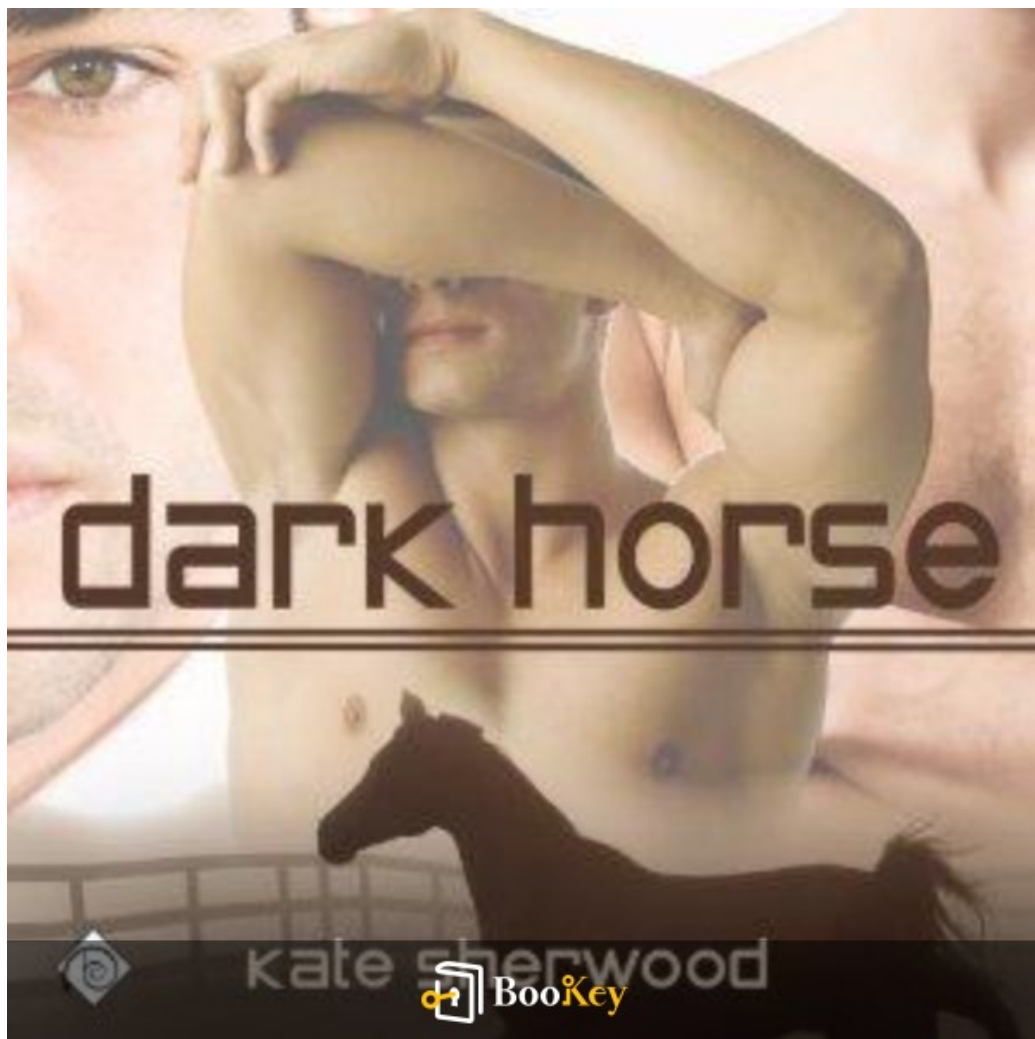


Dark Horse By Kenneth D. Ackerman PDF

Kenneth D. Ackerman



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About the book

Book Review: "Dark Horse" by Kenneth D. Ackerman

In his compelling book, "Dark Horse," author Kenneth D. Ackerman invites readers to explore the extraordinary life of James A. Garfield against the rich tapestry of the Gilded Age. Garfield, who began his life in modest surroundings, ascended to become a significant figure in American politics. Ackerman presents a vivid historical narrative that recounts Garfield's unexpected rise as a reluctant candidate, the so-called "dark horse" of the 1880 presidential election, during a time of national upheaval. The author effectively captures the intense atmosphere of the campaign while showcasing Garfield's principled character in contrast to the rampant corruption surrounding him.

Infused with vibrant details of the era, "Dark Horse" not only reveals Garfield's journey to political prominence but also positions him as a beacon of hope and integrity for a nation in turmoil. Readers will be captivated by this portrayal of a man whose steadfast ideals and quiet strength made a lasting impact on the fabric of American history. Dive into this fascinating account to discover the legacy of a leader whose life story continues to inspire.

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About the author

Profile: Kenneth D. Ackerman

- Occupation: Author, Historian, Attorney
- Area of Expertise: American Political History
- Career Overview:

Kenneth D. Ackerman is a distinguished figure in the realm of American political history. Over his extensive career, he has earned a reputation for delivering meticulously researched and captivating narratives that explore the complexities of historical events and figures.

- Writing Focus:

His literary works delve into pivotal moments and noteworthy personalities within U.S. history, often highlighting lesser-known yet impactful narratives that deserve greater recognition.

- Unique Insights:

Ackerman's legal background enhances his historical analyses, providing readers with nuanced perspectives on the subjects he covers.

- Notable Works:

In addition to his acclaimed book "Dark Horse," Ackerman has penned several other well-received titles, solidifying his status as a respected

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authority in the field of historical literature.

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Dark Horse By Kenneth D. Ackerman Summary

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Dark Horse By Kenneth D. Ackerman

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1. Chapter 1: The Unconventional Rise of a Political Underdog: A Historical Overview

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, American politics was dominated by established political machines and prominent figures. However, within this arena marked by traditionalism and elitism, Warren G. Harding emerged as an unexpected contender—a political underdog whose rise to prominence would forever alter the American political landscape. Understanding this unconventional journey requires a careful examination of the historical context that shaped his ascent from the sidelines of politics to the nation's forefront.

Born in 1865 in Blooming Grove, Ohio, Harding's beginnings were far from glamorous. His family was modest, and unlike many of his contemporaries, he did not come from a lineage of political powerhouses. By the time he entered the political fray, Harding was a newspaper publisher with no significant political ties apart from his local connections. His demeanor, often considered genial but unremarkable, reinforced the perception that he was an unlikely candidate for higher office. This circumstance closely mirrored the stories of other political underdogs who, through sheer resolve and ability to connect with the populace, eventually succeeded.

Warren Harding's political journey began earnestly when he won a seat in the Ohio State Senate in 1900, where he caught the attention of the



Republican Party leadership. Although he had limited control over strong political machinery at the time, Harding's approachable nature allowed him to build essential relationships with key figures within the party, including those in the more rural and industrial sections of Ohio. His platform often emphasized conservative values, economic growth, and a return to what he considered 'normalcy'—a term that would later define his presidential campaign and resonate with a nation weary from World War I.

As Harding navigated through his burgeoning political career, he exemplified tactics characteristic of underdogs: cultivating personal connections, utilizing strategic alliances, and appealing directly to voters' concerns. This approach proved critical in a period where the electorate was becoming increasingly disillusioned with traditional leaders and the elites controlling politics. For instance, Harding actively sought to present himself as a man of the people, often adopting a folksy demeanor that endeared him to both rural constituents and working-class citizens.

Moreover, the shifting political landscape of the early 20th century created an ideal environment for Harding's rise. Populist sentiments were prevalent following the turmoil of World War I, and the 1920 campaign presented a unique opportunity for Harding to leverage his underdog status and rally support against the backdrop of economic instability and social change. He transcended many political barriers by focusing on themes of stability,



traditional values, and national pride, themes which resonated deeply with an America that was desperate for reassurance after years of conflict and upheaval.

The Republican National Convention of 1920 stands as a pivotal moment in Harding's underdog narrative. Initially overlooked as a candidate for the presidency, the convention was marred by deadlocks among more prominent figures. It was during this uncertainty that Harding was given a chance—despite being a compromise choice with no strong faction backing him. His nomination as the party's candidate was not only a surprise but a reflection of his ability to adapt and appeal to the evolving sentiments of the Republican base.

A noteworthy aspect of Harding's campaign strategy was his reliance on media. His experience as a newspaper owner allowed him to utilize press connections to shape his image. He adeptly framed his candidacy as a solution to the nation's woes, promising a return to pre-war normalcy, stability, and economic prosperity. This media influence facilitated outreach to a broader segment of the population, allowing his message to penetrate further into American society than had been possible for previous candidates.

Harding's unprecedented rise through these dynamics serves as a remarkable

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case study in political strategy, emphasizing that conventional routes to power are not always necessary for success in politics. His journey evokes parallels with other historical figures like Harry Truman, who similarly gained national prominence despite initial obscurity. Truman's ascendancy from a relatively simple background to the presidency highlights a shared pattern of success that capitalizes on timing, public sentiment, and strategic campaigning.

In conclusion, while Warren Harding's story may initially appear as the improbable tale of an underdog, it embodies the broader narrative of American politics—an arena where sincerity, adaptability, and public engagement often triumph over established norms and expectations. His unconventional rise points to the inherent unpredictability of political machinations, where the most unlikely candidates can harness the will of the people and ultimately change the course of history. As we delve deeper into Harding's life and the factors that defined his presidency in subsequent chapters, it is essential to recognize the importance of his early experiences that paved the way for his unexpected and significant role in American political history.

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2. Chapter 2: A Deeper Look at the Man Behind the Politics: Exploring the Life of Warren Harding

Warren Gamaliel Harding, the 29th President of the United States, is often remembered as a figure overshadowed by the scandals that plagued his presidency. However, to fully understand his political journey and the complexities of his character, it is essential to delve deeper into his life before he ascended to the highest office in the land. Born on November 2, 1865, in Blooming Grove, Ohio, Harding was the eldest of eight children in a family that belonged to the rural middle class. His upbringing in a modest household shaped his perspectives and ambitions, setting the stage for a life marked by both significant accomplishments and notable shortcomings.

Harding's early education took place in a one-room schoolhouse, a setting that fostered a sense of community and local engagement. He excelled in academics and demonstrated an early interest in leadership. After graduating high school, he enrolled in Ohio Central College, where he faced challenges with strict academic requirements. Though his formal education came to a halt after just one year, Harding's thirst for knowledge did not wane—he became an avid reader and a self-taught man.

In 1884, Harding ventured into the world of journalism, buying a small-town newspaper called the "Marion Star." Under his management, the publication



flourished, establishing him not only as a capable businessman but also embedding him into the local political fabric. This experience would prove vital in shaping his political viewpoints and honing his skills in communication, which became hallmarks of his rise to power.

Harding's political career began in earnest in the late 1890s. Initially a member of the Ohio Republican Party, he served in various capacities, including state senator and lieutenant governor. His charm, affable nature, and ability to connect with the electorate garnered him a loyal following. Harding's politics were decidedly conservative, and he favored a pro-business agenda, which resonated with many Americans during a time of economic expansion. As he navigated the political landscape, he developed a reputation for being a 'Dark Horse' candidate—someone underestimated due to a lack of experience but possessing charisma and broad appeal.

One of the pivotal moments in Harding's life was his marriage to Florence Kling DeWolfe in 1891. Florence, a strong and savvy woman, played a significant role in his career, often acting as his advisor and benefactor. Their relationship was not always conventional; some described it as one marked by rivalry, but they complemented each other in many ways. Florence's influence helped to refine Harding's public persona and guided his decisions as he ventured into politics.



Harding's campaign for the presidency in 1920 was shaped not only by his past experiences but also by the political climate of the time. The aftermath of World War I and the societal shifts it prompted left many Americans longing for a return to 'normalcy'. Harding brilliantly capitalized on this sentiment, promising to restore the country to its pre-war values, and advocating for isolationism in foreign policy. This message resonated deeply with a war-weary population, leading to an overwhelming victory at the polls—his charm and optimistic vision a vital contrast to the tumultuous landscape left by the war and the subsequent economic struggles.

However, while Harding's early life was marked by growth and engagement, it also foreshadowed the struggles he would later face as a leader. His lack of a robust ideological foundation, combined with a tendency to delegate authority to those around him, would haunt his administration as the years progressed. A more nuanced understanding of Harding reveals a man caught between geniality and gravity—a political figure whose ascent was both historically significant and tragically flawed.

Reflecting on Harding's life prior to becoming president provides insight into the man behind the politics. He was shaped by the challenges of his youth, influenced by his marriage to Florence, and propelled by a unique blend of charisma and a desire for stability in an uncertain world. This

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deeper exploration drives home the importance of understanding political figures as complex individuals rather than merely symbolic representations of their time. As we venture further into Harding's presidency, recognizing the man behind the headlines can shed light on the decisions he made and the circumstances he faced in the turbulent early 20th-century America.

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3. Chapter 3: The Intrigues and Tensions of Early 20th Century Politics: Challenges Faced by Harding

In the early 20th century, American politics was characterized by a dynamic interplay of competing interests, shifting alliances, and a reaction to the vestiges of progressivism. Warren G. Harding, the 29th President of the United States, ascended to the highest office amidst this turbulent backdrop, leading to a presidency riddled with innate challenges that would shape his administration.

One of the paramount challenges Harding faced was navigating the remnants of the Progressive Era, which had enacted substantial reforms aimed at addressing corruption, monopolies, and social injustices. The rise of progressivism had ushered in a wave of skepticism towards traditional political spheres, creating a demand for accountability and transparency. Yet, Harding, representing a more conservative Republican platform, emphasized a return to normalcy, a phrase that would define his campaign and subsequent presidency. This call for a more conservative governance model was an attempt not only to unify a divided electorate but also to placate factions within the Republican Party that were wary of progressive reforms.

The political landscape during Harding's time was also deeply affected by World War I and its aftermath. The defeat of the Central Powers led to



significant shifts in international relations and trade, and this in turn necessitated economic adjustments at home. Harding's administration inherited a nation dealing with inflation, labor unrest, and a growing sense of disillusionment following the war. The lingering wartime sentiments fostered an atmosphere of suspicion towards immigrants and non-conformists, elements that Harding's administration had to contend with as public opinion increasingly leaned toward isolationism and nativism.

Furthermore, Harding faced internal challenges from within the Republican Party itself. The factionalism that characterized the GOP created additional layers of tension, particularly between the progressive and conservative wings. Key figures, such as Theodore Roosevelt's supporters, were increasingly at odds with the old guard represented by Harding. As a result, Harding had to employ political stratagems to maintain unity within the party. His willingness to appoint a mix of progressives and conservatives in his cabinet was a tactical choice aimed at bridging these divisions. However, this often limited his ability to enact comprehensive policies, as he was consistently pulled in different directions by competing loyalties.

Additionally, the influence of political machines and emerging lobbyists added another complex layer to Harding's presidency. While these entities had existed prior to Harding's tenure, their power escalated during this era, complicating the nature of political decision-making. For instance, the



influence of the Ohio gang—friends from Harding’s home state who became key players in his administration—often involved personal connections and financial interests that undermined professional governance. The infamous Teapot Dome scandal, which centered on the secret leasing of federal oil reserves to private companies without competitive bidding, epitomizes the kind of corruption that flourished amidst the lax oversight of government contracts during Harding's administration. This scandal would later overshadow Harding’s presidency, highlighting the vulnerabilities of his leadership and the impact of political favoritism.

Moreover, Harding had to grapple with a burgeoning civil rights movement that began to gain momentum in the early 20th century. African Americans, many of whom had migrated to northern cities for better opportunities during the Great Migration, began to push more aggressively for civil rights and against racial discrimination. Harding's responses to this shifting tide were cautious, reflecting both the era's prevailing sentiments and his own political instincts. Although he delivered a notable speech advocating for racial equality and denouncing lynching, actual policy changes were slow and often minimal, reflecting the complexity of balancing progressive ideals with the sociopolitical realities of the period.

In summary, chapter 3 of "Dark Horse" delves into the intricate tapestry of early 20th-century politics that defined Warren Harding’s presidency. The



challenges he faced were not just limited to external pressures such as economic discontent and international relations, but also stemmed from internal party divisions, advancing social movements, and the ever-present shadow of corruption. Each of these challenges required Harding to employ a delicate balance of political pragmatism and ideological commitment in an era rife with strife and change.

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4. Chapter 4: The Key Policies and Decisions That Defined Harding's Presidency: Impact on America

Warren G. Harding, the 29th President of the United States, held office from 1921 until his untimely death in 1923. His presidency, often overshadowed by personal and political scandals, is defined by a series of key policies and decisions that shaped America's post-World War I trajectory. This chapter delves into the significant impacts of Harding's administration on both domestic and foreign policies, revealing how his governance attempted to bring stability and prosperity to a nation weary of conflict and upheaval.

One of the cornerstone initiatives of Harding's presidency was the pursuit of a return to normalcy, a concept that resonated deeply with the American public following the turmoil of the First World War and the Spanish Flu pandemic. This slogan represented Harding's commitment to restoring pre-war social norms, minimizing government interference in the economy, and promoting a laissez-faire approach. The call for normalcy was a reaction against the Progressive Era reforms that many Americans felt had led the nation into complications overseas and domestic discontent.

In terms of economic policies, Harding implemented significant tax cuts aimed primarily at the wealthy and businesses. These tax reductions were part of a broader effort, influenced by Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon, to



stimulate economic growth. The theory was based on supply-side economics, which argued that reducing taxes would lead to increased investments, job creation, and ultimately, greater tax revenue. While this policy initially spurred growth in the 1920s, leading to what is known as the Roaring Twenties, it also set the stage for economic imbalances and contributed to the wealth disparity that would later culminate in the Great Depression.

In addition to economic policies, Harding also focused on regulatory reforms in various sectors. He made significant strides in the area of business deregulation which aimed to promote competition and prevent monopolistic practices. For example, he appointed pro-business leaders to the Federal Trade Commission and the Interstate Commerce Commission, and his administration saw the repeal of wartime regulations on utilities and railroads. These decisions reflected a philosophy that emphasized the free market and minimal governmental intervention, which resonated with many Americans eager for economic revival.

Harding's presidency also witnessed key legislative achievements, notably the passage of the Fordney-McCumber Tariff Act in 1922, which raised tariffs on numerous consumer goods. The intent behind the act was to protect American industries from foreign competition, a move that would eventually pressure European economies still recovering from the war.

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While it helped certain sectors of American agriculture and manufacturing, this protectionist measure had mixed short and long-term consequences, complicating international trade relations and contributing to retaliatory tariffs by other nations.

On the foreign policy front, Harding's administration was characterized by a desire for disarmament and a step back from overseas interventionism. His most significant foreign policy achievement was the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-1922, where major world powers gathered to discuss naval disarmament. The resulting agreements established limits on battleship construction and aimed to prevent an arms race. This diplomatic effort marked a rare moment of international cooperation in the post-war era, reflecting Harding's push for peace and stability.

However, despite these efforts, Harding's administration was marred by scandals, most notably the Teapot Dome scandal. The scandal involved the secret leasing of federal oil reserves to private companies without competitive bidding, highlighting the corruption and cronyism that could flourish in a less-regulated environment. Though Harding himself was not implicated directly, the tarnishing of his legacy due to these scandals underscores the complexities and contradictions of his presidency.

Overall, Harding's key policies and decisions had a profound impact on the



landscape of America, steering it toward economic growth but also planting the seeds of future challenges. His focus on reducing government involvement and promoting free enterprise defined an era of prosperity while also contributing to economic inequalities. The principles of normalcy and deregulation he championed would echo throughout subsequent administrations, influencing political discourse even in the present day. By navigating between idealism and practical governance, Harding left a complicated but lasting imprint on American history.

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5. Chapter 5: The Legacy of Warren Harding: Reevaluating a Presidency Impacted by Scandal and Misfortune

Warren G. Harding, the 29th President of the United States, served from 1921 until his untimely death in 1923. His presidency is often remembered more for its scandals than for its accomplishments, casting a long shadow over his legacy. A reevaluation of Harding's time in office requires a nuanced understanding of how the combination of circumstance, the political environment of the era, and personal failings shaped opinions about him.

Harding rose to power during a period of great upheaval in American society, as the nation was reeling from the consequences of World War I and the subsequent economic challenges. His campaign promised a return to "normalcy," a term that encapsulated the public's desire to move away from the tumultuous times of war and reform back toward stability and conservatism. However, the events that unfolded during his presidency belied that promise.

Among Harding's most notable appointments was his selection of several of his friends and associates, referred to as the "Ohio Gang". This group, composed of men from his home state, was instrumental in various corrupt activities that would forever stain his presidency. The most infamous



scandal, the Teapot Dome scandal, involved the secret leasing of federal oil reserves to private companies in exchange for bribes. This affair not only crystallized the perception of Harding's incompetence but also served as a bellwether for the lack of ethical leadership that would plague American politics in the years to come.

Despite the overwhelming focus on scandal, some historians argue that Harding's presidency deserves a more balanced assessment. He is credited with significant achievements in domestic policy—most notably, his support for initiatives that helped stabilize the economy after the war. Harding's administration significantly reduced taxes, which stimulated investment and economic growth, leading to a short post-war recession but eventually to robust prosperity. Furthermore, he was a proponent of civil rights, advocating for racial equality and supporting anti-lynching legislation, which was a progressive stance for his time.

Harding's foreign policy, while overshadowed by scandals, also had notable successes. His administration oversaw the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-1922, which aimed to curb the naval arms race among the world powers. This resulted in significant disarmament agreements that enjoyed a temporary respite from military tensions.

However, these accomplishments are often eclipsed by the tone of his

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presidency. Harding's personal misfortunes, including his tragic death in office and the emergence of his extramarital affairs, contributed to a narrative that prioritized scandal over substance. His widow, Florence Harding, subsequently took on an active role in preserving and promoting his legacy, but critics claimed that elements of deception shadowed her efforts.

A key element of understanding Harding's legacy lies in the context of the era's attitudes toward leadership. At a time when American voters were craving a return to stability, Harding's promises resonated but ultimately devolved into a series of disheartening revelations that betrayed public trust. This scenario raises important questions about the nature of political legacies: how a presidency is evaluated by history, and whether the failings overshadow the accomplishments.

Furthermore, Harding's presidency is a case study in the complexities of fame and infamy. It serves as a reminder that presidential success cannot merely be measured against scandal; rather, it must also reckon with the societal expectations of leadership during turbulent times. As historians continue to revisit Harding's legacy, they grapple with reconciling his significant policy efforts with the prevalent corruption and misfortune that marked his administration.



In conclusion, reevaluating the legacy of Warren Harding is fundamental not only for understanding the man himself but also for reflecting on the broader implications of political ethics, leadership, and the public's role in shaping a president's place in history. While Harding may have been a victim of his circumstances, the scandals of his presidency reveal deeper systemic issues within American political structures that continue to resonate with contemporary issues of governance and accountability.

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