

# James Benedict

The Seattle Times Critique

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## Seattle Times Digital and Interactives Project Critique: Red state, Blue state

The Seattle Times has some of the cleanest digital design and most intuitive graphics of any publication today. Professors in both my journalism and informatics courses have presented your projects as pinnacles of understandable design.

*Red state, Blue state* shows the changing political divide of Washington voters since 1968. This story became even more relevant after the most recent divisive Presidential election and it is impressive you thought of the idea back in September.

The first map does a good job showing the change over time, but the animation would change before I could grasp what any single map was conveying. The following static maps for each year address this issue well. I am a fan of repeating the components of visualization with more context to provide an interested reader with the information they want without bogging down the initial graphic for the causal reader.

While the interactivity of the first map gave me each counties name, it didn't add too much else. I wish you had added more information to the tooltip because you are already dedicating the resources to render an interactive graphic. I like the decision to include static images below instead of repeating the interactive map. The decision to keep it simple helped the mobile presentation and functionality greatly.

The final cartogram helps alleviate the geographic map's population bias. I believe hexagons preserve the relative position of counties better than rectangles, and if this were my project I would use them instead. Hexagons also increase the fidelity of the State's shape, which would make a more compelling graphic in my opinion.

Poking around *the source code* I was happy to see the amount of vanilla javascript used. As much as I love plugins and libraries, I believe plain javascript provides the best functionality and is worth the extra time programming.

In the process I also discovered the *Seattle Times developer blog*. Regardless if I get this internship, I am happy I can still learn from your developers.

I always spend much of my time programming assuring I have clear documentation so the most people around me could collaborate. I strongly believe the value of open source code and a transparent work environment. One of the projects I'm most proud of was a *template / tutorial for building journalistic responsive websites*.