

An analysis of the Conservative Party of Canada's ad, "Our Country"

Written Task 2

12/17/2013

What is the title of the primary source text(s) that you will analyze?

- “Our Country” by the Conservative Party of Canada

Which part of the course does the essay refer to?

- Part 2 Language and Mass Communication

Prescribed Question

- Text and genre: how does the text conform to, or deviate from, the conventions of a particular genre, and for what purpose?

Some of the closest political races in history have been swung by a single, strong, political advertisement. The genre of positive, political advertisements is essential to campaigning, as these are often employed to convince citizens to vote for a specific party. In the 2012 Canadian federal election, Prime Minister Stephen Harper released “Our Country,” an advertisement which begins with scenes of the national landscape, interspersed with images of ordinary Canadians, and finally, the advertisement foregrounds Harper’s position as the prominent figurehead of the country. As such, “Our Country” by the Conservative Party of Canada conforms to the conventions of a positive political advertisement in the presentation of particular scenes to establish a sense of patriotism, using narration and background music to reinforce the nationalistic, inclusive atmosphere of the advertisement, in the outlining of traditional Canadian values to create a sense of pathos and unity, and in the association of Harper with the creation of these multifaceted, united aspects of Canada.

The scene selection in the advertisement aims to appeal to a wide target demographic in order to invoke a proud sense of patriotism. The imagery of natural beauty, such as majestic, snow-capped mountains, northern lights, and tall pine trees, are all symbolic of Canada’s varied landscape; this is meant to appeal to all citizens who identify with the natural of the environment. (Conservative Party of Canada, “Our Country”) There is also a fundamental appeal to a rural demographic, as well as an urban one; this is accomplished in the images of wheatfields, as well as an urban panoramic view of a cityscape. Toronto, the iconic political and commercial heart of Canada, is represented by the renowned CN Tower, invoking a sense of nationalistic pride, and the advertisement’s implication that in addition to Canada’s beauty, its economy is equally impressive. Throughout the advertisement, there is the sub-textual message that Canada’s beautiful, multifaceted nature is reinforced by its intrinsic character and diversity. Harper’s immeasurable bold assertion that Canada is “the best country in the world” is reinforced with the symbolic waving of the Canadian flag, which further prompts viewers who take pride in their country to recognize the efforts of the Conservative government to this end.

Also characteristic of political advertisements, music and narration support the goal of the advertisement to reinforce a patriotic, inclusive atmosphere. Sentiments of pride and nationalism, which are meant to be acutely felt by the audience, are largely attributable to the pervasive use of Harper’s confident, patriotic tone, combined with inspirational, uplifting orchestral music that enables the audience to more fully engage with the message of the advertisement. In the assertive narration, Harper employs “we” and “our” when addressing the audience; the sustained first person usage appeals to a sense of family, unity and togetherness. (Conservative Party of Canada, “Our Country”) In addition, the advertisement effectively incorporates nationalistic background music, and sounds with positive connotations such as clapping to enhance the optimistic mood but not so as to overpower Harper’s voice.

Furthermore, the ideals conveyed in the advertisement are endemic to those in many other political advertisements, those which are often valued by the majority of Canadians. Three principles exemplified in this advertisement which function as a source of pride for Canadians include family, the cultural mosaic, and unity. Positive emotive language such as “honorable,” “faithful,” and “loyal” are employed to characterize Canada as positive and admirable. (Conservative Party of Canada, “Our Country”) In addition, the archetypal depiction of families on the beach, along with a snapshot of a couple hugging, reinforces the strong, family values embodied in Canadian heritage. Moreover, there is the implicit idea conveyed that Canada takes pride in its diversity and multiculturalism, as its society is analogized to a cultural mosaic. The multi-ethnic population thus relates to the advertisement with the idea that the Conservative Government supports the view of an inclusive, diverse Canadian future. The unifying common denominators between the past, present and future about the paramount importance of working together are illustrated by the historical accomplishments of Canadians, and the country’s historical legacy and traditions, such as the victories achieved in WWII, the sport of hockey, and in the depiction of the Olympic torch as a symbolic rite of passage in Canadian heritage. Thus the advertisement delivers the message to a widespread demographic that the Conservative Party and Harper will fight for the value of families, multiculturalism and unity.

Fundamental to all political ads is the epitomization of the party’s leader as forceful, capable and compassionate. Since Harper is the incumbent Prime Minister, the most notable and powerful aspects of Canada are implicitly attributed to his work, characterizing him as a hero. The metaphor of “courageous warrior” is narrated during the scene in which he is dramatically exiting the office, and the words “compassionate neighbour” are employed as Harper empathetically pats someone’s shoulder. (Conservative Party of Canada, “Our Country”) This diction is effectively used to describe Canada’s vital role in the international community. However, the advertisement clearly connotes Harper’s association; he is the figurehead of Canada and thus must embody both of these essential characteristics. Furthermore, the rhetorical devices of anaphora and parallelism -- “That’s why we’re here, that’s why we strive, that’s why we serve” -- are employed as Harper is walking down an office corridor. (Conservative Party of Canada, “Our Country”) Harper uses rhetoric to emphasize his role in the government, as well as illustrating why Canada needs his leadership to continue upholding these inherent values. Moreover, he is seen socializing with common folks, and speaking in front of parliament and the UN; this leads viewers to believe that Harper dedicates personal time to familiarize himself with his people, and takes his role as leader with care and concern.

The advertisement “Our Country” contains many of the emblematic characteristics of a positive, political advertisement: it contains an uplifting, patriotic mood, reinforced by particular scene selection, narration and music; it supports the underlying common values of citizens, and associates Harper with a multitude of national accomplishments. Possessing many of these defining elements, the Conservative party’s “Our Country” conforms to the style of a typically positive political advertisement in order to effectively engage with its audience on multifarious levels.

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