

## “I Shudda Won! I Cudda Been a Contenda!”

Prior to the Democratic convention leading up to the 1940 Presidential election, Roosevelt, having already served two terms, had already told the Democrats that he would not run for reelection, but at the convention it was announced that he would, in fact, seek reelection to a third term.

But it was the Republican convention for that election that provided the real excitement. “It's hard, dear diary, not to think about all the political drama packed into that program--the fist fights, the endless rounds of balloting and suspense as to who might emerge as candidate... in which Wendell Wilkie, the urbane New Deal Democrat-at-heart, beat Thomas Dewey, the formidable New York prosecutor, and Robert Taft, the Ohio senator known as Mr. Republican, in six ballots--all much to the surprise of party stalwarts. Hordes of the nominee's supporters--they were a fervent lot--had jammed the galleries of the Philadelphia convention hall to roar "We Want Wilkie!" over and over.” (*Dorothy Rabinowitz's Media Log, Friday, July 28, 2000*)

The Republican opponent was Wendell Wilkie, a political outsider from Indiana who was working as a utilities executive in New York City. He was a formerly unknown who gained popularity for his pro-war opinions. He attacked Roosevelt for a lack of military preparedness, an attack which Roosevelt deflected by increasing the military. Wilkie only made an attempt to decry the growing war in Europe, but even he favored aid to England. He lamented the "wooden crosses for sons and brothers and sweethearts" he saw if Roosevelt got the nation into war, but also went against the Republican grain and called for more defense spending. Yet, he could never find any real campaign issues besides the unpopular anti-war stand. And the third-term backlash within the GOP never spread outside the party. Roosevelt, in fact, was too popular to be restricted by tradition.

Wilkie's other stand, the concept that the New Deal had interfered with business and not helped the economy, was not accepted by the public. Among Wilkie's supporters was John L. Lewis of the CIO.

The election was the closest presidential race since 1916 -- although FDR did capture 55 percent of the popular vote, his margins in individual states were thin enough to threaten his electoral college majority:

Roosevelt Totals..	27,263,448 votes.....	54.97%.....	453 Electoral Votes
Wilkie Totals.....	22,336,260 votes.....	45.03%.....	78 Electoral Votes

[Alaska's Electoral Votes were not allocated until 1960; Dist. of Columbia's Electoral Votes were not allocated until 1964; and Hawaii's Electoral Votes were not allocated until 1960]

Check your Major Political collection. You may well have one or more of these or other Wilkie covers issued for the 1940 Presidential campaign.

