

RAY BLISS IN RETROSPECT

**BOOK REVIEW: WILLIAM L. HERSHEY & JOHN C. GREEN,
*MR. CHAIRMAN: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF RAY C. BLISS***

*by Jonathan L. Entin**

Ray Bliss was one of the most effective and respected political operatives in American history. His career spanned five decades, and his influence was in many ways more profound than that of other prominent figures like Mark Hanna and James Farley, who were primarily associated with specific presidents.¹ Bliss made his mark as a party builder and modernizer. He engineered the Republican revival after Senator Barry Goldwater's landslide loss to President Lyndon Johnson in 1964. Before assuming leadership of the Republican National Committee in 1965, he had chaired the Ohio GOP for sixteen years. Working primarily behind the scenes, he was relatively unknown to the general public.

I first heard of Bliss in 1962, when my suburban Boston high school debate partner—an ardent Republican and even more ardent Goldwater supporter—accurately predicted that the GOP would win big victories in Ohio that year because of Bliss.² But I never knew many details about Ray

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1. Hanna was the man behind William McKinley, and Farley played a similar role for Franklin D. Roosevelt. See WILLIAM T. HORNER, *OHIO'S KINGMAKER: MARK HANNA, MAN AND MYTH* (2010); DANIEL SCROOP, *MR. DEMOCRAT: JIM FARLEY, THE NEW DEAL, AND THE MAKING OF MODERN AMERICAN POLITICS* (2006).

2. Lewie and I could hardly agree on the time of day, but we were an effective debating combination because we had to work very hard to find arguments that both of us could support. He was deeply engaged in politics from an early age. Before starting high school, he obtained more than 800 signatures on a petition to repeal a 50% pay raise that Massachusetts legislators had voted themselves. A state commission brought him in for questioning because officials assumed that anyone so young must have forged the signatures. Nothing came of the investigation, because there was nothing irregular to discover. Lewie was the straightest of straight arrows; he really had slogged door to door to persuade people to sign the petition, and the commission soon backed off. During the summer of 1963, while we were attending a two-week debate workshop in Washington, D.C., he snuck into the quarters of a very liberal college debate coach who was helping to run the program and taped a 7-by-9-foot picture of Barry Goldwater to the wall. And in 1964, Lewie briefly ran as an

Bliss. Now, longtime Ohio political reporter William L. Hershey and distinguished political scientist John C. Green (the director of the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at the University of Akron) have produced a highly informative biography that illuminates the work of a great party leader who strongly supported a healthy two-party system throughout his career in the trenches.³

This review proceeds as follows. Part I offers an overview of the volume. This discussion covers only the highlights; the book offers a wealth of additional details, in bite-size chunks, that provide a broad perspective on Ohio and American political history during the middle decades of the twentieth century.⁴ Part II explores Bliss's awkward relationship with Richard Nixon, who clumsily forced Bliss out as Republican national chairman after the 1968 election in a way that foreshadowed the ultimate demise of Nixon's presidency. Part III examines some issues of civil rights and race relations that arose at various points during Bliss's career, and Part IV asks whether Bliss could have succeeded in the modern political environment.

I. OVERVIEW

Bliss was born in Akron on December 16, 1907.⁵ Except for his time in Washington as Republican National Committee (RNC) chair, he spent virtually all of his seventy-three years in his hometown.⁶ After high school, he enrolled at the University of Akron, where he was an indifferent student.⁷ His main focus was campus politics: he led the Hilltop Party,

independent candidate for the Governor's Council, which must approve most gubernatorial appointments and state contracts. At the time, 4 of its 8 members were in jail or under indictment for corruption. The member from our district did not face formal charges, but he was a long-term incumbent who might be charitably described as a rascal. Lewie discovered that state law did not require independent candidates to be registered voters, so several weeks shy of his 17th birthday he declared his candidacy even though the minimum voting age at the time was 21. He withdrew after the secretary of state filed emergency legislation to close that loophole.

3. WILLIAM L. HERSHEY & JOHN C. GREEN, *MR. CHAIRMAN: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF RAY C. BLISS* (2017).

4. The book contains 71 chapters, none longer than 9 pages, so it is easy to read incrementally but can be readily digested in longer installments.

5. HERSHEY & GREEN, *supra* note 3, at 5.

6. He died on August 6, 1981. *Id.* at 316. During his early childhood, his family lived briefly in West Virginia and California but returned to Akron while Ray was in elementary school. *Id.* at 6.

7. *Id.* at 10, 13. Bliss was not the only political figure who had a mixed academic record. President George W. Bush referred to his mediocre college performance in a graduation speech at his alma mater: "And to the C students I say, you, too, can be President of the United States." GEORGE W. BUSH, *Commencement Address at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut*, I PUB. PAPERS 556, 556 (May 21, 2001) (part of a speech full of self-deprecation about his time at Yale).

which he transformed into the dominant student faction or “political combine.”⁸ But in what was supposed to be his final semester, the Hilltoppers stuffed the ballot boxes in the election for May Queen to help Bliss’s girlfriend, Ellen Palmer, whom he would eventually marry.⁹ Although his precise role in that episode remains ambiguous, Bliss accepted responsibility for the shenanigans and was expelled just a few weeks before his scheduled 1931 graduation.¹⁰

Bliss followed a friend’s advice to volunteer with the local Republican organization, where he came under the wing of long-time county chairman James A. Corey.¹¹ Moving quickly up the ladder, he was appointed to a GOP seat on the Summit County Board of Elections, where he served from 1935 until 1978.¹² And Bliss succeeded Corey in 1942 after his mentor’s death.¹³ He received the additional portfolio of Republican state chairman in the wake of the 1948 Dewey-Defeats-Truman election in which Democrats made sweeping gains in Ohio.¹⁴ Bliss retained both of these positions until he became head of the party’s national committee in 1965.¹⁵

8. HERSHEY & GREEN, *supra* note 3, at 13–14.

9. *Id.* at 14–15. The courtship lasted three decades, because Ellen was Catholic and Bliss’s Protestant mother objected to her son’s marrying someone of that faith. *Id.* at 6, 108. His mother’s views mattered because Bliss lived in the family home with her until she died in 1956. *Id.* at 8. Ray was the only one of her three children to survive childhood, and she lost her husband in a construction accident soon after her youngest child died. *Id.* at 5–7.

10. *Id.* at 15–16. The university quietly awarded his degree four years later. *Id.* at 28. Bliss later served two stints on the board of trustees, including a brief period as chair. *Id.* at 301–02, 305.

11. *Id.* at 17–18. Summit County Republicans apparently were more receptive to volunteers than Chicago Democrats were nearly two decades later. University of Chicago law student Abner Mikva, who later served in Congress, as chief judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, and as White House counsel, was rebuffed in his effort to volunteer for the 1948 campaigns of Senator Paul Douglas and Governor Adlai Stevenson. A local party functionary told him: “We don’t want nobody nobody sent.” Cynthia Grant Bowman, “*We Don’t Want Anybody Anybody Sent*”: *The Death of Patronage Hiring in Chicago*, 86 NW. U. L. REV. 57, 57 (1991).

12. HERSHEY & GREEN, *supra* note 3, at 26, 297.

13. *Id.* at 40.

14. *Id.* at 59. “Dewey Defeats Truman” was the famously incorrect headline in the early edition of the *Chicago Tribune* the morning after the election. The polls and the pundits predicted that Governor Thomas E. Dewey would defeat President Harry Truman, but Truman campaigned relentlessly and pulled off an upset victory. See GARY A. DONALDSON, *TRUMAN DEFEATS DEWEY* (1999); ZACHARY KARABELL, *THE LAST CAMPAIGN: HOW HARRY TRUMAN WON THE 1948 ELECTION* (2000); see also BERNARD R. BERELSON ET AL., *VOTING: A STUDY OF OPINION FORMATION IN A PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN* (1954) (a classic study of how voters decided whom to support in the 1948 election).

15. HERSHEY & GREEN, *supra* note 3, at 159.

As a political operative, he lost his share of elections—including the very first campaign that he managed in 1934.¹⁶ But Bliss had a keen strategic mind, such as encouraging owners of rubber factories to reschedule their annual closing for maintenance during election week instead of earlier in the year, a ploy that led many workers to leave town temporarily and helped to tip a closely contested Akron municipal election to the Republicans.¹⁷ More importantly, he was open to innovation. As early as 1935, he began using public opinion polling to inform campaigns,¹⁸ and he saw the value of television starting in 1950, when he arranged for live coverage of speeches and panel discussions featuring reporters questioning his candidate.¹⁹

Bliss's unlikely TV star was Senator Robert A. Taft, who faced a surprisingly difficult reelection campaign. Bliss enthusiastically supported Taft's unsuccessful runs for the GOP presidential nomination in 1940, 1948, and 1952.²⁰ Widely known as "Mr. Republican," the senator was part of a venerable political family: son of President and Chief Justice William Howard Taft²¹ and father of Robert A. Taft, Jr., who served in both houses of Congress at various times during the 1960's and 1970's.²²

16. *Id.* at 26.

17. *Id.* at 35.

18. *Id.* at 27.

19. *Id.* at 66.

20. *Id.* at 39, 56–57, 70–71. Bliss also favored Taft for the 1944 presidential nomination, but the senator chose to seek reelection instead. *Id.* at 50.

21. *Id.* at 37.

22. *Id.* at 132–33, 282. Although Hershey & Green do not mention them, several other members of the Taft family also had political careers. For example, the patriarch of the family, William Howard Taft's father, Alphonso, held local offices in Cincinnati and served as Secretary of War and Attorney General in the final year of President Grant's second term. *See* RON CHERNOW, GRANT 823, 825 (2017); JAMES T. PATTERSON, MR. REPUBLICAN: A BIOGRAPHY OF ROBERT A. TAFT 10 (1972). Robert A. Taft's brother, Charles P. Taft, helped to reform Cincinnati's local government, serving many years on city council and also as mayor, and was the Republican gubernatorial nominee in 1952. *See id.* at 124–25, 127–29, 508–09; Blake Vick Bartlett, *Charles Phelps Taft*, 21 AMERICAN NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY 252 (John A. Garraty & Mark C. Carnes gen. eds., 1999); Joseph B. Treaster, *Charles P. Taft, Former Mayor of Cincinnati*, N.Y. TIMES, June 25, 1983, at 14. After Bliss's death, the son of Robert A. Taft, Jr., became the fourth generation of the family in public office. Robert A. Taft II, who went by Bob, served two terms as Ohio's secretary of state and two terms as governor. *See generally* Joe Hallett, *The Taft Era, 1999–2007*, in OHIO POLITICS 229 (Alexander P. Lamis & Brian Usher eds., 2d ed. 2007). Charles Taft's son Seth also had a brief political career. *See infra* note 69. And Kingsley A. Taft, a distant relative of these Tafts, served more than 21 years on the Ohio Supreme Court, including 7 as chief justice, after holding several other offices. *See* Kingsley Arter Taft, www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/SCO/formerjustices/bios/taft.asp (last visited Jan. 25, 2018); *see also infra* note 32.

Taft was just one of many significant politicians with whom Bliss worked during his career. Other leading characters were John W. Bricker, who served three terms as governor and two terms in the U.S. Senate and was the Republican nominee for vice president in 1944;²³ John H. Glenn, whom Bliss tried unsuccessfully to recruit to the Republicans and who later served four terms in the U.S. Senate as a Democrat;²⁴ C. William O'Neill, a political prodigy who won a seat as a state representative as a twenty-two-year-old college student, became speaker at the age of thirty, and was elected attorney general at thirty-four and governor at forty;²⁵ and James A. Rhodes, the only person ever to win four four-year terms as governor of Ohio.²⁶

Governors O'Neill and Rhodes both clashed with Bliss over party leadership. Some of these conflicts were inevitable, as governors have both official responsibilities and concerns about their political prospects, whereas party chairs like Bliss focus on creating a strong overall ticket. Patronage issues illustrate the tension. Bliss professed indifference on that subject but recognized the long-term political value of patronage.²⁷ Direct negotiation finessed certain conflicts.²⁸

But other clashes were more serious. With Governor O'Neill, the battle involved an effort to undermine labor unions. Ohio business leaders pressed for a right-to-work amendment to the state constitution. Ignoring warnings from Bliss and Senator Bricker that this gambit would enrage union members, who then made up about one-third of the work force, the proposal reached the 1958 ballot with O'Neill's support.²⁹ The warnings proved prescient: the right-to-work measure failed in a landslide, Governor O'Neill was routed, Senator Bricker went down narrowly, and the Republicans lost almost all of the other statewide offices as well as both chambers of the legislature and three seats in Congress.³⁰

23. HERSHEY & GREEN, *supra* note 3, at 37, 39, 50–51, 56, 280.

24. *Id.* at 134–35.

25. *Id.* at 84, 89. O'Neill was the youngest member of the General Assembly when he was first elected, and he was the youngest speaker and attorney general in state history. *Id.* at 84. For more on O'Neill, see *infra* text accompanying note 30; note 32.

26. HERSHEY & GREEN, *supra* note 3, at 130.

27. *Id.* at 42, 93.

28. *Id.* at 93–94, 131, 133.

29. *Id.* at 95–96, 98–100.

30. *Id.* at 102. Bricker's opponent was Stephen M. Young, a 69-year-old former state legislator and member of Congress who ran as a sacrificial lamb because most Democrats regarded Bricker as invulnerable. *Id.* at 99. The crusty Young not only defeated Bricker but was reelected to a second term, see *infra* note 37, despite his penchant for responding to irate constituent letters with pungent comments such as: "What else is new?" JOSEPH S. CLARK, CONGRESS: THE SAPLESS BRANCH 57 (1964).

With Governor Rhodes, the conflict involved the 1964 presidential contest. Bliss wanted Ohio to send a delegation to the Republican National Convention that was committed to a favorite-son candidate so that the state could have more leverage in selecting the nominee.³¹ Bliss feared that frontrunner Senator Barry Goldwater could not win the general election and might doom the national party to the sort of shellacking that the Ohio GOP suffered in the 1958 right-to-work debacle. The Buckeye State's delegates initially agreed to cast their first-ballot votes for Governor Rhodes. Just days before the convention, however, Rhodes released the delegates without warning Bliss of his move. The resulting breach was healed only with difficulty at the time, and Rhodes eventually took control of the state party in a way that led to erosion of its overall vitality.³²

The 1964 dispute illuminates how Bliss envisioned the role of a party leader: as an "office chairman" focused on building an effective party infrastructure rather than as a "speaking chairman" who articulated policy positions.³³ He did have views on the issues, and those views led him to be a Republican.³⁴ But he wanted both to win elections and to promote good government, which he regarded as good politics.³⁵ He was always looking for promising candidates and refused to apply strict ideological tests. For Bliss, it was crucial to have good candidates who could run competitively in their constituencies even if they disagreed with other candidates on some issues; the chairman should facilitate the process by which the party came to agreement on an overall platform.³⁶

Goldwater did secure the presidential nomination in 1964, and his historic landslide defeat in the general election confirmed Bliss's worst

31. HERSHEY & GREEN, *supra* note 3, at 139.

32. *Id.* at 141–42, 279–80. O'Neill and Rhodes crossed paths later. After O'Neill lost his 1958 reelection campaign for governor, he won a seat on the Ohio Supreme Court in 1960. He became chief justice following the death of Kingsley Taft, *see supra* note 22, making him the only person to lead all three branches of state government: speaker, governor, and chief justice. C. William O'Neill, www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/SCO/formerjustices/bios/oneill.asp (last visited January 18, 2018). (This Justice O'Neill should not be confused with Justice William M. O'Neill, a Democrat who was elected in 2012 and resigned in January 2018 to run for governor.) Meanwhile, Rhodes was elected governor in 1962 and reelected in 1966. He announced that he would seek a third term in 1974 but had to go to the state supreme court to run again because of a two-term limit for executive officers. *Id.* at 291. The court, led by Chief Justice O'Neill, held that the limit applied only to consecutive terms, not to total terms. *State ex rel. Rhodes v. Brown*, 296 N.E.2d 538 (Ohio 1973) (per curiam).

33. HERSHEY & GREEN, *supra* note 3, at xiv, 50, 182, 240, 275.

34. *Id.* at xiv.

35. *Id.* at 50.

36. *Id.* at 44–45, 178.

fears.³⁷ Early in 1965, Bliss was chosen as the new Republican national chairman.³⁸ In that role, he would rebuild a party that some observers regarded as doomed.³⁹ And facing that challenge brought Richard Nixon back into Bliss's political life.

II. BLISS AND NIXON

Bliss approached the resuscitation of the national party in much the same way as he led the rebuilding of the Ohio GOP in the wake of electoral failures in 1948 and 1958: consistent focus on revitalizing party structures down to the local level, broad outreach to both traditional party supporters and constituencies that Republicans previously had ignored, promotion of party unity by engaging a variety of views while rejecting extremism, and vigorous fundraising.⁴⁰ He did all this with his typical attention to even the smallest detail, from the number of pens and paper cups at party functions to the type of cushions that national convention delegates would sit on and the number of urinals in the convention hall.⁴¹ These efforts paid dividends early, as the party made strong gains in the 1966 midterm election.⁴²

Richard Nixon barnstormed the nation in support of GOP candidates that year. This was part of the former vice president's effort to resurrect his political career following his narrow loss to John F. Kennedy in the 1960 presidential election and disastrous defeat in the 1962 California gubernatorial contest. Nixon credited Bliss with helping him carry Ohio in 1960 despite losing nationally to Kennedy.⁴³

So Bliss welcomed Nixon's willingness to campaign for Republican candidates in 1966. But the two men soon got cross-wise with each other. At one point, Nixon asked the national committee to pick up part of his travel expenses. Bliss, anticipating that Nixon would seek the 1968 presidential nomination in a contest that might attract a large field, refused. He explained that the RNC could not spend its money on one

37. *Id.* at 147–48. The Democratic tide in Ohio was so strong that Senator Stephen Young, *see supra* note 30, slipped past Robert A. Taft, Jr., for a second term. *Id.* at 148. Young retired after that term. Taft finally won the seat in 1970, barely edging the term-limited Governor Rhodes in the primary and future Senator Howard Metzenbaum in the general election. *Id.* at 280, 282. But Metzenbaum captured the seat in a 1976 rematch. *Id.* at 295.

38. *Id.* at 157.

39. *Id.* at 148.

40. *Id.* at 168–69, 176–84, 193–98.

41. *Id.* at 75, 218.

42. *Id.* at 208.

43. *Id.* at 123–24.

potential candidate lest that be seen as an implicit endorsement of that candidate. This enraged Nixon, who closed a profanity-laced telephone call by warning: “All right, Ray, but remember this, I don’t forget these things.”⁴⁴

Nixon ultimately received the 1968 nomination and won the presidential election. Bliss felt deep ambivalence about the outcome, telling his wife: “I don’t know whether I did the country a service or a disservice.”⁴⁵ He was much happier about another result: Ohio Attorney General William B. Saxbe won Robert A. Taft’s old seat in the U.S. Senate.⁴⁶

Within two weeks of the election, reports began circulating that Nixon wanted to replace Bliss with a new national chairman.⁴⁷ This should not have come as a surprise, because the presidential nominee generally decides who should lead the national committee. And if the nominee wins the White House, the president has an even stronger basis for making the choice. After all, a chief executive has relied on a personal campaign organization, political advisors, and fundraisers. Beyond these general considerations, Nixon still held his grudge from 1966 over Bliss’s refusal to cover his travel expenses while campaigning for GOP candidates.⁴⁸

But Nixon handled the transition very poorly. Press reports made clear that he wanted to replace Bliss.⁴⁹ Less than two weeks before the inauguration, Nixon met with Bliss but did not press him to resign.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, the president-elect dispatched Murray Chotiner, a long-time advisor who was regarded as aggressive even by those who viewed him positively and as a hatchet man by less sympathetic observers, to the national committee.⁵¹ Bliss and Chotiner did not get along at all.⁵²

44. *Id.* at 205.

45. *Id.* at 238.

46. *Id.* at 237. With Bliss’s support, Saxbe had successfully challenged C. William O’Neill’s successor as speaker, *see supra* note 25 and accompanying text, and succeeded O’Neill as attorney general, *HERSHEY & GREEN, supra* note 3, at 76–77, 92. Senator Saxbe eventually became U.S. attorney general after Eliot L. Richardson and William D. Ruckelshaus resigned in protest of President Nixon’s order to fire Watergate special prosecutor Archibald Cox. Nixon nominated Saxbe, who had bluntly criticized some of his policies, because only someone enjoying bipartisan respect could gain Senate confirmation after the Saturday Night Massacre. *See STANLEY I. KUTLER, THE WARS OF WATERGATE: THE LAST CRISIS OF RICHARD NIXON 406–09, 426 (1990).*

47. *HERSHEY & GREEN, supra* note 3, at 239.

48. *Id.* at 240.

49. *Id.* at 242–43.

50. *Id.* at 251–52.

51. *Id.* at 261–62.

52. *Id.* at 262, 264.

Nixon's original plan was to have co-chairs, in Bliss's terms a "speaking chairman" who would be the public face of the party and an "office chairman" who would direct organizational aspects; Chotiner was to be the "office chairman."⁵³ Nixon wanted Representative Rogers C.B. Morton of Maryland as the "speaking chairman."⁵⁴ But Morton, like Bliss, could not abide Chotiner and refused to work with him.⁵⁵ Bliss thought highly of Morton,⁵⁶ whose brother, Senator Thruston B. Morton of Kentucky, had chaired the RNC a decade earlier.⁵⁷ Once it became clear that Chotiner would be out and that Rogers Morton would lead the national committee by himself, Bliss announced his retirement effective April 15, 1969.⁵⁸

The melodrama surrounding Bliss's departure was completely unnecessary. Bliss was a veteran political operative who understood the presidential nominee's prerogatives, and he also was a loyal Republican. Perhaps the soap opera could have been avoided had he tendered a pro forma resignation after the election.⁵⁹ But he also thought that the national party would benefit from stable leadership, which helped to account for the success of the Summit County and Ohio GOP during his years at the helm.⁶⁰

Even if they thought it presumptuous for the national chairman to want to stay on, Nixon and his aides regarded Bliss as an enemy to be outmaneuvered rather than as an elder statesman to be honored and gracefully moved to the side. Indeed, some advisors disparaged Bliss's political skills despite his success in Ohio and his national efforts in the wake of the Goldwater debacle.⁶¹ Nixon's approach to Bliss reflected the insularity and suspicion that affected his approach to many matters. Bliss recognized this problem as early as 1970, complaining that Nixon had surrounded himself with a team of sycophants who generally went along with whatever he wanted to do.⁶²

That insularity and suspicion culminated in the Watergate scandal, which ultimately doomed Nixon's presidency. At the height of the crisis,

53. *Id.* at 240–41.

54. *Id.* at 263.

55. *Id.* at 267–68.

56. *Id.* at 263.

57. *Id.* at 115, 125.

58. *Id.* at 266.

59. *Id.* at 246.

60. *Id.* at 278.

61. *Id.* at 239, 241–42.

62. *Id.* at 287.

Nixon asked Bliss for public support. White House aide Bryce Harlow, an old acquaintance who had played a role in the plot to oust him as national chairman, warned Bliss against making any statement because Nixon was “guilty as sin.”⁶³ Nixon resigned just over three months later.⁶⁴

III. RACE RELATIONS AND CIVIL RIGHTS

Civil rights issues had a prominent place on the political agenda during the years that Bliss led the local, state, and national parties. The authors make clear that he was “a man of his time” who sometimes used racial and ethnic slurs in private conversation.⁶⁵ But he also supported civil rights for African Americans and did not want the GOP to be identified with segregationists like Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, the former Democrat (and 1948 Dixiecrat presidential candidate) who had become a Republican in 1964.⁶⁶ And he admired his mentor Corey for having stood up to the Ku Klux Klan at the height of its influence in Akron during the 1920’s.⁶⁷

As a party leader, Bliss reached out to black voters even at the risk of alienating some whites.⁶⁸ He did so for pragmatic reasons. Even if the GOP could not win a majority among African Americans, the party could at least increase its support; Bliss always sought to make inroads in areas where Republicans competed weakly.⁶⁹ So he was delighted to learn, while serving as a trustee of the University of Akron, that a black colleague was a Republican because she wanted to belong to the party of

63. *Id.* at 247–48, 287–88.

64. *Id.* at 288.

65. *Id.* at 214. His use of anti-Semitic language was especially surprising because he owned and operated an insurance agency with three Jewish partners. *Id.* at 53, 214.

66. *Id.* at 211.

67. *Id.* at 20–21, 214; *see supra* text accompanying note 11.

68. HERSHEY & GREEN, *supra* note 3, at 48, 176, 188, 210–11.

69. *Id.* at 126–27, 200, 210, 235–36, 237. Bliss seems not to have played a role in a couple of race-related situations in his home area of Northeast Ohio. There is no mention of the 1967 Cleveland election in which Carl B. Stokes became the first African-American mayor of a major American city. He narrowly defeated Seth Taft. *See* LEONARD N. MOORE, CARL B. STOKES AND THE RISE OF BLACK POLITICAL POWER 58–60 (2002); *see also id.* at 181–82 (noting that Stokes supported Taft in his successful race for county commissioner in 1970); *supra* note 22 (detailing Taft’s genealogy). Nor is there any mention of the controversy in Akron, where in 1964 the city council enacted a fair-housing ordinance and the voters responded by amending the city charter to require such measures to be approved by referendum. The Supreme Court invalidated the charter amendment because that provision singled out fair-housing measures for less favorable treatment than other types of legislation and noted that the charter already allowed opponents of local ordinances to initiate a referendum to repeal them. *Hunter v. Erickson*, 393 U.S. 385 (1969).

Lincoln rather than join the Democrats, who had been the party of segregation.⁷⁰

Bliss did not make civil rights a partisan issue, but others have done so. For example, the Republican National Committee's website emphasizes that Chief Justice Earl Warren, author of the opinion in *Brown v. Board of Education*,⁷¹ was a Republican and that the Civil Rights Act of 1964⁷² passed when GOP leader Senator Everett Dirksen "defeat[ed] [a] Democrat [*sic*] filibuster."⁷³ But the facts are more complex than the RNC's summary suggests. All of the other justices who subscribed to the unanimous *Brown* opinion—which the website incorrectly describes as the "majority opinion"⁷⁴—were appointed by Democratic presidents.⁷⁵ And while segregationists in the South generally were Democrats, including those who filibustered the Civil Rights Act, that bill was a top priority for President Lyndon Johnson and the Democratic congressional leadership, and it passed with overwhelming bipartisan support.⁷⁶ Moreover, in stark contrast to most congressional Republicans, the two iconic conservative GOP presidential candidates of modern times vocally opposed federal civil rights legislation in the 1960's. Barry Goldwater voted against the 1964 act.⁷⁷ And Ronald Reagan opposed not only that

70. HERSHEY & GREEN, *supra* note 3, at 312.

71. 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

72. Pub. L. No. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241 (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000a to 2000h-6 (2012)).

73. Republican National Committee, *Founding of the Republican Party*, www.gop.com/history/ (last visited Jan. 22, 2018).

74. Chief Justice Warren worked diligently to secure unanimity on what had been a badly divided Court following the initial round of arguments under his predecessor. *See generally* RICHARD KLUGER, *SIMPLE JUSTICE* 678-99 (1976); BERNARD SCHWARTZ, *SUPER CHIEF: EARL WARREN AND HIS SUPREME COURT—A JUDICIAL BIOGRAPHY* 72-101 (1983).

75. Justice Harold H. Burton, formerly mayor of Cleveland and senator from Ohio, was a Republican appointed by President Truman. HERSHEY & GREEN, *supra* note 3, at 39. The other seven justices were Democrats appointed by Truman and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

76. Senator Dirksen and other congressional Republicans did play important roles in the adoption of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. *See generally* ROBERT MANN, *THE WALLS OF JERICHO: LYNDON JOHNSON, HUBERT HUMPHREY, RICHARD RUSSELL AND THE STRUGGLE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS* (1996); CLAY RISEN, *THE BILL OF THE CENTURY: THE EPIC BATTLE FOR THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT* (2014); CHARLES & BARBARA WHALEN, *THE LONGEST DEBATE: A LEGISLATIVE HISTORY OF THE 1964 CIVIL RIGHTS ACT* (1985).

77. HERSHEY & GREEN, *supra* note 3, at 147, 210. Goldwater also supported the filibuster by voting against the successful cloture motion that allowed the bill to come to a vote in the Senate. ROBERT ALAN GOLDBERG, *BARRY GOLDWATER* 196 (1995). He was out of office when other civil rights statutes, *see infra* text accompanying notes 78-79, were enacted. He did not seek reelection to the Senate in 1964 and was elected to the Senate again in November 1968, after those other measures were adopted. *See* GOLDBERG, *supra*, at 234, 249-51, 253-55.

measure but also the Voting Rights Act of 1965⁷⁸ and the Fair Housing Act of 1968.⁷⁹ During his presidency, Reagan's administration pursued a number of policies that were viewed as hostile to civil rights. A notable example was its willingness to grant tax exemptions to racially discriminatory private schools, a policy that the Supreme Court rejected in *Bob Jones University v. United States*.⁸⁰ In short, Bliss was wise not to exaggerate the partisan aspects of civil rights. Both parties can claim credit for advances in that area, but both parties also have some troubling history on the subject.

IV. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Ray Bliss was highly competitive and wanted to win, but he believed in more than winning. He favored a strong system of two parties that could serve as a check on each other and thereby promote effective government.⁸¹ Despite, or perhaps because of, the May Queen ballot-box-stuffing scandal during his college years, Bliss as a political operative tried to play things straight. For example, in 1958 he insisted on checking on a discrepancy in local election returns; his efforts resulted in a victory for a Democratic candidate for state senate over the Republican who initially appeared to have triumphed.⁸² And he insisted on keeping his insurance business entirely separate from his political work.⁸³

78. Pub. L. No. 89-110, 79 Stat. 437 (codified as amended at 52 U.S.C. §§ 10301-10702 (2012)).

79. Civil Rights Act of 1968, Pub. L. No. 90-284, tit. VIII, 82 Stat. 73, 81-90 (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. §§ 3601-3631 (2012)); see LOU CANNON, GOVERNOR REAGAN: HIS RISE TO POWER 142-43 (2003); MATTHEW DALLEK, THE RIGHT MOMENT: RONALD REAGAN'S FIRST VICTORY AND THE DECISIVE TURNING POINT IN AMERICAN POLITICS 188, 199-200 (2000); RONNIE DUGGER, ON REAGAN: THE MAN & HIS PRESIDENCY 198-99 (1983). Reagan also supported Proposition 14, a 1964 California initiative that repealed the state's fair-housing law and prohibited similar measures. DALLEK, *supra*, at 226; see generally Thomas W. Casstevens, *California's Rumford Act and Proposition 14*, in THE POLITICS OF FAIR HOUSING LEGISLATION: STATE AND LOCAL CASE STUDIES 237, 261-81 (Lynn W. Eley & Thomas W. Casstevens eds., 1968). The courts struck down Proposition 14 as unconstitutional. *Mulkey v. Reitman*, 413 P.2d 825 (Cal. 1966), *aff'd*, 387 U.S. 369 (1967). Meanwhile, Reagan was elected governor on a platform calling for legislative repeal of the fair-housing law and later supported a bill to restrict the scope of the law; neither proposal passed. CANNON, *supra*, at 201-05; Casstevens, *supra*, at 284; Raymond E. Wolfinger & Fred I. Greenstein, *The Repeal of Fair Housing in California: An Analysis of Referendum Voting*, 62 AM POL. SCI. REV. 753, 768 (1968).

80. 461 U.S. 574 (1983).

81. HERSHEY & GREEN, *supra* note 3, at 166, 277, 283, 325.

82. *Id.* at 107.

83. *Id.* at 55, 252. The only hint of scandal affecting Bliss involved his top aide at the RNC, whom he fired for breaking into the desk of the party's outgoing national finance director. *Id.* at 173-

Politics has changed significantly since Bliss left the political stage. Parties are less structured than Bliss wanted. Indeed, he clashed with Governors O'Neill and Rhodes precisely because they wanted to consolidate power in their offices at the expense of the broader and deeper organization that Bliss favored. Moreover, much of modern campaigning involves computers and social media that have developed since Bliss's time. We might wonder how he would have functioned in this environment.

Answering that question requires considerable speculation. But Bliss adapted to other innovations. Recall his use of polls beginning in 1935 and his use of television in Senator Robert A. Taft's 1950 reelection campaign. His openness to these resources suggests that he would at least have approached new technology and communication systems with an open mind.

More important than this speculation, Ray Bliss had an old-fashioned faith in the two-party system. He had strong views on public policy, but he also believed in effective government. He understood that today's winners could well be tomorrow's losers, so holding out for the perfect solution might prevent the acceptance of a good one. In an era of candidate-focused parties that are increasingly polarized ideologically and at times seem more interested in scoring rhetorical points than governing, someone like Bliss might seem like an anachronism. Hershey and Green have painted a rich portrait of an important political figure. They do not purport to tell us how to reform the current morass, but their book might provide some inspiration for those of us who believe that our broken system can and must be fixed.

74. This internecine dispute related to an intraparty factional conflict and had nothing to do with corruption.