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The Legacy of 1940: The Election of Franklin D. Roosevelt to a Third Term

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HIS 490 History Honors Thesis

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Contents

Introduction.....	3
Chapter 1: Roosevelt's Motives.....	9
Chapter 2: Winning the Nomination.....	27
Chapter 3: Winning the Election.....	40
Conclusion.....	52
Bibliography.....	58

INTRODUCTION

The United States of America has always taken pride in its democratic institutions; these institutions have been embedded both in the American constitution and in the very experience of the country itself. American democracy maintains itself through these institutions and the rules and traditions that make them up. Countless traditions and laws help ensure that the United States carries on the vision of American democracy that was imagined over two hundred years ago. Many of these traditions and laws share the goal of limiting the power of the government, whether it is through the separation of powers, the separation between state governments and the federal government, or the necessity of reelection in almost all offices of government. These limitations of governmental power are cherished as a vital part of American democracy, whether they are official laws or unspoken traditions. Throughout the history of the United States, citizens have given equal value to both formal laws and informal traditions as safeguards against the concentration of power.

A main theme that defined the American identity since its inception is the fear of the concentration of power, which Americans have long equated with tyranny. The fear of tyranny existed from the days of the American Revolution, when American colonists united against the overextension of British royal power in the colonies, through the Progressive Era, when ordinary Americans criticized and attacked the concentration of economic power, to the present era of American politics, when countless watchdog groups observe the government's every action. This

consistent mistrust of power in America has contributed to the hallowed nature of the lawful and traditional restraint of the concentration of power. Consequently, any encroachment upon these restraints has habitually been greeted with disdain and even violence by the American public. Thus, an infringement of the conventional limitation of power in the United States often constituted a tense moment in American history. These moments, whether they led to a national debate or evolved into a full-blown crisis, raised national issues about the very nature of democracy in the United States.

The year 1940 included one such event. In 1940, the United States held one of the most important elections in its political history. The presidential election of 1940 was a momentous occasion for many reasons. America was only slowly emerging from an economic depression that had endured for over a decade, and the nation faced a potentially greater danger in the outside world than the economic frustrations it currently faced inside its own borders. Hence, the presidential election of that year assumed a vital importance for both political and economic reasons. The need for strong presidential leadership in this difficult time was the greatest it had been since the days of the American Civil War almost a century ago. Americans knew that this election would have enormous consequences on their everyday lives and would potentially impact the future of democracy in their country. Thus, the ballots they cast on Election Day would have a substantial impact on the future of their country.

However, the presidential election of 1940 would have further implications that reached far beyond the existing economic situation and international crisis. The outcome of the election would not only determine the immediate future of the United States, but would also affect America's democratic identity. The election threatened to break one of America's most hallowed political traditions: the unofficial two-term limit to the presidency. The Constitution did not

include any reference to a term limit for the American presidency, but the actions of the nation's founding father had created a cherished convention. When George Washington, the hero of the American Revolution and the first President of the United States, decided not to seek a third presidential term he established a precedent that would last for over one hundred years. While a few Presidents attempted to seek a third term throughout the years, such as Ulysses S. Grant and Theodore Roosevelt, for the most part the two term tradition remained a safely secure and sacred principle that most Americans took for granted and few individuals dared to broach.¹ Therefore, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's decision to seek a third presidential term was truly a shocking and defining event in the political history of the United States.

A number of factors contributed to this unusual move by Roosevelt. Both the domestic political situation and the international crisis of World War II certainly played a role in Roosevelt's decision to seek to continue his presidency into a third term. After eight years of popular New Deal measures and policies, the Democratic Party was in a strong position in the months leading up to the important elections of 1940. However, the lack of suitable presidential candidates among the ranks of the Democrats was cause for concern; in 1940, the top leaders of the party were either unwilling to run or not popular enough to guarantee a certain victory at the polls. Furthermore, the Democrats were divided amongst themselves in 1940; only a very strong candidate would have a chance of keeping the party united enough to win the upcoming election. The actions of Germany in Europe further contributed to the need for a strong presidential candidate, both for the election and the presidency. With the United States in a situation that

¹ Ulysses S. Grant had briefly sought a third term in 1880 after serving two terms from 1869 to 1877. Theodore Roosevelt, after serving most of William McKinley's term from 1901-1905 and then being elected to serve for another term in 1904, ran again in 1912 for what would be his third term.

grew more perilous every day, Roosevelt must have known the importance of the next four years for the future of American democracy.

However, Franklin Roosevelt was a famously secretive man. Historians have struggled to discover his internal thoughts, which remained hidden even to his political allies. Among those individuals who were closest to him in 1940, not one can claim to know exactly what he was thinking when he chose to run again. Roosevelt himself appears to have never committed his thoughts in writing, either to his own personal notes or to another living individual; no trace of Roosevelt's personal feelings survives in his correspondence. While many of his closest companions have offered their thoughts on what exactly drove Roosevelt that year, they all admit the impossible nature of knowing Roosevelt's motives. Today, historians can offer only theories about Roosevelt's mindset. Undoubtedly, Roosevelt struggled with the decision. However, questions emerge about what exactly he struggled with, the amount of time he spent grappling with the question, and why he ultimately chose to seek a third term. Although contemporary sources acknowledge the fact that in the end Roosevelt left them all in the dark, they still contain valuable observations and insights that can aid historians today. Roosevelt's contemporaries may disagree with each other at times, but each source provides a different perspective on the enigma of Roosevelt's decision. Their accounts and memoirs provide key pieces of evidence in solving this historical puzzle.

With the decision made, Roosevelt fell to the task of reentering the political arena and putting his name up for re-election. The stories of the Democratic convention and the election of 1940 are well documented; Roosevelt's personality dominated both events and helped ensure his victory at the polls. Nevertheless, the public's opinion during 1940 cannot be discounted when examining the events and outcome of that year. Roosevelt, always a canny and intelligent

politician, knew how to gauge the American people. Public opinion in every election played a major role in influencing the decisions and values of all candidates. The public shaped Roosevelt's mindset throughout 1940, including before his decision to seek the third term. The shrewd Roosevelt must have acknowledged the fact that his political fortunes were favorable in 1940 and that winning the election that year was very probable. If his popularity had not been quite so high at this time, it is possible he would not have chosen the path he did. When examining the decision of Roosevelt to seek the unprecedented third term, the role of public opinion must be acknowledged.

The goal of this thesis is to analyze the momentous decision of Franklin Roosevelt to defy the political tradition of his predecessors and seek an unprecedented third term. This thesis will examine the decision from multiple perspectives, including the political, the constitutional, the international, and from Roosevelt's personal viewpoint. Ultimately, Roosevelt felt pressured both by the state of the Democratic Party as well as the dangerous situation in foreign affairs to stay in office for an additional term. Despite his personal desire to retire and maintain his health, Roosevelt decided that his third term was necessary for the survival of the United States in this uncertain time.

The decision of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1940 to seek an unprecedented third presidential term was a momentous event in the political and constitutional history of the United States of America. Shaped both by national politics and by the dangerous international situation, the election of 1940 was a key moment in American history that shaped the future of America and the world. While Roosevelt appeared reluctant to break such an important tradition, the nature of the Democratic Party in 1940 and the development of events in both Europe and the Pacific convinced Roosevelt of the necessity of seeking a third term, despite the possibility of dangerous

consequences following the breaking of such a cherished democratic principle such as the two-term limit.

CHAPTER ONE: ROOSEVELT'S MOTIVES

Franklin Roosevelt was not the only democratic leader bracing for the upcoming storm of the Nazi threat and World War II. While Roosevelt was preparing the United States for the possibility of war with either Germany or Japan, Winston Churchill was attempting to rally Great Britain to endure the onslaught of Nazi military might. With France already overwhelmed and defeated by the German *blitzkrieg*, Great Britain stood alone in Europe to resist the strength of the Axis Powers. As Great Britain suffered through brutal air raids, it looked across the Atlantic Ocean. Churchill saw the United States and the “new world, with all its power and might” as their hope for salvation.² The United States, too, looked back across the Atlantic with concern, especially towards Great Britain’s dire situation in 1940. With the increasing alarm that accompanied the German assault, the United States recognized the importance of Great Britain and France to American defense. Roosevelt believed that the French army and the British navy created “a buffer” that protected the United States from the German threat.³ With the fall of France in the spring of 1940, only Great Britain remained among the democracies in Europe. Thus both Roosevelt and the rest of the nation avidly watched how events unfolded in Europe.

It was in this dangerous situation that one of the most important and significant friendships and relationships of the twentieth century developed. As individual leaders of their respective nations, both Franklin Roosevelt in the United States and Winston Churchill in Great

² Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty: An American History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012), 2: 841.

³ Frank Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Rendezvous with Destiny* (New York: Back Bay Books, 1990), 333-334.

Britain accomplished much and secured the safety and security of their people and of democracy itself. Their relationship throughout the turmoil of the Second World War proved vital for the futures of both Great Britain and the United States. The legacies of both Roosevelt and Churchill are defined by it. Their relationship began years before the crisis of World War II. During the summer of 1918, Roosevelt traveled to Europe as the Assistant Secretary of the Navy. While there, he met Churchill for the first time.⁴ On September 11, 1939, Roosevelt renewed their relationship by sending the first of many letters. In it, Roosevelt indicated his respect for Churchill and his appreciation that Churchill was back in the British Admiralty and thus able to shape the British war effort.⁵ The importance of the friendship between Roosevelt and Churchill lay in the fact that these two men represented the goals and needs of their two countries. The correspondence between them reflects this importance; it established the beginning of the Anglo-American alliance before the United States actually entered the war.⁶ The relationship between these two individuals was so important for that reason, and because it lasted for the duration of the Second World War, the most dangerous period in the twentieth century. As Churchill himself summarized it, "I felt I was in contact with a very great man who was also a warmhearted friend and the foremost champion of the high causes which we served."⁷

When this crisis intensified in the spring of 1940, Roosevelt faced important decisions that would impact not only the United States but all of Europe as well. These decisions had always been awaiting Roosevelt, but he had put them off because the political situation in the United States did not yet allow for long-term commitments in foreign affairs. At this time, the

⁴ Freidel, 31.

⁵ Winston Churchill, *The Second World War: The Gathering Storm* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1948), 440-441.

⁶ Francis L. Loewenheim, Harold D. Langley, and Manfred Jonas, eds., *Roosevelt and Churchill: Their Secret Wartime Correspondence* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1975), 4.

⁷ Winston Churchill, *The Second World War: Their Finest Hour* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1949), 23.

nation was still strongly isolationist; Roosevelt could not involve the United States in World War II without alienating the public.⁸ These decisions mostly concerned the conduct of the United States during the World War, including how much aid the United States should provide to Great Britain and France, how the United States should protect itself from Axis aggression, and how the United States should rearm itself. Roosevelt had to manage a difficult balancing act: he had to work for both the interests of the people he served and the interests of Western civilization, which was currently threatened by the onslaught of the German blitzkrieg. Churchill's messages to Roosevelt helped reinforce Roosevelt's recognition of the danger the United States faced. In one of his first letters, drafted on May 15th, 1940, Churchill described Great Britain's uncertain situation and then remarked that "the voice and force of the United States may count for nothing if they are withheld too long. You may have a completely subjugated, Nazified Europe established with astonishing swiftness, and the weight may be more than we can bear. All I ask now is that you claim non-belligerency, which would mean...everything short of actually engaging armed forces."⁹ Roosevelt's response to Churchill's requests, sent on May 18th, would mark the beginning of a period of American assistance to Great Britain; this aid would last through the election of 1940 up until the end of 1941, when the United States entered the war.

The overseas events of 1940 weighed heavily on Franklin Roosevelt. Despite the enormity of the decision awaiting him and the long-lasting implications of this decision, Roosevelt retained his typical secretive nature. Ever since his childhood, Roosevelt had maintained a private barrier around his personal thoughts; this pattern persisted throughout his

⁸ Joseph P. Lash, *Roosevelt and Churchill, 1939-1931: The Partnership That Saved the West* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1976), 113.

⁹ Churchill, *The Second World War: Their Finest Hour*, 24.

life, particularly when it concerned his illnesses.¹⁰ Roosevelt's reluctance to share his true thoughts extended to all the people in his life, even his family and closest companions. Roosevelt had a few advisors he more closely confided in and relied on throughout his political career; the most prominent individuals he confided in over the years included Louis Howe and Harry Hopkins. Louis Howe served as Roosevelt's most important political advisor in his early career; Howe played an important role in helping Roosevelt win the New York governorship in 1928 and subsequently the 1932 presidential election. By 1936, Howe had passed away. Although Roosevelt had been able to carry on without Howe, his absence was felt in the White House.¹¹ Around 1940, Harry Hopkins assumed the role of Roosevelt's most trusted political advisor. As Frank Freidel affirms, "[Hopkins] became Roosevelt's intimate in the way no one had been since Louis Howe's heyday two decades earlier..."¹² Harry Hopkins played a vital role in the events of 1940, both in the political arena and in shaping Roosevelt's foreign policy. However, despite the influence of these two important individuals, Roosevelt remained largely independent and secretive in developing his ideas. This privacy has shaped the historical approach to Roosevelt's life because it has hidden Roosevelt's own thoughts on many subjects. On the third term issue in 1940, however, Roosevelt was even more enigmatic than usual; nobody could claim to know what Roosevelt really was thinking in 1939 and 1940 about the upcoming presidential election and the third term.

The role of Eleanor Roosevelt cannot be underestimated when discussing Franklin Roosevelt's presidency. While she herself could never truly know what Roosevelt was thinking, just as the rest of his companions could not know, she still knew him better than most and played

¹⁰ Freidel, 7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹² *Ibid.*, 347.

an invaluable part in helping shape Roosevelt's policies as President. The relationship between the two Roosevelts was a complicated one. Despite the numerous triumphs they achieved together in the political world and the impact they had on American history, their marriage was not always a happy one. Franklin's affair with Lucy Mercer, Eleanor's social secretary, had threatened to destroy their marriage when Eleanor discovered it in 1918. While both managed to hold on to the marriage and avoid a divorce, Franklin had to agree never to see Lucy Mercer again and never to share a bed with Eleanor again. Despite their loss of intimacy, the Roosevelts remained together as a political team and started an incredibly effective political partnership.¹³ Certainly, Joseph Lash argues, it was this trial that helped make Eleanor an independent woman and pushed her into public life, a key development in the political career of Franklin.¹⁴ Indeed, Eleanor would play a vital role in the events of 1940, particularly the Democratic National Convention of that year. Lash even argues that, had it not been for Eleanor's intervention in the later stages of the Convention, Franklin might not have secured the nomination for 1940.¹⁵

Despite her tremendous value to Franklin, Eleanor, just like everybody else, remained in the dark as to Roosevelt's plans. This reflected the years leading up to the 1932 presidential election, when Eleanor again had no clear idea about what her husband was thinking.¹⁶ All Eleanor could do was guess, just as the rest of Franklin's closest advisors and companions could only guess. The events in Europe in 1939 and 1940 loomed over Eleanor and Franklin, just like the rest of the nation. As the Roosevelt children were now old enough to serve in the military, their concerns went beyond public concerns for the rest of the country to personal concerns for

¹³ Ibid., 33-36.

¹⁴ Joseph P. Lash, *Eleanor and Franklin: The Story of their Relationship, Based on Eleanor Roosevelt's Private Papers* (New York: New American Library, 1973), 220.

¹⁵ Ibid., 612.

¹⁶ Ibid.

their own family. Nevertheless, Franklin remained devoted to steering the United States on a proper course. In her autobiography, Eleanor remembers “As I look back over that whole year of 1939, it seems to me that my husband’s major efforts were bent on trying to avert total war in Europe and to awaken us here to the need for preparation.”¹⁷ This two-pronged strategy included multiple actions by Franklin. In an attempt to prevent war, Roosevelt tried to promote peace among the nations of Europe multiple times, including sending personal messages to both Benito Mussolini in Italy and Adolf Hitler in Germany asking for non-aggression. In case of war, Franklin was expanding all sectors of the armed forces, including the air force and the navy.¹⁸ Roosevelt’s defense preparation extended into 1940, when the international situation worsened and the upcoming presidential election was looming.

American foreign policy was centered on providing aid to Great Britain to help it resist Germany’s attacks while remaining outside of the actual fighting. This was another delicate balancing act that Roosevelt had to conduct in a tumultuous time. Churchill’s messages undoubtedly played a role in convincing Roosevelt of the need for this aid; their communication would also prove vital for the working out of these deals. The first major act of assistance would be the destroyers-for-bases deal. Churchill initiated the discussion in the May 15th message, when he listed Britain’s first immediate need as “the loan of forty or fifty of your older destroyers to bridge the gap between what we have now and the large new construction we put in hand at the beginning of the war.”¹⁹ Great Britain faced an impending crisis at the time of this message. Their greatest ally France was collapsing and Great Britain appeared likely to soon be facing Germany on its own. This destroyers-for-bases deal was a vital part in the relationship

¹⁷ Eleanor Roosevelt, *This I Remember* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), 207-208.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 208-209.

¹⁹ Churchill, *The Second World War: Their Finest Hour*, 24.

between the United States and Great Britain. The United States faced a very dangerous decision. It could provide Great Britain a significant portion of its navy; this support could help Churchill and Great Britain survive the German attack. However, the United States would severely weaken its own forces by doing so; if Great Britain fell to Hitler, the United States would be left in an even more vulnerable position with a depleted navy.²⁰ Eventually, the United States agreed to send the British their destroyers in exchange for seven naval and air bases throughout the Western hemisphere.²¹ In his memoirs, Churchill praised the deal as vital for the war effort.²² However, the destroyers for bases deal would not be the most important deal to be conducted between the United States and Great Britain during the war. That would be the lend-lease legislation, which was passed after the election.

The relationship between Churchill and Roosevelt in 1940, and all that it represented, played an important role in Roosevelt's decision-making, particularly concerning the third term issue. The United States found itself in a precarious position in 1940. By linking itself to Great Britain, FDR hoped to survive during this dangerous time. Roosevelt played an important role in establishing this connection; his friendship with Churchill illustrated Roosevelt's value. Roosevelt may have recognized the significance of his connection with Churchill and believed that he had to stay in office to keep the United States on the correct path. While political considerations certainly played a role in Roosevelt's decision to run again in 1940, the events in Europe as well as Roosevelt's own role in forming America's response to these events were more important factors.

²⁰ Freidel, 333-334.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 352.

²² Churchill, *The Second World War: Their Finest Hour*, 414-416.

With the worsening crisis and the threat of American involvement in the war appearing to be more likely every day, many Americans naturally turned towards the question of the third term. No other American President had ever been elected for a third term. Was this the time to break the precedent, or should the United States stay committed to its traditions? Roosevelt's infamous silence on the issue exacerbated the debate. Like the rest of the nation, the wife of the President could only speculate. Eleanor never resented Franklin for not sharing his plans with her; his mysterious nature had always been a part of their relationship. Eleanor remembered how "People on both sides came to me about it, but I refused to say anything, for a man is entitled to plan his own life, particularly in matters as serious as this."²³ Personally however, Eleanor believed that Franklin truly did not want the third term. Citing only "little things he said at different times," Eleanor assumed that Franklin wanted nothing more than to retire to Hyde Park and do the numerous things he was unable to enjoy as President, including "writ[ing] on naval subjects, go[ing] through his papers, letters, and so on."²⁴ Eleanor's perspective is important, for very few people could claim a closer relationship to Franklin than Eleanor. If her conjecture was correct, then the events of 1940 must have been the key determinant in making Franklin decide to seek the third term. Roosevelt's choice becomes much more significant under these circumstances; the breaking of the precedent established by George Washington becomes a necessary corollary to the safety and security of the nation as Roosevelt saw it. Viewed from this perspective, Roosevelt's decision appears to be a personal sacrifice for the well-being of the nation he had helped along for the past eight years.

Despite the potential desire of Roosevelt to retire however, the realities of 1940 seemed to preclude any attempts by Roosevelt to walk away from the presidency with a clear conscience.

²³ E. Roosevelt, 212.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Eleanor feared as much, for she too was hoping for a chance to leave the White House after eight long years. Although she felt that the Roosevelts' time in the White House was valuable, she was tiring of the public responsibilities of being the First Lady. In an interview with Bess Furman Armstrong, Eleanor responded to a question about being the wife of a public office-holder with the terse statement "It's hell."²⁵ The requirements of being the wife of the President, combined with the lack of privacy attached to such a position, would be enough to tire anybody after eight years. The fact that Eleanor was not responsive to suggestions for at least an additional four years was not surprising. Furthermore, she worried that the third term would not be as productive as the first two terms. According to Lash, Eleanor "had not wanted Franklin to run because she did not see that Congress would be any readier to give him in a third term what it had refused him in the second, and now he would be carrying responsibility for decisions affecting not only the welfare but the lives of millions."²⁶ However, she still accepted his decision and his reasoning behind it. While Eleanor's main focus was still on improving the lives of ordinary Americans through New Deal policies and programs, she recognized the dangers of the international situation in 1940. Furthermore, she recognized the unstable situation within the Democratic Party and the lack of a clear successor for Franklin in the presidency in 1940. Eleanor felt anxious when no clear candidate besides Franklin stepped up, and she initially believed that he was subconsciously preventing strong individuals within the Party from rising up; however, with time she realized that Franklin had provided the opportunity but no one had

²⁵ Lash, *Eleanor and Franklin*, 612.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

been able to take it. Harry Hopkins and Cordell Hull had seemed to be likely candidates, but outside circumstances prevented their nomination in 1940.²⁷

Ultimately, Eleanor accepted what appeared to be the inevitable outcome of Roosevelt accepting the third term nomination. A few years after Franklin died at the beginning of his fourth term, she still believed that “he did not honestly want the nomination. If he had not been nominated, he would have been completely satisfied and would have lived his life very happily.”²⁸ Nevertheless, Eleanor still recognized the many factors that influenced such a monumental decision. The uncertainty in the Democratic Party and the dangerous international situation in 1940 certainly were the largest factors; it is quite possible that Roosevelt would not have run in 1940 if not for these considerations. Eleanor however did allow for the possibility of personal motivations playing a role as well. Roosevelt may have felt circumstances outside of his control pushed him towards seeking and ultimately accepting the Democratic nomination in 1940. But Eleanor always believed that Franklin enjoyed being President and having the sense of importance and power that accompanied it. This belief lends some credence to the fear and accusations that Roosevelt wanted the third term for personal and selfish reasons. Franklin, like almost every President of the United States, certainly had grand ambitions; some part of him must have appreciated the opportunities the Presidency gave him to make a difference and create his own legacy. In the end though, Roosevelt’s decision appeared to be more influenced by outside events than his own personal goals. But as Eleanor succinctly put it in her autobiography, “In his mind, I think, there was a great seesaw: on one end, the weariness which had already begun, and the desire to be at home and his own master; on the other end, the overwhelming

²⁷ E. Roosevelt, 213. The issues which prevented Hull’s candidacy will be discussed later in the thesis. Hopkins was prevented by his bad health.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 213-214.

interest which was the culmination of a lifetime of preparation and work, and the desire to see and to have a hand in the affairs of the world in that critical period.”²⁹ Roosevelt’s decision in 1940 cannot be traced to a single reason or motivation; rather, a combination of different factors prompted Roosevelt to seek reelection.

With even Eleanor left in the dark regarding Franklin’s decision in 1940, much uncertainty surrounded the Democratic nomination. Roosevelt’s silence created a quandary for the Democratic Party, which needed to plan for the upcoming presidential election. Some members of the Party were opposed to the idea of a third term for any man, even Roosevelt. Eleanor Roosevelt herself shared this opinion when she stated “My own personal opinion – and not as the wife of a President – is that except in extraordinary circumstances we should stick to our tradition.”³⁰ Many other notable figures within the Democratic Party shared this view. Perhaps the most important figure within Roosevelt’s own party that firmly stood against any idea of a third term was Jim Farley, both the Chairman of the Democratic National Committee and the Postmaster General at this time as well as one of Roosevelt’s closest advisors.

Jim Farley played a significant role in the events of 1940, and he ultimately both hindered and supported Roosevelt’s attempt to receive the nomination at the Democratic National Convention that year. As he had throughout Roosevelt’s political career, Farley provided vital information on the situation in 1940. However, he ultimately became disillusioned with Roosevelt’s presidency and in the end became one of the major critics of the third term decision (albeit privately). While it is difficult to trace the source of Farley’s opposition, his autobiography reveals key details and observations from 1940. The origin of Farley’s break with

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 214.

³⁰ Lash, *Eleanor and Franklin*, 616.

Roosevelt appears to have begun a few years earlier; as Farley explained to Cardinal George Mundelein, Roosevelt had already lost Farley's confidence when he began excluding Farley from consultations about political appointments. Furthermore, Roosevelt's refusal to publicly defend Farley from the accusations of Huey Long offended both Farley and his wife.³¹ Overall, Farley felt underappreciated by Roosevelt and believed that Roosevelt was merely using him for his own ends.³² These factors led to Farley eventually splitting with the President on the third term issue. As Farley put it, "I had faith in the man. This was shattered in 1937 and 1938, and I made up my mind that I was going to carry on into 1940 for the country and the party."³³ Farley's own decision in 1940 threatened a potential break within the Democratic Party itself, and seemed to portend further opposition against Roosevelt's decision to seek an unprecedented presidential term in 1940.

Although many of those closest to Roosevelt believed at the time that he truly did not want to be President for another four years, Farley contended that Roosevelt wanted the Democratic nomination all along and had planned for such an occasion. Like the rest of Roosevelt's close companions and advisors, Farley lacked substantial evidence for his claim and could only rely on his own beliefs and observations. Nevertheless, in his autobiography Farley set out to tell "how Franklin D. Roosevelt put by third term suggestions 'every time gentler than the other,' then entered on a long period of enforced silence, and finally engineered his own nomination."³⁴ As mentioned previously, Farley's opinion was not without bias. He already had multiple reasons for acting against and resenting Roosevelt, and these feelings may have

³¹ James A. Farley, *Jim Farley's Story: The Roosevelt Years* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1948), 50. In 1934, Long accused Farley of corruption in the Senate. Although cleared, Farley received no public support from Roosevelt.

³² *Ibid.*, 177-178.

³³ *Ibid.*, 151.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

influenced his opinion on the third term issue. Furthermore, Farley harbored presidential ambitions for himself; ironically, it was Roosevelt who first inspired these thoughts when he encouraged Farley to seek the New York governorship in 1938 in order to prepare for a potential presidential campaign in 1940.³⁵ Farley was hoping to receive the Democratic nomination in 1940 and eventually win the Presidency. Roosevelt's decision to ultimately run in 1940 undoubtedly upset him. Throughout 1938 and 1939 Farley considered himself a perfectly viable candidate for the Democratic nomination in 1940. In his 1939 memorandum, he stated, "I don't know if [Roosevelt] has anyone in mind, definitely, to succeed him. If he had to make a selection at the moment, I believe he would select Harry Hopkins, Robert Jackson, or Frank Murphy....But a situation can develop in 1940 whereby the nominee will be either Garner, Hull, or Farley, in the order named."³⁶ Farley's personal ambition certainly played a role in how he interpreted the events of 1940. However, many individuals around Farley and Roosevelt believed that Farley was sincere in his convictions. Eleanor, who had always liked Farley, sympathized with Farley over Roosevelt's treatment of him.³⁷ Frances Perkins, Roosevelt's Secretary of Labor who played a role in the 1940 Democratic Convention, also believed that Farley had legitimate issues with the third term question. These issues included political stagnancy and lack of turnover in the federal government.³⁸ Whatever his reasons were, Farley's discontent with the third term was enough to end his long relationship with Roosevelt.

Farley was not the only major Democratic figure to stand against Roosevelt's decision in 1940. John Nance Garner, Roosevelt's vice president for his first two terms, also figured prominently in Farley's account of 1940. As vice president, Garner's name was often mentioned

³⁵ Ibid., 142-143.

³⁶ Ibid., 153.

³⁷ E. Roosevelt, 216.

³⁸ Frances Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew* (New York: The Viking Press, 1946), 133-134.

among possible candidates for Roosevelt's successor in the White House. Despite his position of influence in the Party, however, Garner was not necessarily a popular choice. Eleanor Roosevelt herself was opposed to any mention of his candidacy. Although she did not want her husband to run for a third term, she would rather have voted against the Democratic Party than have voted for Garner in 1940.³⁹ Any potential controversy over Garner was avoided when he decided he did not want to run for President, despite the efforts of other Democrats to begin campaigns for him.⁴⁰ However, Garner came out firmly opposed to the third term, at least privately, to Farley. According to Farley, Garner asserted "Jim, I can't support a third term and will fight any third term bid for the good of the party. First off, I want you to believe me when I say I don't want to be President. God knows how true that is."⁴¹ Furthermore, he supported Farley's claims for the nomination and felt that Roosevelt was being unfair. Garner, according to Farley, believed that Roosevelt was merely jealous of Farley and other candidates such as Cordell Hull and wished to retain his power and influence.⁴² However, he did retain his affection for Roosevelt, as he blamed more "the bad advice he [had] been receiving."⁴³ Ultimately, Garner did not play a significant role in the events of 1940, as he did not even seek to remain vice president for Roosevelt's third term. Nonetheless, Garner's opposition to the third term revealed that many figures inside Roosevelt's own party were against the idea of the third term. This resistance to the third term would spread beyond the Democratic Party and be a major theme of Roosevelt's choice and its impact.

³⁹ Lash, *Eleanor and Franklin*, 617.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 616.

⁴¹ Farley, 171.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 172.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 206.

Roosevelt himself exacerbated this tension and hostility with his silence on the issue. Already a famously reticent figure on many notable issues, Roosevelt was even more taciturn on this issue. Much of this silence can be traced to Roosevelt's personal indecision; during the early months of 1940, it is entirely possible that Roosevelt was still making up his mind. During this time, Roosevelt apparently went back and forth on the issue; his continuous contradictory remarks to several different individuals demonstrated Roosevelt's uncertainty. Despite this ambiguity, however, Roosevelt enjoyed and even encouraged the rumors of a third term for himself. Roosevelt especially enjoyed the Gridiron dinner in 1939, where he was portrayed as the Sphinx; this caricature was certainly accurate.⁴⁴ Frank Freidel believes that this silence was a deliberate strategy by Roosevelt. By not speaking publicly about the third term, Roosevelt "kept a firm grasp on power, which would have slipped away had he announced he would not run. More importantly still, he gradually accustomed much of the electorate to the idea of a third term."⁴⁵ This strategy, while probably very effective, frustrated many of his close companions and advisors.

Roosevelt's silence, while often criticized by both contemporaries and historians alike, cannot be attributed entirely to him. Much of the uncertainty surrounding the Democratic nomination in 1940 reflects the nature of the Democratic Party itself at that time. At that time, the Party lacked a clear political successor to Roosevelt and many Party members were unsure about the nomination. Eleanor Roosevelt herself lacked knowledge about who could possibly succeed her husband. She remembered that "I could see that it was going to be extremely difficult to have anyone else nominated. First, the Democratic Party had not found anyone else it thought could keep it in office, and second, serious-minded people were worried about the

⁴⁴ E. Roosevelt, 212.

⁴⁵ Freidel, 328.

war.”⁴⁶ Thus, two main issues faced the Democrats. The need for wartime continuity was certainly an important consideration; if not Roosevelt, who in the Party could provide strong leadership during a possible war? Secretary of State Cordell Hull appeared to be a viable option, but other factors made that nomination unlikely. Regardless, the issue of electability concerned the Party the most; as politicians, most members of the Democratic Party wanted a Democratic President elected in order to build up their own strength. Therefore, in 1940 the Democratic Party wanted to ensure that their candidate could win the election. Unfortunately, the candidates most likely to make good leaders are not always the candidates that can win election. Farley, who had experience in politics both as a party boss and potential candidate, surmised as much: “Men are not, as a rule, nominated for the Presidency because they are the outstanding men in the party from the standpoint of ability and experience. Many fine men, who would have made great Presidents, could never be nominated....National conventions of both parties usually pick a man who is considered the most available from a vote-getting point of view....”⁴⁷ This problem manifested itself in 1940, as many potential candidates existed but none of them were what the Democratic Party was looking for. A variety of factors played a role in determining these candidates’ ultimate inability to run in 1940, and Franklin Roosevelt was left as his party’s best chance that year.

The potential Democratic Party candidates, besides Roosevelt, in 1940 included Jack Garner, Cordell Hull, James F. Byrnes, and Jim Farley. All four men had qualifications that made the nomination in 1940 possible; however, extenuating circumstances set them aside. From the outset, Cordell Hull appeared to be the most likely successor to Roosevelt. As Secretary of

⁴⁶ E. Roosevelt, 213.

⁴⁷ Farley, 152-153.

State, he was immensely popular with the American public.⁴⁸ While Garner was the Vice President and thus a likely successor, Garner's opposition to the third term led to him dropping out of the election altogether. This left Hull, who as Farley repeatedly mentioned, was the name that came up most in conversations with Roosevelt. At one point Farley stated that he believed Roosevelt had narrowed the choice down to either himself or Hull.⁴⁹ According to Hull himself, Roosevelt envisioned him as his successor. However, Hull was simply not interested in the presidency. In his memoirs, Hull explains "With Europe at war, with Japan preparing for her next move, and with the United States facing innumerable problems in foreign affairs, I felt that I should continue to guide our foreign affairs under the President, rather than strive to be President myself."⁵⁰ Furthermore, Hull cited his own ill health as an additional reason he did not want the Democratic nomination that year.⁵¹ When Roosevelt ultimately decided he would accept the nomination, he then attempted to persuade Hull to join him on the ticket as Vice President; Hull again turned the offer down, citing his belief that he would serve the nation better as Secretary of State instead of President or Vice President.⁵² Hull's account reveals Roosevelt seriously did consider other candidates, and his many attempts to persuade Hull suggest that Roosevelt truly did wish to retire after his second term. Another name that arose from Roosevelt's discussions with those around him was James F. Byrnes, a senator from South Carolina. Byrnes played an important role on the Senate floor advocating many of Roosevelt's New Deal proposals.⁵³ In his own account, Byrnes recounts how Roosevelt considered him as a potential candidate in 1940 after Garner stepped out of the race. Byrnes believed he was not a legitimate candidate at that

⁴⁸ Freidel, 107.

⁴⁹ Farley, 190.

⁵⁰ Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1948), 855.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 860.

⁵³ Freidel, 99-100.

time, citing his belief that “the party was not yet ready to accept any man from the Deep South, either for the Presidency or Vice Presidency.”⁵⁴ Byrnes, as well as party boss Edward Flynn, also believed his religious history would prevent any chance of his winning the election, let alone the convention nomination. As a former Catholic who had converted to a Protestant church, Byrnes would likely face opposition from many groups around the nation.⁵⁵ Farley faced a similar fate due to his Catholic background. While Farley believed he could still win the election, several members of the party and others believed it was impossible.⁵⁶ In the end, Roosevelt was the only willing and viable candidate for the Democrats to win the 1940 election. This fact helped push him towards the third term.

⁵⁴ James F. Byrnes, *All in One Lifetime* (New York: Harper, 1958), 118.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 118-119.

⁵⁶ Farley, 174-179.

CHAPTER TWO: WINNING THE NOMINATION

No matter what pushed Roosevelt towards seeking an unprecedented third term, Roosevelt appeared to have made up his mind to run again by the time of the Democratic Convention in 1940. As Eleanor remembers, “Before the convention actually opened it was evident that Franklin was going to be nominated and would run; I think he had been persuaded that if he were nominated, he could not refuse.”⁵⁷ Whether Roosevelt had long been working towards getting the nomination or he had decided only recently remains unknown. However, his discussions with Farley, Hull, Byrnes, and Hopkins, along with others, suggest that Roosevelt was still making up his mind at the beginning of 1940 at the very least. His secretary Grace Tully stated in her memoirs that “In my opinion nobody really knows the date on which Mr. Roosevelt made his own decision. I do not accept the accusations of his enemies that it was a long-standing intention, planned and plotted in sinister fashion and with a cruel political disregard for the ambitions of other potential candidates.”⁵⁸ Samuel Rosenman, one of Roosevelt’s speechwriters and close advisors, believed that Roosevelt did not ultimately make up his mind until the crisis in Europe in the spring of 1940. He asserted: “It is my belief that up until the violation of neutrality of Holland and Belgium and the invasion of France on May 10, he was still somewhat in doubt. After the evacuation by the British at Dunkirk, I am sure that his mind was made up to accept a

⁵⁷ E. Roosevelt, 213.

⁵⁸ Grace Tully, *FDR: My Boss* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1949), 237.

third-term nomination.”⁵⁹ While nobody knew exactly when Roosevelt made his ultimate decision, the events at the Democratic Convention in 1940 revealed he had decided to run by then.

Although Roosevelt’s indecision before the convention in 1940 is certainly understandable, his silence drew much ire. This ire only intensified after the Democratic Convention that year, where Roosevelt engineered events to ensure his own renomination for the election. By the time of the convention, it was clear to many members of the Democratic Party that he was willing to run for an unprecedented third term, due to the presence of Hopkins in Chicago. However, Roosevelt continued to stay silent on the issue, probably due both to the political benefits it provided as well as some lingering doubt.⁶⁰ Finally, he revealed his hand to Jim Farley at Hyde Park shortly before the convention on July 7, 1940. There, Roosevelt attempted to explain his actions before the convention. He told Farley that while he had hoped to announce his decision to retire in 1940, the outbreak of war in Europe had forced him to abandon that strategy; according to Roosevelt, “To have issued such a statement would have nullified [his] position in the world and would have handicapped the efforts of this country to be of constructive service in the war crisis.”⁶¹ According to Roosevelt, the delicate foreign policy position the United States was maintaining would be difficult to maintain without him.⁶² He then went on to say that although he did not want to run again, he would feel obliged to accept the nomination if offered to him; by saying this, Roosevelt seemed to assume that the convention would turn to him and he would receive the nomination. Farley expressed his displeasure with

⁵⁹ Samuel I. Rosenman, *Working with Roosevelt* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), 193.

⁶⁰ Freidel, 343.

⁶¹ Farley, 248.

⁶² As discussed earlier, the United States at this time was officially neutral while providing as much aid to the Allies as possible. This aid to Great Britain was conveyed through the cash-and-carry method, where the British paid for the goods with hard money and then transported them in their own ships.

Roosevelt's indecision and accused him of waiting so long in order to ensure that no other candidates could stand a chance against him at the convention. However, despite Farley's observations that Roosevelt still showed some hesitation and uncertainty regarding his decision, the conversation began with the assumption that Roosevelt would be nominated again. Roosevelt even said to Farley at this time "Undoubtedly I will accept the nomination by radio and will arrange to talk to the delegates before they leave the convention hall after the nomination."⁶³ Roosevelt's conversation with Farley prior to the convention, which Farley remembered with much bitterness, foreshadowed the events of the 1940 Democratic Convention, where the third term issue took stage in the arena of national politics.⁶⁴

The Democratic National Convention of 1940 was scheduled to begin on July 15. The choice of the Democratic Party's nomination took on a greater importance, since the convention followed the Republican National Convention, which had begun on June 24. The result of that convention had been a major surprise. While the leading candidate going into the convention had been the experienced politician Thomas Dewey, the outcome of the convention did not match the expectations. The charm of newcomer Wendell Willkie, combined with a surprisingly effective campaign behind him, led to Willkie's unforeseen nomination by the Republican Party.⁶⁵ The result of the Republican National Convention, while unanticipated, did not appear to affect the final outcome of the Democratic National Convention, which Roosevelt planned to win by this time.

⁶³ Farley, 257.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 246-258.

⁶⁵ Michael Barone, *Our Country: The Shaping of America from Roosevelt to Reagan* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 136.

While the public and many members of the Democratic Party certainly remained unaware of Roosevelt's plans, certain key individuals knew what Roosevelt intended and planned for the Democratic Convention accordingly. Roosevelt himself would not be in attendance; he said as much to Farley when he informed him he would accept the nomination by radio and not in person.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, Roosevelt ensured that he would be in control at the Convention whether he was physically there or not. In some sense, Roosevelt was not actively seeking the nomination; rather, Roosevelt "consented" to the nomination, at least according to Rosenman. Rosenman recalled that "By 'consenting,' I mean that he was not an active participant or seeker for the nomination in 1940 in the sense that he was in 1932. He was not going to go out and actively seek delegates. He was not even going to ask any delegates to vote for him."⁶⁷ In this way, Roosevelt was indeed not a normal candidate for the nomination. He believed that the American people both needed and wanted him as their President, and that all he had to do was merely fulfill their wish and accept the nomination.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Roosevelt was still a practical politician. While he may have truly believed (and at least hoped) that his party would renominate him, he still needed to ensure that it would be done. Therefore, he sent Harry Hopkins to the convention in Chicago as "the personal representative of the President" in order to help him achieve his goal.⁶⁹

Harry Hopkins played a very important role in much of Roosevelt's presidency; for many years, he served as Roosevelt's closest advisor and confidante. His role in the 1940 convention was no different. When he arrived in Chicago, he established Roosevelt's convention headquarters at the Blackstone Hotel. While there, his job was to "make decisions and keep in

⁶⁶ Farley, 257.

⁶⁷ Rosenman, 203.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 206.

touch with the delegates during the convention.”⁷⁰ However, the delegates at the convention resented Hopkins’s presence at the convention, due to his unfamiliarity with the politics of the Democratic Party.⁷¹ This anger increased due to the widespread feeling that Roosevelt had manipulated events from the beginning; as word spread that Roosevelt did indeed plan to run again and win the nomination for the third time, many Democratic candidates and delegates had to change their plans. Thus, before the convention even started, a large part of the Democratic Party felt insulted by Roosevelt’s supposed scheming, according to Frances Perkins.⁷² Although the extent of Roosevelt’s manipulation of the politics of 1940 remains unknown, the events of the convention were clearly influenced by him. The presence of Harry Hopkins in Chicago was one important part of Roosevelt’s plans.

Even the location of the Democratic Convention in 1940 was planned; the selection of Chicago as the site for the convention was not incidental. According to the diary of Harold Ickes, Roosevelt’s Secretary of the Interior, Roosevelt wanted “a city where the mayor can be relied on to fill the galleries with New Deal adherents.”⁷³ Using this criterion, the cities of Chicago and St. Louis offered the best chance for Roosevelt’s renomination. With Roosevelt influencing the Democratic Party to choose Chicago as the site for the convention, the framework for Roosevelt’s plans had been laid. The mayor of Chicago, Ed Kelly, would play a central role in these plans. By turning to Kelly and Hopkins, moreover, Roosevelt was fully moving away from Farley; although Farley had served him well throughout the years, he had almost ruined

⁷⁰ Perkins, 129.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 128-129.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Barone, 137.

Roosevelt's chances at the 1932 Democratic Convention.⁷⁴ Kelly would end up providing essential aid to Roosevelt at the convention. Like many machine politicians, Edward J. Kelly enjoyed substantial benefits from Roosevelt's New Deal policies in the 1930s. Chicago had been severely divided between Democrats and Republicans prior to 1931. The election of Roosevelt in 1932 and the subsequent popularity of the New Deal helped transform Chicago into a purely Democratic city and thus cemented Kelly's political power base. Therefore, Kelly was certainly able and willing to accommodate Roosevelt's wishes and assist in his nomination at the convention. Like Hopkins, Kelly apparently received no explicit orders as to his tasks at the convention. Michael Barrone notes that "the president was careful never to say [his plans] out loud, and no written record survives of the orders he gave."⁷⁵ Though there is no doubt that both Hopkins and Kelly were aware of what Roosevelt needed at the convention, no historical evidence exists to support this supposition.

While Roosevelt continued to prepare for his nomination, he insisted on keeping the illusion of an open convention. Many of the delegates, already aware of Roosevelt's motives, had grown frustrated with the continued silence about the third term. Both Hopkins and Ickes sent messages to Roosevelt asking him to openly declare himself and thus spare the Democratic Party any further trouble with naming a candidate. But Roosevelt once again refused; he carried out his silence with the hope that by having the convention choose him, both the American people and history would believe that he did not seek the third term.⁷⁶ Roosevelt insisted on delivering a message that released the delegates from their obligations to him and stated that he

⁷⁴ Ibid. At the 1932 convention, Farley had attempted to abolish the two-thirds majority rule for nominating a candidate. This controversial move had the potential to seriously damage Roosevelt's campaign.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 139.

⁷⁶ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 125.

did not wish to run again, despite the concerns of the political leaders in Chicago. Samuel Rosenman recounted in his account that “The President insisted on sending the message. He put it on two grounds: first, a personal feeling that if he was to be nominated he wanted it to be a free and open nomination by delegates released from any pledge or commitment; second, for purposes of history, he wanted it made clear that he was not actively seeking a third term.”⁷⁷ Roosevelt refused to compromise on this decision, despite the urgings of many close to him. Rosenman observed: “I have never seen the President more stubborn- although stubbornness was one of his well-known characteristics.”⁷⁸ Finally, Roosevelt agreed to a compromise that his statement would be read on the second evening of the Convention, when more people would be listening.⁷⁹ Roosevelt’s intransigence on this issue reflected his desire to have the nomination (and ultimately the Presidency itself) placed upon him due to outside circumstances. This desire may have been Roosevelt’s attempt to convince himself, in addition to everybody else, that he was running again only because it was necessary.

The keynote address of the convention showed much of the lingering discontent towards Roosevelt felt among certain factions of the Democratic Party. The speech of William Bankhead, the keynote speaker, showed that Bankhead himself was not friendly to the President; throughout the speech he did not refer to Roosevelt by name, and his tone was not friendly towards the President.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the continuing spread of Farley’s stories about Roosevelt and Farley’s insistence that he be a candidate further contributed to the discontent. Farley himself observed the lack of clear support for Roosevelt at the beginning of the convention, when Mayor Kelly gave the welcome address to the convention. Farley observed in his account of the events of the

⁷⁷ Rosenman, 210.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 211.

convention: “I have no doubt that the Mayor was confident that his mention of the magic name [Roosevelt] would precipitate a parade that would end in a spontaneous draft of Roosevelt. Puzzlement was stamped on his face when the expected demonstration failed to materialize and he hurried disappointedly through the remainder of his speech.”⁸¹ Roosevelt, for all of his qualifications as the leading candidate for the Democratic Party in the 1940 election, appeared far from a certain lock for the nomination. Roosevelt’s allies would have had to act quickly to help him gain the nomination.

Senator Alben Barkley was the man chosen to deliver Roosevelt’s statement to the convention. As a product of the “old Southern school” of oration, Barkley was a good option for supporting Roosevelt; he “flailed his arms and his face grew red as he worked himself into an oratorical frenzy recapitulating the great achievements of the New Deal.”⁸² When he came to the conclusion of his speech, he read aloud Roosevelt’s statement. He declared emphatically that “The President has never had, and has not today, any desire or purpose to continue in the office of President, to be a candidate for that office, or to be nominated by the Convention for that office. He wishes in all earnestness and sincerity to make it clear that all the delegates to this Convention are free to vote for any candidate.”⁸³ When he finished reading aloud the statement, the convention stalled. Farley remembered that Barkley “turned away to await the roar of applause. There was no applause! The delegates stood pat....The organ pealed. But the delegates stood silent in their places, eying the marchers with distrust.”⁸⁴ And then Roosevelt’s political allies sprang into action. As the crowd sat silently, a loud voice suddenly proclaimed “We Want Roosevelt.” This voice did not come from one of the delegates. Rather, it came from the

⁸¹ Farley, 274.

⁸² Goodwin, 125.

⁸³ Rosenman, 212.

⁸⁴ Farley, 280.

basement of Chicago Stadium, where Kelly had placed Chicago's superintendent of sewers to begin the call for Roosevelt with a microphone. That one voice was all that was needed to jumpstart the convention's demand for Roosevelt. The shout of "We want Roosevelt" soon morphed into calls of "New York wants Roosevelt," "California wants Roosevelt," and similar calls. With this large swell of support for Roosevelt, the delegates who had remained in Farley's camp and Garner's camp suddenly joined with Roosevelt's supporters.⁸⁵ This political maneuver proved to be essential for a decisive renomination of Roosevelt by the convention. Despite Farley's insistence on his own nomination, Roosevelt, nominated by acclamation, won conclusively with 946 votes; Farley finished with 72 votes and Garner finished with 61 votes. Thus did Roosevelt win his party's renomination, the first major political battle in his attempt to gain an unprecedented third term. This part of the convention went relatively well for Roosevelt; Rosenman recounted that a feeling of relief spread throughout the party, for the convention had avoided a major split and did not hurt Roosevelt's chances for reelection.⁸⁶ Roosevelt was well on his way to winning the unprecedented third term in 1940.

Despite the selection of Roosevelt by the convention, discontent continued to simmer within the Democratic Party. Many of the delegates were simply upset at Roosevelt's manipulation of the situation and felt that they had been used. But the anger at Roosevelt was much more deep-seated than the events at the convention; the unhappiness in the Party had been building up for some time. Much of it had come from the events of Roosevelt's second term, when he had attempted to expand the powers and responsibilities of the Presidency as well as control his own party, which was becoming increasingly divided. Frances Perkins noted that "They were angry because of the patronage that had been denied them for eight years. They were

⁸⁵ Goodwin, 126.

⁸⁶ Rosenman, 212.

angry that so many strangers and amateurs had come into political life. They were angry about the [1938] purge, which had hurt some of them and some of their friends. Some were deeply disturbed over the Supreme Court fight, in which honorable men had differed with the President. Some thought that we had had enough of the New Deal, and that it was time to call a halt.”⁸⁷ The discontent only increased with the selection of Henry A. Wallace as Roosevelt’s vice-presidential candidate.

While the renomination of Roosevelt was not without controversy, it went relatively smoothly for the President. Unfortunately, the selection of the vice-presidential nominee was not as easy as the selection of the presidential nominee. Although many Democrats were unhappy with how Roosevelt treated them before the convention, they accepted his nomination without complaint due both to respect for him as well as the realization that Roosevelt was the Democratic Party’s best chance of winning the 1940 election. They agreed to the necessity of Roosevelt; they were upset by their inability to put forth a vice presidential candidate. Wallace, who served as Roosevelt’s Secretary of Agriculture, was more of an “idealistic progressive.” The longtime politicians of the Democratic Party therefore viewed Wallace as “an amateur.”⁸⁸ The selection of Wallace did not fulfill their needs. However, Roosevelt insisted on Wallace. Grace Tully noted in her account: “I think he chose Wallace because he felt the Secretary of Agriculture was at that time a genuine and sincere liberal and that he had been a loyal member of the Administration.”⁸⁹ Roosevelt himself believed that Wallace “is as honest as the day is long. He thinks right. He has the general ideas we have. He is the kind of man who can do something

⁸⁷ Perkins, 129.

⁸⁸ Freidel, 345.

⁸⁹ Tully, 238.

in politics.”⁹⁰ However, many of Roosevelt’s advisors, including Harold Ickes, observed the growing opposition to Wallace.⁹¹

Back at the White House, Roosevelt and many of his closest companions sat in the Oval Room and listened to the events of the convention unfold. The debate over the vice-presidential candidate grew more and more heated, as Bankhead among others insisted on running for the position. It was then that Roosevelt made one of his most surprising maneuvers of the 1940 campaign. As the debate and controversy raged on, Roosevelt swiftly wrote out a speech and gave it to Rosenman to edit. The speech was both a denouncement of the Democratic Party itself and a rejection of the third term nomination. In it, Roosevelt emphatically stated that “Until the Democratic Party makes clear its overwhelming stand in favor of liberalism, and shakes off *all* the shackles of control by conservatism and reaction, it will not continue its march of victory.” Because of this apparent conflict of interests, Roosevelt declared “I in all honor cannot and will not condone or go along with the fact of that party dissension....Therefore, I give the Democratic Party the opportunity to make that historic decision by declining the honor of the nomination for the presidency.”⁹² By making this statement, Roosevelt threatened to throw away his third term candidacy before the election campaign of 1940 even began. Missy LeHand, Roosevelt’s secretary, when she read the note, felt relieved at the possibility that Roosevelt could instead retire; she had always hoped for him to move back to private life. Conversely, Pa Watson, Roosevelt’s appointments secretary, was outraged and ordered Rosenman to destroy the message that Roosevelt had made in the heat of the moment. Ultimately, Rosenman stayed loyal to the

⁹⁰ Perkins, 135.

⁹¹ Rosenman, 213-214.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 216.

President and revised a draft of the speech for him.⁹³ While the Democratic Party's selection of Wallace as Roosevelt's running mate prevented Roosevelt's message from ever being seen by the public, the message itself revealed an interesting point. Roosevelt's willingness to step out of the race showed that he indeed was willing to retire, and perhaps that was what he actually wanted. But if he was to be President again for a third time, it would have to be on his terms. Thus, Roosevelt was already making clear that he had particular goals in mind for his third term, and to meet them he would have to have certain people around him. Wallace, an avid New Dealer, was revealed to be one of these individuals.

The intervention of Eleanor Roosevelt at the Democratic Convention helped ensure the selection of Wallace and thus prevent Roosevelt's withdrawal from the race. Eleanor's role in winning over the delegates and reuniting the Party over this divisive issue cannot be understated. Perkins, who was present at Chicago as one of Roosevelt's supporters, was the one that first came up with the idea. Acting on the advice she had received from Bob Allen (a young Democrat), Perkins believed that "the situation was unfortunate and that if the President came, his courageous, simple, and openhearted way would capture the delegates and help them to re-establish their own feeling of good will which was so important for everyone."⁹⁴ When Perkins called Roosevelt, he refused to come himself, believing that it would cause more harm than good. Instead, he encouraged Eleanor to go instead.⁹⁵ While ironically Eleanor herself did not want Roosevelt to be nominated for a third time, she went out to Chicago after the requests of her husband, Perkins, and Farley. Talking to Farley, Eleanor established that Franklin truly did want Wallace, noting that Franklin "evidently felt at that time that Wallace could be trusted to

⁹³ Ibid., 215-218.

⁹⁴ Perkins, 131.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 130-132.

carry out our policies on foreign affairs if by chance he, Wallace, found himself hurled into the presidency.”⁹⁶ Eleanor’s speech to the convention was unplanned; rather, she just emphasized her sincere conviction that the Democratic Party must band together in these difficult times and help the man they wanted to lead them. In her own words, her main goal was “to persuade the delegations in the convention to sink all personal interests in the interests of the country and to make them realize the potential dangers in the situation we were facing.”⁹⁷ To drive home her point, she made the convention empathize with Roosevelt and feel the burden they were placing on him by choosing him to run again. She declared that the man who would be elected in 1940 would face “a heavier responsibility, perhaps, than any man has ever faced before in this country....So each and every one of you who gave him this responsibility, in giving it to him assume for yourselves a very grave responsibility because you will make the campaign. You will have to rise above considerations which are narrow and partisan.”⁹⁸ Eleanor’s speech proved to be the turning point, as Wallace ultimately won the nomination by a comfortable margin. In this way Roosevelt won both the nomination and the party platform that he had desired. Upon receiving the Democratic Party nomination, Roosevelt set out his campaign platform. While continuing to endorse liberal policies and the New Deal, he emphasized collective security and preparation in case of attack.⁹⁹ The stage had been set; with the support of the Democratic Party, Roosevelt was prepared to launch his campaign for the unprecedented presidential third term in 1940. Although the third term issue would continue to be controversial, Roosevelt had overcome the first obstacle facing him.

⁹⁶ E. Roosevelt, 216.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁹⁸ Lash, *Eleanor and Franklin*, 623.

⁹⁹ Freidel, 346.

CHAPTER THREE: WINNING THE ELECTION

Many pockets of support for Roosevelt's continuance as President existed besides the backing of the Democratic Party throughout the nation. This support for Roosevelt came in many different forms, including survey polls, personal letters to the President, and petitions of American citizens. Petitions were an easy way for large groups of people to band together and declare their support for Roosevelt with one combined voice. These petitions varied from simple statements of support to lofty calls of the United States' desire to have Roosevelt for a third term. One petition addressed and sent to the White House, from the "residents and qualified voters" of Camden, New Jersey, stated "the passing events of the past years, in the United States and the world in general, calls attention to the fact, more than ever, that we, the people of the United States of America, need as a President of the United States, a man who has the proven ability, the [foresight], and the courage to guide this great nation through such troublesome and perilous times...."¹⁰⁰ The petition ended with the signatories imploring Roosevelt to accept the Democratic Party's nomination in 1940.

Throughout the end of 1939 and in the months leading up to the 1940 convention, the White House recorded thousands of letters sent to the White House concerned specifically with the third term issue; the majority of these letters indicated support for a third term for Roosevelt. More importantly, the White House noted that "The number opposed to a third term appear to

¹⁰⁰ "Petitions Regarding Third Term," *President's Personal File*, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

fade into insignificance, as compared with previous months. At present the rate is more than 20 to 1 in favor.”¹⁰¹ The White House observed another trend; as the months passed, the letters increasingly stated that it was Roosevelt’s duty to run in such a dangerous international situation. This trend supports the belief that Roosevelt decided to run due to the events of 1940. The support for Roosevelt only increased after the 1940 Democratic National Convention. Following Roosevelt’s nomination, thousands of letters were mailed to the White House voicing their support for Roosevelt. Like the petitions, they varied in tone and language, yet they all delivered the same message. Evelyn Mello wrote “My family and I are thrilled, now that you were nominated for your third term. All we can say is ‘May God bless you, guard you, and guide you.’ Our enthusiasm is shared by thousands of other families, who, like us, are right behind you, plugging for you. May God bless you and yours....”¹⁰² Many noted Roosevelt’s sacrifice, and offered praise and admiration in support of him.¹⁰³ These messages of support may have solidified Roosevelt’s conviction that he was doing the right thing, and that the third term was necessary for the country to survive and prosper.

The Gallup Poll of Authors also provided a glimpse into the public mindset in early 1940. While not a perfect indicator of the opinion of the American public, the poll did reveal some interesting statistics.¹⁰⁴ While the nation was overwhelmingly opposed to American involvement in World War II, almost half of those polled believed the United States would eventually be drawn into the war. Consequently, half of those polled placed the United States staying out of the war as their greatest priority. Also, while a majority of Americans approved of Roosevelt as

¹⁰¹ “James H. Rowe, Jr. Papers.” Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

¹⁰² “Nomination Congratulations, 1940.” *President’s Personal File*. Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ The Gallup Poll included the results of national surveys conducted by the American Institute of Public Opinion and an author’s poll, which included the results from over two hundred American writers.

President at the time, only around half of those polled believed that they would vote for Roosevelt for a third term.¹⁰⁵ Although just a sample size, the poll results show what the public valued before Roosevelt even declared himself as a candidate. Despite the continuation of the Great Depression into 1940, the average American was more concerned about the events in Europe than the state of affairs at home. This thinking coincided with the thinking of much of the Democratic Party and perhaps the thoughts of Roosevelt himself, who was likely pushed to run again by the events in Europe. In 1940, the very future of the United States appeared to be threatened; in these circumstances, the breaking of an ancient political precedent did not seem as important to many Americans. As both the letters addressed to Roosevelt and public opinion polls showed, many Americans simply wanted the best individual available, who would keep the nation safe and secure, to be President. According to many Americans, including Roosevelt himself, FDR was this man, despite the fact that he had already been President for two terms.

While many Americans were more concerned about the potential policies of the next President rather than who the actual President would be, a considerable political backlash did arise against the third term issue. The early signs of this movement against the third term were already present in the inner workings of the Democratic Party; this opposition had risen to the forefront of the party during the Democratic National Convention. The opposition of both Jim Farley and John Garner portended the opposition of part of the American public; this opposition would be utilized and encouraged by the Republican Party as part of their effort to defeat the Roosevelt coalition in the 1940 election.

Both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party recognized that the third term issue could be divisive and controversial in the 1940 election; both sides used many forms of

¹⁰⁵ "The Gallup Poll of Authors," *The Saturday Review of Literature* 21 (January 13, 1940): 10-11.

propaganda to sway voters on this potentially contentious subject. These forms of propaganda included brochures, pamphlets, newspaper advertisements, and even books. With the Democratic Party on the defensive for this issue, the Republican Party propaganda was often more aggressive and widespread. Often, the Republicans appealed to the American public's fear of tyranny. One flier listed reasons against the third term: "Because a third term opens the door to DICTATORSHIP. Because it violates the American safeguard against usurpation of power as established by Washington, Jefferson, Jackson, Cleveland." The message ends with an ominous warning: "Vote Against a Third Term and Dictatorship Or You May Never Go to the Polls Again in a Free Election."¹⁰⁶ This flier included a theme that ran throughout much of the Republican propaganda: by seeking the third term, Roosevelt was violating the principle that America's Founding Fathers had created and thus was acting in an un-American way. Another pamphlet included quotations from George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, and Woodrow Wilson that all appeared to be against the third term. Propaganda also claimed that Roosevelt's actions were threatening the balance of power established by the Constitution. One flier emphatically declared: "Americans! Do not forget that the even division of power between the Congress, the President, and the Supreme Court is the one guarantee of our liberties. A third term endangers these liberties. A third term will bring dictatorship."¹⁰⁷ The National Committee to Uphold Constitutional Government, a major opponent of Roosevelt, also contributed much to the anti-propaganda movement against Roosevelt.¹⁰⁸ Like the Republican Party, the National Committee to Uphold Constitutional Government used brochures, pamphlets, fliers, and more to

¹⁰⁶ *Campaign Literature, 1940 – Republican*. Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Richard Polenberg, "The National Committee to Uphold Constitutional Government, 1937-1941," *The Journal of American History* 52 (December 1965): 582. Founded in 1937 by New Deal opponents to fight against the court-packing plan, the National Committee to Uphold Constitutional Government was one of many conservative organizations opposed to Roosevelt. For more information, refer to Polenberg's article.

appeal to the American people's sense of nationalism as well as their fear of political tyranny.¹⁰⁹ Overall, the propaganda of the Republican Party and other political opponents of Roosevelt attempted to make the third term issue one of the major issues of the 1940 election. To do so, they employed large amounts of propaganda that appealed to the sentiments and the fears of the American people.¹¹⁰

The Democratic Party replied to the propaganda of their opposition with their own forms of propaganda. Like the Republicans, the Democrats also appealed to American patriotism with historical arguments. One pamphlet argued that while George Washington and Thomas Jefferson did not seek a third term during their presidencies, they had never been opposed to the idea of a third term. Furthermore, this pamphlet cited the fact that Roosevelt's attempt to run for a third term was not unprecedented; both Ulysses S. Grant and Theodore Roosevelt had run for President again after their first two terms. Ironically, both Presidents were Republicans. The Democrats also offered the argument that it would be undemocratic if Roosevelt was not allowed to run: "Democracy is generally defined as the right of the people to select any man to hold any public office at a free election and thereby to guide the direction of governmental policy....The really undemocratic principle is the suggestion that the choice of the people must be curbed by arbitrary rules."¹¹¹ The Democratic Party argued that the third term was not the real issue of the campaign and that this issue was blinding the American people from their real needs at this time. They affirmed that "The most important issue of this campaign is that the people of the United

¹⁰⁹ *Campaign Literature, 1940- National Committee to Uphold Constitutional Government*. Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

¹¹⁰ *Campaign Literature, 1940 – Republican*.

¹¹¹ *Campaign Literature, 1940- Democratic*. Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

States need a real President, not a phony precedent...”¹¹² Much of the campaign propaganda centered on the third term issue.

In the 1940 election, Roosevelt appeared to be facing serious opposition for the first time in a presidential election. His main opponent would be a surprising and unfamiliar candidate: the Republican Wendell Willkie. The choice of Willkie by the Republican Party was an interesting one for many reasons. In his biography of Willkie, Steve Neal described some of the contradictions of his political career: “Wendell L. Willkie never held a public office, yet he nearly became President of the United States. A registered Democrat until the fall of 1939, he captured the Republican party’s most coveted nomination less than a year later.”¹¹³ These remarkable events were partly due to his own characteristics; as a candidate, he was young, idealistic, and eloquent. He offered a “fresh” alternative for the Republican Party.¹¹⁴ Perkins described the challenges Willkie offered as a candidate: “Wendell Willkie, I think, was more disturbing to Roosevelt as a rival than anyone who ran against him. He recognized that the elements which forced Willkie’s nomination were not old-line Republicans but people with some progressive ideas, who, under other circumstances, might have been converted to the Roosevelt cause.”¹¹⁵ However, Willkie’s lack of political experience hurt him as much as it helped him. Grace Tully remembered Roosevelt’s joy when he discovered that Willkie lost his voice “under his terrific campaign schedule.”¹¹⁶

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Steve Neal, *Dark Horse: A Biography of Wendell Willkie* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1984), vii.

¹¹⁴ Freidel, 342-343.

¹¹⁵ Perkins, 116.

¹¹⁶ Tully, 239-240.

One of Roosevelt's campaign strategies was to "let the inexperienced Willkie go it alone for weeks and weeks so that his popularity would peak well before the election."¹¹⁷ In contrast, Roosevelt would avoid campaigning directly and instead focus on defense preparations; this would help Roosevelt's image as the necessary candidate for the country facing the possibility of war.¹¹⁸ Willkie's idealistic personality impacted his campaign and shaped the election as a whole, as his candidacy offered something new to Americans who had grown tired of the prevailing political conditions in Washington, D.C.

The election promised to be a close one. The third term issue threatened to be an important one that potentially threatened the legitimacy of Roosevelt's candidacy; the amount of propaganda employed around the issue revealed the importance it had in the Republicans' campaign strategy. However, it was the conduct and direction of American foreign policy that ultimately proved to be the main debate between the Democrats and the Republicans. Forty-seven percent of Americans polled in 1940 said that staying out of the war in Europe was their greatest priority.¹¹⁹ The focus of the United States as a whole, both its people and its government, was on the looming crisis in Europe; Roosevelt reacted appropriately to the growing likelihood of war.

Roosevelt's actions in 1940 supported the national belief that he was acting in the best interests of the country. According to Freidel, Roosevelt's campaign was affected by both defense and politics.¹²⁰ Roosevelt's main goals at this time were both to win re-election again and to prepare the United States for the possibility of war; he believed that "both undertakings

¹¹⁷ Freidel, 346.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 346-347.

¹¹⁹ "The Gallup Poll of Authors."

¹²⁰ Freidel, 341.

were vital to protect the nation from foreign perils.”¹²¹ Roosevelt’s initial acts to prepare the nation for war including creating defense agencies and organizing groups to efficiently utilize war supplies. He also established a defense cabinet; his inclusion of the Republicans Frank Knox and Henry L. Stimson was an attempt to build a bipartisan coalition before the election.¹²² However, his actions during the campaign months certainly did prove vital in preparing the nation for war. These actions reinforced the popular belief that Roosevelt truly did want a third term only for the best interests of the country, for a change in leadership was often unpredictable.

However, Roosevelt’s focus on military preparation soon threatened his campaign. While Roosevelt’s silence may have been a calculated political maneuver at first, it soon began hurting him at the polls as the American people only heard about the policies of Willkie and nothing about what Roosevelt was doing. Rosenman remembered “The effect of Willkie’s strenuous campaigning and Roosevelt’s silence began to be felt by midsummer. Into the White House poured telegrams and telephone calls from all parts of the country...warning that Willkie was making great headway and that the President had better begin to do some campaigning.”¹²³ Roosevelt’s initial refusal may have been admirable, but it was hurting his chances for November. As Rosenman put it, “the American people just naturally refuse to be taken for granted. They want to hear the campaign issues debated by the candidates.”¹²⁴ If Roosevelt wanted to be the first President to win a third term, he would need to begin to put his voice out there.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*, 341-342.

¹²³ Rosenman, 222.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

Fortunately for the Democratic Party, Roosevelt had left himself an opportunity to insert himself back into the campaign if needed. After the Democratic National Convention, Roosevelt had declared “I shall never be loath to call the attention of the nation to deliberate or unwitting falsifications.”¹²⁵ Always the practical politician, Roosevelt had certainly made this statement in case his stock began falling in the months before the campaign and he had to begin campaigning for himself. In September, Roosevelt finally delivered his first political speech of the campaign, a speech to the Teamsters’ Union Convention in Washington, D.C on September 11, 1940. While this would be Roosevelt’s only “political” speech for the next month, Roosevelt did not remain completely silent during that time. Instead, he delivered three “nonpolitical speeches”; these speeches were not overtly concerned with the election, but they contained implicit praise for Roosevelt’s administration and implicit criticism of the Republican Party. These speeches were very effective; Rosenman reminisced that “The President was very adept at using nonpolitical speeches – especially during his campaigns – to derive great political benefit.”¹²⁶ Roosevelt also turned inspection tours of military facilities in September and October into political events; however, throughout this, Roosevelt maintained that he was not campaigning.¹²⁷ While these actions kept Roosevelt in the race, more direct action was still needed, especially following political attacks on both Roosevelt’s son Elliott and his running mate, Wallace.¹²⁸ Roosevelt would need one final political push in order to ensure his reelection and thus win the third term.

On October 18, Roosevelt finally decided to enter the race as a full participant. He issued a statement declaring that he would deliver five campaign speeches in the next two weeks,

¹²⁵ Freidel, 347.

¹²⁶ Rosenman, 224.

¹²⁷ Goodwin, 176-177.

¹²⁸ Freidel, 353. The criticism against Elliott Roosevelt focused on his commission for the position of captain in the air corps, despite his bad eyesight. The attacks against Wallace concerned the existence of his so-called “guru” letters, a major controversy at the time.

presumably due to his earlier statement that he would “call the attention of the nation to deliberate or unwitting falsifications.” At this point in the race, foreign policy was the focal point of the debate between the Democrats and Republicans. However, by this point the election had devolved into a bitter fight: “The nation witnessed the spectacle of the two contending political leaders, both deeply committed to collective security, attacking each other without gloves as each tried to prove the other more likely to embroil the nation in World War II.”¹²⁹ Willkie, who after the election embraced and supported Roosevelt’s interventionist policies, ran as a full-scale isolationist. Roosevelt countered with the declaration that “We will not participate in foreign wars and we will not send our army, navy, or air forces to fight in foreign lands outside of the Americas except in the case of attack.”¹³⁰ A notable exception came in Boston on October 11, when Roosevelt told the public that “Your boys are not going to be sent into foreign wars.” By leaving out the phrase “except in case of attack”, Roosevelt left himself open to criticism that would later come back to haunt him when the United States did enter World War II.¹³¹ Roosevelt also charged that the Republicans were exploiting national security for the sake of politics; his targeting of Republican Congressmen led to the popular chant of “Martin, Barton, and Fish,” attacking the congressmen Joseph Martin, Bruce Barton, and Hamilton Fish, Jr.¹³² Unlike the previous two presidential elections, the election of 1940 appeared ready to go down to the very end.

Although Roosevelt expected to win, he predicted a very close race. Ultimately, however, Roosevelt won a comfortable victory at the polls and thus secured for himself an unprecedented third term. While the election did prove to be closer than the elections of 1932 and 1936,

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 354.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 354-355.

¹³¹ Goodwin, 187-188.

¹³² Freidel, 355.

Roosevelt still won with 449 electoral votes against Willkie's 82, and with 25 million votes against Willkie's 22 million votes.¹³³ The American people had spoken, and they had indicated that they wanted to continue having Roosevelt serve them for a third term. Roosevelt won large majorities in the South and most of the West, while still managing to win a narrow majority in the big states, including New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Missouri, Illinois, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Michael Barone, in his analysis of the election results, discovered that opinion on foreign policy did have a clear impact, particularly in the traditionally isolationist Midwest. However, despite the divide, the election may have ultimately helped the United States. According to Michael Barone, the election helped a divided United States feel more unified heading into the upcoming war.¹³⁴ The election of 1940, although divisive, gave Roosevelt his third term and perhaps even a mandate in foreign policy for his third term.

Roosevelt put his third term to good use, particularly in foreign policy. While the destroyers-for-bases deal was undoubtedly important for the Allied war effort, it was the Lend-Lease legislation of the United States that tied the fates of Great Britain and the United States together. In the beginning of the war, the United States could not provide significant aid to Britain, due to the stringent neutrality laws prohibiting aid to belligerent nations in the United States. Both Great Britain and the United States were in a bind because they were restricted from acting freely by the isolationism of the United States, despite a mutual willingness to cooperate.¹³⁵ Both Churchill and Roosevelt would have to work to find a way around their respective limitations, and create a relationship that would satisfy the needs of both nations. Churchill stressed the needs of Great Britain in a December 7, 1940 telegram to Roosevelt,

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 357.

¹³⁴ Barone, 142-144.

¹³⁵ Warren F. Kimball, *The Most Unsordid Act: Lend-Lease, 1939-1941* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1969), 9.

where he elaborated on the essentials his country needed to wage the war. He warned that Great Britain was running out of cash and would soon be unable to pay for anymore military supplies unless another deal was reached.¹³⁶ Roosevelt found a solution in the idea of Lend-Lease. Although the lend-lease legislation was not passed until 1941, after the election of 1940 and the beginning of Roosevelt's third term, the idea was developed during late 1940. The legislation allowed the United States to provide massive amounts of material aid (including war supplies) to Great Britain, despite the fact that Great Britain could not afford or pay for any of it. According to Warren Kimball, "It was, in short, a subsidy."¹³⁷ The Lend-Lease Act was instrumental for Britain's survival; it allowed Great Britain to continue fighting the war until the United States finally entered in December 1941. It also marked a key moment in American foreign policy. According to Kimball, the Lend-Lease Act cemented America's alliance with Great Britain against Germany.¹³⁸ The Lend-Lease Act marked the culmination of the working relationship between the United States and Great Britain from the summer of 1939 to the end of 1941, when Great Britain stood against the German blitzkrieg and the United States watched from the sidelines and provided as much aid as it could. It is arguable that this relationship would not have lasted if Roosevelt was not elected in 1940.

¹³⁶ Loewenheim, 122-126.

¹³⁷ Kimball, v.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

CONCLUSION

Roosevelt's election in 1940 marked a first in American political history: the election of a President of the United States to a third term. Roosevelt would follow up this accomplishment with an unprecedented fourth term with his victory in the election of 1944 over the Republican candidate, Governor Thomas E. Dewey. At this time, Roosevelt had successfully steered the nation through most of World War II and had brought the Allied forces close to a victory in Europe. His leadership in the four years of his third term proved vital for the survival and flourishing of the United States. The election of 1944 also seemed very important for the sake of the country however; Roosevelt viewed it as "essential to the winning of the peace."¹³⁹ With the United States close to victory, the country would need a strong leader to ensure the United States would win the peace settlement it desired, unlike the controversial Versailles Treaty after World War I. Once again, Roosevelt believed his leadership was necessary for another four years. Thomas Dewey proved to be a much more formidable opponent than Willkie had been, due to his experience as a politician. Throughout the campaign, he repeatedly and effectively attacked Roosevelt and his policies.¹⁴⁰ Ultimately though, Roosevelt won once again and claimed his fourth presidential term. Although it was the closest presidential election since 1916 (Roosevelt won with 53.5 percent of the popular vote), the American people once again indicated their

¹³⁹ Freidel, 556.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 562-563.

support for the man who had guided the nation for over a decade now.¹⁴¹ Unfortunately, Roosevelt's death in the beginning of his fourth term meant that the task of finishing the war and establishing the post-war peace fell to his little-known Vice President, Harry Truman. Roosevelt had won the election, but he would not last to carry out the task the American people had assigned him; he only served three months before his death.

At the time, Roosevelt's third term election was unprecedented; while Ulysses S. Grant and Theodore Roosevelt had also run for President for a third term, neither was successful.¹⁴² Franklin Roosevelt's reelection in 1940 (and then in 1944) opened up the possibility that an American could serve as President for more than two terms and perhaps for as many terms as he or she wanted. The fact that a President could serve for life was one of the factors that most worried Americans; without a limit, what could stop Roosevelt or anybody else from running the country for his or her entire life? Roosevelt's death in 1945 ensured that he would not be able to do this, but the possibility remained. The ratification of the 22nd amendment, however, ended any chance of this occurring. Amendment XXII states: "No person shall be elected to the office of the President more than twice, and no person who has held the office of President, or acted as President, for more than two years of a term to which some other person was elected President shall be elected to the office of the President more than once."¹⁴³ Passed by Congress in 1947 and ratified by the requisite number of states in 1951, the amendment ensured that no American could hold the office of President for more than ten years.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 567.

¹⁴² See note 1 on page 3.

¹⁴³ Foner, A-32.

¹⁴⁴ Michael J. Korzi, *Presidential Term Limits in American History: Power, Principles, and Politics* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2011), 11.

The passage of the amendment was unusual: it was both controversial and unnoticed. Michael J. Korzi, in his analysis of term limits in American political history, believes that the amendment's passage was heatedly debated in Congress and then largely ignored by the American people both then and now. The amendment, Korzi argues, was "the result of partisan pique, payback for Roosevelt's stunning success at election time."¹⁴⁵ If this is the case, the amendment only rose out of opposition to Roosevelt himself and thus is seriously flawed. Furthermore, the amendment prevents the United States from reelecting an experienced President during a time of crisis, just as it did in 1940 when Roosevelt won his third term. Despite the many weaknesses of the amendment, a surprising lack of attention attended it. Korzi notes that its debate, passage, and ratification were barely covered in the newspapers. Furthermore, he notes, "despite some serious concerns by scholars and observers at the time, the amendment was accepted with almost no public resistance and has quickly become one of the settled facts of the U. S. presidency."¹⁴⁶ Roosevelt's third term left a lot of legacies for the United States, including the introduction of strong government aid during the Great Depression and American victory in World War II. However, the twenty-second amendment is the legacy that it left in the Constitution of the United States. While scholars and academics continue to debate the relative pros and cons of the amendment, the amendment shall continue to prevent any President from following in Roosevelt's footsteps and seeking a third term. Whether or not this is a good thing continues to be debatable.

The 22nd amendment was just one form of condemnation passed on Roosevelt's third term election after the fact. Some historians look back at the decision and wonder if it was necessary. While Roosevelt certainly faced a large amount of opposition and criticism regarding

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

the third term issue during the election, he received much more support than resistance once he won his third term. Although the results were fairly close, Roosevelt's victory demonstrated that a majority of the American people supported Roosevelt's policies and wished for him to continue as President, despite the fact that he was breaking a hallowed political tradition. Clearly, Roosevelt's leadership was valued more than George Washington's decision over one hundred years previously. Even Wendell Willkie, Roosevelt's Republican opposition during the election, supported him following the election. In an Armistice Day speech, Willkie asked the American people to unite once again above their respective parties and support Roosevelt in these difficult times.¹⁴⁷ While the Republican Party, particularly the isolationist wing of the party, continued to give him trouble in the following months, no criticism was raised against the third term issue again.

Not only Americans were satisfied with the news that Roosevelt had won reelection again; the British were happy to hear that Roosevelt, who had supported them at the start of the Second World War, would continue to serve as President of the United States. Winston Churchill, who had already established a strong connection with Roosevelt in the preceding months, was particularly glad that he would continue working Roosevelt and not another American politician. Churchill expressed his pleasure in one of his telegrams sent to Roosevelt: "I did not think it right for me as a foreigner to express any opinion upon American politics while the election was on, but now I feel you will not mind my saying that I prayed for your success and that I am truly thankful for it."¹⁴⁸ However, while he congratulated Roosevelt on his victory, he noted that much work lay ahead for both leaders: "We are entering upon a somber phrase of what must evidently be a protracted and broadening war, and I look forward to being

¹⁴⁷ Freidel, 357.

¹⁴⁸ Churchill, *The Second World War: Their Finest Hour*, 553.

able to interchange my thoughts with you.”¹⁴⁹ Roosevelt had won a significant victory at the American polls; however, an even greater challenge awaited him for the next four years. Roosevelt’s “reward” was the challenge of leading the United States through the dangers of World War II.

1940 was a monumental year in American history, for many different reasons. However, the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt to an unprecedented presidential third term was perhaps the most important event to occur that year. The importance of the election and the outcome were largely outcomes of the events occurring around the country and the world in 1940. With Roosevelt having served the customary two terms, it seemed natural that a new individual would enter the White House in January 1941. However, the long dominance of Roosevelt in the Democratic Party throughout the 1930s helped create a lack of suitable successors for Roosevelt in the party. Despite this fact, all the signs pointed to Roosevelt retiring after 1940 and moving on from politics; Roosevelt himself told multiple people that all he wanted to do was retire to Hyde Park after eight years as President. However, the events occurring in Europe at this time challenged this hope. Beginning in 1939, Europe was consumed by World War II. As Hitler’s German army spread throughout Europe and threatened free governments, Americans watched. While the United States did not enter the war until the end of 1941, the war issue dominated foreign policy as well as politics. The dangers that the war presented most likely convinced Roosevelt that his leadership would continue to be necessary for at least the next four years; his special relationship with Winston Churchill certainly contributed to this belief. As these events pressed upon the United States, Roosevelt decided he had to run again. By doing so, he would be breaking a hallowed American tradition, the two-term limit. Despite some personal misgivings,

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Roosevelt won both his party's nomination and then the election itself to win his third term. This election was very significant, for Roosevelt guided the nation through World War II for the following four years. Roosevelt chose to seek a third term (and later a fourth term in 1944) for the good of his country, not for himself. In the end, his victory helped the United States but it ultimately ended in his own death in 1945.

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