**Introduction:** Imagine yourself surrounded by people in a huge stadium; you can’t even hear yourself think. There are celebrities everywhere you look and you begin to wonder how you were lucky enough to be invited to this amazing party. Cameras are flashing constantly so you dig through your bag looking for your camera too. A man walks up on stage and the stadium erupts in applause. You find you’re clapping as well. You look up and see the platform covered in red, white, and blue. Do you know where you are? You may have flipped by this event on TV. You are standing in the middle of the Democratic National Convention/Republican National Convention depending on your political affiliation. This is not a trivial moment. This could affect your future as a citizen and voter.

**Thesis:** National Conventions are more than just a great party. They are complex, strategic events that need to be understood by this generation. **Mapping:** First one must be clear on the reasons for having a convention. It also becomes important to look at how conventions have changed and evolved, and to finally look at how the conventions are perceived by different groups of people.

**Transition:** Now it is logical to ask the question: What is the point of having a National Convention?

**Body:**

I. Why hold a convention?

A. According to a book entitled *Electing a U.S. President*, there are four purposes that a National Conventions serves; the most well known reason is this is where the presidential nominee and vice presidential nominee are chosen. While this is the main concern and objective of each political party there are also smaller issues which are vital to a party’s success that are decided at the Convention. These are things like adopting a party platform, and also making sure the party establishes a view on major issues of the day. At these conventions the leaders of the party take the opportunity to make rules for themselves. It is much easier to discuss such things when all the influential people are in the same room so to speak. Conventions are also a time for loyal party members and delegates alike to get together and support the party and the nominees, even if it takes a party to get them there.

B. Political parties become incredibly important when the topic of National Conventions comes up. Let me make it clear that the Republicans and Democrats do not caravan together to a convention every four years. If that were the case we would have no one left to run for office. Political parties have been around since early in the 19th century, the book *Electing*
a U.S. president states, that no one would make it to the oval office without the support of one of the major parties. There have been different names for them down through the years, but the names that stuck were Democrats and Republicans. Before conventions came to be, the top senators in each party would gather and choose who they wanted to support as the nominee. A man had to get through them in order to have any hope of becoming president.

Transition: It is no longer such a selective group that decides the fate of a party, and at times ultimately the nation. Time has brought change even since conventions began. They are no longer what they once were.

II. How conventions have changed

A. Back in the 1800’s National conventions were not huge affairs. Rhodes Cook made the remark that the events were small and tranquil enough to be held in a small building or a church. Amazingly, even without all the media outlets that we benefit from today, the conventions continued to grow in popularity. PBS claims that one reason the conventions became favored was because the common man could play a role in government instead of the decision being made by some elite old men.

B. Now the media has also revolutionized the way conventions are held. Most of you are aware that John F. Kennedy’s success has been a least in part attributed to the television. In the debate against Nixon, Kennedy came off as calm and well, presidential, while Nixon looked nervous and unsure of himself. Take the effectiveness of television in Kennedy’s case, and translate that to National Conventions. Television and the media brought National conventions into a whole new light. In the book Electing a U.S. President, the point is brought out that in the 1950’s when TV was still a very novel thing everyone watched every minute they could of the conventions because it was new and exciting. Now, would any of you sit spellbound by 12 hours of coverage of a national convention? Which goes to show how much conventions have changed not only from the early 1800’s to the mid 1900’s but also in the past 50 years. The media sadly stripped away the coat of glory the conventions once wore. The major networks have now deemed the conventions unworthy of a great deal of airtime.

C. As a result of the primary system the presidential nominee for each party is known months before the convention is held. I’m sure most of you have heard sound bites from all the men trying to clinch the nomination in an election year. The man who does secure the nomination gets eight months to campaign with his political party with him all the way. This was not the case before the 1960’s. Previously men would work hard to sway the public to point of view, all the while knowing it could be a wasted effort.
Everything was decided at the National convention, which is why the country sat enthralled in front of their television sets.

**Transition:** Just as the conventions have changed down through the years, how people have perceived them has become a more significant aspect as well.

### III. Perceptions of the conventions

**A.** As a whole both political parties have realized what an opportunity they have at the conventions to sway the public. Even though the media is less involved now, than they once were, the political parties take what they can get and run with it. According to Party Politics in America, the convention is no longer a private meeting; its diplomacy must be conducted in public. Both parties have realized this fact and have worked hard to use it to their advantage. This is the party’s time to shine, and show each one of you, as well as the rest of the nation, that your trust in their party is well founded.

**B.** As both parties work hard to gain that trust, as a citizen you hold great power and influence. Some people get incredibly excited when the conventions roll around, and yet others could not care less. This is what the party leaders have to deal with when planning the conventions. Gaining young people has proven to be a difficult task for both political parties, according to the congressional quarterly, which may be part of the reason the conventions have turned toward the party atmosphere.

**Transition:** A citizen’s role in national conventions has been demonstrated in many different ways.

**Conclusion:** In 1860 Abraham Lincoln was a presidential candidate, yet he was somewhat unknown. He went into the convention very much the underdog, with no expectation of grasping the nomination, yet Lincoln enthusiasts had other ideas. They made fake tickets in order to get more supporters of Lincoln into the convention hall. These supporters yelled so loud that party leaders were convinced that no one else would have the support that Lincoln apparently had. Therefore Lincoln walked away with the nomination and eventually the presidency. Throughout the years, as national conventions have evolved they have strived to meet the needs of all involved. Both political parties put time, money, and effort into making a national convention a grand success, and as citizens we repay them with our votes in November. This is your opportunity to lend a voice to your democracy.
Works Cited


