

Mass Media 'Sells' Politicians

BY BAYARD RUSTIN
 Back in 1968, a group of exceptionally clever and talented marketing experts, most of them from the business world, performed a miracle: they repackaged and sold Richard Nixon, a man who was viewed by many people as a bad loser, and a shady character.

In a real sense, the election of Nixon was not so much a triumph for a political strategy or ideology as it was a victory for a carefully-planned advertising campaign. Voters "bought" Nixon instead of Hubert Humphery in much the same way that they choose Crest toothpaste over Ultra-Brite.

Because of Nixon's success in selling himself, many political candidates have turned to media strategies, emphasizing image over issues. As a result political campaigns, including presidential ones,

have been trivialized and debased. Indeed, far too many people now view campaigns as repulsive displays of sheer nonsense.

PACKAGING PIONEER

Having succeeded in marketing candidates, the media consultants are now turning to a new and financially lucrative endeavor -- the selling of political ideas.

The pioneer, of course, in packaging ideology is the Mobil Corporation, whose conservative political views are regularly scrawled on the Op-Ed page of the New York Times. The Mobil ads, which cost thousands of dollars to print, are concise, brilliantly-written, and even humorous.

But they are also misleading and one-sided (which shouldn't be too surprising, considering Mobil's heavy investment

in the ads).

Following Mobil's example, other corporations have begun producing political messages -- some blatant, some subtle -- in

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the pages of America's newspapers and magazines. Almost every day one can find the opinions of Union Carbide, SmithKline Corporation, Citibank, or Amoco quietly lurking in some magazine or newspaper.

BEST ADVERTISEMENTS

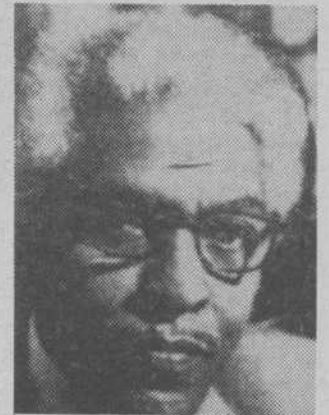
SmithKline's advertisements are perhaps the best, since they have colorful layouts, nice pictures, and a special air of sincerity. One recent SmithKline ad even in-

cluded a patriotic message from Robert F. Dee, the company's chairman and chief executive officer.

Mr. Dee reminded his readers that "only you as

than understanding.

What is worse, political debates carried out in the advertising columns of our newspapers, and on the screens of our television sets will insure that the side with the most money -- not the best case -- will prevail.



RUSTIN

business, especially safety rules and consumer protection measures.

Mr Dee of SmithKline is certainly correct when he writes: "In our society, public policy is often the key to solving problems. If policy is to be sound, it must result from government by the people."

Unfortunately, civil rights groups, trade unions, and community organizations -- which represent millions of people -- can't afford a full-page ad in Time or Newsweek to present their opinions -- opinions which frequently run counter to the views of the corporate elite.

In effect, then, we seem to be moving rapidly toward a situation where discussion of political issues will be limited to those who can pay for slick advertisements and intriguing jingles.

DISASTROUS SITUATION

For the have-nots of society, such a situation could be disastrous, since many of the business-sponsored ads have taken clear aim at programs designed to aid workers and the poor.

Several months ago, for example, SmithKline ran an ad denouncing the minimum wage. Union Carbide has argued for even bigger tax breaks for business, and legislation that would curtail the government's ability to expand social welfare programs and other companies have zeroed in on the "over regulation" of



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