K-2 EDITION · CLASSROOM

1984

Ronald Reagan vs Walter Mondale

A 20-minute lesson on the 1984 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA Cold War Realignment	ELECTORAL VOTES 538 total
WINNER Ronald Reagan (Republican) · 525 EV	RUNNER-UP Walter Mondale (Democratic) · 13 EV
KEY ISSUE Economic recovery; Reagan Revolution; deficit spending; nuclear arms race	TURNOUT 55.2%

CONTENTS

1. Cover
2. Story (with a picture)
3. Three questions
4. Teacher notes

1984

Reagan had been president 4 years. He had won 1980 by defeating Carter 489-49 EV during stagflation + Iran hostage crisis. Reagan achievements 1981-84: (1) August 1981 Economic Recovery Tax Act - massive tax cuts. (2) 1981-82 recession ended with strong 1983-84 recovery. (3) "Reaganomics" - tax cuts + deregulation + tight monetary policy. (4) March 1983 "Star Wars" SDI (Strategic Defense Initiative). (5) October 1983 Grenada invasion. (6) October 23, 1983 Beirut barracks bombing killed 241 U.S. Marines. (7) Air traffic controllers strike broken August 1981 (PATCO). (8) Massive defense buildup.

By 1984 election: GDP growing 7.2% (1984 = best year since 1951); unemployment falling (was 10.8% Nov 1982, 7.5% by Nov 1984); inflation tamed (was 13.5% in 1980, 4.3% by 1984); consumer confidence rising. Reagan was hugely popular.

Republicans renominated Reagan + Bush. Republican convention Dallas August 20-23, 1984.

Democrats picked Walter Mondale - Carter's VP 1977-81, 56-year-old Minnesota senator (1964-76). Mondale won nomination in tough primary against Sen Gary Hart of Colorado +

Rev Jesse Jackson. Jackson's "Rainbow Coalition" campaign was structurally significant - first major African American presidential candidacy (Shirley Chisholm 1972 had been the first African American Democratic presidential candidate but Jackson 1984 was first viable). Mondale picked Rep Geraldine Ferraro of NY as VP - first woman on major-party ticket. July 19, 1984 Mondale: "Mr. Reagan will raise taxes, and so will I. He won't tell you. I just did."

Look at picture. That Ronald Reagan - won 1984 by 49-state landslide.

Reagan campaign theme: "Morning in America" - optimistic ads showing prosperous suburban families, weddings, new houses. "It's morning again in America. Today more men and women will go to work than ever before in our country's history... Why would we ever want to return to where we were less than four short years ago?" Hammond + Riney "Tuesday Team" ads.

Wendy's "Where's the beef?" 1984 TV commercial used by Mondale in primary against Hart but became cultural shorthand.

October 7, 1984 first debate Reagan appeared confused + slow - raised concerns about his age (73). October 21, 1984 second debate Reagan defused age concern: "I want you to know that also I will not make age an issue of this campaign. I am not



Ronald Reagan, the 40th U.S. president. He won the 1984 election by a 49-state landslide - tied for biggest in U.S. history.

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS - U.S. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WORK, PUBLIC DOMAIN

Let's talk about the story

1.

How many states did Reagan win in 1984?

2.

What was Reagan's "Morning in America" campaign theme?

3.

What was the famous Reagan age joke in the 1984 second debate?

Warm-up (5 min)

In 1984 Ronald Reagan won re-election by HUGE margin. 49 states out of 50. Only Minnesota + DC voted for Democrat Walter Mondale. "Morning in America" campaign theme. Reagan was 73 - oldest president to that point.

Answer key

1.

49. Reagan won 49 of 50 states. Mondale carried only Minnesota (his home state, by 3,761 votes) + DC. Reagan 525 EV; Mondale 13 EV (10 MN + 3 DC). Popular vote: Reagan 58.8% vs Mondale 40.6%. The 1984 landslide tied Nixon 1972 for biggest electoral landslide in U.S. history.

AP students should know the 49-state Reagan landslide.

2.

"Morning in America" was Reagan's 1984 campaign theme. Optimistic television ads showed prosperous suburban families, weddings, paperboys, new houses, American flags, prosperous Main Street businesses. Background voice-over: "It's morning again in America. Today more men and women will go to work than ever before in our country's history. With interest rates at about half the record highs of 1980, nearly 2,000 families today will buy new homes, more than at any time in the past four years. This afternoon 6,500 young men and women will be married, and with inflation at less than half of what it was just four years ago, they can look forward with confidence to the future. It's morning again in America. And under the leadership of President Reagan, our country is prouder, and stronger, and better. Why would we ever want to return to where we were less than four short years ago?" Created by Hal Riney + Phil Dusenberry "Tuesday Team" advertising agency. Politically masterful - contrast with Carter "malaise." The "Morning in America" theme became the structural template for subsequent optimistic incumbent re-election campaigns.

AP students should know the "Morning in America" theme.

3.

October 21, 1984 second Reagan-Mondale debate in Kansas City. Reagan was 73 - the oldest U.S. president to that point. The October 7, 1984 first debate had been politically devastating for Reagan: he appeared confused, hesitant, and his answers were rambling. Reporters and analysts openly questioned whether Reagan's age had reached his ability to serve. Mondale's campaign sensed opportunity. The October 21 second debate was structurally critical. Henry Trewhitt of the Baltimore Sun asked Reagan: "You already are the oldest president in history. And some of your staff say you were tired after your most recent encounter with Mr. Mondale. I recall, yes, that President Kennedy had to go for days on end with very little sleep during the Cuban missile crisis. Is there any doubt in your mind that you would be able to function in such circumstances?" Reagan: "Not at all, Mr. Trewhitt, and I want you to know that also I will not make age an issue of this campaign. I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent's youth and inexperience." Mondale (56) laughed. The audience laughed. The line ended the age controversy. Mondale himself later said: "When that line came out, I knew the election was over." Widely cited as one of the most politically effective one-liners in U.S. debate history.

AP students should know the Reagan age joke.