

Lewis H. Lapham: *A Distance From the Cities*

JULY 1992  
\$2.95

# HARPER'S



## 30 SECONDS TO VICTORY: A CAMPAIGN WAR GAME

Six Political Ad Men in Search of a Willie Horton for '92

*Carter Eskew, Stuart Stevens, Ken Swope,  
Joe Trippi, Ian Weinschel, Paul Wilson*

## THE NEW SOVEREIGNTY

Grievance Groups Have Become Nations Unto Themselves

*By Shelby Steele*

## SLEEPYTOWN

A Southern Gothic Childhood, With Codeine

*By Donna Tartt*

## THE WHOLE TRUTH

*A story by Stephen McCauley*

*Also: Senator Bill Bradley, Orson Welles,  
and Conor Cruise O'Brien on West European disunity*



# 30 SECONDS TO VICTORY

**I**n the era of mass communication, the television commercial has become the principal form of political speech. Citizens who once saw their candidates behind podiums or on railroad cars now see them in cleverly edited 30-second television spots accompanied by uplifting music and a soothing voice-over. From Lyndon Johnson's "Daisy" to George Bush's "Willie Horton," political ad makers have shown their genius for discovering the electorate's emotional undercurrents. The advertisers who make the right guesses about the hopes and fears that sway the public mind lead their candidate to victory.

The 1992 presidential campaign offers two candidates toward whom the American public feels deep ambivalence, which means that the election will most likely turn on perceptions of character rather than on questions of government. The prize will go to the candidate who presents himself in the fairest light and his opponent in the darkest shadow.

The work of casting smoke and lights is the work of the media consultant, and with the hope of teaching its readers a few tricks of the trade, *Harper's Magazine* invited six practitioners to design commercials for Bush and Clinton and explore the advertising strategies of a presidential campaign.



*The following forum is based on a discussion held at the Canterbury Hotel in Washington, D.C., in April. Robert S. Boynton and Paul Tough served as moderators.*

ROBERT S. BOYNTON  
is senior editor of Harper's Magazine.

PAUL TOUGH  
is an associate editor of Harper's Magazine.

---

REPUBLICANS

---

STUART STEVENS  
is the director of the Stuart Stevens Group. In 1990 he was a media consultant to William Weld's gubernatorial campaign in Massachusetts. He occasionally writes for the CBS TV program Northern Exposure.

IAN WEINSCHL  
is the president of River Bank, Inc. He and his wife, Betsy, were media-strategy consultants for Pat Buchanan this year.

PAUL WILSON  
is the president of Wilson Communications. He produced ads for Gerald Ford's presidential campaign in 1976 and Howard Baker's in 1980.

---

DEMOCRATS

---

CARTER ESKEW  
is a partner at Squier/Eskew/Knapp/Ochs Communications. He produced ads for Jim Florio's 1990 gubernatorial campaign in New Jersey.

KEN SWOPE  
is the president and creative director of Ken Swope & Associates. He produced ads for Tom Harkin's presidential campaign this year and Michael Dukakis's primary campaign in 1988.

JOE TRIPPI  
is a partner at Trippi, McMahon & Squire. He produced ads for Jerry Brown's presidential campaign this year.

## The Republicans Look for *Wonder Years* Resonance

ROBERT BOYNTON: It's Labor Day, and George Bush is the Republican nominee for president. As his campaign manager, I have gathered you, my media consultants, to help me plan our advertising strategy for the general campaign against the Democratic nominee, Bill Clinton. The political season has just begun in earnest. It's time to put out our first ad. This is the ad that's going to give the public its first post-primary, post-convention sense of George Bush. What do we do?

STUART STEVENS: We have to show that the extraordinary change that has taken place all over the world is relevant to Americans' everyday lives. So my first spot would open with the famous "duck and cover" film, which was aired around the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis to show schoolchildren what to do in case of nuclear war. This will have a sort of *Wonder Years* resonance with the baby boomers, who are the real battle-

ground in this election: Clinton has to win them or else he's dead. The first half of the ad would be in black and white, and in the second half I'd go to color and use contemporary shots—footage of the Berlin Wall coming down and of American troops coming home from Europe. The second half would be about how a generation of kids won't have to fear nuclear war. The first shot would be of the "duck and cover" stuff playing on a vintage television, and the last part would be contemporary scenes on a much more modern set, some sleek television. It would be a 60-second spot. I would do it—and all of the Bush ads—with a hand-held camera. That gives it a more documentary feel.

BOYNTON: Why?

STEVENS: Bush's problem is that when they lock him in the Oval Office he looks stiff, whereas if you put him out in the open, everyone's always struck by what a big, athletic guy he is. To capture that we need to go hand-held, maybe even use a 16-mm camera for a grittier feel. We



need to make him as alive as possible, as real as possible.

BOYNTON: So you'd get him in crowds?

STEVENS: Well, I'm very leery of that kind of shot, because it just screams "Politician!" That is exactly what Bill Clinton is—he's the quintessential political mutation; it's like they constructed him in a lab. All this guy has done is run for office. We must distinguish Bush from that image. The most successful stuff that was done with Bush in 1988 was stuff shot up at Kennebunkport with his family. I'd do variations of that with small groups.

BOYNTON: What kind of music should we use?

STEVENS: I'd open with period music from the early Sixties—whatever the number-one song was during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The old television would be crucial—along with the music—in defining the period. The image of the television will also help the spot's general credibility, because people believe something when they see it on television. TV is our window on the world.

BOYNTON: How do you convey the ad's message other than with the visuals? Do you have a voice-over?

STEVENS: Yeah. We need a voice-over, but it won't say much. Maybe twenty seconds of voice-over. The ad will work because of the images.

BOYNTON: What kind of voice-over would it be?

STEVENS: I'd use this guy that was used a lot in the last Bush campaign. He has the voice of God, if you think of God as a benevolent preacher. And the combined message of the visuals and the soothing voice would be: "It's safe now. And George Bush made it that way." If we can establish our credibility on that one point, we've got our base. Then we can begin to transfer that credibility to our other messages. It's crazy for Bush not to use foreign policy—the area where he has had the most success and the thing he truly cares about—just because people are concerned about the economy. We must dictate the terms of the campaign.

BOYNTON: Do you put the candidate in the ad or is it all just footage?

STEVENS: There is very little Bush, probably just in the last ten seconds.

BOYNTON: A still picture of him?

STEVENS: No. We should never use Bush in a still. God, he looks so wooden when he's not moving! I would shoot Bush very, very tightly. People say, "But he looks tired." That's okay. People don't mind if the President looks tired—it means he's working. I'd make sure the spot has a gritty, rustic look. The more vulnerable Bush looks, curiously, the more real and appealing he is.

BOYNTON: Is Bush in a suit?

STEVENS: No. He should look relaxed. I wouldn't put him in a Red Sox sweatshirt, but I'd give him

something you'd believe he would wear.

PAUL WILSON: I'd take a different approach. I wouldn't start so far back in the past. It's very hard to jerk people back in time—it's much better to work with what you have. And I wouldn't give up the economy issue. Instead, I would use the images and metaphors of our successes and pair them with our weaknesses. I would intersperse shots of the Berlin Wall, even Panama and Desert Storm, with positive news about the economy. My spot would be elaborate and probably quite expensive, but it would dramatize the tremendous changes that have taken place. The metaphor for the spot—the central image—would be a tall ship in the ocean, a re-enactment of Columbus discovering America. The idea would be that Bush

is setting our course in a new direction, with as much significance as the very discovery of America five hundred years ago. I'd weave that metaphor of the ship throughout the shots. You'd have long, glorious shots of the ship cutting through the waves, and next to that I would juxtapose a guy in a house under construction saying, "Housing starts are up 6.5 percent." Then right after showing Desert Storm footage I would have a farmer from the Midwest saying, "We're shipping more grain than ever before" or "We've seen an explosion in our exports." I'd take what we like about Bush and pair it with a selective account of what we are uneasy with—the economy.

BOYNTON: What if housing starts aren't up 6.5 percent? Do we lie?

WILSON: They will be somewhere, during some period. That's why we have a research department.

BOYNTON: In this ad, is the sea stormy?

WILSON: No. It's a gorgeous shot of the ship, but it's not overdone. You might see twenty seconds of the ship. I'm using Columbus as the metaphor for this new direction and our new beginning, to say that we are pointed in the right direction. You also have the analogy of the captain, of somebody in charge who makes things happen, but that would be left to the viewer to supply. The point of this is to start with something that's bigger than life, because the presidency is bigger than life. I would do the whole spot with a Steadicam so it looks smooth and seamless to counteract the herky-jerky movements associated with Bush. Unlike Clinton, Bush needs all the smoothness he can get.

BOYNTON: Would you have music in the background? Is there a voice-over?

WILSON: It would be original music. Something that conveys a sense of newness. Lots of horns.

I WOULD USE ORIGINAL  
MUSIC. SOMETHING  
THAT CONVEYS A SENSE  
OF NEWNESS. LOTS OF  
HORNS



And you have the voice saying: "We're headed in the right direction. It is a new direction, but it is the right one." And under the narrator's voice I'd drop 4- to 5-second snippets from the State of the Union address and people talking to us about the administration's successes.

BOYNTON: Ian, what's your first spot?

IAN WEINSCHTEL: I would open with Desert Storm footage, rescues in helicopters and war footage, to a soundtrack that was something like *Top Gun*—very uplifting music, very dramatic. Then I would segue into another section over which the President's voice would be saying something like, "What we've been able to accomplish in the world we now have to harness back here in this country. We need to take the kind of leadership we had in Desert Storm and bring it home and make America first again." And then, to give it some credibility, I would put in a couple of very specific issues, like term limits. I would use the President's voice and put in an echo to make it inspirational. I'd let Bush do the comparison about how the world has changed. I'd use that patriotic inspiration and bring people together, which is what a president can do.

BOYNTON: Do you show the President?

WEINSCHTEL: I'd show him. His voice-over happens over himself, interspersed with scenes. It's almost like Reagan's old "Morning Again in America" spot, but with more of the President mixed into it—rolled-up shirtsleeves, with people, not large crowds, doing physical things. You'd put him in crowds of ten or fifteen people, working with them, whether they're dockworkers, people in high-tech industries, in assembly plants. I would surround him with women in some shots too.

STEVENS: I think Desert Storm is the wrong way to go. If this campaign is a referendum on Desert Storm, the Democrats can start picking out their offices in the White House. It will be a disaster. The war has very short coattails and is Bush's most obvious achievement, so it's wrong to overplay it. Also, these ads won't work if they look like political ads. That's why I want to do stuff that hasn't been done, like hand-held shots. These ads have to break from the stiff, formal tradition of political commercials and look as good as the ads corporate America puts out to sell its goods.

## The Democrats Look for the Big Idea

PAUL TOUGH: I'm Bill Clinton's campaign manager and I want to plan our first ad. We're behind in the polls, and there is a big segment of the American population that distrusts our candidate. So I want our first ad to convince those people that Clinton is not a bad guy.

KEN SWOPE: I disagree with your strategy.

TOUGH: What am I doing wrong?

SWOPE: We've got to start off on the attack. I worked for Dukakis in 1988 and saw what happens when you don't go negative. Presidential politics is like nuclear war: he who strikes first wins. There are sixty days until the election: I'd do an attack ad every four days and let it play on the news so that Bush has to respond. We've got to use things against Bush that are worse on a personal level than anything Bush has on Clinton. Then people will say to themselves, "Jesus, after what I've seen of George Bush, Bill Clinton is wonderful."

TOUGH: Joe, do you think we can win if we just convince the voters that Bush is even worse than Clinton? Or do you think we need to build up Clinton?

JOE TRIPPI: The country doesn't particularly like either one of them, but it's our guy they don't trust. And if it's a choice between a guy they don't trust and a guy they don't like, we'll end up losing. We've got to define this race vis-à-vis Bush, vis-à-vis the economy and the need for drastic change. But we also need something that defines Clinton in a positive fashion. Our negative track should be a spot that juxtaposes foreign policy issues and economic problems. We can't just hand the Republicans a foreign-policy advantage. We have to put them on the defensive right away with a barrage of attacks, but do it with four or five different spots, each tailored to a specific region of the country: in the Northeast, for instance, we show steel mills shutting down. We show people the problems in their region, show them shots of how the world has changed, and ask them why their lives are going down the toilet.

TOUGH: Those are attack ads. Can't I make a positive ad off the top?

CARTER ESKEW: I think we can. To the extent that people distinguish issues from character, I would want to open with an issue ad. We have to confront the incredible cynicism with which people view ads these days. If we spend lots of money producing beautiful ads, like Paul Wilson's tall ships, people are going to look at them and say they're all bullshit. The American public has become an extremely sophisticated audience for commercials. I guarantee that in three years people in focus groups will be saying, "That's a Ken Swope ad." "That's a Stuart Stevens—he likes to use hand-held." "That's Paul Wilson because he has wonderful ships." The curtain is up and the people are hip to the little man behind it. Frankly, I think what you say is a hell of a lot more important than how you say it. If you look at the Clinton campaign in the primaries, the ad that worked best for him was his opening ad in New Hampshire where he said, "Call for my plan." People actually called. That was about informa-



# "DUCK AND COVER"

STUART STEVENS



ANNOUNCER: [OVER MUSIC: "NOWHERE TO RUN," BY MARTHA AND THE VANDELLAS] "THERE ARE SOME LESSONS THAT CHILDREN SHOULD NEVER HAVE TO LEARN."



"YET FOR GENERATIONS IT SEEMED INEVITABLE THAT THE WORLD WAS DIVIDED, AND A STALEMATE OF FEAR PASSED FOR HOPE."



"AND THEN AMERICA, LED BY GEORGE BUSH,..."



"...ONCE AGAIN CHANGED THE WORLD."

tion. The other thing that worked was his half-hour ad, which was a longer format that let people see him relating to people in a more "real" way, which he is pretty good at. Clinton's problem is that he is so good on camera that it reinforces his whole "Slick Willie" problem. It's ironic: for years we've craved a candidate who could talk, and now we have a guy who's almost too good.

We have to first get a couple of big ideas for the country, and then run spots that explain them. "As president, I will do three things: I'm going to double spending on education, I'm going to cut the defense budget by 50 percent instead of 30 percent, and I'm going to put the money we save into this program and that program." People want that. One of Clinton's problems is that he designed his campaign when the mood of the country was ambivalent—he didn't need big ideas for change. Now 70 percent of the country thinks we are in terrible shape, which is driving the Jerry Brown, Ross Perot, and Pat Buchanan campaigns. The good news is that people want a big change and Bush doesn't have a clue. The bad news is that Clinton doesn't have enough zing in his ideas. He needs the big idea. If he comes out for, say, doubling the money we spend on education, that would be a big idea for the country. Does it win the campaign on its own? No. But it gets people thinking, "Is this guy credible? I like the idea, but can I trust him to do it?" We have to start with the ideas and make that a way of addressing the character problems.

TOUGH: But we're the media team. Aren't we supposed to work with the ideas the candidate's got?

ESKEW: I don't think we can work with what we've got. The ideas have to be bigger.

TRIPPI: I agree. We can't just tinker around the edges. People don't want that. They don't want to choose between two guys arguing over a capital-

gains tax cut. They want drastic change. I'd do a spot that said, "Thomas Jefferson thought we should have a revolution every nineteen years. We haven't had one in two hundred years and it's starting to show. I'm not perfect, but I know our country needs real drastic change. That's why, as your president, I'll do bam-bam-bam." That's the positive spot. Then you do a negative track that plays into "There's a revolution going on everywhere but here. It's time for real change. We can do it here." And I would take the chance on Clinton delivering it to the camera. I agree with Carter: we have to at least get people to ask themselves whether they trust Clinton. We're going to win or lose on that question.

TOUGH: Look, Clinton does have ideas. Can't we sit him in front of a camera, have him talk about the issues he's got, and explain that these programs are a real change?

ESKEW: We can take the platform and try to hype it into drastic change, but I don't think people will buy it.

TRIPPI: Not the stuff Clinton's talking about these days.

TOUGH: Ken, do you think we can sit Clinton down and have him talk to the camera?

SWOPE: No. Clinton was created and destroyed by the free media. He was anointed. It wasn't his commercials that got him there. They were boring and no one paid any attention to them. The only message he had was, "I've got a plan. Call me."

ESKEW: The spot doubled his points.

SWOPE: Well, I don't know if the ad did that or the press did that. I don't think you can have a candidate talk about issues to the camera until the very end of the campaign, when people suddenly really want to know what the candidate is about. Before that, you've got to use the power and the language and the emotion of television to make people watch the commercial.



PAUL WILSON



ANNOUNCER: "500 YEARS AGO COLUMBUS DISCOVERED OUR WORLD. NEITHER ROUGH SEAS NOR PERSISTENT SKEPTICS STOPPED HIM. FIVE CENTURIES LATER WE ARE AGAIN HEADED IN A NEW DIRECTION. THIS NEW DIRECTION HAS SHOWN US VISTAS WE ONCE ONLY DREAMED OF."



"THE BERLIN WALL... GONE. AND WITH IT THE COLD WAR. SOVIET COMMUNISM... FALLEN. DISGRACED..."



"AND DESERT STORM... A TRUE TEST OF OUR NATIONAL WILL AND OUR COMMITMENT TO SUCCEED. NOW WE'RE SEEING THE BEGINNING OF THIS NEW DIRECTION HERE AT HOME..."



"HOUSING STARTS ARE UP 6.5 PERCENT. WE'RE BUILDING AGAIN. THINGS ARE TURNING AROUND... AMERICA IS HEADED IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. IT IS A NEW DIRECTION, BUT IT IS THE RIGHT ONE."

TOUGH: Can you do that in a positive way?

SWOPE: Well, I agree with Carter that the jig is up on political advertising. All the artificial stuff, all the drama techniques—Jack Kemp throwing the football to the Norman Rockwell townspeople—everybody knows it's fake. Remember Dukakis's "packaging of George Bush" ads, with actors playing Bush's strategists? By trying to point out Bush's duplicity, those ads revealed their own. People see right through that. The American people may be politically uninformed, but they have built-in bullshit detectors. On Madison Avenue they're going out of their minds because they'll spend a million dollars just producing a commercial and their ratings show that nobody watches it. So for us to believe that everyone's sitting there with bated breath to see what our boring candidate has to say in our relatively low-budget commercials is the height of hubris.

TOUGH: Hold on. We're trying to write our first ad, and you guys are telling me that ads don't work?

SWOPE: No, but we have to take the old ideas about political ads and throw them out the window. What's turning people off is all the artifice and fakery. For my ads the speech would be the key. I start by writing Clinton a beautiful speech filled with great 30-second clips, each on one single, compelling, dramatic idea—whether it's rebuilding infrastructure or pro-choice or child care or putting people back to work—strong ideas, all of which we choose based on our polling data. Clinton works on the speech until he gets it down, and then on selected days I film him giving it live. He's excited. His speech gets better and better. I pluck out the best 30-second pieces and intersperse shots of Clinton with faces in the audience, as well as dramatic cutaways of other footage to illustrate what he's talking about.

TOUGH: Carter, does that work for you?

ESKEW: Well, not exactly. I don't see why that's necessarily less artificial than anything else.

TRIPPI: Clinton has crossed the threshold of believability. We've got a candidate who, when he wins the bloody New York primary, says, "I had a ball here," and everybody thinks, "Give me a break!" At some point he's going to have to look people dead in the eye, and either they're going to trust him or they are not. Given that, I would start his spots with him speaking directly to the camera.

## The Republicans Go to Arkansas

BOYNTON: Well, I've got some bad news. The first ads, the positive ones, didn't do so well. Bush still has these very high negatives, and I'm coming back to you for help.

STEVENS: It's time to go negative. There is a tragic flaw to the Clinton candidacy that we have to exploit: it's Arkansas. If his mandate is to bring economic change to America, we have to look no farther than his home state to prove he can't do it. Were it not for the dedication of my home state of Mississippi, Arkansas would be last in every imaginable category. Here is a guy who has run Arkansas since the late Seventies with a legislature controlled by Democrats. And he wants to bring economic change to America? It's like the punch line to a bad joke!

So my first negative ad would show the Arkansas delta, one of the more bleak, depressing places in the world. I'd have a caravan of limos driving a Clinton look-alike around. He'd be visiting sharecropper shacks, quoting the exact words from his speech at the Democratic Convention. I'd then have a shot of him at one of those miserable schools where they pay teachers \$16,000 a year and have him say something about education.



And I would intercut this with statistics about what terrible shape Arkansas is in. The spot would end with a closeup of the real Bill Clinton. It would play to two points: First, here is a guy who is good at one thing, which is promising and not delivering. And second, here is a fellow who throughout the Reagan-Bush era had one little corner on the world in which he was king. This is what he has wrought.

WILSON: Rob, let's assume that you're right and that our first spots didn't work. They *will* work, eventually. In communication theory we call this the sleeper effect. Your message just waits while people think about it and then actually comes back stronger than when you put it out. While we're waiting, I too would do an Arkansas ad. My Arkansas ad would have the camera follow an old, dusty Impala with Arkansas plates and smoke coming out of its engine. It would be driving through some godforsaken part of the Ozarks. You let the camera do the talking: the car passes decrepit shacks, poor kids, deteriorating schools. I would also put in images of chickens being slaughtered, which is one of the biggest industries in the state and the only thing Bill Clinton managed to get for it. And then I would pan over a group of out-of-work men. Then the announcer would say, "Bill Clinton's dream for America has been cooking in the Arkansas sun for ten years and it's still half-baked. After ten years as governor, Arkansas is forty-ninth in per capita income; fiftieth in teachers' salaries, forty-eighth in employment. This isn't a dream for America—it's a nightmare. Re-elect the President."

STEVENS: I would never use the word "re-elect" for George Bush.

BOYNTON: Why is that?

STEVENS: The Democrats are going to attack on the change issue, so to stand for the status quo is an invitation to disaster. Instead, I'd say, "Elect George Bush and elect change."

WILSON: But the main point of either of these spots would be to make the Democrats eat that line of Joe's—"We can do it here." They would be gagging on it before the campaign was over. "We can do it here" would become a mocking phrase pointing out that Clinton *didn't* do it in Arkansas.

Clinton's only theme is "It's time for a change." So we have to strip that theme from him by saying, "The Clinton promise doesn't match with the Clinton reality."

## The Democrats Go to Hollywood

TOUGH: We're running an ad that's got Clinton talking about changes and how he's going to accomplish them. But the Republicans have hit us with some pretty brutal ads about Arkansas. How do we respond?

ESKEW: One way would be to run an ad that says: "Look, the reason Arkansas is screwed up is they've gotten nothing out of the federal government. That's who's really to blame for the condition of this state." By this time the press would have gone down to Arkansas and seen that Clinton's been an okay governor and done some good things, so they would be sympathetic to our defense. It gives you an opportunity, as Dukakis had, to come back and say, "It's true Boston Harbor is a disgrace. You know why? Because the federal government won't fund sewage cleanup." It gets you back in the game after a very powerful attack.

TRIPPI: I would take this back to Washington and

### "BRINGING IT HOME"

IAN WEINSCHEL



GEORGE BUSH: [OVER UPLIFTING MUSIC] "AMERICA IS WORKING. TOGETHER, THESE PAST FOUR YEARS, WE'VE SHARED REMARKABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS, INCLUDING A SAFER WORLD. TOGETHER, IN DESERT STORM."



"TOGETHER, WE'VE WATCHED DEMOCRACY TRIUMPH IN EASTERN EUROPE AND RUSSIA. NOW IT'S TIME TO WORK TOGETHER SO ALL CAN SHARE IN THE AMERICAN DREAM."



"TOGETHER, WE WILL MAKE OUR SCHOOLS THE BEST IN THE WORLD AND MAKE OUR SUPERIOR HEALTH CARE AVAILABLE TO ALL. TOGETHER, WE WILL STAND WITH PRIDE AND SHOW THE WORLD HOW GREAT AMERICA REALLY IS."

to George Bush being there for forty years, and use it to refer back to our change theme. I would end the spot with a narrator saying, "There are fifty governors in America, and their state economies have all gone in the toilet. Maybe they're *all* bad—or maybe the place for real change is in the White House." That would turn it back on them. There are good solid governors out there, and they are all having to cope with higher taxes, education problems,



etc. Everybody knows that.

ESKEW: I agree with that response. I think that Bush's attack will be initially effective but also gets him onto very dangerous ground.

TOUGH: But Boston Harbor worked. Why won't Arkansas?

ESKEW: Boston Harbor worked in a very different atmosphere. It was in a year of economic optimism, and it worked because it was never responded to.

TRIPPI: Another spot might be to show newspaper headlines of different states in deep, deep trouble as an announcer asks, "Where's the real problem?" Right now people are convinced the problem is Washington, D.C., whether it's the President or Congress. Bush is an animal of the place. The Republicans are more embarrassed about that than Clinton is about Arkansas.

TOUGH: Ken, would you respond to Arkansas or do a new ad?

SWOPE: You can make cases for Arkansas both ways.

You could say that for its being one of the poorest states, Clinton accomplished a lot. In the speech spots I'm going to do there would be lots of bio information, which would include all the positive stuff about Arkansas. But we've got to get it out there *before* the Republicans run their negative Arkansas spot so that the issue is already neutralized. Otherwise, we're going to be vulnerable.

TOUGH: So instead of saying, "Arkansas sucks and it's George Bush's fault," we just say, "Everyone knows Arkansas is a poor state—Clinton's done a pretty good job with what he had?"

SWOPE: Yes. You explain that he was voted governor of the year for a reason.

TOUGH: Let's make our first ad about Bush. Where do we start?

SWOPE: I'm leaning very heavily on doing com-

mercials that have "all natural ingredients"—that have no fake elements to them. I would select a dozen well-known people from Hollywood, like Kirk Douglas, James Earl Jones, Michael Douglas, Burt Lancaster, Jack Lemmon—all Democrats. I would sit them in an extremely well-lit room, casually dressed, just talking. They would do the attack ads on Bush in a way that would make an issue out of Bush's character and integrity. Jack Lemmon could talk about the fact that when, as vice president, Bush was chairman of the Regulatory Relief Task Force he blocked regulations for almost two years to put warning labels on aspirin to treat Reye's syndrome, causing hundreds of children to become brain-damaged or die. I would cut away to some very emotional images and then cut back to Jack Lemmon, who would say, "What kind of character does that show?" People would say, "Who gives a damn if Clinton cheated on his wife? Compared to this? Jesus!" I could come up with twenty different ads like that: "As president and vice president, George Bush did the bidding of the NRA, blocking legislation to regulate automatic weapons and cop-killing bullets." I'd get Kirk Douglas to talk about it. These people can make you cry, because you were brought up to trust them. The older Reagan Democrats, especially, trust people like Kirk Douglas. It would be even worse than Willie Horton. That's how you get free media coverage. The ad is so sensational they have to keep reporting on it and Bush has to keep responding. You want foreign policy? How about showing toys coming in from China with import duties reduced and then cutting away to the Chinese slave-labor camps and the Tiananmen Square massacre? There's foreign policy and the character issue.

TOUGH: And each time it's one of these Hollywood

## "CHINA DOLLS"

KEN SWOPE



MICHAEL DOUGLAS: [OVER SAD MUSIC] "IT'S JUST A DOLL. [HE HOLDS UP DOLL.] BUT IT'S MADE OF TEARS. AND PAIN. AND BLOOD."



"ALMOST HALF THE TOYS WE GIVE OUR CHILDREN WERE MADE BY CHILDREN, IN THE PRISONS AND SWEATSHOPS OF COMMUNIST CHINA. [ANGRILY] TEN-YEAR-OLD GIRLS—AND YOUNGER! FIFTEEN-HOUR SHIFTS! PENNIES A DAY!"



"AND WHEN THE CHINESE PEOPLE SPOKE OUT FOR FAIRNESS AND FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY . . . REMEMBER THAT?"



"YET, IN SPITE OF IT ALL, GEORGE BUSH SIPPS CHAMPAGNE WITH THE BUTCHERS OF BEIJING. AND GRANTS SPECIAL, MOST-FAVORED-NATION TRADING STATUS TO CHINA! NOW GEORGE BUSH WANTS TO TALK ABOUT CHARACTER AND TRUST IN HIS RE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN? [SARCASTICALLY] O.K., GEORGE. LET'S TALK."



figures who does the voice-over?

SWOPE: Yes. I would choose them very carefully from the ranks of the Hollywood Democrat crowd. They raise tons of money for politicians, and I know from my experience with Dukakis that they would do these ads.

TOUGH: Do you pay them?

SWOPE: Yes, we pay them union scale because they're members of the actors' unions, and we say so in the ad.

TOUGH: Is it a problem, in a year when we're worried about media artifice, to be using paid actors?

SWOPE: Who doesn't trust Spartacus?

TOUGH: And as these spots come out accusing Bush of these awful things, do you have Clinton mention them in his speeches or does he ignore them?

SWOPE: Clinton never mentions the ads. We keep him some distance from them.

TOUGH: Joe, do these attacks on Bush work for you?

TRIPPI: They don't bother me, although I would probably go with a direct-to-the-camera shot with the candidate for the spots.

TOUGH: Even the negative spots?

TRIPPI: Sure.

TOUGH: Is there a more general ad that we can use to blame Bush for the country's malaise?

ESKEW: We have to tap into the sense people have that they are falling behind and that Bush just doesn't understand or care. He is on the record saying he'd just as soon "do nothing" on the economy. So I'd do a spot that started with quotes—"read my lips, no new taxes," and so on—to remind people of Bush's culpability. A spot that gets at economic and character issues will work. If we run some of the attack ads that both the Democrats and Republicans are describing, the public will say, "Wait a minute. You're saying Bush is killing children? You're saying Clinton is in favor of illiteracy and poverty? That's ridiculous!" Those ads don't resonate as true. But people really *do* believe Bush has an empathy problem, so it's something we can use.

TOUGH: Ken, how would you do an attack ad on the economy to bring out the fact that Bush doesn't empathize with the common man?

SWOPE: I would find a person whom polls show our target voters really trust and have him say, "This

is what George Bush said about the economy. This is what he did. He lied. I trust Clinton to do what he says he's going to do."

TOUGH: What do you show while the actor is speaking?

SWOPE: Abandoned factories or empty warehouses, people in unemployment lines. Newspaper headlines would be good, too—things like General Motors announcing massive layoffs.

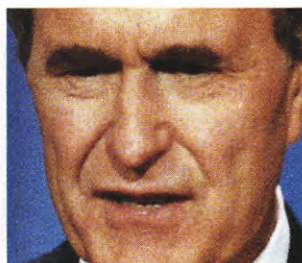
TRIPPI: I like that spot, but Ken's notion of ten different people saying all this negative stuff worries me. I might shoot just a few of them in one

## "READ HIS LIPS"

CARTER ESKEW

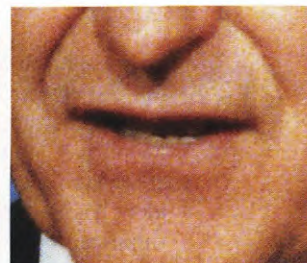


BUSH: "READ MY LIPS: NO NEW TAXES!"



[VIDEO LOOP CONTINUES AS CAMERA ZOOMS IN.]

ANNOUNCER: "NO NEW TAXES? THE EDUCATION PRESIDENT? THE ENVIRONMENTAL PRESIDENT?"



[VIDEO FREEZES AND ZOOMS INTO TIGHT, SLIGHTLY DISTORTED SHOT OF LIPS.]

ANNOUNCER: "FOUR MORE YEARS?"

spot docu-style and straight-up. If we go with too many of these attacks, people are going to see so much meanness that they'll be disgusted. You've got to hook into what people already believe. Our negative spot has to say, "This guy's been there forever. It's time for a change."

ESKEW: I wonder, though, if these ads will really work. We're talking about tactics that have been around for twenty years. Maybe they'll work again, but I have a sense that maybe they won't. We keep pushing the button, but the public's response is no longer there.

## The Republicans Bake Cookies

BOYNTON: The Democrats are attacking Bush's character and using policy decisions to do it. Should we be worried?

STEVENS: Attacking Bush by saying that Clinton's been governor of Arkansas but it's not really his fault is crazy. That's as ludicrous as putting Spartacus on the air to elect the next president. Saying how bad things are can get you only so far. It's a one-trick pony, and you can't ride it across the finish line. The Democrats' attempt to make Bush's tax flip-flop into a character issue will be as successful as their accusing Bush of having a





Gov. Mario Cuomo  
Democrat—New York



Gov. Pete Wilson  
Republican—California

Either we elected 50  
incompetent Governors  
or ...



...maybe we made  
one really big mistake.

ANNOUNCER: "How can it be that 50  
GOVERNORS—BOTH DEMOCRAT ..."

"...AND REPUBLICAN—ARE ALL FACING THE  
SAME PROBLEMS OF CUTS IN SERVICES,  
STAGNANT OR LAGGING ECONOMIES, AND  
JOBLESSNESS?"

"WELL, EITHER WE ELECTED 50 INCOMPETENT  
GOVERNORS, OR ..."

"...MAYBE WE MADE ONE REALLY BIG  
MISTAKE ..."

mistress. If you compare Bush with Clinton and ask the voters, "Who do you believe has slept with more women?" no one's going to pick Bush. People just don't naturally distrust his character.

WEINSCHTEL: When it comes to character, the President has a substantially larger catalogue of good things he's done. All people know about Clinton is that they don't trust him and he's been governor of Arkansas. He has to do some major rebuilding.

STEVENS: And one of the traditional ways a politician rebuilds himself is to tell his real story. But the trouble is that Clinton *has* no story. All he's done is run for office. Clinton writes a letter that the Vietnam War is terrible and he's gaining all this weight worrying about it. Sort of the bulimic's answer to Vietnam. Whereas George Bush is a legitimate war hero. He actually *does* have a story that people find compelling. At eighteen he was the youngest commissioned pilot in the Navy. These are facts.

BOYNTON: So what does your ad do? Does it point out the lack of a Clinton story or does it tell George Bush's story?

STEVENS: What their life stories reflect are the choices the two of them have made. You can parallel their lives choice by choice, and people will find Bush's story much more appealing.

BOYNTON: How do you point out that difference?

STEVENS: You can compare lives. This question of the military draft is perfect—just compare Bush's decision about World War II with Clinton's about Vietnam. The idea that when Clinton was twenty-three years old he was worried about his future political career makes him sound like the twelve-year-old who doesn't go out for Little League because he's studying for the bar exam! That just rubs people the wrong way.

BOYNTON: So do you sit Bush down and have him tell his life story?

STEVENS: No, I'm against having candidates staring

into the camera. We do it only at the very end. There are much more compelling, interesting ways to tell stories. If you have ads that look like political ads, people will be turned off. There's a reason people respond to ads by AT&T, Nike, and Coca-Cola: they know how to tell a story.

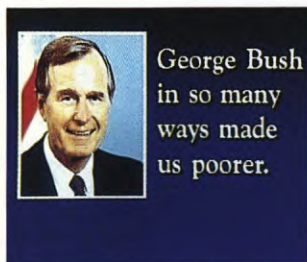
WILSON: The economy is Bush's most vulnerable spot, and we've got to defend it. Our first ads said we were pointed in a new direction; our second set of ads said that when Clinton had his chance to change Arkansas he couldn't do it. Now we're in the third phase, where we question whether Clinton can accomplish what he is promising. This is where we pair him with Jimmy Carter—we marry them inseparably. The memories of the economy during Carter's presidency are much worse than anything that has happened under Bush. I'd do a series of spots with people in Arkansas telling us they think Clinton's a lot like Jimmy Carter. Our spots will get across the message that "If you let Clinton try to improve the economy, it may actually get worse." These spots will be devastating. They should be reinforced with some companion spots that show there are sectors of the economy that are improving. From the first attack ad on we have to show that things are improving.

STEVENS: I disagree. People will find it insulting if you tell them that things are actually better than they think they are. People will hear, "You think things are terrible, but you just don't understand." And they'll think, "There's someone over there who's doing much better than me. Goddamnit, why not me?"

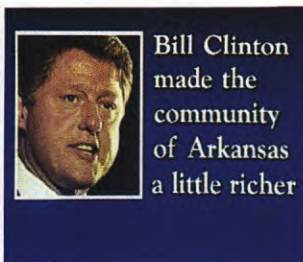
BOYNTON: How do you do the Jimmy Carter comparison?

WILSON: We do interviews in which each person tells us, "He reminds me a lot of Jimmy Carter" or "Clinton is just like Jimmy Carter in many respects." Then we go to people from Arkansas



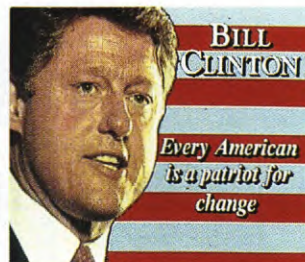


"... BECAUSE WHILE GEORGE BUSH TOOK THE RICHEST NATION IN THE WORLD, AND IN SO MANY WAYS MADE US POORER ..."



"... BILL CLINTON TOOK ONE OF THE POOREST STATES IN THE UNION AND MADE THE COMMUNITY OF ARKANSAS JUST A LITTLE RICHER."

Who would you choose to lead the next American Revolution?



"BILL CLINTON. BECAUSE EVERY AMERICAN IS A PATRIOT FOR CHANGE."

saying, "It's funny—he has an idea for everything, but nothing really works." And in the same spot have people remind us that Carter gave us 10 percent unemployment and astronomical interest rates. Now we're layering the message. We're adding pieces of information to a very direct line that at the end says, "Vote for Bush."

STEVENS: Although I'm not a big fan of using the Gulf War, I want to do one ad that uses it. It is a 60-second spot that reminds people of the negatives involved when George Bush first decided to go to war. It was an unpopular stand. Bush was willing to be a one-term president over it. We contrast that with Clinton's *preposterous* statement that he would have voted with the majority in Congress for the war but supported the minority against it—that is Bill Clinton in a nutshell! At the defining moment of our time, Clinton stands up and waves both arms! I would not say, "Remember the Gulf War; remember how popular it was." I'd say, "Remember the Gulf War; remember how *unpopular* it was. But George Bush was willing to fight."

WILSON: It's time for a curve ball to the Democrats. We now interject a different element and take advantage of another of Bush's strong points. We bring in Barbara. As hokey as it might sound, I would have Barbara Bush with her grandkids making cookies. It would be a terribly contrived spot, but it probably really happens. It would be the warmest ad you could imagine. Barbara would do a very short narration—it would be mostly licking bowls and eating the cookies and putting them in the oven, with as many grandkids as we can get. It would come right at the question of Hillary Clinton.

STEVENS: It could have a soundtrack of Tammy Wynette singing "Stand By Your Man."

WILSON: And Barbara could talk about change, but also say: "The simple experiences that enrich lives are important, too."

## The Democrats Make Fog Machines

TOUGH: They're hitting us on Jimmy Carter, they're attacking us with a comparison of the two candidates' life stories, they're saying we're going to make the economy worse, they've got Clinton's indecision on the Gulf War, and they've got Barbara making cookies. What do we do?

TRIPPI: I wouldn't do a Hillary ad. It's a mistake to put Barbara and Hillary in a head-on competition. What I *would* do is run a straight pro-choice ad to bring the issue of choice into the election. Barbara Bush is pro-choice, and we could do something with that.

ESKEW: You might have fun with the kitchen spot. You could run a response ad saying, "What do you think Barbara talks about in the kitchen with George? It's probably not just cookies. Maybe they even talk about whether or not women should have the right to choose. Barbara Bush happens to think they should. She's right."

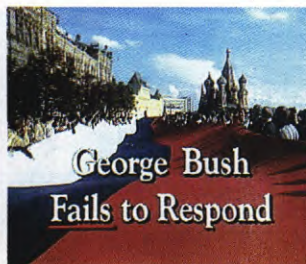
SWOPE: We also need a commercial to counteract their ads setting up Bush as the candidate of change. We can't let them get away with that. I usually use only all-natural ingredients, but on this ad I wouldn't. It's called "Mirrors" and would feature a black box, inside of which would hang a collage of several strangely shaped shards of glass turned slowly by a motor. They would be backlit and give off a weird glow. Onto the shards we project an image of Bush making a speech, so when you rotate this thing you see fragments of his image distorted by the mirrors. It looks sort of like a Picasso—an eye here, a mouth moving there. I'd add some fog too. Over this you hear an echoing sound montage of Bush's speeches. The only time his voice comes through clearly is when he screams, "Cut capital gains!" Then we'd have Michael Douglas do the voice-over. He'd say: "It's so strange. Bizarre.



JOE TRIPPI



ANNOUNCER: "TIANANMEN SQUARE—THEY RAISE LIBERTY IN A CRY FOR CHANGE AND GEORGE BUSH DOES NOTHING."



"THE SOVIET REPUBLICS—THEY BREAK AWAY FOR DRASTIC CHANGE AND GEORGE BUSH FAILS TO RESPOND."



"NOW A PEOPLE WHO LOVE THEIR COUNTRY WANT CHANGE IN THE FAILED LEADERSHIP IN WASHINGTON. BUT IF GEORGE BUSH, THE FOREIGN POLICY PRESIDENT, FAILED TO HEAR THE CRY FOR CHANGE IN THE HEARTS OF PEOPLE OVERSEAS—HOW COULD HE EVER RECOGNIZE THE CALL FOR CHANGE HERE AT HOME?"



"BILL CLINTON: BECAUSE EVEN THOUGH GEORGE BUSH CAN'T SEE IT—THE NEXT AMERICAN REVOLUTION HAS ALREADY BEGUN."

Suddenly, George Bush is rearranging his image, selling himself as a candidate of change. Change! And he says Congress is stopping him from making the changes he wants. You know what the biggest change he wants is? More tax cuts for the rich and big business to stimulate the economy, more trickle-down economics. Isn't that precisely what got us into this mess in the first place? So George Bush's idea of change is more of the same. It's all smoke and mirrors, folks."

TOUGH: Do we respond to any of the other Republican attacks? What about the Jimmy Carter ad?

ESKEW: Jimmy Carter probably has a higher positive rating today than Bush. I don't believe in responding to every ad, but maybe there's an opportunity there, as there was in the cookie ad, to turn it back on them. This time we go to Jimmy Carter at one of his Habitat for Humanity projects and have him say, "They've been beating up on me for a long time. I can take it. But ask yourself, what's happening to this country? I've tried to do the right thing for this country. Now let's talk about things that matter—like where we're going. What are they so scared of?"

## The Republicans Use Race

BOYNTON: What about Gennifer Flowers and Clinton's golf game at the all-white country club? Do we touch these?

STEVENS: No, I don't think you bring up either. Bush can't credibly use the golf issue. And I don't think we should ever bring up anything about infidelity. Ultimately, people don't care.

BOYNTON: What about getting an outside group to do ads on those issues? [See page 45.] So-called independent-expenditure groups were able to say a lot of things the official Bush cam-

paign couldn't in '88. Do you see a role for them in this case?

STEVENS: No, it would be a disaster. Outside groups just confuse our message. We can't control them.

BOYNTON: Did the Willie Horton ad, which was made by an outside group, help or hurt Bush in the last election?

STEVENS: I think that Willie Horton not only hurt Bush but continues to seriously hurt him today.

WEINSCHER: I don't agree with that at all. That ad basically won the campaign for him. Independent expenditures can bring up issues you don't want to be associated with. You can sit back and say, "We think it's awful and they should take it off the air," yet it's out there in everybody's mind. Once the ad is out there, the campaign and the news media can play with it.

WILSON: There's a couple of uses for independent expenditures—with Gennifer Flowers, for instance. There's a vast malleable segment of the public that changes its mind on the abortion issue from day to day, depending on how the argument is phrased. Gennifer Flowers can counter a sliver of the pro-choice women. If you had an ad that started with Clinton's abominable, stumbling denials on *60 Minutes*, and then had woman after woman saying, "I don't believe him," you could start whacking away at that segment. They could also make use of the country-club issue. We know that Clinton's going to win 90 to 95 percent of the black vote. So an independent expenditure could do a country-club ad showing that Clinton is racially insensitive. It would say to black voters, "You don't have a player in this race." It would discourage black turnout. Every black vote that stays home would be two votes for Bush.



## The Democrats Use *Roe v. Wade*

TOUGH: Democrats, is there a way to counter the country-club ad?

ESKEW: You do a spot saying that Bush is dividing the country, race against race: "First there was Willie Horton, now there's this ad." You make a strong statement that the idea that Clinton is weak on civil rights is ludicrous, so let's just stop this horseshit. That would be a powerful spot.

TRIPPI: We'd respond, maybe on the radio, with some credible black spokespeople saying that a lot is at stake and it is important to vote.

TOUGH: That Republican ad came from an outside group. Are the Democrats going to have any outside groups this year?

ESKEW: I'm sure the National Abortion Rights Action League is going to be doing something on the choice issue. Environmental groups will do something.

TOUGH: But can we use them the way the Republicans do to bring up issues we don't want associated with our campaign, like race?

TRIPPI: Nobody's going to get away with that this time. Voters just aren't going to buy it.

TOUGH: Let me give you a scenario. *Roe v. Wade* is substantially undercut by the Supreme Court. In response, Congress passes the Freedom of Choice Act legalizing abortion across the board. President Bush vetoes it. Clinton is in favor of it. There's a march on Washington, and a million people show up. What ad do you run?

ESKEW: We don't need to run an ad.

TRIPPI: I agree. Just the fact of the ruling will get us two zillion points of information from the media. We won't have to pay for it.

SWOPE: I'd consider doing an ad saying, "If you care about your right to choose, it's now or never." But we'd do it in the context of the Supreme Court and any appointments the next president might make. You don't frame it in terms of abortion.

TRIPPI: I'd make an ad that showed Clarence Thomas and the other Reagan and Bush appointees. I'd run it right after the decision and let it ride the wave, but I wouldn't spend lots of money.

## The Republicans Appeal to Character

BOYNTON: Clinton's people do their ads on abortion, making Clarence Thomas and the Supreme Court the issue. Bush is dropping in the polls. What do we do?

STEVENS: Bomb Libya and make sure we've got good video!

WEINSCHTEL: Are you going to hand-hold that shot too, Stuart?

WILSON: I would do two things. First, show it as a strong character decision by Bush and, second, in a strange sort of way, drop it on Congress as an

example of how out of touch they are with the people and how incapable they are of making a decision. My ad would start with the most violent Operation Rescue footage I could find, perhaps from Wichita, Kansas. Then I'd go to Fargo, North Dakota, where the Lambs of Christ have been protesting.

STEVENS: Is this your ad for the Democrats or for the Republicans?

WILSON: For us. Then I'd have the President in the White House saying, "For over twenty years the country's been divided on the issue of abortion. I pray it must stop. But *you* must stop it." He would then explain his veto: "I vetoed the abortion-rights bill not to frustrate this nation, not to anger people, but to give you the chance to make a decision yourself, in your state, in your community. I have no confidence in the Congress of this country to make this important decision for you. They are completely out of touch with your lives and your values. As Abraham Lincoln said of slavery, this issue of abortion tears at the very fabric of our nation. As President, my decision is for this issue to be decided by each state."

STEVENS: If the election turns into a referendum on abortion, the Democrats win it. It's that simple. To join the issue at all is a losing scenario. In the free media I would have Bush say, "Here's what I think on this issue, but I respect others who disagree with me." The abortion issue is most effective when it is seen as resonating within the larger issue of how one feels about women. If Bush can prove that he has a positive attitude toward women, voters will be more accepting of different opinions on a specific issue.

## The Democrats Talk Change

TOUGH: Democrats, we're in the last week. We are pulling even with the President. What do we do?

SWOPE: We continue and intensify with very strong imagery against Bush, questioning his integrity and framing it as a trust issue. So the thought people have before they vote is, "I don't trust either of these guys, but I sure as hell don't want any more of what George Bush has been doing. That's worse than who Bill Clinton is sleeping with."

TRIPPI: I would go the same way we started—that this is a choice about drastic change. I don't think we can base the final ads on character, because people are much more comfortable with Bush. They've known him longer, they've grown up with his dog, Millie. It's got to be about drastic change. The American people are going to have to take a leap, but given the way things are going right now, I think they will.

SWOPE: It's sad, because the election is going to come down to people saying, "Who's the worse bum—the one who I kind of trust or the one who I sort of like?" ■