



## EDUCATING RITA (and Mike, and Temba, and ...)

by **MICHELLE KEMP**

**W**HEN the Independent Forum for Electoral Education (IFEE) was first formed in 1993, it faced a daunting task: to try and reach 24.4 million voters, of whom at least 20 million would be voting for the first time.

A coalition of several organisations, IFEE was formed to meet a need for a non-partisan, large-scale voter education

campaign addressed to all South Africans regardless of their political affiliation or lack of it. This campaign needed not only to cover the mechanics of voting, but needed to convince millions of potential voters that the process of democratisation was real.

After a three-way pitch, J Walter Thompson, Johannesburg was awarded the task of putting together a mainstream advertising campaign.

In planning our advertising strategy, it became clear that although a voter education programme needed to be addressed to all South Africans, it needed particularly to concentrate on those

people who had not participated in elections before. The vast majority of the target audience lived in rural or peri-urban areas and were illiterate or semi-literate. We would need to take special measures to reach those outside the mainstream of our communications structure. IFEE, through a range of media organisations, therefore launched a combination of mainstream, below-the-line media and face-to-face voter education methods.

JWT's campaign, which largely utilised mainstream broadcast media, was launched in early November 1993 and ultimately encompassed seven television



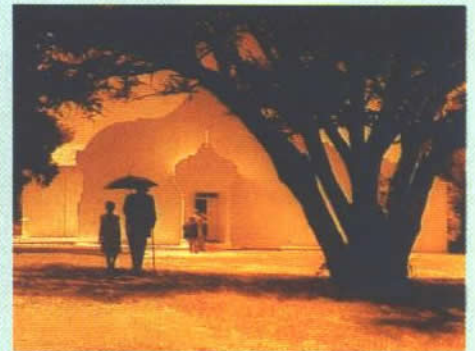
## ELECTION FOCUS

### STILLS FROM JWT TV ADS

LEFT: Directed by Ian Wilson  
(Bozzone Wilson Productions)

BELOW: Directed by John Kani  
(James Garrett & Associates)

RIGHT: Directed by Michael Middleton  
(Peter Gird Productions)



commercials, nine radio spots and three print executions. The television spots were flighted across five languages and the radio spots recorded in 10. A range of below-the-line media was designed and included T-shirts, posters, bumper stickers, taxi and bus decals.

Around the time that JWT took on the project, voter education had become a huge growth industry. Everyone was doing it: political organisations, non-governmental organisations, churches, unions and community groups. As an agency, we needed to find an approach that would cut through this enormous amount of political and educational clutter. The creative team decided on a sepia tone across the seven television executions to create a campaign feel. This together with the device of two plasters in the form of a voter cross with the payoff line "Heal

our Land" helped to brand the campaign in a powerful way. An additional motivation for the sepia route was the need to transcend any hint of party political bias. Given the emotion attached to colours in the party political spectrum, shooting in colour could have been problematic.

IFEE was funded largely through the European Community. The South African private sector chose to fund and conduct its own campaign through the Business Election Fund (BEF) and its agency Ogilvy and Mather Cape Town. Of necessity, the JWT campaign had an extremely tight budget. For the most costly part, the television commercials, minimal rates were negotiated with production house directors, camera crews, on-camera performers, recording studios, jingle writers, etc. Actual airtime costs were donated by the SABC





## HOW TO VOTE

- 1  BRING YOUR IDENTITY DOCUMENT TO THE POLLING STATION.
  - 2  YOUR HANDS ARE CHECKED TO SEE IF YOU HAVE ALREADY VOTED.
  - 3  YOUR HANDS ARE MARKED TO MAKE SURE YOU ONLY VOTE ONCE.
  - 4  YOU ARE GIVEN A BALLOT PAPER TO VOTE FOR THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.
  - 5  GO TO AN EMPTY BOOTH.
  - 6  MAKE A CROSS NEXT TO THE PARTY OF YOUR CHOICE.
  - 7  FOLD YOUR BALLOT PAPER AND PLACE IT IN THE BALLOT BOX. THEN YOU REPEAT THE PROCEDURE FOR THE ELECTION OF THE PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE.
  - 8  YOU ARE GIVEN A DIFFERENT BALLOT PAPER TO VOTE FOR THE PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE.
  - 9  GO TO AN EMPTY BOOTH.
  - 10  MAKE A CROSS NEXT TO THE PARTY OF YOUR CHOICE.
  - 11  FOLD YOUR BALLOT PAPER AND PLACE IT IN THE BALLOT BOX.
- 

HEAL  
OUR  
LAND



VOTE  
APRIL  
27/28

INDEPENDENT FORUM FOR ELECTORAL EDUCATION

YOU'VE **PRAYED** FOR IT

YOU'VE **WORKED** FOR IT

YOU'VE **STRUGGLED** FOR IT

YOU'VE **LONGED** FOR IT

NOW **VOTE** FOR IT



INDEPENDENT FORUM FOR ELECTORAL EDUCATION

through the Democracy Education Broadcast Initiative (DEBI) which oversaw all voter education broadcasts on SABC-owned TV and radio stations.

Research conducted in 1992 on the attitudes of future voters to the coming election indicated a number of key problems: cynicism regarding the negotiating process, fear of the intimidation that may accompany the voting process and ignorance of the mechanics of voting itself. In the first half of the campaign therefore, our TV and radio storyboards and scripts focused on motivating people to vote, within an overall message of reconciliation ("Heal our Land") and reconstruction ("You've struggled for it"). The campaign was kept in touch with its target audience through qualitative and quantitative research undertaken by the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE). Early CASE research indicated that an overwhelming percentage of people polled wanted to vote, but desperately needed more information on how to vote.

Following this research, our campaign focus moved away from a metaphorical, analogy-based approach to a more educational, informative one. The key objectives were to demonstrate who was eligible, what documents were needed and the actual procedure through the voting station.

Two weeks before the election, CASE conducted further focus groups to test the IFEE campaign among different demographic groups. Results indicated that an average of 8.8 million people saw the series of seven TV ads. Radio penetration was even greater, an average of 9.8 million heard the radio spots. In newspapers and magazines, although the potential audience is much smaller than broadcast media, Voter Education penetration was remarkable — 79 per cent of the target audience was reached. Overall, the crossed plasters device reached a huge segment of the target audience — 81 per cent of respondents recalled having seen it in some media form.

The voter education campaign was not without difficulties: voting rules and regulations changed up until the last moment. No-go areas presented problems in that the former Bophuthatswana government pulled IFEE ads off its TV and radio stations.

On the balance though, the IFEE voter education campaign in its various forms reached millions of people. JWT was given an opportunity to contribute positively to the most significant event in South Africa's history. (Additionally gratifying was that the television "Bus" commercial made a finalist in the American Clio Awards).

Although no direct inference can be drawn between viewership of voter education media and individual votes cast, the fact remains that less than one percent of ballots were spoiled in an election which saw 70 per cent of South Africans voting for the first time.

■Michelle Kemp, a Rhodes journalism graduate, is TV and radio producer for JWT.