



Four Hats in the Ring: The 1912 Election and the Birth of Modern American Politics (American Presidential Elections)

Lewis L. Gould

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Imagine a presidential election with four well-qualified and distinguished candidates and a serious debate over the future of the nation! Sound impossible in this era of attack ads and strident partisanship? It happened nearly a century ago in 1912, when incumbent Republican William Howard Taft, former president Theodore Roosevelt running as the Progressive Party candidate, Democratic nominee Woodrow Wilson, and Socialist candidate Eugene V. Debs all spoke to major concerns of the American people and changed the landscape of national politics in the bargain.

The presidential election of 1912 saw a third-party candidate finish second in both popular and electoral votes. The Socialist candidate received the highest percentage of the popular vote his party ever attained. In addition to year-round campaigning in the modern style, the 1912 contest featured a broader role for women, two exciting national conventions, and an assassination attempt on Roosevelt's life. The election defined the major parties for generations to come as the Taft-Roosevelt split pushed the Republicans to the right and the Democrats' agenda of reform set them on the road to the New Deal.

Lewis L. Gould, one of America's preeminent political historians, tells the story of this dramatic race and explains its enduring significance. Basing his narrative on the original letters and documents of the candidates themselves, he guides his readers down the campaign trail through the factional splits, exciting primaries, tumultuous conventions and the turbulent fall campaign to Wilson's landslide electoral vote victory in November.

It's all here—Gene Debs's challenge to capitalism, the progressive rivalry of Roosevelt and Robert La Follette, the debate between the New Freedom of Wilson and the New Nationalism of Roosevelt, and the resolve of Taft to defeat his one-time friend TR and keep the Republican Party in conservative hands. Gould combines lively anecdotes, the poetry and prose of the campaign, and insights into the clash of ideology and personality to craft a narrative that moves as fast as did the 1912 election itself.

Americans sensed in 1912 that they stood at a turning point in the nation's history. *Four Hats in the Ring* demonstrates why the people who lived and fought this significant election were more right than they could ever have known.

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