

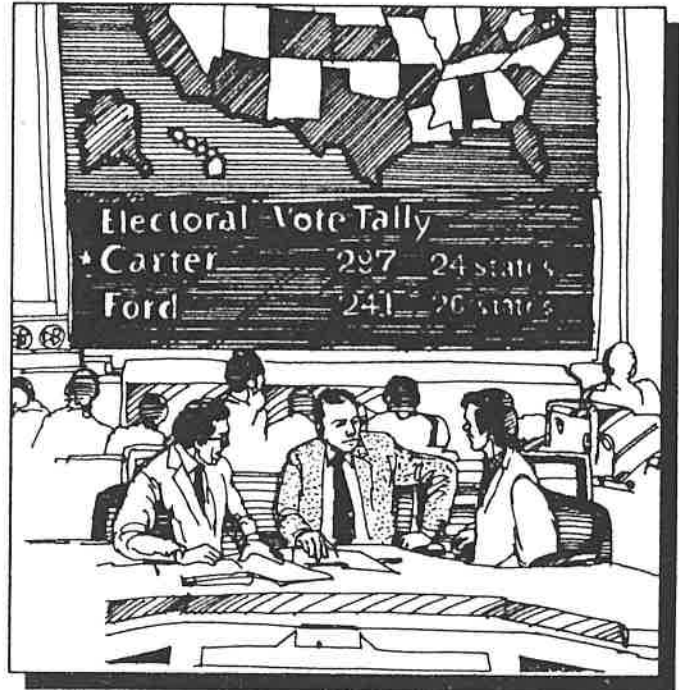
The Electoral College

Id you know that voters in the United States don't vote for the President? When they go to the polls on Election Day, they are actually voting for a group of electors. These electors have pledged to support a party's nominee for President. Many people believe they are voting for the President, because in many states the **ballot** lists only the names of the nominees, and not the names of the electors.

The delegates to the Constitutional Convention in 1787 decided on this system of **indirect election** of the President. They had long debates about how to make sure that the best candidate would be chosen to be President. Some delegates supported a **direct election** by citizens. Others were in favor of having Congress choose the President. And still others thought that state legislatures should make the choice.

The delegates finally agreed on a **compromise**: the President would be elected by electors chosen by each state. This way, ordinary citizens in each state would have a say, but the final decision would be made by people who were better informed about the candidates and the issues.

This system of Presidential electors, called the **Electoral College**, is still in effect today. But some adjustments have been made over the years. At first, the electors voted for two candidates. The one with the highest number of votes became the President, and the one with the second-highest number became Vice President. But in 1796, political foes were chosen for the two posts: Federalist John Adams for President and Democratic-Republican Thomas Jefferson for Vice President. In the next election, there was a tie between Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr. The **House of Representatives** had to decide which one would be President. It was clear that the system needed to be adjusted. In 1804, the 12th Amendment to the Constitution was passed. Candidates are now nominated to run only for



President or only for Vice President. Electors vote for President and Vice President separately.

There have been changes in how the states elect electors, too. In the beginning some states held direct popular elections for the electors. In others, the state legislatures made the choice. Gradually, all of the states adopted direct popular elections for electors.

When the Constitution was written, there were no political parties. But they soon developed, and the party organizations in each state began proposing a **slate**, or a list, of electors who were pledged to vote for their party's nominee. Voters no longer chose individual electors; they chose between party slates.

The political parties then began to push for **winner-take-all elections** for electors. This means that the slate that receives the most popular votes wins all the state's electoral votes. Today, all the states except Maine use this winner-take-all system.

Name _____

1. Do voters in the United States vote directly for the President? _____

2. Fill in the blank in the following sentences.

a. The group of people who cast the official votes to elect the President and the Vice President is called the _____.

b. A (an) _____ election is one where the citizens vote for electors who elect the President.

c. A (an) _____ election is one where the citizens vote for the President.

d. A (an) _____ election is one where the winner of the popular election gets all of the state's electoral votes.

3. What did the 12th Amendment to the Constitution do?

4. Today, all of the states but Maine have _____ elections to elect Presidential electors.

a. indirect

d. winner-take-all

b. direct

e. b and c

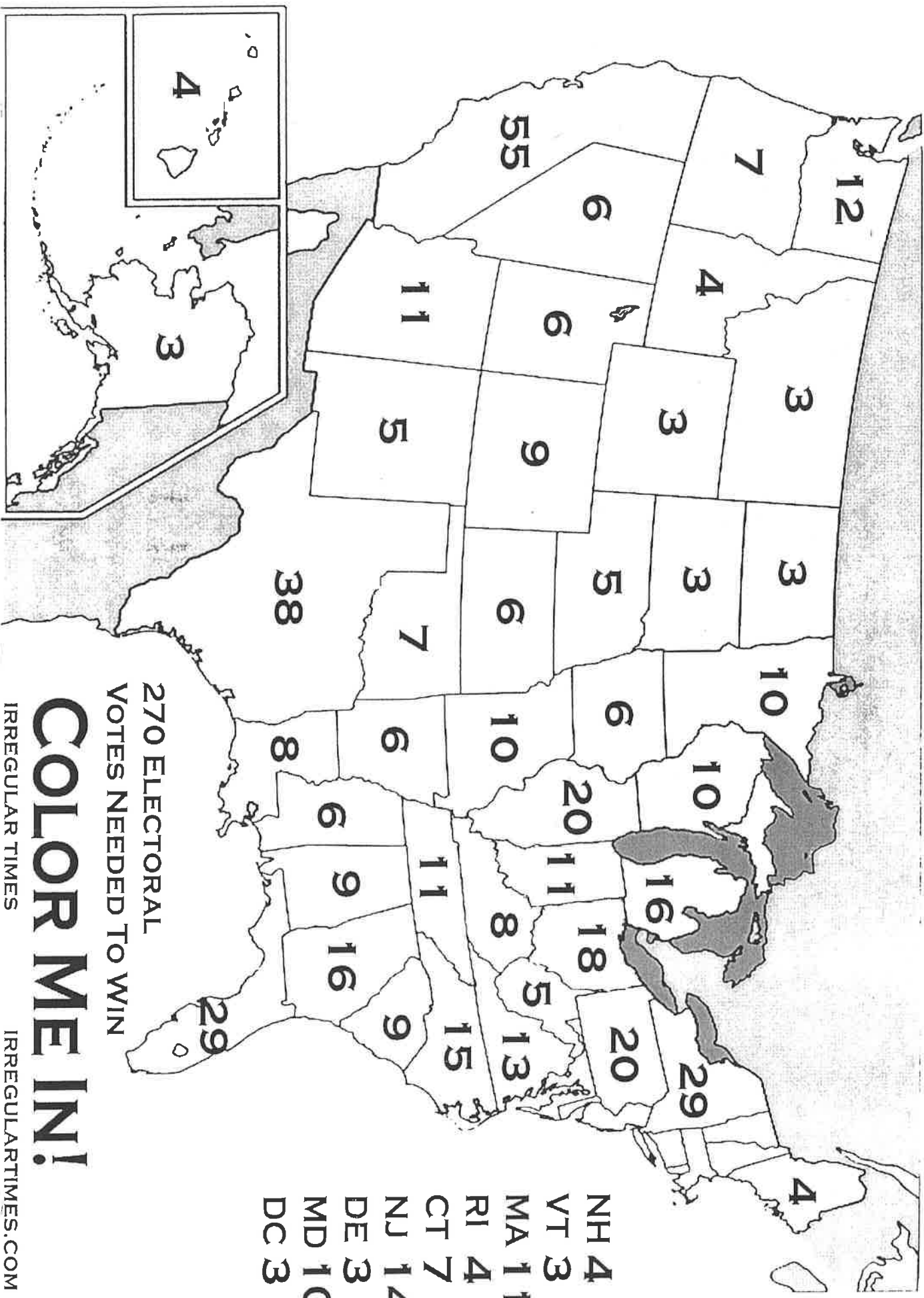
c. popular

f. all of the above

*5. Many of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention believed that ordinary citizens were not well-enough informed to choose the best candidate for President. In your opinion, were they right or wrong? Explain why.

**6. The House of Representatives has twice had to choose a President. One was Thomas Jefferson. Who was the other?

2012 ELECTORAL COLLEGE MAP



270 ELECTORAL
VOTES NEEDED TO WIN

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Road to the White House Electoral College Strategies

Directions: Imagine you are running for President of the United States! Remember, to win the White House you need to receive a majority of the electoral votes which is 270. Your task is to work with your Vice Presidential candidate and/or Campaign Manager to plan a campaign strategy. Look at the Electoral College map to assist your efforts.

1. Identify the States and their respective electoral votes that provide the most efficient path to the White House.
2. Identify the States and their respective electoral votes that provide the most efficient path to the White House provided that you do not win the "Big Three," including California, Texas, and New York.
3. Is it possible to win the White House by only winning in States east of the Mississippi River? If so, identify the States and their respective electoral votes.