

INTRODUCTION

Mark Hanna in the Twenty-first Century



In 1999 and 2000, many people in the press drew parallels between the 1896 presidential campaign of William McKinley and that of George W. Bush. According to reporters who covered the campaign, this was largely due to Bush's chief political strategist, Karl Rove, who spoke often of McKinley, even going so far as to fax entire copies of *The Presidency of William McKinley*, the University of Texas historian Lewis Gould's book, to reporters.¹ Rove was an oft-covered figure in Texas politics for two decades before he worked to help make then-Governor Bush a frontrunner for the Republican presidential nomination. By distributing McKinley materials, he was making the point that he saw important parallels between the political environments at the end of the nineteenth century and the end of the twentieth century. These comparisons led reporters to recall a figure largely forgotten in modern American politics, Marcus Alonzo Hanna, friend and advisor to William McKinley. The trouble, however, is that in recalling Hanna, journalists relied on the worst, most inaccurate information about him.

Why does it matter if the reputation of a figure who died a hundred years ago is besmirched by the reporters of today? In part, because of the way this false impression of Hanna is used. As time passes, scholars may agree with today's journalists and find that there were many valid reasons to criticize the actions and power of Karl Rove. There may well be ways he handled winning elections of which both

Democrats and fair-minded Republicans would disapprove. Building a case against Rove with a false interpretation of the historical record, however, does nothing but cause well-informed readers to question the veracity of everything else that was reported about him.

One of the most dangerous aspects of modern political journalism is its reckless disregard for history and, at the same time, its impact on history. Journalists print and broadcast what they believe to be true at the moment. They either do not know what occurred in the past or often seem as if they do not care. At the same time, what reporters write or broadcast today becomes part of the historical record and will be archived; a future historian in fifty or a hundred years may consider what they produced to be reliable information, but it is not. Journalism is, at best, a rough draft of history. Unfortunately, however, what reporters produce affects history because when people read or watch the news, they respond to it.

The United States went through an economic transition around the end of the nineteenth century as rapid industrialization began to shift the economy away from agriculture. The country was poised not just at the beginning of a new century but the beginning of a new way of life. William McKinley and his advisor and campaign strategist Mark Hanna sensed this change. They wanted the country to acknowledge it and wanted to help facilitate the shift. More than one hundred years later, Rove saw the United States not only on the verge of another new century but also in the midst of yet another major economic transition, from one based on manufacturing to one based on service. During the campaign in 1999 and 2000, Rove spoke often with reporters both about this parallel and the campaign's plans to duplicate something else from the 1896 election. Just as the economic transition at the end of the nineteenth century was accompanied by a long period of hegemony for the Republican Party, Rove argued that the economic transition at the end of the twentieth century boded well for a new period of Republican hegemony in the twenty-first.

Many reporters took the analogy between the two elections further than Rove wanted them to, however, and soon stories began to appear that offered not just comparisons of the McKinley era and a possible Bush era but also of Mark Hanna and Karl Rove. Many of the comparisons were less than flattering, as reporters asserted that McKinley was a president who was controlled by a political master, Mark Hanna,



FIGURE I.1. Nominis umbra (the shadow of a nominee). Cartoon by Homer Davenport, *New York Journal*, September 19, 1896, 3

and further suggested that Bush was under the control of the Hanna-reincarnated Karl Rove. The problem with these comparisons is that they were usually made with careless disregard for historical facts.

Stories that suggested Karl Rove was Mark Hanna, version 2.0, or that Mark Hanna was Karl Rove's role model began to proliferate. These comparisons continued with some regularity throughout Rove's association with the Bush administration, and other comparisons

were made as well. From 1999 through Rove's resignation from the White House staff in 2007, more than three hundred media reports mentioned the names of both Rove and the fictional puppetmaster Sven-gali, from George du Maurier's novel, *Trilby*; several dozen mentioned both Rove and Earl of Warwick, the fifteenth-century kingmaker involved in the reigns of both Henry VI and Edward IV; and more than 150 articles and at least five books mentioned both Karl Rove and Mark Hanna, often referring to Hanna as "William McKinley's Karl Rove."² Are comparisons between Hanna and Rove well founded? The answer, in a word, is no.

The published books and unpublished research about Mark Hanna paint the picture of a complicated man who was, at times, cutthroat in business and politics but who was, at his core, a good and decent man who believed the things he did were for the betterment of the country. To be sure, Hanna was, in part, driven by personal ambition—he wanted to be a president-maker, as is evidenced by the fact that William McKinley was not the first candidate he backed—but he was also driven by an understanding that the times were changing, that the economy of the country was no longer primarily agricultural, and that it would never be so again.

Hanna's perceived political agenda was objectionable both to many when he lived and many in the twenty-first century, spurring coverage that focused not only on alleged parallels between him and Rove but between McKinley's presidency and that of George W. Bush. For instance, columnist Linda McQuaig wrote in the *Toronto Star*, "If the Bush presidency resembles anything, it's that of William McKinley, who occupied the White House in the late 1890s at the height of the era of unchecked corporate power. Bush strategist Karl Rove has been likened to the McKinley strategist (Mark Hanna), who believed government should be run by, and for, big business."³ To McQuaig, George Bush was William McKinley, Karl Rove was Mark Hanna, and the interests of business controlled all four men, to the detriment of society. However, it is important to consider the intent, as well as the consequences, of the policies a person advocates when trying to assess his legacy. Hanna is rarely given that consideration in modern reporting.

It is also important to understand that Hanna was not a one-man band. His role was overestimated and demonized by his critics at the end of the nineteenth century, and it continued to be overestimated and

demonized by many who referenced him in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries as an example of where things started to “go wrong” in American politics. In many ways, the coverage of Hanna was unchanged a century after his death. Despite the fact that several highly respected scholars have argued that Hanna’s legacy was much different from the biography that was written about him by the partisan press of his age—a press that was led by William Randolph Hearst’s reporters—it is the Hearstian legacy of Hanna’s Svengali image that persists.

In 1896, misinformation about Hanna in the press was to be expected for two reasons. First, Hanna lived in an era of blatantly partisan journalism, and consumers knew which outlets were which. People read the publications that aligned with their own political points of view, and those points of view were reinforced by what they read. There were newspapers that lauded Hanna and newspapers that reviled him in accordance with the political predisposition of their editors and publishers. In comparison, the modern press is largely nonpartisan and objective in its coverage of politics, the alarmist claims of watchdog groups notwithstanding.

One hundred years ago, journalism was a very different, very partisan business, and for many journalists who wrote for publications sympathetic to the Democrats, facts about Hanna took a back seat to painting a picture of an evil man who promoted Republicanism at any cost. On the other hand, there were publications that favored the Republicans that wrote scathingly about William Jennings Bryan and much more positively about Hanna. However, the positive image was not nearly as compelling and, as a consequence, the impression of Hanna that survives today is almost universally negative.

The portrait of Hanna that has stood the test of time is of a man who was grossly obese; a cutthroat attack dog for the “Trusts”; a cigar-smoking man clad in a suit covered with dollar signs who stood side by side with a titanic figure representing the trusts and a tiny, childlike William McKinley. He will forever be known as “Dollar Mark,” thanks to Homer Davenport and the many other political cartoonists who drew him as a malevolent presence. Positive impressions of Hanna in the Republican media stood no chance against the powerful prose and darkly humorous cartoons produced by the incendiary journalists who worked for Democratic newspapers. The most



FIGURE I.2. As they go to the polls. Cartoon by Homer Davenport, reprinted in *The Dollar or the Man? The Issue of To Day*, ed. Homer Davenport and Horace L. Traubel (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1900), 35

influential of these were owned by William Randolph Hearst, whose publications were the driving force behind the negative impression of Marcus Alonzo Hanna that survives today.

Hearst had two main motives behind the misleading coverage of Hanna. First, Hearst was one of the few Democratic publishers who openly supported William Jennings Bryan, so the coverage in his

newspapers was a political choice. Second, however, was a strong profit motive. Hearst sold many newspapers on the East Coast because very few other newspapers in the East, including traditionally Democratic newspapers, supported Bryan. Today, in the era of giant media conglomerates, the ideological motive is missing from much of American journalism, but the profit motive is as strong as ever and continues to have a profound influence on the accuracy and quality of reporting.

If this were the only factor that influenced the coverage of Hanna, we might expect that the evolution of journalistic standards from 1896 to the present day might have had an effect on the tone, substance, and accuracy of reporting about Mark Hanna a century after his death. However, the second reason misinformation about Hanna in the press of his day was to be expected is that journalists rarely let facts get in the way of a good story. Newspapers offered compelling dramas on a serialized basis, giving readers details guaranteed to keep them coming back; faithful stories are almost never as compelling as embellished versions of the truth. Painting Hanna as a robber baron set on stealing America's working class blind certainly made for a much more compelling story than did presenting him as a dedicated politician.

Unlike the shift away from partisan journalism that took place in America during the early part of the twentieth century, there has been no shift in modern journalism away from the importance of presenting compelling storylines to attract an audience and of making a profit. The price of the profit motive is frequently paid through bad journalism. Concern about the financial imperative extends beyond the consumers of media coverage to journalists themselves. In the Pew Research Center's annual analysis of the state of the news media in America, the Project for Excellence in Journalism found in 2008 that more than two-thirds of all journalists (Internet, national, and local) feel that "increased bottom-line pressure is seriously hurting the quality of news coverage, rather than just changing the way news organizations operate."⁴ Whether poor coverage is the result of cuts in newsroom budgets, as many journalists complain; time pressures; the pursuit of a compelling story at the expense of reality; or all of the above, journalism is often inaccurate and misleading.

Inaccurate journalism, whatever its cause, is a serious problem in American society because the public depends on accurate reporting if it is to be well informed about politics. As Mitchell Charnley, a respected professor of journalism, writes in his textbook *Reporting*,

What accuracy means literally is that every element in a news story, every name and date and age and address, every definitive word or expression or sentence, is a precise and unequivocal statement of a verifiable certainty. Not only that: it means also correctness of general impression, correct perspective achieved by the way the details are put together and by the emphases they are given. If the meaning and the imperative need for accuracy are easy to understand, the quality itself is not easy to attain.⁵

Charnley points out the hard task of juggling the many details reporters have to handle in their work, but the news media, if they are to be the watchdogs of democracy, have an obligation to be especially vigilant, no matter the difficulty. Unfortunately, both the public and scholars, including Charnley, find that the news media are frequently in error. A majority of the public certainly seems to have doubts about the accuracy of the news media in the United States. In the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press's annual survey of attitudes about the news media, it was consistently found that more than 50 percent of people surveyed felt that news-media stories were often inaccurate.⁶ The fact that the public has such little faith in the watchdogs for democracy is, in and of itself, discouraging. Even more discouraging is that studies of accuracy in journalism have consistently revealed equally disappointing findings. The first such study was conducted in 1936 by Mitchell Charnley, who found that roughly half of all stories published in three Minneapolis daily newspapers contained errors.⁷

In a 2002 study, journalism researcher Scott Maier found that things remain largely unchanged in the twenty-first century. Using methods similar to Charnley's, who asked the subjects of stories to comment on the accuracy of the reporting about them, Maier found an average of 1.5 errors in stories in the *Raleigh News & Observer* during the period he analyzed.⁸ Maier argues that this finding is discouraging in part because the *Columbia Journalism Review* rated the Raleigh newspaper as one of the best in the country—if one of America's best newspapers has so much trouble with accuracy, it implies there may be far greater problems at other newspapers. Maier writes, "It has been suggested that errors in newspapers are not as widespread as the public perceives. But with more than half of locally produced stories containing one or more errors, as news sources found in this study,

the public's claim to finding errors regularly in their daily newspapers seems hardly far-fetched."⁹

Maier expanded the scope of his research in a 2005 study that examined fourteen newspapers of different sizes from across the country and found largely the same thing he found in his Charlotte study. Maier writes, "This study's central finding is sobering: More than 60% of local news and news feature stories in a cross-section of American daily newspapers were found in error by news sources, an inaccuracy rate among the highest in nearly seventy years of research, and empirical evidence corroborating the public's impression that mistakes pervade the press."¹⁰ Worse than making errors, perhaps, is the fact that there is often little effort made to correct them. In 2007, Maier examined more than one thousand errors of fact published in ten newspapers from across the country and found that when newspapers do make errors, they almost never make the effort to correct them: "98 percent of the 1,220 factual newspapers errors examined went uncorrected. The correction rate was uniformly low for each of the 10 newspapers studied, with none correcting even 5 percent of the mistakes identified by news sources."¹¹

Accuracy is of dubious quality not only in newspapers but also in television journalism, which, according to the 2008 state-of-the-news-media report, a majority of Americans cites as its primary source of news. The same study finds that people trust television journalism more than print journalism.¹² Unfortunately, that trust may be misplaced. In a 2001 study by Newslab, in which researchers interviewed television news managers from across the country, researchers found "that errors are common in both large and small markets, occurring at least once or twice a week. In just over a quarter of newsrooms surveyed, managers said errors get on the air every day."¹³ In another study's examination of accuracy of local broadcast news, the researchers surveyed the subjects of news stories broadcast on five Cleveland television stations and found that "one person in three said that important information was left out of a story; one person in five complained that his or her interview was taken out of context, and nearly one in five thought the coverage of a particular event was overblown and sensationalized."¹⁴

A later study, conducted in 2004 by Newslab and Kent State researchers Gary Hanson and Stan Wearden found that 35 percent of news stories contained errors.¹⁵ In addition to measuring the accuracy

of these television stations, Newslab's researchers Deborah Potter and Amy Mitchell also asked television journalists about practices and policies for both preventing and correcting errors. They found that there is often a disturbing lack of precaution in preventing errors from being made in the first place. They also found that there is "a substantial gap between the importance journalists place on reviewing information before air and the frequency with which this actually happens in their newsrooms" and that caution about preventing errors from reaching the air was high with only certain kinds of stories, like investigative pieces and stories run during sweeps periods when there was the greatest chance the stations could get into legal trouble.¹⁶

In a separate analysis, researchers also found that many stations have little in the way of formal policies for correcting errors when they are broadcast. The report found that "two-thirds of the journalists responding to the survey said that on-air corrections are made at their stations, at least some of the time. The trouble is that many of them could discern no formal process for determining when and how to issue a correction" and that "fully one out of five respondents said they work at a station where there either is no corrections policy, or where errors are treated as an internal matter to be handled in a post-mortem meeting or a discrepancy report."¹⁷ The relative lack of concern about accuracy and policies to correct errors when they are made is disturbing for those who depend on television news for information.

The unfortunate reality is that there is nothing new about inaccuracy in the modern age of so-called objective journalism. When Adolph Ochs purchased the *New York Times* in 1896, he bought a Republican-leaning newspaper with a small circulation. As such, it fit right in with all newspapers of the day by serving particular political interests. As the twentieth century arrived, Ochs and his editors began to move the *New York Times* toward a new kind of reporting that was objective and unbiased. The model proved economically successful, and the newspaper's circulation began to increase quickly. The *New York Times'* model of objective journalism was soon adopted by other newspapers whose publishers saw the economic opportunity that kind of coverage afforded. The economic success of objective journalism spurred the creation of schools of journalism, first at the University of Missouri and then at institutions like Columbia University and Northwestern University. These schools helped to establish professional standards

of objective reporting, and people began to accept the notion that the news media are the so-called watchdogs for democracy.

However, inaccurate reporting does great damage to the possibility that the news media can play the role of watchdogs for democracy. For instance, Gary Hanson and Stan Wearden write that errors in television journalism result in “significant loss of credibility at three key levels—the story, the journalists, and the news organization itself.”¹⁸ In print journalism, the consequences of inaccuracy are equally profound, according to Scott Maier: “When the public distrusts what they read and see on the news, the media not only lose customers but, research suggests, community and democracy wither as the public becomes increasingly disengaged.”¹⁹ Craig Silverman, a Canadian journalist who recently wrote a book about inaccuracy in the press and who documents media errors on the Web site *Regret the Error* writes,

Media errors exert an untold—and, of course, unchecked—amount of power in our world. . . . When the press makes mistakes, especially egregious ones, it gives ammunition to those who would curtail its power through increased regulation or legislation that could potentially restrict press freedom and have a corollary effect on freedom of speech. . . . When the seemingly powerful media cannot exercise its freedom, average citizens naturally suffer the impact.²⁰

The vast majority of the public depends on the news media for information about politics.

When the news media get the facts wrong, they create problems for the members of the public who are interested in learning about current events. Much research documents the fact that there are many people with little or no knowledge about politics.²¹ It is important to point out that the lack of knowledge is not necessarily due primarily to inaccuracy by the news media but to a complete lack of interest in news and politics for some citizens. Researcher Markus Prior found compelling evidence to support the notion that, since people now have the ability to watch whatever they want thanks to the proliferation of media outlets on cable, satellite, and the Internet, many choose anything but news or current-affairs programming.

Prior suggests this new reality is a powerful explanation of the continued existence of the knowledge gap that exists between the people

in this country who are well informed about politics and the rest who are not. A large number of people who do not know much about politics do not have that knowledge because they are not interested in seeking it out. In the new media universe, where hundreds of channels are available, such people do not have to watch any news or coverage of politics if they do not wish to. When there were only a handful of channels in each market, each of which broadcast news at basically the same time, people were not able to avoid news if they were going to have the television on. Now, there is always a rerun of *Friends* on somewhere, and viewers can easily choose not to watch the news.²² Overall, news consumption has declined precipitously over the last decade-plus. As the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press reported, use of all news media declined from 1994 to 2006. In that period, use of television news dropped from 72 percent to 57 percent; use of the newspaper dropped from 49 percent to 40 percent; use of radio news dropped from 47 percent to 36 percent; and even use of the Internet for news, which the center started measuring only in 2004, dropped from 24 percent to 23 percent in two years.²³

Despite the fact that some people are directly to blame for their own lack of knowledge about politics because of deliberate avoidance, those who do seek information about public affairs are often ill served by the media outlets they turn to. To remain profitably competitive in the constantly evolving television market, news coverage has changed, becoming softer and less newsworthy, hoping to attract people who are not interested in news. A study of local television news by the Lear Center, a cooperative venture between scholars at the University of Southern California and the University of Wisconsin, found that the largest part of an average thirty-minute local news broadcast was devoted to commercials. The largest portion of the small, roughly twenty-two-minute news hole that remained was given over to sports and weather, which averaged close to 6.5 minutes per newscast, more than one-fourth of the time available. Serious news of all sorts, including elections and politics, received considerably less attention.²⁴ Meanwhile, the nightly news programs aired by the big-three broadcast networks have become something resembling miniversions of the news magazines that have proliferated on each of the networks, rather than actual newscasts. A small number of hard-news stories occupy the first few minutes of a typical broadcast, while the rest of the

news hole is given over to news magazine-style reports. In fact, these reports are often short teasers for longer versions of the stories that will air later in the evening on *Dateline NBC* or *20/20*. Cable news networks like CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, and even CNN's *Headline News* offer far less coverage of hard news than they once did and primarily offer talk shows, often with ideologically charged hosts, throughout their broadcast schedules.

When the lack of interest in public affairs that many people feel is combined with the fact that many other people's knowledge of politics is negatively affected by both indifference to actual news coverage by media outlets and by the frequent errors those same media outlets make and only infrequently correct, much of the public is left with little idea of what is going on in American politics. The mischaracterization of Karl Rove as the second coming of Mark Hanna is one graphic example of the poor quality of information about politics that is frequently reported in the news media. This book addresses oft-repeated errors about Mark Hanna not just to correct the misperceptions that many people have but also to demonstrate how once an error becomes part of the news media's common knowledge, it is repeated over and over and affects the coverage of politics in the news media a century later.

The contemporary political media make their greatest mistakes when they speak authoritatively about current events without putting them into context or, conversely, when they try to put current events in context by inappropriately comparing them to past events. The first problem is exemplified by a cover story in the October 21, 2007, edition of *Time*. The article, "The Incredibly Shrinking Court," presented the thesis that the Supreme Court has gradually become irrelevant as an institution of government. The reporter, David Von Drehle, wrote, "This trend—a steady shrinking of the judicial role in public policy and a handing over of issues to the states . . . points to an obvious question about the highest court in the land. How much does the Supreme Court matter anymore?" He adds,

The irony is that the Court's ideology is playing a dwindling role in the lives of Americans. The familiar hot-button controversies—abortion, affirmative action, the death penalty, police powers and so on—have been around so long, sifted and resifted so many times, that they now arrive at the court

in highly specific cases affecting few, if any, real people. . . .
 What was once salient is now mostly symbolic.²⁵

Von Drehle examines *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and comments that while that case affected millions, the Court's recent desegregation cases affect only a few hundred people.

The problem with Von Drehle's analysis is that it lacks historical context and is, therefore, very misleading to readers who might not have any knowledge of the Supreme Court beyond what they read in his story. The Court has always waxed and waned in importance in the history of the United States, as is true of the other two branches of government. Even if one accepts Von Drehle's contention that the Court's importance waned in 2007, which is an arguable contention, it does not mean the Court will be irrelevant for the rest of time. Journalists' jobs are to report what is happening today, but when they fail to put current events into context, it is impossible for the consumers of the news media to know what is really happening.

While Von Drehle erred by ignoring history, the news media's coverage of one of America's most historically controversial figures, Senator Mark Hanna, illustrates the second problem—misusing history to make misinformed points about politics today. Studying coverage of Hanna in the media of his day becomes more than a mere historical curiosity when it is considered as an example of how the failure to understand the past makes it difficult to report intelligently about the present. Inaccurate coverage of Hanna in the waning days of the nineteenth century became the basis of comments and coverage by pundits and journalists in the waning days of the twentieth century.

What reporters wrote about Hanna during his own time had an impact on the general public, politicians, and even some academics who wrote the history of the Gilded Age, despite the fact that they knew they were writing about an era in which the media were openly and unabashedly partisan. That partisan coverage continued to have an impact a century later. One high-profile and misinformed example of the lasting weight of the words reporters wrote about Hanna between 1896 and his death was the attention devoted to him in 1996 by Senator Bill Bradley in his autobiography *Time Present, Time Past*. What Bradley wrote about Hanna was informed by inaccurate reports about the Ohioan, and what Bradley wrote was later quoted by journalists who

reported Bradley's complaints about the excesses of campaign finance when he ran for the presidency in 2000. Fiction, when it is repeated often enough, seems to become fact.

In his book, Bradley offers first praise, then condemnation of Hanna. Bradley refers to an interview he gave during his high-school years in Missouri in which he noted Hanna as one of his heroes, along with Billy Graham and St. Louis Hawks' basketball player Bob Pettit. He wrote, "I knew about Hanna because I had written a paper on the 1896 presidential election. A few years ago, my high-school history teacher reminded me that its theme had been 'Money is power.'"²⁶

Bradley assigned blame to Hanna for the sharp escalation in campaign spending in American elections, writing, "Modern political fundraising began in William McKinley's campaign for president in 1896. It was an innovation of Marcus Alonzo Hanna, a successful Cleveland entrepreneur who made his money in the coal-and-iron business."²⁷ He elaborated further: "After Hanna was rejected for service in the Cleveland Civil Service Reform Association, he opted for the world of politics. He was a Scotch-Irish man of action, a politician who scoffed at the bookish and preferred the company of men with money."²⁸ According to Bradley, Hanna's decision to turn to politics was motivated by the anger of rejection, but it is hard to know how Bradley arrived at this conclusion. There was no specific mention of the Cleveland Civil Service Reform Association in either of the published biographies of Hanna, which both chronicled his early involvement in local politics: *Marcus Alonzo Hanna* by Herbert Croly and *Hanna* by Thomas Beer.

Herbert Croly wrote about Hanna's early involvement in politics and suggested that Hanna tried to organize fellow businessmen to get involved in politics and challenge the power of local political bosses:

In this connection, it should be remembered that the first phase of the municipal reform movement all over the country took just this form of an attempt to renew the interest of business men in local politics. . . . As a business man and an active politician he was fighting the fact that business and politics were being specialized and divided. He was seeking to escape from the awkward alternative of being obliged either to fight the political mercenaries or to conciliate them.²⁹

Both Croly and Thomas Beer emphasize Hanna's independence from established political authorities, including his support of a Democratic mayoral candidate, Charles Otis, because Hanna and other businessmen felt the Republican nominee was unacceptable.

Thomas Beer addresses Hanna's entry into politics, but his interpretation is very different from Bradley's. To Beer, Hanna's behavior was motivated by a pragmatic analysis of reality:

It was not until 1880 that Mr. Hanna shrugged and consented, and perhaps the experience of hearing himself called a rich busybody at a meeting of reformers was the conclusion of his first political mood. He knew, by that time, that machinery ruled in politics and that the machinery was companionably to be oiled by money. This image itself appeared in cartoons in the time of Grant. All was appropriate. Factories vomited cheap furniture and cheaper machines on the country, and the vital machinery of cities cast up cheap men into place. Behind this apparatus was a point of reality: one might quietly rule in politics without being a politician. One might be an engineer.³⁰

In Beer's view, Hanna adapted to failure by changing his tactics, whereas Bradley portrayed Hanna's actions as little more than a temper tantrum.

Bradley also incorrectly characterized Hanna as the creator of the modern system of campaign finance when, in describing his own efforts to help Patty Murray, then a candidate for the U.S. Senate from Washington state, he wrote,

I said that of all the things someone could give, time and money were the two most important. . . . As I spoke, I couldn't imagine Woodrow Wilson saying what I was saying. For LBJ, the gathering would have been too insignificant. Harry Truman would have frowned at the direct solicitation, and Mark Hanna, the man who started us down this crazy fund-raising path—well, Mark Hanna was popping a chocolate into his mouth and smiling.³¹

This assertion was incorrect in several ways. First, as is demonstrated later, Hanna's methods were not innovative—they had been used by his predecessors. He might have used them more effectively than they

were used in the past, but even that conclusion is open for debate. Second, Bradley also ignored the major changes in electoral politics throughout the twentieth century as the country moved away from a system of rule by the parties to one of popular democracy via primaries. This change made campaigning much more difficult and much more expensive, especially as the costly medium of television became dominant. Hanna raised a great deal of money for McKinley, but even in current dollars, it was not excessive in comparison to the money spent in contemporary presidential elections. In 2004 and 2008, over a billion dollars was spent. In 2008, Barack Obama alone raised more than three hundred million dollars.

Bradley's mischaracterization of Hanna, however, is not confined to finances. He also incorrectly describes Hanna as the "Republican Boss" of Ohio, when he was not even the "Republican Boss" of Cleveland. Bradley suggests incorrectly that McKinley stayed home in the famous "Front Porch Campaign" at Hanna's behest, when the historical record suggests something much different. McKinley was not the first candidate to run a front-porch campaign, nor was it Hanna's decision for him to do so.

Bradley implied that while Hanna admired McKinley, the president owed not only his political success but his financial liquidity to Hanna. McKinley experienced a brush with bankruptcy on the cusp of his presidential campaign in 1896, but it was addressed immediately by a group of his close friends, which did not include Hanna in the beginning. Hanna only became aware of the crisis after a plan to respond to it was already in place. Bradley also asserts that Hanna, a Republican, was the first politico who "explicitly legitimized protecting the rich," and, as such, Republicans have "never had much trouble raising money." However, McKinley's direct predecessor, the Democrat Grover Cleveland, was well supported by business, and business only reluctantly came to McKinley's aid in 1896 out of fear of what would happen if Bryan was elected.

Finally, Bradley reported incorrectly that Hanna did all he could to disrupt the presidency of Teddy Roosevelt, considering him an "impulsive idealist."³² It is true that Hanna was not happy to have Roosevelt get the vice-presidential nomination in 1900, but the two men accomplished a great deal together after McKinley's assassination, and Roosevelt went to visit Hanna on his deathbed. Hanna was never a serious threat to Roosevelt's presidency.

Perhaps the strangest thing about Bradley's assessment of Hanna is that while he is critical of the Ohioan, he also laments that he did not have a comparable figure in his own political stable. Bradley notes, "As I made my way in politics I never forgot the story of McKinley. For a time, I searched for my own Mark Hanna, who could meld organization and money into an unbeatable political machine. Then again, I knew there was another standard."³³ The other standard Bradley touted was Woodrow Wilson, whom he described as "naïve" about political money. Bradley wrote admiringly of Wilson as a man of ideas, suggesting that money is not everything in politics and that ideas matter. Ideas are certainly important in politics, but when citing Wilson as an example of the triumph of ideas over money, it should be remembered how he actually won the presidency in 1912. It was not so much the power of his ideas as the fact that Theodore Roosevelt ran a very strong third-party campaign that split the Republican vote and ensured the defeat of the incumbent Republican with the money, William Howard Taft.

When Bradley summarizes how he saw himself and his role in the political world in 1996, he includes another shot at Hanna: "Political leaders need to redefine our circumstances. For Mark Hanna, politics was a matter of weighing the economic interests of business, labor, and farmers and giving business the advantage."³⁴ What he wrote was not incorrect so much in substance as it was in motive. It is not wrong to argue that Hanna favored business interests, but he did so out of a genuine belief that what was good for the business community was good for society as a whole. Hanna believed America and its economy were in transition, and he believed that what benefited industry also helped labor. To Hanna, what was good for business and labor was good for the country. To attack him as selfish is not a fair characterization of his record or his views.

Later, after the publication of his book, Bradley turned his criticism of Hanna into a criticism of Karl Rove in the campaign of 2000, when he sought the Democratic presidential nomination. In a speech during the campaign, Bradley addressed the parallels that many, thanks in part to Rove's own efforts, drew between the campaigns of 1896 and 2000. He said that McKinley "sat on his porch in Ohio, carefully spinning sound bites that positioned him as a 'new Republican' while Hanna promised the financiers and titans of that era that their interests would be protected in the McKinley White House."³⁵ Once

again, what Bradley said was not so much wrong in fact as it was in tone and innuendo. Hanna promised business leaders their interests would be safer if McKinley were president, but it did not mean he was offering the titans of business free access to the office. It was not his access to give, and, as president, McKinley was very careful to keep outsiders in check. Rather, Hanna was addressing real concerns in the business community about the proposals of William Jennings Bryan, the Democratic nominee. In making this statement, Bradley again played on the popular perception that Hanna ushered in a new era in which the party was captured by moneyed interests. Before the Republicans were captured by moneyed interests, however, the Democrats of Grover Cleveland were captured by moneyed interests. The popular perception is not always right, and the popular perception of Hanna is a case in point.

Bradley's 1996 book was part of his groundwork for his presidential campaign in 2000. What he wrote had an impact, especially on reporters, who pulled quotes from his book without analyzing them. What he wrote was taken as fact when, in reality, Bradley was careless with the facts. He relied primarily on inaccuracies that were reported by politically motivated reporters a century earlier; as a consequence, he made fundamental errors in what he wrote, and his errors were accepted as fact by journalists who reported his comments when he was running for the 2000 Democratic presidential nomination.

Karl Rove was frequently referred to in the press as a modern-day Hanna doppelganger who controlled George W. Bush. Painting Karl Rove as a sinister puppeteer set on controlling everything that happened in the White House, if not the entire government, was just as compelling from 1999 to 2007 as similar coverage of Mark Hanna was from 1895 to 1904. Unfortunately, the public is ill served by this reporting because the comparison is woefully inaccurate, and the portrait that most modern journalists paint of Hanna as Svengali or Warwick is simply wrong. It is impossible to assess presidents and presidencies while the president is still in office or has recently left office, so the extent of Karl Rove's influence in the White House has yet to be understood fully. Although careful analysis may show that Rove had an unprecedented level of power, journalists are inaccurate when they compare him to Hanna.

While is not unusual for journalists, columnists, and pundits to get things wrong, particularly when they cover complicated issues, policy

arenas with which they are unfamiliar, or anything that requires some knowledge of history, there are few personas in American politics that have been as widely—and wildly—analyzed as Mark Hanna and Karl Rove. Beginning in 1999, many in the media and in politics freely made the comparison between the two men. Many also insisted, inaccurately, that Rove invited the comparison by telling people that Hanna was his political idol.

There were two predominant themes in the coverage of Karl Rove during the Bush years: Rove as the “Architect” (Warwick) and Rove as Svengali. In coverage of Rove as the Architect, a nickname bestowed on him by President Bush that both men may well now regret, reporters often used language that was praiseful, noting his achievements as a campaign strategist; but they also always speculated, often with suspicion, about his motives. In their coverage of Rove as Svengali, the news media focused on his role as an advisor to the president in a way that was often accusatory and alarmist in nature.

Frequently, the memory of Mark Hanna was invoked in both kinds of reporting, almost always in a negative context. At best, the modern portrayal of Hanna in the news media is unbalanced. At worst, it is entirely untrue. Considering that the image of Hanna that survives today poorly represents the real man, it raises questions about the coverage of Karl Rove that depicts him as a second coming of Hanna. If reporters blithely rely on an inaccurate view of Hanna, how much does that inaccurate view contribute to a similarly inaccurate view of Rove? This is not to suggest that modern reporters were politically biased in their coverage but, rather, that they were guilty of something far worse: careless disregard of the facts.

There have thus far been a limited number of “insider” accounts of the Bush administration and Karl Rove’s role in it. Until the spring 2008, the best-known accounts were books by reporter Ron Suskind, who collaborated with the former treasury secretary Paul O’Neill in a critique of George W. Bush’s economic policies; and by a former government terrorism expert, Richard Clarke, who provided a critical analysis of the Bush administration’s war on terror.³⁶ Each book included criticisms of Karl Rove’s role in various aspects of the Bush administration. Until May 2008, the single most critical analysis of Rove’s influence came from John DiIulio, Bush’s first director of the White House Office of Faith Based and Community Initiatives, after

DiIulio left the administration. He alleged that policy decisions were largely made by Rove and that they were always made with politics as the most important consideration. DiIulio subsequently recanted his critique after his comments were published in an article by Ron Suskind in *Esquire*.³⁷

In May 2008, a book by former Bush press secretary Scott McClellan was published.³⁸ In it, McClellan is scathing in his criticism of the Bush administration's public-relations efforts. His book, an instant best seller, is also noteworthy because McClellan is easily the closest to the Bush inner circle to write critically about the forty-third president and the people who surrounded him, including—prominently—Karl Rove. It is also open to easy criticism—not surprisingly, most of this criticism came from those who were on the inside of what McClellan calls “the bubble”—because McClellan was a willing participant and major player for a long time in the very efforts about which he writes so critically.

Despite these high-profile, insider accounts, however, most people who worked in the Bush White House remain extraordinarily close-mouthed, and what has been reported about Rove in the press to date is based less on known facts than on rumor, conjecture, and informed speculation. It may be true that Rove's influence as an advisor or a behind-the-scenes power broker was unprecedented while he worked in the West Wing. However, analyses of presidential administrations take years to flesh out with careful scholarship, and only time will reveal Rove's actual influence.

What is definitely true, however, is that Mark Hanna does not make an apt comparison to Karl Rove, largely because the image of Hanna that has been portrayed in modern accounts of him is wrong. Comparisons between Hanna and Rove fall apart under even the most superficial scrutiny because their official positions were not the same. Hanna was elected to the Senate, while Rove served as an aide to the president, with an office in the West Wing. The two jobs cannot be easily compared, if only for the vastly different access to the president that a Senate office and a West Wing office afford.

Perhaps more importantly, if the comparisons made by reporters between Hanna and Rove were inappropriate, their errors were compounded when they extended the comparison to the presidents Hanna and Rove served, William McKinley and George W. Bush. So too were

modern comparisons of the elections of 1896 and 2000. Inaccurate reporting has consequences, one of the most important of which is an ill-informed public. In turn, an ill-informed public can make incompetent choices.

Mark Hanna was an important figure in American political history; for that reason alone, he deserves to be understood better. Not only does understanding him better help correct Hanna's legacy, it also helps us to understand better the time in which we live. This book is not an examination of the role played by Karl Rove in the Bush administration but, rather, a study of the real role played by Mark Hanna in American politics as the country emerged from the shadows of isolation and became a world power at the turn of the twentieth century. However, by better understanding Hanna's true legacy, it may give pause to all who jump to easy—and often inaccurate—conclusions about politics in the present day.

Unfortunately, the news media that cover politics in the United States frequently operate on the basis of knee-jerk, spur-of-the-moment analyses of events. Rarely are history and the need to make careful analyses of complicated situations considered by reporters. Instead, reporters are pressured to make snap judgments with little concern for the consequences. The problem with this for the American people is that, because the media are our main sources of information about politics, we often end up with distorted views of reality. Our media-constructed perceptions of political characters like Mark Hanna and Karl Rove are examples of this problem. In the abstract, perhaps, it does not matter that people remember Mark Hanna. However, when Hanna's name is invoked, incorrectly, as an example of how what was wrong with politics a century ago is even more wrong with politics today, then the public is led astray and led away from what is really important, which is to understand what is really going on in the government and politics when they go to the voting booths to cast their ballots.