In Search of Modern America: Mass Media and Presidential Elections in Genesee County, New York, 1860-1920

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Introduction

Newspapers in Genesee County are examples of the birth of a modern mass media that was emerging in American life in the nineteenth century. Given the limited time that can be devoted to this new form of communication, I will largely, but not exclusively, restrict myself to a handful of newspapers in the county between 1860 and 1920, such as *The Daily News*. Within that context, the area we will explore will be the presidential elections during this time period – with a single question in mind. How did *The Daily News*, and some other Genesee County newspapers, depict presidential elections between 1860 and 1920? How can we interpret those portrayals, and what does this tell us about life in Genesee County – and the nation at large – during this pivotal moment of upheaval and change?

Genesee County newspapers in this period are an example of the dramatic changes taking place in communications during the second half of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. But as numerous scholars have reminded us, this was also a period in which rural areas such as Genesee County, producing *The Daily News* and *The Progressive Batavian*, offered more than one newspaper that provided news about such events as presidential elections. In Genesee County, other newspapers offered insights into how presidential elections were perceived, such as *The Daily Republican Advocate*. While other forms of communications proliferated in the second half of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries – such as letter writing, postcards, and, eventually, telephones, telegraphs, photographs, and phonographs – none could match the daily contact people had with each other via the newspaper. Accordingly, it is fitting to examine how this pervasive form of publication

described the national elections of this most complex moment in the history of the United States.

Whether one looks at *The Daily Republican Advocate*, *The Progressive Batavian*, or *The Daily News*, it is clear that the newspaper – the first example of *mass* communication – is a cultural factor necessarily taken into account if one desires a more thorough comprehension of how the public view such important events as presidential elections. Just as today, newspapers are a common part of many people's lives. Similar to the media today, newspapers in Genesee County – and America at large in the period under examination – had an enormous influence on how individuals saw presidential elections. Indeed, they also served to express what many thought about those elections. For example, look at an excerpt from the May 21st, 1860 issue of *The Daily Republican Advocate* regarding the nomination of Abraham Lincoln as the Republican Party candidate for the presidency:

> Never, within our recollection, has a nomination been received with more general approbation and satisfaction than that made at Chicago. . . Next to Mr. Seward, we consider Mr. Lincoln the choice of the Republicans of the Empire State. They have long seen and admired his able and eloquent defense of the principles so dear to Republicans. His defence of the rights of the Free North against the arrogant demands of the Slavery Extentionists; his manly and thrilling eloquence. . . his pure and unblemished life, and his indomitable perseverance, have won for him a place in the hearts and affections of the People of this State. . .

Nowhere in this talk am I suggesting that newspaper depictions alone tell us everything about how people in Genesee County interpreted presidential

elections between 1860 and 1920. It is acknowledged that newspapers – like the mass media of the early twenty-first century – are riddled with bias and factual inaccuracies. As a result, they cannot – nor should they – form the sole basis in an evaluation of public opinion.

Nonetheless, the newspaper accounts examined in this study remain valuable historical sources for a consideration of how county residents viewed the national developments of their day. One could argue – as I will – that embedded in such newspapers as *The Daily Republican Advocate*, *The Progressive Batavian*, and *The Daily News* are popular perspectives on the presidential elections rarely if ever found anywhere else. We will see depicted personal narratives that most likely are unique to the newspapers. Maybe more importantly, the articles about the elections appearing in such newspapers were written *in their day* – they display an often graphic picture of Genesee County at that time, allowing us to get a sense of opinions circulating through society at the moment of national decisiveness. The newspapers of Genesee County both expressed opinion while simultaneously helping to shape that opinion. Taking into account the political orientation of the newspaper article under examination, the objective remained throughout to understand what is meant in terms of influence on the readership *and* its place as a record of Genesee County's past.

From this angle, newspapers such as those already alluded to permit us to see the development of political sentiments locally – and how those local sentiments correlated with national political trends at election time. This means not only looking at news articles, but additionally, at editorials and even advertisements, all of which will be done in this study. An exciting factor to keep in mind here is that a newspaper's understanding of presidential elections played no small role in deciding the eventual outcome – and historical consequence – of a particular election. Multiplied over many communities throughout the United States, one could begin to get a sense of an important factor – the mass media – in producing the national reality embodied in Election Day results.

Accordingly, tonight's talk is divided into nine sections. The media's depiction of the Civil War as it played out in 1860 and 1864 will first be examined. Secondly,

the effort called Reconstruction – and its eventual abandonment – will be scrutinized for the years 1868, 1872, and 1876. Thirdly, we will turn to the election years of 1880, 1884, and 1888, and ask how big business was portrayed within the arena of presidential politics. This will then take us to the election of 1892, which featured forms of agrarian protest particularly evident in rural Genesee County. Such a focus leads very quickly to the election of 1896, with its vivid debate about what the role of the federal government should be in a modern industrial society.

Maybe surprisingly, the focal point of federal government participation in American life draws us inexorably into a discussion of the creation of an overseas empire – and how that played out in the elections of 1900 and 1904. Because overseas expansion presented many challenges to traditional notions of American democracy, the question of where modern America should be going is one that unsurprisingly dominated the elections of 1908 and 1912. By the election of 1916, that question assumed burning, immediate relevancy as Europe was convulsed in a continental civil war called World War One. Having entered the trench warfare a year later, it is appropriate that the overriding theme of the 1920 election – can "normalcy" be returned to – is one that dominated the presidential election season. But before turning to the election of Warren G. Harding, it is necessary to begin our journey through media depictions of presidential elections during that most decisive of turning points in American history – the Civil War.

Electioneering in Wartime, 1860 and 1864

The newspapers of Genesee County portrayed the 1860 presidential contest in a manner that captured the national reality – that America's political system was split along sectional lines. In April of that year the Democrats convened in Charleston, South Carolina. A number of southerners insisted that the party must advocate that the federal government protect slavery in the territories. When other Democrats refused to do this, arguing instead for popular sovereignty – letting the people in the territory decide whether slavery should exist there – the first group left the convention. It was therefore decided to hold a second Democratic convention, in June, in Baltimore. When the Democrats nominated

Stephen Douglas for President – a candidate in favor of popular sovereignty – southern representatives left. Gathering in Richmond, Virginia, they nominated John C. Breckinridge, who endorsed a proslavery extension position for this second Democratic Party. *The Daily Republican Advocate* wrote extensively of this Democratic infighting, though one depiction in particular stands out. On July 6th, 1860, an article entitled "The Irrepressible Conflict" spoke of how sectional differences permeated not only the Republican and the Democratic parties as they stood in opposition to each other, but in addition, to how deep those sentiments ran within the Democratic Party itself:

> Our Democratic friends made considerable fuss at the announcement made some time since by William H. Seward, that there was an "irrepressible conflict" constantly going on between the two great characteristics of this country – Freedom and Slavery. . .
>
> But recent events have shown to the world that this same "irrepressible conflict" is raging in the very centre of the Democratic Party, and it has already caused a separation which no efforts of the party can put a stop to.

The Daily Republican Advocate then adds that the

> . . . feud between the two sections, all growing out of this same slavery question, is daily growing more intense and bitter, and it cannot be stopped.

Such divisiveness and acidity understandably encouraged the Republican Party in 1860. Disappointing the supporters of New York Senator William H. Seward, whose advocacy of civil rights for African-Americans, the protection of abolitionists, and intervention on behalf of free African-Americans enslaved in the South aroused the opposition of more moderate Republicans – the Republicans who nominated Abraham Lincoln. While also offering antislavery positions, he

lacked the perception of radicalism with which many viewed Seward. This relative moderation was written about much in such newspapers as *The Daily Republican Advocate*. Lincoln at this juncture steered a middle-of-the-road course between the advocacy of African-American equality – which he opposed – and the effort to spread slavery to western territories, which he also stood in opposition to. He feared the extension of slavery, but he also rejected the principle of racial equality. His argument against slavery's extension hence appeased those Republicans who also assumed the "normalcy" of racial inequality. He was viewed as someone capable of healing at a time of bitter division, as an excerpt from an article in *The Daily Republican Advocate* of August 8th, 1860 reveals. Lincoln was described as "just the man for the place he is named, and for the times." It was added that "the liberal and magnanimous spirit of the man" was just what a divided nation needed – his character featured "dignity and honor to himself, and usefulness and satisfaction to the country, and the whole country." But maybe the excerpt shown below, from that same *Daily Republican Advocate*, published on February 18th, 1861 – shortly before he took the Oath of Office on March 4th – captures more clearly the image of Lincoln as a national healer:

> Our confidence in the wisdom and patriotism of President Lincoln, always strong, is reassured. We see, in what he has said, the workings of his mind – the pulsations of his heart. Both are sound.

With the rumblings of war on the not too distant horizon, the article goes on to add this:

> When he reaches Washington, goes on board the Ship Constitution, and takes the Helm, confidence will be restored. Her Officers and Crew, now with arms folded, with heavy cheers, will go to "work with a will." Let the following intimation from the President Elect be acted upon, and in six weeks we shall have a country and an Administration worthy of the

highest and best hopes of the departed Patriots and Statesmen who formed this "more perfect Union:" –

"If all don't join now to save the good old Ship of the Union, (on) this voyage, nobody will have a chance to pilot her on another voyage."

As we all know, the hopes for national reconciliation were dashed with the onset of war. By the election of 1864, then, the imagery surrounding the presidential election was devoid of the hopeful optimism still in evidence as late as 1861. Years of savage fighting affecting growing numbers of families produced a more hardened outlook that found expression in the portrayals of the candidates in a national election. Maybe a better way of understanding the national mood – one discernible in Genesee County – is to see the setting in 1864 as one featuring war weariness. This exhaustion had roots in the simple fact that the war had gone on far longer than many expected. But other factors apart from the sheer passing of time also contributed to this general fatigue. There were Democrats in the north who felt anxious about the war aims of President Lincoln. If the purpose of the conflict was the preservation of the Union, they asked, then how does one explain the Emancipation Proclamation? Was the elimination of slavery the real objective of the Lincoln administration? To complicate matters, Radical Republicans asserted that the freeing of the slaves was not being accomplished soon enough – and the President's views on the conditions for readmitting Confederate states to the Union were far too kind. To make matters worse, both of these groups were appalled at Lincoln's wartime suspension of civil liberties.

Not surprisingly, then, a number of challenges arose in the Republican Party, though Lincoln was able to secure nomination at the Republican Convention in Baltimore. The Democrats remained opposed to emancipation, though they too were split. Some favored a negotiated settlement with the south, while others favored a continuation of the struggle against the Confederacy. This latter group of Democrats found a leader in General George B. McClellan. In the March 12th,

1864 issue of Batavia's *Spirit of the Times*, the war weariness evident in Genesee County that helped to set the stage for the 1864 election, and those supportive of a candidate who would continue the war and yet stand in opposition to a continuation of a Republican administration, is evident in this short article:

> The Republican Party, as a party, is abandoned. It was a fraud in the beginning; it obtained power by fraudulent pretences, and it disappears with the destruction of the Union. When it was organized, it put forth among other objects, this – "To defend the rights of the States against the encroachments of Federal power in the hands of men unrestrained by either political or moral principles."

Nonetheless, the piece continues,

> Turn to the government at Washington, and the Congress, over which the founders of the late Republican Party dominate, and we find there unlimited encroachment on the rights of the States, and power in the hands of men who defiantly disregard political and moral principles.

In his personal dislike of Lincoln, McClellan personified the loathing of McClellan Democrats for both President Lincoln and those who advised him. This was evident in the *Spirit of the Times* in particular. While it is hard to imagine now – given the aura that surrounds Lincoln – Lincoln, as late as the early fall of 1864, did not assume that he would be reelected. Much of this was rooted in a continued opposition to the war against the Confederacy in the north. For instance, look at an article entitled "War Horrors and Suffering in Georgia," an excerpt of which is shown below from the July 9th, 1864 issue:

> Our men have in too many instances burned

> down the houses, destroyed their contents, driving their wretched inmates houseless, homeless, starving outcasts, to perish of cold and hunger. I have met frenzied groups of affrighted, starving women and children huddled together in the woods, where many of them perish of cold and want. Such sad pictures of old and young – grey haired matrons and timid girls – clinging together in hopeless misery, may be imagined, but cannot be described.

For the supporters of McClellan, such images reflected poorly on Lincoln, and the situation was only made worse by a belief in pervasive corruption, as evidenced in that same issue on the previous page:

> The *N.Y. World* believes that an investigation would show that of the $125,000,000 appropriated for recruits, at least one half of it found its way into the pockets of the fellows who are brawling for Lincoln and Johnson.

Nonetheless, President Lincoln easily prevailed in the general election, receiving 212 of the 233 total electoral votes. His subsequent assassination, less than two months into his second term, brought Andrew Johnson to the presidency and helped to set the stage for the election of 1868.

The Elections of 1868, 1872, and 1876: Reconstruction and its Eventual Abandonment

Ulysses S. Grant in 1868 was easily one of the most popular men in the northern states. This wartime general was courted by both Republicans and Democrats as a potential presidential candidate. Because of his differences with President Andrew Johnson, however, he was successfully recruited as a presidential nominee by the Republican Party. Grant, the successful Union Army commander, seemed to be a perfect fit for the Republican Party and its platform

in 1868. First and foremost, his slogan of "Let us have peace" was one deeply yearned for in a nation that had just passed through a war that eventually proved to be the costliest conflict ever in United States history – total battlefield casualties amounted to about 620,000 lives. Just as crucially, he embodied the Republican advocacy of Reconstruction – that period of American life between 1865 and 1877 when the U.S. Constitution was rewritten – along with a multitude of American laws – to ensure the basic rights of freedmen, or former slaves, and the existence of biracial governments in the former Confederacy. Grant's support of the Freedman's Bureau, a federal agency designed to do such things as establish schools, provide medical attention and negotiate labor contracts for former slaves, put him in good graces with Republicans intent upon a rapid and radical transformation of the south.

Not surprisingly, the division in the country at large over the goals and tempo of Reconstruction was a major theme in the 1868 election. Genesee County was no exception here. Its newspapers expressed this division over Reconstruction – and over the candidacy of Grant as well. For example, look at the critical stance articulated in the *Spirit of the Times* regarding Reconstruction in an issue published on April 18th, 1868, entitled "Degeneracy of the Times:"

> It appears to us as if the golden age of the Republic had passed. . . The dignity and character of our Legislative bodies has been nearly destroyed and the places of our great men, (such) as Webster, Clay, Calhoun, and Wright, are now occupied by fourth-rate politicians. . .

The article goes on to add this:

> Corruption, public and private everywhere prevails, the country is loaded with debt almost to bankruptcy, cities overrun with beggars, poor-houses crowded;

> prisons overflowing. . . The state
> and national public offices are
> sought merely for gain. . .

This dismal view of Reconstruction's consequences for the United States became part and parcel of what the critics thought of Grant. This is revealed in the following excerpt from that same *Spirit of the Times* in a June 6th, 1868 article featuring a letter from no less a person than the widow of Abraham Lincoln. Mary Todd Lincoln, in her opposition to a Grant presidency, focused on his alleged insensitivity to the needs of ordinary Americans – the same kind of charge made by many critics of Reconstruction:

> He is a butcher, and is not fit to be at
> the head of an army. And when the
> President (Lincoln) said, by way of
> defending the General, but he has
> been very successful, she replied,
> yes, he generally manages to claim
> a victory, but such a victory! He loses
> two men for the enemy's one. If the
> war should remain four years longer,
> and he be in power, he would
> depopulate the North. According to
> his tactics there is nothing under the
> heavens to do but to march a new line
> of men up in front of the rebel
> breastworks, to be shot down as fast as
> they take their position. Grant, I repeat,
> is an obstinate fool and a butcher.

Such unabashed criticism of Reconstruction and Grant – not to mention the Republican Party – was indicative locally of just how divided the nation still was three years after the end of the Civil War. Conversely, those supportive of Reconstruction and Grant were equally strident in their opposition to the Democratic Party and its candidate, Horatio Seymour, a former governor of New York. A reluctant candidate, he was up against a popular wartime hero and a

media largely supportive of Grant. In Genesee County, one newspaper, the *Progressive Batavian*, was especially supportive of both Reconstruction and a Grant presidency. A regular procession of articles spoke highly of the effects Reconstruction was having in the former Confederacy. For example, look at the article below from the June 26th, 1868 issue. Addressing free labor and the sanctity of contract formation in Mississippi, we find that

> Among the old laws of Mississippi was one which compelled free negroes to accept employment upon any terms which might be offered, no matter how low, on pain of being arrested as a vagrant, and sold into servitude. Gov. Humphrey of that State, a rebel sympathizer and anti-reconstruction man, lately undertook to enforce these obsolete laws, and refusing to desist therefrom on the request of the Department Commander was removed from his office.

Coupled with consistent and unbridled support of Reconstruction – the *Progressive Batavian* featured such statements as "we have gained for four millions of people the blessings of liberty and education, where the darkness of ignorance and the miseries of bondage prevailed for centuries" (July 10th, 1868) – *The Progressive Batavian* merged the blessings of Reconstruction with the record of Grant. The consistent theme was that Reconstruction, orchestrated by a Grant administration, would bring the harmony and peace so desired subsequent to the carnage of the Civil War. As made clear at the end of a long peace appearing under the title of "Democratic Programme" on August 21st, 1868, if the people

> desire that the sun of peace which now appeared above the horizon of our National Sky, shall continue to rise and shine with increasing strength and beauty and blessedness, they will vote for Grant . . .

But the optimism, hope, and trust exhibited by Grant's supporters in the 1868 election was one dashed even before his term of office ended. By the 1872 election the will to continue Reconstruction was ebbing, and a decline in support for Reconstruction effort in the south was made all the more visible when combined with a simultaneous anxiety about incompetence and outright corruption in Grant's administration. Out of this emerged a split within the Republican Party, which witnessed the birth of what came to be called "Liberal Republicans." Most notably, this faction called for an end to Reconstruction and, most galling to other Republicans, a recovery of the rights of the former Confederates. The candidate of the Liberal Republicans, Horace Greeley, was also the nominee of the Democratic Party. This tumultuous election also saw seven other candidates – including Victoria Woodhull of the National Woman's Suffrage Association and her running mate, the former slave Frederick Douglass.

There is not enough time to address how Genesee County newspapers addressed all of these candidates in parties ranging from "Bourbon Democratic" to "Prohibition." Accordingly, we will restrict our inquiry to the two major candidates – Grant and Greeley. It is striking to see how the *Progressive Batavian*, though it continued to support Grant, had nonetheless come to see Reconstruction in a far less favorable light than it had four years earlier. A sense of despair permeated the pages of what was not long before an optimistic and hopeful series of depictions of Reconstruction. A fascinating example of this is an article entitled "The Condition of the South," which appeared on May 3rd, 1872:

> It is needless here to trace the political history of reconstruction, or to apportion the blame for its mistakes. It is enough to say that in a point of fact, the state governments of the south have very largely fallen into the hands of ignorant and knavish men. Public money has been wasted and stolen by wholesale.

The article goes on:

> A proud and high spirited population have seen

> their places of trust and honor filled by foreign adventurers and uneducated freedmen. The old political leaders in whom the people had confidence and who alone had experience in the conduct of affairs have been excluded from office by congress. The course of politics has tended to deepen the antagonism between the former masters and the blacks . . .

Therefore,

> The best service that can be rendered to the southern people politically is to let them alone . . . There should be no more federal interference with local affairs. Political salvation for the south can only come through her own people.

"There should be no more federal interference with local affairs." What a dramatic turn only four years after an equally dramatic endorsement of what is now acknowledged to be a failed policy! Ironically, though, the *Progressive Batavian* did not abandon President Grant. Neither did some of his supporters in Genesee County. On September 13th, 1872, readers were told that in Bergen, "politics run high here now." The short piece continued:

> A hand to hand contest between a Republican and a Greeley man occurred in the Post Office a few mornings since. As usual, the Republican was victorious . . .

Such levity momentarily eased the unrelenting seriousness of the 1872 election. In its endorsement of President Grant for a second term on May 31st, 1872, the *Progressive Batavian* looked forward to another Grant administration – one that with its setbacks stood for a future that will nonetheless be bright:

> The record of the Republican Party present some of the brightest pages in our nation's

> history, but in these days it is not what *has* been but what is to be that will be potential with the voters. We must stand upon a platform of higher, better, and bolder principles than those advocated by our opponents . . .

"Our opponents," of course, meant more than anyone else Horace Greeley. His Liberal Republican Party did not see a better future with a second Grant administration. Instead, as they saw it, it would be more of the same corruption and civil service patronage that, in this view, made the last four years some of the darkest in American history. It was this perspective that was attacked in another Genesee County newspaper, *The Republican Advocate*, which remained a strong advocate for President Grant in the 1872 election. Despite the charges of corruption permeating his administration, mainstream Republicans refused to abandon what was understood as an overall successful presidency – one that deserved a second term. A strong example of this continued faith in President Grant showed itself in an April 11th, 1872 article critical of Greeley's supporters, entitled "Horace Greeley's Constituency." Responding to the charge that Grant's administration is a failure, *The Republican Advocate* retorted:

> "Failure?" how? In what? Have we not peace and plenty in the land? Is not our flag displayed and respected on every sea? What foreign foe molests or threatens us? Who fears insurrection at home, or invasion from abroad? In which of our thirty-six States are the masses wanting work, discontented, suffering?

The confidence in Grant expressed in *The Republican Advocate* continued among mainstream Republicans in 1876 with the nomination of Rutherford B. Hayes. Nonetheless, that confidence could not obscure the fact that corruption was a major campaign issue, and it was one that had emerged out of the scandals

that had in fact plagued the Grant presidency. Indeed, it should not be surprising then that the Democratic Party candidate, Samuel J. Tilden of New York, was someone who had been instrumental in the prosecution of corrupt New York City politicians, such as the notorious William M. Tweed. Hence both parties were in agreement about the need for civil service reform – and, by 1876, about the necessity of ending Reconstruction.

But despite agreement on such key issues as Reconstruction and the need for honest government, the Republicans and the Democrats waged a relentless campaign of mud-slinging that few elections in U.S. history have seen. Democrats under former Governor Tilden spoke consistently about Republican corruption. Not to be outdone, Republicans under Hayes waved "the bloody shirt," alleging that all Democrats were Confederate sympathizers. These bitter national divisions were played out on a regular basis in Genesee County newspapers. For example, look at The *Progressive Batavian*. Here one can get a sense of just how deep emotions ran in 1876. On the one hand, there was a celebration of the triumphs of the Republican Party in an issue dated February 18th, 1876:

> The *New York Herald* summarizes the accomplishments of the Republican Party thus: "It has done noble deeds. It saved the Union; destroyed secession; emancipated the slaves; lifted the Republic from the position of a group of contending angry states, to that of a proud, defiant nation, ranking with the great powers of the world. We are a nation, and this we owe to the Republican Party.

Yet this same newspaper also stressed just how disloyal Democrats were to the Republic, hiding behind the cover of what purported to be a legitimate political party. Hence, the country remained as threatened as ever, as revealed in this May 19th, 1876 article:

> The Democrats . . . are going into the coming Presidential campaign with the single cry of fraud. In the uproar and the confusion of that clamorous change, they hope to drown

> their own shortcomings and induce the people to trust them with power . . .
>
> Have you never developed any corruption? Have *you* never had any rascals, and, what is more, stood by them when their rascalities were known? If the question be simply one of honest administration, what claim have *you* to public confidence? And besides, important as that issue is, it is not the only one at stake . . .

In conclusion, "what does the mastery of the rebel element in your Committees portend?" If Democrats remain very suspect only eleven years after the end of the Civil War, then Republicans too remained equally questionable – albeit for different reasons. The charge of corruption was one relentlessly made by the Democrats, and this too showed up locally – in that case, in *The Republican Advocate*. While the general tone of this newspaper was supportive of the Republican Party, there was still, nevertheless, periodic criticism of the corruption discernible in the Grant administration. For instance, look at the following comments published on April 27th, 1876. They are noteworthy for their subtle, yet pointed suggestions:

> In brief, the election of President Grant was a disappointment to many Republicans, who looked further into the future than he did. They proceeded to lecture him for manifold minor errors, mistakes of dignity rather than of principle.

The conclusion was whether the Republican Party

> shall be frittered away on the vaguest prospects of a reform spirit not yet intelligible in quantity, but which may open a breach for the adversary to enter.

In order to prevent that "adversary" from entering – in other words, the Democratic Party – the Republicans in 1880 turned to James A. Garfield from Ohio.

Big Business and Presidential Elections: 1880, 1884, and 1888

Be it the Republican candidate Garfield, or the Democratic candidate Winfield Scott Hancock, these candidates were in agreement about immigration from China. In fact, both parties promised to limit Chinese immigration in order to placate native-born Americans in the West, who believed that the Chinese depressed wages. Such unions as the Knights of Labor supported this position – which became federal law in 1882 under Garfield's successor, President Chester A. Arthur, and which came to be known as the Chinese Exclusion Act. Such groups as the Knights of Labor believed that industrialists had advocated Chinese immigration as a means of driving down labor costs.

The point is that the 1880 election was the first election in which immigration had become a key issue – and it was one in which both major party candidates were in agreement. Not surprisingly, these sentiments were expressed locally in Genesee County newspapers. *The Progressive Batavian* is a case in point and, as we shall see, the call for Chinese exclusion on the part of both Republicans and Democrats was a striking repudiation of a classical liberalism, or the idea of a limited government – despite the expansion of federal immigration law – that would reach a frenzied peak in the election of Grover Cleveland only four years later in 1884. The possibility of such an irony, of course, rested upon the popular sentiments articulated in such media as local newspapers. For example, look at the anxiety evident about immigration in general that appeared in the June 4th, 1880 issue:

> The tide of immigration rises like a flood. Just think of it – nearly 60,000 foreigners poured in upon us during the month of May!

And then, in stark contrast, that same *Progressive Batavian*, on July 2nd, 1880, in an article entitled "Immigration Statistics," spoke highly of *some* immigrants. In this instance, immigrants from Scotland, England, Germany, France, Russia, and Scandinavia, are depicted in glowing terms:

> A very small proportion of these emigrants are of the pauper element, the majority of them being industrious working people, who start immediately for the West and become respected persons.

The article continued:

> The class of foreigners landing on our shores has been steadily improving of late years, and so marked has the improvement become, especially in the case of the Irish, that there is now no necessity for apprehension as to the beneficial results of the increasing tide of emigration.

But when it comes to Chinese immigrants *The Progressive Batavian* offers a decidedly different perspective. Not long after this article appeared another one emerged – on July 16th, 1880 – entitled "Married a Heathen." In this account, a young woman, "whose maiden name was Braun," married a naturalized Chinese immigrant, whose family was described in the harshest of terms:

> The young wife's transition from the very comfortable home of her family, where she was surrounded by congenial friends and all the usual blessings of (an) American home – life, to the stifling hut of the Mongolian, with its mob of chattering yellow-skinned creatures, should, it would seem, have soon dispelled her silly romance.

All of this culminated in two articles in *The Progressive Batavian* on October 14th, 1881. Depicting the Chinese in terms that were far less flattering than that applied routinely to other immigrant groups – at least until this period – these two articles captured the kind of popular sentiment making the Chinese Exclusion Act possible. One, entitled "Chinamen's Wives," contained this excerpt:

> A Chinaman, when anxious to have a wife of his own nation . . . sends a letter to an agent in Hong Kong . . .
>
> The price of a Chinese woman, delivered in Sydney, is 38 pounds, but two Chinese women only cost 52 pounds. Therefore, the heathen Chinese import the women in couples. The importer never sees his women before they arrive, and then he generally selects the best looking one. The other is shown around to a number of well-to-do Chinese, and, after they have inspected her she is submitted to what may be called public auction.

Two columns across, we find a second article, which again situates the Chinese immigrant in a sinister light:

> A Chinese witness in a Philadelphia court, after taking an oath with a particularly loud kiss of the Bible, was asked if he considered bound thereby to tell the truth. He complacently answered that the Bible was no more to him than the lawyer's old white hat.

The description added that

> The only form of oath that he would respect . . . was to cut off a chicken's head while repeating certain words in Chinese.

But the call for Chinese exclusion, predicated upon such popular sentiments as those shown above, yielded in the wake of its passage to a more uniform classical liberalism exhibited in both major parties by the 1884 election. As both Democrats and Republicans were in general agreement about the desirability of limited government, the only spirited issue that remained was one of personal character – which translated into the first Democratic victory in a presidential election in twenty-eight years. Both the Democrat Grover Cleveland, and the Republican, James G. Blaine, stressed a fiscal conservatism going to the heart of classical liberalism. Both candidates articulated a belief that government should be as absent as possible in a well-functioning capitalist economy. Accordingly, the role of government was to orchestrate law and order and to define – and protect – property rights serving as the anchor for individual freedom. When government is involved in one's life, it was asserted, it should be to promote self-interest; self-interest consistently balanced with the needs of society. For example, *The Progressive Batavian*, while strongly supportive of Blaine, nonetheless applauded the Democratic Platform as it applied to the perceived sanctity of limited government. On July 18th, 1884, there was no appreciable distinction between the Democratic and Republican positions on the issues of property protection, taxation, and free trade and the ability of American workers to successfully compete with their foreign counterparts:

> All taxation shall be limited to the requirements of economical Government. The necessary reduction in taxation can and must be effected without depriving American labor of the ability to compete successfully with foreign labor . . .
>
> While we favor all legislation which will tend to the equitable distribution of property, to the prevention of monopoly, and to the strict

> enforcement of individual rights against corporate abuses, we hold that the welfare of society depends upon a scrupulous regard for the rights of property as defined by law.

Therefore, the biggest issue in 1884 was the relative individual merits of Blaine and Cleveland. Both candidates reeled from the effects of sordid depictions – especially within the context of late Victorian culture. On August 22nd, 1884, *The Progressive Batavian* ran this piece, an excerpt from which is shown below:

> . . . the *Indianapolis Sentinel* contained an editorial charging that James G. Blaine seduced his wife before marriage and then only married her at the muzzle of a shotgun.

And then we find an equally scathing article on Cleveland in that same newspaper's October 31st edition, in a not too subtle reference to his earlier relationship with Maria Halpin and the birth of a son:

> . . . the facts, as known and admitted on all hands, utterly and absolutely (render) unfit Mr. Cleveland to be a candidate for the Presidency of this great Nation. Common decency, to say nothing about Christianity, demanded that his name should at once have been withdrawn, and someone put in his place, whose candidacy would not be an insult to the people . . .

The article then adds this:

> We call upon the ministry of the land to teach their people that partisanship cannot obliterate the Seventh Commandment from the law of God; that the family, environed by the sacred moralities which alike define its function and guard its purity and honor, is the unit of the

> state and the sheet anchor of the social system;
> and that the man who, to gratify his base passions,
> becomes the betrayer and corrupter of womanhood,
> is not to be honored or trusted in any sphere of
> life.

While both Blaine and Cleveland squared off on moral grounds, they nonetheless remained connected to the basic ideals of classical liberalism. Government remained little more than a neutral referee on the playing field of industrial capitalism. That changed in the 1888 election. Despite the lingering hostility in some circles to Cleveland on the grounds of moral principles, the focus shifted sharply, and was confined almost exclusively to the question of just how much of a role the federal government should play in the economic arena. Nowhere was this clearer than in the issue of tariffs.

The Republican candidate, Benjamin Harrison, called for unprecedented government intervention in the marketplace via a policy of protectionism. The incumbent, Cleveland, remained an unabashed free trader. In line with his idea of a greater role for the federal government, Harrison called for increased aid for veterans – which Cleveland opposed. The stage was set for an election that was as much about – indeed, more than – a choice between candidates. It was instead a referendum on the appropriate place for the federal government in the modern industrial state that was America by the end of the 1880s.

Not surprisingly, this national issue was hotly debated in Genesee County. Once again, we turn to *The Progressive Batavian*. During the 1888 election a consistent theme in the coverage of the candidates was their difference regarding the proper role of government with respect to support for veterans and tariff policy. On December 6th, 1888, in an article entitled “Republican Doctrine,” the question of the tariff as one understood along party lines was laid out in the clearest of terms:

> The protective system is part of Republican
> policy, and, just as surely, hostility to
> protection is part of Democratic policy . . .

Such a stark contrast was of course being presented, in this instance, subsequent to President-elect Harrison's victory a month before. But the divisiveness of this controversy had been long discussed in the months leading up to the election. On October 28th, 1887, in an article about a Republican Party rally in Batavia, the focus was on one of the speakers. Congressman J.C. Burrows, of Michigan, thus spoke of the necessity of high tariffs:

> It was replete with facts and impregnable with logic. It presented the benefits which a protective tariff confers upon all classes, manufacturers, agriculturalists, mechanics, and day laborers . . .

On the 14th of October, 1887, the focus was on the opposition of veterans to President Cleveland and his Democratic Party. The thrust of the anger was Cleveland's rejection of veterans' pensions – and his replacement of those veterans of the Union army holding government positions with those of decidedly Confederate sympathies. A short time before this article, on September 23rd, 1887, *The Progressive Batavian* emphasized just how destructive free trade is to domestic industry and its American workers in a long article entitled "Free-Trade Nonsense." Two weeks before, on September 9th, 1887, an article entitled "The Nation's Wealth. How the United States Grew Rich in Spite of all Obstacles," emphasized the role played by tariffs in promoting economic expansion and "unparalleled prosperity." It was also an abundance protected by veterans, and one which Democrats rejected in their repudiation of both the tariff and the veteran. On September 2nd, 1887, *The Progressive Batavian* ran an article entitled "An Unprovoked Insult. A most Surprising Outbreak of Democratic Hatred of Old Soldiers," in which there was a charge that the Democrats had circulated a rumor that Civil War veterans of the Union Army had conspired to assassinate President Cleveland. Such vitriolic articles – to name but a few in the time leading up to the 1888 election – are an indication of just how bitter the conflict between Democrats and Republicans had become. That clash widened by the next presidential election, in 1892. As in other parts of the nation, farmers increasingly looked upon both Democrats and Republicans as increasingly irrelevant, and

sought instead a party more representative of rural, agricultural interests. Hence the People's Party, more popularly known as the Populists, made their presence felt – and in a rural area such as Genesee County, that presence was felt very much indeed.

Agrarian Protest and the 1892 Election

While the Democratic Party candidate, the former President Grover Cleveland, won a narrow victory in New York State, a third-party candidate received a small but noticeable tally of votes. James Weaver, a Populist Party candidate, embodied the frustration and anger of rural farmers who felt left out of the mainstream political discussions of such issues as tariff policy. That rural anxiety led to Weaver's victory in five western and mid-western states – and a very vocal presence in Genesee County. That presence was once again discernible in local newspapers – such as *The Progressive Batavian*. By the early summer of 1892 The People's Party Convention – complete with its entire platform – was found on the front page of the July 8th issue. A positive portrayal of the party and its presidential nominee stood in stark contrast to an article on the Democrats positioned next to it – "A Purposeless Party" was the title given to a depiction of the Democrats and their leader, the former President Cleveland.

By July 29th the fears of local farmers who questioned the logic of free trade and the consequent lack of protectionism advocated by the Democrats was becoming ever clearer. In an article entitled "The Farmers and the Tariff" we discover this:

> The American home market is the best in the world; and it is so because of the prosperity of our manufacturing, mining, and kindred industries, and the farmer who would vote to break down these industries and throw our markets wide open to the competition of the world would be about as wise as the farmer who having superior pasture for his stock should tear down his fences and let all his neighbor's cattle in.

Shortly after, on August 5th, *The Progressive Batavian* reminded readers of how much protectionism shielded local farmers. Alluding to the Tariff Act of 1890, or the McKinley Tariff, the readership saw that subsequent to "the passage of the McKinley law (there) has been an increase average of 18.67 percent in the selling price of agricultural products . . ." A week later, on August 12th, the very independence of the farmer remained predicated upon tariff walls in a piece called "The Living Issue. Protection the True Principle of American Independence." Two weeks later, on August 26th, once again readers of *The Progressive Batavian* were reminded in "Compare the Prices" that:

> The price of farm products everywhere in Canada is very much less than on this side; and what farmer is there who has not sense enough to know that but for our protective tariff these farm products of our Canadian neighbors would be flooded in upon us, having the effect of reducing the prices.

In conclusion, that the farmer in Genesee County

> Gets higher prices for his farm products than does his neighbors across the border is due to "Republican tariff legislation." The McKinley tariff is doing in this matter just what the Republicans claimed that it would.

However, for some readers, the Republican Party – while favored over the Democrats due, in part, to the desire for protectionism – was nonetheless a political party not going far enough. The Populist Party was therefore the favorite for these farmers in particular, as we see in the published election results in *The Progressive Batavian* on November 11th, 1892. While the Democrats regained control of the White House under the free trader Grover Cleveland, the Populist, Prohibition, and Socialist parties all registered a noticeable number of votes. For example, while Republican candidate Harrison received a majority of the votes – 1,049 – the aforementioned three "third" parties enjoyed a combined total of 774 votes (Socialist 171; People's Party 181; and Prohibition Party 422). Hence the

obvious question for the future was clear – what if these smaller parties combined forces and situated themselves in one of the two major parties? Was such a development possible? The answer to such questions began to be answered four years later.

Silverites, Goldbugs, and the Boy Orator – the Election of 1896

By 1896 the growing anxiety felt by farming communities nationwide was discernible in Genesee County as well. Despite efforts such as the tariff to keep crop prices high, those prices were nonetheless falling by 1896 – alongside rising debt levels that translated into what was clearly an economic crisis in agrarian America. Not surprisingly, growing numbers of farmers saw political action as a necessary remedy. Like employees in urban factories, some saw organized action as a way to address the power of railroads, bankers, and even the global commodities market. But unlike city-based factory workers, farmers were a distinctly individualistic lot. This value, combined with the sheer physical isolation of farmers, made concerted organization difficult – but not impossible.

Realizing the need to use their numbers in a unified effort to protect the interests of farmers, the National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry – popularly known as the Grange – was founded in 1867 under the leadership of the Department of Agriculture's Oliver H. Kelley. While starting as an educational and social effort to transcend the loneliness of the isolated farmer, the "Grange" (from the word granary) expanded its objectives to include farmer-owned cooperatives designed for the sale and purchase of crops. Over time, the Granges evolved into the Farmers' Alliances, which increasingly became more politically militant. Searching for political mechanisms in order to carry out an agenda stressing the need to address chronic indebtedness, falling crop prices, and gender inequality, they became known for involvement in minor political parties. An organization open to rural men and women over sixteen years of age and exhibiting "good moral character," a belief in God, and "industrious habits," they critiqued what they perceived to be the tyranny of big banks, big corporations, big railroads, and a federal government that sided with all three. They supported such figures as the Socialist Party leader Eugene V. Debs. In a January 17th, 1896

article on the front page of *The Batavian*, we find an article entitled "Farmers Alliance. Demands and Condemnations of the State Body. Efforts to be Made to Consolidate all Similar Organizations – Telegrams Sent to Debs," we are told that

> Action was taken looking toward the consolidation of the various farmers' organizations . . .There are four of these organizations in this state: the Patrons of Industry, the Grange, the Farmers' Alliance, and the Farmers' League, all striving to accomplish practically the same results, but failing to influence legislations . .

In order to avoid a "further effort to mortgage the labor of future generations for the benefit of the money loaning classes of the world," the Farmers' Alliance sought more political influence by moving into mainstream political parties. Here economic events prompted a wholesale movement of farmers into the Democratic camp in 1896.

Principal among these developments was of course the deep depression of 1893. One cause of the downturn was the failure of a major English bank. This prompted a good number of British investors to discard their American holdings in return for gold. To stop the drain on the U.S. gold reserve, President Cleveland, with the backing of many Democrats, was able to stop the issuance of silver notes that were redeemable in gold. Those seeking a more fluid money supply stepped up their agitation for silver coinage – more money in circulation meant that it was easier for hard-pressed farmers to pay down their debt. The Populist Party believed that both Democrats and Republicans would avoid the controversial issue of silver coinage.

But instead, the Republicans came out strongly for a gold-based currency – which had the effect of contracting the money supply and accelerating the depression. On the other hand, the Democrats split on the silver issue. This opened the door to pro-silver forces and the eventual nomination of William Jennings Bryan, a thirty-six year old fervent Baptist Congressman from Nebraska who electrified the Democratic Convention with his famous utterance that

> You shall not press down upon the brow of labor
> this crown of thorns. You shall not crucify mankind
> upon a cross of gold!

When the Populist Party met, it was clear that they too would nominate the silverite Bryan as their candidate – which they did. In the months leading up to the election the pages of *The Batavian* were filled with heated discussions comparing the worth of silver or gold-based currency. These exchanges exuded an intensity far beyond mere depictions of money supplies – for what was at stake were deeper issues regarding the class position of ordinary, hard-working Americans. On August 21st, 1896, *The Batavian* ran a long article entitled "Bryan's Election. Its Immediate Effect Upon the Nation's Finances." At one point, we read this:

> Should Mr. Bryan be elected his administration would
> come in committed, in the most solemn manner,
> against the maintenance of the gold standard. He and
> his supporters believe that the policy of the present
> administration, and of all previous administrations, in
> maintaining the gold standard is, and always has been,
> an outrageous oppression of the people.

In conclusion, then,

> He would understand that he was elected to
> deliver the people from the oppression of
> "the money power."

Not surprisingly, that same newspaper also ran strident articles outlining the opposition to Bryan and his Democratic/Populist Party. Only a few weeks before, on July 24th, *The Batavian* published a whole series of articles supportive of the Republicans under William McKinley that had appeared around the country. For example, we find this from the *Chicago Times-Herald*:

> If Mr. Bryan had not found a national convention
> (to be) a vacuum and filled it by the combined

> power of lungs and sophistry he would not have been nominated for president of the United States . . .No nomination that was possible to the populistic democracy which controlled the Chicago convention would have been likely on sober second thought to be acceptable to the American people.

But that critique was mild compared to one that appeared on July 17th, in which Bryan was pilloried:

> "No crown of thorns, no cross of gold," says Nominee Bryan – which has caused it to be remembered that the selfish, hungry greed of Judas for silver was what betrayed innocent blood to the "crown of thorns" and the "cross."

Yet, the passions surrounding the national discussion of tariffs and the money supply gave way, a short time later, to yet other controversies. These older issues yielded to an equally pressing concern – the place of the United States in the world order. The Spanish-American War of 1898 brought new territories and troubling questions to the forefront. Therefore, the presidential elections of 1900 and 1904 revealed new conflicts in American life, as the meaning of democracy – and its relationship with the reality of global empire – became one discussed both across the nation and locally, in Genesee County.

Empire and Presidential Politics in the Elections of 1900 and 1904

The presidential election of 1900 was a replay of the 1896 election. Once again, the incumbent, President McKinley, represented the Republicans, while the Democrats again nominated Bryan. The "fusion" faction of the Populist Party also nominated Bryan, and threw their support behind him as the Democratic Party nominee. Noteworthy was the simultaneous nomination of Bryan by the Anti-Imperialist League, who supported Bryan as the Democratic Party nominee. The Anti-Imperialist League, formed in the early summer of 1898, echoed the arguments of Bryan, who opposed the extension of the United States into the

Philippines and Cuba – among other areas of the world – as a violation of the long-standing American belief in a republican form of government – a foundation of which is the principle of the consent of those being governed. The creation of an American empire, then, was a contradiction in terms – how could the United States remain a republic when it forced foreign peoples, against their will, to be subject to American rule?

The debate over America's place in the world as it entered the twentieth century was one played out in the newspapers of Genesee County during the 1900 presidential campaign. Not everyone was convinced by Bryan's assertion that the acquisition of overseas territories posed a threat to American democracy. This was especially so when support was expressed for the Vice-Presidential candidate of the Republican Party – Theodore Roosevelt. The articles supportive of Republican-sponsored expansion abroad – embodied in the depictions of Roosevelt and his participation in the Spanish-American War – were routinely built upon a glorification of American military actions around the world. By 1900 this included the American presence in China. Setting the stage for Republicans and Vice-Presidential candidate Roosevelt we see such articles as "Our Heroes in China," published in *The Daily News* on August 25th, 1900. It read in part:

> There has been gallant fighting in China. Some of it has been done by the English; some by the Japanese, and even by the Chinese themselves . . . Of course we prefer to believe that American soldiers led in the heroics, and it is pleasant for us to hear of definite instances.
>
> . . . In one of the most notable stories of heroism which has thus far come from China two officers of the United States Marine Corps figure. The marines were the first on the spot in China, as they were in Cuba and as they have often been. In fact, our "handy men," the fellows who are "soldiers and sailors, too," have a way of opening the ball.

> It was at Tien-tsin that this instance of double heroism occurred. It began with the exploit of Lieutenant Smedley D. Butler, who went out in the face of the Boxer hordes and under a hot fire brought in one of his men who had been wounded and who was in danger of capture and torture by the yellow barbarians. He was compelled to carry the wounded Marine for some distance on his back, and in doing so was himself wounded in the shoulder.

Such exploits reduced the complexities of the American presence abroad to personal terms that did not pose a challenge to our deepest beliefs regarding a republican form of government – as Bryan and the Democrats were doing. Accordingly we see such depictions of Roosevelt and imperialism as this, in which Republicans in Batavia showed their support for the McKinley/Roosevelt ticket and U.S. foreign policy. Appearing on the front page of *The Daily News* on September 22nd, 1900, it depicted the fear of overseas expansion as little more than a Democratic political maneuver:

> Imperialism, Mr. Washburn (a candidate for County Judge), said, was nothing but a bogey man. The dictionary defined imperialism as a government by an emperor and the nearest this country ever came to anything of that kind was when Grover Cleveland tried to put Queen Lil back on the throne in the Hawaiian Islands. The Democratic leaders found that the policy of expansion was just as popular among Democrats as among Republicans, so they raised the imperialism cry to scare the people.

But as I have suggested, Bryan and the Democratic Party did not see the creation of an overseas empire as a mere political ploy. Earlier in the month in that same newspaper, on September 14th, the "Question of Imperialism" was addressed in a short article describing a group calling upon the President to "stop

the war against the Filipinos and (denouncing) the policy of imperialism . . .” In mid-August (August 17th) *The Daily News* also described an “Endorsement of Bryan” in which “Anti-Imperialists Turn Out as Allies of the Free Silver Champion.” Two days earlier, *The Daily News* featured yet another article describing “two conventions of anti-imperialists.” On August 9th, *The Daily News* reprinted an address of Bryan in its totality, in which the readers were told that Bryan “devoted himself almost entirely to the question of imperialism,” warning listeners that empires are not in conformity with American notions of a republican government:

> Those who would have this nation enter upon a career of empire must consider not only the effect of imperialism on the Filipinos, but they must also calculate its effects upon our own nation. We cannot repudiate the principle of self-government in the Philippines without weakening that principle here.

Nevertheless, the criticisms of American interventions abroad were not enough to stop the reelection of McKinley and the election of Roosevelt as Vice-President. However, the question of American foreign policy did not die in 1900, and it once again became a central issue in the 1904 election – though by then, both parties had expressed doubts about the effects of imperialism on non-Americans – such as Filipinos.

By 1904, Roosevelt – whom some Republicans had hoped to relegate to obscurity as Vice-President – had been President for three years as a result of the assassination of President McKinley in 1901. As a consequence, imperialism had become intertwined with President Roosevelt’s administration, as Roosevelt had personally endorsed an aggressive American presence around the world for years. While the Democrats under their nominee in 1904, Alton B. Parker, remained opposed to this growing international presence, both parties simultaneously paid some attention to the effects of military expansion on non-Americans in such places as Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico. It should be remembered that

this is not really surprising, as even those Americans who had initially viewed the entry of U.S. troops into Cuba as a crusade to support legitimate insurgency against autocratic Spain came to see a continued presence there – just as in the Philippines – as an illegitimate extension of U.S. power that did not look very different from that of the Spanish. There was a strong religious and democratic impulse here that the initial war of liberation had obscured. This is what Bryan had argued – the war with Spain had become little more than a war for the conquest of people who wanted nothing more complicated than national self-determination. What could be more unchristian – and un-American – than to support a war of conquest, the critics asked by 1904?

Such sentiments were articulated by both Democrats and Republicans in Genesee County newspapers during the 1904 election. For example, *The Daily News* published an article entitled "Self-Government for the Filipinos" on July 26, 1904. Sympathetic to the views of the Republican Secretary of War, William H. Taft, the article emphasized the desirability of self-determination for the Philippines:

> The fact that President Roosevelt has taken much counsel of late of Rev. Dr. Lyman Abbott, editor of the *Outlook* and an exponent of the policy of "the Philippines for the Filipinos . . ."

This effort is designed, if President Roosevelt continues in office, to take steps fashioned to "inaugurate measures looking to home rule in the Philippines." In that same article the Democrats are also alluded to, once again in a light favorable to home rule and a rejection of long-term American presence abroad:

> The Democratic platform promises that if placed in power that party will "set the Filipino people upon their feet, free and independent, to work out their own destiny." Thus it is pointed out that the Filipinos are likely soon to have a greater degree of control of their own affairs, whichever

> party is successful in the approaching presidential election.

On the following day The Daily news reprinted President Roosevelt's remarks on self-determination – once again, in the Philippines:

> . . . we are governing the Philippines in the interest of the Philippine people themselves. We have already given them a large share in their government, and our purpose is to increase this share as rapidly as they give evidence of increasing fitness for the task. The great majority of the officials of the islands, whether elective or appointive, are already native Filipinos.

The emphasis that both Republicans and Democrats placed on the necessity of self-rule abroad as a mechanism for the preservation of democratic self-rule at home was one that quickly translated into a major political issue in terms of presidential politics. This emphasis stressed that imperialist aspirations tended to benefit a small group of financiers on Wall Street and not the American public at large. Therefore, a connection was made between a tyranny exercised over non-Americans abroad and Americans at home. When newly-elected President Roosevelt issued his Thanksgiving Day proclamation, published in *The Daily News* on November 23rd, 1904, and stated that in "this great republic the effort to combine national strength with personal freedom is being tried on a scale more gigantic than ever before in the world's history," he undoubtedly had in mind the potential for reconciling the balance between the blessings of an empire and democratic beliefs. But he most likely would have been taken aback by how such a question could become a burning electoral issue four years hence in a somewhat different form, when Americans replaced non-Americans as those whose liberties were most challenged by the development of that empire.

Where is America Going? The Elections of 1908 and 1912

When the Democrats nominated William Jennings Bryan for a third try at the Presidency in 1908, he sought the White House accompanied by a straightforward

campaign slogan. It read simply “Shall the People Rule?” His Republican opponent, William Howard Taft, while sympathetic to some of the reforms advocated by Bryan, nonetheless exhibited a consistently conservative view of government that precluded the use of that government to relieve suffering caused by economic conditions. As a consequence, an image of indifference grew around him; one that neither Bryan nor the outgoing President Roosevelt had. In Taft’s view, the power of the federal government was, in the end, limited to the protection of property rights and the individual tied to those property prerogatives. This illustrates the seeming inconsistency of Taft – for while he was comfortable with using the federal government to break up concentrations of wealth, e.g. antitrust suits, he simultaneously opposed female suffrage. Legalistic to the core, he refused to even consider utilizing the power of the federal government to address the many problems faced by the country as it matured into a modern, industrial state – unless that power could be discovered in the Constitution or the law as it already stood. While this position did not preclude Taft’s election to the Presidency in 1908, it would prove to be fatal four years later, in 1912.

So in 1908 it was the more radical of the two major party candidates, Bryan, who would advocate on behalf of Americans whom he saw as the victims of government policies and economic conditions that favored the few to the detriment of the many. His criticisms were an expression of this underlying theme – too much political and economic power was concentrated in too few hands. He argued for a redistribution of wealth via a tax on income and inheritance. He mounted a campaign against corporate contributions to political candidates, and he favored criminal liability regarding corporate officers who defied laws designed to regulate such contributions.

Such criticisms of the status quo, along with other objections to what was presented as an undemocratic concentration of power threatening the very basis of the republic – was evident in Genesee County newspapers in 1908. Not surprisingly, so too were the reactions of Taft and at least his wing of the Republican Party. But regardless of the perspective pertaining to how much of a role the federal government should play in addressing the pressing problems

faced by 1908, one thing remained certain – newspapers such as *The Daily News* urged a continual reform of government practices; a renovation demanded by growing numbers of people. In an editorial appearing on the eve of the Democratic Convention, we see, on July 7th, a call for

> . . . an improved form of government and this, it is hoped, will come in due time. It is known that the people want it and that the President favors it. The government is said to be as good as it is, but the system can be changed for a better one, more in accordance with modern ideas.

For candidate Bryan that "improved form of government" rested upon ordinary Americans capable of resolving the most pressing problems of the day. The ideal democratic government was one in which the well-intentioned American was inherently capable, through intuition and intelligence, of running the machinery of government as well as anyone with more extensive experience. This vantage point was manifest in a *Daily News* editorial dated August 6th, entitled "Voice of the People." While addressing the gubernatorial nomination process in New York of the Republican Party, the point remained as relevant for Democrats as for Republicans. Discussing the effort to again nominate Governor Charles E. Hughes, the editorial stressed

> . . . that the people may take matters into their own hands and place him in nomination, whatever the attitude of the bosses may be, for the people are just beginning to awaken to a realization of their own power.

Accordingly,

> If they will but arise in their might they themselves can control their caucuses and conventions and force the leaders to do their bidding.

However, in the end, the enthusiasm of Bryan's supporters was not enough to overcome a sense that Taft would continue the policies of the popular Roosevelt. Business and governmental practices were in need of reform, many thought, but the essential integrity of the American system remained sound. On the eve of the election, *The Daily News* captured this perspective in an October 31st article describing Taft's visit to Genesee County. Entitled "Taft's Visit Great Event," the article proclaimed that "Never Before Was There So Stupendous a Political Meeting in Genesee County." Tellingly, it also included this statement: "among the things he (Taft) said was that there would be no crusade against business." For many, Bryan seemed to be mounting just such a crusade. In 1908 the future of the United States was seen as inextricably tied to the business status quo. But four years later all of that would change in the dramatic presidential election of 1912.

This election offered voters four candidates. President Taft was again nominated by the Republicans, while former President Roosevelt ran as a candidate of the Progressive Party. The former President of Princeton University and the Governor of New Jersey, Woodrow Wilson, was put forth by the Democrats. Finally, Eugene Debs emerged as the Socialist Party candidate. Despite their obvious differences, all four candidates shared a basic assumption – that the status quo was simply inadequate in terms of meeting the demands of a modern, industrial society. All four agreed that the older notion of limited government was not suitable when modern conditions mandated active measures to promote the general good. Not surprisingly, all four differed – sharply – in how to approach such contemporary realities.

In such an environment Taft's reluctance to play the part of charismatic leader proved deadly. *The Daily News* featured a front-page article on July 9th, 1912, that was sympathetic to those Republicans who were convinced that Taft's brand of conservatism, coupled with an easy-going, retiring manner, would spell disaster for the Republicans in 1912. Entitled "Move to Induce Taft to Retire," the article said, in part, that in "the circulation of the anti-Taft petitions an effort will be made to get them signed by organization Republicans and others who have stood

with the President, as well as by citizens who have occupied neutral ground." However, as the article concluded, "the reported support of conservative Republicans . . . probably will not be forthcoming."

The reason for this in 1912 was clear – Taft's brand of reform was the most moderate when compared to the other three candidates. While endorsing some of the same reforms as the other candidates, he refused to alter his view that regardless of the new conditions brought into being by a modern, industrial economy, change had to be slow and consistently anchored in a body of law that clearly limits the authority of government. He maintained that the power of the president must be limited, and that expanding suffrage, like the call for a general expansion of democracy, did *not* necessarily produce a better, more just society. In sum, Taft saw the other three candidates as committed to the destruction of "all the checks and balances of a well-adjusted, democratic, constitutional, representative government." Taft's perceived unwillingness to consider the role of a more active presidency, while rooted in his constitutional conservatism, was all too often understood as his being merely the captive of special interests. For instance, look at a front-page article on Taft and the liquor industry, which appeared on July 10th in *The Daily News*. Quoting the Rev. Clinton N. Howard, a prominent Prohibitionist, we see Taft's conservatism depicted in this way:

> "No other President since the foundation of this government," declared Mr. Howard, "has surrendered more abjectly to the liquor interest of this nation than has William Howard Taft. His record is too recent, familiar and odoriferous to require review in this intelligent presence."

The legalistic conservatism that allowed for a perception of Taft such as that above was not possible when looking at the Progressive Party's candidate. Roosevelt's "New Nationalism" viewed the federal government as peculiarly equipped to achieve the goal of a more meaningful, widespread democracy. The idea was simple – Americans had to transcend the long-standing prejudice against big government if the interests of the people were to be served. In other words,

big government was the answer to big business. Government, Roosevelt asserted, could promote and maintain a deeper democracy through such reforms as graduated inheritance and income taxes, the regulation of child and female labor, workers' compensation, and a stricter regulation of corporations. The point here was to soften the harshest features of industrial capitalism. This blend of specific reform proposals and high-minded idealism was captured in a *Daily News* article appearing on August 5th, the day the Progressive National Convention opened in Chicago. In a prominent headline exclaiming that "Roosevelt's Third-Party Convention in Session in Chicago Coliseum with Only One Commanding Figure," ex-Senator Albert J. Beveridge of Indiana was quoted as saying that as Progressives,

> We stand for a nobler America . . . We stand for an undivided nation. We stand for a broader liberty, a fuller justice. We stand for social brotherhood as against savage individualism. We stand for an intelligent co-operation instead of a reckless competition. We stand for mutual helpfulness instead of mutual hatred.

He added that

> We stand for equal rights as a fact of life instead of a catch-word of politics. We stand for the rule of the people as a practical truth instead of a meaningless pretense. We stand for a representative government that represents the people.

Nonetheless, these renegade Republicans, for all of their reform zeal, still kept intact the economic status quo – which they simply tinkered with more than Taft. But another third-party candidate, Eugene V. Debs, spoke to those Americans seeking to go even further. For this group, mere tinkering was not enough. The Socialist Party of America nominated Debs, a former state representative from

Indiana, at a time when the Socialists enjoyed a relatively large national following. They had elected more than a thousand officials in thirty-three states and one hundred sixty cities. The Socialists held their convention in Indianapolis, Indiana on May 12th, again at a moment of social upheaval – *The Daily News* on May 11th featured a half-page article, complete with photographs, on the "New York Suffragists' Parade," described as the "Largest Held In This Country," and on May 13th, when two front page articles – one on a striking miner in Pennsylvania killed during a strike, and whose funeral generated "Fifteen Hundred Mourners," next to an article entitled "Ready To Try Sugar Trust – Seven Months Allowed For Presentation Of Testimony – Case Of Conspiracy," followed by a front page article released shortly after the Socialist Convention. On May 18th *The Daily News* ran a front page article entitled "Debs Is Running for Fourth time – Nominated for Presidency in Indianapolis by the Socialist Party." Making it clear to the readership that the Party opposes "violence as a weapon of the working classes," Debs' position was nonetheless radical. In his Party's Platform, the critique is clear, and goes far beyond reform:

> The Socialist Party declares that the capitalist system has outgrown its historical function, and has become utterly incapable of meeting the problems now confronting society. We denounce this outgrown system as incompetent and corrupt and the source of unspeakable misery . . .

Such rhetoric opened the way for the Democrats and Wilson, who viewed the Democrats of 1912 as a party of reformers who could avoid the excesses of Debs and the relative conservatism of both Taft and Roosevelt. *The Daily News* headline of June 24th, a day before the Democratic Convention opened in Baltimore, captured the energy characterizing the entire 1912 campaign – "Democratic Rivalry Hot – Boomers of Candidates Engaged in Novel Advertising – Wilson Hatbands." After several days of extensive convention coverage, the front page of *The Daily News* proclaimed the winner of the Democratic nomination on July 2nd – "Wilson of New Jersey Won on the 46th Ballot." It added that "New York Tried to Make the Nomination by Acclamation." Be it conservation, agriculture,

tariffs, or the cost of living, the Democratic candidate – on these and many other issues – was able to hit the right tone at a moment of upheaval and change. By 1912 it seemed clear that the role of the federal government would grow in new and innovative ways. By 1916, with the First World War in its murderous third year, those ways would be narrowed to the most pressing of questions – should, and could, the United States maintain its neutrality?

World War One and the Election of 1916

As expected, the Democrats nominated President Wilson for a second term. His Republican opponent, Charles Evans Hughes, exhibited a background that was surprisingly similar to the President's. Both were lawyers and former college professors. In addition, they both had been Progressive governors, and were lauded for their personal honesty. Indeed, former President Roosevelt saw little that differentiated them, referring to the bearded Hughes as "a whiskered Wilson." While the Democrats in particular advocated a strong social-welfare program and support for women's suffrage, it was the stand on U.S. involvement in World War One that nonetheless remained the most important theme of the election.

The Democratic Party's slogan in 1916 was "He Kept Us Out of War." As Europe endured the carnage of an unprecedented industrialized war with horrific casualties, the Democratic position proved to be crucial. By the fall of 1916, for instance, at just one battle – the Battle of the Somme (July 1st – November 18th), over one million men were wounded or killed. Carnage of this magnitude was one that a majority of Americans wished to avoid.

The Republicans, while also maintaining the stance that continued neutrality was in America's best interest, nevertheless also stressed the necessity of military preparedness and the need for mobilization. For some, even the mention of preparedness and mobilization translated into an abandonment of neutrality and eventual entry into the horrors of trench warfare in Europe.

Yet, while Wilson championed peace through nonintervention the Republicans reminded voters that the Wilson administration had *already* sent U.S. forces

abroad to intervene in foreign wars. What they had in mind here was of course Mexico, where the Wilson administration had in fact supported a variety of Mexican factions whose policies affected U.S. business interests. The Republicans pointed out that U.S. troops attacked and occupied Veracruz. U.S. companies had supplied arms to the forces of Venustiano Carraznza. But despite the reality of U.S. intervention in the Mexican Revolution, most eyes remained fixed on the European conflagration, and therefore supported the Wilson administration's advocacy of continued neutrality.

This perspective was clearly expressed in the pages of *The Daily News*, as was the Republican reminder that President Wilson had *already* – in Mexico – involved the United States in foreign conflict. Regardless of the point of view, both Democrats and Republicans expressed concern over the number of foreign-born Americans whose loyalties, it was thought, may ultimately lie with a warring nation abroad. As a consequence, The Daily News ran a front-page article on January 8th, 1916, regarding "America First" pledges. Distributed by the Daughters of the American Revolution, the article pointed out that "foreign-born citizens will be asked to sign:"

> . . . by means of printed slips, their loyalty to America.
>
> "I pledge myself," each slip reads, "to stand for America first, to give her my undivided allegiance in all times of stress as well as in peace. I do this out of gratitude to the land of my adoption, because it has given me protection and opportunity."

As evidenced by the aforementioned "pledge" anxieties were rising regarding the domestic ramifications of the Great War. Accordingly, editorials in *The Daily News* emphasized the necessity of neutrality. For example, readers were told that "business favors peace," as it was stated in the editorial of the January 8th issue.

It is therefore not a surprise that as the nominating conventions of the two major parties approached political cartoons – on a regular basis – highlighted the yearning for peace that drove both Democrats to continue advocating neutrality and for Republicans to do the same while still stressing the necessity of preparedness and mobilization. In that same January 8th issue, a cartoon appeared that revealed the desire for peace and the sense that America may not be able to avoid participation – a German soldier offering a bird marked peace for sale to four European civilians – an Englishman, a Frenchman, a Russian, and an Italian. The price for peace was the German utterance to these four – "If You Want The Bird You Must Pay My Price." The neutrality – and economic prosperity – could not last long, as on that same page *The Daily News* reminded readers that an "appalling prosperity" was supported by the suffering across the Atlantic:

> In truth, our commercial prosperity is, in a sense, appalling. It is magnificent, but it is not altogether normal or healthy. It is based to a considerable extent on diseased conditions in other countries.

The anxiousness regarding events abroad quickened through the spring of 1916. For example, virtually the entire first page of *The Daily News* was consumed with various aspects of the war on April 28th. There were reports of Atlantic naval battles. There were stories regarding the fighting on the eastern front and German diplomatic efforts designed to ease American concerns about German submarine activity. Simultaneously, there was an article on American intervention in Mexico: "American Forces Pushing Villa's Scattered Bandits Gradually Against Wall."

It is within this context that *The Daily News* offered an editorial in the wake of the Republican Convention in Chicago. Endorsing the nomination of Hughes, the column was also supportive of a policy of neutrality bolstered by preparedness:

> The times demand the fullest measure of Americanism. 'Watchful waiting" will not do, and when the United States says it will hold an offender to "strict accountability"

> it should not falter; and, to right a grievous wrong or to preserve the rights of the country, or of "American citizens on land and sea," we are not "too proud to fight."

This aggressive neutrality stood in contrast to that of the Democrats in 1916. Indeed, three days after this editorial appeared on June 12th, *The Daily News* ran a photograph of "Charles E. Hughes, Jr., in Camp at Plattsburg," this June 15th article featuring the young attorney, the "son of the Republican nominee for the Presidency," as "an active believer in preparedness," as one who has "backed up his belief by enrolling in the Plattsburg business men's military training camp."

In stark contrast, *The Daily News* articles describing the nomination of President Wilson for a second term revealed a very different point of view. For one thing, intervention in Mexico was not denied. Instead, the blame was shifted to the Republicans. To illustrate this outlook, none other than William Jennings Bryan was quoted. In a June 16th article entitled "Bryan Praised Wilson Regime – Applause For Commoner," we discover this:

> . . . the insurrection in Mexico had been inherited from a Republican administration, and that whichever way the Democrats acted upon it would have criticized them.

The article went on:

> Not only has the President had "to deal with war to the east of us. My friends (quoting Bryan), I have differed with our President on some of the methods employed in this war, but I am one of those who desire sincerely that this nation shall not become a participant in the dreadful conflict."

In the aftermath of the Democratic Convention, which ended in St. Louis on June 16th, *The Daily News* took an openly fervent position in support of both

Hughes and the possibility of U.S. entry into World War One. In a June 17th editorial entitled "Rally To The G.O.P.," *The Daily News* minced no words in support of U.S. entry into the war; an entry still ten months away:

> Americanism is the watchword. The Democracy and its principles may be judged by the party's performances during the administration of President Wilson. The Wilson administration has sent United States soldiers into Mexico unnecessarily. It has kept this country out of the European war, but at what cost?

Then, in stark language, the reader was told the following:

> The administration, through its spineless diplomacy, has led the world to believe that this nation is lacking in courage; that it is commercial and has not the stamina to insist upon its rights. There is universal abhorrence of war, but there are times when a nation, proud and resourceful, should not act as though it was in fear of it.

Less than ten months later, on April 2nd, 1917, President Wilson appeared before Congress asking for a declaration of war against Germany. This took place subsequent to his narrow victory over Hughes the previous November. By the time the war ended on November 11th, 1918, Genesee County had lost seventy-eight of its military people who were killed during the war. This led to a very different perspective in Genesee County media by the 1920 election, particularly when combined with the disappointments following a war that many had not wanted. There was a cry for "normalcy," and that cry was paramount in the 1920 election.

Can "Normalcy" Be Returned to? The Election of 1920

It is perhaps symbolic that one of the staunchest supporters of U.S. entry into the First World War, Theodore Roosevelt, died early in 1919, only six months after his son Quentin, a pilot in the American forces fighting in France, died when he was shot down behind German lines. He was twenty years old, and the evidence suggests that the grief engulfing his father was of such magnitude that he never recovered from it.

President Roosevelt's experience of trauma was a microcosm of the nation at large. After two years of war and many more years of reformist zeal, the nation was clearly exhausted. The time was ripe for a presidential candidate who embodied a quiet, businesslike return to "normalcy." In a senator from Ohio, the Republicans found just such a candidate in Warren G. Harding. Earlier in the campaign Harding captured the mood of the nation when he said that

> America's present need is not heroics, but healing; not nostrums, but normalcy; not revolution, but restoration; not agitation, but adjustment; not surgery, but serenity; not the dramatic, but the dispassionate.

This stood in stark contrast to President Wilson's reformist agenda and to his insistence upon involvement in international affairs. While the Democratic presidential nominee cut a milder reformist figure than previous progressives, James M. Cox was a reformer nevertheless. But as America entered the 1920s the national temper had changed, and Harding's stance proved to be far more attractive to millions of voters.

The quest for what Harding called "normalcy" was readily apparent in the newspapers of Genesee County. Several months before the major party conventions – not to mention the election itself – *The Daily News* was replete with many articles and editorials castigating any political movement or idea that would inhibit "normalcy" as defined in the aforementioned quotation from Harding's early campaign. Ideas that appeared to be inconsistent with that return to normalcy must therefore be exorcised from American life as soon as possible. With the backdrop of revolution in Russia and widespread unrest in Germany –

not to mention the United States in 1919 – an editorial entitled "America-Made Unrest" appeared on March 25th, 1920:

> We have in our midst distinctly foreign elements, among them advocates of entirely alien doctrines. But our soil is in no way prepared for such a crop; and but for our own hysterical advertising of these persons and their doctrines, they would not rise to the point of practical significance. It is an entirely safe assumption that any doctrine which advocates a change in our institutions by violence would be just as promptly dealt with by the newer as by the older citizenship.

Therefore, how should Americans check the progress of these "alien doctrines?" One way was to deny socialists who had been elected to the New York legislature their seats and prohibiting the gathering of those with "alien doctrines." Two days after the aforementioned editorial appeared, *The Daily News* ran this story on the front page of its March 27th issue:

Rioting Charges Against Solomon

Socialist Assemblyman and Three
Others Arrested in Philadelphia

Police Broke Up Session

> Charles Solomon, one of the Socialist assemblymen unseated by the New York legislature, and three other New Yorkers, were in jail here today charged with inciting to riot. They were arrested last night when the police broke up a mass meeting in (the) Labor lyceum to protest against the unseating of the five Socialist members of the New York assembly.

The article added this:

> Although there was great disorder and fights when the police ordered the meeting stopped because of alleged seditious utterances of one of the speakers, no one was hurt.

The struggle against "alien doctrines" and those suspected of undermining the "serenity" advocated by candidate Harding continued issue after issue in *The Daily News*, a phenomenon not of course restricted to Genesee County media in 1920. On March 30th, two additional articles appeared, along with several others, on the front page. The first of these was entitled "Evader of Draft Sent to Prison:"

> Grover Cleveland Bergdoll of Philadelphia, Pa.,
> Gets Five Years
>
> Hard labor As Penalty
>
> Grover Cleveland Bergdoll, a wealthy young Philadelphian recently court martialed for deserting because of his alleged failure to report for military service under the draft, was sentenced to five years in prison . . .
>
> The sentence, effective today, is for hard labor, in the jail at Governor's Island. Bergdoll's rights to citizenship are forfeited.

Three columns away, this appeared:

> Communist Sentenced
>
> Harry Winitsky, executive secretary of the New York Communist Party, who was convicted on Friday of violating the state's criminal anarchy law, was sentenced to not less than five or more than ten years in state prison.

The following day, on March 31st, the readers of *The Daily News* read that the unseating of duly elected members of the New York State Assembly was intended to promote the "dispassionate" and "healing" objectives as candidate Harding phrased it, that postwar America was so in need of:

Ousting of the Socialists

> If the Assembly concurs in the report of a majority of its judiciary committee of 13 members the five suspended Socialist assemblymen will be ousted from their seats on the ground that they are traitors. The report says that "the Socialist Party of America, as now constituted with its present program, is not a loyal American organization or political party disgraced occasionally by the traitorous act or declaration of a member, but is a disloyal organization composed exclusively of perpetual traitors."

The editorial then concluded, in the strongest of terms, "that there is no room in an American legislative body for advocates of unAmericanism." Then on April 7th, virtually the entire front page of *The Daily News* was a focus on political unrest both in the United States and abroad. "Anti-Bolshevik Leader Believed to be Menaced" was found alongside "Socialists Want New Election." It was within this context that another article was featured, entitled

Attempt To Bar Socialists Made

Two Bills Introduced In Legislature Would
Put Party Out Of Politics

Provide Legal Action

> Two bills designed to carry out the recommendation of the Assembly judiciary committee for "barring the Socialist Party of America from participating in politics in New York state" were introduced in the Legislature today.

> One measure is intended to require the attorney general to begin an action . . . for a judicial determination of the question whether the principles, doctrines or policies of the Socialist Party . . . can "destroy or endanger the government of the state and union."

Coupled with the disillusionment accompanying the end of a war that had not ushered into being a more stable and peaceful world, any hint of reform or "alien doctrines" was repugnant to millions of voters. Not surprisingly, the newspaper coverage of Harding was far more favorable than that shown for the Democratic candidate Cox or his running mate, the future President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The Republicans convened in Chicago on June 8th. On that day *The Daily News* ran a front page series of articles devoted to the convention, which followed an editorial the day before in which *The Daily News* equated "normalcy" with a return to the land. Not surprisingly, then, in an effort to return the county to an idealized preindustrial past, "the Genesee County Farm Bureau is conducting a farm labor campaign." Returning to the land complemented the desire to combat "alien doctrines" in the quest to transform unrest into the national "healing" called for by the Republicans in 1920. Two days after the Republican Convention ended *The Daily News* editorialized enthusiastically for the Republican ticket of Harding and his running mate from Massachusetts, Governor Calvin Coolidge. On June 14th the editorial told readers that while "Senator Harding has not yet completed his first term in the Senate . . . he has already achieved a reputation for an Americanism that shines the more brilliantly in these days of social unrest."

Republicans that year consistently argued that one source of that social unrest was a misguided involvement in world affairs; a participation that had led into the tragic decision to enter into the fighting of World War One. Hence the Republicans officially supported the ideal of international cooperation while avoiding endorsement of the League of Nations. By contrast, the Democrats endorsed the League and continued U.S. involvement in world affairs on a regular basis. On June 28th the Democrats opened their convention in San Francisco. *The*

Daily News provided extensive coverage here just as it had done in its depiction of the Republican Convention. The difference is in its lack of enthusiasm for the Democratic candidates and the party's platform in 1920. In particular, continued U.S. involvement abroad in the form of participation in the League of Nations was clearly rejected. On July 2nd *The Daily News* ran a front page article entitled "Submission of Platform Containing Party Issues Means Convention Scrap," in which we find this:

> "The Democratic party favors the League of Nations as the surest, if not the only practicable peace of the world and terminating the insufferable burden of great military and naval establishment . . .
>
> We endorse the President's (Wilson) view of our international obligations.

In the aftermath of the Democratic Convention *The Daily News* published another article critical of the Democratic stance on foreign relations. On July 14th, it was alleged that President Wilson, exercising his influence as President, "made Democrats use (the) League issue." Quoting Harding, we learn that

> Should the Democrats win, the League would be ratified, and America would become at once a party to the twenty-odd wars now going on in the world.

Perception is of course just as important as objective reality. Such a perspective naturally, in the wake of the losses in World War One, proved disastrous for Cox and Franklin Roosevelt. On Election Day Warren Harding won by a sizeable margin – 60.3% of the vote, as opposed to Cox's 34.2%, with an Electoral College margin of 404 to 127. In the days leading up to the election on November 2nd, *The Daily News* printed much in support of Harding, such as a third of a page advertisement in support of his candidacy on October 18th. One portion of this advertisement is shown below:

Born on a farm, living all his life close

> to farmers, he knows and sympathizes
> with the problems of the farm.

In addition,

> He does not believe that foreign powers
> should be allowed to conscript American
> boys for war beyond the seas.
>
> He does not believe that a Foreign Council
> should send to America for men and money
> to settle wars not of our making.

It is not surprising, then, that as America emerged from the hopeful optimism of earlier reform efforts, and through the dark tunnel of the Great War and into the 1920s, that few could foresee the controversies surrounding President Harding that still lay ahead. For now, as an editorial appearing in *The Daily News* on November 3rd proclaimed, "The voice of the people has been heard." The American Dream, at least for a time, was revived nationally – and in Genesee County as well.

Conclusion

An examination of Genesee County newspapers between 1860 and 1920 – with a focus on their treatment of presidential elections – reveals the changing nature of both local society and the nation as a whole. From 1860 – and of course one could see this even earlier – the aspirations, fears, and demands of ordinary people became increasingly important. The opinions of Americans not holding political power was recognized by the newspapers as important. No longer was there simply an elite who claimed to speak for everyone.

Part of this development was the newspaper's recognition that people – including women in the nineteenth century – endeavored to think for themselves. They did not need a traditional political and economic nobility to do their thinking for them. As we move beyond 1860 one can discern a growing insistence upon challenging conventional ideas and manners of doing things. One could say that

people sought to implement the high-minded idealism of the political candidate to their own views and to the realities of their lives.

Here one sees a rejection of abstract political and economic theories and dense theological ruminations. Instead, the newspaper depictions of candidates – and the editorials that became more and more prominent as we approach 1920 – tried to provide concise and concrete answers to the burning business, social, and political questions of the day. A consistent theme throughout was that of fighting corruption, and editorial writers came across as the conscious of the Genesee County community in a manner that earlier had been the role of clergy.

Over time, newspapers such as *The Daily News* seemed to be inseparable from the identity of the audience for whom the newspaper was directed. The *identity* of the newspaper and that of the reader seemed to merge. The newspaper, particularly with regard to presidential elections, emerged as the mouthpiece for the readership. The success and accuracy of the newspaper's reporting became the accomplishment of the reader. The newspapers of Genesee County nurtured direct contact with people and events – and as we get closer to 1920, that intimate relationship was facilitated not only by words, but in addition, by the imagery of the political cartoon.

In summary, the newspapers of Genesee County between 1860 and 1920 reinforced the fundamental democratic beliefs of the American republic. In part this was done by a sometimes dizzying array of differences between people both locally and nationally. Through this portrayal of what united us as Americans – a depiction predicated upon the basic beliefs regarding democracy that were articulated so exquisitely during an election cycle – the newspapers of Genesee County made an important contribution to the Americanization of immigrants by 1920 – along with normalizing what can be called modernity in the minds of those county residents born here. Just as importantly, the newspapers fostered a distinct Genesee County mentality different from those of its neighbors across county boundaries and one which is still evident today.

Note – I wish to acknowledge Carol Hertel, a volunteer researcher in the Genesee County History Department, for her research assistance in the preparation of this study.