

The Situation Room: The Sometimes Confusing Case of Elections

Jeff Joyce

Introduction

On January 10, 2010 the lead story in the New York Times began, "Scott Brown, a little-known Republican state senator, rode an old pickup truck and a growing sense of unease among independent voters to an extraordinary upset Tuesday night when he was elected to fill the Senate seat that was long held by Edward M. Kennedy in the overwhelmingly Democratic state of Massachusetts. By a decisive margin, Mr. Brown defeated Martha Coakley, the state's attorney general, who had been considered a prohibitive favorite to win just over a month ago after she easily won the Democratic primary." Indeed the entire nation was shocked to see a Republican take a Senatorial seat that was thought to belong to Democrats. Why the amazement? This seat was supposed to be safe!¹

Ted Kennedy was of course a member of one of America's most illustrious political families. Aside from the Adams and the Roosevelts, no American family had combined wealth, social elitism, and political power as well as did the Kennedys. Moreover, they had become the nation's first family in an age in which image meant everything and the instant communication of images reigned supreme. In little time, they became world renowned and universally adored.

"Teddy" Kennedy in particular had parlayed his family's good fortune into a very long political career as a United States Senator from Massachusetts. He in fact made several attempts at securing the Democratic nomination for President in the late 1970s and early 80s but to no avail. But no matter, he easily maintained his seat in Congress up until his death in 2009. Thus, Brown's victory is even more surprising.

When Kennedy died, many in the nation and world mourned. Some claimed that his death was perfectly timed as our nation grappled with health care reform, an issue near and dear to the "crusader" for a government-directed medical program. So the timing was right, it seemed, for the Democrats, who held the majority in Congress to take up Kennedy's banner and fight for what has become known as "Obamacare." And the Democrats were able to secure passage of a health care reform bill. In this political atmosphere, how did Brown win?

Since at least the time of the abolitionists, Massachusetts had been known as a liberal state, and liberal Democrats led by the Kennedy family essentially owned political power in the state for almost 70 years. Media outlets therefore idolized Teddy Kennedy at his recent death, and political figures around the world honored him for his many legislative

accomplishments. His death was used by Democrats to successfully win passage of the most sweeping health care reform bill since the passage of Medicare and Medicaid in the 1960s. Yet somehow his vacant seat was “stolen” from the Democrats amidst all the Democratic fanfare, by a little known, inexperienced, and underdog Republican. How could it be?

Elections are very strange things I think. Often political pundits spend time telling us about how they will proceed. They tell us who the winners are likely to be, or they predict it will be very close, “too close to call.” They then like to tell us about the predominant factors and issues surrounding particular elections and the election season in general, and how those specific things will drive the voters toward specific parties or candidates. But I wonder just how much of that is platitude, and how much of that we can trust? How much of it is media sensationalism, and how much is based on an accurate assessment of the voting public? What factors are parts of the decisions being made by voters, and why do those factors come into play at the very time elections are taking place?

In the AP Government class, students are required to study voting and voters in these kinds of ways. They are to study the election process and what historical candidates have done to get elected. They are to study campaigns in our history and what the similarities and differences are among them. They also should learn about things like voting patterns, the use of polling data, and voter demographics as predictors of voting behaviors. And so I think the example above gives us an opportunity perhaps to do all of this. So, how did Scott Brown get elected? What are the issues that he exploited to win in spite of what seemed to be insurmountable odds? Why did the voters go away from their traditional liberal tack? Why did media outlets fail to correctly predict the outcome? What did polling data tell us prior to the election, and what if anything was in that data that may have given us some reason to believe that the results would be so surprising?

What I propose is a unit where students do case comparative studies of some of the more interesting elections in our history as a means for meeting curricular requirements. My aim in this unit is to first describe, in short form, what those requirements are, then give readers several examples as case studies from some of the more interesting elections in our history. I have chosen particular examples to explore as a way of creating a model for teachers who may want to use the unit with their students; teachers could choose other elections, but use the same model of analysis. Then finally, I will do my best to describe exactly the kinds of things I will have my students do to fulfill the obligations of this project.

Background

I teach at William A. Hough High School but have been there for only a few weeks. I have been teaching now for almost 14 years, and I am experienced at teaching AP

Government and Politics, the class for which I have designed this unit.

The school itself is less than 30% free and reduced lunch and lacks the diversity of most other schools. It is located in a fairly affluent area of Charlotte. But that does not mean that the students are more intellectually gifted as some might assume. They seem very typical of today's teenagers. Not too many of them are interested in learning. Most of them are more interested in getting the kinds of grades that get them into the colleges they hope to attend, and very few of them are aware of their political surroundings. It is likely that they, like all of us, hear their parents, teachers, and friends talk about politics, but it is also likely that they don't do so with much curiosity or an inquisitive spirit.

This is what makes any project like the one I propose so very difficult. In many ways, I will need to introduce them to American politics and the game of "politicking" before we can begin to analyze elections. I think this very well could be the case with many teachers in the public school system. So as I begin to discuss my ideas for this unit, I will spend the first portion discussing the sorts of things that we as teachers might need to grapple with before we begin to prepare students for the work they will ultimately be asked to complete.

Rationale

The problem with teaching politics in social and professional circumstances, most people will advise you to stay clear of conversations about religion and politics. These subjects often bring out the worst in people. People seem to cling tightly to either their party or ideological identification. They also seem, in lots of circumstances, to be absolutely appalled that anyone could think along divergent political lines. I can remember after the election in 2004, an art teacher in my school refused to speak to me for several weeks because she knew I was pleased with the outcome; in her words, she "couldn't bear to see my face." Oddly enough, we are very good friends otherwise.

Political interactions can often reach a high level emotional pitch. Beliefs are very personal things, and people take their beliefs/principles very seriously. On some level, we all want everyone to think like we do. We want to be comfortable with ourselves, and it is most comforting to know that we are correct, right?

And so many high school students come to us with perspectives on issues that are beginning to solidify as their parents have attempted to groom them in what they believe to be the proper ideology. This is not to imply that teachers are excused from this bias. Indeed, we too have developed some very strong opinions, maybe stronger since we teach, and so we must try to avoid letting those preconceived notions impede on our instruction. Even as I write this, I am aware that this is an almost impossible task. As educators, we are left with a complex and sensitive pedagogical challenge when we begin teaching anything that has to do with the inner workings of our government and political

beliefs, especially as they pertain to the outcomes of elections (voting is the one instrument that we can all readily use to participate in the democratic process). Politics is indeed a confusing, frustrating, and emotional topic. There is just so much to consider. But if we can try to strip away the emotional element and get our students to think about elections, voting, and issues with as little emotional engagement as possible, we might get them to think deeper about political processes and thus create a more scholarly and analytical conversation. Moreover, I think there is a path we might take that will lead us toward this goal. Let me quickly use an example to show how emotion can overwhelm intellect and then give some suggestions as to how we might employ reason and analysis instead of emotion.

Let's consider the act of voting within the context of the 2000 Presidential election, one of the most controversial in American history. Republican George W. Bush won by a very slim majority after he was awarded the Florida electoral votes after a number of suspicious recounts in various counties across the state. Even more curious was that the validation of his Presidential victory came by way of a second vote; the conservative majority in the United States Supreme Court voted 5 to 4 to block a statewide recount. In the end, someone had to lose, and that someone, Democrat Al Gore, lost by the smallest of margins. Not surprisingly, a huge number of people were disgruntled with the results. The anger and frustration from the losing side of the electorate would not cease for the eight years Bush served as President. He was blamed for everything. I remember riding to school one day and hearing an NPR story in which environmentalist groups were suggesting that Bush's lack of attention to the problem of global warming had likely created conditions that led to hurricane Katrina. Now that is some serious irrational anger! But like Dr. Phil might say, let's deal with the anger.

Bush was both a two-term and monumentally-hated President. It doesn't seem logical that those things could both be true. He was voted into office by Americans, a people who believe strongly in democratic principles. Most would say voting is a wonderful thing right? We have embraced the concept here in the US so much that media outlets like MTV have programming dedicated to "get out the vote." We develop diplomatic relationships with nations based almost exclusively on our assessment of their democratic inclinations. But does it really work? If Bush was voted into office, wouldn't that then mean that Americans, most notably those who did not vote for him, would embrace him as our President as a means of honoring the democratic process? Well, that just never happens. So then the challenge for teachers is to be able to teach and analyze the 2000 election as a historical event and somehow get rid of the hate.

So imagine that we ask students to try and find out how Bush got elected in an objective fashion. First, they could describe his political experience without making their own assertions about whether they believed him to be qualified as President. Then, we could ask students to list the major issues in the 2000 election and what stance each side took in their platforms and public speeches. Students could then find polling data from

various points in time prior to the election and try to predict the outcome. They might even look at demographic data like how women or Hispanic voters were polling prior to the election. They could even compare the strategies of the two candidates. What kinds of things did each side emphasize, where did they do most of their stump speeches, and did they appeal to veterans or soccer moms? My hope is that if we ask them to collect information without judgment first, perhaps the judgment that inevitably results will be a product of them being well-informed rather than blindly partisan. It is this underlying philosophy that will drive this unit.

Curricular Requirements

The AP College Board gives teachers and students a number of concepts to cover in order to be successful on the AP exam. Below are edited versions of those that seem most pertinent to this unit:

Individual citizens hold a variety of beliefs about their government, its leaders, and the US political system in general; taken together, these beliefs form the foundation of US political culture. It is important for students to understand how these beliefs are formed, how they evolve, and the processes by which they are transmitted.

Students should know why US Citizens hold certain beliefs about politics, and how families, schools, and the media act to perpetuate or change these beliefs. Understanding the ways in which political culture affects and informs political participation is critical. Students should understand why individuals engage in various forms of political participation and how that participation may affect the political system.

It is essential that students understand what leads citizens to differ from one another in their political beliefs and behaviors and the political consequences of these differences. Students should focus on the demographic features of the American population and the different views that people hold of the political process. Students should also understand how changes in political participation affect the political system.

Examination of party reform and of campaign strategies along with financing campaigns provides students with important perspectives. A study of elections, election laws, and election systems on the national and state levels will help students understand the nature of both party and individual voting behavior. Treatment of the development and the role of PACs in elections and the ideological and demographic differences between the two major parties, as well as third parties, are also important.

Students should be aware of the goals and incentives of the media as an industry and how those goals influence the nature of news coverage. They should also understand the consequences of the increasing concentration of major media outlets in fewer hands, as

well as the growing role of the Internet.

Case Studies- Examples of interesting elections

I would like to preface this section with a few qualifying comments. First, although I am writing this unit for an AP Government audience, I do not think that it should be considered exclusive to that group. It might be adapted for a standard level government class and perhaps even a current events style class. With that in mind, I am going to move sequentially through examples of elections that are, in the beginning, not terribly difficult to analyze and then gradually deal with elections that are more complex and thus applicable to a higher level of student. Second, my case studies will go chronologically from the early 20th century to very recent history. They will also move from an exploration of local/ regional elections to national elections. They will contain a number of the same kinds of considerations that I will explore more as I enter into the lessons and activities portion of the narrative.

1898 North Carolina: The Wilmington Race Riots and the End of Fusion- how does a city with a black majority elect openly racist candidates to nearly every political seat?

In November of 1898, the city of Wilmington, NC, experienced one of the more horrific events in Southern history. Angry white mobs, driven by the Democratic leaders in that area and across the state, seized control of the city and the ballot box in a reign of terror arguably unequalled in the Jim Crow South. How did this affect an election? Let's set the scene.

Populists in the area had successfully "fused" themselves with local Republicans to take control of various political offices in the Wilmington area and across the state earlier in the 1890s. They were referred to as the Fusionists. The impetus behind their collaboration was largely economic. Poor whites and blacks had suffered for years at the hands of the propertied Democratic elite in North Carolina. The rise of Populism across the country hit eastern North Carolina in much the same way it had other regions of the country, gaining strength among the region's poor farmers. Republicans seized the opportunity to exploit this condition by fusing themselves with the Populists to take advantage of the fever pitch that had taken hold. Particularly in the Wilmington coastal region of North Carolina, this meant progress for historically poorer members of that community that included whites and blacks. While other southern states enacted Jim Crow laws in the 1890s, black North Carolinians along the coast enjoyed great success due to Republican/ Fusionist power and had risen through the economic ranks becoming majority business owners and part of the growing middle class. But a deadly combination of want for power and socio-political pressure would change all that.

The Democratic Party needed a winning strategy to regain political dominance in 1898. The solution was simple; prey on white southern fears about black power, turn them into reactionary racists, disfranchise blacks, and thus destroy the powerful Fusionist voting block. In that climate and that time in the South, this strategy worked like a charm. Democrats campaigned to rid the state of “negro domination” and protect white women from the “black beasts” who sought to rape them. Democratic speakers and editors saturated the entire state with messages about how whites were losing their color privilege. Newspapers ran stories (fictional or from other states) about black on white rape, to keep the racial “worry” alive. The anger in the white community was so sharp that former Confederates put together a paramilitary organization known as the Red Shirts. They marched through the streets describing Election Day as the day of “white independence.” And they got some unexpected (and unintended) help from the black community.

African American Alexander Manly, the publisher of *The Daily Record*, wrote an editorial piece in his paper responding to the alleged “necessity” of lynchings to stop interracial sexual relationships. He argued that there was a misconception in the white community that all interracial sex amounted to rape, and that white women sometimes willingly slept with black men. That was just the spark the Democrats needed. Democrats took over every important position in the city of Wilmington, took back the state legislature, and won the governorship. The Red Shirts then turned into an angry mob that burned down Mr. Manly’s business and took responsibility for killing several blacks in the Wilmington area (estimated deaths were 9 to 300). And they rounded up at least 21 successful black business owners and marched them out of town, banishing them from the community. Not every place was like Wilmington in the gross threat of violence, but the anti-negro domination campaign had worked. In many areas like Wilmington blacks did not turn out to vote, but angry whites did. The Jim Crow South was firmly in place and African Americans disfranchised.

Students might consider several questions if they chose this or other elections from this period. How did the fusionists successfully take control before the 1898 election? Why were blacks, a sizable population in the coastal region, overwhelmed by whites in 1898? Why weren’t fusionists successful after the riot? Were there any other issues of significance in this election? Was it the violence and intimidation that swung the election or were there other factors at play?²

Harvey Gantt v. Jesse Helms for the North Carolina Senate 1990-how does a conservative use the so-called liberal media/ television to turn an election in his favor?

In the 1990 US Senate race in North Carolina, former Mayor of Charlotte (and its first black mayor) Harvey Gantt stood against the long time incumbent Jesse Helms. Helms, a nationally-known conservative of epic proportions, fought against civil rights and busing

policies in the 1960s. He was openly anti-gay, alluding to the practice as a return to Sodom and Gomorrah, and strongly resisted using federal funds to fight the AIDS epidemic. He fought against paying UN dues and against taxing the rich, and he fought for larger military budgets. And he was brash about all of this. He once whistled the tune Dixie in an elevator while the only black female Senator was riding with him because he wanted to make her cry. He was a conservative's conservative running again for office in the conservative South.

But the campaign against Gantt in 1990 was shaping up to be a tough one. Helms had been North Carolina's senator since 1972 but had never won more than 54% of the vote. Gantt was a very popular mayor in Charlotte and was thought to be representative of the "New South" image supported by so many in the region. Gantt was an effective speaker, dynamic campaigner, and a bit of a media darling. In contrast, Helms was well known for his rampages against the covert liberals running the US media. In September 1990, a New York Times article showed polling numbers that put Helms at 46% and Gantt at 45%, with 9% undecided. According to a report from NBC's Andrea Mitchell in October, blacks were out-registering whites 2 to 1 in the state. And nationally, Democrats were on the rise; the party currently controlled Congress, and in two more years, Americans would elect a Democrat for the Presidency for the first time since 1976. Things did not look so favorable for Helms.³

But Helms was a mudslinger, and this election brought out his most fierce fighting instincts. He attacked Gantt for having "extreme liberal values," and claimed that Gantt supported abortions up until final weeks of pregnancy. Helms said Gantt wanted massive cuts in military spending and was for ending the death penalty. He also chose to emphasize Gantt's support for racial quotas and homosexuals. Gantt struck back, claiming that Helms' assertions were "hazardous to the truth." Gantt emphasized issues important to North Carolinians, such as the dismal performance of the state's public schools on aptitude tests and other watermarks. He also took on environmental issues and health care in a state badly hurt by poverty, especially in the east. Looking back with a somewhat objective eye, one might think that Gantt was destined to win. Helms' attacks come across as desperate and out of touch with the important issues. Gantt seems collected and progressive. But Helms had a card up his sleeve.⁴

Near the end of the campaign, Helms' advertising team developed the TV ad that would turn the tide. The video shows a white man's hands as he tears up a rejection notice he ostensibly received from a prospective employer. The voiceover tells viewers that the man has been denied employment because of racial quotas. The business, according to the narrator, hired a minority because they were forced to fill those quotas. The viewer could clearly tell that this was an older man; the assumption is that he probably has a family to feed. He is wearing a wedding ring and a flannel shirt. He is "Joe Six Pack." In many ways, this ad is very similar to the Wilmington riots of the previous case study. Helms struck fear into the conservative, blue-collar white

community and it worked. And he used media to drive home the message. It should be noted that Helms used a similar strategy as campaign manager for Willis Smith in 1950 against the very popular Frank Porter Graham (see [HYPERLINK "http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-postwar/6103"](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-postwar/6103)
<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-postwar/6103>).⁵

Students might consider several questions if they choose to focus on the 1990 or 1996 senatorial campaigns of Helms and Gantt. What did the exit polling data tell us about why voters swung toward Helms? Were national and local media outlets working to help Gantt as Helms had suggested, and was there a pro-Helms backlash against the media? What areas of the state voted for Gantt and why?

A Consideration of the Presidential Election of 1992 and Congressional Elections of 1994- how does the American public go from supporting Democrats to supporting Republicans in only two years?

In the 1992 campaign, the upstart Governor of Arkansas, William Jefferson Clinton, challenged the incumbent George H.W. when Bush was riding a tidal wave of historical accomplishments. A decorated hero of WWII and Vice President for eight years, Bush was an important part of Ronald Reagan's so-called conservative revolution in the 1980s and had won handily over Governor Michael Dukakis in 1988. Since that time, Bush had overseen the crumbling of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold war, led the liberation of Kuwait in Operation Desert Storm, and continued the traditions of conservatism instituted by Reagan. Everything seemed to be in his favor. But in 1991, the Savings and Loan industry hit the skids. Deregulation of the industry under Reagan led to poor loan practices (imagine that!) and a government bailout was the chosen response by the Bush administration. Sticking with conservative principles, Bush did not want to increase the national deficit and thus chose tax increases to offset the bailout. And so Clinton was given his campaign mantra, "It's the economy, stupid." A veteran politician, Clinton chose to ignore all of the great accomplishments and put Bush on the defensive in dealing with a declining economy. Bush put the final nail in his own coffin when unwittingly asked Americans to "read my lips, no new taxes" in his '88 nomination acceptance speech. Clinton used the phrase in advertisements and in debates to make a mockery of the slow-witted Bush. But there is some really neat stuff for students to consider here.⁶

First, there was a third candidate in this race. Ross Perot, a Texas billionaire, formed the Reform Party just prior to the campaign and funded his own election. His message was that Washington was broken and that Americans shouldn't trust either of the primary party candidates. He said that both were going to increase America's debt and destroy American industry by supporting NAFTA. Some suggest that it was Perot's success at pulling ultra-conservative voters away from Bush that altered the election. I could imagine a case study here that dwells on Perot and the effect of the Reform Party but that

also compares Perot to Clinton. Both of these men are southerners who have a certain allure to southern voters. How are they different? What does the vote tell us about differences in southerners in the Deep South as compared to the southwest?

Second, the 1994 elections play out far differently. Clinton had been in office for almost two years before the Republican landslide in congressional races, a loss for the Democrats widely interpreted as a repudiation of Clinton's leadership. And it was a huge loss. The 54-seat swing gave both houses to the Republicans who'd not controlled the House since 1954. Newt Gingrich, the architect of the Republican victories, was installed as the Speaker of the House and immediately set to work fulfilling his so-called Contract with America. This is perfect stuff for case study. How did the Republican George Bush lose in '92 but Republicans sweep into power in '94? What were the common issues at play in '92 and in '94? Did the issues change or had public opinion shifted and why? Republicans enjoyed massive turnout in the South (even in Clinton's home state), and so we are left with trying to figure out why voters turned on him.

Third, Clinton was up for re-election two years later and was being challenged by Senate veteran Bob Dole. Ross Perot also ran in 1996. Clinton had suffered a stinging defeat in the previous congressional elections and was dealing with multiple controversies, from his own extra-marital machinations to illegal campaign contributions. Most indicators would have suggested he would be a failed one-term President. But he won. Yet another opportunity for students to case study. What is behind Clinton's Presidential survival in 1996? What strategies did Dole use, and why didn't they work? What happened in the congressional elections during this year, and what does that indicate about the mood swing of the American electorate? Why had candidates from the Democratic Party outside the South been unsuccessful since John F. Kennedy's 1960 election? This opens the door to a comparative study between Walter Mondale and Bill Clinton or Michael Dukakis and Clinton.

To summarize, I think this kind of analysis offers students the possibility of trying to answer some of the more important questions that arise when thinking about American politics. There is so much for them to try and absorb and it can be so utterly confusing. They hear a lot about how much elections cost and what role the media (campaign commercials and other) plays in elections. They are swamped with cable television and radio punditry and then are left searching for their own political voice in the barrage of opinions being launched at them. And there is so much to consider. Not just the formal processes of our government but the subtle influences that make it function the way that it does. Geography plays a role, race plays a role, gender and income are important and we can't discount foreign influence. It is easy to see why a student might look at all this and give up. But if can look at just a few elections and find some commonality and then use that knowledge to build upon, I think we will be doing some fine educating. Moreover, we might create a gateway for students to become more civically minded and

politically aware.

Lesson and Activities

I will begin by starting a discussion along the same lines as the examples I have included thus far. The initial conversation will begin by asking a “big question” like how did Scott Brown win the Senate seat formerly occupied by Ted Kennedy or how did Clinton win in 1992 and then Republicans win in 1994? I will do this not because the students know enough to answer, necessarily, but to get us thinking about the possibilities. And also to introduce the concepts we will encounter once we begin to dig into this unit. So we might talk about why voters seem to change their minds. We can talk about issue oriented politics and campaign strategies. We can talk about the role of the media. We might even get a bit deeper into the historical context.

Then students will have to be given a rubric to follow. Structure is very important in an exercise like this, especially when it is quite likely that they have no idea what it is they are supposed to be researching/ finding through their research. So here is what I propose:

I will need to have a series of case studies already prepared for them to choose from. The three that are in this unit will obviously be included. But the good news for me and other teachers who might want to do this unit is that there are so many elections to choose from. It might not be the case that they will need to already be decided. Just off the top of my head, students could research Bush v. Gore in 2000, cases study local politics comparing the terms of Charlotte Mayor Pat McCrory in the 1990s-2000s and the almost-always Democratic school board and county council, a comparison of dominant incumbents Mel Watt and Sue Myrick, or even the Democratic to Republican turn during 2008-2010 (with potential echoes of the 1992-1994 elections). In other words, there should be no fretting about finding ample material or subjects for research.

The case studies will also include sets of “big questions” that need to be answered. The sorts of questions are the ones I have put into the unit so far accompanying the various scenarios I have already explored. Added to those will be questions about the influence of media, questions about the historiographical views (shifting perceptions over time) on some of these elections, and a set of culminating questions about what the students have learned as they have done their research-- bringing together the information and their unique perspective based on their research. Here is what makes sense to me and what I will ask students to do:

Choose one election, or a pair, to analyze (such as the Presidential election in 2000 or compare 1992 and '94 as I did earlier). Students might also choose to look at regional comparisons that seem askew (such as Mel Watt and Sue Myrick have safe seats from the same region but from different political parties. They should also, given this kind of circumstance deal with the problem of gerrymandering by state legislatures). Or they

could do a short historical synopsis of the context in which the election takes place (for example, the 2004 election and the Iraq War).

What elements were in place that produced the results or candidates in the chosen elections you have chosen? Students will need to examine polling data (before and after). What did the polls say? They will need to examine voter trends. In what direction were voters leaning (such as Helms from a conservative NC)? They will need to look at voter demographics. What group was going out to vote (such as young people who voted Obama in 2008 or soccer moms for Clinton in 1996)? They need to look at the important campaign issues, campaign platforms, speeches, and commercials. Where does the “swing vote” come from? What role did the media play? Was there an event of some significance that may have had an impact (such as Howard Dean’s screaming at an Iowa rally that pretty much did him in)?

Having looked at each of these questions, students will need to draw some conclusions. Most importantly, I want them to answer the question; what was the single most important element in the outcome of the chosen election? What other circumstances may have contributed to the outcome? What have you learned about the democratic process in the course of researching this election?

I like to do presentations, so my students will present their findings to the class. But I don’t like a docile audience. So my students will be given a simple rubric that has spaces for them to take notes on all the elections they hear about and an additional set of boxes where they can compare what they have heard to their own research findings (see figure A below). After each presentation, students might ask questions and then tell us about similarities to their own campaigns, candidates, or elections. As I had mentioned earlier, I will also insist that the presentations be done with as little political bias as possible. I don’t want their opinions about the candidates as much as I want to hear their analysis of the candidates, the voters, the events of the campaign, and their conclusions. I understand this can be very hard to do; after all, they are analyzing human beings and have some pretty serious opinions that they like to share. But I will emphasize the need to develop a perspective rather than opinion. A perspective is informed, and an opinion is not.

Fig. A

Name of research project	Notes on presentation	Comparison notes to my study
Bush v. Gore 2000		
Scott Brown takes Ted Kennedy’s seat		

Endnotes

¹ "New York Times Topics." Jan. 10, 2020.

http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/b/scott_p_brown/index.html?inline=nyt-per (accessed Nov. 30, 2010).

² Collins, Kristin. "The Ghosts of 1898." November 17, 2006.

<http://www.newsobserver.com/1370/index.html> (accessed November 30, 2010).

³ Mitchell, Andrea. "MSNBC." October 30,

1990.http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=andrea+mitchell+reports+on+helms+gantt+election+in+1990&aq=f (accessed Nov. 30, 2010).

⁴ "Wikipedia." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesse_Helms (accessed Nov. 30, 2010).

⁵ "You Tube."

http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=helms+hands+video&aq=f (accessed Nov. 30, 2010).

⁶ "Wikipedia." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_presidential_election,_1992

(accessed Nov. 30, 2010).

Annotated Bibliography

Budiansky, Stephen. *The Bloody Shirt: The Terror After Appomattox*. New York: Penguin Books, 2008. If you are interested in reading further about relationships between blacks and whites in the South, particularly in North and South Carolina this is a great book. It is horrifying in many respects but is fantastic in the sense that it drives home how tragic life for blacks became as Southern racism morphed into terrible violence. Moreover, Budiansky makes clear how the political systems in the South failed to respond to their black citizens in a clear time of need.

Hanchett, Thomas W. *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte 1875-1975*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998. This was the primary text for our seminar. This book does not necessarily get into the kinds of things my unit describes above; however, Hanchett does allude frequently to the processes by which power structures in the South were manipulated by the wealthy white elite to maintain economic and political control. And is a worthy read for those interested in understanding acutely the development of Charlotte in the New South period.

Lakoff, George. *The Political Mind: Why You Can't Understand 21st Century American Politics with an 18th-Century Brain*. New York: Penguin Books, 2008. Lakoff is actually

a cognitive scientist at Berkeley but uses the power of his writing in this book to shift American paradigms as they apply to our political behaviors. I have not finished the entire book but can tell you that it is worthy reading for any teacher who wants to challenge students to think about why they think about politics in the way they do. He attacks very clearly the motivations behind our behaviors in an eye opening fashion.

Millbank, Dana. *Homo Politicus: The Strange and Scary Tribes That Run Our Government*. New York: Doubleday, 2008. This book is hilarious but factual. I include it here because I think it is valuable to keep in mind the enormous numbers of scandals that are borne out of political transgressions in this country. They are so ubiquitous it seems that we have become desensitized to them. So for students and teachers alike this book puts them all in one volume, which I think, makes for greater impact. And, more importantly, gives us reason to question the political system and those who are running it.