

American Feud: A History of Conservatives and Liberals
Educators Guide



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About the Film

This documentary is a non-partisan look at the history of the two major political philosophies that have defined American politics since the 1890s; how and why they have changed over time, and how they contribute to the current problem of dysfunctional government.

It was originally released in 2008 when liberalism and conservatism seemed to be fading away. A seemingly pragmatic non-ideological president had tried to move the

country beyond “red and blue” America. Eight years later we have updated the documentary to reflect the persistence of conservatism and liberalism even as those concepts and our politics become increasingly incoherent.

We know of no other educational documentary that tells this story in a single, non-partisan program, with many short chapters that can be viewed separately for classroom use and discussion.



Director's Statement

I decided to embark on this project in 2004 when I became frustrated with the casual use of the terms liberal and conservative in almost every political discussion on every media format. Why did we continue to divide our country into two camps using labels that have a complicated and sometimes outdated and contradictory history?

I set out to create a work that would serve as liberalism and conservatism 101 for citizens fed up with the status quo. Twelve years later I believe this brief history lesson is more important than ever; for we have learned that it can serve to force the viewer to reexamine their attitudes about those they disagree with.

It is vital for me as a director that the documentary is non-partisan but also critical of the weaknesses and failures of both liberalism and conservatism. Only after learning how we have reached this seemingly dysfunctional point in time can we hope to shed the past and reform our political system to better function in the 21st century.

About the Guide

This guide was created to inspire educators to use *American Feud* by providing discussion questions, background information, supplemental activities and resources. Its creators do not wish to imply endorsement by the National Council for Social Studies.

Standards Considerations

National Council for Social Studies

Themes presented in *American Feud: A History of Conservatives and Liberals* and this Facilitator Guide could be used to support the following organizing strands from the National Council for Social Studies:

Thematic Strand 2. Time, Continuity and Change

Thematic Strand 4. Individual Development and Identity

Thematic Strand 5. Individuals, Groups and Institutions

Thematic Strand 6. Power, Authority and Governance

Thematic Strand 10. Civic Ideals and Practice

Common Core History/Social Studies:

This documentary can be used to support:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.3

Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.5

Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.6

Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.8

Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

This film and guide can be used to create new, or supplement existing curriculum to deepen student comprehension of these themes.

Activities

1. The Liberal/Conservative Spectrum

Before viewing the film students can be asked to place themselves somewhere on the spectrum. This can be done on a blackboard, piece of paper etc. After the film you can revisit, and see whether students have changed their places, or even consider it a fair way to classify themselves.

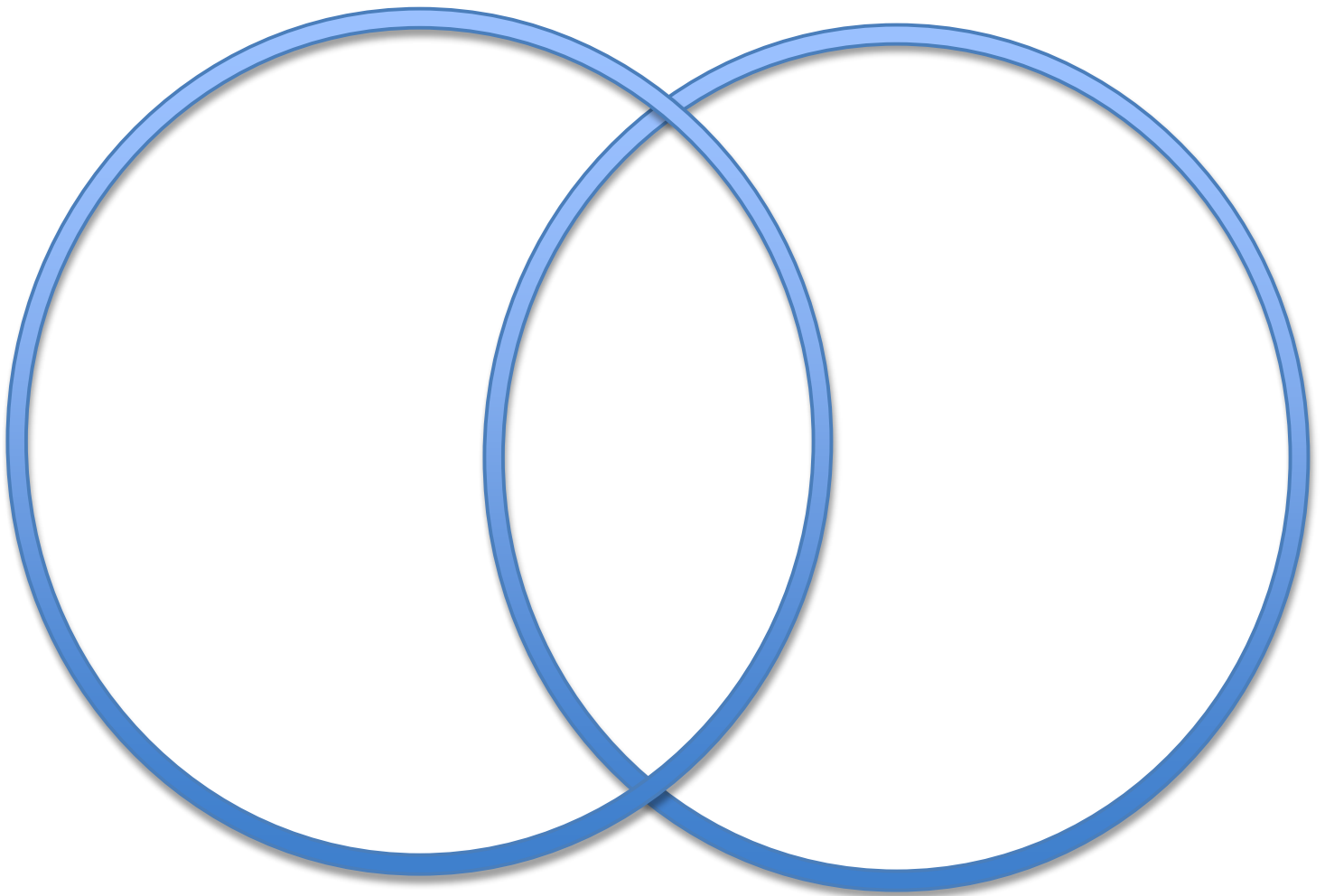


2. Anticipation Guide

Students can fill in before watching the film, then discuss if their opinion has changed afterwards.

Before Viewing (Agree/Disagree)	STATEMENT	After Viewing (Agree/Disagree)
	Democrats have always been liberals and republicans have always been conservatives.	
	Liberals have often been opposed to waging war and Conservatives have usually been in favor.	
	During the 1950s almost no politician would admit to being a Conservative.	
	Conservatives had many good reasons to be concerned about excessive government spending for 1930s New Deal and 1960s Great Society programs.	
	Problems caused by industrialization & immigration in the 1890s and early 20 th century were solved by the capitalist system without government interference.	
	Conservatism has always been associated with the color Red and Liberalism with Blue	
	Liberals and Conservatives both believe in liberty and equality, but Liberals put equality above liberty and Conservatives put liberty above equality.	

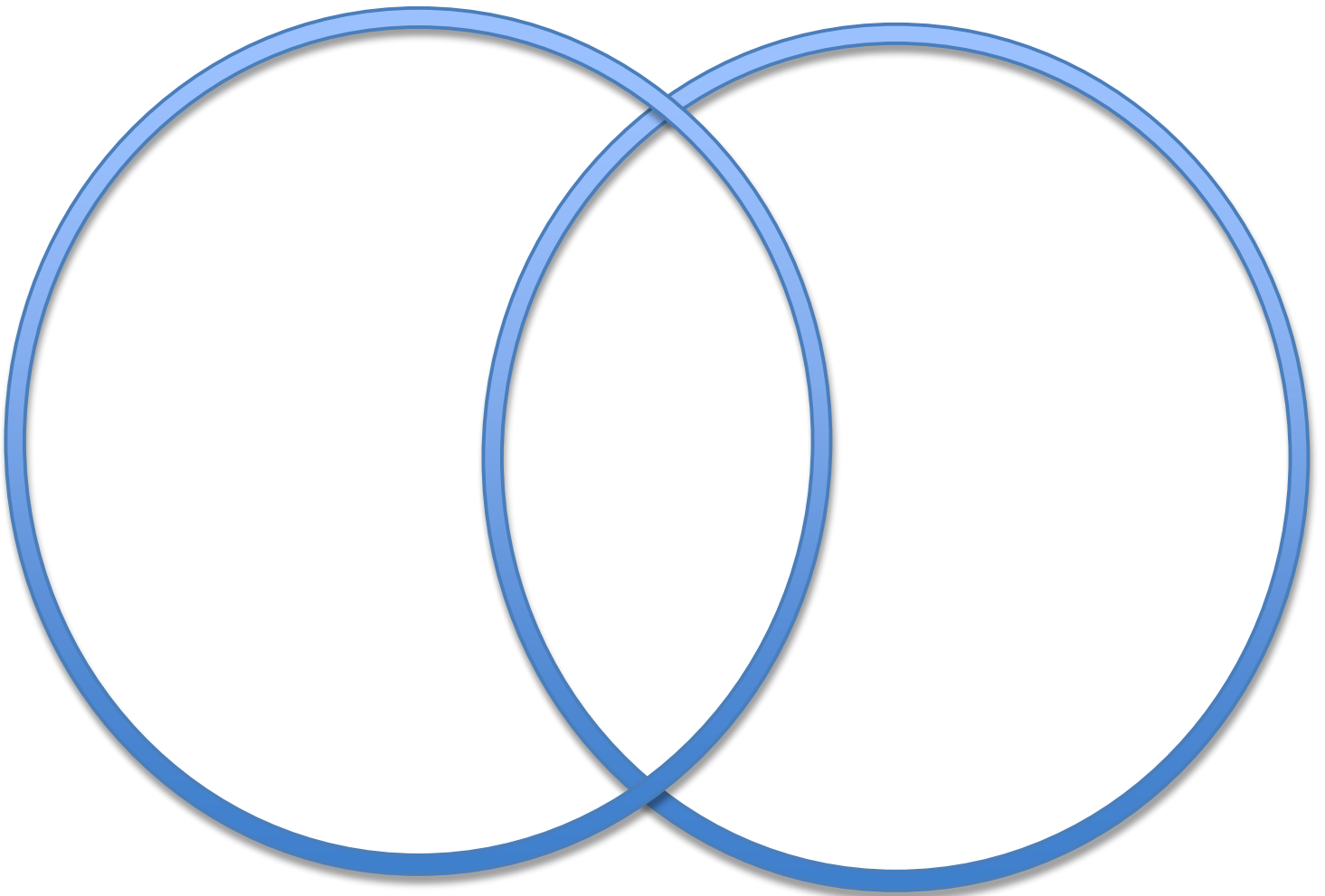
3. Compare and Contrast



FDR

Ronald Reagan

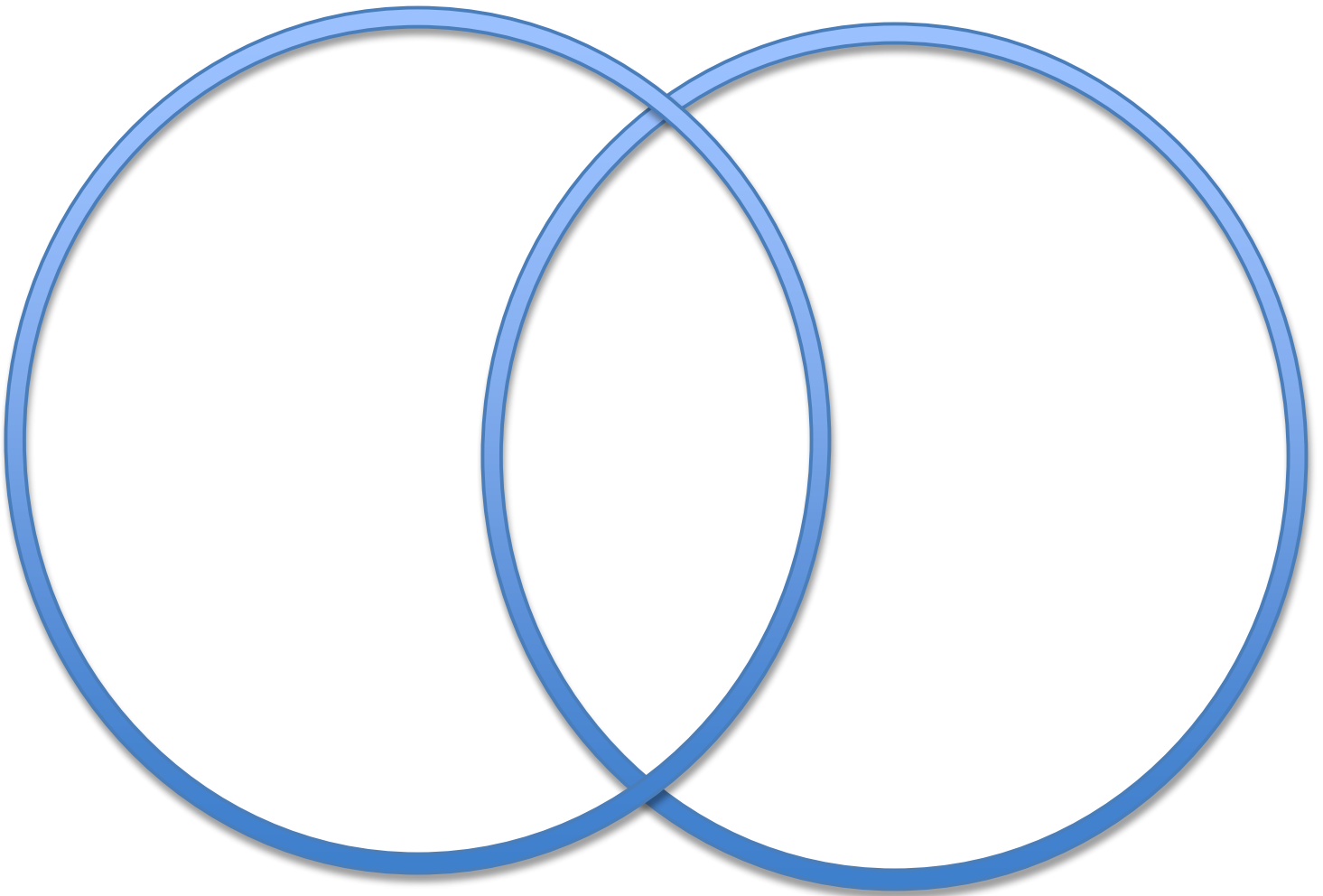
4. Compare and Contrast



Barry Goldwater

Lyndon Johnson

5. Compare and Contrast

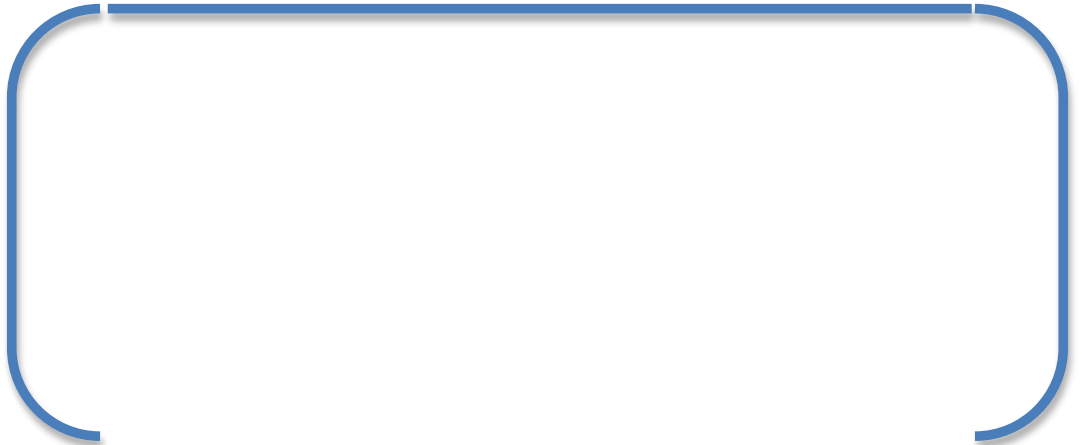


Tea Party

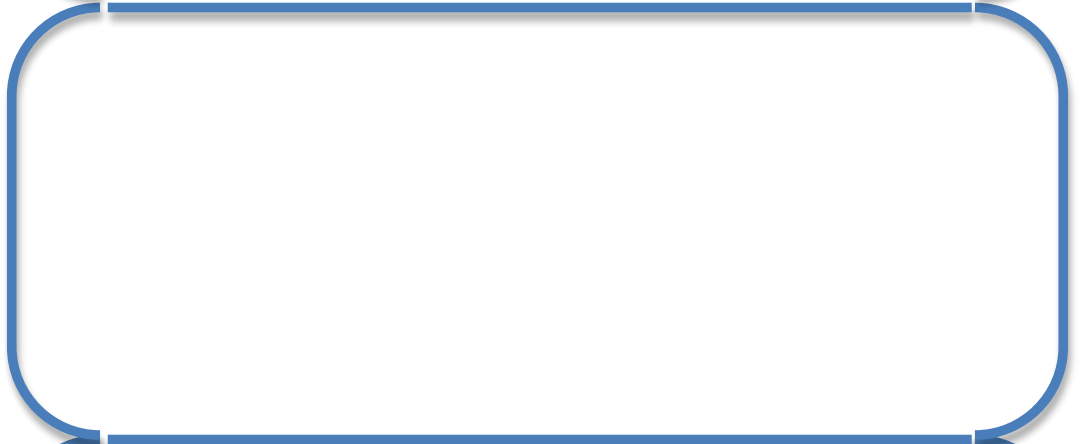
Occupy Movement

6. Views on the Cause of Poverty

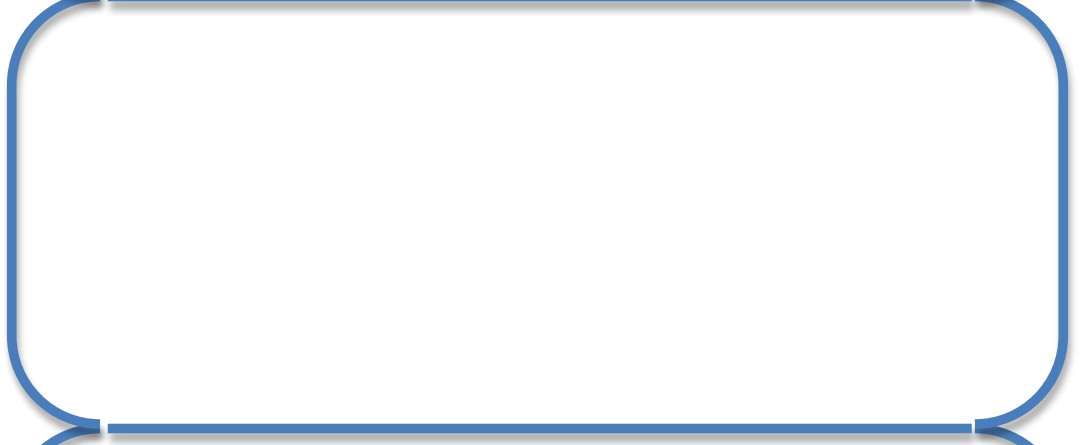
Michael Kazin



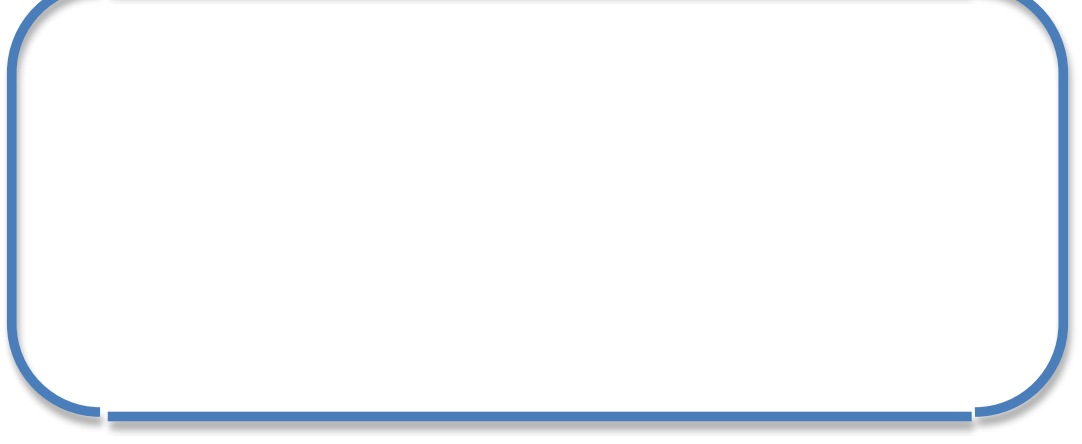
Michael Barone



David Stoesz

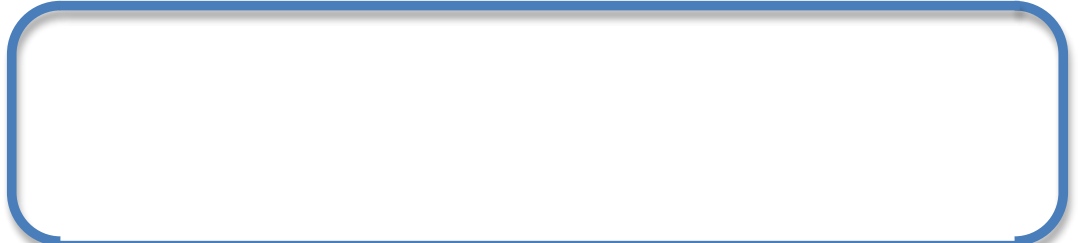


Thomas Frank

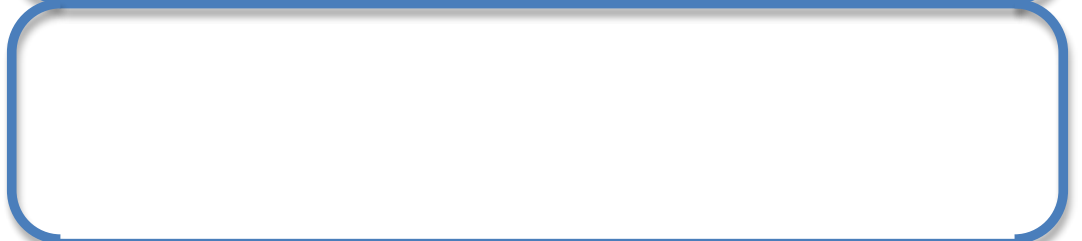


7. Views on the Solution to Poverty

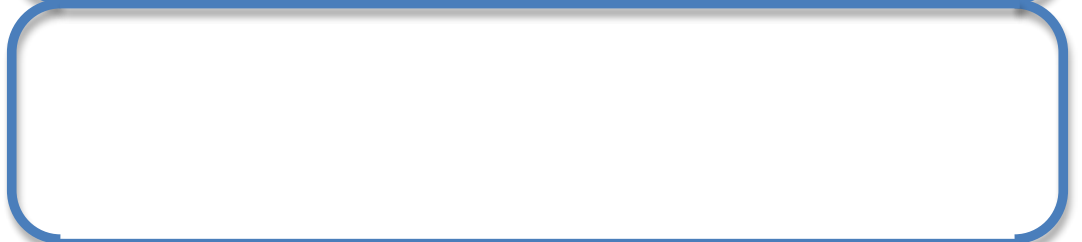
David Stoesz



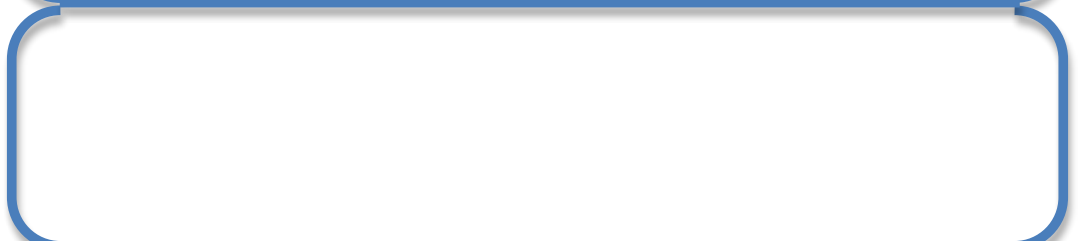
Michael Kazin



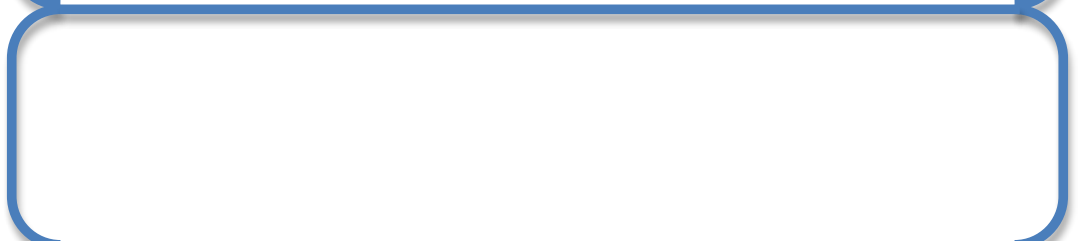
Donna Brazile



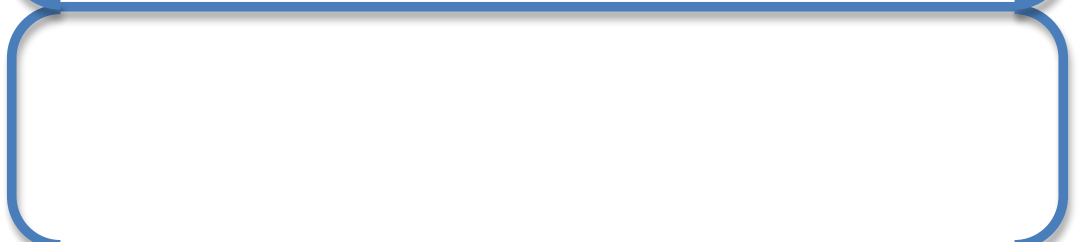
LBJ



FDR



Noam Chomsky



8. Examine Use of the Labels Conservative and Liberal in the Media

After viewing American Feud, for one day, have students listen to the news on the radio, watch it on TV, and read online or in a newspaper. They should make note of each time they encounter the words Liberal or Conservative. Have them discuss or write about whether they felt it was used thoughtfully or thoughtlessly. If you think they were used unfairly, write an email to the offending news outlet expressing your objections.

9. Interview Friends, Family and Acquaintances

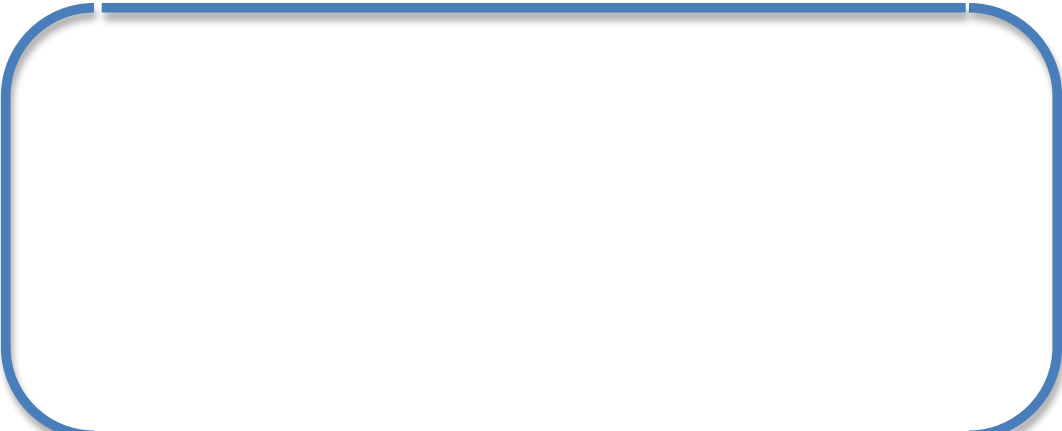
Before doing so students should guess how they think the interview subject would answer the question: ‘how do you label yourself politically’?

Next, poll all these people and find out what they really are. How many self-identify as either Liberal or Conservative? Ask why they are what they say they are. Ask critical questions about their label based on what you have learned in American Feud. Seek out people whom they think they disagree with. Try to decide which political issues they and this “opponent” actually agree on.

Students can either discuss, write about, or create a video of these interviews. If they create a video, it could be posted on the American Feud facebook page and/or YouTube.

10. Views on the Solution to Dysfunctional Government

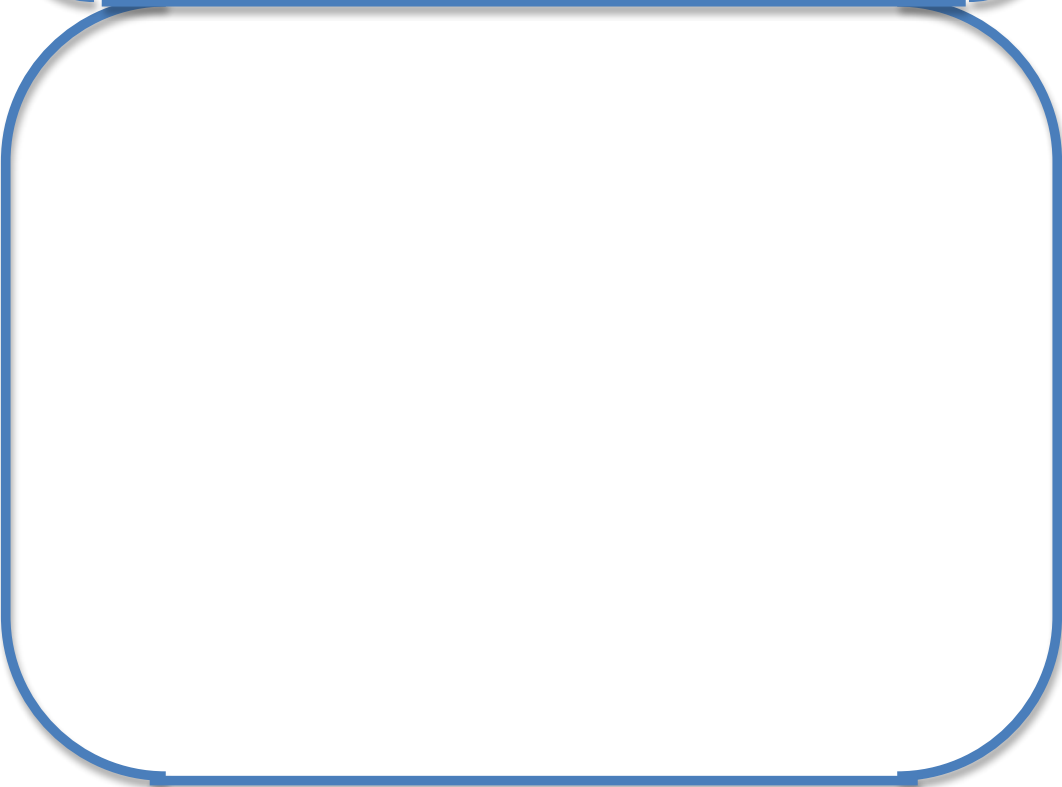
David Stoesz



Norman Ornstein



Me



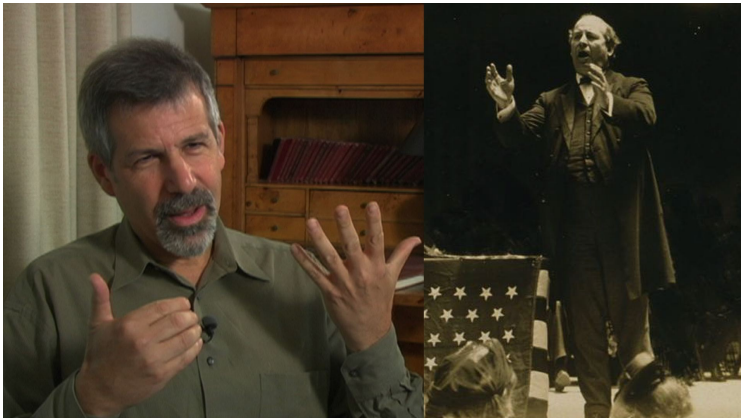
Discussion Questions After Viewing the Film

1. Why are liberalism and conservatism the dominant political labels used in the United States?
2. How have these labels changed over the course of American history since they started being used?
3. Why are many Americans very proud to call themselves Conservative while others hesitate to label themselves Liberal and instead use the word Progressive?
4. Has our system of government become somewhat dysfunctional BECAUSE public figures cling to labels that have been rendered incoherent and outdated?
5. Should we consider changing our constitutional structure to a more parliamentary system where a greater diversity of parties could speed the demise of the outdated and narrow confines of Liberalism and Conservatism?
6. Do Liberalism and Conservatism actually describe a real and historically accurate divide in American politics that has fostered a reasonably healthy debate and competition that over time has given us a stable and enviable system?
7. Are Liberalism and Conservatism hard-wired into people's brains rather than being ephemeral political labels?
8. Is it time for a "third-way"?

Resource Guide

Video Links:

Note: Many of the video links below are from the C-SPAN video library. If you sign up and create an account you can edit short clips from these longer programs and share them on social media, and with students & others.



A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan C-SPAN Book TV lecture by Michael Kazin (2006): in American Feud, Kazin argues that Bryan was the beginning of modern American liberalism: <http://www.c-span.org/video/?191759-1/book-discussion-godly-hero-life-william-jennings-bryan>

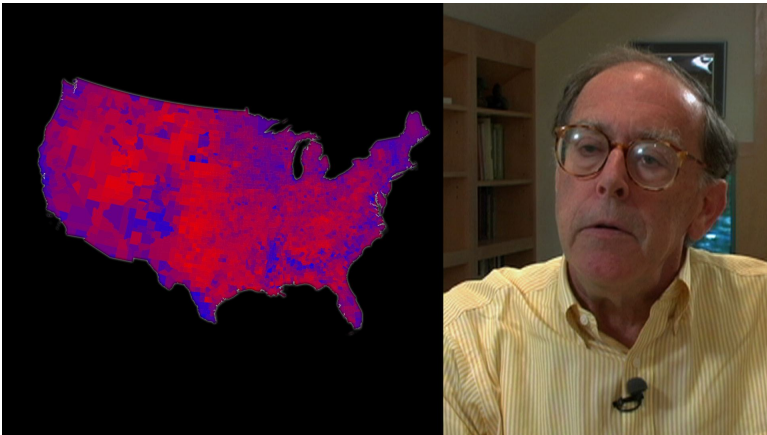


A People's History of the United States Howard Zinn on C-SPAN's Booknotes (2000): <http://www.c-span.org/video/?155006-1/book-discussion-peoples-history-united-states>

10 minutes of Howard Zinn Interview from American Feud: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wy1ZJYimyHo>



Franklin Delano Roosevelt 7 minute biography (1945) National Archives: FDR was a key figure in changing liberalism. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iVcxtuBk9n4>



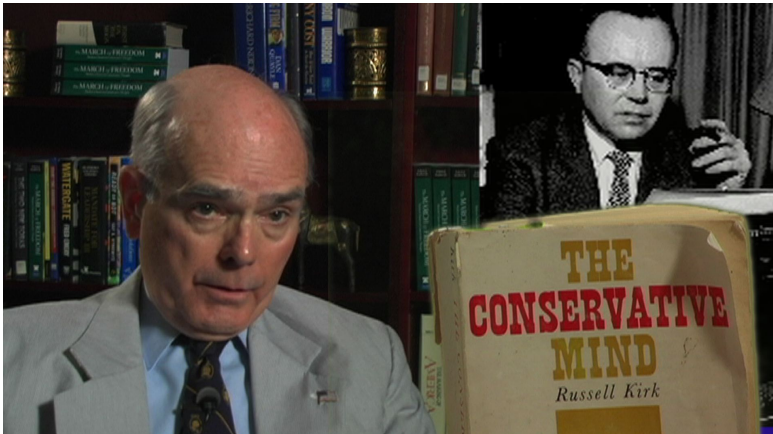
Wealth and Democracy: A Political History of the American Rich Kevin Phillips on C-SPAN (2002) in American Feud, Mr. Phillips argued that money and greed are a major source of problems in U.S. politics <http://www.c-span.org/video/?173160-1/book-discussion-wealth-democracy>



1960 Kennedy-Nixon Presidential Debate (1st of 3 debates) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbrcRKqLSRw>



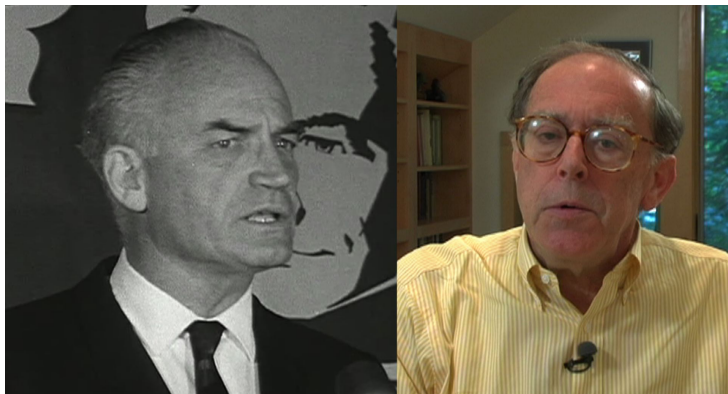
Ronald Reagan 1964 A Time for Choosing speech for Goldwater Campaign: Reagan's speech is a distillation of American conservatism that resonates in 2016. <http://www.c-span.org/video/?153897-1/ronald-reagans-time-choosing-speech>



Lee Edwards on Goldwater & Reagan - Marking the 50th Anniversary of A Time for Choosing Reagan Ranch, C-SPAN program: <http://www.c-span.org/video/?c4586738/lee-edwards-goldwater-reagan>



President Lyndon Johnson 1965 State of the Union Speech: A liberal counterpoint to Reagan's Time for Choosing War on Poverty & Great Society programs announced (LBJ Library): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uou8EppdfAM>



Sen. Barry Goldwater 1964 Campaign Film: Presents ideas that are still talked about in the 2016 election <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nuFaXWmjkUk>



President Johnson on Vietnam policy April 7, 1965:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NSWQztZPMdg>

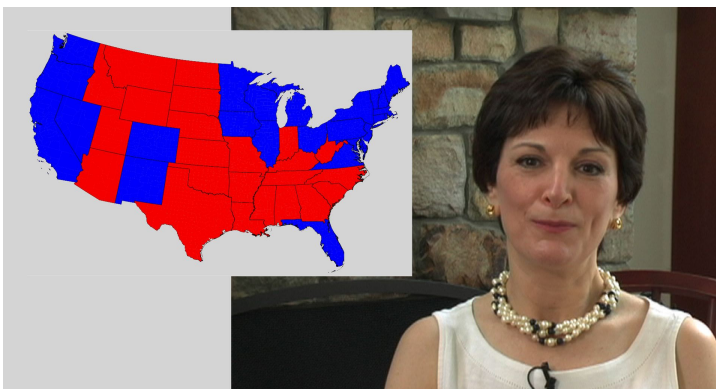
1967 Detroit Riots Raw Silent Film by U.S. Army (22 minutes):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqPVsSNudHs>

Debate on Liberalism & Conservatism - William F. Buckley v George McGovern at Southeast Missouri State University from C-SPAN (1997) <http://www.c-span.org/video/?80308-1/conservative-v-liberal-ideology>

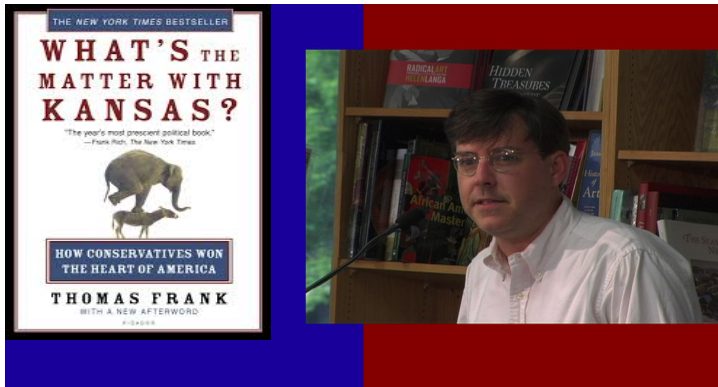


The Right Nation: Conservative Power in America - C-SPAN Book TV lecture by Co-authors Micklethwait & Wooldridge (2004): Authors present a dispassionate look at conservatism at the height of President George W. Bush's power:
<http://www.c-span.org/video/?182458-1/book-discussion-right-nation>

Shaping Our Nation: How Surges of Migration Transformed America and it's Politics Michael Barone on C-SPAN's Book TV at MIT in American Feud Barone frequently looks at immigration and demographics <http://www.c-span.org/video/?315790-1/book-discussion-shaping-nation>



Do-Gooders: How Liberals Hurt Those They Claim to Help (And the Rest of Us) Mona Charen on C-SPAN's Book TV. Charen published this book shortly after we interviewed her for American Feud: <http://www.c-span.org/video/?186046-1/book-discussion-dogooders-liberals-hurt-claim-help>



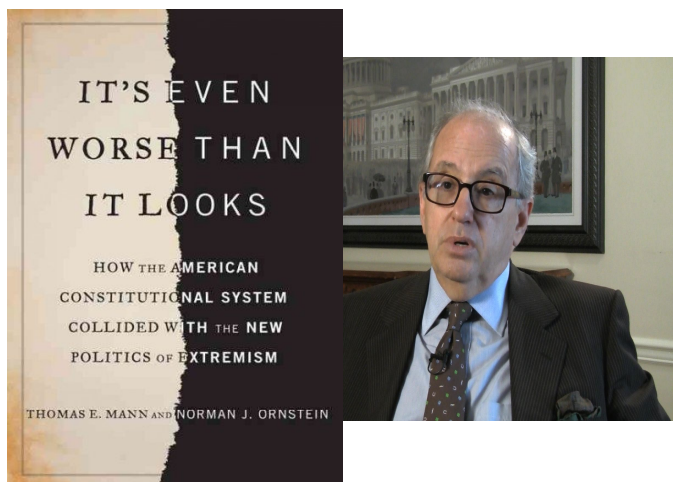
What's the Matter with Kansas? Thomas Frank on C-SPAN's Book TV (2004): Frank explores why blue collar and low-income Americans vote for Republican candidates, (frequently humorous) <http://www.c-span.org/video/?184784-1/book-discussion-whats-matter-kansas>

The Libertarian Mind: A Manifesto for Freedom David Boaz on C-SPAN's Book TV (2015). Boaz equally criticizes liberals and conservatives in American Feud:

- o <http://www.c-span.org/video/?324516-1/david-boaz-libertarian-mind>

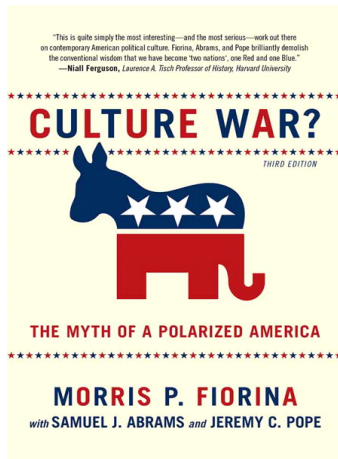


Failed States: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy Noam Chomsky C-SPAN Book TV lecture from U.S. Military Academy (2006). Chomsky argues in American Feud that the United States is becoming a “failed state.” <http://www.c-span.org/video/?192376-1/book-discussion-failed-states>



It's Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism Ornstein and Mann on C-SPAN (2012) Norman Ornstein interview provides information for the 2016 update of American Feud <http://www.c-span.org/video/?306130-3/book-discussion-even-worse-looks>

Books (in addition to those listed above with video links)



Culture War? The Myth of Polarized America (3rd edition) by Morris Fiorina

Important resource when we were developing American Feud
<https://www.pearsonhighered.com/program/Fiorina-Culture-War-The-Myth-of-a-Polarized-America-3rd-Edition/PGM136108.html>



Quixote's Ghost: The Right, the Liberati, and the Future of Social Policy by David Stoesz. In American Feud Mr. Stoesz offers a critique of both liberalism and conservatism and presents ideas for moving beyond what he argues are outdated labels & ideologies.

<http://www.amazon.com/Quixotes-Ghost-Liberati-Future-Social/dp/0195181204>

- *The Conservative Mind* by Russell Kirk summary and excerpts:
<http://www.kirkcenter.org/images/uploads/kirkconservativesummary.pdf>
- *The Strange Death of American Liberalism* by H.W. Brands (2001) Historian argues that Americans trusted government during the Cold War but now they don't and that's why liberalism "died."
https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Strange_Death_of_American_Liberalism.html?id=yMSpsHEXND0C&hl=en
- *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin* by Corey Robin (2011) <https://books.google.com/books?id=lolpAgAAQBAJ&dq=the+reactionary+mind>

WEBSITES

- Edmund Burke Quotes:
http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/e/edmund_burke.html
- Maps of the 2012 Election results (University of Michigan): shows range of colors from red to purple to blue & county-by-county. Also state sizes changed based on population. 2000, 2004, 2008 also available. <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~mejn/election/2012/>
- National Child Labor Committee Photographs - reveal why liberalism & progressivism began: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?st=grid&co=nclc>



Noam Chomsky video & writings:
<https://chomsky.info>



American Feud on the web:
www.americanfeud.org

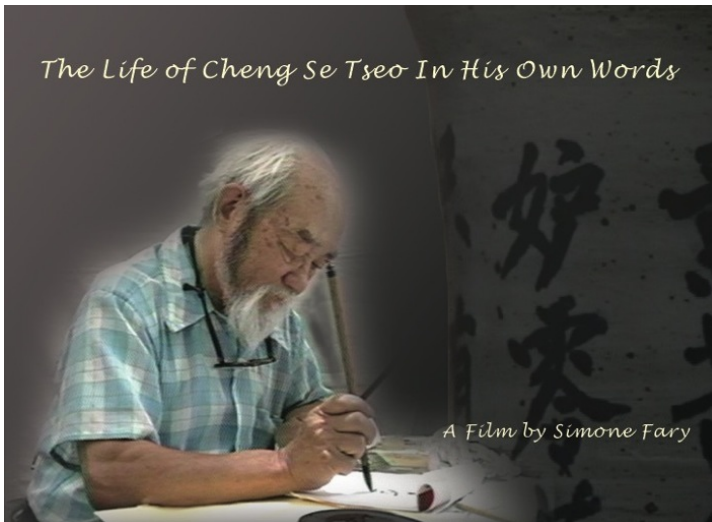
On Facebook:
<https://www.facebook.com/American-Feud-10100836633/>

About Nerdsmaakemedia

Nerdsmaakemedia (www.nerdsmaakemedia.com) specializes in educational media in a variety of formats including documentary and other instructional video, online learning, instructional design, curriculum, eBooks and Wordpress websites. Our other historical films include:



[Confounding Father: Luther Martin versus the U.S. Constitution \(coming soon\)](#)



Cheng Se Tseo in his Own Words
<https://drtseomovie.wordpress.com>