

# The Impact of Modern Presidential Elections on Environmentalism

## Article: Robert Gottlieb's "The Next Environmentalism: How Movements Respond to the Changes that Elections Bring-From Nixon to Obama"

### Class Discussion/Analytical Questions

- 1) Gottlieb presents his beliefs about past presidents openly and clearly. Based on Gottlieb's assessment, give an environmental grade (A-F) to the presidents Gottlieb discusses. Nixon? Reagan? Clinton? George W. Bush? Explain how you came to your conclusions.
- 2) Gottlieb skims over President Jimmy Carter, a president known for proactively fighting for environmental reform. Why does Gottlieb skip such an environmentally important president? Consider Gottlieb's goal in presenting this speech. How might Carter be the exception to the rule, environmentally speaking?
- 3) Gottlieb's speech was given days after Obama's election. Explain Gottlieb's hesitant feelings of hope regarding Obama's 2008 election. What historical factors are keeping Gottlieb from wholeheartedly backing Obama's campaign promise for environmental change? What historical factors are giving Gottlieb hope that Obama will create positive environmental change?
- 4) Reflect upon Obama's years as president. Can you think of any environmental policies or pieces of legislation Obama has proactively engaged with? Have these policies or pieces of legislation lived up to Gottlieb's hope for real environmental change? How would you grade (A-F) Obama environmentally?

### Activities

#### Primary Sources:

- Richard Nixon's "Radio Address About the State of the Union Message on Natural Resources and the Environment"
- Ronald Reagan's "Statement on United Nations World Environment Day"
- An Introduction to Jimmy Carter's "The Environment Message to the Congress"
- Barack Obama's "Proclamation 8364 - Earth Day, 2009"

### 1. Modern Presidents and the Environment

Break the class into four groups, assigning each group a different president and corresponding presidential speech. Explain that each group has three tasks to complete.

#### Tasks

- 1) Read and discuss the presidential speech.
- 2) Describe and evaluate the environmental views of the president your group was assigned.

- 3) Teach the class about the environmental views of your president, according to the speech you were given.

## **2. Political Parties and the Environment**

Break the class into small groups and ask each group to compare Republican and Democratic views of environmentalism. For this activity, Nixon and Reagan will typify the Republicans and Carter and Obama will typify the Democrats. Each group should then create a presentation contrasting the environmental views of Republicans and Democrats. Remind the students that they can, and should, utilize information from Gottlieb's articles regarding presidents from both parties to substantiate their arguments.