

AP Government and Politics (College Level C & E)

Due – The first day of classes

Summer Reading Assignment – *Epic Journey: The 2008 Elections and American Politics*

Last year's presidential election was historic in many ways. Elements of that election will provide the basis for much of what we will be discussing this year as far as the role of the media, primaries, parties, interest groups. To get a start, the summer reading book is [Epic Journey: The 2008 Elections and American Politics](#) by James W. Ceaser, Andrew E. Busch, and John J. Pitney, Jr. (ISBN: 0742561364) They analyze the saga of the 2008 election with the "astonishing twists of fate, the uncanny detours, and the remarkable surprises" that the authors claim turned "an ordinary voyage into an epic journey." In detailing the history of this fascinating election they cover much of the material that is the basis for the first semester of the class's curriculum. If you didn't pay close attention during 2007 and 2008 to political news, this book will provide you with an understanding and with examples that we will be using all year long in A.P. Government.

This book is a new book and bookstores probably won't have many copies in stock, although they can order it for you. I recommend that you order a copy from Amazon where you can save about \$7 to \$10. I have a link on my website home.att.net/~betsynewmark/Amazon.htm for this book and other summer reading assignments for other classes.

Once you have purchased the book, read it, taking notes on each chapter. Your notes should either be neatly written or typed. You will be turning them in on the first day of class and I don't want to be handed chewed up scraps of paper with indecipherable scribbles that purport to be your book notes.

For each chapter, here are the topics that you should be paying particular attention to as you read and should be addressing in your notes. You can download this assignment from my website on the Amazon page link above and use the following questions as the template for typing up your notes.

- 1) "The Scope and Meaning of the Democratic Victory"
 1. To what extent does the election of Barack Obama indicate an end to the "Reagan era"? What does that mean and what indicators are there as evidence?
 2. What is the concept of a party realignment? Why do the authors argue that this an exaggerated concept?
 3. What is the evidence arguing for and against 2008 marking a new realignment?
 4. Explain the six "keys" to Obama's victory
- 2) "George W. Bush: The Other Candidate"
 1. How did George W. Bush go from his success in 2004 to being the weakened president that he was by the time for the 2008 election arrived? What were the factors that weakened him?
 2. Why did the 2006 midterm elections turn into such a debacle for the Republicans?
 3. Explain why there was a stalemate in Bush's last two years in office.
 4. How did the Bush presidency set the stage for the 2008 election?
- 3) "The Republican Nomination Contest"
 5. The authors divide the candidates for the GOP nomination into three groups. What are those three groups and how did this indicate the weaknesses in the Republican field?
 6. What is "frontloading" and what was its impact on the nomination process?
 7. What is the concept of the "invisible primary" and how did it affect the nomination?
 8. How did the schedule of caucus and primary elections influence the outcome?
 9. Why did John McCain go from being counted out to getting a second look?
 10. Why was McCain the "strategic winner" of Iowa and why did he go into the lead after New Hampshire?
 11. What is the importance of the expectations game and doing better or worse than expected in the nomination contest? Give examples.
 12. Why did Giuliani flame out? What did his failure say about the importance of the schedule of elections?

13. What was the importance of winner-take-all rules for McCain's victory?

14. Explain why McCain won the nomination?

4) "The Democratic Nomination Contest"

1. Why did the 2008 election present an opportunity for a relatively leader such as Barack Obama?
2. Explain how the election rules in the Democratic contest have changed since 1968. What changes did the McGovern commission make? What are "superdelegates" and why were they added to the process? What effect did they have? What was the effect of the rules of proportional representation?
3. How did frontloading play out for the 2008 election?
4. What are the reasons why the public financing system had become more and more problematic?
5. What was the role of the Internet in the campaign?
6. How was Obama able to take advantage of the caucus system?
7. Explain the role of the various demographic groups that make up the Democratic coalition.
8. Who were the Democratic candidates and what were their various strengths and weaknesses?
9. Why did Barack Obama emerge as the main challenger to Hillary Clinton?
10. What happened in 2007 to shape the 2008 campaign?
11. What were the Obama and Clinton strategies? How did they appeal to their various constituencies?
12. Explain how the rules and schedule of the 2008 caucuses and primaries led to Obama's victory. What mistakes did Hillary Clinton make?
13. What role did the superdelegates play?
14. What role did luck play in Obama's victory?

5) The General Election Campaign"

1. Explain Obama's and McCain's strategies.
2. Summarize the three periods of the general election that the authors discuss and analyze the tactics each candidate's campaign used to carry out their strategies.
3. What effect did the financial crisis have on the election? What was the impact of the debates on the campaign?
4. Explain the authors' analysis of the turnout rate and the role of the winner-take-all system in the 2008 election.
5. How do the results from 2008 set up future electoral battles?

6) "Congressional and State Elections"

1. How do the authors explain the changes from 2004 to 2008? In general, what factors helped the Democrats to a victory?
2. What are the disadvantages of being the minority party with a president of their party in the White House?
3. What strategies did the Democrats use to press their advantages?
4. What reasons are there to believe that the Congress is even more polarized than previously?

7) "The Future of American Politics and Institutions"

1. What did the election say about the movement to scrap the Electoral College?
2. What did it say about campaign finance?
3. What about questions concerning voter registration and voter fraud?
4. What was the impact of early voting?
5. What questions were raised about the primary calendar and caucuses?
6. What factors do the authors suggest why President Obama will be able to implement his chosen policies? What facts do they discuss for why this might not be true?
7. What possibilities remain for the Republicans in trying to stage a comeback?

You will be graded on the thoroughness of your notes. Neatness will also be a consideration. This will count as a test grade.

If you have any questions over the summer about your project, feel free to email me and ask about it; I never mind hearing from kids and answering their questions. betsynewmark@gmail.com