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# A RETURN TO NATIONALISM

A Framing Analysis of the 1920 Democratic and Republican Presidential Candidates' Narrative on the Central Issues of Wilsonian Progressivism, Internationalism, and Ethnoracial Relations

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## Introduction

'America first', a slogan most observers of today's United States' politics immediately recognise. During the 2016 presidential election and in his presidential term afterwards, Donald Trump enthusiastically used the phrase to articulate his nationalistic vision for the future of the United States under his leadership. He envisioned a future in which the United States would return to isolationism and tariffs to protect its own interests before those of the world economy, and one where the United States would no longer be involved in foreign conflicts or take a leading role in international cooperation.[1] The phrase also holds a more veiled xenophobic message related to migration and race, which then-presidential candidate Trump accentuated by outlaying his plans of building a wall along the Mexican border to keep out immigrants that were supposedly stealing American jobs and posing a threat to American citizens, and later as president when his administration implemented a migration ban that mainly blocked citizens from Muslim-dominant countries from coming to the United States.[2]

The slogan was not devised by the Trump campaign, however. A hundred years ago, the phrase, and the broader nationalistic message behind it, was also a central part of a consequential presidential election.[3] The 1920 presidential election would come to mark the end of the Progressive Era in the United States by ending the presidency of Woodrow Wilson, one of the political leaders of the Progressive Movement, and electing the conservative Warren G. Harding and his running mate Calvin Coolidge. During the campaign, Harding had promised the country a "Return to Normalcy", which would come to mean a transition back to the isolationism that had dominated the United States' foreign policy before the Progressive Era, to stop the great wave of reform spearheaded by Progressives, an end to the social and racial conflict that had swept the nation, and in general, a call for calmness that directly contrasted the reformist mindset of the Wilson administration and the Progressive Era.[4]

A hundred years later, President Trump's opponent, Joe Biden, runs his campaign on a similar message of rebuilding the country after a period of great unrest and upheaval.[5] The

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[1] Christof Parnreiter, 'America First! Donald Trump, the Demise of the U.S. Hegemony and Chaos in the Capitalist Word-System', *Zeitschrift für Wirtschaftsgeographie* 62:1 (2018) 1-13, 1-2.
[2] Sean Illing, 'How "America First" Ruined the "American Dream"', *Vox* 22 October 2018
Retrieved from: https://www.vox.com/2018/10/22/17940964/america-first-trump-sarah-churchwell-american-dream 20-10-2020.
[3] Warren G. Harding, 'Americanism', *Library of Congress* 29 June 1920
Retrieved from https://www.loc.gov/item/2004650663/ 20-10-2020.
[4] Eugene P. Trani, 'Warren G. Harding: Life in Brief', *Miller Center*
Retrieved from: https://millercenter.org/president/harding/life-in-brief 20-10-2020; Wesley M. Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy: The Presidential Campaign and Election of 1920* (Baltimore 1962) 13-15.
[5] Ezra Klein, 'Joe Biden's Promise: A Return to Normalcy', *Vox* 20 May 2019

similarities between the two elections a century apart do not end with the message both campaigns send out into the world. Both elections come as the country was disrupted by a deadly pandemic, largely ignored by the sitting president, and after a summer of racial conflict overseen by a president repeatedly accused of harbouring a racist worldview. Both elections also took place during a period of economic decline brought on by these events. In studying the 1920 presidential election, the numerous parallels between the recent presidential election and the current political climate will serve as a reminder of the continued relevance of this historical election on its centenary.

The relevance of the 1920 presidential election goes beyond those parallels, however. The election was a pivotal moment in the United States' history and has been regarded as a determining moment for the end of Progressivism and Wilsonian foreign relations, and dubbed by some as the "birth of modern America".[6] Historians that have researched the election during the past hundred years have come to understand the election as a referendum on the Wilson administration and its progressive reforms, and on the United States' involvement in the First World War and the subsequently established League of Nations.[7] Those two topics, Wilsonian Progressivism and internationalism, will, therefore, be at the centre of this study, along with a third topic, ethnoracial relations. Through a framing analysis of the narrative presented by the different frontrunners of both the Republican and Democratic Party throughout the election cycle, an underlying pattern will be demonstrated that connects these three topics. This research will show how nationalistic discourse came to overtake Progressive discourse, how Progressives themselves played a central role in that development, and how the conservative Republican candidate Warren G. Harding handily used this shifting narrative to his advantage. As a consequence of this shifting narrative, the hopeful Progressive vision of the preceding years became a hollowed out talking point, resulting in the demise of the Progressive Movement in politics and the election of Harding as president.

Correspondingly, the research question that stands at the basis of this argument and which forms the centre of this research is as follows: *How were rhetorical frames used by the frontrunners of the Republican and Democratic party to construct a narrative on the three central issues in the 1920 United States presidential election: Progressivism, internationalism,*

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Retrieved from: https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2019/5/20/18631452/joe-biden-2020-presidential-announcement-speech 20-10-2020.

[6] David Pietrusza, *1920: The Year of the Six Presidents* (New York 2007) 10; Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy*, 22-23.

[7] Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties in America* (1931 London) 56-59; Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy*, 164-166; Paul F. Boller Jr., *Presidential Campaigns: From George Washington to George W. Bush* (New York 2004) 213-214.

*and ethnoracial relations?* To unpack this research question, it is important to explain the need to answer this question. What is the significance of this question and why does the resulting answer matter?

The purpose of this argument is to add to two existing debates amongst historians. The first debate this research will contribute to is the slowly developing debate on the 1920 election itself. As stated, historians largely agree that the election can be seen as a referendum on Wilsonian Progressivism and on internationalism, what they do not agree on, however, is the role the presidential candidates played in winning or losing the election. Whereas some historians believe the election was predetermined to be a landslide victory in favour of the Republican candidate Warren Harding because it only continued a trend set in motion years before, others argue that it was Woodrow Wilson himself that spoiled the chances of his party's nominee, James Cox, and again others state that Harding had at least a partial role in his election.[8] This research will continue on, and broaden the latter premise, by arguing that the carefully build Republican narrative on the three central issues successfully provided voters an alternative way forward, in contrast, the Democrats became consumed by intra-party conflict resulting in an unwillingness to offer a clear position on the central debates of the election.

It will be demonstrated how the initial Republican frontrunner Theodore Roosevelt built a Progressive narrative steeped in civic and racial nationalism. After his death, his successors Leonard Wood and Hiram Johnson continued this narrative during the early stages of the election cycle, increasingly emphasizing the nationalistic framing of the three central topics of the election, a development accelerated during the Republican convention in the summer of 1920. This move away from the Progressivism of the early years opened the door for the election of the conservative Warren Harding as the presidential candidate of the Republican Party. The Harding campaign, in turn, finished the move away from Progressivism by running a conservative campaign that was still built on the nationalistic rhetoric of the previous frontrunners, showcasing how the conservativeness of Harding, combined with nationalistic rhetoric of the Republican narrative created a popular alternative.

In addition, this study will include an analysis of the opposing campaign of the Democratic Party, which is mostly left out of the debate so far. The party was still dominated by President Woodrow Wilson but opposition to his plans for greater international cooperation

[8] On the election as predetermined: Donald R. McCoy, 'Election of 1920', in: Arthur M. Schlessinger (ed.), *History of American Presidential Elections, 1789-1968* (New York 1971) 2349-2455, 2349-2350.
On Woodrow Wilson's role: Allen, *Only Yesterday*, 56-59; Wesley M. Bagby, 'Woodrow Wilson, a Third Term, and the Solemn Referendum', *The American Historical Review* 60:3 (1955) 567-575.
On Warren G. Harding's role: Boller Jr., *Presidential Campaigns,* 214.

through the League of Nations and his deviance from Progressive ideals during the war had grown within the party and throughout the country. This study will show how the Democratic frontrunners struggled with these intra-party debates, from early frontrunner William McAdoo, through the Democratic convention and the eventual campaign of the Democratic nominee James Cox. The frontrunners increasingly abandoned the radical innovativeness that had won Progressives the election since the beginning of the century, while still attempting to position themselves as true Progressives. On top of that, the Cox campaign attempted to appease both sides in the debate on internationalism, waiting until the last moment to make his position clear. As a result, Cox was unable to distinguish himself from the unpopular Woodrow Wilson and create an independent public persona and a viable alternative, resulting in his loss.

The second contribution of this research is to the continuingly changing field of study on the Progressive Era. Research in this field has been vast and fast developing, and in more recent years, scholars have come to accept the diversity of the Progressive Movement, defining the movement now as a cooperation of coalitions that work together but also often opposed and undermined each other. Part of that inclusion of diversity in the movement has been the incorporation of race and racial relations into the field of study, with researchers arguing that civil rights progress was one of the driving factors of the Progressive Movement. [9] This study will continue on that development by putting ethnoracial relations at the centre of this study, as the third and final focal issue.

Scholars studying the Progressive Movement through a bottom-up approach have shown how minority grassroots organisations have had an important role in shaping the Progressive agenda. This study will turn that proposition around by showing how ingrained ideas about the intended racial make-up of the nation among the political Progressive leadership stood in contrast with the supposed ideals of the movement. This argument builds on the aforementioned argument that the nationalistic narrative came to overtake the Progressive narrative. Using Gary Gerstle's classification of American nationalism in which he identifies two types of nationalism, 'civic nationalism' and 'racial nationalism', which both find their roots in the founding ideals and corresponding foundational documents of the United States, this study will explain how Progressives themselves, through the continued use of racial

[9] Nell Irving Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877-1919 (*New York) 365; Eric Steven Yellin, *Racism in the Nation's Service: Government Workers and the Color Line in Woodrow Wilson's America* (Chapel Hill 2013); Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton 2001; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York 2000).

nationalistic frames combined with an increasingly dominant civic nationalistic rhetoric, abandoned the Progressives ideals, leaving space for alternative ideologies.[10]

## Historiography

### The 1920 presidential election

David Pietrusza is the most recent historian to make the argument for further analysis of the 1920 election.[11] His popular history on the contenders for president in 1920 focuses on telling the stories of the six men that were or would become President of the United States and their journey through the 1920 election cycle. Since his work is not primarily academic and, therefore, does not aim to provide academic insight, it does not purposefully contribute to the academic debate. However, it does make a compelling argument to scholars of early twentieth-century life and politics in the United States to continue to study this election. Not only were there six former and future presidents competing in the election, consequently providing an interesting insight into their respective ideology, strategy, and development, Pietrusza marks the 1920 election as a turning point in United States' history, a statement largely agreed upon by the scholars that studied the election. The debate amongst scholars is not on *if* this election changed the United States' politics but *why* and who or what influenced this repeal of the Progressive ideology.

In one of the earliest studies in which the presidential election of 1920 was discussed, a picture is painted of an ideological struggle between globalism and nationalism, and idealism and realism, in which the public ultimately decided on the latter in both these choices.[12] In this telling, Frederick Lewis Allen explains the presidential campaign and the resulting landslide vote for Warren G. Harding, not as a victory won by Harding but as an election lost by Woodrow Wilson. Allen details the build-up of losses for the Wilson administration after the end of World War I, of which Congress' refusal to have the United States join the newly formed League of Nations was the biggest loss.[13] Wilson's final effort to change the tide was to have the election serve "as a great and solemn referendum" on the matter, to no avail.[14] Wesley Bagby continues on the premise that it was Woodrow Wilson's failures that led to the election of Warren Harding in his detailed account of the paralysation of the Democratic primaries by

[10] Gerstle, *American Crucible*, *Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* 3-5.
[11] Pietrusza, *1920: The Year of the Six Presidents*.
[12] Allen, *Only Yesterday*, 46-48.
[13] Ibidem, 56-59.
[14] Allen, *Only Yesterday*, 65.

Wilson's desire to run for an unprecedented third term.[15] This narrative, which puts Wilson in the centre of the election even after it became clear that he would not be the nominated candidate, continued in studies published during the second half of the twentieth century.

A decade after his first article on the 1920 election, Wesley Bagby wrote another analysis of the election, which is the most substantial study to date.[16] Continuing on the early studies of the 1920 election, Bagby broadens the premise of Wilson's central role in the election results. He argues that the election was a twofold referendum on Woodrow Wilson and the Wilson administration, making a distinction between national and international matters. Nationally, the voters not only voted on Wilson's competence as president but on the Progressive Movement, of which he was a prominent member and in light of its ideals Wilson implemented several major reforms as president, as a whole.[17] Internationally, Bagby also stresses that Wilsonian foreign policy, with its desire to have the United States be a guiding example to the world, and especially the United States' participation in World War I were a determining factor in the election. Especially, the Wilson administration's anti-democratic shift during the war disillusioned supporters of progressivism, Bagby argues.[18]

As time moves on and historians came to stand further away from the events in 1920, the contemporary context that influenced the election results was expanded. Donald McCoy goes further than Bagby in arguing that the election was a referendum on Progressivism. McCoy contends that the Progressive Movement was on a decline by 1920, mainly because of the United States' involvement in the First World War.[19] The election of the moderate Harding in 1920, was, therefore, not a turning point in United States' politics but a "ratification of decisions already made".[20] With this argument, McCoy initiated another perspective on the role that the presidential candidates themselves played in the election and their influence on the outcome. The most recent study of the election agrees with this observation, mainly pointing to Wilson and Wilsonian Progressivism as the reason for voters' support of Harding, before admitting that "Harding helped elect himself" through his public persona.[21]

Thus, as interest among journalists and pundits in the election has grown, among historians, the election has so far not drawn a great deal of attention. Nevertheless, the past century has seen a slowly evolving debate on the meaning of the election results, the central

[15] Bagby, 'Woodrow Wilson, a Third Term, and the Solemn Referendum', 567-575.
[16] Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy*.
[17] Ibidem, 13-18.
[18] Ibidem, 164-166.
[19] McCoy, 'Election of 1920', 2349-2350.
[20] Ibidem, 2349.
[21] Boller Jr., *Presidential Campaigns,* 214.

issues of the election, the causes for the landslide victory for Warren G. Harding, and the role of the presidential candidates in all this. This study will continue the existing debate, focusing on rhetorical strategies applied by both parties in their discussions on the three key issues at the centre of the election. In doing so, this study will argue against the rationale that takes away the self-determination of the presidential candidates, and in favour of a more nuanced explanation of the role that the Republican and Democratic frontrunners played in the outcome of the election. The nominees, Warren Harding and James Cox, both build their narrative on a basis laid out by their predecessors, continuing a path set in motion before their nomination. Their autonomy shows in the chosen strategy, however. Harding was the first frontrunner of the Republican Party to truly abandon Progressivism and, instead, ran a conservative campaign. Cox, on the other hand, dealing with a different intra-party situation, continued to frame himself as a Progressive candidate, while never truly embracing the transformative nature of the movement. Their positioning in the central debates of the election determined their faith in the election.

## The Progressive minefield

Lawrence Glickman describes the historiography of the Progressive Era as a "minefield".[22] Research on the subject is vast and the debates on the era plentiful. In the twentieth century, the research evolved enormously, with historians continuously searching for true and all-encompassing definitions of Progressivism, the Progressive Era, and Progressivists. In the seventies, this search led to an existential crisis amongst scholars of the period. Peter Filene led the way into this crisis with his 1970 article that analysed the ongoing debate on the Progressive Movement's definition by declaring that, because historians were unable to come to a conclusive definition due to the numerous discrepancies, the term 'Progressive Movement' should be buried in its entirety.[23] Although his analysis would not come to end research on Progressivism, it did mean a change in historians' approach to the era.

In the early decades after the Progressive Era, historians focusing on understanding the period between roughly 1890 and 1920, aimed their research at understanding the rise of Progressivism, the driving demographics behind the movement, its main goals, and the reason behind its ending.[24] As early as 1915, Professor Benjamin De Witt studied the Movement to

[22] Lawrence B. Glickman, 'Still in Search of Progressivism?', *Reviews in American History* 26:4 (1998) 731-736, 732.
[23] Peter G. Filene, 'An Obituary for "The Progressive Movement", *American Quarterly* 22:1 (1970) 20-34.
[24] Filene, 'An Obituary for "The Progressive Movement"', 20.

"give form and definiteness to a movement which is, in the minds of many, confused and chaotic".[25] Although his work would often be referred to in later studies of the era, it would not provide the promised definiteness.[26] The description, however, of the main goals of the Movement by De Witt as "the exclusion of privileged interests from political and economic control [and] the expansion of democracy and the use of government to benefit the weak and oppressed members of American society" would largely be agreed upon by historians in later decades.[27]

Nevertheless, when historians began filling in the details of that broad definition, the understanding of Progressivism became more complicated. As it turned out, Progressives often were divided on their presumed core issues and historians increasingly came to the conclusion that different camps formed on different issues. Irwin Yellowitz, for example, argued that on the issue of workers' rights there were the conservative-leaning "political Progressives" and the liberal-leaning "social Progressives".[28] Another prominent example is the debate over Theodore Roosevelt's "New Nationalism" versus Woodrow Wilson's "New Freedom" programs, which fiercely divided Progressives.[29] It is due to that bifurcated state of the historiography of the Progressive Era that first Arthur Link and later Peter Filene came to argue that a true Progressive Movement had never existed.[30] They contended that it would not be right to speak of a singular movement if such large discrepancies existed between supposed members of that movement.[31] In his 1982 landmark historiographical overview, Daniel Rodgers, however, asserted that historians found their way out of the crisis and had redirected their research.[32] Instead of focusing on "the debate over the essence of progressivism, [they moved] towards questions of context".[33] Scholars came to agree that the Progressive Movement was not one coherent movement but "an era of shifting, ideologically fluid, issue-focused coalitions, all competing for the reshaping of American society".[34]

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[25] Benjamin Parke De Witte, *The Progressive Movement: A Non-Partisan Comprehensive Discussion of Current Tendencies in American Politics* (New York 1915) viii.
[26] E.g.: Filene, 'An Obituary for "The Progressive Movement"; Arthur S. Link, *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917* (New York 1954); Glen Gendzel, 'What the Progressives Had in Common', *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 10:3 (2011); Steven J. Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* (New York 1998).
[27] Filene, 'An Obituary for "The Progressive Movement", 21.
[28] Irwin Yellowitz, *Labor and the Progressive Movement in New York State, 1897-1916* (Ithaca 1965) 83.
[29] Filene, 'An Obituary for "The Progressive Movement", 21-22.
[30] Arthur S. Link, 'What Happened to the Progressive Movement in the 1920s?', *The American Historical Review* 64:4 (1959) 833-851; Filene, 'An Obituary for "The Progressive Movement".
[31] Filene, 'An Obituary for "The Progressive Movement", 21-24.
[32] Daniel T. Rodgers, 'In Search of Progressivism', *Reviews in American History* 10:4 (1982) 113-132, 113-117.
[33] Rodgers, 'In Search of Progressivism', 114.
[34] Ibidem, 114.

Studying those coalitions is in line with a second historiographical development, the inclusion of Progressive coalitions outside the political establishment of the time, such as women's organisations, labour coalitions, minority rights groups, civil rights activists, and intersections of these coalitions, in historical research.[35] Most importantly for this study, they came to incorporate ethnicity, race, racial experiences, and racism into their studies. Large overview studies such as David Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness*, Gary Gerstle's *American Crucible*, and Jackson Lear's *Rebirth of a Nation* put race central in their political histories, effectively showing that racial issues were not only a part of the Progressive Era but shaped the history of the United States in this period and beyond.[36] Other studies, specifically focused on Progressivism, have demonstrated that ethnicity, race, and racial relations in the United States were inextricably bound with Progressivism. As early as 1964, Gilbert Osofsky argued that the Great Migration of Black Americans to the North helped fuel the Progressive Movement in the North due to the "emergence of racial violence and antagonism, and the increasing number of varied social problems brought on by Negro migration".[37] Nell Irving Painter went further in binding racial relations and Progressivism, arguing that ending the oppression of ethnic and racial minorities and women was one of the drivers behind the movement.[38] At the turn of the century, research into the Progressive Era continued to put actors previously thought to be only on the receiving end of progressive reforms at the centre of the movement. Works such as Noralee Frankel and Nancy Dye's *Gender Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era* and Anne Scott's *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* look at the Progressive Era through a bottom-up approach, showcasing how women and minorities, had a key role in shaping the progressive agenda.[39]

This study will limit itself to the study of the coalitions active in politics during the 1920 election, while also building on the work done. The focus will lay on the final moments of the Progressive Era, in which a substantive number of progressive leaders were brought together in a final campaign for the most prominent political office of the United States. The purpose of this is to show how Progressive leaders had undercut their own Progressive message by using

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[35] E.g.: Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye (eds.), *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington 1991); Gayle Gullett, 'A Contest over Meaning: Finding Gender, Class, and Race in Progressivism', *History of Education Quarterly* 33:2 (1993) 233-239.
[36] David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (Ann Arbor 2007); Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century*; Jackson Lear, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York 2009).
[37] Gilbert Osofsky, 'Progressivism and the Negro: New York, 1900-1915', *American Quarterly* 16:2 (1964) 153-168, 153.
[38] Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*, 365.
[39] Frankel and Dye (eds.), *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era*; Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana 1991).

racial nationalistic rhetoric that excluded outside-groups based on their ethnicity and race. The loss of support for Progressive politics because of this hypocritical message was accelerated by the Progressives' own decided move away from Progressivism in favour of a hollowed-out civic nationalistic message, essentially bringing their own movement to an end.

## Methodology

### Framing theory

Politicians, like all humans, use language to communicate their thoughts and ideas, and their worldview with the rest of the world. As Lene Hansen explains, "language is how we make sense of the world. [Without language] we cannot make our thoughts understandable".[40] Language, therefore, has long been an important tool to scholars in researching politicians and political actors. They can look at the double meaning of certain words or phrases, or the use of emotional cues in the rhetoric of the speaker to gain a better understanding of the spoken words. In a framing analysis, however, the broader context of the used language is observed to gain a better understanding of how the speaker or writer wishes their audience would interpret certain events, policy decisions, or political and social issues. By filtering out the frames used by politicians or journalists, researchers can observe the larger patterns, context, and priorities of the rhetorician. Conversely, the rhetorician can use frames as a tool to emphasize, contextualize, simplify, and define developments.[41] In this manner, by using different frames, the same information can turn into multiple stories.

With this in mind, Rochefort and Cobb state that "if policy making is a struggle over alternate realities, then language is the medium that reflects, advance, and interprets these alternatives."[42] In other words, politicians use their language to explain the existing presumed realities and why their version of reality is the right one for their audience. Callaghan and Schnell exemplify this through the example of the 'War on Terror' frame, which was, and is, used by politicians to shape domestic and foreign policy. The phrase was used to justify military action in the Middle East, to increase domestic surveillance programs, and to curb immigration, among many other things, all in the name of curbing terrorism and terrorist threats.[43]

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[40] Lene Hansen, 'Poststructuralism', in: John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens, *The globalization of world politics* (Oxford 2014) 170-183, 172.
[41] Porismita Borah, 'Conceptual Issues in Framing Theory: A Systemic Examination of a Decade's Literature', *Journal of Communication* 61 (2011) 246-263, 247-248.
[42] David A. Rochefort and Roger W. Cobb, *The Politics of Problem Definition: Shaping the Policy Agenda* (Lawrence 1994) 9.
[43] Karen Callaghan and Frauke Schnell (eds.), *Framing American Politics* (Pittsburgh 2005) 2-3.

Framing is as old as public debate and democracy and becomes especially prominent during elections when different frames compete for the attention and approval of the voters.[44] The study of framing and framing theory, however, began in the fifties, in the social sciences. At first, scholars broadly studied politicians' public message and the media's response and interpretation of this message, as well as the media's own framing. Over the years, framing analysis has become more detailed. Different types of frames have been distinguished, such as issue-specific framing, thematic framing, episodic framing, and generic framing, ranging from topical-focused messaging to much broader narratives on values and ideology.[45] During these years, framing analysis has also evolved into two distinct research areas: the emerging of frames and the influence of frames on public opinion.[46] This study will contribute to the former by looking at the way presidential candidates and their campaigns constructed frames, in this case, on the departing administration. In doing so, these campaigns propose different interpretations of their recent history, alternatives that often have a lasting legacy. Additionally, as the closing part of the Progressive Era and the Wilson administration, the election can be seen as a bridge between the reality of these years and how they are memorialised in public memory, as both campaigns worked to define the previous years and the central issues in their benefit to win the election.

Sources

As mentioned before, one of the interesting facts of the 1920 presidential election is the aggregation of a large number of individuals that had been or would become president of the United States. This not only makes for interesting storytelling, but it also provides for an abundance of available sources. Where presidential would-be's and, even more so, aspiring vice-presidents of other elections have faded into obscurity, the contenders in the 1920 race have mostly continued to be of historical interest due to their political and personal achievements before and after the election. To ensure a realistic number of sources for this study several demarcations have been set for this research.

First, this study will mainly focus on speeches given by the respective frontrunners of the Democratic and Republican parties. For this purpose, several institutions and projects have been instrumental in the gathering of momentous speeches during the 1920 election cycle. Specifically, the vast resources of the Library of Congress have proved to hold a lot of

[44] Callaghan and Schnell (eds.), *Framing American Politics*, 3-4.
[45] Ibidem, 4-5.
[46] Ibidem, 5.

interesting sources. The Library holds a collection dedicated to the 1920 election, of which the audio recordings of speeches given by Warren Harding, Calvin Coolidge, William Gibbs McAdoo, and James Cox have been studied, as well as the convention reports of both parties' convention.[47] Another project that has delivered important sources for this research is The American Presidency Project, an NGO hosted by UC Santa Barbara, that provides open-access resources from *Messages and Papers of the Presidents of the United States* and *The Public Papers of the Presidents*.[48] These sources contain press statements, remarks, Executive Orders, and memoranda, among others. This research has focused on the speeches filed under the categories 'Spoked Addresses and Remarks', 'Elections and Transitions' and 'Inaugural Addresses', which provided access to speeches from Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Warren Harding, and the 1920 Republican and Democratic Party Platforms. The third organisation that has provided sources for this research is The Miller Center, a nonpartisan affiliate of the University of Virginia that offers an online selection of the most prominent speeches and addresses of every president since George Washington, during their administration.[49] Here, speeches from Woodrow Wilson and Warren Harding have been retrieved for this research, since only their administrations overlap with the 1920 election. Finally, the presidential library of Theodore Roosevelt Center has provided speeches given during the 1920 election, and the New York Times archive has been used to supplement speeches given by James Cox, the only contender who would leave politics after the 1920 campaign and, therefore, has a less substantial collection in the previously mentioned institutions.[50]

The main criticism for these types of sources, speeches and campaign publications, is of course their subjectiveness. However, since the point of this research is to analyse and explain the message each frontrunner intended to send out into the world and the underlying structures and connections, that subjectivity is what makes these sources interesting. The purpose is to understand the interpretations of the events and discussion by each frontrunner and the frame they build through which they wanted their audience to understand those events

[47] The Library of Congress, 'Presidential Election of 1920: A Resource Guide', *Library of Congress*
Retrieved from: https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/elections/election1920.html#American 20-10-2020.
[48] The American Presidency Project, 'About the Presidency Project', *The American Presidency Project*
Retrieved from: https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/about 20-10-2020.
[49] The Miller Center, 'About the Miller Center: Who We Are', *The Miller Center*
Retrieved from: https://millercenter.org/about 20-10-2020.
[50] Calvin Coolidge Presidential Foundation, 'About the Foundation', *Calvin Coolidge Presidential Foundation*
Retrieved from: https://www.coolidgefoundation.org/about/ 20-10-2020; Theodore Roosevelt Center, 'About Us', *Theodore Roosevelt Center*
Retrieved from: https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/About-Us 20-10-2020.

and debates.

The second constraint set for the selection of speeches from these institutions is a time limit. Since presidential election cycles in the United States typically start quickly after the midterm elections, when presidential hopefuls carefully start exploring their chances, a three-year demarcation has been set, resulting in a selection of speeches from the beginning of 1918 until the inauguration of Warren Harding in March 1921. The only exception being Woodrow Wilson, of whom speeches starting from the beginning of his first term in 1913 have been studied and discussed in order to provide an explanation and contextualisation of his administration's agenda, his interpretation of Progressivism and ethnoracial relations, and the debates on internationalism that resulted from his policies and visions. To limit the number of available speeches, the selection made by *The Miller Center* has been observed, leaving 33 speeches, spanning an eight-year period.

The third and final demarcation in selecting speeches for this research is based on substance. Given the fact that this study focuses on the topics of Wilsonian Progressivism, globalism, and racial relations, speeches discussing those topics have been selected, which is determined by either the summary given by the institute providing the speeches, the audience and location of the speech, or the occasion for which the speech was given.

In the following chapters, the findings from these sources will be discussed. The chapters are built in a pyramid-like structure, slimming down in size and becoming increasingly more focused. The reason for this is so that the first chapter can provide the necessary historical context on the events and circumstances that shaped the three central issues of the election, as well as introduce the different frames from which the frontrunners would build their narrative. This chapter will also contain an analysis of the speeches given by the frontrunners during the primary stage of the election. The next chapter will discuss the keynote speeches and the party platforms presented during the party conventions and the speeches given by the nominees afterwards, selecting those speeches that specifically discuss the three issues studied in this research. The final chapter will discuss the campaign in the final moments of the election, the results, and the election of Warren G. Harding as the next president of the United States, discussing how the frames evolved throughout the campaigns of both candidates.

# Chapter 1 The Two Titans of Progressivism

The presidential primaries in 1920 initially seemed to lead the way into another battle between the two titans of Progressivism, Theodore Roosevelt and, by proxy, Woodrow Wilson. Due to unforeseen events and party intrigue, however, the eventual nominees would bring both parties onto new paths. The hold of these leaders and their legacies over the parties would nevertheless shape the 1920 election and the narrative presented by the frontrunners of both parties. Especially Wilson's dominance in the central debates of the election stands out. This chapter will, therefore, start with a contextualisation of Woodrow Wilson and the ideological developments that would define his ideas. It will also explain the ideological differences that would emergence between the two Progressive leaders in their battle over the presidency in 1912, which would shape the political landscape for the 1920 election. Finally, this chapter will introduce the three central issues of the elections, the events that defined them, and the narrative presented by Wilson and Roosevelt, and both parties' eventual frontrunners on these issues.

## The emergence of a Progressive

Thomas Woodrow Wilson, born in 1856, grew up in a religious family of three generations of Presbyterian ministers.[51] His personal life and his worldview would be shaped by this religious upbringing, instilling a Calvinistic belief in predestination, and a "sense of duty and destiny".[52] These concepts would shape his worldview and influence his decisions as president, most prominently his revision of the United States' role in world politics.[53] Another aspect of his childhood would also play an important role in the way Wilson understood the world and the part he had to play: the South. Having been born in Virginia, a few years before the Civil War broke out, the future president grew up during the war and its aftermath.[54] As popular memory now tells the story, upon hearing of Abraham Lincoln's election in 1860, little Woodrow understood the gravity of the situation and the news filled him with dread, an early sign of his interpretation of the events that would follow.[55]

During the war, his father would be an ardent supporter of the Confederacy, transforming his church into a hospital and the churchyard into a prison for prisoners of war.[56] The experience of growing up during the Civil War and especially during subsequent

[51] Edwin A. Weinstein, *Woodrow Wilson: A Medical and Psychological Biography* (Princeton 1981) 4; Mario R. Di Nunzio, *Woodrow Wilson: Essential Writings and Speeches of the Scholar-President* (New York 2006) 1.
[52] Di Nunzio, *Woodrow Wilson*, 3.
[53] Ibidem, 1-2.
[54] A. Scott Berg, *Wilson* (Princeton 2013) 11-12.
[55] Pietrusza, *1920: The Year of the Six Presidents*, 11; Berg, *Wilson*, 31-32.
[56] Arthur S. Link, *Wilson, Volume I: The Road to the White House* (Princeton 2016) 1-2.

Reconstruction as a Southerner would stay with Wilson and colour his views throughout his life.[57] During his academic years, he would often write of the South and, in Wilson's and many southerners' of Wilson's generation's eyes, the unfair treatment that was bestowed upon its people during Reconstruction. As a college professor, Wilson would write in his book *Division and Reunion* on the outbreak of the Civil War and what it meant to the South:

> "The triumph of Mr. Lincoln was, in [the South's] eyes, nothing less than the establishment in power of a party bent upon the destruction of the southern system and the defeat of southern interests. […] southern society had been represented as built upon a wilful sin; the southern people had been held up to the world as those who deliberately despised the most righteous commend of religion. They knew that they did not deserve such reprobation. They knew that their lives were honorable, their relations with their slaves human, their responsibility for the existence of slavery among them remote".[58]

Such revisionist history of the run-up to and causes for the Civil War became popular during the late nineteenth century and Wilson would become a fervent believer in these reinterpretations of events, ultimately promoting his beliefs to a national audience.[59] Although he would not come to fully embrace the Lost Cause narrative, stating that "because I love the South, I rejoice in the failure of the Confederacy", he would continuously reject the notion that slavery stood at the centre of the conflict.[60] Instead, he would continue the argument that the North forced secession upon the South when it denied Southerners their way of living, a way of living in accordance with the Constitution, according to Wilson, and, together with his insistence on the failure of Reconstruction, these beliefs would influence his views throughout his life.[61]

Woodrow Wilson's political career began in 1910 when he entered the race for governor of New Jersey.[62] At that time, Wilson was primarily known as the president of Princeton and as a moderate, even partly conservative scholar of politics and law. He was an outspoken critic of the Democratic Progressive William Jennings Bryan, he had been against increasing the

[57] M. Dennis, 'Looking Backward: Woodrow Wilson, the New South, and the Question of Race', *American Nineteenth Century History* 3:1 (2002) 77-104, 77-78.
[58] Berg, *Wilson*, 32.
[59] Dennis, 'Looking Backward', 78.
[60] Link, *Wilson, Volume I*, 3.
[61] Berg, *Wilson*, 32-33; Dennis, 'Looking Backward', 77-78.
[62] Niels Aage Thorsen, *The Political Thought of Woodrow Wilson, 1875-1910* (Princeton 1988) ix.

federal government's power, against tariffs, and opposed much of labour unions' actions.[63] However, in reality, Wilson had slowly moved more to the left and had come to embrace some of the Progressive ideas he had dismissed earlier during his time at Princeton. The party elites, who had proposed Wilson as the candidate for Governor of New Jersey, were not aware of that development, however, and instead were under the impression that their candidate would be the moderate lackey they had envisioned to manage their interests. In fact, Wilson had assured them he would not seek to reform the party machinery upon his election.[64] During the following campaign and upon his installation as governor, Wilson, however, transformed into a true Progressive, advocating for a reorganisation of the Democratic Party, expansion of direct democracy through referendum and direct primaries, and legislation tackling corruption.[65] His gubernatorial years would prove to be short and would place Wilson in the nation's spotlight as potentially the next Progressive president.

The following presidential election of 1912 could be dubbed the Progressive Election, bringing together three Progressive leaders: former President Theodore Roosevelt, incumbent William Howard Taft, and the new rising star Woodrow Wilson. Roosevelt had left the Republican Party after he lost the Republican nomination to Taft and formed the "Bull Moose" Progressive Party to run as a third-party candidate in the 1912 election.[66] This newly formed party drew much of the most progressive members of the Republican Party into its ranks, leaving the more moderate and conservative members as the new core of the party. This shift would hold even after the dissolution of the Progressive Party, when many of these defectors switched to the Democratic Party, changing the makeup of the dominant parties for the rest of the twentieth century.[67]

The three candidates, four if Socialist Party candidate Eugene Debs, who did not win any electoral votes but did win nearly seven percent of the popular vote, is included, would set up the different strands of the Progressive Movement against each other, serving as a "referendum on reform".[68] Unsurprisingly, Debs represented the most radical calls for reform. The election of 1912 was the fourth run for president for Debs and during these years Debs had taken the Socialist Party out of the fringes of the United States' politics and build a strong base

[63] Pietrusza, *1920: The Year of the Six Presidents*, 10-11; Di Nunzio, *Woodrow Wilson*, 6-7.
[64] Berg, *Wilson*, 192.
[65] Ibidem, 210-211; Di Nunzio, *Woodrow Wilson*, 12-14.
[66] Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*, 268.
[67] Di Nunzio, *Woodrow Wilson*, 16.
[68] Ibidem, 16.

of supporters.[69] Most to the right was incumbent Taft, who described his ideology as "progressive conservatism".[70] His campaign mostly fought against the "extremism" of the new Progressive Party and its leader, and for the judiciary and the need to strengthen its powers, with the slogan "liberty under the law".[71]

The true battle of the election of 1912 however, would be between Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt, the two titans of Progressivism, who each represented two distinct political strands of the movement. Both agreed that reform was necessary to combat the economic inequalities in the country and place power back into the government and out of the hands of trusts and monopolies.[72] The method to do so is what they disagreed on. Teddy Roosevelt's New Nationalism saw the solution to the economic problems in the expansion of federal powers, which could regulate trusts instead of completely abolishing them, and more generally protect the interest of the people and the nation's aspirations.[73] Wilson's New Freedom, on the other hand, was against that expansion of the federal government. Reflecting Wilson's old mistrust of centralised government and his revisionist beliefs in the state's rights argument for the Civil War, he fervently campaigned against expanding the federal government and for the strengthening of state government. He was also more aggressive in his stances on trusts, arguing that they should be broken up altogether and replaced with free-market competition.[74]

Another difference in the campaigns was the inclusion of marginalised groups. The Progressive Party's convention welcomed guests and speakers from a wide range of social organisations. Jane Addams, a leader in the suffragist movement, seconded the nomination of Roosevelt, making the Progressive Party the second party, after the Socialist Party to support women's suffrage.[75] The convention also had a Black speaker, as well as several northern Black delegates, and speakers representing the party's commitment to labour reform. Southern Black delegates, however, were blocked by the party to appeal to white southern voters. Nevertheless, the events at the convention were seen as outrageous by the political establishment.[76] Wilson's campaign was much more subdued on this front. He did make a concerted effort to appeal to the northern Black voter but mostly did so behind closed doors to not fend off his southern

[69] Margaret O'Mara, *Pivotal Tuesdays: Four Elections that Shaped the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia 2015) 49-50.
[70] Jonathan Lurie, *William Howard Taft: The Travails of a Progressive Conservative* (New York 2011) 154.
[71] Lurie, *William Howard Taft*, 157; 169.
[72] Link, *Wilson, Volume I*, 476-477.
[73] Di Nunzio, *Woodrow Wilson*, 16-18.
[74] O'Mara, *Pivotal Tuesdays*, 41-42; Berg, *Wilson*, 240.
[75] Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*, 268.
[76] Ibidem, 268-269.

base.[77] He would also not come out in support of women's suffrage during his campaign and as it would turn out during his first term.[78] In the end, it was Wilson who benefited from the split in the Republican Party, winning on an electoral landslide of 435 electoral votes, even though Wilson did not gain a majority of the popular vote.[79] On top of this, the Democrats also gained a majority in the House of Representatives and the Senate.[80] This legislative advantage made it possible for Wilson to honour most of the promises made during the campaign.

He started his presidential term with a speech to Congress during a special session, something that had not been done since the turn of the nineteenth century. The speech made clear what his intentions were for his presidency. His administration would make sure "that the burden carried by the people under existing law may be lightened as soon as possible" and that "our men of business will be free to thrive by the law of nature (the nature of free business) instead of by the law of legislation and artificial arrangement".[81] In other words, he would reinstall the ideology of the free market by reducing the federal government's influence while protecting the people of the United States, or so was his promise.

During the next four years, he would make a large effort in fulfilling his promises, establishing what we have come to know as the Wilsonian Progressive agenda. That first speech before Congress was to urge the members to pass legislation to reduce tariffs in order for the United States to be able to increase international trade and to reduce the cost of living, affecting not only the domestic economy but also the United States' ties to the rest of the world. In September 1913 Congress did exactly that, by passing the Underwood-Simmons Tariff Act.[82] Additionally, that same act introduced an income tax for incomes over 4000 dollars.[83] The next issue, banking reform, was more complicated. After a two-year investigation into money trusts and their control of the nation's economy, the Federal Reserve System was created. This system created an oversight structure with a board of appointees selected by the president and approved by the Senate, and twelve regional banks, increasing the federal and, most important to Wilson, state governments' influence on banking.[84] The final major progressive reform that passed in the first term of the Wilson administration was a set of anti-trust acts that gave the federal

[77] Berg, *Wilson*, 245-247.
[78] John Milton Cooper Jr., *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge 1983).
[79] O'Mara, *Pivotal Tuesdays*, 53; Berg, *Wilson*, 247.
[80] Link, *Wilson, Volume I*, 525.
[81] Woodrow Wilson, 'April 8, 1913: Message Regarding Tariff Duties", *Miller Center*
Retrieved from: https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/april-8-1913-message-regarding-tariff-duties 15-9-2020.
[82] Di Nunzio, *Woodrow Wilson*, 19.
[83] Walter Nugent, *Progressivism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford 2010).
[84] Nugent, *Progressivism*, 100-102.

government extended powers to combat unfair business practices.[85] These three reforms would define the first term of the Wilson administration, solidifying his standing as a Progressive leader. The second term, however, would prove to be defined by events partly out of Woodrow Wilson's control and would leave the country with a very different understanding of its president.

**The champions of the rights of mankind**

In 1916, Woodrow Wilson won his second presidential election. Despite his progressive accomplishments, the main issue during the campaign was the new war in Europe that quickly escalated into the First World War. At the start of the war, in 1914, Wilson had promised his country neutrality and urged its citizens to "act and speak in the true spirit of neutrality, which is the spirit of impartiality and fairness and friendliness to all concerned".[86] This stance proved to be popular among the broader public, who preferred the United States refrained from armed conflict, and Wilson would remain in favour of neutrality throughout his first term.[87] Despite multiple provocations, Wilson was able to stay true to that promise, resulting in the Democratic campaign slogan "He kept us out of the war".[88] That message, along with his progressive record resulted in a victory for Wilson, although the margin was much closer than in 1912.[89]

As was the case in the 1916 election, the 1920 election would in large part be dominated by the First World War, and its aftermath, hence its centrality in this research. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the events of the war, especially in relation to Wilson's second term because, even though his neutrality stance helped him win the election in 1916, he would not be able to sustain that stance much longer. In the period between the outbreak of the war and the 1916 election, several incidents had already threatened the fragile neutrality stance. The first problem was the naval blockade of Germany by Great Britain. This blockade prevented the United States' ships from reaching Germany, thus, preventing much of the existing trade between the countries, especially harming the southern cotton trade.[90] Instead, trade with the Allied countries increased, which went against the spirit of neutrality that Wilson wanted to

[85] Di Nunzio, *Woodrow Wilson*, 20-21.
[86] Woodrow Wilson, 'August 20, 1914: Message on Neutrality', *Miller Center*
Retrieved from: https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/august-20-1914-message-neutrality 20-9-2020.
[87] Robert H. Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I, 1917-1921* (New York 1985) 8; Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*, 294-295.
[88] Di Nunzio, *Woodrow Wilson*, 31.
[89] Berg, *Wilson*, 416.
[90] Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*, 300.

demonstrate.[91] The next problem was the new German U-boat, which sank multiple British and French ships, killing American citizens on board. The biggest crisis caused by these attacks was the sinking of the *Lusitania* on May 7, 1915. This British passenger ship carried 1,257 passengers when it was attacked by a U-boat, killing most of the passengers, of which 124 were Americans.[92] The event riled up anti-German sentiment in the United States but did not sway the president from neutrality and he was able to stabilise the situation through diplomatic action.[93]

During this time, Wilson worked out his vision for the United States' role in the conflict that would guide him in the following years. He believed that by being a neutral party, the United States could mediate to help end the war and establish a sustainable peace.[94] He first set out this vision in a speech before the Senate on January 22nd, 1917. In it, he laid out the groundwork for what would come to be known as his Fourteen Points, which would be the guiding principle of the Wilson administration's foreign policy from that point on. The main belief that forms the core of this policy and that is highlighted through the speech is the idea that the United States was predestined to be a guiding example of freedom and democracy for the rest of the world. On the role he envisioned for the people of the United States in the conflict he stated:

> "To take part in such a service will be the opportunity for which they have sought to prepare themselves by the very principles and purposes of their polity and the approved practices of their Government ever since the days when they set up a new nation in the high and honorable hope that it might in all that it was and did show mankind the way to liberty".[95]

Through that leadership role that Wilson envisioned for the United States, he sought to make sure a "lasting" peace would be created. Another part of his plan for sustainable peace was the establishment of a "League for Peace", which later would become the League of Nations, in which nations could come together to act in unity and for their common interest, under "a common protection".[96] The last essential part of a lasting peace would be "a peace without

[91] Di Nunzio, *Woodrow Wilson*, 27.
[92] Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*, 301.
[93] Di Nunzio, *Woodrow Wilson*, 28-29.
[94] Ibidem, 391.
[95] Woodrow Wilson, 'January 22, 1917: "A World League for Peace" Speech', *Miller Center*
Retrieved from: https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/january-22-1917-world-league-peace-speech 21-9-2020.
[96] Wilson, 'January 22, 1917: "A World League for Peace" Speech'.

victory", in which none of the warring sides would declare winner and, more importantly, no side would be declared the loser.[97] Such an agreement would prevent feelings of bitterness and revenge, which would stand in the way of lasting peace. Furthermore, that peace would be built upon a set of principles, being national self-determination, freedom of the seas, arms reduction, and diplomacy without alliances.[98] These concepts and visions that Wilson drafted and introduced to the nation in this speech would become the central point of discussions in the years to come and play an essential role in shaping his legacy, even though, or probably because, they would largely fail to become reality.

In April of 1917, however, Wilson would be back to address Congress for a matter seemingly contrary to his previous remarks. This change in strategy was the result of a final combination of provocations, which put an end to Woodrow Wilson's efforts for neutrality. At the beginning of 1917, Germany changed its strategy on submarine warfare. Whereas the country previously had agreed to refrain from attacking neutral merchant and passenger ships, it now moved to unrestricted marine warfare, attacking all ships nearing the British Islands and in the Mediterranean Sea, in an effort to change the tide of the war on the European mainland.[99] They understood that this tactic would make it likely that the United States would declare war on Germany but they wagered that the resulting cut off of the Allied supply lines, combined with a land offensive in France would be enough to win the war before American troops could land on European soil.[100] Wilson did not declare war immediately, instead, he broke off all diplomatic ties with Germany.[101] He too, however, understood that war was now inevitable and said as much to his private secretary.[102] The final push to enter the war came a month later. British intelligence had intercepted a telegram from the German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmerman to the German Ambassador in Mexico, in which he instructed the ambassador to propose an alliance between the countries, and in return, Mexico would receive Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.[103] Wilson released the Zimmerman Telegram to the press, causing national outrage and support for the United States military involvement in the war rose rapidly.[104] On April 2nd, 1917, Wilson called together a special session of Congress and at last asked for a declaration of war.[105]

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[97] Wilson, 'January 22, 1917: "A World League for Peace" Speech'.
[98] Di Nunzio, *Woodrow Wilson*, 32.
[99] Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*, 320-321.
[100] Di Nunzio, *Woodrow Wilson*, 33.
[101] Ibidem, 33.
[102] Berg, *Wilson*, 423.
[103] Ibidem, 425.
[104] Di Nunzio, *Woodrow Wilson*, 33.
[105] Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*, 323.

That speech on April 2nd was the fifth time that Wilson appeared before Congress in 1917 alone. The speeches he gave changed heavily in purpose, going from a passionate argument for neutrality to a declaration of war, portraying the evolution in Wilson's stance on the United States' involvement in the war. What immediately stands out, is that, even though the first three speeches continue to stress that the United States did not "desire any hostile conflict" and the "American people do not desire [armed conflict]", a build-up of pro-war language can clearly be distinguished.[106] In January, Wilson was still optimistic that a "definite discussion of the peace which shall end the present war" was near.[107] The next month, Wilson's understanding of the war had changed due to the recent events, which led him to warn Germany that the current course the German Empire was on would leave him no other choice but to defend the American people by "any means that may be necessary", taking a stronger position which could lead the United States into armed conflict but which also left open the door for a diplomatic solution.[108] Another month later, the United States had moved to arm its merchant vessels to protect them from German attacks, another escalation to the United States' involvement in the war.

In his second inaugural address on March 5th and fourth appearance before the Senate, Wilson no longer shied away from using the word 'war' directly and now described the United States' strategy as "armed neutrality".[109] Then finally, another month later, Wilson could no longer defend the strategy of neutrality, armed or unarmed, and asked Congress to "declare the recent course of the Imperial German government to be in fact nothing less than war against the government and people of the United States; that [Congress] formally accept the status of belligerent which has thus been thrust upon it; and that [Congress] take immediate steps […] to exert all its power and employ all its resources to bring the German Empire to terms and end the war", highlighting that the United States had been "forced into" the war.[110] Thus, the United

[106] Woodrow Wilson, 'February 3, 1917: Message Regarding US-German Relations', *Miller Center*
Retrieved from: https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/february-3-1917-message-regarding-us-german-relations 27-9-2020; Woodrow Wilson, 'February 26, 1917: Message Regarding Safety of Merchant Ships', *Miller Center*
Retrieved from: https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/february-26-1917-message-regarding-safety-merchant-ships 27-9-2020.
[107] Wilson, 'January 22, 1917: "A World League for Peace" Speech'.
[108] Wilson, 'February 3, 1917: Message Regarding US-German Relations'.
[109] Woodrow Wilson, 'March 5, 1917: Second Inaugural Address', *Miller Center*
Retrieved from: https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/march-5-1917-second-inaugural-address 29-9-2020.
[110] Woodrow Wilson, 'April 2, 1917: Address to Congress Requesting a Declaration of War Against Germany', *Miller Center*
Retrieved from: https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/april-2-1917-address-congress-requesting-declaration-war 29-9-2020.

States entered the war, while Wilson was able to maintain that he did everything to prevent that from happening.

Surprisingly, these five speeches are also important because of their remarkable similarity in the underlying message and vision. That last speech, in which Wilson framed the United States as the country taking the moral high ground, doing everything it could to avoid war but ultimately having no other choice but to enter the conflict, points to that underlying message. Throughout these five speeches, Wilson describes the ultimate goal of the United States to be "to guarantee peace and justice throughout the world".[111] He positioned the United States and what the country stood for as being above the depravity of the pursuits of both sides in the war, stating that "it is not of material interests merely that we are thinking. It is, rather, of fundamental human rights".[112] He used that belief to defend his reluctance to enter the war but also as a determining reason for finally declaring war, explaining his position as follows:

> "Our object now, as then, is to vindicate the principles of peace and justice in the life of the world as against selfish and autocratic power and to set up among the really free and self-governed peoples of the world such a concert of purpose and of action as will henceforth ensure the observance of those principles. Neutrality is no longer feasible or desirable where the peace of the world is involved and the freedom of its peoples, and the menace to that peace and freedom lies in the existence of autocratic governments backed by organized force which is controlled wholly by their will, not by the will of their people. We have seen the last of neutrality in such circumstances."[113]

And later in that same speech:

> "The world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty. We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind. We shall be satisfied when those rights have been made as secure as the faith and the freedom of nations can make them. "[114]

[111] Wilson, 'January 22, 1917: "A World League for Peace" Speech'.
[112] Wilson, 'February 26, 1917: Message Regarding Safety of Merchant Ships'.
[113] Wilson, 'April 2, 1917: Address to Congress Requesting a Declaration of War Against Germany'.
[114] Idem

In other words, Wilson underscores that early belief he had in the United States' predestined purpose that the United States and its people, who Wilson was sending into war, would be fighting for a higher purpose, one that the nation was intended to fulfil and one that would not only serve to protect its own citizens, but all citizens submitted to an oppressive government. That frame, that the United States was not only fighting to protects its own freedoms but to protect and provide freedom to all people, would be Woodrow Wilson's guiding message from that point on. A frame in which he directly invokes the United States inhabitants' sense of civic nationalism by appealing to their faith in the foundational ideals of the nation.

**Democrats' succession and Republican attacks**

A year and a half after the declaration of war, the war ended with the signing of the armistice on November 11, 1918.[115] In that period, the Wilson administration's position on the role of government changed substantially. As mentioned before, Wilson did not believe in expanding the power of the federal government, instead, preferring to strengthen state and local government. During the first term, his administration had wavered a little on that front but had also ensured state and local government gained control alongside the federal reforms.[116] In the second term, primarily after the United States entered the war, Wilson and his administration drastically revised their stance. Almost immediately after the war was declared, Congress, and the administration through executive action, centralised the economy, repressed anti-war dissidents, and implemented a mandatory draft, moving substantially closer to Roosevelt's New Nationalism.[117] The central goal of these policies was to create a united public, working in unity to supply, reinforce, and support the Allied troops.

Through these policies, the war seeped into every aspect of people's lives. Herbert Hoover, future president, and presidential hopeful in the 1920 election, was appointed by Wilson to take charge of American food activities to reduce food waste. He implemented meatless Mondays and wheatless Wednesdays, recruited housewives, led by first lady Edith Wilson, as members of the Food Administration charged with reducing their households' consumption, and drastically increased food production.[118] To fund the rapid mobilisation, William Gibbs McAdoo, the Secretary of the Treasury and Wilson's son-in-law, issued

[115] Pietrusza, *1920: The Year of the Six Presidents*, 25.
[116] Saladin Ambar, 'Woodrow Wilson: Domestic Affairs', *Miller Center*
Retrieved from: https://millercenter.org/president/wilson/domestic-affairs 1-10-2020.
[117] Nugent, *Progressivism*, 111-112; Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century,* 82-83.
[118] Berg, *Wilson*, 448.

government bonds to be sold to the public.[119] These plans were embraced by the public.

Other measures, however, were more controversial. The plan to draft two million men into military service found fierce resistance in the House and proposed tax raises sparked intense partisan debate.[120] The most concerning, however, was the administration's effort to redirect public sentiment to generate patriotism and demonstrations of loyalty to the United States and its ideals, which was captured in the term Americanism, which would become the dominant form of nationalism in the years following.[121] The partisan debates in the early months of the war had shown the administration that it needed broad public support to pull off the enormous mobilisation.[122] To achieve this, an Espionage Act and a Sedition Act were passed by Congress, limiting free speech and paving the way for the arrest, prosecution, or deportation of individuals who criticised the war, showed sympathies for the Central Powers, especially the German Empire, or those who showed general disloyalty to the United States.[123] The Act also gave the Postmaster-General, Albert S. Burleson, the power to censor the mail, leading to an unprecedented purging of "disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive" publications.[124]

The final measure was the installation of the most controversial board established during the war, the Committee on Public Information, which was tasked with influencing public sentiment.[125] The Secretary of War, Newton D. Baker's description of the purpose of the Committee upholds the Orwellian imagery the name evokes, namely, "mobilizing the mind of the world so far as American participation in the war was concerned".[126] The Committee published pamphlets explaining the reason the United States had entered the war and spread them throughout the world, issued a daily newspaper, and enlisted thousands of so-called Four Minute Men, who gave speeches in motion picture theatres during the four minutes it took to change the reels.[127] It also produced motion pictures, recruiting, among others, D. W. Griffith to portray the Germans as violent sadists.[128] In all the projects, the central message was that initial message of civic nationalism that Wilson had constructed, that the United States had not entered the war with selfish intentions but to help all people achieve the same level of freedom as the United States had reached and to protect that achievement from bad actors trying to

[119] Charles E. Neu, *Colonel House: A Biography of Woodrow Wilson's Silent Partner* (Oxford 2014) 295-296.
[120] Neu, *Colonel House*, 296.
[121] Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I, 1917-1921*, 200-201.
[122] Neu, *Colonel House*, 296.
[123] Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*, 334-335; Neu, *Colonel House*, 296-297.
[124] Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*, 335.
[125] Berg, *Wilson*, 449.
[126] Ibidem, 450.
[127] Ibidem, 451.
[128] Ibidem, 451-452.

undermine it. That frame was used to inspire and mobilise its population and those abroad.

Meanwhile, as the election was slowly getting closer, both parties had to start considering who their nominees were going to be and concurrently those interested in the presidency started to voice their opinions more widely or plainly announced their interest. Initially, it seemed clear for both parties who their nominees were going to be. The Democratic Party had a clear successor to Wilson's leadership in his son-in-law, William McAdoo, who as Treasurer and adviser to Wilson had substantial political experience and influence.

McAdoo was receptive to the early calls for his candidacy, although he would not publicly declare his interest in the nomination, and positioned himself as the natural successor to his father-in-law by mimicking his rhetoric.[129] In one of the more substantial speeches available for research, given in the final year of the war, McAdoo explains the stakes of the war as "A conflict in which the fate of civilization is at stake. A conflict in which God has called us as his champion of freedom and democracy".[130] That statement continues Wilson's insistence that the United States was not only fighting out of self-preservation but out of its predetermined purpose to instil freedom and democracy in all countries. McAdoo also repeated Wilson's framing that the United States was forced into the war by the German Kaiser's actions, pointing to the German policy of unrestricted marine warfare for the United States inability to stay neutral:

> "If we had submitted to that order […], what would have happened? Disaster for the farms of America. Disaster for the manufactories of America. Disaster for the mining interest of America. Disaster for the libel interest of America. To every productive activity of the American people there would have come irreparable injuries. Never could we submit to that."[131]

Finally, the ultimate goal of a "just peace" that McAdoo gives at the end of the speech, directly repeats Wilson's rhetoric. This speech portrays McAdoo's rhetorical strategy as a candidate, to align himself with Wilson's framing of the war efforts and the United States position in the world as the defender and supplier of freedom and democracy in the world, which seems the

[129] Douglas B. Craig, *Progressives at War: William G. McAdoo and Newton D. Baker, 1963-1941* (Baltimore 2013) 224-226; The New York Times, 'Democrats Watch Three Candidates', *The New York Times* 8 March 1920
Retrieved from: https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1920/03/08/118268435.html?pageNumber=15 12-11-2020.
[130] William Gibbs McAdoo, 'American Rights', *Library of Congress* 17 January 1918
Retrieved from: https://www.loc.gov/item/2004650680/ 12-11-2020.
[131] McAdoo, 'American Rights'.

most natural position to take as McAdoo was himself part of Wilson's cabinet but ignores the increasingly anti-democratic efforts of the Wilson administration during the war which directly contrasted that message.

On the other side of the aisle was Theodore Roosevelt the presumptive nominee and unofficial leader of the Republican party. He had made clear he would be running for a third term as president and had positioned himself as a clear opponent of the Wilson administration. Roosevelt was most critical of Wilson's reluctance to enter the war and his administration's failings in preparing the country for war. In most of his speeches even in the two years leading up to the war, the former president criticised the current administration's handling of the period leading up to the war. Speaking to a gathering of Republicans, Roosevelt explained the consequences of the administration's lack of action during that time:

> "We failed in the smallest degree to profit by that warning, and we drifted into war unarmed and helpless, without having taken the smallest step to harden our huge but soft and lazy strength. In consequence, […] we are still in a military sense impotent to render real aid to the allies or be a real menace to Germany. Had we done our plain duty and prepared in advance we probably would not have had to go to war at all, and certainly would have ended the war almost as soon as we entered it."[132]

Even though he criticised Wilson on his handling of the war, Roosevelt did mirror the president's messaging on the United States' ultimate goal in fighting this war. Roosevelt agreed that the United States was not fighting for their own goals only but also "on behalf of small well-behaved nations", to protect those in the wake of the German Empire's "brutal and scientific […] militarism".[133] However, Roosevelt did not extend this altruistic purpose of the war as far as Wilson did, and in fact dismissed his broader message in which Wilson positioned the United States' as part of the international order of nations, stating in a later speech that "We are not Internationalists. We are American nationalists".[134] That nationalism was most central to Roosevelt's message and was discussed more directly than the invocations to nationalistic

[132] Theodore Roosevelt, 'Speech of Colonel Roosevelt at Portland, Maine', *Theodore Roosevelt Papers. Library of Congress Manuscript Division* 28 March 1918
Retrieved from https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o288716 4-10-2020.
[133] Roosevelt, 'Speech of Colonel Roosevelt at Portland, Maine'.
[134] Theodore Roosevelt, 'Speech of Colonel Roosevelt at Springfield, Illinois', *Theodore Roosevelt Papers. Library of Congress Manuscript Division* 26 August 1918
Retrieved from: https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record/ImageViewer?libID=o288722&imageNo=1 5-10-2020.

sentiment in Wilson's speeches, and was in line with the wave of Americanism that was going through the country in the wake of the international tensions. He also showed support for the anti-democratic measures taken during the war, only criticising that it took the administration so long to implement them. In his speeches, Roosevelt continuously hammers home the message that every American citizen had to be completely loyal to the nation that the American people "can tolerate no half way attitude, no fifty-fifty loyalty. The man must be an American and nothing else or he is not an American at all".[135] And that loyalty not only referred to citizenship or German support but to practically every aspect of life, according to Roosevelt. In his speeches, he referred to partisanship as disloyal, to anyone not working to support the army, speaking another language than English, and to unpreparedness and pacifism as disloyal.[136] In doing so, Roosevelt framed Woodrow Wilson's handling of the period leading up to the war and its beginning not only as dangerous and ineffective but as disloyal to the nation and he created a national climate wherein criticism and ideological deviation were seen as unpatriotic, contradicting the democratic values he claimed to stand for, just as the Wilson administration was doing.

The presumed clarity over the nomination disappeared, however, with the death of Theodore Roosevelt in January 1919.[137] In the wake of his death, the Republican Party continued to support the framing constructed by Roosevelt. His position on the United States' role in the war and the international order afterwards was continued by the two new frontrunners for the Republican nomination, Senator Hiram Johnson and General Leonard Wood, who used Roosevelt's frame for their message. Just as Roosevelt they doused their vision for the United States in Americanism. The militarisation of the country, build up during the war, should be maintained in order for the country to be prepared to fight threats coming from the Pacific or Atlantic, they argued, and the process of "Americanization" of the United States' society should be continued, meaning that the country's citizens should assimilate to the American culture.[138]

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[135] Roosevelt, 'Speech of Colonel Roosevelt at Springfield, Illinois'.
[136] Roosevelt, 'Speech of Colonel Roosevelt at Portland, Maine'; Theodore Roosevelt, 'Colonel Roosevelt's Speech at Miss Price's School at Philadelphia', *Theodore Roosevelt Papers. Library of Congress Manuscript Division* 9 January 1918
Retrieved from: https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o288918 7-10-2020; Theodore Roosevelt, 'Speech of Colonel Roosevelt at Saratoga, New York', *Theodore Roosevelt Papers. Library of Congress Manuscript Division* 18 July 1918
Retrieved from: https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o288720 8-10-2020.
[137] Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy*, 25.
[138] Leonard Wood, 'Americanism', *Nation's Forum Collection. Library of Congress* 18 February 1920
Retrieved from: https://www.loc.gov/item/2016655152/ 19-10-2020; The New York Times, 'Los Angeles Hears Johnson on Treaty', *The New York Times* 4 October 1919

General Wood stated on this that "America first must be stamped upon every heart", citizens could no longer be loyal citizens of the United States while also being loyal to another "flag", and in another speech he stated that "a nation is most effective as a force for peace and for justice when it is of resolute faith, and understands that the strength of right must be organized against the day when it may be necessary to meet the forces of wrong", a statement that not only applied to foreign threats but also to domestic dissidents.[139]

Similarly, on the United States' role in geopolitics the new Republican frontrunners denounced Wilson's attempts at international cooperation after the war as the abandonment of the United States' independence and its ideals.[140] Thus, as Roosevelt had done, they framed criticism, ethnoracial diversity, and deviation from their interpretation of Americanism as disloyalty bordering on treason and only their interpretation of patriotism as the accepted understanding of patriotism. What this ultimately shows, especially on social issues, is the confines of Rooseveltian Progressivism, and the increasing dominance of Americanism over Progressivism as the central frame in their narrative.

**Segregation and the colour line**

The aforementioned interpretations of patriotism point to another important rhetorical tactic that was especially prominent in the Republican argument, the drawing of ethnoracial boundaries around patriotism. The foundational beliefs of the United States of universal equality and self-determination were directly contradicted from the foundation onwards, starting with the widespread practice of slavery. After the Civil War and the formal abolishment of slavery through the implementation of the Thirteenth Amendment, Reconstruction initially seemed to guide the United States towards its initial promise that "all men are created equal". However, as the now newly free Black citizens began to take up space in political and economic life, and move and settle into new areas, the white upper class felt threatened that the racial hierarchy, which they deemed natural and right, would disappear. In reaction, Black Codes and later Jim Crow laws became widespread.[141] These codes and laws regulated Black communities and the mingling of the different races. At the same time, new pseudo-scientific theories on race

Retrieved from: https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1919/10/04/96867447.html?pageNumber=4 19-10-2020.

[139] Wood, 'Americanism'; Leonard Wood, 'Theodore Roosevelt', *Nation's Forum Collection. Library of Congress* May 1920
Retrieved from: https://www.loc.gov/item/2016655156/ 20-10-2020.

[140] The New York Times, 'Los Angeles Hears Johnson on Treaty'.

[141] Catherine M. Lewis and Richard J. Lewis, *Jim Crow America: A Documentary History* (Fayetteville 2009) xi-xiv.

rose to prominence, which supported a worldview of white superiority.[142] Lake and Reynolds call these developments the "drawing of the global colour line" after the famous phrase used by W.E.B. DuBois, pointing to the global scale of these new racial perceptions and the solid division created by these ideas that legitimised racial segregation legislation around the world throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century.[143] The resulting segregated society, in which the availability of one's constitutional rights was based upon one's skin colour, would form the basis of most of the twentieth century's racial conflict in the United States. [144]

Paradoxically, the period in which these Jim Crow laws became widely established was also the period in which the Progressive Movement was at its peak. This seeming inconsistency in events becomes more understandable when the essence of American nationalism, which saw a strong rise at the turn of the twentieth century, is understood. As Gary Gerstle explains, nationalism in the United States is made up of two conflicting ideologies, namely 'civic nationalism' and 'racial nationalism', which both find their roots in the founding ideals and corresponding foundational documents.[145] The former highlights and endorses the founding ideals of the Declaration of Independence, being the foundational equality of all humans and their inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and the righteousness of democratic government that was founded to support and protect those liberal beliefs, and which derives its legitimacy from the people's consent.[146] Those ideals, we have seen continuously highlighted by Wilson, Roosevelt, and the candidates in the previous sections.

The latter concept, however, explains why the United States was, and in many ways still is, unable to live up to those promises set out in the Declaration of Independence. Racial nationalism refers to the ideology that the American people are not only bound together by their common belief in the liberal ideals set out in the Declaration of Independence but also by a shared ethnic and racial composition that results in a common historical background and physical complexion, and the idea that it is that composition that makes them especially suited for self-government and the responsibilities of a liberal democracy.[147] It is that belief in the

[142] Thomas C. Holt and Laurie B. Green, *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 24: Race* (Chapel Hill 2013) 147; Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds*, Drawing the Global Colour Line* (Cambridge 2008) 1-2; David Brown and Clive Webb, *Race in the American South: From Slavery to Civil Rights* (Edinburgh 2007 88-89; Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York 1999) 4-5.
[143] Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 2-5; Brown and Webb, *Race in the American South,* 190.
[144] Sally E. Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Cambridge 2001) 3-5; William M. Tuttle Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (Champaign 1996) 10-12.
[145] Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century,* 3-5.
[146] Ibidem*,* 3-5.
[147] Ibidem*,* 4-6.

unfitness of other races and other ethnicities to participate, and function in a liberal-democratic society that resulted in the expulsion, segregation, and subordination of these groups of people throughout the United States' history, starting with the 3/5th compromise in the Constitution.

That same dichotomy is present in Woodrow Wilson's approach to Progressivism during his presidency. Although Wilson is remembered as one of the prominent leaders of the Progressive Era, his progressivism did not reach across the colour line. At the same time his administration was working to protect individual workers' rights, Black civil service workers were segregated from their white colleagues and eventually largely barred from entering in and climbing up the civil service ranks.[148] These actions not only affected the Black middle class in Washington, D.C., they also nationalised the white supremacist ideology that stood at the foundation of Jim Crow and the racial nationalism that spread alongside it.

The nationalisation of racial nationalism accelerated with the surge of Americanism during the First World War. Wilson and Roosevelt both continuously hammered home the message that it was the duty of all the United States' citizens to display their allegiance to their country and especially those who did not fit into the standard mould of a United States' citizen were expected to portray their patriotism. Immigrants were expected to cut ties with their native country, especially German-Americans who faced increased hostility.[149] However, whereas immigrants could show their patriotism by joining the army or one of the many war efforts at home, Black people were in large part denied that possibility. Only a third of Black applicants were drafted for service, and those who made the selection were situated in segregated battalions and army camps and were largely barred from rising in the military ranks. It took until June 1917 for the army to set up an officers training camp for Black officers.[150] While serving in the army they also faced mistreatment from their superiors, other regiments, and from the townspeople of neighbouring towns.

Those who did not join the military often participated in the largest migration in the United States history. The war had opened up lots of low-skilled jobs in the North, leading to an influx of Black southerners in search of a more stable life.[151] The situation in the North, although not defined by *de jure* segregation, still proved to be riddled with *de facto* segregation, which disillusioned many of those migrants, and meant that in the Northern society Black and white northerners lived in different parts of the city, and obeyed set social norms when it came

[148] Yellin, *Racism in the Nation's Service*, 2-3.
[149] Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I, 1917-1921*, 204-205.
[150] Ibidem, 213-214.
[151] Ibidem, 216.

to interaction between the races. Divergence from these standards often led to violent repressions.[152] These rising tensions were underscored by the rise of organised, violent white supremacist groups, such as the KKK, and as an effect, violent altercations between the races rose steadily.

Most notable in Wilson's narrative on the expansion of racial nationalism is not how he spoke about the subject but his reluctance to weigh in on the issue. As the United States' involvement in the war became more likely and Americanistic sentiment rose among the nation, German-Americans, in particular, faced increased animosities. German shops and manufacturers were vandalised, workers with German names lost their jobs, and even the hamburger was renamed the liberty steak.[153] President Wilson was quick to condemn such exclusions, however, stating that "We have no quarrel with the German people. We have no feeling toward them but one of sympathy and friendship.", instead it was the German government that the United States was fighting.[154] In his speeches he, therefore, continuously refers to the German enemy not simply as Germany or Germans but the German Government, the German Empire, or to the Kaiser, separating the people from their rulers and emphasizing the United States' efforts in providing freedom not only to the occupied countries but also to the German people. In stark contrast, however, stands his laissez-faire approach to the escalating racial tensions in the United State.

Theodore Roosevelt, on the other hand, had been outspoken throughout his career about his beliefs on racial and ethnic issues. His speeches are filled with civic nationalistic symbolism and mentions of patriotic duties.[155] Roosevelt used that civic nationalistic rhetoric to construct a mould of who he deemed a true American patriot. To be included in this group, immigrants or "men of native origin, who are pacifists or denationalized" had to discard their allegiance to any other institution or nation other than the United States and display "full-hearted loyalty".[156] The best way to show that loyalty, according to Roosevelt, was through military service, since he believed the military would function as the true melting pot of different nationalities into the American nationality. He applied the same thinking to individuals in the United States of other races. However, their inclusion as full members of the United States society was based on their

[152] Tuttle Jr., *Race Riot,* 10-11.
[153] Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I, 1917-1921*, 205-206.
[154] Wilson, 'April 2, 1917: Address to Congress Requesting a Declaration of War Against Germany'.
[155] E.g. Roosevelt, 'Speech of Colonel Roosevelt at Portland, Maine'; Theodore Roosevelt, 'Colonel Roosevelt's Speech Delivered at Forest Hills', *Theodore Roosevelt Papers. Library of Congress Manuscript Division* 4 July 1917
Retrieved from: https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o288896 28-2-2021; Roosevelt, 'Speech of Colonel Roosevelt at Springfield, Illinois'.
[156] Roosevelt, 'Colonel Roosevelt's Speech Delivered at Forest Hills'.

ability to win “the esteem and respect of their white neighbors”, putting them on an endeavour of possible endless striving.[157]

[157] Theodore Roosevelt, ‘Extract from Speech at the Chicago Coliseum’, *Theodore Roosevelt Papers. Library of Congress Manuscript Division* 6 August 1912
Retrieved from: https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o285777 28-2-2021.

## Chapter 2 The Stimulus of American Patriotism

The primaries of the Democratic and Republican Party culminated in their respective party convention. In the summer of 1920, delegates came together to vote for their preferred nominees and for the policy agenda those nominees would bring with them to the White House, if elected. At this point in the election, both parties were operating from very different perspectives. Whereas the Democratic Party was still very much the party of Woodrow Wilson, intending to nominate a presidential nominee who would continue his agenda and focus on preserving and defending the legacy of the Wilson years, the Republican Party was at a crossroad. The death of Theodore Roosevelt had left the party without a clear successor and now the party could move forwards by either appointing a nominee that would serve as the replacement of their Progressive leader or a nominee that would lead the party into a new direction.

The chosen nominees, the party platform, and the language used to present both can tell a lot about the path the party wanted to continue on and the way they intended to frame that vision. To do so, this chapter will discuss both conventions, focusing on the keynote speeches, which served as the introduction to the party platform and was the first opportunity to test their messaging to a national audience, and the platforms themselves. After that, the nominees and what their nomination for the party's ideological direction meant will be discussed, as well as their acceptance speeches through which they presented themselves and their campaign to the world. First, however, the chapter will begin with a contextualisation of the events leading up to the conventions in the tumultuous year 1919.

### Rising tensions

1919 had proven to be an exceptionally difficult year for the United States. Even though the war had ended, the political, social, and economic implications of the war were still impacting the everyday life of people across the country. On top of that, the movement of troops across the globe had quickly spread a highly deadly virus, which would come to kill between fifty and a hundred million people worldwide before it would disappear.[158] If that wasn't horrific enough, the Spanish Flu was especially deadly to people with an active and healthy immune response, meaning that this strain of influenza was especially deadly for those in their twenties and thirties, further scarring a generation already ravaged by war.[159]

The Spanish Flu was not the only health emergency that would hit the United States that year. After President Wilson returned from Europe, where he had personally overseen the peace

[158] John M. Barry, *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History* (New York 2018) 4.
[159] Barry, *The Great Influenza*, 4-5

talks, he went on a railroad tour across the country to rally up public support for the Versailles Treaty, containing the League Covenant that would establish the League of Nations.[160] His body, however, was not up to the task. Having already suffered an illness in April which had weakened his body, Wilson broke down during a speech in Pueblo unable to utter the words.[161] Upon return in Washington D.C. Wilson suffered a major stroke, leaving him partially paralyzed and bedridden.[162]

Meanwhile, it was up to the Senate to ratify, revise, or reject the treaty. The senators could be divided into four factions: Democrats in support of the treaty as it was, moderate 'reservationists' who wanted to see some small amendments to the treaty, strong 'reservationists' who opposed the treaty until major revisions were put in place that would secure the United States' sovereignty, and fourteen 'irreconcilables' who would not support the treaty under any circumstances.[163] The uncompromising forces of the opposition leader Henry Cabot Lodge and Woodrow Wilson, determined to have the treaty passed as it was, meant conciliation was virtually impossible, ultimately leading to the defeat of the treaty. Central to the concern of the opposition was the United States' sovereignty, which they deemed under threat due to Article X, in which signatories pledged to respect and defend member states' territorial integrity.[164] Wilson refused to amend the Article, leading to the final vote, which would count forty-nine in favour and thirty-nine opposing ratification, seven votes short of the required two-thirds majority, and a major defeat for Wilson's internationalism.[165]

Beyond the Senate, the end of the war had created new problems, highlighted existing ones, and stoked the flames of racial, ethnic, and ideological divide in the country. The ending of fighting in Europe meant that millions of soldiers and army supply factory workers no longer had a job. That situation combined with a government unprepared for the enormous logistical operation of demobilisation resulted in chaos.[166] The resulting skyrocketing unemployment and steeply rising consumer prices prompted nationwide labour unrest. The year 1919 saw 2,665 strikes, with 4,160,348 workers participating, and Seattle saw the nation's first general strike, lasting five days.[167] These strikes, along with a series of bombings carried out by anarchists, instilled a fear of an upcoming Bolshevik revolution.[168] Politicians used that fear and the general

[160] Nugent, *Progressivism: A Very Short Introduction* 114; Pietrusza, *1920: The Year of the Six Presidents*, 41.
[161] Nugent, *Progressivism: A Very Short Introduction*, 158; Pietrusza, *1920: The Year of the Six Presidents*, 45.
[162] Pietrusza, *1920: The Year of the Six Presidents*, 46-47; Di Nunzio, *Woodrow Wilson*, 39-41.
[163] Nugent, *Progressivism: A Very Short Introduction* 114.
[164] Di Nunzio, *Woodrow Wilson*, 38.
[165] Ibidem, 39.
[166] Nugent, *Progressivism: A Very Short Introduction* 115.
[167] Pietrusza, *1920: The Year of the Six Presidents*, 142-143.
[168] Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I, 1917-1921*, 211.

sentiment of Americanism to break up the strikes by convincing the public that revolutionaries and alien agitators were behind the labour unrests, thereby weaponizing the distrust and hatred against the Other and strengthening feelings of xenophobia.[169] The most prominent politician to use that tactic was Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, who was one of the intended targets of the bombings.[170] Palmer established an anti-radical General Intelligence Division, headed by twenty-four-year-old J. Edgar Hoover, and together with Hoover's intelligence, Palmer soon carried out his Palmer raids, targeting foreign-born individuals, accused of partaking in and inflaming radical sentiment, and deporting them.[171]

The xenophobic sentiments driving the First Red Scare also resulted in racial violence. The summer of 1919 would come to be known as the Red Summer, because of the numerous racial riots killing dozens of, mostly Black, people across the country. A large part of the riots took place in the Northern cities, where newly settled Black workers were blamed for the lack of jobs, were a sign of the nationalisation of the violent ideology behind segregation and white supremacy.[172] These violent racial altercations were part of a larger effort to reaffirm Black people's lowermost position on the social ladder, which used violence as a deterrent to social mobility and as a means to draw the lines of segregation, both geographically and socially. These efforts were underscored by a steep rise in lynchings, with seventy-eight Black people murdered through lynching in 1919 alone, often newly returned veterans, and by the rampant rise of the Ku Klux Klan.[173]

Divisions among Progressives were also amplified due to war. The Rooseveltian section of the Movement, who had long supported a strong federal government and nation-building on the ideas of civic and racial nationalism and militarism, saw their visions come to reality during the war.[174] Roosevelt himself had argued that the military could play an important role in Americanising the immigrants of the country.[175] On the other side were the Wilsonian Progressives, who faced the dilemma of supporting their leader while he abandoned his belief in small government for the sake of the war and some of the last Progressive reforms he had promised to implement or to abandon their camp to stay true to their ideals.[176] Some had drawn

[169] Tuttle Jr., *Race Riot,* 18-19.
[170] Pietrusza, *1920: The Year of the Six Presidents*, 145.
[171] Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I, 1917-1921*, 211-212; Pietrusza, *1920: The Year of the Six Presidents*, 146-147.
[172] Tuttle Jr., *Race Riot,* 21.
[173] Ferrell, *Woodrow Wilson and World War I, 1917-1921*, 217-218; Tuttle Jr., *Race Riot,* 21-23.
[174] Paul D. Moreno, *The American State from the Civil War to the New Deal: The Twilight of Constitutionalism and the Triumph of Progressivism* (Cambridge 2013) 163-164.
[175] Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century,* 83-84.
[176] Nugent, *Progressivism: A Very Short Introduction* 111-112.

the line early on, with the most notable example of William Jennings Bryan, who resigned as Secretary of State in opposition of war before Wilson asked Congress to declare war on Germany.[177] Most, however, stayed loyal to Wilson in the hopes that the newly empowered government would demonstrate how a strong government could reshape society for the better.[178] It was with these turbulent circumstances freshly in people's memories and their effects still influencing every aspect of society that the two major parties headed to their respective national conventions.

**The Republican convention**

Today, the party conventions are largely ceremonial. They are used to introduce the nominee and the vice-presidential nominee and explain the platform on which they will run their campaign and, if elected, will build their administration. The convention also functions as a moment for the party to come together and unite behind the nominee after a hard-fought primary. A hundred years ago, the convention also served in this way, however, most importantly, the nomination was actually decided during the convention.

The first convention of the 1920 election was the Republican Convention, held in Chicago from June 8 until June 12.[179] The most important guests of the Convention were the 984 delegates who would decide who the Republican nominee for president would be. For the first time, 26 of these delegates were women, who would gain the right to vote only two months later, after Tennessee would become the 36th state to ratify the nineteenth amendment.[180] Thirty-nine delegates were Black.[181] Of those 984 delegates, 348 were pledged delegates with Leonard Wood and Hiram Johnson carrying the most support, 72 were there to nominate their home-state nominees or favourite sons, one of which was Calvin Coolidge, and 508 delegates were unpledged and open to nominate whomever they felt was best suited for the job.[182]

On the opening day, Henry Cabot Lodge gave the keynote address to the convention, setting the tone for the following presentation of the Republican platform and the message the Republicans would try to put into the world during the campaign. The overall tone of the speech can be summarized as bleak. Lodge began the speech by setting out the state of affairs in the United States as a result of the Great War, and throughout the speech continued to point out the

[177] Di Nunzio, *Woodrow Wilson*, 28.
[178] Moreno, *The American State from the Civil War to the New Deal*, 164-165.
[179] Pietrusza, *1920: The Year of the Six Presidents*, 201.
[180] Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy* 79; Nugent, *Progressivism: A Very Short Introduction* 116.
[181] Library of Congress, 'Republican National Political Conventions 1856-2008', *Library of Congress* Retrieved from: https://www.loc.gov/rr/main/polcon/republicanindex.html 2-2-2021.
[182] Pietrusza, *1920: The Year of the Six Presidents*, 202.

problems that faced the country, while expanding the events and persons responsible for those problems. The main problem Lodge points to in the speech is the sense that the United States and its citizens had wandered from the ideological duties and moral norms that came with its foundation. The war had taken over every aspect of life and as a result, "moral restraints were loosened and all the habits, all the conventions, all the customs of life, which more even than the rule of law hold society together, were swept aside", and now the country had to be helped to get back to the path it had wandered from, foreshadowing the importance of civic nationalism in the Republican message.[183]

As Lodge explained why it should be the Republican party and not the Democrats to take on that role, he continuously focussed on Woodrow Wilson as the one responsible for the nation's troubles. Continuing Teddy Roosevelt's framing of Wilson, Lodge berated Wilson for failing to prepare the country for war, and afterwards for pursuing his own agenda before that of the United States by insistently demanding the establishment of the League of Nations, which according to Lodge, "threatened the very existence of the United States as an independent power".[184] He extensively listed all the reasons why the League was problematic, defending the Republican vote on the matter, and foreshadowing the dominance this issue would have over the campaign. Most notable, however, is his explanation of Wilson's stance on the matter. As Roosevelt had done, Lodge constructed his critique on Wilson in the form of a purity teste, which Wilson failed miserably. Lodge, however, went beyond Roosevelt's argument that Wilson was anti-American, insisting on top of that, that Wilson was anti-democratic in nature by arguing that Wilson's position was a symptom of his autocratic tendencies. His refusal to compromise should show the American people that Wilson stood for a form of government based on his person, that he was only interested in being the "leader and master of a great party", and, in doing so, made a vote for Wilson or "one of his disciples" a vote for "a dictatorship resting on a plebiscite carried by repellent methods".[185] It was, therefore, up to the people to decisively, vote out "Mr. Wilson and the autocracy he represents, and all which those who believe in his doctrines and share his spirit represent".[186] In using this argument, Lodge rose the stakes of the election. People were not only to vote for their preferred candidates and the

[183] Henry Cabot Lodge, 'Address of the Temporary Chairman', in: Republican National Convention Chicago and George Luzerne Hart, *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Seventeenth Republican National Convention: Held in Chicago, Illinois, June 8,9,10,11 and 12, 1920, Resulting in the Nomination of Warren Gamaliel Harding, of Ohio, for President, and the Nomination of Calvin Coolidge, of Massachusetts, for Vice-President; Reported by George L. Hart, Official Reporter, Pub. Under the Supervision of the General Secretary of the Convention* (New York 1920) 14-33, 15-16.
[184] Cabot Lodge, 'Address of the Temporary Chairman', 28.
[185] Ibidem, 17-18.
[186] Ibidem, 17.

platforms they represented but on the continuity of the representative democracy the nation was built on.

In his discussion of the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations, and correspondingly the place the United States should take in the post-war world, Lodge introduces two slogans that summarised the narrative the Republicans wanted to construct on Wilson's handling of the peace process. In the speech, Lodge continued to portray Wilson as a president with autocratic inclinations. He again insists that President Wilson put himself before the nation, pointing to the multiple vetoes the president used to stop any amendments to the peace treaty, which the Republicans offered for it to be ratified by Congress and resulted in the ongoing failure to establish peace. As Lodge explains it "the President demonstrated again that unless he could have his own way exactly and without any modification he would not permit the country to be at peace".[187] He repeated that explanation of his interpretation of cause and effect a little later in the speech, capturing it in a slogan that twisted the 1916 Wilson campaign slogan, "In 1916 Mr. Wilson won on the cry that he 'had kept us out of the war'. He now demands the approval of the American people for his party and his administration on the ground that *he has kept us out of peace*".[188]

In another section of the speech, using the same reasoning Lodge uses another phrase that summarises the framing that the Republican party used to discuss foreign relations during the election. This phrase would later become one of the slogans in the Harding campaign. Lodge was discussing Wilson's inflexibility on the treaty, when he suggests that it should now come to the people of the United States to determine the matter, implying that they will agree with the Republican position. He concludes that argument by stating that "No man who thinks of America first need fear the answer", again pointedly suggesting that Wilson was not handling in the interest of the country, thereby acting anti-American and enkindling the flames of Americanism that were still so broadly spread throughout the country.[189]

These two slogans, 'America first' and 'he has kept us out of peace', form the frames that the Republican Party wanted to sell to the public. America First summarises the position the party took during the campaign on internationalism. Interaction and cooperation with the outside world were fine as long as it was in the interest of the United States, those interests should always come first, essentially choosing nationalism over internationalism and continuing Roosevelt's position on foreign affairs. The latter frame condenses the accusations

[187] Cabot Lodge, 'Address of the Temporary Chairman', 31.
[188] Ibidem, 31.
[189] Ibidem, 29.

the party was making against Wilson and his administration on the issue of the Treaty of Versailles. It ultimately came down to Wilson's failures that the United States was still involved in the European war and would now be directly involved in any future conflict, was the message of the Republicans.

During that first day, and in the following days, the Resolutions Committee debated on the platform of the Republican party, which was presented to the Convention on the third day.[190] The final platform has three discernible goals. As with all election platforms of political parties, the first and most obvious goal is to communicate the vision of the Republican Party to the voters. These voters can be divided into two groups: the base of the party, who voted for the party in the past and are likely to vote for the party again but need to be satisfied that the party is still planning to govern in their interest. The second group consists of voters who are not reliable voters but might be persuaded to vote for the party. There is of course more diversity within these groups but for clarities' sake, this analysis will focus on these two overarching groups. To reassure the former group, the platform still boosts some Progressive proposals, although far less than during the Roosevelt years. Most notably is the support for the 19th amendment, which would enfranchise women, stating: "We welcome women into full participation in the affairs of government and the activities of the Republican party".[191] At this point, in the summer of 1920, women were likely to gain the right to vote and most political leaders were now in support of the amendment.[192] Besides women's suffrage and a short section on child labour, the references to Progressivism are more subtle and are mainly found in the economic sections of the report. The report, for example, proposes the establishment of a federal commission that will facilitate "voluntary mediation, conciliation and arbitration" between employers and employees, continuing Rooseveltian Progressive solutions to the striking crisis by increasing governmental influence in the economy and industry.[193]

The overall vision of the document, however, is strikingly conservative, including most

[190] Republican National Convention Chicago and George Luzerne Hart, *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Seventeenth Republican National Convention: Held in Chicago, Illinois, June 8,9,10,11 and 12, 1920, Resulting in the Nomination of Warren Gamaliel Harding, of Ohio, for President, and the Nomination of Calvin Coolidge, of Massachusetts, for Vice-President; Reported by George L. Hart, Official Reporter, Pub. Under the Supervision of the General Secretary of the Convention* (New York 1920) 93.
[191] Committee on Resolutions", 'Report of the Committee on Resolutions', in: Republican National Convention Chicago and George Luzerne Hart, *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Seventeenth Republican National Convention: Held in Chicago, Illinois, June 8,9,10,11 and 12, 1920, Resulting in the Nomination of Warren Gamaliel Harding, of Ohio, for President, and the Nomination of Calvin Coolidge, of Massachusetts, for Vice-President; Reported by George L. Hart, Official Reporter, Pub. Under the Supervision of the General Secretary of the Convention* (New York 1920) 93-109, 107.
[192] Nugent, *Progressivism: A Very Short Introduction* 116.
[193] Committee on Resolutions", 'Report of the Committee on Resolutions', 100.

of the economic proposals. Deviating from the course the Republican Party had been on since the beginning of the twentieth century, the drafters of the platform presented a hollowed-out version of Roosevelt's New Nationalism, which can now better be described as Old Nationalism since it preserved all Nationalistic features of Roosevelt's platform but traded in the majority of the Progressivism for conservative standpoints. The platform proposes to raise the tariff again, reversing Progressive policy implemented under Wilson and bringing back a debate between the New Nationalism and New Freedom visions for the international marketplace.[194] It also condemns striking, since it "inflicts such loss and suffering on the community", favours "a policy of rigid economy" and "a more business-like distribution of functions" of the Federal departments, and privatisation of the railroads."[195] This new course this platform put the party on shows how the Committee and those in favour of the platform interpreted the shift in national sentiment after years of war, domestic social unrest, economic hardship, and partisanship meant that voters were no longer interested in Progressivism or systemic change. It shows how the Republican Party calculated that a Progressive vision was no longer what voters were looking for and that the public instead wanted stability and recognisable policies, referring, for instance, to "the time-honored policies […] declared by Washington, Jefferson, and Monroe" in their foreign relations section.[196]

The conversion to conservatism was one way in which the party aimed to represent the national sentiment and thus convince new voters to join the Republican ranks. The other dominant rhetorical tactic was the continued use of nationalistic language, which would speak to both old and new voters, as it represented the nationalistic sentiment that had taken over the country during the war and was in part a continuation of Roosevelt's ideology. Continuing on Lodge's speech and Johnson and Wood's rhetoric in the primary, the texts emphasizes the importance of patriotism and Americanism. The platform applauds "the valor and the patriotism" of the soldiers and sailors who fought in the war and called for education reform to ensure "education must be so directed as to awaken in the youth the spirit of America and a sense of patriotic duty to the United States".[197]

The platform also shaped the mould of the American patriot through the use of explicit racial nationalism by specifically excluding groups they deemed to not fit the frame. The party called for the continuation of the "practical exclusion of Asiatic immigrants", citizenship tests

[194] Committee on Resolutions", 'Report of the Committee on Resolutions', 104.
[195] Ibidem, 99-100; 101; 101; 103.
[196] Ibidem, 97.
[197] Ibidem, 106; 108.

that should determine "the alien's" fitness for American citizenship, an immigration policy that favoured "immigrants whose standards are similar to ours", and the Americanisation of the "foreign population of Hawaii and the "rehabilitation of the Hawaiian race".[198]

The divisions shaped by the nationalistic sentiment that dominates the platform also served to carry out the second goal of the platform: attacking Woodrow Wilson and the Wilson administration. Just as Lodge had done in his speech, the writers of the platform, and by extension, the Republican Party, accused Wilson of autocratic tendencies and the desire to "overthrow the foundations of the government".[199] The reaffirmation of the Republican Party's "unyielding devotion to the Constitution of the United States" and the protection of the foundational "principles and ideals" was even presented as the primary goals for the party. In doing so, the party used civic nationalistic rhetoric to portray Wilson as an autocrat in order to create a division between those endangering the Republic, the Wilson administration, and his enablers, and those working to preserve it, the Republicans.

The third and final goal of the platform is the appeasement of different factions within the party. This mainly points to the League question, which had divided the party. Divisions in the party were still a sensitive issue after the 1912 Progressive exodus. To prevent a similar situation from happening, the party establishment had to make sure all fractions' visions were heard. The party was largely split into two groups, of which one wanted the United States to join the League, granted that there would be guarantees that the independence of the nation would be ensured. The other group was against ratification on any grounds.[200] The solution presented in the platform was to not commit to either of these standpoints. In the platform, the party agrees with the former group that the intention of the League is one they support, stating "The Republican Party stands for agreement among the nations to preserve the peace of the world" and even supports the participation in a "general international conference" whenever peace is threatened.[201] They, however, defend the congressmen in voting against the Treaty, since Wilson had refused to make any concessions, leaving them no choice, according to the platform. Their solution, as was Wilson's, was to bring the issue to the people, to let the "American people exercise its judgment", or as Wilson liked to say, to bring the issue to a solemn referendum. In doing so, the platform implies but never fully explains if a vote for the Republicans would mean alteration of the Treaty or rejection.[202]

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[198] Committee on Resolutions", 'Report of the Committee on Resolutions', 105; 105; 104; 109.
[199] Ibidem, 93.
[200] Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy,* 80.
[201] Committee on Resolutions", 'Report of the Committee on Resolutions', 96-97.
[202] Ibidem, 97.

This ambiguity proved popular when the platform was adopted with virtual unanimity. The Convention then proceeded to the election of their presidential and vice-presidential nominees. Their choice for Warren Harding on the tenth ballot confirmed the conservative path the party had now guided itself onto. As was stated in the nominating speeches by Frank Willis and R.B. Creager, Harding represented the establishment of the party, unsurprising, safe, and loyal to the Republican Party, or in their words "safe and sane" leadership.[203] The party had rejected the perceived successors of Roosevelt and with it rejected Progressivism. The fact that the final nominee had not won any of the primaries and was not perceived as a frontrunner before the Convention underlines how this deviation was a decision by the party and not forced by overwhelming support for Harding. In other words, the Republican Party's answer to the social unrest and problems facing the nation was to nominate a politician who would vow to bring back stability and the American way of life, summarised by Creager in two phrases, "'Back to Normal' should be our slogan and 'America First' our watchword".[204]

**The Democratic convention**

The 1092 Democratic delegates assembled in San Francisco on the 28th of June for the Democratic Convention. Of those delegates, approximately a hundred were women, who were allowed to function as delegates for the first time, just as they were at the Republican Convention, displaying the bipartisan acclimatisation to the nineteenth amendment.[205] Apart from the inclusion of female delegates, the two conventions were very different. The Republican Convention had no clear frontrunner after the passing of Teddy Roosevelt. Deviating from his legacy, the Republican party leadership looked to nominate a conservative candidate, directing the party away from its recent history.

The Democratic Convention, on the other hand, was still dominated by Woodrow Wilson, even though he did not personally attend.[206] The only other political figure who had a

[203] Frank B. Willis, 'Mr. Willis Nominating Senator Harding', in: Republican National Convention Chicago and George Luzerne Hart, *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Seventeenth Republican National Convention: Held in Chicago, Illinois, June 8,9,10,11 and 12, 1920, Resulting in the Nomination of Warren Gamaliel Harding, of Ohio, for President, and the Nomination of Calvin Coolidge, of Massachusetts, for Vice-President; Reported by George L. Hart, Official Reporter, Pub. Under the Supervision of the General Secretary of the Convention* (New York 1920) 168-170, 170.
[204] R.B. Creager, 'Mr. Creager Seconding Senator Harding's Nomination', in: Republican National Convention Chicago and George Luzerne Hart, *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Seventeenth Republican National Convention: Held in Chicago, Illinois, June 8,9,10,11 and 12, 1920, Resulting in the Nomination of Warren Gamaliel Harding, of Ohio, for President, and the Nomination of Calvin Coolidge, of Massachusetts, for Vice-President; Reported by George L. Hart, Official Reporter, Pub. Under the Supervision of the General Secretary of the Convention* (New York 1920) 170-171, 171.
[205] Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy,* 102.
[206] Ibidem, 102.

substantial following was former presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan.[207] That influence of Wilson shines through in both the keynote speech, given by Homer Cummings, and in the platform. Both texts continuously praise the president specifically for his leadership, stating, for example, that his role in the war had been overlooked:

> "Let no one misunderstand us. These great affairs were carried forward under the stimulus of American patriotism, supported by the courage and the spirit of our people. All this is freely and gladly acknowledged, but surely the time has come when, because of the calculated criticism and the premeditated calumnies of the opposition, we are entitled to call attention to the fact that all of these things were accomplished under the leadership of a great Democrat and a great Democratic Administration."[208]

The texts also applauded, with "patriotic pride", the "inspired and incomparable leadership of Woodrow Wilson" in the peace talks, his stance on tax revisions, his Progressive economic achievements, and his support for women's suffrage.[209] In doing so, they also repeat the achievements of the Wilson administration, helping the voters remember why they chose the Democratic Party in the previous elections and what that vote had resulted in.

As can be seen in the previous quote, in these praises for the Democratic president the writers were careful to balance crediting the president and highlighting the patriotism of the American people. Although the sentiment of Americanism does not shine through as heavily in the Democratic documents as it did in the Republican ones, it is present throughout. The sailors and "soldiers of liberty" were repeatedly thanked for their service, as were the "patriotic men and women, who sustained the efforts of their government in the crucial hours of the war".[210] Interestingly, the platform draws a broader connection on this subject, arguing that the eventual

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[207] McCoy, 'Election of 1920', 2361.
[208] Homer S. Cummings, 'Address of the Temporary Chairman', in: Democratic Party San Francisco and Edward George Hoffman, *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention: Held in San Francisco, California, June 28,29,30, July 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6, 1920, Resulting in the Nomination of Hon. James M. Cox (of Ohio) for President and Ho. Franklin D. Roosevelt (of New York) for Vice-President* (Indianapolis 1920) 8-26, 12.
[209] Cater Glass, 'Report of the Committee on Platform and Resolutions', in: Democratic Party San Francisco and Edward George Hoffman, *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention: Held in San Francisco, California, June 28,29,30, July 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6, 1920, Resulting in the Nomination of Hon. James M. Cox (of Ohio) for President and Ho. Franklin D. Roosevelt (of New York) for Vice-President* (Indianapolis 1920) 180-200, 180; Cummings, 'Address of the Temporary Chairman', 12; Glass, 'Report of the Committee on Platform and Resolutions', 180; Glass, 'Report of the Committee on Platform and Resolutions', 184; Glass, 'Report of the Committee on Platform and Resolutions', 189; Glass, 'Report of the Committee on Platform and Resolutions', 190.
[210] Cummings, 'Address of the Temporary Chairman', 25; Glass, 'Report of the Committee on Platform and Resolutions', 183.

victory was in part due to the Progressive reforms the Wilson administration had implemented before the war. The writers argue that the stability created by the economic reforms was "an indispensable factor in winning the war", thereby using the frame of Americanism to review the achievements of the Wilson years.[211]

That reframing of the Progressive achievements of Wilson also points to the most striking difference between the texts of both parties: the Progressive nature of the Democratic vision, which is another sign of the influence that Wilson still had over the party. The vision presented at the Democratic Convention was not as Progressive as it had been during the 1912 or 1916 election, however, it still had multiple Progressive proposals, showing how the Democratic leadership planned to move ahead on the path the party had been on since the change of the century. The platform supported tax revision, a "strict governmental economy", a tariff for revenue only, the raising of federal salaries to "a just and proper level", and the prohibition of child labour. [212] The striking exception being the party's stance on racial and ethnic issues. The Republican platform had included a short statement urging Congress to end lynching. The Democratic platform ignored the subject altogether. Additionally, the Democratic platform supported the "nonadmission" of Asian immigrants.[213] Thereby underscoring how Wilsonian Progressivism was mostly an economically progressive ideology with strong socially conservative tendencies on matters of race and ethnicity and how the colour line is distinctly present in their application of nationalistic rhetoric.

The most pressing subject for Democrats, however, was the League of Nations. Having been consistently attacked on the subject by the Republicans and having even lost support among its own congressmen, the party needed to bring forward a statement that would bring in line all Democrats. Instead, the party leadership doubled down on Wilson's uncompromising\ stance. Homer Cummings went to great lengths to explain why amendments to the Treaty were not possible. Arguing that multiple nations had already ratified the Treaty as it was and that the president at multiple times had given the Republicans the option to object to the Treaty before it was finalised.[214] The committee agreed with that observation, arguing that it would be dishonourable to now go back on promises made, stating that "the honor of the country is involved in this business", trying to speak to the nationalistic sentiments in the country.[215]

The refusal to break with Wilson's stance on the Treaty issue is the first sign that

[211] Glass, 'Report of the Committee on Platform and Resolutions', 183.
[212] Ibidem, 186; 190; 184-191.
[213] Ibidem, 199.
[214] Cummings, 'Address of the Temporary Chairman', 17-21.
[215] Glass, 'Report of the Committee on Platform and Resolutions', 180.

Wilson's influence over the party could be detrimental to the Democratic party's chances of winning the election. That effect escalated with the election of the presidential nominees. As discussed before, the candidate that was thought to be most likely to follow in Woodrow Wilson's footsteps was William McAdoo. His position as treasurer during the war, his close connection to the president, and his Wilsonian Progressive outlook made him the obvious candidate for that election. During his time in office, however, the relationship between McAdoo and Wilson had soured, leading, in part, to McAdoo's resignation in November 1918.[216] Having never resolved their conflict, Woodrow Wilson was vehemently opposed to the nomination of McAdoo as the Democratic candidate.[217] On top of that, and despite his ongoing illness, Wilson himself had become interested in serving a third term as president.[218] He planned to wait for the convention to become deadlocked in its search for a candidate, after which an ally would put his name forward and urge the party to nominate Wilson once again so he could lead the party out of their standoff.[219] This put McAdoo in a particularly difficult situation. As his son-in-law and as his presumed political heir, McAdoo could not openly seek nomination without the president's approval. As a result, the Democrats entered the convention with lots of speculation and rumours but no clear idea of who their candidate was going to be, in large part due to their current leader. The complicated political situation meant that it would take the convention forty-four ballots to nominate their candidate. In the end, it was the relatively unknown James Cox who would walk out of the convention as the Democratic nominee for president.[220]

**The newspapermen**

On paper, James Cox and Warren Harding had a lot in common. They were both born into Ohioan farmer families and chose to leave their families' farms in pursuit of a different life.[221] After high school, they shortly became teachers before eventually buying their own newspapers

[216] Craig, *Progressives at War,* 221-223.
[217] Ibidem, 224-225.
[218] Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy,* 117-119; Berg, *Wilson*, 684-685.
[219] Berg, *Wilson*, 684-685.
[220] Democratic Party San Francisco and Edward George Hoffman, *Official Report of the Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention: Held in San Francisco, California, June 28,29,30, July 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6, 1920, Resulting in the Nomination of Hon. James M. Cox (of Ohio) for President and Ho. Franklin D. Roosevelt (of New York) for Vice-President* (Indianapolis 1920) 419-420.
[221] Robert K. Murray, *The Harding Era: Warren G. Harding and His Administration* (Minneapolis 1969) 5-7; Irving Stone, *They Also Ran: The Story of the Men Who Were Defeated for the Presidency* (New York 1954) 21-24.

and building a successful business.[222] They had similar political persona's as well. They both were known as pleasant people, with few personal animosities and a large influence due to their publishing careers.[223] Their political mindsets were different, however. In his first elected position, as House Representative for Ohio, Cox established himself as an active congressman with a reformist mindset and he considered himself part of the progressive wing of the Democratic Party.[224] He would never become a leading Progressive, however. Instead, working from a pragmatic point-of-view, he would not let ideology overrule his constituents' needs and wants.[225] As a congressman and as the governor of Ohio, he was actively involved in the implementation of popular Progressive legislation but stayed clear of more controversial topics or those Progressive proposals that did not interest the people of Ohio.

Warren Harding, on the other hand, was mainly focused on building and maintaining his favourable reputation and accruing friendships during his senatorial years. He stayed well away from any controversial topics and was hardly seen on the Senate floor.[226] His main strength as a politician was the ability to reach compromises without alienating either side.[227] It was that unproblematic reputation that would eventually win him the Republican nomination. Although the party leadership had been wanting a continuation of the Progressive agenda, all nominees that would be willing and able to stand for such an agenda came with complications. Hiram Johnson fell victim to the rising social tensions when his radical agenda was labelled as "red".[228] General Leonard Wood had positioned himself as the most natural successor of Teddy Roosevelt with a strong nationalistic and Progressive message but in the process had alienated the more moderate wings of the party that had become a bigger proportion of the party since 1912.[229] Thus, as the convention seemed to reach a standstill, the mood shifted in favour of the unproblematic candidate who had not alienated any parts of the party. Rather than the notorious 'Smoke-Filled Rooms' it was Harding's favourable reputation that invited voting blocks to switch to his side. Even after the infamous night in the Blackstone suite, where party leadership supposedly had decided on Harding as the nominee, it took the convention another five ballots to decidedly switch in favour of Harding.[230] Rather, it was his likeability, his large influence in

[222] Murray, *The Harding Era*, 7-9; Robert F. Gorman, *Great Lives From History: The 20th Century,1901-2000* (Pasadena 2008) 1674-1675; James E. Cebula; *James M. Cox: Journalist and Politician* (Ann Arbor 1972) 11-26.
[223] Stone, *They Also Ran*, 23-25; McCoy, 'Election of 1920', 2352-2353.
[224] Cebula; *James M. Cox*, 67-69
[225] Ibidem, 81-85.
[226] Gorman, *Great Lives From History,* 1675.
[227] Murray, *The Harding Era*, 13-14.
[228] Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy,* 82.
[229] McCoy, 'Election of 1920', 2357.
[230] Murray, *The Harding Era*, 39.

important Ohio, and the absence of any history of controversial stances that won him the nomination.

Harding's acceptance speech, therefore, does not take a stand in any of the reigning political debates. The debate on the League issues is mentioned in the speech. However, he copies the Republican platform's tactic of avoiding committing to either side in the debate by first ensuring the public of his commitment to an "independent American eminence and influence", before reassuring the internationalists that "there is a genuine aspiration in every American breast for a tranquil friendship with all the world".[231] That comforting tone is a hint of the rhetoric Harding will deploy during the campaign. Even though he continues to string the nationalistic heartstrings through civic nationalistic rhetoric by placing the Republican's objectives in line with the Founding Father's beliefs, he does so in a non-combative manner, unlike his predecessors. [232] He simply explains to the public that what his party wants to do is to protect the Founders' legacy.

Governor Cox chose a different rhetorical strategy for his nomination speech. Most striking is the combative and vigorous tone. He determines that the United States is "in a time which calls for straight thinking, straight talking and straight acting" and Republicans had been standing in the way of that.[233] In a clear counterattack against the accusations of Wilson's autocratic tendencies, he describes congressional Republicans as the "Senate oligarchy" which "obstructed the works of peace" by opposing the treaty.[234] Cox also blames Republicans of "sinister profiteering", based on reports of large donations during the primaries, and as a reference to Progressive Era accusations of big money influences in politics.[235] The speech then goes on to remind the Republicans, and his audience, of the sacrifices made during the war, alongside the other Allied soldiers and their acceptance of the Treaty of Versailles, before laying out Cox's agenda. These, like the overall speech, are a clear continuation of the Democratic platform and rhetoric. He, for example, clearly continues Wilson's uncompromising stance on the League issues, he praises the Progressive reforms of the Wilson administration and proposes several Progressive proposals of his own, which would extend governmental influence in farming, business, and the railroads, and he extensively voiced

[231] Warren G. Harding, 'July 22, 1920: Enduring Popular Government', *Miller Center*
Retrieved from: https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/july-22-1920-enduring-popular-government 17-2-2021.
[232] Idem.
[233] James M. Cox, 'No Time for Wabbling', *The New York Times* 7 August 1920
Retrieved from: https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1920/08/08/107000459.html?pageNumber=4 19-2-2021.
[234] Cox, 'No Time for Wabbling'.
[235] Idem.

support for women's suffrage. Finally, he continuous the racial nationalistic argumentation regarding immigrants and the need to do "the work of assimilation", in order for them to "become acquainted with the customs and opportunities of American life".[236] Overall, the patterns of the coming campaign begin to emerge in these speeches. Whereas Harding chooses to continue his usual style of politics, in which he stays clear of controversy, and present himself as a calming force in the tense national climate, Cox chooses the opposite, with his combative speech and calls for reform. To what extent they would be able to stick with this strategy and what their rhetorical styles meant for the established messages of both parties would become clear over the next and final months of the election of 1920.

[236] Cox, 'No Time for Wabbling'.

## Chapter 3 The campaign

The nomination of the Warren Harding and James Cox brought the election into its final stage, the campaign. This phase stretched from late July until election day on November 2nd, a short but eventful period of campaigning. The differences between the parties were heightened during these months, portraying the different paths the parties had chosen to continue onto. The style of campaigning, the involvement of party leadership, and the actual rhetoric all show the vision the parties had for the future. Looking at the broader patterns, they also show the nominees' willingness to stick to the scripts laid out by their predecessors and their interpretations of the mood of the public in those tense times. This chapter will focus on those processes, showing how the rhetorical strategies developed in the final months of the election and discussing what those developments meant.

### A return to normalcy

The nominating speech by R.B. Creager had already foreshadowed the final frames through which the Harding campaign would discuss the central issues. The basis for the first frame had been laid months before the actual nomination. In May 1920, Warren Harding gave a speech to the Home Market Club in Boston in which he uttered the now famous words, "America's present need is not heroics, but healing; not nostrums, but normalcy".[237] That phrase caught immediate attention from the media, who wondered what the word normalcy meant and where it came from. Harding himself thereupon explained his definition of normalcy to be "not […] the old order of thing, but a regular steady order of things. I mean normal procedure, the natural way without excess".[238] Interesting in that explanation is the lack of clarification of what he perceived as normal. Harding states that the old order of things is not the normal he was striving to bring back but, since Harding is campaigning as a Republican, he is also not referring to the normal established by Woodrow Wilson. So, what normal is Harding referring to? Upon taking the whole speech into account, it becomes clearer that Harding is not using the phrase to refer to a time or place but rather as a way to contrast with the previous years, and in doing so, explaining how abnormal he believed these had been.

Throughout the speech, he points out the events that led to "men [having] wandered far

[237] Warren G. Harding, 'May 14, 1920: Readjustment', *Miller Center*
Retrieved from: https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/may-14-1920-readjustment 27-12-2020.
[238] The New York Times, 'Elks Make Harding a 'Surprise' Visit', *The New York Times* 20 July 1920
Retrieved from: https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1920/07/21/103463080.html?pageNumber=7 27-12-2020.

from safe paths".[239] He starts by pointing out how the "cataclysmal" war had altered how people viewed the world and heightened anxieties and unrest, according to Harding. [240] To calm those nerves and get people and the country back on the right track he sums up several issues that he felt United States' citizens needed to be reminded of. He states that "excess of government" could be no substitute for "quality of citizenship", that the "transfer of responsibility from citizenship to government" offers no solutions, and that "tranquillity at home is more precious than peace abroad".[241] In doing so, he circumvents a direct attack on the Wilson administration while at the same time helping people realise that Progressive big government and Wilsonian internationalism stood at the centre of the problems facing the country. In other words, in framing normalcy as an antonym to Wilsonian Progressivism Harding is able to indirectly attack the Wilson administration by constructing a connection between the unrest of the previous years and Wilson's ideology, and illustrate his conservative ideology as the alternative way forward.

That conservatism was portrayed in the type of campaign Harding ran as well. Even though he had stated that his idea of normalcy did not refer to the old order, he did choose to emulate the style of campaigning of the late nineteenth century by conducting a front porch campaign from the Hardings' home in Marion, Ohio. In this type of campaign, the candidate does not travel the country to speak to potential voters but instead stays at home where voters and interest groups can come to hear him speak. To further accentuate the reference to pre-Progressive politics, the Harding campaign even put up the flagpole of the last conservative Republican president, who had also conducted a front porch style campaign, William McKinley.[242] The problem with this type of campaign is that potential voters are often not able to travel across the country to hear the candidate speak. To reach those candidates, the campaign participated in an effort to record the nation's leading voices by the Nation's Forums recordings. Several of Harding's speeches were recorded, one of those was the *Readjustment* speech in which he first talked about a return to normalcy and another his acceptance speech. These speeches were published monthly alongside a Democratic speech and distributed to political organisations and other interest groups, thus, reaching a national audience that would otherwise not be able to directly hear the candidate speak.

Besides the two mentioned before, nine other speeches were recorded, all focused on a

[239] Harding, 'May 14, 1920: Readjustment'.
[240] Idem.
[241] Idem.
[242] Murray, *The Harding* Era, 50.

specific topic. There was one speech, for example, that dealt with the labour unrest, another that discussed the role of the judiciary in the United States' democracy, and one speech that praised the soldiers that had served in the war.[243] In all speeches, however, similar frameworks are observable. Most notable is the centrality of the post-war discussions on the League of Nations and the United States' place in the world. The argumentation of Harding on this will be discussed a little later in this chapter. What is more interesting here, is the continuation of his narrative that sets conservatism as the solution for the problems created by Wilsonian Progressivism, and how, in doing so, he breaks with the constructed narrative of the previous Republican frontrunners.

In these recorded speeches, Harding does continuously speak of the greatness of the concept of America and how that idea and the resulting democracy should be defended and protected, just as the previous Republican frontrunners had done. He differs, however, in two distinct ways. First, Harding takes a completely different tone from the militarised rhetorical style of Roosevelt and the radicalness of the Progressive frontrunners Johnson and Wood. In contrast, Harding takes a soothing tone, using the words 'defending' and 'peace' repeatedly, quite literally the opposite of the rhetoric of war and action that Roosevelt was so eager to use. This rhetorical strategy seems to straightforwardly direct itself to a nation tired of war and upheaval. He says as much when he states, "Peace that closes the gaping wound of world war and silences the impassioned voices of international envy and distrust", promising an end to international conflict directly affecting the lives of the United States' citizens.[244]

The second way in which Harding's rhetorical messaging is different is the aforementioned centrality of conservatism in his messaging. He states that "the destruction of healthful competition" was causing a lack of goods, condemns the labour strikes by stating "I decline to recognize any conflict of interest among the participants in industry" and the dangers posed by the collective strikers in saying "The group must not endanger the individual", warns against the dangers posed by communists and anarchists by saying "it would be the blindness of folly to ignore the activities in our own country which are aimed to destroy our economic

[243] Warren G. Harding, 'July 22, 1920: High Wages for High Production', *Miller Center*
Retrieved from: https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/july-22-1920-high-wages-high-production 29-12-2020; Warren G. Harding, 'July 22, 1920: Liberty Under the Law', *Miller Center*
Retrieved from: https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/july-22-1920-liberty-under-law 29-12-2020; Warren G. Harding, 'July 22, 1920: The American Soldier', *Miller Center*
Retrieved from: https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/july-22-1920-american-soldier 29-12-2020.
[244] Warren G. Harding, 'July 22, 1920: An Association of Nations',
Retrieved from: https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/july-22-1920-association-nations 29-12-2020.

system and to commit us to the colossal tragedy which has both destroyed all freedom and made Russia impotent", and criticised the dual loyalty of immigrants by telling his audience "These adopted sons of the Republic want the settlement favourable for the lands from which they came. The misfortune is not alone that it rends the concord of nations. The greater pity is it rends the concord of our citizenship at home". [245] Thus, discarding the Progressive nationalism of his predecessors and remoulding that into a conservative nationalistic frame.

**The party of Wilson**

The situation on the Democratic side was different and the main difference was Woodrow Wilson. With a living president, who, although mostly bedridden, was still leading the party, the Cox campaign was considerably more bound to the rhetoric coming from the White House. Nevertheless, after his nomination, James Cox faced the decision to either comply with the path set out from the White House or set out his own vision and narrative. That decision soon became clear when Cox, against the will of some of his senior advisors, made a highly publicized visit to Woodrow Wilson in the White House.[246] Some in the Democratic Party had rather seen the nominee distance himself from the Democratic President, who had garnered strong opinions within the party and amongst the public. Cox, however, arguing in favour of party unity, decided he could not afford to lose the Wilson Democrats.[247]

That decision continued into his speeches. Whereas Warren Harding showed a distinct shift away from the rhetoric of the previous Republican frontrunners, Cox mainly continued the narrative set out by his predecessors. This is especially prominent in the tone of his speeches. Although his policy proposals weren't as radically Progressive as those of Wilson, his speeches were still filled with the language of the Progressive years. Continuously using keywords such as "change", "forward", "future", and "action", Cox actively sought out the reformist sentiment in the United States' society.[248] Working on the belief that the sentiment that had elected Progressive presidents since the turn of the century was still present in the country and observing the subversive sentiments amongst workers, minorities, and women, amongst others, Cox wagered that a campaign based on the promise of change would win him the election. In

[245] Harding, 'July 22, 1920: High Wages for High Production'; Harding, 'July 22, 1920: Liberty Under the Law'; Warren G. Harding 'Nationalism and Americanism', *Library of Congress* 6 August 1920
Retrieved from: https://www.loc.gov/item/2004650664/ 29-12-2020.
[246] Cebula, *James M. Cox,* 280.
[247] Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy,* 127.
[248] James M. Cox, 'Confidence in Government', *Library of Congress* 8 August 1920
Retrieved from: https://www.loc.gov/item/2016655169/ 5-1-2021; James M. Cox 'The World War', *Library of Congress* 8 August 1920
Retrieved from: https://www.loc.gov/item/2016655170/ 5-1-2021.

doing so, he framed himself as the choice for the future and Harding the candidate of the past, stating, for example, "The opposition stands in the skyline of the setting sun looking backwards, backwards to the old days of reaction".[249]

That framing, of Harding's vision in reality being a backwards-looking vision, is a recurring sentiment in Cox's speeches. He often attacked the Harding campaign and its 'return to normalcy' frame, rebuffing Harding's insistence that he did not want to go back to the old order. Cox instead, accused the Harding campaign of wanting exactly that, stating "This can only mean the so-called normal of former reactionary administrations, the outstanding feature of which was a pittance for farm produce and a small wage for a long day of toil".[250] In that statement, he also explains the dangers of such an administration, pointing to the problems people faced during the old days. He reminds his audience why they voted for Progressive administration: "We want a change from the Old World of yesterday, where international intrigue made the people mere pawns on the chessboard of war. We want a change from the old industrial world, where the man who toiled was assured a full dinner pail as his only lot and portion".[251] In doing so, Cox not only reminds voters why they needed Progressive reforms, but he also reminds them of the harm rescinding those reforms would cost the United States' citizens.

Just like his language, Cox's policy positions were more Progressive. Whereas Harding actively campaigned against the expansion of the government and the risks he thought that brought with it, Cox points to the dangers Harding's stance brought, arguing that confidence in government was central to the nation's ability to recover from the war and its aftermath, and even arguing that such a stance was anti-democratic by stating "The leaders opposed to democracy promise to put the country back to normal".[252] Cox also applauded the ratification of the nineteenth amendment, favoured Irish independence and self-determination for Ireland "or anywhere else", and supported an active involvement of the United States in foreign affairs.[253] Thus, he largely followed in Wilson's footsteps when it came to his campaign

[249] Cox, 'Confidence in Government'.
[250] Idem.
[251] Idem.
[252] Idem.
[253] The New York Times, 'Cox Sees League Aid in Suffrage Victory', *The New York Times* 18 August 1920 Retrieved from: https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1920/08/19/96894001.html?pageNumber=2 8-1-2021; The New York Times, 'Cox Tells Position Regarding Ireland', *The New York Times* 7 September 1920 Retrieved from: https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1920/09/07/96899396.html?pageNumber=1 8-1-2021; Cox, 'The World War'; The New York Times, 'Cox on the League', *The New York Times* 22 August 1920
Retrieved from:
https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1920/08/22/113310180.html?pageNumber=100 8-1-2021.

platform.

On the most central issue to the Progressive legacy, and at stake in the election, the League of Nations, Cox was less straight-forward. He did forcefully argue in favour of the League, bluntly stating "I am in favor of going in".[254] He explained that stance as follows:

> "We must say in language which the world can understand, whether we shall participate in the advancement of a cause which has in it the hope of peace and world reconstruction, or whether we shall propose to follow the old paths trod by the nations of Europe -- paths which always led to fields of blood. We must be say in language which our own people can understand, whether we shall unite with our former allies to make effective the only plan of peace and reconstruction which has been formulated, or whether we propose to play a lone hand in the world, and guard our isolation with a huge army and an ever increasing navy with all the consequent burdens of taxation."[255]

In essence saying that the ratification of the Treaty was necessary to preserve peace in the world, in the same way his predecessors had done. He, however, continued to avoid committing to any one side in the debate on amending the Treaty and in particular Article X. Not wanting to anger any side within his party, Cox chose to stay ambiguous on his position regarding amending the Treaty, instead, focusing his argument on the importance of ratification. This, again, shows the influence that Wilson still had over the Democratic Party and the campaign. President Wilson had declared the election a referendum on the Treaty and would not hear of any amendments, thereby reducing Cox's options to bring more nuance into the debate without alienating Wilson and his supporters.

The final problem the Cox campaign inherited from the Wilson administration was the issue of race and correspondingly the support of Black voters and other minorities. The early nineteenth-century Great Migration of millions of Black people from the South to the North not only meant a change in the workforce and a demographical change in the Northern cities, but it also meant that a large group of people were again able to vote in presidential elections since the Jim Crow laws in the South prevented them from being able to do so. This movement North was, therefore, also called an urge to "vote with their feet".[256] During the 1912 election, Wilson had been able to garner significant support amongst these voters, the first time a Democrat, and

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[254] James M. Cox, 'Prevention of War', *Library of Congress* 8 August 1920
Retrieved from: https://www.loc.gov/item/2016655171/ 8-1-2021.
[255] Cox, 'Prevention of War'.
[256] Florette Henri, *Black Migration: Movement North, 1900-1920* (New York 1975) 60.

a Southerner, had been able to do so since the Civil War.[257] The Black population's disappointment in Theodore Roosevelt and Wilson's promising plans gained him their support.[258] His actions as president soon lost him that support. Jim Crow laws spread quickly under his administration, several federal departments were segregated, and lynchings increased rapidly.[259] Meanwhile, the president did little to intervene in the rising tensions. An incident with the activist William Monroe Trotter encapsulated the relationship between Wilson and the Black population. Trotter, who had been a supporter of the president in 1912, had come to the White House to voice the discontent of the Black population about the federal segregation and the Wilson administration's general handling of racial issues. He proclaimed that Wilson's promised new freedom only meant a "new slavery" for the Black people, infuriating Wilson, who asked Trotter and his delegation to leave.[260] The incident epitomises the souring relationship between Wilson and Black voters, a relationship now inherited by Cox.

The lack of any mention of lynching or other racial issues in the Democratic platform foreshadows the Democrats handling of racial issues during the campaign. Cox rarely mentioned the tensions or other issues facing Black voters. Instead, he accused the Harding campaign of inciting "racial hatred" when they made promises to better the conditions of Black people, reframing a discussion on racial issues as divisive and incendiary.[261] He accused the campaign of lying when they made those promises, explaining that he deemed social equality unrealistic as he found Lincoln had done when he had said "We do not want Negroes to be slaves, but that does not mean that we want negro women for our wives", using a civic nationalistic icon to convey racial nationalistic ideas.[262] The Cox's campaign reluctance to weigh in on the racial tensions in the nation demonstrate the colour line confining the Wilsonian Progressive frame of their campaign.

**America First**

On the other side, the Republican Party was working to bring back Black voters into its folds. The Harding campaign actively organised Black voters, especially focusing on the newly enfranchised female voters, by running registration efforts in states bordering the Mason-Dixie

[257] Link, *Wilson, Volume I*, 526.
[258] Berg, *Wilson*, 245-246.
[259] Ibidem,, 304-308.
[260] Ibidem, 346.
[261] The New York Times, 'Cox Hits Race Inciters', *The New York Times* 27 October 1920
Retrieved from: https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1920/10/27/107004488.html?pageNumber=2 23-2-2021.
[262] The New York Times, 'Cox Hits Race Inciters'.

line and in the Northern cities to which Southern Black migrants had come in great numbers.[263] As Cox essentially surrendered this block of voters, most likely to ensure the support of the Southern Democrats, Harding was fairly outspoken in his support. In doing so, he contrasted himself not only with his competitors in the campaign but also with his predecessors, especially the Progressive icon, Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt's relation with race had been one of conflict and division, believing, in short, in a natural hierarchy of races, in which the superior race, the Anglo-Saxons, had to melt together with complementary racial strains to become stronger. This process, however, had to be protected by the exclusion of races Roosevelt deemed not able or deserving of mixing, most often Black people, Native Americans, and Asians, thus, supporting a separated society. Instead, these races would be uplifted through the Anglo-Saxon example, support of initiative within their own communities, away from the white society, and the threat of military power.[264] As he had done on the other issues in the campaign, Harding took a more appeasing tone. He continued Roosevelt's civic nationalistic message but reframed it, stating that because Black men had fought in the war, they had shown their devotion to the nation and, therefore, were entitled to their rights, stating "I believe the Negro citizens of America should be guaranteed the enjoyment of all their rights, that they have earned the full measure of citizenship bestowed, that their sacrifices in blood on the battlefields of the Republic have entitled them to all of freedom and opportunity".[265]

That new interpretation of the civic nationalistic message became the second central frame of his campaign. As his predecessors had done, Harding put the foundational ideals of the United States central and used them in two different ways. First, he makes nationalism a transactional deal between the nation and its citizens. A true patriot, who carried out patriotic actions, could become part of the nation, with all benefits that came with it. To do so, Harding stated that they had to "dons the garb of American citizenship and walks in the light of American opportunity, must become American in heart and soul".[266] In return, they would enjoy the rights that were promised in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, which Harding called the "temple of equal rights".[267] This framing of civic nationalism provides a route for

[263] Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy,* 152.
[264] Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century,* 6-7; 17-19; Theodore Roosevelt, 'Remarks of Theodore Roosevelt at Meeting Held Under the Auspices of the Circle for Negro War Relief', *Theodore Roosevelt Papers. Library of Congress Manuscript Division* 1-3-2021.
[265] Warren G. Harding, 'Address Accepting the Republican Nomination', *The American Presidency Project* 12 June 1920
Retrieved from: https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-accepting-the-republican-presidential-nomination-2 26-2-2021.
[266] Harding, 'Address Accepting the Republican Nomination'.
[267] Harding, 'Americanism'.

outsiders to become part of the inside groups, without explicitly calling for equality for minorities and immigrants, while still resembling Harding's predecessors views on Americanising immigrants.

The second way Harding used his interpretation of nationalism was in foreign affairs. Harding went back to the isolationistic views of the pre-Progressive era. To explain his views on the United States foreign agenda, his campaign introduced a familiar slogan,

> "It's time to idealize, but it's very practical to make sure our own house is in perfect order before we attempt the miracle of Old World stabilization. Call it the selfishness of nationality if you will. I think it's an inspiration to patriotic devotion to safeguard America first, to stabilize America first, to prosper America first, to think of America first, to exalt America first, to live for and revere America first. Let the internationalist dream, and the Bolshevist destroy. God pity him for whom no [minstrel raptures dwell.] In the spirit of the Republic we proclaim Americanism and acclaim America."[268]

Harding uses the prism of nationalism here to reframe the United States foreign policy to one of self-protection and stabilisation first. The slogan 'America First' was used by the campaign to relay their intentions for the Harding administration's focus to be on the United States, rather than on the world, and in doing so they would restore the United States' "moral leadership".[269] He later works out this argumentation more clearly, "I want America to be the rock of security at home, resolute in righteousness and supremacy of the law. Our moral leadership in the world was lost when ambition sought to superimpose a reactionary theory of discredited autocracy upon the progressive principle of living, glowing democracy".[270] In doing so, Harding builds on the redefinition initiated during the Republican Convention of what it meant to put America first. Instead of building the United States to be a dominating and intimidating military force, Harding prioritises for the United States to be a moral example to the rest of the world and lead in that manner.

[268] Harding, 'Americanism'.
[269] Warren G. Harding, 'August 28, 1920: America', *Miller Center*
Retrieved from: https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/august-28-1920-america 27-2-2021.
[270] Harding, 'August 28, 1920: America'.

**A landslide**

On November 2nd, the election entered its final stage. 26,768,457 people were able to use their right to vote in the presidential election of 1920 and cast their ballot.[271] Overwhelmingly, these voters chose the Republican ticket, electing Warren G. Harding as president and Calvin Coolidge as Vice President with a popular vote share of 60,3 percent against the Democratic 34,1 percent, and 404 electoral votes out of 531.[272] Of the eleven states the Democrats won, only one, Kentucky, was outside the South, and even then they were not able to hold the Solid South, with Harding turning Tennessee red. [273] These results diminished the Democratic gains of the 1916 election, when the Democrats won an outright majority of the popular vote for the first time since Grover Cleveland, and brought them down to the smallest vote share since the Civil War.[274]

The dramatic shift in the popular vote from Democratic to Republican can be attributed to several key voting groups. In 1920, the Progressive that had abandoned the Republicans in 1916 amid the infighting over the Bull Moose Party partly returned to the Republican Party. A remarkable shift, given the conservative campaign of Harding and Cox's attempts to appease the Wilsonians. This shift is a key indicator of the failure of the Wilson administration to satisfy their Progressive voters and the Cox campaign's failure to reassure these same voters. Another key group the Democrats lost were the so called 'hyphenated Americans'.[275] These voters with a migration background shared a dissatisfaction with the Democratic stances on foreign matters. Irish-Americans, for example, were resentful over the disproportionate power of the British Empire in the League and the unwillingness or inability of the Wilson administration to guarantee Irish independence, despite his continuous insistence on self-determination for all people of the world.[276] Irving Fisher, writing in the New York Times, points to this group of voters as having the largest impact on the election results. He points to the fact that states with the largest share of immigrant voters had the largest swing towards the Republican Party.[277] Although more data and analysis would be needed to conclusively decide this group of voters as the determining group of the election, it is safe to say that dissatisfaction of voters with an

[271] The American Presidency Project, 'Election of 1920', *The American Presidency Project*
Retrieved from: https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/elections/1920 19-1-2021.
[272] The American Presidency Project, 'Election of 1920'.
[273] Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy,* 159.
[274] Irving Fisher, 'Explaining Nation's Vote', *The New York Times* 6 March 1921
Retrieved from: https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1921/03/06/103554477.html?pageNumber=86 19-1-201.
[275] Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy,* 153.
[276] Fisher, 'Explaining Nation's Vote'.
[277] Idem.

immigration background with the Democratic accomplishments, platform, and campaign played an important role in their defeat. This fact provides another indicator that Cox's decision to continue to defend and uphold Wilson's position on the League helped him lose the election.

In the end, voters voted against a continuation of Progressive Democratic leadership and for a promised return to normalcy in which stability and a focus on domestic issues would be the priority.

## Conclusion

The Harding presidency would turn out to be normal nor stable. Before president Harding's untimely death on August 3, 1923, his administration had already been rocked by several scandals of which the infamous Teapot Dome scandal is the most well-known. Throughout the 1920s, investigations into this scandal, along with revelations about additional corrupt activities by his cabinet and Harding's extramarital affairs would eventually rule his administration to be a failure in the eyes of most observers. [278]

At the beginning of 1921, though, things looked more positive for Harding. His overwhelming victory provided him with a mandate for the conservative, nationalistic, and isolationistic administration he had campaigned for. Historians over the past century, however, have not credited Harding for that win. Instead, they have argued that a Republican win was either decided years before the actual election or determined by sitting President Woodrow Wilson's actions. In doing so, they have overlooked the importance of both the candidates' role in the election, missing the autonomy of the Harding campaign in relation to his predecessors, and the inability of the Cox campaign to construct an authentic message.

The Harding campaign built an autonomous message on all three of the central issues of the election. That message was based on his personality, political history, and conservative ideology. By using the two frames 'Back to Normalcy' and 'America First', he constructed a message that responded to the perceived failures of the Wilson administration, the central debates of the election, and the tensions in the country. The first frame responds to the unrest of the previous years by framing normalcy as the antonym to Wilsonian Progressivism. It actively paints an alternative path forward, away from Progressivism, while also reminding voters of the abnormality they have lived through in the previous years. This frame used by Harding is not only fitting because of the domestic situation in the United States but also because of his public persona as a likeable, uncontroversial politician and the calming tone he strikes in his speeches. It are these factors that make this type of frame believable and eventually successful in a way that would not have been with another type of candidate.

The Back to Normalcy frame is also notable because it stands in contrast with the Republican frontrunners before Harding's takeover. Their rhetoric was still built on the New Nationalism frame constructed by Roosevelt years earlier. Roosevelt himself, unsurprisingly, used that frame during his time as the frontrunner. He used it to directly criticize Wilson's handling of all three issues of the campaign, arguing that his handling of the war and the

[278] Murray, *The Harding* Era, 515-537.

subsequent peace negotiations, his dramatic change on the role of the federal government, and his approach to ethnoracial conflict were not only problematic but unpatriotic and disloyal to the nation. His New Nationalism message had subtly changed, however, over the years. Roosevelt continued his militarised and race-based interpretation of the idea of nationality. Those who were not in favour of the war or not participating in the war efforts were not American, regardless of their citizenship status, according to Roosevelt and the path for outsiders to become full nationals was through military service. These arguments were all in line with his previous rhetoric, what changed, however, was the overshadowing of the Progressive share of his narrative, leaving only the nationalism in New Nationalism.

That development accelerated after his death, when his frontrunner position was taken over by Hiram Johnson and Leonard Wood. Their rhetoric was doused in civic and racial nationalism, which hardened the boundaries of who could be considered a patriot and determined their message on the United States' place in the world. They rejected Wilson's internationalism and continued to attack his handling of the war, going further than Roosevelt by determining Wilson as anti-democratic. They also doubled down on the need to Americanise immigrants and minority population groups. The true shift in the Republican path, however, came at the convention.

The platform presented during the convention shifted the hollowed-out New Nationalism of the previous frontrunners to something that could best be described as Old Nationalism, because of the conservative policies. The platform proposed some Progressive policies but was overall conservative, especially on economic proposals, signature to Progressivism. The candidate that best fit this platform, was not Wood or Johnson, who still deemed themselves Progressives and had alienated a significant part of the party with their hard-line rhetoric, but Warren Harding, who consequently completed the Republican shift away from Progressivism during his campaign.

These developments demonstrate the incompleteness of the argument in favour of a predetermined outcome of the election in favour of Harding. Harding was the right candidate for the Republican Party at the right time, however, he made their platform his own and transformed their combative rhetoric into a narrative that best fitted his personality and one that suited the situation in the country.

That is further demonstrated by the second frame used by his campaign, the America First frame. This frame predominantly pertained to the debate on internationalism, clearly arguing for a nationalistic approach on foreign issues. At first, such an argument seems comparable to Roosevelt's and later Johnson's and Wood's argumentation on the

internationalism issue. There was a difference, however. The America First frame was used by Harding, especially in the later months of the campaign, to argue for a return to the isolationism of the pre-Progressive years. This stands in contrast to the more internationalistic approach of Roosevelt, who argued in favour of the United States taking a leading role in the world through military dominance while prioritising domestic issues. Harding, on the other hand, argued for the United States to completely focus on domestic issues and only participating internationally in a cooperative way.

The one exception in which the argument that the circumstantial situation largely determined Harding's favourable position is on the ethnoracial issues. Although the Harding campaign did actively reach out to minority voters by working to register the newly enfranchised female voters and reaching out to northern Black voters, the Democrats were left in such an unfavourable position by Woodrow Wilson's actions and rhetoric on racial issues that the Cox campaign essentially abandoned any effort to reach out to this block of voters.

This situation also exemplifies the larger problem of Wilson's dominance over the Democratic Party. Wilson had won the presidency in 1912 through the frame of New Freedom. During the war, however, Wilson relatively quickly let go of his Progressive ideals on the domestic front, curtailing the freedom of the United States' citizens and expanding the powers of the federal government to ensure its capability to deal with the demands of the war. On the international front, his Progressive ideals did continue to form the basis of his policy, especially when he focused on the conclusion of the war. His Fourteen Points and the corresponding Treaty of Versailles, which included the establishment of the League of Nations, were based on his vision of creating liberal democracies throughout the world. At home, this vision was again sold to the public through the use of patriotic and Progressive language. Wilson framed the ratification of the Treaty as the nation's patriotic duty to ensure peace and stability in the future and to further establish its guiding example in the world.

The overshadowing of the war over most of Wilson's Progressive accomplishments, the completion of most of the Progressive proposals set out in the New Freedom platform, and the drastic shift of the Wilson administration on some of the core ideals of Wilsonian Progressivism left the Democratic Party in search of a way forward. This explains Wilson's determination in having the issue of internationalism play such a central role in the election. He, however, undermined the candidate most likely to continue his legacy, William Gibbs McAdoo. The inability of McAdoo to openly campaign in combination with Wilson's refusal to compromise led to the nomination of James Cox.

Cox's reputation as a pragmatic Progressive could have been the path forward for the

Democratic Party, reaching compromises between opposing sides and providing a less radical but still Progressive message for the voting public. Instead, however, Cox was unable to detach himself and his message from Woodrow Wilson. He continued to use a Wilsonian Progressive frame to discuss each issue while trying to appease the opposing sides in his party. As a result, his vision on internationalism never fully developed into an independent argument and, as stated before, he only discussed ethnoracial relations in the United States through a lens of racial nationalism, hardening the colour line Wilson already had drawn around the frame of Wilsonian Progressivism.

The issue Cox most comfortably discussed was that of Progressivism. His speeches were filled with Progressive keywords and sought out the reformist sentiment that had gotten the Democrats elected twice. The content of his proposals, however, was lacking. The Democratic convention had drafted a platform that they presented as Progressive but lacked the innovativeness that was characteristic of Progressivism. The Cox campaign did not change that fact, and campaigned on the platform presented during the convention, while framing it is as truly Progressive. This shows how the last standing Progressive candidate presented a Progressive narrative without the necessary policy positions to back that narrative up.

What becomes clear from these trajectories of both parties is that Progressivism not necessarily died down because the voters no longer desired a Progressive administration. Progressives themselves abandoned the principles for which they claimed to stand. Although the Democrats claimed to still stand for a Progressive vision, the reality proved that they mainly presented a Progressive narrative, rather than a Progressive platform. The Republicans, on the other hand, completely dressed down their Progressive platform and rhetoric until only nationalism was left.

That trajectory of the Republicans described here points to a last conclusion that can be made, the dominance of nationalistic rhetoric in place of Progressive rhetoric. On the Republican side, racial and civic nationalism is the one constant throughout the narrative of the consecutive Republican frontrunners. First by Roosevelt and later by Leonard Wood, Hiram Johnson, and during the Republican Convention, racial nationalism was used to create a distinction between those who qualified as American, through their devotion to the country and adherence to the guidelines set up around the concept of American citizenship, and those who were un-American. In doing so, the narrator creates a powerful rhetorical weapon against their contender. Given that only those who adhered to their version of Americanism could be effectively labelled as patriotic or American, their political contenders would quickly fall outside that denominator. In a society that had just come out of a total war, which had taken

over society and engraved the importance of nationalism and a sense of patriotic duty into the minds of its citizens, this would be an extremely damaging accusation. Without the Progressive of Roosevelt's New Nationalism platform, it does not provide a full policy platform, however. Harding's change of strategy solves that problem. He decreased the use of nationalistic rhetoric as a weapon but continued to appeal to the patriotism of his audience by building his America First frame on nationalistic rhetoric.

The Democratic trajectory was initially comparable. Woodrow Wilson's platform of New Freedom was similarly presented through a nationalistic frame. He built his argument on the foundational beliefs of the United States' purpose, arguing that his platform would help the country reach its predetermined destiny, set out in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The main difference in these early versions of these arguments was inclusivity. Whereas Roosevelt immediately created a distinction between the in-group and the out-group, Wilson's narrative was more inclusive of races and ethnicities. Later on, the Democratic convention presented a semi-Progressive platform that mainly celebrated the Wilson administration's achievements through a nationalistic lens. The Cox campaign afterwards decreased the centrality of nationalism in his rhetoric but failed to offer a full Progressive platform.

Thus, to circle back to the main question, the Democratic frontrunners used the Wilsonian Progressive and nationalistic frames to celebrate the Progressive accomplishments of the Wilson administration, to position themselves as the natural successor of Woodrow Wilson and, therefore, the ones to carry out his internationalistic vision, and to attack their contenders. It was not to be, however. The final message of the Harding campaign, in which he was able to contrast himself with the Democratic message in a positive way, while addressing the issues facing the country, and presenting a clear path forward, ultimately won the election.

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