

Lesson Plan: Media and American Democracy Institute (Harvard)

NOTE: This lesson plan is a result of my attendance and participation in the July 2002 [Media & American Democracy Institute](#) at Harvard University. For a look at the institute, read this [review](#) in the Harvard Gazette. This [article](#), about the Institute, was published in September 2002.

Source Session: Political Campaigning II: Persuasion Through Political Advertising: Prof. Gary Orren

Description of School & Students: all 8-12 grade students in all SC schools

State Standards: SC Social Studies Standard (Grades 11-12)

Power, Authority & Governance: Government/Political Science:
Evaluate and take and defend positions on the influence of the media on American political life

SC English Language Arts Standard (Grade 8-12)

Communication: Viewing

-Demonstrate the ability to analyze and evaluate nonprint sources for the effectiveness of the techniques to particular audiences

-Demonstrate the ability to distinguish between fact and opinion, to compare and contrast information and ideas, to make inferences with regard to what he/she has viewed

-Demonstrate the ability to analyze nonprint sources for accuracy, bias, intent and purpose

-Demonstrate the ability to evaluate the ways that the use of

language, the medium and the presentation contribute to the meaning and impact of a message

Generative Topic: language and techniques of negative campaign television commercials

Generative Object: televised ads on TV, video, or as transcribed script

Understanding Goals:

Essential Questions:

who is running for Governor in SC?

what role does television play in this election?

what issues are primary in the minds of voters; candidates?

how are those issues portrayed in television advertising?

Critical engagement Questions:

what techniques are used in ads to increase viewer believability?

which techniques are unique to negative campaign ads?

what purpose is served in deconstructing such ads?

how do potential voters react to negative advertising?

Performances of Understanding, Rationale and Timeline:

Television is now the centerpiece of all major election campaigns. Candidates raise enormous sums of money, because purchasing TV commercial time is expensive. Students should brainstorm the following: is it true that the candidate who spends the most money on ad time always win? The teacher should ask students what ads they have seen on television and how much, if anything, they remember about the ad. How do voters react to negative ads?

Activity One: Students should read the following articles before class:

- Effectiveness of Negative Campaign Advertising
- Negative Campaign Ads Rub Voters The Wrong Way
- Ad Watch, Hodges "Social Securities"

In this activity, students will analyze one political campaign TV spot sponsored by the Hodges for Governor campaign. Hodges is the incumbent, a Democrat. Congressman Mark Sanford is the Republican challenger. The campaign spot has been converted into an actual TV script for students to analyze. (*Teachers may prefer to record this spot or another one directly from local television, which will assist in the analysis portions*) In addition, students will read a brief research article, a current article regarding negative campaign advertising, and an AD WATCH. After reading the articles and studying the script, students will critically think about and analyze this ad and discuss implications of negative campaigning.

Timeline: Teachers should expect to spend one or two class periods or one block schedule period.

Reading: Teachers may wish to cut and paste this section, making it a handout for students. (other readings, resources, websites, at the end of this lesson plan)

Effectiveness of Negative Political Advertising
[Won Ho Chang](#), [Jae-Jin Park](#), and [Sung Wook Shim](#)
[WJMCR 2:1 December 1998]

After examining more than 1,100 political commercials, Sabato asserted that: Even when television is used to communicate political truth (at least from one candidate's perspective), the truth can be negatively packaged—attacking the opponent's character and record rather than supporting one's own. If there is a single trend obvious to most American consultants, it is the increasing proportion of negative political advertising... At least a third of all spot commercials in recent campaigns have been negative, and in a minority of campaigns half or more of the spots are negative in tone or substance.⁸ The increasing use of negative political advertising has been promoted by two unrelated legal touchstones.⁹ First, the Communication Act of 1934 made an important distinction between candidate ads and product or service ads. It stated that broadcasters could refuse all deceptive advertising except for political commercials. Second, the 1976 amendment to the Federal Election Campaign Act allowed private individuals and political action committees or PACs, to spend unlimited amounts on behalf of candidates. According to L. Sandy Maisel, the 1976 amendment to the Federal Election Commission allowed PACs and individuals to make unlimited *independent political expenditures* on behalf of a candidate, i.e. they can spend as much as they want to independently support a particular candidate, including making their own commercials. These expenditures are different from contributions to a specific candidate's official campaign, which the act limits to \$1000 for an individual and \$5000 for a PAC. The amendment was prompted by a U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Buckley v. Valeo* (424 U.S. 1, 1976). As Maisel puts it, the court "ruled that limitations on such independent expenditures was an abridgment of the freedom on speech."¹⁰ Although these two groups cannot make unlimited donations to a political campaign, they may cover certain expenses, such as advertising, without any limit. Because advertising sponsored by individuals or PACs is usually more aggressive than candidate-sponsored commercials, these ads are often negative.

Why do political practitioners increasingly use negative political advertising? Do they think negative ads are the most effective way to persuade voters in a short period of time in order to win an election? Many researchers have conducted studies, but the results are inconsistent. According to politicians, because attack ads work, they increasingly use such ads. Up to now, the increasing use of negative advertising in political campaigns has created a considerable controversy between researchers and political practitioners. Thus, more research needs to be conducted in a variety of ways to measure the effectiveness of negative political advertising.

⁸ Larry Sabato, *The Rise of Political Consultants: New Way of Winning Elections* (NY: Basic Books, 1981), 165-166.

⁹ Sharyne Merrit, "Negative Political Advertising: Some Empirical Findings," *Journal of Advertising* 13 (1984): 27-38.

¹⁰ Louis Sandy Maisel, *Parties and Elections in America: the Electoral Process* (NY: Random House, 1986), 137-138.

<p>Negative campaign ads rub voters the wrong way, survey finds (published July 28, 2002 in THE STATE, Columbia SC)</p> <p>A word of caution for political candidates and their consultants.</p> <p>Voters are fed up with negative campaign ads. Most believe they are unethical and damaging to democracy, according to a recent nationwide telephone poll taken for the Institute for Global Ethics (IGE).</p> <p>The survey, released July 19, shows eight-in-10 voters loathe mudslinging. The poll provides a blueprint for how voters want candidates to conduct their campaigns.</p> <p>"Citizens are frustrated with what they see in politics," says Dale Lawton, director of IGE's project on campaign conduct. "A healthy democracy depends on drawing distinctions between opposing candidates for office, but there are certain types of criticisms that are considered out of bounds."</p> <p>Key findings include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nine-in-10 voters want candidates to participate in public debates and in forums where the public can question them directly; • Most voters, 68 percent, say an opponent's voting record is fair game; • More than half say it's fair to criticize an opponent for accepting contributions from people with ethical problems, and taking gifts from special interest groups. <p>The survey of 800 likely voters was conducted June 6-11 by Lake Snell Perry and Associates and Deardourff/The Media Company.</p> <p>The results were released by the IGE as it begins to work in 19 states, including South Carolina, to promote candidate-endorsed codes of campaign conduct as a way to raise the level of debate and improve political campaigns.</p> <p>Republican gubernatorial candidate Mark Sanford, who has been critical of the negative attacks against him by his GOP opponent and Democratic Gov. Jim Hodges, says he would be willing to sign the code.</p> <p>Hodges campaign director Jay Reiff says ditto.</p>	<p>The state effort will be directed by the Jim Self Center on the Future, a major component of the Strom Thurmond Institute at Clemson University.</p> <p>Donna London, project director, says the center expects to contact candidates in the next month about signing a code of conduct and encouraging them to run honest, clean campaigns. The effort will include congressional races.</p> <p>"Our only role is to make it clear to voters what was signed and by whom," she says. "The enforcers of the code are going to be the voters."</p> <p>Sanford says Hodges has already violated the code: "They've basically made it clear they have no interest in this. If anyone needs to study up on this, it's the governor."</p> <p>Reiff says the Hodges campaign agrees an opponent's record is fair game. The TV ads against Sanford, he says, are an attempt to educate voters on the former congressman's record.</p> <p>While a candidate's voting record is fair game for criticism, the poll finds, other areas of candidate behavior also are seen as appropriate issues criticizing an opponent for talking one way and voting another, for not paying taxes on time, and for business practices.</p> <p>Meanwhile, calling attention to the actions of an opponent's family, criticizing past personal problems such as marital issues and alcohol or marijuana abuse, personal past financial troubles, and criticisms about financing campaigns are deemed unfair by voters.</p> <p>"The electorate is clearly telling candidates what they want to hear and how they should conduct their campaigns," says Democratic pollster Celinda Lake.</p> <p>Republican pollster John Deardourff adds: "Voters want an end to unfair campaign attacks, and they are prepared to vote against candidates who employ such tactics."</p>
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Assessment: Students will be asked to consider John Splaine's (media literacy expert) **TAPPER** model for analyzing political commercials, before viewing the script. They will complete and submit documentation (handout below).

Target—who is the target audience for the spot?

Affect- how do viewers/voters respond to the ad emotionally?

Proof- was any proof offered for the claims in the ads? If so, where?

Pictures- what did the pictures convey? Images? Symbols? Do these elements work together to support the central theme of the ad?

Errors- are there any omissions of fact or errors? How can you find out?

Remain- how many different images did you see and how long did those images remain on the screen? Was the ad fast-paced or slow?

Here is another handout, which makes it easy for students to document what they find:

	Hodges Ad: Public Education
Target	
Affect	
Proof	
Pictures	
Errors	
Remain	

	Hodges Ad: Social Security
Target	
Affect	
Proof	
Pictures	
Errors	
Remain	

ASSESSMENT

Before viewing the ads, here are some “media literacy” questions for students to consider:

- Who paid for this ad? How can you tell?
- What is the purpose of the ad?
- What is being done to hold my attention?
- How does the ad try to convince me?
- What is being left out or omitted?
- Does the ad outline a position or does it revolve around a slogan that expresses (or evokes) an emotional response or does it do both?

Another study indicates that negative campaign ads might dissuade voters from going to the polls. Discuss this aspect and its possible implications.

Alternative: You may wish to assign your students to locate and record another political campaign spot (US Senate, US House, Governor’s Race, etc) and have students create the actual script (like the ones shown below) and be prepared to discuss the audio and visual attributes of the spot, as well

as what techniques are used by the candidate.

'Hodges for Governor' Political Campaign Ad Scripts

(Note: these are two 15 second spots, joined together and broadcast as 1, 30 second spot: each deals with a different issue in the campaign)VIDEO

AUDIO

	<p>(Voice over narration): Mark Sanford is ready to give up on our public schools.</p> <p>Sanford supports private school vouchers that take tax dollars out of public schools.</p> <p>And he worked in Congress to abolish the Department of Education.</p> <p>Mark Sanford: Wrong on public education: wrong for South Carolina.</p>
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VIDEO

AUDIO

	<p>(Voice over narration): In Congress, Mark Sanford tried to privatize Social Security, giving our retirement to Wall Street. Sanford's plan would leave seniors without protection from companies like Enron and Worldcom.</p> <p>That's why Wall Street bankers are backing Sanford.</p> <p>Mark Sanford: wrong on Social Security: wrong for South Carolina.</p>
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Other Resources/Readings:

Sanford Challenges Hodges to Stop Negative Ads (7/14/02)

<http://www.goupstate.com/docs/articles/11241.asp>

Ad Watch: Hodges Social Securities Campaign Ad (7/25/02)

PERIODICAL: Visual imagery and the art of persuasion: a political campaign project

teaches students how to read and analyze persuasive imagery, Mary Burns and Danny Martinez,

Learning & Leading with Technology, March 2002 v29 i6 p32(6).

TEXT: *News, Advertising, Politics, and the Mass Media The Interplay of Influence*

(5th edition, 2001) Kathleen Hall Jamison and Karyl n Kohrs Campbell, Wadsworth

(see specifically Chapter 11, Ads, pps.341-346)

TEXT: *Media Power in Politics*, 4th edition, edited by Doris Graber (2000)

CQ Press

TEXT: *Air Wars: Television Advertising in Election Campaigns, 1952-1996*

[Darrell M. West](#) (1997) Congressional Quarterly Books

TEXT: *The Spot : The Rise of Political Advertising on Television*, Edwin Diamond

and Stephen Bates, MIT Press, (1984)

TEXT: *The Mass Media Election- How Americans Choose their President*,

Thomas Patterson, Praeger (1980)

TEXT: *The Unseeing Eye- The Myth of Television Power in*

National Elections,

Thomas Patterson & Robert McClure, Putnam Books (1976)

CURRICULUM: *View Smart To Vote Smart*

<https://www.frankwbaker.com/mlc/view-smart-vote-smart/>
(a partnership of the National PTA, the National Cable TV Association, and Cable In The Classroom)

CURRICULUM: Campaign Advertising (C-SPAN)

<http://www.c-span.org/classroom/lessonplans/campaign/cap2000ad.asp>

RESEARCH STUDY: *Effectiveness of Negative Political Advertising*

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December 1998]

<http://www.scripps.ohiou.edu/wjmcr/vol02/2-1a.HTM>

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