



70.1969.1 Wendell L. Willkie
Rush County
Marker Text Review Report
06/8/2012

Marker Text

Wendell L. Willkie, 1892-1944. Lawyer and business leader- Republican presidential nominee, 1940- the only native Hoosier to be nominated for the Presidency by a major political party- author of *One World*- grave and memorial in East Hill Cemetery, Rushville.

Report

While the text of this marker is accurate, it fails to mention Willkie's contributions to the civil rights movement, his World War II efforts to provide Britain with aid, and his support of internationalism. The following report provides additional context.

Willkie was born in 1892 in Elwood, Indiana.¹ Willkie received his law degree from Indiana University in 1916² and practiced in Akron, Ohio for the Firestone Tire Co.³ In 1929, he provided legal counsel for The Commonwealth & Southern Corporation, a large public utilities company.⁴ Willkie later became president of the company.⁵ As president, he fought against President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's (FDR) federally funded New Deal program to establish the [Tennessee Valley Authority \(TVA\)](#).⁶ Willkie opposed the [New Deal](#) program, intended to provide employment to the many jobless during the [Great Depression](#), because the TVA would directly compete with The Commonwealth & Southern Corporation and because he opposed both governmental and private monopolies.⁷ While Willkie lost, he gained notoriety as "the most articulate, vigorous spokesman for the business community."⁸

After gaining the attention of Republican politicians with his outspoken belief in free enterprise,⁹ Willkie was nominated as the Republican presidential candidate to run against FDR in 1940 in what has been described as "one of the most dramatic events in American political history."¹⁰ Despite never holding political office, Willkie was nominated after the sixth ballot was taken at the Republican National Convention, defeating well-known political figures such as Governor Thomas E. Dewey and Senator Robert A. Taft.¹¹ Republicans sought a fresh candidate to represent the party as World War II intensified abroad and Americans became more determined than ever to avoid war at home.¹² Additionally, many nominated Willkie because of their opposition to FDR's New Deal and the possibility of his election to an unprecedented third term.¹³ Willkie lost the election largely because his progressive civil rights position and support of liberal internationalism alienated him from his party.¹⁴ Voters also struggled to identify his position on major causes because he covered a wide range of issues briefly.¹⁵

Willkie avidly defended the rights of African Americans and publicly advocated for the improved housing, education and health of black citizens. He was widely concerned with the treatment of African Americans in the Armed Forces, arguing in various articles that they should be afforded the same freedom at home that they fought for abroad.¹⁶ In his 1944 article "[Citizens of Negro Blood](#)" for *Collier's Magazine*, Willkie stated that World War II "has made us conscious of the contradictions between our treatment of our Negro minority and the ideals for which we are fighting. The equitable treatment of racial minorities in America is basic to our chance for a just and lasting peace."¹⁷ He appealed to political figures to strengthen anti-lynching measures and to eliminate state poll taxes that often prevented African Americans from voting.¹⁸ Willkie ultimately brought attention to the struggles of all minority citizens, arguing that they were "rich assets of democracy."¹⁹

Both during and after the campaign, Willkie went against many in his party with his support of FDR's policy to dispatch war aid to Britain in 1940, as opposed to fighting abroad or remaining isolated from



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the war.²⁰ Historian Justin H. Libby describes Willkie's support of war aid as the "forerunner of the bipartisan policy."²¹ Willkie's support for aid eventually gained favor among the general public, allowing FDR to pass the [Lend-Lease Bill](#) in 1941, which postponed U.S. involvement in the war.²²

Despite losing the presidential election in 1940, Willkie and FDR became friends and political allies as they held similar views on foreign policy and civil rights. Willkie served FDR by travelling the globe as a U.S. emissary to observe the war abroad and meet with foreign leaders, reporting on his experiences.²³ As an internationalist,²⁴ Willkie worked for "world peace," presenting a bipartisan resolution to the Republican National Committee in 1942 that was eventually passed.²⁵

In 1943, Willkie wrote about his experiences traveling the globe in his best-selling book *One World*.²⁶ He described his trip, in which he traveled with Army and Navy officials to over half a dozen countries.²⁷ His observations, made during a period before the United States frequently worked and communicated with other countries, has been described as "extraordinarily perceptive and statesmanlike."²⁸

Willkie sought the Republican presidential nomination in 1944, but dropped out of the race in April after a poor showing in the Wisconsin primaries.²⁹ Constant comparisons to FDR, his liberal stance on civic and international issues, and general independence from other Republican members resulted in the loss of party support.³⁰

Willkie died October 8, 1944 and was buried in East Hill Cemetery in Rushville, Indiana.³¹ President Roosevelt issued a statement honoring Willkie as "one of the great men of our time."³² In addition to the memorial erected at his gravesite,³³ memorials to Willkie were dedicated in Elwood and in the State House Rotunda in Indianapolis.³⁴ The [Willkie Memorial Building](#) was dedicated in New York on the first anniversary of his death.³⁵ The building was created to serve as a center for the Freedom House and other causes he supported.³⁶ Willkie, with the support of Eleanor Roosevelt, helped established Freedom House in 1941 as an organization that could "strengthen human rights and civil liberties in the United States."³⁷ As of 2012, the [Freedom House](#) still advocates for human rights.³⁸

IHB now avoids the use of subjective and superlative terms such as "first," "best," and "most." Such claims are often not verifiable and/or require extensive qualification to be truly accurate. That is the case with this marker's claim that Willkie was the only Hoosier to be nominated for the Presidency by a major political party. President William Henry Harrison resided in Indiana, but was born in Virginia and Indiana resident President Benjamin Harrison was born in Ohio.³⁹ However, Eugene V. Debs of Indiana was nominated by the Socialist party and ran for the candidacy five times.⁴⁰ The Socialist party could be considered a major party in the first quarter of the 20th century.

For more information see other Willkie marker at <http://www.in.gov/history/markers/438.htm> and associated marker file 48.2001.1.



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Links

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¹ "Nation Mourns Sudden Death of Wendell Willkie," *The Vidette-Messenger* 18, October 9, 1944, cover page, accessed <http://newspaperarchive.com/>; "Wendell Lewis Willkie, 1892-1944," Find A Grave, accessed <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=1104>.

² "Wendell L. Willkie: Republican Nominee for President of the U.S," *Life*, August 12, 1940, (Indiana State Library, Clippings File); "Home Town Goes Wild as Willkie Wins Nomination," *Oakland Tribune*, June 28, 1940, 50, accessed <http://newspaperarchive.com/>; Justin H. Libby, "Wendell Willkie and the Election of 1940," in Ralph D. Gray's *Gentlemen from Indiana: National Party Candidates, 1846-1940* (Indiana Historical Bureau, 1977), xvi.

³ Lowell Nussbaum, "Willkie- Another Hoosier in the News," *Indianapolis Times*, April 19, 1940, (ISL, Clippings File); L.S. Bowman, "Wendell L. Willkie," *The Hoosier Republican: Pre-Election Edition* no. 7, November 1944, (ISL, Clippings File); "Wendell L. Willkie: Republican Nominee for President of the U.S.," n.p.; Anne O'Hare McCormick, "Man of the Middle West," *The New York Times*, August 18, 1940, 87 (accessed June 7, 2012 through ProQuest Historical Newspapers), <http://www.proquest.com/en-US/catalogs/databases/detail/pq-hist-news.shtml>.

⁴ "Wendell L. Willkie: Republican Nominee for President of the U.S.," n.p.; Bowman, "Wendell L. Willkie," n.p.

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⁶ McCormick, "Man of the Middle West."; "Power Companies Rest Their Case: Testimony of Wendell Willkie Last Submitted; TVA Preparing Defense," *Biloxi Daily Herald*, December 11, 1937, 1, accessed <http://newspaperarchive.com/>; Ellsworth Barnard, *Wendell Willkie: Fighter for Freedom* (Michigan: Northern Michigan University Press, 1966).



⁷ Wendell L. Willkie, "Mr. Willkie's Reply," *The Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics* 12: 1 (February 1936): 98-99, accessed <http://www.jstor.org>; Barnard, *Wendell Willkie: Fighter for Freedom*, 805-807.

⁸Quote from Frederick S. Troy, Review of *Wendell Willkie: Fighter for Freedom*, by Ellsworth Barnard, *The Massachusetts Review* 7: 4 (Autumn, 1966): 805.

⁹ Roy A. Roberts, "Willkie Crack-Up: Hoosier's Downfall Result of Tactical Political Errors since 1940 Campaign," *Pittsfield Berkshire Evening Eagle*, April 13, 1944, 2, accessed <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

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¹¹ Libby, "Wendell Willkie and the Election of 1940," 303-305.

¹² Turner Catledge, "Willkie Hoosiers See Tide Swinging: Republican Leaders in State Impressed by Throng Out to Hear Him in Indianapolis," Special to *The New York Times*, October 30, 1940, 20, accessed <http://www.proquest.com/en-US/catalogs/databases/detail/pq-hist-news.shtml>.; Barnard, *Wendell Willkie: Fighter for Freedom*.; "The Crusade is Just Begun," *Murphysboro Daily Independent*, November 6, 1940, 2, accessed <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.

¹³ Wendell L. Willkie, "I Challenge Roosevelt," *Look Magazine*, September 10, 1940, 10.; "McNary Declares That Third Term is Biggest Issue," *Kalispell Daily Inter Lake*, September 21, 1940, 1, accessed <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.; "Wendell Willkie Winning Support," *Wisconsin State Journal*, October 1, 1940, 4, accessed <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.; "The Crusade is Just Begun," 2.

¹⁴ Barnard, *Wendell Willkie: Fighter for Freedom*. See notes 15-19 about Willkie's position on civil rights and notes 29-31 about internationalism.

¹⁵ Libby, "Wendell Willkie and the Election of 1940," 308.

¹⁶ Wendell L. Willkie, "Citizens of Negro Blood," *Collier's Magazine*, October 7, 1944, 11, 47, 49, (ISL, Clippings File).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁸ Wendell Willkie, "Willkie Wants G.O.P. to Support Anti-Poll Tax, Anti-Lynching Laws," [likely June 1944], 1,4 (ISL, Clippings File).

¹⁹ Wendell L. Willkie, "Creed for Americans: By Wendell Willkie," *The New York Times*, [September-October 1944], 6E (ISL, Clippings File).

²⁰ Libby, "Wendell Willkie and the Election of 1940," 311.; "Willkie Favors Draft, Allied Aid," *The Elwood Call-Leader* 50: 198, August 17, 1940, cover page.



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- ²¹ Libby, "Wendell Willkie and the Election of 1940," 311.
- ²² Barnard, *Wendell Willkie: Fighter for Freedom*.
- ²³ Ronald H. Snyder, "Wisconsin Ends the Political Career of Wendell Willkie," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* (Autumn 2004): 35-36.; Libby, "Wendell Willkie and the Election of 1940," 293, 310-311.; *History of American Presidential Elections, 1789-1968*, vol 4., 2945.
- ²⁴ Willkie, "Creed for Americans: by Wendell Willkie," 6E.
- ²⁵ Libby, 313.
- ²⁶ Wendell Willkie, *One World* (1943; reprint, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966), Library of Congress, Accessed <http://lccn.loc.gov/66016727>.
- ²⁷ Editorial, "One World or No World: The Vision of Wendell Willkie," *Journal of Public Health Policy* 8:2 (Summer 1987): 143-147, accessed <http://www.jstor.org>.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 144.
- ²⁹ Ronald H. Snyder, "Wisconsin Ends the Political Career of Wendell Willkie," 30-41.
- ³⁰ Roberts, "Willkie Crack-Up: Hoosier's Downfall Result of Tactical Political Errors since 1940 Campaign," 2.; Rex, Karney, "Willkie Got '44 Crowds in State, but Not Votes," *Wisconsin State Journal*, October 9, 1944, 3, accessed <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.; Libby, "Wendell Willkie and the Election of 1940," 314.;
- ³¹ "Nation Mourns Sudden Death of Wendell Willkie," (*Valparaiso*) *Vidette-Messenger*, October 9, 1944, 1, accessed <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.; "Willkie's Death Stuns Nation; Rites Tuesday," *Hammond Times*, October 9, 1944, 1, accessed <http://newspaperarchive.com/>.; *New York Times*, October 12, 1944, 27, accessed <http://www.proquest.com/en-US/catalogs/databases/detail/pq-hist-news.shtml>.; "Wendell Lewis Willkie, 1892-1944," Find A Grave, accessed <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=1104>.
- ³² "F. D. R., Dewey Voice Regret at Willkie's Death," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, accessed <http://www.proquest.com/en-US/catalogs/databases/detail/pq-hist-news.shtml>.
- ³³ "Wendell Lewis Willkie, 1892-1944," Find A Grave, accessed <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=1104>. Several photographs of the memorial erected at Willkie's grave in East Hill Cemetery in Rushville can be viewed at the [Find A Grave](#) website.
- ³⁴ "Wendell L. Willkie Memorial Dedicated at Elwood," publication unknown, n.d., (ISL, Clippings File).; "Elwood Renames School for Wendell L. Willkie," *Indianapolis News*, May 16, 1945, (ISL, Clippings File).; "Plaque Saluting Willkie, Creed Unveiled in Statehouse," *Indianapolis Star*, February 19, 1950, Sec. 2, 1, (ISL, Clippings File). Elwood also renamed a high school for Willkie.
- ³⁵ "Willkie Memorial A 9-Story Building," *New York Times*, February 18, 1945, 36, accessed <http://www.proquest.com/en-US/catalogs/databases/detail/pq-hist-news.shtml>.; "Building Dedicated to



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³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ "Freedom House: A History," accessed <http://www.freedomhouse.org/content/freedom-house-history>.

³⁸ Freedom House, accessed <http://www.freedomhouse.org/>.

³⁹ William Henry Harrison, accessed <http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/williamhenryharrison> (accessed June 15, 2012).; Benjamin Harrison, accessed <http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/benjaminharrison> (accessed June 15, 2012).

⁴⁰ Eugene V. Debs, accessed <http://www.in.gov/history/markers/336.htm> (accessed June 15, 2012).