AP EDITION · DBQ + LEQ · CLASSROOM

1992

Bill Clinton vs George H. W. Bush

A 105-minute lesson on the 1992 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, DBQ pairing, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA Modern Polarization	ELECTORAL VOTES 538 total
WINNER Bill Clinton (Democratic) · 370 EV	RUNNER-UP George H. W. Bush (Republican) · 168 EV
KEY ISSUE Economic recession; NAFTA; healthcare reform; 'It's the economy, stupid'	TURNOUT 58.1%

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3. Background: vocabulary + primary source A
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1992: Bill Clinton vs George H. W. Bush

AP framework alignment

AP US History · Period varies by cycle · Reasoning skills: contextualization, comparison, causation, sourcing. CCSS · CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2 (central ideas), RH.11-12.6 (point of view), RH.11-12.7 (multiple sources). NCSS · D2.His.5.9-12, D2.His.14.9-12, D2.His.16.9-12.

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	Identify two structural conditions in 1990-92 America that would produce a three-way presidential race. For each identify the specific 1990-92 development most responsible.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	1992 election was 52nd U.S. presidential election. Clinton 370 EV / Bush 168 EV / Perot 0 EV (18.9% popular vote). Clinton 43.0%; Bush 37.5%; Perot 18.9%. Bush 1991 Gulf War approval (89% March 1991) faded. 1990-91 recession + 1990 tax-pledge violation damaged him. Approval 29% July 1992. Republican primary 1992: Pat Buchanan challenged from right. 37% NH February 18, 1992. ~3M primary votes. August 17, 1992 Convention keynote "culture war" speech damaged Bush. Democratic primary 1992 front-runner Clinton (45, AR Governor, DLC Chair 1990-91, "New Democrat"). Survived Gennifer Flowers scandal + draft-dodging. "Comeback Kid" after NH. Won March 1992 Super Tuesday. Sen Al Gore Jr (TN, 44) VP - all-Southern ticket. Democratic Convention NY July 13-16, 1992 nominated Clinton-Gore. "I still believe in a place called Hope." Ross Perot (61, Texas billionaire EDS founder) entered February 20, 1992 on Larry King Live. United We Stand America. Self-funded ~$65M. June 1992 polls leading 3-way ~37%. July 16 withdrew. October 1 re-entered. "It's the economy, stupid" - Carville Little Rock war room sign. October 15, 1992 "Bush check watch" debate moment. Clinton 370 EV / Bush 168 / Perot 0. Clinton 32 states + DC; Bush 18; Perot 0. Margin 5,805,344. Clinton inaugurated January 20, 1993. DLC centrist governance: Family and Medical

Leave Act 1993; 1993 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (top rate 31%'39.6%); Brady Bill 1993; NAFTA 1993; 1993-94 healthcare reform failed; 1994 Crime Bill; 1994 Republican Revolution midterm; 1996 Welfare reform; 1997 balanced-budget agreement; 1998 Lewinsky scandal + impeachment + acquittal; 1999 budget surplus; 1999 Glass-Steagall repeal.

Clinton re-elected 1996 (379-159 EV over Dole; popular 49.2% Clinton vs 40.7% Dole vs 8.4% Perot).

1992 election structural significance: (1) Clinton first DLC centrist Democratic president. (2) Perot 18.9% highest third-party since TR 1912. (3) Bush 1992 first incumbent Republican defeat since Hoover 1932. (4) Interrupted but didn't reverse Reagan-era ascendance.

The 1992 election was first major break in 1968-2008 Republican-conservative ascendance. Republican coalition (Southern realignment + Mountain West + suburban-Northeast + working-class whites + religious conservatives) weakened by: 1990-91 recession; Bush 1990 tax-pledge violation; religious right discontent with Bush moderation; Ross Perot drawing 19% of disaffected establishment voters; Clinton DLC centrist Southern Democratic identity neutralizing Northern liberal Democratic vulnerabilities.

Clinton 1992 victory operated within Reagan-era policy framework: NAFTA (free trade); welfare reform 1996; balanced budgets 1997-2001; financial deregulation 1999. Structural Reagan-era ideological dominance persisted.

DLC centrism shaped Democratic presidential politics for 32 years (1992-2024): Gore 2000 (DLC; lost narrowly); Kerry 2004 (DLC adapted; lost); Obama 2008 + 2012 (DLC extended + multicultural-progressive; won twice); Hillary Clinton 2016 (DLC; lost despite popular vote win); Biden 2020 (DLC + Obama-Biden continuity; won); Harris 2024 (DLC + Biden incumbent; lost). Critics: framework too accommodating to Reagan-era conservatism; structurally inadequate for post-2008 economic crisis + post-2016 populist moment.

Ross Perot 1992 campaign's long-term structural significance: demonstrated appetite for independent candidates; Reform Party 1995; Perot 1996 8.4% popular vote; subsequent third-party challenges (Nader 2000 2.7%, widely blamed for Gore Florida loss; Stein 2016 1.1%; West 2024 0.3%); Trump 2016 + 2024 can be analyzed as Perot-style populism within Republican Party. Perot 1992 voter coalition (working-class whites + Midwestern industrial + small-business + government-distrust) structurally similar to Trump 2016+2024 coalition.

The 1992 Bush defeat ended 12-year Republican presidential streak 1980-92. The 8-year Clinton 1993-2001 interlude was structural anomaly within Reagan-era ascendance rather than fundamental realignment. Bush 43 2000 + 2004 victories

		resumed the era through 2008. Republican-conservative ascendance ended structurally with Obama 2008 + post-2008 demographic shifts. The 1992 election can also be analyzed as the beginning of post-Cold-War U.S. politics. Soviet Union dissolved December 25, 1991 - 11 months before 1992 election. Bush's 1991 Gulf War success had reflected Cold War-era U.S. global leadership. By 1992, Cold War framework had ended. Voters could focus on domestic issues (economy, healthcare, social policy) rather than foreign-policy Cold War tensions. Clinton 1992 victory partly reflected this structural shift: foreign-policy experience (Bush) less politically valuable than domestic-policy framing (Clinton) in post-Cold-War world. Subsequent 1990s + early 2000s elections continued the structural shift: Clinton 1996; Gore 2000; Bush 43 2000 (focused on tax cuts + domestic policy). The September 11, 2001 attacks would re-prioritize foreign-policy + national-security politics for Bush 43 2004 + subsequent elections.
20 min	**Source A**	Read aloud once; students annotate individually for tone, evidence, and audience.
20 min	**Source B**	Compare/contrast against Source A. Pair-share on the DBQ comparison question.
20 min	**Worksheet**	Eight questions: 5 short-answer, 2 stimulus-based MCQ, 1 long-essay framing.
20 min	**LEQ planning**	Students sketch a thesis + outline for the LEQ comparison prompt. Submit for next-day full essay.
5 min	**Closure**	Exit ticket: one sentence summarizing the comparison.

Background

Before the worksheet, review the key terms below and then read the primary source carefully. The two source-analysis questions on the worksheet (questions 6 and 7) ask you to quote from the excerpt.

Key terms

Bill Clinton
42nd U.S. president (1993-2001).

"It's the economy, stupid"
Carville's 1992 mantra.

Pat Buchanan culture war speech
August 17, 1992 Republican Convention keynote.

Democratic Leadership Council (DLC)
Founded 1985 by Al From + Bruce Babbitt + others. Bill Clinton DLC Chair 1990-91. Framework: fiscal responsibility + welfare reform + free trade + cultural moderation. Operationalized through Clinton 1992 + 1996 presidencies + subsequent Democratic candidates 1993-2024. Dissolved 2011 (organization continued as Third Way + New Democrat Coalition).

Ross Perot
Texas billionaire entrepreneur and 1992 + 1996 independent presidential candidate.

New Democrat
Clinton's 1992 political identity.

NAFTA
North American Free Trade Agreement. Negotiated by Bush 1991-92; signed by Bush December 17, 1992; ratified by Congress November 1993 under Clinton; implementing legislation signed by Clinton December 8, 1993; took effect January 1, 1994. Free-trade agreement among U.S., Canada, Mexico. Operationalized Reagan-era free-trade framework. Trump renegotiated as USMCA 2018.

United We Stand America
Perot's 1992 grassroots organization. Ballot-qualified Perot in all 50 states + DC. ~5 million volunteers/supporters. Operationalized Perot 1992 campaign's grassroots claim. Continued as political action committee 1992+. Reform Party founded 1995 absorbed UWSA infrastructure.

Acceptance Address at Democratic National Convention

BILL CLINTON, JULY 16, 1992

Clinton delivered this acceptance speech at Madison Square Garden in New York City on July 16, 1992.

> *"I end tonight where it all began for me - I still believe in a place called Hope. My fellow Americans, I end tonight where it all began for me: I still believe in a place called Hope, a place called America. The choice we offer is not conservative or liberal; in many ways it is not even Republican or Democratic. It is different. It is new. And it will work. It is a new covenant. We need a new covenant. We need a new beginning. We need a new tomorrow."*

Clinton, "Acceptance Address at Democratic National Convention" (New York, July 16, 1992). Fair use under 17 USC §107 — educational excerpt of public political speech, ≈150 words.

Document-based question

Source A is on the Background page; Source B is below. Use both as evidence for the worksheet's source-analysis questions and the LEQ.

SOURCE A

Acceptance Address at Democratic National Convention

BILL CLINTON, JULY 16, 1992

“I end tonight where it all began for me - I still believe in a place called Hope. My fellow Americans, I end tonight where it all began for me: I still believe in a place called Hope, a place called America. The choice we offer is not conservative or liberal; in many ways it is not even Republican or Democratic. It is different. It is new. And it will work. It is a new covenant. We need a new covenant. We need a new beginning. We need a new tomorrow.”

Clinton, "Acceptance Address at Democratic National Convention" (New York, July 16, 1992). Fair use under 17 USC §107 — educational excerpt of public political speech, ≤150 words.

SOURCE B

Larry King Live Announcement

ROSS PEROT, FEBRUARY 20, 1992

“If you, the volunteers, in all 50 states are willing to register me on the ballot in all 50 states - not 49, but all 50 - and if you're willing to organize at the precinct level, I will run as a candidate in November. I would not run as a Republican or a Democrat - I would run as an independent. Both political parties, both political organizations are out of touch with the people they are supposed to represent. We have a political system that does not respond to the demands of the people. The people who pay the taxes, who fight the wars, who do the work - they're not represented. The political parties are run by people who are professional politicians and they have created a self-serving political class.”

Perot, "Larry King Live Announcement" (CNN broadcast, February 20, 1992). Fair use under 17 USC §107 — educational excerpt of public political appearance, ≤150 words.

The 1992 Election

Answer the eight questions below. Source A is on the Background page; Source B is on the DBQ Pair page.

QUESTION 1 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify the key phrase in Source A (Clinton 1992 acceptance) articulating DLC centrist "New Democrat" framework. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 2 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify the key phrase in Source B (Perot 1992 Larry King Live) articulating anti-establishment populist framework. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

Both sources are 1992 candidate announcements but from very different political positions. Identify the specific political function each source performs.

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

Perot's "Both political parties... are out of touch with the people they are supposed to represent" framing was operationalized through subsequent third-party + populist candidates. Identify three specific 1996-2024 candidates who adopted similar framing.

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify three specific 1993-2024 Democratic presidents/candidates who operated within Clinton's DLC centrist framework.

QUESTION 6 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How much money did Perot self-fund his 1992 campaign?

( ) A. ~$25 million
( ) B. ~$45 million
( ) C. ~$65 million
( ) D. ~$95 million

QUESTION 7 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

In what year was the Democratic Leadership Council founded?

( ) A. 1981
( ) B. 1985
( ) C. 1989
( ) D. 1990

QUESTION 8 · SHORT-ANSWER

Sketch your thesis sentence for the LEQ (next page). State your position: was the 1992 election about Republican-break, DLC-centrism, or anti-establishment? Identify one piece of evidence from each source you will use.

Long-essay-question

LEQ PROMPT

Clinton's July 1992 acceptance speech (Source A) articulated the DLC centrist "New Democrat" framework - "I still believe in a place called Hope." Perot's February 1992 Larry King Live announcement (Source B) articulated the structural anti-establishment populist framework - "Both political parties... are out of touch with the people they are supposed to represent." Using BOTH sources and your knowledge of the 1968-2024 period, evaluate the extent to which the 1992 election represented (a) the first major break in 1968-2008 Republican-conservative ascendance, (b) the establishment of DLC centrism as Democratic presidential framework for the next 32 years, or (c) the Perot demonstration of structural appetite for independent + anti-establishment candidates that would shape U.S. politics through Trump 2016 + 2024. Defend a clear thesis.

GRADING RUBRIC

Thesis (1 pt): must take a defensible position on the Republican-break-vs-DLC-centrism-vs-anti-establishment axis. Contextualization (1 pt): mention at least two of the Reagan 1980 election, the Bush 1990 tax-pledge violation, NAFTA, the 1994 Republican Revolution, the 1996 welfare reform, the Bush 43 2000-2008 victories, the Obama 2008+2012 victories, the Trump 2016 + 2024 victories. Evidence (2 pts): must quote at least one phrase from each source. Analysis (1 pt): must explicitly evaluate the extent rather than treating the three framings as equivalent. Total 5 points.

Answer key

QUESTION 1

Accept any of: "I still believe in a place called Hope, a place called America", "The choice we offer is not conservative or liberal; in many ways it is not even Republican or Democratic. It is different. It is new", "It is a new covenant. We need a new covenant". The "not conservative or liberal" or "new covenant" phrases are most distinctive DLC framings.

Clinton's framing established DLC centrist "New Democrat" framework.

QUESTION 2

Accept any of: "Both political parties, both political organizations are out of touch with the people they are supposed to represent", "We have a political system that does not respond to the demands of the people", "The political parties are run by people who are professional politicians and they have created a self-serving political class", "I would not run as a Republican or a Democrat - I would run as an independent". The "out of touch with the people" or "self-serving political class" phrases are most distinctive.

Perot's framing established anti-establishment populist framework.

QUESTION 3

Source A is Clinton's 1992 Democratic Convention acceptance speech - articulated as Democratic nominee to assemble Democratic coalition through DLC centrist "New Democrat" framework. The function is to position Clinton as authentic Southern outsider while articulating moderate "not conservative or liberal" policy framework. Source B is Perot's 1992 candidacy announcement - articulated as independent outsider on cable news to mobilize anti-establishment voters. The function is to position Perot as authentic businessman responding to popular demand rather than ambitious politician. Together, the sources reveal the structural anti-establishment moment of 1992: Clinton DLC centrism vs Perot independent populism both represented departures from Reagan-Bush establishment Republicanism. Both succeeded politically - Clinton won 370 EV; Perot won 18.9% popular vote. The 1992 election demonstrated structural voter appetite for change.

AP students should be able to articulate the structural framework.

QUESTION 4

Three specific 1996-2024 candidates who adopted Perot's anti-establishment populist framing: (1) Perot 1996 Reform Party (8.4% popular vote, 0 EV) - direct continuation. Ross Perot ran again on the Reform Party ticket founded 1995. Won 8 million votes - less than 1992 but still significant. (2) Pat Buchanan 1996 + 2000 Republican primary + Reform Party - Buchanan adopted economic-populist + cultural-conservative framing that drew on Perot themes. Buchanan 1996 New Hampshire Republican primary win + Reform Party 2000 nomination (0.4% popular vote). (3) Ralph Nader 2000 Green Party - Nader's 2.7% popular vote (widely blamed for Gore's Florida loss) operationalized Perot-style "two parties same" framing from the left. Nader: "There's not a dime's worth of difference between the two major parties." (4) Howard Dean 2004 Democratic primary - Dean's anti-Washington framing + Internet-based grassroots organization adopted Perot-style outsider strategy within Democratic primary. (5) Donald Trump 2016 Republican primary + general - Trump's "drain the swamp" + anti-establishment framing was structurally Perot-style populism but operationalized within Republican Party. Trump 2016 won 304-227 EV; Trump 2024 won 312-226 EV. The Perot 1992 voter coalition (working-class whites + Midwestern industrial + small-business + government-distrust) was structurally similar to Trump's 2016 + 2024 coalition. (6) Bernie Sanders 2016 + 2020 Democratic primary - Sanders' "political revolution" framing was Perot-style anti-establishment populism from the left within Democratic Party. Sanders 2016 won 23 primaries vs Hillary Clinton; Sanders 2020 won early primaries but lost nomination to Biden. (7) Robert F. Kennedy Jr 2024 - began as independent, withdrew October 23, 2024 + endorsed Trump. Adopted classic Perot-style "both parties broken" framing. The structural lesson: Perot 1992 established the template for anti-establishment candidacy that subsequent figures across ideological spectrum would adapt.

AP students should be able to articulate multiple adaptations.

QUESTION 5

Three specific 1993-2024 Democratic presidents/candidates within Clinton's DLC centrist framework: (1) Al Gore 2000 - Clinton's VP 1993-2001. Continued Clinton DLC centrism. Won popular vote by ~540K but lost Electoral College 271-266 to Bush in disputed Florida result. (2) John Kerry 2004 - Massachusetts Senator + Vietnam veteran. Adopted DLC framework with foreign-policy + national-security elements. Lost 286-251 to Bush 43. (3) Barack Obama 2008 + 2012 - extended DLC framework with multicultural + progressive elements + post-2008-crisis economic policy. Won 365-173 (2008) + 332-206 (2012) over McCain + Romney. Operationally maintained Clinton-era policy framework: continued Bush tax cuts (with adjustments); did not pursue single-payer healthcare; signed Dodd-Frank financial reform but not Glass-Steagall restoration; deported more immigrants than any prior president. (4) Hillary Clinton 2016 - Clinton's wife + former Secretary of State 2009-13. Most explicit DLC centrist candidate since Bill Clinton 1992-96. Won popular vote by ~2.86M but lost Electoral College 304-227 to Trump (Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania flipped Republican). (5) Joe Biden 2020 - Obama's VP 2009-17. Continued DLC + Obama-Biden continuity framework. Won 306-232 over Trump. (6) Kamala Harris 2024 - Biden's VP 2021-25. Replaced Biden as Democratic nominee July 21, 2024 after Biden withdrew. DLC centrist + Biden-incumbent continuity. Lost 312-226 to Trump. The cumulative effect: DLC centrism shaped Democratic presidential strategy for 32 years (1992-2024). Critics argued the framework was structurally inadequate for post-2008 economic crisis + post-2016 populist moment - Democratic Party has lost 3 of 6 elections in DLC framework since 2000 (2000 Gore, 2016 Clinton, 2024 Harris). But DLC framework also produced 4 victories (1992, 1996, 2008, 2012, 2020).

AP students should be able to articulate multiple DLC operationalizations.

QUESTION 6

~$65 million. Perot self-funded his 1992 campaign with approximately $65 million of his personal wealth (~$140 million in 2024 dollars). Perot had a net worth of approximately $3 billion in 1992 (~$6.5 billion in 2024 dollars). The self-funding was structurally unusual: most presidential candidates rely on donor contributions + party support. Perot's self-funding gave him structural independence from establishment Republican + Democratic donor networks.

AP students should know the ~$65M figure.

QUESTION 7

1985. The Democratic Leadership Council was founded in February 1985 by Al From + Bruce Babbitt + others after the McGovern 1972 + Mondale 1984 Democratic presidential defeats. The DLC explicitly positioned against McGovernite-Mondale Northern liberalism. Bill Clinton served as DLC Chair 1990-91. DLC framework operationalized through Clinton 1992 + 1996 presidencies + subsequent Democratic candidates 1993-2024. DLC dissolved 2011 (organization continued as Third Way + New Democrat Coalition).

AP students should know the 1985 DLC founding.

QUESTION 8

Open-ended thesis sketch. Acceptable answers should: (1) state a clear position on the Republican-break-vs-DLC-centrism-vs-anti-establishment axis, (2) avoid treating them as equivalent, (3) signal at least one piece of evidence from each source.

The thesis sketch is preparatory.