THE 2004 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION[1]

I- Some insights into the campaign

a- Popularity: the building of an image
b- Credibility: A smear campaign
c- Religion: A strategic campaign
d- The media and money

II- Results and conclusions

Notes typographiques

. *Le vocabulaire thématique en gras ; je vous recommande de vous constituer des FICHES THEMATIQUES de vocabulaire. L'enrichissement de votre vocabulaire passe nécessairement par l'apprentissage par cœur de telles listes. Toutefois, il peut être plus facile de retenir le vocabulaire en contexte, d'où son inclusion ici au sein de phrases rédigées.*
. *Les informations les plus importantes sont soulignées.*
. *Le vocabulaire en italique est utile pour les essais (mots de liaison, connecteurs logiques etc)*

Les notes de bas de page :

. *les notes en rouge concernent la civilisation et l'histoire*
. *les notes en vert concernent le vocabulaire, les questions de langue, la grammaire*

[1] Please note THE SINGULAR :

En français	les élections présidentielles / législatives
Aux Etats-Unis	the presidential election / the mid-terms
En Grande-Bretagne	the general election (the leader of the winning party becomes Prime Minister)

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2- Some insights into the campaign

The purpose of this section is to *point out* a few useful aspects of the 2004 presidential campaign. Throughout the year, you must build up a series of examples for yourself that you will use and comment in both your written and oral presentation.

I have picked out two specific set of examples that allow me to underline certain features of the American political life or of contemporary America. This exactly the method you should follow when commenting on a text in your oral exams: how are the events / stories / analyses described in this text representative of certain typical political / social / cultural features of America or Britain ?

2.a. Popularity : the building of an image

One must be aware of the extreme importance of the media in the American context. The country is huge and while candidates never neglect the **grassroots** partisans[2] (candidates sometimes visit as many as five states in a day towards the end of the campaign), they must also master communication skills and some media channels to literally « speak » to the average American citizen who often feels little bothered by the election.

This is a feature of the American political life that citizens feels more concerned by local issues than by national, let alone international issues. The United States is a federal state, where the individual states matter more than Washington in the decisions related to everyday life. This is yet another development of American individualism. I have mentioned earlier the low turnout for national election.

The « average Joe », the « rednecks », « joe sixpack », « soccer moms »[3] need to be convinced whereas they feel concerned mainly by issues touching their own lives. Former candidates who seemed too remote, too intellectual, too « Washington » have failed to gather popular support and have lost : Al Gore in 2000, John Kerry in 2004.

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[2] On pourrait traduire par le « terrain ».

[3] Toutes ces catégories « sociologiques » font référence à des Américains moyens, précisément aux électeurs qui font pencher la balance en faveur d'un candidat car ils se décident à la dernière minute (les « **swing voters** » = l'électorat flottant).
the average Joe = Monsieur tout le monde
the rednecks = les « ploucs »
Joe Sixpack = allusion à un « beauf » et son pack de bière
Soccer Moms = mères au foyer des banlieues (**suburbs**) de la classe moyenne qui passent leur temps à convoyer les enfants à l'école et aux multiples activités annexes, notamment les entraînements sportifs (d'où la référence au football, « soccer » aux Etats-Unis).

Notes sur les « suburbs » : la connotation est inversée par rapport à la France. Aux Etats-Unis les populations défavorisées sont plutôt regroupées dans les centres villes à l'abandon (« **inner city** ») et les banlieues (**suburbs**) sont occupées par des lotissements proprets de la classe moyenne et aisée (notamment les « gated communities »).

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By contrast, George W. Bush is a master at communication. From the experience he gained by helping in his father's campaigns, he has learned the importance of being close to the « people ». As a result he has successfully built an artificial image of who he is supposed to be : a simple, not so bright not too educated, certainly not disdainful, man, just as any American might recognize himself. Actually, Bush comes from one of the oldest families of the East Coast, the American aristocracy so to speak; thanks to his family's reputation and prestige, rather than to his own merits, he went to Yale to college, then to Harvard to business school. He is not the Texan self made man he is almost presented to be, but he is a very efficient and well prepared politician[4]. Even his shortcomings are strategic.

It is interesting to compare Bush and Kerry who have the exact same family background and university education. But only Kerry is seen as a member of the elite. Witness how his team desperately tried to hide the fact that his grandmother was French : this could be judged as too elitist, aristocratic, and France is also associated with a disloyal ally that did not support the war in Iraq.

To conclude, popularity understood as « coming from the people » is something Bush has successfully built though he does not originally belong to Middle America. In that sense, he must be seen as an excellent politician and his election, and reelection, are not surprising at all if one is aware of how American politics work. To compare, Kennedy, also heir to a rich and important East Coast family was able to appear as simple and friendly and gain popular support. Part of the reason why Bill Clinton is still so popular, in spite of his sexual misconduct[5], is that he actually comes from a poor background, with a single mother and alcoholic step-father : his brilliant career as a lawyer, then politician, is a source of admiration for Americans. In the same way, Schwarzenegger is respected as a self made man.

[4] His brother, Jeb Bush, is governor of Florida. The Bushes, like the Kennedys, are a political dynasty in American history.

[5] Please bear this in mind when you say that America is « **puritan** » as I often hear. This may true for some states, some political and religious groups. But on the whole, America is as much morally conservative as morally « avant-gardist » (there are gay unions and gay adoption for instance). You may quote that the Republican attempt to « kill » Bill Clinton's presidency with the Monica Lewinsky affair was a complete failure. The Democrats increased their Congress majority in the next mid-terms election and Clinton was reelected afterwards. He remains a highly popular and respected figure.

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