

Face-Off: Presidential Debates in American History

1860. Lincoln v. Douglas
1896. McKinley v. Bryan
1912. Wilson v. Taft v. Roosevelt v. Debs
1932. Hoover v. Roosevelt
1960. Kennedy v. Nixon
1964. Johnson v. Goldwater
1972. Nixon v. McGovern
1976. Ford v. Carter
1980. Carter v. Reagan v. Anderson
1992. Clinton v. Bush v. Perot
1996. Clinton v. Dole
2000. Bush v. Gore
2004. Bush v. Kerry
2008. Obama v. McCain

Faceoff: Presidential Debates in American History

by Amanda Carmelitano and Alan Singer with Denise Cooper, William Gibbons, Derek Pearce, and Firuza Uddin

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While Presidential candidates have debated their ideas in the press, on the campaign stump, and on the floor of the Senate since the beginning of the republic, the first televised Presidential debate between John F. Kennedy (D) and Richard Nixon (R) was not until 1960. Mass media had actually changed the nature of campaigning over a decade earlier. There was a nationally broadcast debate between Republican Presidential contenders Thomas E. Dewey and Harold Stassen, on the radio in 1948. Democratic Party rivals Adlai Stevenson and Estes Kefauver debated on television in 1956.

Today, Americans expect Presidential candidates to debate. During the 2012 campaign, Republican Party candidates faced off more than twenty times between May 5, 2011 and February 22, 2012. This fall the Presidential major party nominees will meet three times, including an October 16, 2012 televised debate at Hofstra University, and the Vice-Presidential nominees once.

This expectation was not always the case. Following the Kennedy-Nixon debate there was not another televised Presidential debate until 1976 when Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford faced-off three times. 1976 was also the first time there was a formal debate between Vice-Presidential candidates. In 1964 and 1972, incumbent Presidents did not want to elevate the public stature of their opponents. In 1968, Richard Nixon, still smarting from the 1960 debate with John Kennedy, may not have wanted the public to see his five o'clock shadow and beady eyes on television again.

According to Hendrick Hertzberg, a senior editor and staff writer at *The New Yorker* and a former speechwriter for President Jimmy Carter (http://www.newyorker.com/talk/comment/2012/02/13/120213taco_talk_hertzberg), the first great public Presidential “debates” were in 1796 and 1800 between John Adams, the candidate of the Federalist Party and Thomas Jefferson of the Democratic-Republicans. In this case the candidates never directly faced each other and much of the debate was carried on by surrogates in the press. The Federalists were largely based in New England and tended to favor a strong central government, while the Democratic-Republicans, with broader support in the South, where champions of state authority. New York State was the crucial swing or battle ground state, supporting the winning candidate in both elections, Adams in 1796 and Jefferson in 1800.

In 1860, the Democratic Party dissolved into three competing factions. One based largely in the North supported Stephen Douglas for President. A group based in the South nominated John Breckinridge. John Bell of the Constitutional Union Party drew most of his supports from the border states. This division allowed Abraham Lincoln of the minority Republican Party to get elected with only 38% of the popular vote. Lincoln’s election without any Southern electoral votes was an immediate cause of the American Civil War. There were no face-to-face debates in this election either, however in 1858, Lincoln and Douglas ran against each other for a Senate seat from Illinois and faced-off seven times in public.

The 1896 presidential election occurred during a time of extreme social strife in the United States. During this period, known as the Gilded Age, there was a great divide between the rich and the poor in America and the key issues in this Presidential campaign were economic. William McKinley, the Republican candidate was Governor of Ohio. The Democratic Party candidate was Congressman William J. Bryan from Nebraska. McKinley, the Republican Party, and their business supporters wanted “tight” money backed by gold. Bryan and his wing of the Democratic Party wanted to pursue inflationary policies that would alleviate debt. Their proposal to monetarize silver had strong support among small farmers but many Democrats abandoned Bryan because of this position. During the 1896 election campaign, both candidates traveled the country making speeches condemning the other’s economic policies. McKinley warned that if Bryan was elected, the country would face massive inflation. Bryan argued that with McKinley as president poor farmers would remain destitute.

In 1912 a divided party also led to the election of a minority candidate. In this case The Republican Party split and two former Presidents both ran for office, William Taft on the Republican line and former President Theodore Roosevelt as the Bull Moose or Progressive Party candidate. The hostility between the Taft and Roosevelt wings enabled Woodrow Wilson, the Democratic Party candidate to get elected.

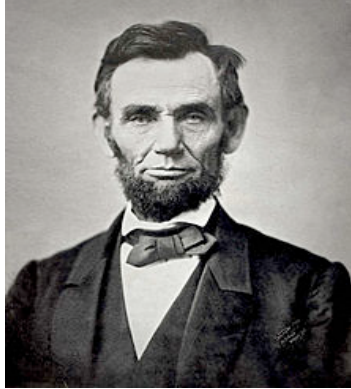
The 1932 presidential election between Republican incumbent Herbert Hoover and New York State Governor Franklin Roosevelt, the Democrat, was a major turning point in American history. Roosevelt blamed the depression on Hoover and promised an active government committed to experimentation and change. Hoover promised to continue his Reconstruction effort and guide America back to prosperity. In the midst of the Great Depression, the American people were inspired by Roosevelt's promises and he was elected by a landslide vote.

The 1964 Presidential election was a mandate on Civil Rights legislation and the Great Society, a continuation of FDR's New Deal. Much of the Presidential debate also centered on who could best protect the American people from the threat of nuclear war. Democrat liberal Lyndon Johnson defeated Republican conservative Barry Goldwater in a landslide. However, the 1968 election marked another turning point and a move toward more conservative and limited government. In a three-way race, Republican Richard Nixon defeated Democratic Vice-President Hubert Humphrey and Alabama Governor George Wallace to led a breakaway group of Democrats, largely from the South, who opposed the party's Civil Rights stands. Debate in the 1972 election largely revolved around U.S. policy in Vietnam and Southeast Asia and Republican incumbent Richard Nixon easily defeated Democratic challenger George McGovern. However, Watergate and other scandals helped Democrats regain the Presidency in 1976 win James "Jimmy" Carter defeated Gerald Ford. The Carter presidency was largely deemed to be disappointing and in 1980 he was defeated in his bid for reelection by Republican Ronald Reagan, a former Governor of California. There were two Presidential debates scheduled in 1980, however Carter refused to participate in the first one because a third party candidate was included. Carter and Reagan faced-off alone in the second debate. Reagan was reelected in 1984 and his Vice-President, George Bush, was elected President in 1988.

The 1992 election was another three-way race as wealthy independent Ross Perot challenged the Republican incumbent, George Bush, and the Democratic Party challenger Bill Clinton. Perot had enough popular support in public opinion polls that he was able to participate in the televised Presidential debates. Perot ran again in 1996 against Clinton and the Republican challenger Senator Bob Dole, but because of a late start he was not able to qualify for the debates.

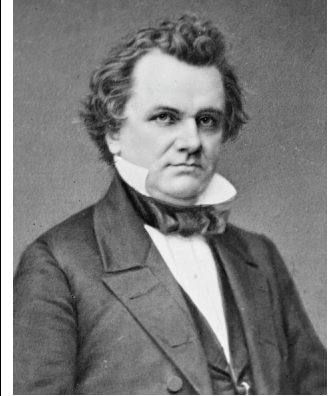
The 2000 election was between Republican George W. Bush, the former Governor of Texas, and Vice-President Al Gore, the Democratic Party nominee. Bush was elected in one of the closest and most controversial elections in U.S. history when the United States Supreme Court stooped a recount in Florida and Gore conceded. Bush was reelected in 2004, defeated Democratic Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts, but his presidency was plagued by terrorist attacks, national security concerns, economic downturns, and controversial wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. These problems contributed to a Democratic victory in 2008 when Senator Barack Obama of Illinois, the first African American nominated by a major political party, defeated Senator John McCain, a Republican from Arizona. The 2008 election was the first time a debate was held at Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York.

Face-Off: Abraham Lincoln v. Stephen Douglas, 1860



Abraham Lincoln (R)
“A house divided against itself cannot stand.”

Lincoln and Douglas ran against each other for President in 1860, but their most famous debates took place in 1858 while they were running for Senator from Illinois. Douglas was elected Senator in 1858. Lincoln was elected President in 1860. One of the most important issues debated among the two candidates was the role of the state and federal governments in determining the validity of slavery. Lincoln famously stated in his “House Divided” speech that a country with separate laws regarding slavery would crumble. Douglas counter-argued that Lincoln and the “Black Republican” party were abolitionists determined to give non-whites equal rights.



Stephen Douglas (D)
“Uniformity in the local laws and institutions of the different States is neither possible or desirable.”

Questions

1. What event is Abraham Lincoln referring to when he says “We are not far advanced into the fifth year since our policy was created?”
2. What is Abraham Lincoln referring to when he says “A house divided against itself cannot stand”? What does Lincoln expect to happen to this “house”?
3. In your opinion, is it smart for Lincoln to say that slavery should either be instituted nationally or not at all? What political repercussions could such a statement have in the time period?
4. Why did Douglas say that uniformity between different states was both impossible and undesirable?
5. Would you choose to elect one of these candidates over the other? Is so, why?

LINCOLN: “I do not understand that the framers of our Constitution left the people of the free States in the attitude of firing bombs or shells into the slave States... We are now far advanced into the fifth year since a policy was created for the avowed object and with the confident promise of putting an end to slavery agitation. Under the operation of that policy that agitation has not only not ceased, but has constantly augmented. In my opinion it will not cease till a crisis shall have been reached and passed. 'A house divided against itself can not stand.' I believe that this Government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. It will become all one thing or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction, or its advocates will push it forward till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new, North as well as South.”

Source:http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lincoln%27s_House_Divided_Speech

DOUGLAS: “Uniformity in the local laws and institutions of the different States is neither possible or desirable. If uniformity had been adopted when the Government was established, it must inevitably have been the uniformity of slavery everywhere, or else the uniformity of negro citizenship and negro equality everywhere... Do you desire to strike out of our State Constitution that clause which keeps slaves and free negroes out of the State, and allow the free negroes to flow in, and cover your prairies? Do you desire to turn this beautiful State into a free negro colony, in order that when Missouri abolishes slavery she can send one hundred thousand emancipated slaves into Illinois, to become citizens and voters, in equality with yourselves? For one, I am opposed to negro citizenship in any and every form. I believe this Government was made on the white basis. I believe it was made by white men for the benefit of white men and their posterity for ever, and I am in favor of confining citizenship to white men, men of European birth and descent, instead of conferring it upon negroes, Indians, and other inferior races.”

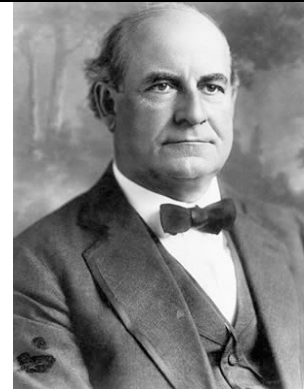
Source:http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lincoln%E2%80%93Douglas_debates

Face-Off: William McKinley v. William J. Bryan, 1896



William McKinley (R)
“Bimetallism cannot be secured by independent action on our part.”

One of the key issues during the 1896 presidential election was coinage of money. William McKinley believed that the best way to issue money was with the gold standard. This meant that all money in circulation was backed gold stored in the national treasury. This kept the amount of money in circulation low and inflation at a minimum. Bryan believed that it was more important to make money accessible to the common man. He was a bimetalist who wanted paper money backed by both gold and silver. This would increase the amount of money in circulation, and the resulting inflation would ease the debt burden of poor farmers.



William J. Bryan (D)
“You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.”

Questions

1. What was the key issue in the 1896 election?
2. What were the differences between McKinley and Bryan’s platforms?
3. Why do you think McKinley won the 1896 Presidential election?

MCKINLEY: “We have had few questions in the lifetime of the Republic more serious than the one which is presented. We must not be misled by phrases, nor deluded by false theories. Free silver would not mean that silver dollars were to be freely had without cost or labor. It would mean the free use of the mints of the United States for the few who are owners of silver bullion, but would make silver coin no freer to the many who are engaged in other enterprises. It would not make labor easier, the hours of labor shorter, or the pay better. It would not make farming less laborious, or more profitable. It would not start a factory or make a demand for an additional day’s labor . . . Bimetallism cannot be secured by independent action on our part. Until international agreement is had it is the plain duty of the United States to maintain the gold standard. It is the recognized and sole standard of the great commercial nations of the world, with which we trade more largely than any other Another issue of supreme importance is that of protection. The peril of free silver is a menace to be feared; we are already experiencing the effects of partial free trade. The one must be averted; the other corrected. The Republican party is wedded to the doctrine of protection and was never more earnest in its support and advocacy than now.”



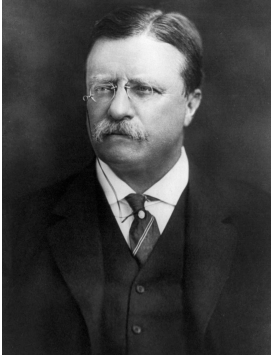
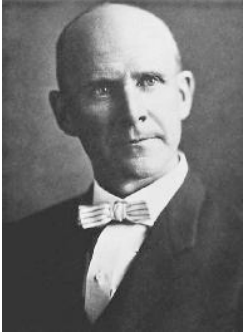
Source: <http://www.famousquotes.me.uk/speeches/presidential-speeches/presidential-speech-william-mckinley.htm>

BRYAN: “On the 4th of March, 1895, a few Democrats... issued an address... asserting that the money question was the paramount issue... The man who is employed for wages is as much a businessman as his employer... The farmer who goes forth in the morning and toils all day... is as much a businessman as the man who goes upon the Board of Trade... The miners who go 1,000 feet into the earth... are as much businessmen as the few financial magnates who in a backroom corner the money of the world... It is for these that we speak... We are fighting in the defense of our homes, our families, and posterity... The Democratic idea has been that if you legislate to make the masses prosperous their prosperity will find its way up and through every class that rests upon it... If they dare to come out in the open field and defend the gold standard as a good thing, we shall fight them to the uttermost, having behind us the producing masses of the nation and the world. Having behind us the commercial interests and the laboring interests and all the toiling masses, we shall answer their demands for a gold standard by saying to them, you shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns. You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.”

Source: <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5354/>

Face-Off: Woodrow Wilson v. William Taft v. Theodore Roosevelt v. Eugene Debs, 1912

This 1912 Presidential debate never occurred. The election was between incumbent Republican President William Howard Taft of Ohio, Democratic Party challenger Woodrow Wilson, the Governor of New Jersey, former President Theodore Roosevelt of New York who broke with the Republican Party and formed his own Bull Moose Party, and Socialist Party candidate Eugene Debs of Indiana. This hypothetical debate presents opposing viewpoints taken from campaign speeches. A major issue in the campaign was the relationship between big businesses, also known as trusts and monopolies, and the government. Transcripts of the speeches are available at <http://www.ssa.gov/history/trspeech.html>; <http://www.infoplease.com/t/hist/state-of-the-union/124.html>; <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5723/>; and <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5725/>.

Woodrow Wilson (D)	William Taft (R)	Theodore Roosevelt (BM)	Eugene Debs (S)
			
"Break up partnership between big business and the government."	"Business will adjust itself."	"Control business."	"Aspiration of the working class to freedom."

Questions

1. What does Wilson present as the solution to economic problems facing the nation?
2. How do Taft and Roosevelt respond to Wilson's proposal?
3. How does Debs respond to all of the "reform" proposals?
4. In your opinion, what does a four-way race for President say about the United States in 1912?

<p>WILSON: "Take the thing as a whole, and it looks strangely like economic mastery over the very lives and fortunes of those who do the daily work of the nation. And all this under the overwhelming power and sovereignty of the national government. What most of us are fighting for is to break up this very partnership between big business and the government."</p>	<p>TAFT: "The trust question in the enforcement of the Sherman antitrust law is gradually solving itself, is maintaining the principle and restoring the practice of competition, and if the law is quietly but firmly enforced, business will adjust itself to the statutory requirements, and the unrest in commercial circles provoked by the trust discussion will disappear."</p>
<p>ROOSEVELT: "Our aim is to control business, not to strangle it – and, above all, not to continue a policy of make-believe strangle toward big concerns that do evil, and constant menace toward both big and little concerns that do well. Our aim is to promote prosperity... wish to control big business ... good wages for the wage-workers and reasonable prices for the consumers."</p>	<p>DEBS: "When the owners of the trusts finance a party to put themselves out of business; when they turn over their wealth to the people from whom they stole it and go to work for a living, it will be time enough to consider the merits of the Roosevelt Progressive party."</p>

Face-Off: Herbert Hoover v. Franklin Roosevelt, 1932



Herbert Hoover

"We must build up men and women in their own homes."

The 1932 election was between incumbent Republican President Herbert Hoover and Democratic Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt of New York. No Presidential debate was actually held. This hypothetical debate is based on campaign speeches. The primary issue during the campaign was ending the Great Depression.

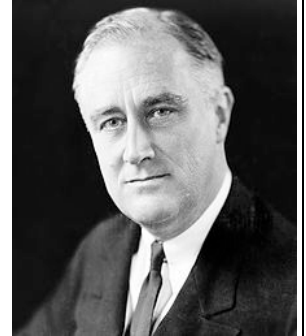
Transcripts of the speeches are available at:

<http://newdeal.feri.org/speeches/1932d.htm>;

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=23269#axzz1xDPwVnLJ>

Questions

1. What did Hoover offer as a solution to the Great Depression?
2. Why did Roosevelt demand bold experimentation?
3. What concrete proposals did they offer in these speeches?
4. In your opinion, why did voters elect Roosevelt?



Franklin D. Roosevelt

"The country demands bold, persistent experimentation."

HOOVER: "The very basis of safety to American agriculture is the protective tariff. The Republican Party originated and proposes to maintain the protective tariff on agricultural products . . . We must build up men and women in their own homes, on their own farms, where they may find their own security and express their own individuality. Now, a nation on such foundations is a nation where the real satisfactions of life and happiness thrive. It is where real freedom of mind and aspiration secure that individual progress in morals, in spirit and accomplishment, the sum of which makes up the greatness of American life. Some will say this is a mere ideal. I am not ashamed of ideals. America was rounded upon them, but they must be the premise for practical action."

ROOSEVELT: "The country needs and, unless I mistake its temper, the country demands bold, persistent experimentation. It is common sense to take a method and try it: If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something. The millions who are in want will not stand by silently forever while the things to satisfy their needs are within easy reach. We need enthusiasm, imagination and the ability to face facts, even unpleasant ones, bravely. We need to correct, by drastic means if necessary, the faults in our economic system from which we now suffer. We need the courage of the young. Yours is not the task of making your way in the world, but the task of remaking the world which you will find before you. May every one of us be granted the courage, the faith and the vision to give the best that is in us to that remaking!"

Summary Question: If you were voting for President of the United States in 1932, which candidate would you have voted for? Explain.

Face-Off: John Kennedy v. Richard Nixon, 1960

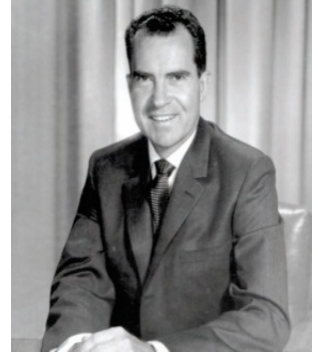


John F. Kennedy (D)

“I support federal aid to education and federal aid to teachers’ salaries.”

One of the key issues that candidates faced during the 1960 Presidential election was the economy. Americans wanted to know how Vice President Nixon and Senator Kennedy planned on alleviating the economic pressure they faced. Kennedy believed more governmental intervention was the answer, while Nixon feared this would cause massive national debt. He believed state and community governments had to take greater responsibility for meeting social needs. The 1960 debate was notable as the first televised debate. Videos of the debate can be found on youtube.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QazmVHA00os>



Richard Nixon (R)

“Kennedy either has to raise taxes or he has to unbalance the budget.”

Questions

1. What was the primary issue during the 1960 election?
2. What was the difference between Kennedy and Nixon’s platforms?
3. Why do you think Kennedy was elected over Nixon?

KENNEDY: “I’m not satisfied when the United States had last year the lowest rate of economic growth of any major industrialized society in the world. Because economic growth means strength and vitality; it means we’re able to sustain our defenses; it means we’re able to meet our commitments abroad. I’m not satisfied when...four million Americans wait every month for a food package from the government, which averages five cents a day per individual. I saw cases in West Virginia, here in the United States, where children took home part of their school lunch in order to feed their families because I don’t think we’re meeting our obligations toward these Americans....

I’m not satisfied when many of our teachers are inadequately paid, or when our children go to school part-time shifts. I think we should have an educational system second to none...

I support federal aid to education and federal aid for teachers’ salaries. I think that’s a good investment. And I think to heap the burden further on the property tax, which is already strained in many of our communities, will... (result with) our children will not being adequately educated.”



NIXON: “What kind of programs are we for? We are for programs that will expand educational opportunities... We are for programs...which will see that our medical care for the aged... better handled than it is at the present time. We want to see that (the old) do have adequate medical care... I think that the means that I advocate will reach that goal better than the means that (Kennedy) advocates...”

I would say that in all of these proposals Senator Kennedy has made, will result in one of two things: either he has to raise taxes or he has to unbalance the budget. If he unbalances the budget that means you have inflation...

I favor higher salaries for teachers. But...the way that you get higher salaries for teachers is to support school construction, which means that all of the local school districts... then have money which is freed to raise the standards for teachers’ salaries... once you put the responsibility on the federal government for paying a portion of teachers’ salaries, your local communities and your states are not going to meet the responsibility as much as they should.”

Summary Question: If you were a voter in 1960, which candidate would you have supported? Why?

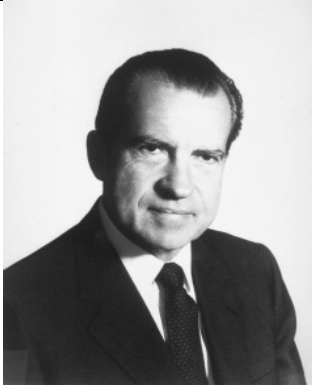
Face-Off: Barry Goldwater v. Lyndon B. Johnson, 1964

 <p>Barry Goldwater (R) “Moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue.”</p>	<p>No debate was held during the 1964 Presidential campaign. The election was between incumbent Democratic President Lyndon Johnson of Texas and Republican Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona. This hypothetical debate is based on campaign speeches. The primary issues were Civil Rights and fear of nuclear war. Transcripts of the speeches are available at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/daily/may98/goldwaterspeech.htm http://www.4president.org/speeches/lbj1964convention.htm</p> <p>Questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What issues do Goldwater and Johnson discuss? 2. What does Goldwater define as the Republican cause? 3. What does President Johnson promise to do? 4. In your opinion, who wins this debate? 	 <p>Lyndon B. Johnson (D) “I pledge the firmness to defend freedom.”</p>
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<p>GOLDWATER: “The task of preserving and enlarging freedom at home and safeguarding it from the forces of tyranny abroad is great enough to challenge all our resources and to require all our strength. Anyone who joins us in all sincerity, we welcome. Those who do not care for our cause, we don't expect to enter our ranks in any case. And let our Republicanism...not be made fuzzy and futile by unthinking and stupid labels. I would remind you that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue. The beauty of the very system we Republicans are pledged to restore and revitalize, the beauty of this Federal system of ours is in its reconciliation of diversity with unity. We must not see malice in honest differences of opinion, and no matter how great, so long as they are not inconsistent with the pledges we have given to each other in and through our Constitution. Our Republican cause is not to level out the world or make its people conform in computer regimented sameness. Our Republican cause is to free our people and light the way for liberty throughout the world. Ours is a very human cause for very humane goals.”</p>	<p>JOHNSON: “There is no place in today's world for weakness. But there is also no place in today's world for recklessness. We cannot act rashly with the nuclear weapons that could destroy us all. The only course is to press with all our mind and all our will to make sure, doubly sure, that these weapons are never really used at all. This is a dangerous and a difficult world in which we live tonight. I promise no easy answers. But I do promise this. I pledge the firmness to defend freedom, the strength to support that firmness, and a constant, patient effort to move the world toward peace instead of war. And here at home one of our greatest responsibilities is to assure fair play for all of our people. Every American has the right to be treated as a person. He should be able to find a job. He should be able to educate his children, he should be able to vote in elections and he should be judged on his merits as a person. Well, this is the fixed policy and the fixed determination of the Democratic Party and the United States of America. So long as I am your President I intend to carry out what the Constitution demands – and justice requires – equal justice under law for all Americans.”</p>
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Summary Question: If you were voting in 1964, which candidate would you have supported? Why?

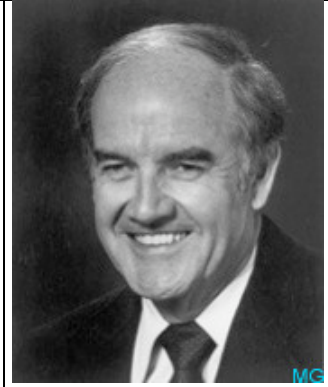
Face-Off: Richard Nixon v. George McGovern, 1972



Richard Nixon (R)

“I pledge to seek an honorable end to the war in Vietnam”

The 1972 election occurred during a time when many Americans were growing weary of the conflict between the United States and Vietnam. Every day more young American men were being killed in Vietnam and troops were experiencing very few victories. Both Richard Nixon and George McGovern ran campaigns promising that they would end the war in Vietnam if elected. The difference between the two campaigns was the way in which each man would conclude the war. Nixon favored what he called a slow, honorable end to the war. McGovern promised Americans that he could end the war immediately if he was elected president.



George McGovern (D)

“This is also a time, not for death, but for life.”

Questions

1. What was the key issue in the 1972 Presidential election?
2. What was the difference between Nixon and McGovern's platforms?
3. Why do you think Nixon won the 1972 election?

NIXON: “No President in our history believed that America should ask an enemy for peace on terms that would betray our allies and destroy respect for the United States all over the world.

As your President, I pledge that I shall always uphold that proud bipartisan tradition. Standing in this Convention Hall 4 years ago, I pledged to seek an honorable end to the war in Vietnam. We have made great progress toward that end. We have brought over half a million men home, and more will be coming home... We have offered a cease-fire, a total withdrawal of all American forces, an exchange of all prisoners of war, internationally supervised free elections with the Communists participating in the elections and in the supervision.

There are three things, however, that we have not and that we will not offer. We will never abandon our prisoners of war. Second, we will not join our enemies in imposing a Communist government on our allies... And we will never stain the honor of the United States of America... Now I realize that many, particularly in this political year, wonder why we insist on an honorable peace in Vietnam. From a political standpoint they suggest that since I was not in office when over a half million American men were sent there, that I should end the war by agreeing to impose a Communist government on the people of South Vietnam and just blame the whole catastrophe on my predecessors.”

Source: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=3537#axzz1wxRxByTo>

MCGOVERN: “And this is also a time, not for death, but for life. In 1968 many Americans thought they were voting to bring our sons home from Vietnam in peace, and since then 20,000 of our sons have come home in coffins. I have no secret plan for peace. I have a public plan. And as one whose heart has ached for the past ten years over the agony of Vietnam, I will halt a senseless bombing of Indochina on Inaugural Day.... There will be no more Asian children running ablaze from bombed-out schools. There will be no more talk of bombing the dikes or the cities of the North. And within 90 days of my inauguration, every American soldier and every American prisoner will be out of the jungle and out of their cells and then home in America where they belong.... And then let us resolve that never again will we send the precious young blood of this country to die trying to prop up a corrupt military dictatorship abroad.

This is also the time to turn away from excessive preoccupation overseas to the rebuilding of our own nation. America must be restored to a proper role in the world. But we can do that only through the recovery of confidence in ourselves.”

Source: <http://www.4president.org/speeches/mcgovern1972acceptance.htm>

Face-Off: Gerald Ford v. Jimmy Carter, 1976



Gerald Ford (R)

“In my judgment, the best way to get jobs is to expand the private sector.”

In 1976, the two presidential candidates primarily grappled over issues regarding the economic recession. Upon the resignation of Vice-President Agnew and President Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford had become the first president not first elected president or vice-president. During Ford’s time as presidency, the United States experienced an economic recession which set the stage for the presidential election of 1976. Videos of the Ford-Carter debates can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w8rg9c4pUrg>



Jimmy Carter (D)

“We will never have a balanced budget until we get our people back to work.”

Questions

1. How would you summarize Ford’s approach to fixing the economy?
2. How would you summarize Carter’s approach to fixing the economy?
3. Compare and contrast both Carter’s and Ford’s approach in fixing the economy.
4. Which approach do you predict will be the most effective? Be sure to explain why.

FORD: “In my judgment the best way to get jobs is to expand the private sector, where five out of six jobs today exist in our economy. We can do that by reducing Federal taxes, as I proposed about a year ago when I called for a tax reduction of \$28 billion, three-quarters of it to go to private taxpayers and one-quarter to the business sector. We could add to jobs in the major metropolitan areas by a proposal that I recommended that would give tax incentives to business to move into the inner city and to expand or to build new plants so that they would take a plant or expand a plant where people are and people are currently unemployed. We could also help our youth with some of the proposals that would give to young people an opportunity to work and learn at the same time, just like we give money to young people who are going to college.”

CARTER: “Yes. First of all it's to recognize the tremendous economic strength of this country and to set the putting back to work of our people as a top priority. This is an effort that ought to be done primarily by strong leadership in the White House, the inspiration of our people, the tapping of business, agriculture, industry, labor, and government at all levels to work on this project. We will never have an end to the inflationary spiral, and we will never have a balanced budget until we get our people back to work. Another very important aspect of our economy would be to increase production in every way possible, to hold down taxes on individuals, and to shift the tax burdens on to those who have avoided paying taxes in the past.”

Summary Question: If you were voting in 1976, which candidate would you have supported? Why?

Face-Off: Jimmy Carter v. Ronald Reagan v. John Anderson, 1980

Jimmy Carter (D)



Reagan's economic plan is "Voodoo economics."

Ronald Reagan (R)



"Take Government off the backs of the great people of this country."

John Anderson (Independent)



"Cut spending and raise taxes to pay off debt."

In 1980 the nation was plagued by double-digit inflation. John Anderson, a moderate Republican Congressman from Illinois joined the race as a third party candidate after failing to secure his party's nomination. He challenged Democratic Party incumbent Jimmy Carter and the Republican Party candidate Ronald Reagan, former Governor of California and a leading spokesperson for the conservative wing of the party. Carter refused to participate in a three-way debate so the first debate was between Anderson and Reagan. The 2nd presidential debate was between Carter and Reagan. A major issue was the state of the economy and the threat of inflation. Transcripts of the debates are available online at: <http://www.debates.org/index.php?page=october-28-1980-debate-transcript>; <http://www.debates.org/index.php?page=september-21-1980-debate-transcript>.

CARTER: "We did have a very severe inflation pressure brought about by the OPEC price increase. It averaged about 18% in the first quarter of this year . . . The most recent figures, the last three months, on the third quarter of this year, the inflation rate is 7% - still too high, but it illustrates very vividly that in addition to providing an enormous number of jobs - nine million new jobs in the last three and a half years - that the inflationary threat is still urgent on us . . . To add nine million new jobs, to control inflation, and to plan for the future with an energy policy now intact as a foundation is our plan for the years ahead."

REAGAN: "I think this idea that has been spawned here in our country that inflation somehow came upon us like a plague and therefore it's uncontrollable and no one can do anything about it, is entirely spurious and it's dangerous to say this to the people . . . We don't have inflation because the people are living too well. We have inflation because the Government is living too well . . . The President's economic plan calls for increasing the taxes to the point that we finally take so much money away from the people that we can balance the budget . . . But we will have a very poor nation and a very unsound economy if we follow that path."

ANDERSON: "I . . . oppose an election year tax cut . . . I simply think that when we are confronting a budget deficit this year - and this fiscal year will end in about 10 days, and we are confronted with the possibility of a deficit of \$60 billion, perhaps as much as \$63 billion - that that simply would be irresponsible. That, once again, the printing presses will start to roll; once again we will see the monetization of that debt result in a higher rate of inflation . . . When I was a candidate in my own state of Illinois, I proposed \$11.3 billion, specifically, in cuts in the Federal budget. I think we've got to have fiscal restraint."

Questions

1. Which candidate blamed the national government for the economic problems of the nation?
2. How did the other two candidates respond?
3. In your opinion, why was inflation such an important campaign issue?
4. If you were a voter in 1980, which candidate would you have supported? Why?

Face-Off: Bill Clinton v. George Bush v. Ross Perot, 1992

Bill Clinton (D)



"Asks the rich to pay their fair share again."

George H. Bush (R)



"Tax relief, opportunities for small business."

Ross Perot (Independent)



"Cut spending and raise taxes to pay off debt."

In 1992 the economy and health care were the biggest issues. Third Party candidate Ross Perot had sufficient support to qualify for the televised debates. In the election he received almost a fifth of the popular vote and many pundits believe that is the reason Clinton was elected. In the first debate they discussed their plans for health care reform. A transcript of the debate is available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/10/12/us/the-1992-campaign-transcript-of-first-tv-debate-among-bush-clinton-and-perot.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

CLINTON: "We would present a plan to control health-care costs and phase in health-care coverage for all Americans. Until we control health-care costs, we're not going to control the deficit. It is the No. 1 culprit . . . The average senior citizen is spending a higher percentage of income on health care today than they were in 1965 before Medicare came in. The President's got another proposal that will require them to pay \$400 a year more for the next five years, but if you don't have the guts to control costs by changing the insurance system, in taking on the bureaucracies and the regulation of health care in the private and public sector, you can't fix this problem."

BUSH: Governor Clinton clicked off the things - you've got to take on insurance companies and bureaucracies - he failed to take on somebody else; the malpractice-suit people. Those that bring these lawsuits - against these frivolous trial-lawyer lawsuits that are running to cost of medical care up by 25 to 50 billion. And he refuses to put anything, controls, on these crazy lawsuits. If you want to help somebody, don't run the costs up by making doctors have to have five or six tests where one would do for fear of being sued, or have somebody along the highway not stop to pick up a guy and help him because he's afraid a trial lawyer will come along and sue him."

PEROT: "We've got the most expensive health-care system in the world. It ranks behind 15 other nations in - when we come to life expectancy, and 22 other nations when we come to infant mortality. So we don't have the best. Pretty simple, folks. If you're paying more and you don't have the best, if all else fails, go copy the people who have the best who spend less, right? Well, we can do better than that. Again, we've got plans lying all over the place in Washington - nobody every implements them. Now I'm back to square one if you want to stop talking about it and do it, than I'll be glad to go up there and we'll get it done."

Questions

1. Which candidate favored a national health insurance program?
2. Which candidate believed high costs were a result of too many law suits?
3. In your opinion, why were the economy, taxes and health care were the main campaign issues?
4. If you were a voter in 1992, which candidate would you have supported? Why?

Face-Off: Bob Dole v. Bill Clinton, 1996



Bob Dole (R)

“What we want to do is called opportunity scholarships.”

On October 6, 1996, Republican Senator Bob Dole of Kansas and Democratic President of Arkansas faced-off in the Bushnell theatre in Hartford, Connecticut in the first of two debates of the 1996 Presidential election campaign. This debate focused on domestic policy issues. The moderator was Jim Lehrer of News Hour on PBS. Among the topics was the future of public education. A transcript of the debate is available at <http://www.debates.org/index.php?page=october-6-1996-debate-transcript>. A video is online at <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/4598>.



Bill Clinton (D)

“I support school choice.”

Questions

1. On what issues do Senator Dole and President Clinton agree?
2. What does Senator Dole propose to give educational opportunity to all?
3. What is President Clinton’s response to the Dole plan?
4. In your opinion, who has a better plan for educational reform? Explain.

DOLE: “I feel strongly about education. I want to help young people have an education, just as I had an education after World War II with the GI bill of Rights. We’ve had millions of young men and women in subsequent wars change the face of the nation because the government helped with their education . . . what we want to do is called opportunity scholarships . . . So it seems to me that we ought to take that money we can save from the Department of Education, put it into opportunity scholarships and tell little Landale Shakespeare out in Cleveland, Ohio, and tell your mother and father, you’re going to get to go to school because we’re going to match what the state puts up, and you’re going to go to the school of your choice. I don’t fault the President or the vice president for sending their children to private schools or better schools. I applaud them for it, I don’t criticize them. But why shouldn’t everybody have that choice. Why shouldn’t low income Americans and low middle income Americans. I’m excited about it. It’s going to be a big, big opportunity for a lot of people.”

CLINTON: “I support school choice. I have advocated expansions of public school choice alternatives and I said the creation of 3,000 new schools that we are going to help the states to finance. But if you’re going to have a private voucher plan, that ought to be determined by states in localities where they’re raising and spending most of the money. I simply think it’s wrong to take money away from programs that are helping build basic skills for kids, 90 percent of them are in the public schools; to take money away from programs that are helping fund the school lunch program, that are helping to fund the other programs, that are helping our schools to improve their standards. Our schools are getting better, and our schools can be made to be even better still with the right kind of community leadership and partnership at the school level. I have been a strong force for reform . . . We need to be doing more in education, not less.”

Summary Question: If you were voting in 1996, which candidate would you have supported? Why?

Face-Off: George W. Bush v. Al Gore, 2000



George W. Bush (R)

“Give younger workers the option . . . to manage some of their own money in the private sector to make sure there’s a Social Security system around tomorrow.”

On October 3, 2000, Republican governor George W. Bush of Texas and Democratic Vice President Al Gore of Tennessee faced-off at the University of Massachusetts in Boston in the first debate of the 2000 Presidential election campaign. This debate focused on domestic policy issues including Education, Social Security and taxes. The moderator was Jim Lehrer of NewsHour on PBS. A major concern was the future of the Social Security program. A transcript of the debate is available at: <http://www.debates.org/index.php?page=october-3-2000-transcript>. A video is online at: <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/159295-1>

Questions

1. Why is Social Security such an important issue?
2. How does Bush want to change Social Security?
3. What does Gore want to do with Social Security?
4. In your opinion, who has the better plan for the future of Social Security? Explain.



Al Gore (D)

“Veto anything that takes money out of Social Security or Medicare for anything other than Social Security or Medicare.”

BUSH: “There’s enough money to pay seniors today in the current affairs of Social Security. The trillion comes from the surplus. Surplus is money – more money than needed. It’s time to have a leader that doesn’t put off tomorrow what we should do today. It’s time to have somebody to step up and say look, let’s let younger workers take some of their own money and under certain guidelines invest it in the private markets. The safest of federal investments yields 4%. That’s twice the amount of rate of return than the current Social Security Trust. It’s a fundamental difference of opinion here, folks. Younger worker after younger worker hears my call that says I trust you. And you know what, the issue is changing. Seniors now understand that the promise made will be a promise kept, but younger workers now understand we better have a government that trusts them and that’s exactly what I’m going to do.

GORE: “I will keep Social Security in a lockbox and that pays down the national debt. And the interest savings I would put right back into Social Security. That extends the life of Social Security for 55 years . . . I am opposed to it. I’m also opposed to a plan that diverts 1 out of every \$6 away from the Social Security Trust Fund. Social Security is a trust fund that pays the checks this year with the money that is paid into Social Security this year. The governor wants to divert 1 out of every \$6 off into the stock market, which means that he would drain a trillion dollars out of the Social Security Trust Fund in this generation over the next ten years, and Social Security under that approach would go bankrupt within this generation. His leading advisor on this plan actually said that would be okay, because then the Social Security Trust Fund could start borrowing. It would borrow up to \$3 trillion. Now, Social Security has never done that. And I don’t think it should do that. I think it should stay in a lockbox, and I’ll tell you this. I will veto anything that takes money out of Social Security for privatization or anything else other than Social Security.”

Summary Question: If you were a voter in 2000, which candidate would you have supported? Why?

Face-Off: George W. Bush v. John Kerry, 2004



George W. Bush (R)
“We've upheld the doctrine that said if you harbor a terrorist, you're equally as guilty as the terrorist.”

In 2004, President George W. Bush, a Republican, was challenged in his bid for reelection by Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts. Following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC, the major issue in this election was who could best lead the American defense against terrorism.

Questions

1. According to Bush, how has the U.S. responded to the attack on 9/11?
2. What does Kerry believe should be done to improve America's role in the world?
3. In your opinion, which approach will be more effective? Why?



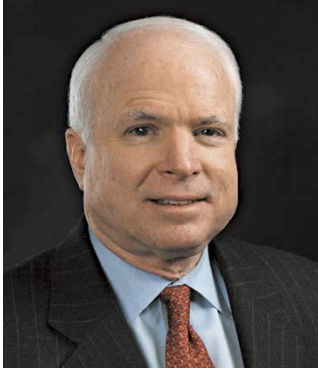
John Kerry (D)
“America is safest and strongest when we are leading the world and we are leading strong alliances.

BUSH: “We pursued al Qaeda wherever al Qaeda tries to hide. Seventy-five percent of known al Qaeda leaders have been brought to justice. The rest of them know we're after them. We've upheld the doctrine that said if you harbor a terrorist, you're equally as guilty as the terrorist. And the Taliban are no longer in power. Ten million people have registered to vote in Afghanistan in the upcoming presidential election. In Iraq, we saw a threat, and we realized that after September the 11th, we must take threats seriously, before they fully materialize. Saddam Hussein now sits in a prison cell. America and the world are safer for it. We continue to pursue our policy of disrupting those who proliferate weapons of mass destruction.”

KERRY: “I believe America is safest and strongest when we are leading the world and we are leading strong alliances. I'll never give a veto to any country over our security. But I also know how to lead those alliances. This president has left them in shatters across the globe, and we're now 90 percent of the casualties in Iraq and 90 percent of the costs. I think that's wrong, and I think we can do better. I have a better plan for homeland security. I have a better plan to be able to fight the war on terror by strengthening our military, strengthening our intelligence, by going after the financing more authoritatively, by doing what we need to do to rebuild the alliances, by reaching out to the Muslim world, which the president has almost not done, and beginning to isolate the radical Islamic Muslims, not have them isolate the United States of America. We can do a better job of training the Iraqi forces to defend themselves, and I know that we can do a better job of preparing for elections.”

Summary Question: If you were a voter in 2004, which candidate would you have supported? Why?

Face-Off: John McCain v. Barack Obama, 2008



John McCain (R)

“We’ve got too much government.”

On October 15, 2008, Republican Senator John McCain of Arizona and Democratic Senator Barack Obama of Illinois faced-off at Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York in the third and final debate of the 2008 Presidential election campaign. This debate focused on domestic policy issues. The moderator was Bob Schieffer of CBS News. During opening comments, he reported it was “Another very bad day on Wall Street.” The first question asked the candidates to explain why the public should endorse their plan for addressing the country’s economic crisis. A transcript of the debate is available at <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/washington/2008/10/debate-transcript.html>. A video is online at <http://video.msnbc.msn.com/msnbc-tv/27207488#27207488>.



Barack Obama (D)

“It is important for the federal government to step up.”

Questions

1. On what issues do Senator McCain and Senator Obama agree?
2. What does Senator McCain propose as a “short-term fix”?
3. What is Senator Obama’s response to the McCain plan?
4. In your opinion, who has a better grasp of economic issues? Explain.

MCCAIN: “Americans are hurting right now, and they’re angry . . . They’re innocent victims of greed and excess on Wall Street and as well as Washing-ton . . . But we also have to have a short-term fix, in my view, and long- term fixes. Let me just talk to you about one of the short-term fixes. The catalyst for this housing crisis was the Fannie and Freddie Mae that caused subprime lending situation that now caused the housing market in America to collapse. I am convinced that, until we reverse this continued decline in home ownership and put a floor under it, and so that people have not only the hope and belief they can stay in their homes and realize the American dream, but that value will come up. Now, we have allocated \$750 billion. Let’s take \$300 (billion) of that \$750 billion and go in and buy those home loan mortgages and negotiate with those people in their homes, . . . so that they can afford to pay the mortgage, stay in their home. Now, I know the criticism of this. Well, what about the citizen that stayed in their homes? That paid their mortgage payments? It doesn’t help that person in their home if the next door neighbor’s house is abandoned. And so we’ve got to reverse this. We ought to put the homeowners first.”

OBAMA: “I think everybody understands at this point that we are experiencing the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression . . . I’ve proposed four specific things that I think can help. Number one, let’s focus on jobs. I want to end the tax breaks for companies that are shipping jobs overseas and provide a tax credit for every company that’s creating a job right here in America. Number two, let’s help families right away by providing them a tax cut -- a middle-class tax cut for people making less than \$200,000 . . . Senator McCain and I agree with your idea that we’ve got to help homeowners . . . I disagree with Senator McCain in how to do it, because the way Senator McCain has designed his plan, it could be a giveaway to banks if we’re buying full price for mortgages that now are worth a lot less. And we don’t want to waste taxpayer money. And we’ve got to get the financial package working much quicker than it has been working. Last point I want to make, though. We’ve got some long-term challenges in this economy that have to be dealt with. We’ve got to fix our energy policy that’s giving our wealth away. We’ve got to fix our health care system and we’ve got to invest in our education system for every young person to be able to learn.”

Summary Question: If you were a voter in 2008, which candidate would you have supported? Why?