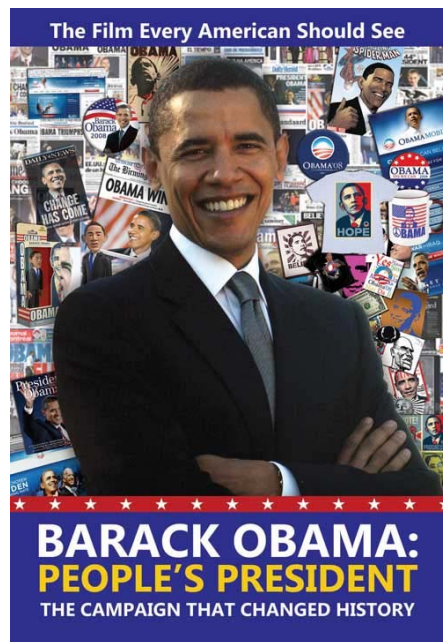




Barack Obama: People's President

The Campaign That Changed History

Lesson Plan/Guidebook



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Barack Obama's Official Biography

Source: [http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/President Obama/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/President/Obama/)

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

Barack H. Obama is the 44th President of the United States.

His story is the American story — values from the heartland, a middle-class upbringing in a strong family, hard work and education as the means of getting ahead, and the conviction that a life so blessed should be lived in service to others.

With a father from Kenya and a mother from Kansas, President Obama was born in Hawaii on August 4, 1961. He was raised with help from his grandfather, who served in Patton's army, and his grandmother, who worked her way up from the secretarial pool to middle management at a bank.

After working his way through college with the help of scholarships and student loans, President Obama moved to Chicago, where he worked with a group of churches to help rebuild communities devastated by the closure of local steel plants.

He went on to attend law school, where he became the first African—American president of the *Harvard Law Review*. Upon graduation, he returned to Chicago to help lead a voter registration drive, teach constitutional law at the University of Chicago, and remain active in his community.

President Obama's years of public service are based around his unwavering belief in the ability to unite people around a politics of purpose. In the Illinois State Senate, he passed the first major ethics reform in 25 years, cut taxes for working families, and expanded health care for children and their parents. As a United States Senator, he reached across the aisle to pass groundbreaking lobbying reform, lock up the world's most dangerous weapons, and bring transparency to government by putting federal spending online.

He was elected the 44th President of the United States on November 4, 2008, and sworn in on January 20, 2009. He and his wife, Michelle, are the proud parents of two daughters, Malia, 10, and Sasha, 7.

Barack Obama: The People's President Lesson Plan/Guidebook

Lesson One: Create an Action Plan for Your Cause

Materials needed: Barack Obama: The People's President DVD

Time to complete: 1-2 class periods

In this lesson, students will learn how to create an action plan for a personal cause they would like to support. This can range from creating awareness about an issue in their community or raising funds for a local non-profit organization. This lesson can be done by students as individuals or as teams.

Step One: Watch the Barack Obama: People's President DVD with your class.

Step Two: Define Parameters and Set Goals

Now ask your students to decide on a cause they would like to work for. They should state the cause, define the issue or problem that needs addressing and then state their goal whether it be to start a letter writing campaign, start fundraising, increase public awareness, etc.

Have each student/team use one page to define the following:

Problem/Issue: What do they want to bring focus to and why is it important? Example: Teen Smoking Can Lead to Health Problems Now and in the Future.

Goal: What do they want to achieve? Example: Create awareness behind a Stop Smoking Day at school or raise funds to create a PSA to air on local radio.

Timeline: Have students create a timeline on how they want to achieve their goal. They should put a date by each step and when each part will be completed.

Tools: Students should define the many tools outlined in the DVD that they can use, whether it was social media, online video, door-to-door efforts, house parties, etc. Stress that they do not have to use every method mentioned in the DVD, only those that will be most effective.

Step Three: Discussion

Have each student present his or her action plan for the class. Discuss the following:

1. What one specific activity or tool will be most effective for achieving the goal set in the action plan? Why?
2. Social Media, i.e. Facebook, blogs, etc. may be "easier" for students to use to help achieve their action plan goals, but are there potential drawbacks? Would traditional methods work better?
3. Grassroots organizing has been used in many campaigns both political and for many causes. Ask students to research on their own notable campaigns how they can learn from them.

Lesson Two:

Write an Article Based on an Interview Transcript

Materials needed:

- **Barack Obama: The People's President DVD,**
- **Interview Transcripts PDF (found in Educational Resources section of Choicesvideo.net)**

Time to complete: 1-2 class periods

During the making of the documentary "Barack Obama: People's President", director Danny Schechter interviewed many people to get their thoughts on the campaign. To save time and to make each interview as compelling as possible, Schechter had to decide which parts of each interview were the most informative.

Assignment: Have students pick one of the transcripts from the interviews shown in the film. Each transcript can be found in the guidebook.

After reading the transcript, each student will then write a one-page newspaper style article based on the interview. The article can be written in a Q&A format or as regular article incorporating information found in the DVD.

Discussion:

After each student has written each article, ask the following questions.

1. Why did you choose the transcript you did? Why did you write it in the format you chose?
2. How did you decide which quotes to use in your article? How did the story's focus influence which quotes you chose to keep in.
3. Sometimes a person's quotes are paraphrased or edited due to a space constraints, content or other considerations. How important is it to make sure that each person's quotes, if edited, were done without taken them out of context?
4. Go back and watch an interview segment on the DVD based on one of the transcripts. Are there differences when editing for print as opposed to film/tv? How does context/content change when someone is being interviewed on film/tv as opposed to print.

Correlation to NCSS and Civitas Standards

NSS-USH.9.12.10 ERA 10: Contemporary United States (1968 To The Present)

- National Council for the Social Studies Standards, X: Civic Ideals and Practices: b. Identify, analyze, interpret, and evaluate sources and examples of citizens' rights and responsibilities.
- Locate, access, analyze, organize, synthesize, evaluate and apply information about selected public issues-identifying, describing and evaluating multiple points of view.
- Understands recent developments in foreign and domestic politics
- Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in contemporary United States

“Barack Obama, People’s President” Describes Techniques That The Obama Administration Is Now Using To Win Support For Its Agenda, And Can Be Used To Hold Him Accountable

By Danny Schechter
Director, “Barack Obama, People’s President”

The election of Barack Obama may be long over, but the campaign for change is still underway. For the first time in American history, a president is using the techniques he deployed in running for office as a candidate in calling for deeper change.

And, no surprise, this significant political development is barely being covered in a media that loves to punditize, poll public opinion, and debate policy options in a top-down way. By “covering” politics in this way, our mass media is missing the most innovative bottom -up grassroots effort in recent memory,

I know about this because as a journalist and filmmaker, I set out to document just how Obama won the election. That story, told in the film “Barack Obama, People’s President” (slated for DVD release later this month by ChoicesVideo.net) documents the online and on the ground techniques that were used to win the highest office in the land.

The President is now using those same techniques, built around an impressive thirteen million-name email list, to keep his organizers and supporters involved in backing his legislative agenda. This is the biggest mass lobbying effort of all time.

While his principal campaign advisor David Axelrod joined the White House staff at a high level, his campaign manager David Plouffe set about converting a campaign apparatus into a legislative army. As MoveOn.Org advisor David Fenton explains in our film, “It’s an institutionalized mass level automated technological community organizing that has never existed before and it is a very, very powerful force.”

They have converted the campaign website, BarackObama.com, and renamed it Organizing for America. It encouraged visitors to call Congress to support the President’s budget. And like the campaign, it sends out emails, text messages and uses social networking technologies. It organizes volunteers to canvass door to door like they did in the campaign. The first time out, they garnered nearly a quarter million signatures.

Andrew Rasiej of the personal Democracy Forum elaborates:

“He knows who is giving him money, who’s voted for him. He can now reach out to these people and ask them to help him to pass his legislative agenda. Those same people can call their congressmen and say we’ll support you for reelection if you vote for Obama’s legislation. We will give you money if you support Obama’s legislation. It’s a very powerful group that is actually the most powerful grassroots organization ever built in American history.”

The film “People’s President” shows how all of this - including use of Meet-up technologies like FaceBook, MySpace and Twitter were used as organizing tools by the campaign.

Rasiej cites the ongoing potential:

“It’s a citizens lobby! And not only can Obama as president go over the heads of congress to speak to the American public, he can go now between their legs and go underneath Congress to the American public and the American public can do the same back and that’s created a new

power structure in the American politics, where the citizens can actually participate and not rely on the old (abstract) system of lobbyists, special interests and only those who have money.”

There is also the possibility, as political theorist Benjamin Barber told us, the young people who backed Obama can use these same techniques and web platforms to challenge him to stay on track:

“There are websites of young people who are deeply involved in the campaign who talk to one another, and now it would be very interesting because now that Obama’s President, they will find that websites and some horizontal campaigns of young people involved with him, now looking at him critically. And using the web to challenge him, to live up to what these young people believed he promised them and so on.”

This is significant. The progressive critics of Obama, disappointed by his appointments and some of his cautious policies, have to go beyond railing in print or crying in their beer. They have to reach out to the grassroots army that assured his election. This means being willing to dialogue with liberals and younger people who don’t label their politics. Reminding them of the role they played in a historic election may be one way to do that — to appeal to the instincts that led them to engage in the campaign for “change.” There’s no need to deify Obama — but there is a imperative to reenergize his base.

It is hard to remember that two years earlier Obama was barely known, registering on the radar screen for just 10% of voters. He was also hardly a brand name as a first term Senator who spent more time in state politics in Illinois than on the national stage. Moreover, he was young and a man of color — not qualities that usually prevail in a presidential arena which tends to draw far older, far whiter, and far more centrist candidates. The thought that he would beat frontrunner Hillary Clinton in the primaries was, quite frankly, unthinkable to most of the elite.

And yet he prevailed, as he used a phrase appropriated from labor organizer and Latino legend Caesar Chavez. Obama turned the farm workers Spanish language slogan “Si Se Puede” into “Yes We Can.” Rather than focus on specific political issues, he built a campaign on the promise of “Hope.” Rather than just rely on traditional fundraising — although by the end, he was flush with it — he reached out over the internet for smaller donations from millions of donors.

Few in the major media gave him a chance, but he was not discouraged because he had created his own grassroots media operation using sophisticated organizing and social networking techniques to build a bottom-up movement, not the usual top-down apparatus. While his campaign ran the show, he encouraged independent initiatives including citizen-generated media, music videos, personalized websites, twittering and texting, etc.

This is the new direction our politics has taken. It is a story that may be somewhat threatening to old media - and older activists - who prefer a one to many approach to communication, as opposed to forging a more interactive empowering platform. There is no question that young people — especially those mobilized by Obama — prefer online media and that choice is making it harder and harder for traditional outlets to sustain their influence and, in some cases, even their organizations. Old media may be on the way out.

This is why our film is, in my mind, so important, not just as a record of how Obama won and what happened in 2008, but in what will happen, can happen, and is happening in the future. This is why I believe its critical for Americans to see it — and others in the world as well — to recognize how Obama represents more than just another politician, but a whole new approach to politics. That old adage is worth remembering: “It’s not the ship that makes the wave, it’s the motion of the ocean.”

Obama, for all his shortcomings, which are becoming more obvious by the day, has pioneered the way change must be won — not by people on the top, but by all of us. It remains for “us” to hold him accountable. We live in a culture of amnesia - it is important to learn the lessons of the recent past.

– Emmy-Award Winning producer Danny Schechter blogs for MediaChannel.org. He’s made 30 documentaries, mostly on issues of change. His film “Barack Obama, People’s President,” produced by South Africa’s Anant Singh, is available soon on DVD from ChoicesVideo.net.

Comments to Dissector@Mediachannel.org

Discussion Questions:

1. Each Presidential campaign had its own website and new media strategy. Why was Obama's campaign more successful? Review websites of several Democratic and Republican Presidential candidates. (If they are not still active/live, try and find past media coverage, stills, etc.) Based on what you find, discuss what Obama's website did differently that made it so successful.
2. Obama wants those who voted for him to use the energy of the campaign to help bring change in their community. How can local organizations/causes use the techniques created by the Obama campaign? Are there any barriers they might have to face such as cost, access to equipment, etc. What are some low-tech things these groups can use?
3. Obama's use of new media and grassroots organizing circumvented the traditional way Presidential candidates are elected. Will future campaigns be able to replicate this success and the methods used? Will these techniques allow third party candidates more opportunities in targeting support for their campaigns? Do you think new media and grassroots are more effective in local campaigns, national campaigns, or both?
4. Voter generated videos were an important part of the Obama campaign. They provided "free advertising" and received immediate response online, for example "Obama Girl". What are the pros and cons of such videos? Can user generated videos accurately reflect a candidate's message? What are the risks if a video is inaccurate or makes comments about another candidate that are untrue? Do these ads risk being labeled as libel or are they protected by free speech laws?
5. Obama's use of the internet during the campaign is compared to President Franklin Roosevelt's use of the radio during his administration. Considering that radio, during F.D.R's time, was a new medium, compare and contrast how both men used the mediums to their advantage. To take it a step further, how did television in the 60's alter the way campaigns were run?
6. The Obama campaign and its grassroots supporters targeted elderly voters, who tend to vote heavily, and kids, who were too young to vote. What was the goal of targeting each of these demographics? How did new media and internet help or hinder in meeting these goals? What previously held assumptions about both of these groups changed because of the Obama campaign? What were the pros and cons of The Great Schlep campaign with Sarah Silverman?
7. MTV used volunteer journalists to cover the campaign in all 50 states. Through blogs, inexpensive video cameras and other tools, they covered stories that mainstream media did not. How did this grassroots media affect overall campaign coverage? Will such techniques change how future campaigns are covered by the media?