

## HOW MR. ROOSEVELT WON

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THERE was a time when citizens might have said, "What earthly difference does it make who is president?", but that time was before the Great Depression over here and Hitler over there. It is not an opinion widely held in 1940. (Of course, among nearly 50,000,000 voters there are some queer ones, especially in certain small towns. As late as 1936 a female clerk with a high school education said, "I'm not really very interested in politics, but I did vote for Landon because I thought those sunflower buttons were nice. It really doesn't make any difference to me who gets it though.") If even a genius nods at times, it may be possible for America to survive and yet have a sprinkling of citizens who can't quite keep awake, who can't keep their minds on it, even in these dangerous days. But these luekless individuals, like the varsity athletes who excel in Greek, are very rare, indeed.

In this presidential campaign the issue and the candidates cut right through to a person's marrow. And if one really knew a voter's fundamental opinions or philosophy of life, he knew his choice—Roosevelt or Willkie. This is because politics and life are now the same thing. I made three mistakes in predicting an individual's choice on the basis of my knowledge of the person. In each case, however, I found there was a hidden factor on which I had not counted—a factor which explained the vote after all. First there was the enthusiastic, wide-awake, clear-thinking graduate student who told me that he had voted for Willkie, and after he mentioned his more unconvincing reasons, he finally told me the real one. "You see, I vote in Vermont. The county clerk will recognize my absentee ballot when it comes in. He is a Republican. Now wouldn't I look like the Devil sending a Roosevelt ballot up there?"

Then there was a physician who said he was for Roosevelt—nearly all the doctors I know were for Willkie—and when I asked the Roosevelt medico his reason, he replied, "Because he will get us into the war quicker!"

And there was the widow managing her small store in Texas. She was voting for Willkie, she said, because "Roosevelt took away my husband's pension."

These reasons for voting stirred my curiosity. So as I went about, I deliberately asked people how they voted and the reasons for their choice. And I wrote a few letters to key people elsewhere about their reasons and the reasons they had heard in the 1940 campaign. I knew that by these direct and indirect methods I might be able to get a cross-section of American public opinion in one of the great crises of its history. "Magnanimity in politics," Burke once said, "is not seldom the truest wisdom; and a great empire and little minds go ill together." This, I reasoned, is an election of both world-wide significance and immediate and enormous personal interest to millions of people here. Some of these millions would have preferred a death in the family to the election of Roosevelt, or Willkie, as the case might be. In an election so soul-searing, what are the reasons for a person's choice, what do the people think of the candidates? If the point at issue is great, will the voter be actuated by a reason of state in casting his ballot, or will some trivial detail call the turn? Some of the reasons would have been worthy of a great patriot, but others were not above the level of an earthworm—save that as many of these non-statesmanlike reasons were held by individuals in high places as in low. (I am not quoting the majority of voters who simply say Roosevelt is a dictator or a lunatic, or those who with equal certainty declare, "I voted for Roosevelt, of course," and probably never had the faintest idea of voting for anyone else. It seems that the central fact in the 1940 campaign is that a controlling number of Americans were confronted with a great fear, a fear of war and destruction, and they voted for Roosevelt or Willkie according to their opinion of the leader's ability to meet the challenge of this fear—I think the vote indicates that a majority of voters believe that Roosevelt with his experience and objectives is the better able to protect and serve them.)

Before describing individual voters, there is one basic fact about all the voters' reasons that is unmistakably clear. The voter is at bay during a campaign. Every sort of appeal or attack is made on him. He must know what he wants, and he must evaluate the record and promises of the candidates. He must cast his lot with the candidate that most squarely measures up to what he, the sovereign, wants. He must do this in spite of every sort of stratagem that human ingenuity with untold dollars to spend can use to lure, frighten, or reason that vote away. The test is a formidable one. The people of other countries have failed it, to their great sorrow. Some of the readers

of this article think that here too, the voters failed, and that inflation and economic collapse are just ahead—a controlling majority voted for Franklin Roosevelt! However, the people who believe that the re-election of Roosevelt was for the common good, must feel that his election was a victory for the democratic process in this country. My purpose is merely to give the reasons that led people to vote one way or the other.

I was in a photographer's shop a few days before the election, and the clerk asked my opinion on it. The proprietor was there, and I suggested that he tell his views. The clerk said, "Oh, Mr. Baker is very radical." I then put the question to Mr. Baker directly, and he answered: "I don't think they'll ever let it come to a vote." "Who won't?" I inquired. "The Democrats—they're in and they are going to stay in. They'll use force if necessary."

Next I questioned a professor. He said, "Willkie", and then added, "I am proud to have participated in the last free election that America will ever have."

I approached the second professor, asking, "Why did you vote for Willkie?" "How did you know I voted for Willkie? Are you a mind-reader? Well, I did. I guess the reason is based on the financial policies of Roosevelt. If we have inflation, I will lose everything I've got—all my investments, my life insurance, and my salary will be reduced. Well, I guess the reason goes back eight years. I never liked that fellow."

A third professor supported Willkie because "I believe that Roosevelt will lead this country into economic chaos." The night the election returns came in, he told his wife, "This is the end!"

Professors in voting are about like the people generally—some are wiser than others. Probably not a few misguided ones think that politics and politicians are like measles and should be stamped out. In this campaign at least one professor believes that Roosevelt is the greatest President since Lincoln, but others think that he is a greater menace to America than Aaron Burr ever was. However, the majority of views fall somewhere between these extremes, and I think a controlling number voted for Roosevelt. In the words of one of the greatest of them, "Roosevelt is not indispensable, but he is far more indispensable than Willkie. The European situation is too acute to be turned over to a new party and to groups neither reliable nor informed. The dictators wanted Roosevelt's defeat. The idea of Roosevelt becoming a dictator is plain rot. And

then as the campaign went on, Willkie became hysterical. He thought he was a savior. That gave me a pain in the neck. Finally, I am for much of the New Deal program. Willkie said he was too—but I prefer to have it handled by the administration that gave it to the country."

Nine out of eleven taxicab drivers said they had voted for Roosevelt. One said, "Willkie", and then he added, "I am a Republican and a German. I don't like Roosevelt." One of the ten said, "Roosevelt is a politician. He is not a greenhorn." The attitude of the other eight is described in the words of one who glowered at me and then answered, "Well, who is a guy supposed to vote for?" However, one of the group, who had spent two years at the University, failed to vote. "I saw no reason to vote," he said.

The negroes that I talked to invariably said that Roosevelt was their choice, although a few said they had voted for Willkie. One of these said, "I am a Republican and I naturally voted for the regular Republican candidate." He hesitated and then added, "It's funny, but I guess I'm glad that the President got it." A middle-aged negro who works in a railway yard voted for Willkie and said, "I am for the man with the money, and in this country, the Republicans have all the money. No matter what the Democrats do, they will never get any place because the big business man is against them. We have had the New Deal for eight years, and they haven't got us out of the depression yet. Roosevelt may be a good man but he can never get any place with the men he has around him and the rich men against him."

An elderly colored house-maid expressed her viewpoint in these words: "I think that Roosevelt was the only man to be put in. Willkie can't match him and I think Mrs. Roosevelt is one of the grandest women. When they wouldn't let Marion Anderson sing in that hall, she certainly did put up a fight for her and ended up with her singing the Star-Spangled Banner under Abraham Lincoln's statue. She is always visiting colored schools and conventions, and I bet she is right behind President Roosevelt about doing something for the colored people."

A janitor in a drug store said, "I can't see how any colored man with any sense can vote for anyone except Roosevelt. He hasn't discriminated against the colored man in helping the poor man. I voted for him every time and will vote for him every time he runs. Why, do you know that my girl wrote

Mrs. Roosevelt a letter and told her she had a little baby to take care of and in less than a week she had a notice telling her to go to some guy down at the merchandise mart about a W.P.A. clerk job, and she started off that next Monday making \$65 a month. That sure helps me out because now I can pay off some of all these debts."

A middle-aged owner of a paper company declared, "Roosevelt is all right with me. I never got so tired of having beggars coming up to me as before he was elected. Now all of the guys who were panhandling are on W.P.A. Furthermore, you don't see him going around in a top hat and formal clothes and in the newreels he is driving a Ford and not some big car. He doesn't try to hold himself above everybody and that's what I like about him, he is human. And look at all the good laws that he has put through and everyone is aimed at the common man and they all benefit my race."

Housewives' opinions seemed to vary in accord with the economic status of their husbands, but some of them are strong enough to stand alone. The wife of a banker told one of my friends—and she trembled as she told him—that "If That Man in the White House ruins this great country, it will be because people like you, who ought to know better, did it!" Another housewife indicated that opinions change during a campaign. "I gave a Willkie rally party two weeks before the election. Then I was sick in bed a week, and I listened to the radio all day. I listened to all the speeches. Willkie didn't say anything, and when you hear both sides, you have to vote for Roosevelt. My husband and I almost had a divorce over the election."

John L. Lewis helped this housewife decide. "I couldn't make up my mind. But when Lewis switched over to Willkie I was for Roosevelt. And then I heard Dorothy Thompson on the radio, and she said just what I thought. Maybe you can't blame Willkie for the people who supported him, but there must be some reason why all the Germans and anti-Semites and Fascists liked Willkie better than Roosevelt. I don't like the idea that I would cast my vote in a way that would suit them."

One housewife spoke for legions of women like herself, I guess, when she said she had voted for Willkie because she felt that "Roosevelt has done nothing about unemployment—and I am against a third term." Another one said, "That Roosevelt is just a big blunderer. All he does is make mistakes. What we need is a man that will do some concrete thinking and get

this country back on a stabilized basis. He can't do anything because the big business man is against him and until he realizes this we will stay in a depression. I voted for Landon last time, and Willkie this time, because until we get someone in there who can enlist the cooperation of big business, we will stand still."

I didn't ask this particular woman what her reason for supporting Willkie was, but I noticed that when Roosevelt was speaking, she left the room to do her dishes, and her young son, when he heard Roosevelt say (it was his Cleveland speech) that he wanted to "stick by" during the storm that was raging, and that there would be a new president next time, began shaking his head solemnly and said, "He is just lying. He doesn't mean it. I know he is going to go on running all his life and be a dictator." I found he was reflecting accurately his mother's opinions.

A housewife in a small town said, "Willkie", and then explained: "Our Ladies Aid talked over the election and we decided that Willkie was the best man. His wife seems to be so awfully nice. And Roosevelt repealed the Prohibition Act, and I've also heard that he is an immoral man." Another wife in the same town gave these reasons for supporting the President: "My husband has been on W.P.A. now for about 4 years. I really don't know what we would have done otherwise. My husband and I figured that since he helped us, we would help him by voting for him. He's a good man. I like the sound of his voice." One in a big city said, "All Republicans are lousey. Look at Hoover. I'd like to know what Willkie could do anyhow—maybe he'd have breadlines like Hoover. I hate Hoover. Roosevelt doesn't give a damn about the rich. He doesn't take anything from anybody." One on Long Island wrote a friend: "I am sorry you are for F.D.R. just because you think he has helped the farmer, for there are so many other matters to take account of. Of course I have never been for him because I knew too much about him and his business methods before he was even Governor of New York. Then, although Governor Smith left a good surplus for the state, he left us a *ninety million* debt—and see the debt of the nation now! I have too much of the New England thrift in me to stand for anything like that. I would rather trust a good, successful business man, with some knowledge of finance to try to turn us back to thrift and economy! The democrats used the 'smear' back in the time of Theodore Roosevelt. They hired Mickelson to smear Mr. Hoover for three years and now the New Deal

have hired him again to do even worse! Look at the five appointments to the Supreme Court—all for purely political and personal rewards. No president ever did so. The presidents in the past have chosen men of the most unblemished records who were well known for their unbiased decisions and who were among the *first class* lawyers and judges of the land. I get frightened when I think F.D.R. if re-elected may have the chance to appoint four more of the justices!"

I spoke to four barbers: three were for Roosevelt, and one voted for Willkie because "I felt it would be dangerous to have the two-term precedent broken. I did not have much respect for Willkie, but I picked him as the lesser of the two evils."

Rugged individualism seems to be making its last stand among our farmers. They are individualists "first, last and forever". One was asked to take a short course in agriculture in the winter at the University. He said, "No, I guess not." He was reminded that he was not busy in the winter months. "But," he said, "I ain't ever used all the farmin' I know yet." If I may paraphrase part of a quotation from Professor Ross, I would say: To innovate in law, religion or state is to reform an army in the presence of the enemy; and the farmer is always in the presence of the enemy. Many farmers, and people in certain very small towns, think that money for relief is throwing money away—or worse. Some farmers think that legislative gains made by labor is harmful to the farmers. Others have trouble getting farm help; they blame it on W.P.A. Others are just naturally Republicans. "I was for Willkie because I've voted Republican all my life and shall continue to do so as long as I vote. I've never figured out any reasons to vote against Roosevelt, and I don't need to. The fact that he is a Democrat is enough." A neighboring farmer said, "I voted for Roosevelt because I figured he was a good man for the job. He's tried to help us farmers. Those A.A.A. checks came in mighty handy, but the Supreme Court stopped that. Now we have the soil conservation program. A lot of people say it's giving the farmer something for nothing. Maybe so, but the Republicans have been giving everyone but farmers money for nothing. I guess it's about time we got a break." An elderly farmer said, "Willkie and Heil", and then continued, "In fact I voted a straight Republican ticket because I'm a damned good Republican. I can't understand how people can let themselves be fooled by Democrats and Progressives. My God, who gave them the best times they ever knew, who made this country what it is

to-day, the Republicans. We got more cars, more telephones, more everything, and we got them while Republicans were in office. And now that lame devil of a Roosevelt wants to change us all over. My God, they should shoot him." A traditional Democrat said, "Willkie, because I can't compete with Argentine beef." A third said, "Thomas, because the sooner people realize that government control of public utilities and business is the only way the common man can get a decent break, the sooner our depressions will cease. F.D.R. is next best, and Willkie isn't worth the powder to blow him up with." Another said, "Willkie, because Roosevelt was and is getting too much power for one man. There is too much unconstitutional legislation and too high a public debt with the resulting danger of bankruptcy."

It would seem that the draft and the war issue would be uppermost in the minds of young voters. It was with some, but the majority I know gave other reasons for their choice. Home influence was strong with these first voters. The children of wealthy parents were most likely to oppose Roosevelt. I asked the views of a group of 72 University students; 42 were for Roosevelt, 14 for Willkie, and 5 for Norman Thomas. Those for the Socialist candidate said that peace was the paramount issue. One who supported the Republican candidate said, "I voted for Wendell Willkie because he was the only possible man to save Democracy. If he would have got in, he would have balanced the budget, and prevented the endless bleeding of finance of the country that Roosevelt has caused in the last eight years. In due time, if this spending spree is not stopped, we will find the value of the dollar like the value of the mark in Germany. Worth nothing. As for honesty, Roosevelt has showed that his word means nothing. Many statistics have been quoted where he has continually changed his mind. His foreign policy has been to land us near war by scaring us." Another Willkie supporter said, "He has experienced modern warfare on the battlefields. Roosevelt existed comfortably as a swivel-chair artist during the war. Who would comprehend the terrors of war? Who would think twice before sending our youth out to be butchered? Roosevelt has had so much handed to him. Willkie is a self-made business man and would practice those principles."

Another young man, now with the National Guard at Camp Beauregard, Louisiana, wrote, "I'll be both glad and proud to vote for Roosevelt next Tuesday, and the same goes for



most of the other fellows down here. Everytime I hear him speak, I feel a patriotic chill run down my spine. He makes me proud to be a soldier."

Then there was one first voter who said, "Franklin I! Germany and Italy have dictators, why can't we?" And another, a girl, supported Willkie because "I do not like men who use cigarette holders." A graduate woman student said, "I forgot to vote for Roosevelt but I voted for Loomis (candidate for governor) because I think he is such a gentleman." Willkie's speeches elected Roosevelt according to this first voter. "I was a confirmed Republican until a month before the election when Willkie's campaigning got strongly under way. His taetics of empty speech-making disappointed me so that I voted for Roosevelt. He, at least, talks because he has something to say whereas Willkie talks because he has to say something." One said, "Roosevelt. He could have 6 terms for all of me. I just think he's the best man for the job and has the experience. Willkie hasn't had any political office and while he was president of Commonwealth and Southern, there wasn't any dividend paid on common stock, don't forget. Still another, a first voter, said, "I voted for Willkie because my father is a big business man, a vice-president." A pretty graduate student pondered a minute and then said, "I voted for Willkie because I inherited the Republican party along with curly hair and blue eyes. I never hear the other side. I suppose that if my parents were Democrats, I'd be one, too."

Laborers supported the President more often than Willkie. A small tavern owner declared, "I voted for Roosevelt because I think he has the common man's interest at heart. What would happen to the poor people if it wasn't for the W.P.A.? I suppose most of them would starve to death. The majority of my patrons are W.P.A. workers. Certainly I have all the big shots out and they may spend a lot when they come but I appreciate much more that consistent little man that comes in practically every night. But not from just a personal interest he has done a lot for this country. He has got a hard job, but he sticks right with it."

An employee in a furrer concern didn't mention Lewis but willingly told his reasons for supporting Roosevelt. "I am a member of the C.I.O. union. Before the Wagner Act I went to work at eight o'clock and worked for twelve hours and during the busy season even more. The union didn't really mean a heck of a lot, that is my union, the furrriers, until

we broke off from the A.F. of L. in 1936, and added impetus was given it when the F.L.S.A. was passed (Fair Labor Standards Act). Under these laws my hours have been reduced thanks to the legal aid given to my union by these laws. Where I was lucky to make \$20 a week, now I make \$35. All of this is due to Roosevelt, and if Willkie got in, it probably would all be wiped out. That's why not only am I voting for Roosevelt, but I am going to get him as many votes as possible." A section hand on the railroad said, "Roosevelt, because he is for the Unions and the laboring man. He tries to protect their rights. If it wouldn't be for men like him, the rich guys would have us working for 10 cents an hour. And that's no damned lie, but a fact." A garage mechanic in a small town said, "I voted for F.D.R. because the guys who were against him, are always against the poor man. After what that old fat hog Hoover did to us in 1932, I guess I'll never vote Republican again." A W.P.A. worker stated that he was for Roosevelt because "he gave me a job when I needed one. A lot of guys yell about W.P.A. workers being so lazy. I wish those guys would come on out and work with us sometime. They'd soon change their tune. It's no fault of mine that I can't get a job. God knows I've tried hard enough. It's for guys like me the W.P.A. is for, and it means a lot to us. I'll always vote for Roosevelt if he runs 10 times."

People in utilities or big business with whom I talked were unanimously opposed to Roosevelt, but business men with small stores were divided; the majority, I believe, for Roosevelt. After the election one book dealer said that, "There are many of us unreconstructed rebels yet. I am against any man who doesn't keep his promises. Roosevelt never kept a promise he ever made. And I don't like the character of the men, and women too, that he has around him. They are radical and are not interested in American traditions. Another thing—sending out checks to farmers before election is bad." Another used an analogy to explain. "Roosevelt running again is like when you play bridge. You open without enough tricks, and then you're so afraid that your partner will find out that you haven't got enough that you keep bidding and bidding just so you won't have to lay your hand down. You get in deeper and deeper. Roosevelt has made such a mess, he can't leave it for anyone else to see. Willkie might have straightened things out." A third said, "I didn't vote for Willkie. I voted against Roosevelt. Four more years of Roosevelt will finish the job.

Absolutely. There'll be bankruptcy. The man's an idiot... Whenever I go to vote I realize what a sell-out it is. They give me two men to choose from and I don't like either of them. Don't think that spontaneous business fooled me. You don't get a thousand people in the galleries shouting "We want Willkie" unless you hire them. But Roosevelt is worse. The Democrats always ruin the country and they always have to start a war to fix things up again." A Jewish merchant said, "Willkie is better economically and Roosevelt is better religiously. Good business won't do me any good if we have like Germany. I had to vote for Roosevelt whether I like him or not." But a great number put it this way: "My business has been better the past four years than it ever was in my life. I've done three times the business. Why shouldn't I vote for Roosevelt?"

Both of Madison's poets voted for Roosevelt. One said that she supported the President because she greatly admires the gentleman. "He is decent, humane and just and he talks as though the people were, too. I cannot endure Willkie because I do not like to be talked to as though I were both dumb and wicked. I do not trust him. You know that during the campaign he said that if 'the third term candidate' were elected it would mean the end of free elections in this country forever. Then when he spoke to his followers the last night he declared that he did not want anyone's name identified with the movement. He paused and then said, "1944 will take care of itself!" Doesn't this prove his insincerity? I didn't believe him when he said that the re-election of Roosevelt would mean the end of free elections, and I can see now that he didn't believe himself."

Probably the group most unanimously for Roosevelt could not cast a vote. I mean the refugees. In order to show the attitude of this group I quote a paragraph from a letter to one of my friends. "You are the first one I must write to. You are part of this victory because you have fought for it with all possible means and, more, you are the living incarnation of this very principle which has won a greater—and farther reaching—battle than the Battle of France has been. I am immeasurably happy, grateful and proud—proud to be admitted to this great nation which proved itself beyond the reach of evil influences and above bigoted stupidity which appears in the dressing of so-called 'tradition'. How good, to know one's children growing up amongst that nation."

Professor Munro once said that those who fight for the poor must fight the poor in order to do it. I think that our

presidential election this year has proved that on some occasions the poor can fight for themselves, particularly when they are provided with effective leadership. And it may be that democracy is right—that there is someone wiser than anyone—that is everyone. Some of the reasons given for voting are odd or queer, and the great majority of persons think of their own skin and bones first, but they are usually wise enough to see that they are useless without America, and they think of America, too. Enlightened selfishness is a most basic principle to follow in human affairs. This requires something more than good intentions. It requires knowledge, understanding and the ability to pick the best man at a given time. I think that the voters demonstrated that they can do this.

Shakespeare had his characters talk themselves alive, and I think many voters go far in describing themselves when they just naturally give their reasons for voting. There is a professor (not at Wisconsin) who said that he couldn't quite make up his mind. "This is a very difficult campaign. Here is what I am going to do. I will vote for Willkie, and then vote him out in four years." This description fits the man. And then there is the sporty band leader in Chicago. He drew his own likeness in giving his reasons for supporting Roosevelt. "Well, man, I don't get a chance to follow politics too close because I'm always busy with my band but from what they tell me that Roosevelt kat is the jive. (Roosevelt is a good man). I figures the colored people would get away from the Uncle Tom stuff voting Republican no matter who ran and I guess the Republicans are having a baby trying to figure out how to get our vote back. I know one thing: some of these W.P.A. guys seem to be making more money than me; got fine togs (clothes) and fine rubber (automobile). Here it is I got a regular slave (job) and just can scuffle up on a pair of kicks (shoes). But I'll leave it to you educated guys to figure it out and see if I can't get my band good enough to go to New York."