
On the Campaign Trail of Warren G. Harding

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The following is a fictional take on “Gonzo” style Journalism if it was used by a Journalist in the 1920’s. This style ignores any attempt to be objective, and follows a fictional writer accounting his experience during Warren G. Harding’s Front Porch campaign in the early 1920’s.

My fellow journalists and I were somewhere in between Columbus and Toledo, Ohio, in a little town called Marion. When I first arrived in town, the atmosphere was welcoming. It was the summer of 1920, and the temperatures were at an all-time high. Folks were out in the streets in their casual summer wear, streamers lined the light posts. Newspapers were handed out and Harding was featured on every page. It was a front porch campaign, tried and true. One that was reminiscent of McKinley in ‘96. Hey, the man even remodeled his front porch in an attempt to resemble the same one McKinley stood on two decades prior. The little town of Marion could not have been a better place to campaign, especially for the message that Harding’s campaign leaned on; normalcy and a return to the status quo. When I arrived at this little speck on the map, I quickly realized what grabbed voters’ attention. The town’s rich nostalgia undoubtedly served to boost Harding’s campaign. Voters and I came to enjoy the orderly fashion of its arrangement. After the war, America was in desperate need of restoration. Americans wanted a feeling of contentment, and the locals of Marion scratched that itch with their simple yet comfortable routine. I came to appreciate Harding’s attempts to appeal to the people. In his words, I heard my own thoughts echoed back to me. I knew that his vision adhered to what America so desperately needed. As a result, I followed his campaign with great interest.

I spent a great deal of time on the campaign trail in Marion, but one of the most powerful moments took place outside of it. It was rare for Harry Daugherty, Harding’s campaign manager, to suggest a speaking tour. The democratic candidate James M. Cox and his running mate Franklin D. Roosevelt shook the nation with hundreds of speeches all over America. Due to their efforts, some amount of touring was necessary in order for Harding to maintain reach across America. I attended one such speaking tour in New York in late June. Little did I know, this speech would resonate within Americans for the duration of the 1920 election. He spoke with impressive stature and stern confidence. On that day, New York rallied behind a man who wished to spare the drama and heroics, instead bring healing and adjustment to a wounded but recovering country shaken by war. I stood behind a large crowd of men, women, and children, taking in the sheer amount of patriotism that was present in that horde of passionate Americans. If I were to ask those people how they felt after the speech, I imagine the response would be nothing short of inspired and united. I clapped along with my fellow countrymen and joined in the festivities that followed. That night when my heavy head hit the pillow, I could still hear the booming voice of a man who wanted nothing but the best for the people.

As Election Day approached in Marion, few in the media had any doubts that Harding was bound for office. Although some journalists at the time bashed Harding for his vague and often times pompous speeches, they were overall the minority of articles related to Harding. I will say one thing with regards to Harding, being a former newspaper publisher he no doubt was very good at maintaining good relations with the press and its readership. In fact, after the 19th amendment, new female voters came to like Harding and his values. To no surprise, Harding won by a landslide. On Election Day, he received 60 percent of the popular vote and 76 percent of the electoral votes.

In his presidency, Warren Harding ultimately achieved what he strived to do, return to a normal and relaxing America. He was low key about everything he did and attempted to get along with everyone. This very well may have led to his downfall and the eventual destruction of his reputation. His administration was fraught with scandals, but he did not live to see the repercussions. Unfortunately, Harding passed away from a heart attack in August of 1923 after only two years in office.

The legacy of Warren G. Harding lives on throughout his hometown of Marion, Ohio. I can no doubt see why. It's a quiet yet passionate little town of people, and I believe that its involvement during Harding's run had a lot to do with his successful campaign. I look back on that campaign with glee. Say what you will about Harding, but I respected the man. He accomplished a fair amount for only being in office for two years. Maybe I'm just another journalist who was wooed by the comradery he demonstrated as a former newspaper publisher, but what I know for certain is how his speeches made me and many other Americans feel. He spoke as a fellow citizen, not as a politician. His words reaffirmed America's thoughts. After the experiences I witnessed during that campaign trail and after I compared those moments with the results of the election, I am not surprised Americans picked him for the job.

Sources of Research

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