

Negative Political Advertising and the Charge of Inconsistency:  
The Rhetoric of “Flip-Flop” Arguments

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by

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## CHAPTER 1: RATIONALE

At the 2004 Republican National Convention, Dick Cheney stood in front of an enthusiastic crowd of GOP delegates and repeated a political attack that voters had been hearing for months: Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry is indecisive and inconsistent. The crowd responded by waving their shoes at him. More specifically, they waved flip-flops. The Vice President intoned:

On Iraq, Senator Kerry has disagreed with many of his fellow Democrats. But Senator Kerry's liveliest disagreement is with himself. His back-and-forth reflects a habit of indecision, and sends a message of confusion. And it is all part of a pattern. He has, in the last several years, been for the No Child Left Behind Act -- and against it. He has spoken in favor of the North American Free Trade Agreement -- and against it. He is for the Patriot Act -- and against it. Senator Kerry says he sees two Americas. It makes the whole thing mutual -- America sees two John Kerrys. (Cheney, 2004, para. 25)

As Cheney attacked Kerry's apparent vacillation, listeners waved their hands back and forth while chanting "flip-flop, flip-flop...." The presence of rubber-thonged sandals in the hands of these enthusiastic participants made the sentiment as physical as it was symbolic.

As luck would have it, the political sin of which Kerry was accused shares the same name as a popular brand of footwear, thus providing a humorous, attention-getting prop for use by Republicans. One commonality between the two uses of the term might be their relation to motion. The sandal works in such a way that it swiftly strikes against a person's heel as they walk. The right and left sides alternate turns with each stride. In

political terms, to “flip-flop” is to indiscriminately change one’s position on an issue, to vacillate, waver, or to waffle. Of course, sound may be just as important as motion to the word’s polysemy. While the footwear is named for the sound it makes as it collides with the foot, the word “flip-flop” derives charm from what Burke (1968a) would have described as its “jingle.” Linguist John McWhorter told the *New York Times*:

Flip-flop is linguistically compelling because it uses sound symbolism... Words beginning with 'fl' tend to have a meaning related to ineffectual, abrupt movements. Fluttering, flickering, flailing, flopping -- the very sound 'fl' is effective because it goes right to our senses. (Cave, 2004, p. 5)

In short, the word resonates with politicians and voters alike because it pleases the tongue and the ear and connotes acts unbecoming of a potential leader. The word has become slang for any variety of political inconsistency. The charge of inconsistency must not necessarily include the expression “flip-flop.” Historically speaking, it is plausible, perhaps even likely, that candidates have attacked their opponents for inconsistency without even conceiving of the argument as a “flip-flop” attack. Notably, the Cheney speech includes no use of the word “flip-flop.” Although surrogates and pundits may have tossed the word around during the campaign, the term was owned and employed more by voters than political leaders. However, this dissertation demonstrates that regardless of their use of terminology, politicians are largely responsible for making the charge of an opponent’s inconsistency so prominent in political campaign dialogue.

But why is the charge of inconsistency so prevalent in American culture? What is it that Americans value about consistency that makes its absence—particularly in the political arena—so potentially repugnant? In the aforementioned 2004 presidential

campaign, George W. Bush was favored by many voters over John F. Kerry in part because he was seen as more consistent in his statements and beliefs than Kerry. Bush declared, “we never change our beliefs, the strategic beliefs that are necessary to protect this country...” (First Bush-Kerry, 2004); and he further boasted, “I understand everybody in this country doesn't agree with the decisions I've made. And I made some tough decisions. But people know where I stand” (First Bush-Kerry, 2004). Although noting disagreement between oneself and the American public seems like an odd campaign strategy for most political candidates, this appeal made sense for George W. Bush because his rhetoric privileged consistency and the ability to make firm decisions over the particular details of his actual decisions and beliefs

Although Bush's resoluteness benefitted him in the 2004 election, his unwavering commitment to his beliefs and policies may have ultimately cost him his popularity during his second term as President. Opponents blamed him for remaining “resolute” even when faced with evidence that his policies were failing (Robinson, 2007, p. A15). Others called him “stubborn” and “outrageously self-confident” (Brooks, 2008, p. 23). In fact, a Newsweek poll in 2007 found that two thirds of Americans believed Bush was “stubborn and unwilling to admit mistakes” (Sederstrom, 2007, p. 4). Ironically, by the end of his second term, a *New York Times* headline announced that it was Bush's poll numbers that were remarkably consistent and “unwavering” – unwaveringly low (Thee-Brenan, 2009, p.11). Psychologist Cynthia Nordstrom summarized Bush's decline in popularity by telling the *Washington Post*, “A lot of people think Bush should have been changing tack in response to new information, and the very thing that was a virtue is now his Achilles' heel” (Vedantam, 2007, p. A03). Consistency, then, may earn candidates

political traction, but this virtue is not unconditionally appreciated. In short, inconsistency is a nuanced rhetorical construction.

Of course, all this talk about consistency does not mean that voters are afraid of change. Challenger candidates routinely promise “change” from an incumbent or incumbent party’s policies and attitudes. Thus, while it is fine for the country, as a collective whole to elect a candidate who seeks to change the course of the nation, it is still not acceptable for that particular candidate to change their own policy positions or contradict themselves in any way- at least not according to popular campaign discourse. For instance, Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign promised “change,” but it was understood that he would be changing the country, not his own mind.

Importantly, politicians are not the only people from whom the public expects consistency. A brief glimpse at contemporary popular culture offers evidence that American society has a low tolerance for those who waffle or change their mind frequently. When Brett Favre, an incredibly successfully but recently retired National Football League quarterback would not make an official decision about whether to return to the game of football for another season, the media quickly grew tired of his indecision and called him a flip-flopper (Battista, 2008; Myers, 2009; Sharp, 2008). First, he said he wouldn’t play football in 2009; but shortly before the start of the season, he signed a contract with the Minnesota Vikings. The short time between his retirement and his return to the NFL was marked by much speculation and impatience on the part of the media.

Favre’s indecision made him the target of ridicule among sports fans, particularly those with allegiances to his former team, the Green Bay Packers. Favre even poked fun

of his own apparent character flaws in a television commercial for Sears in which he played the role of a customer who was unable decide whether or not to buy a new television. The ad takes place in the home electronics section of a Sears department store. Uncertainty and indecision are figuratively written all over Favre's face during his exchange with a salesperson:

Salesperson: That's the new superslim Samsung LED TV. The best part? Sears can check the competition to guarantee the lowest price.

Favre: I'm listening.

Salesperson: We do real-time price checks. We've found that there are some guys out there who really agonize about making decisions. It's not their thing, they waffle, they don't know what they're going to do...

Favre: Those guys drive me crazy.

Salesperson: What do you think?

Favre: I'll take it.

Salesperson: Alright.

Favre: ...I don't know. (Sears Blue Crew, 2009)

In part because of the regularity with which political candidates use the flip-flop charge, other political figures, much like Favre, have been attacked with the same language. This excerpt from a frequently aired Sears commercial demonstrates not only the reach of our culture's concern for consistency, but the potential for humorous exploitation that is inherent to the charge of inconsistency.

Before returning to a discussion of flip-flop charges in political communication, one more brief example of pop culture's condemnation of inconsistency will help to

demonstrate the pervasiveness of this project's subject matter. Even in popular music, a preference for consistency is discernable. In 2008, pop singer Katy Perry released a single titled "Hot N Cold," the lyrics of which rebuke a romantic partner for being consistently inconsistent. The song was number one on the pop music charts and certified platinum three times. The opening lines to the song declare, "You change your mind/Like a girl changes clothes," thus associating indecision with femininity, an inclination that is noted in more depth later in this analysis. The chorus of the song relies on a catalogue of binary terms to further emphasize the target's flip-flops:

You're hot then you're cold

You're yes then you're no.

You're in then you're out.

You're up then you're down.

You're wrong when it's right.

It's black and it's white.

We fight, we break up.

We kiss, we make up. (Luke, Martin, & Perry, 2008).

Although this dissertation focuses primarily on flip-flop charges in political contexts, artifacts from popular culture demonstrate that a preference for consistency and attacks on indecision reach far beyond the political arena. Thus, this analysis of televised political advertising speaks to a phenomenon or cultural predilection that extends beyond the arena of political communication. Still, political communication is the best place from which to study cultural notions regarding inconsistency because it is a high stakes context in which utterances are designed to have specific effects, and because it presents us with

the richest, most complete, and most nuanced rhetorical constructions of (in)consistency.

The charge of flip-flopping, or more generally, inconsistency, has become a *topos* or rhetorical commonplace in political campaigns. It is a stock attack, a readily available tool, or weapon with which office-seekers can strike their opponent. A political candidate with any considerable amount of experience in politics will likely be forced to make countless statements and decisions on many different political issues; and fitfully, some of these decisions are bound to contradict one another. Even the least savvy of opposition researchers is capable of sorting through a candidate's record, and finding instances when that candidate contradicts him or herself.

Politicians can conceivably use flip-flop attacks in any of today's prominent forms of political communication. Stump speeches, talk show appearances, political debates, and campaign web pages are all valid and potentially effective means for communicating such messages. However, there may be reason to believe that this type of argument is particularly well-suited to televised political advertising. First and foremost, television spots permit campaigns to reinforce their messages visually and audibly. It is one thing to claim that an opponent is inconsistent and to verbally provide the relevant evidence. It is another thing entirely to *show* an audience that an opponent is inconsistent with constantly alternating visuals, sound effects that punctuate each "flip" or "flop," and music that makes one's opponent seem all the more ridiculous or untrustworthy. Televised advertising also lets political campaigns use direct evidence of opponents' flip-flopping in the form of actual audio and video examples.

There are several other reasons why television may be preferable to other political communication media for communicating the flip-flop message. Televised political ads

may reach audiences that other forms of communication do not, namely uninterested and undecided voters whose knowledge might be contradicted and whose uncertainty might be heightened upon viewing a flip-flop ad. In contrast to political campaign debates, televised advertising does not subject candidates to the threat of eminent rebuttal.

Although candidates in debates are present and able to defend themselves immediately if attacked, the same is not true of television ads. Ultimately, then, this analysis focuses on televised political advertising because flip-flop attacks are particularly well-suited to the medium.

The flip-flop charge, in fact, has been a part of political advertising since the very inception of the medium. In 1952, Adlai Stevenson's campaign produced an ad titled, "Platform Double Talk." Although it does not attack Dwight Eisenhower by name, it does charge that his party makes outrageous promises, uses double talk, and is generally confused and confusing. The animated cartoon features a two-headed man named Mr. MacGOP on a stage labeled "Republican Side Show." The head on the left and the head on the right contradict each other at every political turn. Circus music plays in the background in order to further communicate a sense of absurdity. The ad proceeds:

Master of Ceremonies: Step right up, folks, see the mental marvel of the campaign, Mr. Mac-G-O-P. He promises to solve all your problems. Ask him any questions.

Female Voice #1: What about Korea?

GOP Head #1: We don't belong in Korea. Let the Commies have it.

GOP Head #2: We should expand the war, open a second front in China.

Female Voice #1: Wait a minute, we can't do both! We can't pull our troops out of Korea and invade China.

Master of Ceremonies: Go away lady, you bother me. Any more questions?

Male Voice #1: What about aid to Europe?

GOP Head #1: I'll personally tear down the Iron Curtain.

GOP Head #2: Not another nickel down that rathole! Let the Commies have it!

Male Voice #1: That's doubletalk!

Master of Ceremonies: What are you complaining about? You get two policies for the price of one!

Female Voice #2: Stop confusing the issue. I want a straight answer! Should we support the United Nations or not?

GOP Head #1: Uh, yes...I mean no.

GOP Head #2: No!...I mean yes.

GOP Head #1: You're confused

GOP Head #2: You're confused!

Male Narrator: Don't you be confused. Vote for Stevenson for president.

(“Platform Double Talk”)

The ad encourages voters to reject the GOP on the grounds that they are inconsistent and untrustworthy. The current analysis demonstrates how this type of advertisement, the flip-flop spot, has been used in presidential campaign televised advertising efforts since 1952. Of course there is much variety among flip-flop ads themselves, as each campaign finds new and creative ways of constructing the same message. Much of this variety is also due to advances in television production. Richardson (2002) reminds us that,

“Political communication has become increasingly audiovisual communication. Each new generation of campaign advertising is marked by even more skilled uses of audiovisual rhetoric” (p. 1). A systematic analysis of flip-flop advertising across multiple presidential campaigns illustrates this point well.

The persistent repetition of the flip-flop charge is evidence of its perceived utility. David Schwartz, curator at the Museum of the Moving Image, which catalogs and screens political advertisements dating back to 1952, notes, “Just like Hollywood loves to remake successful movies, I think political consultants like to remake successful commercials” (Montagne & Inskip, 2008). Presidential candidates and the consultants who advise them are clearly under the impression that it is often wise to attack one’s opponent for being inconsistent. Such charges may make an opponent appear dishonest and/or ineffectual, creating uncertainty about their character and policies.

This study analyzes the strategies and techniques by which televised Presidential Campaign advertisements construct the charge of inconsistency. The study proceeds in roughly two directions. First, the textual, audio, and visual features of these ads are examined in an effort to understand how they solicit particular judgments from potential voters. Of course, this also means understanding the attendant meanings and ideas that contribute to, and make so potent, the charge that one’s opponent is a flip-flopper. Doing so reveals much about the cultural and political values that voters employ when making political decisions. It also places this study in the center of a longstanding conversation among political communication scholars regarding negative campaigning and political malaise. An introduction to the concepts that guide such an inquiry are provided below. Second, the proposed analysis examines the progression and arrangement of ideas and

arguments within flip-flop attacks. As noted below, a study of the progression of ideas lends itself to a discussion of Kenneth Burke's (1968b) theory of form, as well as argumentation theory.

### **Values, Repulsions, and Political Malaise**

This analysis investigates the way political communication shapes, and is shaped by, what Americans want in an elected official. Flip-flop ads tell voters what they do not want in a leader. Careful analysis of the language used in these advertisements produces a picture of what it is that audiences are encouraged to fear, resent, and rebel against. This picture is simultaneously more holistic and more precise than what previous scholars have attempted. Although flip-flop ads have been mentioned in numerous publications (Benoit, 2003; Buell & Sigelman, 2008; Dover, 2006; Felknor, 1992; Kern, 1989; Mark, 2006) and sometimes even labeled as such (O'Shaughnessy & Henneberg, 2007), there exists no sustained analysis of this class of political message.

Rhetorical analysis of flip-flop ads is intimately concerned with the beliefs and values to which political candidates appeal in their communication. By extension, this project is also concerned with the values and beliefs that citizens use when making decisions about voting. This study examines and explains how flip-flop ads invoke key electoral values such as consistency and trustworthiness. The ways in which televised political advertising is designed to appeal to voters' preference for a harmony in their leaders' words and deeds, and for that matter, a harmony of exactly words and words, is of chief concern here.

The careful study of flip-flop ads speaks to the very heart of voters' deepest fears, repulsions, and insecurities as well. Flip-flop ads have come to define what it means to be

a politician. They construct a caricature of the typical politician who is willing to say whatever it takes to get elected, even if that means saying different things at different times, and to different audiences. These ads exploit the fact that all voters know about a politician is what they say (and what is said about them). In other words, one can never actually “know” what politicians truly believe because they might say anything to get elected. Such uncertainty is a reality of all human communication that is exploited in the high stakes arena of political communication, and made particularly salient by flip-flop charges propagated through advertising. An exploration of the vilification of politics via the flip-flop ad is a prominent feature of this rhetorical criticism. Such an undertaking is particularly valuable in light of concerns regarding negative political advertising and political malaise in the United States.

A rhetorical analysis of political flip-flop advertising is also necessary for understanding American voters’ biggest fears and repulsions. Political communication scholars have spilled much ink discussing the possibility that negative political messages demobilize and demoralize the electorate (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995). It has been argued that when candidates attack each others’ policies and character in televised political campaign advertisements, voters lose faith not only in those candidates, but more generally in the electoral and democratic processes that undergird our entire system of government. The most worrisome symptoms of this malaise are decreased voter turnout (Ansolabehere, Iyengar, & Simon, 1999; Brader, 2005; Brader & Corrigan 2006; Brooks, 2006; Brooks & Geer, 2002; Crigler, Just, & Belt, 2002; Freedman, Wood, & Lawton, 1999; Garand & Graddy, 2001; Goldstein, 1997; Houston, Doan, & Roskos-Ewolden, 1999; Kaid, Chanslor, & Hovind, 1992; Lawton & Freedman, 2001; Lemert,

Wanta, & Lee, 1999; Min, 2004; Wattenberg & Briens, 1999), lower trust in government (Brader, 2005; Brooks & Geer, 2007; Craig & Kane, 2000; Globetti & Hetherington, 2000; Leshner & Thorson, 2000; Pinkleton, Um, & Austin, 2002; Thorson et al., 2000; Wanta, Lemert, & Lee, 1999), and reduced political efficacy (Brader, 2005; Brooks & Geer, 2007; Craig & Kane, 2000; Freedman & Goldstein, 1999; Goldstein, 1997; Jackson, Mondak, & Huckfeldt, 2005; Lau & Pomper, 2004; Pinkleton, Um, & Austin, 2002; Stevens, 2002; Thorson et al., 2000). A meta-analysis by Lau, Sigelman, and Rovner (2007) confirmed that “negative campaigning has the potential to do damage to the political system itself, as it tends to reduce feelings of political efficacy, trust in government, and perhaps even satisfaction with government itself” (p. 1184). Such effects clearly pose a threat to the vitality of our democratic institutions.

Not all scholars, however, share this concern about negative advertising. Geer (2006) defends negative advertising on the grounds that it presents a wealth of information about candidates and their policies, and that attack ads typically use more evidence than positive ads. Though he vehemently defends all negative political advertising, Geer does note that political candidates may be “going overboard” with attacks on opponents’ integrity (p. 83). Importantly, Geer defines an attack on integrity as “comments about trustworthiness, a willingness to stand up for principles, or a tendency to ‘flip-flop’” (p. 72). Geer writes:

The attention to integrity when going on the attack makes strategic sense. If a candidate is able to question the opposition’s honesty, the appeal may cause voters to wonder about whether the individual’s positions on issues can be trusted. In many ways, attacks on integrity kill two birds with one stone. The candidate

raises doubts about the personal qualifications of the opposition as well as their ability to deliver on what they have promised in their program for government.

(pp. 72-73)

Because flip-flop ads raise doubts about the honesty and integrity of political candidates, these messages may be more likely to contribute to problems related to political malaise. Ads that accuse candidates of being dishonest and inconsistent may be particularly destructive to our political system. Rather than conduct further effects research on the matter, this study focuses in more depth on the actual content and form of the flip-flop advertisements, identifying key features and probing how the ads construct political realities for candidates and voters. Textual features that may contribute to the repulsion of citizens is also studied here. Previous research has told us what these ads do, without fully probing what these ads are. A systematic rhetorical analysis of flip-flop ads is necessary in order to offer a more thorough criticism of their nature and rhetorical force. This investigation helps scholars better understand political appeals to (dis)honesty and (in)consistency.

### **Progression of Ideas and Arguments**

Whereas most studies of political campaign advertising proceed by means of effects studies or quantitative content analysis, this study uses rhetorical analysis. The diligent scrutiny of these political ads, including their manipulation of music and visuals, explains much about how these ads are constructed to create particular expectations in audiences, at once satisfying those expectations and stirring uncertainty in voters. Their rhetorical form encourages particular judgments from audiences regarding what is desirable in a political leader, and whether individual candidates embody those desirable

traits. In order to fully expand upon this thesis, this analysis pays special attention to the *progression* of ideas and arguments in flip-flop advertising. Kenneth Burke's (1968b) theory of form, with its attention to the creation of appetites in an audience, as well as its focus on repetitive form is of particular value for exploring how recurring patterns of political messages become recognizable to television audiences. The fundamental form of the flip-flop message is entrenched deeply enough to permit not only variations on the standard theme, but to spawn imitation ads that borrow the form of the flip-flop message without the requisite content as well.

Flip-flop ads constitute a unique communicative space in which policy and character claims intermingle to shape political meaning and awareness. These ads make use of opposing candidates' votes, initiatives, and statements on policy issues (e.g. war, education, abortion, etc.) to make larger claims about the candidates' character (e.g. one's integrity, trustworthiness, etc.). Although some scholars have discussed how policy and character claims work in concert in political messages, most political communication research is still based on a policy/character dichotomy. This study will both complicate and clarify the relationship between policy and character claims in one particular type of negative political advertisement.

One of the most general ways in which policy and character conspire to create dominant political meanings in flip-flop ads is best explained through theories of argumentation. In fact, the relationship between policy and character in these ads is not unlike the relationship between data and claim in Toulmin's (1958) model of argumentation. Furthermore, because good claims are not always explicit, Aristotle's concept of the enthymeme must also be applied here (Bitzer, 1959). The ultimate ends of

flip-flop ads is to criticize an individual's character. Therefore, the proposed study also contributes to our understanding of *ad hominem* political attacks (Cragan & Cutbirth, 1984; Walton, 2000a, 2000b).

Just because televised flip-flop messages can be understood in terms of argumentation theory does not mean they are without an emotional dimension. Flip-flop ads provide an excellent site from which to explain the existence and nature of emotional arguments. Anger, anxiety, and fear are just a few of the emotions to which flip-flop ads appeal. In an effort to influence audiences' judgments, these ads use as much emotion as argumentation. Such an analysis is consistent with recent interest in the role of emotion in political decision-making. In fact, Westen's (2007) popular exploration of emotion made frequent use of flip-flop messages (e.g. George W. Bush's anti-Kerry "Windsurfing" spot) in order to demonstrate his thesis regarding the importance of reaching voters with emotional appeals. He writes:

The vision of mind that has captured the imagination of philosophers, cognitive scientists, economists, and political scientists since the eighteenth century—a dispassionate mind that makes decisions by weighing the evidence and reasoning to the most valid conclusions—bears no relation to how the mind and brain actually work together. (p. ix)

Although this dissertation is more concerned with political messages than political brains, Westen's point is well taken—it is important to consider the role of emotion in political campaigns.

## **Overview of Dissertation**

Flip-flop advertisements are an important, recurring, and dramatically unexamined form of political campaign message. Their goal is to make political opponents appear inconsistent and untrustworthy. This rhetorical analysis examines televised flip-flop advertisements from presidential campaigns for 1952-2008. Although flip-flop attacks also occur in Senate, Gubernatorial, and just about all other levels of electoral campaigns, presidential campaign ads have been chosen for their prominence in American society. Such a project produces a better understanding and evaluation of the multiple meanings, associations, and complexities of this particular type of political campaign advertisement.

Chapter two reviews relevant research on the topic of negative political advertising. This review includes special attention to rhetorical analyses of television spots as well as an outline of past research on the topic of political consistency. Chapter three considers the assumptions, aims, and procedures that guide the rhetorical criticism in general and discusses in particular detail the various perspectives and approaches used in the current project.

Chapter four describes and interprets the textual, audible, and visual features of prominent presidential flip-flop ads from 1952-2008 in order to better understand what these ads tell us about desirable and undesirable characteristics of political leaders. At the center of this analysis is a concern for what values are celebrated by flip-flop ads and what character qualities are condemned, thus potentially repelling citizens. This chapter explores how the ads may create negative political feelings that could be transferred from particular politicians to Politicians in general, thus indicting the entire political process and potentially contributing to citizen malaise.

Chapter five considers the progression of ideas and arguments in presidential flip-flop advertisements. This analysis proceeds in two different, but related directions. First, using the work of Kenneth Burke, the ads were analyzed in terms of their rhetorical form. This section argues that the ads seek to create and satisfy an appetite in viewers, while, almost paradoxically, encouraging uncertainty and trepidation. The way in which this form can be bastardized and abused to create the impression of inconsistency is also discussed. Second, this chapter examines the degree to which the progression of ideas in flip-flop ads form a coherent argument, the centrality of the enthymeme to interpreting the ads, and how these ads navigate the *ad hominem* fallacy.

Chapter six explores the implications for this analysis of flip-flop advertising, discussing what it means for negative political advertising in particular, as well as contemporary political discourse in general. Of interest here is the degree to which flip-flop ads reflect and perpetuate voters' anxieties regarding what may be "known" about politicians in a mediated environment.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Social scientists, rhetoricians, journalists, and ordinary citizens have all contributed to ongoing discussions about negative political advertising. Often enough, the tone of this discussion itself is negative. For instance, Mark (2006) notes that “Negative campaigning is one of the most bemoaned aspects of the American political system, particularly by academics and journalists who say it diminishes the level of political discourse and intensifies the divisions among voters” (p. 3). Similarly, Lau and Sigelman (2000) summarized concerns about negative advertising by writing, “attack advertising is widely considered pervasive and problematic, and both its pervasiveness and the problems it poses for participatory democracy are seen as stemming from its effectiveness” (p. 14). Driven by the concern that such negative political discourse cannot be good for democracy, volumes have been written on the topic of political attacks in the context of political campaigns.

Of course, not all commentators on this subject regard negative advertising as a deleterious phenomenon. Geer (2006) is perhaps the single most determined apologist for negative advertising in American political campaigns. According to his arguments, democracy is well served by candidates’ efforts to discuss their opponents’ weaknesses. These efforts inject important information about candidates’ character and policy positions into the public discourse for consideration by voters. Accordingly, Geer claims that negative campaigning actually enriches the information environment surrounding political campaigns, writing, “Any deliberative process usually benefits from having criticism and debate” (p. 2). He continues:

Campaigns are not feel-good exercises; they are pitched battles for control of government. The stakes are often high and competition is usually fierce. The real issue should be whether or not candidates present the information in campaigns that is useful to voters. The tone of that information should be a secondary issue, at best. (p. 3)

Geer's analysis concludes that attack ads are indeed informative and useful for voters. Of course, Geer's is just one voice among many in this discussion.

Overall, the relevant literature on negative political campaigning lacks uniformity. A diversity of perspectives have been applied to the study of negative political advertising, and even studies with similar approaches have sometimes produced different results. This chapter aims to review the available literature on negative ads to build a suitable foundation for a rhetorical analysis of political flip-flop ads. Each body of literature reviewed in this chapter provides insight and instruction for the proposed rhetorical analysis of political flip-flop advertisements. The research considered here can be divided into two rough categories: First, those studies that are useful for providing a foundation for chapter four's analysis of appeals to consistency and the vilification of politicians; and second, those studies that lay groundwork for chapter five's study of the use of rhetorical form to create and satisfy audience desires, as well as the flip-flop ad's construction of compelling arguments.

### **Values, Repulsions, and Political Malaise**

As noted in the introductory chapter, the proposed project aims to better understand the way verbal, visual, and audible features of political flip-flop advertisements construct appeals to political consistency and trustworthiness. This

requires an analysis of how political candidates' willingness to vilify politics and politicians may work to encourage citizens' negative political feelings and attitudes. There are several bodies of literature relevant to such an inquiry. First, this chapter reviews research that examines the effects of negative political advertising on audience attitudes relevant to political malaise. Second, content analyses that speak to the amount of negative political advertising in campaigns, as well as important differences among types of ads, is reviewed. Third, rhetorical approaches to the study of negative advertising are discussed. Narrative and generic theoretical perspectives, among others, are also reviewed in an effort to understand how previous research has gone about describing, interpreting, and critiquing the rhetoric of negative political ads. This section also reviews approaches taken to the study of the visual and aural components of rhetorical acts. Finally, previous empirical analyses of flip-flop ads are discussed.

### **Effects of Negative Advertising**

Although this study does not adopt an effects approach to its analysis of political advertising, the sheer volume of political advertising effects research renders this area of scholarly inquiry impossible to ignore. A brief review of this research not only alerts us to the importance of negative advertising's effects, but also highlights the ways in which the topic has perplexed social scientific scholars, thus highlighting the need to use other, more interpretive approaches for studying this important communication phenomenon. Although most of the research examined here deals exclusively with negative advertising (or the differences between negative and positive advertising), I begin with a brief review of political advertising in general.

**Effects of political advertising.** Benoit, Leshner, and Chattapadhyay (2007) used meta-analysis to summarize the research findings regarding the effects of political advertising. Not surprisingly, this area of research is very large, and the results of these studies are occasionally conflicting. Benoit, Leshner, and Chattapadhyay help to make this research clearer. They found that exposure to political ads influences candidate preference and perception of candidates' character. Also, political ads increase knowledge and serve an agenda-setting function by making some issues appear more salient to voters than others. Furthermore, televised political messages stimulate voter interest in political campaigns and influence vote choice. The meta-analysis is particularly helpful for verifying that political advertising affects citizens in a number of important ways.

**Effects of negative ads.** A considerable body of research is devoted to assessing the specific effects of negative political advertising. This body of research seeks to reveal the specific influences negative advertising has on those who watch it. Importantly, much of the research regarding the effects of negative advertising has produced uncertain or contradictory results. For this reason, meta-analyses of studies about negative advertising are particularly informative (Allen & Burrell, 2002; Lau & Pomper, 2004; Lau & Sigelman, 2000; Lau, Sigelman, Heldman, & Babbit, 1999; Lau, Sigelman, & Rovner, 2007). Because the most recent of these meta-analyses incorporates much of the same data as previous meta-studies, as well as more recent research, the most recent meta-analytic study is reviewed here.

Lau, Sigelman, and Rovner (2007) conducted the most current meta-analysis of studies related to the effects of negative advertising. Their study incorporated results

from 111 individual investigations and sought clarification regarding the numerous claims made about the effects of negative advertising. Many of the claims pertain to immediate effects such as vote choice or knowledge acquisition, while others deal with such latent attitudinal effects as political efficacy.

Some scholars of political advertising have suggested that negative ads are more memorable than positive ads (Brader, 2005; Brians & Wattenberg, 1996; Chang, 2001; Geer & Geer, 2003; Lang, 1991; Newhagen & Reeves, 1991; Roberts, 1995, Shapiro & Reiger, 1992; Sulfaro, 1998); and Lau, Sigelman, and Rovner (2007) found overall support for this conclusion. They claim that it is somewhat more likely audiences will remember negative messages than positive ones. Another popular claim about negative advertising is that it increases campaign knowledge. Lau, Sigelman and Rovner (2007) found that the available literature supports this claim: negative advertising informs voters. Importantly, however, the study did not test whether negative advertising is any more or less informative than positive ads. Furthermore, although negative campaigning has been said to increase campaign interest (Brader, 2005; Bartels, 2000; Patterson & Shea, 2001; Pinkleton & Garramone, 1992), the meta-analysis found only limited support for this claim.

Of course, the sponsors of negative ads aim to do more than get audiences to remember or learn from their messages--they want to persuade as well. Many empirical studies have found that audiences report liking a candidate less after that candidate has been the target of a political attack ad (Arceneaux & Nickerson, 2005; Basil, Schooler, & Reeves, 1991; Fridkin & Kenney, 2004; Houston & Doan, 1999; Jasperson & Fan, 2002; Kaid, 1997; Kaid & Boynton, 1987; King & McConnell, 2003; Merrit, 1984; Pinkleton,

1998; Roddy & Garramone, 1988; Shapiro & Rieger, 1992; Shen & Wu, 2002; Weigold, 1992). To this end, meta-analysis revealed that negative advertising does in fact undermine positive affect for the target of an attack. In short, attack ads can effectively get audiences to view a candidates' opponent less favorably. However, the meta-analysis also confirmed evidence of a backlash effect, as many previous studies had found that negative ads also reduce affect for the sponsoring candidate (Bartels, 2000; Basil, Schooler, & Reeves, 1991; Capella & Tayler, 1992; Chang, 2003; Fridkin & Kenney, 2004; Haddock & Zanna, 1997; Hill, 1989; Hitchon & Chang, 1995; Hitchon, Chang, & Harris, 1997; Houston & Doan, 1999; Houston, Doan, & Roskos-Ewolden, 1999; Jasperson & Fan, 2002; Kahn & Geer, 1994; Kahn & Kenney, 2004; Merrit, 1984; Pinkleton, 1998, 1997; Shapiro & Reiger, 1995; Shen & Wu, 2002; Thorson, Christ, & Caywood, 1991; Weigold, 1992). There is hardly any evidence, therefore, that negative advertising bolsters a candidate's affect relative to their opponent.

For the proposed rhetorical analysis of flip-flop ads the most relevant outcome from Lau, Sigelman, and Rovner's meta-analysis was the degree to which negative ads may have a harmful influence on participatory democracy. For instance, Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) claim that:

Attack advertisements resonate with the popular beliefs that government fails, that elected officials are out of touch and quite corrupt, and that voting is a hollow act. The end result: lower turnout, lower trust in government, regardless of which party rules. (pp. 147-148)

Numerous studies have confirmed these worries with empirical evidence supporting the notion that negative advertising decreases voter turnout (Ansolabehere, Iyengar, &

Simon, 1999; Brader, 2005; Brader & Corrigan 2006; Brooks, 2006; Brooks & Geer, 2007; Crigler, Just, & Belt, 2002; Freedman, Wood, & Lawton, 1999; Garand & Graddy, 2001; Goldstein, 1997; Houston, Doan, & Roskos-Ewolden, 1999; Kaid, Chanslor, & Hovind, 1992; Lawton & Freedman, 2001; Lemert, Wanta, & Lee, 1999; Min, 2004; Wattenberg & Brians, 1999), decreases trust in government (Brader, 2005; Brooks & Geer, 2007; Craig & Kane, 2000; Globetti & Hetherington, 2000; Leshner & Thorson, 2000; Pinkleton, Um, & Austin, 2002; Thorson et al., 2000; Wanta, Lemert, & Lee, 1999), and reduces both internal and external political efficacy (Brader, 2005; Brooks & Geer, 2007; Craig & Kane, 2000; Freedman & Goldstein, 1999; Goldstein, 1997; Jackson, Mondak, & Huckfeldt, 2005; Lau & Pomper, 2004; Pinkleton, Um, & Austin, 2002; Stevens, 2002; Thorson et al., 2000). Yet, there are also effects studies that contradict either some or all of these results (Arceneaux & Nickerson, 2005; Brader, 2005; Clinton & Lapinski, 2005; Djupe & Peterson, 2002; Garramone et al, 1990; Geer, 2006; Geer & Lau, 2003; Jackson & Carsey, 2007; Jackson & Sides, 2006; Kahn & Kenney, 2004; Lau & Pomper, 2004; Martinez & Delegal, 1990; Leshner & Thorson, 2000; Niven, 2006; Pinkleton & Garramore, 1992; Schultz & Pancer, 1997; Thorson et al, 2000; Wattenberg & Brians, 1999). To bring clarity to the issue, Lau, Sigelman & Rovner (2007) examined those studies that attempted to measure the latent effects of attack advertising. Although there was no support found for the claim that negative advertising suppresses voter turnout, such messages do in fact reduce feelings of political efficacy, trust in government, and measures of satisfaction with government.

In summary, studies designed to test the effects of negative advertising have often produced complex and contradictory results. However, the meta-analysis reviewed here

provides support for the contention that negative advertising contributes to factors associated with citizen's malaise. Having examined how people may react to these messages, we now turn to a review of studies that attempt to discern just how much negativity reaches the public through political advertising messages.

### **Content of Negative Advertising**

Numerous content analyses of political advertisements speak to the presence of negativity in televised messages. Due to differences in sampling and coding procedures, there are conflicting reports regarding just how negative these messages may be. For instance, Benoit (2007) reported that 34% of utterances in presidential spots in the years 1952-2004 were attacks. Kaid & Johnston (2000) reached a similar conclusion in their study of ads run from 1952-1996, reporting that 38% of presidential television spots were negative. Conversely, West's (2001) research suggests greater levels of negativity, as his study revealed that 56% of televised presidential advertising produced from 1952-2000 was negative in nature. Importantly, West's decision to sample from prominent ads that had been mentioned by other scholars (Jamieson, 1992) or broadcast on the *CBS Evening News* may have contributed to the amount of negativity in his study. Still, even the lowest estimates for how much negativity permeates the airwaves suggests that this sort of communication is worth examining in more depth. In short, it is likely that the average television viewer will encounter negative advertising during political campaign seasons.

Although the majority of televised political messages are positive, there are several reasons why political campaign negativity often seems more prevalent than it is. First, as Lau, Sigelman, and Rovner (2007) have confirmed via meta-analysis, negative ads are more memorable than positive ads. Second, the media are more likely to report on

negative ads than positive ads (Kendall, 2000; Min, 2002; West, 2001). According to Jamieson (1992), the ads that news media select for coverage are twelve times more likely to be negative than positive. This is not to say that positive ads are ignored, but there is certainly a body of evidence that suggests they will make less of an impression than negative ads. Negative advertising gets more attention from the news and from citizens and it seems, by extension, more attention from scholars as well.

Importantly, not all observers believe that negativity in political advertising is necessarily bad. Geer's (2006) content analysis, for example, revealed that negative television advertisements run during presidential campaigns tend to include more evidence than their positive counterparts. This is likely because while audiences may readily accept positive information, negative claims require more "proof" before they are to be believed. Geer emphasizes the importance of evidence not only because it adds to citizens' knowledge about candidates and issues, but also because it constitutes a crucial characteristic of reasoned argument. According to Geer's study, negative advertisements are also more focused on policy than positive advertisements. This is likely because it is easier for campaigns to retrieve negative evidence about their opponent's policy positions than it is their character. Geer claims that policy concerns are typically about more legitimate issues of public importance than an individual's supposed character flaws. Finally, this research found that the policy concerns raised by negative advertising are just as important to the electorate as those raised in positive television ads. To study flip-flop advertisements in light of Geer's results is particularly interesting because flip-flop ads, which are decidedly negative, use evidence such as congressional votes and direct

quotes regarding candidates' issue positions, to make larger claims about candidates' trustworthiness, which is clearly a matter of one's character.

Many content analyses of televised advertising have revealed important patterns in negative advertising. For instance, incumbency influences the amount of negative advertising a campaign will produce (Benoit, 2007; Dover, 2006; Kahn & Kenney, 2004; Tinkham & Weaver-Lariscy, 1995). Whereas incumbents typically use positive messages to discuss their own achievements in office, challengers are inclined to emphasize an incumbents' shortcomings and failures; in other words, challengers have more reason to go negative. Incumbency, then, tends to have an influence on a candidate's message choice. Of course, both challengers and incumbents have been saddled with the flip-flop label. Consequently, it is one goal of this analysis to explain how the construction and possible interpretations of such attacks may differ depending on whether the target is an incumbent or a challenger.

Incumbency is not the only campaign factor that contributes to the frequency of negative advertising in political campaigns. A candidate's position in popular opinion polls is also an important factor (Buell & Sigelman, 2008; Sigelman & Buell, 2003). Research in this area is based on the Skaperdas-Grofman model of political communication. The model's most important prediction is that frontrunners in political campaigns will be less likely to go negative than those who trail in public opinion polls. This is likely because political campaign advisors are aware that many voters claim to dislike negative advertising and because negative charges can create a backlash effect against candidates that sponsor negative ads. Going negative is a risk that candidates with strong leads in the polls are usually unwilling to take. However, if the outcome of an

election is less certain, there is likely to be more negative advertising (Kahn & Kenney, 2004).

The tone of political advertising tends to also vary according to sponsor. Kaid and Dimitrova (2005) found that although just 50% of ads sponsored directly by presidential candidates were negative, 81% of ads run by independent 527 groups were attacks. Similarly, Benoit (2007) reported that while just 48% of messages in candidate-sponsored ads were negative, a solid 80% of messages in non-candidate sponsored ads qualified as attacks. This confirms the popular belief that outside groups produce messages that are disproportionately negative. By running negative ads on behalf of a favorite candidate (or more accurately *against* an undesirable candidate), independent organizations can do damage to political opponents without their preferred candidate experiencing any potential backlash effects. Many flip-flop advertisements are produced and run by organizations other than a candidate's campaign team. For instance, a set of 1972 anti-McGovern flip-flop ads were created not by Richard Nixon's campaign but by an organization called Democrats for Nixon.

### **Rhetorical Approaches to the Study of Negative Political Advertising**

Although content analysis is useful for tracking the frequency of attacks in political advertising and for recognizing trends and predictors of negative messages, there are many studies that probe the context and meaning of particular political advertisements in more depth. This section examines rhetorical approaches to the study of political television spots. The studies reviewed here are discussed not only for their contribution to knowledge regarding negative advertising, but for the interpretive theoretical and methodological perspectives they bring to the study of political advertising in general.

**Narrative theory and negative ads.** For some scholars, negative political advertisements are notable for their consistent and compelling use of storytelling. Gronbeck (1992) rooted his rhetorical analysis of negative political ads firmly in narrative theory. He argued that political advertising makes a better home for narrative than it does argumentation because these ads focus so much on candidates' personal morality, and not political issues and problems as Geer (2006) has contended. Gronbeck (1992) also divided political advertising narratives into two groups. First, there are adversarial narratives, which appear when opposing campaigns tell competing stories about similar issues. A good example of these sorts of ads are the ads both George H. W. Bush and Michael Dukakis produced in 1988 regarding the environmental condition of the Boston Harbor. Each candidate ran ads that told a different story than their opponent offered. A second type of narrative ad is the sequel narrative. These ads tend to elaborate, clarify, or further emphasize an issue that a campaign has deemed important. For instance, later in the Bush-Dukakis race, the Democrats ran additional ads condemning Bush's record on the environment. More specifically, the second environmental ad "puts Bush's actions in conflict with his words and questions his motivations" (p. 338). This strategy exploits cultural preferences for a harmony of words and deeds and puts issues of trust and character at the center of an ad that would otherwise appear to be about issues. In other words, this particular sequel narrative shares important qualities with the flip-flop advertisements to be analyzed in this analysis.

Gronbeck points out that even while candidates are talking about environmental issues in their ads, the attacks are actually designed to undermine each politician's credibility. He observes that attacks on Dukakis were really trying to draw attention to

his “promises” and that attacks on Bush were trying to question his “politics.” In this way, these ads constitute morality plays in which candidates attempt to demonstrate why their opponent is untrustworthy.

According to Scheckels (2002), the concept of narrative coherence can help explain the appeal of negative advertisements produced during the 1998 Maryland gubernatorial campaign between Democrat Parris Glendening and Republican Ellen Sauerbrey. Scheckels argues that Glendening used his television ads to craft a simpler, more coherent narrative than Sauerbrey. Glendening consistently criticized Sauerbrey for extremism, close connections to the National Rifle Association, and challenged election results in the wake of her 1994 gubernatorial defeat. These attacks were so powerful because of Sauerbrey’s poor antecedent *ethos*. Sauerbrey, who had run for governor once before, already had a reputation as a conservative extremist and a poor loser. Glendening simply ran ads that reminded voters of these worries. According to Scheckels, attack advertising is more likely to work if the targeted candidate is already perceived negatively on the issues or traits about which they are being attacked. Scheckels also notes that in addition to providing a simple, enticing account of Sauerbrey’s candidacy, Glendening promoted values that Maryland voters tend to view positively, such as truth, courage, and equality.

**Genre criticism and negative ads.** Another prominent tool for the rhetorical critic to apply to negative political advertising is genre theory. Richardson (2001) has argued that genre theory is a fruitful lens for studying political attack spots because “negative advertising” has ceased to be a useful term for discussing political messages. Simply stated, genre theory can produce better taxonomies of televised political ads. He

points out that much of what voters and scholars detest about negative ads is also true of positive ads (deception, emotional appeal, etc.) and that to simply label ads as either positive or negative is of little value to academia anymore. His research also indicates that audiences have varied and competing concepts of what constitutes negativity in political advertising. If nothing else, negativity is a “contestable, complex, and multidimensional concept” (p. 776) that cannot be so simply defined as a candidate’s attack on their opponent.

Consequently, Richardson has made numerous suggestions regarding how scholars should apprehend the study of political ads. He suggests there be more efforts to understand the role of music and images in ads, with special attention to how these elements work in cooperation with discursive text to produce desired effects. To better understand the various elements that make up negative political advertising is to better understand its definition as a genre. Richardson also advocates studies of advertisements that consider how particular messages fit among dominant pop culture genres.

Richardson (2000) has argued that the concepts of genre and form are important to political advertising because they explain how viewers fill in the blanks when confronted with “recognizable packages of audiovisuals and narratives” (p.1). Political advertisements operate in conjunction with entrenched conventions of both television and politics in such a way that implicitly or explicitly references other cultural genres and texts. Text, sound, and visual may work independently or in tandem to construct and appeal to citizens’ knowledge of genres. Producers of political advertisements can use genre to implicitly reference external political communication or popular cultural texts

that, when recognized by a viewer, can then influence the way that viewer perceives the advertisement and its messages.

A 2004 George W. Bush television spot serves as an excellent example of how ads may borrow generic conventions. An attack ad titled “Wacky” employs several visual and audible characteristics of silent slapstick comedy films from the 1920s in an effort to ridicule John Kerry’s support for a gas tax. The ad’s visuals are comprised of sepia-toned images set inside a decorative frame with black trim. Video of Kerry speaking is interspersed with stock footage of old-time automobiles and gas station attendants. The frame rate is altered so that all motion is sped up to an unusual, outlandish pace. The accompanying music, which is also very fast, is reminiscent of a circus or carnival. In concert, these audiovisual cues set up an analog to the type of film in which Charlie Chaplin may have starred. The verbal component of this ad features a male voice in a stern yet mocking tone, criticizing Kerry’s habit of increasing taxes. The ad ends with 1920s stock footage of a man attempting to push a car up a hill, and the narrator claiming that John Kerry “doesn’t understand what his ideas mean to the rest of us.” By using known characteristics of a bygone era’s popular film genre, this ad creates a comic quality that helps make Kerry’s ideas look silly and antiquated.

Nelson (1993) has also argued that an approach rooted in concepts of rhetorical genre would be well suited to helping scholars understand how audiences may experience political advertising. He argues that until such projects are pursued, it is premature to conduct studies concerning the effects of these ads. He suggests that this approach should include careful consideration of visual, aural and verbal features of ads and ad

types. This would permit scholars to explore the composition of ads as well as how viewers interpret them. He wrote:

We need initial ideas about how information, argumentation, narration, of the like might relate to the persuasive construction and viewer experience of political ads. This is a rhetorical need. It encompasses not only *logos*, but also *ethos*, *pathos*, and *mythos*. (p. 380)

Nelson believes that audiences, either consciously or unconsciously, use genre to make sense of televised political advertising. All the textual characteristics (persuasive strategies, production techniques, embedded ideologies, etc.) that contribute to the way audiences read these messages ought to be considered thoroughly. To understand how political spots work, it is important that rhetorical critics locate them within the context of the political campaigns that produced them. Furthermore, scholars should consider popular genres of speech, film, television, etc., for their influence on the production and reading of political ads. For instance, if an ad's music borrows the same tone and progression of contemporary tabloid news magazine programs such as *Dateline NBC* or *Inside Edition*, the critic must consider the degree to which audiences are encouraged to read that particular ad as if it were a tabloid news magazine program.

Nelson (1995) argues for the use of *mythos*, or appeals to tradition, pride, heroism, etc., as a lens for interpreting televised political advertising. His arguments lead directly to a rhetorical analysis of negative advertising in particular. He writes that in 1988 and 1992, “[George H. W.] Bush’s spots make their most mythic and experiential appeals in negative terms. These spots turn mundane fears into awful horrors” (p. 561).

The ads threaten dystopia and visit the commonplace of stormy troubles not unlike that which is utilized by the popular horror film genre.

According to Nelson (1995), *mythos* is just as important to political advertising as *ethos*, *pathos*, or *logos*, and is particularly useful when used to understand genre. A mythic perspective permits scholars to locate familiar arguments and understand how topics or themes of negative advertising are created, chosen, and executed. For instance, the 1988 and 1992 George H. W. Bush ads appealed to uncertainty by portraying his opponents as “monstrous risks” who threatened traditional American ideals.

Nelson and Boynton (1997) also contend that before we can attempt to understand what effect these messages have on voters, we must understand how they work. One reason that this line of research is so important is because of its ability to “teach us a great deal about the publics of our time” (p. 17). In other words, the analysis of political television spots can produce valuable information about the people that produce ads, the masses who experience them, and the rhetorics that link them together.

Political advertisements’ invocation of popular genres of television and film encourages a shared understanding between candidates and citizens. Although Nelson and Boynton (1997) refer mostly to genres of popular culture media, they do contemplate the existence of genres specific to televised political advertising. For instance, they discuss negative ads and comparative ads as possible genres or sub-types of political ads. Although comparisons between two candidates are common, it is also important to recognize that “Some comparisons are between what candidates say and do; others are between what a candidate says at different times, often with portraits rotating in an about-face” (p. 51). According to this observation, flip-flop attacks perform precisely the

rhetorical task they describe and would therefore need to be considered a sub-genre of comparison advertising. Ultimately, televised political advertising needs to be understood in terms of extant cultural texts, including other political ads.

Nelson and Boynton claim there are three dimensions of televised political advertising that demand rhetorical analysis: verbal (text), visual (pictures), and audible (sound) cues. When discussing each of these elements, Nelson and Boynton tend to rely on the horror genre, by which political opponents are made to appear threatening and villainous. Not surprisingly, the verbal does not act alone in referencing popular genres and creating meaning for audiences, as visuals and music are also crucial to this process. Several suggestions are made regarding the method by which critics can apply genre theory to this holistic understanding of televised political ads. Most importantly, they propose a comparison of ads, particularly those with similar purposes, similar generic elements, and even from the same campaign.

The temporal progression of verbal, visual, and audible conventions in a political advertisement is also important for invoking genre and constructing rhetorical appeal. For instance, the problem-solution sequence typically employs distorted, unpleasant visuals and anxiety-inducing music as a problem is described, with the ad ending with clearer, brighter imagery, more hopeful music, and the promise that a particular candidate has the vision necessary for correcting the problem. This general form echoes that of just about any narrative of a hero, super or otherwise, found in popular film and television. The familiar sequence reassures audiences of an upright hero who will lead them to a better future. Such analyses dig deep into the form of televised political advertising, and explain how that form is experienced by viewers.

**Visual features of political television ads.** According to Sproule (1988), whereas a previous generation's rhetoric was characterized by text and ideas, today's rhetoric is characterized by images. Although most scholars agree that it is important to analyze the visual components of televised political advertisements, the pertinent literature is punctuated by a distinct lack of direction for performing such a task. The suggestions that do exist for interpreting visual rhetoric in advertising, or anywhere else for that matter, are occasionally conflicting. This project seeks an approach to understanding the visual dimensions of political advertisements that is as rich, descriptive, and as critical as possible. For instance, Kaid & Johnston's (2000) videostyle offers a useful scheme for categorizing, comparing, and contrasting the visual content of televised political advertising, but its content analytic nature does not permit the depth of analysis that is offered by more interpretive approaches. Of course, the rhetorical tradition is by no means monolithic. There are about as many means for interpreting the visual components of political advertising as there are for analyzing the verbal components. The goal here is not to limit the current project to one particular mode of visual analysis but to embrace any and all perspectives that may be useful for exploring visual aids in ample depth.

***Visual argumentation.*** Many scholars have claimed that visuals, particularly televised advertisements, can be understood in terms of argumentation theory (Birdsell & Groarke, 1996, 2007; Ripley, 2008; Slade, 2003; Smith, 2007). For instance, Kjeldsen (2007) points to a political ad run by the Venstre party of Denmark during a 2001 political campaign as evidence of the power of visual arguments in political discourse. The ad under consideration featured a photograph of infamous Palestinian immigrants

who had raped a 14-year-old girl. The text of the ad suggested that the Venstre party would bring change to the country. According to Kjeldsen, the negative emotions and opinions conjured by the visual in this photograph were symbolically transferred onto Venstre's political opponents, even though they were not named or referenced in the ad. Moreover, the inclusion of this visual is said to have embedded, condensed, and intensified anti-immigrant sentiment among particular audiences.

Importantly, other scholars believe it is inappropriate to use argumentation theory to study visual communication. One of their main contentions is that visual artifacts render reasons and propositions (the two elements that define argumentation) indistinguishable and unidentifiable (Blair, 1996; Fleming, 1996; Johnson & Blair, 1994). Neither scholars nor popular audiences could examine a photograph and adequately separate its reasons from its propositions. Because its composition is so much different from that of a traditional argument, the assumption is that audiences must therefore interpret visuals differently as well.

Notably, most of the above discussion about whether visuals should be considered arguments has been conducted in relation to static images such as the photograph analyzed by Kjeldsen (2007). However, when scholars concentrate on televised ads, the question of whether visuals constitute arguments or not remains just as difficult to answer. Television actually complicates one of the major contentions against the idea that visuals are arguments. Because television ads consist of moving and changing visuals sewn together in meaningful sequences, accompanied by words and music, it is possible that argumentative reasons and propositions are present and distinguishable, whereas in static images, they are not. Television ads typically include much more than

just one visual. Where there are multiple images, there is the possibility that some visuals will serve as evidence/reasons while others will serve as propositions/claims. In other words, in television, more so than in print, the necessary components of arguments can be distinguished and labeled.

Conversely, some scholars claim that the dynamic of television renders it even less likely that advertisements will be constructed or experienced as arguments. Blair (1996) claims that television ads:

have enormously powerful means of evoking identifications that are independent of the text. They have music, which in a few seconds can create a mood. A familiar tune can flash us back to earlier experiences, evoking floods of feelings. The dynamics that TV images provide mean that, instead of giving us just a snapshot to identify with, we can get an entire drama, with plot and character development, structure of crisis, climax and denouement, all in thirty seconds. (para. 42)

Blair's mention of mood, feelings, and the possibility of thirty second narratives are a far cry from the language of reasoned argument and decision making. Arguments are offered for the consideration of an attentive audience, ready to choose freely among available options, while television commercials make use of misdirection and manipulation: Blair further contends:

It is easier with TV than print to use humor, which is disarming and misdirecting. Many more evocative symbols (such as children, animals, nature, family, mother, doctor or scientist) can be packed into a thirty-second clip than into a static one-page magazine ad. It is also easy to use the overt, surface, verbal argumentation of

the spoken script to mask the manipulation of feelings by the music, the drama, and the visuals. (para. 43)

Blair recognizes that an ad's visual, verbal, and audible components are not always in harmony. Just because one of these components takes the form of an argument, does not mean the commercial as a whole will be read as an argument.

Ultimately, Blair is unable to claim that television commercials can never be arguments. He concludes:

I am not at all saying that TV ads never use visual arguments directly to sell a product or a brand. But I would hypothesize that the effective ones either don't use arguments at all, or else they get their efficacy not directly from any arguments they proffer, but from the underlying and hidden identifications and feelings they evoke. (para. 44)

For Blair, television works in decidedly irrational ways; it is characterized by misdirection and emotional appeal. Still, he is not absolutist in his doubts. He claims that it is possible that some televised ads use visual arguments. This project accepts Blair's arguments, but is likewise unwilling to throw away the idea that some televised images might function as arguments. It is possible that some flip-flop ads act as visual arguments, while others do not. It is also possible that parts of a particular flip-flop ad (such as its verbal component) will argue, while others (perhaps the visual or audible components) will not.

Those scholars who contend that visuals do not argue still maintain that visuals may persuade and influence. Below is a description of several valuable approaches to studying the visual features of political television advertisements.

**Visual identification and apposition.** Jamieson (1992) has maintained that political advertisements are actually designed to shortcut viewers' ability to process information and think rationally. Her analysis of the visual content of televised political advertising is built on the notion of visual identification and visual apposition. She notes how often political campaigns place images of their candidate among images of people and objects that Americans are expected to celebrate (e.g., American flags, American heroes), and place images of their opponents in the context of images that citizens fear and abhor (e.g., communists, violence). These modes of presentation are very similar to what Messaris (1994, 1998) called associational juxtaposition, which describes the process by which two or more images, when placed in proximity to one another, come to be associated in the minds of audience members. These perspectives may not regard visuals as reasoned arguments, but they nonetheless provide a lens for interpreting and understanding the visual component of rhetorical artifacts.

A previous section has discussed the utility of genre theory for understanding televised political advertisements as a whole, and this section builds upon that concept as it applies to advertising visuals (Nelson, 1993, 1995; Nelson & Boynton, 1997). The process requires the critic to identify features of particular ads that may be borrowed from genres of television and film. For instance, if a negative ad embodies characteristics of a typical horror film, it may encourage audiences to experience the ad as they would a horror film. The critic's job is then to understand how an ad, when read in relation to its pop culture analog(s), can shape citizens' political realities.

**Visual metaphor.** Metaphors have long been noted for their ability to influence thought and behavior (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This applies as much to visual content

as it does to verbal utterances (Hausman, 1989; Johns, 1984; Kennedy, Green, & Varaeke, 1993; Whittock, 1990). In fact, visual metaphor has been of particular interest to those who study advertising (Forceville, 1996; Jeong, 2008; Ma, 2008; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2004; Proctor, Proctor, & Pappasolumou, 2005). The critical analysis of visual metaphor is not unlike analysis of verbal metaphor in that the critic must still identify the metaphor's parts ("vehicle" and "tenor" according to Richards (1965)), and consider the implications for how the metaphor(s) under scrutiny may create meaning and construct reality for audiences. For instance, Phillips and McQuarrie (2004) describe an ad in which bottles of Welch's grape juice are stacked and aligned neatly into rows, each bottle resting horizontally. The ad also features a photo of a full wine glass and the text reads: "A glass a day." In Richards' (1965) terms, the faux wine cellar and the full wine glass constitute the vehicle and the Welch's grape juice serves as the tenor. We are expected to understand Welch's juice in terms of wine, so that we associate the health benefits, as well as the charms and treats of wine collecting and consuming, with ordinary grape juice.

Ronald Reagan's 1984 "Bear" ad provides a rather conspicuous example of visual metaphor in Presidential Campaign ads. In addition to the narrator's clear warning that "there is a bear in the woods," this ad features video of a live bear walking in the forest and later coming face-to-face with a human being. The bear is meant to represent the threat of the USSR. The implication is that the United States needs a leader that takes the bear seriously and makes sure we're "as strong as the bear." By including visual metaphor, the threat of violence, and the need for adequate preparation, is made more palpable and real.

In addition to the perspectives summarized here, scholars have argued that visuals can serve as narratives (James, 2005; Kraft & Cantor, 1991), ideographs (Cloud, 2004; Edwards & Winkler, 1997; Palczewski; 2005), icons (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007; Jenkins, 2008; Kimble & Olson, 2006), and fantasy themes (Benoit, Klyokovski, McHale, & Airne, 2001). There is no shortage of perspectives for interpreting visuals. Perhaps what is most important in any rhetorical analysis of visual communication is that scholars go beyond simply describing visual elements present in a given message, to analyzing, interpreting, and criticizing the way particular visuals encourage audiences to construct meaning. This is particularly necessary in political advertisements where visuals are seldom, if ever, static. Every visual in a given sequence must be interpreted in terms of the visual cues that precede and follow. Visual dimensions of political ads must be understood in the context of the entire ad, including verbal and audible components. Of utmost concern throughout the present analysis is how visuals interact with and reinforce accompanying verbal and audible messages.

**Musical dimensions of political television ads.** Although many scholars have noted that music is comprised of both lyrics and instrumentation (Francesconi, 1986; Root, 1986, 1987; Sellnow & Sellnow, 2001), most of the literature regarding the rhetoric of music emphasizes the former. This is likely because the verbal, logocentric element of lyrics can be studied from traditional perspectives of language and symbol use. For instance, Stewart, Smith, and Denton (2001) relegate nonverbal elements of music to a position of secondary importance. They claim that the function of the nonverbal is to complement the verbal. This is a fair claim, but it neglects music without a lyrical dimension. Although some of the music in the flip-flop ads analyzed in this study contain

lyrics, many do not. Therefore, those studies that provide instruction for strictly aural elements of music are particularly important to this review.

Music, according to Langer (1953), derives its deep emotional appeal from its percussive elements. She argues that all human life, from our breathing patterns, to our heartbeats, to the way we walk, is rhythmic. Music, because of its rhythmic drive, therefore imitates life and stirs the “highest organic response, the emotional life of human beings” (p. 126). This illusion of life perspective is particularly useful for explaining and interpreting symbol systems that are decidedly non-rational.

By building on the “illusion of life” theory, Sellnow and Sellnow (2001) have presented one of the most comprehensive discussions of the rhetoric of music. They emphasize the way in which lyrics interact with instrumental music to create powerful emotional experiences for listeners. More specifically, they propose three goals for analyzing music: to understand the message of the lyrics; to examine the patterned and emotional essence of the musical score; and to determine the relationship between these areas. Much of the music in flip-flop advertisements is non-lyrical, thus making at least two of these goals impossible. However, where political television ads are concerned, it is appropriate to substitute an ad’s verbal and visual dimensions for lyrics, and advance our understanding of the message by determining the relationship between these different components.

Francesconi (1986) has offered a particularly useful perspective for understanding music as it accompanies political messages in televised advertising. He carved out an important place for non-lyrical music by claiming that the function of instrumental music is “to heighten response to the action or plot of a movie, or to heighten patriotic fervor at

a political rally” (p. 37). This view is particularly useful because it does not relegate non-lyrical music to a place of secondary importance, but it does acknowledge that in today’s society music is experienced in the context of other symbols. It also acknowledges that listening experiences aren’t always entirely voluntary or pleasurable. In the case of political advertising, music does not act alone but in concert with visual images and verbal narration. Francesconi further notes that form, style, and composition interact with cultural conventions and listeners’ expectations to create meaning and evoke emotion. Root (1986, 1987) also discusses the importance of musical composition, but his contention that listeners actively make judgments about the music they experience is better suited to the world of consumer-driven popular music than the emotion-stirring music placed in political television advertisements.

Of course, there is still room to consider popular culture in the analysis of music in flip-flop spots. Nelson and Boynton’s (1997) work is instructive if we are to consider the context in which music is experienced. Verbal and visual elements are not alone in comprising the context in which the aural component of televised political advertising is experienced. Similar symbols in our broader culture must also be considered for their potential to influence how audiences interpret tv spots. Nelson and Boynton’s emphasis on genre theory requires that music in political advertisements be understood in terms of its explicit and implicit associations with popular culture. Music in advertisements may be taken directly from popular sources, or it may simply mirror music used in other popular culture contexts. If a political ad’s music mimes or references music typically used in horror films, or television news programs, or political rallies, then it is productive to consider how audiences typically experience those other communicative texts in an

effort to better understand how advertisements may construct dynamic political communication experiences and understandings.

The studies reviewed here serve as excellent evidence that descriptive, critical research can advance important insights about negative political advertising. These methods and perspectives accomplish what other methodological perspectives cannot: namely, an in-depth analysis that accounts for all components that contribute to a televised political commercials' rhetorical force. The following section concentrates further on one particular type of televised political spot: the flip-flop ad.

### **Flip-flop Messages in Political Campaigns**

Numerous scholars have confronted the topic of flip-flop advertising. Some have gone so far as to begin explaining the persuasive appeal of such negative political commercials. However, available literature offers no sustained rhetorical analysis of flip-flop advertisements and the political realities they construct. The studies reviewed in this section provide an excellent starting place regarding the prominence and nature of flip-flop ads. This section demonstrates that scholars have consistently stumbled across flip-flop ads and found them relevant enough to devote some attention to them. The observations cited here do not constitute a body of literature, but a smattering of scholars who have briefly considered the same basic message, often repeating one another. Systematic rhetorical analysis of flip-flop ads is therefore necessary for developing scholarly understanding of this particular type of negative political television spot. Although the current study examines presidential campaigns ads, the following review examines the analysis of campaign ads at numerous levels of electoral politics.

Felkner's (1992) treatise on "political mischief" includes an index of the various charges that have been made of political candidates in the United States. There, alongside accusations of wife-beating, anti-Semitism, and promiscuity is the charge of "vacillating." The passages to which this index refers feature a description of the infamous weathervane spot run against Richard Nixon in 1964. The ad featured Nixon's face on a weathervane as it changed direction in the breeze and an announcer recalled contradictory policy decisions Nixon had made. Similar ads were run against Barry Goldwater in 1968 and George McGovern in 1972.

Among the types of political attack that Kern (1989) identifies is the flip-flop advertisement. These sort of ads attack an opponent for changing their mind regarding a particular political issue. For evidence, these ads tend to rely on public comments from candidates as well as their voting records. Kern notes that these ads are about both policy and character. They raise questions about a candidate's position on government policies while at the same time portraying the candidate as untrustworthy and inconsistent. These tactics are elaborated upon at length in this analysis of flip-flop ads. As an example of this type of advertisement, Kern cites a 1984 spot run against John Meyers, a candidate for the Indiana legislature. In the ad, titled "Bouncing Ball," audiences are asked to follow a bouncing ball as it moves between contradictory positions and decisions Meyers had made.

Mark (2006) makes several observations about negative political advertising in general and flip-flop advertising in particular. He claims that although the charge of inconsistency had been used against politicians for years, the campaign that made it a mainstay of political communication was Jesse Helms' 1984 reelection bid against Jim

Hunt for North Carolina's U.S. Senate seat. Of course, the current analysis demonstrates that flip-flop ads were a part of American politics long before the 1984 North Carolina Senate race. Still, many of these anti-Hunt ads were just 10 or 15 seconds long and featured contradictory quotes from Hunt. The spots ended with Helms looking directly into the camera and asking "Where do you stand, Jim?" Mark notes that these ads were very inexpensive to produce. Furthermore, they were likely so powerful because,

During Senator Jesse Helms' thirty years in Congress, critics had no shortage of nasty names for the North Carolina Republican. But even his most severe detractors could not honestly tag him with the frequent politician's labels of inconsistent, flip-flopper, or wishy-washy. Helms knew exactly where he stood on issues--strongly anti-Communist, anti-government on economic matters, and staunchly socially conservative--and North Carolina voters could judge him on that basis. (p. 91)

In other words, because Helms himself was so consistent, the ad helped draw an important distinction between himself and his opponent that voters interpreted as relevant to the campaign.

A similar attack from a different campaign helps illustrate the appeal of attacks on an opponent's consistency. Gray Davis' 2002 campaign for California governor produced an ad in which Republican Richard Riordan espoused strong anti-abortion, pro-life ideals. These charges raised serious doubts about Riordan's sincerity because he was now running as a pro-choice candidate. The ad therefore appealed to people on both sides of the abortion issue:

Pro-lifers--who tend to dominate Republican primaries in California--thought [Riordan] was a disingenuous turncoat who actually did oppose abortion but had changed his stance to run for office. Pro-choicers, on the other hand, just thought he was a liar. (p. 191)

Despite the appeal to policy-oriented voters, Mark notes that this ad is primarily about Riordan's character. Mark's research is thorough, incorporating reactions from focus groups in which the ad's appeal was tested, and details the opposition research required for securing videotape evidence to document Riordan's flip-flop.

A political marketing perspective encouraged O'Shaughnessy and Henneberg (2007) to remark on flip-flop advertisements run against John Kerry in the 2004 presidential election. George W. Bush's campaign is said to have masterfully crafted a coherent narrative, while the Kerry team did not. The authors blame Kerry for being unable to craft a consistent image for himself. Bush's assertions that Kerry was an indecisive flip-flopper only reinforced this idea:

The "flip-flop" charge proved to be Kerry's Achilles Heel (epitomized by Kerry's windsurfing as used metaphorically by the Republicans in their ads): he voted for the Iraq war and therefore could not credibly convert this war (or the general "war against terror") into political capital. In particular, his tortured, tortuous explanation: "I voted for the bill before I voted against it"- was turned by Republicans into an attack advertisement and his alibi for his Iraq war votes featured in a Republican National Committee website documentary. The analogy is with a product whose core functions are obscure. (p. 256)

In this view, voters were unwilling to invest in a product -- or candidate -- about which they could not develop a sense of certainty. Additionally, it must be noted that this view credits flip-flop advertising with playing a crucial role in the 2004 presidential campaign, thus making it worthy of further examination.

Buell and Sigelman (2008) also studied flip-flop ads in the context of the Bush-Kerry campaign. One important difference between their work, and the work of other political communication scholars reviewed here, is their reliance on news reports that discussed political campaign attack strategies. Such an approach helps demonstrate how flip-flop ads work as part of larger, coordinated campaign efforts.

Buell and Sigelman examined five different types of attack strategies, including fear arousal, labeling (or guilt by association), ridicule, apposition, and charges of lying or inconsistency. This last category, the third most frequent of the 2004 campaign, is important because it includes charges of flip-flopping. Not surprisingly, the charge of inconsistency has been more important in some campaigns than others. For instance, in 2004 George W. Bush's campaign is purported to have used this strategy in 55% of their attacks on John Kerry. The strategy also figured prominently into attacks on Jimmy Carter in 1976 and 1980, Bill Clinton in 1992, George H. W. Bush in 1992, and Al Gore in 2000.

Buell and Sigelman's discussion of Republican attacks against Kerry in 2004 is particularly interesting because it provides vivid examples of how Bush's attempts to paint Kerry as a flip-flopper were fed to, and parroted by, the American press corps. Campaign spokesperson Steve Schmidt was particularly adept at advancing the flip-flop attack in the news media, summarizing his message this way:

[Kerry] said we are wasting money after saying we need to spend more. He said he will stand by our troops after voting against funding to support them. This week, he echoed Howard Dean, saying it was the wrong war at the wrong time, but he voted for the war and said he would vote for it again. John Kerry has given twelve major speeches on Iraq and the American people still have no idea where he stands. (p. 243)

On the stump, Bush embellished the flip-flop charge, telling crowds of supporters that his opponent “woke up yesterday with yet another new position,” and that “When it comes to Iraq, my opponent has more different positions than all of his colleagues in the senate combined” (p. 240). In their examples, Buell and Sigelman also included many instances in which Bush not only attacked Kerry for a lack of consistency, but also constructed consistency as an ideal characteristic of any commander in chief. He asserted, “The President of the United States [must] speak clearly and consistently, and not change positions because of expediency or pressure” (p. 241). By paying heed to rhetoric such as this, the authors do an excellent job of demonstrating how important the issue of consistency/flip-flopping became in the 2004 presidential campaigns.

A study by Kaylor (2008) has valuable implications for the study of flip-flop advertising proposed here. Using Kenneth Burke’s poetic frames, he categorizes political advertisements according to which frame they utilized: epic, tragedy, comedy, elegy, satire, or burlesque. Content analysis of the 2004 presidential spots indicated that the tragic frame was the most common for both George W. Bush and John Kerry. Still, Kerry used the comic frame more than Bush, and Bush used satire and burlesque more often than Kerry.

Kaylor (2008) characterizes the tragic frame as able to identify errors in individuals and policies so that those errors may be corrected. Because of this potential for correction, tragedy is typically labeled a frame of rejection. The burlesque frame, on the other hand, is a frame of rejection because it makes a caricature of its target and makes no attempt to understand the internal motives for that individual's actions. These two frames are of particular importance when Kaylor discusses two separate ads in which Kerry was labeled a "flip-flopper." The following attack on Kerry's education policy operates from the tragic frame:

Better education is about accountability. For years, low standards and poor accountability plagued our schools. Then President Bush signed the most sweeping education reforms in 35 years. John Kerry praised the president's reforms. Even voted for them. But now, under pressure from education unions, Kerry has changed his mind. Kerry's new plan: less accountability to parents.

John Kerry: Playing politics with education.

The ad constitutes a tragic telling because it rejects its target on the basis of wrongdoing but permits them the opportunity to remedy their transgressions.

A different ad, also intended to characterize Kerry as inconsistent, takes a harsher tone by resorting to ridicule and invoking a burlesque frame:

In which direction would John Kerry lead? Kerry voted for the Iraq war, opposed it, supported it, and now opposes it again. He bragged about voting for the \$87 billion to support our troops before he voted against it. He voted for education reform and now opposes it. He claims he's against increasing Medicare premiums, but voted five times to do so. John Kerry, whichever way the wind

blows [images of Kerry windsurfing, first in one direction and then another]. Instead of merely rejecting Kerry, this ad caricatures him and leaves no potential space for redemption.

Kaylor's (2008) express goal has little to do with flip-flop advertisements. However, by using these ads to exemplify advertising during the 2004 campaign for the presidency, he highlights the prominence of the flip-flop attack strategy in recent campaigns. Importantly, he also makes distinctions between types of flip-flop attacks, noting that they can vary according to the rhetorical frames they employ, and by extension severity.

Even Geer (2006), who defends negativity in political advertising at almost all costs, contends that there is at least one type of political attack with which some campaigns have gotten carried away: the attack on an opponent's integrity (p. 83). Such a finding is important to any consideration of flip flop advertisements because Geer defines an attack on integrity as "comments about trustworthiness, a willingness to stand up for principles, or a tendency to 'flip-flop'" (p. 72). Geer (2006) writes,

The attention to integrity when going on the attack makes strategic sense. If a candidate is able to question the opposition's honesty, the appeal may cause voters to wonder about whether the individual's positions on issues can be trusted. In many ways, attacks on integrity kill two birds with one stone. The candidate raises doubts about the personal qualifications of the opposition as well as their ability to deliver on what they have promised in their program for government. (pp. 72-73)

Because a candidate's credibility and integrity are so important to an electorate that prefers candidates they can trust, and because such ads tend to include evidence, Geer suggests that the excess of attacks on integrity may still be "tolerable".

Pfau and Kenski (1990) note the presence of flip-flop advertisements in both the primary and general phases of presidential elections. They noted that in 1968 Hubert Humphrey ran an ad that featured a weathervane changing direction in the breeze as Richard Nixon's contradictory policy positions and decisions were announced. Nixon was apparently so appalled by the ad he phoned Humphrey to ask that it not be aired anymore. Although Humphrey honored this request, Nixon's own reelection campaign used similar flip-flop attacks against George McGovern (also themed around the candidate's face changing direction) just four years later. Pfau and Kenski also discuss the 1986 California Senate race when Democrat incumbent Alan Cranston ran a series of flip-flop ads that portrayed his opponent, Republican Ed Zschau, as indecisive and untrustworthy. What is particularly interesting about this example is that exit polls from that election confirmed the flip-flop attacks stuck in the mind of voters. Pfau and Kenski's reliance on newspaper articles about the campaigns they discuss is helpful for illuminating the communicative context from which these ads were created, as well as their perceived influence on the campaigns.

Many scholars have made passing, almost incidental references to flip-flop ads in their work, as though the attack was already entirely well understood. For instance, Dover (2006) described a "comparative ad" from 1984 that "looked at inconsistencies in Mondale's positions" (p. 31). Similarly, Dover does little more than describe the advertisement, neglecting to account for why this ad, or ads like it, might appeal to the

campaign that produced it or the audience to which it was targeted. Benze and Declercq's (1985) study of the content of non-presidential television spots run by female and male candidates casually notes: "a male's ad shows a 'one-way' traffic sign rotating back and forth, while the audio notes his female opponent's indecisiveness on issues" (p. 279). These authors hint at, but ultimately fail to address, the entirety of the ad -- the combination of verbal, visual, and audible symbols that constitute flip-flop advertising. A rhetorical analysis is therefore necessary to fill this gap in the literature and address the implications flip-flop ads create for American politics.

### **Progression of Ideas and Arguments**

To adequately create a foundation for an analysis of the progression of ideas and arguments in televised political flip-flop advertisements, two separate bodies of literature must be reviewed. First, Kenneth Burke's theory of form is discussed, as is the research it has encouraged. Second, argumentation theory, as it has been applied to political communication, is also considered.

#### **Kenneth Burke's Form**

One of the most important features of political flip-flop advertisements is their form. Because there is variation among flip-flop ads, it is expected that there might be variations in form as well. Blankenship (1986) offers a bevy of terms to which form typically refers: manner, shape of thought, means of presentation, arrangement and organization of material, shape imposed by the rhetor. Similarly, Black (1992) contends that the concept of form refers to the internal relations of a rhetorical artifact's constituent parts. This section outlines common assumptions about rhetorical form, with special emphasis on the work of Kenneth Burke (1968b).

Kenneth Burke's audience-centered approach to studying form has proven exceptionally useful to critics of rhetoric and literature. Heath (1979) credits the theory's importance to its "unification of substance, rules of language use, thought processes, and appeal into a single, coherent critical principle" (p. 402). Similarly, Leroux (1992) applauded the theory's marriage of style and content. For Burke (1968), form centers on the way texts create and fulfill expectations. He writes, "form is the creation of an appetite in the mind of the auditor, and the adequate satisfying of that appetite" (p. 31). To use form well, a rhetor must suitably promote anticipatory desires and adequately fulfill them. The result, among audience members, is a sense of rightness, or pleasure. He claimed, "A work has form in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence" (p. 124). Burke notes that some texts may actually increase an audience's pleasure by temporarily postponing the fulfillment of manufactured desires. Ultimately, form may be particularly apt at encouraging identification between rhetors and audiences (Burks, 1985).

Burke elaborated on his concept of form by posing several variations on the basic idea. For instance, progressive form concerns the way that particular situations in a text can generate particular expectations for audience members. There are two kinds of progressive form. Syllogistic form is the name given to the step-by-step progression of ideas, not unlike that which is found in sound argumentation. Romantic comedy films quite clearly exemplify this principle. When, in a romantic comedy, an audience is confronted with a chance meeting between two attractive characters, they may quite naturally hope, or perhaps expect, that those two characters will fall madly in love. Qualitative form concerns the progression of qualities more so than it does incidents.

Burke described the experience by writing, “We are put into a state of mind which another state of mind can appropriately follow” (p. 125). Often enough, recognition of this sense of form comes after the fact. In horror films, for example, silence is often used to communicate impending fright or violence.

Whereas progressive form describes the internal relation of ideas in a text, repetitive form concerns audience understanding of the external relations of texts to other texts. Narratives, themes, arguments, etc., repeat themselves often enough that audiences may recognize and become accustomed to particular arrangements. Burke described repetitive form as “the consistent maintaining of a principle under new guises. It is restatement of the same thing in different ways” (p. 125). When particular patterns or modes become entrenched to the point of convention or genre, audiences begin to appreciate form for the sake of form. Their decision to engage with a text is based on their knowledge of that text’s form. Burke refers to this phenomenon as conventional form.

In addition to these overarching types of form, there exist minor or incidental forms as well. Incidental forms do not comprise or span the entirety of a text, but nonetheless occur within them. They are distinguishable in their own right, but the text does not depend on them for its greater meaning or for the pleasure it may generate as a whole. Stylistic devices such as metaphor and paradox are common examples of minor form.

Finally, Burke’s discussion also considers rhythm. Rhythm, as Burke understands it, is a means for engaging an audience’s attention or gaining their acquiescence.

A rhythm is a promise which the poet makes to the reader—and in proportion as the reader comes to rely upon this promise, he falls into a state of general surrender which makes him more likely to accept without resistance the rest of the poet's material (pp. 140-141)

As indicated by Burke's language of resistance and surrender, rhythm is a powerful tool for simultaneously engaging audiences and encouraging passivity or acceptance.

Burke's theory of form has been used to analyze televised political debates (Conrad, 1993), drama (Rod, 1986), music, (Bostdorff & Tompkins, 1985), local news (Gronbeck, 1997), arguments advanced in the Book of Revelation (O'Leary, 1993), the nomination and confirmation of U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft (Darr, 2005), and Swedish cuisine (Lindquist, 2008). Cooper (2009) paid special attention to visual forms, arguing that iPod's silhouette advertising campaign constituted a repetitive form that was easily appropriated, reproduced and parodied. Cooper used Edwards and Winkler's (1997) concept of representative form, which is defined as any visual meaning that "transcends the specifics of immediate visual references and, through a cumulative process of visual and symbolic meaning, rhetorically identifies and delineates the ideals of the body politic" (p. 205). In short, popular visual forms may establish meanings and associations that stretch far beyond that which a singular image could communicate.

Brummett (1988) has taken the concept of form beyond the text to argue that rhetorical force may be heightened when the form of a text is consistent with the form of the medium by which it is communicated, and the form of the experience it can be said to produce. His primary example is the experience of watching pornography using a VCR. The text, media, and experience are connected via their relation to male-dominated,

heterosexist ideals of control, freedom, commodification, and intimacy. He presented similar arguments regarding homologies of text, form, and experience in his reading of the popular horror film, *The Ring* (Brummett, 2006).

Although most of the studies reviewed here discussed the way particular texts persuade and please audiences with the careful use of form, other studies have explained that some texts are remarkable for their failure or refusal to employ form as Burke described it. Aeschbacher (1973) argued that the works of Samuel Beckett are remarkable for their rejection of conventional forms, thus encouraging audiences to think differently about, and construct different expectations for, what constitutes theatre. Still, Aeschbacher argues that more organic and subtle forms, such as qualitative form, are at work in Beckett's plays. In other words, not even those texts are entirely "formless." Olson (1995) studied the controversy surrounding President Ronald Reagan's visit to Bitburg war cemetery to argue that news narratives are not held to the same standards of form as fictional narratives. More specifically, when covering conflict situations, news narratives are not responsible for satisfying audience expectations. In the interest of appearing unbiased, television news programs may encourage audiences to act or decide for themselves. Just as importantly, the creation of uncertainty creates a need for the service television news provides.

The example of a problem-solution sequence within political ads is useful for explaining how anticipatory desires are created and satisfied in Presidential Campaign commercials. Bill Clinton's 1992 "Second" ad, begins by detailing how incumbent George H. W. Bush broke his promise not to raise taxes. The music encourages a sense of unease, the male voiceover is foreboding, and the images of President Bush are grainy

and unflattering. By the time the narrator poses the rhetorical question, “Can we afford four more years?” 15 seconds into the ad, the audience is desirous of, and ready for, a change of quality or tone. Bill Clinton, described as “a new kind of Democrat,” ushers in this change, complete with hopeful, determined music, and bright, eye-pleasing images of Clinton on the campaign trail.

With Burke’s theory as a guide, the current project analyzes the form of political flip-flop advertisements. This includes consideration of Burke’s forms as they occur within multiple presidential campaign ads. Ultimately, the analysis demonstrates the importance of form(s) for explaining how flip-flop ads are constructed by campaign teams and understood by audiences.

### **Argumentation and Negative Ads**

As noted previously, Jamieson (1992) has contended that political advertising substitutes persuasive tactics such as identification and apposition for reasoned argument. She claims that emotionally charged negative appeals are designed to short-circuit voters’ ability to carefully process information and make informed decisions. Although Jamieson’s arguments have merit, numerous scholars have actually offered valuable criticism of political advertising by using the language of argumentation.

Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1991) noted that ads can advance arguments through inductive or deductive reasoning. Gronbeck (1994), on the other hand, claimed that there are three types of argumentative ads: implicative ads, which operate by way of implication and innuendo; comparative ads, which make explicit comparisons between candidates; and assault ads, which focus almost exclusively on an opponent’s negative attributes. This last category includes attacks on character, motives, associates, and

actions. These ads tend to epitomize what voters and scholars claim to abhor about negative advertisements. All three types of argumentative ads are united by their inclusion of assertions bolstered by evidence.

Although he did not speak about political television spots in particular, Stephen Toulmin's (1958) work on argumentation is also relevant here. He originated what is perhaps the most well established means for mapping and understanding arguments. Whereas many philosophers describe the means by which people should reason if they are to reach firm truths, Toulmin described the means by which human beings actually argue in an effort to justify and arrive at probable conclusions. His rejection of formal logic in favor of a looser, more democratic means for analyzing argument has made his work particularly popular with rhetoricians. According to Toulmin, the three most basic components of an argument are claim, data, and warrant. A claim is a conclusion that a speaker or writer aims to establish. The data are any factual materials that may support the claim. Finally, the warrant is the link between data and claim. Often unstated, the warrant justifies or authorizes the leap toward a claim. An argument, then, is a claim, supported by data, and justified via a warrant.

For those who wish to analyze arguments a bit closer, Toulmin provided additional labels for other elements of an argument. For instance, a qualifier speaks to the strength of an argument. A rebuttal notes any exceptions that would render the argument invalid. Backing is a reason given in support of a warrant.

Although the dense, multi-modal nature of televised political advertisements is such that mapping arguments via Toulmin's model is particularly difficult and can rarely touch on all there is to explain about individual ads, Toulmin nonetheless provides a

vocabulary with which the parts of an argument can be described and interpreted. Of course, mapping arguments can prove quite difficult. One reason for this is the nature of enthemes, or arguments with unstated premises (Bitzer, 1959). Another is Sproule's (1988) contention that contemporary rhetoric is so marked by a focus on conclusions that presentation of evidence is jettisoned in favor of complete ideological packages and visions.

Although flip-flop ads can be fruitfully analyzed in terms of argumentation theory, they are certainly not without their emotional dimensions. The rhetorical analysis performed here demonstrates how flip-flop ads embody a unique confluence of both rational and emotional appeals. Although *logos* and *pathos* are often discussed separately, there is a strong body of theoretical literature that argues it is unnecessary for rhetoricians to maintain obdurately sharp distinctions between reason and emotion.

Those who wish to marry *logos* and *pathos* typically begin by referencing Ancient Greek theorists (Cooper, 1996; Frede, 1996, Quandahl, 2003; Striker, 1996;). For instance, Jaggar (1989) links emotion and reason by noting that Plato described emotion as useful in the acquisition of knowledge and essential for truly understanding human values. Similarly, Leighton (1996) connected rational and emotional appeals by observing that Aristotle believed emotions alter human judgments. Perhaps even more significantly, Aristotle did not regard emotions as being entirely irrational. Nussbaum (1996) wrote: "In Aristotle's view, emotions are not blind animal forces, but intelligent and discriminating parts of the personality, closely related to beliefs of a certain sort, and therefore responsive to cognitive modification" (p. 303). Because *logos* and *pathos* are so intimately connected, it is appropriate for this project to consider the presence of

emotional arguments in flip-flop ads by analyzing the way particular ideas and images in these messages encourage certain emotional reactions and emotional judgments. Such a project is consistent not only with contemporary analyses of images, emotion, and rhetoric (Hariman & Lucaites, 2001) but with recent literature regarding the importance of emotion in political decision making (Westen, 2007).

Not only can arguments be emotional, but they can also be faulty. In rhetorical analysis, it is as important to be able to locate faulty argumentation as it is to map sound argumentation. The pursuit of faulty or weak argumentation begins with understanding of fallacies. One fallacy in particular, *argumentum ad hominem*, is of utmost relevance to the present project.

An *ad hominem* argument occurs any time somebody attacks an opponent instead of their opponent's argument. Importantly, there is some dispute regarding how *ad hominem* arguments ought to be defined and categorized. In addition to disagreement over how many subtypes of *ad hominem* there are, scholars disagree on the actual labels and definitions for these formations. For instance, Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992) use the term *tu quoque* to categorize any argument that accuses a rhetor of being inconsistent in his or her words or deeds. Such a label would clearly be quite important to a study of flip-flop advertisements. However, as defined by Damer (1980) and Engel (1980), *tu quoque ad hominem* arguments constitute something entirely different. They maintain that *tu quoque* occurs when, upon being accused of some error or wrongdoing, a speaker replies that their accuser is guilty of the same thing. In fact *tu quoque* literally translates to "you too." In an effort to navigate these conflicts, this project defers to the work of Douglas Walton. Walton is an expert on the topic, having written a highly-

regarded book titled *Ad Hominem Arguments*, and he has written several other works directly related to political communication (Walton, 2000a, 200b). Walton's work will be used to classify and critique the arguments made in flip-flop ads.

Walton (1998) discusses five main types of *ad hominem* arguments: abusive, circumstantial, bias, *tu quoque*, and poisoning the well. The abusive *ad hominem* occurs when a rhetor personally attacks the character of another party. Circumstantial *ad hominem* is present when a speaker attacks an opponent's circumstances. More specifically, this argument "requires a contradiction or practical inconsistency between what an arguer says and some propositions expressed directly or indirectly by that arguer's personal circumstances" (p. 6). The circumstantial is less direct than the abusive variant. Walton uses the example of a person who wishes to discredit an opponent's warnings about the negative effects of smoking cigarettes by noting that the opponent is in fact a smoker.

The bias *ad hominem* occurs when a speaker claims that an opposing arguer is biased or impartial in some way. The implication is that the arguer's claims are purely self-serving and without merit. Poisoning the well involves the accusation that a person can never be taken seriously because they are incapable of understanding or interpreting anything from any viewpoint other than their own narrow frame. Therefore, the arguer is uncooperative and nothing they have to say will ever be of value. Finally, *tu quoque* is explained "if a speaker uses a particular type of argument, say in an argument from analogy, then the respondent can turn around and use that same kind of argument against the speaker" (p. 15). In other words, Walton sides with Damer (1980) and Engel (1980), as described above.

Walton consistently notes the disagreements and divergence attempts to define subcategories of *ad hominem* arguments. He also confesses that these categories are often overlapping and hard to distinguish. Even deciding whether or not these argumentative formations constitute fallacies can be difficult. This is particularly true when an individual is accused of contradicting themselves. Where political discourse is concerned, Walton (2000b) notes that *ad hominem* arguments should not be dismissed as entirely unfounded or fallacious, because character is a valuable consideration for voters. He also suggests that what is here referred to as a flip-flop advertisement probably qualifies as a type of circumstantial *ad hominem* fallacy. The circumstantial *ad hominem* attacks a person by claiming “You don’t practice what you preach.” Walton used criticism of Al Gore as an example of this phenomenon at work in political discourse. The charge is that Al Gore gave an emotional speech about his sister’s death from smoking-related causes, but never told the audience that even after his sister’s death, his family still grew tobacco. The charge is designed to attack Gore’s credibility and portray him as hypocritical, insincere, and phony. Walton (2000b) explains that the circumstantial *ad hominem*,

involves an allegation that the party being attacked has committed a practical inconsistency...Then, the allegation of inconsistency is used as the basis for launching a direct, or personal *ad hominem* type of attack to the effect that the person attacked has a bad character and that, therefore, her argument is bad, or should not be taken seriously. (p. 106)

Walton identifies and characterizes the type of argument that is at work when audiences are presented with evidence in support of the claim that a political candidate is a flip-

flopper. The charge of inconsistency not only attacks a person's character, but strikes at their credibility in such a way that a candidate's assertions and arguments regarding policy may not be taken seriously. Importantly, Walton makes a point to explain how his example, which was taken from an editorial source, is different from the attack advertising typically studied by scholars of political advertising. He never claims that political television ads are incapable of using this strategy, but he found it necessary to explicitly differentiate between editorial sources and television spots. Of course, the present study extends consideration of political *ad hominem* arguments to political television ads.

Cragan and Cutbirth (1984) also defend the practice of *ad hominem* political argument, claiming that such messages are not always fallacious. Their perspective is built on the idea that "fitness for office is the most important issue in a political campaign" (p. 229). Numerous scholars offer support for this claim (Nimmo & Savage, 1976; Osgood, 1957; Trent & Friedenberg, 2007). Therefore, any message that speaks to a politician's character is of use to voters. The primary components of one's fitness for office are competency and trustworthiness, two qualities that voters can assess based on the way political candidates run their campaigns.

Not willing to give a free pass to all *ad hominem* political utterances, Cragan and Cutbirth (1984) suggest three criteria for evaluating such arguments. First, the conclusions made must be logically relevant to the attributes being discussed. Second, the material must be supported by facts. Third, the argument should be artistically structured. As an example of an *ad hominem* argument that meets all these criteria for legitimacy, the authors offer George McGovern's contradictory decisions regarding his

choice of running mate: First, McGovern claimed to unequivocally support Tom Eagleton, but later accepted Eagleton's resignation from the ticket. In light of this flip-flop, the authors believe it is legitimate to wonder what sort of decisions McGovern would make if elected President of the United States. Ultimately, the authors deem personal attacks justifiable -- even necessary -- elements of political campaigns.

Some observers of negative advertising would claim that the real trouble with these ads is not merely that they operate in an *ad hominem* fashion, but that they excoriate the political establishment in general. In a scathing assessment of negative advertising in political campaigns, Kamber (2003) presents another concept of political rhetoric useful for explaining many negative television advertisements. He argues that attack ads detract from important political issues and turn people off of politics. Of particular interest is his exposition of what he calls "antipolitics," defined as "the increasing distrust of government, particularly the federal government, coupled with a disdain for the sometimes messy business of elections" (p. 53). Antipolitics are applied in televised political advertising when candidates are derided for "playing politics," or being a "politician" (particularly a *career* politician). More generally, this type of discourse appears whenever a candidate attacks "government" (especially *big* government). Messages such as these, predicated on "populism run amock" (p. 63), are well-suited to damaging citizens' faith in democratic government as well as their trust for elected officials, thus contributing to citizen malaise.

Kamber draws attention to the idea that some negative political ads may be more apt to contribute to a decrease in one's intention to vote and lower levels of political efficacy that existing empirical evidence has linked to attack advertising. Those ads that

undermine the credibility of political candidates in such a way that makes their past, present, or future arguments and ideas less trustworthy or credible should certainly be suspect of perpetuating poison politics, especially when these messages categorize politicians as being all of one detestable make or model.

Janack (2006) also studied attacks that focus as much on the political status quo than on particular individuals. He explains how political advertisements run by Jesse Ventura in his successful campaign for the governorship of Minnesota capitalized on his outsider status in order to attack “politics” and “politicians.” For instance, one ad featured a Jesse Ventura action figure fighting off special interests and a standard, unnamed politician. Ventura’s rhetoric is said to have parodied the political establishment and its most prominent players, but ultimately failed to initiate any major social change.

This literature review has discussed previous research on the topic of negative political advertising (effects studies, content analyses), as well as those areas of past research that provide valuable perspectives for the analysis of televised presidential flip-flop advertisements (visual rhetoric, music, form, argument). The specific methods used for this project’s analysis are discussed next, in chapter three.

## CHAPTER 3: METHOD

This dissertation has established flip-flop ads as an important type of political campaign message worthy of further analysis. Therefore, this chapter presents a systematic process by which flip-flop ads were analyzed, employing rhetorical criticism as the method of analysis. First, this chapter presents an explanation of the process by which the textual components (verbal, visual and audio) of flip-flop advertisements were located and identified. Next, the means by which flip-flop advertisements were rhetorically analyzed is detailed. This process includes the identification of conceptual themes, a consideration of how these ad messages symbolically construct politics and politicians, a close study of the form of flip-flop ads, and an analysis of the arguments these ads advance. Finally, the overarching research questions that guide the current analysis are reviewed and a brief outline of subsequent chapters is provided.

### **Texts**

Written transcripts and videos of relevant presidential campaign advertisements constitute the rhetorical artifacts for this analysis. A relevant text, in this instance, is any televised presidential campaign advertisement that implicitly or explicitly attacks a political opponent for being inconsistent. Additionally, as means of counter example, this study also wishes to analyze those ads that affirm a sponsoring candidates' consistency. To locate the texts necessary for this study, it was necessary to start with a much larger sample of presidential campaign advertisements from which only relevant ads that speak to the issue of inconsistency-consistency were chosen.

To begin, the transcripts of televised presidential general campaign advertisements from 1952-2008 were acquired. This initial body of texts is comprised of

ads transcribed from a variety of sources, including the University of Oklahoma's Julian P. Kanter Political Commercial Archive, which boasts "the largest and most comprehensive collection of political broadcast advertising in the world" (Political Communication Center, 2008). An assortment of other presidential television advertising compilation videotapes, dubbed from a variety of private and public collections, were also consulted. The sample of presidential campaign ads from which the flip-flop ad messages was drawn includes ads from Democrats, Republicans, and prominent third parties. These ads were produced by candidates' campaigns, party organizations, and other political interest groups. For more recent presidential candidates, web ads were also examined.<sup>1</sup> However, radio ads were excluded, as they lack the important visual dimension of interest to this study. All together, over 1200 transcribed ads spanning the presidential elections from 1952-2008 were identified and these ads were examined for their use of themes relevant to the accusation of political inconsistency.

While this sample of over 1200 presidential campaign spots does not constitute the entire population of presidential campaign ads, it nonetheless represents the largest available body of relevant texts from which this analysis could possibly begin. Even if an occasional ad is not included in this collection of texts, the most prominent ads from each election cycle have been included. Because flip-flop ads tend to be particularly noteworthy, memorable, and often-discussed, this sample is a particularly appropriate place to begin searching for flip-flop ads.

As noted, those ads that in some way reference a candidate's political consistency or inconsistency were selected for inclusion in this analysis. Each ad was read and

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<sup>1</sup> Since 2000, presidential campaigns and Political Action Committees have produced advertisements that were made available only on the world wide web.

interpreted for both its connotative and denotative meanings. Although some ads actually refer to their target using such terms as “inconsistent” or “flip-flop,” most do not. Therefore, it was not possible to comb through these 1200 ad transcripts simply by searching for key terms. Often enough, political ads accuse rival candidates of being inconsistent by describing one policy position the rival has taken, and then describing how, in either word or deed, one’s rival has contradicted themselves at some point in their political career. For some messages, the charge of flip-flopping may be communicated visually more so than verbally. In short, recognition of flip-flop attacks is an interpretive endeavor that relies on the careful interpretive judgments of the rhetorical critic.

An initial search through the available transcripts yielded 171 relevant messages. Table 1 presents the campaign years from which these ads were selected. Some of these ads are straightforward, prototypical flip-flop ads devoted almost entirely to constructing the argument that a political candidate is inconsistent. Ronald Reagan’s 1984 “Side by Side” ad, which attacks Democrat Walter Mondale, is a very good example of one such ad. The spot compares “Candidate Mondale’s” record to “Senator Mondale’s” record. When one of “Candidate Mondale’s” positions is described, a photo of Mondale smiling is featured. When one of “Senator Mondale’s” positions is described, a photograph of Mondale frowning appears instead. The ad discusses government spending and national defense in order to exploit the differences between Candidate Mondale and Senator Mondale. An ad such as this represents a flip-flop attack that is the center of attention for this analysis, including particularly the message’s rhetorical form and argumentation. Such ads are clearly present in the sample of texts assembled for this study.

Not all the ads identified as advancing a charge of inconsistency are devoted entirely to the flip-flop theme. For instance, another 1984 Reagan ad, titled “Man on the Street,” features the perspectives of what are made to look like ordinary citizens on the streets of an American city. Each individual speaker provides a brief statement about Walter Mondale’s leadership. Each statement is decidedly negative. A citizen named “Jerry Thomas” tells the camera, “Well, I think Fritz Mondale is probably a good man, but I don’t think he’s a good leader,” and “Abdul Kayoum” notes, “I don’t believe that he has the quality of leadership.” The utterance of most interest for the current analysis comes from “Arjay West”, who says, “Walter Mondale is wishy-washy.” Understood as a synonym for indecisiveness, the “wishy-washy” label speaks to Mondale’s apparent inconsistency and irresoluteness. Although this ad has purposes beyond calling a rival candidate a flip-flopper, it does include ideas and language similar to that of prototypical flip-flop ads. The “Man on the Street” ad is important for demonstrating how the charge of flip-flopping or wishy-washiness is related to messages about presidential leadership. Therefore, this ad is useful, even necessary, for constructing a complete understanding of the pervasiveness of flip-flop charges in presidential campaign messages and for understanding these ads’ rich meanings. It may not be a flip-flop ad per se, but this spot speaks to what it means for a presidential candidate to come to be seen as a flip-flopper. Therefore, it is important to carefully analyze all available presidential campaign ads for textual fragments that may inform the current analysis of flip-flop attacks.

The “Man on the Street” spot described above is of interest to the analysis because *a part* of it is devoted to the charge of inconsistency. In addition, the current analysis examines those ads that include *a part* of the flip-flop accusation, or otherwise

include textual fragments related to claims made in flip-flop ads. For instance, this analysis argues that flip-flop advertisements communicate antipolitics. In an effort to understand the unique means by which flip-flop spots construct antipolitics, it is useful to compare flip-flop ads to other presidential campaign spots that use antipolitics, even if those ads are not concerned, in whole or in part, with the charge of inconsistency. An excellent example of an ad that employs antipolitics is a 2004 John Kerry ad titled “Despicable.” The ad presents direct quotes from a September 25, 2004 *New York Times* editorial in an effort to reflect and perpetuate citizens’ negative feelings about politics and attack incumbent George W. Bush. The ad begins:

“An un-American way to campaign.” The latest Bush/Cheney attacks against John Kerry. George Bush and Dick Cheney are using the “appalling” and “divisive” strategy of playing politics with the war on terror. A strategy that “undermines the efforts... to combat terrorists in America” and puts George Bush’s “own ambition ahead of the national good.” (Kerry, “Despicable”)

Although this ad does not accuse Bush of inconsistency, the attack shares many themes in common with flip-flop messages, including, but not limited to, the accusation that a rival opponent is “playing politics,” and the implication that a candidate’s political campaign reveals information about that candidate’s character. By reference and comparison to ads that share similar features with flip-flop ads, this analysis can bring the themes and features that comprise flip-flop ads into greater focus.

Furthermore, a number of texts have been selected from the full collection of ad transcripts because although they are not flip-flop ads, they speak to the same values featured in flip-flop advertisements. This variety of ad constructs a sponsoring candidate

as the antithesis of a flip-flopping politician. For instance, in 1992, George H. W. Bush's campaign produced an ad titled "Plain Talk" in which Bush speaks about what it takes to be the President of the United States and the Commander in Chief. He says, "In the White House, in the Oval Office, you cannot be on both sides of every issue." He later adds, "The person you choose to lead America must have certain qualities: decisiveness, honesty, integrity, consistency." These ads implicitly claim that George H. W. Bush has the character to serve a second term as President of the United States. This is essentially a positive ad, that uses affirmative language to speak of the desirable leadership qualities ("decisiveness, honesty, integrity, consistency") voters ought to prefer in a President. Although Bush often used other political messages to attack his opponent, William Jefferson Clinton, this particular Bush ad makes no mention of his 1992 Democratic challenger. This is not a flip-flop ad, but when cited and interpreted properly, it sheds substantial light on the same rhetorical constructs as flip-flop ads. Because it speaks to the same values and ideals as flip-flop ads, it must also be considered in the current analysis.

In summary, four related categories of presidential campaign ads are considered in this analysis: First, this study examines ads devoted almost entirely to the charge of flip-flopping. Reagan's "Side by Side" spot serves as an excellent example of such a message. Second, this study analyzes ads of which a portion is dedicated to the flip flop charge. Reagan's "Man on the Street" ad exemplifies this type of ad well. Third, the study examines ads with similar themes and features as flip-flop ads, such as Kerry's "Despicable" spot. Finally, this study also examines ads that communicate the antithesis of flip-flop ads, or otherwise make similar charges as flip-flop advertisements. George H.

W. Bush's "Plain Talk" demonstrates the qualities of the last type of ad to be included in this analysis.

Because the visual and audible dimensions of flip-flop messages are so important to this rhetorical analysis, every effort was made to locate videos of the ads included in this study. This effort was made for all of the ads in the final set of texts selected for analysis; but it is particularly important for the prototypical flip-flop advertisements, which, because they are devoted entirely to the flip-flop charge, rely on visuals that reinforce the verbal charge of inconsistency. Online political campaign advertising databases such as the Living Room Candidate ([www.livingroomcandidate.com](http://www.livingroomcandidate.com)) and the Stanford University Political Communication Lab ([pcl.stanford.edu](http://pcl.stanford.edu)) were thoroughly searched, as have several dozen videotapes obtained from the Communication Department at the University of Missouri.

Notably, it was not possible to locate the visual component of every ad included in this analysis. However, there are several justifications for why this analysis can proceed with confidence nonetheless. The visual component of over 90% of the prototypical flip-flop ads included in this study have already been located. Not only was analysis of the prototypical flip-flop ads relied upon for the bulk of this project (particularly analysis of form and argumentation), but it is for these ads that the visual components of television spots are most important.

Reagan's "Man on the Street" spot is a supreme example of an ad for which the visuals are less important than they would be for prototypical flip-flop ads. The visuals in "Man on the Street" may reinforce the idea that the everyday American has concerns about Walter Mondale's leadership, but in no way are they specifically designed to

accentuate the idea that Mondale is “wishy-washy.” If the visual component for an ad such as “Man on the Street,” which deals only briefly with the charge of inconsistency, were missing, it would not seriously jeopardize the current analysis.

### **Analysis**

Once relevant texts were selected and organized, they were read and re-read in relation to one another so that differences and similarities between individual spots will be more readily recognized. This emersion in the texts required not only a careful study of the written transcripts, but also an attentive viewing and re-viewing of these ads’ video and audio components. The process of reading and viewing these texts was aided by the use of note-taking to better recognize and trace recurring features and interpretations. The ads were considered in chronological order, beginning with ads from 1952, and extending to ads from 2008.

One of the primary considerations during the initial stages of this analysis was identifying, interpreting, and evaluating the complex of conceptual themes that occur within flip-flop ads and related spots. For instance, preliminary analysis suggests that flip-flop accusations are comprised of, and appear in tandem with, other lines of political attack such as weak leadership, broken promises, the tendency to “play politics,” and numerous other political misbehaviors. In order to explain how presidential television ads construct the charge of inconsistency, it is important to consider the ways in which such concepts contribute to the abundance of meanings inherent to flip-flop accusations. Beyond determining how the charge of inconsistency is constructed, this analysis also examined what it means for a politician to be inconsistent, and how audiences are encouraged to think about those who flip-flop. In other words, this analysis seeks textual

cues as to why flip-flopping is so detestable, and what consequences flip-flopping may have.

To fully understand how televised political spots construct the charge of inconsistency, it is also necessary to recognize, document, and explore the rhetorical appeals that make flip-flop ads so unique and rhetorically forceful. To adequately seize upon how these ads construct their appeal, the visual and audible components that make television spots such a powerful means for communicating attack messages must be considered in addition to the spots' verbal components. Televised flip-flop advertisements are much more than a simple statement or accusation of inconsistency. The flip-flop attack looks and sounds much different as a political television commercial than if the charge were made in a political campaign debate, a stump speech, or a press release. Therefore it is important that rhetorical interpretations focus on the various ways that televisual cues make the flip-flop charge so powerful and appealing to audiences.

There are several methods by which visual messages may be rhetorically analyzed. Foss (1994) suggests that the critic must first identify the function of an image. This requires the critic to ask questions regarding the intended goals of a visual. Second, the critic needs to consider the means by which the visual attempts to fulfill the function(s) identified in step one. In other words, this step encourages the critic to identify and describe characteristics of a visual's composition for how it helps accomplish desired ends. Third, the critic must evaluate the visual's various elements for whether they might successfully accomplish their persuasive function. Although Peterson (2001) advises reversing steps one and two so that the critic must identify a visual's features before deciding its function, there are good reasons to rely on Foss'

(1994) original schema. The function of the visuals in flip-flop ads has already been identified; they are intended to reinforce the verbal message that a presidential candidate is inconsistent. In fact, this study provides some support for Foss's procedures by highlighting their intuitive, instinctive nature. Foss' schema seems to present the most fitting procedure for analysis of visuals in the current study.

One of the major contentions of this analysis is flip-flop advertisements practice antipolitics. To better probe this conceptual component of presidential flip-flop ads, it is necessary to consider how relevant ads construct politics and politicians. Special attention has been given to the ways that televised flip-flop advertisements both implicitly and explicitly sully the reputation of not just particular politicians, but Politicians in general. The degree to which ads may encourage citizens to think negatively about politics, government, and democracy is examined here for theoretical links to concerns about political cynicism and malaise.

In an effort to examine the use of rhetorical form in flip-flop advertisements, it is necessary to pay particular attention to the sequence in which ideas and images are presented in this body of texts. Kenneth Burke's (1968b) theory of form will be applied in an effort to understand how particular ideas and images in flip-flop ads lead audiences to anticipate other ideas and images. Here, the critic must identify anticipatory desires, determine what textual features created such desires, and evaluate the degree to which the desires are fulfilled by a given flip-flop ad. In order to accomplish this task, the full range of Burke's ideas concerning form must be applied. Relevant concepts therefore include progressive form (in both its syllogistic and qualitative varieties), repetitive form, incidental form, and rhythm. This portion of the analysis investigates the verbal, visual,

and audible features of relevant ads and proceeds with the assumption that each image or idea in a sequence has the potential to influence the way audiences look forward to, and think about, those images and ideas that follow.

The sequence of ideas within flip-flop advertisements has also been considered in relation to argumentation theory. In applying argumentation theory to particular flip-flop ads, the first step was to identify those ideas or utterances that comprise an ads' data, and those utterances or ideas that constitute an ads' claims. Where applicable, other parts of Toulmin's (1958) model of arguments were labeled as well. However, many components of traditional argumentation were absent or implicit in flip-flop ads, thus operating as enthymemes. Therefore, it is important that critical interpretations are geared toward filling in these important blanks and teasing out unstated parts of each argument to better understand the judgments that flip-flop ads encourage audiences to make. Where applicable, this investigation of argumentation includes discussion of the ads' visual and audible features as well. However, it is sometimes the case that not every set of visuals or audio in flip-flop ads is designed to argue. When this was the case, the critic can still consider the way that accompanying visuals and audio may influence viewers' interpretations of the verbal arguments presented in ads that accuse political opponents of inconsistency. The analysis suggests that one of the most interesting elements of the arguments presented in flip-flop spots is their use of policy utterances as data to support claims regarding a politician's character. This section also examines how flip-flop arguments made against incumbents differ from flip-flop arguments made against challengers.

Because the arguments presented in presidential flip-flop ads have a perceptible emotional dimension, this section also identifies and discusses affective elements of the ads and their attendant arguments. Such an inquiry ensures a comprehensive consideration of flip-flop ads, avoid a purely logo-centric view of political rhetoric, and advance scholarship regarding links between pathos and logos. Because scholars have noted the importance of emotion to visual rhetoric (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007), and music (Langer, 1953), much of this analysis focuses on images and sound in the flip-flop ads.

After modeling the arguments presented in flip-flop advertisements and discussing those arguments' affective elements, flip-flop arguments were also considered in relation to theories of fallacious reasoning. More specifically, these texts were considered for the degree to which they commit *ad hominem* fallacies. Douglas Walton's (1998) typology of *ad hominem* arguments (abusive, circumstantial, bias, *tu quoque*, poisoning the well) were used to evaluate the reasoning by which flip-flop ads progress. However, before judging particular arguments, particular ads, or for that matter, all flip-flop ads as fallacious, the unique context of political campaign communication had to be considered. As chapter two's literature review has noted, some scholars prefer not to label personal political attacks as fallacious because character is an important topic in political campaigns.

### **Research Questions and Study Preview**

This analysis of flip-flop advertisements proceeds in two parts. Chapter four defines flip-flop advertisements, explores their key components, and considers how they may shape the way citizens think about politics and politicians. Chapter five examines in

even closer depth the progression of ideas within flip-flop advertisements. Analysis of the progression of ideas in TV spot entails a consideration of how these ads use form to create and satisfy audience appetites, as well as how these ads use policy matters to make character judgments about political candidates. Throughout both of these analysis and discussion chapters, the foremost goal is to explain the unique rhetorical force of flip-flop advertisements.

#### **Chapter Four Questions**

The first and most general question this study answers is:

*How do televised presidential campaign ads construct the charge of inconsistency?*

To adequately address this question for all presidential campaigns from 1952-2008, it is necessary to consider the verbal, visual, and audible features of multiple flip-flop ads.

Recurring themes within flip-flop ads are described and evaluated.

It is a major contention of this rhetorical analysis that flip-flop advertisements practice antipolitics. Thus, this study broadly asks:

*How do televised presidential campaign flip-flop ads negatively define politics and politicians?*

Intimately related to this question is the rhetorical process by which flip-flop advertisements advance negative depictions and encourage negative assessments of politicians and political processes.

#### **Chapter Five Questions**

The current analysis has two concepts in mind as it aims to rhetorically analyze the progression of ideas in flip-flop ads, including Kenneth Burke's theory of form and theories of argumentation. Therefore, a guiding question addressed by this study is:

*How do televised presidential campaign flip-flop ads use form to construct their appeals?*

Here, each of Burke's (1968) types of form was used as an analytic lens in addressing this question.

Where argumentation is concerned, this rhetorical analysis asks:

*How do televised presidential campaign flip-flop ads construct arguments?*

Key to answering this question is a consideration of the interplay of policy and character themes, the way the ads attempt to appeal to emotions that may alter audience judgments, and the degree to which flip-flop advertisements employ *ad hominem* arguments.

### **Chapter Six Discussion**

Following a thorough analysis of how presidential campaign television spots construct the charge of inconsistency, chapter six synthesizes this study's findings. Chapter six also presents a discussion of this analysis' implications for the study and practice of political rhetoric.

## CHAPTER 4: VALUES, REPULSIONS, AND POLITICAL MALAISE

Televised flip-flop advertisements have been a prominent fixture of many presidential campaigns. In an effort to examine the beginnings of flip-flop messages and understand their evolution over the course of the last half decade, this chapter will present its results in chronological progression. Beginning with 1952, the first year in which presidential candidates used political television advertisements, and ending with 2008, the most recent presidential election, this analysis will consider the verbal, visual, and audible features that comprise flip-flop ads as well as ads related to flip-flop accusations. Altogether, there were 171 advertisements (see Table 1) from which this analysis could draw to justify interpretations and advance arguments. In addition to best demonstrating how presidential campaigns have developed flip-flop accusations over the years, the chronological mode of organization makes it possible to situate each flip-flop and flip-flop related message within the context of the campaign that produced it. Therefore, each flip-flop ad will be understood in relation to the rhetorical needs and situations it attempts to satisfy. This organizational scheme also makes it possible to interpret the concerted efforts of particular campaigns to develop a coherent set of messages related to political consistency and inconsistency.

A major task of this chapter is to analyze the many varied and rich attendant meanings and implicit value claims held within flip-flop attacks. Such a task is crucial for understanding why the American public tends to reject political inconsistency and indecision. To accomplish this goal, the latter portion of the chapter will examine the rhetorical conventions that pervade many flip-flop spots. For instance, two overarching metaphors--one related to the wind, and one related to debate—shape the way political

candidates and political audiences think about politicians who appear to change their positions on important policy issues. Furthermore, the means by which flip-flop attacks associate candidates with feminine traits--such as indecision--will be explored in depth. Another major theme to emerge from the body of ads analyzed here relates to antipolitics and the negative portrayal of politics and government. In sum, this chapter argues that there is much more to being a flip-flopper than simply being inconsistent.

### **Eisenhower vs. Stevenson, 1952**

As the introduction to this dissertation notes, the first presidential campaign to feature televised political ads was also the first presidential campaign to feature a televised flip-flop ad. Adlai Stevenson's campaign created an animated cartoon titled "Platform Double Talk" that accused the Republican party of making contradictory promises to the American public. Importantly, the spot's main target is not presidential candidate Dwight Eisenhower but a character called Mr. Mac-G-O-P. Mr. Mac-G-O-P has two distinct heads, each with its own contradictory opinion. The ad reinforces Mr. Mac-G.O.P's ludicrousness by labeling him a "sideshow" and playing circus music in the background of the ad:

Master of Ceremonies: Step right up, folks, see the mental marvel of the campaign, Mr. Mac-G-O-P. He promises to solve all your problems. Ask him any questions.

Female Voice #1: What about Korea?

GOP Head #1: We don't belong in Korea. Let the Commies have it.

GOP Head #2: We should expand the war, open a second front in China.

Female Voice #1: Wait a minute, we can't do both! We can't pull our troops out of Korea and invade China.

Master of Ceremonies: Go away lady, you bother me. Any more questions?

Male Voice #1: What about aid to Europe?

GOP Head #1: I'll personally tear down the Iron Curtain.

GOP Head #2: Not another nickel down that rathole! Let the Commies have it!

Male Voice #1: That's doubletalk!

Master of Ceremonies: What are you complaining about? You get two policies for the price of one!

Female Voice #2: Stop confusing the issue. I want a straight answer! Should we support the United Nations or not?

GOP Head #1: Uh, yes...I mean no.

GOP Head #2: No!...I mean yes.

GOP Head #1(To head #2): You're confused.

GOP Head #2 (To head #1): You're confused!

Male Narrator: Don't *you* be confused. Vote for Stevenson for president.

(Stevenson, "Platform Double Talk")

Considering the available production and editing technology that would have been available in 1952, the use of an animated cartoon seems like a rather informed choice. In 1952 the only way to present an image of a candidate with two heads, or include two images of one candidate on the television screen at one time, was to use animation. The range of ideas and images that can be represented in animation greatly expands the possibilities for political television ads. The cartoon makes Mr. Mac-G-O-P and his

conflicting positions seem even more comically preposterous.

Notably, the 1950's were part of the golden age of American animation. Well-known animation companies were commissioned to design ads for political candidates. For instance, Eisenhower's 1952 "Ike for President" commercial, which included a catchy song that declared, "You like Ike/ I like Ike/We all like Ike/ For President" was a Walt Disney creation (Diamond & Bates, 1984). Animated cartoons were so popular at this time that an ad such as "Platform Double-Talk" likely benefited from its association with a popular television genre. Audiences were accustomed to watching their favorite characters—Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Bugs Bunny, Woody Woodpecker, and others—act in ridiculous ways. It was taken for granted that these characters were meant for America's entertainment. They were not intended to be taken seriously. Thus, an image of a cartoon politician may have been particularly likely to be regarded as absurd, unintelligent, and as peculiar as a cartoon mouse. Even more generally, many audiences may have derived pleasure from the simple fact that the ad borrowed from one of their favorite television genres. Audiences knew this medium well, and therefore knew what to expect, knew what to feel, and could enjoy the ad on a deeper level. It wasn't just an ad, it was a cartoon, with characters, conflict, and a straightforward message.

Ultimately, the ad portrays the Republican Party as inconsistent and untrustworthy. Voters hear more than one position from the candidate and do not know which to believe. The rhetoric of the ad focuses on promises. The Master of Ceremonies introduces Mr. Mac-G-O-P by saying, "He promises to solve all your problems." This flip-flop ad, like so many to come after it, accuses a rival candidate of not being straight on the issues, of making promises they cannot possibly keep or perhaps do not intend to

keep. A different Stevenson ad from 1952, titled “Resist Special Privileges,” actually praises Stevenson for doing the opposite of Mr. Mac-G-O-P. The ad features a man testifying to Stevenson’s ability to avoid telling audiences exactly what they want to hear:

When I think of what he believes in--and what he has the backbone to say--Well, for example he said that he’d resist any special privileges for pressure groups--and he told *that* to labor unions in Detroit. And another time, he said he wouldn’t stand for special privileges for any special interests, including veterans, and he told *that* to the American Legion. That took real courage. And about tideland oils--Stevenson believes they belong to all of us--and he told *that* to the governor of Texas. Oh, he may lose Texas, but he sure stuck to his guns. (Stevenson, “Resist Special Privileges”)

With a clever list of examples, the text of this ad boasts of Stevenson’s tendency to speak what he believes, not what audiences may want to hear. Stevenson sticks to his guns, has real backbone, and acts courageously. These are positive qualities that voters will presumably admire in a presidential candidate. Because this ad is essentially the antithesis of a flip-flop spot, we can see that, by extension, the flip-flopper is characterized not only by dishonesty and inconsistency, but cowardice. It is unlikely that any voter values these qualities in a presidential candidate.

Of course, there may be some real problems with calling a decorated war General, such as Eisenhower, a coward. This may be at least part of the reason that the “Platform Double-Talk” did not feature the likeness of Dwight Eisenhower. Thus, the attack on Eisenhower was less direct, and less likely to induce a backlash against Stevenson. Another complexity within “Platform Double-Talk” is its use of foreign affairs and

military issues to paint Eisenhower as a flip-flopper. Military issues were almost certainly a topic on which Eisenhower was trusted by the American public. The Stevenson campaign clearly recognized the potential effectiveness of flip-flop attacks, but Eisenhower does not seem like the likeliest target for which these attacks could be aimed.

Flip-flop ads are designed to chip away at a candidate's credibility. However, Eisenhower's credibility was rather strong and likely contributed to the inability of these attacks to sufficiently derail his bid for the presidency. It is possible that Mark's (2006) observation that political attacks must be believable in order to be effective is relevant here. Accusations of flip-flopping and false-promise-making might stick well to a traditional politician, but Eisenhower does not fit this description. In fact, Eisenhower was able to craft for himself the image of a political outsider, untainted by the rough and tumble world of politics. Pro-Eisenhower ads from 1952 complained that "too many politicians have sold their ideals of honesty down the Potomac" and portrayed the General as the man that would "clean up Washington." In short, the Stevenson campaign appears to have recognized the utility of the flip-flop accusation, and was seemingly eager to use it. Unfortunately for Stevenson, the attack may not have been very well suited to the particular personal qualities of its target.

### **Eisenhower vs. Stevenson, 1956**

In 1956, Eisenhower and Stevenson were once again their respective parties' nominees for President of the United States. Once again, Stevenson used the rhetoric of promises in an attempt to claim that Eisenhower was inconsistent. The Stevenson campaign developed a series of ads called "How's That Again, General?" that compared

Eisenhower's campaign rhetoric in 1952 to his actual performance as President.

Stevenson's operatives used actual audio and video clips from Eisenhower's own 1952 ads in an attempt to use Eisenhower's own words against him. For instance, this ad details how Eisenhower failed to deliver on his promise to clean up Washington:

Male Announcer: How's that again, General? During the 1952 campaign, General Eisenhower promised a great crusade:

Dwight Eisenhower: Too many politicians have sold their ideals of honesty down the Potomac. We must bring back the integrity and thrift to Washington.

Announcer: How's that again, General?

Eisenhower: Too many politicians have sold their ideals of honesty down the Potomac. We must bring back integrity and thrift back to Washington.

Estes Kefauver: This is Estes Kefauver. Let's see what happened to that promise.

Wesley Roberts, a Republican National Chairman, sold Kansas a building it already owned for eleven thousand dollars. He got a silver tree from Mr.

Eisenhower. Hal Talbott pressured defense plants to employ a firm which paid him a hundred and thirty thousand dollars while he was Air Force Secretary. He received the General's warm wishes and an official welcome. And there are many others, like Strobel, the Public Buildings Administrator; Mansure, the General Services Administrator. Let's think it through on November 6.

Announcer: Vote for Stevenson and Kefauver--vote Democratic. (Stevenson, "How's that Again, General?")

This advertisement presents a rather compelling picture of inconsistency. Vice Presidential candidate Estes Kefauver lists multiple instances of the Eisenhower

administration participating in the same sort of government corruption Eisenhower promised to eradicate. In 1952, the Stevenson campaign's "Platform Double-Talk" relied on hypothetical promises from a caricature of a Republican party politician to make its claim that Eisenhower was inconsistent. Nineteen fifty six's "How's That Again General?" spot is much more direct and specific. Here, audiences are confronted with the image and sound of Eisenhower making a promise that arguably was not kept. This ad leaves no question as to whether or not Eisenhower ever expressed a desire to "bring back integrity and thrift back to Washington"—audiences can see and hear him make that promise twice in this single ad.

Estes Kefauver provides concrete examples of Eisenhower's involvement in the very same sort of corruption and wastefulness he promised to do away with. Of course, the promise to clean up Washington is rather vague, and may have been particularly easy for the Democratic party to exploit. However, another "How's That Again General?" ad is far more specific, this one dealing with the issue of union-busting. The ad follows the same exact format as the one described above:

Male Announcerr: How's that again, General [v/o]? In the 1952 [Eisenhower on TV screen, 1952] campaign, Mr. Eisenhower said this about Taft-Hartley:

Dwight Eisenhower: I know how the law might be used to break unions. That must be changed. America wants no law licensing union-busting. And neither do I.

Announcer: How's that again, General?

Eisenhower: I know how the law might be used to break unions. That must be changed.

Estes Kefauver: This is Estes Kefauver. That was one more promise Mr. Eisenhower didn't keep. During four years in office, the General did absolutely nothing about changing the union-busting features of Taft-Hartley. What's more, he's stacked the National Labor Relations Board with anti-labor spokesmen. Another thing, under the Republicans, General Motor's profits are up 113%; auto workers' income up only 14% [chart with two arrows]. Let's think it through. Let's get an administration that means prosperity for everybody.

Announcer: Vote for Stevenson and Kefauver [Vote for Adlai Stevenson and Estes Kefauver]--vote Democratic. (Stevenson, "How's That Again, General")

This ad accuses Eisenhower of breaking his promise and describes in some detail why Eisenhower's policies are bad for American labor. In other words, the ad may be capable of persuading audiences that are offended by inconsistency, and also audiences that are bothered by Eisenhower's allegedly anti-labor actions. The reasoning behind the decision to create a series of ads that are so similar is rather sound. Together, the ads reinforce the broken promises theme and create some uncertainty as to whether Eisenhower had done a good enough job as President to be re-elected.

It is rather informative to examine the Stevenson campaign's decision to have Estes Kefauver levy these attacks against Eisenhower. Kessler (1981) notes that surrogate speakers, such as Kefauver in this situation, are often used to say things that a presidential candidate wants said, but do not want to say themselves. For instance, surrogate political speakers are often used to attack opponents, thus permitting political candidates to appear above the fray of dirty politics. In short, the decision to use Kefauver in these attacks on Eisenhower can be interpreted as evidence that the

Stevenson campaign saw accusations of broken promises and inconsistency as having the potential to be regarded as malicious.

In both 1952 and 1956, Dwight Eisenhower was accused of being inconsistent. Notably, however, these attacks looked very different. All of the flip-flop accusations made in the body of presidential advertisements described in this study suggest a distinct difference between flip-flop charges aimed at incumbents and flip-flop charges aimed at challengers. This difference is evident when comparing the anti-Eisenhower ads from 1952 and 1956. Importantly, the model that reveals itself here is repeated in later presidential campaigns.

In 1952, Mr. Mac-G-O-P, the surrogate target for Dwight Eisenhower, was attacked for having two heads and making contradictory promises. The ad generated confusion and uncertainty regarding just what exactly the candidate believed and what the candidate would do if elected President. For instance, would Eisenhower escalate the war in Korea or would he shut it down completely? Such ads exploit the lack of information audiences have about challengers. In addition to attacking a challenger's credibility and trustworthiness, incumbents may also make the challenger appear unsure and unseasoned; unaccustomed to having to make—and remain committed to—tough decisions. Voters may already be very uncertain about candidates with which they are unfamiliar, and the flip-flop spot against an unelected challenger seems designed to exploit and increase this uncertainty. Although the “Platform Double-Talk” ad had to invent conflicting positions for the fictitious Mr. Mac-G-O-P to take, many challengers, often Governors and Senators, enter a presidential race with a record of real world inconsistencies that opposing campaign officials can exploit. This analysis will detail

how Presidential challengers such as Barry Goldwater, George McGovern, Bill Clinton, and John Kerry, among others, were attacked in much the same way. Each time, these ads appeal to voters' sense of prospective voting, encouraging citizens to ask, "what will this unknown challenger candidate do if elected president?" Of course, the goal of the flip-flop ad is to make it as difficult as possible for voters to answer this question in a way that keeps the challenger's credibility intact.

When a candidate enters the presidential campaign as an incumbent, they will have a record of achievements and failures to which they will be held accountable. Flip-flop ads run against incumbent candidates focus exclusively on these candidates' failures, particularly those instances where a candidate failed to deliver on a specific campaign promise made four years earlier. There are many reasons that a candidate may break campaign promises. It is not uncommon for an incumbent to claim that unforeseen circumstances or uncooperative members of congress made their goals unattainable. Still, to promise something and not deliver it is a form of inconsistency that may be taken advantage of by challenger candidates. Even more useful to challengers is any instance in which an incumbent has apparently done the exact opposite of what they promised in their previous campaign. A good example of this is the conflict between Eisenhower's pro-labor rhetoric in 1952 and the decisions he made as President in the four years that followed. In fact, similarly-themed "broken promises ads" have been employed against perhaps every incumbent president in the era of televised political advertising.

Ads that reflect on an incumbent's past four years in office in an effort to portray the President as inept are geared toward voters who engage in retrospective voting. Retrospective voting requires voters to look at a candidate's past successes and failures to

decide if an incumbent deserves reelection. In summary, when considered in relation to one another, the campaigns of 1952 and 1956 demonstrate how charges of inconsistency may vary based on incumbency.

### **Nixon vs. Kennedy, 1960**

The charge of flip-flopping or inconsistency was not particularly prominent in the 1960 presidential election between Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy. Still, there is at least one ad worth analyzing because it represents a recurring theme seen throughout the entire body of ads sampled here. A spot produced for the Kennedy campaign uses rhetoric very similar to that of the 1952 “Platform Double-Talk” spot. The ad, titled “Nixon Civil Rights,” accuses the Republican party of having a confusing and dishonest political platform. Interestingly, the ad says little about Nixon’s position on civil rights, and instead relies on video and audio footage of Nixon’s ally, Republican Senator Barry Goldwater, contemplating how Republicans might win votes in New York, despite a desire for a civil rights platform that would privilege states’ rights:

Announcer: Richard Milhouse Nixon wants you to think that he and his supporters are sincere believers in the civil rights plank in the Republican Platform. But can you really trust them when they change their story in different parts of the country? Mr. Nixon, can you explain why Republican leader Barry Goldwater, one of your chief supporters, made this speech recently in Georgia:

Barry Goldwater: I think for instance our platform on civil rights goes too far away from states’ rights, but that’s the way they have to get elected in New York, so I guess we have to have it in the platform. If we could just cut those New York electoral votes out, we’d be all right.

Announcer: Why do the Republicans have a civil rights plank in their platform? Goldwater says, only to win votes in New York. John Kennedy, the Democratic candidate, is a man of integrity who stands by his party's platform everywhere in the country. Vote for John Kennedy on the Democratic ticket. (Kennedy, "Nixon Civil Rights")

Accusations of inconsistency are designed to strike at rival candidates' trustworthiness. Such a line of attack is made explicit in the "Nixon Civil Rights" ad when the announcer asks, "But can you really trust them when they change their story in different parts of the country?" The question accuses candidates of saying not what they believe, but what they believe their audience wants to hear.

"Nixon Civil Rights" tries to make the Republican party appear dishonest and willing to mislead the American public. Whereas many flip-flop spots will make certain to never tell an audience where an opposing politician really stands on an issue, this ad comes right out and tells the audience that the Republicans are actually pro-states' rights (and therefore anti-civil rights) despite their attempts to court northern voters with a civil rights platform. Thus, the Republicans aren't just untrustworthy because they are inconsistent, they are untrustworthy because they are dishonest.

The ad ends with praise for Democratic candidate John F. Kennedy. Interestingly, the announcer never claims that Kennedy has a better or different stance on civil rights than Barry Goldwater or Richard Nixon. Instead, the ad lauds Kennedy for standing by his party's platform everywhere in the country. Although the Democratic Party may have already firmly established itself as the civil rights party and voters could therefore assume where Kennedy stood on civil rights matters, it is still telling that the

content of their platform is never discussed in “Nixon Civil Rights.” Even if the platform were unwise or unpopular, there is apparently something to be said for standing by it and representing it accurately and consistently. The ad’s proclamation that Kennedy is “a man of integrity,” when considered in such close proximity to the previous statements about Republican deceitfulness, actually implies that Nixon lacks integrity.

The decision to attack Nixon’s integrity in such an indirect manner may be interpreted as evidence that the Kennedy campaign saw potential drawbacks to attacking an opponent so personally and directly. Such direct attacks on character could potentially be seen by voters as unnecessarily nasty and ill-mannered, thus generating a backlash effect against the sponsor of a negative political message. Decades later, political communication scholars confirmed the presence of a backlash effect against politicians who craft and personally deliver negative political attack messages (Allen & Burrell, 2002; Benoit, Leshner, & Chattopadhyay, 2007; Lau et al., 1999). Although Kennedy would not have had access to such research, the decision to imply rather than state that Nixon lacks integrity seems politically calculated to minimize the potential for a backlash against Kennedy. In the political arena of the 1960’s, it was uncommon for candidates to explicitly question a rival candidate’s honesty. In fact, use of words such as “lie,” “lying,” and “liar” did not enter political ads until the 1990s.

#### **Johnson vs. Goldwater, 1964**

The television ads produced by the 1964 campaign for president are particularly valuable for a study of flip-flop advertisements. Lyndon B. Johnson’s election campaign made a coordinated effort to portray Johnson’s opponent, Barry Goldwater, as an erratic flip-flopper, while simultaneously running positive ads that emphasized Johnson’s

rationality, consistency, and steady demeanor. Similarly, but with less zeal, Goldwater tried to highlight Johnson's indecision and inaction.

Two ads that directly confront Goldwater's inconsistency are "Barry, Barry" and "Which Barry Goldwater?" These ads took televised flip-flop commercials to new places, developing a verbal and visual style that has been copied for decades. Other Johnson ads, such as "Daisy" and "Hot Line" may not be flip-flop ads, but they demonstrate the Democratic efforts to color Goldwater as not only indecisive and inconsistent, but wholly erratic and dangerous. Additionally, positive spots, such as "Our President," were produced and aired so that audiences could see how Johnson was the antithesis of Goldwater. Each of these ads will be discussed here.

The text of Johnson's "Barry, Barry" ad features a poster of Barry Goldwater attached to a stick. The poster is flipped around every time the announcer lists another one of Barry Goldwater's contradictory positions. The ad tackles a host of foreign and domestic issues on which Goldwater had been inconsistent:

Announcer: It's a funny thing about Barry Goldwater [poster on stick]. Six different times he told the world he wants to make Social Security voluntary. Then he turns around [poster flips] and says he never said that [flips back]. Five times he's been quoted as saying we ought to get out of the UN. But now he turns around [flips] and says he never said that either [flips back]. He voted against the tax cut. Then he turns around [flips] and says he wants to cut taxes [flips back]. He made a big speech and said extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. Then he [flips] turns around and says I seek the support of no extremist [flips back]. He suggested using nuclear weapons in Laos and in Vietnam. Then he

turns around [flips] and says I have never advocated the use of nuclear weapons anywhere in the world. There's only one Lyndon Johnson. Vote for him on Nov.

3. The stakes are too high for you to stay home [Vote for President Johnson on Nov 3]. (Johnson, "Barry, Barry")

This ad focuses almost exclusively on what Goldwater "says." The list of contradictions totals at least five. When described in such quick succession and punctuated by the flipping of a placard with Goldwater's face on it, the ad gives the impression that for every statement Goldwater has ever made, there exists a contradictory stance on the same political issue. The ad calls into question everything Goldwater has said, or will say, leading up to election day.

In addition to raising doubts about just what Goldwater believes, the ad raises questions about Goldwater's honesty. On this point, it is particularly interesting to further deconstruct Goldwater's denial of ever having made specific comments. For example, the "Barry, Barry" announcer tells the television audience:

Six different times he told the world he wants to make Social Security voluntary.

Then he turns around and says he never said that. Five times he's been quoted as saying we ought to get out of the UN. But now he turns around and says he never said that either. (Johnson, "Barry, Barry")

If Goldwater claims not to have said something that he is clearly on record as saying, then he is a liar. As has been noted previously, it would be a few decades before political candidates used the language of "lying" so directly. For Goldwater, the problem is not only that he can't stick to one political position or that he tries too hard to adapt to the diverse audiences he addresses, nor is the problem that he is misrepresenting what he

actually believes. The problem, as suggested by Johnson's "Which Barry Goldwater" ad, is that Goldwater is deceitful. Voters are forced to wonder how Goldwater can possibly claim not to have said something if he is on record as saying it multiple times. The ad encourages audiences to wonder how Barry Goldwater expects to get away with such a deceit, and what other things Goldwater might lie about.

The "turn around" rhetoric used here is clever because it verbally gives the impression of a flip or a flop—the perfect accompaniment to the image of Goldwater's poster being flipped or rotated. Clearly, this is an attack on Goldwater's consistency, credibility, and trustworthiness. Later ads, namely 1968's "Weathervane," and 1972's "McGovern Turnaround," use similar visual and verbal symbols. Like "Barry, Barry," they feature an image of a political candidate being flipped or spun around as a narrator details their inconsistent policies and statements. In this respect, "Barry, Barry" established an important convention in televised political advertising. A second anti-Goldwater flip-flop ad strikes at Goldwater's credibility in much the same way.

Visually, "Which Barry Goldwater?" features a photograph of Goldwater's profile that has been duplicated and then reversed so that the Goldwater on the left is looking straight into the eyes of the Goldwater on the right. His face is pensive, almost to the point that he looks angry. The camera deliberately pans right and left to switch between frames of each Goldwater. Every time the announcer finishes describing one of Goldwater's positions, the camera pans to the opposite image of Goldwater to describe a conflicting position on the same political issue. The camera's repetitious panning movement is the ad's only motion and the announcer's solemn male voice is the ad's only sound. Thus, both visually and sonically, the ad adopts a stern, somber tone:

When somebody tells you he's for Barry Goldwater, you ask him which Barry Goldwater he's for [Centered image of two Goldwaters]. Is he for the one [camera pans left] who said, "we must make the fullest possible use of the UN," or [camper pans right] is he for the one who said "the US no longer has a place in the UN?" [Camera pans left] Is he for the Barry who said, "I've never advocated the use of nuclear weapons anywhere in the world," or [camera pans right] is he for the one who said "I'd drop a low yield atomic bomb on the Chinese supply lines in North Vietnam?" [Camera pans left] Is he for the Barry who said, "I seek the support of no extremist," or [camera pans right] is he for the one who said "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice?" [Camera pans left and stops at center] And how is a Republican supposed to indicate on his ballot which Barry Goldwater he's voting for? There's only one Lyndon Johnson. (Johnson, "Which Barry Goldwater?")

Like so many other flip-flop ads, this one includes a rhetorical question: "And how is a Republican supposed to indicate on his ballot which Barry Goldwater he's voting for?" Interestingly, during the two seconds it takes the announcer to ask this question, a new image of Goldwater, also duplicated and reversed so that there are two of him, appears on the screen. The new photograph adds very little to the overall meaning of the ad, but may serve to reinforce Goldwater's duplicity. Conversely, the very last sentence of the ad, "There's only one Lyndon Johnson," is clearly designed to express Johnson's trustworthiness. By implication, audiences may assume that Johnson's positions are actually much clearer and less conflicting than Goldwater's. The ad doesn't tell the

audience what those positions are, but they are assured there is only “one” Johnson position for each issue.

“Which Barry Goldwater” directly addresses and instructs its audience, the would-be voter. The viewer is given a script for how they should behave if anybody ever tells them that they intend to vote for Barry Goldwater. Another Johnson ad, “Confessions of a Republican,” presents the concerns of a voter as he tries to decide who he should vote for in 1964. The ad runs over four minutes long as the voter expresses his doubts about Goldwater and wrestles with the idea of voting for a Democratic candidate for the first time in his life. The audience knows that this bookish white male voter is a Republican because he tells them so: “I’ve always been a Republican. My father is, his father was, the whole family is a Republican family. I voted for Dwight Eisenhower the first time I ever voted; I voted for Nixon the last time.” Next, he presents the ad’s thesis: “But when we come to Senator Goldwater, now it seems to me we’re up against a very different kind of a man. This man scares me.” The unnamed voter goes on to consider if Goldwater will act responsibly if elected president and he questions the “strange ideas” of the “men behind” Goldwater. He also notes that a candidate’s judgment is an important factor in determining his vote. The most important passage in the ad, as far as flip-flop accusations are concerned, is the third paragraph. The passage follows the voter’s line of thought as he tries to figure out what Barry Goldwater believes:

The hardest thing for me about this whole campaign is to sort out one Goldwater statement from another. A reporter will go to Senator Goldwater and he’ll say, “Senator, on such and such a day, you said, and I quote, ‘blah blah blah’ whatever it is, end quote.” And then Goldwater says, “Well, I wouldn’t put it that way.” I

can't follow that. Was he serious when he did put it that way? Is he serious when he says I wouldn't put it that way? I just don't get it. A President ought to mean what he says. (Johnson, "Confessions of a Republican")

Throughout the ad, this unnamed Republican stands as a surrogate for the average voter. In the passage presented here, the voter engages in the same arduous task, and experiences the sort of confusion and frustration that Democrats hoped all voters would encounter when they consider Barry Goldwater. The message is simple: Because one cannot know where Goldwater stands on an issue, one should choose Johnson for president in 1964.

The three ads discussed thus far demonstrate the Johnson campaign's repeated efforts to make Goldwater look inconsistent and untrustworthy. These labels are damning in their own right, but they can also be interpreted as important parts of an even larger campaign strategy to label Goldwater as erratic, unstable, and dangerous. The Johnson campaign's negative television ads demonstrate these themes very vividly. For instance, much has been written about Johnson's 60-second "Daisy" spot. The ad implicitly suggests that, if elected President, Barry Goldwater will lead the country in the direction of nuclear war.

"Daisy" features a little girl standing in a field, picking at a flower, and adorably failing to count all the way to 10 with any accuracy. The scene is interrupted by the loud, frightening voice of a military technician as he counts backward from 10. When he finishes, the audience hears an enormous explosion and sees a mushroom cloud. Johnson's voice then warns, "These are the stakes: To make a world in which all God's children can live, or go into the dark. We must either love each other or we must die." A

third male voice brings the ad to a close by saying, “Vote for President Johnson on November 3. The stakes are too high for you to stay home.”

Much of the ad’s power is said to have been derived from the fact that Barry Goldwater is not mentioned anywhere in the message. Instead, the spot plays on already existing fears about Barry Goldwater’s judgment and temperament. The Johnson ad did not place Goldwater into this apocalyptic scene, audiences did. However, a fear appeal that plays on audience’s already existing fears is still a scare tactic. The ad accuses Goldwater of volatility and a lack of sound judgment in matters of life and death. At any moment Goldwater might make the wrong decision. He could change his mind on an important political issue and/or destroy an entire civilization. The flip-flop ads’ contentions that Goldwater is inconsistent and untrustworthy are magnified tenfold in the “Daisy” ad, where he is made to look volatile, emotionally unstable, and dangerously unpredictable. Such constructs come with a whole different set of connotations and concerns for voters. The dangerous, volatile candidate is arguably more likely than the indecisive, wishy-washy, ineffectual candidate to encourage fear in audiences. Few political ads before or after “Daisy” have done such a compelling job of turning their target into a monster.

“Hot Line” constitutes another ad indirectly aimed at Goldwater’s judgment, responsibility, and temperament. This simple 30-second spot featured a phone clearly marked “White House” not so much ringing, but buzzing with the air of emergency. The phone has no dial, but does have a flashing light. Clearly, this is an emergency phone used only to receive messages of the utmost important. In fact, the phone would likely be recognized by many 1964 voters as the “red line” that represents a direct connection

between the United States and the Soviet Union. The phone buzzes unanswered for a time before a male announcer intones: “This particular phone only rings in a serious crisis. Leave it in the hands of a man who has proven himself responsible. Vote for President Johnson on November 3.” Again, this ad does not mention Goldwater by name, but by noting that Johnson has proven himself responsible, the ad certainly implies that Johnson’s opponent, Goldwater, has not. Thus, Goldwater is unreliable and reckless. Seen in relation to campaign ads such as this, Goldwater’s penchant for flip-flopping is just one aspect of his overall instability.

The Goldwater campaign responded to some of Johnson’s attacks with a series of defensive ads. The following spot, the title of which could not be located, attempts to turn a discussion of Goldwater’s alleged imprudence into an assault on Johnson’s decisiveness. An announcer asks, “Mr. Goldwater, what’s this about your being called imprudent and impulsive?” Goldwater responds by saying,

Well, you know, it seems to me that the really impulsive and imprudent president is the one who is so indecisive that he has no policy at all, with the result that potential aggressors are tempted to move because they think that we lack the will to defend freedom. (Goldwater, Untitled)

Goldwater goes on to praise President Eisenhower’s “firmness” in military policies and lists Laos, the Bay of Pigs, Berlin, and the Congo, among Johnson’s military failures. Thus, Johnson is attacked for a timidity that has put the United States’ military prowess in jeopardy.

A similar appeal on Goldwater’s behalf features actor John Wayne explaining what he and other conservatives dislike about big government. Couched among concerns

about high taxes, arrogance, and deceit is an accusation that those currently in power are indecisive, irresponsible, and unprincipled. Wayne tells the camera,

[There is] a resentment against a government of slogan and deceit, against cynicism and indecision. Truth and integrity have taken a backseat in our government along with self-discipline and personal responsibility. Expediency has replaced principle as a guiding force in Washington today. (Goldwater, “John Wayne”)

Certainly, accusations that Johnson lacks “self-discipline” and “personal responsibility” would have been more likely to take hold in the minds of voters if Goldwater himself had not been convincingly charged with these same character flaws. Use of a popular Republican surrogate such as John Wayne was likely intended to circumvent this problem. These are certainly not accusations to be taken lightly, but they are relatively indirect and uncoordinated with the rest of Goldwater’s campaign messages. Although these ads make some of the same accusations as flip-flop ads, these anti-Johnson charges fall short of developing a coherent picture of Johnson as flip-flopper. However, Johnson’s 1964 attacks against Goldwater demonstrate how a campaign can use the full force of their resources to raise doubts about an opponent’s consistency and overall character.

### **Humphrey vs. Nixon, 1968**

The rhetoric of promises and the rhetoric of inconsistency figured into several prominent television ads from the 1968 presidential campaign. Not only did Hubert Humphrey’s campaign run several inventive flip-flop spots against Richard Nixon, but

Nixon's own ads highlighted a distinction between words and deeds that is prevalent throughout many of the flip-flop ads before and after 1968.

Humphrey's "Weathervane" derives much of its appeal from its imaginative incorporation of visual aids. Visually, the ad uses a bronze likeness of Richard M. Nixon as a weathervane to contend that he constantly changes political positions and reverses his direction. Thus, the ad is similar to Johnson's "Barry, Barry" commercial from 1964. The entire "Weathervane" ad is comprised of one sustained shot of the weathervane. As a representative anecdote for Nixon's inconsistency, the ad's verbal dimension relies on a number of conflicting statements he had made about a 1968 Civil Rights bill. Note that like much of the paraphrasing seen in earlier ads, the source for Nixon's quotes is undocumented:

Ever noticed what happens to Nixon when the political winds blow [Camera zooms in on a likeness of Nixon placed atop a weathervane]. Last year, he said, "I oppose a federal open housing law." [Weathervane turns right, stops] This year he said, "I support the 1968 Civil Rights Bill with open housing." [Weathervane turns left, stops] Again this year, he said, "I just supported it to get it out of sight." [Weathervane turns right and continues spinning indefinitely] Which way will he blow next? On November 5, vote for Hubert Humphrey. (Humphrey, "Weathervane")

The wind metaphor present in this ad will be discussed in some length later in this dissertation. First however, it is important to note the ways in which this ad is both similar to, and different from, ads run prior to 1968. Like "Barry, Barry" and "Which Barry Goldwater," "Weathervane" relies on an opponent's comments about a particular

issue or issues to demonstrate the opponent's inconsistency. Another similarity to previous flip-flop spots is the ad's reliance on a rhetorical question designed to mock the opponent. Visually, the ad ups the ante by creating a three dimensional visual aid, even if the basic theme is the same as "Barry, Barry." The visual aid flips (turns, spins, rotates) back and forth in time with the announcer's recitation of the opponents' flip flops, thus reinforcing Nixon's constant shifting.

Another ad, titled "Bubbles," uses images of soap bubbles as its primary visual reinforcement. Each bubble represents a campaign promise from either Republican Richard Nixon or third-party candidate George Wallace. When the announcer presents information that conflicts with a campaign promise, a bubble bursts. The bubbles pop one after another, as if to draw attention to the ephemeral nature of these empty promises. Each pop of a bubble is noted in brackets here:

Announcer: [As soap bubbles appear] Some men will tell you anything. Mr. Nixon pledges he'll end the war in Vietnam [bubble pops], but Spiro Agnew says Nixon has no plan. Mr. Wallace talks about law and order [bubble pops], but under the Wallace administration, Alabama had the highest murder rate in the country. Mr. Nixon wants to offer security to older citizens [bubble pops], but Mr. Nixon opposes Medicare. Mr. Wallace says he'll lower taxes for the little man [bubble pops], but Wallace raised the Alabama food sales tax to 6%, highest in the country. Mr. Nixon tells us he's ready to meet the challenge of international politics [bubble pops], but at home Nixon will not even meet Hubert Humphrey on TV. Some men will tell you anything to get the job, while other men are interested in the truth. [Text: "Vote Humphrey-Muskie on Nov. 5"]

(Humphrey, “Bubbles”)

The inclusion of so many different examples in this ad, when uttered in such quick succession, may overwhelm a viewer. Audience members are expected to take a short cut in evaluating the evidence and instead decide that the sheer quantity of evidence is enough to warrant agreement with the ad’s central premise, which is that Humphrey’s opponents make promises they can’t possibly keep, or have already broken. It is unfortunate that viewers are forced to use such a shortcut in assessing the claims made because the ad deserves much more attention. At least one of the contradictions cited in the spot is not a contradiction at all: “Mr. Nixon tells us he’s ready to meet the challenge of international politics, but at home Nixon will not even meet Hubert Humphrey on TV.” It is not at all clear how or why Humphrey’s alleged refusal to debate Nixon on television qualifies as evidence that Nixon cannot lead the United States in international affairs. Whether because they are overwhelmed with information, because the popping bubble cues them to believe the promise is bogus, audiences may very well fail to note problems with the ad’s logic.

Several other ads from 1968 build on the distinction between what a political candidate says and what a political candidate does. For instance, an ad produced by the Humphrey campaign posed the question, “What Has Nixon Done for You?”, ultimately encouraging voters to believe that Nixon has never accomplished anything (a similar claim to Kennedy ads from 1960). The “What Has Nixon Done for You?” spot tells voters that important initiatives such as medicare, education, and housing were all the work of Democrats. According to the message, Nixon had not accomplished anything important enough to mention. Although “What Has Nixon Done for You?” is not a flip-

flop ad, it is relevant because of how well it exemplifies the popular claim that what a candidate *does* is more important than what they *say*. This spot, like many flip-flop ads, accuses a rival candidate of not being able to get things done.

Of course, Nixon's campaign did offer some messages that suggested he was a bit more effectual. An ad featuring Hiram Fong, U.S. Senator from Hawaii, featured the congressman testifying "I know Richard Nixon: When he says he's going to do a thing, he will do it." This assertion certainly provides a counterpoint to Humphrey's contentions that Nixon is full of empty promises, but this positive theme was never made a focal point of Nixon's campaign. Still, Nixon won the 1968 election, thus demonstrating that either Nixon's image was strong enough to withstand the flip-flop and do-nothing charges, or voters weighted other matters as far more important in their decision making process.

### **Nixon vs. McGovern, 1972**

In 1972, Nixon was the incumbent candidate for President of the United States. Thus, Nixon was criticized in several ads for breaking promises, and failing to act in concert with his 1968 campaign utterances. Meanwhile, Democrat George McGovern was labeled a flip-flopper by a group called Democrats for Nixon. Attacks on McGovern demonstrate how flip-flop ads can make a candidate appear weak and wimpy and unable to defend America.

Unemployment was an important issue for McGovern in 1972. One unnamed ad provides a sharply worded criticism of Nixon's failure to curb unemployment by using a direct quote from Nixon's 1968 campaign:

In 1968, Mr. Nixon said, “What we need are not more millions on welfare rolls, but more millions on payrolls.” Mr. Nixon has spoken in favor of work, but his actions have driven Americans by the tens of thousands into unemployment and onto welfare. (McGovern, Untitled).

Next, the ad detailed how much money the United States had lost because of unemployment. The McGovern campaign apparently decided that it wasn’t enough to simply claim that Nixon was bad at creating jobs, or that he did not care about fixing unemployment. They ratcheted up the unemployment attack by making Nixon sound like a hypocrite. The ad also indirectly cues audiences to be wary of any future utterances Nixon might make “in favor of work.” Similar ads attacked Nixon’s record on crime and inflation by listing Nixon’s failures and reminding voters what Nixon had promised four years earlier.

Although Nixon was not called a flip-flopper, his opponent, George McGovern was. A TV ad called “McGovern Turnaround” focused on a variety of political issues: The Vietnam War, legalization of marijuana, welfare, taxes, and school busing. Another ad, titled, “Vietnam Turnaround,” focused exclusively on the issue of the Vietnam War. Both ads are designed to argue that McGovern is inconsistent, and both ads used the same exact visual materials—a photograph of McGovern’s profile placed on a spindle. As a male narrator recounts McGovern’s many flip-flops or “turn arounds,” the photograph flips or rotates to reveal a photograph of McGovern’s face pointing in the opposite direction. As the narrator describes each change of political direction, the image of McGovern changes direction in kind. Visually, the ad is therefore strikingly similar to the Johnson campaign’s 1964 “Barry, Barry” spot. Verbally, the ad has much in common

with Humphrey's "Weathervane" message because both ads use the language of "this year" vs. "last year" to show their opponents' change of position over time. Below is the text of the "McGovern Turnaround" ad with a description of the visual action in brackets:

In 1967, [photo of McGovern facing right] Senator George McGovern said he was not an advocate of unilateral withdrawal of our troops from Vietnam. Now of course he is [photo flips from facing right to left]. Last year the Senator suggested regulating marijuana along the same lines as alcohol, which means legalizing it. Now he's against legalizing it and says he always has been [photo flips to face right]. Last January Senator McGovern suggested a welfare plan that would give a thousand dollar bill to every man, woman, and child in the country. [photo flips] Now he says maybe the thousand dollar figure isn't right [photo flips back]. Last year he proposed to tax inheritances over \$500,000 at 100% [photo flips]. This year he suggests 77% [photo flips]. In Florida he was pro-busing [photo flips]. In Oregon he said he would support the anti-busing bill now in Congress [photo flips]. Last year, this year. The question is, what about next year [photo flips/spins around and around rapidly]? (Nixon, "McGovern Turnaround")

The image of McGovern on a spindle, just like the images in flip-flop ads before it (e.g. "Barry, Barry," and "Weathervane") first turns in sync with each contradiction the narrator mentions; but by the end of the ad the candidate's face spins continuously and arbitrarily. By relying on so many different political issues for evidence of McGovern's inconsistency, the ad gives the impression that there may be no political issue on which McGovern's position is completely clear. The ad suggests that inconsistency permeates all of McGovern's discourse: It demonstrates the *breadth* of his flip-flopping.

By creating an ad that focused on just one political issue, the Democrats for Nixon group could highlight the *depth* of McGovern's flip-flopping. Some political issues were more important than others in 1972. For instance, McGovern campaigned hard against Nixon's handling of the Vietnam War. In fact, McGovern was largely seen as the contests' anti-war candidate. The Nixon campaign substantially muddled McGovern's position on the Vietnam War with their production of a "Vietnam Turnaround" spot. Visually, the ad is identical to the "McGovern Turnaround" message described above. However, the verbal text is quite different:

In 1964, [photo of McGovern facing right] Senator McGovern voted in favor of the Gulf of Tonkin resolution which supported the escalation of the war in Vietnam [photo flips from facing right to left]. Now he says he's against the war and always has been. In 1965 McGovern said we should wage war rather than surrender south Vietnam to communists [photo flips to face right]. Three years later he said it would not be fatal to the United States to have a Communist government in south Vietnam [photo flips]. In 1967, he was against unilateral troop withdrawal [photo flips]. Now, of course, he favors unilateral troop withdrawal. Throughout the year [photo flips], he has proposed unconditional amnesty for draft dodgers [photo flips/spins around and around rapidly until the end of ad]. But his running mate claims he proposed no such thing. For the war. Against the war. For amnesty. Against amnesty. The question is, where will he stand next year? (Nixon, "Vietnam Turnaround")

Arguably, this ad does an even better job of emphasizing McGovern's flip-flops than the spot that features multiple political issues. This is due in part to the ad's closing: "For the

war. Against the war. For amnesty. Against amnesty.” This language summarizes the rest of the ad by placing McGovern’s flip-flops in closer proximity to each other, thus turning up the ridicule and bordering on the hyperbolic. Visually, the rapid spinning of McGovern’s face enhances this idea. By focusing solely on one issue, the ad actually shows just how conflicted McGovern really may be on this issue. It was likely a wise decision that the one issue this ad emphasized (Vietnam) was regarded by many people as one of McGovern’s main strengths as a candidate.

Most flip-flop spots create uncertainty about a rival candidate’s policy positions. Typically, these ads use past actions and utterances to demonstrate that voters’ cannot be sure of a candidate’s current policy positions. Flip-flop ads create a sense of doubt about the political positions a rival candidate holds or might take during the course of a campaign. Many voters, when they try to envisage a politician in the role of officeholder, may also project their uncertainty about a candidate into the future. Whereas many flip-flop ads only make this move by implication, “Vietnam Turnaround,” due in large part to the rhetorical question with which it closes (“were will he stand next year?”), explicitly extends voters’ sense of uncertainty about McGovern’s decision making into the future. If voters do not know where a candidate stands now, how can they know where a candidate will stand in the future, after they are actually elected. Flip-flop ads in general, and “Vietnam Turnaround” in particular, project voter uncertainty into the future.

Although McGovern had served for fifteen years in the United States Congress, he was still relatively unknown to voters in 1972. The “Democrats for Nixon” group exploited this lack of familiarity with McGovern as best they could, as did the Nixon campaign itself. For instance, a Nixon ad titled “Youth Testimonial” included the

person-on-the-street testimony of a young woman who contrasted McGovern's contradictory comments with Nixon's more honest, straightforward messages:

Since the beginning of this thing with McGovern he's been saying one thing and then turning around a week or two or three weeks later and doing something entirely different. President Nixon seems to say what he's going to do and then takes an honest effort to try to accomplish just what he said. He said he was gonna get us out of Vietnam and the last infantry unit has been pulled out.

(Nixon, "Youth Testimonial").

Rhetoric such as this not only builds uncertainty about what McGovern actually believes, thus increasing the perceived risks of casting a vote for him, it reassures voters that Nixon is the right man for the job—that there is no inconsistency between his pledges and actions. The speaker in the ad compares and contrasts the two candidates' follow through in such a way that Nixon comes out looking like the fairer candidate. Nixon "talks the talk" and "walks the walk," whereas McGovern just talks and talks. More specifically, the ad targets young voters. Nineteen Seventy Two was the first presidential election in which 18-year-olds could vote and many political observers speculated that the youth vote was particularly important to McGovern's campaign (O'Brian, 1972). "Youth Testimonial" incorporates flip-flop charges in its effort to appeal to a group of voters upon which McGovern was particularly dependent.

Evaluation of the 1972 presidential campaign suggests another layer to the flip-flop charge: To be a flip-flopper is to be all-encompassingly weak. In other words, there is breadth to this form of political attack—perceived weakness related to one area of character or policy can lead voters to perceive weaknesses in other areas. The flip-flop

charge, when constructed properly, asserts not only that a person is too weak to stand by their principles, but too weak to defend the country from forces that would do us harm. The Nixon campaign's allegations that McGovern is of weak character extend beyond his consistency (or lack thereof) and into the realm of international affairs. "Vietnam Turnaround" makes claims regarding McGovern's weakness in military matters by creating confusion about his positions. Other ads are much more direct. An ad titled "Conally," tells voters that McGovern wants to "cut an unprecedented thirty-two billion dollars' worth of men and weapons out of the United States defense budget" thus ending the United States' military leadership in the world. Similarly, an ad called "Vote Crawl" warns voters that they have a choice between "McGovern's plan to strip the defense budget and reduce us to a second-class power, or the President's plan to keep America strong." Characterized that way, it hardly seems like there is a choice to make.

Perhaps the most prominent and well developed attack on McGovern's strength, military or otherwise, came in the form of the Democrats for Nixon group's "McGovern Defense Plan" spot. The ad shows toy soldiers, ships and airplanes being removed from a table as a male announcer lists McGovern's proposed defense cuts:

Announcer: The McGovern defense plan. He would cut the marines by a third [hand sweeps toy soldiers off table], the Air Force by a third [more toy soldiers swept off table]. He would cut Navy personnel by one-fourth [more toy soldiers swept off]. He would cut interception planes by one-half [hand removes toy planes], the Navy fleet by one-half [hand removes ships], and carriers from sixteen to six [hand removes carriers]. Senator Hubert Humphrey had this to say about the McGovern proposal: "It isn't just cutting into the fat. It isn't just cutting

into manpower. It is cutting into the very security of this country [jumble of toys]. President Nixon doesn't believe we should play games with our national security. He believes in a strong America to negotiate for peace from strength [Nixon on naval ship]. [Democrats for Nixon.] (Democrats for Nixon, "McGovern Defense")

Not unlike the flip-flop ads analyzed thus far, the verbal feature of this ad includes a recitation of evidence while clever, humorous visuals reinforce the main idea of the ad. The main idea, of course, is that electing McGovern will result in reduced strength and security for America. He is weak on defense, and even a prominent member of his own party, Hubert Humphrey, can see that. McGovern's feebleness might begin with the inability to choose a political position, but it ends with a threat to the safety of all Americans.

It is interesting to compare these attacks against McGovern to the attacks made against Goldwater. Each candidates' apparent inconsistency could be understood in relation to their prospects as Commander-in-Chief. Goldwater was portrayed as erratic--one who might be too quick to take advantage of the United States' military might. McGovern, on the other hand, was excessively weak, both literally and figuratively unable to stick to his guns. In both cases, voters are presented with fear appeals and asked to evaluate the risks associated with electing an inconsistent challenger.

### **Ford vs. Carter, 1976**

Presidential campaign history repeated itself in 1976, as a little-known challenger, this time Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter, was accused of flip-flopping. At the same time, the incumbent Gerald Ford praised himself for providing "steady leadership". The

spots run during this campaign made direct use of the word “flip-flop” more than any other campaign in the history of televised advertising.

An ad called “Flip-Flop, Generic” focuses on the issue of organized labor, alleging that Carter was for anti-union right-to-work laws as the governor of Georgia, but has since joined the side of “big labor unions” that threaten right-to-work laws. The ad features a photograph of Carter flipping back and forth on the screen in time with the announcers presentation of Carter’s conflicting positions. When the photo flips from one side of the screen to the other, the opposing side is left blank. A brief description of Carter’s position appears on the side with the photo.

Announcer: When Jimmy Carter was Governor of Georgia, he was for the right to work laws that protect [The screen is titled “Right to Work”. Carter appears on the left side with the word “For”. The right side of the screen is blank] the workers of GA, and this state. But now that he’s running for President, with the support of the big labor unions [Image of Carter flips to right side, accompanied by the word “Against”. The left side of the screen is blank], he is committed to signing the bill which would do away with our right to work laws. Many working people feel that this is not just a flip-flop [photo flips back to left, then to right], but a betrayal of working people. That’s another reason for supporting President Ford. (Ford, “Flip-Flop, Generic”)

Not only does a photo of Carter “flip” and “flop” back and forth on the television screen, but for the first time in a televised campaign ad, the verbal dimension of the ad actually uses the word “flip-flop.” Carter, the Governor of a largely rural Southern state, is made to look as though he has turned his back on hardworking Southerners after he set his

sights on the bright lights of Washington. The ad makes the claim that what Carter has done is actually something worse than a flip-flop, it's a "betrayal of working people." However, the main message of this spot, as evidenced by its visuals and even its title, is that Carter is a flip-flopper. The Ford campaign produced a variant on this ad ("Flip-Flop, Texas") that targeted its message more directly toward Texans. For instance, where the original ad says "workers of Georgia," the Texas version said "workers of Georgia and Texas." Where the original ad says "a betrayal of working people," the Texas version says, "betrayal of Texas working people." In yet another Texas twist on the same flip-flop message, John Connally, the former Democratic Governor of Texas, was used to recite the ad's text. Connally's presence in the ad is interesting because, although he was a member of the Democratic Party until 1973, he was officially a Republican at the time this ad aired. While some voters may have interpreted Connally's remarks as particularly salient because he had once been a member of Carter's political party, other viewers may have recognized that Connally himself had actually performed one of the greatest flip-flops imaginable. This ad, like the others that discussed labor, included explicit use of the term "flip-flop."

By 1976, the person-on-the-street style of political advertisement featuring "real" people and their opinions about the presidential candidates had become very popular. It is little surprise then that the Ford campaign used this type of ad to call Carter inconsistent. The ad "Stable 3" uses the plain folk's appeal of ordinary voters to introduce apparently down-to-earth synonyms for inconsistency:

Woman: All the things we've read about Jimmy Carter I think are true, that he is fuzzy on a lot of issues.

Man: He changes his mind on his stand every other day or so.

Man: He contradicts himself from one day to another.

Man: Well he's changed his opinions from one day to the next.

Woman: He's much too wishy washy.

Man: He's very, very wishy washy.

Man: He seems to be a little wishy washy.

Man: If he'd stand up and say what he was for he'd be a little easier to understand and maybe to believe.

Woman: I like President Ford, a man who will tell you just exactly where he does stand. (Ford, "Man in the Street")

Importantly, the ad does not claim that Carter's positions are fuzzy. It claims that he is fuzzy. In other words, this ad suggests that inconsistency is not Carter's only problem. In addition to being portrayed as a flip-flopper, Carter is made to look as though he does not grasp issues very well. The ad suggests that perhaps this small town country bumpkin is just not intelligent enough to understand important political issues.

Of course, the ad later asserts that Carter is prone to "contradict himself," and that he's "changed his opinions." Thus, in many ways, this is the same as calling someone inconsistent. The word "wishy washy" pops up as a means to communicate what sounds like a fundamental character weakness on Carter's part. Finally, after having been encouraged to reject Carter on the grounds of his wishy washy-ness, audiences are reminded that Ford provides an excellent contrast to Carter's candidacy. Several variations on this ad, each including people standing on the street discussing Carter's inconsistency, were produced and aired in 1976.

At the same time the Ford campaign attacked Carter for inconsistency, they praised Ford for being “steady.” Several television ads, such as “Workers: Tax Reduction” and “Workers: Mortgage” close with the slogan, “President Ford. Let’s keep to his steady course.” A man on the street ad called his short tenure in office “very stable.” These messages offer a fitting contrast to Carter, who is unknown and appears to change direction often. Other positive Ford ads lauded the incumbent for being “straightforward” and “honest” (Ford, “Man on the Street, Feel Good, 2”). Two ads featuring African American actress Pearl Bailey acclaimed Ford for his “simplicity” (Ford, “Pearl Bailey, 60”; Ford, “Pearl Bailey, 30”). Ford is made to look desirable because he is the antithesis of a flip-flopper. He embodies a steady father figure on which the nation can rely.

Clearly, the image of a “steady,” “stable,” President Ford presents an excellent contrast to Jimmy Carter’s wishy-washyness. At the same time, the “steady leadership” theme is so prevalent in Ford’s positive television commercials that it appears to have been a campaign theme in its own right. In other words, even if his opponent could not be portrayed as a flip-flopper, the Ford campaign may have believed steadiness would be perceived as a virtue. Richard Nixon’s impeachment upended America’s political arena, and the consistency and constancy that Ford offered may have been appealing to many voters. Although labeling Carter a flip-flopper did not win the election for the Republican party, the flip-flop rhetoric of 1976 added meaningful layers to this form of attack. The word “flip-flop” appeared for the first time ever in a presidential television spot, and the charge was linked to accusations that a candidate (Carter) was unintelligent.

**Carter vs. Reagan, 1980**

In 1980, Jimmy Carter was once again labeled a flip-flopper—this time by Ronald Reagan’s presidential campaign. For evidence of Carter’s inconsistency, Reagan turned to Carter’s 1976 campaign promises and his four years of experience in the oval office. As Adlai Stevenson’s 1956 “How’s that Again, General?” ads will attest, this is a typical grounds for attack by a challenger, against an incumbent. Ads that accused Carter of breaking his campaign promises were plentiful.

A Reagan ad titled “Defense” claimed that Carter had promised to “maintain a defense second to none,” but that the Soviet Union was now “ahead of America in ships.” An ad called “Inflation” noted that Carter had “promised to strive for an inflation rate of 4% or less,” but the cost of automobiles, groceries, meat, and houses had risen significantly since then. These two ads featured very similar visual components. In each ad, a description of Carter’s promise appeared in raised letters on a block of stone. Such a visual suggests that politicians’ words are important, sacred and everlasting. The metaphor implies that promises exist in perpetuity so that voters can always refer back to them and judge whether a candidate has kept their word. In both ads, the stone tablet cracks as the announcer presents evidence to support the claim that Carter has not met his campaign promises. In other words, the “breaking” metaphor so often associated with promises is made literal by the visuals. Carter’s words, apparently ephemeral and unreliable, disintegrate, consequently encouraging a sense of disappointment and even betrayal.

Just like McGovern before him, Carter was made to look weak in every possible way. His indecision and his inability to come through on his campaign promises were parlayed into an attack on his strength as Commander-in-Chief. Nowhere was this line of

argument more explicit than in Reagan's two-minute "Peace (Republican)" ad. The spot may be considered a comparative (Jamieson, Waldman, & Sherr, 2000)—rather than a negative attack ad—in that the first part of the ad discusses Carter's weaknesses or failures, while the second part outlines Reagan's strengths. Visually, the ad begins with the sound of sirens and the image of children crying, and some of the children are wounded:

[Sound of Sirens]

Male Announcer: Very slowly, a step at a time, the hope for world peace erodes.

Slowly, we once slid into Korea, slowly, into Vietnam. And now, the Persian Gulf beckons. Jimmy Carter's weak, indecisive leadership has vacillated before events in Angola, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan. Jimmy Carter still doesn't know that it takes strong leadership to keep the peace. Weak leadership will lose it.

[Text appears on screen: July 17, 1980]

Ronald Reagan: Of all the objectives we seek, first and foremost is the establishment of lasting world peace. We know only too well that war comes not when the forces of freedom are strong. It is when they are weak that tyrants are tempted. Four times in my lifetime, America has gone to war...

(fade out)

Announcer: The message Ronald Reagan has carried to America is one of strength.

[Text appears on screen: October 19, 1980]

Reagan: Peace is made by the fact of strength - economic, military, and strategic. Peace is lost when such strength disappears, or - just as bad - is seen by an

adversary as disappearing.

Announcer: The message Ronald Reagan has carried to America is one of restraint.

Reagan: I have repeatedly said in this campaign that I will sit down with the Soviet Union for as long as it takes to negotiate a balanced and equitable arms limitation agreement, designed to improve the prospects for peace.

Announcer: The message Ronald Reagan has carried to America is one of confidence.

Reagan: Whatever else history may say about my candidacy, I hope it will be recorded that I appealed to our best hopes, not our worst fears; to our confidence, rather than our doubts; to the facts, not to fantasies. And these three - hope, confidence, and facts - are at the heart of my vision of peace.

Announcer: Strength, restraint, inspired leadership. The time is now: Reagan for President. (Reagan, "Peace (Republican)")

In one passage, Carter's inconsistency is tied directly to his weak international leadership. Carter's leadership is described first in flip-flop terms such as "indecisive," "vacillating," and then couched in relation to military "leadership." Audiences are told that Carter doesn't understand "strong leadership" and that his brand of "weak leadership" is a threat to peace. As the announcer recites this section of the ad, a camera zooms into an extreme close up of a photograph of Carter's face. This editing technique creates a sense of gravity and suggests that viewers might learn something of Carter's character by studying his face. Ultimately, voters are encouraged to reject Carter and his weak leadership. The first part of "Peace (Republican)" establishes Carter as a problem to be solved or a cancer

to be removed. Ronald Reagan constitutes the solution to the problem, or the healthy tissue that will restore America's "hope" and "confidence."

Although this message is built on the rhetoric of "peace," the underlying message is still clear: Under the Carter Administration, America has been losing "strength," and it may now be vulnerable to "tyrants." The ad hinges on a paradox. Typically, one could assume that the best reason to be strong is so that we can win a fight or a war. However, in this ad, the best reason to be strong is so that there will not be a fight or a war. Reagan is presented as the antithesis to Carter, who personifies vacillation and weakness. The idea that Reagan encourages confidence and knows how to achieve peace carries with it the implication that Carter does not. In addition to grandiose shots of Reagan addressing Americans in the sunshine, the ad includes images of smiling children and the Statue of Liberty. The music is hopeful and triumphant, as if to imply Reagan was returning America to its place of previous greatness. The ad uses Carter's flip-flopping as a point of entry to allay fears that Reagan was an imprudent warmonger, and suggest that he is a bold, inspiring leader.

The image of Reagan as the imprudent warmonger was brought about at least in part by ads that accused Reagan of vacillating or speaking irresponsibly on the issue of nuclear proliferation. For instance, the Carter ad "Flip-Flop" adopts a solemn tone as it notes Reagan's inconsistencies on matters of life and death:

Jimmy Carter [Speaking during a presidential debate]: I and all my predecessors have had a deep commitment to controlling the proliferation of nuclear weapons in ....

Male Announcer: [Speaking over Carter]: When the subject is nuclear

proliferation a President or a candidate must speak with absolute accuracy. He must also be able to remember what he has said.

Carter [Speaking during a presidential debate]: When Governor Reagan has been asked about that, he makes a very disturbing comment that nonproliferation or the control of the spread of nuclear weapons is none of our business.

Ronald Reagan [Speaking during a presidential debate]: I have never made the statement that he suggested about nuclear proliferation...

Male Announcer: But listen to Governor Reagan last January in Jacksonville.

Reagan [Speaking in Jacksonville]: I just don't think that it's any of our business.

Unilaterally the United States seemed to be the only nation in the world that's trying to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Announcer: In this debate, in this whole campaign, Governor Reagan has changed important positions to get votes and then blandly tried to wipe out the earlier position. Which Ronald Reagan should we believe? (Carter, "Flip-Flop")

This ad ends in a rhetorical question intended to highlight Reagan's duplicity and questions whether or not Reagan can be trusted. The ad accuses Reagan of a flip-flop, but it does not try to create confusion about his position, as ads produced by previous presidential campaigns have. Instead, this ad could be said to be most effective when audiences accept Reagan's comments in Jacksonville as his "real" position. In this light, Reagan could be seen as fundamentally and dangerously hawkish and irresponsible. His peace rhetoric is a mere smokescreen, used to conceal his real intentions and get him elected. The ad also constructs Reagan as either deceitful or forgetful, depending on what motives audiences decide to ascribe for his inaccurate debate claim that he "never

made the statement that [Carter] suggested about nuclear proliferation.” Maybe he willfully lied when he claimed he had never made those comments about nuclear weapons or maybe he forgot that he ever made those comments. Neither option is particularly appealing to voters. Either way, Reagan is inconsistent and untrustworthy.

Carter’s flip-flops meant that he was too weak to lead America. Reagan’s flip-flops meant that he was too careless or reckless to lead America. In both cases, the 1980 campaigns used perceived inconsistencies, and audience’s sense of uncertainty, to develop fear appeals related to national security issues.

### **Reagan vs. Mondale, 1984**

The task ahead of any presidential challenger is always a tall one, and the Reagan campaign’s insistence that Democrat Walter Mondale was a flip-flopper only made Mondale’s quest to unseat Reagan even more difficult. Many of the ads run against Mondale borrowed heavily from spots produced in previous election years. At the same time, Reagan’s reelection campaign focused on his effective leadership and a resurging economy.

Reagan’s “Side By Side” spot, like Johnson’s “Which Barry Goldwater?” spot before it, suggests that flip-flop ads have now become a sub-type of comparative advertising. A typical comparative ad contrasts the two major party candidates on one or more issues, arguing that the sponsoring candidate is better than the opponent. Flip-flop ads adjust this formula by comparing an opposing candidate to the same opposing candidate. For instance, “Side By Side” compares Senator Mondale to Candidate Mondale in an effort to communicate how Mondale’s positions have changed since he became a presidential hopeful. Despite his tenure as Vice President of the United States,

Mondale appears to have been vulnerable to the same line of attack that is typically executed against unknown challengers.

Visually, the ad alternates between two actual photographs of Walter Mondale, each set against a plain black background. A photograph of Mondale smiling is designated to represent “Candidate Mondale,” while a photo of Mondale frowning is used to present “Senator Mondale.” The image on the screen changes with every contradiction the announcer lists. The ad opens with a question, printed in plain white lettering, centered against a black background:

Announcer: How do two presidential candidates stand on the issues [Text: "How do two presidential candidates stand on the issues?"]? Candidate Mondale has promised to reduce government spending [Image of Mondale smiling]. But Senator Mondale voted to increase government spending 12 years in a row [Image of Mondale frowning]. Candidate Mondale has promised a strong national defense [Image of Mondale smiling], but Senator Mondale voted to weaken defenses 18 times [Image of Mondale frowning]. Of course, there's one area where they agree: They both stand for increased taxes [Images of smiling, frowning Mondale alternate repeatedly]. That's why we're voting for Reagan [Text: "President Reagan, Leadership that's Working"]. (Reagan, “Side By Side”)

The ad’s primary purpose is to create uncertainty regarding Mondale’s political positions, particularly government spending and military defense matters. When a candidate enters a debate with themselves, they are bound to lose. The ad also calls into question Mondale’s real identity—perhaps the cheerful guy Americans see campaigning for President of the United States is not the genuine Mondale. A final purpose of this ad, as

made clear by the final sentences, is to ridicule Mondale for purportedly being in favor of increased taxes. The ad would probably not be able to generate humor if Mondale, or perhaps more generally, Democrats, had not already been identified as proponents of higher taxes by their Republican opposition. In other words, the spot relies on prior audience knowledge about each political party's reputation on tax policy in order to generate its richest meaning.

A few positive Mondale ads complimented Mondale's "steady hand" and noted that he has the fortitude and honesty to "speak the truth we don't want to hear," as opposed to changing his position to reflect what he thinks audiences want to hear (Mondale, unnamed ad). However, the Reagan campaign's efforts to discredit Mondale's communication and make him seem untrustworthy seem to have been better coordinated than the Mondale campaign's efforts to build his credibility, trustworthiness, and leadership potential. Mondale was constantly kept on the defensive—always having to re-build his credibility in the wake of Reagan's attacks on his image. A person-on-the-street style of advertisement was used to attack Mondale for being wishy washy and lacking leadership qualities. The language of the ad is remarkably similar to that which was used against Carter in 1976. Note the use of the term "wishy washy" as well as use of multiple voices in agreement about a single point:

Announcer: Strong leadership. Does Mondale measure up? [v/o]

[Jerry Thomas]: Well, I think Fritz Mondale is probably a good man, but I don't think he's a good leader.

[Abdul Kayoum]: I don't believe that he has the quality of leadership.

[John Friedmann]: He's just a rubber stamp carried over from the Carter

administration.

[Frances Henderson]: He lacks charisma and he lacks leadership.

[Arjay West]: Walter Mondale is wishy-washy.

[Jenny Scarborough]: I see no strength in Mondale.

[Marion Markovich]: I think we need the strength of President Reagan and his administration and not the weakness of the Carter/Mondale administration.

Announcer: President Reagan: Leadership that's working. (Mondale, Untitled)

This 30-second spot links the quality of being “wishy washy,” which is generally used to describe any variety of indecision, to a lack of “strength,” “leadership,” and “charisma.”

The ad associates Mondale with the “weak” Carter Administration of which he was previously a part. The ad implies that the Carter Administration is no longer in power because it was weak and that to bring back a replica of the former regime would be foolish. Because the view of Mondale as weak and wishy washy is corroborated by so many different faces in this spot, the ad gives the impression that there is common agreement as to Mondale’s lack of leadership ability. Mondale’s lack of leadership is a concern for multitudes of American voters. Indeed, taken together, Mondale’s weaknesses and Reagan’s strengths appear to have been a concern for voters, thus earning Reagan re-election.

### **Bush vs. Dukakis, 1988**

Despite all the mudslinging that is said to have characterized the 1988 presidential election, there was relatively little in the way of flip-flop attacks. Pieces of the popular inconsistency accusations are present in the discourse of the television advertisements run

by George H. W. Bush and Michael Dukakis, but the flip-flop theme was not fully developed by either campaign.

At various times, Dukakis was accused of breaking promises he made when he was Governor of Massachusetts, lying to the American people, and being a hypocrite. One can see how these negative qualities each belong to the flip-flopper; but still, at no time was Dukakis explicitly attacked for “flip-flopping” or “inconsistency.” An ad titled “His Mistakes” opens with the question “How good a governor is Michael Dukakis?”, and the first person-on-the-street reply to this question, and the most relevant for the purposes of this study, comes from a man who says “I don’t think that Mike Dukakis has lived up to his promises.” The implication here is that if Dukakis didn’t follow through on his campaign promises as Governor of Massachusetts, he will not meet his promises as President of the United States. Another Bush ad features Dukakis claiming that he did not raid the pension fund in Massachusetts, only to quote the Wall Street Journal as saying that he did. This ad much more directly calls a presidential candidate a liar than any previously televised presidential campaign ad. The announcer claims Dukakis “deliberately misled” Americans and is “unbelievable.” The ad also sneaks in the charge of hypocrisy by mockingly asking, “And Michael Dukakis says George Bush is running a campaign of lies?” Again, although Dukakis is not being called inconsistent, wishy washy, or prone to flip-flopping, the ad still attacks the trustworthiness of Dukakis’ words in much the same way a flip-flop ad does.

Many of the goals achieved by flip-flop ads can be achieved by other types of ads as well. For example, it is interesting to note that flip-flop ads characterize presidential challengers as being “risky.” The Bush campaign achieved much the same goal with a

series of televised attacks on Dukakis that ended with the phrase “America can’t afford that risk.”

While Dukakis made some efforts to portray himself as straightforward and his opponent as hypocritical, none of these ads truly qualify as flip-flop ads. For instance, an ad titled, “Education” claimed that “Michael Dukakis won’t just give us slogans.” Another ad, called “Leadership” praised his “decisive action” and “unbending integrity.” These acclaims attempt to make Dukakis seem like the opposite of a wishy washy flip-flopper.

At the same time that he praised his own integrity, Dukakis tried to attack Bush’s. For instance, “Voter Quiz” claims that Bush is a hypocrite because even though he voted “for a gun control law that prohibited you from shipping even a deer rifle across state lines,” he nonetheless criticized Dukakis for supporting federal gun control measures. Similarly, “Bush’s False Advertising 1” begins by noting Bush’s criticism of Dukakis’ handling of the Boston Harbor clean-up efforts and then lists the Bush administration’s many anti-environmental decisions. The ad implies that Bush is a hypocrite but never directly juxtaposes two or more of his own statements or policy positions like so many full-throttle flip-flop ads tend to do. Again, we see that although these examples are not flip-flop ads, they still make many of the same arguments about an opponent’s character. In relation to the explosion of flip-flop charges to come in 1992 and 1996, most of which were aimed at Bill Clinton, 1988 might be considered the calm before the storm of flip-flop charges.

### **Bush vs. Clinton, 1992**

Analysis of 1992 television campaign ads suggest that the Bush campaign's main concern was making sure that voters knew they could not trust challenger Bill Clinton. The Republican Party decided to make an issue of Clinton's character in 1992, thus making flip-flop ads a rhetorically practical means of attack. Several unique flip-flop ads were produced to demonstrate how inconsistent Clinton had been during the course of the campaign. At the same time, several positive Bush spots depicted Bush as the perfect antithesis to a candidate who lies and contradicts himself. For his part, Clinton boldly attacked Bush for breaking previous campaign promises, and offered "change" from the Republican policies that dominated the 1980s and early 1990s.

One of the most memorable ads from the 1992 presidential campaign was a flip-flop ad. As creative as the "Grey Dot" ad was, it was also rather solemn. The ad featured a split screen of two presidential candidates, each with a grey dot over their face to obscure their identities. A male announcer describes how the different statements from each man contradict one another. The final seconds of the ad reveal that both candidates are actually Bill Clinton:

[Split screen of two candidates with grey dots over their faces].

Announcer: The presidential candidate on the left stood for military action in the Persian Gulf, while the candidate on the right agreed with those who opposed it. He says [cut to candidate on the left] he wouldn't rule out term limits. While he says [cut to candidate who was on right] he's personally opposed to term limits. This candidate [cut to candidate on the left] was called up for military service, while this one [cut to candidate on the right] claims he wasn't. One of these [split screen of both candidates] candidates is Bill Clinton [left dot removed to reveal

Clinton]. Unfortunately, so is the other [Right dot to reveal removed].

Clinton: There is a simple explanation for why this happened. (Bush, “Grey Dot”)

The first issue discussed in this ad deals with the matter of Bush’s war in the Persian Gulf. Importantly, the war was very popular among Americans, so any insinuation that Clinton did not support the war could be damning. More generally, any flip-flopping on matters of life and death can be seen as exceptionally problematic. The second issue relates to term limits, which were made an issue by former California Governor Jerry Brown during the primary phase of the campaign. Apparently, Clinton had spoken both for and against term limits. Although the issue should not be dismissed as unimportant, it seems likely that it was included in “Grey Dot” because Clinton was documented as flip-flopping on yet another matter, not because it was of vital importance to the American people at the time. It seems unlikely that Clinton’s leadership potential would be determined based on his conflicting statements about congressional term limits.

The third issue listed in “Grey Dot” does not highlight Clinton’s indecision; it highlights his dishonesty. Clinton either was or was not “called up for military service.” The announcer’s claim that Clinton has both affirmed and denied this fact at various times suggests that Clinton was lying at some point. This isn’t a political issue about which Clinton is torn, or a policy position about which he experienced a change of heart. This is an instance of Clinton attempting to mislead the American public. The ad sets up a phony debate between the two candidates in an effort to point out Clinton’s duplicity. However, this final example of a contradiction is not really about a contestable political issue, and therefore cannot be debated. Still, because it questions Clinton’s honesty and calls him a draft dodger, one can understand why the Bush campaign included this

“issue,” placing it at the conclusion of the ad. Clinton is made to look extraordinarily lost and disingenuous in the very last second of the ad when he mutters, “there is a perfectly good explanation why this happened.” In fact, this is the only utterance in the spot that comes directly from Clinton

Although the “Grey Dot” ad suggests a phony debate, Clinton’s actual debate performance was also the topic of a negative campaign commercial. “Debate” features citizens of St. Louis eating breakfast at a diner the morning after a presidential debate between Clinton, Bush, and Ross Perot. In the person-on-the-street tradition, these citizens criticize Clinton’s trustworthiness:

Citizen: I saw the debate last night, and I’ve just got one conclusion, it’s all George Bush.

Citizen: I have, I still have a lot of confidence in my President.

Citizen: I think we need Bush to keep us from a big spending Congress.

Citizen: I don’t trust Clinton.

Citizen: The man says one thing and does another.

Citizen: First he denies it and then he says well maybe it happened: you can’t trust him.

Citizen: If Clinton gets in what we’re gonna see are more taxes.

Citizen: One thing that’s got me definitely for Bush is I remember what happened the last time we did things the way Bill Clinton wants to do ‘em. (Bush, “Debate”)

A citizen’s claim that Clinton will first deny something before ultimately confirming it is both a flip-flop charge and an attack on Clinton’s honesty. Another citizen’s concern that

Clinton “says one thing and does another” provides evidence that voters recognize a distinction between words and deeds and that they prefer a harmony between the two. If individuals do not act in accord with what they say, that person clearly cannot be trusted—their words are meaningless. In addition to attacks on Clinton’s trustworthiness, this ad accuses Clinton of wanting to raise taxes, a stock attack routinely used against Democratic candidates. Recall Reagan’s “Side By Side” ad, which served up numerous differences between “Candidate Mondale” and “Senator Mondale” before closing by reminding voters that both Mondale’s “stand for increased taxes.”

A Bush ad titled “Trust” provides the most direct attack on Clinton’s trustworthiness. The ad deals entirely with whether or not Clinton was ever drafted for military service. The ad does more than just claim Clinton failed to perform his patriotic duty, it accuses him of distorting or “avoiding” the truth. Visually, the ad is comprised of a slow zoom out from a Time Magazine cover story that offers, “Why Voters Don’t Trust Clinton.” The cover used a negative image of Clinton’s face that was unpleasant and haunting:

Male Announcer: He said he was never drafted. Then he admitted he was drafted. Then he said he forgot being drafted. He said he was never deferred from the draft. Then, he said he was. He said he never received special treatment. But he did receive special treatment. The question then was avoiding the draft. Now for Bill Clinton, it’s a question of avoiding the truth.

[Camera zooms out back to Time cover: Why Voters Don’t Trust Clinton. Photo changes to a negative image. (Bush, “Trust”)]

Bill Clinton’s name is not even mentioned aloud until the very end of this 30-second

advertisement. Until then, voters were forced to use the extreme close up of the magazine, and their prior knowledge about Clinton's statements on the draft issue to make full sense of this message. The ad could not be more explicit about its aims. The issue here is not the draft, it is Clinton's perceived inability to tell the truth. The take away message is not that Clinton dodged the draft, the message is that Clinton lied about dodging the draft, and dishonesty might just be a part of his overall character. So many advertisements analyzed thus far have discussed political issues as a means for questioning an opponent's trustworthiness. However, most flip-flop ads, even those that use a heavy-handed rhetorical question, leave it to the audience to make the final connections regarding a candidates' trustworthiness. The "Trust" ad makes its point far more obvious.

The Bush campaign found ways to exploit concerns over Clinton's trustworthiness in ads that had very little to do with presidential character. For instance, an ad called, "Clinton's Health Plan," which rather straightforwardly details how Clinton's health policies would cost Americans too much money, ends with the phrase, "You can't trust Bill Clinton's health plan." Similarly, an ad titled "Clinton Economics/Federal Taxes" notes all the tax increases Clinton would need to make to "pay for his campaign promises." The ad closes with the phrase, "You can't trust Clinton economics." There are a lot of ways to make the claim that Clinton has a bad health plan or tax policy without using the word "trust." However, the Bush campaign repeated the language of "trust" to continue raising doubts about Clinton's character.

The image the Bush team constructed of Clinton offers an excellent glimpse at just what voters are expected to despise and reject in presidential candidates. Notably,

other Bush ads from 1992 celebrated the incumbent as everything Americans ought to embrace. If Clinton's words were deceptive and untrustworthy, what Americans needed was plain talk. The Bush campaign's two-minute long "Plain Talk" spot attributed a plethora of positive qualities to Bush, many of which deal with his communication style, and all of which can be read as sharp contrasts to the attacks on Clinton. For instance, when Bush tells a group of voters, "the President alone must make tough decisions," this can be seen as not only praise for Bush's ability to make those tough decisions, but criticism of Clinton's inability to choose a position from competing sides of an issue. This theme is even clearer later in the spot when Bush says, "you cannot be on both sides of every issue... You must make the call, you must lead." This passage associates an inability to make decisions with poor leadership more directly than any ad before it. Bush also says "The President's word must be good" before going on to list all the "certain qualities" America's leader must have: "decisiveness, integrity, consistency." Although flip flop spots use a variety of creative editing techniques and figurative language to accuse candidates of lacking these qualities, ads that praise a candidate for embodying these attributes are usually more forthright. There may be many reasons that attacks on integrity are implicit rather than explicit, such as the risks associated with looking directly into a camera and calling an opponent a sneaky, indecisive liar. Still, the straightforward style of communication demonstrated by many anti-flip-flop ads is especially fitting for a message titled "Plain Talk."

The abundance of attacks on opponents' inconsistencies, coupled with praise for candidates who are decisive, straightforward, and likely to "do" what they "say" they're going to do, gives the impression that change in one's position or beliefs is not tolerated

in presidential politics. However, a positive Bush ad from 1992 suggests that change is reasonable or desirable if it is “guided by principle.” The ad, titled, “Guided,” once again acclaims Bush for representing the antithesis of a flip-flopper. Visually, the ad features a close up of President Bush, who speaks these words directly into the camera:

Bush: Well everyone wants change. America must change. But change must be guided by principle [v/o]. And there are three basic principles that must guide our quest for change. First, we must control wasteful government spending. That’s absolutely essential for the kind of change the American people want. And second, we must strengthen the American family. The decline of the American family is hurting the soul of America, and we’ve got to change that. Third, we’re a nation of laws. We must increase respect for the law. We must pass strong legislation to help the fight against crime and to back up our police officers and law enforcement officers out on the street. These are the kind of changes that America needs. And I’m convinced that I can bring about that kind of change. (Bush, “Guided”)

Although Bill Clinton is never mentioned in this ad, it is difficult not to read this ad in relation to his candidacy, or at least the way his candidacy had been characterized by Republicans. By noting that “everyone wants change,” Bush concedes that Clinton’s campaign theme, with all its talk of “change” for America, had caught on. Change, therefore, is not universally rejected by voters. Many presidential candidates, most recently Barack Obama, have successfully executed the rhetoric of change to win election. Every so often, Americans decide that it is wise to change the general direction of the country by electing a candidate whose ideas seem fresh and different. The

populace affords itself the opportunity to change direction even if individual candidates are not extended the same privilege.

An overarching problem, according to the ad “Guided,” is that Clinton’s proposed changes are not “guided by principle.” In other words, Clinton lacks resolve and moral fortitude. Next, the specific qualities that Bush discusses can be read as attacks on Clinton: Clinton won’t “control wasteful spending,” Clinton contributes to “the decline of the American family,” and either can’t or won’t “fight against crime.” This ad essentially repeats attacks made elsewhere during the 1992 campaign. These really are not “principles” but political issues Bush sees as important. Still, the ad is instructive because it is one of the few televised messages that describes the attitude or means by which change should be adopted. Positive ads may discuss particular policy problems and describe means for fixing those problems, but they tend not to state the spirit in which solutions should be executed. George H. W. Bush’s campaign tells the electorate that all change should be guided by principle, because Bush is presumably a principled man. It seems wise to portray any candidate as principled. However, the “Guided” ad is curious in at least one way. It seems curious that Bush, or any incumbent, would suggest changes that need to be made in America. An incumbent that too effectively highlights problems they’d like to fix in their second term runs the risk of suggesting that the administration failed to adequately address these pressing issues in their first four years.

Of course, the Clinton campaign worked hard to draw attention to Bush’s failings and encourage the American public to punish Bush for his willingness to change his mind. Many television spots focused on the promises Bush broke during his presidency. In fact, there are very few flip-flops as famous as Bush’s decision to raise taxes, after

having promised not to do so during his 1988 campaign. A Clinton ad titled, “Promise” uses footage of Bush making his “no new taxes” promise during a 1988 debate, and then explains how Bush broke that promise. All of the announcer’s words appear in black letters against a white background. Many of the words are underlined in red (indicated below):

Announcer: 1988 [On-screen text reads “1988”].

George H. W. Bush: Read my lips: no new taxes.

Announcer: Then George Bush signed the second biggest tax increase in American history.

Bush: Read my lips.

Announcer: George Bush increased taxes on the middle class. Bush doubled the beer tax and increased the gas tax by 56%. Now George Bush wants to give a \$108,000 tax break to millionaires. \$108,000. Guess who’s going to pay? We can’t afford four more years. (Clinton, “Promise”)

This ad, like so many flip-flop ads, is designed to use Bush’s own words against him. That this ad features a Democrat attacking a Republican for raising taxes is additionally interesting, as the opposite is more common (see Reagan’s 1984 “Side By Side” spot). Bush was adamant in 1988 that he would not increase taxes. Here, the Clinton campaign describes in clear terms the ways in which Bush broke his promise. The statement regarding tax breaks for millionaires is almost certainly designed to make voters question Bush’s sense of fairness and question whether or not he has the best interest of average Americans in mind. The ad closes with a bit of a pun on the word “afford” which both raises anxieties about how much Americans are able to pay in new taxes, and suggests

that “the next four years” might be better under somebody else’s leadership. Other Clinton ads that attacked Bush’s broken tax promise or made reference to his “read my lips” pledge include “Best,” “Before,” “Second,” “Energy,” “Alert,” and “Read.” Bush’s broken tax promise and the memorable phrasing that came to represent it constituted a major Clinton campaign theme.

Clinton’s “Promise” ad is one of the first commercials in the canon of flip-flop messages and broken promises spots to include sources in support of its claims. For instance, the claim that Bush’s tax increase was the second biggest in American History is accompanied by smaller letters that say “Congressional Budget Office.” Later in the ad, the Congressional Quarterly Almanac and the Department of Treasury are cited. Previous to 1992, most ads made absolutely no attempt to cite where their negative information came from. After 1992, it became far more common to provide sources when discussing a candidates’ record. Arguably, this contributes a level of credibility to the claims made in the ads.

The following ad, titled “Character,” lists many sources in support of the idea that George H. W. Bush cannot be trusted. In an effort to attack Bush’s character, the ad repeats the “no new taxes” theme, uses words such as “flip flop,” and “shifty,” to describe the sitting President, questions his “trustworthiness,” and accuses him of a lack of “principle.” This language is not at all unlike the language that Bush used to describe Clinton in 1992:

Announcer: George Bush. *The Observer* says new information about Mr. Bush’s role in the Iran arms for hostages deal [Text: “new information about Mr. Bush’s role in the Iran arms for hostages deal] and the breaking of his read my lips no tax

pledge raise doubts about his trustworthiness [Text: “the breaking of his read my lips no tax pledge raise doubts about his trustworthiness]. *The Current* says he has been shifty on key issues [Text: “he has been shifty on key issues]. *The Oregonian*, We refocused on Bush’s flip flops on abortion and taxes [Text: “Bush’s flip flops on abortion and taxes”], his secret arming of the brutal Iraqi regime [Text: “secret arming of brutal Iraqi regime”]: Frankly, we no longer trust him [Text: “Frankly, we no longer trust him”]. *The Philadelphia Daily News*: Bush is without a principle or a clue [Text: “Bush is without a principle or a clue”]. It does come down to who you trust. That’s why it comes down to Bill Clinton for President [Text: “It does come down to who you trust. That’s why it comes down to Bill Clinton for President”] (Clinton, “Character”)

Just as the title implies, this ad attacks Bush’s “character.” It says something about the perceived potency and severity of the flip-flopper label that charges of “flip-flops” are included alongside accusations that Bush swapped weapons for hostages and armed a “brutal Iraqi regime.” Both sets of attacks are capable of eroding a candidates’ trustworthiness. Other Clinton ads, such as “Truth” contributed to the impression that Bush was dishonest by simply accusing him of lying. Because the ad uses direct quotes from other sources, the Clinton campaign is able to claim that Bush is “lying to the public about Bill Clinton’s record” and “consistently and flagrantly distorts the truth” with less fear of backlash from voters.

Judging by the television ads analyzed here, the 1992 presidential campaign was characterized by negative attacks on each candidates’ honesty and integrity. Importantly, however, Clinton’s television advertisements also vowed to bring “change” to America.

Such ads shed important light on what sort of “change” American voters are expected to desire or tolerate. Clinton’s 1992 “Change” advertisement describes the prospect of change in unmistakably hopeful terms. Images of Clinton energetically giving speeches and shaking hands contribute to the spot’s optimistic tone. Note that the ad does not promise that Clinton himself will change, it promises that Clinton will bring change to a nation that desperately needs change:

Announcer: Something’s happening. People are ready, because they’ve had enough. Enough of seeing their incomes fall behind, and their jobs on the line. Enough of a government that just doesn’t work. They’re ready for change. And changing people’s lives, that’s the work of his life [Text: “Bill Clinton”]. Twelve years battling the odds in one of our nation’s poorest states. Arkansas now leads the nation in job growth [Text: “Arkansas leads the nation in job growth”]. Incomes are rising at twice the national rate [Text: “Incomes rising at twice the national rate”]. Seventeen thousand people moved from welfare to work [Text: “17,000 people moved from welfare to work”]. That’s progress, and that’s what we need now. Change. Real solutions. Bill Clinton has an economic plan to rebuild America that invests in our own people: Education, training [Text: “Clinton Economic Plan: Education and Training”] eight million new jobs in the next four years [Text: “8 million new jobs”]. Those making over \$200,000 have to pay more [Text: “Those making over \$200,000 pay more”], the rest of us get a break [Text: “The rest of us get a break”]. It’s a plan to put people first again, and 6 nobel prize economists say it will work. But don’t take their word; read it yourself [Text: “For a copy of the plan, write address”]. For people, for a change:

Bill Clinton for President. (Clinton, “Change”)

Here, “change” is associated with “real solutions” to America’s problems with education, jobs, and the economy. It also cites Clinton’s past deeds as evidence that he is qualified to implement these solutions. The Clinton campaign believed that after 12 years of Republican policies, Americans would invite a change of course, or a change of policy, or a change of attitude, or maybe just a change of discourse. Either way, Clinton’s election is evidence that Americans were indeed ready to embrace change.

The “Change” ad serves as solid evidence that Americans are not unequivocally expected to reject change. To borrow a popular cliché, there are some situations in which voters believe that “change is good.” Candidates who frequently change their political positions cannot be relied upon to lead effectively. However, some candidates, such as Clinton, can be relied upon to bring needed change to the nation when it faces persistent problems.

### **Clinton vs. Dole, 1996**

In 1996, Bill Clinton came under no less scrutiny for alleged dishonesty and double talk than he did in 1992. Bob Dole’s presidential campaign ran numerous ads that attacked Clinton’s trustworthiness, while simultaneously praising Dole for his honest, plain spoken style of communication. Like any incumbent, Clinton devoted his resources to praising his record in office. Importantly, his television advertisements also attacked Dole for frequently contradicting himself, thus questioning what the “real” Bob Dole had in mind for America.

In 1996, the Dole campaign worked hard to remind voters of Clinton’s 1992 campaign promises. Although there exist numerous ads that attack Clinton for breaking

promises, the “Broken Promise” ad presented below is of particular interest because of its similarities to ads run against Bush in 1992. The ad begins with video footage of Clinton promising not to raise taxes, then hurdles into a description of the myriad ways Clinton broke that promise. The ad attempts to do to Clinton what Clinton did to Bush four years earlier:

Bill Clinton [Text: “10/19/92”]: I will not raise taxes on the middle class.

Announcer: We’ve heard that before.

Clinton: We’ve got to give middle-class tax relief no matter what else we do.

Announcer: Six months later he gave us the largest tax increase in history. Higher income taxes. Increased taxes on Social Security benefits. More payroll taxes.

Under Clinton the typical American family now pays over \$1500 more in federal taxes. [“Text: \$1583”] A big price to pay for his broken promise. Tell President Clinton you can’t afford higher taxes for more wasteful spending. (Dole, “Broken Promise”)

Right down to the rhetoric concerning what Americans can “afford,” this ad copies Clinton’s anti-Bush “Promise” ad of 1992. Presumably the best way to “tell Clinton you can’t afford higher taxes” would be to cast a vote for Bob Dole in November.

Even the most general of Clinton’s promises became the target of attack in 1996. For instance, an ad titled “Tragedy” and an ad titled “The Threat” each criticizes Clinton’s drug policies and raise fears that America’s children are using more drugs than they had before Clinton became President. The ads end with precisely the same language: “Bill Clinton said he’d lead the war on drugs and change America. All he did was change his mind” (Clinton, “Tragedy”; “The Threat”). In 1992, Clinton’s promise of

change served as evidence that Americans knew the difference between the type of “change” Clinton wanted to bring to America, and the type of “change” exemplified in flip-flop ads. The former is occasionally desirable, while the latter is almost always shunned by voters. With a clever turn of phrase, the Dole campaign’s rhetoric simultaneously conflates these discrete constructions of the term “change” and reinforces the distinction between the two--it just so happens that Clinton promised the preferred “change” but delivered the unacceptable sort.

Another important flip-flop theme expressed by the Dole campaign’s attacks on Clinton concerns the cultural distinction between words and deeds. An ad titled “Sorry-Taxes,” repeats almost the same exact criticism of Clinton’s broken tax promises as noted above, but ups the ante by noting “Sorry Mr. Clinton. Actions do speak louder than words.” The cliché referenced in this Dole ad reminds voters that politicians, and perhaps all people, ought to be measured by their actions, what they do, rather than what they say. Of course, the best, most trustworthy politicians would be those individuals whose words correspond to their deeds. However, if the Dole campaign was to have it their way, even Clinton’s words would conflict with one another. Such was the ultimate goal of a 30-second spot called “Double Talk.” The ad brings together several different video clips of Clinton presenting his plan to balance the budget. In each of the clips, he offers a different time table for balancing the budget:

Announcer: For four years, you’ve heard a lot of talk from Bill Clinton about balancing the budget.

Clinton: I would present a five-year plan to balance the budget. ...

Clinton: We could do it in seven years. ...

Clinton: I think we can reach it in nine years.

Clinton: Balance the budget in 10 years.

Clinton: I think we could reach it in eight years. ...

Clinton: So we're between seven and nine, no?

Announcer: No wonder Bill Clinton opposes a constitutional amendment to balance the budget.

Clinton: Seven, nine, 10, eight, five.

Announcer: Talk is cheap. Double talk is expensive. Tell Mr. Clinton to support the balanced-budget amendment. (Clinton, "Double Talk")

The rapid transitions between each of Clinton's contradictory statements make the incumbent look confused and unfocused. Voters may come away from the ad believing not only that Clinton "opposes a constitutional amendment to balance the budget," but that he might not be able to balance the budget if he tried. Even more importantly, he is accused of "double talk." Like the Republican Party of 1952 that was attacked for its alleged "double speak," Clinton is portrayed as lacking clarity and simply saying what he believes voters want to hear. By referencing a popular cliché ("Talk is cheap"), the Dole campaign highlights how easy is it to make promise and reminds audiences that it is what candidates do that matters most.

The distinction between "doing" and "saying" often takes the form of rhetoric that discusses a candidate's "rhetoric" in relation to their "record." For instance, a Dole ad titled "Who" asks voters to "compare the Clinton rhetoric with the Clinton record." Not surprisingly, the message concludes that on the topic of welfare reform, "The Clinton rhetoric has not matched the Clinton record." In such constructions, the candidate's

“record” is what matters, while the candidate’s “rhetoric” is typically not to be trusted.

Although the charge that a candidate says one thing and does another could be interpreted as an attack on that candidates’ propensity for changing their mind, the Dole campaign ascribed worse motives to Clinton by calling him a “liar.” Presumably, it should raise audiences’ ire to feel as though they have been deceived by the President of the United States. Those who feel anger, according to Aristotle, will seek a means of revenge. In the context of the campaign, a vote against the offending individual is the most obvious, efficacious available means of revenge. The last negative Dole ad to be analyzed here is called “Pants on Fire,” a reference to a popular children’s chant, “liar, liar, pants on fire.” The ad’s visuals are dark, often featuring Clinton in black and white. The spot features a variety of text and images layered upon other text and images. For instance, in this ad the word “False” is laid on top the text of Clinton’s promise to double border agents. The first text to appear on the screen are the words “read my lips.” This is a reference to Bush’s broken promise of four years earlier; and although there existed no video footage of Clinton ever using these words, their inclusion here is likely intended to increase the perceived insincerity of the promise, and highlight the severity of Clinton’s breaking of the promise:

[Text: “Read my lips”]

Male Announcer: He promises us one thing.

Bill Clinton: [Black and white video of Clinton speaking]: I will tell you this. I will not raise taxes on the middle classes.

Male Announcer: He does another.

[Text (newspaper headline): “Clinton Asks Middle Class to Pay Higher Taxes”]

[Text: "Clinton's an unusualy good liar. Unusually good."]

Announcer: "Bill Clinton is an unusually good liar," says Bob Kerrey, Democrat, US Senator. Clinton says he doubled border agents.

[Text: President Clinton doubled border agents]

Announcer: The INS says it didn't happen.

[Text: "FALSE"]

Announcer: He says Bob Dole voted against reimbursing us for illegal immigration. But Bob Dole sponsored the law to reimburse us.

[Text: "HR 4603/AMEND. 2357/103RD CONGRESS"]

Announcer: How much more? Bill Clinton: Unusually Good.

[Text: "Clinton's an unusually good liar. Unusually good."] (Dole, "Pants on Fire")

This ad goes beyond noting that Clinton "promises us one thing" but "does another." The word "liar" appears in direct reference to Bill Clinton three times in this ad. Dole ameliorates some of the potential backlash a claim such as this might encourage by using a direct quote from a Democratic Senator (Bob Kerrey). The quote is particularly powerful because Kerrey's repetition of the words "unusually good" leaves little doubt that Kerrey actually said and meant those words- they were not taken out of context. The accusation that Clinton excels at lying is also interesting, as deceit is something that few people, particularly politicians, would like to be acknowledged for being "good" at. It is plausible that some voters would judge "good liars" to be worse than "bad liars." Good liars are either rotten to their core, blessed with the innate ability to effectively deceive

others, or they've had to work at their lying, thus doing it often and having ample experience in this arena.

Like flip-flop attacks targeted at Barry Goldwater in 1964, Dole's flip-flop ads carried accusations of not just inconsistency, but dishonesty as well. There are numerous conclusions voters can make when a candidate is shown to have taken two contradictory positions on a particular political issue. In the case of Dole's ads, voters are instructed to believe that at least one of Clinton's contradictory remarks is a lie, not that he experienced a genuine change of heart about a particular issue after careful thought and reflection. Dole's flip-flop spots are rather direct in their efforts to encourage voters to assume the worst about Clinton.

Like so many presidential candidates who have attacked their opponent for being inconsistent, untrustworthy, or deceitful, Dole produced positive spots to bolster his own character attributes. An excellent example of such an ad featured Dole's wife, Elizabeth, praising Dole's straightforward communication style as well as his follow through, or his inclination to "do" what he "says" he'll do. The ad is called "From the Heart" and is comprised almost entirely of a headshot of Elizabeth Dole speaking directly into the camera. Only the closing screen, which features the sentence, "Bob Dole will cut taxes 15%", is any different:

Elizabeth Dole: My husband is a plain-spoken man from the heart of America, Russell, Kansas. In Russell, you say what you're going to do and you do it. The truth first, last - always the truth. When Bob Dole says he'll cut your taxes 15 percent, he'll cut your taxes 15 percent. This is Bob Dole. He's a workhorse, not a show horse. And he knows whose money it really is: your family's." [Bob

Dole will cut taxes 15%.] (Dole, "From the Heart")

This ad emphasizes Bob Dole's "plainspoken-ness" as the perfect antidote to Clinton's "double talk." The ad credits Dole's tendency to "do" what he "says" he'll do with his upbringing in smalltown Russell, Kansas. Seen this way, Dole's honesty and follow through may be seen as a lasting, inborn character attribute. Elizabeth Dole's contention that her husband focuses on the "truth" can be read as the perfect alternative to Clinton's reputation as an "unusually good liar." The title of the ad, which is never revealed to the audience, implies that either Elizabeth or Bob Dole tend to speak "from the heart." If one continues to read this ad in relation to the charges against Clinton, one must ask just where Clinton is said to be speaking from.

Another ad, this one also featuring Elizabeth Dole, makes many of the same claims as "From the Heart," thus demonstrating that this was an important campaign theme for Dole in 1996:

Annrc: Honesty, doing what's right, living up to his word.

Elizabeth Dole: My husband has come out strongly to protect the victims of domestic violence, and to make sure a man and woman who work at the same job get the same retirement benefits. Bob gets it done, not for the credit, but because it's right. And when Bob says he'll cut taxes 15% for families, you can count on it, because it's right for America. And Bob Dole doesn't make promises he can't keep. (Dole, "Elizabeth")

This ad, like the one before it, manages to include some policy claims (cutting taxes) alongside the larger message about Dole's character. The language of "honesty," "living

up to his word,” and keeping promises is deliberately uncomplicated because it is meant to represent a straightforward, uncomplicated candidate.

Of course, not everybody saw Dole as being so uncomplicated and straightforward, particularly not the Clinton administration. Although attacks on Dole’s trustworthiness and inconsistency were not always a major theme of the campaign, if there is one ad that best exemplifies the qualities of an ad devoted entirely to the flip-flop charge, it is the Clinton campaign’s “Preserve” ad. Just like Reagan’s “Side By Side” ad from 1984, which pitted two Walter Mondale’s against each other, this ad juxtaposes the policy positions of “Candidate Dole” and “Washington Dole.”

First, a campaign video of Dole taking a policy position is presented on the left side of the screen above the text “Candidate Dole.” Next, a video of Dole making a contradictory pre-campaign remark is played on the right side of the screen above the words “Washington Dole.” This is repeated for both issues discussed in the ad: Medicare and education. Anxiety-inspiring music, not unlike that which is featured on television news magazines programs such as *Dateline*, lends the commercial an air of suspense and doom. A slashing noise accompanies every cut from one visual to another. Ultimately, as the transcript below demonstrates, the ad uses an abundance of visual and audio cues to make its point that the version of Bob Dole people have seen campaigning for president is not consistent with the version of Bob Dole that had served as a U.S. Senator in Washington since 1969:

[Text: “On Medicare”]

Bob Dole: “I will be the President who preserves and strengthens and protects medicare.” [Text: “Candidate Dole, 8/15/96” appears beneath video of Dole

speaking on left. Text on right side reads “On Medicare”].

Dole: “I was there fighting the fight, voting against medicare, one of twelve, because we knew it wouldn’t work.” [Text: “Washington Dole, 10/24/95” appears beneath video of Dole speaking on right. Freeze frame of “Candidate Dole” remains on left].

Announcer: Last year Dole/Gingrich tried to cut Medicare \$270 billion. [Distorted image of Dole and Gingrich making address; Text: “Dole/Gingrich tried to cut Medicare \$270,000,0000,0000”]

[Text: “On Education”]

Dole: Give children a chance in life, give them an education. [Text: “Candidate Dole, 8/6/96” beneath video of Dole speaking on left side of screen. Text on right side reads “On Education”]

Dole: We’re gonna eliminate the Department of Education. We don’t need it in the first place. I didn’t vote for it in 1979.” [Text: “Washington Dole, 2/29/96” appears beneath video of Dole speaking on right side of screen. Freeze frame of “Candidate Dole” remains on left]

Announcer: Dole tried to slash college scholarships. [Distorted image of Dole;

Text: “Dole tried to slash college scholarships”]

Dole: “Voting against Medicare.” [Text: “The Real Bob Dole: Wrong in the Past” appears on left side of screen. Video of Dole speaking appears on the right.]

Announcer: Wrong in the Past.

Dole: Eliminate the Department of Education. [Video of Dole speaking appears on right side of screen. Text: “The Real Bob Dole: Wrong for the future” appears

on right side of screen..]

Announcer: Wrong for our Future. (Clinton, “Preserve”)

Washington Dole’s positions are far more radical than Candidate Dole’s. Most Americans are likely in favor of federal funding for education and see some value in the U.S. Medicare program. The goal of the ad is not just to create confusion as to what Dole believes, but to paint him as a radical conservative U.S. Senator. Early in the ad, Dole’s seemingly extreme positions are attributed to “Washington Dole,” but when these positions are repeated at the end of the ad, the text attributes them to “The Real Bob Dole.” The ad pits Dole’s campaign rhetoric versus the reality of his many years in Congress. Voters are expected to feel uneasy about the reality of Dole’s candidacy. A similarly themed ad titled “Collector” begins with video of Dole on the stump promising, “You’re going to see the real Bob Dole out there from now on.” The rest of the ad, which repeats the phrase “The real Bob Dole” a considerable number of times, outlines some of Dole’s more controversial and unpopular opinions and decisions. In ads such as these, the Clinton campaign offers to show Americans the real (radical) Bob Dole as a necessary contrast to Dole’s (more moderate) campaign rhetoric.

In 1992, Bill Clinton was portrayed as risky and inconsistent. In 1996, he was portrayed as a promise-breaker. In both campaigns, he was called a liar. Still, Clinton won both elections, thus demonstrating that he knew how to *take* the attacks. His own flip-flop spots, targeted against Bush in 1992 and Dole in 1996, stand as good evidence that he also knew how to *give* the attacks. Where political flip-floppers are concerned, perhaps the old adage is true--it takes one to know one.

**Gore vs. Bush, 2000**

In 2000, neither major party candidate ran a flip-flop ad against their opponent. There are several reasons for why it would be difficult to attack the challenger, George W. Bush, for being a flip-flopper. First, his direct, unequivocal mode of communication made it difficult to label him as “wishy washy.” He made every effort to speak like a tough-nosed Texan. Furthermore, his entire political career began with a “change” or “flip-flop” that many Americans would most likely admire. The one time abuser of drugs and alcohol became a “born again” Christian after meeting his wife, Laura, in 1977 (Hatfield, 2002). The reason Bush did not attack Gore for flip-flopping is perhaps even simpler--he didn't have to. Gore's reputation as an exaggerator made it possible for the Bush campaign to attack the former vice president's character and trustworthiness without using flip-flop attacks. So although neither candidate used an outright flip-flop ad against their opponent, many character attacks typically found within flip-flop spots were still prevalent in the 2000 campaign.

Ads that suggest a motive for one's apparent flip-flops are particularly instructive (Karande, Case, & Mady, 2008). Some ads maintain that an individual has spoken or acted inconsistently because they are simply “wishy washy” and weak. Others have gone so far as to claim that their opponent is a liar. Still other ads reviewed thus far suggest that candidates contradict themselves in the name of political expediency: They are simply trying to tell voters what they want to hear. This is true in the case of George W. Bush's “Credibility” ad. “Credibility” attacks Gore for being hesitant to accept the campaign debate schedule proposed by the Bush campaign. The ad is instructive due to its language of political convenience:

Announcer: Labor Day weekend, Governor Bush accepts a record five national debates. March 14, Al Gore says he'd debate on CNN. July 16, Al Gore said he'd debate on NBC. When it was politically convenient, Gore said he'd debate "any time, anyplace, anywhere" [Text: "June 25, 2000"]. Now that Governor Bush has accepted, Gore says "unacceptable." Does Al Gore now mean debates depend on his meaning of "any time, anywhere"? If we can't trust Al Gore on debates, why should we trust him on anything? (Bush, "Credibility")

The rhetorical question that ends this ad might as well be a statement: "We should not trust Al Gore." We can't trust Al Gore because he does not speak his actual beliefs or intentions, he speaks what is politically convenient. The preceding rhetorical question ("Does Al Gore now mean debates depend on his meaning...") relies on previous political events for its fullest meaning. At various times in the 2000 presidential race, the Bush campaign attempted to associate Gore with the doublespeak and deception of the Clinton administration in which Gore had served as Vice President. Of course, one of Clinton's greatest failings was his affair with Monica Lewinsky and his subsequent handling of that affair. Clinton, during grand jury testimony, famously attempted to evade a question about his affair by saying, "It depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is". This statement was regarded by many a new standard in political dishonesty, equivocation, and absurdity. The anti-Gore ad introduced above borrowed this language in an attempt to make Gore seem just as untrustworthy as Clinton.

The Bush campaign also tried to demonstrate that Gore was inconsistent on environmental matters. An ad titled "Agenda" alleges that despite Gore's attacks on Bush's pollution record as Governor of Texas, Gore himself "allowed mining companies"

that were known polluters “to mine zinc from his property.” The motive this time was ascribed to Gore’s greed: “Gore made half a million dollars in mining royalties.” The ad closes by noting the gap between Gore’s words and deeds: “Even on the environment, Al Gore says one thing but does another.” Other ads, such as “Solvent” and “Newspapers,” begin with the rhetorical question: “Why does Al Gore say one thing when the truth is another?” Again, such messages suggest that Gore’s words have no grounding in “truth” or “reality.” In other words, he is a liar. Such attacks fit rather well with the widely accepted perception that Gore was prone to exaggeration. Perhaps the most widely cited example of Gore’s propensity to exaggerate was his alleged boast about having “invented the internet.” In actuality, what he said was:

During my service in the United States Congress, I took the initiative in creating the Internet. I took the initiative in moving forward a whole range of initiatives that have proven to be important to our country’s economic growth and environmental protection, improvements in our educational system. (Shaw & Bitzer, 1999)

Still, such seemingly far-fetched claims were repeated by his opponents in an effort to raise doubts about the veracity of his claims.

Like the Bush campaign, the Gore team also abstained from running any tried-and-true flip-flop ads in 2000. Still, they found ways to attack Bush’s credibility and trustworthiness. For instance, ads titled “Penny” and “Next” attacked Bush’s promise to provide “younger workers” with money from Social Security, despite the fact that those funds were needed to maintain benefits for senior citizens. Armed with evidence of such a promise, the Gore campaign probably could have claimed that Bush does not

adequately comprehend America's Social Security system. However, Gore took the attack in a different direction and essentially accused Bush of talking out of both sides of his mouth. The best explanation for why the Gore team would make this decision is because accusations of double speak are more damning than accusations of ignorance and because the language of the ads was likely to upset two important voting blocks--young people and senior citizens. "Penny" ends by noting, "Bush is promising younger workers and seniors the same money. That's anything but straight talk." This analysis of flip flop ads suggests that the best antonym for "straight talk" is "double talk." Similarly, "Next" ends by claiming, "So what happens when Bush promises the same money to young workers and seniors? Answer: One promise gets broken." This marks a very rare instance in which a candidate is attacked for a promise they will break in the future, as opposed to promises they've already broken. The commercial also leaves it open as to which group, young people or senior citizens, is going to be betrayed. Either way, this spot throws Bush's credibility into question.

While the 2000 campaign ads discussed here are not prototypical flip-flop ads, as none of them are solely devoted to the charge of inconsistency, and none of them use visual cues to support the claim of inconsistency, these ads still used unflattering images of their opponents and played ominous music to suggest that one's opponent was dangerous. Thus, the 2000 presidential campaign cycle suggests that flip flop ads are not the only way to attack an opponent for being inconsistent, untrustworthy, or deceptive. Arguably, however, because the claims in these ads leave conclusions for the audience to fill in, they may do an effective job of making a variety of claims about a candidate's

consistency, trustworthiness, and honesty all at once, without explicitly making negative remarks about one's opponent and thus risking backlash from voters.

### **Bush vs. Kerry, 2004**

Bush's reelection campaign conducted an incredibly well coordinated assault on challenger John Kerry's credibility in 2004. A litany of ads aimed at Kerry's trustworthiness managed to touch on almost every theme associated with the standard flip flop attack. Kerry was made to look like a weak leader whose actual deeds frequently conflict with his words. He was made to look like a stereotypical politician who was willing to say anything to get elected. Kerry was called hypocritical by the Bush campaign and unprincipled and accused of double speak. Meanwhile, positive ads produced by the Bush campaign praised Bush's resolve and steady leadership. Of course, Bush was vulnerable to spots that accused him of breaking his 2000 campaign promises; and although Kerry capitalized on these opportunities, his efforts seemed far less remarkable than what was executed against Kerry by the Bush attacks.

The Bush campaign's "Windsurfing" ad stands as an exemplary instance of the flip-flop attack in televised political advertising. The words, visuals, and music are all geared toward the task of making John Kerry seem laughably inconsistent. The visuals are arguably the most important part of "Windsurfing." By employing the wind metaphor, this ad joined previous campaigns' ads that created images of their opponent to manipulate as they saw fit. A likeness of Nixon was placed on a spinning weathervane, and a photograph of McGovern was fixed on a rotating spindle. "Windsurfing" is different, however, in that it manipulates actual video footage of its target, John Kerry. Kerry was known to be an avid windsurfer, and on at least one occasion, the press was

invited to a photo opportunity where Kerry rode his windsurfing board in Nantucket, Massachusetts. Even before the image was manipulated by the Bush-Cheney campaign, it might have been interpreted as potentially damning to Kerry. An image of Kerry in a wet suit in a wealthy region of the country, engaging in a hobby some voters may regard urbane or upmarket would certainly conflict with Kerry's attempts to identify his campaign with the ideals of middle and lower class America. The image of Kerry in this ad is edited so that his sail reverses direction with every issue flip-flop the ad's announcer lists. Kerry moves to the right, then the left, the right, then the left, and so forth. The visual of Kerry moving to his right is identical to the visual of Kerry moving to his left; the frame is simply reversed.

The verbal text of "Windsurfing" opens with a rhetorical question: "In what direction would John Kerry lead?" After recounting several of Senator Kerry's contradictory policy positions and statements, the ad closes in what approximates an answer to that question: "Whichever way the wind blows." Kerry is made to look inconsistent and inept, an unprincipled, directionless politician who bends to popular sentiment and makes decisions based on political expediency. Unlike earlier flip flop ads, "Windsurfing" does not inspire anger in its audience. Instead, it inspires a humorous form of ridicule. The spot's music is a major factor in the message's tone. More specifically, the Blue Danube, a classical composition with a carnivalesque charm that implies movement, plays throughout the entirety of the spot, always audible below the narrator's voice which says:

Announcer: In which direction would John Kerry lead? Kerry voted for the Iraq war [Kerry windsurfs to the right], opposed it [Kerry windsurfs to the left],

supported it [Kerry windsurfs to the right], and now opposes it again [Kerry windsurfs to the left]. He bragged about voting for the \$87 billion to support our troops [Kerry windsurfs to the right] before he voted against it [Kerry windsurfs to the left]. He voted for education reform [Kerry windsurfs to the right] and now opposes it [Kerry windsurfs to the left]. He claims he's against increasing Medicare premiums, but voted five times to do so [Kerry windsurfs to the right]. John Kerry, whichever way the wind blows [Kerry windsurfs to the right, then left]. (Bush, "Windsurfing")

By referencing numerous and contradictory political issues important in the 2004 campaign, the spot creates the sense that Kerry's indecision and inconsistency permeates all of his thoughts and words. At the same time, it seems wise of the Bush campaign to have referenced so many defense issues. First, Bush's War in Iraq was rather unpopular by 2004, and Kerry ran on a platform that promised to end the war. However, as "Windsurfing" indicates, Kerry's positions on the war were not always entirely clear or consistent. Kerry contributed to his own problems when he was documented as saying "I actually voted for the 87 billion before I voted against it," a statement that is referenced in the middle of the spot. Thus, by obscuring Kerry's position on the war, the Bush campaign could effectively strip Kerry of an issue on which he may have otherwise been a preferred candidate. Second, as previous flip-flop ads aimed at candidates such as George McGovern have established, accusations of vacillation can be rather easily expanded into attacks on a candidates' ability to defend America against its enemies.

A negative Bush ad called “Searching” exemplifies the potential link between an indecisive leader and a weak military very well. The ad pieces together a number of Kerry’s incongruous statements about the Iraq War and plays them in quick succession:

George W. Bush: I’m George W. Bush, and I approve this message. [Text:

“www.GeorgeWBush.com; John Kerry on the War on Terror”]

John Kerry: It was the right decision to disarm Saddam Hussein, and when the president made the decision I supported him.

Kerry: I don’t believe the president took us to war as he should have.

Kerry: The winning of the war was brilliant.

Kerry: It’s the wrong war, in the wrong place, at the wrong time.

Kerry: I have always said we may yet even find weapons of mass destruction.

Kerry: I actually did vote for the \$87 billion before I voted against it.

[Text: “How can John Kerry protect us... when he doesn’t even know where he stands? Paid for by Bush-Cheney ‘04 Inc. And The RNC And Approved By President Bush”] (Bush, “Searching).

At no time during this advertisement is the viewer able to discern Kerry’s actual position regarding the Iraq War. The ad attempts to create enough uncertainty in the minds of voters to get them to reject Kerry’s candidacy altogether. Of course, the ad also does something else: It encourages voters to believe that because of his contradictory statements about the war, Kerry will be unable to “protect” America. It elevates the risks associated with Kerry to matters of life and death. Kerry’s indecision is a weakness that the United States cannot likely afford. Essentially, this flip flop ad carries with it a fear appeal. The ad implicitly associates a vote for Kerry with potential harm to the United

States. In the first election following the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, such fear appeals held the utmost potential for persuasion.

While “Searching” did an excellent job of delineating the potential consequences of Kerry’s flip-flopping, other ads proposed motives for his inconsistency. First, the “Unprincipled” ads suggest that Kerry doesn’t act in concert with his words because he is selfish, even greedy, and looking out only for his own interests:

Female Voice: John Kerry [“John Kerry” typed into search engine, Kerry website appears.]

John Kerry [Video footage of Kerry speaking]: I have a message for the influence members and the special interests. We’re coming. You’re going...

Voice: Sounds good. Special interests [Types “Special Interests” into search engine, WashingtonPost.com article titled “Kerry Leads in Lobby Money” appears.] More special interest money than any other Senator? How much? [“\$640,000” box appears]. Oooh. For what? [Types “Paybacks” into search engine, KansasCity.com page appears. Story titled “Kerry nominations, donations coincided”]. Nominations and donations coincided? Wait. Watchdog groups. [Types “Watchdog groups” into search engine, Center for Public Integrity page appears.] Facts. Kerry... [Window appears with Kerry video. Text reads “brought to you by the special interests.”] Brought to you by the special interests. Millions from the HMOs, telecoms, drug companies. Shame. Unprincipled. [Types “Unprincipled” into search engine, Kerry site appears].

Kerry: I have a message for the influence members and the special interests, special interests, special interests (Kerry’s voice echoes out). (Bush, “Searching”)

This ad allows voters to learn vicariously through the female web surfer as she bounces around the internet acquiring information about John Kerry's "shameful" dealings with special interests. The whole process is made to seem intuitive, as though the information is available to all thinking people, and did not need to be communicated by a rival candidate's television ad. Being accused of cavorting with special interests is bad for any politician. However, it could be additionally troublesome for someone like Kerry who is on record as promising to eradicate special interests. The reason Kerry acts this way? Because he is "unprincipled." He is unable or unwilling to stand by his beliefs. In this message, Kerry gets about as close to being called "spineless" as one can get in a presidential campaign commercial.

Other ads claimed that Kerry switched policy positions so often because it was politically expedient. He was accused of "playing politics" in an attempt to court voters. For instance, Bush's "PATRIOT Act" spot notes that Kerry "voted for the PATRIOT Act, but pressured by fellow liberals' he's changed his position." It is clear that Kerry is the sort to buckle under pressure and it seems obvious that this is not the sort of quality voters should desire in a presidential candidate. What is only implied, however, is that Kerry made the decision to oppose the PATRIOT Act because it earned him support from "fellow liberals" as he pursued the Democratic nomination. The ad closes by saying, "John Kerry, playing politics with national security." Because the ad details all the ways the PATRIOT Act helps law enforcement track down terrorists and criminals, the ad also makes Kerry seem unable to protect America.

The "playing politics" attack was repeated in an ad titled "Accountability." The ad notes that at one time "Kerry praised the president's [education] reforms" but that

“under pressure from education unions, Kerry has changed his mind.” Once again, Kerry is accused of folding under pressure. Presumably, Kerry adopted the education unions’ positions because he wanted their political support, not because he actually believed in their cause. The ad ends with the same idea as “PATRIOT Act”: “John Kerry. Playing politics with education.” The phrase “playing politics” suggests that politics is a game waged earn popularity—a game that Kerry is all too willing to play. Of course, by repeating the same phrases throughout multiple advertisements, the Bush campaign increases the odds that this notion will catch on with voters.

Ads titled “Kerry’s Yucca” and “Intel” used the same slogans as one another. These ads built on the idea that Kerry’s words and Kerry’s deeds were completely irreconcilable. “Kerry’s Yucca” details how Kerry’s recent statements proclaiming his opposition to the nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain conflict with his Senate votes seventeen years prior. The ad concludes by claiming: “There’s what Kerry says and there’s what Kerry does.” Similarly, an ad titled “Intel” notes Kerry’s promise to “reform the intelligence system” and then claims that Kerry “was absent for 76 percent” of the Senate Intelligence Committee’s hearings. The implication here is that Kerry cannot possibly be very committed to the cause. He simply made the promise to reform the U.S. intelligence system because he thought it might be what voters wanted to hear. These two ads are important because they play on the same cultural preference for words over deeds that has been seen in so many other flip flop ads, and because their similarity to one another demonstrates the Bush’s campaign’s persistent, coordinated efforts to damage the credibility of Kerry’s words on the grounds that they don’t match his deeds.

Although there are many other negative Bush ads that could serve to demonstrate

the breadth and depth of the assault on John Kerry's character in the 2004 presidential campaign, just one more will be presented here. The 60-second "Doublespeak" ad opens by quoting Kerry as saying "A lot of people don't really know who I am," then, despite language that would suggest the opposite intention, the ad makes sure voters will never actually know who John Kerry is. The ad is interesting at least in part because of how it so convincingly calls Kerry's entire identity into question. Almost all of the claims in this ad are attributed to a source via on screen text (noted in brackets below):

George W. Bush: I'm George W. Bush, and I approve this message. [Text: "www.GeorgeWBush.com"]

Female Announcer: John Kerry says, "A lot of people don't really know who I am." [Text: "AP, 4/15/04"] Well, actually, a lot of people do.

Male Announcer: Kerry's hometown paper says, "In his continuing effort to be all things to all voters.... John Kerry is engaging in a level of doublespeak that makes most voters wince." [Text "*Boston Herald*, 03/18/04"]

Female Announcer: The *Wall Street Journal* said Kerry's tax plan "would mean increasing the tax burden again, which would likely kill the recovery." [Text: "*Wall Street Journal*, 01/09/04"]

Male Announcer: On Iraq, the *Washington Post* said "Kerry's attempts to weave a thread connecting and justifying [his] positions are unconvincing." [Text: "*Washington Post*, 02/15/04"]

Female Announcer: The *Union Leader* says Kerry has "waffled" on historic education reforms he supported in 2001, but now opposes. [Text: "*Union Leader*, 08/11/03"]

Male Announcer: And the non-partisan National Journal magazine ranks Kerry the most liberal member of the Senate -- more liberal than Hillary Clinton or Ted Kennedy. [Text: "National Journal, 02/27/04"]

Female Announcer: John Kerry's problem is not that people don't know him. It's that people do.

[Approved By President Bush and pfb Bush-Cheney '04, Inc.] (Bush, "Doublespeak")

There, amidst charges that he will increase taxes and that he is the most liberal member of the Senate, are numerous attacks on Kerry's trustworthiness. The ad not only uses the term "doublespeak" but presents an example of the type of behavior that is typically associated with doublespeak: He "attempts to weave a thread connecting and justifying his positions" but ultimately fails. He is accused of "waffling," a term, that like "wishy washy," implies indecision and weakness. The ad closes by intimating that people really do know who John Kerry is, and they just don't like him.

At first glance, it would seem that "Doublespeak" stands in contrast to other flip flop ads that intentionally create uncertainty about a candidate. Many ads analyzed here work hard to make sure that audiences will never be able to put their finger on what an opponent actually believes about important political issues or for which principles they stand. This ad essentially does the same thing via an interesting paradox. What voters know about John Kerry is that he is unpredictable, unreliable, and always changing. They know that they can't know the real John Kerry. Spots such as this make certain that audiences will never know who the opposing candidate is, thus making the ad's sponsor, usually an incumbent, seem preferable to the unknown. At the very least, audiences may

decide to vote for the “evil they know,” to borrow a popular cliché.

Most of the time a presidential campaign attacks their opponent’s consistency and trustworthiness, while they also praise their own candidate’s consistency, reliability and leadership. Bush’s reelection campaign was no exception. A host of ads, including “21<sup>st</sup> Century,” ended with the slogan “Steady Leadership in Times of Change.” The phrase “Times of Change” surely refers to the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and the newly christened War on Terror. Voters are reminded that they live in a dangerous, unstable world . This may also be interpreted as a recommendation that because America is already experiencing so much change, maybe 2004 is not the time for a new leader. Recall that Gerald Ford used a similar rhetorical strategy in the wake of Richard Nixon’s impeachment.

The “Times of Change” phrase is even more persuasive when paired with a reference to Bush’s “Steady Leadership.” Bush, it is argued, was strong and dependable during times of crisis. Similarly, “First Choice,” which features testimony from Republican Senator John McCain, tells the audience even “under attack from depraved enemies,” Bush “has led with great moral clarity and firm resolve. He has not wavered, he has not flinched from the hard choices.” Seen here, Bush’s consistency and resolve are connected to his leadership in a time of crisis. Read in contrast to the image the Bush campaign created for Kerry, one will remember that Kerry is weak, incapable of making any choices at all, and cracks easily under pressure. Voters who are concerned with strength of character were given good reasons to vote against Kerry and good reasons to vote for Bush.

Like many challengers, Kerry accused Bush of breaking his previous campaign

promises. Most notably, a series of ads, each tailored to a specific American city that Bush had visited in 2000, noted how Bush had broken a specific promise. For instance, “Milwaukee” begins with an announcer saying, “Four years ago George Bush came to Milwaukee promising to keep our economy growing...” and then explains how Bush’s policies have destroyed the economy. The ad notes “around here, we remember broken promises.” Similarly, the announcer for the “Cleveland” ad intones, “Four years ago, George Bush came to Cleveland promising, “for a family without health insurance... we must help” before detailing how Bush’s health care policies have hurt Americans. The announcer also says, “around here, we remember broken promises.” Although the ad is not explicit about how people who remember broken promises should act, it seems intuitive that they should cast a vote for John Kerry, who promises “tax cuts for small businesses” and who has a “real plan to expand healthcare.” These ads, like so many others analyzed in this study, treat promises like contractual obligations that, if not honored by a politician, should result in termination of employment.

As noted previously, Bush’s War in Iraq was unpopular with many Americans who felt that his justification for taking the country into battle was weak. The Kerry campaign felt the same way, and produced an ad titled “Reasons” which alleges that Bush’s reasons for going to war “keep changing”:

[Text: “Kerry Edwards”]

John Kerry: I’m John Kerry, and I approved this message.

Male Announcer: Why did George Bush go to war in Iraq? The reason keeps changing. First, it was weapons of mass destruction.

[Text: “The dictator of Iraq has got weapons of mass destruction. -- George Bush,

1/22/03”]

Female Announcer: Not true.

Male Announcer: Later, Iraq’s links to al-Qaida.

[Text: “there was a relationship between Iraq and al Qaeda -- George Bush, 6/17/04”]

Female Announcer: Not true.

Male Announcer: One reason after another, a new one offered every time the facts crumble. Now Americans are being kidnapped, held hostage, even beheaded.

Over 1,000 U.S. soldiers have died.

[Text: “Bush and Iraq; Invasion Rationales Wither as Facts Unfold,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 6-20-04; “Iraq In Crisis,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 9-19-04; “Militants Behead American Hostage in Iraq,” *Miami Herald*, 9-21-04; “Captors Behead American Hostage,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 9-21-04; “Iraq Toll Tops 1000,” *Newsday*, 9-06-04; Latest Deaths Push US Toll Past 1000,” *NY Post*, 9-06-04]

Maybe George Bush can’t tell us why he went to Iraq, but it’s time he tells us how he’s going to fix it. (Kerry, “Reasons”)

George Bush’s inconsistency regarding “reasons” for going to war with Iraq are presented as evidence that his war in Iraq was ill-conceived and his original justification for war was weak. The ad attempts to create the impression that Bush either never had a solid justification for war, or that perhaps the true justification was darker and more secretive than anything Bush has publicly stated. In other words, the ad does not accuse Bush of vacillating on the issue—Bush has always been pro-Iraq War. In fact, it seems

more likely that Kerry might attack Bush for stubbornly sticking to a bad plan rather than attack him for changing his mind. Typically, changes of mind are presented as evidence that a candidate is of poor character. Changes of reasons, however, are presented as evidence that a candidate designed or adheres to a poor policy. Of course, the implication that he or she is of poor character might not be far behind.

There are some good “reasons” to question the rhetorical strategy behind the “Reasons” spot. The conclusion, “but it’s time he tells us how he is going to fix it,” is very weak. John Kerry’s goals, as a presidential candidate, should have been to present himself as the solution to America’s problems. He should have been campaigning to become president of the United States, not to get explanations from the Bush administration as to how they would address existing problems. Arguably, a more effective ad campaign for a challenger would encourage voters to reject an incumbent and everything the incumbent stands for, not give the incumbent one more chance to justify his decisions and make nice with the American public.

Although ads that described Kerry’s military experience and sacrifice for his country certainly pertained to, and helped build, Kerry’s credibility and trustworthiness, none of his ads dealt with consistency in any remarkable way. He neither implicitly with positive ads, nor explicitly with defensive ads, tried to refute the claims that he was a flip-flopper. Although many other television ads from Republican sources, such as Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, are credited with effectively stomping on Kerry’s candidacy, the flip-flop ads run against him, as well as his decision not to defend against those flip flop messages, are likely as responsible for his failed campaign as any other factor in the 2004 election. The Bush campaign’s efforts to question Kerry’s character and paint Kerry as a

flip-flopper were coordinated and persistent, permeating almost all aspects of their overall campaign against John Kerry.

### **McCain vs. Obama, 2008**

The 2008 presidential election was unique because there was no true incumbent candidate. Neither Barack Obama or John McCain had ever served in the White House. Compared to 2004, there were relatively few flip-flop advertisements in 2008. However, the flip-flop ads that were produced suggest a new direction for this popular genre of political advertising. Many of these new directions are the result of the campaign's full incorporation of internet technologies, which provide a relatively less expensive means than television for communicating one's political messages.

By the general phase of the 2008 campaign, Barack Obama had gained a reputation as a gifted speaker. Many of John McCain's attacks on Obama attempted to turn Obama's strength into a weakness by propagating the idea that Obama was all talk, and no substance. For instance, "Love" tells voters that, "John McCain doesn't always tell us what we 'hope' to hear. Beautiful words cannot make our lives better." This statement directly references Obama's campaign by its major theme ("hope") and essentially accuses his rhetoric of being nothing more than empty words. In fact, a McCain ad called "Fact Check" is even more explicit on this point: "Obama's politics of hope? Just empty words." Ads such as this play on the previously mentioned distinction between words and deeds. McCain's campaign tried to remind people that it's not what candidates say that matters, it's what they do that counts. This could be read as either an attack on Obama's inexperience or ability to get things done. However, the ad can also

be interpreted as an attack on Obama's consistency if voters perceive incongruity between his words and deeds.

A McCain ad titled "Jim Johnson" attempted to capitalize on the idea that Obama's words and deeds did not agree by arguing that Obama's decision to hire Johnson, the former CEO of Fannie Mae, to serve as head of his team to choose a vice presidential running mate conflicted with his pledge to squash big pay-outs for executives at institutions that received emergency bailouts from the federal government:

Announcer: What Obama says...

Barack Obama [Video of Obama speaking]: It would be unacceptable for executives of these institutions to earn a windfall. [Text: NBC's "Nightly News," 9/9/08]

Announcer: ...Is not what he does. Meet Jim Johnson, former Fannie Mae CEO. [Text: "Fannie Mae lobbies hard to protect its tax break" -- *The Washington Post*, 1/16/95] Fannie cooked the books, and Johnson made millions. [Text: "High pay at Fannie Mae for the well-connected -- *The Washington Post*, 12/23/04"]

Then Obama asked him to pick his VP. [Text: "Obama's choice of insider draws fire -- *The Washington Post*, 6/11/08"] And raise thousands for his campaign.

[Text: "Obama website: Committed To Raising \$100,000 To \$200,000; Accessed 5/19/08"] Barack Obama. More empty words. [Text: Paid for by McCain-Palin 2008]

John McCain: I'm John McCain, and I approve this message. (McCain, "Jim Johnson")

The ad presents its thesis ("What Obama says is not what he does"), then presents

evidence in support of that claim (Obama's partnership with a Fannie Mae executive). Finally, the ad repeats the attack that Obama's campaign is characterized by "empty words." The ad appeals not only to those audiences who appreciate a harmony of words and deeds and those audiences that are suspicious of Obama's eloquence, but also those voters who believe that Obama's association with Jim Johnson may be a sign of poor character. In other words, the commercial also uses a guilt-by-association appeal.

Just like the ad described above, "Obama Trading in Contradictions" uses Obama's own words about the North American Free Trade Agreement against him. The ad was produced by the Republican National Committee and placed on the internet to make Obama look like a flip-flopper, to not only confuse the audience about Obama's true position on the matter, but to create the belief that even Obama is confused about his position on the matter. In addition to presenting a barrage of conflicting messages, the ad features music that could best be described as disorienting. The music swells and swirls, raising anxieties and portending doom. The visuals also contribute to this sensation. Video footage of Obama speaking on various occasions plays in the center of the screen, bordered by additional video of multiple scenes and landscapes. The video comprising the border is constantly in motion. A camera crawls quickly from left to right, showing an odd angle of a wall of freight train cars. At other times, the camera spins around to encourage dizziness. These visuals are made even more complicated and unpleasant by an image of a map laid over top of the video that comprises the border. The ad apparently tries to confuse and unsettle its viewers. The verbal text of the ad also implies motion, instability, and disorder. The visual text that accompanies Obama's statements is an attempt to summarize his conflicting opinions:

Barack Obama: "I believe in free trade [Text: "I believe in free trade"]. As someone who lived overseas, who has family overseas, I've seen what's happened in terms of rising living standards around the globe. And that's a good thing for America, it's good for our national security."

Obama: "I don't think NAFTA has been good for America ["I don't think NAFTA has been good for America."] and I never have."

Obama: I believe in free trade. And that's a good thing for America, it's good for our national security.[Text:And that's a good thing for America, it's good for our national security] "We should use the hammer of a potential opt-out as leverage to ensure that we actually get labor and environmental standards that are enforced. ["We should use the hammer of a potential opt-out"]"

Obama: "I believe in Free Trade"

Obama: "What I refuse to accept is that we have to sign trade deals like the South Korea agreement [Text: "I believe in free trade"]. That's why I oppose NAFTA. That's why I voted against CAFTA. That's why it didn't make sense to normalize trade relations with China without asking more from China. I will oppose the Columbia Free Trade Agreement."

[Text: "Obama said the United States should work with the World Trade Organization and pursue deals such as the North American Free Trade Agreement, but the country must be more aggressive about protecting American Interests " -Associated Press].

Obama: "And that's a good thing for America, it's good for our national security"[Text: "And that's a good thing for America, it's good for our national

security"].

Obama: "I wanna be very clear. I don't think NAFTA has been good for America

[Text: "I don't think NAFTA has been good for America"]. And I never have."

[Text: "What does he really believe? Barack Obama Not Ready to Lead."]

(Republican National Convention, "Obama Trading in Contradictions")

By asking "What does he really believe" to close this commercial, the RNC aims to reinforce the idea that nobody knows where Obama stands on the issue of free trade.

Throughout the ad, several video clips and quotations are repeated. Such repetition only worsens the utterly unsettling experience of viewing this advertisement. Of course, this unmistakable sense of disorientation is an excellent complement to the overall message that Obama is inconsistent, unpredictable, and always shifting. There are other, even more simple, reasons for including these sorts of editing techniques. The only candidate to appear in this ad is Obama. McCain's name, voice, or image are not to be found here. The spot aims to associate an unpleasant sense of disorientation with the inconsistent Barack Obama.

In many ways, this ad marks a break from the previously described strategies for communicating that a candidate is inconsistent. Ads such as "McGovern Turnaround," "Side By Side," and "FlipFlop," to name just a few, are more linear and straightforward. The verbal text and the visuals in previous flip flop ads alternate back and forth between two conflicting positions. Many ads have a distinct rhythm or timing that makes them rather predictable even while they claim a candidate is not at all predictable. They also make traditional use of space on the television screen by using one half of a screen, or one side of a poster, to represent a political position, and the other side of the screen or

poster to represent that position's exact opposite. The "Obama Trading in Contradictions" ad is far less easy to follow. The temporal pattern in which Obama's conflicting positions are presented and repeated is difficult to discern upon initial viewings. Furthermore, the ad treats space constraints differently than previous flip-flop ads. The conflicting videos of Obama speaking occupy the same space, while the video on top of which it is laid (thus comprising the border) suggests that an image or idea may occupy various positions at various times. Ultimately, the implications for meaning, language, and political reality are called into even greater question by this type of flip flop spot.

"Obama Trading in Contradictions" marks a new and different direction for televised flip-flop advertisements. Whereas previous presidential flip-flop spots used traditional notions of time and space to make rival candidates seem predictably unpredictable, "Obama Trading in Contradictions" attempts to create a much deeper sense of confusion, anxiety, and uncertainty. Presumably, the goal of the ad is to encourage voters to associate their discomfort with the ad's target, Barack Obama. If audiences wish to reject the unpleasant sensation promoted by the commercial and seek a sense of relief or cleansing, then they must also reject Barack Obama, the apparent cause of the anxiety. With "Obama Trading in Contradictions," the Republican National Convention produced an ad that is intentionally difficult to understand in hopes that their target will also appear difficult to understand.

The National Rifle Association ad also accused Obama of changing his stated opinions. Not surprisingly, the NRA ad, titled "Truth Squad," dealt with second amendment issues. By highlighting the differences between Obama's pre-campaign

positions on gun control, and his campaign-period statements in support of gun ownership, the spot suggests that Obama makes statements based on political expediency and that he is more or less a liar:

Every four years, politicians try to run away from their voting records [Text: "Anti-Gun Rights Records"; Grainy photo of Kerry with mouth open, holding rifle]. Barack Obama is no different. [Text: "Obama: Voted to DENY self-defense with firearms"]. He wants you to believe he supports your second amendment rights [TEXT: "Obama: Endorsed Ban on all handguns"], though he has consistently opposed them [Text: "Obama: Supported 500% TAX on guns and ammo"]. Now he's attacking the first amendment too [Text: "Obama Campaign Letter: "immediately cease airing this advertisement"]. Using threats and intimidation against anyone who tells the truth [Image of news from the internet, Obama pointing, looking angry; Text: "Obama Wants NRA Ads Banned"], or runs ads like this one about his real anti-gun record [Image of part of ad]. [Text: "We the People..."]. Don't let Barack Obama trample your constitutional rights. [Text: "Get the Facts"] Get the facts at [GunBanObama.com](http://GunBanObama.com). Defend Freedom. Defeat Obama. (NRA, "Truth Squad")

This ad pits Obama's record against Obama's record in an effort to expose the "truth" about the "real" candidate. It does not claim that Obama is unable to choose a position regarding the right to bear arms, but that he has been deceitful in how he has represented his real position to the public. It is no mistake that the ad begins with an image of John Kerry. Kerry is used to represent a typical liberal who speaks in favor of gun rights, votes against them, and looks silly posing with firearms. An even better reason to

associate Obama with Kerry pertains to Kerry's perceived lack of trustworthiness. It could substantially damage Obama's credibility if voters came to believe that Obama was as inconsistent and wishy washy as John Kerry.

Several other McCain ads, including "Promise," accused Obama of "playing politics." Another ad, "Tax Cutter," accused him of lying, and a web-only ad explicitly, yet very briefly, refers to his decision not to accept federal matching funds during the campaign as a "flip flop." So while there were many attacks on Obama's "words," and more generally, his character, the flip flop attack was never fully applied to Obama.

Barack Obama attacked John McCain in much the same way McCain attacked Obama. For instance, an ad titled, "Foreign Vehicles" attacks McCain's claim that he's "bought American literally all [his] life" on the grounds that it is false. The ad claims that McCain owns 13 cars, including a Lexus, a Volkswagon, and a Honda. The ad accuses McCain of straying from the "straight talk" that he had so often promised voters. The commercial also manages to implicitly attack McCain for being wealthy, and presumably out of touch with a vast number of American families that probably own just one or two cars. Finally, because the spot was aired exclusively in Michigan, the charge that "McCain even refused to support loan guarantees for the auto industry" makes him look particularly unpatriotic and unconcerned about Michigan workers.

Earlier in this analysis, Lyndon Johnson's attacks against Barry Goldwater were discussed in terms of Johnson's effort to make Goldwater appear erratic and dangerous. Obama's campaign did not use flip flop ads to communicate this message about McCain, but instead used a political news source to more directly make the claim:

Senator McCain and Governor Palin talk about experience, a steady hand. But in

this economic crisis, it's McCain who has careened from stance to stance [Text: "careened from stance to stance -Politico, 10/11/08"]. Been erratic [Text: "erratic" -USA TODAY EDITORIAL, 9/19/08"]. Poured gasoline on the economic mess [Text: "Poured gasoline on the economic mess WASHINGTON POST EDITORIAL"]. All while promising more failed policies that give tax breaks to big corporations [Text: "TAX POLICY CENTER"]. But almost nothing to the middle class. Yes, McCain has been erratic. What he hasn't been, is on your side. (Obama, "Erratic")

The ad begins with the language of consistency ("steady hand") and inconsistency ("careened from stance to stance"; "erratic"), before launching into an attack on McCain's tax policy. The crisis, in this case, is an economic one, and McCain has allegedly not shown the leadership necessary for dealing effectively with this crisis. This line of attack shares some similarity with accusations that Democrats, such as Kerry or McGovern, are too inconsistent to protect America from its enemies. Whatever crisis or problem the nation faces, it is unlikely to be solved by someone who offers vacillating, dishonest, or generally weak leadership. Visually, the ad features a black and white slow motion pan of the oval office, as if to juxtapose McCain's erratic nature with the solemnity, magnitude and sound decision-making typically associated with the office of the president.

The closest thing to an outright flip flop ad with McCain as its target was also one of the 2008 campaign's most humorous ads. The League of Conservation Voters (LCV) produced a web-only ad that attacks McCain's record on the environment. The ad begins with footage from a televised presidential campaign debate in which McCain listed the

types of alternative fuels he believed the United States should pursue. Then, the ad details McCain's poor record on energy and environmental issues. Toward the end of the two-minute spot, a video clip of McCain speaking ill of alternative energy in 2007 is revealed. The ad has no announcer. All the claims and evidence in this ad, other than McCain's own voice, come in the form of on screen text. The ad's only sound is Simply Red's 1989 soft rock hit "If You Don't Know Me By Now." The song is slow and sappy to the point of kitsch. When matched to slow motion zoom outs of still images of McCain (some recent, some from decades ago), the song lends the ad a substantial helping of humor. The lyrics to the popular song that are included in the spot admonish:

(Chorus)

If you don't know me by now  
You will never never never know me.

(Verse)

Now of all the things  
That we've been through  
You should understand me  
Like I understand you  
Now, girl I know the difference  
Between right and wrong

(inaudible as footage of McCain plays in foreground)

(Chorus)

If you don't know me by now- oh girl, if you don't know me  
You will never never never know me. Ooooooh.

The rest of the ad presents evidence of McCain's change of views:

John McCain [Text: "October 7, 2008 Debate"]: We, we have to have all of the above. Alternate fuel, alternative fuels, wind, tide, solar, natural gas, clean coal technology. All of these things we can do as Americans and we can take on this mission. And we can overcome it.

[Lyrics to song begin]

[Text: "That's what John McCain Says now."]

[Old photo of McCain with hair and glasses; Text: "But the John McCain we know has consistently voted against national clean energy goals."]

[Photo of McCain waving next to George W. Bush; Text: "John McCain has accepted nearly \$2 million from oil and gas interests. (opensecrets.org)"]

[Photo of McCain on Senate floor; Text: "While he repeatedly voted against clean and more efficient cars"]

[Photo of McCain with Sarah Palin; Text: "And John McCain's running mate refuses to acknowledge the facts about global warming. CBS News 9/30/08"]

[Photo of McCain at microphone; Text: "So when John McCain says he's always supported alternative fuels, just remember what he told his own supporters"]

McCain [Video of McCain]: I, I, I, I'd be glad to send you the figures that that the amount of, even if we gave it the absolute maximum, uh, wind, solar, and tide, uh, etc., the clean tech, the truly true clean technologies don't work. [Text:

"Portsmouth, NH 12/4/07"]

[Text: "Senator McCain, we know you by now. You will never, never, never get our vote."] (League of Conservation Voters, "We Know You")

The first statement McCain makes here clearly conflicts with the second statement. The most recent statement he made is for clean energy, the older statement is against it. Most of the message is filled with evidence of McCain's anti-clean energy voting record. It is little surprise that the LCV isn't content to simply call McCain inconsistent. They also want to underscore his poor record on energy issues. The ad closes by ridiculing McCain with reference to the song that has been playing throughout the spot. The League, and presumably voters as well, "know" that John McCain is no friend of the environment, and refuses to be fooled by a few words he spoke during a single debate, when an entire career's worth of Senate votes suggest the exact opposite position. Therefore, McCain will "never, never, never" get their vote. By use of a cheesy, outdated pop song, the LCV makes McCain look ridiculous for ever having tried to misrepresent his record or position.

An analysis of flip flop ads throughout the years suggest a laundry list of negative character attributes that may be associated with inconsistency in any given ad: weak, vacillating, wishy washy, untrustworthy, unpredictable, erratic, dishonest, misleading, disingenuous, selfish, confused, doublespeaking, dangerous, unprincipled, duplicitous, ridiculous, waffling, and wavering. Flip flop ads encourage voters to reject these qualities in presidential candidates. Both implicitly via the very same flip-flop ads, and explicitly via spots that praise candidates for being the antithesis of flip floppers, voters are taught to value the exact opposite qualities of the flip-flop: consistent, predictable, trustworthy, straightforward, straight talking, principled, resolute, unflinching, direct, forthright, strong, unwavering, steadfast, moral, dependable, and honest. These are the attributes that are revered in presidential qualities.

Importantly, there are some larger themes or threads that run through the discourse of flip-flopping as constructed by televised political advertisements. The following sections of this chapter will, by making reference to many of the ads already discussed here, describe these themes and tease out their meaning in more depth. First, many flip-flop ads make use of a distinct wind metaphor. Second, flip-flop ads often portray a candidate as debating themselves. Third, flip-flopping is associated with stereotypes of femininity. Fourth, flip-flopping communicates antipolitics.

### **Wind Metaphor in Flip-Flop Spots**

The introductory chapter to this dissertation began with a consideration of the similarities between political flip-flops and the popular brand of plastic or rubber footwear. It was suggested that the alternating sound of regular footfall parallels politicians' changes of positions. This interpretation will be particularly important in Chapter Five. However, careful analysis of the ads examined in this study suggests that there may be another overarching metaphor at work in flip-flop accusations: The wind.

The Oxford English Dictionary presents compelling evidence that the term “flip-flop” and its eventual political connotations actually derive from a wind metaphor (flip-flop, 1989). The entry for “flip-flop” encourages the reader to compare the term to “flip-flap.” As an example of usage, the flip-flap entry quotes Phillip Stubbe's 1583 treatise *Anatomy of Abuses* as saying, “Then they goe flip-flap in the wind” (p. 1062). In this vein, the dictionary also cites Italian lexicographer John Florio as recording the word to mean “ventaglio” or “ventarello,” which is used to refer to either a small gust of wind or “a piece of a card or paper cut like a crosse, and with a pin put in at the end of a sticke, which running against the wind doth twirle about” (Lancashire, 2003). Thus, the origin

of the term “flip-flap.” the apparent forerunner to “flip-flop,” is distinctly related to the wind, both as the wind itself, and as something flimsy that is easily moved by the wind.

However unlikely it is that modern presidential candidates and their campaign teams are familiar with old English, these rhetors have nonetheless constructed appeals based on the relationship between flip-flopping, or inconsistency, and the language of the wind. Television ads run by Hubert Humphrey, Richard Nixon, and George W. Bush each make use of a wind metaphor to paint their respective opponents as inconsistent. This trope is designed to make the political candidates at which it is aimed appear to operate under an external locus of control. The targets of these ads are made to look like feckless, diffident caitiffs. Such politicians do not make their decisions based on their own moral principles or deep personal convictions. In fact, they do not make decisions at all. A political candidate caught in a wind metaphor appears to let the political winds push them indiscriminately in unpredictable directions.

Hubert Humphrey’s 1968 “Weathervane” commercial was the first political spot to employ the wind metaphor in a television ad to accuse an opponent of inconsistency. The ad features a bronze statuette of Richard M. Nixon as part of a weathervane. Nixon’s body, from the waist up, is designed to swivel, while the bottom half of the weathervane, which indicates the cardinal directions, is stationary. Nixon’s arms are extended directly outward from his body, his index fingers outstretched as if he were pointing immediately to his right and left. Nixon’s features, particularly the length of his nose, and the disingenuousness of his smile, are exaggerated. This is clearly a caricature. However, it is also a rather familiar image for any viewer who might recall one of the many photos of Richard Nixon with both arms outstretched as he shaped his fingers into two separate “V”

for victory signs. This was a trademark, almost iconic, posture for Nixon, who made the “V” signs years later as he boarded a plane leaving the White House just moments after giving his informal resignation address on August 9, 1974. In short, the image that adorned the weathervane was unmistakable, capturing Nixon in a characteristic posture, that given this new context, made him appear bombastic and overconfident.

The ad begins with a close up shot of Nixon’s face before zooming out to frame the entire weathervane. At first, the statuette of Nixon swivels just a few degrees right and left, his face still visible. A high-pitched squeaking noise, meant to represent the sound of rusty metal, accompanies the weathervane’s motion throughout the entirety of the 30-second spot. The ad’s male narrator opens with a rhetorical question. He asks, “Ever noticed what happens to Nixon when the political winds blow?” As the narrator discusses Nixon’s inconsistent, conflicting positions on a Civil Rights bill regarding housing, the weathervane begins to turn more deliberately. At first the weathervane appears to turn in sync with the narrator’s words. When the narrator says of Nixon, “Last year, he said, ‘I oppose a federal open housing law,’” the image faces right to present a perfect profile of Nixon’s face. When the narrator next claims, “This year he said, ‘I support the 1968 Civil Rights Bill with open housing,’” the image reverses and faces left, to reveal the opposite profile. By the time the narrator says, “Again this year, he said, ‘I just supported it to get it out of sight,’” the weathervane no longer pauses when it faces right or left. Instead, it spins faster, and with less discretion. The statuette spins indiscriminately, failing to signal any predictable direction. The ad closes with another rhetorical question: “Which way will he blow next?”

Clearly, the metaphor here is as visual as it is verbal. Although it is tempting to claim that the visual dimension of this ad reinforces the verbal, such a claim would be inaccurate. Taken separately, both the visual and verbal dimensions of this ad are strong enough and coherent enough to send a negative message about Nixon on their own. If one imagines the spot without sound, we are still left with an inimitable image of Nixon spinning around directionless, dizzy with inconsistency. Conversely, one can also imagine the ad without the image of the weathervane. The political wind theme would remain, and the viewer would still understand that Nixon has a propensity to change positions on important matters of the day.

The “Weathervane” ad is rich with available interpretations. Beyond the propensity to change directions often, if Nixon is a weathervane, he has no agency of his own. Nixon is an object rather than a subject. He does not act but is instead acted upon. He does not make decisions based on internal principles or a strong moral compass, but is instead easily influenced and prone to vacillation. He is guided by prevailing political winds, which are intended to represent popular public sentiment and political expediency. Such an accusation clearly suggests that Nixon either lacks principles, or he lacks the fortitude to stand by those principles; he is of weak moral character.

Importantly, a weathervane’s primary function, its sole purpose for being, is to indicate which way the wind is blowing. A weathervane can only move in the direction of the wind. If Nixon is a weathervane, audiences must understand inconsistency as an innate quality of Nixon’s character. Indecision, unpredictability, and contradiction are ingrained in his genetic make-up. He is a fundamentally and tragically flawed character that, rather ironically, is incapable of change on his own. Because his whole purpose is

to change directions, one should never expect anything different from him. At play here is the fundamental attribution bias, the tendency of individuals to attribute the behaviors of others to predisposed personality flaws, while simultaneously ignoring external or situational factors that may have contributed to those behaviors. Thus, the “Weathervane” ad makes the case that Nixon is so easily influenced by external factors because he is internally flawed.

There is a good reason to return to the final question posed by the “Weathervane” ad: “Which way will he blow next?” This question appears to contradict the thrust of the advertisement, and in many ways contradict the interpretations of the wind metaphor that have been presented here. Throughout most of the ad, the wind blows, while Nixon, the weathervane, is blown. This is not merely a description of the rhetorical construction of inconsistency presented in the advertisement. It is also an accurate description of the material relationship between the wind and a weathervane. Thus, the last sentence contradicts the rest of the composition, and in some ways, is an incorrect account of natural events. However, one can see how the closing question, when worded as it is in “Weathervane,” derives persuasive appeal by returning some agency to Nixon, making him appear willfully neglectful or malicious, and thus potentially raising the ire of audiences. Thus, to say that the ad contradicts the entailments of the wind metaphor is not to claim that the ad wields any less rhetorical force. Rather, the point to be made here is that the wind metaphor is wrought with complexities and contradictions. It is pliable and readily manipulated by the resourceful rhetor.

The “Weathervane” spot deeply troubled Richard Nixon. He was allegedly so offended, and so firmly believed that the attack was inappropriate, that he phoned

Humphrey directly to ask that it never be aired again (Felkner, 1992). Humphrey obliged. However, just four years later, the Nixon campaign used a strikingly similar set of ads against George McGovern, one titled, “McGovern Turnaround” and another titled, “Vietnam Turnaround.” “McGovern Turnaround” focuses on a variety of political issues: The Vietnam War, legalization of marijuana, welfare, taxes, and busing. “Vietnam Turnaround,” on the other hand, focuses exclusively on the issue of the Vietnam War. Both ads are designed to paint McGovern as a flip-flopper. Both ads used the same exact visual materials—a photograph of McGovern’s profile placed on a spindle. Of course, a spindle, in its original context as a piece of textile equipment, may be regarded as a female object. As a male narrator recounts McGovern’s many flip-flops or “turn arounds,” the photograph rotates, to reveal a photograph of McGovern’s face pointing in the opposite direction. As the narrator describes each change of direction the image of McGovern changes direction in kind.

The similarities between “McGovern Turnaround” and the “Weathervane” ad are striking. The ad repeats the same language of “this year” vs. “next year” that was present in “Weathervane.” Like “Weathervane,” it ends in a rhetorical question. It features visuals that correspond directly to the verbal elements of the advertisement. Both ads include a sustained shot of a single object, without a background or additional visual context. The image of McGovern on a spindle, just like Nixon on the weathervane, first turns in sync with each contradiction the narrator mentions, but by the end of the ad McGovern’s picture spins continuously and arbitrarily.

Importantly, the wind theme is only implied in the anti-McGovern ad. Note that the text never uses the language of the wind metaphor (wind, blow, etc.). The language

suggests that McGovern is not blown by the wind, but changes direction on his own volition. In this construction of the flip-flop charge, McGovern has agency, but uses it foolishly, unpredictably, and inconsistently. Notably, however, the visual dimension of the ad contradicts this account. The still photograph of McGovern does nothing to suggest that he controls his own actions. The photo and spindle is either being operated manually from outside the frame (presumably above or below) or it is being acted upon by an unseen force such as the wind.

Based on the evidence presented by the Nixon campaign and based on all those changes of opinion and changes of direction, the viewer should be unable to predict where McGovern will stand next year, just as they should be unable to determine where Nixon will blow next. Thus, the ad makes a rather direct appeal to voters' sense of uncertainty. Televised political ads can create uncertainty simply by offering negative information about a rival candidate. Such negative information can cast doubt on an opponents' candidacy and create uncertainty as to whether they are the right person for the job. Flip-flop ads not only create uncertainty as to whether a candidate is fit for the position they seek, but raise questions as to who the candidate is and what the candidate really stands for. An effective flip-flop ad therefore seeks to achieve the antithesis of what Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) argues is a fundamental goal of human communication (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Most generally, URT suggests that the first stages of developing relationships or understanding are marked by uncertainty, and that communication is the primary means by which uncertainty is reduced. The communication in flip-flop ads, however, is designed to increase uncertainty in an effort to drive a voter away from a rival candidate.

Nixon's anti-McGovern "Turnaround" ads do not reflect an explicit wind metaphor. However, it draws attention to the way the logic of wind metaphor works in televised advertising. In addition to the construction of agency presented in the ad, it also brings to mind the rhetoric of "direction" and "courses," both of which can relate to the wind, or to sailing, which relies directly on the wind. George W. Bush's "Windsurfing" ad uses the language of "direction" very well. The verbal text of this ad opens with a rhetorical question: "In what direction would John Kerry lead?" After recounting several John Kerry flip-flops, the ad closes in what approximates an answer to that question: "Whichever way the wind blows." Just like Nixon before him, Kerry is made to look inconsistent and inept, an unprincipled, directionless politician who bends to popular sentiment and makes decisions based on political expediency. As has been noted above, the visuals, which show Kerry changing direction ad nauseum, are arguably the most important part of "Windsurfing." Throughout the ad, one can see blue water and passing ships behind Kerry. This reminds us that the wind metaphor is closely related to nautical themes. The use of nautical metaphors to describe the past, present, or future "course" of America has a long and prominent history. Founding father Thomas Jefferson was said to make frequent use of the metaphor, referring often to a figurative "ship-of-state" and "ocean-of-life" (Miller, 2003).

The wind metaphor implies that the direction of the wind cannot be stopped. However, it can be resisted. It is the weakness of these candidates (Nixon, McGovern, Kerry) that they cannot stand firm against prevailing political forces and make consistent, principled decisions. Where the open sea is concerned, the wind can also be harnessed to the advantage of human actors. The wise sailor, when faced with winds that change

directions, is expected to adjust his or her sails in order to continue in their chosen direction. Thus, the vehicle in the wind/sailing metaphor suggests that minor adjustments are tolerable, even necessary, but that complete reversals of direction are foolish and undesirable. It is unclear whether this logic extends entirely to the tenor in this metaphor. The profusion of flip-flop ads available for analysis in this project suggests that even minor adjustments in presidential politics might not be tolerated. Even in positive advertisements, particular candidates and particular ads communicate a stubbornness and level of resoluteness that indicates even small adjustments may be unwise and unwelcome. The 2004 Bush campaign, which praised Bush's "great moral clarity and firm resolve" and used the tagline, "Steady Leadership in Times of Change," serves as evidence that it may, in some situations, be effective to deny and disavow even the smallest of necessary adjustments to one's vision or direction.

The language of direction has played a prominent role in many presidential advertising campaigns. For instance, although he was slammed with the rhetoric of "direction" in the "Windsurfing" ad, the Kerry campaign actually produced and aired many ads that ended with slogans such as "It's time for a new direction" and "A new direction for America." Similarly, in 2008, Barack Obama told voters, "We need a new direction." Long before that, John Kennedy's ads claimed the Democrat "offers us the vigorous, principled direction which will answer Kruchev's bluster." Note the use of the word "bluster," another term frequently associated with the wind, to describe Kruchev's posturing. To complete the metaphor, Kennedy would either have to create a wind of his own that blew in the opposite direction of Kruchev's, or he would have to act as a sailor, vigorously adjusting sails in order to maintain that "principled direction." The ship-of-

state metaphor also manifests itself in language related to America or history's "course," a term that is used interchangeably with the word "direction." For instance, Lyndon Johnson's "Our President" campaign commercial asserts that traditionally, Presidents "have known that the decisions they make here can change the course of history." If history is a ship, the President is the ship's captain.

A McCain ad, titled "Storm," more fully develops the nautical metaphor than any other televised campaign ad. The ad portrays America as a ship stuck in the center of a storm, in need of a worthy captain. Democrat Barack Obama, the ad tells us, is not a worthy captain. An excerpt is presented here:

We choose presidents to lead us through uncertain times. Rely on their background and experience to guide us. Some now say this storm cannot get worse. Our nation is so off-course that Barack Obama's quick rise to power and inexperience should not matter. But what if the storm does get worse, with someone who's untested at the helm? (McCain, "Storm")

Terms such as "guide," "storm," "off-course," and "helm" complete the ship-in-danger metaphor that the McCain ad constructs. Visually, the spot includes video images of stormy seas—the waves crest and fall while the wind picks up the water and blows it around. No human beings or watercraft are present in these visuals. The image seems intentionally dark and grim. In such troubling circumstances, it is up to the captain to make sure that the wind does not push us further off-course. The ship's captain should not let the wind, whether the wind is political expediency, popular sentiment, or troubled times, change the course of the nation.

The wind metaphor describes a powerful force. The presence of this wind is timeless and taken for granted. It cannot be stopped. It is always somewhere, if not everywhere. It isn't quite unpredictable, but it is unreliable, fickle and always changing. The same assessment applies to more figurative political winds. Those who would let themselves be pushed about by the wind are not grounded, but rather unreliable and untrustworthy. The metaphor advises political candidates to either ignore the wind or stand firm against it. Ads that rely on the wind metaphor simultaneously damn particular candidates and remind voters that change and inconsistency are objectionable.

Of course, political campaign ads are by no means the only venue for the wind metaphor. Newspaper headlines, political reporters, and television pundits often reference political winds, as a means for representing prevailing public sentiment or in some cases inescapable economic trends or dominant cultural shifts. Stepping away from the political scene for a moment, one can recognize the metaphor in countless popular songs. Bob Dylan tells us the answer is blowing in the wind, Kansas claims all we are is dust in the wind, Bette Midler goes on about the wind beneath her wings and Pocahontas wants to paint with all the colors of the wind. These popular references to a symbolic wind and all their attendant meanings surely exist alongside, within, and perhaps even in spite of the dominant political usages.

The metaphor abounds because it constitutes what Osborn (1967) calls an archetypal metaphor. The criteria for classification as an archetypal metaphor are: immunity from changes wrought by time, grounding in prominent features of experience, ability to speak to basic human motivations, possession of persuasive appeal, and

occupation of an important place in our culture's language. Briefly, each of these criteria will be discussed in relation to the metaphor of political wind.

First, the wind metaphor is immune from changes wrought by time. As often as this metaphor is used to accuse candidates of changing too much or too often, the language of the wind metaphor, and the wind's place in human existence, does not change. It figures just as prominently into human experience today as it did 500 or 5000 years ago. Particular meanings may have changed many times, but the wind nonetheless existed as a metaphor. In other words, perhaps an individual's propensity to change with the wind was not always regarded so negatively, but the possibility that people and environments could change with (or like) the wind has always existed. Ancient professions such as farming and sailing rely as heavily on knowledge of the winds as do contemporary airplane pilots, windmill engineers, and architects. Thus, the second criterion for classification as an archetypal metaphor is also present: the wind metaphor figures prominently into the human experience. One could argue that modern living circumstances provides some literal and figurative separation or distance from the wind. However, wind has not, nor will it ever, disappear from human experience altogether. We feel, hear, see, smell, and perhaps even taste the wind today much like we would have thousands of years ago.

The third criterion for counting a metaphor as "archetypal" requires that the metaphor speaks to basic human motivations. The wind metaphor exemplifies this quality in many ways. The sailing element of the wind metaphor speaks to the basic human motivation of exploration and travel. Even more generally, the metaphor speaks to human being's fundamental desire, and subsequent struggle to control or manipulate

nature, to fit our needs rather than letting it dictate our circumstances. Human beings have benefitted from developing an understanding of the wind, therefore it is little surprise that we would use the language of the wind to understand other aspects of human existence.

Next, one must ask whether the metaphor possesses persuasive appeal. Rhetors' willingness to revisit the wind metaphor in their persuasive pursuits serves as excellent evidence that human beings have perceived some power in the metaphor. Looking at political ads alone, it is telling that Nixon decided to use the wind metaphor against McGovern in 1972, even though he had decried its use against him in 1968. Why would he use this trope if he didn't regard it as persuasive? Similarly, the anti-Kerry "Windsurfing" ad, with all the journalistic and scholarly attention it has garnered (e.g. Kaylor, 2008; Mark, 2006), is typically regarded as one of the most interesting and persuasive messages of the 2004 presidential campaign.

Finally, the wind metaphor certainly occupies an important place in society's language and rhetoric. From popular song to common parlance, the wind is a recurring, perhaps even taken-for-granted element of our language. It is so ingrained in our language that its use may be inadvertent and its meaning may be taken for granted. Who, upon claiming that some task was a "breeze," actually intends for their audience to regard that task in terms of the wind? The wind has so worked its way into common figures of speech, that it can border on cliché.

The wind metaphor, like light-dark metaphors or directional metaphors, is archetypal. It is a fundamental part of human existence. It is little surprise that the metaphor has so often and so compellingly been incorporated into political messages,

particularly those that wish to accuse politicians of flip-flopping or otherwise being inconsistent in their words and deeds.

### **Flip-Flop Spots as Debates**

Debate is another apt metaphor for the rhetoric used in many flip-flop ads. Americans are familiar with debate as a means for settling political disputes, or in the case of campaign debates, highlighting the relative strengths and weaknesses of political candidates for voters to evaluate. Flip-flop ads do not necessarily seek to accomplish either of these ends because the debate they seek to establish is always intrapersonal. In other words, televised flip-flop ads try to portray a candidate as being wrapped in a vigorous debate with themselves. Walter Mondale debates Walter Mondale or Bill Clinton debates Bill Clinton.

More specifically, flip-flop ads approximate televised campaign debates, where exposition of ideas and execution of soundbites and sloganeering trumps actual engagement between two candidates. Mr. Mac-G-O-P from the 1952 Adlai Stevenson spot, despite having just one name and one body, was two people. As these two people expressed their opinions, it was clear that these two people are in disagreement with one another. Worded differently, Mr. Mac-G-O-P was in disagreement with himself.

One purpose of a political campaign debate, especially the televised sort that has been a prominent part of presidential campaigns since 1960, is to see how “two presidential candidates stand on the issues” (Reagan, “Side By Side”). This is exactly what Reagan’s 1984 “Side By Side” ad promises to show voters in its introductory statement. However, the opinions of only one individual were showcased in the spot. The commercial pitted “Senator Mondale” vs. “Candidate Mondale.” Where there had

previously been only one Mondale, there were now two. And, not surprisingly, these two Mondales disagreed on almost everything. Candidate Mondale, always pictured smiling, was interested in reducing government spending and building a strong national defense. Senator Mondale, who was always pictured frowning, “voted to increase government spending 12 times” and “voted to weaken defense 8 times.” As much as this is an intrapersonal debate, it is also a comparative campaign ad. However, most comparative ads explain how the two major party candidates differ on important issues. Flip-flop ads explain how an individual candidate differs from him or herself on important issues.

A 1992 Bush ad established a visual allusion to televised presidential debates by presenting a split screen in which two candidates, each with a grey dot over their face, appeared next to one another. Minus the grey dot, this production technique is common in coverage of televised campaign debates. Therefore, voters were prepared for a debate. As many people probably expected, the “candidate on the left” had very different opinions than the “candidate on the right.” According to the message’s announcer, they disagreed on issues such as the war in the Persian Gulf and congressional term limits. At the end of the ad, the audience learns, if they had not already figured out, the two candidates are actually the same person. They are both Bill Clinton.

This prevalent parallel to televised presidential debates highlights a candidate’s duplicity. The term “duplicity” is often reserved as a synonym for “deceitfulness,” “dishonesty,” or “fraudulence.” Such meanings are certainly relevant to flip-flop ads. For voters, deceit is an available explanation for the inconsistency demonstrated by each of these candidates. However, these candidates, as portrayed in flip-flop ads, incur a more literal sense of the term “duplicitous.” They are made to look, for just a moment,

like two different people. This is consistent with the debate metaphor in that there must be two or more people with differing opinions if there is to be a debate.

It is worth considering whether dividing a single candidate into two different candidates and making them “debate” does more than simply create the impression of inconsistency. The way candidates are portrayed as being so deeply engulfed in disagreement with themselves, these constructions of flip-flopping border on allegations of mental illness. The targets of these ads are made to act in accordance with popular conceptions of mental illness. Candidates aren’t just made to look ridiculous; they are made to look crazy. Allegations of mental illness ought to be regarded as a poison pill in American politics. Associations with any variety of psychological ineptitude can haunt and/or derail political campaigns. For instance, George Romney’s 1968 campaign for the Republican presidential nomination was disrupted after he mistakenly claimed to have been “brainwashed” by the military into supporting the Vietnam War. Similarly, Michael Dukakis’ political career was troubled by allegations that his wife, Kitty, suffered from chronic depression and alcoholism.

Thomas Eagleton is perhaps the most high profile example of a candidate whose political aspirations were dashed due to accusations of mental instability. For 18 days in 1972, Eagleton was Democrat George McGovern’s running mate. However, his vice presidential hopes were ruined when it was revealed that he suffered from frequent and severe bouts of depression. He had undergone electroshock therapy several times in his life and regularly took prescription medication for his ailment. Eagleton was dropped from the Democratic ticket as soon as evidence of his mental illness surfaced. Voters had likely never seen Eagleton experience any symptoms of mental illness, but the knowledge

of his disorder rendered him unqualified to be vice president of the United States. Conversely, candidates against whom flip-flop ads are run may not actually suffer from a mental illness, but the messages often imply that they are psychologically disturbed.

Popular understandings of mental illnesses such as bipolar disorder and dissociative identity disorder associate these conditions with some variety of duplicity. Those who suffer from dissociative identity disorder display at least two distinct identities or personalities. In the case of bipolar disorder, those afflicted change moods frequently, alternating between episodes of mania and depression.

Reagan's "Side By Side" ad does an excellent job of relying on stigma and fear surrounding mental illness to create a deep distrust of Walter Mondale and his apparent instability. One of the most powerful means by which the ad creates two Mondales is through naming. It is clear in this message that Candidate Mondale and Senator Mondale are not the same person, or more accurately, are not the same personality. The audience must understand that materially there is only one Mondale, but that more than one essence or identity exists within him. He is one person, albeit with multiple personalities. Thus, there appears to be a parallel here between Mondale's duplicity and common understandings of dissociative identity disorder. Those who suffer from dissociative identity disorder exhibit multiple and distinct personalities or alter egos. Much of what voters know of multiple personality disorder comes from popular culture, which according to Doak (1999), portrays sufferers very negatively and usually inaccurately.

Some popular culture characters to be portrayed as suffering from some variety of multiple personality disorder include Jerry Lewis' *Nutty Professor*, the tagline for which reads, "What does he become? Some kind of monster?" When Lewis' character, Julius

Kelp, drinks a potion, he turns into a completely different person. His alter ego, named Buddy Love, is abhorrent, obnoxious, and disruptive. Eddie Murphy's 1996 remake of the film relied heavily on the same themes as the original. Of course, not all popular portrayals of multiple personality disorder require that a potion be consumed in order for a change to occur. The main character in the film *Fight Club* follows a calm, good-natured but unnamed office worker as his personality splits into that of an aggressive, destructive anarchist named Tyler Durden. The character bombs the headquarters of major credit card companies in an attempt to disrupt America's financial structure. Although characters such as Kelp and Durden are not directly related to the political arena, they nonetheless shape the way audiences understand dissociative identity disorder. In the case of *Nutty Professor* and *Fight Club*, people with multiple personality disorder are portrayed as simultaneously disturbed and disturbing. Above all else, such characters are dangerous.

The visuals in the anti-Mondale flip-flop ad also create the impression that he suffers from a psychological imbalance. More specifically, the ad alternates between a photo of Mondale smiling and a photo of Mondale frowning. The presentation of two different visual images certainly contributes to the impression that there are two distinct Mondale identities. However, the fast and frequent changes in the emotions expressed by the Mondale photos also suggest that Mondale suffers from emotional instability. The large smiles on Mondale's face communicate tremendous happiness while the frowns a sense of profound sadness. Of course, frequent shifts between mania and depression are typically associated with bipolar disorder, otherwise referred to as manic-depression. Although such mood disorders are not incredibly uncommon, and can be treated, they

nonetheless inspire fear and ignorance in the greater population. All told, the ad makes Mondale seem as though he may suffer from a dissociative identity disorder and/or bipolar disorder, which may lead some voters to believe he is deranged, or at the very least, unfit for the presidency.

Ads that feature multiple visual images of a candidate seem the most likely to imply that a candidate may have a psychological condition. For instance, Johnson's 1964 "Which Barry Goldwater?" image features two images of Goldwater staring directly at one another. The pensive squint gives each photograph of Goldwater the impression that it is trying to learn something about the other image. Visually, these two Goldwaters are identical, but the announcer makes it clear that these two Goldwaters are actually of very different opinions and temperaments. A camera pans between the two images as the announcer asks questions such as, "Is he for the Barry who said, 'I seek the support of no extremist,' or is he for the one who said 'extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice?'" The question is directed at a hypothetical acquaintance who is considering voting for Goldwater. The ad's conclusion further drives home the idea that there are two Goldwaters. Stated another way, Goldwater has two identities: "And how is a Republican supposed to indicate on his ballot which Barry he's voting for?" In both image and word, the ad creates two distinct Barry Goldwaters. Each has a different policy position and a different temperament.

Again, voters understand that, materially, there is really only one Barry Goldwater. Only rhetorically, or perhaps psychologically, can there be two Barry Goldwaters, residing in the same body. The ad does a superior job of communicating Goldwater's duality, effectively implying that the candidate has multiple personalities.

Considering prevailing stigma surrounding mental illness, particularly one as frequently referenced yet misunderstood as dissociative identity disorder, voters will be compelled to fear and reject Goldwater. After all, he looks and sounds crazy. Even if an audience member were to empathize with Goldwater's apparent disorder, they'd probably have to acknowledge that someone who has multiple personalities would not make for a good leader.

When reviewing the 1964 presidential election, the present study noted that Johnson's attack ads were designed to make Goldwater seem erratic and dangerous. If these ads were to work to their fullest potential, voters would believe that Goldwater is an unstable maniac. A clever give and take regarding campaign slogans from 1964 suggests that charges of severe instability plagued Goldwater throughout the campaign. For instance, when the Goldwater campaign presented their slogan, "In your heart, you know he's right," liberal Democrats countered with the observation, "in your guts, you know he's nuts." Rumors and innuendo related to Goldwater's psychological stability (or lack thereof) eventually became a matter for the United States Court system. Goldwater sued *Fact* magazine for libel over a 1964 article that claimed Goldwater "was mentally unstable, had an uncontrollable temper, was hypermasculine to cover up insecurities, and would be a danger to the country" (Mayer, 2009). At one point, the case hinged on whether or not Goldwater had ever experienced an actual nervous breakdown. According to the *New York Times*, the exchange between *Fact's* defense attorney and Barry Goldwater went as follows:

"Senator," asked Mr. Steinberg, "didn't you hear rumblings among the American people during the campaign that you were a nut?"

After Mr. Goldwater had demurred with a smile, Mr. Steinberg jokingly came back to the theme later: "Nobody's ever looked at you like you're nuts?"

The former Arizona Senator responded with a quip: "We'll, I've had some looks that I've had my suspicions about." (Burks, 1968)

Events such as this speak to the prevalence of suspicions that Barry Goldwater was mentally unstable. It is also important to note that as part of their defense, *Fact* magazine argued that presidential candidates' psychological stability is an important public concern. Flip-flop ads such as "Barry, Barry" and "Which Barry Goldwater," much like flip-flop ads targeted at other presidential candidates, both reflected and perpetuated the idea that Goldwater suffered from some variety of mental illness.

Many other presidential ads have split an opposing candidate into two discrete candidates. A 1996 Clinton spot introduced two distinct Bob Dole identities: Candidate Dole and Washington Dole. The ad ("Preserve"), featured multiple video and audio excerpts of Dole expressing disparate opinions on health care and education. One Dole wanted to support medicare, the other had voted against its inception back in 1965. These two positions would appear so irreconcilable that they would seem to have come from two different people, or at least two different identities within the same person. In addition to the possible association with an illness such as dissociative identity disorder, much was made of Dole's age in 1996, thus raising potential concerns over senility, however unwarranted such concerns might be.

Bill Clinton was called a liar so often in 1992 and 1996 that his condition would seem to border on the pathological. Recall that the flip-flop ad "Grey Dot" from the '92 Bush campaign featured a split screen that included two images of Bill Clinton that,

according to the narrator, disagreed on several important political issues. The “Grey Dot” also accused Clinton of lying, because the candidate on the left had been called up for military service, while the candidate on the right had not. If this claim were to be accepted by voters as true, it would suggest not just inconsistency but deceit. Just like there were two Goldwaters, two McGoverns, two Mondales, two Carters, and two Doles, there were two Clintons. Clinton, via flip-flop ads and other means, was accused of lying so many times during the 1996 campaign that voters might need to suspect that only a psychological condition could possibly cause one person to be so deceitful. Audiences may not know a whole lot about pseudologia fantastica, but a lack of knowledge only increases the odds that voters might perceive Clinton as exhibiting symptoms of the disorder.

Flip-flop ads do a remarkable job of raising concerns, however unstated those concerns may be, that a political opponent suffers from a psychological imbalance. Voters who perceive a candidate as being potentially deranged or unstable would seem unlikely to vote for that candidate. Seen in this light, flip-flop ads certainly raise some ethical dilemmas. Not only does it seem excessively malevolent to make such implicit claims about an opponent, but there is little to be praised about ads that exploit ignorance and fear surrounding mental illness. Another powerful, yet potentially insidious set of associations generated by flip-flop advertising concerns their attempted emasculating of political opponents.

### **Femininity in Flip-Flop Spots**

Flip-flop ads also associate political candidates with stereotypically feminine traits. This is important because as Fahey (2007) writes, "to suggest that a male

candidate is feminine is to hurl an insult" (p. 135). Of course, it may be more than just insulting—it is likely to be effective as well. Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles (1996) argue that masculine gender ideals are perceived as a prerequisite for public office. The President of the United States has always been a man, and the office itself has always been associated with masculine traits. Therefore, to suggest that a political candidate is feminine is to suggest that they are unpresidential.

Jeffords (1994) has argued that political candidates associated themselves with masculinity by producing messages that make them seem like “decisive, tough, aggressive, strong, and domineering men” (p. 11). Because gender stereotypes are constructed in dialectical terms, this means anybody lacking these traits are indecisive, tender, passive, weak, and submissive—the very traits that have traditionally been desired in women, but not men (Welter, 1978). Thus, these qualities have deep meanings and substantial persuasive potential when they are either implicitly or explicitly associated with rival political candidates via flip-flop ads.

A contemporary pop song by Katy Perry will serve as anecdotal evidence of the link between indecision and femininity. Later in this dissertation, the song will be considered in more depth because its structure, or rhythm, is remarkably similar to that which is exhibited by so many flip-flop ads studied here. The song, titled “Hot ‘N Cold” criticizes a former romantic partner for being inconsistent. The song’s chorus presents an extensive list of dialectical terms to describe its target:

You’re hot then you’re cold.

You’re yes then you’re no.

You’re in then you’re out.

You're up then you're down. (Luke, Martin, & Perry, 2008)

The target of the song is essentially a flip-flopper. They are not necessarily changing their positions on anything, but their mood is changing constantly. Of course, mood swings and instability of mood or emotion is often stereotypically associated with women. The song is particularly interesting because of how it even more directly associates its flip-flopping target with female attributes and behaviors. The song's first verse presents this argument better than any other part of the song:

You change your mind

Like a girl changes clothes

You PMS like a bitch.

I should know. (Luke, Martin, & Perry, 2008)

The lyrics take for granted that women, or more accurately, "girls" change their clothes a lot. Most people who hear these words will understand immediately that the connection between the target's changes of mind, and a girl's change of clothes, is frequency. The propensity to frequently change one's clothes serves as a representative anecdote, an observable and characteristic behavior of the female gender. Frequent changes are not all that the target has in common with women. Perry's target also experiences premenstrual syndrome, something only women can do. Of course, he experiences this PMS not just like a woman, but like a bitch--a difficult, unpleasant woman. "Bitch" is sometimes used as a derogatory word for all women and tends to encompass the worst qualities associated with feminine stereotypes. Thus, the target of the lyrics is the definitive woman. The song is relevant because it serves as a common and popular example of the association between indecision and femininity. This association exists in the minds of audience

members, ready to be accessed with the right messages. It seems unlikely that anybody would want to vote for the person described in Katy Perry's lyrics.

Televised flip-flop spots accuse political candidates of embodying feminine traits without having to say so explicitly. If a campaign can effectively associate their opponent with indecision, the audience may likely do the rest of the work necessary for connecting indecision to femininity. There are several reasons that a contemporary candidate would not risk more directly pinning an opponent with stereotypically feminine character traits. First, doing so could easily be perceived as mudslinging and encourage a backlash effect against the message source. Just as importantly, no candidate wishes to be accused of sexism or misogyny. Thus, flip-flop ads let candidates covertly rely on deleterious gender stereotypes and reinforce the perceived superiority of masculine traits.

Flip-flop spots are by no means the only sort of televised political spots that may connect political opponents with femininity. However, it is argued here that accusations of femininity permeate any and all complete flip-flop spots. Thus far, this analysis has demonstrated how flip-flop commercials make opposing candidates indecisive. Ads such as Johnson's "Barry, Barry" spot, Nixon's "McGovern Turnaround" ad, and Ford's "Flip Flop, Generic" commercial, each communicate to voters that the targeted candidate has changed their mind many times, and apparently cannot decide what they believe or what policy direction they would pursue. The ads make the charge of inconsistency crystal clear to voters, and to some extent, it requires an inference on behalf of the viewer to recognize that inconsistency is a sign of indecision. Not only is almost every second of these ads dedicated to making a candidate appear inconsistent and indecisive, but the visuals too are devoted entirely to constructing the idea that the candidate can't make a

decision, tough or otherwise. Every spin of a campaign poster or flip of a photograph indicates a new, different, or conflicting decision.

Not all campaigns go through the trouble of finding conflicting policy positions for an opposing candidate and designing creative visuals in order to depict an opponent as indecisive. Some candidates simply come out and say the word. For instance, in defending what many people believed to be his imprudent, erratic character, Barry Goldwater told audiences that his opponent, Johnson, was the one they had to worry about: “Well, you know, it seems to me that the really impulsive and imprudent president is the one who is so indecisive that he has no policy at all” (Goldwater, Untitled). Impulsivity is also generally regarded as a stereotypically feminine trait and therefore an unpresidential character attribute. The President of the United States is expected to be thoughtful and deliberate, or otherwise, more masculine and logical. Reagan launched a very similar attack against Carter in 1980, when his ad claimed, “Jimmy Carter’s weak indecisive leadership has vacillated before events in Angola, Ethiopia, Afghanistan” (Reagan, “Carter Peace”). Such statements emasculate Carter by suggesting that Carter is not as aggressive and clear-thinking as those who have occupied his post before.

Seen in the context of masculine-feminine character attributes it becomes even clearer why so many political campaigns have used the charge of flip-flopping to claim that their opponent is unfit to defend America against enemies. Not only was a candidate such as George McGovern feminized with commercials that claimed he was indecisive on matters of national defense (“Vietnam Turnaround”), but messages such as “McGovern Defense,” which detailed the cuts McGovern wished to make in America’s military budget, make his timidity and weakness seem even more pressing. Very similar

attacks were used against John Kerry. Despite the fact that both Kerry and McGovern had fought wars as part of America's military, they were made to look as though they lacked the requisite strength for protecting America. The role of protector, of course, is stereotypically masculine.

Jeffords (1994) notes that Republican candidates have traditionally done a very good job of presenting themselves as masculine frontiersman, while Democrats have struggled to do the same, either because of ideological differences, or because of prevailing attacks from Republicans. Negative campaign messages about candidates such as McGovern, Carter, Dukakis, and Kerry demonstrate very well how Democrats have fallen victim to the sort of figurative castration that comes from being called a flip-flopper. The anti-Kerry "Windsurfing" spot demonstrates this point exceptionally well, as windsurfing does not seem to be a very manly sport.

Importantly, Republicans have faced similar problems related to flip-flopping and masculinity. For instance, Barry Goldwater was not called "weak" in 1964, but he was called "erratic." Lyndon Johnson's campaign portrayed Goldwater as dangerously unstable and irrational. According to Democrats, Goldwater's election to the presidency could entail serious risks to the safety of America and the rest of the world. Goldwater was feminine because he was not thoughtful enough and his impulsivity was seen as a threat to world peace.

The tendency of flip-flop ads to emasculate political candidates is evidenced by Hubert Humphrey's "Weathervane" ad. The verbal text of the spot, and more specifically its use of the word "blow," carries important sexual connotations. To avoid the topic in the spirit of prudery is to risk missing an instructive and rather insidious

aspect of the flip-flop attack. The “Weathervane” text is bookended by use of the word “blow.” This word, in common parlance, constitutes indecorous slang terminology for fellatio. Thus, to further deconstruct the question, “Which way will he blow next?” means asking whether the “Weathervane” ad accuses Richard Nixon of performing oral sex for/with/on men. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the term “blowjob” has been in use since 1942 (blow job, 2010). Another source claims that prostitutes were using the word “blow” to refer to the act of oral sex as early as 1933 (blow, 2010). Furthermore, the existence of cultural artifacts such as Andy Warhol’s 1964 film *Blow Job*, which featured a sustained 35-minute shot of a man’s face as he received oral sex, suggest that the sexual connotations of the word “blow” would have been ready and relevant to many television viewers in 1968. Because the individual(s) performing oral sex in the film were never shown on camera, their identities have been disputed. However, there is much speculation that the act was performed by as many as five different boys (Warhol & Hackett, 2006).

An explication of the sexual import of the terminology at use in the “Weathervane” ad turns on the issue of agency. However, the sexual connotations of the word “blow” represent a challenge to what has so far been written about the wind metaphor. The wind metaphor suggests that it is better to blow than to be blown. In other words, it is better to act than to be acted upon. Conversely, an appreciation for the sexual meanings of the word “blow” suggests just the opposite: It is better to be blown than to blow. Where sexual blowing is concerned, it is better and more socially acceptable (especially for men) to be acted upon than to act.

Notably, by asking “Which way will Nixon blow next?” the Humphrey spot accuses Nixon of blowing, of acting, of performing oral sex on a man. In other words, if we accept the sexual import of the language, Nixon is being accused of engaging in a homosexual act. Moreover, the act of blowing a man is often considered an act of subservience (Paley, 2000). Importantly, the language of the ad’s question, by use of the word “next” implies that Nixon has apparently blown in the past. The act of blowing is typically associated with women and homosexual men, neither of which, to the best of our knowledge, have ever been president. To be emasculated or feminized in this manner may be particularly troublesome for most heterosexual men, but it should be even more vexing to a man such as Nixon who seeks a political position typically associated with masculinity and dominance (Jamieson, 1995). Where blowing is concerned, it is far more disruptive to dominant social norms if a president or presidential candidate were to act, rather than be acted upon.

If the “Weathervane” ad’s final question had accused Nixon of being blown, of *receiving* oral sex, the spot might seem less problematic. The president of the United States has always been a man; and consistent with society’s prevailing (and restricting) heteronormativity, it is natural, normal, or otherwise “right” for men to be blown. It would be less of a major disruption to the status quo for a male presidential candidate to receive a blowjob or simply be accused of receiving a blowjob. In fact, according to Cawthorne (1998), such an occurrence would be completely consistent with U.S. history.

Although the Clinton-Lewinsky affair happened well after the 1968 presidential election, it still demonstrates the importance of a president being seen as one who is blown, rather than one who blows. President Clinton was embroiled in shame and

controversy because the woman from whom he received fellatio was not his wife.

However, one can only imagine how the controversy may have spiraled if he had been caught performing oral sex on a man rather than receiving oral sex from a woman.

Indeed, recurring theme of this study of flip-flop ads revolves around the tendency of the flip-flop charge to associate rival political candidates with feminine traits. Indecision, vacillation, uncertainty, timidity are routinely regarded as stereotypically female traits. To accuse a rival candidate of flip-flopping is to associate them with femininity, a trait not often associated with the American Presidency. Thus, the sexual interpretation of this text does not secure its relevance from whether or not the Humphrey campaign intended to emasculate Nixon. The sexual reading of the advertisement is relevant because, just like charges of inconsistency where the word “blow” does not appear, there is an apparent association between the candidate and the feminine.

Although the feminization of one’s political candidate via flip-flop spots appears to be a potentially forceful rhetorical strategy, it does not constitute an ethical strategy. Such discourse naturalizes the superiority of masculine character traits, thus excluding feminine traits and women from positions and discourses of power. A rejection of all things feminine marginalizes women and homosexual men. It also eliminates from the political debate many of the ideals useful for counterbalancing the determined, militaristic drive that accompanies the desire to appear strong, resolute, aggressive, and supposedly able to defend America.

### **Antipolitics in Flip-Flop Spots**

In addition to associating political opponents with femininity, flip-flop ads also reflect antipolitics. Kamber (2003) defines antipolitics as “the increasing distrust of

government, particularly the federal government, coupled with a disdain for the sometimes messy business of elections” (p. 53). The belief that politics are the province of the elite, and is therefore deaf and blind to the concerns of the average American, as well as the belief that politics are the arena of the morally low and bankrupt, both run through antipolitics. Although Kamber associates antipolitics with “distrust” and “disdain,” a pair of internal feelings, this study maintains that antipolitics is also a discursive practice. Antipolitics are communicated through political campaign messages, particularly those that accuse candidates of flip-flopping. Antipolitics manifest itself in our contemporary political language.

An excellent example of an ad that communicates antipolitics is Adlai Stevenson’s 1952 “Wallet” ad, which features an announcer who plainly states, “Politics? I’ll tell you what politics mean to you. Open your wallet.” With reference to voters’ wallets, the ad equates politics with high taxes for little in return. Other ads equate politics with mudslinging. For instance, a 1988 Dukakis ad titled “Environment/Leadership” features still photos of a Bush ad that attacked Dukakis on environmental issues. An announcer utters, “Bush attacks Dukakis on the environment. Well, that’s politics.” Here, politics is linked to negativity and unfairness. Similarly, a 1992 Clinton ad called “Duck” states, “George Bush is ducking debates and attacking Bill Clinton. That’s politics.” Seen from this angle, politics represents a dearth of substantive discourse and a desire to tear apart one’s opponent. Often enough, the word politics does not appear without the word “dirty” in front of it. For instance, a 2000 Gore ad titled “Turning” attacks George W. Bush’s behavior during his successful primary campaign by claiming, “From South Carolina to New York, [Bush] used dirty politics to

trash John McCain's record.” Considering the negative manner in which campaign ads construct “politics” the term “dirty politics” actually seems a bit redundant.

When candidates aren't attacking politics, they attack politicians. Naturally, if politics is so awful, those who practice politics are going to be just as base and corrupt. A 1952 “Eisenhower Answers America” commercial features the General telling voters that, “Too many politicians have sold their ideals of honesty down the Potomac.” Simply put, politicians are dishonest. A man in a 1972 McGovern ad claims “Politician after politician, candidate after candidate, comes forth and says before they get in, this is what we're going to aim at, and nobody's ever delivered. I think that we've been duped by phonies and phoniness.” The ad, titled “Phonies,” associates politicians with dishonesty and untrustworthiness. Politicians do not have the best interest of the American public at heart. For instance, an Obama ad from 2008 tells voters that American workers were sold out “by politicians like John McCain, who supported trade deals and tax breaks for companies that ship jobs overseas” (Obama, “Mills”). This statement could have just as easily accused McCain of shipping jobs overseas without labeling him a “politician.” However, politicians are so distrusted, there is some persuasive appeal in representing one's opponent as a politician and oneself as a political outsider. An Eisenhower spot from 1956 confirms that the last thing a politician wants to be known as is a politician. His “Women Voters” ad features a woman who says she'll vote for Eisenhower because “he has not been, and is not, a politician.” Similarly, an unnamed Barry Goldwater ad maintained that Goldwater is not a “power politician.”

Thus far, the ads cited here have not dealt with the charge of flip-flopping. Importantly, there are several excellent examples of ads that simultaneously accuse a

candidate of being inconsistent and also “playing politics.” Such ads inextricably link the two claims, both of which can be damning enough in their own right. In 2004, George W. Bush accused John Kerry of “playing politics with National Security” because although he originally voted for the PATRIOT Act, he often spoke against it on the campaign trail. The entirety of the ad is presented here:

George W. Bush: I’m George W. Bush, and I approve of this message. [Text: “www.GeorgeWBush.com”]

Announcer: President Bush signed the PATRIOT Act giving law enforcement vital tools to fight terrorism. John Kerry? He voted for the PATRIOT Act, but pressured by fellow liberals, he’s changed his position. [Text: “H.R. 3162, 10/25/01; Remarks at Iowa State University, 12/1/03”]

While wire taps, subpoena powers and surveillances are routinely used against drug dealers and organized crime, Kerry would now repeal the PATRIOT Act’s use of these tools against terrorists. John Kerry. Playing politics with national security. [Text: “Approved By President Bush And Pfb Bush-Cheney ‘04, Inc.”] (Bush, “PATRIOT Act”)

As “PATRIOT Act” demonstrates, to change one’s political position, particularly for the purpose of gaining political support, is the epitome of “playing politics.” A very similar ad from the Bush team’s 2004 campaign claimed that Kerry was “playing politics with education.” Thanks to flip-flop ads, “playing politics,” or otherwise acting in the interest of “political expediency,” is perceived as one of the main reasons a political candidate would ever change positions on an issue. Candidates who change their positions are playing politics. This charge has been repeated, in various permutations, so often that

flip-flopping is now understood to be an essentially political behavior. Political candidates who tell one group of voters one thing, and another group of voters a different thing, are guilty of the same political crime. So too are those who don't "do" what they "say" they'll do or attempt to conceal the truth about their "real" political opinions or political records.

Hubert Humphrey's 1968 "Weathervane" ad is also explicit about the relationship between politics and flip-flopping. The ad, which has already been discussed at numerous points throughout this analysis, features Nixon as a weathervane being pushed about by "political winds" as a narrator details Nixon's policy changes regarding a civil rights bill. The "political winds" are responsible for all of Nixon's movements. He moves because the dirty business of politics compels him too. Although it might seem as though "politics" were the real problem, and that Nixon, or those like him, are merely the victims of the bully-some political wind, the fact that candidates are attacked for being a part of politics indicates that candidates are somehow expected to resist political forces.

Presumably, if one plays politics, they are a politician. Considering the abundance of political campaign ads that have sullied this term too, it seems that one of the worst things a politician can ever be called is a politician. The first televised flip-flop spot ever produced, Adlai Stevenson's "Platform Double Talk," presents the image of the politician that currently resides in audience's minds. Mr. Mac-G-O-P speaks with two mouths, each contradicting the other. He makes promises he could never keep, aims to deceive his audience, and engages in political double talk. Visually, he is no better. He is fat, presumably from taking advantage of the political system for so long without actually doing anything for the people. His mode of dress and speech communicate

elitism. He wears a suit and spectacles, his eyes hidden from the public. Mr. Mac-G-O-P represents the sort of politician with which candidates are associated when they are accused of flip-flopping.

Conversely, when a candidate runs a spot that portrays them as the antithesis of a flip-flopper, they are essentially claiming for themselves those traits that voters cannot find in a politician. For instance, George H. W. Bush's "Plain Talk" spot urged, "The person you choose to lead America must have certain qualities: decisiveness, honesty, integrity, consistency," implying that Bush was that man (and his opponent was not). Politicians, because they do not make principled decisions, could be said to lack every one of these qualities. Similarly, the Dole campaign, with all its talk of Dole being "plain-spoken," sticking to "the truth" (Dole, "From the Heart"), and "keeping to his word" (Dole, "Elizabeth"), was portrayed as lacking most qualities of a politician even though he had roughly 35 years of experience in federal government at that time.

Candidates attack their opponents for playing politics and acting like politicians because they perceive some advantage to it. Candidates run as political outsiders, uncorrupted and uninterested in the filth, greed, and backbiting that is so often associated with politics. The American people have decided that their favorite type of politician is one who appears not to be a politician at all. This creates an interesting paradox in which candidates must rail against the system in order to be a part of it. However, what these candidates seem to not realize is that they are doing their profession, and their government, and their country a profound disservice. When Eisenhower calls Stevenson a "politician," Stevenson is not the only person whose reputation is damaged. Such statements reflect and perpetuate on the taken-for-granted belief that politicians, *all*

politicians, are morally bankrupt. As far as negative political rhetoric is concerned, antipolitics appeals are the equivalent of slinging mud into the wind. When candidates use the words “politics” and “politician” pejoratively, they are attacking their own profession and themselves. Try as they might, it is difficult for politicians to effectively separate themselves from the political fray. Arguably, these charges stick to and sully the reputation of all politicians, including those who initiate such attacks. Those who practice antipolitics will undoubtedly be the target of antipolitical sentiment at some point in their career. It seems unlikely that any candidate, especially a candidate that has attained public office, can remain, in the minds of voters, apart from the very institution they have disparaged.

Politics come part and parcel with our electoral democracy. Therefore, a knock on politics is also a knock on our representative government. In fact, televised ads tend to attack “government” as often as they attack “politics.” Usually, the attack revolves around the idea that government is corrupt or too big (or both). This excerpt from an unnamed Goldwater ad exemplifies attacks on “government” in general:

There is a growing resentment against this government, grown too big and too arrogant. Against taxes grown too high, and morals sinking too low. It’s a resentment against a government of slogan and deceit, against cynicism and indecision. Truth and integrity have taken a backseat in our government along with self-discipline and personal responsibility. Expediency has replaced principle as a guiding force in Washington today. (Goldwater, Untitled).

Goldwater’s message attacks “government” and “Washington” for demonstrating many qualities associated with flip-flopping (lack of principle, lack of integrity). Goldwater is

bad mouthing the very organization to which he is applying for work and in which he currently works. This rhetoric only “works” for some politicians because they portray themselves as outsiders who will clean up the problems in government.

To attack government for being slow, indecisive, or ineffectual is to attack the democratic system that is charged with seeing that all ideas receive fair and ample deliberation. To attack politics is to attack the communicative practices that characterize our electoral democracy. Attacks on politics and politicians are attacks on democracy, and therefore threaten representative government.

This chapter has presented a campaign-by-campaign analysis of flip-flop spots and their attendant values and meanings. Furthermore, four dynamic themes surrounding the flip-flop attack were discussed including wind metaphors, debate and mental illness metaphors, emasculation, and antipolitics. One thing that this chapter did not do was perform a detailed analysis of the underlying structure of these ads. To this end, Chapter Five uses Kenneth Burke’s theory of form to understand how these ads create and satisfy particular audience appetites, and performs a sustained analysis of the arguments presented in these spots.

## CHAPTER 5: PROGRESSION OF IDEAS AND ARGUMENTS

The manner and arrangement of ideas in a rhetorical artifact, typically referred to by ancient rhetoricians as *dispositio*, holds incredible potential for influencing audiences. In fact, this chapter demonstrates how an analysis of the selection and progression of ideas in the texts of flip-flop spots reveals important insights regarding both *logos*, or discursive argument, and *pathos*, or emotional appeal. This chapter examines the progression of ideas in flip-flop spots by first using Kenneth Burke's theory of form to understand how these commercials create and satisfy appetites in political audiences. What emerges is a coherent understanding of how the *form* of flip-flop spots is just as important to their overall rhetorical force and ease of recognition as the *content* of flip-flop ads. The form of these ads creates a distinct flip-flop rhythm that creates and satisfies audience expectations. Next, the way these ads use data and claims to construct arguments is explained and evaluated. The intermingling of policy claims and character claims within the text of any one flip-flop argument is of particular importance to this analysis. Additionally, the degree to which flip-flop spots employ logical fallacies will be evaluated. Finally, as a counterpart to this study's focus on logic and reasoning, the emotional appeals present in flip-flop ads will be discussed.

### **Form in Flip-Flop Ads**

One of the most dominant, compelling characteristics of televised flip-flop ads is their form. Consistent with Kenneth Burke's notion of form, flip-flop ads have a distinct way of creating and satisfying appetites in audiences. This section will chart the verbal, visual, and audible texts of flip-flop ads in such a way that makes their form apparent. The form of flip-flop ads is characterized by a recurrent cadence of "flips" and "flops,"

always paired perfectly with one another to create a predictable and recognizable message pattern. I have used the terms “flip” and “flop” to describe the components of form in these ads to emphasize the way in which the form of flip-flop ads complements the specific message content of flip-flop spots. The cadence is intuitively “right” and entirely consistent with the representative image of flip-flopping that exists in voter’s minds. This section will revisit four flip-flop advertisements from Chapter Four in order to elaborate on how they use a flip-flop form to create and satisfy appetites. More specifically, this chapter will discuss the form of Humphrey’s “Weathervane,” Reagan’s “Side By Side,” George H. W. Bush’s “Gray Dot,” and George W. Bush’s “Windsurfing” advertisements. Additional popular culture texts that utilize a similar flip-flop rhythm, such as a Michael Moore documentary and an aforementioned pop song from Katy Perry, will also be considered.

### **Humphrey’s “Weathervane”**

Humphrey’s 1968 “Weathervane” uses a wind metaphor (what Burke (1968b) would call an incidental form) to persuade voters that instead of making principled decisions and standing up for what he believes in, Richard Nixon is content to be pushed around by political forces. The ad attempts to portray Nixon as an unprincipled, untrustworthy politician. The content of the ad, which includes charges regarding Nixon’s positions on the 1968 Civil Rights Bill, takes a rhythmic form by which some utterances and images encourage expectations in an audience, and the utterances and images that follow satisfy those expectations. The verbal, visual, and audible dimensions of this ad are described below. The tables used to chart the message components in each particular flip-flop ad analyzed in this chapter are designed to demonstrate how the

verbal, visual, and audible elements of these spots work in chorus to create and satisfy audience expectations.

Time (s)	Verbal	Visual	Audible
0-4	<i>Ever noticed what happens to Nixon when the political winds blow?</i>	A close-up of a brass model of Richard Nixon's head. The camera zooms out to reveal the figure is part of a weathervane that features Nixon's body, from the waste up, with his arms (and index fingers) extended directly outward from his shoulders. This is an "action shot," as the weathervane twists, and turns a few slight degrees (always less than 90) right and left.	The high-pitched squeak of a weathervane precedes the narrator's voice by less than a second. A similar squeak accompanies each of the weathervane's twists and turns.
4-8	<i>Last year, he said, "I oppose a federal open housing</i>	The weathervane turns to right. This is Nixon's profile.	

	<i>law."</i>		
8-12	<i>This year he said, "I support the 1968 Civil Rights Bill with open housing."</i>	The weathervane turns to face directly forward. After pausing in this position, the weathervane turns 90 degrees to the left. We see Nixon's profile.	
12-17	<i>Again this year, he said, "I just supported it to get it out of sight."</i>	The weathervane changes direction, and begins spinning to the right. However, it does not stop in any particular position. It just spins incessantly.	The squeaking becomes more frequent and the pitch gets particularly high.
17-23	<i>Which way will he blow next?</i>		
23-30	<i>On November 5, vote for Hubert Humphrey.</i>	A blue "HHH" logo filled with white stars appears against a red background.	The squeaking ceases and only the narrator is heard.

Right from the start, “Weathervane” begins to create expectations in its audience. The question posed in the first four seconds (“Ever noticed what happens to Nixon when the political winds blow?”) is clearly rhetorical, thus preparing audiences for not merely an answer, but a persuasive argument. The presence of this question, just like the presence of a particular event or scene in a work of fiction, readies the audience for the content to come. Thus, this constitutes what Kenneth Burke calls syllogistic form. Even more generally, the televisual cues present in the first few seconds of this ad prepare audiences for negative information about Richard Nixon. The narrator’s deep, almost damning voice, in combination with the dark, unflattering image of Nixon as a weathervane, lets the audience know they are about to witness an attack ad.

The narrator’s tone as he speaks the words, “Last year,” (beginning at the 4 second mark) suggests that a later clause or sentence will contradict, or at least alter the interpretation of, this statement. Sure enough, the next statement, beginning at 8 seconds, uses the phrase “This year,” and delivers the promised contradiction/alteration, therefore meeting audience expectations. These two statements are part of the same whole; two sides of the same coin. Together they *form* a complete idea: Nixon has contradicted himself, or otherwise changed his mind, on the topic of the 1968 Civil Rights Bill and the open housing laws.

In order to best understand these ads, it is useful to develop a vocabulary with which the form of these ads can be described. Like so many other flip-flop ads, “Weathervane” does not use the term “flip-flop.” Although the explicit content of the ad does not say “flip-flop,” the form screams it. The terms “flip” and “flop” are used here as labels for the two most important pieces of the flip-flop form. Some statements in an ad

such as “Weathervane” can be labeled as “flips,” while others are “flops.” For instance, the statement, “Last year, he said, ‘I oppose a federal open housing law,’” at seconds 4 through 8 constitutes what may be called a “flip.” A “flip,” in the context of a televised political advertisement, is the introduction of a statement or policy position from a rival candidate. In many situations, the term “flip” symbolizes change or contradiction. However, in the vocabulary proposed here, the term “flip” refers to the establishment or setting up of an idea—it sets the foundation on which a “flop” is based. The “flip” lets the audience know what political issue is of importance in a political ad and communicates at least one position a rival candidate has held on the issue.

Due to the audience’s sense of both progressive and repetitive form, every “flip” signals an upcoming “flop.” A “flop” is a statement or policy position from the same rival candidate that presents itself immediately after a “flip.” The “flop” either directly contradicts, or is designed to appear as though it contradicts, the “flip.” In the case of Humphrey’s “Weathervane” ad, the statement, “This year he said, ‘I support the 1968 Civil Rights Bill with open housing,’” constitutes a flop. This particular ad has one flip and one flop. Although the flip and the flop certainly work in tandem to please audience’s desire for completion, it would be a stretch to claim that this commercial derives much of its rhetorical force from a powerful rhythm. However, later ads, some of which will be analyzed in this section, repeat the flip-flop sequence and most certainly benefit from a compelling flip-flop cadence.

Notably, the visuals in this commercial, just like the visuals in so many other flip-flop spots, change with every verbal “flip” and “flop,” thus reinforcing the verbal dimension of the ad. In fact, the visual dimension of these ads can be said to use the

same exact form as the verbal. Images in flip-flop spots tend to alternate between two images that roughly represent the opposite of one another. For instance, the “Weathervane” ad uses an image of Nixon being blown to the right as its visual “flip.” The image of Nixon turning to his left that comes next can be labeled a “flop” because it constitutes the reverse, or opposite of the “flip.”

There are occasions in the ad when the visuals “flip” and “flop,” even when the verbal does not. For instance, the claim, “Again this year, he said, ‘I just supported it to get it out of sight,’” does not contradict the statement directly preceding it. Because it does not contradict the previous statement, it is not a flop. Nonetheless, the visuals that accompany this statement suggest a turnabout. Nixon’s image turns to face left before the utterance is complete. Later, even when the narrator is finished describing Nixon’s inconsistencies, the weathervane spins indiscriminately. The visual therefore implies contradiction even though the ad’s verbal content offers no additional evidence of inconsistency.

There is a point during the commercial where the weathervane is spinning continuously and the sound effects reach an irritating squeal. This production feature creatively communicates a state of panic, uncertainty, and general unpleasantness. However, before the ad is complete, the squealing sound ceases and quiet is restored just in time for a large, brightly colored “HHH” logo to fill the television screen. The awful, high-pitched squeaking sound and all its accompanying uncertainty establishes a need for resolution, which is satisfied in the fashion of Democratic candidate Hubert Humphrey, who is meant to embody a refreshing, calming alternative to Nixon.

### **Reagan’s Side by Side**

The visuals that make “Weathervane” so distinct are almost entirely unedited.

The shot of the weathervane is established with a zoom out, but the weathervane’s motion is continuous--there are no cuts or breaks in the video. Later presidential TV ads, such as Ronald Reagan’s 1984 “Side By Side” spot, have made greater use of editing in order to strengthen these ads’ rhythms and emphasize opponents’ inconsistencies. The “Side by Side” ad, like many flip-flop ads, splits an opposing political candidate into two distinct persons, creating an argument between two versions of the same candidate. More specifically, this Reagan spot compares “Candidate Mondale” and “Senator Mondale.” Not surprisingly, the two Mondales hold different positions on important political issues.

Time (s)	Verbal	Visual	Audible
0-2	<i>How do two presidential candidates stand on the issues?</i>	A black screen with plain white, centered text reads, “How do two presidential candidates stand on the issues?”	*There is no sound, other than the narrator’s voice, in this spot.
2-7	<i>Candidate Mondale has promised to reduce government spending.</i>	A still photograph of Walter Mondale smiling widely, backlit against a black background appears.	

7-12	<i>But Senator Mondale voted to increase government spending 12 years in a row.</i>	Soft fade to a still photograph of Mondale, also backlit against black background, but now frowning.
12-16	<i>Candidate Mondale has promised a strong national defense.</i>	Mondale smiling.
16-21	<i>But Senator Mondale voted to weaken defenses 18 times.</i>	Mondale frowning.
21-24	<i>Of course, there's one area where they agree.</i>	Mondale smiling.
24-26	<i>They both stand for increased taxes.</i>	Mondale frowning briefly, then Mondale smiling again.
26-30	<i>That's why we're voting for Reagan.</i>	A still image of Reagan, indoors with candles in the background is displayed.

		Overlying text reads “President Reagan: Leadership That’s Working.”	
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Like the “Weathervane” ad, “Side by Side” opens with a question. By omitting the word “the” from its sentence construction, the ad alerts audiences that this may not be a genuine comparison between two political candidates. The ad is not about how *the* two presidential candidates compare on the issues, it is about how the same candidate can’t keep his positions straight. Of course, this may not be evident to every viewer. Undiscerning audiences may not recognize the ad’s “gag” or “catch” until seconds 7 to 12, when, after having already been introduced to “Candidate Mondale’s” position (accompanied by an image of Mondale), they are next introduced to “Senator Mondale’s” position (accompanied by a different image of Mondale). This alternating pattern establishes a rhythm wherein *Candidate* Mondale’s positions (and the accompanying photograph of Mondale smiling) can be labeled as “flips,” and all of *Senator* Mondale’s positions (accompanied by a photo of Mondale frowning), represent “flops.” The Candidate’s positions and the Senator’s positions, although contradictory, are perfectly paired, not unlike a rhymed couplet in poetry. They complete one another, rely on one another for meaning, and most importantly, they are able to best please or satisfy audiences only because of their relationship to one another.

By the second “flip” in the “Side by Side” ad (seconds 12 through 16), audiences are primed and ready to hear about Senator Mondale again. They expect the visual image of Mondale to change and they expect Senator Mondale’s position to contradict Candidate Mondale’s position. Of course, the message delivers on these expectations. The rhythm in this instance is seductive. The “Side by Side” spot pulls audiences into the message, guiding viewers so enticingly to a set of expectations that audiences may derive additional satisfaction from their own apparent ability to predict the ad’s next images and utterances.

By 21 seconds into the “Side By Side” ad, the audience has seen Mondale smile, then frown, then smile, then frown again. At this point, the ad abandons its emphasis on contradictions in order to note a point of agreement between the two Mondales: “They both stand for increased taxes.” Though the narrator is no longer concerned with flip-flops, the visual continues to alternate between a photo of Mondale smiling and photo of Mondale frowning. The visuals continue to flip and flop, maintaining the form of the previous 19 seconds and attempting to make Mondale look patently ridiculous. The spot’s final image, a still photograph of Ronald Reagan, serves as a steady, reliable, reassuring contrast to Mondale’s constant transformations. The “we” language with which the ad closes represents an attempt to speak on behalf of voters or otherwise create a sense of identification between the announcer and his listeners. Thus, “Side By Side begins and ends very similarly to “Weathervane.”

### **H. W. Bush’s Gray Dot**

George H. W. Bush’s 1992 “Gray Dot” advertisement bears striking similarities to the Reagan ad described above. The message splits Bush’s opponent, Bill Clinton,

into two separate candidates who cannot seem to agree on anything. The ad also generates persuasive appeal by using the same flip-flop rhythm as the Reagan ad. What makes “Gray Dot” different is that it waits until the very end of the message to reveal that these politicians are actually the same person. In this transcription, I have used brackets and bold letters to note each “flip” and “flop.”

Time (s)	Verbal	Visual	Audible
0-9	<i>The presidential candidate on the left stood for military action in the Persian Gulf [FLIP], while the candidate on the right agreed with those who opposed it [FLOP].</i>	A split screen includes videos of two men’s bodies. The face and head belonging to each body is blocked by two separate, large, gray dots. The person on the left wears a blue suit with a red and white striped tie. The person on the right wears a black suit with a blue, green, and white striped tie.	The muffled din of multiple voices speaking at once can just barely be discerned behind the narrator’s voice.
9-11	<i>He says he wouldn’t rule out term limits, [FLIP]</i>	Man in red/white tie is shown speaking, gesturing.	
11-14	<i>while he says he is personally opposed to term limits. [FLOP]</i>	Man in blue/green/white is shown speaking, gesturing.	

14-16	<i>This candidate was called up for military service, [FLIP]</i>	Man in red/white tie is shown speaking, gesturing.	
16-19	<i>while this one claims he wasn't. [FLOP]</i>	Man in blue/green/white is shown speaking, gesturing.	
19-20	<i>One of these candidates is Bill Clinton.</i>	Return to split screen of both men. The grey dot on the left is removed, revealing Bill Clinton's face.	
20-24	<i>Unfortunately, so is the other.</i>	The gray dot on the right is removed, revealing Bill Clinton's face. The video freezes as the two still photos of Clinton form mirror images of one another.	
24-30	<i>Clinton: There is a simple explanation for why this happened.</i>	Still image of both Clintons remains on screen.	The commotion of a crowd can be heard beneath Clinton's voice, which is now entirely clear.

Visually and verbally, the ad sets up “the presidential candidate on the left” and “the presidential candidate on the right” as opposites. Audiences are primed to expect that the two candidates, who are portrayed as being in a debate with one another, will disagree with one another. In accordance with Kenneth Burke’s notion of form, the ad delivers on the expectations. The ad establishes a rhythm that lets audiences know exactly what to expect at any given point in the advertisement. For instance, when a voter hears the narrator say, “this candidate was called up for military service” (the flip), they will know, by virtue of the rhythm that has already been established, that the following sentence or clause will be contradictory. Their expectations are fulfilled when the announcer follows up by saying, “while this one claims he wasn't.”

Note that Clinton’s first flip-flop regarding the Persian Gulf War (0 to 9 seconds) represents a genuine contradiction or inconsistency on an important political matter. Even if political operatives had to take interpretive liberties with Clinton’s words in order to make these claims (these are not direct quotes from Clinton), such a seeming contradiction certainly catches one’s attention. However, the second flip-flop, which focuses on Clinton’s position on term limits, has arguably less relevance to the 1992 presidential election. This alleged flip-flop is included in the message merely because it contributes to the impression that Clinton is inconsistent on multiple fronts. Because the ad’s rhythm has gathered good momentum at this point, audiences are probably less likely to scrutinize the specific content of each “flip” and each “flop” in much detail. Viewers may get caught up in the force of this form, perhaps even lulled into complacency by it, thus going along for the ride. These claims about term limits are

given the form of flip-flops, and they are therefore very likely to be interpreted as flip-flops.

The prevailing flip-flop rhythm also makes the issue of Clinton's military service seem more like a matter of inconsistency than it really is. Seconds 14 to 16 (the flip), in combination with seconds 16 to 19 (the flop), do not technically accuse Clinton of being inconsistent or indecisive—they accuse him of being a liar. While it is tempting to criticize the Bush campaign for using deceptive forms to catalog this attack on Clinton's military service as a flip-flop, there is more going on in this ad. Flip-flop attacks strike at the heart of rival candidates' trustworthiness by creating uncertainty as to whether that rival candidate is ever really saying something they believe. By repeating the word "said," this spot reminds audiences that flip-flopping is a communication phenomenon—not only because flip-flops manifest themselves in candidates' messages, but because flip-flop attacks are designed to influence the way voters think about rival candidates' past, present, and future communication.

Although I have not tagged statements such as "One of these candidates is Bill Clinton" (seconds 19 to 20) and "Unfortunately so is the other," (seconds 20 to 24) with either a "flip" or a "flop" label, it is worth noting that these statements were presented in the same rhythm as the other information in the ad and were punctuated by visual reinforcement (removal of the gray dots). In fact, the ad's rhythm is not technically broken until the last frame, when the dual images of Clinton freeze and Clinton's own voice ("There is a simple explanation for why this happened"), reinforces the idea that he is sly, slippery, and untrustworthy. In each of the flip-flop ads analyzed so far, the final few seconds of each message are particularly potent because they mark the point where

audiences are shaken from the docility that such a strong rhythm can induce. When the ads conclude, the audience is asked to make a conclusion regarding the character of the ad’s target, and often enough, the character of the ad’s sponsor as well.

### **W. Bush’s “Windsurfing”**

George W. Bush’s 2004 attack ad titled “Windsurfing” makes use of an ill-advised John Kerry photo-op to highlight Kerry’s contradictory positions on several relevant political issues. The transcript below, labeled with flips and flops to emphasize the ad’s rhythm, indicates that the ad includes more “flips” and “flops” than the other spots analyzed here.

Time (s)	Verbal	Visual	Audible
0-3	<i>I’m George W. Bush and I approve this message.</i>	Video of Bush and wife, shot at a low angle, standing on a front porch on a sunny day.	No sound other than Bush’s voice.
3-5	<i>In which direction would John Kerry lead?</i>	Clip of Kerry (profiled, facing right) standing on a beach in wet suit with water behind him.	“The Blue Danube” by Johan Strauss II plays.
5-7	<i>Kerry voted for the Iraq war, [FLIP]</i>	Video of Kerry standing on a windsurfing board, moving to the right. The words “Iraq War” are centered at the top of the	

		screen. The word “Supported” fades in behind him on the left side of the screen.
7-9	<i>opposed it, [FLOP]</i>	Video of Kerry windsurfing, now pointing left. The word “Opposed” fades in behind him on the right side of the screen.
8-9	<i>supported it, [FLIP]</i>	Kerry windsurfing to right. Word “Supported” fades in.
9-10	<i>and now opposes it again. [FLOP]</i>	Kerry windsurfing to left. Word “Opposed” fades in.
10-15	<i>He bragged about voting for the \$87 billion to support our troops [FLIP]</i>	A centered heading now reads, “\$87 Billion to Support Troops.” Kerry windsurfs to the right. The word “Supported” fades in.
15-17	<i>before he voted</i>	Kerry windsurfs to left.

	<i>against it</i> <b>[FLOP]</b>	The word “Opposed fades in.
17-19	<i>He voted for education reform,</i> <b>[FLIP]</b>	A centered heading now reads, “Education Reform.” Kerry windsurfs to the right. The word “Supported” fades in.
19-21	<i>and now opposes it.</i> <b>[FLOP]</b>	Kerry windsurfs to the left. The word “Opposed fades in.
21-26	<i>He claims he's against increasing Medicare premiums</i> <b>[FLIP]</b> , <i>but voted five times to do so.</i> <b>[FLOP]</b>	A centered heading now reads, “Increasing Medicare Premiums.” Kerry windsurfs to the right. The word “Opposed” fades in on the right and then fades out. The word “Supported” fades in on the other side of the screen.
26-27	<i>John Kerry.</i>	Clip of Kerry (profiled,

		facing left) in wet suit with water behind him.	
27-30	<i>Whichever way the wind blows.</i>	Kerry surfs to the right [ <b>FLIP</b> ], before the image is replaced with video of Kerry surfing to the left [ <b>FLOP</b> ].	“The Blue Danube” reaches its triumphant, emphatic conclusion.

In addition to including more flip-flops than other ads, Bush’s ad makes excellent use of classical music. “The Blue Danube” brings at least three important qualities to the typical flip-flop ad equation. First, the rhythmic, percussive nature of this music (and more generally, most music) enhances the already distinct flip-flop cadence. Second, the bouncy nature of the song itself makes Kerry look especially preposterous as he changes directions on the surf board. Third, the song’s triumphant conclusion brings a strong sense of finality to the 30-second spot, punctuating the arguments and providing an additional sense of completion or satisfaction for the viewer.

The “Windsurfing” ad begins to create expectations when, like many other flip-flop ads, it poses a question. Audiences expect that the remainder of the ad will answer the question. Furthermore, when they see an uncomplimentary photograph of Kerry at the beach, audiences are likely cued to the fact that this is a negative and perhaps humorous message. Soon enough, the rhythm is established, whereby every utterance about Kerry (each “flip”) creates the expectation of a contradictory utterance about Kerry (a “flop”). Every “flop” satisfies the appetite created by the preceding “flip.” The repetition of this

pattern is strong enough that audiences may also expect a new “flip” after every “flop.” In other words, audiences can ready themselves for a new instance of inconstancy, a new “flip” and “flop” once the previous couplet has been completed. Because of the way this ad propels viewers forward, it is a rather masterful example of progressive form.

Flip-flop spots, because of their pronounced rhythm, can be said to share something in common with the rubber-thonged sandals of the same name. Flip-flop footwear works in such a way that the shoes swiftly strike against a person’s heel as they walk, generating a dull slapping noise. The right and left sides alternate turns with each stride, generating the distinct rhythm that gives this style of footwear its name. To summarize, the connection between shoes and televised political attacks is simple: The name of the thing is associated with the rhythm it produces. This makes the thing itself seem all the more internally consistent and intuitively correct.

Where ads that accuse candidates of being inconsistent are concerned, form (the flip-flop rhythm) echoes content (the charge of flip-flopping, or inconsistency). This powerful relationship between substance and presentation creates a commanding homology capable of pleasing and persuading audiences. The ads don’t just tell television viewers that a political candidate vacillates; it shows them with visuals and makes them experience it with an undeniable sense of rhythm. I would argue that one possible explanation for the increased popularity of the term “flip-flop” over the past few years is the abundance of televised political advertisements that use a flip-flop rhythm to communicate its message—even if these ads never use the term “flip-flop.” Still, the notion of “flip-flop” is as closely related with political candidates as it is with summer footwear. This study has focused on presidential ads for its analysis, but flip-flop ads are

also featured in gubernatorial, senatorial, congressional, and mayoral campaigns, thus enhancing their prominence as a feature of contemporary political communication.

The recurrence of flip-flop advertisements in political and popular culture has done at least two things for the form itself. First, it has created the potential for recognition of repetitive form. Because audiences have seen this type of advertisement on numerous occasions, they know what to expect from each ad and they know how to classify or categorize the messages. In short, they know a flip-flop ad when they see one. This activates numerous appetites and expectations that should ultimately be fulfilled by any competent flip-flop attack ad. A second, and related consequence of the persistence and easy recognition of flip-flop ads, is the potential for imitation. Even when evidence of an opponent's inconsistency is weak, savvy producers of political ads can bolster their attacks with flip-flop *form*, thus increasing the likelihood that the ad will be interpreted as a flip-flop ad and the rival candidate will be labeled a flip-flopper. Analysis of George Bush's anti-Clinton ad demonstrates how strong rhythm and form made the charges against Clinton look and feel like flip-flop allegations, even though they were not.

Documentarian Michael Moore, fueled by his dislike of the Bush Administration and the negative campaign they waged against John Kerry in 2004, recognized the potential that flip-flop ads have for imitation and therefore included a faux flip-flop ad in his 2009 film, *Slacker Uprising*. The film follows Moore as he raises controversy during a speaking tour that coincided with the 2004 presidential campaign. One segment of Moore's standard speech features a handful of fake political advertisements, each intended to mock the content and style of actual George W. Bush attack ads. One of the ads borrows the deep-rooted flip-flop form in order lampoon the Bush campaign for

pointing out Kerry’s inconsistencies on seemingly unimportant issues. More specifically, Moore’s ad directs phony criticism at Kerry for changing his mode of transportation over the years. Like the actual flip-flop ads discussed so far, the visuals in the fake commercial change in time with Moore’s narration. Moore’s tone is foreboding and the music ominously builds a feeling of doom and judgment. The visuals are synced with the narrator’s claims just like they would be in a “real” flip-flop ad.

Time (s)	Verbal	Visual	Audio
0-2	<i>John Kerry used to drive</i>	A black and white still photograph of Kerry on a talk show in the 1960s.	Music plays throughout the ad, providing a discernable rhythm, or pulse. Audience laughter punctuates each of Moore’s statements/ punchlines.
2-5	<i>a Chevrolet.</i> <b>[FLIP]</b>	Fade and zoom on a photograph of a blue 1970-something Chevrolet.	
5-9	<i>But then he drove a Ford.</i> <b>[FLOP]</b>	Fade and zoom on a photograph of a contemporary, yet	

		unadorned maroon Ford.
9-13	<i>Now he rides a bike. [FLOP]</i>	Fade and zoom on a photograph of Kerry in full bicycle gear, taking a sharp turn.
13-17	<i>How many more positions will John Kerry take?</i>	Fade and zoom on a photograph of Kerry windsurfing. Text “How many more positions will John Kerry take?” appears on top of photo.
17-22	<i>Vote Bush: He lets others do the driving.</i>	Fade and zoom on a photograph of George W. Bush in a golf cart with his father, waving at the camera. Text at bottom reads: “Paid for by the committee to elect the unelected President and approved by the Axis

		of Evil”	
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Moore’s fake ad is evidence of how both progressive and repetitive form have made flip-flop ads so recognizable. The ad begins with a “flip,” which may rightly be interpreted as the promise of a “flop.” Next, of course, the ad presents a “flop.” Moore’s tone of voice indicates at all times that there is more evidence to come, and that the full meaning of his message depends on his next words. Right down to the rhetorical question, “How many more positions will John Kerry take?”, this message parodies flip-flop ads. It also makes specific reference to George W. Bush’s “Windsurfing” ad by including a photograph of Kerry on his windsurfing board.

Moore’s fake ad derives its humor from the assumption that a political candidate’s decision to change modes of transportation is not a valid political issue. Moreover, it is not truly an indication of inconsistency to replace one’s vehicle every few years. Thus, it would seem ridiculous that anybody could be called a flip-flopper based on their choices of vehicle. However, recall that a 2008 Obama ad pointed out inconsistencies between opponent John McCain’s words and deeds by juxtaposing McCain’s claim to have always “bought American” with the fact that McCain owns a Lexus, a Volkswagon, and a Honda. Thus, Moore produced a humorous video that spoofed flip-flop ads by copying their form; but while trying to inject ridiculous content into his ad, Moore’s spot comes remarkably close to forecasting a future “real” presidential flip-flop attack. It seems that there is very little content that cannot be used to communicate the idea that one’s opponent is a flip-flopper, especially if the form is right.

Michael Moore intentionally replicated a recurring form to mock flip-flop ads in general, and George W. Bush in particular. However, there also exist texts that use the flip-flop form explored here without consciously trying to mimic political campaign advertisements. Such texts are excellent evidence of the intuitive link between the form and content of these ads. The popular Katy Perry song, “Hot N’ Cold” once again serves as an instructive example. As previously argued, the lyrics of this song are designed to explain all the ways in which a former romantic partner is inconsistent, unpredictable, and unstable. Of course, there is no visual component to this song, but the flip-flop rhythm is so distinct that its requisite components (the “flip” and the “flop”) can be charted just like a political advertisement. Because the chorus repeats so often, the following representation of the song’s lyrics does not include an indicator of time. Still, each flip and flop has been noted here with brackets:

You're hot **[FLIP]** then you're cold **[FLOP]**

You're yes **[FLIP]** then you're no **[FLOP]**

You're in **[FLIP]** and you're out **[FLOP]**

You're up **[FLIP]** and you're down **[FLOP]**

You're wrong **[FLIP]** when it's right **[FLOP]**

It's black **[FLIP]** and it's white **[FLOP]**

We fight, we break up **[FLIP]**

We kiss, we make up **[FLOP]**

You, you don't really wanna stay, no **[FLIP]**

You, but you don't really wanna go, oh **[FLOP]** (Luke, Martin, & Perry, 2008)

Lyrically, every “flip” is matched by its opposite, its counterpart, its “flop.” Because this text takes the form of a song, the rhythmic nature of this form is made even more evident. A form that pairs contradictory behaviors, qualities, or even just words in a consistent, rhythmic pattern helps emphasize the sense of inconsistency that these texts aim to convey.

Although the form and content of flip-flop ads are incredibly complimentary, these ads also manage to embody a peculiar paradox. This analysis has demonstrated how flip-flop ads promote and then satisfy audience expectations. However, the ads also create uncertainty about rival political candidates. Political flip-flop commercials play on audience anxieties by making particular candidates appear risky and dangerous. The ability to simultaneously raise anxieties and satisfy appetites is no simple task. Similarly, it is interesting to note that although the form of flip-flop ads is very predictable, they are nonetheless designed to create uncertainty.

A final way in which flip-flop ads enact Burke’s concept of form is via their rough problem-solution order. This is a different variation on form than the previously described flip-flop rhythm. Flip-flop spots are devoted primarily to describing a problem—Candidate X is inconsistent. However, the final few seconds of many of the flip-flop commercials analyzed here do a satisfactory job of providing resolution by offering a stable alternative to Candidate X. For instance, the first 25 seconds of Reagan’s “Side By Side” spot describe the ways in which Walter Mondale is a flip-flopper. The final five seconds of the ad, on the other hand, present a reassuring photograph of Ronald Reagan as the announcer says, “That’s why we’re voting for Reagan.” Similarly, Humphrey’s “Weathervane” commercial is devoted almost entirely

to describing the extent of Nixon's inconsistency, but in its closing seconds, offers a blue "HHH" logo over which the announcer declares, "On November 5, vote for Hubert Humphrey." Michael Moore's phony flip-flop ad uses this same problem-solution order. Understood as a problem-solution form, the flip-flopper is portrayed as a problem—a cause of uncertainty and anxiety. Thus, although the ad is arguably not about Candidate Y, who only appears for a few brief seconds, Candidate Y is the reassuring solution to the problem. Although these ads encourage uncertainty, they almost always reach a tranquil, reassuring conclusion.

### **Argumentation in Flip-Flop Ads**

In order to fully appreciate the progression of ideas in flip-flop commercials, it is necessary to look at not only the form of each ad, but also the argumentative structure that holds these messages together. Although some political communication scholars would claim that televised political advertising does not argue and that traditional argumentation theory is not the most appropriate lens for analyzing and interpreting spots (Jamieson, 1992), the analysis presented in this section serves as excellent evidence to the contrary. Flip-flop ads argue; and there is much to be learned by examining them through the lens of argumentation theory. Whether the ads present data that leads to a claim, or presents data in support of a claim that has already been made (or assumed), these ads can be deconstructed and their component parts labeled as "data" or "claims." Typically, the claim of any given flip-flop spot is some variant on the idea that "Candidate X is inconsistent." The following section applies Toulmin's (1958) work on argumentation to diagram and discuss the argumentative structure of five representative flip-flop ads.

The argumentative structure of flip-flop ads is interesting because each piece of evidence is comprised of two utterances, whereas in most arguments, a single statement may constitute sufficient evidence. For instance, if a candidate were to suggest that their opponent is weak on issues of military defense, they could choose to support their claim by describing an instance in which the opponent voted or spoke against funding for America's armed services. For that matter, they might describe multiple instances of such a vote by saying something like, "My opponent voted against military funding 12 times." This is still one single utterance, and one piece of data in support of a particular claim. In the context of flip-flop ads, which argue that an opponent is inconsistent, a single utterance will not suffice as evidence. In order to support a claim that an opposing candidate is inconsistent, a politician must offer two utterances or establish two different facts. Naturally, these utterances must contradict one another. All this is to say that each piece of evidence in a flip-flop spot is comprised of a "flip" and its contradicting "flop." However, the language of form will be abandoned here in order to better focus on the nature of argumentation in these ads. Stevenson's "Platform Double Talk," Johnson's "Barry, Barry," Humphrey's "Bubbles," Nixon's "McGovern Turnaround" and George W. Bush's "Windsurfing" spots serve as exemplary artifacts with which to critically analyze argumentation in flip-flop spots

### **Stevenson's "Platform Double Talk"**

The first flip-flop spot analyzed in terms of argumentation is "Platform Double Talk" from Adlai Stevenson's 1952 presidential campaign. As the title implies, one of the primary claims which this ad argues is that the GOP engages in "doubletalk." This claim is made explicit a little over halfway through the spot when an audience member

shouts at the two-headed Mr. Mac-G-O-P, “That’s doubletalk!” A similar claim is made at the end of the ad when each head looks at the other and exclaims “you’re confused.” Other than the narration provided by the Master of Ceremonies in this ad, the entirety of the text is devoted to presenting evidence in support of the claim that the GOP’s policy positions are inconsistent or difficult to discern.

The “Platform Double Talk” spot presents its evidence in the form of paired, yet conflicting policy positions. For instance, when asked about Korea, GOP Head #1 says, “We don’t belong in Korea. Let the Commies have it,” and GOP Head #2 says, “We should expand the war—Open a second front in China.” In the structure of most arguments, two utterances as discrepant as these would probably constitute two distinct pieces of supporting information. However, in the case of flip-flop arguments, these two utterances actually comprise just one reason in support of the general claim that the GOP is “confused” and engages in “doubletalk.” The presence of only one policy position can never, in its own right, serve as evidence of inconsistency. Each policy position must be paired with a second policy position that is simultaneously complementary and contradictory—complementary because the utterances constitute evidence only when they are read in relation to one another, but contradictory because they are constructed to appear mutually exclusive or irreconcilable. In fact, the notion that these positions are mutually exclusive ought to be labeled here as the “warrant.” Only if an auditor believes that these remarks genuinely conflict with one another will this evidence support the conclusion that the GOP engages in double talk. The warrant is made explicit here when, immediately following the statements about Korea, an animated audience member tells

Mr. Mac-G-O-P, “Wait a minute, we can’t do both!” In other words, the two policy utterances are contradictory.

Although the two statements about Korea may only represent one piece of data, there nonetheless exist additional data in the “Platform Double Talk” spot. For instance, on the issue of aid to Europe, Mr. Mac-G-O-P offers two more conflicting statements. Head # 1 says, “I’ll personally tear down the iron curtain,” while Head #2 says, “Not another nickel down that rathole! Let the Commies have it.” These two forward-looking policy utterances, when decoded in association with one another, create another piece of evidence in support of the claim that the GOP engages in doubletalk. In fact, just for good measure, an animated audience member, in response to these utterances about Europe, shouts, “That’s doubletalk!” The warrant in this case (the idea that these two positions are mutually exclusive and therefore irreconcilable) is implicit. Figure 5.1 diagrams the entire argumentative structure of “Platform Double Talk.” Although not every textual fragment from the ad is presented in the diagram, the components that build the ad’s main argument are displayed.

Flip-flop ads such as “Platform Double Talk” use *policy* evidence in order to support *character* claims. The claim that Mr. Mac-G-O-P (a stand-in for Dwight Eisenhower) is “confused” relates to a personal quality. However, all of the individual statements in support of this claim, about both Korea and Europe, take the form of statements about general policy goals. This particular ad is even more interesting because although the claim is very real, the evidence borders on hypothetical. Unlike more recent flip-flop spots that either quote or paraphrase political candidates, or present video and audio evidence of a rival candidate’s positions in their own words, “Platform

Double Talk” makes no attempt to substantiate the legitimacy of the policy positions it presents. Viewers may tolerate such ambiguity because, after all, Mr. Mac-G-O-P is not an actual person with a record of actual policy statements—he’s a cartoon character with two heads.

### **Johnson’s “Barry, Barry”**

The argumentation in Johnson’s 1964 “Barry, Barry” ad can be mapped in a similar fashion to the “Platform Double Talk” spot. Importantly, the commercial’s main claim is not immediately obvious. The ad opens by saying, “It’s a funny thing about Barry Goldwater,” but this is a rather vague accusation. Toward the end of the ad, after presenting an abundance of information about Barry Goldwater, the narrator hints at its main claim by stating, “There is only one Lyndon Johnson.” Notably, Johnson’s name appears nowhere else in the entire commercial. Thus, if we accepted this statement about Johnson as the ad’s main claim, absolutely none of the evidence would make sense. The evidence does not support the idea that there is only one Lyndon Johnson—the evidence supports the idea that there is more than one Barry Goldwater. The dominant message is that Barry Goldwater is inconsistent. Of course, it is not at all a stretch to assume that many voters, when confronted with the context presented by the advertisement, interpret “there is only one Lyndon Johnson” to mean “there is more than one Barry Goldwater.” Even though it is not stated, this is certainly the conclusion toward which the ad moves.

In support of the argument that Goldwater is inconsistent, the ad presents a host of information about Goldwater. As in the “Platform Double Talk” ad, the utterances here are presented in complementary/contradictory pairs. Although most of the utterances in the ad take the form of policy statements, this is not true of all the textual fragments

assembled here. For instance, the first piece of data consists of the statement that, “Six different times he told the world he wants to make Social Security voluntary” and followed by this statement’s counterpart: “Then he turns around [poster flips] and says he never said that.” Notably, Goldwater’s insistence that he “never said that” barely qualifies as a policy claim. Although it contradicts the statement before it, it is short on policy details. Not until slightly later in the ad does the argumentative structure of the ad begin to present evidence that is more clearly comprised of two definite and distinct policy statements. For instance, the ad pairs the statement, “He voted against the tax cut,” with the statement, “Then he turns around and says he wants to cut taxes” in order to shape a complete piece of evidence in support of the claim that Goldwater is inconsistent. The former utterance constitutes a statement about Goldwater’s past deeds, while the latter statement discusses general goals. Both past deeds and general goals utterances constitute discourse about policy (Benoit, 2007).

Most flip-flop spots pair two utterances about policy to formulate a single piece of supporting material. However, at least one piece of data in “Barry, Barry” is comprised of two statements about Goldwater’s *character* and thus represents a departure from the data in so many of the other flip-flop spots. The ad cites Goldwater’s 1964 Nomination Acceptance Address as saying, “extremism in defense of liberty is no vice,” then immediately quotes Goldwater’s incongruous remarks at a 1964 Republican Unity conference: “I seek the support of no extremist.” These comments concern Goldwater’s ideals and temperament, and are rightly the province of character discourse. This data demonstrates that although most political television spots do not use utterances about character to build flip-flop arguments, it is certainly possible. The five pieces of

evidence, comprised of ten individual statements about Goldwater and leading to the conclusion that Goldwater is inconsistent, are mapped in Figure 5.2. Notably, most of the evidence here takes the form of direct quotes from Goldwater or are reasonable summations of his actual policy positions, rather than the sort of hypothetical examples presented in “Platform Double Talk.”

### **Humphrey’s “Bubbles”**

Hubert Humphrey’s 1968 “Bubbles” spot attacks his opponents, Richard Nixon and George Wallace, on the grounds that, “Some men will tell you any thing, while other men are interested in the truth.” The evidence presented in the ad focuses exclusively on the first clause of this sentence by presenting evidence of instances in which Nixon’s and Wallace’s campaign promises conflict with their actual policy positions. Perhaps because the audience will take for granted that “some men are interested in the truth,” or because they are expected to immediately assume that Humphrey is such a man, no evidence is presented in support of the second clause. Thus, the ad’s foremost claim is that Nixon and Wallace will tell you anything, even if it is untrue. In support of this claim, the ad offers a litany of conflicting policy positions.

In the same breath that the announcer notes, “Mr. Wallace talks about law and order” he also says, “but under the Wallace administration, Alabama had the highest murder rate in the country.” Thus, Governor Wallace’s home state’s high murder rate contradicts his general goal of instilling law and order in the United States. Together, these two claims form one piece of evidence in support of the greater claim that Wallace is inconsistent, or more specific to the text here, “will tell” voters “anything.” Nixon is attacked similarly in this ad, as the announcer claims, “Mr. Nixon wants to offer security

to older citizens, but Mr. Nixon opposes Medicare.” This single sentence includes two apparently irreconcilable policy positions as evidence of Nixon’s willingness to say whatever it might take to get elected. Again in this ad, the idea that each pair of facts is contradictory, or that the candidate can’t have it both ways, serves as the argument’s warrant. Presumably, one who wants security for older Americans cannot or should not oppose Medicare. Multiple instances of evidence are used against Wallace and Nixon, respectively. This ad is unique because it attacks two candidates at one time, and for the same reason. That both Wallace and Nixon could be so readily attacked for inconsistency is additional evidence of the pliability and universality of flip-flop charges. Figure 5.3 treats the claim that Wallace and Nixon will say anything as one argument, rather than two separate arguments about individual politicians.

Diagramming flip-flop arguments, and more specifically, pairing multiple policy utterances and labeling them as one piece of evidence, makes it easier to evaluate the soundness of each flip-flop argument. For instance, the diagram of the “Bubbles” spot highlights some important problems in the ad’s reasoning. The first piece of evidence cited in the spot (“Mr. Nixon pledges he’ll end the war in Vietnam but Spiro Agnew says Nixon has no plan.”), depends entirely on Agnew’s perceived credibility. The utterances do not suggest that Nixon said one thing, but did or said another. Instead, the utterances suggest that Nixon said one thing but Agnew said something that makes Nixon’s assertion less likely. In other words, the two utterances are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and therefore constitute weak evidence in support of the ad’s overall claim. Other evidence in the spot is similarly flawed. For instance, the spot pairs the claim “Mr. Nixon tells us he’s ready to meet the challenge of international politics” with the claim

“but at home Nixon will not even meet Hubert Humphrey on TV.” The warrant here, that these claims are mutually exclusive, is weak. In fact, these claims barely seem related at all. Without further explanation, it is difficult to see how Nixon’s ability to manage international politics is contradicted by his alleged determination not to debate Hubert Humphrey on television. Because most viewers probably don’t use particularly stringent logical standards when interpreting televised political ads, flip-flop spots are able to get away with presenting flawed arguments. The aforementioned form of these ads also makes it more difficult to spot such a logical inconsistency. After analyzing the argumentative structure of a few more flip-flop ads, this analysis will turn to a discussion of outright fallacies employed by flip-flop ads.

### **Nixon’s “McGovern Turnaround”**

When diagramed as an argument, Richard Nixon’s 1972 “McGovern Turnaround” spot is typical of the bulk of flip-flop spots because it uses policy evidence to support conclusions about character. The commercial makes no explicit claims about its target, George McGovern. In this sense, it is enthymematic—its primary claim is unspoken. The closest the ad gets to forthrightly claiming that McGovern is inconsistent is the rhetorical question that concludes the ad. Repeating the language of the spot which summarizes McGovern’s various positions throughout the years, the narrator concludes by saying, “Last year. This year. The question is: What about next year?” Written as a statement rather than a rhetorical question, this concluding sentence essentially declares, “We don’t know where McGovern will stand next year.” In support of the conclusion that McGovern is indecisive, the ad offers evidence in the form of paired policy positions.

The first piece of evidence offered in the “McGovern Turnaround” spot is comprised of McGovern’s conflicting positions on the issue of unilateral withdrawal of American troops in Vietnam. The first utterance in the ad claims that “In 1967, Senator George McGovern said he was not an advocate of unilateral troop withdrawal of our troops from Vietnam.” The complementary/contradictory counterpart to this statement states simply, “Now of course he is [in favor of unilateral troop withdrawal].” Together, these two utterances form a single piece of evidence in support of the claim that McGovern is indecisive. Another piece of evidence is constructed using two utterances concerning McGovern’s position on the legalization of marijuana. First, the ad notes that, “Last year the Senator suggested regulating marijuana along the same lines as alcohol, which means legalizing it.” Next, the ad tells viewers, “Now he’s against legalizing it and says he always has been.” This is a second piece of data in support of the ad’s primary claim. A third piece of data is comprised of two statements regarding McGovern’s welfare policy, a fourth piece of data is constructed by two references to McGovern’s plan for an inheritance tax, and a fifth piece of evidence is built on two statements regarding McGovern’s plan for busing. Altogether, this ad uses four pieces of evidence, built on 8 individual utterances in support of one general claim. The structure of the argument is presented in Figure 5.4.

### **W. Bush’s “Windsurfing”**

All of the ads discussed in this section use powerful visual materials to reinforce the idea that an opposing candidate is inconsistent. The texts of these ads feature two-headed cartoons (“Platform Double Talk”), spinning images of candidates (“Barry, Barry” and “McGovern Turnaround”), and bubbles popping (“Bubbles”). The final flip-

flop to be analyzed for its argumentative structure, George W. Bush's "Windsurfing" ad, is no exception, as it features images of John Kerry on a windsurfing board flip-flopping back and forth. Thus far, the ads that have been analyzed according to their rhetorical form have not been examined in terms of argumentative structure. Importantly, this is not because the particular ads cannot be fruitfully analyzed with either set of terms. In fact, the anti-Kerry "Windsurfing" ad is analyzed here at least in part to demonstrate the multitude of ways that a particular flip-flop spot can be analyzed.

Understood as an argument, "Windsurfing" is comprised of ten utterances that build four pieces of evidence, supporting one overarching claim. The warrant in "Windsurfing," like the warrant in other flip-flop ads, is that the paired utterances are contradictory or mutually exclusive. The implicit claim in this ad is that John Kerry is inconsistent. The ad gets at this claim by opening with the question, "In which direction would John Kerry lead?" and closes with the statement, "John Kerry: Anyway which way the wind blows." Thus, the claim here could also be interpreted as, "John Kerry is directionless," or "John Kerry is indecisive" or "John Kerry is a weak leader." This spot is diagrammed in Figure 5.5.

Although most of the evidence examined so far in this chapter has been defined by a pair of two conflicting policy positions, the first piece of data offered by the "Windsurfing" ad can actually be interpreted as using four different utterances. The sentence claims, "Kerry voted for the Iraq War, opposed it, supported it, and now opposes it again." By itself, the statement "Kerry voted for the Iraq war" does not support the claim that Kerry is inconsistent. However, the addition of the phrase "opposed it" certainly does support the claim. The next two clauses ("supported it" and

“and now opposes it again”) reinforce his inconsistency on the matter of the Iraq war, demonstrating the magnitude of his directionlessness. However, the two claims are about the same topic, and are not necessarily a new “flip-flop.” Kerry’s flip-flop on whether or not to vote for an \$87 billion bill to fund American troops in Iraq constitutes the next piece of evidence, followed by his turnabouts on education and then Medicare. Each of these bits of supporting material is comprised of two utterances. Some of these utterances are past-oriented (“He voted for education reform”) while others are concerned about the present (“and now opposes it”). Therefore the ad potentially appeals to voters’ sense of both prospective and retrospective voting.

As with the flip-flop spots already examined here, the warrant in “Windsurfing” does not always hold up. That is, upon closer scrutiny, the paired utterances that constitute any one piece of evidence are not mutually exclusive. For instance, Kerry’s infamous boast that he “actually voted for the \$87 billion before [he] voted against it” was definitely inarticulate but it is misleading to suggest that these utterances are untruthful or impossible. Like any bill in the United States Congress, the \$87 billion supplemental appropriation for military operations had to go through various committees, and there were multiple versions of the plan. As FactCheck.org (2004) noted, Kerry voted for an alternative version of the \$87 billion amendment that would have repealed tax cuts for the wealthiest 1% of Americans in order to pay for the \$87 billion. Later, when that measure was defeated, Kerry was one of 12 Democratic senators who voted against the \$87 billion. He claims to have voted against it in protest of George W. Bush’s handling of the Iraq War. In short, Kerry’s statement is logically consistent. However, that is not to say that audiences will recognize flaws in the argumentation of the

“Windsurfing” ad. If Kerry’s statement constitutes evidence of inconsistency in the mind of a particular auditor, the argument will stand.

Toulmin’s scheme for analyzing argumentation permits several notable observations regarding the texts analyzed here. First, flip-flop spots typically use evidence regarding a candidate’s policy positions in order to support claims about that candidate’s character. This intermingling of character and policy statements is not typically recognized in studies of political messages. In fact, many means of analyzing the content of political spots require that coders label entire ads as being about either policy or character. Flip-flop spots, because they include claims regarding both policy and character (although the character claim is often implicit), represent a challenge to such coding procedures. Other content analytic schemes for analyze political messages require that each individual utterance be coded as either policy or character. Although such schemes might better account for the individual utterances in a particular political advertisement, they may still fail to recognize the nuanced relationship between policy and character statements in a sub-genre of negative political advertising such as flip-flop spots. Numerous scholars have noted that policy and character are interrelated topics (Benoit & Wells, 1996; Devlin, 1977; Hacker, Zakahi, Giles, & McQuitty, 2000). For instance, a politician’s promise to help homeless people may, for some voters, serve as a reflection of that politician’s compassionate approach to people and government (character). This analysis of argumentation in flip-flop ads expands even further on how policy and character claims work together in political messages.

A second notable observation to emerge from an analysis of flip-flop argumentation is the use of paired policy utterances that are simultaneously

complementary and contradictory. In many, if not most arguments, a single, simple declarative sentence can serve as sufficient evidence in support of a claim. However, flip-flop spots, because they encourage audiences to conclude that an ad's target is inconsistent, require at least two utterances that contradict one another. In a flip-flop spot, a rival candidate's stated position on a political issue must be paired with a statement that expresses a contradictory position on that same political issue. Thus, the claim that an opponent is inconsistent is intriguing because it requires a different sort of evidence than most other argumentative claims.

Finally, the arguments diagrammed here point to the crucial role of the warrant in political argumentation. In flip-flop spots, each pair of utterances must be understood as contradictory, irreconcilable or otherwise mutually inconsistent in order to constitute evidence in support of the claim that a candidate is inconsistent. Of course, because all of the ads analyzed here include more than one piece of evidence, the failure of one pair of policy utterances to meet the requirements of the warrant does not mean that the entire argument will be disregarded.

### **Fallacies in Flip-Flop Ads**

Although televised flip-flop advertisements can be diagrammed as arguments, those arguments may still be fallacious. The most pressing question about flip-flop arguments concerns whether or not they ought to be classified as *ad hominem*. After discussing the five variants of *ad hominem* argumentation (abusive, circumstantial, bias, *tu quoque*, and poisoning the well) for the degree to which they explain flip-flop spots, the following section will also consider the degree to which flip-flop ads use appeals to ridicule, appeals to fear, and false dilemmas.

### **Abusive *Ad Hominem***

All *ad hominem* arguments attack an individual rather than an idea or argument. Abusive *ad hominem* utterances are unique because they attack a person's character—they essentially allege that the target is a bad person and that their arguments are invalid. More specifically, the abusive variant often attacks a person's capacity to tell the truth (Walton, 1998). Based on this description, it seems evident that flip-flop advertisements forward abusive *ad hominem* arguments. As the above analysis has demonstrated, the central claims of these ads concerns candidates' character. Sometimes the claim is explicit, such as in "Bubbles" when we are told that "some men will tell you anything." This ad attacks Nixon and Wallace instead of refuting their claims. More specifically, the ad questions both candidates' veracity. Viewers are instructed that they can't believe what Nixon and Wallace say, because Nixon and Wallace will say whatever they think might get them elected.

Ads that include only implicit claims about a candidate's character are also guilty of using abusive *ad hominem*. For instance, Nixon's "McGovern Turnaround" spot, as well as the incredibly similar "Vietnam Turnaround" ad, essentially claim that McGovern is indecisive when the ad asks, "where will he stand next year?" Indecision is not the quality of an argument or an idea, it is the quality of a human being. The ad's main claim concerns McGovern's character. The commercial's individual statements about McGovern's policy positions are not fallacious in their own right, but the conclusions to which they lead rely on *ad hominem* reasoning.

According to most definitions, flip-flop arguments constitute abusive *ad hominem* attacks. However, this does not necessarily mean that we must label all flip-flop

arguments as fallacious. An examination of the unique context that is a political campaign suggests that character discourse is more appropriate than in other settings typically reserved for debate. Those scholars who write about fallacies typically have in mind a traditional debate, argument, or deliberative contests. Often enough, *ad hominem* fallacies are discussed in terms of interactions, where two or more parties are immediately present to advance, refute, and defend their arguments (Damer, 1980; Engel, 1980). Understandably, it is inappropriate and fallacious to attack an individual with which one is argumentatively engaged instead of refuting their evidence and conclusions.

Political campaigns are very different from one-on-one deliberative interactions. Not only is the opportunity for direct, immediate give-and-take not present in the flip-flop spots described here, but the criteria for what constitutes valid subject matter is different as well. For instance, many scholars of contemporary politics have noted that character is an important and legitimate concern in political campaigns (Benoit, 2007; Walton, 2000a). During political campaigns, audiences are not merely deciding what arguments and ideas ring most true with them, they are deciding what sort of man or woman they want to occupy elected office. Character speaks to candidates' fitness for office, and according to Cragan and Curtbirth (1984), "fitness for office is the most important issue in a political campaign" (p. 229). In political campaigns, discussions about whether or not a particular candidate is a bad person or doesn't tell the truth are legitimate issues. Character attacks can certainly detract from important policy discussions, but they can also contribute useful information to political decision making. So even though flip-flop ads can be accurately labeled as abusive *ad hominem* attacks, and may therefore be

considered dirty or unethical, they are not altogether fallacious considering the unique communicative context of political campaigns.

### **Circumstantial *Ad Hominem***

The circumstantial version of *ad hominem* arguments requires that a person is attacked not for what they have argued, but for their personal circumstances. Typically, the goal of such an attack is to demonstrate how an opponent's circumstances conflict with their arguments. Walton (1998) has gone so far as to call it an "allegation of inconsistency" (p. 31). Thus, one who lectures against smoking can quite easily become the target of a circumstantial *ad hominem* attack if they themselves are a smoker.

Flip-flop ads certainly accuse opponents of inconsistency. Walton's choice to qualify people's actions, observations, and statements as part of their circumstances draws flip-flop ads even closer to a definition as a form of circumstantial *ad hominem*. Flip-flop ads are dedicated to claiming that one's words conflict with their actions, one's words conflict with their other words, or that one's actions conflict with their other actions. For instance, Bill Clinton's 1996 "Preserve" presents evidence that although Bob Dole claims to want to give every child an education, he is on record as advocating the elimination of the Department of Education. These are conflicting commitments. Similarly, in Johnson's "Barry, Barry" message, Goldwater's commitment to the statement that "extremism in defense of liberty is no vice" is presented as a contradiction to his other commitment that he seeks "the support of no extremist." In short, flip-flop ads can be rightly labeled as circumstantial *ad hominem* arguments.

Importantly, Walton (1998) has noted how difficult it can be to analyze circumstantial *ad hominem* fallacies. Not every pair of commitments said to be in

conflict with one another is actually contradictory. Moreover, one's commitments are not necessarily the same thing as one's character, although they can certainly be said to represent one's character. Still, the decision to use a circumstantial *ad hominem* argument is a decision, at least for a moment, to move from an argument about an issue or object, to a discussion about a person, or subject. Engaging a person instead of that person's argument is typically regarded as the primary criteria for evaluating whether an ad qualifies as *ad hominem*. Importantly, given the political context of flip-flop ads, not every circumstantial *ad hominem* argument needs to be considered fallacious. A political candidate's commitments may very well be a relevant consideration for voters, who have a right to know if any of those commitments would conflict with a person's ability to effectively execute the duties of the elected office they seek.

### ***Bias Ad Hominem***

The bias *ad hominem* is uncommon in political discourse. Such attacks allege that an arguer is biased or has something to gain by making particular assertions. In political campaigns it is already widely accepted that candidates are driven by bias. Candidates are not expected to be impartial, but to advance a coherent set of values and ideological commitments. Candidates are expected to speak on behalf of particular policy positions and against other policy positions. The simple act of belonging to a political party communicates candidates' biases. Therefore, it would make little sense to attack an opponent for being biased. Flip-flop ads, like most political campaign discourse, therefore avoid this *ad hominem* message.

There are some similarities between the bias *ad hominem* and the circumstantial *ad hominem*. For instance, George W. Bush's "Unprincipled" ad juxtaposes John

Kerry's promise to fight special interests with the claim that he had received more money from special interests than any other U.S. Senator. In one sense, the ad is arguing that Kerry's past relationships with special interests bias him in such a way that make his promise to fight special interests implausible. Of course, the attack on Kerry is also characteristic of circumstantial *ad hominem* messages. In other words, Kerry's past relationship can be regarded as a commitment or circumstance that stands in direct contrast to his campaign promises. Thus, although the bias *ad hominem* is certainly not the best tool for understanding argumentation in flip-flop spots, it is not altogether irrelevant either.

### ***Tu Quoque Ad Hominem***

*Tu quoque* arguments are present any time an arguer attempts to take an accusation that has been used against them and direct it back at their opponent. The term literally translates to "you too." In other words, if a candidate who is accused of having raised taxes replies to those accusations by claiming that their opponent has also supported tax increases, they have used a *tu quoque ad hominem* attack. Flip-flop ads simply do not fit this description. *Tu quoque* arguments can be made on any character or policy topic, and do not typically deal with matters of political inconsistency. Although one can imagine a scenario, perhaps in a televised political debate, where a candidate might respond to charges of inconsistency by claiming that their opponent is just as inconsistent, the combination of *tu quoque* and flip-flop attack would be mostly incidental. In fact, there is just one quotation in all of the flip-flop spots analyzed in this dissertation that uses a *tu quoque* fallacy. An untitled Goldwater ad from 1964 features Goldwater himself directly responding to accusations that he is imprudent and impulsive.

Goldwater responds by saying:

Well, you know, it seems to me that the really impulsive and imprudent president is the one who is so indecisive that he has no policy at all, with the result that potential aggressors are tempted to move because they think that we lack the will to defend freedom. (Goldwater, Untitled)

Although Senator Goldwater did not use Lyndon B. Johnson's name in this spot, the response is designed to tell voters that Johnson is just as imprudent and impulsive as Mr. Goldwater.

Examples such as Goldwater's untitled spot are very rare. Although it is possible that *tu quoque ad hominem* attacks and flip-flop accusations can show up in the same place, there is nothing about flip-flop spots that requires the *tu quoque* tactic. Similarly, there is nothing about the *tu quoque* fallacy that requires it to say anything at all about consistency or inconsistency.

### **Poisoning the Well**

Depending on one's definition of poisoning the well, flip-flop spots may be guilty of using this form of ad hominem attack. Walton explained poisoning the well as an extension of the bias *ad hominem* argument. Essentially, poisoning the well occurs when an arguer claims that their opponent's bias has hardened and is "so fixed that we could never believe what this person says because he always adheres to this particular bias" (p. 15). As noted above, the bias *ad hominem* argument is not present in most flip-flop spots. However, almost all flip-flop spots encourage audiences to "never believe what [a] person says." Walton writes that "the strategy of poisoning the well type of argument is to try to close off the argument by barring the other party as a suitable participant in a

critical discussion” (p. 15). This is exactly what flip-flop ads attempt to do. Flip flop ads attempt to discredit all past, present, and future statements a candidate makes by insinuating that any particular position they might take is not a reflection of their actual opinion—that one’s opponent, no matter what they may claim, will likely change their position.

If poisoning the well relies primarily on the presence of a biased argument, then flip-flop ads do not use the poisoning the well tactic. In fact, in some ways, flip-flop ads are the opposite of a poisoning the well argument. As opposed to arguing that a person’s mind is so made up that they can never argue in earnest, flip-flop ads claim that a candidate’s mind is never made up, that their position or opinion always changes. The ultimate conclusion remains the same however—flip-flop ads make it seem as though a rival candidate can never be taken seriously, and that their ideas are not worthy of consideration. If the accusation that a candidate is unworthy of participation in deliberative discourse is understood as the essence of poisoning the well, then flip-flop ads fit the bill.

There is some additional support for the idea that flip-flop ads ought to be considered a version of poisoning the well. For instance, Walton (1998) asserts that Lyndon Johnson’s “Daisy” ad involves an element of poisoning the well because it makes Barry Goldwater look “crazy.” Chapter 4 of this dissertation explains in some length how flip-flop ads routinely make political candidates look “crazy.” Flip-flop ads targeted against Goldwater, McGovern, Mondale, and Kerry exemplify this point well. In short, if any argument that casts doubt on a person’s character in such a way that trivializes or discredits the target’s past, present, or future utterances can be said to

qualify as poisoning the well (Ruby, 1950), then flip-flop ads most certainly poison the proverbial well.

Although some sorts of character attacks seem appropriate to the discourse of political campaigns, poisoning the well is more questionable. Poisoning the well aims to, and if used well can effectively, silence a political actor or render audiences deaf to that actor's words. In other words, this type of *ad hominem* attack does not just point out that a candidate is of poor character, it attempts to silence their point of view and remove potentially legitimate perspectives from the public forum. As has been previously discussed, flip-flop ads portray rival political candidates as completely untrustworthy. Poisoning the well is both an insidious form of character attack, and a threat to the free and open discussion of multiple perspectives vital to a deliberative democracy.

If all instances of poisoning the well must contain a claim of bias, then flip-flop spots cannot be properly labeled as instances of poisoning the well. However, whether flip-flop ads are labeled as "poisoning the well" or not, it remains clear that the line of attack is designed to completely discredit a political source. More so than their potential classification as abusive, circumstantial, or bias *ad hominem* attacks, the relationship between flip-flop accusations and poisoning the well techniques is perhaps the ugliest and most unsettling characteristic of argumentation in flip-flop ads. Flip-flop spots trivialize or demean opposing candidates' personhood by robbing opponents of their worth. Although candidates cannot literally or physically silence their opponents, their flip-flop ads get remarkably close to stripping rivals of their voice. To the extent that flip-flop ads use poisoning the well strategies, they are a dehumanizing affront to free and open exchange of ideas in a democratic society.

## **False Dilemma**

Flip-flop ads can invoke fallacies other than ad hominem attacks. For instance, the argumentation diagrams drawn here point to the presence of potential false dilemma fallacies at work in many of the flip-flop ads this dissertation has analyzed. Otherwise referred to as either/or fallacies, these arguments eliminate a variety of possibilities in an effort to make an arguer choose between only two options. The two options are typically made to seem mutually exclusive, when in fact they may not be. Usually, one of the options is obviously undesirable or incorrect, thus encouraging arguers to choose the only potentially viable or attractive option being presented. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992) present the following exchange as an example of the false dilemma:

Hans: "I'm giving up running, because it's said to be bad for your health."

Bert: "In all these years that's never been proved, so it must be very good for you."

Hans: "In that case I'd better stick to my old habits." (p. 190)

The contrary opposites presented here are very simple: "good" and "bad." Hans errs by reasoning that if running is not bad for you, it must be good. In actuality, running may be neither good nor bad, or both good *and* bad for you. There may in fact be "all sorts of intermediate variations" (p. 190). The either/or fallacy asks people to choose between two options when the best choice may actually be neither, or both options combined.

When options are "wrongfully treated as contradictions," the false dilemma fallacy is relevant. Flip-flop ads rely on the assumption that each pair of policy utterances it presents are mutually exclusive and sufficiently contradictory. However, as this chapter has already noted, the policy utterances it presents are not always mutually

exclusive. In many instances, it is logically possible for a politician to hold the two positions, or to have taken the two actions, without having contradicted themselves. For instance, Humphrey's "Bubbles" ad presents Nixon's desire to offer security to senior citizens as contradictory to his opposition of Medicare. Of course, it is entirely possible that Nixon has a plan other than Medicare, or simply imagines a different way of offering security to senior citizens. Although Medicare is one way to offer security to seniors, it is probably not the only way. If, as this analysis suggests, the choices are not mutually exclusive, then something akin to a false dilemma is present. However, if the choices are in fact mutually exclusive, the dilemma is not false. An example of a piece of evidence in a flip-flop ad that does not present a false dilemma is available in Johnson's "Barry, Barry" spot. It claims that Goldwater "suggested using nuclear weapons in Laos and in Vietnam" but also said he had "never advocated the use of nuclear weapons anywhere in the world." Unless one quibbles that to "suggest" is not the same thing as "advocate," it appears that these two utterances are genuinely contradictory.

Importantly, the sort of false dilemma offered by flip-flop ads is not the same exact sort of dilemma offered in the popular fallacy. The typical false dilemma fallacy asks listeners to choose one of two options as being true or desirable. Flip-flop ads present two options as equally true or viable, thus encouraging voters to simultaneously accept and reject both choices. For a flip-flop argument to work, voters must believe that a candidate really said or did each thing presented in a piece of evidence. Next, because voters cannot determine which thing represents the candidate's "true" position, they must reject the candidate altogether. Again, this is not quite the same thing as the running example presented above. Flip-flop spots don't ask voters to choose among two

possibilities. Instead, they simply ask voters to notice the two possibilities. Although a review of the false dilemma fallacy helps explain how flip-flop arguments incorporate two or more ideas that are falsely touted as being mutually exclusive, flip-flop arguments are fundamentally different. It seems that flip-flop spots may in fact commit a fallacy all their own: The fallacy of False Contradiction.

This fallacy, previously unnamed, is relevant when two acts or utterances are falsely asserted to contradict one another, when they are not in fact contradictory. The fallacy of False Contradiction, in the context of political flip-flop spots, is designed to make a listener conclude that they must reject both acts/utterances because they have no real way of knowing what a political candidate actually believes. Ultimately, listeners are also asked to reject the political candidate that made the apparently contradictory remarks or took the superficially contradictory actions. A very good illustration of the fallacy of False Contradiction is presented in Humphrey's 1968 "Bubbles" ad. At one point in the ad, the announcer says, "Mr. Nixon tells us he's ready to meet the challenge of international politics [bubble pops], but at home Nixon will not even meet Hubert Humphrey on TV." The two facts presented in this excerpt are made to appear contradictory when in fact they are not. Nixon's decision not to debate Humphrey in front of American television audiences does not contradict his assertions about being "ready to meet the challenge of international politics." In fact, these two facts do not have very much to do with one another at all. It seems entirely possible that a politician could be a good leader, particularly an international leader, without wanting to debate their opponent on television. In fact, Nixon's decision not to debate probably had much to do with the popular belief that his previous debate performance against John F.

Kennedy in 1960 was a major reason for his defeat in that campaign. Because the paired facts presented in the “Bubbles” spot are not mutually exclusive, the commercial commits the fallacy of False Contradiction.

Of course, the fallacy of False Contradiction only applies, when upon closer investigation, a pair of actions or utterances are judged as potentially compatible rather than contradictory. When the actions and utterances are genuinely contradictory, no fallacy is present. An excerpt from Lyndon Johnson’s 1964 “Which Barry Goldwater” spot is a good example of a flip-flop claim that does not utilize the fallacy of False Contradiction. In this quotation, the announcer implies that there is more than one Barry Goldwater and it is hard to know for which Goldwater a hypothetical citizen should vote: Is he for the Barry who said, “I’ve never advocated the use of nuclear weapons anywhere in the world,” or is he for the one who said “I’d drop a low yield atomic bomb on the Chinese supply lines in North Vietnam?” The two statements presented in this fragment of the text appear to be logically inconsistent. Goldwater’s claim about never having “advocated the use of nuclear weapons” is contradicted by his plan to “drop a low yield atomic bomb” in North Vietnam. This ad is good evidence that although the fallacy of False Contradiction is common in flip-flop advertisements, it is not present in every statement in a flip-flop spot.

It ought to be noted that the fallacy of False Contradiction bears some similarities to *non sequitor*. Most importantly, both types of fallacy pair unrelated or irrelevant ideas within the same invalid argument. However, the *non sequitor* fallacy is characterized by a disconnect or mismatch between an argument’s data and conclusions (Fearnside & Holther, 1959). In this sense, all fallacies are *non sequitor*, even though the term is

usually reserved for conclusions that are “widely irrelevant” to their evidence (Fearnside & Holther, 1959, p. 152). The fallacy of False Contradiction, on the other hand, is characterized by a lack of coherence between a piece of data and another piece of data. For instance, Humphrey’s “Bubbles” ad commits a fallacy of False Contradiction because of the relationship (or lack thereof) between two parts of a piece of evidence--Nixon’s decision not to debate Humphrey and Nixon’s stated readiness “to meet the challenge of international politics”—not because of the relationship between these pieces of evidence and the argument’s conclusion (“Nixon is a flip-flopper”). All this is to argue that although it shares similarities with other fallacies, the fallacy of False Contradiction is a unique label that describes particular instances of invalid argumentation that have gone previously unnoticed or unnamed.

### **Fear Appeals**

As has been noted elsewhere in this dissertation, flip-flop ads occasionally use fear appeals. By appealing to fear, message producers can circumvent viewers’ more rational processes in hopes of creating knee-jerk, gut-instinct reactions instead of well-reasoned decisions. According to Aristotle (Kennedy, 2006), the three common concerns for most people are 1) physical harm or death, 2) loss of wealth or security, and 3) denial of rights. The most common fear appeal used in flip-flop spots relates to the fear of physical harm. Johnson’s 1964 “Barry, Barry” and “Which Barry Goldwater?” commercials attempt to frighten viewers into believing that Senator Goldwater’s election could result in nuclear warfare, and consequently, the end of the world. Flip-flop spots run against Democratic candidates such as Jimmy Carter and George McGovern presented viewers with the fear that these candidates were too indecisive and ineffectual

to protect America from its enemies, thus endangering the populace. These ads communicate fear because they deal with issues related to military defense. For instance, Johnson's ads implicitly and explicitly reference nuclear warfare, and Reagan's ads against Carter explicitly references enemies.

Not all flip-flop ads appeal to fear of harm or death. The specific policy content of other flip-flop ads focus on appeals to loss of rights or wealth. For instance, Reagan's 1988 "Side By Side" spot created uncertainty about whether or not Mondale would increase taxes, thus appealing to voters' fear of loss of wealth. Similarly, Humphrey's 1968 "Weathervane" spot addresses a civil rights bill, and could therefore lead voters to worry that Nixon will not guard against threats to their rights. Thus, not all flip-flop ads make the same sort of fear appeals. Moreover, not all flip-flop spots appeal to fear at all. In fact, sometimes flip-flop ads appeal to other emotions, such as ridicule.

### **Appeal to Ridicule**

Some flip-flop ads appeal to laughter by ridiculing a political candidate for their alleged inconsistencies. George W. Bush's "Windsurfing" ad is a good example of this. The spot's visual, verbal, and musical dimensions are designed to encourage a sense of mirth in voters. The commercial discredits Kerry and his conflicting ideas by making them seem laughable. According to Herrick (2004), this constitutes a "fallacy of case presentation" by which the Bush campaign intentionally and unfairly characterizes Kerry and his policies. Ultimately, audiences are still encouraged to reject Kerry, but they are not driven to do so out of fear. Popular theories of humor suggest that humor and ridicule are particularly well-suited to flip-flop ads. For instance, superiority theory suggests that people find humor in that which they feel is inferior to them (Ferguson & Ford, 2008). In

this case, Kerry is made to look to weak, indecisive, and silly and inferior to the viewer. Incongruity theory, which asserts that people experience mirth when they recognize incongruities in disparate ideas or images (Veale, 2004) is also relevant here, as flip-flop ads are devoted almost entirely to exposing incongruities in a political candidate's actions and utterances.

### **Emotions in Flip-Flop Ads**

Whether with ridicule or fear, flip-flop ads can appeal to the emotions. However, there is reason to question whether it is appropriate to characterize all appeals to emotion as fallacious. For that matter, there is reason to question whether all emotional appeals in politics, even if deemed fallacious, ought to be considered inappropriate. On the contrary, in order to fully understand the rhetorical force of political advertising in general, and flip-flop spots in particular, it is crucial that scholars consider *pathos*. In fact, many scholars of political advertising have advised that a perspective that privileges emotion rather than argument is more fitting to analyses of political discourse (Holbert & Hansen, 2008; Neuman et al., 2007; Westen, 2007).

So how is one to critically evaluate the presence of emotional appeals in political advertisements? Herrick's (2004) criteria for evaluating emotion in argument is an excellent starting point. Herrick emphasizes Aristotle's contention that pathos should "put the audience in the right frame of mind for making a decision and acting on it" (p. 256). Such a characterization of emotion in argument, with its focus on audiences' states of mind, sounds remarkably similar to the Burkean theory of form used earlier in this chapter. Importantly, this "right frame of mind" criterion is different from the simple question of whether or not a person has been sufficiently moved by a claim. Herrick

interprets Aristotle to mean that a message's emotional features should not interfere with people's more rational decision making processes. Thus, a relevant question of the flip-flop spots here is whether or not the emotions they evoke are such that they might distract voters from evaluating the arguments they present.

In some instances, it seems that the emotional appeals in flip-flop spots could potentially distract voters from using more reason-centered processes. For instance, the music and visuals in an ad such as "Windsurfing" are very powerful, and the way in which they communicate folly may very well prevent viewers from critically evaluating the evidence the narrator presents. Not only do elements other than verbal text encourage emotions, but the particular emotion "Windsurfing" encourages, which is humor or mirth, is not a "frame of mind" that people are accustomed to using for rational processing. Thus, although "Windsurfing" can be mapped as an argument (see Figure 5.5), the emotional content of the ad is forceful enough to distract and detract from the ad's argumentation. The same could be said of the tone of fear and total damnation communicated by the production techniques in many anti-Goldwater ads (e.g. "Which Barry Goldwater?" and "Barry, Barry"). Although these ads can be praised for not using emotional appeals in the total absence of more reasoned arguments (they manage to use some reasoning), the nature of the televisual medium seems to invite and sufficiently complicate the ability of audiences to recognize and evaluate arguments. As this dissertation's review of literature has noted, visual images and music, two major components of televised political advertising, are particularly well-suited for stirring emotions. Of course, it is important to appreciate that it is not entirely possible to distinguish between a flip-flop spot's argumentation and its emotional appeal. These

layers of persuasion are often very much intertwined, or as Herrick notes, emotional appeals “tend to be embedded in and accompanied by other arguments and evidence” (p. 255). Clearly, flip-flop ads include arguments and emotional appeals.

Emotional appeals in flip-flop messages can be problematic in that they may not always put audiences in the “right state of mind” for making a decision. Despite their potential to distract or mislead voters, emotional appeals are an integral part of flip-flop spots and there are some reasons to believe that political discourse is better off for including pathos. It is difficult to argue that a populace constantly moved by only the most base of emotions, rather than rational argument, would steer America in a desirable direction. However, it might be just as debilitating to our electoral democracy if audiences were never encouraged to feel any emotions when they thought about politics. First, audiences are more likely to be politically active when they experience emotional reactions to political messages (Thomas, McGarty, & Mavor, 2009). To involve people at the emotional level in addition to the rational level seems beneficial not only to those candidates who attempt to persuade voters in their favor, but participatory government in general. For instance, scholars have noted that emotions such as anger or moral outrage can lead to prosocial political behaviors (Lodewijkz, Kersten, & van Zomeren, 2008; Montada & Schneider, 1989; Wakslack, et al., 2007).

Finally, considering the importance of the matters at hand in any particular political campaign, it is reasonable, and perhaps even desirable, for people to be emotionally invested in the fate of these issues and the fate of the country. For example, it only seems human to feel and express empathy regarding certain political situations, whether the situation concerns what to do with America’s military men and women

positioned overseas or families struggling to feed and clothe their children in a faltering economy. To cite a specific example from a pair of flip-flop ads, perhaps it was altogether fitting and appropriate that the 1964 “Barry, Barry” and “Which Barry Goldwater” ads raised questions and fears about Barry Goldwater’s potential use of nuclear weapons. To be fearful of Goldwater’s nuclear policies means not only being worried about one’s own safety in the event that a country retaliates against Goldwater’s use of nuclear weapons, but to potentially demonstrate concern for those individuals and communities in foreign nations that Goldwater’s military decisions would destroy. With so much at stake, perhaps emotional appeals are appropriate and even necessary.

Although Herrick used less politically polarizing examples, his argument is similar:

Unless we reject all emotional appeals out of hand as fallacies, we may think these appeals can be properly employed at times, and even that they have a vital role to play in making reasonable decisions. Perhaps we should feel some anger and fear when making decisions about drunk driving laws, some fear when deciding whether to smoke or not, some pity and anger when deciding how to deal with child abusers. (p. 256)

In other words, when electing a president, and when considering the myriad of important issues raised during a presidential campaign, perhaps it is appropriate for voters to feel emotions about political leaders and political issues. Therefore, messages that deal with these issues and appeal to these emotions, such as flip-flop spots, should not be condemned for this characteristic alone.

This chapter began with an investigation of the unique form of flip-flop ads, discussing how the ads use a recurring “flip” and “flop” rhythm to engage and please

voters by creating and satisfying anticipatory desires. Next, the argumentative structure, also related to the progression of ideas in ads, was mapped in such a way that the claims and data typically used in these ads could be better understood and evaluated. Finally, this chapter's analysis of fallacies in flip-flop arguments led to a consideration about the role of emotion in political argumentation. The final chapter will discuss these findings and arguments in relation not only to Chapter Four, but to the larger purpose and implications of this study.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Having critically examined flip-flop ads via two major approaches to analyzing the ads: “Values, Repulsions, and Political Malaise,” and “Progression of Ideas and Arguments,” this final chapter provides a summary of this dissertation’s major findings and arguments. Specifically, this chapter reiterates what makes flip-flop ads unique and rhetorically forceful as a campaign message form, discusses what features of flip-flop ads might contribute to voters’ disdain for inconsistency in the political realm, and discusses implications for future research.

### **Values, and Repulsions, and Political Malaise**

Beginning with 1952--the first presidential campaign to incorporate the use of televised advertising--and ending with the most recent presidential contest, this study has rhetorically analyzed flip-flop ads across 56 years of presidential politics. In addition to providing a detailed account of the content of flip-flop spots, Chapter 4 also identified important patterns and trends among political advertisements from 1952-2008. Moreover, the analysis presented in Chapter 4 revealed the specific values, fears, and ideals that flip-flop ads, and those ads that represent the antithesis of flip-flop ads, associate with the charge of inconsistency. The following section will first summarize the main findings to emerge from the chronological analysis of flip-flop ads, including advances in audiovisual technology, citation of evidence, use of surrogate speakers, the importance of incumbency, and the association of flip-flop accusations with military leadership. Next, this section will summarize the major appeals contained in these messages, including the wind metaphor that is present in numerous political flip-flop spots, the debate metaphor in flip-flop ads that portrays candidates as suffering from

mental illness, the emasculation of candidates in flip-flop spots, and the use of antipolitics in flip-flop messages.

### **Audiovisual Technology in Flip-Flop Spots**

One observation to be made about flip-flop ads throughout the years is that they adapt to available technology to present their claims about an opponents' inconsistency. Adlai Stevenson's 1952 campaign used a flip-flop commercial ("Platform Double Talk") to attack the Republican party candidates for making false promises and contradicting themselves when they spoke about important political issues such as the Korean War and U.S. support for the United Nations. The ad used an animated cartoon of a slimy politician with two heads to demonstrate how confusing the Republican platform was and how untrustworthy Republican politicians were. Animation was a standard convention of television in 1952 and allowed the Stevenson campaign to create visual images they could not construct without animation (such as an image of a man with two heads).

By 2008, when John McCain and Barack Obama produced flip-flop commercials against one another, technology had changed. Many of the 2008 political campaign commercials were aired only on the internet. Moreover, substantial advances in editing and production technology made it possible for campaigns to use visual, audible, and verbal dimensions of a message in new and different ways. For instance, while earlier flip-flop ads, such as "Weathervane," "McGovern Turnaround," "Side By Side," and other ads used a linear progression of symbols and ideas to make opponents appear predictably unpredictable, the 2008 Republican National Committee's "Obama Trading in Contradictions" ad breaks from this tradition. Although all flip-flop ads aim to create uncertainty about political candidates, "Obama Trading in Contradictions" goes to extra

lengths in creating confusion and discomfort in voters. Multiple images, laid on top of one another, appear simultaneously, multiple unpleasant sounds play at the same time, and the spoken text of the ad is often different from the written text that appears on the screen. This ad represents a break from the traditional use of space and time exemplified by most flip-flop spots. Examining the visual, verbal, and audible components of flip-flop ads in chronological order confirms Richardson's (2002) contention that, "Political communication has become increasingly audiovisual communication. Each new generation of campaign advertising is marked by even more skilled uses of audiovisual rhetoric" (p. 2). Presidential campaigns have been particularly adept at using available audiovisual technology to develop new and provocative ways of calling their opponent a flip-flopper.

### **Citation in Flip-Flop Spots**

Another way in which the flip-flop charge evolved between 1952 and 2008 can be seen in these ads' use of citation. The "Platform Double Talk" spot makes no attempt to establish the veracity of its claims about the Republican Party. The ad does not use direct quotes, it does not present third party sources such as newspapers or magazines, and it does not even paraphrase the flip-flopping opponents. Instead, the contradictory policy positions the GOP is portrayed as making are essentially hypothetical. Later ads, such as Bill Clinton's anti-Bush "Promise" commercial, provide sources for its claims. For instance, the claim that Bush's tax increase was the second biggest in American History is accompanied by smaller letters that say "Congressional Budget Office." Later portions of the same Clinton ad refer to the Congressional Quarterly Almanac and the Department of Treasury in order to support claims about George H. W. Bush's alleged inconsistency.

The chronological analysis of flip-flop spots made it possible to notice trends in citation of evidence in televised political advertisements. Today, it is common for political television spots to provide sources for their claims. This strategy might enhance the credibility of an ad's arguments, with viewers perhaps more likely to accept the charges made.

### **Surrogate Speakers in Flip-Flop Spots**

One similarity between flip-flop ads over the years has been their use of an indirect means of attack. For instance, "Platform Double Talk" does not directly attack Dwight Eisenhower, but instead attacks the GOP. This indirect mode of accusation can be interpreted as evidence that flip-flop attacks are viewed as a somewhat malicious form of political discourse. Typically, the source of these attacks are just as indirect. For example, "Platform Double Talk" used a cartoon to attack Eisenhower, while other Stevenson spots used Vice Presidential candidate Estes Kefauver to attack Eisenhower. Later presidential flip-flop ads, such as the 1968 "Weathervane" spot or the 2004 "Unprincipled" commercial, use anonymous narrators to attack candidates. Kessler (1981) reminds us that political campaigns like to use surrogate speakers to say things that candidates may want to say, but are unable to deliver directly for fear of voter backlash or concerns for image maintenance. The use of surrogate speakers to make flip-flop accusations is evidence of their perceived offensiveness.

### **Incumbency in Flip-Flop Spots**

Another critical observation to emerge from Chapter 4's analysis of flip-flop ads from 1952-2008 is a distinct difference in the way challengers and incumbents are attacked for being inconsistent. Incumbents typically take advantage of the fact that

voters may know relatively little about challengers. In other words, flip-flop spots that attack challengers attempt to exploit uncertainty that already surrounds a challenger. A few excellent examples of the targets of this tactic include flip-flop attacks on challengers George McGovern in 1972, Bill Clinton in 1992, and even Walter Mondale in 1984--who just a few short years earlier had served as Vice President of the United States. Such flip-flop ads literally raise questions about where a challenger stood on political issues in the past in order to make it particularly difficult to imagine what the candidate would do or say in the future, were they to become president. In order to create uncertainty about challengers, rival campaigns typically rely on challengers' voting records as members of congress, or performance as governor of their respective states. Because every candidate has so many positions and decisions on record by the time they run for president, it appears particularly easy to find information that will make a challenger look inconsistent.

Attacks on inconsistency in incumbents' records look a bit different. These flip-flop ads frequently take the form of a broken promise claim. Stevenson's 1956 "How's that Again, General" ad series is an excellent example of this rhetorical strategy, as is Clinton's 1992 exploitation of George H. W. Bush's broken "Read my lips, no new taxes" pledge. Flip-flop ads that attack an incumbent will often draw on promises the incumbent made four years earlier when they first sought to be President. Political television ads treat these promises as contractual agreements, and when not fulfilled, establish grounds for removal from office. Flip-flop ads make incumbents look both untrustworthy, often suggesting they never intended to follow through on their promise, and also ineffectual, often suggesting an incumbent just isn't capable of getting things

done. Thus, while both incumbents and challengers can be attacked for flip-flopping and inconsistency, these attacks are a bit different depending on their target.

### **Military Leadership in Flip-Flop Spots**

This study has argued that flip-flop advertisements are designed to make rival political candidates look like weak leaders. Flip-flop ads, because they often focus on issues of military leadership, aim to extend this perceived weakness to an opposing candidate's potential performance as commander-in-chief. Candidates such as George McGovern and Jimmy Carter were made to look so vacillating, wishy-washy, indecisive, and weak that they could not effectively defend America in the event of international conflict. These candidates were made to appear as though they lacked the fortitude to make tough decisions and stick to those tough decisions if and when the country faces a military challenge from other nations. Thus, flip-flop ads create an all-encompassing sense of weakness that extends far beyond candidates' ability to articulate a clear position on a political issue during a campaign, extending particularly to military decision-making and matters of life and death.

Barry Goldwater's perceived inconsistency was also tied to his potential performance as commander-in-chief, but the attacks leveled against him looked a bit different than those aimed at McGovern and Carter. Barry Goldwater was portrayed as volatile and imprudent, able to change his mind at any moment and make a bad decision without due deliberation or thought. Ads such as "Which Barry Goldwater?," "Barry, Barry," and "Daisy" created, or perhaps capitalized on, voter concern that Goldwater would lead America blindly into nuclear warfare and bring an end to all of human civilization.

One of the chief goals of this dissertation is to understand via textual clues in flip-flop spots why inconsistency is so frequently despised and rejected by American audiences. One relatively simple answer that emerges from this analysis is that inconsistency is associated with a range of other values, fears, and repulsions that American culture has typically rejected. The way in which flip-flop spots, a major source from which audiences learn about inconsistency, propose associations between flip-flopping and military weakness is one reason that audiences are encouraged to reject inconsistency and castigate flip-floppers. According to the ads analyzed in this dissertation, a flip-flopper will potentially make decisions that could lead to death or harm for not only Americans, but other citizens of the world.

After analyzing flip-flop spots in chronological order, this dissertation noted some overarching metaphors and themes that were present in a multitude of flip-flop spots. These themes include the use of a wind metaphor that raises concerns about the “direction” of the country, a debate metaphor that makes opponents appear mentally unstable, a tendency to associate indecision and inconsistency with femininity, and the frequent use of antipolitics to criticize not just particular candidates, but politicians and politics in general. Like the association between flip-flopping and military leadership, further discussion of each of these overarching components of flip-flop spots explains their rhetorical force.

### **The Wind Metaphor in Flip-Flop Ads**

Many flip-flop spots, such as Humphrey’s 1968 anti-Nixon “Weathervane” ad, use a distinct wind metaphor. The wind metaphor brings attention to concerns about agency. To be blown about by the wind just like a weathervane is to demonstrate a

definite lack of agency. The wind metaphor, when used in televised flip-flop spots, portray rival candidates as passive, unable to make decisions and choose directions for themselves, and lacking the principles or will to stick to a particular decision for any length of time. As Hahn (2003) notes, it is important for political candidates to be seen as active. Presidential candidates gain traction by appearing to act, not appearing to be acted upon, as the wind metaphor typically depicts. Voters need to believe that they are electing someone with the strength and courage to stand up against external, oppositional forces in order to do what is right for the country, not someone who will change with the ever-fickle political winds. The closely related nautical metaphor that flip-flop ads employ also demonstrates a concern not only for a particular candidates resolve, but for the “course” or “direction” of the nation. Nautical language in American political discourse dates at least as far back as Thomas Jefferson (Miller, 2003), who once wrote, “The boisterous sea of liberty is never without a wave” (Davis & Mintz, 1998, p. 354). The current analysis of flip-flop ads is an important addition to our understanding of how Americans come to view big ideas and difficult circumstances in terms of a sea that must be navigated by a well-staffed ship-of-state.

Chapter 4 also argued that the wind metaphor in these flip-flop messages can be understood as an archetypal appeal (Osborn, 1967). As such, the metaphor is: immune from changes wrought by time, grounded in prominent features of experience, able to speak to basic human motivations, possessive of persuasive appeal, and fixed as an important place in our culture’s language. One of the reasons the wind metaphor is common in political flip-flop spots is because it can influence the way audiences’ see particular politicians, and more generally, come to understand the fate of the nation.

Lakoff & Johnson (1980) are famous for discussing the importance of metaphors in our daily lives in *Metaphors We Live By*. This dissertation, with its focus on the use of the wind metaphor in political flip-flop spots, suggests that there may also be “metaphors we vote by.”

### **Debate Metaphor and Allusions to Mental Instability in Flip-Flop Ads**

Another metaphor at work in flip-flop ads is that of a political debate. Although most political debates occur between two or more people of differing political opinions, the debates constructed within flip-flop spots occur within one person who holds multiple conflicting policy positions. In other words, flip-flop ads create intra-candidate political debates that portray one candidate arguing with themselves. Many political flip-flop commercials go so far as to split a candidate into two different people who cannot see eye-to-eye with one another. For instance, Reagan’s 1984 “Side By Side” ad pits the political opinions of “Candidate Mondale” against the political opinions of “Senator Mondale.” Similarly, Clinton’s 1996 “Preserve” ad compares “Candidate Dole” and “Washington Dole.” Not surprisingly, Candidate Dole and Washington Dole disagree on all of the important issues the ad chooses to explore (e.g. medicare and education). Although some of these flip-flop spots use a narrator to summarize, paraphrase, or otherwise express a candidate’s conflicting points of view, the tactic is particularly forceful when a flip-flop ad uses direct quotes or actual sound bites from opposing candidates.

Flip-flop spots that feature a candidate arguing with themselves ultimately seek to make that candidate look mentally unstable. These commercials reference popular beliefs and misunderstandings about psychological disorders in order to make would-be

flip-floppers look “crazy.” For instance, by portraying a candidate as having two distinct identities, “Side By Side” and “Riady” make Mondale and Dole, respectively, appear as though they might suffer from multiple personality disorder, otherwise known as dissociative identity disorder. Because “Side By Side” features alternative images of Mondale smiling and frowning, it also creates allusions to bipolar disorder, previously referred to as manic depression. Johnson’s 1964 “Barry, Barry” ad, because it refers not only to Goldwater’s contradictory policy positions, but his constantly changing temperament, also references popular understandings of bipolar disorder. Flip-flop ads don’t just make candidates look wishy-washy or indecisive, they also make candidates look *crazy*. Perhaps it goes without saying, but American voters prefer candidates who do not suffer from psychological disorders over those who do. Missouri U.S. Senator Thomas Eagleton, the one time Democratic candidate for Vice President of the United States who had to be removed from the 1976 ticket due to concerns about his mental well-being, is an excellent illustration of this point. In summary, flip-flop ads associate political inconsistency with mental illness, therefore giving voters another reason to fear and reject inconsistency.

### **Femininity in Flip-Flop Spots**

American political culture celebrates all that is masculine while rejecting that which appears to be feminine (Jeffords, 1994). This dissertation’s finding that flip-flop spots feminize or emasculate political candidates is therefore another reason that voters reject inconsistency. The type of indecision assigned to candidates such as McGovern (“McGovern Turnaround,” “Vietnam Turnaround”), Carter (“Flip-Flop,” “Man in the Street”) and Kerry (“Windsurfing,” “Searching”) is typically regarded as a feminine trait.

Similarly, the type of erratic behavior assigned to Goldwater (“Barry, Barry,” “Which Barry Goldwater?”) is more likely to be associated with femininity than masculinity. Because the President of the United States has always been a man, and because the office is typically connected to the myth of the logical, aggressive, decisive male, ads that call a candidate an indecisive or erratic “flip-flopper” are essentially accusing a candidate of being unpresidential.

The analysis of accusations of femininity presented in Chapter 4 suggests an important explanation for why voters reject inconsistency in their political candidates. In simplest terms, inconsistency is a feminine trait. To call someone a “flip-flopper” is to call them “feminine.” Although associating inconsistency with femininity may be an effective rhetorical strategy, it is clearly not an ethical one. Flip-flop ads reflect and perpetuate the idea that political office seekers should be masculine. By exploiting stereotypes about women and reaffirming the need for masculinity in politics and government, these spots contribute to the difficult double-bind that women face in the political arena (Jamieson, 1995).

On the surface, flip-flop ads would appear to say little about gender in politics. However, this dissertation reveals that political television advertisements that accuse rival candidates of inconsistency are actually rife with regressive assumptions about and destructive images of femininity. Flip-flop ads therefore remind us of the degree to which sexism and prejudice so deeply permeate America’s contemporary political discourse. Critics of political rhetoric must continue to identify and explore instances of misogyny in political artifacts that are not explicitly anti-woman in order to better understand the depths of our culture’s abhorrence of femininity.

## **Antipolitics in Flip-Flop Spots**

Flip-flop ads that imply a motive for a candidate's inconsistency are particularly instructive because they provide a glimpse of the values with which inconsistency is associated. Although femininity and mental illness are certainly important explanations for why a politician would act or speak inconsistently, there are still other rhetorically compelling explanations or motives for flip-flopping. One such explanation is that a candidate is "playing politics." To "play politics" is to make decisions based not on what one believes is right but to make decisions based on what is politically expedient or politically and personally beneficial. George W. Bush's 2004 "PATRIOT Act" explained Kerry's change of position on the PATRIOT Act in terms of "playing politics." Although Kerry originally voted for the PATRIOT Act, the spot claims that he came to oppose the legislation in order to earn support from liberal Democrats. In the context of this ad and many other flip-flop spots, the word "politics" is used to refer to a pejorative activity.

Flip-flop ads portray inconsistency as an essentially political behavior. As such, to be a politician is to flip-flop and to flip-flop is to be a politician. Politically speaking then, it is not a good thing for politicians to act like "politicians." The ads analyzed in Chapter 4 suggest that "politicians" are regarded as dishonest and untrustworthy. This leads many candidates to run for office as political outsiders, claiming time and again they are "not a politician" (Carter, Untitled). The persistent negative representation of politics and politicians, otherwise referred to here as "antipolitics" is problematic because it encourages negative feelings about the processes and leaders that drive our democratic system of government. Whether candidates and voters like it or not, without "politics"

and “politicians,” there is no democracy. At the same time, the prevalence of antipolitics in flip-flop ads is consistent with Americans deep-seated distrust of government, and more specifically, their hatred of the *process* of government rather than government itself (Wills, 1999). Because flip-flop spots feed this distrust or dislike of politics and government, they are regarded by political campaigns as a rhetorically forceful mode of campaign rhetoric.

This dissertation has argued that flip-flop ads portray politics and politicians in a negative light. Other research also suggests that America is experiencing a growing problem with citizens’ political malaise, as scholars have found that increased exposure to negative political advertisements actually reduces voter turnout (Ansolabehere, Iyengar, & Simon, 1999; Brader, 2005; Brooks, 2000; Kaid, Chanslor, & Hovind, 1992; Lemert, Wanta, & Lee, 1999), lowers trust in government (Craig & Kane, 2000; Globetti & Hetherington, 2000; Leshner & Thorson, 2000; Pinkleton, Um, & Austin, 2002; Thorson et al., 2000), and reduces political efficacy (Freedman & Goldstein, 1999; Goldstein, 1997; Jackson, Mondak, & Huckfeldt, 2005; Lau & Pomper, 2004; Pinkleton, Um, & Austin, 2002; Stevens, 2002; Thorson et al., 2000). Perhaps the next step, where research on political advertisements and political attitudes is concerned, should be to examine whether particular types of negative advertisements, such as flip-flop ads, are even more likely to encourage negative political feelings in audiences. In other words, perhaps it is not just negativity that drives people away from politics, but negativity about politics and government that discourages turnout, lowers citizens’ trust in government, and reduces political efficacy.

On the topic of antipolitics, this dissertation reaches some rather unsettling conclusions for and about political communication practitioners who use antipolitics. Those who malign “politics” and defame “politicians” as a whole, do so at the risk of substantially damaging America’s democratic system of government. A proficient democracy depends on the very same ideals of political participation, trust, and efficacy to which antipolitics is conceptually linked. By employing antipolitics, practitioners sacrifice the long-term health of our government for the short-term rewards of a potential campaign victory.

### **Progression of Ideas and Arguments**

Chapter 5 focused on the progression of ideas and arguments in political flip-flop ads. It was argued that much of what makes flip-flop spots a unique type of political appeal is the selection and arrangement of ideas within the verbal, visual, and audible components of these commercials. The following discussion, as developed in Chapter 5, will summarize Burke’s notion of form as it applies to flip-flop ads, and discuss the nature of argumentation, both rational and pathetic, in these messages.

### **The Form of Flip-Flop Ads**

Much of the nature and rhetorical force of flip-flop spots can be explained by critically examining their form. Consistent with Burke’s (1968b) notion of form, flip-flop spots generate a distinct rhythm that repetitively creates and satisfies audience appetites. Chapter 5 proposed a vocabulary with which the parts of a typical flip-flop ad could be labeled and described. Flip-flop ads consist of “flips” and “flops.” A “flip,” in the context of a televised political advertisement, is the introduction of a statement or policy position from a rival candidate. A “flop” is a statement or policy position from the

same rival candidate that presents itself immediately after a “flip.” The “flop” either directly contradicts, or is designed to appear as though it contradicts, the “flip.” The “flip” and the “flop” complete one another, rely on one another for meaning, and most importantly, they are able to best please or satisfy audiences only because of their relationship to one another. Most flip-flop ads, such as Reagan’s 1984 “Side By Side” ad, George H. W. Bush’s 1992 “Gray Dot” ad, and George W. Bush’s 2004 “Windsurfing” ad, include multiple “flips” and “flops,” that when repeated over the course of a thirty or sixty second ad, can generate a rhythm that uniquely pleases audiences.

Flip-flop ads are recognized as much by their distinct form as they are their content. When documentarian Michael Moore parodied a flip-flop in his 2008 film *Slacker Uprising*, he made sure to use the same “flip” and “flop” form as the political ads described in this dissertation. This includes both the verbal and visual elements of form in flip-flop spots. Typically, the rhythm of flip-flop ads is enhanced by the presence of visuals that change with every “flip” and “flop.” For instance, in “Side By Side,” Mondale is shown smiling as the announcer describes each “flip,” but frowning during the description of each “flop.” Similarly, in “Windsurfing,” John Kerry and his windsurfing board move to the right during every “flip” and to left during every “flop.” The visuals in most flip-flop ads reinforce the verbal form of these ads, thus contributing to the appearance of inconsistency.

The way that the distinct “flip” and “flop” rhythm of flip-flop ads deters voters from more closely considering the content of these ads begs the question as to what other texts, political or otherwise, use a form that is compelling enough to distract voters in similar ways. Assuming that form dominates content in other contemporary media

artifacts, media literacy programs and publications (Potter, 2008; Silverblatt, 2007) would benefit from encouraging audiences to understand and critically evaluate the operation of form in other messages encountered on a regular basis. To the extent that form can conceal and work to deceive, audiences should be equipped with the critical tools necessary for recognizing and resisting the trappings of form.

### **Argumentation in Flip-Flop Spots**

Although some authors have raised doubts about the compatibility of contemporary political television ads and traditional theories of argument (Jamieson, 1993), this dissertation suggests that an analysis of the argumentative structure of televised spots can be very informative. When flip-flop spots were diagrammed according to Toulmin's (1958) theory of argument, several major findings emerged. First, in order to support the claim that an opposing candidate is inconsistent, flip-flop spots must present two contradictory facts related to that candidate's utterances or actions. In flip-flop spots, one single utterance is not enough to comprise a piece of evidence. In order to support the claim that a candidate has flip-flopped, it must be demonstrated that a candidate has taken two contradictory positions on the same issue. For instance, the following piece of data from Humphrey's 1968 "Bubbles" ad uses two disparate policy positions in order to support the claim that Nixon is inconsistent: "Mr. Nixon wants to offer security to older citizens, but Mr. Nixon opposes Medicare." Neither clause in this sentence, if interpreted without the other, supports the claim that Nixon is inconsistent. However, interpreted together, they form a complete piece of argumentative data. Most political arguments require just one fact or utterance in order to create a piece of data. For instance, if a candidate wishes to attack their opponent for

not supporting education, they only need to find and cite one single instance where their opponent voted or spoke against funding for education. Because flip-flop ads require multiple facts in order to establish one piece of evidence, their arguments are constructed differently than in other political messages. Thus, not only is it possible to apply argumentation theory to televised political advertisements, but by doing so, this dissertation has revealed a unique form of political argumentation.

Another finding of this analysis of arguments in flip-flop ads relates to their combination of utterances about both character and policy. Although this dissertation is not the first work to note that policy and character are related topics (e.g. Benoit & Wells, 1996; Devlin, 1977; Hacker, Zakahi, Giles, & McQuitty, 2000), rarely have scholars examined the interconnections of character and policy appeals in the sort of depth as presented in Chapter 5. The main goal of most flip-flop spots is to make a character claim—an opposing candidate is inconsistent. In support of this claim, most of the evidence presented in flip-flop ads pertains to policy claims. For instance, “Windsurfing” makes Kerry look hopelessly directionless and inconsistent by citing his contradictory positions on the Iraq War, education, and healthcare. Similarly, “McGovern Turnaround” uses George McGovern’s positions on the Vietnam War, legalization of marijuana, welfare, taxes, and busing to demonstrate the breadth of his inconsistency. Other ads, such as “Vietnam Turnaround” focus exclusively on one political issue, but nonetheless rely on policy data to support character claims. These findings suggest that critical scholars would be wise to examine the relationship between policy and character utterances in other types of political messages. Those scholars concerned more with the effects of political television ads could develop this area by investigating the degree to

which audiences perceive messages such as flip-flop ads are about policy, character, or both.

### **Fallacies in Flip-Flop Spots**

Although political flip-flop ads can be diagrammed according to argumentation theory, they are not without their errors in reasoning. This dissertation evaluated flip-flop ads for their potential incorporation of five varieties of *ad hominem* argument (Walton, 1998). It was argued here that flip-flop ads use elements of abusive *ad hominem*, circumstantial *ad hominem*, and poisoning the well. Poisoning the well strategies were judged as particularly malevolent forms of attack because they attempt to eliminate individuals and their perspectives from legitimate consideration in the public arena. This ought to be recognized as an injustice against the individual being silenced and the democratic society that requires the free and open consideration of multiple points of view. Still, it is difficult to argue that political campaigns would be better off without *ad hominem* arguments. Ad hominem arguments are often condemned for attacking character rather than policy, but in political campaigns, character is an important consideration for voters. Because character issues are so relevant to this particular argumentative context, it is difficult to label flip-flop ads entirely fallacious or inappropriate. Thus, the research conducted here contributes to ideas advanced by Cragan and Cutbirth (1984) and Walton (2000a) about the place of personal attacks in political argumentation.

In addition to using elements of several *ad hominem* arguments, flip-flop ads also share important similarities with false dilemma fallacies. Like false dilemmas, flip-flop spots ask voters to evaluate two contradictory statements or options. However, where

false dilemmas encourage audiences to choose an option that is clearly more desirable, flip-flop ads ask voters to reject both options as well as the person that made the contradictory remarks or took the contradictory actions. Although the statements and actions in flip-flop spots are made to look contradictory, such is not always the case. In many cases, the two policy positions a candidate is shown to have held are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, this dissertation has argued that flip-flop ads use a fallacy all their own: The Fallacy of False Contradiction. The portion of Nixon's "Bubbles" ad that claims, "Mr. Nixon tells us he's ready to meet the challenge of international politics, but at home Nixon will not even meet Hubert Humphrey on TV" is a superb example of a false contradiction. Although Nixon's refusal to debate Humphrey on television is presented as conflicting with Nixon's readiness to "meet the challenge of international politics," there is no genuine contradiction here. In fact, the two clauses in this sentence seem to have very little to do with one another. Critical argumentation scholars would benefit from examining other contexts in which the Fallacy of False Contradiction might be relevant. For instance, political punditry programs such as *The O'Reilly Factor*, *Countdown with Keith Olbermann* or *Glenn Beck*, which also try to point out contradictions and hypocrisy in political opponents' records, should be examined for their use of the Fallacy of False Contradiction.

### **Emotions in Flip-Flop Spots**

Although this dissertation first examined emotion in the context of logical fallacies, it also presented reasons that emotional appeals are appropriate and perhaps even necessary in political argumentation. Rather than simply condemning ads such as "Barry, Barry" for using fear appeals, or rebuke ads such as "Windsurfing" for using

appeals to ridicule, it is important to recognize that some political issues and arguments are inherently emotional and that the ideal of a completely rational, dispassionate electorate is neither realistic nor desirable. This dissertation demonstrates that it is no longer wise, helpful, or appropriate to examine “emotion” as something separate and distinguishable from other elements of persuasive discourse. Although a specific section of this dissertation was designated for the discussion of emotion in flip-flop ads, it must be acknowledged that the notion and language of emotion permeates the entirety of this rhetorical analysis. In flip-flop ads, rational appeals and emotional appeals are inextricably intertwined. Thus, the textual analysis conducted in this dissertation provides support for those scholars who wish to conduct experimental and survey research that measures audiences’ emotional reactions to political advertising (Holbert & Hansen, 2008; Neuman et al., 2007; Westen, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

This dissertation has presented a detailed critical analysis of one particular sub-genre of negative political television advertising. By performing the very first sustained rhetorical analysis of flip-flop ads, this dissertation has produced valuable critical observations about a sub-genre of negative political advertising that other political communication sources have noted, but not studied in ample depth (Benoit, 2003; Kaylor, 2008; Mark, 2006; O’Shaughnessy & Henneberg, 2007). By systematically examining the content and form of flip-flop advertisements, this project has advanced several explanations for why American political audiences reject inconsistency and value its antithesis. More specifically, flip-flopping has become appalling to the American public as political campaigns have associated inconsistency with popular ideas about

femininity and mental illness, frame inconsistency in terms of dominant archetypal metaphors such as that of the wind, and construct inconsistency as a major characteristic of politics and government, two institutions regularly attacked and abhorred by voters. The compelling form and argumentative structure of flip-flop ads contribute to their rhetorical force and explain their recurrence throughout multiple decades of televised political advertising.

While this dissertation has not conducted experimental analyses necessary for measuring the effects of flip-flop ads on audiences, the in-depth rhetorical analysis presented here does provide the foundation for social scientific studies of political advertising (Nelson, 1993). Flip-flop spots, and more generally, accusations of inconsistency, are an important part of America's political history and political culture. Because there is no reason to believe that concerns over flip-flopping will vanish any time soon, it seems prudent to continue probing this area of political discourse in additional political settings (e.g. political punditry programs and televised political debates) and guided by other research perspectives (e.g. qualitative and social scientific research methods).

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Sample of Texts

Candidates	Year	Total Ads	Flip Flop Relevant Ads
Eisenhower	1952	33	2
Stevenson		18	4
Eisenhower	1956	8	1
Stevenson		14	4
Nixon	1960	38	1
Kennedy		31	2
Goldwater	1964	35	4
Johnson		28	4
Nixon	1968	26	3
Humphrey		30	3
Nixon	1972	25	6
McGovern		34	5
Ford	1976	60	12
Carter		38	2
Reagan	1980	55	7
Carter		43	4
Reagan	1984	47	2
Mondale		37	1
Bush	1988	40	4
Dukakis		47	4
Bush	1992	19	9
Clinton		40	10
Dole	1996	51	14
Clinton		50	5
Bush	2000	42	5
Gore		47	4
Bush	2004	53	11
Kerry		116	14
McCain	2008	82	12
Obama		92	12
Total		1279	171

Figure 5.1. “Platform Double Talk”

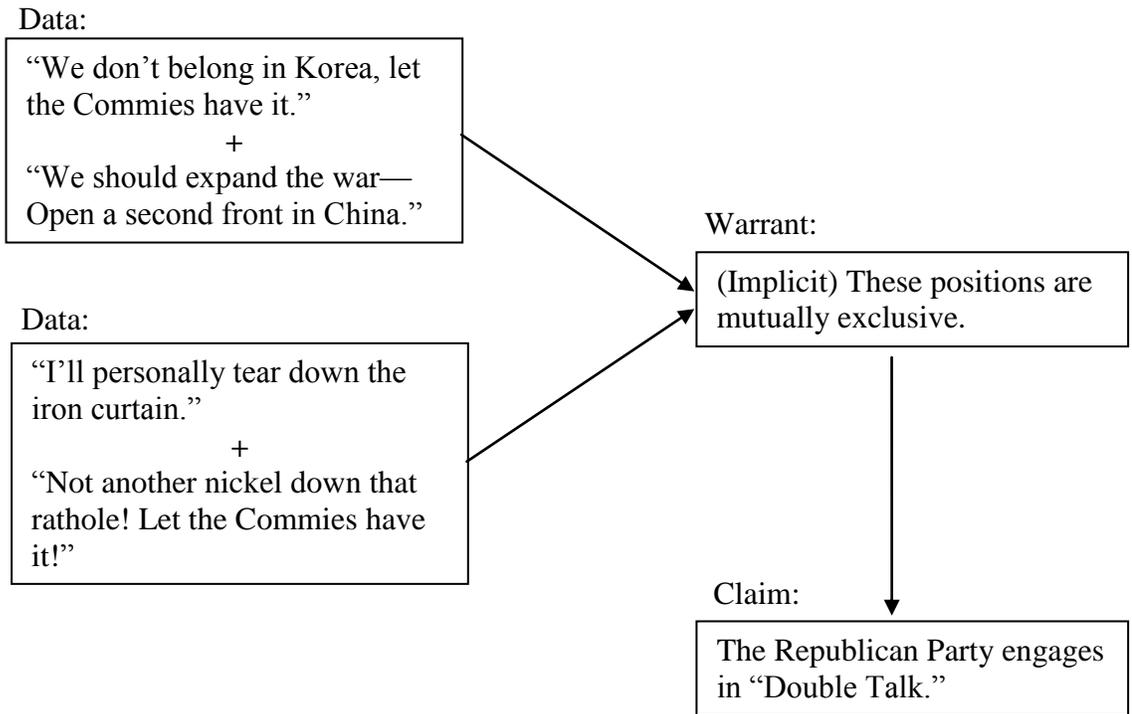


Figure 5.2. "Barry, Barry"

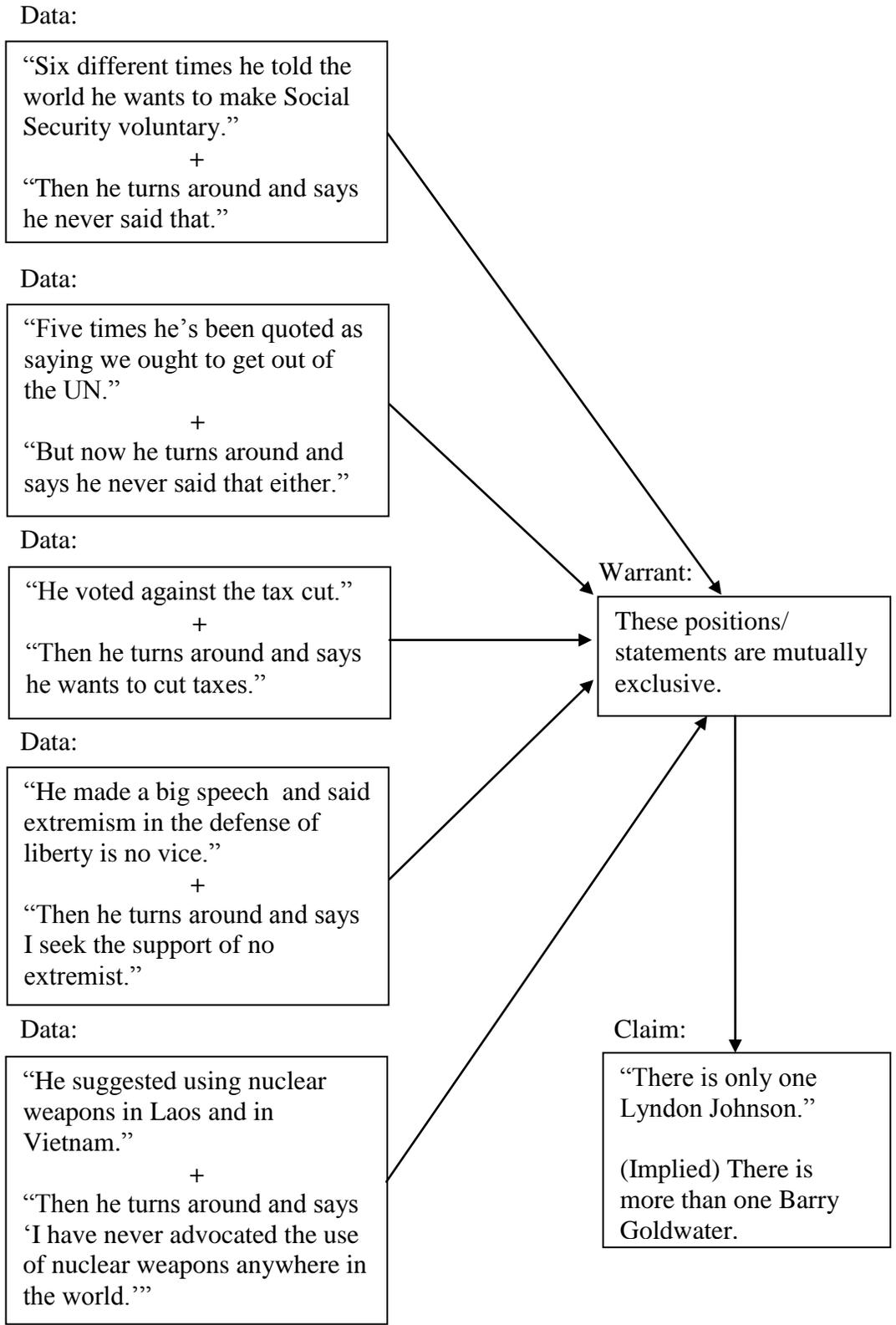


Figure 5.3. "Bubbles"

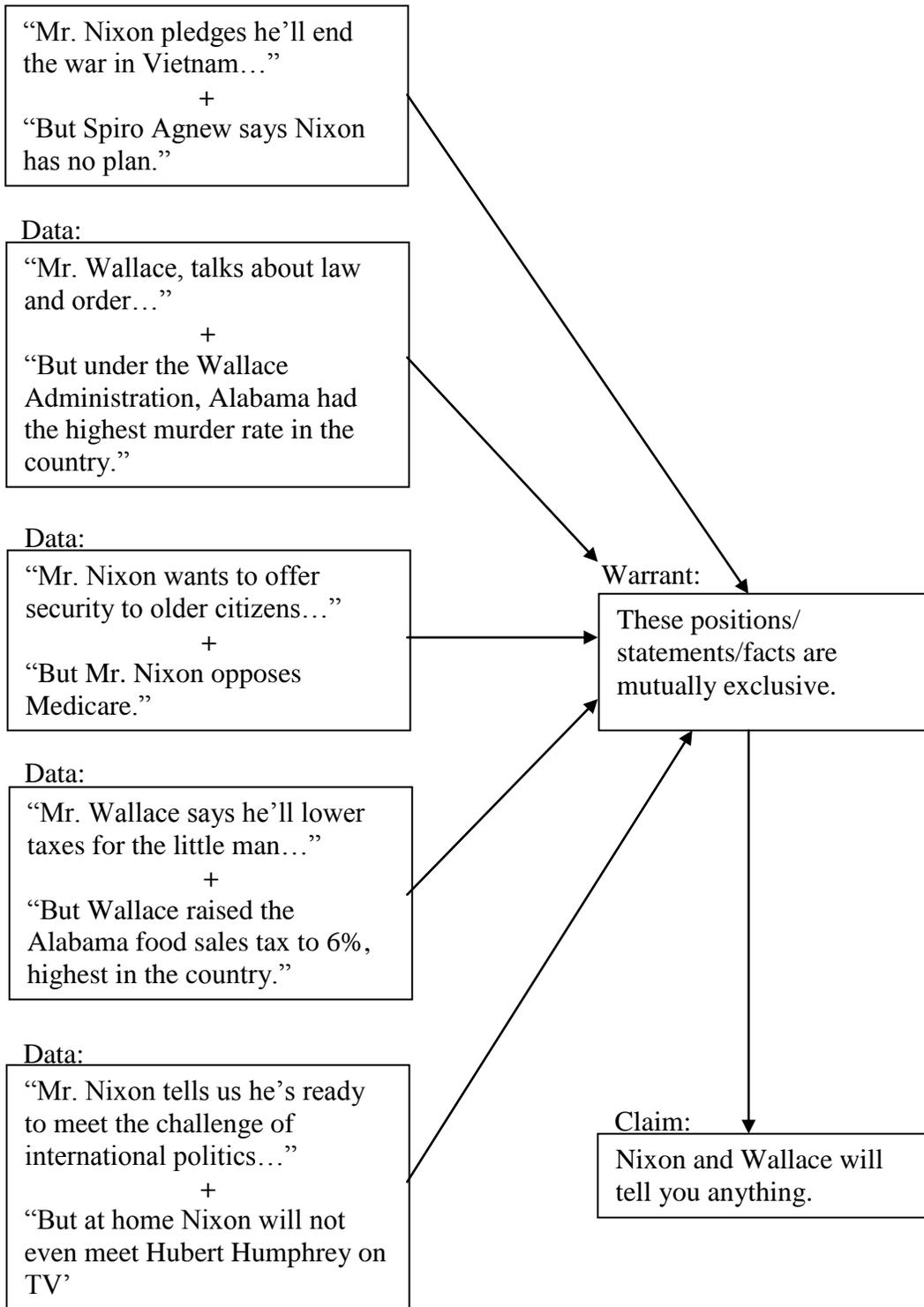


Figure 5.4. “McGovern Turnaround”

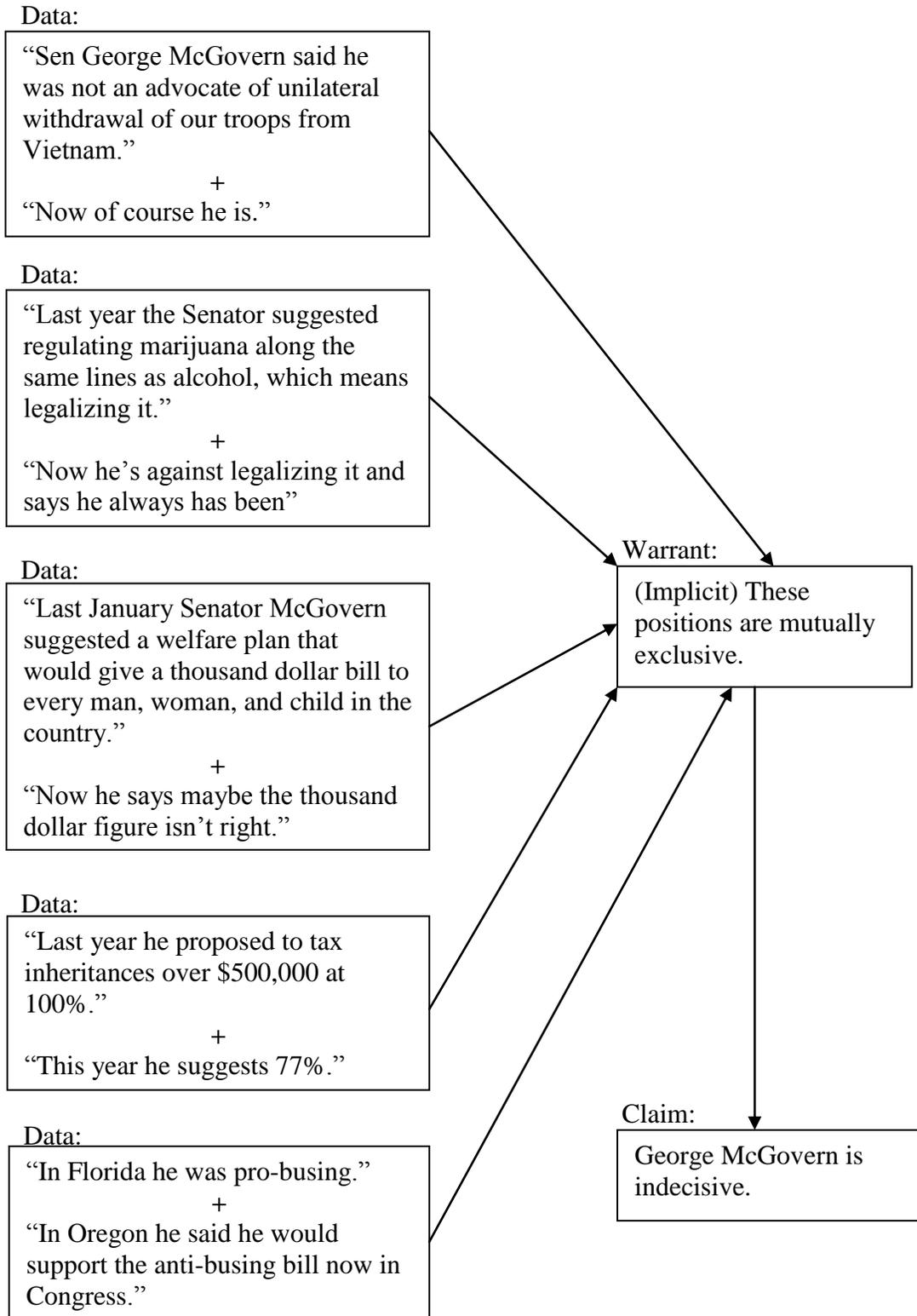
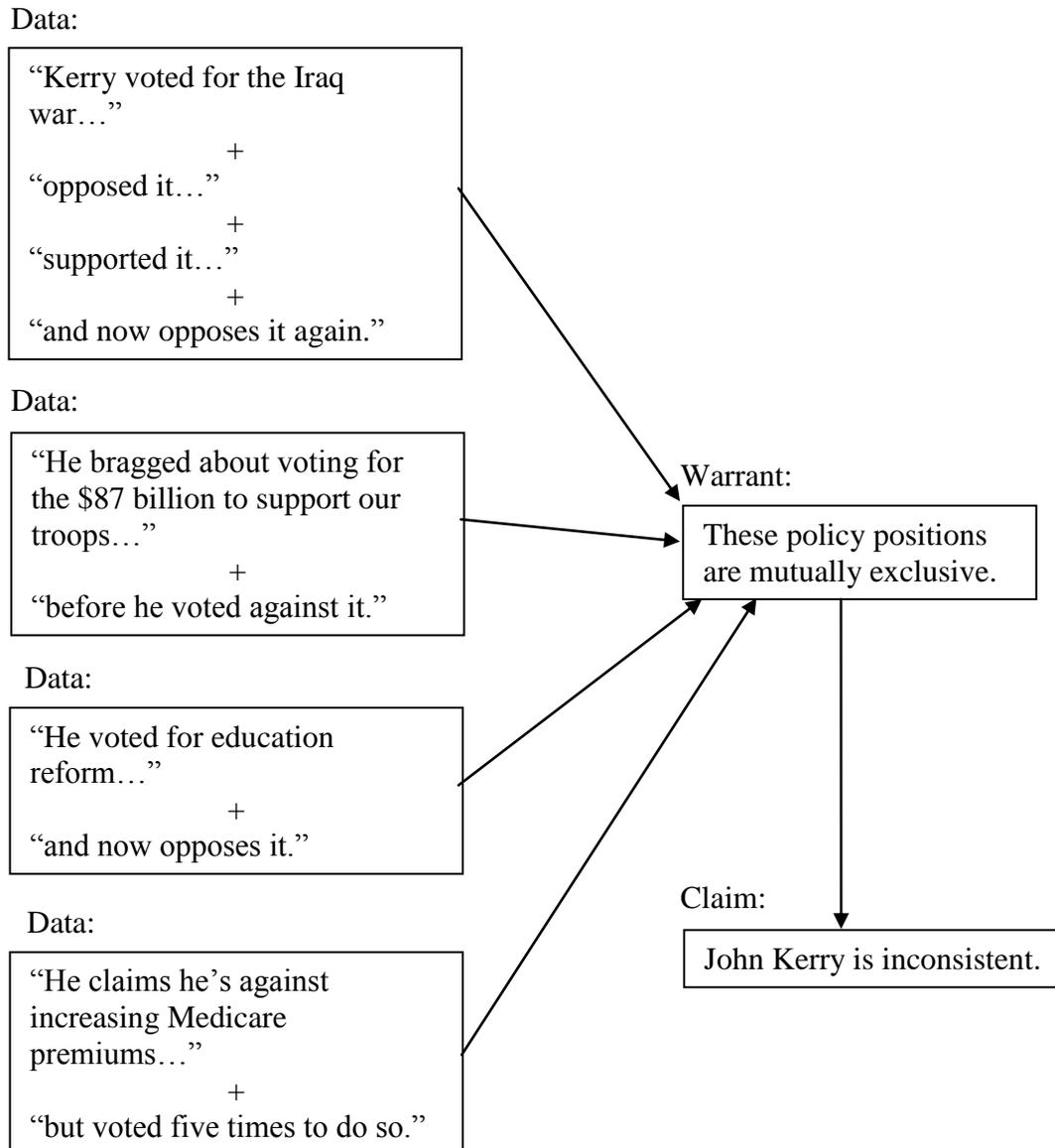


Figure 5.5. “Windsurfing”



## VITA

Most of what can be said about Mark Glantz has already been articulated in the lyrics to Dr. Dre's Grammy Award-winning smash hit, "Forgot About Dre." Still the same ol' G? You bet he is. Gave you a tape full of dope beats to bump when you stroll through in your hood? No doubt. From the streets of Compton? Yep...well...not exactly, but the dirt roads of rural Upstate New York are no playground either.

Mark Glantz really likes teaching and enjoys drinking \$1 PBRs.