

= Warren G. Harding =

Warren Gamaliel Harding (November 2 , 1865 ? August 2 , 1923) was the 29th President of the United States , serving from March 4 , 1921 until his death . Harding died one of the most popular presidents in history , but the subsequent exposure of scandals that took place under him , such as Teapot Dome , eroded his popular regard , as did revelations of an affair by Nan Britton , one of his mistresses . In historical rankings of the U.S. presidents , Harding is often rated among the worst .

Harding was born in Blooming Grove , Ohio . He lived in rural Ohio all his life , except when political service took him elsewhere . He settled in Marion when not yet 20 years old and bought The Marion Star , building it into a successful newspaper . In 1899 , he was elected to the Ohio State Senate and , after four years there , successfully ran for lieutenant governor . He was defeated for governor in 1910 , but was elected to the Senate in 1914 .

Harding ran for the Republican nomination for president in 1920 , but he was considered an also @-@ ran with little chance of success . The leading candidates , such as General Leonard Wood , could not gain a majority to secure the nomination , and the convention deadlocked . Harding 's support gradually grew until he was nominated on the tenth ballot . He conducted a front porch campaign , remaining for the most part in Marion and allowing the people to come to him . He won in a landslide over Democrat James M. Cox and Socialist Party candidate Eugene Debs , running on a theme of return to normalcy and becoming the first sitting senator to be elected president .

Harding appointed a number of well @-@ regarded figures , including Andrew Mellon at the Treasury , Herbert Hoover at Commerce , and Charles Evans Hughes at the State Department . A major foreign policy achievement came with the Washington Naval Conference of 1921 ? 1922 , in which the world 's major naval powers agreed on a naval limitations program that lasted a decade . Two members of his cabinet were implicated in corruption : Interior Secretary Albert Fall and Attorney General Harry Daugherty . The resulting scandals did not fully emerge until after Harding 's death , nor did word of his extramarital affairs , but both greatly damaged his reputation . Harding died of a cerebral hemorrhage caused by heart disease in San Francisco while on a western speaking tour ; he was succeeded by his vice president , Calvin Coolidge .

= = Early life and career = =

= = = Childhood and education = = =

Harding was born November 2 , 1865 , in Blooming Grove , Ohio . Nicknamed " Winnie " as a small child , Harding was the eldest of eight children born to George Tryon Harding , Sr. (1843 ? 1928 ; usually known as Tryon) and Phoebe Elizabeth (Dickerson) Harding (1843 ? 1910) . Phoebe was a state @-@ licensed midwife . Tryon farmed and taught school near Mount Gilead , Ohio . Through apprenticeship , study , and a year of medical school , Tryon became a doctor , and started a small practice . Harding 's mother 's ancestors were Dutch , including the well known Van Kirk family . Harding also had ancestors from England , Wales , and Scotland .

It was rumored in Blooming Grove that one of Harding 's great @-@ grandmothers was African American . His great @-@ great grandfather Amos Harding claimed that a thief , who had been caught in the act by the family , started the rumor in an attempt at extortion or revenge . Nevertheless , even after Warren Harding 's death in 1923 , African Americans made claims of kinship . This issue was resolved in 2015 , when genetic testing of Harding 's descendants determined , with more than a 95 % percent chance of accuracy , that he lacked sub @-@ Saharan African forbears within four previous generations . The Harding family , who were abolitionists , moved to Caledonia , Ohio , where Tryon acquired The Argus , a local weekly newspaper . At The Argus , Harding , from the age of 11 , learned the basics of the newspaper business .

In late 1879 , at the age of 14 , Harding enrolled at Ohio Central College in Iberia , where he proved an adept student . He and a friend put out a small newspaper during their final year at Ohio Central , the Iberia Spectator , intended to appeal to both college and town . During his final year , the

Harding family moved to Marion , Ohio , about 6 miles (9 @. @ 7 km) from Caledonia , and when he graduated in 1882 , he joined them there .

= = = Editor = = =

In Harding 's youth , the majority of the population still lived on farms and in small towns . He would spend much of his life in Marion , a small city in rural Ohio , and would become closely associated with it . When Harding rose to high office , he made clear his love of Marion and its way of life , telling of the many young Marionites who had left and enjoyed success elsewhere , while suggesting that the man , once the " pride of the school " , who had remained behind and become a janitor , was " the happiest one of the lot " .

Upon graduating , Harding had stints as a teacher and as an insurance man , and made a brief attempt at studying law . He then raised \$ 300 in partnership with others to purchase a failing newspaper , The Marion Star , weakest of the growing city 's three papers , and its only daily . The 18 @- @ year @- @ old Harding used the railroad pass that came with the paper to attend the 1884 Republican National Convention , where he hobnobbed with better @- @ known journalists and supported the presidential nominee , former Secretary of State James G. Blaine . Harding returned from Chicago to find that the paper had been reclaimed by the sheriff . During the election campaign , Harding worked for the Marion Democratic Mirror and was annoyed at having to praise the Democratic presidential nominee , New York Governor Grover Cleveland , who won the election . Afterwards , with the financial aid of his father , the budding newspaperman redeemed the paper .

Through the latter years of the 1880s , Warren Harding built the Star . The city of Marion tended to vote Republican (as did Ohio) but Marion County was Democratic . Accordingly , Harding adopted a tempered editorial stance , declaring the daily Star nonpartisan , and circulating a weekly edition that was moderate Republican . This policy attracted advertisers , and put the Republican weekly in town out of business . According to his biographer , Andrew Sinclair :

The success of Harding with the Star was certainly in the model of Horatio Alger . He started with nothing , and though working , stalling , bluffing , withholding payments , borrowing back wages , boasting , and manipulating , he turned a dying rag into a powerful small @- @ town newspaper . Much of his success had to do with his good looks , affability , enthusiasm , and persistence , but he was also lucky . As Machiavelli once pointed out , cleverness will take a man far , but he cannot do without good fortune .

The population of Marion grew from 4 @, @ 000 in 1880 to twice that in 1890 , increasing to 12 @, @ 000 by 1900 . This growth helped the Star , and Harding did his best to promote the city , purchasing stock in many local enterprises . Although a few of these turned out badly , he was in general successful as an investor , leaving an estate of \$ 850 @, @ 000 in 1923 . According to Harding biographer and former White House Counsel John Dean , Harding 's " civic influence was that of an activist who used his editorial page to effectively keep his nose ? and a prodding voice ? in all the town 's public business " . He became an ardent supporter of Governor Joseph B. Foraker , a Republican .

Harding first came to know Florence Kling , five years older than himself , as the daughter of a local banker and developer . Amos Kling was a man accustomed to getting his way , but Harding attacked him relentlessly in the paper . Amos involved Florence in all his affairs , taking her to work from the time she could walk . As hard @- @ headed as her father , Florence came into conflict with him after returning from music college . After she eloped with Pete deWolfe , and returned to Marion without deWolfe , but with an infant called Marshall , Amos agreed to raise the boy , but would not support Florence , who made a living as a piano teacher . One of her students was Harding 's sister Charity . By 1886 , Florence Kling had obtained a divorce , and she and Warren Harding were courting , though who was pursuing whom is uncertain , depending on who later told the story of their romance .

A truce between the Klings was snuffed out by the budding match , as Amos believed that the Hardings had African American blood , and was also offended by Harding 's editorial stances . He started to spread rumors of Harding 's supposed black heritage and encouraged local businessmen

to boycott Harding 's business interests . When Harding found out what Kling was doing , he warned Kling " that he would beat the tar out of the little man if he didn 't cease " . The Hardings were married at their new home on Mount Vernon Avenue in Marion , which they had designed together in the Queen Anne style , on July 8 , 1891 . The marriage produced no children . Warren Harding affectionately called his wife " the Duchess " , based on a character in a serial from The New York Sun , in which the Duchess kept a close eye on the Duke and their money , running anything that required efficiency .

Florence Harding was deeply involved in her husband 's career , both at the Star and once he entered politics . Exhibiting her father 's determination and business sense , she helped turn the Star into a profitable enterprise through her tight management of the paper 's circulation department . She has been credited with helping Harding achieve more than he might have alone ; some have suggested that she pushed him all the way to the White House .

= = = Start in politics = = =

Soon after purchasing the Star , Harding turned his attention to politics , supporting Foraker in his first successful bid for governor in 1885 . Foraker was part of the war generation that challenged older Ohio Republicans , such as Senator John Sherman , for control of state politics . Harding , always a party loyalist , supported Foraker in the complex internecine warfare that was Ohio Republican politics . Harding was willing to tolerate Democrats , as necessary to a two @-@ party system , but had only contempt for those who bolted the Republican Party to join third @-@ party movements . He was a delegate to the Republican state convention in 1888 , at the age of 22 , representing Marion County , and would be elected a delegate in most years until becoming president .

Harding 's success as an editor took a toll on his health . Five times between 1889 (when he was 23) and 1901 , he spent time at the Battle Creek Sanitorium for reasons Sinclair described as " fatigue , overstrain , and nervous illnesses " . Dean ties these visits to early occurrences of the heart ailment that would kill Harding in 1923 . During one such absence from Marion , in 1894 , the Star 's business manager quit . Florence Harding took his place . She became her husband 's top assistant at the Star on the business side , maintaining her role until the Hardings moved to Washington in 1915 . Her assistance and competence allowed Warren Harding to travel to make speeches (his use of the free railroad pass increased greatly after his marriage) . Florence Harding made sure no cents escaped her ? sometimes sending Warren to the bank with a gallon (3 @. @ 8 l) bucket full in each hand ? and wrote of her husband , " he does well when he listens to me and poorly when he does not . "

In 1892 , Harding traveled to Washington , where he met Democratic Nebraska Congressman William Jennings Bryan , and listened to the " Boy Orator of the Platte " speak on the floor of the House of Representatives . Harding traveled to Chicago 's Columbian Exposition in 1893 . Both visits were without Florence . Democrats generally won Marion County 's offices ; when Harding ran for auditor in 1895 , he lost , but did better than expected . The following year , Harding was one of many orators who spoke across Ohio as part of the campaign of the Republican presidential candidate , that state 's former governor , William McKinley . According to Dean , " while working for McKinley [Harding] began making a name for himself through Ohio " .

= = Rising politician (1897 ? 1919) = =

= = = State senator = = =

Harding wished to try again for elective office . Though a longtime admirer of Foraker (by then a U.S. senator) , he had been careful to maintain good relations with the party faction led by the state 's other U.S. senator , Mark Hanna , McKinley 's political manager and chairman of the Republican National Committee (RNC) . Both Foraker and Hanna supported Harding for state Senate in 1899 ;

he gained the Republican nomination , and was easily elected to a two @-@ year term .

Harding began his four years as a state senator a political unknown ; he ended them one of the most popular figures in the Ohio Republican Party . He always appeared calm and displayed humility , characteristics that endeared him to fellow Republicans even as he passed them in his political rise . Legislative leaders consulted him on difficult problems . It was usual at that time for state senators in Ohio to serve only one term , but Harding gained renomination in 1901 . After the assassination of McKinley in September (he was succeeded by Vice President Theodore Roosevelt) , much of the appetite for politics was temporarily lost in Ohio . In November , Harding gained a second term , more than doubling his margin of victory to 3 @,@ 563 votes .

Like most politicians of his time , Harding accepted that patronage and graft would be used to repay political favors . He had his sister Mary (who was legally blind) appointed a teacher at the Ohio School for the Blind , although there were better @-@ qualified candidates , and offered publicity in his newspaper in exchange for free railroad passes for himself and his family . According to Sinclair , " it is doubtful that Harding ever thought there was anything dishonest in accepting the perquisites of position or office . Patronage and favors seemed the normal reward for party service in the days of Hanna . "

Soon after Harding 's initial election as senator , he met Harry M. Daugherty , who would take on a major role in his political career . A perennial candidate for office who served two terms in the state House of Representatives in the early 1890s , Daugherty had become a political fixer and lobbyist in the state capital of Columbus . After first meeting and talking with Harding , Daugherty commented , " Gee , what a great looking President he 'd make . "

= = = Ohio state leader = = =

In early 1903 , Harding announced he would run for Governor of Ohio , prompted by the withdrawal of the leading candidate , Congressman Charles Dick . Hanna and George Cox felt that Harding was not electable due to his work with Foraker ? as the Progressive Era commenced , the public was starting to take a dimmer view of the trading of political favors and of bosses such as Cox . Accordingly , they persuaded Cleveland banker Myron T. Herrick , a friend of McKinley 's , to run . Herrick was also better @-@ placed to take votes away from the likely Democratic candidate , reforming Cleveland Mayor Tom L. Johnson . With little chance at the gubernatorial nomination , Harding sought nomination as lieutenant governor , and both Herrick and Harding were nominated by acclamation . Both Foraker and Hanna (who died of typhoid fever in February 1904) campaigned for what was dubbed the Four @-@ H ticket . Herrick and Harding won by overwhelming margins .

Once he and Harding were inaugurated , Herrick made ill @-@ advised decisions that turned crucial Republican constituencies against him , alienating farmers by opposing the establishment of an agricultural college . On the other hand , according to Sinclair , " Harding had little to do , and he did it very well " . His responsibility to preside over the state Senate allowed him to increase his growing network of political contacts . Harding and others envisioned a successful gubernatorial run in 1905 , but Herrick refused to stand aside . In early 1905 , Harding announced he would accept nomination as governor if offered , but faced with the anger of leaders such as Cox , Foraker and Dick (Hanna 's replacement in the Senate) , announced he would seek no office in 1905 . Herrick was defeated , but his new running mate , Andrew L. Harris , was elected , and succeeded as governor after five months in office on the death of Democrat John M. Pattison . One Republican official wrote to Harding , " Aren 't you sorry Dick wouldn 't let you run for Lieutenant Governor ? "

In addition to helping pick a president , Ohio voters in 1908 were to choose the legislators who would decide whether to re @-@ elect Foraker . The senator had quarreled with President Roosevelt over the Brownsville Affair . Though Foraker had little chance of winning , he sought the Republican presidential nomination against his fellow Cincinnati , Secretary of War William Howard Taft , who was Roosevelt 's chosen successor . On January 6 , 1908 , Harding 's Star endorsed Foraker and upbraided Roosevelt for trying to destroy the senator 's career over a matter of conscience . On the 22nd , Harding in the Star reversed course and declared for Taft , deeming

Foraker defeated . According to Sinclair , Harding 's change to Taft " was not ... because he saw the light but because he felt the heat " . Jumping on the Taft bandwagon allowed Harding to survive his patron 's disaster ? Foraker failed to gain the presidential nomination , and was defeated for a third term as senator . Also helpful in saving Harding 's career was the fact that he was popular with , and had done favors for , the more progressive forces that now controlled the Ohio Republican Party .

Harding sought and gained the 1910 Republican gubernatorial nomination . At that time , the party was deeply divided between progressive and conservative wings , and could not defeat the united Democrats ; he lost the election to incumbent Judson Harmon . Harry Daugherty managed Harding 's campaign , but the defeated candidate did not hold the loss against him . Despite the growing rift between them , both President Taft and former president Roosevelt came to Ohio to campaign for Harding , but their quarrels split the Republican Party and helped assure Harding 's defeat .

The party split grew , and in 1912 , Taft and Roosevelt were rivals for the Republican nomination . The 1912 Republican National Convention was bitterly divided . At Taft 's request , Harding gave a speech nominating the president , but the angry delegates were not receptive to Harding 's oratory . Taft was renominated , but Roosevelt supporters bolted the party . Harding , as a loyal Republican , supported Taft . The Republican vote was split between Taft , the party 's official candidate , and Roosevelt , running under the label of the Progressive Party . This allowed the Democratic candidate , New Jersey Governor Woodrow Wilson , to be elected .

= = = U.S. senator = = =

= = = Election of 1914 = = =

Congressman Theodore Burton had been elected in Foraker 's place in 1909 , and announced that he would seek a second term in the 1914 elections . By this time , the Seventeenth Amendment to the United States Constitution had been ratified , giving the people the right to elect senators , and Ohio had instituted primary elections for the office . Foraker and former congressman Ralph D. Cole also entered the Republican primary . When Burton withdrew , Foraker became the favorite , but his Old Guard Republicanism was deemed outdated , and Harding was urged to enter the race . Daugherty claimed credit for persuading Harding to run , " I found him like a turtle sunning himself on a log , and I pushed him into the water . " According to Harding biographer Randolph Downes , " he put on a campaign of such sweetness and light as would have won the plaudits of the angels . It was calculated to offend nobody except Democrats . " Although Harding did not attack Foraker , his supporters had no such scruples . Harding won the primary by 12 @, @ 000 votes over Foraker .

Harding 's general election opponent was Ohio Attorney General Timothy Hogan , who had risen to statewide office despite widespread prejudice against Roman Catholics in rural areas . In 1914 , the start of World War I and the prospect of a Catholic senator from Ohio increased nativist sentiment . Propaganda sheets with names like The Menace and The Defender contained warnings that Hogan was the vanguard in a plot led by Pope Benedict XV through the Knights of Columbus to control Ohio . Harding did not attack Hogan (an old friend) on this or most other issues , but he did not denounce the nativist hatred for his opponent .

Harding 's conciliatory campaigning style aided him ; one Harding friend deemed the candidate 's stump speech during the 1914 fall campaign as " a rambling , high @-@ sounding mixture of platitudes , patriotism , and pure nonsense " . Dean notes , " Harding used his oratory to good effect ; it got him elected , making as few enemies as possible in the process . " Harding won by over 100 @, @ 000 votes in a landslide that also swept into office a Republican governor , Frank B. Willis .

= = = Junior senator = = =

When Harding joined the U.S. Senate , the Democrats controlled both houses of Congress , and were led by President Wilson . As a junior senator in the minority , Harding received unimportant committee assignments , but carried out those duties assiduously . He was a safe , conservative ,

Republican vote . As during his time in the Ohio Senate , Harding came to be widely liked .

On two issues , women 's suffrage , and the prohibition of alcohol , where picking the wrong side would have damaged his presidential prospects in 1920 , he prospered by taking nuanced positions . As senator @-@ elect , he indicated that he could not support votes for women until Ohio did . Increased support for suffrage there and among Senate Republicans meant that by the time Congress voted on the issue , Harding was a firm supporter . Harding , who drank , initially voted against banning alcohol . He voted for the Eighteenth Amendment , which imposed Prohibition , after successfully moving to modify it by placing a time limit on ratification , which was expected to kill it . Once it was ratified anyway , Harding voted to override Wilson 's veto of the Volstead Bill , which implemented the amendment , assuring the support of the Anti @-@ Saloon League .

Harding , as a politician respected by both Republicans and Progressives , was asked to be temporary chairman of the 1916 Republican National Convention and to deliver the keynote address . He urged delegates to stand as a united party . The convention nominated Justice Charles Evans Hughes . Harding reached out to Roosevelt once the former president declined the 1916 Progressive nomination , a refusal that effectively scuttled that party . In the November 1916 presidential election , despite increasing Republican unity , Hughes was narrowly defeated by Wilson .

Harding spoke and voted in favor of the resolution of war requested by Wilson in April 1917 that plunged the United States into World War I. In August , Harding argued for giving Wilson almost dictatorial powers , stating that democracy had little place in time of war . Harding voted for most war legislation , including the Espionage Act of 1917 , which restricted civil liberties , though he opposed the excess profits tax as anti @-@ business . In May 1918 , Harding , less enthusiastic about Wilson , opposed a bill to expand the president 's powers .

In the 1918 midterm congressional elections , held just before the armistice , Republicans narrowly took control of the Senate . Harding was appointed to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee . Wilson took no senators with him to the Paris Peace Conference , confident that he could force what became the Treaty of Versailles through the Senate by appealing to the people . When he returned with a single treaty establishing both peace and a League of Nations , the country was overwhelmingly on his side . Many senators disliked Article X of the League Covenant , that committed signatories to the defense of any member nation that was attacked , seeing it as forcing the United States to war without the assent of Congress . Harding was one of 39 senators who signed a round @-@ robin letter opposing the League . When Wilson invited the Foreign Relations Committee to the White House to informally discuss the treaty , Harding ably questioned Wilson about Article X ; the president evaded his inquiries . The Senate debated Versailles in September 1919 , and Harding made a major speech against it . By then , Wilson had suffered a stroke while on a speaking tour . With an invalid in the White House and less support in the country , the treaty was defeated .

= = Presidential election of 1920 = =

= = Primary campaign = =

With most Progressives having rejoined the Republican Party , their former leader , Theodore Roosevelt , was deemed likely to make a third run for the White House in 1920 , and was the overwhelming favorite for the Republican nomination . These plans ended when Roosevelt suddenly died on January 6 , 1919 . A number of candidates quickly emerged , including General Leonard Wood , Illinois Governor Frank Lowden , California Senator Hiram Johnson , and a host of relatively minor possibilities such as Herbert Hoover (renowned for his World War I relief work) , Massachusetts Governor Calvin Coolidge , and General John J. Pershing .

Harding , while he wanted to be president , was as much motivated in entering the race by his desire to keep control of Ohio Republican politics , enabling his re @-@ election to the Senate in 1920 . Among those coveting Harding 's seat were former governor Willis (he had been defeated by

James M. Cox in 1916) and Colonel William Cooper Procter (head of Procter & Gamble) . On December 17 , 1919 , Harding made a low @-@ key announcement of his presidential candidacy . Leading Republicans disliked Wood and Johnson , both of the progressive faction of the party , and Lowden , who had an independent streak , was deemed little better . Harding was far more acceptable to the " Old Guard " leaders of the party .

Daugherty , who became Harding 's campaign manager , was sure none of the other candidates could garner a majority . His strategy was to make Harding an acceptable choice to delegates once the leaders faltered . Daugherty established a Harding for President campaign office in Washington (run by his confidant , Jess Smith) , and worked to manage a network of Harding friends and supporters , including Frank Scobey of Texas (clerk of the Ohio State Senate during Harding 's years there) . Harding worked to shore up his support through incessant letter @-@ writing . Despite the candidate 's work , according to Russell , " without Daugherty 's Mephistophelean efforts , Harding would never have stumbled forward to the nomination " .

There were only 16 presidential primary states in 1920 , of which the most crucial to Harding was Ohio . Harding had to have some loyalists at the convention to have any chance of nomination , and the Wood campaign hoped to knock Harding out of the race by taking Ohio . Wood campaigned in the state , and his supporter , Procter , spent large sums ; Harding spoke in the nonconfrontational style he had adopted in 1914 . Harding and Daugherty were so confident of sweeping Ohio 's 48 delegates that the candidate went on to the next state , Indiana , before the April 27 Ohio primary . Harding carried Ohio by only 15 @,@ 000 votes over Wood , taking less than half the total vote , and won only 39 of 48 delegates . In Indiana , Harding finished fourth , with less than ten percent of the vote , and failed to win a single delegate . He was willing to give up and have Daugherty file his nomination papers for the Senate , but Florence Harding grabbed the phone from his hand , " Warren Harding , what are you doing ? Give up ? Not until the convention is over . Think of your friends in Ohio ! " On learning that Daugherty had left the phone line , the future First Lady retorted , " Well , you tell Harry Daugherty for me that we 're in this fight until Hell freezes over . "

After he recovered from the shock of the poor results , Harding traveled to Boston , where he delivered a speech that according to Dean , " would resonate throughout the 1920 campaign and history " . There , he stated that " America 's present need is not heroics , but healing ; not nostrums , but normalcy ; not revolution , but restoration " . Dean notes , " Harding , more than the other aspirants , was reading the nation 's pulse correctly . "

= = = Convention = = =

The 1920 Republican National Convention opened at the Chicago Coliseum on June 8 , 1920 , assembling delegates who were bitterly divided , most recently over the results of a Senate investigation into campaign spending , which had just been released . That report found that Wood had spent \$ 1 @.@ 8 million , lending substance to Johnson claims that Wood was trying to buy the presidency . Some of the \$ 600 @,@ 000 that Lowden had spent had wound up in the pockets of two convention delegates . Johnson had spent \$ 194 @,@ 000 and Harding \$ 113 @,@ 000 . Johnson was deemed to be behind the inquiry , and the rage of the Lowden and Wood factions put an end to any possible compromise among the frontrunners . Of the almost 1 @,@ 000 delegates , 27 were women ? the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution , guaranteeing women the vote , was within one state of ratification , and would pass before the end of August . The convention had no boss , most uninstructed delegates voted as they pleased , and with a Democrat in the White House , the party 's leaders could not use patronage to get their way .

Reporters deemed Harding unlikely to be nominated due to his poor showing in the primaries , and relegated him to a place among the dark horses . Harding , who like the other candidates was in Chicago supervising his campaign , had finished sixth in the final public opinion poll , behind the three main candidates as well as former justice Hughes and Herbert Hoover , and only slightly ahead of Coolidge .

After the convention dealt with other matters , the nominations for president opened on the morning of Friday , June 11 . Harding had asked Willis to place his name in nomination , and the former

governor responded with a speech popular among the delegates both for its folksiness and for its brevity in the intense Chicago heat . Reporter Mark Sullivan , who was present , called it a splendid combination of " oratory , grand opera , and hog calling " . Willis concluded , leaning over the podium railing , " Say , boys ? and girls too ? why not name Warren Harding ? " The laughter and applause that followed created a warm feeling for Harding .

Four ballots were taken on the afternoon of June 11 , and they revealed a deadlock . With 493 votes needed to nominate , Wood was the closest with 3141 ? 2 ; Lowdon had 2891 ? 2 . The best Harding had done was 651 ? 2 . Chairman Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts , the Senate Majority Leader , adjourned the convention about 7 p.m.

The night of June 11 ? 12 , 1920 would become famous in political history as the night of the " smoke @-@ filled room " , in which , legend has it , party elders agreed to force the convention to nominate Harding . Historians have focused on the talks held in the suite of Republican National Committee (RNC) Chairman Will Hays at the Blackstone Hotel , at which senators and others came and went , and numerous possible candidates were discussed . Utah Senator Reed Smoot , before his departure early in the evening , backed Harding , telling Hays and the others that as the Democrats were likely to nominate Governor Cox , they should pick Harding to win Ohio . Smoot also told The New York Times that there had been an agreement to nominate Harding , but that it would not be done for several ballots yet . This was not true : a number of participants backed Harding (others supported his rivals) , but there was no pact to nominate him , and the senators had little power to enforce any agreement . Two other participants in the smoke @-@ filled room discussions , Kansas Senator Charles Curtis and Colonel George Brinton McClellan Harvey , a close friend of Hays , predicted to the press that Harding would be nominated because of the liabilities of the other candidates .

Colonel Harvey 's account of the smoke @-@ filled room had Harding being sent for in the early morning hours , to be informed by Harvey that the Ohioan would be the candidate . Harvey stated he asked if there was anything in Harding 's background that might harm his candidacy , to which the senator , who had had at least one extramarital affair , replied there was not . Harding biographer Charles W. Murray noted that there is no evidence besides Harvey 's word that Harding went to the Hays suite that night , and that other participants denied that Harding was there . Harding was so uncertain of victory that he filed for re @-@ election to the Senate , though Daugherty continued to urge delegates to support him .

The reassembled delegates had heard rumors that Harding was the choice of a cabal of senators . Although this was not true , delegates believed it , and sought a way out by voting for Harding . When balloting resumed on the morning of June 12 , Harding gained votes on each of the next four ballots , rising to 1331 ? 2 as the two frontrunners saw little change . Lodge then declared a three @-@ hour recess , to the outrage of Daugherty , who raced to the podium and confronted him , " You cannot defeat this man this way ! The motion was not carried ! You cannot defeat this man ! " Lodge and others used the break to try to stop the Harding momentum and make RNC Chairman Hays the nominee , a scheme Hays refused to have anything to do with . The ninth ballot , after some initial suspense , saw delegation after delegation break for Harding , who took the lead with 3741 ? 2 votes to 249 for Wood and 1211 ? 2 for Lowden (Johnson had 83) . Lowden released his delegates to Harding , and the tenth ballot , held at 6 p.m. , was a mere formality , with Harding finishing with 6721 ? 5 votes to 156 for Wood . The nomination was made unanimous . The delegates , desperate to leave town before they incurred more hotel expenses , then proceeded to the vice presidential nomination . Harding wanted Senator Irvine Lenroot of Wisconsin , who was unwilling to run , but before Lenroot 's name could be withdrawn and another man decided on , an Oregon delegate proposed Governor Coolidge , which was met with a roar of approval from the delegates . Coolidge , popular for his role in breaking the Boston police strike of 1919 , was nominated for vice president , receiving two and a fraction votes more than Harding had . James Morgan wrote in The Boston Globe : " The delegates would not listen to remaining in Chicago over Sunday ... the President makers did not have a clean shirt . On such things , Rollo , turns the destiny of nations . "

= = = General election campaign = = =

The Harding / Coolidge ticket was quickly backed by Republican newspapers , but those of other viewpoints expressed disappointment . The New York World found Harding the least @-@ qualified candidate since James Buchanan , deeming the Ohio senator a " weak and mediocre " man who " never had an original idea " . The Hearst newspapers called Harding " the flag @-@ bearer of a new Senatorial autocracy " . The New York Times described the Republican presidential candidate as " a very respectable Ohio politician of the second class " .

The Democratic National Convention opened in San Francisco on June 28 , 1920 , under a shadow cast by Woodrow Wilson , who wished to be nominated for a third term . Delegates were convinced Wilson 's health would not permit him to serve , and looked elsewhere for a candidate . Former Treasury Secretary William G. McAdoo was a major contender , but he was Wilson 's son @-@ in @-@ law , and refused to consider a nomination so long as the president wanted it . Many at the convention voted for McAdoo anyway , and a deadlock ensued with Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer . On the 44th ballot , the Democrats nominated Governor Cox for president , with his running mate Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt . As Cox was , when not in politics , a newspaper owner and editor , this placed two Ohio editors against each other for the presidency , and some complained there was no real political choice . Both Cox and Harding were economic conservatives , and were reluctant progressives at best .

Harding elected to conduct a front porch campaign , like McKinley in 1896 . Some years earlier , Harding had had his front porch remodeled to resemble McKinley 's , which his neighbors felt signified presidential ambitions . The candidate remained at home in Marion and gave addresses to visiting delegations . In the meantime , Cox and Roosevelt stumped the nation , giving hundreds of speeches . Coolidge spoke in the Northeast , later on in the South , and was not a significant factor in the campaign .

In Marion , Harding ran his campaign . As a newspaperman himself , he fell into easy camaraderie with the press covering him , enjoying a relationship few presidents have equaled . His " Return to Normalcy " theme was aided by the atmosphere that Marion provided , an orderly place that induced nostalgia in many voters . The front porch campaign allowed Harding to avoid mistakes , and as time dwindled towards the election , his strength grew . The travels of the Democratic candidates eventually caused Harding to make several short speaking tours , but for the most part , he remained in Marion . America had no need for another Wilson , Harding argued , appealing for a president " near the normal " .

Harding 's vague oratory irritated some ; McAdoo described a typical Harding speech as " an army of pompous phrases moving over the landscape in search of an idea . Sometimes these meandering words actually capture a straggling thought and bear it triumphantly , a prisoner in their midst , until it died of servitude and over work . " H. L. Mencken concurred , " it reminds me of a string of wet sponges , it reminds me of tattered washing on the line ; it reminds me of stale bean soup , of college yells , of dogs barking idiotically through endless nights . It is so bad that a kind of grandeur creeps into it . It drags itself out of the dark abysm ... of pish , and crawls insanely up the topmost pinnacle of tosh . It is rumble and bumble . It is balder and dash . The New York Times took a more positive view of Harding 's speeches , stating that in them the majority of people could find " a reflection of their own indeterminate thoughts " .

Wilson had stated that the 1920 election would be a " great and solemn referendum " on the League of Nations , making it difficult for Cox to maneuver on the issue ? although Roosevelt strongly supported the League , Cox was less enthusiastic . Harding opposed entry into the League of Nations as negotiated by Wilson , but favored an " association of nations " , based on the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague . This was general enough to satisfy most Republicans , and only a few bolted the party over this issue . By October , Cox had realized there was widespread public opposition to Article X , and stated that reservations to the treaty might be necessary ; this shift allowed Harding to say no more on the subject .

The RNC hired Albert Lasker , an advertising executive from Chicago , to publicize Harding , and Lasker unleashed a broad @-@ based advertising campaign that used many now @-@ standard

advertising techniques for the first time in a presidential campaign . Lasker 's approach included newsreels and sound recordings . Visitors to Marion had their photographs taken with Senator and Mrs. Harding , and copies were sent to their hometown newspapers . Billboard posters , newspapers and magazines were employed in addition to motion pictures . Telemarketers were used to make phone calls with scripted dialogues to promote Harding .

The rumors that the Hardings were of partially African American blood surfaced again in the last days of the campaign , promoted by Wooster College professor William Estabrook Chancellor . Once these claims became known , reporters filed lengthy stories on them from Marion , which their editors declined to print . The Harding campaign refused to acknowledge or respond to the allegations .

By Election Day , November 2 , 1920 , few had any doubts that the Republican ticket would win . Harding received 60 @-@ 2 percent of the popular vote , the highest percentage since the evolution of the two @-@ party system , and 404 electoral votes . Cox received 34 percent of the national vote and 127 electoral votes . Campaigning from a federal prison where he was serving a sentence for opposing the war , Socialist Eugene V. Debs received 3 percent of the national vote . The Republicans greatly increased their majority in each house of Congress .

= = President (1921 ? 1923) = =

= = = Inauguration and appointments = = =

Warren Harding was sworn in as president on March 4 , 1921 , in the presence of his wife and father . Harding preferred a low @-@ key inauguration , without the customary parade , leaving only the swearing @-@ in ceremony and a brief reception at the White House . In his inaugural address he declared , " Our most dangerous tendency is to expect too much from the government and at the same time do too little for it . "

After the election , Harding had announced he was going on vacation , and that no decisions about appointments would be made until he returned to Marion in December . He went to Texas , where he fished and played golf with his friend Frank Scobey (soon to be Director of the Mint) , then took ship for the Panama Canal Zone . He went to Washington , where he was given a hero 's welcome when Congress opened in early December as the first sitting senator to be elected to the White House . Back in Ohio , he planned to consult the " best minds " of the country on appointments , and they dutifully journeyed to Marion to offer their counsel .

Harding chose pro @-@ League Charles Evans Hughes as his Secretary of State , ignoring advice from Senator Lodge and others . After Charles G. Dawes declined the Treasury position , Harding asked Pittsburgh banker Andrew W. Mellon , one of the richest men in the country ; he agreed . Harding appointed Herbert Hoover as United States Secretary of Commerce . RNC Chairman Will Hays was made Postmaster General , then a cabinet post ; he would leave after a year in the position to become chief censor to the motion picture industry .

The two Harding cabinet appointees who darkened the reputation of his administration for their involvement in scandal were Harding 's Senate friend , Albert B. Fall of New Mexico , the Interior Secretary , and Daugherty , who became Attorney General . Fall was a Western rancher and former miner , and was pro @-@ development . He was opposed by conservationists such as Gifford Pinchot , who wrote , " it would have been possible to pick a worse man for Secretary of the Interior , but not altogether easy " . The New York Times mocked the Daugherty appointment , stating that rather than select one of the best minds , Harding had been content " to choose merely a best friend " . Eugene P. Trani and David L. Wilson , in their volume on Harding 's presidency , suggest that the appointment made sense then , since Daugherty was " a competent lawyer well @-@ acquainted with the seamy side of politics ... a first @-@ class political troubleshooter and someone Harding could trust " .

= = = Foreign policy = = =

=== European relations and formally ending the war ===

Harding made it clear when he appointed Hughes as Secretary of State that the former justice would run foreign policy , a change from Wilson 's close management of international affairs . Hughes had to work within some broad outlines ; after taking office , Harding hardened his stance on the League of Nations , deciding the U.S. would not join even a scaled @-@ down version of the League . With the Treaty of Versailles unratified by the Senate , the U.S. remained technically at war with Germany , Austria , and Hungary . Peacemaking began with the Knox ? Porter Resolution , declaring the U.S. at peace and reserving any rights granted under Versailles . Treaties with Germany , Austria and Hungary , each containing many of the non @-@ League provisions of the Treaty of Versailles , were ratified in 1921 .

This still left the question of relations between the U.S. and the League . Hughes ' State Department initially ignored communications from the League , or tried to bypass it through direct communications with member nations . By 1922 , though , the U.S. , through its consul in Geneva , was dealing with the League , and though the U.S. refused to participate in any meeting with political implications , it sent observers to sessions on technical and humanitarian matters .

By the time Harding took office , there were calls from foreign governments for reduction of the massive war debt owed to the United States , and the German government sought to reduce the reparations that it was required to pay . The U.S. refused to consider any multilateral settlement . Harding sought passage of a plan proposed by Mellon to give the administration broad authority to reduce war debts in negotiation , but Congress in 1922 passed a more restrictive bill . Hughes negotiated an agreement for Britain to pay off its war debt over 62 years at low interest , effectively reducing the present value of the obligations . This agreement , approved by Congress in 1923 , set a pattern for negotiations with other nations . Talks with Germany on reduction of reparations payments would result in the Dawes Plan of 1924 .

A pressing issue not resolved by Wilson was the question of policy towards Bolshevik Russia . The U.S. had been among the nations that had sent troops there after the Russian Revolution . Afterwards , Wilson refused to recognize Russia . Under Harding , Commerce Secretary Hoover , with considerable experience of Russian affairs , took the lead on policy . When famine struck Russia in 1921 , Hoover had the American Relief Administration , which he had headed , negotiate with the Russians to provide aid . Soviet leaders (the U.S.S.R. was established in 1922) hoped in vain that the agreement would lead to recognition . Hoover supported trade with Russia , fearing U.S. companies would be frozen out of the Soviet market , but Hughes opposed this , and the matter was not resolved under Harding 's presidency .

=== Disarmament ===

Harding had urged disarmament , and lower defense costs , during the campaign , but it had not been a major issue . He gave a speech to a joint session of Congress in April 1921 , setting out his legislative priorities . Among the few foreign policy matters he mentioned was disarmament , with the president stating that the government could not " be unmindful of the call for reduced expenditure " on defense .

Idaho Senator William Borah had proposed a conference at which the major naval powers , the U.S. , Britain , and Japan , would agree to cuts in their fleets . Harding concurred , and after some diplomatic discussions , representatives of nine nations convened in Washington in November 1921 . Most of the diplomats first attended Armistice Day ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery , where Harding spoke at the entombment of the Unknown Soldier of World War I , whose identity , " took flight with his imperishable soul . We know not whence he came , only that his death marks him with the everlasting glory of an American dying for his country " .

Hughes , in his speech at the opening session of the conference on November 12 , 1921 , made the American proposal ? the U.S would decommission or not build 30 warships if Great Britain did

the same for 19 vessels , and Japan 17 ships . The secretary was generally successful , and agreements were reached on this and other points , including settlements to disputes over islands in the Pacific , and limitations on the use of poison gas . The naval agreement was limited to battleships and to some extent aircraft carriers , and in the end did not prevent rearmament . Nevertheless , Harding and Hughes were widely applauded in the press for their work . Harding had appointed Senator Lodge and the Senate Minority Leader , Alabama 's Oscar Underwood , to the U.S. delegation ; they helped ensure that the treaties made it through the Senate mostly unscathed , though that body added reservations to some of the treaties .

The U.S. had acquired over a thousand vessels during World War I , and still owned most of them when Harding took office . Congress had authorized their disposal in 1920 , but the Senate would not confirm Wilson 's nominees to the Shipping Board . Harding appointed Albert Lasker as its chairman ; the advertising executive undertook to run the fleet as profitably as possible until it could be sold . Most ships proved impossible to sell at anything approaching the government 's cost . Lasker recommended a large subsidy to the merchant marine to enable the sales , and Harding repeatedly urged Congress to enact it . Unpopular in the Midwest , the bill passed the House but was defeated by a filibuster in the Senate , and most government ships were eventually scrapped .

= = = Latin America = = =

Intervention in Latin America had been a minor campaign issue ; Harding spoke against Wilson 's decision to send U.S. troops to the Dominican Republic and Haiti , and attacked the Democratic vice presidential candidate , Franklin Roosevelt , for his role in the Haitian intervention . Once Harding was sworn in , Hughes worked to improve relations with Latin American countries who were wary of the American use of the Monroe Doctrine to justify intervention ; at the time of Harding 's inauguration , the U.S. also had troops in Cuba and Nicaragua . The troops stationed in Cuba to protect American interests were withdrawn in 1921 ; U.S. forces remained in the other three nations through Harding 's presidency . In April 1921 , Harding gained the ratification of the Thomson ? Urrutia Treaty with Colombia , granting that nation \$ 25 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 as settlement for the U.S.-provoked Panamanian revolution of 1903 . The Latin American nations were not fully satisfied , as the U.S. refused to renounce interventionism , though Hughes pledged to limit it to nations near the Panama Canal and to make it clear what the U.S. aims were .

The U.S. had intervened repeatedly in Mexico under Wilson , and had withdrawn diplomatic recognition , setting conditions for reinstatement . The Mexican government under President Álvaro Obregón wanted recognition before negotiations , but Wilson and his Secretary of State , Bainbridge Colby , refused . Both Hughes and Fall opposed recognition ; Hughes instead sent a draft treaty to the Mexicans in May 1921 , which included pledges to reimburse Americans for losses in Mexico since the 1910 revolution there . Obregón was unwilling to sign a treaty before being recognized , and worked to improve the relationship between American business and Mexico , reaching agreement with creditors , and mounting a public relations campaign in the United States . This had its effect , and by mid @-@ 1922 , Fall was less influential than he had been , lessening the resistance to recognition . The two presidents appointed commissioners to reach a deal , and the U.S. recognized the Obregón government on August 31 , 1923 , just under a month after Harding 's death , substantially on the terms proffered by Mexico .

= = = Domestic policy = = =

= = = Postwar recession and recovery = = =

When Harding took office on March 4 , 1921 , the nation was in the midst of a postwar economic decline . At the suggestion of its leaders , Harding called a special session of Congress to convene on April 11 . When Harding addressed the joint session the following day , he urged the reduction of income taxes (raised during the war) , an increase in tariffs on agricultural goods to protect the

American farmer , as well as more wide @-@ ranging reforms , such as support for highways , aviation , and radio . But it was not until May 27 that Congress passed an emergency tariff increase on agricultural products . An act authorizing a Bureau of the Budget followed on June 10 ; Harding appointed Charles Dawes as bureau director with a mandate to cut expenditures .

== = Mellon 's tax cuts == = =

Treasury Secretary Mellon also recommended to Congress that income tax rates be cut . He asked that the excess profits tax on corporations be abolished . The House Ways and Means Committee endorsed Mellon 's proposals , but some congressmen , who wanted to raise tax rates on corporations , fought the measure . Harding was unsure what side to endorse , telling a friend , " I can 't make a damn thing out of this tax problem . I listen to one side , and they seem right , and then ? God ! ? I talk to the other side , and they seem just as right . " Harding tried compromise , and gained passage of the bill in the House after the end of the excess profits tax was delayed a year . In the Senate , the tax bill became entangled in efforts to vote World War I veterans a soldier 's bonus . Frustrated by the delays , on July 12 , Harding appeared before the Senate and urged it to pass the tax legislation without the bonus . It was not until November that the bill finally passed , with higher rates than Mellon had proposed .

Harding had opposed payment of a bonus to veterans , arguing in his Senate address that much was already being done for them by a grateful nation , and that the bill would " break down our Treasury , from which so much is later on to be expected . " The Senate sent the bonus bill back to committee , but the issue returned when Congress reconvened in December 1921 . A bill providing a bonus , without a means of funding it , was passed by both houses in September 1922 . Harding vetoed it , and the veto was narrowly sustained . A bonus , not payable in cash , was voted to soldiers despite Coolidge 's veto in 1924 .

In his first annual message to Congress , Harding sought the power to adjust tariff rates . The passage of the tariff bill in the Senate , and in conference committee became a feeding frenzy of lobbyist interests . Harding , when he enacted the Fordney ? McCumber Tariff Act on September 21 , 1922 , made a brief signing statement , praising only that the bill gave him some power to adjust rates . According to Trani and Wilson , the bill was " ill @-@ considered . It wrought havoc in international commerce and made the repayment of war debts more difficult . "

Harding ? s Treasury Secretary , Andrew Mellon , ordered a study which demonstrated historically that , as income tax rates were increased , money was driven underground or abroad . Mellon concluded that lower rates would increase tax revenues . Based on this advice , Harding cut taxes , starting in 1922 . The top marginal rate was reduced annually in four stages from 73 % in 1921 to 25 % in 1925 . Taxes were cut for lower incomes starting in 1923 . The lower rates substantially increased the money flowing to the treasury . They also pushed massive deregulation and federal spending as a share of GDP fell from 6 @. @ 5 % to 3 @. @ 5 % . By late 1922 the economy began to turn around . Unemployment was pared from its 1921 high of 12 % to an average of 3 @. @ 3 % for the remainder of the decade . The misery index which is a combination of unemployment and inflation had its sharpest decline in U.S. history under President Harding . Wages , profits , and productivity all made substantial gains as well real GDP average at over 5 % during the 1920s . Libertarian historian Thomas Woods contends that the tax cuts implemented by President Harding ended the Depression of 1920 ? 21 and were responsible for creating a decade @-@ long expansion . Historians Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen argue that , " Mellon 's tax policies set the stage for the most amazing growth yet seen in America 's already impressive economy . "

== = Embracing new technologies == = =

The 1920s were a time of modernization for America . Use of electricity became increasingly common . Mass production of the motor car stimulated other industries , as well , such as highway construction , rubber , steel , and building , as hotels were erected to accommodate the tourists venturing upon the roads . This economic boost helped bring the nation out of the recession . To

improve and expand the nation 's highway system , Harding signed the Federal Highway Act of 1921 . From 1921 to 1923 , the federal government spent \$ 162 million on America 's highway system , infusing the U.S. economy with a large amount of capital . In 1922 , Harding proclaimed that America was in the age of the " motor car " , which " reflects our standard of living and gauges the speed of our present @-@ day life . "

Harding had urged regulation of radio broadcasting in his April 1921 speech to Congress . Commerce Secretary Hoover took charge of this project , and convened a conference of radio broadcasters in 1922 , which led to a voluntary agreement for licensing of radio frequencies through the Commerce Department . Both Harding and Hoover realized something more than an agreement was needed , but Congress was slow to act , not imposing radio regulation until 1927 .

Harding also wished to promote aviation , and Hoover again took the lead , convening a national conference on commercial aviation . The discussions focused on safety matters , inspection of airplanes , and licensing of pilots . Harding again promoted legislation but nothing was done until 1926 , when the Air Commerce Act created the Bureau of Aeronautics within Hoover 's Commerce Department .

= = = = Business and labor = = = =

Harding 's attitude toward business was that government should aid it as much as possible . He was suspicious of organized labor , viewing it as a conspiracy against business . He sought to get them to work together at a conference on unemployment that he called to meet in September 1921 at Hoover 's recommendation . Harding warned in his opening address that no federal money would be available . No important legislation came as a result , though some public works projects were accelerated .

Within broad limits , Harding allowed each cabinet secretary to run his department as he saw fit . Hoover expanded the Commerce Department to make it more useful to business . This was consistent with Hoover 's view that the private sector should take the lead in managing the economy . Harding greatly respected his Commerce Secretary , often asked his advice , and backed him to the hilt , calling Hoover " the smartest ' gink ' I know "

Widespread strikes marked 1922 , as labor sought redress for falling wages and increased unemployment . In April , 500 @,@ 000 coal miners , led by John L. Lewis , struck over wage cuts . Mining executives argued that the industry was seeing hard times ; Lewis accused them of trying to break the union . As the strike became protracted , Harding offered compromise to settle it . As Harding proposed , the miners agreed to return to work , and Congress created a commission to look into their grievances .

On July 1 , 1922 , 400 @,@ 000 railroad workers went on strike . Harding proposed a settlement that made some concessions , but management objected . Attorney General Daugherty convinced Judge James H. Wilkerson to issue a sweeping injunction to break up the strike . Although there was public support for the Wilkerson injunction , Harding felt it went too far , and had Daugherty and Wilkerson amend it . The injunction succeeded in ending the strike ; however , tensions remained high between railroad workers and management for years .

By 1922 , the eight @-@ hour day had become common in American industry . One exception was in steel mills , where workers labored through a twelve @-@ hour workday , seven days a week . Hoover considered this practice barbaric , and got Harding to convene a conference of steel manufacturers with a view to ending it . The conference established a committee under the leadership of U. S. Steel chairman Elbert Gary , which in early 1923 recommended against ending the practice . Harding sent a letter to Gary deploring the result , which was printed in the press , and public outcry caused the manufacturers to reverse themselves and standardize the eight @-@ hour day .

= = = = Civil rights and immigration = = = =

Although Harding 's first address to Congress called for passage of anti @-@ lynching legislation ,

he initially seemed inclined to do no more for African Americans than Republican presidents of the recent past had ; he asked cabinet officers to find places for blacks in their departments . Sinclair suggested that the fact that Harding received two @-@ fifths of the Southern vote in 1920 led him to see political opportunity for his party in the Solid South . On October 26 , 1921 , Harding gave a speech in Birmingham , Alabama , to a segregated audience of 20 @,@ 000 whites and 10 @,@ 000 blacks . Harding , while stating that the social and racial differences between whites and blacks could not be bridged , urged equal political rights for the African American . Many African Americans at that time voted Republican , especially in the Democratic South , and Harding stated he did not mind seeing that support end if the result was a strong two @-@ party system in the South . He was willing to see literacy tests for voting continue , if applied fairly to white and black . " Whether you like it or not , " Harding told his segregated audience , " unless our democracy is a lie , you must stand for that equality . " The white section of the audience listened in silence while the black section cheered .

Harding had spoken out against lynching in his April 1921 speech before Congress and supported Congressman Leonidas Dyer 's federal anti @-@ lynching bill , which passed the House of Representatives in January 1922 . When it reached the Senate floor in November 1922 , it was filibustered by Southern Democrats , and Lodge withdrew it so as to allow the ship subsidy bill Harding favored to be debated (it was likewise filibustered) . Blacks blamed Harding for the Dyer bill 's defeat ; Harding biographer Robert K. Murray noted that it was hastened to its end by Harding 's desire to have the ship subsidy bill considered .

With the public suspicious of immigrants , especially those who might be socialists or communists , Congress passed the Per Centum Act of 1921 , signed by Harding on May 19 , 1921 , as a quick means of restricting immigration . The act reduced the numbers of immigrants to 3 % of those from a given country living in the U.S. , based on the 1910 census . This would , in practice , not restrict immigration from Ireland and Germany , but would bar many Italians and eastern European Jews . Harding and Secretary of Labor James Davis believed that enforcement had to be humane , and at the secretary 's recommendation , Harding allowed almost a thousand deportable immigrants to remain . Coolidge signed a bill permanently restricting immigration to the U.S. in 1924 .

= = = = Debs and political prisoners = = = =

Harding 's Socialist opponent in the 1920 election , Eugene Debs , was serving a ten @-@ year sentence in the Atlanta Penitentiary for speaking against the war . Wilson had refused to pardon him before leaving office . Daugherty met with Debs , and was deeply impressed . There was opposition from veterans , including the American Legion , and also from Florence Harding . The president did not feel he could release Debs until the war was officially over , but once the peace treaties were signed commuted Debs ' sentence on December 23 , 1921 . At Harding 's request , Debs visited the president at the White House before going home to Indiana .

Harding released 23 other war opponents at the same time as Debs , and continued to review cases and release political prisoners throughout his presidency . Harding defended his prisoner releases as necessary to return the nation to normalcy .

= = = = Judicial appointments = = = =

Harding appointed four justices to the Supreme Court of the United States . When Chief Justice Edward Douglass White died in May 1921 , Harding was unsure whether to appoint former president Taft or former Utah senator George Sutherland ? he had promised seats on the court to both men . After briefly considering awaiting another vacancy and appointing them both , he chose Taft as chief justice . Sutherland was appointed to the court in 1922 , to be followed by two other economic conservatives , Pierce Butler and Edward Terry Sanford , in 1923 .

Harding also appointed six judges to the United States Courts of Appeals , 42 judges to the United States district courts , and two judges to the United States Court of Customs Appeals .

= = = Final months , death , and funeral = = =

= = = Political setbacks and western tour = = =

Entering the 1922 midterm congressional election campaign , Harding and the Republicans had followed through on many of their campaign promises . But some of the fulfilled pledges , like cutting taxes for the well @-@ off , did not appeal to the electorate . The economy had not returned to normalcy , with unemployment at 11 percent , and organized labor angry over the outcome of the strikes . From 303 Republicans elected to the House in 1920 , the new 68th Congress would see that party fall to a 221 ? 213 majority . In the Senate , the Republicans lost eight seats , and had 51 of 96 senators in the new Congress , which Harding did not survive to meet .

A month after the election , the lame @-@ duck session of the old 67th Congress met . Harding had come to believe that his early view of the presidency , that it should propose policies , but leave whether to adopt them to Congress , was not enough , and he lobbied Congress , although in vain , to get his ship subsidy bill through . Once Congress left town in early March 1923 , Harding 's popularity in the country began to recover . The economy was improving , and the programs of Harding 's more able cabinet members , such as Hughes , Mellon , and Hoover , were showing results . Most Republicans realized that there was no practical alternative to supporting Harding in 1924 .

In the first half of 1923 , Harding did two acts that were later said to indicate foreknowledge of death : he sold the Star (though undertaking to remain as a contributing editor for ten years after his presidency) , and made a new will . Harding had long suffered occasional health problems , but when he was not experiencing symptoms he tended to eat , drink , and smoke too much . By 1919 , he was aware he had a heart condition . Stress caused by the presidency and by Florence Harding 's ill @-@ health (she had a chronic kidney condition) debilitated him , and he never really recovered from an episode of influenza in January 1923 . After that , Harding , an avid golfer , had difficulty completing a round . In June 1923 , Ohio Senator Willis met with Harding , but brought to the president 's attention only two of the five items he intended to discuss . When asked why , Willis responded , " Warren seemed so tired " .

In June 1923 , Harding set out on a journey , which he dubbed the " Voyage of Understanding " . The president planned to cross the country , go north to Alaska Territory , journey south along the West Coast , then travel by Navy ship through the Panama Canal , to Puerto Rico , and to return to Washington at the end of August . Harding loved to travel and had long contemplated a trip to Alaska . The trip would allow him to speak widely across the country , to politic and bloviate in advance of the 1924 campaign , and allow him some rest away from Washington 's oppressive summer heat .

Harding 's political advisers had given him a physically demanding schedule , even though the president had ordered it cut back . In Kansas City , Harding spoke on transportation issues ; in Hutchinson , Kansas , agriculture was the theme . In Denver , he spoke on Prohibition , and continued west making a series of speeches not matched by any president until Franklin Roosevelt . Harding had become a supporter of the World Court , and wanted the U.S. to become a member . In addition to making speeches , he visited Yellowstone and Zion National Parks , and dedicated a monument on the Oregon Trail at a celebration organized by venerable pioneer Ezra Meeker and others .

On July 5 , Harding embarked on the USS Henderson in Washington state . The first president to visit Alaska , he spent hours watching the dramatic landscapes from the deck of the Henderson . After several stops along the coast , the presidential party left the ship at Seward to take the Alaska Central Railway to McKinley Park and Fairbanks , where he addressed a crowd of 1 @, @ 500 in 94 ° F (34 ° C) heat . The party was to return to Seward by the Richardson Trail but due to Harding 's fatigue , it went by train .

On July 26 , 1923 , Harding toured Vancouver , British Columbia as the first sitting American president to visit Canada . Harding visited a golf course , but completed only six holes before being

fatigued . After resting , he played the 17th and 18th holes so it would appear he completed the round . He was not successful in hiding his exhaustion ; one reporter deemed him so tired a rest of mere days would not be sufficient to refresh him .

In Seattle the next day , Harding kept up his busy schedule , giving a speech to 25 @,@ 000 people at the stadium at the University of Washington . In the final speech he gave , Harding predicted statehood for Alaska . The president rushed through his speech , not waiting for applause by the audience .

= = = Death in San Francisco , funeral , and memorial = = =

Harding went to bed early in the evening of July 27 , 1923 . Later that night , he called for his physician , Charles E. Sawyer , complaining of pain in the upper abdomen . Sawyer thought it was a recurrence of a dietary upset , but Dr. Joel T. Boone suspected a heart problem . The next day , as the train rushed to San Francisco , Harding felt better , and when they arrived on the morning of July 29 , 1923 , Harding insisted on walking from the train to the car , which rushed him to the Palace Hotel where he suffered a relapse . Doctors found that not only was Harding 's heart causing problems , but he also had pneumonia , a serious matter in the days before effective antibiotics . When treated with caffeine and digitalis , Harding seemed to improve . He was pleased when his planned foreign policy address advocating membership in the World Court was released to the press by Hoover and received a favorable reception . By the afternoon of August 2 , 1923 , doctors allowed Harding to sit up in bed . That evening , about 7 : 30 pm , he was listening to his wife read him a flattering article about him from The Saturday Evening Post , " A Calm Review of a Calm Man " . When she paused to plump his pillows , he said , " That 's good , read some more " . As Florence Harding resumed , her husband twisted convulsively and collapsed , and she raced to get the doctors . They attempted stimulants , but were unable to revive him , and President Harding died of a cerebral hemorrhage on August 2 , 1923 , at the age of 57 .

Harding 's death came as a great shock to the nation . The president was liked and admired , and the press and public had followed his illness closely , and been reassured by his apparent recovery . Harding was returned to his train in a casket for a journey across the nation followed closely in the newspapers . Nine million people lined the tracks as Harding 's body was taken from San Francisco to Washington , D.C. , and after services there , home to Marion , Ohio , for burial .

In Marion , the body of Warren Harding was placed on a horse @-@ drawn hearse , which was followed by President Coolidge and Chief Justice Taft , then by Harding 's wife and father . They followed it through the city , past the Star building where the presses stood silent , and at last to the Marion Cemetery , where the casket was placed in the cemetery 's receiving vault . Harding 's body , along with that of his wife who died in 1924 , rests today in the Harding Tomb , which was dedicated in 1931 by President Hoover .

= = = Scandals = = =

Harding appointed a number of friends and acquaintances to federal positions . Some served competently , such as Charles E. Sawyer , the Hardings ' personal physician from Marion who attended to them in the White House . Sawyer had alerted Harding to the Veterans ' Bureau scandal . Others proved ineffective in office , such as Daniel R. Crissinger , a Marion lawyer whom Harding made Comptroller of the Currency and later a governor of the Federal Reserve Board ; or Harding 's old friend , Director of the Mint , Frank Scobey , whom Trani and Wilson noted " did little damage during his tenure " . Harding 's brother @-@ in @-@ law Heber H. Votaw , superintendent of federal prisons , was unable to root out the drug trade from within the facilities . Others of these associates proved corrupt and were later dubbed the " Ohio Gang " .

Most of the scandals that have marred the reputation of Harding 's administration did not emerge until after his death . The Veterans ' Bureau scandal was known to Harding in January 1923 but , according to Trani and Wilson , " the president 's handling of it did him little credit " . Harding allowed the corrupt director of the bureau , Charles R. Forbes , to flee to Europe , though he later returned

and served prison time . Harding had learned that Daugherty 's factotum at the Justice Department , Jess Smith , was involved in corruption . The president ordered Daugherty to get Smith out of Washington and removed his name from the upcoming presidential trip to Alaska . Smith committed suicide on May 30 , 1923 . It is uncertain how much Harding knew about Smith 's illicit activities . Murray noted that Harding was not involved in the corruption and did not condone it .

Hoover accompanied Harding on the Western trip and later wrote that Harding asked then what Hoover would do if he knew of some great scandal , whether to publicize it or bury it . Hoover replied that Harding should publish and get credit for integrity , and asked for details . Harding stated that it had to do with Smith but , when Hoover enquired as to Daugherty 's possible involvement , Harding refused to answer .

= = = = Teapot Dome = = = =

The scandal which has likely done the greatest damage to Harding 's reputation is Teapot Dome . Like most of the administration 's scandals , it came to light after Harding 's death , and he was not aware of the illegal aspects . Teapot Dome involved an oil reserve in Wyoming which was one of three set aside for the use of the Navy in a national emergency . There was a longstanding argument that the reserves should be developed ; Wilson 's first Interior Secretary Franklin Knight Lane was an advocate of this position . When the Harding administration took office , Interior Secretary Fall took up Lane 's argument and Harding signed an executive order in May 1921 transferring the reserves from the Navy Department to Interior . This was done with the consent of Navy Secretary Edwin C. Denby .

The Interior Department announced in July 1921 that Edward Doheny had been awarded a lease to drill along the edges of naval reserve Elk Hills in California . The announcement attracted little controversy , as the oil would have been lost to wells on adjacent private land . Wyoming Senator John Kendrick had heard from constituents that Teapot Dome had also been leased , but no announcement had been made . The Interior Department refused to provide documentation , so he secured the passage of a Senate resolution compelling disclosure . The department sent a copy of the lease granting drilling rights to Harry Sinclair 's Mammoth Oil Company , along with a statement that there had been no competitive bidding because military preparedness was involved ? Mammoth was to build oil tanks for the Navy as part of the deal . This satisfied some people , but some conservationists , such as Gifford Pinchot , Harry A. Slattery , and others , pushed for a full investigation into Fall and his activities . They got Wisconsin Senator Robert M. La Follette Sr. to begin a Senate investigation into the oil leases . La Follette persuaded Democratic Montana Senator Thomas J. Walsh to lead the investigation , and Walsh read through the truckload of material provided by the Interior Department through 1922 into 1923 , including a letter from Harding stating that the transfer and leases had been with his knowledge and approval .

Hearings into Teapot Dome began in October 1923 , after Harding 's death . Fall had left office earlier that year , but he denied receiving any money from Sinclair or Doheny ; Sinclair agreed . The following month , Walsh learned that Fall had spent lavishly on expanding and improving his New Mexico ranch . Fall reappeared and stated that the money had come as a loan from Harding 's friend and The Washington Post publisher Edward B. McLean , but McLean denied it when he testified . Doheny told the committee that he had given Fall the money in cash as a personal loan out of regard for their past association , but Fall invoked the Fifth Amendment right against self @-@ incrimination when he was compelled to appear again , rather than answer questions .

Investigators found that Fall and a relative had received a total of about \$ 400 @,@ 000 from Doheny and Sinclair , and that the transfers were contemporaneous with the controversial leases . Fall was ultimately convicted in 1929 for accepting bribes and , in 1931 , became the first U.S. cabinet member to be imprisoned for crimes committed while in office . Sinclair was convicted only of contempt of court for jury tampering . Doheny was brought to trial before a jury in April 1930 for giving the bribe which Fall had been convicted of accepting , but he was acquitted .

= = = = Justice Department = = = =

Harding 's appointment of Harry M. Daugherty as Attorney General received more criticism than any other . Daugherty 's Ohio lobbying and back room maneuvers were not considered to qualify him for his office . When the scandals broke in 1923 and 1924 , Daugherty 's many enemies were delighted at the prospect of connecting him with the dishonesty , and assumed he had taken part in Teapot Dome , though Fall and Daugherty were not friends . In February 1924 , the Senate voted to investigate the Justice Department , where Daugherty remained Attorney General .

Democratic Montana Senator Burton K. Wheeler was on the investigating committee and assumed the role of prosecutor when hearings began on March 12 , 1924 . Jess Smith had engaged in influence peddling before his suicide , conspiring with two other Ohioans , Howard Mannington and Fred A. Caskey , to accept payoffs from alcohol bootleggers to secure either immunity from prosecution or the release of liquor from government warehouses . Mannington and Caskey 's residence became infamous as the Little Green House on K Street . Some witnesses , such as Smith 's divorced wife Roxy Stinson , and corrupt former FBI agent Gaston Means , alleged that Daugherty was personally involved . Coolidge requested Daugherty 's resignation when the Attorney General indicated that he would not allow Wheeler 's committee access to Justice Department records , and Daugherty complied on March 28 , 1924 .

The illicit activity that caused Daugherty the most problems was a Smith deal with Colonel Thomas W. Miller , a former Delaware congressman , whom Harding had appointed Alien Property Custodian . Smith and Miller received a payoff of almost half a million dollars for getting a German @-@ owned firm , the American Metal Company , released to new U.S. owners . Smith deposited \$ 50 @,@ 000 in a joint account with Daugherty , used for political purposes . Records relating to that account were destroyed by Daugherty and his brother . Miller and Daugherty were indicted for defrauding the government . The first trial , in September 1926 , resulted in a hung jury ; at the second , early in 1927 , Miller was convicted and served prison time , but the jury again hung as to Daugherty . Though charges against Daugherty were then dropped , and he was never convicted of any offense , his refusal to take the stand in his own defense devastated what was left of his reputation . The former Attorney General remained defiant , blaming his troubles on his enemies in the labor movement and on the Communists , and wrote that he had " done nothing that prevents my looking the whole world in the face " .

= = = = Veterans ' Bureau = = = =

Charles R. Forbes , the energetic director of the Veterans ' Bureau , sought to consolidate control of veterans ' hospitals and their construction in his bureau . At the start of Harding 's presidency , this power was vested in the Treasury Department . The politically @-@ powerful American Legion backed Forbes and denigrated those who opposed him , like Secretary Mellon , and in April 1922 , Harding agreed to transfer control to the Veterans ' Bureau . Forbes ' main task was to ensure that new hospitals were built around the country to help the 300 @,@ 000 wounded World War I veterans .

Near the beginning of 1922 , Forbes had met Elias Mortimer , agent for the Thompson @-@ Black Construction Company of St. Louis , which wanted to construct the hospitals . The two men became close , and Mortimer paid for Forbes ' travels through the West , looking at potential hospital sites for the wounded World War I veterans . Forbes was also friendly with Charles F. Hurley , owner of the Hurley @-@ Mason Construction Company of Washington state . Harding had ordered that all contracts be pursuant to public notice , but the three worked out a deal whereby the two companies would get the contracts with the profits divided three ways . Some of the money went to the bureau 's chief counsel , Charles F. Cramer . Forbes defrauded the government in this hospital construction , increasing construction costs from \$ 3 @,@ 000 to \$ 4 @,@ 000 per bed . A tenth of the inflated construction billings was set aside for the conspirators , with Forbes receiving a third of the take . The graft then spread to land acquisition , with Forbes authorizing the purchase of a San Francisco tract ? that was worth less than \$ 20 @,@ 000 ? for \$ 105 @,@ 000 . At least \$ 25 @,@ 000 of the resulting financial excess was divided between Forbes and Cramer .

Intent on making more money , Forbes in November 1922 began selling valuable hospital supplies under his control in large warehouses at the Perryville Depot in Maryland . The government had stockpiled huge quantities of hospital supplies during the first World War , which Forbes unloaded for a fraction of their cost to the Boston firm of Thompson and Kelly at a time when the Veterans ' Bureau was buying supplies for the hospitals at a much higher price .

The check on Forbes ' authority at Perryville was Dr. Sawyer , Harding 's physician and chairman of the Federal Hospitalization Board . Sawyer told Harding that Forbes was selling valuable hospital supplies to an insider contractor . At first Harding did not believe it , but Sawyer secured proof in January 1923 . A shocked Harding , who alternated between rage and despondency over the corruption in his administration , summoned Forbes to the White House and demanded his resignation . Harding did not want an open scandal and allowed Forbes to flee to Europe , from where he resigned on February 15 , 1923 . In spite of Harding 's efforts , gossip about Forbes ' activities resulted in the Senate ordering an investigation two weeks later , and in mid @-@ March , Cramer committed suicide .

Mortimer was willing to tell all , as Forbes had had an affair with his wife (which also broke up the Forbes marriage) . The construction executive was the star witness at the hearings in late 1923 , after Harding 's death . Forbes returned from Europe to testify , but convinced few , and in 1924 , he and John W. Thompson , of Thompson ? Black , were tried in Chicago for conspiracy to defraud the government . Both were convicted and sentenced to two years in prison . Forbes began to serve his sentence in 1926 ; Thompson , who had a bad heart , died that year before commencing his . According to Trani and Wilson , " One of the most troublesome aspects of the Harding presidency was that he appeared to be far more concerned with political liabilities of a scandal than in securing justice . "

= = Extramarital affairs = =

Harding had an extramarital affair with Carrie Fulton Phillips of Marion , which lasted about fifteen years before ending in 1920 . Letters from Harding to Phillips were discovered by Harding biographer Francis Russell in the possession of Marion attorney Donald Williamson while Russell was researching his book in 1963 . Before that , the affair was not generally known . Williamson donated the letters to the Ohio Historical Society . Some there wanted the letters destroyed to preserve what remained of Harding 's reputation . A lawsuit ensued , with Harding 's heirs claiming copyright over the letters . The case was ultimately settled in 1971 , with the letters donated to the Library of Congress . They were sealed until 2014 , but before their opening , historians used copies at Case Western Reserve University and in Russell 's papers at the University of Wyoming . Russell concluded from the letters that Phillips was the love of Harding 's life ? " the enticements of his mind and body combined in one person " , but historian Justin P. Coffey in his 2014 review of Harding biographies criticizes him for " obsess [ing] over Harding 's sex life " .

The allegations of Harding 's other known mistress , Nan Britton , long remained uncertain . In 1927 , Britton , also a Marionite , published The President 's Daughter , alleging that her child Elizabeth Ann Blaesing had been fathered by Harding . The book , which was dedicated to " all unwedded mothers " and " their innocent children whose fathers are usually not known to the world " , was sold , like pornography , door @-@ to @-@ door wrapped in brown paper . The late president 's reputation had deteriorated since his death in 1923 , and many believed Britton . The public was tantalized by salacious details such as Britton 's claim that the two had sex in a White House closet , with Secret Service agents posted to ward off intruders . Although part of the public believed her , a jury found against her when she alleged she was libeled by a refutation of her book . According to Harding family lore , the late President was infertile and could not have fathered a child , having suffered from mumps in childhood ; Britton maintained that Harding had provided child support of \$ 500 per month for the daughter he never met , but she had destroyed romantic correspondence from him at his request .

Harding 's biographers , writing while Britton 's allegations remained uncertain , differed on their truth ; Russell believed them unquestioningly while Dean , having reviewed Britton 's papers at

UCLA , regarded them as unproven . In 2015 , the results of DNA comparisons between members of the Harding and Blaesing families conducted by ancestry.com indicated that Harding was Elizabeth 's father . Sinclair wondered that Harding 's infidelity was held so much against him , given that Grover Cleveland was elected president in 1884 although it was known he had a mistress and may have fathered a son out of wedlock .

= = Historical view = =

Upon his death , Harding was deeply mourned . He was called a man of peace in many European newspapers ; American journalists praised him lavishly , with some describing him as having given his life for his country . His associates were stunned by his demise ; Daugherty wrote , " I can hardly write about it or allow myself to think about it yet " . Hughes stated , " I cannot realize that our beloved Chief is no longer with us " .

Hagiographic accounts of Harding 's life quickly followed his death , such as Joe Mitchell Chapple 's *Life and Times of Warren G. Harding* , *Our After @-@ War President* (1924) . By then , the scandals were breaking , and the Harding administration soon became a byword for corruption in the view of the public . Works written in the late 1920s helped shape Harding 's historical reputation : *Masks in a Pageant* by William Allen White mocked and dismissed Harding , as did Samuel Hopkins Adams ' fictionalized account of the Harding administration , *Revelry* . These books depicted Harding 's time in office as one of great presidential weakness . The publication of Nan Britton 's bestselling book alleging they had had an affair also lowered the late president in public esteem . President Coolidge , not wishing to be further associated with his predecessor , refused to dedicate the Harding Tomb . Hoover , Coolidge 's successor , was similarly reluctant , but with Coolidge in attendance presided over the dedication in 1931 . By that time , with the Great Depression in full swing , Hoover was nearly as discredited as Harding .

Adams continued to shape the negative view of Harding with several nonfiction works in the 1930s , culminating with *The Incredible Era ? The Life and Times of Warren G. Harding* (1939) in which he called his subject " an amiable , well @-@ meaning third @-@ rate Mr. Babbitt , with the equipment of a small @-@ town semi @-@ educated journalist ... It could not work . It did not work . " Dean deems the works of White and Adams " remarkably unbalanced and unfair accounts , exaggerating the negative , assigning responsibility to Harding for all wrongs , and denying him credit for anything done right . Today there is considerable evidence refuting their portrayals of Harding . Yet the myth has persisted . "

The opening of Harding 's papers for research in 1964 sparked a small spate of biographies , of which the most controversial was Russell 's *The Shadow of Blooming Grove* (1968) , which concluded that the rumors of black ancestry (the " shadow " of the title) deeply affected Harding in his formative years , causing both Harding 's conservatism and his desire to get along with everyone . Coffey faults Russell 's methods , and deems the biography " largely critical , though not entirely unsympathetic " . Murray 's *The Harding Era* (1969) took a more positive view of the president , and put him in the context of his times . Trani and Wilson faulted him for " a tendency to go overboard " in trying to connect Harding with the successful policies of cabinet officers , and for asserting , without sufficient evidence , that a new , more assertive Harding had emerged by 1923 .

More recently , there have been revisionist books on Harding . Robert Ferrell 's *The Strange Deaths of President Harding* (1996) , according to Coffey , " spends almost the entire work challenging every story about Harding and concludes that almost everything that is read and taught about his subject is wrong " . In 2004 , John Dean , noted for his involvement in another presidential scandal , Watergate , wrote the Harding volume in " *The American Presidents* " series of short biographies , edited by Arthur M. Schlesinger , Jr . Coffey deemed that book the most revisionist to date , and faults Dean for glossing over some unfavorable episodes in Harding 's life , like his silence during the 1914 Senate campaign , when his opponent Hogan was being attacked for his faith .

Harding has traditionally been ranked as one of the worst presidents . In a 1948 poll conducted by Harvard University , historian Arthur M. Schlesinger , Sr. conducted the first notable survey of scholars ' opinions of the presidents , Harding ranked last among the 29 presidents considered . He

has also been last in other polls since , which Ferrell attributes to scholars reading little but sensational accounts of Harding . Murray argued that Harding deserves more credit than historians have given , " he was certainly the equal of a Franklin Pierce , an Andrew Johnson , a Benjamin Harrison , or even a Calvin Coolidge . In concrete accomplishments , his administration was superior to a sizable portion of those in the nation 's history . " Coffey believes " the academic lack of interest in Harding has cost him his reputation , as scholars still rank Harding as nearly dead last among presidents " .

Murray argued that Harding sowed the seeds for his administration 's poor standing :

In the American system , there is no such thing as an innocent bystander in the White House . If Harding can rightly claim the achievements of a Hughes in State or a Hoover in Commerce , he must also shoulder responsibility for a Daugherty in Justice and a Fall in Interior . Especially must he bear the onus of his lack of punitive action against such men as Forbes and Smith . By his inaction , he forfeited whatever chance he had to maintain the integrity of his position and salvage a favorable image for himself and his administration . As it was , the subsequent popular and scholarly negative verdict was inevitable , if not wholly deserved .