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## Meet Darrell West: In politics, he is a master of quotes

A couple of weeks ago I was reading a political story in The Wall Street Journal and came upon a quote from Brown University political scientist Darrell West. And I thought: "There he is again!"

A few days before, I'd seen him quoted in The New York Times.

I call him Professor Sound Bite.

A computer glance at the last several years shows reams of references to him in the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post and Boston Globe, in stories ranging from Bob Dole's sniping at Katie Couric, to Ross Perot's commercials, to ads used in the debate over health care.

You always see him interviewed on TV. (Note the curly locks.) He's an unpaid Channel 10 analyst.

West is 42. He specializes in advertising, news media and polls — you've undoubtedly seen the polls Brown does. On occasion, West has also worked on polls in conjunction with the Journal-Bulletin.

He gets quoted because he's good.

Elizabeth Kolbert of The New York Times says, "I call him because he's up on things." She says it's especially helpful he's non-partisan, unaligned with candidates.

Howard Kurtz of the Post says, "He returns calls quickly. He speaks in concise sentences. And he knows a lot about his subject matter."

At a recent class, West sported a gold cardigan sweater, a brown shirt and brown khakis. "The first year at Brown I wore a coat and tie," he tells me. "The second year I dropped the tie, and the third year I dropped the coat." Professors rarely wear them, he says. Yes, that's a big

in the '60s, but perhaps not the biggest. One assignment West gives students: Do a report on what they learn about presidential candidates by visiting their Web sites.

The class meets in the early morning. "He's one of the few professors that I know that could carry off an 8:30 lecture at Brown," says Brittain Anderson, a senior from Iowa. This day West showed a video of classic political TV ads, including the "Daisy" spot Lyndon Johnson used on Barry Goldwater in 1964. Anderson was fascinated: "It was a brilliant ad . . . the innocent child, with the mushroom cloud in the background."

You might deem it a forerunner of negative ads polluting our politics today. West tells me, "If voters stood up and refused to listen to what attack ads were saying, candidates would quit running them. They run them because there's evidence that they work. They work because they help candidates attach negative information to the opponent, and people remember negative information longer than they do positive information."

And if an ad is a half truth, well, from the pols' view, they're just trying to get your attention. "The average voter doesn't trust politicians, doesn't see a big difference between Republicans and Democrats," West says. "So politicians have to use ads as a sledgehammer to get the attention of voters."

Truth is an afterthought. "The candidate's goal is to win the election even if the truth gets trampled in the process."

As for being a national quote master, West says it began with calls from Journal-Bulletin writers about Rhode Island stories. Then, sometimes through referrals from here, he'd get calls from national journalists about Rhode Island stories. Then calls about national stories. "It's fun," he concedes.

You see him on TV and think, "What a ham — he must love it." West says, "I would not consider myself a ham. I mean, Buddy Cianci is a ham, and on television he's very entertaining. I don't consider myself entertaining."

West is relaxed as he guides students through a discussion of ads. But to do it, he first shuts out of his mind the fact that these kids are paying, in overall costs, almost \$30,000 a year to be at Brown. If he dwelled on that, he says, he'd be paralyzed. "I just see my job as an educator," he says, "and I can't worry about the tuition."

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