

Harding Presidency Assignment

Teapot Dome Scandal 1921

The Teapot Dome Scandal refers to a bribery scandal of the White House administration of President Warren G. Harding. Teapot Dome is an oil field on public land in the U.S. state of Wyoming, so named for Teapot Rock, an outcrop resembling a teapot overlooking the field.

In 1921, by executive order of President Harding, control of Naval oil reserves at Teapot Dome in Wyoming and at Elk Hills, California, was transferred from the Navy Department to the Department of the Interior. The oil reserves had been set aside for the Navy by President Taft. In 1922, Albert B. Fall, U.S. Secretary of the Interior, leased, without competitive bidding, the Teapot Dome fields to Harry F. Sinclair, an oil operator, and the field at Elk Hills, California, to Edward L. Doheny. These transactions became (1922–23) the subject of a Senate investigation conducted by Sen. Thomas Walsh.

It was found that in 1921, Doheny had lent Fall \$100,000, interest-free, and that upon Fall's retirement as Secretary of the Interior, in March 1923, Sinclair also lent him a large amount of money. The investigation led to criminal prosecutions. Fall was indicted for conspiracy and for accepting bribes. Convicted of the latter charge, he was sentenced to a year in prison and fined \$100,000. In another trial for bribery Doheny and Sinclair were acquitted, although Sinclair was subsequently sentenced to prison for contempt of the Senate and for employing detectives to shadow members of the jury in his case. The oil fields were restored to the U.S. government through a Supreme Court decision.



1. List any labels that you see in the cartoon.
2. List any symbols that you see in this cartoon.
3. With what specific event does this cartoon deal?
4. Explain the main idea of the cartoon.

Evaluation of the Harding Presidency

Source: The following excerpt is from the presidential campaign speech “Back to Normal,” delivered by Warren G. Harding in Boston, MA on May 14, 1920.

“America’s present need is not heroics, but healing; not nostrums (grand plans), but normalcy; not revolution, but restoration; not submergence in internationality, but sustainment in triumphant nationality.

The world needs to be reminded that all human ills are not curable by legislation (new laws), and that quantity of [laws] and excess government offer no substitute for quality of citizenship. The problems of civilization are not to be solved by a transfer of responsibility from citizenship to government.

My best judgment of America’s needs is to steady down, to get squarely on our feet, to make sure of the right path. Let’s get out of the fevered delirium (madness) of war, with the hallucination that all the money in the world is to be made in the madness of war and the wildness of its aftermath. Let us stop to consider that tranquility (calmness) at home is more precious than peace abroad, and that both our good fortune and our eminence (power) are dependent on the normal forward stride of all the American people.

Nothing is so imperative (important) today as efficient production to hold our place in the activities of the world. The American who thinks we can add to cost of production without impairing (damaging) our hold in world markets is blind to reality. It is utter folly (foolishness) to talk about reducing the cost of living without restored and increased production. No law will work the miracle. Only the American people themselves can solve the situation. A simple living and thrifty (spend money responsibly) people will be the first to recover from war’s waste, and our people ought to be the first recovered.

The day will soon come when the world will seek our markets and our trade balances, and we must think of America first or surrender our eminence (power). The thought is not selfish. I want to go on, secure and unafraid, holding fast to the American inheritance and confident of the supreme American fulfillment (success).

1. What type of document is this? Who is the author? Who is the audience? How might this influence what is being said?
2. What is Harding’s main message in the first three paragraphs? What previous events/policies do you think he is reacting against?
3. What does Harding see as most “imperative” to making America strong and successful? What must be done for this to happen?
4. Based on this document, what types of foreign and domestic policies do you think Warren Harding would support? (Be as specific as you can, but general ideas are okay too!)
5. Do you think what Harding is advocating for would be good for America? Why or why not?

Document A: Source: The following excerpt is from the “Give Me Liberty!: An American History,” written by Eric Foner in 2004. Eric Foner is an American historian and professor of history at Columbia University.

“Warren G. Harding took office as president in 1921 promising a return to “normalcy” after an era of Progressive reform and world war. Reflecting the prevailing get-rich-quick ethos, his administration quickly became one of the most corrupt in American history. A likeable, somewhat ineffectual (incompetent) individual—he called himself “a man of limited talents from a small town”—Harding

seemed to have little regard for either governmental issues or the dignity of the presidency. Prohibition did not cause him to curb his appetite for liquor. He continued a previous illicit affair with a young Ohio woman, Nan Britton. The relationship did not become known until 1927, when Britton published *The President's Daughter*, about her child to whom Harding had left nothing in his will.

Decidedly conservative on trade and economic issues, Harding favored pro-business government policies. He allowed Andrew Mellon to push through tax cuts for the rich, stopped anti-trust (anti-monopoly) actions, and opposed organized labor. Harding knew little about foreign affairs when he assumed office, preferring to give Secretary of State Hughes a free hand. Hughes was concerned with securing foreign markets for wealthy American banks, such as the one run by John D. Rockefeller.

Although his cabinet included men of integrity and talent, like Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, Harding also surrounded himself with cronies (buddies) who used their offices for private gain. Attorney General Harry Daugherty accepted payments not to prosecute accused criminals. The head of the Veterans' Bureau, Charles Forbes, received kickbacks (bribes) from the sale of government supplies. The most notorious scandal involved Secretary of the Interior Albert Fall, who accepted nearly \$500,000 from private businessmen to whom he leased government oil reserves at Teapot Dome, Wyoming. Fall became the first cabinet member in history to be convicted of a felony.

Ishmael Reed (Document B) Source: The following excerpt is from an article "Amid Mount Rushmore warriors, why not a lover: Warren Harding," written for SF Gate by Ishmael Reed in September 2014. Ishmael Reed is a visiting scholar at the California College of the Arts.

[Harding] is considered by some historians to have been one of the worst presidents, if not the worst, in American history. Why?

Nothing like Hurricane Katrina occurred during his administration. Nor was there a Vietnam, or an Iraq. In fact, President Warren G. Harding called the Washington Naval Conference in late 1921, with the goal of establishing limits on warship construction and tonnage. Millions of jobs weren't sent overseas; [instead] during Harding's administration, the unemployment rate was cut in half.

Instead of attempting to suppress the black vote, he was a Republican, who, in 1921, made a speech supporting the right of black men to vote. He said: "Let the black man vote when he is fit to vote; prohibit the white man voting when he is unfit to vote." A reporter said that while the white section of the audience remained silent, the black section cheered.

Unlike the anti-union Republican rhetoric heard today, Harding advocated an eight-hour work day. Harding signed a federal child welfare bill, the first of its kind.

As for the reason for Harding's harsh assessment, historians point to the Teapot Dome scandal, in which the secretary of the interior, Albert Bacon Fall, secretly granted government oil reserves to some oilmen.

But in comparison to the [economic scandals of the 1990s and 2000s], which threatened the survival of the nation's economy, the Teapot Dome scandal was like kids knocking over a fruit stand.

During his time, Harding was popular. As his funeral train traveled from San Francisco to Washington, "millions turned out" to show their respect. He also wrote smoky love poetry. A reading proves that Harding was a make-love-not-war president. We have four warrior presidents on Mount Rushmore. Why not make room for a lover?

Warren Harding Graphic Organizer

	<u>Source:</u> Who wrote this document? When?	<u>Summarize:</u> What is the author's main argument? Was Harding's presidency good for America?	<u>Evidence:</u> What are three pieces of evidence that the author uses to support his/her claims?
DOCUMENT A			
DOCUMENT B			
<u>Conclusion:</u> Which author do you find more convincing and why? Do you think Warren Harding's presidency was good for America?			