

TEACHER GUIDE

2000 DOC. #13: *Newsweek* Cover, "The Winner Is..."

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Tuesday, November 7, 2000 was perhaps the strangest Election Day in the United States since 1876. On election night, as the popular and electoral votes began to accumulate, they were fairly evenly divided between Bush and Gore. Early exit polls indicated that Gore would win Florida and at 8:00 p.m. the major TV networks projected Gore as the winner there. With Florida included in the Gore "win column," the networks then called the election for Gore, predicting that he would be the next President of the United States. As more precincts reported in with the actual vote totals, however, the vote in Florida became too close to call and the TV networks were forced to pull Florida back out of Gore's column at 10:00 p.m. By 2:00 a.m. it looked certain that Bush would win Florida, which would give him just enough electoral votes to win the national election, even though he trailed Gore nationally by nearly a half million popular votes. The networks then called Florida for Bush and announced that he would become the next President. With the actual precinct votes continuing to trickle in, by 4:30 a.m. the networks again reversed their earlier projections by saying that the Florida vote count was too close to call.

For 35 days after Election Day there was an ongoing controversy over who had accumulated enough votes to be named President. There were charges and counter-charges from both sides. Republicans complained that calling Florida for Gore at 8:00 p.m. Eastern time before the polls had closed in the pro-Bush Florida panhandle had discouraged Republican voters in that part of the state. Democrats complained that there were irregularities in the vote count in largely pro-Gore counties in southern Florida with a high percentage of African Americans. Many criticized the media for making misleading projections on election night. Others complained that the media failed to aggressively pursue the issue of vote fraud. Some argued that this whole mess was a reason to replace the electoral system with election by popular vote or a proportional representation system.

The *Newsweek* cover that you will see from November 20, 2000 reflects the uncertainty of the country in the weeks immediately following the election.

> **Project** the document.

QUESTION What is the message of this cover?

SUGGESTED ANSWER It is uncertain who will be the next President but people shouldn't worry, everything will work out.

EVIDENCE the composite of the faces of Bush and Gore and the word "Closest" and "the winner is..." suggests uncertainty as to who has won; the smiling faces, the sturdy White House and manicured lawn suggest everything is in order

QUESTION If the headline had read, "The Inside Story of America's Ugliest Disputed Election" and the candidates' faces were grimacing in front of a stormy White House, how would the message be changed?

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Newsweek Cover, "The Winner Is..."

PowerPoint Slide

SUGGESTED ANSWER It would suggest uncertainty and anger at the electoral system and it would raise serious questions about the ability of the country to resolve the conflict easily.

EVIDENCE “Closest & Craziest” along with smiling faces and a sunny day reflects a sitcom with a wild and wacky finish; “Ugly & Disputed” along with angry faces in a storm would reflect a suspenseful thriller that could end all right or in disaster

QUESTION **Which of the cover designs, the original or the one suggested in the second question, reflects the truth?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER Neither represents the whole truth.

EVIDENCE there are elements of truth in both designs; the creators and editors made a conscious decision to reflect the first message rather than the second

QUESTION **Is *Newsweek* supporting one candidate over another in this cover? What is your evidence?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER *Newsweek* is being non-partisan in this cover.

EVIDENCE both candidates make up exactly half the image, there is no indication in the headlines or images of support for one candidate over the other

QUESTION **Why might *Newsweek* want to be non-partisan in its coverage? Is this true of all newspapers and magazines?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER *Newsweek* wants to appeal to both Republicans and Democrats. Some newspapers and magazines today are partisan, but most large national news publications try to at least appear non-partisan.

SEE NOTE →

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Should newspapers and magazines be non-partisan? Why or why not? What are the political perspectives of some of the magazines you read? How do you know?

Discuss the role that mass media play in the decision to question or not to question the existing system of vote counting and electing the President.

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

Media Bias

- Compare the partisan newspaper coverage in the *Connecticut Courant* from 1800 (doc. #3), or the editorials about Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address (1864 doc. #2) with this *Newsweek* cover.
- Compare this cover with the “Taft-evelt” poster from 1908 (doc. #1)

NOTE

The earliest newspapers and news journals were highly partisan; in fact many were started by political parties. Then new technologies allowed publishers to reach larger and larger audiences and increase circulation. As the population of the country grew in both size and diversity, many publications altered their editorial positions. With a more moderate or non-partisan political perspective, newspapers and magazines could attract a broader audience.