

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT—2009-2012

Campaign Promises: How Long Are they Kept?

From Pete Joseph

Grade: 11th

Length of Class: 48 minutes, with possible extensions

Inquiry (Essential Questions):

- What promises do political parties make to gain electoral support?
- How are these promises viewed by members of the media?
- To what extent are these promises fulfilled?

Objectives (Content & Skills):

- Students will:
 - Analyze both visual and textual primary source materials
 - Identify rhetoric and arguments used to motivate the American public
 - Assess the degree to which political parties can deliver on campaign promises

Materials:

- Student worksheet (included below)
- 1994 Republican Party “Contract with America” (transcript included below)
 - <http://www.house.gov/house/Contract/CONTRACT.html>
- 1994 CNN interview with House Speaker Newt Gingrich on the “Contract with America.”
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyqrNg5XOJc>
- Herb Block political cartoon “Contract on America.” (included below)
 - Available at <http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/enduringoutrage/getoutthevote/ExhibitObjects/ContractOnAmerica.aspx>
- President Bill Clinton’s Second Inaugural Address (transcript included below)
 - <http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres65.html>

Activities:

Divide the room into three stations, and place one of the resources at each station. At each station students should answer the appropriate questions. After students have gone through each station, reassemble the class and discuss what they have seen and read.

If you have internet access to the 1994 interview with House Speaker Newt Gingrich, as an extension have students view the interview and research what legislation was introduced to address each element in the Contract with America, and assess to what degree the Republicans were able to deliver on their promises.

Connecticut Grade Level Expectations:

- Standard 1.1:
 - 6. Compare and contrast various American beliefs
 - 8. Analyze the influence of sectionalism on American life
 - 12. Evaluate the role and impact significant individuals have had on historical events
- Standard 1.8:
 - 38. Analyze laws that have been modified to meet society’s changing values and needs

- 39. Explain how different factors contribute to making and implementing laws in different government systems
 - 42. Assess the role of lobbying and citizen petitioning in shaping legislation.
- Standard 2.2:
 - Cite evidence from a source to determine an author's purpose and intended audience.
 - Interpret social/political messages of cartoons.
 - Detect bias in data presented in various forms.

Student Analysis Worksheet

The Contract with America, 1994

1. Why does the Republican Party think that the Contract with America is necessary?
2. According to the Contract with America, what was wrong with the U.S. government?
3. Why do you think these ideas were palatable to American voters in 1994?
4. At this time, the Republican Party branded itself as the party of small government. To what extent does the Contract with America reflect this idea?

Political Cartoon: Contract on America, Herb Block, 1994 (this cartoon was published in October 1994, about one month before the mid-term elections)

1. What symbols or objects do you see in this cartoon?
2. What is the artist's position on the Contract with America? What evidence led you to this conclusion?

President Bill Clinton's Second Inaugural Address, 1996 (President Clinton won't mention the Republicans or Contract with America by name, so you'll have to think a bit here.)

1. What elements of the Contract with America are mentioned in Clinton's address?
2. Who does Clinton credit for these achievements?
3. Take on the point of view of a Republican member of Congress. How would you respond to Clinton's address, based on what you saw at the other stations?

Optional Extension: Interview with Newt Gingrich (this interview occurred on election night in 1994)

1. As you watch the interview, jot down at least 5 adjectives that you could use to describe Newt Gingrich's reaction to the election results.
2. How seriously does Newt Gingrich and the Republican Party seem to take the promises they made in the Contract with America?
3. What impression do you get of the Republican Party's willingness to work with the Democratic Party to accomplish the goals set forth in the Contract with America?

REPUBLICAN CONTRACT WITH AMERICA

As Republican Members of the House of Representatives and as citizens seeking to join that body we propose not just to change its policies, but even more important, to restore the bonds of trust between the people and their elected representatives.

That is why, in this era of official evasion and posturing, we offer instead a detailed agenda for national renewal, a written commitment with no fine print.

This year's election offers the chance, after four decades of one-party control, to bring to the House a new majority that will transform the way Congress works. That historic change would be the end of government that is too big, too intrusive, and too easy with the public's money. It can be the beginning of a Congress that respects the values and shares the faith of the American family.

Like Lincoln, our first Republican president, we intend to act "with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right." To restore accountability to Congress. To end its cycle of scandal and disgrace. To make us all proud again of the way free people govern themselves.

On the first day of the 104th Congress, the new Republican majority will immediately pass the following major reforms, aimed at restoring the faith and trust of the American people in their government:

- **FIRST**, require all laws that apply to the rest of the country also apply equally to the Congress;
- **SECOND**, select a major, independent auditing firm to conduct a comprehensive audit of Congress for waste, fraud or abuse;
- **THIRD**, cut the number of House committees, and cut committee staff by one-third;
- **FOURTH**, limit the terms of all committee chairs;
- **FIFTH**, ban the casting of proxy votes in committee;
- **SIXTH**, require committee meetings to be open to the public;
- **SEVENTH**, require a three-fifths majority vote to pass a tax increase;
- **EIGHTH**, guarantee an honest accounting of our Federal Budget by implementing zero base-line budgeting.

Thereafter, within the first 100 days of the 104th Congress, we shall bring to the House Floor the following bills, each to be given full and open debate, each to be given a clear and fair vote and each to be immediately available this day for public inspection and scrutiny.

1. THE FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY ACT: A balanced budget/tax limitation amendment and a legislative line-item veto to restore fiscal responsibility to an out- of-control Congress, requiring them to live under the same budget constraints as families and businesses

2. THE TAKING BACK OUR STREETS ACT: An anti-crime package including stronger truth-in-sentencing, "good faith" exclusionary rule exemptions, effective death penalty provisions, and cuts in social spending from this summer's "crime" bill to fund prison construction and additional law enforcement to keep people secure in their neighborhoods and kids safe in their schools.

3. THE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY ACT: Discourage illegitimacy and teen pregnancy by prohibiting welfare to minor mothers and denying increased AFDC for additional children while on welfare, cut spending for welfare programs, and enact a tough two-years-and-out provision with work requirements to promote individual responsibility.

4. THE FAMILY REINFORCEMENT ACT: Child support enforcement, tax incentives for adoption, strengthening rights of parents in their children's education, stronger child pornography laws, and an elderly dependent care tax credit to reinforce the central role of families in American society.

5. THE AMERICAN DREAM RESTORATION ACT: A \$500 per child tax credit, begin repeal of the marriage tax penalty, and creation of American Dream Savings Accounts to provide middle class tax relief.

6. THE NATIONAL SECURITY RESTORATION ACT: No U.S. troops under U.N. command and restoration of the essential parts of our national security funding to strengthen our national defense and maintain our credibility around the world.

7. THE SENIOR CITIZENS FAIRNESS ACT: Raise the Social Security earnings limit which currently forces seniors out of the work force, repeal the 1993 tax hikes on Social Security benefits and provide tax incentives for private long-term care insurance to let Older Americans keep more of what they have earned over the years.

8. THE JOB CREATION AND WAGE ENHANCEMENT ACT: Small business incentives, capital gains cut and indexation, neutral cost recovery, risk assessment/cost-benefit analysis, strengthening the Regulatory Flexibility Act and unfunded mandate reform to create jobs and raise worker wages.

9. THE COMMON SENSE LEGAL REFORM ACT: "Loser pays" laws, reasonable limits on punitive damages and reform of product liability laws to stem the endless tide of litigation.

10. THE CITIZEN LEGISLATURE ACT: A first-ever vote on term limits to replace career politicians with citizen legislators.

Further, we will instruct the House Budget Committee to report to the floor and we will work to enact additional budget savings, beyond the budget cuts specifically included in the legislation described above, to ensure that the Federal budget deficit will be less than it would have been without the enactment of these bills.

Respecting the judgment of our fellow citizens as we seek their mandate for reform, we hereby pledge our names to this Contract with America.

Bill Clinton

Second Inaugural Address

January 20, 1997



My fellow citizens:

1

At this last presidential inauguration of the 20th century, let us lift our eyes toward the challenges that await us in the next century. It is our great good fortune that time and chance have put us not only at the edge of a new century, in a new millennium, but on the edge of a bright new prospect in human affairs—a moment that will define our course, and our character, for decades to come. We must keep our old democracy forever young. Guided by the ancient vision of a promised land, let us set our sights upon a land of new promise.

The promise of America was born in the 18th century out of the bold conviction that we are all created equal. It was extended and preserved in the 19th century, when our nation spread across the continent, saved the union, and abolished the awful scourge of slavery.

2

Then, in turmoil and triumph, that promise exploded onto the world stage to make this the American Century.

3

And what a century it has been. America became the world's mightiest industrial power; saved the world from tyranny in two world wars and a long cold war; and time and again, reached out across the globe to millions who, like us, longed for the blessings of liberty.

4

Along the way, Americans produced a great middle class and security in old age; built unrivaled centers of learning and opened public schools to all; split the atom and explored the heavens; invented the computer and the microchip; and deepened the wellspring of justice by making a revolution in civil rights for African Americans and all minorities, and extending the circle of citizenship, opportunity and dignity to women.

5

Now, for the third time, a new century is upon us, and another time to choose. We began the 19th century with a choice, to spread our nation from coast to coast. We began the 20th century with a choice, to harness the Industrial Revolution to our values of free enterprise, conservation, and human decency. Those choices made all the difference. At the dawn of the 21st century a free people must now choose to shape the forces of the Information Age and the global society, to unleash the limitless potential of all our people, and, yes, to form a more perfect union.

6

When last we gathered, our march to this new future seemed less certain than it does today. We vowed then to set a clear course to renew our nation. 7

In these four years, we have been touched by tragedy, exhilarated by challenge, strengthened by achievement. America stands alone as the world's indispensable nation. Once again, our economy is the strongest on Earth. Once again, we are building stronger families, thriving communities, better educational opportunities, a cleaner environment. Problems that once seemed destined to deepen now bend to our efforts: our streets are safer and record numbers of our fellow citizens have moved from welfare to work. 8

And once again, we have resolved for our time a great debate over the role of government. Today we can declare: Government is not the problem, and government is not the solution. We—the American people—we are the solution. Our founders understood that well and gave us a democracy strong enough to endure for centuries, flexible enough to face our common challenges and advance our common dreams in each new day. 9

As times change, so government must change. We need a new government for a new century—humble enough not to try to solve all our problems for us, but strong enough to give us the tools to solve our problems for ourselves; a government that is smaller, lives within its means, and does more with less. Yet where it can stand up for our values and interests in the world, and where it can give Americans the power to make a real difference in their everyday lives, government should do more, not less. The preeminent mission of our new government is to give all Americans an opportunity—not a guarantee, but a real opportunity—to build better lives. 10

Beyond that, my fellow citizens, the future is up to us. Our founders taught us that the preservation of our liberty and our union depends upon responsible citizenship. And we need a new sense of responsibility for a new century. There is work to do, work that government alone cannot do: teaching children to read; hiring people off welfare rolls; coming out from behind locked doors and shuttered windows to help reclaim our streets from drugs and gangs and crime; taking time out of our own lives to serve others. 11

Each and every one of us, in our own way, must assume personal responsibility—not only for ourselves and our families, but for our neighbors and our nation. Our greatest responsibility is to embrace a new spirit of community for a new century. For any one of us to succeed, we must succeed as one America. 12

The challenge of our past remains the challenge of our future—will we be one nation, one people, with one common destiny, or not? Will we all come together, or come apart? 13

The divide of race has been America's constant curse. And each new wave of immigrants gives new targets to old prejudices. Prejudice and contempt, cloaked in the pretense of religious or political conviction are no different. These forces have nearly destroyed our nation in the past. They plague us still. They fuel the fanaticism of terror. And they torment the lives of millions in fractured nations all around the world. 14

These obsessions cripple both those who hate and, of course, those who are hated, robbing both of what they might become. We cannot, we will not, succumb to the dark impulses that lurk in the far regions of the soul everywhere. We shall overcome them. And we shall replace them with the generous spirit of a people who feel at home with one another. 15

Our rich texture of racial, religious and political diversity will be a Godsend in the 21st century. Great rewards will come to those who can live together, learn together, work together, forge new ties that bind together. 16

As this new era approaches we can already see its broad outlines. Ten years ago, the Internet 17
was the mystical province of physicists; today, it is a commonplace encyclopedia for millions of
schoolchildren. Scientists now are decoding the blueprint of human life. Cures for our most
feared illnesses seem close at hand.

The world is no longer divided into two hostile camps. Instead, now we are building bonds 18
with nations that once were our adversaries. Growing connections of commerce and culture give
us a chance to lift the fortunes and spirits of people the world over. And for the very first time
in all of history, more people on this planet live under democracy than dictatorship.

My fellow Americans, as we look back at this remarkable century, we may ask, can we hope not 19
just to follow, but even to surpass the achievements of the 20th century in America and to avoid
the awful bloodshed that stained its legacy? To that question, every American here and every
American in our land today must answer a resounding “Yes.”

This is the heart of our task. With a new vision of government, a new sense of responsibility, a 20
new spirit of community, we will sustain America’s journey. The promise we sought in a new
land we will find again in a land of new promise.

In this new land, education will be every citizen’s most prized possession. Our schools will 21
have the highest standards in the world, igniting the spark of possibility in the eyes of every girl
and every boy. And the doors of higher education will be open to all. The knowledge and power
of the Information Age will be within reach not just of the few, but of every classroom, every
library, every child. Parents and children will have time not only to work, but to read and play
together. And the plans they make at their kitchen table will be those of a better home, a better
job, the certain chance to go to college.

Our streets will echo again with the laughter of our children, because no one will try to shoot 22
them or sell them drugs anymore. Everyone who can work, will work, with today’s permanent
under class part of tomorrow’s growing middle class. New miracles of medicine at last will reach
not only those who can claim care now, but the children and hardworking families too long
denied.

We will stand mighty for peace and freedom, and maintain a strong defense against terror and 23
destruction. Our children will sleep free from the threat of nuclear, chemical or biological
weapons. Ports and airports, farms and factories will thrive with trade and innovation and ideas.
And the world’s greatest democracy will lead a whole world of democracies.

Our land of new promise will be a nation that meets its obligations—a nation that balances its 24
budget, but never loses the balance of its values. A nation where our grandparents have secure
retirement and health care, and their grandchildren know we have made the reforms necessary
to sustain those benefits for their time. A nation that fortifies the world’s most productive
economy even as it protects the great natural bounty of our water, air, and majestic land.

And in this land of new promise, we will have reformed our politics so that the voice of the 25
people will always speak louder than the din of narrow interests—regaining the participation and
deserving the trust of all Americans.

Fellow citizens, let us build that America, a nation ever moving forward toward realizing the 26
full potential of all its citizens. Prosperity and power—yes, they are important, and we must
maintain them. But let us never forget: The greatest progress we have made, and the greatest
progress we have yet to make, is in the human heart. In the end, all the world’s wealth and a
thousand armies are no match for the strength and decency of the human spirit.

Thirty-four years ago, the man whose life we celebrate today spoke to us down there, at the other end of this Mall, in words that moved the conscience of a nation. Like a prophet of old, he told of his dream that one day America would rise up and treat all its citizens as equals before the law and in the heart. Martin Luther King's dream was the American Dream. His quest is our quest: the ceaseless striving to live out our true creed. Our history has been built on such dreams and labors. And by our dreams and labors we will redeem the promise of America in the 21st century. 27

To that effort I pledge all my strength and every power of my office. I ask the members of Congress here to join in that pledge. The American people returned to office a President of one party and a Congress of another. Surely, they did not do this to advance the politics of petty bickering and extreme partisanship they plainly deplore. No, they call on us instead to be repairers of the breach, and to move on with America's mission. 28

America demands and deserves big things from us—and nothing big ever came from being small. Let us remember the timeless wisdom of Cardinal Bernardin, when facing the end of his own life. He said: "It is wrong to waste the precious gift of time, on acrimony and division." 29

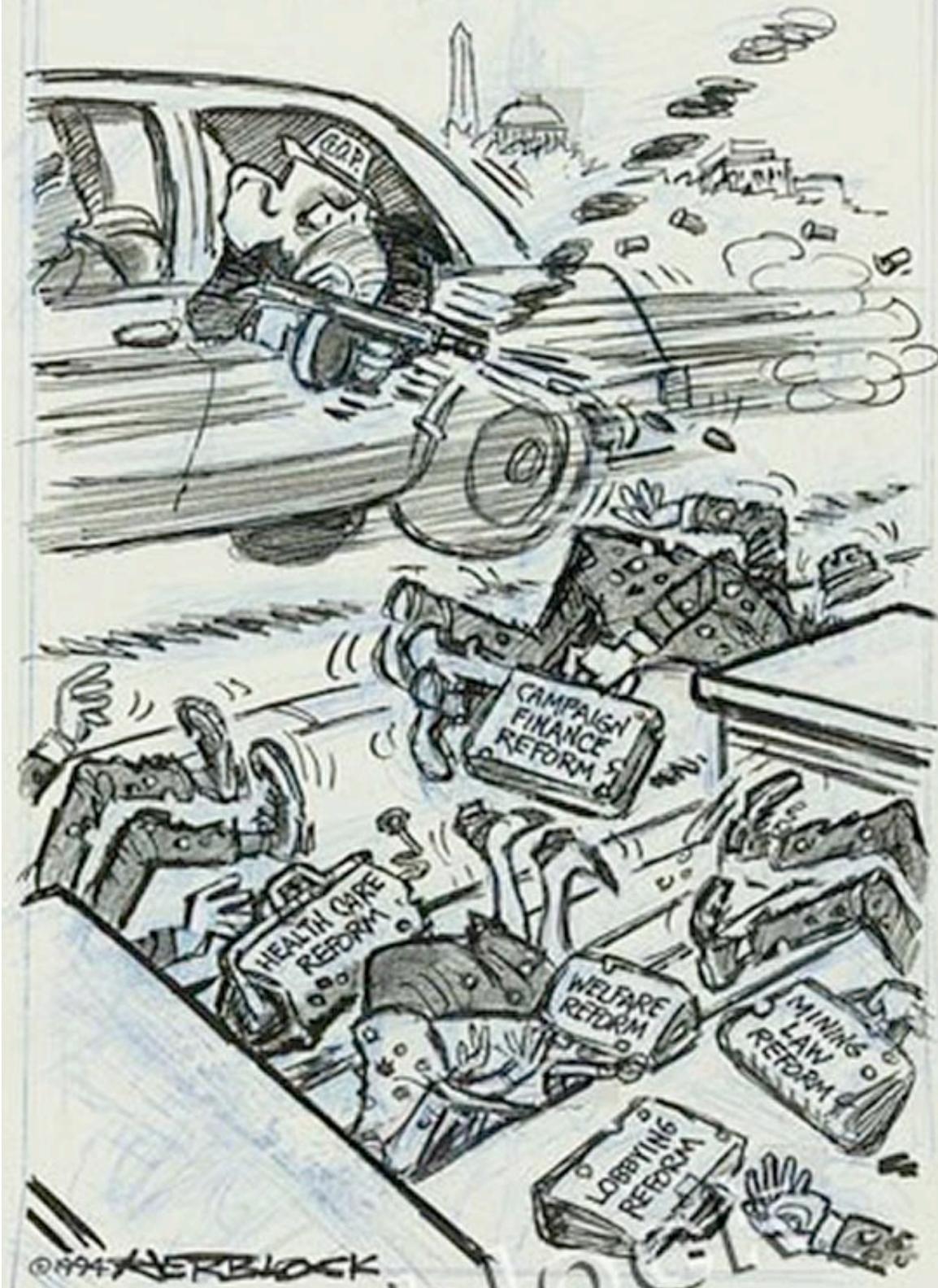
Fellow citizens, we must not waste the precious gift of this time. For all of us are on that same journey of our lives, and our journey, too, will come to an end. But the journey of our America must go on. 30

And so, my fellow Americans, we must be strong, for there is much to dare. The demands of our time are great and they are different. Let us meet them with faith and courage, with patience and a grateful and happy heart. Let us shape the hope of this day into the noblest chapter in our history. Yes, let us build our bridge. A bridge wide enough and strong enough for every American to cross over to a blessed land of new promise. 31

May those generations whose faces we cannot yet see, whose names we may never know, say of us here that we led our beloved land into a new century with the American Dream alive for all her children; with the American promise of a more perfect union a reality for all her people; with America's bright flame of freedom spreading throughout all the world. 32

From the height of this place and the summit of this century, let us go forth. May God strengthen our hands for the good work ahead—and always, always bless our America. 33

CONTRACT ON AMERICA



Herb Block, "Contract On America", 1994.