



AREA V REGIONAL SUPERINTENDENTS OF SCHOOLS

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Informational Text

6 – 12

Sample

Article of the Week

Directions:

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading. Mark up the text with questions and/or comments.
3. Write a one-page reflection on your own sheet of paper.

Turn Off the Phone (and the Tension)

Source: Jenna Wortham/ *New York Times*/ August 25, 2012

One recent sweltering afternoon, a friend and I trekked to a new public pool, armed with books, sunglasses and icy drinks, planning to beat the heat with a swim. But upon our arrival, we had an unwelcome surprise: no cellphones were allowed in the pool area.

The ban threw me into a tailspin. I lingered by the locker where I had stashed my phone, wondering what messages, photos and updates I might already be missing.

After walking to the side of the pool and reluctantly stretching out on a towel by the water, my hands ached for my phone. I longed to upload details and pictures of my leisurely afternoon, and to skim through my various social networks to see how other friends were spending the weekend. Mostly, however, I wanted to make sure that there wasn't some barbecue or summer music festival that we should be heading to instead.

Eventually, the anxiety passed. I started to see my lack of a digital connection as a reprieve. Lounging in the sun and chatting with a friend without the intrusion of texts and alerts into our lives felt positively luxurious. That night, I even switched off my phone while mingling at a house party, content to be in one place for the evening and not distracted by any indecision about whether another party posted online looked better.

My revelation — relearning the beauty of living in the moment, devoid of any digital link — may seem silly to people who are less attached to their devices. But for many people, smartphones and social networks have become lifelines — appendages that they are rarely without. As such, they can sway our moods, decisions and feelings.

One side effect of living an always-on digital life is the tension, along with the thrill, that can arise from being able to peep into people's worlds at any moment and comparing their lives with yours. This tension may be inevitable at times, but it's not inescapable. It's possible to move beyond the angst that social media can provoke — and to be glad that we've done so.

Anil Dash, a writer and entrepreneur, called this phenomenon the “Joy of Missing Out,” or JOMO, in a recent blog post.

“There can be, and should be, a blissful, serene enjoyment in knowing, and celebrating, that there are folks out there having the time of their life at something that you might have loved to, but are simply skipping,” he wrote.

JOMO is the counterpoint to FOMO, or the “fear of missing out,” a term popularized last year by Caterina Fake, an entrepreneur and one of the founders of Flickr, the photo-sharing Web site.

“Social media has made us even more aware of the things we are missing out on,” she wrote in a blog post. “You're home alone, but watching your friends' status updates tell of a great party happening somewhere.”

It may be that many people are in a kind of adolescence with social media and technology, still adjusting to the role that their new devices play in their lives. One day, the relationship may be less fraught.

The influence that technology can wield over our lives may lessen with time — as we grow accustomed to our devices and as the people who use them mature. In Mr.

Dash's case, the birth of his son, Malcolm, an adorable toddler who knows how to moonwalk, curbed his appetite for a hyperactive social life.

"I've been to amazing events," Mr. Dash said. "I still am fortunate enough to get to attend moments and celebrations that are an incredible privilege to witness. But increasingly, my default answer to invitations is 'no.' "

Social media sites, which ask you where you are, what you are doing and whom you are with, can cause people to exaggerate or feel the need to brag about their daily lives, said Sophia Dembling, the author of the coming book "The Introvert's Way: Living a Quiet Life in a Noisy World."

"There is a lot of pressure in our culture to be an extrovert," Ms. Dembling said. The trick to managing that, she said, is self-awareness. It's crucial, she said, to remember that most people tend to post about the juiciest bits of their lives — the lavish vacations, the clambakes and the parties — and not about the trip to the dentist or the time the cat threw up on the rug.

"I have to remind myself that what I enjoy doing," like spending time alone and reading, "is not what they enjoy doing," she said. Those moments, while valuable in their own right, can be trickier to catch artfully on camera.

Joshua Gross, a developer living in the Dumbo neighborhood of Brooklyn, says he thinks that as a modern society, we are "overcommunicated." There is simply too much information flowing across our devices at any moment, he said in a blog post.

A lot of the real-time information on the Web "isn't stuff you need to act on right away," he said in an interview. "And instead of one source vying for your attention, there are hundreds. It becomes too much for a person to handle, and it's only going to get worse."

"There's no rhythm to the way we get information right now," he said. "You never know when you're going to get a buzz. If we develop a rhythm to the way we get information, we'll know what we're getting and when."

Mr. Gross is among those working on solutions to the problem by creating services — including an application allowing users to save content from around the Web — that help stanch the flow of data that is streaming in at any moment.

Heavy users of social media can also adopt coping mechanisms — similar to training oneself to eat healthily — said Wilhelm Hofmann, an assistant professor who studies behavioral science at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business. "It's a problem of self-control," he said.

For those of us who don't have a cute tot to help distract us from the siren call of social media, as Mr. Dash does, Mr. Hofmann recommends setting up a kind of screen diet, building in a period each day to go screenless, either by going for a run and leaving your phone at home, or by stashing it in a drawer during dinner or while hanging out with friends.

"Ask yourself: How important is this, really? How happy does it actually make you?" he said. "Harness that feeling of pride when you do resist and stick to it."

That day at the pool, when I was forced to part with my device, reminded me of the charm of a life less connected — one that doesn't need to be photographed or recorded, or compared with anyone else's.

Possible WN topics

- Do you feel your life is "overcommunicated"? Explain.
- What are some coping strategies you can use to break the hold of your phone and other forms of electronic intrusion?

Directions:

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading. Mark up the text with questions and/or comments.
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Just How Many Facebook Friends Do You Need?

Twenty-somethings spend hours each day keeping their social networks going. But a thousand BFFs just may be a few hundred too many. The torture of modern friendship.

Source: Robin Marantz Henig, Samantha Henig /*Newsweek*/ October 15, 2012

Ask a group of elderly people what it was about their lives that made them happiest overall, and they'll probably mention some warm relationships with family and friends. If you're satisfied with your social life, according to psychologists, you tend to be satisfied with life in general.

From the vantage point of my 50s, I'd say that sounds about right. Some of my happiest moments are the ones I spend with my husband, a few close relatives, and a handful of very good friends who know me well and like me anyway. But the more I read about how social media are interfering with good old-fashioned friendship, creating virtual bonds that can't quite take the place of real ones, the more I wonder just how today's 20-somethings will look back on their own lives when they're my age.

After all, much crucial relationship building work is done in the 20s. According to research by the late Bernice Neugarten of the University of Chicago, who helped launch the academic study of human development, people choose most of their adult relationships, both friends and lovers, between the ages of 22 and 28. The friends we make in our 20s are not only BFFs; they're also our first truly chosen friends, people we discover as a result of our adult decisions—where to live, work, or study—as opposed to our parents' choices. And choosing how to reconfigure and commit to these friendships is an essential psychological task of the 20s. Finding intimacy—the basis and byproduct of good friendships—is one of the five major life tasks of young adults ages 18 to 30, according to Robert Arnstein, a Yale psychiatrist who was, like Neugarten, a pioneer in the study of development through the life span.

But with so much of friendship in this age group now being navigated online, an essential question is what the effect of that interaction is. And as a mother of two young adults, I feel this question personally. Will my younger daughter, Samantha, 28, some day feel that she missed out somehow on this crucial life resource?

One measure of the effect of social media on real-world social life comes from a study conducted in 2010 by Craig Watkins and Erin Lee of the University of Texas at Austin, who investigated the Facebook habits of 776 young people between the ages of 18 and 35. "No matter if it is a wall post, a comment, or a photo," they wrote in "Got Facebook? Investigating What's Social About Social Media," "young people's engagement with Facebook is driven, primarily, by a desire to stay connected to and involved in the lives of friends who live close by, far away, or have just entered into their lives."

This kind of constant contact can be efficient, but it can also be unsettling. For one thing, it adds a new layer of angst to a young person's already-heightened awareness of social ranking, giving appearance-conscious young people yet another thing to fret about. "I see other 20-somethings feeling pressured to constantly keep up a public image, especially a cyber-public image," wrote Ariana Allensworth of Brooklyn on the group blog the Twenty-somethings. "Folks are always keeping the world in the loop one way or another about what they're up to, where they're at, what projects they're working on. It can be a bit much at times." Not the most fertile ground for real-world friendship.

Robin's daughter Samantha says: I see what it is about all this that worries my mother. What especially bothers me about social networks isn't so much their effect on the institution of friendship as it is the way they make me think, to an off-putting degree, about the image I'm projecting. I hate that sometimes I say something clever in real life and actually think, I should tweet that. Or that when my friend sends an email of a flattering photo he took of me, I get annoyed that he didn't post it to Facebook, where others could see it. (I'm not yet so vain that I would post it myself.) Social networks have inserted themselves as an unwelcome filter through which I view just about everything, in much the same way the TV show My So-Called Life once hijacked my brain, making me silently narrate my thoughts in Claire Danes's voice. I'm not about to die for love of my reflection any time soon, but social networking does seem to amplify my narcissistic tendencies. The more you talk about yourself on sites such as Facebook, Twitter, or Tumblr, the more successful you are. With all the self-promotional activity going on, it sometimes feels like your feed is less a virtual living room than it is a hall of mirrors.

The cyber-styling has seeped into online dating, too, leading to what Marina Adshade, an economist at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, calls "beauty inflation." People browsing the profiles at OKCupid.com or Match.com are seeing only the most flattering photos and most witty reflections, which

can lead to an unrealistic sense of who is out there in the dating pool and of what kind of partner they can actually get. It's like a mating bubble.

Through social media, young people are constantly being pinged about a whole slew of potentially better matches or social activities. Today's 20-somethings complain of a pervasive feeling that there's something better going on somewhere else that they haven't been invited to: a rowdier party, a more interesting conversation, a funnier movie, a better hookup. This feeling is nothing new, of course, but it's more intense now—and more likely to be a feeling they'll twist themselves in knots to try to do something about.

Samantha says: In my mother's day, even if you knew in theory that people were sometimes doing fun things without you, you didn't have to see photographic evidence of it, unless your friends invited you over for a slide show of their trip to Europe. Now you see that stuff daily: look, there are eight of your friends in some Facebook photo together at ... is that a barbecue? Who had a barbecue? Why wasn't I at that barbecue? By keeping tabs on a wide group of people's every check-in, you feel you're less likely to miss out on something awesome—or even just mildly better than whatever you're currently doing. But you're also more likely to spend much of your night preoccupied with smoke signals arriving via cellphone and wondering which are worth following rather than just settling in and focusing on the choice you've already made.

All of which leads to the crux of what makes friendships different for young people today: the nefarious Fear of Missing Out. It's because of FOMO that 20-somethings are so focused on their smartphone screens, so preoccupied with potential friends that they forget to be with the friends they already have. The FOMO mentality is leading millennials to become smartphone-addled cyber-sluts, constantly texting and emailing, always on the prowl for the next better thing.

There's also a limit to how far a true social network can extend. Nature sets that limit. Back in the 1990s, anthropologist Robin Dunbar of Oxford University calculated the maximum number of friends it's possible for any one person to have. The ceiling, which has come to be known as Dunbar's Number, is based on his observation that in primates, the size of the social group is directly proportional to the size of the neocortex of the brain—the bigger the neocortex, the more individuals any primate can keep track of. In humans, Dunbar's Number is 150—well, 147.8, plus or minus.

“Partly it's a cognitive challenge just to keep track of more people than that,” Dunbar has explained. “And it's a time-budgeting problem: we just don't have the time in everyday life to invest in each of those people to the extent where you can have a real relationship.”

Dunbar's Number was calculated pre-Internet, but it applies to social networks, too. A study conducted in 2009 for *The Economist* found that people with 500 Facebook friends had actual interaction—such as leaving comments on people's walls or “liking” their links or photos—with an average of just 17 friends for men, 26 for women. And one-on-one communication, such as individual messages or Facebook chats, was even more limited: men had two-way contact with an average of just 10 of those 500 friends, women with just 16.

Facebook itself has figured this out and has developed an algorithm that restricts the updates you'll see on your friend feed to those from the people whose updates and links you most commonly interact with. Other social media startups, including Path, Highlight, GroupMe, Frenzy, Rally Up, Huddl, Kik, and Shizzlr, also offer ways to limit groups to a more manageable size, a reflection of how friendships work in real life: an inner circle for true intimacy, an outer circle for all the benefits of a community at large. And when Google+ launched in 2011, many early adopters were excited about the chance to start sorting their e-friends from scratch.

The new apps suggest that maybe we've come full circle, using technology to make real-world friend encounters more satisfying instead of less so. That would be a relief. Because the fact remains that most human interactions are still occurring in the real world, and friendship circles are still restricted by time, space, personal preferences, and the limits of the neocortex. The real thing young people should fear is missing out on those few, true, long-term friendships that make for a richer, happier life.

Possible WN topics

- Do you suffer from FOMO? Explain.
- Reflect on how Facebook and other sites have affected your friendships.
- Choose a passage from the article and respond.

Directions:

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading. Mark up the text with questions and/or comments.
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Sports Drinks Role Often Overplayed

Gatorade, Powerade and other bottles of candy-colored drinks are a common sight at athletic events. And not just on the playing fields. But are they really helpful? New research suggests water, in moderation, may be best.

Source: Chris Woolston/ *Los Angeles Times*/ 11.03.12

Anywhere someone is lifting a weight, strapping on a football helmet or lacing up running shoes, there's probably a big bottle of green, blue or neon orange liquid nearby. Gatorade, Powerade and other sports drinks have drenched just about every sport in America, from triathlons to pee-wee soccer.

But sports drinks are also popular with spectators in the stands, kids playing video games, long haul truckers and office workers. Lots of people chug down sports drinks without ever breaking a sweat.

It raises the question: Who really needs this stuff? While TV ads suggest that sports drinks are the key to athletic success, there's a growing backlash in some medical circles against these salty, sugary beverages.

"Sports drinks are oversold and over-hyped," says nutrition expert Kelly Brownell, director of the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at Yale University. "If I were Coke or Pepsi, I would sell off these brands. People are starting to figure out sports drinks, and criticism against them is only going to grow."

Some of that criticism showed up in the July issue of the prestigious *British Medical Journal*. A series of articles suggested that the benefits of sports drinks are meager at best, especially when compared with plain water, the original sports drink.

Gatorade (a product of PepsiCo), Powerade (from the Coca-Cola Co.) and the like promise to replace the three basic things lost during intense exercise: fluids, electrolyte minerals (mostly sodium) and carbohydrate fuel. An 8-ounce serving of original Gatorade — now sold as Gatorade Perform 02 — contains 110 milligrams of sodium and 14 grams (3.5 teaspoons) of sugar. Regular Powerade is a bit less salty but has a little more sugar.

Many athletes believe they need sports drinks to replace the salt lost in sweat, but most of them can get by just fine with regular water, says Michael Bergeron, a fellow of the American Academy of Sports Medicine and executive director of the National Institute for Athletic Health & Performance. "Most people in most situations do not need

electrolytes during physical activity, but the longer you go, the harder you go, the more you sweat, the more sports drinks can potentially play a role."

Bergeron says that he often runs for an hour at a time in hot weather — and he doesn't bring water, let alone a big bottle of sports drink. "A lot of people don't need anything when they exercise, as long as they start out hydrated and nourished." He adds that, like most recreational runners, he gets plenty of sodium in his regular diet.

When athletes sweat enough to shed large quantities of salt, sports drinks may not help much, Bergeron says. He often works with young football players who can lose as much as 4,000 mg of sodium in an hour in an especially sweaty workout. "A kid can drink a 32-ounce bottle of Gatorade Endurance [800 mg of sodium] every hour and still be cramping up at the end of the day," he says. "Sometimes we'll add a half-teaspoon of salt to the bottle."

As noted in the *British Medical Journal*, there isn't much evidence that sports drinks improve athletic performance. Most studies over the years have been very small, and the results have been hard to interpret. For one example, a 2007 study of 16 male soccer players published in *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise* found that players who drank a sports drink during a workout could sprint a bit faster and shoot better than players who drank plain water, but they didn't do any better on a passing drill.

The marketing of sports drinks has helped feed a dangerous obsession with hydration, says Dr. Arthur Siegel, an associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School who volunteers for the medical team at the Boston Marathon. He warns that drinking too much water or sports drink before, during or after physical activity can lead to potentially fatal water intoxication. "It's far more dangerous than dehydration," he says. Siegel urges runners and other athletes to drink enough to control thirst, no more and no less. "I wish sports drinks would come with a warning telling people to drink responsibly."

Possible WN topics

- Do you think sports drinks help your performance? Why? Why not?
- Watch a Gatorade commercial on Youtube and analyze the claims it makes.
- Do you agree that sports drinks are “oversold” and “over-hyped”? Explain.

Directions:

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No more curtain calls for elephants 11.26.12. Latimes.com

They are majestic animals, not performers. The City Council should act to protect them.

The Los Angeles City Council is poised to consider a measure that would in effect prevent elephants from performing in traveling shows and exhibitions in the city. It's hardly unusual for the council to sound off on any issue under the sun, but in this case, the proposal before it underscores a growing appreciation for the world's largest and most majestic land mammal. It deserves to be approved, and should prompt serious reflection on humanity's relationship with these noble animals.

In the wilds of Asia and Africa, elephants roam miles a day, foraging for vegetation, socializing in groups, gamboling over varied topography — dirt, grass, hills, rocks — and wallowing in mud holes. Until recently, nothing about that natural existence was approximated in zoos. When they weren't on display in cramped exhibits, they were chained in zoo barns, standing on concrete or other hard surfaces. For 8,000-to-10,000-pound creatures who spend all day on their feet and can live into their 40s, the consequence of that confinement was a painful middle age, marked by arthritis, cracked toenails and sore feet.

Zookeepers entered elephants' enclosures and maintained control over the animals with the bullhook. With one blunt end and a sharp hook on the other, it resembles a hammer. Keepers used it to poke, prod or strike.

Since the 1990s, as zoos and veterinarians started to understand the severity of elephant foot diseases, conditions began to improve. Zoos stopped chaining their elephants at night. Exhibits got bigger and surfaces for treading got softer. The Los Angeles Zoo spent more than \$40 million building a new habitat, trying to offer, in several acres, some of what elephants might find in the wild — dirt, grass, hills, logs, a waterfall— as well as features they wouldn't find, such as a barn with heated floors.

Today at the L.A. Zoo, the bullhook has been banished and keepers practice "protected contact" with elephants, meaning that man and pachyderm rarely share the same space. This protects keepers and animals and eliminates the need for the former to threaten the latter with a sharp-edged tool. The Assn. of Zoos and Aquariums, which accredits North American zoos, has instructed all of its member facilities to adopt, by 2014, the practice of keepers not sharing "unrestricted space" with elephants.

What has been slower to change is the common perception of elephants and how they interact with human civilization. That concept is tangled in a history of pachyderms depicted as brave warriors in battle, stately beasts of burden and hardy workers, hauling lumber in Asia, ferrying tourists in Thailand and carrying visitors at county fairs in the United States.

But elephants are not horses. Although some argue that they have become domestic animals, they are not domesticated in the technical sense of having been bred by humans for selective gene traits. At best (or worst), many have been tamed for human handling. But "taming" is not gentle; it requires chaining and the bullhook, and comes at the expense of an elephant's well-being. Whether the animal is trained to entertain or to drag logs through a jungle, it is taught by force.

Using elephants to perform in circuses and give rides at county fairs may seem more benign than using them to labor in Asian logging facilities, but it relies on much of the same coercion. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus has long defended its use of elephants, saying they are meticulously cared for on the road and at its conservation center in Florida. But Ringling still chains its elephants in trains to

transport them and uses bullhooks to manage them, according to reports by the L.A. Department of Animal Services and a veterinarian assigned by the department to examine the animals. That's why a City Council committee is recommending a prohibition on public elephant performances and bullhooks.

Elephants have been part of human history for thousands of years, and their image as gentle giants endures. But their interaction with humans has often been characterized by their mistreatment. With greater understanding has come new responsibility to treat elephants with the dignity they deserve and have too often been denied.

Why elephants need circuses and zoos

11.29.12 Latimes.com

The Times' editorial Monday on the L.A. City Council's proposed ban on elephants performing in traveling shows such as circuses paints a romantic picture of elephants as gentle giants. The editorial board seems to buy into the animal extremists' idealistic scenario of happy, fat pachyderms lazily wandering the open plains of Africa or the jungles of Asia, free of disease and conflict with humans.

The reality is far grimmer. The "wild" left for these magnificent animals is rapidly disappearing. Instead, these endangered and threatened animals are often contained within park ranges by fences, or, when no fences exist, villages and fields block historic migration routes, often leading to human-elephant conflict. In Sri Lanka, an island country with the highest elephant-to-human ratio, elephants regularly raid farmers' fields, and human-elephant conflict sometimes leads to deaths -- of both elephants and humans.

In Africa, elephants may walk for miles during the drought months to find water and food -- a harsh reality that elephants in captivity don't have to endure. Captive elephants don't face the threat of being killed by humans from gunshot, electrocution or poisoning as they compete for resources or because their ivory is a valuable commodity. While park rangers do what they can to protect elephants from poachers, too many are being slaughtered. Calves are orphaned and often die without human intervention.

The imaginary Eden created by animal extremists has elephants and humans coexisting without interacting and ignores the reality of thousands of years of history. In fact, Asian elephants have been working in their native lands with their native peoples for thousands of years, just as horses have in lands where horses and people are found together. The Times has not called for an end to bridles on horses, but instead has demonized the traditional tool for working with elephants.

Commands are taught first and foremost to permit personal interaction between humans and elephants, which in turn allows for the provision of better husbandry and veterinary care. These movements are not taught through force or coercion, just as you would not beat your dog at home to make him sit. Elephants at zoos and circuses are taught primarily through a series of repetition and reward.

It is a good thing that people can see elephants at the L.A. Zoo or up close through traveling circuses. The elephants act as ambassadors for their species living in their range countries. While it may seem pleasant for extremists to imagine a perfect scenario in which elephants are set free to roam the hills of California to their hearts' content, that isn't the world in which we live. Elephants need people to care for them in captivity and to protect and conserve them in their range lands.

By Deborah Olson, executive director of the International Elephant Foundation

Possible Topics:

- Which claim about elephants in zoos and circuses convinces you the most? Why?
- With which editorial do you agree the most? Why?
- Which claim seems the least convincing? Why?
- What solutions would you propose to ease the concerns of animal rights protectors?
- What are your feelings about animals performing in circuses?
- Write your own rebuttal to either article. Send it to latimes.com if you want to be published.

Directions:

1. Mark your confusion.
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Can Obama Hold On to the Latino Vote?

In 2008, Hispanic voters helped make Barack Obama president. Will they now save his re-election campaign?

Source: *The Week* August 17, 2012

How important is the Latino vote in 2012?

It could be decisive. The boom in the Latino population — from 35 million in 2000 to over 50 million today — has been especially pronounced in five key swing states: Florida, Colorado, Nevada, North Carolina, and Virginia. The Latino vote is almost certain to tilt heavily Democratic, but the size of the margin could mean the difference between victory and defeat for President Obama and his Republican opponent, Mitt Romney. That's why both campaigns are wooing Hispanic voters. Obama's decision in June to halt the deportations of young immigrants illegally brought to the U.S. as children was widely seen as an attempt to please Hispanic voters, as was Romney's pledge to overhaul the green card system to allow immigrants to more easily keep their families together. But despite all the attention to Latino voters, there are real doubts that a majority of them will show up at the polls.

Why is that?

Americans of Latin American descent represent the fastest-growing demographic in the U.S., but the number of Latino voters isn't rising as quickly. Just under half of eligible Latino voters turned out to vote in 2008, compared with 66 percent of whites and 65 percent of blacks. And voter enthusiasm among Latinos is going down, not up. Hispanic voter registration actually fell from 11.6 million in 2008 to 10.9 million in 2010 and has shown few signs of picking up this year, even though the total number of eligible Latino voters has climbed to 21.7 million. "We still need to confront a registration gap that is quite significant," said University of Washington political scientist Matt A. Barreto.

What's the reason for that gap?

It's at least partly the result of the recession's hitting Latinos disproportionately hard. Median household wealth among Hispanics plummeted 66 percent between 2005 and 2009, and Latino homeowners have suffered a foreclosure rate of 11.9 percent, more than twice that of whites. "When people lose their jobs or homes, they usually have to move elsewhere," said Antonio Gonzalez, head of the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project. "When you move, you have to re-register, and we suspect that didn't happen in 2009 and '10." In addition, almost a third of eligible Hispanic voters are under 30, a demographic group with lower engagement across the board. In 2010, just 17.6 percent of young Latinos voted.

Can turnout be improved?

The Democrats have long pushed get-out-the-vote campaigns among Latinos, but now Republicans have recognized that they have to get serious about courting Hispanic voters, too. They face a challenging trend: George W. Bush captured 40 percent of the Hispanic vote in 2004, but John McCain got only 31 percent in 2008. And this year, polls indicate that Obama is crushing Romney among Hispanics, 67 percent to 23 percent. Since Latinos are projected to make up nearly 30 percent of the U.S. population by 2050, the

Republican Party will be unable to win national elections if it does not bring more of them under its tent.

Can Republicans make that happen?

In the long term, it's possible. Hispanics tend to skew conservative on many issues that define Republican voters, such as opposition to abortion, gay rights, and organized labor. But in recent years, the GOP's often harsh rhetoric about illegal immigration has turned off Latino voters. During the primary season, Romney moved right on immigration, vowing to block illegal immigrants from getting jobs and benefits so they'd "self-deport." He also promised to veto the DREAM Act, which would allow many children of illegal immigrants to apply for U.S. citizenship. "Romney has dug himself into a great big hole with Latinos on immigration," said Ana Navarro, an adviser to John McCain in 2008. That hole got deeper when Obama issued the executive order ending deportations of illegal immigrants who arrived as minors and offering them a chance to stay in the U.S. permanently.

So Hispanics will back Obama?

Yes, but the question is whether the lopsided poll numbers will hold up on Election Day. Unemployment among Latinos is 10.3 percent. Many Latino leaders have strongly criticized Obama for failing to craft a national immigration policy and for deporting a record 1.4 million illegal immigrants. With many white voters deserting the Democrats, analysts say Obama cannot win if his share of the Hispanic vote drops below 65 percent. Romney hopes to chip away at Obama's Hispanic support, especially among Cuban-Americans in the swing state of Florida. The Obama campaign, meanwhile, is counting on Hispanic voters to deliver two other critical swing states, Nevada and Colorado. "All they need is to be inspired," said Armando Navarro, a political scientist at the University of California, Riverside. "We are truly the balance of power, we are the swing vote."

Battling for el corazón of Texas

Nowhere is the Latino vote more significant in the long term than in Texas, where the Latino population has grown by 3 million in the past 10 years and one in three residents is now Hispanic. Republican presidential candidates have won this deep-red state in every election since 1976, but unless the party can improve its share of the Latino vote, Texas could turn blue within a decade. Fortunately for the GOP, it now has a rising Hispanic star in Texas — Ted Cruz, a Cuban-American attorney who was swept to victory in last month's U.S. Senate primary on a wave of Tea Party support. If he wins in November, Cruz could play a major role in attracting conservative-minded Latinos to the GOP. But Texas Democrats see a future just as promising for Julián Castro, the 37-year-old mayor of San Antonio, who has been tapped to give the keynote speech at the Democratic National Convention in September. Cruz and Castro, said Dallas Morning News columnist Wayne Slater, represent "the radically different poles that will divide — and will define — our politics for the next generation."

Possible WN topics

- What other key groups might decide this election? Why? How?
- What might Romney and Obama do to capture more Latino voters?
- Pick a line from this AoW and reflect on it

Directions:

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading. Mark up the text with questions and/or comments.
3. Write a one-page reflection on your own sheet of paper.

Five myths about political conventions

Source: Martin Cohen, *Washington Post*/ August 16, 2012

1. Nothing substantive comes out of the conventions.

Yes, the parties' standard-bearers have already been selected and presented to the public. But the conventions give the parties a chance to shape their images and platforms.

In some years, the parties have emerged from the conventions with sharply contrasting tones. For example, when the Democrats were split over the Vietnam War in 1968, the party's elites picked Vice President Hubert Humphrey at the convention in Chicago, and the antiwar faction went ballistic. Police and protesters battled in the streets, while pro- and antiwar delegates shouted each other down in the convention hall. Meanwhile, the Republican Party met in Miami Beach and had a tranquil coronation of Richard Nixon. The GOP came out looking better — and went on to win in November. And incidentally, the chaos in Chicago led to the reforms that created the modern nominating system.

The 1992 conventions pitted Republican culture warriors Pat Buchanan and Pat Robertson, whose calls to "take back our country" sounded tone-deaf to many voters, against Democrats Bill Clinton and Al Gore, who projected youth, vitality and progress. The country rewarded their social liberalism in November as George H.W. Bush lost his bid for a second term.

And in 2004, each convention sought to portray its candidate as a war hero. The Democrats made John Kerry's service in Vietnam a key theme, only to see it tarnished by the swift boat ad campaign. George W. Bush, who did not see combat in Vietnam, trumpeted his strong leadership after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and during the still-popular wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Bush's manufactured military career dominated Kerry's actual one.

Considering how negative the 2012 campaign has been, it would not be surprising if both conventions focused mostly on the flaws and shortcomings of their opponents — a classic "lesser of two evils" election.

2. The nominee's speech is the most important part of the convention.

Many of us might get our fill of the candidates before the party meetings start. However, other speeches can have a lasting effect on the rest of the campaign.

In 1980, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy's attempt to challenge President Jimmy Carter for the Democratic nomination failed, but Kennedy's words at the convention proved memorable. His "the dream shall never die" speech, imploring the party to renew its commitment to economic justice, roused convention-goers to their feet. And his endorsement of his onetime rival helped give Carter a bump in public support.

In contrast, Buchanan's "culture war" speech dragged down the Bush-Quayle ticket in 1992, turning off moderate voters with moralistic rhetoric.

Who will steal the show in 2012? My bet is on former president Bill Clinton, who will officially place President Obama's name in nomination, and who will probably use the opportunity to burnish his record and that of his wife, Hillary Rodham Clinton, the once-and-maybe-future presidential candidate.

3. The convention bounce is meaningless.

Convention bounces — higher favorability ratings for a candidate after the party's meeting — are generally thought to occur because many voters are just beginning to pay attention to the candidates, and their first impression is usually a good one, considering that the candidates can control the setting and message at a convention much more easily than at any other time in the campaign. The bounce may be more a reflection of hype than a measure of sustained support.

But sometimes a convention can kick-start a campaign to victory, such as Bill Clinton's in 1992. His 16-point post-convention jump in the polls, compared with George H.W. Bush's five-point rise, was the biggest since surveys began measuring the bounce in 1964.

In other years, the lack of a bounce has hurt a faltering campaign. Democrat George McGovern didn't get one in 1972, while Kerry's favorability rating went down after his 2004 convention. Those were bad signs for both candidates, who fell short in their bids for the White House. Given the latest polls, such a bounce might be more important for Mitt Romney than for Obama.

4. The delegates are a bunch of political hacks on a taxpayer-funded junket.

First of all, the delegates travel to the conventions at their own expense. Second, you do not need to be a current or former elected official to attend. The gatherings are certainly dominated by those with political experience, but ordinary voters — with a little ambition, luck and disposable income — have a decent shot at attending.

The delegate process varies among states, but anyone can apply with the local party office. Each state is allotted delegates in proportion to its population and with regard to its partisan voting history. States that are deeper shades of blue, as measured by Democratic votes for president and for governor, have more delegates invited to the Democratic convention, for example. California has been allocated 611 Democratic delegates this year, while Delaware has 32.

5. There are no surprises.

Even though a vice presidential candidate is now more likely to be selected a few weeks ahead of time, the convention is often a coming-out party, setting the tone for the rest of his or her political career. The prototypical example occurred four years ago when Sarah Palin was thrust onto the scene by John McCain. Her folksy personality charmed or rankled, depending on where you fell on the ideological spectrum. The GOP convention was must-see television simply because the country was discovering this fascinating individual.

And in 2004, a young state senator from Illinois thrilled the Democratic crowd with a speech that showcased his life story and his belief in a better America. We all know what happened to that guy.

While Romney's running mate, Rep. Paul Ryan, is a rising conservative star in Washington, most Americans don't know much about him. The Republican convention is his chance to change that. However, with Sen. Marco Rubio delivering the speech introducing Romney, many in the party may be surprised to find themselves wishing that their nominee had made a different choice.

Possible WN topics

- Will you watch either of the conventions? Why? Why not? Explain.
- Would you ever try to be a delegate? Why? Why not? Explain
- What issue (or issues) do you think are the most important in this election? Explain.

Directions:

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading. Mark up the text with questions and/or comments.
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Five Crucial Factors to Watch, Just 58 Days From the Election

Source: Jeff Zeleny and Jim Rutenberg/ *New York Times*/9/8/12

WASHINGTON — Two months before the election, President Obama and Mitt Romney agree on one thing: the collection of states where the race will be decided.

As Mr. Obama opened a two-day bus tour of Florida on Saturday, Mr. Romney set his sights on trying to put Virginia back in the Republican column. Television advertisements from both sides were filling the airwaves in those two vital states and six others from Nevada to New Hampshire, while outside groups supporting the candidates tested for traction elsewhere.

With the political conventions over, the battle to determine whether Mr. Obama will win re-election or Mr. Romney will become the 45th president of the United States is fully engaged. The race has been deadlocked, according to many measures, and each side was predicting that it would see no lift from its convention. That seems to have been true in Mr. Romney's case, while Mr. Obama's aides were hopeful that new polls due out this week would prove them wrong.

But for now, Mr. Obama may hold a slight edge because the race remains essentially tied, which means voter disappointment has not turned into a resounding call for his defeat despite the challenging economic climate.

Here are a few things to watch in the 58 days ahead:

Electoral Map

The roster of battleground states has not changed much, but one that Republicans had dearly hoped to put in play appears to have broken decisively: Pennsylvania. Mr. Romney spent time and money in the state, which voted Democratic in the last five presidential elections, but Republican strategists now say it seems out of reach.

Wisconsin, which has 10 electoral votes and is home to Mr. Romney's running mate, Representative Paul D. Ryan, may offer Mr. Romney the best chance to expand his options. Republicans have not won there since 1984, despite fighting hard in almost every election. Wisconsin was not one of the eight states where the Romney campaign placed its first flight of general election ads late last week, but one party strategist said, "Keep watching."

By this point, Mr. Romney had hoped to put at least a few more states into safer Republican territory. North Carolina, which Mr. Obama narrowly carried in 2008, is at the top of the list. But the state is still competitive enough that Mr. Romney and Republican groups feel compelled to keep advertising there, complicating their hopes of making Wisconsin and Michigan more competitive.

Some Democratic strategists say that winning Florida remains a reach for Mr. Obama, but his visit this weekend suggests that the White House has not given up and at a minimum will make Mr. Romney spend a lot more time and money in the state.

And Democrats say they are happily surprised by polls showing Mr. Obama running strong in Ohio, whose working-class voters have been exposed to heavy advertising portraying Mr. Romney as a job killer.

Debates

In a race that has featured little significant movement between the candidates, the three presidential debates this fall are taking on even greater importance. For weeks, Mr. Obama and Mr. Romney have been preparing for their encounters on Oct. 3 in Denver; Oct. 16 in Hempstead, N.Y.; and Oct. 22 in Boca Raton, Fla. With each passing debate, millions of Americans will probably cast their ballot, given the rise of early voting and balloting by mail in many Western states.

Tens of millions of people will watch the debates — four years ago, viewership ranged from 52 million to 63 million — almost certainly a much bigger television audience than the totals for the conventions.

Ads and Messages

After spending the spring and summer trying to turn Mr. Romney's success as a business executive from a positive to a negative, characterizing him as uncaring about the middle class, Mr. Obama's aides and allies intend to graft their portrayal onto specific policy areas.

They suggested that one attack, building on the president's argument that Mr. Romney intends essentially to privatize Medicare, would contend that the Republican ticket's next target would be another immensely popular program, Social Security.

In the past, Mr. Ryan has supported adding personal investment accounts to Social Security, a fundamental shift in the program that most Democrats say would leave the elderly vulnerable to unpredictable swings in the financial markets.

Having intently studied the 2004 race, when President George W. Bush won re-election after defining Mr. Kerry on his terms during the spring and summer, Mr. Obama's advisers are convinced that the most crucial advertising period is already over, and that they accomplished what they had to by introducing Mr. Romney to the nation as a rapacious capitalist.

Mr. Romney's team is betting that early ad spending is largely wasted, and that a final and furious campaign will move the race in his direction when it most counts. The campaign's belief is that continued disappointing economic data will feed its slogan, "Obama Isn't Working," and give a new edge to the question that Mr. Romney is posing at every opportunity: "Are you better off than you were four years ago?"

On Saturday, the Democratic "super PAC" Priorities USA Action released an advertising campaign highlighting a study by the nonpartisan Tax Policy Center that estimated that Mr. Romney's plans would raise taxes on the middle class while cutting them for the wealthy. The Romney campaign has said the finding is based on flawed assumptions.

Like the Democrats, Republicans say they intend to link their broader economic message to specific policies: cutting spending and reducing the national debt, working to ensure the solvency of Medicare for future generations, cutting expensive regulations and avoiding tax increases.

Over the next two months, residents of swing states will see ads on the issues that matter most to them: foreclosures in Nevada, Medicare in Florida, military spending in North Carolina and Virginia, and, especially from the Republicans, the federal budget deficit just about everywhere.

Ballots

There is one factor in the campaign that has yet to get much attention but could influence the outcome: third-party candidacies in many states, most notably that of former Gov. Gary Johnson of New Mexico, the Libertarian Party's presidential nominee.

Mr. Johnson, who argued for free markets, fewer wars and the legalization of marijuana during his brief run for the 2012 Republican nomination, hardly shows up in polls. But he is on the ballot in more than three dozen states and is trying for more.

Mr. Johnson shares some of the cross-party appeal of Representative Ron Paul of Texas, who complimented him publicly last week. Advisers said Mr. Johnson's potential for cutting into Mr. Romney's support was greatest in Florida, where Mr. Romney is basically tied with Mr. Obama, but could also have an impact in Arizona, Nevada, New Hampshire and North Carolina.

They said Mr. Johnson's potential to eat into Mr. Obama's support was greatest in Colorado, Iowa, New Mexico, Oregon and Wisconsin.

Republican officials have already tried to challenge Mr. Johnson's place on the ballot or are trying to in states including Iowa, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia. Many of the challenges have failed — courts recently rejected efforts to throw him off the ballot in Virginia — and Roger Stone, a Republican Party veteran who is advising Mr. Johnson, said he was optimistic that Mr. Johnson would qualify in all 50 states.

The Republican Party of Virginia also failed in a bid last week to remove former Representative Virgil Goode from the presidential ballot there. He is the nominee for the Constitution Party and could draw disaffected Tea Party adherents away from the Republican Party.

Money

For the first time since the advent of public financing after Watergate, neither major-party candidate will accept matching funds, forcing both to keep raising money right up until Election Day. That means Mr. Obama and Mr. Romney have to build substantial room into their schedules for fund-raising, including more time than they would like traveling to places that are not competitive politically but are flush with wealthy donors, starting with New York and Los Angeles.

At the end of July, when the last official figures were available, Mr. Romney and the related Republican Party presidential committees had about \$186 million on hand, compared with about \$124 million for Mr. Obama and the Democrats. On Saturday, Mr. Obama wrote in a Twitter message that his convention had prompted 700,000 new donations to his campaign.

Possible WN topics

- Which of the five factors in this article are most crucial? Explain.
- Will you watch the upcoming presidential debates? Why? Why not?
- Research one topic that interests you and find Obama's and Romney's stance. Comment which side of the issue you support and explain why.

Directions:

1. Mark your confusion.
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America's War on Wildfires

Tens of thousands of wildfires ravaged extensive areas of the country this summer. Is this the new normal?

Source: *The Week* September 14, 2012

How many wildfires were there?

More than 45,000, and they destroyed more acres of forest than in any year on record. An unusually mild winter that left little snowpack gave way to a hot, dry summer across much of the South and Midwest, turning huge swaths of the country into a giant tinderbox. Almost 13,000 square miles of land in California, Utah, New Mexico, Colorado, and other states — an area larger than Massachusetts — have been burned by wildfires this year. And the fire season isn't over yet. Last week, 34 large fires were still burning. Over the past decade, there have been six unusually severe fire seasons — suggesting that extensive wildfires have become the new normal. "Fire activity has definitely increased in terms of overall activity and acreage burned," said William Sommers, former director of fire research for the U.S. Forest Service.

Why are wildfires getting worse?

Climate change is clearly a factor. The past decade has been hotter in the U.S. than any in recorded history, and prolonged drought has left forests highly combustible. The spread of human development into once-remote, fire-prone areas hasn't helped. One out of every four homes in Colorado, which suffered a brutal fire season this summer, has been built in a "red zone" of high wildfire risk. This kind of sprawl leads fire officials to quickly suppress any fire that threatens human lives or dwellings, which disrupts the natural fire cycle — setting the stage for larger, more intense fires.

What is the natural fire cycle?

Wooded areas naturally accumulate lots of deadwood, leaves, pine needles, and underbrush on the forest floor. For millennia, nature's way of clearing this undergrowth came in the form of smaller fires that would periodically roll across forests, thinning them and renewing the soil. Human habitation changes that pattern, as people suppress all fires to protect lives and property. As a result, the underbrush and deadwood grow very dense — and serve as a huge store of kindling when a fire is sparked. Such fires can burn intensely and race rapidly across the landscape, defying efforts to stop them. This year, the fire season was so bad the U.S. Forest Service changed its firefighting strategy for the first time in decades.

What was the new strategy?

The Forest Service ordered all blazes to be snuffed out, no matter their size or location. In recent years, smaller blazes in remote areas had been allowed to burn, to restore the natural fire cycle. But controlling these "prescribed fires" has become more difficult because of the drought. Prescribed fires are also expensive to carry out — and federal firefighting funding has been slashed by \$512 million, or 15 percent, since 2010. So in the face of this year's extraordinary conditions, the agency decided that suppressing all fires quickly was its only option.

Does that make sense?

In the short term, perhaps. But total suppression is not only counter-productive, it's impossible. Thousands of fires still occur each month, sparked by everything from recklessly discarded cigarettes to lightning strikes. And budget cuts are making firefighting efforts even harder: The U.S. Forest Service employs about 10,000 firefighters to cover dozens of states, and relies on local crews for help. State and local government budget cuts, however, have eaten into that support. In California, for example, the state cut 750 seasonal firefighters last year, in order to shave \$34 million off its budget. In recent years, the federal government has also failed to invest in new equipment, such as the air tankers that drop thousands of gallons of water or fire retardant on wildfires. The Forest Service had 43 air tankers on call in 2000, but when some of these decades-old planes crashed, many were taken out of service, and there were just nine available tankers earlier this year. President Obama finally signed a \$24 million bill to fund seven additional tankers — but many of those will not be operational for months.

What does the future hold?

The federal government is slowly moving toward a more preventive approach, through a computerized system that would model fire-prone regions, and predict the likelihood of fires and how quickly they might spread. This would alert fire officials to do some controlled burns and take other steps to stop wildfires from getting out of control. "Simulating the fire behavior in a computer is really the future," said Mark Finney, a U.S. Forest Service researcher. But the technology has been very slow to emerge. The government originally said the prediction system would be operational by 2007, but ran into many programming problems, and now says a scaled-back version will be rolled out next year. That'll be too late, of course, for the thousands of people whose communities were destroyed in 2012, as wildfires reduced vast forests to smoldering ash. "Billions of dollars, homes, and people's lives were at stake," said Chester Joy, a retired natural-resources expert for the Government Accountability Office. "And now we're paying the price."

Punishing arsonists and fools

About 90 percent of wildfires are started by humans, experts estimate. And over the last decade, as wildfires have become more damaging, the penalties for setting them — either inadvertently or on purpose — have become more severe. Two arsonists in California now face the death penalty for setting wildfires that resulted in the loss of human life. Texas, meanwhile, recently increased the maximum penalty for arson to life in prison. States are also ratcheting up the punishments on people who start wildfires through negligence. Utah now has a law requiring those responsible for starting a fire to pay back the costs of fighting it, which typically run into millions of dollars. Some reckless fire starters are even sent to jail. William Rupp of Jones Valley, Calif., was jailed for four years in 2006 for "negligent use of a lawn mower," after the blade of his ride-on mower struck a rock. The resulting sparks ignited drought-stricken grass, sparking a major wildfire that destroyed 80 homes.

Possible WN topics

- Consider other consequences of global warming. In what other areas are we facing a “new normal”? How else is global warming changing our world?
- Do you agree with the increased penalties for those who start fires? Why? Why not?
- Google “global warming” and comment on some of your findings.