

The Vilification of the Presidency: Similarities between Harding and Trump

-Edward Kennelly

Most people, if they know anything about President Warren G. Harding, know that he presided over one of the most corrupt administrations. Many know about his infamous Tea Pot Dome Scandal but few know of any of his accomplishments. Harding actually had several notable achievements. Harding like Trump improved the economy, cut down on illegal immigration, and promoted the Civil Rights of African Americans.

Harding like Trump, ran on a platform of normalcy. Trump's *Make America Great Again* platform is similar to Harding's *Return to Normalcy* platform. Harding promised to reign in America's political influence abroad after World War I. A nationalist, Harding opposed Woodrow Wilson's League of Nations and his Fourteen Points Plan. He opposed free trade among all nations. [Fourteen Points | Text & Significance | Britannica](#) He was also against the notion that the President should have the authority to send troops to foreign lands without Congressional approval if the U.S. allies are attacked. He thought the League limited America's ability to act as a sovereign power.

The League of Nations consisted of 42 founding countries including Belgium, the United Kingdom, and Canada. Even though the United States did not join the League of Nations many academics, historians, and progressives thought the U.S. should have joined. The League of Nations later essentially transformed and became the United Nations in 1945. [The League of Nations | The United Nations Office at Geneva](#) The U.S. later joined the United Nations. Many progressives, historians, and academics supported the League of Nations and Wilson's Fourteen Points and opposed Harding's nationalist sentiments. Due to this, when they discovered scandals during Harding's administration, they capitalized on the scandals to smear Harding's image and reputation.

Harding, like Trump, lowered the unemployment rate, cut taxes, and reduced government regulations. When Harding went into office the unemployment rate was 12% in 1921. When he died in 1923, the unemployment rate was 3%. (Walters, Ryan S. pp. prologue xxvii 27) [Amazon.com: Jazz Age President: Defending Warren G. Harding: 9781621578840: Walters, Ryan S.: Books](#) During Trump's first term the unemployment rate fell to 3.5%, the lowest level since 1969. [What Happened to the Economy Under Trump Before Covid and After – WSJ](#) Moreover, Harding and Trump cut federal taxes and reduced government regulations so that businesses could thrive. Harding's economic policies made way for the economy to boom throughout the 1920s. Calvin Coolidge continued many of Harding's economic policies after his death.

Harding also ran on cutting the number of immigrants coming into the United States. Most immigrants came to the U.S. from Europe. This change resulted in more American born citizens

receiving jobs instead of foreigners. Likewise, Trump has placed travel bans on several countries in Africa, the Middle East, and South America [US travel ban expanded to include more countries | CNN Politics](#). Both Trump and Harding's immigration policies improved workers' wages and prevented the number of radicals coming into the country.

On the domestic front both Harding and Trump were supporters of African Americans. Harding condemned the Tulsa Race Massacre which resulted in the deaths of anywhere between 36 to 300 African Americans, the burning of 1,256 homes, and the looting of 215 other homes. [Tulsa Race Massacre – Facts, Photos, Coverup | HISTORY](#) In 1921, Harding gave the commencement address at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. Lincoln University was the first-degree granting historically Black University. During his address he said that African Americans should have the same opportunities for higher education as whites. He also said that all African Americans should be able to exercise their right to vote without fear of being lynched. He supported a federal civil rights bill and a federal anti-lynching bill. Even though these bills did not pass during his administration the number of lynchings decreased under his presidency. [What Did It Look Like for a U.S. President to Condemn Racism in 1921? | Britannica](#) These were important policy moves in the right direction. Woodrow Wilson had segregated African Americans in the federal government.

Trump, like Harding, also supported African Americans. In 2025, Trump signed an executive order redirecting \$435 million dollars to historically black colleges. [Trump redirects \\$500M in federal funding to Black and tribal colleges | AP News](#) During his first term Trump signed legislation increasing school choice funding by \$42 million. Trump also signed the *First Step Act*. The *First Step Act* helped to reduce prison sentences for people who were convicted of non-violent drug offenses. Ninety percent of those people who had their sentences reduced were African Americans. [BOP: First Step Act Overview](#)

Harding was loved by most Americans during his presidency. He had a high approval rating. His death, from a heart attack, in 1923 left the nation in mourning. Upon his death famous architects of the time fought over who would build his tomb. Harding's tomb contains marble pillars and is located in Marion, Ohio. A few years later Harding's reputation was damaged after historians, media people, and progressives discovered that the Secretary of the Interior, Albert B. Fall, received bribes of up to \$100,000 from Doheny and Harry Sinclair's Mammoth Oil Company for a deal related to the oil reserves. This became Tea Pot Dome Scandal. Fall was later imprisoned for his crimes. This scandal damaged Harding's reputation. [U.S. Senate: 100 Years Since Teapot Dome](#) Even though Harding was not personally involved in the Tea Pot Dome scandal historians have unfairly pinned this scandal on him to destroy his reputation.

Likewise, the media and progressives have tried to destroy Trump's reputation several times. The media and progressives used the Russian collusion narrative in 2016 to claim that he cheated to get elected. The Left then tried to claim that he attempted to overthrow the U.S. Capitol in 2021 by sending his supporters there which he did not do. They tried to prevent him from running for president by bringing up scandals involving Stormy Daniels and E. Jean Carroll. Many academics and progressives do not like Trump because he is a nationalist who puts restrictions on the number of immigrants coming into the country and because he supports policies that favor America over our European Allies, China, Mexico, and Canada. Trump,

unlike Harding, has been able to change his reputation by winning reelection but progressives continue to try to destroy his reputation.

Overall, Trump and Harding share many similarities. Both men are nationalists who opposed illegal immigration, improved the economy, and supported civil rights for minorities. Both men were illegitimately vilified by the press and historians.

Works Cited

Walters, R, S (2022). *The Jazz Age President: Defending Warren G. Harding*