

Evaluation of child's pay according to toulmin



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To the common eye, a political commercial can be evaluated at a quick glance. Right away, the reader decides whether they liked the commercial and whether they agreed with it or not, without even having an understanding to why they felt the way they did. Toulmin's *The Uses of Argument* helps clarify what makes an effective argument and can then be put in context of political arguments within commercials. *Childs Pay*, a decidedly democratic commercial, won the "Bush in 30 seconds" contest sponsored by MoveOn.com. Obviously, many people thought it was an effective commercial-but, what elements made this commercial so effective to the public eye that it won first place? Toulmin's model can help one to understand how the argument in "Child's Pay" functions and therefore make a more educated decision on whether the commercial is effective or not.

"Child's Pay" relies almost completely on its use of visuals, because it contains virtually no text. An acoustic guitar starts playing a mournful song in the background, and then different scenes fade in and out of a black screen. Portrayed is a little boy washing dishes, a small blond girl vacuuming a hotel hallway, a girl watching an assembly line, a boy out in the cold, hauling trash while a nice 4x4 drives past him, a boy rotating tires, and finally the commercial ends with a very small girl with long blond hair bagging groceries. All of these children are intent on their work, and all have unhappy, somber looks on their face. Near the end of the commercial, one line of text comes on the screen in white letters, reading "Guess who is going to pay off Bush's one trillion dollar deficit? In 30 seconds, many questions and emotions are provoked in the reader's mind regarding the

commercial. The overall tone of the commercial is an extremely sad one, created by the music and the dark visuals containing ideas of child labor.

The reader will immediately be sympathetic towards the children and set Bush in opposition to them. The one line of text gives the reader a feeling of mistrust and uneasiness towards Bush. This is the point in which questions form in the reader's mind. Did Bush get our country into debt, or were we in debt already? Is the country's deficit really one trillion dollars? Is he really going to make children work to pay off the deficit? Toulmin's model can really help clarify the argument that is going on in the commercial. The implied claim is that the country's children are going to pay off the 1 trillion dollar deficit that George Bush created.

However, there is absolutely no data to back up the claim. " If this claim [that we make] is challenged, we must be able to establish it-that is, make it good, and show that it was justifiable. (Toulmin) That's where all the reader's questions arise from. To make the claim valid and credible, and then declare the commercial effective, it will be essential to answer those questions and turn up some data that will support the claim so that when the " challenger" asks " What have you got to go on? " (Toulmin) there will be a solid answer. The largest issue of concern is the amount of deficit claimed in " Child's Pay. " The amount that was claimed, 1 trillion dollars, turned out to be an exaggeration.

The federal deficit for the year 2004 is much closer to 500 billion dollars. There are slight discrepancies, between the Office of Management and Budget, which claimed the accurate deficit 521 billion dollars, and the

Congressional Budget Office, which claimed the deficit to be 477 billion dollars. (How Stuff Works) However, these numbers are only half of what "Child's Pay" was claiming the deficit to be. This inaccuracy makes the argument much less credible.

One point though, is that even though the deficit number was exaggerated, the 500 billion dollars that is our deficit is one of the largest numbers in history. During Bill Clinton's time in office, there was a surplus for the United States, in place of the deficit. In 1999, the surplus was 129 billion dollars, and in the year 2000 the surplus spiked at 236 billion dollars. (How Stuff Works) After that, when George Bush took office, the surplus ended and the country's financial situation declined into a deficit. The only other deficit as large as what it is now was in 1945, with a deficit of 456 billion dollars. (How Stuff Works) The issue of the deficit is a major one in the upcoming election, and "Child's Pay" had a great idea in a way to address it.

It seems that "Child's Pay" was correct in implying that George Bush and his administration got the United States into the deficit, just not to 1 trillion dollars. If they had been more accurate about the deficit numbers and included a blurb about where they got their information, the data would have better supported the claim and therefore been more effective. One major question that may be evoked in the reader's mind when watching the commercial is "Wow, WHO will pay off this enormous deficit? Child's Pay is subtly suggesting through the visuals that small children will pay off the deficit. When the commercial is first viewed, it may be mistaken for an anti-child labor ad, instead of a political ad. The powerful images of overworked, unhappy children performing child labor are used as an emotional appeal to

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evoke fear in the audience that this will happen to their children if Bush continues to build a deficit.

As simplistic as it may seem, the reality is that the people paying off the debt will not be small children. While the idea behind using children to portray a message is effective, when placed in context of how relevant it is to portraying who will pay off the deficit becomes ludicrous. "I've also got a separate, more practical problem with the ad: message clarity. Only at the end do we get the punch line, and even then it leaves us a little puzzled.

I mean, these kids won't really be kids anymore when they go to work to pay off the deficit. They'll be adults then", says Seth Stevenson, an influential author and critic for MSN's website. (Not So Amateur). So, the one fact containing any data regarding the amount of the deficit was quite inaccurate, and the children that were portrayed in the advertisement is inaccurate as well.

The implied claim of the argument in "Child's Pay" was that children were going to pay off the trillion dollar deficit that George Bush created really has no data to back it up, except for the fact that George Bush did in fact dig the United States into debt from the last president's surplus. Using Toulmin as a model that determines one must have "Grounds" for the argument; "Child's Pay" really is not a "good" advertisement. So, then why did "Child's Pay" win the contest, not only by the panel of judges, but also the people's popularity vote? It won because of its clear, higher tech production. "Child's Pay" has excellent production values-it's by far the slickest of the 14 finalists.

' It has the ability to evoke an emotional response using the moody music and forlorn looking children, and its ability to convey a harsh portrayal of the president without lecturing. Perhaps the MoveOn folks, in a surprisingly savvy move, chose gentle persuasion over rallying the base. Perhaps they feared that a low-budget, preach-to-the-choir ad would make them look like fringe amateurs, instead of the power players they long to be. " (Not So Amature) While the advertisement was popular and well made, according to Toulmin, it really lacks the substantial data that would support the claim.