THE FRONT PORCH OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE: JAMES COX AND THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 1920

JOSEPH FAYKOSH

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 2009

Committee:

STEPHEN ORTIZ, Advisor

SCOTT MARTIN

JEFFREY PEAKE

ABSTRACT

Dr. Stephen Ortiz, Advisor

This work will focus on the presidential election of 1920 and the campaign of James M. Cox. In it, I argue that the campaign was not simply a referendum on the League of Nations or Woodrow Wilson's presidency. Instead, Cox's campaign inadvertently changed the way presidential campaigns were conducted and how candidates addressed the issues. The first chapter will examine the political issues that impacted this presidential election, dispelling the notion that the election was simply a single issue referendum on World War I, prohibition, the League of Nations, or the progressive movement. While the final chapter will discuss how Cox responded to the various issues, this chapter will be important in demonstrating the extremely difficult political climate in which Governor Cox campaigned. The second chapter will describe the changing political geography and the decline of partisan politics. Included in this chapter is a discussion of the importance of both candidates emerging from the state of Ohio and how this particular election marked the end of party machines dominating the nomination process. The third chapter will examine the Cox campaign in contrast with that of Harding. This chapter will reveal the myriad ways that Cox attempted to adapt his campaign to fit the issues and changing political landscape. Here, it will be demonstrated how the campaign and election marked the blending of the two eras, the effects of which are still felt today.

While other books provide the reader a greater sense of Warren Harding as a candidate and the way his campaigned negotiated the issues, Harding's perspective is not dominant in my work. Instead, Harding's campaign will serve as the constant and Cox's as the variable. Harding added to the history of presidential campaigns primarily in the hiring of an advertising agent and in his savvy use of celebrity endorsements. But, his campaign largely kept him on his front porch in Marion, Ohio, borrowing heavily from the McKinley model. Cox's campaign would mimic, in many ways, the William Jennings Bryan speaking tours. But Cox's campaign also covered a great many more issues than Harding's, and he reached more states throughout the country to present the first truly national presidential campaign. It was Cox's campaign, and not Harding's, that was more in accordance with what voters came to expect of their candidates. Thus, it was Cox's campaign that would serve as the model for the future, while Harding's front-porch has been relegated to the nostalgia of the 1920s.

“Defeat should serve as well as victory to shake the soul and let the glory out.”

-Edwin Markham

This work is dedicated to presidential candidates. The winners first got me interested in politics, but it is the “also-rans” whose compelling life stories have kept me there.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

"Writing a history thesis is a long and arduous…blah blah blah."

I picked a subject that was interesting to me, and has been interesting to me my entire life: the presidents and presidential campaigns.

My father first introduced me to the presidents, and one of my earliest memories is of him reading to me from a book of presidents. After all of the authors and historians I have encountered, I still find his opinions and his values to be my most formative.

My mother has always demonstrated the value of hard work, and being a good, happy person. Together, the two have created a happy historian.

My siblings, Brittany, Michael, Veronica, and Andrea have always known that I was a history nerd, piling a stack of books to go to the supermarket fifteen minutes away. And yet, they loved me and I love them.

My Grandma and Grandpa Faykosh and Grandma Hernandez have all indulged my interest over the years, along with Pat and Katherine Rigg. I will always be grateful. I have kept every book of presidents that they gave me.

My extended "family" has always been more help than they know, and I love knowing that I can count on them when in need of advice or a laugh: Dave and Jackie, Harvey, and Jim Hyman, Mindy Barney, Purvi Bheda, and Candi Koenig.

My Bowling Green "family" of graduate students have provided enormous help, in relieving stress, providing friendship, and helping bounce ideas around for this project: Beth Dutridge-Corps, Michael Martin Carver, Rob MacDonald, and Norma Flores. Also, for proofreading assistance, in addition to the above assistances: Gary Cirelli and Stephanie Gaskill.

My formal and informal mentors over the years, who have helped steer me in the right direction and follow my instincts: Sam Hatcher, Tricia Langhals, Robin Judd, Randy Roth, Rick Livingston, Rebecca Barry, Emily Carpenter, Beth Griech-Polelle, Tina Amos, and DeeDee Wentland. I appreciate everything they have done for me over the years.

My friends at the Hayes Presidential Center, who helped me rediscover my love for history, and who provided me with invaluable help in tracking down resources for this thesis. I would not be here without Nan Card, and the assistance of Tom Culbertson, Becky Hill, Mary Lou Rendon, and John Ransom.

The staffs at the Hayes Presidential Center Reading Room, the Jerome Library at Bowling Green State University, the Carlson Library at the University of Toledo, and the Ohio Historical Society have all been of great assistance.

Finally, to my thesis committee, who have helped form this project, and my understanding of the historical scholarship: Jeffrey Peake and Scott Martin. And to my graduate advisor, who has helped me enormously to develop as a scholar and as a writer: Stephen Ortiz.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: THE FRONT PORCH OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

The election of 1920 was not a turning point in American presidential politics, but was instead a moment where the past held off the future. Warren G. Harding famously won the presidency by capitalizing on the memory and campaign of President William McKinley, and by benefitting from a rejection of the incumbent party. He promised to return the nation to "normalcy," its pre-World War I state. The untold story is that of James M. Cox, the Democratic nominee for president, and his campaign that brought the presidential election to the voting public. Cox embarked on a lengthy, expensive, and exhaustive tour of the United States. Although candidates had made long speaking tours before, Cox took advantage of faster and more reliable transportation and made efforts to reach voters in every state outside of the South (then solidly Democratic). Cox's campaign did not rely on the parties' traditional tactic; he was not content to rely solely on the South and traditional battleground states to determine the outcome. Instead, James Cox ushered in a new era with the first national presidential campaign.

Just four years after the election of 1920, Arthur Schlessinger (Sr.) and Erik Ericksson wrote about the decline in voter turnout for presidential elections as related to the major personalities and issues during each cycle. Schlessinger and Eriksson concluded that in elections featuring "compelling personalities," such as the elections in 1884 (James Blaine vs. Grover Cleveland), 1904 (Theodore Roosevelt vs. Alton Parker), and 1912 (W. H. Taft vs. Roosevelt vs. Woodrow Wilson), a remarkably low voter turnout was reported. Conversely, elections produced higher voter turnout when dominated by controversial issues, such as in 1888 (a debate on the controversial rise in tariffs) and in 1896 (the debate over the gold standard). This contradicted a commonly held assumption, Schlessinger and Eriksson argued, that "the average American is

more interested in magnetic or spectacular personalities than in basic principles."[1] The election of 1920 was neither solely about the issues nor solely about the personalities, but a combination of both. What was revealed through the campaign process was the emerging importance of campaign travel, advertising, and expertly framing the opponent.

The election represented the beginning of a new era, marking the decline of the dominance of party politics and the beginning of the age of personality-influenced elections. Both candidates capitalized on the emerging cultural trends like motion pictures, popular athletics (baseball, golf), radio, and transportation networks. Though Cox and Harding were not the charismatic campaign presences that Woodrow Wilson, William Jennings Bryan, or Theodore Roosevelt had been, both parties attempted to turn the conversation away from the issues and emphasized their candidates' private life and upbringing. Contributing to this tactic was the fact that the Harding's and Cox's views on the issues differed only negligibly in many instances. To highlight their differences, and to help a burgeoning electorate decide between the two, both campaigns charted very different paths. For Harding, this meant harkening back to the days of William McKinley and adopting a front porch campaign that would combine his folksy approachability and accessibility with an organized and calm demeanor. Governor Cox, on the other hand, would go in the opposite direction, arguing that the public had a right to hear the various views of the candidates for office. "I want to take the vote to the front porch of the American people," he argued, in a direct challenge to the Harding approach.[2] But, the declaration made no mention of why direct appeals were necessary for Cox as the Democratic candidate in this election. Among the issues were: a waning economy; an unpopular incumbent president of the same party; the unpopular League of Nations (which Cox supported); and the

[1] Arthur M. Schlessinger and Erik M. Eriksson, "The Vanishing Voter," *The New Republic*, October 15, 1924, 4-6.

[2] "Cox Opens Drive Wednesday," *The Lima (OH) News*, August 9, 1920, Section A1.

emergence of an anti-progressive electorate. These factors combined with the large number of newspapers under ownership by Republican supporters to create a climate that would not afford Cox the luxury of Harding's relaxed air. Cox had an exhausting itinerary, making over four hundred speeches and visiting thirty-six states (including the West Coast, the first presidential candidate to stop in those states) in his two months of campaigning, a significant feat in 1920. Though ultimately unsuccessful in his campaign for president, Cox's whistle-stop campaign tours are still in use by candidates today. Conversely, while Harding eventually won the election, his campaign became a relic of a bygone era.

To date, there are only two books that focus solely on the 1920 presidential election. The first, *The Road to Normalcy: The Presidential Campaign and Election of 1920* by Wesley M. Bagby, concentrated on the ideological shift that occurred in the selection of the two candidates, representing a real break with the previous Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson administrations. Bagby described the nominating procedures for the two candidates by their respective parties. Yet, the actual campaign and election were given limited attention, focusing almost exclusively on Harding's campaign while giving scant attention to Cox's. Bagby's book followed the conventional narrative of the 1920 election: Cox was doomed to failure because he was unable to separate himself from Wilson's administration and the increasingly unpopular League of Nations. Bagby's sole chapter concentrating on the election contained small sections on various issues, like "Slush Funds" or "League Pessimism." In fact, Bagby argued that the actual drama involved in the presidential election was in the selection and nomination of Warren G. Harding, with the general election functioning merely as an entertaining sideshow.[3]

[3] Wesley Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy: The Presidential Campaign and Election of 1920* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962).

The second book to focus on the 1920 election, *Selling the President, 1920: Albert D. Lasker, Advertising, and the Election of Warren G. Harding* by John Morello, described Warren Harding as a product to be sold and consumed by Americans. Morello concentrated on the advertising genius of Albert Lasker, the political consultant whose influence on campaign procedures can still be felt today. The book discussed the election solely from Harding's perspective, and focused exclusively on how Harding dealt with various issues such as the allegation that he fathered an illegitimate child, or was of "mulatto" descent. Morello argued that Lasker's main contribution during these crises was to create the distracting carnival-like atmosphere in Harding's hometown, Marion, Ohio. Rather than addressing the issues and rumors, Lasker urged Harding to ignore them. All of these events are told solely from the Harding campaign's perspective, and with Lasker as the main character. Morello writes very little about the actual electoral processes or results. James Cox is also seldom mentioned, and the narrative reinforces the popular notion that the presidential election was decided in the favor of Republicans before it began.[4]

The available monographs on James Cox's life were few and deeply biased. The first, *Cox-The Man* by Roger W. Babson, was published in 1920, shortly after Cox's nomination. The author claimed to be exposing Republican anti-Cox sentiments as contradictory, asserting that he and Harding were very similar in their small-town upbringing and personalities. Any disagreement with Cox, Babson claimed, was a result of political bias. While a campaign biography such as this is clearly slanted, the book offered a unique look at Cox's life and upbringing.[5] Cox's own autobiography, *Journey Through My Years*, offered little about the

[4] John A. Morello, *Selling the President, 1920: Albert D. Lasker, Advertising, and the Election of Warren G. Harding* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2001).

[5] Roger Babson, *Cox-The Man* (New York: Bretano's, 1920).

election of 1920. Instead, Cox focused on his career as a journalist and governor, and viewed his defeat in 1920 as a result of aligning himself with Wilson's League of Nations. In addition, Cox still blamed a senatorial conspiracy for bringing money to Harding's campaign.[6] James E. Cebula's book, *James Cox: Journalist and Politician*, was significantly more scholarly. The book focused as much on Cox's early life and journalism career as on his political career. In this narrative, Cox's candidacy was depicted as an almost sacrificial act, a fulfillment of an obligation to his party and symbol of Cox's loyalty to Wilson. Cebula's narrative also portrayed Cox as the victim of nostalgia and Wilson's failed policies. According to Cebula, Cox was unable to separate himself from the incumbent and simply could not overtake Warren Harding. The book then focused on Cox's return to publishing, leaving his candidacy as one very small part of Cox's long life.[7]

The available literature on Warren Harding was significantly larger. In the mid-1960s, as Harding's papers became accessible to historians, a mini-boom in Harding-related books occurred. The first, *The Available Man* by Andrew Sinclair was significant for removing any nostalgia from Harding's administration. Though Harding was extremely popular throughout his shortened term, the subsequent Teapot Dome scandal had tarnished his image. Sinclair's narrative was divided into "masks," the popular images the public had associated with the president. Included were discussions of these facets of Harding's life, like "the political innocent" or "the reluctant candidate." Sinclair cautioned historians against attempting to attach only one such mask to Harding and argued that too often friends and associates took advantage

[6] James M. Cox, *Journey Through My Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946).
[7] James E. Cebula, *James Cox: Journalist and Politician* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985).

of Harding's good nature. The election of 1920 was discussed in two chapters that trace his rise from obscurity and his role as a product of Albert Lasker's salesmanship.[8]

The second book, *The Shadow of Blooming Grove* by Francis Russell, was an explosive account of Harding's scandalous life both before and after the presidential election. Russell's book exposed Harding's various marital indiscretions, even though most rumors remained unsubstantiated. With many parts of his narrative blacked out by court order, Russell's book, like Sinclair's, was more revealing in what it avoids saying about Harding. Both authors took pains to demonstrate that Harding's associates and friends created most of the havoc for which his administration is remembered. Russell's narrative followed the other books in showing his candidacy was only truly effective with the hiring of Lasker and similarly able campaign staffers. But Russell's book proved the most difficult to engage academically, as it too often devolves into discussions and dissections of Harding's love interests. While interesting, especially when discussing the ways that Harding's campaign was almost ended by the affairs, the lack of creditable evidence makes this book a problematic source for this study.[9]

The other two books dealing solely with Harding's political career were much less sensational. Randolph Downes' *The Rise of Warren G. Harding, 1865-1920* was the most comprehensive book on Harding's upbringing and political career. The book avoided the tabloid revelations of Russell's tome, but similarly revealed Harding to be a pawn of a much greater machine. Downes wrote his book largely using Harding's own newspaper, *The Marion Star*. This provided a unique point of view, but an admittedly biased perspective. Downes' narrative reinforced the idea that the 1920 election was almost an afterthought, and that the real drama was

---

[8] Andrew Sinclair, *The Available Man: The Life Behind the Masks of Warren G. Harding* (Chicago: Quadrangle Paperbacks, 1965).

[9] Francis Russell, *The Shadow of Blooming Grove: Warren G. Harding and His Times* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968).

in Harding's unexpected nomination.[10] Eugene Trani and David L. Wilson wrote *The Presidency of Warren G. Harding* with the purpose of placing Harding's administration in a broader historical context. Trani and Wilson provided the demographics and depict the political landscape of the post-World War I period, giving the reader a great sense of the general events and tensions that elevated Harding from political novice to president. The book then focused on Harding's administration and the political appointments and decisions he made as president. Trani and Wilson, however, did not write about the election except to inform the reader of the political climate Harding inherited.[11]

While the books described above all served as the secondary sources for researching the 1920 presidential election, the literature on the Progressive Era and the transformations of American electoral politics provided the necessary context for properly exploring the election. Two books in particular stand out in the Progressive Era literature: Alan Dawley's *Struggles for Justice: Social Responsibility and the Liberal State* and John Milton Cooper, Jr.'s *The Pivotal Decades.* Taken together, they provided a strong discussion and complete picture of how both foreign and domestic issues mixed in the 1910s to create a polarizing political climate. During the Progressive Era, the role of the federal government grew significantly as Americans became increasingly more reliant on federal intervention into conservation, labor, suffrage, and immigration issues. The movement was beginning to end when the election of 1920 commenced,

[10] Randolph C. Downes, *The Rise of Warren Gamaliel Harding, 1865-1929* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1970).

[11] Eugene Trani and David Wilson, *The Presidency of Warren G. Harding* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1977).

and provided a referendum for an electorate divided on how much government intervention was necessary. [12]

The way that political parties responded to the electorate during this era was also informative. Morton Keller's *America's Three Regimes*, Michael McGerr's *The Decline of Popular Politics*, and Mark Wahlgren Summer's two works, *Rum, Romanism and Rebellion* and *Party Games*, each presented a thorough examination of the way political parties maintained power in the decades preceding 1920. In addition, the books provided a detailed account of how the political parties' machinery was becoming undone by progressive reforms, declining voter turnout, and a diverse electorate. All of these elements shaped the way political parties responded to their constituencies and how the two candidates for president in 1920 formed their campaigns.[13]

This work will focus on the presidential election of 1920 and the campaign of James M. Cox. In it, I argue that the campaign was not simply a referendum on the League of Nations or Woodrow Wilson's presidency. Instead, the Cox's campaign inadvertently changed the way presidential campaigns were conducted and how candidates addressed the issues. The first chapter will examine the political issues that impacted this presidential election, dispelling the notion that the election was simply a single issue referendum on World War I, prohibition, the League of Nations, or the progressive movement. While the final chapter will discuss how Cox

---

[12] John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Pivotal Decades: The United States, 1900-1920* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1990); and Alan Dawley, *Struggles for Justice: Social Responsibility and the Liberal State* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991).

[13] Morton Keller, *America's Three Regimes: A New Political History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Michael McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865-1928* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Mark Wahlgren Summers, *Rum, Romanism and Rebellion: The Making of a President, 1884* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000); and Mark Wahlgren Summers, *Party Games: Getting, Keeping, and Using Power in Gilded Age Politics* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

responded to the various issues, this chapter will be important in demonstrating the extremely difficult political climate in which Governor Cox campaigned. The second chapter will describe the changing political geography and the decline of partisan politics. Included in this chapter is a discussion of the importance of both candidates emerging from the state of Ohio and how this particular election marked the end of party machines dominating the nomination process. The third chapter will examine the Cox campaign in contrast with that of Harding. This chapter will reveal the myriad ways that Cox attempted to adapt his campaign to fit the issues and changing political landscape. Here, it will be demonstrated how the campaign and election marked the blending of the two eras, the effects of which are still felt today.

While other books provide the reader a greater sense of Warren Harding as a candidate and the way his campaigned negotiated the issues, Harding's perspective is not dominant in my work. Instead, Harding's campaign will serve as the constant and Cox's as the variable. Harding added to the history of presidential campaigns primarily in the hiring of an advertising agent and in his savvy use of celebrity endorsements. But, his campaign largely kept him on his front porch in Marion, Ohio, borrowing heavily from the McKinley model. Cox's campaign would mimic, in many ways, the William Jennings Bryan speaking tours. But Cox's campaign also covered a great many more issues than Harding's, and he reached more states throughout the country to present the first truly national presidential campaign. It was Cox's campaign, and not Harding's, that was more in accordance with what voters came to expect of their candidates. Thus, it was Cox's campaign that would serve as the model for the future, while Harding's front-porch has been relegated to the nostalgia of the 1920s.

CHAPTER 1-A GATHERING STORM: THE ISSUES IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 1920

The election of 1920 remains important less for the result than for the process, and less about the two major candidates' personalities than the specter of political personalities from the past. Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson had dominated the political arena for the previous two decades. But when Roosevelt died in 1919, the Republicans lost their most consensus leader, while Wilson's stroke in the same year effectively deprived the Democrats of theirs. Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt first emerged on the political scene in 1920, but they would not fully realize their political potential until years later. Instead, the political contest would feature two unassuming men, all but forgotten in today's history books: Warren G. Harding and James M. Cox.

The two candidates for president in 1920 were not on par with the engaging and bold personalities of their immediate predecessors. Never before or since have the two major party presidential nominees been so similar. Harding and Cox were both men from small-town Ohio, educated at local colleges, and trained as professional newspaper men. Both men built their papers into vaunted successes (Harding with *The Marion Morning Star*, Cox with the *Dayton Daily News*), but were persuaded to give up their lucrative positions to run for public office. In 1920, Warren Harding was serving as the first popularly-elected senator from the state of Ohio (after the passage of the 17th amendment, which guaranteed direct election of senators), while James Cox was serving a second term as governor of Ohio, having been easily re-elected in 1918. Neither man was well-known outside of the state of Ohio, a feature that both parties hoped to craft into a positive. Following the turbulent preceding decade dominated by Wilson and Roosevelt, both Harding and Cox would be a welcome, quiet change. It was clear that while

Harding and Cox would not be compelling candidates in terms of personality, the issues of the election would serve to frame their candidacy for the voting electorate.[14]

The 1910s had seen a great upheaval throughout all sectors of American life. The progressive movement produced the passage of four new amendments to the Constitution, with two amendments increasing the federal government's powers in ways few had previously thought possible. The 16th amendment (1913) established a federal income tax, a dramatic departure from the laissez-faire policies of the federal government that had dominated the late-nineteenth century. The 17th amendment (1913) guaranteed the direct election of United States senators, ending the selection by members of the individual state legislatures. Reformers, principally the Populists, had suggested this change as a way of increasing democratic participation and the responsiveness of senators to their constituents' needs. The 18th amendment (1919) prohibited manufacturing and selling alcohol, the final step in a fifty year battle on the part of temperance advocates. Finally, the 19th Amendment (1920) extended the franchise to include women, thereby granting all citizens over the age of 21 the ability to vote.

Each of these amendments greatly changed the way many viewed the role of the federal government. Moreover, this expansion of powers continued with the United States' entry into World War I, which was an expensive enterprise in terms of both money and manpower. Once the Allied Powers won the war, President Wilson pushed for the League of Nations, an entity that he declared would prevent future wars. All of these issues and their ramifications would dominate the discourse of the presidential election of 1920. Since Harding and Cox spent months of their respective campaigns trying to convince the American people that each was the right man to address the issues, this chapter will examine these major issues, showing the differences between the two candidates' positions.

---

[14] Bagby, *Road to Normalcy*, 122.

I. WORLD WAR I

The effects of World War I still hung in the air as men and women, for the first time, voted in the presidential election on November 2, 1920. Virtually every aspect of American life had been altered by the United States' entry into the conflict. While Americans were deciding between Warren Harding and James Cox, the election also served as a referendum on the new role the government was playing in their lives as a result of progressives and the Wilson administration.

The government's decision to enter the war mobilized citizens to manufacture goods for use in the war, drafted young men into military service, ushered women in cities from the domestic sphere to production lines in factories, and allowed the federal government to take a greater role in the regulation of business. To be sure, the United States' involvement in World War I was much less lengthy and the nation's death toll was far lower than those of the European belligerents. By the time the United States entered the war in April 1917, the conflict was already in its third year. At home, the decision for the United States to enter the war was very controversial.[15]

As the war erupted in Europe, American leaders were unsure of how to proceed. President Wilson urged American citizens to "be neutral in thought as well as action," as the United States was in a precarious position financially and diplomatically. The European nations relied on the United States to provide the food and munitions to survive a lengthy war, and were paying America's farmers and businessmen well, helping the United States emerge from its worst depression since the 1890s. Moreover, the Allied nations sought loans from the United

[15] For best discussions of World War I, the executive branch's reaction, and the effects, see: Robert Zieger, *America's Great War: World War I and the American Experience* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000); Josephus Daniels, *The Wilson Era: Years of War and After, 1917-1923* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1946); and Edward Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1998).

States, a move which could only help the United States economically but which belied the United States' avowals of neutrality.[16] In addition to the financial incentives, domestic opinion made neutrality seem a more attractive course. A major factor was the fact that the United States was not being directly threatened by the conflict in Europe. Increasingly, newspapers related the carnage and destruction in Europe to the American people, which exposed many to the conflict. Still while many were conflicted by the horrors of war, the fact remained that the fighting was a continent away, across the Atlantic Ocean. Involvement in the war might mean not only an end to the financial boom the United States was experiencing, but the potential for loss of life, as young men would be sent to fight and die in Europe. Many citizens were also divided by mixed allegiances, as increased immigration in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century had brought many new citizens from the very nations that were engaged in the war. More than one-third of the population was either foreign born or had at least one parent who had been, leaving significant ties to the warring nations of Europe. These divided loyalties made siding with either set of belligerents a problematic prospect. [17]

Other Americans were loath to enter the war because of their involvement in reform. Citizens who were active in various reform movements, like women's and workers' rights, government reform, or prohibition almost uniformly viewed the impending war as the enemy of their individual causes. They had watched the social progress in Europe come to a halt with the beginning of the hostilities and worried that the United States would suffer the same fate. As women's suffrage and prohibition began to win ratification in several state legislatures at the beginning of the decade, reformers feared their efforts would be wiped away by war.[18]

---

[16] Zieger, *America's Great War*, 7-19.
[17] Ibid, 14-16.
[18] Ibid, 15-22.

Between 1914 and 1917, President Wilson became increasingly ambivalent about the policy of neutrality. His secretary of state, William Jennings Bryan, along with many influential bankers and financial advisers, believed the United States should use the opportunity afforded by the war in Europe to expand the United States' economic, diplomatic and moral influences in South America and Asia. Wilson rejected these ideas, and he dedicated himself to ending the war. On May 7, 1915, however, a German torpedo struck the British passenger liner Lusitania en route from New York to Great Britain. Included in over 1,200 dead were 128 U.S. citizens, leading many newspaper editors nationwide to question the policy of neutrality and the safety of Americans.[19] Joining the pleas were some in Wilson's cabinet, including Secretary of State Bryan, who called for an examination of the United States' policy of neutrality. Specifically, Bryan argued for "non-intervention," which would effectively keep the United States from becoming entwined with the European conflict. The difference between Bryan's non-intervention policy and Wilson's neutrality was subtle, as Wilson's policy allowed the United States to remain engaged with the warring European nations. Wilson was then torn between his dual desires of continuing the United States' prosperous trade with Britain and the now-immediate danger the policy was placing on American lives. The State Department's Counselor, Robert Lansing, issued declarations to Germany to claim accountability for the actions and demanded that Germany not launch torpedoes at commercial vessels. Bryan resigned his post as secretary of state, as his proposed policy of non-intervention was being undermined by Lansing's letters to the German government. Without Bryan, Wilson's administration had no vocal proponents of non-intervention.[20]

[19] Ibid, 22.
[20] Ibid, 22-25.

The frustrations of voters and Wilson's political opponents only grew with the decision Wilson's appeal to Congress for the use of American force in World War I after two years of advocating neutrality. In 1916, Wilson faced a difficult re-election campaign against Republican Supreme Court Justice Charles Evans Hughes. President Wilson's supporters rallied around a cry first heard at the nominating convention: "He Kept Us Out of War!" Neutrality, however, was a tenuous balancing act.[21]

By the beginning of Wilson's second term, in early 1917, Wilson's pleas for neutrality looked all the more implausible. The German government reneged on their promise to cease submarine warfare leading Wilson to end diplomatic relations once again. Wilson requested Congress' consent to arm United States to arm merchant ships, but it was denied in a close vote. A few weeks later, Wilson released the infamous "Zimmerman Note" which demonstrated that German officials were making overtures to Mexican leaders for a potential operation against the United States. By late March, Germany had torpedoed three American ships and Wilson asked Congress for a special session where he asked for consent to war.[22] Several scholars have argued that the American's entry into the war was inevitable. According to historian Robert Zeiger, Wilson was motivated both by fervent religious beliefs and a strong desire to have a large role in brokering any resulting peace treaty. Wilson viewed his role as president as a means to spread democracy and truly believed that United States represented mankind's most advanced and enlightened achievement.[23]

The United States' involvement in the war lasted seventeen months, ending with the November 11, 1918 armistice. Over three hundred thousand Americans died or were wounded in

[21] Ibid, 17.
[22] Coffman, *War to End All Wars*, 6-8.
[23] Zieger, *America's Great War*, 44.

Europe,[24] and those that survived returned to a very different set of circumstances. Reformers found that their fears of the war halting reform were un-founded, as they were able to push through significant legislation aimed at prohibiting alcohol and securing women's rights, including voting. In fact, the 18th amendment prohibiting alcohol was advanced and aided by the war, as temperance advocates used the grain and sugar rationing as an excuse to further restrict alcohol production. Women likewise used the conflict in Europe to advance their cause. Women cited their contributions to the work force and their involvement in peace and preparedness groups as evidence of their civic contribution, and successfully pushed for the right to vote, culminating in the 19th amendment.[25]

In addition to these progressive advances, the federal government had enacted various laws designed to protect national security. Throughout the war, the government passed numerous bills aimed at suppressing dissent, particularly from non-naturalized immigrants whose loyalties were in question. The Bureau of Investigation, created in 1908, emerged as a powerful and popular government agency, as governmental surveillance, all in the name of security, increased. Moreover, throughout the war, the federal government sought to suppress criticism of war-time policies. The Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918 allowed for the prosecution of war critics and encouraged private vigilante action against dissenters.[26] However, not all of the government's actions at this time were reactionary. Beginning with the Committee on Public Information in 1917, the government spent millions of dollars on pro-government and pro-military propaganda. The C.P.I. created advertisements and contests to promote war bonds and

---

[24] John W. Chambers, II, ed., *The Oxford Companion to American Military History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 849.

[25] Andrew Sinclair, *Prohibition: The Era of Excess* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1962), 117-118; and Maurine Weiner Greenwald, *Women, War, and Work: The Impact of World War I on Women Workers in the United States* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980), 239-242.

[26] Zieger, *America's Great War*, 2-4, 78-79.

various government-sponsored economic measures to offset the stifling costs of war. Similarly, the committee was also able to control the dissemination of information, actively selecting and censoring information to be sent to newspapers nationwide. Combined with forced conscription, these acts have been described as the beginning of what would become the "military establishment" in America.[27]

The government was also increasingly involved in issues of industrial production and economic regulation. After the war in Europe began, a federal agency was created to streamline war-related manufacturing. The War Industries Board tried to encourage cooperation between the different industries, but in ways that would both avoid the costly showdowns between government and industry, and comparisons to similar practices throughout Prussia and Germany. Instead, the government worked with industrialists to modify their production to suit the needs of the government and military. Another federal agency was created when the railroad industry requested government intervention, as the demand for railroad transportation increased with the war. The United States Railroad Administration, created in late 1917 consolidated terminal facilities, coordinated traffic and routing, and intervened with union settlements.[28]

In addition to government intervention in manufacturing industries, the Lever Act gave the government a large role in regulating supplies and prices of food and fuel. Also called the Food and Fuel Act, the Lever Act created the U.S. Food Administration (headed by future president Herbert Hoover) and the U.S. Fuel Administration. Both agencies stressed the conservation of resources. Proclaiming that "Food will win the war," the U.S. Food Administration encouraged Americans to ration, popularizing "meatless Tuesdays" and "porkless

[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid, 70-71.

Thursdays." Similarly, the U.S. Fuel Administration introduced daylight-savings time as a means of conserving fuel.[29]

Clearly the role of the United States government had changed drastically during President Wilson's second term. Thus, the 1920 presidential election would provide the American citizens a referendum on the new, expanded role of the federal government. For all of the progress made, there was a significant portion of the voting population that longed to return to the days before the war, before government intervention, and before the large reform movements. It was no accident that Warren Harding's most famous campaign slogan promised a "return to normalcy."

II. THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

To Woodrow Wilson, the 1920 presidential election was a "solemn referendum" on his proposed League of Nations. The end of his second term was dominated by the League of Nations controversy as Wilson was consumed with drafting the League of Nations covenant and with ensuring that the League would be approved by the United States Congress. The League of Nations battle was pure political theater, pitting the president against the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Henry Cabot Lodge (R-Massachusetts). Wilson and Lodge openly disliked one another, and eventually allowed their personal animosity to dramatically influence the debate over the League of Nations. As Americans headed to the polls, the League of Nations had become the central domestic issue, and both campaigns scrambled to frame the thorny issue into a political advantage.[30]

---

[29] Ibid, 72-73.

[30] For best discussions of the League of Nations and Treaty Battle, see: John Milton Cooper, Jr. *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); George Scott, *The Rise and Fall of the League of Nations* (London: Hutchinson of London, 1973); and Henry Cabot Lodge, *The Senate and the League of Nations* (New York: C. Scribner's and Sons, 1925).

The idea for a formal coalition of nations was neither Wilson's own, nor was it a partisan creation. To the contrary, the idea had first been seriously suggested less than a decade before by a Republican, former president Theodore Roosevelt. During President Taft's term, Roosevelt was dispatched to mediate in the Russo-Japanese War, and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts. One of his suggestions was a "League of Peace," which would enlist the cooperation of "great nations which sincerely desire peace and have no thought themselves of committing aggressions." President Taft and Senator Lodge were early supporters of the idea, but the concept failed to gain much ground because it would lack the power of enforcement: none of the proposals were able to demonstrate the ability of the organization to enforce peace without coercion. However, as the war in Europe began and intensified, the desire for such a coalition also increased.[31]

Once the United States entered the war, Woodrow Wilson turned his focus to brokering the peace. In a speech delivered to a joint session of Congress on January 22, 1917, Wilson called for a "covenant of cooperative peace." He also encouraged the warring nations to seek "peace without victory," hoping to end the painful process of negotiating reparations imposed on the vanquished. When seeking Congress' approval to declare war on Germany on April 2, Wilson declared that he was still seeking the same results as in his earlier speech. All that had changed was that now the United States' armed forces would join the other nations to achieve that peace.[32]

On January 8, 1918, Wilson first articulated his plan for the League of Nations in his "Fourteen Points" speech. Many viewed the speech as a response to claims made by Bolsheviks in the recent Russian Revolution that both the Allied and Central Powers were imperialistic and

[31] Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World*, 10-13.
[32] Ibid, 21-23.

waging war out of greed. Wilson's speech carefully described fourteen reasons for waging war, culminating in the fourteenth: the establishment of a coalition of nations "affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity" to member nations, thus making any future large-scale wars unnecessary.[33]

The reaction to Wilson's speech in Europe was different than in the United States. The Fourteen Points were printed and distributed throughout Europe, to both Allied and Central Power nations. Wilson became popular throughout many Allied countries, as his speech demonstrated the noble cause for which they were sacrificing. At home, however, Wilson was facing mounting obstacles to his hope of getting the League ratified by the Senate. He failed to include sympathetic senators, journalists, and members of the powerful League to Enforce Peace (headed by former president Taft, who was a big, early supporter of Wilson's proposed League of Nations) in his decision-making and treaty-drafting. Instead, Wilson saw the impending Senate debate as a battle for power, pitting himself against the Senate as a whole. Days before the 1918 midterm elections, Wilson issued an appeal to the American voters, asking: "If you wish me to continue as unembarrassed spokesman in affairs at a home and abroad, I beg that you will express yourselves by returning a Democratic majority to both the Senate and House of Representatives." The result was embarrassing, as the Democratic Party lost both houses of Congress in what was construed as a clear message to Wilson.[34]

Shortly after the stunning election came news of the Allied victory in Europe. A peace conference was planned for January of the following year, in Paris. Wilson, who was still popular internationally as a result of his Fourteen Points speech, decided to make the unprecedented move of traveling to Paris himself. Until this time, no president had visited

---

[33] Josephus Daniels, *The Life of Woodrow Wilson: 1856-1924* (Philadelphia: Universal Book House, 1924), 293.

[34] Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World*, 28-31.

Europe while in office, and certainly not to negotiate a peace settlement. Wilson believed that this action would demonstrate, both to the American public and the European heads of state, the degree to which he believed in the League. Instead, it angered many senators, who felt that their role in approving treaties (by two-thirds majority) was being overstepped by an over-eager president. Many expected for Wilson to at least name Lodge as one of the chief representatives at the conference, but Wilson refused, further angering the powerful Lodge and his Republican supporters.[35]

Woodrow Wilson wasted no time in Europe before beginning his work on the League of Nations "covenant." France's Georges Clemenceau and Britain's Lloyd George, however, sought reparations for money and men lost in the war. The representatives from Germany and Austria tried to avoid paying reparations which they believed would result in a financial disaster. Yet, Wilson worked with the leaders from all parties to include the League of Nations covenant in the peace treaty, convincing both the victors and vanquished that the League would eliminate the necessity of future peace conferences, and providing a working draft for the present members to vote in mid-February. The onus remained on Wilson, however, to convince the American people of the necessity of the League.[36]

Wilson's League faced obstacles from the beginning, many of his own making. In addition to excluding influential congressmen from both parties in the process, Wilson's covenant contained several articles that seemed ambiguous. He had included a system of "universal guarantees," which most of the heads of state immediately refused, and which United States congressmen found difficult to accept. The main objection was to Article X, which stated the member's commitments to other members of the League, and "in case of any aggression,

[35] Ibid, 33-35.

[36] F.S. Northedge, *The League of Nations: Its Life and Times, 1920-1945* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986), 83-86.

threat, or danger, the Council shall advise upon the means by which this obligation should be fulfilled."[37] Senator Lodge was still furious that he had not been invited to accompany Wilson to the peace conference and made it clear that Republicans would oppose the treaty. Lodge argued that the United States could not enter into any agreement where they would be forced into military action, especially if the conflict did not involve the United States. Wilson, unmoved, made clear to Democratic congressmen and senators that the document needed to be accepted or rejected wholly without revisions, ultimately setting up a showdown between Lodge and Wilson.[38]

By the fall of 1919, Wilson realized he would have to change tactics if the League of Nations were to be approved by Congress. The opposition to the League of Nations was large, well-funded, and across much of the United States. Many Democratic senators told Wilson that their constituents were vehemently opposed to the League, viewing the proposal as another instance of the federal government forming entangling alliances and expanding powers unnecessarily. The League would need a two-thirds majority to approve the treaty, which was proving harder and harder to obtain especially with Wilson's refusal to negotiate. Wilson thought that the best strategy would be to bypass Republican congressmen and take his cause on the road. He planned a whistle-stop tour throughout the country, aimed at "educating" the American people and convincing them of the necessity of the League of Nations.[39]

Wilson believed Americans would force their congressmen into supporting the League, and relished the opportunity to circumvent his growing number of nemeses. On September 3, 1919, Wilson left Washington and delivered speeches to state legislatures, business luncheons, public meetings, and county fairs throughout the country. He urged the attendees at each stop to

[37] Daniels, *Life of Woodrow Wilson*, 329.
[38] Northedge, *League of Nations*, 85-87.
[39] Daniels, *Wilson Era*, 478-480.

honor the sacrifices of the fighting men by demanding immediate ratification of the League covenant, without any major revisions.[40] He used the carnage and destruction caused by the war to elicit sympathy, citing the League as a promise that the deaths would not be in vain. Frequently, he told the audience of the "high-minded, statesman-like cooperation" he had encountered at the Paris Peace Conference, and of the joyous reception the League had enjoyed among Clemenceau, Lloyd George, and citizens throughout Europe (though this statement was not completely grounded in reality). Should the Treaty not be ratified, Wilson warned, disorder would "shake the foundations of the world," and he envisioned "this great nation marching…to heights upon which there rests nothing but the pure light of the justice of God."[41]

Critics accused him of taking on the comportment of a minister to sell his point, but few could criticize the vigor with which he presented the League. Every speech that he delivered was hand-crafted, and none were alike (key phrases, of course, were repeated). Wilson traveled over 8,000 miles in hopes of convincing the public, but they were little moved. Walter Lippmann, a political critic, wrote that Wilson's failure lay not only in refusing to make concessions, but also in failing to explain the original reasons for entering the war. Lippmann explained, "He failed because in leading the nation to war, he had failed to give durable and compelling reasons for the momentous decision. The reasons he gave were legalistic and moralistic and idealistic reasons, rather than the substantial and vital reason that the security of the United States demanded (action)."[42] Now, he was attempting to convince the voters of another gambit, an entangling alliance with no immediate advantage and few vocal proponents besides the president.

---

[40] Zieger, *America's Great War*, 222.

[41] Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1931), 24.

[42] Scott, *Rise and Fall of the League of Nations*, 47-48.

Woodrow Wilson's dedication to the League cost him nearly everything. Just three weeks into his journey, the strenuous task took its toll on the president. On September 26, Wilson suffered what his doctors termed a "nervous breakdown" in Wichita. The presidential train reversed course and sped back to Washington. A week later, Mrs. Wilson found her husband unconscious on the floor of his bathroom. He had suffered a severe stroke, and never regained full use of the left side of his body. For months, the nation was left in the dark as Mrs. Wilson and advisors kept President Wilson from public view, but insisted the government was functioning properly. Rumors of Wilson's incapacitation required a visit of several senators and cabinet members, who found a visibly ill and soft-spoken president alive, but not well. With Wilson recovering in the White House, the League of Nations lost its most vocal supporter.[43]

While Wilson lay incapacitated, the treaty battle moved into the Senate. The Senate was divided into three camps: pro-League advocates (mostly Democrats); reservationists, like Lodge, who supported the League but with major revisions to the covenant; and "Irreconcilables," who were unalterably opposed to the League and the treaty. Senator Lodge attempted to gain victory by passing the League of Nations draft with several reservations to major points, including a complete redraft of Article X. Lodge's draft did not require the United States to enter into conflicts simply by recommendation of the League of Nations. Lodge moved the amended covenant for the Senate to debate on November 6, 1919. Two weeks later, the treaty went to a vote. Wilson had made it clear to his Democratic supporters in the Senate that there would be no compromise on his League of Nations vote; the organization was to be formed either the way Wilson had proposed, or not at all. Loyal Democrats voted with the Irreconcilables to reject the amended version, delivering a blow to Lodge. A day after the first vote, a vote for the treaty as originally proposed was also rejected. For months, the League and reservations were debated,

[43] Daniels, *Life of Woodrow Wilson,* 344-351; and Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World,* 198-217.

passing through several committees. British and French delegations made it clear that they would accept any American entry at this point, and were willing to accept any and all reservations. The last vote was held on March 19, 1920, with Lodge submitting a slightly-altered proposal. Twenty-one Democrats voted with the reservationists, gaining a 49-35 vote majority, but not the required two-thirds vote.[44]

Despite feeling betrayed by his party members and disappointed that American entry into the League was shelved indefinitely, Wilson put his faith in the American people once more. Rather than planning another speaking tour, Wilson encouraged the American people to make the upcoming presidential election a "great and solemn referendum" on the League. Wilson's position in the Democratic Party meant that he would have enormous influence over the eventual nominee, and that he could prevail upon the candidate to continue the League of Nations fight. As Americans headed to the polls in November, the debate over the League was still very polarizing. The American people would choose, clearly, between not just two candidates, but between two foreign policies.[45]

III. PROHIBITION

Prohibition was another major issue of the 1920 presidential election. Less than two years before, the 18th Amendment prohibiting the manufacture, distribution, and sale of alcohol was ratified in January 1919. Both candidates pledged their ability to enforce the law, but were careful to avoid telling voters their private views on the issue of alcohol consumption.

Though the 18th amendment was still very recent as the American voters headed to the polls in November 1920, the battle to ban the sale of alcohol had been a long, slow process.

---

[44] Zieger, *America's Great War*, 222-224. For a discussion of Senate vote, see: Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World*, 370-375.

[45] Zieger, *America's Great War*, 224-225.

Temperance leagues had been started as early as 1830 as religious groups increasingly associated the sale and growing consumption of alcohol with the loosening of morals throughout the country. For years, however, the granaries and whiskey distilleries were profitable businesses in many rural communities, most notably in the South and West. Opposition to alcohol and liquor consumption was organized only on the local level, with some states gaining, at most, a state-wide movement to ban the sale. However, in a move that presaged the nationalizing of the political parties, the temperance movement began organizing on a national level.[46]

Founded in 1893, the Anti-Saloon League gained power through its association with churches, and influenced the message of up to 60,000 churches between 1911 and 1925. The League flourished in rural communities across the country, and was notoriously anti-Catholic. Catholicism was associated with the big cities along the East Coast, where urban issues, like drunkenness, prostitution, and corruption seemed to develop more rapidly. Another important victory for the Anti-Saloon League was in convincing labor leaders of the benefits of prohibition. Traditionally, many working-class laborers were drinkers, frequenting the local pub or saloon with co-workers. Labor leaders finally acceded when the League presented alcohol and whisky as enemies of industry and leading to moral degradation. Many managers began rewarding good workers who found other forms of recreation (besides saloons) to occupy their time, and hopefully, set an example for the others.[47]

In the early 1910s, prohibition was an issue left decided by the various states. In fact, several states in the South and West had already banned the sale of alcohol. Temperance officials argued that a national ban on alcohol was the next logical step. Detractors of prohibition, frequently called "wets," argued that the process was dominated by a small, but powerful,

[46]K. Austin Kerr, *Organized for Prohibition: A New History of the Anti-Saloon League* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 14-17.

[47] Sinclair, *Prohibition*, 64-68, 102-104.

wealthy, and, most importantly, rural political group that was using the European war as a distraction to reinforce their views. They further argued that in states where alcohol was banned, prohibition was not passed through a referendum or initiative, but rather in state legislatures by a small group of politically-minded men (women still could not vote at this time).[48]

For politicians during this decade, prohibition was a difficult issue to gauge. Candidates from both parties were careful to not alienate either side. The powerful Anti-Saloon League was fanatical in determining the allegiance of state politicians, and with their well-funded coffers, would campaign for or against candidates depending on the candidate's temperance voting. In 1916, both Charles Evans Hughes and Woodrow Wilson refused to discuss the issue, both claiming that there was nothing in their party platforms on the subject. Instead of supporting a candidate for the president, the A.S.L. threw their support behind congressmen who supported prohibition. To cross the Anti-Saloon League was dangerous, and ministers from the A.S.L. frequently bragged that the road was lined with the gravestones of politicians who had dared challenge the League.[49]

Women temperance groups benefitted from a decade that saw increased participation by women in the civic sphere. Until the 1910s, female temperance officials were often portrayed as housewives emboldened by virtue, hoping to quietly coerce their husbands and children to live moral lives. Temperance leagues capitalized on this notion, and advanced the image of the woman activist as "pure, pious, domestic and submissive."[50] The two powerful groups advocating for prohibition, the Anti-Saloon League and the Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.), were often at odds with one another in terms of the best approach, but were

---

[48] John Kobler, *Ardent Spirits: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1973), 216.

[49] Sinclair, *Prohibition*, 68; and Kerr, *Organized for Prohibition*, 192-193.

[50] Catherine Gilbert Murdock, *Domesticating Drink: Women, Men, and Alcohol in America, 1870-1940* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 17.

revolutionary in the pressure they collectively applied. Until this time, no amendment and very few laws attempted to modify personal behavior, as prohibition surely would. Both organizations sought legislation with vigor, taking aim at advertisements for alcohol and liquor even before seeking the full ban on production and transportation.[51]

Both the Anti-Saloon League and W.C.T.U. sponsored medical and scientific studies that reported on the damage alcohol could do to the body, and frequently used the Bible to approach the subject of personal behavior. They also were willing to compromise, leaving one clause in the final bill presented to Congress that allowed for the consumption of alcohol in domestic areas. Clearly, this was a concession aimed at opponents' argument that prohibition would allow the federal government to invade the domestic sphere. The goal was not to change people on an individual level, but to better society as a whole. Both organizations fought for prohibition with nationwide efforts, in a state-by-state effort that presaged the nationally-focused Cox campaign. Few political projects could be deemed nationalized at this point, but prohibition served as a strong model to follow for activist groups and, eventually, presidential candidates.[52]

"Drys," or proponents of prohibition, frequently insisted that the only people against the movement were heavy drinkers and those in the liquor industry. Historian John Kobler argues that there were many opponents of prohibition outside of the alcohol industry, but they simply were not as well organized as the Anti-Saloon League or the W.C.T.U. They also suffered from a "failure of imagination." Few wets could actually conceive of a dry America, or the ability of Congress to enforce such a notion, and believed that at some point the movement would lose ground and fail. In addition, beer manufacturers and liquor distillers were unable to work together, after having competed against each other for far too long. The temperance groups,

[51] Richard F. Hamm, *Shaping the Eighteenth Amendment: Temperance Reform, Legal Culture, and the Polity, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 228-236.

[52] Sinclair, *Prohibition*, 82, 90.

however, were simply too well funded and influential with politicians. In Kobler's words, the wets "lost by default."[53]

World War I had been the great turning point in the battle for prohibition. To be certain, supporters of prohibition had used the rationing of grains and sugar at the beginning of World War I as proof of the evils of alcohol, portraying those who drank as unpatriotic and unsympathetic to the war effort. In major cities, prohibitionists were successful in petitioning Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels for "dry and decent" zones around military camps to protect the new soldiers from becoming effected by the ills of alcohol. This measure closed large saloons for up to five miles from base camps. The drys also were successful in producing advertisements that argued that beer was a distinctly German commodity, and that the reported Germanic barbarianism in the war was proof of the ill effects of the beverage.[54]

The 18th amendment was ratified on January 29, 1919 and allowed one full year for the law to take effect. The amendment did not specifically say that alcohol was illegal but instead prohibited the sale, manufacture, and transportation of intoxicating drinks. On October 28, 1919, the Volstead Act was passed to enforce the prohibition amendment. The Volstead Act specifically stated that all drinks containing more than 0.5% alcohol were considered intoxicating. Yet, the Volstead Act was riddled with loopholes since the final document was the product of much wrangling between members of both houses of Congress who feared alienating the large urban population who still favored alcohol and drinking. Organized crime bosses would eventually find easy ways to work around the language of the Volstead Act and the 18th amendment.[55]

---

[53] Kobler, *Ardent Spirits*, 205; and Kerr, *Organized for Prohibition*, 15-16.

[54] Sinclair, *Prohibition*, 117-118. For a discussion of Josephus Daniel's wartime measures, see: Kobler, *Ardent Spirits*, 206.

[55] Sinclair, *Prohibition*, 166-170.

In January 1920, the slow transition to prohibition began throughout the United States. In New York City and Chicago, protesters carried large caskets filled with alcohol through the streets, still outraged at what they saw as an invasion of the federal government into the private sphere. For many, the passage of the 18th amendment represented government excess gone wrong, as the lawmakers were held captive by rural and religious special interest groups, and allowed their fear to drive them to pass overreaching laws.[56] As the November election loomed, voters on both sides of the issue would have the opportunity to weigh in on prohibition.

IV. WOMEN AND SUFFRAGE

The final issue that had an impact on the election of 1920 was not as controversial for the candidates as, say, prohibition or the League of Nations, but added a new dimension to presidential politics. In August of 1920, just before the election, the 19th amendment guaranteeing the right to vote regardless of gender,was ratified by the required thirty-six states. The amendment came at the end of decades of campaigning and protest on behalf of women seeking the same rights as men. Both the Democratic and Republican parties scrambled to attract the sudden influx of eight million potential voters in time for the November election.

The 1910s had been a remarkable decade for the advancement of women. World War I had provided several major changes to the way society viewed women. First, women were heavily involved in the war manufacturing effort. The deployment of troops meant that many jobs in the United States were left available. White women first took the places of white men, and then black women occupied the places of white women and deployed black men. Women viewed this opportunity as a way to improve their living conditions and acquire earnings independent of men. Men in and out of the military were concerned with what this moment

[56] Ibid, 160, 173.

meant for society. The immediate concern was with what this mobility for women meant for the jobs white men had and would expect upon their return. A greater concern centered on what gendered spheres existed out of necessity and which operated only out of tradition.[57]

For other women, the war provided an opportunity to become involved in civic exercise as many turned to activism. Large numbers of women joined organizations directly involved in World War I. Some joined so-called "preparedness" organizations that advocated for the increase of military spending for defense purposes. Still others viewed the war in negative terms, such as the American Union Against Militarism (A.U.A.M.), which argued that money should not be spent on building up the military.[58]

By far the largest group consisting of women during World War I, outside of suffrage, was dedicated to the peace movement, namely the Women's Peace Party (W.P.P.). Women in this organization were adamant that universal women's suffrage would lessen the chances of large-scale wars and increase the opportunity for peaceful solutions. Throughout the war, women organized rallies aimed at both ending the war (or at least, American involvement in it) and granting women the right to vote.[59] Female school teachers involved in the League also used their influence to advocate for peace education, and fought against military training in the schools, often confronting male administrators and officers in the process. These teachers often were also involved in the suffrage movement, and associated women's rights with their rights as educators. These teachers drew criticism for their increasing influence over the lives of students, supposedly feminizing the youth. The U.S. entry into World War I proved disastrous to the peace advocates among teachers, as many were forced to ally themselves with the president or risk

[57] Greenwald, *Women, War, and Work*, 88.
[58] Zieger, *America's Great War*, 36-38.
[59] Barbara Steinson, *American Women's Activism in World War I* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982), 380-381, 392.

charges of dissension. Yet, others viewed the war in the same terms as President Wilson and thought that this war was necessary to bring about peace.[60]

Women involved in the war effort increasingly fought for professional recognition commensurate with that of the men in service. Female nurses involved in the war in Europe experienced harsh conditions and poor treatment from soldiers. The Army Nurses Corps employed ten thousand nurses in Europe, all of whom were subject to the discipline and rules of the military, but without the rank and potential to advance. Throughout the course of the war, women would argue for military rank as a way of commanding respect and obedience from the often-disorderly soldiers. The women found support from former president William Howard Taft, the director of the Red Cross, and the editors of the New York Times. In opposition were the Surgeon General Merritte Ireland, and the director of nursing service for the American Expeditionary Force, Julia Stimson, who argued that "tact" would better serve the nurses in garnering respect. The movement failed to gain Congressional approval until 1919 after the war's end. The movement demonstrated the heightened importance and the increasing equality of women in the civic sphere. Both would serve females in the suffrage movement.[61]

Once the war ended, the emotions of many women were mixed. For women involved in the manufacturing industry, the war's end meant a return to the home and their former traditional roles as wives and mothers. But in some instances, the entry into the workplace would not be temporary, and some newly liberated women intended to stay liberated. The liberated and independent woman would eventually give way to the popular "flapper" girl of the 1920s:

---

[60] Susan Zeiger, "The Schoolhouse vs. the Armory: U.S. Teachers and the Campaign Against Militarism in the Schools, 1914-1918," *Journal of Women's History* 15.2 (2003): 150-179. For more on peace activism during World War I, see: Joshua Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Boston: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 322-330.

[61] Kimberly Jensen, "A Base Hospital is Not a Coney Island Dance Hall: American Women Nurses, Hostile Work Environment, and Military Rank in the First World War," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 26.2 (2005): 206-235.

young, assertive, and with a different style of dress and manners.[62] For female peace activists, the war's end also resulted in conflicting emotions. Their stated goal of eliminating the war had been accomplished, and President Wilson was heading to Europe to enact his plan for permanent peace in the League of Nations. However, the war's end also meant a return to the domestic sphere, where their opinions and contributions had gone largely unnoticed before the war. As a result, many women wanting to remain active joined the prohibition movement. [63]

Another success for women came in the passage of the 18th amendment, prohibiting the sale, manufacturing, and transportation of alcohol. Women had long been at the forefront in the battle for temperance. Their opposition was grounded in morality and religion, two aspects of the domestic sphere where women held influence. Many women linked consumption of alcohol with other vices, including prostitution and gambling, both of which held severe consequences for their families. Women were, at first, inspired by figures like Carrie Nation, whose larger-than-life episodes of destroying saloons in the 1860s and 1870s similarly emboldened married women to eliminate the saloons and the associated temptations in their communities. Few followed Nation's example of destroying the saloons and getting arrested, but instead turned to more conventional means, organizing local temperance groups and eliciting the support of their voting spouses. The movement had reached its zenith, and in 1919, the prohibition amendment was passed by a majority of state legislatures. [64]

All of these advancements and efforts combined in the 1910s to make female suffrage an urgent issue. By early 1918, eleven states had extended full suffrage rights to women, but only one, New York, was east of the Mississippi River. Shortly after his reelection in 1916, President

---

[62] James McGovern, "The American Woman's Pre-World War I Freedom in Manners and Morals," in *Causes and Consequences of World War I*, ed. John Milton Cooper, Jr., (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1972), 271-274.

[63] Steinson, *American Women's Activism in World War I*, 380-381, 392.

[64] Sinclair, *Prohibition*, 57-59, 168-170.

Wilson had added his voice to the call for women's suffrage. Wilson had waited until after he was safely elected to express his support because he was more interested in eliciting the support of female activists for the League of Nations than in enfranchising women. His support, however, accelerated the final push for women's suffrage. Finally, on September 30, 1918, President Wilson appeared before Congress to appeal for suffrage as a war measure, stating: "We have made partners of women in this war, shall we admit them only to a partnership of suffering?" The Senate voted the next day on an amendment measure, but it was defeated. Twice more, over the course of several months, the Senate would vote on the measure, but it failed both times. The movement turned to the state legislatures, particularly those in the north and west, where states adopted the amendment. The measure would still be opposed in several states, mostly in the south. Eventually, the amendment was ratified on August 26, 1920, little more than two months before the general election. The right for women to vote would therefore play a crucial role in the contest between Harding and Cox, as both candidates would have to quickly adopt strategies to deal with the new influx of voters nationwide. Neither party began with a distinct advantage with women, as both the Democrats and Republicans in Congress had opposed female suffrage until recent years.[65]

V. CONCLUSION

All of these issues had an impact on the election of 1920, not only because they drew voters to the polls and created compelling political theater, but also because of the way the two candidates would adapt their message to the various issues and interests of voters (detailed in Chapter 3). With the enfranchisement of women, the electorate grew, and that growth coincided

[65] Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 322, 332-337.

with a period that saw the rapid development of the federal government's involvement in the American people's day-to-day lives. For these reasons, the presidential election of 1920 provided a unique opportunity for Americans to register discontent with the major transformations of the war years. But other larger transformations had taken place in American life in the two decades of the twentieth century-transformations out of which a new kind of politics would emerge. And in 1920, this new type of politics would emerge from Ohio.

CHAPTER 2-POLITICAL LANDSCAPES: POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY AND THE DECLINE OF PARTY POLITICS

In the same way that the 1920 presidential election produced a new set of issues for both political parties to address, the election also demonstrated the bridging of two eras of electoral strategies. The period between the Civil War and World War I was characterized by political battles led by powerful parties. The parties held their power through various means: corruption, voting fraud, the lingering effects of sectional antagonism, and the pageantry of Gilded Age political culture. Commonly, a single party dominated not just a state, but an entire region of the country, often rendering elections as mere formalities. This left only a few so-called "swing states," where party allegiance varied from election to election. One such swing state, Ohio, was frequently the lynchpin of presidential campaign strategies, with both political parties determined to win the state and its attractive electoral vote count. For the Republican Party, that strategy included nominating successful Ohio politicians eleven times in fourteen presidential elections (winning eight times). But while the mainstay of political maneuvering was employed in 1920, other electoral factors of the preceding decades had changed. Progressive-Era reforms eliminated a great deal of election-related corruption and created a more transparent electoral process with all states voting on the same day. Beginning in the years following the 1920 presidential election, regional allegiances would still exist, but as a result of the way parties addressed issues and marketed their appeal. Thus, the election of 1920 serves as a bridge between two eras, as the presidential candidates and their campaigns struggled to balance past and future electoral strategies with a new electoral map.

I. OHIO AND OHIOANS IN POST-CIVIL WAR POLITICS

One of the chief curiosities surrounding the presidential election of 1920 is the fact that both men were from the state of Ohio. Only once before, in 1904, when President Theodore Roosevelt defeated Alton Parker, had both presidential candidates been born in the same state (New York). The 1920 election, with Warren Harding and James Cox, would be the second such instance, and also the last. The Republican Party nominated Harding, the latest in a long list of mostly-successful Ohioans nominated by the party. The Democratic Party nominated an Ohioan, Governor Cox, for the first and only time, in an attempt to benefit from the state's position of electoral power. The election served as a turning point for the state, as it was the last election featuring an Ohioan, signaling the end of one state's disproportionate control over presidential politics and an end to the type of party-dominated elections of the past.

Between 1868 and 1920, Ohio, the so-called "Cradle of Presidents," produced seven native-born presidents. This was due to several factors, the first being that Ohio carried significant electoral power throughout this time period. The electoral votes, determined by adding together the numbers of representatives and senators from a given state, was a direct reflection of the population of that state. In 1870, Ohio had 22 electoral votes, third only behind New York and Pennsylvania. By 1920, Ohio's electoral votes numbered 24, which put it fourth behind New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. Through this time period, as industries and manufacturing flourished and with the northern migration of disenfranchised African Americans, the Midwest states, and Ohio in particular, reaped the electoral benefits of larger population. Ohio, along with Indiana (15 electoral votes), Illinois (21), Michigan (11), and Kentucky (12), made up a strong Midwest voting bloc that competed with New England and New York for political power. Ohio also represented a microcosm of sorts for the nation, as it balanced the

industrial power and diverse, urban populations with a strong agricultural foundation and rural, native-born Protestant population. As a result, nearly all elections in Ohio (presidential and statewide) were highly competitive, and neither party was able to establish unchallenged dominance.[66]

The Republican Party was the first to capitalize on the strength and attraction of Ohio's electoral power. The Republican Party elected the successful Union general born in Point Pleasant, Ulysses Grant. Grant's election had more to do with his military prowess than his home state, as he lived in New York City in the years immediately following the election and seldom returned to Ohio. Yet the Republican Party subsequently sought to replicate Grant's electoral success by nominating men who shared his humble, Midwestern upbringing. In the following fourteen presidential elections, spanning from 1868 through 1920, the Republicans nominated an Ohioan a staggering eleven out of fourteen times. The Ohioans who were successfully elected were: Ulysses Grant (who served from 1869-1877); Rutherford Hayes (1877-1881); James Garfield (1881); Benjamin Harrison (1889-1893); William McKinley (1897-1901); William Howard Taft (1909-1913); and Harding. Indeed, unusual circumstances surrounded the three times where the nominee was not an Ohioan: James G. Blaine in 1884, supposedly nominated in response to Chester Arthur's unsuccessful administration after Garfield's assassination; Theodore Roosevelt in 1904, running for his own term after being elevated to the role of president by the assassination of William McKinley in 1901; and Charles Evans Hughes in 1916, selected by Republicans after the disastrous party division during the election of 1912.[67]

The Ohioan Presidents occupied the office during an era of weak executive power. Indeed, with few exceptions, this period between the Civil War and World War I has never been

[66] Sinclair, *Available Man*, 26-28.
[67] Ibid.

noted as a time of great presidential accomplishments. To the contrary, the era was typified by a weakened executive branch, as the powers of the presidency were secondary to those of the legislature. The political parties were certainly at the root of this phenomenon. During this time, the parties controlled the nominating procedures, often rewarding party service with political favors and elevating extreme loyalists to positions of power. The key was in energizing the largest number of people to support the candidate.[68]

The Republican Party seized upon the hero worship that surrounded the victorious Union generals, using the field of battle as a political testing ground. Ulysses Grant's Union victory, Republican bosses assured, naturally provided him the perfect springboard for a career in politics. His popularity rivaled only that of the deceased Lincoln. Grant's handlers compared him favorably to George Washington, Andrew Jackson, William Henry Harrison, and Zachary Taylor, as generals whose success on the battlefield translated into success in upholding the Constitution. His successors borrowed heavily from Grant's playbook, constantly reminding voters and other politicians of their war careers and bravery. The campaigns of Hayes, Garfield, Benjamin Harrison, and McKinley all emphasized their (comparatively-limited) military records, legislative or executive skills, and their humble, Ohioan upbringing in an attempt to link the candidates to Grant.[69]

Many men cutting their political teeth gained a distinct advantage in hailing from Ohio during the years between the Civil War and World War I. Once elected, the Ohio presidents employed cronyism to assist fellow Ohioans in attaining positions of power. From Reconstruction to World War I, Ohio produced more federal jobholders and cabinet members

[68] McGerr, *Decline of Popular Politics,* 1-11.
[69] Sinclair, *Available Man,* 26-30.

than any other state, a system that often allowed one president to groom another.[70] The strength of Ohio's electoral power caused Grover Cleveland and Theodore Roosevelt (two of only three presidents elected between the Civil War and World War I not from Ohio) to appoint at least two Ohioans to their cabinet. In the years before the passage of the 17th amendment, the senators representing a state were selected by the state legislature. The selected senators, then, were among the most influential or powerful Ohio politicians, and were indebted to their fellow state legislators for this position. To come to power in this period meant paying one's dues, being amenable to political appointment, and always staying in the party's good graces.[71]

Along with this notion of playing within the party's system was the knowledge that political silence or inactivity could be deemed a virtue. Of the Ohio presidents with prior legislative record, only William McKinley produced any significant legislation. Similarly, the Ohio presidents that had served as governors, Hayes and McKinley, oversaw periods of significant industrial expansion and prosperity, an attractive connotation for subsequent Ohio Republican candidates. Furthermore, both Hayes and McKinley governed without major controversies or disruptions, and both were able to convey a calm approach to their executive responsibilities. Harding's campaign staff would borrow heavily from this narrative to paint their candidate as a significant legislator, despite his lack of actual legislative production.[72]

Indeed, neither Warren Harding nor James Cox were able to replicate the battle heroism of their Ohio predecessors. The election of 1916 had been the first in a generation to feature two candidates (Woodrow Wilson and Charles Evans Hughes) without war service. The election of 1920 was the second. While both candidates had been born after the Civil War and missed out on

[70] Charles Mee, Jr., *The Ohio Gang: The World of Warren G. Harding* (New York: M. Evans and Company, 1981), 60-61.
[71] Sinclair, *Available Man,* 30.
[72] Morello, *Selling the President,* 50-51.

service during the War of 1898, each attempted to equate his legislative or executive record with war experience. Cox highlighted his record as a war governor, especially his oversight of Ohio's preparation and rationing through the years of World War I. Cox saw his responsibility as readying Ohio's soldiers for combat, and in overseeing the war's political dialogue by exposing Republicans who were using patriotism for political gain. [73] Harding's campaign emphasized his repeated calls for the United States' continued neutrality during the presidential election of 1916 and his criticism of President Wilson after the war as proof of his civic and military understanding. In these ways, the former Ohio journalists attempted to put themselves on the same level of military prestige as their predecessors.[74]

In addition to Ohio's political influence in terms of party control and power, Ohio's rise to political prominence and assumption of the title of "Cradle of the Presidency" resulted from the changing political geography of the era. As the nation emerged from the Civil War and Reconstruction, Ohio emerged as a bellwether state where elections were very close and where neither political party could establish and maintain complete dominance.

Through the country's first fifty years, the majority of the presidents had been born in Virginia. Virginia's early political strength was attributed to its geographical position. It was in the center of the new nation, and important to both northern and southern states. To the North, Virginia remained a mercantile state capable of trading and producing goods. To the South, Virginia was sufficiently immersed in the tobacco industry and slaveholding. In addition, the proximity to Washington, D.C. also proved an attractive feature in terms of political appointments and federal jobs.[75]

---

[73] Babson, *Cox-The Man*, 52-55.
[74] Downes, *Rise of Warren Gamaliel Harding*, 255-258.
[75] Sinclair, *Available Man*, 26.

The Civil War created a shift in electoral power. At the close of the war, Virginia's role as a Confederate state severely crippled any chance that a presidential candidate from the state would be successful. The large number of soldiers from Ohio, combined with the Union victory, created a large body of successful soldier/politicians for the post-war years. In addition, Grant's life story mimicked Andrew Jackson's rise to power more than it resembled George Washington's. Born to poor conditions and a background of self-made determination, Grant was able to prove himself on the battlefield. Grant thus represented a change in narrative from the aristocratic background of the patrician Washington, evocative of a "self-made" mantle that the other Ohioans soon replicated (and over-replicated).[76] In addition, Ohio emerged as a center of political currents in this period. According to political scientist Frank Kent, the electorate in Ohio was "influenced by Eastern thought and Western feeling. It had even, to a certain extent, been settled by Southerners." Ohio was, in his terminology, "the middle ground and the battleground." In Ohio there were more independent voters than in any other state. Most elections ended very closely, allowing for neither party to claim the permanent control they exerted elsewhere.[77]

In the elections after the Civil War, the United States remained electorally divided between North and South. Republicans could rely on the Northeast and Midwest throughout the entirety of the Gilded Age, while the South consistently voted with the Democrats. As the United States expanded westward, both parties eagerly courted the new voters, hoping to retain power through electoral numbers. Mathematically, Democrats were fighting a losing battle. Of the states that consistently voted Democratically, Missouri, Tennessee and North Carolina were the only states with over ten electoral votes. Florida (4 electoral votes) and Texas (8), which both consistently voted for the Democratic Party, remained growing frontiers, states that gained

[76] Ibid, 26-27.
[77] Frank Kent, *The Great Game of Politics* (New York: Doubleday, Duran & Company, 1928), 156-162.

population gradually and were not yet states with large electoral vote totals. The census distributed the electoral votes every ten years, and the process helped keep the Democrats out of power. Republicans, on the other hand, could predictably rely, with notable exceptions, on Indiana, Illinois, and Pennsylvania, each with over fifteen electoral votes apiece. In order for a Democratic candidate to win, he would have to crack into the Republican Party's stronghold.[78]

The disputed elections of 1876 and 1888 demonstrated the importance of the post-Reconstruction battleground states. In 1876, the Democratic nominee, Samuel Tilden, broke the Republican stronghold, gaining victory in New York, New Jersey, and Indiana. Yet, he lost the election when he failed to establish a clear victory in Louisiana, South Carolina, and Florida, leading to a disputed election result and the Compromise of 1877. The Compromise awarded the three disputed states to the Republican nominee, Rutherford Hayes, in exchange for the withdrawal of federal troops from the South, effectively an end to Reconstruction. The election of 1888 resulted in President Grover Cleveland winning all of the South, but losing close elections in Indiana and New York. Unsurprisingly, in both elections, the Republican nominee was an Ohioan and Ohio rested comfortably in the Republican nominee's column.[79]

Republicans learned from these results, and began to nominate Ohioans in election after election. Eleven out of fourteen elections (from 1868-1920) resulted in the Republican Party nominating an Ohioan as president. The vice presidential candidates were plucked from relative obscurity and were, by and large, from New York and New Jersey. In terms of electoral strength, this maneuver allowed the Republican Party to maintain the Midwestern, populist standard-bearer while also appealing to party loyalists on the East Coast.[80]

---

[78] Neal R. Peirce, *The People's President: The Electoral College in American History and the Direct-Vote Alternative* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 86-93, 312-321.

[79] Ibid, 86-93.

[80] Kent, *Great Game of Politics*, 160-162.

If the Republicans were predictable in choosing their nominees, the Democrats were similarly creatures of habit. From 1868 through 1904, Democrats nominated New Yorkers, with the exception of William Jennings Bryan's nomination in 1896 and 1900 (Bryan was from Nebraska). Three of the nominees were governors, one was a representative, one was a judge, and the other was a general. By nominating New Yorkers, Democrats were hoping to capitalize on the sizeable electoral vote and population advantage that New York held over Ohio. In the 1870 elections, New York had 35 votes to Ohio's 22. In the 1880s and 1890s, the numbers changed only slightly to 36-23. By 1912, the advantage was significantly larger, with New York garnering 45 votes to Ohio's still influential 24. Incidentally, the majority of the Democratic vice presidential nominees in this period were chosen from Ohio and Indiana, a clear attempt to make a play for the Republican Party's strongholds.[81]

This electoral vote advantage made New York the most attractive battleground prize. But a victory in New York was only a portion of the electoral picture. The Republicans were successful in portraying New Yorkers and other East Coast lawmakers as patrician and elitist, while portraying the Ohioans and Midwesterners as self-made and industrious. Sensing that Ohio candidate's values would resonate with the Midwest's ideals and traditional values, Republicans nominated candidates who would have the widest appeal in other electoral-vote rich states, such as Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan. The Republicans successfully kept the presidential election a regional affair, pitting Ohio candidates against the New Yorkers and reaping the benefits of a divided electorate.[82]

In choosing a Republican candidate from Ohio, the party ensured that the nominee was already successful in winning over voters, an extremely important enterprise given how close the

[81] Peirce, *People's President*, 312-321.
[82] Sinclair, *Available Man*, 28-32.

electoral results were in the state of Ohio after the Civil War. This tactic proved crucial in the 1876, as the popular Governor Hayes easily gained victory in his home state. In 1888, Benjamin Harrison was serving as senator of Indiana, Ohio's western neighbor. His birth state, still rich with pride in Harrison's grandfather and ninth president, William Henry Harrison, voted overwhelmingly for Harrison.[83] During the period between 1868 and 1904, the Republican Party nominated an Ohioan every time with only one exception. In 1884, popular Ohio Senator John Sherman was considered the front-runner, but eventually lost the nomination to James Blaine. The Republicans still carried the state of Ohio, but it required much more campaigning on Blaine's part than would have been the case if they had nominated Sherman. This led to Blaine's exhaustion towards the end of his tour.[84]

The Democrats, on the other hand, rarely had a winning electoral strategy during this period. Between 1868 and 1912, Democrats seldom gained states north of Tennessee, while Republicans were successful in garnering voters in both the North and the new states of the West. William Jennings Bryan, who was nominated three times, proved to be the exception to the Democratic Party's rule as he was from the Midwest (Nebraska). Bryan performed very well in the rural areas of the Midwest, but not enough to turn the partisan tide. In an election that seemed to set the stage for the 1920 presidential election, Bryan preferred to deliver his speeches in public, stumping in small towns throughout the United States. His opponent in the first two elections, William McKinley, delivered one speech a day, off of his front porch in Canton, Ohio.[85]

The turning point in electoral geography came in 1912. The Republican Party was divided into two separate factions. One group supported Republican incumbent (and Ohioan)

[83] Peirce, *People's President,* 86-93.
[84] Summers, *Rum, Romanism and Rebellion,* 129-132.
[85] Morello, *Selling the President,* 50.

William Howard Taft, while the other supported former president Theodore Roosevelt. Once friends, Roosevelt was critical of Taft's more conservative philosophy, believing that Taft had been elected basically to continue Roosevelt's administration. At the party's nominating convention, Taft was re-nominated, causing Roosevelt to storm out of the convention and form his own party, the Progressive or "Bull Moose" party. Roosevelt advocated for the "Square Deal," a long list of progressive reforms, including graduated income taxes, workmen's compensation, conservation, and federal regulation of businesses. The reforms were all aimed squarely at the Republican Party, and Roosevelt's candidacy caused a split in the party, especially at the state and local level in key states like Illinois and California. Roosevelt's speeches were far better attended and received than those of the judicial, quiet-spoken Taft, yet he lacked the backing of the party as many Republican politicians and officials publicly supported the incumbent. In the end, Democrat Woodrow Wilson was able to capitalize on the split and garnered a slim majority of the votes in traditionally Republican states, including Ohio, and won the election. For Taft and Republicans, the loss of his home state was a stinging defeat.[86]

The election of 1916 was one of the only elections of the era without an Ohioan as a candidate. The main issue of the election was the United States' neutrality during World War I. Ohio, with a large concentration of German-American population, was especially interested in Wilson's calls for neutrality and peace.[87] For just the second time in the Republican and Democrat two-party system, Ohio voted for the Democratic candidate. Wilson was reelected, but again failed to get over 50% of the votes cast. In addition, the vote count in several states was

[86] John Allen Gable, *The Bull Moose Years: Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Party* (New York: Kennikat Press, 1978), 8-10, 81-85; and George E. Mowry, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Movement* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1947), 247-303.

[87] Sinclair, *Available Man*, 28.

much closer than had been predicted, demonstrating the inability of the Democratic candidate to gain a substantial plurality of voters.[88]

As the 1920 presidential election approached, neither party was able to rely on the old campaign strategies of the previous fifty years. Wilson's election proved that Democrats were able to win elections in states like Ohio and California. But Democrats were still unsure if Wilson's elections had been a rare occurrence and a reaction to the split Republican Party, or a sign that the political tide had turned. Wilson's election and reelection proved to Republicans that their hold on prize electoral states had weakened and that they need to create a whole new strategy. Both parties ultimately chose to return to the successful method of nominating a popular Ohioan.

II. THE DECLINE OF PARTISAN POLITICS AND THE EFFECT ON PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

During the Gilded Age, the issue of party power was serious business. Party loyalists would go to great lengths to ensure the continuity of that power. The judiciary would intervene at state and local levels to control polling policies and redistricting, leaving whole groups of men unable to vote based on religion, race, or property-ownership. Moreover, polling places were patrolled by party heavies, whose sole job was to ensure that the "proper" loyalists were admitted and all others threatened into not registering their vote. The party in power often crafted laws in language that allowed separate ballots for key issues, or irregular voting dates, to ensure that only the most knowing, and available, voters were able to cast ballots. The press, almost always

[88] S.D. Lovell, *The Presidential Election of 1916* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), 172-175.

owned by one of the two major parties, worked tirelessly at partisan promotion and its corollary, slandering the opposition.[89]

The decline of popular politics began in the Gilded Age with several changes affecting the way the major political parties interacted with their constituencies. The Pendleton Act of 1883 severely restricted the political parties by eliminating the so-called "spoils" system which rewarded party loyalists with prime jobs in the federal government. The law was seen as a reaction to President Garfield's assassination by a disappointed office-seeker and served as a blow to the major parties, as the promise of jobs remained a strong incentive to campaign and contribute for a candidate. After the Pendleton Act, much of civil service employment was gained on merit, instead of party allegiance.[90]

Another key blow to party control was the introduction of the so-called "Australian ballot." Before this system was enacted, the major parties produced ballots for party loyalists featuring only the nominees from the party. The parties would ensure that a solid ticket was elected by bribing voters to cast the party-approved ballot and making it impossible to add or subtract nominees in other offices on their individual sheet. Under the new system, the ballots for elections were produced municipally, featured all of the candidates for an office, and, most importantly, were cast secretly by the voter. This process eliminated most of the associated bribery, as parties lost their ability to control the ballot. It had the negative effect, however, of disenfranchising many in the South who were unable to read the ballot.[91]

The election reform movement did not end in the late-1800s, but instead intensified in the new century. Progressive reforms aimed at elections constantly altered the political parties' control. In several states, laws were passed to allow recall, referendum, and the direct election of

[89] Summers, *Party Games*, 73-75, 112-113.
[90] Ibid, 235-237.
[91] Ibid, 240-242.

senators (eventually passed as a federal amendment), all of which wrested power from the party and allowed the public greater control over the legislative process. By the 1920 election, suffrage was extended to all adults over the age of 21, creating a much wider spectrum of interests for political parties to court.[92] Further erosion of political party control came with the creation of a binding primary. At the time of Harding's and Cox's nominations for president, there were less than a dozen primaries. Most were straw polls, gauging larger voter interest or deciding party platforms. This old system remained partly in place until the 1960s when the two parties democratized the process, completely taking the power out of the hands of party bosses and allowing the party's voters to choose their candidates.[93]

The Democratic Party, in particular, suffered from several fissures following the Civil War, especially at the state level. The party saw its machinery weakened by election reforms like the Pendleton Act and the Australian ballot, and was threatened by the growing appeal of third-party candidates. In addition, the penalties of Reconstruction made many Southerners reluctant to participate in elections as Democratic lawmakers struggled to balance the resentment toward the federal government with appeals to move forward.[94]

The electoral process of 1920 was very different than elections of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. But, the election of 1920 represented the last election of its kind: one dominated by party bosses and relying heavily on regional dominance and party machinery to gain the victory. Ohio has remained an essential state to winning presidential elections, as the state's electoral returns have often been extremely close, allowing neither party to securely put the state into their permanent column. Instead, both parties spend large amounts of time and money in an

[92] Robert D. Johnston, *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon (*Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003), 127-137.

[93] McGerr, *Decline of Popular Politics*, 177-178.

[94] Walter Dean Burnham, *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1970), 14-24.

effort to win over the state's diverse population, which is still representative of the United States as a whole in terms of class and race distribution, and in the contrast between urban and rural populations and manufacturing and agriculture jobs.[95]

Together, the end of party rule and the changing political geography forced both parties to reevaluate their electoral strategies. The relationship between voter and candidate in the late nineteenth century was mediated by the political parties. The candidate was permitted, and even expected, to retire from public view for the duration of the election. The party loyalists displayed their intent to vote for the candidate and did all of the necessary campaigning, with little or no interaction with the nominee himself. The candidate revealed little of himself outside of a biographical sketch (wife, children, religious affiliation), while the voter was expected to expose his passion for the party by waving banners, pushing large floats, or paying voters for support.[96]

During the late-nineteenth century, the candidate simply wrote a letter to accept the party's nomination and then all but disappeared. The vice presidential nominees sometimes made appearances, but theirs were not the well-known names that drew large crowds. Campaign managers knew the risks of allowing a candidate to speak often and openly on the campaign trail, which was still seen as an exhausting endeavor with little payoff. Presidential candidates like Stephen A. Douglas (1860) and Horace Greeley (1872) ventured on tours, mostly in Northern states thought to be undecided. However, both men became exhausted by the relentless, largely ineffective campaigning. The most often-cited example of a candidate on the trail occurred in 1884, as James G. Blaine (Republican) engaged in a close election with Grover Cleveland. Blaine toured the Midwest, in the hopes of shoring up last-minute support. Just weeks before the election, he returned exhausted and made a final trip to New York City where a speech was to be

[95] Bagby, *Road to Normalcy*, 80-81.
[96] McGerr, *Decline of Popular Politics*, 37.

delivered in his honor. The expected minister did not arrive, and instead, his replacement gave a stinging rebuke of the Democratic Party, famously maligning them as the party of "Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion."[97] Blaine did nothing to contradict the sentiment, and would later claim exhaustion had sapped his energy, rendering him incapable of effectively responding. In New York state, the vote was close, with large number of Roman Catholic immigrants casting their ballots for Cleveland, thanks to the insulting speech.[98]

Blaine's tour served as a cautionary tale for presidential candidates for years to come. Yet, twelve years later the Democratic nominee, William Jennings Bryan, embarked on a tour of the Midwest determined to avoid Blaine's mistakes. One of his key advantages was his youth, as he was just 36 and enjoyed public speaking. Bryan's opponent, William McKinley, was unable to leave his ailing wife, Ida, who suffered from painful seizures and was unable to bear the extensive travel. Bryan had a reputation as a great speaker earned by his famous "Cross of Gold" speech attacking the gold standard. Dubbed "The Great Commoner," the Nebraskan campaigned throughout the country where audiences greeted him in tents resembling those used in religious revivals.[99] Bryan had another reason for traveling to great lengths in an attempt to reach people: the newspapers in the Midwest were overwhelmingly owned by Republicans. Appearances in even the smallest towns were sure to get some press attention, and Bryan seized the opportunity. In the end, though Bryan traveled thousands of miles to meet voters, he could not overcome McKinley's well-financed campaign. In 1900, both candidates were re-nominated by their

[97] Summers, *Rum, Romanism and Rebellion*, 279-285.
[98] McGerr, *Decline of Popular Politics*, 36-37.
[99] Robert North Roberts and Scott John Hammond, *Encyclopedia of Presidential Campaigns, Slogans, Issues and Platforms* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004), 62-65.

parties. McKinley again stayed in Canton and Washington, while Bryan engaged in yet another tour. Not surprisingly, the election yielded the same results as the previous election.[100]

While Bryan's tours were not successful in winning elections, the speeches and rallies marked a turning point in presidential campaigns, for voters as well as the candidates. Before, candidates largely had relied on a favorable, biased press to disseminate information. Bryan demonstrated that the candidate could serve as the campaign's best spokesperson. Undecided voters were able to access information directly from the candidates. In 1904, President Theodore Roosevelt, who was elevated to the office after the assassination of President McKinley, craved the opportunity to conduct a campaign tour against his opponent, Alton Parker. His handlers, however, rejected the idea and insisted that he stayed in Washington. Roosevelt privately told his son, "I could cut him (Parker) into ribbons if I could get at him in the open. But of course, a president can't go on the stump and can't indulge in personalities, and so I have to sit still and abide the result." Four years later, Secretary of State William Howard Taft correctly sensed that the attitude of voters had changed, and a new demand was pressing on the candidates to advocate in person for votes. Constituents, especially those in the West, he said, "seem to attach little importance to the idea that the candidate should conduct a campaign of dignified silence, and… they insist on their right to see and hear the candidate."[101]

The election of 1912 presented a situation that required public campaigning by the candidates as the incumbent president (Taft) was challenged by a former president of his own party (Roosevelt). The two candidates, along with the Democratic nominee, Woodrow Wilson, all took to the road and campaigned vigorously. Taft and Roosevelt ended up dividing the Republican Party (though Roosevelt ran as a Progressive or "Bull Moose"), and Wilson emerged

[100] Paul W. Glad, *The Trumpet Soundeth: William Jennings Bryan and his Democracy, 1896-1912* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), 53-57, 77-78.

[101] McGerr, *Decline of Popular Politics*, 171-173.

victorious. The large speaking tours were successful in gaining votes. Four years later, Wilson and his Republican challenger, Charles Evans Hughes, campaigned throughout the East and Midwest. Wilson won by a narrow margin, gaining victory in tight races in many of the states where he and Hughes had campaigned against each other, namely in Texas, Ohio, and Missouri.[102]

After two consecutive elections where the major candidates conducted campaign tours, Warren Harding's decision in 1920 to stay at home was indeed a "return to normalcy," or at least the campaigns of William McKinley. His campaign directly harkened to the McKinley campaign style by copying his front-porch speeches and allowing the party machinery to conduct the day-to-day campaign. His opponent, James Cox, took a different direction. He employed the idea of a campaign tour like those of Bryan, Wilson, and Hughes, but expanded this concept to include the entire country, including the West Coast. President Taft's premonition in 1908 was proven correct, as the American people were eager to meet and hear the candidates for the highest office. Harding's decision for a limited campaign was the last such attempt made by a major candidate. Though Harding proved victorious in the election, the days of winning an election by campaigning from the front porch appeared to be over.

III. CONCLUSION

The election of 1920 thus offers a unique look at the way presidential elections have been conducted, giving a sense of the past and the future of campaign strategies. Presidential elections transitioned from partisan spectacles delivered by party loyalist voters on behalf of candidates to the current scenario that requires candidates to do their own bidding across the nation and assure an often skeptical electorate. The party machinery that once ruled and determined elections gave

[102] Lovell, *Presidential Election of 1916*, 170-173.

way to parties limited by financial and geographical constraints, and a rise in the number of independent voters. Moreover, the prominent role of Ohio in United States electoral politics that led to the nomination of two Ohioans likewise would diminish with the demographic changes of the twentieth century. The election of 1920, then, provides a glimpse at this change, and a case study for the ways campaigns adapt to the shifts in American society.

CHAPTER 3-AWAY FROM THE FRONT PORCH: JAMES COX AND THE CAMPAIGN TOUR

Two persistent story-lines emerged from the 1920 presidential election. The first was the slogan with which Warren Harding inadvertently branded his campaign. In a minor slip of the tongue that would be used throughout his campaign, Harding promised that his election would provide a "return to normalcy." He had meant to say his administration would be a "return to normality," restoring the United States to its pre-World War I state, an incredibly intoxicating promise to a nation dominated by too much change in too little time. The phrase, however, perfectly summarized who he was and how he would lead. His administration would be different from his predecessor's administration in many ways. He promised a different set of guiding principles: modest intelligence instead of Wilson's arrogance and purported genius; government rule by party as opposed to Wilson's one-man government; and above all, a warm human touch over Wilson's cold intellectualism.[103]

The other storyline commonly associated with the election is Harding's "front porch campaign." As inextricably linked to Harding's campaign as the "return to normalcy," the front porch strategy was a clear reference to the style of Harding's hero and the popular president from Ohio, William McKinley. The front porch image was employed as a visual reminder to voters of Harding's promise to return to normalcy, as well as his humble background. This served to differentiate him from the campaign styles and presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, dynamic leaders who had mobilized and divided the nation, leaving many Americans wary of the constant crusades for reform. Harding's speeches were well-measured

[103] Bagby, *Road to Normalcy*, 101.

and non-specific, but contributed to his election by one of the widest margins of the 20th century.[104]

Too often, however, historians neglect Harding's Democratic opponent, Governor James Cox. In brief narratives, authors reduce the election to a foregone conclusion, portraying Cox as the unlucky man chosen to defend Wilson's beleaguered administration. Throughout these narratives, Cox's candidacy is depicted as a losing battle. Cox was forced to desperately appeal for votes while Harding was able to reap the benefits of an electorate ready for a change from the current leaders and policies.[105] But, the election of 1920 was much more than simply a referendum on the League of Nations, or Wilson's administration. The campaign of James Cox attempted to reach the American voting public as no candidate had before (due, in large part, to his desperation). He planned an unprecedented tour in which he would visit both coasts and speak to large crowds in both cities and the countryside. Cox would borrow from the speaking tours of his Democratic predecessors, William Jennings Bryan and Woodrow Wilson, and the popular Republican president, Theodore Roosevelt, while speaking directly to a diverse and divided electorate about the issues of the period.[106]

The election of 1920 was also a battle between dueling ideas and theories about presidential campaigning. Harding's campaign was efficiently run by Harding's personal manager, Harry Daugherty, and Republican Party chairman Will Hays. Daugherty and Hays made the innovative decision to employ an advertising manager from outside of the political world, Albert Lasker. Many of Lasker's techniques continue to be used today, from the "reason why" approach, the use of celebrities and the media to persuade voters, and the responsibility of the campaign staff to control the message, which in Lasker's case consisted mainly of keeping

[104] Geoffrey Perrett, *America in the Twenties: A History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 114-116.
[105] Paul Boller, Jr., *Presidential Campaigns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 212-217.
[106] Cebula, *James Cox*, 112.

Harding in his house to avoid potential gaffes. James Cox had no such counsel. He relied mainly on his personal manager, Edmond Moore. Cox's candidacy was detrimentally affected by his divided party and an increasingly unresponsive voting public. Yet, his campaign would prove innovative as well. Voters today would recognize Cox's stumping techniques and hectic schedule, his verve for campaigning, and the tailoring of his speeches to suit specific audiences. While Harding's campaign is better studied, a study of the Cox campaign can help explain the shifting ground of twentieth-century electoral politics. This chapter will focus on Cox's campaign, contrasting his new style and his ability to adapt to changing situations and circumstances with the rather static performance of his opponent.[107]

I. HARDING'S STRATEGY

According to the designs of his campaign managers, Warren Harding had been holed up in Marion, Ohio since his nomination in June. Harding would not be leaving his hometown to deliver speeches. Instead, he delivered one or two speeches per day from his front porch. For the most part, these were "canned" speeches, prepared ahead of time and repeated daily, with small asides included to address various visiting delegations or specific issues of importance. Harding's campaign team did not trust him to deliver his message without notes, and in fact forbade him to do so. The staff was confident that the Democratic Party had little hope of winning the election, due to the League of Nations debate and the recession, and worked instead to prevent their candidate from allowing the Democrats any opening. They endeavored to keep Harding on message, and, largely, quiet. "Keep Warren at home," Senator Boies Penrose from Pennsylvania said. He explained, "Don't let him make any speeches. If he goes on tour,

[107] Morello, *Selling the President*, 50-53.

somebody's sure to ask him some questions, and Warren's just the sort of damn fool that'll try to answer them."[108]

Harding's chief manager, Lasker, insisted that a front porch campaign "assured a correct public version of deliberate statements." Harding agreed, pointing to his own experience working as an editor during William McKinley's first election. He had been scarred by an interaction with Mark Hanna, McKinley's manager, who refused to give Harding an interview with the candidate. Harding wrote, "This shows how a man, travelling, can cross his wires without knowing it, and that's the reason I decided on a front porch campaign this summer. I wanted to avoid crossed wires." Later, he confided, "The country is calling for deliberate utterance, and that is why the front porch appeals so strongly to me."[109] Harding told the newspapers that "the office of the Chief Executive is too high and important to be sought through whirlwind campaign tours." He explained to the press that he met daily with advisors and discussed the major issues, and that a large-scale campaign would interrupt this type of preparation for the office. He also related that Senator Charles Thomas, a close Senate friend and a Democrat from Colorado, had advised him candidly that "the man who stays home will be elected."[110]

Albert Lasker was fully aware that Harding did not need to go to the press, or do anything to seek attention. Instead, the press would come to Harding. The press would naturally be attracted to reporting the story of a small-town newspaperman running for president from his home-state. In addition, the press assigned to cover the campaign would have little else to do, and would be sure to report all of the pieces of information the campaign issued. The campaign

[108] "An Impossible Choice," *The Nation*, July 10, 1920, 4. For more on the Harding campaign's strategy of keeping the candidate quiet, see: Morello, *Selling the President*, 51.
[109] Downes, *Rise of Warren Gamaliel Harding*, 462-463.
[110] "Harding Stays on Porch," *Lancaster (OH) Daily Gazette*, June 16, 1920, Section A1.

would control every aspect of the reporting. To ensure this fact, Lasker devised several major strategies to attract attention to Marion.[111]

The first strategy was to create a festival-like atmosphere in Marion, with days like "Governor's Day," "First Voter's Day," "Women's Day," and "Foreign Voter's Day."[112] Every day, visiting delegations were received at the front porch by Harding and his wife who dressed simply and frequently remained silent. The local marching band was regularly employed to parade down the streets and there was always a crowd to watch Harding raise the flag each morning. Throughout the summer, the Harding campaign ran a tight ship, exposing Harding only when advantageous: when he had a speech (always prepared by the campaign) or when posing for photographs or receiving diplomats (again, always pre-arranged).[113]

The second strategy was to control the message and access to the candidate. Harding's own views on the major issues (the League of Nations, the recession) were limited and amorphous. Rather than discussing these subjects, Harding used platitudes and avoided controversial issues. Instead, Harding and his campaign focused on what they saw as the key to winning the election: making the public like him. Hand-in-hand with the press coverage, the strategy of focusing on Harding's personality, rather than the substance of divisive issues, was important.[114]

Harding's campaign presented the election as if Harding was facing Woodrow Wilson, assuming voters would respond much less favorably to the president than to the previously-unknown Governor Cox. President Wilson was maligned for being too intellectual, too cold and reserved, while Harding's managers presented the image of Harding as one of the "folks,"

---

[111] Morello, *Selling the President*, 50-53.
[112] Downes, *Rise of Warren Gamaliel Harding*, 475.
[113] Charles Merz, "The Front Porch in Marion," *The New Republic*, October 6, 1920, 12-14; and Morello, *Selling the President*, 53.
[114] Merz, "The Front Porch in Marion," *The New Republic*, 12.

someone who was unassuming and down to earth. The campaign team took pains to address Harding's speech, providing him with the vernacular that would demonstrate his good-natured disposition, derisively nicknamed by some in the Democratic press corps as "Gamalielese" (after his middle name, Gamaliel).[115] One of Harding's campaign managers distributed a list of "Suggestions for Public Utterances and Interviews Relative to Harding and Coolidge" (Harding's vice presidential nominee was Governor Calvin Coolidge from Massachusetts). The list included: "born poor," "cool judgment," "intensely practical," "an ardent patriot," and "a man of the people."[116] The campaign wanted to ensure that there would be a clear distinction between Wilson and Harding.

The third strategy was the introduction of celebrities to advocate for the candidate. Albert Lasker believed that it would not be enough to simply advertise his product; what he needed were people of a certain cultural cache to support his candidate. Al Jolsen, then one of the most celebrated personalities in America (famous for his "mammy" singing, later of *The Jazz Singer* fame), declared himself the president of the "Harding and Coolidge Theatrical League."[117] He was accompanied by other actors and actresses (including Mary Pickford) from New York and Chicago who were greeted on arrival by the marching band for a stroll up Main Street, renamed "Victory Way." Harding's staff cleverly played up the opportunity, issuing a speech that included the line: "I am sure the American people are going to welcome a change of the bill. For the supreme offering, we need an all-star cast, presenting America to all the world."[118] The group, which also included film stars Lillian Gish, Douglas Fairbanks, and Ethel Barrymore, performed throughout the country, each time advocating on behalf of Warren Harding. For

[115] Sinclair, *Available Man*, 166.

[116] Downes, *Rise of Warren Gamaliel Harding*, 459; and Jack Warwick, "Growing Up With Harding," *The Oakland (CA) Tribune*, August 7, 1920, Section A 6-7.

[117] Russell, *Shadow of Blooming Grove*, 406.

[118] Downes, *Rise of Warren Gamaliel Harding*, 471.

Lasker, this was the exemplification of his "reason why" advertising techniques. It was not enough to offer people a choice, he reasoned, one had to provide a compelling reason. As the motion picture industry entered its prime, these actors and performers were becoming more famous and recognizable throughout the country. The efforts of these actors and actresses were among the first celebrity endorsements. At the time, no one debated the merit of having professional performers endorse a candidate or issues.[119]

In addition to the endorsement of actors, Lasker used professional athletes from the national past-time, baseball. Harding's campaign was concerned that his love for golf would be viewed as elitist and out of touch with the public, and hoped to capitalize on the popularity of baseball to further associate Harding with the common man. Through Lasker's connections with the Wrigleys of Chicago (his best known work was in selling their bubblegum), he was able to arrange for the Chicago Cubs to play a game against the local farm team, the Kerrigan Tailors. In early September, the Cubs arrived in Marion to play the Tailors. Amazingly, Warren Harding was in attendance, not to throw out the first pitch (as was already commonplace), but to play! Harding suited up in uniform and threw the first three pitches before being called out in favor of ace Grover Cleveland Alexander. Again, Harding's remarks were tailored to the event, as he discussed "team play," referring to Wilson's refusal to make concessions with congressional Republicans. Although Lasker organized the event, the Republican Party took no credit and pretended the event was a great coincidence, which freed up additional funds for other candidates on the party ballot.[120]

More than simply photo opportunities to add to the file, Lasker's innovations forever changed the face of presidential politics. Harding's overwhelming success in the general election

---

[119] Morello, *Selling the President,* 54-55. For a description of the Marion proceedings, see: "Film Stars to Marion," *Marietta (OH) Daily Register Leader,* August 24, 1920, Section A1.

[120] Morello, *Selling the President,* 58

was due to many factors. Among the likely factors was the celebrity endorsement. The challenge that faced political parties, whose machinery was eroding, was to use the new elements of mass culture to attract voters without party organization. Since, the new interests of voters were not in politics, but in pastimes and recreation like motion pictures and baseball, the popularity of those interests was now employed to elect a president.

II. A LONG SHADOW: COX AND WILSON

From the beginning, James Cox struggled to define his campaign for himself. Nominated on the 44th ballot, Cox was a compromise candidate for a Democratic party struggling to create a new identity and to find a new leader. Throughout much of the 1916 presidential election, Woodrow Wilson's supporters had campaigned with the slogan "He kept us out of war," both a statement of his record and a promise for his second term. Of course, Wilson had not been able to keep this promise, eventually bringing the United States into the war in April 1917. The United States suffered considerably fewer losses in terms of troops than the other nations involved, but the recession that crippled Europe following the war eventually affected to the United States, bringing America's war prosperity to a halt. Wilson's decision after the war to create the League of Nations and to include the League's covenant in the peace treaty was a politically divisive issue in the United States. Wilson found major opposition from Republicans in both houses of Congress. Rather than compromising or cooperating, Wilson decided to take the issue to the American people, and launched a speaking tour throughout the western states where he advocated for the League.[121]

[121] Zieger, *America's Great War*, 222. For Wilson's speaking tour advocating for the League of Nations, see: Scott, *Rise and Fall of the League of Nations*, 47-48.

Many assumed Wilson was laying the groundwork for a bid for a third term against former president Theodore Roosevelt, the consensus choice of many Republicans. The matchup, however, would not materialize. Roosevelt passed away unexpectedly in early 1919, and Wilson suffered a physically debilitating stroke while on his tour. The White House became a fortress, with little information being released about the president's health and administration. Without Wilson to advocate on behalf of the League, loyal Congressional Democrats locked into a stalemate with Republicans throughout the winter and spring of 1919-1920, and the League of Nations covenant and Versailles Peace Treaty were never ratified by Congress.[122] As the 1920 presidential election loomed, it became clear to many in the Democratic Party that Wilson was not fit to run for a third term. Yet, the president refused to give up on the League of Nations, insisting that there were still opportunities for the treaty to be ratified. Wilson would not nominate himself for a third term, but made known his desire to run and pointedly declared that he would not refuse a nomination.[123]

At the convention, the Democratic Party went in a decidedly different direction. William Jennings Bryan had given a speech introducing proposed planks in the party platform, including pronounced support for the League of Nations. Despite his influence in the party, the plank was not passed, and the party could not agree on a consensus nominee. On ballot after ballot, front-runners Governors John Davis and Al Smith and Treasury Secretary William McAdoo failed to capture the necessary majority votes needed to secure the nomination. Supporters of the front-runners began looking for a compromise candidate. On the forty-fourth ballot, James Cox gained the clinching votes needed to become the nominee. He had been a newspaper man by trade but

---

[122] Alvin Johnson, "Woodrow Wilson: A Tragedy," *The New Republic*, September 8, 1920, 10-12; and Bagby, *Road to Normalcy*, 55. For the effects of Wilson's stroke, see: Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World*, 370-375.

[123] "Cox: Away from the White House," *The New Republic*, July 14, 1920, 4-5. For Wilson's behind-the-scenes maneuvering at the convention, see: Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy*, 117-119.

found the allure of affecting change too irresistible. Cox had built his reputation as a crusader by advocating for the reform of Ohio's schools and prisons. He was credited with helping the state solve its teacher shortage, in a time when the profession was underpaid and undervalued. In his autobiography, Cox would portray his decision to enter politics as purely altruistic, asserting that he was not seeking the glory or prestige of public life. Yet, his public speaking abilities and engaging personality helped make him a perfect fit for political life. Still, his nomination had not been anticipated, and the bitter fight over the League of Nations plank, nomination struggle, and lack of knowledge about their candidate left many delegates and party faithful hesitant as they left the San Francisco convention.[124]

Cox had significant input in choosing his running mate, and aimed to balance his ticket in terms of geography and party ideals with the young Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Franklin D. Roosevelt from New York. At the convention, Roosevelt had garnered attention with his loyalty to President Wilson, as he grabbed the New York banner in a demonstration at the unveiling of the invalid president's portrait. Of course, another huge factor in his favor was his last name and the link to the late, albeit Republican, President Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin's fifth cousin and uncle of his wife, Eleanor. Alvin Johnson raised the issue in an issue of *The New Republic* after the nomination, claiming that millions of voters would vote for Cox's ticket "in the belief that Franklin Roosevelt is the son of T.R. and sole heir to his manly virtues."[125]

---

[124] "Democracy's Candidate and His Platform," *The New York Times*, July 9, 1920, Section A1, national edition. For Cox's qualifications against Wilson's son-in-law, Treasury Secretary William McAdoo, see: Charles Merz, "Two Leading Democratic Candidates," *The New Republic*, June 2, 1920, 10-12. For Cox's executive qualifications, see: Cebula, *James Cox*, 103-105; and "One State Solves Teacher Shortage; Ohio Under Cox Uses Single Expedient to Make Profession Worth While," *Woodland (CA) Daily Democrat*, September 9, 1920, Section A2.

[125] James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1956), 72-75. For Roosevelt's effect on the Democratic ticket, see: Alvin Johnson, "Why Will they Vote for Harding?" *The New Republic*, July 28, 1920, 19.

President Wilson's shadow loomed so large at the convention that one of Cox's first acts after being nominated was to pay the president a visit in the White House. The press viewed the visit largely as a conciliatory one, meant to show the unity of the Democratic Party, and to ensure Wilson's support of Cox's candidacy. Instead, Wilson viewed the meeting as a referendum on the subject of the League of Nations and made Cox promise to see that the League became ratified. The press statements issued by both men reflect the competing goals each had for the meeting. Cox claimed that he and Wilson agreed "on the meaning and sufficiency of the Democratic platform and the duty of the party," while Wilson claimed "[Cox] and I were absolutely at one with regard to the great issue of the League of Nations."[126]

Wilson's endorsement tied Cox to the most divisive issue of the election, and supposedly placed him in complete agreement with the president. Earlier in the year, however, Cox had written a piece for *The New York Times*, establishing what he thought would be the dominant issues of the election. When discussing the League of Nations, he couched his support solely in terms of the economic crisis, coloring his rhetoric with stories of his interactions with farmers in Ohio and Kentucky. Farmers in both states viewed the League as a way to restart the economic trade between the United States and Europe that they enjoyed during the war. In making his argument in terms of economics instead of the virtuous and self-righteous language Wilson had used, Cox was attempting to create some separation between his interpretation of the League and Wilson's. But after their meeting, and the joint statements they issued, Cox's position was no longer seen as his own, but rather as a full endorsement of Wilson's covenant.[127]

---

[126] Norman Hapgood, "The San Francisco Answer," *The Independent*, July 10, 1920, 7-12.

[127] "Gov. Cox on the Issues of the Campaign," *The New York Times*, May 23, 1920, Section A1, national edition. For Cox's first comments on the League as a nominee, see: "League is Made Issue by Gov. Cox," *The Lima (OH) News & Times-Democrat*, August 8, 1920, Section A3.

From the beginning, Cox was touted for his ability to win Ohio, an essential state to his electoral strategy. Cox's campaign manager, Edmond Moore, told the press, "Governor Cox was the most available candidate and the best man entered in the contest who would carry pivotal states." Representative John Fitzgerald of Massachusetts maintained that Cox was the better candidate to carry Ohio (between Cox and Harding), offering as proof Cox's three elections as governor of the state and to Harding's defeat as governor in 1910. Central to the strength of Cox's campaign was the favorability of the state's press machine toward him. Cox was confident he would be endorsed by the state's largest newspapers, including *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *The Cleveland Press*, *The Columbus Citizen*, *The Cincinnati Post*, *The Akron Press*, and *The Toledo News*. This support would be an important means of making his message accessible to voters throughout the state.[128]

Indeed, the press was favorable to Cox directly after his nomination. Newspapers nationwide presented his speeches and introduced him to the American voters in special pieces discussing his family, especially his young wife and daughter. What was missing from these accounts was any reference to Cox's first marriage and the fact that he was divorced. These accounts played up his farmer's upbringing and his love for journalism and printing, but said nothing about his divorce. Warren Harding's wife, Florence, was also a divorcee, so the issue might have been negated. But the fact that the subject was never even broached demonstrated the favorability of the sympathetic press corps towards Cox. Yet, the idea that Cox would maintain a press advantage throughout the election was misguided at best. Part of the allure of the two candidates squaring off was the journalistic background and small-town upbringing the two shared. Both maintained great allies in the press, and Harding's reception had been as warmly

[128] "Leaders Believe Cox Best Nominee," *The New York Times*, July 6, 1920, Section A1, national edition.

welcomed as Cox's. However, the election would not necessarily be dominated by these trivial matters, but also by the significant issues of the period.[129]

III. COX'S CAMPAIGN TOUR

The onus was always on Governor James Cox to prove that he was different from both Harding and Wilson, while simultaneously providing citizens with a solid reason to vote for him. Unfortunately, Harding's campaign was crafted in such a way that Harding's own positions were muddled and couched in neutral language. Cox had to be innovative, yet palatable and personable, and above all, on the offensive. Cox's campaign was framed primarily by its reaction to the Harding campaign. As innovative as Harding's managers were in crafting the message and controlling the media, Cox's would have to exceed the efforts in order to get their candidate elected. The governor predicted immediately after his nomination that the winning candidate would be the one who was able to remain on the offensive. "We need make no defense," Cox assured his supporters regarding his stance on the League of Nations and the difficult task ahead. He proclaimed, "We have won the same kind of fight before, and we will win again because we are right."[130]

Describing the Democratic nominating convention in *The Independent,* Samuel Hapgood gauged the manner in which Cox's campaign would proceed. He wrote: "Democratic success in November will depend on the success with which the issues are made clear and dramatic not only by the candidates and leading speakers but also by that division of the national headquarters that is charged with the task of circulating the right facts in the right quarters." For the

---

[129] For examples of newspaper articles detailing Cox's private life, see: "Cox's 'Life,' By Himself," *The New York Times*, July 7, 1920, Section A1, national edition; and "Mrs. Cox Arrives to Greet Husband," *The New York Times*, October 23, 1920, Section A1, national edition.

[130] "Fighting Words are Uttered by Governor Cox," *The Sandusky (OH) Register*, August 4, 1920, Section A1.

Republican Party, the route was clear and fairly obvious, as they had strong-armed several media outlets to stay in Marion for the summer and fall. For the Democratic Party, the challenge would be to successfully circumvent the media, appealing directly to voters.[131]

One advantage that Cox enjoyed at the outset of his candidacy was that he was able to recognize Harding's campaign strategy and form a contrasting scheme. Cox was selected as the Democratic candidate a full month after Harding had been selected by the Republicans. By the time Cox was nominated, Lasker's Marion festivals were in full swing and it was obvious that Harding would not be traveling far from his front porch. The opportunity to distinguish himself from Harding had been presented, and Cox quickly decided his own campaign strategy would be the exact opposite of Harding's.[132]

Governor Cox decided almost immediately after his nomination that he would launch an intensive campaign, and ambitiously proposed to visit every state. He adamantly refused to follow Harding's example, insisting to his advisors that he would not engage in a "front porch" campaign. Cox's staff crafted a speaking tour that would focus on the states that would be essential to a Democratic victory. The South was solidly in the Democratic column, while the Republicans would most likely claim New England and the Midwest. Cox's candidacy was devised as a way for the Democrats to hold on to his home state, Ohio, as Wilson had done in the two previous elections. At the very least, it would offset the purported advantage that Harding might otherwise hold as the state's "favorite son" and Senator. The true battleground for the election, then, was in the West, where the population continued to grow and where both parties were on terms of parity. Cox announced that he would make a tour to both coasts, primarily

---

[131] Norman Hapgood, "The San Francisco Answer," *The Independent*, July 20, 1920, 7-13.

[132] "Gov. Cox Accepts; May Tour Country," *The New York Times*, July 6, 1920, Section A1, national edition; and "Harding and Cox Bare Their Gloves," *The Lima (OH) News & Times Democrat*, July 7, 1920, Section A1.

focusing on California on the West Coast. He was also interested in visiting unpledged states like South Dakota and Minnesota in the Midwest. A campaign official told *The New York Times* that Cox "intends to speak to every city in the country before he is through." While paying his call on President Wilson, Cox was pressed by newsmen on which states he would visit. He reiterated that he wanted to visit each state, even those states in the South where victory was all but assured. Cox explained, "I think it would be gracious to go into the South, even though it is not absolutely necessary. I can see nothing undignified in carrying the cause to the people."[133]

Indeed, the initial promise to visit each state seemed like simply the optimistic rhetoric of a new candidate. In choosing to tour the entire country, Cox hoped to demonstrate a clear difference between himself and Harding. Cox prided himself on his knowledge of the issues and his record as a progressive and reforming governor, and wanted the opportunity to discuss the issues with the American people while Harding stayed at home in Marion. He knew the task ahead was difficult, and that an extensive tour would be costly to him and his party. Yet, his defense of the League of Nations, Wilson, and Congressional Democrats automatically put Cox at a disadvantage, requiring him to take a far more active role than was required of Harding.[134]

A week after his meeting with Wilson and after careful deliberation and planning, Cox announced the plan for his campaign tour. The press was infatuated with the idea of a presidential candidate visiting each state, something never before attempted. The excitement was contrasted with the increasing boredom that came from the beat reporters holed up in Marion with Harding. "I shall visit every doubtful state," Cox told *The New York Times*, "which is not Democratic beyond the slightest doubt. There is no other kind." His trip, more extensive than

[133] "Cox Will Make Ratification His Issue and Start Active Campaign in Far West; For the League with Two Reservations," *The New York Times*, July 9, 1920, Section A1, national edition.

[134] "Cheering Crowd Welcomes Cox in Washington," *The New York Times*, July 17, 1920, Section A1, national edition.

even William Jennings Bryan's celebrated tours in 1896 and 1900, began with a tour of West Virginia, New York, New Jersey, and most of New England. His running mate, Franklin Roosevelt, did the opposite, beginning in the west and then traveling eastward. Roosevelt spent two weeks traveling through California and other western states. Eventually, the two men planned to cross paths and switch coasts (Roosevelt traveling to the east, Cox to the west). This plan ultimately excluded the South, which fell into the column that Cox discussed, as states whose affiliation were beyond question. Cox and Roosevelt would have to spend all available time and resources in undecided states.[135]

The announcement of Governor Cox's plans had two significant effects. The first was obvious, as it created a sense of anticipation throughout the press and the public; Cox was proposing a very democratic enterprise, "meeting face to face with each voter." The other effect was that it called the relatively boring Harding campaign's technique into question. Democratic Senator Pat Harrison of Mississippi issued a challenge to Senator Harding, demanding he "leave the front porch," and "come out into the open and submit the respective records of the two parties and opposing candidates to the limelight of publicity." Trumpeting Cox's promise, Harrison said, "The most aggressive speaking campaign in the history of American politics will be conducted. The Democratic nominees both believe in going directly to the people with their appeals of support." Further, Harrison added, "Cox and Roosevelt will have no sympathy for the 'front porch' campaigns but will instead submit their cause and themselves to the public for

[135] "Greatest Tour of Any Campaign Planned by Cox," *The New York Times*, July 24, 1920, Section A1, national edition. For Cox's Electoral College strategy, see: "Strong Position for League Urged," *Fort Wayne (IN) Journal-Gazette*, August 3, 1920, Section A1.

judgment." In Cox's own words, the campaign would bring the election to "front porches of the people of this country."[136]

The Democrats sensed that Cox's election hinged on his ability to have an intelligent discussion of the issues, offered in contrast with Harding's purported limited grasp of the same topics. Senator Thomas Walsh, Democratic chairman of the Congressional Campaign Committee, was enthused that the campaign would "drive Harding from his 'front porch.'" Indeed, Harding's managers were getting worried about the excitement over Cox's proposed campaign, and by the way voters might expect Harding to respond. The Democrats planned a huge "notification rally" in Dayton where Cox would be formally announced as the nominee (candidates did not attend the nominating convention at the time). As the rally neared, the two opposing camps squabbled over how many people were preparing to attend the festivities. Harding's supporters claimed that Cox's staff was bribing people to attend, an allegation denied by the Cox campaign.[137] When the rally finally materialized, 50,000 supporters (Republicans disputed this reported number as too generous) came to wish Cox well, and cheered as delegations from across the state showed their loyalty to the Ohio governor. A visible sign of the intra-state rivalry emerged during the Cox notification rally, as a contingent representing Marion (Harding's hometown and headquarters) carried a banner reading: "It's getting a little too warm on the front porch." Another read: "Marion has a candidate; Dayton has a president." The tension throughout Ohio in early August was palpable.[138]

---

[136] "Quit Front Porch, Harrison Demands," *The New York Times*, July 30, 1920, Section A1, national edition; and "Cox Opens Drive Wednesday," *The Lima (OH) News & Times Democrat*, August 9, 1920, Section A1.

[137] For examples of the popular images of Governor Cox speaking, see: "Dem. Nominee in Characteristic Speaking Poses," *The Columbus Dispatch*, August 7, 1920, Section A1; and "Democrats Flock to Dayton to Hear Cox Speech Today," *The New York Times*, August 7, 1920, Section A1, national edition.

[138] "50,000 Cheer Cox's Speech," *The New York Times*, August 7, 1920, Section A1, national edition. For details of Cox's notification rally, see: "Pageant Put on by Cox Men," *The Lima (OH) News & Times Democrat*, July 8, 1920, Section A1.

At the same time as the rousing rally in Dayton, Harding's campaign began to grow restless as the various "days" Lasker envisioned began to wear thin. The *Cedar Rapids* (Iowa) *Evening Gazette* stated that there was real dissension in the Harding camp over what the proper course of action would be to combat Cox's tour. Harding was prodded by campaign staff to leave Marion for the stump, but Harding remained steadfast in his decision to stay at home. His campaign staff tried to control the story by claiming his choice demonstrated Harding's calm decision-making and his tough stance when faced with difficult choices. In addition, Harding's supporters claimed that he would be able to conserve energy while allowing Cox to wear out his energy. Harding finally spoke on the matter, saying "The strategy adopted by my opponent will be ignored. The contest for president is to be conducted in dignified manner, and in temperament fit for a candidate." It was a bold decision to allow the other campaign to make all of the headlines, but Harding was confident he would gain the victory.[139]

When leaving on his great tour, Cox was optimistic about the possibility of winning the presidency. The day he left to begin his tour, he said "We feel we can win wherever folks are and where the case can be stated. State lines don't amount to much." The Harding campaign had developed an effective strategy, forcing Cox to go on the offensive, but now it appeared the Republicans were being far too cautious. And Cox was only too eager to go on the offensive. His campaign had prepared banners with the slogan, "Peace, Progress, and Prosperity," and Cox carried hundreds of buttons that read "Coxsure." He delivered sixteen speeches on his first day, all with references to the passive Republican, announcing "I am going to see thousands of front

[139] "Still at Outs Over Campaign; Harding Balks," *The Cedar Rapids (IA) Evening Gazette*, August 7, 1920, Section A1. For Harding's comments, see: "Harding Conceit Well-Developed," *Moberly (MO) Evening Democrat*, August 14, 1920, Section A1.

porches from coast to coast, believing the front porch of the people is the seat of American sovereignty."[140]

From the beginning, Western papers greeted the news of Cox's planned trip with excitement. Harding's festivals did not maintain a consistent amount of press, and many reporters relayed the news of Cox's plans. Larry Jacobs, writing from Franklin Roosevelt's campaign train for the Associated Press, wired an article to be printed in several papers about the interest in Cox's tour. "There are objections to both men [Harding and Cox]… and the West wants to be shown and convinced that Cox is its' kind of man, that his principles are their principles." At the same time, Cox was repeating his charges of the Republican Senate slush fund attempting to buy the election. His planned trip coincided with these allegations to keep his candidacy constantly in the Western press as he toured.[141]

Cox began his western tour by visiting the neighboring and potential battleground states of Michigan and Indiana before heading north to Wisconsin. He spent three days touring Minnesota and both North and South Dakota, even appearing as a jockey at the Minnesota State Fair. He delivered many speeches daily, almost all appealing to voters to jointly support his candidacy and the League of Nations.[142] Heading west, Cox tailored his speeches to his audiences, hastily preparing individual speeches for each town on the train or automobile with his staffers en route to rallies. In speeches in Washington state, he spoke about reclaiming land seized by the government for federal dams and other projects. In Oregon, a state that had eagerly

---

[140] For Cox's confident attitude at the beginning of the tour, see: "Coxsure," *The New Republic*, August 11, 1920, 6. For Cox's quotation, see: "Governor Cox to Start Speaking Tour Very Soon," *The Sandusky (OH) Register*, August 6, 1920, Section A1.

[141] Larry Jacobs, "West Eager to See Gov. James Cox," *The Waterloo (IA) Times-Tribune*, August 27, 1920, Section A1; and "Gov. Cox to Repeat his G.O.P. Expose," *The Oakland (CA) Tribune*, August 27, 1920, Section A1-3.

[142] For details of Cox's Western tour, see: "Cox Starts on Swing Through Our 'Wild West,'" *The Sandusky (OH) Register*, September 2, 1920, Section A1; "Gov. Finds Wisc. Bitter Against Wilson," *The Columbus Dispatch*, September 5, 1920, Section A1; and "Gov. Cox Invades Dakotas," *The Columbus Dispatch*, September 7, 1920, Section A1.

supported Prohibition, he spoke of his law-enforcing credentials in the state of Ohio. He was not afraid to show the strain of the campaign, sweating profusely, talking about his exhaustion, and speaking with a weakened voice, all demonstrating the level of hard work and determination that he had invested in his candidacy.[143]

First in Boise, Idaho, and then again throughout California, Cox used the opportunity to explain his views on the League of Nations in contrast with leading Republican senators William Borah (ID) and Hiram Johnson (CA). Rather than shying away from the issue, Cox instead put the issue at the forefront. Throughout California, he tailored his speeches to discuss the League as it related to the Pacific Basin. He pointed out the large number of Chinese immigrants in the San Francisco Bay area and discussed how the League of Nations would have prevented the Japanese invasion of the Shantung province. In an incident at the San Francisco Auditorium, a heckler interrupted Cox's speech by proclaiming that Harding's opposition to the League promoted America's interests, while Cox's position reduced the United States' stature. Cox quickly responded that the nationalist fervor had been rampant throughout Germany before World War I, and that the League would work to promote harmony for all nations.[144]

Throughout his visit to California and Arizona, Cox went to great lengths to keep his visit in the news. Several papers frequently listed the number of speeches and appearances Cox made, focusing on the novelty of a presidential candidate visiting previously uncharted territory. While in Los Angeles, Cox was eager to visit Hollywood. Several film stars, including Bessie Love and

---

[143] "Sidestepping With Cox," *The Nation*, October 6, 1920, 6-7.

[144] Henry Rodgers, "Cox's Voice Improves; Plans Address at Boise Tonight," *The Oakland (CA) Tribune*, September 14, 1920, Section A3; "The Visiting Candidate," *The Oakland (CA) Tribune*, September 17, 1920, Section A1; "8000 Hear Cox in Capital; Johnson Praised by Leader," *The Woodland (CA) Daily Democrat*, September 17, 1920, Section A1; and "Quizzers Heckle Cox in his Nation League Plea at Auditorium," *The Oakland (CA) Tribune*, September 19, 1920, Section A1.

Charles Bay, were on hand to give him a tour of a movie set. While on set, a scene was filmed with Cox and over fifty film stars on a giant ship while the American flag was unfurled behind the candidate. This incident, however, was far less publicized than Harding's interaction with Al Jolsen and the other actors who visited Harding in Marion. To gain further exposure, Cox launched allegations that Harding was supported by the "German press," and that nearly all of Arizona's newspapers were under Republican control. Though he made dozens of appearances every day, Cox seemed unable to capture the press attention that he felt he deserved (a statement perhaps contradicted by the consistent publication of his accusations).[145]

The press was not the only factor working against Cox's candidacy. The breakneck pace of his campaign had caused problems almost from the outset. In August, before Cox began his tour, a town constable in West Virginia attempted to arrest Cox and his party for excessive speeding as they tried to get from rally to rally on time (the party was reportedly driving at 23 miles per hour). In late September, the train that was carrying Cox and his campaign staff through Arizona was wrecked by spreading rails as it sped to the next rally. The governor was unhurt but badly shaken up; his speeches that day were markedly shorter. In addition, Cox was noticeably tired, often becoming hoarse near the end of each day and suffering from his lack of sleep. His plan to give a different speech at each stop was taking an obvious toll on the governor, as he suffered from severe exhaustion and damaged vocal chords. This caused Cox to cancel some of his outdoor appearances in late September as his tour was winding down.[146]

---

[145] "Cox Rounding Turn in Swing Around Circle," *The Oakland (CA) Tribune*, September 20, 1920, Section A1; "Cox Becomes Actor in Movie in Hollywood," *The Oakland (CA) Tribune*, September 21, 1920, Section A2; and "Harding Backed By German Press is Cox Charge," *The Oakland (CA) Tribune*, September 25, 1920, Section A3.

[146] For details of Cox's transportation issues, see: "Town Constable Tried to Arrest Cox For Speeding," *Moberly (MO) Evening Democrat*, August 16, 1920, Section A1; and "Cox Train Wrecked, Nominee and Party Are Badly Shaken," *The New York Times*, September 23, 1920, Section A1. For details on Cox's speaking maladies, see: "Cox Calls for Throat Specialist," *The Columbus Dispatch*, September 12, 1920, Section A1.

The differing campaign styles of Cox and Harding were divisive for voters and members of the press. While many voters were excited to greet Governor Cox on his campaign to the West, not all were registering to vote. The writers for *The Nation* frequently reported voter apathy throughout many states. In an editorial titled "Don't Throw Away Your Vote," the editors were critical of both candidates. In addition to having similar views on the major issues, the editors accused Harding saying nothing of any substance and Cox of saying anything to get elected.[147]

Cox was dealt a further blow when the state of Maine conducted their statewide election in mid-September, before the rest of the country voted in November. The results often predicted the national vote, giving voters and both parties an idea of which direction the electorate was leaning. The results in Maine were overwhelmingly against the Democratic Party, and came as Cox was trying to rally voters in California. The Republicans were overjoyed, with vice presidential nominee Calvin Coolidge wiring Harding, "You are already elected." Harding capitalized on the momentum and favorable press by announcing his intention to leave the front porch in Marion for some well-chosen sites in early October. A month prior, Harding had announced a plan to travel to California to battle against Cox's ambitious tour, but now backed off the initial promise and settled for locations throughout the Midwest and East Coast. Cox's plan to force Harding from the porch was coming to fruition, but the emergence was on Harding's terms rather than Cox's.[148]

---

[147] For *The Nation*'s inventory of the 1920 presidential campaign, see: "The Campaign to Date," *The Nation*, September 11, 1920, 4; and "Don't Throw Away Your Vote," *The Nation*, September 18, 1920, 4.

[148] "Harding Approves Speaking Tour," *The Columbus Dispatch*, October 13, 1920, Section A3; and Harding Plans Speaking Tour to California," *The Oakland (CA) Tribune*, September 11, 1920, Section A2. For Maine's early vote, see: "Maine Votes," *The Columbus Dispatch*, October 14, 1920, Section A1; and "The Prospect of Harding," *The New Republic*, September 29, 1920, 4-5.

Cox's western tour came to an end in Kansas City, with many Democrats in California and other states calling it a great success. Cox's campaign staff was still very confident in his chances of winning, but knew that their time spent traveling in the West had been limited. Cox took a much-needed week to relax, and then went back to the stump. In mid-October, he announced a second, though smaller, tour. He would also be debuting a huge surprise at one of his rallies: the innovative "sound amplifier" which would allow him to speak for long periods of time without constantly going hoarse. The innovation came too late, however, for Cox to have made sufficient use of the new tool, but he spent the last two weeks speaking with the aid.[149]

With the election drawing to a close, newspapers attempting to gauge the voters' leanings had mixed prognostications. In mid-September, as Cox was touring California, *The Oakland Tribune* published an article detailing his candidacy's fate. The headline trumpeted "Big Majority is Predicted for Harding," and opined that Cox would lose the election based on his inability to win New England and the Midwest, leaving the Western states as irrelevant to his victory. One month later, however, an Associated Press article titled "Turning of Tide is Apparent" was published throughout the country. In the article, Cox was gaining on Harding's lead. He had "laid bare the machinations of the Senate oligarchy," and "wholeheartedly and decisively" proven the strength of the League of Nations. These competing theories on the election's outcome demonstrated the inability of the press, at the time, to properly predict voting trends, while also showing the unpredictability of how Cox's tour was being received.[150]

---

[149] "Cox Ends Tour in Kansas City," *The Columbus Dispatch*, October 3, 1920, Section A1; and "Cox Starts Upon his Second Tour," *The Galveston (TX) Daily News*, October 7, 1920, Section A2. For the introduction of the sound amplifier, see: "Cox to Spring Surprise in his Address," *The Columbus Dispatch*, October 14, 1920, Section A1.

[150] "Big Majority is Predicted for Harding," *The Oakland (CA) Tribune*, September 19, 1920, Section A1; and "Turning of Tide is Apparent," *The Lima (OH) News & Times-Democrat*, October 17, Section A1.

Still, Cox's bold campaign tour had failed to create the huge momentum that he felt was necessary to overtake Harding and win the election. It was becoming apparent that simply meeting and speaking to large amounts of voters was not going to ensure victory. Instead, the prominence of issues forced Cox to detail his views in a way that few candidates before had ever attempted. Cox's handling of those issues would help determine the outcome of the election.

IV. CAMPAIGN RHETORIC: COX, HARDING, AND THE ISSUES OF THE CAMPAIGN

For contemporary historians, James Cox's candidacy was defined less by his campaign techniques and the large tour he planned than by the issues Cox spoke about in his speeches. From the beginning, Cox knew that he would have to defend the League of Nations, both because of the promise he made to President Wilson and because he was the Democratic nominee. Cox was also aware that he would need to address the issue of Prohibition, the recently-added amendment to the Constitution. On this subject, Cox would not have to convince voters of the measure's merits, but rather discuss how he would enforce the new law. Also, the election was the first in which women would be voting, another potential issue for Cox to address. Cox's campaign would be defined by the way that he addressed, or dodged, these issues.

On the issue of League of Nations, Cox knew that his nomination was owed to the support he pledged for Wilson's draft covenant. He therefore echoed Wilson's rhetoric, namely in calling the League "the world's most urgent need."[151] He would repeat the phrase in numerous speeches, especially early in the campaign, as the Democrats were convinced that the American people supported the League. His promise meant that Cox could not abandon the issue, even when it became clear that audiences, particularly in Midwestern states like Wisconsin, were

[151] "Gov. Cox on the Issues of the Campaign," *The New York Times*, May 23, 1920, Section A1.

opposed to the League covenant. Most vexing to Cox was that hecklers and critics did not limit their opposition to the League, but extended their criticisms to Wilson in particular and Democrats in general.[152]

The Republicans planned the entire election as a referendum on Wilson. They wisely side-stepped the League issue, and were careful to invoke the League only in relation to criticism of Wilson. In addition, they never provided a definitive response regarding Harding's own views. Political critic Samuel Blythe wrote about the Republicans: "You cannot teach an old dog new tricks…the Old Guard surrenders but never dies. The war hasn't made a dent in them, the only way they look is backward."[153] Indeed, Harding's nomination was seen as a direct response to Wilson, a rejection of the previous eight years. Edward Lowery wrote that Wilson was a visionary, who identified with "forward-thinking men;" Harding was "as old-fashioned as those wooden Indians which used to stand in front of cigar stores." These commentaries on their personalities clearly were meant to underline their political views on issues like the League, but implicitly reminded the voting public of the results of electing high-minded intellectuals like Wilson.[154]

Harding's scripted rhetoric hewed closely to the party line, citing the United States' entry into World War I and the League of Nations as dangerous to national security, costing Americans vast amounts of money and forever damaging social conventions. Less than two weeks before the election, in one of his few appearances outside of Marion, Harding spoke to a large crowd at Madison Square Garden in New York City. He accused Wilson of undoing years of diplomacy, claiming the League violated the policies set forth by Washington, Jefferson, and

---

[152] "Gov. Finds Wisconsin Bitter Against Wilson," *The Columbus Dispatch*, September 5, 1920, Section A1.

[153] Samuel Blythe, "The Same Old Game," *Saturday Evening Post*, March 20, 1920, 3-5.

[154] Allen, *Only Yesterday*, 29-30.

Roosevelt. He claimed that a victory for Cox would be the same as a third term for the Wilson administration, and would further destroy the United States' foreign policy.[155] This was his strongest commentary on the League; before, he had chosen to be vague about the United States' entry, allowing "the Senate debate to take its course." This was a prudent position. If elected, Harding faced the prospect of the League being approved in one form or another. To argue strongly against the League and to refuse to cooperate with the decision meant the potential of having to reverse course. Harding chose to vacillate, and hoped that the public would not notice.

At the same time, James Cox was feeling similar pressure to guard his words. When he departed for his whistle-stop tour of the United States, comparisons could be made between his tour and the one that Wilson had embarked on less than a year before. The political futures of both men hung in the balance, and both chose to take their argument on the road, sure of their ability to appeal to the American people and convince them of the strength of the League of Nations. Like Wilson, however, Cox soon found that the American people were not receptive to his message, particularly when he was beset by hecklers and sparse attendance in some Western states.[156]

By October, Cox began stressing how his conception of the League of Nations differed from that of Wilson. He was still adamant in his support for the League, but he explicitly stated the charges he thought essential to get the League passed through Congress while still protecting the rights and lifestyles of the voting people. Then as Election Day neared, Cox downplayed the importance of the League of Nations vote and support, and began stressing other issues. For

---

[155] "Vast Throngs Hear Madison Square Garden Speech," *The Columbus Dispatch*, October 24, 1920, Section A1.

[156] "Side Stepping With Cox," *The Nation*, October 6, 1920, 6-7. For Cox's difficulties in some Western states, see: "Gov. Finds Wisconsin Bitter Against Wilson," *The Columbus Dispatch*, September 5, 1920, Section A1; and "Quizzers Heckle Cox in his Nation League Plea at Auditorium," *The Oakland (CA) Tribune*, September 19, 1920, Section A1. For a discussion of Cox's rallies in Oregon and Washington, see: "The Week," *The New Republic*, October 20, 1920, 2.

instance, from mid-September through Election Day, Cox accused Harding of benefitting from a secret slush fund set up by other Republican senators. This accusation demonstrated, according to Cox, the low moral fiber of his Republican opponent, but the accusation also served to distract the voting public from the League of Nations debate. Though the accusations were never substantiated, the press kept Cox in the news, as many western newspapers carried the rumors on their front pages before and after Cox's tour came to a close.[157]

Cox also found himself on the defensive as Harding's Senate colleague, Henry Cabot Lodge, began actively campaigning against Cox and the League of Nations. Lodge remained steadfast in his opposition to the Wilson-sponsored League and regarded Cox as the spokesperson for the Democratic Party and the target of his criticisms. Lodge and Cox frequently issued attacks against each other in the final weeks of the campaign. This had two adverse results for the Cox campaign. First, it served to keep Cox from engaging Harding one-on-one through the media, with Lodge acting as the *de facto* Republican candidate in Harding's stead. Instead, Cox's focus and invective was too often directed towards Lodge, who was not facing election. Second, it kept the League of Nations as a subject of debate. For Cox, the League was an issue increasingly best left untouched, as it only served to remind the public of his association with Wilson, who grew more unpopular by the day. As a result, Harding was able to stay above the fray.[158]

Cox dealt with the issue of prohibition very differently from his position on the League. As a popularly-approved amendment, prohibition passed successfully throughout the United

---

[157] Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of the World*, 388-389. For Cox's accusations of slush funds, see: "Cox Declares Senators Are Trying to Buy the Presidency for Harding," *The Daily Capital (Jefferson City, MO) News*, August 15, 1920, Section A1; "Cox Opens Fire On Republicans For All Deeds," *The Greeley (CO) Daily Tribune*, August 14, 1920, Section A1.

[158] Daniels, *Wilson Era*, 520. For Cox's debates in the press with Lodge, see: "Cox Flays Lodge in New England; Ridicules Harding," *The New York Times*, October 19, 1920, Section A1, national edition.

States, particularly in the rural areas in the South and Midwest which had been the basis of the movement for the amendment. Therefore, Cox defended his original opposition to the measure, while also ensuring voters of his ability to enforce the law as written.

Both candidates had personal objections to prohibition. Warren Harding especially enjoyed alcohol and frequently drank while playing poker, a habit well-reported throughout Washington. Nevertheless, newspapers frequently cited Harding's support as a U.S. senator for the Volstead Act, which reinforced the eighteenth amendment prohibiting alcohol, and that many temperance officers supported Harding's candidacy. Conversely, James Cox had been re-elected as governor in Ohio in 1918 while continually stating his opposition to the measure. Once prohibition passed in Ohio, however, Cox earned high praise for his willingness to enforce the law. He insisted his record of enforcement was a virtue. Throughout the campaign, whenever reporters raised the issue, he replied that he would "enforce the laws of the land, as I enforced the laws of the state of Ohio." He viewed the debate over prohibition in the 1920 election as distracting. Since the prohibition amendment was passed and made into law, Cox felt his support or opposition of the original amendment should have no bearing on the election. Cox explained, "The friends of world peace (invoking the League of Nations again) and the friends of progress will win this election, and an attempt to divide them on any question not at issue will be unavailing."[159]

Among skeptical drys, Cox benefited from the strong pro-Prohibition record of his running mate, Franklin Roosevelt. Prohibition officials in New York heralded Secretary Roosevelt as a staunch "dry," citing his legislative record as a state assemblyman in the Albany statehouse where he frequently pushed for stronger prohibition laws. He substantiated this

[159] "Gov. Cox Declares Prohibition Is Not Campaign Issue," *The New York Times*, September 9, 1920, Section A1, national edition.

reputation at the nominating convention with his efforts to defeat a plank in the 1920 Democratic Party platform that called for easing implementation of the Volstead Act. His candidacy helped balance the ticket against accusations that Cox was a "wet," with Roosevelt frequently reassuring rural voters that Cox would enforce the law.[160]

The press constantly stressed Cox's original opposition to prohibition, however. After his nomination, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* published the nomination announcement under the headline, "The Wets Won!" *The Chicago Tribune* published "An Estimate of Cox's Vote," detailing Cox's opposition to the amendment and dubbing him "the 'wettest' candidate in sight," indicating that the Democrat party wants to get as far away from Wilsonism as possible." Further undermining Cox's position came when Federation of Liquor Interests (headquartered in New Jersey) mailed flyers supporting Cox's election. The Federation was certain that Cox would support liquor interests, even if he was unable to formally support the wets. Cox did not reject the support (if even made aware of it), and did not further expand his position.[161]

Neither candidate expressed many opinions on prohibition but the issue remained at the fore for the entirety of the campaign. Again, the discussion of prohibition only served to help Harding, who kept mum on the subject. Those who supported prohibition would view him as an ally, honoring his efforts to get the measure passed. Those who disagreed with the amendment would see the passage as yet another reform and extension into the domestic sphere on the part of the federal government. Both groups were unlikely to favor the Democratic candidate. As with the League issue, Cox tried to explain his views by citing his personal values and ideals, but it

---

[160] Steve Neal, *Happy Days Are Here Again: The 1932 Democratic Convention, The Emergence of FDR- and How America Was Changed Forever* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), 237.

[161] "The Wets Won!" *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 7, 1920, Section A1; and "Cox and Booze," *The Morning Republican (Mitchell, SD),* September 3, 1920, A4. For a discussion of Cox's views on Prohibition, see: "Estimate of Cox's Vote," *The Chicago Tribune,* July 7, 1920, Section A1; and "Cox Could Win California If He Stayed Longer," *The Columbus Dispatch,* September 21, 1920, Section A1.

was to no avail. While Cox's support of the League of Nations was more ruinous to his candidacy than prohibition, Cox certainly did not benefit from the issue.

The final issue that was unique to the election of 1920 further altered the way elections were conducted. Both candidates supported the 20th amendment allowing women the right to cast ballots. In the immediately preceding elections, policies had already been incorporated to change the way candidates interacted with their constituents. Progressive reforms had eliminated many of the controls and incentives the political parties leveraged with their loyalists, and were forcing candidates to take a far more active role in campaigning. Candidates now made their speeches shorter and took care to explain their issues and views in a clear and concise way, removing much of the high-minded and flowery language that peppered Bryan's speeches.[162] In theory, this should have favored the candidate who traveled most and spoke to the largest number of people. But 1920 was unique because of the shrewd manner that Harding campaigned. He effectively gave short speeches that centered on the key issues, which were then dispersed throughout the country. Cox, meanwhile, gave hastily prepared speeches directed to the voters in each city. The speeches generally followed the same themes, as he advocated for the League of Nations and assured voters of his values, belief in the law, and ability to enforce the laws of the country.[163]

Both campaigns were eager to seize upon the large number of new voters who had entered the roll books.Near the end of the campaign, Harding routinely met with interest groups, and began focusing on women in particular, inviting them to meet at his house in Marion. Frequently he asked his wife Florence to join in. Florence was a natural campaigner and often more current on major issues than her husband. Harding's message for women often echoed their

[162] McGerr, *Decline of Popular Politics*, 27.
[163] Cebula, *James Cox*, 113.

concerns. He assured them he would uphold prohibition and was working to improve working conditions for women, including advocating for an eight-hour work day and maternity protection.[164]

Governor Cox could not meet with small groups on quite the same level, due to his hectic schedule. In addition, Cox's divorce and the fact that his second wife was still under thirty years old (and some twenty years younger than he) provoked uncomfortable questions, particularly with women. Margaretta Cox rarely accompanied her husband on his travels and frequently avoided the limelight. She granted one interview to the chairman of the Woman's Bureau of the Democratic National Committee two weeks before the election, and was extremely deferential, saying, "I am rather old fashioned. I believe that I can best care for my husband in this difficult campaign by taking the responsibility of household details. I am interested and glad to have people like him (Cox), but please excuse me from talking about politics."[165] Cox did receive the endorsement of noted suffragette, Carrie Chapman Catt, who wrote an article printed in several papers, saying "A vote for Cox is a vote for peace," and urging fellow suffrage advocates to follow suit.[166]

Numerous articles that were printed in the weeks leading up to the election compromised the integrity of the new female constituency, including some that were supposedly assisting women in casting their first vote. "You can't let your admiration for some good-looking candidate for president or vice president lead you to vote for that handsome gentleman to the exclusion of his running mate," advised one. Others emphasized the difficulty in finding a baby-

[164] "Women Hear Senator Harding on Welfare," *The Sandusky (OH) Star-Journal*, October 1, 1920, Section A1.

[165] "Mrs. Cox Arrives to Greet Husband," *The New York Times*, October 23, 1920, Section A1, national edition.

[166] "Cox for Peace, Suffrage Leader," *The Sandusky (OH) Star-Journal*, October 22, 1920, Section A1.

sitter and finishing household chores in time to vote.[167] Neither candidate, however, attempted to make similar statements regarding the newly required right of women. Cox took the issue very seriously, frequently urging states where the suffrage amendment had not been ratified to do so before the election.[168]

In addition to dealing with these issues, James Cox sought to clearly separate himself from his opponent in terms of reputation and values. At the beginning of his campaign tour, Cox focused on Harding's record and tried to portray Harding both as passive and as a reactionary. But as time went on, Cox's charges turned more personal and sinister. At the end of August, Cox repeatedly insisted that Harding was part of a senatorial ring that was attempting to buy the White House. There was ample evidence, Cox charged, to show the millions of dollars the Republican Party had illegally accepted to gain the presidency.[169] As Cox gave the speech in various cities, he would garner applause when he mentioned the alleged slush fund the Republicans developed. "Give it to them, Jimmy," and "That's the way to talk," were heard at a rally in Wheeling, West Virginia. Later, as the campaign intensified, and hope of victory waned, Cox's language became more pointed. In New York City, he greeted a large crowd with his familiar phrases: "The only front porch I recognize is your front porch. I can discuss the issues that are vital within the shadow of homes because I was not nominated by a senatorial ring." If nothing else, Cox had found a way to distract the audiences from discussions on the League of Nations, prohibition, or any controversial issue that tied the Democratic nominee to Wilson. The

[167] For examples of articles targeting female voters, see: Stella Crossley Daljord, "What Will They Do With Their Vote?" *The Nation*, September 4, 1920, 8; and "Timely Hint for Sentimental Lady Voters," *The Columbus Dispatch*, October 3, 1920, Section A1.

[168] "Vigorous Attack on G.O.P. Plan of Dem. Nominee," *The Sandusky (OH) Register*, August 13, 1920, Section A1.

[169] "Cox Declares Senators Are Trying to Buy the Presidency for Harding," *The Daily Capital (Jefferson City, MO) News*, August 26, 1920, Section A1.

accusations would continue throughout the campaign, with no proof ever being found to substantiate his claims, then or now.[170]

The frustrations for the Cox campaign did not end with accusations about the alleged Senate ring. After receiving low poll numbers from Republican-owned newspapers, Cox began leveling charges against the media, claiming that the news was not being reported fairly everywhere, particularly regarding the alleged slush fund. As a former reporter and editor, he made this statement from a perspective of first-hand experience, particularly about the power of the owner and distributer of the papers to control their content. He stated angrily, "A great many reactionary papers are not printing the news of the campaign. They decline to have this case tried before the jury, the American people." [171]

A few days after his complaint about the newspapers, Cox returned to the original target. Harding had been heckled in Baltimore, Maryland, while delivering a rare speech away from the confines of Marion. The heckler was jailed, which caused Cox to make an issue out of the man's constitutional rights. By way of contrast, Cox offered his own experience where he engaged a heckler in a dialogue regarding the issues. Then he charged that his hecklers had been placed by the Harding campaign staff, in an attempt to force Cox to contradict himself. Cox too often became flummoxed during speeches, speaking in tangents, especially after being interrupted or booed. These incidents exposed Cox to criticisms that he was not acting presidential, while

[170] For details of Cox's slush fund accusations against Harding, see: "Cox Opens Fire on Senate Group in Five Speeches," *The New York Times*, August 14, 1920, Section A1, national edition; "Cox To Make New Charges," *The New York Times*, August 29, 1920, Section A1, national edition; "Campaign Funds," *The New Republic*, September 15, 1920, 8-9; and Cox, *Journey Though My Years*, 246-265.

[171] For Cox's claims of press bias and/or ignoring of his candidacy, see: "The Campaign to Date," *The Nation*, September 11, 1920, 4; "Cox Very Angry Because Papers are Ignoring Him," *The Sandusky (OH) Register*, September 20, 1920, Section A1; and "Cox Hits Old Guard and Coast Papers," *The New York Times*, September 20, 1920, Section A1, national edition.

Harding, who rarely made accusations or was forced to defend himself, remained cool and collected.[172]

However, there was one incident that revealed Cox's character, and demonstrated his ability to act presidential. Rumors have persisted since the death of Warren Harding in 1923 about two elements of his private life. First, there were whispers that he was of a mixed-race heritage, the son of an African-American father and a white mother. Second, there were rumors that Harding frequently engaged in extra-marital affairs. Both accusations were potentially disastrous to Harding's career and candidacy. President Wilson's personal secretary, Joseph Tumulty, was approached with evidence of both rumors, in the hopes of gaining the attention of the Democratic National Committee. Tumulty and President Wilson repudiated the contents of the purported evidence. Governor Cox refused to make mention of the rumors in any of his speech. As a result, no available newspaper articles made mention of the rumors. Since 1923, the rumors have gained notoriety, particularly in books written in the 1960s when Harding's papers became public record. Governor Cox's ambition was clear, evidenced in his accusations about the senatorial ring attempting to buy the election. Yet, his refusal to raise moral and racial questions about Harding's private life demonstrated the strength of his personal character.[173]

In situation after situation, Cox constantly found himself forced to defend his record as governor, and his personal values and beliefs, all while carrying the mantle of his political party by himself. Harding received ample help, not just from his campaign manager and staffers, but

---

[172] "Cox Raps Harding on Heckler Incident," *The New York Times*, September 29, 1920, Section A1, national edition.

[173] Further reading on rumors about Harding's ancestry and infidelity should include: Samuel Hopkins Adams, *Incredible Era: The Life and Times of Warren G. Harding* (Boston: Octagon Books , 1979), 181-183; Sinclair, *The Available Man*, 109-111; and Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy*, 124. Several monographs exist focusing solely on Harding rumors and legacy, including: Russell, *Shadow of Blooming Grove;* John Dean, *Warren G. Harding* (New York: Times Books, 2004); Phillip G. Payne, *Dead Last: The Public Memory of Warren G. Harding* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009); and James David Robenalt, *The Harding Affair: Love and Espionage During the Great War* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

from fellow senators, most notably Senator Lodge. Added to these challenges was the fact that the entire burden of proof was placed on Cox, as the Republicans were all but assured victory by keeping quiet and allowing the cumulative effect of Wilson's administration and insistence on the League of Nations to take its toll on the American voters. Despite Cox's best efforts, the campaign seemed out of his grasp.

V. CONCLUSION

As the election drew to a close, Cox's great tour of the nation seemed a moderate success. He had been greeted at every stop by cheering throngs, and found his message well-received. What plagued him, however, was his inability to significantly engage Senator Harding. In August, Cox had invited Harding to make scheduled appearances where they could discuss issues one-on-one, but the offer was denied as Harding chose to remain close to home. Instead, Cox launched the first truly national presidential campaign. He carried his appeals to the American people, offering his views and ideas, all while fighting back the criticisms of his party. In total, Cox would deliver approximately 394 scheduled speeches (not counting casual conversations and interviews), traveled over 22,000 miles, and visited a total of 36 (out of 48) states. But ultimately the election was not remotely close. Harding won the election with 16 million out of a total of 26 million votes. The popular vote came to 35 percent to 60 with Cox winning only in the solid Democratic South (with the exception of Tennessee).[174]

Warren Harding believed that America could go back to the way things were before World War I, and campaigned as though he were living twenty years earlier. James Cox knew that things had changed, and spent his entire campaign trying to convince America that the change was for the better, that good could and would come from it. He displayed true boldness in

[174] Cebula, *James Cox*, 112.

attempting the tour of America that he did, believing that the only way to win the presidency was to educate the voters on his positions, and allow them to make an informed decisions on their own. In the end, however, Cox was unable to overcome the huge disadvantages presented by the incumbent president's previous eight years, and his inability to consistently frame the debate in a way that was advantageous to his candidacy. His ambitious tour was undone by unfavorable press, an inconsistent and unpopular message, and a practically invisible, but very real opponent.

CONCLUSION: THE FRONT PORCH OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE RECONSIDERED

Governor Cox's presidential campaign ended on a very low note. He had delivered thousands of speeches and greeted untold numbers of supporters, often putting his health and family out of mind in his quest to win the presidency. Cox proved he was the opposite of his opponent, Warren Harding, in his ability to address a large number of issues and to defend the Democratic Party and Wilson administration throughout the campaign. But ultimately, his speeches could not turn the tide. A week before the election, editors of *The Nation* urged their readers to vote for a third party candidate and deemed Harding and Cox as "indistinguishable." The voters did not, of course, vote for a third party candidate, and all of Cox's efforts resulted in one of the largest landslides in presidential history. Cox's name entered history books only as the unfortunate losing candidate.[175]

While the 1920 election ended in defeat, Cox's belief in taking his message to the voters would be proven effective in subsequent elections. In 1928, the next presidential election that did not have an incumbent running, both the Democratic and Republican nominees took their campaign on the road. Governor Al Smith of New York knew that a national tour was a necessity. His Catholicism was a major issue for voters throughout the country, especially in the Democratic stronghold of the south. The Republican nominee, Secretary of the Commerce Herbert Hoover, had the benefit of party incumbency, particularly as the economy was strong throughout 1928. Hoover's campaign was notable for taking cues from the Cox model, viewing every state as a potential battleground. Hoover campaigned throughout the south, where the Ku Klux Klan had reemerged during the 1924 presidential election and divided the Democratic

[175] For *The Nation*'s editor's letter to voters, see: "Last Aid to Voters," *The Nation,* October 20, 1920, 4.

Party.[176] Hoover also took advantage of new technology, the radio. Hoover wrote his own speeches and sounded much more natural than Smith. Governor Smith, who preferred delivering speeches in person, found his New York accent was exaggerated by the radio and was frequently ridiculed for the way he pronounced the words "radio" and "hospital." In addition to his speaking style and Catholic beliefs, Smith's candidacy suffered from accusations of snobbery. Despite being born into poverty in New York City, Smith frequently derided the countryside as boring and compared it unfavorably to the bustle of his familiar city. In the end, Hoover won the presidency easily, carrying forty states and 21 million votes to Smith's eight states (all in the south) and 15 million votes.[177]

Hoover's campaign provided another turning point in presidential politics, borrowing from Cox's campaign. It was no longer safe for a candidate, even from the incumbent party, to stay at home and rely on the party faithful to carry out the campaign. Hoover also took advantage of the divided south and attempted to pad the Republican strongholds with new states. But four years later, Hoover's candidacy was undone by the new electoral math. In 1932, the Great Depression had created a charged political climate that was dangerous to the Republican Party. Mirroring 1920 in many ways, the incumbent party candidate, President Hoover, had to defend the previous four years against the promised government action of the challenger, Governor Franklin Roosevelt.

Franklin Roosevelt made himself extremely accessible throughout the campaign. Many of Roosevelt's managers advised him to play safe and force Hoover to campaign tirelessly. Roosevelt refused, arguing that a strenuous campaign would allow him the opportunity to experiment with new ideas and visions. He was also confident that he could combat any

[176] John D. Hicks, *Republican Ascendancy: 1921-1933* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 209-211.
[177] Roy Peel and Thomas Donnelly, *The 1928 Campaign: An Analysis* (New York: Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1931), 71-95.

criticisms about his health. Many reporters had noticed that Roosevelt's walk was unsteady and that he frequently relied on staffers to help him to his feet, but the lingering effects of Roosevelt's polio were still largely unknown.[178] He made the unprecedented decision to accept his party's nomination at the convention in Chicago, a move that has since become common-place. Roosevelt also matched Hoover in his ability to communicate with the public via radio, and easily exceeded the incumbent in speeches delivered. Roosevelt also had a skilled campaigner in his wife, Eleanor, who was often dispatched to give speeches on her own.[179]

The active campaign became a feature of mid-20th century presidential politics. In 1948, after four elections dominated by Franklin Roosevelt, the political climate did not favor his successor, President Harry Truman. Between 1945 and 1948, he constantly fought with a conservative Congress. The Democratic Party in the south had fractured, with many supporters disenchanted with FDR's New Deal and the Party's expanding civil rights agenda. Those supporters joined the socially conservative "Dixiecrat" party. Republican candidate Thomas Dewey was all but assured of victory by the press. The election was reminiscent of 1920, as Thomas Dewey remained quiet and took a cautious approach to his presidential campaign. He spoke on the radio in prepared remarks, but largely refused to engage Truman, even refusing to speak his name. Dewey also stayed close to home, delivering speeches throughout New York, but seldom going elsewhere. Truman, on the other hand, went on the offensive. Seizing the opportunity as the underdog, Truman conducted a nationwide tour and launched a series of attacks on Dewey's character and the Republican Congress. Using plain language and blunt phrases, he attempted to scare voters by insisting that Dewey's election promised that large corporations would once again run the United States government. Truman was successful in

[178] Donald A. Ritchie, *Electing FDR: The New Deal Campaign of 1932* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 120-134.

[179] Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox*, 139-145.

placing the blame for all of the failures of his administration on the Republican-led Congress and often disassociated himself from his own administration's policies.[180] In spite of his efforts, almost all of the media predicted a clear Dewey victory. Famously, the Chicago Tribune's morning-after issue proclaimed "Dewey Defeats Truman!" Yet, Truman's campaign successfully eked out a small margin of victory. The Dixiecrat Party candidate, Strom Thurmond, won many of the southern states which were once considered essential for a Democratic candidate's victory. But Truman won the majority of the western states and key Midwestern states, including Ohio.[181]

In many ways, Harry Truman's 1948 victory was the successful realization of Cox's 1920 campaign policy. Both men were forced to campaign because of popular discontent with the incumbent administration. Both men refused to rely solely on the party machinery to win the election, and each viewed himself as his campaign's primary spokesperson. Both men found solace not through cooperation with other party members, but with their rapport with voters throughout the countryside. Truman, however, benefited from an electoral process that changed drastically after Cox's failed attempt. His communication skills served him well as partisan politics continued to diminish and presidential campaigns became national affairs. Truman was also extremely conversant in the issues of the election. Cox had attempted this educational format in 1920, but many voters were already decided about the League of Nations and Prohibition before his campaign began. By 1948, presidential candidates were expected to speak knowledgably about the major issues of the presidential election. Truman had been able to explain his views in a direct and folksy manner, and he found favor with voters. Prior to 1920, the Democratic Party had relied on the strength of the southern states to provide an electoral

[180] Zachary Karabell, *The Last Campaign: How Harry Truman Won the 1948 Election* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 127-137.

[181] Gary Donaldson, *Truman Defeats Dewey* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 209-212.

base, but now Democratic contenders were able to win by taking their message to voters throughout the country. Truman's election in 1948 was the last before the introduction of television into presidential politics. Television, along with the increasingly swift advances in communications and transportation, would heavily alter the way elections were conducted. All of these elements created a world of politics that Cox and Harding would not have recognized.

James Cox's candidacy was ultimately unsuccessful. As with many presidential also-rans from the era, Cox's name has passed into obscurity as his relevance fades. Yet, Cox's and Harding's campaigns served as an important pivot point for presidential politics. Contained in one election were the past and the future of presidential politics. And it was not clear which campaign belonged in a particular category. Harding's campaign ushered in an era of celebrity endorsement and clever techniques for manipulating the press. At the same time, Harding himself remained quiet throughout the campaign, at ease with allowing others to conduct the election on his behalf and in his name. The front porch model was a clear link to his Republican roots and an homage to a slain president. But it also provided the perfect visual reminder of Harding's promise to help America "return to normalcy."

The 1920 election remains a bridge between the past and the present of presidential elections. Clearly the electorate and political culture had changed, and both Cox and Harding attempted to change with it. Though Governor Cox was ultimately unsuccessful in winning the presidency, he deserves credit for helping to change the way elections are conducted. Cox's candidacy was not doomed from the beginning, and his defeat was not solely a referendum on the League of Nations or Harding's promised return to normalcy. Instead, Cox's campaign should be seen as transformative. He helped to usher in an era of national elections, exposing a

larger number of American voters to the electoral process, and engaging voters substantively on the important issues of the day. Cox can rightly take credit for moving the electoral process from the back halls of conventions and dining parlors of party bosses, and onto the front porches of the American people.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. MONOGRAPHS

Adams, Samuel Hopkins. *Incredible Era: The Life and Times of Warren G. Harding.* Boston: Octagon Books, 1979.

Allen, Frederick Lewis. *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1931.

Babson, Roger. *Cox-The Man.* New York: Bretano's, 1920.

Bagby, Wesley. *The Road to Normalcy: The Presidential Campaign and Election of 1920.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962.

Boller, Jr., Paul. *Presidential Campaigns*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Burnham, Walter Dean. *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1970.

Burns, James MacGregor. *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox.* New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1956.

Cebula, James E. *James Cox: Journalist and Politician.* New York: Garland Publishing, 1985.

Chambers, II, John W., ed. *The Oxford Companion to American Military History.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Coffman, Edward. *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I.* Lexington, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky Press, 1998.

Cooper, Jr., John Milton. *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

---. *Pivotal Decades: The United States, 1900-1920.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1990.

Cox, James M. *Journey Through My Years.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946.

Daniels, Josephus. *The Life of Woodrow Wilson: 1856-1924.* Philadelphia: Universal Book House, 1924.

---. *The Wilson Era: Years of War and After, 1917-1923.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1946.

Dawley, Alan. *Struggles for Justice: Social Responsibility and the Liberal State.* Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991.

Dean, John. *Warren G. Harding.* New York: Times Books, 2004.

Donaldson, Gary. *Truman Defeats Dewey.* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999.

Downes, Randolph C. *The Rise of Warren Gamaliel Harding, 1865-1929.* Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1970.

Flexner, Eleanor. *Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975.

Gable, John Allen. *The Bull Moose Years: Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Party.* New York: Kennikat Press, 1978.

Glad, Paul W. *The Trumpet Soundeth: William Jennings Bryan and his Democracy, 1896-1912.* Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 1960.

Goldstein, Joshua. *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Greenwald, Maurine Weiner. *Women, War, and Work: The Impact of World War I on Women Workers in the United States.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980.

Hamm, Richard F. *Shaping the Eighteenth Amendment: Temperance Reform, Legal Culture, and the Polity, 1880-1920*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.

Hicks, John D. *Republican Ascendancy: 1921-1933.* New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960.

Johnston, Robert D. *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.

Karabell, Zachary. *The Last Campaign: How Harry Truman Won the 1948 Election.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000.

Keller, Morton. *America's Three Regimes: A New Political History.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Kent, Frank. *The Great Game of Politics.* New York: Doubleday, Duran & Company, 1928.

Kerr, K. Austin. *Organized for Prohibition: A New History of the Anti-Saloon League.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

Kobler, John. *Ardent Spirits: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition.* New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1973.

Lodge, Henry Cabot. *The Senate and the League of Nations.* New York: C. Scribner's and Sons, 1925.

Lovell, S.D. *The Presidential Election of 1916.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980.

McGerr, Michael. *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865-1928.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

McGovern, James. "The American Woman's Pre-World War I Freedom in Manners and Morals." In *Causes and Consequences of World War I,* edited by John Milton Cooper, Jr. New York: Quadrangle Books, 1972.

Mee, Jr., Charles. *The Ohio Gang: The World of Warren G. Harding.* New York: M. Evans and Company, 1981.

Morello, John A. *Selling the President, 1920: Albert D. Lasker, Advertising, and the Election of Warren G. Harding.* Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2001.

Mowry, George E. *Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Movement.* Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1947.

Murdock, Catherine Gilbert. *Domesticating Drink: Women, Men, and Alcohol in America, 1870-1940.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

Neal, Steve. *Happy Days Are Here Again: The 1932 Democratic Convention, The Emergence of FDR-and How America Was Changed Forever.* New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004.

Northedge, F.S. *The League of Nations: Its Life and Times, 1920-1945.* New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986.

Payne, Phillip G. *Dead Last: The Public Memory of Warren G. Harding* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009.

Peel, Roy and Thomas Donnelly. *The 1928 Campaign: An Analysis.* New York: Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1931.

Peirce, Neal. *The People's President: The Electoral College in American History and the Direct-Vote Alternative.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968.

Perrett, Geoffrey. *America in the Twenties: A History.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982.

Ritchie, Donald A. *Electing FDR: The New Deal Campaign of 1932.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007.

Robenalt, James David. *The Harding Affair: Love and Espionage During the Great War.* New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009.

Roberts, Robert North and Scott John Hammond. *Encyclopedia of Presidential Campaigns, Slogans, Issues and Platforms.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004.

Russell, Francis. *The Shadow of Blooming Grove: Warren G. Harding and His Times.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968.

Scott, George. *The Rise and Fall of the League of Nations.* London: Hutchinson of London, 1973.

Sinclair, Andrew. *The Available Man: The Life Behind the Masks of Warren G. Harding.* Chicago: Quadrangle Paperbacks, 1965.

---. *Prohibition: The Era of Excess.* Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1962.

Steinson, Barbara. *American Women's Activism in World War I.* New York: Garland Publishing, 1982.

Summers, Mark Wahlgren. *Party Games: Getting, Keeping, and Using Power in Gilded Age Politics.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

---. *Rum, Romanism and Rebellion: The Making of a President, 1884.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

Trani, Eugene and David Wilson. *The Presidency of Warren G. Harding.* Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1977.

Zieger, Robert. *America's Great War: World War I and the American Experience.* New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000.

II. JOURNALS AND PERIODICALS

Blythe, Samuel. "The Same Old Game." *Saturday Evening Post,* March 20, 1920.

Daljord, Stella Crossley. "What Will They Do With Their Vote?" *The Nation,* September 4, 1920.

Hapgood, Norman. "The San Francisco Answer." *The Independent*, July 20, 1920.

Jensen, Kimberley. "A Base Hospital is Not a Coney Island Dance Hall: American Women Nurses, Hostile Work Environment, and Military Rank in the First World War." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 26.2 (2005): 206-235.

Johnson, Alvin. “Why Will they Vote for Harding?” *The New Republic*, July 28, 1920.

---. “Woodrow Wilson: A Tragedy.” *The New Republic*, September 8, 1920.

Merz, Charles. “Two Leading Democratic Candidates.” *The New Republic*, June 2, 1920.

---. “The Front Porch in Marion.” *The New Republic*, October 6, 1920.

Schlessinger, Arthur M., and Erik M. Eriksson. "The Vanishing Voter." *The New Republic*, October 15, 1924.

Zeiger, Susan. “The Schoolhouse vs. the Armory: U.S. Teachers and the Campaign Against Militarism in the Schools, 1914-1918.” *Journal of Women’s History* 15.2 (2003): 150-179.

“An Impossible Choice.” *The Nation*, July 10, 1920.

“The Campaign to Date.” *The Nation*, September 11, 1920.

“Campaign Funds.” *The New Republic*, September 15, 1920.

“Cox: Away from the White House.” *The New Republic*, July 14, 1920.

“Coxsure.” *The New Republic*, August 11, 1920.

“Don’t Throw Away Your Vote.” *The Nation*, September 18, 1920.

“Last Aid to Voters.” *The Nation*, October 20, 1920.

“The Prospect of Harding.” *The New Republic*, September 29, 1920.

“Sidestepping With Cox.” *The Nation*, October 6, 1920.

“The Week.” *The New Republic*, October 20, 1920.

III. NEWSPAPERS

The Cedar Rapids (IA) Evening Gazette, August-September 1920.

The Chicago Tribune, July 1920.

The Columbus Dispatch, July-November 1920.

The Daily Capital (Jefferson City, MO), August-September 1920.

The Fort Wayne (IN) Journal-Gazette, August-October 1920.

The Galveston (TX) Daily News, October 1920.

The Greeley (CO) Daily Tribune, August-September 1920.

The Lancaster (OH) Daily Gazette, June-September 1920.

The Lima (OH) News & Times-Democrat, August-November 1920.

The Marietta (OH) Daily Register Leader, August-November 1920.

The Milwaukee Sentinel, July 1920.

The Moberly (MO) Evening Democrat, August-October 1920.

The Morning Republican (Mitchell, SD), September, 1920.

The New York Times, July-November 1920.

The Oakland (CA) Tribune, August-November 1920.

The Sandusky (OH) Register, August-November 1920.

The Sandusky (OH) Star-Journal, October-November 1920.

The Waterloo (IA) Times-Tribune, August-September 1920.

The Woodland (CA) Daily Democrat, August-November 1920.