

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

THE LIVING ROOM CANDIDATE

PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN COMMERCIALS 1952–2020

SIGN IN | REGISTER

SEARCH

COMMERCIALS

ELECTION YEAR

1952

1956

1960

1964

1968

1972

1976

1980

1984

1988

1992

1996

2000

2004

2008

2012

2016

2020

PLAYLISTS

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2020 BLOG

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TERMS OF USE

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00:00 / 01:00

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FEATURED AD: *Go from There*
In this October presidential campaign ad, Joseph Biden reminds voters that he would be the president for all of America, not just "red" or "blue."

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INTRODUCTION

"The idea that you can merchandise candidates for high office like breakfast cereal is the ultimate indignity to the democratic process."
-Democratic candidate Adlai Stevenson, 1956

"Television is no gimmick, and nobody will ever be elected to major office again without presenting themselves well on it."
-Television producer and Nixon campaign consultant Roger Ailes, 1968

In a media-saturated environment in which news, opinions, and entertainment surround us all day on our television sets, computers, and cell phones, the television commercial remains the one area where presidential candidates have complete control over their images. Television commercials use all the tools of fiction filmmaking, including script, visuals, editing, and performance, to distill a candidate's major campaign themes into a few powerful images. Ads elicit emotional reactions, inspiring support for a candidate or raising doubts about his opponent. While commercials reflect the styles and techniques of the times in which they were made, the fundamental strategies and messages have tended to remain the same over the years.

The Living Room Candidate contains more than 300 commercials, from every presidential election since 1952, when Madison Avenue advertising executive Rosser Reeves convinced Dwight Eisenhower that short ads played during such popular TV programs as *I Love Lucy* would reach more voters than any other form of advertising. This innovation had a permanent effect on the way presidential campaigns are run.

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