

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 18, 2013

CONTACT: Michael Rozansky, 215-746-0202, mrozansky@asc.upenn.edu

Could Lincoln Be Reelected Today?

Video ads reimagine the 1864 campaign waged with current tools of deception

If Abraham Lincoln ran for president today, what sort of attack ads might he encounter? What deceptive advertisements, false claims, and out-of-context quotations might the Illinois Republican face from the likes of Democratic nominee Gen. George B. McClellan and the third-party political groups known as Super PACs?

Using a variety of political-campaign techniques along with parody and humor, FlackCheck.org, a political literacy site of the Annenberg Public Policy Center, has reconceived the bruising 1864 campaign in a video timeline. The ads seek to portray Lincoln as soft on terrorism and McClellan as cowardly – and subject both men to the deceptive approaches familiar in campaign ads today.

The Gettysburg Address, which marks its 150th anniversary on Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2013, starts the video timeline. Following his address in Gettysburg, Pa., Lincoln comes under attack in an ad for having “even refused to dedicate a battlefield still fresh with the blood of tens of thousands of Union soldiers: ‘We cannot dedicate – we cannot consecrate – we cannot hallow this ground,’ ” he says. As for his resolution that “these dead shall not have died in vain,” the ad asks: “Honestly, Abe: Died in vain?”

Another ad portrays Lincoln as untrustworthy because as a lawyer he defended “an admitted adulteress and a wife who poisoned her husband.” McClellan, too, comes under unflattering scrutiny as a general for “leading from the rear,” based on his admission that “the duties of my position are such as often to make it necessary for me to remain in the rear – an awful thing.” As the ad puts it: “George ‘Little Mac’ McClellan: Unfit to Command an Army. Unfit to Lead a Nation.”

The campaign-ad timeline features fictional campaign attacks generated by real events, from the Gettysburg Address to Lincoln’s reelection on Nov. 8, 1864. The dozen ads include several produced by the renowned political consultants Bob Shrum, who worked on the Democratic presidential campaigns of Al Gore and John Kerry, and Mark McKinnon, who worked with Republicans George W. Bush and John McCain.

In addition to the dozen ads on the timeline, FlackCheck.org has produced nearly 30 other ads employing deception, distraction, and out-of-context words that bring to life the characters, legislation, and landmark events of Lincoln’s presidency – with an eerie resonance to anyone who’s followed recent political campaigns. “Where’s the birth certificate, Mr. President?” asks

one. In another, the pro-Lincoln Super PAC “Steam Boat Veterans for Truth” goes after McClellan’s military record.

Even Mary Todd Lincoln is not spared. Known as “the hellcat” to the president’s staff, she comes under fire for holding séances in the White House. “This November,” one ad says, “let’s elect a President who’s guided by the Constitution, not a Ouija board.”

Designed for students of history, politics and advertising, the ads are accompanied by a lesson plan for teachers who are interested in making mid-19^h century American history and politics more accessible and teaching about the ways in which language can be distorted in false claims and campaign advertising.

Find the 12-video campaign chronology at <http://www.flackcheck.org/lincoln-1864/>.

Find the entire set of FlackCheck.org Lincoln videos at <http://www.flackcheck.org/lincoln-vs-mcclellan/>.

FlackCheck.org (<http://www.flackcheck.org/>), a political literacy companion site to the award-winning FactCheck.org, is dedicated to exposing and educating citizens, especially students, about patterns of deception and other flaws in advertising and political discourse. Both FactCheck.org and FlackCheck.org are projects of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania.

The **Annenberg Public Policy Center** (<http://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org>) was established in 1994 to educate the public and policy makers about the media’s role in advancing public understanding of political and health issues at the local, state and federal levels.

Follow FlackCheck.org on Twitter: @FlackCheck.

Follow APPC on Twitter: @APPCPenn.