

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: ALFRED E. SMITH AND TRANSITIONAL
PROGRESSIVISM: THE REVOLUTION BEFORE THE
NEW DEAL

Robert Elliot Chiles, Doctor of Philosophy, 2012

Dissertation directed by: Professor David B. Sicilia
Department of History

In New York State in the 1910s and 1920s, two groups of political actors—largely female social work reformers from the settlement house tradition, and legislators from urban ethnic political machines—coalesced to develop a unique political amalgam: transitional progressivism. Transitional progressivism brought together the common interests of these two groups, forging an agenda that sought to expand the role of the state in protecting industrial laborers, ensuring social welfare, and promoting cultural pluralism. Through a complex process, this agenda became Democratic partisan dogma—first in New York and then nationally; and during both the implementation of this program and the articulation of the broader ideology of the transitional progressives in the context of state and national campaigns, transitional progressivism became the political platform of America’s urban ethnic working-class voters. Through these voters and their political representatives, many priorities from the transitional progressive tradition became important facets of New Deal liberalism. Thus, by way of transitional

progressivism, key elements of Progressive Era reform evolved into hallmarks of the New Deal. The foremost practitioner of this unique progressivism was Alfred E. Smith, a Democrat who served four terms as governor of New York and ran unsuccessfully for president in 1928.

Part I explores the rise of transitional progressivism and its implementation during the Smith governorship. Part II presents a revisionist interpretation of the 1928 presidential contest. The conclusion follows the developments of 1928 into the 1930s, suggesting ways in which transitional progressivism exerted an important influence on the development of the New Deal.

ALFRED E. SMITH AND TRANSITIONAL PROGRESSIVISM:
THE REVOLUTION BEFORE THE NEW DEAL

by

Robert Elliot Chiles

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2012

Advisory Committee

Professor David Sicilia, Chair
Professor Julie Greene
Professor David Karol
Professor Robyn Muncy
Professor Whitman Ridgway

©Copyright by

Robert Elliot Chiles

2012

Acknowledgments

As I prepare to submit my dissertation and bring this journey to a close, I want first to acknowledge the guidance, support, and generosity of a number of individuals.

When I arrived at Maryland, I was quickly overwhelmed and discouraged—unsure that I even belonged in graduate school. By my second semester, however, I met Professor David Sicilia, who quickly took an interest in my goals and my ideas and swiftly volunteered to serve as my advisor. It was through his strenuous advocacy that I entered the doctoral program; and since then he has consistently pushed me to be ambitious in both the conceptualization and execution of my project, while offering continuous interest, constructive criticism, and steadfast support.

Professor Robyn Muncy, whose research interests so strikingly parallel my own, has exhibited unwavering enthusiasm for our discipline and for this project, and has provided invaluable feedback while imbuing my own professional temperament with her joyful zeal for historical work. Professor Whitman Ridgway has also been especially generous with his time and interest in this work; and through many long conversations about history in general and my research in particular, professors Sicilia, Muncy, and Ridgway have each profoundly influenced this dissertation. Joining this triumvirate in the later stages of the project have been Professor Julie Greene and Professor David Karol, both of whom have greatly enhanced my dissertation committee. Additionally, a number of University of Maryland faculty have contributed to this project by reading and commenting on various elements of the work, including professors James Gilbert, James Henretta, Lisa Mar, Sonya Michel, Keith Olson, and Thomas Zeller. Similarly, several of my fellow graduate students have read pieces of the dissertation, including Chris Donohue, Paul Gibson, Reid Gustafson, Robert Henderson, Jon Franklin, Christina LaRocco, and Rebecca Wieters.

Beyond College Park, a number of people contributed to this project's success. During the research process I enjoyed support from many archivists and librarians; the staffs at the New York State Library and the New York State Archives in Albany were especially helpful. Several scholars have been kind enough to consider portions of my output at various stages. From the University at Albany, Richard Hamm commented on my work on education reform, and Lauren Kozakiewicz did the same for my studies of parks and of health policy. Daniel Georgianna of UMass-Dartmouth gave thoughtful consideration to my work on New England. William Leuchtenburg of the University of North Carolina read and commented on a number of materials, and through correspondences and conversations helped me crystallize my thinking and provided some very important leads on sources. Oscar and Lilian Handlin of Harvard took great interest in my work and in my professional development more broadly; they both read pieces of the dissertation, and were incredibly generous in meeting with me repeatedly to discuss my work while counseling me on the vicissitudes of academic life. I am especially

grateful for the thorough consideration of John Buenker of the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, who read the entire dissertation and provided incredibly helpful feedback and remarkably encouraging commentary.

I was also aided with material support. I am grateful for monetary awards from the New York State Library Anna K. and Mary E. Cunningham Research Residency in New York State History and Culture; the New York State Archives/New York State Archives Partnership Trust Larry J. Hackman Research Residency; and the University of Maryland Department of History Hearst Dissertation Fellowship. Of even greater value was the childcare provided by a number of friends, family, and students, especially my father-in-law George Brown and most of all my mother, Bonnie Chiles.

I am obviously not the first person to have a family while undertaking graduate work, but the responsibilities of raising a small child while composing a doctoral dissertation at times proved challenging. Yet for any difficulties this situation may have presented, my daughter Sarah, who is now almost four, is also deserving of thanks. Unconsciously, she compelled from me a level of self-discipline that I believe only strengthened this work; naturally, she provided love and adventure and fun that I believe kept me moored to humanity in the most challenging phases of my studies. Her very presence in our lives has provided a sense of perspective without which I might not have endured many of the trials of the past years.

I say “our lives,” because nothing about this project was undertaken alone. Indeed, my wife Leslie is deserving of the most thanks of all. I cannot imagine what it must be like to be married to someone who is going through the gauntlet of graduate work. Patiently enduring the worst along with me and cheering my small triumphs along the way, she created with her unconditional love and support a world imperturbably secure from the worst uncertainties of academic life. Simultaneously, she has remained uniquely steadfast in her belief that I would succeed. It was Leslie who first convinced me even to pursue graduate studies (a fact of which I remind her regularly), and it has been her love and her faith in my endeavors that have inspired me occasionally to believe along with her.

R.C.

Baltimore, Maryland
March 30, 2012

Contents

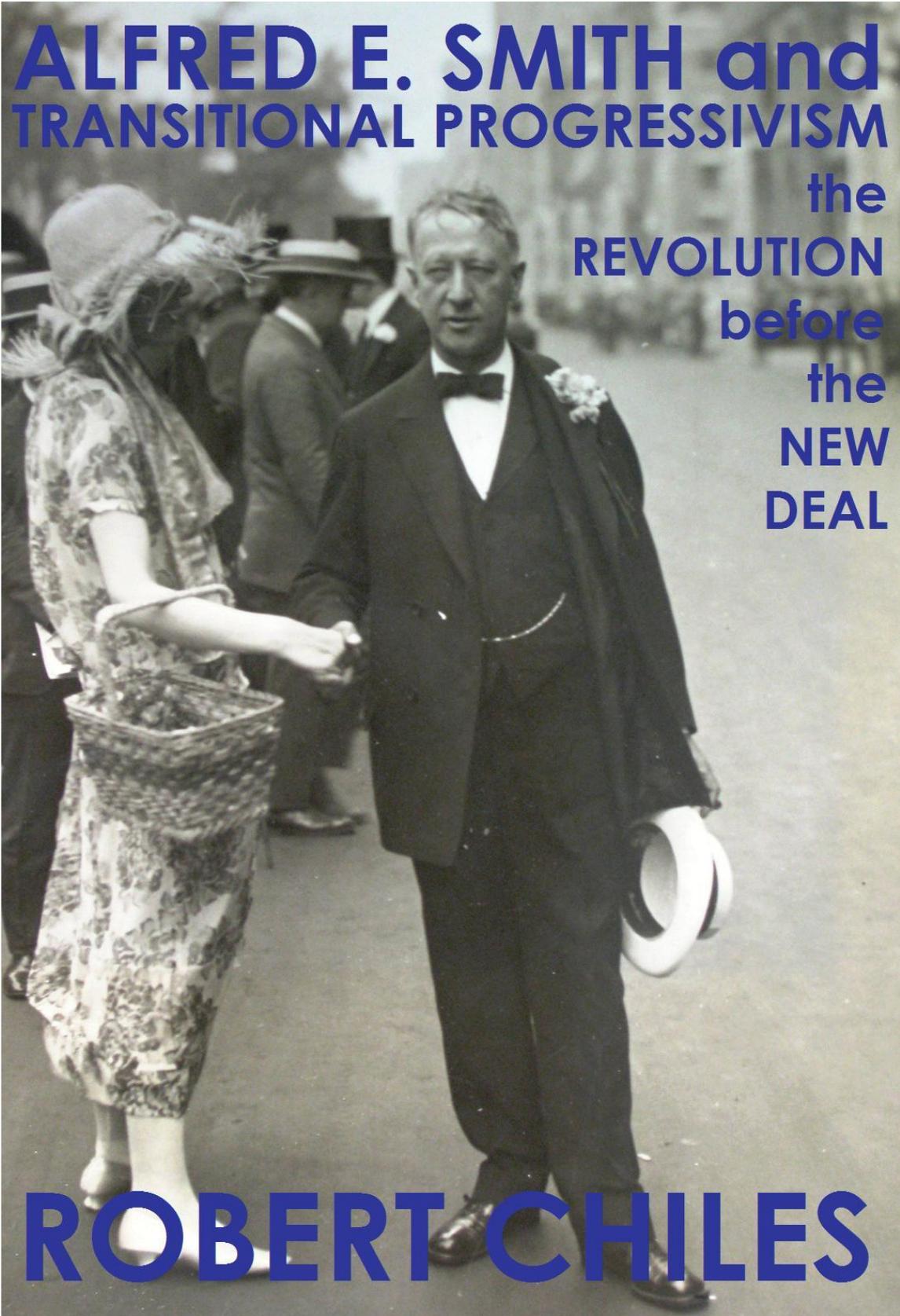
Acknowledgments	ii
List of figures and illustrations	vi
* * *	
Introduction: The Happy Warrior	1
The Happy Warrior	4
* <i>PART I: PROGRESSIVE GOVERNOR</i> *	
Chapter I: A New Progressivism	16
Chapter II: Transitional Progressivism and Social Welfare	60
Public Health	63
Public Education	95
Public Property	118
Chapter III: Transitional Progressivism and Administrative Reform	165
* <i>PART II: 1928</i> *	
Chapter IV: The Campaign of the Decade	209
Toward the Nomination	213
Agriculture	230
Water Power	254
Economic Justice	270
Social Welfare	288
From Albany to Washington	303
The Religious Question as Opening Wedge	309
Chapter V: Critical Election	337
Critical Election?	342
The Democratic Quotient	350
Chapter VI: The Revolution before the New Deal	371
The Happy Warrior in New England	373
Ethnic New England	379
Industrial New England	403
New England Textiles	411

Mill Life	429
Solutions	450
Chapter VII: A Warning Shot from Dixie	471
Dry Southerners	479
“Dry Southerners”	487
Protestant, Anglo-Saxon Southerners	491
White Southerners	498
Southern Farmers	513
New Southerners	521
Southern Democrats and Progressive Southerners	541
Conclusion: The Happy Warriors	569
Father of the New Deal?	570
Making A New Deal	574
The Happy Warriors	581
<i>Quantum Mutatus Ab Illo</i>	615
	* * *
Appendices	625
Bibliography	641

Maps, Charts, and Illustrations

<i>ALFRED E. SMITH AND TRANSITIONAL PROGRESSIVISM</i>	viii
I.1: Alfred E. Smith at age 18	7
1.1: Legislation by Alfred E. Smith and Robert F. Wagner, 1910-1914 (chart)	29
1.2: Frances Perkins, ca. 1920	35
1.3: Lillian Wald and Jane Addams, 1916	40
1.4: Alfred E. Smith at Yankee Stadium, 1923	59
2.1: Assemblyman Louis Cuvillier, ca. 1928	74
2.2: New York State Hospital Construction, 1924-1925 (map)	82
2.3: New York State Hospital Construction, 1914-1927 (chart)	84
2.4: Hospital Construction, 1927	87
2.5: Robert Moses, 1934	127
2.6: Jones Beach, Nassau County, New York, 2004	128
2.7: Tongue Mountain, Warren County, New York, 2009	131
3.1: Henry Stimson, Elihu Root, and Charles Evans Hughes, 1920s	186
3.2: Rollin Kirby, “There’s No Use in Trying to Beat that Man Smith,” 1925	206
II.1: <i>The Brooklyn Eagle</i> , “Stepping Out,” 1928	208
4.1: Alfred E. Smith, John W. Davis, William Gibbs McAdoo, ca. 1920s	217
4.2: Alfred E. Smith and Governor Walter Maddock, 1928	233
4.3: Sen. John J. Blaine, Sen. George W. Norris, Sen. Robert M. La Follette, Jr., Gov. Frank O. Lowden, 1920s	246
4.4: Gale, “He Got In The Wrong Mellon Patch!” 1928	309
4.5: Sen. J. Thomas Heflin, ca. 1928	313
4.6: Rollin Kirby, “The Three Musketeers,” 1928	320
4.7: Jerry Doyle, “Carry On!” 1928	328
4.8: Fred B. Watson, “Where They Roost,” 1928	330
5.1: Electoral College Vote, 1928 (map)	340
5.2: Democratic Strength, 1928 versus 1920-1924 Average (map)	340
5.3: Metropolitan Democratic Quotients (DQs), 1896-1928 (chart)	352
5.4: Metropolitan DQs, 1896-1928 versus Roosevelt Averages (chart)	352
5.5-5.12: DQ correlations, 1912 through 1944 (charts)	353-54
5.13: DQ of 27 Metropolitan Counties, 1896-1928 versus Roosevelt Years (chart)	355
5.14-5.23: DQs of Select Jurisdictions, 1896-1944 (charts)	357-59
5.24-5.27: DQs of Irregular Jurisdictions, 1896-1944 (charts)	362
5.28: DQ of the 20 Largest Urban Municipalities, 1896-1944 (charts)	364
5.29-5.32: Democratic Percentages in Select Jurisdictions, 1896-1944 (charts)	366
5.33-5.36: DQ and Democratic Percentages, Suffolk County, Mass., and Providence County, R.I., 1896-1944 (charts)	368
6.1: French-American Citizens for Alfred E. Smith advertisement, 1928	390

6.2: Democratic Percentages in Four Textile Cities, 1896-1944 (chart)	415
6.3: Decline in Textile Employment in Three Cities, 1919-1929 (chart)	423
6.4: Average Hourly Wage of Female Textile Workers, Massachusetts and South Carolina, 1890-1928 (chart)	423
6.5: Change in the Indexed Number of Operating Spindles, Cotton South, New England, and Massachusetts, 1925-1929 (chart)	423
6.6: Decline of New Bedford Textiles, 1925-1929 (chart)	445
6.7: Rollin Kirby, “A Great Army,” 1928	470
7.1: Decline in the Democratic Presidential Vote in South, 1924-1928 (map)	477
7.2: North Carolina Presidential Vote by County, 1920-1928 (map)	478
7.3: Santford Martin, 1954	480
7.4: Bishop James Cannon, Jr., and Senator John J. Blaine, 1930	490
7.5: “White Supremacy as Practiced by Tammany,” 1928	505
7.6: Indexed Price of Cotton and Cotton Seed and All Farm Products, 1920-1928 (chart)	515
7.7: <i>The St. Louis Post-Dispatch</i> , “You Know Me, Al!” 1928	520
7.8: Senator Furnifold M. Simmons, 1913	525
7.9: Statewide Presidential Vote in former Confederate States, 1928 (chart)	532
7.10: Urban Population, former Confederate States, 1930 (chart)	533
7.11: Urban Growth Rate, former Confederate States, 1920s (chart)	533
7.12: Percentage of North Carolina Presidential Vote from 20 Most Urbanized Counties, 1900-1928 (chart)	535
7.13: Governor O. Max Gardner, 1929	540
7.14: Reyn Olds, “To An Audience of Forty Million,” 1928	549
7.15: Senator Joseph T. Robinson and Secretary Josephus Daniels, 1920s	552
7.16: “A Daniel{s} Come To Judgment!” 1928	557
7.17: “We Lost” 1928	560
7.18: Southern Attitudes toward a Two-Party South, 1939-1965 (chart)	562
7.19-7.22: Democratic Presidential Strength in the former Confederate States, 1896-1988 (charts)	565-66
7.23: Democratic Presidential Strength in the former Confederate States, 1896-2008 (chart)	568
8.1: Rollin Kirby, “We Know it’s Hot but Here is an Important Subject,” 1937	579
8.2: President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signs the “Beer Bill,” 1933	589
8.3: Rep. William P. Connery, Jr., and Sen. Robert F. Wagner, 1937	601
8.4: Rep. Mary Theresa Norton, 1939	603
8.5: Rep. Arthur D. Healey, 1939	606
8.6: Senator David Ignatius Walsh, 1938	609
8.7: Cy Hungerford, “The Forgotten Man?” 1932	613
8.8: Rep. Hermann Kopplemann and President Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1940	624



**ALFRED E. SMITH and
TRANSITIONAL PROGRESSIVISM**

**the
REVOLUTION
before
the
NEW
DEAL**

ROBERT CHILES

Introduction: The Happy Warrior

“I am sure you are whole-heartedly in accord with what seems inevitable—a life of hard, toilsome labor, harder than ever before, but always for the good of others.”

-James Donohue to Alfred E. Smith (a childhood schoolmate), June 24, 1928¹

In New York State in the 1910s and 1920s, two seemingly irreconcilable groups of political actors—largely female social work reformers from the settlement house tradition, and pragmatic legislators and bosses from urban ethnic political machines—were able to coalesce and develop a unique political amalgam: transitional progressivism. Transitional progressivism brought together the common interests of these two groups, forging an agenda that sought to expand the role of the state in protecting industrial laborers, ensuring social welfare, and promoting cultural pluralism. Through a complex process of negotiation, this agenda became Democratic partisan dogma—first in New York and then nationally; and during both the implementation of some of these progressive programs and the articulation of the broader ideology of the transitional progressives in the context of state and national campaigns, transitional progressivism became the political platform of America’s urban ethnic working-class voters. Through these voters and their political representatives, many priorities from the transitional progressive tradition became important facets of New Deal liberalism. Thus, by way of

¹ James Donohue to Alfred E. Smith, June 24, 1928, George Graves Papers, New York State Archives, Albany, New York (hereafter, George Graves Papers), Box 17, Folder “DONOHUE, JAMES,” p. 2.

² See chapter one. To consider a few notable examples: In his classic work *The Age of Reform*, Richard

transitional progressivism, key elements of Progressive Era reform evolved into hallmarks of the New Deal.

Generations of scholars have produced a rich literature on the relationship between Progressivism and New Deal liberalism. This work has not yielded a consensus as to whether the latter period of reform represented a continuation of the Progressive agenda or a shift in direction or focus. One school has suggested that the New Deal marked a dramatic departure from the old Progressive tradition—that Franklin Roosevelt’s modern liberalism had little in common with the Progressive crusades of an earlier day; another has proposed continuity, suggesting either that the New Deal was the culmination of many decades of Progressive policy developments on the local, state, and national levels, or that the Great Depression offered a unique opportunity for American Progressives to enact an agenda that had been stifled by unfavorable domestic conditions since the close of the Great War.²

This controversy has been exacerbated by the nebulous nature of Progressivism itself. The striking diversity of Progressive Era reformers has led scholars to identify various and often incongruous groups and movements as “progressive.” Naturally, historical determinations about the degree of continuity between Progressivism and New Deal liberalism are dependent on historians’ decisions regarding whom to include as a

² See chapter one. To consider a few notable examples: In his classic work *The Age of Reform*, Richard Hofstadter dubbed the New Deal “a drastic new departure.” Buttressing this argument in 1967, Otis Graham, Jr., found that after “initial enthusiasm,” most of the “Old Progressives” decided “that the New Deal was destructive of their political and social hopes for America.” On the other hand, Daniel Rodgers suggested in *Atlantic Crossings* that the New Deal was “a great, explosive release of the pent-up agenda of the progressive past.” Scholars like Robyn Muncy have noted that with the coming of the New Deal, the progressive agenda that had grown out of the settlement house tradition was largely instituted as federal policy. Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Vintage, 1955), p. 303; Otis Graham, Jr., *An Encore for Reform: The Old Progressives and the New Deal* (New York: Oxford, 1967), pp. 166-167; Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1998), p. 416; Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform: 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford, 1991), pp. xi, 153.

Progressive. If the Progressives were Richard Hofstadter's status anxious mugwumps, or, more broadly, if their ambition was to check social change, then there is little to commend an interpretation connecting Progressive reforms to the upheavals of the New Deal years.³ Conversely, if the Progressives were figures who responded to those social changes by struggling to establish a state role in promoting public health and welfare, limiting the power of big business, or improving the lot of workers, then the liberalism of the 1930s does not represent a "drastic new departure" from the earlier reform tradition.

This study recognizes that all of these groups may well have been Progressives—certainly they considered themselves to be such and certainly they all exerted influence on policymaking in the Progressive Era. Thus the project of drawing a straight line from Progressivism to the New Deal, already fraught with complexities and contradictions, becomes a Gordian knot for historians of United States politics. Scholars can begin to disentangle this quandary with a slight adjustment of focus: exploring how *particular strands* of the Progressive tradition came to influence *specific facets* of New Deal liberalism.

With this work, I am engaging in such a project. I demonstrate how transitional progressivism represented a key phase in the process of political evolution from Progressive policies and politics to those of the New Deal. Recognizing that not all self-described progressives would have approved of transitional progressivism—indeed, many were quite antagonistic toward the program and its sponsors—I am limiting the scope of my conclusions to specific progressives, who were able to overcome their differences in order to promote and implement a platform reflecting their common goals

³ Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, p. 135. On social control, see: Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003), *passim*.

for society. My ambition is not to end the debate over continuity versus change, for while this work leans heavily toward continuity, my conclusions are not sweeping. Nevertheless, I am presenting in transitional progressivism a new way of conceptualizing early twentieth century United States political history, an admittedly ambitious project in itself.

The foremost practitioner of this unique progressivism was Alfred E. Smith, a Democrat who served four terms as governor of New York and ran unsuccessfully for president in 1928. Because of Smith's leading role in the application of transitional progressivism, his governorship and his 1928 presidential campaign figure prominently in the pages that follow. However, my interest is much less in Smith the man than in the issues and ideas that affected his policies and politics—and so this work is not intended as a comprehensive Smith biography. Nonetheless, by centering the narrative on Smith's role in developing, implementing, and nationalizing transitional progressivism, I present a fundamental reinterpretation of a major political figure.

The Happy Warrior

In 1927, journalist Walter Lippmann delineated what would become the consensus view on the national significance of Al Smith, then in his fourth term as governor of New York. “Smith is the first child of the new immigration who might be President of the United States. He carries with him the hopes, the sense of self-respect, and the grievances of that great mass of newer Americans who feel that they have never been wholly accepted as part of the American community. . . . Many of them are

Catholics, most of them are wet, most of them live in cities. Those are all superficial facts as against the fundamental fact that they are all immigrants. . . . he comes from a class of citizens who are felt to be alien to the historic American ideal.”⁴ In this passage, Lippmann set down many of the important tropes that continue to dominate the historical understanding of Alfred E. Smith.

Indeed, these themes have retained their prominence with justification. In 1928, Al Smith became the first Roman Catholic to secure a major party presidential nomination. He openly opposed prohibition, rhetorically bludgeoned the Ku Klux Klan, and thoughtfully challenged immigration quotas that had been rooted in an Anglo-Saxon conception of Americanism. His campaign theme song was “The Sidewalks of New York” and his trademark brown derby—along with his perpetual cigar—became a staple within contemporary political iconography. His speeches were delivered, unapologetically, in the raspy tones, dubious pronunciation, and proletarian diction of the Bowery.

All of this was a reflection of Smith’s background. Indeed, in order to understand Al Smith’s personality and his politics, one must understand Manhattan’s Fourth Ward. A geographically small neighborhood on New York’s Lower East Side, it had absorbed thousands of Irish refugees during the mid-nineteenth century.⁵ It was filled with “a motley array of tenements, of converted warehouses, of dwellings in every stage of repair and decay, and of shacks and shanties” and, as a waterfront neighborhood, it acquired an

⁴ Walter Lippmann, “The Sick Donkey: Democratic Prospects for 1928,” *Harper’s Magazine*, Vol. 155 (September, 1927), pp. 415-421, p. 418.

⁵ The Fourth Ward was bordered on the west by the Bowery, on the east by the bustling East River, on the north by East Broadway and on the south by South Street. Oscar Handlin, *Al Smith and His America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1958), pp. 6-7.

“unsavory” reputation as a den for rowdy sailors and various other ruffians.⁶ Nevertheless, it was cheap to live near the wharves along the East River, and so the Fourth Ward’s population of impoverished, unskilled laborers continued to swell, all while these families struggled mightily to raise their children in an environment secluded from the surrounding vice.⁷ Born December 30, 1873, Alfred Emanuel Smith was one of those children.

The son and namesake of a Civil War veteran, Smith grew up on South Street, one of the Fourth Ward’s many narrow, bustling, cobblestone roads.⁸ Like the lion’s share of their neighbors, Smith’s family was Irish, Catholic, and poor.⁹ Young Al Smith started work at age eleven; the next year, he lost his father and was forced to leave school in the eighth grade and go to work full time.¹⁰ For several years he labored twelve-hour days (that began at 4:00 a.m.) as a checker at the Fulton Fish Market, and later moved on to a position at a pumping station in Brooklyn.¹¹ In the decades that followed, Smith would often joke “that his only academic degree was F. F. M., standing for Fulton Fish Market.”¹²

⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

⁸ Robert A. Slayton, *Empire Statesman: The Rise and Redemption of Al Smith* (New York: Free Press, 2001), p. 16; Handlin, *Al Smith and His America*, p. 12; Emily Smith Warner, with Hawthorne Daniel, *The Happy Warrior: The Story of My Father, Alfred E. Smith* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956), p. 26.

⁹ Smith biographer Robert Slayton notes that the Fourth Ward did house an eclectic collection of ethnic groups, but that in the mid-nineteenth century, the ward was “one of the most Gaelic in the city.” Similarly, research by Frances Perkins has shown that Smith was in fact not 100 percent Irish, but rather of mixed Irish, Italian, English, and German extraction. While a fascinating biographical point, Smith’s lineage is not as significant to this study as his professed heritage, which was, according to one grandson, “100% Irish.” Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, pp. 9-13; Matthew and Hannah Josephson, *Al Smith: Hero of the Cities: A Political Portrait Drawing on the Papers of Frances Perkins* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), pp. 8-18.

¹⁰ Handlin, *Al Smith and His America*, p. 12.

¹¹ “National Affairs: The Brown Derby,” *Time*, April 30, 1928, pp. 9-11, p. 9; Handlin, *Al Smith and His America*, p. 12.

¹² “Tribute Given to Alfred E. Smith at School Dedication,” *The New York Times*, December 13, 1966, p. 51.



Fig. I.1: Alfred Emanuel Smith at age eighteen.¹³

As with so many ethnic, working-class ghettos throughout Manhattan, another fundamental characteristic of the Fourth Ward was the omnipotence of Tammany Hall. The most notorious political machine in United States history, Tammany dominated New York City for eight decades, from the founding of the modern organization in 1854 to the election of Fiorello La Guardia as mayor in 1933.¹⁴ Its formula for success, according to Gilded Age district healer George Washington Plunkitt, lay in the organization's ability to satisfy basic human needs: patronage—mostly in the form of municipal jobs;

¹³ "Alfred E. Smith, bust portrait, facing right," November 4, 1926, from a photograph taken in 1892, New York World-Telegram and the Sun Newspaper Photograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

¹⁴ Arthur Mann, "Introduction," in William L. Riordan, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall: A Series of Very Plain Talks on Very Practical Politics*, (New York: Dutton, 1963), pp. vii-xxii, p. x.

benevolent acts to ease the daily burdens of constituents—a bucket of coal when money was tight, bailing a son out of jail after a night of hooliganism, and other such favors; as well as the provision of a sense of community.¹⁵ All of this forged a spirit of fealty between machine and constituent and secured generations of political loyalty. These operations also required exorbitant sums of money—funds easily obtained over decades of looting the city treasury.

Such was the political school in which Al Smith was educated. The Plunkitt of the Fourth Ward was “Big Tim” Sullivan, but for Smith, the most important political lessons were learned from saloonkeeper Tom Foley, considered the “real boss” by many in the neighborhood.¹⁶ As *Time* magazine would later note: “His college was the Society of St. Tammany and his freshman courses were in addressing postcards to voters,” and “watching the polls,” until “Tammany promoted him to speechmaking in his district and his name began to get into the newspapers.”¹⁷ For several more years Smith “investigated jury panels,” and “worked for other men’s elections.”¹⁸ During this period the young Tammany man, who was also an aspiring actor, married Catherine Ann Dunn, and within a few years the couple moved to the Oliver Street home that would be forever associated with Al Smith.¹⁹ By 1903 Tom Foley had become frustrated with an assemblyman who “seemed to have forgotten his friends,” and decided to send the faithful Smith to Albany.²⁰

¹⁵ Plunkitt discusses these issues throughout his talks. Riordan, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall: A Series of Very Plain Talks on Very Practical Politics*, *passim*.

¹⁶ Handlin, *Al Smith*, pp. 20-21.

¹⁷ “National Affairs: The Brown Derby,” p. 10.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁹ Warner, *The Happy Warrior*, pp. 40-41; Handlin, *Al Smith*, pp. 12-17. Indeed, the Smith residence at 25 Oliver Street “became a Registered National Historic Landmark in 1973.” Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, caption to illustration between pp. 224 and 225.

²⁰ Handlin, *Al Smith*, pp. 26-27.

During his first legislative session, Al Smith did not make a single speech.²¹ He “found himself entirely disregarded and completely confused.”²² Amplifying Smith’s frustration was his total inability to comprehend the stack of bills that would arrive on his desk daily.²³ The wording of these bills was often difficult even for the well-trained lawyer to decipher, but “it might have been designed to mock a man whose schooling had ended in the eighth grade.”²⁴ Yet Al Smith was tenacious. Each night, while other legislators caroused in local pubs, Smith would retire early and thoroughly dissect each bill—developing not only an understanding of specific pieces of legislation but also a critical eye for the mechanics of state government.²⁵ With time, Smith earned a positive reputation among his colleagues; and in 1911, after revelations of corruption among legislative Republicans ushered in a Democratic majority, the young assemblyman was the logical choice for Tammany sachem Charles Francis “Silent Charlie” Murphy to promote for majority leader.²⁶ After a brief foray into New York City politics as sheriff and then president of the board of aldermen, Smith was elected governor of the Empire State in 1918. A decade later, his party nominated him for the White House.

Smith, who was dubbed “the Happy Warrior” by his ally and gubernatorial successor Franklin Delano Roosevelt, is rightly remembered as a progressive executive.²⁷

One study of his gubernatorial years goes as far as to suggest that “Smith represents a

²¹ Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Vintage, 1975), p. 118.

²² Handlin, *Al Smith*, p. 27.

²³ Caro, *The Power Broker*, p. 118; Handlin, *Al Smith*, p. 27.

²⁴ Caro, *The Power Broker*, p. 119.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 119-20.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

²⁷ *E.g.*: Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, pp. 125-233; Handlin, *Al Smith and His America*, pp. 90-111; Elisabeth Israels Perry, *Belle Moskowitz: Feminine Politics and the Exercise of Power in the Age of Alfred E. Smith* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992), pp. 122-183; Paula Eldot, *Governor Alfred E. Smith: The Politician as Reformer* (New York: Garland, 1983), *passim*.

transitional stage between progressivism and the New Deal.”²⁸ However, historians have not understood Al Smith’s campaign for the presidency in the same way. The study that recognized the “transitional” nature of his administration in New York did not consider his presidential run. Those scholars who have tend to portray Smith’s national campaign in a different light than his years as governor. Historian David Burner, in his crucial work on 1920s Democratic politics, suggested that Smith’s campaign was essentially conservative, and this position has proven the prevailing academic interpretation.²⁹

Historians have thus determined that, as Smith biographer Robert Slayton suggests, 1928 saw “no substantial issue to differentiate the parties,” rendering the campaign “a contest between personalities.”³⁰ Indeed, Smith’s personality has come to dominate the scholarly understanding of his presidential run. A typical description in a recent academic work introduces the 1928 Democratic presidential nominee thus: “Al Smith was as urban as the Brooklyn Bridge near which he had grown up, as Irish as the Blarney Stone, and as Catholic as St. Patrick’s Cathedral.”³¹ Such a cartoonish, if poetic and in some ways accurate description of the four-time New York governor, diverts

²⁸ Eldot, *op. cit.*, p. 399.

²⁹ David Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism: The Democratic Party in Transition, 1918-1932* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), pp. 194-197. Burner is hardly alone in taking this position. Michael Parrish’s treatment of the 1920s and ’30s, *Anxious Decades*, declares that “Smith ran an ideologically conservative campaign.” William E. Leuchtenburg’s *The Perils of Prosperity* suggests that Smith was either unable or unwilling “to establish a progressive position sharply different from Hoover’s,” while Arthur M. Schlesinger’s *The Crisis of the Old Order* portrays Smith’s campaign as an ambivalent one, “too liberal for the business community . . . too mild for the more ardent reformers.” Donald McCoy classified Smith’s stance on issues as “an amalgam . . . designed to appeal to both economic liberals and conservatives.” A key exception to this trend is the earliest academic biography of Smith, Oscar Handlin’s *Al Smith and His America*, which does not discount Smith’s progressivism, emphasizing Smith’s policy ideas along with his background and personality. Michael E. Parrish, *Anxious Decades: America in Prosperity and Depression, 1920-1941* (New York: Norton, 1992), p. 213; William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity: 1914-32* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1958), p. 234; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Crisis of the Old Order: 1919-1933* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), p. 128; Donald R. McCoy, *Coming of Age: The United States during the 1920’s and 1930’s* (New York: Penguin, 1973), pp. 146-150; Handlin, *Al Smith and his America*, p. 130.

³⁰ Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 275. See also: Allan J. Lichtman, *Prejudice and the Old Politics: The Presidential Election of 1928* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1979), *passim*.

³¹ Parrish, *Anxious Decades*, p. 209.

scholarly attention toward a total fixation upon the candidate's personality, obscuring the important policy ideas of Smith and his closest associates. In fact, Smith continued throughout his presidential campaign to argue doggedly for his progressive vision of the government's responsibility to implement a broadly defined social welfare regime.

With a focus on the political implications of policy ideas, my work seeks to revise the prevailing view of the Happy Warrior. Understanding Smith as the leading exponent of transitional progressivism helps place him in proper perspective: squarely at the center of an evolutionary process that connected aspects of Progressivism with central portions of the New Deal. The policies implemented during Smith's governorship represented the fruition of the ongoing process of political negotiation and coalition between Democratic political machine operatives and social work activists. Smith's personal appeal to urban ethnic working-class voters enabled him to promote those same policies on the national level in 1928. Thus, the 1928 Democratic campaign was the apogee of transitional progressivism, an ideology that imbued the emerging urban Democratic coalition with a set of values that anticipated many facets of the New Deal.

The urban, ethnic, working-class voters who would soon comprise the backbone of the Roosevelt coalition embraced both the cultural symbolism of the Smith candidacy *and* the progressive initiatives the candidate expounded. Smith's Catholicism, his working-class roots, his disdain for prohibition and for the Ku Klux Klan—these attributes all had a clear influence on voters in 1928, and they benefited Smith greatly among urban workers, just as they would prove politically unpalatable among voters in other parts of the nation. But leaving the story at that is superficial. I have proceeded from the hypothesis that, like any other human actors, the real people who constituted the

new Smith Democrats of 1928—the ones who did the working and praying and suffering and voting that historians have attempted to decipher—were complex beings with complicated motivations. There is no question that there were many voters like Nazzareno Marconi of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, who wrote Smith (in Italian) to assure him that “we Catholic people do not get tired of working for your victory.”³² But there were others like Joseph F. Nolan of Westfield, New Jersey, an Irish-American first-time voter who explained to the *Newark Evening News* that Smith’s gubernatorial résumé was “ample proof of his ability. If that record is indicative of what is to be expected of him in the event of his election the United States is destined for one of the most distinguished administrations in its history.”³³ In fact, this is not an “either or” proposition; most Smith voters were sophisticated enough to understand the Democratic candidate as representing both cultural pluralism and social and economic reform—and most of those voters were clamoring for both by 1928. This combination of cultural empowerment with social welfare appeals had been the formula of Smith’s progressive governorship, and it was the platform from which he sought the presidency. In 1928, Al Smith nationalized his unique brand of progressivism; and while he went down to a bitter defeat that year, the ideas he promoted were taken up by his enthusiastic supporters and, through their efforts, infused the reforms of the New Deal with the spirit of transitional progressivism.

* * *

³² Translated by Smith’s office. Nazzareno Marconi to Alfred E. Smith, May 21, 1928, Graves Papers, Box 44, Folder MAR.

³³ Joseph F. Nolan, Letter to the Editor, *The Newark Evening News*, November 3, 1928, p. 13.

It will be apparent that my understanding of this period necessarily builds upon the works of many past scholars. Some of the most significant contributions to my thinking have come from the scholarship of J. Joseph Huthmacher and John D. Buenker on “urban liberalism”; Robyn Muncy and Elisabeth Perry, among others, on women’s social work progressivism; and William E. Leuchtenburg on the politics of the 1920s and of the New Deal. I have also considered the works of numerous scholars of Alfred E. Smith, most significantly Oscar Handlin, who produced the first academic biography of the Happy Warrior in 1958.

However, it will be equally apparent that what I am proposing is a revisionist argument, and I intend to present points of strong disagreement both with those scholars mentioned and with a large number of other excellent historians of the period. I have felt that many of my interventions required a preponderance of evidence in order to justify my divergent interpretations of actors and events. This has therefore proven a rather long work; and while I do not intend to present an apologia for any moments of verbosity, I will suggest that there are often times when a thorough exploration of the richness of the human experience is the most potent mechanism for understanding our past.

Part I, comprised of the first three chapters of this work, explores the rise of transitional progressivism and its implementation during the Smith governorship. In chapter one, I consider the relevant literature on Progressivism and introduce the concept of transitional progressivism, defining it both in terms of ideology and constituency. I then explore how that “new progressivism” developed in the 1910s and 1920s in New York State. In chapters two and three I interpret specific policy initiatives undertaken by Governor Smith and explore ways in which these programs were tangible manifestations

of Smith's unique progressivism. Chapter two describes the establishment of a broadly defined social welfare regime, focusing on areas of health, education, recreation, and water power. Chapter three considers Smith's administrative reforms in New York State within the context of his transitional progressivism. I argue as others have that he sought these structural reforms to expedite and enhance his social welfare agenda, while also using his fight for administrative reform to understand the political tactics of transitional progressivism.

Part II, consisting of chapters four through seven, presents my interpretation of the 1928 presidential contest. Chapter four explores the major policy debates of 1928, presenting them as part of a revisionist narrative of the campaign. Chapter five is a quantitative analysis of the electoral results and their significance. Chapters six and seven are regional case studies, intended to explain the important political changes that took place in 1928. Each is presented as an interpretive narrative: chapter six is the story of southern New England, where Smith experienced his greatest triumphs; chapter seven considers 1928 in the Old South, the locale of some of the biggest—and most portentous—Democratic disappointments. I conclude by following the developments of 1928 into the 1930s, suggesting ways in which transitional progressivism exerted an important influence on the development of the New Deal.

PART I

PROGRESSIVE GOVERNOR

Chapter I: A New Progressivism

“You come into possession of the franchise after the battle for political independence is won. The issues of the present hour are purely economic, and to meet them, women are equally qualified with men.”

-State Senator Anthony Griffin, (D-Bronx), 1917

* * *

“The Tammany group is constantly jockeying with the Socialists to prove that they are the real ‘people’s friend’ . . . skillfully maneuvering ‘to beat them to it’ . . . it gained the appearance of a progressive party and left the reformers appearing as reactionaries.”

-Henry Moskowitz,
“New York’s East Side as a Political Barometer,” *Outlook*, 1918

The period between the unofficial close of the Progressive Era (sometime shortly after the Armistice and the precipitous decline of Wilsonianism) and the inauguration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt to the presidency was not simply an unchallenged conservative interregnum.³⁴ To be sure, this “long 1920s” was marked by the cult of the businessman, cultural clashes, and laissez faire governance. But even as Bruce Barton preached the virtues of corporate prowess, even while William Jennings Bryan delivered jeremiads on the decline of traditional values and Calvin Coolidge made laconic

³⁴ I am not alone in making this assertion. In 1959, Arthur Link concluded that “in spite of reversals and failures, important components of the national progressive movement survived in considerable vigor and succeeded to a varying degree,” that “various progressive coalitions controlled Congress for the greater part of the 1920’s,” and that “the progressive movement in the cities and states was far from dead in the 1920’s.” Arthur S. Link, “What Happened to the Progressive Movement in the 1920’s?” *The American Historical Review*, 64:4 (July, 1959), pp. 833-851, p. 850. Other scholars who have noted progressive elements surviving into the 1920s include Clarke Chambers and Robyn Muncy, the works of whom are discussed below.

indifference an heroic trait, a progressive ideology and style persisted that would serve to link the two periods of reform within a longer liberal tradition.

During the long 1920s, New York Democratic governor Alfred E. Smith, along with a motley group of reform-minded allies, practiced what I call transitional progressivism. Transitional progressivism was both an ideological system and a rhetorical style; it affected both public policy and electoral politics in the Empire State. This new progressivism drew from various “progressivisms” of the past, arranging previously unrelated or even antagonistic elements within one consistent progressive agenda for the state and eventually the nation. Of equal significance, transitional progressivism politicized this agenda in a radically new way, transposing the reform platform into Democratic partisan dogma. The ways in which transitional progressivism was expressed in the 1920s are best explored through study of the executive career of its foremost practitioner, Al Smith. But first one must understand the roots of that progressivism, in order to see how this unique phenomenon developed from long-established elements, both political and philosophical.

I

“The Progressives,” as one scholar put it, “were a diverse lot.”³⁵ Progressivism has been defined as everything from a reactionary defense against a “status revolution” to a rationalization and bureaucratization of government in response to modernizing technological and economic forces; from a move to homogenize the citizenry and control

³⁵ Gary Gerstle, “The Protean Character of American Liberalism,” *American Historical Review*, 99:4 (October, 1994), pp. 1043-1073, p. 1051.

social conflict on the part of the middle class to a set of tools for dealing with industrial society imported from late-nineteenth century Europe by cosmopolitan intellectuals, to a drive to establish the political ascendancy of the “public interest” over interest group, class, or partisan goals.³⁶ Studies have thus located the core progressive constituency variously, in the old-money men of the “Mugwump type,” the professional middle-class of the new industrial order, worldly scholars and social reformers, settlement house activists, and even urban machine politicians.³⁷ Moreover, some scholars have questioned whether a “progressive movement” existed at all, and others have suggested that there was no ideological connection between the various political drives of the reputedly progressive decades, but merely a shared set of “clusters of ideas” and “social languages” that were drawn upon by sundry interest groups.³⁸ Indeed, some studies have demonstrated that the rhetoric of progressivism was sometimes appropriated by partisans and injected into the public sphere toward non-reformist, highly divisive ends.³⁹

³⁶ Progressivism as response to a status revolution: Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*; as bureaucratization: Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); as social control: McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*; as a European import: Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*; James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford, 1986); as the public interest: Thomas R. Pegram, *Partisans and Progressives: Private Interest and Public Policy in Illinois, 1870-1922* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 1992); on promoting the public interest to control class conflict, see Shelton Stromquist, *Re-Inventing “The People”: The Progressive Movement, the Class Problem, and the Origins of Modern Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2006).

³⁷ Progressives as mugwumps: Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*; as the new middle class: Wiebe, *The Search for Order*; McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*; as worldly reformers: Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*; as settlement house workers: Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nation’s Work: The Rise of Women’s Political Culture, 1830-1900* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1995); as machine politicians: John D. Buenker, *Urban Liberalism and Progressive Reform* (New York: Norton, 1973). Keith Olson summarizes the situation well: “At one time or another, almost every group and individual in the country . . . probably endorsed one or more reform movements.” Keith W. Olson, *Biography of A Progressive: Franklin K. Lane, 1864-1921* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), p. 5.

³⁸ Peter G. Filene, “An Obituary for ‘The Progressive Movement,’” *American Quarterly*, 22:1 (Spring, 1970), pp. 20-34; Daniel T. Rodgers, “In Search of Progressivism,” *Reviews in American History*, 10:4 (December, 1982), pp. 113-132, p. 123.

³⁹ E.g.: James J. Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism: Urban Political Culture in Boston 1900-1925* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1998).

Amidst such academic ambivalence, it is necessary for any consideration of progressive politics to stake out its conceptualization of the subject. The posture of the present study leaves room for a diversity of “progressives” or even “progressivisms” within the working definition of that idea; sharing with historians Arthur S. Link and Richard L. McCormick the belief that “in general, progressives sought to improve the conditions of life and labor and to create as much social stability as possible. But each group of progressives had its own definitions of improvement and stability. . . . Certainly there was no *unified* movement, but . . . progressivism [was] a real, vital, and significant phenomenon, one which contemporaries recognized and talked and fought about.”⁴⁰ Nevertheless, in attempting to define the specific ideology of a candidate, and to place that ideology within a longer process of political development, such an approach no longer suffices. To discover how transitional progressivism represents a link between Progressivism and New Deal liberalism, it is imperative that the specific progressivisms that contributed to its development be isolated; and that the means by which those progressivisms were reconciled to develop a new political ideology be analyzed.

At its core, transitional progressivism was the confluence of two important streams of progressive ideology: urban liberalism and social welfare progressivism. Urban liberalism was a form of progressivism prevalent among machine politicians, who realized that ameliorative social and labor legislation was an increasingly effective way to

⁴⁰ Arthur S. Link and Richard L. McCormick, *Progressivism* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1983), p. 2. (Emphasis in original.) This seems to run counter to what appears to be the prevailing understanding of progressivism: that it was, in historian Michael McGerr’s words, “the creed of a crusading middle class,” encapsulated by “utopian” drives “to change other people; to end class conflict; to control big business; and to segregate society”—a view strikingly reminiscent of Richard Hofstadter in its location of the progressive impetus within a socially distressed middle class with somewhat reactionary motives. This interpretation is undoubtedly true—of *some* progressives—but with limited exceptions, those were not the progressives who conceived of and implemented transitional progressivism. McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, pp. xiv, xv; Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, p. 135.

retain the political loyalties of their urban ethnic working-class constituents.⁴¹ It grew out of the pragmatic machine tradition of urban politics, and adopted reform and welfare legislation as means of securing power in lieu of the more traditional, feudalistic system of building fealty to the machine through personal favors.⁴²

The introduction of the urban liberalism concept to the study of progressive politics by scholars like J. Joseph Huthmacher and John D. Buenker in the 1960s represented a significant shift in the analysis of early-twentieth century reform. It directly challenged previous treatments, most of which portrayed the progressive reformer as “likely to be from urban, upper middle class backgrounds. They were generally rather young, native-born Protestants of old Anglo-American stock. Many of them were college graduates. Most of them were either professional men, particularly lawyers, or businessmen who represented neither the very largest nor the very smallest businesses.”⁴³

Urban liberalism scholars agreed with earlier analyses that the progressive period was one in which two competing political cultures were in conflict: the “sovereign individualist” culture of old-stock Anglo-America, represented by the progressive profile

⁴¹ E.g.: Buenker, *Urban Liberalism and Progressive Reform*; John D. Buenker, “The Mahatma and Progressive Reform: Martin Lomasney as Lawmaker, 1911-1917,” *The New England Quarterly*, 44:3 (September, 1971), pp. 397-419; J. Joseph Huthmacher, “Urban Liberalism and the Age of Reform,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 49:2 (September, 1962), pp. 231-241; J. Joseph Huthmacher, *Senator Robert F. Wagner and the Rise of Urban Liberalism* (New York: Atheneum, 1968); Nancy Joan Weiss, *Charles Francis Murphy, 1858-1924: Respectability and Responsibility in Tammany Politics* (Northampton, MA: Smith College, 1968). For a more recent study that draws similar conclusions to those of Huthmacher and Buenker, see: Robert F. Wesser, *A Response to Progressivism: The Democratic Party and New York Politics, 1902-1918* (New York: New York University, 1986).

⁴² For a pioneering work on the pragmatic nature of urban liberalism, see J. Joseph Huthmacher, “Charles Evans Hughes and Charles Francis Murphy: The Metamorphosis of Progressivism,” *New York History*, 46: 1 (January, 1965), pp. 25-40.

⁴³ Richard B. Sherman, “The Status Revolution and Massachusetts Progressive Leadership,” *Political Science Quarterly*, 78:1 (March, 1963), pp. 59-65, p. 59. Sherman employs this description even while challenging the notion, ascendant at the time of his study, that progressivism was a response to a status revolution.

quoted above, and the “organic network” culture largely retained by recent immigrants and central to the success of the urban political machine.⁴⁴ However, they differed from their predecessors’ exclusive assignment of the label “progressive” within this cultural contest. Indeed, the political disciples of the organic network culture often supported progressive reforms as strongly as the sovereign individualist politicians.⁴⁵

The reformist tendencies of the urban machines were often masked by their scandalous administration of city affairs and relentless plundering of the municipal treasury. Indeed, many of the politicians who would later be recognized as urban liberals had benefited directly from the machines’ massive patronage operations—and since patronage was one of the most distressing targets of old-stock middle-class progressivism’s ire, these figures could at best be viewed by contemporaries as an ironic source of progress. Nevertheless, urban liberalism analyses of progressive politics were able to sift through these incongruities; they rightly present the urban ethnic politician as at least an opportunistic reformer, and demonstrate how rank-and-file urban ethnic voters became increasingly aware of government’s potential to improve their living and working conditions.

Social welfare progressivism was a manifestation of the reform movement that grew largely out of the settlement house tradition, and was generally the progressivism of female social workers.⁴⁶ It focused on improving the living and working conditions of

⁴⁴ John D. Buenker, “Sovereign Individuals and Organic Networks: Political Cultures in Conflict During the Progressive Era,” *American Quarterly*, 40:2 (June, 1988), pp. 187-204, p. 188.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 198-199.

⁴⁶ The term “social welfare progressive” is understood here in terms of the distinction made by Otis Graham between New Nationalists whose priority was “the National Interest,” and “Social Work Progressives” who emphasized the social welfare aspects of Progressivism; as well as with consideration to the role of social workers in Progressive politics demonstrated by Clarke Chambers. The literature that has added a gendered understanding to the term will be considered below. See: Graham, *An Encore for*

the urban poor, through settlement house work, education campaigns, and pressuring industry by way of protests and boycotts through organizations such as the National Consumers' League, as well as through lobbying state legislatures for specific welfare and labor laws. The social welfare progressives tended to fit the classic progressive profile rather well—they tended to be well-educated, middle-class, old-stock Protestants—except they were women. As the large majority of the movement's leaders were college graduates, a central aspect of the social welfare progressives' *modus operandi* was the execution of scientific surveys of conditions in order to determine the best course of action. Most essential to an understanding of social welfare progressivism is consideration of its development as a largely female reform movement.

The Progressive Era witnessed the entry of more women into public life than any previous period.⁴⁷ But this influx of female activists did not occur unhindered, for Victorian ideas about “separate spheres” for the sexes persisted into the progressive age, often excluding female reformers from “professions traditionally dominated by men” and forcing these women “to create within the public realm a new territory they could rule themselves . . . that territory of policy and professional expertise which affected women and children exclusively.”⁴⁸ Thus barred from established policy-making institutions, female reformers entered public life at the end of the nineteenth century by opening settlement houses, most notably Jane Addams' Hull House in Chicago.⁴⁹ Experiences like those at Hull House “supplied the values and strategies” that made it possible for

Reform, p. 38; Clarke A. Chambers, *Seedtime for Reform: American Social Service and Social Action, 1918-1933* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1963).

⁴⁷ Susan Ware, *Partner and I: Molly Dewson, Feminism, and New Deal Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1987), p. 33.

⁴⁸ Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform*, pp. 36-37.

⁴⁹ Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform*, pp. 3-37; Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nation's Work*, pp. 171-316.

these women to create what historian Robyn Muncy has called “a female dominion within the larger empire of policymaking.”⁵⁰ Critically, women within the progressive movement were not only building their own institutions, they were also developing their own unique reform ideology within those institutions—an ideology that heartily endorsed labor regulations and government social welfare action, particularly on behalf of children, mothers, and the unemployed.⁵¹

The alliance between the cigar-chomping, glad-handing, opportunistic ward healer and the college-educated, old-stock, often moralistic female reformer is a strikingly unnatural one at first glance. The machine politician often benefited from (or

⁵⁰ Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform*, p. 3.

⁵¹ Much of the recent literature has labeled the reform ideology these women espoused as a “maternalist” progressivism, characterized by an intertwining of women’s and children’s welfare; a view of the female reformer as occupying a “motherly role toward the poor”; a belief that women’s experiences as mothers made them “uniquely able to lead certain kinds of reform campaigns”; a stress upon “women’s political obligation to raise the nation’s citizens”; and a firm resolve to retain traditional gender roles and the “male breadwinner” household, including through ameliorative government programs. It is essential to note that by no means were all maternalists progressive women—indeed, some were quite conservative. The maternalists relevant to this study, however, are those whom Molly Ladd-Taylor defines as “progressive maternalists,” who “openly asserted women’s right and desire, as well as responsibility, to participate in the public world,” and “combined motherhood rhetoric with appeals to justice and democracy, rather than to morality and social order.” Other works have used the term “social justice feminists” to describe women similar to the most progressive of the maternalists; they prefer this term because it emphasizes the “social justice goals that motivated” these women’s activities as well as their basic belief in women’s political rights (although this belief did not include support for the Equal Rights Amendment, which was seen as a threat to the gender-specific labor laws the female reformers had succeeded in passing throughout the Progressive era. This general ideology, be it “progressive maternalism” or “social justice feminism,” is of what I speak when I describe the political agenda of “female social welfare progressivism.” Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1994), p. 55; Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1994), p. 75; Patrick Wilkinson, “The Selfless and the Helpless: Maternalist Origins of the U.S. Welfare State,” *Feminist Studies*, 25:3 (Autumn, 1999), pp. 571-597; Gwendolyn Mink, *The Wages of Motherhood: Inequality and the Welfare State, 1917-1942* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1995); Eileen Boris and S. J. Kleinberg, “Mothers and Other Workers: (Re)Conceiving Labor, Maternalism, and the State,” *Journal of Women’s History*, 15:3 (Autumn, 2003), pp. 90-117; Sonya Michel, *Children’s Interests/Mother’s Rights: The Shaping of America’s Child Care Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1999); Joanne L. Goodwin, *Gender and the Politics of Welfare Reform: Mothers’ Pensions in Chicago, 1911-1929* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1997); Kathryn Kish Sklar, Anja Schüler, and Susan Strasser, eds., *Social Justice Feminists in the United States and Germany: A Dialogue in Documents, 1885-1933* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1998), (p. 5 quoted above); Kathryn Kish Sklar, “The Historical Foundations of Women’s Power in the Creation of the American Welfare State, 1830-1930,” in Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, eds., *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (New York: Routledge, 1993); pp. 43-93; John McGuire, “From the Courts to the State Legislatures: Social Justice Feminism, Labor Legislation, and the 1920s,” *Labor History*, 45:2 (May, 2004), pp. 225-246.

participated in) unsavory or illegal activities; was primarily interested in retaining power; and generally held chauvinistic attitudes toward female civic participation—fittingly summarized by the Boston boss Martin “Mahatma” Lomasney who declared that in politics, “you can’t trust these women, they are apt to blab everything they know.”⁵² Meanwhile female reformers could at times be culturally insensitive toward immigrants; were generally in favor of prohibition; and often advocated the overthrow of the political machine.⁵³ Nor was this alliance, once forged, unproblematic—for example, during a heated exchange, Al Smith once called National Consumers’ League founder Florence Kelley a “Protestant bigot.”⁵⁴ Nonetheless, by the 1928 Smith presidential campaign, these two progressive traditions had come together to form a unique transitional

⁵² On corruption: *E.g.*: James Michael Curley’s two terms in prison seen in Joseph F. Dinneen, *The Purple Shamrock: The Hon. James Michael Curley of Boston* (New York: Norton, 1949), pp. 50-61, 299-313; see also, the corruption of William Marcy Tweed, in John M. Allswang, *Bosses, Machines, and Urban Voters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1977), pp. 36-59; also, the Seabury investigations of Tammany Hall and the fall of James J. Walker in Arthur Mann, *La Guardia Comes to Power 1933* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1965), pp. 51-62; Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*, pp. 324-325; for a classic discussion of legally questionable machine activities, see Riordan, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall, passim*. On the centrality of retaining power, the best example is that of “Silent” Charlie Murphy’s pragmatism in Wesser, *A Response to Progressivism*, and in Allswang, *Bosses, Machines, and Urban Voters*, pp. 60-90. Lomasney is quoted in Buenker, “The Mahatma and Progressive Reform,” p. 412. Note that while Lomasney’s sexism might have been characteristic, his recalcitrant opposition to women’s suffrage was not. Most machine politicians were like Al Smith, who opposed extending the franchise early on but eventually came to be a strong supporter of votes for women. For the definitive article on this process, which explores both the machines’ opposition to women’s suffrage and their leading role in promoting the reform at the end of the 1910s, see John D. Buenker, “The Urban Political Machine and Woman Suffrage: A Study in Political Adaptability,” *The Historian*, 33:2 (February, 1971), pp. 264-279.

⁵³ On women reformer’s political attitudes: *E.g.*: Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled*, p. 74: “Al Smith’s presidential campaign promoted more division than unity, however, because most women ‘social workers’ were critical of his ‘wet’ positions and his association with machine politics.” Also, McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, pp. 77-117; Mink, *The Wages of Motherhood*; Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, pp. 41-57. The bottom line is that many of these women were trying to “clean up” the cities (based on their conceptualization of cleanliness), while the machine men were largely benefiting from the status quo.

⁵⁴ Frances Perkins Oral History, Columbia Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, New York, New York (hereafter, Frances Perkins Oral History), Book II, pp. 260-263. In fairness to Smith, Perkins, a devout Protestant, agreed with this assessment: “[Kelley] was as near a bigoted Protestant as I ever met for an intelligent person, well educated, well grounded in philosophy, who shouldn’t have been anti anything.” *Ibid.*, p. 260. Also, in spite of this episode, Kelley supported Smith in 1928: “She finally got over it and I think she was for him in the ’28 campaign. She finally became convinced by the Goldmark girls (Josephine and Pauline) and myself and some of the other people. There was a man from Buffalo who gave a lot of money and a lot of good advice. He convinced her that Smith was okay.” *Ibid.*, p. 263.

progressivism. Analyzing the process by which these progressive strands negotiated their differences and formed a coherent national platform unearths significant trends in the evolution from Progressivism toward New Deal liberalism.

II

It would have seemed unlikely for Al Smith, who remained loyal to Tammany Hall throughout his political career, to become the gubernatorial embodiment of progressive reform. Young Smith learned politics under the tutelage of saloonkeepers and worked his way up the hierarchy of the infamous New York machine until he was rewarded for his loyalty by ward boss Tom Foley with a seat representing Manhattan's Lower East Side in the state assembly.⁵⁵ While set apart from many of his machine brethren by what Franklin Roosevelt's secretary of labor Frances Perkins described as "a receptive mind" that drew him to the progressive agenda and allowed him to function with a certain amount of ideological independence, he always remained true to the Democrats and to Tammany sachem "Silent Charlie" Murphy.⁵⁶ As partisanship and machine politics were the very embodiment of the sort of corruption and civic vice the extermination of which was New York progressivism's *raison d'être*, Al Smith was an offensive character to most reformers. His early career in Albany was dismissed as hackery by most progressives, and in fact he did not make a single speech in his first term.⁵⁷ Yet over time Smith grew as a legislator, and he slowly earned respect from members of the reform community. Joseph Proskauer, a member of New York's

⁵⁵ Handlin, *Al Smith and his America*, p. 21.

⁵⁶ Frances Perkins Oral History, Book I, pp. 238, 241, 417, 428.

⁵⁷ Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, p. 122; Caro, *The Power Broker*, pp. 119-122.

progressive Citizens' Union and an eventual Smith confidant, noted that his organization began to change its opinion of the Tammany assemblyman when they saw time and again "the whole high caliber of Smith's service in the legislature" on behalf of reform.⁵⁸

Al Smith gained a forum to demonstrate his capabilities further in 1911, when his party took control of the state legislature. Charlie Murphy had Smith elected majority leader of the assembly; Robert F. Wagner, a German immigrant representing the Upper East Side, was made majority leader of the state senate.⁵⁹ Wagner and Smith's relationship went back to 1905, when then-freshman assemblyman Wagner was roommate of second-term assemblyman Smith at Albany.⁶⁰ Not only would the two Manhattan Democrats' careers be inextricably linked over the ensuing decades, they would also develop a close friendship—Wagner even naming his son Alfred in honor of Smith.⁶¹

During this period a tragedy occurred that would change the course of both men's careers. On March 25, 1911, a fire erupted in the tenth floor workroom of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company in Manhattan.⁶² One-hundred forty-six of the workers who toiled at the sewing machines—most of them Jewish immigrant girls from the Lower East Side—died in the inferno.⁶³ In response, a Committee on Safety was established, culminating

⁵⁸ "The Reminiscences of Joseph M. Proskauer," 1962, Columbia Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, p. 98.

⁵⁹ Huthmacher, "Charles Evans Hughes and Charles Francis Murphy," pp. 30-32.

⁶⁰ Henry F. Pringle, *Alfred E. Smith: A Critical Study* (New York: Macy-Masius, 1927), p. 142; Huthmacher, *Senator Robert F. Wagner*, p. 19.

⁶¹ "The Reminiscences of Robert F. Wagner, Jr.," Columbia Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, p. 12. According to Robert Wagner, Jr., the boy died in infancy.

⁶² Cornell University [Web site], "The Triangle Factory Fire," Site address: <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/>.

⁶³ George Martin, *Madam Secretary: Frances Perkins* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), p. 85; Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, p. 79. Ironically, Perkins witnessed the tragedy, having been taking tea with a friend at Washington Square, fifty yards from the sight of the fire. Martin, *Madam Secretary*, p. 84.

with Wagner and Smith's sponsorship of legislation to form an investigative commission; Wagner served as chair and Smith as vice-chair of the body.⁶⁴

The commission "was one of the first experiments in the utilization of the volunteer citizen in a governmental project to discover what was wrong and what to do."⁶⁵ Consequently, this was among the first opportunities for non-partisan reformers to participate directly in the process of governmental regulation. Female reformers served crucial roles: Mary Dreier of the progressive Women's Trade Union League was named one of the commissioners, while Frances Perkins, who had served as secretary of the Committee on Safety, was consistently called as an expert witness on factory conditions, having established her credentials as an investigator with the National Consumers' League.⁶⁶

After repeatedly testifying before the commission, Perkins became one of its investigators, and later reminisced that she soon "became kind of in charge of investigations."⁶⁷ In this capacity, Perkins made it her mission to "educate" Smith and Wagner on the abhorrent working conditions prevalent across the Empire State. Perkins later recalled that "Alfred Smith said it was the greatest education he'd ever had. He had no idea life was like that. He'd grown up in the slums of New York, but he didn't know what factory life was like. Neither did any of them. It was an astonishment for them to see the frightfully filthy conditions, the obvious fire hazards and the very great accident hazards. We took them to everything before we got through."⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, p. 83.

⁶⁵ Frances Perkins Oral History, Book I, p. 140.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 142-143; Alfred E. Smith, *Up to Now* (New York: Viking, 1929), p. 91; Martin, *Madam Secretary*, pp. 76-90.

⁶⁷ Frances Perkins Oral History, Book I, p. 143.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

Perkins has written that she and her fellow investigators “[made] it our business to take Al Smith . . . to see the women, thousands of them, coming off the ten-hour night-shift on the rope walks in Auburn.”⁶⁹ They “made sure that Robert Wagner personally crawled through the tiny hole in the wall that gave egress to a steep iron ladder covered with ice and ending twelve feet from the ground, which was euphemistically labeled ‘Fire Escape.’”⁷⁰ Wagner and Smith and other legislators witnessed “five-, six-, and seven-year-olds, snipping beans and shelling peas,” and saw “the machinery that would scalp a girl or cut off a man’s arm.”⁷¹ Huthmacher has argued that for Wagner (and the same can certainly be said of Smith), “service on the commission was the most important event in his public life up to that time, for it focused and made impregnable the reformist leanings he had exhibited earlier. It also made him, and the political organization he represented, essential links in the chain of reform that spanned the Progressive Era and marked the emergence of modern, urban liberalism on the American scene.”⁷²

Through investigations and interrogation of experts—experts hand-picked by Perkins—Smith and Wagner became “considerable fellows” on issues of industrial conditions.⁷³ They heard testimony from such social work leaders as Jane Addams and Lillian Wald, and developed a reform program that gained the endorsement of “every important civic and social work organization in the city of New York.”⁷⁴ The commission sponsored thirty-six bills on fire regulations, workplace safety, and working hours and conditions for women and children between 1912 and 1914, moving well

⁶⁹ Frances Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew* (New York: Viking, 1946), p. 22.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁷² Huthmacher, *Senator Robert F. Wagner*, pp. 10-11.

⁷³ Frances Perkins Oral History, Book I, p. 162.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Book I, p. 169.

beyond the original scope of the investigation, into some of the labor and welfare crises that had been made so vivid through the Perkins-led field trips.⁷⁵ Many of these bills were crafted by Smith and Wagner, along with reformers including Perkins and Louis Brandeis, in the law office of Abram Elkus, counsel to the commission.⁷⁶ On the floors of the assembly and senate respectively, Smith and Wagner became the champions of the reform bills.⁷⁷ Such issues came to dominate the agenda of the two Tammany leaders. By a conservative estimate, 47 percent of the bills introduced by the pair in the three sessions following the initiation of the factory investigations concerned labor reform and other questions of social welfare; in the two previous sessions, that figure had stood at just over 4.5 percent.⁷⁸

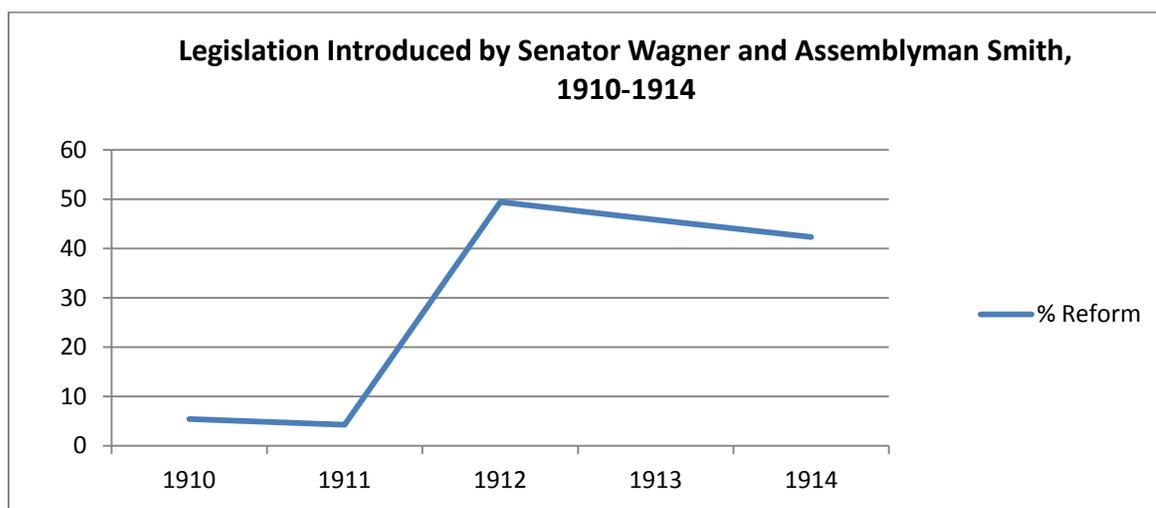


Fig. 1.1: Note the sharp increase in the percentage of Smith and Wagner bills that involved labor reforms.

⁷⁵ Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, p. 83.

⁷⁶ Frances Perkins Oral History, Book I, pp. 170-172.

⁷⁷ Caro, *The Power Broker*, p. 124.

⁷⁸ Figures calculated by the author from data published in the annual *New York State Legislative Record and Index*. *New York State Legislative Record and Index, 1910* (Albany, NY: Legislative Index Publishing Group, 1910), pp. 277-278, 290; *New York State Legislative Record and Index, 1911* (Albany, NY: Legislative Index Publishing Group, 1911), pp. 352, 368; *New York State Legislative Record and Index, 1912* (Albany, NY: Legislative Index Publishing Group, 1912), pp. 303, 316-317; *New York State Legislative Record and Index, 1913* (Albany, NY: Legislative Index Publishing Group, 1913), pp. 448-449; *New York State Legislative Record and Index, 1914* (Albany, NY: Legislative Index Publishing Group, 1914), pp. 322-323.

The Factory Investigating Commission experience certainly affected each legislator's world view. Nevertheless, they remained loyal party men, retaining their "profound affection for Tammany Hall and all that it stood for."⁷⁹ In the 1910s, being a Tammany stalwart was still often irreconcilable with favoring aggressive social welfare programs by an active state. For example, in a 1912 campaign speech, Robert Wagner raged against Theodore Roosevelt's New Nationalism, exclaiming "Whatever advance its adoption would bring is advance toward socialism. . . . Such a 'new nationalism' would lay the meddling hand of bureaucracy upon every industry, increasing the burdens of taxation."⁸⁰ Worse, when Silent Charlie Murphy ordered his legislators in 1912 to block passage of Perkins' fifty-four hour women's work week, Wagner—while sympathetic to the bill—dutifully employed his powers as temporary president of the senate in an attempt to prevent a vote on final passage (he was ultimately out-maneuvered by a fellow Tammany man, Big Tim Sullivan, who had less to lose by flouting Murphy's edict).⁸¹ Over time, a combination of political expediency and genuine interest in the advance of social welfare policies would soften and eventually eliminate the opposition of Wagner, Smith, and other urban ethnic Democrats to the dynamic state. The 1911 fire and the investigations in its wake initiated this process.

Providing further impetus for reform was the Democrats' realization that their urban ethnic working-class constituents would reward them for taking strong positions in favor of ameliorative social welfare and labor legislation. Throughout the 1910s, Tammany began to lose its stranglehold over new-immigrant neighborhoods, ceding

⁷⁹ Frances Perkins Oral History, Book I, p. 93.

⁸⁰ Robert F. Wagner, "Untitled Speech," 1912, Robert F. Wagner Papers, Georgetown University, Washington, DC (hereafter, Robert F. Wagner Papers), Box 327, Folder 7, p. 4.

⁸¹ Richard F. Welch, *King of the Bowery: Big Tim Sullivan, Tammany Hall, and New York City from the Gilded Age to the Progressive Era* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008), pp. 157-161.

these wards—especially the Jewish ones—not to the conservative GOP but to Progressives and Socialists.⁸² The East Side of Manhattan thrice elected Socialist Meyer London to Congress (in 1914, 1916, and 1920), and in the 1917 municipal elections, seven Socialist aldermen were swept into office from “chiefly Jewish districts” on a wave of support for mayoral candidate Morris Hillquit.⁸³ Over the decade, a series of nativist attacks by Republicans, as well as some social welfare initiatives by the Democrats (especially those championed by Al Smith and Robert Wagner as a result of the factory investigations), along with Smith’s large and visible group of progressive Jewish supporters in 1918, would help bring some of these voters back into the Democratic fold.⁸⁴ The Democrats, pragmatists still, keenly interpreted and acted upon these trends. In a 1918 article in *Outlook*, former Progressive Party official Henry Moskowitz wrote in a rather pro-Socialist analysis of the politics of the East Side:

The Tammany group is constantly jockeying with the Socialists to prove that they are the real ‘people’s friend’ . . . skillfully maneuvering ‘to beat them to it’ . . . In the recent city election [Tammany] advocated radical municipal reforms. . . it gained the appearance of a progressive party and left the reformers appearing as reactionaries.⁸⁵

Significantly, while Moskowitz remained skeptical of Tammany in general, he credited much of this strategy to the sincere reformist leanings of Robert Wagner and, especially, “Alfred E. Smith, a brilliant East Side product.”⁸⁶

⁸² Wesser, *A Response to Progressivism*, pp. 95-96, 197. On radicalism among early-twentieth century Jewish immigrants, see Annelise Orleck, *Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working-Class Politics in the United States, 1900-1965* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1995), pp. 15-86.

⁸³ Henry Moskowitz, “New York’s East Side as a Political Barometer,” *Outlook*, February 27, 1918, pp. 325-327, p. 326.

⁸⁴ Wesser, *A Response to Progressivism*, pp. 153-156, 213-214; Moskowitz, “New York’s East Side as a Political Barometer,” p. 326.

⁸⁵ Moskowitz, “New York’s East Side as a Political Barometer,” pp. 326-327.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

The new generation of urban ethnic working-class Democrats, the so-called “urban liberals” of the Progressive Era, with Smith and Wagner in the vanguard, was evolving to champion aggressive social welfare and labor reforms. Thus, in these years the very nature of the urban Democracy was beginning, ever so slowly, to transform. Perhaps the most vivid example is that of the state senator who had supplanted the famous Tammany apologist George Washington Plunkitt in the fifteenth district. Thomas J. McManus, better known simply as “The McManus,” whom Plunkitt had described as “my Brutus,” certainly inherited his predecessor’s propensity for graft, and reformers like Perkins saw him as “obviously very much of a roughneck and not too bright”; but he was also, with Tim Sullivan and others, “the hero” of the 1912 battle for the fifty-four hour law in the state senate, and was the chairman who was first able to recover that bill and others affecting workplace standards from the legislative purgatory of the Committee on Labor and Industry.⁸⁷

Thus, in the 1910s, machine politicians were beginning to evolve; employing their time-tested shenanigans not exclusively to line their own pockets, but also to promote social welfare and labor reforms. As Moskowitz noted, the urban Democrats had tutors during this progression: “Settlement workers . . . have helped to modify the point of view of Tammany’s elementary neighborliness.”⁸⁸ So too did the social welfare progressives have an evolutionary process to undergo before their reformist vision could be forged with the political aspirations of urban ethnic Democrats.

⁸⁷ Riordan, ed., *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*, p. 33; Frances Perkins Oral History, Book I, pp. 85-95, 106.

⁸⁸ Moskowitz, “New York’s East Side as a Political Barometer,” p. 325.

III

In 1919, when Al Smith was inaugurated for his first term as governor, he named Frances Perkins to the State Industrial Commission. After years of fighting side by side for reform legislation, Smith considered Perkins a good candidate to promote his vision of how the commission ought to operate, and in fact “the Governor looked upon [Perkins] as *his* member on the Industrial Commission.”⁸⁹ Nevertheless, at this time, Perkins was not yet a Democrat.⁹⁰ Although an ardent Smith supporter, she chose to remain a registered independent, free from partisan responsibilities. “I voted for whom I thought was the right man and the right program. I certainly didn’t call myself a thorough-going bona fide Democrat. I would always vote for the right person. I thought Al Smith was the right person and I was very enthusiastic about him. I wasn’t voting for him as a Democrat.”⁹¹

As with many female reformers, much of Perkins’ nonpartisanship resulted from the experiences of the pre-suffrage era. She had attended the 1912 Democratic convention at Baltimore because “I’d never seen one. . . . I went for the show.” And while she “also went because I was deeply interested in political principles,” the “convention didn’t make too much difference to me I was not . . . a Democrat. Woman didn’t have the vote, so women didn’t have to be anything.” Furthermore, while admiring “the Wilsonites,” Perkins did not even favor the progressive Democrat in 1912,

⁸⁹ Frances Perkins Oral History, Book II, p. 21. Emphasis added.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 36. In an earlier interview, Perkins suggested that she had become inclined toward the Democrats “before Al Smith ran for governor in 1918,” so while she had not yet become a registered partisan, she was clearly already thinking about it. Frances Perkins Oral History, Book I, p. 213.

⁹¹ Frances Perkins Oral History, Book II, p. 36.

considering herself “nearer a Bull Mooser,” and only missing the Progressive convention in Chicago due to a death in the family.⁹²

When in the fall of 1919 Governor Smith became aware of Perkins’ nonpartisanship, he called on the commissioner to meet him at his suite in Manhattan’s Biltmore Hotel. Smith inquired if Perkins considered herself a Democrat. She responded that she did, insofar as in her time at Albany the Democrats had been much more amenable to the kinds of reform legislation she was promoting.⁹³ Well, that makes you “a Democrat in theory at least,” responded the governor, but “they tell me you’re not an enrolled Democrat.”⁹⁴ “I never enrolled, I wouldn’t think of enrolling in any party,” responded Perkins, “that sort of ties your hands.”⁹⁵ Smith, who by this time greatly admired Perkins and many of her progressive associates, took the opportunity to articulate his vision of their place in the party, in a manner that combined their progressivism with old-fashioned machine politics. “That’s the kind of mistake a lot of good people are likely to make,” he told his commissioner.⁹⁶ To Smith, the party was necessary as a rallying point: “Suppose you got some good ideas. . . . You can’t go out and say that to the public because you just sound like a fool. . . . [But] if your party is all ready set They’re all for it and they put it over. They make it popular. It doesn’t seem like a one-man crank idea.”⁹⁷

In Smith’s conceptualization, the Democratic Party could serve as an apparatus for mobilizing the reform movement. But in order for this to occur,

⁹² Frances Perkins Oral History, Book I, pp. 211-212.

⁹³ Frances Perkins Oral History, Book II, p. 39.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

Good people need to be in the party, not outside looking in. They don't have any influence at all if they're outside looking in. If they're inside, doing their full duty by the party, voting, getting out the vote, helping with the campaigns, and making what they know available to everybody, then they have some influence. . . . Then the party takes up a good and wise program.⁹⁸

Perkins protested that she wanted to see who specifically she was voting for before she enrolled in a party. But Smith responded that she and other progressives needed to enroll first, “so you have something to say inside the party”:

These people who jump around from one party to another. . . . Have any of them ever accomplished anything? No. You've accomplished more in a couple of years than they have in twenty years by always being so independent. But you won't get far if you won't line up with a party so that the Democrats know that you're a Democrat and that they can rely on you.⁹⁹

Perkins, taken by this logic, recalls that she registered as a Democrat “as soon as they opened enrollment” and “never had any doubts about it afterwards.”¹⁰⁰



Fig. 1.2: Frances Perkins, ca. 1920.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 43.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 44, 46-47.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 47. In fact, beginning in 1918, Smith aggressively encouraged women to register as Democrats. “Candidate Smith Talks to Women,” *The New York Times*, September 21, 1918, p. 8.

¹⁰¹ “Frances Perkins” (undated), George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

This is an extreme case. It is doubtful that a significant number of social workers were proselytized for the Democracy through a colloquy with their state's governor. But this anecdote aptly demonstrates the initial philosophical discordance between the reformer and the partisan, as well as the thinking behind so many New York progressives' abandoning their independent posture in favor of Al Smith and the Democrats.

Furthermore, speeches given by Perkins throughout the 1910s in her capacity as executive secretary of the New York Consumers' League demonstrate an evolving concept of the role of politics in reform. Earlier speeches focused upon women's place in economic life as consumers: "Their duty in the life of family is purchases. So after all it lies in their hands to . . . change conditions" through boycotts.¹⁰² As the factory investigations progressed and the commission's work continued, Perkins would see "legislative work" as the "most important phase" in the reform movement.¹⁰³ In 1912, Perkins declared that the "purpose of Gov[ernment] is to make things better for the children," and later that year she called for government studies of industries and imitation of German and English "social measures" to fight unemployment.¹⁰⁴ Perkins had begun legislative lobbying activities prior to developing relationships with Albany politicians, but through her work on the factory investigating commission she was increasingly crafting bills not only for the Consumers' League but for legislators like Smith and

¹⁰² Frances Perkins, "Outline Used at Rainy Day Club, New York, 1911," Frances Perkins Papers, Columbia University, New York, New York (hereafter, Frances Perkins Papers), Box 42, p. 1. See also: Frances Perkins, "Notes for Report to Consumers' League by Frances Perkins, Executive Secretary, NY, 4/7/11," Frances Perkins Papers, Box 42.

¹⁰³ Frances Perkins, "Notes for Report to Consumers' League by Frances Perkins, Executive Secretary, 10/6/11. New York," Frances Perkins Papers, Box 42, p. 1. Underlined in original.

¹⁰⁴ Frances Perkins, "Notes for address on the McManus Bill, Albany, 1/1912," Frances Perkins Papers, Box 42, p. 1"; Frances Perkins, "Notes for Lecture: 'Remedies for unemployment,' Adelphi College, Garden City, NY, 3/5/12," Frances Perkins Papers, Box 42, pp. 2-3.

Wagner. By 1919 she was a total insider, appointed by Governor Smith to the State Industrial Commission.¹⁰⁵

Certainly social welfare progressives had petitioned the government prior to 1911—perhaps most famously in the National Consumers’ League’s central role in the 1908 Supreme Court case *Muller v. Oregon*. While much of the focus of such efforts was on the ostensibly non-political courts, it was through the NCL’s legislative lobbying that such landmark cases were precipitated.¹⁰⁶ Clearly, social welfare progressives had been committed to legislative action long before the Perkins-Smith alliance was forged—Hull House activists had succeeded in getting labor legislation passed in Illinois as early as the 1890s. Moreover, Perkins was not the first social worker to gain a position within government; she was preceded in this by notables including Florence Kelley as chief factory inspector in Illinois and Julia Lathrop as head of the federal Children’s Bureau.¹⁰⁷ In fact, settlement activists had been lobbying for local and state ordinances, pressuring local politicians, sponsoring reform candidacies, and advising municipal governments for decades before Al Smith met Frances Perkins.¹⁰⁸

Yet these very real political drives operated outside of traditional partisan divides and did not serve to inculcate the old parties with reformist zeal. The social progressives tended to gravitate toward government service under reform and “fusion” administrations, and certainly not under machine politicians, with whom they instead

¹⁰⁵ Perkins biographer Kirstin Downey notes that Smith “chided” a reluctant Perkins: “If you girls are going to get what you want through legislation, there better not be any separation between social workers and the government.” Kirstin Downey, *The Woman Behind the New Deal: The Life of Frances Perkins, FDR’s Labor Secretary and his Moral Conscience* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 2009), p. 77.

¹⁰⁶ McGuire, “From the Courts to the State Legislatures,” p. 226.

¹⁰⁷ Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nation’s Work*, pp. 236-264; Muncy, *Creating A Female Dominion in American Reform*, p. 48.

¹⁰⁸ See Allen F. Davis, “Settlement Workers in Politics, 1890-1914,” *The Review of Politics*, 26:4 (October, 1964), pp. 505-517.

battled tenaciously and only occasionally struck a reluctant *détente* (Addams finally gave up trying to upend the political organization in her Chicago neighborhood only after her candidates were twice defeated by local kingpin Johnny Powers).¹⁰⁹ The closest these reformers came to concerted partisanship was in 1912, when many from the settlement community “flocked” to Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Party; but that campaign would ultimately produce nothing in the way of long term partisan alignment, and in retrospect appeared “in some ways more like a crusade than politics.”¹¹⁰ Thus, despite their record of political activity and the inherently political nature of their work, most social work progressives adopted the posture of Mary Simkhovitch from the Greenwich House settlement in New York, another future Smith partisan, who wrote that “in political action the settlement has held aloof . . . because of the conviction that political parties do not express in any vital way the desires of the people of the neighborhoods where settlements are situated,” leaving reformers with “an inability to regard existing forms as adequate to meet the real situation.”¹¹¹

So while the story of Perkins’ evolution is telling, what begins to make it diverge from past experiences is that the desire to work within government to implement a progressive social vision now translated into partisan political activity. By 1920 Perkins was an active Democrat, and promoted her social welfare vision within the context of

¹⁰⁹ James J. Connolly, *An Elusive Unity: Urban Democracy and Machine Politics in Industrializing America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 2010), pp. 115, 118-122. On Addams versus Powers, see Davis, “Settlement Workers in Politics, 1890-1914,” p. 509; Harold Platt, “Jane Addams and the Ward Boss Revisited: Class, Politics, and Public Health in Chicago, 1890-1930,” *Environmental History*, 5:2 (April, 2000), pp. 194-222; Allen F. Davis, “The Settlement Worker versus the Ward Boss,” in Bruce M. Stave, ed., *Urban Bosses, Machines, and Progressive Reformers* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath, 1972), pp. 102-117.

¹¹⁰ Davis, “Settlement Workers in Politics, 1890-1914,” p. 516.

¹¹¹ Mary Simkhovitch, “Are Social-Settlers De-barred from Political Work,” Mary Simkhovitch Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, Box 3, Folder 61, pp. 3-4. This item is undated, but appears to have been written in the aftermath of the World War because it speaks of “reconstruction” programs—the popular nomenclature for assorted welfare initiatives of that period.

Democratic politics, articulating her progressive beliefs in speeches on behalf of Smith throughout his governorship.¹¹² As Smith had suggested, this further promoted Perkins' ambitions. In 1923, the governor appointed Perkins to the State Industrial Board, and in 1926 he made her the board's chairperson.¹¹³ Meanwhile, Perkins continued her political activities, helping craft Democratic strategy and composing materials for "a good many of Governor Smith's speeches."¹¹⁴ Her star would of course ascend further still under Smith's successor and fellow Democrat, Franklin Roosevelt.

The case of Perkins' politicization—or, better, her increasing partisanship—helps illustrate the female side of the development of a new, transitional progressivism; but hers is hardly the only story to be told. Lillian Wald, who ran the Henry Street Settlement on Manhattan's Lower East Side and was a particularly strong advocate for public health nursing services and other pieces of the social welfare progressive agenda, underwent a similar transformation in the 1910s and 1920s.

As with Perkins, the more established Wald came out of the settlement house tradition and was lobbying Albany for social welfare measures long before the factory commission produced its blizzard of reform bills.¹¹⁵ Like many progressives, she was drawn to "Governor Wilson's splendid record in social reform" during the 1912

¹¹² E.g.: Frances Perkins, "Notes for campaign address, for Al Smith, NY, 1920," Frances Perkins Papers, Box 43; Frances Perkins, "Notes for campaign speech for Al Smith, Troy, NY, 11/3/22," Frances Perkins Papers, Box 43; Frances Perkins, "Campaign Speech for Governor Alfred E. Smith, NY, 10/15/24," Frances Perkins Papers, Box 43, pp. 1-2; Frances Perkins, "Notes for campaign speech, to reelect Gov. Smith and to elect Senator Wagner, Troy, NY, 10/29/26," Frances Perkins Papers, Box 43.

¹¹³ James Malcolm, ed., *The New York Red Book: An Illustrated Legislative Manual of the State* (Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon, 1928), p. 165.

¹¹⁴ Frances Perkins Oral History, Book II, p. 574.

¹¹⁵ E.g.: Lillian Wald to Alfred E. Smith, May 20, 1911, Lillian Wald Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY (hereafter, Lillian Wald Papers), Reel 1. Indeed, Wald had been active in electoral politics, fighting against Tammany as a member of the "Woman's Municipal League" of New York City. S. Sara Monoson, "The Lady and the Tiger: Women's Electoral Activism in New York City before Suffrage," *Journal of Women's History*, 2:2 (Fall, 1990), pp. 100-135, p. 100.

presidential campaign.¹¹⁶ But when members of the Democratic National Committee solicited Wald's official support they were rebuffed. "As a suffragist," she explained, "I find it illogical to assume even a minor responsibility for a platform that has no suffrage plank."¹¹⁷ Here again the influence of women's exclusion from the franchise by the traditional parties foreclosed the potential for partisanship by politically active social welfare progressives; not only technically, through the legal denial of votes, but also philosophically, creating intellectual barriers to partisan participation by otherwise engaged individuals.¹¹⁸



Fig. 1.3: Lillian Wald (left) and Jane Addams (right) address reporters, 1916.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Lillian Wald to Mrs. E. Broden Harriman, August 12, 1912, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 1.

¹¹⁷ Lillian Wald to Mrs. E. Broden Harriman (telegram), August 10, 1912, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 1.

¹¹⁸ The evolving attitudes of Smith and other Tammany politicians toward women's political participation in this period are significant. In the 'teens, Smith and the Democrats had repeatedly helped defeat women's suffrage amendments in the legislature. Handlin, *Al Smith*, p. 52. However, by 1919, Governor Smith "called the Legislature in special session . . . in order to record New York among the first of the States to ratify the woman suffrage amendment"; and by 1928, Democratic literature could accurately boast of his *relatively* enlightened attitude toward women, praising his "appointment of women to high State offices," his struggle to "secure equal pay for women for equal work in the teaching profession," and his achievement of "equal representation for women in party affairs." *What Everybody Wants to Know about Alfred E. Smith* (New York: Democratic National Committee, 1928), pp. 13-14.

¹¹⁹ "Press Correspondents with Lillian Wald and Jane Addams" (1916), Harris & Ewing Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Even after gaining suffrage, Wald was not involved in Smith's first campaign for the governorship, instead continuing to offer her services to the new governor just as she had to legislators, aldermen, and mayors for decades.¹²⁰ By 1920, she was increasingly enthusiastic over the governor's agenda, assuring Smith of her "whole-hearted support for your admirable, progressive administration."¹²¹ In that year, Smith was turning to Wald for advice in specific policy areas that had defined her career—especially public health.¹²² By the fall, she was no longer only an interested progressive or an enthusiastic observer; she was now a Smith partisan. In October, she promised the Citizens' Committee for Alfred E. Smith that she would "be very glad indeed to do what I can," to aid the campaign, adding that "the residents of the Settlement agree with me in that the Governor has given us an admirable administration. Appreciation of voters should enable him to continue his good work."¹²³ Three days later she fulfilled this pledge by writing a more formal letter for the campaign which noted that Smith "should be re-elected and that voters irrespective of party affiliations should keep in office one who has served the state so well."¹²⁴ The next week Wald donated ten dollars to the governor's reelection fund.¹²⁵

In spite of Smith's defeat that year, Wald's commitment to him in both politics and policy abided. Upon Smith's return to Albany in 1923, Wald served on the

¹²⁰ Women in New York gained suffrage in 1917. The Wald Papers contain no correspondence pertaining to her opinions on the 1918 campaign, although letters written after the fact strongly suggest her support for Al Smith. Lillian Wald to Alfred E. Smith, December 28, 1918, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 2.

¹²¹ Lillian Wald to Alfred E. Smith, January 9, 1920, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 2.

¹²² Alfred E. Smith to Lillian Wald, January 13, 1920, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 2; Lillian Wald to Alfred E. Smith, January 15, 1920, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 2.

¹²³ Lillian Wald to Joseph Proskauer, October 5, 1920, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 2.

¹²⁴ Lillian Wald to Joseph Proskauer, October 8, 1920, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 2.

¹²⁵ Secretary to Miss Wald to Joseph Proskauer, October 18, 1920, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 2.

governor's committee to study rural health.¹²⁶ She also continued her political activities for Smith, giving a speech on the governor's behalf at Nyack in August.¹²⁷ Furthermore, Wald's activism spread beyond a personal attachment to the governor: Smith allies (and partisan Democrats) like Joseph Proskauer and Herbert Lehman would soon gain the endorsement of the noted social work leader.¹²⁸ By the time Smith ran for president in 1928, Wald undertook a furious letter-writing campaign on his behalf, penning correspondences both public and private in the hopes of winning social workers' votes for the Democrat while "working all the time" for his election.¹²⁹

A most striking example of a female social work progressive turning to politics is that of Belle Moskowitz. Moskowitz spent the first two decades of the century struggling for social reforms in New York City, with a particular interest in dance halls and other working-class recreational outlets.¹³⁰ In this mission she looked to the government, for as historian Elisabeth Israels Perry notes, "she wanted the state to act as a beneficent parent, sheltering the weak and leading the strong to serve society as a whole."¹³¹ Like many reformers, Moskowitz was wary of the major political parties and of Tammany Hall, and like Frances Perkins she was a supporter of Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressives in

¹²⁶ Lillian Wald to Alfred E. Smith, September 12, 1923, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 2.

¹²⁷ Secretary to Miss Wald to Mrs. Henry Moskowitz, August 15, 1923, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 2.

¹²⁸ It should be noted, however, that both Proskauer and Lehman were also noted progressives, and Lehman had spent time working at the Henry Street Settlement. Nevertheless, Wald was involved in Democratic politics on behalf of these progressive candidates, demonstrating a commitment to political action beyond a personal attachment to Al Smith. Secretary to Miss Wald to "Campaign Committee for Justice Joseph M. Proskauer" October 24, 1923, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 2; Lillian Wald to Franklin D. Roosevelt, October 16, 1925, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 2.

¹²⁹ Lillian Wald to Judge Julian W. Mack, October 4, 1928, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 3; Wald to Belle Moskowitz, July 3, 1928; Wald to Jane Hamilton Rhodes, September 4, 1928; Samuel Orr to Wald, September 14, 1928; Wald to G. E. Sehlbrade, September 14, 1928; Wald to Mary McDowell, September 14, 1928; Wald to McDowell, September 27, 1928; Wald to Edith Abbott, September 29, 1928; Wald to Graham Taylor, October 25, 1928; all from Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 3.

¹³⁰ Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, pp. 41-57.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

1912.¹³² Over the course of the 1910s Moskowitz remained a non-partisan reformer, but she was drawn increasingly toward political activities both by the nature of her work and by her new husband, Henry Moskowitz (whose interest in electoral politics had included a 1912 congressional campaign on the Progressive ticket).¹³³ Also during that period, her apprehensions about Tammany politicians began to wane with exposure to Al Smith and the New York Democrats' increasing commitment to social welfare measures.¹³⁴

Moskowitz joined with other prominent progressives to support Smith's gubernatorial candidacy in 1918; the following year, she was appointed executive secretary of the State Reconstruction Commission.¹³⁵ As "linchpin" of the commission, Moskowitz directed its work toward such social reforms as unemployment insurance, a state milk commission, a coordinated housing policy, state maternal and infant welfare campaigns, and compulsory health insurance for industrial workers.¹³⁶ As Smith's closest advisor throughout his governorship, Moskowitz crafted not only public policy but also Democratic partisan strategy.¹³⁷ By 1928 she was a leading force within the party; at the same time she was gaining national recognition, with newspapers describing her as "Smith's Colonel House."¹³⁸

To talk of a "politicization" of female social work progressives provoking the development of transitional progressivism would be misleading, for these women's project was itself a political one. Through lobbying, lawsuits, public service, and at times support for progressive candidates, the social work progressives had led a thoroughly

¹³² Ibid., p. 74.

¹³³ Ibid., pp. 98, 102.

¹³⁴ Ibid., pp. 114-117.

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp. 117, 121.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 115-160; e.g.: pp. 126, 129, 132, 133.

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp. 161-213.

¹³⁸ "Woman Smith's Colonel House," *The Charlotte Observer*, July 1, 1928, p. 1.

political existence from the inception of the settlement house movement. But what developed in New York in the late 1910s and the 1920s was something more. The adoption of political partisanship by some of these progressive women represented a new threshold of politicization, one that could only be reached after much ideological negotiation between the old parties and these new voters. Only after the Democrats embraced not only women's suffrage but also the progressive women's social welfare agenda, and only after they had demonstrated the utility of partisan politics and politicians to the achievement of social work's broader goals, could these women be not only politicized but also evangelized for the party.

The activities of politicians like Smith and Wagner—and even The McManus—in the 1910s show how the Democratic Party in New York was undergoing a transformation; and Smith's ascension to the undisputed leadership of the state party by 1920 signaled that this transformation would continue. Through appointments, policy innovations, and some old-fashioned political haggling, the increasingly progressive New York Democracy made a strong appeal to the newly enfranchised social work women and their allies. The outlook of many Democratic partisans had been adjusted to include a broad vision of state action for social welfare; adopting much of the progressive women's agenda, Smith and his Democratic colleagues could challenge those women likewise to modify their outlook.

In a speech before the Women's State Democratic Forum at the Hotel Astor on November 22, 1917, Anthony Griffin, an Irish Catholic Tammany politician who the following year would begin a nine-term career representing parts of Harlem and the Bronx in Congress, asked women: "Now having obtained the suffrage, the question is

‘What are you going to do with it?’¹³⁹ A progressive as well as a Tammanyite, Griffin had his own suggestions as to the answer. “You come into possession of the franchise after the battle for political independence is won. The issues of the present hour are purely economic, and to meet them, women are equally qualified with men.”¹⁴⁰ With ongoing clashes over tariff rates, struggles against trusts, and a rising cost of living, “the battles of the future for economic independence will be by the ballot. We ought, therefore, to welcome the aid of women in this conflict.”¹⁴¹

Moreover, the “we” that would fight economic inequality would be the Democratic Party, with the strong support of progressive women interested in such issues. Like Smith, Griffin declared that it was not enough to profess these things and then shift mercurially between Democrats, Socialists, and independents. Instead, women should sign on with the Democrats, because they had demonstrated the value of partisan political action for progressive advances. After all, claimed Griffin, “the eight hour law; better working conditions for men, women and children in factories; the Workmen’s Compensation Law and the Widows Pension Law were all enacted by Democratic Legislatures without the aid of Socialist agitation.”¹⁴² In another speech two weeks later, Griffin made the case for a progressive alliance crossing lines of gender within the Democratic Party even more explicitly. “Man and woman stand together in loyalty to our country at large and in their interest in community welfare. In order to make her ballot most effectual, she must align herself politically in accordance with the cleavage of

¹³⁹ Anthony Griffin, “Speech: ‘Ideals. National and International,’ delivered before Women’s State Democratic Forum at the Hotel Astor,” Nov. 22, 1917, Anthony Griffin Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY (hereafter, Anthony Griffin Papers), Box 14.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

political parties. She must find her political home among the parties which have hitherto claimed only men among their membership.”¹⁴³

The following fall this alliance began to crystallize when the now unabashedly progressive Al Smith gained the Democratic nomination for governor. By then, Smith’s progressive credentials were such that he enjoyed the solid support of New York’s reform community in his gubernatorial bid. To help corral Smith’s non-Democratic admirers, Abram Elkus formed the Independent Citizens’ Committee for Alfred E. Smith, reviving the progressive coalition that had fought for reform after the Triangle fire.¹⁴⁴ Many of the members of that committee, including the Moskowitzes, would become ardent Smith Democrats in short order. Significantly, about one-third of the committee members were women.¹⁴⁵

IV

In New York, then, the 1910s into the early 1920s was a time of negotiation between the largely old-stock-female social welfare progressives and the largely ethnic-male machine-Democrats-turned-urban-liberals. As each side shed its inhibitions about coalition, as well as some of its own attributes that were anathema to the other party, they were able to coalesce to fuel the uniquely progressive governorship of Alfred E. Smith in the 1920s. As is often the case, personalities also aided in this fusion. Al Smith and Robert Wagner, unlike many of their Tammany brethren, were never associated with vice

¹⁴³ Anthony Griffin, “Speech: Woman’s Democratic Party,” December 10, 1917, Anthony Griffin Papers, Box 14.

¹⁴⁴ Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, p. 117.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

or scandal, and Tammany sachem Charlie Murphy is known to have seen their promise and granted them a certain degree of ideological autonomy.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, reformers like Frances Perkins and Belle Moskowitz did not come off as culturally condescending in the way some social workers appeared, and unlike some within the reform sorority, did not prioritize prohibition over social welfare.¹⁴⁷

The progressivism that developed through this confluence of traditions focused upon certain strains of the broader progressivism of the 1900s and 1910s; specifically those that concerned the urban laborer. The one common denominator between the settlement house activist and the socially engaged ward boss was a desire to ameliorate the ills of the urban industrial order. Transitional progressivism, then, was the adoption of the female social welfare agenda by enlightened urban ethnic politicians and savvy reformers, as well as the institutionalization of that agenda as Democratic partisan dogma. The first fruits of this coalition were to be harvested during Al Smith's remarkably progressive governorship.

As might be expected, labor laws were promoted to build upon the foundation laid in the wake of the Triangle fire by the early transitional progressive alliance. The number

¹⁴⁶ "The Reminiscences of Robert F. Wagner, Jr.," p. 13; Huthmacher, "Charles Evans Hughes and Charles Francis Murphy," p. 32; Caro, *The Power Broker*, p. 128.

¹⁴⁷ Indeed, Moskowitz had been part of a reform group that attacked New York City's Sunday drinking ban in pragmatic terms in 1913. Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, p. 72. For a brief example of the well-meaning but condescending cultural attitudes of some Progressive-era social workers, see: Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence* (New York: Penguin, 1988), pp. 14-16, 297. Shelton Stromquist notes the "suspicion" with which ethnic, racial, and working-class leaders and movements were viewed by settlement workers. Stromquist, *Re-Inventing "The People,"* p. 9. James J. Connolly argues that although progressive female political activists did attempt to transcend divisions of class and ethnicity, ultimately "activist women in New York and Philadelphia approached the working class and immigrants as targets, people to be educated and beneficiaries of League support. They were not peers whose ideas and agendas were worthy of serious consideration in setting a course for reform. . . . these politically active women were . . . unable to imagine their lower-class counterparts on an equal footing." On the other hand, Connolly also identified progressive reformers who exhibited a greater "openness to the ideas of outsiders" and "insisted that no group or class held a monopoly on virtue," labeling them "democratic Progressives" and presenting Jane Addams as a prototypical figure in that group. Connolly, *An Elusive Unity*, pp. 122, 168-170.

of workers covered by the fifty-four hour work week was expanded in 1919 and again in 1924, and a series of bills were passed to regulate conditions in specific industries.¹⁴⁸ The apogee of these efforts came in 1927 with the passage of the forty-eight hour week for women. Mary Dreier, another female progressive leader and another crucial member of the New York coalition, recognized the important role Smith and the partisans had played in this achievement, cabling the governor that “had it not been for your courageous and generous support throughout all these years and your persistent effort in behalf of the forty eight hour week for the working women of this state this bill would never have gone through.”¹⁴⁹ (Indeed, Dreier and others had been working with Smith since the early years of his governorship on a series of unsuccessful bids to pass similar legislation.)¹⁵⁰ Smith retorted that Dreier gave “me too much of the credit for the final success of our forty-eight hour bill,” for “you . . . and the women associated with you have worked unselfishly for its success, and I feel that you are entitled to more credit than I. However, we will not quarrel about it.”¹⁵¹ Smith was indeed sincere when he remarked that he considered the forty-eight hour bill “*our* bill”—he saved the pen used to sign the legislation and sent it to Dreier as a token of thanks.¹⁵² In the final year of his incumbency Smith declared: “It is a matter of record that I have had my strongest and most vigorous support from the women of my State. They have a deep interest in the

¹⁴⁸ “Child Labor Laws Enacted Since 1915,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, New York State Library, Albany, NY (hereafter, Alfred E. Smith Papers), Box 2, Folder 31, p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ Mary E. Dreier to Alfred E. Smith (telegram), March 23, 1927, George Graves Papers, Box 18, Folder “Dreier, Mary E.”

¹⁵⁰ Mary E. Dreier to Alfred E. Smith, December 24, 1922, Mary Dreier Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (hereafter, Mary Dreier Papers), Box 9, Folder 161; “Annual Report of the Consumers’ League of New York 1926-1927,” Consumers’ League of Massachusetts Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, Box 16, Folder 264; Mary E. Dreier to Alfred E. Smith, March 31, 1925; Alfred E. Smith to Mary E. Dreier, April 2, 1925, George Graves Papers, Box 18, Folder “Dreier, Mary E.”

¹⁵¹ Alfred E. Smith to Mary E. Dreier, March 25, 1927, George Graves Papers, Box 18, Folder “Dreier, Mary E.”

¹⁵² Ibid.

human side of government.”¹⁵³ He stressed that these progressive women had not necessarily come from the ranks of the Democratic Party, and yet:

they fought side by side with me . . . in the struggle to obtain factory laws for safeguarding the lives, health and welfare of men, women and children in industry; to secure social legislation like widowed mothers’ pensions, designed to keep the orphaned child in its mother’s home; to protect society against the evils of child labor and the overwork and exploitation of women and children in industry; to improve the care of afflicted veterans, tubercular patients, of the mentally deficient, and to restore to usefulness the lives of crippled children.¹⁵⁴

In fact, this transitional progressivism influenced nearly every facet of Smith’s executive tenure, manifesting itself in a number of reform initiatives that placed New York in the forefront of social legislation in the United States. During his four terms as governor, Smith championed unemployment insurance, better compensation for victims of industrial accidents, improved benefits for injured workers, and increased death benefits for widows of accident victims.¹⁵⁵ He also pressed for labor measures including the eight-hour day and a minimum wage.¹⁵⁶ In the realm of housing, which was the Smith initiative “most energetically attacked as socialistic,” the governor fought for state credit for builders of moderately priced homes, municipal development of low-cost housing, and the establishment of state and local housing boards.¹⁵⁷ On recreation, the Smith administration battled for the development of state parks and beaches, and parkways to provide easy access from New York City to these facilities on Long

¹⁵³ Alfred E. Smith, Radio Address at Carnegie Hall, November 5, 1928, in *Campaign Addresses of Governor Alfred E. Smith, Democratic Candidate for President 1928* (Washington, DC: Democratic National Committee, 1929), pp. 309-316, p. 315.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

¹⁵⁵ Alfred E. Smith, “Speech at Oneonta, NY,” October 14, 1924, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 27, Folder 274, p. 5.

¹⁵⁶ Robert Moses, “Suggested Statement by the Governor Regarding Results of 1920 Legislative Session And Need of a Special Session,” May 28, 1920, Robert Moses Papers, New York Public Library, New York, New York (hereafter, Robert Moses Papers), Box 5, Folder: “Citizens Committee on Reorganization in the State Government,” p. 2.

¹⁵⁷ Norman Hapgood and Henry Moskowitz, *Up From the City Streets, Alfred E. Smith* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1927), p. 239; Moses, “Suggested Statement by the Governor Regarding Results of 1920 Legislative Session And Need of a Special Session,” p. 2; Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, p. 132.

Island.¹⁵⁸ On power, Smith fought tirelessly for the development of water power by the state, for the control of plants by the state and not private concerns, for the conservation against private development of those water resources left undeveloped, and for the formation of a state power authority.¹⁵⁹ On public health, Smith and his administration fought for the development of a state milk commission to ensure the quality and availability of milk by making it a regulated public utility; pressed for maternity education and state grants for maternal and infant welfare, including participation in the federal program developed under the Sheppard-Towner Act; proposed increased child welfare services, hot lunch programs, and mandatory physical education; and promoted compulsory health insurance for industrial workers.¹⁶⁰ Smith was not able to institute all of these programs during his governorship, largely because never in his four terms did he enjoy a Democratic senate and assembly simultaneously; nevertheless, much of this platform was achieved, and all of it was pursued doggedly by the Democrats and their newly minted social welfare progressive allies.

Throughout the 1920s, Governor Smith distinguished himself by pursuing an agenda driven by this new style of progressivism. And it was indeed new. Owing partially to its roots in the social work tradition and partially to its constituency within the urban ethnic working class, the transitional progressive agenda shifted the emphasis away

¹⁵⁸ “Governor Smith’s Record on Conservation: Parks and Recreation in New York State,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 3, Folder 43, pp. 2-7; “Governor Smith’s Record on Conservation: Forest Protection, Wildlife, and the Saratoga Reservation,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 3, Folder 43, p. 1; Caro, *The Power Broker*, pp. 143-157.

¹⁵⁹ Alfred E. Smith, “Speech at Flushing,” October 28, 1926, Robert Moses Papers, Box 6, Folder: “Governor’s Speeches,” p. 1; Thomas K. McCraw, *TVA and the Power Fight, 1933-1939* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1971), p. 29.

¹⁶⁰ Moses, “Suggested Statement by the Governor Regarding Results of 1920 Legislative Session And Need of a Special Session,” p. 2; Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, pp. 129, 133; J. Stanley Lemons, “The Sheppard-Towner Act: Progressivism in the 1920s,” *The Journal of American History*, 55:4 (March, 1969), pp. 776-786, p. 782; “The Reminiscences of Charles Poletti,” 1978, Columbia Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, p. 193; “Report on Governor Smith’s Health Program,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 13, Folder 158, pp. 1, 5; “The Reminiscences of Robert F. Wagner, Jr.,” pp. 84-85.

from the retention of small-town Yankee values, away from the veneration of American individualism or the fear of an overthrow of the social hierarchy, and applied all of its reformist pretensions to causes of social welfare, industrial justice, and a general improvement of the quality of working-class life. Radically absent was the erstwhile obsession with personal behavior and cultural assimilation; lives would be uplifted not through forced temperance or compulsory Americanization, but through better working conditions, adequate healthcare, and ample recreation. Here at last was a progressivism of which working-class immigrants and their progeny could imbibe; here as well was a progressivism that retained the women's social work agenda and which offered pragmatic means of widespread implementation. It was this transitional progressivism that informed the administration of Alfred E. Smith in New York, and it was on this progressive platform that Smith sought the presidency in 1928.

V

While the nascent progressivism of up-and-coming Democrats like Wagner and Smith revolved around ameliorative labor and social welfare measures for the benefit of the urban working class, another facet of this progressivism was the promotion of public policies designed to benefit an increasingly heterogeneous society, in the interest of Tammany's diverse constituency. Historians have often assigned such issues as religious and racial tolerance, immigration restriction, and prohibition to a unique ethnocultural category of analysis, separating them from questions of economic justice. Yet when considering the developing ideology of the ethnic working class and their political

representatives, such a bifurcation proves artificial. Justice for these workers meant *both* industrial democracy *and* social respect. Indeed, while transitional progressivism was centered on the social welfare agenda, the very nature of its intended beneficiaries compelled it also to denounce bigotry and cultural condescension.

Tammany's constituents had always been the ethnic working classes of New York City. For decades, this had meant the Irish, and as such Democratic candidates could succeed while maintaining a clannish insularity. But as the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries brought waves of new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, as well as a deluge of African American refugees from the Old South, wily Tammanyites modified their tactics not only to outflank Socialist challengers but also to avoid ethnic dissension. In 1898, the "United Colored Democracy" was established by Tammany to distribute favors and jobs among New York's growing African-American community in return for electoral support in much the same way the machine operated in predominantly white wards.¹⁶¹ This was a small advance and did not yet translate into black Democratic nominees for high office. Within other communities, however, representation became an increasingly important tactic for securing partisan loyalties.

To give only a brief sampling: Yorkville, on the Upper East Side, was represented not by an Irishman but by a German immigrant (Robert Wagner), reflecting its status as New York's "Little Germany."¹⁶² This was not particularly pathbreaking given Germans' long history in the city, but many newer groups would slowly receive

¹⁶¹ Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, pp. 177-179. This was a step forward, but ultimately a small one. Slayton notes that with higher-profile appointments, Tammany (and Smith) had a weaker record. Moreover, it has been established that African-Americans were often excluded even from more mundane patronage in New York City, while bureaucratic self-governance "made advancement beyond the lowest rank, if not appointment itself, virtually impossible. Michael L. Goldstein, "Black Power and the Rise of Bureaucratic Autonomy in New York City Politics: The Case of Harlem Hospital, 1917-1931," *Phylon*, 41:2 (2nd Quarter, 1980), pp. 187-201, p. 189.

¹⁶² Huthmacher, *Senator Robert F. Wagner and the Rise of Urban Liberalism*, p. 13.

similar treatment. In the opening decade of the twentieth century, Tim Sullivan responded swiftly to demographic changes on the Lower East Side with ethnic outreach—“the Big Feller” was far ahead of his Tammany cohorts in extending “a welcome to Jewish advisors and captains” and “started many successful Jews in their careers.”¹⁶³ While Sullivan outpaced the city-wide machine, this pragmatic inclusiveness would cease to be exceptional in the decades to follow. In 1923, when seeking a congressional candidate for a previously Republican-dominated seat in a heavily Jewish district, the Democrats drafted Sol Bloom, who recalled that “I had been chosen because I was an amiable and solvent Jew.”¹⁶⁴ Bloom, a colorful impresario and son of Polish immigrants, would go on to serve for nearly three decades in the House of Representatives.¹⁶⁵ In East Harlem, Tammany survived both a party insurgency and a Republican challenge from the neighborhood’s burgeoning Italian community in 1911; in 1912, twenty-eighth district boss Nick Hayes reluctantly but presciently acceded to community demands and nominated Salvatore Cotillo to stand for assemblyman as a Democrat.¹⁶⁶ During a distinguished career in Albany, Cotillo would join Wagner and Smith as a leading advocate for labor and welfare reforms, and in 1923 he would become the first Italian-American elected to the State Supreme Court.¹⁶⁷ The Democrats in New York were not the only political machine in the United States that appealed to a polyglot

¹⁶³ Welch, *King of the Bowery*, p. 132.

¹⁶⁴ Sol Bloom, *The Autobiography of Sol Bloom* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1948), p. 200.

¹⁶⁵ Bloom, *The Autobiography of Sol Bloom*, p. 10; Biographical Directory of the United States Congress [Web site], “Bloom, Sol,” Site Address: <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=B000565>.

¹⁶⁶ Thomas M. Henderson, “Immigrant Politician: Salvatore Cotillo, Progressive Ethnic,” *International Migration Review*, 13:1 (Spring, 1979), pp. 81-102, pp. 84-85.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82. Al Smith would reflect in 1938 that Cotillo’s “forte seems to have been in the fostering and putting through of legislation involving social welfare reforms, child welfare bills, and regulatory measures aiming to prevent the exploitation of our then huge masses of newer immigrants.” Alfred E. Smith, “Introduction,” in Nat J. Ferber, *A New American: From the Life Story of Salvatore A. Cotillo, Supreme Court Justice, State of New York* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1938), pp. v-viii, pp. vi-vii.

constituency to insure its own survival.¹⁶⁸ Yet while Tammany's adoption of such pragmatism toward ethnicity seems almost too obvious to mention, it must be remembered that Irish political organizations in places like Boston and Providence had antagonized newer immigrants by excluding them from representation—to the extent that groups like the Italians, Poles, and especially the French Canadians tended to coalesce around the Yankee-dominated Republicans in New England.¹⁶⁹

Nevertheless, Tammany's small strides toward more diverse representation were only a minor piece of its ethnocultural agenda. To serve their constituents, these Democrats fought strenuously against repressive social measures like prohibition and blue laws, while battling discriminatory policies such as literacy tests and immigration restriction. The question of alcohol is a complex one. It is true that aspiring politicians like Al Smith received much of the Tammany catechism at the saloon. But many of the notorious bosses were teetotalers—perhaps most notably George Washington Plunkitt, who although “no fanatic” and a friend of saloonkeepers, made certain “as a matter of business I leave whisky and beer and the rest of that stuff alone.”¹⁷⁰ Of equal significance, “as a matter of business, too, I take for my lieutenants in my district men who don't drink.”¹⁷¹ According to Plunkitt, sachems like Richard Croker and Charlie Murphy were of the same disposition, the latter taking “a glass of wine at dinner

¹⁶⁸ E.g.: Republican Boss “Big Bill” Thompson in Chicago, who appealed to various ethnic groups as well as African Americans through various means. Allswang, *Bosses, Machines, and Urban Voters*, pp. 91-116.

¹⁶⁹ J. Joseph Huthmacher, *Massachusetts People and Politics, 1919-1933: The Transition from Republican to Democratic Dominance and its Implications* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), p. 15; Evelyn Savidge Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles: Ethnic Politics and the Catholic Church in Providence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 2004), pp. 46, 51, 84; Aaron F. DeMoranville, Jr., “Ethnic Voting in Rhode Island” (MA thesis, Brown University, 1961). While confirming the existence of Franco-Irish rivalries, Ronald A. Petrin demonstrates that French-Canadian voting involved more than a simple anti-Democratic bias; indeed some French enclaves regularly supported Democrats, particularly on the municipal level, depending on local conditions and contemporary issues. Ronald A. Petrin, *French Canadians in Massachusetts Politics, 1885-1915: Ethnicity and Political Pragmatism* (Philadelphia, The Balch Institute Press, 1990).

¹⁷⁰ Riordan, ed., *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*, p. 77.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

sometimes, but he don't go beyond that."¹⁷² The same even applied to Bowery leaders "Big Tim" and "Little Tim" Sullivan, neither of whom had "ever touched a drop of liquor in his life."¹⁷³ This is not to say that Tammany men had no stake in the issue: Murphy and the Sullivans were saloonkeepers with an obvious financial interest in alcohol; these establishments provided a great deal of funding for the machine; and Plunkitt is noted for hyperbole and generalizations. Still, the battle on behalf of the saloon ought not to be seen as a purely personal and emotional crusade by the Democrats. If Plunkitt exaggerated, so did those who caricatured the ward boss as a souse (as much of the more scurrilous anti-Smith propaganda would do in 1928). A more representative figure would probably be the real Al Smith. Franklin Roosevelt testified that Smith had never been a "drunkard," and biographer Robert Slayton reports that the Happy Warrior "was a light to moderate social drinker who enjoyed an occasional beer."¹⁷⁴ More significantly, Smith did not view prohibition as "a critical political issue."¹⁷⁵ With Smith, as with the earlier party leaders, standing up for the saloon was a way of standing up for the legitimacy of his constituents' way of life.¹⁷⁶ Fighting against prohibition was a way to fight against cultural domination of urban ethnic workers by élites, just as fighting for social welfare measures was a way of battling for economic justice for those workers. Indeed, Plunkitt summarized Tammany's position on alcohol succinctly: good political leaders "don't make no pretenses of being better than anybody else."¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁷³ Riordan, ed., *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*, p. 79. Richard F. Welch confirms both Sullivans' personal abstention from drink in his biography of "Big Tim." Welch, *King of the Bowery*, p. 50.

¹⁷⁴ Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 193. Roosevelt quoted in Slayton, *loc. cit.*

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 197.

¹⁷⁶ This was certainly the case for the Sullivans. Welch, *King of the Bowery*, p. 50.

¹⁷⁷ Riordan, ed., *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*, p. 79.

If transitional progressivism imbibed this democratic approach to drink, it adopted even more passionately the urban ethnic worker's disdain for immigration restriction. It is well known that political machines like Tammany Hall thrived on the votes of recent immigrants, providing newcomers with connections and social services in return for political loyalty. In a new and often overwhelming setting the immigrant's unfulfilled needs were satisfied and abstract democratic concepts were humanized. Sociologist Robert King Merton thus acknowledged that "with a keen sociological intuition, the machine recognizes that the voter is a person living in a specific neighborhood, with specific personal problems and personal wants."¹⁷⁸ This in turn earned the machine votes, and enabled its operations to persist indefinitely. Clearly there was strong incentive for urban machines to oppose immigration restrictions. But in seeking to serve the interests of their constituents, the machines were also compelled to stand up for these newcomers' legitimacy as citizens by opposing legislation that implicitly denied their social worth. Thus Tammany politicians opposed literacy tests, national origins quotas, and other proposals founded on an Anglo-Saxon vision of the ideal American.

In fact, transitional progressives framed these issues as questions of democratic justice. In proposing a resolution that the state senate petition Congress in opposition to a literacy test in 1917, Robert Wagner proclaimed that "the question of a literacy test for immigrants does not belong to this day of toleration and liberal thought. It is an echo sounding from the past, from a very brief period in the history of our country."¹⁷⁹ Significantly, Wagner insisted that his vision—and that of his urban ethnic constituents—

¹⁷⁸ Robert King Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1963), p. 74.

¹⁷⁹ Robert F. Wagner, "Speech Delivered by Senator Robert F. Wagner in State Senate on a Resolution introduced by him, petitioning Congress not to pass Literacy Test Bill," 1917, Robert F. Wagner Papers, Box 401, Folder 1.

was the legitimate understanding of American democracy, concluding that “the imposition of a literacy test for admission to our shores is un-American.”¹⁸⁰ After the passage of the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act in 1924 established national origins quotas based on the 1890 census, New York Democrats decried the “sinister” attempt to institutionalize ethnic hierarchies.¹⁸¹ Brooklyn congressman Emanuel Celler denounced it as discrimination against those “from Southern and Eastern Europe,” while New York-born Meyer Jacobstein, a representative from Rochester, agreed that the act “arbitrarily and unfairly discriminates against certain nationalities.”¹⁸²

The transitional progressives were devoted both to their party and to their inclusive vision of the United States polity. This at least partly explains the debacle at the Democratic National Convention at Madison Square Garden in 1924, when Al Smith and his allies battled unsuccessfully for both the presidential nomination and a platform provision denouncing the Ku Klux Klan, while the Tammany-packed rafters repeatedly erupted into raucous choruses of heckling at opponents like William Gibbs McAdoo and William Jennings Bryan.¹⁸³ The transitional progressives wished to depart from some of the most bigoted traditions of the Democratic Party while retaining an unconditional love for that party; they believed that their understanding of the party’s philosophy was rooted not only in their own aspirations but also in historical fact.¹⁸⁴ Thus the cheerfully naïve and blatantly ahistorical sentiments of Congressman Celler, who declared in 1928 that “the clause of the Immigration Act of 1924 providing for immigration by ‘National

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ “Memorandum Emanuel Celler,” September 21, 1928, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 9, Folder 104.

¹⁸² Meyer Jacobstein, “MEMORANDUM re: Governor Smith’s Position on Immigration,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 9, Folder 104.

¹⁸³ See chapter four. An excellent recounting of the events of the 1924 convention is included in Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, pp. 202-216.

¹⁸⁴ Robert Slayton and Smith’s daughter Emily Smith Warner have concluded that Al Smith clung to this belief to the point of naïveté during the 1924 convention. Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 204.

Origins' should be repealed. The Democratic Party, *which has always been opposed to discrimination against races*, should be the first to urge this repeal."¹⁸⁵

This vision has been denounced as “provincial” by historian David Burner and others, who have assigned at least partial responsibility for the unsavory cultural battles of 1928 to Smith’s supposed myopic urbanism.¹⁸⁶ This will be explored later; in any case, transitional progressivism, while mainly focused on the social welfare progressive agenda, also retained and even amplified the traditional urban push for a less rigid definition of Americanism. Those female social work progressives who aligned with the Democrats to develop this new progressivism tended to be either those least inclined to press for measures such as prohibition (like Belle Moskowitz), or those who were willing to put such questions aside in favor of the social welfare and labor issues that they saw as much more significant (like Lillian Wald). Indeed, these social welfare progressive women often shared the cultural positions of the Tammany Democrats outright: In 1921, Mary Dreier berated President Warren G. Harding for remarks made by his secretary of state suggesting that “Armenians, Jews, Persians, and Russians cannot be regarded as desirable population. . . .”¹⁸⁷ In both social welfare and cultural pluralism, the transitional progressives sought to represent their urban ethnic working-class constituents—to battle for both their economic welfare and their social dignity. As Wagner saw it: “There are in America two schools of political thought . . . one conception of government which believes that there should be a governing class and a class to be governed . . . the other . . . which holds that governments are created by the

¹⁸⁵ “Memorandum Emanuel Celler,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 9, Folder 104. Emphasis added.

¹⁸⁶ Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism*, pp. 179-216.

¹⁸⁷ Mary E. Dreier to Warren G. Harding (telegram), April 20, 1921, Mary Dreier Papers, Box 9, Folder 161.

people themselves as instruments for the working out of the happiness and welfare of all.¹⁸⁸



Fig. 1.4: Al Smith (center-right, to the left of the two police officers), who had joined with other New York City legislators at Albany to fight the state's proscription against Sunday baseball in 1907, preparing to deliver the first pitch ever thrown at Yankee Stadium, Bronx, NY, April 18, 1923.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Robert F. Wagner, Press Release, Address of Acceptance, October 8, 1926, Robert F. Wagner Papers, Box 401, Folder 2.

¹⁸⁹ Jacob Ruppert, "Gov. Al Smith & wife at opening of Yankee Stadium, 4/18/23," George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. On Smith and Sunday baseball, see Christopher M. Finan, *Alfred E. Smith: The Happy Warrior* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), pp. 66-67.

Chapter II: Transitional Progressivism and Social Welfare

“Public health is purchasable.”

—Dr. Herman Biggs, New York City Health Department, 1911

* * *

“[H]owever great the cost and burdensome the tax . . . We must be liberal in our treatment of the public schools.”

—Governor Alfred E. Smith, Annual Message to the Legislature, 1924

* * *

“Let us battle it out right in the shadow of the Capitol itself and let us have a decision, and let us not permit the impression to go abroad in this State that wealth and power can palsy the arm of the State and stall the machinery of Government in the performance of a duty that has so much to do, now and in the future, with the health, happiness and the comfort of our ten million people, and of the millions more who will follow them.”

—Governor Alfred E. Smith, Radio Address, 1925

By the time Al Smith became governor of New York in 1919 it was clear that his administration would be marked by a progressive ethos. Fueled by a genuine interest in finding state solutions to social ills, informed by the progressive social welfare tradition, and championed through pragmatic politics, the transitional progressivism that had emerged during the 1910s would continue to develop over the next decade, expressing itself consistently throughout Smith’s executive tenure. Careful consideration of Smith’s accomplishments as governor demonstrates unwavering support for a uniquely broad

social welfare regime; attention both to these policies and to the governor's accompanying political rhetoric sheds new light on the importance of Smith's progressive ideas to his executive record, his presidential run, and the evolution of American politics in this period. Health care, education, and conservation are but three of the many policy areas in which Smith's transitional progressivism transformed life in New York State. A thorough analysis of the advances made in these areas of social welfare reveals both the profundity and the breadth of Smith's commitment to this style of progressivism during the 1920s.

In the case of public health, the governor's actions demonstrate transitional progressivism's dual heritage in social work and machine politics. The Smith administration envisioned near-universal access to health care in the state, and in order to achieve this goal the governor early on attached himself to the crusade for compulsory health insurance. However, as insurance foundered on the shoals of Red Scare politics, Smith identified alternative means of extending health coverage. By expanding the state's health care infrastructure, and through profligate spending on state-run services, the governor was able to improve public health in New York tangibly and earned plaudits from public health workers—a key constituency within the social welfare progressive community. To accomplish this, Smith relied on ideas and tactics that had been developed over decades by female social work progressives. He also exercised his own political skills, as well as his keen understanding of state government and finances, allowing him to use innovative mechanisms for funding his ambitious health program.

A surprising, but nonetheless quite important case study is Smith's record with regard to public education in New York. As governor, Smith increased state funds to

education more than 1,000 percent, increased teacher pay prodigiously and repeatedly, and, most significantly, set rural education in New York on a course bound for modernity that transplanted thousands of upstate children from antiquated one-room schoolhouses to modern facilities with qualified faculty, up-to-date curricula, and as much as possible, equal access to the broad opportunities available to students attending urban schools. The education narrative not only demonstrates Smith's commitment to progressive ideals and procedures, it also gives the lie to charges of urban provincialism against his gubernatorial regime.

In the case of conservation, Smith directed the creation of the first comprehensive state program for parks and recreation, expanding parks and integrating them into a statewide network. His administration also dramatically extended the state's role in environmental protection, from massive reforestation projects to aggressive programs to defend the state against threats ranging from forest fires to gypsy moths. Most significantly, Smith fought tenaciously to preserve state resources for public benefit—best demonstrated by his passionate battle against private development of New York's water power potential, arguing instead for a system that would be constructed, owned, and operated by the state. The administration's posture toward these issues demonstrates how broadly transitional progressivism defined social welfare, and how liberally its adherents would be willing to exercise state power in order to promote the public good.

Public Health

Ascending to the governorship of New York in 1919 after a brief break from state affairs as sheriff and then president of the board of aldermen for New York City, Al Smith was already widely known as a progressive reformer, and his administration was expected to reflect such an agenda. These expectations were promoted further by the fortuitous timing of Smith's ascension to the governorship. Coming less than two months after the conclusion of the Great War, the first year of the Smith administration would be marked by the work of the State Reconstruction Commission, a body appointed by the governor to craft a response to the many public welfare crises made plain by the war mobilization.¹⁹⁰ Smith elucidated the administration's philosophy in his first inaugural address: "The lessons of the war must not go unheeded. We must benefit by the war as a nation and as a State. It has taught us that more stringent and more universal laws are required for the protection of the health, comfort, welfare, and efficiency of all our people."¹⁹¹

The most embarrassing wartime lesson was learned when the state draft board had deemed "one-third of all the male population in the State of New York between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-one years . . . unfit to fight because of diseases or other physical unfitness."¹⁹² The governor recognized a need for both temporary solutions (those which

¹⁹⁰ For an excellent treatment of the broad social welfare agenda of Smith's Reconstruction Commission, see Perry, *Belle Moskowitz: Feminine Politics and the Exercise of Power in the Age of Alfred E. Smith*, pp. 115-139.

¹⁹¹ Alfred E. Smith, "Inaugural Address, 1919" in Henry Moskowitz, ed., *Progressive Democracy: Addresses and State Papers of Alfred E. Smith* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1928) pp. 71-74, p. 73.

¹⁹² Democratic State Committee, "Agriculture under Alfred E. Smith as Governor: A Plain Statement of the Facts as They Exist and What Has Been Accomplished During the Past Two Years," 1920, p. 8, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.

would deal with immediate post-armistice crises) and permanent remedies (the aforementioned “universal” social welfare laws).¹⁹³ Smith proposed two categories of solutions to this disgraceful situation, both of which would be addressed by the reconstruction commission and both of which would inspire legislative battles. The first was legally reforming health policy in the state, most notably by supporting compulsory health insurance for all laborers. The second was the expansion and modernization of the state’s health care infrastructure.

I

In his first inaugural address, Smith “strongly urge[d] . . . the enactment of a health insurance law,” to “remedy” the “unfair condition” in which “the worker and his family bear . . . alone” the “burden” of illness, injury, and incapacitation.¹⁹⁴ The governor believed that this plan would “result in greater precautions being taken to prevent illness and disease, and . . . eliminate the consequent waste to the State therefrom. It will lead to the adoption of wider measures of public health and hygiene, and it will operate to conserve human life.”¹⁹⁵ Smith also called for the adoption of a maternity insurance program “in the interest of posterity and of the race.”¹⁹⁶ For a model, he looked overseas, lecturing the legislature that “Other countries are far ahead of us in this

¹⁹³ “Report of Governor Smith’s Public Health Program,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 13, Folder 158, p. 1.

¹⁹⁴ “Governor Smith Takes Office Amid Crowds’ Acclaim,” *The New York Times*, January 2, 1919, pp. 1-4, p. 4.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

respect, and their experience has demonstrated the practical value and economic soundness of these principles.”¹⁹⁷

As with much of his agenda, Smith was not creating this program himself. As he noted, programs for compulsory insurance or national sickness insurance had been implemented in a number of European countries, including Great Britain and Germany.¹⁹⁸ Domestically, the American Association for Labor Legislation (AALL) had drafted a “standard bill” that was promoted in numerous state legislatures beginning in 1915.¹⁹⁹ This bill called for a system of local mutual funds administered by a state health insurance commission, to be financed by contributions from workers (two-fifths), employers (two-fifths), and the state (one-fifth).²⁰⁰ A program based on the bill had been proposed in California but was defeated soundly in a 1918 referendum.²⁰¹ Meanwhile in New York, Republican state senator Ogden L. Mills had proposed a compulsory health insurance bill modeled on the AALL program during the 1916 and 1917 legislative sessions, with the senate agreeing to create a commission to study the question.²⁰² As Smith took office promoting state health insurance, another iteration of the standard bill

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁹⁸ S.S. Goldwater, “To the editor of the New York Times,” *The New York Times*, January 27, 1916, p. 10; “Health Insurance for New York’s Workers,” *The New York Times*, January 30, 1916, p. SM8; Irving Fisher, “The Money Value of Human Beings,” *The New York Times*, March 19, 1916, p. 18; Beatrix Hoffman, *The Wages of Sickness: The Politics of Health Insurance in Progressive America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2001), p. 27. For the authoritative work on European progressive welfare measures and their influence on American public policy, see Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age*.

¹⁹⁹ Milton Terris, “National Health Insurance in the United States: A Drama in Too Many Acts,” *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 20:1 (1999) pp. 13-35, p. 13.

²⁰⁰ Hoffman, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 33. The vote was 358,324 to 133,858 against the bill.

²⁰² “Health Insurance for Workers Asked,” *The New York Times*, January 24, 1916, p. 20; “Study Health Insurance,” *The New York Times*, April 18, 1916, p. 22; Terris, “National Health Insurance in the United States,” pp. 13-14.

began meandering through the legislature which would become tied to the rest of the governor's welfare agenda.²⁰³

The 1919 bill was introduced by Frederick Morgan Davenport, a Republican state senator from Clinton who had run unsuccessfully for governor on the Progressive ticket in 1914.²⁰⁴ In the assembly the bill was sponsored by Charles D. Donohue, a Manhattan representative and the leader of the Democratic caucus, further indicating Smith's support. Based on the AALL's model bill, the proposal would create a system in which employers and employees would contribute equally to a fund to cover health care costs in times of illness, as well as promoting preventative care; but unlike the model bill or the earlier Mills proposal, Davenport's bill did not include state contributions, only state management of the program.²⁰⁵ "Local mutual funds" would be administered by boards of directors comprised of equal numbers of employers and employees, and each board would set premium rates and manage health care in its region. "Special provision" was made for medical, surgical, and nursing care for mothers and their babies, and working women were provided a cash benefit for two weeks before the birth of the child and six weeks thereafter.²⁰⁶ In addition, Davenport's plan would provide "minimum benefits" to cover costs associated with medical, surgical, sanitarium, and dental treatment, and cash benefits would be provided for sickness and funerals, as well as maternity.²⁰⁷ The

²⁰³ For a comprehensive examination of the history of the standard bill and the political battles surrounding it, with a focus on New York but with no examination of Governor Smith, see Hoffman, *The Wages of Sickness*.

²⁰⁴ Malcolm, ed., *The New York State Red Book, 1928*, p. 278; Biographical Directory of the United States Congress [Web site], "Davenport, Frederick Morgan, (1866-1956)," Site Address: <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=D000070>.

²⁰⁵ *New York State Legislative Record and Index, 1919* (Albany, NY: Legislative Index Publishing Group, 1919) p. 10; *New York State Legislative Record and Index, 1917* (Albany, NY: Legislative Index Publishing Group, 1917), p. 10.

²⁰⁶ "Health Insurance Measure Amended," *The New York Times*, March 17, 1919, p. 20.

²⁰⁷ "Insured Against Illness," *The New York Times*, March 12, 1920, p. 12.

program was projected to cost employers 24¢ per week per employee and cost each worker the same.²⁰⁸ Like the AALL model, the New York bill explicitly excluded agricultural workers, domestic servants, and government employees from the program.²⁰⁹ The bill was amended by its sponsors in March, “in an endeavor to meet objections advanced by physicians” by retaining beneficiaries’ ability to choose their own doctor, rather than having one assigned by the local board, and by placing all of the boards under more strict supervision by the State Industrial Commission.²¹⁰ The amendments were also designed to mollify businessmen by narrowly defining what sort of “employee [*sic*]” would be covered by the program: under the final wording, the bill would cover “a mechanic, workingman, laborer, clerk, bookkeeper, or person of similar grade of employment, including foreman, but not including superintendents, managers, and officers.”²¹¹ This failed to impress the opposition however, and a mere two days after the changes were made a coalition of manufacturers, merchants, physicians, and fraternal societies denounced the bill as “un-American, unsound, and unconstitutional,” before the Senate Judiciary Committee.²¹²

While compulsory health insurance became a key piece of Smith’s welfare agenda, it quickly earned denunciations from numerous professional organizations and interest groups. The New York City Bar Association denounced the Davenport-Donohue Bill as “socialistic,” the New York State Coal Merchants’ Association strongly disapproved, the Associated Manufacturers and Merchants of New York State expressed

²⁰⁸ “Health Insurance Measure Amended,” *The New York Times*, p. 20

²⁰⁹ Hoffman, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-32; “Health Insurance Measure Amended,” *The New York Times*, p. 20.

²¹⁰ “Health Insurance Measure Amended,” *The New York Times*, p. 20

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20. The word “employee” was often spelled “employe” in this period; for the rest of this work, I will not include the cumbersome “[*sic*]”; rather, I will use the contemporary spelling “employe” without further comment.

²¹² “Unite in Attack on Health Insurance,” *The New York Times*, March 20, 1919, p. 5.

alarm at the burdensome costs to business associated with the program, the International Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers opposed the bill fearing “the espionage that accompanies it,” and other groups of manufacturers, merchants, and physicians wrote letters, made speeches, and testified before legislative committees in an attempt to derail compulsory health insurance.²¹³ Encouraged by these developments, legislative Republicans snuffed out the bill, as well as the entire Smith program; not allowing insurance or other welfare proposals to escape committee.

Davenport, however, was undeterred. While the GOP held a 29 to 21 advantage in the state senate, the progressive from Oneida County led a revolt by “radical” Republicans against the dilatory tactics of President Pro Tempore J. Henry Walters and by extension assembly speaker Thaddeus Sweet. Davenport led the charge, based on the question of health insurance; he was joined by Ross Graves of Erie, who sought state-run hydroelectric development, Samuel Fowler of Chautauqua, who sought a municipal ownership bill, and George F. Thompson of Niagara, who sought to compel “bone-dry” prohibition enforcement as demanded by the Anti-Saloon League.²¹⁴ All but the last of these were important planks in Smith’s platform.

The insurgent Republicans, allied with the entire Democratic caucus and a shifting coalition of other GOP senators, were able to pass the Davenport Health Insurance Bill 30 to 20 (as well as passing the Fowler municipal ownership bill 28 to 22).²¹⁵ However, in the assembly Sweet was able by one vote to pass a motion allowing

²¹³ “New York Bar Finds Bad Bills in Albany,” *The New York Times*, February 21, 1919, p. 8; “Wants Coal Men United,” *The New York Times*, February 28, 1919, p. 13; “Health Insurance Measure Amended,” *The New York Times*, p. 20; “Unite in Attack on Health Insurance,” *The New York Times*, p. 5; “Move to Conserve Health,” *The New York Times*, May 27, 1919, p. 17.

²¹⁴ “Senators Defy Albany Leaders,” *The New York Times*, April 2, 1919, pp. 1, 5, p. 1.

²¹⁵ “Barely Retain Assembly Control,” *The New York Times*, April 17, 1919, p. 4; Terris, “National Health Insurance in the United States,” p. 14.

for adjournment, and in the ensuing days the lower house voted down a motion to take the insurance bill out of the Rules Committee by a healthy 84 to 58 margin, “indicating that insurgent Republican Assemblymen had been whipped back into line.”²¹⁶ At the governor’s mansion on Eagle Street, Smith still held the constitutional option to compel the legislature to remain in session for “at least another week,” but with Davenport striking a deal to end his rebellion in return for Walters’ support of a progressive income tax bill, such a maneuver would have been futile; and so health insurance was dead for 1919 in New York.²¹⁷ With the crumbling of the insurgency and the suffocation of the Smith reconstruction program, that year’s session would be aptly summarized by the *New York Times* with the headline: “Legislature Noted for Little it Did.”²¹⁸

But this was not the end of the battle. Late that summer, Smith addressed the convention of the State Federation of Labor at Syracuse and promised to demand health insurance, a minimum wage, and an eight-hour day for women from the 1920 legislature; the governor charged that “reactionaries,” who “are men of little foresight” had blocked his industrial reforms, including health insurance, and threatened that these politicians “must see the light or they will be replaced by men of our modern day.”²¹⁹ Senator Davenport also appeared before the convention, telling the delegates of a growing consensus for insurance, “even among employers who opposed it at the outset.”²²⁰ The AALL shared Smith and Davenport’s optimism, declaring their encouragement at “the impetus given to the movement for compulsory workmen’s health insurance,” by the

²¹⁶ “Republicans Agree on Graduated Plan for Income Tax,” *The New York Times*, April 18, 1919, pp. 1, 7, p. 1; “Barely Retain Assembly Control,” *The New York Times*, p. 4.

²¹⁷ “Republicans Agree on Graduated Plan for Income Tax,” *The New York Times*, p. 1; “Barely Retain Assembly Control,” *The New York Times*, p. 4.

²¹⁸ “Legislature Noted for Little it Did,” *The New York Times*, April 20, 1919, p. 10.

²¹⁹ “Smith Says State Neglects Health,” *The New York Times*, August 28, 1919, p. 14.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

success in the New York State Senate, as well as by a favorable legislative report issued in Ohio.²²¹ The very support of the New York Federation of Labor, expressed at the summer convention, was quite significant, for the American Federation of Labor opposed compulsory health insurance, and AF of L president Samuel Gompers had resigned from the AALL over the “socialistic stuff” he felt the organization was producing.²²² Nevertheless, it was clear that health insurance for New York workers would not sail to easy passage in 1920: in October, yet another organization, the New York County Medical Society, announced its opposition to the program.²²³

At the opening of the following legislative session, Smith was as good as his word, and in his message to the legislature of January 7, 1920, the governor made a point to ask for swift action on his welfare agenda, noting in particular maternity insurance, workmen’s compensation insurance, and health insurance for workers, as well as an expansion of the state’s public health activities.²²⁴ These remarks were received enthusiastically by New York’s social welfare progressives. From Henry Street, Lillian Wald wrote the governor: “I am . . . very much interested in your recommendations for reform in the health protection of the state, and naturally personally interested in your recognition of the need of the public health Nursing Service,” while pledging her personal support for his agenda.²²⁵

In March, Davenport once again introduced a bill for compulsory health insurance.²²⁶ But this time the senator was less optimistic, suggesting that he would “not

²²¹ “See Labor Benefits in New Legislation,” *The New York Times*, September 1, 1919, p. 2.

²²² Quoted in Hoffman, *op. cit.*, p. 34; see also pp. 115-136.

²²³ “Oppose Compulsory Health Insurance,” *The New York Times*, October 29, 1919, p. 7.

²²⁴ “Governor Calls for a Referendum on Dry Amendment,” *The New York Times*, January 8, 1920, pp. 1-2, p. 2.

²²⁵ Lillian Wald to Alfred E. Smith, January 9, 1920, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 2.

²²⁶ “Insured Against Illness,” *The New York Times*, p. 12.

press for final passage of the bill until there was an intelligent public opinion back of it.”²²⁷ Indeed, only days earlier a potential ally—Warren Stone, chairman of the social insurance committee of the National Civic Federation and grand chief of the International Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers—had written a letter to several state legislatures, including New York’s, asking that they delay creating compulsory health insurance programs until a commission had studied its possible effects.²²⁸ Stone’s committee argued that disease prevention was “not a function of insurance,” citing the “failure” of the compulsory health insurance law in Britain.²²⁹

Davenport linked this loss of momentum to the Red Scare, citing “a subtle and organized propagandism” against social welfare measures in the context of the New York State Legislature’s anti-Bolshevik Lusk Committee investigations of socialist politicians and educators and the federal Justice Department’s ongoing hunt for subversives under Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer.²³⁰ In fact, only three weeks after this announcement, the bill was “bitterly denounced as ‘pernicious and un-American’ by opponents . . . at a hearing before the Senate Labor and Industrial Committee.”²³¹ The National Association of Manufacturers assured the committee that the bill was “unsound,” while the Women’s Betterment League of the Lady Maccabees of America denounced not only the bill but also its supporters within the League of Women Voters, whom they skewered as a socialist cabal.²³² Not everyone agreed with these sentiments;

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²²⁸ “Ask Delay in Legislation,” *The New York Times*, March 1, 1920, p. 7.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²³⁰ “Insured Against Illness,” *The New York Times*, p. 12. The Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate Seditious Activities, or “Lusk Committee,” operated from 1919 to 1920, hunting “subversives” in New York State. New York State Archives [Web site], “The Lusk Committee ‘Introduction,’” Site Address: http://www.archives.nysed.gov/a/research/res_topics_bus_lusk_intro.shtml.

²³¹ “Republican Women in Tilt with Sweet,” *The New York Times*, April 8, 1920, p. 11.

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

the same day, a group of progressive Republican women “bearded Speaker Sweet in his den” and upbraided him over his stifling of Smith’s welfare agenda, arguing that such actions were “more fertile of Bolshevist propaganda and of disloyalty toward Government than a thousand radical schools and soap-box orators.”²³³ In any case, it was clear by April that the insurance bill would not pass the 1920 legislature—its momentum one of innumerable casualties of the Red Scare.

Any lingering hopes for compulsory health insurance in New York died that November with Smith’s electoral defeat at the hands of Republican Nathan Miller. Restored to office two years later, Smith continued to push his welfare agenda, and he ultimately succeeded in getting much of it passed. However, health insurance advocates would never again come as close to victory as they had in 1919.

By the time Smith’s wider program began gaining traction in the mid-1920s, Davenport had been elected to Congress, and Donohue had been elected to the state judiciary. The primary mover behind health insurance for the duration of the Smith years would be Assemblyman Louis Cuvillier, a Democrat from New York County’s twentieth district who introduced a bill establishing a “system of compulsory insurance for employees in case of old age, unemployment, death, sickness and accident, not covered by Compensation Law, and for dependents and to furnish maternity benefits, and creat[ing] [a] health insurance commission and appropriat[ing] \$200,000” during the 1926, 1927, and 1928 legislative sessions.²³⁴ Cuvillier is an interesting character: a veteran of the Spanish-American War and the Great War who would be remembered

²³³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²³⁴ *New York State Legislative Record and Index, 1926* (Albany, NY: Legislative Index Publishing Group, 1926), p. 112; *New York State Legislative Record and Index, 1927* (Albany, NY: Legislative Index Publishing Group, 1927), pp. 111, 130; *New York State Legislative Record and Index, 1928* (Albany, NY: Legislative Index Publishing Group, 1928), p. 115.

upon his death as something of a maverick, “whose independence in voicing his opinions frequently caused embarrassment for his Democratic colleagues.”²³⁵ He had sponsored legislation as diverse as abolition of motion picture censorship and establishment of the death penalty for arsonists; the creation of a “new State of Manhattan, including Westchester, New York, Kings, Queens, Richmond, Suffolk, Nassau and Bronx Counties,” and state protection for labor unions; he was a vehement opponent of prohibition and of women’s suffrage; his enemies included several assembly speakers as well as the American Society for the Protection and Care of Animals (he cited their cruelty to animals); and he had led the charge both for the expulsion of five socialist legislators in 1920 (exclaiming in an assembly-floor tirade that they “ought to be shot”) and for compulsory health insurance for all laborers in New York State.²³⁶ So while Cuvillier openly expressed his admiration for Smith, there is little correspondence between the two and it is difficult to gauge Smith’s—or anyone’s—involvement in the Cuvillier scheme, except to say that it reflected the governor’s earlier efforts and met with his approval.²³⁷ Nevertheless, the Cuvillier plan suffered a similar fate to the plan

²³⁵ “Louis A. Cuvillier Dies of Pneumonia,” *The New York Times*, May 19, 1935, pp. 1, 32, p. 1.

²³⁶ *New York State Legislative Record and Index, 1924* (Albany, NY: Legislative Index Publishing Group, 1924), p. 328; *New York State Legislative Record and Index, 1925* (Albany, NY: Legislative Index Publishing Group, 1925), p. 134; *New York State Legislative Record and Index, 1926*, pp. 112, 331; *New York State Legislative Record and Index, 1927*, pp. 111, 130; *New York State Legislative Record and Index, 1928*, p. 115, 310; “Will Challenge Cuvillier for Bias,” *The New York Times*, February 8, 1920, p. 16; “Louis A. Cuvillier Dies of Pneumonia,” *The New York Times*, p. 32; “Animals: Nosko’s Buster,” *Time*, February 17, 1930.

²³⁷ Cuvillier’s papers were never archived, and ostensibly have been lost to history. However, a comprehensive examination of numerous collections of Smith papers reveals at least seven letters sent between the two men in the 1920s, including one where Smith praises the assemblyman as “the ever thoughtful one who is always doing things in behalf of the disabled soldiers.” Alfred E. Smith to Louis Cuvillier, November 22, 1926, George Graves Papers; “Louis A. Cuvillier Dies of Pneumonia,” *The New York Times*, p. 32.

proffered by the more ideologically concrete Davenport: each year it died unceremoniously in the assembly's Committee on Labor and Industries.²³⁸



Fig. 2.1: Assemblyman Louis Cuvillier, the primary legislative advocate for compulsory health insurance in New York in the later Smith years.²³⁹

While compulsory insurance appeared moribund by the spring of 1920, Republican leaders in the legislature proposed another health care plan as a compromise with the program of Smith and Davenport. Henry M. Sage, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, and his assembly counterpart H. Edmund Machold, proposed a bill to establish “a system of statewide health centres, supported in part by State funds”—a program that had already been urged by the governor, who had called for “a law extending a State subsidy to localities which would establish health centers in order that

²³⁸ *New York State Legislative Record and Index, 1926*, p. 112; *New York State Legislative Record and Index, 1927*, p. 111; *New York State Legislative Record and Index, 1928*, p. 115.

²³⁹ Picture from Malcolm, ed., *The New York State Red Book, 1928*, insert after p. 64. (Author's collection.)

doctors and nurses might be available for the entire population.”²⁴⁰ The bill’s supporters claimed that it would allow “persons of small means and dwellers in rural and industrial communities [to] have access to the best that modern medicine provides.”²⁴¹

This was especially critical given the failure of compulsory health insurance, for the advocates of that bill had long recognized that uninsured laborers in New York’s cities had been inundating charitable dispensary clinics and public health centers originally meant for the very poor.²⁴² Accordingly, one motive behind insuring laborers was easing the increasing burden on these clinics wrought by growing numbers of working-class sick seeking free treatment.²⁴³ If these workers could not be insured, at least their access to care at public clinics could be expanded. Furthermore, the program would be especially advantageous to rural areas of the state, where thirty-seven communities were “entirely without the services of a physician,” according to a study by State Health Commissioner Dr. Hermann M. Biggs.²⁴⁴ In spite of this apparent incentive for Republican cooperation, Smith’s health program, like his entire welfare agenda, went down in flames in the 1920 legislature—during which, the *New York Times* announced with indignation, the “long trial of [the] socialists delayed important measures until [the] last minute.”²⁴⁵ Despite its failure, the nature of this compromise semaphored the new direction that Smith’s health program would take in the wake of the defeat of insurance:

²⁴⁰ “To Extend Health Work,” *The New York Times*, March 26, 1920, p. 12; Democratic State Committee, “Agriculture under Alfred E. Smith as Governor,” 1920, p. 8; “Child Welfare,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 2, Folder 31, p. 1; “Report of Governor Smith’s Public Health Program,” p. 1.

²⁴¹ “Health Centres Bill Indorsed,” *The New York Times*, April 2, 1920, p. 11.

²⁴² Hoffman, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-21.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-21.

²⁴⁴ Democratic State Committee, “Agriculture under Alfred E. Smith as Governor,” 1920, p. 8.

²⁴⁵ “Assembly Buries Governor’s Bills by Caucus Order,” *The New York Times*, April 24, 1920, p. 1; “Legislative Record of the 1920 Session,” *The New York Times*, April 26, 1920, p. 3.

a focus on heavy spending to improve the state's public health infrastructure and thus open access to care for the entire population.

II

It will be recalled that one of the most important periods of reform in New York history was spurred by the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist Fire of March, 1911: in the wake of this horror, protective labor legislation was passed at a frenzied pace, informed by the State Factory Investigating Commission and shepherded through the legislature by Al Smith and Bob Wagner. It is a tragic, even shameful irony that the Empire State's major initiative for improving one aspect of its health care infrastructure was to be inspired by another, less well known conflagration. On February 18, 1923, only seven weeks after Smith was inaugurated for his second tenure as governor, a fire at a hospital for the mentally ill on Ward's Island in New York killed twenty-four inmates and three state employees.²⁴⁶

The blaze caused a sensation in the media and scandalized the New York public. It was revealed that there had been warnings of a possible cataclysm by a series of fires at the facility in the past; the antiquated fire apparatus on the island was lambasted; a slew of investigations into various aspects of the tragedy commenced almost instantaneously; and the *Times* editorialized that "responsibility for the failure to provide a fireproof

²⁴⁶ "22 Madmen Die in Ward's Island Fire; 3 Attendants Perish in Rescue Work; Fire Apparatus Ancient and Inadequate," *The New York Times*, February 19, 1923, p. 1; "Six Inquiries Begin into Hospital Fire," *The New York Times*, February 19, 1923, pp. 1-2; "War Veterans Lost Lives in the Fire," *The New York Times*, February 19, 1923, p. 2; "More Death Traps Bared by Inquiry into Ward's Island Fire," *The New York Times*, February 20, 1923, p. 1; "Ward's Island Fire Not Due to Wiring," *The New York Times*, February 21, 1923, p. 19.

building for the insane must be assumed by the State authorities.”²⁴⁷ The fire had a significant effect on the psyche of New Yorkers well after the flames were extinguished: for example, in June a grand jury in Brooklyn admonished Mayor John F. Hylan’s administration over conditions at Greenpoint Hospital and Kings County Hospital, fearing “a repetition of the Ward’s Island disaster.”²⁴⁸

At Albany, Assemblyman Cuvillier demanded immediate consideration of his proposal for a “tri-borough” bridge, which had been approved the previous year but blocked by Hylan, and which acting mayor Murray Hulbert claimed would have allowed fire vehicles access to Ward’s Island.²⁴⁹ Meanwhile, the governor dispatched the director of the State Hospital Commission, Dr. Floyd Haviland, and the state architect, Lewis W. Pilcher, to Manhattan to investigate the tragedy. Smith immediately launched an offensive, declaring from Albany the day after the fire that “the overcrowded condition of the Manhattan Hospital, to my mind, was the main cause for the great loss of life. The only remedy seems to me to be new buildings, or additions to those already in use. No amount of fire apparatus could have prevented what has occurred, I am told.”²⁵⁰

Since 1916 the state had been moving to remedy its “acute hospital problem” with a program of construction and repair; but “the exigencies of war halted the program until 1920,” and after Smith’s defeat that November, the Miller administration “slowed up that program.”²⁵¹ The renewed scrutiny of conditions in hospitals for the state’s dependents offered Smith an unparalleled opportunity for action. It would be too much to suggest

²⁴⁷ “Warned by Former Fires in Hospital,” *The New York Times*, February 19, 1923, p. 2; “Six Inquiries Begin into Hospital Fire,” *The New York Times*, pp. 1-2; “The Ward’s Island Tragedy,” *The New York Times*, February 20, 1923, p. 16.

²⁴⁸ “Grand Jury Calls Hospital Firetrap,” *The New York Times*, June 1, 1923, p. 40.

²⁴⁹ “Governor at Work on Fire at Hospital,” *The New York Times*, February 20, 1923, p. 2.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁵¹ Alfred E. Smith, *Progress of Public Improvements: A Report to the People of the State of New York*, October, 1927, pp. 6-7. (Author’s collection.)

that he was simply playing politics (genuinely moved, he pressed the legislature to provide a year's salary to the survivors of each of the state workers killed), but he did see the fire as a graphic case in his larger point that the state needed to expand and modernize its health care infrastructure. Swiftly, the point was made. Within twenty-four hours of the fire, officials in New York were warning of "death trap" conditions at Bellevue Hospital and at the City Home on Welfare Island.²⁵² Within seventy-two hours, the governor had sent a special message to the legislature urging approval for submission to the voters of at least \$50 million in bonds "for the erection of new State hospital buildings to check overcrowding, as well as an immediate appropriation of \$1,438,950 for urgent repairs and removal of fire hazards at these institutions."²⁵³

When the State Hospital Commission submitted its final report to the legislature in mid-March, they confirmed Smith's theory, declaring overcrowding the primary culprit in the holocaust.²⁵⁴ The revelations bolstered Smith and by April it appeared that his bond proposal, sponsored in the assembly by his insurance war ally Charles Donohue, would pass the legislature and face a November referendum.²⁵⁵ That fall, the governor campaigned vigorously for the bond issue, reminding voters of the Ward's Island tragedy and the looming threat of further devastation due to poor conditions in state facilities.

At Yonkers on October 11, Smith stated that he could "think of no more sacred duty resting on the State today than the proper care of the unfortunate sick and afflicted whom we promised to care for, and we are not doing it."²⁵⁶ Smith noted that "the

²⁵² "More Death Traps Bared by Inquiry into Ward's Island Fire," *The New York Times*, February 20, 1923, p. 1

²⁵³ "Asks \$50,000,000 for New Hospitals," *The New York Times*, February 22, 1923, pp. 1, 5, p. 1.

²⁵⁴ "Ward's Island Loss Laid to Crowding," *The New York Times*, March 14, 1923, p. 3.

²⁵⁵ "Governor Gets Plan for Safe Hospitals," *The New York Times*, April 28, 1923, p. 4.

²⁵⁶ "Speech by Governor Alfred E. Smith Delivered at Yonkers October 11, 1923," Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 27, Folder 271, p. 3.

structures themselves are too old.”²⁵⁷ Thus it was of fundamental importance to develop these facilities not only because of overcrowding but also because of dilapidation. Indeed, a report issued to the governor days after the Ward’s Island fire illustrated this point. The youngest of the state hospitals had been constructed in the late nineteenth century.²⁵⁸ Binghamton State Hospital had been opened as an inebriate asylum in 1860; Brooklyn State Hospital was a reincarnation of the Kings County Asylum, which had been built in 1855; Manhattan State Hospital had been in use since 1855 and had gone through phases as a homeopathic hospital, a holding facility for immigrants, and an insane asylum before its ultimate conversion to a hospital in 1896.²⁵⁹ Construction on Utica State Hospital had been completed in 1843—three years before the first shots were fired in the Mexican War.²⁶⁰

If humanitarianism obliged the state to rebuild these facilities, “good sound business principles” demanded that the state finance these operations with long-term debt, for “hospitals built to-day on modern plans, built of steel and concrete, are destined to last for a hundred years at least to come, and why should the taxpayers of to-day pay for them?”²⁶¹ This was not a sinister attempt to disguise reckless spending, but rather a maneuver for circumventing the politics of the legislature which had so often stifled Smith’s program in past sessions. Smith had seen how the election of a new governor in 1920 had led to a substantial cut in construction spending the following year, and feared that when annual appropriations were used to finance these projects they would be

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

²⁵⁸ “Memo Re: Ages of State Hospitals,” February 19, 1923, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 1, Folder 19, p. 1.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 1-2.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

²⁶¹ “Speech by Governor Alfred E. Smith Delivered at Yonkers October 11, 1923,” p. 4.

subject to political whims.²⁶² “When you don’t pay for them as the result of bonds they fall into the politics of the State once in a while when there is a wave of alleged economy and there is a cut down in the building and in the construction so that we have an overcrowding to-day in State hospitals throughout the whole State of very nearly 35%. 37,000 people are in these institutions alone and 35% of them are not being properly cared for.”²⁶³ Smith sought further to ease voters’ anxieties by suggesting costs would be minimal: repaid over twenty-five years, the ostensibly large deficit “would mean, for each individual, a debt of [\$]4.65, and each individual would have 25 years in which to pay that debt, or about 19¢ a year. . . . Now, tell me, what citizen of this State would not pay 19¢ a year, or a good many times that amount, for the sake of knowing that the unfortunate dependents upon the State were cared for safely and properly.”²⁶⁴

Independent organizations echoed these sentiments. In October, the State Federation of Women’s Clubs issued an endorsement of the proposed bond, citing the fire and noting that “there are very many buildings as old and as dangerous at the other State hospitals and institutions.”²⁶⁵ The Citizens Committee on Protection of the State’s Unfortunates, an umbrella group representing a motley array of organizations including the American Legion, the State Federation of Labor, the Grand Lodge of Masons of New York, the League of Women Voters, the Federal Council of Churches, the Federation for the Support of Jewish Philanthropic Societies of New York City, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, the Knights of Columbus, the New York State Nurses’ Association, the Woman’s City Club, the New York City Conference of Charities and Correction, and

²⁶² Smith, *Progress of Public Improvements*, p. 7.

²⁶³ “Speech by Governor Alfred E. Smith Delivered at Yonkers October 11, 1923,” p. 4.

²⁶⁴ “Memorandum No. 4. Draft of paragraphs in re. Bond Issue for the Governor,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 1, Folder 18, pp. 1-2.

²⁶⁵ “Bond Issue Endorsed,” *The New York Times*, October 17, 1923, p. 31.

the New York State Association, also issued a set of strong endorsements for the Smith hospital bond, calling it “a humanitarian measure” and a way to help prevent a repeat of “the disastrous fire on Ward’s Island.”²⁶⁶ Edward E. Spafford, commander of the American Legion for the Department of New York, went further, declaring that “Any man or woman who votes against the proposition is, in my opinion, asking that a funeral pile be erected and on that be sacrificed those who are not in all ways able to care for and protect themselves.”²⁶⁷ Three days before the vote, the Catholic Archbishop of New York, Patrick J. Hayes, wrote a letter discussing the “imperative urgency of replacing many of our State institutions by modern structures in order that the State may perform its duty toward its public charges according to the highest standards of safety, sanitation, and humanity.”²⁶⁸ Perhaps the most powerful appeal came the next day, from the families of twenty-five of the victims of the Ward’s Island fire, who implored voters “not to let such a thing happen again in any State institution.”²⁶⁹ The bond issue was widely approved, and so the governor could now set about the mission of modernizing the state’s hospitals.

It is one thing to win a political victory (and if the Smith literature is conclusive on anything it is unequivocal on the question of his prowess as a political tactician); but a more profound understanding of Smith’s governorship demands investigation into how that victory was translated into public policy. In the case of the \$50 million bond issue approved in 1923, one must discover where the money went.

²⁶⁶ “Gain Wide Support for Hospital Plan,” *The New York Times*, October 19, 1923, p. 14.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁶⁸ “Favor Bond Issue To Aid Hospitals,” *The New York Times*, November 4, 1923, p. 3.

²⁶⁹ “Ask Voters to Aid State Hospitals,” *The New York Times*, November 5, 1923, p. 3.

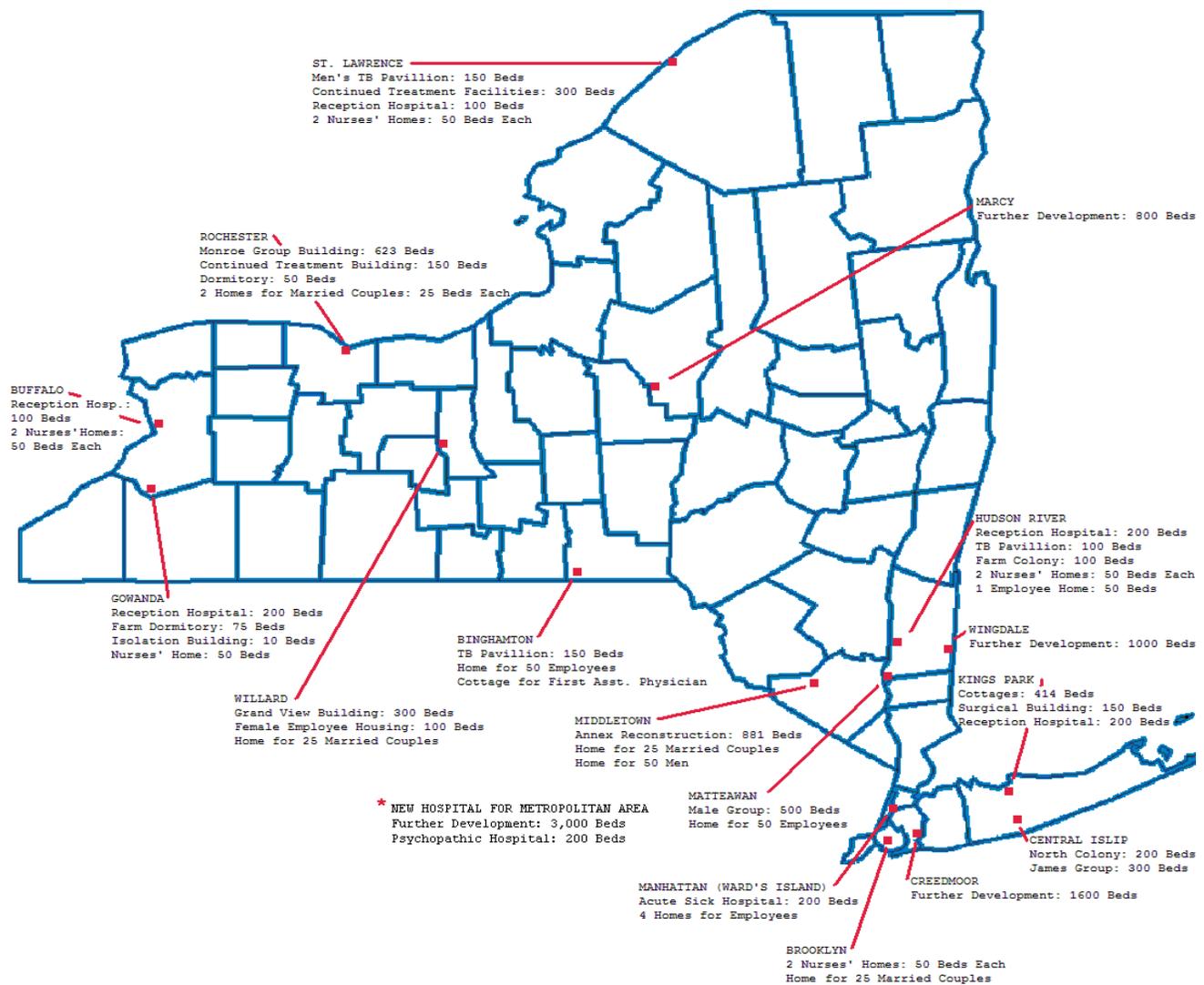


Fig. 2.2: Map showing allotment of Schedule A funds in 1924 and 1925. Note the geographic dispersion of projects.

Spending was bifurcated into two programs, Schedule A, which was solely for hospital and accommodation construction, and Schedule B, consisting of “certain essential utilities and services required for the new patient accommodations, such as power houses, laundries, bakeries, cold storage plants, water supply, kitchens, etc.”²⁷⁰

Twenty-five months after the bond was approved, Schedule A had spurred a spending

²⁷⁰ Belle Moskowitz, “Memorandum For Governor Smith on Bond Issues,” December 17, 1925, Belle L. Moskowitz Correspondences, New York State Archives, Albany, NY, Folder 4, p. 1.

and building spree, with robust projects breaking ground in all corners of the state. In Binghamton, work began on a one hundred fifty bed tuberculosis pavilion and housing for fifty employees; in Buffalo, a one hundred bed reception hospital and housing for one hundred nurses.²⁷¹ On Long Island, five hundred beds of new buildings for an inpatient colony at Central Islip; in Gowanda, a two hundred bed reception hospital and additional accommodations.²⁷² Three hundred beds worth of rooms at Hudson River Hospital in Poughkeepsie, 764 at Kings Park on Long Island, 200 at Manhattan, 873 at Rochester, 550 at St. Lawrence, and so forth.²⁷³

The Schedule A program—construction to provide more beds to alleviate overcrowding—was prioritized dramatically over the miscellaneous improvements included in Schedule B. This had been the original intent of the bond issue, and so some plans were changed to reflect such priorities (for example, at Willard State Hospital, plans for a new powerhouse were scrapped in favor of “a psychopathic unit or reception service”).²⁷⁴ By 1927, bond funds had provided accommodations for 12,691 additional patients in the state’s hospitals, schools for “mental defectives,” and charitable facilities, as well as room for 2,846 doctors, nurses, and staff.²⁷⁵ In the decade preceding this growth spurt, the state had provided for a total of 7,060 new patients—an average addition of 706 beds per year; from 1924 through 1927, the state added 3,173 beds per year.

²⁷¹ “Allotment of Funds Derived From the Bond Issue,” Belle L. Moskowitz Correspondences, Folder 4, p. 1.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-3.

²⁷⁴ Smith, *Progress of Public Improvements*, p. 16.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

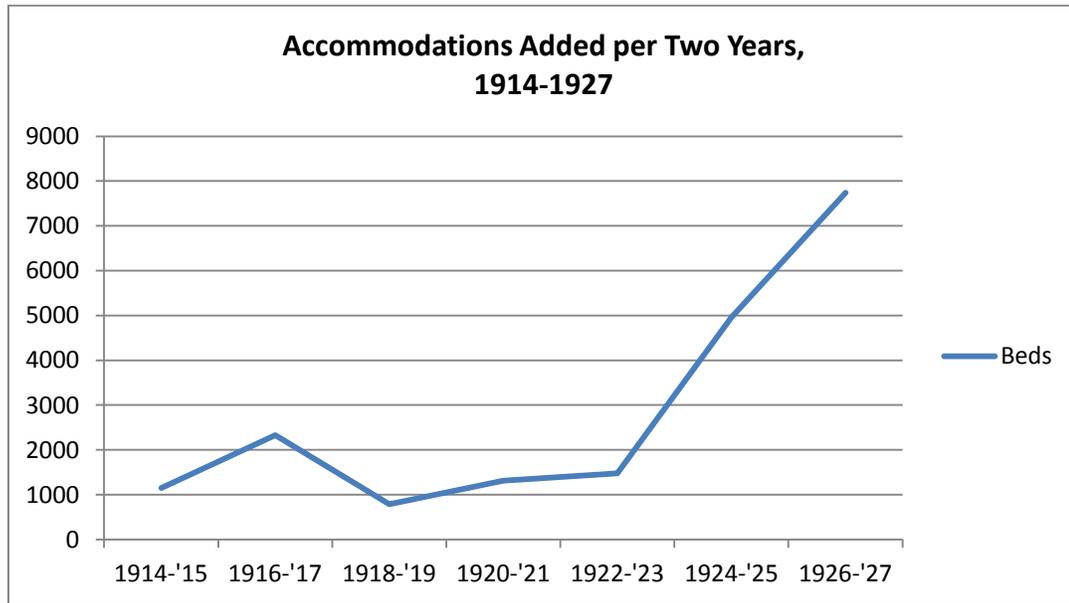


Fig. 2.3: Chart showing the rate of hospital construction, measured in number of beds added per year, 1914-1927, demonstrating the precipitous leap in construction in the Smith years.

While delighting in these advances, the governor was far from satisfied. In 1925, advisor Belle Moskowitz had calculated that plans were in place for 13,275 new patient beds for state hospitals and charitable institutions. But when overcrowding figures from 1923 (9,900 for hospitals; 1,175 for special schools) and increases in the population of the system in the intervening years (approximately 2,100) were considered, the addition of these accommodations yielded a statewide surplus of only 100 beds—hardly enough to assure long-term adequacy of the hospitals.²⁷⁶ Moskowitz concluded that “if provision . . . is not made by appropriations from current revenues year by year to take care of the reconstruction items and to provide new accommodations for the annual increases it is only a question of time when the State will be again confronted with the problem of overcrowding and face the need of another bond issue to ‘catch up.’”²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ Moskowitz, “Memorandum For Governor Smith on Bond Issues,” pp. 1-2.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

Smith's solution was to double down: to seek further bond revenue to allow the state to keep pace with demand for hospitals and all other public works. In 1925, only two years after the \$50 million was approved specifically for hospitals, the governor pushed an even more ambitious debt scheme: an amendment to permit the legislature to bond \$10 million a year for the next ten years "without further reference to the people."²⁷⁸ Smith had arrived at this plan the previous year after a conference with legislative leaders, seeking a way to avoid "the temptation that looms in front of every man . . . that the way to gain popular favor is to have low appropriations bills," as well as a means of circumventing the constitutional prohibition against holding referenda on multiple bonds at a single election.²⁷⁹ Smith reflected again on the hospital experience, detailing how the State Hospital Commission had requested \$49 million for construction between 1919 and 1923 but had received only \$15 million, "because every succeeding Legislature and most of the Executives had in mind low appropriation bills as an indication of their ability to economize in the government of the State."²⁸⁰ When faced with criticism from conservatives for pushing a "blank check amendment," the governor suggested that the legislature already held a blank check against the state's general fund.²⁸¹ In any case, Smith understood that this ten-year bond scheme was a radical departure from the legislative and constitutional traditions of the Empire State—but he

²⁷⁸ "Debate Between Governor Smith and Former Governor Miller on State Bond Issue," July 9, 1925, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 28, Folder 295, p. 7.

²⁷⁹ "Debate Between Governor Smith and Former Governor Miller on State Bond Issue," pp. 15, 18; "Constitution of the State of New York" in Malcolm, ed., *The New York State Red Book, 1928*, pp. 534-591, p. 572.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16. Smith says "most of the Executives," but in three of the five years in question, Smith himself was governor. The statement was a poorly constructed jab at Smith's debate opponent that night, Nathan Miller.

²⁸¹ "Governor Smith's Primer on the Constitutional Amendments—1, 2 & 3—Public Improvements Bond Issue," Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 1, Folder 19, p. 1.

did not care.²⁸² He proclaimed that he and his allies were “not thinking of some holy economic law,” nor were they particularly interested in “what Silas Wright said in 1846.”²⁸³ His interest was not orthodoxy, but that “what the State of New York is doing tonight and today with regard to tubercular patients is a crime and a disgrace.”²⁸⁴ His interest was in the fact that “we have in this State the greatest group of dilapidated, worn out, sickly looking, old buildings devoted to public use that anybody will find in the United States.”²⁸⁵

The \$100 million bond carried with bipartisan support, and the Smith administration was able to cooperate with the legislature to direct funds to projects ranging from government offices in Albany to major construction at Sing Sing Prison to land acquisitions for the Taconic State Park to improvements at state hospitals like Brooklyn, Creedmoor, Harlem Valley, and Rockland.²⁸⁶ Even still, Moskowitz’s prophecy would prove all too accurate as the decade progressed. In 1927, with the last of the \$50 million bond now appropriated, Smith informed constituents that “demand for additional patient beds in the state hospitals for the insane increases every year. For the fiscal year ending June 30th last, the net increase was 1,891. That alone calls for one-half

²⁸² Consider that the state courts had always held a narrow view of the state government’s right to embrace indebtedness: the way in which debt was incurred in 1851 for canal completion was found “repugnant” in *People v. Newell*, 7 N.Y. 9; and an 1872 proposal to allow a multi-purpose bond was held to “violate [the constitution] in providing for the creation of a debt for many different objects” in *People, ex rel. Hopkins, v. Board of Supervisors of Kings Co.*, 52 N.Y. 556. Simultaneously, the courts had no objection to the state compelling municipalities to take on debt for public improvements (*People, ex rel. v. Havemeyer*, 3 Hun, 97; *People v. Supervisor of Chenango*, 8 N.Y. 317; *Darlington v. Mayor of N.Y.*, 31 id. 164; *People, ex rel. v. Flagg*, 46 id. 401). The 1846 and 1894 constitutions had explicitly limited legislative debt authority to meeting “casual deficits or failures of revenues, or for not provided for, contract debts . . . not at any time [to] exceed one million dollars,” and debts necessary “to repel invasions”; all others must “at a general election, have been submitted to the people, and have received a majority of all the votes cast,” after being approved by the legislature—a clear (and successful) attempt to limit state issuance of bonds. *The New York State Red Book, 1896* (Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon, 1896), pp. 346-347.

²⁸³ “Debate Between Governor Smith and Former Governor Miller on State Bond Issue,” p. 18.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁸⁶ Smith, *Progress of Public Improvements*, pp. 119-120.

of a 3,600-bed hospital like the new Rockland State Hospital or one such new hospital every two years. The State cannot stop building and meet its legal and moral obligations to care for those of its citizens who become afflicted with mental disorder.”²⁸⁷



Fig. 2.4: Projects funded with the 1923 bond, pictured in 1927. Clockwise, from the upper left: aerial view of construction at Creedmoor State Hospital, Queens; construction at Rockland State Hospital, Orangeburg; State Psychiatric Institute, New York City; new surgical building, Kings Park State Hospital, Long Island.²⁸⁸

The next governor, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, recognized the need for further revenue, and sought to follow the same methods as his predecessor, calling for another \$50 million bond for improvements at state hospitals and state prisons. However, the 1929 legislature rebuffed the Democrat, not allowing his proposed bond amendment to face a fall referendum. In 1930, with the legislature acquiescing, Smith again threw

²⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 18-19.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 22, 23, 26, 27. (Author's collection.)

himself into the campaign for bonds and public works. Nominating FDR for reelection at the state Democratic convention, Smith railed against Republican “insincerity” in killing Roosevelt’s construction plan and then, “to save face,” appropriating “\$18,000,000 in cold cash out of the current revenues of the State in early January, 1930, for the Pilgrim Hospital on Long Island.”²⁸⁹ To Smith this was as irresponsible as it was cynical, for “they took from the taxpayers of a single year \$18,000,000 instead of spreading it over the generations for 100 years to come for the proceeds of a bond issue.”²⁹⁰ By November, this was a bipartisan endeavor, with both parties, as well as hundreds of civic groups and clergymen from all faiths and denominations urging public approval of the bond.²⁹¹ On November 4, as part of a Roosevelt landslide, the bond question carried five to one statewide—and almost fifteen to one in New York City.²⁹² In Smith’s wake, the means by which he had revolutionized state finances and shifted New York’s priorities toward human welfare had been ratified and crystallized by policymakers and voters alike.

III

Smith’s massive building program for State Hospitals is a particularly striking example of his move to expand and modernize New York’s health care infrastructure, both because of the dozens of structures and thousands of accommodations created

²⁸⁹ “Ex-Gov. Smith’s Speech Nominating Gov. Roosevelt,” *The New York Times*, October 1, 1930, p. 22.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁹¹ “Both Parties Back \$50 Million Bonds,” *The New York Times*, November 2, 1930, p. N3; “Clergy Join in Plea for State Bond Issue,” *The New York Times*, November 2, 1930, p. N4; “Makes Final Plea for Welfare Bonds,” *The New York Times*, November 3, 1930, p. 30.

²⁹² “State Bond Issue Wins By Huge Vote,” *The New York Times*, November 5, 1930, p. 3; “City Gives Governor Greatest Plurality,” *The New York Times*, November 5, 1930, p. 1.

during his tenure and because of the way his approach to financing the endeavor would affect New York state governance forevermore. But this was in fact only one portion of his broader agenda. Of equal significance is the way in which his administration expanded health clinics, research facilities, and access to medical personnel statewide.

In his 1920 message to the legislature, Smith had urged a redistricting of the state in health matters “so that each community could support proper public health administration,” in addition to “establishing throughout the State” an “adequate system of public health centers in conjunction with local health activities,” and providing state help in “subsidizing local health efforts.”²⁹³ Alongside these administrative reforms and generous subsidies, the governor called for “good salaries to get good people.”²⁹⁴

Smith accomplished none of this in his first term. Returning to Albany in 1923, he began again to push this public health program. In February he called a group of physicians and experts to the executive chamber to craft a plan for improving health care in the rural reaches of the state.²⁹⁵ The Conference on Rural Health and Medical Practice found that many of these places lacked adequate services not because of poverty but due to the inaccessibility of existing facilities.²⁹⁶ They recommended against state subsidies for country doctors, calling instead for development of small, centralized rural hospitals to be created by the counties.²⁹⁷ In a message to the legislature on April 11, 1923, the governor summarized the need for rural health reform, declaring, “Sickness is no respecter of geographical location, and tragic conditions prevail in the more sparsely

²⁹³ “Child Welfare,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 2, Folder 31, p. 1.

²⁹⁴ “Report of Governor Smith’s Public Health Program,” p. 1.

²⁹⁵ “Governor Smith’s Record in Relation to Public Health, Medicine and Public Welfare,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 13, Folder 158, p. 3; “Report of Governor Smith’s Public Health Program,” p. 2; “Asks More Rural Doctors,” *The New York Times*, February 14, 1923, p. 4.

²⁹⁶ “Report of Governor Smith’s Public Health Program,” p. 2.

²⁹⁷ “Against A Subsidy for Rural Doctors,” *The New York Times*, March 19, 1923, p. 19.

settled areas of the State where, especially in the winter months, it is difficult for physicians to go.”²⁹⁸ This was in contrast to the city, where citizens, “however poor or unfortunate, [have] hospitals and nursing services at hand and never need experience the suffering that now falls on the lot of some parts of our farm population.”²⁹⁹ Echoing the physicians’ conference, Smith prescribed the establishment of “small community hospitals to serve rural districts where . . . physicians would have the advantages of being able to take care of several patients at a time, and thus avoid the long rides in the winter time over difficult roads to scattered homes.”³⁰⁰ The governor asked counties to establish such hospitals, but promised that the state would match all expenditures “dollar for dollar,” reasoning that “it is sometimes necessary to apply a stimulus to secure local activity.”³⁰¹ The program passed the legislature that spring.³⁰²

The administration’s rural health initiative went beyond stimulating hospital development. By 1925, Smith could also point to an increase in the availability of nurses in rural communities. Through January of that year, \$26,000 had been granted in aid to sixteen counties, and fourteen of those grants went directly to provision of nurses.³⁰³ By 1927 he could claim credit for “twenty-four counties of New York State receiv[ing] a total of \$91,732.00 for aid in providing public health nursing services and other urgently

²⁹⁸ Alfred E. Smith, “Legislative Document No. 87, Message from the Governor relative to Public Health in Rural Districts and Narcotic Drug Evil” (Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon Company, 1923), Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 33, p. 3.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁰¹ Smith, “Legislative Document No. 87,” p. 4; “Smith Asks for Act to Meet Drug Evil,” *The New York Times*, April 12, 1923, p. 4.

³⁰² “Governor Smith Gives Legislative Chart of His Proposals and the Action Taken,” *The New York Times*, May 7, 1923, p. 2.

³⁰³ “Report of Governor Smith’s Public Health Program,” p. 3; “Text of Gov. Smith’s Annual Message to the Legislature Detailing His Policies.” *The New York Times*, January 8, 1925, p. 20.

needed public health activities that would not otherwise have been available to these communities.”³⁰⁴

Also approved in 1923 was Smith’s proposal to extend the Health Department’s laboratory system.³⁰⁵ The rural health bill included state aid for laboratory work undertaken by counties and municipalities, and more generous appropriations continued to be made for state laboratory services.³⁰⁶ By 1925, Smith boasted to the legislature that the Empire State’s facilities were recognized for their “value and efficiency” throughout the world, with 230 visitors, including 25 from foreign nations, coming for weeks at a time to observe the state’s labs in action.³⁰⁷ The following year, funding had been approved for 106 laboratories around the state through this program.³⁰⁸

Perhaps most significantly in 1923, Smith pushed successfully for New York’s participation in the federal Sheppard-Towner maternity education and health program—a reform which had been blocked by Governor Miller.³⁰⁹ Smith credited generous state appropriations for public health, along with participation in Sheppard-Towner, with providing a quick return. “The decrease in the death rate of infants is especially remarkable. For the first ten months of 1924, sixty deaths per 1,000 infants under 1 year of age is much the lowest ever recorded in the State. If we compare it with the average annual death rate of infants for the five-year period of 1917-1921, it would mean that 3,455 infants now living would have died.”³¹⁰ These programs were also effective in promoting maternal welfare, producing a “most gratifying decrease in deaths among

³⁰⁴ “Governor Smith’s Record in Relation to Public Health, Medicine and Public Welfare,” p. 3.

³⁰⁵ “Governor Smith Gives Legislative Chart of His Proposals and the Action Taken,” p. 2.

³⁰⁶ “Full Text of the Annual Message of Governor Smith to the State Legislature,” *The New York Times*, January 3, 1924, p. 10; Smith, “Legislative Document No. 87,” p. 3.

³⁰⁷ “Text of Gov. Smith’s Annual Message to the Legislature Detailing His Policies,” p. 20.

³⁰⁸ “Report of Governor Smith’s Public Health Program,” p. 4.

³⁰⁹ Lemons, “The Sheppard-Towner Act: Progressivism in the 1920s,” p. 782.

³¹⁰ “Text of Gov. Smith’s Annual Message to the Legislature Detailing His Policies,” p. 20.

women from causes directly connected to childbirth” of about forty-five per year since the organization of the Division of Maternity, Infancy, and Child Hygiene in 1921.³¹¹

All three of these major initiatives of 1923—aid to local public health programs, increased funding for laboratories, and participation in Sheppard-Towner—allowed the Smith administration to devote increasing sums to its public health agenda. By 1927, the state was granting counties \$91,000 for public health work, \$80,000 for laboratories, and \$62,000 for maternity programs.³¹² The administration’s lavish spending on public health extended well beyond such aid. In 1917, the State Health Department spent \$732,095; by 1927, that figure stood at \$1,748,477.18.³¹³ The state had created a travelling pre-school children’s health unit which featured two pediatricians, two nurses, a dental hygienist, and a chauffeur; by 1927 this mobile care center was performing 220 clinics in twenty-three counties.³¹⁴ Two obstetrical units, each with an obstetrician and a nurse, travelled the state performing 284 clinics in twenty-two counties in 1927.³¹⁵ Also that year, ninety-two orthopedic clinics had examined 1,935 patients, with five hundred additional exams by the unit’s orthopedic surgeons and over seven thousand home visits by orthopedic nurses.³¹⁶ Meanwhile, a tuberculosis consultation unit comprised of two physicians, one nurse, an x-ray operator, and a chauffeur, travelled to twenty-seven

³¹¹ “Text of Gov. Smith’s Annual Message to the Legislature Detailing His Policies,” p. 20. Smith was rightly pleased with the drop in maternal mortality, but it should be noted that this reduction by 45 deaths per year was from a rate of 1,359, so the decrease was only around 3 percent.

³¹² “State Aid to Counties,” 1927, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 13, Folder 157, pp. 1-2.

³¹³ “Report of Governor Smith’s Public Health Program,” p. 6.

³¹⁴ “State Aid to Counties,” 1927, p. 3.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

counties, performing 132 clinics for 3,249 patients.³¹⁷ Funds for hospital improvements continued to flow, and salaries for state nurses and attendants were raised.³¹⁸

Similarly, the administration was doing more for the state's mentally ill than just constructing new hospital buildings. By the end of 1927, the newly created Department of Mental Hygiene had established outpatient mental health clinics in fifty-nine villages and cities and occasional clinics were held in thirty-three other locations.³¹⁹ Children's mental health clinics, which had previously served as forums to deal with severely disturbed or limited children, had become "child guidance clinics . . . examining and helping all types of problem children."³²⁰ "An active social service" unit was maintained by the department, providing speakers for talks on mental health to parent teacher associations and luncheon clubs.³²¹

Smith argued that the results of this largesse were reflected in the state's health statistics. Vaccinations and children's clinics had led to a reduction in childhood illness; prenatal care translated to lower infant and maternal mortality rates; better facilities and better-paid staff would allow better patient care; preventative mental hygiene promised "far-reaching influence on the character and mental health of these cases."³²² The governor could cite specific instances of success. The state had initiated a major campaign against diphtheria, and by 1926 the number of deaths from that disease had

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³¹⁸ "Report of Governor Smith's Public Health Program," p. 6.

³¹⁹ "Report of the Department of Mental Hygiene for the Calendar Year, 1927," Alfred E. Smith Correspondences, New York State Archives, Albany, NY (hereafter Alfred E. Smith Correspondences), Reel 45, p. 16.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³²² "Report of the Governor's Public Health Program," p. 6; "Report of the Department of Mental Hygiene for the Calendar Year, 1927," p. 16.

fallen below 700—an all-time low from the high of 6,500 in 1888.³²³ Scarlet fever had “almost ceased to be a factor in childhood mortality,” while tuberculosis had fallen to a record low, halved from the number of cases two decades earlier.³²⁴ Within three years of commencing participation in the Sheppard-Towner program, maternal mortality rates reached an all-time low in 1926, beginning to parallel the fantastic successes in infant health noted in previous years.³²⁵

“Public health is purchasable,” was the favorite saying of Dr. Hermann M. Biggs, who served as New York State health commissioner in the early years of the Smith administration, until his death in the summer of 1923.³²⁶ In a 1911 editorial for the monthly bulletin of the New York City Health Department, Biggs had explained this belief:

Disease is a largely removable evil. It continues to afflict humanity, not only because of incomplete knowledge of its causes and lack of individual and public hygiene, but also because it is extensively fostered by harsh economic and industrial conditions and by wretched housing in congested communities. These conditions and consequently the disease[s] which spring from them can be removed by better social organization. No duty of society, acting through its government agencies, is paramount to this obligation to attack the removable cause[s] of disease. . . . the provision of more and better facilities for the protection of the public health must come in the last analysis through the education of public opinion so that the community shall vividly realize both its needs and its powers. . . . The reduction of the death rate is the principal statistical expression and index of human and social progress. It means the saving and lengthening of the lives of thousands of citizens, the extension of the vigorous working period into old age, and the prevention of inefficiency, misery, and suffering. These advances can be made by organized social reform. Public health is purchasable.³²⁷

³²³ “Full Text of Governor Smith’s Message to the Legislature, Setting Forth His Policies,” *The New York Times*, January 6, 1927, p. 22.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³²⁶ “Biggs Seeks Funds for 25,000 Lives,” *The New York Times*, March 15, 1915, p. 10.

³²⁷ Harvard University [Web site], “The Public Health Disparities Geocoding Project Monograph: ‘Introduction,’” Site Address:

<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/thegeocodingproject/webpage/monograph/introduction.htm>.

Al Smith was fond of Biggs' saw, to the extent that he quoted it in his annual message to the legislature in 1925, 1926, and 1927, and included it in policy speeches long after his tenure as governor had concluded.³²⁸ Smith believed whole-heartedly that public health, within natural limits, was indeed purchasable, as reflected not only in his rhetoric but also his policies. Public health spending more than doubled in the Smith years, and spending on new facilities reached unprecedented levels through unprecedented means. In 1925, as his program began to gain momentum, Smith alluded to the former commissioner and the enduring credibility of his ideas: "the late Dr. Biggs, was noted for his statement that public health is purchasable. I believe we have demonstrated it."³²⁹

Public Education

Al Smith himself was not well educated, having been forced to withdraw from school after the eighth grade to support his family following the death of his father. He often noted this when arguing for expanded—indeed universal—educational opportunity in New York, explaining that as a result of this deprivation, "no one would have a better appreciation of the value of education than I have."³³⁰ This, he claimed, was the reason that he had "struggled all during my public career to put the State in the strongest position in which it could possibly be placed to extend the full benefits of education to all the

³²⁸ "Text of Gov. Smith's Annual Message to the Legislature Detailing His Policies," p. 20; "Complete Text of Annual Message Read by Gov. Smith to the Legislature," *The New York Times*, January 7, 1926, p. 10; "Full Text of Governor Smith's Message to the Legislature, Setting Forth His Policies," p. 22; "Smith Urges Clinics to Insure Health," *The New York Times*, October 17, 1931, p. 1.

³²⁹ "Text of Gov. Smith's Annual Message to the Legislature Detailing His Policies," p. 20.

³³⁰ "Smith Tells Work For State Schools," *The New York Times*, October 21, 1926, pp. 1, 3; p. 3.

children of the State.”³³¹ Additionally, Smith saw high quality education as central to the democratic project, and key to the political, economic, and social success both of the individual and the community.³³² Thus, like much of his program, Smith’s attitude toward public education was informed by a strong belief that the state had a fundamental responsibility to provide its citizens with the security and tools necessary to lead successful and dignified lives in modern society; public education was part of Smith’s broad vision of a robust welfare state, a reflection of his progressive temperament.

I

When Smith assumed the governorship in 1919, public education in New York was in utter disrepair. Increasing numbers of vacant teaching positions left classrooms unstaffed in the cities, while an archaic adherence to a community-based system of one-room schoolhouses left the countryside with inadequate facilities and outdated curricula. Smith’s inaugural address made it clear that the new administration would make public schools a top priority. “The industrial efficiency, the economic soundness, and the civic righteousness of the State very largely depend upon our educational system,” warned the governor.³³³ Accordingly, “it should be the objective of the State that no person who can be brought under our influence, should be without ability to read and write, or without a clear conception of our American institutions and ideals.”³³⁴ To achieve such lofty goals,

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² “Full Text of the Annual Message of Governor Smith to the State Legislature,” *The New York Times*, January 3, 1924, p. 10.

³³³ “Governor Smith Takes Office Amid Crowds’ Acclaim,” *The New York Times*, January 2, 1919, pp. 1, 4, p. 4.

³³⁴ “Governor Smith’s Views In Regard to Education,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 5, Folder 65, p. 1.

Smith was willing to spend prodigally. “I strongly recommend that whatever curtailment may be necessary elsewhere, full and adequate provision be made for the education and training of our children.”³³⁵

The first front in Smith’s battle to modernize education in the Empire State was New York City. Across the metropolis, hundreds of classes went without teachers. A *New York Times* exposé revealed on the day of its city-wide investigation 1,178 classes forced either to “double-up” with other classes or to be taught by substitutes.³³⁶ Worse, “32,097 students were deprived of the benefit even of these expedients and had no instruction. On another day the number rose to 50,000.”³³⁷ This appallingly inadequate staffing was blamed on the poor salaries offered to educators in the city. “The situation . . . in New York . . . is acute. The number of new applicants for teachers’ positions falls far short of the demand. Those who do apply are of inferior quality, and the best of those who are already in the system are leaving it for better paying jobs in the business world.”³³⁸

From 1900 to 1919, teachers’ salaries increased a meager 11 percent, and principals saw no increase. From 1908 to 1918, the number of pupils in New York City schools rose by twenty-five thousand, while the number of applicants for teaching positions fell 47 percent. And of those who did apply, the number rejected as unqualified increased from more than 25 percent in 1908 to more than 31 percent in 1918. Further,

³³⁵ “Governor Smith Takes Office Amid Crowds’ Acclaim,” p. 4.

³³⁶ “School Teachers And Small Pay,” *The New York Times*, March 2, 1919, p. 41.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

of those who applied and were accepted, an increasing number opted to forgo service in the schools—9 percent declined positions in 1915; nearly a quarter declined in 1918.³³⁹

Although the situation in New York City had become critical by the time Smith assumed office in 1919, not all parties favored increased salaries for teachers. Strong opposition came from the city's real estate interests, who opposed any tax increase to provide for higher pay. Salaries were said to be "adequate" by United Real Estate Owners' Association spokesman Dr. Henry Bird, who contended that "the increased rent which a teacher will have to pay will absorb the increase in salary she may get under this bill."³⁴⁰ Indeed, it was due to such concerns that Mayor John F. Hylan had blocked a bill to amend the City Charter to raise teachers' salaries in New York City alone: "If this bill to raise salaries indiscriminately becomes a law, it will pile from ten to twenty million dollars a year on the already heavy tax burden which is now carried by the rent payers."³⁴¹

The alternative to a bill that would ostensibly have overburdened New York City's tax base was a bill to increase teachers' salaries state-wide with a significant contribution from the state toward pay raises in each jurisdiction. This second bill called for a state appropriation of \$3.5 million for this purpose; nevertheless, it would still require a contribution from the city treasury of \$15 million over three years.³⁴² Because this bill dealt with the entire state, Hylan had no say in the matter, and the measure was signed into law by Governor Smith on May 19, 1919.³⁴³ The state contribution did nothing to assuage the fears of anti-tax groups, and Smith's approval of the bill provoked

³³⁹ Ibid., p. 41.

³⁴⁰ "Teachers Fight for Salary Increase," *The New York Times*, May 9, 1919, p. 14.

³⁴¹ "Vetoes Bill To Give Teachers More Pay," *The New York Times*, May 8, 1919, p. 18.

³⁴² "Governor Signs Teachers' Bill," *The New York Times*, May 20, 1919, p. 22.

³⁴³ Ibid., p. 22.

“open warfare” between the mayor and the governor, with the former continuing to cite pecuniary concerns in his increasingly hostile denunciations of the latter.³⁴⁴ To Smith, however, investment in education, even if it meant increasing the tax burden, was socially necessary money well spent: “If we can stand \$150,000,000 for a canal and \$100,000,000 for good roads, we certainly ought to be able to spend money for education, without which neither canal nor roads would be worth a quarter.”³⁴⁵

Given the choice between immediate fiscal prudence and long-term social benefit, Smith chose to spend. In the process, he aggrandized the role of the state in local education, a move that would presage his administration’s approach to rural schools (and countless other outlets of social welfare, broadly defined) in the years to come. Meanwhile, in a little less than six months in office, Smith had helped push bills to increase inadequate salaries, provide equal pay for female teachers, and fight adult illiteracy across the state.³⁴⁶ During the school year in which Smith took office, state contributions in aid of localities for public schools stood at \$7,424,440; at the end of his first term, that figure was \$33,856,117—an almost five-fold increase.³⁴⁷ As Smith began his second term in 1923, the *New York Times* reflected with satisfaction on this development, editorializing that it had “made possible the increase of teachers’ salaries throughout the State at a time when the higher cost of living made the old salaries shamefully low.”³⁴⁸ Higher salaries would attract more applicants, the *Times* opined, and lead to adequate staffing. Upon signing the pay bill, Smith optimistically boasted that

³⁴⁴ “See Hylan Hostile Now To Gov. Smith,” *The New York Times*, May 21, 1919, p. 15. It should be noted that Hylan was a strong ally of William Randolph Hearst. Due to the long-standing antipathy between his patron and the governor, his opposition to Smith on this single question ought not to be taken at face value.

³⁴⁵ “Teachers Hear Governor,” *The New York Times*, June 1, 1920, p. 20.

³⁴⁶ “Governor Smith’s Views on Education,” p. 2.

³⁴⁷ Alfred E. Smith, “Ten Years of Educational Progress,” in Moskowitz, ed., *Progressive Democracy: Addresses and State Papers of Alfred E. Smith*, pp. 360-369, p. 361.

³⁴⁸ “Public Education in New York,” *The New York Times*, January 5, 1923, p. 10.

“the vacancies in teaching staffs will be filled because of the raised salaries.”³⁴⁹ The following year, with Smith’s “urgent support,” the legislature mandated a minimum salary for teachers within the state’s several jurisdictions, and buttressed this decree with an appropriation of over \$20 million.³⁵⁰

II

The salary increase passed in the spring of 1920 would be Smith’s last major achievement in education policy during his first term. However, prior to his defeat in that year’s election, Smith had overseen the appointment of a “Committee of Twenty-One” to investigate the problems of public education in the rural sections of New York. While the group’s endeavors quickly became a point of controversy between educators and agrarian organizations, with time the two sides were able to come “together in united effort to promote such legislation as would assure the country child educational advantages in every corner of the State.”³⁵¹ In late 1922 the committee published its findings, and they became widely available in early 1923, just as Smith was restored to the governorship. The debate over rural schooling that followed unveiled the most egregious failures of public education in New York, demonstrated the sharp contrasts between Al Smith’s beliefs about government spending and those of his conservative opponents, and provided a forum whereby the governor’s ideas about the positive role of government in promoting the public welfare could be applied in creative ways upon unfamiliar territory.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ “The State and the Schools,” *The New York Times*, January 18, 1923, p. 14.

³⁵¹ “The Committee of Twenty-One,” *The New York Times*, January 24, 1923, p. 14.

Throughout the Progressive Era, academics, activists, and social workers turned new weapons such as the social survey and the neighborhood study upon the perils of an unfamiliar urban industrial order. This work exposed the misery of the cities and provided a foundation upon which reformers—especially female social work progressives—would construct the first rudiments of a welfare state.³⁵² Smith had of course been exposed to these progressives as a state legislator and had enlisted their service as governor; in general however, these past experiences had focused on the problems of the industrial city.³⁵³ Having learned the value of such methods, Smith now applied similar tactics to the countryside, focusing on rural education. Under this professional scrutiny, the venerable “little red schoolhouse” began to appear dangerously anachronistic.

In 1812, the New York State Legislature created the district system of public schools.³⁵⁴ Under this system, each locality was the administrative unit for its own schools, and each of these units was responsible for funding its schools through local taxation.³⁵⁵ This system survived over a century in the Empire State, so that by the time Al Smith began his second term as governor in 1923, there existed “more than eight thousand single room schools.”³⁵⁶ Of these, 3,600 had an average daily attendance of ten or less, 400 had five or less, and 15 schools operated for the benefit of a single pupil.³⁵⁷ It seemed to many observers that under the current system there was “no possibility of

³⁵² See Muncy, *Creating A Female Dominion in American Reform*; Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nation's Work*; Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled*; Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*; Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1992).

³⁵³ On Smith's interaction with female reformers as a legislator, see Smith, *Up to Now*, p. 91; Martin *Madam Secretary*, pp. 76-90.

³⁵⁴ The Joint Committee on Rural Schools, George A. Works, Chairman, *Rural Schools Survey of New York State: A Report to the Rural School Patrons* (Ithaca, NY: Joint Committee on Rural Schools, 1922), p. 23.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³⁵⁶ “Public Education in New York,” p. 10.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

giving these marooned pupils such educational advantages as city or village children have, without inordinate expense.”³⁵⁸

Aside from the fiscal extravagance involved in running a local school for the profit of a single child, the committee of twenty-one (officially called the Joint Committee on Rural Schools), under the chairmanship of George A. Works of the State College of Agriculture, found numerous deficiencies in the district system. “Undoubtedly the most serious handicap that the rural child encounters in his education,” stated the group’s report, “is to be found in the teaching personnel of the rural schools.”³⁵⁹ Rural teachers were found to be “more immature, far more inexperienced, less well educated, less well prepared professionally for their work, and very much less well supervised than . . . city teachers as a group.”³⁶⁰ The median age of a teacher in a one-room schoolhouse was 23.7, the median service time was four years, and 22 percent of these teachers were in their first year on the job.³⁶¹ “Mature teachers,” concluded the report, likely eschewed careers in one- and two-room schoolhouses because of the “professional isolation” involved in such assignments.³⁶² Furthermore, these country teachers were not only inexperienced, they were largely untrained. A “negligible” number of rural schoolteachers had attended college, and college graduates accounted for “less than one-third of 1 percent of the rural school personnel”; a less negligible number—10 percent of all rural school teachers—had received no schooling beyond the elementary level.³⁶³ By way of comparison, 80 percent and 62 percent of teachers in

³⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 10.

³⁵⁹ Works et al., *Rural Schools Survey of New York State*, p. 37.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 37.

³⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 42, 44.

³⁶² Ibid., p. 43.

³⁶³ Ibid., pp. 51-52.

New York cities of the third and second class, respectively, had attended at least two years at a normal school.³⁶⁴

Rural high schools were a point of particular embarrassment for the state, where “the percentage of pupils reaching the third and fourth years [was] considerably lower than that for the rural high schools of the United States as a whole.”³⁶⁵ The average rural high school teacher was found “young and inexperienced.”³⁶⁶ In all but the largest of these schools, the principal was “regarded primarily as a class-room instructor,” with his administrative capacity “indefinite and vague,” and often not recognized by other teachers.³⁶⁷ This lack of an executive resulted in administrative anarchy; obstructing adjustments in the teaching load, leaving “insufficient attention . . . to the organization of the school,” and hampering professional conferences of educators.³⁶⁸

Moreover, rural high schools lacked modern facilities. Some 80 percent had no gymnasium; 75 percent lacked an auditorium.³⁶⁹ Laboratories and libraries were found “inadequate for the work of the high school of to-day.”³⁷⁰ Finally, there was a general lack of appreciation for the educational value of extracurricular activities such as music, sports, and drama.³⁷¹

While a gymnasium or an auditorium for the local high school might be dismissed as extravagancies by proponents of an austere but frugal vision of the rural school, some deficiencies of the physical plant could not be excused. This was particularly problematic in the one- and two-teacher schools. The committee found that “the typical

³⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 52.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 87.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 95.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 90.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 91.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 93.

³⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 93.

³⁷¹ Ibid., p. 102.

school does not have enough window area to give sufficient light.”³⁷² Heating systems were ineffective and inefficient.³⁷³ Among one- and two-teacher schools, 74 percent had no water system and were dependent on a neighbor’s well; while the majority of these arrangements were found to be sanitary and within a reasonable proximity of the school, a full quarter were not.³⁷⁴ Only 10 percent of the schools had adequate first aid supplies.³⁷⁵ A third lacked a satisfactory blackboard.³⁷⁶ Almost two-thirds of the one-teacher schools had outdoor bathroom facilities, and of these, only 25 percent were well-ventilated, only 30 percent were well-lit, and a full 42 percent did not offer students “sufficient seclusion.”³⁷⁷ In general, the study found that all of these conditions were worst in the one-teacher schools, and improved relative to the size of the faculty.³⁷⁸

It was not merely these spartan conditions which were offensive to the sensibilities of modern observers. Obsolete facilities coalesced with a feeble faculty and administrative chaos to condemn rural students to academic disadvantage. In the elementary years, students at one- and two-teacher schools read a full grade level behind the average, with students at larger rural elementary schools faring about a half-grade better.³⁷⁹ Among high school students, 27 percent were unable to read accurately from the prose of standard English writers, half did not know the meaning of words like “patriarch,” “dexterity,” and “intrigue,” and a quarter misidentified words like “obstacles,” “nocturnal,” and “spherical.”³⁸⁰ In American History, rural eighth-graders

³⁷² Ibid., p. 129.

³⁷³ Ibid., p. 131.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 132.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 134.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 136.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 138.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 141-142.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 157.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 154.

scored well below urban students.³⁸¹ New York's larger rural elementary schools fared slightly better in arithmetic, where they out-paced schools in Pittsburgh and Denver; nevertheless, they fell uniformly below modern standards.³⁸² Rural students also fell well below state standards in Latin, a failure that, in the 1920s, would have significantly hindered any collegiate aspirations of the country child.³⁸³ In all subjects, rural students at one- and two-teacher elementary and high schools scored significantly lower than rural students attending larger schools.³⁸⁴

The *Rural School Survey* made sweeping recommendations, including consideration of district consolidation by the current administrative units, local studies of school buildings and grounds to elucidate for the community the urgency of present conditions, clarification of standards for school buildings, dramatically heightened qualifications for acceptance into the teaching corps, provision for the training of more qualified educators, universal availability of four-year high schools, revision of high school curricula, and greater attention to extra-curricular activities.³⁸⁵ Significantly, the study concluded that "many communities have so little wealth that, unaided, it is practically impossible for them to make all the changes . . . desired. Where this is true the state should give financial assistance. This is only a matter of fairness."³⁸⁶

Calls for reform began as the committee's findings were made public in 1923, and in 1924 these demands became increasingly intense. The condition of rural schools became a state-wide issue, with editorialists in New York demanding that legislators in

³⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 160-161.

³⁸² Ibid., p. 163.

³⁸³ Ibid., p. 166.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 152, 153, 155, 157, 158, 161, 167-168.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 13-16, 19, 21, 22.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 145.

Albany heed the prescriptions of experts in Ithaca.³⁸⁷ During the 1923 legislative session, a bill to institute many of the reforms called for by the *Report* gained some traction but failed to escape the state assembly.³⁸⁸ In 1924, as Smith pushed again for a rural schools bill, parents and educators began to lobby the legislature on behalf of reform.³⁸⁹ “The trouble with the little red schoolhouse in my district is that the paint is all off,” Mrs. Willis G. Mitchell told assembly speaker Edmund Machold; “I have visited between thirty and forty rural schools in my country and found them in deplorable condition.”³⁹⁰

Governor Smith lent his considerable persuasive abilities to the cause. He insisted that “the people who don’t care to have schools any better today than the ones they themselves attended certainly cannot be credited with a great deal of interest in their children.”³⁹¹ In his annual message to the legislature on January 2, 1924, the governor denounced those who had worked to obstruct rural school reform “upon the ground that the rural schools are well enough as they are and that they should be let alone,” stating unambiguously that “this type of opposition is not entitled to consideration.”³⁹² During the course of the debate over the expense of the program, Smith was cavalier in his insistence on the importance of fully funding education: “Whatever other public function may have to bow to political expediency, education should never be compelled to do so. It must be maintained 100 per cent. efficient.”³⁹³ Furthermore, the governor laid responsibility for any delay in reform squarely upon his legislative rivals, the rural Republicans who dominated the state assembly:

³⁸⁷ “The Committee of Twenty-One,” p. 14.

³⁸⁸ “Women Urge Passage of Rural School Bill,” *The New York Times*, April 2, 1924, p. 21.

³⁸⁹ “To Aid Little Red School,” *The New York Times*, March 31, 1924, p. 18; “Women Urge Passage of Rural School Bill,” p. 21.

³⁹⁰ “To Aid Little Red School,” p. 18.

³⁹¹ “Governor Recalls Schoolboy Days,” *The New York Times*, March 6, 1924, p. 3.

³⁹² “Full Text of the Annual Message of Governor Smith to the State Legislature,” p. 10.

³⁹³ “Women Urge Passage of Rural School Bill,” p. 21.

The Democratic majority in the Senate . . . passed this bill last year and I believe they are ready to do so again this year. The question remaining, therefore, is whether or not representatives of sections of the State where our children are not getting the full benefits of our educational system are ready to come to their rescue and extend the relief this bill calls for and which, in the opinion of our educational authorities, is necessary.³⁹⁴

After the Republican majority in the state assembly again derailed reform legislation, Smith made the proposals for rural schools an important issue in his 1924 reelection bid. As he formally opened his campaign at Schenectady on October 4, the governor cited both his record of “increasing the state’s contribution to education . . . by more than \$36,000,000,” and the need for further reform.³⁹⁵ At a luncheon of Democratic women’s organizations in New York in late October, Smith decried the status quo, declaring that “the state of New York is not giving to the children in the country parts of the State the same opportunity for an education that we are giving to the children in the cities.”³⁹⁶ The governor gained applause when he warned that “if we are going to keep our people in the country sections,” the state must endeavor to make rural life “attractive to them from the standpoint of giving them an opportunity to give their children an education.”³⁹⁷ The incumbent also used the issue to lampoon his opponent, Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., for his lack of familiarity with the subject.³⁹⁸ Smith even spent time on the question of rural schools at an election-eve rally at Carnegie Hall with Democratic

³⁹⁴ “Women Urge Passage of Rural School Bill,” p. 21.

³⁹⁵ Alfred E. Smith, “Speech of Acceptance,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 27, Folder 274, p. 4.

³⁹⁶ Alfred E. Smith, “Campaign Luncheon Democratic Women’s Organizations of Greater New York, Hotel Commodore, Saturday, October 25, 1924,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 27, Folder 274, p. 4.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁹⁸ “Democratic Women Give Luncheon Here,” *The New York Times*, October 26, 1924, p. 5.

presidential nominee John W. Davis, a forum that focused upon national issues and only allowed the governor to highlight his foremost state-level priorities.³⁹⁹

Returning to Albany the following year (by which time there were three thousand school districts in New York that had either no school or an average daily attendance of fewer than ten students), Smith again pursued rural school reform, calling for larger administrative and tax units and for more generous state aid to local schools.⁴⁰⁰ In his third attempt, the governor was able to achieve these goals with the Central Rural School Act of 1925.⁴⁰¹ Significantly, the bill was designed to be “entirely permissive in character,” allowing localities to consolidate and opt in to the state program—mollifying some cantankerous country legislators, and simultaneously “challeng[ing] the local initiative of the community,” much like the *Rural School Survey* had recommended.⁴⁰² In 1927, as some rural districts began to coalesce into central school districts, the University of the State of New York further aided this movement by formally interpreting the 1925 rural school bill and identifying some key aspects of the consolidation process. Consolidated districts should “consist of a group of existing districts around a natural and logical center,” and they “must possess resources in population and taxation sufficient to insure well-organized graded instruction in both elementary and high school subjects.”⁴⁰³ Consolidated districts were also obliged to provide “transportation of a standard satisfactory to the Commissioner of Education.”⁴⁰⁴ Reflecting a sustained sensitivity for

³⁹⁹ Alfred E. Smith, “Speech at Carnegie Hall, November 2, 1924,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 27, Folder 274, p. 7; “Davis and Smith, Closing Campaign, Cheered by Throng,” *The New York Times*, November 2, 1924, pp. 1, 16, p. 16.

⁴⁰⁰ “Rural Schools Again,” *The New York Times*, January 9, 1925, p. 16.

⁴⁰¹ Smith, “Ten Years of Educational Progress,” p. 365.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 365; Works, et al, *Rural School Survey of New York State*, pp. 14-15, 21.

⁴⁰³ “University of the State of New York Bulletin; Central Rural Schools,” August 15, 1927, Albany, NY, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 5, Folder 66, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

local autonomy, it was further recommended that district superintendents file petitions showing “the attitude of the legal voters in the common school districts relative to the establishment of the proposed central district.”⁴⁰⁵

This last point is important, because the voluntary feature of the consolidation bill made local opinion relevant to the success of any central school district proposal. Many rural voters looked upon the new scheme with skepticism, often fearing that burdensome property taxes would be the immediate result. However, with the success of some central districts, many farmers saw their tax bills decrease (partially because the new system was more efficient, and partially due to significant state aid). Furthermore, the improvement in educational facilities and opportunities was so drastic that, for many farmers, the results of consolidation spoke for themselves.

This process of waning skepticism and waxing enthusiasm played out in a letter written to Bureau of Rural Education chief Ray P. Snyder by L. H. McCluen, a self-described “dirt farmer” from Trumansburg:

My school taxes before centralization were \$7.50 per thousand valuation. I believed that in case of centralization my taxes would be more than doubled, that they would be so high that I could not afford to pay them. In fact when I was told that a \$225,000 school building could be erected and equipped and run without a material increase in my taxes I thought those who said it were fit subjects for Willard Asylum. Our central school has now been running five years. . . . Our tax rate has averaged a little over eight dollars per thousand. It is five dollars on the assessed valuation this year and I doubt that it will ever be over five dollars per thousand on the real value.⁴⁰⁶

Indeed, farmer McCluen’s initial concern about the potential tax burden threatened by the new school plan was supplanted by elation over the many benefits derived from the change by local youths:

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴⁰⁶ L. H. McCluen to Ray P. Snyder, October 8, 1930, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 5, Folder 66.

After five years of experience, during which time I have made a careful study of the question, I am fully convinced that the central rural school is a great improvement over the old type of school for our country boys and girls. Through transportation the school is brought to our very doors. Our children are getting the same privileges and opportunities in music, drawing, physical training, vocational training and social training as the village boys and girls and at no increase in cost and they are home at night.⁴⁰⁷

McCluen concluded that “any farmer who opposes central rural schools is opposing his best interests.”⁴⁰⁸

By 1928, “about forty of these large central districts [had] already been formed.”⁴⁰⁹ In December of that year, the University of the State of New York, the State Department of Education, and the Rural Education Bureau hosted the First Conference of Central District Boards of Education. When J. Cayce Morrison, assistant commissioner for elementary education, asked the 130 rural educators assembled at Syracuse’s Onondaga Hotel, “What do you have in the way of educational facilities that you did not have in that same district before the central district was formed?” the meeting transformed into something of a pep rally for the new system, with each locality announcing with justifiable pride its recent achievements.⁴¹⁰ Adams Center now offered four years of high school instead of three; Forestport now offered four instead of two; West Leyden and Hague both offered four instead of none.⁴¹¹ Richburg now had a staff of fifteen instead of six; Pine Island had a staff of eight instead of one.⁴¹² Chappaqua had constructed a \$360,000 school building, boasting stone construction, an auditorium, and a

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Smith, “Ten Years of Educational Progress,” p. 365.

⁴¹⁰ The University of the State of New York, The State Department of Education, and the Rural Education Bureau, “First Conference Central District Boards of Education,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 5, Folder 66, p. 5.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., pp. 5, 6.

⁴¹² Ibid., p. 6.

gymnasium.⁴¹³ Along with Brockport, Chappaqua had also added a school nurse, and the former had developed a “homemaking department.”⁴¹⁴ Hamilton, Buchanan, and Adams Center all offered their students transportation for the first time.⁴¹⁵ Shrub Oak had added an auditorium and a gymnasium, as well as a “fine cafeteria.”⁴¹⁶ Schroon Lake now boasted a high school orchestra, and Trumansburg had organized a soccer team and a track team.⁴¹⁷ Georgetown anticipated the completion of its new gymnasium, a particularly exciting prospect for a town where “no boy has ever before had room enough to play a good game of basketball.”⁴¹⁸ North Rose had established “a little school paper which is something new and of which we are very proud.”⁴¹⁹ Two years later, at the second such conference, again at Syracuse and now with 275 educators present, the hosannas were amplified, with towns like Trumansburg, New Lebanon, and Sharon Springs announcing new construction; Hamilton, Milford, and Gilboa bragging of their new music programs; and Newark Valley suggesting that since consolidation, “farms are selling better.”⁴²⁰ During the proceedings one delegate inquired, “Are there any representatives here who are sorry they centralized?” After a few seconds of silence, the room broke into applause, and a second delegate concluded, “Then we all seem to be of one mind.”⁴²¹

⁴¹³ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 5, 6.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 7, 9.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 7, 9.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴²⁰ The University of the State of New York, The State Department of Education, and the Rural Education Bureau, “Second Conference Central District Boards of Education,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 5, Folder 66, pp. 9-12. Notably, one of the representatives from Trumansburg at this conference was the aforementioned L. H. McCluen, who had joined that district’s Board of Education.

⁴²¹ Ibid., pp. 13-14.

The accolades for the new central school districts of rural New York were not confined to the Empire State. In 1930, five years after the initiation of consolidation, the periodical *Farmer's Wife* made a study of the central school district in Lewis. The article noted that the district had added “better teachers,” library books, and improved buildings—some of which had enjoyed “more repairs . . . in one year than in twenty years previous.”⁴²² The most significant change the magazine found in Lewis was the provision of a high school. “Formerly there was none and any farm boy or girl who wanted more than an eighth grade education had to go to Boonville, an average distance of fifteen miles away, live there most of the week, pay tuition and board, and make long trips to and from home every week-end. It was so discouraging that only one in twenty children ever went to high school.”⁴²³ But with the introduction of a central district high school with transportation, “fifteen in twenty children go.”⁴²⁴ At the new school, “the teachers are all college graduates,” and the students had the benefit of “well-lighted, well-equipped class rooms and laboratories,” an auditorium, and a gymnasium.⁴²⁵ Children in Lewis were now “getting as good an education as that offered in most small cities.”⁴²⁶

Farmer's Wife concluded that “all the advantages which have resulted from the central school plan . . . are possible because of two developments. One is the change from the small school district to a larger unit of administration The other is state support.”⁴²⁷ Further, “what farmers in the Lewis district have done, others in South Carolina, South Dakota, South Fork Township, Missouri, or anywhere else could do if

⁴²² Carrol P. Streeter, “How New York Communities are Getting a Square Deal for Rural Schools,” *Farmer's Wife*, February, 1930, pp. 2-4, p. 2.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

they had a similar plan.”⁴²⁸ In an accompanying editorial, the publication suggested that “the New York plan is deserving of careful study by our FARMER’S WIFE readers.”⁴²⁹

Smith’s achievements in rural education demonstrated to his agrarian supporters that his social welfare vision was not confined to the five boroughs. Smith made no excuse for his urban heritage, joking that “they don’t raise many crops on the ‘sidewalks of New York’”; but he applied to the country the same fundamental principle that he held for the city: a willingness to employ the power of the state expansively in order to ensure human welfare.⁴³⁰ As governor, Al Smith believed that the state government could be a positive force for social welfare, particularly where the modern order had wrought what he saw as poverty, humiliation, and chaos. This belief did not apply exclusively to the huddled masses of immigrant laborers in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Rochester, and Buffalo; it also applied to the thousands of farmers across the Empire State—and, as *American Agriculturalist* publisher and future secretary of the treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr., suggested, Smith’s devotion to these principles in the rural context was demonstrated in state aid to farmers, cooperative dairy marketing initiatives, proposals for provision of cheap hydroelectric power, development of rural health care facilities, and aid to rural schools. Reviewing this record, Morgenthau aphoristically summarized Smith’s executive philosophy: “a penurious program is an obstacle to progress.”⁴³¹

⁴²⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

⁴²⁹ “Editorial: The Rural School Problem,” *Farmer’s Wife*, February, 1930, p. 1.

⁴³⁰ Henry Morgenthau, Jr., “Gov. Smith has Aided the New York Farmer,” *The New York Times*, July 22, 1928, p. 114.

⁴³¹ Ibid., p. 114.

III

If the battle to use state funds to raise teachers' salaries marked the opening act of Smith's education policy, and his initiatives on rural school reform its climax, the fight to appropriate generously for the advancement of education was the dramatic conclusion to this aspect of his gubernatorial regime. Built upon the recommendations of another executive commission, and codified through controversial legislation, the *coup de grâce* for the ancient, miserly approach to public education in New York State was delivered by Smith during his fourth term in the governor's mansion.

In his 1924 message to the legislature, Smith articulated his basic attitude toward public education: "The stability of the State and its institutions depends upon the enlightenment of its people, and this can only be attained by the effective maintenance of a system of public schools in which all the children of the State may receive educational opportunity."⁴³² This vision of democratic citizenship was to be buttressed through generous appropriations: "however great the cost and burdensome the tax We must be liberal in our treatment of the public schools."⁴³³ However, circumstances were such that "the cost of maintaining our public schools is, like the cost of everything else, increasing greatly."⁴³⁴ This was creating a fiscal nightmare for the many local units of administration, including the anachronistically localized rural districts, but also including "the several cities" of the state—for example, by the mid-1920s, Buffalo faced a deficit of \$7 million, and Rochester faced a \$1.5 million shortfall, each precipitated by school

⁴³² "Full Text of the Annual Message of Governor Smith to the State Legislature," p. 10.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

expenses.⁴³⁵ Smith's initial response was twofold: he demanded that the state "cannot . . . withhold its full support" of the local districts, and he committed to initiating "a study of the problem of financing of city public schools" which he would then submit to municipal governments and state educational authorities.⁴³⁶

The political battles over rural schools dominated education-related legislation in the 1924 and 1925 legislative sessions. However, in October of 1925 Governor Smith called for a conference "to discuss sources of taxation and problems of financing education in [the] large cities of [the] State dealt with in [his] message to [the] 1924 Legislature."⁴³⁷ On November 6, that conference was held in the executive chamber at Albany, producing a resolution for the governor to appoint a "Commission of Fifteen" charged with studying financing and administration of public education in the cities, cooperating with appropriate legislative committees, and reporting to the governor.⁴³⁸

During the 1926 legislative session, the commission, headed by Colonel Michael Friedsam (and thus known as the "Friedsam Commission") made its report, concluding that local funds could not "provide the necessary revenues for maintaining the public schools," and that as such, "the main reliance for their support must rest in the State."⁴³⁹ The commission admonished the state to raise its contribution to local schools from the \$54 million budgeted for fiscal year 1926 to a more robust \$89 million by fiscal year 1929.⁴⁴⁰ Moreover, it rather audaciously counseled the state to pay for this largesse through increased inheritance taxes, a tax on gasoline, a tax on unincorporated

⁴³⁵ "Favors Income Tax to Pay School Costs," *The New York Times*, April 8, 1926, pp. 1, 5, p. 1.

⁴³⁶ "Full Text of the Annual Message of Governor Smith to the State Legislature," p. 10.

⁴³⁷ "Governor Smith's Views In Regard to Education," p. 5.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴³⁹ "Favors Income Tax to Pay School Costs," p. 1.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

businesses, increased franchise taxes on corporations, or an increase in the personal income tax.⁴⁴¹ While the commission's conclusions were bold and controversial, Smith embraced the report unequivocally, stating in a press release: "I recommend the adoption of the legislation it suggests at this Session."⁴⁴² Smith's hearty endorsement of the commission's proposals ("the report . . . will for many years be a standard of guidance for Legislative action on educational finance and administration"), as well as the vigorous support of state education officials, was not enough to overcome the skepticism of the Republican legislature, and the measures failed to pass the assembly in 1926.⁴⁴³

The defeat of the Friedsam legislation in 1926 did not spell doom for the commission's proposals. Rural school reforms had of course failed twice prior to the 1924 gubernatorial election, during which Smith made the question a campaign issue, painted his opponents as obstructionists and reactionaries, won a decisive reelection, and attained his legislative druthers in the succeeding assembly. The same general pattern emerged for the finance bills, which failed in the spring of 1926, on the eve of Smith's final campaign for governor.

During a major speech at Utica on October 20, 1926, Al Smith, campaigning for an historic fourth term as governor of the nation's most populous and powerful state, boasted of his record of lavish financing for education.⁴⁴⁴ But Smith, "not entirely satisfied" with legislative allotments to the localities for schools, maintained that the

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴⁴² "To The Legislature (For Immediate Release)," April 4, 1926, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 46, Folder 492, p. 2.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 2; "School Officials Back Finance Bills," *The New York Times*, April 14, 1926, p. 2; "State Must Defer Further School Aid," *The New York Times*, April 11, 1926, p. 25; "Governor Smith's Views In Regard to Education," p. 5.

⁴⁴⁴ Alfred E. Smith, "Speech at Utica," October 20, 1926, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 28, Folder 300, p. 2. Only George Clinton, 1777-1795, 1801-1804 and Daniel D. Tompkins, 1807-1817, had served as New York's governor for longer periods than had Smith at the conclusion of his tenure on December 31, 1928. Malcolm, ed., *The New York Red Book*, pp. 522-523.

proposals of the Friedsam Commission must be enacted to continue the progress he had initiated with his teachers' pay raises of 1919 and 1920.⁴⁴⁵ Furthermore, he dared his Republican challenger, Congressman Ogden Mills, to articulate his position on the commission's proposals, asking him for "a plain 'yes' or 'no.'"⁴⁴⁶ The next day, at Troy, Smith continued this line of attack, stating: "I have stood behind the Board of Regents, and the Commissioner of Education, in every single suggestion that they have made for the up-building of what I believe to be the greatest educational system that any commonwealth in the country can boast of"; and contrasting this support with the frugality of legislative Republicans and the reticence of Congressman Mills.⁴⁴⁷ Mills retorted by calling Smith a liar ("the Governor could never have delivered the speech he did last night with one hand on the Bible"), and avoided taking a position on the Friedsam recommendations by suggesting, accurately enough, that the proposals were made late in the legislative session, implying that this was the reason for their demise.⁴⁴⁸

As in 1924, the voters sided with Smith. At the following assembly session, the finance program, in the form of the Dick-Rice Bill of 1927, was approved, adding \$16.5 million to the state's education budget.⁴⁴⁹ Smith proudly compared the \$82.5 million appropriation by the state for education in 1927 to the \$9 million for the same purpose in his first year in office, cautioning the press, "When you hear our political friends talking about 'the great spender at Albany,' let's stop and study the amount of money the State is spending for education."⁴⁵⁰ For Al Smith, these statistics represented the fulfillment of

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 2, 5.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 6-7; "Smith Tells Work For State Schools," p. 1.

⁴⁴⁷ Alfred E. Smith, "Speech at Troy," October 21, 1926, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 28, Folder 300, p. 5.

⁴⁴⁸ "Mills Awaits Summons," *The New York Times*, October 22, 1926, pp. 1-2, p. 2.

⁴⁴⁹ "Col. Friedsam Sees Governor Sign Bill," *The New York Times*, April 3, 1927, p. 27.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 27.

his basic principle that the state must promote the welfare of its citizens through universal access to quality education.

Public Property

The story of Al Smith's conservation policies provides great insight into his broader political ideology.⁴⁵¹ It suggests a genuine desire to protect wilderness areas and to provide citizens with recreation, linking Smith with a long progressive conservationist tradition.⁴⁵² It also demonstrates the breadth of Smith's social welfare vision—one which encompassed things like recreation and cheap electricity. Furthermore, it shows how Smith employed the might of the state to pursue this agenda, and did so with vigor.

I

On April 18, 1923, in a special message to the New York State Legislature, Governor Smith advocated the development of a statewide system of parks with a centralized administrative apparatus.⁴⁵³ Smith presented a number of reasons for the request. He argued that “there is undoubtedly great need of large open spaces outside of

⁴⁵¹ Portions of this section can be found in Robert Chiles, “Working-Class Conservationism in New York: Governor Alfred E. Smith and ‘The Property of the People of the State,’” *Environmental History* (forthcoming).

⁴⁵² On the Progressives and Conservation: Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement 1890-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1959); Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History* (New York: Oxford, 2002), pp. 138-156; Thomas R. Wellock, *Preserving the Nation: The Conservation and Environmental Movements, 1870-2000* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2007); Olson, *Biography of a Progressive: Franklin K. Lane, 1864-1921*.

⁴⁵³ “Governor Smith's Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART I: ‘PARKS,’” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 3, Folder 43, p. 1.; “Asks \$15,000,000 to Aid State Parks,” *The New York Times*, April 19, 1923, p. 4.

our cities for camping and recreation,” pointing out that “the cheap automobile has brought the country and the forests and lakes to the doors of hundreds of thousands of people,” who had never ventured “more than a mile or two away from their homes before.”⁴⁵⁴ With these developments, “people in great numbers, not the rich, but the great rank and file of citizens and particularly the children visit our forest playgrounds, even going as far as the Adirondacks to do so.” This “enthusiasm for outdoor life” represented “one of the healthiest developments of recent years”; and as such, “the State ought to do everything in its power to provide forests and streams and parks to satisfy not only this generation but future generations who must live in even more crowded places.”⁴⁵⁵ Along with recreation, there was an underlying conservationism that influenced Smith’s thinking. “Our water supply, the protection of watersheds, and the flow of streams, the protection of trees which are being cut four times as fast as they are grown, the wild life of the forests, the rainfall and the very temperature of the State depend upon our forest preserves I am convinced that timely expenditures for the extension of our forests and parks is a real economy.”⁴⁵⁶

Smith understood that his proposal would be quite expensive; yet under Article VII, Section 4 of the state constitution he was prohibited from seeking a bond issue for his parks program in 1923 because he was already campaigning for the \$50 million hospital bond.⁴⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the pace of ecological destruction and the rising costs of lands that the state might wish to purchase in the future necessitated quick action, so the

⁴⁵⁴ “Asks \$15,000,000 to Aid State Parks,” *The New York Times*, April 19, 1923, p. 4.

⁴⁵⁵ “Governor Smith’s Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART I: ‘PARKS,’” p. 3.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴⁵⁷ “Governor Smith’s Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART I: ‘PARKS,’” p. 3; “Asks \$15,000,000 to Aid State Parks,” *The New York Times*, April 19, 1923, p. 4; “Constitution of the State of New York” in Malcolm, ed., *The New York State Red Book, 1928*, p. 572.

governor requested, and received, \$850,000 in immediate appropriations.⁴⁵⁸ Additionally, Smith proposed the issuance of a \$15 million bond in 1924, so that the program might be funded more robustly.⁴⁵⁹ The bond, argued Smith and other proponents, would help meet the demands of a growing population by providing funds for a unified park system, camp site development, and extensions of the forest preserve.⁴⁶⁰ It would allow for the development of existing holdings like the Palisades Interstate Park on the New Jersey border, the Niagara reservation on the falls at the Canadian border, and Letchworth Park along the Genesee River; as well as the creation of new parks—proposed projects like an Allegany state park in the west, a Taconic tri-state park on the border with Massachusetts and Connecticut, and numerous projects on Long Island.⁴⁶¹

Prior to this, the state had never established a definite program for the acquisition or supervision of parks—as Smith put it, “the largest State in the union, showing the greatest increase in population, leading all the states in point of wealth, value of property,

⁴⁵⁸ “Governor Smith’s Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART I: ‘PARKS,’” p. 4.

⁴⁵⁹ “Governor Smith’s Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART I: ‘PARKS,’” p. 3.; “Asks \$15,000,000 to Aid State Parks,” *The New York Times*, April 19, 1923, p. 4.

⁴⁶⁰ State Council of Parks, Allegany State Park Commission, New York State Reservation at Niagara, Westchester County Park Commission, American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, Finger Lakes State Parks Association, Conservation Commission, Long Island State Parks Commission, State Museum, Adirondack Mountain Club, Allegany Field and Trail Club, American Game Protective and Propagation Association, American Legion—Department of New York, Anglers’ Conservation Association, Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks, Associated Mountaineering Clubs of North America, Buffalo City Planning Association, Buffalo Chamber of Commerce, Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences, Bronx Parkway Commission, Camp Directors Association, Camp Fire Girls, City Club of New York, City Recreation Committee—New York City, Finger Lakes Association, Inkowa Club of America, Lake Placid Club, New York Academy of Sciences, New York Chapter—American Society of Landscape Architects, New York State Association, New York State College of Forestry, Southern New York Fish and Game Association, Torrey Botanical Club, Tramp and Trail Club of New York, Westchester County Chamber of Commerce, Westchester County Recreation Association, and Wild Flower Preservation Society, “What the State Park Bond Issue, to be voted on at the November Election, Will do for you,” Alfred E. Smith Correspondences, Reel 88, pp. 2-6.

⁴⁶¹ State Council of Parks et al., “What the State Park Bond Issue, to be voted on at the November Election, Will do for you,” pp. 4-6.

commerce and everything that goes to make up a good commonwealth, was entirely without any program.”⁴⁶² New York had been actively preserving the Adirondacks since the nineteenth century, several scattered state park systems had been established, and a \$10 million bond issue in 1916 for the development of the Palisades Park had been the largest in American history. Yet there existed neither a coordinated administration of these lands nor a vision for the extension or even the maintenance of such holdings.⁴⁶³ Although Smith received the funds he requested in 1923, he did not yet win the overarching parks commission necessary to implement his broader vision.

The following year, Smith called again for a unified parks system in his annual message to the legislature.⁴⁶⁴ Responding with surprising alacrity, the legislature created the State Parks Council, consisting of the heads of various park commissions, the state conservation commissioner, and the head of the state museum. The council was empowered to act as the central advisory agency for all parks except the forest preserve.⁴⁶⁵ The legislature further gladdened the governor by approving the \$15 million bond proposal for referendum, appropriating an additional \$850,000 for immediate use, and creating two new agencies: the Finger Lakes State Park Commission and the Long Island State Park Commission.⁴⁶⁶ Smith’s winning streak rolled into the fall, when voters approved the bond issue by a vote of nearly three to one. Smith noted that nearly nine-tenths of this majority came from the larger cities of the state, claiming that this demonstrated “the desire of the congested populations for summer breathing spaces

⁴⁶² “Governor Smith’s Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART I: ‘PARKS,’” p. 1.

⁴⁶³ State Council of Parks et al., “What the State Park Bond Issue, to be voted on at the November Election, Will do for you,” p. 2.

⁴⁶⁴ “Governor Smith’s Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART I: ‘PARKS,’” p. 4.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

outdoors.”⁴⁶⁷ It might be added that these jurisdictions were also the source of much of Smith’s strength in his reelection bid, and so his influence likely affected the outcome in the urban districts.

Armed with \$15 million and bolstered by a countercurrent reelection victory, Smith returned to Albany in 1925 intent on developing his coveted parks system. On January 26, in another special message to the legislature, he requested the immediate appropriation of the \$15 million to the sundry park commissions; he also called for an amendment to the 1924 law to permit each county to create its own commission for parks and parkways (as Westchester and Erie had already done), asked for legislation permitting construction of roads to the new state parks, and proposed a number of technical alterations to the 1924 law.⁴⁶⁸ Among the modifications Smith demanded was a new, quicker method of condemnation for park purposes. Here however the governor’s year-long rally reached its conclusion—the Republican legislature suddenly turned against the Smith agenda. The administration would later reflect that these developments were due to the planned development of parks on Long Island.⁴⁶⁹

The battle of Long Island has been masterfully rendered by Robert Caro in his biography of Smith parks prefect Robert Moses.⁴⁷⁰ The legal chicanery and clever methods of funding whereby the Island’s parks gained a foothold in the 1920s need only be reviewed here insofar as they elucidate Smith’s ideology on the question. What the entire episode demonstrates is that one motive behind the governor’s strong push for state

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 5-6.

⁴⁶⁹ “Governor Smith’s Comment on Action of Legislative Leaders on the State Park Program on Long Island,” August 16, 1928, pp. 1-3, Alfred E. Smith Correspondences, Reel 88; “Governor Smith’s Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART I: ‘PARKS,’” pp. 6-18.

⁴⁷⁰ Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*, pp. 143-259, *passim*.

parks was his belief in the value of the outdoors to the welfare of the urban working class that had produced him, along with a related belief that the power of the state ought to be used to wrest control of potential recreation destinations from the rich and open them up to the masses—a sort of redistribution of environmental wealth.

Groups of Long Island residents vocally opposed the Northern State Parkway, intended as a thoroughfare for New York City residents to the emerging parks on Long Island—“unwilling,” in the administration’s analysis, “to have the people of the city drive along this parkway and enjoy the scenic effects and beneficial air which they claimed as their ‘heritage.’”⁴⁷¹ Meanwhile, on the South Shore, the members of the Timber Point Golf Club filibustered plans for a state park on a tract known as the Taylor Estate. “The officers of the Club stated that they themselves wanted the Taylor estate in order to break it up into large plots of land to be used by millionaires who were to become members of their club.”⁴⁷²

Under pressure from North and South Shore residents, the Republican assembly proposed an appropriations bill that included a series of amendments intended to thwart the activities of Moses and the Long Island Park Commission. The legislation, dubbed the Thayer Bill after its sponsor, a Republican senator from Franklin County, drew a forceful rebuke from Smith; the governor responded on March 19, 1925, with a message outlining his objections, which included the addition of several layers of bureaucracy to the condemnation process and a cumbersome mechanism for approving park expenditures that would feature the Republican-dominated State Board of Estimate and

⁴⁷¹ “Governor Smith’s Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART I: ‘PARKS,’” p. 8.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Control.⁴⁷³ The now-defiant legislature passed the bill over the governor's protests, and although Smith vetoed the Thayer Bill, another burdensome method of appropriations was eventually established.⁴⁷⁴

With Long Island at the root of this legislative pertinacity, Smith took to the airwaves on June 11 to discuss the controversy over funding that region's park projects. The speech is an astounding document that demonstrates a strongly class-based motivation behind the governor's actions, and a willingness to politicize class on behalf of his policy proposals. Smith told his radio audience:

As soon as it became known that the State intended to acquire [the Taylor Estate] for a park, several of the wealthy residents and golf club members of this region started an agitation and some local lawyer and real estate man made a speck about the hordes of people from New York that would come down tramping over the country and leaving empty sardine and cracker boxes behind them, giving thereby the impression that a public park to serve all the people was not desirable in that section of Long Island. Immediately thereafter pressure was exerted by a small group of wealthy men upon the owners in an effort to persuade them not to sell to the State.⁴⁷⁵

In an attempt to ease the conflict Smith had held a hearing at which the State Parks Commission "declared that they desired this large acreage to find a breathing spot on the south shore of Long Island for the millions of people living . . . throughout the Greater City and metropolitan section" while "their opponents, a very few wealthy men . . . reduced their entire argument against the State to the bare statement that they desired

⁴⁷³ "Minutes For the Second Hearing before Committee Consisting of the Governor, the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee and the Chairman of the Assembly Ways and Means Committee on the Estimates and Maps submitted by the State Council of Parks in accordance with the Provisions of Chapter 16 of the Laws of 1926," p. 1, Alfred E. Smith Correspondences, Reel 88; "Governor Smith's Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART I: 'PARKS,'" pp. 11-13.

⁴⁷⁴ "Minutes For the Second Hearing before Committee Consisting of the Governor, the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee and the Chairman of the Assembly Ways and Means Committee," p. 1; "Governor Smith's Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART I: 'PARKS,'" p. 13.

⁴⁷⁵ "Speech of Governor Smith to the People of the State on the Park Situation Delivered Over the Radio, Thursday, June 11th, 10:00 P.M.," Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 28, Folder 293, p. 10.

to get control of the property for themselves in order that they might develop it to help their golf club and bring in about fifty millionaires who would have a kind of exclusive community there with the golf club as the center of attraction.” For Smith, the choice was clear: “As between the few and the many to be benefited, I cast my lot with the many and I signed the papers necessary to acquire the property by entry and appropriation.”⁴⁷⁶

In response, “high-priced legal talent was brought in,” because, as Smith saw it, “this small group of Long Island people desired that great playground to themselves and wanted to keep the people from it.”⁴⁷⁷ So the question according to the governor was: “will the law of this State be so shaped to give power and influence to a small group of selfish men as against the best interests of the great mass of our people?”⁴⁷⁸ Concluding, Smith unleashed a Theodore Roosevelt-like tirade against privilege and on behalf of state action: “Let us battle it out right in the shadow of the Capitol itself and let us have a decision, and let us not permit the impression to go abroad in this State that wealth and power can palsy the arm of the State and stall the machinery of Government in the performance of a duty that has so much to do, now and in the future, with the health, happiness and the comfort of our ten million people, and of the millions more who will follow them.”⁴⁷⁹

This speech is not important because it convinced legislators to abandon their protests—it did not. A special session was called the following week, and the same bill was passed, again to be vetoed by the governor. But the speech, and the entire episode,

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 15.

gives important insight into Smith's beliefs about parks and about state action more broadly. It demonstrates that an important part of his motivation was the provision of what he considered to be a key welfare service—recreation—by the state to the masses of crowded workers in New York City and throughout the state. It also demonstrates his willingness to arouse class antagonism on behalf of what he considered a progressive cause.

It is worth completing the story of Long Island. Because the legislature held firm in June, there was no money to purchase the Taylor Estate. This might have ended in victory for the golf club had it not been for the donation of \$262,000 by philanthropist August Heckscher to the state for the purpose of purchasing the property.⁴⁸⁰ The estate became Deer Range State Park, named originally for the great numbers of white-tailed deer residing in the area, but quickly was renamed Heckscher State Park in honor of its benefactor. In 1926, 1927, and 1928, the legislature appropriated requested portions of the \$15 million bond to the parks council, but each year it excluded most of the funds for Long Island.⁴⁸¹ Yet Smith did not surrender: even in the midst of his presidential campaign, the governor took a strong position on the Long Island question, declaring, "I do not intend to leave the office of governor without at least providing the skeleton of a great park and parkway system with land needed in the hands of the State."⁴⁸² Decrying Republican opponents of his program for "attempt[ing] to block every single park and parkway project on Long Island since 1924," Smith recalled that, "the park program has gone on in spite of them and in every battle the State has been the victor," predicting that

⁴⁸⁰ "Governor Smith's Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART I: 'PARKS,'" p. 15.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

⁴⁸² "Governor Smith's Comment on Action of Legislative Leaders on the State Park Program on Long Island," August 16, 1928, p. 3.

the same would happen in 1928. In fact, it did happen—courtesy of August Heckscher, who again donated the needed sums to keep the Long Island program moving, in this instance, on the North Shore.⁴⁸³ Smith’s successor, Franklin Delano Roosevelt (who had, before ascending to the governorship, served as commissioner of the Taconic State Park) would preside over the opening of Long Island parks like Jones Beach as well as the initiation of construction on the Northern State Parkway.



Fig. 2.5: Long Island State Park Commission president and avid swimmer Robert Moses (arms crossed, front of group) prepares to enter the ocean at Jones Beach State Park, Nassau County, Long Island, New York, 1934.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸³ “Governor Smith’s Comment on Action of Legislative Leaders on the State Park Program on Long Island,” pp. 1-3; “Governor Smith’s Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART I: ‘PARKS,’” p. 16.

⁴⁸⁴ Alajos L. Schulser, “August 6, 1934 shot of Commissioner Robert Moses and officials at Jones Beach, Long Island,” New York City Parks Photo Archive, neg. 36501-1.



Fig. 2.6: Jones Beach State Park, Nassau County, Long Island, New York. Among the numerous park projects initiated on Long Island under Smith to provide for “the health, happiness and the comfort of our ten million people, and of the millions more who will follow them.” (Photo by author.)

By 1928, the State Council of Parks administered 2,218,993 acres divided into about seventy parks and reservations.⁴⁸⁵ Such a widely dispersed and expensive system was made possible largely by the centralized administrative apparatus that Smith had envisioned, as well as by the use of bonds, rather than annual appropriations, to fund condemnations and improvements. Bonds were vital to the project for two related reasons: first, because legislative appropriations for all sorts of public works always tended to suffer delays, so that in the pay-as-you-go system, “we do not ‘pay’ and therefore we do not ‘go’”; and second, because swiftness was key in the interest of economy, since “prices for land are continually rising.”⁴⁸⁶ As with his hospitals program, Smith justified incurring long-term debt for these projects by reasoning that they were

⁴⁸⁵ “Governor Smith’s Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART I: ‘PARKS,’” p. 18.

⁴⁸⁶ “Address of Hon. Alfred E. Smith At Staten Island Coliseum, October 27, 1925,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 28, Folder 286, p. 13; “Governor Smith’s Primer on the Constitutional Amendments –1, 2 & 3—Public Improvement Bond Issue,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 1, Folder 19, p. 5; Smith, *Progress of Public Improvements*, pp. 8-9.

undertaken not simply for immediate needs but with an eye toward the future.⁴⁸⁷ Moreover, this did not leave the state under the ominous cloud of a particularly onerous bond obligation: in 1927, the per capita debt of New York State was \$21.80, while for the federal government it was \$165.92.⁴⁸⁸

This massive statewide project reflected the governor's understanding of recreation as an important facet of the welfare services of the progressive state. But it also reflected a genuine interest in preserving the state's natural heritage from destruction.⁴⁸⁹ This is particularly striking, for while Smith's interest in the welfare of the urban worker has been well-chronicled, his interest in conservation has not.

The list of conservation achievements during the Smith administration is an impressive one which transcends parks and recreation. Under Smith, the area protected from the devastation of forest fires increased from 7,270,324 acres in 1918 to 16,424,324 acres in 1928.⁴⁹⁰ The annual output of the state's nurseries for reforestation trebled from 7,236,785 trees in 1918 to 23,375,502 trees in 1927.⁴⁹¹ In response to a request in his 1925 annual message for increased funding to expedite reforestation, Smith received a \$120,000 appropriation for enlarging the capacity of state nurseries; a year later, output at these facilities had swelled from 10.5 million trees to 20.5 million trees, and by 1928 it

⁴⁸⁷ "Speech of Acceptance Delivered by Governor Alfred E. Smith at Schenectady, NY, October 4, 1924," p. 5, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 27, Folder 274.

⁴⁸⁸ Smith, *Progress of Public Improvements*, p. 6.

⁴⁸⁹ Destruction like that which occurred in 1922 when a "valuable tract of timber land in the Adirondack Preserve" was given away to the Santa Clara Lumber Company by the Republican State Land Board. "Speech by Governor Alfred E. Smith at Carnegie Hall," p. 3, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 27, Folder 274. Indeed, Smith deplored the idea that "all over the country we have the reputation . . . of being the most reckless people on the universe when it comes to the preservation of natural resources. We have destroyed and tore down and pulled to pieces all of our timberlands." "Address of Governor Alfred E. Smith at Vielmeister Hall, Stapleton, S.I., on Tuesday evening, Oct. 26, 1926," Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 29, Folder 301, p. 12.

⁴⁹⁰ "Governor Smith's Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART II: 'FOREST PROTECTION WILD LIFE AND THE SARATOGA RESERVATION,'" p. 1.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

stood at 25 million trees.⁴⁹² Under Smith, more than three hundred thousand acres were added to the state forest preserve.⁴⁹³ During his tenure, 190 municipal and community forests were started in the state as compared with 79 over the preceding eighteen years.⁴⁹⁴ More than three hundred thousand acres were cleared of ribes to protect white pines from blister rust.⁴⁹⁵ A five thousand square mile “barrier zone” was established along the state’s eastern border and on Long Island’s North Shore to prevent the advance of the gypsy moth, which had done millions of dollars of damage in New England and by 1922 had begun “invading [the] state from Massachusetts.”⁴⁹⁶ In 1928 the administration could boast that “since the establishment of the barriers there has been no further advance of this pest which destroys fruit, shade and forest trees.”⁴⁹⁷

New York became a national leader in reforestation during the 1920s: “In the planting of new forests for the reclamation of idle, non-agricultural land, New York State . . . led all the states in the country, a conservation achievement of the very first importance.”⁴⁹⁸ By 1928, idle land was “being planted to forests at the rate of about 25,000 acres,—or 25,000,000 trees,—a year, an increase of 500 per cent over the average annual planting for the ten years prior to [Smith’s] incumbency.”⁴⁹⁹

If forests were planted and preserved with enthusiasm, so were they made available to the citizenry. State parks were expanded greatly—and not only on Long Island for quick weekend escapes by residents of Manhattan and Brooklyn, but throughout the state for excursions by all the people. Six hundred miles of trails were

⁴⁹² Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 1.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 1.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 1.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 1.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

established in the Catskills and in the Adirondacks.⁵⁰⁰ Campsites were established in these places with a capacity for two million—a figure which they attracted annually.⁵⁰¹ Hundreds of islands on Lake George were purchased and preserved by the state, and of these 155 were opened to the public.⁵⁰²



Fig. 2.7: Tongue Mountain in Lake George, Warren County, New York.
One of the areas added to the Adirondack Preserve during the Smith administration. (Photo by author.)

All of this demonstrates the Smith administration's commitment to the conservation of New York's forest and wildlife resources and the governor's willingness to employ the power of the state expansively for such purposes. Indeed, Smith and his circle did not see the issue merely as a political game—they felt passionately and

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 2, 7.

⁵⁰² Ibid., p. 8.

sincerely that this was something that must be done for both current and future generations. Wrote one top Democrat: “No person can have seen the interstate park along the Hudson River or the Adirondacks, or Allegany Park . . . without realizing what an enormous help they are to all the people. . . . Throughout the State, poor and rich, country and city derive great benefit from our parks it is something to all to know that the most beautiful natural scenery in the country is available to all the people.”⁵⁰³ Smith concurred, saying of Lake George that there was not a “lake in Switzerland that matches it in natural beauty,” while warning that if the lake should become “open to private development you can bid it goodbye [*sic*].”⁵⁰⁴

These initiatives gained Smith effusive praise and enthusiastic support from scores of outdoorsmen. A Long Islander thanked the governor for the new bridle path at Hempstead State Park, which he was able to ride “almost every morning.”⁵⁰⁵ The Vice Commodore of the American Canoe Association’s Delaware-Chesapeake Division noted Smith’s “real personal interest in the Lake George park program,” and remarked that “every citizen who becomes acquainted with the value of this work is a great booster for the present administration that brought it about.”⁵⁰⁶ The Southern New York Fish and Game Association named the governor an honorary member, remarking that his administration had been conducted in accord with their motto: “For the Good of All.”⁵⁰⁷ Across the state, interested citizens encouraged the governor to acquire idyllic tracts that were yet unprotected—from glens near the Finger Lakes, to Dome Island in Lake

⁵⁰³ Herbert Claiborne Pell to John H. MacLean, July 1, 1925. Alfred E. Smith Correspondences, Reel 88.

⁵⁰⁴ “Rededication Exercises of the Madison House,” November 25, 1923, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 26, Folder 266, p. 8.

⁵⁰⁵ T. J. McLaughlin to Alfred E. Smith, December 3, 1927. Alfred E. Smith Correspondences, Reel 88.

⁵⁰⁶ James S. Cawley to Alfred E. Smith, March 24, 1926. Alfred E. Smith Correspondences, Reel 88.

⁵⁰⁷ Melville Rosch, Secretary of the Southern New York Fish and Game Association, Inc., to Alfred E. Smith, George Graves Papers, Box 62, Folder “ROS.”

George, to Montauk Point on Long Island.⁵⁰⁸ From Iowa, the Dubuque *Herald* noted the progress of the Smith program and adjured the Hawkeye State to emulate New York's success.⁵⁰⁹

On another level, then, the experience of the Smith conservation program helps debunk charges of urban provincialism against his gubernatorial administration. While it is clear that the parks program, particularly on Long Island, was primarily inspired by the governor's expansive program for improving the lives of urban workers, it is equally clear that overall the Smith conservation program was designed for the benefit of, and had great appeal to, diverse segments of New York's population. There is even evidence that Smith's program gained him electoral favor among some voters in the counties of the Adirondack preserve. In every county of that region except for Warren, Smith consistently outperformed down-ballot Democrats; and in all but two counties—Herkimer and Warren (along with Saratoga the most urbanized counties in the region)—Smith's electoral performance beat his statewide performance when weighted for a county's percent rural.⁵¹⁰ Moreover, Smith's success in the North Country tended to increase over his tenure, suggesting a positive reaction to his program; and beyond outpacing the local Democrats, Smith actually carried Clinton County in 1926 and carried

⁵⁰⁸ E. Cooperman to Alfred E. Smith, May 8, 1926, Alfred E. Smith Correspondences, Reel 88; Cawley to Smith; Florence G. Downs to Alfred E. Smith, September 12, 1923, Alfred E. Smith Correspondences, Reel 88.

⁵⁰⁹ "State Parks," Dubuque *Herald*, February 4, 1925, clipping in Alfred E. Smith Correspondences, Reel 88. This is also noted in Paula Eldot's political biography of Smith, *The Politician as Reformer*, a work which includes a strong consideration of the legislative wrangling involved in Smith's parks and power programs, from a quite different perspective than that provided here. See Eldot, *Governor Alfred E. Smith: The Politician as Reformer*, 115-153; 234-269. Eldot's work differs strongly in its understanding of these aspects of Smith's career, presenting him—as the title suggests—as a politician first. It will be noted that the argument herein is quite different: to a great extent, Smith had evolved as governor to a point where he was putting reform first, and he was using his political skills in order to achieve his policy goals.

⁵¹⁰ Election returns and urbanization statistics from Malcolm, ed., *The New York State Red Book, 1928*, charted and analyzed by the author. The "weighting" assumed that Smith's performance should improve as urbanization increased, which was generally the case in New York's counties.

both Clinton and Franklin Counties when he ran for President in 1928. This may or may not have been based on Smith's expansion and protection of the Adirondack park—but it does help diminish the argument for urban provincialism. In any case, people who had been hunting and fishing, hiking and riding, camping and boating the Empire State for decades, and not only refugees from the sidewalks of New York, were drawn to the governor's program because of its very real benefits and protections for the state's natural splendor. As had been the case with public education, Smith's progressivism was applied universally.

II

If the twin impulses to assuage the condition of the poor New Yorker and to preserve the state's natural heritage can be recognized in alternating degrees among the sundry parks and conservation initiatives of the Smith administration, these impulses can be seen to have converged in what was to become not only one of Smith's signature initiatives as governor, but also one of the fundamental issues of his national campaign: water power. The experience of water power development in New York State prior to Smith's tenure as governor was a haphazard comedy of errors marked by a deficit of foresight and an absence of coordination. At the turn of the century, the legislature had granted charters for development on the Niagara River so prodigally that in 1905 the federal government, "fearing the ultimate destruction of the Falls themselves, reached its hand into the State" through the Burton Act, which initiated negotiations with the Dominion of Canada limiting such projects—stopping for a time these "promiscuous

legislative grants.”⁵¹¹ Within two years, the St. Lawrence was in similar jeopardy, as the Long Sault Development Corporation was established to develop power projects on that river.⁵¹² This however was short-lived: in 1913, the reform-minded Democratic legislature of Al Smith and Robert F. Wagner repealed Long Sault’s incorporation.⁵¹³ Partially in response to the Long Sault giveaway, progressive Republican governor Charles Evans Hughes had called for public development of state water resources in 1907, but his program was met with a legislative blockade. Similarly, in 1912 some legislative Democrats—including Smith—called for state ownership of water power projects—to no avail.⁵¹⁴ The 1912 legislature was able to establish a conservation commission to replace the feeble water commission, but this body’s work was encumbered in bureaucracy in 1915 when Republicans, led by Governor Charles Whitman, enacted a provision to require all of the commission’s plans to gain approval from the attorney general and the state engineer.⁵¹⁵

As Smith took office for the first time as governor at the end of the decade, he began urging state development of water power. When the 1919 legislature responded with a bill for private development, Smith vetoed their program, reiterating that he favored water power’s “development, its ownership, and its control by the State itself for the benefit of all the people,” rather than permitting these resources to be leased away to

⁵¹¹ “Speech of Alfred E. Smith at Troy, NY, October 16, 1922,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 26, Folder 258, p. 3; “Speech of Governor Alfred E. Smith, Rochester,” October 20, 1924, p. 4, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 27, Folder 274; “Governor Smith’s Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART III: ‘Water Power,’” p. 2.

⁵¹² “Speech of Alfred E. Smith at Troy, NY,” p. 3. “Speech of Governor Alfred E. Smith, Rochester,” p. 5.

⁵¹³ “Governor Smith’s Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART III: ‘Water Power,’” p. 2.

⁵¹⁴ Alfred E. Smith, “Water Power and its Social Uses,” *Survey Graphic*, Vol. X, No. 4, January, 1927, pp. 421-425, pp. 421-422; “Speech of Alfred E. Smith at Troy, NY,” p. 4. Smith later recalled that 1912 had been “a little bit early, and the plan was a little bit drastic and it required a great deal of expenditure of public money and probably its defeat at that time was in the best interest of the state.” Smith, “Water Power and its Social Uses,” *Survey Graphic*, pp. 421-422.

⁵¹⁵ “Speech of Alfred E. Smith at Troy, NY,” p. 5.

private corporations.⁵¹⁶ This program passed in a “hostile” senate, but failed to escape the assembly’s Rules Committee.⁵¹⁷ Smith explicitly urged his policy again in his 1920 message to the legislature, but they “flatly rejected this recommendation.”⁵¹⁸ As with so many of his early proposals, public hydroelectric development was held in check by obdurate legislative Republicans; and as with so many of those proposals, Smith opted to present his case directly to the voters.

Running for reelection, Smith proclaimed at Elmira his stand for water power’s “public ownership, public development, and public control in the interest of all our people.”⁵¹⁹ A week later, the governor explained before four thousand at the Wieting Opera House in Syracuse that experience had demonstrated the dangers of private control. “I am for State development, State ownership and State control because I am sure that is the only way in which the people themselves will get any benefit from this God-given resource, because under private development the price of electricity is exactly the same in Buffalo, where it is developed from the falls, as it is in the City of New York, where every bit of it is developed from coal which is dragged all the way from Pennsylvania.”⁵²⁰ Smith believed that hydroelectricity should be cheaper than coal power once developed, and that if the profit margins of private capital were removed from the price of this energy, electricity rates for New Yorkers would decline significantly. He

⁵¹⁶ “Speech of Governor Alfred E. Smith, Rochester,” p. 7; “Governor Smith’s Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART III: ‘Water Power,’” p. 2.

⁵¹⁷ “Speech of Alfred E. Smith at Troy, NY,” p. 5; “Governor Smith’s Speech at Lexington Opera House, Saturday, November 4, 1922,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 26, Folder 258, p. 5.

⁵¹⁸ “Governor Smith’s Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART III: ‘Water Power,’” p. 2.

⁵¹⁹ Alfred E. Smith, Speech at Elmira, NY, October 14, 1920, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 26, Folder 255, p. 3.

⁵²⁰ “Says Miller Avoids Water Power Issue,” *The New York Times*, October 21, 1920, p. 14. Smith often repeated the argument that water power ought to be, but was not, cheaper than coal. *E.g.*: “Address of Governor Alfred E. Smith at the Town Hall, Saturday evening, November 3, 1923, at the closing session of the School of Democracy of the Women’s Democratic Club,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 26, Folder 269, p. 25.

criticized his challenger, Syracuse's own Nathan Miller, for demurring on the issue, and lambasted the Republican platform for declaring "in cold blooded, plain, ordinary, everyday type for private ownership and private development."⁵²¹ Smith also dismissed Miller's opposition to state development on the grounds that such projects would require international treaties, arguing that "we have water power here running to waste, day in and day out," on domestic rivers like the Genesee, Black, Sacandaga, upper Hudson, and even the barge canal—claiming as an example that there was enough hydroelectric potential at Vischer's Ferry and Crescent to light Troy, Albany, Cohoes, and Watervliet.⁵²²

Smith reiterated his stance October 30, before ten thousand supporters at Madison Square Garden: "The great natural water power resources of this State must be developed by the State itself under State ownership and State control. . . . that is the only way that the rank and file of the people can ever get any distinct benefit from the property that belongs to themselves."⁵²³ Smith distinguished his stand from that of the Republicans, whom he claimed were controlled by "a small and an influential and a rich and a very powerful group" who intended "that the great water power resources of this State should be developed for private interests and by private capital."⁵²⁴ Defeated, Smith exited the political stage for what would prove a brief Republican intermission.

⁵²¹ "Says Miller Avoids Water Power Issue," *The New York Times*, October 21, 1920, p. 14. Smith later elaborated on this argument, saying that without also including power from the Niagara and St. Lawrence, the inland hydroelectricity would need to be supplemented by coal power. "Address of Governor Alfred E. Smith Delivered at Rochester, New York, October 18th, 1926," Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 28, Folder 300, p. 3.

⁵²² "Says Miller Avoids Water Power Issue," *The New York Times*, October 21, 1920, p. 14.

⁵²³ "10,000 Hail Smith as Next Governor as He Hits Miller," *The New York Times*, October 31, 1920, pp. 1, 19, p. 19.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 19.

Now a private citizen, he watched as many of his fears about private power development were confirmed.

During his first year in office, Governor Miller was asked his view on public water power development, and he responded by citing the lubberly pace of state work on the barge canal (it was approved in 1903, construction began in 1905, and, at the time the question was posed in 1921, it had not yet been completed) as a cautionary tale on the hazards of state building projects. By his second year in office, however, some observers believed that the Republican was coming to hold a similar view of the possibilities of public power programs and the perils of private projects as had his predecessor. During a hearing on a bill to extend a one million dollar appropriation for continued state development of power sites on the barge canal, Miller said that “the experience of years shows that every private water-power development plant put on the canal means further subordination of the canal’s purposes. I have come to the definite conclusion that I would rather have no development than private development.”⁵²⁵

Yet if Miller was pondering a shift toward the Smith view, it was not coming fast enough for the former governor. Accepting re-nomination to challenge the incumbent, the Democrat assailed Miller as “a reactionary Governor of the old-fashioned Republican school” whose reign benefited the “water power interests,” among other nefarious plutocrats (this attack was in fact tame by the standards of the evening, during which Albany mayor William Stormont Hackett denounced Miller as a “dictator”).⁵²⁶ While this was a night for political histrionics, the underlying assumptions of Smith’s broadside were factual, for although Miller had at times hinted at a personal skepticism toward

⁵²⁵ Editorial, “State Water-Power Development,” *The New York Times*, April 3, 1922, p. 12.

⁵²⁶ “Smith Denounces Miller as Servant of ‘Big Interests,’” *The New York Times*, October 6, 1922, p. 1.

private power, he also created a new water power commission authorized to grant licenses for development to private persons and corporations—reversing what had been state policy since the Hughes administration.⁵²⁷ At Troy on October 16, Smith outlined the long history of the power struggle, from federal intervention on the Niagara, through Hughes’ stand against private exploitation, to the creation of the new power board under the Republican incumbent.⁵²⁸ The challenger concluded that on the question of water power, Miller had taken “a decidedly backward step,” and had turned “back the hands of the clock more than fifteen years.”⁵²⁹ On this and many other points, the voters ostensibly agreed with the challenger, and Smith won in the greatest landslide of his career.⁵³⁰

Yet the Democrat’s victory was far from the deathblow for private power interests. Prior to Smith’s restoration, in early 1922, an amendment to Article VII, Section 7 of the state constitution was passed by both houses of the legislature. Because the 1894 New York State Constitution required any amendment to gain approval during two consecutive sessions before being submitted for referendum, the proposal of Mortimer Ferris, a Republican state senator from the Clinton-Essex-Warren district, underwent a second test in 1923, now facing a Democratic-controlled senate. The bill again passed the assembly and was “railroaded” through the senate with enough bipartisan support that the Democratic leader, Smith protégé Jimmy Walker, was left utterly impotent. Resigned to legislative futility, the future Gotham mayor declared:

⁵²⁷ “Governor Smith’s Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART III: ‘Water Power,’” p. 3.

⁵²⁸ “Speech of Alfred E. Smith at Troy, NY,” p. 5.

⁵²⁹ “Smith Says Miller Stifled Home Rule,” *The New York Times*, October 17, 1922, p. 8; “Governor Smith’s Speech at Lexington Opera House,” p. 6.

⁵³⁰ Malcolm, ed., *The New York State Red Book, 1928*, p. 376.

“We will refer this resolution to the people and let them defeat it.”⁵³¹ Walker’s confidence was influenced by his awareness of the governor’s campaigning prowess; the senator understood that with the battle now taken to the public, Smith would be the most formidable contestant in the arena.

The Ferris Amendment, which would quickly earn the epithet “the Adirondack Raid,” would alter the section of the state charter dealing with conditions under which portions of the forest preserve could be flooded. The original language had allowed up to 3 percent of the preserve to be flooded “for the construction and maintenance of reservoirs for municipal water supply, for the canals of the state and to regulate the flow of streams.”⁵³² To this, the Republican from Ticonderoga sought to add a fourth purpose for which the state forests could be exploited: water power development.⁵³³ The proposal would have allowed the legislature to grant fifty-year leases to private power developers, at as low a price as legislators found agreeable.⁵³⁴

Across the Empire State, a torrent of objections was unleashed in response to the legislative ascent given the Ferris Amendment. Groups began to organize in protest, most notably the Committee to Prevent the Exploitation of the Adirondacks, chaired by John G. Agar, a prominent lawyer and progressive Democrat noted for his reformist stands on issues including education, political corruption, and conservation.⁵³⁵ The

⁵³¹ “Governor Fights Adirondacks ‘Raid,’” *The New York Times*, September 15, 1923, p. 20.

⁵³² “Constitution of the State of New York” (1894), Art. VII, § 7, in Robert Moses, *Manual for the Use of the Legislature of the State of New York 1928* (Albany: J. B. Lyon, 1928), pp. 85-175, p. 148.

⁵³³ Malcolm, ed., *The New York State Red Book, 1928*, p. 279; “Governor Fights Adirondacks ‘Raid,’” *The New York Times*, September 15, 1923, p. 20.

⁵³⁴ “Fires A Broadside on Adirondack ‘Raid,’” *The New York Times*, September 16, 1923, p. E1.

⁵³⁵ “New-York State Democracy; Committee of One Hundred Selected by Mr. Fairchild,” *The New York Times*, February 5, 1894; John G. Agar, “Mr. Agar to the Mayor” *The New York Times*, February 3, 1899, p. 12; “Speaks for the Reform Club,” *The New York Times*, August 30, 1899, p. 3; “Leaves the School Board,” *The New York Times*, October 4, 1899, “Democratic Split in Westchester,” *The New York Times*, April 1, 1904, p. 2; “Agar Calls Hughes Another Cleveland,” *The New York Times*, October 29, 1908, p. 4;

committee warned of “the disfiguring of beautiful lakes and streams, the cutting down of wide swaths of trees, and the gridironing of the state forest preserve with transmission lines.”⁵³⁶

An even graver threat, editorialized the *New York Times*, was that the amendment would “give the water-power and lumber interests a foothold upon the people’s preserve,” as well as “the fact that it would allow the private monopoly of the principle sources of New York City’s future water supply.”⁵³⁷ At Saranac Lake, one opponent of the amendment warned residents that the bill, and Ferris’ broader program for a Raquette River regulation district to promote regional development (a scheme that would have been unshackled by the constitutional alteration), would result in the “loss of every island” in the upper portion of the lake, as well as “every tributary and bay in the section involved.”⁵³⁸ Another opponent queried why this hydroelectric “white coal” should be handed over to private exploitation when it could be sold by the state at a profit that could then be used for the benefit of war veterans.⁵³⁹ In New Rochelle, the local Chamber of Commerce denounced the amendment as a giveaway to private power interests.⁵⁴⁰ The progressive New York State Association implored voters to reject the amendment, shuddering at the notion of allowing “the erection of private power plants on State lands,”

“Rights in the State Park,” *The New York Times*, March 9, 1910, p. 8; John G. Agar, “Mr. Sheehan Represents What is Worst in the Old System,” *The New York Times*, January 16, 1911, p. 10; “Wilson Committee Named,” *The New York Times*, November 1, 1916, p. 4; “Citizens Organize to Work for Smith,” *The New York Times*, October 17, 1918.

⁵³⁶ Editorial, “The Adirondack ‘Raid,’” *The New York Times*, September 15, 1923, p. 14; “Governor Fights Adirondacks ‘Raid,’” *The New York Times*, September 15, 1923, p. 20.

⁵³⁷ Editorial, “The Adirondack ‘Raid,’” *The New York Times*, September 15, 1923, p. 14; Editorial, “Vote No,” *The New York Times*, October 25, 1923, p. 18.

⁵³⁸ “Assails Power Interests,” *The New York Times*, September 22, 1923, p. 7. The Raquette plan, which Smith denounced as a “power grab,” was eventually killed by his Water Commission. “Speech of Governor Alfred E. Smith at Schenectady, NY, October 22, 1926,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 28, Folder 300, p. 7.

⁵³⁹ “Judson Raps Sage for Power Stand,” *The New York Times*, October 10, 1923, p. 14.

⁵⁴⁰ “Agar Asks Voters to Save Forests,” *The New York Times*, October 7, 1923, p. E1.

while a Long Islander lamented that, should the amendment be ratified, “the ruggedness of the country, its wild grandeur, solitude and wild life, the peace, recreation and joy I with thousands of others have experienced who have climbed its mountains, fished in its trout streams and lakes and hunted in its forests, will remain but a memory instead of a priceless heritage to benefit posterity.”⁵⁴¹ The editor of *Farm and Home* charged “that a gigantic conspiracy is on foot to impose forever upon all the people of New York an onerous tax from which they can never escape,” by creating a monopolistic multi-state “super-power combine.”⁵⁴²

To all of these voices was added that of the governor, who abhorred both the denuding of the forest preserve and the invasion of the region by rapacious private developers. In an open letter of support to Agar and his organization, Smith wrote that he feared the Ferris proposal represented a “departure from [the] wise policy” of “protect[ing] our forest preserve by constitutional safeguards” and asserted that he would “deplore the adoption of this amendment . . . because I believe that it would be putting public approval upon private exploitation of water powers located on State lands.”⁵⁴³ Smith further cautioned that the amendment offered no benefit to the public, but instead

⁵⁴¹ “Asks Voters to Aid Two Amendments,” *The New York Times*, October 14, 1923, p. E2; F. A. Huebner, “Letter to the Editor,” *The New York Times*, October 27, 1923, p. 12.

⁵⁴² “Sees Conspiracy by ‘Power Trust,’” *The New York Times*, October 30, 1923, p. 18. On Ferris’ side, one consulting engineer argued that New York’s voracious appetite for electricity, combined with the tumultuous vicissitudes of the coal industry, made the amendment a matter of common sense. Former state senator Henry M. Sage agreed that the amendment would furnish the state with a serviceable alternative to coal. Meanwhile, a leading engineer from the federal power project at Muscle Shoals speculated that “millionaires owning 400,000 acres of Adirondack parks” were behind the opposition to the amendment. “Sees Water Power as State’s Big Need,” *The New York Times*, November 2, 1923, p. 30; “Agar Asks Voters to Save Forests,” *The New York Times*, October 7, 1923, p. E1; “Denies Water Body Backs Power Lease,” *The New York Times*, October 22, 1923, p. 25.

⁵⁴³ “Governor Fights Adirondacks ‘Raid,’” *The New York Times*, September 15, 1923, p. 20.

represented an aggressive action on behalf of “well-known exploiters of public resources . . . eager to get their grips on the people’s lands.”⁵⁴⁴

Determined to scuttle the Ferris measure, Smith took to the campaign trail in opposition to ratification.⁵⁴⁵ In doing so, the state’s chief executive became its chief crusader for the protection of state lands and the retention of public water properties. At Yonkers, Smith railed against the “raid” while making sure to tie the whole program of private exploitation of public resources to its Republican supporters—anticipating a key strategy of his reelection campaigns in 1924 and especially 1926.⁵⁴⁶ But beyond exemplifying Smith’s skills as a political tactician, the speech elucidates his genuinely passionate convictions about the value of natural resources as well as the role of the state in preserving them and using them for the general welfare:

They say that the Republican party favors the development of the water power of the State by private owners. . . . They are at least frank and honest about it. They believe in the development of the water power of the State by private owners; but to whom does the water power belong? It belongs to the people of the State. . . . this proposed amendment to the Constitution would permit the flooding of the Adirondack Preserve for power development, the power proposed being in the hands of private owners. Now that great big natural park is the property of the people of the State and if water power is going to be developed from it, it should be developed for the people themselves, and not for the private owners that are spoken of in the water power plank of the Republican declaration of principle.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵⁴⁵ “Governor Smith’s Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART III: ‘Water Power,’” p. 3.

⁵⁴⁶ *E.g.*: In 1924, Smith specifically cited his challenger Theodore Roosevelt, Jr.’s support for the “raid.” “Speech by Governor Alfred E. Smith at Carnegie Hall,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 27, Folder 274, p. 5; “Speech of Governor Alfred E. Smith—Troy—October 23, 1924,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 27, Folder 274, p. 4. At Rochester in 1924, the governor mocked the GOP on the issue, saying “the man that wrote the water power plank in the Republican platform knows as much about water power development as I know about the rise and fall of the tide in the South China Sea.” “Speech of Governor Alfred E. Smith, Rochester,” October 20, 1924, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 27, Folder 274, p. 12.

⁵⁴⁷ Alfred E. Smith, Speech at Yonkers, October 11, 1923, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 27, Folder 271, pp. 1-2.

Ultimately, the episode would yield one of Smith's few total victories on the issue: voters overwhelmingly sided with the governor: 965,777 to 470,251.⁵⁴⁸

The aggressiveness of the Ferris amendment demonstrated that the state GOP no longer suffered from the ambivalence Nathan Miller had once voiced; henceforth the party would unabashedly champion private development of water resources. With Republican power in the legislature and large sums of money backing private development, the governor and his allies realized that the defeat of the Adirondack Raid did not assure victory for public hydroelectricity. Given these realities, Smith needed to recalibrate his political tactics in order to promote his public power agenda.

A little over a month after defeating the Ferris amendment, Smith sent a special message to the legislature outlining in the most specific terms yet his alternative to the Republican private development plan; and for this plan, the governor looked northward:

The two chief beneficiaries of future development on the Niagara and St. Lawrence should be the Province of Ontario and the State of New York. So far the State of New York has hesitated as between practically unregulated development and public control at the source. The Province of Ontario, on the other hand, has boldly developed a successful policy of control by a public agency representing the municipalities of the Province. . . . It has supplied cheap power to the small consumer; it has supplied this power on the basis of plans made in the interests of the community and not in the interests of profits.⁵⁴⁹

For Smith, the Ontario system suggested the possibility of a "middle way" for his own jurisdiction. Furthermore, it was a way that appeared to function well: the previous year it was estimated by former Troy mayor William F. Burns that electricity in Ontario cost \$16 to \$20 per horsepower, while in New York it cost \$60 to \$90; and more palpably, in Toronto, Hamilton, and London, Ontario, the average cost of household

⁵⁴⁸ "Governor Smith's Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART III: 'Water Power,'" p. 4.

⁵⁴⁹ Alfred E. Smith, "Power," December 22, 1923, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 22, Folder 226, pp. 1-4.

energy was 2¢ to 4¢ per kilowatt hour, while in New York's cities, power cost from 8¢ to 15¢ per kilowatt hour.⁵⁵⁰

Offering tangible benefits, Smith also sought to assuage popular fears. He suggested that a total state takeover of the entire power system would not be necessary, “provided that the State controls the situation at the source, from which it can direct where the power derived from public sources can go and at what rates it can be sold.”⁵⁵¹ Accordingly, Smith declared his advocacy of a public corporation—a state power authority.⁵⁵²

That same month at a conference on water power development, Robert Moses fumed, “it is to the everlasting discredit of the corporations which have engaged in the electric light and gas business that, generally speaking, they have been interested primarily—almost exclusively—in development for profit.”⁵⁵³ Although the prioritization of profits was a perfectly reasonable position to be taken by these capitalist outfits, it was nevertheless a threat to the governor's alternative view of the use of state resources. Recent events had served to alert the administration to the continuing perils of private development, and had caused Smith and his allies to become entrenched in their opposition to private exploitation of New York's untapped rivers. The administration believed that, once established, corporate developments would prove difficult to bring under public control. Sounding the tocsin, Moses declared that “once you take . . . the Niagara and St. Lawrence—and throw them into private hands . . . the possibility of

⁵⁵⁰ “Speech of Alfred E. Smith at Troy, NY,” p. 6.

⁵⁵¹ Smith, “Power,” December 22, 1923, pp. 4-5.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

⁵⁵³ “CONFERENCE ON WATER POWER DEVELOPMENT: Held in the Governors' Room at the Lawyers' Club, 115 Broadway, New York City, on Wednesday, December 12, 1923, at 12:30 P.M.,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 23, Folder 228, p. 17.

regulation as a solution of this whole question becomes somewhat dubious.”⁵⁵⁴ Given all of this, the solution for Moses, as for Smith, was to institute a power authority.⁵⁵⁵

The idea of a power authority emerged during this first year of Smith’s return to Albany as an alternative to the privatized system instituted by Miller. Within the broader national context, it seems only natural that Smith’s thinking on water power would reach maturity in these years, taking the form it would hold essentially for the duration of his public life. As historian Richard White notes, the Great War had “bared the weakness of the existing energy system,” and provided “new impetus to conservation, to efficiency, and to production of electricity on a grand scale.” From Pennsylvania to the Pacific Northwest to the halls of Congress, interest in hydroelectric development—whether public or private—grew tremendously in this period.⁵⁵⁶ Some of this occurred in response to the Federal Water Power Act of 1920, and some in response to state initiatives. By 1925, one economist wrote of the “romance” surrounding hydroelectricity in which “the popular imagination has been caught in recent years.”⁵⁵⁷ Thus, when Smith returned to office in 1923, the subject had come to the center of the national political conversation, with organizations including the American Federation of Labor calling for an increased government role in development.⁵⁵⁸

During the 1923 legislative session, Smith urged a policy of state development, ownership, and control, and sent a special message to the legislature requesting the repeal

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁵⁵⁶ Richard White, *The Organic Machine* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), pp. 50-54.

⁵⁵⁷ Walter H. Voskuil, “Water-Power Situation in the United States,” *The Journal of Land and Public Utility Economics*, 1:1 (January, 1925), pp. 89-101, p. 89.

⁵⁵⁸ Samuel Gompers, “The Future of Giant Power: Tyrant-Servant or Coordinator”, August, 1924, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 22, Folder 224, p. 11; Samuel Gompers, “Giant Power—Its Possibilities, Potentialities and its Administration,” December, 1923, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 22, Folder 224, p. 6; “Resolution Adopted by 1923 Convention, American Federation of Labor, Portland, Oregon,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 22, Folder 224, p. 2.

of Miller's program. These requests were ignored.⁵⁵⁹ In preparation for 1924, the governor worked with advisors like Moses to find ways to make his power program more concrete as well as more acceptable to the hostile legislature.

At the opening of that session, in the wake of the battle of the Adirondacks, the governor announced a "definite policy of development of the State's water power resources by a so-called 'Power Authority.'"⁵⁶⁰ He sought to create a commission like the Port of New York Authority which "would have no private stockholders, would be municipal in character, and would derive its powers from the State and have placed upon it the duty to take over and develop the State's power resources," with the prerogative to issue its own bonds for such purposes.⁵⁶¹ Smith forecast that the principal of the bonds could be paid by the profits from the sale of electricity, and in any case this was a fiscally safe undertaking for the state, which would not use any of its own money on the projects.⁵⁶² The Democratic-controlled senate approved this program, but the Republican assembly passed its own bill creating only an investigatory body.⁵⁶³ The senate attempted to retool the assembly's dilatory legislation by amending it to include the provisions the governor had called for, but this new bill was rejected outright by the lower house, and so no progress was made in 1924.⁵⁶⁴ In June, an angry Smith declared that "the Assembly majority deliberately, willfully and defiantly said to the People of the State of New York that they would not subscribe to the principle that what we now own

⁵⁵⁹ "Governor Smith's Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART III: 'Water Power,'" p. 3.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

we must keep.”⁵⁶⁵ Reelected in 1924 despite the second of three quadrennial triumphs by the national Republicans, the governor returned in 1925 and 1926 with the same power program—with similar results. After sustaining repeated frustrations, Smith made this struggle the signature issue of his 1926 reelection campaign.⁵⁶⁶

In fact, Smith did not need to go out of his way to make water power a major point of contention in 1926; the Republicans reaffirmed their intention to lease development rights to private companies in their state party platform.⁵⁶⁷ This, along with the legislature’s recalcitrance, demonstrated that in 1926 there would be no surrender on the issue by the GOP. Nor was Smith going to capitulate after the series of defeats. In March of that year, the governor sent yet another message to the legislature outlining his proposal and demanding action. But this message also showed increasing resentment toward the ossifying Republicans, and at times adopted an aggressively political tone. The message once again called for state control of power plants, while presenting the governor’s economic reasoning—that the state’s water resources, properly administered, could be used to ease the household costs of New Yorkers: “We start with the promise that the ownership . . . by a public corporation rather than by a private one, is a very material factor in cheapening the cost of developing the energy.”⁵⁶⁸ Smith then went on to denounce his opponents as unreasonable, concluding that their “foolish talk about Socialism is an insult to the intelligence of the people of the State.”⁵⁶⁹ Smith went further still, attacking directly Congressman Ogden Mills, a virulent critic of the Smith program

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵⁶⁶ At Rochester, he called it “The greatest single issue in this campaign.” “Address of Governor Alfred E. Smith Delivered at Rochester, New York, October 18th, 1926,” p. 1.

⁵⁶⁷ “Governor Smith’s Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART III: ‘Water Power,’” p. 11.

⁵⁶⁸ Alfred E. Smith, “For Release in the Morning Papers of Monday March 15 1926, George B. Graves, Secretary to the Governor” March 13, 1926, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 22, Folder 226, p. 1.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

who was emerging as a likely challenger in the fall campaign. “No wonder Mr. Ogden Mills has the point of view of a well-intrenched [*sic*] advocate of private interests. Mr. Mills, who is shrieking so loudly about Socialism, was a director in this power company in 1923 and in all probability is still interested.”⁵⁷⁰

If Smith’s message was that of a frustrated politician, it nevertheless portrayed accurately the nature of Mills’ opposition by mentioning the charges of socialism. Mills was indeed the Republican gubernatorial nominee in 1926, and along with blaming the governor for a milk crisis in several cities (in a maneuver reminiscent of Smith’s arch-nemesis William Randolph Hearst), his major critique of Smith was to attach the epithet “socialism” to the proposed power authority. While Smith had repeatedly called for “perpetual ownership and control by the people of the State of the State-owned water-power resources,” in contrast to development “by private capital,” the governor was no doctrinaire socialist.⁵⁷¹ Like other progressives, he sought within reasonable limits the decommodification of life’s basic necessities—healthcare, milk, housing, education, and in this case, electricity.⁵⁷² As a pragmatist, when he recognized that the private sector could not adequately or responsibly perform one of these social functions, the governor had no qualms with state intervention.

Thus Smith had no particular objection to socialistic solutions to the failures of the market. In defense of his plan, the governor looked to precedents for state involvement in public works projects to encourage economic development, pointing to

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

⁵⁷¹ Alfred E. Smith, “Water Power,” in *Progressive Democracy: Addresses and State Papers of Alfred E. Smith*, pp. 315-327, pp. 318-319.

⁵⁷² On “decommodification,” see Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*. *E.g.*: “I have recognized that transportation, light, heat and power are necessary services to the life, health, comfort, convenience and industry of our great cities. I have held that where they are monopolies they should be public monopolies, especially where they offer a service of universal use.” “Address by Governor Alfred E. Smith, Accepting Renomination as Governor,” September 24, 1920, p. 4, Smith Papers, Box 26, Folder 269.

the case of the Erie Canal and querying: “Does Congressman Mills suggest that DeWitt Clinton was a socialist?”⁵⁷³ He later became blunter: “The Congressman’s talk about Socialism is, using a mild term, stupid.”⁵⁷⁴

Indeed, with charges of plutocracy and bolshevism flying about, the 1926 contest became a particularly bellicose affair. One Smith stalwart declared Mills “unqualified to be governor of New York” because of his recent directorship of an energy combine in New England and because of his noble family’s vast holdings in power concerns.⁵⁷⁵ Smith himself produced one of the most hotly classist speeches of his career on behalf of his plan at Flushing that October: “Here we have a service promised by the Republican party but promised to whom? To the people of the State of New York? No. Promised to the water barons of the State, to the group of millionaires who now control practically all the water power resources in the northern and northwestern part of the State.”⁵⁷⁶ Such attacks were common throughout the campaign.⁵⁷⁷

And if Democratic supporters of state power could count on such spellbinders, the Republican opposition could rely, at least indirectly, on anti-Smith propaganda bankrolled by the very power interests Mills and the GOP were being accused of supporting. In 1928 a Federal Trade Commission investigation revealed that power interests had, since 1922, invested more than \$227,000 into printing pamphlets against the Smith power scheme. The materials distributed included 196,000 copies of a pamphlet entitled “Water Power in New York State,” given to newspapers, public

⁵⁷³ “Address of Governor Alfred E. Smith Delivered at Rochester, New York, October 18th, 1926,” p. 9.

⁵⁷⁴ “Address of Governor Alfred E. Smith at Vielmeister Hall, Stapleton, S.I. on Tuesday evening, Oct. 26, 1926,” p. 16.

⁵⁷⁵ Samuel Untermyer, “Why Ogden L. Mills is Unqualified to Be Governor of New York,” November 1, 1926, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 22, Folder 225, pp. 8-9.

⁵⁷⁶ Alfred E. Smith, “Speech at Flushing,” October 28, 1926, Robert Moses Papers, Box 6, Folder: “Governor’s Speeches.”

⁵⁷⁷ E.g.: “Mills is Linked in Power Combine,” *The New York World*, October 20, 1926.

officials, college professors, libraries, commercial and banking institutions, and civic organizations; another entitled “River Regulation in New York State,” of which 40,000 copies were dispersed among similar groups; and, most egregiously, 106,000 copies of two propagandistic textbooks, disbursed to students at 491 high schools, entitled *Know New York State* and *Servants of Progress*. Furthermore, utilities were estimated to have spent between \$28 and \$38 million on public relations annually—sponsoring in one six-month period 3,479 speeches. Significantly, Fred W. Crone of the New York State Commission on Public Utility Information “testified that the private power companies of the State opposed Governor Smith’s power development plans, and admitted, upon close questioning . . . that the object of the literature was to oppose the movement.”⁵⁷⁸

Even after Smith was reelected, the fight persisted. An overhaul to Governor Miller’s power commission was scheduled to take effect January 1, 1927, as part of a broader reorganization of the executive branch of state government.⁵⁷⁹ In response to the looming threat of a new, Smith-dominated commission, several firms petitioned the lame duck board in the late fall of 1926 for power development leases.⁵⁸⁰ Over the governor’s protests, the commissioners declared their intent to proceed in December. Seeking to halt this advance, Smith considered state legal action against the state’s own commission; but this was even more complicated than it already sounds, since the attorney general was a member of the outgoing board. Charging forward, Smith appointed a special counsel—Samuel Untermyer, the very public power proponent who only a month earlier had called

⁵⁷⁸ “Use Schools to Beat Smith’s Power Plan,” *The New York Times*, May 29, 1928, pp. 1, 10.

⁵⁷⁹ See chapter three. “Text of the Hughes Report on the Consolidation of State Departments,” *The New York Times*, March 2, 1926, p. 13.

⁵⁸⁰ “Governor Smith’s Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART III: ‘Water Power,’” p. 10.

Ogden Mills unqualified to be governor.⁵⁸¹ With the belligerents taking the field, the public was aroused to the flag of the governor; under growing pressure, the applicants dropped their proposal and conceded defeat.⁵⁸²

As another legislative session began, Smith penned an article for the periodical *Survey Graphic* in which he explored the obstacles his program had theretofore endured. “You know as well as I do that in democratic government you can get too many blocks ahead of the parade. You have got to be able to look around and see whether all of the members of your regiment are with you or not.”⁵⁸³ The governor now recognized that public ownership was a difficult proposition, for it left proponents open to the toxic charge of socialism. Yet he saw a way around this: “We found out that it is possible to create . . . an agency of the state for the purpose of progressive public development without any public responsibility . . . beyond the point that a commission establishes the economic soundness of the development before they proceed with it. Now, how any man who voted for the New York Port Authority or to set up the Port of Albany can talk about a power authority as a socialistic proceeding is more than I can understand.”⁵⁸⁴

Smith’s ports analogy won the strong endorsement of New York Port Authority general counsel Julius Henry Cohen, who functioned as a key strategist for the Smith

⁵⁸¹ Smith had chosen a special counsel with peculiarly strong feelings on the issue of power. The passionate Untermeyer would later lament to a women’s group in Buffalo: “A review of the history of our own blind folly leaves one almost to doubt whether Democracy is not a failure. At every step the greedy hand of the exploiter is thrust forth in the dark to take from the people their property.” Samuel Untermeyer, “The Most Urgent Economic and Political Issue of the Day: Shall the Water Power of the State be developed by Private Enterprise under State Supervision of by the State through a Power Authority?” Alfred E. Smith Papers. Box 22, Folder 225, p. 7.

⁵⁸² “Governor Smith’s Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART III: ‘Water Power,’” p. 10.

⁵⁸³ Smith, “Water Power and its Social Uses,” p. 422.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 424.

forces throughout 1926 and 1927.⁵⁸⁵ Like Smith, Cohen was optimistic that the authority would be a financial success. “Water Power Authority bonds would find a much easier market than our own Port Authority bonds,” he predicted, “for I believe that prior to the offering of an issue the Power Authority would have made contracts in advance for the disposal of the power with responsible distributors and could have definite proposals which would fix the upset price of the cost of the plant.”⁵⁸⁶

In making the Port Authority analogy, Smith was able to use the tangible example of the Holland Tunnel, which would open later that year as the first of a number of Hudson River crossings constructed under the auspices of the authority (in fact, construction on the Outerbridge Crossing, the Goethals Bridge, and the George Washington Bridge was well underway by the end of Smith’s administration):

How many of us know how much we really cut from our annual tax roll for this tunnel? Between 1919 and 1926 we put twenty-one million dollars in cash into it—and nobody knows anything about it because we just put it up Now that we are satisfied with it, everybody is going to go down when it opens and ride out into Jersey and sing ‘Three cheers for the red, white and blue.’ Yet it was just as much of a risk as would be the pledging of the credit of the state in the development of dams and powerhouses on the St. Lawrence River.⁵⁸⁷

Despite his reelection triumph, his public relations victory over the outgoing power board, and his increasingly tangible rhetoric on the issue, Smith would not win the power fight during his fourth and final term. In fact, while he saw it as an improvement over Miller’s defunct power commission, Smith could not claim satisfaction with the refurbished board either: like its predecessor, the new body included the attorney general, the conservation commissioner, and the director of public works—individuals,

⁵⁸⁵ Samuel Untermyer to Julius Henry Cohen, October 17, 1927, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 23, Folder 228.

⁵⁸⁶ Julius Henry Cohen to Samuel Untermyer, October 11, 1927, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 23, Folder 228.

⁵⁸⁷ Smith, “Water Power and its Social Uses,” p. 425.

according to Smith, who were all preoccupied with the work of their own departments and who were not qualified to devise a water power plan for the state. Frustrated again, Smith vetoed their appropriation.⁵⁸⁸

Smith would never succeed in creating a state power authority. Indeed, such a body would not be inaugurated until the second term of Franklin Roosevelt, and real work on state power projects would not commence for another two decades.⁵⁸⁹ So hydroelectricity does not fit with the usual pattern of Smith initiatives, whereby a proposal would fail several times, the governor would make it a campaign issue, and then, after a reelection or two (as well as some legislative cajoling and compromise), the governor's program would be adopted. Such was the pattern with Smith's public school reforms, with much of his health care agenda, and with the development of many of the new state parks and parkways. But this was not the case with water power, where emotions continued to run high for the duration of Smith's incumbency (for example, in 1927 Attorney General Albert Ottinger, a Republican, claimed the Democrat's mulishness was costing New York manufacturing jobs, while Smith continued to fight charges of state socialism with counter-charges of corporate rapacity).⁵⁹⁰ Thus the lesson from the water power fight is not about Smith's tactics as much as it is about his fundamental beliefs. State hydroelectric development represents the confluence of two of them: the belief in the inviolability of public resources and the belief that, when necessary, the government must be employed in full to assuage the hardships of modern

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 422-423.

⁵⁸⁹ New York State Power Authority [Web site], "NYPA's History," Site address: <http://www.nypa.gov/about/history1.htm>.

⁵⁹⁰ "Ottinger Attacks Smith Power Plan," *The New York Times*, September 28, 1927; "Smith Will Evade Water Power Issue, Ottinger Declares," *New York Tribune*, September 28, 1927; "Ottinger Hits Smith's Water Power Stand," *The New York World*, September 28, 1927 (clippings in Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 22 Folder 225).

life—even to the point of “socialistic” policies. Al Smith’s militant rhetoric, teetering as it did on the brink of class warfare, was but a manifestation of his interest in preserving the tranquility of the Adirondacks, asserting the state’s riparian rights, and providing cheap energy to the working class. By the mid-1920s, Smith’s political activities were driven by his policy ambitions.

This demonstrates a great deal about Smith as an executive, and it also elucidates much about his national agenda. His eventual plunge into the fracas over the federal power project at Muscle Shoals, Alabama in 1928 was not the first time Smith weighed the benefits of government-run hydroelectricity. Nor was it the first time the Democratic candidate joined the debate over national power issues. In fact, during his tenure as governor, Smith engaged in a series of skirmishes with the national administration over questions of authority and of economics.

In June 1920, during Smith’s first term, Congress enacted the Federal Water Power Act, or “Esch Law,” a bill intended to bring hydroelectric development under the control of the national government. Although the implications of the act might not have seemed so pernicious to the governor when executed by the relatively friendly Wilson administration, upon his return to office in 1923 Smith would find water power policy being piloted by the Harding and then the Coolidge administration.⁵⁹¹ Smith fought against the federal authority granted by the act on the grounds that “for years it has been our understanding that Federal control over navigable streams was only and solely for the purpose of regulating navigation. In other words, we believe that the bed of the stream is

⁵⁹¹ As Thomas McCraw notes of the water power potential at Muscle Shoals, “the presence of government structures capable of producing vendible items such as electricity . . . offended the Harding administration’s sensibilities about government in business. Harding and the two Republican presidents who followed him strove to sell or lease the project to private entrepreneurs.” McCraw, *TVA and the Power Fight, 1933-1939*, pp. 1-2.

the property of the State and over it flows the water that generates the electrical energy.”⁵⁹² New York pressed a suit against the federal government challenging the Esch Law that was to be heard by the Supreme Court of the United States, with Smith rejecting the entreaties of another progressive conservationist governor, Pennsylvania Republican Gifford Pinchot, to abandon the case, saying that the streams were “the property of the State and should be preserved for the benefit of the people of the State.”⁵⁹³ To avoid the spectacle of *The State of New York v. Warren G. Harding*, a conference was held on May 10, 1923, between federal and state authorities, at which the federal government ceded to the New Yorkers exclusive jurisdiction over water power development in the Empire State.⁵⁹⁴ The litigation was dropped in response.

This arbitration did not end the quarrel between Washington and Albany, and in fact the episode only masked the most crucial issue behind the rhetoric of states’ rights. Smith remained openly critical of the national administration, warning New Yorkers in 1924: “If Republicans are the same in the State as they are nationally, bid good-bye to your water power resources. Say a farewell to the Adirondack Preserve, be prepared to deliver the inland streams and rivers to the power combine.”⁵⁹⁵ The White House was no more impressed with the direction being taken in New York. Watching the critical events of 1926 unfold, the Coolidge administration decided to push back against Smith’s drive for state-run hydroelectric plants. Private communications between the parties demonstrate that economic, rather than constitutional questions had become the real points of contention. In a memorandum for the New York governor summarizing the

⁵⁹² “Governor Rejects Appeal by Pinchot,” *The New York Times*, March 16, 1923.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁴ “Governor Smith’s Record on Conservation Parks and Recreation in New York State, PART III: ‘Water Power,’” p. 9.

⁵⁹⁵ Speech of Governor Smith at Mt. Vernon, NY, October 27, 1924,” p. 4.

position of the White House, dated December 22, 1926, the president's very different philosophy on the purpose of electrical power production was set forth—a philosophy much more in tune with the polity of 1920s America. State regulations that encumbered the freewheeling development of power by private capital were called “illegitimate items of cost” which “must be eliminated.”⁵⁹⁶ Furthermore, argued the national administration:

It is important to bear in mind that, in addition to the promoters' profits charged up as an initial cost, the constitutional return on the investment, which the United States Supreme Court says must be protected, is a constitutional return on the entire investment, that is to say, taking simple figures: Assume an actual cash capitalization of one hundred million dollars. At least 75 of these millions can be secured on a 5% basis; the balance surely on an 8% basis. That means that 25 millions cost at the rate of 2%, and 75 millions cost at the rate of 3¾%, or a total cost of the money of 5¾%, or an interest charge against the entire 100 millions of \$5,350,000 per annum. On an 8% return on the entire 100 millions, the net revenues will be \$8,000,000. The interest charges, i.e., 5% on 75 millions, are \$3,750,000. Deducting from the eight millions gives you the profit which the stockholders make on their 25 millions—\$4,250,000 on an investment of 25 millions or approximately 16% return to the common stockholders. When you realize that the actual cash capital figure of 100 millions is very often made into 200 million through the inclusion of the factors of franchise value, good will, cost of reproduction, etc., you can see how the consumers are being taxed in order to make for these large profits for investors. **IT IS THESE PROMOTERS' PROFITS WHICH ARE SENDING UTILITY STOCKS BOOMING AND WHICH GIVE TO STOCKHOLDERS A RETURN ON THE GRANT OF SOVEREIGN POWER OR GRANT OF SOVEREIGN RESOURCES WHICH THE CONSUMERS OR USERS ARE PAYING FOR.**⁵⁹⁷

After this revealing dissertation, the administration suggested that such economic dynamism would be impossible under a scheme similar to that governing the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, where tolls were charged only to cover costs,

⁵⁹⁶ J.H.C., “Memorandum For Governor Smith Showing How the Federal Government Regards Public Regulation As A Means of Safeguarding the Consumers in the Development of Hydro-Electric Power From Publicly Owned Natural Resources and the Ineffectiveness of Regulation as a Means of Control,” December 22, 1926, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 22, Folder 227, p. 1. “J.H.C.” was almost certainly Julius Henry Cohen, who regularly prepared policy briefings for Smith, often outlining, as did this memorandum, the views of the opposition.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4. Emphasis in original.

and thus profits were not accumulated.⁵⁹⁸ Julius Cohen, who compiled these administration arguments for the governor, reiterated their meaning in a less favorable light: “All these profits are made under legal sanction. In the last analysis, it means consumers are paying in their light and power rates huge dividends to the owners of common stock in power and light securities. Of course the Insulls and the Carlisles know it That is why the fight against the governor’s plan is so intense and so bitter. He has touched a delicate pocket nerve.”⁵⁹⁹

Nevertheless, there is evidence that even within the Coolidge administration there was some sentiment toward Smith’s philosophy on water power. In 1927, the Federal Power Commission, consisting of Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work, Secretary of Agriculture William Jardine, and Secretary of War Dwight Davis (who served as chair of the commission) issued its annual report, which Cohen deemed “a perfect gold mine of paragraphs in support of [Smith’s] Water Power Authority policy.”⁶⁰⁰ The commission declared that the old government policy of transferring resources from public to private hands as swiftly as possible had “resulted in an era of reckless exploitation, during which our resources . . . were wasted and destroyed as if the supply were inexhaustible.”⁶⁰¹ In light of this lesson, it was asserted that in the future, “values inherent in a public resource developed and used in the performance of an essential public service by an agency created by law for that purpose shall not be capitalized for purposes of sale, of establishment of rates, or of issuances of securities, in an amount in excess of actual

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

⁵⁹⁹ Julius Henry Cohen to Samuel Untermyer, October 11, 1927, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 23, Folder 228.

⁶⁰⁰ Julius Cohen to Alfred E. Smith, December 5, 1927, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 23, Folder 228.

⁶⁰¹ “Extracts from Seventh Annual Report of the Federal Power Commission: 1927,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 23 Folder 228, p. 2.

reasonable cost.”⁶⁰² Furthermore, “one way in which this principle can be maintained with certainty is for the public to retain in perpetuity the ownership of these resources to which it has title, and to retain it through that public agency which has the title.”⁶⁰³ Finally, assenting to Smith’s position in the constitutional controversy of 1923, the commission determined that the question was “primarily a State problem over which the States should assume the major responsibility.”⁶⁰⁴

Not among those cabinet members sympathetic to the Smith position was Secretary of Commerce Hoover, chairman of the Joint Federal Commission on the St. Lawrence Waterway Project and the man to whom engineers investigating power possibilities in that region were responsible.⁶⁰⁵ In fact, as was the case with most policy questions, the Hoover position within the administration was the dominant one—the one that denounced state control of water power development as a hindrance to the booming market in utilities securities and supported the “taxing” of working-class rate-payers in order to bankroll the investors’ bonanza.⁶⁰⁶ The leading proponents of these two positions would engage on the national stage in 1928 as the nominees of the two major parties for the presidency of the United States.

* * *

⁶⁰² Ibid., p. 2.

⁶⁰³ Ibid., p. 2.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

⁶⁰⁵ J.H.C., “Material in Support of Governor Smith’s Policy for the Development of Hydro-Electric Power through a State Water Power Authority, Showing the Financial Soundness of the Proposition and the Necessity for it by Testimony of Record from Washington,” December 22, 1926, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 23, Folder 228, p. 1.

⁶⁰⁶ There is a rich literature on the imperious nature of Hoover’s Commerce Department within the Coolidge administration. The most recent and probably the best work is by William Leuchtenburg in his Hoover biography. William E. Leuchtenburg, *Herbert Hoover* (New York: Henry Holt, 2009), especially pp. 51-79.

The history of Alfred E. Smith's conservation policies elucidates several key themes central to a broader understanding of the governor's political ideology. His fiery, often class-based rhetoric in the battles to expand state parks and to prevent private exploitation of state resources demonstrates his strongly progressive mindset, as do his administration's expansive projects for resource preservation. Smith was enthusiastic to mobilize the power of the state on behalf of his conservationist agenda. He was also willing to spend liberally on these conservation initiatives, denouncing the "kind of false economy that means a weakening of our efforts to preserve forests and streams, the great gifts of nature herself."⁶⁰⁷ His genuine interest in a variety of preservation and wildlife protection projects—not only on Long Island but throughout New York State—as well as the approbation and cooperation he received from numerous sportsmen, clubs, and upstate interest groups as a result of these actions, helps to discredit the suggestion that Smith was a myopic urbanite who knew—and cared—nothing for the world beyond the five boroughs.

Furthermore, his understanding of parks and recreation as an important facet of social welfare, especially for urban workers who lacked regular access to such facilities, expands the academic understanding of 1920s urban liberalism. The welfare state was defined not only as laws to protect workers, to shelter the poor, or to extend health services, but also to provide ample recreation, fresh air, and open space to those citizens. Moreover, access to recreation was recognized not as a privilege that was doled out by a generous caretaker state, but as a fundamental right of all people in a modern industrial society.

⁶⁰⁷ "Speech by Governor Alfred E. Smith at Mt. Vernon, NY, October 27, 1924," p. 2.

In the water power debate, Smith simultaneously took stands for the preservation of the people's natural inheritance and for responsible state development of power resources to ease the burdensome cost of energy. Smith's battles over water power development provide important insight into his expansive view of the appropriate role of the state, while foreshadowing his approach to the question of federal development of the hydroelectric potential of Muscle Shoals and other sites as a national candidate. If his scheme for state run hydroelectricity teetered on socialism, it did so out of a pragmatic willingness to experiment in order to improve the lives of all citizens—particularly the working class.

In all areas of conservation policy, Smith believed that the state should play an important part in retaining New York's forests and streams for future generations and in ensuring that all citizens were able to derive benefits from those resources, whether through preservation, access to recreation, or cheaper electricity rates. In both parks and power, there was a socioeconomic element to his thinking—the state needed to keep resources from being monopolized by the influential and the wealthy, whether they be buccaneering power trusts or Long Island barons. In both cases there was also a surprisingly strong undercurrent of conservationism, a traditional progressive virtue. This was colored by Smith's larger welfare vision to develop a working-class policy of conservation for future benefit as well as in the interest of social justice.

The case of Smith's treatment of education in New York provides further evidence of his belief in a robust and broadly defined social welfare regime. Indeed, the ways in which the administration implemented its policies in this area demonstrate several key themes about transitional progressivism under Governor Smith. The first

phase of Smith's education reforms, boosting New York City and other urban schools by raising teachers' salaries in response to the troubles of those jurisdictions, fit with the governor's initial priorities as a long-time representative of Manhattan's Fourth Ward. It also reflected his personal experience as a New York resident who recognized, through his own deprivation, the value of a quality education to urban youth. It can be seen as part of the broader sweep of Smith's early governorship, characterized by his reconstruction commission, which dealt mainly with the problems of urban industrial society that the transitional progressives understood best and that had been made all the more conspicuous by the Great War.

The second phase, Smith's program for rural schools, demonstrated the broadening of Smith's understanding of the problems of the state, and the application of his urban progressivism to the problems of rural life. In adopting the cause of rural school reform as his own, Smith shed any so-called "provincialism" and successfully applied his city-inspired social welfare vision to the plight of the countryside.

In the final phase, Smith continued his customary progressive reliance on studies by expert commissions in order to address the problem of financing the modern schools he envisaged. Smith's fervent political support for the proposals of the Friedsam Commission revealed the extent of his commitment to an active government role in improving people's lives. The governor's dedication to these progressive beliefs was exemplified in his endorsement of two particularly controversial mechanisms for the adequate funding of public schools: a dramatically enhanced role for the state in an erstwhile local concern, and the increase of taxes in order to finance this endeavor.

The Smith record also demonstrates a belief in the necessity of public health work and a willingness to appropriate generously for such purposes, reflecting an adherence to the Biggs maxim “public health is purchasable.” Smith clearly understood his efforts to “purchase” public health as an essential part of his platform (and one which he would be proud to highlight during his national campaign). Yet this was only half of the governor’s initial program for improving health care in New York. The other part was legal reform, reflected in the failed attempts to institute a compulsory health insurance law, as well as other initiatives, including a repeatedly rejected plan to ensure the purity and availability of milk by making it a state-regulated utility, and Smith’s push to consolidate local health efforts at the county level (which was partially achieved by granting the lion’s share of state aid for local public health work to county officials).

Smith never fully abandoned his hopes for compulsory health insurance, but after the proposal was killed in committee in 1920 by a militantly anti-Smith Republican majority inflated by Red Scare atmospherics, it would not regain its place as a central piece of Smith’s welfare agenda. Instead, the governor’s focus would shift away from insurance and toward an alternative means of providing wider access to quality health care: modernization and expansion of the state’s health care infrastructure. Like insurance, this proposal had been stifled by conservative legislators for years; but unlike insurance, Smith was able to devise a scheme for circumventing the politics of the legislature in pursuit of this policy. Through an administrative innovation—promoting the profligate issuance of bonds to pay for his hospitals program and other construction initiatives—Smith was able to put the choice directly to the voters of New York State, thus enabling the “Happy Warrior” to deploy his remarkable political skills.

Furthermore, by taking these projects out of the conventional appropriations process, he had defanged the legislature, reducing their opportunities to make political gains by blocking funds, and sapping their ability to reject the program outright. Once he had the money, Smith's executive capacity enabled him to push a public health program that went far beyond the hospital bond, expanding annual state spending on public health clinics, laboratories, and aid to counties and municipalities.

Smith's use of a large bonded debt for social welfare purposes enabled him to accomplish much of this agenda in his own time. Moreover, it set a two-pronged precedent for those who would follow in his wake. First, it claimed for the state a legitimately expansive role in public welfare. Second, it blazed a path for the heavy use of bonds for public works. The ramifications of this double-legacy would become immediately apparent under Smith's successor, Franklin Roosevelt, who like Smith expanded the state's role in public welfare and like Smith sought to finance many of his public works projects using bonded debt. Over the succeeding administrations of Smith, Roosevelt, and Herbert Lehman, the state's role in public welfare was legitimized both through repeated use and—eventually—through the desperation of the Depression years. But it must be noted that long before the Great Depression compelled the state and eventually the nation to expand services and endure debt, Smith was already pressing such an agenda, urging that New York fulfill its obligation to the well-being of its citizens, at whatever cost necessary.

Chapter III: Transitional Progressivism and Administrative Reform

“Inefficiency is simply waste of public money; taxation to supply waste is simply extortion.”

-Governor Charles Evans Hughes,
Conditions of Progress in Democratic Government, 1910

* * *

“I shall have . . . the prayers of my successor—because he will talk to seventeen men. I have been trying to talk to nearer 17,000 for four years.”

-Governor Alfred E. Smith, Speech, 1926

Transitional progressivism, as practiced by Governor Smith, called for the swift implementation of a broadly defined and generously funded social welfare regime. As the story of Smith’s ardent labor on behalf of this agenda demonstrates, these initiatives were often frustrated—not only by conservative politics, but also by technical and constitutional hurdles. Thus, in order to promote hospital construction, for example, the governor needed to improvise new administrative tactics—in that case, a redefinition of the appropriate use of the state’s bonded debt. The bond innovation was a remarkable one that would be of fundamental significance to the future of New York state governance, and it elucidates Smith’s priorities as well as his mastery as an executive tactician. These themes are demonstrated even more profoundly in the governor’s battle for administrative reorganization and the executive budget. Like partisan blockades and fiduciary scruples, the archaic administrative apparatus of the Empire State conspired to

hobble and halt many of the governor's social welfare initiatives. Therefore, the transitional progressive agenda, as well as traditional concerns over "good government," compelled Smith to take up the mantle of administrative reform in the name of efficiency and economy.

Numerous studies have agreed that Smith's pursuit of executive reform was intertwined with his social welfare agenda; as historian Elisabeth Israels Perry put it, Smith quickly "discovered" that "a powerless governor presiding over an array of uncoordinated agencies staffed by political hacks could never implement the reforms the Reconstruction Commission was proposing."⁶⁰⁸ Of equal significance, the episode is instructive regarding strategy. Smith pioneered a political style to accompany transitional progressivism, and he employed those tactics liberally throughout the reorganization fight: The byzantine machinations of state government were made plain to uninitiated voters; abstract reforms were promoted in palpable terms; and a long-standing objective of elite progressives was transformed into a popular cause.

I

Following his service on the Factory Investigating Commission and his legislative campaigns for labor reforms from 1912 to 1914, the next major step in Al Smith's rise to progressive legitimacy was taken at the State Constitutional Convention of 1915. By the end of that gathering, the nationally renowned New York Republican Elihu Root was lauding "Mr. A. E. Smith, the member of this convention whose personality has so

⁶⁰⁸ Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, p. 135; Eldot, *Governor Alfred E. Smith*, p. 76.

impressed itself upon every member.”⁶⁰⁹ Not only did these events confirm Smith’s emerging reputation as a progressive, they also sparked his interest in administrative reform.

It was at the 1915 convention that Al Smith first joined the battle for reorganization, the issue having been raised by Senator Root.⁶¹⁰ There the debate was centered much more around the “short ballot” than questions of administrative reorganization or the executive budget.⁶¹¹ Simply put, the ballot reform would reduce the number of elected state officers; rather than electing a state treasurer or a state engineer or a secretary of state, these officers would be appointed by the governor.⁶¹² Furthermore, those state officials who would continue to be elected, such as the governor, attorney general, and comptroller, would gain stronger appointive power over their own departments—in the case of the governor, appointive power over the entire cabinet.⁶¹³

Although the rhetoric of reform was framed by the question of the short ballot, the larger goal was increasing efficiency and economy through administrative reorganization. Root affirmed this shortly after the convention, remarking that “the short ballot feature of the bill was but an incident to this great work of putting the executive and administrative business of the state upon a sound business basis of accountability and responsibility, and

⁶⁰⁹ Elihu Root, “Invisible Government,” in *Addresses on Government and Citizenship* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), pp. 191-206, p. 197.

⁶¹⁰ It is also noteworthy that in 1914, while still a member of the state assembly, Al Smith had been a central figure in passing a bill calling for the short ballot. The Democratic caucus had initially opposed the bill, but after Smith successfully amended the measure to retain the Comptroller and Attorney General as elective constitutional offices, the legislative Democrats voted with the progressive Republicans to approve the measure. (Of course, with the failure of the 1915 constitution, nothing ever came of this particular short ballot bill.) Root, “Invisible Government,” pp. 197-98; Alfred E. Smith, Personal Notes on Reorganization. Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 14, Folder 167.

⁶¹¹ Root, “Invisible Government,” p. 191.

⁶¹² Alfred E. Smith, “Responsive and Responsible Government,” in *Progressive Democracy: Addresses and State Papers of Alfred E. Smith*, pp. 83-92, p. 84.

⁶¹³ Root, “Invisible Government,” p. 192.

responsiveness.”⁶¹⁴ Thus the short ballot was but one manifestation of the larger push for dramatic consolidation in state government.

Proposing reorganization before the constitutional assembly, Senator Root eloquently decried the state of the state, declaring: “Anybody can see that all these one hundred and fifty-two outlying agencies, big and little, lying around loose, accountable to nobody, spending all the money they can get, violate every principle of economy, of efficiency, of the proper transaction of business.”⁶¹⁵ In response, the convention adopted several key provisions designed to remedy New York’s chaotic administration. The delegates “undertook to condense all those one hundred and fifty-two agencies of the state into seventeen departments.”⁶¹⁶ Furthermore, they “undertook to require that the overlapping and the interference, and the useless expenditure of money should be done away with, by putting all those agencies into a limited number of departments, under one head that . . . could be held responsible by the governor of the state who himself can be held responsible by the people of the state because they will have given him power upon which they can hold him responsible.”⁶¹⁷ These measures, encapsulated within the executive reorganization proposal, were approved by the convention with a majority of more than four to one.⁶¹⁸

The new document required that the seventeen heads of the newly consolidated state departments “furnish the governor in ample time a statement of the needs of their

⁶¹⁴ Elihu Root, “The New York State Constitution and Representative Government,” in *Addresses on Government and Citizenship*, pp. 227-244, p. 233.

⁶¹⁵ Elihu Root, “Invisible Government,” p. 200.

⁶¹⁶ Elihu Root, “A Study of the Proposed Constitution,” in *Addresses on Government and Citizenship*, pp. 213-225, p. 216.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 216-17.

⁶¹⁸ On this bill, the Republicans voted 97 to 15 in favor, and the Democrats voted 25 to 15 in favor, with 3 additional votes in the affirmative (these three votes are not accounted for by Root), for a total majority of 125 to 30. Root, “The New York State Constitution and Representative Government,” p. 241.

departments, to arrange them in the order of their importance, [and] to be responsible for that statement.”⁶¹⁹ The document then charged the governor to “revise these statements and cut them down, or hold himself responsible for the amounts. . . [and] to lay the statements of the needs of the executive departments of the whole state government before the legislature side by side with a statement of the resources from which the appropriations are to be paid.”⁶²⁰ Thus, the convention established within its new constitution the executive budget. This provision was approved by a majority of “more than thirty-four to one.”⁶²¹

At the close of the convention, the delegates felt that they had taken the state’s executive branch, which had been “ill-compacted, confused, extravagant, subject to no effective control,” and “sought to apply the rule of responsibility.”⁶²² The convention had proposed that New York’s tangled web of 169 state agencies, boards, and commissions, be consolidated into 17 departments.⁶²³ All executive functions would be run through the new departments of Law, Accounts, Finance, Treasury, Taxation, State, Public Works, Health, Agriculture, Charities and Correction, Banking, Insurance, Labor and Industry, Education, Public Utilities, Conservation, and Civil Service.⁶²⁴ With the short ballot provision, ten departments would now have their leaders appointed by the governor, while only two would retain elective constitutional officers—the comptroller

⁶¹⁹ Root, “A Study of the Proposed Constitution,” pp. 217-218.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

⁶²¹ On this bill, the Republicans voted 101 to 2 in favor, the Democrats voted 36 to 2 in favor, for a majority of 137 to 4. Root, “The New York State Constitution and Representative Government,” p. 241.

⁶²² Root, “A Study of the Proposed Constitution,” pp. 215-16.

⁶²³ In fact the total was seventeen higher than the one hundred fifty-two that Elihu Root routinely decried. F. C. Crawford, “Legislative Notes and Reviews: New York State Reorganization,” *The American Political Science Review*, 20:1 (February, 1926), pp. 76-79.

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

and attorney general at the heads of the Departments of Accounts and Law, respectively.⁶²⁵

Al Smith had been an important supporter of these reforms during the convention, adopting the traditional progressive interest in efficient government. However, the new constitution was submitted to delegates for approval *in toto* rather than in individual sections; and New York City Democrats like Smith voted against the document, largely because the proposed charter did not remedy the gross underrepresentation of the City in the state legislature—an injustice resulting from decades of upstate gerrymandering.⁶²⁶ While the new constitution limped out of the convention, it was rejected at the polls in November, with reformers like Smith actually campaigning against the document that contained administrative innovations for which they had fought.⁶²⁷ While the proposals for reorganization and the short ballot were “generally well received,” there was too much “cumulative opposition to the document” for it to be ratified by a majority of New Yorkers.⁶²⁸ The result spelled doom for reorganization; and while Republican governor Charles Whitman would make some attempts at pursuing administrative reforms during his two terms (attempts which were blocked by his own party in the legislature), such proposals would not again enjoy even a near-miss like 1915 until Smith became governor four years later.⁶²⁹

⁶²⁵ Ibid., p. 77.

⁶²⁶ Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 110.

⁶²⁷ Crawford, “Legislative Notes and Reviews: New York State Reorganization,” p. 77.

⁶²⁸ Ibid., p. 77.

⁶²⁹ Alfred E. Smith, “The Cooing Dove,” in *Progressive Democracy: Addresses and State Papers of Alfred E. Smith*, pp. 20-28, p. 21.

II

Smith's gubernatorial pursuit of administrative reform originated in the proposals of his State Reconstruction Commission. The executive secretary of this body was the governor's close advisor Belle Moskowitz, on whose advice Smith had called upon Robert Moses, a young reformer whose Oxford thesis had explored administrative reorganization as a means of promoting government efficiency, to help write the commission's final report.⁶³⁰ The findings were organized into a series of twelve reports published in 1919 and 1920.⁶³¹ A chief concern was the question of administrative reform. Because of the failure of the 1915 constitution, reorganization would now have to be undertaken by constitutional amendment, which required approval in two consecutive legislatures and then ratification by the voters.⁶³² The proposal, while favored by Smith, was not originally a priority of the new governor—he was much more anxious to bring about many of the social reforms endorsed by the commission.⁶³³ But Smith soon came to understand that the executive's ability to endeavor for reforms of any kind would be handicapped without administrative reorganization. An enlightening episode occurred when the head of the Department of Farms and Markets was cited for corruption, and yet Smith had no authority to remove him from office.⁶³⁴ More significantly, Smith could not set the state agenda without crafting his own budget proposals, yet the governor of New York lacked such authority.⁶³⁵ During Smith's first

⁶³⁰ Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, p. 122; Caro, *The Power Broker*, p. 100.

⁶³¹ Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, p. 125.

⁶³² *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

year in office, the Republican legislature, motivated by party antagonism, refused to move on any of the governor's proposals, capping what was widely decried as a do-nothing legislative session.⁶³⁶ At the end of his first term, a frustrated Smith accurately grumbled that it had become "notorious throughout the State that much of my administration so far as constructive suggestions requiring legislation were concerned was fought by a Republican majority in the state legislature with no regard whatever to the merit of my proposals."⁶³⁷

Those proposals, largely the fruits of Smith's reconstruction commission, were an early manifestation of the Democrat's developing transitional progressivism. Influenced both by the urgent conditions identified by social workers and the Tammany pragmatism of politicians like Al Smith, this progressivism had departed the realm of the abstract. When Smith became governor and initiated the reconstruction commission, he made it clear that he was not interested in a theoretical exercise, barking: "Is this commission going to do something or is it just going to offer a report? Are you going to have something definite that can be put into effect to benefit the state? Because if you are not, the sooner you report and go out of existence the better."⁶³⁸ It will be recalled that, with these marching orders, the commission did seek to "do something definite to benefit the state," proposing a catalogue of social initiatives in areas like housing, recreation, and public health. The programs that were introduced by the commission and championed by Smith reflected much of the social work agenda, and spoke to the governor's unique progressive sensibilities.

⁶³⁶ "Legislature Noted for Little it Did," *The New York Times*, April 20, 1919, p. 10.

⁶³⁷ Alfred E. Smith, Campaign Speech at Poughkeepsie, October 19, 1920, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 26, Folder 255.

⁶³⁸ Smith quoted in Caro, *The Power Broker*, p. 101.

Yet it also will be recalled that while the governor and his forces fought doggedly for these and other reforms, they lost the first round of each bout. It took three years to create a housing board.⁶³⁹ This triumph came comparatively briskly, as most of the reconstruction programs would not be adopted until Smith's third term. The development of state parks on Long Island did not begin in earnest until Smith's fourth term, and only after a protracted court battle that was won chiefly by the maneuvering of Robert Moses.⁶⁴⁰ Approval for a milk commission and for workers' health insurance initiatives would never be secured in the Smith era.⁶⁴¹

It was through such frustrations and failures that Al Smith came to embrace administrative reorganization. He had already supported it conceptually during the constitutional convention of 1915; yet in the midst of that debate Smith switched sides, and during the state-wide campaign for ratification, he fought against the reorganized constitution—as Moses biographer Robert Caro has noted, for Al Smith partisan loyalty and regional interests had trumped good theory.⁶⁴² Partisanship did not trump theory, however, when Smith realized that the social reforms he knew would help the people of his beloved Lower East Side—and workers all over New York—were more likely to succeed under a progressive reorganization scheme.⁶⁴³

Thus Smith became the foremost champion of administrative reorganization in New York. To him, it was more than a progressive reform a long time in coming, more

⁶³⁹ Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, p. 132.

⁶⁴⁰ Caro, *The Power Broker*, pp. 181-206; see chapter 2.

⁶⁴¹ Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, pp. 129, 134; see chapter 2.

⁶⁴² Caro, *The Power Broker*, p. 127.

⁶⁴³ As Caro notes, it was the political concerns that Charlie Murphy held about reorganization, and not *only* the legitimate concerns about New York City's legislative underrepresentation, that led Smith and others to reject the 1915 constitution. Thus, it is not enough to say that Smith had been emancipated from the concerns over gerrymandering and was now free to embrace reform without any political scruples. It was only his failed attempts at reform that thrust him past that political threshold. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

than just making state government more scientific. By consolidating budget-making authority and executive powers in the governor, the proposed reorganization enhanced the governor's ability to set the agenda for the entire state government. By increasing the efficiency of state administration, these reforms would provide resources for aggressive social programs and increase the efficacy of existing welfare initiatives.

During the second legislative session of Smith's first term, the governor was able to "bludgeon" the legislature into passing the reorganization amendment.⁶⁴⁴ *The New York Times*, criticizing the bloated state budget, editorialized in favor of the reorganization program as it lay before the legislature, declaring:

There must be a halt to this extravagance. There can be none until the machinery of government is simplified, until there is a responsible and effective administrative control, and by means of an executive budget, responsible and effective financial control. New York is lagging behind the great majority of states.⁶⁴⁵

During that autumn's gubernatorial race, the incumbent made the need for reorganization a central theme of his campaign. Smith lamented the inefficient stewardship of state funds by legislative Republicans, laying the foundation for his argument in favor of an executive budget.⁶⁴⁶ In a speech at Brooklyn, the governor countered charges by his opponent, Judge Nathan Miller, that Smith's "paternalistic" programs were a drain on the state treasury:

The Judge well knows that the real solution of the cost of government in this state is a change in the present method of making appropriations, and well knows that the cost of this government is made necessary because of its cumbersome organization. . . . I have declared for an executive budget at Albany, in the interest of economy. . . . I have declared in favor of reorganization and

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁶⁴⁵ "Reorganization of the State Government," *The New York Times*, February 11, 1920, p. 10.

⁶⁴⁶ Alfred E. Smith, Campaign Speech at Brooklyn, October 26, 1920, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 26, Folder 255.

consolidation of the state departments, not only in the interest of economy, but to promote efficiency in the government of the state.⁶⁴⁷

There was no question that New York's government was wasteful. Actors on all sides sought to remedy this in a variety of ways. Smith sought to do so not by scaling back social welfare programs, but by making government run more efficiently. The governor rhetorically asked his opponent just which of his "paternalistic" initiatives he would cut—would it be care for orphans?⁶⁴⁸ Or would he reduce hospital funding?⁶⁴⁹ Or would he eliminate care for the mentally ill?⁶⁵⁰ To Smith, a miserly campaign of whittling necessary social programs down to austerity—or eliminating them outright—was not a serious solution. The only "real solution of the cost of government" was reorganization.⁶⁵¹

Although Smith lost in November, it was clear that his message had taken root in reform circles. The incumbent had retained the backing of many "old-line reformers, independents and Republicans who normally would have supported his opponent," and managed to run well ahead of the national Democratic ticket in New York.⁶⁵² In New York City, Republican presidential nominee Warren G. Harding won by 443,000 votes; simultaneously, the Democrat Smith won the city by 325,000 ballots.⁶⁵³ Moreover, there was a "record vote for Smith in districts normally Republican," and many considered his showing "a great personal triumph."⁶⁵⁴ Meanwhile, Miller's allies expressed

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid.

⁶⁵² Caro, *The Power Broker*, p. 111.

⁶⁵³ "City's Vote Goes to Harding and Smith," *The New York Times*, November 3, 1920, p. 1.

⁶⁵⁴ "Smith Defeated by About 74,000," *The New York Times*, November 4, 1920, p. 1.

disappointment with the judge's relatively weak showing in the midst of a national Republican landslide.⁶⁵⁵

Nevertheless, the election of Nathan Miller put the reorganization program in peril. In order to appear on the ballot, the amendment was required to pass in two consecutive legislatures—it had thus far only progressed half way. Under Miller's direction, the legislature failed to approve the amendment a second time. The new governor made clear his opposition to the reorganization and executive budget bills, and in response the Republican legislature did not even let them out of committee.⁶⁵⁶ For now, reorganization appeared moribund.

Defeat did not equate to a withdrawal from public life for Al Smith, nor did it terminate his interest in reorganization. In a 1921 speech before the New York State Association, the former governor lectured his progressive audience on the virtues of the still unfinished fight:

I think it is agreed by everybody that we are struggling along in this State under a constitution we have grown away from. We are trying to fit the activities of a great State into constitutional machinery that was manufactured before anybody in the room was born. . . . I am taking a good, cold, practical common-sense view of it, and if there is any man in this State who can give me a good reason why the people of this State should elect a State Engineer I should like to hear it. . . . The same thing applies to Secretary of State. The same thing applies to State Treasurer. Still we go on in solemn fashion every two years putting forth candidates for all of these State offices. Is there any reason we should have in this State five or six different tax-collecting agencies? . . . What man can give us any reason for having four or five commissions dealing with prison matters in this State? . . . Does it look like efficiency? Does it look like responsibility? No, it looks like confusion.⁶⁵⁷

Smith continued with a telling anecdote that illustrated the results of such administrative inefficiency:

⁶⁵⁵ "Miller Lead, 64,014, 107 Dists. to Come," *The New York Times*, November 5, 1920, p. 2.

⁶⁵⁶ Caro, *The Power Broker*, p. 111.

⁶⁵⁷ Smith, "Responsive and Responsible Government," pp. 83-85.

The commission on prisons after the plans had been drawn for the new death house at Sing Sing found a provision in the law that gave them power to say whether or not it was to be built, and they decided to hold it up. I summoned them to the Executive Chamber and discussed it with them in the presence of the State architect and the superintendent of prisons. We all agreed that the building should be built, as long as the plans were all drawn, and were about to submit them for public letting, but the commission on prisons changed its mind about it, and there we are. We have the death trap down on the Hudson River years after the Legislature has declared its purpose, years after the State speaking through its law-making body has declared its desire for a new building; and the old one is still standing there.⁶⁵⁸

After further haranguing against the lumbering and disorganized status quo, Smith presented his remedies. He reaffirmed his commitment to “a constitutional amendment to reduce the number of elective offices and provide for the creation of . . . eighteen departments of government.”⁶⁵⁹ Smith also denounced the existing budget-making process, remarking that “every governor has come to regard the present budget system as a kind of joke.”⁶⁶⁰ He continued to assert the need for an executive budget system, like that proposed by the convention of 1915.⁶⁶¹ Smith also tried to allay the fears of those who worried that this was simply an executive power grab, stating somewhat disingenuously that “nobody would want to take away policy-making from the legislature. . . . Don’t let anybody talk to you about the executive budget system interfering with the power of the Legislature. No suggestion of that kind appears in the amendment.”⁶⁶²

Smith’s appearance at the New York State Association was one of the few major policy speeches he delivered during his two year hiatus from office.⁶⁶³ Nevertheless, the

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 85.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 87.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 88.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 87-88.

⁶⁶² Ibid., pp. 88-89.

⁶⁶³ Ibid., p. 83.

address, and discussions Smith had with his old reformer-colleagues, indicated that he was ready to make another run for governor, and that reorganization was now at the top of the agenda.

In a speech at the Lexington Opera House on November 4, 1922, just days before the election, challenger Al Smith accused incumbent Nathan Miller of exacerbating statewide dysfunction by killing reorganization. “By his action he continued the disorganized and disjointed government that he claims he was able to make run, although nobody, not even the progressive members of his own party, believes that to be possible.”⁶⁶⁴ In their rematch, Smith cruised to victory over Miller, winning by 387,000 votes statewide—to that time the largest plurality for any gubernatorial candidate in New York.⁶⁶⁵

Back in office, Smith pushed with renewed vehemence for his reorganization program. In his inaugural address on New Year’s Day 1923, Smith briefly touched on the question of increasing efficiency, and implored the legislature to cooperate with him during his new term.⁶⁶⁶ He began making allusions to his famous Republican forerunner, Charles Evans Hughes, and analogizing his difficulties with the Republican legislature to those faced by Hughes when he tried to take on party bosses fifteen years earlier.⁶⁶⁷ Smith did have political capital to spend, having won the most decisive victory in New York gubernatorial history, and he increased this advantage both through his political cunning and his ability to garner the support (and invoke the legacy) of progressive

⁶⁶⁴ Alfred E. Smith, Campaign Speech at Lexington Opera House, November 4, 1922, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 26, Folder 258.

⁶⁶⁵ Caro, *The Power Broker*, p. 135.

⁶⁶⁶ Alfred E. Smith, “Inaugural Address: 1925,” in *Progressive Democracy: Addresses and State Papers of Alfred E. Smith*, pp. 75-6, p. 75.

⁶⁶⁷ Alfred E. Smith, “The Difference Between the Republican and Democratic Parties in New York State,” in *Progressive Democracy: Addresses and State Papers of Alfred E. Smith*, pp. 43-51, p. 46.

Republicans. Meanwhile, the administration continued to concentrate on the question behind the scenes at cabinet meetings.⁶⁶⁸ That year, the assembly did pass the reorganization amendment, setting the program back on track for a chance at referendum. A triumphant Smith crowed that “passing the consolidation amendment has lifted this important issue out of the realm of controversy.”⁶⁶⁹

The next year, Smith once again called for an executive budget, which had theretofore floundered in the legislature. In his 1924 message to that body, he lectured that “hand in hand with reorganization of the Government itself should go a fundamental and permanent reform in the State’s financial structure. Throughout the country there is an insistent demand for a greater degree of Executive responsibility for the appropriation of public moneys.”⁶⁷⁰ By October, the governor could announce that “the Constitutional amendments providing for the reorganization of the Government were passed by both houses and are now awaiting passage by the new Senate to be elected this Fall.”⁶⁷¹ However, Smith, again a candidate for reelection, retained significant grievances with legislative Republicans: “They refused absolutely to provide by constitutional amendment for an executive budget, and in place of it they put forth the dishonest proposal that a budget bureau be created by statute.”⁶⁷² This would not suffice, because “the laws governing the appropriation of money today are fixed in the constitution, and no modern method can be adopted without amendment to that document. They know

⁶⁶⁸ Minutes from Smith cabinet meetings kept by Robert Moses show that the work of the committee on reorganization was usually the first item on the agenda in this period. Calendars of the Governor’s Meetings, February, March of 1923, Robert Moses Papers, Box 4, Folder “Cabinet.”

⁶⁶⁹ “Full Text of the Annual Message of Governor Smith to the State Legislature,” *The New York Times*, January 3, 1924, p. 10.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶⁷¹ Awaiting re-passage by the senate, since the lower house had already passed the bill twice. “Text of Gov. Smith’s Address,” *The New York Times*, October 5, 1924, p. 2.

⁶⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

that just as well as I do, and their proposal for a statutory budget commission is a smoke screen to hide their opposition to honest, straightforward budget reform.”⁶⁷³

By now, the momentum of the reorganization movement was almost certain to force legislators to acquiesce. It was becoming increasingly clear that 1925 would be the year in which the battle over these reforms would leave the halls of Albany and be taken to the voting public. Thus, that year would be one in which Al Smith’s talents as a speaker, debater, and campaigner would become vital.

Smith received a major opportunity to apply those talents to the reorganization cause on March 7, 1925, at a debate sponsored by the Women’s City Club. Thanks in large part to the work of Belle Moskowitz, a member of the group’s board since 1922, the club had energetically backed Smith’s executive reform proposals for several years.⁶⁷⁴ Now they decided to host a debate on the issue. Molly Dewson, the organization’s civic secretary, sent invitations to Lieutenant Governor Seymour Lowman and State Senator Jimmy Walker to represent the Republican and Democratic viewpoints, respectively.⁶⁷⁵ Sensing an opportunity to rally support before a friendly audience, Smith announced his intention to take Walker’s place.⁶⁷⁶ Smith’s flair for debate was so “legendary” in New York that when it was learned that the governor intended to engage Lowman personally, Dewson and club president Ethel Dreier traveled to Albany to inform the lieutenant governor of the change—and to give him the opportunity to withdraw.⁶⁷⁷ Dewson recalled that “it was in the winter yet great drops of perspiration [*sic*] came out on his

⁶⁷³ Ibid., p. 2.

⁶⁷⁴ For example, according to Perry, in April of 1924 “the club sent every Assembly member an appeal to pass the executive budget and also four-year term bills.” Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, p. 165.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 165.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 165.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 165; Caro, *The Power Broker*, p. 124.

forehead”]; but although visibly nervous at the prospect of jousting Smith in public debate, Lowman “was a sport and did not back out.”⁶⁷⁸

The event was an oratorical tour-de-force for a politician already notorious for his prowess in debate. Lowman fired the opening salvo the afternoon of the event, distributing a press release in which he referred to Smith as taking “his usual holier-than-thou” stance and stating that “no twisted vision of intoxication can be more arbitrary and more dangerous than the mind of an ambitious man who is drunk with power.”⁶⁷⁹ While taking a slightly more amicable posture in face-to-face debate, the lieutenant governor nevertheless accused Smith of engaging in an unabashed power grab. He also insinuated that Smith was merely the front man for other progressives’ ideas, claiming that “very rarely does [Governor Smith] advance a plan or policy that is original with him.”⁶⁸⁰ On making these accusations, Lowman was “roundly hissed” by the largely pro-reorganization (and pro-Smith) audience.⁶⁸¹ As the crowd continued to exhibit hostility toward the lieutenant governor, Smith genially applauded, both “staving off embarrassment” and “giving the outburst against his opponent a friendly turn.”⁶⁸² Despite being granted by his adversary a temporary reprieve from the antagonism of the audience, Lowman continued to pursue an aggressive indictment of the Smith agenda:

Governor Smith . . . is the first ruler of an Anglo-Saxon State to demand executive power over the purse since the days when the English yeomen on the field of battle overthrew the right of the King to levy taxes and appropriate money.

⁶⁷⁸ M.W.D. (Molly Dewson), Untitled Document, Mary W. Dewson Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY, Container 4, Folder, “Smith, Alfred E., Correspondence Re 1928 Campaign.” Elisabeth Israels Perry quotes this passage as well, but attributes the remarks to Mary Dreier. Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, p. 165.

⁶⁷⁹ “Governor Cheered, Lowman Hissed in Budget Debate,” *The New York Times*, March 8, 1925, pp. 1, 23. p. 1

⁶⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶⁸² Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, p. 165; “Governor Cheered, Lowman Hissed in Budget Debate,” p. 1.

Revolutions . . . rocked kingdoms to take away from Kings and Emperors the power of raising and spending money.⁶⁸³

Rising to open his remarks, Smith approached a table and arranged several exhibits that he intended to use throughout his response. Addressing the irony of Lowman's analogy between the wealthy, well-born King John and Al Smith, a poor grandson of immigrants who grew up in the slums of the Lower East Side, the governor began by proclaiming himself the "king from Oliver Street."⁶⁸⁴ Lowman, having reconsidered the situation, fled the hall.

During his remarks, Smith attempted to answer the argument that the executive budget and administrative reorganization programs were aimed at reducing the influence of the legislature: "After the appropriation bill becomes a law, the legislator is as free as he can be to get up and build all the bridges and all the roads, to dig all the canals and to do any God's thing he wants, but the terrible thing is that he must show where the money is coming from."⁶⁸⁵ He also noted support for his plan among a group of Republican legislators, also citing the general support for reorganization by Elihu Root, the former senator and secretary of state who had played such a key role in promoting constitutional reorganization at the 1915 convention. Smith referenced Lieutenant Governor Lowman's prior support for the so-called "Root Plan," and repeatedly quoted Root's 1915 speeches on the subject.⁶⁸⁶ This tactic of invoking the names of prominent New York Republicans would yield nearly continuous benefits to Smith throughout the duration of the reorganization battle.

⁶⁸³ "Governor Cheered, Lowman Hissed in Budget Debate," p. 1.

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

The governor went on to discuss other important issues of the day in his comments, including the enforcement of prohibition and the state's apportionment system, but it was the issue of reorganization that dominated the night—and it was on that issue that Smith triumphed in the debate. The headline in the next morning's *New York Times* read:

GOVERNOR CHEERED, LOWMAN IS HISSED IN BUDGET DEBATE

The subhead noted: "Smith's Economy Program Warmly Received at Women's Club Luncheon."⁶⁸⁷

This episode is demonstrative of Smith's ability to apply his talents as a politician—working an audience, telling compelling anecdotes to illustrate a point, reaching "across the aisle" for support—to the battle over his reorganization plan. In the following months, the governor continued to speak out vigorously on behalf of the proposal. Addressing the Economic Club of New York on May 18, Smith expressed his wish "to have the people of the State put a little check on the Legislative procedure to try to stop them from seeking, year after year as they have been doing for the last ten years, a certain control over the administrative departments of the government through the appropriation bill."⁶⁸⁸ In a July debate with former governor Miller, Smith blamed Republican procrastination on reorganization and the administrative chaos that ensued with causing overcrowding in state hospitals that, by Smith's first term, "constituted a disgrace to the State of New York."⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶⁸⁸ Alfred E. Smith, Speech at the Economic Club of New York, May 18, 1925, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 28, Folder 294.

⁶⁸⁹ Alfred E. Smith, Speech at Carnegie Hall, July 9, 1925, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 28, Folder 295.

Thus, for Smith the March debate with Lowman was the opening skirmish in a very public battle over administrative reorganization. The governor's decision to take the battle to the public is noteworthy on its own merits, for as historian C. K. Yearley notes, proponents of administrative reform had always eschewed appeals "to the masses," partly as "a matter of style" and partly because "they could rarely count on much from the general public except indifference."⁶⁹⁰ Contrastingly, Smith's argument for reorganization, crafted in layman's terms by a well-liked politician, effectively popularized the subject.

Furthermore, the Lowman debate is particularly significant because it suggests the importance of invoking the names, words, and deeds of respected Republicans—a tactic which Smith and his allies would use to great effect in the proceeding months. A Democratic executive who was consistently confronted with Republican legislative majorities, Al Smith understood that bipartisanship would be fundamental to achieving administrative reorganization. His experiences as a caucus leader in Albany had taught him the art of bipartisan negotiation; his upbringing in the culture of Tammany by wheeler-dealers like Tom Foley had taught him the importance of offering extreme generosity to secure political loyalties. In his protracted battle with the legislature, Smith would offer progressive Republicans both the reforms they sincerely coveted and the acclaim they could hardly refuse.

⁶⁹⁰ C. K. Yearley, *The Money Machines: The Breakdown and Reform of Governmental and Party Finance in the North, 1860-1920* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1970), p. 168.

III

By 1925, the governor enjoyed public support from prominent Republicans including Elihu Root and Henry L. Stimson, secretary of war under William Howard Taft; but he still struggled to convince his partisan rivals in the state legislature to back his reorganization program. For example, early in 1925 legislative Republicans disingenuously introduced an ersatz budget reform known as the Hewitt-Hutchinson Bill.⁶⁹¹ The proposal was patterned somewhat after the Federal Budget and Accounting Act of 1921, which gave the president the duty to produce a “recommended budget”—a budget that could then be ignored by Congress.⁶⁹²

Simultaneously, Smith was increasingly able to count on his progressive Republican allies to break party ranks and speak out against the obdurate posture of the legislature. At a luncheon of the New York’s Banker’s Club on March 5, reorganization proponents Root and Stimson criticized Hewitt-Hutchinson, which had been amended by the GOP to permit the legislature to increase and strike out budget items.⁶⁹³ In a document released by the Democrats, noted Republican lawyer Richard S. Childs, editor of the *National Municipal Review* and treasurer of the New York State Association, decried the legislative budget system, where, in his view, department heads “become lobbyists, dealing with legislators who are eager for patronage for their constituents.”⁶⁹⁴ (Childs, who had spent years calling for consolidated executive leadership whose “legislation would be scientific,” joined forces with Smith after being impressed, like

⁶⁹¹ Draft of Letter to the Editor, Elihu Root and Henry Stimson, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 2, Folder 25.

⁶⁹² Ibid.

⁶⁹³ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁴ Press Release, Democratic Publicity Committee, 1925 (day and month unknown), Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 2, Folder 25.

other progressives, by the conviction this unlikely ally brought to the reorganization fight.)⁶⁹⁵

Through these Republicans, the Smith camp began to make overtures to the man who could without exaggeration be considered the crown jewel of New York's Republican Party: Charles Evans Hughes. By now a former governor, United States Supreme Court justice, secretary of state, and presidential nominee who happened to be an erstwhile spokesman-in-chief for administrative reorganization in New York, Hughes seemed both a natural and powerful potential ally for the reform movement. Based on his track record, the reformers' pursuit of Hughes was quite logical.

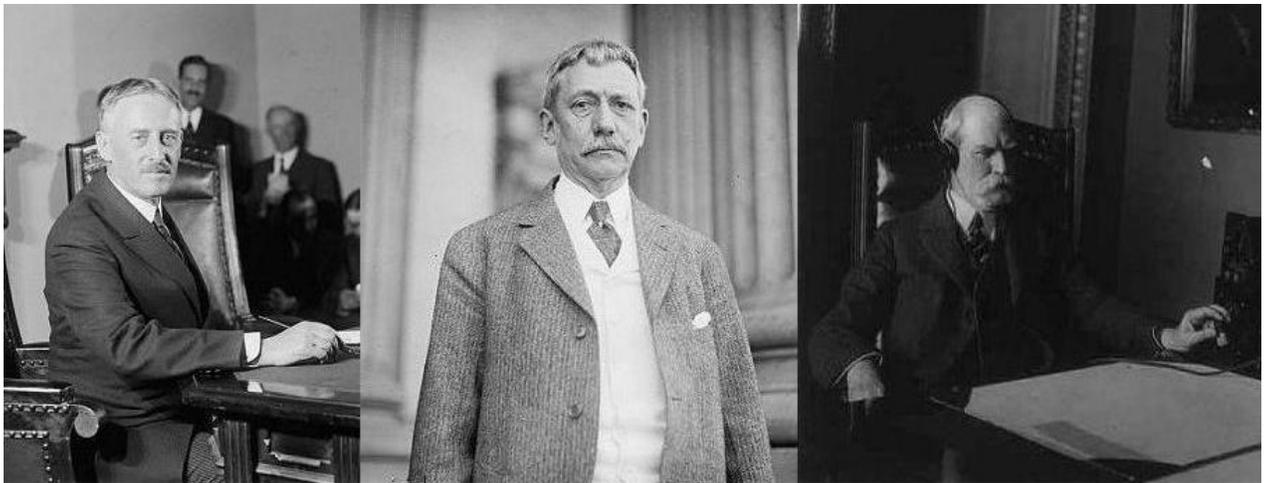


Fig. 3.1: A number of prominent New York Republicans supported Smith's endeavors at administrative reform. Among them were (left to right): Henry L. Stimson, Elihu Root, and Charles Evans Hughes.⁶⁹⁶

Indeed, the issues of reorganization and the short ballot had first been raised in New York by Governor Hughes during his 1910 message to the legislature, in which he

⁶⁹⁵ Richard S. Childs and William P. Burr, "Executive Leadership in a Democracy: Discussion," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science in the City of New York*, 8:1, pp. 54-55, p. 55.

⁶⁹⁶ "Henry L. Stimson, [3/26/29], National Photo Company Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; Bain News Service, "Elihu Root," George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress; "Charles Evans Hughes, 1862-1948," National Photo Company Collection, Library of Congress.

called for “administrative reorganization and consolidation.”⁶⁹⁷ Laying much of the intellectual groundwork for later battles over the issue, Hughes suggested that reorganization would “tend to promote efficiency in public office by increasing the effectiveness of the voter and by diminishing the opportunities of the political manipulators who take advantage of the multiplicity of elective officers to perfect their schemes at public expense.”⁶⁹⁸

As early as his first year on the job, Hughes had encountered some of the administrative difficulties that later would inspire his vigorous support for reform. In 1907, Hughes was forced to endure an affair in which a “bungling” state official, Otto Kelsey, could not be removed from his post due to the governor’s administrative weakness.⁶⁹⁹ Kelsey, the superintendent of insurance, had failed to make changes in his department after several major scandals, and was deemed incompetent by Hughes.⁷⁰⁰ However, at that time leaders of state agencies could only be removed by the state senate, so there was no official action that Hughes could take to remove Kelsey from his post. After a long and turbulent public battle between Hughes and Kelsey (the latter backed by powerful interests who desired that the embattled bureaucrat’s régime continue), the senate refused to unseat the superintendent.⁷⁰¹

The Kelsey case is an important anecdote in understanding the basic rationale for the style of administrative reorganization that Hughes and other reformers embraced. At the center of such reforms must be increased gubernatorial control over the state’s

⁶⁹⁷ Crawford, “New York State Reorganization,” p. 76; Finla G. Crawford, “Administrative Reorganization in New York State,” *The American Political Science Review*, 21:2 (May, 1927), pp. 349-359, p. 350; “Hughes in Message Calls for Reforms,” *The New York Times*, January 6, 1910, p. 3.

⁶⁹⁸ Crawford, “New York State Reorganization,” p. 76.

⁶⁹⁹ Merlo J. Pusey, *Charles Evans Hughes* (New York: MacMillan, 1951), pp. 191-199, 203.

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

executive bureaucracy. As it stood, the governor could not discipline department heads: Many antedated the governor, having been appointed by previous executives to terms that insured their tenure would persist long after their appointer-patron had left office. Others were elected on the same ballot as the governor, and thus were responsible only to the voting public.⁷⁰² Still others were installed by the legislature. None served at the pleasure of the governor; Hughes, or any other chief executive, was powerless to remove department heads, or any of their subordinates. Thus the Kelsey affair was a distressing illustration of the need for reform. The governor was incapable of controlling the personnel within his branch of government—indeed, many of them served in spite of the governor’s wishes. The state senate was the only body empowered to remove such individuals from office, and there the political spoils of patronage and the power of political machines and corporate interests trumped any impulse toward reform. The entire matter led Hughes and other reform-minded politicians to believe that effective administration would require “a concentration of executive powers in the hands of the governor.”⁷⁰³

Not only the Kelsey experience but the larger question of executive reform helped to inform Hughes’ actions. In setting up public service commissions, Hughes was steadfast in his demand that the governor must have power to remove their members.⁷⁰⁴ Hughes’ speeches across the state made increasing reference to the need for a stronger executive in the battle for statewide reform.⁷⁰⁵ Meanwhile, Republican bosses and other

⁷⁰² Such officers included the secretary of state, the state engineer, and the state treasurer.

⁷⁰³ Pusey, *Charles Evans Hughes*, p. 215.

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

party men had found Hughes' crusading temperament so obnoxious that many believed the party might not even re-nominate the sitting governor.⁷⁰⁶

Of course Charles Evans Hughes was both re-nominated and reelected. In his second inaugural address, Hughes argued for more efficient state government—to be accomplished, in part, by establishing gubernatorial control over executive department heads.⁷⁰⁷ To make the case, Hughes drew an analogy between his proposed system and the president's cabinet—perhaps the first, but certainly not the last time this reference was made during the reorganization fight.⁷⁰⁸ By 1910, the governor was calling specifically for administrative reorganization and the short ballot.⁷⁰⁹ That same year, Hughes partnered with Comptroller Clark Williams to study the idea of an executive rather than legislative budget-making system.⁷¹⁰

These were to be the last advances in the march toward administrative reorganization made under the governor who had initiated the struggle. Although Hughes continued to speak on behalf of such reforms during and after his second and final term as governor—delivering a series of lectures at Yale University in which he turned his attention to the question of “Administrative Efficiency”—his gaze became increasingly fixed on national issues.⁷¹¹ Moving forward, the fight for reorganization would be without its pioneer and original champion.

⁷⁰⁶ Here are two brief examples. Fellow Progressive Republican (and fellow New Yorker) Theodore Roosevelt had been so frightened of a possible Hughes defeat that he “used every ounce of power he possessed to bring about Hughes' re-nomination.” Secretary of State Elihu Root believed that had it not been for this presidential intervention, the incumbent would have garnered the votes of only two hundred of the convention's more than one thousand delegates. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

⁷⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

⁷⁰⁹ Crawford, “New York State Reorganization,” p. 76.

⁷¹⁰ Pusey, *Charles Evans Hughes*, p. 260.

⁷¹¹ In these lectures, the Governor railed against the inefficient administration of New York. “Inefficiency,” he warned, “is simply waste of public money; taxation to supply waste is simply extortion.”

More than a decade later, Smith and his allies saw the former governor as the ideal field marshal in the rekindled battle over reorganization. Hughes gubernatorial activities demonstrated that he was ideologically committed to the reform program—indeed it was Hughes who had laid much of the groundwork for the movement. Moreover, Hughes’ Republican bona fides were not to be questioned. Here was a credible Republican who had been a trailblazer for reorganization and, significantly, was completely trusted by Smith’s progressive Republican allies.⁷¹² But Hughes was reluctant to involve himself in the issue, due to the partisan nature of the contemporary debate.⁷¹³ It was only a series of Republican misfires and Democratic entreaties that prompted the former governor to reenter the battle for administrative reform.

The first move was made by the legislative Republicans. Smith’s forces had planned to announce the formation of a commission that would be charged with crafting the final proposals for reorganization should the necessary amendment be approved at the impending referendum. The Republicans, having caught wind of this strategy, struck first, announcing the formation of their own commission on reorganization—even furnishing an impressive list of names to fill it. The proposed commission would involve such notables as former governor (and Smith nemesis) Nathan Miller, former speaker H.

He also discussed the importance of efficiency to understanding how to remedy truly dysfunctional government: “Efficient administration is also necessary to reveal defects in government, and to point the proper direction of remedial efforts. We cannot tell what is needed until what we have has been well tried. We are frequently in a state of confusion as to results because the experiments in the public laboratory are so carelessly conducted. The best plans of progress will be shattered if administration is faulty. And it is hardly worth while to consider improvements unless at the same time we insist upon having public work attended to with absolute fidelity and with the highest degree of ability that we can command.” Hughes also addressed the question of the short ballot, stating that a “fundamental difficulty in enforcing . . . accountability is found in the number of offices which are filled by election.” Charles Evans Hughes, “Administrative Efficiency,” in *Conditions of Progress in Democratic Government* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1910), pp. 32-58, pp. 32-41, 55.

⁷¹² Alfred E. Smith to Henry L. Stimson, December 7, 1925, Alfred E. Smith Correspondences, Reel 86. Henry L. Stimson to Alfred E. Smith, December 9, 1925, Alfred E. Smith Correspondences, Reel 86.

⁷¹³ Pussey, *Charles Evans Hughes*, p. 623.

Edmund Machold, and of course Charles Evans Hughes.⁷¹⁴ It appeared as though the legislative Republicans had outfoxed Smith and the Democrats.

But this was in fact a Pyrrhic victory for the Republicans. In their haste to beat the governor out of the box with a commission proposal, they had made the “clumsy” error of “not finding out if appointments are willing to serve” on their commission.⁷¹⁵ Many of these notables were not even aware that they were being considered as appointments. Wrote Hughes: “I know nothing of the matter except what I have seen in the newspapers, and so far my appointment on the Commission has not been brought before me in a manner requiring any decision on my part.”⁷¹⁶ The acerbic Robert Moses declared that the confused responses of Hughes and others demonstrated “how crudely the whole thing was done.”⁷¹⁷ Some even feared that the possibility of Hughes’ participation had been jeopardized by the “infantile” manner in which the legislative Republicans issued their invitation to the celebrated New Yorker.⁷¹⁸

The chaos generated by the Republican maneuver created a prime opportunity for the Smith forces. According to Richard Childs, “Gov. Smith, although taken by surprise, promptly welcomed this move since it implied Republican support for the amendment and an expectation that it will be passed in November.”⁷¹⁹ Rather than fight the Republicans, Smith chose to persuade them to modify their proposal to meet his requirements. The governor convinced the legislators to allow him to “repair some of

⁷¹⁴ Pussey, *Charles Evans Hughes*, p. 624; Richard S. Childs to Charles Evans Hughes, July 1, 1925, Robert Moses Papers, Box 4, Folder “Alfred E. Smith-George Graves Correspondence.”

⁷¹⁵ Robert Moses to Alfred E. Smith, July 8, 1925, Robert Moses Papers, Box 4, Folder “Alfred E. Smith-George Graves Correspondence.”

⁷¹⁶ Charles Evans Hughes to Richard S. Childs, July 6, 1925, Robert Moses Papers, Box 4, Folder “Alfred E. Smith-George Graves Correspondence.”

⁷¹⁷ Moses to Smith, July 8, 1925.

⁷¹⁸ Richard S. Childs to Charles Evans Hughes, July 1, 1925, Robert Moses Papers, Box 4, Folder “Alfred E. Smith-George Graves Correspondence.”

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*

their omissions” by appointing fifteen additional members to their commission.⁷²⁰ Furthermore, an open letter from Smith suggested the installation of Hughes as commission chairman.⁷²¹ Childs wrote several letters to Hughes, imploring him, with a mix of flattery and alarmism, to accept the post. He praised Hughes as the obvious choice to lead the commission, stating that “it seemed particularly appropriate inasmuch as it was you who opened the fight for the short ballot idea in 1910. . . . It was our hope that your name and your interest in the amendment would dignify it as good Republican doctrine and make it harder for the [upstate Republican] machine to oppose.”⁷²²

At the same time, Childs outlined the dire consequences that could befall their shared reform ambitions should Hughes abstain: “It is . . . important that ex Gov. Miller shall not be chosen as he is hopelessly wrong-headed on this subject and defeated it one year by a wink to legislators when he was Governor. If you were not made chairman, it would be dangerously logical for the Commission to turn to him!”⁷²³ The possibility of a Nathan Miller chairmanship, as well as the rumored Republican intention to hand the gavel to former speaker Machold, were in fact frightening possibilities to those, including Hughes, who favored comprehensive reform.⁷²⁴ Furthermore, without the clout that Hughes would bring to the commission, reformers were “far from certain that the up-state machine would refrain from knifing” reorganization.⁷²⁵

Hughes’ legitimate concern that the administrative reorganization program for which he had spent years fighting might be in peril, as well as the prestige offered to him

⁷²⁰ Ibid.

⁷²¹ Handlin, *Al Smith and His America*, p. 96.

⁷²² Childs to Hughes, July 1, 1925.

⁷²³ Ibid.

⁷²⁴ Pussey, *Charles Evans Hughes*, p. 624.

⁷²⁵ Childs to Hughes, July 1, 1925.

by Smith and other advocates of reform, encouraged the former governor to put an end to his recent quiescence on the issue. The once-reluctant Hughes did agree publicly to serve on the commission, and while “there had been some speculation as to the chairmanship,” the suggestion of Hughes “practically ended the discussion.”⁷²⁶ As reformers had hoped, the voters ratified a constitutional amendment which stated that “all the civil, administrative, and executive functions of the State government’ shall be assigned to twenty departments . . . and provide[d] that, while no new department shall be created, the Legislature may reduce the number of departments by consolidation or otherwise.”⁷²⁷ The amendment passed with almost 60 percent of the vote.⁷²⁸

IV

The ratification of the reorganization amendment was but a single step—now the commission needed to make concrete proposals. Under Hughes’ chairmanship, the commission set about its task of preparing a report in time for the 1926 legislative session.⁷²⁹ Subcommittees were authorized, each charged with investigating and developing reorganization plans for specific arms of the state bureaucracy.⁷³⁰ The chairmanships of these committees were distributed among a diverse group of important

⁷²⁶ In fact, Hughes was not *elected* to the chairmanship until the first official meeting of the commission on November 19, 1925, after successful passage of the reorganization amendment. Under the Republican proposal, the commission was to elect its chairman from the whole body once it was seated; however, both publicly and privately (as demonstrated by Governor Smith’s “open letter”), the Democratic “plan” was “to get [Hughes] the chair.” Crawford, “Notes on Administration: Administrative Reorganization in New York State,” p. 350; Handlin, *Al Smith and His America*, p. 96; Childs to Hughes, July 1, 1925.

⁷²⁷ “Text of the Hughes Report on the Consolidation of State Departments,” *The New York Times*, March 2, 1926, p. 13.

⁷²⁸ The vote to amend article five and section eleven of article eight to allow for reorganization passed with 1,048,087 for 775,768 against. Malcolm, ed., *The New York Red Book, 1928*, p. 598.

⁷²⁹ The vice chairmanship was held by John Lord O’Brian. Pussey, *Charles Evans Hughes*, p. 624.

⁷³⁰ Pussey, *Charles Evans Hughes*, p. 624; “Text of the Hughes Report,” p. 13.

New Yorkers: Colonel Stimson chaired the committee on executive and state departments; former speaker Machold chaired audit, taxation and finance; former Republican governors Charles Whitman and Nathan Miller chaired public works and banking and insurance, respectively; and former Democratic presidential nominee John W. Davis chaired civil service.⁷³¹ These sub-committees were then to report their findings to Hughes' executive committee, which in turn would author the commission's final report.⁷³² The group was noted for its intense sessions, long hours, and relentless schedule—all driven by the zeal and determination of its newly revitalized chairman.⁷³³

The commission's proposals, dubbed the "Hughes Report on the Consolidation of State Departments," were submitted to both houses of the legislature on March 1, 1926.

The report began by dealing with the issue of department executives, recommending:

The heads of the various departments shall be individuals and not boards or commissions. . . . the tenure of heads of the departments shall be the same as that of the Governor who appoints them. . . . heads of departments [shall be] appointed by the Governor and by and with the advice and consent of the Senate [and] may be removed by the Governor in a manner to be prescribed by law.⁷³⁴

After dealing with the question of appointment and removal of department heads, the report outlined sixteen proposed new departments under the consolidated system: Executive, Audit and Control, Taxation and Finance, Law, State, Public Works, Conservation, Agriculture and Markets, Labor, Education, Health, Mental Hygiene and Charities, Correction, Public Service, Banking and Insurance, and Civil Service.⁷³⁵

⁷³¹ "Text of the Hughes Report," p. 13.

⁷³² Pussey, *Charles Evans Hughes*, p. 624; "Text of the Hughes Report," p. 13.

⁷³³ *E.g.*: "Once the members rebelled when he tried to keep them in continuous session without any lunch. His seeming insensibility to the pangs of hunger when there was serious work to be done was one failing that his associates never quite forgave." Pussey, *Charles Evans Hughes*, p. 624.

⁷³⁴ "Text of the Hughes Report," p. 13.

⁷³⁵ The Department of Agriculture and Markets was in fact the exception to the gubernatorial appointment rule. "While believing that the administration of this department might be improved by the application of the same principle of centralization of authority and responsibility which is to be applied to the other civil

Collapsing 187 state agencies into these 16 executive departments was only half the job: it was also vital to define specifically the jurisdiction and operating procedures of the realigned bureaucracy.

Perhaps the most dramatic changes proposed by the Hughes report were those involving the executive department—an entity without precedent in other reorganized states.⁷³⁶ It was in this department that many of the most important reforms that Smith and others had desired were realized. Hughes' executive department was to be headed by the governor, a move expressly designed to “increase [the governor's] power of supervision and to make him exercise the necessary duty of coordinating the activities of these departments which in the future will constitute the executive branch of the State Government.”⁷³⁷ The department was to be divided into five divisions, including one to oversee the state budget.⁷³⁸ In that body, the commission took steps toward establishing the long-coveted executive budget system. Responsibility for “formulating the budget and exercising supervision and control over the estimates, requests and expenditures of the various departments of the State” was now placed unequivocally upon the

departments of the State Government, we have taken into consideration the fact that the constitutional amendment recognized an exception as to the method of choice of the head of this Department by leaving the matter in the hands of the Legislature. . . . The head of the Department shall be the State Council of Farms and Markets, the members of which shall be chosen in such manner as the Legislature may determine, with power to elect a Commissioner of Agriculture to be the executive head of the Department.” The Departments of Education, Mental Hygiene and Charities, and Civil Service, were to be headed by commissions as well, however in each of these cases, the governor, with advice and consent of the senate, was given the power to appoint members. Furthermore, the comptroller, who was to be the head of the Department of Audit and Control, and the attorney general, who was to be the head of the Department of Law, were to remain elected offices, and thus were not subject to appointment of any kind. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁷³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁷³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁷³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

governor.⁷³⁹ The Division of Budget was thus to “assist the governor in performance of his fiscal functions.”⁷⁴⁰

While pressing forward with the controversial executive budget, the commission went to some lengths to relieve fears that New York was embarking on an unprecedented systemic overhaul that would lead to an imbalance of state power. The report explained that unlike the executive department proposal, the executive budget was not original to New York. “In thirty States,” the commissioners reassured, “the budget is now formulated by the Governor alone. In ten more States it is formulated by a board composed either of a group of executive officers, which includes the Governor, or are nominated by him.”⁷⁴¹ Furthermore, the Republican-dominated federal government had moved toward such a system as well, “thus reversing a Congressional practice of over one hundred and thirty years.”⁷⁴² Significantly, the commission pointed to New York’s tardiness in embracing reform: “[I]n only two states, Arkansas and Rhode Island, is [the budget] still formulated by the Legislature.”⁷⁴³

No longer would the Empire State be noted for its archaic budget system. Under the new method, the heads of the concurrently overhauled departments would be emancipated from their annual pilgrimage to the legislature. This was to be the end of department chiefs groveling before legislative committees, their budget requests honored only after they had paid tribute in the form of patronage to powerful chairmen. Instead,

⁷³⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid., p. 13.

⁷⁴² Of course this assertion is somewhat disingenuous, since many of the reformers who fought for the executive budget considered the new federal budget system a sham. Ibid., p. 13.

⁷⁴³ Ibid., p. 13.

these officers, most of whom were to be appointed by the governor, would bring their requests directly to the executive. As prescribed by the Hughes Report:

The head of each department of the state government except the legislature and judiciary, shall submit to the governor itemized estimates of appropriations to meet the financial needs of such department. . . . The Governor, after public hearing thereon . . . shall revise such estimates according to his judgment. . . . [and then] shall submit to the legislature a budget containing a complete plan of proposed expenditures and estimated revenues.⁷⁴⁴

The plan also allowed the governor to submit supplemental budget requests and amendments to the original budget, although explicitly prohibited from vetoing the original executive budget proposals once they were approved by the legislature.⁷⁴⁵

Besides granting the chief executive more appointment power over department heads, defining for those officers tenures simultaneous to that of the governor, and establishing the long-overdue executive budget system, the Hughes Report also took on the herculean task of streamlining the state government by eliminating redundancy and consolidating agencies. Reorganization was not pursued exclusively “in the interest of economy, but [also] to promote efficiency.”⁷⁴⁶ This was to be the beginning of the end for the anachronistic hodgepodge of 187 boards and commissions operating throughout the state. New York would no longer have “five or six tax-collecting agencies,” nor would it continue to abide “four or five commissions dealing with prison matters.”⁷⁴⁷

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

⁷⁴⁵ It is important to be clear on this point: the governor retained his power of veto against legislative amendments to the original budget; it was only the original gubernatorial budget proposals that were exempt from veto. Declared the commission: “When the budget is formulated by the Governor, he should not have any further control over the budget after the Legislature has acted upon his proposal except in regard to such new items as the Legislature may have introduced. To leave with the Governor his present power of constitutional veto in respect to a budget which he himself has formulated, tends to destroy the Legislature’s sense of responsibility and turn over to the Governor the purse strings of the State.” Ibid., p. 13.

⁷⁴⁶ Alfred E. Smith, Campaign Speech at Brooklyn, October 26, 1920, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 26, Folder 255.

⁷⁴⁷ Smith, “Responsive and Responsible Government,” pp. 84-85.

Entities such as the Department of Narcotic Drug Control, established for the sole purpose of “enforcing three sections of the Public Health Law” independently of the Department of Health, would be eliminated—their functions absorbed into more accountable overarching state departments.⁷⁴⁸ This consolidated system would curb redundancy, cut costs, and alleviate the governor’s reaffirmed duty of coordinating the functions of the various state agencies.⁷⁴⁹ Proclaimed Smith: “I shall have the prayers—at least the prayers of my successor—because he will talk to seventeen men. I have been trying to talk to nearer 17,000 for four years.”⁷⁵⁰ Furthermore, by calling specifically for gubernatorial appointment of most department heads, the Hughes Commission’s report finally established the short ballot in New York.⁷⁵¹

By December of 1925, with the reorganization amendment ratified a month prior and the Hughes Commission deeply absorbed in its efforts to consolidate state government, Al Smith was beginning to see victory within reach. Colonel Stimson wrote that in a meeting with the governor, Smith had told him “emphatically” that “no man or men could induce him to become Governor for another term . . . he was only anxious to finish up this work for the state.”⁷⁵² This issue had come to define much of Smith’s executive tenure, and it would be a major piece of his legacy to the Empire State.⁷⁵³

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 85-86.

⁷⁴⁹ “Text of the Hughes Report,” p. 13.

⁷⁵⁰ Alfred E. Smith, “A Typical Financial Accounting to the People,” in *Progressive Democracy: Addresses and State Papers of Alfred E. Smith*, pp. 116-131, p. 122.

⁷⁵¹ Crawford, “New York State Reorganization,” pp. 78-79.

⁷⁵² State Reconstruction Comm., Notes of interview of Governor Smith and Col. Stimson, December 2, 1925, Alfred E. Smith Correspondences, Reel 86.

⁷⁵³ According to future governor Thomas E. Dewey, Smith was “a fine executive,” because “he reorganized the entire State government into a modern system and introduced the first Executive Budget.” Thomas E. Dewey, in Robert Moses, ed., *A Tribute to Governor Smith* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962), pp. 9-10, p. 9.

The conclusion of the decade-and-a-half long struggle seems anticlimactic. The Hughes Commission's prestige was so great that the legislature "hastened to accept not only the organizational pattern but also the recommended changes in the law."⁷⁵⁴ The Hughes Report had stipulated that the changes go into effect January 1, 1927.⁷⁵⁵ The legislature voted to enact the proposals and referred those necessitating further constitutional alterations to the people for approval; in the fall of 1927 amendments were ratified establishing the governor as head of the executive department and instituting the executive budget.⁷⁵⁶ Smith, who of course did stay on for one more term as governor, was able to oversee the implementation of the consolidation program, and was the first governor of New York to produce his own budget.⁷⁵⁷

* * *

To declare this long episode a success for Smith and the progressives simply on the merits of their having won the political battle over reorganization would be irresponsible. Yes, after more than fifteen years of political maneuvering, administrative consolidation and the executive budget were now constitutionally mandated. But this fact was not a progressive triumph on its own. In order to assess the success or failure of Smith and his allies, one must analyze whether they were able to achieve any of the governmental virtues that they believed reorganization would promote.

⁷⁵⁴ Pussey, *Charles Evans Hughes*, p. 624.

⁷⁵⁵ "Text of the Hughes Report," p. 13.

⁷⁵⁶ Malcolm, ed., *The New York Red Book, 1928*, p. 598.

⁷⁵⁷ Dewey, *A Tribute to Governor Smith*, p. 9. See note 760.

The most obvious measures of reorganization's effectiveness are figures like the number of state agencies, the number of state employees, and the overall size of the budget. Looking exclusively at the cost of running the state, in search of a reduced budget, suggests that reorganization failed. In 1925, the total cost of operating the state was \$169,719,834.33.⁷⁵⁸ In 1926, that figure stood at \$185,896,833.36; an increase of \$16,176,999.03.⁷⁵⁹ These were two typical consecutive years in the heart of Smith's administration, and the last two budgets prior to the passage of reorganization. In 1928, Smith's executive budget message estimated state needs at \$229,269,065—an increase over two years averaging \$21,686,115.82 per year.⁷⁶⁰ In 1929, when Smith's heir Franklin Roosevelt submitted his first budget—an executive budget for a reorganized state government and the first budget created under the new constitutional provisions—the estimated cost of operating the state was \$256,418,774.58.⁷⁶¹ This was an increase of \$27,149,709.58 over 1928. Thus, from 1926 to 1929, the state budget increased by \$70,521,941.22. If, for the purposes of simplification, this increase is averaged over the first three years under reorganization (in fact it increased even more rapidly as time progressed), then it amounts to an annual increase in the budget of \$23,507,313.74. The budget increased by over \$8 million more per year in the first three years after

⁷⁵⁸ Alfred E. Smith, *The Citizen and his Government* (New York: Harper, 1935), p. 225.

⁷⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

⁷⁶⁰ "Smith Avoids New Taxes in Budget of \$229,269,065, Reducing the Levy on Realty," *The New York Times*, January 17, 1928, pp. 1, 16, p. 1. This is referred to as "Smith's executive budget message" intentionally. It is true that the constitutional amendment for the executive budget did not go into effect until the fall of 1928, and thus "really [became] effective only during the session of the Legislature of 1929." However, Smith crafted his own budget, referred to as "the governor's budget bill," and did so "in accordance with Chapter 546 of the Laws of 1926," which "was made to conform as closely as possible under the present provisions of the Constitution with the new Executive Budget Amendment to the Constitution." As noted earlier, successors like Thomas Dewey would credit Smith with having "introduced the first executive budget," and not without cause. The numbers are those of an executive budget, not one created by the legislature, and so I believe this label is appropriate. *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 16; Dewey, *A Tribute to Governor Smith*, p. 9.

⁷⁶¹ "Text of Governor Roosevelt's First Budget Message, the Longest on Record," *The New York Times*, January 29, 1929, pp. 14-15, p. 14.

reorganization. Comparing these two sets of consecutive years, two before and two after reorganization, it is clear that not only did the reforms fail to rein in the growth of the state budget, but indeed the budget increased even more after reorganization.⁷⁶²

Nor did reorganization succeed in truly reducing the number of state entities and their employees. Ostensibly, the Hughes Commission collapsed the 187 state agencies, bureaus, and commissions into 16 executive departments; in reality, the commissioners did not eliminate many of these bodies so much as they organized them within 16 umbrella departments. While some redundant entities were absorbed by others or eliminated outright, many more were placed under the control of the new departments. This promoted better organization and communication and established a clear chain of command with authority vested in the governor. It did not necessarily reduce the size or complexity of government. Indeed, Roosevelt's 1929 budget was longer than any previous budget in New York history.⁷⁶³

Reorganization did not dramatically slash bureaucracy. Not that Smith had really set out to do so. While many progressives, including Smith, engaged in the rhetoric of promoting economy through reducing bureaucracy, organization to foster more effective administration was much more important to the governor. What was to be gained by eliminating "unnecessary personnel" anyway, Belle Moskowitz is reported to have asked with an air of Tammany-like pragmatism—"Personnel, she said, were voters. . . . You didn't antagonize voters."⁷⁶⁴

Thus, reorganization did not reduce the size of government, either in cost or in number of employees. The traditional progressive goal of promoting economy had not

⁷⁶² It would not be useful to compare budgets after 1929, as 1930 represents the first Depression era budget.

⁷⁶³ "Text of Governor Roosevelt's First Budget Message," *The New York Times*, p. 14.

⁷⁶⁴ Quoted in Caro, *The Power Broker*, p. 98.

been achieved.⁷⁶⁵ But what about efficiency? After all, it was efficiency that Smith's transitional progressivism truly required, for by promoting efficient administration, the needs of the citizens could be met by good government. To assess this, one must consider whether the governor's new budget-making power held up or was usurped by powerful legislative committee chairs. If legislators once again seized control over the design of the budget, then the governor's ability to set the state agenda and administer state policy efficiently would be severely compromised. One must also assess whether this change really promoted Smith's ultimate ambition of using a streamlined executive system to promote social welfare.

Early in the administration of Franklin Roosevelt, attempts were made to circumvent the governor's budget-making authority. The legislature sought to give two committee chairmen "power to control and dictate the expenditure of lump sums appropriated for certain departments of the state . . . without the executive having the power to approve or disapprove of their actions."⁷⁶⁶ Roosevelt refused to acquiesce to this assault upon the nascent executive budget. Furthermore, the legislature had struck out several of Roosevelt's appropriations measures, substituting their own lump sum appropriations, and the governor maintained that under the new system the legislature could not segregate items within the budget and substitute for them itself, that rather it

⁷⁶⁵ A 1980 study of the effects of administrative reorganization on the cost of state governance and employment by state governments showed that the New York experience was anomalous. "Although the orthodox theory of government organization holds that executive reorganization can save money and reduce employment, the empirical evidence . . . shows that significant savings rarely occur. Of 16 reorganized states, only three showed a statistically significant long-term decline in employment, while none showed a significant short-term decrease. None of the short- or long-term reductions in expenditures were statistically significant." Kenneth J. Meier, "Executive Reorganization of Government: Impact on Employment and Expenditures," *American Journal of Political Science*, 24:3 (August, 1980), pp. 396-412, p. 410.

⁷⁶⁶ Smith, *The Citizen and his Government*, p. 78.

could only strike out or reduce items.⁷⁶⁷ Late in 1929, the New York State Court of Appeals decided in favor of the governor, declaring that the legislature had overstepped the powers conferred upon it by the state constitution as amended.⁷⁶⁸ This case affirmed the executive budget system; the governor's ability to set the state agenda through the budget-making power was fortified.

This power quickly proved crucial to the governor's ability to direct the state efficiently in promoting social welfare. By the end of Roosevelt's first year in office, the nation was embroiled in the Great Depression. The executive budget gave him "some flexibility in initiating . . . programs," and so Roosevelt was able to mobilize the state government in response to the economic catastrophe.⁷⁶⁹ With this gubernatorial action, the transitional progressive understanding of efficient government was realized. The state was able to respond to the social tumult wrought by mass-unemployment thanks in part to reorganization.

Al Smith had argued that the government had a responsibility to improve the lives of its citizens through social welfare programs. Frustration at the *de facto* inability to fulfill this promise had led him to crusade for administrative reorganization. Now reorganization had helped the government respond to desperate social problems. For Smith it was this goal, rather than reducing the cost or size of government, that was paramount.⁷⁷⁰ To this end, the reforms were a success.

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 79-80.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 82.

⁷⁶⁹ Allan M. Winkler, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Making of Modern America* (New York: Pearson, 2006), pp. 49-51.

⁷⁷⁰ However, it is also significant that this is an example of machine politics being mobilized on behalf of a "good government" reform. The classic literature on such reforms suggested that they were anathema among urban machine politicians like Smith; but John Buenker has made a convincing case against this view using the example of ratification of the Seventeenth Amendment: "The fate of the Seventeenth Amendment in the major industrial states amply demonstrates that the urban political machine was one of

This episode provides another example of Smith's agenda pressing traditional progressive ideas toward a more modern liberalism—here the governor sought classic progressive reforms (efficiency, economy, accountability), but did so largely out of truly liberal motives (the desire effectively to provide necessary welfare services). In the field of administration, the progressives championed a professional, rational, scientific administrative structure. But this in itself is not a liberal initiative. For example, one could favor reorganization in order to ensure domination of government by the educated élite. Indeed, many adherents of the “cult of efficiency” were hostile toward “a democracy more plural than they preferred.”⁷⁷¹ Moreover, the push for economy could just as easily cause one to decry social programs as unnecessary extravagancies. For example, Smith's reorganization ally Elihu Root once lamented of social welfare programs: “We are setting our steps now in the pathway which through the protection of a paternal government brought the mighty power of Rome to its fall.”⁷⁷² Smith pursued reorganization to enable government to engage in the sort of programs that Root would have censured as “paternal.” The reorganization narrative elucidates the distinctive nature of Al Smith's progressive sensibilities by revealing his zeal for, and intended use of, a quintessentially progressive reform; it sets Smith's progressivism apart from that of many of his contemporaries, placing him at the crossroads of Progressivism and modern liberalism.

the most consistent and influential supporters of this reform. In some states the machine was simply one of several political factions favoring ratification. In others—New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Massachusetts—machine support was unquestionably the major force behind the success of the measure. . . . the machine politician's attitude toward political reform was not uniformly reactionary, but selectively pragmatic.” The case of administrative reform in New York State buttresses the arguments made by Buenker. John D. Buenker, “The Urban Political Machine and the Seventeenth Amendment,” *The Journal of American History*, 56:2 (September, 1969), pp. 305-322, p. 320.

⁷⁷¹ Yearley, *The Money Machines*, p. 147.

⁷⁷² Quoted in McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America*, p. 164.

Of equal significance is what this history demonstrates about Smith's progressive style. Many who had pressed for executive reorganization, as well as other progressive reforms, had intentionally avoided popular political crusades in favor of more academic or legalistic exercises. And why not?—after all, when presented to the voters, the reformist 1915 constitution was roundly rejected. Yet rather than being theoretical and even élitist, the reform program proffered by Smith, while often esoteric, was transformed by its sponsor into a people's initiative. This was in fact the essence of Smith's progressivism. According to Robert Moses, the governor "had a way of getting at the heart of things and popularizing very abstruse questions so that the average fellow could understand them."⁷⁷³ Others shared this evaluation: future New York City mayor Robert F. Wagner, Jr., opined that his father's long-time ally "could get people, the rank and file of America, to understand what the problems were—make complicated issues plain to them, so they could understand," while future New York governor Charles Poletti "liked [Smith's] mind because he was able to as I say strip any problem into simple terms and get those simple terms over to the people."⁷⁷⁴ Even Franklin Roosevelt concurred, writing that "Governor Smith reminds me of Theodore Roosevelt in his instinctive method of stripping the shell of verbiage and extraneous matter from any problem and of then presenting it as a definite programme which any one can understand."⁷⁷⁵ Thus, the Happy Warrior's battle for administrative reorganization, perhaps the most arcane of progressive initiatives, demonstrates one of the most

⁷⁷³ "A Conversation with Robert Moses," 1973, Columbia Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, p. 14.

⁷⁷⁴ "The Reminiscences of Robert F. Wagner, Jr.," p. 99; "The Reminiscences of Charles Poletti," p. 189.

⁷⁷⁵ Franklin D. Roosevelt, *The Happy Warrior, Alfred E. Smith: A Study of A Public Servant* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1928), p. 16.

important qualities that Smith brought to the development of transitional progressivism: the ability to “popularize the abstruse.”



Fig. 3.2: Rollin Kirby, “There’s No Use in Trying to Beat That Man Smith” (1925).⁷⁷⁶

⁷⁷⁶ Rollin Kirby, “There’s No Use in Trying to Beat That Man Smith” (1925), from the Collections of the Museum of the City of New York.

PART II

1928

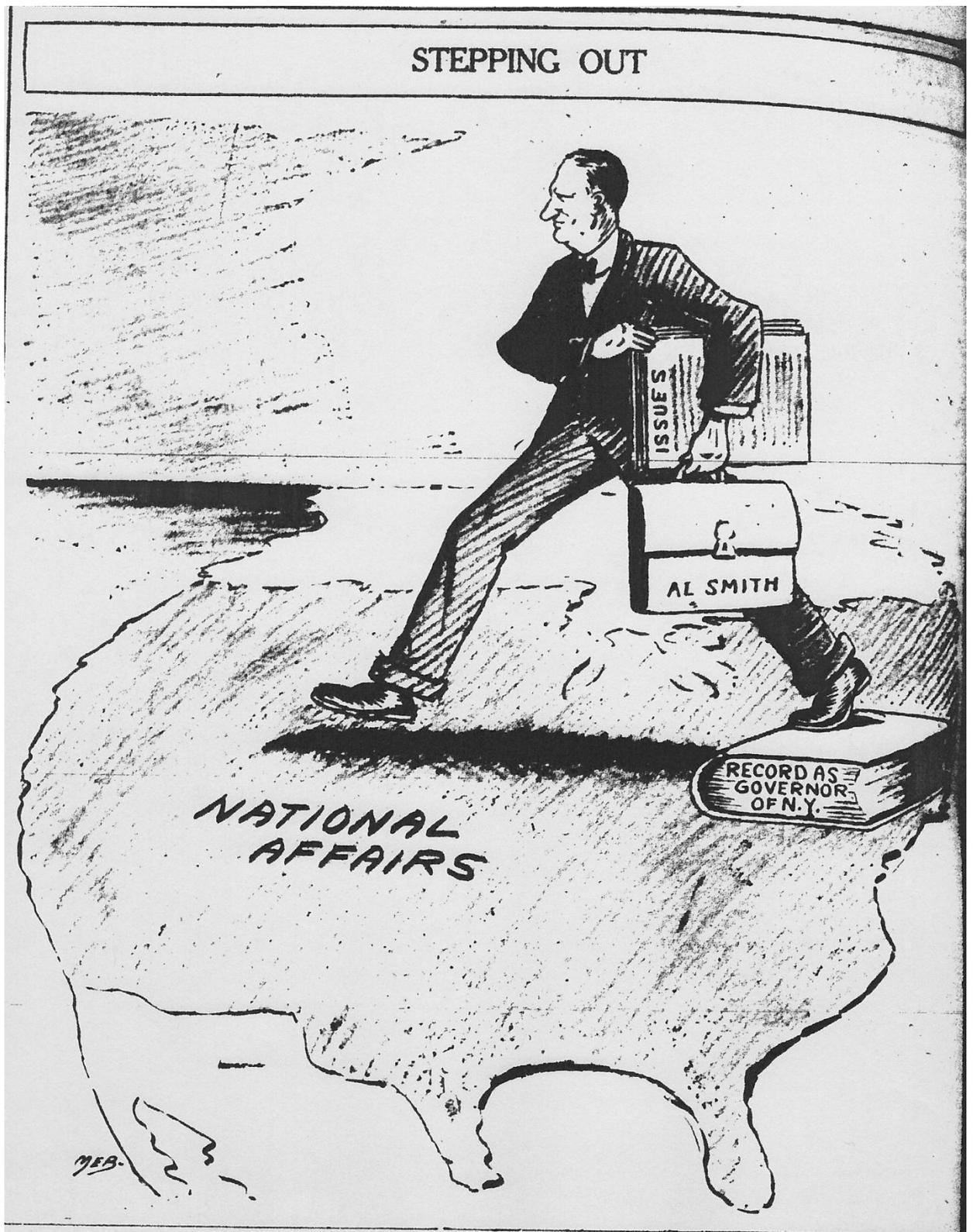


Fig. II.1: "Stepping Out," *The Brooklyn Eagle*, August 28, 1928, p. 8.

Chapter IV: The Campaign of the Decade

“Dominant in the Republican Party today is the element which proclaims and executes the political theories against which the party liberals like Roosevelt and La Follette and their party insurgents have rebelled. This reactionary element seeks to validate the theory of benevolent oligarchy. It assumes that a material prosperity, the very existence of which is challenged, is an excuse for political inequality. It makes the concern of the government, not people, but material things. I have fought this spirit in my own State. . . . in order to place upon the statute books every one of the progressive, humane laws for whose enactment I assumed responsibility in my legislative and executive career. I shall know how to fight it in the nation.”

-Alfred E. Smith, Address of Acceptance, August 22, 1928

* * *

“There has been revived in this campaign . . . a series of proposals which, if adopted, would be a long step toward the abandonment of our American system and a surrender to the destructive operation of governmental conduct of commercial business. . . . In effect, they abandon the tenets of their own party and turn to State socialism.”

-Herbert C. Hoover, Address at Madison Square Garden, October 22, 1928

* * *

“Governor Alfred Smith has stood by us, has put the women’s social welfare problems into effect Will they recognize their duty to be loyal, not only to the man and his service, but to the program of industrial progress and of social welfare, of equality of women, and the protection of the weak, which he represents and on which his public career rests today?”

-Frances Perkins, Radio Speech, September 24, 1928

As governor of New York State, Al Smith earned a reputation as an efficient administrator and a progressive crusader. Over the course of four terms as chief

executive, Smith's progressivism was distilled into a unique, discernible cluster of policy initiatives and political beliefs; the transitional progressivism which had been born of his and other machine men's interaction with female social welfare activists had matured into a coherent reform agenda. Moreover, the governor's political skills had been refined over a decade of communicating that agenda to his constituents. Therefore it should come as no surprise that Smith's 1928 campaign for the presidency featured the nationalization of his transitional progressivism.

The historical significance of the 1928 presidential contest has been a topic of lively debate within the literature on United States politics. Most scholars focus on cultural questions including prohibition, Smith's Roman Catholicism, and the urban-rural divide. Such interpretations often suggest a recognizable shift within the electorate: the forging of a new Democratic alliance of urban-dwelling recent immigrants, Catholics, Jews, and to a lesser extent African-Americans, in the crucible of a decade of mounting native Protestant chauvinism that in many ways climaxed with the scurrilous whispering campaign waged against Smith. This new, heterogeneous coalition was to provide the electoral muscle behind New Deal liberalism. Hence, Samuel Lubell declared 1928 "an Al Smith revolution," and V. O. Key labeled it a "critical election."⁷⁷⁷

The literature has made little allowance for consideration of major policy debates. Studies that have deemed Smith's campaign critical or even revolutionary have been cautious about assigning any political-philosophical dynamic to the cleavages that emerged. For their part, works that have challenged the transformative significance of the election have been no more charitable to the candidates' convictions, usually either

⁷⁷⁷ Samuel Lubell, *The Future of American Politics* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1951), p. 36; V. O. Key, Jr., "A Theory of Critical Elections," *The Journal of Politics*, 17:1 (February, 1955), pp. 3-18, p. 4.

ignoring them altogether or declaring, as did one noted study, that “on most important questions facing the American people, Democratic and Republican positions could not be distinguished.”⁷⁷⁸

The myopic gaze which the literature has fixed upon the cultural issues of 1928 has obscured the significant policy debates that occurred in that year. In fact, the campaign represented the apogee of Smith’s transitional progressivism, which imbued the emerging urban Democratic coalition with a set of values that anticipated many facets of the New Deal. Considering the events of 1928 with an acknowledgment of the Democrat’s peculiar style of progressivism places the election squarely at the center of an evolutionary process that connected portions of the progressive tradition to key facets of New Deal liberalism.

It is clear that cultural battles over alcohol and urbanism and particularly over Smith’s Catholicism were of great significance to the candidates and voters of 1928. But far from monopolizing the debate, these questions were often relegated to the periphery by Smith and his allies in favor of issues that, in the context of their time, represented important ideological divisions between the parties and the nominees. Smith went into great detail enunciating and defending his positions on fundamental problems including farm relief, water power policy, economic justice, social welfare, and administrative efficiency. On all of these questions he challenged, in some cases very profoundly, the Harding-Coolidge status quo.⁷⁷⁹ Smith’s opponent Herbert Hoover had engineered much

⁷⁷⁸ Allan J. Lichtman, “Critical Election Theory and the Reality of American Presidential Politics, 1916-40,” *The American Historical Review*, 81:2 (April, 1976), pp. 317-351, p. 340.

⁷⁷⁹ This assertion is a direct challenge to nearly the entire literature on 1928, both the aforementioned consensus that policy debates were of little significance in that year, and a large body of literature that points to the conservatism of the Smith campaign. Probably the most important work to deal with the agendas of the 1928 candidates is David Burner’s *The Politics of Provincialism*, which asserts that Smith’s campaign was essentially conservative, and that Hoover was the more progressive candidate. Burner, *The*

of that status quo from his powerful post as secretary of commerce for the previous two administrations, and in his campaign for the White House the Republican nominee proudly became the chief exponent of the virtues of the political economy of the 1920s. Smith never sought the total destruction or even the dramatic reconstruction of that political economy—to expect such things from a mainstream candidate in a period of general economic strength would be absurd. Nevertheless, the Democrat shone a critical light upon the neglected corners of Calvin Coolidge’s America, challenged many accepted policy doctrines, and presented in the form of his transitional progressive governorship the blueprints of an alternative approach to national administration.

Not only were there serious policy disputes between the candidates and among their lieutenants; these debates also transcended the realm of high politics and were taken up in the nation’s press and even by rank and file citizens. Al Smith and Herbert Hoover offered contrasting visions of the state’s role in promoting a just society, and these

Politics of Provincialism, pp. 194-197. A similar view is expressed by Hoover biographer Joan Hoff Wilson. Joan Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1975), p. 132. Greatly influenced by Burner, Matthew and Hannah Josephson’s Smith biography downplays the role of the governor’s progressivism in the 1928 election, despite the consistent assertions by their major source, Frances Perkins, that it was a progressive campaign. Josephsons, *Al Smith: Hero of the Cities*, p. 371. Michael Parrish’s treatment of the 1920s and ’30s, *Anxious Decades*, declares that “Smith ran an ideologically conservative campaign.” Parrish, *Anxious Decades*, p. 213. It is necessary, given the central place of Burner’s work in the historiography of this era, to address several inaccuracies upon which the author bases his claim of Hoover’s progressivism and Smith’s conservatism. First, Burner states that “Hoover was . . . the more explicitly progressive candidate—enough so that Coolidge’s Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon fiercely opposed his presidential candidacy.” Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism*, pp. 196-197. This is simply wrong. In fact, Mellon endorsed Hoover and gave an important national radio address on behalf of the Republican, during which he decried Smith’s support for the progressive McNary-Haugen Farm bill, defended the quota basis of the immigration restriction acts, and stated that a Hoover election would be tantamount to four more years of the conservative Coolidge. “Mellon Over Radio Makes Last Appeal to Elect Hoover,” *The New York Times*, October 30, 1928, pp. 1, 22; “Mellon Says Hoover Will Make No Change,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 5, 1928, p. 6. Indeed, according to Hoover (who after his election, retained Mellon’s services at the Treasury) “Mr. Mellon telephoned me from [the Republican National Convention at] Kansas City that the Pennsylvania delegation would meet the following morning, and ‘I am going to recommend that they vote for you on the first ballot.’” Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: The Cabinet and the Presidency, 1920-1933* (New York: MacMillan, 1952), p. 194. Burner also notes the opposition to Smith among many of the social workers contacted by Lillian Wald, the role of John Raskob, and Smith’s alleged weakness on the question of water power—these questions will all be addressed later in the chapter.

distinctions were taken seriously by the press and the public. Far from drowning out the other issues of the campaign, the question of Smith's religion and the broader debate that ensued over sundry cultural questions served to invigorate all sides of the contest and awaken many quiescent citizens to the importance of national affairs. For those voters who were initially attracted to Smith because of his faith or his friendliness toward drink there became evident a robust agenda that spoke to their isolation from mainstream American society on cultural *and* economic levels. For these voters as well as those who cast a skeptical eye upon Smith's famous brown derby, these questions added another layer of complexity to a labyrinthine political-economic landscape that exhibited very real challenges to which the candidates proposed very different remedies.

Toward the Nomination

During what could be called the "long Gilded Age," being governor of the Empire State made one an *ex officio* contender for a presidential nomination. From the end of the Civil War through the election of Franklin Roosevelt in 1932, New Yorkers secured major party nominations for the presidency no less than eleven times, including six sitting or former governors and three men who would eventually reside in the White House. By 1928, Alfred E. Smith was the four-term governor of the wealthiest, most populous, and arguably the most politically significant state in the union, with an impressive catalog of achievements and a considerable national following. Moreover, there was not in the waiting an eager battery of prominent Democrats clamoring to contend for the presidency

that year. At least as early as 1927, it was clear that the last election of the “Roaring Twenties” would be Al Smith’s best chance at the nation’s highest office.

I

Smith’s name had already been placed before Democratic delegates twice that decade: in 1920, in a largely ceremonial “favorite son” nomination by noted orator and sometimes congressman Bourke Cockran; and in 1924, when he was introduced by former vice presidential nominee Franklin Delano Roosevelt as “the Happy Warrior.” At the latter convention, the New York governor and other northeastern progressives waged a fierce if unsuccessful battle to wrest the party away from southern and western domination by thwarting the presidential ambitions of William Gibbs McAdoo and calling for a direct rebuke of the Ku Klux Klan.

While McAdoo, the son-in-law and treasury secretary of Woodrow Wilson, was considered the front-runner, Smith enjoyed the benefit of home court for the 1924 contest, which was held at Madison Square Garden. Seeking to exaggerate this advantage, Tammany operatives packed the rafters with their constituents, whose bawdy taunts of the speakers and constant bickering with the delegates transformed the proceedings into a burlesque of the decade’s culture wars.⁷⁸⁰ Sectional antagonisms raged, especially over the Klan issue. Oklahoma senator Robert Owen was hissed from the bleachers when he suggested that “a large number” of Klansmen “joined the order to protect the Constitution and the law.”⁷⁸¹ When delegate Andrew C. Erwin, “a tall young

⁷⁸⁰ E.g.: Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 209; Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism*, pp. 114-121.

⁷⁸¹ Elmer Davis, “Georgia Beats Klan Plank,” *The New York Times*, June 29, 1924, pp. 1, 5.

Georgian” and veteran of the World War, implored the nation to help the South put down the Invisible Empire and denounced his fellow Southerners as “unworthy of their ancestry” if they refused to join the fight, he was jeered by McAdoo’s forces and ignored by his fellows.⁷⁸² He was not ignored however by representatives from twenty-three other states, who paraded and then mobbed in celebration of Erwin’s righteousness, “pushing in so hard that police had to protect the Georgians.”⁷⁸³ Isabella Ahearn O’Neill, an actress from Providence and the only woman in the Rhode Island delegation, “rushed up to the youthful orator and kissed him on the lips.”⁷⁸⁴ Dixie delegates reacted with indignation as the house band struck up the popular Sherman tribute “Marching Through Georgia” in the midst of the brouhaha.⁷⁸⁵ Fistfights were rampant.⁷⁸⁶ When a North Dakotan gave a speech endorsing McAdoo that included the line “I condemn the order known as the Ku Klux Klan,” only the New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island contingents marched in approval; McAdoo’s own California delegation refused even to applaud.⁷⁸⁷ An Ohio jurist was shouted down (“Oh, shut up!”), and the audience laughed openly at the governor of North Carolina.⁷⁸⁸

After more than a week of balloting, McAdoo, whose name was consistently met with acrid chants of “oil, oil” (a reference to his past legal work for Teapot Dome offender Edward Doheny), was indeed denied the nomination; so too was Al Smith.⁷⁸⁹

⁷⁸² Davis, “Georgia Beats Klan Plank,” p. 1; Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 212.

⁷⁸³ Davis, “Georgia Beats Klan Plank,” p. 1.

⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁷⁸⁵ “Georgian Says Band Insulted Delegation,” *The New York Times*, July 1, 1924, p. 1.

⁷⁸⁶ Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 213.

⁷⁸⁷ “Storm Over Klan Menacing,” *The New York Times*, June 28, 1924, p. 1.

⁷⁸⁸ Davis, “Georgia Beats Klan Plank,” pp. 1, 5.

⁷⁸⁹ Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 208; Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism*, pp. 107-109. Burner assigns at least partial responsibility for Smith’s failure to secure the nomination to the Klan controversy, stating that Chicago boss George Brennan, who was a leader in pushing for both Smith and the Klan plank, “did

Meanwhile, the proposal to denounce the Klan by name had been rejected by a single vote out of over a thousand cast.⁷⁹⁰ In the sweltering July heat, in the exhaustingly heavy air, with the delegates' lethargy checked only by the cacophonous anarchy within the hall, decades of Democratic contradictions were betrayed and the party was torn asunder. Even a three-time presidential nominee was not immune from the infectious disrespect. In the midst of the chaos William Jennings Bryan, a year away from his grave, had taken to the podium. Portions of the Commoner's speech were "met with such a storm of hisses and booing that it was impossible for him to make himself heard."⁷⁹¹ Reprimanding the rowdy Tammanyites and their northeastern allies on the convention floor for their indecorous conduct, Bryan forecast that if the present Democracy failed in its historical mission against privilege, "some other party will grow up to carry those issues and take our place. But, that new party will never find the leaders of a noble cause in the gallery." The progressivism of Wilson, Bryan's own populism, these would surely be carried on—but not by these New York hooligans.⁷⁹²

Al Smith had other ideas. The crude shenanigans of the galleries aside, historians have allowed that within the mêlée the Smith forces "had represented the good fight . . . had stood before the most powerful politicians the Klan could muster and never backed down."⁷⁹³ Many ordinary New Yorkers, like John Vincent Donohue, a postal employee and low-level Tammany operative, thought by 1924 that "the poor little boy from Chatham Square and Fulton Fish Market is without doubt the Moses who is going to lead

not realize the full impact the Klan vote would have on the convention. . . . Brennan had by his own strategy killed all hope of nominating Al Smith." Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism*, p. 120.

⁷⁹⁰ Davis, "Georgia Beats Klan Plank," p. 1.

⁷⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁷⁹³ Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 216.

the masses of this country out of the wilderness of the rottenness created by the present situation in Washington.”⁷⁹⁴ Nor had all of the visiting delegates been as disgusted with the antics of their hosts as had Bryan. A Texan wrote to Brooklyn congressman Loring Black that he had been impressed by “the great demonstration given [Smith] at that memorable Convention . . . because of the great love the common people manifested for him. . . . the spontaneous explosion of sincere devotion by a people in admiration of their great leader.”⁷⁹⁵



Fig. 4.1: Contenders for the 1924 Democratic Nomination: Alfred E. Smith of New York (left), William Gibbs McAdoo of California (right); and the eventual nominee, John W. Davis of West Virginia (center).⁷⁹⁶

⁷⁹⁴ John Vincent Donahue to Alfred E. Smith, March 11, 1924, George Graves Papers, Box 17, Folder “Donahue, John V.”

⁷⁹⁵ J. B. Hayes to Loring Black, October 1, 1924, George Graves Papers, Box 5, Folder “Black, Loring M. (Hon).”

⁷⁹⁶ Bain News Service, “Al Smith,” Undated, George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress; “John W. Davis, 9/27/24,” September 27, 1924, National Photo Company Collection, Library of Congress; Harris & Ewing, “McAdoo, William Gibbs, Secretary of the Treasury, 1913-1921,” 1914, Harris & Ewing Collection, Library of Congress.

It should further be noted that Smith's campaign was only partly aimed at making an ethnocultural point. Prior to the convention, Smith suggested that his candidacy was rooted in his record as a progressive governor; he directed those interested in his ideology to his ambitious annual messages to the legislature; he reproached those "progressives who only talk about progress in government," but "never do anything about it," (a gibe almost certainly directed toward McAdoo); and demanded that his "stand on the 'wet' issue . . . not be stressed," but rather that it be "left alone."⁷⁹⁷ This might be dismissed as political posturing if it were not for Smith's address to the final night of the convention, in which he boasted of the greatness of his home town but then guided delegates through an extended tour of his progressive achievements and ambitious agenda—highlighting hospital construction, administrative reforms, liberal appropriations for education, the water power fight, protective labor legislation, parks development, and public health programs—along with a number of other important state initiatives.⁷⁹⁸ He did not discuss the KKK, prohibition, or any other contemporary cultural controversies.⁷⁹⁹ Responding to the *New Yorker's* disposition throughout the convention, journalist Walter Lippmann, a friend and advisor of the governor, wrote Smith that "working for the best things in sight meant working for you. . . . let me thank you."⁸⁰⁰

⁷⁹⁷ "Smith Relies on His Record," *The New York Times*, June 23, 1924, pp. 1-2.

⁷⁹⁸ "Davis and Smith Are Cheered In Speeches at the Night Session," *The New York Times*, July 10, 1924, pp. 1, 2. Smith biographer Robert Slayton calls the speech "the worst of his career, arrogant and mean-spirited." Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 215. Perhaps—but while the speech opens with some provincial bombast about the greatness of New York City, the lion's share is a rather formulaic outline of Smith's progressivism, not remarkably different from many of his other orations.

⁷⁹⁹ "Davis and Smith Are Cheered In Speeches at the Night Session," pp. 1, 2. Smith made but one passing, veiled reference to prohibition when he mentioned his earnest efforts at "law enforcement" in New York State. Even David Burner, who is consistently critical of Smith for his "provincialism" and in general presents him as less of a serious candidate than a cultural icon, characterizes Smith's campaign in 1924 as "a serious try for the nomination," inspired, after McAdoo's primary woes, to be more than just an attempt "to block McAdoo on behalf of the eastern bosses." Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism*, p. 112.

⁸⁰⁰ Walter Lippmann to Alfred E. Smith, July 18, 1924, George Graves Papers, Box 42, Folder "Lippmann, Walter." In fact, Lippmann went further than this in a telegram days earlier, stating that Smith had "saved

Indeed, despite his loss at the convention, 1924 was a good year for Al Smith: while the national Democratic ticket of John W. Davis and Charles W. Bryan went down to ignominious defeat, Smith was reelected governor, vanquishing Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., by one hundred thousand votes in spite of New York's going to Calvin Coolidge by a margin of almost one million ballots.⁸⁰¹ The following summer, during a debate at Carnegie Hall over the ten year \$100 million bond proposal, Smith's opponent Nathan Miller received what was probably his most enthusiastic applause of the evening when he asserted: "I do not suppose the Governor intends to stay in Albany all of the next ten years. . . . I have heard that he had ambitions to go somewhere else."⁸⁰² As the *Newark News* proclaimed, Smith had "emerge[d] from the Democratic wreck a bigger figure than ever before"; from 1924 forward, the governor was a serious contender for the 1928 Democratic presidential nomination.⁸⁰³

Significantly, as Smith's reputation grew, so too did his emphasis on his progressive agenda. The governor marked his return to national prominence on September 27, 1925 in Chicago, at a picnic event dubbed "Al Smith Day" by the Cook County Democratic Party.⁸⁰⁴ With an estimated one hundred thousand people present, he refrained from discussing issues popular with this largely ethnic audience—namely "his well-known views on prohibition" which "could have set the crowd . . . aflame"—and

the Democratic Party in the most dangerous threat it has encountered in this generation. You have justified all the faith your friends put in you." Walter Lippmann to Alfred E. Smith (telegram), July 9, 1924, Walter Lippmann Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT (hereafter, Walter Lippmann Papers), Reel 29, Box 30, Folder 1137.

⁸⁰¹ Malcolm, ed., *The New York Red Book, 1928*, pp. 367, 377.

⁸⁰² "Debate Between Governor Smith and Former Governor Miller on State Bond Issue, Held at Carnegie Hall, July 9, 1925, 8:15 O'clock P.M.," Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 28, Folder 295, pp. 38-39.

⁸⁰³ Quoted in Handlin, *Al Smith and His America*, p. 124.

⁸⁰⁴ "Greatest Throng of Democrats Hails Smith at Chicago," *The New York Times*, September 28, 1925, pp. 1, 6, p. 1.

instead chose to use the venue to promote his progressive ideas.⁸⁰⁵ Before what was described as an attentive audience, Smith outlined his battles for workmen's compensation and widows' pensions, and outlined the need for reorganization of both state and federal government to meet the demands of modern society.⁸⁰⁶ By that December, Lippmann was writing in *Vanity Fair* that for those following Smith, it had become "impossible any longer to ignore the signs of an impending fate. For with each new proof of his power in New York the tension throughout the country becomes more ominous. His victories have ceased to be victories merely; they are premonitions."⁸⁰⁷

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁸⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 6.

⁸⁰⁷ Walter Lippmann, "'Al' Smith: A Man of Destiny, A Consideration of Some of the Tragic Aspects in a Brilliant Political Career," *Vanity Fair*, December, 1925, pp. 41, 88, p. 41. Smith wrote Lippmann that he had seen the essay and "the older members of the family read it over with a good deal of satisfaction"; but Lippmann admitted that he "had rather hoped you wouldn't see it, for I cannot imagine it makes you comfortable to be told the finger of destiny is pointing at you, at breakfast." Alfred E. Smith to Walter Lippmann, December 10, 1928; Lippmann to Smith, December 11, 1928, Walter Lippmann Papers, Reel 29, Box 30, Folder 1137. There are several aspects of Lippmann's essay which must be addressed. One is his insistence that "fate" and "destiny" were pushing Smith toward a "tragic" battle. Lippmann meant a tragedy in the Greek sense—something beyond human control—and he was referring to an impending urban-rural clash in American politics and culture. More challenging for this work is Lippmann's affirmation of Smith's "conservative" credentials. Lippmann and Smith's correspondence, of which there is a great deal, does not show evidence that he saw Smith as a political conservative, but rather suggest that Lippmann—who by the 1920s was increasingly cynical toward progressive reform in general after being "burned" by Wilsonianism—had respect for and placed at least some faith in Smith's reformism as governor and as a presidential candidate. There are two items that square Lippmann's words with the view that Smith was seen as a progressive reformer. First, Lippmann was a Smith supporter: describing him as someone who would not stir up class resentments and who was in fact a conventional conservative made the *New Yorker* more palatable to a general audience in the 1920s. Second, Lippmann defined his terms in a way that created a strange dichotomy in the *Vanity Fair* piece. Lippmann's "progressives" were radicals—eager to challenge the very structure of American capitalism and government (he cites as one example La Follette's proposals to overhaul the American judiciary). On the other hand, Smith's conservatism was manifested in his general acceptance of the basic assumptions of American capitalism and democracy—the governor wished only to reform these systems. Smith was not an ideological crusader, and had no particular interest in all-out class warfare. In fact Lippmann was right, but not in assigning the label "conservative" to such a posture. Interestingly, other evidence offered for Smith's conservatism includes his acceptance of traditional matrimony and a strange, speculative statement by Lippmann that if one interviewed Smith long enough he might well betray skepticism about the theories of Charles Darwin. Smith's worldview is presented as a wholesome anachronism, a throwback to a time of "Sunday family dinners." Lippmann maintained this view throughout his long and intimate interaction with Smith, and it greatly influenced his posture in 1928. It should be noted here as well that Lippmann's view was also affected by his own biography. Most significantly, he had long been wary of ideologues and crusaders, and he had long since abandoned his own early socialism; indeed, even in his more idealistic college days, while reading Marx, he had "disliked the emphasis on class struggle and felt that inciting the

Smith's national progressive advocacy took him to Pennsylvania the following May, where he spoke on behalf of a proposed bond issue for hospital construction in that state similar to the one he had championed in New York in 1923. Before a mass meeting held at the Philadelphia Academy of Music under the auspices of the Public Charities Association of Pennsylvania, the *New Yorker* told an enthusiastic crowd that although "people don't like to roll up against the Commonwealth . . . any burden of debt," the majority of citizens "are ready and prepared to carry the burden of indebtedness," when they "have a thorough understanding of just what the money is to be used for."⁸⁰⁸ In that spirit, Smith challenged Pennsylvanians: "Does it not occur to the individual that every now and then there is expected some offering in the nature of gratitude or in the nature of thanksgiving?"⁸⁰⁹ If so, the hospital bond offered an ideal opportunity "for every man and every woman in Pennsylvania to be able to say to the ruler of the Universe Himself, 'Inasmuch as the poor, the weak, the sick and the afflicted were special charges of Thy Divine Son during His life on earth, their care, their proper and adequate care, will be given by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.'"⁸¹⁰ This was an important moment for Smith; not only because he received "prolonged applause" for presenting the sort of progressive arguments he had enlisted at home before citizens of another state, but also because he was introduced that night by George W. Norris, the Nebraska Republican

masses to mob action was not a desirable way to bring about a better society. . . . he wanted to make society more equitable, not turn it upside down." Furthermore, he was increasingly skeptical of the wisdom of mass-democratic movements, and even of the effectiveness of majority rule. Desirable reforms, even a "radical constructive program," must "come from the top, free from meddling by the masses." Lippmann had abandoned the "cult of democracy" early in his career. In 1922 he explored these questions in *Public Opinion* and by the year "'Al' Smith: A Man of Destiny" was published, he "was becoming convinced that democracy had to be protected from the masses," as suggested in his *The Phantom Public* (1925). Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1999), pp. xvii, 23, 27, 40, 47, 211, 257.

⁸⁰⁸ "Address of Hon. Alfred E. Smith, Governor of the State of New York," *Public Speaker Magazine*, January, 1927, pp. 7-9, 25, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 28, Folder 297, p. 7.

⁸⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁸¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

widely considered “the accepted leader of the Progressives in the Senate.”⁸¹¹ Norris’ respect for Smith’s progressivism would grow in the years that followed, but it is significant that already in 1926 the Nebraskan was introducing the New Yorker as a “forceful and brilliant Governor” who had successfully “met and corrected” the sort of public health crises rampant in contemporary Pennsylvania.⁸¹²

As the next presidential contest drew closer and the press focused increasing scrutiny on the frontrunner’s every public pronouncement, Smith continued to call for active government on behalf of progressive reform. He also sought out forums in which to profess these beliefs. Appearing before the Child Welfare Committee of America in early 1928, Smith declared to “great applause” his belief that since “we have been particularly blessed. . . . we owe something . . . to take care of the poor, of the sick, the afflicted and particularly of the children.”⁸¹³

In these years Smith’s national following continued to grow. Loring Black reported that Dubuque, Iowa was “quite enthusiastic” for the New Yorker by 1926; the next year congressman William Cohen, another New York Democrat, sent similar news from Dallas and from Miami.⁸¹⁴ In Tampa, Florida, the city fire department followed Smith’s 1926 reelection campaign, and cabled his Republican challenger: “straw vote here Smith ninety eight and you nothing.”⁸¹⁵ On March 10, 1927, the wife of an

⁸¹¹ Robert M. La Follette, Jr., Untitled Address (2), The La Follette Family Collection, Manuscript Reading Room, Library of Congress, Washington, DC (hereafter, La Follette Family Collection), Series C, Box 555, Folder “Coolidge Administration 1928 Undated,” p. 9.

⁸¹² Address of Hon. Alfred E. Smith, Governor of the State of New York,” p. 7.

⁸¹³ Child Welfare Committee of America, Inc., “The Human Side of Government by His Excellency Alfred E. Smith Governor of New York,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 2, Folder 31, p. 9.

⁸¹⁴ Loring Black to Alfred E. Smith, July 21, 1926, George Graves Papers, Box 5, Folder “Black, Loring M. (Hon)””; William Cohen to Alfred E. Smith, February 7, 1927 and August 13, 1927, George Graves Papers, Box 12, Folder “Cohen, William W.”

⁸¹⁵ TAMPA, FLA Fire Dept. to Alfred E. Smith (telegram), October 30, 1926, George Graves Papers, Box 80, Folder “Campaign–1926.”

infantryman stationed at Fort Benning, Georgia, gave birth to Alfred Smith Washington.⁸¹⁶

By 1927, speculation about Smith's presidential ambitions routinely appeared in newspapers and magazines.⁸¹⁷ The candidate's religion remained an albatross during these discussions. Anticipating a Smith presidential bid, Alabama senator Thomas Heflin, a fellow Democrat and a noted anti-Catholic, "assailed" the governor of New York in March of 1927 (such tirades would become banal by the end of the campaign).⁸¹⁸

On a more sophisticated plane, an essay was published in the April 1927 issue of *Atlantic Monthly* by New York attorney Charles C. Marshall. The piece questioned whether a Roman Catholic president could uphold the constitution, respect religious freedom, maintain military neutrality, and support public education.⁸¹⁹ Walter Lippmann wrote Smith that the article "offers you a tremendous opportunity . . . to answer not only for yourself but for this whole generation in a way that would be final and conclusive."⁸²⁰

Smith concurred. The following month he composed a rejoinder with the help of Father Francis P. Duffy, a Catholic priest, and Joseph Proskauer, a Jewish progressive and long-

⁸¹⁶ Mrs. Smith Washington to Alfred E. Smith, March 8, 1928, George Graves Papers, Box 75, Folder WAS."

⁸¹⁷ E.g.: Edward James Woodhouse, "The South Studies Governor Smith," *The Independent*, January 9, 1926, p. 45; "Believes Smith Reply Ends Religion Issue," *The New York Times*, April 22, 1927, p. 3; "The Governor Replies," *The Independent*, April 30, 1927, p. 457; "Religion in Politics," *Banker's Magazine*, June, 1927, p. 809; "Smith has Support of South Dakotans," *The New York Times*, July 26, 1927, p. 23; "Democrats of Ohio Widely Split Over Smith's Candidacy," *The Washington Post*, August 17, 1927, p. 2; Arnold A. M'Kay, "A Southerner Tells Why He Would Vote For Smith," *The New York Times*, August 21, 1927, p. xx16; "Smith Becomes Issue in Mississippi Primary," *The Washington Post*, August 23, 1927, p. 4; "Smith is Attacked at W.C.T.U. Meeting," *The New York Times*, September 1, 1927, p. 9; "Party Workers Endorse Gov. Smith At Conference of 8 Western States; Call Him 'Most Available Candidate'," *The New York Times*, September 24, 1927, p. 1; "Western Democrats Form Association to Nominate Smith," *The New York Times*, September 25, 1927, p. 1; "Smith Men Prepare to Wage Campaign in Western States," *The New York Times*, September 26, 1927, p. 1.

⁸¹⁸ "Heflin Assails Smith; Edge Defends Governor," *The Washington Post*, March 3, 1927, p. 4.

⁸¹⁹ Alfred E. Smith, "Catholic and Patriot," *Progressive Democracy: Addresses and State Papers of Alfred E. Smith*, pp. 254-269. p. 254.

⁸²⁰ Walter Lippmann to Alfred E. Smith, April 4, 1927, George Graves Papers, Box 42, Folder "Lippmann, Walter."

time advisor.⁸²¹ The essay presented episodes from his career as well as writings by Catholic theologians in an attempt to confirm both he and his co-communicants' patriotism and fidelity to democratic government. Unlike any candidate before him, the Catholic Smith was forced to defend openly his faith and to declare that "I recognize no power in the institutions of my Church to interfere with the operations of the Constitution of the United States."⁸²² Smith would later discover that his response on the religious question was neither final nor conclusive; but believing it was he continued to base his presidential ambitions on his progressive agenda and his gubernatorial résumé.

Clearly then, by the fall of 1927 Al Smith's career plans were the talk of the nation. It was in that context that the governor released an important document entitled *Progress of Public Improvements: A Report to the People of the State of New York by Governor Alfred E. Smith*. The report was a sort of capstone to the Smith years; an apologia on the transitional progressive view that generous expenditures and bonded indebtedness on behalf of massive public works projects were warranted in the name of social welfare and civic progress. In his introductory statement, the governor reasserted the principle that it was necessary to issue bonds and increase appropriations in order to allow the government to finance projects for the social good. Rejecting the narrow reading of the appropriate use of bonds employed by his conservative opponents, he touted his record of fighting recalcitrant legislators in order to secure public funds for hospitals, parks, parkways, conservation projects, prisons, civic centers, and schools.⁸²³

⁸²¹ "The Reminiscences of Joseph M. Proskauer," pp. 29-32.

⁸²² Smith, "Catholic and Patriot," p. 268. No other presidential contender would have to endure such treatment until 1960, when John Fitzgerald Kennedy, another Irish Catholic from the Northeast (but hardly a son of the working class) was forced to confirm his support for the separation of church and state before the Houston Ministerial Association in order to "defuse the issue of his Catholicism." John Morton Blum, *Years of Discord: American Politics and Society, 1961-1974* (New York: Norton, 1991), p. 18.

⁸²³ Smith, *Progress of Public Improvements*, pp. 4, 6-10.

Then, with his characteristic talent for popularizing the abstruse, Smith presented almost a hundred pages of captioned photographs demonstrating just where these public funds were being spent—many of them before-and-after shots of bridges, grade-crossings, parks, beaches, roadways, hospitals, asylums, schools, and government buildings.⁸²⁴ Here was the increasingly scrutinized governor of New York, boasting of his liberal use of state funds for the purpose of active government on behalf of social welfare and demonstrating the real-life benefits attained through such activities. This 127-page advertisement for the virtues of Smith’s executive temperament, issued on the eve of his campaign for the White House, was “eagerly sought after and got very good mention.”⁸²⁵ More than ten thousand copies were issued to the public.⁸²⁶ Smith did not intend to present himself as anything but a progressive.

As Smith continued to prepare for a national campaign, another important event occurred which was seen at the time as linked to the presidential ambitions of the New Yorker. In 1926, Governor Smith had strongly supported his friend Robert F. Wagner’s bid to unseat Republican United States senator James Wadsworth. Wagner, like Smith, had been among the most influential members of the original transitional progressive alliance, and in 1926 he ran for the senate as a sort of “Al Smith candidate.”⁸²⁷ Having

⁸²⁴ “A Conversation with Robert Moses,” p. 14; Smith, *Progress of Public Improvements*, pp. 20-118.

⁸²⁵ Alfred E. Smith to James J. Walker, December 1, 1928, George Graves Papers, Box 75, Folder “Walker, Hon James J.”

⁸²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸²⁷ *E.g.*: “During our service together in the legislature he worked for the same constructive legislation in the Assembly that I sponsored in the Senate On our records no one can logically support me and oppose the election of Governor Smith.” This endorsement of Smith is an interesting way of linking himself to the popular governor without appearing self-interested—nevertheless, Wagner clearly had more to gain by the comparison, for his victory was much less certain than the reelection of Al Smith. “Undated Press Release, 1926 Wagner for Senate Campaign,” Robert F. Wagner Papers, Box 401, Folder 2, No. 8, p. 1; “I shall fight the battle of Democracy shoulder to shoulder with the illustrious Governor of New York, Alfred E. Smith.” Robert F. Wagner, “Acceptance Speech,” October 8, 1926, Robert F. Wagner Papers, Box 401, Folder 2, No. 10, p. 1; “Wagner and Smith to Stump Together,” *The New York Times*, October 1, 1926, p. 2.

won a close election, Wagner went to Washington intent on continuing his work on behalf of progressive labor and social welfare legislation, and committed to serving the interests of the working-class voters who were largely responsible for his narrow victory. With these goals, as well as the memory of the factory commission's methods of scientific study of industry in mind, Wagner took to the senate floor on March 5, 1928, giving his maiden speech on behalf of a bill he had proposed which would compel the secretary of labor to investigate thoroughly unemployment conditions.⁸²⁸ In the face of continuing claims of general prosperity and a "full dinner pail," Wagner cited the "growing bread lines . . . the larger number of men and women seeking work . . . a constantly decreasing return for the worker . . . a lowered standard of living for a large portion of our people" that he witnessed among his urban, working-class neighbors; and he demanded federal action.⁸²⁹ In his remarks, Wagner charged that "four million people . . . is a conservative estimate of the number of those out of work . . . one in every ten of our wage earners is in idleness"; he mocked President Calvin Coolidge's persistently sanguine reports of high wages and "plentiful" employment as not supported by any realistic study of the situation; and he censured Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover for looking "all across the Nation, to discover not a single idle man."⁸³⁰

Wagner's speech was given from the perspective of the urban worker, for whom—in many cases—the 1929 stock market crash would not mark a sudden onset of poverty. It was a broadside against the Republican administration on behalf of such workers, and it was framed in progressive terms, viewing systematic surveys as the first

⁸²⁸ "Speech of Senator Robert F. Wagner," March 5, 1928, in *Remarks from the Congressional Record of Senator Robert F. Wagner, 70th Congress*, pp. 4067-4075, Robert F. Wagner Papers, Box 106, Book, "70th Congress," pp. 4067.

⁸²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4067.

⁸³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4068.

step toward ameliorative legislation. Significantly, the speech was widely viewed in the press as an opening salvo by the forces of Alfred E. Smith against the Republican administration in anticipation of an imminent conflict between the governor and either Coolidge or one of his lieutenants.⁸³¹ Furthermore, there is evidence that Smith was aware of some of the details of Wagner's speech in advance of March 5; and regardless, he was so excited by the news from Washington that he cabled the senator, "because I could not wait long enough to write a letter."⁸³² Just four months in advance of Smith's nomination for the presidency, his close friend and strong political ally Robert Wagner was attacking the Republican administration in progressive terms from a working-class perspective in a move that was widely seen as in concert with Al Smith.

II

Columnist Mark Sullivan wrote that for the Democrats to nominate anyone but Al Smith for the presidency in 1928 "would be an act so calling for explanation as to weaken them in the country."⁸³³ The party obliged. The convention, held at Houston in late June, was "rather dull," particularly as a sequel to the pandemonium at Madison Square

⁸³¹ "Liaison Seen Between Al Smith and Wagner on Unemployment," *Syracuse Herald*, March 6, 1928; "Smith Seen Back of Wagner Move," *Brooklyn Times*, March 6, 1928; "Wagner Declares Unemployment Rife, Senate Asks Inquiry," *The New York Times*, March 6, 1928, p. 1—sub-heading: "Move to Aid Smith Seen"; "Senate Demands Check Up of Idle on Wagner's Plea; State Labor Out For Smith," *Albany Knickerbocker*, March 6, 1928; Mark Sullivan, "Democrats Putting Forth New Issue for '28 Campaign," *Troy Morning News*, March 17, 1928; Mark Sullivan, "Issue for Smith Seen in Wagner Labor Speech," *New York Herald Tribune*, March 18, 1928. See also: Huthmacher, *Senator Robert F. Wagner and the Rise of Urban Liberalism*, pp. 58-61.

⁸³² Alfred E. Smith to Robert F. Wagner, March 6, 1928, Robert F. Wagner Papers, Box 106, Folder: "The Maiden Speech of Hon. Robert F. Wagner in the United States Senate." In the context of discussing his excitement over the speech, Smith tells Wagner "I have your letter of March 3d and note its contents." This makes the implication of some advance knowledge, but is hardly conclusive.

⁸³³ Quoted in Handlin, *Al Smith and His America*, p. 125.

Garden; Smith was nominated “handily,” as was Joseph T. Robinson, a senator from Arkansas and the party’s choice for vice president.⁸³⁴

The Republicans nominated Herbert Clark Hoover, the ambitious and imperious secretary of commerce under the Harding and Coolidge administrations. Hoover had been a prominent engineer, a successful businessman, and a noted humanitarian: his administration of relief efforts in post-World War Europe earned him universal applause for saving the lives of hungry millions.⁸³⁵ By the end of that effort, his name was part of the national lexicon: to “Hooverize” meant “to economize in the national interest.”⁸³⁶ His reputation was such that Woodrow Wilson’s assistant secretary of the navy, Franklin Roosevelt, coveted Hoover as the Democratic presidential candidate for 1920.⁸³⁷ Instead, Hoover became the leading force in the next two Republican administrations, earning him some of the credit for the economic successes of the 1920s, and allowing him to dominate federal policies on everything from air travel to farm relief to radio broadcasting.⁸³⁸ All of this culminated with his coordination of recovery work in the wake of the 1927 Mississippi River flood. By 1928 Hoover, like Smith, had emerged as his party’s clear choice for the presidency.⁸³⁹

Officially Al Smith was running against Herbert Hoover, but in fact he was also running against the accumulated legacies of eight years of Republican rule. His acceptance address, delivered to a rain-soaked crowd in Albany as well as a national

⁸³⁴ Ibid., pp. 126-127.

⁸³⁵ For an excellent treatment of Hoover’s early career, see Leuchtenburg, *Herbert Hoover*, pp. 1-70.

⁸³⁶ Ibid., p. 35.

⁸³⁷ Ibid., p. 47.

⁸³⁸ Ibid., pp. 53, 54, 59.

⁸³⁹ Ibid., p. 71.

radio audience on August 22, demonstrated that the Democrat intended to assault the status quo on progressive grounds:

Dominant in the Republican Party today is the element which proclaims and executes the political theories against which the party liberals like Roosevelt and La Follette and their party insurgents have rebelled. This reactionary element seeks to validate the theory of benevolent oligarchy. It assumes that a material prosperity, the very existence of which is challenged, is an excuse for political inequality. It makes the concern of the government, not people, but material things. I have fought this spirit in my own State. I have had to fight it and to beat it, in order to place upon the statute books every one of the progressive, humane laws for whose enactment I assumed responsibility in my legislative and executive career. I shall know how to fight it in the nation.⁸⁴⁰

Smith critiqued Republican stewardship of the economy, calling the idea of general prosperity under the GOP a “myth”:

When four million men, desirous to work and support their families, are unable to secure employment there is very little in the picture of prosperity to attract them and the millions dependent upon them. . . . Specific industries are wholly prostrate and there is widespread business difficulty Prosperity to the extent that we have it is unduly concentrated and has not equitably touched the lives of the farmer, the wage-earner and the individual business man.⁸⁴¹

These sentiments contrasted sharply with those of Smith’s opponent. Historians have long recognized in Hoover’s ideology a tepid rebuff of free-market orthodoxy; but as William Leuchtenburg points out, this was “much less germane than his rationalizations of the status quo.”⁸⁴² Indeed, as he began his campaign for the White House, the secretary of commerce hoisted the banner of Harding-Coolidge prosperity, promising that if elected he would “go forward with the policies of the last eight years,” and if “given this chance” Republican economic policies would ensure that “poverty will

⁸⁴⁰ Alfred E. Smith, “Address of Acceptance, Albany,” in *Campaign Addresses of Governor Alfred E. Smith, Democratic Candidate for President 1928*, pp. 1-26, pp. 1-2.

⁸⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4. Note in particular the criticism of the “concentration of wealth,” an argument which tied Smith explicitly to the most progressive critics of the Coolidge administration, such as Robert La Follette, Jr., who would “venture to assert that never has this process of wealth concentration moved faster or further than during the years of the Coolidge administration.” Robert M. La Follette, Jr., *Untitled Address (1)*, The La Follette Family Collection, Series C, Box 555, Folder “Coolidge Administration 1928 Undated,” p. 20.

⁸⁴² Leuchtenburg, *Herbert Hoover*, p. 65.

be banished from this nation.”⁸⁴³ Hoover may have once declared that fairness “can only be obtained by certain restrictions on the strong and the dominant,” but by 1928 he appeared less a latter-day Wilson and more, in H. L. Mencken’s phrase, a “fat Coolidge.”⁸⁴⁴

In his acceptance, Smith outlined a number of key differences between himself and the GOP, including water power development, farm relief, tariff policies, immigration restriction, prohibition, and labor relations. The lines between the candidates’ ideologies were sharply drawn, and the Democrat intended to persist in this approach throughout the campaign. It was to be a national debate about issues of fundamental significance to the American polity of 1928. Believing this, Smith asserted:

The people can and do grasp the problems of the government. . . . I have seen legislation won by the pressure of popular demand, exerted after the people had had an honest, frank and complete explanation of the issues. Great questions of finance, the issuance of millions of dollars of bonds for public projects, the complete reconstruction of the machinery of the State government, the institution of an executive budget, these are but a few of the complicated questions which I, myself, have taken to the electorate. Every citizen has thus learned the nature of the business in hand and appreciated that the State’s business is his business.⁸⁴⁵

In that spirit, the candidate proposed to continue “that direct contact with the people . . . in this campaign.”⁸⁴⁶

Agriculture

In late September, the Smith campaign locomotive barreled across the Great Plains with the Happy Warrior and his entourage of family, New Yorkers, national party

⁸⁴³ Ibid., p. 72.

⁸⁴⁴ Hoover quoted in Leuchtenburg, *Herbert Hoover*, p. 66; Mencken quoted in Leuchtenburg, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

⁸⁴⁵ Smith, “Address of Acceptance,” pp. 2-3.

⁸⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

figures, and a growing press corps, in tow. En route to St. Paul, Minnesota, Smith made a stop in Bismarck, North Dakota, for a meeting with that state's new governor, Walter Maddock. After meeting privately, the two governors emerged for a brief press conference that descended into an *opera buffa* on Smith's relationship with the Corn Belt.

Maddock, a farmer who had been elected lieutenant governor as a member of North Dakota's radical-populist Non-Partisan League (NPL), had inherited the governorship on August 28 upon the death of Arthur G. Sorlie. He opened his remarks with a broadside against the Republican Party (of which he had been a nominal member until two weeks prior).⁸⁴⁷ "I went to Kansas City as a delegate, a Republican delegate, to the national convention, hoping we could put [former Illinois governor Frank] Lowden over. We were unable to put Lowden over and we were unable to get our agricultural plank written into the platform. I made the statement then that it was impossible for Hoover as a candidate to carry North Dakota. I have not changed my mind in the least. The farm organizations which I felt I was representing there . . . were turned down at the convention."⁸⁴⁸ In contrast, the Democrats—whom Maddock had joined on September 13 in his bid to secure the governorship in his own right—had afforded "the farm interests . . . better treatment at Houston."⁸⁴⁹ As "one of the original Non-Partisan Leaguers," the governor understood the break with precedent involved in his flight from the GOP, recalling that "we have operated principally through the Republican Party," but noting also that the league had maintained its "right at any time to operate through the

⁸⁴⁷ State Historical Society of North Dakota [Web site], "Walter J. Maddock," Site address: <http://history.nd.gov/exhibits/governors/governors15.html>; "Maddock Out For Smith," *The New York Times*, September 14, 1928, p. 4.

⁸⁴⁸ "Smith Train Speeds Across Wheatland," *The New York Times*, September 27, 1928, pp. 1, 4; p. 1.

⁸⁴⁹ "Maddock Out For Smith," p. 4; "Smith Train Speeds Across Wheatland," p. 1.

Democratic or any other party as we saw fit.”⁸⁵⁰ Now appeared such a time, for Maddock estimated that Smith’s further expounding on the Democratic platform had secured “80 per cent. of the farmers of North Dakota to his support.”⁸⁵¹ Furthermore, Maddock reckoned that this “sentiment . . . rings true in Minnesota and South Dakota also”; states, like North Dakota, where the tradition of radical agrarian non-partisanship (embodied in Minnesota by the Farmer-Laborites) was quite strong.⁸⁵²

This ought to have been a great boon to the Democratic candidate, coming as it did on the heels of his well-received policy speech on agriculture and from the mouth of a serious leader on farm issues. Yet the whole event was confounded by the hesitant behavior of the North Dakotan. He insisted that “I am not speaking and do not want to speak as an individual,” and refused “to declare outright that he would support” Smith’s candidacy.⁸⁵³ This instigated “a cross-fire of questions,” to which Maddock responded with obstinate equivocation.⁸⁵⁴ Ultimately, the governor was at his most direct when he delivered this triangular head-scratcher: “I am for the best-interests of agriculture and the agricultural organizations of this State are 80 per cent. for Smith.”⁸⁵⁵ A reporter pointed out that given Maddock’s professed sympathy for the farm organizations and their approval of the New Yorker, the “natural conclusion” was that the governor supported

⁸⁵⁰ “Smith Train Speeds Across Wheatland,” p. 1.

⁸⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁸⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 4; On the Farmer-Laborites and their connections to the NPL and other progressive third party movements (including the La Follette Progressives in Wisconsin) see Richard M. Valelly, *Radicalism in the States: The Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party and the American Political Economy* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989); George H. Mayer, *The Political Career of Floyd B. Olson* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1951); James J. Lorence, *Gerald J. Boileau and the Progressive-Farmer-Labor Alliance* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 1994).

⁸⁵³ “Smith Train Speeds Across Wheatland,” p. 1.

⁸⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁸⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

the Democrat.⁸⁵⁶ Unable to evade this transitive logic, Maddock responded brusquely: “I do not see any other interpretation you can put on it.”⁸⁵⁷



Fig. 4.2: North Dakota governor Walter Maddock (third from right, between Smith and the two women) appearing with the Democratic candidate for president after delivering a series of indirect endorsements. (Author’s collection).

The situation in North Dakota had local complications. Maddock was pressured from both flanks: the two NPL United States senators from North Dakota were supporting Hoover, while a vocal group of North Dakota “regular” Democrats had come out in opposition to Maddock’s nomination for governor.⁸⁵⁸ (Ultimately, he would not be reelected.)⁸⁵⁹ Meanwhile, there were reports that Maddock’s religion was making things even less comfortable: an anonymous friend told the press that “the reason Governor Maddock himself was so reluctant to announce his personal support for Governor Smith was because both were Catholics.”⁸⁶⁰ These intricacies aside, the Bismarck episode

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 1.

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 1.

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

⁸⁵⁹ State Historical Society of North Dakota, “Walter J. Maddock.”

⁸⁶⁰ Smith Train Speeds Across Wheatland,” p. 4.

encapsulates the complicated relationship that developed between Al Smith and the Midwestern granary in 1928.

I

Having opened his campaign with a promise to speak directly to the voters on problems of fundamental importance, Smith dedicated each of his campaign speeches to one or two major issues, outlining his views and attacking those of the Republican administration and the Republican nominee. For his first speech, the Democrat travelled to Omaha, Nebraska, and spoke on agriculture. While governor of New York, Smith had in fact dealt with farm problems, but such questions were not central to the transitional progressivism that he and his circle had developed in the Empire State. Nevertheless, Smith's approach to the issue demonstrates the ways in which the candidate chose to apply his progressive sensibilities to alien problems; while the response to that approach by farmer-statesmen like Walter Maddock suggests the complex political economy into which the candidate gingerly wandered.

In spite of Smith's personal background, it was fitting that the Democrat should commence his critique of the sitting administration with a speech on agriculture. For America's farmers, depression did not wait until late 1929 to set in; rather, the crash in agricultural prices after the close of the Great War left most farmers desperate for relief throughout the 1920s.⁸⁶¹ In 1928, the Democrats called this "the most noteworthy flaw in

⁸⁶¹ Gilbert C. Fite, *George N. Peek and the Fight for Farm Parity* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 1954), pp. 3-20; Parrish, *Anxious Decades*, pp. 81-88.

our present prosperity.”⁸⁶² Moreover, the issue offered an opportunity for partisan differentiation since many farm progressives believed, with Robert La Follette, Jr., that “President Coolidge with his cabinet ministers Mellon, Hoover and Jardine, has fought bitterly and desperately against all effective measures for the relief of agriculture.”⁸⁶³

In order to assuage the suffering of American husbandry, Congress repeatedly considered a set of measures known as the McNary-Haugen bills, which called for the federal government to purchase agricultural surplus and sell it abroad at the world market price, segregating this crop from the domestic market (which would be protected by tariffs), thus boosting prices within the United States.⁸⁶⁴ The cost to the government would be recovered by a fee imposed on the agricultural commodities benefited. This program encountered resistance within the Republican administration that Calvin Coolidge had inherited from Warren G. Harding. While strongly supported by Secretary of Agriculture Henry C. Wallace, the bill suffered the staunch opposition of commerce secretary Herbert Hoover, who “feared for the souls of farmers if the government intervened further.”⁸⁶⁵ (This was only one of many clashes between Wallace, whom Hoover found “a dour Scotsman with a temperament inherited from some ancestor who had been touched by exposure to infant damnation and predestination,” and Hoover,

⁸⁶² *The Campaign Book of the Democratic Party: Candidates and Issues in 1928* (New York: Democratic National Committee, 1928), p. 72.

⁸⁶³ Robert M. La Follette, Jr., Untitled Address (1), The La Follette Family Collection, Series C, Box 555, Folder “Coolidge Administration 1928 Undated,” p. 7.

⁸⁶⁴ Kimberly K. Porter, “Embracing the Pluralist Perspective: The Iowa Farm Bureau Federation and the McNary-Haugen Movement,” *Agricultural History*, 74:2 (Spring, 2000), pp. 381-392, p. 383; Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity*, pp. 102-103; Vaelely, *Radicalism in the States*, pp. 75-77.

⁸⁶⁵ Leuchtenburg, *Herbert Hoover*, p. 59. Wallace and his progressive allies had long differed with Hoover on agricultural policy: at least as early as 1918, Pennsylvania’s Gifford Pinchot wrote Wallace that “it is curious to find a man born on a farm in Iowa, as Herbert was, showing such blindness toward everything that effects and controls the farmer, but we both have met cases before where later education wiped out an earlier training. In Hoover’s case the mining engineer has won against the earlier farm boy, and has eliminated him.” Pinchot to Wallace, February 17, 1918, quoted in *The Campaign Book of the Democratic Party*, p. 266.

whom Wallace judged “‘bloodless,’ ‘stuffy,’ and ‘opinionated.’”⁸⁶⁶ Wallace was dead by the time Coolidge began his own full term in the White House, and the president followed Hoover’s council to the order of two vetoes—each accompanied by a message that the commerce secretary had helped compose.⁸⁶⁷

By 1928, the debate over the McNary-Haugen bill was central to farm politics. In response, Smith followed the pattern he had established in New York by calling on conferences of experts to help craft state policy, and the Democrats hired George Peek, a leading exponent of McNary-Haugenism, as well as General Hugh Johnson and Professor Rexford Tugwell, to make a survey of the farm situation and help develop the governor’s agricultural policy.⁸⁶⁸ Tugwell later recalled that the team had devised a strategy to raise farm prices that candidly would have raised the price of food, but the plan had been discarded by the time of Smith’s nomination because urban advisors like Belle Moskowitz thought these living expenses were already too high.⁸⁶⁹ However, Peek, “the man who was most instrumental in developing and promoting” the concept of farm parity in the 1920s, remained a key advisor to the Smith campaign, energetically coordinating

⁸⁶⁶ Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: The Cabinet and the Presidency, 1920-1933*, p. 109; Wallace quoted in Leuchtenburg, *Herbert Hoover*, p. 59.

⁸⁶⁷ Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order, 1919-1933*, pp. 107-108; Roger T. Johnson, “Part-Time Leader: Senator Charles L. McNary and the McNary Haugen Bill,” *Agricultural History*, 54:4 (October, 1980), pp. 527-541, p. 537. According to historian Theodore Saloutos, “Wallace had hoped to win over Harding and the businessmen of the nation to the McNary-Haugen plan. Calvin Coolidge knew little about the states west of the Alleghenies, cared even less, and thought the farm depression was unimportant politically; thus Wallace, an advocate of the McNary-Haugen plan, found himself hemmed in by Coolidge, who farmers felt was insensitive to their needs, and Herbert Hoover, an advocate of high protective tariffs for industry and cooperative marketing for the farmers.” Theodore Saloutos, *The American Farmer and the New Deal* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University, 1982), pp. 21-22.

⁸⁶⁸ Josephsons, *Al Smith: Hero of the Cities*, p. 377.

⁸⁶⁹ “The Reminiscences of Rexford G. Tugwell (1950),” Columbia University Oral History Project, Columbia University, pp. 1-3. In fact, most observers understood that the McNary-Haugen program would exercise a similar inflationary effect on the cost of urban living, and this presented a serious conflict for the Democrats. As Walter Lippmann noted, “A measure like the McNary-Haugen bill would, if it worked, cost the city people money.” Walter Lippmann, “The Sick Donkey: Democratic Prospects for 1928,” *Harper’s Magazine*, Volume 155 (September, 1927), pp. 415-421, p. 419.

“independent agricultural leagues . . . in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Minnesota, the Dakotas, and Montana for the sole purpose of electing” the Democrat.⁸⁷⁰ Moreover, by September 18, when Smith delivered his Omaha speech, the Democratic nominee was explicit in his approval of “the principle” of McNary-Haugenism:

As I read the McNary-Haugen Bill, its fundamental purpose is to establish an effective control of the sale of exportable surplus with the cost imposed directly upon the commodity benefited. For that principle the Democratic platform squarely stands, and for that principle I squarely stand. Mr. Hoover stands squarely opposed to this principle by which the farmer could get the benefit of the tariff. What remains of the McNary-Haugen Bill is a mere matter of method, and I do not limit myself to the exact mechanics and method embodied in that bill.⁸⁷¹

The “mere matter of method” to which Smith would not commit was the proposal to fund the scheme using an “equalization fee,” a detail seen as crucial by many in the Corn Belt. The Democrat’s attempt to finesse this point caused consternation among many farm progressives and served to temper enthusiasm for his candidacy in some quarters. In spite of this, Smith saw in McNary-Haugenism “a clean-cut issue which the farmers and the voters of this country must decide.”⁸⁷²

The Democrat asserted that Republicans had been promising farm relief for nearly two full terms and had delivered only expressions of sympathy; this had been exacerbated by the “hostility” toward farm relief expressed at the Kansas City convention, wherein, according to Republican senator George Norris, “a direct slap [was] administered to the farmers of the country” with a platform that proved “a sad disappointment to every

⁸⁷⁰ Gilbert C. Fite, “The Agricultural Issue in the Presidential Campaign of 1928,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 37:4 (March, 1951), pp. 653-672, p. 664; Fite, *George N. Peek and the Fight for Farm Parity*, p. vii.

⁸⁷¹ Alfred E. Smith, “Omaha,” in *Campaign Addresses of Governor Alfred E. Smith, Democratic Candidate for President 1928*, pp. 27-42, pp. 38-39; “Full Text of Governor Smith’s Speech at Omaha on the Problem of Farm Relief,” *The New York Times*, September 18, 1928, p. 3.

⁸⁷² Smith, “Omaha,” p. 39.

progressive citizen of the United States.”⁸⁷³ While Republicans refused to act, farm debt was ballooning, rural banks were failing, and agricultural prices continued to plummet in the face of a rising cost of living.⁸⁷⁴ To Smith, all of this meant that Hoover was no friend of the farmer: “Mr. Hoover, as the chief adviser of the last two administrations upon the subject of agriculture, assumed a direct responsibility for the hostility and inaction of the administration and continues to assume that responsibility by his fulsome indorsement of the record of Coolidge policies.”⁸⁷⁵

Smith’s running mate Joe Robinson reinforced this message with a Nebraska visit of his own. Unlike the presidential nominee, Robinson came from an agrarian background, and the Democrats sought to make the most of this fact, describing the senator as “Born on a farm in the Ozarks, reared among struggling farmers and conversant with the problems of distribution and marketing.”⁸⁷⁶ Already in his acceptance address, Robinson had declared farm relief the “most important” of the “big issues” of 1928.⁸⁷⁷ Traveling to Lincoln in October, he charged that “there was never a time when reactionary influences were more dominant in the United States than at present,” particularly given the Republican farm relief policy of “insincerity and indecision.”⁸⁷⁸ The next day, at Sioux City, Iowa, the Arkansan took to the airwaves to denounce again the “reactionary” posture of Hoover and his running mate, Senator

⁸⁷³ Norris quoted in *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

⁸⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

⁸⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁸⁷⁶ *The Campaign Book of the Democratic Party*, p. 25.

⁸⁷⁷ “Robinson’s Acceptance Speech,” *Barron’s*, Vol. VIII, No. 36 (September 3, 1928), p. 4; *The Campaign Book of the Democratic Party*, p. 52.

⁸⁷⁸ “Robinson Fires Farm Aid Blast,” *The Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 1928, p. 7.

Charles Curtis of Kansas, in what was interpreted by the press as an attempt to “woo” farm progressives.⁸⁷⁹

II

Historians including David Burner and Alan Lichtman have criticized the Smith campaign, particularly the candidate himself, for running an operation marked by confusion over the problems of agriculture and obfuscation regarding potential remedies.⁸⁸⁰ Given Smith’s ambivalence over the equalization fee, this critique is not without merit. Contemporary opponents often made such attacks; and at times they were expressed by friendlier observers like Henry A. Wallace, editor of *Wallace’s Farmer* and son of Hoover’s late nemesis at the Department of Agriculture. The junior Wallace wrote to Democratic congressman Meyer Jacobstein that although he was “personally . . . quite sure that I shall vote for Smith in the coming election,” because he had a “record which is somewhat sympathetic to the common man,” he was troubled because he found the governor “colossally ignorant of the agriculture problem.”⁸⁸¹ These doubts were especially prevalent during the early stages of the campaign (Wallace wrote his letter in June), and Smith’s pronouncements on agricultural issues tended to improve his

⁸⁷⁹ “Robinson Woos Progressives,” *The Los Angeles Times*, October 24, 1928, p. 6.

⁸⁸⁰ E.g.: Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism*, p. 196; Lichtman, *Prejudice and the Old Politics*, p. 190; James L. Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1973), p. 174.

⁸⁸¹ Henry A. Wallace to Hon. Meyer Jacobstein, June 14, 1928, Robert Moses Papers, Box 4, Folder “Campaign—National/State 1928, Feb-Aug.”

reputation amongst farm progressives. Wallace himself “threw his support to Smith” after hearing the Omaha speech.⁸⁸²

In fact, while Smith is often charged with evasion on the farm question, the popular response to his Omaha address was positive—except among Republican spellbinders. Secretary of Agriculture William Jardine denounced Smith in Riverhead, Long Island, sneering that his hosts’ governor was “either . . . grossly ignorant in the field of practical economics or . . . deliberately misrepresenting the truth.”⁸⁸³ The Democratic *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, on the other hand, cheered the speech as a “bold offensive” in which the candidate’s “definition of the farm issue given in plain ‘Park Row’ talk . . . caught the fancy of western crowds,” and Smith aide Joseph Proskauer observed that “people throughout Nebraska and Kansas are wildly enthusiastic about the speech.”⁸⁸⁴ After Smith spoke further on agriculture at St. Paul, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* declared that “if the farmers sincerely believe in the McNary-Haugen scheme of relief . . . they have found a man who would, if he were president, co-operate with them to give such a plan the effect of law.”⁸⁸⁵ While these partisan reactions were to be expected, the enthusiasm of the progressive Republican governor of Nebraska could claim more neutral origins. After the Omaha speech Smith shuttled to Lincoln and met with Governor Adam McMullen, who released a statement to the press “crediting his visitor with more understanding of the agricultural problem than he had shown

⁸⁸² Malcolm O. Sillars, “Henry A. Wallace’s Editorials on Agrarian Discontent, 1921-1928,” *Agricultural History*, 26:4 (October, 1952), pp. 132-140, p. 139.

⁸⁸³ “Says Smith is Not Clear,” *The New York Times*, September 22, 1928, p. 3.

⁸⁸⁴ Marion J. Pike, “Swift Smith Blows in Omaha Drive Out Foe From Trenches,” *The New Orleans Times-Picayune*, September 23, 1928, p. 21; Joseph Proskauer to Walter Lippmann (telegram), September 20, 1928, Walter Lippmann Papers, Reel 26, Box 27, Folder 1005.

⁸⁸⁵ “Governor Smith and St. Paul,” from *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, reprinted in *The New Orleans Times-Picayune*, October 5, 1928, p. 8. On the other hand, the *Hartford Courant*, also noted Smith’s support for the program, calling it “a sound reason” for his defeat. Editorial, “A Sound Reason for Defeating Governor Smith,” *The Hartford Courant*, September 21, 1928, p. 8.

before.”⁸⁸⁶ While desiring further explanation of Smith’s position on the equalization fee, the governor gave a favorable review: “From what I gathered, listening to Governor Smith’s speech, he gave an unequivocal endorsement of the McNary-Haugen bill. . . . It is quite evident that the governor has been giving further study to the agricultural question since he delivered his speech of acceptance. He seems to have a better understanding of the problem and is more in accord with the legislation the farmers have been seeking than he was some time ago.”⁸⁸⁷

Indeed, Smith’s campaign, which historians claim failed to capture the loyalties of disheartened Corn Belt Republicans, made significant inroads in the region in the weeks following the Omaha speech.⁸⁸⁸ Besides the kind words of Governor McMullen, Smith would eventually secure the endorsements of two leading Midwestern progressive Republicans—Nebraska’s Senator Norris, and Senator John J. Blaine of Wisconsin. Blaine decried Hoover as “opposed to practically all of the policies of the great mass of progressive Republicans and independent forward-thinking people of America.”⁸⁸⁹ Norris, whose support was largely based on Smith’s water power stand, was of particular significance. Speaking on the Democrat’s behalf in late October, the Republican attributed the demise of Congress’ farm relief proposals to Hoover’s influence in the cabinet.⁸⁹⁰ In contrast, “the farmers and those who depend on the farmers for their prosperity should support Mr. Smith. His program, as he has announced in a number of his speeches, is to the great advantage of the nation, because it will give the farm sectors

⁸⁸⁶ “Crowds Greet Gov. Smith On Way Through Corn Belt; Farm Speech Stirs Debate,” *The New York Times*, September 20, 1928, p. 1.

⁸⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1; Paul F. Haubert, “Smith Sees McMullen in Lincoln, Neb.,” *The Hartford Courant*, September 20, 1928, p. 1.

⁸⁸⁸ *E.g.*: Lichtman, *Prejudice and the Old Politics*, pp. 181, 191.

⁸⁸⁹ “Senator Blaine in Flat Refusal to Help Hoover,” *The New Orleans Times-Picayune*, September 24, 1928, p. 1.

⁸⁹⁰ “Norris Recites Party Peeves,” *The Los Angeles Times*, October 28, 1928, p. 13.

the relief they are so much in need of at the present. The Republicans offer nothing but a few kind words.”⁸⁹¹ From Minnesota, the editor of *Farm, Stock and Home* wrote Norris that his endorsement was “the crowning act of a long and valuable service in the interest of the common people.”⁸⁹² The Nebraskan was hailed in the Democratic *Houston Post-Dispatch* for displaying “the strict intellectual integrity and moral courage, for which he is noted,” while the Republican *Wall Street Journal* speculated that Norris’ “plate from his new Democratic friends is expected to consist of at least thirty pieces of silver.”⁸⁹³

The drift toward Smith by agrarian progressives went well beyond the two senators.⁸⁹⁴ A group of “several thousand . . . normally Republican. . . disgruntled Iowa farmers” organized the Agricultural Equality Voters’ League “for the purpose of ‘spanking’ their party,” while the forty-five thousand member Iowa Farmers’ Union seemed to abandon its “theoretical non-partisanship” in favor of Smith.⁸⁹⁵ Also from the Hawkeye State, “notice was served that the 1,000,000 farmers behind the Corn Belt

⁸⁹¹ “Senator Norris Turns To Al Smith After Hoover Power Speech,” *The Houston Post-Dispatch*, October 25, 1928, p. 1. These statements are all the more compelling given that Norris, unlike his fellow farm progressives, had actually considered Frank Lowden too conservative for serious presidential consideration—a member of “the selfish interests in the party.” Fite, *George N. Peek and the Fight for Farm Parity*, pp. 204-205.

⁸⁹² H. N. Owen to George Norris, October 27, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Manuscript Reading Room, Library of Congress, Washington, DC (hereafter, George W. Norris Papers), Box 5, Folder 15—Commending Senator for Support of Smith in 1928 Campaign. *Farm, Stock and Home* was considered by the Department of Agriculture’s Everett Edwards to have been “outstanding among the many agricultural periodicals that have served Minnesota and the Northwest,” and ran from 1884 until 1929, when it merged with *The Farmer*. Everett E. Edwards, “Some Sources for Northwest History: Agricultural Periodicals,” *Minnesota History*, Vol. 18 (Dec. 1937), pp. 407-414, pp. 410-411.

⁸⁹³ Editorial, “The Progressive Republican Revolt,” *The Houston Post-Dispatch*, October 27, 1928, p. 6; “By The Way—,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 7, 1928, p. 1. The *Hartford Courant*, who shared the editorial disposition of the *Journal*, dismissed the Norris endorsement, quipping that “Senator Norris has but little more in common with the average rock-ribbed Republican than the late Henry Cabot Lodge had in common with the late Karl Marx.” Editorial, “Norris Out for Smith,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 26, 1928, p. 8.

⁸⁹⁴ For example, Norris’ fellow Nebraskan, retired Democratic senator and Bryanite Populist Gilbert Hitchcock, supported the Smith campaign, blaming the Republicans for “having aided in deflating farm prices immediately following the world war by increasing the discount rates on farm notes.” “Hitchcock Raps G. O. P. Regime for Low Farm Prices,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 11, 1928, p. 12.

⁸⁹⁵ N. B. Register, “Norris Indorsement Swings Disgruntled Iowa Farmers,” *The Washington Sunday Star*, October 28, 1928, p. 26; “Iowa Farmers’ Union Urges Hoover Defeat,” *The Hartford Courant*, September 21, 1928, p. 14.

Committee” (a nonpartisan organization formed earlier in the decade by a group that included radical farm leader Milo Reno) were for Smith.⁸⁹⁶ In Wisconsin, the progressive revolt became so problematic for the GOP that party regulars were compelled to apply the “party boot . . . to ‘Young Bob’” La Follette in order to thwart “the insurgent movement in the State.”⁸⁹⁷ Despite this crackdown, the *Madison Capital-Times*, “long known as the organ of the late Senator Robert M. La Follette and the voice of the western progressives,” endorsed Al Smith in early October.⁸⁹⁸ In Montana, progressive Democratic senator Burton Wheeler, the elder La Follette’s running mate from 1924, was reported to be “lining up the radicals of every ilk, in the endeavor to corral for Smith and himself the La Follette-Wheeler vote of four years ago” in that state; as such, “the old Nonpartisan League . . . has been revived by Senator Wheeler . . . to cast the farmer vote to Smith.”⁸⁹⁹ In South Dakota, former Populist governor Andrew E. Lee, former Populist congressman John E. Kelly, and a number of past NPL and Farmer-Labor candidates (including gubernatorial nominees from 1922 and 1924) supported Smith.⁹⁰⁰ *Washington Star* columnist William Hard noted that along “the line from Chicago to Butte” Smith’s campaign was developing a new “formidable alignment” that would challenge Republican supremacy in the farm regions. This was so because the Democrat

⁸⁹⁶ Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 1900-1939* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1951), p. 403; Valelly, *Radicalism in the States*, p. 89.

⁸⁹⁷ “Party Boot Appiled [sic] to ‘Young Bob,’” *The Los Angeles Times*, October 2, 1928, p. 6.

⁸⁹⁸ “Big Progressive Paper Turns Over to Smith,” *The Scranton Times*, October 11, 1928, p. 1. In a demonstration of ideological solidarity, Michael K. Reilly, who was nominated by the Democrats to challenge the progressive Republican La Follette and the conservative Republican-turned-independent William H. Markham for the U. S. Senate seat from Wisconsin, withdrew from the race, suggesting that Senator La Follette “is just as in favor of the legislative program for which Gov Smith stands as I am.” “Democrat Quits Senate Contest Against La Follette in Wisconsin,” *The Boston Globe*, October 9, 1928, p. 6. It is well to note that Dr. H. G. Alexander of Charlotte, NC, the Farmer-Labor Party’s Vice-Presidential nominee, quit the ticket in favor of Smith and the Democrats. “Farmer-Labor Nominee Withdraws to Aid Smith,” *The Boston Globe*, September 26, 1928, p. 24.

⁸⁹⁹ “Montana Race Will Go Limit,” *The Los Angeles Times*, November 2, 1928, p. 6.

⁹⁰⁰ Richard V. Oulihan, “South Dakotans Split on 3 Issues,” *The New York Times*, October 8, 1928, p. 4.

“has qualified, to La Follette and Farmer-Laborite eyes, as a ‘Progressive.’ He has qualified as a friend of the ‘principle’ of McNary-Haugenism and of the Northwestern farmer’s own conception of his own salvation.”⁹⁰¹

One of Smith’s Corn Belt supporters literally worked himself to death on the Democrat’s behalf. Charles A. Towne was another venerable Midwestern activist who was attracted to Smith’s cause; he had served in Congress as a Republican from Minnesota in the late nineteenth century and had been offered the vice presidential nomination of the Populist Party and the Silver Republican Party in 1900 (he declined), later moving to New York and again securing a term in the House of Representatives—this time as a Democrat.⁹⁰² After two decades out of office, Towne embarked on an ambitious tour of the West on behalf of Al Smith. Despite catching a cold during an open car parade in North Dakota, Towne persisted in his efforts, taking to the stump in Oklahoma, Missouri, South Dakota, and Arizona; with a speech planned for New Mexico before a return to the Breadbasket for more campaigning.⁹⁰³ Instead, the former congressman’s strenuous schedule got the best of him: he took a turn for the worse and succumbed to pneumonia at a hospital in Tucson.⁹⁰⁴

In spite of this passion and these newly won allies, Smith never inspired a stampede of agrarian progressives to his cause. In Minnesota, Farmer-Laborite Henrik Shipstead met Democratic entreaties with Coolidge-like reticence.⁹⁰⁵ Equally silent was former Illinois governor Frank Lowden, Walter Maddock’s first choice for the presidency

⁹⁰¹ William Hard, “Republican Invasion of South Most Striking Phase of the Campaign,” *The Washington Sunday Star*, October 21, 1928, Part 2, p. 2. Ibid.

⁹⁰² Biographical Directory of the United States Congress [Web site], “Towne, Charles Arnette” Site address: <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=T000324>.

⁹⁰³ “Smith Backer Dies on Tour,” *The Houston Post-Dispatch*, October 23, 1928, p. 1.

⁹⁰⁴ “Smith Backer Dies on Tour,” p. 1; “Milestones: Nov. 5, 1928,” *Time*, November 5, 1928.

⁹⁰⁵ G. Gould Lincoln, “Shipstead is Key in Minnesota Race But Keeps Silence,” *The Washington Evening Star*, October 16, 1928, p. 1.

and a recognized leader on agricultural issues. While several of Lowden's campaign staffers publicly endorsed Smith, the former contender himself denied rumors that he planned to support the Democrat in return for an appointment as secretary of agriculture, declaring instead: "I do not contemplate making any statement with reference to the Presidency before the election."⁹⁰⁶ In spite of the open revolt of La Follette Republicans like John Blaine in Wisconsin, "Young Bob" La Follette never explicitly joined his fellow senator.⁹⁰⁷ La Follette stated that he had "disassociated" himself "from the Republican national ticket and platform throughout the campaign," and he lauded Smith's "public declarations and definite commitments which are in substantial accord with the Progressives' views on waterpower, farm relief, the injunction in labor disputes," and other key issues; yet despite Democratic implications to the contrary, he withheld any definite imprimatur from the party's nominee.⁹⁰⁸ While Young Bob's words indicated even to Republicans that the progressive held a "slight preference . . . for Smith," his ambiguity allowed the Hoover-boosting *Los Angeles Times* to infer that "La Follette's 'Agin' Everyone."⁹⁰⁹

⁹⁰⁶ "Lowden Manager Bolts to Smith," *The New York Times*, October 26, 1928, p. 3; "Lowden Aide for Smith," *The New York Times*, November 4, 1928, p. 23; "Lowden Denies A Report," *The New York Times*, October 30, 1928, p. 18; "Lowden to be Silent to End of Campaign," *The New York Times*, October 31, 1928, p. 18.

⁹⁰⁷ However, La Follette's pronouncements of the "dominant issues of the 1928 campaign" catalogued a list of topics which could have been taken almost verbatim from Smith's acceptance address or the policy declarations of the Democratic Campaign Book: Republican corruption, the injustice of Mellon's tax cuts, Federal Reserve policies that encouraged "the wildest era of speculation ever known in Wall Street," exploitative foreign policies, the need for farm relief, the abuse of the labor injunction, and the threats posed by power monopolies. Robert M. La Follette, Jr., "Dominant Issues in the 1928 Campaign," The La Follette Family Collection, Series C, Box 555, Folder "Coolidge Administration 1928 Undated," pp. 1-3.

⁹⁰⁸ "La Follette Hits Both Parties But Lauds Gov. Smith," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, October 26, 1928, p. 3; "La Follette's 'Agin' Everyone," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1928, p. 4.

⁹⁰⁹ "La Follette's 'Agin' Everyone," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1928, p. 4. This seems to have been a particularly difficult stretch for Young Bob; not only was it the first presidential election since his father's death, but his family's *La Follette's Magazine* was in deep financial trouble in 1928, forcing him to write letters to friends soliciting donations to keep the publication running. The magazine survived, but changed names in 1928. Robert M. La Follette, Jr., to Alice G. Brandeis, April 20, 1928, The La Follette Family Collection, Series C, Box 6, Folder "1928 Brandeis, Alice G. (Mrs. Louis D.)"; Alice Honeywell

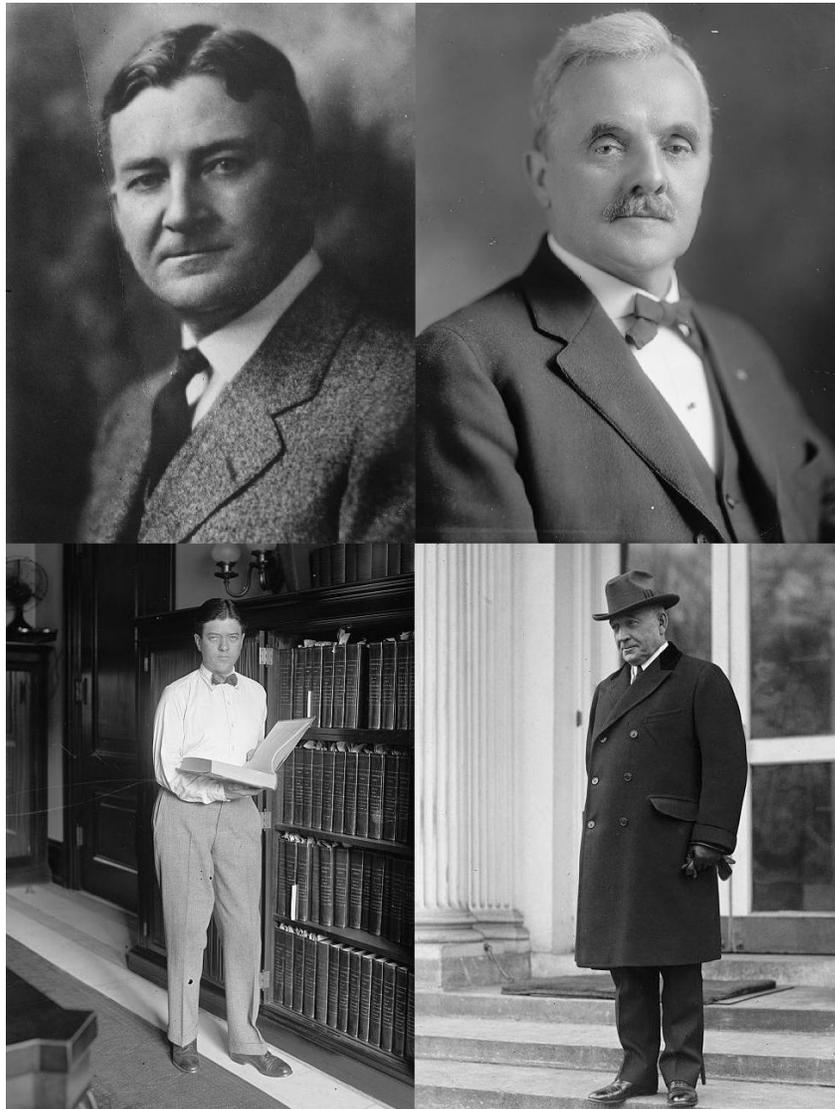


Fig. 4.3: Noted Midwestern farm progressives from the 1920s (clockwise, from top left): Senator John J. Blaine (R-WI) and Senator George W. Norris (R-NE), who endorsed Smith; former governor Frank O. Lowden (R-IL) and Senator Robert M. La Follette, Jr. (R-WI), who remained neutral.⁹¹⁰

Worse still, many progressive Republicans whose support Democrats had sought eventually came out for Hoover. Governor McMullen, despite his praise for Smith in September, affirmed his loyalty to the Republican cause in October in response to Norris’

[Web site], “La Follette and His Legacy,” Site address: <http://www.lafollette.wisc.edu/publications/otherpublications/LaFollette/LaFLegacy.html>.

⁹¹⁰ Bain News Service, “John J. Blaine,” George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress; Harris & Ewing, “Norris, George W. Senator,” Harris & Ewing Collection, Library of Congress; “Frank O. Lowden of Ill. At W.H., 2/12/25,” National Photo Company Collection, Library of Congress; “Robert M. La Follette, Jr., 7/13/25,” National Photo Company Collection, Library of Congress.

party bolt. McMullen assured farmers that Hoover was “contemplating” calling a special session of Congress to deal with agricultural problems; he then announced that although he agreed with Norris’ stance “on the agricultural and power questions I believe in government by parties. For that reason I will not follow him into the Democratic camp.”⁹¹¹ Despite professing his support for their plan, Smith was able to secure the loyalties of neither Charles McNary nor Gilbert Haugen (a Republican senator from Oregon and a Republican congressman from Iowa, respectively).⁹¹²

In another crucial blow, Iowa senator Smith Wildman Brookhart, along with Congressman Haugen, took to the radio on Hoover’s behalf in late October, declaring Smith agricultural advisor George Peek the “archenemy” of farmers and denouncing the candidate himself for embodying “things that I have been fighting my whole life.”⁹¹³ If this was tough for Al Smith, it became awkward for Smith Brookhart once his fellow progressive George Norris fled the GOP. Brookhart had “been describing Norris as a sort of demi-god among men,” making a speech in Fremont, Nebraska, where he emblazoned his fellow senator as “the biggest, soundest and most sensible man in Congress, and the farmer’s greatest friend.”⁹¹⁴ He had even championed Norris for the presidency at Kansas City, and seemed to experience a minor personal crisis upon the Nebraskan’s endorsement of Smith, sullenly refusing to believe the news “until I see a telegram signed

⁹¹¹ “M’Mullen Relies on Hoover’s Word,” *The New York Times*, October 26, 1928, p. 15. Partisanship was a key factor in the agricultural regions: out of all the letters written to George Norris denouncing his endorsement of Al Smith, 22 percent mentioned party loyalty as a major reason for their disappointment; of these, 55 percent came from the Great Plains and the rural Midwest. Letters analyzed and quantified by the author from the George W. Norris Papers, Box 5, Folder 15—Letters on Smith (Condemning Senator N 1928 Campaign).

⁹¹² “McNary Sure of Farmers,” *The New York Times*, October 17, 1928, p. 13; “Smith Spurred By Brookhart,” *The Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1928, p. 4.

⁹¹³ “Smith Spurred By Brookhart,” *The Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1928, p. 4.

⁹¹⁴ “Iowa Democrats Cheered,” *The New York Times*, October 28, 1928, p. 2.

by Norris himself.”⁹¹⁵ Within days, Brookhart’s former campaign manager had also endorsed the Democrat.⁹¹⁶

III

Historian Gilbert Fite has noted that “contrary to popular belief, the Democratic appeal to farm voters in the Midwest was not entirely in vain.”⁹¹⁷ Similarly, political scientist James L. Sundquist noted that Smith made significant inroads among voters in places like Iowa and North Dakota in 1928.⁹¹⁸ Nevertheless, farmers shared the ambivalence toward the Democratic nominee exhibited by many Corn Belt politicians.

One major factor was the candidate and his campaign’s reluctance to embrace more fully the populist tradition. In Minnesota, former North Dakota senator Henry Clay Hansbrough, an erstwhile Republican who had been the first person elected to the House of Representatives from his state and was now chair of the “Smith Independent League,” called on Hoover to withdraw from the race, attributing to the candidate a fabulous personal fortune, vast oil reserves, and imperialist tendencies.⁹¹⁹ While Hansbrough’s charges were probably more paranoia than informed populism, the alacrity with which party chairman John Raskob “flayed” the North Dakotan revealed the DNC’s urgency to purge agrarian radicalism in favor of a détente with the barons of industry.⁹²⁰ While

⁹¹⁵ “Iowa Democrats Cheered,” p. 2”; “M’Mullen Relies on Hoover’s Word,” p. 15.

⁹¹⁶ “Lowden Manager Bolts to Smith,” *The New York Times*, October 26, 1928.

⁹¹⁷ Fite, “The Agricultural Issue in the Presidential Campaign of 1928,” p. 653.

⁹¹⁸ Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System*, pp. 174-176.

⁹¹⁹ “Huge Holdings Laid to Hoover,” *The Los Angeles Times*, October 11, 1928, p. 10; Biographical Directory of the United States Congress [Web site], “Hansbrough, Henry Clay,” Site Address: <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=H000169>

⁹²⁰ “Raskob Flays Hansbrough,” *The Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1928, p. 10. Hansbrough was not merely some firebrand; he was a credible source on agricultural questions, having once served as Chairman

Hansbrough was extreme and perhaps irresponsible, the episode speaks less to the temperance of the Democrats than to their eagerness to please big business.⁹²¹

If the party was uncomfortable with the most aggressive populists, the candidate himself was unwilling to commit to their most radical remedies. Indeed, while Smith was praised by many agrarian progressives for his “unequivocal endorsement” of McNary-Haugenism, he was less concrete on many of the details, and he continued to hedge on the specific question of the equalization fee. Smith’s pledge to call a conference of experts to work out the problem comported with his transitional progressive administrative style from New York State, and seems to have been made in good faith; yet to the suffering farmer, this promise to “talk things over later” must have appeared less like a firm stand and more like a flailing Charleston.

The point is trite, but it must be noted that there was also something foreign about the candidate from the Lower East Side to the western farmer, no matter the extent of their converging economic interests. One Smith biographer reports that Texas congressman Sam Rayburn later opined, “I never thought the brown derby helped”; while Frances Perkins confessed that Smith “did not sound like a man who knew pigs and

of the Senate Committee on Public Lands, where he earned a reputation as “the most strenuous advocate in the Senate of the utilization of the vacant public lands through national irrigation works,” and introduced the first bill “providing for the construction” of such projects. H. M. Suter, ed., *Forestry and Irrigation: Official Organ of the American Forestry Association and the National Irrigation Association (Vol. VIII, 1902)* (Washington, DC: Judd and Detweiler, 1902), p. 235.

⁹²¹ Felix Frankfurter, a strong Smith supporter, lamented this strategy early in the campaign: “Thus far the chief endeavor seems to have been to attract big business votes—a wholly idle policy, for they (with few exceptions who care deeply about prohibition [*e.g.*: Raskob]) are too comfortable with the G. O. P. Instead of endeavoring to appear like unto the G. O. P., it’s our function to be and to appear very different.” Felix Frankfurter to Belle Moskowitz, August 7, 1928, Felix Frankfurter Papers, Manuscript Reading Room, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, Reel 105. Meanwhile, Smith himself was certainly not ready to level the same “body blows at the ‘folklore of capitalism’” as the most aggressive reformers, especially those who retained the ideology of “earlier progressives,” such as Robert La Follette, Jr., who embodied much of the ideology of his father during the 1920s. Theodore Rosenof, “‘Young Bob’ La Follette on American Capitalism,” *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 55:2 (Winter 1971-1972), pp. 130-139, p. 132.

chickens.”⁹²² Hoover supporters of course agreed. No less a figure than Jane Addams was absorbed by such reasoning; the settlement house pioneer told farmers that Hoover was the candidate who could be expected to recognize agriculture’s “deplorable conditions,” since his “childhood was spent in a farming community in the Mississippi Valley.”⁹²³ As much as anywhere, the Democrat’s pride in his urban heritage and his Tammany roots was a liability in the Heartland.

Prohibition posed a similar problem. The issue had been second only to the Klan plank in dividing Smith’s disciples from those of Bryan at Madison Square Garden in 1924. In 1928, a league of New York Bryanites, organized in 1900, announced their defection to the party of McKinley after seven presidential elections, largely on the question of prohibition—speculating that if the Great Commoner “were living he would do the same.”⁹²⁴ Meanwhile on Bryan’s dreaded Wall Street, the cocksure *Journal* quipped that “Demagogues have evidently failed to ‘sell’ farmers their panic-acea.”⁹²⁵ From Boston, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported approvingly that farmers had chosen to “scorn promises of personal gain to defeat [the] liquor menace.”⁹²⁶ *New York Times* reporter Richard V. Oulihan noted in South Dakota that “Many Republican farmers who have no enthusiasm for Mr. Hoover and believe Governor Smith is more sympathetic to their complaints than Hoover, do not care for Smith’s wet stand and his Tammany connection, and large numbers who feel hostile to Hoover are said to be opposed to Smith’s candidacy on religious grounds.”⁹²⁷ The *Washington Star* found

⁹²² Josephsons, *Al Smith: Hero of the Cities*, p. 386.

⁹²³ “Jane Addams For Hoover,” *The Los Angeles Times*, October 18, 1928, p. 3.

⁹²⁴ “W.J. Bryan League to Vote G.O.P.,” *The Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1928, p. 1.

⁹²⁵ “By the Way—,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 6, 1928, p. 1.

⁹²⁶ “Midwest Fails to Rise to Lure of Farm Relief,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 7, 1928, p. 6.

⁹²⁷ Oulihan, “South Dakotans Split on 3 Issues,” p. 4.

Idaho's progressives apprehensive about the New Yorker, partially because of his Tammany ties and his "lack of understanding of irrigation," but also because of his "wet stand."⁹²⁸ George Norris would later remark in frustration that "There are many prohibitionists who are cranks on the subject. They would support a prohibitionist or a man who said he was a prohibitionist, regardless of how he stood on any other governmental question."⁹²⁹

As was the case nationwide, Smith's Catholicism presented another obstacle. Figures including Senator McNary were "unsettled by the urban, immigrant-Catholic constituency that Al Smith represented."⁹³⁰ While only 15 percent of those who wrote to George Norris denouncing his endorsement of Smith explicitly discussed the religious question, the Nebraskan maintained that "thousands of American citizens were actuated by religious prejudice, without ever being conscious of the fact."⁹³¹ The senator may have developed this impression based on his correspondence with constituents including a realtor from Lincoln who stated frankly that "if Al Smith was not a Catholic I would vote for him."⁹³²

These objections were real and did indeed matter, but it would be a tremendous mistake to dismiss Smith's economic appeal to Midwestern agriculture because of such

⁹²⁸ A. A. Lawson, "Progressives In Idaho Declared for Hoover," *The Washington Star News*, October 14, 1928, p. 25.

⁹²⁹ George W. Norris to John F. Cordeal, January, 6, 1929, George W. Norris Papers, Box 4, Folder 15—1928 Presidential Campaign (Smith), p. 5. Norris believed that the 1928 campaign had demonstrated the existence of both "dry bigots" and "wet bigots."

⁹³⁰ Johnson, "Part-Time Leader: Senator Charles L. McNary and the McNary Haugen Bill," p. 539. On the other hand, Henry A. Wallace "did not like the way in which Smith's religion, Catholicism, was used to smear him as the campaign grew hotter." Quoted from Russell Lord, *The Wallaces of Iowa*, in Sillars, "Henry A. Wallace's Editorials on Agrarian Discontent, 1921-1928," p. 140.

⁹³¹ Norris to Cordeal, January 6, 1929, pp. 4-5; Letters analyzed and quantified by the author from the George W. Norris Papers, Box 5, Folder 15—Letters on Smith (Condemning Senator N 1928 Campaign).

⁹³² C. L. Nethaway to George Norris, Box 5, Folder 15—Letters on Smith (Condemning Senator N 1928 Campaign). In this letter, Nethaway engages in a lengthy "history" of the Catholic menace in America, and praises the efforts of the Ku Klux Klan to defend the nation. Most notably (and disturbingly) the realtor's letterhead includes the line: "I never Sell or Rent FLORENCE Property to Niggers, Japs or Chinks." Ibid.

cultural divisions. The story of Smith's campaign for Corn Belt votes demonstrates that the Democrat, although hardly a Grange man, made a serious attempt to apply the technique of transitional progressivism (formulating progressive, state-sponsored remedies through consultation with panels of experts and then promoting those remedies through aggressive and direct interaction with the voting public) to the farm problem. This history also demonstrates that within the tumultuous context of 1920s farm politics, Smith's ideas were taken seriously by many progressive leaders and an unprecedented number of new Democratic voters; it gives the lie to assertions that in this region voters scoffed at questions of political economy and focused wholly on ethnocultural factors.

Smith took the farm problem seriously, and voters—many of whom crossed over to the Democratic Party for the first time—took his ideas seriously. But these significant events were partially occluded by a number of factors, including generations-old partisan loyalties, sectional antagonism, religion, and especially prohibition. Like Walter Maddock, many progressive farmers moved cautiously toward the Democratic nominee in 1928, attracted to—if not overwhelmed by—his reformist pronouncements, but inhabiting a complex political world not fully understood by Belle Moskowitz, John Raskob, or the Happy Warrior. One Smith backer, Harvard law professor Felix Frankfurter, awestruck by the “refreshing lesson in independence and intellectual integrity George Norris is giving us,” had ridiculed less adventuresome western progressive Republicans like Frank Lowden and Idaho senator William Borah: “How pitiful [they] appear by contrast.”⁹³³ Frankfurter was right to recognize the audacity

⁹³³ Felix Frankfurter to Walter Lippmann, October 25, 1928, Walter Lippmann Papers, Reel 10, Box 10, Folder 429.

summoned by Norris; but his remark betrays a lack of sensitivity to the intricacies of the region's politics—an insensitivity which plagued Smith's eastern supporters.

Ultimately, the fact that Smith did not sweep the Corn Belt does not suggest that he failed to speak effectively to agricultural issues; nor does it demonstrate a lack of receptiveness to his message among suffering farmers. As *New York Times* columnist Anne O'Hare McCormick noted perceptively:

If there were a farmer vote in this country La Follette would have carried more than his own State four years ago. . . . Discontented farmers cheered and thrilled to La Follette, yet in all the rebel States save one they cast more votes for the President, whose penny-wisdom they understood, than for the first regular leader who summoned them to political adventure. If there were a farmer vote it would go today to Governor Smith, who has adopted the slogans of the insurgents and made his most effective appeal to the defeated hopes of the watchers on the grain elevators and the silo towers.⁹³⁴

Yet “there is no such thing as a farmer vote. The farmer asserts the right of all Americans to cast a wholly personal and irrelevant ballot. The mid-Western plains were settled by men seeking escape from classification; one reason why they are still unsettled now is because the sons of pioneers still balk at action as communities.”⁹³⁵ From Lincoln, a Nebraskan observer shared similar sentiments: “This is a fight to the death between the Common people and the big interests. The common people have the votes to win this election, but it is a question whether they have the voting sense to cast their ballot for their own interest.”⁹³⁶ Many people agreed, and voted accordingly; but not everyone votes purely on economics, and there were many others whose primary motivations were different. There can be no single explanatory factor for political

⁹³⁴ Anne O'Hare McCormick, “Trailing the Elusive Farm Vote,” *The New York Times*, October 14, 1928, pp. SM1, 22, p. SM1.

⁹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. SM1.

⁹³⁶ E. E. Arterburn to George Norris, October 27, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 5, Folder 15—Commending Senator for Support of Smith in 1928 Campaign.

behavior in such a complex world; appreciating that complexity requires recognizing that it did not negate nor did it totally dampen Al Smith's economic appeal to the Corn Belt.

Water Power

Southward from Omaha, Smith traveled to Oklahoma City and delivered what is probably the most famous address of the campaign, a fierce denunciation of bigotry coupled with an unapologetic defense of his gubernatorial record.⁹³⁷ Afterward, the Democrat traveled to Denver and made another tremendously important speech that suggested very real divisions between Smith's view of the role of government in promoting public welfare and that of Hoover. For his Colorado address, Smith took up the subject of water power.

I

Felix Frankfurter wrote Belle Moskowitz that "the Governor has a trump card in water power. He knows about that issue at first hand; he has fought a fight on it, and . . . 'the interests' fear his stand on the issue. Hoover has extremely conservative views on it."⁹³⁸ Smith's position did not change in any dramatic way as he transformed from governor to presidential candidate. Referring to the nation's many rivers as "the property of all the people of the country and of the different States wherein they lie," Smith explained his belief that where these resources were owned by a single state, they ought

⁹³⁷ This speech will be considered in depth later in the chapter.

⁹³⁸ Felix Frankfurter to Belle Moskowitz, August 7, 1928, Felix Frankfurter Papers, Reel 105.

to remain the property of that state; where controlled by a group of states, those states should enter into a compact for developing the resources; and where nationally owned, the federal government should retain and develop the site.⁹³⁹ This may seem like a lot of qualification, but these nuances were the product of years of working through the intricacies of hydroelectric policy. A potential power site along the barge canal in New York State should not be understood in the same way as the Boulder Dam project on the Colorado River, which affected seven states, or the project at Muscle Shoals, Alabama, which was federal property. Yet despite these provisos, there was a unifying theme which differentiated Smith's position from that of the Republicans: the people's "absolute retention of the ownership of the power itself, by owning and controlling the site and the plant at the place of the generation."⁹⁴⁰ Smith continued to believe that "Only in this way can the Government agency, State or Federal, as the case may be, find itself in a position to provide fair and reasonable rates to the ultimate consumer, and insist upon a fair and equal distribution of the power through contractual agreements with the distributing companies."⁹⁴¹

This posture was far different from the status quo. The Republican Party claimed also to stand for public retention of power sites, but called for them to be leased to private developers for intervals of fifty years.⁹⁴² To Smith this was unacceptable, for "unless you provide for State or Federal development, there can be no control of the ultimate rates to

⁹³⁹ "Stenographic Report of Gov. Smith's Denver Speech on Water-Power Control," *The New York Times*, September 23, 1928, p. 2; Alfred E. Smith, "Denver," *Campaign Addresses of Governor Alfred E. Smith, Democratic Candidate for President 1928*, pp. 61-76.

⁹⁴⁰ Smith, "Denver," pp. 63-64.

⁹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

⁹⁴² The Republican Platform spoke only of the party's role in passing the Federal Water Power Act of 1920, when the GOP held congressional majorities but not the White House, and the benefits accrued from that law. Republican Platform republished in *The Democratic Campaign Book, 1928*, pp. 346-364, p. 360.

the consumer and no control of the power site itself.”⁹⁴³ Smith also sought to paint the Republican position as corrupted by the influence of big business. Hoover had not elaborated on the GOP platform—dodging the issue of public ownership during a speech at Los Angeles—and the party had maintained a firm commitment to inaction over the course of two presidential terms.⁹⁴⁴ “I will leave it to your imagination,” the Democrat told his audience, but given the administration’s inaction and its fervent opposition to government development (manifested in Coolidge’s pocket veto of a bill providing for federal operation at Muscle Shoals), they “must have been in sympathy” with the National Electric Light Association’s push for private development and against public ownership.⁹⁴⁵ Indeed it did not take much imagination at all to make such connections, suggested Smith, when the president had just appointed Roy O. West, a figure with decades-long ties to the utilities industry, to be secretary of the interior.⁹⁴⁶ According to Smith’s notes, all of this indicated to the candidate “a spirit of unfriendliness, if not hostility, on the part of the Republican Party in the nation to those who stand for public ownership and control of the God-given resources of the nation [and] a leaning toward those seeking to exploit these resources for their own private gain and profit rather than in the interests of the people themselves.”⁹⁴⁷

The question was a complex one, and Smith pledged to treat it as such. In the regionally relevant case of the Boulder Dam, Smith again suggested deferring to expert

⁹⁴³ Smith, “Denver,” p. 65; “Stenographic Report of Gov. Smith’s Denver Speech on Water-Power Control,” p. 2.

⁹⁴⁴ Smith, “Denver,” pp. 66-67; “Stenographic Report of Gov. Smith’s Denver Speech on Water-Power Control,” p. 2.

⁹⁴⁵ “Stenographic Report of Gov. Smith’s Denver Speech on Water-Power Control,” p. 2; “National Affairs: The Coolidge Era,” *Time*, February 25, 1929.

⁹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁹⁴⁷ Smith, “Denver,” p. 67. This quotation is qualified because it appears in the published version of Smith’s speech, which was based on the candidate’s notes, but not in the stenographic report of the speech as published by the *New York Times*.

opinions on whether the operation should be controlled by a multi-state compact or the federal government. “But however this dam shall be constructed,” he concluded, “one thing is sure: the site of the dam and the machinery generating this water power must be preserved in public ownership.”⁹⁴⁸ Meanwhile, the hydroelectric potential at Muscle Shoals, which was already under federal control, ought to be developed by the national government.⁹⁴⁹

The Democratic candidate saw this question as one of fundamental importance and one on which voters were presented with a definite choice. He outlined both his record in New York and the record of his opponent, presenting the issue as a manifestation of the progressive archetype “the people” versus “the interests.” Producing further allure for the progressive Republicans of the West, Smith pronounced that he himself was “follow[ing] another Republican idea,” quoting Theodore Roosevelt as warning that water power was “still in its infancy and unless it is controlled the history of the oil industry will be repeated in the hydraulic electric industry with results far more oppressive and disastrous for the people.”⁹⁵⁰

The candidate spoke persistently on the question of water power throughout the campaign. At Nashville, in the face of “considerable sentiment for private operation” at Muscle Shoals, Smith affirmed his commitment to government ownership, and criticized Hoover’s “evasion” of the issue.⁹⁵¹ The question received prominent consideration

⁹⁴⁸ “Stenographic Report of Gov. Smith’s Denver Speech on Water-Power Control,” p. 2; Smith, “Denver,” p. 74.

⁹⁴⁹ “Stenographic Report of Gov. Smith’s Denver Speech on Water-Power Control,” p. 2; Smith, “Denver,” p. 75.

⁹⁵⁰ “Stenographic Report of Gov. Smith’s Denver Speech on Water-Power Control,” p. 2.

⁹⁵¹ “Smith Challenges Hoover to Clarify his ‘Evasion’ Stand on Muscle Shoals,” *The Washington Post*, October 13, 1928, pp. 1, 4; “Smith Challenges Hoover to State Views Clearly; Gets Tennessee Ovations,” *The New York Times*, October 13, 1928, pp. 1, 6; “Smith Rips Into Hoover Attitude on Water Power,” *The*

during speeches at Chicago, Boston, Baltimore, and Brooklyn.⁹⁵² Campaign literature highlighted Smith's "consistent" advocacy as governor of "the absolute ownership and control by the State of water power resources."⁹⁵³ At Reno, Nevada, Joe Robinson contrasted Coolidge's foot-dragging and Hoover's "vacillation" with Smith's promise to undertake work "promptly."⁹⁵⁴ Days later from Portland, Oregon, the Arkansan declared that "Republican victory will mean the triumph of a monopoly," while "the success of the Democratic ticket means protection of the people against extortionist rates It means conservation of the most valuable reserves remaining in the public ownership."⁹⁵⁵ By November, *Time* declared: "Nominee Smith's stand for government control of water power is as well known as his first name."⁹⁵⁶

II

Some of the literature has suggested that Smith's stand on power was an ambivalent one, not sufficiently aggressive to render him a "progressive" on this national issue. David Burner is a leading exponent of this argument. For example, Burner cites Socialist presidential candidate Norman Thomas' statement that Smith's differences from

Saratoga Springs Saratogian, October 13, 1928, p. 1, Saratoga Springs Public Library, Saratoga Springs, NY; Smith, "Nashville," p. 145.

⁹⁵² Alfred E. Smith, "Nashville," *Campaign Addresses of Governor Alfred E. Smith, Democratic Candidate for President 1928*, pp. 141-152, pp. 145-147; Alfred E. Smith, "Chicago," *Campaign Addresses of Governor Alfred E. Smith, Democratic Candidate for President 1928*, pp. 187-202, pp. 197-199; Alfred E. Smith, "Boston," *Campaign Addresses of Governor Alfred E. Smith, Democratic Candidate for President 1928*, pp. 203-218, pp. 203-207; Alfred E. Smith, "Baltimore," *Campaign Addresses of Governor Alfred E. Smith, Democratic Candidate for President 1928*, pp. 237-250, pp. 240-242; Alfred E. Smith, "Brooklyn," *Campaign Addresses of Governor Alfred E. Smith, Democratic Candidate for President 1928*, pp. 269-286, pp. 271-273.

⁹⁵³ *What Everybody Wants to Know about Alfred E. Smith*, p. 19.

⁹⁵⁴ "Robinson Again Attacks on Dam," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1928, p. 10.

⁹⁵⁵ "Robinson Fears Power's Future," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 16, 1928, p. 10.

⁹⁵⁶ "Octopus!," *Time*, November 5, 1928.

Hoover on power were “comparatively insignificant.”⁹⁵⁷ This argument has a number of flaws, including Smith’s gubernatorial record, the clear demarcation between the two parties’ proposals as enunciated by their nominees, and the national attention Smith’s stand garnered from those interested in the question, including Senator Norris, the driving force behind the Muscle Shoals plan in Congress, and Morris Cooke, director of Pennsylvania governor Gifford Pinchot’s “giant power” survey.⁹⁵⁸ Strong opponents of government control, such as *Barron’s* magazine, which had warned of “creeping state ownership” in January of 1928, also found Smith’s statements “interesting,” cautioning of the perils associated with transplanting the governor’s “obstructionist” water power policies from Albany to Washington.⁹⁵⁹ On both sides of the question, the *New Yorker’s* ideas were in fact taken quite seriously.⁹⁶⁰

Indeed it was based largely on the Democrat’s water power stand, along with the question of farm relief, that Senator Norris chose to campaign actively for Smith, whom

⁹⁵⁷ Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism*, p. 195. There are several problems with this assessment. First, it is not logical; of course Norman Thomas, who was running to the left of Al Smith, would criticize his more centrist opponent as meek on all issues—he was, after all, trying to gain left-leaning partisan votes that might otherwise have gone to the Democrat. Furthermore, no one, outside of his Republican opponents and their allies in the press, ever claimed that Al Smith was a socialist—his progressive policies were not intended to satiate the appetites of those of Thomas’ ilk. As such, Burner has set an unreasonable standard for Smith on this issue. Also, the argument that Smith was not strong on public power is ahistorical based on his record, as demonstrated in chapter two. It is interesting to note Thomas’ own response to the Norris endorsement: “I have read with interest your statement in support of Governor Smith. My own deep respect for you and the properties of my own position prevent me from challenging your judgment. I have always known not only that you were not a Socialist but that you were philosophically a disbeliever in party government. I on the contrary believe in party responsibility.” This cryptic paragraph was followed by a series of questions Thomas wanted Norris to pose to Smith on the details of his water power policy. Norman Thomas to George Norris, October 26, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 5, Folder 15—Commending Senator for Support of Smith in 1928 Campaign.

⁹⁵⁸ Morris Cooke to Alfred E. Smith, January 8, 1924, Morris L. Cooke Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY, Box 193, Folder 154-159, No. 157; Cooke to Smith, January 23, 1925, Cooke Papers, Box 46, Folder 433; Cooke to Smith, March 15, 1927, Cooke Papers, Box 46, Folder 433.

⁹⁵⁹ “Creeping State Ownership,” *Barron’s*, Vol. VIII, No. 1 (January 2, 1928), p. 1; “Governor Smith’s Acceptance Speech,” *Barron’s*, Vol. VIII, No. 35 (August 27, 1928), p. 4; “Political Obstruction,” *Barron’s*, Vol. VIII, No. 42 (October 15, 1928), p. 12.

⁹⁶⁰ In response to the Denver speech, the Smith-boosting *Boston Globe* proclaimed “SMITH FOR CONTROL OF POWER BY STATE.” “Smith for Control of Power By State,” *The Boston Globe*, September 23, 1928, pp. 1, 21.

he described as the “people’s champion” against the “power trust . . . an octopus with slimy fingers that levies tribute at every fireside.”⁹⁶¹ Smith operatives like Robert Moses had been entreating the Nebraska progressive for a cross-party endorsement based on the governor’s support for public ownership from early in the campaign.⁹⁶² While appeals from New Yorkers like Moses may have been easily ignored, pleas came also from fellow Corn Belt politicians like Henry Hansbrough, an erstwhile leader on public management of water resources who wrote Norris of his “hope that you approve of Governor Smith’s emphatic condemnation of the Public Utilities Lobby.”⁹⁶³ Nevertheless, Norris had demonstrated a reluctance to support Smith in the opening months of the campaign, because while the Democrat “went further and did better than Hoover in his speech of acceptance . . . still it was far from satisfactory.”⁹⁶⁴ In early September, Norris wrote Paul Anderson of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* that he feared Smith’s calls for “government control” might be manipulated by “the power trust

⁹⁶¹ “Norris Bases Bolt on Power Question,” *The New York Times*, October 28, 1928, pp. 1, 28, p. 1.

⁹⁶² Robert Moses to George Norris, August 20, 1928, Robert Moses Papers, Box 4, Folder: “Campaign—National/State 1928, Sept-Dec”. See also: Royal Copeland to George W. Norris, October 15, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 4, Folder 15—1928 Presidential Campaign (Smith). Senator Copeland asked Norris to endorse himself and his fellow New York Democrat on progressive grounds.

⁹⁶³ H. C. Hansbrough to George W. Norris, August 24, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 4, Folder 15—1928 Presidential Campaign (Smith). On Hansbrough and public development of water resources, see Senator H. C. Hansbrough, “A National Irrigation Policy,” in H. M. Suter, ed., *Forestry and Irrigation*, pp. 102-104. In this article, adopted from a speech delivered on the Senate floor, Hansbrough demanded government-backed irrigation, suggesting that “To say that the national government cannot, within the Constitution, do its part in the development of the latent wealth that exists in a region that is nearly one-third of the total area of the United States is to discredit the genius of the American people.” *Ibid.*, p. 102. Similarly, the “Non Partisan Smith League,” which was “organized by bolting Republicans and independents scholars and businessmen and women” began asking Norris to give speeches for their organization on the question of water power—before he had actually endorsed Smith. Dr. Forrest R. Black and William R. Sutherland to George W. Norris, (telegram) October 12, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 4, Folder 15—1928 Presidential Campaign (Smith).

⁹⁶⁴ George W. Norris to Paul Y. Anderson, September 8, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 4, Folder 15—1928 Presidential Campaign (Smith); George W. Norris to Robert Moses, September 8, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 4, Folder 15—1928 Presidential Campaign (Hoover). Burner notes Norris’ reluctance as well, but attributes it to Smith’s record. As has been demonstrated in chapter two and will be further shown here, Smith’s *record* was not a problem for progressives. Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism*, p. 195 (n).

representatives” to allow for privatization of Muscle Shoals.⁹⁶⁵ Instead, Smith “ought to have said . . . that he favored its ownership and ‘operation’ by the Government.”⁹⁶⁶ While recognizing that “many Progressives seemed to think that [Smith’s] declaration was satisfactory and complete,” Norris expressed doubts to Lewis S. Gannett of *The Nation*, reiterating the need for a commitment to “the word ‘operation’” and concluding that Smith “may be alright, but . . . I hesitate to take the word of any man.”⁹⁶⁷ Perhaps this was all semantics, but Norris felt a deep obligation not “to mislead those who are placing their faith in me and my judgment” by prematurely endorsing the Democrat.⁹⁶⁸ Eventually Smith would state unequivocally that the government should “own and build and operate the power house”; and in fact when he made this statement on October 31 at Newark, he was paraphrasing (he claimed to be quoting) what he had said a month earlier at Denver, which affirms the interpretation that the September 23 speech included an implicit call for government operation.⁹⁶⁹

Meanwhile, what Norris saw as his responsibility to his followers was compounded by the pressure he was feeling from rank and file supporters of both sides. Responding to rumors that his senator favored the Democrat, a footwear salesman from

⁹⁶⁵ George W. Norris to Paul Y. Anderson, September 8, 1928.

⁹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶⁷ George W. Norris to Lewis S. Gannett, September 8, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 4, Folder 15—1928 Presidential Campaign (Hoover), p. 2..

⁹⁶⁸ Norris to Anderson, September 8, 1928. In fact, many people were placing their trust in Norris’ judgment, for by this time he had developed a national following. An Albany man wrote the Senator in late August to inquire “is it correct, from your viewpoint, to say that Governor Smith, on his record, is nearer to the liberalistic policies of the Progressives than is Mr. Hoover?” Other admirers also wrote to ask Norris’ opinion during the summer. James L. Connors to George W. Norris, August 31, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 4, Folder 15—1928 Presidential Campaign (Smith); Thomas P. Lynch to George W. Norris, July 17, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 4, Folder 15—1928 Presidential Campaign (Smith).

⁹⁶⁹ “Full Stenographic Report of Governor Smith’s Address on Labor in Newark,” *The New York Times*, November 1, 1928, p. 4. No such call appears explicitly in the Denver speech, although Smith called for government ownership and control repeatedly, and remarked that the government must “keep its hands on the switch that turns on or off the power.” Based on the Newark remarks, this was obviously intended as an endorsement of state operation.

Fremont, Nebraska, warned that this “certainly would be a great disappointment to a great number of your life long supporters.”⁹⁷⁰ Norris received a great deal of mail expressing such sentiments after he did officially back Al Smith, but most of the lobbying prior to his announcement came from progressive admirers who supported the New Yorker. A hardware salesman from Stuart, Nebraska, wrote Norris that “as a statesman you have been my ideal,” and that he felt “sure in my heart that you are still . . . one hundred per cent my ideal statesman and support Alfred E. Smith.”⁹⁷¹

Most of the campaigning came from outside Nebraska—from Norris’ considerable national following. In June a realtor from Newark, responding to an article from that morning’s *New York Times* which described Norris’ frustration with the Coolidge administration over Muscle Shoals, demanded that the only reasonable action now was for the Nebraskan to “walk out of the convention and the party,” goading the senator that “You men from the West, You, and Gov. McMullan [*sic*] and others talk a lot, but none of you seem to have the nerve to walk out Is there no man in the West who has the nerve of the Late Pres. Roosevelt?”⁹⁷² An attorney from Providence wrote in early September that “Governor Smith’s declaration [on water power], which I have inclosed, stands foursquare with your own stand on this and other important issues and I suggest that you be as consistent in honesty now as you have been in the past, by

⁹⁷⁰ R. P. Turner to George W. Norris, September 28, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 4, Folder 15—1928 Presidential Campaign (Smith).

⁹⁷¹ Harry Kopp to George W. Norris, October 15, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 4, Folder 15—1928 Presidential Campaign (Smith).

⁹⁷² E. Scott Miles to George W. Norris, June 9, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 4, Folder 15—Hoover (1928) Campaign. Underlining and double-underlining in original. Miles also professed his own preference for Al Smith, and enclosed a clipping of the *Times* article, dated June 9, entitled “Norris Attacks Coolidge Stand on the Shoals Bill.” Norris actually responded to this letter, denouncing partisanship but suggesting “it is a fact nevertheless.” He then wrote cryptically: “Speaking in a general way, the country owes more to an independent voter who is not bound by the partisan yoke than to any other class of citizens.” He did not mention any presidential contenders in the letter. George W. Norris to E. Scott Miles, June 12, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 4, Folder 15—Hoover (1928) Campaign.

advocating the election of the greatest humanitarian and statesman America has had since Lincoln.”⁹⁷³ One of Smith’s fellow East-siders assured the Nebraskan that “the New York ‘Wonder Man,’” had “lambasted the reactionaries here . . . so that their lives are hardly worth living.”⁹⁷⁴

It was not only Northeasterners who held such a view of the New Yorker. An attorney from Denver wrote to express his antipathy for the “power and light trust,” suggesting to Norris that “The hope and safety of this Country today is in the hands of men like yourself and Gov. Smith of New York.”⁹⁷⁵ A Georgist from Wichita suggested “that Governor Smith’s speech at Denver is the high mark of all public utterances thus far by our Presidential candidates,” and that as a La Follette man he would be “ardently supporting” the Democrat.⁹⁷⁶ A Washingtonian was also impressed by Smith’s Denver address, sending Norris front-page coverage from the *Seattle Daily Times* and proclaiming: “Here comes the line of attack which Gov. Smith has opened on Hoover that wins his battle.”⁹⁷⁷

All of this shows just how seriously average citizens of the progressive persuasion took Smith’s water power stand—and just how much lobbying was being directed toward Senator Norris. These efforts were rewarded in late October.⁹⁷⁸ During an Omaha

⁹⁷³ Donald O. Burke to George W. Norris, September 4, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 4, Folder 15—1928 Presidential Campaign (Smith).

⁹⁷⁴ Thomas F. McGrath to George W. Norris, September 30, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 4, Folder 15—1928 Presidential Campaign (Smith).

⁹⁷⁵ Henry V. Johnson to George W. Norris, October 5, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 4, Folder 15—1928 Presidential Campaign (Smith). It should be noted that unlike most of the other correspondents, Johnson was a self-identified Democrat.

⁹⁷⁶ Henry Ware Allen to George W. Norris, September 24, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 4, Folder 15—1928 Presidential Campaign (Smith).

⁹⁷⁷ Henry W. Elliott to George W. Norris, September 24, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 4, Folder 15—1928 Presidential Campaign (Smith).

⁹⁷⁸ The Norris endorsement influenced at least one vote: an army Signal Captain stationed at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, would eventually decide to “vote for Smith because you say so, all because I

speech that was broadcast throughout the western farm states, the maverick Nebraskan eloquently lauded the Democratic nominee on the power issue, declaring that “Governor Smith’s attitude on this question places him side by side with that great father of national conservation, Theodore Roosevelt,” and proclaiming to “those who have sympathized with and given support to the little group of Progressives in Congress in their terrible struggle to preserve for all the people the great water power resources of the nation, that it seems to me we are led . . . logically and inevitably to the support of Governor Smith.”⁹⁷⁹ Norris’ support of Smith is astounding considering the daring it required to campaign for the wet, urban, Catholic candidate in his largely dry, rural, Protestant state. Outraged Nebraskans said as much: An attorney from Nelson wrote that “Personally, I pray to be forgiven for having supported you, for I now realize that you are not a Republican, but a moonshine Democrat, spiked with Socialism and boot-legged into the United States Senate under a Republican label”; while a telegram “deplor[ing] your recent course of action” was attributed to “we the undersigned former friends.”⁹⁸⁰ For the rest of his career, Norris would be harassed by offended constituents, and during his 1930 reelection campaign, the Republican National Committee flooded Nebraska with charges

believe you sincere.” Calvin H. Burkhead to George W. Norris, October 27, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 4, Folder 15—1928 Presidential Campaign (Smith).

⁹⁷⁹ “Norris Bases Bolt on Power Question,” *The New York Times*, p. 28.

⁹⁸⁰ H. A. Brubaker to George W. Norris, October 27, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 5, Folder 15—Letters on Smith (condemning Senator N 1928 Campaign). The denunciations from out of state were even worse. From New Jersey came the opinion that “for the most part, your statements are nauseating. You are a man with an alum soul and a chloroformed point of mind, which is just another way of describing a deadhead.” Another Garden State correspondent exclaimed that “it is a wonder you were not struck dead. A Methodist and a Mason to speak as you did.” An Arizonan expressed “pleasure and satisfaction” at Norris’ action, since “For some few years past it has been difficult for me to reconcile my membership in the Republican party in view of the fact that you, publicly at least, likewise claimed membership in that party.” A publisher from Warren, Minnesota called Norris a liar and wrote that “If the [Minneapolis] Journal’s reporter has been accurate in his report of your speech, as set forth in this clipping, then all I have to say is that you are a bigger ass than I have heretofore believed.” G. E. Stringfellow to George W. Norris, October 29, 1928; (illeg.) Spring Lake, NJ to George W. Norris, October 28, 1928; Cleon T. Knapp to George W. Norris, October 27, 1928; C. L. Stevens to George W. Norris, November 3, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 5, Folder 15—Letters on Smith (condemning Senator N 1928 Campaign).

that the incumbent was a drunkard and that his wife was a Catholic.⁹⁸¹ David Burner and others rightly note Norris' initial reluctance to support Smith; but the larger story demonstrates the diligence of the senator's evaluation, the conviction behind his ultimate decision, and the serious consequences of his activities.⁹⁸² As Norris himself wrote weeks after the election: "One thing seems clear to me, and that is that if I was right in supporting the so-called Progressive Senators regardless of politics, then, for the same reason, I was right in taking the attitude I did in favor of Governor Smith as against Mr. Hoover."⁹⁸³

Smith's position was sufficiently progressive—and unique from that of Herbert Hoover—to inspire such eventual boldness from George Norris. So too was Smith bold when challenged on his stand. After facing scathing criticism from Charles Evans Hughes, Smith held firm and indeed sharpened his stance, stating: "I believe the agency, whether it be State or [Federal] Government, should not only own the site, but should own and build and operate the powerhouse. It is the only way that you can guarantee equitable distribution of the power and fair and reasonable prices to the ultimate consumer The whole thing is contained in the sentence: the Government must keep its hands on the switch that turns on or off the power."⁹⁸⁴

⁹⁸¹ Norman L. Zucker, *George W. Norris: Gentle Knight of American Democracy* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 1966), p. 14; John F. Kennedy, *Profiles in Courage* (New York: Harper, 1956), pp. 214-219.

⁹⁸² Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism*, p. 195 (n).

⁹⁸³ George W. Norris to Carl F. Marsh, November 27, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 4, Folder 15—1928 Presidential Campaign (Smith).

⁹⁸⁴ "Full Stenographic Report of Governor Smith's Address on Labor in Newark," *The New York Times*, November 1, 1928, p. 4.

III

Much of this occurred in the wake of the most scalding denunciation of Smith's water power policy—delivered by Herbert Hoover himself at Madison Square Garden on October 22, where the Republican decried Smith's proposals as “State socialism.”⁹⁸⁵ The assault was aimed mainly at Smith's positions on water power, farm relief, and prohibition—all of which Hoover claimed “confronted” citizens “with a huge program of government in business.”⁹⁸⁶ Hoover asserted that wartime necessities had begotten an “organized despotism” under Wilson for the purposes of preserving the nation: “To a large degree we regimented our whole people into a socialistic state.”⁹⁸⁷ This may have been “justified in time of war,” but “if continued in peace time it would destroy not only our American system but with it our progress and freedom as well.”⁹⁸⁸ It was therefore the recognition of this danger and the prompt return to normalcy under Harding and Coolidge—piloted in large part by Hoover—which had spurred economic growth and averted the dangers of bolshevism in the post-war period. But now the destruction of the “American system” loomed again, in the ominous form of the Smith program:

There has been revived in this campaign, however, a series of proposals which, if adopted, would be a long step toward the abandonment of our American system and a surrender to the destructive operation of governmental conduct of commercial business. Because the country is faced with difficulty and doubt over certain national problems—that is, prohibition, farm relief, and electrical power—our opponents propose that we must thrust government a long way into the businesses which give rise to these problems. In effect, they abandon the tenets of

⁹⁸⁵ “Text of Hoover's Speech on Relation of Government to Industry,” *The New York Times*, October 23, 1928, p. 2.

⁹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

their own party and turn to State socialism as a solution for the difficulties presented by all three.⁹⁸⁹

“Emphasiz[ing] the seriousness of these [Democratic] proposals,” Hoover “submitted to the American people a question of fundamental principle. That is: shall we depart from the principles of our American political and economic system, upon which we have advanced beyond all the rest of the world, in order to adopt methods based on principles destructive of its very foundations?”⁹⁹⁰

Most Republicans enthusiastically accepted and repeatedly invoked Hoover’s line of attack. When Smith attempted to respond, the *Los Angeles Times* announced: “Smith Defends His Socialism.”⁹⁹¹ Charles Evans Hughes, a progressive and former Smith ally, affirmed his belief that the Democratic nominee’s program was one of “State Socialism” at Buffalo.⁹⁹² Of course not all Republicans were as impressed: in Tacoma, Washington, Senator Norris responded directly to Hoover’s speech, stating that “he is repudiating . . . myself and all the other Progressives who have supported him in the past.”⁹⁹³ In fact, it was Hoover’s speech that provided the decisive nudge to Norris’ endorsement: “How any progressive in America can support him now, after his Madison Square Garden address, in which he slapped every progressive-minded man and woman in America in the face, my God, I cannot conceive it.”⁹⁹⁴

Not everyone took Hoover’s remarks this seriously. Socialist Jacob Panken, a former New York Municipal Court justice who had challenged Smith for governor in 1926, “ridiculed” the speech, deeming the assertion that Smith’s policies were socialistic

⁹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 2.

⁹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

⁹⁹¹ “Smith Rails at Hoover,” *The Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 1928, pp. 1-2, p. 2.

⁹⁹² “Alibi of Al Attacked,” *The Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1928, p. 1.

⁹⁹³ “Declares Norris Will Shift to Smith,” *The New York Times*, October 24, 1928, pp. 1, 14, p. 1.

⁹⁹⁴ “Norris Supports Smith; Strikes at Hoover on Power,” *The New York World*, October 25, 1928, p. 1; “Declares Norris Will Shift to Smith,” p. 1; “Norris Bases Bolt on Power Question,” p. 28.

“absurd.”⁹⁹⁵ “Hoover’s attempt to pin the charge of socialism on Governor Smith is an illegitimate child which I wouldn’t want placed on my doorstep,” he scoffed.⁹⁹⁶ “The Democratic nominee wants the Government to develop Muscle Shoals and then to turn it over to private agencies for exploitation. That’s not socialism. . . . We favor the development, ownership, and operation of our water power resources.”⁹⁹⁷ Here Panken was either disingenuous or obtuse, for Smith had quite literally called for “absolute retention of the ownership of the power itself, by owning and controlling the site and the plant at the place of the generation” during his speech at Denver.⁹⁹⁸ There were serious differences between Smith’s plan and that of the Socialists: the Democrat would not necessarily have the government delivering the power to consumers, instead favoring a system featuring government generation for sale to private distributors; moreover, Smith’s calls for public ownership did not extend to areas like railroads and mines in the manner of the Socialist platform.⁹⁹⁹ Yet in spite of Norman Thomas, Jacob Panken, and others’ assertions to the contrary, Smith’s position on hydroelectricity was far different from that of Hoover, who opposed such government involvement as a matter of principle; and indeed when placed side by side with the Republicans and Socialists it is with the latter that differences in the Democrat’s position on water power appear, using Thomas’ phrase, “comparatively insignificant.”

Some Socialists had recognized this from early on: in January, Thomas Duncan of Milwaukee, state assembly leader of Wisconsin’s Socialist Party, lauded Smith,

⁹⁹⁵ “Panken Says Smith is Not Socialistic,” *The New York Times*, October 24, 1928, p. 9; Malcolm, ed., *The New York Red Book, 1928*, p. 380.

⁹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁹⁹⁸ Smith, “Denver,” pp. 63-64.

⁹⁹⁹ “Panken Says Smith is Not Socialistic,” p. 9.

predicting that “he will get about half the Socialist vote because of his stand on the public utility question.”¹⁰⁰⁰ A socialist from Kansas wrote to George Norris that “the way to socialism seems to lie in working through the old parties; and Governor Smith’s policies . . . are steps toward socialism & a possible ultimate solution to our economic woes.”¹⁰⁰¹ Hoping to evaluate the virtues of the two left-leaning candidates, the Community Church on Park Avenue in New York City hosted a debate entitled “Smith or Thomas: Which Should Progressives Vote For?”¹⁰⁰² Moreover, on the same day that Hoover addressed Madison Square Garden, Norman Thomas himself implicitly acknowledged a genuine qualitative difference in the philosophies of Hoover and Smith. “Everything Hoover has said and done makes it clear that he will be on the side of special privilege. Contemplating this spectacle, some of our progressives are ready to throw their votes to the Democratic party.”¹⁰⁰³ This was a fruitless venture not because of alleged conservatism on Smith’s part, but rather because “Almost certainly they can’t elect Smith. . . . [or] rehabilitate the Democratic party.”¹⁰⁰⁴

Hoover’s remarks had served to exacerbate the confusion already clouding partisan alignments in the closing weeks of the 1928 election; the speech drew praise from conservatives and instigated panic among moderate Democrats, while antagonizing progressive Republicans—a number of whom defected to the Smith banner. In many

¹⁰⁰⁰ “Wisconsin Assembly Praises Gov. Smith,” *The Washington Post*, January 28, 1928, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰¹ B. Stanley to George Norris, October 29, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 5, Folder 15—Commending Senator for Support of Smith in 1928 Campaign.

¹⁰⁰² “Radio Chain To Carry Smith Speech Tonight,” *The New York Times*, October 31, 1928, p. 26.

¹⁰⁰³ “Thomas Asks Liberals Not to Vote For Smith,” *The Washington Evening Star*, October 22, 1928, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4. It was speculated in the press that the Socialists had particular interest in Smith’s defeat: “Hoover is [the Socialists’] favorite on the ground that what they see as Smith’s play for the liberal vote is a trespass on Socialist domain and should be combated.” This posture in turn drew the ire of the Workers’ Party, who “seized upon it as evidence in its campaign literature that the Socialists are, after all, as ‘capitalistic’ as the major parties.” “Socialists May Swing to Hoover,” *The Hartford Courant*, September 24, 1928, p. 5.

ways, the speech served to clarify real differences between the two candidates: Joe Robinson suggested that it provided any voter who “possesses sufficient intelligence” great insight into “the reactionary spirit which animates the Republican candidate for President.”¹⁰⁰⁵ Nevertheless, Smith was not running as a socialist, and he certainly was not running in a political environment friendly to socialistic proposals. For the Democrats, the Madison Square Garden speech could not be the last word. Hoover’s criticism of Smith’s “state socialism” compelled and drew a response—one which, when coupled with the Republican’s remarks, clearly delineates the significant philosophical differences between the two contenders.

Economic Justice

I

The rejoinder to Hoover came forty-eight hours later at Boston. In the speech, Smith famously denounced the “socialism” charge as “the cry of special interests,” and as “subterfuge and camouflage” for “groups who either want to stop you or who want to get something for themselves.”¹⁰⁰⁶ It was an attack, claimed Smith, with which he had been grappling for his entire career—“the only argument in twenty-five years that they have been able to advance against the constructive policy of the Democratic Party” in New York.¹⁰⁰⁷ As Oscar Handlin notes, the candidate “refused to hedge when Hoover charged that Smith was taking a road to Socialism. In his reply in Boston, Al reaffirmed his

¹⁰⁰⁵ “Robinson Gives Smith’s Record,” *The Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1928, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰⁶ “Stenographic Report of Smith’s Boston Speech Answering Hoover on ‘State Socialism,’” *The New York Times*, October 25, 1928, p. 2; Smith, “Boston,” p. 216.

¹⁰⁰⁷ “Stenographic Report of Smith’s Boston Speech Answering Hoover on ‘State Socialism,’” p. 2.

conviction of the importance of his program and pointed out that the accusation of Communism was always an easy weapon in the hands of the enemies of progressive legislation.”¹⁰⁰⁸

Others, like Democratic Party chair John Raskob, denied Smith’s interest in placing the “government in business,” demanding that “if there ever was a candidate who was opposed to that principle it was Governor Smith.”¹⁰⁰⁹ Raskob’s role in the party amounted to that of CEO rather than architect; he was an excellent fundraiser whose importance to the 1928 campaign has been greatly exaggerated in the literature—a false prominence roundly debunked by Smith biographer Robert Slayton.¹⁰¹⁰ In fact, the General Motors vice president had been brought into the Democratic campaign specifically to mollify the business community, and indeed his early assurances of Smith’s soundness on economic matters had “caused such a flurry of buying that on Wall Street it was called a ‘Smith Market.’”¹⁰¹¹ While it is true that Smith had been “taken with Raskob, the kind of self-made successful man he admired,” the chairman’s comments, which also included a brief diatribe on “states’ rights,” provide little insight into the beliefs of the nominee.¹⁰¹² It was not Raskob, but Belle Moskowitz who directed Smith’s “personal campaign.”¹⁰¹³ Indeed, Raskob was a relative newcomer to the Smith

¹⁰⁰⁸ Handlin, *Al Smith*, p. 130.

¹⁰⁰⁹ “Comment is Varied on Hoover Speech,” *The New York Times*, October 24, 1928, p. 12.

¹⁰¹⁰ Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 266. Slayton’s conclusions are affirmed by—and in fact partially based upon—those of Elisabeth Israels Perry, who places Belle Moskowitz, not Raskob, at the center of Smith’s circle. Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, pp. 184-213. In fact, my own research in the Raskob papers, housed at the Hagley Museum and Research Library just outside of Wilmington, Delaware, confirmed the point for me as well: there is a surprisingly sparse number of documents pertaining to the campaign, and a cursory look at the nature of the other materials in the massive collection suggested that there were as many documents regarding yachts as there were regarding 1928.

¹⁰¹¹ Edmund A. Moore, *A Catholic Runs for President: The Campaign of 1928* (New York: Ronald Press, 1956), pp. 121-122.

¹⁰¹² Handlin, *Al Smith and his America*, p. 128.

¹⁰¹³ Handlin, *Al Smith and his America*, p. 129; Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, pp. 184-213; Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 266.

circle, and had not witnessed his candidate fending off charges of socialism for a decade as governor; but then neither had most of the nation. For their benefit, Smith engaged the charge at Boston, not only as it pertained to hydroelectricity, but to his entire platform and indeed his entire career. The Democrat used Hoover's socialism offensive to broaden the debate, engaging his opponent in a wider ideological conflict over the role of government in economic life.

"Take the workmen's compensation act," he implored his Boston audience, which cramped an overcrowded arena and spilled out "for blocks around":

What was the argument against that? Because it set up an insurance company under State ownership and State operation, it was referred to as socialism. Take all the factory code. Take the night work law for women, the law prohibiting manufacturing in tenements, the [law] prohibiting the working of children in the tanneries of the State, the bill prohibiting the working of women in the core rooms of foundries. That great factory code in New York, designed to protect the health, the welfare and the well-being of men, women and children at some time or the other in the last twenty-five years has been referred to as paternalistic and socialistic.¹⁰¹⁴

Smith denied Hoover's charge that these programs constituted a socialist agenda. But he seconded the Republican's assertion that the campaign involved "a question of fundamental principle." While differing on the nomenclature, both candidates understood the conflict as one between the continuation of the Harding-Coolidge political economy and the development on a national scale of the progressive polity Smith had administered in New York and had described throughout the campaign.

Responding to Hoover's consistent praise of the economic status quo, Smith pointed out the struggles of certain sectors—most notably textiles—during his Boston

¹⁰¹⁴ "Stenographic Report of Smith's Boston Speech Answering Hoover on 'State Socialism,'" p. 2; Charles Michelson, "Smith Smites Hoover For Cry of 'Socialism'; Boston Wild Over Him," *The New York World*, October 25, 1928, p. 1.

address.¹⁰¹⁵ The Democrat criticized the Coolidge administration, which persisted in presenting a sanguine interpretation of employment and payroll statistics in spite of the profound suffering of industrial laborers.¹⁰¹⁶ He also scoffed at Herbert Hoover's rationalization that northeastern textile workers, who were making forty cents an hour, "were much better off than the textile workers in any other part of the world."¹⁰¹⁷

It was easy for Smith to criticize Republican economic policies in New England, where the slumping textile industry was causing great hardship for many working-class families. But he continued on this theme a week later in Newark, New Jersey, renewing the call made during his August acceptance address for a study of unemployment conditions. To remedy the accumulated ills of two terms of Republican dereliction, Smith proffered initiating a program nearly identical to that proposed by Robert Wagner in March of that year, calling on the Department of Labor to collect "accurate and comprehensive information on employment in important industries."¹⁰¹⁸ (Both Smith and Wagner continued to assert that as many as four million workers were unemployed at the time.) Similarly to the Wagner bill, Smith's proposal would adopt "a scientific plan whereby during periods of unemployment appropriations shall be made available for the construction of necessary public work," at the conclusion of the study.¹⁰¹⁹ Turning his attention to those who were employed, Smith challenged the Coolidge administration's

¹⁰¹⁵ Smith, "Boston," p. 215; "Stenographic Report of Smith's Boston Speech Answering Hoover on 'State Socialism,'" p. 2.

¹⁰¹⁶ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁰¹⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁰¹⁸ Smith, "Newark," p. 255.

¹⁰¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 255-256. Smith's running-mate, Senator Joseph Robinson of Arkansas, also focused a great deal on labor issues during the campaign. He echoed Smith's progressivism at Dallas, enunciating his opposition to the issuance of injunctions in "pretended emergencies," asserting Democratic support for "the principle of collective bargaining which implies that organized labor shall choose its own representatives without coercion or interference," and calling for "a scientific program for public works construction in times of unemployment." Most significantly, Robinson declared that "labor is not 'a commodity,'" but should be "exalted above the plane of mere things and given its proper recognition as a function of the human brain and hand." "Robinson Pledges Labor Aid," *The Charlotte Observer*, September 4, 1928, p. 6.

interpretation of its own wage statistics, asserting that while the Republicans claimed that “everybody owns an automobile and everybody lives on chicken dinners,” the Bureau of Labor Statistics had declared \$2,000 a year to be a minimum livable wage for a family of five, while the administration had calculated the average wage for a manufacturing worker to be \$1,280 a year.¹⁰²⁰

Smith partisans made similar arguments. At a Labor Day rally in Fort Hamilton, New York, John J. Manning of the American Federation of Labor “spoke of the necessity of caring for the 4,000,000 men who he said are now unable to secure employment.”¹⁰²¹ In Elizabeth, New Jersey, Eleanor Roosevelt, who headed the campaign’s women’s division, stated that “the Republican party is making much of the issue of prosperity. There may be prosperity in spots, but it is not uniform. We cannot truly say that the whole country is prosperous. . . . Great groups of people are very badly off, including the farmers and the textile workers of New England.”¹⁰²² In Newark, a voter named L. Mastriani wrote the *Evening News* what could easily have been an excerpt from a Democratic campaign speech:

The spellbinders of the Republican party are making a desperate effort to garner the vote of the working-men in this year’s campaign, and their chief stock in trade is stressing the prosperity issue. They do not have a single constructive measure to offer the workers. They talk about great prosperity, regardless of the fact that, according to the Labor Department’s Minimum Health and Decency Budget, a family of five should have an annual income of between \$2,059.63 and \$2,511.02, depending upon the locality, while the annual average earnings of all workers amounts to only \$1,222. . . . Governor Smith has shown by his record in New York that he is in sympathy with the workers’ struggle for improved conditions,

¹⁰²⁰ Alfred E. Smith, “Newark,” *Campaign Addresses of Governor Alfred E. Smith, Democratic Candidate for President 1928*, pp. 251-268, p. 257. Similarly, the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated in 1929 that a family of two adults and two children required an income of at least \$2,500 per annum to maintain a decent standard of living—but of the 27 million families that filed tax returns that year, 18 million earned less than \$1,500 annually—a third of those making less than \$1,000. Parrish, *Anxious Decades*, pp. 81-82.

¹⁰²¹ “Celebration of Labor Day on U.S. Army Reservation Signal Day for Smith Oratory,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 4, 1928, p. 5.

¹⁰²² “Mrs. Roosevelt Stirs Audience By Smith Plea,” *The Elizabeth Daily Journal*, October 21, 1928, p. 1.

and no attempt to frighten them about bad times if the Democrats are elected is going to swerve them from their purpose to help make him the next President of the United States.”¹⁰²³

Smith and his supporters challenged the very notion of Republican prosperity, demanding that a truly universal public welfare required a serious evaluation of the shortcomings of American economic life. They did not call for a massive overhaul of American capitalism—such a demand from a mainstream candidate would have been anachronistic in the 1920s. But neither did they turn a blind eye to the failures of the “American system.” Those failures included the depression of certain sectors of the economy and rising unemployment. Smith proposed progressive remedies, calling for scientific studies of the problems in order to develop a state-run and state-funded solution; an approach reminiscent of the transitional progressive executive style he had administered over four terms as governor.

Allan Lichtman has written that Smith “neither articulated an alternative vision of America nor challenged the values represented by the candidacy of Herbert Hoover.”¹⁰²⁴ Robert Slayton has concluded that in 1928 there was “no substantial issue to differentiate the parties.”¹⁰²⁵ A number of other important works have shared in this assessment.¹⁰²⁶ Smith’s pronouncements were certainly tempered by the reality that he was running in a generally strong economy, and there is no evidence that he sought a profound remaking of the American economic system. But this does not mean he did not question the efficacy of Republican policies and propose an alternative vision of a just society.

¹⁰²³ L. Mastriani, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Newark Evening News*, October 30, 1928, p. 13.

¹⁰²⁴ Lichtman, *Prejudice and the Old Politics*, p. 14.

¹⁰²⁵ Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 275.

¹⁰²⁶ E.g.: Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity*, p. 234; Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order: 1919-1933*, p. 128; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Politics of Upheaval: 1935-1936* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), p. 410; Parrish, *Anxious Decades*, p. 213; Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism*, pp. 194-197.

Indeed, the Democratic campaign, while in accord with the basic tenets of American capitalism, was strongly critical of Republican satisfaction with the economy.¹⁰²⁷ President Coolidge and treasury secretary Andrew Mellon were said to have “made some amazing tax reductions, amazing for the discrimination practiced for the benefit of the millionaire and profiteering classes as opposed to the interests of the great majority of taxpayers.”¹⁰²⁸ The apparent prosperity of the 1920s was portrayed as “flawed”—not only because of the much commented upon struggles of agriculture and textiles, but also because of the “speculative” nature of the “unsound inflationary condition” which was being presented as prosperity.¹⁰²⁹ “As is usual under such circumstances, the ‘insiders’ have profited at the expense of the ‘outsiders’ and many small investors,” lamented the Democratic campaign handbook.¹⁰³⁰ Much like Smith’s speeches in Boston, Newark, and elsewhere, official campaign materials did not wholeheartedly accept the economic assumptions of the 1920s in the way the historical literature suggests. “This is not prosperity at all, in a national sense, but a regrettable episode in our financial history. It has had its evil effects, not only upon the small trader and investor, but upon labor seeking employment, and upon legitimate business and the farmers, who need credit at reasonably low rates.”¹⁰³¹ Smith knew well from his tussles with Coolidge over hydroelectricity that the administration saw virtue in such conditions,

¹⁰²⁷ By late September, Smith’s critiques of Republican handling of the economy had moved Charles Curtis to assail the “constant nagging” of the Democratic campaign during a Denver speech praising the Coolidge administration’s efforts “to restore conditions throughout the country.” “Sen. Curtis Lauds Record of G. O. P.,” *The Hartford Courant*, September 25, 1928, p. 4.

¹⁰²⁸ *The Campaign Book of the Democratic Party*, pp. 148-149. The question of taxation also represents a stark divide between Smith and his Republican opponents. When an Iowa man began harassingly questioning Charles Curtis “about tax reduction on the higher incomes” during a campaign stop in Spencer, the vice presidential nominee angrily scolded the elderly heckler that “I just told you about that, but I guess you are too damn dumb to understand it.” “Hurray For Smith Heckler’s Parting Shot at Curtis,” *The Hartford Courant*, September 20, 1928, p. 1.

¹⁰²⁹ *The Campaign Book of the Democratic Party*, pp. 72, 75.

¹⁰³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹⁰³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

but he and his campaign believed differently, assigning federal policymakers “some of the responsibility” for the “speculative inflation” that was deemed so harmful.¹⁰³²

Moreover, speculation was not the only flaw that the Democrats saw within the apparently robust growth of the American economy. Smith and Wagner had both spoken of an undetected—or rather unacknowledged—rise in unemployment in recent years. The Democrats pointed to a “shameful condition” whereby “in spite of the fact that the United States is now the richest country in the world . . . there are still large sections of the population whose incomes are so small or uncertain that they fall below the requirements for what would be recognized as a decent standard of life.”¹⁰³³ The “most important cause of poverty and destitution” was unemployment, but campaign literature also pointed out that in spite of continued growth, wages had failed to keep up with productivity, just as employment had failed to parallel expansion.¹⁰³⁴ Far from singing hosannas for the economic conditions of the 1920s, Al Smith and his campaign were in fact beginning to point out what William Leuchtenburg has so poignantly described as “the rotten beams in the economic structure.”¹⁰³⁵

There were many in the contemporary press who shared the view of later historians that the candidates were one in the same. No less a Smith partisan than Walter Lippmann suggested just that in a piece for *Vanity Fair* in September. “My own personal opinion,” he suggested, “is . . . if Mr. Hoover and Mr. Smith met in a room to discuss any concrete national question purely on its merits, they would be so close together at the end

¹⁰³² Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁰³³ Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁰³⁴ Ibid., pp. 86, 134.

¹⁰³⁵ Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity*, p. 8.

you could not tell the difference between them.”¹⁰³⁶ Many progressive intellectuals felt this way: *The Nation* famously editorialized that during the campaign “the two older political parties” had become “as like as two peas.”¹⁰³⁷ Yet the fact remains that in spite

¹⁰³⁶ Walter Lippmann, “Hoover and Smith: An Impartial Consideration of the Candidates For the American Presidential Office,” *Vanity Fair*, September, 1928, pp. 39-40, p. 40. It is of fundamental importance to clarify that when Lippmann said this, he “meant it as a compliment.” Indeed, Lippmann was describing his ideal situation, not only because he felt either candidate would represent a departure from the lull of the Coolidge years, but because “Two virtually identical candidates was Lippmann’s idea of a perfect election. He never accepted the argument that the parties ought to stand on firm ideological principles.” In fact, in a letter to Al Smith weeks before the candidate began his speaking tour, Lippmann wrote “I want to suggest that in your acceptance speech you state that you are not one of those who think that everything the Republican Party has done at Washington has been bad, and that on the contrary it has done some things which are very good and which you propose to continue.” In any case, since Lippmann’s statement appears to challenge the argument presented herein that Smith’s program was indeed differentiable from Hoover’s, the essay calls for serious analysis. First, his justification for the statement: “they are both intensely practical, and neither has a vast assortment of political dogmas to sustain.” Hoover’s “main interest” was “in the proper functioning of capitalism,” while Smith’s was “in the proper functioning of government,” but Lippmann praised both men as reasonable and pragmatic administrators. His conclusion: “Business can get along with or without Mr. Hoover. But Democracy was never in greater need than it is today of a man who can again make popular government at once really popular and really respectable.” If Lippmann’s essay seems strangely conflicted for someone who was a long-time admirer of Al Smith and who edited one of the foremost organs of Democratic partisan propaganda (*The New York World*), it must be noted that in 1920, Lippmann had “launched Hoover’s trial balloon in the *New Republic*,” impressed by his fellow wartime bureaucrat’s “independent progressive” outlook. Furthermore, his spiritless endorsement of Smith (he was less equivocal elsewhere) on the basis of his potential to remedy the ills of American democracy gets at the essence of Lippmann’s political concerns during the 1920s. Democracy was not an effective way to make decisions about the complex problems of a modern society, Lippmann had argued in his 1922 book *Public Opinion*, because everyone could not be an expert about everything and the world had become “out of reach, out of sight, out of mind”; and so citizens responded to stereotypes and propaganda, “erod[ing] the whole foundation of popular government.” This did not mean that all was lost: Lippmann suggested that impartial experts might be employed to form rational judgments on public issues and provide such analysis for democratic citizens. This is where Smith’s talent for rallying rank and file voters to progressive causes and his ability to popularize the abstruse became so important, for Lippmann was “a rationalist, an idealist, and an optimist” who retained “an abiding faith in American democracy, even though he was skeptical about the men and women who comprised it.” Smith’s talents seemed especially suited for the challenges facing democratic government. So Lippmann made Smith his ideal candidate both by picturing him as similar to Hoover and by locating in him the lost virtues of democracy. Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century*, pp. 168, 181, 182, 184, 249; Walter Lippmann to Alfred E. Smith, August 6, 1928, Walter Lippmann Papers, Reel 29, Box 30, Folder 1137.

¹⁰³⁷ Editorial, “As Like as Two Peas,” *The Nation*, 127, August 8, 1928, p. 122, reprinted in John L. Shover, ed., *Politics of the Nineteen Twenties*, (Waltham, MA: Ginn-Blaisdell, 1970), pp. 186-189, p. 186. It will be seen below that the conclusions of Lippmann and of *The Nation*, used as important sources of evidence for the claim made by many historians that there were indeed few genuine differences between the Hoover and Smith candidacies, were not in fact representative. Simply put: these were the opinions of élites. More significantly, the defensive posture forced upon the Smith camp by the combined influence of cultural attacks and warnings that a Democratic incumbency would wreck the economy was particularly evident among those Smith partisans who did write in *The Nation*. Mary Simkhovitch penned a rather formulaic defense of Smith in which she upheld the patriotism of Catholics, praised Smith’s frankness on prohibition, justified the Democrat’s fidelity to Tammany Hall, and claimed that Smith could be trusted by businessmen. One imagines that Simkhovitch, a social work activist, shared many of the social welfare

of popular accolades for Republican economic policies, Smith partisans rejected the notion—however expedient—that their candidate was in accord with Hoover’s proposals. Former Wyoming governor Nellie Tayloe Ross, addressing five hundred fellow Democratic women at Rochester, New York, suggested that Republican leaders who sought “the aggrandizement of the carefully chosen few” trembled at the prospect of a Smith election, for they feared “the governor’s progressive theories” and his talent for harnessing state power “in the interests of the rank and file of the people.”¹⁰³⁸ “The real conflict now,” she insisted, “is between the forces of conservatism and those of progressivism.”¹⁰³⁹

Bronx congressman Anthony Griffin summarized this view for a crowd in Hamden, Connecticut: “It has become a custom today to make the frivolous generalization that there is no difference between the policies of the two great parties.”¹⁰⁴⁰ But this was “vicious propaganda to lull the American people to sleep . . .” because in fact, the Republicans sought “to perpetuate the economic slavery of the American people. . .” on behalf of “the aluminum trust, the coal trust and the electric lightning [*sic*] and power trust.”¹⁰⁴¹ Against this backdrop, “the greatest imposition and the most outrageous insult to the intelligence of the American people is the effort of these minions of special privilege to circulate propaganda that prosperity now prevails and that

motivations of the female progressives discussed below, and in fact she hinted at this when she stated that although “economic security is a primary issue,” citizens must also consider “the whole tone of American life,” including “regard for the welfare of the downmost groups which business prosperity has not touched.” Yet the tone set in *The Nation* and similar publications was dismissive of such subtleties, and thus the context in which she and others wrote was not conducive to profound exploration of the serious differences between the candidates. Mary Simkhovitch, “Al Smith — Able, Honest, Liberal,” *The Nation*, 127, July 4, 1928, pp. 9-10, reprinted in Shover, ed., *Politics of the Nineteen Twenties*, pp. 183-185.

¹⁰³⁸ “Mrs. Ross Praises Smith as Reformer,” *The New York Times*, October 2, 1928, p. 2.

¹⁰³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴⁰ “Campaign Speech in Support of Alfred E. Smith for the presidency,” Hamden, Connecticut, October 11, 1928, Anthony Griffin Papers, Box 14, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 3-4.

it would be dangerous to trust the country's welfare to a Democratic administration."¹⁰⁴² Citing commerce department figures with acknowledged irony, Griffin pointed to weakness in farming, textiles, and coal, and called Republican optimism "tantamount to the cheering diagnosis of a Doctor, who tells his patient he is alright except that his heart is not working rightly, his lungs are effected and his skin is effected with dermatitis."¹⁰⁴³ Pointing to wage cuts in various industries, rampant strikes in textiles and in coal mining, and the desperate pleas for farm relief, Griffin concluded: "No, all is not right in the land."¹⁰⁴⁴ A change of direction was needed, extricating the ruling Republicans who "truckle to the vested interests" and installing "Alfred E. Smith in the White House," so that "the common people can rely on having a friend at the seat of government."¹⁰⁴⁵

II

As Smith and his allies were touring the nation articulating the candidate's reformist vision and challenging aspects of the economic status quo, the Democratic nominee for the vice presidency was also busy campaigning on such questions. Joseph Robinson's campaign tour concentrated largely on the South and especially the West, where the candidate focused on topics including agriculture and Republican corruption.¹⁰⁴⁶ Another recurring theme within Robinson's remarks was the rights of

¹⁰⁴² Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁰⁴³ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁰⁴⁶ "Robinson Flays Foe at Phoenix," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 9, 1928, p. 5; "Robinson Flays Prosperity Cry," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 11, 1928, p. 8; "Robinson Again Attacks on Dam," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1928, p. 10; "Robinson Fears Power's Future," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 16, 1928, p. 10; "Robinson Fires Farm Aid Blast," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 1928, p. 7;

labor. The Arkansan echoed the progressive sentiments of Smith's acceptance address during a speech at Dallas, enunciating his opposition to the issuance of injunctions in "pretended emergencies," asserting Democratic support for "the principle of collective bargaining which implies that organized labor shall choose its own representatives without coercion or interference," and calling for "a scientific program for public works construction in times of unemployment."¹⁰⁴⁷ Most significantly, Robinson declared that "labor is not 'a commodity,'" but should be "exalted above the plane of mere things and given its proper recognition as a function of the human brain and hand."¹⁰⁴⁸ In San Francisco, Robinson turned these arguments against Republican economic stewardship, demanding that while "the Democratic party recognizes the right of every individual to enjoy prosperity . . . it must be distributed among all who contribute to our national wealth."¹⁰⁴⁹ Thus he joined Smith in "condemn[ing] the system set up by the Republican Party whereby only a few enjoy real prosperity and the remainder are required, like Lazarus, to accept the crumbs which fall from the overladen tables of Dives."¹⁰⁵⁰

Historian Vaughn Davis Bornet has shown that in 1928 both major party candidates were seen as friendly toward unions.¹⁰⁵¹ Indeed, the Republican enjoyed a great deal of support from organized labor—such as it was in the 1920s. United Mine Workers of America president John L. Lewis supported Hoover, declaring over the radio that "unprecedented conditions render it imperative 'from the standpoint of Organized

"Robinson Woos Progressives," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 24, 1928, p. 6; "Robinson Gives Smith's Record," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1928, p. 5;

¹⁰⁴⁷ "Robinson Pledges Labor Aid," *The Charlotte Observer*, September 4, 1928, p. 6.

¹⁰⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁴⁹ "Robinson Flays Prosperity Cry," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 11, 1928, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵¹ Vaughn Davis Bornet, *Labor Politics in a Democratic Republic: Moderation, Division, and Disruption in the Presidential Election of 1928* (Washington, DC: Spartan, 1964).

Labor, as well as business and industry, that Herbert Hoover should be elected.”¹⁰⁵² Lewis credited the secretary of commerce’s refusal to accept prewar economic conditions as natural with instigating “a new industrial revolution which has become the marvel of the civilized world.”¹⁰⁵³ American Federation of Labor president William Green lauded Hoover for his “announced opposition to any change in the quota and restriction provisions of existing immigration legislation,” calling the policy “most welcome.”¹⁰⁵⁴ Meanwhile, George L. Berry, president of the International Printing Pressmen and Assistants Union of North America (and chairman of the labor division of the Democratic National Committee) scoured Hoover as an enemy of labor, pointing out the Republican’s consistent advocacy of “the open shop,” a charge echoed by other Democratic unionists, including Chicago Federation of Labor president John Fitzpatrick.¹⁰⁵⁵

Democrats hailed their own candidate as a champion of labor. Voters were reminded that in 1925 Smith had asserted that “the labor of a human being is not a commodity or an article of commerce,” and that the following year he had recommended hearings to circumscribe the judiciary’s power to enjoin striking unions.¹⁰⁵⁶ Teamsters

¹⁰⁵² “John L. Lewis Delivers Radio Talk for Hoover,” *The Philadelphia Trades Union News*, October 25, 1928, p. 6, Pattee Library, Pennsylvania State University, State College, Pennsylvania.

¹⁰⁵³ “Miners’ Leader Lauds Hoover,” *The Los Angeles Times*, October 18, 1928, p. 7.

¹⁰⁵⁴ “Green Praises Hoover’s Attitude on Immigration,” *The Philadelphia Trades Union News*, November 1, 1928, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵⁵ George L. Berry, “To the Officers and Members of the American Labor Movement,” Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 22, Folder 224. Fitzpatrick also served as spokesman for the Alfred E. Smith Union Labor League. “Hoover is Accused of Being Advocate of the Open Shop,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 23, 1928, p. 20. In his history of labor in the 1920s, Irving Bernstein suggests that “the inclination of most AFL leaders was toward Al Smith, and with good reason.” Bernstein describes the attraction of Smith’s gubernatorial record and his messages on the rights of labor, but contends that since “a Republican victory was generally anticipated and no one believed labor could prevent it by endorsing Smith,” a “reversion to neutrality was the safest course, and in 1928 the Federation could hardly be accused of being anything but safe.” Irving Bernstein, *The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker, 1920-1933* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1960), p. 104.

¹⁰⁵⁶ *The Campaign Book of the Democratic Party*, p. 134.

president Daniel J. Tobin declared Smith “the best friend labor ever had”; an endorsement made all the more powerful by the fact that only four years earlier Tobin had denounced the national Democrats under John W. Davis as “‘just as reactionary’ as the Republicans” in explaining labor support for Robert La Follette.¹⁰⁵⁷

The Republicans’ favorite argument against Smith among workers was to criticize his opposition to immigration restriction. The “Democratic presidential candidate’s plan to break down restriction would admit many more immigrants who immediately would become competitors with American labor,” workers were warned.¹⁰⁵⁸ Since Smith was a Tammany man he was “bound to advocate the Tammany Hall idea on immigration—which is, MORE IMMIGRANTS”; nor should this surprise anyone, since “New York has the largest foreign-born population of any city in America,” and the 1924 vote on restriction had come down to “Tammany Versus the Nation” with “New York City utterly opposed to the rest of America in the matter of restrictive immigration.”¹⁰⁵⁹

Smith had indeed criticized the National Origins Act of 1924 for establishing immigration quotas based on the 1890 census.¹⁰⁶⁰ However, at St. Paul the Democrat attempted to assuage fears that he intended to “open up the flood gates and let Europe pour all over this country,” which Republicans warned would cause a glut in the labor market and depress American wages; while he had demanded a halt to the use of thirty-eight year old census data in the formulation of national origins quotas in his acceptance address, the candidate avoided calls for further changes, instead suggesting that there

¹⁰⁵⁷ First quote from Bornet, *Labor Politics in a Democratic Republic*, pp. 44-45; second quote from Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism*, p. 130.

¹⁰⁵⁸ “The Hoover for President Labor Council of the Republican National Committee,” “Governor Smith WRONG on Immigration,” Washington, DC, 1928, p. 1, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 9, Folder 103.

¹⁰⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-5.

¹⁰⁶⁰ “Full Text of Smith’s Speech Accepting Party’s Nomination for the Presidency,” *The New York Times*, August 23, 1928, p. 2.

would be no difference in the number of immigrants admitted under a Democratic or a Republican administration.¹⁰⁶¹ Smith's timorous challenge to restriction policy has been rightly criticized by historians including Mae Ngai, who notes that he "opposed the quotas in the North while favoring them before southern audiences."¹⁰⁶² In fact, Ngai's analysis is simultaneously too harsh and too lenient: Smith did openly oppose the use of the 1890 quota during his acceptance speech as "designed to discriminate against certain nationalities and . . . an unwise policy," and thenceforth consistently referred audiences to that statement; yet a reading of his campaign addresses suggests that he never again enunciated this posture explicitly, and so it was not only the South, but everywhere beyond the friendly confines of the Empire State which was denied a serious critique of the National Origins Act.¹⁰⁶³

While immigration restriction presented the GOP with an appeal to labor of specific usefulness against Al Smith, Republican advocacy of protective tariffs had long served to win votes among industrial workers. In Louisville, Smith departed from party orthodoxy, gingerly suggesting that as president he would not necessarily do away with Republican protections for industry, instead calling for tariff formulation by a non-

¹⁰⁶¹ "Stenographic Report of Address by Gov. Smith at St. Paul," *The New York Times*, September 28, 1928, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶² Mae Ngai, "The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924," *Journal of American History*, 86:1 (June, 1999), pp. 67-92, p. 68.

¹⁰⁶³ "Full Text of Smith's Speech Accepting Party's Nomination for the Presidency," p. 2. It is to Smith's credit that he maintained his opposition to the 1890 census as the basis for the quota, for even this went beyond what many in his circle would have preferred. Walter Lippmann and Felix Frankfurter repeatedly forwarded Smith messages from Harvard Professor Calvert Magruder, who had convinced them (and hoped to convince Smith) of the wisdom of Hoover's call for the retention of the 1890 quota. Frankfurter found his Harvard Law colleague Magruder's anti-immigration stance "the most lucid statement of it that I have thus far seen," and Lippmann even had Magruder draft a statement for Smith to use to "clarify" his position. Walter Lippmann to Belle Moskowitz, October 4, 1928, Walter Lippmann Papers, Reel 20, Box 21, Folder 844; Walter Lippmann to Belle Moskowitz, October 9, 1928, Walter Lippmann Papers, Reel 20, Box 21, Folder 844; Felix Frankfurter to Walter Lippmann, Walter Lippmann Papers, Reel 10, Box 10, Folder 429; (Illegible Harvard Law Professor [likely Felix Frankfurter]) to Henry Moskowitz, October 17, 1928, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 9, Folder 104; Calvert Magruder, "MEMORANDUM FOR GOVERNOR SMITH," Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 9, Folder 104.

partisan panel of experts and demanding that the benefits of the tariff be extended to agriculture.¹⁰⁶⁴ Such a panel already existed, but Democrats, led by former tariff commissioner Edward P. Costigan, claimed that the current commission had “ceased to represent disinterested and non-partisan independence,” that its findings were made to promote favored industries rather than to reflect detached scientific conclusions, and that in any case its judgment was often overruled by the president.¹⁰⁶⁵ In fact, many progressives were frustrated with the current state of the Wilson-era tariff commission; “Young Bob” La Follette lamented that under Coolidge it had been “packed with men who were appointed not because they were personally equipped to perform the duties of the office but solely because they were subservient and ready to carry out the administration’s will.”¹⁰⁶⁶ Furthermore, reforms to the commission similar to those Smith was proposing had been suggested by a senate select committee chaired by Joseph Robinson (and including La Follette) in the spring of 1928.¹⁰⁶⁷

¹⁰⁶⁴ “Stenographic Report of Gov. Smith’s Speech to Louisville Democrats Last Night,” *The New York Times*, October 14, 1928, p. 25. Smith’s position on the tariff may well have reflected a sort of resignation among Democrats in the late 1920s, who felt that political realities made high tariffs a permanent fixture and so they ought to be reformed to be more just. The best example of this attitude can be seen in a letter from Bernard Baruch, Democratic financier, to Walter Lippmann, in which the former suggests “The high tariff and the high railroad rates are economic wrongs which it is almost impossible to right, and therefore it becomes necessary to bring the farming industry up to the level of the others.” Such logic had led Lippmann reluctantly to suggest Democratic support for the McNary-Haugen program: “we here are in rather a queer position. We don’t like the McNary-Haugen bill and we don’t like the present tariff, and yet we see perfectly clearly that if the present tariff policy is to be maintained there is no reason why the McNary-Haugen policy shouldn’t also be established.” Baruch agreed, suggesting that Democrats “should attempt to do something . . . in this time of great wealth . . . we should attempt to hold out a helping hand to the thirty per cent of our population engaged in agricultural pursuits, who are generally acknowledged to be out of the economic circle.” Walter Lippmann to Bernard Baruch, March 7, 1927; Bernard Baruch to Walter Lippmann, April 14, 1927; Walter Lippmann Papers, Reel 3, Box 3, Folder 117.

¹⁰⁶⁵ *The Campaign Book of the Democratic Party*, pp. 100-125, (quote from p. 102); Colin B. Goodykoontz, “Edward P. Costigan and the Tariff Commission, 1917-1928,” *The Pacific Historical Review*, 16:4 (November, 1947), pp. 410-419, p. 410.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Robert M. La Follette, Jr., Untitled Address (1), The La Follette Family Collection, Series C, Box 555, Folder “Coolidge Administration 1928 Undated,” p. 10. The same criticism was leveled against the ICC, the FTC, and the Shipping Board.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Goodykoontz, “Edward P. Costigan and the Tariff Commission, 1917-1928,” p. 417.

While Smith's proposal showed hints of Wilsonianism in its reliance on experts and of Bryanism in its demand for the equality of farmers, there can be no question that it abandoned the traditional free trade posture of the Democrats. It has been argued that this signaled a surrender to the contemporary popularity of Republican economic policies—Allan Lichtman has disparaged Smith's posture as "pusillanimous."¹⁰⁶⁸ Yet if protectionist proposals by the Democrats broke faith with the populist left, it must be remembered that free trade policies had long cost the populist left the full support of organized labor. Diagnosing the ailments of the Democratic Party in late 1927, Walter Lippmann wrote in *Harper's* that "reduction of the tariff in the interest of the farmer might cost many workingmen their jobs. So while both farmers and workingmen may denounce Big Business, they do not have a common interest and they do not mean the same thing."¹⁰⁶⁹ As high tariffs were an essential piece of labor's agenda, the change in direction should be understood as a strategic shift rather than a defeatist retreat; the Democrats were reaching out to urban workers who were convinced of the benefits of protectionism, seeking to neutralize the issue (as well as the question of immigration) and differentiate themselves from the Republicans on other matters. Even still, on both questions Smith did suggest significant reforms in the execution of Republican policies, if not the policies themselves.

In any case, Smith did find points of grievance with Republican economic policies and in his Boston and Newark speeches he was particularly aggressive in distinguishing his posture from Hoover's. Some of this was explicit, such as his rejection of the notion of universal prosperity and his charges of rising unemployment. Other

¹⁰⁶⁸ Lichtman, "Critical Election Theory and the Reality of American Presidential Politics, 1916-40," p. 340.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Lippmann, "The Sick Donkey," p. 419.

criticisms were less obvious; for example, the question of hydroelectricity was framed not merely as a moral clash over the disposal of public property, but also as a struggle to determine which class should benefit from these resources. Public water power projects were presented as a means for decreasing household expenses and therefore improving the quality of life for laborers. Additionally, Smith's recapitulations of his record of industrial reforms and welfare initiatives in New York State were always used to suggest that his administration would seek similarly to improve living and working conditions nationally—a case made even more explicitly by Smith's progressive surrogates.

While Smith separated himself from Hoover on these issues of interest to both organized and unorganized laborers, he also sought to gain an advantage on the central concern of many unions: injunctions. Even this was complicated by the fact that the Republican platform had noted an occasional abuse of the injunction. Yet on this issue Smith exploited his position as challenger, suggesting that Republican inaction was to blame for the perpetually high number of injunctions issued: legislation had been introduced, a commission had been called to study the problem (with Hoover as a member), and yet “what happened to it? Nothing.”¹⁰⁷⁰ The Democrats talked specifics: picketing, a usual target of injunctions, was called “an essential activity for organized labor during a strike, and to forbid it is to place unions at a disadvantage as instruments for collective bargaining.”¹⁰⁷¹ While decrying violence or outright bullying of strikebreakers, the party claimed that “some forms of what courts have called intimidation . . . if one approves of unions and collective bargaining, may be legitimate

¹⁰⁷⁰ “Full Stenographic Report of Governor Smith's Address on Labor in Newark,” *The New York Times*, November 1, 1928, p. 4.

¹⁰⁷¹ *The Campaign Book of the Democratic Party 1928*, p. 130.

and desirable expressions of group loyalty and social ethics.”¹⁰⁷² In order to promote this vision of liberated labor, the Democrats called for laws to regulate “the process by which courts may issue injunctions in industrial disputes,” to regulate “the process by which guilt of constructive contempt may be determined and punishment meted out,” and to exempt “organized labor from the anti-trust laws.”¹⁰⁷³ Furthermore, the party called for:

A declaration of public policy in favor of collective bargaining, and the enumeration and definition, under that declaration, of the substantive rights of labor to perform legitimate acts necessary to further its interest. Such a guarantee of the rights of labor would have to be weighed by the courts against rights asserted for the employer, and against the ‘right of contract.’ It would permit emphasis upon the fact that, in most if not all cases, strikes are carried on, not as conspiracies to injure the employer, but as a part of the process of collective bargaining, to protect the interest of labor.¹⁰⁷⁴

In 1928, most American workers enjoyed relative comfort. This presented an obvious problem for a presidential candidate who sought to critique the economic ideology of the incumbent party. Yet while accepting many of the underlying principles of Republican policies—a move that can only be seen as pragmatic given the robust economy—Smith still challenged aspects of those policies on progressive terms crafted to attract the support of urban laborers.

Social Welfare

I

If Smith partisans proposed to challenge aspects of the Harding-Coolidge-Hoover polity, their alternatives could be found in the Smith governorship. Not only did Smith

¹⁰⁷² Ibid., p. 130.

¹⁰⁷³ Ibid., p. 133.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 133.

seek the presidency on the merits of his gubernatorial résumé, he also submitted that résumé to the American voters as a means for divining his executive temperament and policy intentions.¹⁰⁷⁵ The candidate said as much on the campaign trail repeatedly.¹⁰⁷⁶ While Smith made these assertions, some of the most important iterations of this argument came from the very group that had been central to crafting and implementing his transitional progressivism over the course of two decades in New York State: female social work progressives.

Eleanor Roosevelt, whose husband had nominated Smith at the Democratic National Convention in Houston, spearheaded the women's division of the Smith campaign, which essentially used existing contacts to propagate campaign information.¹⁰⁷⁷ In meetings with women's groups, Roosevelt highlighted Smith's "interest in providing adequate educational facilities [and] advocacy of better salaries for teachers," as well as "the Governor's outstanding record regarding humanitarian legislation on behalf of women and children."¹⁰⁷⁸

Molly Dewson, president of the New York Consumers' League and former secretary of the Massachusetts State Minimum Wage Commission, was another social worker who would become a leading Democratic partisan, rising to national prominence during the Franklin Roosevelt years. But she was already an active Democrat by 1928,

¹⁰⁷⁵ When the Democratic camp began entreating the NAACP's Walter White for his support, the civil rights leader was told frankly that Smith "planned, if elected, to extend to the nation the benefits of the social legislation New York state enjoyed because of the pioneer work by Governor Smith, Senator Robert F. Wagner, and Franklin D. Roosevelt." Walter White, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White* (New York: Viking, 1948), pp. 99-100.

¹⁰⁷⁶ E.g.: Smith, "Address of Acceptance," p. 24; Smith, "Oklahoma City," pp. 44-50; Smith, "St. Paul," p. 89; Smith, "Brooklyn," pp. 269-286; Smith, "Radio Address at Carnegie Hall," p. 315.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Ware, *Partner and I*, pp. 150-151; "Plan for Organizing Women Voters," Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York (hereafter, Eleanor Roosevelt Papers), Box 6, Folder 5; "Report on Office of Organizing Women, 9/11/28," Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, Box 6, Folder 5.

¹⁰⁷⁸ "Memorandum: Hans Rieg to Mrs. FDR," 1928, Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, Box 6, Folder 5.

serving as a campaign vice chair and director of women's activities for the central United States.¹⁰⁷⁹ During a radio speech from St. Louis, Dewson explained why she had chosen to campaign for Smith:

My own interests are in the field of education and social economics. It is natural, therefore that my attention should have been early called to the man who has been unceasingly active as the chief executive of New York in making real for the people through the channels of government those opportunities and services about which most of us can only theorize.¹⁰⁸⁰

Dewson proceeded to outline Smith's progressive record on public education, health care, and factory legislation.¹⁰⁸¹

It is not surprising that one of the most active Smith partisans was New York State Industrial Board chairperson Frances Perkins, one of the architects of the governor's transitional progressivism. Perkins made a number of speeches for her fellow Democrat, and in all of them she emphasized his progressive record, particularly as an advocate for the social welfare agenda. In a September speech at Boston, Perkins emphasized Smith's "social service record," and admonished her audience that it was "the duty of social worker[s] to press for their social conception as controlling political policies," by voting for the Democrat.¹⁰⁸² Perkins reiterated this point in a radio address from New York on September 24, proclaiming:

Governor Alfred Smith has stood by us, has put the women's social welfare problems into effect, has listened with sympathy, with knowledge and understanding, to the aspirations of working women for leisure, for fair wages, for a good life. . . . Will they recognize their duty to be loyal, not only to the man and his service, but to the program of industrial progress and of social welfare, of

¹⁰⁷⁹ "Former Boston Woman Directs Smith Offices in Region of St. Louis," *The Boston Globe*, September 26, 1928, p. 24.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Molly Dewson, "What Campaign Issues Mean to Women," (Dewson Speech over Radio in St. Louis for Al Smith, 1928), Mary W. Dewson Papers, Box 4, Folder: "Smith, Alfred E. and 1928 Campaign, Corres. Re."

¹⁰⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸² Frances Perkins, "Notes for Campaign Speech to Social Workers in Boston, Sept 1928," Frances Perkins Papers, Box 43.

equality of women, and the protection of the weak, which he represents and on which his public career rests today?¹⁰⁸³

Perkins was not the only social welfare progressive to demand that loyalty compelled a vote for the Democrat: Mary Van Kleeck, who chaired a national committee of social workers supporting the New Yorker, reportedly said “emphatically that any working woman who failed to support Smith is almost guilty of treason.”¹⁰⁸⁴

Returning to Boston in October, Perkins predicted that Smith would garner tremendous support within the social work community “because he is the one outstanding personality in American political life who has translated into reality and made effective the social welfare programs which social workers have formulated and have dreamed of throughout this country for the last generation.”¹⁰⁸⁵ Furthermore, this was not simply one aspect of Smith’s political sensibilities; rather, he was “the first politician who has built his political career on the practical expression in legislation and in government of this passion for social justice.”¹⁰⁸⁶ Before these audiences, Perkins outlined Smith’s park and playground initiatives, his “strengthening the work of the State Health Department,” his “espousing the cause of increase of nurses for maternity care,” his development of “traveling child health clinics throughout the state,” his work “to secure suitable widows’ pensions,” and his “leadership in the movement for better factory and labor laws.”¹⁰⁸⁷

¹⁰⁸³ Frances Perkins, “Notes for Campaign Speech for Al Smith (radio) NY, 9/24/28,” Frances Perkins Papers, Box 43, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Lillian Wald to Mary McDonald, September 27, 1928, p. 1, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 3. Wald claimed Van Kleeck had made such a remark, qualifying only slightly: “These may not be her exact words but it is the idea, and she, in consequence, has taken the chairmanship of a national social workers’ committee.”

¹⁰⁸⁵ Frances Perkins, “Speech, Boston, 10/2/28,” Frances Perkins Papers, Box 43, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Frances Perkins, “Campaign Speech by Miss Perkins for Al Smith, Oct. 1928,” Frances Perkins Papers, Box 43, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Perkins, “Speech, Boston, 10/2/28,” pp. 1-2.

Indeed, suggested Perkins, Smith's was "a program of social welfare legislation which might have been written by the National Social Workers' Association."¹⁰⁸⁸

Many social workers longed for a Smith presidency because of his record—a record which, as summarized by Perkins, captures the very essence of transitional progressivism. In her Boston speech she did this succinctly by simply describing Al Smith: "He understands these problems and talks about them as a social worker. The greatest contribution perhaps to the whole program of making a better life for the plain people in New York State, has been his political leadership."¹⁰⁸⁹ Smith's governorship had expressed transitional progressivism in both policy and politics, and this was reason enough to promote him to the nation's highest office.

After giving the Boston speech, during which she had "got a great hand," Frances Perkins recalled feeling that the 1928 "campaign, whether it elected Al Smith or not, would *plant the seed of a set of ideas all over the country*."¹⁰⁹⁰ Perkins gave similar speeches in Pittsburgh, Chicago, Buffalo, and Detroit—each time arguing that Smith was the social welfare candidate.¹⁰⁹¹ To Perkins and many other social welfare progressives, the 1928 campaign was not only about electing Al Smith; it was, at its core, a drive to broaden an entire agenda—the articulation for the first time on the national stage of a set of progressive values that they had promoted at the state level and hoped to implement in Washington under the presidency of their strongest political patron.¹⁰⁹²

¹⁰⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 1.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Frances Perkins Oral History, Book II, p. 628. Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁹¹ Ibid., p. 635.

¹⁰⁹² The importance of such speakers in spelling out the progressivism of urban politicians cannot be overstated—and was clearly recognized by those politicians. For example, days after his 1932 re-election to the U.S. Senate, Robert Wagner wrote to Frances Perkins that "I would be an ingrate, and I am not, if I did not express to you my appreciation for your unstinted support and for the many kind things you said about me and my work. It did much to persuade the people that my efforts were sincerely devoted to the

Another Smith supporter, Lillian Wald, took a much different approach to the campaign. Fellow settlement house leader Jane Addams, a Hoover supporter, had written Smith advisor Henry Moskowitz that she would not speak on the Republican's behalf; and so in a sort of gentlemen's agreement, Wald acted in kind.¹⁰⁹³ Yet Wald was "working all the time" for the Democrat.¹⁰⁹⁴ One technique she employed was "to talk to little groups," telling "stories of [Governor] Smith . . . in very much detail," at dinner parties and other gatherings.¹⁰⁹⁵

Of broader significance, Wald penned dozens of letters to fellow social workers on behalf of the Democratic candidate. She wrote many of her colleagues that Smith possessed a "tender sympathy for humanity" rivaled in American political history only by Abraham Lincoln.¹⁰⁹⁶ To justify this appraisal she directed her correspondents to "the record of his unique and able administration of the affairs of New York State."¹⁰⁹⁷ Wald implored one Chicago settlement activist to "ask . . . the doctors who know his programs for hospitalization, and the New York child labor committee who know his comprehension of children's needs. Ask the housing people and the people who understand his great program for conserving the water power for the benefit of the people."¹⁰⁹⁸ In these letters Wald praised not only Smith's progressive policies, but also the efficacy of his political methodology: "Time and time again when the opposition has [blocked] measures that the Governor thought important for the welfare and happiness of

welfare of humanity." Robert F. Wagner to Frances Perkins, November 25, 1932, Frances Perkins Papers, Box 8.

¹⁰⁹³ Lillian Wald to Judge Julian W. Mack, October 4, 1928, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 3.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Lillian Wald to Belle Moskowitz, July 3, 1928, p. 1, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 3.

¹⁰⁹⁶ *E.g.*: Lillian Wald to June Hamilton Rhodes, September 4, 1928, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 3; Lillian Wald to G.E. Sehlbrade, September 14, 1928, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 3.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Lillian Wald to June Hamilton Rhodes.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Lillian Wald to Mary McDonald, September 27, 1928, p. 2, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 3.

the people, he has gone before the voters directly, explaining as only Theodore Roosevelt ever did.”¹⁰⁹⁹

Beyond these personal correspondences, Wald reached an even wider audience with an open letter to her charitable colleagues. The document, which was co-authored by fellow settlement house leader John L. Elliott and mailed to social workers across the nation, proclaimed that Smith had “done more to promote human welfare and social justice in New York than any other man in public life throughout the history of the State.”¹¹⁰⁰ Citing accomplishments including the \$50 million hospital bond, “financial assistance to mothers of dependent children,” the creation of a commission on child welfare, “efforts to promote the building of low priced houses and to improve housing conditions generally,” the forty-eight hour work week for women, and administrative reorganization, Wald and Elliott determined that “social workers and the socially minded generally may find great satisfaction in Governor Smith’s record of transforming hopes for social reform into the realities of legislation and efficient administration.”¹¹⁰¹ Readers were reminded of Smith’s methodology—of his ability to make “an appeal to the people,” and achieve “victories of popular government.”¹¹⁰² Again, in making the case for Smith’s candidacy, social welfare advocates were describing his unique qualifications for the presidency as precisely what has been termed “transitional progressivism”: “His record of legislative achievement in social work and his rare qualities as a public leader,

¹⁰⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

¹¹⁰⁰ “An Open letter to Social Workers,” Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 33. John L. Elliott was head worker at the Hudson Guild Settlement House in New York City. *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work, at the Forty-Fifth Annual Session Held in Kansas City, Missouri, May 15-22, 1918* (Chicago: Rogers & Hall Co., 1919), pp. 458-459.

¹¹⁰¹ “An Open letter to Social Workers.”

¹¹⁰² Ibid.

displayed in dealing with the social problems of the State, have fitted him in an unusual way for national leadership.”¹¹⁰³

As Perkins spoke and Wald wrote on Al Smith’s behalf, Belle Moskowitz crafted political strategy for the campaign. In fact, Moskowitz had for years been the central figure maneuvering on Smith’s behalf behind the scenes, and her position was strengthened as the election season dawned. According to Elisabeth Perry, Moskowitz had not only “penetrated” the ostensibly all-male leadership of the Smith campaign; she “could almost be said to dominate it,” meeting regularly with “a smaller, more intimate group within the War Board.”¹¹⁰⁴ Bolstered by her assiduous recordkeeping over the past decade, as well as by a vast national network of correspondents and political allies, Moskowitz was probably the only indispensable person within the Smith circle.¹¹⁰⁵ She did not always get her way: Moskowitz had opposed Smith’s selection of Raskob as party chair, and like many women within the party she was disgruntled when female members of the DNC (who constituted precisely half of the membership) were excluded from the process of selecting vice-chairs for the campaign by an informal meeting of male committee members.¹¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, Moskowitz, along with Smith’s other long-time advisors Joseph Proskauer and Robert Moses, sat atop what Robert Slayton has deemed “the *real* flowchart” of power within the campaign.¹¹⁰⁷ As a member of the party’s executive committee and head of the publicity bureau, Moskowitz was charged with “the selling of Al Smith”; coordinating materials for the press, directing research,

¹¹⁰³ Ibid. See also: Marjorie N. Feld, *Lillian Wald: A Biography* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2008), pp. 138-141.

¹¹⁰⁴ Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, p. 189.

¹¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 189.

¹¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 194-195.

¹¹⁰⁷ Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 266. Emphasis in original.

and preparing campaign literature.¹¹⁰⁸ It was Moskowitz who put together the party's campaign handbook, shaping an image of the candidate and his credentials that fit with her conception of his "best points."¹¹⁰⁹ Thus campaign publicity stressed Smith's progressive achievements as governor of New York, his attachment to the progressive tradition, and his personal virtues.¹¹¹⁰ While Moskowitz molded the official public image of Al Smith, she also distributed talking points to speakers and approved advertisements for publication.¹¹¹¹ With direct authority over the "Social Work, Public Health, and Education" committee and the "Women's Activities" committee, she was further empowered to promote Smith's social welfare progressive credentials.¹¹¹² While many progressive women played important parts in the Smith campaign, Belle Moskowitz had enjoyed, in Rexford Tugwell's words, an "elevation to the role of President-maker."¹¹¹³

One branch of the campaign which fell under Moskowitz's jurisdiction was the "Public Health Workers for Smith," a group formed to promote the Democrat's candidacy among social welfare progressives on the key issue of health care.¹¹¹⁴ In an effusive letter to their colleagues, the committee declared: "No man in public life in New York State has contributed as much in terms of constructive legislation, and in the support of adequate appropriations for the development of the state's modern public

¹¹⁰⁸ Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, p. 196.

¹¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 197, 200.

¹¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 198-200.

¹¹¹¹ Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 268.

¹¹¹² Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, p. 196.

¹¹¹³ Rexford G. Tugwell, *The Democratic Roosevelt* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957), p. 172. It should be noted that Tugwell used the phrase, however apt, as part of a particularly disparaging rant against Moskowitz.

¹¹¹⁴ See Robert Chiles, "'Public Health is Purchasable': Health Policy under Governor Alfred E. Smith, 1919-1928," paper presented at "The Conference on New York State History," June 4, 2010, Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY; Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, p. 196.

health facilities.”¹¹¹⁵ The development of county health units and generous state funding for local health work was praised, as was the governor’s supposed non-partisanship and his understanding “that the health of the people is one of the State’s most precious assets.”¹¹¹⁶ Significantly, the letter suggested that such an administration could be expected nationally should Smith ascend to the White House: “Those of us who subscribe to this letter believe that he would bring to the complex public health problems of the nation, the same intelligent and sympathetic understanding that has marked his leadership in New York State.”¹¹¹⁷

These activists saw in Smith’s gubernatorial career and in his agenda for the nation the manifestation of a great deal of their social welfare agenda. Moreover, in Smith they saw not merely a politician playing the part of reformer, but rather a coworker who shared genuinely in their progressive vision. Smith made much of this clear in his campaign speeches, and women like Molly Dewson and Frances Perkins made the case more explicitly and in greater detail in addresses of their own. These progressive sentiments matched those articulated in Smith’s defense of his program during his Boston rejoinder to Hoover’s “socialism” charge. After all, as Lillian Wald wrote to her fellow social worker Graham Taylor, “most of us are for what Hoover designates as ‘Smith’s state socialism.’”¹¹¹⁸

¹¹¹⁵ Public Health Workers for Smith, “TO PUBLIC HEALTH WORKERS,” October 19, 1928, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 33.

¹¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹¹⁸ Lillian Wald to Graham Taylor, October 25, 1928, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 3.

II

Not all progressive women rallied to the Smith cause. One group which roundly rejected his platform was female progressives who might be dubbed “equal rights feminists.” During the 1910s, as historian Nancy Cott has written, “the suffrage coalition temporarily concealed” the internal divisions among progressive women; by the 1920s there was a clear gulf between women interested in social welfare and labor legislation and those who prioritized women’s total equality, individuality, economic independence, and political rights.¹¹¹⁹ The latter coalesced around groups like Alice Paul’s National Woman’s Party and pressed for an Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution. These feminists, in contrast with the social welfare progressive women, frowned upon welfare and labor legislation that presupposed sex differences. Simultaneously, those who supported the social welfare agenda tended to be staunch opponents of the Equal Rights Amendment because its adoption would render the lion’s share of their progressive labor statutes unconstitutional.

Given this background, it is not surprising that the National Woman’s Party—which Smith derided as an “interesting sidelight” in his notes—supported Herbert Hoover, citing vice presidential nominee Charles Curtis’ support for the Equal Rights Amendment and chastising the Democrat for “refusing to put their ideas into effect in New York State.”¹¹²⁰ Walter Lippmann cabled Smith that this presented an “admirable opportunity” to enunciate his social welfare vision, since “what is meant by equal

¹¹¹⁹ Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1987), p. 8.

¹¹²⁰ Smith, “Newark,” p. 261; “Women to Open Fight on Smith,” *The Los Angeles Times*, October 1, 1928, p. 4; “Hoover in Council With the President on the Campaign,” *The New York Times*, September 13, 1928, pp. 1, 3, p. 1.

opportunity is the destruction not only of laws unfavorable to women but laws specially designed to protect them.”¹¹²¹ The *Fall River Globe*, which supported the Democratic nominee, shared this assessment on its editorial page: “An organization exerting itself for the interests of the sweatshop is something that could not properly find a place for itself under the Smith banner.”¹¹²² The candidate himself addressed the question directly the following month at Newark:

When it comes to women’s legal status, when it comes to the custody of children, when it comes to property rights, I will go as far as anybody in the world to maintain the equality between women and men. But what I will never do is consent to an amendment to the Federal Constitution that will prohibit the States from enacting legislation to promote the health, the comfort and the happiness of women who are compelled to work in factories.¹¹²³

Even among those progressive women whose focus was on social welfare there was nothing approaching unanimity. Jane Addams, like many social work progressives, supported Hoover largely based on the Republican’s own progressive credentials, particularly his humanitarian efforts at the close of the World War. Hoover, she said, was “the one American connected with the Great War that should have been distinguished not for his military services but for ‘conservation of tender lives menaced by war’s starvation.’”¹¹²⁴ A social worker from Minneapolis wrote that despite her own preference for Al Smith, she saw “little to choose between the social service record of the two men,” for Hoover, like Smith, had proved a great humanitarian.¹¹²⁵

¹¹²¹ Walter Lippmann to Alfred E. Smith (telegram), September 17, 1928, Walter Lippmann Papers, Reel 29, Box 30, Folder 1137.

¹¹²² Editorial, “The ‘Equal Rights’ Issue,” *The Fall River Globe*, September 25, 1928, p. 10.

¹¹²³ “Full Stenographic Report of Governor Smith’s Address on Labor in Newark,” *The New York Times*, November 1, 1928, p. 12.

¹¹²⁴ “Jane Addams Lauds Hoover as ‘Best Bet,’” *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 17, 1928, p. 3.

¹¹²⁵ Joana C. Colcord to Lillian Wald, October 4, 1928, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 11. William Leuchtenburg nicely summarizes and problematizes the Republican’s lure for progressives in his recent Hoover biography: “Recollections of his years of service and the vision of the New Era appealed especially to progressives They were gratified when Hoover warned against excessive use of

Many others opposed Smith because of his stance on prohibition. As had been the case among agrarian reformers, Smith's openness in questioning the efficacy of federal prohibition and his advocacy of a state-level system of enforcement had earned him mistrust from many social welfare progressives—both male and female. Responding to Lillian Wald's entreaties, Irving Fisher, a noted Yale economist and social reformer, wrote that in spite of Smith's "great vision in Public Health measures, educational and labor measures," he was compelled to support Hoover because "Prohibition in the hands of its enemies could never succeed."¹¹²⁶ A social worker from Kalamazoo, Michigan, expressed similar ambivalence: "I am sorry, for Governor Smith fills my imagination and I would have liked to vote for him but I believe a victory for Mr. Hoover at the present time would settle the question of the Eighteenth Amendment."¹¹²⁷ Another wrote Wald that "I recognize with you, the great service which Governor Smith has rendered to the improvement of public social service in the state of New York—especially in the reconstruction of hospitals for the insane, institutions for feeble-minded, and public prisons, as well as the development of the park system," however, "I am for prohibition, and I am therefore compelled to vote against Governor Smith."¹¹²⁸ Another social worker suggested that Smith's position on prohibition was "reactionary, not progressive,"

injunctions against labor unions; advocated public works to employ the jobless; and announced that he favored a shortened workday, more spending for education, and 'hundreds of millions' of dollars to help the farmer. . . . Progressives seeking clues as to what kind of president Hoover might be would have done well to have scrutinized him more carefully. When Harding contemplated freeing the Socialist leader Eugene V. Debs from prison, Hoover had told him he was making a mistake. Throughout this period, he expressed intense hostility to proposals for federal operation of the power dam and nitrate plants at Muscle Shoals in the Tennessee Valley. In 1924 he wrote Ray Lyman Wilbur how displeased he was that some members of the Stanford faculty were backing the presidential candidacy of Senator Robert La Follette on a Progressive ticket, adding that engineers and economists who looked favorably on public power development and other heresies were either 'deliberately untruthful or . . . incompetent' His liberal supporters might also have taken note of several of his remarks on the campaign trail [including the Madison Square Garden address]." Leuchtenburg, *Herbert Hoover*, p. 74.

¹¹²⁶ Irving Fisher to Lillian Wald, October 3, 1928, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 11.

¹¹²⁷ C.W. Gilfillan to Lillian Wald, October 17, 1928, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 11.

¹¹²⁸ Hastings H. Hart to Lillian Wald, October 2, 1928, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 11.

overshadowing “the progressive work which he has done in the field of social work.”¹¹²⁹ Worse still, the writer had read of “the number of highballs and cocktails which the Governor is in the habit of imbibing daily.”¹¹³⁰ One writer called those social workers who favored Smith in spite of his opposition to prohibition “the worst kind of hypocrites.”¹¹³¹ An anonymous “progressive” woman wrote Eleanor Roosevelt to criticize her for supporting Smith, suggesting, “You must have seen him at some time or another at some of his public appearances in a condition which you as a supporter of the Volstead Act would disdain Can you imagine Mr. and Mrs. Smith in the White House as the leading family of the nation?”¹¹³² Thus did social workers from Demorest, Georgia, to Wellston, Missouri, to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, express their opposition to Smith on the question of prohibition.¹¹³³

Another reason for disapproval of the Democrat among some in the social work community was his lack of a formal education. The fact that the New York governor had educated himself to a par with any of his colleagues through rigorous self-discipline (to the point that he was correcting fellow assemblymen’s grammar during debate) was less well known than the fact that he had often bragged that his only degree was “F. F. M.”—from the Fulton Fish Market.¹¹³⁴ This was an obvious liability when courting professionals in a field founded by college graduates on principles of social scientific expertise. A correspondent of Lillian Wald’s from Pittsburgh pointed this out, demanding: “Do you social workers, belonging to a group that is stressing so much these

¹¹²⁹ Henry W. Farnam to Lillian Wald, October 13, 1928, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 11.

¹¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹¹³¹ Owen Stuart to Lillian Wald, October 5, 1928, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 12.

¹¹³² Anonymous to Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1928, Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, Box 6, Folder 4.

¹¹³³ Sarah E. Jenkins to Lillian Wald, October 8, 1928, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 11; Birdie Massick to Lillian Wald, October 3, 1928, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 11; K. Schweivitz to Lillian Wald, October 4, 1928, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 12.

¹¹³⁴ “‘Al’ Smith’s Grammar,” *The New York Times*, April 21, 1915, p. 1; Caro, *The Power Broker*, p. 88.

days the importance of training for the job—do you not think the presidency is the biggest job there is and cannot have a man too well educated and trained?”¹¹³⁵ This suggested an education gap between the two candidates in the opinion of the executive secretary of the Massachusetts Child Labor Committee, who pointed out that Hoover “has had the best training for president of any man we have had.”¹¹³⁶ A social worker from St. Louis was less charitable, admonishing Wald for “trying to ‘go down the line’ for a man whom you would otherwise call illiterate, just because he favored a few good things for suffering humanity.”¹¹³⁷

Hoover’s progressive credentials, prohibition, and the education gap all served to divert much of the social work vote, a particularly large bloc among female social welfare progressives, away from the Democrat. So too did religious bigotry, which will be explored later. In spite of these failures, the New Yorker attracted the support of many female progressives, and it was these women who gave voice (and in the case of Belle Moskowitz, direction) to the most fundamental aspirations of Smith’s transitional progressivism. Prohibitionists or not, there were many important progressive women who were ready to work tirelessly on behalf of the Democrat; for they could not easily set aside their hope that with Governor Smith in the White House they might be able to accomplish a few more “good things for suffering humanity.”

¹¹³⁵ Mildred B. Duncan to Lillian Wald and John L. Elliott, October 22, 1928, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 11.

¹¹³⁶ Mabel A. Strong to Lillian Wald, October 2, 1928, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 12.

¹¹³⁷ Stuart to Wald, October 5, 1928. Another social worker, from Hartford, Connecticut, agreed that Smith’s “lack of educational advantages shows he is ill fitted to fill the position which he is seeking.” Sarah E. Jenkins to Lillian Wald, October 29, 1928, Mary Van Kleeck Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts (hereafter, Mary Van Kleeck Papers), Box 30, Folder 4.

From Albany to Washington

Other issues received expansive treatment during Smith's speaking tour. Prohibition, which cost the Democrat dearly among progressive farmers and social workers, was the focus of Smith's speech in the beer capital Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where "no more popular subject could have been chosen for an audience," according to the *Brooklyn Eagle*, since "a large proportion of [the residents] are Germans or of German extraction."¹¹³⁸ The topic also received prominent comment in Newark and Philadelphia, and in Chicago, which had been dubbed six years earlier "the town Billy Sunday couldn't shut down" by songwriter Fred Fisher.¹¹³⁹ In these speeches, Smith defended his plan to allow states to decide how to handle the question as "nothing more nor less than the simple application of the good old Jeffersonian democratic theory of States' rights."¹¹⁴⁰ While he often discussed the topic, Smith shared the opinion of a group of forty Harvard professors who had suggested in endorsing the Democrat that prohibition "should not be allowed to overshadow other matters."¹¹⁴¹ Indeed, when asked directly in Omaha "Do you believe that liquor is the great issue in this campaign," he responded tersely: "I certainly do not."¹¹⁴²

¹¹³⁸ "Smith Paints Dry Law as G.O.P. Pork Barrel in Milwaukee Address," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 30, 1928, p. 1; Alfred E. Smith, "Milwaukee," *Campaign Addresses of Governor Alfred E. Smith*, pp. 105-120.

¹¹³⁹ "Full Stenographic Report of Governor Smith's Address on Labor in Newark," *The New York Times*, November 1, 1928, p. 4; Alfred E. Smith, "Philadelphia," *Campaign Addresses of Governor Alfred E. Smith*, pp. 219-236; Alfred E. Smith, "Chicago," *Campaign Addresses of Governor Alfred E. Smith, Democratic Candidate for President 1928*, pp. 187-202.

¹¹⁴⁰ "Full Stenographic Report of Governor Smith's Address on Labor in Newark," *The New York Times*, November 1, 1928, p. 4.

¹¹⁴¹ "We, the Undersigned, support for the Presidency, Governor Alfred E. Smith," Felix Frankfurter Papers, Reel 105, p. 1.

¹¹⁴² "Prohibition Not Main Issue," *The New York Times*, September 19, 1928, p. 1; Smith, "Omaha," p. 40.

Controversial as it was, Smith's position was little more than a nationalization of the stance he had taken throughout his tenure as governor, during which he signed an act repealing the Mullin-Gage Law (which had provided for the enforcement of prohibition in the state).¹¹⁴³ Based on this record, no one should have been surprised by the New Yorker's antipathy toward the Eighteenth Amendment. Yet his handling of the issue left much to be desired. Walter Lippmann, who approved of Smith's position as "wise, courageous and fine," nevertheless disapproved of the Democrat's reticence on the question prior to the primaries and party convention, demanding that "good faith requires you to serve notice on the convention as to the line you intend to take on a matter of such importance."¹¹⁴⁴ Publicly, Lippmann suggested in *Harper's Magazine* that prohibition was becoming the most important issue of the upcoming campaign, and that Smith was being kept quiet by his advisors for fear of upsetting dry Democrats.¹¹⁴⁵ Smith chose a different course. As former secretary of the navy Josephus Daniels, a North Carolina delegate and committed prohibitionist would later recall:

At Houston . . . the only fight was in the Committee on Platform where the dries had a small number of determined men who were opposed to a plank demanding the repeal of national prohibition. Such men . . . told the Smith forces that if they insisted on an outright repeal declaration we would offer a minority report and carry the debate to the floor of the Convention. The Smith forces wished to avoid that if possible for fear of its effect on the election.¹¹⁴⁶

¹¹⁴³ See Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, pp. 196-201.

¹¹⁴⁴ Walter Lippmann to Alfred E. Smith, May 9, 1928, Walter Lippmann Papers, Reel 29, Box 30, Folder 1137.

¹¹⁴⁵ Walter Lippmann, "The Wetness of Al Smith: The Practical Consequences if He Were Elected," *Harper's Magazine*, Volume 156 (June, 1928), pp. 133-139, p. 135. A frustrated Lippmann repeated this speculation to Smith biographer Norman Hapgood in the spring. Hapgood disagreed with his assessment: "All through his career many of those around him have urged him to talk or act before he was ready. . . . the decision to stand on what the public knows about him, or can readily find out, until he surveys the ground all at once in his speech of acceptance, is his own decision, and I think in harmony with his habit." Norman Hapgood to Walter Lippmann, May 1, 1928, Walter Lippmann Papers, Reel 12, Box 12, Folder 504.

¹¹⁴⁶ Josephus Daniels, notes for *Life Begins at Seventy*: "Attending Democratic National Convention," Josephus Daniels Papers, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina (hereafter Josephus Daniels Papers), Series 2.2, Folder 79.

Thus, hoping to avoid an intraparty rift, Smith steered clear of the sort of outright declaration urged by Lippmann—until after the nomination and platform were finalized. Then, he abruptly broke his silence on the question and sent a telegram to the delegates at Houston declaring his intent to stand by the platform but simultaneously reiterating his belief in the need for “fundamental changes” in the prohibition law.¹¹⁴⁷ Apparently, Smith acquiesced to Lippmann’s urgings—Franklin Roosevelt would later blame this “fool telegram” on Lippmann and the *New York World*.¹¹⁴⁸ The dilatory tactics of Smith’s representatives may have kept the major actions of the convention amicable, but the telegram did indeed alienate many dry delegates and cause serious problems throughout the campaign. Yet despite such faulty strategy, the Smith forces remained relatively disciplined on the alcohol question, avoiding outright calls for repeal while focusing on the “Jeffersonian” nature of Smith’s position as New York governor; and so while many prohibitionist Democrats were antagonized, figures like Josephus Daniels were given ample cover to remain within the partisan fold.

Another issue on which Smith proposed New York policy writ large was government efficiency—a question of greater consequence in New York but lesser comment in 1928. In a major speech at the Missouri State Fairgrounds in Sedalia, Smith mocked Republican claims of “economy in government” as petty compared to what he considered the enormous waste overseen by the Coolidge administration. He ridiculed Republican boasts about “the young man in charge of the navy store room in Washington who had affected a great saving in the Administration of the Government by going through the wastepaper baskets every night and picking out the pins and the paperclips

¹¹⁴⁷ Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 258.

¹¹⁴⁸ Roosevelt quoted in Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 259.

and the short stubs of pencils and saving them all,” and “the Consul General at Curacao . . . [who] saved \$14 in one year by turning off the electric lights early at night.”¹¹⁴⁹ At the same time, the Democrat skewered federal officials for failing to allocate funds to develop government properties across the country, a condition which led to the unnecessary expenditure of millions of dollars in rent; he cited cases in Brooklyn, Binghamton, Chicago, and Pittsburgh, and claimed that there were “more than one hundred parcels of land spread out through the length and breadth of this country, purchased by the Government for Federal buildings, upon which there has never been a brick laid or a dollar appropriation made to progress them.”¹¹⁵⁰ Smith also decried the lack of government appropriations for necessary projects, blaming federal haggling with the states for delays in Mississippi River flood controls and demanding that “instead of wasting time debating and arguing what this State and that State ought to pay, the whole improvement ought to be financed by the Federal Government itself in the interest of the whole country.”¹¹⁵¹ Similarly, Republican economy was held responsible for miserly funding within the Department of the Interior that had led to horrible neglect of American Indians living on reservations.¹¹⁵²

As he had in New York, Smith proposed that such austerity did not constitute real economy; instead, the adoption of business-like management and common sense reforms (such as developing federal holdings to eliminate the long-term cost of rent) could enable the federal government to provide for the people’s welfare while promoting more efficient administration. The Democratic campaign suggested that “there are endless

¹¹⁴⁹ “Stenographic Report of Gov. Smith’s Address to Democrats at Sedalia Last Night,” *The New York Times*, October 17, 1928, p. 14.

¹¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹¹⁵² Ibid.

anomalies, often serious as well as humorous, in the grouping of activities within departments. . . . The lack of coherence in the departments, due to failure to organize them on the principle of the association of related functions, is accompanied by a scattering of the same kinds of work among numerous, unconnected branches of the administration.”¹¹⁵³ The party’s official *Campaign Book* neatly juxtaposed what it saw as Smith’s position on government economy and that of the Republicans:

The real friends of departmental reorganization are not these cheese-paring sticklers for an economy that is merely negative. Rather they are those who view government in positive terms, seeing what effective governmental service can mean in the lives of ordinary people. It is not accidental, therefore, that the last two Administrations should have seemed so lacking in real seriousness and should have been so demonstrably unable or unwilling to put driving force behind its lip-service to the ideal of reorganized administration.¹¹⁵⁴

It is unsurprising that the argument presented in 1928 paralleled so closely the arguments Smith had made against miserly government and in favor of positive reorganization as governor, for the person charged with compiling the handbook was none other than Belle Moskowitz.¹¹⁵⁵

After the nominee articulated all of this in Missouri, the *Wall Street Journal* expressed indignation at Smith’s “cheap” attempt to “ridicule . . . economy in government.”¹¹⁵⁶ Not content with this rebuff of the Democrat, the *Journal* then objurgated Smith in one of the most patronizing paragraphs of the campaign:

All of us think the more of him that he rose from humble surroundings and made himself a genuine success in politics. . . . But if Mr. Smith rose in the world in so creditable a way, he took a less worthy part of his original surroundings with him. Just as your maid-servant or your office boy sees no sense in economy and nothing reprehensible in waste, each believing that your income is far greater than

¹¹⁵³ *The Campaign Book of the Democratic Party*, pp. 174-175.

¹¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

¹¹⁵⁵ Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, p. 197.

¹¹⁵⁶ “Review and Outlook: Fair Warning,” *The Wall Street Journal*, October 19, 1928, p. 1.

any needs they can imagine, so the politician of the Smith type views the public purse.¹¹⁵⁷

Equally critical of Smith's speech was Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon, who believed that the Democrat "undertook to challenge my good faith and to accuse me of presenting a false picture of the nation."¹¹⁵⁸ Referencing the "scorn and ridicule" Smith had offered to "examples of minor savings," Mellon queried: "Doesn't he realize that these . . . are simply proof that the example set by the President at the top has reached down until it has permeated the whole civil service and revolutionized their attitude toward the expenditure of public funds?"¹¹⁵⁹ Mellon also disputed Smith's characterization of the government's building program, and concluded that "Governor Smith has been led to draw rash conclusions from insufficient data and inadequate study."¹¹⁶⁰ Despite the arrogant flippancy of the *Wall Street Journal*, the debate over economy demonstrated that unlike in New York, Smith's battle for national reorganization would not be characterized by a Democratic monopoly on reasoned arguments. Rather than inspiring a progressive revolt, Smith's criticism of the administration allowed Republicans to hail Mellon's policies and to celebrate his reply as a brilliant discourse on the imperative of continuing the policies of Calvin Coolidge.

¹¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 1.

¹¹⁵⁸ "Mellon Says Smith Distorted Figures," *The New York Times*, October 18, 1928, pp. 1, 20, p. 1.

¹¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 20.

¹¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 20.



Fig. 4.4: Cartoon from the *Los Angeles Times* celebrating Mellon's response to Smith's Sedalia, Missouri speech.¹¹⁶¹

The Religious Question as Entering Wedge

In the midst of all of these policy speeches, the question of Smith's religion retained a clear significance. The governor recognized this, and so he decided to devote much of his September 20 address at Oklahoma City to the Ku Klux Klan and others' opposition to his candidacy on the basis of his Catholicism. A somewhat naïve confidence that the American voter would instinctively look to a candidate's

¹¹⁶¹ Gale, "He Got In The Wrong Mellon Patch," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1928, p. 1.

qualifications and not their ethnicity or religion had always been part of Smith's worldview. He had brushed aside the Klan's taunts in New York, and this posture had been justified by electoral success.¹¹⁶² Even in 1928, the nominee tried literally to laugh off the issue. As his campaign locomotive crept into Oklahoma, Smith and Joseph Proskauer gazed out their window at the fiery crosses that had been erected on a hillside near the tracks in anticipation of the Catholic candidate's arrival. Rather than take the display to heart, he brushed it aside with humor, turning to the Jewish Proskauer and inquiring, "Joe, how did they know you were on this train?"¹¹⁶³

Nevertheless, the Democrat took an uncompromising stand against such bigots during the second speech of his campaign tour. He declared that it was not immigrants or racial or religious minorities who were un-American, but rather that it was the Klansman and his ilk that were "totally ignorant of the history and tradition of this country and its institutions."¹¹⁶⁴ Addressing a series of documents that had been circulated in Kentucky to defame him as immoral, the governor became angry, declaring that the "set of men responsible for the publication of that wicked libel, in my opinion, do not believe in Christ."¹¹⁶⁵

Smith saw addressing the religious question as part of his duty to the nation, believing that he could put it to rest and move on to discuss his reform agenda, proclaiming: "The wicked motive of religious intolerance has driven bigots to attempt to inject these slanders into a political campaign. I here and now drag them into the open and denounce them as a treasonable attack upon the very foundations of American

¹¹⁶² Alfred E. Smith, Remarks at Liberty Hall, Harlem, October 28, 1924, Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 27, Folder 274.

¹¹⁶³ "The Reminiscences of Robert F. Wagner, Jr.," p. 215.

¹¹⁶⁴ Smith, "Oklahoma City," p. 52.

¹¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

liberty. . . . Let the people of this country decide this election upon the great and real issues and upon nothing else.¹¹⁶⁶ Thus, Smith wanted to put the religious issue, which he believed had no place in political debate anyway, permanently behind him, stating that if this happened he could be “confident of the outcome in November.”¹¹⁶⁷

In fact, the candidate’s cheerfulness reflected a gross misjudgment of the political and cultural climate.¹¹⁶⁸ As early as 1926, one Georgia Grand Wizard had promised: “We will march in 1928, chanting a funeral dirge, carrying a coffin on which will be inscribed: ‘Here lie the political remains of Al Smith.’”¹¹⁶⁹ The wizard’s kinsmen and like-minded Americans did not disappoint. Reminiscing on the events of 1928, Eleanor Roosevelt recalled that “if I needed anything to show me what prejudice can do to the intelligence of human beings, that campaign was the best lesson I could have had.”¹¹⁷⁰

I

In 1928, Alabama Democrat Thomas Heflin, who had already denounced Smith and the Pope on the floor of the United States Senate, embarked on a nationwide speaking tour, partially funded by the KKK.¹¹⁷¹ In North Carolina, Governor Angus McLean lamented that opposition to Smith in his state was “based on the fact that he is a

¹¹⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 55, 58.

¹¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 59.

¹¹⁶⁸ For a classic consideration of the religious question in the 1928 campaign, see Moore, *A Catholic Runs for President: The Campaign of 1928*.

¹¹⁶⁹ “Vengeful,” *Time*, December 6, 1926.

¹¹⁷⁰ Eleanor Roosevelt, *This I Remember* (New York: Harper, 1949), p. 39.

¹¹⁷¹ “Heflin Assails Smith, Edge Defends Governor,” *The Washington Post*, March 3, 1927, p. 4; “Heflin Issues Defi To Party In Senate On Catholic Issue,” *The Washington Post*, January 24, 1928, pp. 1, 10; “Papal Red In President Room, Heflin Charges,” *The Washington Post*, May 18, 1928, p. 5; “Heflin, Clad in Papal Hues, Stirs Smith Row in Senate,” *The Washington Post*, May 24, 1928, pp. 1, 10; Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism*, p. 204; “Heflin Predicts Hoover Will Win By 10,000,000,” *The Boston Globe*, September 11, 1928, p. 13.

Roman Catholic.”¹¹⁷² In Arkansas, the president of Central College had his school’s funding discontinued by “the bigoted leaders of my church in Arkansas—the Baptist Church,” as retribution for his active support of the Catholic Smith.¹¹⁷³ The Anti-Saloon League distributed literature that not only alleged Smith drank “from four to eight ‘cocktails’ a day,” but also made thinly veiled allusions to the religious question—describing the looming threat of “THE DOWNFALL OF CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION,” the support of Smith among “aliens,” and the opposition to the Democrat by “Evangelical Churches,” while explicitly denouncing DNC chairman John Raskob’s Catholicism and his membership in the Knights of Columbus.¹¹⁷⁴

The “fraternal” (*i.e.* Klan-published) periodical *Fellowship Forum* “regularly . . . devoted eight of its ten pages to violent, blatant and inaccurate attacks on Al Smith, the Pope and rum,” featuring headlines like “‘Drunk Negro Boosting Smith,’ ‘Kissing Pope’s Ring Insult to Flag,’ [and] ‘Tirades on Religion and Liquor by Smith in West Turn Voters in Disgust.’”¹¹⁷⁵ During the campaign, *Fellowship Forum* “won more circulation and showed a greater increase in gross revenue than any other U.S. publication.”¹¹⁷⁶ Indeed, Kenneth T. Jackson has argued that Smith’s candidacy was a “temporary godsend for the Invisible Empire,” helping to revivify the Klan and enabling it to boast “that it had nailed ‘Smith’s political hide to the Klan’s barn door.’”¹¹⁷⁷

¹¹⁷² M’Clean Urges State to Give Vote to Smith,” *The Charlotte Observer*, October 4, 1928, p. 1

¹¹⁷³ Charles H. Brough to John J. Raskob, November 26, 1928, John J. Raskob Papers, Hagley Museum, Wilmington, Delaware (hereafter, John J. Raskob Papers), File 602, Box 1.

¹¹⁷⁴ “The Present Crisis,” Pamphlet of the West Virginia Anti-Saloon League, 1928; Smith, “Oklahoma City,” p. 55.

¹¹⁷⁵ “After All is Said,” *Time*, November 12, 1928.

¹¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷⁷ Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (New York: Oxford, 1967), p. 252. Historian John Higham agreed with this assessment, noting that “the anti-Catholic spirit that the order embodied flared up violently again in the election of 1928, when the Democratic candidate, Al Smith, seemed almost the Pope incarnate.” Ultimately, however, “that campaign failed to revive an organized



Fig. 4.5: Senator J. Thomas Heflin, Alabama Democrat and leading anti-Smith spellbinder.¹¹⁷⁸

A flyer entitled “Appointments made by Gov. Al. Smith” was circulated across the country, falsely asserting that of twenty-one judicial appointments made by Smith, “ONLY 21 Were Roman Catholics.”¹¹⁷⁹ As a result, Smith’s campaign was inundated with letters requesting “a certified list of appointees” and verification of the religious affiliations of each Smith hire.¹¹⁸⁰ Acquiescing, the Democratic National Committee

nativist movement.” John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), p. 329.

¹¹⁷⁸ Harris & Ewing, “HEFLIN, J. THOMAS. SENATOR,” taken between 1920 and 1931, Harris & Ewing Collection, Library of Congress.

¹¹⁷⁹ “Appointments Made By Gov. Al. Smith,” Robert Moses Papers, Box 4, Folder: “National Campaign 1928.”

¹¹⁸⁰ E.g.: Arthur M. Jackson to Robert Moses, September 24, 1928; Louis Mahloch to Robert Moses, September 6, 1927 [*sic*]; John H. Dillard to Robert Moses, September 27, 1928; Mrs. Elmer K. Hoch to Robert Moses, September 7, 1928; Robert Grady Johnson to Robert Moses, July 13, 1928; James T.

published a pamphlet in September providing the requested statistics, and distributed several printings-worth of the document in September and October. There was no similar flood of letters inquiring about the governor's stance on administrative reform or water power.

These concerns were not quarantined among anonymous bigots or public clowns like Thomas Heflin. In March, 1927, after a discussion with Idaho Republican senator William Borah, Walter Lippmann wrote Al Smith that "in spite of the decline of the organized power of the Klan . . . there has been a very strong development in the last few months, of fear, on the part of progressive and on the whole tolerant-minded people about the political power of the Catholic Church."¹¹⁸¹ Hostility over the candidate's faith and related cultural questions was evident even among social welfare progressives. One letter, sent from a self-professed progressive woman to Eleanor Roosevelt, explained why the writer could not support Smith: "You discreetly refrain from mentioning [Smith's] stand on Immigration. Naturally he would like to let down the bars and permit more of the same kind of people to come in as are in large part supporting him now, regardless of the fact that we have not half-way assimilated those already here."¹¹⁸² She went on to criticize "those men whose names appear on your stationary for the most part they are Catholics and Jews, who would at any time, it is evident, support one of Smith's type . . . for the sake of opposing what to them is anathema, the 'Old Americans' of the United

O'Neill to George B. Graves, July 24, 1928; L.H. McGehee to Robert Moses, August 28, 1928; Rob't A. Shivers to Robert Moses, September 24, 1928; John E. V. Jasper to Robert Moses, September 20, 1928; Robert Moses Papers, Box 4, Folder: "National Campaign 1928."

¹¹⁸¹ Walter Lippmann to Alfred E. Smith, March 21, 1927, Walter Lippmann Papers, Reel 29, Box 30, Folder 1137. Borah had suggested that such fears were aroused by the increasing assertiveness of the Knights of Columbus on questions of foreign policy.

¹¹⁸² Louise B. Hill to "The Progressive League for Alfred E. Smith," November 1, 1928, Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, Box 6, Folder 5.

States.”¹¹⁸³ A welfare advocate from New Orleans lamented to Lillian Wald that “even among social workers, who ought to know better, Smith’s remarkable record in social legislation, and his unquestioned ability, courage and honesty, seem to go for naught as against his church affiliation.”¹¹⁸⁴ Wald herself aired similar frustrations in her own correspondences with fellow settlement activists.¹¹⁸⁵ She did so with good reason: one social worker had attacked Wald for supporting the Democrat since “wherever the Catholic Church rules, there is darkness, superstition, and deterioration,” while another, who called Smith “a cheap politician,” accused her of “prostitut[ing]” herself on his behalf.¹¹⁸⁶

These shameful episodes and others like them have led scholars to conclude that Smith’s religion caused a backlash that bifurcated the electorate Catholic against Protestant and produced a result neatly understood through the question of religion. Such a framework may be convenient, but it is also far too simplistic to account for the realities of the contest. The first hint of this is contained in the speech renowned for Smith’s denunciation of the Klan. At Oklahoma City, the candidate spent nearly as many pages dealing with his progressive record as governor of New York as he did decrying bigotry. Of equal significance, the issues which he chose to use as evidence of his executive prowess—water power, administrative reorganization, labor reforms, and social welfare—were the issues on which he was seeking to differentiate himself from Herbert Hoover. Thus the Oklahoma City address demonstrates the multifaceted nature of Smith’s campaign in a way that challenges the literature’s singular focus on religion. It is

¹¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹¹⁸⁴ David Fichman to Lillian Wald, October 11, 1928, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 11.

¹¹⁸⁵ Lillian Wald to Mary McDonald, September 14, 1928, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 3.

¹¹⁸⁶ Chambers, *Seedtime for Reform*, p. 141.

clear that Smith's denomination cost him votes—and that it helped attract other votes. But looking at the positive side of this equation—examining those voters who were drawn to Smith because of his Catholicism—demonstrates just how complicated the issues of the election really were, and invites a more profound consideration of the complex motives of American voters.

II

As the conventional narrative goes, Smith, a working-class urbanite and grandson of immigrants who was the first Roman Catholic to secure a major-party nomination for the presidency, became himself the central issue of the campaign. Formerly loyal Democrats, especially in the South, turned away from this representative of the “new Americans,” while many of those new Americans became enthusiastic supporters of the New York governor.¹¹⁸⁷ While this traditional history contains many elements of truth, it masks the authentic, discernible ideological differences between Smith and Hoover. It also masks the fact that the new Democrats of 1928, the urban ethnic workers who were voting as a bloc for Alfred E. Smith, were fully aware of his progressive approach to economic and social welfare issues, and that these voters supported Smith based not only on their biographical similarities, but also based on a developing political ideology. The

¹¹⁸⁷ Samuel J. Eldersveld, “The Influence of Metropolitan Party Pluralities In Presidential Elections Since 1920: A Study of Twelve Key Cities,” *The American Political Science Review*, 43:6 (December, 1949), pp. 1189-1206; Key, “A Theory of Critical Elections”; Duncan MacRae, Jr., and James A. Meldrum, “Critical Elections in Illinois: 1888-1958,” *The American Political Science Review*, 54:3 (September, 1960), pp. 669-683; Gerald Pomper, “Classification of Presidential Elections,” *The Journal of Politics*, 29:3 (August, 1967), pp. 535-566; Carl N. Degler, “American Political Parties and the Rise of the City: An Interpretation,” *The Journal of American History*, 51:1 (June, 1964), pp. 41-59; John M. Allswang, *A House for All Peoples: Ethnic Politics in Chicago 1890-1936* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, 1971); Lubell, *The Future of American Politics*, p. 36.

implications of this point are profound: if urban ethnic workers were voting for Smith based not exclusively on ethnocultural issues but also on economic and social concerns, then the 1928 election should be viewed as one in which a new coalition began to develop around principles that would inform the New Deal and provide the basis of Democratic policy for decades. It would certainly be going too far to say that New Deal ideology *per se* was forged in the battles of 1928. More appropriately, it must be acknowledged that in the midst of the cultural struggles of that year, the Smith campaign would, as Frances Perkins prophesied, “plant the seed of a set of ideas all over the country.”¹¹⁸⁸

Importantly, those who were antagonized by the 1920s march toward “one-hundred percent Americanism” were themselves diverse; southern and eastern European Jews and Catholics, Irish Catholics, and African-Americans had very little in common besides their enemies. While these groups were often bitter toward one another, they did harbor similar resentments toward a society that seemed quite willing to exclude them from the mainstream. Historian J. Joseph Huthmacher described the phenomenon succinctly: “True, there were many religious and ethnic differences among the component elements of the lower class, which often resulted in prejudice and violence. But each of these elements resented the Old Stock’s contention that all of them were equally inferior to the ‘real Americans’ of Yankee-Protestant heritage.”¹¹⁸⁹

Nevertheless, there is nothing to suggest that by the late 1920s there was any sort of alliance on the horizon. There were no obvious signs that these diverse groups would coalesce behind Alfred E. Smith. And yet that is precisely what occurred. The

¹¹⁸⁸ Frances Perkins Oral History, Book II, pp. 628.

¹¹⁸⁹ Huthmacher, “Urban Liberalism and the Age of Reform,” p. 239.

Democracy's opening wedge with these voters was the cultural assault being leveled against their nominee, and the party's allies in the press made the most of this line of attack.

III

One favored theme of pro-Smith newspapers was the opposition to their candidate by the Ku Klux Klan.¹¹⁹⁰ This was reiterated time and again to urban ethnic audiences—as when readers of the rabidly Democratic *New York World*, a leading paper among that city's working classes, were told of a thwarted Klan plot to march on the Democratic convention in Houston in a desperate attempt to deny Smith the nomination.¹¹⁹¹ Meanwhile, Smith's speeches denouncing the Klan, particularly those delivered at Oklahoma City and Baltimore, were lauded in front page tributes and reprinted in full.¹¹⁹²

Some articles went further—asserting that Hoover's reticence regarding the Klan, and the antics of Hoover lieutenants like Mabel Walker Willebrandt and Horace Mann—both reputed to be tied to scurrilous anti-Smith propaganda—demonstrated that the Republicans and perhaps even their nominee were party to the “whispering

¹¹⁹⁰ “Drys and Klans In Bitter Fight on Al Smith,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, September 8, 1928.”

¹¹⁹¹ “Klan Men Plotted March on Houston to Defeat Smith,” *The New York World*, October 17, 1928, p. 17 (Second edition p. 1).

¹¹⁹² Ernest K. Lindley, “Smith Rips Dry League And Klan in Baltimore; 90,000 Hear His Speech,” *The New York World*, October 30, 1928, pp. 1, 4; “Smith Opens Fire on Intolerance in Oklahoma Speech,” *The Philadelphia Record*, September 21, 1928, pp. 1, 4; “Smith Flays Klan Charging Alliance With G.O.P. Chiefs,” *The Philadelphia Record*, October 30, 1928, p. 1; Henry Suydam, “Smith's Denunciation of Bigots in Klan Zone is Hailed For Courage,” *The Brooklyn Eagle*, September 21, 1928, p. 1; “24,000 Cheer Smith's Attack on Klan and Dry League as ‘Allies’ of G.O.P.,” *The Brooklyn Eagle*, November 4, 1928, p. 1; “Smith Smashes Ku Klux Klan In Talk Here,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, November 3, 1928, p. 1; “Governor Smith Hits Bigotry And Intolerance In Oklahoma Speech,” *The New York Negro World*, September 29, 1928, p. 4.

campaign.”¹¹⁹³ Numerous political cartoons made the same point.¹¹⁹⁴ One that appeared on the front page of the *Baltimore Afro-American* entitled “Where They Roost” represented Al Smith as a bird nesting with “Religious Freedom” and “Personal Liberty,” while Hoover nested with “Bigotry,” “Race Prejudice,” and the “Ku Klux Klan.”¹¹⁹⁵

Official Democratic rhetoric encouraged such connections. At Ridgefield Park, New Jersey, Brooklyn congressman Loring Black accused the Republicans of participating in the campaign of bigotry.¹¹⁹⁶ A full-page Democratic advertisement that ran in several cities pictured the tomb of the Unknown Soldier and queried: “Who Asked His Religion?” As if this icon were not enough, the ad included an excerpt from a speech by New York mayor Jimmy Walker that had been delivered at Newark in which the mayor referenced the anonymous martyr, suggesting with righteous indignation that “no one knew what color he was, and no one knew where he went to church.”¹¹⁹⁷ “Beau James” also took aim at Hoover, slyly remarking that he did not “feel like charging the Republican candidate with the responsibility of the whispering, bigoted campaign that is carried in contradiction of the Declaration of Independence, but there are men in this country who would refuse to be President if they got it with that kind of vote.”¹¹⁹⁸ The Unknown Soldier was also invoked by Democrats in Boston, where once and future

¹¹⁹³ “Hoover Silent on Intolerance Charge By Smith,” *The Brooklyn Eagle*, September 21, 1928, p. 1; “Willebrandt Is At It Once More; ‘Smith No Sport,’” *The Brooklyn Citizen*, October 8, 1928, p. 1; “McDonald Raps Hoover as KKK and Lilly White,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, August 4, 1928, p. 1; “Hoover Chief Now Playing With Ku Klux,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, August 11, 1928, p. 1; “GOP Guilty of Dastard Crime—Kelly Miller,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, October 13, 1928, p. 1; “Goose Neck Bill Scores Hoover,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, October 13, 1928, p. 2; “Think G.O.P. Has Put \$100,000 In Klan Newspaper,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, October 20, 1928, p. 3; “To The Polls For Smith!” *The New York Negro World*, November 3, 1928, p. 4.

¹¹⁹⁴ *E.g.*: “Down Among the Dreamy Hills of Tennessee,” *The Baltimore Sun*, October 8, 1928, p. 8.

¹¹⁹⁵ Fred B. Watson, “Where They Roost,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, October 20, 1928, p. 1.

¹¹⁹⁶ “Black Links G.O.P. With Bigotry and Klan in Address,” *The Brooklyn Eagle*, September 30, 1928, p. 24.

¹¹⁹⁷ “Who Asked His Religion?” *The Brooklyn Eagle*, October 24, 1928, p. 10.

¹¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

mayor James Michael Curley displayed a poster at his headquarters with an image of the monument and the sardonic caption: “What a tragedy if we should learn he was a Jew, Catholic or a Negro.”¹¹⁹⁹ A Democratic ad appearing in Marcus Garvey’s *New York Negro World* admonished readers: “Smash Republican Deal With The Ku Klux Klan Vote Right This Year.”¹²⁰⁰

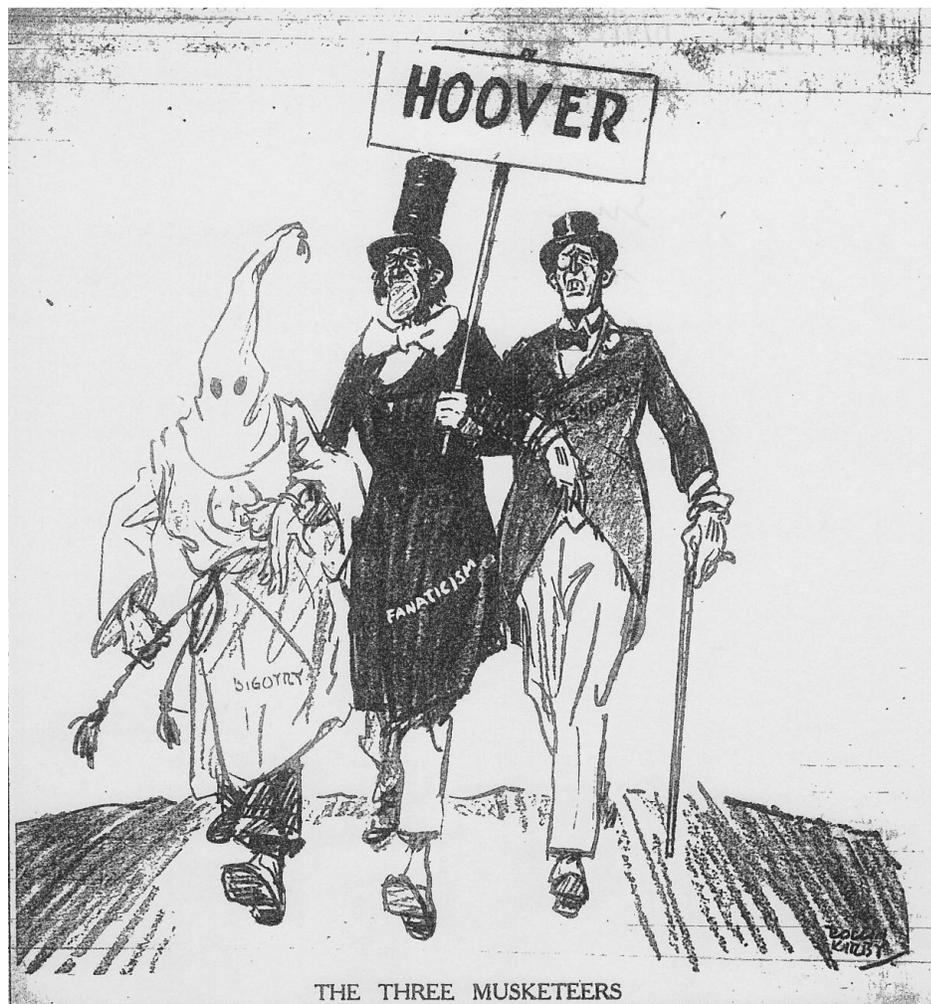


Fig. 4.6: Anti-Hoover cartoon from the *New York World* by Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Rollin Kirby, encouraging readers to associate the GOP with anti-Smith bigotry.¹²⁰¹

¹¹⁹⁹ Huthmacher, *Massachusetts People and Politics*, p. 166.

¹²⁰⁰ “Smash Republican Deal With The Ku Klux Klan Vote Right This Year,” *The New York Negro World*, November 3, 1928, p. 5.

¹²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10. Kirby won three Pulitzer Prizes for editorial cartooning, in 1922, 1925, and 1929. The last of these was for his 1928 cartoon “Tammany,” which used figures from Republican scandals to mock the

It is significant that this last advertisement appeared in an African American newspaper, and that many similar articles and cartoons did as well. The nebulous community that began to materialize in 1928 in response to the Smith candidacy and the constricted view of Americanism espoused by allies of the Republican campaign was not restricted to those who were of the specific ethnic or religious group of the Democratic nominee. Rather, in a crucial development, recent immigrants, Catholics, Jews, and many African Americans, began to see each other as similarly under assault and thus discovered an impetus for alliance. The important development of 1928 was not that minority groups realized they were threatened by a movement to homogenize American society under Anglo-Saxon hegemony—this had been going on for generations; what mattered was that these groups all saw in the struggles against bigotry of the Democratic candidate an analogy to their own cultural battles, and with encouragement from the Democrats and their allies in the press they developed a sense of coalition, in part as a unified response to such attacks.

When the *Baltimore Afro-American* announced in a banner headline that “Religious Intolerance Is Biggest Campaign Issue,” it followed with the hopeful declaration “RACE QUESTION IS NEXT,” and reprinted a statement from the *Kansas City Call* that editorialized, “to our way of thinking, the denunciation [of the KKK by Smith at Oklahoma City] was as momentous as Lincoln’s question to Stephen A. Douglass [sic].”¹²⁰² The *Chicago Defender* supported Smith, in part, because the

incumbent party’s indignation toward the corruption of the New York Democratic machine. S. L. Harrison, *Cavalcade of Journalists 1900-2000, Chroniclers of an American Century* (Miami, FL: Wolf Den Books, 2002), pp. 46-47; The Pulitzer Prizes Board [Web site], “1929 Winners,” Site address: <http://www.pulitzer.org/awards/1929>.

¹²⁰² “Religious Intolerance is Biggest Campaign Issue,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, October 6, 1928, p. 4.

Catholic candidate, like blacks, was an enemy of the Klan.¹²⁰³ In fact, at least eighteen typically Republican black newspapers across the country, including leading publications like the *Defender* and the *Afro-American*, strongly endorsed Al Smith.¹²⁰⁴

Not only black publications, but their readers, responding on the editorial pages, pronounced notions of a community of interest among ethnic, religious, and racial minorities. One reader from St. Louis wrote the *Afro-American* that “the Ku Klux Klan has put us with the Catholics and they will have to defend us if things go on as they have. . . . Please do all you can to help elect Smith.”¹²⁰⁵ A Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, man reminded his fellow *Afro* readers that the “Preamble to the Constitution does not say ‘We The Protestants,’ . . . Catholics are people.”¹²⁰⁶ The ambivalent *St. Louis Argus* editorialized that “The Klan is opposed to the Catholics, Jews or Negroes holding public office. Let the real Americans rise up and down such a doctrine.”¹²⁰⁷ A New York City man meditated cheerfully in the *Afro-American*:

*The farmers will be satisfied
The Gentile and the Jew.
Prosperity will be nation-wide.
For every Negro too.
And everyone that’s in this land,
Will feel his vote well-spent,
For we are all going hand in hand—
Smith is our next President.*¹²⁰⁸

¹²⁰³ Allswang, *A House for All Peoples*, p. 133; Harold F. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians: The Rise of Negro Politics in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1935), p. 30; Samuel O’Dell, “Blacks, the Democratic Party, and the Presidential Election of 1928: A Mild Rejoinder,” *Phylon*, 48:1 (1st Quarter, 1987), pp. 1-11, p. 7.

¹²⁰⁴ O’Dell, “Blacks, the Democratic Party, and the Presidential Election of 1928: A Mild Rejoinder,” p. 7; Huthmacher, *Massachusetts People and Politics*, p. 173.

¹²⁰⁵ Mrs. J. A. Robinson, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, November 3, 1928, p. 6.

¹²⁰⁶ Robert Jackson, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, November 3, 1928, p. 6.

¹²⁰⁷ Editorial, “Religious and Racial Intolerance,” *The St. Louis Argus*, September 21, 1928, p. 8.

¹²⁰⁸ Lloyd Berry, “Letter to the Editor: ‘Al’ of Mine,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, November 3, 1928, p. 6.

Like mayors Curley and Walker, who alluded to African-Americans and Jews as well as their Catholic co-communicants in attacking the Republicans, the Polish-language *Dziennik Chicagoski* warned its mostly Catholic readers that Republicans were “warring against ‘all Catholics, foreigners and Negroes.’”¹²⁰⁹ Similarly to these Irish and Slavic Catholics, Jewish leaders and publications began to adopt a coalitionist posture in the midst of the 1928 struggle. At a New York luncheon featuring Democratic gubernatorial nominee Franklin D. Roosevelt, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise called for “a great uprising of the American people to smite the bigots and fanatics who dare to say to 20,000,000 loyal American citizens, ‘Not one of you is fit and qualified, not one of you shall be trusted by us to be President of the United States of America!’”¹²¹⁰ Rabbi Wise played a prominent role in boosting Smith on such terms within American Jewry—for example, a sermon he gave against the Republican campaign at Carnegie Hall was reprinted in the Cincinnati *American Israelite* and accounted for the most prominent election coverage of the entire season in that publication. In it Wise opined that “if America is to mean to me nothing more than the perpetuation in the Western World of the century old phobias and fanaticisms of the past, then is America not worth while.”¹²¹¹ Adopting a similar line, the Chicago *Jewish Courier* scolded Herbert Hoover for not condemning those who used religion against the Catholic candidate.¹²¹²

Jews and African-Americans began to see the assault on Smith’s Catholicism as an analogue to their own disadvantaged social position. Outsiders who aspired to

¹²⁰⁹ Allswang, *A House For All Peoples*, p. 135.

¹²¹⁰ “Roosevelt Denies Tariff is an Issue,” *The New York Times*, October 17, 1928, p. 19; “Rabbi Wise Fears New Civil Strife,” *The New York World*, October 17, 1928, p. 7.

¹²¹¹ “Fair Play and Foul Methods in American Political Life,” *The Cincinnati American Israelite*, October 4, 1928, p. 1.

¹²¹² Allswang, *A House for All Peoples*, p. 136.

mainstream acceptance could relate naturally to the Democrat's travails. Historian Oscar Handlin, thirteen at the time, later recalled of Smith: "I heard a lot of talk about the religious issue, and I knew his middle name was Emanuel—I thought he was Jewish."¹²¹³

Meanwhile, Catholic ethnic groups began to reach out to these non-Catholic minorities in order to develop a sense of shared purpose. In New York, where the Democrats had already mastered such politics, Smith campaign events reflected such diversity. Brooklyn's largest Columbus Day celebration, hosted by Deputy Street Cleaning Commissioner Michael Laura, erupted into a Smith-for-President rally, prompted by speeches from a diverse set of dignitaries, including Monsignor Alfonso Arcese, a prominent Italian Catholic priest; John H. McCooey, the Irish head of the Kings County Democratic machine; Frank M. Ferrari, president of Manhattan's Italian Hospital; and Herbert Lehman, the Jewish Democratic nominee for lieutenant governor of New York.¹²¹⁴ A Democratic rally for "up-town Italians" held at New York's Central Opera House featured Irish, Italian, and Jewish speakers, and even threw in a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant for good measure—gubernatorial nominee Franklin Delano Roosevelt.¹²¹⁵

Nationally, coalitionist sentiment was encouraged by the Democratic Party and facilitated by the Democratic press. But if ethnic and religious questions were an effective opening wedge, they were not enough to establish a durable coalition among this polyglot confederacy of the culturally disfranchised. Tirades against Yankee snobbery, southern racism, and Protestant fanaticism only told these groups what they

¹²¹³ Personal Interview, August 15, 2009.

¹²¹⁴ "Brooklyn Observes Columbus Day With Many Celebrations," *The Brooklyn Eagle*, October 13, 1928, p. 3.

¹²¹⁵ "Walker and Olvany Will Address Uptown Italians," *The Bronx and Manhattan Home News*, October 31, 1928, p. 7.

were against; recognition of their similar position in American economic life facilitated the development of an affirmative sense of community among these diverse members of America's working class.

IV

In September, the *Brooklyn Eagle* reminded its readers that Herbert Hoover, whose fortune was "shrouded in mystery," would be the first millionaire president should he achieve election in November.¹²¹⁶ Contrastingly, the Democratic *Philadelphia Record* described how Smith was beloved by even the domestic workers at the New York governor's mansion, where his rise to prominence had apparently not diminished his working-class humanity.¹²¹⁷ Similarly, the *Record* published the findings of a psychologist who had determined Smith to be the American politician with the closest affinity to the common man since Abraham Lincoln, while Hoover was found to be "out of touch."¹²¹⁸ The *Negro World* repeatedly reminded the public that Smith was "a man from the people," and beckoned its readers "To the polls for 'The Happy Warrior,' the truckman's son!"¹²¹⁹

Such strategically placed biographical morsels held a narrow currency in a decade when the cult of wealth had taken deep root in American society—they were of use only within a specific community: among the working class. The constant repetition of such

¹²¹⁶ Basil Manly, "Hoover, if He Is Elected, Will Be First Millionaire to Occupy White House," *The Brooklyn Eagle*, September 24, 1928, p. 3.

¹²¹⁷ "Smith is Hero To Servants of Household Staff," *The Philadelphia Record*, October 28, 1928, p. 9.

¹²¹⁸ "Smith Closest to People Since Lincoln, Rooted in Soil, Says Psychologist," *The Philadelphia Record*, November 3, 1928, p. 16.

¹²¹⁹ "Marcus Garvey States Why He is For Smith And Against Hoover," *The New York Negro World*, September 29, 1928, p. 4; "Every Negro With A Ballot Must Vote For Al Smith," *The New York Negro World*, October 20, 1928, p. 1;

background information uncloaks the Democratic alliance-building strategy. More significantly, the relentless cataloging of Smith's social welfare and labor achievements in New York, as well as his similar agenda for the nation, both by the Democratic campaign and their allies in the media, demonstrates that economics, along with cultural tolerance, would form the basis for this nascent coalition.

Democratic rhetoric—especially the speeches of Al Smith himself—often focused on the concerns of the working class.¹²²⁰ These speeches were disseminated to workers by the Democratic press, who vigorously extolled Smith's positions on labor issues. Hoover meanwhile was painted as an enemy of the labor movement and workers more broadly—a disgusted *Philadelphia Record*, for example, angrily alerted its readers that “brushing aside a custom of Presidential candidates declaring their views of labor [on Labor Day], Herbert Hoover rested again today in the quiet of his home.”¹²²¹ Claims of Republican prosperity were challenged in political cartoons that highlighted the plight of textile workers, miners, and farmers in a manner paralleling the speeches of Smith and other Democratic orators.¹²²²

Democratic newspapers emphasized Smith's support for government owned and operated hydroelectric plants as an issue that would profoundly benefit workers—and one

¹²²⁰ E.g.: “Speech of Senator Robert F. Wagner,” March 5, 1928, in *Remarks from the Congressional Record of Senator Robert F. Wagner, 70th Congress*, pp. 4067-4075, Robert F. Wagner Papers, Box 106, Book, “70th Congress”; *The Campaign Book of the Democratic Party*, p. 134; Smith, “Newark,” pp. 251-268; Smith, “Boston,” *Campaign Addresses*, pp. 203-218; “Robinson Pledges Labor Aid,” *The Charlotte Observer*, September 4, 1928, p. 6.

¹²²¹ “Hoover Hovers Close to Home for Labor Day,” *The Philadelphia Record*, September 4, 1928, p. 18.

¹²²² “They Know Different,” *The Philadelphia Record*, November 2, 1928, p. 8; “Where's The Smoke From The Chimneys, Mr. Hoover?” *The New York World*, October 16, 1928; “Giving Him a Smell,” *The Baltimore Sun*, October 16, 1928, p. 14.

which clearly distinguished the Democrat from his Republican rival.¹²²³ The *Brooklyn Eagle* declared this to be “the first time since 1912 that a great economic issue has been seriously debated in a national campaign,” and publications left no ambiguity as to what was at stake for workers.¹²²⁴ “Billions” would be saved by rank-and-file consumers under the Smith plan, Philadelphians were told.¹²²⁵ “Hoover is for the power trust,” the *Negro World* summarized; “Smith has renounced this giant economic threat to the poor man in terms which none may misunderstand.”¹²²⁶ Democratic newspapers went wild when George Norris endorsed Smith and his power plan; and were aroused further by Smith’s caustic rejoinder to Hoover’s “state socialism” charge, reprinting the Boston address verbatim and dismissing the Republican critique as a ridiculous “straw man.”¹²²⁷ The Democratic press used the sharp partisan differences over water power to demonstrate their candidate’s kinship with the worker and his sympathy with their daily struggles.

¹²²³ Henry Suydam, “Smith In Fighting Speech Charges Hoover Gave Aid To Power Propagandists,” *The Brooklyn Eagle*, September 23, 1928, p. 1; “Gov. Smith Links Hoover With Huge Waterpower Trust,” *The Philadelphia Record*, September 23, 1928, p. 1.

¹²²⁴ Basil Manley, “Smith Fight With Hoover Looms in Bold Stand By Democrat on Water Power,” *The Brooklyn Eagle*, August 23, 1928. p. 3.

¹²²⁵ Albert Parsons Sachs, “Smith Would Save Billions To Consumers of Electricity By His Water-Power Plan,” *The Philadelphia Record*, October 28, 1928, p. 7.

¹²²⁶ “To The Polls For Smith,” *The New York Negro World*, November 3, 1928, p. 1.

¹²²⁷ “Norris Supports Smith; Strikes At Hoover on Power,” *The New York World*, October 25, 1928, p. 1; “Out Into The Open Air,” *The New York World*, October 25, 1928, p. 14; “Carry On!” *The Philadelphia Record*, October 29, 1928, p. 8; “Senator Norris Attacks Hoover for Silence on ‘Water Power Trust’,” *The New York World*, October 28, 1928, p. 22; Charles Michelson, “Smith Smites Hoover For Cry of ‘Socialism,’ Boston Wild Over Him,” *The New York World*, October 25, 1928, p. 1; “Smith Sees Smoke Screen of Power Trust in Hoover’s ‘Socialism’ Cry,” *The New York World*, October 25, 1928, p. 2; “Governor Nails Story Of Socialism,” *The Brooklyn Citizen*, October 25, 1928, p. 1; “Government Ownership Of Power Plants Hit By Hoover,” *The Philadelphia Record*, October 23, 1928, p. 1; “At Last—An Issue!” *The Baltimore Sun*, October 24, 1928, p. 12; “Herbie, I Think WE Made A Mistake, When YOU Said Somethin’ In New York,” *The Baltimore Sun*, October 25, 1928, p. 1; “A-HA!! Another Straw Man!” *Brooklyn Citizen*, October 25, 1928, p. 1; “That Boogey Man Will Get You If You Don’t Watch Out,” *The Philadelphia Record*, October 24, 1928, p. 8.

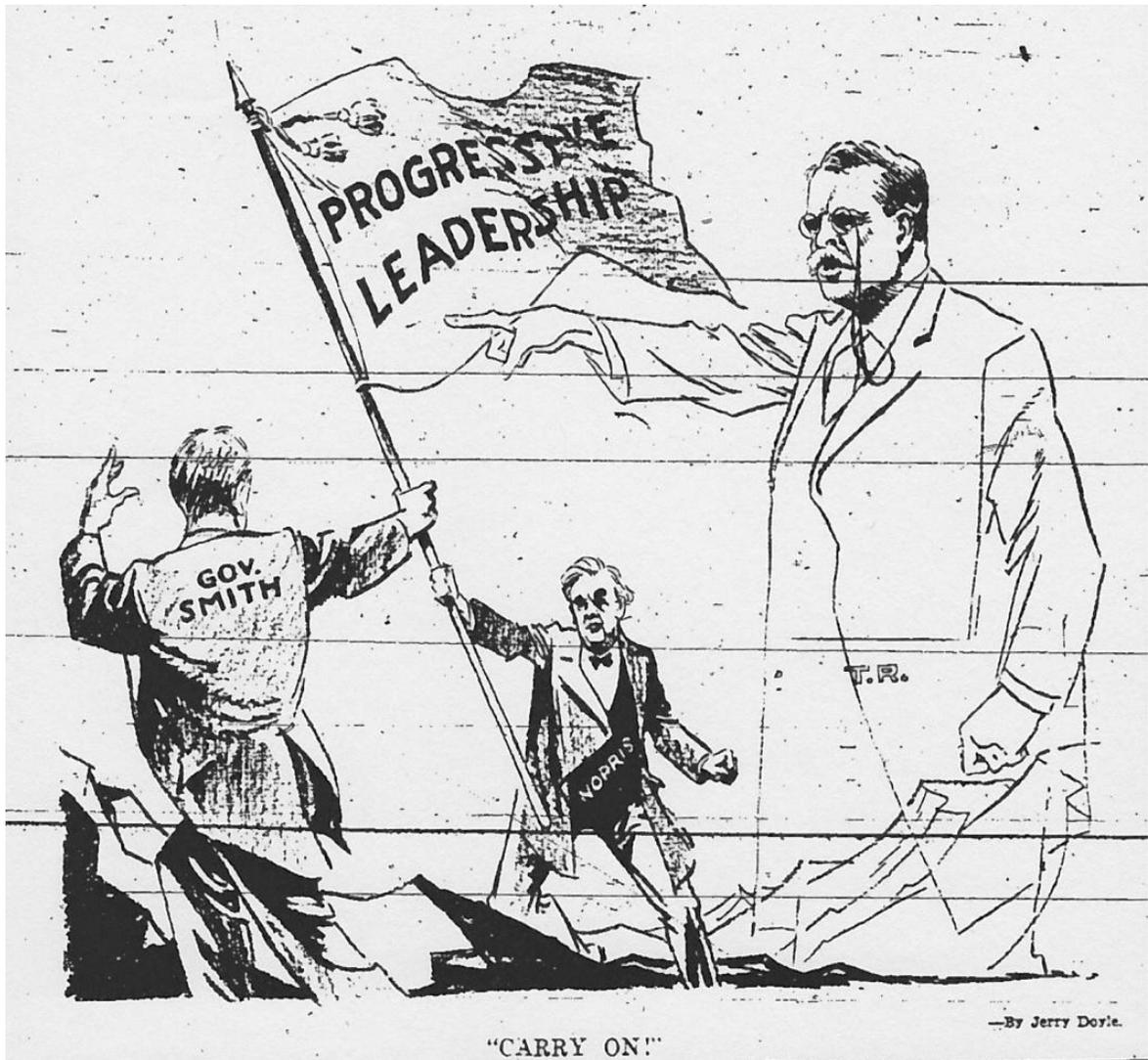


Fig. 4.7: A cartoon from the *Philadelphia Record* celebrating George Norris' endorsement of Smith as an affirmation of the New Yorker's ties to the Progressive tradition.¹²²⁸

Smith's support for social welfare programs and his record as a national leader on such questions was routinely lauded. While the Democrats reached out to non-Catholic minority groups such as Jews and African-Americans by emphasizing Smith's appeals for tolerance, his social welfare record as governor was also highlighted—adding an important class dynamic to these cultural entreaties. Why should Philadelphia's Jews support the Democratic nominee? asked one advertisement. "Because he stands for (1)

¹²²⁸ Jerry Doyle, "Carry On!" *The Philadelphia Record*, October 29, 1928, p. 8.

Constructive, broad, social service legislation as evidenced by his splendid record of achievement as Governor of New York State,” and “(2) Absolute elimination of the spirit of bigotry, intolerance and snobbishness.”¹²²⁹ Similarly, an ad by the “Smith for President Democratic Colored League of Maryland” appearing in the *Afro-American* gave a list of seven reasons “Why New York Negroes Favor Al Smith,” including his housing program, his dramatic increase in appropriations for public education, his widow’s pension program, and his advocacy of minimum wages and employment standards for women and children.¹²³⁰ The *Negro World* saw these policies as proof that Smith was a man of “broad humanitarian sympathies,” and dubbed him “the symbol of liberalism and Christian charity.”¹²³¹ The cartoon in the *Afro-American* that had placed Al Smith alongside freedom and liberty included another bird in his roost: “industrial democracy.”¹²³²

These genuine policy differences on economic questions like labor rights, public power, and social welfare, helped feed the broader argument of the Democrats and their allies that, as Marcus Garvey wrote, “Smith is a man from the people; Smith is a man who has sprung from the common people, he knows their wants and their heart-beats and their pulse. Hoover has been pampered by the monopolist class; he is himself a millionaire; he can only see American politics and American power from the capitalist point of view.”¹²³³ On election eve, a page one editorial in the *Negro World* proclaimed:

¹²²⁹ “Give-Work-and-Vote For Alfred E. Smith,” *The Jewish Exponent*, October 19, 1928, p. 9.

¹²³⁰ “Why New York Negroes Favor Alfred E. Smith,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, September 1, 1928, p. 10.

¹²³¹ “Every Negro With A Ballot Must Vote For Alfred Smith,” *The New York Negro World*, October 20, 1928, p. 1; “Misleading The People, I—Smith’s Fitness and The Public Weal,” *The New York Negro World*, October 20, 1928, p. 4.

¹²³² Fred B. Watson, “Where They Roost,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, October 20, 1928, p. 1.

¹²³³ “Marcus Garvey States Why He is For Smith And Against Hoover,” *The New York Negro World*, September 29, 1928, p. 4.

“Hoover believes in millions for the few and crumbs for the millions; Smith believes that a competence is the right of the humblest of the nation’s citizens.”¹²³⁴

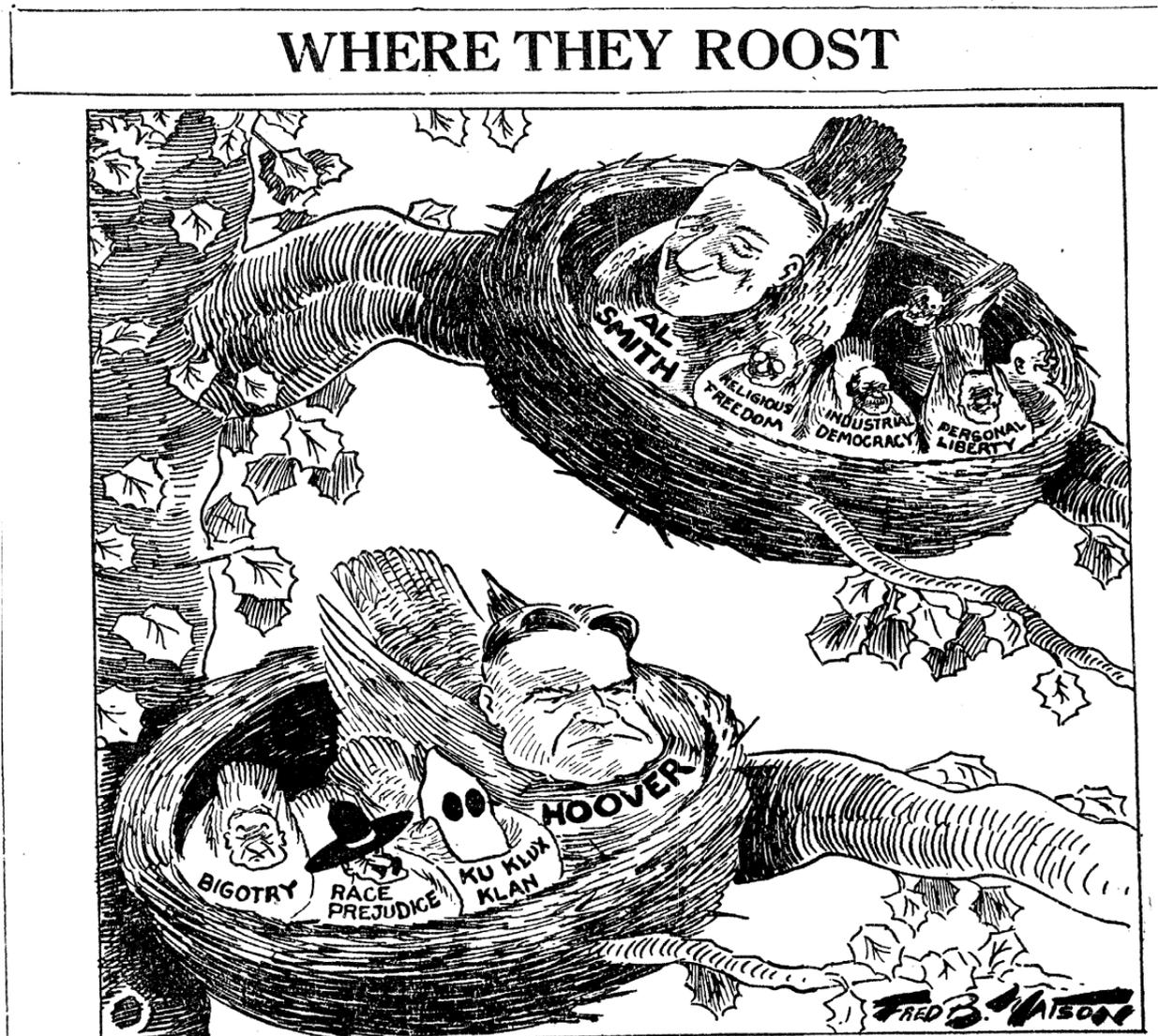


Fig. 4.8: Cartoon from the *Baltimore Afro-American* assigning Smith’s campaign both cultural and economic significance.¹²³⁵

This sharp class dichotomy was not merely implied by speeches given by Democrats and articles published by their allies in the press; it became a part of the

¹²³⁴ “To The Polls For Smith,” *The New York Negro World*, November 3, 1928, p. 1. See also: E. David Cronon, *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1969), p. 150.

¹²³⁵ Watson, “Where They Roost,” p. 1.

Democratic line, and was often absorbed by workers. A report about the behavior of a rowdy group of Smith supporters published in the *Philadelphia Record* demonstrates both the success of this class-based community-building strategy and the manifestation of that strategy in the presentation of news. In a scene “reminiscent of Hallowe’en or New Year’s Nights,” a mob of several thousand milled about the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel in Philadelphia, hoping to catch a glimpse of their political hero. These “ebullient Smith rooters tooted raucously on horns, cried out and cheered every passing automobile that bore a Smith tag.” But as the evening progressed, “a hundred lusty-lunged Smith followers let out an uproarious ‘Hooey!’ as an expensive limousine with a Hoover placard behind rolled by. . . . The occupants, two men and a woman in evening clothes, stared frigidly.”¹²³⁶ This delightfully partisan journalism demonstrates the success of the Democratic strategy—these grassroots, probably working-class Smith supporters were aroused but apparently not surprised by a passing group of upper-class Hoover voters. Simultaneously, the story is an obvious attempt to perpetuate this class politics with its close attention to the fancy clothing and expensive automobile that are implied to be typical of all Republicans.

V

The Democratic press successfully imbued portions of the working class with a sense of shared values under the auspices of the Smith presidential campaign. In response, urban ethnic working-class citizens exhibited unprecedented enthusiasm for Smith’s candidacy. Tales of individual initiative on behalf of the New Yorker abounded.

¹²³⁶ “Thousands Mill Around Hotel to Glimpse Smith,” *The Philadelphia Record*, October 28, 1928, p. 9.

Thomas De Mayo of the Bronx, an Italian immigrant and musician, was “not content merely to cast his vote for Gov. Alfred E. Smith,” and “dedicated his latest composition, a campaign march, to the Democratic nominee.”¹²³⁷ Francis J. McGuire, a truck driver from Manhattan, drove to Democratic headquarters and donated \$25.00 of his \$42.00 wages to the Smith cause, exclaiming, “I can’t afford to give this much money, but the Governor has been a hero of mine for years. I want to see him President.”¹²³⁸ John F. Donohue, a former hobo from Idaho now working as a carpenter in Philadelphia and supporting a family of seven, sketched a charcoal portrait of Smith for publication in the *Record*.¹²³⁹ Even children got involved: three-year-old William James McKay of Camden, New Jersey, “had been saving his pennies for months only to decide that he would spend them for flowers when he heard Governor Smith was coming.”¹²⁴⁰ So too did celebrities: New York Yankee hero Babe Ruth (a son of German-American saloonkeepers who was raised in an orphanage in Baltimore) took to the airwaves on Smith’s behalf, while the prolific Irving Berlin (a Russian-Jewish immigrant) composed a campaign theme in order to put “his devotion to Al Smith into song.”¹²⁴¹

While these episodes demonstrated grassroots initiative, they also provided instructional tales for other potential Democrats, and so Smith-friendly newspapers covered such human interest stories in depth. At times they strained credulity, like the saga of James Joseph Buriage, a seven-year-old Baltimore boy who was struck by a car and according to “several surgeons and physicians” was saved by a packet of Al Smith

¹²³⁷ “Campaign March Dedicated to ‘Al’ Smith Is the Latest Composition of Bronx Musician,” *The Bronx and Manhattan Home News*, November 4, 1928, p. 11.

¹²³⁸ “Truck Driver Gives \$25 of \$42 Wages For Smith,” *The New York World*, October 28, 1928, p. 23.

¹²³⁹ “Charcoal Sketch of Al Smith by Phila. Admirer,” *The Philadelphia Record*, September 4, 1928, p. 18.

¹²⁴⁰ “Camden Crowds Pack Streets to Welcome Smith,” *The Philadelphia Record*, October 28, 1928, p. 7.

¹²⁴¹ “Babe Steps to ‘Mike’ to Pole Out Batch of Runs to Smith,” *The New York World*, October 20, 1928, p. 2; Advertisement, “Better Times With Al,” *The Philadelphia Record*, October 13, 1928, p. 16.

placards he was carrying under his shirt which “had broken the blow and protected the boy’s heart and lung jacket.”¹²⁴² (As an inspiring footnote, readers were informed that the brave lad’s nurses had “assented to his appeal and displayed the twenty-five pictures about the room.”)¹²⁴³

Meanwhile, readers were reminded of the sinister tactics that nefarious Republican operatives were willing to employ to thwart these enthusiastic Democrats. Stories were told of a Republican scheme to disfranchise tens of thousands of rank-and-file voters in Hudson and Essex Counties, New Jersey, as part of “an effort to defeat Governor Smith.”¹²⁴⁴ New Yorkers learned of a Republican plot in Columbus, Ohio, to deny the franchise to nuns.¹²⁴⁵ Philadelphians were informed with outrage by the *Record* that the city’s Republican machine had terminated a tax collector for supporting Smith with the brazen proclamation: “This is a Republican office.”¹²⁴⁶ African Americans in Baltimore were alerted that a black Smith supporter had received a threatening letter that included a news clipping outlining the flogging of a black Democrat in Florida.¹²⁴⁷

This passion translated into enthusiastic receptions for Smith at campaign stops nationwide. Welcomes for the Democrat in cities like Omaha were compared favorably to the only similarly triumphal outpouring of unbridled fervor in recent memory: welcome parades for aviator Charles Lindbergh.¹²⁴⁸ Eastern journalists noted the “uproarious and spontaneous outpouring of enthusiasm” for Smith by an audience of

¹²⁴² “Smith Placards Save Boy In Motor Smash,” *The New York World*, October 21, 1928, p. 3.

¹²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹²⁴⁴ “300 Voters Fight Against Poll Ban Against 40,000 in Jersey,” *The Brooklyn Eagle*, October 26, 1928, p. 2; “Democrats Fight Jersey Poll Laws,” *The New York World*, October 21, 1928, p. 3; “Jersey Jury Acts On Vote Blacklist,” *The New York World*, October 31, 1928, p. 3.

¹²⁴⁵ “Republicans Challenge Nuns at Registration,” *The New York World*, October 17, 1928, p. 5.

¹²⁴⁶ “26th Ward Head Fired By City for Backing Al Smith,” *The Philadelphia Record*, October 2, 1928, p. 1.

¹²⁴⁷ “Smith Worker Gets Black Hand Note,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, September 22, 1928, p. 10.

¹²⁴⁸ “Smith’s Welcome In Omaha Rivals Col. Lindbergh’s,” *The Brooklyn Eagle*, September 18, 1928, p. 1;

twelve thousand in St. Paul, where it was reported that the Democrat had been greeted by “25 miles of humanity-lined streets.”¹²⁴⁹ New Yorkers read of an unprecedented reception for their governor at the state fairgrounds in Sedalia, Missouri, by “between 35,000 and 45,000 farm folk.”¹²⁵⁰ Writers described a “stampede” to the “Smith cause” in Iowa and the “riot” over Smith in Chicago, where a “huge crowd gathered” at the train station to “thunder” their approval of the New Yorker.¹²⁵¹ A “gay tumult” greeted the Democrat in Baltimore; and in Richmond enthusiastic bands blasted “The Sidewalks of New York” along with “Dixie.”¹²⁵²

The *Brooklyn Eagle* described Smith’s reception in Boston as “without exaggeration, the most overwhelming that a candidate for President—or for that matter a President of the United States—has ever had. . . . it was a combination of the most turbulent, riotous and wild elements of Armistice night and the return of Lindbergh.”¹²⁵³ As the Happy Warrior departed the city that had granted him this fantastic popular endorsement, the “vociferous reception [was] repeated as a goodbye,” as crowds stormed the railroad tracks to bid farewell to the Democrat, delaying his departing train.¹²⁵⁴

¹²⁴⁹ Henry Suydam, “Smith Rejoices As Enthusiasm Fires Northwest,” *The Brooklyn Eagle*, September 28, 1928, p. 2; “Children Cheer Gov. Smith Over Twin City Route,” *The Philadelphia Record*, September 28, 1928, p. 1.

¹²⁵⁰ Ernest K. Lindley, “G.O.P. Economy Is Party Myth, Smith Tells Missourians,” *The New York World*, October 17, 1928, p. 1.

¹²⁵¹ George H. Authier, “Iowa Stampedes to Smith Cause,” *The New York World*, October 25, 1928, p. 7; “Riot In Chicago to Hear Smith,” *The Brooklyn Eagle*, October 19, 1928, p. 1; Ernest K. Lindley, “Chicago Thunders Greeting To Smith,” *The New York World*, October 18, 1928, p. 1.

¹²⁵² Ernest K. Lindley, “Smith Rips Dry League And Klan in Baltimore; 90,000 Hear His Speech,” *The New York World*, October 30, 1928, p. 1; “‘Hello, Al!’ Solid South Greets Smith,” *The Philadelphia Record*, October 12, 1928, p. 1; “Virginia Recognizes Quality,” (captioned photograph), *The Brooklyn Citizen*, October 12, 1928, p. 1.

¹²⁵³ Henry Suydam, “Big Smith Ovation at Boston Spurs Hope of Winning East,” *The Brooklyn Eagle*, October 25, 1928, p. 1.

¹²⁵⁴ “Unbroken Ovation Marks Smith Trip After Hub Triumph,” *The New York World*, October 26, 1928, p. 1.

Indeed, enthusiasm for Smith in industrial New England was such that it spurred “hope of winning the east.”¹²⁵⁵

After this triumph Smith journeyed to Republican Philadelphia. There, Democrats used the “eager, welcoming crowds of Boston” to instruct residents on how to greet the nominee in the City of Brotherly Love.¹²⁵⁶ Publishing a photograph of the “Greatest Crowd Boston Ever Saw . . . Hail[ing] Democracy’s Leader,” the *Record* implored, “Will Philadelphia Duplicate This Welcome To Al Smith Today?”¹²⁵⁷ The Democrats were not disappointed: “hundreds of thousands jam[med] sidewalks . . . cheering like a tidal wave” as Smith made his way to deliver “his striking speech before a wildly enthusiastic crowd.”¹²⁵⁸ Smith was the first Democratic candidate even to campaign in Philadelphia in twenty years, and the response was advertised as the “greatest political triumph in city annals.”¹²⁵⁹ The *Negro World* described “a roaring, cheering, maddened throng of 12,000 souls within, and 20,000 more outside upon the ramparts What a mob!” they exclaimed, “What an ovation! Folks, you really ought to be here to join in the revelry.”¹²⁶⁰

New Yorkers responded to these developments with a clamorous reception of their own. A crowd of forty-five thousand was reported to approach delirium during Smith’s speech in Brooklyn, while an ardent crowd of “23,000 yelling voices” granted

¹²⁵⁵ Suydam, “Big Smith Ovation at Boston Spurs Hope of Winning East,” p. 1.

¹²⁵⁶ “Boston Welcome To Smith Moves His Wife to Tears,” *The Philadelphia Record*, October 26, 1928, p. 5.

¹²⁵⁷ “Greatest Crowd Boston Ever Saw Out To Hail Democracy’s Leader; Will Philadelphia Duplicate This Welcome To Al Smith Today?” (captioned photograph), *The Philadelphia Record*, October 27, 1928, p. 4.

¹²⁵⁸ “City Gives Smith Wild Welcome as He Tours Streets,” *The Philadelphia Record*, October 28, 1928, p. 1; “Smith in Arena Speech Rips Dry, Tariff Critics to Pieces,” *The Philadelphia Record*, October 28, 1928, p. 1.

¹²⁵⁹ Ernest K. Lindley, “Smith In Philadelphia, Has Greatest Political Triumph In City Annals,” *The New York World*, October 28, 1928, p. 1.

¹²⁶⁰ S. A. Hayes, “Philadelphia’s Surrender to Smith,” *The New York Negro World*, November 3, 1928, p. 2.

Smith the “biggest ovation of his campaign,” at Madison Square Garden.¹²⁶¹ Outside the halls, two million citizens feverishly greeted their governor as he paraded down the streets of his home town on the last leg of his campaign tour.¹²⁶² After almost three decades of decline, popular interest in politics had been revived.¹²⁶³

¹²⁶¹ “Gov. Smith Stirs Brooklyn Crowd of 45,000 to Frenzy; Day Parade Wild Tribute,” *The New York World*, November 3, 1928, p. 1; Ernest K. Lindley, “Smith Gets Biggest Ovation Of His Campaign At Garden; Sees Victory as Fight Ends,” *The New York World*, November 4, 1928, p. 1.

¹²⁶² William Weer, “2,000,000 Cheer Smith In City,” *The Brooklyn Eagle*, November 2, 1928, p. 1.

¹²⁶³ On this decline, see Michael E. McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics, The American North, 1865-1928* (New York: Oxford, 1986), pp. 184-210. Before McGerr, Richard L. McCormick noted that partisanship and electoral participation declined dramatically in the Progressive Era, beginning around 1900. Richard L. McCormick, *The Party Period and Public Policy: American Politics from the Age of Jackson to the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford, 1986), pp. 316-319.

Chapter V: Critical Election

“The campaign now beginning will prove memorable for many reasons. . . . It is destined to be marked by a breaking up of old political lines and the formation of new ones.”

-Senator Joseph Robinson (D-AR), August 31, 1928

* * *

“Before the Roosevelt Revolution there was an Al Smith Revolution. In many ways, Smith’s defeat in 1928, rather than Roosevelt’s 1932 victory, marked off the arena in which today’s politics are being fought.”

-Samuel Lubell, *The Future of American Politics* (1951)

Alfred E. Smith lost the 1928 presidential election in a landslide. The Democrat carried only eight states, while Hoover won the Electoral College 444 to 87. The Republican also attracted almost 60 percent of the popular vote, while Smith barely cleared 40 percent.¹²⁶⁴

The result was a rout; yet simultaneously Smith had received more votes than any previous Democratic candidate—the 15,016,169 ballots marked for the Happy Warrior were more than 5.8 million greater than the second-largest total for a nominee from his party.¹²⁶⁵ In fact, only Warren Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover bested Al Smith among the hegemonic Republicans.¹²⁶⁶ Because Smith was able to attract so many voters to the Democratic cause despite being defeated so soundly, many scholars have recognized within this ostensible fiasco the beginnings of a significant shift in the

¹²⁶⁴ Edgar Eugene Robinson, *The Presidential Vote, 1896-1932* (Stanford University, CA: Stanford University Press, 1934), p. 46.

¹²⁶⁵ *Loc. cit.*

¹²⁶⁶ *Loc. cit.*

electorate.¹²⁶⁷ The boldest of these, the eminent political scientist V. O. Key, has asserted that “the Roosevelt revolution of 1932 was in large measure an Al Smith revolution of 1928.”¹²⁶⁸

This “revolution” was found in the impressive gains Smith made in areas dominated by working-class ethnic citizens, which produced substantial inroads for the Democratic Party among recent-immigrant, Catholic, and Jewish industrial laborers across the Northeast and the Midwest. New England witnessed “the activation by the Democratic candidate of low-income, Catholic, urban voters of recent immigrant stock,” prompting a realignment that led to Smith victories in Massachusetts and Rhode Island and was destined to “persist for several succeeding elections.”¹²⁶⁹ Historians have detected similar developments in places like Chicago and Philadelphia, although such cities usually lacked an actual Smith plurality.¹²⁷⁰ Nationwide, of the nineteen cities with a population over 250,000 that had ethnic (either immigrant or child-of-immigrant) majorities at the time of the 1930 census, all nineteen had given strong majorities to Harding in 1920.¹²⁷¹ In 1928, Smith won seven of these cities, and in each of the nineteen, his tally represented a Democratic increase of over 100 percent—even in those jurisdictions where he failed to achieve a majority.¹²⁷²

¹²⁶⁷ Eldersveld, “The Influence of Metropolitan Party Pluralities In Presidential Elections Since 1920: A Study of Twelve Key Cities,” pp. 1189-1206; Key, “A Theory of Critical Elections,” pp. 3-18; MacRae and Meldrum, “Critical Elections in Illinois: 1888-1958,” pp. 669-683; Pomper, “Classification of Presidential Elections,” pp. 535-566; Degler, “American Political Parties and the Rise of the City: An Interpretation,” pp. 41-59; Allswang, *A House for All Peoples*; Lubell, *The Future of American Politics*.

¹²⁶⁸ Key, “A Theory of Critical Elections,” p. 4.

¹²⁶⁹ Key, “A Theory of Critical Elections,” p. 4; Huthmacher, *Massachusetts People and Politics*, pp. 150-190.

¹²⁷⁰ Huthmacher, *Massachusetts People and Politics*, p. 177; Allswang, *A House for All Peoples*, pp. 38, 43-53.

¹²⁷¹ Degler, “American Political Parties and the Rise of the City: An Interpretation,” pp. 53-55.

¹²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 55. Taking a longer view of these events, historian Morton Keller notes: “Smith went far to restore the urban Democratic majority of most of the nineteenth century.” Morton Keller, *America’s Three Regimes: A New Political History* (New York: Oxford, 2007), p. 197.

Smith attracted the attention of these diverse voters in large part because his background embodied their own struggles for respect—for ethnic equality, religious tolerance, and social acceptance. Smith’s career was a metaphor for all these things, as well as for the rise of the city and its newest inhabitants to prominence in American life. But the governor offered more than hopeful metaphors. His campaign, like his career, spoke effectively to these voters’ desire for household security and reliable, dignified employment. Americans who flocked to the Democratic banner in 1928 were often those hungriest for such assurances—those to whom accolades for Republican prosperity seemed increasingly preposterous.¹²⁷³ As tens of thousands of these anxious citizens cheered Al Smith at speeches and rallies, he and his allies promised them dignity—something that entailed both social acceptance and economic security.

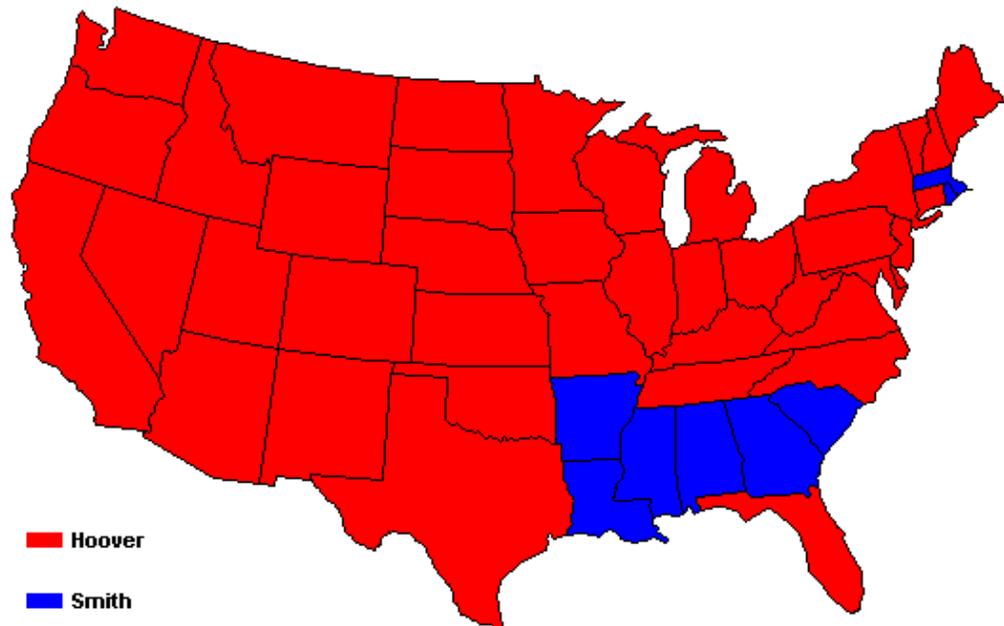
In fact, Smith’s appeal to those voters least enamored with the 1920s political economy transcended urban environs and traditional minorities. James L. Sundquist has shown that of the forty-five counties Smith carried in Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and North Dakota, fewer than half had Catholic majorities.¹²⁷⁴ Moreover, in all of the twenty-five he labeled “predominantly Protestant,” except four in Illinois, Smith’s percentage showed marked improvement over both the average Democratic vote since 1908 and the average Democratic vote in 1916 and 1920.¹²⁷⁵

¹²⁷³ It is noteworthy that Smith enjoyed success in areas where Robert M. La Follette’s progressive insurgency had been particularly successful in 1924. This phenomenon will be discussed below as it relates to the upper Great Plains; but it also occurred in Midwestern manufacturing cities. In Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, there was a much stronger correlation between Smith’s vote in a given municipality and that of the Progressive La Follette than existed between the Smith vote and that of the Democrat John W. Davis. In St. Louis City, Missouri, a similar pattern occurred—there too Smith wards correlated better with La Follette’s strength than with the Davis vote, although in St. Louis, unlike in Allegheny County, Davis outran the Progressive insurgent. Republican Calvin Coolidge carried both municipalities by wide margins. See appendix one.

¹²⁷⁴ Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System*, p. 175.

¹²⁷⁵ *Loc. cit.*

1928 Presidential Election Results by State



Smith Percentage of Presidential Vote versus Average Democratic Vote, 1920-1924, by State

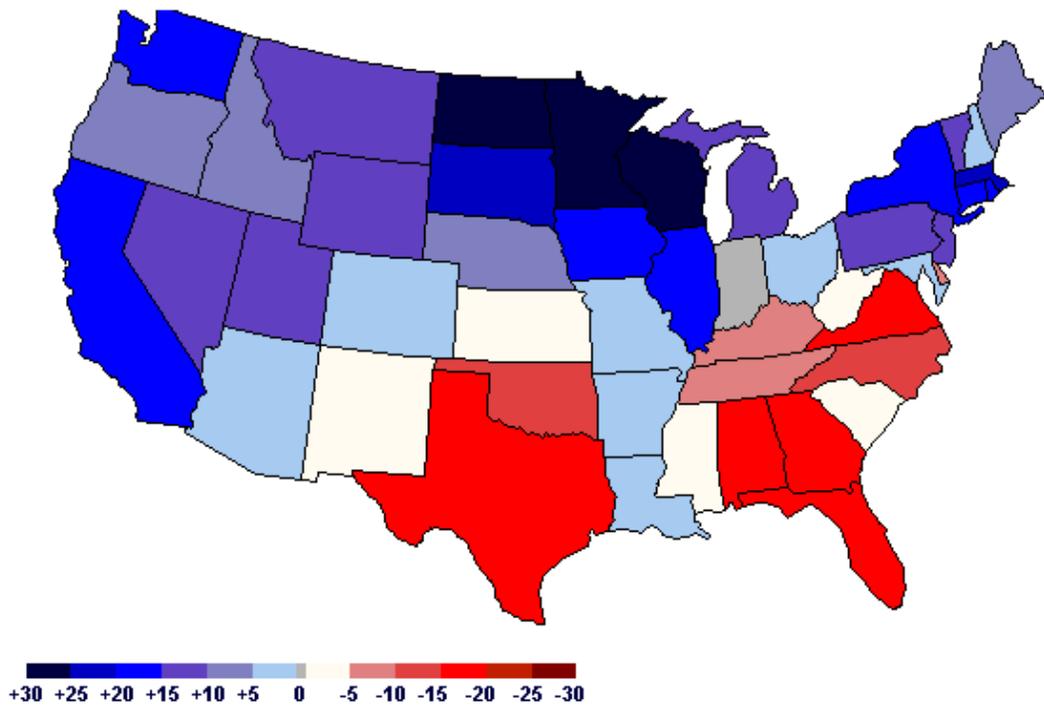


Fig. 5.1: 1928 Electoral Vote by State.

Fig. 5.2: Changes in the Democratic percentage of statewide presidential vote, 1920/'24 to 1928.

In North Dakota, Logan County (37 percent Catholic), McIntosh County (11 percent Catholic), and Mercer County (9 percent Catholic) voted Democratic for the first time in their histories.¹²⁷⁶ In Mercer, Smith's 62 percent of the vote literally doubled the 31 percent Wilson had garnered in the party's former high-water mark for that county in 1916.¹²⁷⁷ Significantly, all three counties had defected to La Follette in 1924, and the latter two had voted for Theodore Roosevelt in 1912.¹²⁷⁸ These farmers had a history of political protest and now found a new outlet for it in Al Smith's Democratic Party. The same could be said for voters in Traverse County, Minnesota (40 percent Catholic; 61 percent for Smith, a gain of 20 percent over the Democratic average since 1908), where both Roosevelt and La Follette had been victorious; Big Stone County, Minnesota (33 percent Catholic, 56 percent for Smith, a gain of 22 percent over the Democratic average since 1908), where Roosevelt had won and La Follette had come within five votes out of over 3,300; Lincoln County, Minnesota (29 percent Catholic; 51 percent for Smith, a gain of 10 percent over the Democratic average since 1908), which TR had carried and La Follette had lost 48 percent to 44 percent; Crawford County, Iowa (22 percent Catholic, 57 percent for Smith, a gain of 6 percent over the Democratic average since 1908 and of 23 percent over the average in 1916 and 1920) which La Follette had carried by a robust 9.7 percent; and Plymouth County, Iowa (42 percent Catholic, 51 percent for Smith, a gain of 7 percent over the Democratic average since 1908) where Roosevelt had won and La Follette had come within less than 2 percent.¹²⁷⁹ The Midwestern granary, like the urban ethnic enclaves of the Northeast, harbored many of those citizens most disaffected

¹²⁷⁶ *Loc. cit.*

¹²⁷⁷ Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System*, p. 175; Robinson, *The Presidential Vote, 1896-1932*, p. 290.

¹²⁷⁸ Robinson, *The Presidential Vote*, pp. 289-290.

¹²⁷⁹ Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System*, p. 175; Robinson, *The Presidential Vote*, pp. 194, 198, 235, 237, 240.

by 1920s economic realities; and while farmers exhibited more hesitancy toward Smith's message than many city-dwelling workers (for example, he carried only one county in Kansas), the Democrat appealed to both groups' desire for stability, with each responding in tangible ways.

This was not an aberration—a temporary flaring of political passions that had artificially divided the electorate based on emotional debates over religion and culture. Rather, it represented the beginning of something more: the emergence of a new national politics divided by both economic and ethnocultural factors. Exploring more deeply the events of the 1928 campaign and the reactions of individual citizens to the issues of that contest at the local and regional levels helps affirm this thesis, while also elucidating the wonderful complexities of the voters and the election. It demonstrates the prescience of Joe Robinson's prognostication, made early in the contest, that "the campaign now beginning will prove memorable for many reasons. . . . It is destined to be marked by a breaking up of old political lines and the formation of new ones."¹²⁸⁰

Critical Election?

Al Smith's 1928 presidential campaign featured the nationalization of his transitional progressivism. There were places in both the Cotton South and the Corn Belt Midwest where Smith's articulation of progressive solutions to the problems of agriculture earned him strong support among pockets of struggling farmers.¹²⁸¹ Yet whether due to substance, style, or lack of exposure, this politics did not captivate rural

¹²⁸⁰ "Robinson Visions Readjustment of Old Political Lines," *The Brooklyn Eagle*, September 1, 1928, p. 6; "Robinson Sees New Issues Split Old Party Lines," *The Philadelphia Record*, September 2, 1928, p. 13.

¹²⁸¹ On the Corn Belt, see chapter four; on the South, see chapter seven.

voters in a widespread or electorally significant way. Even noting the Democrat's successes among farmers, it is clear that the population for whom transitional progressivism had been formulated was to be found elsewhere. It is no surprise, then, that Smith's greatest triumphs came among those who toiled not in the fields, but in the factories.

By the 1950s, scholars were looking to the 1928 contest as a turning point in American political development. Political analyst Samuel Lubell would proclaim: "Before the Roosevelt Revolution there was an Al Smith Revolution," concluding that "Smith's defeat in 1928, rather than Roosevelt's 1932 victory, marked off the arena in which today's politics are being fought."¹²⁸² The most significant facet of this revolution was the shift in the urban vote, which had been solidly Republican until 1928, when the nation's twelve largest cities yielded a Democratic plurality that was not relinquished for decades. Four years after Lubell's pronouncement, V. O. Key confirmed his conclusions in the case of New England, where the 1928 contest was found to have precipitated "a sharp and durable realignment between the parties," in which the post-Smith Democratic Party would dominate "urban, industrial, foreign-born, Catholic areas," while the Republicans would draw strength from those areas that "tended to be rural, Protestant, native-born."¹²⁸³ Other scholars have since recognized in 1928 the beginnings of a significant shift in the electorate. Important works by political scientists Samuel Eldersveld (1949), Duncan MacRae and James Meldrum (1960), and Gerald Pomper (1967), as well as historians Carl Degler (1964) and John Allswang (1971), have

¹²⁸² Lubell, *The Future of American Politics*, p. 36.

¹²⁸³ Key, "A Theory of Critical Elections," pp. 7-8, 16. In fact, political scientist David R. Mayhew credits Key's article with spawning the very study of United States electoral realignments: "in 1955, courtesy of Key, the idea of critical elections came out of the bottle." David R. Mayhew, "Electoral Realignments," *The Annual Review of Political Science*, 3 (June, 2000), pp. 449-474, p. 451.

variously suggested that the 1928 contest was a critical election, the fulcrum of a critical period, or the initiation of significant voter realignment.¹²⁸⁴ In 1973, political scientist James L. Sundquist would conclude that “some of the great Democratic strongholds of the present day . . . trace their Democratic preponderance not to the New Deal but to the pre-New Deal election of 1928.”¹²⁸⁵

Since the 1970s, however, a majority of those commenting on 1928 have found this argument less convincing. In 1969, historians Jerome M. Clubb and Howard W. Allen complicated the scholarly view of 1928 with an examination of down-ballot political behavior, suggesting that while “in terms of the presidential vote alone in these areas . . . it is plausible to speak of an ‘Al Smith Revolution,’” consideration “of the vote in elections to lesser offices . . . does not provide consistent support for the view that significant and lasting changes in partisan loyalties and habits of political participation occurred in 1928.”¹²⁸⁶ In his *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (1970), political scientist Walter Dean Burnham noted significant changes occurring within the electorate in 1928, but turned away from the idea that the election represented a specific point of partisan realignment.¹²⁸⁷ Historian John L. Shover determined that while the 1928 election in Philadelphia fulfilled “two of the criteria necessary to classify

¹²⁸⁴ Eldersveld, “The Influence of Metropolitan Party Pluralities In Presidential Elections Since 1920: A Study of Twelve Key Cities,” pp. 1189-1206; MacRae and Meldrum, “Critical Elections in Illinois: 1888-1958,” pp. 669-683; Pomper, “Classification of Presidential Elections,” pp. 535-566; Degler, “American Political Parties and the Rise of the City: An Interpretation,” pp. 41-59; Allswang, *A House for All Peoples*. In a more recent study considering United States presidential elections from 1868 to 1996, Larry M. Bartels identified 1928 as the first of three elections constituting “the New Deal realignment” which “erased much of the existing party system,” which he saw evidenced in very low “partisan persistence levels” in 1928, 1932, and 1936—with 1928 representing the lowest of the three. Larry M. Bartels, “Electoral Continuity and Change, 1868-1996,” *Electoral Studies*, 17:3 (September, 1998), pp. 275-300, p. 281.

¹²⁸⁵ Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System*, p. 178.

¹²⁸⁶ Jerome M. Clubb and Howard W. Allen, “The Cities and the Election of 1928: Partisan Realignment?” *The American Historical Review*, 74:4 (April, 1969), pp. 1205-1220, pp. 1210, 1218.

¹²⁸⁷ E.g.: “First, 1928 was not a realigning election as such in Pennsylvania. It was part of a realigning sequence which could be identified as such only after it had been completed.” Walter Dean Burnham, *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1970), p. 56.

an election as critical: intensity and abnormality,” it failed at the “third and most important test”: producing durable cleavages within the electorate.¹²⁸⁸ Moreover, Shover found in a separate study that 1928 was of little consequence in the state of California.¹²⁸⁹ Political scientists David J. Alvarez and Edmond J. True suggested much the same for Hartford, Connecticut, tempering suggestions of an urban-ethnic shift toward the Democrats in 1928 with evidence that those voters had been inclined toward the party much earlier in the century.¹²⁹⁰ By 1975, historian Bernard Sternsher could point to the growing consensus against the quantitative significance of the 1928 election to level a larger critique of the prevailing interpretative framework of the period’s politics: “A deterministic axiom which imposes on the elections of 1928, 1932, and 1936 a grandfather-father-son relationship is not warranted by the analyses of Lubell and Key.”¹²⁹¹ The death blow for 1928 as a critical election was seemingly delivered by historian Allan Lichtman with an extensive statistical analysis of the voting returns, presented in both a 1976 article and a 1979 book on the subject. Lichtman concluded that ethnicity and class were not driving factors, that 1928 was by no means a critical election, and that religion was far and away the most significant determinant of voter preferences in 1928.¹²⁹² In fact, Lichtman argued that 1928 was quite simply an anomaly in which turnout was bloated on both sides due to the heated ethnocultural controversies surrounding Smith’s Catholicism. He concluded that “however fascinating and exciting,

¹²⁸⁸ John L. Shover, “The Emergence of a Two-Party System in Republican Philadelphia, 1924-1936,” *The Journal of American History*, 60:4 (March, 1974), pp. 985-1002, p. 992.

¹²⁸⁹ Michael Paul Rogin and John L. Shover, *Political Change in California: Critical Elections and Social Movements, 1890-1966* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1970).

¹²⁹⁰ David J. Alvarez and Edmond J. True, “Critical Elections & Partisan Realignment: An Urban Test-Case,” *Polity*, 5:4 (Summer, 1973), pp. 563-576.

¹²⁹¹ Bernard Sternsher, “The Emergence of the New Deal Party System: A Problem in Historical Analysis of Voter Behavior,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 6:1 (Summer, 1975), pp. 127-149, p. 138.

¹²⁹² Lichtman, “Critical Election Theory and the Reality of American Presidential Politics, 1916-40,” pp. 317-351; Lichtman, *Prejudice and the Old Politics*, p. 231.

the presidential election of 1928 was not the harbinger of the next generation of politics. The contest was neither a critical election nor a key component of a critical era of voter realignment. The presidential election of 1928 is best viewed as an aberrant election that had little impact on later patterns of politics.”¹²⁹³

Yet even while challenging the 1928 realignment narrative, many of these critics discerned significant qualitative transformations within large portions of the electorate. Sternsher acknowledged this, reiterating in 1984 his view that “the election of 1928 involved significant qualitative change (many Al Smith supporters in the cities, including many who had never voted before, became Democratic loyalists for some time to come) but did not meet the quantitative requirement of a critical election (Smith received 40.8 percent of the two-party vote).”¹²⁹⁴ Shover recognized such developments in considering Philadelphia, deeming 1928 “a clear case of ethnic group political mobilization”—the dawning of a pluralistic politics which maintained prominence well after the New Deal coalition had been forged.¹²⁹⁵ While challenging the 1928 election’s quantitative significance and rejecting suggestions of a causal relationship with the New Deal coalition, most scholars have affirmed the existence of many of the dynamics that Lubell found revolutionary.

¹²⁹³ Lichtman, *Prejudice and the Old Politics*, pp. 201, 239. Marc V. Levine made a similar argument for the state of Maryland, where “the lack of association between 1928 and any election after 1932 leads one to doubt that 1928 was a critical election in Maryland in the classical sense. Although 1928 did shatter the pre-existing pattern in several ways, it did not establish a persistent pattern. From this perspective, the election of 1928 in Maryland can be classified as a deviant election based on the temporarily paramount issue of Smith’s Catholicism. Once the religious polarization diminished, so too did many aspects of the pattern of 1928.” Marc V. Levine, “Standing Political Decisions and Partisan Realignment: The Pattern of Maryland Politics, 1872-1948,” *The Journal of Politics*, 38:2 (May, 1976), pp. 292-325, p. 317.

¹²⁹⁴ Bernard Stensher, “The New Deal Party System: A Reappraisal,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 15:1 (Summer, 1984), pp. 53-81, p. 53.

¹²⁹⁵ John L. Shover, “Ethnicity and Religion in Philadelphia Politics, 1924-40,” *American Quarterly*, 25:5 (December, 1973), pp. 499-515, pp. 508, 515.

From a qualitative perspective, Al Smith made substantial inroads for the Democratic Party among members of the recent-immigrant working classes in the nation's great manufacturing centers. In Boston and elsewhere in urban Massachusetts, groups such as Italians, Poles, Greeks, Lithuanians, Portuguese, and French-Canadians—once isolated from the Democracy by Irish hegemony—now formed ethnic “Smith for President” clubs and flocked to the polls on behalf of the Democrat.¹²⁹⁶ In Chicago, throughout the 1920s ethnic voters “could be confidently labeled neither Democratic nor Republican in presidential voting,” but “from 1928 on, they were clearly Democratic,” with tremendous gains for Smith not only among Catholic Poles, Italians, Germans, Czechs, and Slavs, but also among Protestant Germans and African-Americans.¹²⁹⁷ In Philadelphia, sections of the city with heavy concentrations of Catholic Germans, Poles, Irish, and Italians gave Smith 64 percent of their vote—a significant improvement from the combined 21 percent given by these same neighborhoods to the Democrat Davis and the Progressive La Follette in 1924.¹²⁹⁸

As much as with Catholics, the shifts in Jewish voting patterns were dramatic. In Philadelphia, the Jewish vote for Smith was twenty-one points higher than the combined Davis/La Follette.¹²⁹⁹ Jews in Chicago voted 60 percent for Al Smith, a forty-one point Democratic increase over the previous election.¹³⁰⁰ In Malden, Massachusetts, the Jewish population defected from the GOP in 1928, the culmination—inspired by the Smith

¹²⁹⁶ Huthmacher, *Massachusetts People and Politics*, p. 177. See chapter six.

¹²⁹⁷ Allswang, *A House for All Peoples*, pp. 38, 43-53.

¹²⁹⁸ Shover, “The Emergence of a Two-Party System in Republican Philadelphia, 1924-1936,” p. 991.

¹²⁹⁹ *Loc. cit.*

¹³⁰⁰ Allswang, *A House for All Peoples*, p. 51.

candidacy—of a trend of gradual exodus from the Republican ranks.¹³⁰¹ In fact, across the country, typically Republican or independent Jews voted heavily for Smith.¹³⁰²

What are scholars to conclude from all of this? By these reports, 1928 was a year of extraordinary change within the American electorate—most particularly in the industrial cities of the Northeast and Midwest, and there, most especially among ethnic working-class voters. Yet so much of the quantitative evidence suggests that this was, as Lichtman suggested, an “aberrant election”: irrespective of the fact that no one can dismiss the real shifts that occurred within the electorate in 1928, and regardless of the scholarly consensus that these same urban ethnic workers constituted the very heart of Roosevelt’s electoral coalition, scholars have concluded that the numbers simply cannot affirm Lubell’s hypothesis of an Al Smith Revolution.¹³⁰³ In fact, they can. Considering the electoral results within their appropriate context yields a more revealing perspective on the profound quantitative significance of the 1928 election. More than that, traditional qualitative historical work elucidates the very complex motivations of these voters and presents a case for taking their ideas—and those of their chosen candidate—seriously.

Numerous scholars have used very sophisticated quantitative analyses to challenge the notion of a 1928 partisan realignment. One method, as suggested earlier, has been to consider down-ballot activity, which by and large has shown that Democratic voting by urban ethnics in 1928 either was nothing new or did not precipitate lasting changes, depending on the locality in question. The other important method of debunking the importance of 1928 has been to consider county-level voting trends:

¹³⁰¹ Richard Klayman, *The First Jew: Prejudice and Politics in an American Community, 1900-1932* (Malden, MA: Old Suffolk Square Press, 1985), pp. 84, 85, 117, 121.

¹³⁰² Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 325; Klayman, *The First Jew*, p. 117; Lichtman, *Prejudice and the Old Politics*, p. 111.

¹³⁰³ Lichtman, *Prejudice and the Old Politics*, p. 239.

scouring these results to determine the predictive capacity of certain demographic factors to voting behavior as well as to determine how well one election predicts the outcome of another. This was the approach taken by Lichtman, and the results are difficult to dispute within the parameters of his study. However, in order better to understand county-level voting trends, scholars must recognize how those trends fit into state and even national electoral contexts.

While it is true that many Roosevelt strongholds did not support Smith in 1928, this actually demonstrates very little about the nature of the electoral coalition. In fact, the metamorphosis in the profile of a party's loyalists is the real touchstone of a critical election that precipitates significant partisan realignment. As political scientist John R. Petrocik has suggested, "realignment occurs when the measureable party bias of identifiable segments of the population changes in such a way that the social group profile of the parties—the party coalitions—is altered."¹³⁰⁴ Abandoning "the conventional assumption that electoral realignments are synonymous with a change to a new majority party," Petrocik's nuanced definition allows historians to investigate alterations in the character of partisan coalitions and track the significance of specific contests to those changes.¹³⁰⁵

This understanding of partisan realignment reopens the debate over the viability of the Lubell thesis, for it was his argument that the nature of American politics changed in 1928 as the Democrats became the party of the urban, ethnic, working classes—a transformation which fueled Democratic hegemony in the decades proceeding from the initiation of Roosevelt's New Deal. The centerpiece of this argument, particularly as

¹³⁰⁴ John R. Petrocik, *Party Coalitions: Realignment and the Decline of the New Deal Party System* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981), p. 15.

¹³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

presented by Lubell, Key, Eldersveld, and Degler, is the rise of the city—specifically the great industrial cities of the Northeast and Midwest, which witnessed a spectacular surge in Democratic strength beginning with Al Smith.

The Democratic Quotient

To affirm this point, it must be demonstrated that the party's vote became more urban in 1928, and that it remained so during the Roosevelt years. Anecdotal evidence of the increasingly working-class, ethnic, and urban nature of the Democratic Party in this period, however voluminous, will never be inoculated against charges of impressionism except by some sort of quantitative measure. Happily, there is a rather basic means of accomplishing this task: the "Democratic Quotient" (DQ). The Democratic Quotient does not measure success in a given jurisdiction; rather, it reveals each jurisdiction's relative importance to the party's state electoral coalition. It is calculated by dividing a county's percentage of the state Democratic vote by its percentage of the state turnout ($DQ = \frac{\% \text{ of State Democratic Vote}}{\% \text{ of State Voter Turnout}}$). Tracking changes in the DQs of urban counties across the presidential elections from 1896 through 1944 demonstrates that in many important cases, the 1928 election dramatically altered the urban/rural balance of state Democratic voting coalitions, and did so in a way that would be reinforced during the Roosevelt years.

Taking as a sample the 167 counties of the Northeast and Midwest identified as part of metropolitan regions in the 1930 United States Census, it becomes possible to quantify the marked shift toward an urban Democracy that occurred in 1928 and was

confirmed in the Roosevelt period.¹³⁰⁶ When the DQs of all 167 metropolitan counties are plotted for each of the nine elections preceding the Great Depression against each of the four Franklin Roosevelt elections, 1928 stands out as the contest that best predicts the relative importance of specific municipalities to the New Deal coalition. The significant differential in r^2 values (strength of correlation) between 1928 and the other elections demonstrates the singularity of the Smith-Hoover contest as a predictor of Roosevelt-era outcomes. Of equal significance, the correlation between the earlier elections and 1928 is quite weak. Thus, in terms of the relative importance of specific counties to their states' Democratic vote, the 1928 election represented both a break with traditional patterns and a harbinger of future coalitions.

¹³⁰⁶ U.S. Department of Commerce, R. P. LaMont, Secretary, Bureau of the Census, W. M. Steuart, Director, under the supervision of Clarence E. Batschelet, Geographer, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Metropolitan Districts Population and Area* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1932). The definition of "metropolitan districts" is tidy and utilitarian: "Ninety-six metropolitan districts have been established, each having an aggregate population of 100,000 or more, and containing one of more central cities of 50,000 or more inhabitants. No metropolitan district was established for those cities which did not have in the central city and surrounding area a population of at least 100,000." *Ibid.*, p. 6.

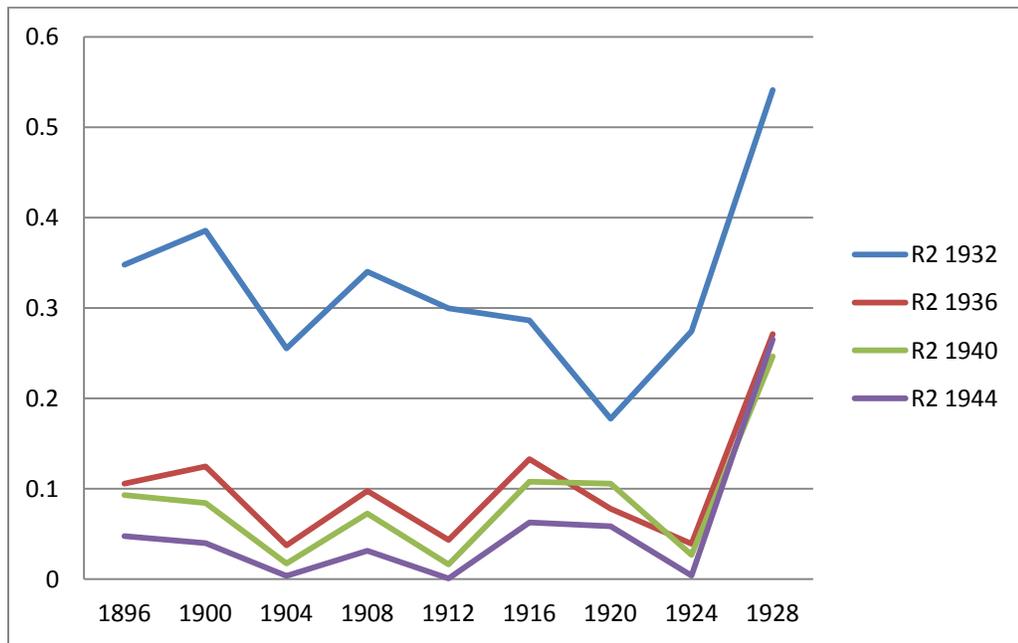


Fig. 5.3: Chart tracking the strength of correlation (r^2) of the Democratic Quotients of the 167 Northeastern and Midwestern counties defined as “metropolitan” in the 1930 census in each election (1896-1928) for predicting the DQ of those counties in each of FDR’s presidential elections.

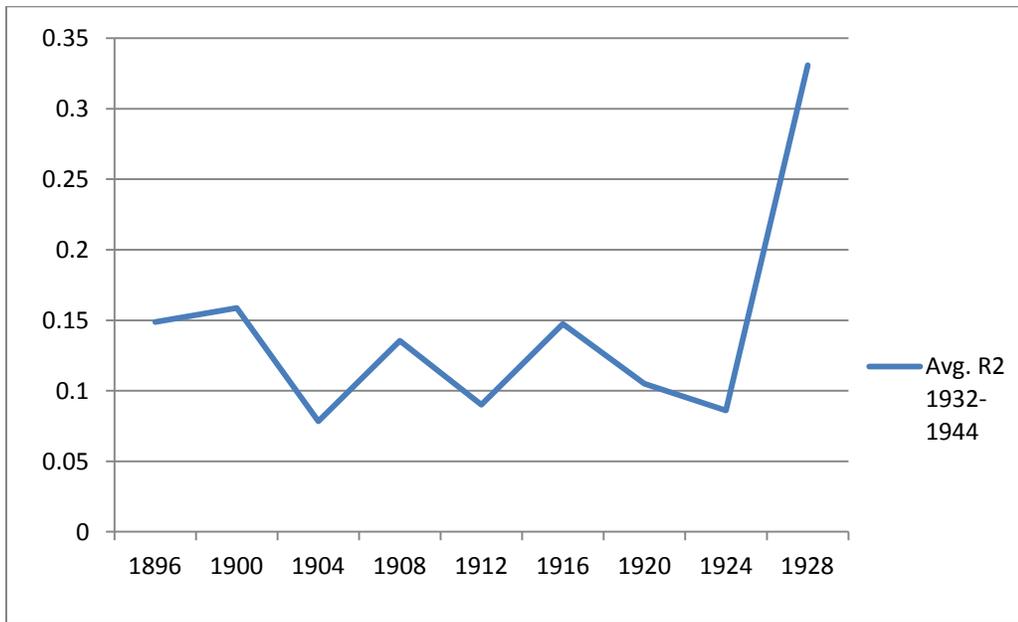
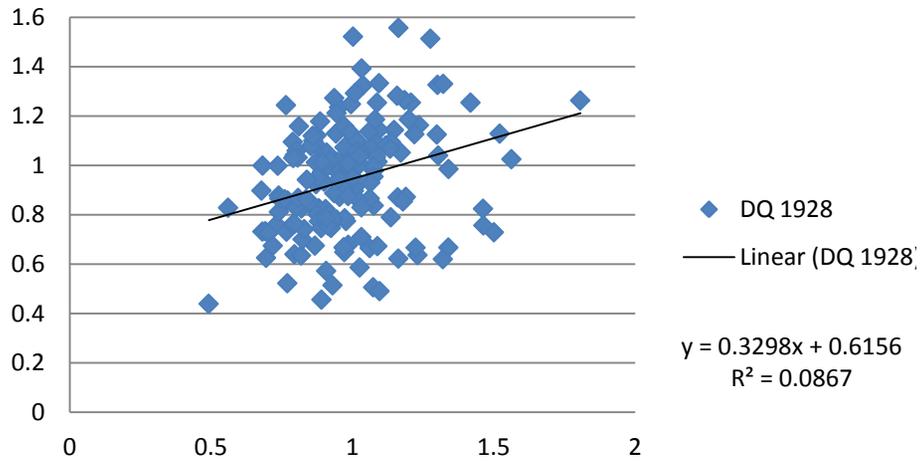


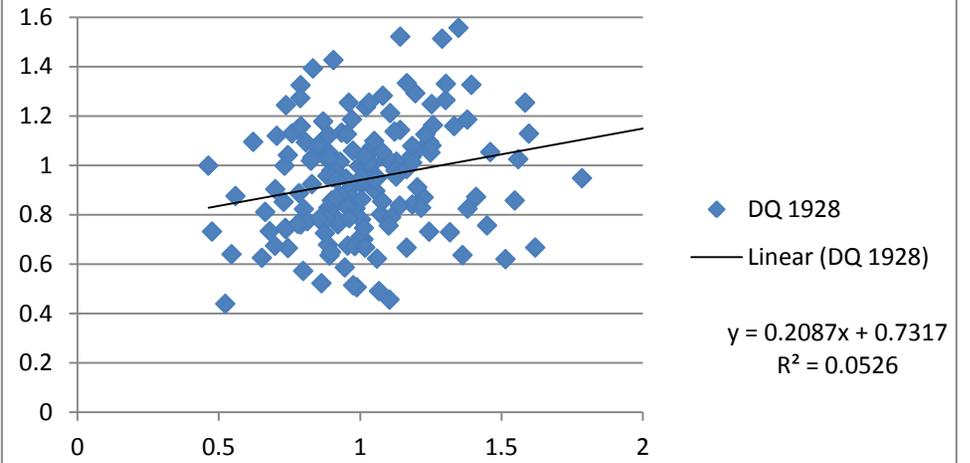
Fig. 5.4: Chart demonstrating the average predictive strength for the entire Roosevelt period for each election’s metropolitan DQs.

Below: Figs. 5.5 through 5.12, showing the correlations of the metropolitan DQs in the four elections preceding 1928 and the four elections after 1928.

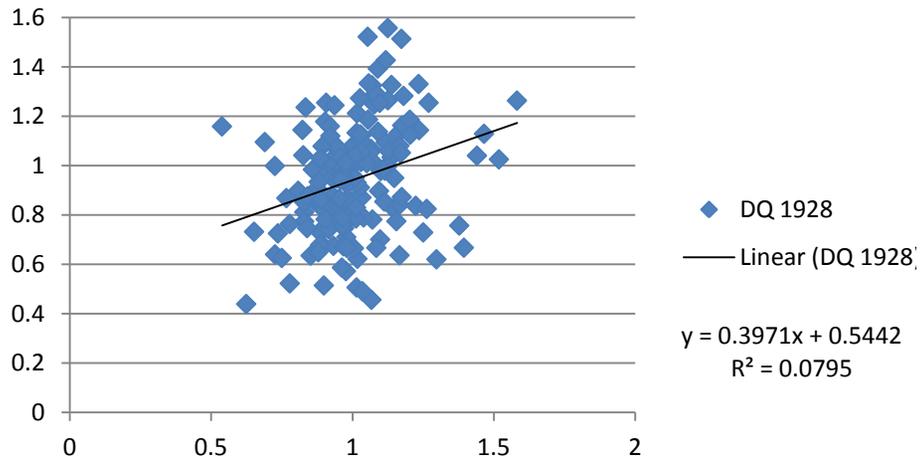
DQ Correlation, 1912 to 1928



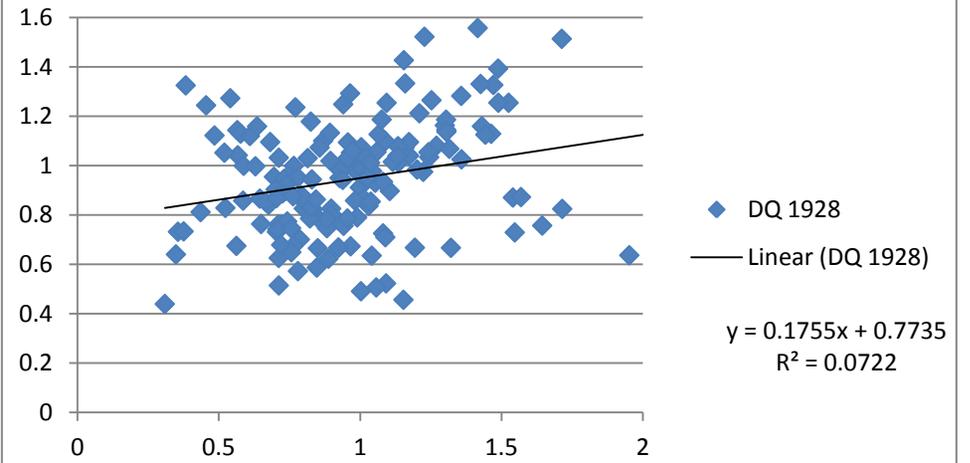
DQ Correlation, 1920 to 1928



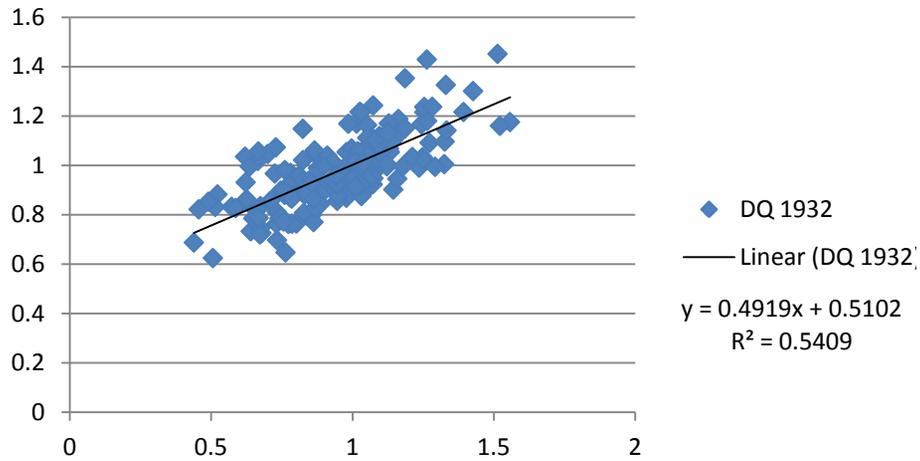
DQ Correlation, 1916 to 1928



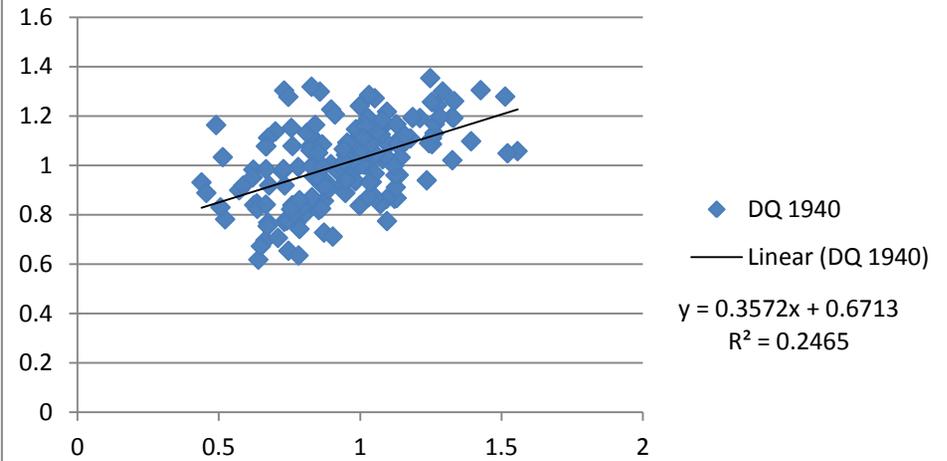
DQ Correlation, 1924 to 1928



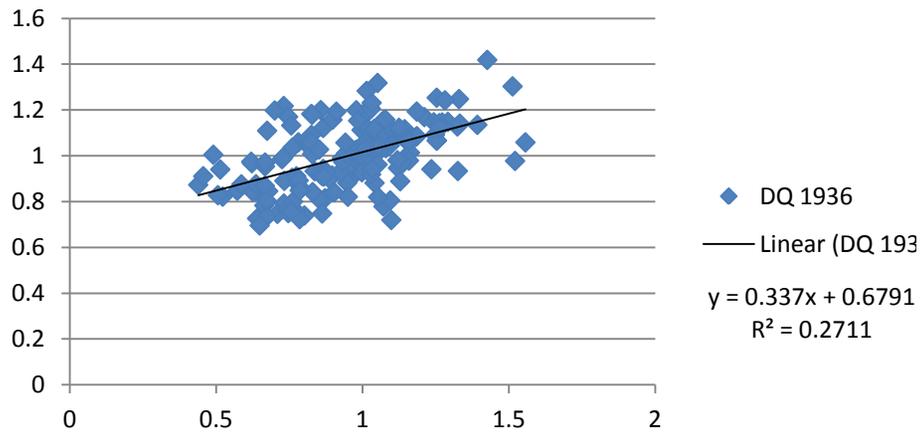
DQ Correlation, 1928 to 1932



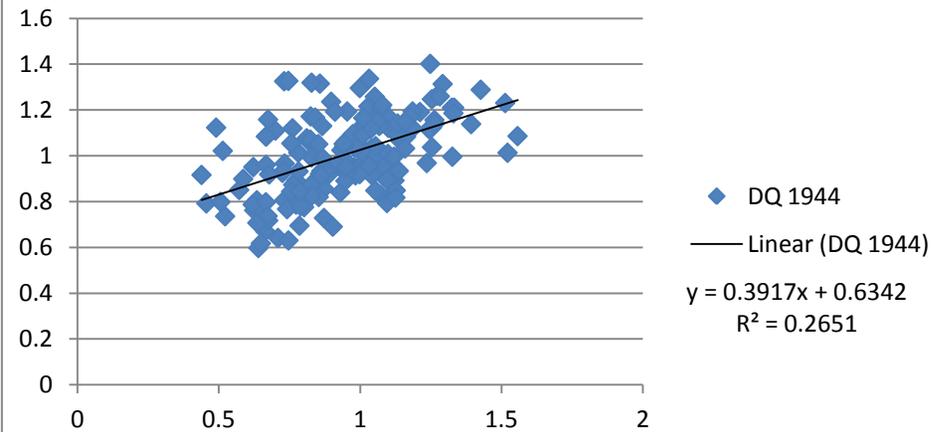
DQ Correlation, 1928 to 1940



DQ Correlation, 1928 to 1936



DQ Correlation, 1928 to 1944



The predictive capacity of the 1928 election is increased further when the sample of counties is reduced to those with a population greater than 250,000. These figures begin to suggest that the Smith vote presents a strong indicator of the Roosevelt coalition's urban nature. Like the earlier scholars argued, the 1928 election appears to have been part of a shift toward a much more urban Democratic Party; this analysis also suggests that this was in fact an enduring change.

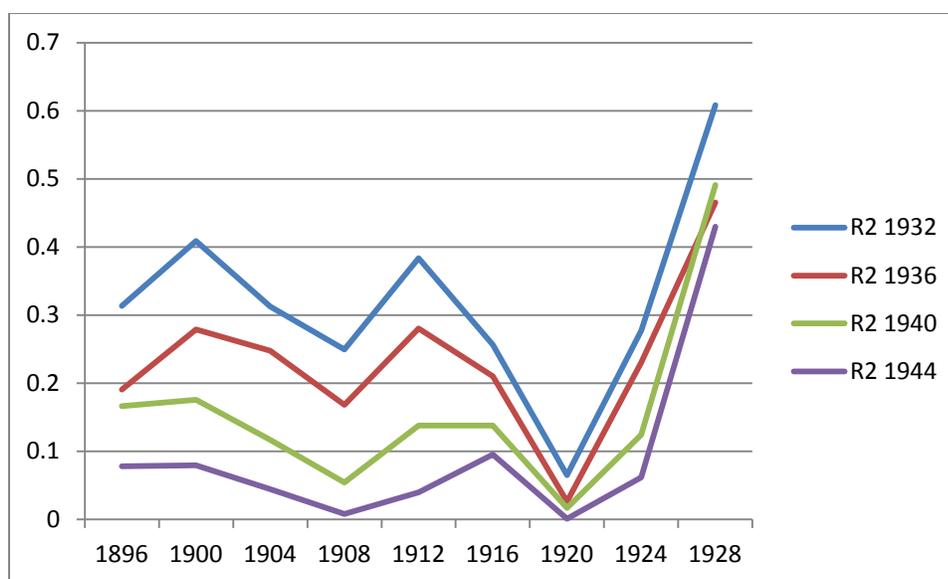


Fig. 5.13: Chart showing the value of the Democratic Quotients of the twenty-seven metropolitan counties with a population over 250,000 in the elections from 1896-1928 to predicting the DQ of those counties in each Roosevelt election.¹³⁰⁷

Narrowing the focus, the Democratic Quotient allows for an understanding of statewide electoral patterns that reveals the importance of specific jurisdictions to a state's Democratic coalition. If the Democratic Quotients are under 1.0 for most of a

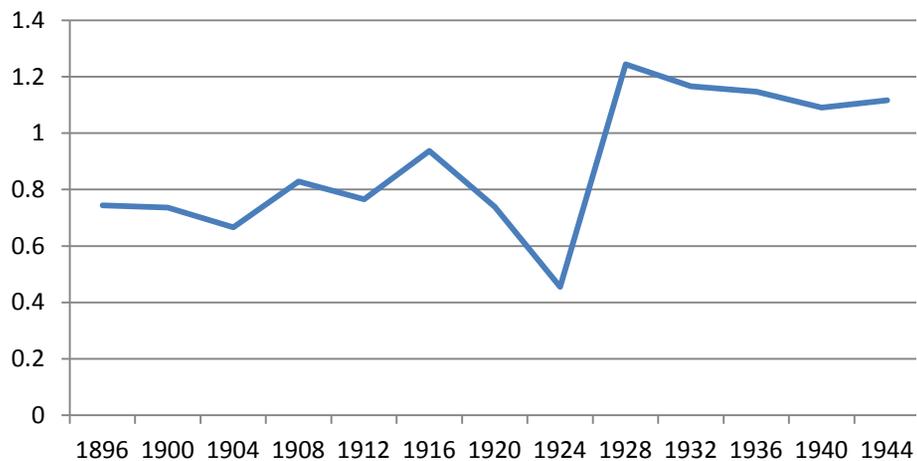
¹³⁰⁷ The counties in the urban sample are: Allegheny, PA; Baltimore City, MD; Bronx, NY; Cook, IL; Cuyahoga, OH; Erie, NY; Essex, NJ; Franklin, OH; Hamilton, OH; Hennepin, MN; Hudson, NJ; Jackson, MO; Jefferson, KY; Kings, NY; Lucas, OH; Marion, IN; Milwaukee, WI; Monroe, NY; New York, NY; Philadelphia, PA; Providence, RI; Queens, NY; Ramsey, MN; St. Louis City, MO; Suffolk, MA; Summit, OH; and Wayne, MI.

state's metropolitan counties, this means that the Democratic coalition in that state was more rural in nature. Unsurprisingly, the DQ figures for the 1928 and New Deal elections demonstrate a more urban coalition in the Northeast and Midwest than during the preceding period.

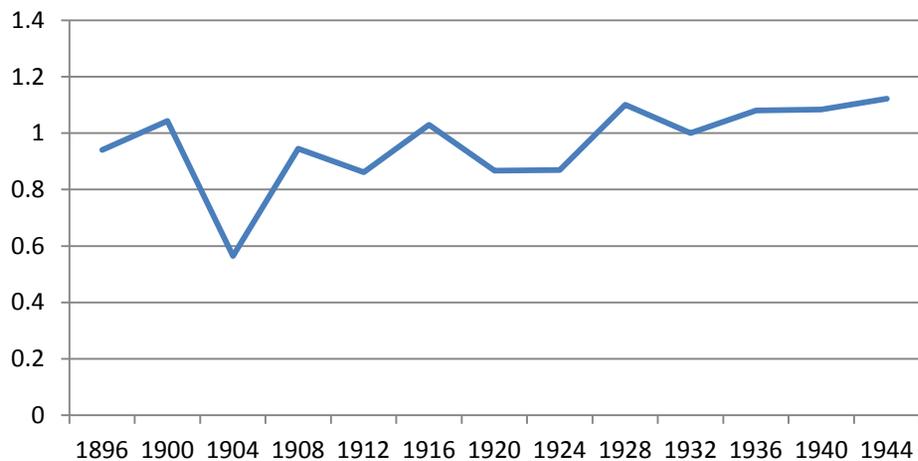
In many places, the most urban counties consistently had DQ values of less than 1.0 from 1896 through 1924, indicating that the cities were not a source of Democratic strength in those states. In 1928, many of those scores underwent a precipitous rise, to a level well above 1.0, indicating that the cities had become a relatively significant source of Democratic votes. These new higher urban DQs often declined a bit in 1932 and 1936 (because of the landslide nature of those elections, in which most jurisdictions in many states were strongly Democratic and thus the relative significance of specific jurisdictions was tempered). But these rates would not decline to their pre-1928 levels, and usually rebounded to nearer the 1928 figures in the later Roosevelt elections (when FDR's political appeal had become less universal). This was particularly true for many of the great cities of the Mid-Atlantic and the Midwest. Indeed, even many cities in this region that had occasionally scored DQs of greater than 1.0 in the early twentieth century experienced an increase in relative Democratic strength in 1928. Therefore, an important trend becomes evident in these cities (many of which were not previously Democratic strongholds): the DQ, or that jurisdiction's relative importance to the state Democratic coalition, rose—in most cases quite remarkably—in 1928, and then straddled this plateau for the entirety of the Roosevelt presidency.

Below: Figs. 5.14 through 5.21, tracking the Democratic Quotients for selected major metropolitan counties in the Northeast and Midwest, 1896-1944.

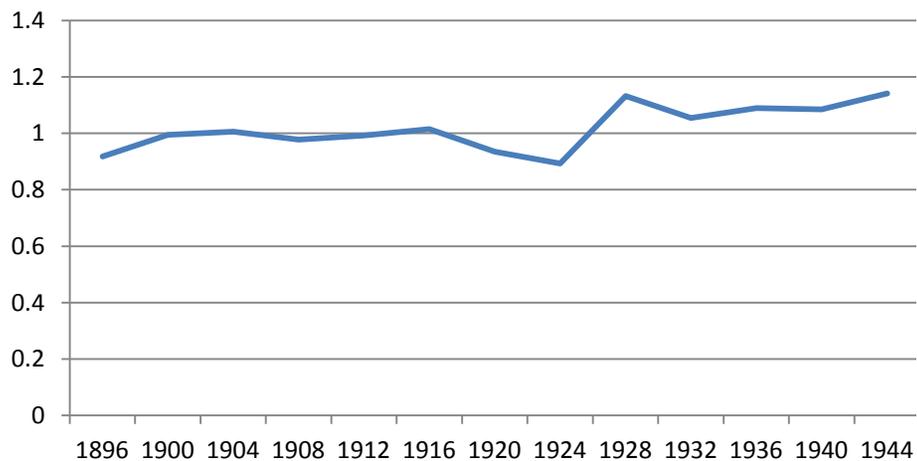
Allegheny, PA



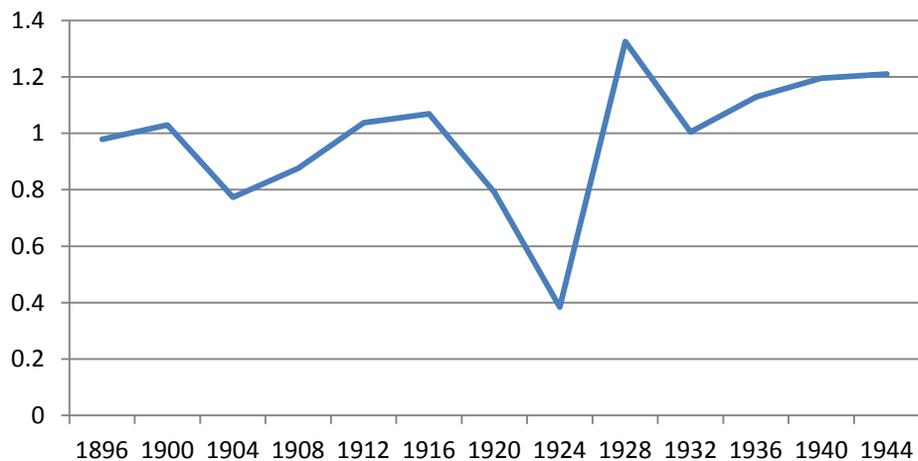
Cook, IL



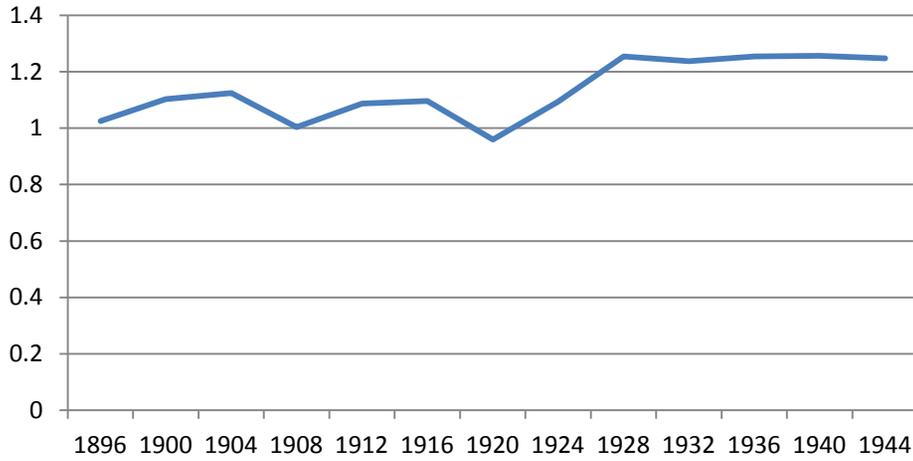
Baltimore City, MD



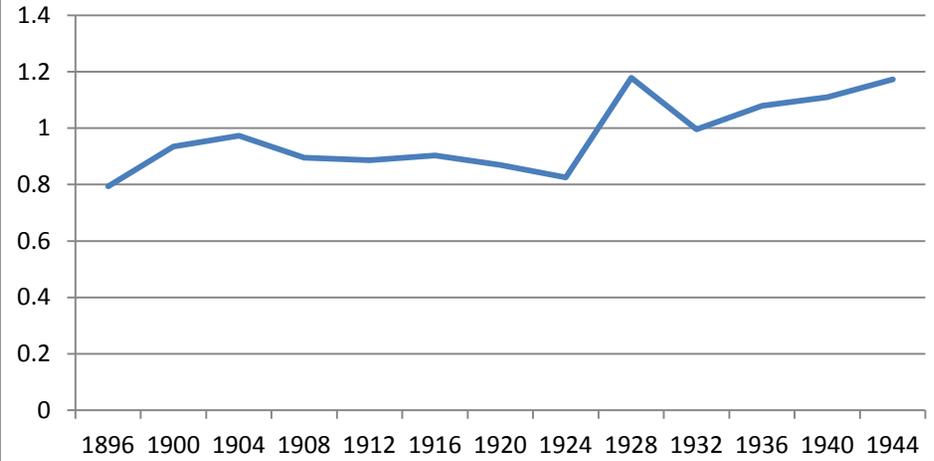
Cuyahoga, OH



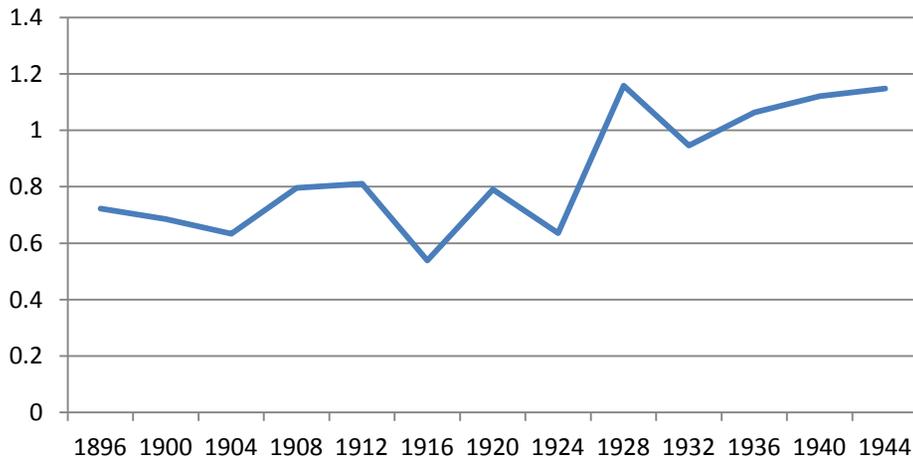
Kings, NY



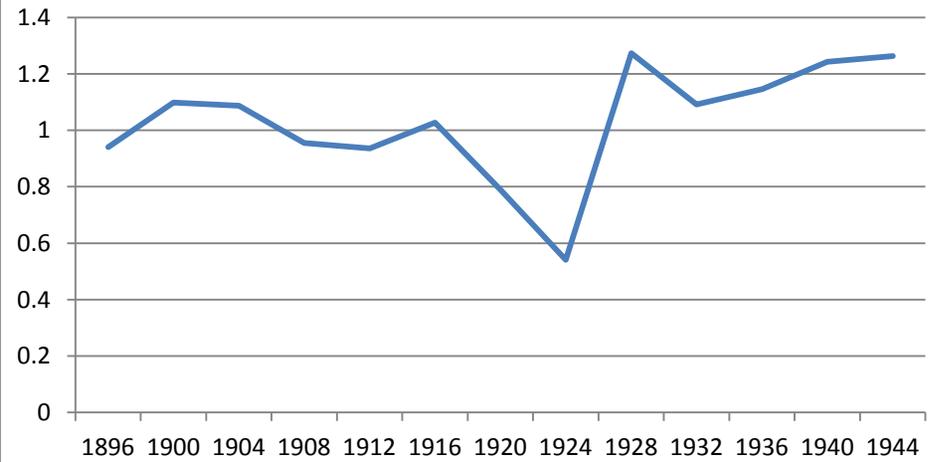
St. Louis City, MO



Philadelphia, PA



Wayne, MI



The pattern is more impressive in some counties and states than in others. But it is important to keep a sense of perspective: even in places like Cook County, Illinois, or Essex County, New Jersey—places where the rise in the urban DQ was not nearly so precipitous in 1928 as it was in other jurisdictions—the figure exceeded, and would largely continue to exceed, the previous high marks for those counties in the period under consideration. A new, higher norm had been established for the relative importance of the largest cities to the Democratic coalition.

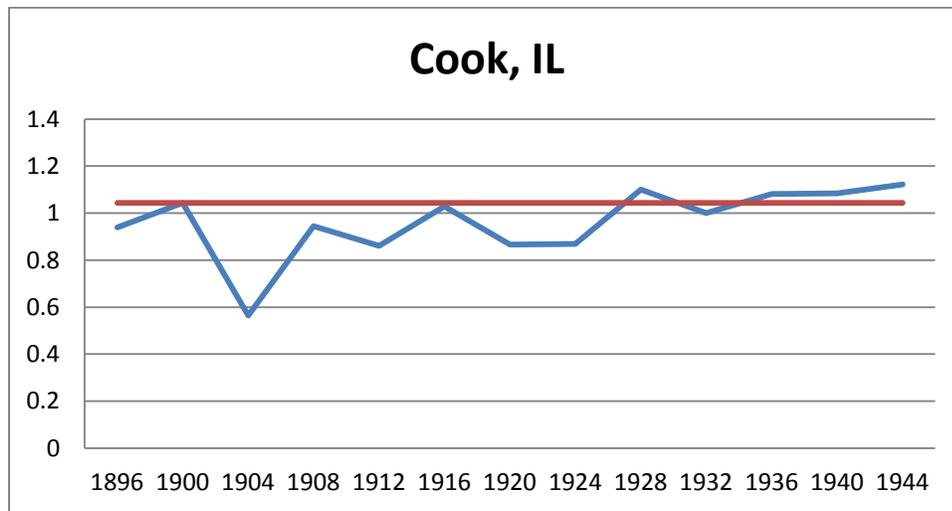


Fig. 5.22: DQ in Cook County, Illinois, 1896-1944, indicating pre-1928 high mark.

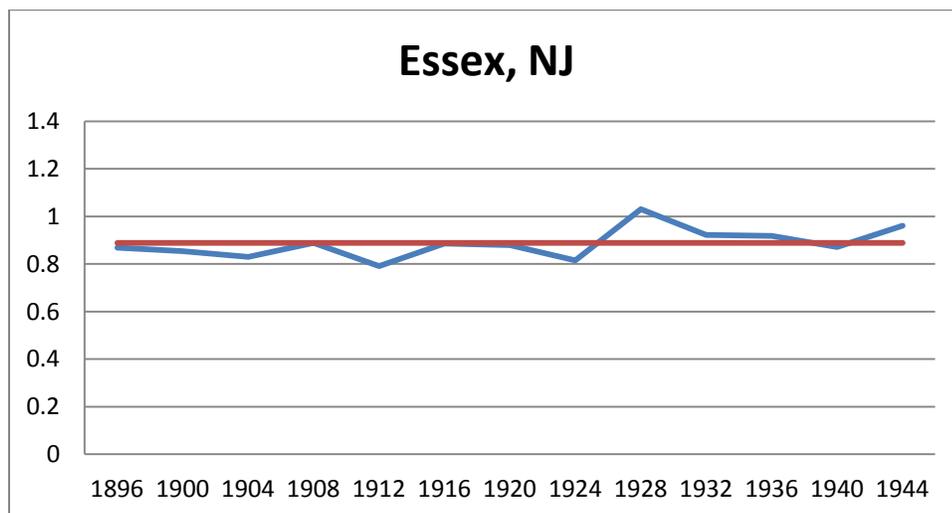


Fig. 5.23: DQ in Essex County, New Jersey, 1896-1944, indicating pre-1928 high mark.

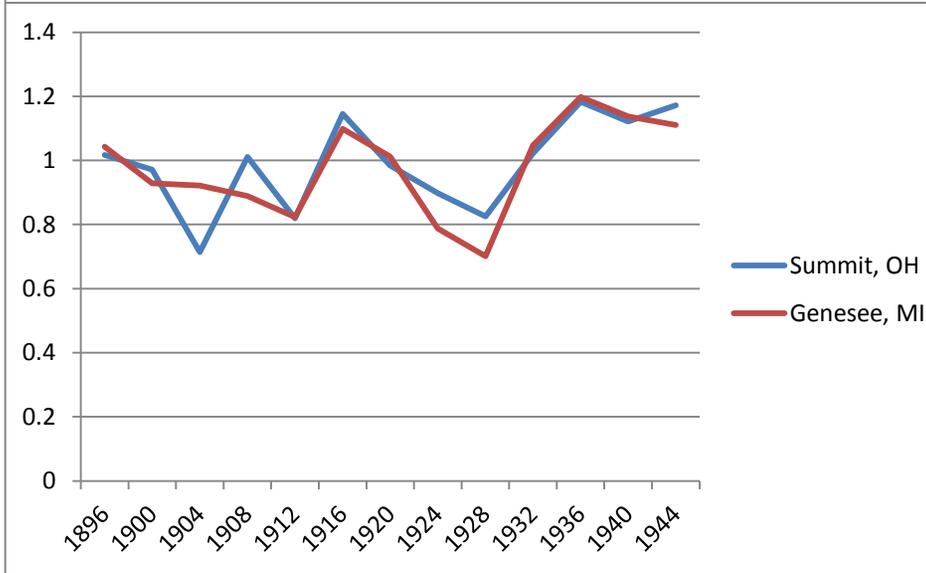
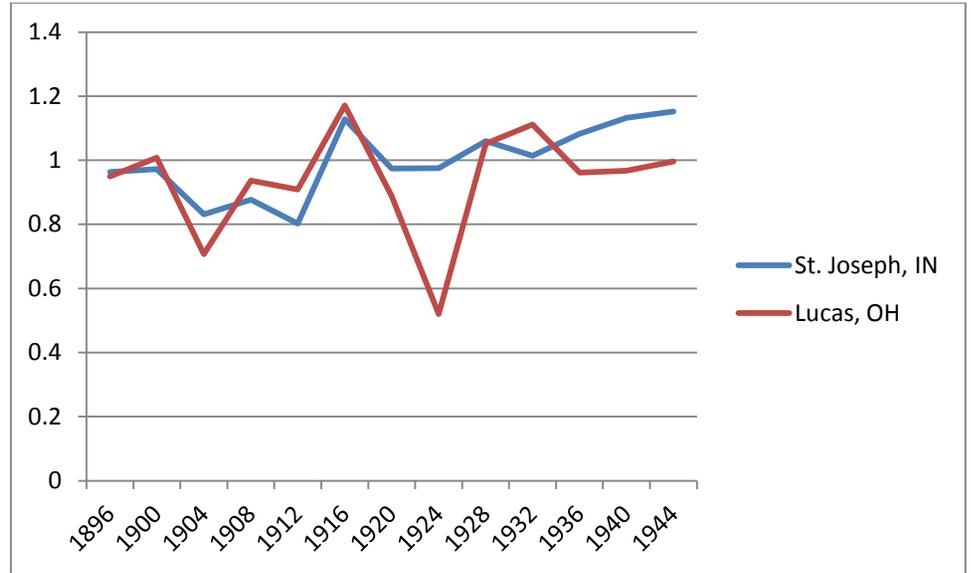
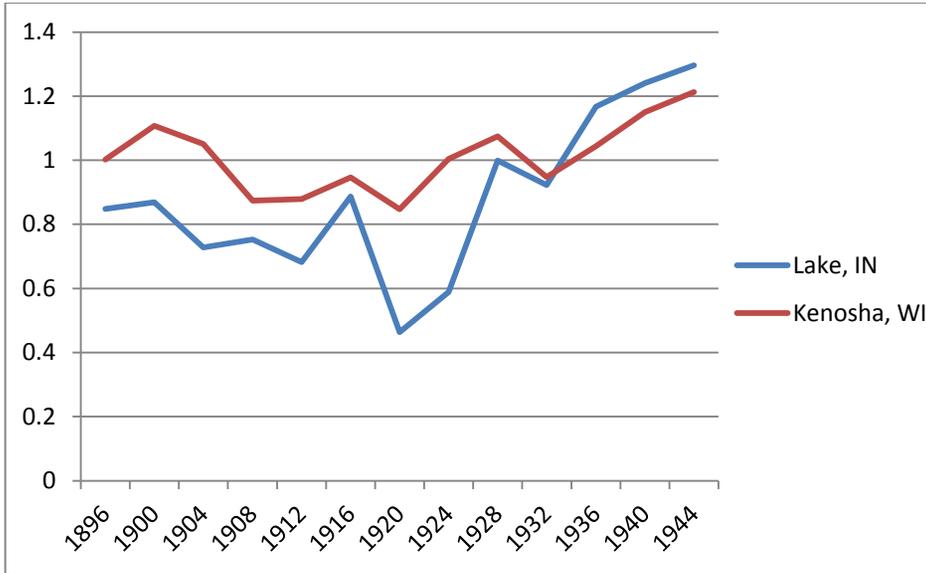
These patterns were far from universal. In many states, especially in New England, the largest cities had already been centers of Democratic strength. In fact, DQ figures for the counties containing Boston, Providence, Jersey City, and St. Paul were all *lower* in 1928 than 1924; and in Milwaukee it was essentially the same—in spite of the fact that Al Smith carried all of these counties in 1928 while of the entire group John W. Davis carried only Hudson County, New Jersey in 1924. This is because the DQ does not measure electoral achievement in a given jurisdiction, only the relative importance of that jurisdiction to the statewide coalition. In these cases, Davis' overall performance was so poor that otherwise unimpressive urban numbers (10 percent in Ramsey County, Minnesota and in Milwaukee County, Wisconsin; 22 percent in Suffolk County, Massachusetts; 39 percent in Providence County, Rhode Island) were enough to skew the weight of the state coalition toward these cities.

There were other counties where 1928 did not establish an enduring precedent for the state Democratic coalition. For some jurisdictions, like Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties in Pennsylvania (Scranton and Wilkes-Barre, respectively), 1928 was a year of peculiar weightiness in the statewide Democratic vote. In other places, the 1928 election appears to have represented more a restoration of an urban district's Democratic strength than an unprecedented level of support—two examples of this are Lucas County, Ohio (Toledo) and St. Joseph County, Indiana (South Bend), which had generally scored DQs of under 1.0 until 1916, when each came nearer 1.2, only to sink again during the 1920s and be restored to a plateau around 1.0 beginning in 1928 (slightly higher in South Bend, slightly lower in Toledo). In other jurisdictions, like Lake County, Indiana (Gary), or Kenosha County, Wisconsin (Kenosha), 1928 represented the beginning of a sharp

upward trend in Democratic voting strength that would be tempered in 1932 but then continue to increase for the rest of the Roosevelt years. Therefore, while the trend in the largest cities appears to have been toward an increase in relative Democratic importance in 1928, which then remained somewhat stable during the New Deal era, for the medium-sized metropolitan counties of the same region, the implications of the 1928 shift were less uniform. While there were medium-sized metropolitan counties like Passaic and Middlesex in New Jersey, where the DQ followed a pattern similar to those of the more populous jurisdictions, the conclusions drawn from the experiences of Cleveland, Detroit, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and other large cities cannot be applied universally.

In fact, some cities actually held unusually little importance to their state's Democratic coalition in 1928. This was the case in Summit County, Ohio (Akron), where the DQ in 1928 was the lowest since 1912, and far lower than those of the Roosevelt elections. This trend was even more evident in Genesee County, Michigan (Flint), where 1928 represented the lowest DQ of the entire period, a nadir from which a swift restoration would take place in 1932. Elsewhere, 1928 set a new, lower precedent for relative significance to the statewide Democratic coalition: in Kent County, Michigan (Grand Rapids), the DQ dropped below 1.0 in 1928 for the first time since 1904, and would remain there throughout the Roosevelt years. In Dauphin County, Pennsylvania (Harrisburg), 1928 was an even ruder break for local Democrats: the election interrupted a steady trend for the county of increasing prominence to the statewide coalition which had reached 1.15 in 1924; in 1928, the DQ had plummeted to 0.45, and would remain well under 1.0 through 1944.

Below: Figs. 5.24 through 5.27, showing various patterns that emerged in metropolitan counties defying the trend of the larger cities.



There are several obvious explanations for these variations. One is the classic argument about religion and ethnicity. Akron and Flint had fewer Catholics, Jews, and people of recent-immigrant stock than Cleveland or Detroit. Another is the question of prosperity. Rubber manufacturing remained robust in 1928, and the automotive sector was booming; cities like Akron and Flint continued to benefit from Republican prosperity and returned the favor electorally. This economic point may help explain the growing Democratic vote in places like Lowell, Massachusetts, or Scranton, Pennsylvania, where key local industries were experiencing stark decline—and this will be considered below. But economics cannot fully explain the growing prominence in statewide Democratic voting of Detroit or Pittsburgh, where industry continued to enjoy success. An important reason for these discrepancies is that in general it was the largest cities that were the source of the shifts in the electorate outside of New England. Totaling the voting results for the counties containing the twenty largest cities from the 1930 census and tracking their combined DQ as a part of the national popular vote reveals a pattern similar to that produced in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Detroit, and other great metropolises.¹³⁰⁸

1308 Those cities were, from largest to smallest: New York, NY; Chicago, IL; Philadelphia, PA; Detroit, MI; Los Angeles, CA; Cleveland, OH; St. Louis, MO; Baltimore, MD; Boston, MA; Pittsburgh, PA; San Francisco, CA; Milwaukee, WI; Buffalo, NY; Minneapolis, MN; New Orleans, LA; Cincinnati, OH; Newark, NJ; Kansas City, MO; Seattle, WA; and Indianapolis, IN. Washington, DC was larger than several of these cities, but was excluded because it had no presidential vote in the period under consideration.

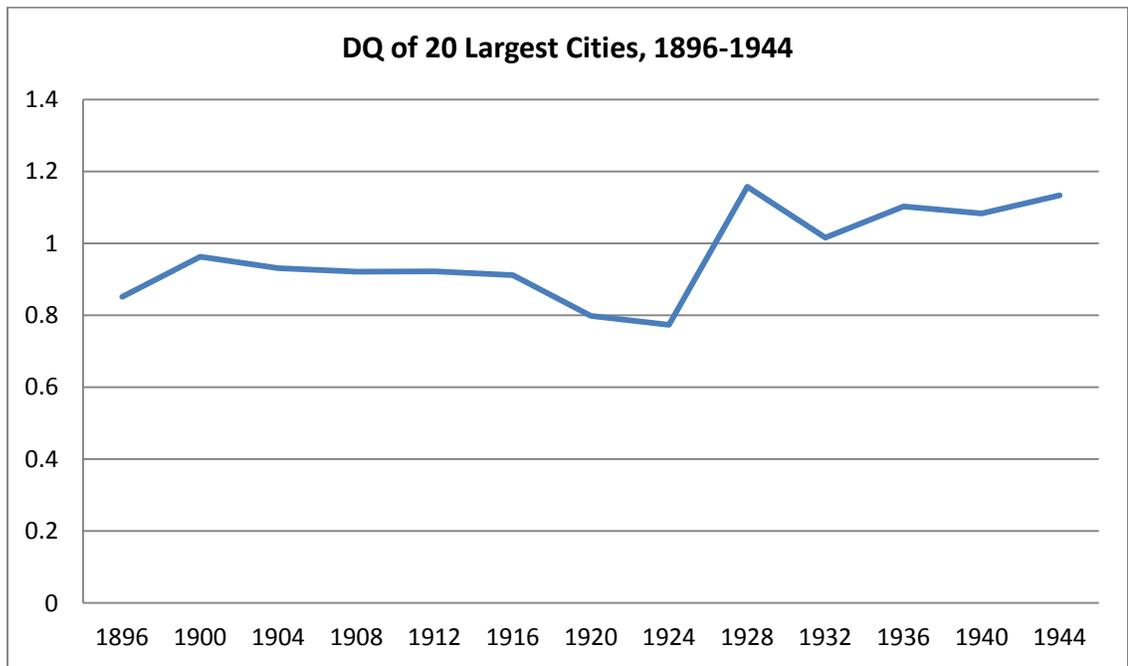


Fig. 5.28: DQ of the twenty largest cities (according to the 1930 census), 1896-1944.

There are other explanations for the variances. Because the DQ tracks a jurisdiction's relative importance to the statewide party coalition, it can mask Democratic success in two situations: medium-sized urban areas in states where the largest cities have undergone spectacular improvements; and cities in states with a history of poor Democratic performance, like the New England jurisdictions noted above. Because of these complications it is important also to track changes in a more traditional measure of success: the Democratic percentage of the vote. This approach abandons the focus on the changing nature of state coalitions, and instead demonstrates how Smith and Roosevelt were each able to transform areas of relative Democratic strength into sources of statewide Democratic majorities.

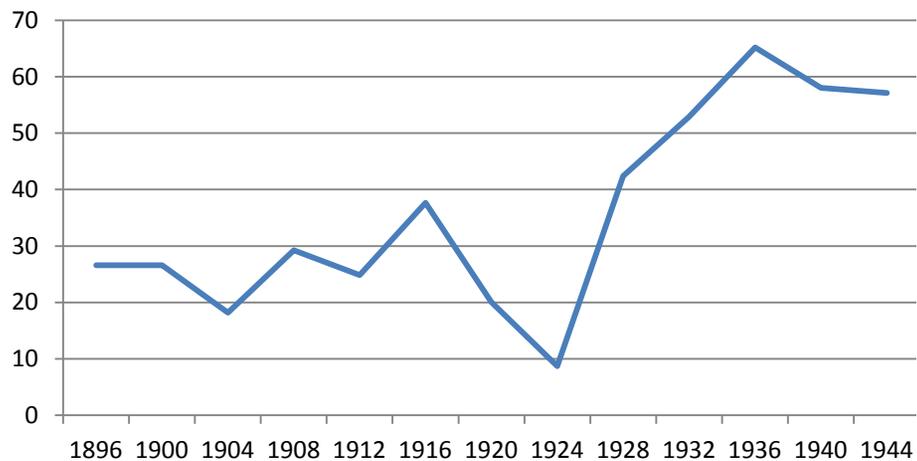
Smith did not carry most of the counties that fit the DQ trend of the great urban centers in 1928. However, the DQ does not misrepresent the changes that occurred in those municipalities, for tracking their Democratic percentages shows that 1928 heralded

a stark increase over previous levels—sometimes a new high, other times a return to Wilson-era successes. The DQ illuminates the fact that while Democrats were enjoying relative improvement in the great cities in 1928, they were losing strength in rural counties; the Democratic percentages show that despite these vast urban improvements, in most cases the party still had work to do to achieve majority status.

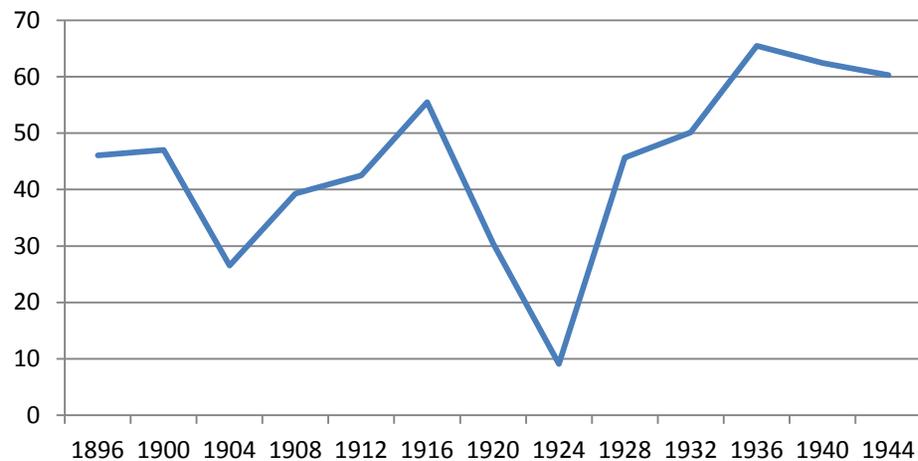
In these urban locales, the Smith campaign improved Democratic percentages drastically over those of the preceding two elections, and often set new high marks for the party; in places like Milwaukee and St. Louis the Democrats even achieved a majority. These relative successes, coupled with the decrease in rural Democratic percentages, shifted the Democratic Quotients in the Northeastern and Midwestern states toward much more urban coalitions—a quantifiable change with profound qualitative significance. Moreover, Democrats would build upon these successes during the Roosevelt years, crystallizing the realignment that occurred in 1928. Even in states where Smith lost badly—like Michigan, where he received 28.9 percent of the vote and did not carry a single county; or Pennsylvania, where he won only three counties and 33.9 percent—his campaign had shaken old patterns of political behavior and replaced them with at least the foundations of a new system.

Below: Figs. 5.29 through 5.32, tracking the Democratic percentage of the presidential vote in four major metropolitan counties, 1896-1944.

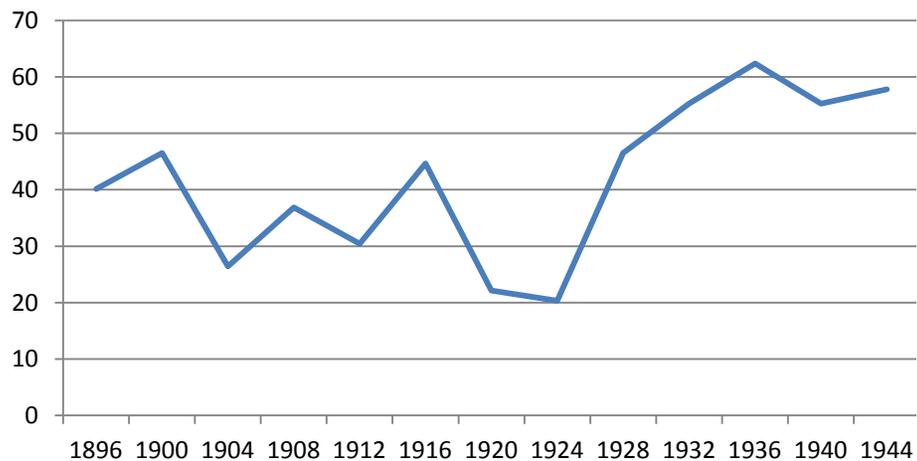
Allegheny, PA



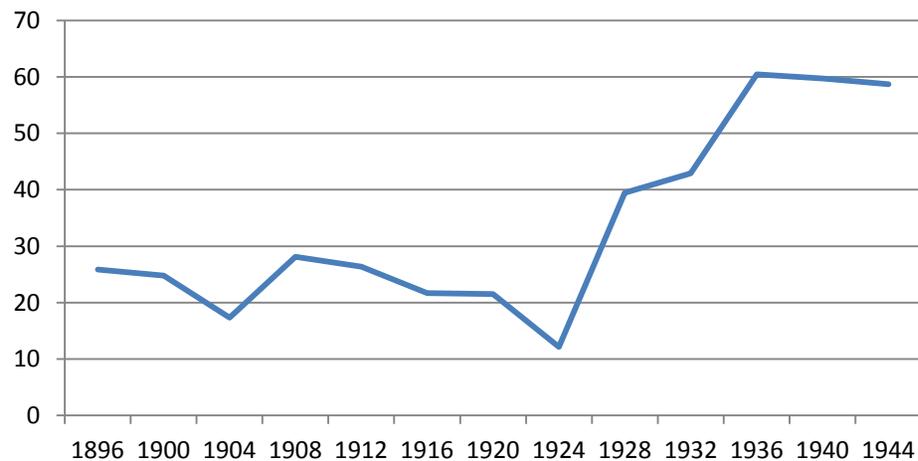
Cuyahoga, OH



Cook, IL



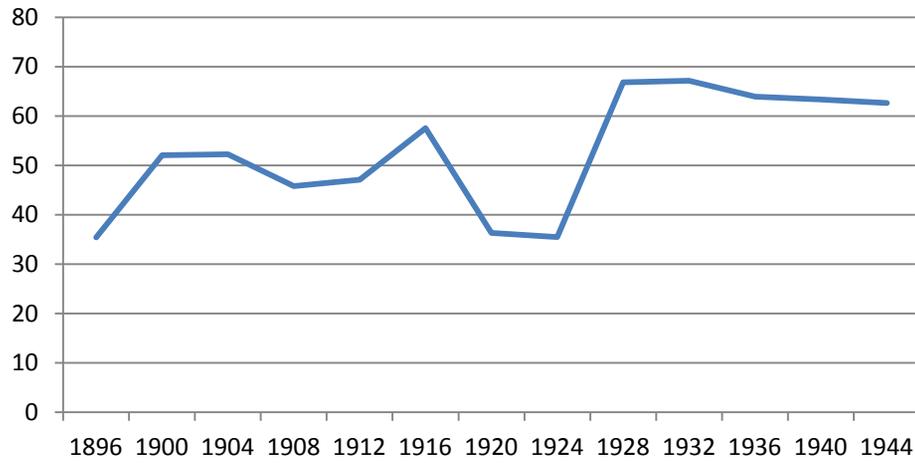
Philadelphia, PA



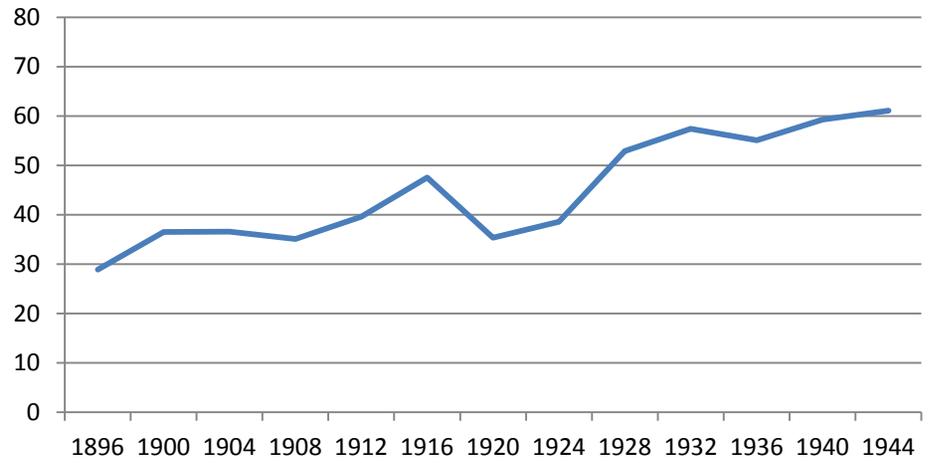
Significantly, portents of that new system could already be observed in 1928 in places where Al Smith actually won. Unlike the Mid-Atlantic and Midwestern states, Smith was able to achieve victories in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. In these states, he improved on the relative Democratic strength that had already been established in the largest cities—Irish Democrats were firmly ensconced power brokers in Boston, and held significant influence in Providence. This had been reflected in the high DQs of these cities prior to 1928, but had never translated into a working majority. As Roosevelt would do in states like Michigan and Illinois in 1932, Smith would build upon the existing urban foundations of Democratic strength in Massachusetts and Rhode Island in 1928 with a campaign that spoke directly to the social and economic grievances of working-class voters.

Below: Figs. 5.33 through 5.36, tracking Democratic Quotients and Democratic percentages of the presidential vote in Suffolk County, Massachusetts, and Providence County, Rhode Island, 1896-1944.

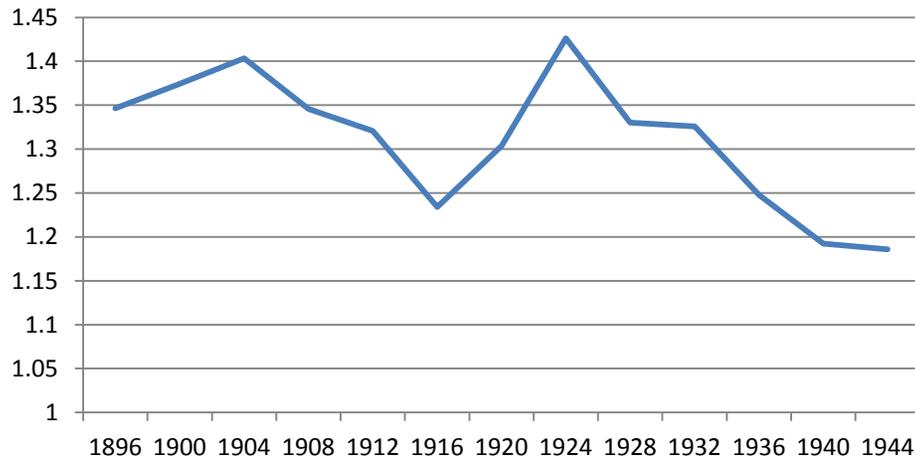
Suffolk, MA: % Democratic



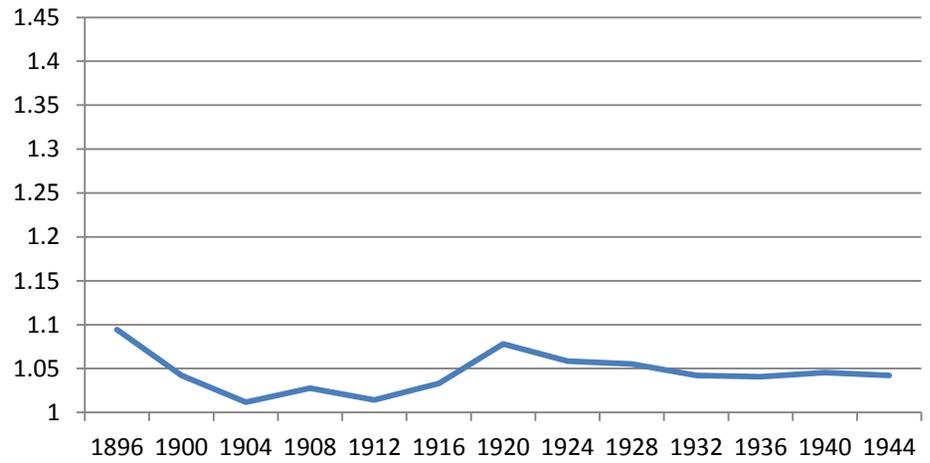
Providence, RI: % Democratic



Suffolk, MA: DQ



Providence, RI: DQ



In New England, as in the rest of the nation, a key facet of Smith's success was his ability to appeal to urban ethnic working-class voters. Just as his campaign had brought ethnic voters firmly into the party in cities like Chicago and Philadelphia, Smith was able to transcend the Democracy's traditional Irish Catholic base in New England and attract the votes of typically Republican "new immigrant" groups. Historian J. Joseph Huthmacher has noted that in Massachusetts, "New Immigrants left the Republican Party in droves" in 1928.¹³⁰⁹ Similarly, a study of ethnic voting in Rhode Island found that 1928 "was the year of a lasting Democratic alignment for the French and Italians in the state."¹³¹⁰

Furthermore, unlike most of the country, this region was experiencing widespread economic discontent. Indeed, depression did not wait until 1929 to set in for the textile sector—a key New England industry which suffered through a painful decline for most of the 1920s. Tellingly, in areas where textiles had been particularly hard hit, Smith achieved unprecedented Democratic victories.

All of these quantifiable developments suggest to two hypotheses. First, as argued above, the 1928 election was in fact a "critical election," insofar as it heralded the elevation of the great urban centers to prominence within the Democratic Party on the national level, establishing a new pattern that would persist throughout the Roosevelt years. Second—and more controversially—this process, completed nationally by the Great Depression and by Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, came to maturation four years earlier in southern New England. In the face of economic calamity, social upheaval, and widespread suffering, the national Democratic Party, fueled by the activation of urban,

¹³⁰⁹ Huthmacher, *Massachusetts People and Politics*, p. 182.

¹³¹⁰ DeMoranville, "Ethnic Voting in Rhode Island," p. 93.

ethnic, working-class voters, achieved majority status in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. It was the confluence of cultural grievances with economic despair that set this region apart and enabled Al Smith to capture the loyalties of millions for his political vision of progressive government action on behalf of his conception of social and economic justice. From its origins in 1910s New York, transitional progressivism had always spoken to both of these categories of human experience, for it was born out of the pragmatic recognition that people are complex and have both cultural and economic needs. By articulating the transitional progressive agenda throughout his national campaign, Smith had presented his formula for fulfilling those needs. In the great cities, where urban, ethnic, working-class voters heard a major party presidential nominee speaking to these questions in a relatable fashion for the first time, portents of the looming Roosevelt Revolution became manifest. In New England, where the longing for dignity and respect and industrial democracy was coupled more often than in other regions with desperate uncertainty as to the stability of one's job or how to provide meals or pay rent, transitional progressivism attracted majorities. In that region, there was indeed an Al Smith Revolution.

Chapter VI: The Revolution before the New Deal

“We get a lot of prosperity hash, with here and there something about the full dinner pail, but working men are reading up a little these days and the old dinner pail argument is getting to be more of an insult than an incentive.”

-“Luke Warm,” Letter to the Editor of the *Hartford Courant*, September 30, 1928

* * *

“The deplorable existing conditions and partiality and favoritism that the Republican party has been showing to the manufacturer and powerful combines with their poor records during the eight years and with the uniform and despicable tactics that they are using against Gov. Smith is the reason why he is going to be our next president.”

-V. Gentile, Letter to the Editor of the *Westerly Sun*, October 7, 1928

* * *

“Perhaps it would be best after all to elect Mr. Hoover, with his wide experience in feeding the hungry in other lands and let him direct the ‘Prosperity Breadlines’ in America.”

-“Breadwinner,” Letter to the Editor of the *Springfield Daily News*, October 30, 1928

Herbert Hoover’s landslide victory over Al Smith represented both an affirmation of the Republican economic policies of the 1920s and a rejection of the new, urban, pluralistic America represented by the Democrat. Yet Smith ran strong in Republican New England, scoring unprecedented victories in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. In that region, anti-Catholic sentiment and prohibitionist harangues failed to resonate as they had nationally; indeed, urban, ethnic, “wet” voters were rallied to the Democratic cause by these ethnocultural controversies. Moreover, Smith’s criticisms of Republican economics also found a receptive audience in New England, for as historian J. Joseph

Huthmacher noted, “in the Bay State prosperity of any brand was hard to find.”¹³¹¹ Smith was successful in New England because his transitional progressivism appealed to the region’s ethnic working class on both cultural and economic levels. Based on this, the Democrat was able to construct a new and durable Democratic coalition in this depressed region—a realignment that foreshadowed the New Deal coalition and has rightly been dubbed an “Al Smith revolution.”¹³¹²

Historians have tended to minimize the economic dimensions of the profound political realignment that occurred in New England in 1928.¹³¹³ This cultural focus is not entirely illogical given that the majority of New England workers were wets, Catholics, urbanites, of recent stock, and qualified for membership in every other cultural cohort that historians have inducted into the Smith coalition. Yet assigning prohibition or religion dominant—even exclusive—responsibility for the political upheavals of 1928 requires ignoring much of what was written and uttered by rank and file workers as well as the Democrats for whom they voted. More importantly, the reality of these voters’ lives is misunderstood through denial of their economic motivations. In 1928, New England’s ethnic working class was striving both for economic security and social acceptance, they had been battered by regional decline as well as by religious and ethnic prejudice, they longed for good pay in decent working conditions and for a glass of beer. In order to bring these long-quiescent, politically disorganized voters into a working majority, a candidate was needed who addressed these varying motivations. Smith criticized Republican economics while standing, both symbolically and rhetorically,

¹³¹¹ Huthmacher, *Massachusetts People and Politics, 1919-1933*, pp. 157-158.

¹³¹² Lubell, *The Future of American Politics*, p. 36.

¹³¹³ J. Joseph Huthmacher, in his *Massachusetts People and Politics* (1959), provided the most notable exception to this trend, although he too was hesitant about the relevance of economics to Smith’s victories in many areas of Massachusetts. Huthmacher, *Massachusetts People and Politics*, pp. 150-190

against cultural condescension. By necessity, Al Smith's New England victory was a holistic revolution.

The Happy Warrior in New England

Portents of the coming upheaval could be recognized in late October when Al Smith arrived in New England. As he departed the familiar environs of the Empire State and crossed eastward into the Republican citadel of Massachusetts, ten thousand hailed the nominee's train in Pittsfield.¹³¹⁴ Thirty thousand provided a "tremendous demonstration" of enthusiasm for the Democrat as he stopped in Springfield.¹³¹⁵ On Boston Common, Smith was greeted by 150,000.¹³¹⁶ At Boston Arena, only fifteen thousand were able to enter out of the fifty thousand who attempted to gain entrance for his speech, and so crowds extended for "blocks around the arena . . . listening to the radio to what was going on inside, this, though two other halls, the largest in the city, were crowded to the doors with listeners. . . . Moreover, the passion of the people was appalling in its intensity, more like what might be seen at a monster religious revival than at a political gathering."¹³¹⁷ All told, police estimated that 750,000 people flooded the streets of Boston to greet the governor of New York.¹³¹⁸

¹³¹⁴ "10,000 Hail Smith Party Going Through Pittsfield," *The Boston Globe*, October 25, 1928, p. 21.

¹³¹⁵ "Thousands Greet Governor Smith at Springfield," *The Holyoke Daily Transcript*, October 24, 1928, p. 1; "30,000 People Cheer Gov Smith As He Halts Here On Way to Boston," *The Springfield Daily News*, October 24, 1928, p. 1; "Crowds Greet Train at All of its Stops," *The Boston Globe*, October 25, 1928, p. 21.

¹³¹⁶ "150,000 Hail Smith on Boston Common," *The Boston Globe*, October 25, 1928, pp. 1, 24.

¹³¹⁷ "Battle of the Atlantic," *Time*, November 5, 1928; "Arena Crowd Twice Breaks Police Lines," *The Boston Globe*, October 25, 1928, pp. 1, 24; Charles Michelson, "Smith Smites Hoover For Cry of 'Socialism;' Boston Wild Over Him," *The New York World*, October 25, 1928, p. 1.

¹³¹⁸ "Arena Crowd Twice Breaks Police Lines," p. 1.

As Smith travelled from Boston to Providence, he abandoned his train in favor of an automobile tour “through the mill towns of the Blackstone Valley which are traditionally Republican, French-Canadian, wet and Roman Catholic.”¹³¹⁹ As he did, “mill hands left their piece work, ran to big windows and yelled,” forcing “numerous mills to shut down from five minutes to an hour.”¹³²⁰ Smith toured Woonsocket, Manville, Albion, Berkeley, Valley Falls, Central Falls, and Pawtucket, greeted all along the way by the shouts and cheers of mill families who formed “one unbroken line of howling humanity . . . all the way down the historic valley.”¹³²¹ Arriving in Providence, Smith encountered a “frenzy of mobs” that “cheered him lustily.”¹³²² In Hartford, “five miles of packed humans jammed the streets, through which police fought a slow way for the Candidate’s car,” and in this “pandemonium,” Smith’s famous brown derby seemed more like “a magician’s wand” able “literally to conjure cheers” from the two hundred thousand who thronged to catch a glimpse of the Democratic nominee.¹³²³ In Bridgeport, Smith’s train was greeted by twenty thousand, who “roared a welcome” as “red torches flared.”¹³²⁴ The *New Yorker* reflected on the Boston reception as the greatest of his life, while Mrs. Smith was moved to tears.¹³²⁵

Republicans insisted that New Englanders remained in their camp—particularly on economic matters—and that the enthusiasm for the “Happy Warrior” was less a

¹³¹⁹ “Battle of the Atlantic.”

¹³²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³²¹ “Throgs Roar Welcome To Al Smith On His Passage Through Woonsocket,” *The Woonsocket Call*, October 25, 1928, p. 1; “Battle of the Atlantic.”

¹³²² “Al Smith Acclaimed by Thousands on Trip from Blackstone to Providence,” *The Providence Journal*, October 26, 1928, p. 1; Editorial, “A Visit From Al,” *The Providence Journal*, October 26, 1928, p. 18 (Second section).

¹³²³ “500,000 Folk Pay Tribute to Smith,” *The Boston Globe*, October 26, 1928, pp. 1, 16; “Battle of the Atlantic.”

¹³²⁴ “500,000 Folk Pay Tribute to Smith,” p. 16; “Battle of the Atlantic.”

¹³²⁵ “Greatest Reception I Ever Received,” *The Boston Globe*, October 25, 1928, p. A1; “Battle of the Atlantic.”

political statement than excitement over the arrival of a celebrity.¹³²⁶ The *Woonsocket Call* declared the Smith visit “a non-partisan event,” for “a cheering crowd will always turn out to welcome any prominent figure in the life of the nation,” concluding that “crowds and cheers are seldom an indication as to just how the political wind is blowing.”¹³²⁷ Similarly, the *Providence Journal* explained that “Governor Smith may be pardoned if he concluded, after his enthusiastic reception, that he is destined to carry Rhode Island, but he will receive more definite information on that score the night of November 6”; and the *Hartford Courant* clarified that “as the one and only ‘Al’ Smith, he was enthusiastically received by fellow Democrats, while those of a different political faith, who admire the Governor but who will not vote for him for president, joined in the greetings.”¹³²⁸

It was likely the case that the majority had come to see the champion of religious liberty and of liberation from Volsteadism, while many others were there to witness a national star waving his iconic hat. A group in Providence probably articulated the motivations of many as they traipsed about the confetti-laden streets carrying a large banner that read: “Remember November sixth—beer!”¹³²⁹ But as these New Englanders listened to Smith’s Boston address at the auditorium or on their radios, as they read his words in their local newspapers or heard regional politicians outline the Democratic vision for the future, a more complete picture emerged. With purpose, Smith had chosen New England as the setting for his most vigorous response to Hoover’s consistent praise of the economic status quo—which was said by Republican speakers to have “filled the

¹³²⁶ Editorial, “A Visit From Al,” p. 18

¹³²⁷ Editorial, “The Brown Derby Passes,” *The Woonsocket Call*, October 25, 1928, p. 15.

¹³²⁸ Editorial, “A Visit From Al,” p. 18; Editorial, “Governor Smith’s Reception,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 27, 1928, p. 8.

¹³²⁹ “Battle of the Atlantic.”

workingman's dinner pail and his gasoline tank besides, and placed the whole nation in the silk-stockings class," allowing the GOP to invoke the promise of "a chicken in every pot." Smith called attention to those neglected by this "Republican Prosperity."¹³³⁰ The Democrat elicited laughter from his Boston audience by asking them to "see if you can in your mind's eye picture a man at \$17.30 a week going out to a chicken dinner in his own automobile, with silk socks on."¹³³¹ This was an amusing one-liner, but the issue was no joke to Smith—and certainly it was not a throw-away to thousands of struggling New England workers, most notably those employed in the slumping textile sector. "In one manufacturing city in this State the number of wage earners in industry dropped from 33,300 in 1921 to 24,800 in 1927, a loss of work for 8,500 men and women, particularly in the woolen and cotton mills," he reported solemnly. "In that same period the amount of wages earned in a year had fallen from \$36,904,884 to \$28,961,874, or a loss of \$8,000,000 a year."¹³³²

Dissenting from the popular accolades for "Republican prosperity," Smith presented a serious consideration of the thousands of jobs lost in New England textiles and suggested that the interests of workers were being neglected in favor of rich, powerful forces.¹³³³ Furthermore, he suggested an alternative policy approach, based on his record of progressive social welfare and labor reforms in New York. Smith campaigners and spokespeople constantly discussed his gubernatorial record, and argued that the Democrat would bring a similarly dynamic and compassionate posture to the White House. Indeed, for the hundreds of thousands that had flocked to hear the Boston

¹³³⁰ Smith, "Boston," p. 215; "Stenographic Report of Smith's Boston Speech Answering Hoover on 'State Socialism,'" *The New York Times*, October 25, 1928, p. 2.

¹³³¹ "Stenographic Report of Smith's Boston Speech Answering Hoover on 'State Socialism,'" p. 2.

¹³³² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹³³³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

address Smith presented a vigorous defense of his social welfare record and of his ambitions to mobilize the federal government to assuage the condition of American workers.¹³³⁴

Progressive Smith allies like Frances Perkins were particularly active in espousing the governor's program in New England.¹³³⁵ Social welfare and labor activists, especially women from these traditions, promoted Smith's ambitions in the industrial Northeast by extolling his progressive record on these questions and by insisting that such a humanitarian agenda was the key to remedying the injustices of 1920s America. Across the region, New Jersey congresswoman Mary Theresa Norton took to the airwaves to celebrate the New Yorker's "humane record," including struggles to limit women's working hours, end child labor, provide aid for infant and maternal welfare, extend generous funding for public health services, and mandate equal pay for female teachers.¹³³⁶ Throughout the national campaign, Perkins, Norton, Eleanor Roosevelt, Molly Dewson, Lillian Wald, and many other social welfare activists made similar arguments on the Democrat's behalf.¹³³⁷ In New England these efforts were buttressed by local initiative. In the closing weeks of the campaign, a group of Massachusetts trade union women barnstormed the Bay State for Smith, setting out for "every factory city and town in Massachusetts" in "three motorcars . . . decorated with seven banners, in colors

¹³³⁴ Handlin, *Al Smith and His America*, p. 130.

¹³³⁵ E.g.: Frances Perkins, "Notes for Campaign Speech to Social Workers in Boston, Sept 1928," Frances Perkins Papers, Box 43; Frances Perkins, "Speech, Boston, 10/2/28," Frances Perkins Papers, Box 43, p. 1.

¹³³⁶ "Smith's Humane Record is Mrs. Norton's Topic," *The Boston Globe*, October 9, 1928, p. 10.

¹³³⁷ "Mrs. Roosevelt Stirs Audience By Smith Plea," *The Elizabeth Daily Journal*, October 21, 1928, p. 1; "Former Boston Woman Directs Smith Offices in Region of St. Louis," *The Boston Globe*, September 26, 1928, p. 24; Molly Dewson, "What Campaign Issues Mean to Women," (Dewson Speech over Radio in St. Louis for Al Smith, 1928), Mary W. Dewson Papers, Box 4, Folder: "Smith, Alfred E. and 1928 Campaign, Corres. Re."; Lillian Wald to Belle Moskowitz, July 3, 1928, Lillian Wald Papers, New York Public Library, New York, NY, Reel 3; Lillian Wald to June Hamilton Rhodes, September 4, 1928 Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 3; Lillian Wald to G.E. Sehlbrade, September 14, 1928 Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 3; Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, p. 189.

representing the rainbow, while on each are . . . printed the Democratic issues of the campaign.”¹³³⁸ Smith and his allies did their utmost to notify New Englanders of their reform agenda.

Political historians have long sought to categorize voters and their motivations, and in the case of 1928 the most assertive studies have concluded that cultural issues were absolutely dominant.¹³³⁹ Yet political motivations often defy neat classification. This is so because the vast majority of human beings defy such classification. Most of the actors in working-class New England, aside from the most conservative priests or the most myopic Marxists, lived their lives with multiple layers of interests covering varying categories of analysis. People are complex—their lives and their problems and their hopes are complex, and it has been as superficial for historians to avoid this basic reality as it has been for them to dismiss Al Smith’s strenuous challenge to the political-economic status quo. Granting serious consideration to both Smith and his constituents demonstrates that prior to the national onset of the Great Depression and the national ascension of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a Democratic revolution was underway in New England, fueled both by changing demographics and industrial turmoil, and led by a working-class Irish Catholic social welfare progressive from “the Sidewalks of New York.”

¹³³⁸ “Women Speakers To Tour for Smith,” *The Boston Globe*, October 27, 1928, p. 13; “‘Smith Special’ Off for Tour of State,” *The Boston Globe*, October 28, 1928, p. A16.

¹³³⁹ E.g.: Lichtman, *Prejudice and the Old Politics*.

Ethnic New England

Angelo Peter Bizzozero was a notable figure among the Italians of Quincy, Massachusetts. A veteran of the Great War, Bizzozero was on the honor roll of the Ave Maria Council No. 1535 of the Knights of Columbus in West Quincy, and had been elected as a Republican to the city council several times in the 1920s.¹³⁴⁰ By September 29, 1928, the councilman was an important enough figure in the Fourteenth Congressional District that the Massachusetts Republican Party nominated him as one of eighteen presidential electors to stand for Herbert Hoover at the Electoral College, should their candidate carry the Bay State as predicted.¹³⁴¹ This was done without the knowledge of the nominee, however, and three days later Bizzozero formally declined.¹³⁴² “I have intended, and will vote for Alfred E. Smith for President of the United States,” he revealed: “I cannot on election day go and vote for Alfred E. Smith and permit my name to be used as Presidential elector for Herbert C. Hoover. . . . I would be unworthy of the trust which has been placed in me by the voters if I was false to myself in voting and appearing on the ballot in another way.”¹³⁴³ This vignette was but a minor episode—noteworthy more for the “amusement” it brought to Democrats than for any profound electoral influence.¹³⁴⁴ Yet it is indicative of a tremendously important

¹³⁴⁰ Maurice Francis Egan and John B. Kennedy, *The Knights of Columbus in Peace and War*, vol. 2 (New Haven, CT: Knights of Columbus, 1920), p. 160; “Quincy’s New Mayor Sworn in On Saturday,” *The Boston Globe*, January 3, 1925, p. A8; “McGrath Discusses Finances at Quincy,” *The Boston Globe*, January 7, 1930, p. 7.

¹³⁴¹ “Coolidge Asks Vote for Party Policies,” *The New York Times*, September 30, 1928, pp. 1, 27, p. 27.

¹³⁴² John D. Merrill, “Walsh Turns Down Debate with HYoung [sic],” *The Boston Globe*, October 3, 1928, p. 25; “G.O.P. Elector Quits to Support Smith,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 3, 1928, p. 5.

¹³⁴³ Merrill, “Walsh Turns Down Debate with HYoung [sic],” p. 25.

¹³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25. In fact, while quadrupling recent Democratic performances, Smith did not carry Quincy (nor would Franklin Roosevelt in the elections that followed). *A Manual for Use of the General Court of*

phenomenon that occurred across New England during the 1928 election: the shift in the ethnic vote away from neutrality and even Republicanism, and into the Democratic fold.

In most considerations of the 1928 election, questions of ethnicity have held great prominence. In fact, the “ethnic vote”—nebulously understood as the political preferences of communities dominated by second-wave immigrants and their progeny—underwent transitions that alone make 1928 important, for these voters were to become an essential element of the Democratic majority in the Roosevelt era. According to political scientist Kristi Andersen, it was this mobilization “of new populations, rather than conversion of Republicans, which . . . constituted the substance of realignment,” in the 1930s.¹³⁴⁵ During the preceding decade, “the pool of . . . electorally inexperienced” potential voters was “unusually large,” because children of second-wave immigrants (and many of those immigrants themselves) were only then becoming adult citizens.¹³⁴⁶ In general, ethnic voters lacked strong party prejudices because they “had not been around at the last major party reshuffling at the end of the nineteenth century.”¹³⁴⁷ Therefore, these “inexperienced and ‘available’ citizens” of the 1920s were especially malleable when it came to partisan preferences, and the major events that would follow their entrée into civic participation—the Smith candidacy in 1928, the Depression, and the New Deal—“gave the Democrats an appeal among these groups which was translated into votes and into a persisting Democratic majority.”¹³⁴⁸ Tracking voting trends from 1920 until 1940 in major American cities with substantial immigrant populations, John

Massachusetts for 1921-1922, p. 391; *A Manual . . . for 1925-1926*, p. 397; *A Manual . . . for 1929-1930*, p. 405; *A Manual . . . for 1933-1934*, p. 327; *A Manual . . . for 1937-1938*, p. 331.

¹³⁴⁵ Kristi Andersen, “Generation, Partisan Shift, and Realignment; A Glance Back to the New Deal,” in Norman H. Nie, Sidney Verba, and John R. Petrocik, *The Changing American Voter* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1976), pp. 74-95, p. 77.

¹³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

Petrocik affirmed the Andersen thesis: “the Republican party simply did not get its share of the increase in the size of the voting population, and this failure to attract the new voters resulted in a 30 percentage point decline in the Republican share of the vote.”¹³⁴⁹ The conclusion was “inescapable”: Democratic success after 1928 was “less a consequence of changed behavior on the part of old voters than . . . the result of the choices of new voters.”¹³⁵⁰

However, while the bulk of the second-wave immigrant populations had remained electorally aloof until the late 1920s, the leadership of these communities had been quite active politically, purporting to speak for their ethnic brethren. These élites supported Republicans at least as often as Democrats. The behavior of such ethnic political pioneers mattered, for their influence at the local level would help direct the partisan preferences of their cohorts as they entered into the franchise. Some Republican ethnic notables dug in during the 1928 campaign, but there were enough Angelo Bizzozeros in New England and elsewhere to alter significantly the political dynamics of many communities.

It did not have to be this way. The Democrats were not predestined to become the party of tolerance toward recent immigrants, let alone the party of progressive labor and social welfare reforms. The dual processes of converting Republican ethnic communities and mobilizing naturalized citizens and their children were a vital phase—perhaps *the* vital phase—in developing the foundation for Roosevelt’s Democratic majority. It was not until the 1928 Smith campaign that these new voters were firmly established as Democrats.

¹³⁴⁹ Petrocik, *Party Coalitions*, p. 55.

¹³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

On October 14, 1920, Democratic presidential nominee James Cox delivered an address at Memorial Hall in Columbus, Ohio, in which he denounced a confederation of special interests—what he described as “the most motley array of questionable groups and influences”—that he believed were behind the candidacy of Republican Warren G. Harding.¹³⁵¹ Many of these groups were identified as “reactionaries” who sought low wages, suppression of “progressive thought,” and “martial law” as “a solvent for all industrial disputes.”¹³⁵² This populist rhetoric, particularly as it appealed to the apprehensions of the working class in a period of uneasy economic adjustment to peacetime conditions, could have bolstered the Democrat’s cause among urban ethnic citizens laboring in the nation’s factories. Yet this was hardly the overriding theme of the speech. Cox identified such “selfish” blocs as “the pro-German party,” “the Italian party,” “the Greek party and the Bulgarian party,” and the “Afro-American party” as only some of the “racial groups” bolstering the Republicans.¹³⁵³

However noble Cox’s intention to carry on Wilson’s quixotic pursuit of the League of Nations (or his apparent fear of “counter-attacks” and “bloody race riots” against “unsuspecting colored people”), his speech became noteworthy for its denunciation of “hyphenated” Americans.¹³⁵⁴ While the African-American vote was already overwhelmingly Republican, this rejection of ethnic-group cohesion hastened the Democratic Party’s isolation of recent immigrant voters—a process well underway in the closing years of Wilson’s second term. Many Irish and German citizens had opposed American participation in the Great War from the beginning; and other groups were

¹³⁵¹ “17 Selfish Groups Backing Harding, Declares Gov. Cox,” *The New York Times*, October 15, 1920, pp. 1, 3, p. 1.

¹³⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹³⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 3.

¹³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

dismayed as the shape of the post-war world became clear—most notably the Italians, whose motherland’s claims to the Adriatic port of Fiume had been scuttled at Versailles by the American president.¹³⁵⁵ Nationwide, including in the ethnic enclaves of America’s great cities, Cox and the Democrats were soundly defeated.

In fact, this was only the latest setback in the turbulent Democratic courtship of immigrant voters in the Northeast. The lure of the “full dinner pail” and promises of higher wages through Republican protectionism had entranced urban workers of immigrant and native stock alike since the Gilded Age. Meanwhile, the Democrats embodied much that repelled immigrants. There was the undiluted agrarianism of the party’s populist western wing; the domination of the national party by the South and of the regional party by the Irish; the homiletic declarations of Bryan and, to a lesser extent, Wilson; all of these Democratic hallmarks had served to alienate ethnic voters.¹³⁵⁶

This was particularly true in New England. There, high-tariff shibboleths beckoned mill workers into the Grand Old Party, while resentment against monopolization of the Democratic Party and the Roman Catholic hierarchy by the Irish tempered any chances of cross-ethnic cooperation in an anti-Yankee alliance.¹³⁵⁷ The Irish themselves were dismayed by the alleged Anglophile bias of Wilson’s

¹³⁵⁵ Allswang, *Bosses, Machines, and Urban Voters*, p. 100; Allswang, *A House for All Peoples*, pp. 112-114, 116; Huthmacher, *Massachusetts People and Politics*, pp. 19-23. Edward Kantowicz notes that Chicago’s Polish voters were initially enthusiastic for Wilson and the war due to that community’s nationalist and anti-German sentiments. Yet even these voters were ambivalent about the outcome of the war, and in fact the machinations at Versailles unleashed an ugly wave of anti-Semitic paranoia within the Polish community, which turned many of these voters away from the Democrats. Edward R. Kantowicz, *Polish-American Politics in Chicago, 1888-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1975), pp. 115-119; see also, Allswang, *A House for all Peoples*, pp. 114-115.

¹³⁵⁶ Oscar Handlin summarized the situation well: “The populists made no headway at all in districts where the newcomers were numerous, and William Jennings Bryan could not hold the loyalty of such traditionally Democratic groups as the Irish.” Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1952), p. 218.

¹³⁵⁷ Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960* (New York: Cambridge, 1989), pp. 19-60; Huthmacher, *Massachusetts People and Politics*, pp. 14-15; Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles: Ethnic Politics and the Catholic Church in Providence*, pp. 46, 51, 84.

internationalism—despite Governor Cox’s intentional exclusion of this group from his catalog of malignant hyphenators.¹³⁵⁸ While things were more complex at the local level, in the 1920s, French Canadians, Italians, Jews, Poles, Portuguese, and other New England ethnic groups whose electoral strength had been steadily increasing since the turn of the century were deeply skeptical of the Democratic Party. In national and especially presidential voting this reality was particularly consequential to the electoral calculus in places like Massachusetts and Rhode Island, where such groups held the balance of power between Yankee Republicans and Irish Democrats.

For decades the Irish had dominated the Democratic organizations in many American cities; among them New York, Boston, and Providence. But in contrast to the evolving ethnic pragmatism of New York’s Tammany Hall, the Irish Democrats of New England clung to power through exclusionary tactics—monopolizing political offices and patronage and in turn isolating other ethnic groups. In response, recent immigrants often aligned themselves with the Republican Party in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, producing a counterintuitive coalition that set Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Jewish, and especially French-Canadian voters alongside old-stock Yankee Protestants.

In 1928 Al Smith captured new-immigrant loyalties for the Democratic Party—permanently—and thus shifted the balance of power in southern New England away from its traditional Republicanism. Yet within the Democracy, Irish hegemony remained strong in 1928. When a preliminary set of Smith organizations for Boston was announced, their leaders included former mayor James Michael Curley (the “Smith Volunteers”), former fire commissioner Theodore A. Glynn (the “Smith Flying Wedge”), Boston Schoolhouse Commission chair Francis E. Slattery (the “Boston Smith Campaign

¹³⁵⁸ Huthmacher, *Massachusetts People and Politics*, pp. 23-28.

Executive Committee”), and former mayor Andrew J. Peters (the “Smith Campaign Advisory Committee”).¹³⁵⁹ Moreover, the list of speakers for Commissioner Glynn’s “Flying Wedge” was comprised of 80 percent Irish surnames; with a dusting of English and Scottish orators, as well as a single Italian.¹³⁶⁰ There were no French, Polish, or other recent-immigrant names included.¹³⁶¹ These groups fared only slightly better in Hartford, Connecticut.¹³⁶² In that city, the executive committee that was named to make preparations for Smith’s October 25 visit was dominated by Irish Democrats, with a strong English presence on the sixty-member board.¹³⁶³ Meanwhile, Italians made up just under 7 percent of the executive committee; 5 percent of the members had traditionally Jewish surnames; and Poles represented slightly over 3 percent of the body.¹³⁶⁴ While clearly more diverse than the Boston group, the Hartford partisans did not provide an ethnically representative sample of their city’s population, which was more than 12.8 percent Italian and 7.6 percent Polish at the time of the 1930 census.¹³⁶⁵

As Irish dominance of New England’s Democratic organizations persisted into the 1928 campaign, élites from other ethnic groups—especially fellow Roman Catholics—continued to stoke resentment at their exclusion from power. During a Republican rally at a Sons of Italy hall in Newport, Rhode Island, Luigi Cipolla, “a venerable of the lodge,” reminded his brethren that “the Democratic party in the nation and the state has

¹³⁵⁹ “Democrats Assign Roles In Campaign,” *The Boston Globe*, October 1, 1928, p. 4. Classified and calculated by author.

¹³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹³⁶² It is worth noting that by 1928, “the triumvirate that ruled the Democratic Party in Hartford were Thomas J. Spellacy, Tony Zazzaro, and Hermann Koppleman—an Irishman, an Italian, and a Jew.” Herbert F. Janick, Jr., *A Diverse People: Connecticut, 1914 to the Present* (Chester, CT: The Pequot Press, 1975), p. 36.

¹³⁶³ “Committees Named For Smith Rally,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 21, 1928, p. 14. Classified and calculated by author.

¹³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹³⁶⁵ *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population*, Volume III, Part I, pp. 353, 360.

always discriminated against the Italians.”¹³⁶⁶ In the same state, one Franco-American leader claimed that his community “had been persecuted by the Irish for over fifty years.”¹³⁶⁷ Indeed, while prevalent across New England, these internecine antagonisms were especially bitter among Rhode Island’s Catholics. This was largely due to lingering animosity between the Irish and the region’s sizable French-Canadian community, which held its greatest strength in the Ocean State.

The political significance of these rivalries was well-established by 1928. Throughout New England, the French-Canadian vote had been a source of Republican strength since the late nineteenth century. While in some areas, including western Massachusetts, these voters had occasionally flirted with the Democratic Party, French Canadians were largely Republican, by virtue of their rivalries with the Irish as well as their general support for the economic ideology of the GOP.¹³⁶⁸ In Rhode Island, the Republicans had amplified their advantage with this crucial bloc through recognition at nomination time. By 1908 the party had elected a French-Canadian governor, Aram Pothier, who served several terms and was followed after a six year Yankee interlude by another French Canadian, Emery San Souci, who was elected in 1920.¹³⁶⁹

During the 1920s these partisan loyalties suffered numerous trials. In 1922, Republican legislators in Rhode Island passed the Peck Act, a law extending the authority of the state board of education to parochial schools and mandating English-language instruction.¹³⁷⁰ This law was especially egregious to French-Canadian proponents of “*la*

¹³⁶⁶ “Italians Hold Rally,” *The Newport Mercury and Weekly News*, November 2, 1928, p. 2.

¹³⁶⁷ DeMoranville, “Ethnic Voting in Rhode Island,” p. 107.

¹³⁶⁸ Petrin, *French Canadians in Massachusetts Politics, 1885-1915: Ethnicity and Political Pragmatism*, pp. 83, 87, 106, 127, 157; Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles*, p. 84; DeMoranville, “Ethnic Voting in Rhode Island,” pp. 15-16.

¹³⁶⁹ DeMoranville, “Ethnic Voting in Rhode Island,” pp. 15-16.

¹³⁷⁰ Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles*, pp. 218-223; Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism*, pp. 28-29, 46-50.

survivance”—a zealous defense of the community’s traditional cultural institutions—and these citizens were particularly disturbed by the passive ascent given the law by Governor San Souci.¹³⁷¹ With community élites antagonized by this cultural harassment and working-class voters dismayed by the state’s repressive response to the 1922 textile strikes in the Pawtucket and Blackstone valleys, the French joined with other Catholic ethnic groups and voted Democratic that fall.¹³⁷² While portentous, these developments proved fleeting, for they had represented a rejection of Republican policies rather than an endorsement of the Democrats. By 1924, French-Canadian voters had returned to the GOP.¹³⁷³

Entering the 1928 campaign there was little reason for Republicans to doubt the security of the French vote—particularly in Rhode Island, where it was strongest. There, an ongoing feud between Bishop William Hickey, the Irish-American prelate of Providence, and an outspoken group of French Canadians who had been excommunicated the previous year as a result of a quarrel over school funding, seemed likely to reinforce Franco-Irish rivalries.¹³⁷⁴ One of the rebels, Elphege Daigneault of Woonsocket, did his part to exaggerate this wedge, penning a screed for the French-language *La Verité* in which he both extolled Herbert Hoover and denounced Bishop Hickey.¹³⁷⁵

Further boosting their prospects, the Republicans nominated Felix Hebert, a prominent French-Canadian jurist from West Warwick, to challenge Democrat Peter Gerry for the United States Senate. Republicans would trumpet this nomination as “the

¹³⁷¹ Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism*, p. 50; Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles*, pp. 222-223. On *la survivance* see Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism*, p. 25.

¹³⁷² Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism*, p. 47; Sterne, *Ballots and Bibles*, p. 223; DeMoranville, “Ethnic Voting in Rhode Island,” pp. 59-61, 71, 76.

¹³⁷³ DeMoranville, “Ethnic Voting in Rhode Island,” pp. 86, 87, 92.

¹³⁷⁴ “G. O. P. Certain of Rhode Island,” *The Boston Globe*, October 21, 1928, p. A64; DeMoranville, “Ethnic Voting in Rhode Island,” p. 106; Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism*, pp. 50-53.

¹³⁷⁵ DeMoranville, “Ethnic Voting in Rhode Island,” p. 107.

greatest honor ever conferred on the Franco-American element” in ads featuring Hoover and Hebert.¹³⁷⁶ Gerry himself faltered in his attempts to court the French vote, condescendingly centering his pitch on the Volstead Act and allowing Hebert to claim that the senator “meant the only interest the French had in the election was prohibition.”¹³⁷⁷ Rhode Island’s French Canadians were persuaded to their countryman’s cause, joining the majority of the state’s voters in ousting Gerry in favor of the Republican challenger.

Yet 1928 was far from business as usual for New England’s French Canadians. While these voters had occasionally entered the Democratic ranks, such alliances had always proven ephemeral. In 1928, however, the French-Canadian vote went strongly for Al Smith, breaking with precedent; and the patterns established in that year would persist for decades.¹³⁷⁸ On the strength of this vote, Smith carried communities with large concentrations of French Canadians—such as Central Falls and the ethnic wards of Pawtucket.¹³⁷⁹ The great French enclave of Woonsocket went to Al Smith by a margin of nearly two to one—this despite the ongoing battle between members of the French community and the Catholic hierarchy and despite decades of mistrust between the French and both the Irish and the Democratic Party.¹³⁸⁰ In several of the city’s most heavily French districts, Smith won by margins of eight and even ten to one—and his appeal in these communities was so strong that Peter Gerry actually defeated Felix Hebert in French Woonsocket by a thin margin.¹³⁸¹

¹³⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 112.

¹³⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 112.

¹³⁷⁸ John K. White, “Alfred E. Smith’s Rhode Island Revolution: The Election of 1928,” *Rhode Island History*, 42:4 (May, 1983), pp. 56-66, p. 65; DeMoranville, “Ethnic Voting in Rhode Island,” p. 92.

¹³⁷⁹ DeMoranville, “Ethnic Voting in Rhode Island,” p. 117.

¹³⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 121.

¹³⁸¹ Ibid., p. 120.

The Democrats enjoyed similar success among French Canadians across New England, the result of momentum that had been established in the closing weeks of the campaign. In Lowell, Massachusetts, Democrats were compelled by requests “from numerous French-American voters of the city” to begin organizing a local French-American Smith club.¹³⁸² A few days later, former Fall River mayor Edmund P. Talbott, the head of the Massachusetts French-American Smith League, began sending agents from his state staff into the region to help coordinate a registration drive.¹³⁸³ In short order bilingual meetings were held to organize local French-American women interested in the cause.¹³⁸⁴ All of this occurred as a Democratic response to the initiative of French Americans in Lowell who found the party’s nominee attractive and sought aid in mobilizing their community politically.

The case of Hartford provides a sense of the vitality the Democrats enjoyed in French New England in the closing weeks of the campaign. In October, the city saw the formation of its French-American Al Smith Club at St. Ann’s Hall, with bilingual mass meetings held through Election Day.¹³⁸⁵ From national headquarters the Democrats dispatched Orphie Langevin, who headed the French division of the party’s “Naturalized Citizen’s Bureau,” to deliver an oration in his native tongue, joined by Barney Fallon, a former football star from Fordham.¹³⁸⁶ By election eve, the French-American Smith-for-President Club drew a “demonstrative” crowd of six hundred to a rally featuring

¹³⁸² “French Start Smith Drive,” *The Lowell Sun*, October 2, 1928, p. 1.

¹³⁸³ “Smith Drive at Height Here,” *The Lowell Sun*, October 5, 1928, p. 1.

¹³⁸⁴ “Cronin Writes Braden Again,” *The Lowell Sun*, October 8, 1928, p. 3.

¹³⁸⁵ “French-Americans form Al Smith Club,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 12, 1928, p. 17.

¹³⁸⁶ “French-American Democrats to Meet,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 22, 1928, p. 5; “Hold Democratic Rally,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 24, 1928, p. 12.

congressional nominee Herman P. Kopplemann.¹³⁸⁷ Less than a month earlier the organization had been founded by a mere thirty-five people.¹³⁸⁸

Indeed, shifts in the French vote, although most impressive in Rhode Island, were not isolated to the Ocean State. Across New England working-class French Canadians abandoned their traditional Republicanism in favor of Smith. In Massachusetts, John Merrill of the *Boston Globe* noted that many French voters “who had hitherto supported Republican candidates voted for Gov Smith” in 1928.¹³⁸⁹ In Fitchburg, Smith improved the Democratic vote by 4.6 percentage points in the old-stock ward; in the French ward, he was up an astounding 20.1 points.¹³⁹⁰ In Lowell, Smith topped 65 percent in the two majority-French wards; in Chicopee, the French ward gave Smith 71.5 percent; in Holyoke it was 84.1 percent.¹³⁹¹

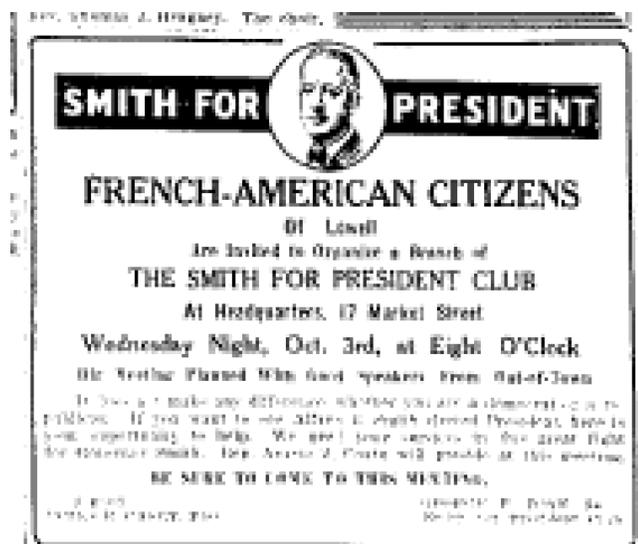


Fig. 6.1: Smith ad from the *Lowell Sun* calling for support from the local French-American community.¹³⁹²

¹³⁸⁷ “Democrats End Campaign with Spirited Rallies,” *The Hartford Courant*, November 5, 1928, p. 6.

¹³⁸⁸ “French-Americans form Al Smith Club,” p. 17.

¹³⁸⁹ John D. Merrill, “Democrats Add to Legislature Seats,” *The Boston Globe*, November 8, 1928, pp. 1, 21.

¹³⁹⁰ Huthmacher, *Massachusetts People and Politics*, p. 185.

¹³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

¹³⁹² Advertisement, “Smith for President,” *The Lowell Sun*, October 2, 1928, p. 3.

Smith's success with New England's Italian-American voters, while grounded in a slightly more favorable partisan tradition, was equally dramatic. In September, the Smith Italian-American League of Massachusetts was formed, with former Suffolk County assistant district attorney Vincent Brogna in command.¹³⁹³ The *Boston Globe* described the league as "the first movement of its kind to band the Italo-American voters of this State for a presidential candidate."¹³⁹⁴ By October 1, local clubs had been started in twenty-five municipalities, with ambitions to organize "in every city and town where there are Italian-American residents."¹³⁹⁵ These organizations were always headed by Italians themselves, whether it was Mr. Tony Garofino in Lynn, Mr. Silvio Bernardini in Lowell, or Mr. George Costanza in Boston.¹³⁹⁶ In short order, a state women's division was organized, chaired by Mrs. Luigi P. Verde, whose leadership enabled her to utilize existing social and political networks in ways that paralleled Brogna's use of his status as a former state representative.¹³⁹⁷ Nor was this an exclusively top-down initiative, for some local Smith organizations had their own women's division.¹³⁹⁸ Statewide, Smith forces had clearly captured the enthusiasm of the Italian community: an Italian-American Smith League rally in Springfield attracted more than four thousand citizens; a few nights earlier, an Italian meeting for Hoover in the same city had attracted forty-two.¹³⁹⁹

In Hartford, local Italians organized on Smith's behalf in early September, founding a non-partisan "Italian-American Smith-for-President Club" for the purpose of

¹³⁹³ "Brogna Named to Direct Smith Italian Campaign," *The Boston Globe*, September 21, 1928, p. 16.

¹³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹³⁹⁵ "Italian American League For Smith Extends Work," *The Boston Globe*, October 2, 1928, p. 7.

¹³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹³⁹⁷ "Smith Italian League Forms Women's Group," *The Boston Globe*, October 9, 1928, p. 10.

¹³⁹⁸ *E.g.*, "Smith Italian League Organizes at Brockton," p. 4.

¹³⁹⁹ Huthmacher, *Massachusetts People and Politics*, p. 173.

“educating the voters,” and entering “whole-heartedly” into the presidential campaign.¹⁴⁰⁰ Unlike the Massachusetts Smith League, the Hartford club was part of a national movement among Italians that had emerged outside the purview of the Democratic Party. In fact, the non-partisan organization elected several Republicans to its executive committee and declined an offer of quarters at the Democratic regional offices.¹⁴⁰¹ Also unlike the Massachusetts movement, in Hartford there was no auxiliary women’s organization; instead, women served alongside men on prominent committees, and the club elected a female vice president, Miss Rose D’Esposito.¹⁴⁰² While these efforts remained ostensibly independent, partisan Connecticut Democrats also pursued the Italian vote with vigor: New Britain mayor Angelo Paonessa, state chairman of the Italian division of the Democratic National Committee, refused his party’s offer of the nomination for lieutenant governor, “so that he might have complete freedom in leading an Italian campaign for the Democratic nominee.”¹⁴⁰³

Local circumstances encouraged this new enthusiasm for the Democrats, just as local conflicts had previously foreclosed such possibilities. In Connecticut, Francis A. Pallotti had been elected secretary of state as a Republican in 1922, and had come to be regarded by Italians “as one of the outstanding citizens of their race in the State.”¹⁴⁰⁴ However, Pallotti’s ambitions for higher office were thwarted in 1928, when his bid for the Republican nomination for lieutenant governor was rejected at the party’s convention.¹⁴⁰⁵ In response, thirty-eight Pallotti clubs “changed their names to Al Smith-

¹⁴⁰⁰ Gerald P. McCarthy, “Al Smith Club is Formed by Local Italians,” *The Hartford Courant*, September 5, 1928, p. 2.

¹⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁴⁰³ “Democrats Will Try For Italian Vote,” *The Hartford Courant*, September 9, 1928, p. 6B.

¹⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6B.

¹⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6B.

for-President clubs and . . . indicated that they would give their whole-hearted support to the candidacy of Governor Smith.”¹⁴⁰⁶ Mayor Paonessa sought to capitalize on the “dissatisfaction” that he saw growing from the incident, and in fact the Pallotti controversy helped many Italian Democrats transform the presidential election into a campaign against the political denigration of their community—paralleling what many ethnic groups saw as Smith’s national battle against racial, ethnic, and religious bigotry.¹⁴⁰⁷ “We shall respect those who have shown respect for us,” declared George DiCenzo, toastmaster at a rally of eight hundred Italian Americans in New Haven.¹⁴⁰⁸ At a Hartford rally for 1,200 Italians on the Sunday before the election, editor Giovanni Lizzi warned the crowd in Italian that “they would set back the cause of the Italian-Americans at least 25 years unless they voted to carry the State and the United States for the Democratic party.”¹⁴⁰⁹

These efforts were rewarded on Election Day. In late October, M. E. Hennessy of the *Boston Globe* declared that in Rhode Island, “the Italians are almost solid for Smith.”¹⁴¹⁰ A few weeks later, Smith carried 79 percent of the vote in the Italian sections of Providence.¹⁴¹¹ In Boston, Smith topped 80 percent in Wards One and Three, both with sizable Italian populations; and in the precincts encompassing the Italian-dominated

¹⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 6B.

¹⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 6B.

¹⁴⁰⁸ Gerald P. McCarthy, “800 Italians Hold Smith Club Rally,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 1, 1928, p. 4.

¹⁴⁰⁹ “Roraback’s Message Hit By Spellacy,” *The Hartford Courant*, November 5, 1928, p. 2.

¹⁴¹⁰ M.E. Hennessy, “G.O.P. Certain of Rhode Island,” *The Boston Globe*, October 21, 1928, p. A64.

¹⁴¹¹ White, “Alfred E. Smith’s Rhode Island Revolution,” p. 58. Aaron DeMoranville noted that in Providence’s heavily Italian 14th district, Smith had a four to one margin, and in the Italian 17th district, the Democrat’s cushion was six to one. This was an even stronger showing than in the Irish 24th district, which went to Smith by a mere three to one. DeMoranville, “Ethnic Voting in Rhode Island,” p. 118. One study has suggested that Rhode Island Italians began drifting toward the Democracy with Wilson; but even that study, while challenging 1928 as a “revolution,” appears to concede that the numbers that occurred with Smith were unprecedented. Stefano Luconi, *The Italian-American Vote in Providence, Rhode Island, 1916-1948* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2004), p. 18.

North End, Smith received 2,325 votes to Hoover's 134.¹⁴¹² In Waterbury, Connecticut—a city which was about a quarter Italian—the turnout was a robust 91 percent; Smith carried the Brass City with 58 percent, and the entire Democratic ticket was swept to victory as a result.¹⁴¹³

The Poles were another source of traditional Republican strength in New England, and the party did what it could to maintain the community's favor in 1928. On October 20, when 250 members of the Polish Political Organization gathered for a banquet in Hartford, they were met by John Trumbull, Connecticut's Republican governor, who noted that his party had "always had loyal support from the Polish citizens of this state," expressing confidence that 1928 would witness the continuance of this happy tradition.¹⁴¹⁴ Indeed, the banqueters were treated to a procession of Republican luminaries, each of whom shared the governor's confidence. All of this was capped by the surprise appearance of Herbert Hoover's running mate, Kansas senator Charles Curtis, who pithily beckoned his hearers to the support of the national ticket with his "warm and contagious smile" and a bonhomous "God bless you all!"¹⁴¹⁵

Other members of the GOP ticket were more explicit in rallying Poles to the Hoover banner. "You, of all people, should vote for the man who made the new Poland possible," insisted State Senator Frederic Walcott, the party's choice for United States

¹⁴¹² Huthmacher, *Massachusetts People and Politics*, p. 184.

¹⁴¹³ "Waterbury Gives Smith Plurality of 5,428 Votes," *The Hartford Courant*, November 7, 1928, p. 26; "NEW HAVEN COUNTY," *The Hartford Courant*, November 7, 1928, p. 3; *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population*, Volume III, Part I, p. 360. A noteworthy exception to the conclusion, expressed by the *Hartford Courant*, that the Democrats had enjoyed a "complete victory" in Waterbury, was the victory of Congressman James Glynn, a Republican who ran 187 votes ahead even of Al Smith, despite the fact that the Brass City was the home of his opponent, Edward Mascolo.

¹⁴¹⁴ "Curtis Visit Surprise to Polish Body," *The Hartford Courant*, October 21, 1928, p. B6.

¹⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. B6.

Senate.¹⁴¹⁶ “We are on the verge of an industrial era of prosperity, and we want men in office like Senator Curtis,” proclaimed Governor Trumbull.¹⁴¹⁷ These three themes—traditional ethnic Republicanism, Polish nationalism, and Republican prosperity—constituted the bulk of the Hoover pitch to Polish New England.

The Republican nominee’s work in feeding post-war Europe, including millions of desperate Poles, was deemed a particularly powerful argument for his elevation to the presidency. A Hartford attorney told a Polish gathering at Meriden, Connecticut, that “Herbert Hoover did much for Poland during the dark days of the World War. He fed and clothed the Polish people and he did not ask their faith.”¹⁴¹⁸ Suzanne Farnam, a veteran of Hoover’s Belgian relief efforts, reminded a group of Hartford Poles gathered at White Eagle Hall of the Republican’s post-war humanitarianism.¹⁴¹⁹ Farther north along the Connecticut River, a “Polish Citizen” wrote the *Springfield Daily News* that Poles “owe a personal debt of gratitude to Herbert Hoover” for feeding Polish children after the war.¹⁴²⁰

Smith Poles also drew on cultural motifs to promote their candidate. Unsurprisingly, the Democrats relied heavily on the twin issues of prohibition and Catholicism. In Connecticut, Democratic senatorial nominee Augustine Lonergan told a group of Bridgeport Poles that prohibition was a “sham,” and ventured that “if Smith is elected, it will insure new hope in every mother’s breast and will again prove to the world that in America a lowly birth or any membership in the Catholic church is no bar to the

¹⁴¹⁶ Ibid., p. B6.

¹⁴¹⁷ Ibid., p. B6.

¹⁴¹⁸ “Polish Voters Close Campaign in Meriden,” *The Hartford Courant*, November 6, 1928, p. 7.

¹⁴¹⁹ “Belgian Native Praises Hoover at Polish Rally,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 31, 1928, p. 17.

¹⁴²⁰ “Polish Citizen,” “Letter to the Editor,” *The Springfield Daily News*, November 5, 1928, p. 11.

presidency.”¹⁴²¹ On November 4, Herman Kopplemann warned separate Hartford rallies for French, Polish, and Lithuanian voters that the Anti-Saloon League was “playing a major part in the campaign for Mr. Hoover,” and that anti-tobacco legislation loomed in the event of a Republican triumph.¹⁴²²

While projecting superficial confidence in the security of the Polish vote, Republican speeches betrayed a fear that these cultural issues threatened their viability with this usually reliable bloc. Hoover campaigners often felt compelled to dismiss prohibition.¹⁴²³ Moreover, when addressing Smith’s Catholicism before ethnic audiences, New England Hoover Republicans often sounded like national Smith Democrats. “I believe that politics and religion are two distinct subjects that should never be mentioned at the same time, much less mixed,” was the sermon from Joseph B. Kulaf, a Hartford lawyer.¹⁴²⁴ “There is no religious issue in this campaign,” Suzanne Farnam assured; “There are going to be as many Catholics voting for Hoover as there are going to be Protestants for Smith.”¹⁴²⁵

Affirming these arguments, especially those regarding Hoover’s good deeds for the old country, New England’s Polish élite remained true to their traditional Republicanism—as was the case in other American Polish enclaves.¹⁴²⁶ When the Republican nominee visited Boston, the president of the Massachusetts Polish State Club, A. S. Bachorowski, thanked him personally for “the humanitarian work rendered by you in Poland,” and promised the support of “Bay State Poles” during a reception for “the

¹⁴²¹ “Lonergan Lectures Poles at Bridgeport Rally,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 22, 1928, p. 4

¹⁴²² “Democrats End Campaign with Spirited Rallies,” p. 6.

¹⁴²³ “Belgian Native Praises Hoover at Polish Rally,” p. 17; “Curtis Visit Surprise to Polish Body,” p. B6.

¹⁴²⁴ “Polish Voters Close Campaign in Meriden,” p. 7.

¹⁴²⁵ “Belgian Native Praises Hoover at Polish Rally,” p. 17.

¹⁴²⁶ Kantowicz, *Polish-American Politics in Chicago*, p. 127.

spokesmen of the foreign groups” hosted by Governor Alvan Tufts Fuller.¹⁴²⁷ Nationalist gratitude toward Hoover was even articulated by Poland’s legendary pianist-patriot Ignacy Jan Paderewski, who spoke warmly of the Great Humanitarian during the campaign.¹⁴²⁸ As expected, the Polish Federated Political Clubs of New England endorsed Hoover in October.¹⁴²⁹ Yet the Democratic *Springfield Daily News* noted indications of “a sizable reaction among the Poles in this vicinity” against the endorsement.¹⁴³⁰ In Chicopee, an officer of the federation responded to the endorsement by resigning, “with the frank statement that he is unreservedly for Smith.”¹⁴³¹ Others went further, immediately forming a Polish Democratic Club for Chicopee.¹⁴³² In Holyoke, an existing club “expressed strong dissatisfaction with the course of the New England federation.”¹⁴³³ This dissent was not limited to western Massachusetts: in New Bedford, the endorsement had been preempted when Stanley J. Sieczkowski had declared in late September that the Polish-American Bristol County Club was for Smith.¹⁴³⁴ Republican rallies for Poles in several Massachusetts towns had to be canceled “because of sparse attendance.”¹⁴³⁵

By November, it was predicted from Springfield that “a heavy vote for Smith is certain among the Polish people of this city, Chicopee and Holyoke as a result of an intensive campaign that has been carried out in each neighborhood,” and on Election Day

¹⁴²⁷ Louis M. Lyons, “Crowds in Suburbs Warmer than Here,” *The Boston Globe*, October 16, 1928, pp. 1, 16, p. 16.

¹⁴²⁸ Kantowicz, *Polish-American Politics in Chicago*, p. 127.

¹⁴²⁹ Editorial, “Poles And National Election,” *The Springfield Daily News*, October 10, 1928, p. 6.

¹⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁴³² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁴³³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁴³⁴ “Asserts Club Favors Smith,” *The New Bedford Evening Standard*, September 27, 1928, p. 1.

¹⁴³⁵ Huthmacher, *Massachusetts People and Politics*, p. 173.

this prophecy came to fruition.¹⁴³⁶ Indeed, the Polish vote across New England helped fuel a Democratic explosion in the region. Hamden County, Massachusetts—12.7 percent Polish—returned a Democratic presidential majority for the first time in the century, and only the second Democratic plurality of that period.¹⁴³⁷ The county’s three major cities all showed marked Democratic improvements. In Chicopee, a city which was 32 percent Polish, Smith carried over 70 percent of the vote.¹⁴³⁸ In the previous two elections, Democrats had averaged just under 28 percent, and since 1896, only one Democrat had cracked 50 percent.¹⁴³⁹ Nearby Holyoke was 13 percent Polish at the time of the 1930 census.¹⁴⁴⁰ In the Paper City, Democrats like Bryan and Wilson had sometimes gained small majorities (the best performance was Wilson’s 56.3 percent in 1916), but the party’s presidential nominees in 1920 and 1924 had achieved 35.5 and 32.3 percent, respectively. Al Smith scored 66.5 percent of the vote in 1928.¹⁴⁴¹ In Springfield, by far the largest city in western Massachusetts, Poles accounted for only 5.3 percent of the population—still a considerable enclave, although nothing near the one in three of Chicopee.¹⁴⁴² There, Smith carried 48.7 percent—a significant improvement over the 26.1 percent earned by Cox in 1920 and the 21.7 percent that went to Davis in

¹⁴³⁶ “Big Smith Rally For Polish Voters Listed For Tonight,” *The Springfield Daily News*, November 3, 1928, p. 2.

¹⁴³⁷ Wilson had carried the county over Taft by 27 votes in 1912—an election in which Theodore Roosevelt’s Progressive candidacy attracted over 8,000 Hamden County ballots. *A Manual for Use of the General Court of Massachusetts for 1929-1930*, p. 401; *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population*, Volume III, Part I, pp. 1082, 1098, 1100; Robinson, *The Presidential Vote, 1896-1932*, p. 227.

¹⁴³⁸ *A Manual for Use of the General Court of Massachusetts for 1929-1930*, p. 401; *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population*, Volume III, Part I, pp. 1085, 1098, 1100.

¹⁴³⁹ Election statistics compiled from *A Manual for Use of the General Court of Massachusetts 1897* (pp. 326-336), 1901 (pp. 324-334), 1905 (pp. 347-357), 1909 (pp. 364-374), 1913 (pp. 378-388), 1917 (pp. 385-395), 1921 (pp. 383-393), 1925 (pp. 389-399), and 1929 (pp. 397-407).

¹⁴⁴⁰ *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population*, Volume III, Part I, pp. 1085, 1098, 1100.

¹⁴⁴¹ *A Manual for Use of the General Court of Massachusetts for 1929-1930*, p. 401.

¹⁴⁴² *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population*, Volume III, Part I, pp. 1085, 1098, 1100.

1924; in fact, only one other Democrat, Woodrow Wilson in 1916, had even surpassed 40 percent in Springfield since the century began.

Neighboring Hampshire County was even more Polish—20.8 percent—and there the results were similar to those in Springfield: although the county did not deliver a Smith majority (he carried 46.9 percent of the county-wide vote), his percentage was nearly twenty points above the 1920s average, and in fact this represented only the third time in the century a Democrat had surpassed 30 percent of the county’s presidential vote.¹⁴⁴³ More revealing, however, were the results from Northampton, a city that was 11.6 percent Polish and was home to 20.1 percent of Hampshire County Poles.¹⁴⁴⁴ There, Smith achieved a majority of 54.3 percent—making him the first Democrat to win the Meadow City in the twentieth century.

Southward in the Connecticut River Valley, other large Polish enclaves underwent similar transitions. Hartford County was 11.3 percent Polish, and more than 60 percent of the county’s Poles were concentrated in the cities of Hartford and New Britain—the latter of which was nearly a quarter Polish.¹⁴⁴⁵ Both cities had sizable populations of other ethnic groups—especially Italians, who comprised 12.8 percent of Hartford’s population.¹⁴⁴⁶ In any case, in both Hartford and New Britain, there was a clear correlation between the percentage of each ward’s population that was first or second generation immigrant and the strength of the ward’s Democratic vote.¹⁴⁴⁷ Smith carried both cities, and his 46 percent of the county-wide presidential tally was a

¹⁴⁴³ *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population, Volume III, Part I*, pp. 1082, 1098, 1100; Robinson, *The Presidential Vote, 1896-1932*, p. 227.

¹⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 1085, 1098, 1100.

¹⁴⁴⁵ *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population, Volume III, Part I*, pp. 352, 353, 360.

¹⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 353, 360.

¹⁴⁴⁷ “New Britain Election Returns by Wards,” *The Hartford Courant*, November 7, 1928, p. 7; “National and State Election, November 6, 1928,” *The Hartford Courant*, November 7, 1928, p. 11; *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population, Volume III, Part I*, p. 365.

substantial improvement over the 31.2 percent that had been averaged by Cox and Davis.¹⁴⁴⁸

All of this occurred despite the traditional Republicanism of Polish New England and in the face of the Polish-American élite's avowed preference for Hoover. Much of this popular dissent was based on hostility toward prohibition and on membership in the Catholic Church—both of which the vocal majority of Polish New Englanders shared with the Democratic nominee. A Polish-American baker from Hartford noted how his community had mobilized on their co-communicant's behalf—and that as a result pro-Hoover Poles had been shunned. “With the opening of the present Presidential campaign I naturally continued my Republican activities. . . . Yet because of my course some of my friends have ostracized me and some of my customers have withdrawn their trade,” reported John Winialski.¹⁴⁴⁹ The baker's erstwhile friends and customers admonished him that he had a duty “to support Governor Smith because his religious faith is the same as mine.”¹⁴⁵⁰

In fact, chronicling Democratic attempts to mobilize rank-and-file Polish, Italian, and French-Canadian New Englanders does much to commend the literature's traditional focus on cultural conflict. In East Hartford, Angelo Paonessa labeled federal prohibition agents “a bunch of grafters” and denounced the Eighteenth Amendment as “a curse to

¹⁴⁴⁸ Robinson, *The Presidential Vote, 1896-1932*, p. 155. In Hartford, Smith's success may have represented a restoration of past Democratic power, for in 1916 Wilson achieved 49 percent in the county and had carried the city of Hartford by nearly 3,000 votes over Charles Evans Hughes. Nevertheless, the 1920s were a time of particular weakness in the region for the Democrats, and Smith had lessened the Republican grip significantly—with the aid of the ethnic vote, and, along the Connecticut River, with the popular support of the large Polish community. “How Democrats Used To Do It In Capital of Conn.,” *The Hartford Courant*, November 3, 1920, p. 10.

¹⁴⁴⁹ John S. Winialski, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 23, 1928, p. 8.

¹⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

this country.”¹⁴⁵¹ In New Haven, Democratic gubernatorial nominee Charles Morris deplored “the injection of the religious question into the campaign,” before that city’s Italian Smith club.¹⁴⁵² A Yale divinity student rallied his French audience in Hartford by promising that a Smith victory would settle “one and for all the question of a man’s religious faith as a test for public office.”¹⁴⁵³ Along with prohibition and religious bigotry, speakers before these groups often denounced Republican-sponsored immigration quotas—“perfectly insane” was how they were viewed by Herman Koppleman at an Italian rally in Hartford.¹⁴⁵⁴

Religion, prohibition, and immigration restriction represent the well-known ethnic rallying points from 1928, and they have achieved this prominence with good reason, for they were all employed enthusiastically by Democrats before ethnic audiences.¹⁴⁵⁵ The shifts in the Polish-American vote during the 1928 election help affirm the importance of these ethnocultural concerns to that campaign.¹⁴⁵⁶ However, this was only one facet of the reasoning employed by Poles in their flight to the Democratic Party. Among the many Polish-Americans who were stirred to rebellion by élite Polonia’s support for the

¹⁴⁵¹ “Prohibition Called Curse of Country,” *The Hartford Courant*, September 29, 1928, p. 6.

¹⁴⁵² McCarthy, “800 Italians Hold Smith Rally,” p. 4.

¹⁴⁵³ “Democrats End Campaign With Spirited Rallies,” p. 6.

¹⁴⁵⁴ “Roraback’s Message Hit by Spellacy,” p. 2.

¹⁴⁵⁵ *E.g.*: “Prohibition Called Curse of Country,” p. 6; McCarthy, “800 Italians Hold Smith Rally,” p. 4; “Democrats End Campaign With Spirited Rallies,” p. 6; “Roraback’s Message Hit by Spellacy,” p. 2.

¹⁴⁵⁶ Indeed, this was also the case nationally. From Chicago, *Dziennik Chicagoski* alerted its readers that Smith’s opposition to prohibition marked the upcoming election as “a big moment in your lives.” (The city’s usually Republican *La Tribuna Italiana Trans-Atlantica* made the case even more bluntly: “Prohibition or No Prohibition!! That’s the Question.”) Also in the Windy City, the editor of *Polonia* placed 1928 among “the most important elections in the history of this country,” for at stake was “the victory of religious tolerance, the victory of personal freedom and all the great principles which the Constitution of the United States guarantees us.” In Pittsburgh, the Polish-language *Pittsbuczanin* routinely ran front-page editorial cartoons attacking prohibition and religious intolerance. In one it was suggested that prohibition had mutated the Statue of Liberty into a monument to terror; in another the behavior of prohibition agents was likened to “*gwaltu*”—rape. Allswang, *A House for All Peoples*, pp. 121-122; Kantowicz, *Polish-American Politics in Chicago*, p. 128; “Choą koniecznie kwestję religji zaszczeić do polityki,” *Pittsbuczanin*, September 15, 1928, p. 1; “Gwałtu! Co się dzieje . . .,” *Pittsbuczanin*, August 25, 1928, p. 1; “Dzie nie pomnik Wolności, ale terror jest godłem prohibicyjnej Ameryki,” *Pittsbuczanin*, August 31, 1928, p. 1, Hillman Library, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA.

Republican nominee was Alexander Bielski of Chicopee, who wrote the *Springfield Daily News* that “so-called” Polish leaders, “drunk with their own powers of intimidation and coercion,” had attempted to deliver the Polish vote to Hoover; but rank and file Poles would mobilize to defeat this “clique.”¹⁴⁵⁷ The reason, according to Bielski, was not so much ethnocultural as it was economic: “For the past seven and one-half years, our government has been of the type which has furthered, protected, and fostered the special interests of a certain few against the common interests of the many.”¹⁴⁵⁸ Another Pole wrote the Republican *Springfield Union* in even more explicit terms which reveal the connections between class and culture:

Capital governs the Republican party and influences the people to vote for Hoover, who thus far favors prohibition. It is said that after a workman performs his daily task and refreshes himself with a glass of beer or wine he becomes unable to maintain his efficiencies. . . . Alfred Smith . . . holds that should the laborer, the farmer and the small business man prosper, money will be in more free circulation and the country will prosper. . . . it is the duty and obligation of every free-minded Polish citizen to cast his vote for Alfred E. Smith.¹⁴⁵⁹

These attitudes were not confined to Hamden County, nor were they limited to Poles. A letter from one Italian-American Rhode Islander to the *Westerly Sun* amply demonstrates the multifactorial nature of ethnic New Englanders’ political preferences. The Republican *Sun* had lamented in an editorial that Italians could be expected to vote for Al Smith because of their desire to restore the saloon.¹⁴⁶⁰ One reader, V. Gentile of Pierce Street, became indignant at this superficial analysis, composing a corrective letter

¹⁴⁵⁷ Alexander Bielski, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Springfield Daily News*, November 1, 1928, p. 8.

¹⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁴⁵⁹ J. J. Z., “Letter to the Editor,” *The Springfield Union*, November 1, 1928, p. 10. This class-based objection to prohibition was common. As James H. Timberlake has noted, most laborers “stoutly opposed” prohibition “to the end,” often “because it smacked of paternalism and class exploitation. To them it was a hypocritical and insulting attempt to control their personal habits in order to exact greater profits for their employers” James H. Timberlake, *Prohibition and the Progressive Movement, 1900-1920* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), pp. 92-93.

¹⁴⁶⁰ Editorial, “The Under Dog,” *The Westerly Sun*, September 16, 1928, p. 4.

to the editor: “The deplorable existing conditions and partiality and favoritism that the Republican party has been showing to the manufacturer and powerful combines with their poor records during the eight years and with the uniform and despicable tactics that they are using against Gov. Smith is the reason why he is going to be our next president.”¹⁴⁶¹ The desperate, “deplorable” state of New England’s working class was just as significant as the cultural conflicts of the 1920s in shaping the world view of these voters.

Indeed, such denunciations of Republican economics rang painfully true for many living in New England’s ethnic enclaves, adding a strong class dynamic to these voters’ interest in Al Smith’s Democratic Party. For the region’s working class, Herbert Hoover’s confidence in the policies of the previous eight years demonstrated a favoritism of capitalist over laborer, especially when compared to the Smith campaign’s regular probing of the weaknesses of the Coolidge economy. Hoover’s contentment with the status quo suggested to the *Springfield Daily News* that the Republican approved of what many New Englanders perceived as sharpening economic inequality: “He has been content to hide behind a mass of evasions and irrelevancies, which is ever the way of conservative elements who live by the rule that ‘them that has gets.’”¹⁴⁶²

Industrial New England

A chorus of Republicans responded to these critiques by reiterating their party’s support for high tariffs as a tonic for low wages and unemployment. Visiting

¹⁴⁶¹ V. Gentile, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Westerly Sun*, October 7, 1928, p. 4.

¹⁴⁶² Editorial, “Hoover Still Evasive, Irrelevant,” *The Springfield Daily News*, October 20, 1928, p. 4.

Swampscott, Massachusetts, Speaker of the House Nicholas Longworth of Ohio presented a stark choice: “No Republican protective tariff ever closed a factory, mortgaged a farm, or caused an American man or woman to lose their jobs. No Democratic tariff law ever failed to do all three.”¹⁴⁶³ “It would be suicide for Massachusetts to turn the country over to the Democrats,” agreed A. Platt Andrew, a member of Longworth’s caucus from Massachusetts who spoke at the same meeting. “The depression in the industries of New England” was the result of cheap foreign goods undermining domestic manufacturing and imperiling “the future of those industries and of the hundreds of thousands of persons employed therein.” The congressman concluded that “a continuance of the policy of protection,” under prudent Republican administration, was the only way to assure an industrial renaissance.¹⁴⁶⁴

In acknowledging the serious challenges facing New England textiles, Andrew’s remarks reveal an important facet of the economic stance of regional Republicans. National figures like Longworth could point to widespread prosperity and only allude in passing to localized blemishes; New England Republicans had no such luxury. At Whitinsville, Massachusetts, on October 5, Loring Young, the Republican challenger to Senator David Ignatius Walsh, encapsulated his party’s response to the poor condition of regional industries: “Bad as conditions now are in the textile industry, they would be even worse today if Senator Walsh and his southern associates had written the tariff law.”¹⁴⁶⁵

For their part, Democratic speakers in New England sought to distance themselves and their presidential nominee from the party’s traditional free trade posture.

¹⁴⁶³ John D. Merrill, “Essex Republicans Hear Tariff Issue,” *The Boston Globe*, October 4, 1928, p. 11.

¹⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁴⁶⁵ “Young Assails Walsh On His Tariff Vote,” *The Boston Globe*, October 6, 1928, p. 12.

Democratic National Committeeman Thomas Spellacy told New Haven's Italian-American Smith club that the governor's "attitude on the tariff is one of absolute protection," a position that was reinforced by Augustine Lonergan at the same rally.¹⁴⁶⁶ The nominee himself bolstered these claims on October 13 with his Louisville speech, criticizing Coolidge's tariff commission but also suggesting that his election would not foredoom protectionism.¹⁴⁶⁷ New England Democrats were cheered by this articulation of a new Democratic trade policy—the *Lowell Sun* called Smith's Louisville address "probably the best he has yet delivered."¹⁴⁶⁸ Herman Kopplemann buttressed Smith's point at a Hartford labor hall, declaring that "he, together with all other Democratic congressmen, would favor a high protective tariff."¹⁴⁶⁹

While in New England, Smith affirmed these arguments with a note he handed to Angelo Paonessa during a visit to New Britain in late October. When the mayor emerged from a private meeting with the nominee, he revealed a signed statement promising Connecticut laborers that Smith "will do nothing to bring about tariff legislation which will so injure the industries of their cities as to reduce their earning powers one penny."¹⁴⁷⁰ In the closing weeks of the campaign, the *Hartford Courant*, for years an advocate of high tariffs and of Republican leadership, would mockingly announce that "We Are All Protectionists Now."¹⁴⁷¹

Republicans varied in their interpretation of Smith's stand. Navy Secretary Curtis Wilbur told a "record-breaking audience" in Nashua, New Hampshire, that while Smith

¹⁴⁶⁶ McCarthy, "800 Italians Hold Smith Club Rally," p. 4.

¹⁴⁶⁷ "Stenographic Report of Gov. Smith's Speech to Louisville Democrats Last Night," *The New York Times*, October 14, 1928, p. 25. See chapter four.

¹⁴⁶⁸ Editorial, "Gov. Smith's New Tariff Policy," *The Lowell Sun*, October 15, 1928, p. 12.

¹⁴⁶⁹ "Koppleman Ridicules G. O. P. Prosperity Issue," *The Hartford Courant*, November 2, 1928, p. 18.

¹⁴⁷⁰ Robert D. Byrnes, "State Roars Welcome to Smith Train," *The Hartford Courant*, October 26, 1928, pp. 1, 20, p. 20.

¹⁴⁷¹ Editorial, "We Are All Protectionists Now," *The Hartford Courant*, October 20, 1928, p. 8.

may well have been genuine in his Louisville address, “no candidate . . . can change his party’s platform nor reverse the decision of its convention,” suggesting facetiously that “if Gov Smith really believes in the protective tariff, he should vote the Republican ticket.”¹⁴⁷² New Jersey congressman Franklin T. Fort was more skeptical of Smith’s conversion. In Boston, Fort contemplated, “how can we turn over the Government to a party which changes its views as it changes its shirts or socks?”¹⁴⁷³ Pennsylvania governor John E. Fisher, speaking in Holyoke, concurred, expressing suspicion toward Smith’s protectionist remarks in light of “practically every previous statement he had made upon the tariff subject.”¹⁴⁷⁴ The *Hartford Courant* was similarly incredulous, citing the New Yorker’s past denunciations of the Fordney-McCumber tariff and other protectionist policies and concluding that if Smith “were elected the policy of protection which he now espouses would not weigh heavily on his conscience.”¹⁴⁷⁵

While Smith attracted minimal support from notable New England businessmen, the region’s leading capitalists were broadly in accord with their traditional Republican allies in looking askance at the Democrat’s economic policies, and so as usual, New England industrialists rallied to the Republican banner.¹⁴⁷⁶ The Boston Wool Trade Association held an important public meeting in support of “the election of all candidates on the Republican ticket in Massachusetts” that featured Frank G. Allen, the party’s

¹⁴⁷² “Says Smith Throws Over Own Platform,” *The Boston Globe*, October 27, 1928, p. 13.

¹⁴⁷³ “Fort Condemns Smith Program,” *The Boston Globe*, October 19, 1928, pp. 1, 16, p. 16.

¹⁴⁷⁴ “Gov Fisher Says Tariff Big Issue,” *The Boston Globe*, October 27, 1928, p. 12.

¹⁴⁷⁵ Editorial, “Our Tariff Distrust of Smith,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 11, 1928, p. 8. See also: Editorial, “Tariff A La Governor Smith,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 13, 1928, p. 8; Editorial, “Governor Smith’s Tariff Views,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 16, 1928, p. 8.

¹⁴⁷⁶ Smith attracted the support of some tycoons, such as Rodolphe Agassiz, chairman of the Calumet & Hecla Consolidated Copper Company and director of several Boston area trusts. Department store magnate Edward A. Filene, on the other hand, supported Smith because of his “liberal ideas.” “Calumet Copper Head for Smith,” *The Hartford Courant*, September 20, 1928, p. 13; “Filene of Boston Store Supporting Gov. Smith,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 4, 1928, p. 4.

nominee for governor and a member of the association.¹⁴⁷⁷ DeWitt Page, president of the New Departure Manufacturing Company and a vice president with General Motors, lauded “the policies that have made for the prosperity of the country over a considerable number of years,” remarking from Bristol, Connecticut, after his nomination as a Republican presidential elector that “I must support the party that has served the best interests of our own and other industries during the past two decades.”¹⁴⁷⁸ As Hoover departed Boston after an October 15 speech, his tour through textile country was greeted with the enthusiasm of mill owners, who “turned their steam on for Candidate Hoover . . . kept every whistle at full toot as long as he was in hearing.”¹⁴⁷⁹

More significantly, manufacturers inundated their payrolls with dire predictions about the consequences of a Smith victory. On October 16, responding to Smith’s Louisville address on tariff policy, Brigadier General Charles Cole, Democratic nominee for governor of Massachusetts, told a Boston audience that “no longer will the mill overseer stand by the gate and assure the men that their job and pay envelope depends upon so-called republican protection.”¹⁴⁸⁰ In fact, Smith’s candidacy only served to exacerbate such activities. Republican-aligned industrialists doggedly promoted Hoover among those who toiled in the textile mills and machine works of New England. One large Connecticut manufacturer posted signage: “Hoover and Curtis—If these men are elected your jobs are safe.”¹⁴⁸¹ Large pictures of the Republican nominee were “conspicuously” placed at the doors of The New Bedford Spinning Company.¹⁴⁸² The

¹⁴⁷⁷ “Wool Trade Conducts Rally for Republicans,” *The Boston Globe*, October 18, 1928, p. 16.

¹⁴⁷⁸ “DeWitt Page Explains His Party Stand,” *The Hartford Courant*, September 9, 1928, pp. 1, 10, p. 1.

¹⁴⁷⁹ “Battle of the Atlantic.”

¹⁴⁸⁰ “General Cole Raps Hoover,” *The Lowell Sun*, October 17, 1928, p. 2.

¹⁴⁸¹ Editorial, “Insidious Coercion That Will Not Work,” *The Springfield Daily News*, October 1, 1928, p. 4.

¹⁴⁸² “Mill Posters Boost Hoover,” *The New Bedford Evening Standard*, November 2, 1928, p. 14.

Bigelow-Hartford Carpet Company warned millworkers: “Hoover and Prosperity—Save Your Job.”¹⁴⁸³ From Lowell, it was reported that workers in parts of Massachusetts were “receiving in their pay envelopes little folders showing the home of a working man protected by a tariff wall which the democrats are pictured as tearing down.”¹⁴⁸⁴

Republican campaigners reiterated these threats. In newspaper advertisements for the Republican ticket, workers were implored to preserve prosperity: “Let’s Keep What We’ve Got!”¹⁴⁸⁵ Horace Greeley Knowles, a lawyer and retired diplomat, wrote the *Hartford Courant* that “within a very few weeks after the election, should Smith be successful, lack of confidence, doubt and uncertainty as to the effect of the change of administration . . . would develop into a panic, would result in many thousands and probably millions of men and women being thrown out of work.”¹⁴⁸⁶

Smith alluded to these tactics during his labor speech at Newark, New Jersey, claiming that “circulars were paid for and sent out by the Republican National Committee to be put in the pay envelopes of American workingmen”; responding to the Democrat, the *Lowell Sun* reported that “instances of such coercion are reported in this state; and it is nothing new,” for “in past years” Massachusetts Republicans had employed “the old tariff bogey” to “intimidate labor” into voting the GOP ticket.¹⁴⁸⁷ Indeed, the scale and tactics may have been novel, but by 1928 Republican propaganda extolling high tariffs was an autumn tradition in New England. What was quite new, however, was how the region’s workers responded to these entreaties.

¹⁴⁸³ Editorial, “Boomerangs,” *The Springfield Daily News*, October 3, 1928, p. 6.

¹⁴⁸⁴ Editorial, “Tariff Bogey and Intimidation of Labor,” *The Lowell Sun*, November 3, 1928, p. 8.

¹⁴⁸⁵ “Let’s Keep What We’ve Got!” (advertisement), *The Fall River Globe*, November 5, 1928, p. 8.

¹⁴⁸⁶ Horace G. Knowles, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Hartford Courant*, November 5, 1928, p. 8.

¹⁴⁸⁷ Smith, “Newark,” in *Campaign Addresses*, p. 258; Editorial, “Intimidating Labor,” *The Lowell Sun*, November 2, 1928, p. 16.

Some New England laborers were stirred by the Republican economic argument, as they had been since the nineteenth century. “A Worker” reminded the *Hartford Courant* that the Republican tariff must be preserved in order to bolster Connecticut manufacturing.¹⁴⁸⁸ Yet many were unmoved by such boilerplate. “We get a lot of prosperity hash, with here and there something about the full dinner pail,” went a different letter to the *Courant*, “but working men are reading up a little these days and the old dinner pail argument is getting to be more of an insult than an incentive.”¹⁴⁸⁹ A voter from Northampton dismissed Republican claims of prosperity as “a myth”: “Prosperity in New England just is not. The McCallum Hosiery Company, the Cutlery, the Corticelli mills in Northampton have slashed salaries and let help go. The Northampton Hosiery Company has failed. A community in this condition cannot feel there is prosperity simply because Mr. [Charles Evans] Hughes says so.”¹⁴⁹⁰ A writer from Glastonbury, Connecticut, agreed, arguing that “our prosperity is not anything to brag about and has been that way for the last three years. Far too many people are jobless and the number is increasing.”¹⁴⁹¹

In fact, the lived experiences of tens of thousands of working-class New Englanders belied Republican satisfaction with Coolidge prosperity. A pseudonymous “Breadwinner” from Springfield noted an increase in the number of beggars in the community, sardonically suggesting that “perhaps it would be best after all to elect Mr. Hoover, with his wide experience in feeding the hungry in other lands and let him direct

¹⁴⁸⁸ “A Worker,” “Letter to the Editor,” *The Hartford Courant*, September 30, 1928, p. A2.

¹⁴⁸⁹ “Luke Warm,” “Letter to the Editor,” *The Hartford Courant*, September 30, 1928, p. A2.

¹⁴⁹⁰ “Northampton,” “Letter to the Editor,” *The Springfield Union*, November 5, 1928, p. 8.

¹⁴⁹¹ “Reader,” “Letter to the Editor,” *The Hartford Courant*, September 30, 1928, p. A2.

the ‘Prosperity Breadlines’ in America.”¹⁴⁹² A former Republican from Holyoke agreed that there was a perceptible decline in the region’s economic fortunes: “Our closed industrial plants, comprising textile, shoe, paper and those producing from iron and steel does not uphold the Republican slogan, Prosperity! New England’s thousands of industries that operate from four days to 12 days per month; the hundreds of thousands of idle and part-time idle workers is a refutation of the statements made by the ballyhoo speakers of the Republican Party.”¹⁴⁹³ A writer from Westfield, Massachusetts, emphasized that in the unbalanced economy of the 1920s, these questions were ultimately a matter of perspective: “Yes, there is prosperity, but not with the poor, the struggling tradesman or the farmer. But the rich are prospered, the bloated bondholder, the manipulator in stocks and the politically high up.”¹⁴⁹⁴

Democratic politicians perceived this discontent, joining both New England workers and their party’s presidential nominee in challenging the very notion of Republican prosperity. Speaking before 3,500 people in Lowell, once and future mayor of Boston James Michael Curley employed his characteristic ethnocultural appeals—denouncing the Klan, lauding the Americanism of those who had fought in the Great War “regardless of race or creed,” and amusing Irish listeners by adopting a cockney accent to mock “Erbie ’Oover” and his ties to England. But the “Purple Shamrock” also engaged in a long dissertation on the worsening lot of New England workers. “Where is the prosperity?” he queried. “Where is the protection the Republicans talk about? . . . It is too bad Hoover couldn’t have stayed in this state a few days and seen the bread lines in

¹⁴⁹² “Breadwinner,” “Letter to the Editor,” *The Springfield Daily News*, October 30, 1928, p. 6.

¹⁴⁹³ William H. Kelly, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Springfield Daily News*, October 16, 1928, p. 6.

¹⁴⁹⁴ Anonymous (from Westfield, MA), “Letter to the Editor,” *The Springfield Daily News*, October 30, 1928, p. 6.

New Bedford. They are timid of talking about prosperity here—with 2300 homes unoccupied in Lawrence, 3000 here, 2000 in New Bedford and the same number in other textile cities. What have the republicans done for the people of this state?”¹⁴⁹⁵

At Ansonia, Connecticut, Augustine Lonergan speculated whether the state’s closed mills were indications of Republican prosperity.¹⁴⁹⁶ In Manchester, Connecticut, Hermann Kopplemann wondered which workers were receiving the supposed “luxury wages” Speaker Longworth had claimed resulted from GOP policies.¹⁴⁹⁷ Prosperity was unbalanced, claimed Senator Walsh at a Massachusetts mill town—“centered on a preferred class of men, namely big business.”¹⁴⁹⁸ New York congressman Anthony Griffin agreed during an address in Hamden, Connecticut: “Every one concedes that the big fellows are doing well, with plenty of money in the bank—the thing now to do is to give the little fellows a show and an opportunity to earn a living.”¹⁴⁹⁹

New England Textiles

During the Hamden speech, Congressman Griffin centered much of his critique of Republican economics on “the strike in the textile industries of a neighboring State—a strike which lasted for 25 weeks and was only settled by the starving workmen at last consenting to accept a reduction of 5% in their meager wages.”¹⁵⁰⁰ Here Griffin referred to the New Bedford textile strike of 1928, a conflict that began on April 16 as a response

¹⁴⁹⁵ “Enthusiastic Crowd of 3500 Attends Democratic Rally,” *The Lowell Sun*, October 20, 1928, p. 3.

¹⁴⁹⁶ “G. O. P. Prosperity Claims Attacked by Lonergan in Speech,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 10, 1928, p. 6.

¹⁴⁹⁷ “Lonergan Raps Hoover’s Ability at Smith Meeting,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 27, 1928, p. 2.

¹⁴⁹⁸ “Walsh, Cole and Barry Speak at Ludlow Plant,” *The Boston Globe*, October 25, 1928, p. 6.

¹⁴⁹⁹ “Campaign Speech in Support of Alfred E. Smith for the presidency,” Hamden, Connecticut, October 11, 1928, Anthony Griffin Papers, Box 14, pp. 4-5.

¹⁵⁰⁰ Griffin, “Campaign Speech in Support of Alfred E. Smith for the presidency,” p. 5.

by both union craftsmen and hastily organized unskilled workers to a 10 percent wage cut which had been announced by mill owners on April 9—Easter Monday. The strike had involved more than twenty thousand mill hands and, as noted by Griffin, did not end until ragged, exhausted workers voted on October 6 to concede a 5 percent pay cut.¹⁵⁰¹ For Smith and his allies, the New Bedford episode exemplified the perils of the Republican economic posture: the administration, in this view, had been too swollen with its own sense of accomplishment to address the struggles of certain sectors—in this case, textiles—and as a result the working class was forced to absorb the consequences of regional misfortune. Thus, to Griffin and other Smith Democrats in New England, bromides on the nation’s flourishing economy were absurd.

Across New England, the New Bedford crisis and that of textiles generally provided Smith’s forces with an ideal rebuttal for Republican warnings about Democratic recklessness. At Lowell, Curley pointed to the bitter irony revealed by the strike: “when the country was supposed to be prosperous, there were soup kitchens in New Bedford.”¹⁵⁰² In the same city, the Smith-boosting *Lowell Sun* scoffed at the suggestion that workers should retain Republican administration in the interest of prosperity. “We are told that the ‘continued prosperity’ of the textile industry in New England demands that the republican party be retained in power. The continuance of present conditions would threaten the extinction of what remains of this industry. The republican party has been in control of the government since 1920, and it is safe to say that the textile industry never experienced any period of such intense depression as during that time.”¹⁵⁰³ The

¹⁵⁰¹ See Daniel Georgianna, with Roberta Hazen Aaronson, *The Strike of '28* (New Bedford, MA: Spinner Publications, 1993).

¹⁵⁰² “Enthusiastic Crowd of 3500 Attends Democratic Rally, p. 3.

¹⁵⁰³ Editorial, “The G. O. P. Tariff Attacked,” *The Lowell Sun*, October 8, 1928, p. 10.

next day, the editors continued on this theme: “The people of Massachusetts, and particularly in the textile cities, realize how absurd is the claim that general prosperity abounds. The textile industry during the past five or six years has suffered probably the most severe depression in its entire history.”¹⁵⁰⁴

About twenty miles to the southwest, in the shoemaking hub of Marlborough, Massachusetts, Senator Walsh “doubted the glowing stories of the country’s prosperity when strike conditions exist” in cities like New Bedford—a theme he reiterated in towns across the state.¹⁵⁰⁵ General Cole joined Walsh in Ludlow, Massachusetts, just east of Chicopee, to review the influence of Republican policies on local workers. “You people here have nothing to thank the Republican party for. You know how many families have had to leave Ludlow in the past few years because there is no work here. You have a tariff already and what good has it done you? The Republican talk of raising the tariff wall to restore the textile industry will not fool the people in Ludlow any more than it will fool the people in Lowell, in New Bedford, in Fall River, where the mills have under the Republican party written their own tariff schedules.”¹⁵⁰⁶ In struggling manufacturing communities this rhetoric had resonance: Two weeks later, Al Smith carried Ludlow with 54.9 percent of the vote—the first Democrat to win the town in the twentieth century.¹⁵⁰⁷

This responsiveness to Democratic derision of Republican prosperity was not limited to small mill towns like Ludlow. The great Massachusetts textile manufacturing

¹⁵⁰⁴ Editorial. “G. O. P. Campaigners Make a Discovery,” *The Lowell Sun*, October 9, 1928, p. 10.

¹⁵⁰⁵ He made similar remarks in Ayer, Hudson, Maynard, and Quincy. “Walsh Heads Guests at Marlboro Outing,” *The Boston Globe*, September 23, 1928, p. A15; “New Smith Clubs Hear Cole, Walsh,” *The Boston Globe*, October 4, 1928, p. 25.

¹⁵⁰⁶ “Walsh, Cole and Barry Speak at Ludlow Plant,” p. 6.

¹⁵⁰⁷ *A Manual for Use of the General Court of Massachusetts for 1929-1930*, p. 401.

cities of Fall River, Lawrence, Lowell, and New Bedford all voted strongly for Al Smith in 1928. Of these cities, the one with the strongest Democratic tradition since the realignment of 1896 was Lawrence, which had twice produced Democratic presidential majorities—in 1900 and 1916. In the latter election Lawrence had the best Democratic showing of any of the four cities in this entire period, with just over 57 percent of the two-party vote going to Woodrow Wilson; and Lawrence had been joined in the Democratic column by Lowell and Fall River, each of which produced their lone pre-Smith Democratic majority in 1916. New Bedford never delivered a Democratic majority or even plurality in this period, and during the 1920s none of these cities had a Democratic presidential percentage above the mid-30s. Simply: Most New England textile workers were Republican in presidential voting. In 1928, Smith gained 71.6 percent in Lawrence, 64.8 percent in Fall River, 64.1 percent in Lowell, and 55.8 percent in New Bedford.¹⁵⁰⁸ Victories in the traditionally Republican textile centers propelled Smith to a statewide victory in Massachusetts, as they did in neighboring Rhode Island, where the New Yorker became the first Democrat to win since Woodrow Wilson in 1912—and the first to gain a majority in the Ocean State since Franklin Pierce. In both Massachusetts and Rhode Island, this new Democratic strength in the textile regions would be fortified during the New Deal era.¹⁵⁰⁹

¹⁵⁰⁸ *A Manual for Use of the General Court of Massachusetts for 1929-1930*, pp. 397-407.

¹⁵⁰⁹ A similar phenomenon occurred in Passaic, New Jersey. At the time of the 1930 census, 13.9 percent of that city's workforce was engaged in textile work. Throughout 1926 and into 1927, the city had endured textile strikes that in some cases lasted over a year. Like the New Bedford strike (discussed in further detail below), the Passaic strike was energized by discontent among new-stock unskilled workers who had been shut out by craft unionists and were eventually organized with help from communists. To this point, the city had been consistently Republican in presidential voting; in 1928, Passaic granted Al Smith an unprecedented majority, and from that time forward the city was strongly Democratic in national elections. See appendix two. David Lee McMullen, *Strike! The Radical Insurrections of Ellen Dawson* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, 2010), pp. 67-95; *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population, Volume III, Part II*, p. 213.

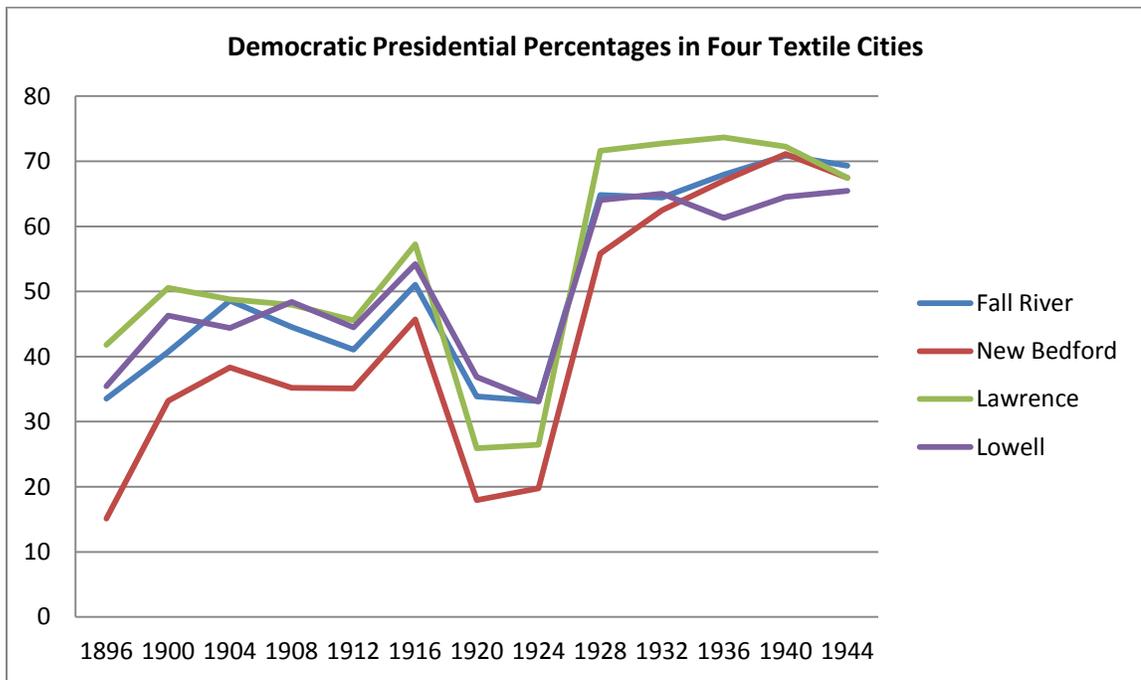


Fig. 6.2: Chart demonstrating the precipitous increase in the Democratic vote in major textile cities in 1928.

Of course, the mill workers who voted for Al Smith in droves in 1928 were also largely Catholic and heavily immigrant. In 1926, 72.4 percent of Lawrence, Massachusetts, citizens claiming membership in a religious denomination were Roman Catholics.¹⁵¹⁰ In other textile centers this figure was even higher: in New Bedford, as well as in Cranston, Rhode Island and Pawtucket, Rhode Island, Catholics comprised more than 73 percent of the religious population.¹⁵¹¹ In Lowell, the figure was 79.8 percent.¹⁵¹² Woonsocket, Rhode Island, was an astoundingly homogeneous 89.8 percent Roman Catholic.¹⁵¹³

¹⁵¹⁰ United States Department of Commerce, R. P. LaMont, Secretary, and Bureau of the Census, W. M. Stewart, Director, *Religious Bodies: 1926*, Vol. I (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1930), p. 452.

¹⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 400, 479, 504-505.

¹⁵¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 460-461.

¹⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 572.

It is also clear that ethnic voters in these cities were aroused by the cultural conflicts of the day, and this likely influenced many people's presidential vote. In Fall River, there was a strong correlation between a ward's concentration of first and second generation Americans and its support for the Massachusetts referendum calling on the state's United States Senators to vote to repeal the Eighteenth Amendment.¹⁵¹⁴ Fall River was 78.4 percent immigrant or child of immigrant and 78.8 percent Roman Catholic; its voters favored repeal of prohibition by a healthy 70.7 percent, and also gave 74.7 percent of their vote to a separate referendum to lift the state ban on Sunday sports.¹⁵¹⁵ This was the archetypical Smith stronghold, and the Democrat carried the city with nearly 65 percent of the vote.¹⁵¹⁶

Yet this is an incomplete profile of the city—and of Smith's supporters. Fall River was also a textile center, and by 1928 it was in the doldrums of industrial depression. On January 30, 1928, thirty thousand of the city's mill workers, in thirty of the city's thirty-two mills, acquiesced through their frail union to a 10 percent wage reduction.¹⁵¹⁷ This was in the wake of an identical cut in Lawrence, and shortly in advance of the 10 percent cut that would precipitate mass strikes less than fifteen miles to the east in New Bedford.¹⁵¹⁸

The political mobilization of New England's working class behind Al Smith and the Democrats in 1928 can only be understood within the broader context of this decade-

¹⁵¹⁴ Calculated by the author from "Tabulated Vote of the City By Precincts," *The Fall River Globe*, November 7, 1928, p. 4; *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population*, Volume III, Part I, p. 1110.

¹⁵¹⁵ "Tabulated Vote of the City By Precincts," *The Fall River Globe*, November 7, 1928, p. 4; *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population*, Volume III, Part I, p. 1110; U. S. Department of Commerce, *et al.*, *Religious Bodies: 1926*, Vol. I, pp. 420-421.

¹⁵¹⁶ "Tabulated Vote of the City By Precincts," p. 4.

¹⁵¹⁷ "Mills in Fall River Cut Pay 10 Percent," *The Boston Globe*, January 20, 1928, p. 10; Georgianna, *The Strike of '28*, p. 51.

¹⁵¹⁸ Georgianna, *The Strike of '28*, p. 50.

long decline in textiles. In Bristol County, Massachusetts, home of both Fall River and New Bedford, the 1920s were a disastrous time. Following sharp declines in cloth prices after the close of the Great War, New Bedford's mills were shuttered for several months beginning in late 1920, and in February, 1921, a shrunken work force returned to the mills for 20 percent less than they had previously been paid.¹⁵¹⁹ In early 1922, some workers in Fall River, which had followed a similar trajectory, were complaining that since resuming operations their salaries had been halved.¹⁵²⁰ By 1927, New Bedford mill hands were paid 15 percent less than even their reduced 1921 salaries.¹⁵²¹

Moreover, things were even worse elsewhere in the region. As 1922 began, a wave of industrial austerity swept irresistibly northward from Connecticut and Rhode Island across southeastern New England. On January 17, 20 percent wage cuts were announced for mills in Putnam, Wauregan, and Danielson, Connecticut.¹⁵²² Two days later, seven thousand mill hands in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, as well as in Lonsdale and Ashton in the same state, were informed of a 20 percent cut.¹⁵²³ By January 23, about eighteen thousand workers were "affected by the new wage conditions" in northeastern Connecticut alone.¹⁵²⁴ On February 2, 1922, textile manufacturers announced a 20 percent cut for fifty thousand workers in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Maine.¹⁵²⁵ That day, the employees of the Lancaster Mills in Clinton, Massachusetts, were informed of a cut to take effect in less than two weeks—the two thousand mill operatives affected

¹⁵¹⁹ Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁵²⁰ "Fall River Doffers on Strike, Cut 50 Percent," *The Boston Globe*, February 4, 1922, p. 5.

¹⁵²¹ Georgianna, *The Strike of '28*, p. 46.

¹⁵²² "Cotton Mills Cut Wages," *The New York Times*, January 18, 1922, p. 28.

¹⁵²³ "Mill Wages Cut 20%," *The New York Times*, January 20, 1922, p. 9.

¹⁵²⁴ "Wage Cut Effective in Cotton Mill," *The Hartford Courant*, January 24, 1922, p. 14.

¹⁵²⁵ "Textile Mills Cut Wages of 50,000 Men," *The New York Times*, February 3, 1922, p. 10; "Wage Cuts for 50,000," *The Boston Globe*, February 3, 1922, p. 1.

represented fully 15 percent of the town's entire population.¹⁵²⁶ Two days later, 1,500 mill workers in Easthampton, Massachusetts, were informed of a "general wage reduction," to take effect later in the month on top of the 22.5 percent cut instituted in the aftermath of the World War.¹⁵²⁷ The workers affected comprised 13 percent of the town's population.¹⁵²⁸

Workers in Lawrence, Fitchburg, Pawtucket, and elsewhere erupted in protest.¹⁵²⁹ By Valentine's Day, there were more than fifty thousand New Englanders out on strike against the ubiquitous 20 percent cut—as well as against a parallel campaign by many employers to "restore" the fifty-four hour work week.¹⁵³⁰ The situation in Rhode Island's Blackstone and Pawtuxet valleys was especially volatile. By February 9, police in Cranston had received a "shoot to kill" order in response to rioting by workers and their sympathizers.¹⁵³¹ On one winter evening, "more than 500 strikers besieged the Pontiac mill office of B. B. & R. Knight, Inc., shattered all the windows with brickbats and clubs, driving the office help and two police constables out," while the high sheriff of Kent County was compelled to "flee to the attic and take refuge behind bales of cotton while the mob ransacked the lower floor."¹⁵³²

In response to this and other riots, Governor San Souci dispatched Troops C and D of the Rhode Island National Guard to the area, and mobilized a battery of the guard's 103rd Field Artillery—a unit including "artillerymen . . . equipped with machine guns"

¹⁵²⁶ "Announce Cut for 2000 at Lancaster Mills, Clinton," *The Boston Globe*, February 3, 1922, p. 15; Edgar A. Bowers, ed., *Annual Report on the Vital Statistics of Massachusetts: Births, Marriages, Divorces and Deaths for the Year Ending December 31, 1920* (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1921), p. 217.

¹⁵²⁷ "Big Wage Cuts in Textile Mills," *The Hartford Courant*, February 5, 1922, p. X7.

¹⁵²⁸ Bowers, ed., *Annual Report on the Vital Statistics of Massachusetts*, p. 217.

¹⁵²⁹ Georgianna, *The Strike of '28*, p. 47.

¹⁵³⁰ "Strikes Shut Down New England Mills," *The New York Times*, February 14, 1922, p. 16.

¹⁵³¹ "Armed Police Rout Strikers," *The Boston Globe*, February 10, 1922, p. 9.

¹⁵³² "Troops Sent to Quell Strikers," *The Boston Globe*, February 21, 1922, pp. 1, 12.

and possessing four “French 75s.”¹⁵³³ The next morning, as soldiers patrolled the streets of mill towns including Pontiac and Natick, a riot in Pawtucket led to police fire that left five critically wounded and one dead.¹⁵³⁴ Throughout the spring the governor continued to escalate the military presence in the strike centers.¹⁵³⁵ Judges contributed their usual slew of injunctions against the strikers.¹⁵³⁶ On April 29, mill owners began evicting workers from company housing.¹⁵³⁷ At one point, two thousand strikers stormed the state house in Providence in an effort to compel the legislature to adopt a forty-eight hour work week; but the state senate, like the governor and judiciary, rebuffed Rhode Island’s floundering labor movement.¹⁵³⁸ In September, it was agreed that the strike would be ended and January pay rates would be restored, along with the fifty-four hour week, although “discrimination in re-employing strikers” delayed the reopening of some mills.¹⁵³⁹ On October 5, after thirty-six weeks, the Rhode Island strikers went back to work.¹⁵⁴⁰

The eighteen thousand strikers in Lawrence won a similar victory, returning to the mills in early September at their original wages.¹⁵⁴¹ In his Labor Day review for 1922, *Baltimore Sun* columnist John T. Leary, Jr., declared that while “textile unions have had a

¹⁵³³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁵³⁴ “Police Fire on Pawtucket Mob,” *The Boston Globe*, February 22, 1922, pp. 1, 5.

¹⁵³⁵ “More Troops Go To Strike Zone,” *The Boston Globe*, June 15, 1922, p. 6.

¹⁵³⁶ “Serve Subpoenas on Strike Chiefs,” *The Boston Globe*, May 13, 1922, p. 5; “Court Bars All Strike Pickets,” *The Boston Globe*, June 23, 1922, p. 8; “Injunction Checks Textile Strikers,” *The Boston Globe*, July 9, 1922, p. 2.

¹⁵³⁷ “Textile Mills Begin Eviction of Strikers,” *The New York Times*, April 30, 1922, p. 16.

¹⁵³⁸ “Strikers Storm R I State House,” *The Boston Globe*, April 14, 1922, p. 13.

¹⁵³⁹ “Knight Mill Strike Ends,” *The New York Times*, October 6, 1928, p. 23; DeMoranville, “Ethnic Voting in Rhode Island,” p. 58.

¹⁵⁴⁰ “Pawtucket Valley Mill Strikes End,” *The Boston Globe*, October 6, 1922, p. 5.

¹⁵⁴¹ “Textile Strike Ends in Lawrence,” *The Hartford Courant*, August 31, 1922, p. 1; “Lawrence Spindles Hum,” *The New York Times*, August 31, 1922, p. 28. The more radical “One Big Union,” which held out against Lawrence’s Pacific mills, eventually capitulated to that mill’s decision to restore the “old wages” beginning October 1, rather than retroactive to September 1, as had the other Lawrence manufacturers. “One Big Union Sends Men Back,” *The Boston Globe*, September 3, 1922, p. 18.

hard year of it,” ultimately, “offers of old wages at a future period by important mills in Lawrence and elsewhere may be taken to show which way the wind is blowing.”¹⁵⁴² Swiftly, these fickle winds shifted.

In the May 1924 edition of its monthly bulletin *The Index*, the New York Trust Company described the “difficult and discouraging” condition of the cotton textile industry.¹⁵⁴³ Rising prices for raw cotton, increasing foreign competition, and dropping consumer demand had conspired to produce a “disturbing situation,” and as a result, “few, if any of the cotton mills are operating at normal capacity . . . and many mills are closing down temporarily.”¹⁵⁴⁴ While “labor costs” were forecast as “likely to continue permanently higher than pre-war costs,” the report proposed “lower operating costs” as one potential remedy to these unfortunate circumstances.¹⁵⁴⁵ Textile manufacturers responded to these conditions with initiatives to help stem those costs—especially the cost of labor.

By September of 1924, Rhode Island manufacturers were heralding a new round of wage cuts.¹⁵⁴⁶ In November, the Amoskeag mills in Manchester, New Hampshire, cut the wages of fourteen thousand operatives—18.2 percent of the city’s population—by 10 percent.¹⁵⁴⁷ That winter, one after another, the dominoes fell. A week before Christmas, the Massachusetts mills and the Appleton mills in Lowell announced 10 percent wage reductions to go into effect by the end of the year.¹⁵⁴⁸ On January 3, 1925—after a year

¹⁵⁴² “Union Outlook Rosiest Since Spring of 1920,” *The Baltimore Sun*, September 3, 1922, p. 3.

¹⁵⁴³ “Tells of Plight of Cotton Industry,” *The New York Times*, May 31, 1924, p. 19.

¹⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁵⁴⁶ “Textile Workers Plan to Resist Wage Cuts,” *The New York Times*, September 22, 1924, p. 20.

¹⁵⁴⁷ “Amoskeag Mills Cut Pay,” *The New York Times*, November 9, 1924, p. 13; U.S. Department of Commerce, *et al.*, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930—Population*, Volume III, Part II, (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1932), p. 163.

¹⁵⁴⁸ “Lowell Textile Mills Cut Wages,” *The New York Times*, December 19, 1924, p. 43.

of operating at half capacity—Fall River manufacturers announced their own 10 percent cut affecting twenty-five thousand.¹⁵⁴⁹ Fall River was joined that week by more Rhode Island mills.¹⁵⁵⁰ United Textile Workers president Thomas F. McMahon did a great deal of foot-stomping—lambasting the Fall River and Rhode Island reductions as an “outrage” and a “steal”—but the unions acquiesced within four days.¹⁵⁵¹ Neighboring New Bedford made the call on January 9.¹⁵⁵² Mills in Lawrence and in Willimantic, Connecticut soon followed.¹⁵⁵³ Conditions did not improve that summer: in Lawrence, “part time, or complete shutdowns” became the rule in the woolen mills, and in that city—as well as in Andover, Haverhill, and Pittsfield, Massachusetts, Franklin and Goff’s Falls, New Hampshire, and Peace Dale, Rhode Island—10 percent wage reductions were instituted.¹⁵⁵⁴ The 1925 “adjustment” in labor costs was not the last word—in the years following this burst of parsimony, wage cuts continued across the region.¹⁵⁵⁵

Nor did such cuts prove the salvation of New England textiles. Throughout the 1920s, mills halted operations for extended periods due to poor business. Often factories were closed altogether. Some mills were simply liquidated, while many others were moved to the South in search of cheaper labor and lax regulations. A 1925 survey by social worker Mary Van Kleeck found a tremendous disparity in the prevailing work weeks of Massachusetts and North Carolina: in the Bay State, 93.2 percent of cotton

¹⁵⁴⁹ “Other Mills to Follow Fall River Wage Cut,” *The New York Times*, January 4, 1925, p. 15.

¹⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁵⁵¹ “Accept Textile Wage Cut,” *The New York Times*, January 8, 1925, p. 29.

¹⁵⁵² “New Bedford Mills to Reduce Wages,” *The Hartford Courant*, January 10, 1925, p. 19.

¹⁵⁵³ “Textile Wage Cut,” *The Hartford Courant*, January 23, 1925, p. 14; “Refuses to Arbitrate,” *The New York Times*, April 11, 1925, p. E2. (While the latter article is dated April 11, that is when the *Times* reported on management’s refusal to negotiate the cuts made in January.)

¹⁵⁵⁴ “Wage Cuts in Woolen Mills,” *The Boston Globe*, July 18, 1925, p. 8; “Lawrence Plant Closes,” *The New York Times*, July 23, 1925, p. 22; “More Mills Cut Wages,” *The New York Times*, July 24, 1925, p. 5; “Pittsfield Mill Strikers to Return,” *The Boston Globe*, August 28, 1925, p. A12.

¹⁵⁵⁵ *E.g.*: “Textile Strikers Accept Wage Cut,” *The New York Times*, January 9, 1926, p. 14; “Amoskeag Cut Unsettled,” *The New York Times*, December 15, 1927, p. 47.

factories operated with a work week of forty-eight hours or less; in North Carolina, that figure was 0.2 percent—and 51.1 percent of the Tar Heel State’s cotton mills were operating under a sixty hour week.¹⁵⁵⁶ Such conditions were nothing new, and this exodus had been ongoing since the late nineteenth century.¹⁵⁵⁷ Yet in some cases regional wage and regulatory differentials had actually sharpened in the 1920s. In 1924, female weavers in South Carolina cotton mills earned 38.6 percent less per hour than their Massachusetts peers, and among frame spinners the gap was 49.8 percent—at the close of the World War, the gaps had been a more modest 14.6 percent for weavers and 22.7 percent for spinners.¹⁵⁵⁸ In the face of such disadvantages, the region was hemorrhaging manufacturing jobs by mid-decade.¹⁵⁵⁹

Next page: Fig. 6.3: Chart showing the decline in cotton textile employment in three leading Massachusetts cities during the 1920s.¹⁵⁶⁰ Fig 6.4: Average hourly wage rates for female frame spinners and weavers in Massachusetts and South Carolina (in dollars), 1890-1928.¹⁵⁶¹ Fig. 6.5: Chart showing growth and decline of cotton textile industries in the South, New England, and Massachusetts.¹⁵⁶²

¹⁵⁵⁶ “Wage Earners In Cotton-Goods Industry, Classified According to Prevailing Hours of Labor In Factories In Which Employed, For Massachusetts and North Carolina: 1925,” Mary Van Kleeck Papers, Box 62, Folder 9.

¹⁵⁵⁷ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University, 1971), pp. 299, 305, 306, 308.

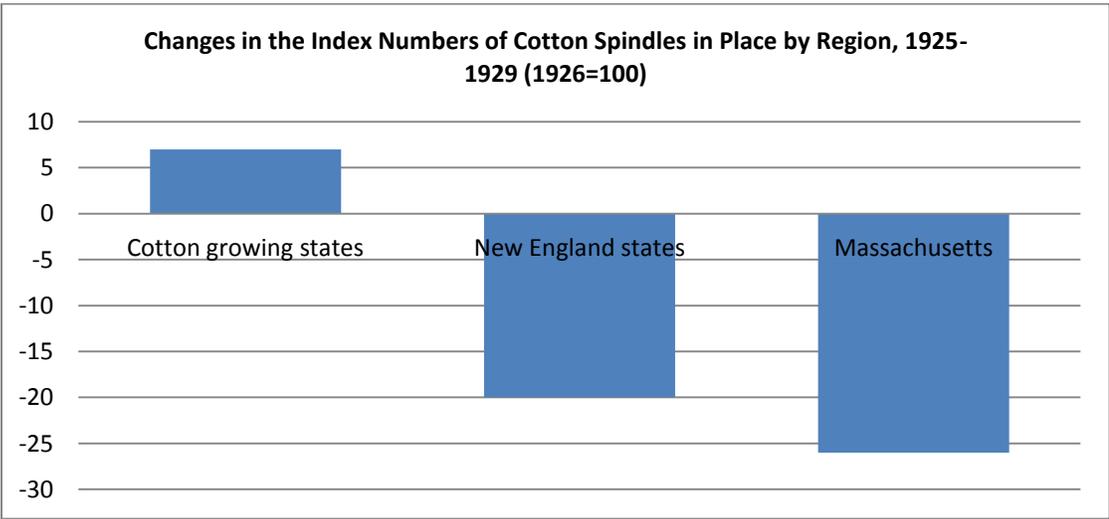
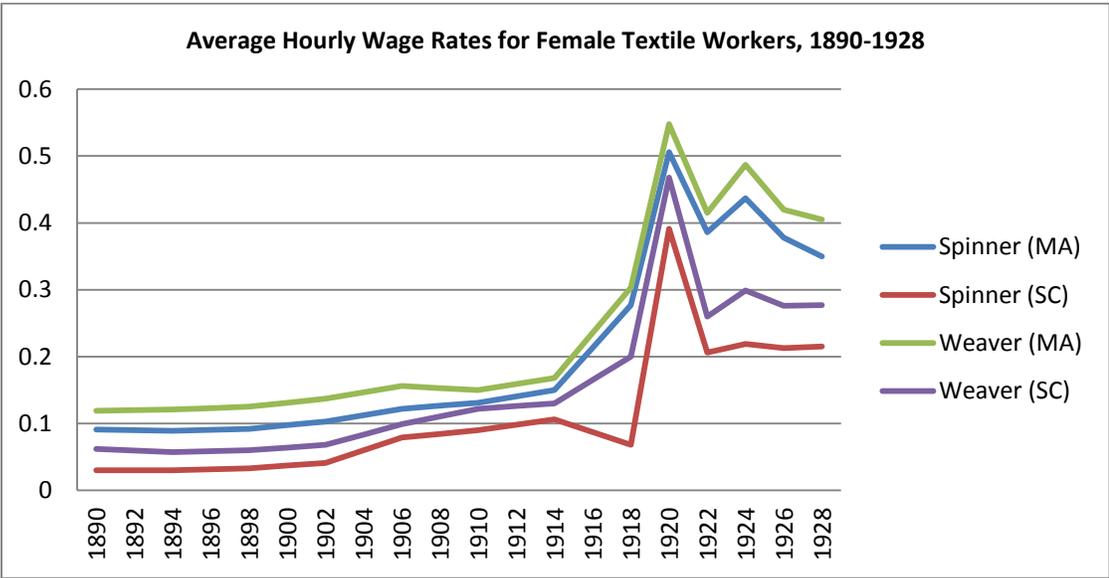
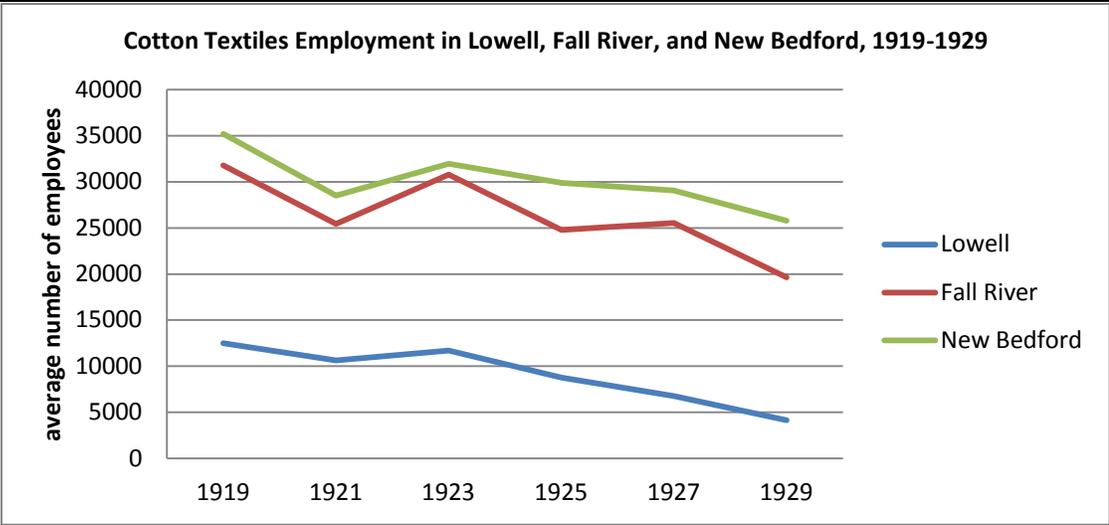
¹⁵⁵⁸ Margaret Terrell Parker, *Lowell: A Study of Industrial Development* (New York: MacMillan, 1940), p. 162.

¹⁵⁵⁹ *E.g.*: “Textile Mills Shut Down,” *The New York Times*, July 3, 1926, p. 6; “July Employment Felt Usual Slump,” *The New York Times*, August 13, 1926, p. 28; “Nashua Co. Sells Part of Lowell Plant,” *The New York Times*, December 24, 1926, p. 22; “Three Mills Close, Two After Walkout,” *The New York Times*, March 15, 1927, p. 27; “American Woolen Co. Closes Mill in New Hampshire,” *The Hartford Courant*, March 15, 1927, p. 9; “Another Maine Mill Announces Wage Cut of 10 Per Cent,” *The Hartford Courant*, December 14, 1927, p. 15; “Textile Mill to Close Temporarily,” *The New York Times*, December 23, 1927, p. 34; “Mills to Close 2 Weeks,” *The New York Times*, June 25, 1928, p. 39.

¹⁵⁶⁰ Data taken from a table in Parker, *Lowell*, p. 173.

¹⁵⁶¹ Data taken from a table in Parker, *Lowell*, p. 162.

¹⁵⁶² Data taken from a table in Seymour Louis Wolfbein, *The Decline of A Cotton Textile City: A Study of New Bedford* (New York: Columbia University, 1944), p. 33.



In 1928, the *Lowell Sun*, gazing downstream along the Merrimack to Lawrence, lamented that by 1927 the city's workers had lost "\$8,000,000 as compared with the amount earned in 1921."¹⁵⁶³ Moreover, thousands had been laid off, "these having been mainly employed in the woolen, worsted and cotton mills."¹⁵⁶⁴ The next week, the *Sun* turned its gaze inward: "the total value of cotton goods manufactured here in 1926 fell off by 20.6 per cent from the year 1925, while the average number of wage earners declined 8.3 per cent. . . . The value of production of woolen and worsted goods fell . . . 15.1 per cent from 1925 and although the number of wage earners seemed to remain the same, a large proportion of them were on short time schedules or on periodic layoffs."¹⁵⁶⁵ These numbers had broader social implications for the Spindle City: "The slump in Lowell is seen in the total property valuation which fell from \$145,910,187 in 1926 to \$136,678,260 this year, a loss of \$9,234,927."¹⁵⁶⁶

The story could be found in scores of communities scattered along dozens of rivers across New England. On the eve of Thanksgiving, 1926, the Otis Company announced that its stockholders would be voting to move operations from Ware, Massachusetts (where they had been located since 1835 and employed almost 20 percent of the population) to Lee, Alabama.¹⁵⁶⁷ The Otis mills employed around 1,500 in this "immaculate town of 8,000, nestling in the Ware valley and surrounded by a fertile farming community"; and it was predicted that "should the mills close nearly every

¹⁵⁶³ Editorial, "Textile Cities Hit Hard," *The Lowell Sun*, October 18, 1928, p. 14.

¹⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14. The statistics noted in this article are the precise figures which Smith would cite during his Boston address the next week.

¹⁵⁶⁵ Editorial, "New England Should Support Smith," *The Lowell Sun*, October 23, 1928, p. 10.

¹⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁵⁶⁷ "Ware Facing Ruin in Closing of Mills," *The New York Times*, November 25, 1926, p. 32.

family in town will be affected.”¹⁵⁶⁸ Along Main Street, shopkeepers “sadly discussed the future,” as wistful mill hands talked openly of “going to the almshouse.”¹⁵⁶⁹ Merchants were left with bloated stock as Thanksgiving inventories sat untouched on shelves and buyers reneged on orders made prior to the announcement.¹⁵⁷⁰ Town leaders feared that Ware would share the fate of nearby Thorndike—a community similarly dependent on a single mill which had closed earlier in the year, leading the town to “suffer disastrously.”¹⁵⁷¹

Ware, however, was more fortunate. In December, the board of the Otis Company voted to postpone action, causing the townspeople to “rejoice.”¹⁵⁷² An anonymous Associated Press reporter captured the prevailing mood: “Just as to the man in the death cell any stay of execution is an augury of good holding out infinite possibilities, so to the mill worker,” the delay was “an omen of good that holds out hope—none too strong, to be sure—that the town may not be called upon to face a readjustment so basic as to gender a feeling almost of despondency.”¹⁵⁷³ Otis stockholders granted Ware clemency the next day, voting to remain “indefinitely” and “brighten[ing] the Christmas outlook,” according to Governor Fuller.¹⁵⁷⁴ Fuller, a Republican, informed Otis that “you may consider us entirely at your service” as the company began to articulate the terms of its continued residence in Massachusetts.¹⁵⁷⁵

¹⁵⁶⁸ “Ware Facing Ruin in Closing of Mills,” p. 32. The *Boston Globe* estimated the workforce at closer to 2,000—or 25 percent of the town. “Delay Action on Otis Company Closing,” *The Boston Globe*, December 21, 1926, p. 14.

¹⁵⁶⁹ “Ware Facing Ruin in Closing of Mills,” p. 32.

¹⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁵⁷² “Saving Ware Mills Declared Possible,” *The New York Times*, December 21, 1926, p. 11.

¹⁵⁷³ “Ware Folk Hopeful after Postponement,” *The Boston Globe*, December 21, 1926, p. 14.

¹⁵⁷⁴ “Otis Company Mills to Stay,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 22, 1926, p. 5B; “Gov Fuller Promises His Collaboration,” *The Boston Globe*, December 22, 1926, p. A17.

¹⁵⁷⁵ “Gov Fuller Promises His Collaboration,” p. A17.

These included “relief from excessive State and town taxation and an amendment to the law limiting the hours of daily operations.”¹⁵⁷⁶ Stockholders’ Chairman Henry K. Hyde denounced “social legislation, particularly the law forbidding women to work after 6 pm, even when they so desire.”¹⁵⁷⁷ As Massachusetts considered these demands, Ware moved to become more hospitable to business. The following February, the town meeting voted to cut over \$20,000 from the municipal budget “in an effort to keep the Otis Mills here by materially reducing the taxation on property.”¹⁵⁷⁸

In the mean time, Otis did what it could to maintain profitability: on Christmas Eve, those living in company housing “received notice that an increase in rentals will be effective for the future, probably averaging about 25 percent.”¹⁵⁷⁹ Two weeks later, a “wage readjustment” was declared.¹⁵⁸⁰ The price of keeping the mills had been a reduction in household incomes and thus of quality of life—but then, netting less was better than netting nothing at all. Through all of this “cooperation,” the mills were saved—for now—“with the understanding that should their future operation prove unprofitable they would eventually be closed.”¹⁵⁸¹ Spared the fate of Thorndike, the people of Ware toiled on at the mills—now for less pay, and always with the sword of Damocles dangling overhead.

That sword plunged mercilessly into the heart of many a New England community. In 1919, before the textile slump began in earnest, there were 122,499 people employed in cotton textiles in Massachusetts and 53,869 employed in woolens; by

¹⁵⁷⁶ “Fuller’s Aid Sought to Lift Burden,” *The Boston Globe*, December 29, 1926, p. 5.

¹⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁵⁷⁸ “Ware Taxes Reduced to Hold Otis Mills,” *The Boston Globe*, February 16, 1926, p. 17.

¹⁵⁷⁹ “Raise Rents of Otis Employes,” *The Boston Globe*, December 26, 1926, p. B30.

¹⁵⁸⁰ “Wage Readjustment for all Otis Mills,” *The Boston Globe*, January 7, 1927, p. 11.

¹⁵⁸¹ “Mill Men Discuss Textile Troubles at Meeting Today,” *The Hartford Courant*, February 8, 1927, p. 7.

1930, these numbers had plummeted to 73,404 for cotton and 48,401 for wool—reductions of 40.1 percent and 10.2 percent, respectively.¹⁵⁸² This collapse was hardly confined to the Bay State. In Rhode Island the employment rolls went from 31,404 to 18,427 in cotton and from 24,393 to 20,861 in woolens; in Connecticut, employment declined from 15,647 to 10,711 in cotton and from 7,798 to 6,747 in woolens; in New Hampshire, from 21,183 to 12,691 in cotton and from 9,772 to 5,265 in woolens.¹⁵⁸³ From 1919 to 1930, these four states lost 27.6 percent of their woolen textile jobs, and 48.2 percent of their cotton textile jobs. In Massachusetts, these losses during the 1920s would have accounted for 3 percent of all employment in the state in 1930.

From this macro perspective the considerable economic motivation behind the political mobilization of New England workers becomes compelling. Of course, to the workers themselves these were not numbers, but rather a threat to their very survival. Even in good times life had been a bitter struggle for the unskilled immigrant laborers who ran New England's mills. They faithfully continued their tasks out of desperation, but also out of a nebulous sense of promise: there was a vague spirit of progression—grindingly slow, yes, but improvement nonetheless—that seemed to fuel the aspirations of the mill workers despite reality's daily assaults on hope itself. That vision of eventual progress, along with traditional elements including culture, family life, and religion,

¹⁵⁸² “1919: Average number of wage-earners in the cotton goods industry in the United States establishments where the prevailing hours of labor were,” and “1919: Average number of wage-earners in woolen and worsted mills in the United States establishments where the prevailing hours of labor were,” Mary Van Kleek Papers, Box 62, Folder 9; *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population*, Volume III, Part I, p. 1102.

¹⁵⁸³ “1919: Average number of wage-earners in the cotton goods industry . . .”; “1919: Average number of wage-earners in woolen and worsted mills . . .”; *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population*, Volume III, Part I, p. 361; Part II, pp. 169, 770.

sustained these New Englanders against abominable circumstances.¹⁵⁸⁴ In the 1920s, their culture and their religion were under attack, and this affected the politics of the ethnic working class. Statistically it is obvious that hopes of progression as a reward for years and even generations of faithful toil were also under siege. This too had a profound influence on the political outlook of these workers. The upheaval of the 1920s delivered a death blow to the faith many workers had held that, however bad things might be, they could get better with hard work—or at the very least, one might expect to maintain the status quo. Now there was regression, and an already tenuous existence began to appear unsustainable.¹⁵⁸⁵

In his study of working-class Woonsocket, historian Gary Gerstle noted that in the 1920s, “the French-Canadian masses . . . lived their cultural life much as they had always done but were consumed with worry about their precarious economic predicament. The source of their economic anxiety was the city’s failing cotton textile industry.”¹⁵⁸⁶ To an organizer from the 1928 New Bedford textile strike this was obvious: the trepidation of mill employees was “because their living was so closely connected with working. . . . so that there was no something else, you work in the mill and that mill was your life, that’s the place you went to, that’s the place you came back from, and there is very little in

¹⁵⁸⁴ For example, Gary Gerstle has demonstrated that for the French-Canadian community in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, the project of “cultural survival,” top-down though it may have been, was central to working-class life into the 1920s. Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism*, pp. 19-53, 58.

¹⁵⁸⁵ One student of the 1928 New Bedford strike has made a similar observation: “Excluded from unions and city government, women and new immigrants created their own social clubs, mutual aid societies and neighborhood networks. Until 1928, they considered these systems sufficient means of survival or dared not ask for more. When the proposed pay cut threatened the delicate balance of their lives, they mobilized their support systems in what began as an individual survival strategy and became a formidable class action They participated not because they were committed to class struggle but because they could not afford a pay cut and felt ill-treated, by more privileged workers as well as by employers and the urban power structure.” Evelyn A. Sterne, “Patchwork of Protest: Social Diversity and Labor Militancy in the New Bedford Strike of 1928” (MA thesis, Duke University, 1994), p. 61. Sterne does not connect these actions to political-electoral mobilization.

¹⁵⁸⁶ Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism*, p. 53.

between because there wasn't enough income to take care of in between."¹⁵⁸⁷ Transcending the regional perspective and tracing personal experiences establishes the unavoidable primacy of such concerns to many workers' lives. Considering those experiences within the broader political and economic context of the 1920s clarifies those workers' political impetus.

Mill Life

“At half-past five each morning in the City of the Dinner-Pail the factory bells ring out in merry chorus; only the older factories keep up the custom, but they are so numerous that the bells are heard from one end of the city to the other. On many a dark winter morning the sound of the bells has awakened me to reflect for a moment on the lot of those who ‘get up by night and dress by yellow candle-light’; and I have returned to my dreams while already the streets were beginning to be thronged with the army of the dinner-pail.”¹⁵⁸⁸ So meditated a Fall River businessman in 1909 as he explored the lives of the city’s “nearly thirty thousand men and women who earn their daily bread making cotton cloth.”¹⁵⁸⁹ Joining in these reflections provides context for the political activities of mill workers in the twenty years following this rather romantic account. This specific reflection is particularly instructive because it opens before sunrise.

In many smaller mill towns, the schedules of workers were directed by their employers even outside of working hours. In Pontiac, Rhode Island, bells rang nightly at

¹⁵⁸⁷ “Interview with Jack Rubenstein, 9/2/80,” New Bedford Textile Workers’ Strike of 1928 Oral History, University of Massachusetts—Dartmouth, Dartmouth, Massachusetts (hereafter, “New Bedford Oral History”), Box 1, Folder 8, p. 12. Emphasis in original.

¹⁵⁸⁸ Jonathan Thayer Lincoln, *The City of the Dinner-Pail* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), pp. 10-11.

¹⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

nine o'clock to clear the streets, and then rang again at five in the morning to awaken workers in preparation for the six o'clock factory opening.¹⁵⁹⁰ Thus began the twelve-hour six-to-six shift at the Pontiac mill Monday through Saturday.¹⁵⁹¹ In Cranston, Rhode Island, bleachers at the Cranston Print Works put in an eighty-four hour week in 1926, working from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. for \$38.00 to \$40.00 weekly.¹⁵⁹² Since these bleachers worked long past dinner, wives or mothers prepared their "full dinner pails" and sent them to the factory with their children acting as couriers.¹⁵⁹³ At this particular plant, recalled Francis Dailey, one of the bleachers, there was "no lunch hour. You ate on the fly."¹⁵⁹⁴ Meanwhile, Dailey's sister worked fifty-five hours a week, netting \$6.00.¹⁵⁹⁵ However weary mill laborers might grow after long shifts and six-day weeks, they dared not take off: "I remember seeing people take a day off and they were fired . . . because they wanted to be off too often," recalled one Lowell worker.¹⁵⁹⁶ These marathon shifts affected not only adults but children as well, whose family life was severely restricted. In the face of Lowell's twelve-hour shifts in the 1910s, a son of one worker would remark that the mills "kidnapped your parents. You never saw them."¹⁵⁹⁷

Nor was this the only way in which the factories touched these children's lives. Teens in textile families usually went to work in the mills as soon as it was legal to do

¹⁵⁹⁰ "Interview With Hattie Anderson, 1974," Mill Life Oral History Collection, University of Rhode Island Library Special Collections and Archives, University of Rhode Island, Kingstown, Rhode Island (hereafter, "Rhode Island Oral History"), Box 11, Folder 70, p. 9.

¹⁵⁹¹ "Interview With Hattie Anderson, 1974," p. 3.

¹⁵⁹² "Interview: Francis Dailey (1971)," Rhode Island Oral History, pp. 7, 20.

¹⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁵⁹⁶ Interview: Valentine Chartrand, Interviewed by Diane Novelli, October 8, 1984, Mill Workers of Lowell: Mary Blewett and Martha Mayo, Project Directors, University of Massachusetts—Lowell and Lowell National Historical Park, Lowell MA, <http://libweb.uml.edu/clh/OH/MWOL/OH1.htm> (accessed Spring, 2011) (hereafter, Lowell Oral History), Tape 84.01, p. 29.

¹⁵⁹⁷ Interview: Edward D. Hart, Interviewed by Kathleen Curtin, October 10, 1984, Lowell Oral History, Tape 84.03, p. 34.

so—and in many cases even younger.¹⁵⁹⁸ In fact they felt an influence earlier still, for their parents' scant wages meant that even young children needed to help support the household. Before they were legally allowed to work (for most of this period the minimum age was fourteen), the children found ways to contribute. Schoolchildren routinely scavenged for wood, boxes, and any other potential sources of fuel for winter heating.¹⁵⁹⁹ One mill hand's daughter recalled the simple reason she had taken up selling newspapers in the streets of Brockton, Massachusetts, at an early age: "after all I was a worker's kid."¹⁶⁰⁰ To aid his widowed mother, whose meager \$9.00 a week "wasn't quite enough to meet all the things she felt we needed," a New Bedford adolescent took a position spraying lacquer on light fixtures in an electrical plant, a job so "terrible" that he longed for his fourteenth birthday to arrive so that he could begin at the mills.¹⁶⁰¹

Indeed, "if you had a large family, everyone went to work. There was no question"—and this meant that there was "no chance" that a child attending school "was allowed to continue after 14."¹⁶⁰² Such was the case for Brigida Bristol, who went to work at a mill in Peace Dale after finishing the eighth grade in 1922. The mill "looked like a prison to me every time I went by," she recalled. "It was the last place I ever wanted to go into. My dream was to be a school teacher."¹⁶⁰³ This was not to be, for

¹⁵⁹⁸ For example, Eula Papandreu, who began work at New Bedford's City Mill before her fourteenth birthday. "Interview with Eula Papandreu," New Bedford Oral History, Box 1, Folder 16, Tape 1, Side 1, p. 2. "March 14, 1983 Robert Shartery interview with Joseph Figuerido," New Bedford Oral History, Box 1, Folder 18, Tape 1, Side 1, p. 3; "May Alves Interview," New Bedford Oral History, Box 1, Folder 12, p. 2; "Interview: Theophile Brien (1975)," Rhode Island Oral History, Box 11, Folder 85, p. 1; "Interview: Ida Brown (1972)," Rhode Island Oral History, Box 12, Folder 92, p. 1; "Interview: Emil Ciallella (1971)," Rhode Island Oral History, Box 12, Folder 102, p. 1; "Interview: Gerard DiFiore (1974)," Rhode Island Oral History, Box 13, Folder 120, p. 1.

¹⁵⁹⁹ "Interview with Eula Papandreu," Tape 1, Side 2, p. 3; Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism*, p. 34.

¹⁶⁰⁰ "Interview with Eula Papandreu," Tape 1, Side 2, p. 3.

¹⁶⁰¹ "March 14, 1983 Robert Shartery interview with Joseph Figuerido," Tape 1, Side 1, pp. 4-5, 8.

¹⁶⁰² "Beatrice Pacheco" in "Descriptions of the 1928 Strike," New Bedford Oral History, Box 5, Folder 63, p. 2.

¹⁶⁰³ "Interview: Brigida Bristol (1974)," Rhode Island Oral History, Box 11, Folder 86, p. 3.

once Bristol was fourteen, her mother explained that “I need your help,” and so she began a career in the sewing department, dutifully contributing “every penny” of her \$12.90 weekly income to the household.¹⁶⁰⁴

When asked later in life why she had gone into the mills at fourteen, Rose Fontaine, who worked on doublers in a twisting room in Central Falls earning \$6.20 for a fifty-four hour week, answered matter-of-factly: “Because I had to”—her father had become too sick to continue working in the mill himself.¹⁶⁰⁵ Lillian Melia, also of Central Falls, also went to work at fourteen, and was “very happy to get \$3.00 a week,” because her family’s income was insufficient.¹⁶⁰⁶ When Aldea LeDuc went to work at the Lafayette mill in Woonsocket in 1921 she was a mere thirteen years old, securing the job after her mother had “talked to the boss.”¹⁶⁰⁷ Martha Doherty had simply lied to secure a position for sixteen-year-olds at Lowell’s Merrimack mills. When she was eventually found out and confronted, she coolly explained that “if I told you I was fourteen you wouldn’t hire me and I need the job.”¹⁶⁰⁸

Valentine Chartrand, the daughter of French-Canadian immigrants, attended classes at Immaculate Conception School in Lowell until December of her seventh grade year.¹⁶⁰⁹ On the occasion of her fourteenth birthday, Chartrand’s father approached her to ask if she would mind quitting school. Tearfully, he confessed that “he needed help”; tearfully, the teenage girl agreed.¹⁶¹⁰ Inside of two weeks, she had a job at the woolen

¹⁶⁰⁴ “Interview: Brigida Bristol (1974),” pp. 3, 7.

¹⁶⁰⁵ “Interview: Rose Fontaine (1975),” Rhode Island Oral History, Box 14, Folder 129, pp. 1-2.

¹⁶⁰⁶ “Interview: Lillian Melia (1975),” Rhode Island Oral History, Box 16, Folder 178, pp. 1, 6.

¹⁶⁰⁷ “Interview: Aldea LeDuc (1977),” Rhode Island Oral History, p. 5.

¹⁶⁰⁸ Interview: Martha Doherty and Blanche Graham, Interviewed by Diane Novelli, October 12, 1984, Lowell Oral History, Tape 84.04, p. 4.

¹⁶⁰⁹ Interview: Valentine Chartrand, Interviewed by Diane Novelli, October 8, 1984, Tape 84.01, pp. 2-4.

¹⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

mills in North Chelmsford.¹⁶¹¹ Chartrand had ambitions to finish high school, and the nuns at Immaculate Conception were disappointed that she had to go, noting her strong academic performance.¹⁶¹² Yet with a pithy resignation that reflected a precocious awareness of her new place in the world, Valentine Chartrand explained to her teachers: “Well my father needs the extra money and I have to leave.”¹⁶¹³ She would continue to work in the mills for the next fifty-four years.¹⁶¹⁴

Because of Progressive Era restrictions on children’s work hours, New England’s most youthful mill hands were often limited to forty hour weeks until sixteen, and then to nine hour shifts on weekdays plus some morning work on Saturday, adding up to a robust forty-eight hour week. In Lowell, teens worked from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. with an hour for dinner and some work on Saturday mornings—reaching the forty-eight hour ceiling.¹⁶¹⁵ Similar schedules could be found in New Bedford and in Peace Dale, where fourteen-year-olds worked from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. plus a half day on Saturday.¹⁶¹⁶

The specifics varied, but the recurring theme in textiles during the 1910s and 1920s was labor less appropriately described as work than as a daily test of human endurance. During these long hours, mill workers were expected to toil without interruption or distraction. In many plants, sitting was forbidden, and most had no chairs

¹⁶¹¹ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁶¹² Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁶¹³ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁶¹⁴ Ibid., Tape 84.2, pp. 34, 48-49.

¹⁶¹⁵ Interview: Martha Doherty and Blanche Graham, Interviewed by Diane Novelli, October 12, 1984, Tape 84.04, p. 9.

¹⁶¹⁶ “Interview: Brigida Bristol (1974),” p. 5; “March 14, 1983 Robert Shartery interview with Joseph Figuerido,” Tape 1, Side 1, p. 12.

or stools—thus forcing employees to stand for the entire shift.¹⁶¹⁷ One Lowell worker even recalled being admonished for whistling on the job.¹⁶¹⁸

It was an unpleasant atmosphere, lacking even the most rudimentary comforts. Drinking water was often “ladled out of a pail.”¹⁶¹⁹ In many mills, water was provided in an unsanitary barrel which was shared by all of the hands.¹⁶²⁰ In the summer, workers were given ice to cool the water they drew from the barrel—at a 25¢ charge.¹⁶²¹ The plants often lacked sanitary facilities. In 1926, the Cranston Print Works still had no toilets—although, as one employee recalled, “the stream wasn’t too far away.”¹⁶²² At the same operation, there was “a dirty old sink in the washroom and they provided the industrial soap they used on washing the cloth.”¹⁶²³

The carding room—where laps of mixed cotton fibers still containing debris were cleaned, combed, and straightened in preparation for spinning—featured particularly disagreeable conditions.¹⁶²⁴ As a nine-year-old boy, Joseph Figuerido would walk from school to visit his mother, an immigrant from the Azores, at her New Bedford mill during lunch. “I used to get very upset . . . she would be sitting on a box of bobbins, cotton all

¹⁶¹⁷ Interview: Valentine Chartrand, Interviewed by Diane Novelli, October 8, 1984, Tape 84.01, p. 19. Massachusetts had a rather progressive labor code, which in the 1920s stated that “In every manufacturing, mechanical and mercantile establishment suitable seats must be provided for women and children when they are not engaged in the active duties of their employment. They must also be permitted to use the seats while at work except when the work cannot be properly performed in a sitting position.” It is obvious enough that almost all tasks in the mills could not be performed while sitting, and since employees worked non-stop due to the nature of textile production, these rules were of little consequence. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Annual Report of the Department of Labor and Industries for the Year Ending November 30, 1926* (Public Document No. 104), p. 15.

¹⁶¹⁸ Interview: Edward D. Hart, Interviewed by Kathleen Curtin, October 10, 1984, Tape 84.03, p. 27.

¹⁶¹⁹ “Interview: Francis Dailey (1971),” p. 9.

¹⁶²⁰ “Interview: Emil Ciallella (1971),” p. 4.

¹⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁶²² “Interview: Francis Dailey (1971),” p. 9.

¹⁶²³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁶²⁴ Mary H. Blewett, *The Last Generation: Work and Life in the Textile Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1910-1960* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts, 1990), pp. 10-11.

over her eyebrows and around her ears,” adhered to her face with sweat.¹⁶²⁵ Even “when the machinery was shut down there was still cotton in the air.”¹⁶²⁶ Throughout the mills but particularly in the card room, “workers used to breathe a lot of cotton dust,” and “a lot of workers in those days . . . got tubercular effects.”¹⁶²⁷ Especially in the winter, workers breathed a great deal of the lint that was constantly “flying around” the work area since the windows of the plant were all closed with the cold.¹⁶²⁸ “I always had a feeling that wasn’t good for your lungs,” recalled a doffer from Lowell.¹⁶²⁹ The swirling cotton dust managed to contribute to insults as well as injury—a derogatory moniker was assigned to the lower-tier employees in the weaving rooms, who were constantly covered in cotton from sweeping up after the machinery: “mill rats.”¹⁶³⁰

The machinery itself could be quite dangerous. Lena O’Brien, who began working at the Little Scholl mill in Tiverton, Rhode Island, after turning fourteen in 1918, had once caught her dress in the spinning machinery, and was spared catastrophe only by a quick-thinking coworker cutting her free.¹⁶³¹ O’Brien was less fortunate on another occasion, when her hair was caught in the machinery “and it yanked my hair right off!”¹⁶³² More than five decades later she still had a bald spot from the incident, concealed only by a helpful hair dresser.¹⁶³³ Such accidents were an occasional spectacle. At a Lowell mill, horrified employees witnessed a “girl . . . with long, long hair” become “caught in the pulley and she went up with the strap”; coworkers “heard the

¹⁶²⁵ “March 14, 1983 Robert Shartery interview with Joseph Figuerido,” Tape 1, Side 1, p. 2.

¹⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 12.

¹⁶²⁸ Interview: Valentine Chartrand, Interviewed by Diane Novelli, October 8, 1984, Tape 84.01, p. 9.

¹⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*, Tape 84.01, p. 9.

¹⁶³⁰ Interview: Edward D. Hart, Interviewed by Kathleen Curtin, October 10, 1984, Tape 84.03, p. 3.

¹⁶³¹ “Interview: Lena O’Brien (1974),” Rhode Island Oral History, Box 16, Folder 196, pp. 1, 6.

¹⁶³² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁶³³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

screech” of the woman as the machinery “pulled a lot of hair out”—a sound which would haunt witnesses for life. The victim soon died.¹⁶³⁴ Blanche Graham, whose mother was also scalped in a Lowell mill when her long hair became caught in a belt, suffered through a less traumatic accident herself when her finger was “squashed” by the gears of a twister machine.¹⁶³⁵

In general, the work was arduous and dangerous.¹⁶³⁶ Historian Mary Blewett notes that bleachers and dyers in the mills “performed some of the worst kinds of work near scalding steam, dangerous chemicals, and indelible dyes.”¹⁶³⁷ Many other positions included a great deal of heavy lifting. In her mid-teens, Martha Doherty “got a ruptured appendix from lifting” large bobbins in a Lowell spinning room. “I was out about two months and almost died.”¹⁶³⁸ Joseph Figuerido recalled that his father had also suffered internal injuries from working conditions. A boiler attendant in New Bedford’s Hathaway mill, Thomas Figuerido, a native of Portugal, died of a bladder condition that “was actually job related” when his son was only four years old.¹⁶³⁹ The reality was that “in those days there was little concern on the part of mill owners of any safety conditions. . . . in terms of safety everything was geared to satisfy production.”¹⁶⁴⁰

¹⁶³⁴ Interview: Valentine Chartrand, Interviewed by Diane Novelli, October 8, 1984, Tape 84.2, p. 50.

¹⁶³⁵ Interview: Martha Doherty and Blanche Graham, Interviewed by Diane Novelli, October 12, 1984, Tape 84.04, p. 37.

¹⁶³⁶ These anecdotes of workplace injuries are not merely impressionistic. For example, in 1925, in all of Massachusetts manufacturing, 7,961 workplace accidents occurred on machinery; 320 were on belts and 246 on gears. There were 115 injuries to fourteen year olds, 616 to those at age fifteen, 1,050 at sixteen, 1,716 at seventeen; 56 of these resulted in permanent injuries—16 were in textiles. Two textile children lost fingers in 1925. That year the state also investigated 254 cases of occupational diseases, including 5 fatalities. Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Annual Report of the Department of Labor and Industries for the Year Ending November 30, 1926*, pp. 9-17.

¹⁶³⁷ Blewett, *The Last Generation*, p. 20.

¹⁶³⁸ Interview: Martha Doherty and Blanche Graham, Interviewed by Diane Novelli, October 12, 1984, Tape 84.04, pp. 9, 11.

¹⁶³⁹ “March 14, 1983 Robert Shartery interview with Joseph Figuerido,” Tape 1, Side 1, p. 1.

¹⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

When Doherty's appendix burst, the mill beneficently paid for her surgery. This was an act of charity, for there was no compensation coverage for such occurrences.¹⁶⁴¹ Certainly there was nothing resembling a "safety net" for these workers, despite the dangerous nature of their jobs. One mill hand from Rhode Island recalled that "if a fella lost a finger in a mill or was taken ill, he'd never get anything. There was no workmen's compensation."¹⁶⁴² Most cities had some sort of municipal charity by the 1920s, but there was "no such animal" as social welfare in the mill villages; instead, "each town had a poor farm."¹⁶⁴³ These institutions were each run by "a political appointee who had the opportunity to run the poor farm as a money-making proposition and it was just pitiful."¹⁶⁴⁴ Likewise, there was "no retirement. There was nothing. If he worked 50 years, they'd give him a gold watch and they cost \$7-8 in those days. But there was nothing. If a fella quit work, that was it. It was a pitiful situation."¹⁶⁴⁵ And while progressive initiatives such as child labor laws and income tax reforms "helped a bit . . . so far as helping a disabled workman who worked in the plant, no matter how many years, they never did a thing for him."¹⁶⁴⁶ "If you were sick, there was no pay unless you happened to be a very pretty girl and the boss liked you, he kept you on the payroll at times."¹⁶⁴⁷

All of this took an exceptional toll on the women. A male worker from New Bedford observed: "These women workers many of them had families and they needed to work, they needed the income . . . to help their husbands support the family. And it

¹⁶⁴¹ Interview: Martha Doherty and Blanche Graham, Interviewed by Diane Novelli, October 12, 1984, Tape 84.04, p. 11.

¹⁶⁴² "Interview: Raoul Archambault (1971)," Rhode Island Oral History, Box 11, Folder 72, p. 4.

¹⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁶⁴⁷ "Interview: Ernest Denomme (1971)," Rhode Island Oral History, Box 13, Folder 117, p. 12.

was a real, very difficult life to run.”¹⁶⁴⁸ “Remember that these same women were raising families . . . when they used to leave their mills to go home, you would look at their faces and they were the faces of people that were worn out. You could see it, and many of them had large families and they had to take care of their children, take care of their family life and they did most of the domestics you know . . . and they thought of themselves last.”¹⁶⁴⁹ Valentine Chartrand continued working at the mills during each of her five pregnancies. Only two of her babies survived birth.¹⁶⁵⁰ “I worked until I was ready to go,” she recalled, noting that many women did the same.¹⁶⁵¹ “I was in the Boott Mill and they had to take me to First Aid and they called the ambulance. I thought I was going to have her in the ambulance.”¹⁶⁵²

There was rarely respite for these workers, and when rest did come, it did not take place in anything resembling comfortable—even healthful—conditions. Even with the entire household contributing, life for the mill families was “very meager.”¹⁶⁵³ Houses, while proudly kept and always clean, were “rather barren,” with “little in the form of actual comfort.”¹⁶⁵⁴

This was often company housing, and so the mills permeated the lives of workers further still. By the 1920s, mill hands in larger centers like New Bedford and Fall River typically attained housing from independent landlords, but in many of the smaller towns and villages workers still rented from their employers.¹⁶⁵⁵ In Pontiac, company housing cost 50¢ weekly rent for small homes that housed up to four families. They featured “a

¹⁶⁴⁸ “March 14, 1983 Robert Shartery interview with Joseph Figuerido,” Tape 1, Side 1, p. 12.

¹⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁶⁵⁰ Interview: Valentine Chartrand, Interviewed by Diane Novelli, October 8, 1984, Tape 84.2, p. 34.

¹⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

¹⁶⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁶⁵³ “Beatrice Pacheco” in “Descriptions of the 1928 Strike,” p. 2.

¹⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁶⁵⁵ Georgianna, *The Strike of '28*, p. 26.

kitchen and the pantry and the bedrooms,” with “four families and one entrance.”¹⁶⁵⁶ Cranston village consisted of about 75 duplexes for around 150 families, each of which paid \$5.00 monthly rent for a home with “no indoor plumbing,” and “no central heating system.”¹⁶⁵⁷ Workers were compelled to go outside to pump their water in Cranston, and things were the same in Pontiac, where “if you wanted water, you had to go to the village pump in the center of the town, and bring a galvanized bucket along.”¹⁶⁵⁸

These homes, heated only by the kitchen stove, were especially susceptible to harsh New England winters. Put bluntly, residents “froze sometimes in the cold, going to bed.”¹⁶⁵⁹ “You wake up in the morning and you could draw pictures on the frost on the windows.”¹⁶⁶⁰ Preparing for the long day at the mill was more complicated under such conditions, for “in the winter, without having central heat, the first thing you would have to do before you could wash your face was to break the ice in the bucket.”¹⁶⁶¹

Water and warmth were not the only basics that were usually lacking. In a bitter irony, these textile workers often went without the most elementary of their own products. For some unskilled New Bedford workers, towels proved a luxury, and these scarce items were treated with the utmost care in order to maximize their lifespan.¹⁶⁶² Similarly, “sheeting was a commodity,” and thus families made their own—usually not large enough to provide full coverage or comfort.¹⁶⁶³

Strenuous, often noxious working conditions and an impoverished home life left workers prone to disease. “You’d have epidemics of scarlet fever, stuff like that. You’d

¹⁶⁵⁶ “Interview With Hattie Anderson, 1974,” p. 5.

¹⁶⁵⁷ “Interview: Francis Dailey (1971),” p. 5.

¹⁶⁵⁸ “Interview: Francis Dailey (1971),” p. 5; “Interview: Gerard DiFiore (1974),” p. 8.

¹⁶⁵⁹ “Interview With Hattie Anderson, 1974,” p. 7.

¹⁶⁶⁰ “Interview: Francis Dailey (1971),” p. 13.

¹⁶⁶¹ “Interview: Gerard DiFiore (1974),” p. 8.

¹⁶⁶² “Beatrice Pacheco” in “Descriptions of the 1928 Strike,” p. 3.

¹⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

take up the red card on your door and your father wouldn't come home. He'd sleep somewhere else so he could continue to go back and forth to his job. Because if he come into the house, he couldn't go to work."¹⁶⁶⁴ During the Great War, Lowell was struck by a wave of typhoid fever.¹⁶⁶⁵ In New Bedford, rates of "children's deaths from gastric, respiratory and intestinal diseases" ranked "among the highest in the country."¹⁶⁶⁶ In the 1910s in Lawrence, a third of mill hands died within their first decade on the job, and the average worker lived to thirty-nine—nineteen years less than the typical mill boss.¹⁶⁶⁷

Considering the oppressive circumstances in which they lived, these New Englanders were remarkably resilient. Often workers considered themselves fortunate to have what so many described as "good jobs."¹⁶⁶⁸ "Good" is of course a relative term; but it is clear that most of these mill hands were doing what was necessary to survive, embracing whatever small felicities they encountered along the way. One Lowell woman concluded that textile employment "was very difficult work, but . . . one didn't have a lot of choices available to them. And you made the best of what you could."¹⁶⁶⁹ Burdensome and hazardous though it was, mill work at least provided the means of self-preservation, and this source of security was something worthy of thanksgiving. This was a perfectly natural and reasonable posture to assume in such a precarious world, and this attitude helped maintain a level of dignity and a vague glimmer of hope. In the 1920s, struggling mills began increasing the burden on labor, cutting pay, raising rents,

¹⁶⁶⁴ "Interview: Francis Dailey (1971)," p. 10.

¹⁶⁶⁵ Interview: Valentine Chartrand, Interviewed by Diane Novelli, October 8, 1984, Tape 84.01, p. 18.

¹⁶⁶⁶ Georgianna, *The Strike of '28*, p. 27.

¹⁶⁶⁷ Bruce Watson, *Bread and Roses: Mills, Migrants, and the Struggle for the American Dream* (New York: Viking, 2005), p. 9.

¹⁶⁶⁸ E.g.: "Interview: Brigida Bristol (1974)," p. 3; "Interview: Marie Brouillard (1971)," Rhode Island Oral History, Box 12, Folder 90, pp. 3, 9; "Interview: Yvonne Desrochers (1975)," Rhode Island Oral History, Box 13, Folder 119, p. 5; "Interview: Rachel Landry (1975)," Rhode Island Oral History, Box 14, Folder 152, pp. 1, 4.

¹⁶⁶⁹ Interview: Valentine Chartrand, Interviewed by Diane Novelli, October 8, 1984, Tape 84.02, p. 63.

and issuing layoffs. In the process they sapped their workers' ability to provide themselves with a sense of dignity and robbed their employees of the lingering hope that life would someday brighten through faithful service in the mills.

Anton Huettel, an immigrant from Russian Poland who went to work at the Ever-Lastic factory in Pawtucket in 1918 at fourteen years old, recalled that being a weaver "to begin with . . . wasn't so bad." But "as the years went on, they wanted more production—they'd speed up the machinery to the limit without giving you an increase in pay."¹⁶⁷⁰ Speed-ups and reductions in the number of workers, instituted in earnest during the 1920s, chafed the mill workers. Many believed that "the mill owners were making a lot of money but they were obviously never satisfied They always wanted to make more, and the way they could do that is by taking it off the hides of workers by increasing their production with less workers."¹⁶⁷¹ In real terms, this meant "giving the workers more machines to operate, more looms for the weavers or more spinning frames for the spinners and so on down the line."¹⁶⁷² Victor Signorelli, who worked at a mill in Peace Dale, concluded that management "wanted new machinery so they could . . . cut down the help. It was 200 laborers in there, just the weave shop. All they run is one loom." But with increased automation came efficiency, and what this meant from Signorelli's perspective was more work for less workers. "There would be three weavers, instead they only had one. They put two people out of work. They was always figuring how to

¹⁶⁷⁰ "Interview: Anton Huettel (1971)," Rhode Island Oral History, Box 14, Folder 144, pp. 13-15.

¹⁶⁷¹ "March 14, 1983 Robert Shartery interview with Joseph Figuerido," Tape 1, Side 1, p. 11.

¹⁶⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

throw people out of a job.”¹⁶⁷³ By 1928 in Peace Dale, each worker operated six looms.¹⁶⁷⁴

In the mid-1920s Theophile Brien observed similar changes at the Weybosset mills in Rhode Island where he worked as a twister, like his father before him. His plant had once run 1,200 looms, with 50 workers per shift. Then management introduced “a bobbin-combing knotting machine from Framingham. It would take 8 hrs., the machine would tie them in 15 min. So what they did with us was take the youngest ones and learned them that and [threw] the other ones out of work. . . . They bought 2 knotting machines and they were using 2 men on each shift to replace 40 men.” Management was not satisfied with even this massive reduction in labor costs because foremen began to notice that many of the remaining workers, eager to preserve their tenuous employment, were running more looms than they had been assigned. “When the foremen seen that they said these guys can run 4 looms, so we’ll give them 4 looms. . . . for the same price as 3 looms.”¹⁶⁷⁵

Mill workers had endured a great deal, often maintaining a surprisingly cheerful disposition in the face of grueling hours, paupers’ wages, and deplorable conditions at the plants and in their homes. In the 1920s, mill owners began seeking to economize by slashing wages and cutting payrolls, effectively robbing workers of their only motivation for industrial cooperation—the vague hope that hard work would pay off. As confidence waned, resentment built: “the workers were angry about this.”¹⁶⁷⁶ Yet the actions of owners only occasionally provoked rebellion, for while the workers were frustrated, “at

¹⁶⁷³ “Interview: Victor Signorelli (1974),” Rhode Island Oral History, Box 18, Folder 227, pp. 7-8.

¹⁶⁷⁴ “Interview: Elizabeth Raitano (1974),” Rhode Island Oral History, Box 17, Folder 210, p. 4; “Interview: Victor Signorelli (1974),” p. 4.

¹⁶⁷⁵ “Interview: Theophile Brien (1975),” p. 1.

¹⁶⁷⁶ “March 14, 1983 Robert Shartery interview with Joseph Figuerido,” Tape 1, Side 1, pp. 11-12.

the same time they were kind of influenced in terms of job security.”¹⁶⁷⁷ Indeed, even when conflicts did flare, they were often about security. Looking back on the 1920s, one Rhode Island worker agreed with the premise that “the people went out on strike not because they were trying to make one man work three looms, but because people were losing their jobs”; in this view, the purpose of the labor activism of the 1920s was the modest goal of preventing the company from arbitrarily throwing people out of work.¹⁶⁷⁸ Wage cuts exercised a similarly devastating influence on workers whose original wages had scarcely been adequate—these too threatened the security of the workers, and caused further labor turmoil.¹⁶⁷⁹ “They were treading water,” recalled one New Bedford worker, “and no one could see how they could make ‘ends meet’ with a 10% cut.”¹⁶⁸⁰ All of these actions, especially the wage cuts, precipitated a series of strikes; but they also led to a dramatic shift in the political sensibilities of many workers.

The final ingredient that was necessary for such a political shift to occur was a candidate who understood both the social and economic needs of the ethnic working class. This of course had been the precise formula of Alfred E. Smith’s political success in New York State. Smith was the first major national candidate to embody the cultural aspirations of ethnic workers. His denunciations of religious and ethnic prejudice, his opposition to prohibition—his very biography—all seemed to affirm ethnic workers’ vision of their place in America. Simultaneously, the economic dimensions of that vision—increased security, livable conditions, and dignified, rewarding labor—were addressed in Smith’s acknowledgment of the weaknesses of the 1920s economy and the

¹⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁶⁷⁸ “Interview: Victor Signorelli (1974),” pp. 8, 10.

¹⁶⁷⁹ “Interview: Secondo Siniscalchi (1971),” Rhode Island Oral History, Box 18, Folder 228, pp. 4-7.

¹⁶⁸⁰ “Beatrice Pacheco” in “Descriptions of the 1928 Strike,” p. 3.

progressive agenda he proposed in response. The fervent, frenzied reception which New England granted the Happy Warrior in 1928 resulted largely from the arrival of a candidate who espoused ethnic workers' vision of a just society.

The alternating despondency and outrage provoked by wage cuts, speed-ups, and layoffs, the desire for a holistic solution to the economic and social grievances of ethnic workers, and the attraction to Smith's unique progressivism could all be seen in New Bedford—a major textile center that voted for a Democratic presidential nominee for the first time in 1928. There, the strikes against the 10 percent wage cut that raged through most of 1928 and ended in October were followed within a month by a victory for Al Smith. The complicated demarcations within the city—by ethnicity, class, and craft—and the ultimate political conclusions to which these conditions led demonstrate the importance of the accumulated social and labor grievances of New England's ethnic workers to political outcomes in 1928 and beyond.

As in many New England mill cities, the mounting woes of New Bedford textiles led in 1928 to wage cuts that in turn precipitated mass strikes. A central feature of this ordeal was the existence of dual organizations among the workers: the Textile Council, a well-established craft union, and the Textile Mill Committees (TMC), the first real effort to organize New Bedford's unskilled immigrant workers.¹⁶⁸¹ The former group was affiliated with the United Textile Workers and through that organization the American Federation of Labor, while the latter was directed by Communist veterans of such episodes as the Passaic textile strike of 1926.¹⁶⁸²

¹⁶⁸¹ See McMullen, *Strike!*, pp. 120-131.

¹⁶⁸² Georgianna, *The Strike of '28*, pp. 80-84.

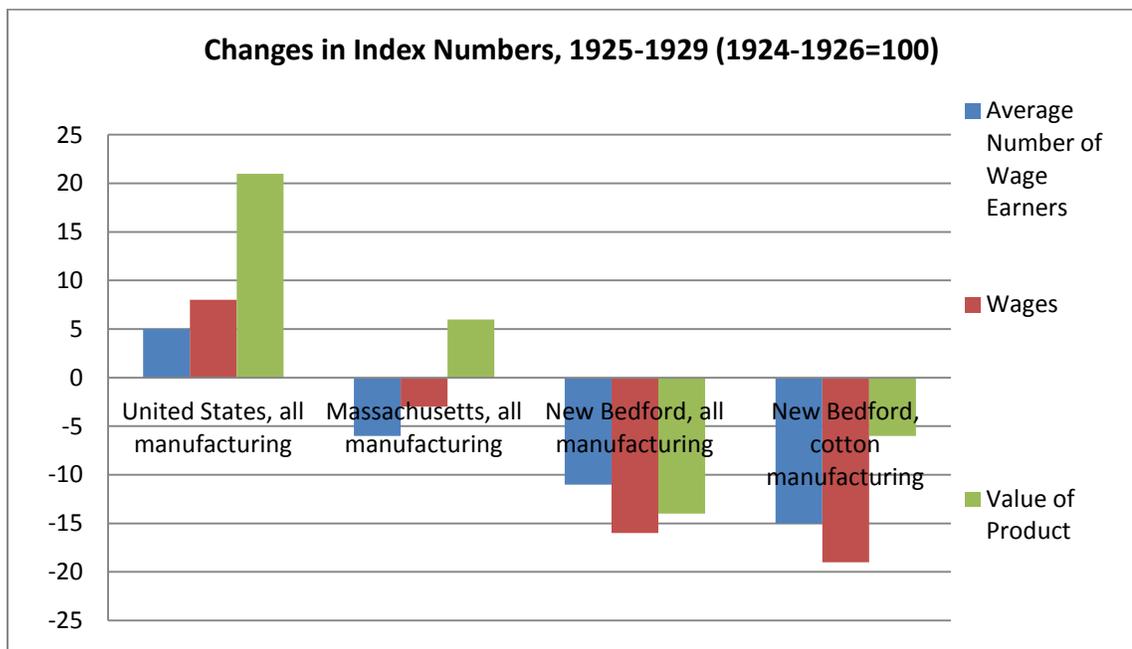


Fig. 6.6: The progress of New Bedford manufacturers, 1925-1929, as compared with the rest of the state and the nation.¹⁶⁸³

The Textile Council was focused narrowly on averting the wage cut—indeed, earlier in the decade they had acceded to speed-ups in order to maintain their salaries.¹⁶⁸⁴ The TMC had a more ambitious agenda, owing both to its Bolshevick heritage and its constituency among New Bedford’s unskilled Polish-, French-, and especially Portuguese-American workers: they called for a forty hour week, an end to child labor, a reversal of speed-ups, equal pay for women, and a 20 percent pay raise.¹⁶⁸⁵ Their radicalism and aggressive tactics—such as using children on the picket lines—drew the ire of institutional forces in the city who were also opposed to the wage cut, including the Textile Council, Democratic mayor Charles Ashley, and the city’s three daily

¹⁶⁸³ Data taken from a table in Wolfbein, *The Decline of A Cotton Textile City*, p. 31.

¹⁶⁸⁴ Georgianna, *The Strike of '28*, p. 74.

¹⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

newspapers.¹⁶⁸⁶ But when the Textile Council began denouncing the TMC as “reds,” few were swayed—partly because the unskilled strikers were mainly immigrants, who often spoke little English and were impervious to appeals to “Americanism”; but more significantly because the craft union lacked credibility among the disciples of the TMC.¹⁶⁸⁷ A Portuguese worker captured this antagonism as he catalogued his cohorts’ accrued grievances in the opening weeks of the strike:

One south end mill with 144 twisters had from 16 to 20 tying-in men. The same mill now with 168 twisters has but six to eight tying-in men with no wage increase. . . . Same mill same department—two doffers and piecer for eighteen frames. Now the same three men doff from 50 to 60 frames. Check boy in this department at one time earned \$19.30 is down to \$16.05 and they say they are the last to cut down wages. Ten per cent of \$16.05 is how much? Same department, same mill had 10 to 12 rail washers; now they have five to six. Is this higher production cost? This department is 100 per cent union. Is the secretary of this union asleep? . . . What’s the matter with the union?¹⁶⁸⁸

Part of the matter with the union was that for years it had been conspiring with management to buttress the pay of organized craftsmen by cutting the salaries of unskilled workers.¹⁶⁸⁹ Moreover, divides between skilled and unskilled employees were notoriously collinear with divides between national groups; and so the recent immigrant laborers were also the workers operating under the worst conditions with the least security and the lowest wages. In New Bedford, “it was clear that there was a discriminatory policy in effect in terms of hiring and in terms of promotions and so that you would find that among the skilled workers the predominant group would be among

¹⁶⁸⁶ “Mayor Terms Child Picketing Contemptible Refuses His Aid,” *The New Bedford Evening Standard*, May 5, 1928; “Mayor Raps at Radicals for Child Pickets,” *The New Bedford Times*, May 5, 1928, in “Charles F. Ashley Mayor of New Bedford from 1891-1936 Scrapbook of Newspaper Clippings,” University of Massachusetts—Dartmouth, Dartmouth, Massachusetts (hereafter, Ashley Scrapbook), Reel 1; Georgianna, *The Strike of '28*, p. 85.

¹⁶⁸⁷ Georgianna, *The Strike of '28*, p. 89.

¹⁶⁸⁸ Alfred L. Botelho, “Letter to the Editor,” *The New Bedford Evening Standard*, April 21, 1928, Ashley Scrapbook, Reel 1.

¹⁶⁸⁹ “March 14, 1983 Robert Shartery interview with Joseph Figuerido,” Tape 1, Side 1, p. 9.

the English.”¹⁶⁹⁰ French Canadians, Poles, and Portuguese were left to the lesser positions, while Cape Verdeans, the only major “black” immigrant group in New England textiles, were “relegated finally to the card room which was the dirtiest, unhealthiest department.”¹⁶⁹¹

As a result of this cliquishness, Portuguese workers constituted “the backbone” of the TMC.¹⁶⁹² For Jack Rubenstein, one of the radical organizers, this was unsurprising. “You didn’t have to go very far to tell these people that they were down-trodden, when kids made thirteen cents an hour and they got a ten percent cut and had three cents an hour taken out of their pay.”¹⁶⁹³

The prospect of checking declines in labor conditions and pay at all skill levels and asserting their own social worth fueled the unskilled workers’ enthusiasm for the TMC. These workers, who sang Portuguese folk songs and anthems with “no strike ideology whatsoever” on the picket lines, were not as interested in the TMC’s world view as they were in its willingness to mobilize the unorganized and treat them with a level of respect that their skilled coworkers had always withheld.¹⁶⁹⁴ Thus did the Textile

¹⁶⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁶⁹¹ Ibid., p. 9. This discrimination was universal. In Rhode Island, Italians, rather than Poles or Portuguese, were the largest group to be excluded from advancement. In Peace Dale, it was well known that “Italians weren’t hired” for the sewing department; rather, “they were mostly hired in the machinery departments and the winding departments,” performing manual tasks rather than skilled crafts; a similar situation emerged in Barrington, where all of the manual workers were Italian, while their managers tended to be Irish. In Cranston, Italians could only be hired in the bleach room of the local Print Works, and only because the manager of that department happened to be sympathetic to their plight; “but no other mill would hire Italians previous to World War II.” Brigida Bristol recalled that in the sewing department of the Peace Dale mill, there were “about a hundred. And I was the only Italian!” “Interview: Brigida Bristol (1974),” p. 4; “Interview: Emil Ciallella (1971),” pp. 8-9; “Interview: Francis Dailey (1971),” p. 25.

¹⁶⁹² “Interview with Jack Rubenstein, 9/2/80,” p. 29.

¹⁶⁹³ Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁶⁹⁴ “Interview with Jack Rubenstein, TMC Leader during 1928 New Bedford Textile Strike, 8/19/80,” New Bedford Oral History, Box 1, Folder 8, pp. 1, 8, 10-11. Indeed, while there was some violence and many arrests, there was no great push to overthrow traditional authority. The strikers and law enforcement coexisted on generally amiable terms: “Most of the picketers knew what our job was, they knew what their job was, so there was no hard feelings in between us, sometimes we exchanged jokes.” James Levesque interview, c. 1981, New Bedford Oral History, Box 5, Folder 65, p. 3.

Council's anti-Communist screeds fall on indifferent ears; as economist Daniel Georgianna has noted, many workers "knew the difference between a labor strike for higher wages and a political revolution to overthrow the government. . . . For them, the TMC was fighting for higher wages and equality with other workers, principles easily identified with American democracy."¹⁶⁹⁵

The TMC treated Polish and Portuguese workers, who "knew that they [were] really getting the raw deal in terms of equal opportunity," with dignity, and pursued a platform that essentially sought to provide workers with the security that events in the 1920s had removed.¹⁶⁹⁶ Yet this did not lead to a surge in ethnic support for radical politics. Socialist Party presidential nominee Norman Thomas donated \$500 to aid the strikers and addressed a rally of three thousand unionists in New Bedford during the conflict.¹⁶⁹⁷ In November, this support earned Thomas 510 New Bedford votes—just under 1.6 percent of the city's presidential ballots.¹⁶⁹⁸ Notably, Thomas had been closely associated with craft leaders like William Batty, and delivered his pro-worker oration under the auspices of the Textile Council.¹⁶⁹⁹ By the later months of the strike, fights were breaking out on the picket lines between Textile Council and TMC members, and so a lack of popular support for Thomas is understandable in spite of his courageously sympathetic posture.¹⁷⁰⁰

¹⁶⁹⁵ Georgianna, *The Strike of '28*, p. 89.

¹⁶⁹⁶ "March 14, 1983 Robert Shartery interview with Joseph Figuerido," Tape 1, Side 2, p. 17.

¹⁶⁹⁷ "Check Comes from Thomas," *The New Bedford Evening Standard*, May 5, 1928, Ashley Scrapbook, Reel 1; "Sends \$500 to Strike Council," *The New Bedford Evening Standard*, May 10, 1928, Ashley Scrapbook, Reel 1; "Thomas Praises Strikers For Fight Made Here," *The New Bedford Morning Mercury*, September 4, 1928, Ashley Scrapbook, Reel 2; Georgianna, *The Strike of '28*, p. 90.

¹⁶⁹⁸ *A Manual for Use of the General Court of Massachusetts for 1929-1930*, p. 399.

¹⁶⁹⁹ Georgianna, *The Strike of '28*, p. 90.

¹⁷⁰⁰ "Interview With Frank Manning. Interviewer Roberta H. Aaronson August 18, 1981," New Bedford Oral History, Box 1, Folder 11, p. 133. Indeed, one study of American third parties noted that under Thomas, the Socialist Party transformed: "Intellectuals replaced unionists, farmers, and immigrants; New

Communist candidates, whose partisan and ideological leanings were more closely aligned with those of the TMC, fared even worse. Workers Party presidential nominee William Z. Foster carried 0.4 percent of the New Bedford vote, while Socialist Labor Party nominee Verne L. Reynolds achieved 0.07 percent.¹⁷⁰¹ None of these figures represented a substantial increase from the previous presidential election.¹⁷⁰² These results partially confirmed the observations of Communist organizers like Jack Rubenstein, who saw TMC success as a testament to the group's frank embrace of workers' basic economic needs rather than a portent of revolution. They also confirm the reflections of one Portuguese mill hand, who lamented the Communists' hostility toward workers' cultural and especially religious traditions. "This was one of their main issues—the religious question. That isolated them. It made them ineffective because most of them saw religion as the opiate of the people and we did not share that concept at all."¹⁷⁰³

Successful political mobilization of New England's ethnic workers could ignore neither their cultural nor their economic desires. There was indeed an appetite for change, and there existed among these laborers the sheer numbers to fuel a dramatic political realignment. But such an upheaval would require sensitivity to the complex realities of those workers and would have to approach problems in terms acceptable to the workers themselves. The only revolution that was possible was a holistic revolution.

York, where Socialists had enjoyed little support in the past, became the new base of power. Party backers were generally middle class and well educated rather than working class." Steven J. Rosenstone, Roy L. Behr, and Edward H. Lazarus, *Third Parties in America: Citizen Response to Major Party Failure* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1984), p. 91.

¹⁷⁰¹ *A Manual for Use of the General Court of Massachusetts for 1929-1930*, p. 399.

¹⁷⁰² *A Manual for Use of the General Court of Massachusetts for 1925-1926*, p. 391.

¹⁷⁰³ Joseph Figuerido interview with Paul Buhle, November 3, 1983, New Bedford Oral History, Box 1, Folder 18, p. 15.

Solutions

Republicans were at a disadvantage on both economics and culture. In New England, they attempted to neutralize the latter challenge by openly rejecting Klan attacks on Smith, by denouncing the notion of a “religious test” for political office, and by downplaying prohibition. On economics, Republicans were cursed with incumbency in a region suffering industrial decline. They sought to check this by appealing to their traditional strength with New England workers—proposing to amplify customary prescriptions like protective tariffs and limits on business regulation. For many workers these were familiar, even comfortable remedies, but their plunging economic fortunes now complicated once-reliable solutions.

For their part, the Democrats ardently embraced the cultural aspirations of the majority of ethnic workers—fiercely condemning prohibition and demanding that Smith’s election would strike a blow for religious tolerance. Smith himself provided both rhetorical and symbolic material for this narrative. The Democrats attempted to leverage regional economic discontent by insistently linking industrial woes to Republican stewardship. Ironically, these challengers also sought to negate traditional Republican strength with industrial workers by adopting a friendlier posture toward protectionism.

All of this shuffling did not minimize important differences between the remedies proffered by the two major parties. For New England businessmen and many Republican politicians, the solution was reductions in taxation and regulation. “The return of New England’s manufacturing resources to a position of parity with those of the South,” reported the Boston Chamber of Commerce in 1926, would require “the elimination of

legislative inequalities.”¹⁷⁰⁴ Officials were admonished that “New England has within itself the power to reestablish conditions of parity with the newer sections of the cotton manufacturing industry,” through the “reestablishment of equal competitive opportunities with the South with respect to labor legislation.”¹⁷⁰⁵ Massachusetts officials had themselves noted this as early as 1923, when Republican governor Channing Cox’s commissioner of labor and industries, General E. Leroy Sweetser, had pointed to a number of industrial disadvantages suffered by the Bay State—among them high wages, the forty-eight hour week, and, “worst” of all according to the commissioner, the prohibition against women’s night work.¹⁷⁰⁶

While regulatory repeal had yet to gain traction, the business-government cooperation proposed by Governor Fuller and other Republicans would certainly mean cuts in state and local taxes. This approach was of course shared by the national party, which consistently decried governmental burdens on business and extolled tax cuts. At the state and municipal level, tax cuts meant budget cuts, and these were already well under way by 1928—with tangible results. In Ware, the \$20,000 budget reduction in February 1926 came mostly from the town’s Highways Department, which was forced to reduce the snow removal allotment by more than half.¹⁷⁰⁷ In early 1928 in New Bedford, as wage reductions struck nearby Fall River, aldermen debated a 10 percent tax cut—and accompanying layoffs of municipal employees—in order to avert similar adjustments to

¹⁷⁰⁴ Boston Chamber of Commerce, Bureau of Commercial and Industrial Affairs Committee on New England Industries, “The Cotton Manufacturing Industry of New England” (1926), New Bedford Oral History, Box 5, Folder 58, p. 21.

¹⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁷⁰⁶ Department of Labor and Industries of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, General E. Leroy Sweetser, Commissioner, “Report of a Special Investigation into Conditions in the Textile Industry in Massachusetts and the Southern States” (August, 1923), New Bedford Oral History, Box 5, Folder 57, pp. 2-3.

¹⁷⁰⁷ “Ware Taxes Reduced to Hold Otis Mills,” *The Boston Globe*, February 16, 1926, p. 17.

pay scales in the city's mills.¹⁷⁰⁸ The layoffs were rejected, but the budget was slashed by \$162,000, with the "bulk of reductions" coming at the "expense of children" as "no new teachers" would be hired that fall.¹⁷⁰⁹ After the mills decided to reduce wages anyway, the city health board, also struggling at "living within the amount given us by the City council," decided to "concentrate our resources on the work that is required by law," and thus terminated its program of dental clinics for school children.¹⁷¹⁰

Moreover, in order to keep factories in New England, some Republicans were now considering rolling back labor protections. Cooperation with business would mean acceding to corporate demands for reversals in Progressive Era industrial laws. Announcing their 10 percent wage cut for New Bedford mill workers, textile manufacturers made a representative statement, complaining that "New Bedford manufacturers, paying the old wage scale, limited to a 48-hour week and restricted as to night work, must be doing business under a serious handicap."¹⁷¹¹ The message was clear: state and local politicians must seriously reconsider labor regulations if they desired to hold on to the mills.

Frank P. Walsh, the leader of the Smith Progressive League who had served under Woodrow Wilson as chairman of the United States Commission on Industrial Relations, connected these demands to Hoover himself during a fiery address at Weavers' Hall in Fall River on October 18, censuring the Republican nominee as "the open-shopper of

¹⁷⁰⁸ "Baillargeon Demands 10 Percent Tax Cut to Prevent Wage Slash in Cotton Mills," *The New Bedford Evening Standard*, March 23, 1928, Ashley Scrapbook, Reel 1.

¹⁷⁰⁹ "Aldermen Balk At Firing Any Job Holders," *The New Bedford Times*, April 3, 1928, Ashley Scrapbook, Reel 1.

¹⁷¹⁰ "School Dentistry to be Dropped by Health Board Plan," *The New Bedford Evening Standard*, April 16, 1928, Ashley Scrapbook, Reel 1.

¹⁷¹¹ "27 Plants To Put Scale In Force April 16," *The New Bedford Evening Standard*, April 9, 1928, Ashley Scrapbook, Reel 1.

open-shoppers.”¹⁷¹² Textile workers ought to support Smith, Walsh demanded, because of the New Yorker’s endorsement of public power projects and his record of reforms in New York State; but also because Hoover opposed eight-hour laws and had called instead for “cooperation” between management, labor, and the state.¹⁷¹³ For New England workers, “cooperation” meant surrendering to wage readjustments or rolling back industrial reforms in order to assuage business interests.

Smith Democrats never entertained that option, instead suggesting that industrial conditions were worsening precisely because business interests dominated the Republican Party and were manipulating the regional response to the downturn. In Medway, General Cole charged that “prominent Republicans who are raising funds and urging the election of Hoover . . . had signed reports of a national cotton manufacturers’ association asking that Massachusetts mills be removed to Texas or other Southern States because of lower wages and longer working hours for men, women, and children.”¹⁷¹⁴ A week later he asserted that “the big business’ interests prefer to obtain the larger dividends paid by mills in States where the protection afforded employes is less rigorous.”¹⁷¹⁵ These politicians—and most of the mill workers whose votes they sought—insisted that the mills were profitable, but their owners were either insatiable or incompetent: Gilded Age labor conditions in the South were an attractive alternative for avaricious Massachusetts industrialists who had grown weary of cumbersome details like wages and hours regulations or unionized employees; while failing mills were victims of

¹⁷¹² Joseph A. McCartin, *Labor’s Great War: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy and the Origins of Modern American Labor Relations, 1912-1921* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1997), pp. 20-23; “Walsh Sounds Smith Praises,” *The Fall River Herald News*, October 19, 1928, pp. 1, 2.

¹⁷¹³ “Walsh Sounds Smith Praises,” p. 2.

¹⁷¹⁴ “Cole Charges Attempt to Move Mills South,” *The Boston Globe*, September 28, 1928, p. 9.

¹⁷¹⁵ “Cole Scores Methods of ‘Big Business,’” *The Boston Globe*, October 6, 1928, p. 4.

inept businessmen who mulishly retained outdated marketing practices or foolishly expanded beyond their means.¹⁷¹⁶

Like most of his New England allies, Al Smith was in many ways vague on solutions, focusing instead on criticizing the shortcomings of Republican administration. While there is within such a critique an implicit agenda of policy reversal, this was not in fact the Democrat's most important contribution to the debate. Rather, what mattered most about Smith was his record as governor of New York, and his promise to bring to Washington the agenda and approach he had so long employed at Albany. At times the connections were obvious, as between the Muscle Shoals controversy and the ongoing debates over resource conservation and power development in New York. What was most pertinent in New England (aside from Smith's pledge to protect industry and to rework tax and tariff policies to end what Democrats saw as inequitable distribution of national prosperity) was the governor's record regarding social welfare and labor legislation.

Al Smith's progressive supporters insisted that his election would "make social justice a national issue."¹⁷¹⁷ A group of prominent social workers, including Lillian Wald, Mary Van Kleeck, Mary Simkhovitch, and Harry Hopkins, judged Smith "unique among our statesmen for his contribution to social progress."¹⁷¹⁸ Since they believed that "all the problems of the nation have their roots in the needs of the people and . . . can best be solved by one who has not only faith in social progress but skill in bringing the resources of government to bear upon it," these progressives enthusiastically promoted

¹⁷¹⁶ Georgianna, *The Strike of '28*, p. 50.

¹⁷¹⁷ National Committee Social Workers for Smith, "An Open Letter to Social Workers," October 12, 1928, Mary Van Kleeck Papers, Box 108, Folder 11, p. 1.

¹⁷¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

the ambitions of Al Smith, who would nationalize the transitional progressive policies and administrative tactics he had established in New York State.¹⁷¹⁹

This language was employed nationally, and New England was no exception. Indeed, while business interests were demanding that states roll back their social welfare programs and labor regulations, Smith Democrats were boasting of the New Yorker's activist record in the Empire State and suggesting that this would be a central facet of his national agenda.¹⁷²⁰ At Quincy, during a speech skewering Republican leaders for their handling of the textile crisis, Senator Walsh explained that "more than all else [Smith] has a heartfelt realization of the problem of the common man He has shown this in the great program of social welfare legislation which he put into effect in the State of New York."¹⁷²¹ Other New Englanders more explicitly used Smith's achievements to challenge the wisdom of retrenchment. A Connecticut Democrat suggested in Southington that her state should not celebrate its record of fiscal prudence since Smith's more aggressive spending had yielded manifold benefits to the people of New York.¹⁷²² Massachusetts state senator John W. McCormack, running for Congress in the twelfth district, summarized this understanding of Smith's credentials on the eve of the election: "The people realize that he typifies the progressive leadership America needs and

¹⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁷²⁰ Perkins, "Notes for Campaign Speech to Social Workers in Boston, Sept 1928"; Perkins, "Speech, Boston, 10/2/28"; "Smith's Humane Record is Mrs. Norton's Topic," p. 10; "Mrs. Roosevelt Stirs Audience By Smith Plea," p. 1; "Former Boston Woman Directs Smith Offices in Region of St. Louis," p. 24; Dewson, "What Campaign Issues Mean to Women"; "Walsh Quotes Foe on Mill Conditions," p. 29; Editorial, "Labor For Smith and Why Not?" *The Springfield Daily News*, October 10, 1928, p. 6; "Lavery at Al Smith Club in Bridgeport," *The Hartford Courant*, September 29, 1928, p. 12.

¹⁷²¹ "Walsh Quotes Foe on Mill Conditions," *The Boston Globe*, October 19, 1928, p. 29.

¹⁷²² Mary Hinman, "Letter to the Editor," *The Hartford Courant*, November 1, 1928, p. 8.

demands, and they appreciate the straightforward manner in which he has stated to the American people his position on the great issues of the day.”¹⁷²³

Republicans also recognized that Smith sought to pursue his progressive gubernatorial policies at the federal level, criticizing both the record and its national implications. Of course there were the famous denunciations of Smith’s proposals as “state socialism”—articulated by everyone from Herbert Hoover, who made the attack at Madison Square Garden, to Congressman Fort, who told a Boston audience that Smith was committed to “the broadest policy of Government in business ever proposed to the people of any Nation except Russia.”¹⁷²⁴ Supplementing such castigation were critiques of Smith’s liberal spending as governor. Massachusetts state representative Henry Shattuck warned a Boston rally of Smith’s “extravagant” spending in the Empire State.¹⁷²⁵ The *Hartford Courant* ridiculed Democratic rebukes of President Coolidge’s spending policies, given their nominee’s prodigality at Albany.¹⁷²⁶ In a radio address comparing Smith’s New York record to his own sober stewardship of Connecticut, Governor Trumbull claimed that the interest payments on New York’s bonded debt “would run every department and institution of Connecticut for three quarters of a year.”¹⁷²⁷ From Torrington, a Connecticut writer questioned whether voters were “willing to have [their] taxes increased over 100 percent” as a result of “Governor Smith’s free and easy spending,” admonishing readers to “remember that they are the ones who must pay for extravagance.”¹⁷²⁸ Given the Democrat’s propensity for lavish

¹⁷²³ “McCormack Predicts Smith Victory Here,” *The Boston Globe*, November 4, 1928, p. A7.

¹⁷²⁴ “Fort Condemns Smith Program,” p. 16.

¹⁷²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁷²⁶ “Is Governor Smith Bluffing A Bit?” *The Hartford Courant*, October 5, 1928, p. 8.

¹⁷²⁷ “N. Y. Bonding Scheme Hit by Trumbull,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 10, 1928, p. 2.

¹⁷²⁸ Hinman, “Letter to the Editor,” p. 8.

state programs, Connecticut senator Hiram Bingham suggested that the “Happy Warrior” might more accurately be called “the Happy Spender.”¹⁷²⁹

Smith’s social welfare policies and his support for expansive labor protections bolstered his cause in struggling industrial cities like New Bedford, where economic insecurity and reductions in welfare services were rampant. They also held a clear resonance in depressed New England mill towns, where families living in pre-modern shacks raised children to begin working forty-eight hour weeks at age fourteen while overburdened parents toiled without interruption until they were laid off, maimed, or became too old or sick to work and were sent off to the dreaded “poor farm.” Much like New Bedford, Fall River, Lawrence, and Lowell, Massachusetts mill towns like Clinton, Easthampton, Ludlow, Palmer, and Ware delivered unprecedented Democratic presidential majorities. Palmer, Massachusetts, which contained the struggling textile village of Thorndike, voted Democratic for the first time in the twentieth century, while in Easthampton, Smith’s 53.6 percent made him the first Democrat to avoid losing the city by at least 25 points since Grover Cleveland.

There were sections of New England that were not enduring especially poor economic conditions in 1928 and still voted for Al Smith. The most important example of this is Chicopee, the city that showed the largest Democratic increase of any in Massachusetts. J. Joseph Huthmacher noted this as an exception to his proposition that depressed areas voted for Smith: “contrary to the trend . . . employment and payroll figures indicated an actual improvement in the economic situation compared with 1926 and 1927.”¹⁷³⁰ Huthmacher found that defections from the GOP among the city’s sizable

¹⁷²⁹ “Candidates Contrasted by Bingham,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 13, 1928, p. 1.

¹⁷³⁰ Huthmacher, *Massachusetts People and Politics*, p. 183.

French-Canadian and Polish populations and increased registration among those groups were the driving factors in this shift, concluding that “the matter of ‘recognition’ involved in Smith’s candidacy, with all the resentments and aspirations implied in that term, sufficed in itself to cause a political revolution among those elements, even though unabated by acute economic distress.”¹⁷³¹

All of this is true. But immediate losses or gains in employment and payroll are only part of what defined the economic outlook of New Englanders. It is clear that mill workers did not suddenly perceive economic distress in 1928 and therefore precipitously mobilize as Democrats; rather years, decades, and sometimes even generations of accumulated degradation left these populations poised for activation by the right political leader. Poverty and prosperity are not short-term conditions. Nor are they purely quantitative. Small, recent improvements in household incomes were insufficient to provide a sense of security to workers who had long suffered physically and socially from their economic position and lived within a regional context of industrial instability.

Chicopee in fact provides an outstanding example of all of this. Huthmacher accurately noted the slight increases in employment and in wages in Chicopee in 1928 over 1927 and 1926. But the capital invested in the city, the value of materials consumed by the factories, and the value of the city’s products all declined from 1926 to 1928, with the latter year showing only minor improvements over 1927.¹⁷³² The number of manufacturing establishments had slipped from a high of fifty-seven in 1923 to forty-eight in 1926, settling at fifty in 1928—a figure nearer pre-war numbers than those of the

¹⁷³¹ Ibid., p. 183.

¹⁷³² Vera Shlakman, *Economic History of a Factory Town: A Study of Chicopee, Massachusetts* (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), p. 227.

mid-1920s.¹⁷³³ The zenith of Chicopee industry had come in 1926, and by 1928 the city had already embarked on a slow decline.¹⁷³⁴ Indeed, Chicopee lost a number of important manufacturers during this period: the Stevens-Duryea Company, which had produced cars there for two decades, was liquidated in 1922; the Belcher and Taylor Agricultural Tool Company, employer of three hundred, was sold to outsiders in 1923 and soon saw its Chicopee operations halt; the Page Needle Company was similarly sold to outsiders and discontinued production in this period.¹⁷³⁵ The Chicopee Manufacturing Company, a textile concern purchased in 1916 by Johnson and Johnson, saw many of its operations shipped in 1927 to a new mill town which had been built in Georgia by the New Jersey firm.¹⁷³⁶ Announcing a now-familiar trope, Johnson and Johnson treasurer Charles A. McCormick made clear that the Peach State's "sane policy of taxation" had played a decisive role in the move.¹⁷³⁷ As a final insult, the new town was named for the textile company around which it was constructed—it was called Chicopee, Georgia.

By far the worst blow to Chicopee, Massachusetts, was delivered by another textile firm, the Dwight Manufacturing Company. Dwight had established a mill in Alabama at the end of the nineteenth century, but operations had continued in Chicopee into the 1920s.¹⁷³⁸ In 1927, Dwight ceased all manufacturing in Chicopee, concentrating production in Alabama and throwing around two thousand people out of work.¹⁷³⁹ A 1934 study noted: "For Chicopee the loss of the Dwight Company was disastrous. . . . in

¹⁷³³ Ibid., p. 227.

¹⁷³⁴ Ibid., p. 227.

¹⁷³⁵ Ibid., pp. 227-228.

¹⁷³⁶ James J. Lorence, "The Workers of Chicopee: Progressive Paternalism and the Culture of Accommodation in a Modern Mill Village," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 91:3 (Fall, 2007), pp. 292-323, p. 293; Shlakman, *Economic History of a Factory Town*, pp. 228-229.

¹⁷³⁷ Lorence, "The Workers of Chicopee: Progressive Paternalism and the Culture of Accommodation in a Modern Mill Village," p. 294.

¹⁷³⁸ Shlakman, *Economic History of a Factory Town*, p. 228.

¹⁷³⁹ Ibid., p. 229.

many cases whole families had been entirely dependent on cotton earnings. A large proportion of the workers affected by this shutdown lived in a compact area, and the traders who served it also suffered. The city lost one of its largest taxpayers.”¹⁷⁴⁰ Many workers were able to secure employment in Springfield or Holyoke, but Chicopee took a serious hit from the shutdown.¹⁷⁴¹

In fact, the opulence of the “Roaring ’Twenties” never arrived in this factory city, for Chicopee lacked any real middle class from the 1890s forward, and enjoyed very little upward mobility among its working class—even among community leaders and skilled workers.¹⁷⁴² The city’s population was scattered in a series of villages with no unifying commercial district.¹⁷⁴³ This decentralization conspired with the city’s proximity to more attractive commercial hubs in Springfield and Holyoke to ensure that Chicopee remained distinctly working class. Thus in the late 1920s, Chicopee’s per capita retail sales were far lower than other Massachusetts factory cities, while the number of residents per store was 84.1—far higher than the 74.3 of Fall River, which had the second highest rate in one study.¹⁷⁴⁴ In 1929, a mere 979 of Chicopee’s 43,930 residents met the income threshold to pay federal taxes.¹⁷⁴⁵ At the end of the decade, the city had fewer citizens engaged in professional services, fewer business proprietors, fewer retail dealers and managers than other mid-sized manufacturing cities in Massachusetts.¹⁷⁴⁶

Chicopee was compelled to abstain from the consumption boom of the Coolidge years, and this influenced the working class profoundly. Per capita annual food sales in

¹⁷⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 229.

¹⁷⁴¹ Ibid., p. 229.

¹⁷⁴² Ibid., pp. 235-237, 242.

¹⁷⁴³ Ibid., p. 232.

¹⁷⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 233.

¹⁷⁴⁵ In 1929, that figure was \$1500 for individuals and \$3500 for married couples. Ibid., p. 234.

¹⁷⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 235.

Chicopee were \$112 in 1929—far lower than comparable Bay State industrial cities.¹⁷⁴⁷ The 1934 study concluded that “what we have . . . is the result of a large factory population living on a lower food standard than is usual in communities which have a larger middle class element.”¹⁷⁴⁸

This had some effect on the health and welfare of Chicopee’s workers. Mortality rates and disease rates in the city remained comparable with the rest of the state throughout the 1920s.¹⁷⁴⁹ But this was not the case among infants. In Chicopee, the infant mortality rate (IMR) in 1921 was a horrific 105 per 1000 live births.¹⁷⁵⁰ In 1928, the rate was reduced, but it remained an appallingly high 88 per 1000 live births.¹⁷⁵¹ These reductions over the decade paralleled those made across the commonwealth and across the nation in the 1920s; but parallel declines, while clearly indicating progress, do not suggest a satisfactory improvement in local infant and maternal health care, since Chicopee’s IMR in 1921 was 38.2 percent higher than that for the entire state of Massachusetts.¹⁷⁵² In fact, this was the case throughout the decade: in only one year between 1921 and 1928 was Chicopee’s IMR less than 20 percent higher than the Massachusetts rate, and in most years that figure compared even less favorably to the national rate, which was usually slightly lower than that of the Bay State.¹⁷⁵³ In 1928, Chicopee’s IMR remained 35.4 percent higher than the figure for all of

¹⁷⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 233.

¹⁷⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 233.

¹⁷⁴⁹ Bowers, ed., *Annual Report on the Vital Statistics of Massachusetts*, pp. 168, 172; Robert S. Leonard, *Editorial Review of the Vital Statistics of Massachusetts, 1928* (Boston: Division of Vital Statistics, 1929), pp. 64, 68, 170.

¹⁷⁵⁰ Leonard, *Editorial Review of the Vital Statistics of Massachusetts, 1928*, p. 97.

¹⁷⁵¹ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁷⁵² *Loc. cit.*

¹⁷⁵³ Leonard, *Editorial Review of the Vital Statistics of Massachusetts, 1928*, p. 97; United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1929* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1929), p. 88. For example, in 1922, Chicopee’s IMR was 39.5 percent higher than the national figure.

Massachusetts.¹⁷⁵⁴ The gap clearly had not closed: among all municipalities in the state with a population greater than fifteen thousand, Chicopee had the second highest IMR in 1928—behind only nearby West Springfield, a small industrial town with large Italian and French-Canadian populations.¹⁷⁵⁵ A child born in Chicopee in 1928 was 2.5 percent less likely to survive its first year of life than a child born elsewhere in Massachusetts.¹⁷⁵⁶ This damnable condition could be observed to a lesser degree in many of the ethnic industrial cities of Massachusetts: Fall River, New Bedford, Lowell, and Holyoke all had above-average IMRs throughout the 1920s.¹⁷⁵⁷ Chicopee was not unique—it simply had things even worse.

So while Chicopee's wages and employment rolls remained relatively stable until the onset of the Great Depression, other measures of quality of life—consumption, social mobility, nutrition, and infant mortality—remained unacceptably stable. Voters in Chicopee did not necessarily experience a sudden economic shock in 1928 that primed them for political activation (although the loss of the Dwight Company the previous year certainly mattered a great deal). Rather, encroaching economic insecurities and years devoid of progress, along with a profound yearning for ethnocultural affirmation, had prepared these citizens for mobilization by a candidate who acknowledged both their cultural and their economic concerns.

When Smith and his lieutenants spoke of his record of social legislation, they often referred specifically to his successful push to bring the Sheppard-Towner maternal

¹⁷⁵⁴ Leonard, *Editorial Review of the Vital Statistics of Massachusetts, 1928*, p. 97.

¹⁷⁵⁵ Leonard, *Editorial Review of the Vital Statistics of Massachusetts, 1928*, p. 97; *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population*, Volume III, Part I, pp. 1095, 1098-1101. West Springfield was 15 percent Italian and 8.5 percent French Canadian in 1930; it was 56.1 percent immigrant or child of immigrant, and had a total population of 16,684.

¹⁷⁵⁶ Leonard, *Editorial Review of the Vital Statistics of Massachusetts, 1928*, pp. 97-98.

¹⁷⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

education and health program to the Empire State. Smith had made Sheppard-Towner an election issue in 1922, and it helped him oust Republican Nathan Miller, who had blockaded New York's entry into the program. Miller's party brethren to the east enjoyed greater success. Boasting that Connecticut was "a state that begs no favors," Senator Hiram Bingham and other Republicans had prevented the Nutmeg State from participating in the federal program; and their Massachusetts neighbors followed suit—placing the two Yankee stalwarts among only three states never to accept Sheppard-Towner funds.¹⁷⁵⁸ Once again, New England Republicans and Smith Democrats provided starkly contrasting views of the role of government—including the federal government—in providing for the health and welfare of the population. Within the context of the dangerous, unhealthful conditions experienced in New England's manufacturing cities—conditions that sometimes manifested themselves in inflated rates of disease and nearly always were shown in abnormally high infant mortality rates—it is understandable that Smith's progressive posture on questions of social welfare held great appeal for working-class voters.

Many New England laborers were beginning to understand their struggles within a broader national political context, and the 1928 Smith campaign hastened this development. Workers sometimes found clever ways of expressing their political views: In the wake of President Coolidge's terse August 2, 1927 memorandum informing the press "I do not choose to run for president in nineteen twenty-eight," New Bedford textile workers carried signs early in their 1928 strike bearing a similarly direct message: "WE

¹⁷⁵⁸ The third was Illinois. Lemons, "The Sheppard-Towner Act: Progressivism in the 1920s," p. 782; Janick, *A Diverse People*, p. 28.

DO NOT CHOOSE TO WORK.”¹⁷⁵⁹ Of course, their participation in national politics was not merely editorial. As Smith and his local allies promoted social welfare reforms, labor protections, economic progressivism, and cultural tolerance, rank and file ethnic workers registered as Democrats, organized into Smith Clubs, delivered speeches, and opined in local newspapers. Their words and actions indicate that the inspiration for this initiative came from their own life experiences, stimulated at last by the arrival of a candidate who both symbolized their view of social progress and articulated their concept of economic justice.

It is clear that while workers’ enthusiasm for Smith may have originated with admiration for his humble roots or their shared religious affiliation, his record of achievement in New York—and the promise of a similarly progressive administration in Washington—was also especially attractive to these voters. An address delivered on the Democrat’s behalf in Springfield, Massachusetts, in October of 1928 captured these sentiments:

Why is Alfred E. Smith, a graduate of the city streets, the political idol and the political hope of so many of his county-men? Because he possesses leadership, honesty, human interests and the executive ability necessary for presidency. . . . His strongest opponent has recognized his achievement in the total reorganization of the government, in the business-like management of state finance. Through his leadership he was able to show the quality of interest in humanity. On the enactment of a legislative program, he has been able to protect the man, woman, and child engaged in industry, he has improved the public health and he has attained the finest standard of public service. This interest in humanity could only be attained with his leadership. . . . he has learned the business of government from the bottom up. He knows well every phrase in government administration. Mr. Smith also possesses the quality of selecting appointees who are able to give the highest success in the management of their tasks. The ability and integrity of these people have appealed strongly to citizens regardless of party. . . . The last quality which will make an efficient President and which Governor Smith possesses is the ability to interest people in . . . the government.

¹⁷⁵⁹ Image from the Ashley Scrapbook, reprinted in Georgianna, *The Strike of '28*, p. 58; Robert Sobel, *Coolidge: An American Enigma* (Washington, DC: Regency Publishing, 1998), pp. 367-371.

The Governor has proved during his eight years as Governor of New York his desire and his power to make the people as interested in the government as he is himself. . . . Governor Smith senses [the needs] of the people because he has [been] through hardships himself. Between him and the people is that bond which makes them trust him with their loyalty and love.¹⁷⁶⁰

This could easily have come from the notes of Frances Perkins or Molly Dewson, but these particular lines were not delivered by one of the legions of social workers trekking the nation espousing Smith's credentials. Nor were they delivered by a visiting Democratic luminary, a state-ticket candidate, or even a local Springfield politician, community leader, or labor activist. The speech was given by Katherine Cofski, a Polish-American high school senior from Springfield, during a school-wide debate on the presidential campaign.¹⁷⁶¹ Smith's ideas and achievements, and the entire reform narrative associated with his campaign, were successfully diffused among receptive New Englanders.

* * *

The battles of 1928 established durable electoral coalitions in New England, determining party allegiances and setting the tone for regional politics in the ensuing decades. In many ways, those nascent coalitions were personified by the combatants in a high school debate in Hartford on the theme, "Resolved: That Governor Alfred E. Smith is better qualified for the Presidency than Herbert C. Hoover." On the affirmative side

¹⁷⁶⁰ Katharine Cofski to Alfred E. Smith, October 28, 1928, George Graves Papers, Box 81, Folder "Campaign Correspondence-1928," pp. 1-9.

¹⁷⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

were James Clancy and Stanley Straska, on the negative, Allen Hyde and Robert Crandall; Irish and Polish for Smith, English and Scottish for Hoover.¹⁷⁶²

Yet this ethnocultural view provides only a partial understanding of the developments of 1928. Democrats had often tried to use such issues to their electoral advantage, and these efforts had repeatedly failed. In his 1924 campaign for governor of Massachusetts, James Michael Curley ran a flamboyantly urban and Irish operation, denouncing religious bigotry and making attacks on the Ku Klux Klan a centerpiece of his movement—to the extent that multiple historians have joined Curley’s Republican opponent in accusing the Democrats of staging cross burnings in order to stir their ethnic base.¹⁷⁶³ In some areas it is apparent that this strategy paid dividends: in heavily Catholic Fall River, Curley would be the first Democrat in recent times to crack 50 percent; he expanded on existing Democratic strength in Chicopee, where he came nearer 60 percent; and he made impressive gains in other Catholic, working-class cities as well.¹⁷⁶⁴ Yet while Curley showed strength in some of the working-class ethnic areas that would fuel Smith’s 1928 victory, he did not gain enough support in such locations to achieve a statewide majority; as one biographer noted, “the Klan as an issue was not enough, and Massachusetts was not yet ready for Curley.”¹⁷⁶⁵ Indeed, his numbers were worse than his Democratic predecessor John F. Fitzgerald in Lowell and Lawrence—each with a strong tradition of state-level Democratic voting—and in Republican New Bedford, where he garnered a paltry 38.6 percent of the vote despite the city’s

¹⁷⁶² The Smith team won in a 2-1 decision: the judges were named Wiggin, Kilburn, and Horan. “Smith Contenders Win Inter-Club H. P. H. S. Debate,” *The Hartford Courant*, September 29, 1928, p. 6.

¹⁷⁶³ Dineen, *The Purple Shamrock: The Hon. James Michael Curley of Boston* pp. 151-153; Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism: Urban Political Culture in Boston 1900-1925*, pp. 174-175; Huthmacher, *Massachusetts People and Politics*, pp. 104-105.

¹⁷⁶⁴ *A Manual for Use of the General Court of Massachusetts for 1925-1926*, pp. 442-452.

¹⁷⁶⁵ Dineen, *The Purple Shamrock*, p. 153.

tremendous Catholic majority.¹⁷⁶⁶ The same year, Connecticut's Democratic Party "decided to wage its campaign on the Klan issue"; but this proved ineffective, and the election was a "one-sided" Republican romp.¹⁷⁶⁷ It was only with the rounded campaign of 1928 that Connecticut Republicans would be forced to admit that "Smith had pulled the Italian and Polish vote from the GOP."¹⁷⁶⁸

A similar phenomenon occurred in Rhode Island. When that state's Democrats, who had championed industrial reforms in the wake of the 1922 labor revolts, chose to stress cultural issues in the 1924 election, their 1922 gains among Italian voters receded, and they once again surrendered the statewide French vote.¹⁷⁶⁹ The Democratic inroads of 1922 were crystallized only when Al Smith carried the state with a holistic platform embracing both the cultural and economic aspirations of these voters. Espousing such an agenda produced political upheaval, propelled by Smith's strength in working-class ethnic jurisdictions.¹⁷⁷⁰ This would be consummated at the local level in the elections to follow.¹⁷⁷¹

New England's ethnic working-class voters were clearly offended by anti-Catholic bigotry, cultural condescension, and self-righteous prohibitionism. But in many cases, economic desperation was also a defining characteristic of these workers' outlook. Tellingly, when Victor Signorelli, an Italian immigrant who began working in a Peace Dale textile mill at fifteen, recalled "one time during the depression" in an oral history

¹⁷⁶⁶ *A Manual for Use of the General Court of Massachusetts for 1925-1926*, pp. 442-452; *A Manual for Use of the General Court of Massachusetts for 1923-1924*, pp. 441-451.

¹⁷⁶⁷ Janick, *A Diverse People*, p. 36.

¹⁷⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁷⁶⁹ Indeed, one thesis has suggested that the return of the French vote to the Republican column in 1924 was a reflection of the fact that, for the time, the "mills were working again." DeMoranville, "Ethnic Voting in Rhode Island," pp. 86-87.

¹⁷⁷⁰ DeMoranville, "Ethnic Voting in Rhode Island," pp. 117-122.

¹⁷⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

interview years later, he was referring not to the 1930s, but to events that occurred in 1927 and 1928.¹⁷⁷² Religion and prohibition were important, but so were economic conditions, and it was the confluence of these factors that made the upheavals of 1928 possible.

In New England, the Smith campaign ran blatantly contrary to national policy assumptions—the Democrats were almost iconoclastic in their open rejection of the widely held faith in Republican economics. “SMITH RAPS G.O.P. PROSPERITY,” went a representative headline.¹⁷⁷³ Meanwhile, New England Republicans held firm to the contention that only the preservation of their party’s administration with an even deeper commitment to party orthodoxy could ameliorate the woes of the region’s manufacturers. Thus, Republicans presented the election as a clearly defined contest pitting the steady continuance of Coolidge’s pro-business policies against the experimentation of myopic critics too focused on lingering regional complications to appreciate the architecture of the robust national economy. The *Hartford Courant* summarized this position:

The voters are offered a choice of roads, one marked Republican, the other, Democratic; one recommended by Hoover, the other by Smith. Hoover says: ‘You have been travelling along this road. You know where it leads to. There are no uncertainties about it. Your progress has been pleasant thus far. The next four years of the journey will be like the last four, not tedious and painful, but marked all along the way by agreeable experiences.’ Mr. Smith says: ‘The road you have just passed over was full of all sorts of pitfalls which perhaps you didn’t notice. You thought you had a comfortable journey, but that was because you simply do not know what real comfort means. Go along with me on the next lap, pursue the course that I and my associates have charted, and you may be sure that no evil will befall you.’¹⁷⁷⁴

¹⁷⁷² “Interview: Victor Signorelli (1974),” p. 4.

¹⁷⁷³ “Smith Raps G. O. P. Prosperity,” *The Fall River Globe*, October 5, 1928, pp. 1, 10.

¹⁷⁷⁴ Editorial, “Mr. Hoover at Newark,” *The Hartford Courant*, September 18, 1928, p. 8.

Speaking at the Mechanics' Building in Boston on October 12, New York Democratic gubernatorial nominee Franklin Delano Roosevelt agreed that the election was a question of continuity versus change: "The Republican candidate for President will appeal to those in New England who are satisfied with things as they are, who are content to have no change even though it be a change for the better. The Democratic candidate and his party are appealing to New England because they believe New England wants and needs a change, that conditions today are bad, and that they will be doing everything that lies in their power to bring a more fundamental and general prosperity not only to New England, but to all of the United States."¹⁷⁷⁵

Thus the lines were drawn in bold relief for New England voters. Republicans hoped to leverage their economic credentials to retain the loyalties of workers despite Smith's appealingly familiar demographic profile; Democrats hoped to use that profile to secure a forum for leveling their broad critique of the status quo. This made many people's decisions very complicated. On October 26, Hartford's Republican mayor, Walter E. Batterson, praised Judge John L. Bonee's steadfast loyalty to the party cause. Bonee, the Republican nominee for state senate from the third district, was a Roman Catholic, but had unequivocally endorsed the presidential candidacy of Herbert Hoover in what Batterson deemed "one of the finest demonstrations of tolerance any man could give."¹⁷⁷⁶ The judge's reckoning was honorable for its frankness—he "asserted that prosperity was the principal matter in which individuals should be interested."¹⁷⁷⁷ A Catholic, an Italian, and a Republican, Bonee understood the stakes for New England in the 1928 presidential contest, and he exhorted his fellow ethnic citizens to consider their

¹⁷⁷⁵ "Roosevelt Receives Roar of Greetings," *The Boston Globe*, October 13, 1928, pp. 1, 4, p. 4.

¹⁷⁷⁶ "Mayor Batterson Praises Bonee for Party Loyalty," *The Hartford Courant*, October 27, 1928, p. 2.

¹⁷⁷⁷ "Mayor Batterson Praises Bonee for Party Loyalty," p. 2.

economic welfare when casting their ballots.¹⁷⁷⁸ They did—and they voted overwhelmingly for Al Smith.



Fig. 6.7: Rollin Kirby, “A Great Army” (1928)¹⁷⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷⁸ “The Italian People Who Live In Hartford,” *The Hartford Courant*, August 29, 1915, p. X1.

¹⁷⁷⁹ Rollin Kirby, “A Great Army” (1928), from the Collections of the Museum of the City of New York.

Chapter VII: A Warning Shot from Dixie

“Let me see, the Governor spoke about the blending of ‘Dixie’ and the ‘Sidewalks of New York.’ I do not think that can be done.”

-Senator William Borah (R-ID),
Charlotte, North Carolina, October 17, 1928

* * *

“[Governor Smith] is already defeated unless there are 500,000 liars in the South.”

-Bishop H. M. DuBose, Anti-Smith Democratic Conference,
Asheville, North Carolina, July 18, 1928

Historically, the South’s political culture has been distinct from that of the rest of the nation, and this was certainly the case in the early twentieth century. While for most of the United States the default political position in the decades between Reconstruction and the Great Depression was Republicanism, in the “Solid South,” the Democracy reigned almost unchallenged. Southern politics were sufficiently unique in this period for political historian Allan Lichtman simply to exclude the region from his otherwise sweeping quantitative analysis of the 1928 election. Yet there is much that occurred in the South in 1928 that is instructive—elucidating the major themes of the campaign as well as significant long-term trends.

From a national perspective, the story of the 1928 campaign in the South derives particular significance from the region’s uniquely hyperbolic politics, as well as its complex relationship with the rest of the union. Viewed in this way, the 1920s South can be understood as an anomalous region that within its exceptionalism enriches the understanding of the broader American narrative. Discussions of prohibition, religion,

ethnicity, and race—significant nationwide—were intensified to an almost travestied degree. Simultaneously, controversies over economic policy and progressive ideology were engaged in Dixie as they had been in the North; but the idiomatic manner in which these questions were broached by the combatants in the South, as well as the distinctive socioeconomic realities of the region, rendered the electoral results of these activities peculiar. The home of a polarized political economy that pitted the populist proclivities of struggling farmers against the unbridled boosterism of zealous urban promoters and entrepreneurs, the South provided a unique setting for the weighing of Smith's transitional progressivism against the Coolidge-Hoover status quo.

The region's relationship with Al Smith himself presented yet another peculiarity. The nominee's background did not have the same allure to most Southerners that it did for many urban Northerners. Rather than attracting attention to his progressive agenda and rallying popular support for the Democratic cause, Smith's personality repelled many potential Southern supporters. Furthermore, the candidate largely failed to engage those prospective followers: Smith spent very little time or effort in the region—a dereliction that begat a flamboyant politics which drowned out the candidate's program with the calumnies of partisan demagogues. Exploring the factors that led to these idiosyncrasies not only adds to the understanding of Southern politics; it also contributes richly to the study of the rest of the nation by providing a sort of real-life counterfactual.

Within the South, North Carolina was exceptional as well. Dubbed a “progressive plutocracy” by V. O. Key in 1949, the state exhibited the virulent race-baiting and Piedmont/Black Belt rivalries that marked the politics of much of the region.¹⁷⁸⁰ At the same time, the Tar Heel State was set apart, enjoying “a reputation for progressive

¹⁷⁸⁰ V. O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), p. 205.

outlook and action in many phases of life,” including industrial development and education.¹⁷⁸¹ In the 1920s, North Carolina exhibited manufacturing might and a business acumen that tied the state to larger national trends, while hosting a disciplined and well-funded political machine as powerful as any in the urban North.¹⁷⁸² Therefore, the state presents a useful case study because it concurrently exhibited traits of the “Old South” and the “New South,” clinging to provincial attitudes while embracing unabashedly the business ethos of 1920s America. Exploration of the events of the 1928 campaign in the South, with particular focus on North Carolina, reveals a great deal about the important themes of that election, while simultaneously allowing the election to be used to understand the development of Southern politics.

In fact, the complexity of the 1928 presidential election was felt as acutely in the states of the former Confederacy as it was anywhere in the nation. Southerners in particular were presented with a knotty decision: abandon the Democracy—the party of their forefathers and the only political refuge for the noble vanquished in the wake of the Civil War; or vote for a nominee who embodied the most unpalatable features of the modern American polity—the rise of the city, the aspirations of the immigrant masses, and disdain for prohibition and more broadly for the traditional social order, including the ascendancy of Protestantism in American life. This was not a minor issue. The intensity of the South’s loyalty to the Democratic Party in the years since most African-Americans had been purged from the voting rolls in the region was remarkable: from 1904 to 1924,

¹⁷⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 205. Key includes among North Carolina’s exceptional attributes “race relations,” which may well have been the case in 1949; but it is not included here because, as the history below shall demonstrate, it certainly was not yet the case in 1928.

¹⁷⁸² Rob Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics: The Personalities, Elections, and Events That Shaped Modern North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2008), p. 35; Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, pp. 211-213.

the Democratic presidential candidate scored, on average, 18.7 percentage points higher in North Carolina than their national share of the popular vote—and this was relatively modest. In Florida that figure was just over 25 percentage points; in Georgia and Alabama it topped 30; in Louisiana it was 41; and in Mississippi and South Carolina the Democrat polled more than 50 points higher than nationally. Indeed, over the first four decades of the twentieth century, South Carolina never granted the Democratic presidential nominee less than 91 percent of the popular vote!

The reasons for this steadfast partisanship have been well chronicled. The Republicans were the party of Lincoln, the party of carpetbaggers and scalawags and the oppressive radicals who had imposed a decade of Reconstruction on prostrate Dixie; it had been the Republicans who elected African Americans to the state legislatures and the Congress. It was the Democrats who had redeemed the South from this insulting and corrupt despotism and restored good government under the explicit banner of white supremacy.

Yet the people who now sought to command that venerable party were not worthy of its heritage. They were of alien stock; papists advised by Jews; machine men and wets masquerading as law-abiding public servants; the rabble from the slums of New York (and Jersey City and Boston and Chicago) that had made a Roman holiday of the 1924 convention—conducting themselves in a disgraceful manner as they mocked the values of Bryan, scuttled the aspirations of McAdoo, and incited rivalries that sent the party down to humiliation. Four years later the leaders of Southern Democracy insisted that their party remained the haven of white rule in government, while from national headquarters in Manhattan the campaign made an unabashed appeal to “colored voters.”

Democrats in the South continued to remind law-abiding citizens of the dangers to white womanhood and community peace posed by the disintegration of the social hierarchy certain to result from infiltration of the Solid South by the GOP, while others alerted voters to the black Smith ally in Harlem who employed a white woman secretary, and the legal acceptance of miscegenation in New York State. The heirs of Jefferson and Jackson doggedly exhorted their constituents with cautionary tales of Republican plots to enfranchise Negroes and undermine the established order, while the Republican Party purged itself of Southern black leadership and made entreaties to the rest of the South as an organization that was now reliably “lily-white.” It was a complicated time indeed.

These were concerns of the Old South; but such questions only begin to reveal the complexities of the election in that region, for the South itself had been changing in the years since Reconstruction. Some areas were industrializing, and in these and other sections business interests were gaining a foothold in life and politics. Simultaneously, the legacies of the plantation system and attempts to retain its spoils for the regional aristocracy in the wake of the Civil War yielded a perennial harvest of economic desperation and social deferment, against which a strong populist undercurrent often flared in rebellion. Certain areas developed sophisticated infrastructures, attracted modern manufacturing, and provided for their citizens a world-class education; while others remained bound by environmental disadvantage and intransigent feudalism.

Like those of any other region, Southern voters were not monolithic. They had multiple layers of political, social, and economic interests and beliefs that all affected their electoral behavior. For many decades after Reconstruction, this complexity was hidden beneath the superficial unanimity of the Solid South. The 1928 election did not

instigate any of these complexities; instead, it provided a forum for lingering grievances to be aired and for fractures that had been thirty years or more in the making to be temporarily revealed. There had always been a number of distinctive forces pulling Southern voters toward the political conclusions they were making. The difference in the 1928 contest was that these forces were no longer all moving voters in the same direction—toward the Democrats. Instead, voters were drawn along divergent paths by a range of public questions.

This splintering of the Southern vote along various fault lines in 1928 can be understood by employing the sociological concept of reference groups. Voters in the South may have identified themselves as whites, as farmers, as Democrats, as progressives, as entrepreneurs, as prohibitionists, as Protestants, or as members of any number of other social categories; and in fact each citizen was a member of multiple reference groups. In 1928, the combination of a serious campaign for white Southern votes by the Republicans and the unfamiliar background and style of the Democratic nominee created the jarring circumstance of conflict between these groups, forcing Southern voters to make difficult and uncomfortable choices. Ultimately, voters cast their ballot based on their interpretation of the best interests of the group with which they most strongly identified. The decision each Southern voter made in 1928 reflected which of these forces had the most powerful influence on that individual or on their community.

The election results demonstrate that many of those voters were willing to abandon their Democratic loyalties based on other influences. Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia voted Republican for the first time since Reconstruction; Texas did so for the first time in its history. Tennessee went Republican as well—for only the second

time in the century. Smith barely retained Alabama for the Democracy, and the party's victory in Arkansas has been credited almost entirely to Joe Robinson's presence on the ticket.¹⁷⁸³ Indeed, even in states where Smith prevailed, his percentages represented a stark decline both from Democratic averages and recent party achievements.

Within North Carolina these changes were particularly evident. Of the state's one hundred counties, forty-three gave majorities to at least one Republican and one Democratic presidential candidate during the 1920s; of those swing counties, eight voted for Warren G. Harding in 1920, and one voted for Calvin Coolidge in 1924. All forty-three voted for Herbert Hoover in 1928. Exploring the key controversies of the 1928 election by examining the motivations of the most significant Southern reference groups provides explanations for these important electoral shifts.

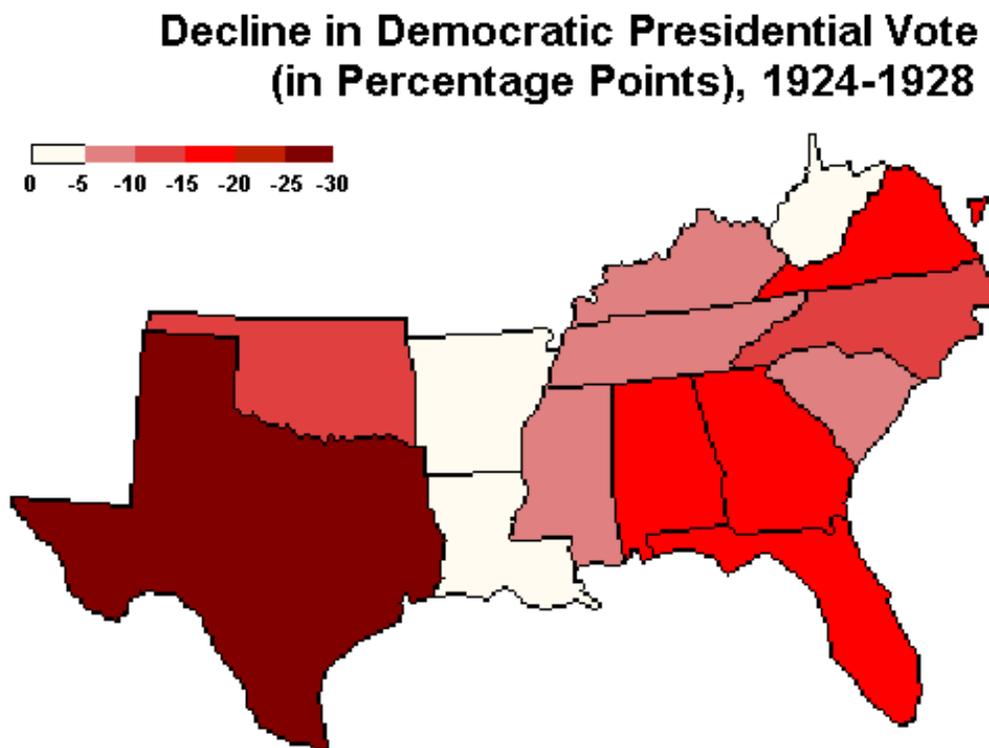
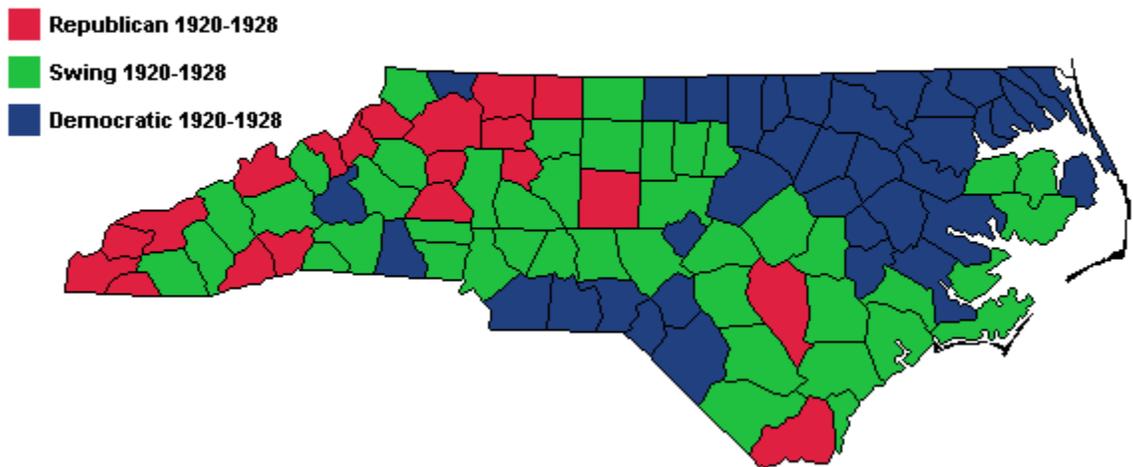


Fig. 7.1: Showing the decline in Democratic dominance in Southern states, 1924-1928.

¹⁷⁸³ Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, p. 319.

Presidential Voting in North Carolina Counties, 1920-1928



1928 Presidential Vote in North Carolina, by County

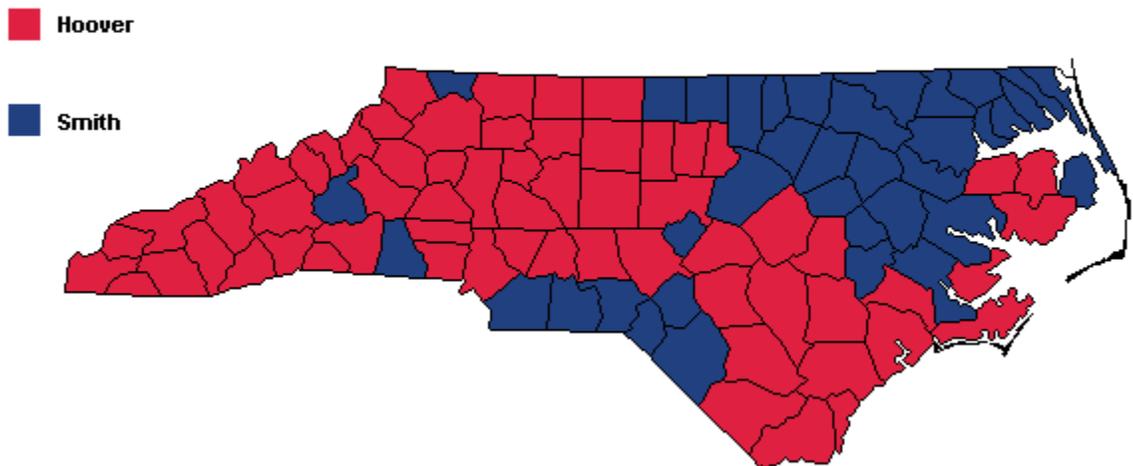


Fig. 7.2: Showing county-level presidential voting in North Carolina, 1920-1928.

Dry Southerners

In 1949, nearly sixteen years after the repeal of national prohibition, Forsyth County, North Carolina, asked its citizens to decide by referendum whether to legalize the sale of liquor. The two leading local publications, the *Winston-Salem Journal* and the *Twin City Sentinel* were owned by Secretary of the Army and tobacco heir Gordon Gray, a “moderate drinker” who favored repeal.¹⁷⁸⁴ The publisher was compelled to have associate editors write in behalf of his position, for his chief editor was “a lifelong teetotaler and editorial crusader for prohibition.”¹⁷⁸⁵ Sanford Martin, a “tall, pink-cheeked man” two decades Gray’s elder, was permitted to compose his own essays decrying repeal, and these were printed alongside the official editorials on the subject.¹⁷⁸⁶ Martin’s conviction was strong enough to drive him into direct conflict with his powerful superior, with whom he fought an editorial battle over the course of the summer; and this conviction was shared by the voters of Forsyth County, who sided with the editor over the publisher 56.7 percent to 43.3 percent in a September contest that witnessed “record numbers” at the polls.¹⁷⁸⁷ All of this occurred in a world far removed from that of 1928; after the Twenty-First Amendment had been swiftly ratified with overwhelming popular sentiment, and after the Great Depression and World War II had dulled the significance of many divisive cultural issues. Two decades earlier such issues mattered even more (and Gray, barely twenty at the time, was not yet in the picture). Thus it would be during

¹⁷⁸⁴ “The Press: Editor vs. Publisher,” *Time*, September 12, 1949.

¹⁷⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

the 1928 presidential campaign that Santford Martin would firmly establish his credentials as an “editorial crusader for prohibition.”



Fig. 7.3: Santford Martin, at work in the offices of the *Winston-Salem Journal*, 1954.¹⁷⁸⁸

Certainly the most candidly discussed of the issues that drove Southern Democrats away from Al Smith’s candidacy was the nominee’s posture toward alcohol. By 1928, there was a general consensus in favor of the Eighteenth Amendment and the Volstead Act within the public sphere of Southern life. While it was likely the case that many citizens agreed privately with the writer from Vandemere, North Carolina, who queried, “Why fight Al Smith about whiskey? If one third of the reports I hear is so, there is not five square miles in Pamlico County in which whiskey is not sold,” the

¹⁷⁸⁸ Courtesy of Forsyth County Public Library Photograph Collection, Winston-Salem, NC.

overwhelming majority of public sentiment and political capital lay on the side of the dries in the American South.¹⁷⁸⁹

Many who had opposed Smith's nomination over the question remained within the Democratic fold, justifying their steadfastness by pointing to sundry other issues. Even these figures continued to assert their prohibitionist credentials throughout the campaign. Josephus Daniels, Woodrow Wilson's navy secretary and the publisher of the *Raleigh News and Observer*, made clear his differences with Smith on prohibition, even while campaigning vigorously for the New Yorker's election.¹⁷⁹⁰ Daniels and others suggested repeatedly that Smith's position was irrelevant, since the president was powerless to modify the constitution and any alterations to enforcement legislation would have to come from Congress.¹⁷⁹¹

Furthermore, these loyalists insisted, like Smith, that the Republican Party had failed to enforce prohibition effectively. While Smith suggested that this was because Volsteadism had discouraged respect for law and order, his Southern allies concluded that these failures demanded Democratic solutions. This argument was made doggedly on the pages of Daniels' *News and Observer*, where cartoonist Reyn Olds portrayed the Republican elephant, Herbert Hoover, and Andrew Mellon singing "How Dry I Am" while the treasury secretary clutched a liquor bottle.¹⁷⁹² An editorial noted that the Prohibition Party's presidential nominee, William F. Varney, had scored the Republican enforcement record, "and yet, good men and women, folks of conscience, are planning to shut their eyes to all this because of the personal opinions of the Democratic party's

¹⁷⁸⁹ S. J. Clark, "Letter to the Editor," *The Raleigh News and Observer*, September 11, 1928, p. 4.

¹⁷⁹⁰ E.g.: "Daniels Assails 'Rotten' Regime," *The Washington Star*, October 18, 1928, p. 2.

¹⁷⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁷⁹² Reyn Olds, "Nobody Knows," *The Raleigh News and Observer*, July 27, 1928, p. 1.

nominee.”¹⁷⁹³ Indeed, while political operatives crisscrossed the Tar Heel State demanding that dries must vote for Hoover, the *News and Observer* alleged that these “Republican candidates and whipper-snappers . . . a year ago were as wet as the Atlantic Ocean.”¹⁷⁹⁴

Democrats aligned with Smith also demanded that the Happy Warrior receive credit for at least taking a firm stance on the question. This, they opined, was superior to the “wriggle and wobble campaign” of Herbert Hoover, whose vague statement of prohibition’s “nobility” was dismissed by O. Max Gardner, Democratic gubernatorial nominee in North Carolina, for being “as classic and as romantic as his promise to abolish poverty.”¹⁷⁹⁵ Gardner contrasted this “vacillating policy of Mr. Hoover with the candid and courageous statement of Governor Smith.”¹⁷⁹⁶ Some even claimed that failures of enforcement and Hoover’s hazy pledges made the Republican the “Best Wet Bet.”¹⁷⁹⁷

Such sentiments were expressed by party loyalists in North Carolina and elsewhere, allowing Southern politicians to support a wet candidate while maintaining their own reputations for temperance. It only partially worked. Even before he came out for Smith, Josephus Daniels was lectured by Methodist bishop James Cannon, Jr., who argued that “as an intelligent, well-informed, Democratic leader” the secretary was “obliged to agree” that because of the question of prohibition, Smith’s nomination would

¹⁷⁹³ Editorial, “Frying Pan and the Fire,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, August 11, 1928, p. 4.

¹⁷⁹⁴ Editorial, “Can They Successfully Play Both Sides Against the Middle?” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, August 3, 1928, p. 4.

¹⁷⁹⁵ O. Max Gardner, “Untitled Gardner Campaign Speech III, 1928,” O. Max Gardner Papers, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina (hereafter, O. Max Gardner Papers), Box 45, Folder 709, p. 1.

¹⁷⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁷⁹⁷ Editorial, “Hoover Best Wet Bet,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, September 3, 1928, p. 4; Thomas H. Young, “Hoover Evasive on Dry Question,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, September 3, 1928, p. 5.

render other issues irrelevant.¹⁷⁹⁸ As Daniels' support for the national ticket became clear, readers of his newspaper began to protest. "I have liked the **News and Observer** and have loved Josephus Daniels but I do not appreciate the positions of Mr. Daniels and his paper in regard to Al Smith. I am not able to see how such a position can be taken without betraying the cause of prohibition," suggested a reader from Monroe, North Carolina.¹⁷⁹⁹

Many Democrats suggested that by nominating Smith the party had broken faith with its rank and file and would cost itself votes. Due to his position on liquor, "there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of lifelong Democrats . . . who will not vote for Al Smith," wrote George Conrad of Harrisonburg, Virginia, a correspondent of Bishop Cannon.¹⁸⁰⁰ W. T. Danforth of Houston warned that the Democratic Party, whose ticket he had been supporting for five decades, had now "fallen into the clutches of an evil gang and the good people of the party are not going to follow their lead into the camp of the old liquor gang."¹⁸⁰¹ Moreover, like Bishop Cannon, Danforth suggested that these developments rendered all other debates moot: "The candidacy of Al Smith means nothing but the last supreme effort of the old distillery, brewery and saloon gang to get their grip on this country once more."¹⁸⁰² Another Texan agreed: "There is but one issue worthy of Christian citizens' honest consideration—the Tammany-Smith-Raskob program for the restoration of liquor to America. All the rest is pure 'hokum.'"¹⁸⁰³

¹⁷⁹⁸ James Cannon, "An Open Letter to Hon. Josephus Daniels," June 8, 1928, James Cannon Papers, Duke University, Durham, NC (hereafter, James Cannon Papers), Box 7, Folder 1927-1928 Aug."

¹⁷⁹⁹ J. M. Folger, "Letter to the Editor," *The Raleigh News and Observer*, August 17, 1928, p. 4.

¹⁸⁰⁰ George N. Conrad to James Cannon, July 13, 1928, James Cannon Papers, Box 7, Folder 1927-1928 Aug.

¹⁸⁰¹ W. T. Danforth, "Letter to the Editor," *The Houston Post-Dispatch*, October 3, 1928, p. 3.

¹⁸⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁰³ H. A. Ivy, "Letter to the Editor," *The Houston Post-Dispatch*, October 3, 1928, p. 8.

Across the South, “Anti-Smith Democratic Clubs” were formed. Many, like the one in Durham, North Carolina, chaired by a Duke professor, were explicitly responding to the nominee’s position on prohibition.¹⁸⁰⁴ In some places this broadened from a local to a state-wide phenomenon, with the most powerful politician in North Carolina, Senator Furnifold Simmons, proudly taking the reins of the anti-Smith Democratic forces in his state.

Simmons had a number of reasons for opposing Smith, and the complexity of his motivations, explored in greater depth below, presents a useful tool for understanding the political impulses of his state. It is clear however that one of Smith’s attributes that particularly chafed North Carolina’s senior senator was his opposition to prohibition. In May of 1928, Simmons took to the floor of the United States Senate and delivered a broadside against the governor of New York, declaring that no one knew anything about his record or his agenda other than his “conspicuous role” in Tammany Hall and his desire to bring back “bar rooms and liquor.”¹⁸⁰⁵ Earlier that spring, Simmons began consorting with Santford Martin, using the *Winston-Salem Journal* to demonstrate that “90%, at least, of the voters of Winston-Salem and this section are against Al Smith, and that thousands of life long Democrats will either vote against him or not vote at all if he is nominated.”¹⁸⁰⁶ Responding to entreaties from Simmons’ personal secretary, Martin “begged, cajoled, persuaded, and threatened” one of his news men “to write but one story

¹⁸⁰⁴ “Anti-Smith Club is Formed in Durham,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, July 24, 1928, p. 12.

¹⁸⁰⁵ “Memorandum For The Press,” May 23, 1928, Furnifold Simmons Papers, Duke University, Durham, NC (hereafter, Furnifold Simmons Papers), Box 74, Folder “Press Release 1928, May-Dec.”

¹⁸⁰⁶ Santford Martin to Frank A. Hampton, March 6, 1928, Furnifold Simmons Papers, Box 64, Folder March 6-10, 1928.

. . . to show that sentiment [in] northwest North Carolina is against Al Smith,” proposing to run “at least one story a week along the line” suggested by the Simmons camp.¹⁸⁰⁷

Upon Smith’s nomination, Simmons’ ally in Winston-Salem continued his war on the *New Yorker*. Both the editor’s life-long stance and the emphasis of the *Journal*’s news and editorial coverage demonstrate that Santford Martin’s reason for opposing the Democratic candidate was undiluted prohibitionism. Martin’s writers insisted that prohibition was working, that it was “neither farce nor failure.”¹⁸⁰⁸ “North Carolina Democrats should not be misled,” they warned on one occasion: “A vote for Smith is a vote against the forces that are fighting to maintain the laws outlawing the liquor traffic. A vote for Smith is a vote for the forces that are trying to restore the liquor traffic.”¹⁸⁰⁹ The paper beckoned its readers to the “enthusiastic support” of those who sought to derail “Smith’s program of destruction of national prohibition.”¹⁸¹⁰ As citizens continued to join anti-Smith organizations and a flood of letters arrived supporting the editor’s position, the *Journal* announced with satisfaction in mid-October that “southern Democracy is rising in its might to repudiate the Tammany-Smith-Raskob liquor program.”¹⁸¹¹ Meanwhile, it was suggested that party stalwarts had lost credibility. Daniels was called on to “apologize and retract” several of his campaign speeches

¹⁸⁰⁷ Santford Martin to Frank A. Hampton, March 9, 1928, Furnifold Simmons Papers, Box 64, Folder March 6-10, 1928.

¹⁸⁰⁸ Editorial, “Neither Farce Nor Failure,” *The Winston-Salem Journal*, October 20, 1928, p. 4.

¹⁸⁰⁹ Editorial, “Smith Answers Daniels,” *The Winston-Salem Journal*, September 28, 1928,* p. 6. *The author neglected to date this editorial while transcribing it in the archive. Because it was written in response to Smith’s September 27 speech at St. Paul, MN, it is being dated September 28, 1928, since the *Journal* was a daily publication.

¹⁸¹⁰ Editorial, “A Political Epoch,” *The Winston-Salem Journal*, October 3, 1928, p. 6.

¹⁸¹¹ Editorial, “The South is Speaking,” *The Winston-Salem Journal*, October 12, 1928, p. 6.

because he was said to have mischaracterized Smith's repeal agenda as innocuously theoretical.¹⁸¹²

Since all of this represented an internal Democratic feud, Republicans were generally content to let anti-Smith Democrats do all of the campaigning.¹⁸¹³ However, when Republicans did speak up, they usually drew attention to their opponent's desire to modify the Volstead Act. When vice presidential nominee Charles Curtis spoke at Raleigh in mid-October, it was described by the *Charlotte Observer* as an appeal to "southern dries."¹⁸¹⁴

It was alleged by Smith supporters at the time and has been suggested by historians since that much of the opposition to the Democrat that was ostensibly focused on prohibition was in fact rooted in the candidate's Catholicism.¹⁸¹⁵ A Charlotte attorney who supported the New Yorker claimed that "Roman Catholicism and 'wetness' constitute a two-fold objection to Smith, and are as closely connected to each other as were the Siamese Twins, although the ligament that binds may not always be visible."¹⁸¹⁶ Nevertheless, there were many Santford Martins in the South—many people for whom prohibition was the dominant motivator.¹⁸¹⁷ Such voters may or may not have been anti-

¹⁸¹² Editorial, "Smith Answers Daniels," p. 6.

¹⁸¹³ Dewey W. Grantham, *The Life & Death of the Solid South: A Political History* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), p. 75; "Durham G.O.P. To Keep Out of Quarrel," *The Raleigh News and Observer*, July 25, 1928, p. 12.

¹⁸¹⁴ "Curtis Appeals to Southern Dries," *The Charlotte Observer*, October 17, 1928, pp. 1, 10.

¹⁸¹⁵ For example, Smith conflated the two issues somewhat during his speech in Oklahoma City. Smith, "Oklahoma City," pp. 54-55. Smith biographer Robert Slayton states, accurately, that "the campaign for prohibition . . . always carried with it an anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic taint." Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 300.

¹⁸¹⁶ Charles W. Tillett, "Al Smith and Fair Play," distributed by News Publishing Printing House, Charlotte, NC, November 17, 1927; re-published and issued by "Western States Smith-for-President Association," Ogden, UT, p. 11, Mary and Harry L. Dalton Rare Book and Manuscripts Room, University of North Carolina Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina.

¹⁸¹⁷ Another noteworthy example was Donald Comer, son of the late Alabama Governor B. B. Comer, a textile magnate and Democrat who went out of his way to "condemn" religious attacks against Smith while

Catholic; but it is clear that the reason they abandoned the Democrats in 1928 was their aversion to drink. The pro-Smith *Raleigh News and Observer* suggested as much repeatedly. “The bulk of the dry Democrats who hesitate to vote for Governor Smith are concerned over his opposition to the New York State enforcement law and his advocacy of change in the law. The attempt to charge religious bigotry as the chief cause has no basis in truth,” they editorialized on one occasion.¹⁸¹⁸ “There are those who will not vote for a Catholic,” they recognized on another, responding to allegations by former congressman Clyde Hoey; “But the bulk of the objection to Smith is not his religion.”¹⁸¹⁹ Indeed, they suggested—as would historian David Burner four decades later—that the nomination of a dry Catholic like Montana’s Thomas Walsh would have elicited little talk about religion.¹⁸²⁰

“Dry Southerners”

On the other hand, there were many voters who were motivated by religious prejudice. When Harrisonburg’s Conrad wrote Bishop Cannon of his prohibitionist objections to Smith’s nomination, he also hinted darkly that the New Yorker sought “to make of himself the party’s pope.”¹⁸²¹ R. L. Ryburn of Houston wrote that city’s *Post-Dispatch* that “Alcohol Catholic Smith Tammany and Catholic Alcohol Republican Raskob are just too much for good people of the South to swallow. . . . We prefer to let

simultaneously stating that he could not vote for his party’s nominee due to the question of prohibition. “Not For Hoover But Comer is Against Smith,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 6, 1928, p. 7.

¹⁸¹⁸ Editorial, “Prohibition: Not Creed,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, August 14, 1928, p. 4.

¹⁸¹⁹ Editorial, “Hoey’s Opening Speech,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, July 25, 1928, p. 4.

¹⁸²⁰ Editorial, “Hoey’s Opening Speech,” p. 4; Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism*, pp. 190-191.

¹⁸²¹ George N. Conrad to James Cannon, July 13, 1928.

the pope run the Catholic church and the people the United States.”¹⁸²² A Charlotte attorney delivered a speech to decry “the record of Al Smith on the liquor question, and also state my objections to him for President on account of being Catholic.”¹⁸²³ At a July conference in Rockingham, North Carolina, Methodist bishop Edward D. Mouzon unleashed a “pulpit assault on wets and Catholics,” and two months later clergymen in Gaston, North Carolina, were reported to “declare war” on Smith on the twin issues of religion and alcohol.¹⁸²⁴

Prohibitionist forces, led by Bishop Cannon, organized a major conference for anti-Smith Democrats at Asheville, North Carolina, on July 18. Walter Adams of the *Asheville Times* noted that “if Smith’s being a Catholic has anything to do with the movement here against him, it has not been allowed to creep out in the open. . . . These crusaders . . . have all the issue they want in liquor and Tammany.”¹⁸²⁵ The rebel Democrats’ detractors were forced to concede that “the fact that Governor Smith was a member of the Roman Catholic Church does not seem to have been emphasized at the Asheville meeting.”¹⁸²⁶ Nevertheless, during the conference Cannon explained to a reporter that it was clear some voters would oppose the Democrat on religious grounds; while Bishop Mouzon “made a sly wager with a reporter that the latter did not know that

¹⁸²² R. L. Ryburn, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Houston Post-Dispatch*, October 8, 1928, p. 6.

¹⁸²³ D. E. Henderson to Frank A. Hampton, March 6, 1928, Furnifold Simmons Papers, Box 64, Folder March 6-10, 1928.

¹⁸²⁴ “Conference Hears Pulpit Assault On Wets and Catholics,” *The Charlotte Observer*, July 7, 1928, p. 3; “Gaston Clergymen Declare War on Smith,” *The Charlotte Observer*, September 11, 1928, p. 2.

¹⁸²⁵ Quoted in Rembert Gilman Smith, *Politics in a Protestant Church: An account of some happenings in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, during the Hoover-Smith race of 1928 and of some events in 1929; containing a defense of the equal political rights of Roman Catholic citizens and discussions of other burning issues of the day in Church and State* (Atlanta: The Ruralist Press, 1930), p. 53. It was at this conference that Bishop DuBose suggested that Smith was “already defeated unless there are 500,000 liars in the South.” *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁸²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

the pope had a secretary of state.”¹⁸²⁷ Reviewing these events two years later, a Methodist pastor from Wilkes County, Georgia, demanded that “by suggestion to the public through the press, these two bishops thus early in the campaign injected the issue of religion; later on they were quite outspoken.”¹⁸²⁸

Indeed, Bishop Cannon, who began organizing against Smith on the prohibition issue immediately upon the New Yorker’s nomination, was accused by contemporaries of shrouding in his dry crusade a virulent anti-Catholicism—an accusation which has been echoed by historians including Robert Slayton.¹⁸²⁹ Virginia senator Carter Glass, for whom the 1928 campaign morphed into a personal battle with the bishop, “fairly shouted” at a Norfolk audience that while the clergyman “didn’t say it in terms. . . . prohibition is a mask and cloak to conceal religious bigotry.”¹⁸³⁰

In fact, while superficially Cannon used prohibition to disguise his religious motives, his private papers demonstrate a deep-seated intolerance extreme enough to offend many of his contemporaries. In August of 1928, Cannon’s attempt to convince a Norfolk grocer of Catholic abuses against Protestant missionaries in Durango, Mexico, was met with a storm of opprobrium. “It strikes me that your letter excludes Catholics from the fold of Christianity so in view of that I see no reason to continue a newspaper discussion with you,” responded J. L. Buck, adding with an allusion to the contemporary political situation that “if the Catholic church authorities in the Country were in politics

¹⁸²⁷ Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁸²⁸ Ibid., pp. iii, 58.

¹⁸²⁹ Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, pp. 192, 258, 300, 312-314.

¹⁸³⁰ “The Following is an excerpt from Senator Glass’ Speech at Norfolk,” *The Lynchburg News*, October 6, 1928, James Cannon Papers, Box 8, Folder 1928: Oct. 1-18. Glass had warned Cannon: “You seem to have found it desirable to initiate assaults on me and other Democrats who have preferred to remain loyal to their party convictions; and much as I regret to be drawn into controversy with a bishop of my church, I shall not hesitate to give blow for blow at every stage of the pending campaign.” Carter Glass to James Cannon, September 28, 1928, James Cannon Papers, Box 8, Folder 1928, Sept.

as deeply as the Methodist Church there would indeed be reason to fear for the future. I have never seen the equal in my lifetime and rarely read of it in history.”¹⁸³¹

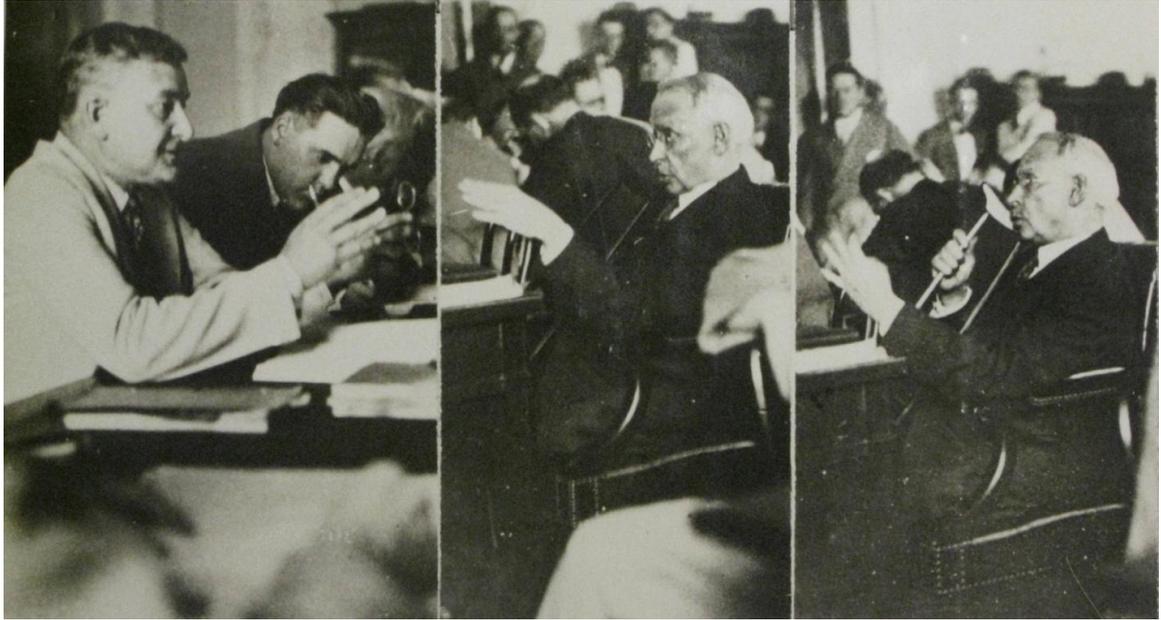


Fig. 7.4: Bishop James Cannon, Jr. (right), anti-Smith Democrat from Virginia, sparring with Senator John J. Blaine (left), pro-Smith Republican from Wisconsin, during a hearing of the Senate Lobby Committee, June 5, 1930. Cannon was called as part of an investigation of campaign funding led by Blaine and acting committee chairman Thomas Walsh (D-MT). Later that day, the bishop walked out of the hearing, because, among other reasons, “I believe the proposed investigation to be a part of the effort for many months of wet and Roman Catholic elements, and of those who worship party regularity, preventing a recurrence of the Asheville conference in 1932.”¹⁸³²

This pattern was repeated in October when Cannon drew the scorn of the publisher of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* over an advertisement the bishop submitted to that publication entitled “Is Southern Protestantism More Intolerant Than Romanism?” Explaining his rejection of the ad, C. P. Hasbrook lectured Cannon that “it must be apparent to you, upon reflection, that much of the enclosed is not a political advertisement. It is, rather, a discussion of the merits and de-merits of two religious

¹⁸³¹ J. L. Buck to James Cannon, August 8, 1928, James Cannon Papers, Box 7, Folder 1927-1928 Aug.

¹⁸³² James Cannon Papers, Box 40, Folder “Pictures: James Cannon Jr.”; “Cannon Walks Out of Lobby Inquiry, Defying Senators,” *The New York Times*, June 6, 1930, pp. 1, 2, p. 2; “Cannon Gives Fund Data To Press After Defying Senate Committee Again,” *The New York Times*, June 5, 1930, p. 1. Notably, Blaine was a strong foe of prohibition, and Walsh was a Roman Catholic.

beliefs. The Times-Dispatch cannot open its columns to an attack upon the tenets or creed or ritual of any church, be it Protestant, Catholic or Hebrew. . . . We consider it an act against the common good to foment ill-will and hatred between the several religious groups of which our nation is made.”¹⁸³³ A week later, an engineer from Martinsville, Virginia, wrote Cannon that the “scurrilous and untrue matter used by you in an attempt to defeat a man . . . whom I consider superior to you in all respects, was received today. . . . I have been a Methodist for the past fifty years, and you are the only one who has made me ashamed of that fact.”¹⁸³⁴ These personal correspondences reveal that Cannon’s base motivation in opposing Smith was not prohibition, but religion; and while these letters capture the disgust of many Southern voters with such tactics, Cannon was not alone in lacking an ecumenical spirit.

Protestant, Anglo-Saxon Southerners

In September, Mrs. Willie W. Caldwell, a Republican National Committeewoman for Virginia, warned that “we must save the United States from being Romanized and rum-ridden.”¹⁸³⁵ The following month, “Dr. Bob Jones, wealthy evangelist,” who was identified by the *Washington Star* as “the first to openly inject the religious issue into the campaign,” traveled home to Alabama promising “to make 100 speeches in the interest of

¹⁸³³ C. P. Hasbrook to James Cannon, October 27, 1928, James Cannon Papers, Box 8, Folder 1928: Oct. 16-31.

¹⁸³⁴ J. R. Gregory to James Cannon, November 3, 1928, James Cannon Papers, Box 8, Folder 1928: Nov 1-13.

¹⁸³⁵ “Rebuked,” *The Charlotte Observer*, October 4, 1928, p. 1. Caldwell’s comments drew a “forceful repudiation” from the Hoover campaign. Dated as September rather than October based on a letter from the managing editor of the *Washington Post* to DNC chairman John Raskob mentioning the incident: N. W. Baxter to John J. Raskob, September 29, 1928, John J. Raskob Papers, File 602, Box 1.

the Republican nominee.”¹⁸³⁶ Also in Alabama, “Oliver D. Street, republican national committeeman . . . and state republican campaign chairman . . . declared that he has distributed through the mails 200,000 copies of a circular attacking the ‘political, civic and social doctrines’ of the Roman Catholic church, of which Governor Smith is a communicant.”¹⁸³⁷ Writing in the *Wesleyan Christian Advocate*, Dr. A. M. Pierce “declared that the Republican party was the party of the ‘upper world’ and the Democratic party of the ‘under world’ and that a vote for the Republican party was a vote for ‘the kingdom of God’”; while another Methodist periodical, *The Quarterly Review*, suggested that it was lawful but “not expedient” to elect a Roman Catholic president.¹⁸³⁸ Touring the South to battle Smith, a Baptist minister from New York alerted a Dallas audience that the Democrat was “the nominee of the worst forces of hell.”¹⁸³⁹

Things got just as ugly in the Tar Heel State. Responding to the *Raleigh News and Observer*’s insistence that prohibitionists’ opposition to the Democrat was not grounded in religious objections, Thomas Gill of Laurinburg, North Carolina, suggested that “judging by this community, I think you are wrong as to the main opposition to Governor Smith in this State, especially among the women voters the bulk of women voters do not hesitate to say that they will not vote for a Roman Catholic for president of the United States.”¹⁸⁴⁰ Meanwhile, it was revealed by the *Charlotte*

¹⁸³⁶ Atticus Mullin, “Alabama Ready For Bitter Fight,” *The Washington Star*, October 14, 1928, p. 25.

¹⁸³⁷ “Street Admits Broadcasting Attacks on Smith’s Church,” *The Charlotte Observer*, October 2, 1928, p. 6.

¹⁸³⁸ Smith, *Politics in a Protestant Church*, pp. 97-98. The editor of *The Quarterly Review*, Dr. W. P. King, supplemented his “argument against the Roman Catholics,” with “collateral attacks against atheists and negroes, seemingly putting the three classes on a level.”

¹⁸³⁹ “Hell Nominated Al, Says Rev. Straton,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 24, 1928, p. 7.

¹⁸⁴⁰ Thos. J. Gill, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, August 17, 1928, p. 4.

Observer that “the wife of a prohibition agent is spreading a story to the effect that if Governor Smith is elected the hands of all Protestant children will be cut off.”¹⁸⁴¹

It is significant that these two examples involved women, for just as some women were particularly active in promoting Smith’s candidacy, others were especially galvanized against the Happy Warrior. To such voters, the social workers and other progressive women who campaigned for the Democrat were the worst sort of traitors. Lillian Wald endured a number of attacks based on her endorsement, and these detractors often explicitly cited Smith’s Catholicism.¹⁸⁴² Nellie Tayloe Ross also drew fire, condemned by one Houston woman to “political death” for choosing to “‘sell out’ in this campaign”—a death which was certain because “the imps of satan cannot ‘whip, beat or buy’ the womanhood of the South, or the North, either, in this moral fight.”¹⁸⁴³

While alcohol and Catholicism were often merged into a single criticism of Al Smith, prohibition was not the only question with which religion was conflated during the 1928 campaign. A Baptist minister from Raleigh attacked the Catholic Church in an address to a group of Wake County anti-Smith Democrats, asserting that “every man who votes the straight Democratic ticket this fall will be voting to crucify his country on a black, bloody cross builded by the foreign element.”¹⁸⁴⁴ Indeed, whether linking it directly with religion or not, the question of immigration and the anxiety over the rise of “foreigners” in American life was also a significant objection to Smith among Southern Democrats.

¹⁸⁴¹ H. E. C. Bryant, “Religious War Waged in N. C.,” *The Charlotte Observer*, October 26, 1928, p. 1.

¹⁸⁴² See chapter four.

¹⁸⁴³ Mrs. Kathryn G. Long, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Houston Post-Dispatch*, October 11, 1928, p. 6.

¹⁸⁴⁴ “Tucker Assails Catholic Church,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, August 3, 1928, p. 1.

These fears had been given voice by Furnifold Simmons in 1912, when he took to the floor of the Senate (in an election year) and declared:

Speaking broadly, it is untrue that an American if he is unlettered is ignorant. . . . But this is not true of the illiterates coming to us from southern and eastern Europe. . . . they learn nothing of the genius of our institutions and life by contact and absorption. Their ignorance is dense. . . . They are unfit for citizens when they come, and they remain so. . . . It is this element who come here unfitted for citizenship who, after they get here, segregate themselves in the slums of the great cities or in colonies of our manufacturing and mining centers, who learn nothing by contact and make assimilation practically impossible, who are willing to live on less and work for less than the native American or old class of immigrants I would exclude.¹⁸⁴⁵

Sixteen years later these sentiments retained political salience. “American Ideals” cautioned the *Winston-Salem Journal* that Al Smith intended to “open the immigration doors so that the poor of Southern Europe shall flow over our Nation and State and destroy the foundations of our civilization.”¹⁸⁴⁶ An oil dealer from Greensboro wrote Senator Simmons, encouraging him to battle “the wops and aliens of Tammany Hall—Al Smith’s hoards.”¹⁸⁴⁷ Republican congressional candidate A. I. Ferree made the picture clear at Wilkesboro, North Carolina, alerting his audience that under Smith’s proposals, “32,000 Italians will be let in instead of 3,000 . . . 2,000 Turks can enter instead of 100 . .

¹⁸⁴⁵ Congressional Record, Sixty-Second Congress, Second Session, March 18, 1912, Hon. F. M. Simmons of North Carolina: “Regulation of Immigration to Exclude Undesirable Foreigners,” Josephus Daniels Papers, Series 4, Folder 164, p. 12. Simmons would also suggest that “I do not believe that anybody is interested in bringing this ignorant horde here except the great corporations, who want cheap labor.” However, twelve years later Simmons would show some flexibility on the issue. As historian Peter Wang notes: “In passing the Immigration Act of 1924, Congress made a fairly important concession to southern farm interests. Although legislators remained inflexible on proposals to increase alien admissions in order to secure farm labor, they did tailor the law specifically to meet agricultural needs.” This accommodation was provided in response to “an amendment, offered by North Carolina’s Furnifold Simmons, to give farm laborers and agriculturalists preference for half the total quota. Southern farmers, Simmons told his colleagues, were suffering from the effects of a Negro labor shortage and cotton cultivation had been cut by nearly two-thirds. The North Carolina senator apparently had few reservations about the adaptability of southeastern Europeans, whom he had once characterized as ‘fine farmers and good citizens.’” Peter H. Wang, “Farmers and the Immigration Act of 1924,” *Agricultural History*, 49:9 (October, 1975), pp. 647-652, pp. 650, 652-653.

¹⁸⁴⁶ “American Ideals,” “Letter to the Editor,” *The Winston-Salem Journal*, October 25, 1928, p. 4.

¹⁸⁴⁷ T. A. Lyon to Furnifold Simmons, July 2, 1928, Furnifold Simmons Papers, Box 65, Folder July 1-5, 1928.

. 25,000 Russians will be granted entrance instead of the present quota of 2,000.”¹⁸⁴⁸
Former Charlotte mayor Frank McNinch, who led North Carolina’s anti-Smith Democrats and would later serve as chairman of the Federal Communications Commission under Franklin Roosevelt, told a Fayetteville crowd that Smith’s immigration policies presented “one of the most menacing threats to our American civilization.”¹⁸⁴⁹

These fears were not isolated to the South, but they were of special significance in a region where, as historian Dewey Grantham notes, “it was the outside . . . that most alarmed and frightened . . . traditionalists,” who observed with trepidation the ascent of “huge polyglot cities, Roman Catholic and Jewish religions, and foreign cultures,” in the Northeast and Midwest.¹⁸⁵⁰ Such citizens feared for the nation’s future in the event that a politician like Smith gained control of immigration policy, and Republicans could sense these anxieties. Thus, when speaking in Charlotte, Idahoan William Borah would go out of his way to mention that Smith would “let down the bars of immigration for southern Europe,” just as he would transplant Tammany Hall to Washington and personally see to the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment.¹⁸⁵¹ Playing to all of these fears, the senator summarized his case: “Let me see, the Governor spoke about the blending of ‘Dixie’ and the ‘Sidewalks of New York.’ I do not think that can be done.”¹⁸⁵²

Like those who wrote to rebuke Bishop Cannon, there were many in the South who found the cultural attacks on Smith unsavory. A Middlesex, North Carolina, man concluded that “the objections to [Smith] are trivial, founded for the most part on

¹⁸⁴⁸ “Ferree Hails Foes of Smith,” *The Charlotte Observer*, October 2, 1928, p. 4.

¹⁸⁴⁹ “Smith Seen A Menace to Civilization,” *The Charlotte Observer*, October 19, 1928, p. 2.

¹⁸⁵⁰ Grantham, *The Life & Death of the Solid South*, p. 72.

¹⁸⁵¹ “Carolina City Cheers Hoover,” *The Los Angeles Times*, October 18, 1928, p. 3.

¹⁸⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

ignorance and narrow, silly prejudices.”¹⁸⁵³ Many lifelong Protestants were particularly dismayed at the politicization of their cherished faith.¹⁸⁵⁴ A Methodist bible class in Norfolk reproved their pastor when he attempted to inject campaign rhetoric into their study, which had “remained free of politics for twenty years.”¹⁸⁵⁵ Also in the Old Dominion, 133 Methodists signed a statement denouncing four bishops who had attempted to “exert influence” to “promote the election of Herbert Hoover”; while in Atlanta, 83 Methodist-Episcopal laypeople issued a statement of “protest against dragging our beloved church into politics.”¹⁸⁵⁶

The most forceful reprobation of anti-Catholic opposition to Smith came on the eve of the campaign from attorney Charles Tillett, a Methodist of fifty-five years who liked to refer to himself in newspaper columns as “The Near Iconoclast.”¹⁸⁵⁷ Responding to the campaign against a Smith nomination that had been underway as long as speculation about the Democrat’s ambitions had been the subject of public comment, Tillett penned a lengthy essay defending Catholic participation in public life and promoting Al Smith’s aspirations for the presidency. In it he declared that many opposed Smith due to religious “hatred,” that anyone fighting Smith on such grounds “**besmirches his American citizenship,**” and that “**He who avers that the American Catholics are less loyal to their government than are the Protestants, is either a willful maligner,**

¹⁸⁵³ R. T. Lewis, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, August 21, 1928, p. 4.

¹⁸⁵⁴ This group included other Methodist bishops. While “offering no criticism of others,” Bishop Warren A. Candler of the Methodist-Episcopal Church, South, with the concurrence of Bishop Collins Denny, wrote an essay in July decrying political activities by his church, citing “the words of our Lord when He witnesses His good confession before Pontius Pilate, ‘My Kingdom is not of this world.’” Smith, *Politics in a Protestant Church*, pp. 13, 18.

¹⁸⁵⁵ “This Bible Class Protests,” *The Chicago Tribune*, August 15, 1928, clipping in the John J. Raskob Papers, File 602, Box 1.

¹⁸⁵⁶ “Methodists Attack Bishops’ Ads,” *The Charlotte Observer*, September 9, 1928, p. 1; “Pulpit Politics Protested By Methodists in Georgia,” *The Charlotte Observer*, October 7, 1928, p. 1.

¹⁸⁵⁷ Charles W. Tillett to Walter Lippmann, November 23, 1927, p. 3, Walter Lippmann Papers, Reel 31, Box 32, Folder 1204; Tillett, “Al Smith and Fair Play,” p. 5.

an ignoramus or a blind bigot.”¹⁸⁵⁸ The piece, entitled “Al Smith and Fair Play,” was published by three of the state’s four leading dailies: the *Raleigh News and Observer*, the *Greensboro News*, and the *Asheville Citizen*.¹⁸⁵⁹ The fourth, the *Charlotte Observer*, declined the piece due to its length (although Tillett speculated that it was truly rejected because the paper’s “editor is a ‘rantankerous’ Presbyterian”), so the author paid to have the entire essay printed as an advertisement.¹⁸⁶⁰ While Tillett was certainly an exceptional character, his sentiments were shared by many, and his vigorous arguments and personal enthusiasm for Smith were making some, including his “intimate friend” Josephus Daniels, “almost enthusiastic” themselves.¹⁸⁶¹

While cultural objections to Smith—especially religious opposition but also questions like ethnicity and immigration—were indeed a significant factor in the Democrat’s unusually weak performance in the South, the election cannot be understood only in such terms, for this bigotry was far from universal. There was enough sentiment against the vituperations of anti-Catholics that ardent Democrats could comfortably denounce religious prejudice. While it still took some courage to do so, it was not uncommon for partisan politicians to call on their constituents to accept diversity of creed. Thus the actions of Mississippi senator Pat Harrison during the 1928 campaign would produce incredible headlines like “Harrison Pleads for Tolerance in Southern States.”¹⁸⁶²

¹⁸⁵⁸ Tillett, “Al Smith and Fair Play,” pp. 11, 13, 15. Emphasis in original.

¹⁸⁵⁹ Tillett to Lippmann, November 23, 1927, p. 1.

¹⁸⁶⁰ Tillett to Lippmann, November 23, 1927, pp.1-2; Charles W. Tillett, “Tillett and Al Smith,” reprinted from *The Charlotte Observer*, November 22, 1927, Mary and Harry L. Dalton Rare Book and Manuscripts Room, University of North Carolina Charlotte.

¹⁸⁶¹ Tillett to Lippmann, November 23, 1927, p. 3. Tillett wrote Lippmann that he and Daniels had been friends for thirty years.

¹⁸⁶² “Harrison Pleads for Tolerance in Southern States,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, August 3, 1928, p. 1.

White Southerners

Such appeals for tolerance would have been nobler had they not been so ironic; for what made the headlines incredible was the open racism of Harrison and his colleagues.¹⁸⁶³ While Smith Democrats in the South asked for a cooling of passions on religious differences, they simultaneously stoked the politics of race. This paradox can be seen in a letter to the editor of the *Houston Post-Dispatch* that asked:

Do you through narrow-mindedness 'Southerners' want it unsafe for your children, your wives, sisters and mothers, and self? Then vote for Hoover and afterwards cry aloud up to heaven for real fighting constructively Smith Democrats to lock up kidnappers, rapists, murderers and robbers and protect you while you turn your back to a reel set with spiked boots for voting for Hoover, and tearful at heart for life to think you placed prohibition and religious hate before blood of Southern heroes, safety for your women, your children and self. Now let Hoover sweep you, or Smith pilot you safely.¹⁸⁶⁴

This clear reference to the supposed perils of black empowerment traditionally associated with Republican ascendancy in the South was often invoked even more

¹⁸⁶³ To call an individual a "racist" is a serious charge that demands justification. The words "open racism" are chosen carefully here, rather than "virulent racism" or something stronger, for Harrison was not a race-baiting demagogue in the manner of his fellow Mississippian Theodore Bilbo. At the same time, he exhibited the racist attitudes and white-supremacist politics characteristic of the Southern caucus. In 1922, he "offered dilatory amendments, insisted the clerk read the daily journal, and made frequent procedural motions," to help kill anti-lynching legislation. In the 1930s, he bristled when Roosevelt, hardly a crusader for civil rights, so much as mentioned a personal opposition to the poll tax. In 1938, he lamented that the Democratic Party was abandoning the South in favor of black Northerners, declaring "We see the people of the South confronted with the terrible situation of a Democratic majority betraying the trust of the Southern people, destroying the things that they have idolized and in which they believe. I read the other day the Negro representative from Illinois has introduced a bill to abolish Jim Crow laws in the States, to abolish those laws which provide for the segregation of the races. The next thing, in all probability, will be a bill to provide that miscegenation of the races cannot be prohibited, and when that has been accomplished, they will come back here and seek the help of the majority party in power to take away from the States the right to say who shall vote in their elections, to say that every colored man in every Southern State should take part in the primaries in the State!" George C. Rable, "The South and the Politics of Antilynching Legislation, 1920-1940," *The Journal of Southern History*, 51:2 (May, 1985), pp. 201-220, p. 206; Frank Friedel, *F. D. R. and the South* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University, 1965), p. 98; Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue: The Depression Decade* (New York: Oxford, 1978), p. 134; Harrison quoted in Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, p. 293.

¹⁸⁶⁴ A. Warner, "Letter to the Editor," *The Houston Post-Dispatch*, October 6, 1928, p. 10.

explicitly. The editors of the *Post-Dispatch* later reminded Houstonians that “the last time the Republican party carried Texas was during the infamous carpetbag regime, when the white Democracy of the South was disfranchised and Yankee soldiers, white and negro, stood guard with fixed bayonets at the polls.”¹⁸⁶⁵ Days later in the same city, Judge H. M. Garwood presented “a graphic picture of ‘carpet bag’ days following the civil war, days of terror and negro rule under the victorious Union war leaders,” before a crowd of twenty-five thousand Democrats.¹⁸⁶⁶

Of course such sentiments were hardly unique to the Magnolia City. In North Carolina, the *Raleigh News and Observer* was scandalized by Hoover’s Ohio primary campaign, in which it alleged that “white men and women were put side by side with Negro women.”¹⁸⁶⁷ In Virginia, Governor Harry Flood Byrd alerted a constituent that “if Virginia goes Republican, I believe that the Progress of the State will be set back many years. The Democratic Party preserved white supremacy in Virginia. It has given Virginia throughout the years, honest and efficient government.”¹⁸⁶⁸ In Piedmont, Alabama, Major Lamar Jeffers, a Democratic congressman from that state, appealed to his constituents to vote the straight Democratic ticket in order to retain “White Supremacy.”¹⁸⁶⁹ Numerous Democratic firebrands reminded listeners of the threat to local sovereignty posed by the Republican-backed federal anti-lynching bill, with one suggesting that the bill’s sponsor, Missouri representative Leonidas Dyer, “is promising

¹⁸⁶⁵ Editorial, “The New Carpetbaggers,” *The Houston Post-Dispatch*, October 25, 1928, p. 6.

¹⁸⁶⁶ “Smith Banner Held Aloft By Harris County Voters As Throngs Attend Rally,” *The Houston Post-Dispatch*, October 28, 1928, pp. 1, 16.

¹⁸⁶⁷ Editorial, “The Segregation Order,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, September 1, 1928, p. 4. Another North Carolinian criticized the Hoover campaign on the grounds that the Republican’s nomination at Kansas City had been seconded by “a North Carolina negro.” “Hon. John H. Kerr Speaks to Full House,” *The Burlington Daily Times*, October 16, 1928, p. 1.

¹⁸⁶⁸ Harry F. Byrd to Marshall Belcher, October 22, 1928, James Cannon Papers, Box 8, Folder 1928: Oct. 16-31.

¹⁸⁶⁹ “Jeffers Urges Straight Vote For Democracy,” *The Anniston Star*, October 28, 1928, p. 1.

the south a second reconstruction, and is promising the negro absolute equality with the white man.”¹⁸⁷⁰ In Mississippi, Governor Theodore Bilbo, a venomous race-baiter, began circulating gossip that Herbert Hoover “had danced with a negro woman” during flood relief work in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, in 1927.¹⁸⁷¹

All of this was standard fare for Democratic spellbinders in the early twentieth century South—and in that regard 1928 was unspectacular. What makes the election fascinating is that the Democratic monopoly on racist politics had been broken. Bilbo’s feigned distress over Hoover’s alleged interracial cotillion was surpassed by the unrestrained fury expressed by Republican operatives, who took umbrage with the governor’s apparently scurrilous story. George Akerson, Hoover’s personal assistant and future press secretary, called the contention “unqualifiedly false,” adding that this was “the most indecent and unworthy statement in a bitter campaign.”¹⁸⁷² Chairman Walker K. Welford of the Memphis Non-Partisan Hoover Club wired Democratic Party chair John Raskob demanding that he repudiate the “disgraceful charges,” which he classified as “libel.”¹⁸⁷³ Contacting the governor himself, the Hoover camp summarized their outrage over Bilbo’s tale: “No more untruthful and ignoble assertion was ever uttered by a public man in the United States than that attributed to you.”¹⁸⁷⁴

¹⁸⁷⁰ Ben Cooper, “Hardwick Predicts Big Victory for Democracy in Address at Newnan,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 25, 1928, p. 2; Charles Noel King, Letter to the Editor, “Young Democrat Writes on Issues,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 14, 1928, p. 3F; Herman D. Hancock, “G. O. P. Prosperity is Called ‘Myth’ at Rousing Rally,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 28, 1928, pp. 1A, 3A.

¹⁸⁷¹ Historian C. Vann Woodward suggests that Bilbo was characterized by his enemies as “an obscene clown.” He would later author a racist manifesto entitled *Take Your Choice: Separation or Mongrelization* (Poplarville, MS: Dream House, 1946). Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, pp. 394-395; “Asks Repudiation of Bilbo’s Charge,” *The Washington Star*, October 21, 1928, p. 19; “Hoover Denies Negro Dancing,” *The Houston Post-Dispatch*, October 20, 1928, p. 1.

¹⁸⁷² “Hoover Denies Negro Dancing,” *The Houston Post-Dispatch*, p. 1.

¹⁸⁷³ “Asks Repudiation of Bilbo’s Charge,” *The Washington Star*, p. 19

¹⁸⁷⁴ “Hoover Denies Negro Dancing,” *The Houston Post-Dispatch*, p. 1.

It is one thing to deny a false report; but the bombardment of superlatives discharged by Hoover's supporters to express their righteous indignation over Bilbo's allegation provides insight into the Republican racial strategy. Indeed, 1928 may have been the only time that Theodore Bilbo found himself being attacked for taking sides with "a friend of the negro," as he was during a debate with Colonel Louis P. Bryant at the South Louisiana State Fair in Donaldsonville.¹⁸⁷⁵ Across the South, Hoover supporters portrayed Smith as dubious at best on white supremacy. In Montgomery, Alabama, Senator Thomas Heflin suggested that Smith favored "'social equality' as against 'white supremacy,'" noting the governor's support for a New York statute "providing punishment for a hotel or restaurant keeper who refused to serve a negro."¹⁸⁷⁶ In Georgia, Judge Hugh Locke echoed these charges; and while the pro-Hoover but also genteel *Christian Science Monitor* suggested that this was not necessarily meant as a criticism of Smith's position on the matter, they further reported that Locke's anti-Smith organization was also advising voters that New York senator Royal Copeland was boasting of black support for the Democratic nominee in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, and that "Al Smith-Joe Robinson Negro Clubs" were being organized across the North.¹⁸⁷⁷ A Wilmington, North Carolina, man expressed similar concerns about black support for the Democratic ticket; after spying a Smith placard on the car of a "Negro undertaker," he

¹⁸⁷⁵ "Spirited Attack On Republicans Is Made By Bilbo," *The New Orleans Times-Picayune*, October 21, 1928, p. 8.

¹⁸⁷⁶ "Issue of Race is Raised in New Heflin Attack," *The Boston Globe*, September 25, 1928, p. 10.

¹⁸⁷⁷ "Anti-Smith Democrats Fight Misrepresentation," *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 26, 1928, p. 4. Copeland, a moderate senator who would become a strong critic of Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal, had a penchant for causing controversy in campaign speeches—often saying one thing too many. Congressman Sol Bloom recalled: "my friend Senator Royal S. Copeland spoke for me at a big rally of orthodox Jews. It was a wonderful little speech, right up until the end. Then he wound up, 'And with your loyal support, I confidently predict that by this time tomorrow your good friend and mine, Sol Bloom, will have *brought home the bacon!*' There are some things that even a United States senator should be careful about when praising an orthodox Jew before an audience consisting almost entirely of other orthodox Jews." Bloom, *The Autobiography of Sol Bloom*, p. 211. Emphasis in original.

concluded that “the national Democratic party during this campaign is endeavoring to corral the Negro vote, a ‘sin and crime’ that the Republican party has been accused of as long as I can remember.”¹⁸⁷⁸ A Mumfordsville, Alabama, man challenged the Democratic *Anniston Star*: “Why do negroes as a whole support Al Smith? . . . Why is Jack Johnson (negro with white wife) out for Smith? Why has Smith appointed more negroes to office in New York State in one year than Coolidge has during his entire term of office?”¹⁸⁷⁹

Often these criticisms went beyond questioning Smith’s credibility as a friend of the white South and became full-fledged indictments of the Democratic presidential nominee as the “Negro-loving Al Smith,” as one detractor referred to him during a speech in Hickory, North Carolina.¹⁸⁸⁰ “He stands for race equality,” wrote a voter from Galveston, Texas. “Under Tammany rule in New York City there is no distinction in the public schools on account of color. White and black children mingle together, and of course, in Harlem the majority of children are negroes Intermarriage of blacks and whites frequently occurs in New York, usually a negro man to a white woman with hybrid offspring resulting. . . . this mixing of races permitted by Tammany rule in New York continues to menace the future of the American nation.”¹⁸⁸¹ An anti-Smith

¹⁸⁷⁸ Alfred G. Ward, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, September 13, 1928, p. 4. Attacks on the Democratic Party for attracting black votes were commonplace in 1928. E.g.: “Smith Attracting Negro Vote,” *The Winston-Salem Journal and Sentinel*, October 14, 1928, p. 4-A.

¹⁸⁷⁹ Clark Bros., “Letter to the Editor,” *The Anniston Star*, October 30, 1928, p. 4. In fact, there was debate as to the authenticity of the alleged Jack Johnson endorsement. It was reported as fact in *Time*, while the *Norfolk Journal and Guide* suggested the story was apocryphal and had in fact been refuted by the boxer himself. “National Affairs: In Chicago,” *Time*, December 12, 1927; “Jack Johnson Refutes Smith Report Remark,” *The Norfolk Journal and Guide*, September 29, 1928, p. 11. Meanwhile, another correspondent of the *Star*, George A. Laney, took the time to write in order to clarify that he did not support the Democratic nominee after some local Smith supporters began erroneously praising him for a letter written by Laney’s cousin. “My cousin ‘J. W.’ seems to be wrought up and excited over the race problem. In my opinion there are more negroes in the Smith wood pile than there are in Hoover’s.” George A. Laney, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Anniston Star*, November 2, 1928, p. 4.

¹⁸⁸⁰ W. Earl Hotalen, Statement on Speech at Hickory, NC and response of the *Hickory Daily Record*, Forest City, NC, October 14, 1928, Furnifold Simmons Papers, Box 64, Folder October 14-16, 1928.

¹⁸⁸¹ Mrs. D. L. Denney, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Houston Post-Dispatch*, October 19, 1928, p. 8.

Democrat from Georgia told a crowd of one thousand in Atlanta that “the republican party never stood for social equality among the races as Governor Smith and Tammany hall today.”¹⁸⁸²

Leading the charge, the Ku Klux Klan began actively “using the Negro in their propaganda to discredit Alfred E. Smith.”¹⁸⁸³ Numerous Klan publications, as well as advertisements appearing in the mainstream press, pointed to the intermeddling of the races in New York State, Tammany’s reliance on “the Negro vote,” and Smith’s apparent reputation as a “Negro Lover.”¹⁸⁸⁴ At a Klan fish fry in Foley, Alabama, a preacher—aptly named Showt—indignantly accused Smith of employing “a Negro wench” as his stenographer, a story which survived the duration of the campaign.¹⁸⁸⁵

A favorite target of these attacks was Ferdinand Q. Morton, the leader of the Tammany-aligned United Colored Democracy. A Smith ally, Morton had been a key figure in shifting a substantial portion of the black vote in Harlem from the Republican column into the Democratic, and was rewarded by Tammany Hall with considerable patronage for his followers.¹⁸⁸⁶ Morton himself became a civil service commissioner,

¹⁸⁸² Ben Cooper, “Ex-Senator Owen Assails Al Smith,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 22, 1928, p. 10. The speaker was Barry Wright of Rome, Georgia, introducing former Oklahoma Senator Robert Owen. Wright would later attack Franklin Roosevelt for supporting interracial marriage and profiting from black votes in New York in response to the latter’s speeches on behalf of Al Smith in Georgia. “Tammany Assailed in Wright Statement,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 7, 1928, p. 3A.

¹⁸⁸³ “Klan Stresses Race Prejudice Against Smith,” *The Norfolk Journal and Guide*, September 22, 1928, pp. 1, 2.

¹⁸⁸⁴ “Believe Klan is Fighting Smith,” *The Norfolk Journal and Guide*, September 1, 1928, p. 11; “Klan Influence Fighting Smith,” *The Norfolk Journal and Guide*, September 15, 1928, p. 5; “Klan Stresses Race Prejudice Against Smith,” pp. 1, 2.

¹⁸⁸⁵ “Klan Stresses Race Prejudice Against Smith,” p. 1. Meanwhile on Maryland’s Eastern Shore, it was reported that “Negroes . . . were being hired to ride in automobiles on the side of which are streamers bearing the words ‘Al Smith,’” apparently to trick whites into believing Smith had strong African-American support. This charge came from Maryland Democratic senator Millard Tydings, who claimed he had heard such reports from informants in Easton. It may well have been the case that these were actually black citizens who were supporting the Democrat, a fact that could have rankled some whites; nevertheless, as the story was reported by the black press, who were especially careful to sift through such racism, it has a reasonable level of credibility. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁸⁸⁶ Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 178.

appointed by the Tammany mayor.¹⁸⁸⁷ When anti-Smith Democrats stumbled upon this situation, they broadcast their findings with alarm. Morton was not only a civil servant drawing a \$7,500 annual salary and a “recognized leader” in New York politics; he also dictated to “a white, American-born woman,” assigned as his personal secretary by Smith’s Tammany allies.¹⁸⁸⁸ At Bristol, Virginia, Bishop Cannon “strayed from his main theme, Prohibition, to declare that Negroes employed by Tammany have white stenographers.”¹⁸⁸⁹ As Smith Democrats equivocated in response to these charges, their opponents demanded, “Let’s Have the Truth About This Negro Morton!”¹⁸⁹⁰

Morton was alleged to typify the equality offered to African-Americans in New York; and in fact pointing to the divide between Northern and Southern racial systems and the supposedly glamorous lifestyle of the “Tammanyized Negro” of the Empire State that resulted was an especially popular tactic.¹⁸⁹¹ “Give us the Southern colored brother every time, with his petty graft thrown in. We are accustomed to him, but deliver us from the Tammanyized black politicians.”¹⁸⁹² Smith and his ilk were deemed antagonistic toward Southern racial mores, and Southern Democrats were said to be hamstrung by these malevolent Yankees. “Senator Pat Harrison, of Mississippi, is prominent in Democratic headquarters in New York,” wrote author William Rufus Scott in his “Letter

¹⁸⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 286.

¹⁸⁸⁸ Political Advertisement, “White Supremacy as Practiced by Tammany,” Furnifold Simmons Papers, Box 66, Folder “Oct. 1-5, 1928.”

¹⁸⁸⁹ “Campaigners,” *Time*, November 5, 1928.

¹⁸⁹⁰ Political Advertisement, Democratic State Anti-Smith Committee, “Let’s Have the Truth About This Negro Morton!” *The Charlotte Observer*, November 5, 1928.

¹⁸⁹¹ “Ministers Vent Wrath On Smith,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, July 24, 1928, p. 2.

¹⁸⁹² Ibid., p. 2.

to an Alabama Voter”]; “But try to imagine Tammany inviting him to make the same kind of a ‘white man’s party’ speech in New York that Harrison makes in Mississippi.”¹⁸⁹³

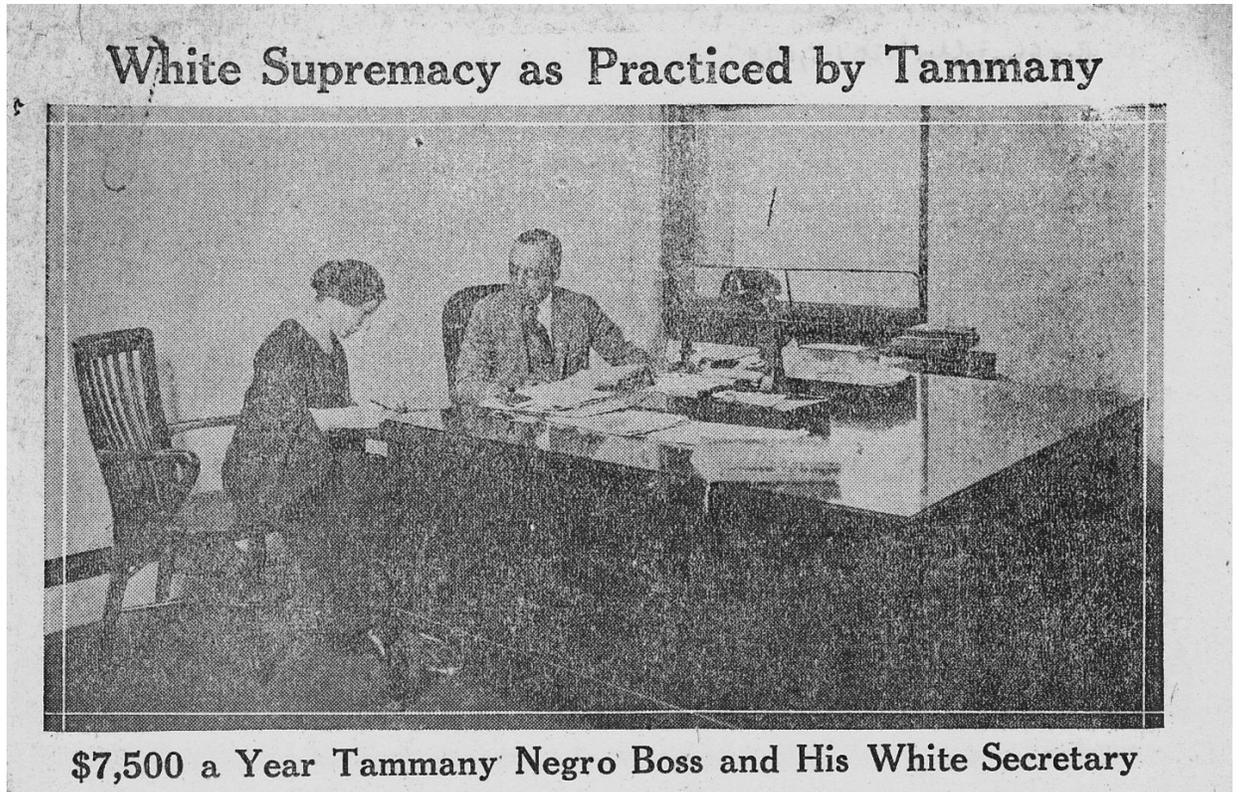


Fig. 7.5: Anti-Smith ad featuring Ferdinand Morton and Miss Florence Eckstein, “a white American-born woman.”¹⁸⁹⁴

Although this was the popular perception of the New Yorker among white Southerners, in actuality Smith’s record on race was mixed. Biographer Robert Slayton assesses the Happy Warrior as “a typical, reasonably liberal politician of the time.”¹⁸⁹⁵ The diversity of his boyhood haunts on Manhattan’s Lower East Side had made him basically tolerant, and his father, a Union veteran and volunteer fireman who according to family legend had saved the lives of several African Americans during the 1863 New

¹⁸⁹³ William Rufus Scott, “Tammany Flim-Flamming the South On the Race Question” (Letter to an Alabama Voter),” Furnifold Simmons Papers, Box 64, Folder September 1-3, 1928.

¹⁸⁹⁴ Political Advertisement, “White Supremacy as Practiced by Tammany,” Furnifold Simmons Papers, Box 66, Folder “Oct. 1-5, 1928.”

¹⁸⁹⁵ Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 180.

York draft riots, had inculcated young Smith with the belief that, like anyone else, their black neighbors were “children of God.”¹⁸⁹⁶ As a Tammany man Smith had been enthusiastic to court the black vote, and was rewarded by these citizens with electoral support; yet he had never made any prominent appointments of African Americans as governor, and, like Franklin Delano Roosevelt after him, Smith was noticeably silent on Jim Crow—a reticence which drew a strong rebuke from W. E. B. Du Bois.¹⁸⁹⁷

Meanwhile, behind the scenes the Democrat showed hints of a more progressive attitude. According to civil rights leader Walter White’s 1948 autobiography, the Smith campaign had approached the NAACP officer through Belle Moskowitz (whose husband had helped found the organization in 1909) and sought his help in attracting the African American vote; in a private meeting, Smith assured White that “I know Negroes distrust the Democratic Party, and I can’t blame them. But I want to show them that the old Democratic Party, ruled entirely by the South, is on its way out, and that we Northern Democrats have a totally different approach to the Negro.”¹⁸⁹⁸ Smith then asked White to help him “demonstrate this conversion” to skeptical African Americans, and White drafted a statement declaring Smith’s independence from “the anti-Negro South.”¹⁸⁹⁹ All of this ultimately came to naught, as Smith was eventually persuaded by advisor Joseph

¹⁸⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 178.

¹⁸⁹⁷ W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, “Is Al Smith Afraid of the South?” *The Nation*, 127, October 17, 1928, pp. 392-394; reprinted in Shover, ed., *Politics of the Nineteen Twenties*, pp. 189-197, p. 193. Indeed, Du Bois concluded that in spite of what he viewed as “some color of right” to Smith’s self-definition as a progressive, his silence on race meant that the governor was only “posing as a liberal.” Ibid., p. 189. Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, pp. 178-180.

¹⁸⁹⁸ White, *A Man Called White*, pp. 99-100.

¹⁸⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 100. David Levering Lewis notes that Du Bois harbored profound “skepticism” of Smith’s entreaties to White and the NAACP from the beginning of the episode. David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), pp. 246-247; David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Penguin, 1997), pp. 205-206.

Proskauer, running mate Joe Robinson, and Senator Pat Harrison, not to sign the statement.¹⁹⁰⁰

While reality was ambiguous, it was the image of Smith as the spokesperson for a vaguely defined new social order that mattered more to voters. Questioning Smith on race was particularly useful for the insurgent Democrats, who could then justify their abandoning the party that had restored white supremacy. Frank McNinch warned a crowd in Goldsboro, North Carolina, that “Governor Smith does not know us, does not understand us and is governor of a state where in public office white people work not only with, but under negroes and where white people and negroes intermarry under protection of the law.”¹⁹⁰¹ The anti-Smith Democrats in North Carolina made special use of their best-known supporter; at New Bern, McNinch was introduced by “our Old Chieftain of White Supremacy, the Leader of the campaign of ’98 and 1900, whose wise leadership has survived all the vicissitudes of the past 30 years, and who is now the Sage of Democracy and the best beloved of North Carolinians—SENATOR F. M. SIMMONS.”¹⁹⁰²

Simmons, who “always regarded the removal of black voters as his greatest accomplishment,” was particularly valuable to the insurgent Democrats because he brought them unquestioned credentials in both partisan and racial loyalty.¹⁹⁰³ He had been the leader of the 1898 crusade to overthrow the interracial Populist/Republican fusion government of North Carolina and to reestablish white rule under the

¹⁹⁰⁰ White, *A Man Called White*, p. 101.

¹⁹⁰¹ “M’Ninch Sees Racial Menace in Al Smith,” *The Charlotte Observer*, October 20, 1928, p. 2.

¹⁹⁰² Political Advertisement, “Great Anti-Smith Democratic Rally,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, October 11, 1928, p. 12.

¹⁹⁰³ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, p. 37.

Democrats.¹⁹⁰⁴ The senator's power as well as his popular appeal remained strong through 1928, and if he had any hesitation about bucking the party he had led for three decades, the deluge of correspondences entreating him to abandon the national ticket satiated his fears.¹⁹⁰⁵ So too did promises of help from friends in the Ku Klux Klan, one of whom assured the senator, "We will Elect you to office again—don't worry—give them Hell."¹⁹⁰⁶

Not only anti-Smith Democrats like Simmons and McNinch, but also Republican partisans were participating in racial politics in 1928.¹⁹⁰⁷ Making a "definite step toward taking Mississippi and other Southern states out of the hands of the negro politicians, and turning it over to the white men and women," the Republican National Committee

¹⁹⁰⁴ See Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1996), pp. 63-123.

¹⁹⁰⁵ E.g.: Mrs. D. E. Stepp to Furnifold Simmons, June 1, 1928, Furnifold Simmons Papers, Box 64, Folder June 1-5, 1928; T. A. Lyon to Furnifold Simmons, July 2, 1928, Furnifold Simmons Papers, Box 64, Folder July 1-5, 1928; T. J. Ray to Furnifold Simmons, July 2, 1928, Furnifold Simmons Papers, Box 64, Folder July 1-5, 1928; (Illegible, Red Springs, NC) to Furnifold Simmons, July 4, 1928, Furnifold Simmons Papers, Box 64, Folder July 1-5, 1928; A. M. Harris to Furnifold Simmons, July 10, 1928, Furnifold Simmons Papers, Box 64, Folder 6-10, 1928; Col. J. C. Michie to Furnifold Simmons (telegram), July 13, 1928, Furnifold Simmons Papers, Box 64, Folder July 11-15, 1928; Dr. J. H. Judd to Furnifold Simmons, July 16, 1928, Furnifold Simmons Papers, Box 64, Folder July 16-20, 1928; J. T. Fender to Furnifold Simmons, July 19, 1928, Furnifold Simmons Papers, Box 64, Folder July 16-20, 1928.

¹⁹⁰⁶ John Deal to Furnifold Simmons, October 8, 1928, Furnifold Simmons Papers, Box 64, Folder October 6-10, 1928. Also: Amos C. Duncan to Furnifold Simmons, May 30, 1928, Furnifold Simmons Papers, Box 64, Folder May 29-31, 1928; Furnifold Simmons to Amos C. Duncan, September 1, 1928, Furnifold Simmons Papers, Box 64, Folder September 1-3, 1928. Noting Simmons' sustained support within the Invisible Empire, one admirer suggested the following fate for a reporter who had written unfavorably of the senator: "the dog in Elizabeth City," was obnoxious enough that "some K.K.K. should tar and feather [him] (when the campaign is over)." Chas. S. Bryan to Furnifold Simmons, October 7, 1928, Furnifold Simmons Papers, Box 66, Folder Oct. 6-10, 1928.

¹⁹⁰⁷ The Republicans' turn to lily-whitism under Hoover in 1928 was only the most recent and most brazen iteration of a longstanding Republican policy of racial Machiavellianism: it was Rutherford B. Hayes who had gained the White House after abandoning black southerners, and even "the wing of the Republican party that raised the loudest outcry against Hayes's policy of deserting the Negro promptly abandoned him itself as soon as it came to power under Garfield and Arthur and threw support to white Republicans in alliance with any white independent organization available." By the 1880s, local southern Republican organizations were also moving in this direction. Indeed, even later reform-minded Republicans like Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft would flirt with a blanched Southern Republicanism in the pursuit of indigenous white support. Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, pp. 216, 219, 463-468; McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, p. 195.

“shoved aside” black party leaders in 1928.¹⁹⁰⁸ Across the nation, it was alleged by African Americans that Hoover sought a “lily-white” Republican Party in order to compete for the South.¹⁹⁰⁹ As William Leuchtenburg points out, “to cater to southern whites, [Hoover] denied that he opposed Jim Crow; allowed his subordinates to make racist remarks; and ignored an appeal to denounce the Ku Klux Klan.”¹⁹¹⁰

None of this is meant to suggest that the Smith Democrats in the South were any better on race—Leuchtenburg has deemed them “far worse.”¹⁹¹¹ Much like the Republican hand-wringing over Bilbo’s attacks on Hoover, the Democrats responded to Republican accusations that Smith was a friend of African Americans with excessively forceful denials. When a Klan lecturer said in Lumberton, North Carolina, that “Al Smith told Senator Glass and John C. Cohn, publisher of the Atlanta Journal, that he would appoint a negro member of his cabinet if elected,” an overwrought Carter Glass was quick to point out that this was an “unmitigated lie.”¹⁹¹² The *Raleigh News and Observer* denigrated McNinch’s attacks on Smith as an appeal “to the moron vote,” countering that it was Hoover who stood for desegregation.¹⁹¹³ As the North Carolina anti-Smith Democrats continued to criticize the New Yorker on race, Daniels’ paper

¹⁹⁰⁸ H. E. C. Bryant, “Hoover to Fight for Mississippi,” *The Charlotte Observer*, September 9, 1928, p. 14.

¹⁹⁰⁹ E.g.: “Negroes Seek Hoover Stand,” *The Charlotte Observer*, November 5, 1928, p. 1; “Gooseneck Bill For Al Smith,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, July 28, 1928, p. 2; “McDonald Raps Hoover As KKK and Lily White,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, August 4, 1928, p. 1; “Goose Neck Bill Scores Hoover,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, October 13, 1928.

¹⁹¹⁰ Leuchtenburg, *Herbert Hoover*, p. 75. Donald J. Lisio disputes the interpretation, held in Leuchtenburg and elsewhere (including herein), that Hoover was engaged in a racial strategy for southern votes in *Hoover, Blacks, & Lily-Whites: A Study of Southern Strategies* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1985).

¹⁹¹¹ Leuchtenburg, *Herbert Hoover*, p. 75. Leuchtenburg is probably correct in his assessment; for example, numerous Democrats protested that a Hoover victory could mean a federal mandate against lynching. “Rousing Democratic Rally is Addressed by T. W. Hardwick,” *The Jackson Progress-Argus*, October 12, 1928, p. 1; Editorial, “Some More South Hating,” *The Jackson Progress-Argus*, October 19, 1928, p. 4.

¹⁹¹² “Senator Glass Hurls ‘Lie’ At Klan Speaker,” *The Charlotte Observer*, October 2, 1928, p. 2.

¹⁹¹³ Editorial, “Appealing to the Moron Vote,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, October 31, 1928, p. 4.

again leapt to his defense, reminding readers that it was the Republicans who sought to extend the franchise “to every ignorant Negro in the South,” and concluding that given each side’s record, “There is no occasion for anyone to talk Negro in this campaign.”¹⁹¹⁴

Nevertheless, Smith’s credibility among white Southerners was poor enough, and his appeal to black Northerners was strong enough, that the issue of race was severely muddled for the first time in the postbellum era. *Washington Star* columnist William Hard noted as much when he suggested that “these two facts—the presence of the Republican foxes in the vineyard of the South and the presence of Democratic wolves in the sheepfold of the colored vote—attest to a revolution in American politics.”¹⁹¹⁵ Most telling was the transformation of the Republican Party in the South, for Democrats were loath to abandon their traditional position on white supremacy. The metamorphosis of one North Carolina Republican aptly demonstrates how 1928 had redrawn the battle lines. In 1915, Charles Andrew Jonas told Lincoln County voters that:

The politician who yells ‘Reconstruction,’ ‘Negro Rule,’ and ‘Butler’ does so for the purpose of blinding the people to the real issues and for the purpose of appealing to the baser natures in men rather than reason and judgment. He wants to win on hate, deception, prejudice, and malice, rather than on merit. He is playing the voters of the state for fools and suckers, and laughs in his sleeve at the success of his decay.¹⁹¹⁶

Yet in 1928, as a congressional candidate on a ticket opposing Al Smith, Jonas felt quite differently about such matters, telling voters in front of Lincoln courthouse:

Let me tell you democrats about one of your candidates. A negro man named McLemore, of St. Louis, educated and considered the best looking negro in the United States, has been nominated by the democratic party for congress. There

¹⁹¹⁴ Editorial, “It Gets Sillier and Sillier,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, November 2, 1928, p. 4.

¹⁹¹⁵ William Hard “Republican Invasion of South Most Striking Phase of the Campaign,” *The Washington Star*, October 21, 1928, Part 2, p. 2.

¹⁹¹⁶ Chas. A. Jonas, “Important Information For Every Voter In Lincoln County, Read It,” 1915, Charles Andrew Jonas Papers, Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Box 6, Folder 53.

are no negro candidates on the republican ticket. In New York state the negroes vote the democratic ticket and they get their share of the profits. There are fifty negro school teachers in New York now and they all teach white children. A negro named Burkley is principal of the first and second ward in New York while the teachers and pupils under him are all white. There are 200 negro policemen in the city. Tammany Hall caters to the negro. Jimmy Walker is the Tammany Hall mayor of New York. Two months ago he addressed a negro meeting in which he said, 'after the first Monday [*sic*] in November I can assure you that you will be as welcome in the White House as you are now in the capitol in Albany.'¹⁹¹⁷

Jonas was elected to Congress that November.

While these were major developments that complicated the racial politics of the South, the election results strongly suggest that the Republicans made only minimal gains in areas of the Black Belt where these questions were traditionally the primary motivator. V. O. Key found that "generally the whites of the black belts remained most steadfast in their loyalty to the Democratic Party, while in the areas of few Negroes the shift to Hoover was most marked."¹⁹¹⁸ The two states with proportionately the most African Americans were also the strongest Smith states: Hoover carried less than 10 percent of the vote in South Carolina and less than 18 percent in Mississippi.¹⁹¹⁹ Meanwhile, states captured by Hoover "had relatively low percentages of Negro population."¹⁹²⁰ Key concluded that the "whites of the black-belt counties were bound in loyalty to the Democracy by a common tradition and anxiety about the Negro. Whites elsewhere could afford the luxury of voting their convictions on the religious and prohibition issues."¹⁹²¹ Within North Carolina, Hoover carried eighteen of the twenty counties with the lowest

¹⁹¹⁷ "Jonas Talks County, State and National Issues to Rousing Republican Gathering," *The Lincoln Times*, October 25, 1928, clipping in the Charles Andrew Jonas Papers, Box 6, Folder 52.

¹⁹¹⁸ Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, p. 318.

¹⁹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

¹⁹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

¹⁹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

percentages of African American population, while Smith carried eighteen of the twenty counties with the largest proportions of black citizens.¹⁹²²

While this was all true, the evidence complicates the question of race a bit. First, it is wrong to presume that voters outside the Black Belt were not motivated by racist ideology; for example, multiple scholars of Southern textile workers have noted the “virulent racism of the villagers” in Piedmont towns where white workers “successfully fought to keep blacks out of the mills,” and forced management, even in times of labor shortages, “to restrict black labor in the mills to janitorial tasks.”¹⁹²³ Furthermore, the traditional Republican vote outside the Black Belt was never enough to produce Republican victory in Florida, North Carolina, Texas, or Virginia, all of which Hoover carried. The Democrats ceded some of their usual base; and while controversies over prohibition and religion certainly carried a great deal of import, the fact that Republicans had to some extent inoculated themselves on the race question and even neutralized the Democrats’ appeals to white supremacy relaxed some of the impetus toward fidelity to the Democracy.

¹⁹²² Data analyzed by the author from U. S. Department of Commerce, R. P. LaMont, Secretary and Bureau of the Census, W. M. Steuart, Director, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930*, Population: Volume III, Part 2, pp. 353-359; Robinson, *The Presidential Vote 1896-1932*, pp. 280-287.

¹⁹²³ John A. Salmond, *Gastonia 1929: The Story of the Loray Mill Strike* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1995), pp. 4-5; see also: Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State, 1986), pp. 188-189; Clifford M. Kuhn, *Contesting the New South Order: The 1914-1915 Strike at Atlanta’s Fulton Mills* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2001), p. 217.

Southern Farmers

Key also recognized that “not only high Negro population ratios were associated with Democratic steadfastness. A complex of factors—ruralism, cotton-growing, plantation organization, intense Reconstruction memories—as well as anxieties about the racial equilibrium characterized the Democratic areas.”¹⁹²⁴ The counties of the Black Belt were also the counties most dominated by agrarian interests, especially tenant cotton farmers and other “dirt farmers”; and as was the case in the Corn Belt, Black Belt farmers and indeed farmers throughout the South were struggling mightily by 1928.

Since 1921, the indexed cost of commodities purchased by farmers had outstripped the amount received for farm products, with only a fleeting break in 1925.¹⁹²⁵ Partially as a result, farm debt ballooned. Across the South, the total value of farm debt increased in proportion to the total value of farm land and buildings between 1920 and 1925: in the South Atlantic region, this figure rose from 29.5 percent to 37.2 percent; in the East South Central region, it grew from 30.9 percent to 42 percent; and in the West South Central region, the value of farm debt was 26.8 percent the value of farm land in 1920, a figure which would grow to 37.4 percent by 1925.¹⁹²⁶

Furthermore, the average price of the ten leading U.S. crops had plummeted in the wake of the Great War, and after a mild rebound from 1922 to 1924, remained

¹⁹²⁴ Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, p. 329.

¹⁹²⁵ United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1929*, p. 642.

¹⁹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 634. The regions described are those used by the U. S. Department of Commerce in its organization of the data cited. The South Atlantic region is defined as Delaware, Maryland, the District of Columbia, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida; the East South Central region is Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi; and the West South Central region is Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas.

stagnant.¹⁹²⁷ Southern farmers engaged in a variety of enterprises, so the general downward trends in agricultural fortunes were bad enough; and with the traditional attachment to cotton still strong in the region, that crop's fate was of particular influence. The relative condition of cotton farmers was on par with that of American farmers as a whole, and in fact appears to have become slightly worse by the mid-1920s.¹⁹²⁸ By that time, the value of the nation's cotton yield had dropped 35 percent since the close of the Great War.¹⁹²⁹

The collapse in cotton had broad effects, especially in the South. In North Carolina and elsewhere in the region, "poor cotton prices tempted growers to turn to tobacco," swamping an already glutted supply of that product and contributing to a 41 percent decline in tobacco prices in the five years after the war.¹⁹³⁰ In 1928, the price of flue-cured tobacco fell below 20¢ per pound for the first time in the decade.¹⁹³¹

Indeed, many important southern crops saw their values collapse in the five years after the armistice, only to remain somewhat stable thereafter: from 1919 to 1924, the value of the peanut yield decreased 43 percent due to lower prices; rice dropped 48 percent; peaches dropped 36 percent.¹⁹³² All of this occurred in addition to the well-chronicled depression in cereals. Cotton or otherwise, Southern farmers were far removed from the vaunted prosperity of the Coolidge years.

¹⁹²⁷ Ibid., p. 667.

¹⁹²⁸ Ibid., pp. 642, 702.

¹⁹²⁹ Ibid., p. 669.

¹⁹³⁰ Anthony J. Badger, *Prosperity Road: The New Deal, Tobacco, and North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1980), p. 21; United States Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1929*, p. 669.

¹⁹³¹ Badger, *Prosperity Road*, p. 21.

¹⁹³² Ibid., p. 669.

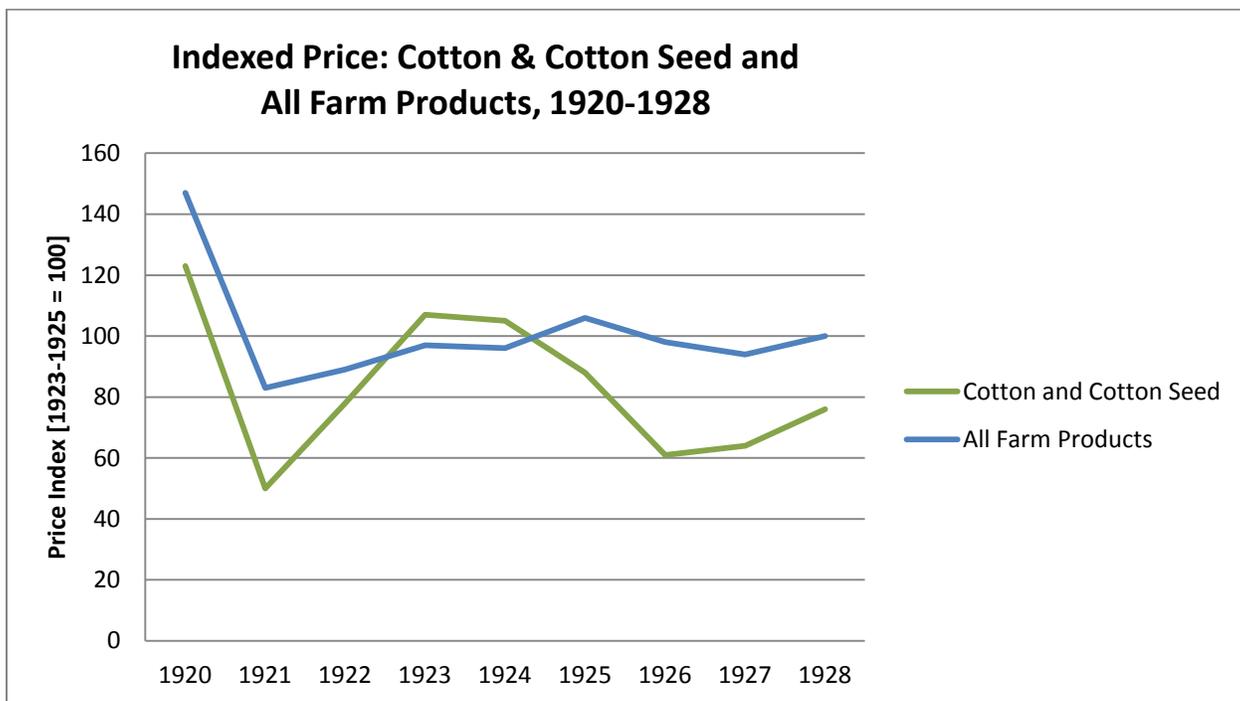


Fig. 7.6: Showing cotton and other agricultural prices in the 1920s.

Because of the enduring significance of agriculture to the social and economic life of the South, Al Smith’s proposals for farm relief and his attacks on the complacency of the Republican administration were compelling to many Southern voters. Much like the candidate’s rhetoric, the agricultural arguments of Southern Smith backers initially focused on criticizing Coolidge and Hoover rather than presenting a positive case for the Democrat. “‘Fair promises butter no parsnips.’ Hoover’s campaign pledges will fool no farmers unless they are suckers,” commented the *Raleigh News and Observer*, which demanded that “every farm editor and every farmer knows that Hoover holds the same views that Coolidge held and was with Coolidge in turning the cold shoulder to every plan of farm relief proposed.”¹⁹³³ A week later, the paper renewed this line of argument,

¹⁹³³ Editorial, “No Dirt Farmer Quoted,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, August 14, 1928, p. 4.

suggesting that the administration's "broken pledges" had sapped farmers' confidence in Hoover's willingness to deliver on promises of relief.¹⁹³⁴

Such arguments were made throughout the campaign, but by the fall they were usually supplemented with modest praise for Smith. In Monetta, South Carolina, former governor Thomas McLeod spoke before a group of asparagus growers, blasting the Coolidge administration and noting that "in eight years they have offered no solution" to the farm crisis.¹⁹³⁵ Suggesting that agriculture presented the "greatest social and economic problem of the day," the governor commended Smith for making the "frank admission" that he was not an authority on farming and pledging that he would therefore rely on farm experts for council.¹⁹³⁶ In this context, the governor encouraged farmers to "get into politics up to your necks and stay there until relief has been obtained as has been the case with labor and industry."¹⁹³⁷ Expressing similar discontent with Republican farm policy in an open letter to the *Athens Banner-Herald*, Georgia congressman C. H. Brand alleged that as commerce secretary, Hoover had schemed to cap the price of cotton at an unprofitable 15¢ per pound.¹⁹³⁸ Moreover, "these eight years of the Republican administration" had witnessed the value of the cotton crop regularly falling "below the cost of production"—a condition made worse by official bulletins from the Department of Agriculture which had prompted further price declines, and exacerbated by President Coolidge's pocket veto of the Muscle Shoals bill, which had

¹⁹³⁴ Editorial, "Two Broken Pledges Destroy Confidence in Promises," *The Raleigh News and Observer*, August 21, 1928, p. 4.

¹⁹³⁵ "Says Farmers Must Get Into Politics," *The Aiken Standard*, October 5, 1928, p. 1.

¹⁹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁹³⁸ "Congressman Brand Explains His Reasons for Supporting Smith," *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 9, 1928, p. 9A.

promised “a saving to the farmers of \$12.73 per ton” on the price of fertilizer.¹⁹³⁹ All of this led Congressman Brand to a similar conclusion to that drawn by Governor McLeod: “I prefer Smith because from what I have learned about him, if elected, he will be a real friend to the cotton farmers of the south, which neither Hoover nor Coolidge has been.”¹⁹⁴⁰

While these endorsements remained grounded largely in antipathy toward the Republican administration, others interested in southern agriculture were more enthusiastic in extolling the Democratic nominee. Early in the campaign, Dr. B. W. Kilgore, president of the American Cotton Growers’ Association, heaped praise upon Smith’s proposals for farm relief.¹⁹⁴¹ Similarly, Dr. H. E. Stockbridge, founder of *The Southern Ruralist* and manager of Warren G. Harding’s 1920 campaign in Georgia, abandoned the Republican Party in favor of Smith out of “sincere appreciation and felicitation for what you said upon the farm situation in your able address accepting your nomination for the presidency.”¹⁹⁴²

Indeed, many Southern leaders viewed the question of farm relief as a prime reason to support Al Smith. “Amid a bedlam of enthusiasm not seen in Atlanta since the stormy days of free silver and gold standard fights,” part-time Georgian Franklin Delano Roosevelt “scoffed at Republican claims of prosperity,” noting “that 444 farms are being abandoned every day of the year, that there is an average of three and one-half bank failures a day, and that farmers are either drifting to the cities or are enduring living

¹⁹³⁹ Ibid., p. 9A.

¹⁹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 9A. It must be noted that, while Rep. Brand focused his remarks on the question of agriculture, he also noted his preference for the Democrat because of Republican support for federal anti-lynching legislation and the threat of “social and racial equality” posed both by Hoover’s Republicanism and his Quakerism.

¹⁹⁴¹ “Kilgore Praises Smith’s Position,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, August 16, 1928, p. 1.

¹⁹⁴² “Leader in G. O. P. Swings to Smith,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 16, 1928, p. 7A.

conditions which are a disgrace to America.”¹⁹⁴³ Cataloguing the lack of affluence in various sections of the nation, Roosevelt concluded, “we are not even prosperous in Meriwether county, Georgia, or any other part of the south where we grow cotton and peaches.”¹⁹⁴⁴ Later, in Columbus, Georgia, Roosevelt suggested that although “we are confronted with the bankruptcy of half of our population” due to the “broken pledges” of the GOP, “Today there is still hope for the re-birth of the farm life of the nation. Governor Alfred E. Smith is the key to accomplishment of that hope.”¹⁹⁴⁵ Georgia senator Walter F. George repeatedly made a similar case, declaring farm relief to be “the big issue between the democrats and republicans in the present national campaign,” and insisting that “if Hoover and Curtis, in eleventh hour statements, promise the farmers that they will give them immediate relief if elected they should not be sent to the white house, but should be put in the common jails of the land for having denied the farmer this relief during the last eight years they have been dominant factors in the republican party.”¹⁹⁴⁶

In a general letter to his fellow Virginians, former congressman J. Murray Hooker promised that “Smith has proven himself, as Governor of New York, to be a warm friend of farmers. . . . He stands for a tariff policy that will do the same for the farmer as for the manufacturer—that will give the farmer economic equality with industry,” concluding: “The farmer who votes for Smith votes for one whose policy for immediate and adequate farm relief is sound. He offers the only hope farmers have of being rescued from the

¹⁹⁴³ Paul Stevenson, “Vast Audience Cheers as Roosevelt Praises Smith’s Record and Flays Democracy’s Foes,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 27, 1928, pp. 1, 10.

¹⁹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁹⁴⁵ “Religious Bias Hit By F. D. Roosevelt,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 5, 1928, p. 10.

¹⁹⁴⁶ Paul Stevenson, “G. O. P. Fears Farmer Vote, States George,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 2, 1928, pp. 1, 8, p. 1; “Gainesville Turns Out To Hear Senator George Urge Solidarity,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 1, 1928, p. 6.

complete ruin which threatens them today.”¹⁹⁴⁷ North Carolina attorney general Dennis G. Brummitt concurred: agricultural relief was the “real issue,” and only Smith could rescue American farmers from “the condition of the European or Asian peasantry.”¹⁹⁴⁸ From the Red River Valley, *Houston Post-Dispatch* correspondent Ed Kilman found that while some locals opposed Smith on religious grounds, “the farmers generally seem convinced that the Smith-Robinson ticket offer[s] more hope for the solution of their problem than Hoover.”¹⁹⁴⁹

Certainly questions of religion, prohibition, and race outranked the issue of farm relief for many Southern voters. However, in a period that experienced a sharp decline in the fortunes of American farmers and in a region that witnessed a discernible Democratic advantage in depressed rural areas, it would be careless to ignore or dismiss the farm question’s importance and the many figures who deemed it the most pressing political issue of the day. In 1930, forty-one of North Carolina’s one hundred counties had half or more of their farms operated by tenants.¹⁹⁵⁰ Twenty-nine of those forty-one voted for Al Smith—who carried only thirty-seven counties in the entire state. Smith won only 37 percent of the counties in North Carolina, but he won 70.7 percent of the counties in which more than half the farms were operated by tenants; and these accounted for 78.3 percent of all the counties carried by the Democrat. Moreover, Smith’s performance was even stronger at the 70 percent tenancy threshold: the Democrat carried all of the thirteen North Carolina counties where at least seven in ten farms were tenant-operated.

¹⁹⁴⁷ J. Murray Hooker, “General Letter,” October 9, 1928, James Cannon Papers, Box 8, Folder 1928: Oct. 1-18.

¹⁹⁴⁸ “Farm Relief is Real Issue, Says Brummitt,” *The Charlotte Observer*, September 27, 1928, p. 3.

¹⁹⁴⁹ Ed Kilman, “Red River Area To Back Smith,” *The Houston Post-Dispatch*, November 4, 1928, p. 4.

¹⁹⁵⁰ See map in Badger, *Prosperity Road*, p. 14.



Fig. 7.7: Cartoon from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (republished in the *Houston Post-Dispatch*), promoting Smith as the hope of desperate farmers.¹⁹⁵¹

Significantly, struggling farmers were not the only Southerners with strong economic motivations in 1928. The business community, Southern manufacturing and financial concerns, and those generally who espoused the virtues of the “New South,” also had an interest in the outcome. They voted accordingly.

¹⁹⁵¹ “You Know Me, Al,” *The Houston Post-Dispatch*, October 30, 1928, p. 6.

New Southerners

“Certain individual democrats have announced opposition to Smith because they are interested in water power companies and have been informed that his election would injure such companies. Why do these citizens not come out in the open? Why do they use the mask of Tammany and religion?”¹⁹⁵² This question was posed mid-campaign by former North Carolina congressman John H. Small, frustrated over the machinations of the anti-Smith Democrats in his home state. And while it is unclear who specifically Small meant to indict with this remark, he identified with it a significant piece of the anti-Smith coalition, one which has been neglected by historians of the 1928 campaign; for while the vast majority of the rank and file Southern Democrats who spurned party regularity in favor of Herbert Hoover were evidently motivated by concerns over prohibition, religion, or even race, many of the élites within that movement were very much motivated by economics. The Coolidge economy, after all, still roared for many.

As a state with both a burgeoning manufacturing base and a social code dominated by Old South cultural conventions, North Carolina provides a particularly compelling case study of this phenomenon. The bulk of the evidence is indirect, but taken in the context of the economic development of the post-Reconstruction South and the political evolution of the Tar Heel State after 1900 it is logical. In the 1920s, the regional economy continued to reflect dynamics that had emerged during the period directly following Reconstruction, while the politics of North Carolina were still firmly

¹⁹⁵² “War on Smith Laid to Power,” *The Charlotte Observer*, September 26, 1928, p. 6.

grounded in the developments of the 1890s. Thus, an understanding of this background is necessary to appreciate in full the political economy of 1928.

C. Vann Woodward, in his epochal *Origins of the New South*, stressed that the groups who “redeemed” Southern states after Reconstruction also set about granting special privileges to private railroads and retrenching state budgets; in general, suggested Woodward, Redeemers “definitely allied themselves with the business interests—with the factory owners, railroad men, and merchants” of the cities.¹⁹⁵³ Meanwhile, Southern entrepreneurs, “uninhibited by the traditions and complacency of the Old Order,” helped enkindle regional manufacturing in tobacco, cotton oil, and textiles in the postbellum period, with considerable acceleration in the final two decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁹⁵⁴ The financial motivations for these developments were matched—particularly in the case of the cotton mills—by a remarkable “public zeal” that “converted economic development into a civic crusade inspired with a vision of social salvation.”¹⁹⁵⁵ These developments affected established Southern metropolises like Atlanta and Charlotte, but their influence was most profound in “isolated Piedmont towns,” where citizens were “suddenly aflame with the mill fever and ‘a passion for rehabilitation.’”¹⁹⁵⁶ Thus, “under the plume of the smokestack and the shadow of the blast furnace grew the New South—the industrial towns of the Piedmont.”¹⁹⁵⁷

The exponents of this New South did not enjoy an uninterrupted series of triumphs in the post-Reconstruction years. Throughout the 1880s, Farmers’ Alliances gained traction among discontented agriculturalists; and by 1890 Southern Populists were

¹⁹⁵³ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, pp. 1, 19.

¹⁹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 130-135.

¹⁹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹⁹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹⁹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

enjoying spectacular electoral success, challenging “New-South romanticism head on” and ridiculing “the clichés of Reconciliation and White Solidarity.”¹⁹⁵⁸ In 1894, disgust with Grover Cleveland’s handling of the economy and a strategy of fusion between Populists and Republicans produced an “outstanding victory” for these insurgents in North Carolina.¹⁹⁵⁹

For both the proponents of white supremacy and those of unfettered economic expansion, these developments demanded another round of “redemption.” Historian Glenda Gilmore has demonstrated the mixed motivations of the fresh Democratic leadership that emerged in response: seeking to modernize and industrialize North Carolina, the “new generation of white men—educated, urban, and bourgeois plotted to replace the white Democrats of their fathers’ generation within the party structure and to recapture power from the Populist/Republican coalition. . . . The New White Man proposed to meet backward-looking agrarian unrest with forward-looking urban remedies.”¹⁹⁶⁰ In 1898 this group seized control of the state in an ugly and violent campaign lead by Furnifold Simmons, aided by his close ally Josephus Daniels and the *Raleigh News and Observer*.¹⁹⁶¹ The rhetoric employed during this defenestration was that of white supremacy and the “protection of white womanhood”; while the resources came from North Carolina businessmen.¹⁹⁶² Gilmore notes that “Simmons collected hefty monetary contributions from industrialists across the state to reprint Daniels’s newspaper articles as broadsides and send them to county Democratic leaders to

¹⁹⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 192, 235, 249.

¹⁹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 276-277, 280.

¹⁹⁶⁰ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, pp. 63-65, 66, 77.

¹⁹⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 66, 88, 92.

¹⁹⁶² Ibid., pp. 82-83, 92, 117.

distribute to voters.”¹⁹⁶³ Moreover, notes another study, Simmons “promised the railroad[s] and other large corporations that taxes would not be increased if they too would fall in line against the Fusionists”; a pragmatic politician, “Simmons wanted to keep in with industrial leaders,” since “publicity did not then have to be given about campaign funds Railway President Colonel Andrews could ever count upon Simmons, even as Simmons could count upon the colonel’s contribution.”¹⁹⁶⁴

After the 1898 triumph, Furnifold Simmons became the undisputed leader of North Carolina’s Democratic Party, and was sent to the United States Senate in 1900; the “Simmons machine” would dominate the state’s politics for the next three decades.¹⁹⁶⁵ The economic motivations of Simmons’ racially charged ascent to power, and the industrial allies the Democrat made in the years culminating with his 1898 crusade, predetermined the nature of his powerful regime: cultural conservatism blended with “business progressivism.”¹⁹⁶⁶ As a result, in the opening decades of the twentieth century, “North Carolina’s Democratic politics became a tug-of-war between its historically conservative impulses and a progressive mood of reform; between the

¹⁹⁶³ Ibid., p. 88.

¹⁹⁶⁴ Pocahontas Wight Edmunds, *Tar Heels Track the Century: Andrew Johnson, Z. B. Vance, M. W. Ransom, C. B. Aycock, O. Henry, J. B. Duke, W. H. Page, F. M. Simmons, Josephus Daniels, Thomas Wolfe* (Raleigh, NC: Edwards and Broughton, 1966), p. 210.

¹⁹⁶⁵ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, p. 35.

¹⁹⁶⁶ Journalist Rob Christensen captured the machine’s ethos when he classified it as: “a ruthless, antireform organization that loved to thump the Bible in public but had few reservations about stealing an election behind closed doors. It reflected the social conservatism of the countryside: North Carolina should be run for the benefit of whites only, women shouldn’t bother their little heads over voting, liquor was the devil’s tool, and Catholics couldn’t be trusted with power. But at the same time, the Simmons Machine oversaw an era of business progressivism, as North Carolina began moving away from agriculture and toward textile, furniture, and cigarette factories that would make the state the most industrialized in the South. There was a major push for the improvement of the public schools, the creation of one of the nation’s largest road-building programs, and the rise of the University of North Carolina as the premier public university in the South.” Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, p. 35.

interests of farmers and those of the rising industrialist class; between the Simmons Machine and party insurgents.”¹⁹⁶⁷



Fig. 7.8: North Carolina political chieftain and Al Smith opponent Furnifold M. Simmons, in 1913.¹⁹⁶⁸

Simmons himself was increasingly attacked by populists as a “conservative tool of the state’s industrial interests”; and progressive Democrats, offended by the leader’s support for specific tariffs favored by North Carolina businesses including the powerful timber industry, ran a spirited but unsuccessful campaign to oust the senator in 1912.¹⁹⁶⁹ In the Wilson years and after, Simmons would become a particularly strong voice for low tariffs, co-sponsoring the Revenue Act of 1913 (dubbed the Underwood-Simmons Tariff); and in national affairs—as opposed to those of his state—he exhibited

¹⁹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁹⁶⁸ Bain News Service, Publisher, “Senator F. M. Simmons, N. C.,” George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

¹⁹⁶⁹ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, pp. 45-46.

progressive tendencies.¹⁹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the senator remained a close ally of railroad barons and the Duke tobacco clan, and in general retained his reputation for “consorting with rich men.”¹⁹⁷¹

In 1949 V. O. Key reviewed the political economy that resulted from these developments:

Industrialization has created a financial and business elite whose influence prevails in the state’s political and economic life. An aggressive aristocracy of manufacturing and banking . . . has had a tremendous stake in state policy and has not been remiss in protecting and advancing what it visualizes as its interests. Consequently a sympathetic respect for the problems of corporate capital and of large employers permeates the state’s politics and government. For half a century an economic oligarchy has held sway.¹⁹⁷²

Key concluded that “the effectiveness of the oligarchy’s control has been achieved through the elevation to office of persons fundamentally in harmony with its viewpoint. Its interests, which are often the interests of the state, are served without prompting.”¹⁹⁷³

Under the care of the Simmons machine and the enlightened state leadership of several of Simmons’ hand-picked governors, North Carolina industry flourished.¹⁹⁷⁴

These regimes tended to be “Progressive, forward looking . . . but always sound, always

¹⁹⁷⁰ In general, Simmons was in accord with the more populist positions of national Democrats unless these positions ran afoul of his industrial allies at home: “While he voted for high tariff on lumber to protect the tar, pitch and turpentine interests of his section, he was usually in Democratic low tariff company although he was accused of consorting with financiers. . . . Senator LaFollette called Simmons a ‘Jekyll and Hyde’ on tariff.” Edmunds, *Tar Heels Track the Century*, p. 214. Charles M. Dollar, “The South and the Fordney-McCumber Tariff of 1922: A Study in Regional Politics,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 39:1 (February, 1973), pp. 45-66, p. 49; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, p. 47. Historian Anne Firor Scott notes Simmons’ national progressivism: “In his own state Simmons had a reputation for conservatism, which persists to this day, but this reputation is belied by his voting record both in the period covered here and during the years of the Wilson administration.” Anne Firor Scott, “A Progressive Wind From the South, 1906-1913,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 29:1 (February, 1963), pp. 53-70, p. 70.

¹⁹⁷¹ Even Simmons’ ally Daniels accused him of “consorting with rich men” according to author Pocahontas Edmunds. Edmunds, *Tar Heels Track the Century*, pp. 214, 216.

¹⁹⁷² Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, p. 211.

¹⁹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 211. Indeed, Key recognized the very point that bedevils this study—the lack of direct, concrete evidence of any formal alliance—there was no “direct line of authority, or even of communication, from the skyscraper offices of industrial magnates to the state capitol,” but rather the political organization that dominated the state shared the economic priorities of North Carolina business.

¹⁹⁷⁴ *E.g.*: The administration of Cameron Morrison, discussed below.

the kind of government liked by the big investor, the big employer.”¹⁹⁷⁵ Prior to the Great War the leading sector in this regional boom was textiles, an industry which had weathered the panic of 1893 and enjoyed spectacular growth in the South during the early years of the twentieth century—often at the expense of the more mature New England mills.¹⁹⁷⁶ In the late nineteenth century, “Southern boomers and capital seekers” had tallied a number of advantages to investment in their region, but the most significant differences between New England and the Piedmont involved labor costs.¹⁹⁷⁷ Indeed, as economic historian Gavin Wright has stressed, “in the post-Civil War era . . . the South constituted a separate regional labor market, outside the scope of national and international labor markets that were active and effective during the same era. . . . Labor market channels that originated in agriculture carried over into mining, manufacturing, and other types of employment. . . . employers were well aware of . . . ties of family and race and made use of them in labor recruitment and job-design policies, which therefore served to reinforce and maintain the initial regionalism.”¹⁹⁷⁸ During and after the World War, the labor situation in the Piedmont became more complicated, as was the case nationally, and it would be a gross error to imagine Southern workers as a docile group

¹⁹⁷⁵ Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, p. 214.

¹⁹⁷⁶ From 1890 to 1897, southern textiles added spindles at a rate of 151 percent; this figure stood at only 20 percent in New England. The South continued to make remarkable gains in the 1900s: in 1904 the region surpassed New England in cotton consumption and cotton yarn production, surpassing the whole of the nation in these categories in 1914 and 1909, respectively. In 1899 Southerners worked 27.6 percent of the nation’s spindles; by 1914 that figure was 35.5 percent (New England’s share declined from 60.1 percent to 54.4 percent in the same period). Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, pp. 299, 305, 306, 308.

¹⁹⁷⁷ In 1897 it was estimated by one New England group that North Carolina millworkers labored 24 percent longer and cost 40 percent less than their Massachusetts peers. As “bankrupt croppers and tenants, despairing of making a living from 5-cent cotton, left the land for the mill” throughout the 1890s, southern textiles were provided an abundant supply of “cheap and tractable labor.” Laborers in southern mills endured a work week of anywhere from sixty-six to seventy-five hours in the early years of the twentieth century (North Carolina’s work week was sixty-nine hours in 1906). *Ibid.*, pp. 305-307.

¹⁹⁷⁸ Wright, *Old South, New South*, pp. 7, 9; see also, pp. 124-155.

who submitted cheerfully to the paternalism of industrialists.¹⁹⁷⁹ Nevertheless, after the turbulence of the immediate post-war years, the mid-1920s were marked by relative calm, as the waves of textile strikes that were ravaging the North would hold off until 1929 in the Piedmont; and despite market turmoil, throughout this period “textiles dominated the economy, the politics of the community, and the lives of the workers.”¹⁹⁸⁰ Furthermore, Wright notes that during this entire period, “as relative southern wages fell in the late nineteenth century—while European immigrants filled the unskilled industrial jobs of the North—both the economic and cultural gaps actually widened and in many respects were greater in the 1920s and 1930s than they had been since the Civil War itself.”¹⁹⁸¹

This was the economic context of North Carolina politics in 1928. The Piedmont remained dominated by industrial interests, especially textiles; the cities continued to harbor great enthusiasm for the sustained progress of the New South economy; the working class remained somewhat isolated from their cohorts in other regions, both culturally and economically; and the Democratic Party, under the control of the Simmons organization, remained an institution devoted to progressive policies as defined by the business community. Finally, the geography of this political economy is noteworthy: the hotbed of resistance to the Simmons machine was the Black Belt. Key noted that this was an “odd aspect of North Carolina sectionalism” since, for example, “agrarian radicalism, reminiscent of the Populists and centered in the same areas as the strength of

¹⁹⁷⁹ E.g.: “From 1919 to 1921, industrial strife rocked the Piedmont as workers flocked to join the AFL’s United Textile Workers (UTW), which before the war had no presence in the South at all.” Salmond, *Gastonia 1929*, p. 7. See also: Kuhn, *Contesting the New South Order*; Bryant Simon, “Choosing between the Ham and the Union: Paternalism in the Cone Mills of Greensboro, 1925-1930,” in Jeffrey Leiter, Michael D. Schulman, and Rhonda Zingraff, eds., *Hanging by a Thread: Social Change in Southern Textiles* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1991), pp. 81-100; Linda Frankel, “‘Jesus Leads Us, Cooper Needs Us, the Union Feeds Us’: The 1958 Harriet-Henderson Textile Strike,” in *Ibid.*, pp. 101-120, pp. 105-108.

¹⁹⁸⁰ Salmond, *Gastonia 1929*, pp. 9, 10, 23; Quote from Frankel, “‘Jesus Leads Us, Cooper Needs Us, the Union Feeds Us’: The 1958 Harriet-Henderson Textile Strike,” p. 105.

¹⁹⁸¹ Wright, *Old South, New South*, p. 9.

the People's party, is found in the Alabama counties with fewest Negroes."¹⁹⁸² Meanwhile, "in North Carolina opposition to the political machine, to the economic oligarchy of manufacturing and financial interests, comes from the counties with the most Negroes. These counties as a group did not constitute the area of greatest Populist sentiment in the 'nineties."¹⁹⁸³ This anomaly could "be understood only in terms of [the Black Belt's] minority position in North Carolina's new prosperity."¹⁹⁸⁴ Therefore, in an odd twist, the Simmons machine found its greatest strength in the Republican counties of western North Carolina, where solidarity was demanded by partisan competition—but also where the economic ideology of the voters was more in line with the New South boosterism of the organization.

Within this context, Al Smith's denunciations of the low wages of New England textile workers (wages which seemed generous when compared with those offered in the Piedmont) and his vaguely threatening posture toward the power industry begin to hint at an economic motivation for opposition to the Democrat by the business-friendly Simmons machine. One author pointed cryptically at this when she wrote of Simmons: "He said that he was not against Al Smith as a Catholic but as a wet and as a representative of Tammany Hall and of Wall Street. (Incidentally, Smith was against Simmons and industrialists like the Dukes.)"¹⁹⁸⁵ This is going too far, for Al Smith was no Robert La Follette. But the thesis is a compelling one given the political economy of North Carolina in 1928 and particularly given the sectional splits revealed by the election returns.

¹⁹⁸² Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, p. 217.

¹⁹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

¹⁹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

¹⁹⁸⁵ Edmunds, *Tar Heels Track the Century*, p. 218.

Hoover was victorious in the counties of the west, which were established Republican strongholds, while Al Smith retained most of the traditionally Democratic Black Belt. The major shifts occurred on the peripheries of the areas of traditional Republican strength. Republican totals increased in already Republican counties as well as on the margins of these regions, thus pushing a larger portion of the Piedmont into the GOP column.¹⁹⁸⁶ These were the areas that had the greatest attachment to the Simmons machine, and therefore it is apparent that the senator's defection from the Democratic ranks had the greatest influence within the areas of his traditional strength.¹⁹⁸⁷ Tellingly, the greatest Republican achievements in eastern North Carolina occurred in the southeastern portion of the state, where a handful of counties had flirted with Republicanism in the past but where the Simmons machine "was strong in some sure Democratic counties," due to the senator's roots near New Bern in Jones County.¹⁹⁸⁸

This demonstrates the power of the Simmons machine and of the senator's personal appeal to many constituents, but not necessarily any economic motivation in voting. Certainly voters loyal to Simmons were aware of his business progressive ideology, but he did not express these sentiments during his campaign against Smith—relying instead, as he had in 1898, on divisive cultural appeals. Yet the nature of the areas that defected to Hoover does provide some insight beyond suggesting fidelity to Simmons. Many of the western counties that flipped to the GOP were important centers of industry—Gaston County, for example, which tallied a Republican majority for the

¹⁹⁸⁶ Robinson, *The Presidential Vote 1896-1932*, pp. 280-287; Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, pp. 321-322.

¹⁹⁸⁷ Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, pp. 223-227.

¹⁹⁸⁸ Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, p. 223; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, pp. 37-38.

first time in the twentieth century.¹⁹⁸⁹ Significantly, Key found a glaring exception to the general rule that counties with large black populations voted Democratic: “Counties with large urban centers tended generally to be more Republican than were rural counties with comparable proportions of Negro population.”¹⁹⁹⁰ Indeed, this was the case not only in North Carolina but across the South.¹⁹⁹¹ It was not simply that the Black Belt South remained steadfastly Democratic in 1928; rather, it was only the old, depressed, cotton South. It was probably the case, as Key suggested, that urban whites were not as captivated by race as their rural counterparts and were therefore easier to sway on questions of religion and prohibition; but it is also true that it was the cities which were home to the most fervent exponents of the New South.¹⁹⁹² In his political history of the region, Dewey Grantham hinted at this when he pointed out Hoover’s success in “such growth-minded cities as Dallas, Houston, Birmingham, Atlanta, and Richmond.”¹⁹⁹³ Kevin P. Phillips, one of the architects of Richard Nixon’s “southern strategy,” noted these trends as he crafted his “political bible of the Nixon era,” *The Emerging Republican Majority* (1969).¹⁹⁹⁴ Hoover’s success had drawn on cultural factors to be sure, but also on “increasing middle-class Republicanism in the Piedmont (North Carolina and Virginia) [and] growing economic Republicanism in the new resort and plains cities

¹⁹⁸⁹ Robinson, *The Presidential Vote 1896-1932*, p. 283.

¹⁹⁹⁰ Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, p. 328.

¹⁹⁹¹ This was found to be the case in Texas, Alabama, and Georgia as well. *Ibid.*, pp. 321-326.

¹⁹⁹² Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, pp. 63, 65; Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, pp. 154-155; Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, p. 328.

¹⁹⁹³ Grantham, *The Life & Death of the Solid South*, p. 75.

¹⁹⁹⁴ On Phillips, see Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, The Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), pp. 378-379. Dan T. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution 1963-1994* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University, 1996), pp. 42-44. *The Emerging Republican Majority* was referred to as the “political bible . . .” by *Newsweek* magazine.

(Florida and Texas).”¹⁹⁹⁵ Recognizing the business conservatism at play against the Democratic candidate, Phillips concluded that “while anti-Catholicism was important, it was by no means the only factor at work for Hoover.”¹⁹⁹⁶

Phillips elaborated that Texas and Florida, formerly “stalwart Southern Democratic states,” had been transformed during “the boom times of the Nineteen-Twenties,” which had spurred “rapid urbanization in cities like Houston, Dallas and Miami, bringing commerce and an element of Republicanism.”¹⁹⁹⁷ The crux of this argument, which appears to some degree in the work of both Grantham and Key, is the centrality of urban expansion and economic dynamism to the Southern Hoover coalition. The story of the Simmons machine merges with these hypotheses to present a snapshot of the New South embracing Republican prosperity over Democratic calls for reform in 1928; a conclusion that is strongly supported by the electoral data.

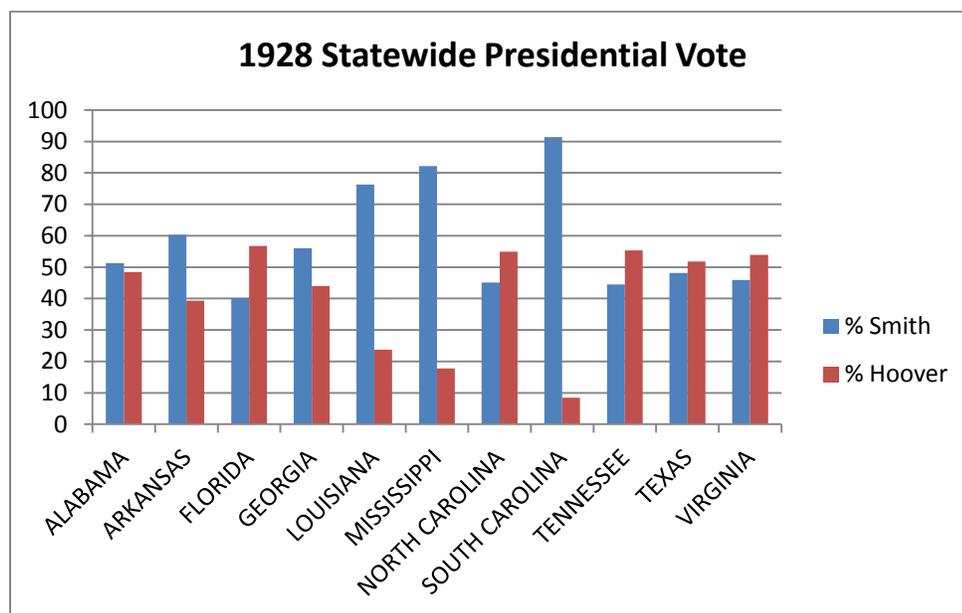
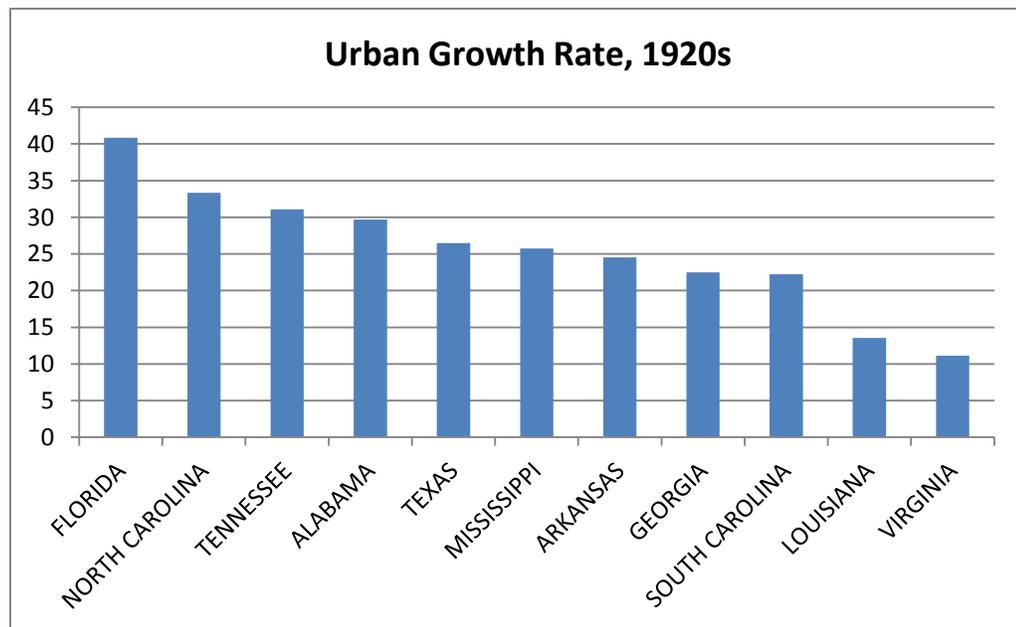
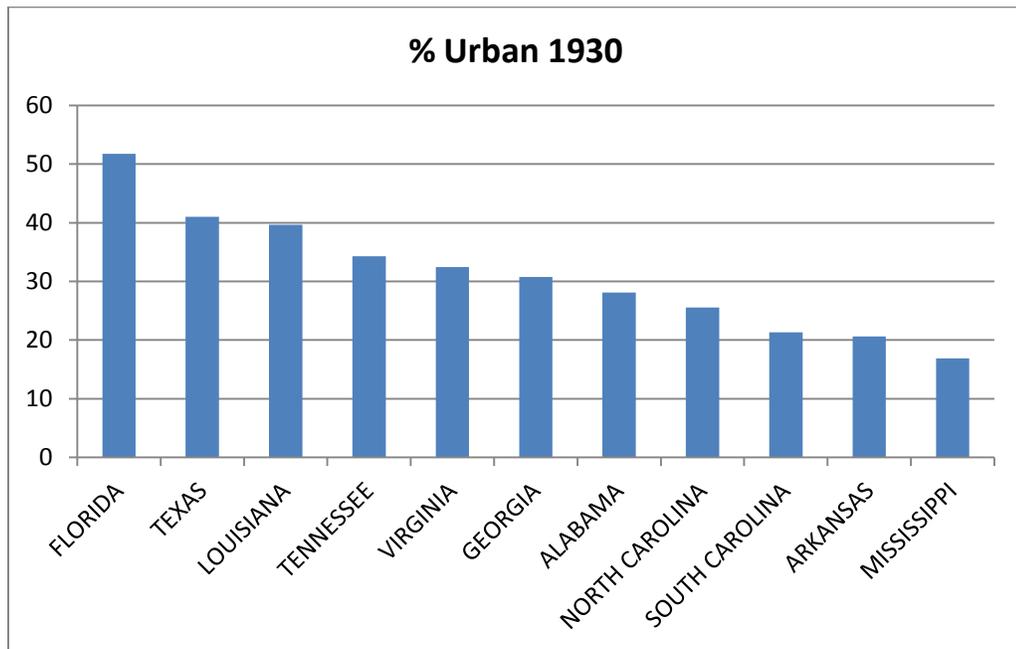


Fig. 7.9: Presidential voting in the former Confederate states, 1928.

¹⁹⁹⁵ Kevin P. Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969), p. 195.

¹⁹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

¹⁹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 245.



Figs. 7.10 and 7.11: Charting urbanization rates in the 1920s South.

On the state level, there was a strong connection between Republican success and the rates of statewide population growth, urbanization, and relative urban growth. In the eleven former Confederate states, Hoover carried four of the five states with the highest

relative urban populations (the exception was Louisiana), while he lost all but one (North Carolina) of the six least urbanized. Yet North Carolina was not actually bucking the trend, for the Tar Heel State trailed only Florida in its rate of urbanization relative to its over-all population growth during the 1920s, and by this measure again four of the top five states went to Hoover. The exception, Alabama, was barely retained by the Democrats. There were, moreover, discernible negative correlations between Smith's performance in Southern states and both the relative urban population of the state and the relative growth rate of that state's urban population in the 1920s.

At the county level within North Carolina, these trends were even more remarkable. The state's urban growth rate in the 1920s was a robust 65 percent. Twenty-one counties outpaced the state average; of these, eight had no urban population whatsoever in 1920 and continued to have minimal urban populations at the end of the decade. However, of the remaining thirteen, most included important urban centers like Greensboro and High Point (Guilford County, urban growth rate of 164.4 percent); Durham (Durham County, 139.6 percent); Burlington (Alamance County, 113.5 percent); Charlotte (Mecklenburg County, 78.4 percent); Asheville (Buncombe County, 76.1 percent); and Gastonia (Gaston County, 75.2 percent).¹⁹⁹⁸ Of these thirteen most dynamic urban counties, eleven voted for Hoover. Even more tellingly, ten of them had voted for Democrat John W. Davis in 1924, and seven had not voted for a Republican since William Howard Taft in 1908. Mecklenburg and Durham voted Republican for the first time in the twentieth century.¹⁹⁹⁹ These internal trends reveal the New South dynamism associated with the Hoover coalition in North Carolina—and the story of that

¹⁹⁹⁸ Data analyzed by the author from U. S. Department of Commerce, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population: Volume III, Part 2*, pp. 353-359.

¹⁹⁹⁹ Robinson, *The Presidential Vote, 1896-1932*, pp. 280-287.

state was replayed across the urban South. This city-based strength for Hoover was made all the more ominous for Democrats by the increasingly urban nature of the North Carolina electorate. In the Wilson years, the twenty most urbanized counties in North Carolina cast around 31 percent of the state’s presidential ballots; by 1928, that figure was 38 percent.²⁰⁰⁰ It was in these New South counties—rather than the old, poor, stagnant counties of the Black Belt—that elections were increasingly being decided; and it was there that the Republicans saw their greatest triumphs.

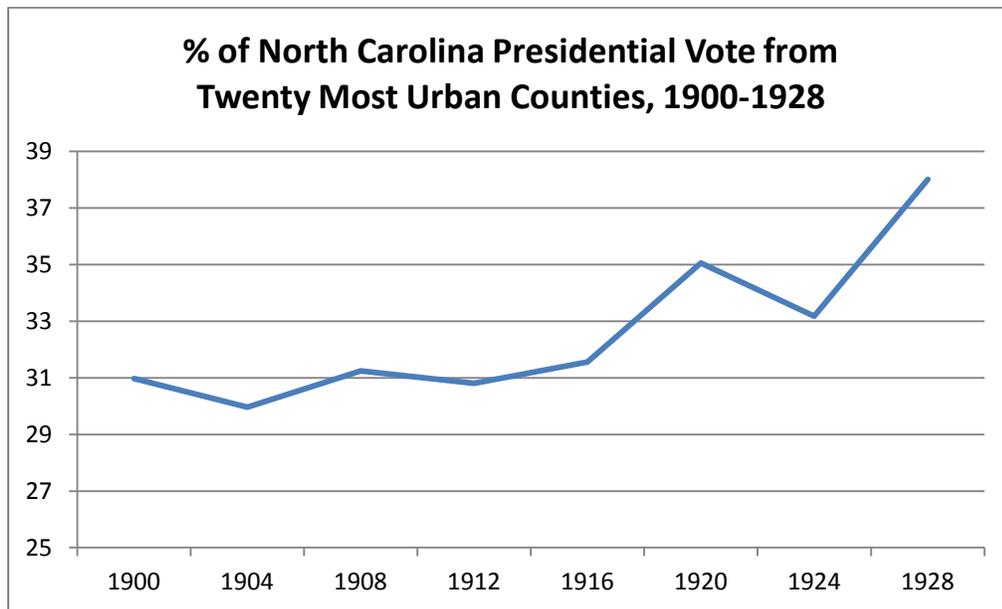


Fig. 7.12: Showing the increasing voting strength of urban North Carolina, 1900-1928.

In fact, the political potential of the ongoing revolution in Southern economic attitudes was noted early in the campaign by syndicated columnist Mark Sullivan, who suggested that “even in the South where prohibition and Tammany are almost the exclusive topics of popular discussion business lies in the background, influencing a more important, if not more numerous class of voters than the other campaign

²⁰⁰⁰ These were the twenty counties most urban in 1930 (in ascending order): Cumberland, Alamance, Chowan, Cleveland, Lenoir, Wayne, Edgecombe, Iredell, Rowan, Gaston, Craven, Wake, Davidson, Buncombe, Pasquotank, Mecklenburg, Forsyth, Guilford, New Hanover, and Durham.

arguments.”²⁰⁰¹ Sullivan predicted that while the more “familiar arguments” would motivate “the bulk of those Southern voters who will interrupt their customary party allegiance . . . if any Southern states actually go Republican, the margin that makes a Republican majority will come from the business community.”²⁰⁰² These developments were possible since “business has been . . . increasing as the vocation of Southerners,” and “most of those Southern business men, especially the younger ones, share the traditional point of view which regards the Republicans as the party of business.”²⁰⁰³ In fact, the seeds of change had been planted during the Harding regime, when the GOP began openly to court Southern business on the question of the tariff.²⁰⁰⁴ By 1928 the Baltimore-based *Manufacturers’ Record*, a relentless booster of Southern industry, was decrying the “spirit of vituperation” exhibited by Southern Smith partisans “against the so-called ‘robber barons’ of the Republican party,” noting that “fortunately the real business people of the South are not of that way of thinking. They welcome the Northern and Western capital, and gladly cooperate with both.”²⁰⁰⁵ The next month Herbert Hoover made clear that he had taken these editors at their word.

On October 6, the Republican nominee traveled to Elizabethton, Tennessee—another urban monument to Southern industry—to laud the “amazing progress of the South in this past seven and one-half years.”²⁰⁰⁶ He cited numerous statistics to demonstrate the “enormous increase in wealth and production,” linking these trends to

²⁰⁰¹ Mark Sullivan, “Tariff Issue Now to the Fore,” *The Hartford Courant*, September 16, 1928, p. E7.

²⁰⁰² *Ibid.*, p. E7.

²⁰⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. E7.

²⁰⁰⁴ Dollar, “The South and the Fordney-McCumber Tariff of 1922: A Study in Regional Politics,” pp. 45-66.

²⁰⁰⁵ Quoted in Sullivan, “Tariff Issue Now to the Fore,” p. E7.

²⁰⁰⁶ “Text of Mr. Hoover’s Appeal to the South in Address Yesterday at Elizabethton, Tenn.,” *The New York Times*, October 7, 1928, p. 2. Irving Bernstein describes Elizabethton as Southern industry’s “new tabernacle,” and links Hoover’s “glowing picture of the industrializing South” to his Tennessee victory. Bernstein, *The Lean Years*, p. 14.

the policies of the national administration.²⁰⁰⁷ The candidate also appealed to Southern businessmen with a unique variation on his stock theme that Smith's proposals represented unwarranted extensions of the government into competition with private enterprise: not only would this run counter to the "American system"; it also represented "the destruction of States' rights."²⁰⁰⁸

None of this is to suggest that Al Smith somehow sought to do battle with either the ideology or the results of the New South. The threat to business from his economic progressivism was mild, and indeed Smith enjoyed plenty of support from Southern business élites—Georgia governor L. G. Hardman, who endorsed the New Yorker on the basis of party loyalty, had risen to prominence as a mill owner; and the Southern Railway did its part to aid the Democratic campaign by offering Atlantans "a special excursion rate" on train fares to see the nominee appear in Chattanooga.²⁰⁰⁹ Yet when compared to Hoover's enthusiasm for Piedmont industry, Smith's interest in public hydroelectric projects, his sympathetic overtures to struggling Northern textile workers, and his assorted critiques of the economic status quo, proved unpalatable to many in Southern business.

²⁰⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

²⁰⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 2. Hoover continued that "Democracy however must be master of its own house," and suggested that federal conservation of natural resources was necessary; but even here he remained ambiguous on the implications of this philosophy for water power and of course later would clarify his position through his attacks on the Democratic plan for government operation. From a distance, Uncle Dudley, the *Boston Globe's* pseudonymous editorial writer, noted the "calculated dexterity" with which the Republican had contended "sharply for private development and operation of our natural resources. . . . tak[ing] up the gauntlet thrown down by Gov. Smith." Uncle Dudley, "A Bow To Dixie," *The Boston Globe*, October 8, 1928, p. 14. Returning northward from a campaign tour through Dixie later in the month, Senator Borah noted "a marked increase in sentiment in favor of the protective tariff system" supplementing the dominant questions of immigration and prohibition; and the Republican predicted "that the next quarter of a century will mark a most important industrial development in the south." "Dry, Alien Issues Grip South, Borah Asserts," *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 26, 1928, p. 24.

²⁰⁰⁹ "'Vote Straight Ticket,' Gov. Hardman Urges," *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 1, 1928, p. 1; "Southern Excursion," *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 10, 1928, p. 7.

Those who remained cheerful about the course of Southern industry were drawn to Hoover's complimentary remarks—certainly more than to the constant quibbling of Smith and his backers, who, like the writer “Jeffersonian” in Burlington, North Carolina, exhorted Southerners to “let your conscience be your guide. Vote for the money making Hoover or the humanitarian Smith.”²⁰¹⁰ While Hoover claimed that the prosperity of the New South had enjoyed “wide distribution,” Texas senator Morris Sheppard, a Smith Democrat, continued to claim that “only the privileged few are prosperous.”²⁰¹¹ Given the choice between these two arguments it is only natural that the paladins of Southern progress would opt for the sanguine over the critical.

Interestingly, the two leading men associated with the Simmons machine that remained loyal to Smith in 1928 often asked such critical questions. In Orlando, Josephus Daniels suggested that because “republican policies, after seven and one-half years have not given farm relief and steady employment, the sensible voter will give the verdict ‘weighed in the balance and found wanting’ and will vote a change.”²⁰¹² Meanwhile, O. Max Gardner, a one-time foe of Simmons who had “made his peace with the old man,” ran for governor in 1928 with the organization's imprimatur—while campaigning actively for Al Smith.²⁰¹³ During one speech, Gardner invoked the sort of partisan economic ideology that had been expressed by Northern Smith allies like Anthony Griffin before textile workers in New England when he said:

The Democratic Party believes that things were made for men, the Republican that men were made for things. The Democratic Party believes in the rights of men, the Republican Party in the ‘PRIVILEGES OF MEN.’ The Democratic

²⁰¹⁰ “Jeffersonian,” “Letter to the Editor,” *The Burlington Daily Times*, October 25, 1928, p. 3.

²⁰¹¹ “Text of Mr. Hoover's Appeal to the South in Address Yesterday at Elizabethton, Tenn.,” p.2; “Texas Senator Flays Hoover on Prohibition,” *The Anniston Star*, October 23, 1928, p. 1.

²⁰¹² “Prosperity of G.O.P. Scored,” *The Charlotte Observer*, October 17, 1928, pp. 1, 12.

²⁰¹³ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, p. 35.

Party believes that politics is humanity, the rule of the people, the betterment of the race, service to the intimate needs of the masses, beneficial endeavor. Have you ever heard a Republican politician anywhere who did not say that ‘politics is business’?²⁰¹⁴

In a speech earlier that year, Gardner, himself a textile manufacturer, expressed his discomfort with the overzealous materialism that might arise from the economic progress of the New South.²⁰¹⁵ Before the High Point College graduating class of ’28, Gardner considered: “what is the dominant thing we are thinking about in North Carolina today? It has been charged that we are thinking too much in the arithmetic of material things and too little in the mathematics of men, that we are thinking more of money than we are of men. There is undoubtedly some basis for this belief, and it is running pretty strong through the current of American life.”²⁰¹⁶ While this was a disturbing trend, the speaker suggested that “the serious thought of North Carolina is not concentrated wholly on things, but is gradually and constantly growing in the human and social philosophy of life that finds expression in the application of money to the multiplication of better and finer opportunities and social conditions for the individual man,” and proposed “for North Carolina a sustained thinking in human problems” as an alternative to the profit-driven credo of the 1920s.²⁰¹⁷ That September, Gardner would apply this thinking to his endorsement of Smith, suggesting that while he had initially opposed the New Yorker’s nomination on prohibitionist grounds, “I have also great admiration for the progressive legislation Governor Smith has secured and applied as Governor of New York. I feel that he has demonstrated beyond question his absolute integrity, and has exerted his great

²⁰¹⁴ “Untitled Gardner Campaign Speech, 1928,” O. Max Gardner Papers, Box 45, Folder 709, p. 1.

²⁰¹⁵ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, p. 48.

²⁰¹⁶ O. Max Gardner, “The Arithmetic of Christianity: Extract from a Speech Delivered before the Graduating Class of High Point College, High Point, N.C. May 28, 1928,” p. 1, O. Max Gardner Papers, Box 45, Folder 709.

²⁰¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

administrative ability generously and humanely in behalf of the people rather than the interests.”²⁰¹⁸



Fig. 7.13: O. Max Gardner as governor of North Carolina, on a visit to Chapel Hill in 1929.²⁰¹⁹

It is a fine distinction to be sure, but one which parallels Smith’s own critiques of the political economy of the 1920s. Gardner, like Smith, was friendly toward business; but both men were nevertheless troubled by the fact that public policy had focused increasingly on promoting economic dynamism rather than human welfare. In North Carolina, the regions that voted for Smith were those that felt the ill-effects of these

²⁰¹⁸ O. Max Gardner, “Extract from Address Delivered by O. Max Gardner, Democratic Nominee for Governor, Opening his Campaign at Boone, North Carolina, September 3rd,” p. 2, O. Max Gardner Papers, Box 45, Folder 709.

²⁰¹⁹ Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC, Collections #3590-#3614, Volume 3/P-3613, Box P-3613, Folders 3 and 4.

policies most acutely; while those that voted for Hoover tended to be the ones that continued to reap the benefits of the status quo and subscribe to its ideological foundations.²⁰²⁰ Furthermore, public figures who diverged from this trend, including an urban New South booster and Simmons ally (Josephus Daniels) and a textile businessman from the Piedmont town of Shelby (Max Gardner), tended to be those who moderated their excitement for the material progress of the South with a recognition of the need to address economic ills and questions of social welfare.²⁰²¹

Southern Democrats and Progressive Southerners

Not all of the organization men who clung to the national ticket in 1928 were motivated by scruples with the economic status quo. Many Simmons Democrats were Democrats first, and this was especially the case with politicians and publishers as opposed to the business community or even rank and file citizens.²⁰²² In a vivid example of this, a Wachovia banker from Asheville lamented in a letter to Simmons that his son, the editor of the *Hickory Record*, was supporting Al Smith because “he is influenced by

²⁰²⁰ Indeed, it is a testament to Max Gardner’s popularity in his native Cleveland County that it was that county, with an urban growth rate of 156.2 percent in the 1920s, which most glaringly deviated from this dynamism-Republicanism correlation; for Cleveland County was carried by Al Smith with 50.8 percent of the vote. Robinson, *The Presidential Vote, 1896-1932*, p. 282.

²⁰²¹ Gardner himself attributed Smith’s losses in the South to anti-Catholicism. Joseph L. Morrison, *Governor O. Max Gardner: A Power in North Carolina and New Deal Washington* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1971), pp. 50-51.

²⁰²² On the press, Colonel Horace Mann, leading the Republican campaign in the south, found Democratic strength “crumbling,” but declared that these developments were inhibited by the “lack of support from hostile Democratic press.” Robert B. Armstrong, “Solid South Crumbling,” *The Los Angeles Times*, October 1, 1928, pp. 1, 4. Mark Sullivan also discussed the business/politician divide in his essay on southern business politics, discussed above. Sullivan, “Tariff Issue Now to the Fore,” p. E7.

the Hickory politicians,” elaborating that in general “the politicians are for Smith and the people are against him.”²⁰²³

An instructive case in point is that of Cameron Morrison, governor from 1921 through 1925, who had gained the 1920 Democratic nomination over then-insurgent Max Gardner thanks to the chicanery and race-baiting of the Simmons machine.²⁰²⁴ In 1928, Morrison was so offended at the irregularity of his erstwhile benefactor that he broke with the senator in particularly powerful terms:

Two years from now Senator Simmons says he will run again. I hope he will live to make good his announced candidacy and that I may live to take the stump in this state in apology to the memory of Governors Vance and Aycock, and the Kitchins, living and dead, for having helped four times to elect F. M. Simmons and to help North Carolina find a man worthy of its traditions to represent it in the United States Senate.²⁰²⁵

In fact, it would have been easy for Morrison to support the New Yorker on progressive grounds, for while the two men were quite different in outlook, their administrations had numerous parallels: Morrison’s victory ushered in an era of activism and growth that pleasantly surprised formerly “disappointed progressives”; the Democrat pressed for \$50 million in bonds for public works—a program denounced by Virginia’s Carter Glass as “crazy”; and under Morrison the state’s bonded debt grew from \$12 million to \$107 million, while his administration supervised the grand finale of a ten-year period that saw state expenditures grow by 847 percent.²⁰²⁶ Nevertheless, there is no evidence that Morrison was particularly motivated by any fiscal kinship with the Happy Warrior;

²⁰²³ A. C. Avery to Furnifold Simmons, March 6, 1928, Furnifold Simmons Papers, Box 64, Folder March 6-10, 1928.

²⁰²⁴ Christensen suggests that this was “in all likelihood a stolen election.” Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, pp. 48-50.

²⁰²⁵ “Cam Morrison Says He Will Fight Simmons,” *The Burlington Daily Times*, November 1, 1928, p. 1.

²⁰²⁶ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, pp. 50-55.

rather, he was inspired by partisan pride at “One of the Best Tickets Since [the] Civil War.”²⁰²⁷

Morrison’s old rival Max Gardner, in spite of his more cerebral arguments during the campaign, also made simple appeals to partisanship. “No one realizes better than me that I could be elected Governor by an unprecedented majority if I would compromise my nomination, surrender my loyalty to the national ticket, and duck into a political storm cellar while the lightnings flash and the thunders reverberate; but I cannot and will not pay the price I would go down to defeat before I would desert the leader of my party in this campaign, ” he pledged in one speech, while in another he called for “the United, loyal and militant support of North Carolina Democracy for the entire ticket of my party from constable, Tom Brown, to President, Alfred E. Smith.”²⁰²⁸

Beyond these political leaders, there were warnings from low-level Democrats and numerous editorial boards about the perils of abandoning party loyalty and the vague threat to “Southern culture” if the Solid South should be broken.²⁰²⁹ Reflecting such concerns with humorous effect, a Democratic stalwart in Jackson, Mississippi, presented Dr. John Roach Straton of New York with “an old-fashioned carpetbag” after the Baptist

²⁰²⁷ “Morrison to Stump State for Smith and ‘One of the Best Tickets Since Civil War,’” *The Charlotte Observer*, July 4, 1928, p. 1. Magnifying Morrison’s partisan impulse was his new position as a Democratic National Committeeman for North Carolina—a position he inherited after Simmons resigned the post out of opposition to Smith. Elmer L. Puryear, *Democratic Party Dissension in North Carolina, 1928-1936* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1962), pp. 10-11.

²⁰²⁸ O. Max Gardner, “Untitled Gardner Campaign Speech II, 1928,” p. 2, O. Max Gardner Papers, Box 45, Folder 709; O. Max Gardner, “The Price of Disloyalty is Too Great,” O. Max Gardner Papers, Box 45, Folder 709.

²⁰²⁹ *E.g.*: “Palmetto Democrats Turn to Smith,” *The Charlotte Observer*, July 5, 1928, p. 2; “Southern Culture At Stake? G.O.P. Seen as Dixie Menace,” *The Charlotte Observer*, July 10, 1928, p. 3; “Judge Grady is for Gov. Smith,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, August 8, 1928, p. 2; “Box Declares Smith Much to be Preferred,” *The Houston Post-Dispatch*, October 1, 1928, State News Section, p. 1; William H. Ewing, Jr., “Smith Endorsed in First Action of Legislature,” *The New Orleans Times-Picayune*, October 2, p. 1; “Democrats Stick To Their Ticket In Georgia Rally,” *The New Orleans Times-Picayune*, October 5, 1928, p. 5; “100-Year-Old Voter Registers to Support Smith,” *The New Orleans Times-Picayune*, October 11, 1928, p. 6.

minister delivered one in a series of anti-Smith tirades.²⁰³⁰ In spite of such occasional jocularly, calls to partisan fidelity were serious business—and were often poorly disguised appeals to racial solidarity.²⁰³¹ But at other times Democrats were simply exhibiting a tenacious devotion to long-held partisan affiliations—as was the case with the indignant voter from High Point, North Carolina, who likened the bolting Furnifold Simmons to “Benedict Arnold or Judas [Isca]riot[us].”²⁰³²

There were, however, many in the South who were attracted to the Democratic nominee not wholly on partisan terms, but also because they believed genuinely in his progressive agenda for the nation.²⁰³³ As was the case in the Corn Belt, Smith attracted the support of notable members of the La Follette movement (such as it was in the South); Robert Corley, a high-ranking member of the International Association of

²⁰³⁰ “Carpetbag for Straton,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 23, 1928, p. 1.

²⁰³¹ Indeed, they were usually not disguised at all. A typical statement was that of J. Ira Harrelson of the Atlanta board of education, who suggested that “loyalty to the forefathers of southerners who fought against racial equality demanded his support of the democratic standard.” “J. Ira Harrelson to Cast Ballot for Gov. Smith,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 6, 1928, p. 20. Another was made by former Atlanta assistant district attorney W. Paul Carpenter, who summarized his adherence to the Democratic ticket by asserting that “We are honor bound as white southern men and women, with all the blood of southern chivalry flowing through our veins, to carry on for the ideals of our democratic party, which our own kind and kin struggled for, and are admonished to maintain.” “Carpenter Announces Allegiance to Smith,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 27, 1928, p. 12.

²⁰³² V. A. Cregier, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, October 3, 1928, p. 4. Cregier was not alone in making the analogy; an attorney from Monroe, Georgia, wrote the *Atlanta Constitution* to liken “party bolters to church deserters.” W. O. Dean, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 23, 1928, p. 3G.

²⁰³³ *E.g.*: Georgia Democratic Congressman Charles R. Crisp lauded the New Yorker as having “the most progressive record of any governor in the United States. If elected he will make a great president.” S. E. Yow, a “prominent citizen of Lavonia, [Georgia],” published ten reasons to support Al Smith, including the governor’s stance on conservation, water power, and his record of administrative reorganization in the Empire State. A group of Democratic women in Georgia noted a number of Smith’s labor and welfare reforms in their endorsement of the nominee, including wages and hours laws, industrial reforms, equal pay for female teachers, and his role in bringing the federal Sheppard-Towner maternity program to New York State; while another of Georgia’s leading female citizens cited the Democrat’s work to aid widowed mothers, his support for Sheppard Towner, and his work to improve rural healthcare (along with the traditional Republican association with African-American rights) in explaining her endorsement. “Crisp Discounts Smith Criticism,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 8, 1928, p. 10; “Lavonia Citizen Gives 10 Reasons in Support of Al,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 9, 1928, p. 6F; Bessie S. Stafford, “Georgia Women Clearly Define Reasons for Supporting Governor Smith,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 23, 1928, p. 6M; “Woman Lawyer Tells Women Why Smith Is Due Support Of Sex for Enlightened Acts,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 3, 1928, p. 3.

Machinists who had abandoned the Democrats to direct Fighting Bob's 1924 campaign in eleven Southern states, effused that "Governor Smith in every way comes nearer representing the progressive views of the late Senator La Follette than anyone who has ever been offered to voters of the country."²⁰³⁴ Indeed, Southern labor in general demonstrated considerable enthusiasm for Smith's candidacy, with Georgia Federation of Labor president O. E. Petry organizing union members around Atlanta "into a group to disseminate information among the workers of the community regarding the labor record of Governor Smith and his attitude toward the principles for which the labor movement stands," in an effort "to counteract the effect of the 'whispering campaign.'"²⁰³⁵

Smith's progressive appeal reached far beyond the South's fledgling labor movement. Along with his stance on agricultural relief, which had garnered support among struggling Black Belt dirt farmers, Smith's progressive position on water power development gained notice—particularly when it came to Muscle Shoals, a project of keen interest to much of the region. While Southern business was mixed in its posture toward Smith's proposals, there were many in northern Alabama and elsewhere in the South who trumpeted the Democrat's progressive stand as a leading virtue of his candidacy. In late September, an Alabaman wrote George Norris to praise the Nebraskan's position on Muscle Shoals and to encourage him to support the Democratic nominee on progressive grounds: "Governor Smith advocates those things which you advocate. He is a progressive in every sense of the word. He is an admirer of yours. . . . This is not a battle between Democrats and Republicans, but between the progressives

²⁰³⁴ "Smith is Termed 'A Progressive' By Atlanta Man," *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 6, 1928, p. 3.

²⁰³⁵ "Labor Group is Named to Fight 'Whispering,'" *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 11, 1928, p. 11. "Record of Governor Smith On Organized Labor Praised By Emmitt Quinn, Atlantan," *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 15, 1928, p. 2; "Democratic Labor Head Urges Loyalty," *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 19, 1928, p. 8.

and re-actionaries.”²⁰³⁶ The *Anniston Star* editorialized on Smith’s behalf briefly after Hoover attacked his program as socialism (and days after Norris came out for Smith), demanding that:

The people of this city and of Alabama generally are vitally interested in seeing the Norris plan for the operation of Muscle Shoals put into effect. We are now threatened with another raise in rates by the Alabama Power Company The people of Alabama, too, have a common interest with the people of the nation in putting an end to the intermeddling of the power trust in the affairs of the American people. . . . If it be socialism to keep out of the hands of private monopoly the only power site we have left to the people here in Alabama, then let’s have it.²⁰³⁷

Numerous Democratic spellbinders emphasized Smith’s position on water power as an important reason to support his candidacy.²⁰³⁸ Among these was Josephus Daniels, who listed hydroelectric policy as one of twelve reasons to vote for Smith during an address in Atlanta and included it as a central piece of his argument for Smith in a published debate with Richard Edmonds of the *Manufacturers’ Record*.²⁰³⁹ Indeed, Daniels’ entire argument against Edmonds revolved around Smith’s progressivism. “If there were only one issue in this campaign, and there were not fundamental differences upon great questions between the two leading parties, I could well appreciate your inability to understand why I remain in the Democratic ship,” suggested the former secretary in response to the Baltimorean’s concerns over prohibition.²⁰⁴⁰ But Smith was promising farm relief, and “farmers are the forgotten men of the Republican

²⁰³⁶ Kirkman O’Neal to George W. Norris, September 29, 1928, George W. Norris Papers, Box 4, Folder 15—1928 Presidential Campaign (Smith).

²⁰³⁷ Editorial, “Power Issue Is Very Vital To the People of this State,” *The Anniston Star*, October 28, 1928, p. 4.

²⁰³⁸ E.g.: Congressman Robert Henry (D-TX) “Texan Declares Smith Gaining,” *The Charlotte Observer*, October 10, 1928, p. 3; Josephus Daniels “Daniels Assails ‘Rotten’ Regime,” *The Washington Star*, October 18, 1928, p. 2. Joseph Robinson, the most visible southerner in the Democratic campaign, made these arguments often, but tended to do so before western audiences.

²⁰³⁹ “Josephus Daniels letter debate with Richard E. Edmonds, Editor of the Manufacturers Record (Baltimore),” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, August 22, 1928, p. 4.

²⁰⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

administration”; government development of Muscle Shoals was a progressive priority, and “the record of Governor Smith in New York shows he fought the water power monopoly.”²⁰⁴¹ Moreover, Daniels found Smith’s entire progressive record compelling, citing the nominee’s campaigns for minimum wage legislation, the eight hour day for women, maternity insurance, extensions of workmen’s compensation, state provision of physicians and nurses for rural areas, state ownership and operation of water power, state-owned and operated grain elevators “after the manner of the experiments in North Dakota,” state control of the milk supply, and municipal operation of public utilities; concluding that Smith had “championed better working conditions for men, women and children. He has fairly earned the name Progressive.”²⁰⁴²

The South of course had its own indigenous, populist-infused progressive tradition, and it was that tradition which provided the basis of the Democratic argument in the region. Such appeals can be seen in the constant invocations of the party’s Jeffersonian heritage, which only partially meant a call to arms on behalf of decentralization. Less muddled by such constitutional dilemmas were comparisons between Smith and Andrew Jackson, which Daniels made repeatedly on his Southern tour—including during a stop in Nashville.²⁰⁴³

²⁰⁴¹ Ibid., p. 4.

²⁰⁴² Ibid., p. 4. It is unlikely that Mr. Edmonds found these points particularly compelling; the following April, visiting Gastonia’s Loray Mills during that textile outfit’s notorious strike, the editor concluded that “there doesn’t seem to be any real grievance,” and then “described the crowds of strikers as a ‘cesspool of humanity.’” “Richard H. Edmonds Pays Visit to Loray Mills,” *The Gastonia Daily Gazette*, April 27, 1929, republished from *The Charlotte Observer*, retrieved from: University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, School of Education [Web site],

“Learn NC, 8.3: An industry representative visits Loray Mills,” Site address: <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newcentury/5958>.

²⁰⁴³ At Durham: “Daniels Calls Hoover ‘Myth,’” *The Charlotte Observer*, October 2, 1928, p. 3; at Nashville: “Smith Painted as Jackson of Present Time,” *The Charlotte Observer*, October 20, 1928, p. 3; “Smith Painted as Jackson of Present Time,” *The Houston Post-Dispatch*, October 20, 1928, p. 3; “Daniels Likens Smith to Hero,” *The Los Angeles Times*, October 20, 1928, p. 4; at Richmond: “Daniels Compares Smith With Jackson,” *The Washington Star*, November 3, 1928, p. 2. Others made the comparison as well:

The most important progressive parallel for Daniels was a more recent one: his former chief Woodrow Wilson. There is no greater evidence of Daniels' Wilsonian enthusiasm over Smith's progressive pronouncements than the editorial cartoon run by the *Raleigh News and Observer* in response to the New Yorker's acceptance address. From Albany, Smith began his speech by commenting that it was in the New York State capitol building that he had "confirmed my faith in the principles of the Democratic Party so eloquently defined by Woodrow Wilson."²⁰⁴⁴ As he stood among the rain-soaked spectators, all that Daniels had needed to hear was the name "Woodrow Wilson" to be sold on the Happy Warrior.²⁰⁴⁵

The *News and Observer* would champion Smith as a progressive throughout the campaign.²⁰⁴⁶ Responding to several of the nominee's policy pronouncements, the editors made their case plainly:

The strongest claim Governor Smith has to election this year is that upon the large questions he is the champion of progress, of change from the static, of opening doors of equality for all, and for putting an end to privilege. His speeches at Denver, at Omaha and Helena reached the high water mark of Progressivism, the sort the old Andrew Jackson and Woodrow Wilson and LaFollette and Theodore Roosevelt (limited in 1912) incarnated. But it is . . . his record for social welfare and social justice and the rights of labor and for better public schools and for

At Macon, Georgia, Democratic congressman Charles Crisp called Smith "the prototype of Andrew Jackson, a true tribune of the people"; and the *Atlanta Constitution* suggested that "the nearest approach to the insidious activities of the anti-Smith groups was the campaign directed against Andrew Jackson." Editorial, "Humanity in Government," *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 4, 1928, p. 8; Editorial, "Close of the Campaign," *The Atlanta Constitution*, November 6, 1928, p. 6.

²⁰⁴⁴ Smith, "Address of Acceptance," p. 1.

²⁰⁴⁵ It is clear that Daniels was present in Albany (and that he got wet), from a letter sent to the publisher by his former deputy at the department of the navy, Franklin Roosevelt. Franklin Roosevelt to Josephus Daniels, August 28, 1928, in Carroll Kilpatrick, ed., *Roosevelt and Daniels: A Friendship in Politics* [published letters of Roosevelt and Daniels] (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1952), p. 96.

²⁰⁴⁶ Editorial, "Governor Smith's Speech of Acceptance," *The Raleigh News and Observer*, August 23, 1928, p. 4; Editorial, "Wherein Lies the Genius of Smith," *The Raleigh News and Observer*, September 1, 1928, p. 4; Editorial, "What the Voter Votes For," *The Raleigh News and Observer*, September 4, 1928, p. 4.

government retention of water power and the like that makes the strongest appeal.²⁰⁴⁷

Many North Carolina progressives agreed—including C. Guillet of Elon College, who wrote the *Burlington Daily Times* that “the chief [reason to vote for Smith] is his noble record as Governor of the Empire State, his record of continual legislation on behalf of the poor and the weak (who are too little likely to be remembered by politicians).”²⁰⁴⁸



Fig. 7.14: Cartoon demonstrating the Wilsonian enthusiasm of Josephus Daniels and his *Raleigh News and Observer* for Smith’s candidacy.²⁰⁴⁹

²⁰⁴⁷ Editorial, “Progress vs. Reaction,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, October 3, 1928, p. 4.

²⁰⁴⁸ C. Guillet, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Burlington Daily Times*, November 1, 1928, p. 3.

²⁰⁴⁹ Reyn Olds, “To An Audience of Forty Million,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, October 23, 1928, p. 4.

The Democrats' petition to Southern progressivism was made all the more explicitly by their choice of a running mate for Al Smith. Conventional wisdom held that with a Catholic from New York's Lower East Side as their presidential nominee, the party would need a Southerner to balance the ticket. It had to be a Southerner; it did not have to be Joe Robinson, who stands out among his contemporaries as a relatively progressive figure. As a young congressman, Robinson had been a supporter not only of regionally popular causes like railroad regulation, but also of Theodore Roosevelt's Pure Food and Drug Act, on which he broke with party leadership.²⁰⁵⁰ Rather unique among Southern senators, Robinson had been a "strong and outspoken supporter" of labor.²⁰⁵¹ During his two-month tenure as governor of Arkansas (Robinson ran to succeed Senator Jeff Davis upon the latter's death, shortly after ascending to the governorship), he managed to organize a state health board, form a state highway commission, establish a workmen's compensation system, create a state department of education, and push successfully for a corrupt practices act.²⁰⁵²

As a leading voice among senate Democrats and as minority leader beginning in 1923, Robinson continued to pursue such an agenda—taking a leading role in approving the creation of the Federal Trade Commission; helping to strengthen the Interstate Commerce Commission; and supporting progressive farm remedies including the Capper-Volstead Act (1922) which exempted farm cooperatives from anti-trust laws, the Agricultural Credits Act (1923) which provided government subsidies for farms, and

²⁰⁵⁰ Cecil Edward Weller, Jr., *Joe T. Robinson: Always a Loyal Democrat* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas, 1998), pp. 35-36.

²⁰⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

²⁰⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

several iterations of the McNary-Haugen plan.²⁰⁵³ Knowing that Smith needed a Southerner on the ticket, Nevada senator Key Pittman wrote Belle Moskowitz to recommend his colleague from Arkansas, assuring her that Robinson was a perfect fit for the *New Yorker* because he was “liberal at heart . . . tolerant, unselfish, and fearless.”²⁰⁵⁴ Once nominated, Robinson made dozens of speeches denouncing the administration and the Republican nominee as tools of special interests; championing the rights of labor; and extolling Smith’s progressive views on resource management and farm relief—travelling twenty-five thousand miles by rail in the process.²⁰⁵⁵

As was the case in the rest of the nation, Southern voters were not exclusively inundated with competing cultural appeals during the 1928 conflict. Rather, they were also exposed to Smith’s progressive arguments and his progressive record, and to the progressive ideas of his supporters. Much like the female social workers of the urban Northeast, the populist-progressives of the rural South who championed Smith’s candidacy set aside certain tenets of their traditional platform—especially prohibition—in order to promote those planks also espoused by the Democratic nominee. Thus, when Thomas McLeod endorsed Smith’s proposal to call on a panel of experts to craft a federal solution for struggling agriculture, or when Josephus Daniels praised the *New Yorker*’s social welfare record as a compelling argument for his elevation to the White House, or

²⁰⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 66, 78, 93.

²⁰⁵⁴ Pittman quoted in *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113. Like most of his fellow Southern progressives, one of Robinson’s great flaws was an antediluvian attitude toward race relations. Robinson had been ahead of his time in championing the rights of Native Americans as well as in denouncing bigotry against Catholics and Jews; he had made an enemy of the Ku Klux Klan and had argued with Tom Heflin on the floor of the Senate when the Alabaman denounced Al Smith and the Catholic Church in January of 1928, saying that Heflin had made “a fool . . . of himself.” But Robinson was also a defender of applying the *Plessy v. Ferguson* “separate but equal” doctrine to schools and opposed the Dyer anti-lynching bill. Biographer Cecil Weller notes in an otherwise sympathetic treatment: “he never supported increased participation of black Americans in the electoral process. Nor did he try to dismantle the discriminatory system which existed throughout the country.” *Ibid.*, pp. 64, 65, 68, 95, 110.

²⁰⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 117. See also: chapter four.

when Joe Robinson lambasted the “reactionaries” of the Coolidge administration for failing to conserve the people’s resources—all in the context of an Al Smith campaign—then in fact transitional progressivism adopted a Southern drawl.

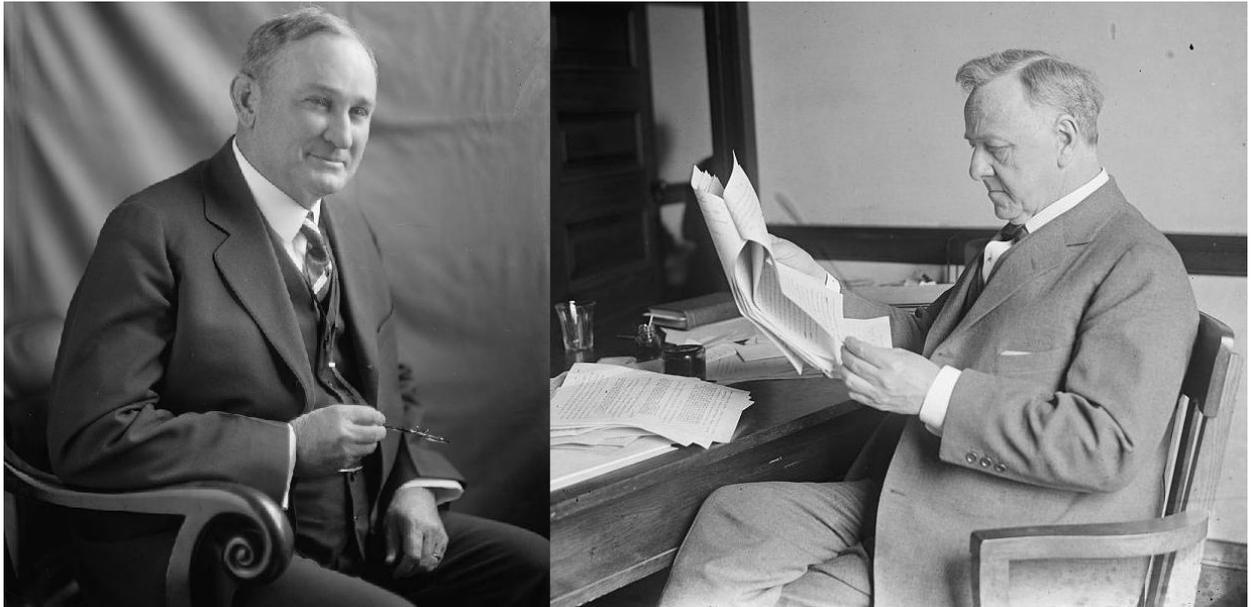


Fig. 7.15: Smith’s leading Southern supporters: his running mate, Senator Joseph T. Robinson of Arkansas (left), and publisher and former secretary of the navy Josephus Daniels of North Carolina (right).²⁰⁵⁶

Within the South there was an indigenous progressive tradition, the adherents of which the Democrats sought to galvanize on behalf of their reformist nominee. Yet Smith’s progressive appeals, whether to desperate farmers, labor activists, or conservationists, did not have the same force in the South as elsewhere. There were several reasons for this, all of which highlight key facets of the broader national campaign.

Smith’s progressivism was born of the urban experience. While it was absolutely the case that the New Yorker and his advisors made earnest attempts to apply their approach to rural life, there was simply less to attract farmers to the governor’s vision for

²⁰⁵⁶ Harris & Ewing, “Robinson, Joseph T. Senator,” Harris & Ewing Collection, Library of Congress; “Josephus Daniels, 3/25/24,” National Photo Company Collection, Library of Congress.

America than there was for urban workers. Populist farmers and Southern reformers formed a starkly different audience than the one transitional progressivism had been crafted to serve, and the two populations' desires on questions like tariff rates, labor rights, and monetary policy were not always compatible. Moreover, ethnic urban workers coveted not only labor protections, but also social acceptance; indeed, many of the Smith supporters who would rally to his proposals for welfare reforms or economic justice were initially captured by the governor's calls for a cessation of prohibition enforcement and the destruction of the Ku Klux Klan.²⁰⁵⁷ Smith's pluralism was not universally the entering wedge it had been in the urban North; in the South it functioned as more of a door stop.

Furthermore, the candidate himself failed to make the sort of energetic appeal to the people of the South that was so central to his progressive style. If a key to Smith's success had always been his talent for communicating directly with voters on serious matters, it is no wonder that the Democrat failed to instigate a stampede to his cause among Southern progressives: put simply, the region was neglected by the candidate. Joseph Robinson spent much of the fall battling what he perceived as a Northeastern bias within the campaign that diverted resources away from Southern states, complaining privately of the DNC's slow and incompetent handling of the region.²⁰⁵⁸ A minor symptom of this disregard was an uncharacteristically amateurish oversight in which Smith ignored a warm communication from North Carolina governor Angus McLean for over two months—finally replying to a congratulatory letter of July 3, 1928, on

²⁰⁵⁷ See chapter four.

²⁰⁵⁸ Weller, *Joe T. Robinson*, p. 117.

September 13.²⁰⁵⁹ Of broader significance, the nominee spent very little time in what he assumed to be the Solid South. The campaign only scheduled one major address for the entire region—delivered in Nashville on October 12. This was supplemented by several very brief, extemporaneous speeches at stops in medium-sized cities like Chattanooga and Raleigh, as well as a raucous pep rally in Richmond.²⁰⁶⁰ Smith’s only real trek into the Deep South occurred en route from Chattanooga to Nashville, when his train dipped into northern Alabama and “passed through two stations . . . slowing down for the Governor to wave to a crowd of 200 at Bridgeport and stopping at Stevenson, where a crowd of 250 were led in three cheers ‘for the next president.’”²⁰⁶¹

The hallmark of Smith’s progressivism was his ability to communicate his proposals to voters; in the case of the South, the nominee not only failed to do this, he failed even to make a serious effort. He did endeavor to do so during his Nashville address, highlighting farm relief as he had during several stops in the Corn Belt. But struggling Southern farmers, heirs to a strong populist tradition who might well have been attracted to Smith’s pronouncements on agriculture, were largely excluded from the candidate’s discussion of the question—unless they happened to reside in central Tennessee or were fortunate enough to inhabit a community where the newspapers spent significant column space on the issue. Most of Smith’s major addresses, including many on agriculture, were made available nationally through radio broadcasts; but this was of little consequence to the overwhelming majority of Southern farmers: in 1925, only 4.5

²⁰⁵⁹ Alfred E. Smith to Angus W. McLean, September 13, 1928, Angus McLean Papers, North Carolina Room, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Reel 1.

²⁰⁶⁰ “Southern Itinerary of Gov. Smith includes Carolina,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 9, 1928, p. 1; “Smith Challenges Hoover to State Views Clearly; Gets Tennessee Ovations,” *The New York Times*, October 13, 1928, pp. 1, 6.

²⁰⁶¹ “Smith Challenges Hoover to State Views Clearly; Gets Tennessee Ovations,” pp. 1, 6.

percent of all American farms had radios; in the South Atlantic region, that figure was 1.1 percent; in the West South Central region it was 1.6 percent; and in the East South Central region, it was 0.6 percent.²⁰⁶² In Alabama, both Carolinas, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi, farm radio ownership rates stood—at most—at one half of one percent.²⁰⁶³

Smith's failure to communicate effectively with these potential constituents produced a rhetorical vacuum that was swiftly filled by demagogues from both campaigns. In the urban North and portions of the Midwest, the nominee was able to capture the interest of potential supporters with his background and win them over with his preternatural ability to distill complex policy problems into popular terms. In the South, Smith lacked that initial appeal and failed to exercise his talents.

While acknowledging that Smith's "provincialism" was not totally responsible for his political downfall in 1928, David Burner faults the candidate for his stubborn attachment to his self-identity—his frank unwillingness to mask his faith, his urban heritage, or his personal revulsion at prohibition.²⁰⁶⁴ It is clear that Smith could have done much more to bridge the cultural gap between himself and the voters of the South and other rural regions; but it is equally clear that to have done so would have involved a great deal of dishonesty, as well as submission to the very sort of social élitism against which he had spent his career rebelling. Smith's great mistake in the South was in fact that he was not himself to a greater degree—he did not engage voters on progressive issues to the same extent he had elsewhere, and thus he failed to offer an alternative narrative to the one centered upon Tammany, saloonkeepers, and ultramontaniam. It

²⁰⁶² United States Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1929*, p. 640.

²⁰⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 640.

²⁰⁶⁴ Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism*, pp. 182-187.

probably would not have changed the outcome, but it is a certainty that had the candidate emphasized his progressive platform in greater depth before more Southern audiences, and had his local supporters more enthusiastically followed the models of Robinson, Daniels, and others in doing the same, then the campaign would have presented a compelling message to contend with that being anxiously broadcast by bigots of all stripes.

* * *

The 1928 campaign was an ugly battle nationwide—and nowhere more so than the South. The vicious whispers about religion launched in all regions were supplemented in Dixie with wild accusations doused in racist vitriol from figures on both sides. Harangues against the candidates were transmogrified into secondary and even tertiary attacks by supporters of one camp against notable supporters of the other. Klansmen discharged tirades not only against the pope and Al Smith, but also against Clyde Hoey and Cameron Morrison; Carter Glass dueled bitterly with Bishop Cannon throughout the fall; former congressman Hallett Ward suggested that Furnifold Simmons had “lost his mind and is virtually crazy”; and Josephus Daniels was assailed by an anti-Smith group based as much on his record as secretary of the navy as on his support for his party’s nominee (these critics were in turn condemned by an indignant group of Democratic war veterans).²⁰⁶⁵

²⁰⁶⁵ “Klan Speaker Raps Morrison and Hoey,” *The Charlotte Observer*, September 16, 1928, p. 2; “Cannon Brands Glass ‘A Pawn,’” *The Charlotte Observer*, October 27, 1928, p. 3; Editorial, “Should Retract and Apologize,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, September 28, 1928, p. 4; Advertisement, “A Daniel{s}

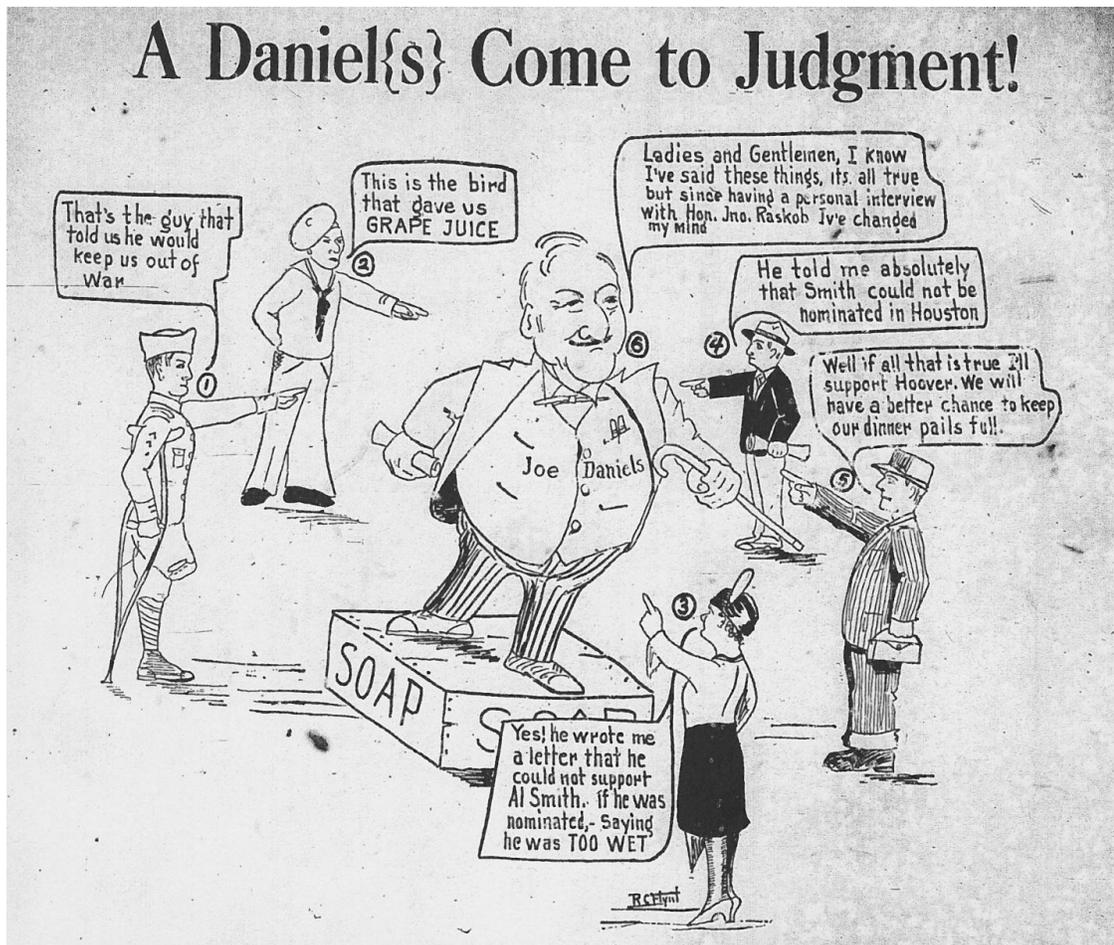


Fig. 7.16: Attack ad run against Josephus Daniels in the *Winston-Salem Journal and Sentinel*.²⁰⁶⁶

As passions flared, the campaign devolved from nasty to violent. In Richland County, South Carolina, an anti-Smith Democratic meeting was infiltrated by party regulars, who pelted the bolters with eggs during a “five minute period of free-for-all fighting.”²⁰⁶⁷ At the Texas State Democratic Convention in Dallas, “eyes were blackened and noses bled” as former governor Oscar Colquitt marshaled fellow anti-Smith partisans from the hall to jeers of “get out, Republicans” while wrestling with loyalists for

Come to Judgment!” *The Winston-Salem Journal and Sentinel*, November 4, 1928, p. 5A; Advertisement, “Veterans Resent Scurrilous Attack,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, November 6, 1928, p. 10.

²⁰⁶⁶ Advertisement, “A Daniel {s} Come to Judgment!” p. 5A.

²⁰⁶⁷ “Hoover Rally Turned into Smith Meeting as Eggs are Hurlled,” *The Boston Globe*, September 1, 1928, p. 12; Editorial, “Eggs as Democratic Arguments,” *The Hartford Courant*, September 6, 1928, p. 8.

delegation banners.²⁰⁶⁸ When two Hoover supporters tried to drive their politically festooned auto in a Smith parade in Raleigh, “a mob of spectators broke ranks at the curb, halted the car, smashed its headlights, wrenched off a door, ripped up the upholstery, slashed a tire and plastered the body with Smith stickers,” as the once-audacious pair fled.²⁰⁶⁹ In the course of a week in northern Alabama, a Methodist minister’s pro-Hoover oration “was greeted by a hail of eggs and oranges,” resulting in “a hasty adjournment”; a candidate for alderman was escorted home from a separate meeting by sheriff’s deputies after punching a man who had begun cheering for Al Smith; and another clergyman at another meeting encountered “a bombardment of eggs” during an anti-Smith speech.²⁰⁷⁰ A Brooksville, Florida, man was struck with a water pitcher by the town’s former mayor after expressing dissent at an anti-Smith meeting.²⁰⁷¹ A storekeeper in Robinson Station, Kentucky, was shot and killed after “an argument over politics and religion.”²⁰⁷² Thomas Heflin was egged repeatedly; a policeman was shot to death by his brother-in-law in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, during a political argument; and on Election Day, the *Washington Star* would report: “Man Shot at Polls in West Virginia. Weather Good.”²⁰⁷³ As “Hambone,” J. P. Alley’s grotesque caricature of a black working man observed:

²⁰⁶⁸ “Democrats Oust Bolters in Fight,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 12, 1928, pp. 1, 6; “Texas Bolters Fight Way Out,” *The Boston Globe*, September 12, 1928, pp. 1, 17; “Anti-Smith Forces Bolt as Fists Fly,” *The Hartford Courant*, September 12, 1928, p. 1; Editorial, “The Tumult In Texas,” *The Hartford Courant*, September 13, 1928, p. 8.

²⁰⁶⁹ “Hoover Boosters in Smith Parade are Now Wiser,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, October 13, 1928, p. 20.

²⁰⁷⁰ “Anti-Smith Meet Ends in Disorder,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 8, 1928, p. 7; “Egg Barrage Fails to Halt Anti-Smith Speech,” *The Hartford Courant*, September 6, 1928, p. 13.

²⁰⁷¹ “K. of C. Defender Hit By Water Pitcher At Anti-Smith Meeting,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 20, 1928, p. 20. The perpetrator was *alleged* to be former mayor H. S. Simmons.

²⁰⁷² “Man Shot to Death After Politics Quarrel,” *The Hartford Courant*, November 7, 1928, p. 5. The assailant, a Smith man, claimed that the victim, a Hoover supporter, had pulled a knife during the argument and that he fired in self-defense; the victim’s brother claimed that no such dispute took place.

²⁰⁷³ “Heflin Egged at Meeting of Anti-Smiths,” *The Anniston Star*, November 6, 1928, p. 1; “Political Quarrel Has Fatal Ending,” *The Statesville Landmark*, November 1, 1928, p. 1; “Man Shot at Polls in West Virginia. Weather Good,” *The Washington Star*, November 6, 1928, p. 1.

“Atter dis’ heah ‘lection gits over wid, de pahson’s sho gwine hab a time holdin’ big, shoutin’ meetin’s so’s to patch folks togedder ag’in!!”²⁰⁷⁴

The reason for all of this acrimony was that for the first time in decades the many important categories of political self-definition for Southern voters were being forced into conflict by shifting coalitions and changing national debates. Southerners who had contently marked the straight party ticket as dries, Protestants, whites, farmers, and rock-ribbed Democrats, were now compelled to make tough choices. Voters had to decide which of these reference groups was most crucial to the maintenance of their personal, social, and political worldview; and even if they were able to make such a choice, they were often faced with competing importunities for their vote, as both sides tenaciously claimed to represent the best interests of most factions. Therefore, the conclusion to be drawn from the Southern experience is that 1928 was a particularly complicated campaign; no single factor can explain the results, for there were many motivations which had varying degrees of importance to different voters in different regions and contexts. In the South, as in the rest of the nation, the election was too complex for its results to be assigned a neat causality.

In the midst of this chaos, many Democrats saw reasons for hope. Newspapers crowed about the imperturbability of the Solid South, while party operatives exuded confidence in public and private.²⁰⁷⁵ This aplomb was unfounded. For the first time

²⁰⁷⁴ J. P. Alley, “Hambone’s Meditations,” *The Houston Post-Dispatch*, October 25, 1928, p. 2.

²⁰⁷⁵ Franklin Roosevelt wrote his former boss Josephus Daniels that anti-Smith forces were “over-playing [their] hand” in Georgia and that voters’ “revulsion” at the Republicans’ Southern strategy would lead to Democratic success in Dixie. Franklin Roosevelt to Josephus Daniels, August 28, 1928, in Kilpatrick, ed., *Roosevelt and Daniels*, p. 96. A group of Texas state legislators predicted that Smith would carry 209 of Texas’ 254 counties; Hoover would carry 9, and 36 were “doubtful.” “Legislators Draw Texas Political Picture,” *The Houston Post-Dispatch*, October 28, 1928, p. 2. John Raskob sent a memorandum to all Democratic county chairmen in October indicating the party expected Smith to carry ten of eleven ex-confederate states (Tennessee, listed as a “toss-up,” was the exception). J. J. Raskob to all County

since Reconstruction, the “Solid South” was sundered. Days after the election, Josephus Daniels wrote Franklin Roosevelt that he had “hardly adjusted myself to new conditions,” for “I was so confident that Governor Smith would carry . . . North Carolina,” which he had considered “perfectly safe.”²⁰⁷⁶ In retrospect there were clear portents of Smith’s impending doom in the Tar Heel State; but evidently Daniels could not read the writing on the wall.



Fig. 7.17: A sullen Smith backer, resigned to defeat, standing before the Winston-Salem courthouse.²⁰⁷⁷

Chairmen, October 18, 1928, pp. 1-2, John J. Raskob Papers, File 602, Box 1. The *New York World* likewise had Smith carrying all former confederate states except Tennessee. “How States Are Likely to Vote In Election,” *The New York World*, November 4, 1928, p. 22.

²⁰⁷⁶ Josephus Daniels to Franklin Roosevelt, November 9, 1928, in Kilpatrick, ed., *Roosevelt and Daniels*, p. 97. Daniels also expressed his disappointment at Smith’s loss in New York—indeed, it is telling that he saw the losses of the Empire State and the Tar Heel State as equally surprising.

²⁰⁷⁷ Courtesy of Forsyth County Public Library Photograph Collection, Winston-Salem, NC.

The next Democratic nominee's fortunes in North Carolina and throughout Dixie would be much different from those of Al Smith. Franklin Roosevelt, a lifelong Episcopalian who saw himself as a farmer from bucolic Dutchess County, New York, and made Warm Springs, Georgia, into something of a second home, held a strong appeal for many Southerners. Furthermore, by 1932 prohibitionist firebrands had lost the attention of the public—bankrupt farmers and unemployed millworkers had other concerns. Indeed, the Great Depression had discredited inchoate Southern Republicanism just as it had discredited Hoover across the nation. The two leading voices among the anti-Smith Democratic senators, Alabama's J. Thomas Heflin and North Carolina's Furnifold M. Simmons, were both denied re-nomination in 1930.²⁰⁷⁸ In four presidential contests, Franklin Roosevelt never lost a single Southern state.²⁰⁷⁹ After a brief aberration, the Solid South had been restored.

So it may have appeared; but as a matter of fact that Southern solidity began to crack as soon as the name Roosevelt ceased to appear on the ticket. Even in the heyday of the New Deal, Southern politicians had been in the forefront of the conservative opposition to the president's proposals; yet Roosevelt had "struck a responsive chord with southerners He soon captured the minds and hearts of the southern people During the 1930s his personality and his programs were as popular in the southern states

²⁰⁷⁸ But not before Heflin would have the opportunity that year to tell Senator Royal Copeland that "he might be lynched if he ever went south on a presidential campaign," after the New Yorker attempted to have a letter submitted by Heflin decrying interracial marriage in New York State stricken from the official senate record. "They will ask 'Is he the fellow who tried to have Tom's letter expunged from the Record when he protested against the marriages of Negroes and Whites?'" It will be said "Yes, he's the same fellow." "Well," they will say, "We'll give it to him"—here Senator Heflin executed an encircling gesture with his hand as if tying a rope tight around his throat—"in the neck." "National Affairs: Again, Heflin," *Time*, February 17, 1930.

²⁰⁷⁹ Unless one considers Delaware a Southern state; Hoover carried it in 1932.

as in other parts of the country.”²⁰⁸⁰ However, there were signs in the later Roosevelt years that the Democratic hold on the region’s politics might be weakening—in 1939 and again in 1943, a clear majority of Southerners told the Gallup poll that the South would be better off with “two political parties . . . of about equal strength, instead of only one strong party as at present.”²⁰⁸¹ In the post-Roosevelt years, the percentage who favored an end to Democratic hegemony would rise consistently, never dropping below 60 percent.²⁰⁸²

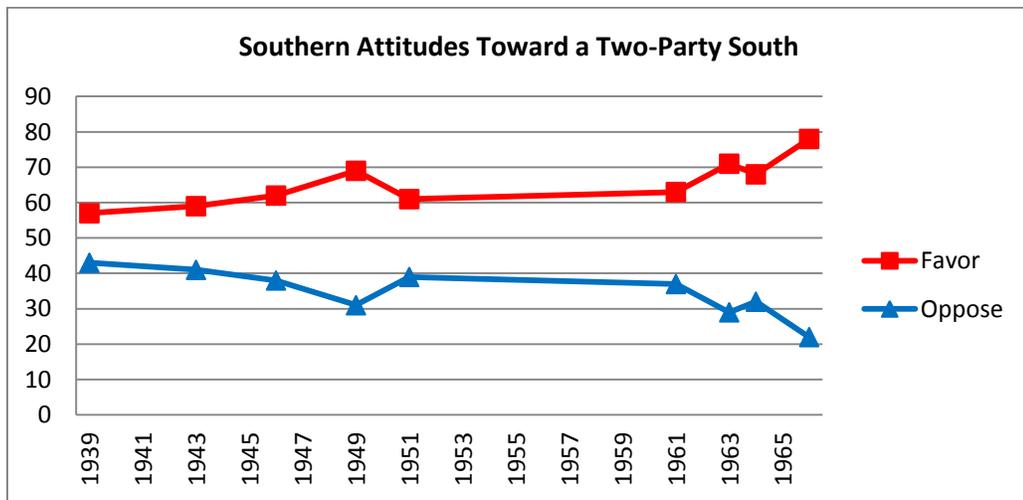


Fig. 7.18: Charting the Gallup Poll’s findings on Southern attitudes toward a two-party South.

Not only was there a change in attitude; there was also a change in behavior. In 1948, when a liberal civil rights plank in the Democratic platform inspired a Southern walk-out at the party’s convention, South Carolina governor J. Strom Thurmond carried Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and his home state for the hastily fashioned States’

²⁰⁸⁰ Grantham, *The Life & Death of the Solid South*, pp. 103, 106-124; see also: James T. Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal: The Growth of the Conservative Coalition in Congress, 1933-1939* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, 1967); James T. Patterson, *The New Deal and the States: Federalism in Transition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1969).

²⁰⁸¹ George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971*, volume one (New York: Random House, 1972), pp. 182, 398.

²⁰⁸² Consistently, but with some spikes in response to major episodes (such as the Dixiecrat walk-out of 1948, which produced a spike in anti-Democratic sentiment in 1949). *Ibid.*, volume one, pp. 182, 398, 585; volume two, pp. 879, 985; volume three, pp. 1729, 1822, 1900, 2036.

Rights Democratic Party.²⁰⁸³ The great strength for these insurgents came from the Black Belt, upending the trends witnessed in 1928. Yet, as Grantham notes, “the growth of centralized government and the creation of a welfare state” also “disturbed conservative southerners”; while “racial fears” fueled this “Dixiecrat revolt,” it “was also a manifestation of a broader regional conservatism promoted by rapid economic and social change.”²⁰⁸⁴ In the 1950s, the Democrats would begin ceding the outer South to the Republicans: in the 1952, 1956, and 1960 elections, West Virginia voted Republican once; Kentucky and Texas did so twice; and Florida, Tennessee, and Virginia did so in all three contests. In 1960 the Deep South also caused trouble for the national Democrats, with the state of Mississippi as well as the unpledged portion of Alabama’s electors casting their votes for Virginia senator Harry Flood Byrd rather than the Democratic nominee, Massachusetts senator John F. Kennedy.²⁰⁸⁵ In 1964, Democratic president Lyndon Johnson’s relative boldness on civil rights again cost the party the Deep South, and from 1968 forward the outer South and the Deep South were Republican as a rule.²⁰⁸⁶

The issues that propelled these developments were as variegated as those that split the Democracy in 1928; civil rights was clearly in the forefront, but fiscal conservatism and the attractiveness of the business-minded Republicans to successful urban entrepreneurs played significant roles as well.²⁰⁸⁷ Just as had been the case in 1928, it was this confluence of cultural, social, and economic factors that made Southern politics more complex than it had been since Reconstruction—a development that eventually led

²⁰⁸³ Grantham, *The Life & Death of the Solid South*, pp. 120-124.

²⁰⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 123-124.

²⁰⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

²⁰⁸⁶ With the exception of the 1976 presidential election, an outstanding occasion in which Georgia governor Jimmy Carter carried the entire South except Virginia and (depending on how one defines “the South”) Oklahoma for the Democrats.

²⁰⁸⁷ Grantham, *The Life & Death of the Solid South*, pp. 177-203.

to a two-party system and even Republican ascendancy. The kinds of questions that divided the Southern Democracy in the post-World War II period found neat parallels in the Smith-Hoover bout; and while neither Thomas Heflin nor Furnifold Simmons was involved in the Dixiecrat movement, there were clear thematic continuities between the anti-Smith Democrats and those who rebelled against every Democratic nominee that succeeded Franklin Roosevelt.²⁰⁸⁸

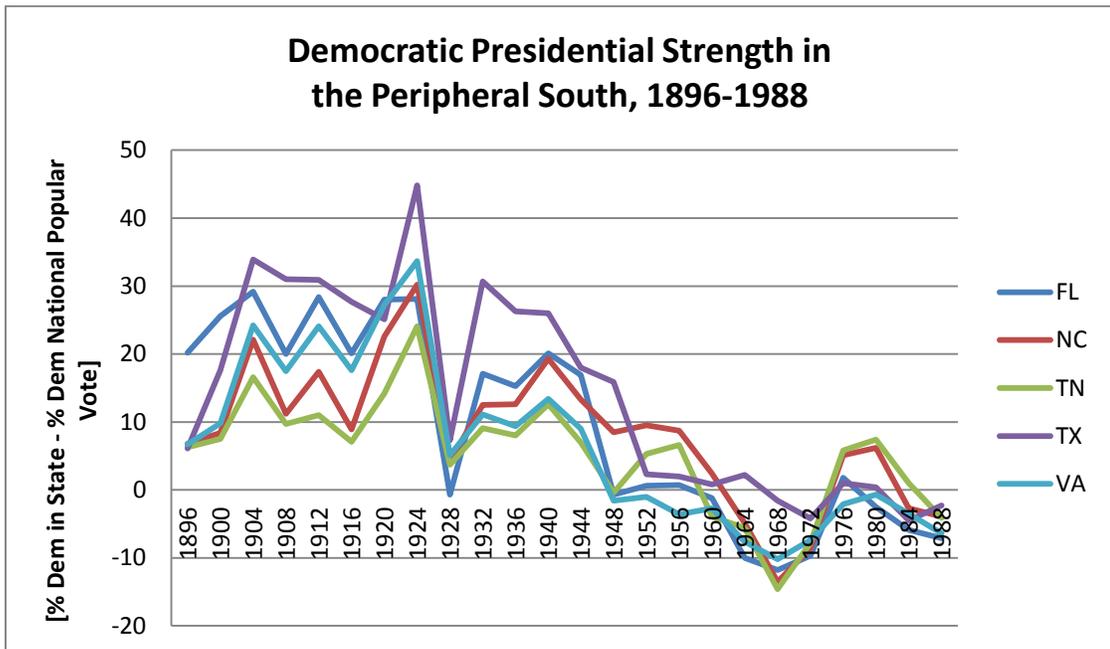
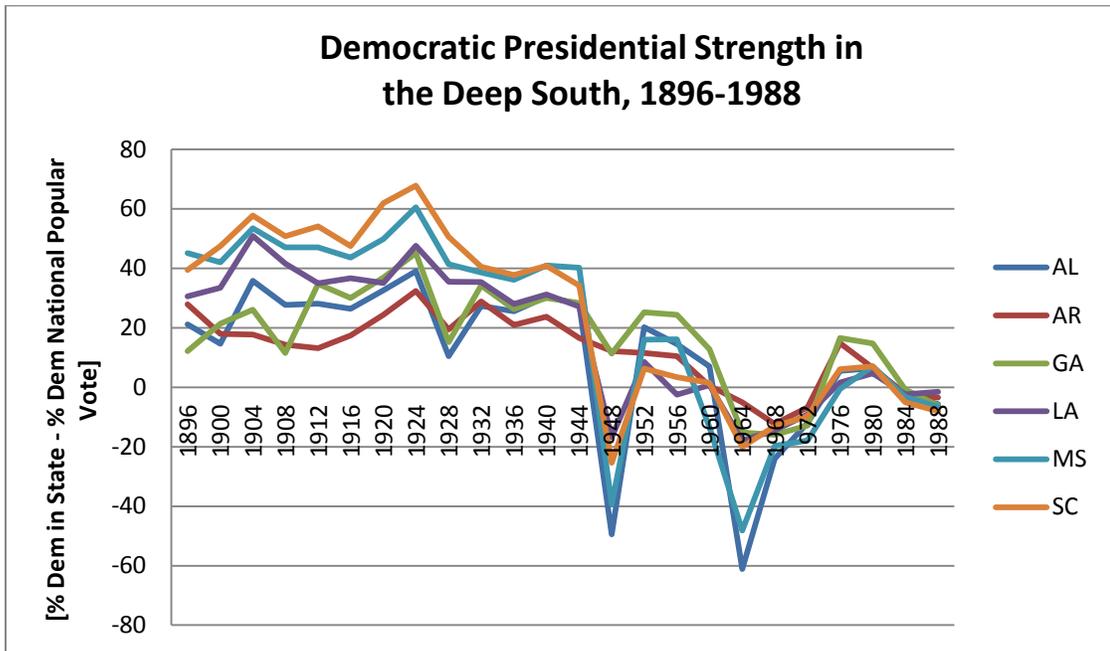
Charting Democratic presidential percentages in the South during the twentieth century graphically demonstrates the tangible products of these links. In most states, the huge Democratic majorities that were broken in 1928 were restored or even enhanced in the FDR years, only to begin a steady decline in the years after Roosevelt's death. This trend is telling, but the size of a party's presidential vote in a given state is heavily influenced by the national political situation in that particular year, so the numbers can be skewed in an election like the 1972 Nixon landslide. A better method for charting the declining strength of Democrats in the South is to subtract the percentage of the national popular vote achieved by the party's nominee from that received in a given state. This measure shows whether a state was especially Democratic, or less Democratic than the nation as a whole in a given year.

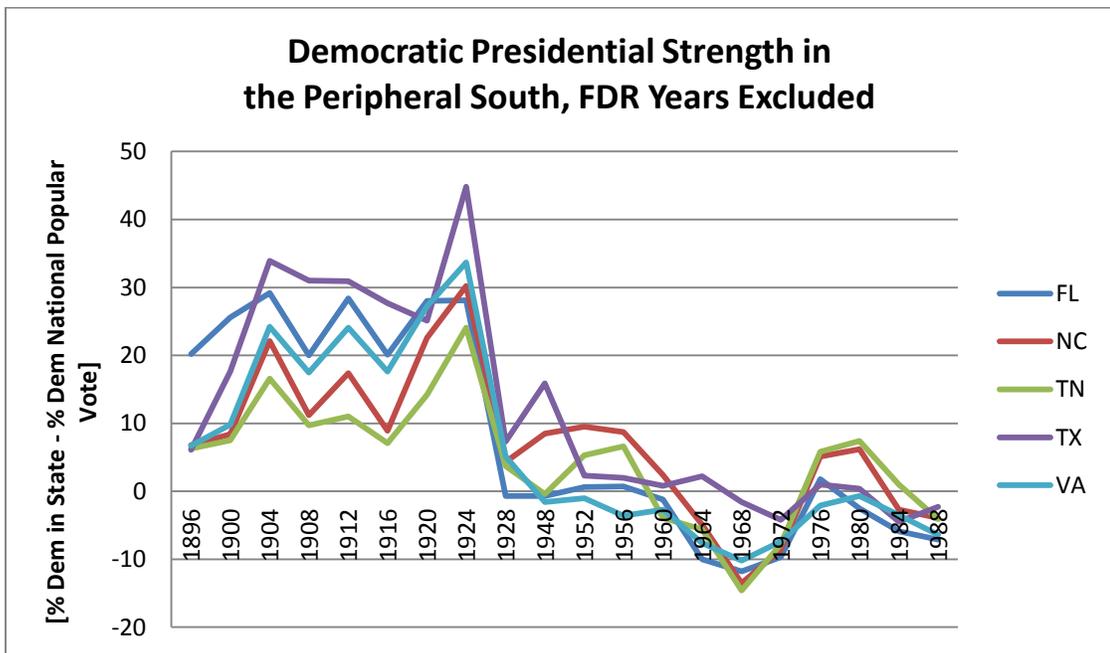
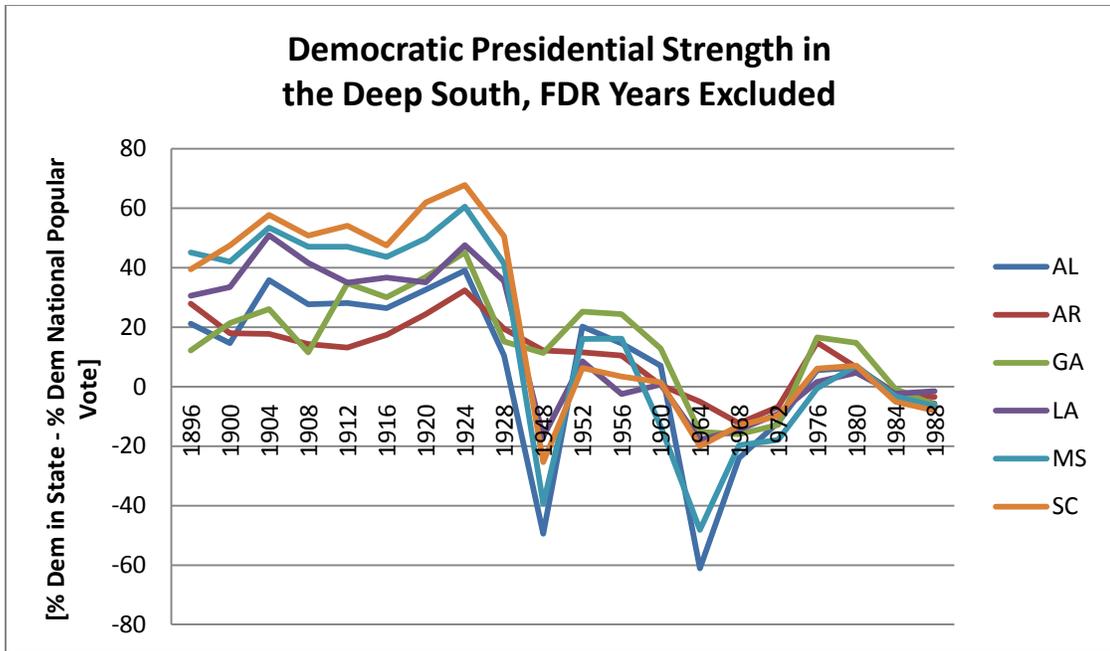
This measure demonstrates declining Democratic fortunes in both the Deep South (defined here as ex-Confederate states that voted for either Strom Thurmond in 1948 or George Wallace in 1968, or both) and the Peripheral South (defined as ex-Confederate states that did not vote for either insurgent candidate) in the post-Roosevelt period. But the Roosevelt elections took place under extraordinary circumstances and featured an

²⁰⁸⁸ Simmons died in 1940; Heflin, who lived until 1951, remained loyal to the Democrats in 1948. Elbert L. Watson, *The Encyclopedia of Alabama* [Web site], "J. Thomas Heflin," Site address: <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-2952>.

extraordinary personality at the top of the Democratic ticket. If the same figures are tracked, excluding 1932, 1936, 1940, and 1944, it becomes evident that the trends established in 1928 continued once Roosevelt was no longer the nominee.

Below: Figs. 7.19 through 7.22, charting Democratic presidential strength in the South.





It is significant that the 1928 pattern was more closely resembled in the post-Roosevelt period among the states of the Peripheral South than in those of the Deep South. In these outer states, “urban and suburban voters, together with Dixiecrats who had fled the party reservation in 1948, combined with traditional GOP supporters to carry

four states” (Tennessee, Virginia, Florida, and Texas) for Eisenhower in 1952.²⁰⁸⁹ Similarly, in 1928, Smith was able to hold the entirety of the Deep South, while he lost all of the Peripheral South. Stable and sustained Democratic weakness in the specific areas where the Smith campaign had struggled the most suggests that 1928 was the election in which this modern pattern first emerged.

Opposition to African-American civil rights, while a potent force in the periphery, was not independently powerful enough in those states to pull them into the column of either of the segregationist insurgencies. Thus, while Democratic fortunes post-FDR in the Deep South appear erratic—influenced sharply by factors including civil rights (1948, 1964, 1968) or the presence of a Southerner at the head of the ticket (1976)—Democratic decline in the Peripheral South, while far from uniform, was more steady, and slightly cushioned from such factors—although they clearly exerted at least some influence, especially in North Carolina and Tennessee and especially during the turbulent 1960s. A possible conclusion is that in the peripheral states, the rising economic conservatism which had at least some importance in 1928 exerted an enduring influence on presidential voting, as the national Democrats continued to espouse a liberal agenda. In the Deep South, on the other hand, economic struggles and historical partisan loyalties continued to keep voters faithful to the Democrats in years when the party did not take a particularly aggressive stance on civil rights (1952, 1956, 1960), while the race question drove many white voters away from the party in years when the Democratic position was noticeably different from that of the Republicans or alternative parties. By the 1970s and 1980s, the growth of the Sun Belt had brought much of the New South dynamism enjoyed by the periphery into the Deep South, and election results suggest that in those years there was

²⁰⁸⁹ Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority*, p. 245.

more unanimity within the region—perhaps signaling that economic and social conservatism had blended more evenly across the South by the later decades.²⁰⁹⁰

While the influence of economic forces on these trends is debatable, what the data unquestionably demonstrates is that in 1928, not only did the Southern vote splinter; it did so in a way that foreshadowed later patterns. All of this suggests that the Roosevelt years might not have been a simple restoration of the Solid South after an isolated aberration prompted by the nomination of a wet Catholic from the Lower East Side. Perhaps instead the unique economic situation of the 1930s and the magical personality of FDR temporarily postponed the further decomposition of the Democratic South, rendering the results in 1932, '36, '40 and '44 the real anomaly. Viewed in this context, 1928 was not a misfire for the Solid South; it was a warning shot in a pending revolution.

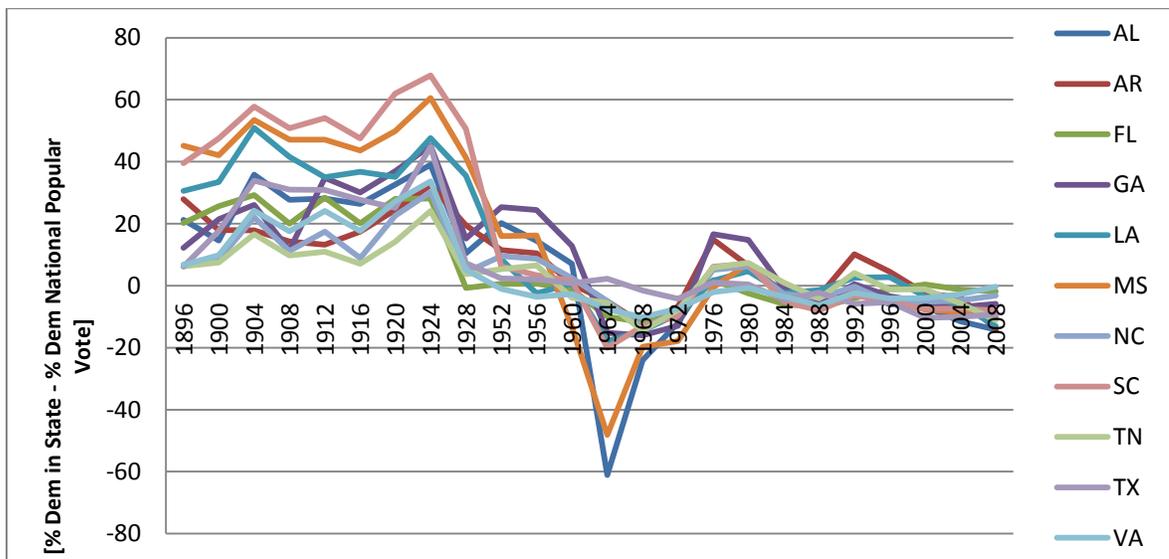


Fig. 7.23: Democratic presidential strength in the former Confederate states, 1896-2008 (FDR elections excluded).

²⁰⁹⁰ Matthew Lassiter suggests as much in *The Silent Majority*, arguing that “overreliance on race-reductionist narratives to explain complex political transformations . . . downplays the centrality of class ideology in the outlook of suburban voters and ignores the consistent class division among white southerners evident throughout the civil rights era.” Instead, “the civil rights movement and the Sunbelt boom jointly destroyed the political mythology of the Solid South.” Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 2006), pp. 4, 15.

Conclusion: The Happy Warriors

“I voted as the other Members of Congress did in those days of honeymoon between the Executive and Legislative branches of the Government. There was this difference though: I was not voting to remedy the new and different onslaught of economic distress which seemed suddenly to have descended upon us. I had come from a little bit of world where economic distress had, it seemed, always been a part of life. What I had known, what I had seen in Brownsville, Pitkin Avenue, in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn, in the Park Places of Brooklyn, in the markets of Brooklyn, had now become the generalized commonplace experience. I had known people hungry, cold, homeless, afraid, insecure. I was not talking and voting about anything new. I represented a district that had never known leisure, had never known freedom from want and freedom from fear.”

-Congressman Emanuel Celler (D-NY), *You Never Leave Brooklyn* (1953)

After almost two decades of development in New York State, transitional progressivism had been presented to the nation in a coordinated fashion by Alfred E. Smith and his Democratic allies during the 1928 presidential contest. In the urban, industrial North—particularly in New England and in many of the nation’s great cities—this unique amalgam of social welfare and labor progressivism, cultural pluralism, and political pragmatism, had fueled unprecedented Democratic successes. Yet faced in 1928 with the nation’s prevailing economic and cultural conservatism, Al Smith and his ideas went down to defeat.

Though Smith was vanquished, the Republican landslide of 1928 did not halt the momentum that the New Yorker’s candidacy had lent to those progressive ideas. In September of that year, syndicated columnist Mark Sullivan had noted the increasingly urban cast of the Democratic Party, discussing the influx of ethnic city-dwellers into politics and the consequent influence this would exert on debates over prohibition and immigration restriction. He concluded that irrespective of Smith’s fortunes, this was to

be a permanent transformation: “Dry Democrats have been telling their followers to sit tight and vote straight, as usual; that Smith will be beaten in November and that then the old management could resume control. Of all the vain hopes now current in the political world, that is probably the vainest. In the new Democratic party, the bulk of the votes are going to come from the wets in the big cities and the new wet leadership will keep control.”²⁰⁹¹ Sullivan’s headline blared his conclusion: “New Democratic Party is Born.”²⁰⁹²

In fact, a substantive metamorphosis of the Democratic Party had been set in motion by Smith’s national campaign. In its wake, an increasingly influential faction within the party began to insist both that their voices be recognized and that their proposals be enacted. During the 1930s, the agenda of transitional progressivism would constitute a considerable portion of the liberal Democratic program.

Father of the New Deal?

While remarkable and even revolutionary, the subtleties of this development must be understood in order to define the precise role transitional progressivism (and transitional progressives) played in shaping Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal. There has been an understandable tendency to overstate Al Smith’s significance as the inspiration or even the progenitor of the liberal program of the 1930s. A particularly strong exponent of this position, historian Paula Eldot, identified “Smith as an important source of the New Deal” in her thorough examination of his governorship, concluding that “his career

²⁰⁹¹ Mark Sullivan, “New Democratic Party is Born,” *The Hartford Courant*, September 9, 1928, p. E7.

²⁰⁹² *Ibid.*, p. E7.

in Albany places Smith in a reform tradition that extends from progressivism to the New Deal.”²⁰⁹³ Eldot, who rightly identified Smith’s gubernatorial program as that of a progressive reformer, pointed to a “continuity of policy” between Smith and Roosevelt in areas including administrative reorganization, “humanitarian” government, conservation, housing, labor, and water power, to affirm the thesis—set forth by Frances Perkins—that the Happy Warrior ought to be remembered as “the forerunner of the New Deal.”²⁰⁹⁴ Eldot was not the first author to make such observations. In 1969, Matthew and Hannah Josephson asserted that under Smith, “in New York you could find the beginnings of the Welfare State which was to reach full bloom later in its federal form under the New Deal Administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt.”²⁰⁹⁵ Moreover, this view has commanded remarkable staying power. In 2011, *Salon* editor-in-chief Joan Walsh went as far as to dub Al Smith “the real father of the New Deal.”²⁰⁹⁶

Many studies have presented a far different view of the Happy Warrior. William Leuchtenburg suggested that the New Yorker had been a moderate reformer who was “from the first fundamentally conservative” and who “never questioned the assumptions of capitalist society, certainly not the profit motive or the virtue of success,” pointing out that “the notion of a planned society was as repugnant to [Smith] as to Hoover.”²⁰⁹⁷ Similarly, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., detected an important difference between the New Yorker’s beliefs and the influential “economic pseudo-radicalism” of agrarian Democrats: “Smith stood for a social welfare liberalism, indifferent to the concentration

²⁰⁹³ Eldot, *Governor Alfred E. Smith: The Politician as Reformer*, pp. 379, 396.

²⁰⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 396-397. Perkins quoted in *ibid.*, p. 396.

²⁰⁹⁵ Josephsons, *Al Smith: Hero of the Cities*, p. xi. It should be reiterated that the Josephsons drew heavily on the notes of Frances Perkins in making this argument.

²⁰⁹⁶ Joan Walsh, “Obama, the Triangle Fire and the Real Father of the New Deal,” *Salon*, March 25, 2011, http://www.salon.com/2011/03/25/obama_al_smith_and_the_triangle_fire/singleton/.

²⁰⁹⁷ Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity*, p. 231.

of wealth, uninterested in basic change, but concerned with protecting the individual against the hazards of industrial society.”²⁰⁹⁸

Both positions spring from essential truths, yet each errs in its basic premise. Historians are correct to recognize the significance of Smith’s governorship to the development of a social welfare regime prior to the onset of the Great Depression and the consequent establishment of the New Deal state. However, Smith’s progressivism must not be extracted from the world in which it was exercised. Each facet of his gubernatorial agenda was a programmatic manifestation of transitional progressivism—variously applied in diverse contexts based on specific problems and crafted each time to succeed within a unique political environment. To the extent that Governor and then President Roosevelt faced many of the same humanitarian crises that Smith had combated at Albany, precedents had been established by the elder Democrat for robust governmental intervention on behalf of social welfare. Moreover, figures who had helped to develop Smith’s transitional progressive approach to state governance—most notably Frances Perkins and Robert Wagner—would play central roles in determining FDR’s approach to many of the problems of the Great Depression. Because of the singularity—in breadth, scale, and success—of Smith’s progressivism during the 1920s, and because of the intimate connections between the two New York Democrats, it is only logical to perceive a line of development running through Smith to Roosevelt and the New Deal. Yet Smith never faced the Great Depression as an executive; nor did he ever have to deal with national problems as anything more than a candidate. Smith’s progressive administration set precedents upon which Roosevelt would build and

²⁰⁹⁸ Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, p. 97.

established a strong social welfare tradition from which Roosevelt would draw, but transitional progressivism did not constitute the genesis of the New Deal.

On the other side, there is truth to the argument that Al Smith was not particularly interested in establishing a “planned society,” especially at the national level. But Smith’s gubernatorial record belies the notion that he instinctively found such planning “repugnant.”²⁰⁹⁹ Similarly, while not an anti-corporate crusader or visceral maligner of the upper classes, Smith’s record demonstrates a willingness to engage in such class-based politics in situations where this was a useful political technique for promoting his vision of social justice. Indeed, the very notion that social justice ought to be established—and that this usually meant an active government promoting the interests of the poor and working classes while infringing on the prerogatives of the wealthy and powerful—was a central tenet of Smith’s transitional progressivism, which runs counter to the impressions left by Schlesinger and Leuchtenburg. From the perspective of the social workers and machine politicians who had awkwardly aligned to develop this transitional progressivism, and most importantly from the perspective of the urban workers on whose behalf that progressivism was employed, the assertion that “protecting the individual against the hazards of industrial society” did not constitute “basic change” would have been absurd.

The flaw of both positions is their attempt to understand Smith’s program through the prism of the New Deal era. One looks back to the 1920s and discovers that many of the social welfare battles won by New Dealers had earlier been joined by Al Smith; the other scours Smith’s progressivism and finds an absence of Tugwellian planning and a lack of class rhetoric in the manner of the 1936 Democratic campaign. What emerges in

²⁰⁹⁹ See chapters 2 and 3.

both cases is a narrative that necessarily discounts the subtleties of Smith's progressivism and risks projecting unique contextual elements such as the Great Depression and the Roosevelt landslides into the political reality of the 1920s, thus utilizing anachronistic standards for "progressivism," "conservatism," "liberalism," and other concepts which were themselves redefined by the upheavals of the 1930s. Eldot is absolutely correct that Smith was a progressive governor, and that many of his achievements can be seen at least to have foreshadowed elements of the New Deal; and Leuchtenburg and Schlesinger are equally correct that Smith's progressivism was not New Deal liberalism. Here J. Joseph Huthmacher's nomenclature is the most precise: many New Deal programs were "akin to those [Smith] had espoused at Albany."²¹⁰⁰

Making a New Deal

In fact, transitional progressivism did serve as a fundamental stage in the evolution from Progressivism to New Deal liberalism, both in policy and politics. In New York, the transitional progressives reconciled and then synthesized the social work and urban Democratic traditions; they then politicized the resulting new progressivism as a partisan agenda, institutionalized that agenda as a comprehensive program for New York State, and nationalized their program during the 1928 presidential campaign. Simultaneously, Al Smith's presidential bid precipitated an electoral revolution in key regions—especially the industrial Northeast—and the powerful voting bloc that emerged would in turn prove an essential component of the Roosevelt coalition.

²¹⁰⁰ Huthmacher, *Senator Robert F. Wagner and the Rise of Urban Liberalism*, p. 103. Emphasis added.

While cultural factors like religion and prohibition clearly bolstered Smith's cause among these urban ethnic working-class voters, the candidate's transitional progressivism, articulated throughout the campaign by the nominee and his partisans, also resonated with those being neglected by Republican economics. It is widely accepted that, irrespective of the cultural controversies surrounding Smith's candidacy, Republican success in 1928 was foreordained by the prosperity being enjoyed by much of the nation.²¹⁰¹ In fact, this argument is even stronger than its proponents have acknowledged, for rather than adopting wholesale a "me too" posture toward Republican policies, Smith articulated his alternative, progressive vision of a robust social welfare regime at a time when economic conditions left most Americans disinterested in such matters.²¹⁰²

Yet this program was not universally repulsive. The experiences of urban ethnic workers left these voters more eager to embrace Smith's policies, and they were responsive to the entreaties of the transitional progressives.²¹⁰³ The 1928 campaign thus strengthened ties between urban ethnic voters and the Democratic Party.²¹⁰⁴ This invigoration was not merely manifested in the reinforcement of Democratic machines with a new infusion of ethnic votes.²¹⁰⁵ Rather, the nature of the national Democratic Party began to change with these developments. As urban ethnic voters became an

²¹⁰¹ The strongest statement of this position appears in William Leuchtenburg's *The Perils of Prosperity*: "If Smith had been Protestant, dry, and born in a log cabin of good yeoman stock, he still would have been defeated on the Democratic ticket. In the atmosphere of the 1920's, the Republican party was almost unbeatable." Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity*, p. 237. Also: Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism*, pp. 179-180; Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, p. 300.

²¹⁰² Leuchtenburg states that "for the most part, the Democratic party in 1928 chose to take a 'me too' position." Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity*, p. 233. This assessment is largely accurate as regards the party platform and most notably the position on the tariff; but there were fundamental differences, particularly within the presidential campaign. See chapter 4.

²¹⁰³ See chapter 6.

²¹⁰⁴ Burner suggests that that vote was "already clearly growing earlier in the decade," a claim which is debatable by region (see chapters 5 and 6). Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism*, p. 243.

²¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

increasingly significant bloc within the party, they became increasingly assertive. In Smith's wake, these voters and their elected leaders became forceful advocates of social welfare and labor reforms within the Democratic Party, and in this way helped shape the course of New Deal legislation and the development of the American welfare state. Before 1928, noted Frances Perkins, this "program of social justice" had been at most a marginal priority for Democratic presidential candidates; but those voters who were initiated into the party by the Smith candidacy would prioritize such questions, altering the parameters of serious public policy debate in the United States.²¹⁰⁶

In 1990, historian Lizabeth Cohen argued in *Making a New Deal* that common cultural experiences among ethnic Chicagoans in the late 1920s and 1930s provided diverse workers a common foundation on which to construct class solidarity.²¹⁰⁷ Simultaneously, those workers witnessed the impotence of private and local charities in the face of the Depression and began demanding federal action on behalf of social welfare.²¹⁰⁸ Galvanized collectively as active Democrats by 1936 and organized as enthusiastic unionists shortly thereafter, Chicago's ethnic workers pressed for public policies that reflected their conception of "moral capitalism."²¹⁰⁹ In this way, workers truly *made* the New Deal.

Cohen's is a compelling and largely accurate picture of working-class ethnic politics during the Great Depression. However, a crucial addendum to such a narrative is recognition that Al Smith's 1928 campaign, beyond stimulating ethnic city-dwellers over

²¹⁰⁶ Frances Perkins Oral History, Book II, p. 629. Uncharacteristically, Perkins hedges on her assessment of the Cox and Davis campaigns, but a consideration of their candidacies largely affirms her recollections in this case.

²¹⁰⁷ Lizabeth Cohen, *Making A New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge, 1990), *passim*; e.g.: pp. 101, 136, 313, 324-325, 328, 331, 332.

²¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 364.

²¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

the question of prohibition, as acknowledged by Cohen, helped to activate ethnic workers as Democrats who espoused the principles of transitional progressivism on questions of social welfare as well as cultural pluralism.²¹¹⁰ The tumult of the Depression catapulted Franklin Roosevelt into the White House just as urban ethnic workers became a crucial bloc within the Democratic Party, and simultaneously these voters' representatives began to express their particular progressive agenda with increasing force and assertiveness. As they did, specific facets of the New Deal would be imbued with the distinctive agenda of transitional progressivism.

Indeed, those who entered the 1930s espousing that agenda were in many ways satiated. With the New Deal, the engaged state envisioned by social workers and their political allies was firmly established. Female social work progressives found much of their specific agenda present in Roosevelt's program.²¹¹¹ As historian Robyn Muncy notes, the 1935 Social Security Act incorporated almost wholesale the programmatic recommendations of Children's Bureau chief Katharine Lenroot and her predecessor Grace Abbott—restoring the bureau's maternal and infant health programs, providing programs for crippled and neglected children, and nationalizing mothers' pensions.²¹¹² Furthermore, as the New Deal bureaucratized and expanded many of these women's initiatives, it offered numerous positions for female progressives who had been trained within the social work tradition.²¹¹³

²¹¹⁰ Cohen on 1928: *Ibid.*, p. 255.

²¹¹¹ Molly Dewson proclaimed that the New Deal was "just dazzling," representing the fruition of "what us girls . . . have been working for for so long." Muncy, *Creating A Female Dominion*, pp. xi, 153.

²¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp 151-152.

²¹¹³ Ware, *Partner and I*, pp. 192-193; Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform*, pp. 150-153. However, Muncy also notes that "for all the progress these women saw in New Deal legislation . . . they were not nearly satisfied with it," and in fact "When the Social Security Act put the largest children's program under the supervision of the Social Security Board, the female monopoly over children's policy

Specific national problems that had been identified during the Smith campaign and which were made urgent with the onset of the Great Depression were often met through amplified, nationalized formulations of transitional progressive proposals. Through New Deal agencies including the Civil Works Administration, Public Works Administration, and Works Progress Administration, great public works projects were initiated to help alleviate unemployment and modernize the national estate.²¹¹⁴ Meanwhile, the Tennessee Valley Authority's power program firmly established federal control over the Muscle Shoals site and demonstrated the potential of public power projects to lower electricity rates and improve efficiency.²¹¹⁵

Housing, the Herculean challenge with which social workers had been contending since the Gilded Age and that had become a focus of state policy under Al Smith's Reconstruction Commission, was another area of social welfare taken up by Roosevelt's administration. In 1933 the New Deal "saved tens of thousands of homes from foreclosure" by refinancing mortgages through the Home Owners' Loan Corporation.²¹¹⁶ The following year, the Federal Housing Authority began encouraging construction of private housing by insuring loans.²¹¹⁷ By 1937, an even more active role was being played in housing thanks to the Wagner-Steagall Act, which created the United States Housing Authority and helped finance public housing projects.²¹¹⁸

dissolved. Women certainly did not at this point disappear from the child welfare bureaucracy, but neither did they exercise sole responsibility any longer." Muncy, *op. cit.*, pp. 153-154.

²¹¹⁴ William E. Leuchtenburg, "The Achievement of the New Deal," in *The FDR Years: On Roosevelt and His Legacy* (New York: Columbia, 1995), pp. 236-282, pp. 256-260, 267-269.

²¹¹⁵ Leuchtenburg, "The Achievement of the New Deal," p. 268; Thomas McCraw, in his history of the TVA, concluded that as of 1969, "the Authority's power program is the largest and probably the most efficient in the United States." McCraw, *TVA and the Power Fight*, p. 160.

²¹¹⁶ Leuchtenburg, "The Achievement of the New Deal," pp. 248-249.

²¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

²¹¹⁸ Leuchtenburg, "The Achievement of the New Deal," pp. 248-249; Paul K. Conkin, *The New Deal*, (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1978), p. 60.



Fig. 8.1: Rollin Kirby, “We Know it’s Hot but Here is an Important Subject” (1937).²¹¹⁹

Industrial life, the evils of which had provided the original impetus for the transitional progressive alliance, became the focus of serious federal regulation. As William Leuchtenburg notes, in facilitating the codification of labor practices for major industries, the National Recovery Administration “wiped out sweatshops, ended various forms of exploitation, and removed some 150,000 child laborers from factories.”²¹²⁰ Workers were also provided with the means of self-advocacy. Section 7(a) of the National Industrial Recovery Act set the precedent for federal protection of collective bargaining rights; and while this would evaporate with the Supreme Court’s 1935 decision in *Schechter Poultry Corp. v. United States* and the resulting demolition of the floundering NRA, even stronger and more durable union protections would be

²¹¹⁹ Rollin Kirby, “We Know it’s Hot but Here is an Important Subject,” July 28, 1937, from the Collections of the Museum of the City of New York.

²¹²⁰ Leuchtenburg, “The Achievement of the New Deal,” p. 253.

established in the wake of the ruling.²¹²¹ The National Labor Relations Act of 1935, known colloquially as the “Wagner Act” after the New Yorker who sponsored the bill in the Senate, guaranteed collective bargaining rights to duly chosen unions, legalized strikes and boycotts, outlawed company unions, yellow-dog contracts, and blacklists, and formed a National Labor Relations Board empowered to supervise union representation elections and conduct hearings on labor grievances.²¹²² As a result of these protections, union membership in the manufacturing sector soared by almost four-fold from 1933 to 1941.²¹²³ Moreover, in the tradition of the state-level labor progressivism of the 1910s and 1920s, the federal government now established minimum wages and maximum hours, and sought to improve workplace conditions for many workers through such legislation as the 1936 Walsh-Healey Act and the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act.²¹²⁴

Indeed, the urban ethnic workers who were brought into the Democratic column beginning in 1928 could fairly consider the New Deal *their* deal. They had gained labor protections (under the Wagner Act and Fair Labor Standards Act), unemployment relief (through the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, the sundry works programs, and later through Social Security), and at least a modicum of financial security (of personal savings, through the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation; of homes, through the HOLC; and, eventually, even in retirement through Social Security). Perhaps as significantly for these groups, the Democratic Party of the New Deal era had inherited

²¹²¹ Conkin, *The New Deal*, p. 61; Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, pp. 150-152.

²¹²² Huthmacher, *Senator Robert F. Wagner*, pp. 190-199; Conkin, *The New Deal*, pp. 61-62. Historian Paul Conkin has suggested that with the act labor gained “an almost unbelievable capitulation from the government.” *Ibid.*, p. 61. Anthony Badger notes that while “the New Deal may have failed to disturb the basic structure of American business,” it did “appear to have facilitated the formation of a countervailing force in the trades union movement.” Anthony J. Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-1940* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), p. 118.

²¹²³ Leuchtenburg, “The Achievement of the New Deal,” p. 250.

²¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

from transitional progressivism a distaste for social policies based upon proscriptions on personal behavior and élitist drives for old-stock cultural domination. As William Leuchtenburg characterized the change:

The reformers of the thirties had abandoned . . . the old Emersonian hope of reforming man and sought only to change institutions. This meant that they did not seek to ‘uplift’ the people they were helping but only to improve their economic position. . . . Reform in the 1930’s meant *economic* reform; it departed from the Methodist-parsonage morality of many of the earlier Progressives, in part because much of the New Deal support, and many of its leaders, derived from urban immigrant groups hostile to the old Sabbatarianism.²¹²⁵

On March 22, 1933, less than a month into his presidency, Franklin Roosevelt signed legislation amending the Volstead Act to legalize beer with an alcoholic content of up to 3.2 percent.²¹²⁶ By December, the Twenty-first Amendment, which had passed both houses of Congress prior to FDR’s inauguration, had been ratified.²¹²⁷ Prohibition was over.

The Happy Warriors

Of course, FDR had not ascended to the presidency intent on nationalizing transitional progressivism or with a stated goal of instituting the proposals of Alfred E. Smith. His mission was much more straightforward: defeat the Depression. Constitutionally, many others shared this responsibility with the new president, and so Roosevelt and his “Brains Trust” were compelled to work with Congress in restoring the economy and ameliorating the suffering of the American people.

²¹²⁵ Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, pp. 338-339. Emphasis in original.

²¹²⁶ See Leuchtenburg for a colorful account of the “day of liberation.” *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

²¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Often, Roosevelt enjoyed the support of a cooperative—in the early days, sometimes even pliant—Democratic caucus, which dominated both houses of Congress for his first six years in office. Yet just as often congressional forces insisted on promoting their own agendas, and this legislative independence helped shape the course of the New Deal.²¹²⁸ Such was certainly the case with the newest major bloc inside the Democratic caucus: representatives of the urban, ethnic, working classes—especially those from the Northeast and other areas where Al Smith had made tremendous inroads for the Democratic Party.²¹²⁹

I

In general, these Northeastern urban Democrats were among the most loyal supporters of New Deal legislation. In his 1967 study *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal*, historian James T. Patterson found that of the seventy-seven most

²¹²⁸ *E.g.*: Leuchtenburg argues that Roosevelt was pressed by western inflationists to abandon the gold standard (a claim disputed by Frank Freidel); and Roosevelt (along with Senator Carter Glass) is said by Leuchtenburg to have “frowned upon” the proposal for deposit insurance, rendering the FDIC “a stepchild of the New Deal.” Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, pp. 50, 60; Frank Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: Launching the New Deal* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1973), p. 321.

²¹²⁹ Smith had made tremendous gains over Democratic presidential precedents in these areas (see chapter 6); and in the succeeding congressional elections Democrats began to pick up seats. While it is true that many Northeastern Democratic legislators were already Congressional veterans by the time of Roosevelt’s “Hundred Days,” others had been swept into office in the wake of the Crash of 1929. For example, Rhode Island’s three-member delegation to the House of Representatives had consisted variably of zero or one Democrats throughout the 1920s; after the 1932 election, the two-member delegation was dominated by Democrats. Similarly, Connecticut’s six-member delegation had nearly been monopolized by Republicans until 1930, when two Democrats were elected to the House. In the following election, two Democrats were also elected—both freshmen—and by 1937 Connecticut’s delegation was totally Democratic. (Rhode Island and Connecticut Democrats would be battered by the 1938 Republican resurgence; but this would prove a temporary setback, as each state’s congressional delegation would remain strongly Democratic for the better part of the century.) Similarly, while Massachusetts had long sent a handful of Democrats to Congress from Boston and the industrial regions of the east, western Massachusetts—where Smith had made significant gains—elected Democrat William Granfield in a special election after Republican congressman William Kaynor died in a plane crash in December, 1929. On the other hand, the New York delegation already had a strong Democratic presence throughout the 1920s, although it too was strengthened in the New Deal years.

conservative House Democrats from 1933 to 1939, eighteen were from the Northeast or Midwest, and of these, only ten were from “urban” districts.²¹³⁰ Significantly, only four of the seventy-seven conservative Democrats were from urban districts in either southern New England or the New York metropolitan region.²¹³¹ Only one of these conservative Democrats was from New York City; there were none from Boston or Jersey City, nor were there any from the entire states of Connecticut or Rhode Island.²¹³²

Put more positively, the Democratic delegations from New York, New Jersey, and southern New England, were important congressional partners in much of Roosevelt’s program.²¹³³ In 1933, these representatives were unanimous in their support for creating FERA and the NRA; they gave 85.4 percent support to the Agricultural Adjustment Act and 91.7 percent support to the TVA conference report.²¹³⁴ In 1935 they unanimously backed the Social Security Act and the conference report creating the Works Progress

²¹³⁰ Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal*, pp. 340-343. Patterson defines “Midwest” as “Old Northwest, Minn., Iowa” and “East” (which I have called “Northeast”) as “New England, N.Y., N.J., Pa., Del.” Districts were defined as “urban” if they were 50 percent or more urban according to the 1940 census. “Conservative” is defined as having voted against the Roosevelt administration on at least 25 percent of “key roll calls.” Ibid., pp. 340, 343.

²¹³¹ Defined by the author herein as: Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island. Ibid., pp. 340-343.

²¹³² Although the New Bedford and Fall River districts remained part of larger, Republican districts throughout the 1930s.

²¹³³ In the senate, affairs were more complicated—largely by personality clashes and individual agendas. Conservative Northeastern Democratic senators like Peter Gerry of Rhode Island and Royal Copeland of New York aligned with Southern “irreconcilables” like Carter Glass of Virginia and Josiah Bailey of North Carolina by the mid-1930s to promote a strong conservative agenda; while Copeland’s fellow New Yorker, Robert F. Wagner, consistently prodded the administration leftward. On the conservatives, see Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal*, pp. 188-210; 250-324; on Wagner, see Huthmacher, *Senator Robert F. Wagner and the Rise of Urban Liberalism*, pp. 107-278.

²¹³⁴ *Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the First Session of the Seventy-Third Congress, also Special Session of the Senate of the United States of America*, volume 77, part 1 (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1933), p. 766; *Congressional Record*, volume 77, part 2, p. 2129; *Congressional Record*, volume 77, part 4, p. 3600; *Congressional Record*, volume 77, part 5, p. 4373. All figures were calculated by the author based on the roll call votes (found in the *Congressional Record*, *loc. cit.*) of all Democratic representatives from the states of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island.

Administration; and later initiatives including housing legislation (1937 and 1939) and the Fair Labor Standards Act (1938) would also attract unanimous support.²¹³⁵

As with any collection of politicians, this bloc could be fickle. Yet the nature of their disagreements with the administration elucidates their priorities far better than the frequency of their concurrence. There was regular dissent among these representatives, for example, on matters of corporate regulation and taxation. Only 78 percent of these Northeasterners supported creating the Securities and Exchange Commission in 1934.²¹³⁶ Similarly, 79.5 percent supported the conference report on the so-called “soak the rich” Revenue Act in 1935, and 78.6 percent backed the undistributed profits tax the following year.²¹³⁷ In each of these cases, the support for the administration’s wishes was still slightly above the congressional average—SEC received 77 percent, the Revenue Act 77.2 percent, and the undistributed profits tax received 69.3 percent—but when Republicans are factored into the opposition, the Northeasterners are shown to have been among the weaker Democratic supporters of the administration’s more populist ambitions. Certainly this was the case when two-thirds of the Northeastern representatives voted to replace the Senate’s public utilities holding company “death sentence” provision with a milder House substitute in 1935.²¹³⁸ Indeed, only 55.3 percent ultimately supported the conference report on that bill.²¹³⁹ The significance of this opposition is revealed further in light of the fact that twenty-eight of the one hundred

²¹³⁵ *Congressional Record*, volume 79, part 5, p. 5150; *Congressional Record*, volume 79, part 6, p. 6069; *Congressional Record*, volume 81, part 8, p. 9293; *Congressional Record*, volume 83, part 7, p. 7449. *Proceedings and Debates of the 76th Congress, First Session*, volume 84, part 10 (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1939), p. 10957.

²¹³⁶ *Congressional Record*, volume 78, part 8, p. 8116.

²¹³⁷ *Congressional Record*, volume 79, part 13, p. 14644; *Congressional Record*, volume 80, part 6, p. 6367.

²¹³⁸ *Congressional Record*, volume 79, part 10, p. 10637.

²¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, part 13, p. 14626.

Democrats who “deserted” the administration on the utilities bill were from the Northeast—whereas in 1935 that region provided only 13.7 percent of the entire Democratic caucus.²¹⁴⁰

Conversely, Northeastern congressional Democrats sometimes bucked the Roosevelt administration in ways that hardly marked them as conservatives. The first, and most noteworthy, was with the Economy Act. Intent on restoring business confidence and moving toward a balanced budget, Roosevelt called for federal retrenchment nearly immediately after solving the banking crisis, on March 10, 1933. House Democrats initially rebelled, with some portraying the move as a gift to powerful business interests and others as simply cold and heartless; yet William Leuchtenburg notes that while “at any other time such appeals would have carried both chambers . . . they made little headway against the power of the President in a time of crisis. . . . Under the leadership of Franklin Roosevelt, the budget balancers had won a victory for orthodox finance that had not been possible under Hoover.”²¹⁴¹ Despite the strong support Roosevelt had gained for this fiscal maneuver (the bill passed the House 266 to 139), the Northeastern bloc proved implacable on the issue, with only 44.7 percent of the region’s Democrats supporting the bill.²¹⁴² Similarly, 83.8 percent of these Democrats voted in 1936 to override Roosevelt’s veto of a bill to distribute bonuses to World War veterans.²¹⁴³ In this case they were joined by overwhelming majorities in both houses of Congress, but, like with the Economy Act, the bonus question demonstrated the delegation’s willingness to defy Roosevelt and promote more prodigal spending—a

²¹⁴⁰ Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal*, p. 71.

²¹⁴¹ Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, p. 45.

²¹⁴² *Congressional Record*, volume 77, part 1, p. 217.

²¹⁴³ *Congressional Record*, volume 80, part 1, p. 1015.

temperament that was more often manifested in strong support for New Deal proposals reflecting similar goals, including the \$1.425 billion deficiency appropriation of 1936 and Roosevelt's "pump-priming" initiative in 1938.²¹⁴⁴

When this sort of welfare spending was attacked by Republicans as "socialistic"—as it was during an August, 1935 debate over the president's proposed tax increases, these urban Democrats responded with rhetoric reminiscent of the Happy Warrior—who had always fought such criticisms with a two-pronged retort both belittling the merits of the charge and extolling his own record. "This bill opens the door to the path that leads straight to . . . a socialistic condition," warned New York Republican Bertrand Snell.²¹⁴⁵ In response, Chicago Democrat Adolph Sabath presented a seventeen-point recitation of the economic and social welfare achievements of 1933 and 1934, concluding with the declaration that Roosevelt was "the first and only President of the United States who has ever insisted upon feeding the hungry and furnishing clothing and shelter to the needy."²¹⁴⁶ Next, John J. O'Connor of New York asserted that "the people of this country from 1929 to 1933 suffered such distress and privation under Republicanism that, if a solution to their problems did mean socialism, they would welcome it rather than go back to Republicanism."²¹⁴⁷

Much of this represented political histrionics and campaign bombast from both sides. O'Connor exposed this when he referred to Snell as "the distinguished gentleman from New York . . . my good friend, a candidate for president," as did Sabath when he

²¹⁴⁴ Each ultimately received 100 percent support from the region's House Democrats. *Congressional Record*, volume 80, part 8, p. 8519; *Congressional Record*, volume 83, part 6, p. 6836.

²¹⁴⁵ *Congressional Record*, volume 75, part 11, p. 12283.

²¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12286

²¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12287.

proclaimed that Roosevelt's humanitarian record would "go down in history."²¹⁴⁸ Even still, on seemingly more mundane matters urban Northern Democrats similarly held the line.

In the House of Representatives on March 22, 1939, Illinois Republican Everett Dirksen proposed an amendment to an appropriations bill that would strike out a \$60,000 allocation for a conference to be held by the Children's Bureau. By this time, the New Deal was already under heavy congressional assault, and even before Dirksen's proposal, the appropriation was reduced by 70 percent in committee. But this was not enough for Dirksen, who queried: "What good can come of bringing 250 women to Washington to sit around a conference table for 2 or 3 days and then bring them back again for another 2 or 3 days and finally have them draw up 100 pages of conclusions on the position of children in a democracy That would be \$18,000 sheerly wasted."²¹⁴⁹ Embedded in this obscure congressional action was a direct assault on the premise that the government should foster and fund the formulation by experts of aggressive programs to combat social inequality—a foundational principle of transitional progressivism and a central tenet of the social welfare initiatives of the New Deal era.

On this occasion, the first Democratic respondent was Caroline O'Day, a social worker and close Roosevelt ally from Westchester County, New York, who had served as Commissioner of the New York State Board of Charities under Governor Smith, toured the nation with the Smith campaign in 1928, and was elected to Congress in 1934.²¹⁵⁰

²¹⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 12286, 12287.

²¹⁴⁹ *Proceedings and Debates of the 76th Congress, First Session*, volume 84, part 3, p. 3128.

²¹⁵⁰ Malcolm, ed., *The New York State Red Book, 1928*, p. 204; "Smith Starts Tour to Win the West, Big Crowd Cheers," *The New York Times*, September 17, 1928, pp. 1, 3; "Smith on Way West Plans Second Trip," *The New York Times*, September 18, 1928, pp. 1, 2.

We women, and the men too, should be very much concerned over the plight of children in this democracy. . . . The Federal Government only pays one-third of what is paid by the States, in aid of dependent children who have no lobby. The consequence is the dependent children, not your children, not mine, not the children of you gentlemen here, but the dependent children are not properly looked after, and we women want to get busy on that because the old people will die off and those dependent children will be our citizens who will supplant us and take our place and hold the reins of government in their hands, and they are not taken care of.²¹⁵¹

Dirksen's amendment was narrowly defeated—167 for, 189 against—and the action, while primarily supported by Republicans, received aid from economy-minded Democrats. Among Democrats from the Northeastern districts, however, the Dirksen Amendment received but a single vote.²¹⁵²

Overall, the agenda of the urban Northeastern Democrats reflected national priorities that their constituents had begun to express in 1928 with their embrace of transitional progressivism: strong support for social welfare measures—no matter the cost; strong support for labor protections; and ambivalence toward strong regulation and heavy taxation (usually providing such measures with tepid support). The other ingredient to this progressive formula was support for a pluralistic vision of Americanism. Predictably, therefore, these representatives were also staunch advocates of the conception of American society and culture that had been championed by Smith and the transitional progressives—and which had fused with issues of economic security and social welfare to draw urban ethnic workers into the Democratic Party.

This advocacy occurred irrespective of the Roosevelt administration's wishes. The 1930s were not a period of great legislative activity on such issues; however, when presented with the opportunity, the heirs of transitional progressivism were unanimous

²¹⁵¹ *Proceedings and Debates of the 76th Congress, First Session*, volume 84, part 3, p. 3128.

²¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 3130.

backers of tolerance and pluralism. The most famous instance was the Beer Bill, backed by the president and approved with strong support in both houses of Congress. This was passed with total support from the Democrats of the “wet” Northeast—and indeed largely at their instigation.

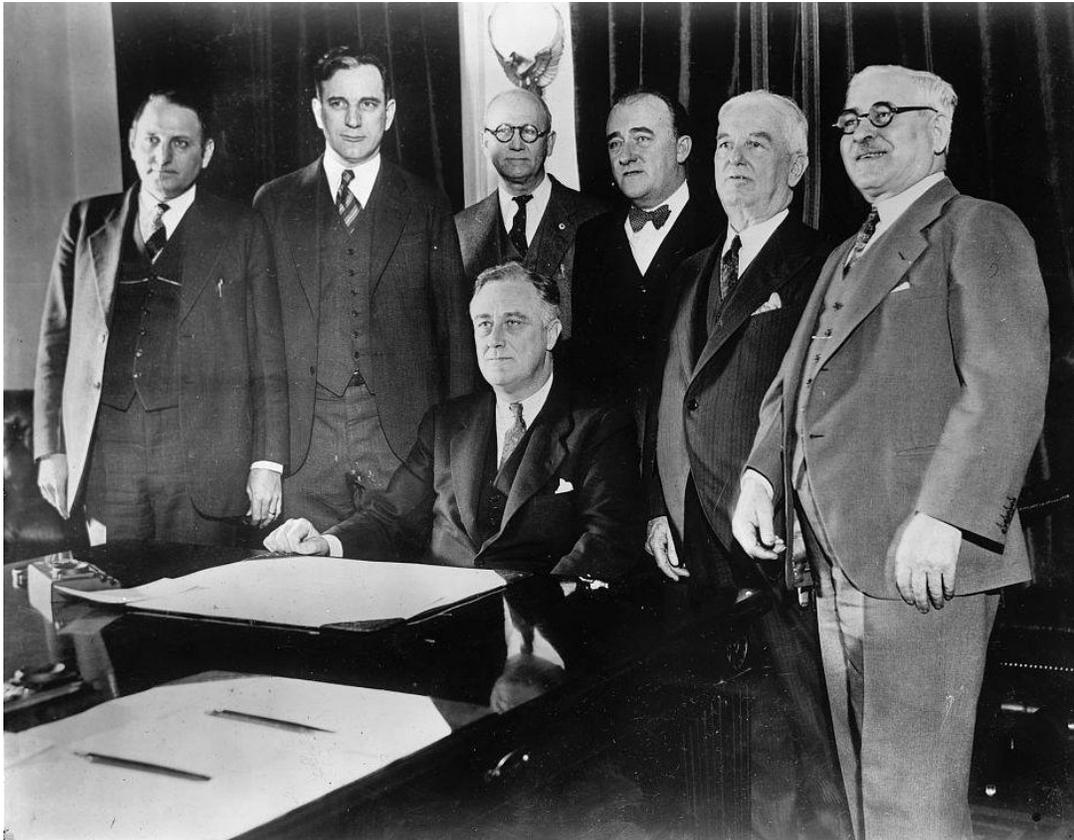


Fig. 8.2: President Roosevelt signs legislation amending the Volstead Act to legalize the sale of 3.2 percent beer, March 22, 1933. Behind him stand major congressional supporters of the bill (left to right): Claude V. Parsons (D-IL); John W. McCormack (D-MA); H.V. Hesselman, committee clerk; John J. O'Connor (D-NY); Thomas H. Cullen (D-NY); and Adolph J. Sabath (D-IL).²¹⁵³

Much more serious—and ultimately less fruitful, at least in terms of immediate victories—was the fight for federal anti-lynching legislation. Bills granting federal authorities legal powers to compel local sheriffs to investigate lynching had been introduced numerous times in the past. Such proposals always failed to survive the

²¹⁵³ “Congressional beer crusaders witness signing of beer bill,” March 22, 1933, Harris & Ewing Collection, Library of Congress.

machinations of filibustering Southern senators. Previously, these bills had come from Republicans—providing Southern Democrats with invaluable campaign fodder.²¹⁵⁴ By the 1930s, however, New York Democrats had taken the reigns. In 1937, Robert F. Wagner introduced an anti-lynching bill in the Senate, which went nowhere; the following year, reintroduction of the bill spurred a filibuster that tied up the Senate from January 6 through February 21.²¹⁵⁵ As J. Joseph Huthmacher gloomily concludes: “the Senate’s first major civil rights debate of the New Deal era” had “ended in defeat for the proponents of racial justice.”²¹⁵⁶

This was not the case in the House of Representatives, where filibusters were not a viable option for recalcitrant Southerners. There, companion legislation was introduced in the spring of 1937 by Joseph Gavagan, a New York City Democrat. Lacking the dilatory powers of their senate brethren, Southern representatives resorted to virulent race-baiting in their efforts to stop the Gavagan bill. While the proposal passed the House by a wide margin (277 to 120, including 100 percent of the Northeastern Democrats), the floor debate exposed a major ideological rift between Democratic congressmen representing the old “Solid South” and those who had been elected from the new Democratic strongholds in the urban industrial North.

Some Southerners denigrated the plan as a political ploy by Tammany Hall. After all, the Irish Gavagan’s twenty-first congressional district included large swaths of Harlem; thus, many snickered that the proposal ought to be entitled “a bill to make

²¹⁵⁴ See chapter 7.

²¹⁵⁵ Wagner was joined in introducing the bill by Senator Edward Costigan (D-CO). Huthmacher, *Senator Robert F. Wagner and the Rise of Urban Liberalism*, pp. 238-243; Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal*, pp. 156-157.

²¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

Harlem safe for Tammany.”²¹⁵⁷ Mississippi congressman John E. Rankin went a step further: “I think it should be called ‘A bill to encourage rape.’”²¹⁵⁸

Worse, from Rankin’s perspective, was the fact that the bill fit into a broader pattern of Northern Democratic assaults on long-standing racial mores. “We are told that this is just the beginning of a series of drives to destroy the color line and try to force race amalgamation on the American people,” he reported. “One member from Connecticut [Hermann Kopplemann], I understand, has already introduced a bill to wipe out segregation in the District of Columbia. . . . Mr. O’Connor of New York stated on the floor that he favored such a measure and hoped the gentleman from Connecticut would pursue it.”²¹⁵⁹

North Carolina’s Alfred Lee Bulwinkle, among others, agreed. Southern Democrats had been promoting the interests of the party in Congress for decades—and now these upstarts from the urban North were shattering partisan traditions and seeking to transform the very nature of the Democracy.²¹⁶⁰ Edward Leo O’Neill, a New Jersey freshman representing parts of Newark, retorted that Northern Democrats had been hampered in their own electoral sorties by the kind of rhetoric being employed against the Gavagan bill—rhetoric that had damaged Democratic credibility in the North and had cost candidates votes from African-American citizens. When Bulwinkle then demanded to know if O’Neill meant that “the Negro vote [sent] him here,” the Garden State congressman presented a basic articulation of the new, moderate Democratic position on

²¹⁵⁷ *Congressional Directory: 73rd Congress, First Session, June, 1933* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1933), p. 78; *Congressional Record*, p. 3547.

²¹⁵⁸ *Congressional Record*, volume 81, part 3, p. 3547.

²¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3549.

²¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3558.

racial inclusion.²¹⁶¹ While hardly a righteous sermon from a bold civil rights pioneer, O’Neill’s retort was nevertheless a challenge to old Democratic attitudes—a challenge that started from the basic, egalitarian premises of transitional progressivism and pressed them toward a more just, more inclusive posture:

I do not regard lynching as a racial problem, neither do I regard it as a sectional problem. I think it is an entirely American problem. . . . Lynching is a heinous crime against American concepts and as such alone should it be treated. The gentleman from North Carolina wishes to know whether I represent a Negro district. I represent a number of Negroes, and I am grateful for the suffrage of those who voted to send me here, and I intend to represent them as vigorously as I would any other person in the district. I made such a statement during my campaign, not to an audience of Negroes but to an audience of whites.²¹⁶²

This speech by a relatively obscure Democratic freshman (O’Neill would not even be reelected) reflected the mounting intrapartisan challenge to long-held positions on race and inclusion. The party was beginning to fulfill Al Smith’s private 1928 pledge to Walter White, that “the old Democratic Party, ruled entirely by the South, is on its way out, and that we Northern Democrats have a totally different approach to the Negro.”²¹⁶³

II

In his 1993 study *The New Dealers*, historian Jordan Schwarz profiled numerous individuals whose “timely opportunism” allowed them to pursue “permanent improvements of America’s capital structure and its standard of living” during the Great

²¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 3558.

²¹⁶² Ibid., p. 3558.

²¹⁶³ White, *A Man Called White*, pp. 99-100. It was a long process of course, but there were signs of movement. In the early 1930s, when Democrats took control of House committees, Roy Wilkins, a clerk to the labor committee described as a “Negro” and a “College graduate,” was removed from his position at the insistence of Southern members. In response, Congressman William P. Connery, Jr., a Democrat from Lynn, Massachusetts, hired Wilkins as assistant to his chief secretary. Benjamin E. Waite, “Connery’s Aide Negro,” *The Item*, (undated clipping—1963), William P. Connery Papers, Lynn Museum, Lynn, MA (hereafter, William P. Connery Papers), Folder 3.

Depression and beyond.²¹⁶⁴ In this view, the New Deal and its enduring legacies were shaped by figures with agendas that only sometimes coalesced with the relief, recovery, and reform initiatives radiating from the White House. Others, including Elizabeth Cohen, have demonstrated how rank and file workers began to assert themselves to define the course of labor and welfare policies in the 1930s. Somewhere between the power players of finance and politics and the increasingly class-conscious working masses, there operated the middle ranks of the New Deal Revolution: legislators and other key figures who advocated in Washington on behalf of their increasingly assertive urban ethnic working-class constituents and who often pushed the Roosevelt administration toward stronger positions on the rights of labor and the government's responsibility for promoting social welfare.

These figures did not “make” the New Deal, for while they supported a diverse set of initiatives, their focus remained on the problems of their own districts. But they did help to shape the New Deal, advocating from within Roosevelt's coalition on behalf of the transitional progressive agenda their constituents had adopted as their own. Over the course of the 1930s and 1940s, the popularity of many New Deal initiatives, as well as Roosevelt's personal appeal to urban workers, would transform these citizens from nebulously defined self-advocates into New Deal Democrats; and since FDR had adopted the lion's share of their agenda, it was a relatively small step for these voters to evolve from transitional progressives into what Huthmacher has called “modern, urban liberals.” The “middle-men” (and women) in this process were the transitional progressives in Congress—those legislators who represented the interests of urban workers specifically

²¹⁶⁴ Jordan A. Schwarz, *The New Dealers: Power Politics in the Age of Roosevelt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), p. xii.

and who helped shift the focus of the New Deal increasingly toward their own constituents.

While there can be no ideal-type for these legislators, several cases are instructive in understanding their motives and their influence. A lesser-known congressman who exhibited a number of the fundamental characteristics of these members was Hermann Kopplemann, a Hartford Democrat who was elected in 1932 after his fellow Democrat, Augustine Lonergan, declined to seek reelection in favor of a senatorial bid. Kopplemann was of new-stock descent (he was a Jewish immigrant from the Ukraine) and represented an urban district in southern New England.²¹⁶⁵ Prior to his election to Congress, Kopplemann had been an advocate of social welfare initiatives: as a state senator in the late 1910s, his “most notable” achievement was his sponsorship of a “widows’ aid and children’s dependent act.”²¹⁶⁶ During the 1928 campaign, Kopplemann had been a strong supporter of Al Smith on both cultural and economic issues, and his attitudes on these questions remained progressive into the Depression. Once in Washington, Kopplemann consistently favored New Deal social welfare and labor programs, and indeed the congressman was a reliable supporter of Roosevelt’s initiatives in general.²¹⁶⁷ Although he produced little legislation of note, three bills he repeatedly introduced were an anti-lynching bill, a bill to promote industrial employment by enhancing the loaning power of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, and a bill to

²¹⁶⁵ *Congressional Directory: 73rd Congress, First Session, June, 1933*, p. 16.

²¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²¹⁶⁷ Among his only major votes against the administration were votes against the public utilities holding company “death sentence” (1935) and against naval expansion (1938), as well as a vote to override FDR’s veto of the World War veterans’ bonus bill in 1936. *Congressional Record*, volume 79, part 10, p. 10637; *Congressional Record*, volume 80, part 1, p. 1015; *Congressional Record*, volume 83, part 4, p. 3767.

cover emergency medical costs of war veterans whose expenses had been left unpaid after Roosevelt initiated his early drive for federal austerity.²¹⁶⁸

The unheralded Congressman Kopplemann is a good example of how the transitional progressive tradition became influential with the rise of a congressional bloc of urban, working-class Democrats in the 1930s—both in his background (he was of “ethnic” stock, from an urban district, and with a history of support for social welfare generally and Al Smith specifically) and in his activities during the New Deal (he compiled a fairly liberal voting record, particularly on questions relating to social welfare, labor rights, and cultural pluralism). Understanding the backgrounds and agendas of some of the more noteworthy members of the Northeastern, urban, ethnic, working-class Democratic bloc helps furnish a useful profile. Like Kopplemann, they had come to Congress as advocates of labor or of social welfare; they had been strong supporters of Al Smith in 1928 and usually in 1932 as well; and they were the most strident proponents of labor and welfare legislation in the New Deal era. In their biographies, priorities, and usually in their dispositions, these were the “happy warriors” of the 1930s.

III

In his 1953 autobiography *You Never Leave Brooklyn*, Congressman Emanuel Celler identified the most important element in the creation of transitional progressivism—an element that made the perspective of these legislators unique within the New Deal coalition. During Roosevelt’s first months in office, Celler recalled, “I

²¹⁶⁸ E.g.: *Congressional Record*, volume 78, part 12, p. 245.

voted as the other Members of Congress did in those days of honeymoon between the Executive and Legislative branches of the Government. There was this difference though: I was not voting to remedy the new and different onslaught of economic distress which seemed suddenly to have descended upon us. I had come from a little bit of world where economic distress had, it seemed, always been a part of life.”²¹⁶⁹ Indeed, Celler realized:

What I had known, what I had seen in Brownsville, Pitkin Avenue, in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn, in the Park Places of Brooklyn, in the markets of Brooklyn, had now become the generalized commonplace experience. I had known people hungry, cold, homeless, afraid, insecure. I was not talking and voting about anything new. I represented a district that had never known leisure, had never known freedom from want and freedom from fear.²¹⁷⁰

Moreover, “I had now made a discovery about myself. For the first ten years of my life in Congress, I had been timid. I had been too timid to tell the truth as I saw it. In a way I had betrayed my trust.”²¹⁷¹ While he had “fought against the unjust restriction of immigration,” fought prohibition, “advocated the establishment of a Negro industrial commission,” mildly opposed “the growth of monopoly power,” and “introduced a few civil rights bills,” ultimately the congressman “had driven back all the emotion that rose from the Brooklyn streets, so that I could belong unobtrusively to the exclusive club of Congress.”²¹⁷² The Depression, however, “loosened my inhibitions against being different. For the first time in ten years I could be myself.”²¹⁷³

²¹⁶⁹ Emanuel Celler, *You Never Leave Brooklyn: The Autobiography of Emanuel Celler* (New York: The John Day Co., 1953), pp. 20-21.

²¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22. Celler notes that among the issues on which he felt particularly passionate were “independence for India . . . the establishment of the National Homeland for the Jews in Palestine . . . our immigration laws . . . and . . . economic freedom for the people of the United States against the growth of monopoly power stifling that freedom.” He also presents himself repeatedly as a strong advocate of the working class and especially of the rights of labor. *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 216-233.

Conditions now allowed those who, like Celler, had understood the challenges facing urban ethnic workers, to present their agenda within a more accommodating social context and with a sympathetic executive. Thus it would be legislators from districts like Celler's, with experiences and agendas similar to his, who would be the strongest forces behind most of the social welfare and labor legislation of the New Deal era. The National Labor Relations Act, the Social Security Act, the Public Contracts Act, and the Fair Labor Standards Act all were crafted and sponsored by such legislators, and similar programs also received their staunch support.

The most obvious figure through whom the agenda of transitional progressivism influenced the course of the New Deal was Robert F. Wagner—one of the architects of that agenda. Wagner's legislative prolificity as the sponsor or co-sponsor of New Deal staples including the National Industrial Recovery Act, the National Labor Relations Act, the Social Security Act, and the National Housing Act of 1937, among many other bills, is well known. Significantly, Wagner was actively pursuing this agenda prior to Roosevelt's "Hundred Days." At the time of FDR's inauguration, the New York senator had a bill to strengthen the Emergency Relief and Construction Act of 1932 pending in Congress; as well as a federal-state employment exchange plan, recommendations for unemployment insurance, a bill creating retirement insurance for railroad workers, a proposal to investigate conditions among African-Americans working on the Mississippi River flood control project, and a bill to legalize beer and wine.²¹⁷⁴ Indeed, notes Huthmacher: "All these Wagner proposals were forerunners of the New Deal that was about to begin as Franklin Roosevelt took the oath of office, and they were indicative of the groups that would benefit from New Deal policies—the destitute, the unemployed,

²¹⁷⁴ Huthmacher, *Senator Robert F. Wagner and the Rise of Urban Liberalism*, pp. 128-129.

businessmen shorn of orders and customers, the elderly, exploited minority groups, and yes, even those who yearned to take a legal drink.”²¹⁷⁵

Wagner’s experiences in New York imbued his entire agenda with the principles of transitional progressivism. In fact, social welfare advocates who had worked with Wagner recognized that his background would help guide his response to the Depression and prompt him to direct the New Deal beyond recovery and toward an emphasis on economic justice. In October, 1932, Lilian Wald confidently wrote her senator: “when Mr. Roosevelt enters the White House, your position in Washington and in the Senate will make many measures possible. . . . and I feel that . . . courageous men like you who have training and the sense of values will push us on.”²¹⁷⁶

Robert Wagner is rightly remembered as the progenitor of numerous key New Deal initiatives. His lesser-known partner in many of those initiatives, particularly the National Labor Relations Act, was William Patrick Connery, Jr., a Democratic congressman from Lynn, Massachusetts—another legislator whose career reflected the rise of transitional progressivism and its significance in shaping the course of the New Deal. After seeing combat in the World War, Connery returned to Massachusetts where he took work in a General Electric plant, providing him with experiences “as a laboring man” that “were to echo and re-echo throughout the land in years to come.”²¹⁷⁷ Connery, whose mother was an Irish immigrant and whose father had been elected mayor of Lynn in 1912, entered political life himself in 1922—running for Congress on the pledge that “when I get there I am never going to forget my life’s work. And that life’s work is to

²¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 129.

²¹⁷⁶ Wald quoted in Ibid., p. 129.

²¹⁷⁷ “A True Friend of the [Common Man?] Passes On,” William P. Connery Papers, Folder MS/P10, p. 1.

gain for every man and woman in this country a decent living wage.”²¹⁷⁸ During the Coolidge years he plodded away in the minority on the House Labor Committee. By the end of the decade his efforts had already gained him recognition as “a reliable Progressive and a good friend of labor” by the *Machinists’ Monthly Journal*.²¹⁷⁹ In 1930 he introduced legislation calling for a thirty-hour work week, and in 1931 he succeeded in having measures providing for old age pensions and for \$700 million worth of relief funding to the states reported out of committee.²¹⁸⁰

Connery’s background among the urban working class consistently shaped his response to the Depression. “When Billy Connery thinks of the depression,” wrote Washington reporter Bulkley S. Griffin in 1931, “he does not think so much of banks or railroads as of people. . . . When Connery thinks of the depression he sees hungry children and men with their shoes worn through, and gaunt women.”²¹⁸¹ Because of this perspective, “When he hears the word dole and direct relief . . . he asks if people shall starve because of a phrase.”²¹⁸²

In 1932, campaigning for reelection as well as for Al Smith’s presidential nomination, Connery continued to focus on the human suffering caused by the Depression. “There are thousands of little children all over the United States . . . who have not Grade A milk to drink and need it; who have no stockings and who need them; who have no clothing and need it; who are starving to death,” he reported, promising to

²¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 1.

²¹⁷⁹ Charles M. Kelley, “Chip Off the Old Block,” *Machinists’ Monthly Journal*, p. 152 (undated clipping), William P. Connery Papers, Folder MS/P10. The article is dated from “the end of the decade,” because Kelley notes that Connery was in his fourth term—which would have been 1929-1930.

²¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

²¹⁸¹ Bulkley S. Griffin, “Two New Englanders And The President,” undated clipping, William P. Connery Papers, Folder MS/P10. Although undated, this article is likely from 1931, because Hoover is president but the Democrats have taken control of congressional committees.

²¹⁸² Ibid.

“fight” such conditions as long as he could.²¹⁸³ With the coming of the Roosevelt administration, the prospects of successfully undertaking such efforts improved dramatically, and several facets of Connery’s 1930 labor legislation—including “outlawing the yellow-dog contract, outlawing child labor, insuring labor the right to organize and the right . . . to bargain collectively,” were incorporated into the NIRA.²¹⁸⁴ When the NRA was dismantled in 1935, labor legislation introduced in Congress to entrench those advances (legislation which had initially received a chilly response from the White House) became more pressing; and so the National Labor Relations Act, sponsored in the House by Connery as chairman of the labor committee, was enacted that summer.²¹⁸⁵ Given the Massachusetts Democrat’s significant influence in drafting and passing the legislation, the Wagner Act “should really be known as the Wagner-Connery Act,” reflected International Union of Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers President Paul Jennings in 1965.²¹⁸⁶

²¹⁸³ “Jam Colonial At Democratic Rally Held Friday Night—Smith Cheered,” *Lawrence Telegram*, undated clipping, 1932, William P. Connery Papers, Folder MS/P10.

²¹⁸⁴ “A True Friend of the [Common Man?] Passes On,” p. 2.

²¹⁸⁵ Both FDR and Labor Secretary Frances Perkins were at best ambivalent toward the 1935 National Labor Relations Act. Roosevelt had pressured legislators not to allow an earlier version offered by Senator Wagner to come to a vote in 1934, and only gave the 1935 bill the go-ahead “to see how far [Wagner] could get, on his own, with his pet bill.” Roosevelt was “astonished” at Wagner’s quick legislative success, and it was only in response to the Supreme Court’s nullification of the NRA in *Schechter Poultry Corp. v. U. S.* (after the Wagner bill had been passed by the Senate and approved by the House labor committee) that the timely FDR announced that the Wagner Act was a priority. Huthmacher, *Senator Robert F. Wagner and the Rise of Urban Liberalism*, pp. 189-190, 192, 197-198. See also: Winifred D. Wandersee, “‘I’d Rather Pass a Law than Organize a Union’: Frances Perkins and the Reformist Approach to Organized Labor,” *Labor History*, 34:1 (Winter, 1993), pp. 5-32; Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, pp. 150-152.

²¹⁸⁶ Paul Jennings to Marie T. Connery Franciose, October 1, 1965, William P. Connery Papers, Folder MS/P10; “IUE President Lauds Connery at Lynn Dinner,” (undated clipping), William P. Connery Papers, Folder MS/P10.



Fig. 8.3: Representative William P. Connery (D-MA, left) and Senator Robert F. Wagner (D-NY, right), awaiting the Supreme Court's decision on the National Labor Relations Act, April 5, 1937.²¹⁸⁷

Undeterred by any lack of recognition, the congressman sought reelection in 1936 with the motto “100 per cent for labor. . . . 100 per cent for the veteran,” and “100 per cent for social justice for all.”²¹⁸⁸ These priorities, a reflection of the congressman's working-class background and of his constituency among the laborers of Lynn and Lawrence, sometimes placed Connery in conflict with the broader priorities of Franklin Roosevelt. Thus was Connery among the leading voices against one of FDR's first major

²¹⁸⁷ “Awaiting Decision on Labor Relations Act,” April 5, 1937, Harris & Ewing Collection, Library of Congress.

²¹⁸⁸ “A True Friend of the [Common Man?] Passes On,” p. 1. Connery did not go totally unrecognized. He always received strong electoral support from labor, and his congressional colleague, Minnesota Farmer-Laborite Ernest Lundeen, referred to the labor committee chairman as “one of the ablest and finest leaders that labor has ever had.” *Congressional Record*, volume 79, part 5, p. 5460.

initiatives—the Economy Act of 1933; as well as a leader of the forces that overrode the president’s veto of the veterans’ bonus payment bill in 1936.²¹⁸⁹ The nature of Connery’s opposition to Roosevelt serves to buttress the conclusions drawn from his support for the administration: he was primarily interested in promoting the rights of labor and improving social welfare. To that end, he set out in his next term in pursuit of legislation to develop federal standards on wages, hours, and working conditions. He would not live to see his victory. Billy Connery died on June 15, 1937, at age 48, in the midst of hearings on his legislation, which would eventually become the Fair Labor Standards Act.²¹⁹⁰

It was left to Connery’s successor as chair of the labor committee to complete the codification of federal labor standards. As it turned out, she was no less an exemplar than Connery of the urban, ethnic, working-class, Northeastern tinge of the new welfare- and labor-oriented Democrats now exercising such influence over New Deal policy. A representative from Jersey City, Mary Theresa Norton embodied transitional progressivism in both background and agenda as completely as any member of Congress.

Norton had been widowed in the 1910s and became active in child welfare and health work, spending many years as president of the Day Nursery Association of Jersey City and serving as chair of one of the Garden State’s largest Red Cross units during the Great War.²¹⁹¹ Following a trajectory strikingly similar to New York social workers like Frances Perkins and Belle Moskowitz, Norton’s activities gained the attention of Jersey

²¹⁸⁹ *Congressional Record*, volume 77, part 1, p. 216.

²¹⁹⁰ “Rep. Connery’s Death Threatens Wage Bill,” *Washington Daily News* (undated clipping), William P. Connery Papers, Folder MS/P10; United Press, “Labor Committee Head to Be Buried Saturday at Home” (undated clipping), William P. Connery Papers, Folder MS/P10.

²¹⁹¹ “Women in the Eighty-First Congress,” *Social Service Review*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (December, 1949), pp. 505-509, p. 506; *Congressional Directory: 73rd Congress, First Session, June, 1933*, p. 70.

City Democratic boss Frank Hague, who in 1920 presciently suggested that Norton might make a good representative of Hudson County women on the State Democratic Committee.²¹⁹² In 1923 Norton was the first Democratic woman elected as a freeholder in New Jersey, and in this capacity she used her political connections to pursue her social welfare agenda—gaining notoriety with her successful push to construct a maternity hospital in Hudson County.²¹⁹³ A decade later this achievement was noted as “the first of its kind in this country.”²¹⁹⁴



Fig. 8.4: Rep. Mary T. Norton (D-NJ; center, white dress) is “besieged” by reporters following testimony before the House Rules Committee, July 22, 1939.²¹⁹⁵

²¹⁹² “Women in the Eighty-First Congress,” p. 506; *Congressional Directory: 73rd Congress, First Session, June, 1933*, p. 70.

²¹⁹³ *Congressional Directory: 73rd Congress, First Session, June, 1933*, p. 70.

²¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

²¹⁹⁵ “Reporters question Rep. Mary Norton,” July 24, 1939, Harris & Ewing Collection, Library of Congress.

Norton was elected to Congress with Hague's backing the following year. She quickly gained prominence within the national party, and campaigned actively across the nation for Al Smith in 1928, thrashing prohibition and Republican administration more broadly while lauding Smith's record "on legislation for the protection of women and children."²¹⁹⁶ With the coming of the New Deal, Norton was given the opportunity to support such an agenda, and did so consistently—her voting record demonstrates particular enthusiasm for bills promoting social welfare, protecting labor rights, and bringing a halt to prohibition. Yet like Connery and many of the New Deal legislators who came out of the transitional progressive tradition, Norton was not universally supportive of the Roosevelt agenda. Unlike Connery, Celler, and Wagner, but like many Northeastern and especially New York area Democrats, Norton lacked any particular enmity toward big business, voting against establishing the SEC in 1934, against the public utilities holding company "death sentence" in 1935, and against the undistributed profits tax in 1936.²¹⁹⁷ Again, by understanding the nature of Norton's occasional opposition to the administration, it becomes easier to comprehend the character of her progressivism. Her priorities were those of the transitional progressives: social welfare, labor protections, and cultural pluralism. This was not necessarily to the exclusion of other New Deal priorities, such as economic planning or robust regulation, but neither were such priorities essential for the representatives of the urban working classes to qualify as important actors within the New Deal coalition. Upon the death of Billy Connery in 1937, Congresswoman Norton inherited the chair of the House Labor

²¹⁹⁶ "Smith's Humane Record is Mrs. Norton's Topic," *The Boston Globe*, October 9, 1928, p. 10; "More than 1,000 Women to Speak for Smith," *The Hartford Courant*, September 4, 1928, p. 2; "Asks if Death is Part of 'Noble Experiment,'" *The New York Times*, October 10, 1928, p. 6; Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, p. 196.

²¹⁹⁷ *Congressional Record*, volume 78, part 8, p. 8116; *Congressional Record*, volume 79, part 10, p. 10637; *Congressional Record*, volume 80, part 6, p. 6367.

Committee, and would play a crucial role in piloting the Fair Labor Standards Act to its eventual passage in 1938.²¹⁹⁸

Like Wagner, Connery, and Norton, numerous members of Congress from similar Northeastern, urban, working-class districts who had been participants in the Smith campaign and who espoused the ideals of transitional progressivism were key figures in crafting and passing significant pieces of New Deal legislation in areas of labor and welfare. Arthur D. Healey of Somerville, Massachusetts, had made a series of unsuccessful runs for political office in the 1920s, including a bid for Congress on the Smith ticket in 1928 which he lost to the incumbent Republican by 643 votes out of over 100,000 cast.²¹⁹⁹ Successful in 1932, Healey entered Congress with a mission to pursue specific goals of the urban working class.²²⁰⁰ In the long New England tradition, this sometimes meant advocating protectionism.²²⁰¹ More often it meant work in two specific areas: labor regulations and the provision of low-cost housing.

While still a freshman in Congress, Healey coauthored legislation that established the Federal Housing Administration in 1934.²²⁰² After reelection that fall, Healey continued to espouse federal aid to housing. He did this for private home owners with attempts to provide the Home Owners Loan Corporation with more robust funding; as well as for renters, with the Healey-Russell Bill of 1936, which authorized “the Federal Government to pay service charges in lieu of taxes on its low-cost housing projects” in

²¹⁹⁸ “Women in the Eighty-First Congress,” p. 507.

²¹⁹⁹ *A Manual for Use of the General Court of Massachusetts for 1929-1930*, p. 443.

²²⁰⁰ Prior to his successful election to the same post in 1932, Healey practiced as a lawyer, litigating noteworthy cases including a challenge by Al Smith supporters that local ballots were printed in a misleading manner and a successful suit by Somerville residents to compel the Metropolitan Ice Company to stop storing fuel oil in large tanks in their community. “Decision Due Today on Ballot Protest,” *The Boston Globe*, October 26, 1928, pp. 1, 6; “Somerville Citizens Win Fight Over Oil Tanks,” *The Boston Globe*, June 6, 1931, p. 4.

²²⁰¹ “Healey In Capital Asks Refined Sugar Tariff Rise,” *The Boston Globe*, March 2, 1933, p. 5.

²²⁰² “Pictures Benefits from Housing Act,” *The Boston Globe*, September 19, 1934, p. 5.

order to “make possible rentals low enough to accomplish the purposes of the housing project and at the same time . . . meet objections of other property owners, whose own taxes would be increased if the Government paid neither service charges nor taxes.”²²⁰³



Fig. 8.5: Rep. Arthur D. Healey (D-MA), pictured in 1939.²²⁰⁴

Healey was just as active in promoting labor protections. In early 1936 he was point-man in the House Judiciary Committee for the Walsh-Tobey Bill—a minimum wage compact between the states of Massachusetts and New Hampshire (and including

²²⁰³ “Curley Addresses 700 at Somerville,” *The Boston Globe*, December 12, 1934, p. 3; “Low Cost Housing Service Bill Wins,” *The Boston Globe*, June 2, 1936, p. 4.

²²⁰⁴ “Rep. Arthur D. Healey of Mass., member of the Committee investigating the Nat’l Labor Relations Board,” September, 1939, Harris & Ewing Collection, Library of Congress.

signatories from Connecticut, Maine, New York, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island).²²⁰⁵ Later that year, he was co-author and House sponsor of his most famous piece of legislation—the Public Contracts Act (or Walsh-Healey Act). This law articulated minimum labor standards that must be required of any firm doing business with the federal government, threatening “to deprive corporations of government contracts” if they failed to comply.²²⁰⁶ Both pieces of legislation can be viewed as pragmatic, piecemeal forerunners of the Fair Labor Standards Act.

The records of Healey and Connery fuse with that of Boston’s John W. McCormack, whom voters had promoted from the Massachusetts State Senate to the Congress in 1928, to produce a useful profile of the priorities of Bay State Democrats in this period. McCormack’s record was slightly less supportive of the Roosevelt administration than Healey or Connery—unlike the others he had opposed the Guffey Coal Act and the public utilities holding companies death sentence of 1935, and in 1938 he helped scuttle some of Roosevelt’s more aggressive corporate taxation plans.²²⁰⁷ Yet McCormack’s votes on questions of housing, work relief, labor standards, and social welfare marked him as a strong ally of the liberal administration on these key issues.

A more extreme case of such ambivalence was Massachusetts Democratic senator David I. Walsh. Huthmacher noted in his study of Massachusetts political development that Walsh’s 1926 bid to return to the United States Senate after being defeated for reelection in 1924 “had laid the groundwork for party victory” in the Republican-dominated state by incorporating “newer nationality groups” into the Democratic

²²⁰⁵ “Pay Compact Wins Approval In House,” *The Boston Globe*, January 21, 1936, p. 28.

²²⁰⁶ Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, pp. 162, 242.

²²⁰⁷ *Congressional Record*, volume 79, part 13, p. 14364; *Congressional Record*, volume 79, part 10, p. 10637; Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism in the New Deal*, pp. 229-231.

coalition.²²⁰⁸ As a young lawyer in Fitchburg practicing in an era before modern workmen’s compensation laws, Walsh had sought out cases supporting the interests of laborers and specifically of victims of workplace accidents; he had been a progressive executive and administrative innovator as the Bay State’s first Irish Catholic governor from 1914 to 1916; and as an incumbent senator in 1928, he had been a munificent champion of Al Smith’s progressive economic and cultural attitudes.²²⁰⁹

Walsh’s profile entering the Depression seemingly predisposed him to be a strong supporter of the New Deal—and so he was in the early years. Yet Walsh became increasingly estranged from the White House in the wake of Roosevelt’s “court packing” plan. By the end of 1937, the senator’s posture toward the inchoate conservative coalition in Congress was rumored to be “sympathetic,” and James T. Patterson’s statistical analysis of roll call votes has marked him as the nineteenth most conservative Democratic senator of the New Deal years.²²¹⁰ Nevertheless, Walsh’s record was neither consistently conservative nor capricious. He favored relief programs in 1939 just as he had in 1933; he repeatedly championed federal housing programs; and he authored and promoted numerous labor laws—including sponsoring the public contracts bill in the Senate.²²¹¹ Although the degree to which he objected to some New Deal initiatives was more extreme than his House colleagues, Walsh’s background and his discernible pattern

²²⁰⁸ Huthmacher, *Massachusetts People and Politics*, pp. 141, 148.

²²⁰⁹ Dorothy G. Wayman, *David I. Walsh: Citizen-Patriot* (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing Co., 1952), pp. 27-30, 51-86. On 1928, see chapter 6.

²²¹⁰ Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism in the New Deal*, pp. 117, 121, 202, 349. Walsh was also an ardent isolationist, and his ultimate break with the administration more centered on foreign policy. Wayman, *David I. Walsh: Citizen-Patriot*, pp. 291-301; Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism in the New Deal*, p. 337.

²²¹¹ Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism in the New Deal*, p. 297; *Congressional Record*, volume 77, part 1, p. 1042; *Congressional Record*, volume 78, part 3, p. 2423; *Congressional Record*, volume 79, part 11, p. 12013.

of support for liberal social welfare and labor initiatives made him a significant—if intractable—voice for the transitional progressive agenda throughout the 1930s.



Fig. 8.6: Senator David I. Walsh (D-MA) speaking at Arlington National Cemetery, Memorial Day, 1938.²²¹²

There were other Northeastern Democrats with urban, working-class constituencies and backgrounds who supported the lion's share of the transitional progressive agenda during the 1930s and yet frequently ran afoul of the Roosevelt administration. John J. O'Connor, a congressman from Manhattan who had served as secretary to Al Smith and the other Democratic delegates at the 1915 New York State Constitutional Convention and was the brother of Franklin Roosevelt's law partner Basil

²²¹² "Massachusetts senator pays tribute to America's war dead," May 30, 1938, Harris & Ewing Collection, Library of Congress.

O'Connor, is an especially complex figure.²²¹³ He was a consistent supporter of the early New Deal and his voting record even into 1935 and 1936 makes him at least superficially a “party regular” (indeed he did not qualify as a “conservative” in Patterson’s statistical analysis); yet as chairman of the House Rules Committee, O’Connor wielded great power to sidetrack New Deal priorities, which he did with increasing zeal as his indignation over presidential infringements of congressional prerogatives devolved into a churlish territoriality.²²¹⁴ This earned the chairman the political wrath of the White House and, ultimately, the dubious distinction of being one of the few targets of Roosevelt’s 1938 “purge” to be defeated in that year’s Democratic primaries.²²¹⁵ Less potent and thus less obnoxious to the White House was Joseph Gavagan—the sponsor of anti-lynching legislation in 1937 and a regular supporter of New Deal labor, welfare, and relief programs whose constant opposition to major taxation and regulatory initiatives made him the only New York City Democrat to vote against the Roosevelt administration on at least 25 percent of major roll call votes in the 1930s.²²¹⁶

All of these figures represent particular cases in the broader story of Northeastern, urban, ethnic Democrats who pursued many of the goals of transitional progressivism during the 1930s, and who did this in a way that profoundly influenced the course of the New Deal. There were dozens of such figures, and many, like Hermann Kopplemann, did not have a great deal of major legislation to their name. Indeed while some—like Wagner—have rightly gone down in history as crucial architects of important aspects of the New Deal, and others—like Connery—ought to be remembered in a similar way,

²²¹³ *Congressional Directory: 73rd Congress, First Session, June, 1933*, p. 77.

²²¹⁴ Patterson deals with these issues in depth. Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal*, pp. 53-57, 79, 176-177, 185-187, 191-192, 225-229, 235.

²²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 284-286.

²²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 340-343. The other New Yorker on Patterson’s list, Parker Corning, represented Albany.

many of these figures were particularly unremarkable members of Congress.²²¹⁷ Yet besides their geographic roots in the urban Northeast and their political support among the ethnic working classes of the region, these legislators also engaged in a common, discernible pattern of support for labor and welfare legislation, and did so at the behest of their constituents.

One other political characteristic that most of these congressmen shared was their strident support for Alfred E. Smith's presidential ambitions—in 1928 and usually also in 1932. The activities of many of these figures during the 1928 presidential campaign have already been noted. Interestingly, many of these same figures remained loyal to the Smith cause in the early stages of the 1932 contest. In February, Congressman Connery promised that should Smith run, his “friends, who were always loyal, will now work zealously for him not only in Massachusetts but in the New England states.”²²¹⁸ Congressman McCormack was similarly “pleased” to hear of Smith's interest in another race.²²¹⁹ In April, an all-star slate of Massachusetts politicians described by the *Boston Globe* as “the ‘heavy artillery’ of the Smith campaign” began a blitz in favor of the New Yorker's nomination.²²²⁰ Connery and McCormack joined other important figures in touring greater Boston on Smith's behalf.²²²¹ At an April 24 Smith rally at Boston's Hotel Statler, a crowd of 3,500 women heard Congresswoman Norton denounce anti-Smith Democrats as “political chameleons and charlatans an unprincipled band of

²²¹⁷ *E.g.*: Historian Arthur Mann has described James Lanzetta, who defeated the nominal Republican Fiorello La Guardia in East Harlem in 1932, as “an ingratiating Tammany candidate . . . who was soon to vanish into the obscurity from which he had emerged.” (Lanzetta would later lose the seat to another left-wing nominal Republican, Vito Marcantonio.) Mann, *La Guardia Comes to Power: 1933*, p. 18.

²²¹⁸ “Active Smith Drive Cheers Republicans,” *The New York Times*, February 23, 1932, p. 3.

²²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²²²⁰ “Smith Speaker Hits ‘Judases,’” *The Boston Globe*, April 25, 1932, pp. 1, 3.

²²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

political Judases.”²²²² Nor were these speeches all merely the vituperations of “stop Roosevelt” conservatives or machine pawns.²²²³ In a rousing address at Lawrence, Congressman Connery called for inflationary policies, generous and speedy payment of war bonuses, a decrease in the pension age from seventy to sixty-five, and the maintenance of current pay rates for federal employees, concluding that “as for Billy Connery, I am for Smith to the finish.”²²²⁴

Eventually of course all of these figures became New Deal Democrats and Roosevelt supporters. But their loyalty to Smith had been an accurate reflection of their constituents’ preferences—at least in the spring of 1932. At a rally of five hundred in Quincy, Massachusetts, on April 24 (featuring, among others, Somerville attorney Arthur Healey), Dr. Joseph Santosuosso had declared the Italian vote “100 percent for Smith.”²²²⁵ At least in the urban Northeast, this proved to be the case not only among Italians but among most urban ethnic workers. On April 27, Smith swamped Roosevelt three to one in Massachusetts, winning all thirty-nine Bay State cities and even sweeping Boston, where Mayor Curley had sided with FDR.²²²⁶ Indeed, Huthmacher has argued that in Massachusetts the 1932 primary “boiled down to a contest between Al Smith and James Michael Curley”; the results “demonstrated just how strong a hold the 1928 candidate retained.”²²²⁷ With a note of irony, Walter Lippmann suggested that Smith’s ability to “overwhelm the Curley machine in Boston itself is clear proof that the

²²²² *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 3.

²²²³ It is true that Frank Hague, Norton’s patron in Jersey City, would be Smith’s floor leader at the 1932 Democratic Convention in Chicago; and that in Massachusetts, James Michael Curley’s endorsement of Roosevelt had been seen as a challenge to the party establishment. Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, p. 298.

²²²⁴ “Jam Colonial At Democratic Rally Held Friday Night—Smith Cheered.”

²²²⁵ “Smith Speaker Hits ‘Judases,’” p. 3.

²²²⁶ Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, p. 293; Huthmacher, *Massachusetts People and Politics*, p. 237; Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, p. 7.

²²²⁷ Huthmacher, *Massachusetts People and Politics*, p. 237.

‘forgotten men’ intervened in the contest.”²²²⁸ The same week, in Connecticut’s Democratic caucuses, Smith defeated Roosevelt in “virtually all the large cities”; he won 75 percent of the Hartford County delegates (many of the other 25 percent simply remained unpledged); and he captured 375 delegates statewide—to Roosevelt’s 51.²²²⁹ Smith went on to wins in New Jersey and Rhode Island, and received strong support among the urban workers of Pennsylvania.²²³⁰

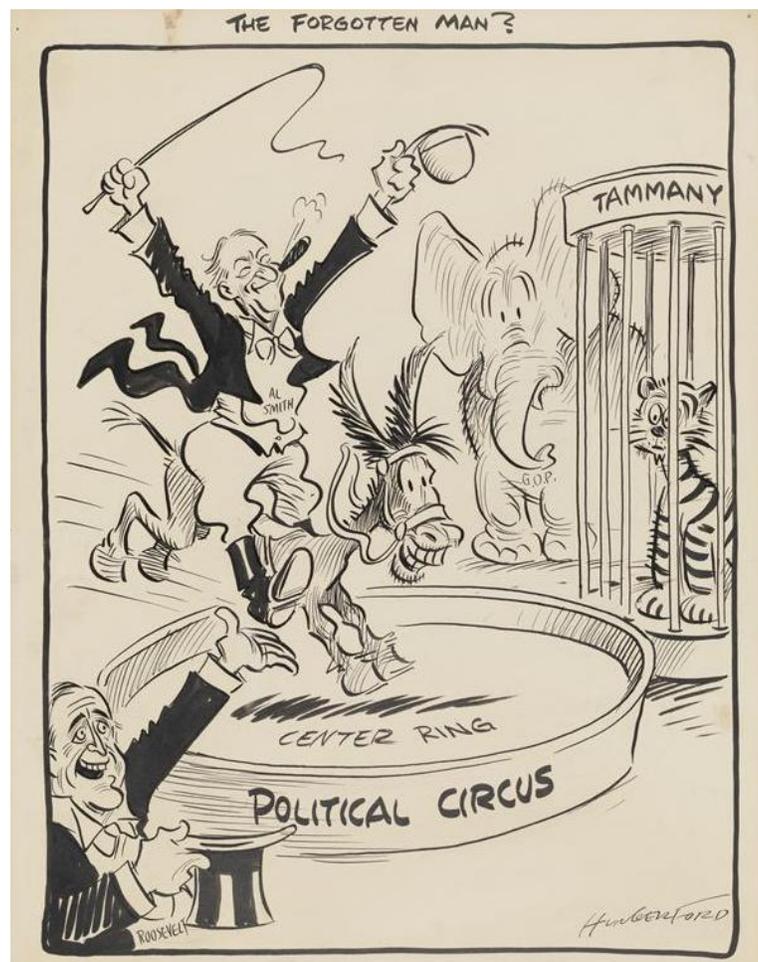


Fig. 8.7: Cy Hungerford, “The Forgotten Man?” (1932).²²³¹

²²²⁸ Walter Lippmann, “Boston Vote Tells the Story,” *The Boston Globe*, April 28, 1932, p. 16.

²²²⁹ “More Smith Groups Win in Connecticut,” *The Boston Globe*, April 29, 1932, p. 18; “375 Smith Delegates 51 for Roosevelt In Democratic Caucuses,” *The Hartford Courant*, April 29, 1932, p.1.

²²³⁰ “National Affairs,” *Time*, June 27, 1932, p. 14; “Lippmann, “Boston Vote Tells the Story,” p. 16.

²²³¹ Cy Hungerford, “The Forgotten Man?” (1932), from the Collections of the Museum of the City of New York.

All of this was a temporary condition, however, and it had little influence on the eventual nomination. When Roosevelt emerged victorious, the Democrats feared that they might lose the Northeastern urban workers whom Smith had attracted into the party—especially in the New England states. In what would prove a final episode of partisan loyalty, Smith spoke on the nominee’s behalf at a major rally in Boston on October 27, abandoning the “lukewarmness” of his previous Roosevelt speeches and adopting a vigor reminiscent of his own campaigns.²²³² On his way to the event, Smith made several stops in Connecticut, attracting enthusiastic crowds as he had in 1928 and remarking, “I feel like I’m running again.”²²³³ Elected to the Senate from the Nutmeg State on Roosevelt’s ticket, Augustine Lonergan would reflect that “it was [Smith’s] personal magnetism and leadership that brought many thousands of votes to the polls on election day allowing the majority of the Democratic candidates to win.”²²³⁴ Among the Democrats who did not win in Connecticut that year was Franklin D. Roosevelt; but by 1936 he too would carry the state, adding it to the Smith strongholds of Massachusetts and Rhode Island, which he had secured in 1932.

As the New Deal took hold and Roosevelt’s agenda became increasingly palpable, the urban ethnic workers who had long espoused Smith’s transitional progressivism became the most loyal of New Deal Democrats.²²³⁵ Al Smith would not participate in

²²³² Huthmacher, *Massachusetts People and Politics*, p. 248.

²²³³ “Smith in Boston Asks Complete Support of Roosevelt and Garner,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 28, 1932, p. 1.

²²³⁴ “Lonergan is Guest of Democrats,” *The Hartford Courant*, November 30, 1932, p. 13.

²²³⁵ William Leuchtenburg has noted that in 1938, when Democratic candidates again faced serious tests from the GOP, “new sources of Democratic strength” were revealed: “among lower-income groups, especially union labor, and Negroes, Italians, and Poles.” Irving Bernstein tied this more explicitly to the Smith vote, arguing that by the mid-1930s, groups that had broken Democratic in 1928 “constituted the bulk of the northern urban working class, and many, including women, were casting ballots for the first time. They bore the brunt of the joblessness of the Great Depression; they poured into the unions, especially those in the mass-production industries, in the thirties; they supported the New Deal; they voted

this movement. Instead, the man once known as the Happy Warrior, increasingly bitter and increasingly isolated from his old world, launched himself in a strange and discordant new direction, hopelessly battling the unstoppable forces which he himself had helped to unleash.

Quantum Mutatus Ab Illo

Shortly after Al Smith's 1928 defeat, a long-time ally contacted him to propose a real estate investment. On November 20, 1928, Lillian Wald wrote Smith, entreating him to come home to the Lower East Side. "It would be glorious if you and your family would return," she pleaded. "It would fire the imagination of a people, and our real trouble is the lack of imagination." Moreover, Wald had identified "a lovely site . . . where the river bends at Corlears Point." Warning that "if we do not look out, the millionaires will capture it," the social work icon envisaged that "upon this site could be built a place dignified and great for you—a home that would become a shrine as Thomas Jefferson's home."²²³⁶

Smith's urban Monticello never came to be. Actually, there is no evidence he was even given the letter by his secretary, whom Wald had pragmatically recognized "has to

for Roosevelt." Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, p. 272; Irving Bernstein, *A Caring Society: The New Deal, The Worker, and the Great Depression* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), p. 300. See also: John M. Allswang, *The New Deal and American Politics* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1978), pp. 73, 87-88.

²²³⁶ Lillian Wald to Alfred E. Smith, November 20, 1928, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 3.

decide between a mountain of letters and correspondences” in the wake of the national campaign.²²³⁷ Rather than return to the Fourth Ward, Al Smith began to drift uptown.

Except for a brief, successful stint as head of the United States Trucking Company during 1921 and 1922, Smith had spent his entire adult life in the public sector, and absent the marauding administrative techniques of his more notorious Tammany forebears, this was not a lucrative career path.²²³⁸ This meant that financial concerns had plagued Smith throughout his life. Nevertheless, during his time in the corporate world he had made lifelong connections with New York businessmen—most of them self-made Irishmen who shared Smith’s background and his affinity for Tammany Hall.²²³⁹ His increasingly opulent social circle, along with four terms in the executive mansion, left Smith with a taste for the high life: “After I left Albany, after living in a mansion for six years I couldn’t see First Avenue very well, so I went over on Fifth Avenue.”²²⁴⁰ The Smiths settled in a \$10,000 a year apartment on Fifth Avenue at Sixty-Third Street, from which he was taxied about town in a limousine.²²⁴¹ His new, lavish lifestyle was financed through investment help from John Raskob and eventually through Smith’s appointment (again by Raskob and his associate Pierre Du Pont) as President of the Empire State Building Corporation at an annual salary of \$50,000.²²⁴²

Yet Smith’s timing could not have been worse. If he had run for president four years too soon, he had arrived in the real estate business four years too late. The coming of the Great Depression made corporate office rentals a tough sell; thus when the Empire

²²³⁷ Ibid. Nevertheless, Smith did accept an offer by Wald, extended in a letter of December 26, to join the board of directors of the Henry Street Settlement. Wald to Smith, December 26, 1928, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 3; Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 331; Feld, *Lillian Wald*, p. 140.

²²³⁸ Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 150.

²²³⁹ Ibid., pp. 150, 344-345.

²²⁴⁰ Smith quoted in Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, p. 283.

²²⁴¹ Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, p. 284; Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 331.

²²⁴² Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, pp. 332, 337.

State Building opened in 1931, it was three-quarters vacant.²²⁴³ Meanwhile, his investments evaporated with everyone else's beginning in October 1929, and in the early 1930s he was "in an extremely bad position" financially, managing dutifully to maintain a façade of solvency as he continued his work beseeching struggling businessmen to lease space in his empty skyscraper.²²⁴⁴

Like most Americans, Smith had real problems during the Depression. Employed, housed, fed and clothed, the former governor's challenges did not approach those facing many of his countrymen. Yet having chosen Fifth Avenue over Oliver Street, Al Smith's perspective on the Depression was not that of the urban workers to whom he had devoted most of his life, but was rather the perspective of the businessman. His understanding of the crisis was increasingly constricted by his own experiences, for he was no longer working every day to understand and conquer the problems of ordinary citizens. Smith's new challenge was to kick-start a business intimately dependent on the good fortunes of corporate America.

This myopia was exacerbated by Smith's dramatic change in associations in the years after he left Albany. To the end of Smith's life, Bob Wagner remained one of his closest friends—throughout the 1930s, their Sunday evening poker games descended into "hotter and hotter" political arguments, but "liquid spirits plus the good spirits invoked by reminiscences of times past invariably restored amicability as the two old cronies, arm in arm, made their unsteady exit."²²⁴⁵ Yet while he retained cordial relations with figures like Wagner, Frances Perkins, Eleanor Roosevelt, and other officials, Smith was increasingly detached from their struggles with public policy. In January 1933, the most

²²⁴³ Ibid., p. 340.

²²⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 343.

²²⁴⁵ Huthmacher, *Senator Robert F. Wagner and the Rise of Urban Liberalism*, p. 124.

prominent of the old voices was silenced when Belle Moskowitz died of an embolism while recovering from a bad fall.²²⁴⁶ Smith's views were increasingly shaped not by social workers or even Tammany precinct captains, but by the businessmen with whom he retained regular professional and social contact. As H. L. Mencken would later conclude, Smith had been "ruined by associating with rich men—a thing far more dangerous to politicians than even booze or the sound of their own voices."²²⁴⁷ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., proposed a similar thesis: "Plunged into a world of business against which he had no intellectual defense, he rapidly absorbed the Raskob point of view."²²⁴⁸

This shift in perspective meant that Smith's 1932 bid for the Democratic nomination was not the encore of 1928 that voters in Boston, Hartford, or Scranton—not to mention a good many of their political leaders—may have been expecting. Smith's ill-fated 1932 campaign was a conservative affair. It is true that he had called for a federal public works program (Schlesinger called this "a last fling for the old Al Smith"), and he even remained steadfast in his commitment to "government ownership and control of all electrical power developed," from federal or state holdings.²²⁴⁹ But the heart of his program involved calls for retrenchment, budget-balancing, and cuts in business taxes—to be offset by a sales tax.²²⁵⁰ While it is not entirely accurate that Smith's bid was simply a "stop Roosevelt" campaign—he clearly believed he deserved another chance at the nomination—it is certainly the case that Smith was the candidate of conservatives like Raskob and his Bourbon sidekick Jouette Shouse, and that most of his efforts were

²²⁴⁶ Perry, *Belle Moskowitz*, p. 216.

²²⁴⁷ Mencken quoted in Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 382.

²²⁴⁸ Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, p. 283.

²²⁴⁹ Alfred E. Smith, "Water Power Control and Ownership Should Be in People's Hands," *Providence News Tribune*, April 2, 1932, clipping in the Alfred E. Smith Papers, Box 23, Folder 231; Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, p. 284.

²²⁵⁰ Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, p. 284.

devoted to thwarting the ambitions of his gubernatorial successor.²²⁵¹ Indeed, Smith's 1932 campaign is best remembered for his vitriolic denunciation of FDR's "forgotten man" speech ("I will take off my coat and fight to the end against any candidate who persists in any demagogic appeal to the masses of the working people of this country to destroy themselves by setting class against class and rich against poor").²²⁵²

His ambitions thwarted at the party convention in Chicago, Smith grudgingly settled into the role of party elder during the fall contest, and eventually even campaigned for FDR—most notably with his crucial swing through southern New England. None of this meant that Smith had accepted Roosevelt's ideas. "We should stop talking about the Forgotten Man and about class distinctions," he counseled in October; instead, the party should advocate fiscal prudence.²²⁵³ Nor were his views moderated with the conclusion of the campaign: in mid-November, as World War veterans continued demanding bonus payments, Smith complained coldly that "the veterans were imposing on the taxpayer without real justice for their claims."²²⁵⁴

Smith's conservatism of 1932, even his rage against the "forgotten man" speech, was but a temperate preview of the unrestrained fury soon to be unleashed by the former governor. As an editorialist in the *New Outlook*, Smith became increasingly critical of the New Deal throughout 1933, decrying its "baloney dollars" and "alphabet soup."²²⁵⁵ He emerged as the "most vehement" among conservative Democratic critics of the

²²⁵¹ Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, p. 5; Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, p. 282.

²²⁵² Smith quoted in Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, p. 5.

²²⁵³ Smith quoted in Schlesinger, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, p. 416. Not that Smith was alone in this—Roosevelt himself had identified "reduction in Federal spending as one of the most important issues of this campaign. In my opinion, it is the most direct and effective contribution that Government can make to business." Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, p. 11.

²²⁵⁴ "Bonus Hope is Dim in Next Congress," *The New York Times*, November 11, 1932, p. 3.

²²⁵⁵ George Wolfskill, *The Revolt of the Conservatives: A History of the American Liberty League, 1934-1940* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), p. 15.

Roosevelt program, denouncing centralization, mocking administration by “inexperienced young college professors,” and skewering by name New Dealers like Donald Richberg, Harold Ickes, Henry Wallace, Harry Hopkins, and Rexford Tugwell.²²⁵⁶ When Raskob and Shouse began organizing prominent businessmen from Du Pont, General Motors, General Foods, Sun Oil, Montgomery Ward, and other firms into a “non-partisan” organization to preserve the Constitution and safeguard Jeffersonian government against the machinations of New Deal bureaucrats, Al Smith was among the founding members of this “American Liberty League.”²²⁵⁷

Under the auspices of the Liberty League, Smith made his most inflammatory speech of the period, on January 25, 1936, from Washington. The Democratic agenda was indistinguishable from a Socialist platform, he fumed. In fact, communism was threatening representative democracy, for the New Dealers were not Democrats at all, but rather Marxist ideologues with the temerity to “march under the banner of Jefferson, Jackson, [and] Cleveland.”²²⁵⁸

At this point it may have been possible that Smith had forgotten what he had once stood for; but others had not. PWA information director Mike Straus, for one, recalled Smith’s 1928 Boston speech defending his own program from Herbert Hoover’s similar charges of socialism, reminding his boss, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, that “in his reply Smith had said that the cry of socialism had always been raised by powerful interests that desired to put a damper upon progressive legislation. It was raised, according to him, by reactionary elements in the Republican party and he had fought it

²²⁵⁶ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Coming of the New Deal: 1933-1935* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), pp. 483-484; Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 379.

²²⁵⁷ Schlesinger, *The Coming of the New Deal*, pp. 485-488; Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 380.

²²⁵⁸ Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, pp. 387-388.

for twenty-five years.”²²⁵⁹ The next day, before the Washington press corps, Ickes had Kentucky senator Alben Barkley question him about Smith’s anti-administration tirade.²²⁶⁰ In a prepared response, Ickes was able to refute Smith’s contemporary attacks by quoting Smith’s 1928 remarks verbatim.²²⁶¹ The pathetic irony was too much—the exchange “brought down the house.”²²⁶²

Smith’s 1928 running mate found it all quite distressing. Joe Robinson, still in the Senate representing Arkansas, concluded that Smith was now “the unhappy warrior,” a sadly diminished sell-out. “The brown derby has been discarded for the high hat; he has turned away from the East Side with those little shops and fish markets, and now his gaze rests fondly upon the gilded towers and palaces of Park Avenue.”²²⁶³ Robinson, who believed that Smith had once stood for much of what was being instituted through the New Deal, lectured the former nominee *in absentia* that “it was as difficult to conceive of you at the Liberty League banquet as it would be to imagine George Washington waving a cheery good-bye to the ragged and bleeding band at Valley Forge while he rode forth to dine in sumptuous luxury with smug and sanctimonious Tories in near-by Philadelphia.”²²⁶⁴

The president himself was bemused by the reactionary positions of his erstwhile ally, famously lamenting to Frances Perkins, “I just can’t understand it. . . . Practically all the things we’ve done in the Federal Government are like things Al Smith did as Governor of New York. They’re things he would have done if he had been President of

²²⁵⁹ Harold L. Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes: The First Thousand Days, 1933-1936*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953), p. 526.

²²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 526.

²²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 526-527.

²²⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 527.

²²⁶³ Robinson quoted in Finan, *Alfred E. Smith*, p. 319.

²²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 320.

the United States. What in the world is the matter? Why can't Al see this is the program he ought to be for?"²²⁶⁵

A number of scholars have struggled admirably to determine the precise reasons why Smith had taken this course.²²⁶⁶ Ultimately, such explanations are less important to this study than the obvious conclusion that there had in fact been a pronounced transformation—that these new positions were a departure from the old Al Smith. The Happy Warrior—jaundiced, bitter, resentful—had chosen a new, reactionary path. But his legions of political followers were reluctant to join him. Indeed, the motivations behind Smith's conversion do not matter much beyond biographical interest, because the shift affected so few people. When Smith helped author a Liberty League manifesto demanding that the Democrats dump Roosevelt and cabled it to the party's 1936 convention in Philadelphia, the document stirred conversations—but the party simply chose not to respond.²²⁶⁷ The public reaction was similar to that of Congressman O'Connor, who dismissed the Smith telegram as “an impertinence.”²²⁶⁸ In October, after Smith delivered a radio address for Republican presidential nominee Alfred M. Landon, there was no outpouring of urban support for the challenger from Kansas; instead, a Democratic club on Second Avenue in Manhattan took Smith's portrait down from their wall.²²⁶⁹ The next month, when Smith formally took his “walk” out of the party to which he had devoted his life and into a booth to vote Republican for the first time, no one

²²⁶⁵ Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew*, p. 157.

²²⁶⁶ E.g.: Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, pp. 376-389; Finan, *Alfred E. Smith*, pp. 297-328. Both studies find some ideological consistency in Smith's attitudes—on administrative inefficiency, federal centralization, and social planning. The efficiency point is a good one; planning is discussed above. Context matters on federalism: in the 1920s Smith and the national administration often crossed swords over specific policies, influencing his attitude toward federal authority; but this was situational rather than a broad rejection of federal powers. In general, it is clear that Smith's attitudes had changed in the 1930s.

²²⁶⁷ Wolfskill, *The Revolt of the Conservatives*, pp. 182-184.

²²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

²²⁶⁹ Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval*, p. 618.

followed. The working-class, ethnic cities that he had secured for the Democracy in 1928 became *more* Democratic in 1936.²²⁷⁰

Smith's greatest influence on the politics of the 1930s had been exerted during the preceding decade. As a presidential nominee the Happy Warrior had welcomed millions into his party with a straightforward articulation of his progressive vision for humanitarian government. Smith had always held that the Democratic Party was the vehicle that would transport "the people" toward a just society, and so he had ushered his enthusiastic followers aboard the Democracy for a drive to an America marked by cultural tolerance and a strong concern for social welfare. During a national campaign that centered on this particular progressive platform, he helped urban ethnic working-class Democrats articulate an agenda based on their own definition of progress. As the Great Depression hit and these Smith voters became an increasingly powerful bloc within the Democratic coalition, their drive began to pick up momentum: they were able to influence the directions in which Roosevelt would steer his New Deal, leveraging their electoral clout and mobilizing their vibrant cohort of political representatives. In this way, working-class urban ethnic Democrats exerted their new-found power and institutionalized the most important facets of transitional progressivism.

Al Smith had been a hero to many of these voters. For over a decade he had been their foremost champion. Now their agenda was building steam; but the old conductor refused to remain on board. This baffled many admirers, and broke many hearts—to her death, Lillian Wald kept a clipping of a 1936 article from the New York *Sunday News*

²²⁷⁰ See chapter 5.

that pondered Smith's renunciation of his former ideals.²²⁷¹ Among urban Democrats still struggling to reshape the nation to reflect their conception of social justice, the vanquished warrior was reluctantly relegated to irrelevance. While the working masses continued to board the refashioned Democracy in search of a better life in a more equitable nation, Smith disembarked—a sad, bitter, increasingly disregarded figure. As the New Deal Express steamed irrepressibly toward the future, Alfred E. Smith was left at the station, a surly old man shaking his fist angrily from the platform as history passed him by.



Fig. 8.8: President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (center) joins former (and future) congressman Hermann Kopplemann (D-CT, center-right) at a campaign stop in Connecticut in 1940. (Courtesy of the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Hartford.)²²⁷²

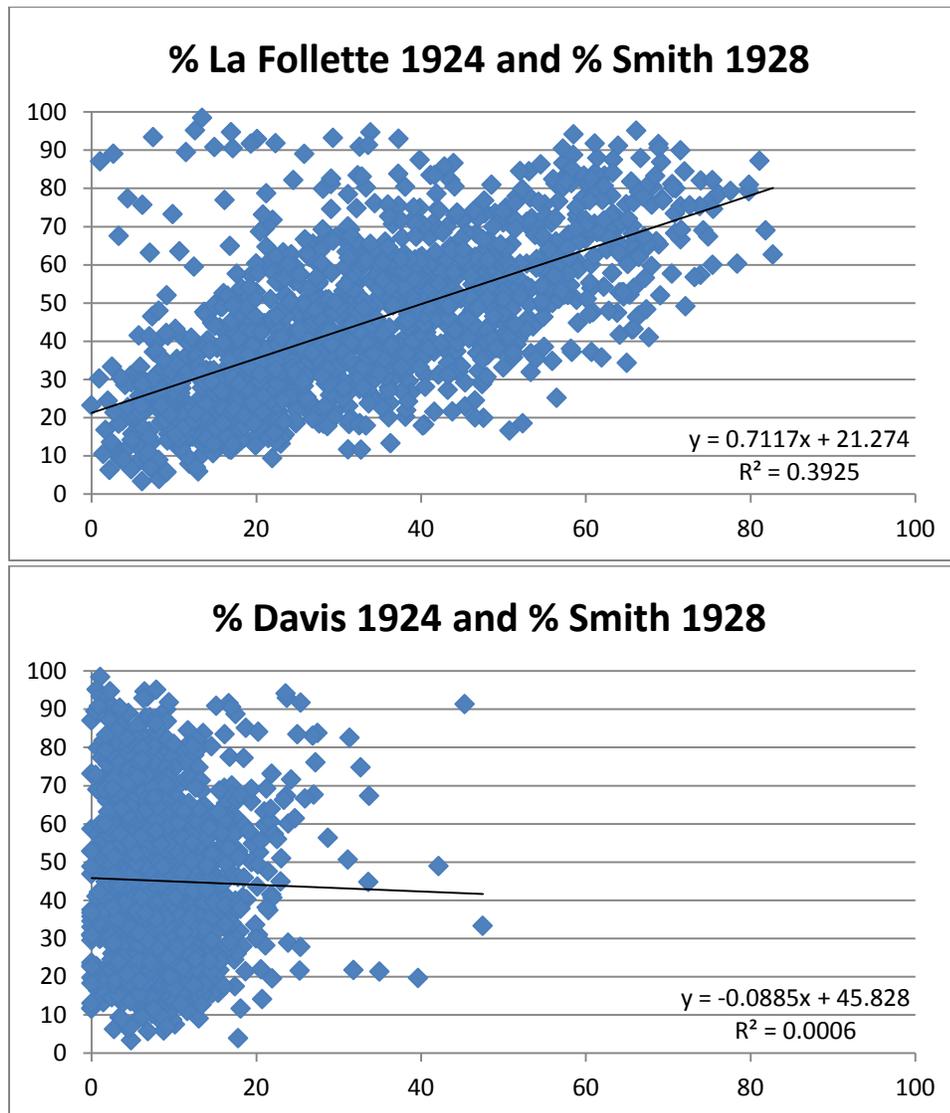
²²⁷¹ Dick Lee, "Brown Derby to High Hat," *The Sunday News*, February 23, 1936, pp. 52-53, Lillian Wald Papers, Reel 33.

²²⁷² Hermann Kopplemann Collection, Jewish Historical Society of Greater Hartford, West Hartford, CT.

Appendix I: The 1924 and 1928 Presidential Vote in two Midwestern Manufacturing Cities

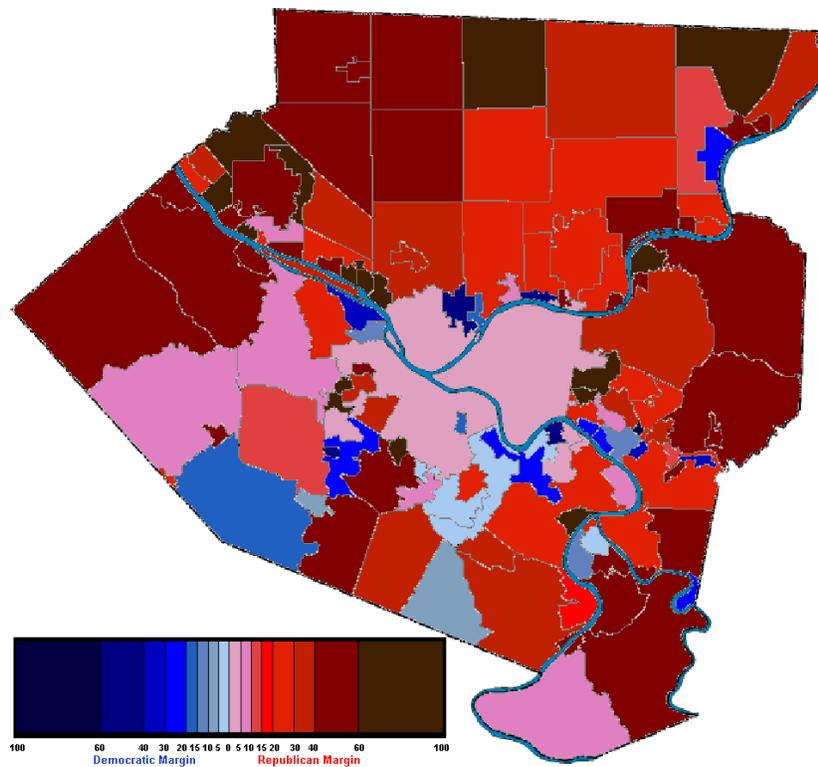
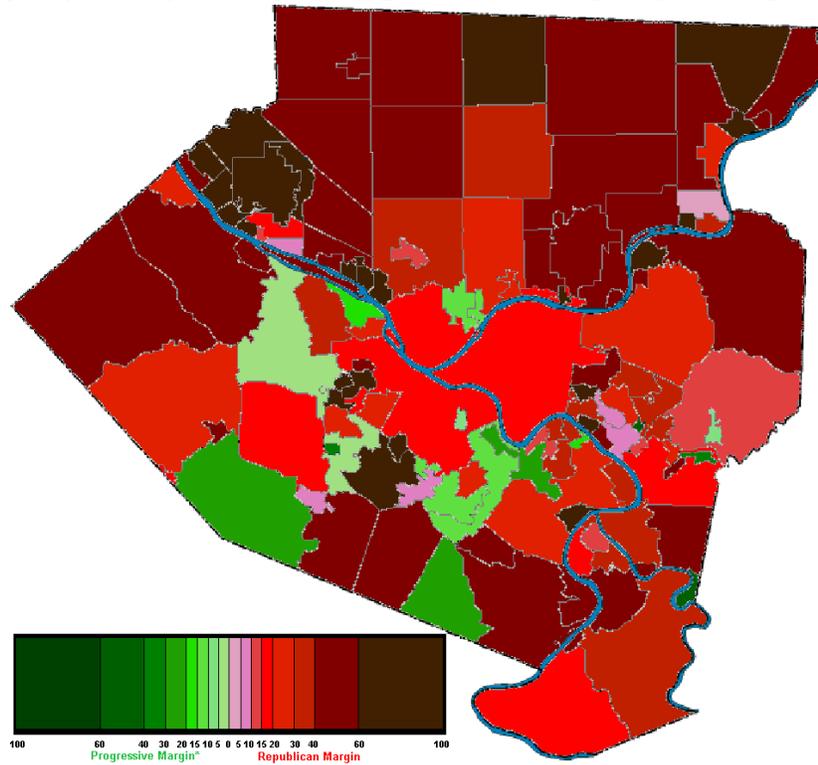
The following tables are provided to demonstrate the correlation between the La Follette vote of 1924 and the Smith vote of 1928 in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania and St. Louis City, Missouri, as per discussion in chapter five, footnote 1273.

I. Allegheny County, Pennsylvania: percentages by ward.²²⁷³



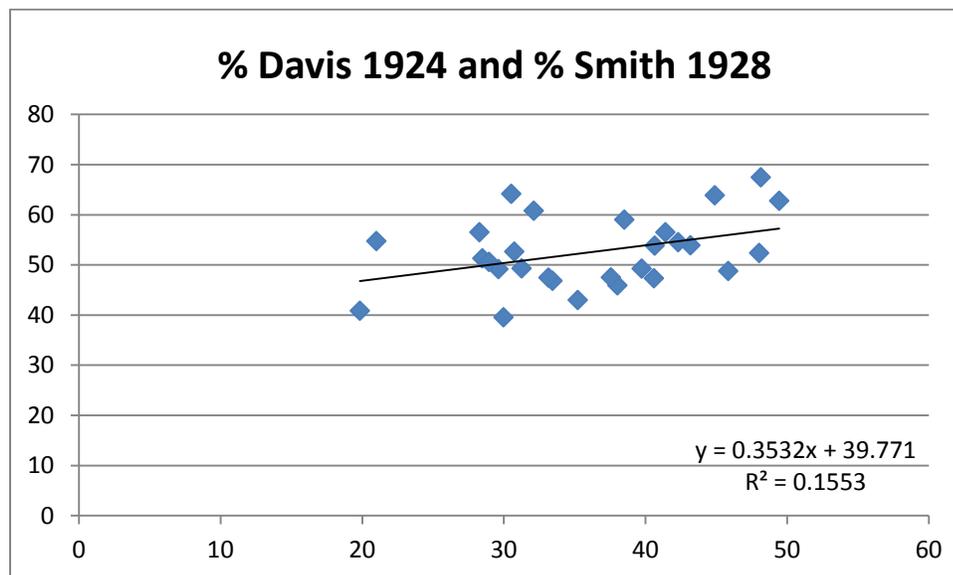
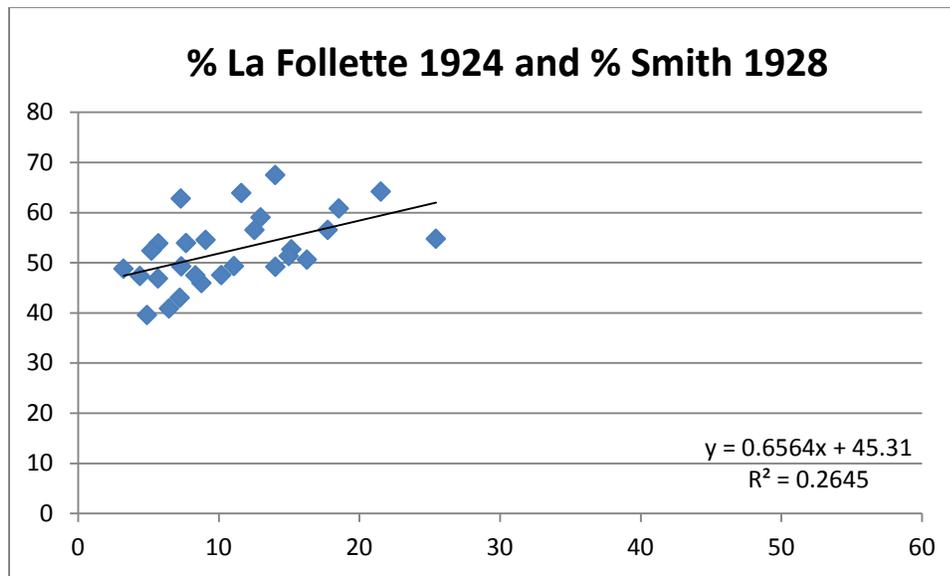
²²⁷³ "Tally Paper: Official Returns of the General Election Held in the Several Election Districts of Allegheny County on the First Tuesday after the First Monday November 6th, 1928," Archives of Industrial Society, Pittsburgh University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; *Pennsylvania State Manual, formerly Smull's Legislative Handbook, 1925-1926* (Harrisburg, PA: The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1925).

II: Allegheny County, Pennsylvania: presidential margin by municipality, 1924 & 1928.*



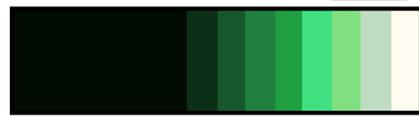
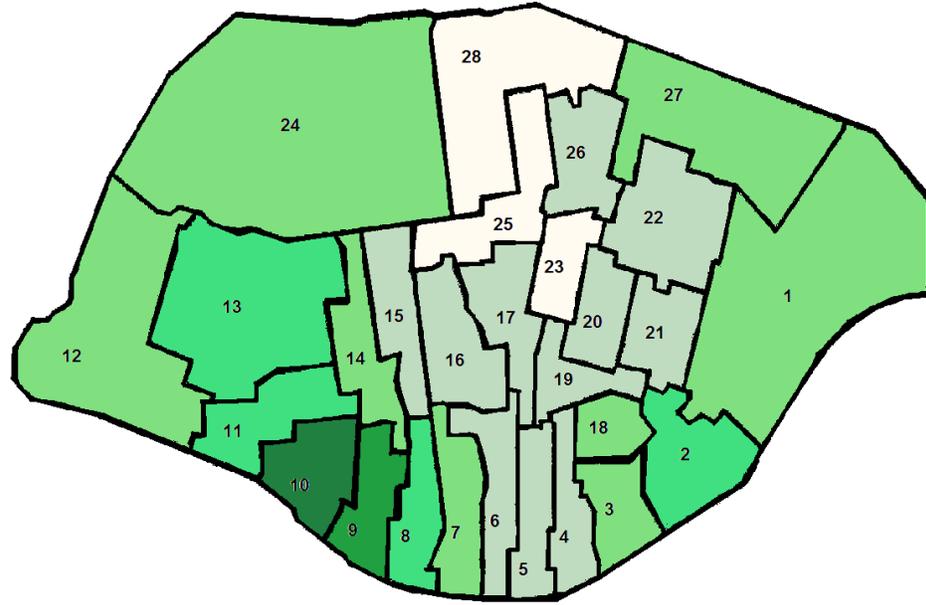
* Margin is shown over the second place finisher. The Democrat did not win any jurisdictions in 1924.

III: St. Louis City, Missouri: percentages by ward.²²⁷⁴



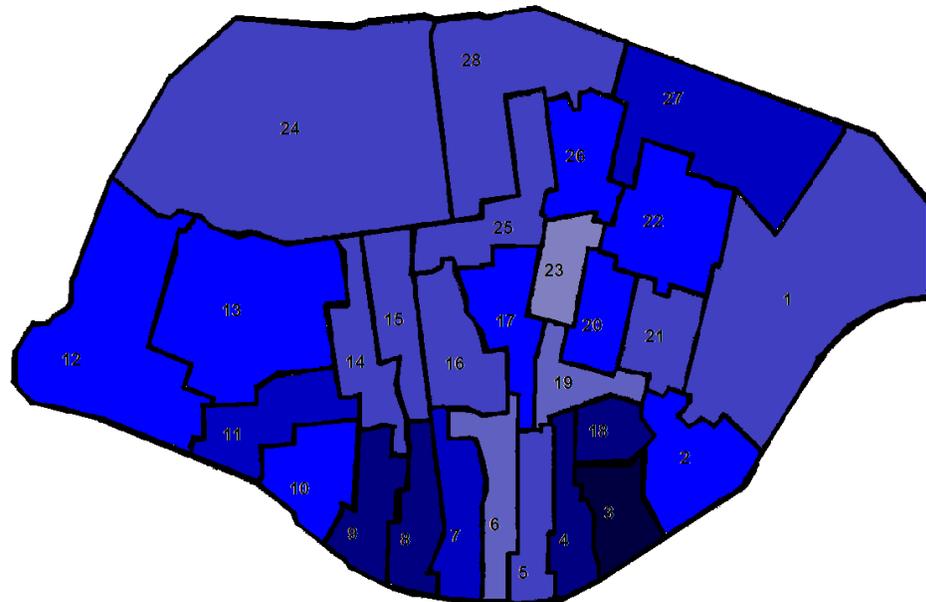
²²⁷⁴ Charles U. Becker, Secretary of State, *Official Manual of the State of Missouri 1925-1926* (Jefferson City, MO: Hugh Stephens Press, 1925), p. 242; Charles U. Becker, Secretary of State, *Official Manual of the State of Missouri 1929-1930* (Jefferson City, MO: Hugh Stephens Press, 1929), p. 237.

IV: St. Louis City, Missouri: percentages by ward 1924 and 1928.[†]



70 65 60 55 50 45 40 35 30 25 20 15 10 5 0

% La Follette



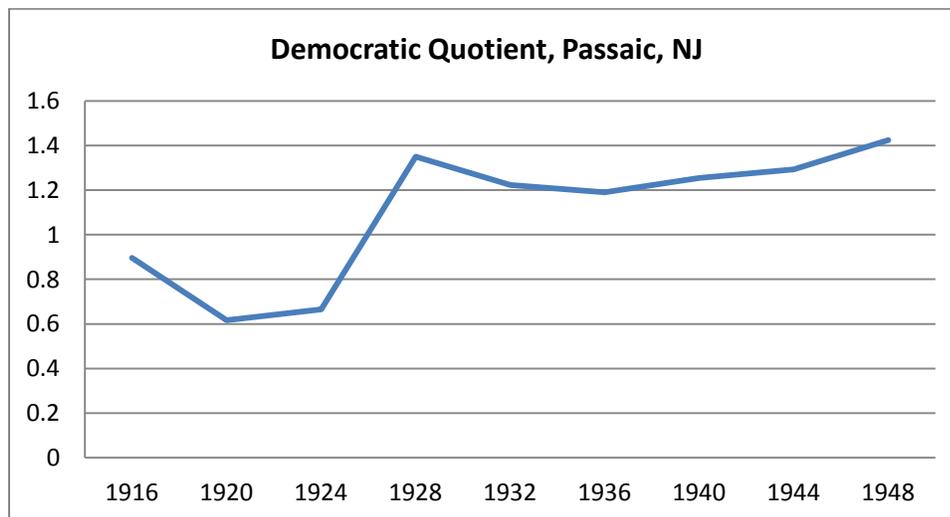
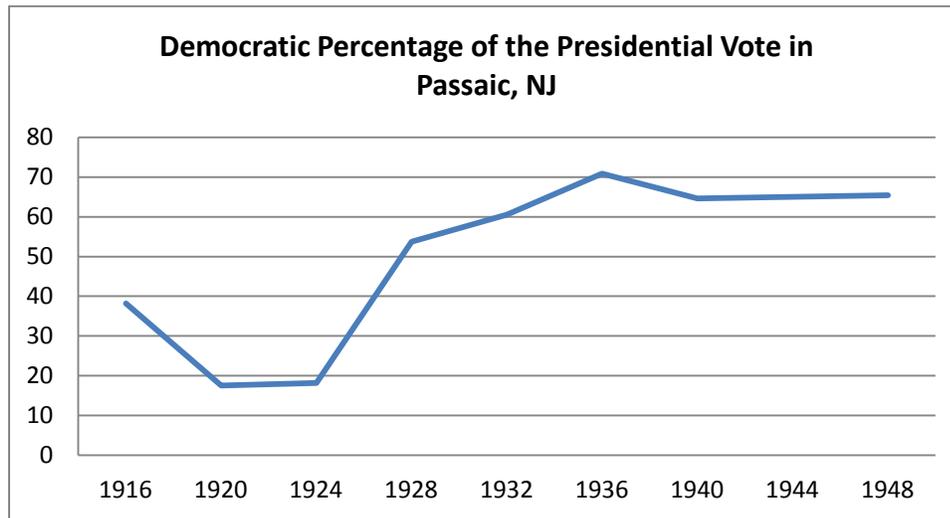
70 65 60 55 50 45 40 35 30 25 20 15 10 5 0

% Smith

[†] The Progressive nominee did not win any wards in 1924, so margin of victory is not a useful measure.

Appendix II: Presidential Voting in Passaic, New Jersey, 1916-1948

The following tables are provided to demonstrate the evolution of the presidential vote in the city of Passaic, New Jersey, beginning in 1928, as per the discussion in chapter six, footnote 1509. The first graph demonstrates the precipitous increase in the Democratic percentage of the vote beginning in that year; the second shows the drastic rise in the city's Democratic Quotient, representing an increase in Passaic's relative importance to the statewide Democratic coalition.²²⁷⁵



²²⁷⁵ State of New Jersey, *Manual of the Legislature of New Jersey* (Trenton, NJ: Josephine A. Fitzgerald, 1917) [hereafter, *New Jersey Manual* (year)], p. 594; *New Jersey Manual* (1921), p. 501; *New Jersey Manual* (1925), pp. 490-491; *New Jersey Manual* (1929), p. 592; *New Jersey Manual* (1933), p. 519; *New Jersey Manual* (1937), pp. 540-541; *New Jersey Manual* (1941), p. 527; *New Jersey Manual* (1945), pp. 652-653; *New Jersey Manual* (1949), pp. 542-543.

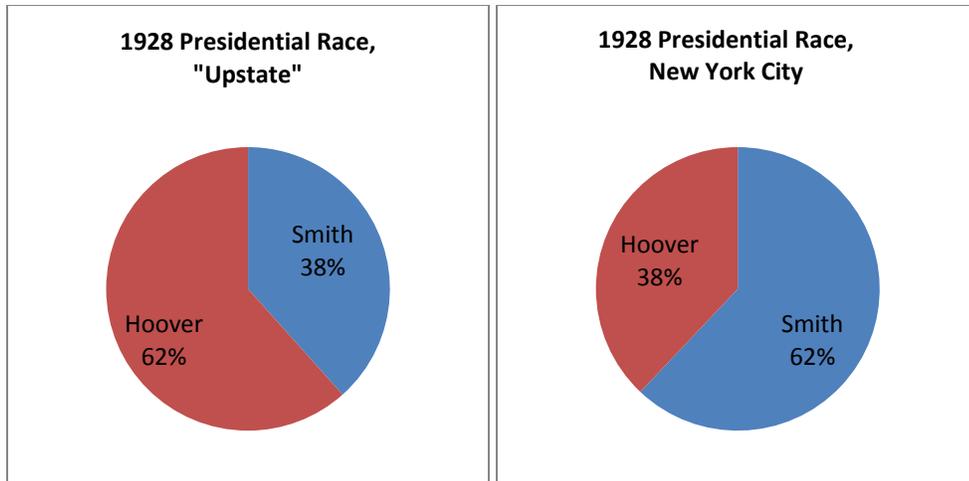
Appendix III: How Did Al Smith Lose New York State in 1928?

The question of why Al Smith lost his home state in 1928 is not especially germane to this project. The state's vote is significant insofar as Smith's success in New York City, especially in Brooklyn and the Bronx, was unprecedented for a Democratic presidential nominee and represented the genesis of a new statewide voting pattern in national elections (see chapter five). Yet his success in the five boroughs was obviously not *personally* unprecedented. Smith had always carried New York City by spectacular margins. And so it has been assumed by historians that his defeat in New York State in 1928 was delivered by upstate voters, many of whom had never supported the Happy Warrior, and others of whom evidently considered the notion of having a Catholic in the White House less tolerable than that of having one in the governor's mansion. As Smith biographer Robert Slayton concluded: "In New York State, outside the city . . . voters could not accept the vision of this kind of man in the White House, despite his record as their governor."²²⁷⁶

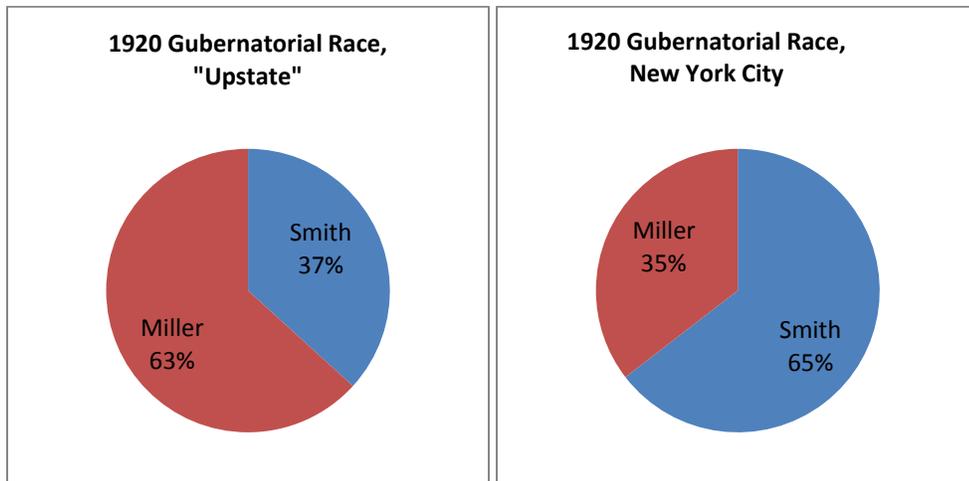
Yet a closer look at state and city voting statistics complicates these explanations. Smith lost New York State in 1928 by just over 103,000 votes; 51 percent to 49 percent. He carried New York City by a margin of 453,817, and lost outside of the city by 557,298. All of which seems to confirm the thesis that it was "upstate" (defined as everywhere outside of the five counties comprising New York City) where Smith was defeated.²²⁷⁷

²²⁷⁶ Slayton, *Empire Statesman*, p. 322.

²²⁷⁷ Robinson, *The Presidential Vote, 1896-1932*, pp. 275-280.



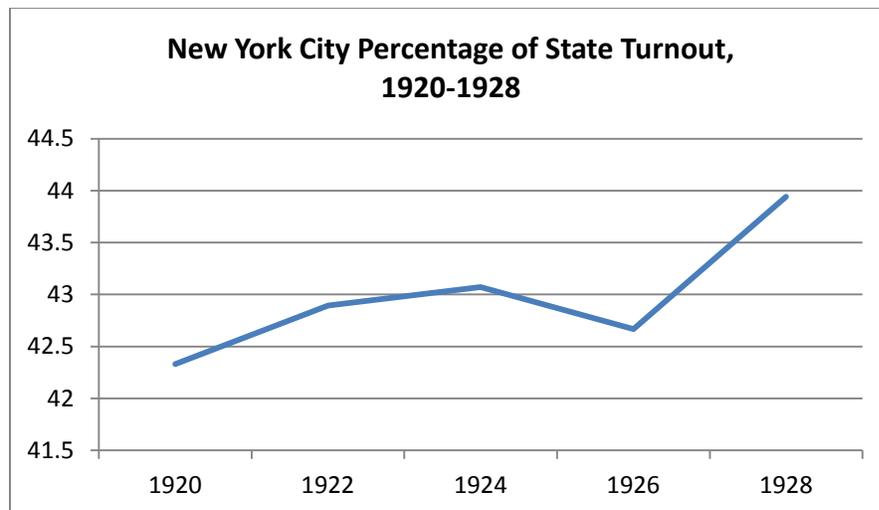
Yet Al Smith had won four statewide races in his career, never having carried the upstate vote. The difference in 1928 was that his success in New York City was not enough to overcome his deficit north of the Bronx. This had happened to Smith once before—in 1920, when he lost reelection narrowly to Nathan Miller in a result that has always been attributed to increased upstate turnout in the presidential year.



In that election, Smith lost upstate by 396,700 votes, and won New York City by 319,875. This election was much closer than the later presidential contest—the margin of defeat in 1920 was a little more than half that of 1928. Yet Smith’s percentage outside of New York City was nearly the same. It was in the city that Smith’s performance was

noticeably weaker—62 percent of the two-party vote in 1928, rather than 65 percent in 1920.²²⁷⁸

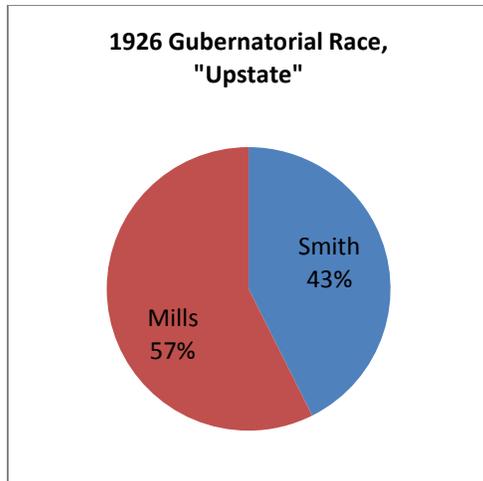
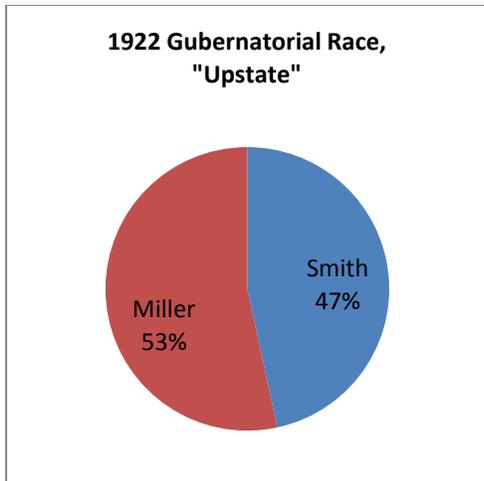
It could be hypothesized that this is attributable to a stronger anti-Smith turnout upstate. Yet that is not what happened at all. Indeed, New York City’s proportion of the total state vote was remarkably stable throughout the 1920s—always between 42 percent and 44 percent of all Empire State ballots. Moreover, New York City’s turnout in 1928 actually swelled to a greater degree than that of the rest of the state, which comports with my thesis that urban ethnic voters enthusiastically rushed to the polls for Smith, but which also defies the notion that the upstate, anti-Smith vote was particularly motivated in 1928.²²⁷⁹



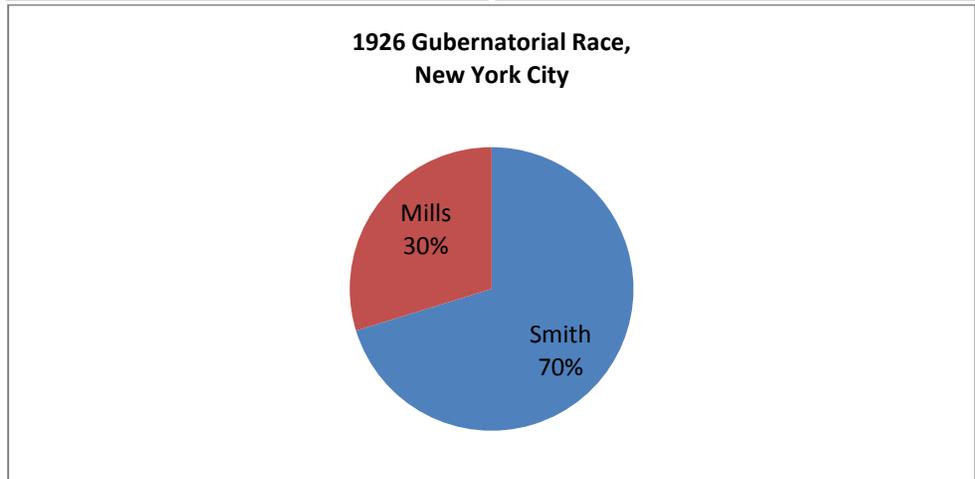
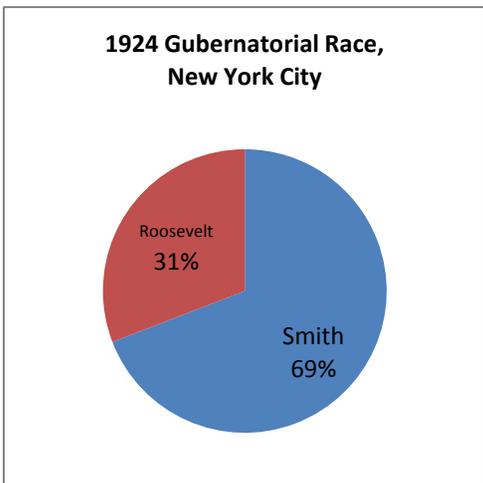
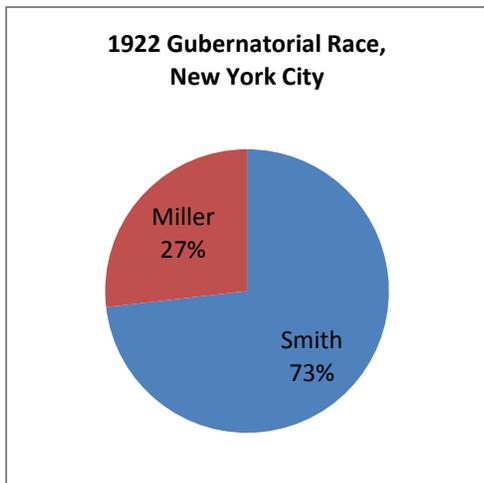
In fact, Smith’s statewide victories in 1922, 1924, and 1926, were facilitated by two factors. One was his ability in the non-presidential or “off-year” elections to attract large swaths of the rural vote. In both 1922 and 1926, Smith cracked 40 percent outside of New York City; indeed, in 1922, running against an incumbent Republican from Onondaga County, he carried 47 percent of the upstate vote.

²²⁷⁸ Malcolm, *The New York State Red Book, 1928*, p. 371.

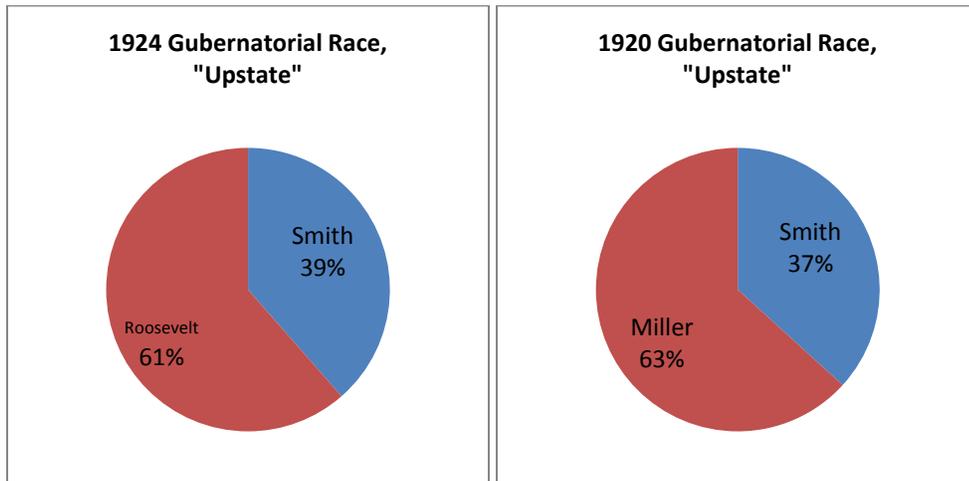
²²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 371-374; Robinson, *The Presidential Vote, 1896-1932*, pp. 275-280.



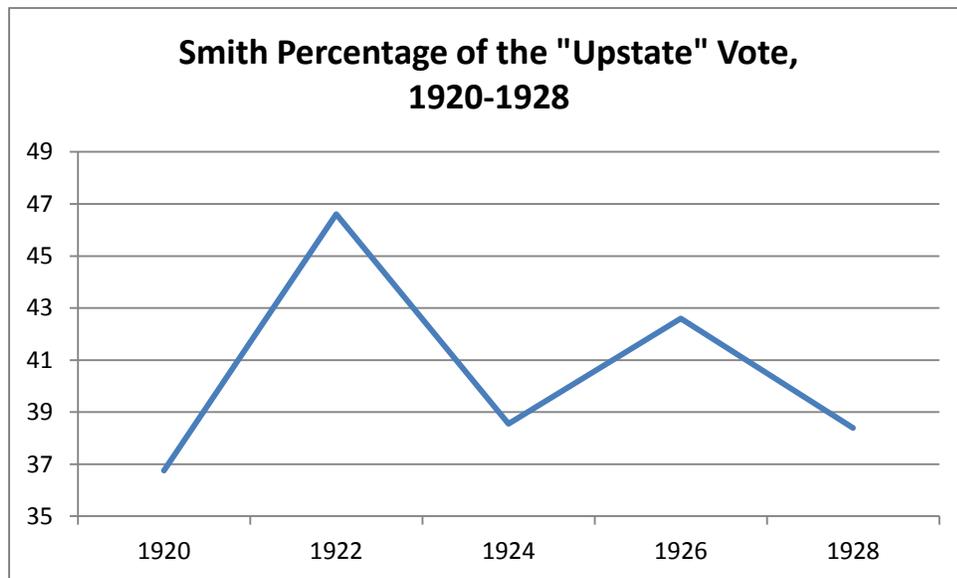
The more obvious explanation for Smith's usual statewide success is his tremendous margins in New York City in his three 1920s victories:



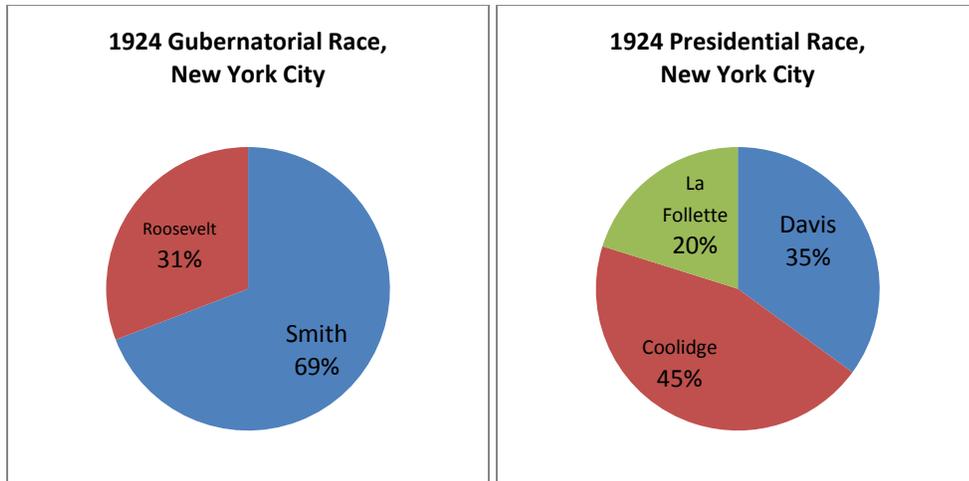
In 1922 and 1926, this urban strength combined with Smith's relative success outside the city in order to produce statewide landslides. In the presidential year 1924, however, Smith did not enjoy the same support upstate. That election was more similar to 1920 beyond the five boroughs:



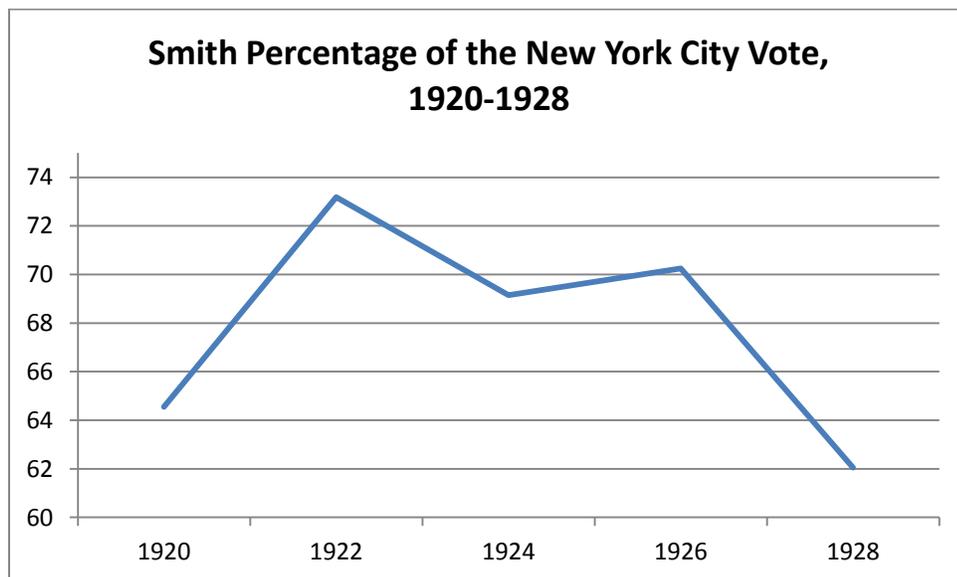
In fact, a clear pattern is revealed by tracking voting outside of New York City in presidential years: Smith did relatively well in off-year elections, and was beaten more soundly in presidential years:



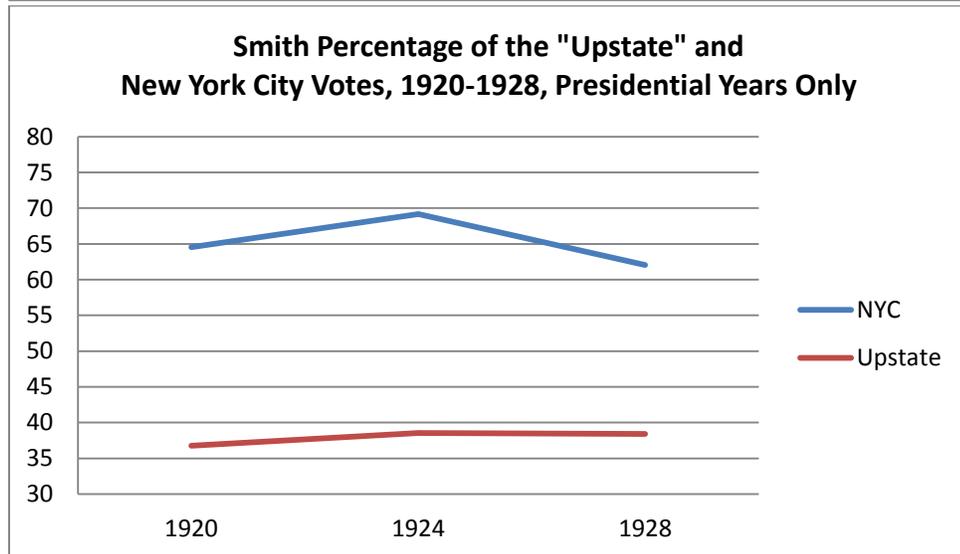
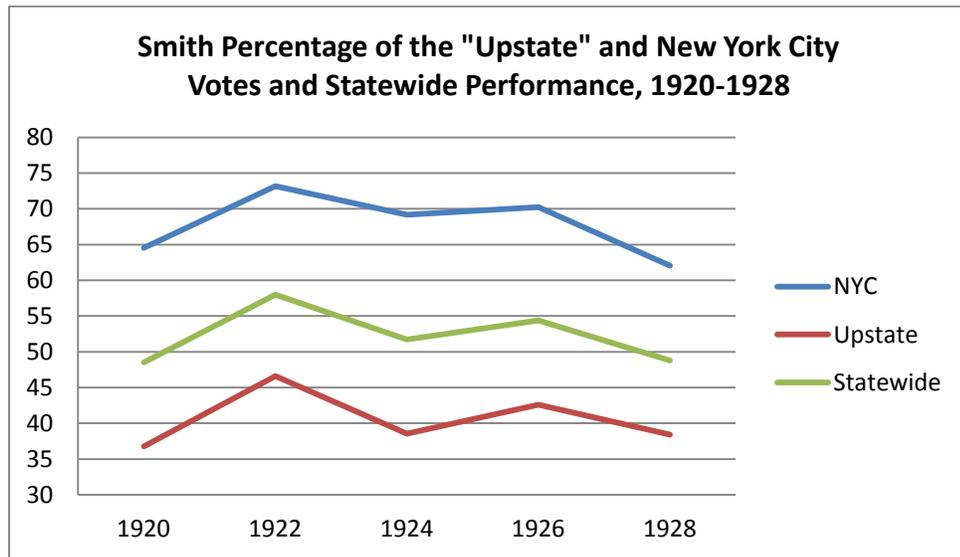
Clearly, the reason that Smith was able to win in the presidential year 1924, despite receiving a percentage of the upstate vote similar to the poor showings of 1920 and 1928, was his overwhelming victory in New York City—a victory made all the more remarkable by the abysmal performance of the Democratic presidential nominee, John W. Davis, within the city:



While Smith's percentage in 1924 was slightly lower than it was in the off-year contests, this deficit was not nearly as pronounced as it had been in 1920 and would be again in 1928:



In 1924, the usual presidential-year Democratic decline in the New York City vote was not as pronounced, and so although the “upstate” vote was more Republican in that year than in the off-year contests, Smith was able to achieve reelection. In fact, Smith’s percentage of the upstate vote was strikingly consistent across the presidential-year elections. Since the upstate/city turnout proportions were also stable throughout this period, it is clear that it was Smith’s inability to offset the upstate Republican vote with an especially strong city performance that most undermined his Empire State efforts in 1928.



Smith's 1928 plurality in Manhattan was 130,831.²²⁸⁰ This was far lower than the stunning 201,940-vote margin he had racked up in 1924.²²⁸¹ His plurality of 26,135 in Queens was particularly disappointing; it was 32,000 votes shy of his largest plurality for that county (achieved in 1926), and it was well short of the 60,000-vote margin Democrats had hoped to achieve.²²⁸² On Staten Island, Smith's 1924 plurality had been over 9,100; in 1928, it was 3,950.²²⁸³ Smith lost New York State by 103,481 votes in 1928; had he merely equaled his best margins in New York, Queens, and Richmond counties, he would have gained more than 107,000 votes.

None of which should be taken to mean that Smith performed poorly among the urban ethnic working-class voters of New York City, for Smith's performance in the city was not uniformly disappointing. The Democrat's largest pluralities were in Brooklyn (158,771) and the Bronx (134,130).²²⁸⁴ These were the widest margins Smith had ever achieved in either jurisdiction. In many of the working-class, ethnic, Tammany-dominated assembly districts of New York County, Smith's margins of victory only declined slightly from 1924. In lower Manhattan, Smith's margin in district one was down 283 votes from 1924—only 2.4 percent; in the heavily Jewish district four, his margin declined 912 votes (9.8 percent); and in the heavily Italian second assembly district, his margin was actually up 1,498 votes from 1924—an improvement of 19.2 percent. Conversely, in all of the Manhattan assembly districts that had elected Republicans to the state legislature in 1927, Smith's vote was down markedly. In the

²²⁸⁰ Robinson, *The Presidential Vote, 1896-1932*, p. 277.

²²⁸¹ Malcolm, *The New York State Red Book, 1928*, p. 373.

²²⁸² Robinson, *The Presidential Vote, 1896-1932*, p. 278; Malcolm, *The New York State Red Book, 1928*, p. 374; "City Gives Smith 430,000 Majority," *The New York Times*, November 7, 1928, pp. 1, 7, p. 7.

²²⁸³ Malcolm, *The New York State Red Book, 1928*, p. 373; Robinson, *The Presidential Vote, 1896-1932*, p. 278.

²²⁸⁴ Robinson, *The Presidential Vote, 1896-1932*, p. 275.

tenth district, Smith's margin was reduced by 81.1 percent from 1924; in the fifteenth, Smith's 1924 victory of over 2,700 votes was transformed into a defeat by nearly 3,600—a decline of over 230 percent; in the nineteenth district, a Republican enclave with a large African-American population, Smith's margin declined 173.7 percent. There was a similar story in Queens: Smith's margins in assembly districts one and two, bordering Brooklyn, were improved from 1924; those in the districts farther east on Long Island were reduced by thousands of votes.²²⁸⁵

In all of these districts, Smith ran much stronger than had John W. Davis; but Davis had lost the city and state miserably. In order to transform presidential politics, Smith needed to best Davis in a convincing fashion by cobbling together a discernible and durable new electoral coalition. He did. But in order to win New York State, Smith needed to build on his own, already strong majorities—and at that task the Happy Warrior failed.

In the aftermath of the election, the *New York Times* identified qualitative trends evident within these results. “Governor Smith carried his old home district in Oliver Street [on the Lower East Side] by 610 to 66, but lost the election district in which his current residence, the Hotel Biltmore, is located [in Midtown] by 404 to 223.”²²⁸⁶ Hoover had carried “the ‘silk stocking’ districts,” while Smith had run strong with his working-class base.²²⁸⁷ The home precincts of Charles Evans Hughes and John D.

²²⁸⁵ “Governor—N. Y. City,” *The New York Times*, November 5, 1924, p. 2; “President,” *The New York Times*, November 7, 1928, p. 3; Moses, *Manual for the Use of the Legislature of the State of New York 1928*, pp. 595-604; 605-609; Malcolm, *The New York State Red Book, 1928*, pp. 424-425; Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism*, pp. 253-254.

²²⁸⁶ “City Gives Smith 430,000 Majority,” *The New York Times*, November 7, 1928, pp. 1, 7, p. 7.

²²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Rockefeller, Jr., voted Republican; those of Jimmy Walker, Robert F. Wagner, and the late “Silent Charlie” Murphy went Democratic.²²⁸⁸

These results are more meaningful in their wider context. It is true that Smith outperformed the Democratic gubernatorial nominee, Franklin Roosevelt, in New York City, and thus Roosevelt’s victory is appropriately credited to his ability to outperform Smith upstate. But this was not the case with the rest of the Democratic ticket: Herbert Lehman, running for lieutenant governor, Royal Copeland, running for reelection to the United States Senate, and Morris Tremain, running for reelection as state comptroller, each outperformed Smith within the city.²²⁸⁹ All three of these Democrats were victorious.

This evidence suggests that Smith’s 1928 defeat in New York State was not the result of a new surge in anti-Catholic rural voting. Instead, the Happy Warrior was thwarted by an inability to garner the sort of overwhelming support in New York City that had allowed him to overcome upstate Republican strength in the past—particularly in 1924. Smith’s weakness was not on his left flank: the nearly fifty thousand city votes that went to Socialist Norman Thomas in 1928 were of little significance, considering that Socialist gubernatorial nominees (including Thomas himself) had achieved comparable totals in 1924 and 1926.²²⁹⁰ It was Smith’s inability to retain the allegiance of moderate New York City Republicans who had approved of his progressive administration of state affairs that played the decisive role in his defeat.

²²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7. Although it is noteworthy that Tammany leader George W. Olvany was unable to carry his home precinct for the Democratic ticket.

²²⁸⁹ “City Gives Smith 430,000 Majority,” p. 1.

²²⁹⁰ “City Gives Smith 430,000 Majority,” p. 1; James Malcolm, ed., *The New York Red Book: An Illustrated Legislative Manual of the State* (Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon, 1932), p. 374; “Governor—N. Y. City,” p. 2; Malcolm, *The New York State Red Book, 1928*, p. 380. AMDG.

Appendix IV: Major Party Presidential Nominees to Lose Their Home State in the Post-Reconstruction Period

While it is surprising that Al Smith was not able to carry New York, where he had already won four statewide contests, it was not unprecedented for a major party presidential nominee to lose their home state. Below is a table showing all major party nominees to lose their home state in the post-Reconstruction period. All presidential nominees who won at least one Electoral College vote were considered “major party” nominees in this survey. Only one nominee, Woodrow Wilson, lost their home state while achieving a national victory.

Year	Nominee	Party	State	Outcome
1880	Winfield S. Hancock	Democratic	Pennsylvania	Lost
1888	Grover Cleveland	Democratic	New York	Lost
1892	Benjamin Harrison	Republican	Indiana	Lost
1900	William Jennings Bryan	Democratic	Nebraska	Lost
1904	Alton B. Parker	Democratic	New York	Lost
1912	William Howard Taft	Republican	Ohio	Lost
1912	Theodore Roosevelt	Progressive	New York	Lost
1916	Woodrow Wilson	Democratic	New Jersey	Won
1920	James M. Cox	Democratic	Ohio	Lost
1924	John W. Davis	Democratic	West Virginia	Lost
1928	Alfred E. Smith	Democratic	New York	Lost
1932	Herbert Hoover	Republican	California	Lost
1936	Alfred M. Landon	Republican	Kansas	Lost
1944	Thomas E. Dewey	Republican	New York	Lost
1952	Adlai Stevenson	Democratic	Illinois	Lost
1956	Adlai Stevenson	Democratic	Illinois	Lost
1972	George McGovern	Democratic	South Dakota	Lost
2000	Al Gore	Democratic	Tennessee	Lost

Bibliography

* *PRIMARY MATERIALS* *

Manuscripts and Archival Collections

Charles F. Ashley Scrapbook. University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth, Dartmouth, Massachusetts.

James Cannon Papers. Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

William P. Connery Papers. Lynn Museum, Lynn, Massachusetts.

Consumers' League of Massachusetts Papers. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Morris L. Cooke Papers. Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

Josephus Daniels Papers. Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Mary W. Dewson Papers. Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

Mary Dreier Papers. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Felix Frankfurter Papers. Manuscript Reading Room, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

O. Max Gardner Papers. Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

George Graves Papers. New York State Archives, Albany, New York.

Anthony Griffin Papers. New York Public Library, New York, New York.

Charles Andrew Jonas Papers. Manuscripts Department, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina.

The La Follette Family Collection. Manuscript Reading Room, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Walter Lippmann Papers. Manuscripts and Archives Division, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

Angus McLean Papers. North Carolina Room, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Robert Moses Papers. New York Public Library, New York, New York.

Belle L. Moskowitz Correspondences. New York State Archives, Albany, New York.

George W. Norris Papers. Manuscript Reading Room, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Frances Perkins Papers. Columbia University, New York, New York.

John J. Raskob Papers. Hagley Museum, Wilmington, Delaware.

Eleanor Roosevelt Papers. Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

Mary Simkhovitch Papers. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Furnifold Simmons Papers. Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

Alfred E. Smith Papers. New York State Library, Albany, New York.

Alfred E. Smith Correspondences. New York State Archives, Albany, New York.

Mary Van Kleeck Papers. Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts.

Lillian Wald Papers. New York Public Library, New York, New York.

Robert F. Wagner Papers. Georgetown University, Washington, DC.

Oral History Collections

Mill Life Oral History Collection. University of Rhode Island Library Special Collections and Archives, University of Rhode Island, Kingstown, Rhode Island.

Mill Workers of Lowell. Mary Blewett and Martha Mayo, Project Directors, University of Massachusetts-Lowell and Lowell National Historical Park, Lowell Massachusetts, <http://libweb.uml.edu/clh/OH/MWOL/OH1.htm>.

New Bedford Textile Workers' Strike of 1928 Oral History Collection. University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth, Dartmouth, Massachusetts.

Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, New York, New York.

Robert Moses (1973)

Frances Perkins (1951-1955)

Charles Poletti (1978)

Joseph M. Proskauer (1962)

Rexford G. Tugwell (1950)

Robert F. Wagner, Jr. (1980)

Photographic Collections

Forsyth County Public Library Photograph Collection, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Hermann Koppelman Collection, Jewish Historical Society of Greater Hartford, West Hartford, Connecticut.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures>.

George Grantham Bain Collection

Harris & Ewing Collection

National Photo Company Collection

New York World-Telegram and the Sun Newspaper Photograph Collection

Museum of the City of New York Collections Portal: <http://collections.mcny.org>.

New York City Parks Photo Archive, New York, New York.

Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Newspapers

The Aiken Standard, Aiken, South Carolina.

The Anniston Star, Anniston, Alabama.

The Atlanta Constitution, Atlanta, Georgia.

The Baltimore Afro-American, Baltimore, Maryland.

The Baltimore Sun, Baltimore, Maryland.

The Boston Globe, Boston, Massachusetts.

The Brooklyn Citizen, Brooklyn, New York.

The Brooklyn Eagle, Brooklyn, New York.

The Bronx Home News, Bronx, New York.

The Burlington Daily Times, Burlington, North Carolina.

The Charlotte Observer, Charlotte, North Carolina.
The Christian Science Monitor, Boston, Massachusetts.
The Cincinnati American Israelite, Cincinnati, Ohio.
The Elizabeth Daily Journal, Elizabeth, New Jersey.
The Fall River Globe, Fall River, Massachusetts.
The Fall River Herald News, Fall River, Massachusetts.
The Hartford Courant, Hartford, Connecticut.
The Holyoke Daily Transcript, Holyoke, Massachusetts.
The Houston Post-Dispatch, Houston, Texas.
The Jackson Progress-Argus, Jackson, Georgia.
The Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles, California.
The Lowell Sun, Lowell, Massachusetts.
The Newark Evening News, Newark, New Jersey.
The New Bedford Evening Standard, New Bedford, Massachusetts.
The New Bedford Morning Mercury, New Bedford, Massachusetts.
The New Bedford Times, New Bedford, Massachusetts.
The New Orleans Times-Picayune, New Orleans, Louisiana.
The Newport Mercury and Weekly News, Newport, Rhode Island.
The New York Negro World, New York, New York.
The New York Times, New York, New York.
The New York World, New York, New York.
The Norfolk Journal and Guide, Norfolk, Virginia.
The Philadelphia Jewish Exponent, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
The Philadelphia Record, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
The Philadelphia Trades Union News, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
Pittsbuczanin, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
The Providence Journal, Providence, Rhode Island.
The Raleigh News and Observer, Raleigh, North Carolina.
The St. Louis Argus, St. Louis, Missouri.
The Saratoga Springs Saratogian, Saratoga Springs, New York.
The Scranton Times, Scranton, Pennsylvania.

The Springfield Daily News, Springfield, Massachusetts.
The Springfield Union, Springfield, Massachusetts.
The Statesville Landmark, Statesville, North Carolina.
The Wall Street Journal, New York, New York.
The Washington Post, Washington, DC.
The Washington Star, Washington, DC.
The Westerly Sun, Westerly, Rhode Island.
The Winston-Salem Journal, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.
The Woonsocket Call, Woonsocket, Rhode Island.

Periodicals

Banker's Magazine
Barron's
Harper's Magazine
The Independent
Outlook
Salon
Time
Vanity Fair

Printed Campaign Materials

Democratic National Committee. *Campaign Addresses of Governor Alfred E. Smith, Democratic Candidate for President 1928*. Washington, DC: Democratic National Committee, 1929.

------. *The Campaign Book of the Democratic Party: Candidates and Issues in 1928*. New York: Democratic National Committee, 1928.

------. *What Everybody Wants to Know about Alfred E. Smith*. New York: Democratic National Committee, 1928.

Tillett, Charles W. "Al Smith and Fair Play," distributed by News Publishing Printing House, Charlotte, NC, November 17, 1927; re-published and issued by "Western States Smith-for-President Association," Ogden, UT. Mary and Harry L. Dalton

Rare Book and Manuscripts Room, University of North Carolina Charlotte,
Charlotte, North Carolina.

West Virginia Anti-Saloon League. "The Present Crisis." 1928.

Government Documents (Federal)

United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce.
Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1929. Washington, DC: United States
Government Printing Office, 1929.

United States Department of Commerce, R. P. LaMont, Secretary, and Bureau of the
Census, W. M. Stewart, Director. *Religious Bodies: 1926*. Volume I.
Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1930.

United States Department of Commerce, R. P. LaMont, Secretary, Bureau of the Census,
W. M. Stewart, Director, under the supervision of Clarence E. Batschelet,
Geographer. *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Metropolitan Districts
Population and Area*. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing
Office, 1932.

United States Department of Commerce, R. P. LaMont, Secretary, Bureau of the Census,
W. M. Stewart, Director, under the supervision of Leon E. Truesdell, Chief
Statistician for Population. *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930,
Population*, Volume III, Part 1 (Alabama-Missouri). Washington, DC: United
States Government Printing Office, 1932.

----- *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population*. Volume III, Part 2
(Montana-Wyoming). Washington, DC: United States Government Printing
Office, 1932.

United States Government Printing Office. *Congressional Directory: 73rd Congress,
First Session, June, 1933*. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing
Office, 1933.

----- *Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the First Session of the
Seventy-Third Congress, also Special Session of the Senate of the United States of
America*. Volume 77, Part 1. Washington, DC: United States Government
Printing Office, 1933. Volumes 77-83 (1933-1939).

Government Documents (State)

MASSACHUSETTS

Bowers, Edgar A., ed. *Annual Report on the Vital Statistics of Massachusetts: Births, Marriages, Divorces and Deaths for the Year Ending December 31, 1920*. Boston: Wright and Potter Printing Co., 1921.

Clerk of the Senate and Clerk of the House. *A Manual for Use of the General Court of Massachusetts for 1897-1898; 1901-1902; 1905-1906; 1909-1911; 1913-1914; 1917-1918; 1919-1920; 1921-1922; 1923-1924; 1925-1926; 1927-1928; 1929-1930; 1931-1932; 1933-1934; 1935-1936; 1937-1938; 1939-1940; 1941-1942*. Boston: Wright and Potter Printing Co.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts. *Annual Report of the Department of Labor and Industries for the Year Ending November 30, 1926*. Public Document No. 104.

Leonard, Robert S. *Editorial Review of the Vital Statistics of Massachusetts, 1928*. Boston: Division of Vital Statistics, 1929.

MISSOURI

Becker, Charles U. *Official Manual of the State of Missouri 1925-1926; 1929-1930*. Jefferson City, MO: Hugh Stephens Press.

NEW JERSEY

State of New Jersey. *Manual of the Legislature of New Jersey*. Trenton, NJ: Josephine A. Fitzgerald, 1917, 1921, 1925, 1929, 1933, 1937, 1941.

------. *Manual of the Legislature of New Jersey*. Trenton, NJ: Dorothy A. Fitzgerald, 1945, 1949.

NEW YORK

New York State Legislative Record and Index. Albany, NY: Legislative Index Publishing Group, 1910, 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914, 1917, 1919, 1924, 1925, 1926, 1927, 1928.

The New York State Red Book, 1896. Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon, 1896.

The Joint Committee on Rural Schools, George A. Works, Chairman. *Rural Schools Survey of New York State: A Report to the Rural School Patrons*. Ithaca, NY: Joint Committee on Rural Schools, 1922.

Malcolm, James, ed. *The New York Red Book, 1928: An Illustrated Legislative Manual of the State*. Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon, 1928.

Moses, Robert. *Manual for the Use of the Legislature of the State of New York 1928*. Albany, NY: J. B. Lyon, 1928.

Smith, Alfred E. *Progress of Public Improvements: A Report to the People of the State of New York*. October, 1927.

PENNSYLVANIA

“Official Returns of the General Election Held in the Several Election Districts of Allegheny County on the First Tuesday after the First Monday,” 1926, 1928, 1932, 1936, 1944, 1948, 1952. Archives of Industrial Society, Pittsburgh University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. *Pennsylvania State Manual, formerly Smull's Legislative Handbook, 1925-1926*. Harrisburg, PA: The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1925.

Statistical Collections

Robinson, Edgar Eugene. *The Presidential Vote, 1896-1932*. Stanford University, CA: Stanford University Press, 1934.

Gallup, George H. *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971*. Three volumes. New York: Random House, 1972.

Autobiographies and Memoirs

Bloom, Sol. *The Autobiography of Sol Bloom*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1948.

Celler, Emanuel. *You Never Leave Brooklyn: The Autobiography of Emanuel Celler*. New York: The John Day Co., 1953.

Hoover, Herbert. *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: The Cabinet and the Presidency, 1920-1933*. New York: MacMillan, 1952.

Perkins, Frances. *The Roosevelt I Knew*. New York: Viking, 1946.

Riordan, William L., ed. *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall: A Series of Very Plain Talks on Very Practical Politics*. New York: Dutton, 1963.

Roosevelt, Eleanor. *This I Remember*. New York: Harper, 1949.

Smith, Alfred E. *Up to Now*. New York: Viking, 1929.

Tugwell, Rexford G. *The Democratic Roosevelt*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957.

White, Walter. *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White*. New York: Viking, 1948.

Other Published Primary Documents and Collections

Childs, Richard S. and William P. Burr. "Executive Leadership in a Democracy: Discussion." *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science in the City of New York*. 8:1: 54-55.

Hughes, Charles Evans. *Conditions of Progress in Democratic Government*. New Haven, CT: Yale, 1910.

Egan, Maurice Francis, and John B. Kennedy. *The Knights of Columbus in Peace and War*. Two volumes. New Haven, CT: Knights of Columbus, 1920.

Ickes, Harold L. *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes*. Three volumes. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953.

Kilpatrick, Carroll, ed. *Roosevelt and Daniels: A Friendship in Politics*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1952.

Lincoln, Jonathan Thayer. *The City of the Dinner-Pail*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1909.

Moses, Robert, ed. *A Tribute to Governor Smith*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962.

Moskowitz, Henry, ed. *Progressive Democracy: Addresses and State Papers of Alfred E. Smith*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1928.

Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work, at the Forty-Fifth Annual Session Held in Kansas City, Missouri, May 15-22, 1918. Chicago: Rogers & Hall Co., 1919.

Roosevelt, Franklin D. *The Happy Warrior, Alfred E. Smith: A Study of A Public Servant*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1928.

Root, Elihu. *Addresses on Government and Citizenship*. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1969.

Shover, John L., ed. *Politics of the Nineteen Twenties*. Waltham, MA: Ginn-Blaisdell, 1970.

Smith, Alfred E. *The Citizen and his Government*. New York: Harper, 1935.

Smith, Rembert Gilman. *Politics in a Protestant Church: An account of some happenings in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, during the Hoover-Smith race of 1928 and of some events in 1929; containing a defense of the equal political rights of Roman Catholic citizens and discussions of other burning issues of the day in Church and State*. Atlanta: The Ruralist Press, 1930.

Suter, H. M., ed. *Forestry and Irrigation: Official Organ of the American Forestry Association and the National Irrigation Association*. Vol. VIII. Washington, DC: Judd and Detweiler, 1902.

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, School of Education. "Learn NC, 8.3: An industry representative visits Loray Mills." <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchistnewcentury/5958>.

"Women in the Eighty-First Congress." *Social Service Review*. Vol. 23, No. 4 (December, 1949): 505-509.

* *SECONDARY MATERIALS* *

Scholarly Articles

Alvarez, David J., and Edmond J. True. "Critical Elections & Partisan Realignment: An Urban Test-Case." *Polity*, 5:4 (Summer, 1973): 563-576.

Bartels, Larry M. "Electoral Continuity and Change, 1868-1996." *Electoral Studies*, 17:3 (September, 1998): 275-300.

Boris, Eileen, and S. J. Kleinberg. "Mothers and Other Workers: (Re)Conceiving Labor, Maternalism, and the State." *Journal of Women's History*, 15:3 (Autumn, 2003): 90-117.

Buenker, John D. "The Urban Political Machine and the Seventeenth Amendment." *The Journal of American History*, 56:2 (September, 1969): 305-322.

----- . "The Urban Political Machine and Woman Suffrage: A Study in Political Adaptability." *The Historian*, 33:2 (February, 1971): 264-279.

----- . "The Mahatma and Progressive Reform: Martin Lomasney as Lawmaker, 1911-1917." *The New England Quarterly*, 44:3 (September, 1971): 397-419.

----- . "Sovereign Individuals and Organic Networks: Political Cultures in Conflict During the Progressive Era." *American Quarterly*, 40:2 (June, 1988): 187-204.

- Clubb, Jerome M., and Howard W. Allen. "The Cities and the Election of 1928: Partisan Realignment?" *The American Historical Review*, 74:4 (April, 1969): 1205-1220.
- Crawford, F. C. "Legislative Notes and Reviews: New York State Reorganization." *The American Political Science Review*, 20:1 (February, 1926): 76-79.
- Crawford, Finla G. "Administrative Reorganization in New York State." *The American Political Science Review*, 21:2 (May, 1927): 349-359.
- Davis, Allen F. "Settlement Workers in Politics, 1890-1914." *The Review of Politics*, 26:4 (October, 1964): 505-517.
- Degler, Carl N. "American Political Parties and the Rise of the City: An Interpretation." *The Journal of American History*, 51:1 (June, 1964): 41-59.
- Dollar, Charles M. "The South and the Fordney-McCumber Tariff of 1922: A Study in Regional Politics." *The Journal of Southern History*, 39:1 (February, 1973): 45-66.
- Edwards, Everett E. "Some Sources for Northwest History: Agricultural Periodicals." *Minnesota History*, 18 (December, 1937): 407-414.
- Eldersveld, Samuel J. "The Influence of Metropolitan Party Pluralities In Presidential Elections Since 1920: A Study of Twelve Key Cities." *The American Political Science Review*, 43:6 (December, 1949): 1189-1206.
- Filene, Peter G. "An Obituary for 'The Progressive Movement.'" *American Quarterly*, 22:1 (Spring, 1970): 20-34.
- Fite, Gilbert C. "The Agricultural Issue in the Presidential Campaign of 1928." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 37:4 (March, 1951): 653-672.
- Gerstle, Gary. "The Protean Character of American Liberalism." *American Historical Review*, 99:4 (October, 1994): 1043-1073.
- Goldstein, Michael L. "Black Power and the Rise of Bureaucratic Autonomy in New York City Politics: The Case of Harlem Hospital, 1917-1931." *Phylon*, 41:2 (2nd Quarter, 1980): 187-201
- Goodykoontz, Colin B. "Edward P. Costigan and the Tariff Commission, 1917-1928." *The Pacific Historical Review*, 16:4 (November, 1947): 410-419.
- Henderson, Thomas M. "Immigrant Politician: Salvatore Cotillo, Progressive Ethnic." *International Migration Review*, 13:1 (Spring, 1979): 81-102.

- Huthmacher, J. Joseph. "Urban Liberalism and the Age of Reform." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 49:2 (September, 1962): 231-241.
- , "Charles Evans Hughes and Charles Francis Murphy: The Metamorphosis of Progressivism." *New York History*, 46: 1 (January, 1965): 25-40.
- Johnson, Roger T. "Part-Time Leader: Senator Charles L. McNary and the McNary Haugen Bill." *Agricultural History*, 54:4 (October, 1980): 527-541.
- Key, Jr., V. O. "A Theory of Critical Elections." *The Journal of Politics*, 17:1 (February, 1955): 3-18.
- Lemons, J. Stanley. "The Sheppard-Towner Act: Progressivism in the 1920s." *The Journal of American History*, 55:4 (March, 1969): 776-786.
- Levine, Marc V. "Standing Political Decisions and Partisan Realignment: The Pattern of Maryland Politics, 1872-1948." *The Journal of Politics*, 38:2 (May, 1976): 292-325.
- Lichtman, Allan J. "Critical Election Theory and the Reality of American Presidential Politics, 1916-40." *The American Historical Review*, 81:2 (April, 1976): 317-351.
- Link, Arthur S. "What Happened to the Progressive Movement in the 1920's?" *The American Historical Review*, 64:4 (July, 1959): pp. 833-851.
- Lorence, James J. "The Workers of Chicopee: Progressive Paternalism and the Culture of Accommodation in a Modern Mill Village." *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 91:3 (Fall, 2007): 292-323.
- McGuire, John. "From the Courts to the State Legislatures: Social Justice Feminism, Labor Legislation, and the 1920s." *Labor History*, 45:2 (May, 2004): 225-246.
- MacRae, Jr., Duncan, and James A. Meldrum. "Critical Elections in Illinois: 1888-1958." *The American Political Science Review*, 54:3 (September, 1960): 669-683.
- Mayhew, David R. "Electoral Realignments." *The Annual Review of Political Science*, 3 (June, 2000): 449-474.
- Meier, Kenneth J. "Executive Reorganization of Government: Impact on Employment and Expenditures." *American Journal of Political Science*, 24:3 (August, 1980): 396-412.
- Monoson, S. Sara. "The Lady and the Tiger: Women's Electoral Activism in New York City before Suffrage." *Journal of Women's History*, 2:2 (Fall, 1990): 100-135.

- Ngai, Mae. "The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law: A Reexamination of the Immigration Act of 1924." *Journal of American History*, 86:1 (June, 1999): 67-92.
- O'Dell, Samuel. "Blacks, the Democratic Party, and the Presidential Election of 1928: A Mild Rejoinder." *Phylon*, 48:1 (1st Quarter, 1987): 1-11.
- Platt, Harold. "Jane Addams and the Ward Boss Revisited: Class, Politics, and Public Health in Chicago, 1890-1930." *Environmental History*, 5:2 (April, 2000): 194-222.
- Pomper, Gerald. "Classification of Presidential Elections." *The Journal of Politics*, 29:3 (August, 1967): 535-566.
- Porter, Kimberly K. "Embracing the Pluralist Perspective: The Iowa Farm Bureau Federation and the McNary-Haugen Movement." *Agricultural History*, 74:2 (Spring, 2000): 381-392.
- Rable, George C. "The South and the Politics of Antilynching Legislation, 1920-1940." *The Journal of Southern History*, 51:2 (May, 1985): 201-220.
- Rodgers, Daniel T. "In Search of Progressivism." *Reviews in American History*, 10:4 (December, 1982): 113-132.
- Rosenof, Theodore. "'Young Bob' La Follette on American Capitalism." *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 55:2 (Winter 1971-1972): 130-139.
- Scott, Anne Firor. "A Progressive Wind From the South, 1906-1913." *The Journal of Southern History*, 29:1 (February, 1963): 53-70.
- Sherman, Richard B. "The Status Revolution and Massachusetts Progressive Leadership." *Political Science Quarterly*, 78:1 (March, 1963): 59-65.
- Shover, John L. "Ethnicity and Religion in Philadelphia Politics, 1924-40." *American Quarterly*, 25:5 (December, 1973): 499-515.
- ". "The Emergence of a Two-Party System in Republican Philadelphia, 1924-1936." *The Journal of American History*, 60:4 (March, 1974): 985-1002.
- Sillars, Malcolm O. "Henry A. Wallace's Editorials on Agrarian Discontent, 1921-1928." *Agricultural History*, 26:4 (October, 1952): 132-140.
- Sternsher, Bernard. "The Emergence of the New Deal Party System: A Problem in Historical Analysis of Voter Behavior." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 6:1 (Summer, 1975): 127-149.

- . "The New Deal Party System: A Reappraisal." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 15:1 (Summer, 1984): 53-81.
- Terris, Milton. "National Health Insurance in the United States: A Drama in Too Many Acts." *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 20:1 (1999): 13-35.
- Voskuil, Walter H. "Water-Power Situation in the United States." *The Journal of Land and Public Utility Economics*, 1:1 (January, 1925): 89-101.
- Wandersee, Winifred D. "'I'd Rather Pass a Law than Organize a Union': Frances Perkins and the Reformist Approach to Organized Labor." *Labor History*, 34:1 (Winter, 1993): 5-32.
- Wang, Peter H. "Farmers and the Immigration Act of 1924." *Agricultural History*, 49:9 (October, 1975): 647-652.
- White, John K. "Alfred E. Smith's Rhode Island Revolution: The Election of 1928." *Rhode Island History*, 42:4 (May, 1983): 56-66.
- Wilkinson, Patrick. "The Selfless and the Helpless: Maternalist Origins of the U.S. Welfare State." *Feminist Studies*: 25:3 (Autumn, 1999): 571-597.

Books

- Allswang, John M. *A House for All Peoples: Ethnic Politics in Chicago 1890-1936*. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, 1971.
- . *Bosses, Machines, and Urban Voters*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1977.
- . *The New Deal and American Politics*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1978.
- Badger, Anthony J. *Prosperity Road: The New Deal, Tobacco, and North Carolina*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1980.
- . *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-1940*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1989.
- Bernstein, Irving. *The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker, 1920-1933*. Baltimore: Penguin, 1960.
- . *A Caring Society: The New Deal, The Worker, and the Great Depression*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985.

- Blewett, Mary H. *The Last Generation: Work and Life in the Textile Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1910-1960*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts, 1990.
- Blum, John Morton. *Years of Discord: American Politics and Society, 1961-1974*. New York: Norton, 1991.
- Bornet, Vaughn Davis. *Labor Politics in a Democratic Republic: Moderation, Division, and Disruption in the Presidential Election of 1928*. Washington, DC: Spartan, 1964.
- Buenker, John D. *Urban Liberalism and Progressive Reform*. New York: Norton, 1973.
- Burner, David. *The Politics of Provincialism: The Democratic Party in Transition, 1918-1932*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968.
- Burnham, Walter Dean. *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics*. New York: Norton, 1970.
- Caro, Robert A. *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. New York: Vintage, 1975.
- Carter, Dan T. *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, The Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995.
- . *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution 1963-1994*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University, 1996.
- Chambers, Clarke A. *Seedtime for Reform: American Social Service and Social Action, 1918-1933*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1963.
- Christensen, Rob. *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics: The Personalities, Elections, and Events That Shaped Modern North Carolina*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2008.
- Cohen, Lizabeth. *Making A New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939*. New York: Cambridge, 1990.
- Conkin, Paul K. *The New Deal*. Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1978.
- Connolly, James J. *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism: Urban Political Culture in Boston 1900-1925*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1998.
- . *An Elusive Unity: Urban Democracy and Machine Politics in Industrializing America*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 2010.

- Cott, Nancy F. *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*. New Haven, CT: Yale, 1987.
- Cronon, E. David *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1969.
- Dinneen, Joseph F. *The Purple Shamrock: The Hon. James Michael Curley of Boston*. New York: Norton, 1949.
- Downey, Kirstin. *The Woman Behind the New Deal: The Life of Frances Perkins, FDR's Labor Secretary and his Social Conscience*. New York: Nan A. Talese, 2009.
- Edmunds, Pocahontas Wight. *Tar Heels Track the Century: Andrew Johnson, Z. B. Vance, M. W. Ransom, C. B. Aycock, O. Henry, J. B. Duke, W. H. Page, F. M. Simmons, Josephus Daniels, Thomas Wolfe*. Raleigh, NC: Edwards and Broughton, 1966.
- Eldot, Paula. *Governor Alfred E. Smith: The Politician as Reformer*. New York: Garland, 1983.
- Feld, Marjorie N. *Lillian Wald: A Biography*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2008.
- Ferber, Nat J. *A New American: From the Life Story of Salvatore A. Cotillo, Supreme Court Justice, State of New York*. New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1938.
- Finan, Christopher M. *Alfred E. Smith: The Happy Warrior*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2002.
- Fite, Gilbert C. *George N. Peek and the Fight for Farm Parity*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 1954.
- Friedel, Frank. *F. D. R. and the South*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University, 1965.
- , *Franklin D. Roosevelt: Launching the New Deal*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1973.
- Goodwin, Joanne L. *Gender and the Politics of Welfare Reform: Mothers' Pensions in Chicago, 1911-1929*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1997.
- Gordon, Linda. *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence*. New York: Penguin, 1988.
- , *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1994.

- Gosnell, Harold F. *Negro Politicians: The Rise of Negro Politics in Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1935.
- Graham, Jr., Otis. *An Encore for Reform: The Old Progressives and the New Deal*. New York: Oxford, 1967.
- Grantham, Dewey W. *The Life & Death of the Solid South: A Political History*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1988.
- Gerstle, Gary. *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960*. New York: Cambridge, 1989.
- Georgianna, Daniel, with Roberta Hazen Aaronson. *The Strike of '28*. New Bedford, MA: Spinner Publications, 1993.
- Gilmore, Glenda Elizabeth. *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1996.
- Handlin, Oscar. *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1952.
- . *Al Smith and His America*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1958.
- Hapgood, Norman, and Henry Moskowitz. *Up From the City Streets, Alfred E. Smith*. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1927.
- Harrison, S. L. *Cavalcade of Journalists 1900-2000, Chroniclers of an American Century*. Miami, FL: Wolf Den Books, 2002.
- Hays, Samuel P. *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement 1890-1920*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1959.
- Higham, John. *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*. New York: Atheneum, 1973.
- Hoffman, Beatrix. *The Wages of Sickness: The Politics of Health Insurance in Progressive America*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2001.
- Hofstadter, Richard. *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR*. New York: Vintage, 1955.
- Huthmacher, J. Joseph. *Senator Robert F. Wagner and the Rise of Urban Liberalism*. New York: Atheneum, 1968.

- . *Massachusetts People and Politics, 1919-1933: The Transition from Republican to Democratic Dominance and its Implications*. New York: Atheneum, 1973.
- Jackson, Kenneth T. *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930*. New York: Oxford, 1967.
- Janick, Jr., Herbert F. *A Diverse People: Connecticut, 1914 to the Present*. Chester, CT: The Pequot Press, 1975.
- Josephson, Matthew, and Hannah Josephson. *Al Smith: Hero of the Cities: A Political Portrait Drawing on the Papers of Frances Perkins*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969.
- Kantowicz, Edward R. *Polish-American Politics in Chicago, 1888-1940*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1975.
- Keller, Morton. *America's Three Regimes: A New Political History*. New York: Oxford, 2007.
- Kennedy, John F. *Profiles in Courage*. New York: Harper, 1956.
- Key, V. O. *Southern Politics in State and Nation*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949.
- Klayman, Richard. *The First Jew: Prejudice and Politics in an American Community, 1900-1932*. Malden, MA: Old Suffolk Square Press, 1985.
- Kloppenber, James T. *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920*. New York: Oxford, 1986.
- Koven, Seth, and Sonya Michel, eds. *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Kuhn, Clifford M. *Contesting the New South Order: The 1914-1915 Strike at Atlanta's Fulton Mills*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2001.
- Ladd-Taylor, Molly. *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930*. Chicago: University of Illinois, 1994.
- Lassiter, Matthew D. *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 2006.
- Leiter, Jeffrey, Michael D. Schulman, and Rhonda Zingraff, eds. *Hanging by a Thread: Social Change in Southern Textiles*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1991.
- Leuchtenburg, William E. *The Perils of Prosperity: 1914-32*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1958.

- . *The FDR Years: On Roosevelt and His Legacy*. New York: Columbia, 1995.
- . *Herbert Hoover*. New York: Henry Holt, 2009.
- Lewis, David Levering. *When Harlem Was in Vogue*. New York: Penguin, 1997.
- . *W. E. B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963*. New York: Henry Holt, 2000.
- Lichtman, Allan J. *Prejudice and the Old Politics: The Presidential Election of 1928*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1979.
- Link, Arthur S., and Richard L. McCormick. *Progressivism*. Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1983.
- Lisio, Donald J. *Hoover, Blacks, & Lily-Whites: A Study of Southern Strategies*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1985.
- Lorence, James J. *Gerald J. Boileau and the Progressive-Farmer-Labor Alliance*. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 1994.
- Luconi, Stefano. *The Italian-American Vote in Providence, Rhode Island, 1916-1948*. Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2004.
- Lubell, Samuel. *The Future of American Politics*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1951.
- McCartin, Joseph A. *Labor's Great War: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy and the Origins of Modern American Labor Relations, 1912-1921*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1997.
- McCormick, Richard L. *The Party Period and Public Policy: American Politics from the Age of Jackson to the Progressive Era*. New York: Oxford, 1986.
- McCoy, Donald R. *Coming of Age: The United States during the 1920's and 1930's*. New York: Penguin, 1973.
- McCraw, Thomas K. *TVA and the Power Fight, 1933-1939*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1971.
- McGerr, Michael E. *The Decline of Popular Politics, The American North, 1865-1928*. New York: Oxford, 1986.
- . *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920*. New York: Free Press, 2003.

- McMullen, David Lee. *Strike! The Radical Insurrections of Ellen Dawson*. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, 2010.
- Mann, Arthur. *La Guardia Comes to Power 1933*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1965.
- Martin, George. *Madam Secretary: Frances Perkins*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976.
- Mayer, George H. *The Political Career of Floyd B. Olson*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1951.
- Merton, Robert King. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1963.
- Michel, Sonya. *Children's Interests/Mother's Rights: The Shaping of America's Child Care Policy*. New Haven, CT: Yale, 1999.
- Mink, Gwendolyn. *The Wages of Motherhood: Inequality and the Welfare State, 1917-1942*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1995.
- Moore, Edmund A. *A Catholic Runs for President: The Campaign of 1928*. New York: Ronald Press, 1956.
- Morrison, Joseph L. *Governor O. Max Gardner: A Power in North Carolina and New Deal Washington*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1971.
- Muncy, Robyn. *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform: 1890-1935*. New York: Oxford, 1991.
- Nie, Norman H., Sidney Verba, and John R. Petrocik. *The Changing American Voter*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1976.
- Olson, Keith W. *Biography of A Progressive: Franklin K. Lane, 1864-1921*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979.
- Orleck, Annelise. *Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working-Class Politics in the United States, 1900-1965*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1995.
- Parker, Margaret Terrell. *Lowell: A Study of Industrial Development*. New York: MacMillan, 1940.
- Parrish, Michael E. *Anxious Decades: America in Prosperity and Depression, 1920-1941*. New York: Norton, 1992.

- Patterson, James T. *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal: The Growth of the Conservative Coalition in Congress, 1933-1939*. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, 1967.
- , *The New Deal and the States: Federalism in Transition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1969.
- Pegram, Thomas R. *Partisans and Progressives: Private Interest and Public Policy in Illinois, 1870-1922*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 1992.
- Perry, Elisabeth Israels. *Belle Moskowitz: Feminine Politics and the Exercise of Power in the Age of Alfred E. Smith*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992.
- Petrin, Ronald A. *French Canadians in Massachusetts Politics, 1885-1915: Ethnicity and Political Pragmatism*. Philadelphia, The Balch Institute Press, 1990.
- Petrocik, John R. *Party Coalitions: Realignment and the Decline of the New Deal Party System*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981.
- Phillips, Kevin P. *The Emerging Republican Majority*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969.
- Pringle, Henry F. *Alfred E. Smith: A Critical Study*. New York: Macy-Masius, 1927.
- Puryear, Elmer L. *Democratic Party Dissension in North Carolina, 1928-1936*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1962.
- Pusey, Merlo J. *Charles Evans Hughes*. New York: MacMillan, 1951.
- Rodgers, Daniel T. *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1998.
- Rogin, Michael Paul, and John L. Shover. *Political Change in California: Critical Elections and Social Movements, 1890-1966*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1970.
- Rosenstone, Steven J., Roy L. Behr, and Edward H. Lazarus. *Third Parties in America: Citizen Response to Major Party Failure*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1984.
- Salmond, John A. *Gastonia 1929: The Story of the Loray Mill Strike*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1995.
- Saloutos, Theodore, and John D. Hicks. *Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 1900-1939*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1951.

- Saloutos, Theodore. *The American Farmer and the New Deal*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University, 1982.
- Schlesinger, Jr., Arthur M. *The Crisis of the Old Order: 1919-1933*. Volume 1 of *The Age of Roosevelt*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002.
- . *The Coming of the New Deal: 1933-1935*. Volume 2 of *The Age of Roosevelt*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003.
- . *The Politics of Upheaval: 1935-1936*. Volume 3 of *The Age of Roosevelt*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003.
- Schwarz, Jordan A. *The New Dealers: Power Politics in the Age of Roosevelt*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.
- Shlakman, Vera. *Economic History of a Factory Town: A Study of Chicopee, Massachusetts*. New York: Octagon Books, 1969.
- Sitkoff, Harvard. *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue: The Depression Decade*. New York: Oxford, 1978.
- Sklar, Kathryn Kish. *Florence Kelley and the Nation's Work: The Rise of Women's Political Culture, 1830-1900*. New Haven, CT: Yale, 1995.
- Sklar, Kathryn Kish, Anja Schöler, and Susan Strasser, eds. *Social Justice Feminists in the United States and Germany: A Dialogue in Documents, 1885-1933*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1998.
- Skocpol, Theda. *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1992.
- Slayton, Robert A. *Empire Statesman: The Rise and Redemption of Al Smith*. New York: Free Press, 2001.
- Sobel, Robert. *Coolidge: An American Enigma*. Washington, DC: Regency Publishing, 1998.
- Stave, Bruce M., ed. *Urban Bosses, Machines, and Progressive Reformers*. Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath, 1972.
- Steel, Ronald. *Walter Lippmann and the American Century*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1999.
- Steinberg, Ted. *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History*. New York: Oxford, 2002.

- Sterne, Evelyn Savidge. *Ballots and Bibles: Ethnic Politics and the Catholic Church in Providence*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 2004.
- Stromquist, Shelton. *Re-Inventing "The People": The Progressive Movement, the Class Problem, and the Origins of Modern Liberalism*. Chicago: University of Illinois, 2006.
- Sundquist, James L. *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1973.
- Timberlake, James H. *Prohibition and the Progressive Movement, 1900-1920*. New York: Atheneum, 1970.
- Valelly, Richard M. *Radicalism in the States: The Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party and the American Political Economy*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989.
- Ware, Susan. *Partner and I: Molly Dewson, Feminism, and New Deal Politics*. New Haven, CT: Yale, 1987.
- Warner, Emily Smith, with Hawthorne Daniel. *The Happy Warrior: The Story of My Father, Alfred E. Smith*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956.
- Watson, Bruce. *Bread and Roses: Mills, Migrants, and the Struggle for the American Dream*. New York: Viking, 2005.
- Wayman, Dorothy G. *David I. Walsh: Citizen-Patriot*. Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing Co., 1952.
- Weiss, Nancy Joan. *Charles Francis Murphy, 1858-1924: Respectability and Responsibility in Tammany Politics*. Northampton, MA: Smith College, 1968.
- Wellock, Thomas R. *Preserving the Nation: The Conservation and Environmental Movements, 1870-2000*. Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2007.
- Wesser, Robert F. *A Response to Progressivism: The Democratic Party and New York Politics, 1902-1918*. New York: New York University, 1986.
- White, Richard. *The Organic Machine*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1995.
- Wiebe, Robert H. *The Search for Order 1877-1920*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1967.
- Wilson, Joan Hoff. *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1975.

- Winkler, Allan M. *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Making of Modern America*. New York: Pearson, 2006.
- Welch, Richard F. *King of the Bowery: Big Tim Sullivan, Tammany Hall, and New York City from the Gilded Age to the Progressive Era*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008.
- Weller, Jr., Cecil Edward. *Joe T. Robinson: Always a Loyal Democrat*. Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas, 1998.
- Wolfbein, Seymour Louis. *The Decline of A Cotton Textile City: A Study of New Bedford*. New York: Columbia University, 1944.
- Wolfskill, George. *The Revolt of the Conservatives: A History of the American Liberty League, 1934-1940*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962.
- Woodward, C. Vann. *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University, 1971.
- Wright, Gavin. *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State, 1986.
- Yearley, C. K. *The Money Machines: The Breakdown and Reform of Governmental and Party Finance in the North, 1860-1920*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1970.
- Zucker, Norman L. *George W. Norris: Gentle Knight of American Democracy*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 1966.

Unpublished Theses

- DeMoranville, Jr., Aaron F. "Ethnic Voting in Rhode Island." MA thesis, Brown University, 1961.
- Sterne, Evelyn A. "Patchwork of Protest: Social Diversity and Labor Militancy in the New Bedford Strike of 1928." MA thesis, Duke University, 1994.

Internet Sources

- Biographical Directory of the United States Congress. Last accessed March 29, 2012.
<http://bioguide.congress.gov/>.
 "Bloom, Sol."
 "Davenport, Frederick Morgan."
 "Towne, Charles Arnette."
 "Hansbrough, Henry Clay."

- Cornell University. "The Triangle Factory Fire." Last accessed March 29, 2012. <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/>.
- Harvard University. "The Public Health Disparities Geocoding Project Monograph." Last accessed March 29, 2012. <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/thegeocodingproject/webpage/monograph/introduction.htm>.
- Honeywell, Alice. "La Follette and His Legacy." Last accessed March 29, 2012. <http://www.lafollette.wisc.edu/publications/otherpublications/LaFollette/LaFLegacy.html>.
- New York State Archives. "The Lusk Committee 'Introduction.'" Last accessed March 29, 2012. http://www.archives.nysed.gov/a/research/res_topics_bus_lusk_intro.shtml.
- New York State Power Authority. "NYPA's History." Last accessed March 29, 2012. <http://www.nypa.gov/about/history1.htm>.
- The Pulitzer Prizes Board. "1929 Winners." Last accessed March 29, 2012. <http://www.pulitzer.org/awards/1929>.
- State Historical Society of North Dakota. "Walter J. Maddock." Last accessed March 29, 2012. <http://history.nd.gov/exhibits/governors/governors15.html>.
- Watson, Elbert L. "J. Thomas Heflin." *The Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Last accessed March 29, 2012. <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-2952>.