AP EDITION · DBQ + LEQ · CLASSROOM

1996

Bill Clinton vs Bob Dole

A 105-minute lesson on the 1996 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) · 379 EV	RUNNER-UP Bob Dole (Republican) · 159 EV
KEY ISSUE Budget surplus; economic boom; welfare reform; Newt Gingrich's Republican Revolution	TURNOUT 51.7%

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3. Background: vocabulary + primary source A
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1996: Bill Clinton vs Bob Dole

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 1993-96 America that would produce a Clinton re-election. For each identify the specific 1993-96 development most responsible.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	1996 election was 53rd U.S. presidential election. Clinton 379 EV / Dole 159 EV / Perot 0 EV (8.4% popular vote). Clinton first Democrat re-elected since FDR 1944. Clinton first-term troubles: 1993-94 healthcare reform failed; November 1994 Republican Revolution (Republicans gained 54 House + 8 Senate; Gingrich Speaker). Recovery 1995-96: 1995-96 government shutdowns (public blamed Republicans); strong economy; August 1996 Welfare reform (PRWORA); 1996 wage growth. Republican primary 1996: Bob Dole (KS, 72, Senate Majority Leader) defeated Buchanan + Forbes + Gramm + others. Dole won Iowa Feb 12 + NH Feb 20. Resigned Senate Majority Leader May 15 + Senate June 11. Republican Convention San Diego August 12-15, 1996 nominated Dole-Kemp. Dole August 15 acceptance: "Let me be the bridge to an America that only the unknowing call myth." Politically devastating backward-looking framing. Democratic Convention Chicago August 26-29, 1996 renominated Clinton-Gore. Clinton August 29 acceptance: "Tonight, let us resolve to build that bridge to the 21st century." "Bridge to the 21st Century" theme. Ross Perot Reform Party. Self-funded ~$25M. Excluded from October debates. Won 8.4% + 0 EV. Clinton 379 EV; Dole 159; Perot 0. Clinton 31 states + DC; Dole 19. Popular: Clinton 49.2%; Dole 40.7%; Perot 8.4%. Margin 8,203,716. Clinton expanded 1992 coalition. Gained FL + AZ (first Democratic AZ since Truman 1948). Clinton second term 1997-2001: 1997 balanced-budget agreement; 1998 first budget surplus since 1969; 1998 Monica Lewinsky scandal; December 19, 1998 House

impeached Clinton; February 12, 1999 Senate acquitted; 1999 Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act repealing Glass-Steagall.

1996 election structural significance: (1) First Democrat re-elected since FDR 1944. (2) Dole-Kemp last classic establishment-Republican ticket. (3) Perot 8.4% confirmed third-party appetite. (4) Clinton-Gingrich demonstrated divided-government dynamics. (5) Welfare reform defined post-1996 federal welfare framework.

The Clinton 1996 re-election confirmed DLC centrism viability. Clinton 1992 + 1996 victories operated within Reagan-era policy framework. Subsequent Democratic candidates (Gore 2000, Kerry 2004, Obama 2008+12, Hillary Clinton 2016, Biden 2020, Harris 2024) operated within DLC framework. Critics: framework inadequate for post-2008 economic crisis + post-2016 populist moment. DLC produced 4 victories (1992, 1996, 2008, 2012, 2020) + 4 losses (2000, 2004, 2016, 2024) in 9 elections.

The 1995-96 Clinton-Gingrich confrontation structurally important. Subsequent divided-government periods (Obama vs Boehner-Ryan 2011-15; Trump vs Pelosi 2019-21; Biden vs McCarthy-Johnson 2023-25) followed similar patterns. Clinton-Gingrich 1997 balanced-budget framework instructive: divided government can produce significant policy through compromise + presidential triangulation.

The Welfare reform 1996 + financial deregulation 1999 structurally Reagan-era achievements operationalized by Democratic president. 1999 Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act repealing Glass-Steagall later cited as contributing to 2008 financial crisis. Clinton-era prosperity partially built on financial deregulation framework that would prove structurally fragile.

The 1996 Bob Dole defeat was last classic establishment-Republican presidential candidacy. Dole was 72 - oldest major-party nominee to that point. WWII veteran. Career Senate Majority Leader. Senior establishment Republican. Subsequent Republican nominees would adopt more populist + culture-war framings: Bush 43 2000 + 2004 (compassionate conservatism + national security); McCain 2008 (centrist Republican but adopted Sarah Palin VP for populist appeal); Romney 2012 (corporate Republican who pivoted to "47 percent" cultural framing); Trump 2016 + 2024 (populist culture-war Republican). The cumulative trajectory: establishment Republican governance framework that Dole 1996 embodied was structurally weakened over the next 28 years.

The Clinton-era political-economic transformation 1993-2001 was structurally consequential: (1) NAFTA + GATT/WTO 1993-94 - globalization framework that would shape U.S. economic policy through 2024. (2) Welfare reform 1996 - structural retraction of federal welfare state. (3) 1997 balanced-budget agreement - first budget surplus since 1969 (1998-2001). (4) 1999 Glass-Steagall repeal + Commodity Futures Modernization Act 2000 - financial deregulation that would contribute to 2008

		crisis. (5) Internet-era technological transformation - dot-com boom 1995-2000 + structural transformation of U.S. economy + communication. (6) End of Cold War + emergence of new foreign-policy framework (humanitarian intervention; Yugoslavia 1995 + Kosovo 1999; counter-terrorism focus emerging). The cumulative effect: by 2001, U.S. federal government + economy + foreign-policy had been structurally transformed within DLC centrist Democratic framework that accepted much of Reagan-era policy direction.
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

Bob Dole
Kansas Senator and 1996 Republican presidential nominee.

1994 Republican Revolution
November 8, 1994 midterm.

Welfare reform 1996
PRWORA. Replaced AFDC with TANF.

Newt Gingrich
Republican Speaker of the House (1995-99).

Glass-Steagall repeal (Gramm-Leach-Bliley)
November 12, 1999 Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act repealing parts of 1933 Glass-Steagall Banking Act that had separated commercial banking from investment banking. Operationalized Reagan-era deregulation framework. Later cited as contributing to 2008 financial crisis.

Bridge to the 21st Century
Clinton's 1996 campaign theme.

Government shutdowns 1995-96
November 1995 + December 1995-January 1996 federal shutdowns.

Jack Kemp
1996 Republican VP nominee.

Contract with America
Republican congressional candidate platform announced September 27, 1994 (6 weeks before midterm). 10 policy proposals: balanced budget, term limits, welfare reform, tort reform, tax cuts, defense spending. Operationalized through 1994 Republican Revolution + subsequent Republican congressional policy.

Acceptance Address at Democratic National Convention

BILL CLINTON, AUGUST 29, 1996

Clinton delivered this acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago on August 29, 1996.

> *"My fellow Americans, after these four good, hard years, I still believe in a place called Hope, a place called America. Tonight, let us resolve to build that bridge to the 21st century, to meet our challenges and protect our values. Let us build a bridge to help our parents raise their children, to help our young people and adults to get the education and training they need, to help our families be successful at home and at work. We need a bridge to be repaired and rebuilt, a bridge of opportunity for every American."*

Clinton, "Acceptance Address at Democratic National Convention" (Chicago, August 29, 1996). 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, AUGUST 29, 1996

“My fellow Americans, after these four good, hard years, I still believe in a place called Hope, a place called America. Tonight, let us resolve to build that bridge to the 21st century, to meet our challenges and protect our values. Let us build a bridge to help our parents raise their children, to help our young people and adults to get the education and training they need, to help our families be successful at home and at work. We need a bridge to be repaired and rebuilt, a bridge of opportunity for every American.”

Clinton, "Acceptance Address at Democratic National Convention" (Chicago, August 29, 1996). Fair use under 17 USC §107 — educational excerpt of public political speech, ≈150 words.

SOURCE B

Acceptance Address at Republican National Convention

BOB DOLE, AUGUST 15, 1996

“Let me be the bridge to an America that only the unknowing call myth. Let me be the bridge to a time of tranquility, faith, and confidence in action. To those who say it was never so, that America has not been better, I say, you're wrong, and I know, because I was there. And I have seen it. And I remember. Our nation, though wounded and scarred, has outlasted revolution, civil war, world war, racial oppression, and economic catastrophe. We have fought a long Cold War. Often we won. Sometimes we lost. But never, never, never, has the human spirit been more truly tested or more victorious than in the great deeds and works of the American people during the time of my life.”

Dole, "Acceptance Address at Republican National Convention" (San Diego, August 15, 1996). Fair use under 17 USC §107 — educational excerpt of public political speech, ≈150 words.

The 1996 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 1996 acceptance) articulating the forward-looking "Bridge to the 21st Century" framework. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 2 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify the key phrase in Source B (Dole 1996 acceptance) articulating the backward-looking framework. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

Both sources are 1996 convention acceptance speeches but articulate opposite framing strategies. Identify the specific political function each source performs.

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

Dole's "bridge to an America that only the unknowing call myth" framing was politically devastating. Identify the specific rhetorical strategies that produced the structural failure.

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify three specific 1992-2024 Democratic presidential candidates who operated within Clinton's DLC centrist framework.

QUESTION 6 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How old was Bob Dole in 1996?

( ) A. 68
( ) B. 72
( ) C. 76
( ) D. 80

QUESTION 7 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

On what date did Clinton sign the 1996 Welfare reform (PRWORA)?

( ) A. April 24, 1996
( ) B. August 22, 1996
( ) C. September 30, 1996
( ) D. November 12, 1996

QUESTION 8 · SHORT-ANSWER

Sketch your thesis sentence for the LEQ (next page). State your position: was the 1996 election about DLC-centrism, shutdown-pattern, or Reagan-era-operationalization? Identify one piece of evidence from each source you will use.

Long-essay-question

LEQ PROMPT

Clinton's August 1996 acceptance speech (Source A) articulated the "Bridge to the 21st Century" forward-looking framework. Dole's August 1996 acceptance speech (Source B) articulated the "bridge to an America that only the unknowing call myth" backward-looking framework. Using BOTH sources and your knowledge of the 1981-2024 period, evaluate the extent to which the 1996 election represented (a) the first Democrat re-elected since FDR 1944 confirming DLC centrism viability, (b) the demonstration that 1995-96 government shut-downs generally hurt the party perceived as causing them, or (c) the structural Reagan-era conservative achievements operationalized within Democratic Party governance (Welfare reform 1996; financial deregulation 1999). Defend a clear thesis.

GRADING RUBRIC

Thesis (1 pt): must take a defensible position on the DLC-centrism-vs-shutdown-pattern-vs-Reagan-era-op-erationalization axis. Contextualization (1 pt): mention at least two of the Reagan 1980 election, the 1994 Republican Revolution, NAFTA, Welfare reform 1996, Glass-Steagall repeal, the Obama 2008 election, the Trump 2016 + 2024 elections. 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: "build that bridge to the 21st century, to meet our challenges and protect our values", "build a bridge to help our parents raise their children, to help our young people and adults to get the education and training they need", "bridge of opportunity for every American". The "build that bridge to the 21st century" phrase is the most distinctive forward-looking framing.

Clinton's framing established forward-looking framework.

QUESTION 2

Accept any of: "Let me be the bridge to an America that only the unknowing call myth", "Let me be the bridge to a time of tranquility, faith, and confidence in action", "To those who say it was never so, that America has not been better, I say, you're wrong, and I know, because I was there". The "bridge to an America that only the unknowing call myth" phrase is the most distinctive backward-looking framing.

Dole's framing established backward-looking framework.

QUESTION 3

Source A is Clinton's 1996 incumbent acceptance speech - articulated to assemble Democratic coalition through forward-looking "Bridge to the 21st Century" framework. The function is to position Clinton as future-oriented leader contrasting with backward-looking Dole. Source B is Dole's 1996 challenger acceptance speech - articulated to assemble Republican coalition through restorationist appeal to past American virtue. The function is to position Dole as bridge to traditional American values + dismiss contemporary concerns as "myth." Together, the sources represent one of the clearest structural framings in U.S. presidential campaign history: forward-looking vs backward-looking political appeal. Clinton's framing won decisively (379-159 EV; 49.2% vs 40.7%). The structural lesson: forward-oriented political rhetoric typically defeats backward-oriented rhetoric in close elections.

AP students should be able to articulate the structural contrast.

QUESTION 4

Dole's "bridge to an America that only the unknowing call myth" produced structural rhetorical failure through five strategies: (1) "Only the unknowing call myth" dismissed voters' contemporary concerns as ignorance. The framing was condescending - voters who had concerns about contemporary America were implicitly labeled "unknowing." (2) Backward-looking framing - "bridge to a time of tranquility, faith, and confidence in action" positioned Dole as bridge to past rather than future. The framing implicitly conceded that contemporary America was less good than past America. (3) Personal-credibility appeal - "I was there. And I have seen it. And I remember" relied on Dole's individual memory rather than universal experience. The framing limited appeal to voters of similar age + background. (4) Historical-list framing - "wounded and scarred, has outlasted revolution, civil war, world war, racial oppression, and economic catastrophe" enumerated American crises rather than promising future improvement. The framing was structurally conservative-restorationist rather than progressive-forward-looking. (5) "Time of my life" closing - "the great deeds and works of the American people during the time of my life" structurally personalized the era to Dole's personal experience (age 73 in 1996; lifetime 1923-2021). The framing alienated voters who had different generational experiences. The structural lesson: candidate-personal frames + generational nostalgia + dismissive framings can damage political appeal. Subsequent candidates have generally avoided similar structural rhetorical failures. The 2024 Trump "Make America Great Again" was structurally exceptional past-oriented framing that succeeded - but it was framed as forward-looking restoration rather than static nostalgia.

AP students should be able to articulate the rhetorical strategies.

QUESTION 5

Three specific 1992-2024 Democratic presidential candidates within Clinton 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) 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. (3) Hillary Clinton 2016 - Bill 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. (4) Joe Biden 2020 - Obama's VP 2009-17. Continued DLC + Obama-Biden continuity framework. Won 306-232 over Trump. (5) Kamala Harris 2024 - Biden's VP 2021-25. Replaced Biden as Democratic nominee July 21, 2024. DLC centrist + Biden-incumbent continuity. Lost 312-226 to Trump. Cumulative effect: DLC centrism shaped Democratic presidential strategy for 32 years (1992-2024). Critics argued framework was structurally inadequate for post-2008 + post-2016 populist moment - DLC produced 4 victories (1992, 1996, 2008, 2012, 2020) + 4 losses (2000, 2004, 2016, 2024) in 9 elections.

AP students should be able to articulate multiple DLC operationalizations.

QUESTION 6

72. Dole was 72 years old in 1996 - oldest major-party presidential nominee to that point. He was born July 22, 1923 (died December 5, 2021 at age 98). The age advantage was politically problematic against Clinton (50 in 1996). Subsequent older nominees: McCain 72 in 2008; Biden 78 at inauguration January 20, 2021; Trump 78 at inauguration January 20, 2025; Biden 82 in 2024 (had he run); Harris 60 in 2024.

AP students should know Dole's 72-year age.

QUESTION 7

August 22, 1996. Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) on August 22, 1996 - approximately 10 weeks before the November 5, 1996 presidential election. The signing was politically masterful: Clinton signed Reagan-era welfare-skepticism legislation that DLC centrists supported but Democratic liberals opposed. Three HHS officials resigned in protest. The signing operationalized Clinton 1992 campaign promise to "end welfare as we know it."

AP students should know the August 22, 1996 PRWORA signing.

QUESTION 8

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

The thesis sketch is preparatory.