Votes Beyond Victory

Weighing the impact of third parties in 1912

USH.C.2.4.C "Evaluate the significance of the 1912 presidential election, including the rise of Roosevelt's Bull Moose Party and the viability of Eugene V. Debs' Socialist Party."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline evidence that Roosevelt's party changed the contest. Circle evidence that shows both the strength and the limits of Debs's party.

The Election That Split the Vote

1 In 1912, former president Theodore Roosevelt challenged President William Howard Taft for the Republican nomination. When Taft won, Roosevelt formed the Progressive Party, nicknamed the Bull Moose Party. Both men sought votes from people who usually supported Republicans. Democrat Woodrow Wilson offered another choice, while Socialist Eugene V. Debs called for greater public control of major industries.

1912 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION RESULTS

Candidate	Popular vote	Electoral votes
Wilson	41.8%	435
Roosevelt	27.4%	88
Taft	23.2%	8
Debs	6.0%	0

2 The election results show a striking split. Wilson won the presidency with less than half the popular vote, while Roosevelt finished ahead of Taft in both popular and electoral votes. The Bull Moose campaign proved that a new party could attract millions, but its strength also helped divide the Republican vote. Wilson carried many states where his opponents competed.

3 Debs received over 900,000 votes, his highest popular-vote share, but no electoral votes. That support made Socialists visible nationally, not likely winners under the state-by-state Electoral College system. After 1912, the Progressive Party faded as a national force. The election showed that third parties could spread ideas and alter contests even without winning the White House.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Roosevelt's Bull Moose run affect the Republican Party's chances?

2. Why was Roosevelt's finish significant for a new party, and what limit did it reveal?

3. How viable was Debs as a candidate for president in 1912? Use two election results to support your judgment.

4. What does Wilson's share of the popular vote suggest about the effect of having several candidates?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence museum label arguing whether Roosevelt's or Debs's campaign mattered more in 1912. Cite two results from the table and explain one important effect of the other campaign.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · USH.C.2.4.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline evidence that Roosevelt's party changed the contest. Circle evidence that shows both the strength and the limits of Debs's party. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Roosevelt's Bull Moose run affect the Republican Party's chances?	**It divided voters who usually supported Republicans between Roosevelt and Taft, helping Wilson carry states.**
2	Why was Roosevelt's finish significant for a new party, and what limit did it reveal?	**Roosevelt beat sitting president Taft in both popular and electoral votes, but he did not win the presidency.**
3	How viable was Debs as a candidate for president in 1912? Use two election results to support your judgment.	**He attracted substantial support, including over 900,000 votes, but his zero electoral votes made him an unlikely winner.**
4	What does Wilson's share of the popular vote suggest about the effect of having several candidates?	**Wilson won with 41.8% of the popular vote, suggesting that divided opposition helped him win without a majority.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Roosevelt's campaign mattered more to the 1912 result because it split voters who usually backed Republicans. His 27.4% of the popular vote helped Wilson win with only 41.8%. Debs's campaign mattered in another way because it brought Socialist ideas to a national audience. His support showed that a party could influence debate without winning the presidency.

Accept either choice in Part 3 if the student makes a supported argument, cites two accurate table results, and explains an effect of the other campaign. Do not treat Debs's lack of electoral votes as a lack of public support.