

The President As Preacher

"Civil Religion and the Gilded Age Presidency: The Case of Benjamin Harrison" by Charles W. Calhoun, in *Presidential Studies Quarterly* (Fall 1993), 208 E. 75th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

Theodore Roosevelt was not the first president to see his office as a "bully pulpit." A dozen years before him, Benjamin Harrison, elected in 1888, grasped the opportunities the presidency offered to preach to the nation. Indeed, Harrison's "exercise of the 'priestly functions' of the presidency," argues Calhoun, a historian at East Carolina University, helped transform the office.

The grandson of an earlier president, William Henry Harrison, Benjamin Harrison (1833–1901) of Indiana served a single term in the U.S. Senate before running for the presidency in 1888. A contemporary said that Harrison had "a very cold, distant temperament," but "if he should address 10,000 men from a public platform, he would make every one his friend." That gift proved to be his greatest political asset, Calhoun says. Presidential candidates of the period were obliged to stay off the campaign trail and appear to be above politics. Candidate Harrison waged a brilliant "front-porch campaign," delivering brief "homiletic" remarks to throngs of visitors and reporters virtually every day. He defeated Democrat Grover Cleveland 233 to 168 in the Electoral College while narrowly losing the popular vote to the incumbent chief executive.

In the White House, Harrison continued to seek a direct rapport with the citizenry. During his single term (Cleveland won back the presidency in 1892), Harrison spoke publicly on 296 occasions, half as many as all of his predecessors combined. After Harrison, presidents would find it harder to view the office as strictly administrative; increasingly, they would feel obliged to exert leadership through direct appeals to the public.

"At a time when the disruption of modernization wrought profound disarray in personal and national values," Calhoun says, "Harrison effectively exploited the national pulpit, invoking the tenets of a civil religion that comprehended both spiritual and secular goals."

"I do not know how our institutions could endure," Harrison said on one occasion, "unless we so conduct our public affairs and society that every man who is sober and industrious shall be able to make a good, comfortable living and lay something aside for old age or evil days; to have hope in his heart and better prospects for his children. That is the strength of American institutions. Whatever promotes that I want to favor." What promoted that, he maintained, was the Republican economic program, particularly a stable currency



President Harrison, who sought a direct rapport with the people, receives a procession at the White House after his inauguration.

and the protective tariff.

Harrison has risen in the estimation of historians lately. With the 1890 Sherman Anti-Trust Act and other measures, Calhoun writes, his administration laid the groundwork for later Progressive reforms. And by addressing the nation so vigorously from the "pulpit," Harrison helped change the presidency. TR and other presidents would build on what Harrison began, "echoing his civil religious concerns but pleading more boldly and forthrightly for government action for the public good."

An Unlimited Future?

"Term-Limitation Express" by Mark P. Petracca and Darci Jump, in *Society* (Nov.–Dec. 1993), Rutgers—The State University, New Brunswick, N.J. 08903.

The term-limitation movement, born in 1990, shows no sign of slowing down. With the addition of Maine last November, voters in 17 states have limited the terms of federal or state legislators, and in 14 of those they have limited the terms of both. Activists are working to get initiatives on the ballot in eight other states this year and are lobbying legislatures elsewhere. Not