

David Pietrusza. *1920 The Year of the Six Presidents*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2007. Pp. 544. Cloth \$28.95.

David Pietrusza presents a detailed overview of the 1920 election, focusing on the six past, current, and future men who would occupy the office of the Presidency. For students of political campaigns and back room deals, this examination of Harding, Coolidge, Wilson, Hoover, and the two Roosevelt's (Theodore and Franklin Delano) is a narrative of intrigue and interaction among these fascinating political players who were involved in this election.

After an introductory portrayal of the numerous political players in the 1920 election cycle, Pietrusza produces a work with twenty-six chronological chapters, beginning in 1919 with the death of the initial presumptive Republican frontrunner, Theodore Roosevelt. His topics include the battles for the nomination of each party, the multi-balloted conventions, third party candidates, the newly enfranchised women votes, the role of African-Americans, and culminating with the unanticipated lopsided win by the Harding – Coolidge ticket. Pietrusza delves into the twists and turns of the 1920 political landscape, highlighting Wilson's political and physical incapacitation due to the failure of senatorial approval for American participation in the League of Nations and his massive debilitating stroke. He then reviews how the country was poised and moved towards an isolationist, prohibitionist, free market, and anti-socialist environment championed by the eventual winner Warren G. Harding.

Pietrusza explains little known details, such as the potential ticket (advanced by more than a few) of a Herbert Hoover – Franklin Roosevelt run for the White House and the personal attributes of each candidate. This analysis of both the Chicago Republican convention and the Democratic San Francisco assembly is punctuated with pointed comments from Baltimore publicist H. L. Mencken. Tidbits, such as endless ballots in the July heat of Chicago endured by Republicans searching for a concusses nominee, while a Harding compensated Columbus, Ohio glee club endlessly serenades the wiry delegates throughout never-ending night sessions, provide spice to the work. A chapter titled “Warren Harding is the best of the second-raters,” lifted from a newspaper editorial, summarizes the tone of this book.

With the Republicans needing ten ballots, and the Democrats suffering through forty-four rounds of voting, the convention events provide ample plot material for this book. With a chapter dedicated to the African American participation in this election, most voting Republican, Pietrusza reviews topics such as lynching and how the words of Coolidge were reassuring to the minority group. Sixty-seven pages are dedicated to end notes, where the author uses mostly newspaper articles from the period, interspersed with source material gleaned from a variety of books that have dealt with the subject.

Pietrusza, the winner of the Casey award and a member of the Board of Directors of the Calvin Coolidge Memorial foundation, has authored more than thirty books, chronicling both the histories of baseball and presidential campaigns. His previous work on the election of 1960, evaluates the three men who would eventually occupy the presidency, and this book follows in that vein. The reader may be challenged to find an argument or a position, other than a stinging critique of FDR. For those interested in presidential campaigns, *1920 the Year of Six Presidents*, provides a wealth of data assembled in a long but readable work.

Howard Gaass