Suffragists march in October 1917, displaying placards containing the signatures of over one million New York women demanding the right to vote.

The New York Times

women's suffrage became the law of the land, only thirty-five percent of eligible women cast a ballot. In 1924, turnout among women dropped to thirty-four percent.[75] African-American women, the vast majority of whom still lived in the South, remained largely disenfranchised due to the formal and informal restrictions on Black voting in place throughout the region. Women who did vote in the 1920s did not diverge from male voting patterns. Despite the widely anticipated power newly enfranchised women were expected to wield, no cohesive voting bloc emerged, and the powerhouse organizations of the suffrage movement foundered. Catt's NAWSA peaked at 2 million members in 1920; by 1930 membership of its successor organization, the League of Women Voters, stood at 100,000, a ninety-five percent decline.[76]

Paul's NWP fared no better. After 1920, the NWP pivoted to mobilize for an **Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)** that sought an explicit constitutional guarantee against discrimination "on the basis of sex." Although it was revived in the 1970s, the push for an ERA failed in no small part due to vigorous state and national opposition from the League of Women Voters. The League feared the ERA would erase hard-won gender-based legislation like mother's pensions and laws protecting women workers. While women's organizations continued to exert influence and lobby for specific policies and issues, without the common goal of suffrage to unite them, many splintered along racial, class, and ideological lines. Even the **Sheppard-Towner Maternity Act** of 1921, a hard-won, crowning achievement of women progressives that secured governmental funding to provide health care and other services to mothers and children, was unceremoniously phased out when Congress halted appropriations to the program in 1929. As we will discuss in Section III, while the Nineteenth Amendment failed to revolutionize American politics, it did herald seismic shifts for women in other areas of American society as old gender norms gave way to those of a new era.

A RETURN TO "NORMALCY": REPUBLICAN RULE RETURNS TO WASHINGTON

President Warren G. Harding and the Election of 1920

Few people, including **Warren G. Harding** himself, predicted his rapid political ascendancy to the nation's highest office. Harding was a life-long Republican who loyally followed the party line. Presidents William McKinley and William Howard Taft, both fellow Ohioans, served as his political role models. The owner of *The Marion Daily Star*, a moderately successful small-town newspaper, Harding excelled in the personal networking and backroom dealmaking that characterized local partisan politics at the turn of the century. Harding used these skills to vault from the Ohio state legislature to the U.S. Senate in 1916.

An unremarkable junior senator and an intellectual lightweight, Harding's bid for the Republican nomination in 1920 initially appeared dead-on-arrival. Harding's lackluster performance in the Republican primaries left him a distant sixth place (out of eight candidates). Harding received a paltry 36,795 total votes out of a total 1,089,307 cast in all contests and won only his home state of Ohio.[77] At the Republican presidential convention, however, the assembled delegates finally nominated Harding on the tenth ballot as an inoffensive compromise candidate acceptable to both the conservative and progressive wings of the party. While Harding possessed a flowery vocabulary, he was not a particularly compelling speaker and was largely unconcerned with policy. Tall and handsome, Harding's most appealing trait may have been his ordinariness. After eight years of Wilson, the nation had grown weary of great men with ambitious plans.

Instead, the American people seemed to crave someone relatable. To borrow a modern cliché, they wanted a president with whom they could imagine

Workers install tires on the Ford Model T Assembly Line at Ford's Highland Park Plant, c. 1925.

From the Collections of The Henry Ford, Gift of Ford Motor Company

The crowd of applicants outside Ford's Highland Park plant after the announcement that workers would be paid five dollars a day, January 1914.

From the Collections of The Henry Ford, Gift of Ford Motor Company

where he revolutionized automobile production by introducing an assembly line system. Patterned on the mass production of sewing machines and the mobile "disassembly" lines developed by Chicago meatpackers to process millions of pounds of pork, Ford's assembly line employed a network of conveyor belts, chains, and cranes to move a bare chassis through a series of stations that culminated in a fully finished automobile ready to drive off the lot. "The man who places a part, doesn't fasten it. … The man who puts in a bolt does not put on the nut; the man who puts on the nut does not tighten it."[116] Workers remained stationary and completed a single task, over and over, for their entire shift.

This low-skill, repetitive work alienated many auto workers, who could not help feeling as though they were simply cogs in a great industrial machine. Nevertheless, Highland Park was an engineering and architectural marvel. A visiting British journalist described it as "a jungle of wheels, belts, and weird iron forms—of men, machinery and movement" that created a thundering din that resembled "the sound of a million squirrels chirking, a million monkeys quarreling, a million lions roaring, a million pigs dying, a million elephants smashing through a forest of sheet iron, [and] a million sinners groaning as they are dragged to hell."[117] This description, terrifying as it may seem, reflected the widespread awe that Ford inspired around the globe. In the 1920s, Ford received more press coverage than any other American with the exception of President Calvin Coolidge.[118]

In his near-fanatical dedication to maximizing efficiency, Ford applied the principles of "scientific management" popularized by **Frederick W. Taylor**, whose time and motion studies of factory workers were used to streamline production processes in many industries. Ford continuously refined his assembly line, eliminating waste to gain precious seconds. The numbers spoke for themselves. Ford had produced 18,664 cars in 1910 and 34,538 in 1911 before the introduction of the assembly line. With the assembly line, annual production spiked to 300,000 while the time to produce a complete car dropped from twelve hours to ninety-three minutes.[119]

By 1920, the Highland Park facility was churning out a new car every minute of the workday. Ford built more than one million cars in 1921, accounting for half of all cars made in the U.S. Refusing to rest on his laurels, Ford doubled production between 1923 and 1925.[120] On October 31, 1925, Ford completed 9,109 cars in a single day, at a rate of one every ten seconds.[121] In 1928, after nearly a decade, Ford's massive complex at River Rouge became fully operational. By 1930, cars accounted for one-tenth of the nation's manufactured goods.[122]

Automobile manufacturing spurred demand for steel, rubber, glass, and oil and provided a boom to the cities where these industries were based. Ford's assembly line transformed American manufacturing and provided