THE 1988 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

In 1988, a majority of Americans were economically comfortable, and they attributed their comfort to Reagan and Bush. When Michael Dukakis, the Democratic governor of Massachusetts, ran for the presidency in 1988 against George Bush, Reagan’s vice-president, most voters saw little reason for change.

George Bush simply built on President Reagan’s legacy by promising, “Read my lips: no new taxes” in his acceptance speech at the Republican Convention. He stressed his commitment to the conservative ideas of the Moral Majority. Though Bush asserted that he wanted a “kinder, gentler nation,” his campaign sponsored a number of negative “attack ads” aimed at his opponent. He told audiences that Dukakis was an ultraliberal whose views were outside the mainstream of American values. In particular, Bush suggested that Dukakis was soft on crime and unpatriotic.

Some commentators believed that the negative ads contributed to the lowest voter turnout in 64 years. Only half of the eligible voters went to the polls in 1988. Fifty-three percent voted for George Bush, who won 426 electoral votes. Bush’s electoral victory was viewed, as Reagan’s had been, as a mandate for conservative social and political policies.

CRITICAL THINKING

3. ANALYZING MOTIVES

Why did President Reagan and President Bush think it was important to appoint conservative justices to the Supreme Court?

4. EVALUATING

In your opinion, was Reagan’s first term a success? Think About:

- how his tax cuts impacted the rich and the poor
- the economy
- the federal budget

What picture did Reagan paint of the Carter administration?