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**PROGRESSIVE CIVIC DEVELOPMENT AND POLITICAL CONFLICT:  
REGULAR DEMOCRATS AND REFORMERS IN NEW ORLEANS, 1896-1912**

VOLUME I

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by  
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May, 1999

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As a resident of New Orleans, I have always been fascinated with the complex and rich history of the city. That interest increased as I undertook the study of history at Loyola University in New Orleans and the University of New Orleans. Additional study in the field of public administration, and civic work that examined issues of municipal ownership and utility regulation, led me to the period under study--New Orleans in the first decade of the twentieth century. In particular, I was struck by the dissonance between descriptions of the New Orleans Regulars--the city's dominant political organization--and the accounts of municipal progress under Regular mayors. The traditional view of big-city bosses, a category to which Martin Behrman, New Orleans Mayor from 1904 to 1920 and 1925 to 1926, clearly belonged, seemed at odds with the accomplishments the city enjoyed. This study examines that apparent contradiction.

In the preparation of this work, I am indebted to my colleagues at the University of New Orleans, Metropolitan College, who read portions or all of the manuscript and provided valuable comments, especially William Neville, Carl Drichta, Dan Harper, Charles Gifford, Dan Olmsted, and Glenn Schiro. The University of New Orleans Department of History includes many faculty who assisted my work by answering questions and giving timely advice. Raphael Cassimere, Joseph Logsdon, Joe Caldwell, and Arnold Hirsch were generous with their time, ideas, and, often, information about

New Orleans and Louisiana that might otherwise have escaped my notice. Gunter Bischof, also of the History Department, provided timely encouragement and suggestions. In the College of Urban and Public Affairs, Dean Fritz Wagner, Robert Whelan, Ralph Thayer, and Peter Sorant offered constant support and helpful advice. I am also indebted to Chancellor Gregory St. L. O'Brien and Executive Vice-Chancellor Louis V. Paradise for their understanding and support, as well as to Gordon Mueller, Chris Flug, Robert Sternhell, and Norma Grace. Beryl Gauthier provided valuable typing and editorial assistance. I am also grateful for the assistance of committee members at Louisiana State University, whose reading of the manuscript and helpful suggestions improved the work I initially submitted. Professor Gaines Foster provided a most appreciated model for a major professor, taking on the role of editor and constructive critic with care and encouragement. His suggestions, editorial corrections, and insistent questioning contributed greatly to the final product.

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## ABSTRACT

The 1896 elections in Louisiana produced a Regular Democrat as governor, but a reform government within New Orleans. The turbulence of the Populist era led to the unification of political factions behind disfranchisement of blacks and a narrowing of the electorate. In spite of attempts to make their triumph permanent, New Orleans reformers gave way to a resurgent Regular Democratic organization, the Choctaw Club, which dominated city politics for the first half of the twentieth century. Mayors Paul Capdevielle and Martin Behrman successfully led the city in an era of commercial expansion, public works, and municipal reform. That leadership persisted through factional political conflict because the underlying consensus favored the major policies typical of southern progressivism.

Three public works projects, and their accompanying governmental structures, demonstrated the progressive consensus in New Orleans. The Sewerage and Water Board oversaw the development of the water, sewerage, and drainage systems of the city. The Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans constructed and administered the docks, wharves, and landings of the city and the surrounding area along the Mississippi River. The New Orleans Public Belt Railroad Commission built and operated a public railroad that facilitated the exchange of commerce, particularly along the riverfront. The construction and operation of these public works occurred

during the administration of Regular Democrats, but all political factions supported the role of both state and municipal governments in these projects. The consensus in favor of public activity drew strength from the southern progressive assumption that economic development, commercial expansion, and municipal progress represented ideal methods of addressing social concerns.

By the end of the second term of Martin Behrman, the reform faction in New Orleans sought to regain power through the introduction of a new form of city government--the commission. Mayor Behrman and the Regular organization accepted commission government and the city adopted a new charter. But the elections results under the new system did not fulfill the expectations of the reform faction. The Regulars stayed in power, continuing the pattern begun in 1899 of ineffectual reform challenges to the Regular organization.

## INTRODUCTION

New Orleans was the largest city in the South from the time of the Louisiana Purchase well into the twentieth century. It remains the largest city in Louisiana and enjoys a reputation for a colorful history, not least because of an impressive array of cultural influences that included colonial French and Spanish, African-American, German, Irish, Italian, and, more recently, Vietnamese, and Central American. This cultural melange thrived in unlikely geographical circumstances--swamps, sinking land, difficult transportation, and frequent floods. One observer, noting the Crescent City's triumph over its precarious site, called New Orleans "the impossible but inevitable city." By the end of the nineteenth century, New Orleans had long since passed its golden age, the antebellum boom times of cotton, sugar, and the steamboat trade. The first decade of the twentieth century brought a different excitement to the city: the challenges of modernization. This investigation of the history of New Orleans focuses on the years 1896 to 1912 and provides a case study of urban political and economic development in the era of southern progressivism.<sup>1</sup>

The narrative begins with 1896 for two reasons. In that year, the Regular Democrats of Louisiana defeated a strong challenge by a Fusion candidate, who

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<sup>1</sup> Peirce F. Lewis, *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1976), 17.

represented an unlikely coalition of wealthy sugar planters, hill-country Populists, urban reformers, and independent black voters. Thereafter, Populist political activity went into a long period of inactivity, to be awakened in the 1920s by Huey P. Long. Also in 1896, the Regular Democrats of New Orleans lost control of the city government to the Citizens' League, one of a series of reform groups periodically organized to challenge the power of the Regulars. The League cooperated with the Louisiana legislature to bring to the city the beginnings of progressive municipal reform. In the same legislature, white politicians of all factions united to eliminate black voters by adopting a new state constitution.

The elimination of black voters and the decline of Populism drastically reduced multi-party political contests. Subsequently, factional candidates for state office contended within the Democratic party, rarely straying from Regular orthodoxy. In New Orleans, the Regular organization, called the Choctaw Club, was the political beneficiary of the increased Democratic loyalty. The Regulars reorganized after their 1896 defeat, attracted defectors from the reform ranks, and recaptured the city government. Many businessmen, formerly associated with the Citizens' League, became active, influential, and loyal members of the Choctaw Club. Building on the foundation of legislation passed from 1896 to 1899, the Regular administrations of New Orleans embraced most of the progressive initiatives of their predecessors, especially the organization of new administrative units of the city and the state, which transformed New Orleans by building and operating major public works. By 1912, when the study

ends, the Regulars enjoyed political control and the gratitude of the voters, who could see the products of public works projects and the changes brought to the city.

The examination of New Orleans events from 1896 to 1912 reveals lively political conflict, embodied in the factional split between reformers and the Regular Democrats. But it also establishes the existence of a strong, underlying consensus in favor of progressive policies. That consensus grew out of political decisions to disfranchise blacks and in response to the need for substantial public development and investment. For the leaders of New Orleans, “progressive” was synonymous with progress. The progress that they strived for was inextricably bound up with the commercial advancement of the city. This consensus crossed community income groups, occupations, and political inclinations, and favored what this study will call progressive civic development.

Many of the changes in New Orleans constituted progressive reforms, both in the substance of the changes and in the governmental structures utilized to implement the reforms. Regardless of whether those changes began as the result of the reformers or the Regulars, both political factions and, subsequently, scholars considered the policies deserved the label progressive. Also, the changes in New Orleans were broadly civic in nature. In reaction to fears of private monopoly power and aware of nationwide trends toward municipal ownership, a clear majority of New Orleanians agreed with activist city administrations. Citizens accepted the efficacy of public financing, ownership, and operation. Finally, the consensus most strongly supported the promotion of economic and commercial development as a defining municipal interest.

Factional disputes paled in comparison to the unanimity on the need for business success and the creation of wealth.<sup>2</sup>

The most pressing arguments in favor of the existence of such a consensus for progressive civic development are found in the shared attitudes toward major public works. This study examines three new governmental entities, products of the progressive era, and the public works completed by each: the Sewerage and Water Board, which built a modern sewerage, water, and drainage system, the Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans, which reconstructed the city docks, and the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad Commission, which constructed the railroad car transfer system crucial to the movement of freight along the docks. These entities, though isolated from the impacts of direct democracy, built public facilities, maintained public ownership, and carried out operations by means of public administration.

The results of this study demonstrates the existence of a consensus for progressive civic development, but consensus did not imply unanimity. In at least three ways, the limitations of the consensus were apparent. First, the vast majority of blacks who had participated in politics prior to the Constitution of 1898 no longer had the opportunity to join or reject the consensus. Second, at least two crucial elements of the

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<sup>2</sup> The author wishes to acknowledge the insights of Matthew Schott in "The New Orleans Machine and Progressivism," *Louisiana History* 24 (Spring 1983): 141-153. Schott wrote of the New Orleans "conservative leaders who identified civic progress with economic growth and development which the consensus believed would occur with municipal and state government working in harmony with business interests." The present study attempts to build on that insight by more closely examining the interplay among progressive ideas, the commercial leadership, the reform faction, and the Regular Democrats who controlled city government.

national progressive agenda--reform of patronage and the control of morality--were not part of the New Orleans consensus. The reform and Regular factions continued to differ on the value of civil service reform as well as attempts to control gambling, promote prohibition, and suppress prostitution. Third, in spite of the successes of public utilities in New Orleans, a segment of the political and business leadership remained skeptical about the advisability of public ownership. Electric power, street lighting, and streetcars remained in private hands. Nonetheless, evidence for the existence of the consensus for progressive civic development is strong, particularly in the behavior of the city's two political factions, the reformers and the Regulars.

Although there were vigorous electoral contests in New Orleans, 1896 to 1912, those contests did not disturb the fundamental consensus for progressive civic development. Both factions in New Orleans politics agreed with the essential southern view of progressivism. Between 1896 and 1912, there were five municipal elections. The two factions staged vigorous contests in all but one of the mayoral races, and, in each contest, the rhetoric of each faction corresponded to the expected constituencies and interests. Reform candidates emphasized efficiency in government, low taxes, and restoration of honest government. The Regulars praised Democratic unity, their connections to the people, and the practical progress accomplished in city government. But behind the rhetorical flourishes, and the sometimes bitter campaigning, neither faction sought to challenge the prevailing consensus or alter the governmental structures put in place to carry out the progressive reforms.



There were many examples of the reluctance of either political faction to challenge the initiation or implementation of progressive policies. The reliance on independent boards and commissions received support from both factions at the state and local levels. The appointments to those boards and commissions, while not explicitly non-partisan, drew from a pool of businessmen and interested citizens that did not vary significantly whether the reform or Regular faction made the appointments. Numerous tax and bond referenda enjoyed support from both factions; from 1896 to 1912, no such referendum was seriously contested nor defeated at the polls. And in the most important structural change in city government--the adoption of a commission form of government--both factions agreed with the essential elements of the new plan.

The two political factions in New Orleans corresponded to Richard Hofstadter's dichotomy of reformer versus machine politicians. The reform faction in the city included a slightly higher percentage of Protestants, and its members had somewhat more wealth than the members of the machine. But the social and ethnic patterns of New Orleans did not correspond to those in the northeastern urban centers, and the Hofstadter status-anxiety model only occasionally fits the Crescent City's political environment. The machine faction, known as the Regular Democrats, not only included a large number of Protestants, but also attracted numerous businessmen that Hofstadter's model would normally place in the ranks of the reformers. The policies of the city administrations did not fit a preconceived model of reformers versus the machine. Martin Behrman, Mayor of New Orleans from 1904 until 1920, led the

machine faction, but also supported a remarkable list of progressive reforms and municipal improvements.<sup>3</sup>

The evidence also undermines the traditional semantic treatment of the two political factions. The assignment of the word “reform” to one faction and “machine” to the other leaves little to the imagination. George Orwell’s famous essay “Politics and the English Language” warns that English becomes “ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.”<sup>4</sup> The use of “reform” and “machine” is not foolish *per se*, but indiscriminate and unexamined acceptance of the terms is inimical to historical precision. The capture of the “reform” label by those opposed to the Regular faction in New Orleans ought not lead to the automatic assumption of a Manichaean political contest, wherein the opposite of “reform” must necessarily stand for the tainted *status quo*, governed by political “bosses.” In particular, there is a danger that the “reform” faction and progressive policies become identified as one, and it is imperative to disconnect progressive policies from factional rhetoric and labels. With these cautions in mind, the term “reform” is used to identify the insurgent faction within the Democratic party, and its opposition is identified as the Regulars or Regular Democrats.

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960). See also John Buenker, “Sovereign Individuals and Organic Networks: Political Cultures in Conflict During the Progressive Era,” *American Quarterly* 40 (June, 1988): 187-204.

<sup>4</sup> George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language,” in Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, editors, *In Front of Your Nose*, Volume IV of *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 127.

The term “boss” is also retained. Though the reformers used “boss” as a term of reproach, many Regular leaders accepted the label, sometimes with pride.<sup>5</sup>

The rejection of the reform versus machine dichotomy is not based on the New Orleans experience alone. Howard Chudacoff, in the *Evolution of American Urban Society*, praised the contribution of the bosses and their political machines, and pointed out that “Prestige, service, loyalty, accomplishment . . . were what the machine offered inner-city residents, and these were what enabled the boss system to withstand heated attacks for so many years.” Chudacoff summarized the reality of boss rule by asserting:

Men like [the political bosses] would not have lasted as long as they did if they had not served real needs of large segments of the urban population. Machines were less immoral than amoral, less illegal than extralegal. They were not reactionary but pragmatic, not one-dimensional but flexible. Moreover, bosses did express higher goals, if not in their words then in their deeds. Bosses were both villains and heroes--and something more.

Previous work on the same period of New Orleans tended to accept the traditional reform-boss dichotomy. Robert Williams provided a largely sympathetic portrait of Martin Behrman, but asserted that “Behrman was no reformer . . . but identified himself with many elements of contemporary civic reform.” Matthew Schott’s valuable biography of John M. Parker stressed the social bases of Parker’s antagonism toward the Regulars, rather than significant policy disagreements. Even though Schott credited Behrman with a “responsible, constructive, and businesslike administration,” he nonetheless concluded that “Behrman undoubtedly lacked the idealistic devotion to

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<sup>5</sup> Less charitable labels assigned to the Regulars included not only the “machine,” but also the “ring.”

honest and efficient government which characterized Parker.” In his study of New Orleans politics 1896 to 1900, Oscar Nussbaum discussed the election of 1900 during which the Regular organization accommodated insurgent factions within several wards. “These insurgents,” said Nussbaum, “could not be described as reformers because they were merely seeking the leadership for themselves.” Later, in a discussion of comparative campaign rhetoric, Nussbaum refers to the Regulars’ “shameless manipulation of public opinion.” The analysis of the reform versus machine split extended to state and regional studies as well. Dewey Grantham, while giving credit to the accomplishment of the bosses, including a specific mention of Martin Behrman of New Orleans, claimed that “in some cases urban reform came in the guise of city boss and organization leadership.” And C. Vann Woodward, in reference to state political conflict, referred to traditional Democratic “interests” that “were defended by southern apologists . . . strongly entrenched within the old party and frequently controll[ing] it through bosses and state machines. . . . The struggle for progressive democracy was directed against [the bosses] and was carried on within the old party between conservative and reform factions.” Contrary to these views, the evidence from New Orleans demonstrated that the consensus for progressive civic development in New Orleans owed far more to the leadership of the Regulars and their political machine--including support from the state party--than to the good intentions of the New Orleans reformers and their haphazard political organizations.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Chudacoff, *The Evolution of American Urban Society*, 2nd edition (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1981), 160; Michael McCarthy, “On Bosses, Reformers and

No single city or state can provide a picture sufficiently broad to answer all of the questions about southern, urban progressivism. But New Orleans in the first decades of the twentieth century offers a view into three worlds: the South, progressive reform, and urban life. The city was *within* the South, but, perhaps, not completely *of* the South. It was, by the start of the new century, an old city, by United States standards, whereas most southern cities were just developing. As a seaport, it shared characteristics with northeastern coastal cities, particularly as a destination for immigration. Finally, its politics shared at least the rhetoric of the progressive era, as self-proclaimed "reformers" entered battle against the New Orleans "ring." One particularly interesting aspect of New Orleans government during the post-Civil War period was its dependence upon governmental forms that provided a precursor to progressive reforms. The sheltering of certain functions of government from democratic impulses began with the establishment of the Board of Liquidation of City Debt. The dependence on such boards continued throughout the 1890s and beyond with the

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Urban Growth: Some Suggestions for a Political Typology of American Cities," *Journal of Urban History* 4 (November, 1977): 29-38; Robert Webb Williams, "Martin Behrman: Mayor and Political Boss of New Orleans, 1904-1926" (M. A. thesis, Tulane University, 1952), 12; Matthew James Schott, "John M. Parker and the Varieties of American Progressivism" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1969), 100-103; Oscar Nussbaum, "Progressive Politics in New Orleans, 1896-1900" (Ph.D. diss., Tulane University, 1974), 193, 208; Dewey W. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 287-288; C. Vann Woodward, *The Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 371-372. In a later publication, Matthew Schott gave Behrman credit for the accomplishments of the his administration, but suggested that "whether Behrman's leadership deserves any credit for these achievement may be debated." See Schott, "The New Orleans Machine and Progressivism," 144.

establishment of state-sanctioned levee boards, the Public Belt Railroad, Dock Board, and, by the turn of the century, the Sewerage and Water Board in New Orleans.

Specific analysis of New Orleans during this era is limited. In 1930, Harold Zink included a chapter on Behrman in his study of city bosses, and George M. Reynolds published a study of New Orleans politics in 1936 drawing on interviews with members of the prominent New Orleans political organization. The period 1896 to 1900 is covered in Raymond Oscar Nussbaum's "Progressive Politics in New Orleans, 1896-1900," a doctoral dissertation for Tulane University in 1974. More recently, Terrence Fitzmorris authored "Pro Bono Publico: New Orleans Politics and Municipal Reform in the Progressive Era, 1912-1926," a dissertation covering the later years of Mayor Behrman's administration through the mid-1920s. Works utilizing the state as a focus include Schott's biography of John M. Parker and studies of minority voting, the Populist movements, and Republican politics. More recently, Edward Haas has written of New Orleans politics in the beginning of the twentieth century and compiled a useful statistical comparison of reform and machine leadership. His characterizations of the reformers and the Regular Democrats provided valuable information and insights into the composition of the political factions.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Oscar Nussbaum, "Progressive Politics in New Orleans, 1896-1900"; Terrence Fitzmorris, "Pro Bono Publico: New Orleans Politics and Municipal Reform in the Progressive Era, 1912-1926" (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 1989); Schott, "John M. Parker of Louisiana and the Varieties of American Progressivism"; William Ivy Hair, *Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest: Louisiana Politics, 1877-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969); Henry Clay Dethloff, "Populism and Reform in Louisiana" (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, 1964); Phillip Uzee, "Republican Politics in Louisiana, 1877-1900" (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University,

The historiography of progressivism, once a staple of consensus, has been in turmoil for nearly two decades. The work of Richard Hofstadter set the standard and the intellectual assumptions for the study of progressivism and progressives, but Peter Filene's "obituary" for the movement marked a turning point by noting the impossibility of identifying progressivism as a distinct movement and the elusive nature of clear definitions. From the early 1970s to the present, a spirited argument has raged over the usefulness of the concept progressivism. Certainly there is less agreement now than several decades ago on whether or not there existed a central organizing set of tenets of progressivism. In another development, a new approach to progressivism captured the attention of historians. The organizational synthesis promised an explanatory framework for progressivism, to be found in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century transition from "villages" to a bureaucratic, urbanized society. Such an approach echoed Hofstadter's emphasis on the professional middle-class, but offered an explanation for the ambivalent, even paradoxical nature of the movement. If progressivism were a "search for order" emphasizing new organizational forms, its tendency toward conservative, anti-democratic elitism became understandable.<sup>8</sup>

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1950); Harold Zink, *City Bosses in the United States: A Study of Twenty Municipal Bosses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1930); John R. Kemp, editor, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans: Memoirs of a City Boss* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977); George M. Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans, 1897-1926* (New York: 1936); Edward Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City: New Orleans in the Progressive Era, 1896-1902* (Ruston, Louisiana: McGinty Publications, 1988).

<sup>8</sup> See for example, Peter Filene, "An Obituary for 'The Progressive Movement,'" *American Quarterly*, 22 (1970): 20-34; Richard L. McCormick, *The Party Period and Public Policy: American Politics from the Age of Jackson to the Progressive Era* (New

Cautious historians now write of progressivism as a set of attitudes, rather than as a consistent view of the world, and a series of shifting coalitions, rather than a coherent movement. Richard McCormick identified three reasons for the decline in the use of the term progressivism: the discomfort with using a “value-laden” term, general discouragement over the “liberal reform tradition,” and a growing recognition of the “complexity and diversity of early twentieth century reform.” In a search for the identity of progressives, scholars find multiple groups in favor of progressive reforms. “Many groups had a hand in it,” wrote McCormick, including “urban residents [crusading] for better city services, more efficient municipal government, and, sometimes, the control of social groups whose habits they feared.” McCormick added that “businessmen, too, lobbied incessantly for goals which they defined as reform.”<sup>9</sup> These observations fit the history of New Orleans, where a range of citizens clamored for progressive reform. But progressivism in New Orleans not only echoed national experiences; it also took place in the South, and bore the characteristics of that region’s uniqueness.

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York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Daniel T. Rogers, “In Search of Progressivism,” *Reviews in American History* 10 (December 1982): 113-132; John D. Buenker, “The Progressive Era: A Search for a Synthesis,” *Mid-America* 51 (July, 1969): 175-193; Louis Galambos, “The Emerging Organizational Synthesis in Modern American History,” *Business History Review* 44 (Autumn, 1970): 279-290; Robert Weibe, *The Search for Order* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); Dewey W. Grantham, “The Contours of Southern Progressivism,” *American Historical Review* 86 (December, 1981): 1035-1059.

<sup>9</sup> Richard L. McCormick, *The Party Period and Public Policy* (1986), 263.



The study of southern history pays somewhat less attention to the progressive era than to the antebellum or Reconstruction years. In part, that relative neglect can be traced to the tremendous interest in slavery and race relations, but it can also be explained by the overwhelmingly rural nature of the South, even during the progressive era. But a paucity of urban influence did not prevent the emergence of a southern progressivism. In *Origins of the New South*, C. Vann Woodward stated that the South “developed its own variety of progressivism in the era that followed hard upon McKinley. . . . [a] phenomenon [that] has been pretty universally ignored--or misconstrued.” Woodward argued that “the Southern counterpart of a Northern progressivism developed nearly all traits familiar to the genus, but it was in no sense derivative. It was a pretty strictly indigenous growth.”<sup>10</sup>

The most obvious characteristics of the South that made its variety of progressivism different were the composition of its electorate and the high proportion of African-Americans among the working classes. According to Woodward, “Southern progressivism generally was progressivism for white men only, and after the poll tax took its toll not all the white men were included.” Woodward also pointed the way to the cities as the logical starting point to examine southern progressivism. “Southern progressivism was essentially urban and middle class in nature, and the typical leader was a city professional man or business man, rather than a farmer.” Dewey Grantham’s study of southern progressivism made a similar point. “Since most black southerners

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<sup>10</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *The Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, 371.

had been disfranchised, along with many poor and illiterate whites, the southern urban electorate was relatively homogeneous and increasingly middle- and upper-class in makeup.” Grantham also noted that urban life emerged as a key element in the discussion of southern progressivism and confirmed the usefulness of a municipal study to demonstrate southern progressive policies. “Municipal reform,” Grantham wrote, “made up an essential part of southern progressivism. While it reflected all of the progressive tendencies of the age, the most significant aspect of municipal reform in the South was the movement to modernize the organization and administration of the city.” He emphasized that “the expanding role of cities in Southern life brought notable social changes,” and that “proliferating organizations . . . provided an indispensable matrix for the growth of progressivism in the South.”<sup>11</sup>

In addition to urban influences, southern progressivism was formed by strong local traditions in rural areas. In *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, William Link cited patterns of “traditional governance” and “republican libertarianism” as countervailing tendencies to the modernizing and centralizing force of progressivism. His thesis reinforces the argument in favor of the uniqueness of southern progressivism. Another element of that uniqueness was the nature of the Southern working class and its

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<sup>11</sup>Dewey W. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism*, 260. A number of state studies provide insight into local conditions in the South, and two studies of particular cities--Memphis and Birmingham--add valuable local examples to the general questions about the interaction of southern and progressive tendencies. See, for example, Sheldon Hackney, *From Populism to Progressivism in Alabama*; William D. Miller, *Memphis During the Progressive Era, 1900-1917* (Memphis, 1957); Carl V. Harris, *Political Power in Birmingham, 1871-1921* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977).

relationship to suffrage, which created a social configuration that necessarily affected political alignments and the agenda of progressive politicians. J. Morgan Kousser, in his *Shaping of Southern Politics*, added an important dimension to the study of the progressive years in the South through an examination of the disfranchisement movement. Kousser argued that the movement to reduce the black electorate reflected not only the politics of race, but also the desire of the Democratic party in the South, and its middle- and upper-class leadership, to establish and maintain a monopoly on political power. Suffrage laws and constitutional changes in Louisiana altered the electorate of New Orleans in the early twentieth century and, consequently, altered the shape and course of progressivism. Jack Temple Kirby examined the interplay between race and progressive reform in *Darkness at the Dawning*. Kirby argued that the “desire for reform ran deeper and broader in the South than in other regions.” But the “seminal” reform for Southerners was the segregation and disfranchisement of blacks.<sup>12</sup>

These views of progressivism and its southern variant provide a composite backdrop against which the civic development of New Orleans can be examined. southern progressivism promoted municipal reform, public health, regulation of industry, education, and economic development, goals it shared with its northern

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<sup>12</sup> Link’s thesis also suggests a basis for studying the role of the South’s urban areas in weakening rural adherence to tradition and republicanism. William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), xi; J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); Jack Kirby, *Darkness at the Dawning: Race and Reform in the Progressive South* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1972), 1-5.

counterpart. But southern progressivism operated within a social and political context that disfranchised large numbers of its workers, suffered from oppressive poverty, was dominated by rural values, and, yet, struggled to promote economic development and to join the mainstream United States economy. This study of New Orleans seeks an understanding of southern progressivism as practiced in a urban setting. The evidence supports the existence of a consensus in favor of progressive civic development developed and sustained during the period 1896 to 1912. But in a departure from much of the literature, the evidence also supports the finding that the Regular Democrats, the so-called machine, helped to develop the consensus and were largely responsible for the successful implementation of progressive reforms and improvements in civic development.

This study begins with a chapter describing the politics of Louisiana and New Orleans in the 1890s, the end of the Populist revolt, and the beginning of the progressive era. Chapter Two discusses the new Louisiana electorate and the organization of New Orleans political factions; Chapter Three looks at the election of 1899 and the return of the Regulars to political power. Chapters Four and Five provide brief histories of the mayoral terms of Paul Capdevielle (1899-1904) and Martin Behrman (1904-1908). Chapters Six through Eight break the political narrative to discuss the three great public works of the early twentieth century in New Orleans: the sewerage, water, and drainage systems, the New Orleans port, and the public belt railroad. Chapters Nine and Ten describe Martin Behrman's second term as Mayor, the adoption of commission

government in New Orleans, and Behrman's election to a third term under the new commission plan.

The study ends with the adoption of commission government in New Orleans, although Martin Behrman serves through 1920 and is once more elected Mayor in 1925. By 1912, the Regulars had demonstrated conclusively that progressive policies did not depend upon the rule of a reform administration. At the end of Behrman's second term, the Regulars accepted progressive structural reform and demonstrated that their political skills would outlast those of the reformers. The Regular Democrats, complete with a ward boss system, an effective political organization, and a dependence upon patronage, presided over a consensus in favor of progressive civic development that transformed New Orleans into a twentieth century city.

## CHAPTER I

### THE LIMITATIONS OF FUSION POLITICS: PROTEST AND REFORM IN LOUISIANA AND NEW ORLEANS

The story of New Orleans during the progressive era begins in the state and local conditions of the 1890s. Louisiana politics in that era were uncommonly turbulent. The decade started with a significant agrarian revolt, continued with major disputes over the state lottery and tariff protection for the sugar interests, reached a tense battle in the disputed gubernatorial election of 1896, and ended with major constitutional change and the disfranchisement of most black voters. Conditions in New Orleans, the largest city in the state, were no less tumultuous. The lottery dispute intruded upon city politics, the city council suffered a major scandal, a reform ticket ousted the Democratic machine in 1896, and disfranchisement not only eliminated the city's black voters, but threatened large numbers of white voters as well. These developments transformed New Orleans and its politics and provided essential background to the progressive era in city government.

Agrarian protest was particularly strong in Louisiana as the result of falling cotton prices, natural disasters, and the anti-authoritarian impulses of the hill country farmers of the northern part of the state. Upset with the refusal of their Regular Democrat congressmen to endorse the subtreasury plan, independent-minded voters in

the Fourth and Fifth Congressional Districts challenged the incumbents in the 1890 elections by urging their followers to stay away from the polls, and the resulting drop in participation signaled a high level of unrest. Not content merely to boycott the elections, the organized opposition in Catahoula Parish put forth a congressional candidate who polled a majority in that parish, but lost the district-wide vote to the incumbent. Although both Regular Democratic congressmen triumphed, the political establishment took note of the danger. The challenge engendered enthusiasm among the insurgents and helped to develop leadership that would carry the Populist banner through the middle of the decade. Within a year, Louisiana representatives of the Peoples' Party had attended organizing conventions in Ocala and Cincinnati. By October, 1891, Alexandria was host to the first Populist Party convention in the state, consisting of seventy-eight delegates from seventeen different parishes, including thirty-five from the city of New Orleans.<sup>1</sup> The New Orleans *Daily Picayune* at first assessed the convention's attendees generously as "men of the better classes," but later editorialized against what it viewed as the revolutionary nature of the third party efforts. "The organization of a 'Third Party' movement in Louisiana," the paper complained, is "the inauguration of a revolution designed to change the entire character of the government; it is the movement not of a party but of a proletariat. . . . It is a gathering of

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<sup>1</sup> In Louisiana, counties are called parishes. The City of New Orleans is an incorporated entity and consists of the entirety of Orleans Parish. For details of the formation and growth of the Peoples' Party in Louisiana see William Ivy Hair, *Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest: Louisiana Politics, 1877-1900*, 198-233.

all the discontented, dissatisfied and unprosperous elements . . . a war of classes against classes [and] a movement toward a radical revolution.”<sup>2</sup>

Opposition to the power of the Regular Democrats seen in the Alexandria convention reflected economic, racial and political resentments. Farmers faced weak economic conditions; cotton production in 1890, for example, lagged behind that of thirty years before, and bad weather reduced Louisiana output during the years 1891 to 1893. Yet increasing production from other states and countries resulted in an oversupply, and prices for cotton declined severely. Per pound prices dropped below eight cents by 1890, reached a low of less than five cents within three years, and did not exceed eight cents again until the turn of the century. One investigation of the prices concluded that proceeds from the sale of cotton in Louisiana in the early 1890s did not match the cost of production. Populist complaints about monopoly power and the ills of small producers found a ready audience among farmers suffering under the effects of such an economy. Complaints about race found receptive listeners as well.<sup>3</sup>

Racial resentments by the Populists derived from the peculiar distribution of population in the state. The agricultural alluvial parishes along the Mississippi River and the Red River held disproportionate political power based upon a pronounced imbalance between black and white residents. These parishes produced approximately

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<sup>2</sup> New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, October 2, 1891, 2; October 3, 1891, 1; October 4, 1891, 7; October 5, 1891, 4 (hereinafter cited as *Daily Picayune*).

<sup>3</sup> Lucia Elizabeth Daniel, “The Louisiana People's Party,” *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 26 (October 1943): 19; Dethloff, “Populism and Reform in Louisiana,” 51-56; Gavin Wright, *Old South New South* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 81-123.



two-thirds of the state's cotton with the labor provided by predominantly black tenant farmers; in some parishes the black population outnumbered whites by ten to one or even more. In most of these areas, white planters controlled the votes of their black laborers and enjoyed an inherent advantage at election time, although the extent of control over the black vote varied greatly from one electoral district to the next. New Orleans black voters enjoyed a high level of independence as did their colleagues in some of the southern sugar-producing regions.

Populist anger at the manipulation of black votes shaped their attitudes and tactics toward potential black allies throughout the decade. Although members of the Colored Alliance were allowed to speak at the Alexandria Convention in 1891, relations between the two races were always difficult. A second convention in Alexandria went so far as to place two black Populists in nomination for statewide offices, but the convention ultimately chose an all white ticket. The convention's platform reflected the ambivalence of the delegates. Although it included a statement on behalf of equality under the law, the platform also asserted that "the interests of the white and colored races in the South . . . would suffer unless the undisputed control of our government were assured to the intelligent and educated portion of the population." By organizing those who rebelled against the Regular Democratic organization, the Populist Party began to gain electoral support; its candidate for governor carried four parishes in the election of 1892.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Normal Pollack, editor, *The Populist Mind*, a volume in *The American Heritage Series* edited by Leonard W. Levy and Alfred Young (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), 385-386; Hair, *Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest*, 222-225. Populists

The third-party movement was not the only threat to Regular Democratic hegemony. Though it did not often face an effective Republican opposition, the Democratic Party displayed a tendency toward bi-factionalism, as coalitions formed and dissolved around issues of religion, geography, and attitudes toward gambling. Factions within the party arose to challenge current orthodoxy and to seek political advantage. The controversial Louisiana lottery, for example, served as a lightning rod for political opinion. First chartered in 1868, the lottery faced numerous attempts to abolish it, but the courts ruled that its contract with the state could not be abrogated by legislative action. When a convention rewrote the state's constitution in 1879, delegates chose to retain the lottery, but set a time limit on its existence. In the absence of further action, the lottery would expire on January 1, 1895. If lottery proponents were to extend its life, the governor and legislators elected in 1892 would have to act.

As the deadline approached, pro- and anti-lottery forces supported candidates for state office who would determine if the deadline were to be extended, an issue of "increasing warmth." In 1890, those opposed to the extension organized the Anti-Lottery League as a vehicle for electoral politics, particularly looking toward the gubernatorial race in 1892. In that contest, the Anti-Lottery League settled upon Murphy J. Foster as its candidate, but reached beyond the Democratic base by joining with the Farmers' Alliance. Even before the formation of the League, the farmers had

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eventually joined a statewide push for disfranchisement as a solution to the alluvial parishes' manipulation of black votes.

opposed the lottery and were willing participants in the campaign against its renewal.<sup>5</sup>

But the Democrat-Alliance partnership diluted the effectiveness of the Farmers' Alliance on other matters.<sup>6</sup>

Attitudes toward the lottery were more complex than the simple question of whether or not one opposed gambling. The lottery provided financial support to a number of Louisiana projects, not the least of which was the levee system. During the flood season of 1890, the company contributed \$100,000 to state levee districts. The reform mayor of New Orleans accepted \$50,000 toward flood protection and had to defend himself against charges from religious leaders that the funds were tainted.<sup>7</sup>

During the campaign, lottery proponents made extravagant promises to assist public works, including a direct subsidy for drainage in the City of New Orleans.

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<sup>5</sup> John S. Kendall, *History of New Orleans* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1922), 2: 483, 492. At the Farmers' Union convention in Lafayette, the keynote address emphasized opposition to the lottery. Within two days, the *Daily Picayune* reported that "the Anti-Lottery League and the Farmers' Alliance have come to terms [on the upcoming election]." See *Daily Picayune*, August 5, 1891, 1, 4; August 6, 1891, 1; August 7, 1891, 1, 4. For brief accounts of Murphy J. Foster, see Joy Jackson, "Murphy J. Foster," in Joseph G. Dawson, III, editor, *The Louisiana Governors: From Iberville to Edwards* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 189-193 and Glenn R. Conrad, editor, *A Dictionary of Louisiana Biography* (New Orleans: Louisiana Historical Association, 1988), 315.

<sup>6</sup> On the lottery issue, see Joy Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 121-135; John R. Kemp, editor, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans, Memoirs of a City Boss*, 13-20; George M. Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans, 1897-1926*, 23-26; Dethloff, "Populism and Reform in Louisiana," 82-120; Hair, *Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest*, 168-169, 201-204. Hair considered the absorption of the Farmers' Union by the Anti-Lottery League "one of the most Machiavellian maneuvers in the long, squalid history of Louisiana politics."

<sup>7</sup> Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age*, 125.

Samuel D. McEnery had served as Louisiana governor from 1881 to 1888, acquiring the nickname “the levee governor” in the process, though his enemies tagged him with “McLottery” as well. He supported the extension of the lottery's charter and sought reelection in the 1892 campaign. He and Foster fought almost to a draw in the Democratic primary, but Foster prevailed by a narrow margin. McEnery then declared as an independent and stood in the general election, losing to Foster once again, but by a more decisive margin.<sup>8</sup> The new governor had run with the support of the reformers, but Foster proved no hero to the state's reform elements. Although partners with the Alliance during the election, he quickly formed political connections with the Louisiana Regulars who had supported McEnery and with the New Orleans Regulars lead by John Fitzpatrick. Populists who had resisted the fusion movement suggested by the Farmers' Union, and who had insisted on their own candidate for governor, felt vindicated when Foster abandoned the Alliance soon after the election.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the rise of the People's Party and the lottery issue, a third factor disturbed the power of the Democratic party in the 1890s--the defection of the state's sugar producers from the ranks of the Regulars. Although the agricultural depression of

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<sup>8</sup> Not only the Democratic Party was split on the lottery issue. The Republican Party also divided into pro- and anti-lottery factions, adding two more candidates to the general election. The People's Party candidate rounded out the field of five, although only the two Democrats polled significant numbers.

<sup>9</sup> Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age*, 135; Schott, “John M. Parker and the Varieties of American Progressivism,” 50. John Fitzpatrick, leader of the New Orleans Regulars, had represented the McEnery faction on the committee which assessed the results of the Democratic primary in March, 1892, but his association with Foster's opponent did not prevent post-election cooperation.

the mid-1890s lowered the prices of sugar as well as cotton, economic troubles of a different sort befell the sugar producers of south Louisiana when national tariff policies and politics exacerbated the effects of the price drop. During the Republican presidency, sugar producers enjoyed a per-pound bounty of two cents, which offset low prices and helped to protect the industry. After Cleveland's second term began, national Democrats revised tariff policy and removed the bounty in favor of an ad valorem tariff. Outraged Louisiana planters bolted the party and joined the Republicans. In September, 1894, John N. Pharr, a sugar planter from St. Mary's Parish, led the effort. Regular Democrats expressed concern that the split "would encourage the return of Negro rule" and Governor Foster, although a sugar planter himself, condemned the move. It would, he said, "bring the Negro back into political prominence and would breed strife and turmoil."<sup>10</sup>

Not content with their new political home, the planters organized the National Republicans, dedicated to white supremacy (in contrast to the other Republican faction in the state, National Republicans called themselves the Lily Whites) and sugar protection.<sup>11</sup> The new faction offered candidates for Congress in 1894 but could not defeat the Regular Democrats. Nevertheless, this was a danger to the Democratic Party different in kind from the Populists. National Republicans were part of the state's elite, enjoyed great wealth, and controlled significant black votes of their own that might

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<sup>10</sup> Dethloff, "Populism and Reform in Louisiana," 227; Glenn R. Conrad and Ray F. Lucas, *White Gold: A Brief History of the Louisiana Sugar Industry, 1795-1995*, Louisiana Life Series, Number 8 (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1995), 58-59

<sup>11</sup> Hair, *Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest*, 246-248.

counter the effects of the cotton region. Regular Democrats had held power by avoiding such issue-based divisions within the party. Faced with insurgency from the left and the right, the state's regulars sought stability in the state's largest city. At least there--or so they hoped--the city's Regular organization would provide a steady majority in state elections. But even the New Orleans Regulars found the 1890s a challenge to political stability.<sup>12</sup>

Post-Reconstruction politics in New Orleans was a battle ground between Regular Democrats and periodic challengers, usually organized under the banner of reform. The election results had alternately favored Regular and reform elements of the city's leadership. The Regulars triumphed in 1884 and 1892; the reformers won municipal elections in 1880, 1888, and 1896. The reform group represented many of the city's commercial elite and often placed issues and interests ahead of formal party affiliation. In spite of their participation in the Redeemer movement, the reformers often had more in common with the national Republican Party and held to a Whiggish view of governmental functions and finance. For many years after Reconstruction, the candidates of the Regular Democrats questioned the party loyalty of the reformers, often with good cause. For their part, the New Orleans reformers tried to have it both ways politically, adhering to the emotional tradition of the anti-Republican Redeemer movement, while at the same time proclaiming non-partisanship as an ideal and

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<sup>12</sup> Dethloff, "Populism and Reform in Louisiana," 226-228.

reserving the right to run against the Democratic Party, generally known as the Regulars, in city elections.<sup>13</sup>

Within New Orleans, the Young Men's Democratic Association (YMDA) carried the reform banner in 1888. The YMDA drew its support from the city's commercial exchanges, particularly the Cotton Exchange. The Association took up the cause of reform from several predecessors, including the Committee of One Hundred and the Law and Order League. Those organizations undertook investigations of the city administration of Mayor J. Valsin Guillotte, lobbied for state legislative intervention into city affairs, and provided evidence to local grand juries, but without noticeable effect. The YMDA sought success at the ballot box instead.<sup>14</sup>

Mayor Guillotte declined to run for reelection and Judge Robert Davey became the Regular candidate for mayor in 1888. Davey was not only a prominent Regular, he was one of the so-called "Big Four" ward bosses which governed the Regular organization and the city's seventeen wards. Burdened by the public perception of an inept, if not corrupt, city government, and by the defection of normally loyal Ring

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<sup>13</sup> The city Democrats are referred to herein as Regular Democrats or Regulars. Opposition newspapers and political opponents often referred to the Regulars as the Ring or the Machine.

<sup>14</sup> Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age*, 92-95. The YMDA "was not made up strictly of young men, or of Democrats." William W. Howe, "Municipal History of New Orleans" in Herbert B. Adams, ed., *John Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science* (Baltimore, 1889), 187 quoted in Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age*, 95. The New Orleans commercial exchanges played an important role in the political and economic life of the city. In addition to the Cotton Exchange, businessmen organized the Sugar and Rice Exchange, the Stock Exchange, the Board of Trade, and the Mechanics, Dealers and Lumber Exchange.

members, Davey lost by over 7,000 votes. YMDA candidate Joseph A. Shakspeare entered the mayor's office for a second time (he had served an earlier term from 1880-1882) along with a city council pledged to YMDA principles.<sup>15</sup> But governing successfully proved more difficult than winning the election. Having gained power, the YMDA adherents sought to constrain the authority of city government. Some restrictions echoed standard good government reforms, such as purchasing requirements, advertising of bids prior to award of leases, and ordinances to control hiring practices. More controversial changes included the establishment of a Police Board, the Orleans Levee Board, and a municipal fire department to replace the old system of volunteer companies. In addition, the Mayor helped to refinance bonds at a favorable interest rate, and put the city on a firm financial basis, balancing the budget in 1890.<sup>16</sup>

Shakspeare's term in office exhibited the frustrations faced by the reform elements. The urge to remove politics from city administration served to weaken his authority and control. As boards and commissions took over city functions while still other municipal services remained in private hands, the mayor's ability to affect policy was minimal. During the Shakspeare administration, Maurice Hart, a New Orleans financier, held influence over the ostensibly reform council, opening the Mayor to

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<sup>15</sup> *Daily Picayune*, April 20-31, 1888; Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age*, 96. For the political status of Davey, see Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, 16, 35 and Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 20. Robert Davey subsequently served the city as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives and remained a loyal member of the Regular Democratic organization.

<sup>16</sup> Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age*, 95-109.



charges of hypocrisy. Finally, Shakspeare's voter base included the city's black population. Any attention paid to black voters attracted the scorn of the city's press and political opposition.<sup>17</sup>

In 1892, after four years of Joseph Shakspeare, the city's Regular Democrats nominated John Fitzpatrick for the office of mayor, one of the "Big Four" of the Regular organization. Observers later complained that the nominating contest had been held at the same time that the city was celebrating the reunion of the United Confederate Veterans and that the "best element" of the electorate was otherwise occupied. City Democrats had little to fear from the new Populist Party or from the Farmer's Alliance, but the anti-lottery campaign took center stage in the city elections as it did at the state level. In spite of a political history that included attempts to suppress the lottery, the Fitzpatrick group followed the pro-lottery stance of McEnery. Shakspeare, although personally in favor of the regulation, not outright suppression, of gambling, followed the Foster faction in its crusade against the lottery company.<sup>18</sup> Martin Behrman later recalled the bitter fight between Foster and McEnery:

I was a delegate to the convention of the McEnery, the pro-lottery faction in Pike's Hall, Baton Rouge, in the fall of 1891. The Foster faction met in the State

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<sup>17</sup> Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age*, 109.

<sup>18</sup> By the time of the 1892 election, two of the "Big Four" were no longer in politics. Behrman's recollections assert that "political power tended to spread itself more evenly among the wards [as a result]." Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 20; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 503. Kemp's work consists of edited newspaper columns published as "Behrman Tells." The memoirs were printed in the New Orleans *Item* after Behrman's 1920 defeat for a fifth consecutive term as mayor. The columns--and Kemp's edited version--provide a valuable source of information about the Regular organization, state and local politics, and the thoughts of Behrman.

House. I have some recollections of the appointment of a committee on harmony to get the two factions together, but it is not distinct, and I am told that there was no such committee. As I remember the excitement over that issue, I guess a committee on harmony would have had little chance to do anything.<sup>19</sup>

Although Foster won at the state level, the city organization carried the day for Fitzpatrick by over 3,000 votes. Foster's rapid *rapprochement* with the Regulars lessened the possibility of adverse state legislation, and Fitzpatrick settled in for an eventful four-year term. Regular Democrats controlled the New Orleans city council as well as parish-level offices essential to the organization's patronage system.<sup>20</sup>

The new mayor had learned that system well. During his service with the Louisiana National Guard he acquired the nickname "Captain John." He served for six years as the city's Commissioner of Public Works, a position that controlled a large payroll, spread liberally among the city's Irish-American population in particular. One account of his activities lists memberships "in the Elks, the Knights of Columbus, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the United Irish League of New Orleans, the Continental Guards, and the Firemen's Charitable and Benevolent Association."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 13-14. The Regular Democrats often utilized a committee on harmony in instances where two or more strong candidates threatened to split the loyalty of the group.

<sup>20</sup> Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, Chapter VII; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 499, 505. The City of New Orleans and the Parish of Orleans have identical boundaries; however, two sets of elected officials serve. One set represents the municipal government, established by charter; the other set fills parish (county) positions such as criminal sheriff and district attorney. Both sets of offices came under the influence of the Regular organization.

<sup>21</sup> Mayor' Office, *Administrations of the Mayors of New Orleans* compiled and edited by the Works Progress Administration, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division (New Orleans, 1939), 198-203; Conrad, *A Dictionary of Louisiana Biography*, 303; Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, 15-18.

The first half of Mayor Fitzpatrick's term held great promise for the city and for the political career of Captain John. He committed the city to the completion of public works projects, some of which had been started by the previous administration. The notoriously bad streets of New Orleans, laid on land subject to flooding, received Fitzpatrick's attention, and by 1894 the mayor boasted to the council that major streets "are [now] graveled roads, while most all the cross streets are likewise paved, much to the credit of the city's enterprise and progressiveness. Square block granite pavements have also been laid on Rampart, Burgundy and St. Philip streets" in the French Quarter. Behrman later commented that "the gravel did not turn out so well as was expected, but the people were satisfied with it at the time. There was not sufficient money to use the large granite blocks" on all the streets.<sup>22</sup>

The Shakspeare administration had reorganized the volunteer fire department, but the completion of the task was left to Fitzpatrick. The city purchased the assets of the volunteer associations and assumed the responsibility for fire protection in December, 1891, but the city's obligations for payments fell into the subsequent three years. (Behrman recalled the figure owed at \$700,000, but other accounts put the obligation much lower.) Fitzpatrick honored the commitment and paid the funds. He

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<sup>22</sup> Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age*, 135, quoting from John Fitzpatrick, *Mayor's Message to the City Council of New Orleans* (New Orleans, 1894), 8.; Kemp, *Mayor Behrman of New Orleans*, 22. Street paving became a priority for Behrman after his election to the mayor's office in 1904, but remained a perpetual problem. No mayor has permanently conquered the difficulties of maintaining streets on reclaimed swamp land. In the 1989 mayoral campaign, Mayor Sidney Barthelemy was challenged about the conditions of city streets by a voter. The mayor replied in frustration, "Did you ever try to pave a sponge?"

also completed several large construction projects begun by his predecessor, including a courthouse, police, and jail complex. Behrman would later recollect that the Fitzpatrick administration replaced the city's gas lamps with electric versions with the result that "small boys were deprived of the fun of annoying the gas man as he came around at sunset to light the gas lamps."<sup>23</sup>

These projects and others put a heavy demand upon city finances, but the administration effectively met the challenge. More efficient collection of revenue, reduction of debt, and a slow but steady increase in assessments provided sufficient revenue for the ambitious program. In the judgement of one historian:

If Fitzpatrick had left office in early 1894, his administration would have appeared to be one of the most successful since the Civil War. With a balanced budget, a surplus in the treasury, and public improvements for all to see, the Third Ward's favorite son was at the peak of his career. He could even look forward to the possible capture of the governorship at some future date.<sup>24</sup>

But the last two years of Fitzpatrick's tenure would eliminate any talk of the governorship and would burden the Regular organization for years. The mayor's alleged connections to emerging scandals would doom Fitzpatrick's future political ambitions even within the city.

The proximate cause for the mayor's trouble came from a new reform organization, the Citizens' Protective Association, a direct descendant of the YMDA, the

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<sup>23</sup> Kemp, *Mayor Behrman of New Orleans*, 21-23; Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age*, 136; Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, 18

<sup>24</sup> Oscar Nussbaum, "Progressive Politics in New Orleans, 1896-1900," 16; Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age*, 137-138. Fitzpatrick later tried to secure the Democratic nomination for governor, but the attempt failed.

anti-lottery group, and the commercial exchanges. The association reacted to the council's award of a franchise for the construction of a public belt railroad to an agent of the Illinois Central Railroad. At about the same time, the council awarded a favorable contract for garbage disposal at a increased cost to the city over the previous arrangements. Although both developments addressed important municipal problems, the method of awarding franchises and contracts attracted the attention not only of the Citizens' Protective Association, but also of the city's law enforcement establishment.

During the latter half of 1894, Fitzpatrick's administration and members of the council faced investigation by the press, the Citizens' Protective Association, and the grand jury. Eventually, indictments fell on twelve city officials, including ten members of the council. The most serious charges involved public bribery and three of those indicted served time in prison. The council acquired the nickname "Boodle Council," and the press expanded its charges to include the mayor himself. Fitzpatrick fought back by suing for libel, an action he eventually won against the *Daily States*. Not able to find specific criminal activities with which to charge the Mayor, but still pressed by the Citizens' Protective Association for some action, the district attorney agreed to an impeachment hearing in civil court.

In March, 1895, the Mayor defeated the attempt when the judge found in his favor. The repercussions of the council scandals, the libel trial, and the impeachment process provided the background to the next city election, which would be held on the same day as the state contest for governor. Once again, the outcome of the city and state elections would be intertwined, but instead of the 1892 crusade over the lottery, the

1896 election included a significant challenge to the dominance of the state's Regular Democrats and a replay of the 1888 and 1892 contests between the reformers and the Regular within the city of New Orleans. The Regulars at the state level survived the challenge, but the New Orleans Democratic organization did not.<sup>25</sup>

At the state level, Foster's fusion with the Farmers' Alliance in 1892 had split the agrarian movement. Populists nominated their own candidate in 1892 and the Alliance faded from the scene. As the election of 1896 approached, Regular Democracy in Louisiana faced numerous threats. Populists represented a potential adversary, one that had proved independent of attempts at absorption. An influential segment of the Redeemer elite--wealthy sugar planters, mostly from the southern part of the state--had defected from the Democratic Party entirely. And the prospects for the Regular ticket in New Orleans had dimmed, which made Foster's reelection outlook even more precarious. In Foster's favor, however, was the disparate nature of the opposition and the prior success Democrats had in coopting rebellious factions. "Democrats found that one of the most effective ways of combating political insurgency and the reform movement lay in absorbing part of the reform program. This occurred sometimes reluctantly, sometimes purposefully, and sometimes under coercion, but it happened."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> For accounts of the investigations, trials and civil actions, see the *Daily Picayune*, June, 1894, through April, 1895; Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age*, 139-144; Kemp, Mayor Behrman of New Orleans, 20-21; Dethloff, "Populism and Reform in Louisiana," 258-260; Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, 19; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 511-514.

<sup>26</sup> Dethloff cites numerous examples of successful Democratic attempts to coopt the opposition, including Foster's activities with the anti-lottery forces, endorsement of free silver by some Democrats in 1894, and various bills regarding election reform.

The perennial Republican challenge to the Democrats would be strengthened by the addition of the National Republicans, still angry over Democratic policy on the sugar tariff, but the possible combination of that group with both the agrarian Populists and city reformers seemed implausible. Foster had faced the threat of fusion in 1892, but in that year the Republican Party divided its votes between two candidates, and the left wing of the Alliance formed the People's Party and offered a candidate of its own. To the chagrin of the Regulars, however, the unlikely fusion took place and seriously threatened Bourbon Democracy. The election of 1896 tested the strength of the Fusion movement, the ability of the Democrat Party in the state and New Orleans to respond to this challenge, and even the civil stability of the state.

The combination against the Regulars in 1896 resulted, in part, from the congressional elections two years earlier. Both the Populists and the Republicans attempted to win congressional seats in that year, but without success. In the northern part of the state, Populists candidates ran strong campaigns in the Fourth and Fifth Congressional Districts. In the former, Congressman Henry W. Ogden adopted the free silver stance of his Populist opponent and won by a margin of over 6,000 votes. The Populists contended that election fraud had cost them the seat. Study of the election returns indicated that manipulation of the black vote helped to provide Ogden with his apparent margin. In the Fifth Congressional District, the Regular Democrat, Charles J. Boatner, held fast to the gold standard in defeating Alexis Benoit by over 10,000 votes. More charges of fraud came from the Populist camp, and Benoit took his case to

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Dethloff, "Populism and Reform in Louisiana," 137-138.

Congress. Although the investigation resulted in a new election, Boatner's margin of 6,000 in the rematch was sufficient to convince Congress to award him the seat.<sup>27</sup>

Republicans fared no better in the First through Third Congressional Districts in the 1894 elections; three candidates put forward by the Republicans suffered defeat by Regular Democrats. In these elections, as well as those in the northern part of the state, charges of fraud tainted the Democratic victories, but the dominance of the Democrats was clear. If opposition parties were to mount serious efforts to capture the governorship and other state and federal offices, a combination between the Republicans and Populists was essential. A third partner in the anti-Regular effort would bring success even closer: the urban reform movement in New Orleans. The success of Foster in 1892 had demonstrated the necessity of gathering substantial support from the state's largest city even in the absence of support from the urban Regulars.<sup>28</sup>

On November 8, 1895, New Orleans reformers organized yet another election-year association, the Citizens' League. The League had common membership with the Citizens' Protective Association and earlier organizations enlisted to fight the Regulars. Cotton broker John M. Parker assisted in the formation of the League, as did prominent lawyer Walter Denegre and insurance executive Charles Janvier. Opposition to Mayor Fitzpatrick had grown as the scandals multiplied, and the League pronouncements made clear that recapturing the mayor's office was the group's first priority, but, as a side

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<sup>27</sup> Hair, *Bourbonism and Agrarian Reform*, 239-243.

<sup>28</sup> Uzee, "Republican Politics in Louisiana, 1877-1900," 145-150; Hair, *Bourbonism and Agrarian Reform*, 247; Dethloff, "Populism and Reform in Louisiana," 235-236.



effect of the city reform effort, statewide challengers to the Democratic Regulars gained potential allies.<sup>29</sup>

The economic aspirations of the hill country small farmers paralleled the political goals of the city reformers. Both fought against the constraints of Regular Democratic organizations and the use of vote fraud and manipulation. Brought together from opposite ends of the economic spectrum by shared concerns, urban and rural forces formed an unlikely alliance as the election of 1896 approached. What emerged in Louisiana in 1896 was an opposition to Regular Democracy held together primarily by its common target, not by a joint program or a shared ideology. Wealthy sugar planters formed an alliance with upcountry small farmers, and sophisticated urban reformers joined (albeit tentatively) with rural Populists opposed to machine rule, whether it dominated the city or the alluvial parishes. A common adversary united the disparate groups whose members found themselves at odds with the dominant party's objectives. As one historian later explained, "The criteria for determining why a Louisiana Democrat became a Populist will also largely explain why an Allianceman became an anti-lottery Democrat, or a sugar planter a Republican, or an urban Democrat an anti-lotteryite or a Citizens' Leaguer. Democratic solidarity . . . prevented each of these interests from obtaining [its] objectives within the regular processes of the Democratic party."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Daily Picayune*, February 26, 1896, 1, 5; Schott, "John M. Parker," 57; Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age*, 312; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 517.

<sup>30</sup> Schott, "John M. Parker," 39-90; Dethloff, "Populism and Reform in Louisiana," 153, 173, 256. Schott notes that in 1895 John M. Parker and Farmers'

Partners in the Fusion movement of 1896 did not easily reach agreement on a candidate. Populists and the remnants of the Farmers' Alliance harbored suspicions toward their partners; memories of the betrayal that followed cooperation with Foster in 1892 led to a high degree of caution. Negotiations between factions of the Republican Party and the Populists began in mid-1895 and continued later that year. The Republicans pledged to await the Populist nominating convention in early 1896 and, assuming the selection of a broad-based ticket, promised their backing for the nominees. In fact, the National Republicans preempted the Populists less than a week before the convention by nominating E. N. Pugh, a wealthy planter, for governor. The Populists proceeded with their own plans, but had difficulty in selecting a nominee. After a series of mishaps and negotiations, competing nominees stepped aside and all parties to the coalition--Populists, National Republicans, and Regular (Radical) Republicans--settled on John N. Pharr, a wealthy sugar planter from the southern part of Louisiana, as the Fusion nominee for governor. Pharr had led his planter colleagues out of the Democratic Party in response to the Wilson-Gorman Tariff, possessed sufficient wealth to run a plausible campaign, and exhibited enough sympathy toward the Populist platform to convince the agrarians that he could be trusted to uphold their interests if elected.<sup>31</sup>

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Alliance leader Thomas Scott Adams advocated common political reforms including the secret ballot. Dethloff gives Adams substantial credit for actions that resulted in the formation of the Citizens' League. The direct quote is found in Dethloff, "Populism and Reform in Louisiana," 153.

<sup>31</sup> Hair offers the most complete account of the nominating process and speculates that Pharr's wealth and subsequent support of Populist newspapers eased the

The New Orleans reform movement did not take part in the nominating process as a formal organization, but connections between the city's elite and the sugar planters had always been strong. The city's business interests supported tariff protection, and many reform supporters had economic or family ties to the sugar regions. The Fusion ticket could expect substantial votes from the city, if not an official endorsement. By the time of the election, therefore, Regular Democracy was under siege both at the state level and in its largest city. The Regular Democrats fought back, employing legal and illegal means. Orators for Foster denounced the Fusion opposition for its left-wing tendencies, its disloyalty to the memory of the Civil War and Reconstruction battles, and, most energetically, for its implied threat to white supremacy. Pharr's somewhat moderate record on race proved an easy target for such claims.<sup>32</sup>

At the same time as the state contest, the Citizens' League fought to take back the New Orleans mayor's office from the Regulars. The League nominated Walter C. Flower, attorney, successful businessman, and former president of the city's Cotton Exchange. He accumulated substantial wealth as a cotton broker, but contracted tuberculosis and moved from the city to recover his health. After recuperating, he left retirement to make the mayoral race. It was his first attempt at elective politics, a presumed deficiency in experience that reformers turned into an asset when contrasting the League ticket with the Fitzpatrick administration. Although Flower's party

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way toward Fusion. Hair, *Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest*, 248-256; Dethloff, "Populism and Reform in Louisiana," 126.

<sup>32</sup> Schott, "John M. Parker", 68-70.

credentials as a Democrat were somewhat suspect, as a young man he had participated in the Battle of Liberty Place, the 1874 revolt against Reconstruction authority that achieved mythic status in subsequent years. Charles Janvier, leader of the Citizens' League, announced Flower's candidacy a month before the election, and the local newspapers mentioned the crucial role that Janvier had played in the selection process.<sup>33</sup>

The Regulars faced a difficult task in deciding upon their own mayoral candidate and accompanying ticket. Fitzpatrick's administration carried the weight of scandal, but the mayor still commanded popularity among many voters and, more importantly, the loyalty of his Regular colleagues. The selection would normally fall to the Regular caucus where Fitzpatrick enjoyed his greatest strength, but this was not a normal election. Mindful of the Fusion threat and needing a strong vote from New Orleans, Governor Foster intervened and pressured the Regulars to drop the notion of a Fitzpatrick candidacy. His influence and that of the press convinced the Regulars to select a "clean ticket," repudiating the "Boodle" council and its current officeholders. The Regulars prevailed upon Charles F. Buck, incumbent Congressman from the state's Second Congressional District in New Orleans, and former City Attorney in the early 1880s. Buck, born in Germany in 1841, appealed to the city's significant population of German ancestry and provided the Regular ticket with a scandal-free leader.

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<sup>33</sup> Janvier was a prominent member of the city's elite as a banker and insurance executive. In the same year that he worked on behalf of Flower, Janvier reigned as Rex, king of the city's annual Mardi Gras festivities. *Administrations of the Mayors of New Orleans, 1803-1936*, 204-207; *Daily Picayune*, March 22, 1896, 4, 11; Conrad, *A Dictionary of Louisiana Biography*, 309, 431; Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, 50-51; Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age*, 312, 314; Oscar Nussbaum, "Progressive Politics in New Orleans," 52-57; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 519.

Nevertheless, he was a member of the Regulars and considered safe in matters of patronage should he be victorious. Fitzpatrick and Ernest B. Kruttschnitt, chairman of the state's Democratic Central Committee, personally worked to secure Buck's agreement to run.<sup>34</sup>

The city contest reflected the larger issues fought at the state level, but the Citizens' League did not embrace the statewide insurgency. Content to challenge for control of New Orleans, the League did not offer its endorsement to Pharr, fearing that alliance with the Populists would weaken prospects in the city. In contrast, Pharr and his supporters promised complete support to the League's candidates. In one important respect, League strategy mirrored that of the Fusion effort: both made strenuous efforts to secure votes of the city's black population.

In New Orleans, black voters constituted slightly less than one-fourth of the total registration, a smaller proportion than in the state as a whole. But the urban minority vote tended to be independent, prepared to negotiate in its own interest, and less subject to pressure than its rural counterpart. Regulars did not ignore the potential of black support, and Ring candidates actively campaigned among black voters. The Republican Protective League, an organization of black voters under the leadership of the Radical Republican faction, sought to bargain between the two competing tickets. Ultimately, the League succeeded in this competition. In April, 1896, blacks assembled at a mass

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<sup>34</sup> *Daily Picayune*, February 26, 1896, 1; April 3, 1896, 2, 8; April 8, 1896, 1, 4; April 11, 1896, 7; April 12, 1896, 3; Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age*, 314-315; Nussbaum, "Progressive Politics in New Orleans," 62-63; John F. Nau, *The German People of New Orleans*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), 129-130; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 521-522.

meeting agreed to support the city's reform ticket and, at the same time, pledged support to Pharr. Behrman recalled later that:

I remember seeing John Fitzpatrick's office jammed with colored preachers one day as the fight was getting hot. . . everyone was dressed in black and most of them wore long tailed coats. Their leaders conferred with Fitzpatrick again and again but they were unable to make arrangements satisfactory to themselves and they all went to the Citizens' League.

Although Behrman does not mention it, a labor dispute along the New Orleans docks may have contributed to the loss of the black vote for the Regulars. It would be many decades before the black vote in the city or the state once again had any substantial affect on the outcome of an election.<sup>35</sup>

Foster retained the governor's seat after a bitter fight. Throughout the state, Regulars harnessed compliant or cowed black voters in an ironic effort to make the state safe for white politics, while Fusionists fought to protect polling places from Regular chicanery. By most accounts, Foster's victory resulted from a high degree of vote manipulation if not outright fraud. In six rural parishes, for example, the 1890 census listed only 3,278 white males in the parishes, but over 16,000 votes were counted overwhelmingly for the Democrats. Pharr, the Fusionist candidate, received only 139 of these votes. In three other parishes, he received no votes and, in a fourth parish, only one vote. George Reynolds's study of New Orleans politics asserted that "the election

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<sup>35</sup> *Daily Picayune*, March 19, 1896, 13; April 3, 18896, 2; April 19, 1896, 12; Dethloff, "Populism and Reform in Louisiana," 190, 261, 312; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 39-40. Eric Arnesen asserted that black leaders supported Flower as a reaction to Fitzpatrick's support of white dock workers in an ugly inter-racial labor conflict in 1895. See Eric Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 146.

was the most disorderly ever held in the state. There were charges of fraud, coercion, stuffing of ballot boxes, in fact every known election crime.” Reynolds reported that eyewitnesses to the election confirmed the extent of the vote manipulation.<sup>36</sup>

The Fusionists may have lost at the state level, but in New Orleans, Flower defeated Buck by over 6,000 votes out of 45,640 cast. The Citizens' League swept almost all of the city council positions, losing only two to the Regulars, and elected a total of at least nineteen members of the state legislature as well. The results seemed a complete defeat for the city machine, and local newspapers that supported the League proclaimed the death of the Ring. Regulars blamed their losses on the Republicans and, especially, on the black vote. From the perspective of the 1920s, Martin Behrman would recall the election when “the negro vote elected the Citizens' League ticket in New Orleans and came very near to electing the Republicans in the state.”<sup>37</sup>

Foster's victory, though, seriously diluted the League triumph. If he were allowed to take office, New Orleans patronage would continue to flow to the Regulars,

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<sup>36</sup> The evidence is strong that the Regulars stole the state election from the Fusion ticket made up of Republicans and Populists. See Hair, *Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest*, 248-267; Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 195-196; Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 27; Dethloff, “Populism and Reform in Louisiana”, 261-275.

<sup>37</sup> *Daily Picayune*, April 22, 1896, 1; Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 27-28; Kemp, ed., *Mayor Behrman of New Orleans*, 35; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 523. There is disagreement among the sources regarding the number of League legislators. Reynolds gave the figure of nineteen; Hair stated that twenty-seven of the new legislature were loyal to the League. Dethloff's figures agreed with Hair, i.e., “The league had eighteen in the House and nine in the Senate.” Dethloff, “Populism and Reform in Louisiana,” 282. Haas set the figures at seventeen in the House and five in the Senate. Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, 51.

whose support was crucial to Democratic control of the legislature. The League members of that body served alongside thirteen Republicans, eighteen Populists, and four Independents. The Fusionists disputed the election of Foster and hoped that the legislature would intervene. The Citizens' League members would be crucial in any vote, and Pharr's supporters expected the cooperation of the city reformers. But the fragile electoral coalition did not survive even the initial legislative session. Natural divisions between the Fusion partners began to emerge, and, by the end of the session, the Populists had little to show for their efforts.<sup>38</sup>

The legislature convened less than a month after the state and city elections amidst rumors that the Fusionists would resort to violence. The League legislators agonized over whether to align with Foster or pursue a more independent course. Although a majority of the League initially voted to maintain its independence, members quickly opted to prove their party loyalty rather than respond to the pleas of their recent allies. The legislature's first task was to settle the disputed governor's election. Pharr had continued his campaign and urged an inquiry into the suspicious returns. The precarious Democratic majority in the legislature combined with the votes of many League members, and the legislature certified Foster's election by eighty-six to forty-eight. League members had a lengthy agenda for the remainder of the session, but this initial issue did not bode well for the Fusion effort.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Joy Jackson, "Murphy J. Foster," 192.

<sup>39</sup> New Orleans *Times-Democrat*, May 15, 1896, 2, 4, 5; Schott, "John M. Parker," 77-79; Hair, *Bourbonism and Agrarian Reform*, 266-267; Nussbaum, "Progressive Politics in New Orleans," 79. Reynolds described Foster's victory margin



The high point of the Citizen's League influence in the state occurred over the following two weeks. The legislature began to consider the election for a U.S. Senator, and numerous candidates emerged, including Pharr, McEnery, the 1892 candidate for governor, incumbent Newton Blanchard, and Walter D. Denegre, one of the most prominent members of the Citizens' League. Behrman later characterized Denegre as "what we called a 'silk stocking,' a term used to designate a man of wealth and education out of touch with the average citizen." In spite of the League's ill treatment of the Fusion members on the issue of Foster's contested election, the Regulars' opponents coalesced around Denegre on successive ballots. Faced with an inability to elect Blanchard, Foster swallowed his pride and negotiated an agreement to back his 1892 rival, McEnery, for the position. Blanchard played his role by withdrawing from the race, and Denegre was narrowly defeated. Shortly thereafter, Foster appointed Blanchard to the Supreme Court of Louisiana. Having lost the prize of the Senate seat, the League settled for smaller victories in the legislative session and changed their expectations from reform of the state to the task of reforming the city. The Populist experiment in Louisiana all but ended with the election of 1896, but the new League administration in New Orleans and its allies in the state legislature began to introduce their version of progressive reform into city government.<sup>40</sup>

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as "a small majority," but he may be referring to a previous procedural vote. See Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 29.

<sup>40</sup> *Daily Picayune*, May 29, 1896, 1; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 30-31; Dethloff, "Populism and Reform in Louisiana," 293-296.

In the state's largest city, the Regular Democrats had been routed. Newspaper headlines proclaimed that the "ring is smashed." The cycle of reform and Regular administrations swung once more toward reform, and the new government began the task of preparing New Orleans for the new century. National trends encouraged reform, and the spirit of progressive change inspired the Flower administration. But for its political success to become permanent, the reformers had to learn the lessons of previous efforts to challenge Regular power. It would not be sufficient to bring progressive policies to the city. The reformers had to develop the political skills, and the level of comfort with political power, that had made the Regulars so formidable in the past and would once again in the not too distant future.

## CHAPTER II

### ORIGINS OF THE PROGRESSIVE CITY: STRUCTURE, SUFFRAGE AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

The political skills of Governor Foster and the strength of regular Democracy thwarted the statewide ambitions of the New Orleans Citizens League. The failure of the fusion movement to investigate the gubernatorial election and the defeat of Walter D. Denegre in the contest for the U.S. Senate foreclosed any decisive role in state or national politics. But the League held substantial power in the legislature and was determined to use the state forum to effect change in the city. League members set out a far-reaching agenda to revise the city charter, to reform election procedures, and to establish governmental structures that would transform not only the means of government but also the physical infrastructure of New Orleans. The legislative actions promoted by the League set the conditions for the emergence of progressive New Orleans and the shape of the city well into the twentieth century.

The actions of the Regulars produced similarly far-reaching effects. The disputed gubernatorial race, and the close call for the Regular candidate for the United States Senate, set the strategies of the Democratic leadership. In quick succession, the Regulars solidified control of the legislature, agreed to call a constitutional convention, limited the convention agenda to prevent most Populist reforms, and passed restrictive

laws to control the electorate that would choose convention delegates. The explicit purpose of the planned new constitution was the disfranchisement of Louisiana's black voters. The Democratic leaders faced a dilemma. The disfranchisement of blacks would reduce the majority that could be counted on in the many rural parishes; yet the failure to disfranchise allowed the continued possibility of a Populist-Black or Reformer-Black alliance. Democratic fears of such a combination increased after the 1896 Pharr candidacy, during which his platform condemned lynching, his campaign remarks supported black voting, and the Fusion ticket recorded significant numbers of black votes.<sup>1</sup>

New Orleans Democrats confronted a set of circumstances opposite from their rural counterparts. Although Regular Democrats in the rural areas of the state controlled the majority of the black vote, the New Orleans black electorate exercised considerable independence.<sup>2</sup> Disfranchisement would rid the Regulars of the threat posed by the city's independent black voters, but many of the proposed schemes of disfranchisement risked a reduction of the votes of poor whites--particularly the rapidly-growing Italian

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<sup>1</sup> For accounts of the politics of disfranchisement, see Hair, *Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest*, 255-256, 274-279; Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics*, 152-165; Matthew J. Schott, "Progressives Against Democracy: Electoral Reform in Louisiana, 1894-1921," *Louisiana History* 20 (Summer 1979): 247-260; Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America*, 195.

<sup>2</sup> The independence of the state's black vote depended on a number of factors: the extent of intimidation, level of economic pressure, and the absence or presence of an alternative to the regular organization. Hair provided results for the 1896 election which showed a fusionist win in East Baton Rouge parish. He explained the victory in part because of an independent black vote made possible by conflict between factions of the regular Democrats. Hair, *Bourbonism and Agrarian Protest*, 263.

immigrant population. The New Orleans Regulars backed Foster, the winning candidate in the 1896 gubernatorial race, but lost the city elections to the Citizens' League. The city results frightened the machine leadership at all levels in the state because the Citizens' League's victory, based on an alliance of reformers, Republicans, and blacks, was an object lesson of the risks to Regular rule of fusion movements. Even though the rural parishes' heavily black population could be counted on to remain Democratic, the prospect of losing the urban base of New Orleans helped move the legislature toward disfranchisement.<sup>3</sup>

The Citizens' League had abandoned their Populist allies by supporting Foster's claim to the governorship. The League thereby lost any chance of establishing a solid, state-wide reform group in opposition to the Regulars. Such a combination was unlikely from the start, given the vast economic differences between the two groups; yet the ease with which the League broke ranks with their colleagues provided an indication of reform weakness that would affect the next municipal elections. What bound the reformers together--antagonism toward the machine--broke down in the face of calls for party and racial solidarity. The 1896 fusion with Populists and blacks had been tenuous from the beginning (the League never formally endorsed the Fusion candidate for governor), and within a few weeks after the election, the Citizens' League's loyalty to

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<sup>3</sup> The city's Italian population increased by more than 100 percent from 1890 to 1900. The 1890 total of foreign-born Italians was 7,767; by 1900 that figure had grown to 16,560. The Italian population in New Orleans tended to cluster into a limited number of distinct neighborhoods, which increased its political effectiveness at the ward level. Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 13.

party proved stronger than Fusion politics. Moreover, the political performance of the League in the 1896 legislature suggested an amateurish inconsistency and insufficient appreciation of the uses of power.<sup>4</sup>

The black voters of New Orleans, who had provided substantial electoral support for reform efforts in the city, fared no better. When the state legislature moved toward disfranchisement, ostensibly in the name of reform, the League quickly abandoned its meager efforts at biracial politics. Anxious to prove their credentials on the issue of race and to certify their loyalty to the Democratic Party, the reform bloc supported disfranchisement. Blacks were left with no legislative support. Neither the rural nor urban branch of the Regulars strayed from a commitment to disfranchisement. The Populists resented the manipulation of the rural black vote and did not sufficiently appreciate the potential of an electoral coalition based on economic class. And the urban reformers cynically abandoned a group that helped bring them to power in New Orleans.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The breakdown of the coalition continued on the issue of a constitutional convention. Populists sought an unrestricted convention, but the Regulars rejected the call and received League support for their more restrictive convention. *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, May 30, 1896, 2; Nussbaum, 83-86.

<sup>5</sup> Schott, "John M. Parker," 76-80; Schott, "Progressives Against Democracy: Electoral Reform in Louisiana, 1894-1921," 253. In the latter work, Schott presents evidence that the reformers were not reflexively anti-black, and that disfranchisement was not part of the formal Citizens' League program. For an examination of the argument that disfranchisement constituted a progressive reform in the mind of southern reformers, see Jack Temple Kirby, *Darkness at the Dawning: Race and Reform in the Progressive South*.

The city contingent of Regulars in the legislature wanted to reduce or eliminate black voting, but took care to preserve the votes of immigrants and other poor whites who provided strong support at election time. Ironically, this concern aided the interests of one element of the Fusionists--the rural poor, stronghold of agrarian dissent. With almost unanimous support from the city reformers, the legislation that called the constitutional convention and restricted suffrage passed. Although white registration declined in New Orleans as the result of this action, the city Regulars managed to preserve an important part of their base through protection for poor white voters. Statewide, the Regular Democrats faced somewhat less of a threat from the Populist tendencies of poor whites, although the normally compliant rural black vote declined as well. The legislation that proposed revision of the constitution also stipulated a referendum on whether or not to hold the convention. The election of delegates to the proposed convention was scheduled at the same time, January, 1898. Assuming a favorable vote, the constitutional convention would follow one month later. Legislators placed certain limitations on the work of the convention, but examination of suffrage rights clearly held center stage.<sup>6</sup>

The call for the constitutional convention was the most important work of the 1896 legislature, but other crucial pieces of legislation followed. The same legislature that called the constitutional convention also dealt with a backlog of municipal problems. The Citizens' League vowed to reform the city charter, renew the registration

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<sup>6</sup> Schott, "Progressives Against Democracy: Electoral Reform in Louisiana, 1894-1921," 247-260; Schott, "John M. Parker," 82;

laws, revise the election laws in favor of a secret ballot, fight the abominable sanitary conditions of the city, and address the needs of city merchants, especially those concerned with the conditions of the city wharves. This agenda involved the state legislature because the state exercised substantial power over the city's finances and possessed the ability to propose amendments to the state constitution. Although home rule provisions guaranteed a measure of independence to New Orleans, the city's infrastructure needs constituted a degree of change that required participation of the state. In addition, governmental forms had evolved during the 1880s and 1890s to include alternatives to direct control by city government. As progressive opinion developed in local government, the trend toward utilizing boards and commissions increased. The Citizens' League controlled the New Orleans government and maintained significant strength in the Louisiana legislature. Many League members, drawn from the professional and commercial elite, harbored suspicion toward pure democracy and, perhaps, anticipated a time when the Regulars might regain control of the city. Insulating certain functions of government--and the associated revenue sources --from the city council appealed to the League. Progressives often sought to balance a professed belief in the efficacy of people with their attraction to expertise, if not elitism.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Samuel P. Hays, "The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 55 (October, 1964): 157-169. Daniel Rogers wrote "the progressives appeal to 'the people' is a more complicated example of the phenomenon [of language use] . . . but one of the reasons for the triumph of that particularly elastic phrase . . . was that it allowed those who sincerely believed in a government serving the needs of 'the people' to camouflage from voters the acute distrust many of those same persons harbored of political egalitarianism." Rogers, "In Search of Progressivism," 122.



The city and state had depended upon boards and commissions even before the 1890s. In the post-Reconstruction era, debt problems plagued both the city and the state. A good credit rating proved impossible, and banks limited loans to government. The city and state established the New Orleans Board of Liquidation in response and gradually rebuilt confidence in city finances. But the city agreed to circumscribe its fiscal independence severely. The Board enjoyed first rights to city revenue and pledged the first proceeds to bond holders and other creditors. The city was unable to enter into additional long-term debt without the permission of the Board. The most significant Board power was in the area of membership. After the initial members were named, the Board enjoyed self-perpetuating power of appointment. Vacancies caused by resignation or death were filled by the remaining Board members. Although city government enjoyed representation on the Board of Liquidation, the elected members were in a perpetual minority to the other members.<sup>8</sup>

The New Orleans Board of Liquidation of City Debt proved an effective model for the legislature and a precursor to progressive restructuring of governmental administrative units. Creating such agencies allowed the legislature to address important governmental functions, but keep direct control out of the hands of the city council--even one dominated by the Citizens' League. Throughout its tenure, the legislature elected in 1896 consistently approved changes to the constitution and passed statutes in favor of a devolution of authority from the council to other bodies. Two such

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<sup>8</sup> Carl E. Hyde, Jr, "The Origins of the New Orleans Board of Liquidation of the City Debt, 1876-1882" (Unpublished seminar paper: University of New Orleans, 1993).

innovations occurred in the first session of the legislature: the formation of a city Drainage Commission and the establishment of the Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans. At the end of its term, the legislature, in a special session of 1899, created another independent agency by passing the enabling legislation that established the Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans.<sup>9</sup>

Agitation for a state takeover of the city docks began with complaints from shippers and merchants concerned about the conditions of the river front. A city council committee investigated the purchase of the private contract under which a corporation administered the wharves, but concluded that the estimated price of \$450,000 was too high. A committee of the city's commercial exchanges considered legal action to abrogate the contract, but no action took place. A port commission bill passed both houses of the state legislature by the end of June, 1896, with support from both the reform and Regular factions, and the governor signed the legislation shortly thereafter. A *Daily Picayune* editorial called the legislation "among the measures of great importance to the people of New Orleans." The newspaper further claimed that the legislation "promises to secure for this city a permanent lowering of port charges as well as an economic and businesslike administration of the docking facilities." During the same session, at the request of Citizens' League members, the legislature passed laws revising the city charter and instituting a system of civil service. But the success of the League at the legislature did not produce the normal patronage rewards. Governor

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<sup>9</sup> See Chapters VI and VII.

Foster continued to favor the Regulars, and the “League was left out in the cold as regards patronage.”<sup>10</sup>

The League could take some comfort in its control of New Orleans. Its impressive city victory over the Regulars secure, the Citizens' League sought to make its power permanent. Members recognized that one of the failings of previous reform efforts was a lack of formal structure. Groups of politically active opponents of the Regulars formed organizations prior to elections, but rarely survived for more than a few months. Reform groups attracted members of the professions and businessmen, not all of whom were ambitious to serve in elective office. Nor were they willing to make the financial sacrifices that election and service as public officials demanded. After hard-fought elections, members returned to other interests, and political control could not be sustained even in those instances when the reformers were victorious. To counter this tendency, the League copied the machine's organizational structure based on wards and precincts, incorporated as a permanent association, and established a headquarters. “Periodical revolutions are no longer to be endured,” asserted one League spokesman. More important, the League moved to control patronage, its support for civil service reform notwithstanding. In December, 1896, over two hundred persons signed the charter and selected Charles Janvier as president.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Daily Picayune*, June 5, 1896, 4, 12; July 2, 1896, 1; July 3, 1896, 3; July 7, 1896, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Even before the election, Charles Janvier had attacked the Regulars and called for permanent changes in the city charter and civil service. *Daily Picayune*, February 26, 1896. For the post-election organization changes, see Charles Janvier, “Municipal Reform in New Orleans,” *Proceedings of the Louisville Conference for Good City*

The organization of the Citizens' League attempted to duplicate the centralized characteristics of its political rival. In addition to Janvier, the group elected five vice-presidents, a secretary, and a treasurer. The president exercised considerable power in appointing an executive committee, which included one member from each of the city's wards as well as ten at-large members. The charter granted the executive committee the responsibility for "the entire control and management of the business of the League." However, the League's ambivalence to political power led to inherent contradictions. In an organization ostensibly dedicated to the acquisition and exercise of political and governmental power, members tried to divorce governance of the League from office-holding. Article V of the charter specifically prohibited League officers and members of the Executive Committee from holding elective office. In the League, adherence to an idealized view of reform separated office-holding from the leadership of the private political organization. In its charter, the League adhered to its principles by specifically legislating such a division, though there was no evidence that such exaggerated purity influenced the electorate at large. Even as successful League members governed the city and sought legislative change, the charter expressed the organization's views on the necessity of disinterested officials. In the Regular organization, power flowed from the influence of the elected leadership and its day-to-day connection with the machinery of government. Most Regular leaders held government posts that kept them in touch with

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*Government and of the Third Annual Meeting of the National Municipal League* (Philadelphia: National Municipal League, 1897), 216-217; *Daily Picayune*, May 2, 1896, 1; Edward Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, 39-59. Haas's work provides the best summary of the characteristics of League members.

voters and provided a dynamic critique of policy. The League attempted to copy the Regular organization, but in its zeal to demonstrate political purity, cut off its leadership from the practical side of public administration. In its organization, the League fell far short of what was necessary for political permanence.<sup>12</sup>

Stung by the defeat of their city ticket in 1896, the Regulars moved to reorganize as soon as possible. The Crescent Democratic Club, formed in 1891, had provided the political vehicle for the Regulars, but its usefulness disappeared along with the Fitzpatrick scandals and Buck's defeat. In November, 1896, members of the club moved to dissolve, but, within a month, a committee of Regulars convened to organize a successor association. The initial meeting occurred only a few days after the official formation of the Citizens' League. The "new Democratic club" selected the name "Choctaw" in imitation of the successful Tammany organization and drafted a charter outlining three purposes: "to uphold and advance Democratic principles; to promote harmony, enjoyment, and literary improvements; and to provide the conveniences of a Club House." Martin Behrman later acknowledged the New York antecedents of the use of an Indian name, and recalled in his memoirs that club historians listed Chicamauga, Houma, and Tensas--all Louisiana tribes--as other possibilities.<sup>13</sup>

Although contemporary accounts of the organizational meetings do not mention the role of the governor, Behrman later credited his influence. "Foster . . . combined the

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<sup>12</sup> For details of the League organization, see the New Orleans *Daily States*, December 13-19, 1896; Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, 39-41.

<sup>13</sup> New Orleans Times-Democrat, December 30, 1896, 12; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 34-35; Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, 20-23.

city organization and the parish politicians more completely into one faction than they have ever been since then."<sup>14</sup> Specifically, Foster continued his patronage support of the Regulars, as he had after the 1892 elections. In appointing Regulars to state offices, he ignored the League control of the city administration. Behrman wrote:

Foster's appointment of regulars to state offices in New Orleans after [their] defeat by the Citizens' League was, in my opinion the beginning of the "city organization" known as the regulars. These appointments gave him a following of about half the leaders in New Orleans. When he came to New Orleans and mixed in local politics, he did it openly. He did not send friends or agents but came himself and the [New Orleans] *Times-Democrat* thought this was a very wicked proceeding.

Behrman was not a neutral observer. Within a month, Foster named him and four of his Regular colleagues as tax assessors for the city, powerful offices often associated with ward and city leadership. Any property owner displeased with an assessment could make a personal appeal to the assessor, who often granted relief based on the political inclinations of the petitioner. Other Choctaw members received appointments to boards and commissions, such as the Dock Board, crucial to a continuation of patronage for loyal party members, the "very life blood for a machine struggling to be born."<sup>15</sup>

The governor's interests revealed the partisan nature of the New Orleans rivalry as well as the extent of the influence the Choctaw Club might have in statewide

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<sup>14</sup> Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 33; Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, 23-27; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 34-36, 57, and 343-347. Kemp provided a copy of the charter of the Choctaw club in an appendix to the Behrman memoirs. Officers filed the charter in March, 1897, but the essentials of the new organization were in place by the end of the previous year.

<sup>15</sup> Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 34; Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, 27; Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 33.

contests. "The welfare of the country," the charter proclaimed, "shall be determined and guided by the principles of the Democratic Party." This identification between the Choctaws and the Democratic Party formed the basis of Behrman's assertion that "In those days, the Choctaws did not represent a faction. They represented the Democratic Party. . . . The Choctaws were good Democrats who organized against a Republican party in Louisiana and a combination of Republicans and 'reformer' Democrats in New Orleans."<sup>16</sup>

Unlike the Citizens' League, the Choctaw Club charter had no prohibition against its leadership holding elective office. Club members embraced political life, not only for the obvious patronage benefits, but also for the functional necessity of politics as a means to various ends. Behrman commented in his memoirs that "the theory that a thing can be done because it is a good thing to do seems to run through a great deal of what I have read about city government. That is not true." He and his colleagues knew that municipal action flowed from electoral power, not good intentions. Article 2 of the Choctaw Club charter asserted "that it is the duty of every good citizen to take not only a deep interest, but also an active part in the political affairs of the country." Writing in the 1930s, George Reynolds put it more bluntly: "Professional politicians organized the Choctaw Club and have always dominated it." The professional nature of the Choctaw Club and the political practices of its members suggested that the progressive ideal of expertise extended to electoral politics. The bureaucratization of American life at the turn of the century included not only governmental agencies, but also professional and

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<sup>16</sup> Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 35-36.

voluntary associations. The many examples of urban political machines--especially when viewed apart from the value questions of patronage and corruption--constituted further examples of society's "search for order" and pursuit of expertise.<sup>17</sup>

Attempts to characterize the differences between the League and the Choctaw Club, and, more generally, between "reform" organizations and their "machine" rivals, often depends on an analysis of what the competing groups said about themselves and each other. Representatives of the two groups adopted stock rhetorical devices to distinguish themselves from their political enemies, and this led historians to adopt simplistic portrayals of the competing organizations. The upper and upper-middle class reform rhetoric emphasized purity of motive, the disinterested nature of reformers' actions, criticism of the political process (particularly voting procedures), the corrupt nature of the opposition, and economy in government. By the end of the 1890s, reform rhetoric also emphasized the assumed virtues of "business" and the "businessman," who would bring efficiency to a boss-ridden system. Citizens' League President Charles Janvier emphasized the honesty of League candidates and mocked the Regulars' efforts to construct a "clean ticket" in 1896. His colleague Charles Claiborne, candidate for city council, told a League rally that there were no "issues in the election," not "the tariff nor protection," but only "good government against bad." League spokesman A. G. Romain characterized the 1896 election as "the people against fraud, bribery, and plunder;" H. Dickson Bruns called it "honesty against dishonesty." Walter Denegre

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<sup>17</sup> Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 344; Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 33.



proclaimed a League victory necessary for the “honest and efficient management of the affairs of the city.” And Bernard McCloskey asked rhetorically, “Who shall be the directors of this great corporation known as the city of New Orleans?”<sup>18</sup>

In contrast, the oratory of the Regulars highlighted achievements in government, party loyalty, racial solidarity, references to southern history, especially Reconstruction, and the amateurism and hypocrisy of the self-styled reformers. The Regulars’ self-identification with the Democratic Party--the party of the Confederacy--provided the theme most utilized in support of “Regular Democracy” and against opponents of all stripes. Regulars in the New Orleans elections of 1896 and 1900 also played on public fears of monopoly and corporate power. In elections such as 1892 or 1896 when specific issues such as the lottery or the recent municipal scandals dominated, speakers integrated the traditional themes with those more timely issues. In fighting the Citizens’ League in 1896, Ernest B. Kruttschnitt called for racial solidarity and characterized the members of the League as “traitors to the Democratic Party.” Regular Democrat S. A. Montgomery told a rally that “Citizens League members were Republicans,” and labor leader James Leonard declared them “anti-labor.” In a later election, Regular candidates continued to assert that “Democrats are the party of the people,” and the leader of a city ward claimed he was “proud to be a ward boss by the voice of the people.” In comparing reform and Regular platforms, one candidate noted that the Regulars

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<sup>18</sup> The illustrative remarks come from the 1896 campaign of the Citizens’ League in New Orleans, but are typical of reform campaigns throughout the period under study. *Daily Picayune*, April 2, 1896, 1, 9.

declared in favor of “home white labor,” but the reformers had placed only the words “home labor” in their platform. Captain Fitzpatrick connected the reform candidates to the city’s prominent banks, insurance companies, and the leadership of Tulane University. Charles J. Theard, a supporter of the Citizens’ League in 1896, “came back” to the Regulars in 1899 and charged that independent movements “not only threaten to disrupt the party, but threaten you with a return to Republicanism . . . and tend to degrade politics by setting a premium upon political dishonesty and disloyalty.”<sup>19</sup>

In *Political Leadership in a Southern City: New Orleans in the Progressive Era, 1896-1902*, Edward F. Haas provided a careful analysis of the memberships of the League and the Choctaw Club. His statistics revealed information on age, education, wealth, and other aspects of the participants. Haas’s analysis offered evidence about the nature of the groups beyond the assertions of campaign orators, but the data failed to support the existence of dramatic differences between the rival political factions. Haas’s basic comparison relied primarily on memberships lists from the Citizens’ League charter in 1896 and, for the Choctaw Club, the charter membership in 1897 and a subsequent list published in 1902. The different years from which the lists were drawn raised questions about the significance of the data, particularly given the movement of Citizens’ League members into the Choctaw Club at the end of the century. But the distributions of membership characteristics remained essentially the same whether or not the analysis accounted for duplicated membership. The transfer of a segment of the

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<sup>19</sup> *Daily Picayune*, April 1, 1896, 6; September 19, 1899, 8; September 27, 1899, 7; October 1, 1899, Section I, 8, 9.

Citizens' League membership into that of the Choctaw Club did not alter the differences (or lack of differences) between the two groups.<sup>20</sup>

What were those differences? Apart from patterns of electoral speech, what characteristics of participants provided insight into policy decisions and electoral choices? Place of birth, indicative of standing in the community or of association with tradition, did not separate the groups. A higher percentage of Regulars were born in Louisiana; slightly more Citizen's League members were born outside of Louisiana, but most were born in the South. In education, the two groups shared similarities: approximately thirty-seven percent of members of both had college and/or professional education, and distribution among other education categories did not vary significantly between the Citizens' League and the Choctaw Club. The data confirms the widespread assertions that reform groups drew most heavily from business interests, but the percentage of Regulars with backgrounds in business closely tracks that in the League.<sup>21</sup>

Closer examination of the data, however, reveals several interesting patterns.

One trend is the distribution of membership within the city. Canal Street bifurcated

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<sup>20</sup> Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, 105-120 (statistical tables) and 123-155 (a listing of membership). Twenty-seven League members became Choctaw Club members by 1902, approximately eleven percent of the original sample of 235 League members identified by Haas. Specific membership listings allow isolation of this group. A sample of the original Haas figures were reworked to correct for the duplication factor, but no significant variations emerged.

<sup>21</sup> Haas reported that the business and professional members of the League totaled 68.5 percent and 28.1 percent respectively. The corresponding figures for the Choctaw Club were 60.2 percent and 29.6 percent. Only in the category of skilled labor did the distribution vary significantly: 8.2 percent for the Regulars versus 3 percent for the League, although the low number of skilled workers among League members (seven out of 235) reduces the statistical level of confidence in comparing the two numbers.

New Orleans on a course perpendicular to the Mississippi River. The areas of the city downriver from Canal Street included the French Quarter, the oldest section of the city, and the Fourth through the Ninth Wards. Algiers, part of the city but on the west bank of the Mississippi, made up the city's Fifteenth Ward. The remainder of the seventeen wards were located upriver from Canal Street and included the wealthy, ante-bellum neighborhood known as the Garden District. Over three-quarters of League members lived upriver of Canal Street; nearly fifty-five percent inhabited the fashionable Tenth through Fourteenth Wards. Approximately sixty-five percent of the Regulars lived uptown, but only thirty-two percent had homes in the most desirable wards.

The choice of residence reflected wealth differences most apparent at the upper end of the economic spectrum: nearly forty-five percent of the League member had taxable wealth in excess of \$10,000, while only twenty-four percent of the Regulars did. Louis Grunewald and Orris McClelland, the two wealthiest Choctaw members in 1902, were both members of the Citizen's League in 1896. An additional divergence between the two groups lay in the area of club memberships. Choctaw members joined the volunteer fire companies at a rate of over five times that of the League members and were more than twice as likely to join the Elks. On the other hand, League members joined the exclusive Boston Club at four times the rate of their Choctaw counterparts, and were fifty percent more likely to be members of the Pickwick Club.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, Tables 7, 8, 12, 14 20, 21, 25 and 27. The wealth differential may have been even greater than Haas measured, since most of his figures for the Citizens' League predated those of the Choctaw Club by five years or more.

Coupled with the information on wealth and residence, the club information paints a picture of the Citizens' League members distinguished from the Regulars by social class rather than by ideology. Reformers, concentrated in exclusive neighborhoods and sharing membership in even more exclusive clubs, complained about taxes, inefficiency in government, and dishonesty, thereby reinforcing their innate suspicions of the Regulars, most of whom did not come from the "better element." The Regulars returned the antagonism and held the reformers in contempt for being out of touch with the majority of the population. Behrman, for example, nurtured a healthy skepticism toward the uptown Citizens' League members, "the silk stocking element in politics."

In those days the words "silk stocking" were used to point out a type of citizen who knew all about municipal government because he read magazines and books and the *Life of Jefferson* and did not know where to file his complaint if the garbage man did not come around early enough to suit him. The high class silk stocking always knew what led to the fall of the Roman empire, but he did not seem to know that the bulk of the voters were more interested in schools, police, firemen, the charity hospital, the parks and squares and labor troubles than the Roman empire.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to class distinctions, the data on occupational background revealed differences between the two groups in patterns of employment. The Haas compilation emphasized the occupation of each member without regard to government employment; no category accounts for those who held full time government positions, including those elected or appointed. Thus, occupational listings for Citizens' League members during

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<sup>23</sup> In New Orleans, the geography and residential patterns led the terms "upriver," "uptown," and "above Canal" to carry social as well as geographical implications. For Behrman's comments, see Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 106-108. See also, Schott, "The New Orleans Machine and Progressivism," 145.

1896-97 indicated that nearly twelve percent enjoyed government employment; the figure rises to seventeen percent if elected council members are included. (Council members were not considered full time government employees because they were able to maintain other employment.) For the Choctaw Club, over twenty-seven percent held government jobs in 1902, a figure that rises only slightly if council members are included. Regardless of background, many Choctaw Club members viewed political participation as either a means to obtain or keep government employment, or a by-product of that employment. The difference between the two groups also reflected the relationship with the governor enjoyed by the Regulars, which resulted in state positions for many members of the Choctaw club. Thus, in their contest for political supremacy, the two groups shared many characteristics, but differed in social standing, wealth, and attitude toward government employment. The similarities allowed a gradual convergence of the two organizations; the differences persisted for decades, and arose in bitterly fought campaigns.<sup>24</sup>

By the beginning of 1897, the two factions dominated the city's political landscape and seemed to add a degree of stability, especially compared to previous years. The Citizens' League had delivered on its promise to organize a permanent opposition to the Regulars, and the Regular organization, reorganized under fresh leadership, prepared to distance itself from the Fitzpatrick scandals. But 1898 would upset the temporary tranquility, as the state's call for a constitutional convention came

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<sup>24</sup> Author's calculations, drawn from the detailed membership listings in Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*.

before the voters, and political loyalties broke down. The product of that convention upset the political balance and provided the conditions to return the Regulars to power for an unprecedented five terms. Throughout those terms, the basic political and electoral conflicts between the Choctaw club and various reform groups played out in a manner familiar to the New Orleans scene.

Revision of the state's basic law had occurred in 1864, 1868, and 1879 amidst Reconstruction and its aftermath. If the voters agreed to a convention in 1898, the delegates would revise the constitution created by the 1879 convention. That meeting had considered the suffrage question, but declined to explicitly confront the Fifteenth Amendment. Among the 134 delegates in 1879 were thirty Republicans and seven blacks, enough of a voice to lend support to the state's black voters. In addition, the delegates were aware of the risk of a declining labor pool caused by black departures from the state, and, in the early days of their deliberations, passed a resolution to reassure the state's black residents by specifically rejecting any diminution of civil rights. The convention eventually extended suffrage to all adult male citizens, though it authorized a poll tax and tightened residency requirements. Attempts to extend the suffrage to women failed.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ronald M. Labbé, "The Reign of Robbery Will Never Return to Louisiana: The Constitution of 1879," Warren G. Billings and Edward M. Haas, editors, *In Search of Fundamental Law: Louisiana's Constitutions, 1812-1974* (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1993), 86-87. See also, Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 20. Regarding the issue of women's suffrage, Labbé cites the *New Orleans Times* defending the decision to withhold the right to vote for women on the basis that Louisiana politics was too "dark and dismal" to include the work of women.

In January, 1898, a state election affirmed the call for the constitutional convention, and voters chose the delegates to rewrite the basic law. The vote for the convention was 36,178 in favor and 7,578 opposed. In the delegate vote, Martin Behrman won election from Algiers, a New Orleans neighborhood on the west side of the Mississippi, somewhat isolated from the rest of the city. He attributed the light turnout to the inevitability of the convention since “when the results of the election are absolutely certain, the vote is not usually very heavy.” Later observers mentioned the drop in registration due to suffrage restrictions imposed by the legislature and by the confusion caused by a complicated ballot process. The strict requirements for voting imposed by statute in 1896 had reduced total registration by over half. Black registration fell by ninety percent.<sup>26</sup>

All accounts of the 1898 convention mention its domination by the Regular Democrats, whose party controlled all but two of the 134 delegates, one Republican and one Populist. Ernest Kruttschnitt of New Orleans, chair of the Democratic Party State Central Committee, served as convention president. When the convention met on February 8, 1898, he set the tone early in the proceedings by characterizing the convention as “little more than a family meeting of the Democratic Party of the State of Louisiana.” Two prominent New Orleanians--T. J. Semmes of the Judiciary Committee and former Mayor John Fitzpatrick of the Committee on New Orleans-- became chairs

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<sup>26</sup> *Report of the Secretary of State, 1898*, 145, quoted in Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 35; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 40; Hair, *Bourbonism and Agrarian Reform*, 275; Michael Lanza, “Little More than a Family Matter: The Constitution of 1898,” in Billings and Haas, *Louisiana Constitutions*, 98.



of important committees, but the primary work of the convention lay in the hands of the Committee on Suffrage and Elections, chaired by T. F. Bell of Caddo Parish, home to the state's second largest city, Shreveport.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to his characterization of the convention as a “family meeting,”

Kruttschnitt's opening address to his colleagues delineated the purpose of the gathering:

We are all aware that this convention has been called by the people of the state of Louisiana principally to deal with one question, and we know that but for the existence of that one question this assemblage would not be sitting here today. . . to eliminate from the electorate the mass of corrupt and illiterate voters who have degraded our politics during the last quarter of a century.

Behrman's recollections were less subtle: “The main purpose of that convention was to put the negroes out of politics.” The delegates highlighted the importance of the suffrage issue by making its settlement the first order of business; the convention took no other actions until it appointed the Committee on Suffrage and Elections and then settled on the method of disfranchisement.<sup>28</sup>

Delegates could choose from a range of options in the disfranchisement process. The 1896 changes in state registration laws proved efficacious, reducing black and poor white suffrage. Various other tactics included refinement of the poll tax, education or property qualifications, and the understanding clause. But these changes posed a danger

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<sup>27</sup> Lanza, “The Constitution of 1898,” 98-99 in Billings and Haas, *Louisiana Constitutions*; Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 34-35.

<sup>28</sup> Kruttschnitt's remarks can be found in the *Official Journal, Louisiana Constitutional Convention, 1898*, 9. See also Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 39-41 and Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 35. Behrman had hoped to serve the convention as a member of the committee on suffrage and elections, but was appointed to the committee on New Orleans affairs.

to various constituencies, particularly to the New Orleans Democrats. Broad brush education and property qualifications threatened the votes of poor whites. To counter those effects, Frank. A. Monroe, judge and Regular stalwart from the city, proposed a grandfather clause, providing the vote to descendants of voters eligible in 1868. The clause covered mostly whites otherwise unable to qualify for suffrage under the new rules. Special provisions were added to ease restrictions on recent immigrants. Additionally, the city Regulars opposed the poll tax, but reached a compromise with tax supporters that allowed its imposition after the elections of 1900.<sup>29</sup>

The city Democrats emerged with the best of both worlds: the elimination of the black vote, which in New Orleans was not subject to Regular control, and the preservation of a large part of their natural constituency. Members of the 1894 Ballot Reform League and the Citizens' League that brought the reformers to power in 1896 could not afford to oppose the convention or the new constitution. Their political history contained more than a few dalliances with Republicans, Populists, and blacks. In the new electorate, the Democratic Party had achieved an enviable position in the white popular imagination. Racial solidarity demanded a loyalty to the party, now seen as the architect of the new constitution and preserver of white supremacy. As in previous elections, the Regulars would remind voters of the role of the party in the history of the South, but now an additional part of that history became available.

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<sup>29</sup> *Daily Picayune*, March 1, 1898, 4, 13; March 2, 1898, 1; March 3, 1898, 4; March 4, 1898, 1, 4; March 5, 1898, 4, 9; Lanza, "The Constitution of 1898", 100-105; Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, 80.

Regulars presented themselves not only as Redeemers, but also as the authors of the state constitution that effectively eliminated the black vote. When New Orleans elections occurred in 1899, the city Democratic organization would benefit from the convention's work. And in the event that any lingering protest vote remained, the Democrats in control of the state added one more provision to their handiwork: the new constitution would go into effect without facing a referendum.<sup>30</sup>

The adoption of the 1898 constitution represented a watershed in the politics of the state. The results of disfranchisement marginalized the opponents to the Democratic Party by assuring that dissident groups could not mobilize the black vote. For city reformers, long suspected of weak party loyalty to the Democrats, the constitution drastically reduced opportunities for political maneuvering. The Citizens' League victories for mayor and the city council did not survive the political revolution. The League had come to power in part because of black voters in New Orleans. Those votes were no longer available. The changes of the 1898 constitution--and the political skill of the Regulars--led to the familiar pattern of reform administrations: electoral victory followed by vain attempts at permanence. But during the four years of its tenure, with the cooperation of its colleagues in the state legislature, the League helped to initiate municipal changes that would far outlast its electoral success.

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<sup>30</sup> Schott offers a brief discussion of J. Morgan Kousser's thesis on the politics of disfranchisement--namely, that the partisan dimension was paramount in the plans of the constitution--in "Progressives Against Democracy," 254-255. See also Schott's comments regarding the disfranchising convention in the same article, 254.

As the municipal elections of 1899 approached, neither the League's permanent organization nor its record of achievement could overcome the changing political environment. But the League's contributions to the city would survive. Not only its leadership but also its ideas would be absorbed by the Choctaw Club. The legislation establishing independent boards and commissions would not be reversed, and the work of those new entities would go on. The progressive reforms initiated by the League combined with Regular Democratic implementation formed the basis for a long-term consensus in favor of progressive policies, civic involvement, and municipal development.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE REGULARS RETURN AS THE MORNING GLORIES FADE

"Capdevielle for Mayor," proclaimed the headline of the *Daily Picayune*. The convention of New Orleans Regular Democrats met on September 11, 1899 to select the ticket for the municipal elections scheduled for early November. Within another day the convention selected the entire slate, and the campaign for control of the South's largest city began. Within two months, the Regular Democrats would triumph, regaining city offices they had lost in 1896. The election of 1899 proved crucial for the emerging politics of the twentieth century. Over the years since Reconstruction, the voters of New Orleans had alternately favored Regular and reform elements of the city's leadership. The 1899 election completed this pattern of the previous two decades, alternating city administrations led by Regular Democrats and then by a self-styled reform opposition. It also marked the start of twenty years control by the Regular Democrats. Not until 1920 would an anti-machine candidate again become mayor. A close examination of the 1899 nomination process and the subsequent election reveals important features of the city's post-disfranchisement political environment.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 11, 1899, 1; Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age*, 28-54, especially Table 4, 38.

As the 1899 election approached, the Citizens' League suffered defections. Ambitious members looked to increase their chances for election, and it seemed unlikely that the reform elements would triumph again. Disfranchisement eliminated the possibility of mobilizing the black vote, and, although the Regulars lost potential voters among the poor as well, the new constitutional limitations on suffrage damaged the reformers' efforts to establish a permanent hold on city government. Ironically, some of the restrictions on voting hampered the reformers in unexpected ways. The Regulars took care that their supporters paid the poll tax on time, an example of the advantages of a professional political organization. Behrman later commented that the reformers calculated at the time of the convention that imposition of the tax would be to their advantage and fought against a provision to delay the tax until after 1900. Instead, weak rates of poll tax payment hampered many reforms efforts. In addition, the identification of the Regular Democrats with white solidarity increased after the 1898 convention. Deviation from the Democratic line had been dangerous before disfranchisement; after the convention, politicians risked almost certain defeat outside the Democratic Party structure. Finally, the inducements of patronage and the favor of the governor convinced many reformers from the League to reconsider their allegiance. Charles Janvier, Citizens' League President, anticipated the problem in an 1897 essay in which he wrote that many reformers would be tempted to alliances with the machine.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 50-51.; Charles Janvier, "Municipal Reform in New Orleans," 214-215.

Writing in 1904, Civil Service Commissioner J. Pemberton Baldwin looked back at 1899 and assessed the political situation. The legislature had given the League a victory in the form of a new city charter which included provisions for civil service under an independent board, "the first attempt in this State to separate patronage from politics." Pemberton noticed "a development among certain members of the better element (to use an awkward term) who went into politics, and took a prominent part in the reform movement of 1896." The League had succeeded in defeating the Regulars in the municipal contest of that year, but its members discovered "before the term of that administration had expired that it was necessary in order to carry the next election to make some coalition with the ward leaders." Pemberton next posed the question "whether it were wiser to risk defeat or to give the ward leader recognition, in return for which he would join the better element in naming a high class of candidates for submission to the people on the regular party ticket." The commissioner's analysis concluded that compromise was the best policy, thereby constructing a virtue out of necessity. Had the reform movement persisted in sufficient strength, no coalition with the ward leaders would have been necessary. The labeling of what occurred as a coalition put the best face on the situation from the League point of view, but the direction of the political movement was largely one way.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> J. Pemberton Baldwin, "New Orleans Under a partisan Administration." *Proceedings of the Chicago Conference for Good City Government and the Tenth Annual Meeting of the National Municipal League* (Philadelphia: National Municipal League, 1904), 143-153.

The rush of political realignments accelerated as the campaign of 1899 drew near.<sup>4</sup> Citizen League members abandoned their colleagues and sought out the Regulars in the hope of joining the Regular ticket or obtaining an appointment. By the time both tickets took shape, Bernard McCloskey, Samuel Gilmore, and others had shifted allegiances from the League to the Regulars. For their part, the Regulars attempted at least a symbolic break with the discredited past, and they accepted, if not embraced, the change in loyalties offered by their former antagonists. Eager to avoid overt connection with former Mayor Fitzpatrick's associates, the Regulars pledged a clean ticket and promised to nominate a mayoral candidate above reproach.<sup>5</sup> The incumbent Mayor Flower tentatively tested the waters, but a *rapprochement* between the Regulars and the candidate that had succeeded Fitzpatrick was apparently too much for both sides. Earlier in the year Fitzpatrick had requested tickets for carnival seating at City Hall, but was turned down by Mayor Flower, who expressed regret that "seating is limited . . . and seems to be in demand this year." Fitzpatrick had requested the seats to

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<sup>4</sup> The constitutional convention of 1898 had separated the municipal and state elections. Thus elections for city offices took place in late 1899; state elections would follow in April, 1900. Some reformers hoped that the election timing would reduce the influence of the Regulars that contemporaneous elections would allow. Behrman later noted laconically that this proved not to be the case. Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 55-56.

<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately for Fitzpatrick, his escape from legal problems during his mayoralty did not exempt him from guilt by association. He sought vindication by putting himself forward as candidate for mayor in 1899, but was unsuccessful. Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, 35; *Daily Picayune*, September 5, 1899, 4, 7.



accommodate the Cook County Democratic Club, and the Mayor's snub indicated a distinct lack of political judgement.<sup>6</sup>

Subsequent consideration of Charles Janvier for Mayor by the Regulars was even more startling than the possible Flower defection. Janvier had been president of the Citizens' League and had served as Rex, ruler of the city's Mardi Gras, during carnival season, 1896. He was born in New Orleans in 1857 and had participated as a White League member in the Liberty Place battle--an experience that certified his Democratic credentials--but had been no friend of the Regular organization. Janvier's departure in mid-summer, 1899, signaled the end of the League; no clearer indication could be found that it had fallen on hard times.<sup>7</sup> There are conflicting accounts of Janvier's switch to the Regulars. Schott asserts that Janvier "with the encouragement of Governor Foster . . . joined with several individuals [to] organize the Choctaw Club of New Orleans," which would place his defection in late 1896. Haas describes Janvier's "retirement" from politics in fall, 1899, and his reappearance as a member of the

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<sup>6</sup> Office of the Mayor, Outgoing Correspondence, Walter Flower to John Fitzpatrick, February [date illegible], 1899, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division (hereinafter cited as Mayor's Correspondence). Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 533 provided an account of the Regulars approach to Flower which failed, among other reasons, because of Flower's reluctance to be seen as "seeking" the nomination.

<sup>7</sup> The New Orleans carnival, or Mardi Gras, included a number of marching clubs and social organizations. Among the most prominent, the Rex organization represented the city's elite citizens and families. As King of Carnival, Janvier represented the uptown social elite. For a capsule biography of Janvier, see The Writers Press Association, Advance Press Service, New York, June 7, 1912, available in the Janvier Family Papers, Historic New Orleans Collection.

Choctaw Club in December. The dates are significant since the announced retirement comes shortly after the Regulars rejected his bid to become their mayoral candidate. The December emergence as a Choctaw member coincides with Janvier's selection as a member of the Democratic Party State Central Committee.<sup>8</sup>

Citizen League members uncertain of their organization's efficacy, yet unwilling to join the Regulars, had two other options available: remain with the Citizens' League and face almost certain defeat or form yet another organization. From the ranks of disaffected Citizens' League membership and occasional Regular defectors arose a new organization to carry the reform banner--the Jackson Democratic Association. Jacksonians refused to take part in the primary; victory in that process was unlikely and would make subsequent challenge to the Party difficult. Yet establishing a presence among voters proved even more difficult, since the Jacksonians organized only a few months before the election.

Founders of the Jackson Democratic Association took care in the choice of a name. Associating its name with the Democratic Party, the new organization sought to reassure voters who valued the traditional label and white solidarity. The memories of 1896 angered the Regulars, who quickly reminded voters that Flower's victory could be attributed to the black vote. The Jacksonian Democrats quickly adopted standard anti-

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<sup>8</sup> Schott, "John M. Parker," 87; Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, 34; Nussbaum, "Progressive Politics in New Orleans, 1896-1900," 198; *Daily City Item*, January 25, 1900, 10; *Daily Picayune*, December 31, 1899, 11.

Ring rhetoric. Chairman W. B. Porter asserted the intention of the group to “further the election of such a city government and such offices for New Orleans as will secure to the people” an honest government, safe from boss influence and illegal ballot practices. The Jackson Democratic Association warned against ballot fraud, claiming that “all reasons and excuses for fraud or even irregular methods in elections have . . . disappeared” since the removal of the black vote.<sup>9</sup>

Walter Denegre, the reform candidate for the United States Senate in 1896, came back to the city in midsummer to help the Jackson Democratic Association effort, though he regretted the return to the New Orleans summer heat and missed his Massachusetts vacation spot. Denegre sought to reassure Democratic voters and to shore up the party credentials of the new organization:

[Denegre] thought that there would be no ticket of Republicans or Populists in the state [election], but that they would see that the best thing to do was to support the Jackson Democracy. . . . The Association was strongly Democratic and was working inside of the party and that there was really only one party in the state since the negroes were eliminated. Mr. Denegre indicates that there would be some hustling in the association now but was sorry to miss the remainder of his vacation.

The Jackson Democratic Association support soon included the usual line up of reformers, including members of the 1888 Young Men’s Democratic Association, many of whose political backgrounds the Regulars suspected of disloyalty, and members of the Citizens’ League still attracted to reform ideas. While organizing the Association,

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<sup>9</sup> *Daily Picayune*, July 14, 1899, 4, 9; July 25, 1899, 10; August 6, 1899, 4.

the leadership thought it best to await the Regulars' choice for Mayor before naming its own ticket.<sup>10</sup>

The Regular Democrats chose a mayoral candidate through a primary election system that selected delegates to a party convention. Control of the party machinery, influence in state elections, and designation of lesser candidates for municipal and parochial offices depended upon the outcome of the primary. In effect, the Regulars' primary consisted of seventeen separate ward elections wherein potential challengers to the Regular establishment contested local power. Victory by one or more insurgents, however, did not overthrow Regular rule. The challengers sought to be part of the machine, not to subvert it. Although in some instances the Regulars avoided electoral fights through negotiations, compromise, or timely retirements, primary conflicts were not uncommon. The 1899 primary measured the effectiveness of the Choctaw Club as the newest incarnation of the Regular machine and the extent to which it could absorb new actors at the ward and precinct level. Victors at the ward level entered the caucus (also known as the Council of Seventeen) which governed the Regular organization. In addition, the caucus members routinely held office on the Democratic State Central Committee, thus providing a link between city and state politics.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Daily Picayune*, July 27, 1899, 3; *Daily Picayune*, July 29, 1899, 12. In a speech to a Ninth Ward gathering of YMDA and JDA supporters, Denegre claimed that the Citizens' League should be given credit for "getting rid of negro suffrage."

<sup>11</sup> Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 61; Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 122-126.

The September 8, 1899, primary produced mixed results. Although the Regulars returned most of its chosen leadership to the caucus, vigorous contests took place in several wards and new leaders emerged in several others. In the First Ward, the leadership of Mike Fanning and C. Taylor Gauche faced a challenge from the Trauth-Drown-Kohnke faction, associated with the reform elements in the ward. Businessman E. F. Kohnke and his brother, Dr. Quitman Kohnke, were originally Citizens' League members; Quitman served on the 1896 city council. George Trauth was a saloon keeper. In spite of the challenge to the leadership, Trauth remained loyal to the Choctaws. The Fanning-Gauche faction won easily and carried every precinct. Ward Two was the stronghold of Congressman Robert Davey; no opposition emerged. The Third Ward was even stronger for the Regulars. It was home to former Mayor John Fitzpatrick and Remy Klock, two of the most entrenched of the Democratic stalwarts. In Ward Four, home of the powerful boss Victor Mauberret, an intra-party challenge by Samuel Gately ended in victory for Mauberret by a majority of slightly less than two to one, although Gately carried two precincts out of nine. Gately remained within the Regulars; the 1902 Choctaw Club roster included his name. Fifth Ward leader Alexander Pujol won reelection over the De Rance faction by margin of 1,170 to 830. Although De Rance carried only one precinct, Pujol's margin of victory in four other precincts was in single digits. The *Daily Picayune* noted that a number of ballots were disallowed, raising suspicions of voting irregularities. But more than two-thirds of the

rejected ballots named Pujol's faction. Wards One through Five included the oldest parts of the city on either side of Canal Street.<sup>12</sup>

The Sixth Ward was the site of a bitter contest between incumbent leader John Brewster and James Demoruelle. Feelings ran high enough to include gunplay between rivals at an earlier date. Although Brewster prevailed, the margin of 820 to 639 was not great. Demoruelle carried two precincts and lost three others by less than twenty-five votes in each. The returns showed a clear geographic pattern with Brewster strongest in the lower end of the ward (those precincts near the river) and Demoruelle strongest in the upper precincts, toward the north along fashionable Esplanade Avenue. Since the river area precincts had the highest percentage of immigrant voters, mainly Italians, the Demoruelle faction accused Brewster of appealing to "that class of people commonly known as Dagoes." The Regulars likewise triumphed in the Seventh through Ninth Wards, where they faced only token opposition. The Sixth through the Ninth Wards include the downriver, eastern part of New Orleans, consisting mostly of working class families.<sup>13</sup>

The most serious challenge to the Regulars came from uptown wards where the Citizens' League had its greatest strength. In the Tenth Ward, Robert Ewing, a politically ambitious newspaper manager, challenged the Regulars. Eager to join the

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<sup>12</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 9, 1899, 1; Nussbaum, "Progressive Politics in New Orleans, 1896-1900," 199-200.

<sup>13</sup> *Daily Picayune*, July 27, 1899, 6, 12; September 9, 1899, 1, 7.

Council of Seventeen, Ewing and his supporters worked within the primary structure while denouncing the Regular leadership. At a rally the day before the voting, one speaker in support of the Ewing candidacy said that Fitzpatrick was “like the other bosses--a barnacle and should be turned down by the people.” Ambrose A. Maginnis argued for Ewing on the basis that the city needed “new men.” Maginnis admitted to being a Republican, but excused the apostasy on the grounds that he voted that way “for protection” in manufacturing. Another speaker characterized Ewing as a champion of small capital, opposed to the trusts, one of which had just closed a plant in the city. Ewing was simultaneously against the “Jackson group and bossism.” He reasoned that with the threat of “Negro rule” gone, the bosses could safely be discarded, and he read a letter from former Citizens' League leader Charles Janvier supporting the Ewing candidacy. Janvier had recently moved out of the Tenth Ward but continued to have influence in his former neighborhood. Perhaps the hardest fought contest of the electoral season saw Ewing triumph over Peter Farrell by a margin of 403. Out of eleven precincts, Ewing carried seven to his opponent's four. Farrell was popular among the Choctaw Club leadership, and his defeat weighed heavily upon the supporters of former mayor John Fitzpatrick. Ewing would play an important role in city politics for two decades as a Regular, but with an erratic record for loyalty to the organization.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 7, 1899, 6; September 9, 1899, 1, 7.

In another uptown neighborhood, Ward Twelve, the former Citizen League councilman W. J. Turner had challenged Assessor Henry McMurray for the leadership prior to the primary. McMurray prevailed, but would face additional challenges in the coming years. The Thirteenth Ward remained firm for the Regulars, but in the prosperous Fourteenth Ward, lawyer Samuel Gilmore, formerly of the Citizens' League, replicated Ewing's tactics, placing himself between the League and the bosses, but willing to work within the Regular machinery. Gilmore had served as Assistant City Attorney in the 1888 administration of Mayor Shakspeare and had moved into the City Attorney position under Mayor Walter Flower. Eager to explain his participation in the Citizens' League movement, Gilmore said that joining the League in 1896 was the only way to keep the new sewerage and water revenues out of the hands of Fitzpatrick's "Boodle" council, and that the Regular leaders, "perhaps inadvertently," had lost their way in 1896. Gilmore claimed that he "didn't want to be a ward boss" but ran for office to insure the city could "go forward in improvement forever." Gilmore defeated his opponent in every precinct for a majority of 350. He joined the Council of Seventeen, took an important position on the Regular's municipal ticket, and served as city attorney for another nine years.<sup>15</sup> There was no contest in the Fifteenth Ward (the Algiers neighborhood on the West Bank of the Mississippi), home to the emerging Regular leader Martin Behrman, then thirty-five years of age. The Regulars faced light

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<sup>15</sup> Conrad, *A Dictionary of Louisiana Biography*, 346; *Daily Picayune*, September 7, 1899, 6; September 9, 1899, 1, 7; January 2, 1909, 2.



opposition in the remaining uptown two wards, the Sixteenth and Seventeenth, where ineffective challenges to the leadership fell short.

The results confirmed the strength of the new Regular organization. After only three years, the Choctaw Club proved it could mobilize votes and maintain discipline. But the primary also illustrated an important feature of the post-constitutional convention political world. The Regulars had to find ways to absorb the defections from the League and, at the same time, provide for upward mobility among the ambitious members of its own organization. Particularly in the uptown wards, where Gilmore and Ewing defeated Regular bosses, the Choctaw Club's victory came at a significant price, as newly elected leaders took their place on the Council of Seventeen. The Regulars did not make concessions only to those who successfully challenged them at the polls. Citizens' League member Bernard McCloskey defected to the Regulars, but did not run for office. His legal skills, however, recommended him to the Democratic organization, and he served as attorney to the new Dock Board. These adjustments by the Regulars proved crucial to the emergence of a citywide consensus in favor of progressive civic development. There were no significant disagreements over municipal policy between the two factions, and the Regular Democratic environment proved comfortable to the numerous reform defectors.

The press considered the results of the primary a victory for reform, to the extent that it believed that reform could take place within the Choctaw Club. The citywide

results certainly constituted a challenge to the Regular hegemony. Prior to the election, the fear of establishment newspapers, the *Daily Picayune* and the *Times-Democrat*, involved the possible return of Captain John Fitzpatrick. The former mayor held a prominent position within the Regulars, and he hoped for a return to City Hall as well as vindication for the scandals of his administration. But even before the primary, Fitzpatrick's chances dimmed. The *Daily Picayune* commented that "the [Jackson Democratic Association leaders] have recognized that their greatest hope of success lies in the probable mistake the ward leaders will make [in not naming a clean ticket]." But the newspapers observed that "latterly, the Jacksonians began to appreciate that some few of the ward leaders have been and are sincere in their determination to insist on the nomination of a clean ticket . . . and this determination has occasioned no inconsiderable amount of alarm among" the Jacksonians.<sup>16</sup>

Before the selection of the two tickets, local comment expressed amusement at the high-toned Jackson Democratic Association rhetoric. An editorial titled "They Are All on the Make" skewered the reformers' claims of purity and reminded readers that practical politics necessarily involved self-interest and the exercise of power:

One of the funny features of the [current] political campaign . . . is the rising into prominence of . . . leaders who loudly proclaim that they do not want any office

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<sup>16</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 3, 1899, 4, 10. On following days, the *Daily Picayune* continued this theme in editorials explicitly opposed to Fitzpatrick, reminding its readers of the 192 "Boodle" council. A more general condemnation of "bossism" invoked the evils of Tammany Hall. *Daily Picayune*, September 5, 1899, 4 and September 6, 1899, 4.

or any other reward, but are only working for the public good. The old ward bosses are never caught making protestations of their patriotism and disinterestedness . . . . They know by experience that no ward boss . . . can exert any influence and gather and hold any following unless he proves his ability to get office for himself and places for his . . . helpers. It will not do for politicians, no matter on which side they might be, to boast too much of their patriotism. They deserve to be distrusted. They want something.<sup>17</sup>

As the Regulars counted votes on September 8, the local newspaper interpreted the ward by ward results as either pro- or anti-Fitzpatrick. The Orleans Parish Democratic Committee apportioned to each ward in the city a number of convention votes based on the size of the ward. Ninety-six votes were available, and by the calculations of the *Daily Picayune*, the new Regular leadership would oppose Fitzpatrick's return by a margin of fifty-six to forty. The Regulars had absorbed the most ambitious remnants of the Citizens' League, but lost their most prominent leader. Fitzpatrick paid the price for the unification of the Democratic Party under the all-white banner. The balance of power shifted toward a caucus that would be more independent, less susceptible to Captain John's control. Any ambitions that Fitzpatrick had of returning to the Mayor's office died with the primary results, although he attempted to secure the gubernatorial nomination in 1900. Several of the Council of Seventeen had opposed his candidacy even prior to the primary; the addition of Ewing and Gilmore to the caucus settled the issue. When the caucus convened to choose the municipal ticket, the "old leaders" threatened a walkout on behalf of Fitzpatrick, but, as accomplished

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<sup>17</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 4, 1899, 4.

politicians, they knew that the former mayor could not carry the caucus and would damage their chances in the election. The supporters of Fitzpatrick controlled fewer votes at the convention, but represented the most powerful, and tightly controlled, wards. Ever the realists, the Fitzpatrick loyalists accepted their champion's defeat and settled for a favorable division of municipal patronage.<sup>18</sup>

The elected ward representatives of the New Orleans Regular Democrats met in convention on September 11, 1899. Selection of the Mayor was the first order of business, and the choice for mayor served as a perfect symbol for the fusion of a significant portion of the Citizens' League and new Regulars, represented by the Choctaw Club. John Brewster, the leader of the Sixth Ward, suggested a plan to divide patronage but found himself in competition with the Fifth Ward, led by the formidable Alex Pujol, for the comptroller position. To break the deadlock, the Sixth Ward leader would forego lesser offices, but suggested Paul Capdevielle, resident of the Sixth Ward, for mayor. Charles J. Theard, a prominent banker, placed his friend's name in nomination on behalf of the Sixth Ward's organization. Brewster's promotion of the Capdevielle candidacy did not come as a surprise. In July, an enthusiastic Sixth Ward gathering had endorsed Brewster for ward leader and Capdevielle for mayor. Reporters at a meeting of the Orleans Parish Levee Board, on which Capdevielle served, asked the

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<sup>18</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 9, 1899, 1, 7; September 11, 1899, 1, 2, 4; Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, 35; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 65.

potential candidate whether he would be a candidate, and he indicated a willingness to run. A letter to the *Daily Picayune* confirmed his interest; he “would not decline the honor.” Capdevielle was a Citizens’ League vice-president in 1896, but had followed many of his colleagues into the Regular ranks.<sup>19</sup>

Capdevielle was an amiable man with a history of involvement in civic and charitable causes. He was a product of a Jesuit secondary education and a law graduate of Tulane University who had given up the law for business, though his efforts did not put him the first rank of the city's commercial elite. His record as a businessman was not impressive. He acted as CEO for several companies that faced bankruptcy and others that showed poor return on investment. During the campaign the opposition used his lackluster business history as proof that the Regular mayoral candidate was ill suited to the office. Capdevielle lived on Esplanade Avenue, the downtown equivalent (in social terms) to uptown's grand boulevard, St. Charles Avenue. His brother, Armand Capdevielle, edited a French language newspaper in the city. Paul Capdevielle was a member of the Progressive Union, forerunner to the Chamber of Commerce, but his name was not found among the leaders of the city's commercial exchanges or business associations. His civic résumé was more impressive: president pro tempore of the

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<sup>19</sup> Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 532-533; *Daily Picayune*. September 12, 1899, 1, 4; July 22, 1899, 3; *Times-Democrat*, September 11, 1899, 3, 4; September 12, 1899, 1; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 532. Kendall provides an elaborate account of the maneuvering over city positions, but gives the wrong date for the convention.

Orleans Levee Board, former member of the School Board, member and chairman of the Finance Committee of the Drainage Commission, president of the Esplanade Avenue Commission, and active in the Prison Reform Association. As President of the City Park Improvement Association, Capdevielle demonstrated political dexterity and the ability to bring “divergent factions” together, playing a role between “old-line New Orleans families” and professional politicians. This would be precisely the skills needed in the Mayor’s office. He retained his interest in City Park and remained on the board until his death. Thirty-four years after the Civil War, a Confederate war record still added luster to a candidacy. Behrman's memoirs recounted Capdevielle's bravery and noted that although he had been captured by the Northern forces and paroled, he risked additional punishment by rejoining the Southern army.<sup>20</sup>

The caucus had “agreed upon a citizen of the highest character . . . in the business and social world.” A *Daily Picayune* editorial continued its praise of Capdevielle and, significantly, related the nomination to the advancement of public works in New Orleans:

The city, under the benign influences of an honest city government, has reached the point in its programs when it is about to enter on the construction of public works of the greatest importance in the way of municipal improvement and sanitation, and, in order that these works may go on to their complete and perfect level, a continuation of honest and faithful city government is necessary.

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<sup>20</sup> Mayor’s Office, *Administrations of the Mayors of New Orleans*, 208-212; Sally K. Evans Reeves and William D. Reeves, *Historic City Park New Orleans* (New Orleans: Friends of City Park, 1982), 20; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 63-64.

The Regulars recorded the selection as unanimous, although the press reported that one member of the caucus had walked out rather than accept the nominee. Rumors began to spread that the nominee was no friend of the working man, and Capdevielle quickly defended himself from the persistent charge that he had once proclaimed a dollar a day to be a sufficient wage for the city's laboring classes.<sup>21</sup>

Within another day the convention selected the rest of the ticket, and the campaign for control of New Orleans city began. With large numbers of the working class vote disfranchised, the Regulars moved toward the center of the political spectrum, attracting reform defectors along the way. Concessions to the former Citizens' League members could be seen in the nomination of Samuel Gilmore for City Attorney and George B. Penrose for Treasurer, in addition to Capdevielle at the top of the ticket.<sup>22</sup>

The Jackson Democratic Association put forth its own ticket on September 25 after balancing the demands of the several wards and the ambitions of political hopefuls. After some hesitation, the leadership nominated Walter Flower for Mayor, hoping that the voters would reward him with a second term. Flower's prior interest in the Regular nomination created some misgivings among the Jacksonians, but his residual support among the reform community remained strong. Reformers, including veterans of the

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<sup>21</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 12, 1899, 1, 4, 9. Behrman also recalled the controversy over the candidate's alleged antagonism toward the working class. See Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 63-64.

<sup>22</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 13, 1899, 1.

YMDA victory in 1888, and the more recent Citizens' League triumph of 1896, filled other positions on the ticket. Abraham Brittin, cotton broker and president of the City Council under Flower, stood for Comptroller and A.G. Ricks, merchant, ran for Treasurer; both were charter members of the Citizens' League. During the campaign, Ricks stated that the Regulars had offered him a spot on the ticket, but he felt he should stay with Flower out of loyalty to the Mayor. The leadership also nominated Councilman Sidney Story for the position of Commissioner of Police and Public Buildings. (During the Flower administration, Story had sponsored the ordinance establishing the city's red light district, thereafter nicknamed Storyville.) A few days later, the few remaining members of the Citizens' League also nominated Flower, although the League divided places for lesser offices among both Jacksonian and Regular hopefuls. The Regulars responded promptly by disavowing the nominations and refusing to be listed on the League ballot. Nominee Gilmore wrote his former colleagues suggesting that "independent political movements within the Democratic party" were dangerous.<sup>23</sup>

Press reaction to the tickets followed predictable patterns. The *Times-Democrat*, a virulently anti-Regular publication, assailed the boss-dominated Regular ticket and

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<sup>23</sup>*Daily Picayune*, September 13, 1899, 1; September 24, 1899, 3, 4; September 26, 1899, 1, 4, 7, 8; October 1, 1899, 4, 10, 11, 12; Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, 49; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 533.



reminded readers of its “Boodle” antecedents. The somewhat less partisan *Daily Picayune* opined that:

A careful comparison with the roster of the candidates on the Regular ticket develops no superiority in the ability and quality of the men put forth by the Jacksonians. In fact, there is in many cases a positive inferiority in the [Jacksonian] committee’s ticket. Comparisons of individuals show in many cases decided advantages on the side of the Regulars.

The *Daily Picayune* attitude toward the Jacksonians represented a perceived difference between the two tickets that the Regulars would exploit and the Jacksonians strive to overcome. In the late 1890s, public attitudes toward corporate power reflected a growing concern with monopoly, political corruption, and other effects upon the public. A Third Ward political club--the Fitz[patrick] Invincibles--simultaneously declared “against civil service [and] opposed to trusts and oppressive combinations.” In spite of the record of the Flower council, which generally supported public ownership, the *Daily Picayune* and the Regulars’ orators singled out Mayor Flower and Abraham Brittin as “friends of corporations” not to be trusted with the emerging public utilities in the city. The day after the Jacksonian announcements, the *Daily Picayune* condemned the actions of the Mayor and Brittin in their dealings with railroads, the Water Works Company, a “defunct and defaulting sewerage corporation,” and the Electric Light company. The paper questioned Flower’s candidacy, claiming his was “favorable to the demands of corporations, too yielding to the efforts of railroad corporations,” and willing to give away levee lands “to the permanent injury of the mercantile interests.” Ironically, the

JDA had delayed its nomination of Flower for Mayor in part because of his attendance at the convention of the League of American Municipalities. The Mayor delivered a paper to the delegates explaining the work of New Orleans in establishing the publicly-owned water, sewerage, and drainage systems.<sup>24</sup>

Both tickets addressed the press and public's concern with public works. Earlier in the year the city had approved a constitutional amendment to fund the construction of the Sewerage and Water Board and the Drainage Commission. The promise of public improvements merged with a generalized anti-corporation movement and helped define the issues for the election. The Jacksonians endorsed municipal ownership as part of their platform, but Flower was on record opposing a city-owned lighting system, generating doubt in the sincerity of his support for public utilities. Some Jacksonian ward meetings drew only limited numbers of voters, leading one supporter to complain about the lack of favorable press and to assert that his organization "was just as much opposed to trusts as the regular Democrats."<sup>25</sup>

Former Mayor John Fitzpatrick, a favorite Regular orator, constantly reminded audiences of the corporate connections of the prominent Jacksonians, and posed the primary question of the election as "are we to allow a small coterie of individuals

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<sup>24</sup> *Times-Democrat*, September 12, 1899, 4; September 13, 1899, 1, 4; September 14, 1899, 4; *Daily Picayune*, September 23, 1899, 4; September 27, 1899, 4. The Regulars' use of antimonopoly rhetoric echoes the point about language in Rogers, "In Search of Progressivism," 123, in which he describes "three languages of discontent."

<sup>25</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 2, 1899, 6.

interested directly in a certain few corporations to take unto themselves . . . the government of our city?" Fitzpatrick's rhetoric condemned the Jackson Democratic Association connection to the city's Board of Liquidation, whose members were closely allied with the New Orleans banking industry. At one rally, Fitzpatrick condemned the influence of Charles Janvier, perhaps unaware that the former Citizens' League member and prominent banker would soon join ranks with the Regulars.<sup>26</sup>

Campaign rhetoric aside, neither ticket sought to undermine what had developed in the late 1890s as a clear consensus in favor of a progressive civic development. The freely-granted franchises of post-Reconstruction New Orleans had framed the city's development, sanitation, health, and transportation. The resulting urban conditions appalled both Regular and reformer alike and led to the legislative underpinnings for drastic change adopted in the period 1896-1899. When the legislature considered the statutory prerequisites for that change, neither League nor Regular members of the legislature objected to either the substance or the structure of the new government agencies. Similarly, in the municipal election of 1899, neither ticket sought to change the direction of that change. City development and ownership of public improvements and major utility systems became a firm belief of most New Orleanians.

The strongest evidence for the existence of an underlying consensus flowed from the commonalities in the two tickets' platforms. Both proudly announced for municipal

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<sup>26</sup> *Daily Picayune*, October 1, 1899, 10

ownership and praised the recent vote in favor of establishment of the Sewerage and Water Board. Press opinions notwithstanding, the Flower administration had provided ample support for the difficult early years of large-scale public improvements. By the 1899 election, neither aspirant for mayor would move counter to overwhelming public opinion on the public improvements question. Although individual interests of various parties would cause occasional dissent, the consensus was firm.<sup>27</sup>

The campaign rhetoric escalated as election day drew near, but political conditions favored the Regulars. Voters associated the successful Constitutional Convention with Regular leadership, the reform organization neglected grass roots canvassing and considered itself above patronage, and wholesale defections of businessmen and other reformers softened the public view of the Choctaw Club. Capdevielle triumphed easily, polling 19,559 to Flower's 12,998. The regular ticket swept the municipal and parochial offices as well. Walter Flower left politics and retired to his country home. Shortly thereafter, he suffered a recurrence of tuberculosis and died October 11, 1900. His family declined a City Hall funeral. Although the *Daily Picayune* had not supported him in the recent election, the paper praised his devotion to the cause of clean water and other public works projects for the city.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 56, quoting both the post-election admissions of the *Daily Picayune*, November 9, 1899, and Norman Walker, "An Attempt at Municipal Reform," *Harper's Weekly*, 40 (August 29, 1896): 854.

<sup>28</sup> *Daily Picayune*, October 2, 1900, 1.

Three elements shaped the politics of the new century: a new electorate, constructed by disfranchisement and immigration, the resurgence of the Regulars after the 1896 defeat, and a non-partisan consensus on the importance of progressive civic development, seen most clearly in the movement for municipal control of utilities. Paul Capdevielle was the first beneficiary of these trends, and his four years in office solidified the hold of the Regular Democrats on New Orleans government. His victory symbolized the transition of the city across the turn of the century and into the modern world. His style of governance and support of civic development prepared the city for an activist successor more firmly committed to the power of the Democratic organization, but equally committed to a new concept of municipal progress and the role of the mayor in city government.

The victory of the Regulars vindicated their policy of flexibility, but also reflected the rewards of their persistence. George Washington Plunkitt, political sage of Tammany Hall, characterized the reformers as “morning glories [who] looked lovely in the mornin’ and withered up in a short time, while the regular machines went on flourishin’.” In New Orleans, the “morning glories” had faded once again. If the progressive policies of the reformers were to survive, it would now be the work of machine politicians.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> William L. Riordan, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* (New York: Bedford Books, 1994), 57.

## CHAPTER IV

### PAUL CAPDEVIELLE: THE MAYORALTY IN TRANSITION

Paul Capdevielle entered the New Orleans mayor's office via a curious political route. As a leader in civic, not political affairs, he gravitated toward the Citizens' League, and when the reform group organized as a permanent group in 1896, he became its vice-president. He declined to run in the 1896 election and thus became an ideal official for a political group whose leadership felt honor-bound not to seek office for itself. When the changing electorate, altered by disfranchisement, encouraged a convergence of political interests between the defectors from the Citizens' League and the Regular Democrats, Capdevielle found himself in a serendipitous situation. His selection as the Regulars' candidate for mayor provided the reformers with an excuse to come home to Regular Democracy, while providing the machine politicians with a ceremonial leader, if not figurehead, to polish its credentials on honesty and business-oriented issues. Capdevielle also bore an pronounced resemblance to financier J. P. Morgan.

Capdevielle served as a transitional figure in several ways. He represented the change from the nineteenth to the twentieth century political style. He eased the way for a more loyal machine advocate to convince the business community that Regular Democracy and business interests coincided on most material issues. And the new

mayor helped prepare the city government for a more activist mayor in matters of public administration and public interest. At the national level of politics, the country witnessed an abrupt transition from William McKinley to Theodore Roosevelt during the same years, hastened, of course, by the assassination of the Republican President. Though the city's transition was without violence, it was no less dramatic. By the end of Capdevielle's term in office, his staid performance helped lead to a new mayor and a new energy. To describe Capdevielle as transitional and as a man of the nineteenth century is not to disparage his service to the city. His record reflected the courtly honor of his attitude toward service and the responsibility of his position. Capdevielle accepted the duties of the mayoralty with gravity, if not cheerfulness.<sup>1</sup>

The mayoralty of Paul Capdevielle also played a crucial part in the effectiveness of the consensus for progressive civic development. Capdevielle was the candidate of the Choctaw Club, but, as a former officer in the Citizens' League, reassured the business community and commercial elite. Capdevielle favored municipal ownership, but appreciated the complexities inherent in government takeover of utilities. Had the Regulars chosen a more traditional machine candidate, political tensions between the reform and Regular factions might have prevented progress toward civic development.

Capdevielle took office in May, 1900, succeeding Walter C. Flower. Within two months he endured the most serious crisis of his term, the mayhem occasioned by the actions of Robert Charles and the subsequent race riots. Charles was a rural-born

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<sup>1</sup> Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 532; *Administrations of the Mayor of New Orleans, 1803-1936*, 208-212.

black from Mississippi who had come to New Orleans, perhaps to escape trouble arising from an incident in Jackson. In late July, 1900, he wounded a policeman in a minor confrontation, but then shot and killed two other policemen who tried to arrest him for the original incident. He then eluded capture for several days, creating a crisis atmosphere in the city. Fear and racial hatred combined into generalized riots against blacks throughout the city.<sup>2</sup>

At the time of the initial murders and riots, Mayor Capdevielle was absent from the city. The Mayor enjoyed a second home in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, about sixty miles from New Orleans. He used the residence as a frequent retreat, but also as a place to convalesce after several illnesses which he suffered during his term in office. Newspaper reports offered the latter explanation for the Mayor's absence, although he was well enough to return to the city immediately after hearing the news of the racial troubles. In his absence, Acting Mayor William Mehle, in an attempt to reduce violence, issued a proclamation asking "persons not to assemble and discuss events," but deaths and injuries from white mobs continued. Within a day of the police deaths, three blacks had been killed and over fifty beaten, some seriously. Regarding one victim of mob violence, the *Daily Picayune* reported that "nobody tried to identify the poor fellow and his name is unknown." The paper recommended better training for

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<sup>2</sup> William Ivy Hair, *Carnival of Fury; Robert Charles and the New Orleans Race Riot of 1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976) provides the most complete account of Charles's background and the riots. Extensive coverage appeared in all local papers, July 26 to August 1, 1900. See also Parkash Kaur Bains, "The New Orleans Race Riot of 1900" (M.A. thesis: Louisiana State University in New Orleans, 1970).



police so they might shoot better and not leave the community dependent upon “the Negro [being] hunted by boys.” At the funeral for a murdered policemen, the officiating Catholic priest, Father Coughlin of St. Michael’s, used the occasion to denounce opponents to capital punishment. In an attempt to promote peacefulness, Former Mayor Fitzpatrick addressed a mob, called for calm, and asked the assembled group to return home.<sup>3</sup>

Capdevielle’s return on July 26 brought decisive action. Arriving at 9:00 A.M., the Mayor announced that “I am here to stay until I have the situation met and conquered.” He issued declarations to close all saloons in the city, arrest rioters, and hold lawbreakers without parole. Capdevielle’s order to the superintendent of police was unequivocal: “You are hereby commanded to immediately cause to be arrested the persons who participated in the unlawful disturbances which occurred in the city last night.” He issued a call for a force of five hundred special officers and requested that the governor assemble the state militia. To equip the special force, he directed a local hardware supplier “to please deliver . . . 500 revolvers along with ammunition,” and added the instructions to “please charge to the account of the City of New Orleans.” When a call for transportation did not produce the required vehicles on a voluntary basis, he “impressed” what he needed from livery companies. The city’s street railways offered their services as well. The response to his call for volunteers exceeded the

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<sup>3</sup> Hair, *Carnival of Fury*, 146; Dale A. Somers, “Black and White in New Orleans: A Study in Urban Race Relations, 1865-1900.” *Journal of Southern History*, XL (February, 1974): 42; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 539; *Daily Picayune*, July 26, 1900, 1.

Mayor's initial request; the special force grew to over fifteen hundred, and order slowly returned to the city. On the next day, the Mayor added another proclamation asking citizens to obey the law and remain in their homes. Concerned that liquor had added to the unlawful behavior, he directed that if any barkeepers refused to obey the order to close bar rooms, the police were to put them under arrest.<sup>4</sup>

An informant revealed the hiding place of Robert Charles, and police, joined by an unsafe number of supporters and onlookers, quickly surrounded the residence. A fire drove him out of hiding to his death at the hands of the volunteers, but not before Charles shot and killed several other policemen and civilians. Blacks in the neighborhood came under suspicion of harboring the fugitive, and at least one was killed. Police arrested the occupants of the house where Charles had taken refuge on suspicion of complicity, but after some threats to their safety, the authorities gained control of the situation. Capdevielle issued another proclamation, removing restrictions on the population and thanking the militia for its assistance. Under the Mayor's picture in the *Daily Picayune* read the caption "to whose prompt and courageous action the speedy restoration of order was due." Praise for the Mayor continued in the city council, which passed a resolution thanking him for his management of the crisis. A discussion of the food bills for feeding the special officers led one council member--a hotel owner--

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<sup>4</sup> Letter to D. S. Gaster, Superintendent of Police, July 26, 1900, Mayor's Correspondence; Two Proclamations from Mayor Capdevielle, July 26, 1900, Mayor's Correspondence; Letter to A. Baldwin & Co., July 26, 1900 Mayor's Correspondence; Letter to Colonel Wood, Commander of Special Force, July 26, 1900, Mayor's Correspondence; Letter to American Express Company, July 26, 1900, Mayor's Correspondence; Proclamation from Mayor Capdevielle, July 27, 1900, Mayor's Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, July 27, 1900, 1; Hair, *Carnival of Fury*, 154-155.

to donate the food he had provided and offer an additional \$25.00 toward the effort. Several days later, Capdevielle appeared at a benefit concert and received a standing ovation. The city collected a fund for the widows and orphans of the slain policemen. The Mayor personally thanked prominent contributors and convened a committee to distribute the proceeds.<sup>5</sup>

Less edifying results also followed the resolution of the violence. Two police commissioners resigned over the performance of the force. One of the police officers present at the original attempt to arrest Charles was tried for cowardice, convicted, and removed from the force. Several other policemen were punished for various deficiencies in conduct during the course of the riots and the search. The city prosecuted eight bar owners who, in defiance of the Mayor's proclamation ordering them to close, remained in business during the riots. To provide a legal basis for the Mayor's actions should a similar situation develop, the city council passed an ordinance providing the Mayor the authority to close the city's saloons in case of riot or other civil disturbance. Claims for damages resulting from the riots included one store owner's lawsuit for \$4,404.25. The district assessor derided the claim and reported that the assessment of the store's goods only six months before "was sworn [by the store owner] to be \$500." And the owner of the hardware store which loaned weapons to the special

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<sup>5</sup> Letter to Charles Janvier, August 3, 1900, Mayor's Correspondence; Letter to Charles F. Claiborne, August 3, 1900, Mayor's Correspondence; Letter to Robert M. Walmsley, September 18, 1900, Mayor's Correspondence; Letter to John M. Parker, September 18, 1900, Mayor's Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, July 30-31, 1900; August 1, 1900, 1; August 12, 1900, 1; Hair, *Carnival of Fury*, 156-200; Bains, "The New Orleans Race Riot of 1900," 33-45. The black man who informed police of the hideout location was subsequently murdered.

police complained that a number of weapons had not been returned by the volunteers. The city paid for the firearms and for the ammunition provided as well. Eager to distance themselves from Charles, a group of Tenth Ward blacks offered “support to suppress lawlessness among our people.” The city’s press, already sensitive to regional differences on the matter of race, highlighted race troubles in the North and made explicit comparisons with the Charles riots. The *Daily Picayune* focused on New York’s race disturbances in its August 17, 1900 issue. The following day, the headlines read “The North Has a Black Problem As Well As the South.”<sup>6</sup>

In August of 1900, with the memories of the Charles riots receding, the city council turned to other matters. A new Civil Service Commission took office, replacing the one created by the Citizens’ League under the 1896 revision of the city charter. The Choctaws did not attempt to dismantle Civil Service in its entirety. The new commission resulted from legislation introduced by the Regulars in 1900, designed both to weaken the 1896 reform legislation and to correct its defects. Act 89 of the legislative session of 1900 was the result. Like other developments under Capdevielle, the new commission combined reform and machine characteristics. City officials--the mayor, the comptroller, and the treasurer--served on the commission, preserving direct representation and, presumably, political influence. Two citizen members, nominated by the mayor and subject to council approval, completed the commission’s membership. Capdevielle chose two non-political businessmen: one was an elderly Civil War veteran

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<sup>6</sup> Bains, “The New Orleans Race Riot of 1900,” 42, 44-45; *Daily Picayune*, July 31, 1900, 3; August 1, 1900, 3; August 2, 1900; August 17, 1900, 4.

and president of the Red Cross society; the other a real estate agent, manufacturer's representative, and bicycling enthusiast. Capdevielle did not belong to the Choctaw Council of Seventeen, though he was a member of the Club. The ward leaders may have advised the Mayor on appointments, but evidence does not suggest that he blindly followed that direction. Capdevielle's former Citizens' League colleague Charles Fenner filed suit against the new commission, but the legal challenge failed.<sup>7</sup>

Capdevielle demonstrated a measure of independence from Democratic powers in his politics. He defended the choice of W. B. Sommerville for a judicial vacancy even in the face of objections from State Democratic Chairman E. B. Kruttschnitt that the candidate "was not a good enough Democrat." Sommerville was a former Citizens' League member, who had served Mayor Flower as assistant city attorney. He ran for District Attorney in 1899 on the Jackson Democratic Association ticket. Perhaps worse, at least in the opinion of Kruttschnitt, he admitted voting for President McKinley. A letter by a number of prominent former Citizens' League members, including Charles Janvier and Samuel Gilmore, supported Sommerville, and the Council of Seventeen eventually endorsed the nomination with only one dissent. The episode indicated that Capdevielle would not be content as a figurehead, and that the combination of former League members and the Regulars was not yet stable. The *Daily Picayune* observer "Mr. McDonogh" commented:

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<sup>7</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 14, 1900, 6; August 21, 1900, 4; Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 58-60; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 536. Mayoral appointee Harry Hodgson served only three months and resigned in November, 1900. His replacement was not prominent in political activities. See Capdevielle to Harry Hodgson, November 10, 1900, Mayor's Correspondence.

The power in the regular party was as good as sworn to the mayor and his policy . . . for bringing the regular Democratic party to such a standard that the representative men of business and the professions would attach to it. . . . That is saying a happy thing for the mayor. It has been told [to] me that the regulars have found the man they have sought for so long. The mayor has the respect of the entire community. . . . He is calm, deliberative, determined, fearless and will dare assert himself when right.<sup>8</sup>

The Mayor asserted himself on other occasions as well. The increased traffic along the city's main thoroughfare, Canal Street, and its deplorable condition led to a plan for redesign and paving. Several street railroads enjoyed franchises along the street and could not agree on responsibility for the improvements. The redesign would also necessitate the removal of the Henry Clay statue at Canal and St. Charles, a traditional meeting place utilized by generations of New Orleanians and equivalent to Lee Circle and Liberty Place in their hearts. But the Mayor pushed forward at a meeting of street railroad managers. "Gentlemen, as mayor of this city I represent 300,000 people," the Mayor said, "and I do not propose to allow this matter to drag any further. This ordinance will be introduced in the council at the next meeting. It will be passed and go into effect. That is my decision." The meeting with the managers took place on Friday, August 24, 1900. By that afternoon the Mayor had once more left the city for his Bay St. Louis home where he would remain for the weekend. The council fought over a new location for the Clay statue, eventually moving it to Lafayette Square in front of City Hall. In order to pay the cost of the relocation, the Mayor informally assessed each street railroad company. The Mayor's secretary informed Robert Walmsley, prominent

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<sup>8</sup> Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, Appendices I and II; *Daily Picayune*, August 19, 1900, 4. Choctaw club records list Sommerville as a member by 1902.

banker and president of the New Orleans City Railroad company, that “\$300 has been fixed as your company’s proportion of the amount needed” to beautify the statue in its new location.

The Mayor was wrong in his estimate of the New Orleans population; that same weekend the 1900 census count put the figure at 287,104, a gain of approximately 45,000 over the 1890 population. The city remained the largest in the South; only New Orleans, Louisville (204,731), and Memphis (102,320) exceeded 100,000 among southern cities. In spite of the comparative advantage, the new figures distressed some observers; though the city had grown over eighteen percent, the rate of increase trailed other fast-growing cities of the nation and of the South. The *Daily Picayune* bemoaned the lack of manufacturing base and called for a Lake Borgne canal to connect interior waterways with the Gulf of Mexico, shipyards, maintenance of a forty-foot river depth, and “possibly a river crossing” to accelerate the city’s growth.<sup>9</sup>

City development, prosperity, and New Orleans’s reputation in the nation were constant concerns of the Mayor and the city’s commercial and civic establishments. The epidemics of the 1890s had damaged that reputation, but the new public works promised to improve the situation. Real estate businessmen predicted an increase in property values, and in its annual commercial review, the *Daily Picayune* proudly proclaimed “New Orleans is the Healthiest City.” The paper reported municipal mortality rates and

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<sup>9</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 25, 1900, 3; August 26, 1900, 1. August 30, 1900, 3; September 2, 1900, 4. Capdevielle to Robert Walmsley, November 20, 1900, Mayor’s Correspondence; *Twelfth Census of the United States*, Part I (Washington, D.C., 1901), lxix-lxx, quoted in Grantham, *Southern Progressivism*, Table 11, 277.

found “the true white mortality . . . is unquestionably low and compares favorably with most cities of the world.” The rate among the city’s blacks was much higher, but the Board of Health released figures for each race to highlight the differential. The issue of health arose again the following month. The *Shreveport Times* defended New Orleans from “the attitudes of other cities.” The *Daily Picayune* saw the issue in terms of economic competition. “The *Times* is quite correct in stating that false reports have been circulated about the health of New Orleans by commercial rivals . . . and such reports have been put forth for commercial purposes without any foundation.” The Louisiana Board of Health mortality rates for whites per 1000 were 18.4 in July, 14.05 in August, and 16.57 in September, “on a plane with the most favored cities in the union.”<sup>10</sup>

An important role for the Mayor involved the promotion of the city’s economy and, particularly, the convention business. The New Orleans Progressive Union organized local businessmen to promote the city and to attract conventions that would generate visitors and their expenditures. In this effort, the Progressive Union received the assistance of the city’s commercial exchanges and the city administration. Immediately after taking office, the Mayor had agreed to serve on a committee that welcomed Professor Emory Johnson, Chairman of the Committee on Industrial and Commercial Value of an Inter-Oceanic Canal. This was only one of numerous efforts involving the personal intervention of the Mayor. The Progressive Union succeeded in attracting the Southern Industrial Convention to the city in 1900 and began raising funds

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<sup>10</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 1, 1900; October 17, 1900, 4.



to entertain the attendees. Voluntary groups such as the Progressive Union depended upon contributions from their members. Hospitality funds and the costs of temporary construction projects for convention visitors required fund raising drives led by the exchanges or local newspapers. The Progressive Union, for example, suffered from financial problems due to an unsuccessful trade fair in 1899 that led to operating deficits. The organization resorted to the raffle of a horse to raise funds. Even the Mayor was solicited to sell tickets. At the end of the year, the Progressive Union, with only \$100 on hand, dissolved its Board of Directors and reorganized as a more broadly-based association. The city's eagerness to promote the convention business did not extend to direct municipal subsidies to voluntary associations.<sup>11</sup>

The Mayor also faced questions regarding municipal ownership of utilities early in his term. Although the legislature had acted to establish the Dock Board and the Sewerage and Water Board, the city faced decisions over how quickly to pursue implementation of the public system. In an effort to replace the private water company with the new public body, for example, the city filed suit claiming the franchise was null and void because of gross violations of the private company's franchise agreement. Though the city would eventually prevail, the initial decision went against the public argument, leaving New Orleans "at the mercy of the monopoly." The *Daily Picayune*, a

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<sup>11</sup> Letter to Udolpho Wolfe, President, Board of Trade, May 15, 1900, Mayor's Correspondence; Letter from Progressive Union to Mayor Paul Capdevielle, Mayor's Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, September 7, 1900, 3; November 9, 1900, 3. As of early September, 1900, the winner had not yet claimed his prize in the horse raffle. An attorney advised the group to sell the horse and hold the proceeds in escrow for six months.

staunch advocate of public ownership, published a bitter editorial after the setback in the water case. “About the only satisfaction that the city and its people have gained from a judicial examination of their relations with private companies is that they incur extreme risks of suffering irremediable evils when they delegate their municipal powers, franchises and privileges to private corporations.” Electric utilities were on the city’s agenda as well. Early franchisees found it difficult to make money and petitioned the city to transfer rights to other companies. The Merchants Electric Light and Power Company sought to combine with another electric power company for advantages of scale. The city council debated the merits of competition versus the protection of the investors. Although fear of corporate combinations was widespread, the council agreed to allow the merger. In the midst of the discussion, the issue of municipal ownership of the electric franchise arose and would come before Capdevielle and the council again.<sup>12</sup>

In November of 1900, the national election received the attention of the New Orleans political establishment, although there were no local races in serious contention. Conservative Democrats preferred other candidates, but went along with the party’s choice of William Jennings Bryan. As the election approached, the national debate turned briefly to consideration of disfranchisement, and Republicans suggested a reduction in the number of representatives allocated to the South. Local press reaction was swift. “Those young men who think [Republicans are different now] are simply shutting their eyes to the present conditions. It is the same old party stripped of the

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<sup>12</sup> *Daily Picayune*, October 20, 1900, Section I, 4 and Section II, 1. See Chapter VI for an investigation of the early years of the Sewerage and Water Board.

arbitrary power it once exercised, the *Daily Picayune* warned. “The Republican Party was the one which put black heels on white necks in the southern states.” When McKinley won easily, the *Daily Picayune* petulantly declared that “the people of the United States have unmistakably declared for McKinley and Roosevelt. This means that they are in favor of trusts; they want a large standing army; they believe in the conquest and annexation of foreign countries.” Not all New Orleanians shared the newspaper’s view. At Thanksgiving, 1900, J. C. Murphy, president of the Louisiana Sugar and Rice Exchange, gave thanks to the “American people for sending Mr. Bryan to the ‘scrap pile’” as well as “for a splendid grinding season.” He added a compliment to the Mayor “for his admirable handling of the ‘Charles’ incident.”<sup>13</sup>

The Mayor’s City Hall colleagues honored him in early November, the first anniversary of his election victory. City Attorney Samuel Gilmore gave a florid speech praising Capdevielle’s leadership, and the press echoed his judgements. The memory of the Charles riots continued to affect journalistic assessments of the Mayor. “Many who knew him but slightly mistook his personal courtesy for weakness and his modesty for timidity,” wrote the *Daily Picayune*, “but in less than a year his great courage and calmness [and] his self possession and resourcefulness in a great emergency . . . have stamped Mayor Capdevielle [as] one of the greatest mayors New Orleans every had.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Daily Picayune*, November 2, 1900, 4; November 7, 1900, 4; November 29, 1900, 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Daily Picayune*, November 8, 1900, 4. The *Daily Picayune* remained a supporter of the Mayor, but in the next three years did not offer any assessment of the Mayor which put him in the first rank of New Orleans mayors.

The enthusiasm of the new century and the constant emphasis on commercial improvement set the stage for the Southern Industrial Conference in the city. Delegates heard Capdevielle's welcome to New Orleans as well as promotions for a Nicaraguan Canal. In early 1901, James S. Zacherie, "the progressive and public-spirited councilman," put forth a vision of the city reaching northward to the lake, with grand boulevards and municipal ownership of electricity and water. At the Progressive Union's annual meeting, President Andrew Blakely, proprietor of the St. Charles Hotel, predicted that "New Orleans would be the country's second city before another decade will have passed." Businessman and recent Choctaw convert Charles Janvier echoed the remarks two weeks later, though he allowed more time for the city's expansion. "By 2001," Janvier wrote, "New Orleans will have 2,000,000 people, second only to New York."<sup>15</sup>

The New Year also brought renewed discussion regarding the public's role in the provision of utilities. Mayor Capdevielle had run on a platform of municipal ownership, though the city's resources would not support absorption of all utilities. Encouraged by the Board of Trade, the lessees of markets in the city reached a compromise with the city government, and public markets became another function of the municipal government. The status of electrical service, however, posed a more difficult problem. The city's debt load was already large. Out of twenty-two mills property tax, ten mills supported debt service, and that proportion of operating to capital funds would increase as

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<sup>15</sup> *Daily Picayune*, December 5, 1900, 2; January 2, 1901, 3; January 14, 1901, 3; January 26, 1901, Section II, 1.

construction started on the new sewerage, water, and drainage systems. Purchase of existing franchises and capital assets would require yet more borrowing. Capdevielle also seemed reluctant for the city to absorb electric service because electric franchises were intertwined with electric street railroad service, the business base of more than a few prominent citizens, including Board of Liquidation President Robert Walmsley and Dock Board President Hugh McCloskey.<sup>16</sup>

A middle path, however, was possible. The city's plans for a modern drainage system anticipated the construction of an electric generating station to provide power to the various drainage pumping stations. Since the capacity of the generating plant would exceed the requirements of the pumping stations, which would be in use intermittently depending on rainfall rate and amount, members of the council proposed to build the generating station with sufficient capacity to provide not only for drainage, but also for street lights and other municipal purposes. But this plan placed the city's Drainage Commission in the middle of the issue. Frequent problems with city drainage had hurt the credibility of the commission, and the prospect of it absorbing another major function discouraged implementation of the plan. Although the *Daily Picayune* continually pressed for municipal ownership, the city's other morning newspaper, the *Times-Democrat*, opposed it, clearly doubting the ability of the Regular-led administration to manage electric power successfully. The paper also feared expansion

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<sup>16</sup> *Daily Picayune*, January 13, 1901, Section I, 4; January 16, 1901, 3; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 537.

of the Regular patronage base and constantly demanded investigation of the payrolls in city departments.<sup>17</sup>

At the end of March, 1901, the *Daily Picayune* reported on a lecture by Mayor Capdevielle at Tulane University in which he took the position that “modern progress and the advancement of public interests in cities demand municipal ownership and operation of public utilities.” The newspaper noted the Mayor’s speech and answered anticipated objections concerning graft in public ownership by turning the argument on its head. “Graft [was] easier to hide when in private hands.” The *Daily Picayune* saw the danger in the awarding of franchises, a process wherein “bosses derive power from arrangements with private owners.” Quoting from a contemporary article in the *Atlantic* magazine, the newspaper noted that given the protection of a civil service system, public ownership would be administered by non-political managers to the benefit of the public interest. The newspaper also attempted to delineate services subject to public ownership--police, fire, sewer, drainage, parks, and street lighting--from other services that would remain private--street railroads, gas, telephones, and electric power. There was no such distinction in Europe, where “public ownership had prospered . [But] whether or not [complete ownership] will be the answer in the cities of the American republic remains to be seen.” Crucial to the management of public utilities were “non-

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<sup>17</sup> *Daily Picayune*, March 13, 1901, 4; April 12, 1901, 3. See Chapter VI for a discussion of the city’s difficulties with drainage. Although characterization of the editorial positions of the two newspapers can be hazardous, it is clear that the *Daily Picayune* more closely followed national developments and attitudes towards municipal ownership. The *Times-Democrat* was reflexively, if not bitterly, anti-Regular in its politics and a more likely defender of private enterprise in almost all circumstances.

political boards for the non-political public business,” an important feature of the progressive era theory of governance. The *Daily Picayune* reflected the ambivalent feelings of the city’s leadership. The emerging consensus for progressive civic development easily covered the basic utilities--sewer service, water, and drainage. However, New Orleans was not a wealthy city, and its needs were great. The anticipated financial burden of a takeover of the electric services, street lighting, and streetcar transportation caused even enthusiastic supporters of public ownership to reconsider.<sup>18</sup>

Not all municipal developments carried so much weight. During the spring months, Mayor Capdevielle and the city council fought over the efficacy of an anti-spitting ordinance, vetoed by the Mayor but passed over his objections, in part at the urging of various women’s organizations. On a more pleasant note, the city prepared for the visit of President McKinley, the first sitting chief executive to visit New Orleans. The President’s agenda included a parade, an elaborate reception, and a tour of the port to impress the visitor and his party with the importance of the city in national and international trade. School children enjoyed a holiday and enthusiastic crowds greeted the Republican chief executive.<sup>19</sup>

During late spring, 1901, the press of business kept the Mayor busy. He declined an invitation to attend the National Municipal League annual convention and held

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<sup>18</sup> *Daily Picayune*, March 28, 1901, 4; March 29, 1901, 4; May 14, 1901, 4.

<sup>19</sup> *Daily Picayune*, April 10, 1901, 3; April 17, 1901, 4; April 13, 1901, 8; April 29 - May 4, 1901; Capdevielle to McKinley Reception Committee, April 24, 1901, Mayor’s Correspondence; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 538.

extensive talks with the managers of the street railroads to complete plans for a redesigned Canal Street. City council members requested a meeting to discuss the Public Belt Railroad, a project neglected during the previous year. And the anticipated arrival in the city of a large Navy dry dock facility brought forth another round of committees, fund raising, and planning. In early June, Capdevielle “was on the sick list . . . exhausted from meetings.” In the middle of the month, he wrote former councilman Sidney Story and declined an opportunity to head the city’s delegation to the Trans Mississippi Commission Congress. The following month, the Mayor’s secretary requested the rescheduling of a Drainage Commission meeting so the Mayor “can leave for his home over the lake the same evening.” For much of the summer, the Mayor spent time in Bay St. Louis, and in early August, he left for Montreal “for reasons of health.” In his absence, council president William Mehle served as Acting Mayor.<sup>20</sup>

During the Mayor’s absence, Commissioner Moulin of Public Works admitted to a scheme with Louis Knop, a Regular ward leader. In exchange for the organization’s support, Moulin had agreed to a detailed procedure (for some reason committed to writing) for sharing his salary or obtaining a position for Knop equal to one-half of the Commissioner’s salary. When informed of the scandal, Mayor Capdevielle directed Mehle to suspend Moulin and the grand jury began an investigation. After hearings, the

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<sup>20</sup> Capdevielle to National Municipal League, April 30, 1901, Mayor’s Correspondence; Capdevielle to Robert Walmsley, May 4, 1901, Mayor’s Correspondence; Capdevielle to Hugh McCloskey, Dock Board President, June 7, 1901, Mayor’s Correspondence; Members, New Orleans City Council to Mayor Capdevielle, June 7, 1901, Mayor’s Correspondence; Capdevielle to Sidney Story, June 16, 1901, Mayor’s Correspondence; Capdevielle to Robert Walmsley, President Drainage Board, July 10, 1901, Mayor’s Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, June 6, 1901, 3.



council recommended Moulin be fired, but a technical deficiency in the state law under which he was charged saved his position. In another scandal, city councilman P. J. McMahan informed the Mayor of a bribery scheme involving council members. The Mayor assumed the scheme involved the current city council. Pressed for an explanation, McMahan admitted the matter involved a prior administration, but would reveal no more. The council required him to apologize and, when he refused, expelled him. A subsequent court decision reinstated McMahan to the council in May, 1902.<sup>21</sup>

Returning to the issue of public utilities, the council assigned the issue of municipal lighting to its Lighting Committee and requested that the group study a city engineer's report recommending municipal ownership. The committee did not act promptly, generating a stern *Daily Picayune* editorial reminding the council that the current franchise for city lighting would expire December 31, 1902. If the city were to take over the franchise, immediate action would be required. Dogged by the newspaper, the committee asked the Sewerage and Water Board engineer for assistance. By early October, the pace of action picked up and the committee held hearings on the possible assumption of lighting responsibilities by the city. The threat of city action affected the current franchisee. Representatives of the private company appeared at the hearing and promised to offer new rates that were "very much lower." A letter from the company claimed "it has yet to be demonstrated that municipal ownership [of] electric lighting

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<sup>21</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 16, 1901, 3; August 30, 1901, 7; September 13, 1901, 3; October 9, 1901; October 11, 1901, 6; October 12, 1901, 3; October 15, 1901, 4-5; October 25, 1901, 3; October 27, 1901, 10; November 6, 1901, 3; November 9, 1901; April 15, 1902, 10; April 26, 1902, 3; Capdevielle to City Council, October 15, 1901, Mayor's Correspondence.

has been much of a success.” The letter continued, “Every large city . . . has investigated [such ownership, and] only two or three have constructed their own plants.” In spite of the company’s opposition, the Mayor asked the council to continue its investigations. Although City Attorney Gilmore reminded council members that “municipal ownership was the platform on which the present administration was elected,” members remained reluctant to take the expensive steps required toward complete public ownership. Uncertain about a firm course of action, the council approved specifications for a municipal plant, but also advertised for bids from companies to provide lighting. The threat of municipal power forced the franchisee to offer the city increasingly better rates, and the council settled for that victory. Lighting remained in private hands.<sup>22</sup>

A measure of the city’s progress was provided by former resident of New Orleans, who returned for a visit in February, 1902, and gave an interview to the *Daily Picayune*. St. B. McConnico praised the city for the “new spirit” and “advances” he noticed, including new Illinois Central tracks, the Sewerage and Water Board, advances in drainage, and the reorganization of the Progressive Union, the city’s predecessor to the Chamber of Commerce. His mention of the Progressive Union coincided with a new effort to revitalize that voluntary organization. To assist the effort, the *Daily Picayune* announced it would annually donate a loving cup for the Progressive Union to award to a New Orleans resident. The first award went to Frank T. Howard, who

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<sup>22</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 11, 1901, Section II, 1; September 26, 1901, 4; October 4, 1901, 3; October 10, 1901, 7; October 11, 1901, 3; November 11, 1901, 3.

merited the cup for his donation of an elementary school to the children at the northern edge of the Third Ward. Subsequent awards provided a important indication of the charitable and civic work valued by the community.<sup>23</sup>

Capdevielle continued to face numerous issues of public ownership and operation. To acquire the assets of the private sewerage company, now out of business, the Sewerage and Water Board offered \$295,000. The proposed amount included forgiveness of back taxes and required the approval of the city council. The council did not move rapidly on the proposal and became reluctant to agree after testimony that questioned the quality of the company's pipes. Controversy grew after an editorial in the *Daily States* severely criticized the council. Outraged members forced Capdevielle to convene a special session at which a resolution condemning Robert Ewing, manager of the *Daily-States*, passed easily. Council anger was undoubtedly increased by the fact that the *Daily-States* held the official printing contract for the city. Ewing was a ward leader and member of the Choctaw club, but exhibited a high degree of independence and feistiness. Not content with a council resolution, members prevailed upon the grand jury, which issued indictments for libel against Ewing. Nothing came of the libel charges, and additional litigation opposing the sewer settlement delayed further action for months.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Daily Picayune*, February 14, 1902, 3; March 13, 1902.

<sup>24</sup> *Daily Picayune*, February 15, 1902, 3, 4; March 12, 1902, 15; March 15, 1902, 9; March 18, 1902, 4, 10; March 21, 1902, 3; March 25, 1902, 3; April 4, 1902, 7; City Council to Capdevielle, March 20, 1902, Mayor's Correspondence.

The Louisiana legislature met in regular session during 1902, and the city had an interest in several crucial pieces of legislation. At the request of the Drainage Commission, the legislature passed a bill to merge the commission with the Sewerage and Water Board. Of greater interest in the political realm, the legislature changed the city's election from November, 1903, to the following year. Capdevielle and his administration would serve an extra six months. In addition, the legislation altered the charter of the city by increasing the membership of the council and by making elective previously appointed positions in the administration, such as city engineer. The governor would not have proposed such changes in the absence of agreement from the city's ward leaders. At a conference on May 19, 1902, the Regular leadership agreed to the changes and, at the same time, assured the governor the New Orleans delegation would not oppose a movement to repeal the poll tax.<sup>25</sup>

In May, 1902, the Mayor became ill once more. A severe abscess required hospitalization and surgery. Although public information assured citizens that the Mayor would recover, the *Daily Picayune* openly commented on the issue of succession should Capdevielle not survive the ordeal. The legislature was still in session, and members quickly introduced a vacancy and succession bill. The Mayor's recovery made the issue moot, but Capdevielle did not regain full strength for several months. He retreated to his Bay St. Louis residence, and William Mehle served as Acting Mayor once again, though Capdevielle kept up correspondence through his secretary. From

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<sup>25</sup> *Daily Picayune*, May 17, 1902, 9; May 20, 1902, 9; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 542-543. See Chapter VI for details on the merger bill. The legislature did not repeal the poll tax.

Mississippi, the Mayor accepted the presidency of a new city group dedicated to building an auditorium that would serve the growing convention business. Capdevielle appointed a committee to assist him in the auditorium effort and later announced a replacement for the membership of a committee appointed to find a site for a new federal post office in the city. In late July, the city council journeyed to the Mayor's home to receive his policy recommendations. The next day, the Mayor felt well enough to journey halfway to New Orleans from his Mississippi home, where he was met by a messenger from the city with important papers for his signature.<sup>26</sup>

The Mayor returned to New Orleans in mid-August to sign bonds, but remained on a limited schedule. He left town intermittently in early September, but returned full time by September 18 because Acting Mayor Mehle departed on an extended vacation. Events tested his health once again when a strike of street car workers shut down the city's transportation system for several weeks. The contending parties rejected offers of mediation from the Progressive Union. Capdevielle ordered the street railroads to operate, but violent demonstrations prevented even token service. Only intervention by the governor brought the two sides together. Within one week of announcing the settlement, Capdevielle left New Orleans "to rest and recuperate" in part from the stress associated with the "Carmen strike." On November 4, 1902, the *Daily Picayune* reported that William Mehle returned from his vacation, resumed Acting Mayor status,

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<sup>26</sup> *Daily Picayune*, May 29, 1902, 10; May 30, 1902, 4; May 31, 1902, 13; July 6, 1902, 3; July 28, 1902, 7; July 29, 1902, 6; Acting Mayor William Mehle to the City Council, July 1, 1902, Mayor's Correspondence; Capdevielle's secretary to Bernard McCloskey, July 14, 1902, Mayor's Correspondence; Capdevielle to James Porch, July 30, 1902, Mayor's Correspondence.

and received a letter from Capdevielle recuperating in New York. The public did not comment on the Mayor's health and frequent absences from his office. Municipal management did not depend upon his daily presence, and Capdevielle's view of his duties and obligations did not include a high level of initiative.<sup>27</sup>

Toward the end of 1902, the city enjoyed several conventions that highlighted its role as a center of corporate, voluntary, and professional association meetings. In November, New Orleans played host to the American Federation of Labor, an association of bankers, and the United Daughters of the Confederacy. (Nearly forty years after the Civil War, the *Daily Picayune* still printed a weekly column on the history of the Confederacy.) In 1903 the city would host an even more important meeting--the reunion of the United Confederate Veterans. But financing for visitor facilities lagged. The movement to build an auditorium stalled for lack of funds. The estimated cost of the structure exceeded \$250,000, but only \$27,000 in stock subscriptions had been received by December. Additionally, estimates of the hospitality funds needed for the U.C.V. reunion approached \$100,000. The city abandoned plans for the auditorium, and funds for the reunion fell short of expectations.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Capdevielle to M. J. Sanders, President, New Orleans Progressive Union, October 3, 1902, Mayor's Correspondence; Capdevielle to City Council, October 7, 1902, Mayor's Correspondence; Capdevielle to City Council, October 14, 1902, Mayor's Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, October 21, 1902, 4; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 540-42. Kendall's account provides significant detail, but errs by placing the date of the strike in 1901, not 1902.

<sup>28</sup> *Daily Picayune*, November 14, 1902, 4; November 30, 1902, Section IV, 2; December 7, 1902, 4.

Capdevielle's inactivity on at least one major issue became an issue late in 1902. Stung by lack of movement on the public belt system, the Mayor agreed to call the commission together in January, 1903. Nothing came of the effort in spite of numerous requests from New Orleans commercial interests. Capdevielle lacked the leadership or the energy to assess such an opportunity and to appreciate its political and economic dimensions. But railroad issues dominated the Mayor's agenda in the new year and highlighted his passive, if not ambivalent, attitude toward issues that demanded a clear vision of the public interest.<sup>29</sup>

The New Orleans Progressive Union held its annual meeting on January 12, 1903. Assessor Martin Behrman joined the board of Directors. The organization reviewed the previous year's successes and looked forward to 1903. One theme of the Progressive Union's work was the improvement of railroad service to New Orleans. Within two weeks, another railroad would petition to serve the city, initiating a controversy that lasted for several years. In an age of suspicion toward corporate power, railroads held a special place in the public mind. Cities needed transportation development, yet feared domination by companies controlled by Harriman and Morgan. In January, 1903, the *Daily Picayune* reported that a city council committee had been "railroaded" by the Frisco, popular shorthand for the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad. The committee granted to the company a large corridor running roughly

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<sup>29</sup> *Daily Picayune*, December 16, 1902, 12; Capdevielle to Members, Public Belt Railroad Commission, January 5, 1903, Mayor's Correspondence; Capdevielle to Members, Public Belt Railroad Commission, January 17, 1903, Mayor's Correspondence.

north-south, east of and parallel to Canal Street. In addition, the Frisco received permission to bring tracks to the riverfront, upriver from Canal Street, to provide access to the lucrative Mississippi River trade. The Frisco lawyer was E. H. Farrar, partner of E. B. Kruttschnitt, and nationally prominent attorney.<sup>30</sup>

At the end of January, the council's Streets and Landings committee took up the Frisco ordinance as well as a second request for track privileges. The additional request came from the Shreveport and Red River Valley Railroad, anxious to obtain access to the city's water front. The next day, a conference of the city's commercial exchanges met to sort out the varying requests and suggested a compromise. The exchanges feared monopoly railroad power and wanted the city to complete its plans for a public belt railroad along the river. Exclusive rights to the Frisco threatened those aims. The council did not take the advice of the exchanges and voted the Frisco most of what it requested. Capdevielle vetoed the ordinance, but was overridden. Only five councilmen voted with the Mayor.<sup>31</sup>

Suspicious about the ordinance arose immediately. The Board of Trade objected to the actions of the council, and the *Daily Picayune* raised the issue of conflict of interest. Answering the letter of a Frisco proponent, the newspaper pointed out that Councilman Cucullu, "one of the honestest men alive," was nonetheless president of a

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<sup>30</sup> *Daily Picayune*, January 13, 1903, 5; January, 24, 1903, 1, 6. Farrar also represented the defunct water company in its various suits against the city, even though Farrar has assisted in drafting the original Sewerage and Water Board legislation.

<sup>31</sup> *Daily Picayune*, January 31, 1903, 3; February 1, 1903, 4; February 3, 1903, 5; February 4, 1903, 1,5; February 11, 1903. For a full discussion of the public belt railroad, see Chapter VIII.



bank that the Frisco had favored with \$1,000,000 of deposits being held for the purchase of property. On February 20, the Mayor took the matter to the local civil district court and asked the judge to enjoin execution of the ordinance. City Attorney Samuel Gilmore argued the case. On February 26, local press accounts mentioned that the Frisco had joined the J. P. Morgan railroad interests, but that news was quickly overshadowed by a *Daily Picayune* exposé.<sup>32</sup>

Curious about the corporate background of the Frisco, the *Daily Picayune* investigated the railroad's incorporation and discovered that a widespread assumption about its ownership was incorrect. The franchise had been granted to a local corporation--the New Orleans and San Francisco Railroad--not to the national railroad line assumed to be in charge. Moreover, the local corporation was a "paper" entity with no operations. The owners of the local Frisco included E. H. Farrar and E. B. Kruttschnitt, whose political connections surpassed even the most prominent New Orleanians among Regulars and reformers alike. Kruttschnitt was President of the School Board as well as chairman of the State Democratic Central Committee. His brother was a prominent official with the Harriman railroad interests. The paper called for more investigation and urged the courts to overturn the council's actions.<sup>33</sup>

To the disappointment of the Frisco opponents, the ordinance survived its first court challenge as Civil Court District Judge King ruled the council had not exceeded its

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<sup>32</sup> *Daily Picayune*, February 11, 1903, 5; February 12, 1903, 6; February 21, 1903, 4; February 26, 1903, 1.

<sup>33</sup> *Daily Picayune*, February 28, 1903, 6.

authority, although he placed some limitations on the right of the railroad to close streets. An appeals court upheld the district court in May, and one month later the state Supreme Court affirmed the council's powers to grant the franchise. Safeguards to the public interest were at "the discretion of the council," which, the *Daily Picayune* claimed, "has already given everything away." But the Frisco did not win everything. Its franchise to the river front brought a challenge from the Dock Board, established by the state to organize the river front. The Board prevailed, setting the important precedent for public control of the areas adjacent to the docks.<sup>34</sup>

During the Frisco fight, the attention of most New Orleanians was on the reunion of the United Confederate Veterans. The hospitality fund did not reach its goal of \$100,000, but citizens contributed nearly \$60,000, including a donation of \$12.00 from a civil jury hearing the probate case of a departed veteran. Although the city's drive for a permanent auditorium had failed, organizers built a temporary auditorium and hospitality areas at a local race track in order to host the reunion crowds. City officials and reunion committees pressed the railroads to offer preferential rates to visitors, and thousands of veterans and their families came to the city. The event proved such a success that the Progressive Union began a drive to have the city declared the permanent reunion site. (Although the U.C.V. declined the offer, the group returned to the city in 1906.) The U.C.V. reunion was not the only prominent meeting in the city in 1903. Earlier in the year, the Mayor helped to plan the convention for the National Association

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<sup>34</sup> *Daily Picayune*, March 31, 1903, 4; May 28, 1903; June 2, 1903, 6, 8. For a discussion of the Dock Board and its power, see Chapter VII.

of Manufacturers, of which prominent New Orleanian James Porch was Vice-President.<sup>35</sup>

In early August, Capdevielle once again left the city for Bay St. Louis, planning to return “when healthy and when [council President William] Mehle leaves for a six week vacation.” At an early August council meeting, members agreed to adjourn “for two or three weeks during the oppressive days of August.” When the Mayor and council members returned to work, the political season began. Although the municipal elections had been moved to the fall of 1904, the state election contests would take place in spring. By the end of September, the candidates for the Democratic primary began lining up support. A solid, Regular Democratic ticket emerged--Newton Blanchard for Governor, Jared Sanders for Lieutenant Governor, and former Governor Murphy Foster for the U.S. Senate. But the potential state ticket lacked sufficient presence from New Orleans. Martin Behrman, President of the Board of Assessors and Regular ward leader from the Fifteenth Ward, filled the gap. “Algiers Endorses Martin Behrman” announced the *Daily Picayune* headline. “The people of Algiers last night [presented] Martin Behrman . . . who is now before the people of the state for the nomination as Auditor.” The election also saw the electoral debut of Charles Janvier, who ran for the Senate from uptown New Orleans.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Daily Picayune*, April 17, 1903, 15; May 17-21, 1903; May 29, 1903, 4; Capdevielle to James Porch, April 6, 1903, Mayor’s Correspondence.

<sup>36</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 1, 1903, 4; August 5, 1903, 5; September 30, 1903, 4; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 71-78.

The state election monopolized the attention of the city leaders through the end of 1903 and the first month of 1904. On January 20, Blanchard won election and carried most of the Regular ticket to victory. Behrman barely missed a majority and faced a runoff, but rather than face a second primary, Behrman's opponent withdrew, making the New Orleanian the State Auditor. With the state elections completed, city issues returned to the top of the agenda. But city elections would take place in early November, and Capdevielle's administration showed no great energy or initiative to affect substantial change in the interim.<sup>37</sup>

In early February, the city prepared for the annual Mardi Gras celebration. Mayor Capdevielle asked Council President William Mehle to take responsibility for the entertainment of official City Hall guests. The Choctaw Club offered its own hospitality to a delegation of 150 Democrats "with a band of fifty pieces" from Cook County, visiting the city "as has been their custom for the past several years." A group of Choctaw Club members, led by former Mayor Fitzpatrick, went to Chicago to escort the quests to New Orleans, and the Choctaw club house was headquarters for the visitors. Serious matters intruded upon the festivities, and the council once again dealt with a proposal for municipal lighting. Uncertain over the direction the city should take, the council called for bids for the construction of a city plant. But the city simultaneously received proposals from local companies for the provision of lighting. In April, the council abandoned plans for a municipally-owned system and awarded the lighting

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<sup>37</sup> *Daily Picayune*, January 10, 1904, 6; January 20, 1904, 1; February 9, 1904, 11.

franchise to the local street railroad company. Although the Mayor had recommended a municipal lighting system for more than four years, the council did not follow his advice. Capdevielle's position, however, was more in the nature of a sincerely offered opinion, rather than a serious advocacy. The Mayor fought for elements of progressive civic development, but did not offer a comprehensive program for council adoption.<sup>38</sup>

The months prior to a municipal election were often marked by a flurry of press interest in possible areas of conflict. In late April, evidence of widespread gambling and the complicity of the Police Department in the vice became front page news. Capdevielle asked for the resignation of the Police Board, but the members refused. A group of citizens quickly organized a Civic League and approached the commercial exchanges for support. Only the Sugar Exchange seemed interested; the others "suddenly decided they must keep out of politics." Exchange members expressed reluctance for good reasons. The municipal elections were approaching, and alignment behind the Civic League could constrain their ability to maneuver. In early June the Civic League met in the offices of Regular (and former mayoral candidate) Charles Buck to condemn gambling and the spread of saloons. Although the daily papers did not lend strong backing to the League, the *Daily Picayune* reminded readers of the responsibilities of voters. The paper cited the commission government of Galveston as a model. "The success of the experiment [i.e., Galveston's government] depended on

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<sup>38</sup> *Daily Picayune*, February 3, 1904, 4; February 6, 1904, 5; February 10, 1904, 10; April 19, 1904, 4.

two important facts. There was honest and intelligent administration and it was free from politics. Here is the entire key to proper municipal government.”<sup>39</sup>

The Capdevielle administration had not proved that lack of politics promoted proper municipal government. In the years following his election, Capdevielle steadfastly adhered to his concept of mayoral duty. He acceded to Progressive Union requests to attract conventions to the city. He responded forcefully to threats to the public order. He gave of his time to charitable and civic causes, even to the point of maintaining the presidency of his high school alumni association and presidency of the City Park Improvement Association. Capdevielle’s campaign commitment to public ownership of utilities shaped his attitudes toward the Sewerage and Water Board and to the possibility of municipal lighting owned by the city. Mayor Capdevielle, however, did not transcend the gilded age era in which he had become a man of prominence. He acted as the chairman of the board of the municipal corporation, not as a chief executive officer. He showed no particular enthusiasm for active government and certainly exhibited no great personal energy on behalf of progressive causes. The Mayor spent a great deal of time outside of the city, and frequent illnesses contributed to his absences.

At the end of Capdevielle’s term, his name was not prominently mentioned as a mayoral candidate. Speculation in July, 1904, centered around Captain (and member of Congress) Robert Davey, Charles Janvier, former Council President Abraham Brittin, and businessman W. G. Tebault. The *Daily Picayune* praised the Mayor’s record in the

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<sup>39</sup> *Daily Picayune*, May 23, 1904, 4; June 2, 1904, 5. The *Daily Picayune* was more skeptical about commission government in 1911 and 1912 when it was under consideration by the city’s reform elements. See Chapter X for details.

Charles riots and the streetcar strike, and speculated about the absence of a move to renominate him. The paper suggested that Capdevielle had offended “powers” in his handling of the Frisco grant, and that his efforts to enforce anti-gambling laws frightened those with a more casual attitude toward the practice. But there is no apparent evidence that Capdevielle wanted another term. The political environment and the Mayor’s record pointed to the thanks of the city and a pleasant retirement to his Mississippi home.<sup>40</sup>

But events did not run according to script. Capdevielle’s service earned him consideration on the part of the Regular organization, and developments in the city elections created an opportunity for his continued service. He assumed state office and served the public for nearly sixteen years. It would be his successor who brought together a firm consensus on behalf of progressive civic development in New Orleans. By 1904, however, many of the requirements for that success were in place. New boards and commissions had taken over functions of government previously held by the city. The business community, although never monolithic, united behind public works initiatives. Most important, through the Mayor’s service, the Regulars had consolidated their municipal political power. In 1899, the Choctaws had chosen Capdevielle to reassure the public. In the next city election, the Regulars would return to a nominee of their own ranks. Southern progressivism in New Orleans would be led by a Regular, who, to the surprise of many, found a way to stay loyal to this political colleagues and to promote the progressive civic development of New Orleans at the same time.

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<sup>40</sup> *Daily Picayune*, July 23, 1904, 5; August 25, 1904, 6.

## CHAPTER V

### **MARTIN BEHRMAN, 1904-1908: POLITICAL BOSS AS COMMUNITY BUILDER**

In July, 1904, New Orleans political and journalistic circles began to speculate about a successor to Mayor Capdevielle. Regular Democrats had every reason to assume an easy election for the Choctaw-anointed candidate. The Citizens' League no longer existed, many of its most prominent members having defected to the Regular opposition. Capdevielle's tenure had raised no fundamental issues of governance. The recent gambling scandal generated little response, and the Civic League's call to action failed to produce significant opposition to the entrenched Regulars. Within two months, however, the political landscape changed. Governor Newton Blanchard, easily elected in January, 1904, with significant Regular assistance, provided the opposition with an issue that threatened to return New Orleans to the pattern of alternating reform and Regular administrations. But the Regulars survived the challenge, elected their candidate, and initiated the most stable period in New Orleans mayoral history.

Underlying the political controversy, and eventually overshadowing its impact, was the continued progress of the city toward acquisition of a modern infrastructure. By the 1904 election, the legislature, the city council, and Mayor Capdevielle, with the cooperation of the both the city reformers and the Regular organization, had established



three significant programs of public works. The Dock Board was a state agency, appointed by the Governor. The Public Belt Railroad Commission consisted mostly of businessmen chosen by the commercial exchanges. And the Sewerage and Water Board, although subject to mayoral appointment, consisted of long-term members not subject to immediate removal. The voting public could enter the municipal elections secure in the knowledge that, regardless of the outcome, the transforming efforts in public works would continue without interruption. The consensus in New Orleans on behalf of progressive civic development benefitted from political stability and from the remarkable career of Martin Behrman.

Events moved quickly in the summer of 1904 as the Regulars searched for a candidate. At the end of July, State Auditor and leader of the Fifteenth Ward, Martin Behrman, returned from an Elks Convention and the Louisiana Purchase exhibit at St. Louis and answered reporters questions about New Orleans politics. Professing to be “rusty on the city situation,” Behrman would not discuss possible candidates. He did say that he opposed a primary to choose a Democratic candidate and recommended instead the traditional process of party election and subsequent convention, wherein, Behrman claimed, “every businessman and every man [could] participate.” The Orleans Parish Democratic Party Executive Committee met soon thereafter to decide whether to retain the convention nominating procedure. The *Daily Picayune* reported that when the roll was called “thirty-three out of thirty-four members [i.e., two from each of the city’s seventeen wards] were present. The absent one was dead.” The committee reaffirmed the convention process a week later, apportioned delegates to the

various wards, and arranged for elections in those wards where opposition to the Regular leadership had arisen. The Regulars anticipated no difficulties in electing a full ticket.<sup>1</sup>

In the first of a series of political missteps, Governor Blanchard angered Walter Denegre, former Citizen's League member, 1896 candidate for the U.S. Senate, and prominent reform faction attorney. In a Shreveport speech, Blanchard recalled the 1896 fight and referred to Denegre's candidacy, and the reformer's party status at the time, using the words "not a Democrat." Denegre took issue, and an exchange of letters raised the temperature of the dispute. The charge of disloyalty to the party was a common theme of Regular electoral tactics, but Denegre took the occasion not only to dispute the charge, but also to defend the reform movement in New Orleans. He "had always voted Democratic," Denegre argued, suggesting that Blanchard "had imperfect knowledge of local political conditions in New Orleans." Denegre defended the record of the Citizens' League and claimed reform credit for the "Dock Board, the Drainage and Sewerage Act, . . . [and] the Constitutional convention." His spirited defense of the reformers revealed latent support for opposition to the Regulars and may have provoked the reformers to action.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*Daily Picayune*, July 23, 1904, 5; July 31, 1904, 9; August 18, 1904, 5; August 23, 1904, 4; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 65-66; Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 82-83.

<sup>2</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 19, 1904, 1. Walter Denegre did not stand as a candidate after his narrow 1896 defeat for the U.S. Senate. He and his brother George Denegre, however, remained active in the various reform movements. Their law firm represented many important clients including the L&N Railroad, the defunct water company, and Tulane University. Behrman identified Walter Denegre as one of the

The memory of the political scandals of the mid-1890s had faded, but in its search for a mayoral candidate, the organization turned first to a prominent businessman and politician whose credentials attracted reformer and Regular alike--Charles Janvier, ex-Citizens' League President, newly elected State Senator from uptown New Orleans, and confidante to Governor Blanchard. Blanchard personally requested that Janvier accept the call. Janvier did not disdain politics. In 1903, correspondence between Janvier and John Parker revealed different views on office holding. Parker believed that businessmen "should only 'preach' reform." Janvier thought that the businessmen's lack of direct involvement resulted in laws "inimical to public interest." Janvier's political ambitions, however, collided with his economic aspirations. He had recently been given a position as an officer in the Canal Bank and Trust Company and, after a period of deliberation, turned down the opportunity to run for mayor. After Janvier declined, a gathering of party stalwarts then turned to a surprise choice--newly-elected State Auditor Martin Behrman.<sup>3</sup>

Behrman was thirty-nine when the organization chose him to run for mayor. Born in New York, he moved to New Orleans before his first birthday. The family background was German and Jewish, but Martin became a Catholic. Having been orphaned at the age of twelve, his education was minimal. He later recalled that while

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prime backers of the 1899 "Jacksonian Democracy" movement which opposed Capdevielle. Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 33.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Janvier to John Parker, October 20, 1903, Parker Papers, University of North Carolina, quoted in Schott, "John M. Parker," 98-99. Parker eventually overcame his qualms about reformers running for office. He successfully ran for governor of Louisiana in 1920.

at school he was called upon to help teach the newcomers, "Italians, Slavs, Greeks and Bohemians and a few Austrians." After his mother's death, he supported himself as a cashier and continued his education at a night school. He then moved to Algiers to work in a grocery store and his formal education ended. He later wrote, "I have always had the feeling that I would have been fortunate to have been able to spend more of my boyhood at school. If my mother had lived, I would have been kept at school, and I feel quite sure she would have wanted me to have a college education." Though the lack of higher education did not constrain Behrman's career, he retained some insecurity about his education. For many years, Behrman considered himself a poor speaker, and it was not until the passage of a number of years in public service that he developed a flair for public speaking.<sup>4</sup>

Behrman married in 1887 and held a series of jobs in the retail and wholesale grocery business. "I had always taken an interest in politics and . . . I usually had work that brought me in contact with many persons," he later observed. "I suppose it was my rather wide acquaintance for a young man that suggested to the active politicians that they choose me as secretary of the fifteenth ward campaign committee . . . in 1888."

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<sup>4</sup> Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 3-5; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 803; Conrad, *A Dictionary of Louisiana Biography*, 58. There is no biography of Behrman. Kemp's valuable editing of Behrman's 1922-1923 newspaper columns provide the only memoirs by the ex-mayor. Harold Zink, *City Bosses in the United States: A Study of Twenty Municipal Bosses* (New York: AMS Press, 1968, reprinted from the 1930 edition), contains a chapter on Behrman, but most of the biographical details are taken from the Behrman newspapers columns or from obituaries at the time of his death. Zink refers to interviews with Behrman's son Stanley and "twenty-nine large scrapbooks" kept by the Mayor, but efforts to discover whether the materials still exist were unsuccessful. See Zink, *City Bosses*, 317-319.

Soon afterward, the assessor of the New Orleans Fifth District offered Behrman the job of Deputy Assessor. He accepted and, by 1892, led the Algiers delegation to the parish nominating convention that chose John Fitzpatrick as mayoral candidate. In his memoirs Behrman recalled:

I had taken the position of deputy assessor because it appeared to be a generally better job than that of traveling salesman and Mrs. Behrman preferred to have me more at home. . . . I did not feel like I was a politician at the at time. Even when I quickly organized a new faction in Algiers and beat the two older factions, I was not yet fully conscious of the fact that I had become a politician. But when I sat in the caucus with the mayor-elect, John Fitzpatrick, and discussed the apportionment of the patronage . . . well, I realized that Martin Behrman had become a politician.

When the new Mayor divided the City Hall patronage, the clerkship of the city council budget committee--a perfect training ground in the workings of municipal government--went to Behrman. "I have read many books on municipal government and hundreds of magazine articles," Behrman wrote. The authors "would have done better if they had actually engaged in such work as I had as a clerk." Behrman later added service on the school board to his resume.<sup>5</sup>

In 1896, Behrman ran for the state legislature but lost in the midst of the Citizens' League municipal victory. He was active in the founding of the Choctaw Club and never wavered in his loyalty to the Regulars. In the election for delegates to the Constitutional Convention of 1898, Behrman won the right to represent Algiers. He

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<sup>5</sup> Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 8-9, 20-26. In addition to being divided into seventeen wards, New Orleans also consisted of seven municipal districts, each with its own assessor and tax collector. Although the tax collector positions were eventually merged into one office, New Orleans still retains the seven assessor districts. District Five consists of Algiers, the portion of New Orleans on the west bank of the Mississippi River.

moved up to assessor for the Fifth District through a gubernatorial appointment and eventually became President of the Board of Assessors. From that position, he was tapped to run for State Auditor and won election in January, 1904. Behrman had the benefit of powerful patrons, such as Ernest Kruttschnitt, but his long-term success can only be explained by his considerable skills. He spoke several languages, served in volunteer fire departments, joined the Knights of Columbus, participated as a director of the New Orleans Progressive Union, and helped take the census counts in 1890 and 1900. He was gregarious, conscientious, generous, attentive to detail, and incredibly energetic. In short, he followed the sensible social and governmental routes to become well-known, well-liked, and respected in political circles.<sup>6</sup>

Faced with its inability to convince Charles Janvier to run for mayor, a high-powered Regular delegation summoned Martin Behrman to a meeting at the offices of the *Daily Picayune*. Members included: Robert Ewing, newspaperman and Tenth Ward leader, Samuel Gilmore, city attorney, former member of the Citizens' League, and Twelfth Ward leader, former governor and Senate hopeful Murphy Foster, and Charles Janvier. After some hesitation (Behrman was reluctant to give up his new position as State Auditor), Regular loyalty won out, and Behrman officially announced his candidacy on August 24, 1904. The day before, Behrman had received the approval of the governor to make the race, and press accounts indicated the Regulars had done their homework. A majority of the convention participants immediately declared for

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<sup>6</sup> Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 8, 38-41; *Daily Picayune*, August 25, 1904, 3.

Behrman, and his support grew to unanimity with a few days. The *Daily Picayune* noted only one negative reaction. A local, unidentified law firm “told Mr. Behrman that he would not do; that a businessman was wanted.”<sup>7</sup>

The anonymous judgement did not reflect the thinking of most in the business community. Behrman’s political apprenticeship had not neglected business interests. As president of the Board of Assessors, he often assisted the assessor of the business district in the evaluation of property and, in the process, made the acquaintance of many businessmen. In addition, his service as a Director in the Progressive Union gave him several years experience in both promoting the city and absorbing the opinions of the business community. Though there was some natural opposition to the nomination of “a boss,” many business leaders announced approval of the Behrman candidacy. “Around the Board of Trade in particular, many of the best and most substantial businessmen of the city who know Behrman [agreed with] Albert Baldwin, Jr., that Behrman was good enough for them and they would vote for him.” A member of the Progressive Union added that Behrman “was one of the most active men; he was a worker” and “always willing either with work or with means.” He added that “we do not all agree as to the manner of his selection . . . but we are for him for mayor.” Behrman encouraged this benevolent view in the announcement of his candidacy by pledging “a clean business

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<sup>7</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 24, 1904; 3; August 25, 1904, 3; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 78-81.

administration” and a “new method [and] business-like approach” to government, including an emphasis on clean streets.<sup>8</sup>

All seemed in place for an uneventful Behrman nomination and victory, but Governor Blanchard intervened once again. In opposition to the plans of the New Orleans Regulars, he insisted that Porter Parker be placed on the ticket as candidate for District Attorney. It was not uncommon for the state’s chief executive to influence a city ticket, but Blanchard’s replacement of a popular and universally-accepted candidate, Chandler C. Luzenberg, put the Regulars in an awkward position. Bowing to the Governor’s political and patronage power, the Regulars surrendered, creating a firestorm of reform and press opposition to Blanchard’s methods and to the craven agreement of the bosses. “Blanchard: Boss of All Bosses” and “City Delivered to Blanchard” were the *Daily Picayune* headlines, and the reformers awoke to the convenient issue at hand. Behrman’s election was no longer a certainty.<sup>9</sup>

Within a matter of days, opposition to Blanchard’s actions and the Behrman candidacy coalesced into the Home Rule Movement, led by long-time reformer William S. Parkerson. The reform leadership would normally have supported Porter Parker, brother to John M. Parker, prominent cotton broker. And their new-found affection for Luzenberg hid their previous resentment as his appointment as District Attorney at the behest of the Regulars. As Behrman astutely noted at a later date, the controversy over

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<sup>8</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 25, 1904, 3; August 26, 1904, 4; August 27, 1904, 4; August 21, 1904, 8; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 9, 12, 81.

<sup>9</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 11, 1904, 12; September 20, 1904, 1; September 22, 1904, 1; September 23, 1904, 1; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 83-87.



the governor's actions was a convenient cover to "the main idea of the opposition. That idea was that a ward leader, which is what we call what they call a 'ward boss,' was not fit to be mayor. The impression they conveyed was that a professional politician was unfit for an office of honor because he was a professional politician." The observation neatly summarized the ambivalence of the reformers, who wanted a professional administration but distrusted professional politicians. The Home Rule ticket that eventually opposed Behrman did not include Luzenberg, giving weight to Behrman's argument that the alleged central issue of the Home Rule campaign hid the organization's true motives.<sup>10</sup>

By October 3, 1904, the Home Rule organization announced its own municipal ticket, led by former mayoral candidate and Choctaw member Charles F. Buck. In an echo of the Citizens' League efforts, Buck called for a "permanent reform organization to protect the great city's vital interests." Both the *Daily Picayune* and the *Times-Democrat* supported Buck, although the election coverage in the *Daily Picayune* was fairly balanced. Detectives hired by the Home Rule organization brought to light some irregularities in the city's voter registration records in the days before the election, but the numbers involved could not alter the outcome of the election. Parkerson charged Behrman with financial irregularities in the operation of his assessor's office, and the Regulars responded with an attack upon Buck's record in the Civil War, but most campaign rhetoric centered on the Home Rule issue, the power of the governor, and the

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<sup>10</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 25, 1904, 12; October 1, 1904, 8; October 2, 1904, 2; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 88-93. .

efficacy of boss rule. No candidate raised the question of municipal ownership nor the state of public works, a clear sign of the city's basic consensus on progressive civic development. The Regulars pointed to a good record from the previous term, but issues of substance found no audience. A typical editorial from the *Daily Picayune* read:

A vote [for the regular ticket] is a vote to vindicate the governor in his tyrannical invasion of the rights of the people of the city . . . to declare approval and endorsement of his hateful despotism and to support the slavish bosses in their inexcusable combination and conspiracy with the Governor to perpetuate a wanton outrage upon the people of New Orleans.<sup>11</sup>

By the end of October, the Home Rule leadership was certain of victory “express[ing] the opinion that the fight is already practically won.” The *Times-Democrat* published an analysis of the projected vote demonstrating a Buck victory was inevitable. But the Regulars maintained their poise and reminded voters of the history of Regular Democracy. The “names of opposition parties had gone into oblivion,” proclaimed Regular orators, and “the [Independents] change their name after every election because they are afraid to stand before the people with the same name.” The day before the election, the *Daily Picayune* editorial apocalyptically claimed that “today New Orleans is on trial before the world.” Mayor Capdevielle called out special police to suppress possible election day violence. In spite of confident Home Rule predictions to the contrary, Behrman won not only the election, but also “a lot of money. There was

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<sup>11</sup> *Daily Picayune*, October 3, 1904, 1; October 11, 1904, 1; October 20, 1904, 1; October 21, 1904, 6; October 27, 1904, 6; November 3, 1904, 4; November 4, 1904, 1,3; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 93-95. Robert W. Williams, Jr., “Martin Behrman: Mayor and Political Boss of New Orleans, 1904-1926,” 11. Williams makes the claim for irregularities “to a marked degree” but does not provide evidence for the claim beyond the assertions of the partisan press.

a great deal of betting done on that election. I had a small share in a big pool and we won. . . . The [Home Rulers] accepted the bets, knowing that their failure to do so would show a lack of confidence in the Home Rule movement.” The mayoral count showed Behrman with 13,962 to Buck’s 10,047. Behrman’s willingness to wager on his own election was due in part to his analysis of registration figures. In spite of the reformers’ expressed interest in voting restrictions, many of their natural followers had failed to pay the poll tax. The various changes in voting law had reduced the electorate steadily since the 1896 municipal election. In that contest over 45,000 New Orleanians cast ballots. The turnout fell to approximately 32,000 in 1899 and to 24,000 in 1904. Behrman enjoyed the irony that the reform elements--long in favor of a poll tax--now suffered as the result of its passage. In Behrman’s words, the reformers “had more followers than voters.” In the dejected words of the *Daily Picayune*, “Blanchard’s Bosses Seem Safe.”<sup>12</sup>

In spite of Behrman’s margin of victory citywide, three Home Rule council candidates won office. Home Rulers seemed encouraged by their showing and “insisted that a permanent organization will be maintained and a constant campaign carried on to keep civic vigilance active in the interest of good government.” Post-election analysis by the Regulars drew several lessons from the vote. More than ever, the organization

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<sup>12</sup> *Daily Picayune*, October 22, 1904, 1; November 8, 1904, 8; November 9, 1904, 1; Capdevielle to Fitzpatrick, November 5, 1904, Mayor’s Correspondence; Capdevielle to Brigadier General S. P. Walmsley, November 8, 1904, Mayor’s Correspondence; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 101-102; Mayor’s Office, *Administrations of the Mayors of New Orleans*, 213-223; Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 200-202.

felt that without the black vote, reformers could not win. The Regulars admitted that “fresh blood was needed in some wards,” and that “the day was past when the Party can put up a yellow dog and elect him.” Behrman resigned as State Auditor two days after the election, and, in a surprise to most observers, the governor named Paul Capdevielle as his successor. The Mayor resigned several weeks before the official end of his term in order to begin work in Baton Rouge and turned over his post to Acting Mayor William Mehle.<sup>13</sup>

The election had been difficult, but Behrman did not bear grudges. Within a short time, he later recalled, he was friends with the Home Rule leaders--with the exception of Parkerson, who has raised the ethical charges against Behrman during the campaign. The *Daily Picayune* reported that Buck’s “large and imposing” picture still hung in the Choctaw Club in recognition of his 1896 candidacy. The Club displayed a “long row of honored Democratic leaders” in its club house. “Although defeated, his photograph will continue to occupy its honored placed on the wall of Choctaw Fame.” Politics was not personal to the Regulars. It was business.<sup>14</sup>

Behrman’s election was a surprise to the commercial leadership of New Orleans loyal to the Home Rule cause. The new Mayor was worlds apart from the educated, socially prominent Capdevielle and was a business neophyte compared to both Capdevielle and former Mayor Flower. Behrman later remembered that his enemies

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<sup>13</sup> *Daily Picayune*, November 10, 1904, 1, 4, 5; November 16, 1904, 5; Capdevielle to City Council, November 15, 1904, Mayor’s Correspondence.

<sup>14</sup> Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 90; *Daily Picayune*, November 13, 1904, 4.

considered him “uncouth,” but over the years he would grow in stature and social skills. Eventually, he earned the respect, if not the friendship, of many reformers. The harsh anti-boss rhetoric of campaigns and editorials often masked the recognition that Behrman “gave New Orleans a responsible, constructive, and businesslike administration.”<sup>15</sup>

Behrman took office on December 5, 1904. His first message to the city council set a tone for his administration--pragmatic, business-like, and down to earth. The business and governmental positions he had held prior to becoming Mayor required a keen sense of finance and organization, and he put those qualities into his call to action. He reminded council members that their primary duty lay in “organizing the various departments of the city government for practical operation of the municipal purposes.” He pointed out the low level of public revenue and urged “efficient organization. Whether or not there have been sinecures in the city government of the past, there should be none in the government which has just been installed.” The council examined staffing in the Mayor’s and the city’s attorney’s office, but “both [were] deemed to have no sinecures.” Behrman called for “cutbacks in the list of city employees, . . . clean streets, and a healthful city.” The Progressive Union enthusiastically offered its help in working for clean streets and the removal of filth from the gutters.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Schott, “John M. Parker, 102-103; Williams, “Martin Behrman,” 4-5; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 89; Zink, *City Bosses*, 330.

<sup>16</sup> Behrman to City Council, December 6, 1904, Mayor’s Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, December 6, 1904, 3; December 9, 1904, 5; January 11, 1904, 4.

The new Mayor moved quickly to put his mark on city government. He presided over a Civil Service Commission meeting and asked the members to utilize “practical instead of theoretical questions in civil service exams for public works superintendents.” He urged the Finance Committee to move on acquisition of a city asphalt repair plant to reduce the dependence on private contractors. To fulfill a campaign promise for cleaner streets, he recommended the purchase of a street cleaning machine. He began a plan for personally inspecting street conditions and often wrote the heads of city departments with directions for correcting particular situations. He forwarded to the council a letter from the Progressive Union urging enforcement of sanitation ordinances. By the end of February, the council considered a new ordinance regulating garbage collection. The Mayor wrote urging its passage. On occasion, he brought the Commissioner of Public Works with him on street inspections. When the Fire Board issued purchase orders for hoses without public bidding, Behrman went to court and enjoined the action. Viewed without reference to Behrman’s political affiliation, the actions corresponded to what any “reform” administration might have attempted. Behrman’s pragmatic orientation and auditor’s frugality combined with a clear confidence in the legitimacy of public activity. These characteristics would shape all of Behrman’s service as mayor.<sup>17</sup>

Behrman first months in office also set a pattern for his attention to the role of mayor as dispenser of patronage and an important state Democrat with connections to

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<sup>17</sup> *Daily Picayune*, January 27, 1904, 7; January 31, 1905, 4; February 4, 1904, 4; February 28, 1905, 7; March 15, 1905, 4; Behrman to City Council, January 31, 1905, Mayor’s Correspondence; Behrman to James Mayo, Secretary, Progressive Union, February (date illegible), 1905, Mayor’s Correspondence; Behrman to City Council, February 28, 1905, Mayor’s Correspondence.

the Congressional delegation. Less than two weeks after taking office, his secretary responded to a constituent's request. "Mayor Behrman has directed me to inform you that it is impossible for him to comply with your request to give your husband employment. . . . There are thousands of just such applications before him for consideration. Enclosed herewith you will find the sum of five dollars to aid you." On another occasion, he intervened on behalf of a job seeker, writing to Louis Johnson, chairman of the Executive Committee of the Sewerage and Water Board. "John Blessing, son of a late porter for the Sewerage and Water Board," sought to take his father's place. Behrman urged Johnson to arrange for his hire. The Mayor took such requests seriously, and he expected public agencies and private companies he approached to do the same. As leader of the Regulars in New Orleans, Behrman also took seriously his role as conduit to the city's congressional representatives. In response to a request from Shreveport, Louisiana, leaders, he wrote to Congressman Robert Davey urging his assistance in obtaining an appropriation to dredge the Red River at the northern Louisiana city. The Mayor's frugality coexisted with an assumption that public jobs should be at his disposal and that public funds should be dispensed to those in need. Years later, Behrman's defended his use of patronage. He argued that "you do not appoint men . . . because you can get control of their votes but because they are already with you."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Behrman's Secretary W.P. Ball to Mrs. P. Schoen, December 16, 1904, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to Louis Johnson, February 20, 1905, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to Congressman Davey, January 11, 1905, Mayor's Correspondence; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 300.

The council received an indication of the level of detail under the Mayor's scrutiny in March, 1905. The administration examined the bills received for municipal lighting and the terms of the contract to the lighting company. The city was to be credited a certain amount to compensate for lights burned out or inoperable during the billing period. The Mayor and Commissioner of Police and Public Buildings Alex Pujol began to monitor the outages. When the council passed a routine ordinance to pay the bill, the Mayor pointedly vetoed it and brought the discrepancies to the council's attention. Another veto message overturned the council's permission to operate a stockyard in a residential area. The Mayor wrote, "I have personally visited the site" and "the schools and public institutions nearby" and, somewhat grandly, reminded the council of the effect on "taxpayers, whose sacred rights must be regarded and respected."<sup>19</sup>

In the same way that Capdevielle had been tested early in his administration by the Charles riots, Behrman faced a public health crisis in his first year in office. After a decade of sparing New Orleans, yellow fever broke out in the summer of 1905. The essential facts about yellow fever had been discovered by U.S. Army physicians working in Cuba. The yellow fever resulted from a particular type of mosquito, *Aedes aegypti* (*Stegomyia*), an "urban domestic mosquito . . . breeding in small collections of water." New Orleans provided a plethora of breeding places, including residential cisterns, undrained gutters, privy vaults, and even cemetery vases. The city health

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<sup>19</sup> Behrman to City Council, March 21, 1905, Mayor's's Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, March 17, 1905, 8; Behrman to City Council, March 7, 1905, Mayor's Correspondence.



officials had previously attempted to regulate such potential hazards, but had been rebuffed by a skeptical council and the complaints of homeowners.<sup>20</sup>

The first cases of the fever came to the attention of the city in late July. Notice of the disease rapidly circulated to other southern cities and nearby states. In an ironic and embarrassing development, Havana served notice on the Crescent City that it would be quarantined. (Cuba had been considered a source of yellow fever until U.S. Army-led sanitary procedures eliminated the disease in 1901.) No goods or persons from New Orleans would be allowed into the Cuban city. It would not be the only city to act against New Orleans; Mobile joined in the next day. The New Orleans Board of Health, led by Dr. Quitman Kohnke, urged the Mayor to act, and on July 25 Behrman issued a detailed proclamation to the citizens. It called for emptying water containers, sleeping with mosquito nets, screening cisterns, and treating cesspools with oil. By July 26, 1905, the Board reported 154 cases and thirty-four deaths. The figure appeared in the *Daily Picayune* and other local papers “so that the exaggerated reports which have been in circulation can be discontinued.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> For a history of the yellow fever and the discovery of its etiology, see Robert S. Desowitz, *Who Gave Pinta to the Santa Maria: Torrid Diseases in a Temperate World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 120-143; *Daily Picayune*, July 26, 1905, 6.

<sup>21</sup> *Daily Picayune*, July 23, 1905, 1; July 24, 1905, 6; July 25, 1905, 1; July 26, 1905, 5; Kemp *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 133. Kohnke, originally a Citizens' League member, had served the Board of Health, formed after an outbreak of yellow fever in 1897, in the Flower and Capdevielle administrations. His brother served as President of the Board of Trade. Dr. Kohnke was also a member of the Board of Trade as well as the Knights of Columbus and the St. Vincent de Paul Society. He died in June 1909. *Daily Picayune*, June 27, 1909, 7.

The crisis required large-scale public action. The Mayor asked Charles Janvier to manage a business committee for the “sanitary war.” Janvier agreed and began collecting contributions to fund the effort. The city council reversed earlier policy and passed ordinances regulating the storage of water. Public education accelerated to convince citizens of the efficacy of the new measures. “The clinging to antiquated notions concerning the propagation and transmission of diseases is a great obstacle to the thorough and successful application of the mosquito doctrine of the causation of malarial and yellow fever.” As the number of cases accelerated, the city faced increased hostility from nearby areas, especially Gulf of Mexico cities in commercial competition. Assuming that the disease could spread by contact or through contaminated goods, additional cities began to quarantine New Orleans. Bay St. Louis and other Gulf Coast cities considered a quarantine of all of Louisiana. A dispute broke out in Baton Rouge between politicians urging a quarantine of New Orleans and doctors “unwilling to be influenced by a quarantine that we believe to be unscientific and impracticable, and based upon commercial and political interests.” Other cities expressed sympathy, and a hotel manager in Atlanta even “welcomed citizens and travelers from New Orleans.” By the end of the month the number of cases increased to 283; deaths stood at fifty-seven.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Daily Picayune*, July 26, 1905, 5, 6, 15; July 27, 1905, 6; July 28, 1905, 4. Quarantines were not unique to the 1905 outbreak. One author estimates that New Orleans lost investment of \$10.5 million a year during the period 1846 to 1851. See Desowitz, *Who Gave Pinto to the Santa Maria*, 104-108. Behrman had no doubt that commercial motives entered into the quarantine orders. See Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 132-135.

The distribution of cases varied across the city. African-American neighborhoods had lower rates of the disease. Some observers assumed a natural immunity, but mobilized the community nonetheless. To fight the disease “colored men organize[d] for sanitation’s sake.” On the other hand, the new Italian neighborhoods in the vicinity of the French Quarter suffered disproportionately. The city successfully enlisted “Italian colony leaders” to assist in the sanitation efforts. Arturo Dell’Orto of Comitato di Soccorso wrote Mayor Behrman in August noting that the city had received a donation of twenty-five cases of Mumm Champagne “for the purposes of supplying the sick. As we have a large number of such under our care, we would like to know whether we can get some cases to be used for the purpose for which they were donated.” In suburban St. Bernard Parish officials “met violent resistance when they attempted to investigate a sick woman.” The parish Sheriff and a local doctor were met by “several Sicilians, mean-tempered and refractory by nature,” who “defied the representatives of the law.” Newspaper accounts of the incident, however, indicated that nothing more than a language barrier may have led to the confrontation.<sup>23</sup>

In the most antagonistic and strangest of the quarantine confrontations, Mississippi Governor James K. Vardaman called on armed ships to patrol the waters of the Mississippi Sound. Governor Blanchard protested the “violation of Louisiana waters” and appealed to the federal courts. The president of the New Orleans National

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<sup>23</sup> Desowitz refers to “partial resistance” to yellow fever among African-Americans, a condition that led to the assumption in some quarters that they were actually carriers of the disease. Desowitz, *Who Gave Pinta to the Santa Maria*, 108; Arturo Dell’Orto to Behrman, August 1, 1907, Behrman Papers, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division; *Daily Picayune*, July 28, 1905, 4; July 29, 1905, 4.

Bank, Albert Baldwin, had a vacation home at Pearl River, near the Louisiana-Mississippi border. Mississippi troops seized the home in their determination to quarantine the border from the disease. The courts sided with Louisiana, and the border panic subsided. But the conflict illustrated the city's weakness in dealing with multiple jurisdictions and public health demands with limited resources and authority. On August 4, 1905, the city appealed to the federal government for help, assuming that U.S. authority would at least lessen the commercial impact of hostile quarantines. The "newly created Public Health Service . . . responded to the emergency by declaring that it was broke and could do nothing." Private bankers guaranteed the \$250,000 demanded by the federal government to fund the program, and local surgeon J. H. White of the U.S. Marine Hospital in New Orleans took charge of the fight.<sup>24</sup>

Public efforts, led by Behrman, accelerated. The city put up \$50,000 and asked the state government for another \$100,000, a figure that a majority of the legislature agreed to within a matter of days. As cases of the disease increased, the council increased the city share to \$60,000. Ex-governor Heard, vacationing in Asheville, North Carolina, prevailed upon the mayor of that city to offer hospitality to New Orleanians, a gesture gratefully received by Behrman especially when "the gates of other places were

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<sup>24</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 3, 1905, 1; August 5, 1905, 1, 3; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 143. Trouble between Mississippi and Louisiana flowed from confusion over the exact boundary between the two states at the mouth of the Pearl River. The River split into three branches before it reached the Mississippi Sound. In early 1906, Louisiana received a favorable ruling from the Supreme Court and won most of the disputed area. Its 1906 value lay in its prolific oyster beds. Later the value increased dues to discovery of offshore oil and gas deposits. *Daily Picayune*, March 6, 1906, 4.

closed.” Citizen committees organized self-help crews ward by ward to search out breeding places and to assist in screening cisterns and treating privies. Behrman wrote to his political adversary George Denegre assuring him that the Mayor would call out the police if cemetery crews refused “to admit sanitary forces to empty vases.”<sup>25</sup> Donations for the volunteer effort multiplied, including \$250 from Lodge #30 of the Elks and an identical amount from Captain Fitzpatrick, safely on vacation in Massachusetts. By August 18, the council enacted a law calling for imprisonment for homeowners that neglected to screen cisterns. The Mayor personally sent a list of possible offenders to the Inspector of Police. The Gulf Refining company offered to donate “ten tank cars of petroleum for disinfecting gutters.” But by the end of August, total cases had grown to 1,878; deaths had reached 271.<sup>26</sup>

In the annual commercial review issue of the *Daily Picayune* on September 1, 1905, the Mayor put the best face possible on the situation and claimed that “the visitation of the fever has only served to develop a spirit of civic pride.” Health officials looked back to the epidemic of 1878, in which almost 4,000 persons died, and saw the

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<sup>25</sup> Behrman to W. Heard at Asheville, North Carolina, August 10, 1905, Mayor’s Correspondence. George Denegre was related to William Crawford Gorgas of Mobile, who served as the Army’s sanitarian in Cuba. Desowitz, *Who Gave Pinta to the Santa Maria*, 139-140; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 133-134.

<sup>26</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 9, 1905, 2; August 10, 1905, 8; August 11, 1905, 4; August 16, 1905, 5; August 31, 1905, 2; Behrman to George Denegre, August 5, 1905, Mayor’s Correspondence; Behrman to Charles Janvier, August 11, 1905, Mayor’s Correspondence; Behrman to Captain John Fitzpatrick in North Cambridge, Massachusetts, August 14, 1905, Mayor’s Correspondence; Behrman to Inspector of Police, August 14, 1905, Mayor’s Correspondence; H. James, Gulf Refining Company to Behrman, August 28, 1905, Behrman Papers.

current crisis as “less of a threat.” Governor Blanchard wrote to Behrman, confiding that his son, “Dr. Blanchard, would be in New Orleans at the St. Charles hotel to study the yellow fever.” He asked Behrman to visit his son and offer help. Charles Janvier announced the formation of a permanent citizens’ group—the New Orleans Health Association—to propose legislation required to continue the efforts at improving sanitation. (The new association offered auxiliary status to the Women’s League, but was turned down on the basis that “nothing but equal standing will be accepted.”) The Elks organized a festival in mid-September to raise funds to fight the disease, but also to raise the spirits of New Orleanians. The group held a parade of “about seven hundred Elks,” including Mayor Behrman, “dressed in suits of cheese cloth and wearing hats made in good imitations of screened cisterns.” City officials expressed concern that the epidemic might prevent a visit by President Roosevelt scheduled for the end of October, but by mid-September the White House agreed that the President would come. The local papers praised Roosevelt’s courage. (Certainly cancellation of the trip would have been prudent.) Behrman later, in a letter of congratulations to Alice Roosevelt on the occasion of her marriage, mentioned the “kindness shown to the city by your father.” In his memoirs, Behrman acknowledged had Roosevelt “remained away from New Orleans, it would have done us a great deal of harm. The fact that he came did us a great deal of good.” Not until the end of October (and after the President’s visit) did new cases decline and the death rate stabilize. Years later, Behrman also recounted meeting a man on the local ferry who confided that he had placed a bet on the number of cases increasing. The local press printed statistics on the epidemic daily, providing the

source of data for the macabre numbers game. The final count was 3,403 cases and 437 deaths.<sup>27</sup>

Behrman's stature increased as a result of the epidemic. The crisis tested the Mayor's administrative abilities, the resources of the city, and the ability of New Orleans to project a public image consistent with economic progress. The epidemic also strengthened the position of those in the city advocating various public policies as solutions to public health problems. The city suffered commercially from not only the injurious publicity but also from the actions of other jurisdictions which, sincerely or not, feared spread of the disease. Behrman's energy and enthusiasm never flagged, and he revealed an effective talent for working with a wide spectrum of society. His temperament and work habits fit well with the interests of the city's leadership, almost desperate to maintain the momentum of commercial expansion. Even before the end of the crisis, the New Orleans Board of Health published statistics to show the city's white population had a death rate below the average of the rest of the county, "in spite of the fact that yellow fever has existed here." By Thanksgiving, the Mayor's annual message acknowledged "deliverance from yellow fever," a building boom, and "the spirit of the people." Concern over public health led to increased support for the sewerage, water, and draining systems under construction by the Sewerage and Water Board. The

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<sup>27</sup> The estimated cases and "certified" deaths are reported in *Biennial Reports of the Board of Health of the City of New Orleans, 1904-1905*, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division. Desowitz, *Who Gave Pinta to the Santa Maria*, 141, put the death total at 452. *Daily Picayune*, September 1, 1905, Section IV, 1, 13, 16; September 17, 1905, 6; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 131-149; Behrman to Alice Roosevelt, February 17, 1906, Mayor's Correspondence; Blanchard to Behrman, September 23, 1905, Behrman Papers.

Board's projects promised to eliminate the greatest sources of the disease--open cisterns, privies, and inadequately-drained gutters.<sup>28</sup>

Behrman's energy carried over to other projects. As President of the Public Belt Railroad Commission, he regularly presided at commission meetings and promoted the railroad to the city council. The Mayor also took an active role in the Sewerage and Water Board, as well as the Board of Liquidation of City Debt, the School Board, the Fire Board, and the Police Board. In some instances the Mayor held an official post; in other cases, the Mayor's appointment power provided direct input to the workings of various municipal functions. Within the city administration, Behrman took particular notice of the Department of Public Works and constantly forwarded letters of complaints or recommendations he had collected from citizens or his own investigations. In March, 1906, the Mayor received a threat from the Post Office that street and sidewalk conditions in some sections of the city were so poor that its mail carriers would refuse to attempt delivery. The Mayor brought the news to the city council to reinforce his arguments for improved draining and street paving. When an unexpected windfall of revenue accrued to the city in 1906, the Mayor urged that it be used for street cleaning "for visitors but also our own health."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Daily Picayune*, October 24, 1905, 4; November 30, 1905, 10. See Chapter VI for a discussion of the Sewerage and Water Board.

<sup>29</sup> Behrman to City Council, March 20, 1906, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to City Council, December 11, 1906, Mayor's Correspondence. An investigation of the Mayor's outgoing correspondence show that Commissioner of Public Works Smith received a communication from the Mayor at the rate of more than one every working day. Although Behrman pressured the Commissioner for action, he also argued strenuously for additional resources and supplemental appropriations. See



Adequate funding for the city was central to the Mayor's concerns. As an assessor, Behrman had taken pride in seeing the additional revenue for the city inherent in increases in property value. As Mayor, he directed the city attorney to research payments owed by franchise holders that may have not been collected. Many street railroads were in default of franchise provisions that required the upkeep of streets where the railroads operated. Behrman insisted on enforcement of the franchises, which generated additional city revenue and better upkeep of the streets. Behrman also took an interest in how the city handled deposits of idle funds and the policies for collecting interest on municipal bank balances. In a message to the city council, the Mayor demanded collection of interest due to the city. A canvass of the various boards and commissions receiving city funds revealed that most drew the funds in anticipation of expenses and deposited the proceeds in accounts that drew no interest. The city consolidated the funds and demanded interest payments. City Attorney Gilmore estimated the annual savings at \$33,000 a year.<sup>30</sup>

Shortly afterward, the Mayor began a year-long campaign to force banks to pay interest on public funds on deposit with the Board of Liquidation. In the process, Behrman took on the most powerful of the city's bankers and businessmen. Though his first efforts met with failure, he refused to drop the issue. The city had no direct control over the Board of Liquidation, a post-Reconstruction era entity founded to guarantee

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Behrman to City Council, April 3, 1907, Mayor's Correspondence.

<sup>30</sup> Behrman to City Council, November 28, 1905, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to City Council, January 30, 1906, Mayor's Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, January 26, 1906, 6; January 31, 1906.

bondholders that the city would pay its debts. Established by the state legislature in 1880, the Board of Liquidation had direct control over twelve of twenty-two mills collected by the city on the value of property. Ten mills paid off interests and principal on long term general obligation bonds. Two mills serviced the Sewerage and Water Board Debt. The Board split funds in excess of those requirements between the School Board and the Sewerage and Water Board. The composition of Board of Liquidation was peculiar even in an era which prized expertise, elite administration, and non-partisanship. The core of the membership was six private citizens. The original appointees could fill vacancies without approval by city or state government, thus perpetuating a tight network of prominent bankers and businessmen isolated from normal state and municipal politics. Three members of the city administration also sat on this Board, but the private members could easily outvote their public colleagues. In January, 1906, the private members prevailed six to three in a vote to deposit funds in the Canal-Louisiana Bank and Trust Company at no interest. The *Daily Picayune* reported that five of the private members had connections to the bank, either as directors or stockholders.<sup>31</sup>

Behrman's fight continued in the state legislature, which passed a law demanding members vote for interest bearing accounts. But the governor vetoed the law as unconstitutional. Board members took the position that requiring bids for deposits

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<sup>31</sup> Carl E. Hyde, Jr, "The Origins of the New Orleans Board of Liquidation of the City Debt, 1876-1882," 1, 17-19; *Acts Passed by the General Assembly, 1880*, Act No. 133, 180; *Daily Picayune*, January 26, 1906, 6; February 16, 1906, 12; Robert W. Williams, "Martin Behrman and New Orleans Civic Development, 1904-1920," *Louisiana History* 2 (Fall 1961): 376-378.

based on the level of interest offered would encourage an unhealthy level of competition and put the bondholders' funds at risk. The Mayor took the Board to court, but lost at every level. However, Behrman's persistence and the weight of public opinion eventually prevailed. Although they declined to solicit bids, the majority voted in 1907 to place the Board's funds in five banks, each of which agreed to pay interest at three and one-half percent. As members voted, each declared that he had no financial interest in the banks chosen or recused himself when necessary. Behrman's insistence on upholding the right of the public to earn money on its funds provided an interesting case of a "machine" mayor adhering to progressive principles, while the progressive, independent board acted to sustain private advantage.<sup>32</sup>

In 1906, Behrman faced another issue with public and private implications. The local "Frisco" railroad had obtained concessions from the New Orleans City Council in a contentious dispute during Mayor Capdevielle's term. The railroad, now reconstituted as the New Orleans Terminal Company, requested land from the city along Basin Street be provided to the company "as a free gift." The original franchise allowed the railroad access to Canal Street, the city's central business thoroughfare, via Basin Street, but the width of the corridor was insufficient for the company's new plans--the construction of

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<sup>32</sup> *Daily Picayune*, March 14 1906, 4; June 9, 1906, 4; June 12, 1906, 5; July 1 1906, 5; December 21, 1906, 6; December 24, 1906, 6; Williams, "Martin Behrman and New Orleans Civic Development," 377-378. Williams cites the Behrman memoirs which mention three banks receiving funds, but newspaper accounts list five recipients. *Daily Picayune*, March 13, 1907, 4. See also Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 169-172.

a grand terminal on Canal Street. Once again, the city debated the business advantage of the railroad facility versus the value of the land requested.<sup>33</sup>

Louis Berg, the company president, must have wondered whether or not he would get a fair hearing from the Mayor. Earlier in the year he received an angry letter from Behrman:

I wish to take this opportunity to say to you . . . that it seems to me that my sending notes to you with requests for employment for deserving people seems to be treated as a huge joke; perhaps not by yourself, but by those to whom you refer the applicants. Of course you know that I have sent a good many to you with letters, but there has been no results. This [letter] for your information.

Berg was fortunate that the city council, not the Mayor, had the first opportunity to decide on the request. The company promised an investment of \$1,000,000 in a terminal and a consolidation of passenger service in the new facility. The number of tracks required and provision of service for the Public Belt as well as street railroads made the additional space necessary, Berg argued. The council's Streets and Landings Committee agreed to the request, but placed several restrictions on the grant. Only passenger service would be allowed, expansion of the terminal to the east, along Basin Street, would be limited, and the company would be required to pay the city \$100,000 for the privileges. Berg resisted at first, perhaps for show, but agreed to the limiting provisions. The full council approved the measure the following week. Further action was the responsibility of the Mayor.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Daily Picayune*, March 23, 1906, 3. See Chapter IV for information on the original Frisco controversy.

<sup>34</sup> *Daily Picayune*, March 23, 1906, 3; March 24, 1906, 4; March 28, 1906, 3, 6; March 29, 1906, 5.

Representatives of the city's financial and commercial leadership urged Behrman to sign the ordinance. Members of the Board of Liquidation, Charles Janvier, Abraham Brittin, and Board of Trade Vice-President Pearl Wight argued that the economic effects of the terminal activity justified the grant. But the Mayor vetoed the council action. After paying respects to the attorney for the railroad (E. H. Farrar, who was also a part owner of the terminal company), Behrman told the council that no plans for the terminal had been submitted nor had the railroad consulted the city engineer on track placement. The Basin Canal property to the east of the terminal would revert to the state in 1907, and the city should protect the state's interests. Finally, Behrman found the figure of \$100,000 "ridiculous and not worthy of consideration" and suggested a minimum of \$350,000 compensation. The city council upheld the veto by one vote. Three of the six votes to sustain came from uptown Home Rule councilmen. Most of the Regulars on the council sided with the railroad. Dire predictions that the company would abandon New Orleans disappeared when the *Daily Picayune* revealed that the Southern Railroad had taken a one-half interest in the terminal company and assured the city that it wished to stay in the city.<sup>35</sup>

Behrman's defiance of the city's financial and business establishment had its limits, and on most issues the Regular Mayor found no reason to dispute business policies. The Mayor shared membership with Charles, J. Theard, for example, on the Sewerage and Water Board. Theard, first appointed by Capdevielle, was prominent in banking circles. He and the Mayor worked together with no apparent hostility. But

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<sup>35</sup> *Daily Picayune*, April 1, 1906, 4; April 1906, 3, 3; April 8, 1906, 8.

Theard supported the Home Rule movement in the 1904 election, and his appointment to the Sewerage and Water Board expired in 1906. Behrman nominated Joseph Voegtle to replace Theard, much to the displeasure of the local newspapers, especially the reform-minded *Times-Democrat*. Behrman defended his choice as a “conservative, sensible, reliable, public-spirited gentleman. . . not a lawyer, but a lawyer was not necessary.” The *Times-Democrat* had criticized Voegtle as a politician, but that label, Behrman argued, was “less applicable to Voegtle than to Theard.” Voegtle was, however, a loyal member of the Choctaw Club and, as the proprietor of a French Quarter hotel, had provided Behrman with private offices during the campaign of 1904.<sup>36</sup>

Theard’s interest in serving on the Sewerage and Water Board remained strong, and his colleagues intervened. Charles Janvier resigned from the Board of Liquidation and its members appointed Theard to the vacancy. The Board of Liquidation had reserved membership on the Sewerage and Water board, and one month later, the Board of Liquidation appointed Theard to fill one of its slots. Behrman showed no antagonism to Theard’s somewhat contrived return and worked with him to pass crucial constitutional amendments in the November, 1906, election. In the years to come, Behrman and Theard cooperated in a strong defense of the Sewerage and Water Board practice of using its own construction crews to drive down the cost of the systems.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Daily Picayune*, May 2, 1906, 5; May 5, 1906, 6, 8; *Times-Democrat*, May 3, 1906.

<sup>37</sup> *Daily Picayune*, June 7, 1906, 4; September 14, 1906, 4. See Chapter VI for a discussion of the construction practices of the Sewerage and Water Board.

The importance of municipal action in the face of urban problems remained a theme of Behrman's administration. He urged the council to move quickly on the completion of the city's asphalt plant, designed to avoid the expense of private contractors. The plant opened in August, 1907, at a cost of over \$77,000, with a speech by City Engineer Hardee, who declared "it must be kept out of politics." Mindful that the hot summer months contained a threat of yellow fever, he urged a \$10,000 supplemental appropriation for the Board of Health "for mosquito work." Council member and physician William O'Reilly became the new director of the Board of Health, but delayed taking office until "after the summer fight [against the mosquitos]." Behrman worked with the legislature to clarify the ownership of the city's West End recreational area and then pressed the city council to arrange a lease for its development. As increased government activity led to tight quarters in City Hall, the Mayor urged to council to accelerate the construction of an annex for City Hall. And to avoid delaying the construction of the water purification plant, he called the council into special session to approve the specifications.<sup>38</sup>

On January 1, 1907, a state law and constitutional amendment controlling child labor and providing for factory inspectors went into effect. The legislation held a special interest for Jean and Kate Gordon, uptown New Orleans sisters active in the Era

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<sup>38</sup> *Daily Picayune*, June 13, 1906, 5; August 22, 1906, 4; July 4, 1906, 3; Behrman to City Council, March 6, 1906, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to City Council, April 17, 1906, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to City Council, August 7, 1906, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to City Council, September 14, 1906, Mayor's Correspondence; Williams, "Martin Behrman and New Orleans Civic Development," 380, 393.

Club and a variety of causes. (When the legislation considered the factory inspection bill in June, 1906, Behrman had responded to a request of Jean Gordon and sent a copy of the act to her.) The Gordons had no use for ring politicians, but they had cooperated with the Regulars in the campaign for clean water and in the efforts to clean up the city during the yellow fever epidemic. In November, 1906, Behrman announced that he would forward to the governor the name of Jean Gordon to be appointed Factory Inspector. When she returned from an overseas vacation, the Era Club honored her appointment, and Behrman spoke at the club's gathering. The Mayor also continued his efforts to get jobs for friends or constituents in need. In a letter to Hugh McCloskey, President of the Dock Board, Behrman urged the hiring of "a Southern Pacific worker with a large family. He now needs work" because of a strike.<sup>39</sup>

Mayor Behrman, starting his third year in office, faced a host of recurring problems, but his commitment to public authority and activist government persisted. Not every problem was equally important. Many items of detail came to the Mayor's attention from citizens moved to action by his accessibility. He reported to the city council, for example, on a complaint received "that a merchant at Poydras and Fulton was leasing out the sidewalk for a chicken coop." On another occasion, the Mayor referred a claim for damages to the city attorney from a man who sought reimbursement of \$125.00--the value of a mule killed by falling through a defective city bridge at

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<sup>39</sup> Behrman to Jean Gordon, June 29, 1906, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to Hugh McCloskey, November 7, 1906, Mayor's Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, November 23, 1906, 5; January 27, 1907, 5. The Behrman papers contain a copy of Jean Gordon's oath of office taken in the Mayor's office and signed by the Mayor. Jean Gordon Oath, March 5, 1907, Behrman papers.



Decatur and St. Louis streets. Of greater concern to the Mayor were problems associated with the completion of the Public Belt Railroad and the enormous public works of the Sewerage and Water Board. Mardi Gras and the annual visit of the "Cook County Democracy . . . with a band of forty pieces" provided some respite from the municipal problems. Faced with a railroad request for the extension of a franchise, the *Daily Picayune* reported that "the matter would be discussed after carnival."<sup>40</sup>

In March, the Mayor took on another long-standing municipal problem--garbage disposal. For many years, disposal had been simple, if less than hygienic. Garbage collected in carts from throughout the city was dumped onto garbage boats at a dock at Hospital Street, downriver from the business district. The boats transported the refuse to the middle of the river some distance from the city and dumped their cargo into the current. Unfortunately, the garbage boats did not always travel the requisite distance. And when the river front wharves expanded in the first decade of the century, complaints about the stench and inadequate disposal multiplied. As early as May, 1905, the Dock Board had asked the city to make other arrangements, but Behrman put off the request since the city did not have sufficient time to develop an alternative. By 1907, the Dock Board set a time limit of six months for the city to remove the garbage docks. The development of the Public Belt Railroad provided a means to haul the garbage and the city abandoned the river method. Specially built railroad cars hauled the garbage to

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<sup>40</sup> *Daily Picayune*, January 19, 1907, 11; June 7, 1907, 4; February 8, 1907, 5. See Chapters VI and VIII for details of the Sewerage and Water Board and Public Belt Railroad issues.

a swamp east of the French Quarter which served as the city landfill, and the refuse would be deodorized as the cars emptied their contents.<sup>41</sup>

In March, 1907, the New Orleans Terminal company revived its plan for a Canal Street terminal. The company had been unable to convince all passenger lines serving the city to consolidate in one depot, and the organizers reduced their \$1,000,000 plan to \$200,000. The smaller project did not require additional concessions by the city, and Behrman agreed to the new plan. The Frisco, Rock Island, and Southern lines eventually signed with the terminal company, raising the project cost to one-half million. Unfortunately, the north side of Basin Street, along which trains would enter the terminal, served as the southern border of Storyville. For years thereafter the city found itself in controversies over the alleged effects on passengers exposed to the seamy side of New Orleans life.<sup>42</sup>

By mid-year, the city formulated ambitious plans to host a Panama Canal Exposition in 1915, the projected opening of the canal. Many businessmen remembered the 1884 World Cotton Exposition, held in uptown New Orleans, and wished to repeat the impact of the fair on city development, even though the operations of the fair itself lost money. Behrman asked prominent citizens, such as Charles Janvier, to serve on a committee to plan the exposition. One replied that Behrman "was entitled to great

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<sup>41</sup> Behrman to Hugh McCloskey, President, Dock Board, May 18, 1905, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to City Council, November 11, 1907, Mayor's Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, March 13, 1907, 12; Williams, "Martin Behrman and New Orleans Civic Development," 393-395.

<sup>42</sup> *Daily Picayune*, March 16, 1907, 8; May 12, 1907, 5.

credit for starting this movement.” The wrote to President Roosevelt seeking his support for the city, agreeing to keep his answer “in sacred confidence.” Although the city had not received official sanction from the federal government, the vision of the exposition affected municipal policy. Heavy rains in April and May of 1907 exceeded the average of the previous ten years by fifteen inches, for example, leading to serious damage. The city leadership worried that the drainage system would not be completed in time for the exposition and used the example of the rains as justification for increased efforts in public works. Planners chose site for the fair only after assurances from experts that the area could be drained.<sup>43</sup>

By fall of 1907, the state election cycle demanded the attention of city politicians. Capdevielle announced that he would seek reelection as state auditor, but the most important race to the New Orleans regulars was for the governor’s office. Jared Sanders, Lieutenant Governor under Blanchard, announced his candidacy in April, 1907, and Behrman committed to support him shortly thereafter. By October, in spite of some dissent among the Regulars, the had successfully rallied the Choctaw Club to the Sanders candidacy. The city’s reform elements backed Colonel Theodore Wilkinson, who had been prominent in the Anti-Lottery League. Home Rule Councilman William Bisso organized the Fourteenth Ward for Wilkinson and declared “the Fourteenth Ward

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<sup>43</sup> Behrman to Charles Janvier, May 8, 1907, Mayor’s Correspondence; Behrman to City Council, May 7, 1907, Mayor’s Correspondence; Behrman to Theodore Roosevelt, May 21, 1907, Mayor’s Correspondence; Charles Janvier to Behrman, May 8, 1907, Behrman Papers; George Dunbar to Behrman, May 9, 1907, Behrman Papers; A. Aschaffenburg to Behrman, May 6, 1907, Behrman Papers; Isidore Newman to Behrman, May 8, 1907, Behrman Papers; *Daily Picayune*, June 12, 1907, 7; July 13, 1907, 8. See Chapter X for additional details about the planned exposition.

is always to first to get in line for good government.” The “Wilkinsonites promptly raise[d] the anti-boss slogan.” A third candidate, General Leon Jastremski, who had been defeated by Blanchard in the 1904 race, died during the campaign.<sup>44</sup>

The year had been a difficult one for the Regulars. Behrman and Governor Blanchard had sparred over state lands to be used for an immigration station and over levee protection. The boss of the Ninth Ward, Frederick Dudenhefer, died, and his son took over political leadership and the position of state tax collector for the district. Within months, he embezzled over \$60,000 of state funds and spent the money on cotton speculation, automobiles, the race track, and a chorus girl. Faced with arrest, the young Dudenhefer fled to Honduras. Later in the year, Captain Fitzpatrick’s tax collection office discovered a larger theft. A clerk confessed to taking over \$100,000 over the course of several years. Most of the funds went to a “Negro mistress,” accused in the press of “mesmerizing” the perpetrator, who was sentenced to seven years for the crime. Fitzpatrick repaid the state for losses not covered by the clerk’s bond. Dudenhefer later returned to the city and was arrested at his family’s home in 1908. He went to prison, and while serving his sentence occasionally received small gifts of money from Behrman. Fitzpatrick sued Virginia Reed, the mistress of his larcenous clerk, in Civil Court to recover the money. The courts eventually found in favor of Reed, holding that Fitzpatrick could not prove that money had been given to her, and that property in her possession predated the embezzlement. Behrman had no personal

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<sup>44</sup> Behrman to J. Y. Sanders, May 1, 1907, Mayor’s Correspondence; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 193-205; *Daily Picayune*, July 14, 1907, Section I, 4; October 11, 1907, 5.

connection to the thefts, and no one accused the Choctaw Club of complicity. But the thefts involved state funds and highlighted the system of patronage in New Orleans, which had seven municipal districts, each with an assessor and a tax collector.<sup>45</sup>

Changes in that system became the focus of a special session of the Louisiana legislature called for December 11, 1907. Governor Blanchard opposed the Sanders candidacy and used the session, Behrman later charged, to “take Sanders off the stump at the hottest period of the fight.” The call included plans for legislation to reduce the number of state-appointed officials, to increase protection “against defalcation by public officers,” revise the primary law, and investigate the port of New Orleans. The Governor left Louisiana after issuing the call, and Lieutenant Governor Sanders, chief executive in the absence of Blanchard, added to the legislature’s agenda the consideration of regulation of railroads and “other . . . public service corporations.” Sanders hoped this would boost his campaign.<sup>46</sup>

Before the election, Behrman faced a series of controversies that illustrated the moralistic aspect of progressive thought. The general consensus among the New Orleans leadership in favor of a civic, pro-business progressivism broke down on issues of personal morality. In December, 1907, the Mayor received complaints that the Greenwald Theater exhibited immoral performances. Behrman wrote to the proprietor

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<sup>45</sup> *Daily Picayune*, April 19, 1907, 4; September 12, 1907, 1; September 13, 1907; July 1, 1908; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 144-115; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 516.

<sup>46</sup> *Daily Picayune*, November 2, 1907; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 205-206.

that “many complaints have come to me about the character of the performances which are put on in your play-house.” The Mayor threatened to close the theater “unless there is some improvement.” “By ordinance,” the *Daily Picayune* reminded its readers, “the managers of all public exhibitions must reserve for every performance a free seat for the mayor and the chief of police (in the front row).” The paper concluded that it was “the Mayor’s duty to judge the presence of immoral and corrupting exhibition.” Within a week, Councilman Kelly introduced an ordinance to hold both “person and manager” responsible for “immoral and indecent exhibitions.” Proprietor Greenwald protested that he offered “clean shows” and had stopped one performance when its immoral content came to his attention. The Council declined to act, in part because the ordinance constrained public performance so severely that a ballet would have been outlawed due to the performers’ tights. There was a danger, warned the *Daily Picayune*, of “puritanizing the population.”<sup>47</sup>

The puritan spirit came to the city in human form the same month. On December 29, 1907, Carrie Nation, “of Saloon Smashing Fame,” paid a visit to the Crescent City, a somewhat unlikely location from which to argue prohibition. Mayor Behrman asked her “not to use her hatchet here,” but the famous crusader against drink had a ready response. “Would you be so audacious,” she asked, “as to refuse the Lord the right to smash?” She would give the Mayor no assurance because “she was absolutely in the hands of providence.” Saloons were not her only target. She spoke

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<sup>47</sup> Behrman to Henry Greenwald, Greenwald Theater, December 10, 1907, Mayor’s Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, December 13, 1907, 4; December 18, 1907, 8; December 19, 1907, 6.

against the use of corsets, claiming that they weakened women's organs and unborn infants. "Mothers, warn you daughters . . . I always advise young men never to marry a girl who ruins her health by wearing tight corsets." She later spoke to a male-only gathering, where she preached sexual purity and the avoidance of disease.<sup>48</sup>

In what would prove far worse to New Orleans than bawdy exhibitions or drink, the ongoing campaign for governor raised the issue of gambling, specifically, betting on horse races. With two functioning race tracks and a thriving book-making business, New Orleans backed Sanders in part because he seemed the more tolerant of gambling of the two candidates. Wilkinson raised the question of gambling early in the campaign, and sought votes in the Protestant areas of the state by reminding voters of the New Orleans vices. Behrman declined to suppress the city's gambling, and--perhaps to his later regret--asserted that "it [was] a state matter." The Mayor agreed to address the complaints of citizens on moral issues, but held strong beliefs on the intractability of human nature. His enforcement of blue laws betrayed a reluctance to meddle in private behavior, although he did not ignore the law when called upon for more vigorous actions. The state elections of 1908 highlighted his (and the city's) easygoing attitudes, and the issues of the campaign led to state action that Behrman could not control.<sup>49</sup>

The legislature had separated the state elections from those in the city in an attempt to cut down the influences that one had on the other. The city election would not take place until fall, 1908. But as early as December, 1907, in the middle of the

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<sup>48</sup> *Daily Picayune*, December 20, 1907, 11; December 21, 1907, 12.

<sup>49</sup> *Daily Picayune*, December 11, 1907, 4.

gubernatorial race, the *Times-Democrat* began an attack upon Behrman and “bossism.” The Mayor had contempt for the newspaper’s position. The *Times-Democrat* had been active in the fight to keep city and state elections separate. Now “it insisted that city affairs and city candidates and politics should be discussed in the state campaign . . . in order that the people should be prepared for the city campaign and not give ‘the bosses’ the opportunity they had in the city campaign of 1904.” Page Baker, editor of the *Times-Democrat* vigorously attacked the city administration in a December 19, 1907 editorial titled “The Need for City Reform.” Behrman immediately responded, and in a series of letters and editorials over the next several days, familiar lines of battle emerged.<sup>50</sup>

The Mayor acknowledged the basic position of the *Times-Democrat* and its editor. Baker “has always been and will ever remain in opposition to ‘ward-bossism.’” But the editorial called for “men who would lop off all superfluities, wipe out all deadheadism . . . and suppress all graft.” Behrman demanded proof of the alleged wrongs and, in his response to Baker, seemed frustrated that after three years in office he had not been able to convince his opponents of the efficacy of his administration. “Since I have assumed the office of chief executive,” the Mayor wrote, “I have given my whole time and attention to administration on a clean, honest, and business like basis.” He called upon Baker to provide “facts in substantiation of your charges.” Two days later, Behrman continued his counter-attack. “I challenge the comparison of the present

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<sup>50</sup> Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 210-211; *Times-Democrat*, December 19, 1907; *Daily Picayune*, December 20, 1907, 6.



with any reform administration you may see fit to single out.” When Baker published a picture of city workers “loafing” at public expense, Behrman noted that one worker sat next to his “dinner pail” and charged the picture had been taken during the meal break.<sup>51</sup>

Behrman picked up an unlikely ally in this dispute. The *Daily Picayune*, normally as anti-ring as the *Times-Democrat*, defended the Mayor at once. “It can be confidently declared that the city has not had [a more honest] or more faithful and public-spirited government since it was rescued from the hands of the carpetbaggers and Republican self-seekers.” Shortly thereafter, the *Daily Picayune* added an editorial analyzing the history of municipal of reform.

The *Picayune* had engaged in not a few of these movements for reform, but it has in every instance found that all of the glitter . . . was too often disappointing in the extreme. For instance, . . . [Mayor] Flower opened a harvest to the private corporations that preyed upon the public franchises and property of this city. The so-called reform administration proved to be one of the most costly and disappointing to the people.

The *Daily Picayune* had revealed the key to Behrman’s success, and, perhaps, the hypocrisy of the opposition. If “reform” administrations could be “costly and disappointing,” it was but a small logical step to conclude that “boss” administrations could be frugal, honest, and progressive.<sup>52</sup>

With a strong vote from New Orleans, Sanders prevailed in the Democratic primary on January 28, 1908. Of his statewide majority of approximately 13,500, nearly

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<sup>51</sup> Behrman to Page Baker, editor, *Times-Democrat*, December 19, 1907, Mayor’s Correspondence; Behrman to Page Baker, December 21, 1907, Mayor’s Correspondence.

<sup>52</sup> *Daily Picayune*, December 20, 1907, 6; December 22, 1907, 8.

10,000 came from the city. There was a general election scheduled for the Spring, but Democrats felt sufficiently confident to begin planning the inauguration. Behrman felt triumphant. Choctaw Club candidates won election, including former Mayor Paul Capdevielle, who received a huge majority from New Orleans. Regular patronage was safe, and a close friend of the Mayor would be governor. Construction began on the long-awaited City Hall annex, a visible sign of the new functions and scope of the public sector. The often reactionary Cotton Exchange promised new cooperation. William Mason Smith, who had clashed with the Mayor on numerous occasions, was succeeded by William B. Thompson. The Mayor promptly answered Thompson's request about the construction of approaches to the docks and wrote "I assure you . . . that it is my purpose to do everything in my power to facilitate the business of the Port." Even the constant criticism of the *Times-Democrat* faded for a time as Behrman initiated his own investigations into city finances and administration. Behrman and the Regulars clearly held the upper hand.<sup>53</sup>

No one anticipated the surprise that Sanders revealed in his inauguration day speech, May 18, 1908. For reasons that escaped the Mayor, Sanders announced state initiatives to increase the regulation of bar rooms and to suppress gambling at race tracks. The Regulars firmly controlled the city delegation to the state legislature. The Speaker of the House, H. Garland Dupre, for example, was also assistant City Attorney.

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<sup>53</sup> Behrman to City Council, January 21, 1908, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to W. B. Thompson, President, Cotton Exchange, January 24, 1908, Mayor's Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, February 2, 1908, 4; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 214.

But the governor's recommendations had sufficient support in the rest of the state to overcome the efforts of Behrman's colleagues. In one bizarre incident, the *Daily Picayune* printed a story accusing pro-gambling forces of trying to poison an anti-gambling senator. The senator recovered and explained that his illness resulted from an excess of "ipecac, taken to relieve indigestion." The bill passed by one vote and the governor signed the anti-gambling legislation on June 24, 1908. The new laws--Gay-Shattuck to control the bar rooms and the Locke Law against race track gambling--caused the Mayor problems with enforcement and opened potential issues that might threaten his re-election. In spite of the governor's position, he and Behrman remained close. The Mayor used his relationship with the governor to distribute patronage. Even during the gambling controversy, the Mayor wrote to ask that a local doctor be retained with the State Board of Health. "He is a good regular, a Behrman man as well as a Sanders man. In addition to that, he is thoroughly competent."<sup>54</sup>

The legislative session brought disappointment to the Regulars, but events in New Orleans held great promise. Behrman's solid record in municipal ownership, construction of utilities, paving, and finance established a basis for a second consecutive term, something no mayor had accomplished since Reconstruction. His election as mayor had broken the cycle of alternating reform and regular administrations. The Mayor's interest and participation in the independent boards and commissions that governed the new development solidified the city's commitment to progressive reforms,

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<sup>54</sup> *Daily Picayune*, May 19, 1908, 1; June 23, 1908, 1; June 24, 1908, 1; June 25, 1908, 1; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 220-228; Behrman to Governor Jared Sanders, June 1, 1908, Mayor's Correspondence.

although his overt use of patronage put him outside of the typical reformer. Behrman forged a strong relationship with the New Orleans business community by the end of his term, in spite of his credentials as a loyal Regular. Only those committed to comprehensive regulation of moral behavior had reason to object to the Mayor's record. The Mayor had agreed to police theater performances and cooperated with efforts to suppress child labor. But he showed no enthusiasm for suppression of gambling or liquor. Although the New Orleans reform element represented a latent political threat, Behrman entered the municipal political season in the summer of 1908 confident of his achievements and eager to serve again.

The years 1900 to 1908 also represented a success for the New Orleans effort to confront the new century. Behrman's first term came to a close as three great public works projects neared completion. The Sewerage and Water Board, first organized as the Regulars recaptured the Mayor's office, promised a clean water supply, modern sewerage, and an improvement in the city's drainage system. By 1908, those promises had largely been kept. Although work on drainage needed completion, the essential challenges had been met. Similarly, the city's wharves, taken into public ownership and operation by 1896 legislation, entered an important era of expansion and development. Finally, the Public Belt Railroad, reorganized under Capdevielle in 1904, began full operations toward the end of the decade. These three initiatives illustrate the overwhelming public support each enjoyed from all points along the political spectrum. And the fact of their development during eight years of "boss" and "machine" rule

makes clear that political and social pedigrees were not essential to the effective public development and administration of progressive civic development.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE NEW ORLEANS SEWERAGE AND WATER BOARD: PUBLIC WORKS AND PUBLIC HEALTH

From its earliest days, New Orleans faced the reality of its improbable location. The first settlers located the city among numerous bodies of water, wetlands, and swamps. To the north was Lake Pontchartrain, actually a large shallow bay connected to the Gulf of Mexico by salt-water passes and other bays. The Mississippi River bisected the city into two unequal parts. The bulk of the city lay on the "East Bank;" the "West Bank" consisted of Algiers, which was part of the incorporated city, and the suburban parishes. The location brought commerce and status as a world port, but also problems of access, weather and health.

Topography exacerbated the unfavorable location. The city existed in a natural, saucer-shaped depression that placed substantial parts of the municipality below sea level. The natural levees of the Mississippi river, interior ridges along placid bayous (once parts of the river itself), and the surrounding swamps constrained the growth of New Orleans. Early settlers found relatively dry land only along the river, and the expansion of the city followed the natural levees in both directions. Residents dug crude drainage canals along the property lines, perpendicular to the river, in attempts to dry their land, but the resulting transfer of water to the rear of the city made conditions

there even worse. The crescent of the river created a circumferential and radial system of streets instead of a grid system, and the radial streets converged in a section known simply as the “backswamp.”<sup>1</sup>

The pre-Civil War growth of New Orleans followed the dictates of topography. The influx of Anglos into a previously French and Spanish colonial landscape, created a tripartite city--an upriver American sector, the French Quarter at the city’s center, and a downriver melange of working class immigrants. Toward the backswamp lived free blacks and those without the means to live elsewhere. Residents in the backswamp built homes on makeshift pilings, dug drainage canals around properties, and placed boards across ditches for safe passage. In the more desirable sections, the wealthy built large homes on spacious lots, but constraints on available land increased population density, especially in the poorer areas. The quality of the land available added to the list of difficulties. Even in relatively well-drained parts of the city, buildings of any type rested upon a soil that had a high content of organic matter and a water table that could

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<sup>1</sup> George G. Earl, *Sewerage, Water and Drainage System of New Orleans*, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana Collection, Vertical File, n.d.; Peirce Lewis, *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape*, 17-30, 42; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 565; *The Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans: How It Began, the Problems It Faces, The Way It Works, The Job It Does*, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana Collection (New Orleans, 1959), 5. Lewis’s work provides an excellent description of the city from the point of view of a geographer: “the cross-section rather resembles a shallow clay saucer filled with layer upon layer of warm jello.” See also Albert E. Cowdry, “Land’s End,” excerpts from Albert Cowdry, *Land’s End* (U.S. Army Corps of engineers, 1977) reprinted in Thomas A. Becnel, editor, *Agriculture and Economic Development in Louisiana*) Volume 16 in Glenn R. Conrad, General Editor, *The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History* (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1997), 22-26.

be reached by anyone with a shovel and energy sufficient to dig several feet.

Construction required pilings for stability, but subsequent settling and soil subsidence left buildings with eccentric tilts and angles. Perversely, progress in drainage meant a lowering of the water table, a consequent drying of the organic material, shrinkage in the soil as water evaporated, and a resulting drop in the city's elevation.<sup>2</sup>

Any water which entered the city--by rainfall, river levee crevasse, or, occasionally, flood--could be removed only if it could flow to an even lower section of the city or if it evaporated over time. At the end of the nineteenth century, New Orleans challenged the laws of hydrology by introducing mechanical means of removing the water and keeping the city dry. And as the city removed more and more water from within its boundaries, the extent of inhabitable land grew, property values increased, and the not inconsiderable threat of frequent floods declined. Two other benefits grew out of the ambitious plan to drain the city: disposal of sewerage and distribution of pure water. The vaults of privies in New Orleans were shallow and subject to overflowing. Sewerage and other liquid municipal waste obeyed the same laws of physics as the less noxious rain water. As the city contemplated pumping rain water out of its boundaries,

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<sup>2</sup> *New Orleans: A History of Three Great Public Utilities--Sewerage, Water and Drainage--and Their Influence upon the Health and Progress of a Big City*, a paper read by Hon. Martin Behrman, Mayor of New Orleans, before convention of League of American Municipalities, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, September 29, 1914, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana Collection (New Orleans, 1914), 1. In John McPhee, *The Control of Nature* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1989), 61, the author describes the relative positions of the river and the Louisiana Superdome by imagining ships on the river with the ability to turn inland and maintain elevation above sea level. By the time they reached the football stadium's playing field, "they would hover above the playing field like blimps."



a system of collecting and removing sewerage seemed logical as well. And if drainage were sufficient to stabilize the city's soils, a water distribution system could be installed. The annual rainfall in New Orleans was among the highest of all cities on the continent. Citizens collected a portion in cisterns for drinking water, unaware of the health hazards of uncovered cisterns.

The interconnectedness of the three systems--drainage, sewerage and water--posed management, engineering, and political challenges. The sewerage system could not work effectively in the absence of a water supply to flush the pipes and allow pumps to lift the outflow. A household water supply, if sufficiently purified, could provide drinking water as well as supply the medium to carry sewerage. And the large complex of pipes necessary to both systems could only be constructed in a stable, drained environment. All three would require development according to a carefully phased plan. Construction would start in the built up areas of the city and be expanded as the city grew. The completion of all three systems demanded a consistent source of funding, a high degree of professional competence, and patience on the part of the electorate. Further, the success of projects required a long term public commitment sustained by the voters and by the political, civic, and commercial establishments. That commitment rested on a widespread certainty among the city's leadership that drainage, water, and sewer systems would not only improve sanitation and health, but also stimulate prosperity and commercial development. For large numbers of New Orleanians, progressive government was synonymous with these ostensibly mundane

public works and public services. The consensus in favor of progressive civic development was first apparent in the support for a new sewerage, water, and drainage system.

The municipal development of the utility systems formally began under the state legislature elected in 1896, but local attempts at acquiring the systems started some years before. Efforts to establish drainage districts supported by taxes failed in the late 1880s, though a city flood in 1890 provoked new interest in governmental action. In that year, the legislature created the Orleans Levee Board which, although it did not directly address drainage, repaired interior levees and improved protection of the city from the overflows of canals. Several years later, the Fitzpatrick administration, which “showed an enlightened interest . . . in drainage,” contracted for a topographical survey of New Orleans, the first step toward a comprehensive plan. (According to a WPA-compiled biography of Fitzpatrick, his interest earned him the nickname “Father of the Sewerage and Water System.”) Although consulting engineers formulated a plan complete with specifications, Fitzpatrick declined to adopt it, citing financial difficulties. Not until 1896 did the legislature create a drainage board for the city year and provide modest financing. In later years, the reform and Regular factions fought to claim credit for the new system, but Fitzpatrick’s actions gave the Regulars grounds to assert paternity.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Report on the Drainage of the City of New Orleans by the Advisory Board (Appointed by Ordinance No. 8327, Adopted by the City Council, November 24, 1893) (New Orleans, 1894), 51-52 quoted in Jackson, New Orleans in the Gilded Age, 95-103; Behrman, New Orleans: A History of Three Great Public Utilities, 3; Mayor’s Office,*

Drainage was not the only public works challenge for which the city looked to the state for assistance. The city granted franchises to two private companies in attempts to acquire a modern sewer system, but both companies underestimated the engineering challenge inherent to the New Orleans topography. Similarly, the city depended upon a private water company for a distribution system under a franchise granted in 1878. Widespread dissatisfaction with service of the Water Works Company led to a movement favoring municipal ownership. The city sued the private company, and the courts declared the franchise void due to nonperformance. The Municipal Improvement Association, formed in 1897, began an extensive campaign of public education and political lobbying to establish a property tax and a special board for sewerage and water system development. Abraham Brittin, a prominent councilman, echoed the association's suggestion and called for a special election. On June 6, 1899, city residents agreed by a margin of 6,272 to 394 to adopt a fifty-year tax of two mills. The new Board also received one-half of the surplus generated by a 10-mill city debt tax passed in 1890 and administered by the Board of Liquidation of City Debt. Act 6 of the legislature's extra session of 1899 and a constitutional amendment affirmed the establishment of the independent board, which began operation in late 1899.<sup>4</sup>

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*Administrations of the Mayors of New Orleans*, 201-203; Conrad, *A Dictionary of Louisiana Biography*, 303; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 507, 574-575. Members of the 1896 commission included Robert Walmsley, Abraham Brittin, Paul Capdevielle, Mayor Flower and others.

<sup>4</sup> Behrman, *New Orleans: A History of Three Great Public Utilities*, 3; *First Semi-Annual Report of the Sewerage and Water Board of the City of New Orleans*, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division, cited hereinafter as [Number] *Semi-Annual*

The timing of the election allowed Mayor Flower to appoint the initial members of the Sewerage and Water Board, even though he would leave office within a few months. Members immediately faced the enormity of their duties, including the possible acquisition of the private company, the establishment of plans for the water and sewerage systems, and the negotiation of a revenue-sharing agreement with the Drainage Commission. In order to obtain the funds necessary for large capital projects, the Board sought authorization for a bond issue from the voters in April, 1900, which passed easily. By the end of the first six months of operations, the Board directed its Superintendent, George Earl, to draw up preliminary plans for the water and sewerage systems. Earl warned the members that the large land area of the city relative to population reduced the efficiency of the sewer system, and he suggested limiting its initial coverage to approximately 500 out of the city's 700 miles of streets. He also reviewed comparative consumption figures with the Board and demonstrated the need for a metering system and a program to reduce waste.<sup>5</sup>

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*Report; Program of the Inauguration of Active Construction of the Sewerage System of the City of New Orleans*, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division (New Orleans, 1903), listed members of the city council and citizens' committees which worked on the special election. Section 32 of Act #6, required periodic reports from the Sewerage and Water Board to the city council. See also *By-Laws: Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans*, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division (New Orleans, 1904), for a capsule history of the special district, especially 14-21; *The Waterworks, Sewerage and Drainage System of New Orleans*, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana Collection (New Orleans, 1940), [no pagination]; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 525-528, 578-579; *Daily Picayune*, June 7, 1899, 1; and Nussbaum, "Progressive Politics in New Orleans," 135-145.

<sup>5</sup> *First Semi-Annual Report*, 1, 3, 4, 12-13, 16-17; *Report of General Superintendent George G. Earl to Sewerage and Water Board, at Regular Meeting*,

In July, 1900, the Board considered a proposal to contract for water from a private company that promised to construct a pipeline to bring water into the city. The company did not reveal the source of this water, but contrasted its quality with river water and assured the Board that “no filtering [would be] necessary.” The proposal received a respectful hearing in part because the company’s attorney was the ubiquitous State Democratic Chair, E. B. Kruttschnitt, a Regular stalwart and Choctaw Club member. The Sewerage and Water Board Superintendent disputed the cost estimates of the proposal and promised the Board that pure river water was possible. In need of expert assistance, the Board retained prominent engineers George Fuller and Rudolph Hering of New York, though “both gentlemen were [temporarily] in Europe,” to form a committee of consulting engineers and local experts. The committee’s first assignment required a recommendation on the issue of filtration of river water. The engineering committee firmly recommended the use of river water for the city. By using a multi-stage process of settling and treatment, pure water could be delivered, although the Board of Advisory Engineers admitted that the intake from the Mississippi River would be “more difficult to purify than the water supplying any other large city in the world.” The Board agreed with engineers’ recommendation, but took the precaution of establishing an experimental purification station to test the process. It authorized a site

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*April 19, 1900*, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division (New Orleans, 1900), 3, 11; *By Laws: Sewerage and Water Board*, 17, 37; *De-watering and Re-watering the City of New Orleans*, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana Collection (New Orleans, 1950?), [no pagination],

in Audubon Park, adjacent to the Mississippi River, and rapidly accepted bids for its construction.<sup>6</sup>

The Board also considered a proposal to purchase the existing private water works, but the initial offer of the company at \$110 per share far exceeded a fair price as determined by Board consultants, in part because the city's legal attack on the company franchise had lowered the market value of the stock. Having successfully established the principle of public ownership of the water utility, the Board decided to let the private company assets remain on the market and to proceed with plans for construction of a new system. In order to finance the new system, the Board quickly moved to sell the bonds secured by the proceeds of the property tax. Advertisements for the bond issue set the sale date for December 15, 1900.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Earl, *Sewerage, Water and Drainage System of New Orleans; First Semi-Annual Report*, 28.; *Reports of General Superintendent on Possible Supply of Water North of Lake Pontchartrain with Estimated Cost of Making Necessary Investigation and Status of Water Purification Elsewhere and approximate Cost and Method of Conducting Investigation Proposed and Final Report of Executive Committee on Preliminary Report of Board of Advisory Engineers and Recommendations on Above Reports*, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division (New Orleans, 1900), 1-4; *By-Laws: Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans*, 17; *Daily Picayune*, July 25, 1900, 10; *Report of Board of Advisory Engineers of Preliminary Meeting and Report of General Superintendent to the Sewerage and Water Board*, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division (New Orleans, 1900), 7; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 581.

<sup>7</sup> *Report of Counsel on the Morrill Proposal to Purchase the New Orleans Water Works Company*, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division (New Orleans, 1900), 1, 7; *Daily Picayune*, August 17, 1900, 3; August 25, 1900, 4; August 30, 1900, 3; September 13, 1900, 4; *First Semi-Annual Report*, 5, 16-17; *Second Semi-Annual Report*; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 582; *De-watering and Re-watering the City of New Orleans*; Behrman, *New Orleans: A History of Three Great Public Utilities*, 8-9. The *Daily Picayune* suggested that since settling would produce large residues of

Excitement over the public improvements permeated public discussion. Real estate agents and developers, identified in the *Daily Picayune* as the “class of people in the city [most interested in] progressive movements,” looked forward to an increase in property values. Harry Hodgson, President of the New Orleans Real Estate Exchange, declared “paving, draining and sewerage . . . has already increased the value of property from ten to fifteen percent,” and that he had already received communications from New York informing him that “now that drainage, paving and sewerage is an assured fact in New Orleans we wish to open a correspondence with you with a view of placing loans in your city.” Hoping to capitalize on the new interest, a local plumber placed an ad reminding residents that “Progressive New Orleans Demand Progressive Plumbing.” And the Progressive Union hosted a sanitary expert from Chattanooga who lectured on the topic “Health is Wealth--Sanitation as a Civic Factor.” All hoped that the new works would help to eliminate the “unsanitary reputation” that burdened the city. Martin Behrman later recalled that commercial expansion of the city began with the passage of the tax because “the outside world” had previously tended “to avoid New Orleans as an undesirable place, either for residence or investment.”<sup>8</sup>

From the beginning, residents treated the project as more than just an engineering project or another instance of public construction. The rhetoric of the

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mud, the city should utilize rail cars to dump the mud in the rear of the city, thereby filling in swamp lands.

<sup>8</sup> Behrman, *New Orleans: A History of Three Great Public Utilities*, 4; Earl, *Sewerage, Water and Drainage System of New Orleans*; *Daily Picayune*, September 1, 1899, Section II, 6, Section III, 2, 7; September 8, 1899, 6.

Municipal Improvement Association emphasized the connection between the sanitation project and commercial success. The Louisville *Courier-Journal* predicted that “New Orleans . . . must inevitably become one of the great cities of the world” given a clean bill of health. The *Daily Picayune* echoed that judgment, claiming that “the greatest need to the progress of [the] city is . . . public sanitation.” At Thanksgiving, A. F. Theard gave thanks “that the citizens have ratified the sewerage and drainage tax . . . [that] will help New Orleans to regain its rank as one of the healthiest and greatest commercial cities of the world.” The holiday message of Superintendent of the Sewerage and Water Board, George Earl, praised the work of the citizens on the Board and found virtue even in the numerous unpaved streets of New Orleans “where it is easier to build sewerage lines.” The consensus for new utility systems transcended city politics. Regardless of electoral squabbles to come, the Board and its works remained sacrosanct, immune from challenge by any of the city’s political factions or organizations.<sup>9</sup>

Sales of the Sewerage and Water Board bonds offered another occasion for linking the project to the city’s prosperity. All municipal bond sales went through the city’s Board of Liquidation. Although members expressed disappointment that banks demanded four percent interest on the issue, thereby lowering the amount available for construction, the Board of Liquidation approved the sale. Member Isidore Newman, President of the New Orleans Stock Exchange, urged acceptance of the bid and a rapid

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<sup>9</sup> Earl, *Sewerage, Water and Drainage System of New Orleans*; *Daily Picayune*, September 4, 1900, 4; November 29, 1900, 3; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 538.



start to construction. “It is my opinion [that] the sooner the work is completed,” he said, “the [sooner] city will enter on a new era of prosperity such as we have never known before.” On December 2, 1900, a *Daily Picayune* editorial predicted future New Orleans railroad expansion, population growth, and great manufacturing operations attributable to the sanitary improvements. Anxious to promote the sale of the bonds, the newspaper continued the theme, suggesting that “the future welfare and prosperity of the city are dependent upon the success of the improvements.” Mindful of conflict of interest difficulties, four Board of Liquidation members, including President Robert Walmsley, recused themselves due to connections with the banks purchasing the bonds.<sup>10</sup>

Mayor Capdevielle met with the full Board on December 16, shortly after a group of banks bid on the bond issue. After interest charges and fees, the Board anticipated \$12,000,000 for construction. With the funds imminent, the Mayor wanted to know how soon construction would start. The staff explained that engineering work was slow; specifications would take at least sixty days to complete. In addition, continuing litigation with the Water Works Company might add to the delay. Board member Charles Janvier asked whether the city would allow excavations during the summer months, the period of greatest risk for disease, especially yellow fever. But the Mayor assured all that the city was “perfectly healthy now.” Enthusiasm continued into the new year. At the annual meeting of the Municipal Improvement Association,

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<sup>10</sup> *Second Semi-Annual Report*, 3-6; *Daily Picayune*, December 2, 1900, 4, December 16, 1900, 4; December 18, 1900, 1.

officers reminded the membership of the group's pioneering work on behalf of public ownership of the sewerage and water systems and offered their congratulations to the city on the occasion of the bond sale. Later, Councilman Zacherie addressed a church group and repeated the connection between the project and prosperity: "We cannot live in an unhealthy place and if this city is to grow in population it must be thoroughly sanitized, which is to us more than half the battle for commercial success and supremacy." The councilman predicted a city that would grow "from the present city clear back to the lake."<sup>11</sup>

In March, 1901, the Sewerage and Water Board staff announced a plan to divide the proceeds of the bond sale. The Drainage Commission, granted a portion of the funds by the state legislature, would receive \$3,900,000. The water works would get \$1,600,000 and the sewerage project the remainder. Progress on water purification encouraged the members. Superintendent Earl announced the experimental station at Audubon Park produced pure water at less than \$.03 per gallon; within a month that figure fell to \$.025. But the Drainage Commission faced severe criticism from residents upset at a flood produced by torrential spring rains. The press reported that "Canal Street was a lake, Common and Tulane a river, and the rest of the central portion of the city from Camp and St. Charles back, an ocean. As to the outskirts of the city and the

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<sup>11</sup> *Daily Picayune*, December 16, 1900, 12; December 18, 1900, 1; January 9, 1901, 1; March 5, 1901, 3; *Second Semi-Annual Report*, 3-6. The councilman's predictions of lakeward expansion came to pass within a few years. See below regarding the help provided by the Board to the New Orleans Land Company to drain the wetlands toward the lake.

suburbs, the water was from two to five feet deep.” The Commission blamed a negligent contractor and faulted itself only for “being too patient in dealing with contractors.” Not long after, however, the Commission announced a reorganization of the drainage operation to improve service. The Commission planned to sue one of the contractors for negligence, but relented when the attorney for the contractor threatened “to expose” the Drainage Commission. The attorney was Edgar Farrar, law partner to E. B. Kruttschnitt, Chairman of the Democratic State Central Committee. Farrar had been active in drafting the original state legislation enabling the Sewerage and Water Board.<sup>12</sup>

Concern over the effectiveness of the Drainage Commission became a theme in subsequent press coverage. In a new round of bids, the commission awarded a large contract to the very company it had earlier blamed for the city flooding. In addition to its disputes with contractors, the Drainage Commission competed with the sewerage and water functions for tax revenues. Linus Brown, a local engineer, criticized the level of spending on drainage as inefficient. The Chair of the City Board of Health defended the level of drainage expenditure, but criticized both utility boards for being composed of financiers and engineers, not sanitarians or hygienists, confirming once again the identification of the project with city health.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Third Semi-Annual Report*, 4; *By-Laws: Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans*, 17; *Daily Picayune*, March 14, 1901, 3; April 19, 1901, 5; April 20, 1901, 6; April 24, 1901, 4; May 16, 1901; May 19, 1901, 4.

<sup>13</sup> *Daily Picayune*, July 25, 1901, 3; July 31, 1901, 3; August 6, 1901, 3.

In August, 1901 Superintendent Earl returned from a trip to the Northeast during which he visited a number of cities and investigated water purification and sewerage treatment plants. Earlier he had advocated disposal of sewerage waste in the Mississippi River. After his visits, he reported to the Board:

Because a discharge into the Mississippi River is the cheapest method, because every city above us has given us the example, because we can do it without harm to ourselves (as there are no cities below us to take exception to our course), because of the almost infinite and immediate dilution and disposal which such a discharge, properly placed, offers, I can see no grounds to look elsewhere.

Earl's visit confirmed his recommendations. He noted the complicated sewerage treatment procedures necessary in most cities and remarked that "the cost . . . of such a system is very great and after seeing it I could but feel thankful that New Orleans has a turbid river with a continuous and large discharge of water into which the sewerage will be discharged with perfect impunity." The Board agreed. New Orleans saved money on sewerage treatment at the cost of its downriver neighbors, but those lands were scarcely populated.<sup>14</sup>

The Louisiana Supreme Court handed the city an important victory on November 6, 1901, when it declared the franchise of the private water company void. The Board immediately moved to begin construction of the public system. A search

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<sup>14</sup> *The Waterworks, Sewerage and Drainage System of New Orleans; First Semi-Annual Report*, 20-21; *By-Laws: Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans*, 17; *Daily Picayune*, August 24, 1901, 3; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 580. Forgetful of Earl's cavalier attitude, public comment later criticized the city of Chicago for altering the flow of the Chicago River in a manner that ultimately dumped that city's sewerage into the Mississippi. In 1940, the Sewerage and Water Board continued to insist that the discharge "was lost in the immensity of flow" in the Mississippi."

began for a suitable site for the water purification system, and the Board authorized its attorneys to use expropriation in any case in which an agreement for compensation could not be reached. The engineering staff quickly located sites, but later complained that the owners wanted “high prices.” The Board also moved to take advantage of its favorable legal position by entering into negotiations with the private water and sewer companies to acquire their assets at what the Board hoped would be advantageous terms. The water company, having lost its franchise as a result of the court decision, still possessed a substantial distribution system. And an investigation of existing sewer lines concluded that the pipes “were in not bad shape” and suggested an acquisition price of between \$170,000 and \$229,000.<sup>15</sup>

During early 1902, the Sewerage and Water Board faced increasing criticism regarding the slow pace of progress. Bonds had been sold more than a year ago, yet no work had begun. The Board’s President Pro Tem, Charles Janvier, responded by detailing the difficulties faced in “one of the largest public works of this character ever undertaken in the U.S.” He defended the Board by pointing out the problems of protracted litigation, the limited funds, and the requirements of complicated engineering. But the contradictions inherent in the separate governance of drainage from sewerage and water also began to emerge. As early as January 10, 1902, the Drainage Board suggested a plan by which it would voluntarily dissolve and ask the legislature to merge its functions with the Sewerage and Water Board. Public opinion

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<sup>15</sup> *Fourth Semi-Annual Report*, 3; *Daily Picayune*, September 27, 1901, 7; November 7, 1901, 3; January 7, 1902, 3 .

turned against the Drainage Commission as the result of flooding, but also because of events that suggested financial incompetence and weak planning. The commission's chief engineer resigned under fire, and talks of merging the two boards grew more frequent.<sup>16</sup>

The regular state legislative session of 1902 considered a bill to merge the systems under the Sewerage and Water Board. Local bankers expressed concern that the merger would invite yet more litigation, and the city's commercial exchanges opposed the merger as well, but the legislature approved the bill. After a governor's veto "for technical deficiencies," the legislature proposed a new version, somewhat quieting the opponents. The logic of a merged board proved decisive. The governor signed the new bill, and members of both boards met as one on August 22, 1902. Though litigation followed and a court decision eventually reduced its membership, the new Board assumed the expanded duties with little difficulty.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Fifth Semi-Annual Report*, 6-10; *Daily Picayune*, January 10, 1902, 7; January 26, 1902, 4; February 4, 1902, 3, 4; February 14, 1902, 4; February 21, 1902, 3, 4. The engineer allowed the substitution of one grade of cement for a cheaper variety resulting in excess profits to a contractor. The Board initially won a suit against the company, but the courts later decided that no harm had come to the city as a result of the substitution. See *Daily Picayune*, May 22, 1904, 4.

<sup>17</sup> The merger took place subsequent to Act 111, July 8, 1902. *Sixth Semi-Annual Report, By-Laws: Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans*, 17-18, 26-28; *Daily Picayune*, May 27, 1902, 11; June 8, 1902, 3, 4; June 13, 1902, 6, 7; June 26, 1902, 1; August 15, 1902, 3; August 22, 1902, 3, 9; Mayor Capdevielle to Sewerage and Water Board, August 13, 1902, Mayor's Correspondence; "Drainage in New Orleans" (n.d.), unpublished summary of drainage legislation, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana Collection, Vertical File; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 538.

During the time the legislature debated merger, the Sewerage and Water board showed signs of progress in initiating construction. Its staff prepared detailed specifications for construction bids and announced that work on a series of sewer pipe contracts would begin “before the year is out.” By mid-year, the Board’s semi-annual publication detailed the work of the previous two and one-half years and looked forward to construction. But the bids received exceeded estimates by a wide margin. Acceptance would result in a reduction in capital projects and lead to an incomplete system or the necessity for additional taxes. In spite of public pressure to begin construction work at all costs, the Board delayed the awards, reorganized the potential contracts into smaller segments, and requested that the construction companies resubmit bids. The Board also announced its intention to start construction with its own crews if necessary. By year’s end the Board advertised the newly reorganized contracts and anticipated substantial savings.<sup>18</sup>

New Year’s greetings published in the *Daily Picayune* prominently mentioned the public works projects. Tom Richardson, Secretary-Manager of the Progressive Union, hoped “that all difficulties concerning municipal improvements of every character will be removed and that a complete sewer and drainage system may be a reality.” J. Watts Kearney, the city’s postmaster, wished “that the Sewerage and Water

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<sup>18</sup> For a sample contract, see *Specifications for Pumping, Steam and Electrical Equipment: Contract “D”*, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division (New Orleans, 1902); *Daily Picayune*, May 27, 1902, 11; August 22, 1902, 9; August 26, 1902, 3; August 27, 1902; October 24, 1902, 6; November 14, 1902, 11; *Fifth Semi-Annual Report*; *Sixth Semi-Annual Report*.

Board be enabled to start their great works.” Kearney was more realistic. The Board started construction in 1903, but it would be a number of years before a system began operations. Board members faced revenue allocation decisions now that drainage responsibilities had become part of its budget, but an increase in assessed valuation of property generated income in excess of bond issue requirements, and the resulting surplus could be appropriated.<sup>19</sup>

The *Daily Picayune* reported on February 3, 1903 that the Board opened the new bids. It would take several weeks to compile the responses, but the new bids “[did] not seem lower than the rejected bids.” The newspaper’s information was incorrect. In a vindication of the decision to delay the project, six of the eight bids corresponded closely to the estimates of the Board’s engineers. The savings from the new bid process totaled between \$200,000 and \$500,000. Recommended contractors provided the necessary bonds, the city council concurred in the award of the contracts, and work finally began. In the midst of the bid process, a court decision on the merger upheld the joining of the two boards, but altered the composition of the membership, which consisted of the mayor, seven district representatives, three city council committee chairmen, and the President and one other member of the city’s powerful Board of Liquidation.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Seventh Semi-Annual Report; Daily Picayune*, January 1, 1903, 5; January 22, 1903, 4; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 538.

<sup>20</sup> *Seventh Semi-Annual Report; By-Laws: Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans*, 18-19; *Daily Picayune*, February 3, 1903, 4; February 13, 1903, 8; February 18, 1903, 8; March 13, 1903, 4; March 20, 1903; March 27, 1903.



Sewer system construction began on June 25, 1903 with a special event at Canal and Robertson Street. Principals wielded ceremonial shovels, and the assembly listened to speeches by the Mayor, attorney Bernard McCloskey, and E. B. Kruttschnitt. The Mayor called the project “unquestionably the greatest public improvement the city had ever undertaken.” Other speakers estimated the cost of the sewer project at \$5,000,000; the initial seven contracts totaled approximately \$1,500,000. Some observers later complained that the ceremony did not give “sufficient credit to former Mayor Flower, Abraham Brittin, Edgar Farrar nor to the Women’s League,” all early proponents of the project and the property tax to provide revenue. However, the program for the event clearly listed the early supporters and thanked “numerous citizens . . . [who assisted in] this great stride in the advance of the city to the front rank among cities of the world.” Special mention was made of Miss Kate Gordon, President of the Woman’s League “who took an active part in the voting” that established the projects.<sup>21</sup>

Difficult engineering problems faced the contractors who started the construction. The city’s almost featureless topography provided very slight gravity assistance to a sewer system, and what declination existed brought the sewerage toward the lake--exactly the opposite of what the engineering plans intended. To compensate, contractors dug deeper and deeper trenches in which to place pipe. At intervals, electric lift stations pumped the liquid waste to a higher elevation, and the process began again.

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<sup>21</sup> Behrman, *New Orleans: A History of Three Great Utilities*, 7; *Program of the Inauguration of Active Construction of the Sewerage System of the City of New Orleans, Sewerage and Water Board Plan; By-Laws: Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans*, 20; *Daily Picayune*, June 26, 1903, 1; June 30, 1903, 6.

Increasing sizes of pipe connected homes to secondary lines and, in turn, to primary lines twenty-four inches in diameter. Ultimately, the sewerage of the entire city was pumped over the levee well down river of the central business district and, more importantly, well down river from the anticipated intake for the city's water purification plant.<sup>22</sup>

Superintendent George Earl provided a review of Sewerage and Water Board activities in the annual business issue of the *Daily Picayune*, September 1, 1903. Earl admitted the tardy start to the sewerage system but blamed court cases. He noted that the Board had started over \$1,700,000 in sewer projects. Also underway were drainage projects began under the previous commission. Construction had not yet started on the water works, but the Board had acquired property and completed specifications for a purification plant with a capacity of 40,000,000 gallons per day. Earl went on to explain that the expense of the systems resulted from the large area of the city in relation to population, the level character of the area, and the great amount of local rainfall.<sup>23</sup>

In 1904, the Board remained active through two political contests: state elections early in the year and municipal elections in the fall. Neither contest obstructed the progress of the Board, nor did any of the various political platforms suggest a change in direction of the utility. The Board staff advertised additional requests for bids

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<sup>22</sup> Behrman, *New Orleans: A History of Three Great Utilities*, 6; *Semi-Annual Report*, Numbers 1-6; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 579-580.

<sup>23</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 1, 1903, Section IV, 4. See also Earl's subsequent analysis of the engineering difficulties in Earl, *Sewerage, Water and Drainage System of New Orleans*.

on sixty-six miles of sewer line, cast iron pipe, and, for the first time, two miles of water mains. Having learned from the first experience with letting bids, the Board divided the sewer work into six contracts in anticipation of promoting competition and lower costs. When bids arrived, there were thirty-six proposals. The work attracted to the city contractors "skilled in sewerage construction," and several firms based outside of New Orleans received contracts. The use of outside contractors raised questions in the community regarding the source of their labor, and the Board noted the obligation of the construction crews to give preference to "home labor." The next year, the new Mayor, Martin Behrman, would again question contractors, noting rumors that "Negro workers from Memphis were being imported to the detriment of local labor."<sup>24</sup>

As construction progressed, estimates of completion dates began to circulate. For the first time, Superintendent Earl provided assurance that, in spite of earlier setbacks, the systems would be completed by the end of 1908--more than four years away. In addition to the complexities of construction and litigation, the Board faced a the problem of constantly adjusting its plans to an expanding city. As the public systems improved, the city grew, requiring extension of the system into areas increasingly distant from the center of the city. The Metairie ridge, a slight rise in elevation of only a few feet, marked the rear, or northern, boundary of New Orleans development. To the north of that ridge lay undeveloped, undrained lands for several miles toward Lake Pontchartrain. Acting on a request from the New Orleans Land

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<sup>24</sup> *Daily Picayune*, December 11, 1903, 4; January 21, 1904, 13; February 3, 1904, 4; October 6, 1905, 8.

Company, the Board agreed to assist the company in draining the northern area, called “Lakeview.” Several years later, under the pressure of declining budgets, the Board required extensions of the water and sewerage systems to be partly financed by the land companies requesting the new facilities.<sup>25</sup>

On April 1, 1904 the Board celebrated a milestone: the completion of the first contract let by the Board for sewer work, in this case the laying of sewer pipe along the river front near Audubon Park. The demonstration of progress did not quell complaints, however, and Earl had to defend the Board once again. He reiterated the 1908 goal for completion of the systems and denied that the Board delayed projects to accumulate funds otherwise available to construction. Three more contracts reached completion by mid-May, 1904, and the Board provided statistics to demonstrate the extent of the works in progress: thirty-nine construction gangs at work, 1,200 men employed, and fourteen active contracts. The scale of the public works attracted nationwide attention. In June, Mayor Capdevielle “had a visitor in Richard Wayne Wilson . . . the representative of the New York *Tribune*, to write of the sewerage, water and drainage systems, the industriousness of the South, and the new progress in this section of the country.” The Board awarded additional contracts in July totaling over \$500,000 of work and noted the “ample and wholesale competition” on the bids.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Eighth Semi-Annual Report; Daily Picayune*, December 24, 1903, 5; February 19, 1904, 4.

<sup>26</sup> *Ninth Semi-Annual Report, By-Laws: Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans*, 21; *Daily Picayune*, May 13, 1904, 5; May 14, 1904, 5; June 7, 1904, 5; July 8, 1904, 5.

When the regular session of the Louisiana legislature convened in summer, 1904, the Board faced only routine matters, although there was some concern over a bill that would limit the work day of Sewerage and Water Board employees to eight hours. Lewis Johnson, Chair of the Board's legislative committee, later reported that the offending legislation "was happily killed." More important to the works project was the announcement in August that the Board planned to begin construction on the enormous water works that would provide the city with 40,000,000 gallons of filtered Mississippi River water per day. Although the New Orleans summer saw little progress (at one point the *Daily Picayune* headline read "Sewerage and Water Board Managed to Get a Quorum"), the staff and consulting engineers worked on specifications for the giant pumps, filtering devices, and storage tanks. The board received initial bids in November, though a dispute over specifications delayed the awards until the following year. The bid dispute involved the attorney for one manufacturer questioning the quality of the ostensible winner's product. Once again, the Board showed considerable deference to attorney E. H. Farrar. The machinery went to bid a second time, but, ultimately, neither company received the award.<sup>27</sup>

Although work on the water and sewerage system proceeded well, the drainage system continued to bedevil the Board. In December, 1904, the Board responded to

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<sup>27</sup> *Specifications for Water Works Pumping Machinery: Contract "1-W"*, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division (New Orleans, 1904); *Tenth Semi-Annual Report*; Behrman, *New Orleans: A History of Three Great Utilities*, 10; also *By-Laws: Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans*, 21; *Daily Picayune*, July 16, 1904, 4; July 29, 1904, 6, 11; August 13, 1904, 4; November 9, 1904, 10; November 10, 1904, 5; December 24, 1904, 10; December 28, 1904, 15; February 7, 1905, 6.

residents' complaints about the drainage canals and frequent flooding by establishing rules for use of the drainage system. Henceforth, the Board forbid the discharge of industrial waste and domestic outhouses into the canals and required specific permission for anyone to connect to any part of the new system. Nature did not cooperate, however, and 1905 brought even heavier rain than usual, highlighting drainage deficiencies during every downpour.<sup>28</sup>

At a lecture to Tulane University students, Superintendent Earl reminded listeners of the scope of the work in progress: a land area of 15,000 acres, population of over 200,000, more than ninety percent of the population dependent on cisterns for water supply, approximately 66,000 structures, and 400 miles of streets. He argued that the drainage system showed progress. Prior to 1900 drainage could remove only 1,300 cubic feet of water per second, although in recent rainstorms water fell on the city at rates exceeding 15,000 cubic feet per second. In a perverse way, city progress added to the strain on the system. Not only was there more land to be drained as the city grew, but the city's extensive street paving program reduced the surface area available to absorb rain water. By the end of 1905, the allocation of revenue for drainage projects ran out. In the absence of additional construction funds, the Board limited drainage

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<sup>28</sup> *By-Laws: Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans*, 21; *Rules of the Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans*, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division (New Orleans, 1908), 3. The Sewerage and Water Board Pamphlet, published in 1908, included a listing of the 1904 rules as well as subsequent regulations regarding fire hydrants and house plumbing.

work to maintenance, and began planning for a new bond issue to finish the drainage works.<sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile, the sewerage and water functions drew upon the remainder of the original \$16,000,000 bond issue. The Board awarded contracts for pumping machinery and extensive supplies of pipe. The largest of the sewer mains became the city's property as contractors completed work. The *Daily Picayune* humorist "McDonogh" praised the Board in a column comparing their activities to a stage production. "The Lucky Thirteen [Sewerage and Water Board Members]," he wrote, "are steady, if at times slow, performers . . . running three [acts] alone and at the same time."<sup>30</sup>

The outbreak of yellow fever in the city in the summer, 1905, made everyone aware that public health and sanitation measures were deadly serious. The connection between the epidemic and the work of the Sewerage and Water Board became apparent as soon as yellow fever cases and deaths began to increase. Drainage and water functions directly affected the spread of the disease because a particular breed of mosquito provided the vector for yellow fever. Ineffective drainage allowed standing water, a potential breeding place for the pest. Likewise, for the ninety percent of New Orleanians that depended upon cisterns, the household water supply served as a source

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<sup>29</sup> *Twelfth Semi-Annual Report, Daily Picayune*, January 19, 1905, 6. In the previous year, the Board's *Tenth Semi-Annual Report* had identified trash in the canals as a major cause of drainage system failure. Average annual rainfall during 1896 to 1905 was approximately 51.5 inches; the 1905 total exceeded seventy-four inches.

<sup>30</sup> *Twelfth Semi-Annual Report, Daily Picayune*, April 19, 1905, 5; May 3, 1905, 10; May 23, 1905, 5; June 9, 1905, 7; July 23, 1905, Section III, 14.

of the disease. By July, 1905, Councilmen Zacharie proposed an ordinance outlawing the manufacture of ice from “impure” water. Superintendent Earl reiterated the promise that the systems would be completed by 1908, but that schedule now seemed more important in an atmosphere of panic over the number of new cases and deaths. The New Orleans Taxpayers Protective Association demanded prompt completion of the water system even if it meant slowing work on the other parts of the system. The Sewerage and Water Board patiently answered the letter. As the new President of the Board, Mayor Behrman reminded the association that only by stretching out the work had the Board been able to accomplish its goals, and that a completed water system, in the absence of the other systems, would be counterproductive. Engineers planned the sewerage system to carry household water waste in addition to sewerage. A domestic water supply with no means of sewerage disposal would lead to additional standing water, not less. And the standing water would remain if there were no drainage system that would carry it away. Controversy did not subside until fall, when cool weather and energetic public health measures brought the mosquito population, and the rate of infection, under control.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Letter of Mayor Martin Behrman, President of the Sewerage and Water Board to the New Orleans Taxpayers’ Protective Association, August 16, 1905, in Sewerage and Water Board: Miscellaneous Correspondence, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Collection; *Daily Picayune*, July 29, 1905, 4; August 1, 1905, 4; August 18, 1905, 8. Superintendent Earl claimed the next year that improvements in drainage also contributed to the reduction in death rates. See Earl, *Sewerage, Water and Drainage System of New Orleans*.



In late 1905, a letter to the Sewerage and Water Board from a disgruntled contractor claimed that the sewer lines deteriorated rapidly due to deficient plans drawn by the Board's staff engineers. The Superintendent claimed the contractor was "simply extortionate," but the Board suspended all work until an assessment of the charges could be arranged. The consulting engineers assembled quickly and began a thorough review of work completed to date. Their report found no widespread problems and affirmed the engineering principles behind the system. Out of over 118 miles of pipe, defects appeared in only 317 feet. The Board affirmed the work of its engineers. To reassure the public even more, the Board invited the American Association for the Advancement of Science, which met in the city at the end of the year, to examine the sewerage, water and drainage plans.<sup>32</sup>

Early in 1906, the Board faced the unpleasant reality of its financial situation. Completion of all three systems demanded additional capital, but additional taxes would not be popular. Fortunately, the rapid growth of the city since the beginning of the project in 1899 provided a solution. The growth in property values increased the yield of the Board's dedicated 2 mill tax; only a portion was necessary to service the original bond issues. The remaining revenue could be combined with the Board's share of the so-called debt tax of 10 mills which provided a second income stream. The resulting funds would be able to service a new bond issue, yielding up to \$8,000,000 in

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<sup>32</sup> *Twelfth Semi-Annual Report, Daily Picayune*, October 24, 1905, 10; November 1, 1905, 4; November 12, 1905, 5; December 15, 1905, 12; January 5, 1906, 5; January 12, 1906, 4.

construction. Attorney Edgar Farrar, author of the 1899 legislation, agreed with the plan and offered his assistance to the Board. The Progressive Union joined in the effort to approach the legislature for an enabling act at the next regular session.<sup>33</sup>

Board projections for completion now depended upon the new funding. Drainage improvements became a secondary priority. By the end of 1908 the central infrastructure of sewerage and water projects would be in place, but household connections would take one to two years more, assuming that the legislature approved the additional bond issue and the Board of Liquidation could sell the bonds. The Sewerage and Water Board also planned to ask the legislature for increased regulatory powers, including the authority to remove cisterns once connection to the central system became possible, but, fearful of public opposition at a time when the bond issue was at stake, the Board withdrew its request for the cistern legislation.<sup>34</sup>

The connection of Farrar to the Board's activities highlighted the non-partisan nature of the activities. Farrar started as a Regular, but drifted toward the reform elements of the city, even while maintaining his law practice with E. B. Kruttschnitt. Board members appointed by the Mayor worked in concert with members from the

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<sup>33</sup> Assessed value of city property subject to taxation grew from \$132 million in 1890 to \$140 million in 1900. After the start of Board operations, during the next fourteen years, values grew to \$250 million. Behrman, *New Orleans: A History of three Great Utilities*, 11; *Twelfth Semi-Annual Report, Daily Picayune*, February 15, 1906, 7. Farrar represented the investors of the private water works, now in receivership. If the sewerage and Water Board were in better financial condition, it might see fit to increase its offer to buy certain assets of the private company.

<sup>34</sup> *Daily Picayune*, April 6, 1906, 6; April 10, 1906, 4; April 21, 1906, 12.

Board of Liquidation; rarely did political issues intervene. On early May, 1906, however, the term of member Charles Theard expired; Behrman replaced him with Joseph Voegtle, a member of the legislature and a Regular stalwart. The *Times-Democrat* immediately objected. Theard's connections with the commercial establishment were impeccable; Voegtle managed a French Quarter hotel. Behrman defended his actions by reminding his opponents that his other Sewerage and Water Board appointments were favorable to the silk-stocking element. The underlying dispute involved more than a comparison of occupations and the class-consciousness of the *Times-Democrat*. Theard, though a friend of Mayor Capdevielle and a Regular in the 1899 elections, had opposed Behrman in the mayoral election of 1904. Voegtle not only supported the Regulars; he had provided rooms in his hotel for Behrman to use as his private offices during the 1904 campaign.<sup>35</sup>

In this instance, the commercial elite saved Theard's membership, but not by dissuading the Mayor. Within a month, members of the Board of Liquidation engineered Theard's reappointment. Charles Janvier resigned from the Board of Liquidation and the private members selected Theard as his replacement. Subsequently, Abraham Brittin, member of the Sewerage and Water Board by virtue of a Board of Liquidation appointment, resigned from the Sewerage and Water Board, creating an opening for Theard. Behrman could not prevent the maneuver. Ever the pragmatist, he accepted Theard's presence, and the two worked well together. In spite of

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<sup>35</sup> Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 97; *Daily Picayune*, May 2, 1906, 5; *Times-Democrat*, May 3, 1906, 4; *Daily Picayune*, May 5, 1906, 6.

disagreements with the Board of Liquidation on other matters, the pending bond issue required the two boards to cooperate, and Behrman helped organize the joint efforts.<sup>36</sup>

Several important events converged in fall, 1906. An immense water purification plant served as the heart of the water system, and plans for its construction approached completion. The Board took special care with the plant, inviting the consulting engineers to review the plans before a call for bids began. The firm of Black and Laird offered the successful bid, totaling \$1,840,727.20. The executive committee and full Board agreed to the proposal, the city council concurred, and the parties signed the contract at the end of September. A reminder to the new contractor to hire local labor followed closely behind. The legislature approved the new bond issue, but the Board needed voter approval. State officials cooperated with the Mayor, and the proposition enjoyed the favored first place on the November ballot. The measure passed by a large margin.<sup>37</sup>

After years of plans, torn-up streets, and litigation, concrete manifestations of the new systems reached the public. The first connection to the sewerage system

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<sup>36</sup> *Daily Picayune*, May 9, 1906, 4; June 7, 1906, 4; September 14, 1906, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Earl, *Sewerage, Water and Drainage System in New Orleans; Thirteenth Semi-Annual Report; Fourteenth Semi-Annual Report*, 24-25; *Daily Picayune*, July 6, 1906, 4; August 7, 1906, 5; September 12, 1906, 7; October 12, 1906, 4; Behrman to General Leon Jastremski, October 24, 1906, Mayor's Correspondence. For sample contract for various parts of the systems, see *Special Specifications for Sewers: Contract "X"*, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division (New Orleans, 1906), and *Special Specifications for Laying Water Pipe: Contract "9-W"*, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division (New Orleans, 1906). The latter document is an original submission by a contractor, "M. O'Herren Co. of Pittsburgh, Pa."

occurred October 11, 1906, at the firm of C. C. Hartwell, 213 Baronne Street, in the heart of the city's business district. After an inspection by the Board, plumbers completed the connection amid a small celebration. When the system reached the offices of the Progressive Union, another celebration took place. Involvement of the Progressive Union highlighted the non-partisan nature of the triumph. The Union's membership, though heavily representative of the city's commercial interests, crossed factional lines between Regular and reformer. Mayor Behrman served on the organization's Board of Directors. Members of the City Board of Health and members of the Sewerage and Water Board also attended the festivities at the Progressive Union. Though the organizers of the celebration hoped the governor would attend, they settled for the state Director of Health, who reminded the assembled dignitaries that the system would reduce the chance of yellow fever. (The honor of the first residence to be connected went to Major Harrod, former engineer to the Drainage Commission and consulting engineer to the Panama Canal Commission.) At its annual meeting early the next year, the Progressive Union celebrated the success of the system. President Godchaux made the commercial argument for the construction. "A few years ago the people of the city arose in their might and said 'Let us have sanitary water and sewerage facilities, and lo! and behold! These are being constructed. Drainage, sewerage, wholesome water and clean streets is a city's best investment, giving greatest, strongest and surest returns.'"<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Daily Picayune*, October 12, 1906, 4; October 21, 1906, 6; November 6, 1906, 5; January 8, 1907, 4.

By March, 1907, the sewer system covered 230 miles of streets; 153 miles were ready for residential connections, but those connections did not materialize rapidly. Short of funds, the Board required the cost of connections to be borne by residents on the promise of repayment when the new bond issue produced funds. In spite of a few high profile connections, large numbers of residents remained skeptical and chose not to pay for a connection. The Board also faced renewed drainage difficulties. A downpour of 8.57 inches in late April, 1907, reminded residents of their precarious site. "Drain, Not Explain" served as the protest slogan for Third Ward residents, but the Board could offer no immediate solution. The Era Club joined the dispute and formed a committee "to propose some persistent questions to the Sewerage and Water Board." Board of Liquidation and Sewerage and Water Board member Theard worried about the city's bid to hold an exposition in 1915 to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal if the drainage system were not complete. He suggested to the Board of Liquidation president that the bankers of the city be organized "to take the \$8,000,000 issue at four percent." Yet the boom years of the decade did not continue. By 1907 uncertainty clouded national financial conditions and the public bonds became difficult to sell. Foreign investors withdrew funds from the United States, and large public bond issues could find no purchasers. Later in the year, the Board diverted a portion of operating funds--\$240,000--into additional drainage construction, but only the sale of the bonds could provide funds to complete the system.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Fifteenth Semi-Annual Report; Sixteenth Semi-Annual Report; Daily Picayune*, March 4, 1907, 5; April 27, 1907, 4; May 14, 1907, 11; May 25, 1907, 3; June 7, 1907,

By September 1, 1907, the annual commercial review of the *Daily Picayune* hailed the progress on “the Trinity of Civic Salvation” and looked forward to its completion in 1908. The main sewers began operation with unfiltered river water and over 277 miles of pipe passed all tests. Over 150 miles of the water distribution system were complete, and work continued on the main purification station. The purchase, earlier in the year, of the assets of a private water company in Algiers hastened progress on the west bank of the river. Even the cash-poor drainage system was forty percent complete. Mindful of the financial squeeze, the Board rejected a series of private bids, estimated at \$300,000 in excess of what was reasonable, in favor of performing the work with Sewerage and Water Board employees. Behrman later claimed that the use of city employees saved the Sewerage and Water Board from \$562,000 to \$895,000 during the period 1907-1913. But the issue of public versus private labor did not go away. Behrman and Earl stoutly defended the use of public labor. By 1913, the use of Board labor became a source of dispute between the Board and local contractors, and the state legislature refused to endorse the use of public labor for original construction, although maintenance work could be performed by Board employees.<sup>40</sup>

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4; June 12, 1907, 7; November 24, 1907, 5. The Era Club later confirmed the judgement of the Sewerage and Water Board staff that refuse clogging drains led to street flooding. The Club recommended “cleaning culverts, reducing street circulars and picking up garbage carefully.” *Daily Picayune*, December 29, 1907, 6. For an account of the 1907 financial panic and the intervention of J.P. Morgan, see Jean Strouse, “The Brilliant Bailout,” *New Yorker*, November 23, 1998, 62-77.

<sup>40</sup> *Eighteenth Semi-Annual Report*; Behrman, *New Orleans: A History of Three Great Utilities*, 12-13; *Correspondence and Papers Relating to the Board's Negotiations with the Algiers Water Works and Electric Company for the Purchase of*

Early in 1908, the Board reached another milestone when the sewerage system in Algiers began operation. The first residence workers connected was Mayor Behrman's home. The Board, however, faced new challenges from the water system. A large fire in the Third Ward spread out of control as insufficient pressure at the new hydrants hampered firemen. The superintendent explained that not all hydrants had been connected. Concerns over fire protection continued when, in June, conflagrations threatened the business district, still served by the private water company. Sewerage and Water Board officials hastened to connect the new city system to the old pipes in order to increase the pressure at the hydrants. By the end of the year, the Mayor staged a demonstration of the new system, using fire trucks to spray water down Elks Place. The *Daily Picayune* declared "The City's New Water System Makes a Splendid Showing."<sup>41</sup>

The Board also dealt with less momentous matters. In early February, 1908, the Board received a report that an employee had been "garnished" by a woman in the red light district who claimed he "had pledged Sewerage and Water Board plans for wine drunk in her house." And citizens along the new Melpomene drainage canal petitioned

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*Its Waterworks Systems*, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division (New Orleans, 1907); Behrman to City Council, April 30, 1907, Mayor's Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, September 1, 1907, Section III, 3; September 17, 1907, 4; October 11, 1907, 13. The Board plan received a setback when a local judge granted an injunction against Sewerage and Water Board labor on projects and ordered contracts awarded to the low bidder(s). The Board appealed and the ruling was later overturned, but the issue remained contentious for at least a decade. *Daily Picayune*, March 17, 1908, 15.

<sup>41</sup> *Daily Picayune*, January 10, 1908, 4, 11; February 12, 1908, 13; February 14, 1908; June 16, 1908; June 25, 1908, 5; November 16, 1908, 4.



the Sewerage and Water Board to build bridges over the canal to make travel easier and to build “fences along the canal to prevent cows” from falling into the water. The Board agreed to the bridges, but did not have sufficient funds to protect local livestock.<sup>42</sup>

Anticipating completion of the system, the Board revisited the issue of household connections and the use of cisterns. At the Board’s request, the legislature considered a bill to require all premises to connect to the system and to outlaw the use of both cisterns and privy vaults. Not all citizens agreed. The New Orleans Taxpayers’ Protective Association rallied against the legislation, claiming that “personal liberty is being attacked.” One member “advanced the argument that river water does not agree with some people; that a man knows his own stomach better than . . . state legislation on the Water Board knows it.” Another member blamed the Regular organization, “seventeen inferior men,” though that comment “brought [another] member to his feet saying that if party politics were to be dragged into a meeting at which ladies were present, there would be trouble.” Though the Board got its bill, it would be years before all homes joined the new system.<sup>43</sup>

The pace of construction picked up as the end of 1908, the Board’s self-imposed deadline, approached. By September, 1908, Earl reported the successful installation of 411 miles of water pipe with most under pressure. Anticipating the start of distribution operations, the Superintendent studied water rates across the country to arrive at a

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<sup>42</sup>*Daily Picayune*, February 12, 1908, 13; March 24, 1908, 5; April 10, 1908, 4.

<sup>43</sup> *Daily Picayune*, June 24, 1908, 4; September 9, 1908, 8; December 11, 1908, 4.

schedule for New Orleans. Charges would “be sufficient to cover maintenance and operation of the system” but would not exceed the average for cities having municipal systems. Board members agreed with Earl, but put off formal adoption of rates until after the municipal election. A pro-Behrman election pamphlet later boasted that an investigation of water rates by a committee of the Progressive Union found the “rates satisfactory . . . [and] the department was wonderfully well conducted.” The Board also considered an orderly method for establishing sewer and water connections; applications had increased and created a backlog for Sewerage and Water board crews. Complete operations awaited only the completion of the water works and implementation of the filtering process.<sup>44</sup>

Those works attracted considerable national and international attention. Dr. Albert Chalmette, Director of the Institute of Lille, member of the Supreme Council of Public Hygiene of France and bacteriologist, visited New Orleans and “declared himself highly pleased with [the] water works.” George K. Rider, Board of Trustees of Sacramento, echoed the French visitor’s comments and paid the highest compliment: “New Orleans is a progressive and rapidly growing city and it couldn’t make a better investment than [the water works.]” Later in the year, the Louisiana Section of the American Chemical Society visited the works, examined the method of purification, and

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<sup>44</sup> *Eighteenth Semi-Annual Report, Daily Picayune*, September 11, 1908, 4; September 18, 1908, 4; *The Behrman Administration: Work Accomplished During the Eight Years of the Honorable Martin Behrman as Mayor of the City of New Orleans Compiled and Condensed from the Records and Official Reports in the Various Departments of the City Government*, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana Collection, Vertical File (New Orleans, 1912), 4.

“were impressed.” Mayor Behrman, asked for a Thanksgiving message by a New York newspaper, wrote “New Orleans rejoices today over the completion of our modern system of sewerage, water and drainage and water purification which will be in full operation by the dawn of the new year.” His message to the newly installed city council in December boasted of progress toward completion of the sewerage, water and drainage system, adding that street paving would be made easier once the contracts for pipe-laying were completed.<sup>45</sup>

The Board missed the December, 1908, deadline by only a few months. By January 1, 1909, the Superintendent estimated that ninety percent of the sewerage system and ninety-nine percent of the water distribution system were complete. Testing on the water purification plant proved successful, and, in February, 1909, workers pressurized the distribution system and pure water flowed through the more than 500 miles of pipes along New Orleans streets, including over 5,000 fire hydrants. Shortly thereafter, the city joined the remnants of the old, private system to the new by means of “a great reducing valve.” Consulting engineers from New York supervised the connection which “waited for the close of carnival” before completion. By 1910, the city had spent a total of \$8.5 million on the water system alone and over \$5 million each on the sewerage and drainage systems. Not everyone felt gratitude towards the Board. Disputes over water rates arose immediately and bedeviled the Board for months. When the Era Club met in May, 1909, Jean Gordon, who had fought for adoption of the

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<sup>45</sup> *Daily Picayune*, October 16, 1908, 6; October 28, 1908; November 26, 1908, 5; December 8, 1908, 5; December 11, 1908, 4.

systems in 1899, suggested “that a special thanksgiving be held for the splendid clear water now being supplied to the city.” But “there was some opposition to this motion, one member holding that she saw no reason to give thanks for what one had to pay for.” In spite of the advice of the City Board of Health, the Taxpayers Protective Association persisted in its fight to preserve the right to maintain cisterns. Only a Louisiana Supreme Court decision to the contrary ended the use of cisterns to provide water to homes.<sup>46</sup>

The start of operations of the system did not mark the end of the capital funding crisis. The 1906 authorization for an additional \$8,000,000 bond issue remained in place, but bonds could not be sold, even after a 1908 amendment providing for a premium of up to six percent for the purchasers. In February, 1909, the Mayor assembled the representatives of local banks to urge purchase of the bonds. Charles Theard, Chairman of the Sewerage and Water Board Finance Committee, and former adversary of Behrman, echoed the Mayor’s pleas. Bankers blamed the national financial crisis, but also reminded the Mayor of his insistence upon interest payments for public funds. Bank executive Sol Wexler suggested that public deposits “without interest would be a greater inducement to take” the bonds. Wexler also pointedly complained about the city’s assessments on bank property. Not until May, 1909, after suspension of construction and dismissal of 400 employees, was the Board able to sell

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<sup>46</sup> Behrman, *New Orleans: A History of Three Great Utilities*, 10; Nineteenth Semi-Annual Report; *The Behrman Administration: Work Accomplished During the Eight Years . . .*, 4; *Daily Picayune*, February 25, 1909, 4; May 24, 1909, 5; March 10, 1910, 4; March 14, 1910, 6.

bonds, and then only \$1,000,000 of the issue was taken in spite of the premium available to purchasers. The Mayor intervened once again late in 1910, bringing together the commercial exchanges in the hopes that their leadership would impress local banks. After promising that unexpended funds would be deposited in the banks that would purchase the issue, a local syndicate purchased the remaining \$7 million in 1911. A full construction schedule resumed, and the systems were substantially completed by 1917.<sup>47</sup>

What Behrman apologists called “the three great public utilities” embodied the principles of southern urban progressivism: limitations on direct democratic input, the use of experts, and the assumption that a public interest could be defined and served. The Sewerage and Water Board, for example, included both political appointments and representatives from the Board of Liquidation of City Debt. The city establishment justified support for the systems in recognizable progressive terms: commercial success as well as improvements in health and efficiency, especially as the result of the epidemic of 1905. In New Orleans, the progressive impulse toward municipal reform existed across political and social lines, and lasted through numerous elections and changes in governmental structure. The underlying consensus in favor of progressive civic

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<sup>47</sup> The Louisiana legislature granted permission for the premium in Act 111, regular session of 1908. Senator Voegtle, member of the Sewerage Water Board handled the legislation. Charles Theard, whom Behrman had replaced on the Sewerage and Water Board with Voegtle, later commended his adversary on his management of the legislation. *Eighteenth Semi-Annual Report*, 11; *Daily Picayune*, July 12, 1908, 4; February 27, 1909, 5; *Nineteenth Semi-Annual Report*, *Twentieth Semi-Annual Report*, *Twenty-Second Semi-Annual Report*, *Twenty-Third Semi-Annual Report*.

development transcended, or overcame, corporate interests. New Orleans underwent a transformation as the result of these public utilities: a decrease in death rates, distribution of pure water, and expansion of habitable space due to drained lands. Such progress enjoyed the widest possible support and illuminates the turn of the century view of politics, progressivism, and the public interest.



**PROGRESSIVE CIVIC DEVELOPMENT AND POLITICAL CONFLICT:  
REGULAR DEMOCRATS AND REFORMERS IN NEW ORLEANS, 1896-1912**

VOLUME II

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Doctor of Philosophy

in

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## CHAPTER VII

### THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF THE PORT OF NEW ORLEANS: PUBLIC WORKS AND TRADE EXPANSION

Along the bends of the Mississippi River below New Orleans, vessels of all types traveled to and from the Crescent City. Between the city and the open water of the Gulf of Mexico was one hundred and ten miles of winding river, currents, narrow passes, and sand bars. Ship captains picked up bar pilots to navigate through the confusing passes at the mouth of the river, shaped by centuries of silt, and switched to river pilots to complete the trip upriver to New Orleans. Once at the port, ships clung to the city's docks, fighting the currents that were always difficult and especially treacherous at high water times. The location of the Port of New Orleans overcame these and other obstacles through the transcending advantages of its location on the continent's greatest river. The Mississippi provided access to a large percentage of the United States interior, to the Missouri and Ohio Rivers, and beyond.

Although the leadership of the city feared a decline of trade after the Civil War, the river trade revived quickly. The federal government sponsored improvements at the mouth of the river, and the products of new commercial agriculture developing in the Midwest and Plains became available for export. A large percentage of the nation's grain output, coal production, cotton crop, and, in the twentieth century, petroleum

products found an outlet to the world through New Orleans. The port also provided the Latin American world an entry to the United States market, particularly for the raw materials and agricultural products of Central and South America.<sup>1</sup>

A closeup view of the New Orleans port in the aftermath of the Civil War revealed an unplanned mix of levees, batture lands, wharves, and landings. City streets converged at the river, adding to the congestion and confusion. The city council exercised authority over the river front, but had no clear vision of the port's future. Unable to finance necessary improvements, the city contracted with a private firm to administer the port. After the expiration of the contract in 1881, a second lease granted rights of administration to Joseph A. Aiken & Company for ten years. The company agreed to spend a minimum amount on annual repairs and improvements, but the port's infrastructure requirements quickly exceeded the specified investments. When the lease expired in 1891, the council drew up a more elaborate contract binding the successor company to a higher level of improvements, especially for the period 1891 to 1893. Moreover, the council specified wharf charges and license fees for steamships, flatboats, and barges. An elaborate, though arbitrary, allocation of space divided the river front area into zones for steamships, sailing vessels, salt carrying vessels, coal ships,

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis, *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape*, 48-51; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 599; Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age*, 6; *Port Handbook of New Orleans*, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana Collection (New Orleans, 1928), 9; *Port and Terminal Facilities, Port of New Orleans, Louisiana*, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana Collection (New Orleans, 1919), 12; Frank T. Cass, *Facts of Interest about the Port of New Orleans*, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana Collection (New Orleans, 1922), 6-7.

steamboats, and luggers. Conditions improved for a time, but by mid-decade the river front area was in disarray.<sup>2</sup>

New transportation technologies complicated the port's future. In the post-Civil War period, railroads came into the city in spite of formidable natural barriers. Attracted by the business of the port, railroads competed for scarce river front space. Once a railroad received a franchise or privilege, granted by the city council, that portion of available land came under the control of the railroad and the shipping lines with which it negotiated agreements. The river front became increasingly crowded as competing interests and modes of transport filled the available space, and the port grew beyond the boundaries of the city proper. In 1888, Congress had recognized the growth and expanded the jurisdiction of the port into Jefferson Parish, upriver from New Orleans. The multi-parish nature of the operation changed the political climate, and in the crucial legislative session of 1896, business, state, and municipal interests converged to radically restructure the administration of the river front.

At the time, the legislature included a number of business-oriented municipal reformers from the Citizens' League. Mayor Flower, and most of the city administration, belonged to the Citizens' League as well. The Regular organization, although temporarily out of office in the city, maintained considerable strength at the state level and could challenge initiatives of the League. But this was not an issue about

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<sup>2</sup>Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age*, 6; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 603-605. For a comprehensive history of the port, see Harold Sinclair, *The Port of New Orleans* (New York: Garden City, 1942).

which the two factions disagreed. Both agreed that the contracting of port administration should be replaced with a comprehensive, state-level public structure. When the city council received a report from a committee of the city's merchants, no dissent was recorded. The legislature passed a bill to reorganize the port without significant opposition, and Governor Foster, a friend of the New Orleans Regular organization, signed the legislation. Act Number 70 of 1896 took the river front out of the control of private contractors and placed it under a new organization--the Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans. The new governance of the port took its place alongside other progressive-era reforms and public works projects in New Orleans. The widespread support given the Dock Board, as it was popularly called, reinforced the existence of a city consensus in favor of progressive civic development.

The structure of the new board eliminated direct control by elected officials. The governor appointed members of the board from among the residents of Orleans, Jefferson, and St. Bernard parishes. Members were required to "be prominently identified with the commerce or business interests of the port." Thus the new structure followed the progressive ideal of expert governance. But Regular Democrats maintained a measure of control through the governor's appointment process as long as the state's chief executive remained sympathetic to the Regulars' wishes. Appointees to the Dock Board had considerable influence. The Dock Board possessed significant power to:

regulate the commerce and traffic of the Harbor of New Orleans . . . to administer the public wharves; to construct new wharves. . . and erect sheds

thereupon; to protect merchandise in transit; to place and keep the wharves, sheds, levees and approaches in good condition; to maintain sufficient depth of water and provide for lighting and policing such wharves and sheds.<sup>3</sup>

At its first meeting, the Board selected Robert Bleakley as President and Hugh McCloskey as Vice-President. Other members included Thomas Henderson, Sidney March and W. A. Kernaghan. Hugh McCloskey's brother Bernard served as attorney to the commissioners. Board members and staff were political appointees; all had significant connections to the city's political or economic establishments. The McCloskey brothers were charter members of the Citizens' League, although Bernard McCloskey joined the Choctaws by 1902, as did Board member Sidney March. William Kernaghan was a charter member of the Choctaw Club. The Board's Assistant Secretary, Clark Steen, had served as secretary to John Fitzpatrick during his mayoralty. In September, the Board wrote to Acting Mayor Abraham Brittin of New Orleans to announce their readiness to assume authority over the wharves and landings. To their disappointment, the Louisiana Construction Company, contractor for the docks, implicitly questioned the Board's authority. Correspondence from the company came not to the Dock Board but to the city administration. The Mayor forwarded the communications, but the Board refused to receive the letters. Before long, members

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<sup>3</sup> Arthur McQuirk, *Laws Constitutional and Statutory Relating to the Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans Up to and Including the Year 1920*, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana Collection (New Orleans, 1920), 2; *Port Handbook of New Orleans*, 13-14; *Daily Picayune*, June 5, 1896, 4, 12; July 7, 1896, 4; July 9, 1896, 1; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 605; Sinclair, *The Port of New Orleans*, 298-301. St. Bernard Parish occupies the east side of the Mississippi River below New Orleans.

discussed the advisability of seeking an annulment of the contractor's lease in order to take over the docks immediately.<sup>4</sup>

Awaiting developments regarding the lease, the Board addressed other matters. The system of assigning dock space and the casual attitude of wharf officials had led to abuses. In April, 1897, the Board held special hearings to investigate charges that employees of the commission took bribes in exchange for allowing goods to sit on the wharves at no charge. Nothing emerged from the investigation, and a local grand jury took over the probe. In early September, 1897, Board President Bleakly became seriously ill and died after just one year's service. Hugh McCloskey took over as president and Branch M. King, a cotton factor, took Bleakly's place on the commission. McCloskey quickly showed interest and energy in his new position. He wrote the contractor urging repairs to wharves and landings and, within a month of taking office, organized the commission agenda and drafted a set of rules for the superintendent and other port employees. The commission prepared a report of its first-year activities and forwarded the results to Governor Foster. The Governor wrote the members and thanked them for their efforts. Though he "had not yet read the report," he wrote that "time, I feel confident, will show the wisdom of my selections in the personnel of the board as its record will be one of honest and intelligent administration of the port's affairs." The members approved by-laws in mid-November, 1897, committing

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<sup>4</sup> Minute Books, Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Collection, August 24, September 8, November 4, November 18, 1896, hereinafter cited as Dock Board Minute Books; *Port Handbook of New Orleans*, 8; Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, Appendices I and II.

themselves to twice-monthly meetings from September to April and once-a-month meetings in the warmer months.<sup>5</sup>

The commissioners adopted a list of port regulations in November as well. The specificity of the new rules revealed areas of concern; for example, ships were not allowed to heat tar, pitch, or resin while in port because of the fire danger. The regulations sought to impose a measure of order to berth assignments, assigned responsibility for enforcement, and forbade “throwing ballast, rubbish, or anything that will sink into the river.” In addition to its administrative role, the Board also became a promoter and defender of the port facilities. In answering a report in the *New Orleans Times Democrat* wherein a captain complained about wharf charges, the commissioners ordered the staff to research comparative charges at Baltimore, Mobile, New York and Galveston. The New Orleans charges were lower than all others, even under contractor rates. When the new public rates went into effect, the New Orleans port would be an even better bargain.<sup>6</sup>

By early 1899, port commissioners showed impatience with their situation. The city administration continued to grant privileges along the river front to various railroads, though state law seemed to give such authority to the Dock Board. Commissioner King requested an opinion from the Board’s attorney to investigate the situation, but only future litigation would clarify the respective roles of the city and the

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<sup>5</sup> Dock Board Minute Books, September 1, 15, 23, October 20, November 17, 1897.

<sup>6</sup> Dock Board Minute Books, November 17, 1897, March 2, 1898.

Board. The Board also directed the attorney to investigate expropriation of the private lease. Bernard McCloskey brought unwelcome news to the frustrated members. The Board had the authority to expropriate, but such a course was unwise. Protracted litigation would last until the lease's expiration date, and legislation obligated the city of New Orleans to pay liquidation costs in the case of a takeover. The attorney's "conversation with city officials" indicated that the municipal government had no funds for that purpose. Unwilling to give up its investment and income, the company remained in operation until the expiration of its lease, and the Dock Board members waited until the wharves would finally pass to their control.<sup>7</sup>

Commissioner King again raised the question of Board authority in December, 1900, six months prior to the lease expiration. He provided a list of suggestions to his fellow members, asking them to notify the New Orleans City Council and "ask their cooperation . . . [that] no more franchises or privileges be granted by them without consultation." He also suggested gathering data concerning operations from the contractor and negotiating a lighting contract along the wharves, adding "we must first work in harmony and let our efforts be earnest but economical, our aim always being to foster our port and harbor and increase our commerce."<sup>8</sup>

In 1899, Board President Hugh McCloskey had promised the "wharfage system would be ideal as soon as all the private profit is eliminated." Neither McCloskey nor any other Board member opposed private profit. All members enjoyed private business

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<sup>7</sup> Dock Board Minute Books, March 1, May 10, 1899.

<sup>8</sup> Dock Board Minute Books, December 5, 1900.



interests of their own, but the ethic of public ownership and operation prevailed. Private interests gave way when a clear public purpose arose. More to the point, the commercial establishment preferred (or tolerated) public ownership when the project served the larger concept of commercial progress. The Dock Board did not, in the eyes of the commissioners, supplant private enterprise. The operation of the wharves under public control made an expansion of private enterprise possible. The consensus held that progress depended upon an expansion of harbor activities that would be possible only under public rule. The state legislature confirmed the Board's authority by Act Number 36 in 1900 and adjusted the rates that could be charged.<sup>9</sup>

Expectations ran high as the takeover of the river front drew near. "Wharf reforms to wait a while," proclaimed one headline, "until the control . . . passes into Dock Board's enterprising hands." In a letter to the editor of the *Daily Picayune*, former Council member Sidney Story praised the position of the newspaper in favor of public utilities and counted the Dock Board as "the first victory . . . [in] the campaign for building a greater city." New Year's greetings in 1901 from Mayor Capdevielle looked forward to wharves under the Dock Board control and vowed "to educate our people . . . that they have the finest city on the continent." The Mayor may have wished the Dock Board well, but this did not prevent him from trying to collect funds he felt were due the city for services rendered to the new commission. In May, 1901, the

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<sup>9</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 1, 1899, Section III, 12; McGuirk, *Laws Constitutional and Statutory*, 3-6; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 605-606 .

Mayor wrote the Dock Board demanding \$17,500, the cost of police protection provided to the harbor district.<sup>10</sup>

The lease of the Louisiana Construction and Improvement Company finally expired May 29, 1901. The commissioners compensated the Louisiana Construction Company for the residual value of property left behind. Board appraisers placed the amount due at \$15,317.92, even though the company considered the price “confiscatory.” But the Board did not relent and the funds were paid. The Dock Board moved quickly to assert its leadership. Members visited the wharves and published a schedule of charges that lowered rates on certain sized vessels to encourage use of the wharves. Within a week of the takeover, McCloskey appeared before the city’s Progressive Union. He noted the reduction in rates under public control and detailed a comparison for seven ships in port. Under the old rates, the vessels would have paid \$728.88 in port charges. The new schedule of fees lowered that amount to \$242.96. Such comparisons enabled McCloskey to justify the public involvement. The money saved, after all, was returned to private hands.<sup>11</sup>

Before long, the Board faced the consequences of jurisdictional ambiguities along the river front. Years of *ad hoc*, even contradictory, actions on the part of the city

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<sup>10</sup> *Daily Picayune*, November 8, 1900, 5; January 1, 1901, 3; April 1, 1901, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Dock Board Minute Books, May 14, 28, 29, 1901; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 605; *Daily Picayune*, June 4, 1901, 3; Martin Behrman, *New Orleans: What It Is Doing to Facilitate Transportation Both by Rail and River*, address delivered by Martin Behrman, Mayor of New Orleans, Twelfth Annual Session of the National Rivers and Harbors Congress, Washington, D.C., December 8, 1915, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana Collection (New Orleans, 1915), 8.

council left the area a jumble of franchises and special privileges. Speculation about the intrusion of railroad franchises on Dock Board land began before the expiration of the primary lease. By mid-July, 1901, the Board confronted the dilemma by asserting its full rights to the river front land, vowing to go to court to enforce its jurisdiction over the Illinois Central tracks. The Board of Trade backed the Dock Board position, which assured the commercial organization of its intention "to build all wharves . . . necessary to the handling of export and import business." Similarly, in August, 1901, a seemingly minor conflict over the placement of a fence, on property the ownership of which was a matter of dispute, escalated into a confrontation between the Dock Board and the Louisville and Nashville Railroad (L&N). McCloskey and City Attorney Samuel Gilmore defended the public position, while attorney George Denegre represented the railroad. A court decision favorable to the Dock Board helped settle the dispute.<sup>12</sup>

By early September, port operations enjoyed increased success and received corresponding praise. August statistics showed the largest volume of business for the port in its history, and Board members approved ambitious plans for construction. By October the *Daily Picayune* wrote approvingly of the simultaneous lowering of rates and increased improvements:

When one reflects that a few month have elapsed since the Dock Commission came into complete possession of the wharves . . . the reputation of the port has been enhanced and more ships are now coming here. . . . The Dock Board is

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<sup>12</sup> Dock Board Minute Books, July 2, 9, 24, August 27, September 3, 1901; *Daily Picayune*, February 12, 1901, Section II, 1; July 26, 1901, 4; July 31, 1901, 4; August 1, 1901, 3, 4; August 29, 1901, 3; August 30, 1901, 3; August 31, 1901, 4; September 6, 1901, 3.

entitled to the warm commendation of the business community for the intelligent and public-spirited manner in which the work . . . has been carried on.<sup>13</sup>

The Board began to take a leadership position among government agencies. In October, the Dock Board joined with the commissioners of the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad, recently established by the city council, to oppose Illinois Central claims to the waterfront. A month later, the Board convened a meeting with the Orleans Levee Board for the same purpose. Board authority increased dramatically when a court decided that only the Dock Board had authority over batture lands. The future of the river front lay in the Board's hands. Port charges declined again in December as the Board completed an effective six months in control of the wharves. The governor and various local dignitaries, including Mayor Capdevielle and former Mayor Fitzpatrick, took a tour of the new facilities at the end of the year, viewing "the great benefits that have resulted since the control . . . passed from the hands of a private corporation." Capdevielle's tour did not suppress all controversy between the city and the Dock Board. In November, the Mayor reminded the port of the \$17,500 owed for the cost of policing the "harbor precinct" for the previous seven months. Dock Board records indicate that "no action was taken" on the city's request.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Dock Board Minute Books, October 15, November 5, 1901; *Daily Picayune* September 4, 1901, 3; October 3, 1901, 7; December 4, 1901, 3,4.

<sup>14</sup> Dock Board Minute Books, October 15, November 19, December 3, 1901; *Daily Picayune*, October 3, 1901, 7; November 16, 1901, 3; December 4, 1901, 3,4; December 14, 1901, 3; Capdevielle to Port Commission, November 27, 1901, Mayor's Correspondence. The New Orleans Public Belt Railroad was organized at the turn of the century to provide a public, common carrier railroad for the wharves and docks of New Orleans. See Chapter VIII for the history of the public belt's development.

Progress continued during 1902 as the port business increased. The U.S. Navy brought a dry dock to Algiers to use for the repair and refurbishing of large ships. A successful test was completed early in the year using the battleship *Illinois*. Within a short time, the use of the facility exceeded expectations. The Board continued its building program, expanding the capacity of the port while improving existing facilities. Prior to the Board's administration, most freight passing through the port lay exposed to the elements. Only a limited number of wharves had sheds to protect goods; tented tarpaulins provided only minimal protection for the remainder. Under the Dock Board's leadership, contractors built sheds and wharves at a rapid rate at Henderson, Market, Toledano, Clouet and Orange Streets and provided facilities for an oil refinery in Chalmette, located in St. Bernard Parish. New facilities brought additional revenue, and funds in excess of operating expenses capitalized additional improvements. Not all projects involved contractors. When faced with higher-than-expected bids, the Board rejected the private option and directed its staff to perform the work. When rates for private dredges exceeded expectations, the Board contracted to purchase and operate its own. Nor were the Board's promotional functions overlooked. Members received the pleas of the New Orleans Progressive Union and cooperated in a program to bring additional railroads to the city. One Progressive Union publication urged railroad investment in the city by detailing progress along the river. "City wharves . . . are now

in the hands of the Port commission . . . [which is] reconstructing the wharves with substantial structures and sheds.”<sup>15</sup>

By the end of the board’s first year of full operation, members looked back on significant progress from the conditions extant under the private contractor. The governor reappointed Hugh McCloskey upon the expiration of his term, and his colleagues immediately reelected him President. Board interest in the progress of the Public Belt railroad added to an increasingly lengthy agenda, as did the operation of a harbor patrol and the constant stream of requests for wharf space from steamship lines and railroads. Tonnage handled by the port had increased significantly from 1900 through 1901, from under 3,000,000 tons to over 4,000,000. In spite of the by-laws specifications of one meeting per month in late spring and summer, the Board held numerous special meetings in 1902 as the demands of business increased: four in May, one in June, two in July and three in August. By November, the rapid construction schedule required a line of credit and the Board negotiated a loan from the Hibernia Bank and Trust Company.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Dock Board Minute Books, January 7, February 4, 15, May 13, 16, 22; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 607; *Daily Picayune*, January 7, 1902, 4, 11; February 23, 1902, 3; July 9, 1902, 3; *New Railroads for New Orleans: Valuable Facts and Reliable Statistics About the Metropolis of the South*, published by Associated Committee of Commercial Bodies of New Orleans for the Increase of Railroad Facilities Called Together by the New Orleans Progressive Union, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana Collection (New Orleans, 1902), 8.

<sup>16</sup> Dock Board Minute Books, May-September, October 21, November 18, and December 2, 1902; *Port Handbook of New Orleans*, 8, 11.

The next year marked a replay of earlier court fights. Even in the middle of important litigation over river front control, a local railroad company requested additional privileges along the wharves. Dock Board members declined “to act upon the request until the suit is settled.” Mayor Capdevielle attempted to restrain the council’s tendency to award franchises along the river, questioning whether or not the council had the right to give property if the Dock Board had control. Throughout the process, the Board counted on the support of the Board of Trade, a stalwart defender of the notion that river front commerce should be administered by public bodies. As the Dock Board’s building program slowed because of lack of funds, steamship companies and railroads suggested a plan to advance funds to the port for the construction of additional steel sheds. Mindful of the public interest in the river activities, Board members briefly considered a recreational platform or pier. But safety considerations prevailed, and the plans died a quiet death.<sup>17</sup>

In August, 1903, the Board announced plans to spend \$250,000 on new steel sheds. Board president McCloskey proudly reviewed the year’s progress, including the decline in ton-costs from twelve cents under the old system to less than seven cents. In 1900, forty-eight percent of port business came across public wharves; the 1903 figure was seventy percent. The coffee trade from Central and South America grew from

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<sup>17</sup> The conflict between commercial and recreational access to the river continues. A collision in 1996 between a large freighter and a wharf refitted as a shopping center caused concern about the large number of tourist and hotel facilities built close to the river, including the New Orleans Aquarium. Dock Board Minute Books, March 6, April 7, April 25, June 9, 1903; *Daily Picayune*, January 20, 1903, 6; January 21, 1903, 8; February 3, 1903, 9; March 10, 1903, 3; June 10, 1903, 3.

200,000 sacks in 1896 to 1,000,000 in 1902. To keep up with demand for facilities, the Board accepted an advance from a railroad line and contracted for even more shed construction at the Julia and Celeste Street facilities.<sup>18</sup>

New construction at the river near Girod Street placed more demands on the Dock Board budget. By May, 1904, as the regular session of the legislature approached, the Board prepared legislation authorizing \$2,000,000 in revenue bonds for port construction and other improvements. The city's political and commercial establishments immediately united behind the plan. Charles Janvier, member of the city's Board of Liquidation, issued a statement of support, the Board of Trade agreed by formal resolution, and the *Daily Picayune* lent its editorial voice to the effort. A vision of the new river front was presented to the public. "Commerce to Have a Grand River Front," read the *Daily Picayune* headline to an article that described paved roads and approaches, sheds with public utilities, and lower shipping rates—all to be completed within two to three years. In the midst of the plans came word that the Dock Board had won its case against a railroad granted land by the city council, affirming the power of the state agency. Mayor Capdevielle agreed not to appeal, marking the acquiescence of the city in the Dock Board's power. The Mayor, who had won his position through the political power of the Choctaw Club, defied the wishes of his city council when he decided not to appeal the case. But there was no clear Regulars versus reformer

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<sup>18</sup> Dock Board Minute Books, July 14, August 11, September 1, 15; *New Railroads for New Orleans*, 6-7; *Daily Picayune*, August 12, 1903, 5; September 1, 1903, Section III, 10; September 2, 1903, 8; September 16, 1903, 5; September 29, 1903, 4.



controversy on this issue. Most of the Dock Board, with the exception of President Hugh McCloskey, had ties to the Regulars and owed their positions to governors similarly connected to the Choctaw Club. The dividing line between the two sides was not factional, but rather reflected two different, although largely unarticulated, ideologies. Both groups wanted an expansion of city commerce, but those in favor of the railroad position saw economic development as a function of private investment, especially investment by large railroads. Those who argued in favor of the Dock Board position also craved commercial expansion. But the latter group assumed a major role for government investment, operation, and even ownership of crucial elements of the transportation infrastructure.<sup>19</sup>

After personal lobbying of Governor Blanchard by Board members, the bond authorization passed the legislature in Act Number 44 of the 1904 legislature. In mid-July consulting engineers placed “the magnificent plan” before the port commission and the long-range vision of the port was in place. In the midst of the 1904 mayoral campaign, the changes along the river front received no great notice. Even though the campaign divided the city along traditional Regular-reformer lines, Martin Behrman and Charles Buck, the contending mayoral candidates, did not make the governance of the

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<sup>19</sup> Dock Board Minute Books, February 20, May 24, 1904; *Daily Picayune*, February 19, 1904, 5; May 26, 1904, 1; May 28, 1904, 5; June 25, 1904, 5. The differences in the two groups may also reflect what William Link called the “paradox” of southern progressivism. In this case, those arguing for private investment represent the individualistic, republican South; those arguing on behalf of the Dock Board represent the centralizing influences of progressivism. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, 1-5.

wharves an issue. The civic consensus in favor of changes in the port was firm and not subject to the vagaries of election. Once again, President McCloskey set out the vision: "The Cheapest Port Charges with the Best Facilities." Routine business continued as well. The Illinois Central offered an advance to keep construction on schedule as the Board planned for an early 1905 bond sale. The Dock Board firmly supported city efforts to serve the wharves with an efficient railroad belt system. December tonnage figures set another record as the Board struggled to expand facilities to meet demand. And the completed bond sale provided necessary funds for four years of construction.<sup>20</sup>

In February, 1905, an enormous fire broke out on the Stuyvesant Docks, the portion of the wharves leased to the Illinois Central Railroad. Damage to the cargo, freight handling facilities, nearby homes, and an ice plant was estimated to be as high as \$3,000,000. The railroad immediately announced plans to rebuild, and the Board turned its attention to prevention and fire fighting. Within a week, plans emerged for a water main that would run along the river and serve the docks with sufficient pressure to fight fires. In addition, the Board planned for the purchase of a fire boat. By the end of March, the port acquired a tug to be converted into such a boat. Later actions of the Board recommended the use of spark arresters on locomotives and the use of fuel less likely to cause a fire hazard.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> McGuirk, *Laws Constitutional and Statutory*, 6; Dock Board Minute Books, July 26, 1904; *Daily Picayune*, July 13, 1904, 9; September 1, 1904, Section III, 10; October 5, 1904, 4; December 21, 1904, 7; January 4, 1905, 4; February 8, 1905, 5; March 2, 1905, 5. For a full discussion of the public belt railroad, see Chapter VIII.

<sup>21</sup> *Daily Picayune*, February 27, 1905, 1; February 28, 1905, 1; March 2, 1905, 5; March 10, 1905, 4; March 31, 1905, 5.

In May, 1905, the Board looked back on its four years of active control of the port with pride. Among other achievements, Superintendent Cope reported on the “Dock Board’s fine showing” after the port’s own crews built sections of wharves for “less than the lowest [private company] bids and much quicker” than the private estimate of construction time. The emphasis on savings realized from the use of public labor echoed the attitude of the city’s Sewerage and Water Board, which went to similar pains to justify public labor supplanting private contractors. But the substitution of public labor for private enterprise was not a permanent change. The Board would use the option of its own labor when private bids were too high. As long as those bids were within reason, the Board utilized private contractors. By the end of May, 1905, the Board announced award of a contract for one of the largest projects to date, the construction of the Julia Street Wharf. And to prevent further fire calamities, the Board completed arrangements for a water main along the length of the river front, although the Sewerage and Water Board did not complete the project until 1908. The activity did not go unnoticed. *Daily Picayune* columnist “McDonogh” called the Board “the Sensational Five . . . doing the building along the riverfront.” He added that “they have earned the title by neat, clean and consistent work” and “every day represents something done for the public welfare.”<sup>22</sup>

The next few months proved difficult for the port and the city as the yellow fever epidemic undermined the city’s commercial reputation. Monthly tonnage figures began

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<sup>22</sup> *Daily Picayune*, May 3, 1905, 10; May 10, 1905, 4; May 31, 1905, 7; July 11, 1905, 4; July 23, 1905, Section III, 14; May 9, 1906, 5.

to fall as the fever spread, although the port management announced only “very slight decreases from the previous year in spite of the yellow fever.” Wharf construction proceeded even during the months of the epidemic; \$500,000 refurbished or built wharves at Toledano, Market, Erato, Eighth, Toulouse, Hospital, and Mandeville Streets. As a fire prevention measure, the Board asked riverfront railroads to use fuel that would reduce the danger of stray sparks. The tug-turned-fire boat, re-christened “Sampson,” proved its worth by the end of the year, when, after a fire broke out on a cotton ship, it extinguished the blaze in three hours.<sup>23</sup>

The success of the port led to the Board’s involvement in a wider range of civic endeavors. In addition to its contributions to the public belt system, the Board provided an important mediating influence among river front interests. At the request of the Progressive Union, which wished “to make New Orleans the distribution point for the immigration business,” the Board agreed to investigate the building of an immigration station. New Orleans was an important port of entry for immigrants and state policy sought to increase the flow of potential rural labor. The Board identified a potential site but needed railroad cooperation in rearranging tracks, and the project stalled.<sup>24</sup>

Board policy also transformed the port administration into an active agent for promoting specific market segments in the import/export business. Latin American

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<sup>23</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 9, 1905, 14; September 6, 1905, 4; September 15, 1905, 5; November 14, 1905, 7.

<sup>24</sup> *Daily Picayune*, December 20, 1905, 4; April 4, 1906, 11. For one view of Louisiana’s efforts to increase immigration, see Charles Shanabruch, “The Louisiana Immigration Movement, 1891-1907: An Analysis of Efforts, Attitudes, and Opportunities,” *Louisiana History* 18 (Spring 1977): 203-226.

exports of fruit to the United States expanded rapidly during the first decade of the century, and New Orleans was a natural point of entry. The Board responded by erecting special facilities for the fruit trade. When the contractor experienced difficulties in delivering the completed sheds, the Board threatened to take over the project rather than risk the loss of the trade. Business was so good that St. Bernard interests proposed an extension of port jurisdiction to the mouth of Lake Borgne east of New Orleans. But the city council and press condemned the move as detrimental to the interests of the port, since it would dilute the economic effects of commerce over too large an area.<sup>25</sup>

Throughout 1906, the Board's construction program continued: acquisition of steel doors for sheds, roofing contracts, new shed construction, and paving projects. Cooperation with the belt road led to an extension of the time limit set for the belt's completion, a project necessary for the most efficient movement of goods along the river front. But for the first time since the organization of the new commission, questions arose over the port's schedule of fees. The state legislature voted for an investigation of "excessive charges" at the port, and McCloskey was forced to defend his policies. Cotton brokers in particular complained that the New Orleans port suffered in comparison with Galveston, causing a loss in cotton trade to the Texas competitor. The controversy accelerated, and the Progressive Union asked Mayor Behrman to intervene, claiming that "the net cost for handling [cargo in New Orleans] is

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<sup>25</sup> *Port Handbook of New Orleans*, 11; *Daily Picayune*, February 21, 1906, 5; March 7, 1906, 5; April 4, 1906, 11.

prohibitory.” Behrman declined, but the Board of Trade announced an investigation of the port charges.<sup>26</sup>

The controversy over fees at the port persisted for two years. In response to the concerns of the Cotton Exchange, the Dock Board began an inquiry into labor costs at the New Orleans docks and the methods of cotton compression and inspection that might put the city at a disadvantage. In February, 1907, the Board agreed with the Exchange that inspection policies put the city in a weak competitive situation and urged a conference between the Board of Trade and the Cotton Exchange. When the situation had not improved by summer, the Progressive Union intervened and again urged a resolution of the issue. Throughout the controversy, the Dock Board continued its program of improvements. Bids were opened for a paved roadway along the wharves, the first phase of which would run from Bienville Street to Barracks Street, roughly the east-west boundaries of the French Quarter. A long wharf was planned for the stretch of the river from Jackson Avenue to St. Mary Street, a distance of 1,600 feet. And the Board held a conference with lumber interests from the Board of Trade to consider construction of a wharf designed to promote the export of lumber from the port. Governor Blanchard recognized the contributions of Board President McCloskey by appointing him to an additional five-year term in September, 1907.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 1, 1906, Section III, 3; September 29, 1906, 5; October 11, 1906, 4.

<sup>27</sup> Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 607-608; *Daily Picayune*, January 4, 1907, 4; January 19, 1907, 12; February 20, 1907, 8; March 6, 1907, 4; April 3, 1907, 5; June 28, 1907, Section II, 1; July 3, 1907, 5; September 26, 1907, 15. See also Donald J. Millet, “The Lumber Industry of ‘Imperial’ Calcasieu: 1865-1900,” *Louisiana*

The latter half of 1907 proved difficult for the port as total tonnage declined from 1906 levels. In 1908 the port would handle 1,000,000 fewer tons than the peak of 5,000,000 in 1906. Longshoremen struck the river front, and even Mayor Behrman, viewed as sympathetic to labor, was unable to coax them back to work. Behrman suggested former Mayor Capdevielle as an “umpire” for the strike, but management rejected him because he would be standing for reelection as state auditor early in 1908. In addition, racial tensions among the workers arose over representation on an investigating committee. Although black screwmen welcomed the investigation and nominated participants, white workers refused to accept African-American representation. In addition to labor troubles, the port continued to receive criticism and unfavorable comparisons with other ports. In November, after numerous attempts at mediation, the strike ended. At the same time, Governor Blanchard’s message to a special session of the legislature called for an investigation of the New Orleans port, emphasizing its status as a state, not a city, agency. The Progressive Union sided with the governor’s call for investigation. In the group’s annual report for 1907, initiation of the investigation is claimed as a signal accomplishment.<sup>28</sup>

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*History 7* (Winter 1966): 51-69 and Anna C. Burns, “The Gulf Lumber Company, Fullerton: A View of Lumbering During Louisiana’s Golden Era,” *Louisiana History* 20 (Spring 1979): 197-207.

<sup>28</sup> *Port Handbook of New Orleans*, 11; Behrman to William M. Smith, President, New Orleans Cotton Exchange, November 2, 1907, Mayor’s Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, September 29, 1907, 1; October 8, 1907, 13; October 9, 1907, 13; October 22, 1907, 1; October 31, 1907, 12; November 1, 1907, 10; November 5, 1907, 8; January 8, 1908, 2; Colored Screwmen Benevolent Association Number 1 of Louisiana to Behrman, October 31, 1907, Behrman papers.

For the first part of 1908, the Dock Board faced the recently-appointed legislative investigating committee, whose work took five months to complete. Members of the investigative committee visited Savannah, Pensacola, and Mobile to examine operations and gather suggestions for improving the New Orleans port. Upon convening back in New Orleans, the committee received information from the Dock Board, and attention quickly returned to the question of cotton handling. Inconsistent inspection and a myriad of compression standards harmed the cotton trade, and the President of the Cotton Exchange, William B. Thompson, called for “a central warehouse to cut out unnecessary labor and handling [and equipped] with a compression machine.” The Cotton Exchange and the Board of Trade entered into a rare public disagreement, each appealing to the investigating committee. Dock Board President McCloskey claimed that the “diversion of cotton” to Galveston could be traced to “transportation discrimination” not to the shortcomings of the port. He blamed both the railroads and the shipping lines, since preferential agreements between railroads and shippers discriminated against “tramp steamers.”<sup>29</sup>

The idea of an injurious combination of railroad and shipper resonated with a public suspicious of monopoly and alert to anti-trust actions. Federal power had been brought to bear against nefarious combinations; should not local and state power be exercised as well? The *Daily Picayune* editorialized against the “combinations” that restricted the cotton “free market.” Resentments aimed against the railroads increased

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<sup>29</sup>*Daily Picayune*, February 8, 1908, 1; February 19, 1908, 11; February 20, 1908, 11; May 1, 1908, 4; May 3, 1908, 4.



when President J. T. Harahan and local General Agent Hunter C. Leake of the Illinois Central publicly suggested shipping cotton through Birmingham to Savannah. Leake later claimed that the simultaneous statements were “co-incidence” and that the railroad was not engaged in threatening the New Orleans port. Local observers remained unconvinced.<sup>30</sup>

The completion of the investigating committee’s work brought good news to the city and the port administration. The final report emphasized the quality of the port’s facilities and the “natural advantage” of its location, but pointed out that additional construction--especially for much-needed lumber facilities-- required more funds. “Facilities and natural advantage equal trade” was the recommended formula, and the committee advised the upcoming session of the legislature to approve another bond issue first proposed by the Board in April “to complete the great wharf system.” The committee criticized the Leyland and Harrison shipping lines for “combining” with the railroads to “secure practically a monopoly” and shut out tramp steamers, thus reducing competition. Mindful of the controversy over the cotton trade, the report endorsed efforts to regulate cotton handling and compression. Finally, the committee confidently predicted labor peace “for five years” due to its benevolent intervention. (In spite of the investigating committee’s prediction, labor peace did not come to the docks. Strikes broke out in July, 1908, and the governor appointed an arbitration commission, assuring the community that “the arbitrators [would] be all white men.”). Additional good news

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<sup>30</sup> *Daily Picayune*, March 27, 1908, 5, 6; March 28, 1908, 5.

came from a city council resolution. First introduced in the beginning of 1908, the resolution, backed by the Mayor, sought to dedicate the naturally scarce land along the river front for “public use . . . forever.” The city council resisted, but the weight of public opinion—including support from the Board of Trade—moved the ordinance in the spring of that year.<sup>31</sup>

The proposed bond issue received widespread support after the recommendation of the investigating committee. The commercial exchanges and civic groups joined in urging the legislation, including the Cotton, Sugar and Rice, Livestock, Stock, and Contractors and Dealers Exchanges, as well as the Board of Trade. The state legislature agreed, and Act 180 of 1908, approved on July 3, provided \$3,500,000 for new construction. The act pledged Dock Board revenues from operations to pay the bonds. Obviously confident in the profitability of the docks, the legislature also required the Board to stand behind a bond issue granted to the Public Belt Railroad.<sup>32</sup>

The bond issue allowed the Board to continue its construction work at a crucial time, but final approval awaited a statewide vote in November. In April, the Board had agreed to expand the wharves by 4,000 feet in the area above Napoleon Avenue. During summer, shipping lines requested expanded facilities as overseas trade boomed. The

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<sup>31</sup> Henry Schreiber, President, Board of Trade to Behrman, February 3, 1908, Behrman Papers; *Daily Picayune*, February 19, 1908, 4; March 26, 1908, 6; April 29, 1908, 4; May 29, 1908, 12; June 9, 1908, 6; July 7, 1908, 1. The arbitration commission successfully ended the strike. In February, 1908 the Wholesale Grocers Association; felt the land dedication issue important enough to issue a statement of support to the city council. *Daily Picayune*, February 14, 1908.

<sup>32</sup> McGuirk, *Laws Constitutional and Statutory*, 10-12; *Daily Picayune*, June 17, 1908, 12; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 608.

United Fruit Company petitioned the Board for additional wharf space to add to its 2,100 feet. Company representative C. H. Ellis announced that United Fruit had ordered three new ships for the Latin American trade and planned to order three more, the largest of which would be 400 feet long. The company anticipated an increase in the banana trade from 4,000,000 bunches per year to 8,000,000. In August, the Board hosted a visit from Governor Sanders and thanked him for supporting the bond issue. The Governor returned the compliment, calling the Dock Board “a model of finest public service.” By November, additional requests for expansion came from coffee shippers. “Coffee the new king and the Dock Board will crown him” announced the *Daily Picayune*. The shippers estimated a volume of 2,000,000 bags, and the Board agreed to build a 1,500 foot shed and install automated handling equipment as soon as possible.<sup>33</sup>

As 1909 began and the bond issue went to market, the Board juggled space requests from competing interests, asserted its authority vis-a-vis the city council once again, and confronted safety issues. Steamboats constituted a declining percentage of port business and a nuisance to other users of the docks. Bowing to the steamship lines, the Board rearranged wharf space, moved the steamboats, and assigned new facilities to

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<sup>33</sup> McGuirk, *Laws Constitutional and Statutory*, 12; *Daily Picayune*, April 10, 1908, 4; July 15, 1908, 10; August 10, 1908, 5; October 24, 1908, 5; November 18, 1908, 4. The New Orleans port remained an important part of the banana trade until Gulfport, Mississippi, constructed special facilities and diverted a large portion of the business. By 1920, the coffee trade at New Orleans exceeded 380,000,000 pounds, approximately thirty per cent of all imports of coffee into the United States. Cass, *Facts of Interest about the Port of New Orleans*, 19.

them from Canal Street to Lafayette. But the Board resisted a new council initiative to grant land at Canal Street and the river to the Texas Pacific Railroad. The city council passed an ordinance at the request of the railroad, which wanted to use the Louisville and Nashville passenger depot on the downriver side of Canal Street. Secure in its legal status after a decade of court decisions, the Board refused. Alert to the continuing threat of fires along the docks, the Board recommended to the railroads that spark arresters be installed on all locomotives and required wharf operators to acquire fire-fighting equipment that would connect to the new water mains.<sup>34</sup>

Matters of commerce and the business climate united the commercial and political establishment beyond the routine matters of port administration. In March, 1909, Mayor Behrman, John Parker and James W. Porch traveled to the northeastern United States to promote the port's facilities. Although the Mayor and Porch had worked together on the public belt railroad, Parker--prominent member of the Cotton Exchange--was a constant enemy of the Regulars. (Parker once called professional politicians "socially useless.") Nevertheless, any political antagonism remained in the background during the promotional trip. At a banquet in Philadelphia, the Mayor spoke in praise of the river front facilities and emphasized the public nature of the operations. He assured the audience that all steamship and railroad lines enjoyed "parity" at the docks and recommended to his hosts "the evolution of a public policy which has had in view the preservation of a large part of our water front and its dedication under public

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<sup>34</sup> *Daily Picayune*, January 20, 1909, 4; February 2, 1909, 12; February 18, 1909, 5; March 12, 1909, 4.

control to the needs of our commerce.” In May, 1909, Philadelphia officials visited New Orleans, and regular steamship service began between the two ports. President F. S. Groves of the Philadelphia and Gulf Steamship Line inspected the New Orleans harbor facilities and supported the notion of public ownership by commenting:

This is the most wonderful harbor I have ever seen; the best system in the county is in operation here. . . the docks are splendidly constructed and much better than the slip system. The public ownership of the docks, I think, solves the problem. In Philadelphia, ninety percent of the river front is owned by the railroads and this tends to cripple any port.<sup>35</sup>

Behrman had occasion to repeat his arguments in favor of public port facilities in May when the battleship *Mississippi* paid a call on the port of New Orleans. Port officials felt that the U.S. Navy discriminated against the city and that competing ports spread false information about the navigability of the river. The federal government had only recently financed the opening of the Southwest Pass from the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico, and city officials used the battleship’s visit to publicize the port’s facilities. At a grand banquet for the officers of the *Mississippi*, Mayor Behrman mentioned the city’s campaign to sell “the rest of the country” on the river’s ease of navigation. Congressman Ransdell of Louisiana called the visit “a splendid argument for deep waterways” and added that “New Orleans is especially fortunate in having

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<sup>35</sup> Behrman to James W. Porch, June 2, 1907, Mayor’s Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, March 11, 1909, 1; March 12, 1909, 5; May 8, 1909, 7; June 13, 1909, 4. According to Schott, “John M. Parker and the Varieties of American Progressivism,” 151-153, Parker helped organize the Southern Commercial Congress and was a prominent participant in the Rivers and Harbors Congress. The lobbying groups emphasized improvements to waterways, especially the Mississippi River. For the comment regarding professional politicians, see Schott, 117.

retained control of its riverfront instead of transferring [it] to railroads.” When the *Mississippi* subsequently traveled upriver as far as Natchez and then returned down the river in record time, the city viewed the exercise as further proof that the river and port were established in the first ranks of American waterways and harbors.<sup>36</sup>

Throughout the decade, the Dock Board took an expansive view of its authority, and its role in the promotion of commerce continued to grow. A joint committee of the Cotton Exchange and the National Farmers’ Union had studied the issue of cotton warehousing, and Chairman W. B. Thompson approached the Dock Board with a request for a radical departure from private enterprise. The business slump of 1906 to 1908 was over, and the port hoped to capture a larger share of the cotton market. In July, 1909, the President of the Cotton Exchange (and Public Belt commission member) called for the construction and operation of a public warehouse for the storage and handling of cotton for export. This was not the first occasion on which a central warehouse had been recommended, but Thompson emphasized the difference between the old and the new plans. The new plan involved a public facility, owned and operated

by the people of the state. . . . It is a public enterprise which must . . . be successfully inaugurated and operated only by the power of the people. Individuals or private corporations cannot accomplish the object of the design. [It would be] foolhardy to give to such individuals or private corporations so large a grant of arbitrary power.”

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<sup>36</sup> Monthly Report of Secretary/Manager, Minutes, Reports, and Related Miscellany of the Progressive Union Board and Its Various Committees and Subcommittees, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Special Collections (hereinafter cited as *Progressive Union Minutes*), May, 1909: *Daily Picayune*, May 10, 1909, 4; May 11, 1909, 6, 12; May 13, 1909, 1; May 26, 1909, 1.

Thompson enumerated three dangers inherent in private ownership--high charges, monopolistic tendencies, and potential domination by the railroads--and argued that a public operation placed "under the Dock Board would avoid" all three. A *Daily Picayune* editorial quickly echoed Thompson's arguments for expanded Dock Board power:

While under ordinary circumstances, the facilities for the handling of cotton would and should be provided by private enterprise, the powerful combination composed of American railroads and foreign shippers and foreign buyers renders it imperatively necessary that our cotton growers, our manufacturers . . . should make some counter movement to obtain some hold on the traffic of one of our great staples. We must therefore adopt some such methods in handling and storing of cotton as are used and operated against us.<sup>37</sup>

The warehouse project faced a significant challenge from the private sector. A member of John M. Parker's brokerage firm announced in early 1910 that investors planned a private warehouse to service the cotton trade. John Airy enumerated several reasons for a private facility, including liability, superior administration, and better cooperation from railroads. W. B. Thompson, Cotton Exchange President, took the lead in refuting Airy's contentions. The Exchange declined to endorse a particular plan, but agreed that the facility--whether public or private--should stay within the city. Mayor Behrman opposed the private project, recalling later that "whenever government wants to do something some private interest always says it is unjustly injured." The Dock Board vowed to fight the scheme, especially because its proposed location would remove business from the city. A steamship line joined opponents of the "outside site,"

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<sup>37</sup> *Port Handbook of New Orleans*, 11; *Daily Picayune*, July 11, 1909, 8.

and Mayor Behrman began a search for a city location. The *Daily Picayune* editorialized on behalf of a public warehouse, citing fear of domination of trade by one railroad, the effectiveness of the Dock Board, and the access to the Public Belt Railroad that a city location would provide.<sup>38</sup>

The warehouse project took several years to implement. The Board received legislative authorization in 1910. Later that year, a constitutional amendment added to the Board's authority. But litigation delayed the project, and the ability of the Board to construct the facility remained uncertain until 1913, when a new constitution for the state clarified the issue. Construction began the next year after a review of the plans by the city's Cotton Exchange and the first stage of the warehouse was completed with an annual capacity of two million bales. In later years, a public grain elevator took its place among the expanded facilities along the river front.<sup>39</sup>

Mayor Behrman praised the operation of the river front and considered its improvement an important achievement for the city. Even though the Dock Board was a state agency, city support was essential in obtaining legislative support. In return, Dock Board patronage flowed to the Regular organization. In its operation, the Board

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<sup>38</sup> Hugh McCloskey to Behrman, January 3, 1910, Behrman Papers; *Daily Picayune*, January 1, 1910, 6, 12; January 5, 1910, 6; January 13, 1910, 5; January 21, 1910, 7; February 10, 1910, 8; February 18, 1910, 5, 8; Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 152-153.

<sup>39</sup> *The WPA Guide to New Orleans*, the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration for the City of New Orleans (Pantheon Books, New York: 1983), 276-277; Kendall, *The History of New Orleans*, 2: 609-611; McGuirk, *Laws Constitutional and Statutory*, 13-14; *Port Handbook of New Orleans*, 25; *Port and Terminal Facilities*, 25-26; *Facts of Interest about the Port of New Orleans*, 18; Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 152.



thus represented an interesting combination of progressive ideals--expertise and governance insulated from direct democracy--and the political functionality of the Regulars--patronage and direct service to clients. The two supposed opposites came together in the public ownership and operations of the docks. Mayor Behrman's pragmatism led him to support the Dock Board and public projects such as the cotton warehouse, easily rejecting arguments to the contrary. Perhaps his lack of intellectual rigor, as opposed to native intelligence, made the Mayor the ideal leader for such ostensibly contradictory arrangements. Behrman claimed that public attitudes were pragmatic as well. "Things change. The people's ideas change from time to time. . . . Once upon a time you could easily condemn anything by saying it was 'Socialistic.' When it was decided in 1910 to build the public cotton warehouse, *The Times-Democrat* said it was 'Socialistic.' Nobody paid the least attention to that." In an address to the National Rivers and Harbors Congress in 1915, the Mayor claimed "in the policy and practice of public ownership, control and operation of its water-front facilities, New Orleans is far in advance of any other American port." In that year, the jurisdiction of the Dock Board extended over forty-one miles of river front and five miles of wharves. In 1914, Behrman reported, the public facilities of the port served 1,529 vessels. The port ranked second in the United States in volume of cargo--over 6,000,000 tons--and had attracted \$20,000,000 in federal funds helped to dredge the Mississippi River channels.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 83; Behrman, *New Orleans: What It Is Doing to Facilitate Transportation*, 5-7; *Port Handbook of New Orleans*, 11.

The construction and development program along the river front demonstrated a consistent purpose and an adherence to the principles under which the Board operated. Once the city and state turned away from private enterprise as a solution to the public organization of the docks, the Board steadfastly pursued the socialization of costs and benefits. Starting with the original legislation, the Board supplanted the private contractor and began infrastructure improvements, but its role grew almost immediately. Within a decade, the Board built wharves and sheds, assisted in the development of the belt railroad, promoted the export and import trade through the construction of specialized facilities, and, eventually, built large warehouse and grain elevator sites.

This public orientation did not flow from a well-constructed ideology or political agenda. Much as public opinion supported the socialization of the sewerage, water and drainage systems, the public supported the operations of the Dock Board--first, as a logical response to the threat of monopoly power, and, second, as a method of promoting private industry and commerce. To the turn-of-the-century businessman, progressive meant progress--the expansion of business and the well-being of citizens. To the professional politician of the era, progressive civic development also meant the well-being of citizens, with the by product of satisfied voters and a smoothly functioning political organization.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE PUBLIC BELT RAILROAD COMMISSION: PUBLIC WORKS AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

In New Orleans, geography was destiny to a greater extent than most cities. If the city's location was improbable from a drainage and sanitation point of view, the consequences to transportation and economic development were not much better. The enormous advantage New Orleans enjoyed as a major port city on the continent's greatest river could not be denied. As cotton production moved south and west in the nineteenth century, the city's wharves attracted higher volumes of trade and the financial services that supported the cotton trade. But as the Mississippi River approaches New Orleans from the northwest it begins an enormous counter-clockwise loop, forming the crescent that gives the city its nickname. After completing the crescent, the river turns abruptly southward, forming Algiers point on the west bank across from the French Quarter, and then continues on its way to the difficult river passes that empty into the Gulf of Mexico. The river's twists and turns somewhat devalued the locational advantage. Commerce along the river was always difficult as ships fought varying water levels, swift currents, and congested access.

The development of land transportation, particularly railroads, came slowly to New Orleans because of its geographical constraints. The river formed a highway for

trade but a nearly insurmountable barrier as well. Any access to the river—whether from east or west—confronted other bodies of water that tested the limits of engineering as well as financing. To the north and east lay Lake Pontchartrain and Lake Borgne, actually shallow bays of the Gulf of Mexico. In every direction, wetlands, swamps, and estuaries surrounded the city, justifying its colonial designation as the “Isle” of New Orleans. The Illinois Central Railroad approached from the north, connecting New Orleans to the lower Mississippi valley and to Chicago. From the northwest and west came the Texas Pacific and Southern Pacific, and from the Northeast came the Louisville and Nashville, the Northeastern, and the Southern.<sup>1</sup>

The wharf activity along the river front developed adjacent to the New Orleans Vieux Carre (French Quarter) and gradually expanded up and down the river from central New Orleans. The legislature eliminated the ad hoc system of contract administration of the wharves by establishing the Board of Commissioners for the Port of New Orleans, and the new Dock Board reconstructed the river front wharves. But the problem of access to those wharves remained. The Franchise Committee and the Streets and Landings Committee of the City Council heard frequent requests from railroads seeking wharf access, but granted privileges on a case-by-case basis that brought tracks from important trunk lines, such as the Illinois Central, up to the riverfront. These company-owned spurs provided connections to various points along the river or to a

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<sup>1</sup> Peirce Lewis, *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape*, 10-16. Some background material on New Orleans railroads can be found in Donald J. Millet, “Southwest Louisiana Enters the Railroad Age: 1880-1900,” *Louisiana History* 24 (Spring 1983): 165-83.

stretch of the river front wharves; however, they did not solve the problem. Railroads first provided switching to their own cars and serviced wharves where steamship lines with whom they had favorable agreements would berth. Rival carriers would receive service--for a price--only after the line's own cars had been moved. Under these conditions, cargo interchange for goods leaving and coming into New Orleans was haphazard at best. Even on those occasions when interchange worked, railroads charged excessive fees.<sup>2</sup>

As early as 1879, during the improvements that dredged the river passes below New Orleans, businessmen began to promote the idea of a publicly-owned belt railroad that would encircle the developed areas of the east bank of the city and provide low-cost interchange of goods among carriers. In 1889, the Municipal Affairs Association suggested that the belt line become a priority for the city. Private railroads gave lip service to the idea of a public belt, but often opposed its development. In 1894, the Illinois Central convinced the city council to grant rights to the company for the construction of a belt railroad under its control. Construction plans called for one section of the belt to run down State Street, a fashionable neighborhood adjacent to the city's Audubon Park. Residents objected and the council repealed the ordinance. At a later date, the Illinois Central successfully obtained access to its Stuyvesant Docks by agreeing to the construction at railroad expense of four miles of double track along the

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<sup>2</sup> Behrman, *New Orleans: What It Is Doing to Facilitate Transportation*, 3; Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 151.

river levee in uptown New Orleans. The track would become part of a larger public belt system.<sup>3</sup>

Official city action on the belt began early in 1900. In his annual address to the Municipal Improvement Association, William B. Bloomfield, its president, proposed the protection of the land side of the river levee for public use and the construction of a public belt.<sup>4</sup> Within two weeks, encouraged by a favorable civil court decision regarding the city's rights along the river front, New Orleans Councilman Lafaye echoed Bloomfield's comments and offered an ordinance to create the public railroad, citing the necessity for "free and untrammelled use of the levee front" and the prospect of its misuse "if it passes into the hands of any railroad corporation even under the most stringent restrictions." The ordinance contained the essential features of the system that would eventually be built: public ownership and operation, freedom from corporation subordination, modest switching charges, and the construction of a double track along the length of the river front. The draft ordinance also provided for a commission to govern the belt railroad, composed of the mayor, various city commissioners, and the chairs of essential council committees such as finance and budget. A *Daily Picayune* editorial praised the ordinance and asserted the great need for the belt line, the "greatest importance . . . next to the reduction of wharfage and other port charges." The new commission not only fit the progressive ideal of a independent government entity with

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<sup>3</sup> John Wilds, *James W. Porch and the Port of New Orleans*, 40-41; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 509-510.

<sup>4</sup>*Daily Picayune*, January 10, 1900, 4.

access to expert advice, it also fit within the emerging New Orleans consensus in favor of progressive civic development.<sup>5</sup>

The new city council under Mayor Capdevielle took up the ordinance, and the streets and landing committee approved it on July 30, 1900. Shortly thereafter, the full council added its support and adopted Ordinance Number 147 on August 7, 1900, naming a commission and appropriating \$40,000 over four years for construction of the tracks. The council emphasized the business purpose of the belt and the public nature of the levee which “belongs to the people for . . . commerce,” and upon which the “export and import commerce of New Orleans” depended. The ordinance also required a swift start to construction, and the Mayor signed it on August 11, 1900.<sup>6</sup>

Under the terms of the ordinance, the governing commission consisted of various public officials. In early September, the council selected three of its members to serve along with the Mayor, Comptroller, Commissioner of Police and Public Buildings, and the City Engineer. During Thanksgiving greetings to the city some months later, City Engineer W. J. Hardee gave thanks “for the municipal problems solved during the year” and cited the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad as a signal achievement. At its annual meeting on January 9, 1901, the Municipal Improvement Association officers reminded the membership that the group had advocated “for the last three years . . . the

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<sup>5</sup> Wilds, *James W. Porch and the Port of New Orleans*, 8; *Daily Picayune*, January 16, 1900, 4; January 24, 1900, 4, 8. For a brief biographical sketch of William Bloomfield, see Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 879.

<sup>6</sup> *Ordinance of the City of New Orleans Providing for a Belt Railroad for the City of New Orleans and a Public Belt Railroad System*, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division (New Orleans, 1900).

building of the public belt. The present city administration deserves credit for recognizing and appreciating the great benefits to commerce of a belt railroad.”<sup>7</sup>

Hardee’s enthusiasm notwithstanding, the initial years of the New Orleans Public Belt showed little progress. Many problems faced the new commission, including the composition of the governing body. The ordinance specified the membership of the commission, but restricting the group to members of the administration and the city council diminished the authority of the commission to speak to and for the commercial interests in the city. More to the point, the council members of the commission suffered from an inherent conflict in upholding the duties of their two positions. The council heard requests from a variety of interests seeking privileges and franchises, particularly railroads. There was a business and community inclination to support the railway business. Some of the same organizations in favor of the belt railroad were also advertising the benefits of New Orleans to railroad companies in the hopes of increasing service to the city. It was difficult for the council to simultaneously give a fair hearing to railroad petitions while at the same time upholding the interests of the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad. Additionally, the council’s appropriation to the commission to begin work on the belt was insufficient to the task at hand.<sup>8</sup>

These problems paled, however, before the central dilemma: private railroads that enjoyed preferential access to the wharves resisted the construction and operation of

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<sup>7</sup> Wilds, *James W. Porch and the Port of New Orleans*, 43; *Daily Picayune*, August 8, 1900, 4; September 6, 1900, 4; November 29, 1900, Section II, 1; January 9, 1901, 1.

<sup>8</sup> *New Railroads for New Orleans*, 9-12.



the belt at every turn. Access resulted from agreements with the city council, an arena in which the railroads operated with confidence and considerable success. From the first, the belt railroad found it necessary to fight for a clearly defined concept of public interest over private interests. In this conflict, the belt administration drew upon the lessons that the Dock Board and the Sewerage and Water Board had learned and articulated a consistent policy that resisted compromising the public belt ideal. Support for the belt came from a variety of sources: machine politicians committed to public ownership, other governmental agencies, such as the Dock Board, commercial interests eager for lower shipping charges, and associations dedicated to efficiency in government.<sup>9</sup>

The first years of the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad Commission, as the governing body was formally known, saw only halting progress toward the construction of the line. The council made an attempt to reform the process of granting privileges to railroads along the river front by making such grants revocable, but deferred the ordinance without further action. The council ordered City Engineer Hardee to prepare a map of the belt route and to survey the available land. His report in June, 1901, concluded that with “some current encroachments” excepted, there was sufficient room for a two-way track. Councilman Cucullu asserted that “the Belt Railroad project was of the greatest importance to the city . . . [and] required prompt action.”<sup>10</sup> But the

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<sup>9</sup> Private associations included the Progressive Union and the Municipal Improvement Association. The wide range of support given to the Public Belt Railroad provides one look at the various sources of southern commercial progressivism.

<sup>10</sup> *Daily Picayune*, June 12, 1901, 1.

council soon learned that the available land identified by Hardee was the subject of a myriad of competing claims.

Of all the railroads serving the city, the Illinois Central was the most powerful. In late June, IC officials asked the council for a grant of six blocks along the river front. At the hearing by the council's Streets and Landings Committee, the proposal drew opposition, particularly by the New Orleans Board of Trade, an association of merchants and shippers. The railroad resisted attempts to amend the ordinance and withdrew the request. Several weeks later, the city received "a curt letter" from Stuyvesant Fish of the Illinois Central accusing the city of being ungrateful for the benefits brought by the railroad. Mayor Capdevielle responded and defended city policy. By the end of the month, the controversy attracted the attention of the dock board, which asserted its own rights to the land in question.<sup>11</sup> The Illinois Central returned to the council one month later with a new proposal which, in spite of the Board of Trade's and the Dock Board's opposition, the council approved. The *Daily Picayune* editorialized in vain against giving "the city to the railroads," although two other city dailies accused the Board of Trade and the Municipal Improvement Association of standing in the way of progress.<sup>12</sup>

The controversy neatly captured the countervailing forces at work. The Dock Board, newly active along the river front, sought to preserve its rights, supported by the

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<sup>11</sup> *Daily Picayune*, June 25, 1901, 3, 4; June 26, 1901, 4; July 1, 1901, 4; July 17, 1901; July 26, 1901, 11.

<sup>12</sup> *Daily Picayune*, July 31, 1901, 3; August 1, 1901, 3; August 3, 1901, 4, 7; August 4, 1901, 4; August 5, 1901, 4; August 6, 1901, 4; August 7, 1901, 3, 4; Wilds, *John W. Porch and the Port of New Orleans*, 46-47.

prominent Board of Trade. The railroad sought increased access to the wharves, asserting its commercial contributions for which the city should be grateful. And the city council found it difficult to choose among competing interests, often succumbing to the political power of the large trunk lines. When the IC ordinance reached Mayor Capdevielle, he concurred with the council's judgement, citing the provision in the new ordinance requiring the railroad to provide land to the Public Belt Commission when belt construction began. In spite of ardent pro-business feelings, the *Daily Picayune* consistently backed the concept of a public river front. A disappointed editorial acknowledged the Mayor's honesty but disagreed with his conclusion.<sup>13</sup>

The Louisville and Nashville Railroad (L&N) next tested the public resolve by erecting a fence on disputed property near the river front at Canal Street, the central business district's main street. George Denegre, corporate lawyer and a brother of the Citizens' League Senate candidate in 1896, represented the railroad. As the dispute reached the level of threats of force from both sides, the Board of Trade weighed in again, reminding the parties that the Public Belt Railroad had an interest in the land as well. Ironically, the principals in the controversy--including William Bloomfield--had been colleagues in the Citizens' League efforts and had shared membership in the Municipal Improvement Association. But the former political associations did not lessen the economic conflict. The railroad relented when confronted with its lease payments of prior years, which undermined its claims to ownership. The fight ended

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<sup>13</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 8, 1901, 4; August 10, 1901, 3, 4.

with the belt railroad's interests protected. The Board of Trade used the occasion to "agitate for public railroad construction as soon as possible."<sup>14</sup>

By fall, 1901, more than a year had elapsed since the passage of the enabling ordinance, but no belt construction had begun. Mayor Capdevielle called a meeting of the Public Belt Commission to consider the lack of progress. As the group examined the issues, the primacy of the Dock Board along the river front emerged. Specifically, the potential route of the railroad inevitably passed over ground in the hands of the Dock Board. The Mayor appointed a subcommittee "to wait upon [the Dock Board] and ask that such space be dedicated for the uses of a belt road." At the September 28 Public Belt Commission meeting, City Engineer Hardee shared with the membership his assessment that although an agreement between the city and the Southern Pacific Railroad was likely, a compromise with the Texas and Pacific line would be difficult. Attempts to cross the right of way of the T & P would likely end in litigation. At the same meeting the commission clarified its leadership by choosing, over his objections, Mayor Capdevielle as president. The meeting with the Dock Board went well as the Public Belt Commission elicited a promise of cooperation and the assurance that the port governors would take up the needs of the belt road as soon as possible. And in

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<sup>14</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 29, 1901, 3, 4; August 30, 1901, 3, 4; August 31, 1901, 3; September 4, 1901, 3. The paper referred to the contest between the Dock Board and "Ellen N.," a play on L&N. Mayor Capdevielle did not participate in this dispute. The Mayor sought to escape the city's oppressive summer heat at various vacation sites. On this occasion, he visited Montreal "for reasons of health." *Daily Picayune*, August 10, 1901, 3.

spite of widespread skepticism, the Illinois Central lived up to its agreement with the city by starting construction of a portion of the belt tracks.<sup>15</sup>

The attention given by the Public Belt Railroad Commission to the Dock Board grew in importance as the result of a state supreme court decision upholding the authority of the Dock Board over river front lands. But clarification of authority did not lead to swift construction of the belt. In late July, 1902 the New Orleans Cold Storage Plant complained that the Illinois Central refused to provide switching services to the railroad cars of opposition lines. This prevented the plant from efficiently receiving and shipping goods. The city pressured the Illinois Central to change its policy, pointing to the terms under which the city allowed the railroad to use public streets. But the incident reinforced the view that, in the absence of a fully-developed common carrier doctrine, only a public agency could move goods fairly. The state legislature added its weight to the commission's authority enacting a law recognizing the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad operation. In response to an L&N request to extend its tracks closer to the river, editorial comment asserted that the belt "should be regarded as a sacred undertaking, and for any man to lay hands lawlessly [on lands needed by the belt] . . . should be regarded as an infamous crime." Yet even then the Public Belt Commission failed to act decisively and begin construction.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Dock Board Minutes, October 1, 1901; *Daily Picayune*, September 29, 1901, 4; September 28, 1901, 12; October 3, 1901, 7.

<sup>16</sup> *Daily Picayune*, March 4, 1902, 4; March 5, 1902, 4; July 31, 1902, 3; August, 24, 1902, 3; August 2, 1902, 3; August 3, 1902, 4.

At the end of 1902, Capdevielle called a meeting of the Commission “to suggest some sort of work be started,” but it was not held until the new year. Assembled in the Mayor’s parlor, the group heard Capdevielle urge activity because “new railroads were entering . . . the city and there should be some way of letting them in and giving them entry to the river front.” After some discussion regarding the status of land dedication along the river, the Mayor agreed to send an ordinance to the council addressing once again the subject of jurisdiction over the choice lands. The impetus for the Mayor’s actions lay in the increasing interest on the part of a growing number of railroads in the city and its river trade. Sorting through the requests burdened the council and the administration; perhaps the belt construction would relieve the problem. Within two days, the *Daily Picayune* took the Commission to task for its delay. “The remarkable neglect with which the Public Belt Road has been treated . . . is astonishing. Years have passed away. . . . This is a poor showing, a poor commentary on the outcome of the gallant fight made by the people of this city to secure their own public belt.<sup>17</sup>

The confidence of the editorial writers in their assessment of public opinion never wavered; the city council was not so certain. Railroads served as catalysts for and symbols of economic progress. An offer to bring a railroad into the city could not be taken lightly, and the council faced a difficult balancing act in both upholding the public belt concept and granting privileges to attract and keep major trunk lines. As the Frisco controversy demonstrated, a politically well-connected railroad company wielded

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<sup>17</sup> *Daily Picayune*, December 16, 1902, 12; January 7, 1903, 4; January 9, 1903, 6.

substantial influence. Grants from the council during the early part of the century tried to finesse the inherent tension by giving land and access to the railroads, but requiring the companies to assist in the building of the belt. This effort merely complicated the situation, both legally and operationally. Lengths of track built by the railroads inevitably came under private operation, opening new controversies.

In the midst of efforts by the Frisco railroad to obtain a foothold in the city, a conference of the city's commercial exchanges attempted to craft a compromise. Under the auspices of the Board of Trade, the group established a model ordinance under which the railroads would build sections of the belt tracks. The tracks would serve all carriers with a fee set for switching cars, but the proceeds of the fees collected would be reinvested into extension of the belt system. Neither the railroads nor the city council accepted the compromise, which led to protracted litigation and more construction delays.<sup>18</sup> For six months, the Public Belt Commission suspended active operations and awaited the outcome of litigation. When the Commission gathered on July 17, 1903 to consider plans, the *Daily Picayune* sarcastically reported on "the alleged Public Belt Railroad . . . [whose] commissioners had a meeting yesterday. This body has not been heard of for so long a time that few citizens knew of its existence, but, nevertheless, there is such a body." The request of another railroad energized the Commission. The Shreveport and Red River Railroad sought access to the city and offered to build a portion of the belt tracks as well as to donate \$50,000 to the city for

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<sup>18</sup> *Daily Picayune*, February 1, 1903, 4; February 6, 1903, 11.

belt expenses. Additionally, the Commission had accumulated a like amount from several years of modest city appropriations.<sup>19</sup>

By the end of the month, the plan gained momentum as a alternative to a city-constructed and operated belt line. Council grants to the railroads would be used as leverage to obtain track construction and revenue. Council members served on the Public Belt Commission, but did not control a majority of its votes. The city council considered the Commission to be dominated by the administration and did not appreciate the commissioners crafting the terms of council franchises. In the midst of negotiations with the Shreveport and Red River Railroad, the council considered an ordinance to change the composition of the Commission by eliminating all administration members except the mayor and replacing them with additional council members. Nothing came of the effort, but the structure of commission membership remained controversial for over a year. The proposed agreement with the Shreveport and Red River Railroad continued to gain support, including messages from the commercial exchanges. The Progressive Union added its endorsement, pointing out desirability of securing additional railroad connections to the northern part of the state. On September 1, 1903, the grant passed the council unanimously.<sup>20</sup>

By spring of the following year, access to the river front had increased, but interchange of cars was no more rational than before. The public belt consisted of

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<sup>19</sup> *Daily Picayune*, July 18, 1903, 6; July 29, 1903, 4, 5..

<sup>20</sup> *Daily Picayune*, July 31, 1903, 4; August 5, 1903, 5; August 7, 1903, 5; August 28, 1903, 4; September 1, 1903, 5.



disconnected pieces of track constructed by various railroads. Among the competing actors--the railroads, the Dock Board, the Public Belt Commission, the city council, and, occasionally, the Orleans Parish Levee Board--there existed no comprehensive plan for construction or operation. The state supreme court, however, brought some clarity to the situation in May, 1904, with its decision in the Frisco case. It upheld the authority of the Dock Board over river front land and thereby removed the council from the business of granting privileges and franchises in that area of the city.

Decisions regarding railroad access became the responsibility of Dock Board members appointed for the purpose of improving the development and efficiency of trade along the wharves. Although the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad Commission had been given powers by the legislature and the city council, the decision established the supremacy of the Dock Board in deciding not only the placement of public belt tracks, but also the expropriation of property for Dock Board mandated construction. Although the Public Belt Commission remained in existence, its focus changed to construction and operation. Only the Dock Board would have power over track locations in the future.<sup>21</sup>

The new developments moved the Commission to action. Mayor Capdevielle met with an early belt railroad supporter, J. E. Auvray, and assured him that pending sufficient funds "the Belt Road will be built." Possibly because of the impending

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<sup>21</sup> *Daily Picayune*, May 24, 1904, 4, 6. A *Daily Picayune* editorial the next day suggested the abolition of the belt commission in favor of a takeover of the operation by the Dock Board. *Daily Picayune*, May 25, 1904, 6.

municipal elections, the pace of action increased and the Dock Board reiterated its support for the belt operation, noting that it was the “council’s fault if nothing has been done in this matter.” In mid-July Mayor Capdevielle met with a committee of the Board of Trade, one of whose officers, James W. Porch, showed considerable interest in the future of the belt. Porch lobbied the Mayor to change the composition of the Commission to increase representation from the city’s commercial exchanges, including the Board of Trade. City Attorney Samuel Gilmore drafted an ordinance to restructure the Commission and presented it to the council on August 30, 1904.<sup>22</sup>

This election eve restructuring continued a progressive era trend toward isolation of governmental functions from the effects of direct democratic representation. The governor appointed Dock Board members. The Board of Liquidation of City Debt was a self-perpetuating body, although representatives of the city administration served in a minority capacity. The Sewerage and Water Board included the city administration and mayoral appointees, but Board of Liquidation members had rights to membership as well. The plan for the new Public Belt Commission followed this trend. The mayor remained on the governing board, but other public officials would be replaced by representative chosen from the city’s commercial exchanges--the Board of Trade, Cotton Exchange, Sugar Exchange, Progressive Union, and Mechanics, Dealers and Lumber Exchange-- and by five at-large members. The mayor appointed the members from lists submitted by the exchanges subject to council approval, provided the

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<sup>22</sup> *Daily Picayune*, July 7, 1904, 4; July 13, 1904, 5; August 17, 1904, 4; Wilds, *James W. Porch and the Port of New Orleans*, 43-44.

nominees were taxpayers and had lived in the city at least five years. The ordinance set the term of office for members at sixteen years to further isolate the membership from the trends of city politics.<sup>23</sup>

The timing of the organizational change, immediately prior to the mayoral election, could hardly have been accidental. Both Gilmore and Capdevielle joined the Regulars after service to the Citizens' League in 1896. Gilmore resided in uptown, silk-stocking New Orleans; Capdevielle was part of the social elite along Esplanade Avenue. Certainly the entreaties of the Board of Trade found both sympathetic to the notion of increased commercial representation on the Commission. By late summer, 1904, Capdevielle knew the Regulars would look elsewhere for their mayoral candidate. The absorption of Citizens' League members by the Regulars had not completely altered the attitudes of the reformers. By acceding to the Board of Trade lobbying, Capdevielle transformed the Public Belt Commission into an arm of the exchanges and assured its governance by the city's commercial elite, with only a minimal level of formal input from the city administration. Although the next city administration might attempt to re-establish direct political control of the Commission, the exchanges could be expected to resist any such action, especially at the hand of a new mayor sensitive to charges of "bossism."

Within a few days of the introduction of the ordinance, Board of Trade member Porch compared it favorably to efforts in Chicago and Indianapolis and assured the

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<sup>23</sup> Wilds, *James W. Porch and the Port of New Orleans*, 44; *Daily Picayune*, August 31, 1904, 4.

public that such a commission would have the ability to build the tracks. The *Daily Picayune* reminded the city council that “if the present council wants credit [for the restructuring], they (sic) should pass it immediately.” The council concurred and passed Ordinance #2683, N.C.S. (New Council Series), and the Mayor, for whom “it was important . . . to pass the ordinance during his administration,” signed it on October 8, 1904. Appointments followed quickly and included William Bloomfield, supporter of the belt system since his days as president of the Municipal Improvement Association, Board of Trade member James W. Porch, bankers Sol Wexler and Louis Cucullu, and other members of the city’s commercial establishment.<sup>24</sup>

At the first meeting of the reorganized Commission, the membership elected Porch President Pro Tem. Fellow member J. D. Hill called him “the sturdiest champion of the Belt project the city has ever had.” According to the Commission’s by laws, Porch served as *de facto* executive director. Mayor Capdevielle administered the oath of office to the new members, and the Commission agreed to meet with the Dock Board to pursue vigorously the construction of the tracks. Prior to the official end of his mayoral term, Capdevielle resigned to accept an appointment as state auditor, but, as his final act in office, issued formal commissions to members of the new board. At the end

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<sup>24</sup> Capdevielle to City Council, October 13, 1904, Mayor’s Correspondence; Wilds, *James W. Porch and the Port of New Orleans*, 44; *Daily Picayune*, September 2, 1904, 5; September 30, 1904, 4; October 7, 1904, 4; Capdevielle to the City Council, Mayor’s Correspondence, October 13, 1904; *By Laws—Public Belt Railroad Commission of the City of New Orleans; Ordinance #2683, N.C.S., Creating the Present Commission*, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana Collection (New Orleans, 1905). Reynolds, in *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 151, confuses the ordinance for restructuring the Commission with the start of the Public Belt.

of December, Porch requested a meeting with the new mayor, Martin Behrman, suggesting that it was “about time for the appointment of the several committees” to carry out belt operations. Behrman agreed, presided at the Commission meeting, and began to take an active role in the business of the public belt.<sup>25</sup>

Behrman’s assumption of office, clarification of authority over the river front, and the reorganization of the Public Belt Commission marked important turning points in the development of the project. The pace of activity quickened in part because of Behrman’s energy and leadership and in part because business support followed the lead of the commercial exchanges now represented on the Commission. The new members attended the first Dock Board meeting of 1905 to appeal for assistance. Porch presented a plan for a twenty-one mile track system that would require eighteen months to construct. He left the meeting with assurances that the Dock Board would assist. Two weeks later, the Dock Board approved the belt plans, granted space for the tracks, required the Commission to begin construction within three months, and insisted that the belt road must remain the property of the city in perpetuity. Both the Dock Board and the Public Belt Commission now consisted of business men, many of whom worked with each other in their private endeavors. They certainly shared a common vision of commercial expansion. But they also shared a vision of public development in the

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<sup>25</sup> *Daily Picayune*, November 3, 1904, 10; November 16, 1904, 5; December 22, 1904, 5; Minutes, Public Belt Railroad Commission, November 2, 1904; Wilds, *James W. Porch and the Port of New Orleans*, 44; *By-Laws--Public Belt Railroad Commission*, 5-10. Behrman and Porch knew each other well, having served together on committees and as directors of the Progressive Union.

service of that expansion, and their subsequent policies did not waver from a commitment to public action.<sup>26</sup>

Mindful of its new deadline, the Commission met the next day to hear the report of City Engineer Hardee reviewing the route the tracks would take along the river. The city appropriations had accumulated over several years and payments from railroads added to the belt treasury. A total of \$160,000 was available, enough to begin work but far short of the total that would be necessary to complete the project. In addition to its financial problems, the Commission faced the legal difficulties of building a belt route that traversed a river front with numerous railroad crossing, switch tracks, and sidings. Porch decided to convene a conference of all presidents of rail lines operating in the city “to clarify the Public Belt route and to stay out of court.” An unexpected claim by the New Orleans and Northwestern Railroad that threatened to delay the start of construction would be only one of the controversies faced by the Public Belt Commission in its attempt to finish its work. At the conference, the belt staff reported on the results of a preliminary survey; thirty tracks would have to be crossed by the belt, each track representing a construction and legal challenge. Conference participants reached no general agreement, and the Commission decided to move ahead and negotiate with each railroad one at a time.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Daily Picayune*, January 4, 1905, 4; January 18, 1905, 5; *By Laws--Public Belt Railroad Commission: Resolution of the Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans*, 15. The Board resolution reaffirmed the dedication of space to the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad that the Dock Board passed on August 12, 1902.

<sup>27</sup> *Daily Picayune*, January 20, 1905, 6; February 3, 1905, 4; February 17, 1905, 5.

The Commission's activity did not put an end to the city council's attempts to dictate railroad policy. Seeking the privilege of a switch track, the Southern Pacific Railroad appealed to the council, and an ordinance favoring the line reached the Streets and Landings Committee. Council members ignored an amendment requested by the Public Belt Commission, in spite of the argument that other railroads had paid for privileges and the Southern Pacific ought to contribute as well. For several weeks the controversy continued until Mayor Behrman intervened and invited the antagonists to his office. At the gathering, support for the belt came from the commercial exchanges, including the wholesale grocers who registered their opposition to the Southern Pacific. Under pressure by the Mayor and his business allies, the Southern Pacific officials relented, but informed the council that they expected some consideration when another of their franchises came up for extension in a few months. Meanwhile, the Dock Board added to the argument in favor of a public belt when it presented a finding that showed one particular rail car of lumber destined for wharf construction took five days "to belt."<sup>28</sup>

During May and June, 1905, the Commission's engineering staff continued the survey work preparatory to construction. By the end of June, it completed surveys on eighteen out of twenty-one miles of the route. Noting the encouraging progress, the Orleans Parish Levee Board offered land to the Commission to extend the tracks to the rear of the city, a location that would fulfill the plan to circle the developed area of the

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<sup>28</sup> *Daily Picayune*, March 11, 1905, 4; March 23, 1905, 6; March 30, 1905, 5; March 31, 1905, 4; April 1, 1905, 4, 6.

city. The Commission felt sufficiently confident to approve the specifications for the purchase of the operation's first locomotive and to announce plans for a July 1 celebration of the start of construction, complete with speeches by city officials and the governor. Anticipating the festivities, the *Daily Picayune* lent its congratulations: "The New Orleans Public Belt Railroad, which was for a long time a mere figment of the imagination and was for a term of years a fragmentary affair . . . become[s] at last a valuable factor in the city's commercial facilities."<sup>29</sup>

The celebration was memorable. Guests included not only politicians, but also representatives of the city's commercial associations. Speakers paid tribute to J. E. Auvray, "the father of the Public Belt," as well as to the contributions of the commission, the city administration, and the Dock Board. President Pro Tem Porch gave the keynote address, estimating the cost of the tracks and equipment would be \$1,500,000, but proclaiming that the value of the operation on the private market would be \$10,000,000. Porch cited twenty-six ports around the world which operated public belt tracks; New Orleans was the only city in the United States with such an asset. "With a publicly owned system of wharves and with a public-controlled system of levees coupled with a perfect publicly owned belt line service we have the implements . . . that will enable us to defy the commercial and manufacturing world." Governor Blanchard said "your belt line, in short, means progress. It will demonstrate to the outside world. . . that New Orleans has caught the spirit of progress." Mayor Behrman

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<sup>29</sup> *Daily Picayune*, May 19, 1905, 7; June 20, 1905, 12; July 1, 1905, 6.



reminded the audience “that the river front and its vast opportunities of commerce belong to the people and should be owned by them.” The highlight of the ceremony featured the Mayor enthusiastically driving a golden spike, though event organizers later admitted that workers had pre-drilled the hole and filled it with cork.<sup>30</sup>

On July 12, 1905, the city council accepted the bid of the Southern Iron and Equipment Company of Atlanta to provide a locomotive to the Public Belt Railroad. But the line could not begin operation until construction crews finished the tracks. In spite of a cash flow crisis, work continued. The enthusiasm of new Commission members extended to financial assistance when board member Henry Schreiber personally loaned funds to the Commission to avoid a delay in preparing for construction. To conserve funds, the management agreed to reduce the double-track plan to a single line, anticipating that revenue could be raised from one track and then applied to additional construction. Railroads friendly to the belt offered to advance money toward its construction, but the City Attorney ruled out subordinating the authority of the belt road.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *The Key to the Commercial Situation: A Publicly Owned and Publicly Operated Belt Railroad*, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division (New Orleans, 1904). This Public Belt Railroad pamphlet contains the speeches of dignitaries from the opening ceremony and newspaper comment from that event and later. The pamphlet carries the date 1904, but the date is in error. There is no pagination in the document, although hand-written page numbers can be found at various places. See also Wilds, *James W. Porch and the Port of New Orleans*, 44-46; *Daily Picayune*, July 1, 1905, 6; Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 152.

<sup>31</sup> Wilds, *John W. Porch and the Port of New Orleans*, 44-45; *Daily Picayune*, July 24, 1905, 5; July 27, 1905, 6; August 9, 1905, 5.

Claims of success began long before the completion of the track. Secretary Mayo of the Progressive Union announced that two flour mills would locate along the tracks; additional reports of industrial expansion surfaced, which seemed to confirm Porch's judgment regarding the benefits of the belt in attracting manufacturing. "There is not a progressive city in the United States today but that is a great manufacturing center, and the Belt commission realizes that we must . . . be in a position to handle our own production. We must become a manufacturing city, the creator of wealth." But amid the optimism, track construction came up against another obstacle. As the Commission's work gangs approached land claimed by the Illinois Central, fights broke out with railroad employees. A crowd of between 450 and 1,000 Illinois Central employees (contemporary estimates varied) blocked construction and overturned rail cars. The police arrested a number of workers for interfering with belt operations, but paroled them on assurances that the protest would end. The Mayor criticized the railroad and urged a peaceful solution, which Porch achieved after lengthy negotiations with IC officials. The controversy overshadowed the steady progress underway. In an annual review of the city's business climate, the *Daily Picayune* printed a lengthy article by Porch detailing belt achievements including cooperation with the Dock and Levee Boards, the adoption of sound business practices within public ownership, and a sincere wish for "accord" with all the railroads. Later in the month, Porch returned to the city from a vacation and expressed the hope "that now that cooler weather is on and

members of the commission are returning home, it is intended to push belt line construction.”<sup>32</sup>

A truce with the Illinois Central persisted, the antagonists arranged a conference, and progress resumed. In early October, 1905, various railroads, including the Illinois Central, entered into agreements with the belt management. By mid-month construction reached a milestone when tracks proceeding toward the central business district from both directions along the river met at Canal Street. Amid celebration, construction crews joined the uptown and downtown sections. The Public Belt Commission announced that the first engine and cars would move over the newly constructed tracks. Progress was “rapid and satisfactory,” and the press recounted reports of more firms and industries eager for locations along the belt facilities. The Dock Board cooperated in finding additional room for tracks and for rail yards to hold an estimated 110 cars the belt would be obliged to store. By the end of November, the *Daily Picayune* asserted that “all tracks [were] clear now for the Public Belt” and, with an agreement in hand with the Illinois Central, “all opposition on the levee front has been removed.” Relations with the railroads, nevertheless, caused constant barriers to the belt project. Private and public interests continued to conflict, but the belt management persisted in its belief that its public organization would prevail against the private railroads. At the end of the year, Porch wrote that one of the benefits of the belt operation was that “in

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<sup>32</sup> *The Key to the Commercial Situation*, 6-7; *Daily Picayune*, August 2, 1905, 5; August 9, 1905, 5; August 21, 1905, 1-2; September 1, 1905, section 4, 1; September 24, 1905, 3; September 29, 1905, 4; Wilds, *John W. Porch and the Port of New Orleans*, 48-50.

the age of combinations. . . a publicly owned [railroad] would forestall monopoly.” In a belt pamphlet commemorating the open of belt construction, a series of aphorisms in support of public ownership included “Our local safeguards protect us against combinations from the outside.”<sup>33</sup>

In February, 1906, the Public Belt Commission, faced with a shortage of funds, negotiated a \$100,000 loan from the council. The council, consisting largely of members elected by the Regular organization, saw no contradiction in funding an autonomous commission whose members were drawn almost exclusively from the ranks of business. Admitting the limitations of its finances, the Commission announced its intention to put off construction in the rear of the city, dedicating “funds and energy . . . to completing a continuous track along the city’s wharves.” In a reversal of earlier policy, the council began to examine all of the switch track privileges granted to railroads in order to test the legality of revoking them if the Public Belt Railroad needed the tracks for its own operations.<sup>34</sup>

With routine matters apparently under control, James Porch expanded his view of the belt’s possibilities. As the council wrestled with where to place a railroad passenger terminal, for example, Porch suggested that the terminal company be required to reserve two tracks for the belt railroad. Anticipating development along the river, he also suggested that the belt build and operate a grain elevator “for everyone’s use.” He

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<sup>33</sup> Dock Board Minutes, November 7, 1905; *The Key to the Commercial Situation*, 7; *Daily Picayune*, October 6, 1905, 3; October 18, 1905, 4; October 25, 1905, 4; November 8, 1905, 5; November 29, 1905, 12; November 30, 1905, 5..

<sup>34</sup> *Daily Picayune*, February 16, 1906, 7; March 1, 1906, 4.

encouraged the transfer of surplus city sugar sheds along the river to the belt's jurisdiction. In his capacity at the Board of Trade, Porch encouraged dissemination of pro-belt information. In a discussion with steamship officials, Porch noted the excess costs to the shipping lines caused by shifting berths. In the absence of a completely functioning belt railroad, cargo could not easily be shifted on land. By completing the railroad, the shipping lines would avoid those costs.<sup>35</sup>

Expansion of the belt activities awaited resolution of more basic problems. The Shreveport and Red River Railroad, now known as the Louisiana Railway and Navigation Company, filed a dispute over river front land in extreme uptown New Orleans, adjacent to Jefferson Parish. By its actions, the railroad challenged the Louisiana Supreme Court and claimed that the court's decision in the case between the Frisco Railroad and the Dock Board did not apply to the claim of the Louisiana Railway and Navigation Company. The actions of the company were the first in a number of nuisance controversies faced by the belt in 1906. The Southern Pacific, Texas Pacific and L&N lines raised additional roadblocks and forced the belt line to delay the start of its full operations. In each instance, the Mayor and the Commission remained steadfast; they permitted no compromises with public ownership and control. And through it all Porch remained confident, ordering work "in dead earnest" on an uptown section of tracks so that revenue could be earned and asserting that the belt seemed "as near a state of perfection in the method of transportation as can be devised." Porch followed his

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<sup>35</sup> *Daily Picayune*, March 16, 1906, 5; March 17, 1906, 4; March 22, 1906, 2-3.

claim with a request to the city council for a continuing appropriation of \$25,000 per year, a figure that the council increased twice before final passage of the city's 1907 budget.<sup>36</sup>

In his New Year's wishes for 1907, City Engineer Hardee hoped for the completion and operation of the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad, now more than a year behind schedule. Behrman wished the community "health, prosperity and happiness" but called a conference the next day to investigate the construction delays. No one accepted blame, but the Dock Board offered to "take the lead" in pushing for completion. New appropriations from the city helped the belt to purchase needed equipment and supplies. By mid-month, the belt and the Texas Pacific finally reached a tentative agreement, and the Illinois Central once more promised cooperation. But the Southern Pacific remained adamant that if it conceded transit to the belt, the city must reciprocate by extending its franchise for thirty years. The Commission, speaking through Porch, made its position clear: the belt would negotiate track rights of way, but the franchise was a council matter. "The Public Belt Railroad Commission . . . is advised that it has a legal right . . . to construct and operate a double track along the

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<sup>36</sup> *Daily Picayune*, April 3, 1906, 4; April 4, 1906, 3; April 9, 1906, 12; April 14, 1906, 4; May 16, 1906, 7; May 18, 1906, 4; June 22, 1906, 15; July 11, 1906, 5; August 17, 1906, 4; August 22, 1906, 4; August 31, 1906, 4; September 1, 1906, Section II, 16; September 16, 1906, 7; October 19, 1906, 4, 5; November 3, 1906, 5, 6; November 9, 1906.

entire river front.” All parties agreed to meet to seek a resolution to the Southern Pacific conflict, but delayed discussions until after the city’s annual carnival celebration.<sup>37</sup>

When negotiations resumed in March, Mayor Behrman learned of executive sessions between belt management and Southern Pacific officials and demanded a public hearing. The Mayor criticized his fellow commissioners for the secret sessions and forced through an agreement in principle for the belt to obtain track rights in the Southern Pacific area along the river. Not until another month went by, however, did the Dock Board, the belt, and the railroad reach “a three-cornered peace on the river front” that allow the belt to proceed. The pace of construction resumed and the belt anticipated the start of operations by June 1, 1907. The belt could not meet that date, however, and rescheduled the opening for October.<sup>38</sup>

Before the city could celebrate the opening of the belt line, another conflict with the Southern Pacific arose. In a replay of earlier violence, railroad employees, under instructions from their management, overturned rail cars to prevent belt construction. Railroad officials objected to the quality of materials used by the belt in crossing the Southern Pacific lines and resorted to force to make the point. Behrman went to the site and negotiated a truce. He later solicited reports from witnesses to the controversy, including Public Belt employees. In the first open break between the Mayor and President Pro Tem Porch, Behrman argued that the railroad should have some voice in

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<sup>37</sup> *Daily Picayune*, January 1, 1907, 6; January 18, 1907, 5; February 7, 1907, 5; February 9, 1907, 5.

<sup>38</sup> *Daily Picayune*, March 21, 1907, 5; March 27, 1907, 5; April 13, 1907, 5; April 19, 1907, 4; May 8, 1907, 4.

quality control because it would be responsible for track maintenance at the crossing. Weary of all the belt's troubles and the demands on his time, the Mayor publicly suggested that it might be necessary to increase the Mayor's authority over belt governance.<sup>39</sup>

In September, 1907, the Civil Service Commission informed the belt management that, as a city agency, the public railroad must follow civil service rules. The Civil Service Commission would examine potential employees of the belt, from the superintendent to common laborers, and certify applicants. The Regulars had adapted to various civil service restrictions and did not seek to overturn this decision. The selection process delayed operations yet again. Examinations for the position of superintendent began on September 24, 1907, but the Civil Service Commission did not complete the process for two months. On November 27, Augustus Phelps was named superintendent for the operation, but did not begin work until well into the following year. The belt had completed over seventy miles of track, including twenty miles of double track along the busiest sections of the river front. Even at this point, the private railroads did not give in. A new set of negotiations began that would set the conditions of interchange and the rates the public line would charge.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Behrman to James Porph, May 23, 1907, Mayor's Correspondence; H. Reynolds, Assistant Engineer, New Orleans Public Belt Railroad to Behrman, July 8, 1907, Behrman Papers; Wilds, *James W. Porph and the Port of New Orleans*, 50-51; *Daily States*, July 8, 1907; *Daily Picayune*, July 9, 1907, 4; *Times-Democrat*, July 19, 1907, 5; *Daily Picayune*, July 19, 1907, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Behrman to James Porph, August 16, 1907, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to James Porph, August 22, 1907, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to City Council, November 27, 1907, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to Public Belt



The belt announced rules in late December, submitted the draft of them to the railroads, and awaited comment. The Commission set a basic change of \$2.00 per car for interchange service, a figure well below the \$8.00 to \$10.00 common among private lines. The commercial railroads adhered to a regional operating manual, and the belt agree to join the common rules that had rationalized inter-line operations, especially Rule 10 of the Southern Car Service Association as its associated guidelines. But the belt attempted to limit its liability while handling the rail cars, and the private lines balked.<sup>41</sup>

City Engineer Hardee, who had given thanks for the belt in 1900, issued a New Year's wish that the project be completed in 1908. The Public Belt Commission finally prevailed that year and presided over the official opening of the public line. The newly-hired superintendent filled staff positions and drew up an operating budget. Although the railroads did not accept the proposed Commission rules, the management of the belt line announced unilateral adoption of its draft pending further negotiations. The city council drafted a comprehensive ordinance to dedicate, in cooperation with the Dock Board, all river front lands to public use. A council resolution proclaimed that henceforth switch track privileges, the source of numerous controversies between the belt line and the railroads, would be granted only to connect with belt tracks. A proposal to the state legislature to allow the issuance of bonds promised to end cash

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Commissioner, November 27, 1907, Mayor's Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, September 1, 1907, Section III, 4; September 20, 1907, 5; September 25, 1907, 4; November 28, 1907, 2.

<sup>41</sup> *Daily Picayune*, December 21, 1907, 12.

flow problems and financial uncertainties. The Progressive Union recognized the impending milestone by awarding its annual Loving Cup to William Bloomfield, who helped bring the belt to the attention of the public ten years before. The *Daily Picayune* donated the cup each year and approvingly noted the contributions of Bloomfield and all other who assisted in the success of the belt railroad.<sup>42</sup>

Members of the state legislature raised temporary objections to the Commission's plans to issue bonds. Complaints reached the members regarding the "seizure of private property" during construction of the railroad, but the legislature relented and allowed the bond issue after intense lobbying by the Mayor Behrman, Dock Board president, the Board of Trade, and other commercial interests. The legislative act inserted a clause requiring compensation for private land taken. The opponents to the belt declared victory but allowed the operation to go forward. Act 179 of the 1908 legislation provided authority for the bond issue, but contained a provision designed to protect the bondholders. If the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad were unable to properly service the bonds, the responsibility for repayment to the bondholders would pass to the Dock Board.<sup>43</sup>

A last minute barrier arose from an unexpected source: the Interstate Commerce Commission declared the Public Belt Railroad a common carrier, subject to federal

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<sup>42</sup> Behrman to City Council, January 7, 1908, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to City Council, February 4, 1908, Mayor's Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, January 1, 1908, 5; February 18, 1908, 4; March 20, 1908, 12; June 2, 1908, 5; June 7, 1908, 8.

<sup>43</sup> *Daily Picayune*, June 17, 1908, 12; June 19, 1908, 5; McGuirk, *Laws Constitutional and Statutory*, 10.

rules. After hurried attempts to reverse the federal ruling, the belt agreed to conform to ICC rules and put off the fight over jurisdiction. This allowed the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad Commission to celebrate a ceremonial opening on August 2, 1908 when a locomotive traversed the length of the tracks. Interchange of cars under public auspices began several weeks later. The *Daily Picayune* noted “the innumerable obstacles [which had been] encountered and overcome” and praised the efforts of the Board of Trade, the Mayor, the Dock Board and the city council. “The present council . . . will mark this administration as public benefactors for all time to come.” Construction cost nearly \$500,000, but the line became self-sustaining and remained so throughout the history of its operation. The city council passed a resolution of thanks to the Leyland steamship line which had added to the celebration, emphasizing the close relationship between the belt line and the port.<sup>44</sup>

In 1905, James Porch wrote “We are confident it [the belt railroad] will prove a money earner.” True to Porch’s prediction, the belt succeeded financially from the beginning. Public belt equipment switched over 150 cars the first day, and management announced plans for additional tracks within one month. The volume of business required the upgrading of phone installation. The opposition of private lines diminished

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<sup>44</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 4, 1908, 1; August 15, 1908, 5; *John W. Porch and the Port of New Orleans*, 51-52; *Daily States*, August 3, 1908; *A General Resume of the Composition, Functions, History and Operations of the City of New Orleans’s Civic-Owned and Operated Terminal Railroad*, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana Collection (New Orleans, 1956), [no pagination]; Clerk of City Council to Behrman, August 4, 1908, Behrman Papers.

and, eventually, disappeared. Minor difficulties over equipment and the constant jockeying over crossing and dock access did not detract from the accomplishment. In 1909, the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad switched approximately 80,000 cars, a figure that more than doubled by 1914, and reached over 200,000 by 1915. Behrman often boasted of the belt's success and low charges, claiming an average savings per car of \$4.00, and a reduction in switching time from several days to twenty-four hours or less. The belt administration was a financial success, but Behrman stated "it is not the purpose of the city of New Orleans to obtain a profit," rather its purpose "[is] to decrease the excessive charges and provide efficient belting service at the lowest possible cost." Businesses agreed that the belt had succeeded. Users of the services praised the operations after only a few months of activity. In fighting a railroad claim to land, the belt pointed to the line's success as a reason for the court to certify its jurisdiction. In May, 1909 steamship agents approached Porch with a plan to implement a barge unloading system, arguing that "railroads will not build [the facilities], therefore agents depended upon the belt." Though Porch carried the idea to the Commission, the system was never built.<sup>45</sup>

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the public nature of the belt became a fixture on the city's river front. Though legal challenges lingered, the belt

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<sup>45</sup> *The Key to the Commercial Situation*, 14; Behrman, *New Orleans: What It is Doing . . .*, 14-15; *The Behrman Administration: Work Accomplished During the Eight Year . . .*, 6; Martin Behrman, *An Address by Honorable Martin Behrman, Mayor of New Orleans, Louisiana, at the Invitation of the Society of Economics, Tulane University, New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Collection* (New Orleans, 1913), 14-15; *Daily Picayune*, March 19, 1909, 4; March 26, 1909, 4; May 8, 1909, 7.

leadership remained firm. In May, 1909, former city attorney Samuel Gilmore, now a Congressman from the state's Second district, returned from Washington, D.C., to argue a case on behalf of the belt railroad. Gilmore had filed the case some years earlier, and felt an obligation to see the litigation to the end. The *Daily Picayune* recalled the 1906 incident in which railroad crews tried forcibly to build a track on disputed land, but Mayor Behrman, city Attorney Gilmore, and a court injunction saved the public interest. Three years later, the case was still in court attracting "much interest . . . because of the principle involved, namely the city's control of the river front." The city eventually won the case, but the judgment did not become final until after Gilmore's death.<sup>46</sup>

James Porch deserved much of the credit for the success of the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad because he mobilized the support of commercial interests. He also defined the principles by which the belt operated, including a strong commitment to equity and efficiency. Mayor Behrman played the same role from the public side and was especially valuable mediating among intense and occasionally violent parties. The two worked as allies for five years seldom disagreeing, but in 1909 Porch resigned as President Pro Tem. A possible conflict of interest, illness, the demands of running a business, and the strain of constant public service affected his decision. As the operational demands of the belt grew, Behrman stepped in to assist in its reorganization; Porch resigned just days later. There is no evidence that Behrman engineered the resignation, but his day-to-day involvement with the Commission makes it likely that

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<sup>46</sup> *Daily Picayune*, May 23, 1909, 7. Gilmore served only a short time in Congress, passing away in 1910.

Porch's action represented a decision reached at least with the Mayor's knowledge. Commission members quickly nominated a replacement, but the Mayor objected to filling the position so quickly and without consultation. The Commission agreed to delay the vote. Within two weeks, W. B. Thompson, member of the Commission from the Cotton Exchange, who was developing a strong friendship with Mayor Behrman, emerged as the new President Pro Tem. Porch remained a member and served for another twelve years.<sup>47</sup>

Though neither Porch nor Behrman realized it at the time, their joint effort symbolized an important aspect of New Orleans pragmatic progressivism. The belt operation assumed functions previously allocated to private corporations. The consensus in favor of a public belt did not represent an explicit, ideological statement in support of socialism. To the contrary, Behrman's memoirs reject the notion that the belt represented socialism: "Public ownership of such facilities as . . . [the] public belt, was condemned as 'Socialistic' and 'radical' ideas when I was young. Now hard boiled bankers and business men all over the United States are strong for it." Behrman held contempt for socialism, but a strong appreciation for public works in support of commercial development. In 1912, in his campaign for re-election, Behrman boasted that his administration "built the Public Belt Railroad [after] years of futile efforts [and in spite of] severe antagonisms on the part of corporate interests." The New Orleans

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<sup>47</sup> *The Key to the Commercial Situation*, 1-5; *Daily Picayune*, September 17, 1908, 5; November 11, 1908, 5; December 8, 1908, 15; December 18, 1908, 4; Wilds, *James W. Porch and the Port of New Orleans*, 52-56; Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 151-152.

Public Belt Railroad joined the other great public works of the first decade of the twentieth century in defining the business climate, the political life, and the very geography of New Orleans. Its construction resulted from the consensus in favor of progressive civic development and the effective leadership of Martin Behrman. The railroad's start of operations in 1908 highlighted the success of Behrman's first term, and provided ample proof to the business community that there was no danger in a second Behrman term.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *The Behrman Administration: Work Accomplished . . .*, 5; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 104.

## CHAPTER IX

### MARTIN BEHRMAN, 1908-1912: POLITICAL BOSS AS COMMUNITY LEADER

Political activity in the city and nation began to quicken in the summer of 1908. The national parties met in convention to determine presidential candidates, and speculation grew in New Orleans about the fall municipal elections. Although the state chose officials earlier in the year, an eventful legislative session affected the New Orleans contests. A party primary became the required method of choosing the Democratic candidate, ending the party convention system that the Regulars dominated. The legislature also passed laws regulating gambling and bar rooms, giving hope to those who proclaimed that a wave of moral reform would sweep the ring from power. But the state elections and the legislature also solidified the power of Governor Jared Sanders, the choice of the regular Democrats and a loyal friend to Martin Behrman.

Behrman enjoyed the normal advantages of incumbency, as well as the extraordinary successes of the past four years. In contrast to the Capdevielle administration, which ended in 1904, Behrman's term in office saw substantial progress in the implementation of vital public works projects. The sewer, water, and drainage systems had begun service, the Public Belt Railroad had started switching cars in summer 1908, and the Dock Board had transformed the river front. In addition,



Behrman, the city council, and the various city departments had made significant improvements in the cleanliness of the city, paved miles of previously primitive streets, and, despite the national financial panic and recession, had presided over impressive city expansion and a building boom. As early as July 3, 1908, the *Daily Picayune* speculated that Behrman would head the ticket, “with no talk of opposition” to the Mayor or his principle lieutenants. Assuming no repetition of the 1904 District Attorney controversy, the Mayor seemed secure. Confident of victory, Behrman left for the Democratic National Convention in Denver. But he did not want to neglect his local duties as campaign chairman for a local congressional district. Before he departed, he reminded Choctaw colleague John Fitzpatrick to “look after the First Congressional District Campaign Committee in his absence.” The announcement in mid-July that the Republican Party intended to contest the city elections by appealing to “disgruntled Democrats” did not attract much attention.<sup>1</sup>

Commissioner Smith of the Department of Public Works sat for a *Daily Picayune* interview while Behrman was away, and he made the case for the administration. During the Behrman years, Smith boasted, the city had acquired “seventy-four head of livestock, five sanitary flushing machines, twelve sweeping

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<sup>1</sup> Behrman to John Fitzpatrick, June 26, 1907, Mayor’s Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, July 3, 1908, 12; July 12, 1908, 4; July 17, 1908, 11. The city was quiet during the Mayor’s absence, although Acting Mayor McRacken faced a unique problem. “There came a request to City Hall . . . for a permit to have a bull fight in this city, but Acting Mayor McRacken was not disposed to issue it, understanding that the Mayor was opposed to exhibitions of this character. He decided to withhold the permit to await the return of the Mayor.” Behrman declined to issue the permit as well. *Daily Picayune*, July 20, 1908, 4.

machines, eleven four-wheel dump carts, one paper wagon, and an egg wagon” for the collection of spoiled eggs. Of the \$45,000 cost of these improvements only \$17,000 required new appropriations. The remainder had been financed out of savings. “My earnest aim and effort,” Smith asserted, “is to have the service conducted upon the strict principles of business.” He concluded with a plea for another term. Other office holders speculated about the composition of the ticket, but no caucus could be held nor decisions made “until the return of the big ones [bosses] from Denver.”<sup>2</sup>

While the Choctaw Club awaited the bosses return, jockeying for position and advantage began among the Regular faithful. A conflict over which ward would name the Civil Sheriff broke out between the Twelfth and Thirteenth Wards. Louis Knop of the Seventh Ward “wanted something more [in salary] than coal gauger” and threatened to challenge Commissioner Smith. Speculation suggested that Knop might “settle for State Inspector of cattle at the slaughterhouse.” The Ninth Ward, a site of constant intra-party fights since the death of the elder Dudenhefer and the imprisonment of his son, faced the loss of important patronage in the Recorder’s Office if the various factions could not get together.<sup>3</sup>

Behrman returned to the city on July 23, 1908. The national convention had nominated William Jennings Bryan for the third time. Behrman preferred a different candidate, but went along as a loyal Democrat. Choctaw member and newspaperman Robert Ewing accompanied Behrman to Denver and returned as Louisiana national

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<sup>2</sup> *Daily Picayune*, July 19, 1908, 1; July 21, 1908, 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Daily Picayune*, July 21, 1908, 8.

committee member. Within a few days, the Mayor and ward leaders “harmonized” almost all conflicts. No contests for the top positions emerged, although the primary election would be necessary to settle minor judicial posts. The Twelfth Ward surrendered the Civil Sheriff position, and the intramural factions of the Ninth Ward declared peace. Knop received the prize of the Civil Sheriff’s office, securing Smith’s renomination for Public Works. Even the *Daily Picayune* expressed admiration at the smooth operation of the Regulars. “There is reason for general congratulations on the manner in which the primary scheme has worked,” suggested the *Daily Picayune*. “There has been very little friction among the ward leaders, having apparently felt satisfied with the administration of Mayor Behrman. . . . The opposition seems to have faded away.”<sup>4</sup>

Behrman’s control of the situation extended beyond the confines of the Choctaw Club. The former traveling salesman, council clerk, and assessor now regularly worked with the city’s commercial elite. As a result, the opposition faded, and the Mayor quietly began to gather support, even from unlikely quarters. On July 29, 1908, the remnants of the 1904 Home Rule Executive Committee met to consider the upcoming campaign. Frank A. Daniels, chair of the committee, declared that he “was out of politics” and would resign if the group sought to enter the mayor’s race. He added that “many of those who were prominent in the movement four years ago have since become

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<sup>4</sup> *Daily Picayune*, July 23, 1908, 4; July 26, 1908, 4; July 28, 1908, 8; July 29, 1908, 5; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 178. Schott attributed the lack of opposition to the power of Governor Sanders and the workings of the new primary law, which favored the machine. Schott, “John M. Parker,” 110-111.

supporters of Mayor Behrman.” A new reform group, the Independent Party, emerged and proposed a merger with the Home Rulers, but a joint meeting proved more farce than drama. Only five out of thirty-four members of the Home Rule Executive Committee attended. The Independents assembled a larger group, but not all wards were represented. The members adjourned and authorized the chairman, R. A. Tichenor, to draft a statement of principles but delayed a decision on whether to challenge Behrman. Even the *Times-Democrat*, perpetual enemy of the Choctaws, offered a grudging endorsement of the Mayor, while condemning his colleagues and organization.<sup>5</sup>

Final proof of the Mayor’s strong position came in a telegram sent to the *Daily-States*. William B. Thompson, Jr., prominent businessman and President of the Cotton Exchange, wrote the paper while on vacation in Bar Harbor, Maine, urging a second term for Behrman. Thompson had graduated from University of the South at Sewanee, attended John Hopkins, and received a law degree from Columbia. After a brief career as a lawyer in Dallas, he returned to New Orleans to take over the family business upon the death of his father. W. B. Thompson and Company was a cotton factorage business, but the son expanded into other areas, including insurance. Thompson’s endorsement symbolized both the Mayor’s success in attracting support and the unlikelihood of any

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<sup>5</sup> *Daily Picayune*, July 29, 1908, 4, 11; July 31, 1908, 8; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 178-181. Chudacoff suggested that “reformers had little stamina compared with their rivals” and noted that the “New York Reform Club had to suspend its meetings [four years after its formation] for lack of a quorum.” Chudacoff, *The Evolution of American Urban Society*, 173-174.

serious opposition. In his memoirs, Behrman complained that he had no real friends in the Cotton Exchange crowd, but Thompson proved a loyal friend and political ally.<sup>6</sup>

Behrman expressed his gratitude to Thompson in a letter sent soon after word of the endorsement became public. "When I assumed the reins of government, there were many representative citizens who feared that the city of New Orleans had taken a step back," the Mayor wrote, and, that many believed "the progressive march of this metropolis would be impaired most seriously based [on] their having heard of me only as a politician or 'ward boss.' I set out not only to maintain the progressive march of our beloved city, but to quicken it." When Thompson returned to the city, he repeated his endorsement and identified the characteristics in Behrman he most valued--the Mayor's ability to build consensus and to mobilize public opinion. Thompson wrote that citizens tend "to discourage all improvements because it is our humor to be dissatisfied with whatever order or system may be in control." He went on to praise Behrman's ability to overcome that constraint. "Your unostentatious discharge of your duty, your fairness and your faithfulness have been fruitful . . . in inducing the most thorough concurrence of opinion that I have known in my acquaintance with the political history of New Orleans."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Daily Picayune*, July 30, 1908, 4; Schott, "John M. Parker," 100 quoting the *New Orleans Item*, November 17, 1922; Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, 2: 804. There is no indication of political activity on the part of Thompson prior to the 1908 election. He had only recently been elected president of the New Orleans Cotton Exchange when he endorsed Behrman.

<sup>7</sup> Behrman to W.B. Thompson, July 30, 1908, Mayor's Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, August 8, 1908, 8.

In spite of the long odds, the Independents decided to oppose Behrman. A headquarters opened, but the groups had difficulty finding a candidate to challenge the popular Mayor. The *Daily Picayune* ridiculed the effort and claimed the “Independents Still Hunting A Moses.” But on August 23, the group presented William G. Tebault as its candidate for mayor. Tebault was forty-nine years old and claimed participation in the Battle of Liberty Place as a teenager, as well as more recent civic service in fighting yellow fever. He owned a retail furniture business that was “known for [its] original advertising.” Tebault quickly resorted to the standard reform rhetoric. He promised an infusion of “\$250,000,000 in capital to the city” as soon as the “system [of bosses] was defeated.” He added that “the ring is frightened.” By early September, he issued a platform calling for a clean city, honest elections, revision of city payrolls, frequent audits, and “a liberal policy toward railroads and industry.”<sup>8</sup>

The Independents faced challenges more difficult than assembling a ticket and platform. A new state law sought to discourage Democratic insurgents from running in the party primary and, when they lost, bolting to enter the general election. To prevent such rebellion, the law required independent tickets to file petitions prior to the Democratic primary. Signatures could not include those who subsequently voted in the primary. The Independents did not fulfill the mandates of the law. Immediately after the primary, the state’s Board of Contests disqualified the New Orleans Independents because several persons who signed the petition also took part in the just-completed

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<sup>8</sup> Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 181-182; *Daily Picayune*, August 19, 1908, 5; August 23, 1908, 4; September 3, 1908, 5.

Democratic election. Tebault challenged the decision in court and asserted his plans “to run anyway.”<sup>9</sup>

The Regulars faced a momentary crisis when Vital Tujague, Chief Clerk for the city’s Treasurer’s Office, admitted the theft of \$30,000 of municipal funds under his control. (He used the money to support a gambling habit.) But Tujague’s brother agreed to cover the shortfall, and Behrman immediately issued a statement claiming credit for uncovering the theft. Several months prior to the discovery of the missing funds the city had begun a series of audits at the Mayor’s suggestion. The theft created no lasting damage to the Regulars or to Behrman’s candidacy. The Independents, on the other hand, found no judicial relief to the Board of Contests’ decision and lost an appeal to gain a position on the ballot. Important supporters defected, but Tebault claimed he “would run to the bitter end” and that “thee [Independent] League is stronger than ever,” all evidence to the contrary.<sup>10</sup>

The *Daily Picayune* added to Tebault’s troubles by publishing a comparative analysis of municipal expenditures that contradicted the standard reform claim of ring profligacy. In a list of per capita expenditures in major cities, New Orleans ranked near the bottom at \$20.93. The highest expenditures were in Boston (\$48.52), New York (\$43.39), and Washington, D.C. (\$37.84). No one made the obvious point that low expenditures reflected a lack of necessary public investment. But the reform elements

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<sup>9</sup> Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 182; *Daily Picayune*, September 6, 1908; September 8, 1908, 4.

<sup>10</sup>*Daily Picayune*, September 11, 1908, 1; September 20, 1908, 5.

of the city had for so long preached the necessity of frugality that the statistics undercut any argument for a change in administration. The statistics also showed the city was not among the highest in indebtedness as well.

On October 3, 1908, the Independents lost another court challenge of the decision that denied its candidate a place on the ballot. Undeterred, the group issued its platform and vowed to fight on. Tebault promised the use “of white labor for all public works on the levees and handling commerce for New Orleans,” and the Independents’ platform “encourage[d] all negroes to return to cane, rice, corn and cotton fields of Louisiana.” Although reluctant to reverse progress toward clean water, it also defended “the rights [of citizens] to use cisterns” and committed the Independents to the efficient management of public utilities. But very few took Tebault’s campaign seriously. Late in October, the Supreme Court of Louisiana once again ruled against the Independents. Tebault reminded the voters that a write-in vote remained an option, but on election day, the insurgents drew only a few votes. Tebault recorded only eighty-nine votes, a Socialist candidate 270 votes, and Behrman 26,897.<sup>11</sup>

The Regulars victory overshadowed defeat of the national Democratic ticket. The *Daily Picayune* interpreted the presidential race as a contest between monopoly power and the people, and proclaimed the “Trust Kings [were] Out for Taft.” City candidates unopposed in the general election turned over surplus funds to the organization for use in the presidential race. Regular John Fitzpatrick managed fund

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<sup>11</sup> Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 182-186; *Daily Picayune*, September 20, 1908, 5; October 4, 1908, 5.



raising for the Bryan campaign and asked the Mayor to recommend “ a reliable man to canvass for Bryan.” Fitzpatrick confidently predicted the election of Bryan was “more probable every day.” The Mayor personally contributed \$100.00 to the fund. Although the Democrats easily carried the city and the state, Taft won the national race.<sup>12</sup>

In reporting Behrman’s victory, the *Daily Picayune* offered a flattering recap of Behrman’s career and an assessment of his temperament. “His disposition [is] most genial and he is charitable to a fault.” Two weeks after the election, the paper paid tribute to his hands-on management style in an article titled “How the Mayor Does It.” The paper cited two letters from the Mayor to members of his administration in response to citizen complaints. The letter to Superintendent Earl of the Sewerage and Water Board began “I met a delegation of citizens” and went on to describe the need to maintain the Melpomene Canal. The other communication went to Commissioner Smith of the Public Works Department and described the need for a foot bridge over the same canal at Roman Street. The *Daily Picayune* concluded “that there will be action commenced after receipt of the letters may be assured.” Behrman paid tribute to the outgoing council, issued a challenge to the new council to continue his first term’s policies, and “after the hurrah and the celebration were over,” the Mayor later recalled, “I went back to work.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Fitzpatrick to Behrman, August 18, 1908; Behrman secretary (W.P. Ball) to Robert Ewing, September 17, 1908; *Daily Picayune*, October 29, 1908, 12; November 4, 1908, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Behrman to City Council, December 5, 1908(?) (no date provided), Mayor’s Correspondence; Behrman to City Council, December 8, 1908, Mayor’s Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, November 4, 1908, 1; November 19, 1908, 5.

At the first meeting of the new council, Behrman reported on the auditors' analysis of the municipal bookkeeping system and asked the council to support reform. The press paid tribute to the Mayor's experience and accomplishments and the initial meeting of the council. The *Daily Picayune* noted the election of the same set of officers who had served the previous four years, a "remarkable tribute to the general efficiency of city government." Less generously, the *Times-Democrat* took issue with Behrman's characterization of "a practically unanimous vote of the people." "It is true that there was no opposition, but . . . political conditions destroyed any chance for organization in opposition to the ring." The anti-ring paper went on to give Behrman credit for his knowledge of city government and "for the investigation initiated by him to find the financial status of the various city departments."<sup>14</sup>

A more tangible tribute awaited Behrman upon his return from a Washington, D.C., conference on December 18, 1908. Over 150 colleagues greeted him at his home, held a banquet in his honor, and presented the Mayor with a magnificent silver service, "243 pieces . . . worth \$1,000." The group lauded the Mayor "for his loyalty to the Democratic Party," his hard work to advance "up from the ranks," and his service as Mayor, including school construction and public utilities. Former Mayor Fitzpatrick, Choctaw Club leader and state tax collector, generously proclaimed Behrman "the greatest Mayor of all time."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Daily Picayune*, December 8, 1908, 5; *Times-Democrat*, December 8, 1908, quoted in Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 188-192.

<sup>15</sup> *Daily Picayune*, December 19, 1908.

Political events soon intruded on the Regulars' victory celebrations. Robert Davey, charter member of the Choctaw Club and Member of Congress for the Second Congressional District of Louisiana, died in late December, 1908. Speculation about a successor began immediately and centered on City Attorney Gilmore, Lieutenant Governor Paul Lambremont, and Tenth Ward leader Robert Ewing. Gilmore declared his candidacy on January 1, 1909. His reform background in the Shakspeare and Flower administrations had been forgiven by his loyalty to the Regulars since his 1899 election as City Attorney. He had no opposition in his recent reelection campaign. Within two days the Regulars affirmed his selection. Behrman personally chose Judge Isaiah D. Moore to succeed Gilmore as City Attorney. Gilmore had served the city as a firm believer in public ownership and carried the city's cases against the railroads and the private utility companies. Even after his election to Congress, Behrman called upon his friend to argue cases on behalf of the city.<sup>16</sup>

Matthew Schott, biographer of John Parker, characterizes Behrman's second term as one in which the city organization drew apart from the reform and commercial elements of the city. Specific issues arose to create conflict between the factions, and subsequent political developments increased the perception of a break between the groups. But most of the Mayor's second term followed the trends of his first. The connections between the Mayor and the business community remained strong as he strove to finish public work projects, upgrade the appearance of the city, and promote

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<sup>16</sup> *Daily Picayune*, December 27, 1908, 1,6; January 2, 1909, 2; January 4, 1909, 7; May 23, 1909. See Chapter VIII for Gilmore's role in the Public Belt Railroad cases.

New Orleans on the regional and national scene. Political and electoral differences persisted and new ones would emerge. But on the essential elements of the consensus in favor of progressive civic development, Behrman and the commercial elite shared the same agenda.<sup>17</sup>

As Behrman's second term began, routine administrative and policy matters absorbed the Mayor's attention. He pursued delinquent payments from street railroads to fulfill their obligations under the terms of city franchises. Sensitive to criticism from the *Times-Democrat*, he demanded testimony from a reporter who interviewed an alleged deadhead employee of the Dock Board. Informed of a potential scandal at the House of Detention, the Mayor investigated and found that "Captain Morris Picheloup . . . [was] using prisoners for personal business." The Mayor referred the matter to Commissioner of Police and Public Buildings, Alex Pujol, and the captain was suspended. Behrman also appealed to the District Attorney to investigate rumors of wrongdoing in other city departments. The Mayor echoed the concerns of the Board of Trade regarding high fire insurance rates in New Orleans and demanded the council begin an investigation. In late January, 1909, the Mayor appealed to U.S. Senators Murphy Foster and Samuel McEnery to intervene in Congress to "preserve the naval station at New Orleans." Together, these actions illustrated Behrman's conception of his role as Mayor in an active government: careful accountability in the expenditure of

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<sup>17</sup> Schott, "John M. Parker, 107-108.

public funds, regulation of private industry under franchise agreements, and promotion of economic development.<sup>18</sup>

Less lofty aspects of the Mayor's jobs also demanded Behrman's attention. His responsibilities as chief executive and political leader demanded constant attention to the requirements of patronage. Behrman often prevailed upon subordinates and other political figures to employ persons he recommended. The Mayor sent a list of eleven names to Sewerage and Water Board Superintendent Earl, suggesting they might "be used as laborers. They are worthy and deserving." He forwarded to Governor Sanders the letter of a mutual friend and recommended that Sanders "issue to him a commission and make him happy." Even in a letter to his daughter, vacationing in Mississippi, patronage questions intruded. He could get not a job with the Public Belt Railroad for a Mississippi resident, the Mayor wrote. The law required all employees of that public agency to be Louisiana voters. But he suggested an alternative. "I may be able to get him on the streetcars as a conductor or motorman. Let me know what he thinks."<sup>19</sup>

The progressive trend toward regulation of morals became an immediate concern to the Mayor in 1909. The Locke Law outlawing race track gambling and the Gay-

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<sup>18</sup> Behrman to Editor, *Times-Democrat*, December 12, 1908, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to Alex Pujol, January 6, 1909, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to City Council, January 12, 1909, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to McEnery and Foster, January 25, 1909, Mayor's Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, January 13, 1909, 4; January 24, 1909, 8.

<sup>19</sup> Behrman to Superintendent Earl, Sewerage and Water Board, January 17, 1909, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to Governor Sanders, February 25, 1909, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to Nellie Behrman, September 8, 1908, Mayor's Correspondence.

Shattuck Law regulating bar rooms went into effect at the start of the year. Behrman opposed both efforts, but was bound to enforce the laws. In a letter to W. J. O'Connor, Inspector of Police, Behrman detailed the elements of "Shattuck-Gay" that required enforcement, particularly the prohibition against issuing liquor licenses to women, and allowing any "woman, girl or minor" to "serve in any bar room." Behrman had little use for prohibition, but remained polite to his constituents who thought otherwise. To one such voter, Behrman expressed regret that "he would be unable to attend the annual meeting of the Carrie Nation Club." Regarding the anti-gambling Locke Law, Behrman asserted it would not suppress gambling, but would drive the practice off of the legitimate tracks and into the community at large where "ten times the size of the police force" could not suppress it.<sup>20</sup>

Some businessmen shared Behrman's concerns and made a connection between laws to control behavior and the economic condition of the city. On January 5, 1909, B.C. Casanas organized a meeting at the Grunewald Hotel and formed the Business Men's League to combat the perception that New Orleans had become "ultra puritanical." Such attitudes, Casanas feared, contributed to a depression in the local economy and low employment:

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<sup>20</sup> Behrman to W. J. O'Connor, January 2, 1909, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to Louis Ochs, February 16, 1909, Mayor's Correspondence; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 231-239. Behrman's attitude toward prohibition can be inferred from a telegram to Governor Sanders at Vicksburg, Mississippi, October 28, 1909. The Governor was on his way to New Orleans and Behrman sent greetings. "My sympathy is extended to the near-beer sufferers. Console yourselves with the knowledge that oceans of the real stuff awaits your arrival here." Behrman to Sanders, October 28, 1909, Mayor's Correspondence.

These injurious effects have been produced by an erroneous report that has gone abroad that the people of New Orleans are becoming ultrapuritanical and that they have passed and would still further pass drastic blue laws that would curtail the just liberties of its citizens and make penal what has hitherto been considered legitimate occupations and innocent amusement.<sup>21</sup>

The Business Men's League was not the only commercial association mindful of the New Orleans economy. The 1909 annual meeting of the Progressive Union highlighted the group's achievements and praised the Mayor for his "Buy at Home Campaign" among city departments. But the mutual congratulations could not hide apprehension about the city's economy. The previous year, members agreed, "had been one of business stagnation," and President Philip Werlein promised efforts to bring more business to New Orleans. The national financial panic and recession affected all city businesses. Shipments declined in the port, the street railroad company faced bankruptcy, and the city experienced difficulties in leasing property and selling franchises. Both the Progressive Union and the Business Men's League sought additional advertising for the city, increased expenditures for promotional literature, and the installation of a natural gas pipeline franchise to boost the local economy. The Progressive Union fought adverse economic conditions with a campaign to identify New Orleans as the "Winter Capital of America" in the hopes of attracting tourists. The Businessmen's League lobbied for the restoration of winter horse racing and organized underwriting for the revival of the French Opera. Fearful of the effects of adverse

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<sup>21</sup> Business Men's League, Board of Directors Meeting, January 22, 1909, Minutes, Reports and Related Miscellany, Business Men's League, New Orleans, 1909-1911, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Special Collections (hereinafter cited as BML Minutes); *Daily Picayune*, January 6, 1909, 11.

legislation on the city's economy, the group issued a statement of opposition to calls for "the complete suppression of the liquor traffic in the state and other blue law legislation."<sup>22</sup>

The commercial and political leadership of New Orleans had built up the physical infrastructure of the city during the previous decade. The victory over yellow fever and a strong building boom reassured city leaders who feared losing place among the great cities of the nation. But 1907-1909 proved a difficult time, and the city sought a variety of solutions. Press comment advocated increased manufacturing in the city as the path to economic growth. Businessman John M. Parker looked beyond the city and promoted regional growth through the Southern Commercial Congress. City leaders reached out to attract conventions and professional meetings to New Orleans, confident that investment would soon follow visitors once the progressive nature of the city were discovered. Special attention focused on the river and the port as the sources of commerce, wealth, and international status. News that the city would host the Lakes-to-the-Gulf Deep Waterway Convention encouraged city businessmen to view New Orleans as a commercial leader. The 1910 convention of the American Water Works Association gave the city an occasion to show off its new water purification plant and distribution system.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Progressive Union Minutes, Annual Report of Activities in 1908 by M. B. Trevezant, Secretary/Manager, January 11, 1908; Board of Directors, BML Minutes, January 22, 1909; Board of Directors, BML Minutes, March 9, 1909; *Daily Picayune*, January 11, 1909, 5; March 3, 1909, 4; March 25, 1909, 5.

<sup>23</sup> Progressive Union Minutes, Board of Directors, April 1, 1909; Progressive Union Minutes, Monthly Report of Secretary/Manager, May, 1909; *Daily Picayune*,



Mayor Behrman retained a central role in the promotion of the city as well as in the management of the major public works projects. Through 1910, he continued to serve on the Board of Directors of the Progressive Union, although his attendance at Board meetings declined. After receiving a number of citizen complaints, he urged the Sewerage and Water Board to review the new water rates. He also worked tirelessly for the sale of bonds to finish the water and drainage systems, although adverse financial conditions allowed only \$1,000,000 of the potential \$8,000,000 to be sold. The city's efforts to change its method of garbage disposal made progress when the Public Belt Railroad agreed to haul garbage to a landfill. Eager for the city to expand, the Mayor argued before the city Council on behalf of the New Orleans Land Company, which had opened the city to the north and developed the suburb of Lakeview. Behrman supported the company in its request for an extension of city lighting, and cited both the work performed in building streets and draining land and the company's record in paying taxes.<sup>24</sup>

In the summer of 1909, the Mayor took a long vacation to the West. During his travels, he visited with mayors of large cities and exchanged information on items of mutual interest. In his absence, Acting Mayor McRacken filled in as chief executive, but stayed in close touch with the Mayor. At Behrman's instructions, McRacken

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April 2, 1909, 4; April 4, 1909, 4; June 10, 1907.

<sup>24</sup> *Daily Picayune*, May 26, 1909, 12; June 11, 1909, 15; June 12, 1909, 5; June 25, 1909, 5; June 26, 1909, 5; Behrman to Hugh McCloskey, Dock Board, June 7, 1909, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to Public Belt Railroad Commission, June 7, 1909, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to City Council, July 6, 1909, Mayor's Correspondence.

contacted Louisiana members of Congress to promote the immigration station, which Congressman Gilmore announced would be approved. The site of the station was in Algiers, Behrman's home, and he took particular interest in the project. The Progressive Union maintained a high level of activity, even during the hot summer months. The group attempted to improve sanitation by hiring an inspector at a salary of \$75 per month. The experiment only lasted three months. Upset at numerous complaints over the inspector's zealotry, the Board of Directors fired him in August. Both the Progressive Union and the Business Men's League worked on city promotion. The Union planned a conference matching rural buyers with New Orleans dealers, and the League published a pamphlet "advertising New Orleans as a commercial center."<sup>25</sup>

The Mayor returned to New Orleans in late August. He praised the city of Seattle, which he had just visited, as "progressive" and cited its tripling of population in just ten years. Eager to see similar growth in New Orleans, the Mayor quickly resumed his duties. He wrote to A.C. Wuerple, President of the New Orleans Land Company, developers of the north New Orleans area known as Lakeview, acknowledging the company's offer of a site for a new school "not less than \$25,000 in value." Behrman also joined the Progressive Union's effort to raise money to entertain the delegates of the upcoming Lakes-to-the-Gulf Deep Waterway Association and pressed city departments to keep the city clean for the visitors to New Orleans. He emphasized his

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<sup>25</sup> *Daily Picayune*, June 29, 1909, 5; July 11, 1909, 8; July 11, 1908, Section II, 15; July 29, 1909, 5; August 8, 1909, 5; Acting Mayor McRacken to Representatives Gilmore and Estopinal and to Senator Foster, July 20, 1909. The immigration site did not obtain final approval until December, 1909.

message by inspecting areas of the city without prior warning, looking for weeds, clogged gutters, and other unsightly problems.<sup>26</sup>

City council business had accumulated during the Mayor's absence. Many pending actions reflected the concerns of progressive sensibilities. Mindful of the threat of disease-bearing mosquitos, the council voted to fumigate local schools prior to the return of students from summer vacation. At the council's urging, a citizens' committee began to raise funds for the establishment of public baths. "Among the most prevalent reform endeavors in southern towns and cities were clean-up and local improvement campaigns," and New Orleans joined the trend. The council heard from proponents of the city beautiful movement, who asked for funds to establish a tree nursery. Organized into a new city Parking [Park] Commission, the movement at first wanted to locate the new nursery in the New Orleans City Park. The Mayor asked former Mayor Paul Capdevielle, President of the City Park Improvement Association, to hear the Commission request, but the meeting did not go well. Although the council initially insisted that City Park surrender fifteen acres for the nursery, resistance from the influential association led the council to reserve its decision. At the Mayor's urging, the council acquired sufficient land in another part of the city and located the nursery at the new site. The resolution of the issue was typical of Behrman's political skill. He responded to the demands of the city beautiful movement, deferred to the City Park

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<sup>26</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 23, 1909, 3, 5; August 24, 1909, 5; August 28, 1909, 4; Behrman to A.C. Wuerple, August 25, 1909, Mayor's Correspondence.

Improvement Association, and still managed to find an alternative method to satisfy the parties.<sup>27</sup>

Behrman's political skills led him safely through another problem in September 1909. Business interests upset over high fire insurance rates appealed to the Board of Trade, which issued a report to the Mayor. One of the charges contained in the report identified "the political influence in the organization and control of the Fire Department." The report recommended "a reorganization of the Board of Fire Commissioners," that would free "the department . . . from the machinations of ward bosses." The strong language came from a committee that included James Porch, the Mayor's colleague on the Public Belt Commission. The connection between the organization of the Fire Department and insurance rates was tenuous, and Behrman could have fought the committee's conclusions and defended his administration. Instead, Behrman thanked the Board of Trade for its work and accepted structural change in the department. He pressed the city council and local architects to prepare a new building code, and, by the end of the year, shared credit with the Board of Trade as insurance companies agreed to reductions in premiums of nearly forty percent. Behrman's actions in the fire insurance controversy coincided with the interests of the city's commercial classes, but nothing in Behrman's background nor his outlook on politics suggested to the Mayor that those interests were in any way different from the

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<sup>27</sup> Behrman to Paul Capdevielle, August 27, 1909, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to City Council, October 12, 1909, Mayor's Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, August 25, 1909, 5; October 13, 1909, 8; October 18, 1909, 5; December 7, 1909, 6; Grantham, *Southern Progressivism*, 288-289.

interests of the city or its citizens. The booster spirit of the commercial elite coincided with the views of Behrman and the Regulars. Only on rare occasions did the views of the two groups diverge.<sup>28</sup>

There was no divergence when it came to promoting the economic future of the city. In the fall of 1909, both the business and political leadership mobilized to support the Lakes-to-the-Gulf Deep Waterways Convention. The meeting fulfilled multiple city goals: promotion of Mississippi River trade, appropriation of federal funds for dredging and harbor improvements, and elevation of New Orleans to a leadership position among commercial cities along the great river. A hospitality fund of more than \$20,000 and preferential rates on railroads made visitors welcome. Word that President Taft would visit the convention added luster to the event and provided an opportunity to directly approach the Chief Executive on behalf of city interests, such as the immigration station. The presidential visit also became an occasion for the city to boast of its recent improvements. Plumbing contractor C. C. Hartwell suggested in an advertisement that “there are many interesting things in and around the Crescent City to show the President, and none more important than the great sewerage and water system.”

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<sup>28</sup> Behrman to C.H. Ellis, President, Board of Trade, September 13, 1909, Mayor’s Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, September 12, 1909, Section I, 8; December 19, 1909, 10; December 25, 1909, 11. Behrman submitted a new building code to the city council in June 1910. Behrman to City Council, June 28, 1910, Mayor’s Correspondence.

Hartwell added to those among readers who might need his services, “Are you connected?”<sup>29</sup>

After the weeks of buildup, the visit itself prove anticlimactic. The President approached New Orleans by way of the Mississippi River, and the *Daily Picayune* hired a boat to deliver copies of the newspaper to the Presidential party. A navy fleet accompanied the President, but the flotilla ran four hours behind schedule. Parade Chairman John P. Sullivan ordered the ceremonies to start, and the parade proceeded without the honored guest while onlookers called out “Where’s Taft?” The President arrived late, but delivered speeches at the Jesuit College and at Tulane University. Before he departed the next day, Taft agreed to help the port, visited the potential site of the long-planned immigration station, and endorsed the aims of the Lakes-to-the-Gulf Deep Waterways Convention.<sup>30</sup>

The convention highlighted the connection between New Orleans and the Mississippi Valley. But the cities commercial interests also display strong support of Southern regional interests. John Parker worked to gain financial support for the Southern Commercial Congress, founded in 1908 with the slogan “A Greater Nation through a Greater South.” In addition to promoting tariff protection for southern

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<sup>29</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 1, 1909, Section V, 1; September 2, 1909; September 26, 1909; October 13, 1909. Taft’s visit was his second to New Orleans. As President elect in February, 1909, Taft attended a Carnival ball in New Orleans, played golf, and delivered a speech to the residents of the Confederate Soldiers’ Home.

<sup>30</sup> Financial Statement, Lakes-to-the-Gulf Deep Waterway Convention, Progressive Union Minutes, December 1, 1909; *Daily Picayune*, October 31, 1909, 1; November 1, 1909, 1. The performance of the French Opera company cost \$1,027; the Stag Smoker totaled \$1,373.

products, the Congress supported improvements to transportation infrastructure, including river dredging and harbor improvements. The New Orleans Progressive Union joined with the Congress. Responding to regional loyalty, the Union also worked to alter the federal government's design plan for the new post office in New Orleans. Instead of Indiana limestone, the Union and other city organizations lobbied for "improved material" and eventually settled on Georgia marble as a substitute. A year later, the lobbying succeeded, and the post office received the "finer," Southern material.<sup>31</sup>

The sheer volume of civic voluntary activity, lobbying, fund raising, and municipal promotion was impressive. But duplication of efforts and the fatigue brought on by constant pleading for dues, subscriptions, and donations wore on members of the business community. During 1909 and 1910, the Progressive Union raised funds--in excess of normal dues--for convention hospitality, for a clean city campaign, and for special activities for city merchants. The Union also considered proposals to underwrite the French Opera season as well as to underwrite the Southern Commercial Congress. Business Men's League President Casanas authorized agents to solicit for memberships in the BML and, at the same time, chaired a committee city to raise funds for public baths. The Anti-Tuberculosis League and the Good Roads Association also appealed to

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<sup>31</sup> Board of Directors, Progressive Union Minutes, November 11, 1909; Secretary/Manager's Report, Progressive Union Minutes, December, 1910; Behrman to John M. Parker, November 4, 1909, Mayor's Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, December 1, 1909; December 12, 1909. The post office subsequently moved to a new location, but the building remains, now the site of the Internal Revenue Service.

the public for funds. And in 1910, fund raising for the proposed Panama Exposition demanded attention. Some participants in all of these efforts complained, and a Joint Conference met in late 1909 to consider merging at least some of the organizations. No progress resulted, and the various exchanges and associations remained independent.<sup>32</sup>

On issues of good works, boosterism, and public improvements, the business community had acted with virtual unanimity. But its solidarity broke down when the interests of one business group collided with another. In those instances, the Mayor either stayed out of the dispute or chose to support the position most likely to benefit the wider public. Two controversies in late 1909 and 1910 illustrated the potential for disagreement between business groups. In one instance, President W. B. Thompson cited the findings of a Cotton Exchange committee that the railroads bringing cotton to New Orleans for overseas shipment practiced rate discrimination. In addition to his role as President of the Cotton Exchange (a position to which he was reelected in December 1909), Thompson was one of the Exchange's representative to the Public Belt Railroad Commission. Only one month earlier, he succeeded James Porch as President Pro Tem of that body. Railroad and steamship lines (which enjoyed cooperative agreements on rates) denied Thompson's assertions of discrimination, but relations between the Exchange and the transportation companies remained tense.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Executive Committee, BML Minutes, February 2, 1909; Progressive Union Minutes, November 11, 1909; *Daily Picayune*, September 1, 1909, Section II, 4; September 12, 1909; September 14, 1909; November 12, 1909, 8.

<sup>33</sup> *Daily Picayune*, November 23, 1909, 6; November 28, 1909, 4; December 12, 1909, 5; December 12, 1909, 5.



Early in 1910, in another example of a breakdown in the normally placid relations among business interests and government, private investors announced plans to build a cotton warehouse on the river front, but outside of the jurisdiction of New Orleans. The plan contradicted the recommendations made by Thompson, and members of the Dock Board objected to the plan as well. President Hugh McCloskey assured Behrman that “the Board of Port Commissioners would use every effort” to keep cotton wharves in the city. The suspicion that the new facility would favor the Illinois Central Railroad to the detriment of other lines generated opposition to the plan as well. Behrman agreed that the plan threatened the city’s interests and mobilized the Regular organization’s resources in the legislation to help in the fight. The Mayor also supported Dock Board actions to support the imports of coffee into New Orleans by expanding public warehouse facilities, including the construction of two-story steel sheds along the stretch of wharves dedicated to the handling of coffee imports. The construction established a precedent for subsequent Dock Board actions that completed not only a public cotton warehouse, but a public grain elevator as well.<sup>34</sup>

The two cases--alleged railroad discrimination and public versus private warehouse facilities--demonstrated that business interests were not monolithic. The ethic of private enterprise occasionally came into conflict with public interests. Not only Behrman, but also public-spirited businessmen such as Thompson argued for the

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<sup>34</sup> *Times Democrat*, January 4, 1910; *Daily Picayune*, January 5, 1910, 6; January 13, 1910, 5; February 17, 1910, 6; February 25, 1910, 4; Hugh McCloskey, President, Dock Board to Behrman, January 3, 1910, Behrman Papers. See Chapter VII for details of the private versus public warehouse controversy.

public interest in such cases. The decision of businessmen to advocate for public facilities did not deny the basis of private enterprise, but asserted that in particular instances a public entity served business interests--widely defined--better than a single corporation or combination. The essence of the consensus for progressive civic development depended on the acceptance of a strong public role in the promotion of the city's economic future.

The business community remained respectful of the Mayor's record in spite of occasional disagreements. In February 1910, Sol Wexler of the Whitney Bank, provided his thoughts on government to the *Daily Picayune*. Only a year earlier, Wexler had clashed with the Mayor over a Sewerage and Water Board bond issue, but the incident had no lasting effect. "The first thing necessary to make a city great," Wexler said, "is that it shall be well governed. In this we are past fortunate for in Mayor Behrman we have an administration that has few equals in the whole country." The *Daily Picayune* continued its defense of municipal operations and Behrman's role. The paper argued that the important distinction in the public ownership debate was not government versus private enterprise, but political versus business principles.

While municipal control has proved wasteful in many cities, this has been due not to the fact of municipal control but to the attempt to manage these utilities along political instead of along business lines. There is no more reason why municipal control should not prove successful than would ordinary private control, provided only the same business principles are applied in both cases.

The commercial leadership of New Orleans accepted and, on occasion, welcomed Regular political leadership because business principles coexisted with politics in the new governmental agencies of the progressive era<sup>35</sup>

Unfortunately for Behrman, his acceptance by the commercial leadership was not matched by those citizens eager to improve the New Orleans moral climate. The future of Storyville, the city's "restricted," district, became an issue in early 1910. The Era Club announced it would join with the Progressive Union "to have the neighborhood surrounding the terminal depot purged of the present conditions which makes entry into the city a disgrace to our citizens." Perhaps not coincidentally, the attack on Storyville coincided with a Progressive Union membership drive. The two groups objected to the fact that trains entering the terminal passed along the southern border of Storyville, and passengers not heeding the conductor's discreet warning could view the places of business located along that section of Basin Street. The Committee on Municipal Affairs issued a report to the Progressive Union "complaining of houses in Storyville fronting Basin Street near the terminal" and submitted photographs of the situation. Behrman declined to take action. He stated that "the railroads knew of Storyville prior to locating [their] terminal," and he denied the existence of "a threat to public morals." He noted that no one from the railroads had filed a complaint, and he preferred a policy that would keep the houses in a restricted zone.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Daily Picayune*, February 1, 1910, 6.

<sup>36</sup> *Daily Picayune*, February 13, 1910, 4; February 24, 1910, 15; March 20, 1910; Report from Committee on Municipal Affairs, Progressive Union Minutes, March 8, 1910; Behrman to President and Board of Directors, Progressive Union, March 18,

The standoff between Behrman and those opposed to Storyville did not end the controversy over the regulation of morals. The Business Men's League, formed in opposition to "puritanizing," assisted the Mayor in his attempts to reduce the effects of laws regulating gambling and bar rooms. He also faced a growing prohibition movement in the state. In March 1910, the Business Men's League received notice of Anti-Saloon League activities in the upcoming session of the legislature. The Business Men's League took the lead in organizing the New Orleans commercial exchanges against prohibition. The Mayor warned that prohibition would cause a loss of \$1,000,000 in tax revenue and make it "almost certainly impossible to bring the proposed Panama Exposition to New Orleans." Responding to a more broadly-based community membership, the Progressive Union declined to join the Business Men's League in opposition to prohibition.<sup>37</sup>

Behrman may have tolerated gambling and drink, but on the subject of race he was more likely to seek social control. In this respect, the Mayor's views corresponded with most southern progressives. In July 1910, black heavyweight John Johnson defeated a white opponent. Racial unrest broke out in several cities where, in the words of the *Daily Picayune*, "negroes became obstreperous." "It is to the credit of New Orleans," the paper continued, "that nothing of the sort happened here" and consoled its readers with the assertion that it was "only in the matter of brute force, muscular power

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1910, Mayor's Correspondence; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 304.

<sup>37</sup> Executive Committee, BML Minutes, March 19, 1910; Special Meeting, Board of Directors, Progressive Union Minutes, April 2, 1910.

and endurance that the negro is the equal of the white.” The Progressive Union wrote the Mayor, urged him to ban motion pictures of the fight, and warned that “the proven result of this fight has been assaults, race clashes and disturbances and the inflammation excited by these can easily lead to rape and lynching.” Behrman promptly responded that he agreed with the Union’s position on the fight and had already prohibited the motion pictures. When word spread of the Mayor’s actions, he received congratulations for the ban. Some months later, however, a riverboat company showed the film on one of its vessels. The river was under federal jurisdiction and outside of the Mayor’s prohibitions. New Orleans escaped racial unrest over the Johnson fight, but unrest of a different sort emerged.<sup>38</sup>

Regardless of individual views of morality and its effects upon business, all factions in the city united behind one great cause in 1910--the effort to have the federal government designate New Orleans as the site for the 1915 celebration of the opening of the Panama Canal. The effort to obtain the exposition for New Orleans revealed that political factions could join together on issues they perceived as important to the city’s stature and future. Proponents of both Regular and reform factions supported the exposition and worked to acquire it for New Orleans. In addition, the efforts to convince the federal government illustrated what the New Orleans leadership thought of its own city. In the competition with San Francisco for the exposition, the arguments

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<sup>38</sup> Board of Directors, Progressive Union Minutes, July, 1910; Behrman to Philip Werlein, President, Progressive Union, July 8, 1910, Mayor’s Correspondence; John Janvier to Behrman, July 8, 1910, Behrman Papers; *Daily Picayune*, July 5, 1910, 8; January 19, 1911, 4.

and responses often showed the strengths and weaknesses of the Crescent City. Finally, the exposition campaign demonstrated both the limitations of voluntary efforts and the extent to which businessmen depended upon the direct financial and political support of local and state government.<sup>39</sup>

The first committee in charge of the exposition promotion consisted of twenty-five prominent citizens appointed by the Mayor. By early 1910, the committee had given way to an exposition company of which Janvier, Behrman, and others were directors. Initial attempts to fund the promotional campaign depended upon private enterprise. The company attempted to raise the necessary funds for the exposition through stock offerings, but the subscriptions fell far short. Word reached New Orleans that San Francisco would compete for the exposition and had raised substantial funds. Behrman concluded that the city must take the lead in transforming the exposition efforts into a public endeavor. On March 2, 1910, the exposition leadership announced that at the next session of the legislature, the city would seek “a small tax from the state” to fund the 1915 exposition.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to public funding, Behrman mobilized personal lobbying on behalf of the exposition. On March 5, 1910, he appointed a group of businessmen who traveled to Washington, D. C., to promote New Orleans as the federally-approved site. Later in the month, the Mayor asked for a special meeting of the Progressive Union Board of

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<sup>39</sup> *Daily Picayune*, March 3, 1910, 1,3. See Chapter V for the beginning of the Panama Exposition effort.

<sup>40</sup> Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 239-243; *Daily Picayune*, December 23, 1909, 5; March 3, 1910, 1,3.

Director in order to pass a resolution in support of the exposition efforts. The Directors agreed to the request and passed the resolution. The New Orleans Fat Man's Club, "formed by fifty who met the 200 pounds prerequisite," also endorsed the Panama Exposition and, for good measure, elected President Taft an honorary member of the club. After the return of the lobbying delegation from the nation's capital, the Mayor helped to organize a mass meeting in New Orleans in support of the exposition. Governor Sanders attended, pledged the support of the state towards the exposition tax, and listened to Behrman commit the city to its share of the public funding.<sup>41</sup>

By June 1910, the exposition leadership organized the World's Panama Exposition Company to carry on the fight. Charles Janvier served as Chairman of the Finance Committee, Sam Blum, an active member of the Business Men's League, chaired the Publicity Committee, and insurance executive T. P. Thompson became chairman of the Executive Committee. The Progressive Union and the Business Men's League assisted in organizing support among their memberships. Information from the state's congressional delegation confirmed that Congress would select either San Francisco or New Orleans as the official exposition site, and that the choice would be made after Congress convened in December. The congressmen added that depth of financial commitment would be crucial and urged the company to spend the summer months securing substantial support. The tenor of the competition became clear when

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<sup>41</sup> Behrman to Senator McEnery, March 3, 1910, Mayor's Correspondence; Board of Directors, Progressive Union, March 28, 1910; *Daily Picayune*, March 6, 1910, 9; March 29, 1910, 6; April 4, 1910, 5; April 8, 1910, 1.

San Francisco newspapers began criticizing New Orleans' climate and health conditions. The *Daily Picayune* promptly responded to the "slanderous and malignant attacks . . . concerning the salubrity of the climate of New Orleans and charging that summer temperatures are extreme." The paper continued that "fevers [are] no longer a menace [in New Orleans], as is the oriental bubonic plague at San Francisco." After defending the city's health, the paper added that if there were any problem, it could be traced to "the increase in negro death rates."<sup>42</sup>

The state legislature held its regular session in 1910, and the exposition played an important part in the deliberations. Behrman later recalled that the state's prohibition lobby threatened to involve liquor regulation with the exposition tax, but Senator Joseph Voegtle of New Orleans defused the issue. A bond issue to support the exposition passed, and the legislature dedicated a three-eighths mill tax to service the bonds. To boost the city's chances of success, the legislature passed a resolution to invite former President Theodore Roosevelt to take a position at the head of the exposition company. The city did well during the legislative session, but lost an important ally in the exposition fight when Senator McEnergy died on June 28, 1910. What had been a straightforward and noncontroversial process now became embroiled in the politics of senatorial succession.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Board of Directors, Progressive Union Minutes, June 21, 1910; BML Minutes, August 1, 1910; *Daily Picayune*, June 19, 1910, Section I, 1; June 24, 1910, 8; June 25, 1910, 8.

<sup>43</sup> Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 239-244.



Immediate speculation about the successor to McEnery focused on the governor. However, Senator Foster and Governor Sanders both came from the same town. The election of Sanders would violate an unwritten law of Louisiana senatorial politics that dictated that the northern and southern sections of the state would each have a senator. In spite of explicit threats that “North Louisiana would be heard from in the elections of 1912,” the state legislature elected Sanders on July 6, 1910. Only twelve days later, after the adjournment of the legislature, Congressman Samuel Gilmore passed away. Behrman later noted that “the death started more politics,” and the organization quickly settled on H. Garland Dupre, Speaker of the House and Assistant City Attorney in New Orleans, as the successor. Dupre was only thirty-seven years old, but had attracted attention throughout the state, and, at the time of his selection, was considered a possible candidate for governor. Behrman recalled “that with the exposition bill pending in Congress, we needed a man of Dupre’s caliber.”<sup>44</sup>

The success of that bill depended not only upon congressional leadership, but also upon the level of financial support. When the backers of the San Francisco exposition “raised the stakes in Washington . . . New Orleans had to respond.” The bond issue passed by the legislature proved insufficient, and the city requested a special session of the state legislature to impose an additional special tax on city property holders only. The directors of the exposition company offered to reimburse the state for

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<sup>44</sup> Behrman to City Council, July 26, 1910, Mayor’s Correspondence; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 246-247; *Daily Picayune*, July 19, 1910, 1; July 21, 1910.

the expenses of the special session but, Governor Sanders declined the offer. The extra session took place in August, and members voted the new tax as requested. The *Daily Picayune* made a sophisticated argument for the tax by opposing free riders on the benefits of the exposition. The tax would “distribute a fair portion of the burden on property holders who will be greatly benefitted by the exposition but who have subscribed nothing to the fund.” The company leadership appreciated the extra funds, but feared the consequences of the impending turnover in the governor’s office when Sanders departed for Washington. After an appeal to the Governor signed by the company’s Board of Directors (including Behrman), Sanders agreed to resign as senator. To counter a rumor that he was in line for a high-paying job with the exposition, Sanders announced he would accept no such position. He made it clear that he would run for the Senate in the future. Acceding to the wishes of North Louisiana, Judge James R. Thornton of Alexandria took the seat in the Senate. Mayor Behrman watched the events from a distance; he was in St. Paul, giving a speech on street paving at the League of American Municipalities. Behrman was happy to report that the association endorsed New Orleans as the site of the exposition.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Special Meeting, Board of Directors, Progressive Union Minutes, July 30, 1910; Board of Directors, BML Minutes, August 1, 1910; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 250-255; *Daily Picayune*, July 31, 1910, 1; August 1, 1910; August 15, 1910, 6; August 25, 1910, August 27, 1910, 5; Martin Behrman, *Street Paving Problem, Address by Honorable Martin Behrman, Mayor of New Orleans La.*, Fourteenth Annual convention of the League of American Municipalities, St. Paul, Minnesota, August 23 to 26, 1910, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana Collection.

During the months of effort on the exposition, Behrman remained active in other aspects of municipal government. He led efforts to attract the Amateur Athletic Union competition to New Orleans, earning a *Daily Picayune* headline, "Progressive Chief Executive Heads the List." Later in the year, he traveled to Chicago to convince the Knights Templar to bring their convention to the city. Though unsuccessful, he thought the effort repaid by the publicity the city received. Back home, he hosted officials from Camden, New Jersey, to examine the sewerage, water, and drainage systems. And in March, the city announced it would plant "blue grass . . . on the mound of the Clay statue to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of its unveiling." The Clay statute had been moved to Lafayette Square during the Capdevielle administration because of increased street car traffic on Canal Street. Mindful of the interests of local businesses, Behrman promoted a "Buy at Home" campaign among city departments, though "he would not want the city to pay more money to get the material here than it could be bought for in the market generally."<sup>46</sup>

In July 1910, in the midst of organizing efforts for the Panama exposition, the political opposition to Behrman and Sanders began to coalesce around familiar reform themes. The *Charleston News and Courier* published a lengthy editorial linking the issues of political environment and the proposed exposition. The South Carolina newspaper claimed that "no city in the union is more completely at the mercy of an organized political machine than is New Orleans." The paper acknowledged

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<sup>46</sup> *Daily Picayune*, February, 25, 1910, 12; March 15, 1901; March 22, 1910, 5.

Behrman's's qualities as "an able and honest man" who "saved the machine in the last election." But the editorial predicted "that New Orleans in the next election will make a vigorous effort to throw off the yoke [of the machine]." The New Orleans *Times-Democrat* picked up the theme and began to predict that the presence of the machine would have dire effects on the city's chances for the exposition. Seeking to counter the argument, the *Daily Picayune* published comparative statistics on national municipal expenditures, calling New Orleans "the most economically governed city."<sup>47</sup>

Although political developments at all levels of government held the public attention in 1910, even greater interest focused on the continued fight for the honor of holding the Panama Exposition. The ballot on the November congressional elections included a state constitutional provision for the exposition tax. The amendment passed, supported by both the city and other state parishes. James L. Wright, secretary of the World's Panama Exposition Company, welcomed the vote and expressed his gratitude on Thanksgiving Day. "Never before in its history has New Orleans been so well advertised throughout the country, or her people so united on any proposition." T. P. Thomson, Chairman of the exposition Executive Committee, noted that private funds and the proceeds of the public taxes would provided approximately \$10,000,000 with which to lobby Congress for official designation as the exposition site. The New Orleans effort adopted the argument that the city provided the logical point for the exposition, convenient to the Panama Canal and to major United States population

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<sup>47</sup> Charleston *New and Courier*, quoted in *Daily Picayune*, July 26, 1910, 6; July 28, 1910.

centers. “The Logical Point” became the slogan for the publicity associated with the lobbying campaign. City stationary showed a map of cities with New Orleans at the center. The exposition company published a series of pamphlets, each titled “The Logical Point,” for distribution to other cities and to members of Congress.<sup>48</sup>

In December, 1910, Congress convened in Washington, D.C., and the House of Representatives Committee on Expositions took up the contest between New Orleans and San Francisco. Even the national railroads took sides. A report that the Southern Pacific favored San Francisco angered New Orleans politicians who had fought for favorable treatment for the trunk line. A large group of New Orleans business and civic leaders traveled to the nation’s capitol to take part in the lobbying. Behrman joined the group in early December. Preliminary indications favored the Crescent City, and Chairman T. P. Thompson declared “victory in Washington is assured.” Not everyone thought that victory was worthwhile. A *Wall Street Journal* editorial claimed that the exposition would bring no real increase in wealth and concluded “we think Providence should inflict this cross upon New Orleans [because] San Francisco had her earthquake and fire.” The *Daily Picayune* answered that “such an exposition will bring into the state a vast concourse of people who have money to invest and are seeking opportunities

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<sup>48</sup> *The Logical Point*, Number 17, [n.d.], New Orleans Public Library, Louisiana Division; *Daily Picayune*, November 24, 1910, 5. Census results in 1910 revealed that New Orleans remained the largest city of the South, although its 1900 to 1910 rate of growth was a modest fourteen percent. The city’s population of 339,075 in 1901 exceeded Louisville, the second largest city, by over 100,000. Atlanta, 154,839, had less than one-half of the population of New Orleans. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism*, Table 11, 277.

for such investment.” The paper later reported that the Harvard Law School football team, traveling in New Orleans, had endorsed the city as the best site for the exposition. In early January, a mild earthquake in the San Francisco area, and the resulting memories of the 1906 disaster, provided the New Orleans delegation with ammunition against the selection of the California city. To counter San Francisco warnings about New Orleans health conditions, the *Daily Picayune* reported on a war on rats in San Francisco as part of a an effort to reduce “the bubonic plague on the west coast.”<sup>49</sup>

A new delegation of New Orleans business leaders “stormed Washington” as the House committee began its work. Mayor Behrman, Cotton Exchange President W.B. Thompson, and Unitarian minister H.E. Gilchrist provided testimony on the first day of the hearings. To counter claims of labor trouble in the Crescent City, union leaders of New Orleans assured Congress that “labor conditions [in New Orleans] are eminently pleasant and satisfactory. The selection of the city of New Orleans as a site for a Panama Exposition would be of inestimable benefit and advantage not alone to the general public, but very largely to the laboring man and all labor unions here.” San Francisco added to the argument by claiming that construction jobs in New Orleans associated with the exposition would go to “negro mechanics.” New Orleans countered by publicizing the demand of artists asked to exhibit at the exposition that the U.S.

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<sup>49</sup> *Daily Picayune*, December 2, 1910, 1; December 5, 1910, 5; December 12, 1910, 5, 8; January 5, 1911, 1; January 6, 1911, 6; January 9, 1911, 8.

government would have to bear the cost of earthquake insurance should the event be held at San Francisco.<sup>50</sup>

The report of the House committee favored New Orleans by a vote of nine to six. Faced with defeat in the House, San Francisco representatives attempted to bypass normal Senate rules to expedite the process in that chamber, a move that New Orleans considered “treachery.” More worrisome for New Orleans was the intervention of President Taft, reported to be “working against New Orleans.” In a curious echo of Populist rhetoric, the *Daily Picayune* darkly suggested that “Taft can’t ignore powerful railroad combinations and Eastern syndicates.” Taft increase his pressure on Republican House members before the final vote, and the *Daily Picayune* complained that “Taft’s activities for San Francisco Are Notorious,” and that “President Taft, his Cabinet and Wall Street [are] Working Against New Orleans.” The presidential lobbying proved effective, and on January 31, 1911, the House voted 188 to 156 to reverse the committee recommendation. Subsequent information suggested that Taft had brokered a deal with California to support the exposition in San Francisco in exchange for withdrawal of anti-Japanese legislation in California, which threatened Taft foreign policy. Although at first New Orleans delegates vowed to fight in the Senate, the city soon accepted defeat. Acting Mayor McRacken telegraphed Behrman in Washington to offer condolences. “I can safely speak for the people of New Orleans

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<sup>50</sup> Acting Mayor McRacken and City Attorney I.D. Moore to Behrman, January 11, 1911, Mayor’s Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, January 10, 1911, 1; January 12, 1911, 1; January 13, 1911, 4; January 15, Section I, 6.

in saying that your noble and untiring efforts in their behalf commend the admiration and excite the applause of every man, woman and child in this community notwithstanding apparent defeat.” A subsequent report in the New Orleans press charged that San Francisco had obtained the exposition in part through the expenditure of over \$100,000 for entertainment in Washington during the contest.<sup>51</sup>

Behrman returned to New Orleans several days after the defeat. The *Daily Picayune* had previously noted his absence by commenting “there has not been that spice and snap to the scene that is usual” and observing that City Hall awaited the Mayor’s return “as the big rains are after a long dry spell.” Grateful for the help received in Washington, Behrman and the Business Men’s League made plans to honor the Congressmen on the House committee who had supported New Orleans, especially Congressman Rodenberg of East St. Louis. Rodenberg agreed to visit New Orleans and paid tribute to its leadership. “I have never met a finer set of men than those who represented New Orleans.” He offered hope that the city would get favorable treatment from Congress in the future “because of the feeling among the members that new Orleans did not get what she was entitled to.” House committee members visited New Orleans several months later and received loving cups from the grateful city. In a private comment to Louisiana Senator Murphy Foster, Behrman expressed the opinion

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<sup>51</sup> *Daily Picayune*, January 21, 1911, 1; January 23, 1911, 1; January 24, 1911, 1; January 26, 1911, 1,8; January 29, 1911, Section I, 1; January 31, 1911, 1; February 1, 1911, 1, 8; February 2, 1911, 1; February 3, 1911, 1; February 4, 1911, 1; February 5, 1911, 1; March 8, 1911, 4; March 25, 1911, 4; Acting Mayor McRacken to Behrman, January 21, 1911, Mayor’s Correspondence; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 239-240.



that San Francisco had “put up a dirty fight,” and relations with San Francisco remained strained as a result of the Washington contest. Tensions eased somewhat, however, after an exchange of telegrams. The San Francisco organizers expressed “appreciation of the chivalrous manner in which you have met a very trying situation. [We] respect your abilities as fighters and organizers.” In the Mayor’s absence during the exposition contest, James Porch had become president of the Progressive Union, and, for the first time in over a decade, the Mayor was no longer on its Board of Directors. On the other hand, at the annual meeting of the Choctaw Club, Behrman became a member of the club’s Board of Governors.<sup>52</sup>

The effort to gain the exposition produced several important residual effects. The business and political leadership united behind a single effort, regardless of political affiliations. The city gained an awareness of its potential role in the commerce of Central and South America. Convinced that the city would benefit from increased efforts to attract visitors, the Progressive Union subsequently established a Convention and Tourist Bureau. The private funds raised by the exposition company were sought for permanent city exhibits, but the company liquidated its assets after plans proved impractical. Advertisements of local retailers continued to refer to “the logical point,” and interest in Latin America led local executives to found the Pan American Life

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<sup>52</sup> *Daily Picayune*, February 3, 1911, 4, 11; February 10, 1911, 5; February 14, 1911, 6; February 15, 1911, 9; Progressive Union Annual Meeting, January 9, 1911, Progressive Union Minutes; Choctaw Club to Behrman, January 15, 1911, Behrman Papers; Behrman to Senator Murphy Foster, February 11, 1911, Mayor’s Correspondence.

Insurance Company. James Wright, secretary to the exposition company, became the secretary to the new insurance venture. James Porch worked to established a shipping line to service Central and South America. In July, 1912, a chartered vessel made a voyage to Brazil and Argentina under the name of the new line--the Mississippi Valley, South American and Orient Steamship Company, also know as the Pan American Mail. After delivering a full load of cargo, however, the ship was unable to obtain goods for the return trip. Faced with an undercapitalized business, increasing charter rates, and the antagonism of British shippers influential in the Latin American market, Porch abandoned the effort in October, 1912.<sup>53</sup>

The Mayor, exhausted from the hectic events, fell ill and received visitors at his home for several weeks. Unable to attend a banquet of the Progressive Union, he acknowledged the group's plans to highlight the Public Belt Railroad and sent a message praising the operation as "one of our chief sources of pride and congratulation." When in late March, 1911, local banks finally accepted \$7,000,000 of Sewerage and Water Board bonds, the president of the Interstate bank remarked, "the present Mayor is the best practical official who has held that office during the fifteen years that I have lived in New Orleans . . . so we wanted to have these bonds sold during his administration." His comments started speculation that Behrman would not stand for reelection, but the bank official denied that reading of his remarks. Behrman left the city for rest and recuperation amidst growing speculation about candidates, tickets, and

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<sup>53</sup> *Daily Picayune*, February 27, 1911, 4; March 5, 1911, 5; March 29, 1911, 5, 6; Wilds, *James W. Porch and the Port of New Orleans*, 93-101

political factions. He had served almost seven years as Mayor, and presided over unprecedented modernization, reorganization, and promotion of the city. His administrations had successfully completed large parts of the reform program, first defined during the difficult years of the 1890s: a clean water supply, improved draining, modern sewerage disposal, reform of the waterfront, establishment of a public belt railroad, street paving and cleaning, expansion of public education, and the establishment of the city's reputation as an international commercial center. With the possible exception of social pressure to govern moral conduct, such as regulation of bar rooms, suppression of gambling, and removal of Storyville, and the constant disagreement over the role of patronage in government, the Mayor helped to conceive and implement the progressive vision of an early twentieth century city. But successful implementation of the reform agenda did not satisfy the reformers. The members of the Good Government League represented a political faction that had not seen success in city or state elections since 1896. Fifteen years later, the League would not take comfort in the achievements of the city, even those in which League members had played a significant part. Only political victory would satisfy the League, and the process of demonizing Regular leadership and the city machine began in earnest in Spring, 1911.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Behrman to City Council, May 9, 1911, Mayor's Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, March 24, 1911, 4; March 31, 1911, 3; April 8, 1911, 3.

## CHAPTER X

### POLITICAL POWER AND PROGRESSIVE REFORM: COMMISSION GOVERNMENT COMES TO NEW ORLEANS

Mayor Behrman's political control remained steady throughout his first term and most of the second, but a challenge arose in 1910. In that year, on August 23, a headline in the New Orleans *Daily Picayune* announced the emergence of a new faction within the Democratic Party of Louisiana. A meeting of more than one hundred and fifty men from throughout the state convened in New Orleans to condemn Governor Jared Sanders and issue a manifesto of reform principles. Editors of both the *Times-Democrat* and the *Item* attended the meeting. E. H. Farrar, a prominent corporate attorney, who became president of the American Bar Association two months later, chaired the assembly, and Behrman nemesis John M. Parker served as third vice President. To emphasize its commitment to the Democratic Party, the enthusiastic assembly named the organization the Democratic Good Government League of Louisiana. Reform efforts of the 1890's had associated with racially suspect Republicans and Populists, hence the necessity of emphasizing the connection with the Democratic Party. The proclamation that the League was statewide in scope indicated a challenge to the Regulars that would include politics outside of the city. The new organization's platform called for a wide range of legislation, especially laws that would guarantee free and fair elections. The

League looked first to the state elections scheduled for early 1912, but the *Daily Picayune* observed “while there was no direct attack upon the city administration [in the public speeches], the inference was plain that plans of the movement contemplated a fight.” In fact, the League’s agenda and the speeches of the leadership singled out the New Orleans political machine as a target. Parker, for example, directly challenged the Choctaw organization. His motive, he said, “was to rid this state and city of the infernal political machine which has been a menace ever since I was a boy.” Behrman and his colleagues may have enjoyed an easy reelection in 1908, but Parker and the new League made certain that 1912 would be different. The League organized early, set its sights on statewide and city goals, and launched multiple challenges to the power of the Regulars. Unlike the occasional and ineffective challenges to the political power of Behrman and Sanders, the Good Government League seemed, in the words of one Regular, “serious” and able to take advantage of “the unrest in the country parishes,” possibly caused by resentment over the Sanders senatorial candidacy.<sup>1</sup>

The League repeated the familiar pattern of reform versus Regular political competition, whether within the Democratic Party or in the general elections. The League’s formation and challenge to the Regulars recalled the fights over the lottery system, which had divided the state into pro- and anti-lottery forces. In the 1890’s, Populists and Republicans joined forces at the state level to fight corrupt elections and Democratic bossism. During the municipal elections of 1896, a combination of

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<sup>1</sup> Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 250; *Daily Picayune*, August 23, 1910, 1; August 24, 1910, 3; September 2, 1910, 1. Schott, “John M. Parker, 111-112.

reformers upset by the excesses of a machine administration defeated the ring candidates. The Democratic Good Government League followed much of the pattern set by previous reform groups. These were ad hoc organizations brought together by authentic outrage, political opportunism, and expediency. Few of the reform organizations had lasted beyond the elections for which they formed. The 1910 gathering, though, showed promise of more permanent success. Supporters of the League included many experienced politicians and financial supporters. It presented a clear platform, chose strong candidates, and benefited from divisions within the Regulars.

A listing of those attending the organizational meeting of the Good Government League showed fifty-six names; twenty-nine were present or former office holders. This strong base of experience increased the League's chances for success, but diminished its ability to claim political innocence. The *Daily Picayune* admiringly described the League's first meeting, but expressed disappointment that "the inauguration [was] somewhat spoiled by the presence of so many former office-holders." In addition to the politicians present, a number of reform-minded attorneys from New Orleans attended, along with the editors of the New Orleans *Times-Democrat* and the New Orleans *Item*--two newspapers supportive of anti-ring candidates. It was an auspicious beginning. The reform movement, quiescent since 1904, once more affected state and city politics. The new League did not challenge Behrman nor the Regulars on issues of policy. There was no movement to turn the clock back on civic improvements, nor on the changes in

government that had seen the successful development of a new port and belt railroad. The new League focused, instead, on the process of elections, the machinery of the Regular organization, and the form of government that administered New Orleans.<sup>2</sup>

Behrman's political troubles extended beyond the formation of the new faction. Late in 1910, a patronage controversy erupted over selection of a new public school superintendent. From 1877 to 1908, both the state government and the city council chose members of the school board. Behrman, Capdevielle, Charles Buck (former mayoral candidate), W. J. Kernaghan (Regular Dock Board member), Ernest B. Krutchnitt (Chairman of the State Democratic Central Committee), John T. Michel (Secretary of State under Sanders), R. M. Walmsley (President of the Board of Liquidation), Charles Theard (member of the Board of Liquidation), and many other prominent citizens and office holders participated on the board under that system. In 1906, the city prevailed upon the state legislature to increase local participation in the selection of the school board. Act No. 6 provided for a board of seventeen members (one from each ward) and three city administrators--mayor, city treasurer, and comptroller--to serve *ex officio*. The arrangement provided Behrman, and the Choctaw organization, opportunities for increased political power and, more importantly, the gratitude of voters whose districts received new schools. The Mayor worked to increase school board tax revenues, helped to pass a license tax on bar rooms dedicated to

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<sup>2</sup> New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, August 24, 1910. The New Orleans *Times-Democrat* and the New Orleans *Item* were strong reform papers. Regular boss Robert Ewing published The New Orleans *States*. The *Daily Picayune* dismissed the other papers as the "partisan press" and tried to advertise its independence whenever possible.

education, and persuaded the city council to appropriate funds for school construction. During Behrman's first term, the school board also increased teacher salaries and expanded a program of evening schools.<sup>3</sup>

In October, 1910, long-time Behrman ally Warren Easton, superintendent of the New Orleans public schools, died after serving in that post since 1888. Unwilling to accept the promotion of Easton's assistant to the top position, Behrman tried to entice James Aswell, director the state's Normal School, to accept the position. Aswell had served as state superintendent of education, but Behrman's interest went beyond those credentials. Aswell's ambition to be governor was well known, and accepting the New Orleans position would eliminate a gubernatorial candidate who might threaten the Regulars' choice for the highest state office. Aswell declined, however, and the Mayor sought a new candidate, ignoring the calls of reformers for a "non-political" school board. The Mayor's views on patronage enraged the reform elements, but he held his position without guile or apology. "I am the head of the administration and the local Democratic organization," declared the Mayor. "The members of the school board were nominated by that organization the same time I was, and I have a right to a voice in the policies of the board . . . to the end that their execution shall reflect credit both on the organization and on my administration." To have his voice heard, however, Behrman

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<sup>3</sup> Donald Devore and Joseph Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools: Public Education in New Orleans* (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1991), 120-146. Behrman took a personal interest in many school issues, especially construction. See letter to Behrman from the Mother's Club of Beauregard School, November 18, 1907, Behrman Papers.



forced one member off the board and arranged a favorable appointment in his place. With an majority now secure, Behrman nominated Joseph R. Gwinn, an associate professor of education at Tulane University.<sup>4</sup>

The Mayor's handling of the dispute was typically adroit. His choice of Gwinn, a uptown professor with connections to a parents' reform group, protected him from charges of cronyism. And when parents mobilized a mass protest meeting, the Mayor personally appeared to defend his actions. The *Daily Picayune*, at first antagonistic toward the Mayor's actions, began to defend the Mayor and new superintendent. For his part, Gwinn reassured anxious parents and pledged to support reform of the school board. The Mayor echoed his call for reform and stole an issue from the reform element by backing a smaller board to be elected at-large. The obvious evidence of progress, especially the number of new school buildings, demonstrated to the public at large, if not to the Mayor's uptown enemies, that the administration of public education was in good hands. But the Mayor's political opponents continued to resist. The ward system of school board representation became the focus of protests, and, within two years, a new "non-political," five-member school board replaced the larger governing body. The dispute over the size and composition of the school board, and the assumption that politics could be taken out of the system, paralleled the emerging discussion over the structure of city government. The transition from a ward-based system of representation to an at-large structure with limited membership was the central characteristic not only

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<sup>4</sup> Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 134-135; Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 204; *Daily Picayune*, October 18, 1910, 8; October 29, 1910.

of the reform of the school board, but would also become part of the reform prescription for city government--the commission.<sup>5</sup>

The Mayor's opponents in the school board fight sought to protect education from politics, or, at least, from the influence of Regular Democratic politics. Behrman approached the superintendency as another opportunity to exercise his political power and extend his influence. To the protesting parents, patronage in the school system was evil *per se*. To Behrman, patronage represented an important means of governing. And not only school board patronage demanded his attention. Throughout the term of Sanders, Behrman made use of his close friendship with the Governor to provide jobs for associates. In August, 1910, for example, Behrman prevailed upon Sanders to appoint Regular Herman Miester to the Fire Rating Commission. The Mayor's position as leader of the New Orleans Regulars increased his influence in patronage matters, but the power of other ward leaders constrained his freedom of action. The strict division of patronage within the city functioned to maintain order and prevent intra-organizational disputes. The Mayor respected those patronage boundaries, but, beginning in 1910, Tenth Ward leader Robert Ewing began to show disturbing signs of independence, if not outright revolt.<sup>6</sup>

Ewing had become part of the Choctaw leadership in 1899 by supplanting the Regulars' choice in the Tenth Ward. He served as business manager for the *Daily States*

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<sup>5</sup> *Daily Picayune*, November 17, 1910, 1; November 24, 1910, 6; Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 136-139. The dispute over the size and composition of the school board paralleled the emerging dispute over the structure of city government.

<sup>6</sup> Behrman to Sanders, August 15, 1901, Mayor's Correspondence.

and later became publisher of that newspaper as well as one in Shreveport, Louisiana. Ewing possessed a reputation for gathering patronage to the Tenth Ward, and, during Behrman's second term, controlled the operations of the city treasurer and the municipal tax collection apparatus, among other offices. Ewing's newspapers gave him a disproportionate voice in the political affairs of the Regulars, and he was not shy in expressing his opinions nor in asserting his patronage rights. In *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, Reynolds repeated the assertion of the *Daily Picayune* that Ewing controlled one-fourth of all patronage available to the Regulars. His enthusiastic exercise of patronage power led to occasional conflict with the Mayor. "Finnegan of Algiers, Oil Inspector for the Board of Health," the Mayor wrote to Sanders, "died on yesterday. [I] understand that Ewing is making claim for this place. This position is allotted to me and I insist that the vacancy belongs to me." On another occasion, the Mayor protected the patronage rights of another ward leader. "William J. Brady, Constable First city Court, died last night. This is clearly a First Ward place. Don't do anything until you see [Assessor] Taylor Gauche." The conflict with Ewing over patronage would lead to more serious challenges to the Regulars' authority.<sup>7</sup>

By the close of 1910, Behrman faced political problems on several fronts. The Democrat Good Government League promised to run an anti-machine candidate in the upcoming governor's race, threatening the Mayor's source of state power. Many

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<sup>7</sup> Behrman to Sanders, October 5, 1910, Mayor's Correspondence; Behrman to Sanders, December 2, 1910, Mayor's Correspondence; Schott, "John M. Parker," 104; Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 167. Both Schott and Reynolds use the word "insatiable" when describing Ewing's attitude toward patronage.

parents active in public education, and the influential women's Era Club, objected to the Mayor's action in replacing Warren Easton. The Good Government League, in the middle of the school board controversy, made clear that its political ambitions went beyond the state elections and directly challenged the Mayor. The League placed John Parker in command of the New Orleans campaign with instructions to organize the city ward by ward. The leadership of the reform element called upon supporters to pay the poll tax, and announced "the objective and purpose of the league . . . is to destroy the system that makes bosses and rings possible." And Robert Ewing continued to demonstrate political independence from the Choctaw organization, raising the possibility of an internal challenge to the Mayor's authority. Clearly, Behrman would not enjoy an easy election should he decide to run for a third term.<sup>8</sup>

In the first decade of the century, the national progressive movement touched municipal governments in a number of ways. Reformers examined not only the policies and politics of local governments but the governmental structures as well. Unable to obtain power in New Orleans by confronting Mayor Martin Behrman on substantive issues and policies, the Democratic Good Government League determined to overthrow the Democratic Regulars by first capturing the office of governor of Louisiana, and then by changing the governmental structure of New Orleans. The power of the Regulars was more precarious than at any time since the 1890s, but the city organization met the

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<sup>8</sup> *Daily Picayune*, November 15, 1910, 10; November 18, 1910, 5.

challenge of the new reform League and accepted the trends in progressive governmental forms.

Throughout 1910 and the following year, League spokesmen reiterated the intentions of the group: the destruction of the boss system, and the deliverance of the state and city from Regular Democratic control. One important method of fighting the Regulars involved the machinery of elections. The Regular organization provided poll commissioners, and the important position of Registrar of Voters, a parish official appointed by the Governor, fell under the patronage arrangements between the Choctaw Club and the state's chief executive. During the period 1910 to 1912, the registrar was William Ball, former secretary to Mayor Behrman. From Behrman's triumph in 1904 until the 1912 gubernatorial race, elections in the city held little suspense, and the evidence suggests that, at least in some wards, Regular commissioners were not above padding the results by voting on their own the names of electors who had chosen to stay home on election day.

In March, 1911, an election to the state Supreme Court shattered the Regulars' complacency. Civil Court Judge W. B. Sommerville faced little opposition as he sought to replace retiring Supreme Court Judge Francis Nicholls. The election took place without incident, but several days later, the Good Government League brought charges against a number of Regular commissioners. The district Attorney received evidence that vote lists included the names of persons who later filed affidavits swearing that they had not voted in the election. John Parker, chair of the League's City Campaign

Committee, complained that “all I have ever asked is a square deal from the New Orleans ring. If they will give us a fair and square election in 1912, and they lick us, we won’t say a word, not a word.” Mayor Behrman did not defend the Regular commissioners. He denounced electoral fraud and asked that all perpetrators face prosecution. The district attorney indicted twelve men for fraud. All received jail sentences of six months in the parish prison. After sentencing, two prison officials were indicted for alleged favorable treatment of the prisoners, including issuing furloughs to prisoners to visit their families.<sup>9</sup>

Further battles arose over the registration lists. The complex voter registration law, Act 90 of 1908, allowed sworn canvassers to challenge the registration of anyone on the rolls. The Good Government League employed detectives to examine the rolls and to challenge those suspected of fraud. In a city of over 300,000, it was common for many voters to change addresses from one election to the next. This provided at least one innocent explanation for what might otherwise seem fraudulent. But the League anticipated more serious transgressions and spent months in 1911 investigating the Registrar’s Office. League detectives identified approximately 3,000 records of “improper and illegal registration,” but admitted that most of the discrepancies involved change of address problems with no clear pattern of dishonesty. The League conflicts with Registrar Ball took place against the backdrop of increased political speculation.

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<sup>9</sup> *Daily Picayune*, March 7, 1911, 5; March 16, 1911, 4; March 17, 1911, 6; April 13, 1911, 6; April 19, 1911, 8; April 22, 1911, 4; June 23, 1911, 5.

The state Democratic primary, scheduled for January, 1912, would be contested by at least two candidates--the nominee of the League and that of the Regular organization.<sup>10</sup>

At a rally at the New Orleans Athenaeum theater, the League promised allegiance to the Democratic Party, a permanent organization, and a fight against “not individuals, but against a system, which creates one-man power in our city and state.” The league principles promised security of legitimate investment from “browbeating by those in office,” restoration of the financial good names of the city and the state, efficiency in government, education free from politics, an honest count in elections, and a fight “not for interest, but for good government.” The *Daily Picayune* analyzed the principles in an editorial. The paper, independent but generally supportive of Mayor Behrman if not the Regular organization, declared the Good Government League “largely inspired and animated by selfish personal motives,” but felt that political opposition was healthy in that it would “arouse citizens to their political duties.” The paper felt it unfortunate that “it [was] customary to speak and write of politicians in a contemptuous and reproachful tone and manner as if they were engaged in a calling at least disreputable, if not disgraceful.” The *Daily Picayune* did “not believe that the present city and state administrations are wicked, corrupt or unworthy, any more than it believes that all the citizens arrayed in opposition to them are unselfish, pure and blameless.” But the League rhetoric betrayed exactly that Manichaeian view of the political world. Speakers at the league rally condemned the power of the bosses and the

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<sup>10</sup> Terrence W. Fitzmorris, “Pro Bono Publico: New Orleans Politics and Municipal Reform in the Progressive Era, 1912-1926,” 37-39.

“ballot stuffers.” One speaker gave advice to League members in the city who would deal with Regular poll commissioners: “Peacefully if you can; forcibly if you must.”<sup>11</sup>

The League plan of confronting the Regulars in a two-way race went awry in early April, 1911, when James Aswell, head of the state Normal School, announced for governor. His platform echoed many League themes: reduction of the appointive power of the governor, efficiency in the delivery of government services and education, and the abolition of “useless offices.” Although Aswell’s candidacy seemed to pose the greater threat to the League, the Regulars feared the third candidate as well. As they searched for their own candidate, the normal unity of the Regulars showed strain, and Robert Ewing, powerful Regular leader in the New Orleans Tenth Ward, openly supported the Aswell effort. The New Orleans vote might reach as much as thirty percent of the total vote cast. Any split in the heavily controlled New Orleans returns could assist the League candidate as well as Aswell.<sup>12</sup>

The League had trouble selecting its candidate for Governor. Most of its well-known leaders, such as John M. Parker, had disavowed any interest in elective office, in an attempt to convince voters of the purity of their motives. By April, the League decided upon Luther Hall, a north Louisiana jurist, whose recent election to the state Supreme Court provided a safe haven from which to run. Hall agreed to carry the

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<sup>11</sup> *Daily Picayune*, March 19, 1911, 1, 8, 13. The talk of abolition of excessive or useless state offices rarely resulted in action. After his election to the governor’s office in 1920, Parker admitted that the phrase “useless offices” was “largely demagogic” and that he could not find such offices in the state. See Schott, “John M. Parker,” 359.

<sup>12</sup> *Daily Picayune*, April 2, 1911, 3.



League banner, but declared his independence of political factions. The northern part of the state harbored resentment toward the southern because of Sanders's attempt for McEnergy's senate seat. Hall and Aswell would benefit from that feeling, but might split the available vote. In an effort to balance the League ticket, delegates to its convention in New Orleans searched for "a Creole, from South Louisiana, and a good French speaker." Henri L. Gueydan fit the description, and the convention added him to the ticket. In his acceptance speech, Hall struck familiar reform themes. The campaign would be a mission against the machine. The "present, paramount, dominant issue," proclaimed Hall, "is whether this machine shall remain in power to continue its exploitation of government functions." In its review of the speech, the *Daily Picayune* called it "commonplace, made up of platitudes and altogether disappointing."<sup>13</sup>

The search for a candidate among the Regulars took several strange turns. Efforts to convince Congressman Joseph E. Ransdell to run failed because he preferred a Senate race against Murphy Foster. Congressman H. Garland Dupre of New Orleans had a safe seat in the House and chose to remain in that office. Another rumor suggested that the Regulars would draft First District Congressman Albert Estopinal for Governor. Even W. B. Thompson, Cotton Exchange President, was mentioned, despite his lack of experience in electoral politics. The Regulars scrambled to find a candidate because the natural successor to Sanders was John T. Michel, Regular leader from the New Orleans Thirteenth Ward, and Secretary of State. Michel had announced for

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<sup>13</sup> *Daily Picayune*, March 7, 1911, 5; April 6, 1911, 4; June 20, 1911, 3; June 21, 1911, 1, 3; June 22, 1911, 1, 8; Fitzmorris, "Pro Bono Publico," 28-29.

governor in 1910, but suffered under at least two handicaps. A member of the Regular caucus confided to the *Daily Picayune* that “Michel is a ward boss” and that “he can’t speak.” The paper’s source defended Michel from both charges, pointing out that Mayor Behrman was also a ward boss, but “the best mayor this city has ever had.” Behrman had trouble speaking in public when he first ran for office but overcame his reticence. There was speculation that the Regulars lacked confidence in a Michel candidacy, but an alternative plan to send Behrman to Congress and let Michel run for mayor did not materialize. Behrman wanted to run for a third term as mayor. The Regulars prized loyalty, and Michel, whatever his weaknesses, had earned their support and received the nomination. When the new candidate released his platform, the *Daily Picayune* expressed surprise at its reform tone: honest elections, economy in government, abolishment of useless offices, frequent accounting for state funds, and reorganization of the state bureaucracy.<sup>14</sup>

The similarity of the three platforms reflected more than the banality of campaign rhetoric. Secure in his base, Michel reached out to reform elements and those areas of the state outside New Orleans. Hall and Aswell echoed the prejudices of the conservative newspapers and rural leaders most likely to effect votes. Hall also reached

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<sup>14</sup> Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 248; *Daily Picayune*, April 23, 1911, Section II, 16; April 26, 1911, 2; June 18, 1911, 3. Fitzmorris, in “Pro Bono Publico,” rendered harsh judgements about Michel, describing him as “the epitome of the second class politician.” But Michel had won a statewide race for Secretary of State. For the Regulars to function effectively, the ward leaders required at least some basic skills in management, communication, and political judgement. See Fitzmorris, “Pro Bono Publico,” 24.

out to the city voters by repudiating the support of the Anti-Saloon League and coming out in favor of local option. All candidates adopted platforms that reflected the conventional wisdom of their time, repeated the anti-government sentiments of the business classes, and “contained promises to the good people.” In addition, the three gubernatorial candidates opposed suffrage for women, although they supported the right of women to stand for election to parish school boards. In matters of style, however, Michel suffered by comparison to his competitors. Aswell was young, active, an effective stump speaker, and quick with a story to illustrate his points. Hall, a respected judge before his entry into the race, had a keen legal mind and the rhetorical abilities honed by long service in the courts.<sup>15</sup>

Michel was also at a disadvantage because of the peculiar election cycle. The primary for governor and other state offices ran at the same time as primaries for both U.S. Senate seats. The seat held by Murphy Foster was up for election, and the incumbent drew the challenge of Joseph Ransdell. The seat made vacant by the death of Senator McEnery drew a larger field: Governor Sanders, south Louisiana Congressman Robert Broussard, and Congressman Arsene Pujoe from the southwest corner of the state. The three-way race took all of the Governor’s energy, and support for Michel that the Regulars might expect from Sanders was not forthcoming. The Senate races may also have exacerbated the South-North split. If Foster won re-election and Sanders

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<sup>15</sup> *Daily Picayune*, June 25, 1911, Section II, 16.

triumphed in the race for the other seat, both Senators would be politicians from the southern part of the state.

Finally, Michel's candidacy bore the burden of his New Orleans connection. Apart from League rhetoric about the evils of the machine, Louisiana residents outside of New Orleans often viewed the Crescent City with suspicion. The regulation of saloons and the suppression of race track gambling had passed the legislature over the objections of most New Orleans legislators. Though New Orleans Catholics shared their religion with other South Louisiana residents, the majority of North Louisiana residents were Protestant. New Orleans was an exciting destination, almost exotic to the rural population of the state. But it was also the object of distrust. In spite of press attempts to claim that it was somehow the right of New Orleans to finally have a governor from its ranks, the remainder of the state resisted rule by a Crescent City politician.<sup>16</sup>

Behrman tried valiantly to promote the Michel candidacy. He limited the damage caused by Aswell by confining the Regular revolt to Ewing. To avoid further conflicts with the Tenth Ward leader, Behrman agreed to limit the split to the gubernatorial candidacy only. Ewing would not be challenged by the Regulars, but his apostasy would be contained. Behrman knew that he remained in control of the city vote. He had earlier written to Senator Foster and assessed the political situation. "I can

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<sup>16</sup> *Daily Picayune*, April 9, 1911, Section II, 5. This attitude toward New Orleans and its politicians persisted throughout the twentieth century, fed at first by Huey Long's populism, and, subsequently, by resentment toward New Orleans' perceived liberalism on the race issue.

state to you positively that the League is making very little progress in the city. John Parker is going around making different statements, and I feel quite sure that the people will soon have him sized up for what he is worth, and with that the movement here will be of almost no consequence.” Behrman had particular contempt for Parker, whose erratic loyalty to the Democratic Party was well known. During the League campaign, Parker acknowledged support of Taft in 1908, although he later claimed that he had remained loyal to Sanders and Behrman. In 1904, “through an oversight,” Parker had not paid the poll tax and did not vote. Behrman added his reassurances to Foster that “every leader in the city will support you. You need have no fear at all.” The Mayor’s assessment of the city situation was accurate, but he had little control over the country vote.<sup>17</sup>

To further diffuse potential League issues, Behrman announced in June, 1911, that the city Democratic organization “will purge the registration rolls in every ward. The public can rest assured of one thing--that the regular organization is now engaged in as thorough a purging of the registration rolls as is possible.” Each faction checked names and addresses on the voter rolls against actual residents. By August, Registrar of Voters William Ball bragged that the canvass had removed more names than the efforts of the Good Government League, but the work of the Regulars failed to quell the issue. The registration fight became more bitter as the election approached. The League’s

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<sup>17</sup> Behrman to Senator Murphy Foster, May 12, 1911 and May 20, 1911, Mayor’s Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, May 27, 1911, 3; June 15, 1911, 7; June 23, 1911, 3; July 2, 1911, Section II, 16.

constant charges of fraud provoked a *Daily Picayune* editorial. "It has been a rule of the various state political campaigns . . . for the self-seeking politicians who style themselves 'reformers' [to] arrogate to themselves all the political honesty in the state." By November, Ball reported that 5,851 names had been purged. The Regulars reported 3,515 of those names; the League canvassers discovered 2,336. Most of the purges resulted from voters changing residence; only 173 were discovered to be fraudulent, and thirty-eight of those were from one precinct in the Eight Ward, known to be "reform territory."<sup>18</sup>

During the election campaign, the League began to show interest in more than just overturning the boss system. Progressive reformers across the nation put their faith in new forms of city government. By 1911, nearly 200 cities had adopted the commission form; within a decade, that total would more than double. The commission replicated features of the business world and appealed to the reformers' longing for efficiency and simplicity in municipal government. Commission plans transferred authority from ward leaders and district councilmen to commissioners elected at large. The commissioners formed a board of directors for the municipal corporation, presumably free of political obligations and machine pressures. In operation, the commission plan was more complex, but it quickly became a favorite solution for reformers who sought to oust machine rule. After League members began advocating the commission form, the *Daily Picayune* reminded readers that the commission system

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<sup>18</sup> *Daily Picayune*, June 23, 1911, 3; August 5, 1911, 6; August 12, 1911, 6; November 9, 1911, 8.

“now in vogue is not new to New Orleans,” since a commission governed the city from 1870-1882. That government proved “such a despotism that the people were eager to get rid of it.” A visiting professor at the Tulane Summer Normal School praised the commission form and detailed its success in Houston. To answer the objection that the commission had once been tried in New Orleans, he asserted that “the commission rule will not be a success if the political bosses are in power.” Visiting officials from the Montgomery commission made the obvious point, that “when there is a good mayor and council, there is no necessity [for the commission]. The strategy of the League became clear. After electing its gubernatorial candidate, thus eliminating one source of the Regulars’ power, it would attempt to destroy the ward boss system by altering the form of government in the city. A commission would reduce the number of elected officials, and the reformers believed that the boss system would wither in the absence of electoral offices to dispense. Late in the state campaign, Parker admitted that the League would not run a city ticket unless Hall was victorious.<sup>19</sup>

The campaign did not stop the Mayor from important initiatives. He took time to support the Dock Board’s plans for a public cotton warehouse, only now coming to fruition, and when long-time Dock Board President Hugh McCloskey resigned, Behrman convinced Governor Sanders to name Cotton Exchange President (and Regular supporter) W. B. Thompson to the vacancy. Behrman confidently left the city to attend the National Municipal League Convention and delivered an address

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<sup>19</sup> *Daily Picayune*, June 29, 1911, 6; July 1, 1911, 4; January 11, 1912, 3; Bradley R. Rice, *Progressive Cities* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977), 53.

describing the operation of the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad. At the conclusion of the convention, the association honored Behrman by electing him a trustee. The city later hosted a meeting of five southern governors at the end of October. W. B. Thompson addressed the group, arguing in favor of the public warehouse system for cotton that would provide a means to gradually release the commodity onto the world market. The Mayor's participation and the governors' conference highlighted the prominence of the city and its chief executive. Behrman continued to participate in such national associations, addressing the groups on various matters of municipal operations.<sup>20</sup>

The state election, however, dominated the time of city officials. As the election approached, defections from one camp to another became partisan news, demonstrations of strength or weakness. "Joseph W. Dorsam, well-known coal merchant and businessman," reported the *Daily Picayune*, "has severed his connections with the Good Government League." Dorsam reported that "the Good Government League of the Eighth Ward is actuated solely by a desire to substitute themselves for those in power." W. B. Thompson delivered a speech on behalf of Michel, asking citizens "not to be misled by the hue and cry and affirmations of holiness into believing that this is a contest between light and darkness. . . . It is the same old effort of the 'outs' to gain control of political place and power." The truce in the Tenth Ward broke down, and James Henriques attacked Ewing claiming that the rebel leader drew power only from

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<sup>20</sup> Behrman to Sanders, September 23, 1911, Mayor's Correspondence; *Daily Picayune*, August 9, 1911, 7; September 30, 1911, 3; October 7, 1911, 4.



his newspapers. Charles Buck, former candidate for mayor in 1896 and 1904, weighed in on the side of the League, comparing the battle against the bosses to the battle against “carpet bag rule.” City Treasurer Otto Briede, beholden to Ewing, fired Michel supporters in his office. The Mayor’s secretary, Rudolph Hufft, supported Aswell. He resigned his position with the Mayor “to avoid embarrassment,” and took a position in the City Treasurer’s office, a Ewing stronghold. The *Daily Picayune* darkly warned against the threat to the Democratic party posed by “Republicans and Near-Republicans.” Parker had voted for Taft, and League activist Donaldson Caffery “ran against the Democrat [candidate for governor] Heard. Worst of all the League transgressions, James Wilkinson ran in 1892 as a Republican candidate, and, during the campaign, had argued “for equal rights for whites and Negroes.”<sup>21</sup>

As the new year approached, additional conflict broke out over the voter lists. To demonstrate the hypocrisy of League attempts to purge the rolls, Ball released copies of the registrations forms for John Parker and H. Dickson Bruns, a physician long active in reform campaigns. Ball showed that each form contained mistakes in calculating the amount of time the gentleman had resided in New Orleans, sufficient under the law to prosecute for fraud. Also, in the place provided for a listing of party affiliation, the Bruns application was conspicuously blank. After yet another challenge from Bruns regarding the honesty of the rolls and lack of service from the Registrar, Ball responded

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<sup>21</sup> *Daily Picayune*, October 17, 1911, 3; October 20, 1911, 3; October 29, 1911, Section I, 3; November 1, 1911, 3; November 8, 1911, 6; November 17, 1911, 3; November 30, 1911, 3; December 12, 1911, 3; December 16, 1911, 8.

with a “warm” letter. “You are one of those whose superior esteem of themselves has misled them into prating about public officials being public servants so much and so often that you [have confused] public servants with private menials.” He went on to call Bruns “a political eunuch” out to destroy the Democratic Party. Bruns decided not to respond, but the League effort did not cease. League canvassers presented 600 additional names for removal on January 5, 1912. On the same day, word came from Acadia Parish that the League had attempted wholesale purges of the rolls in that parish as well.<sup>22</sup>

The election took place January 23, 1912. Results remained incomplete for several days, but as country returns came in, it became clear that the League had done better than the Regulars expected. Senator Foster lost to Congressman Ransdell; Governor Sanders and Congressman Broussard faced a second primary. In the gubernatorial race, the three-way contest left Aswell far behind. Michel and Hall would enter a second primary. Closer examination of the results over the next few days further discouraged the Regulars. Sanders withdrew, giving Broussard the Senate seat. Michel trailed Hall by only 6,000 votes out of nearly 120,000. However, much of Aswell’s vote was anti-machine and would naturally go to Hall in a run off. The efforts for Michel by the city Regulars produced a 10,000 majority from the New Orleans wards, but they could not overcome the country vote. After a few days of reflection and consultation, Michel announced he would withdraw, and Hall became the Democratic

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<sup>22</sup> *Daily Picayune*, December 13, 1911, 3; December 17, 1911, 3; January 1, 1912, 3; January 2, 1912, 1; January 6, 1912, 3, 4.

nominee for governor. In the one-party Louisiana system, that was equivalent to election as governor. Michel did not leave unrewarded. Regulars announced in early March that the former candidate would become assessor for his uptown municipal district, replacing a Regular office holder, whose apparently genuine illness opened a spot for Michel at a crucial time.<sup>23</sup>

The defeat of Governor Sanders for Senate was a bitter disappointment for the state's chief executive. In 1910 he had resigned the Senate seat to assist New Orleans in its campaign for the Panama Exposition. The city returns seemed a betrayal to Sanders, but, in his memoirs, Behrman defended himself and the New Orleans Regulars. Sanders, Behrman argued, had introduced the Locke Law to suppress race track gambling and had cooperated with efforts to regulate saloons more carefully. Behrman carried his ward for Sanders, but other leaders had not concealed their opposition to his election. With Sanders, the sitting governor, angry at the city, Behrman quickly moved to make friends with Hall, the governor-elect. At the meeting of the Democratic State Central Committee at which Hall's nomination would be certified, observers noted that Behrman proudly escorted Hall into the meeting. Behrman later recalled that "some of Hall's wilder supporters immediately began to cry that their successful candidate had 'gone over to the ring.'" Behrman denied that Hall had converted to the Regulars. The Regulars enjoyed a majority of votes in the Democratic State Central Committee, yet let it be known that Hall should be free to name the next chairman. In the organization of

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<sup>23</sup> *Daily Picayune*, January 24-28, 1912; January 30, 1912, 1; March 3, 1912, 2; Fitzmorris, "Pro Bono Publico," 45-47.

the state legislature, the Regulars from New Orleans controlled a crucial bloc of votes. New Orleans supported Robert Butler of Terrebonne Parish for Speaker, a “Hall man, but that is no longer regarded as a barrier to the support of the Orleans delegation.” These demonstrations of good faith undoubtedly improved relations between the Regulars and the new Governor, but in his memoirs, Behrman refuted the charge that Hall assented to Regular control, and asserted that Hall was “against the Regulars in New Orleans” during his entire term.<sup>24</sup>

Regardless of Hall’s attitude toward the Regulars, his effectiveness as a governor depended on his ability to deal with the state legislature. Only four New Orleans League candidates managed to win seats; the Regulars captured the balance. Nevertheless, the League looked forward to that year’s legislative session and anticipated success in its attempts to defeat the ring. The legislature provided the Good Government League with crucial weapons to battle the city machine. New registration and election laws made machine vote-tampering more difficult, though legislators loyal to the ring diluted the harshest measures. In addition, reformers attempted to follow through on their promise for a substantial change in the structure of the city’s government by replacing the mayor-council with the commission form of government.<sup>25</sup>

Momentum for commission government began building after the state election and continued through the legislative session of 1912. Only days after Hall’s election,

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<sup>24</sup> Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 259-261, 265-271; *Daily Picayune*, January 28, 1912, 1; February 9, 1912, 3; March 5, 1912, 3; March 11, 1912, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 186-198.

the *Daily Picayune* commented on the upcoming city elections. “Along with the rumors of prospective candidates [ for example, Parker] there is an equally strong inclination that a commission government might be handed New Orleans by the next session of the legislature.” Once again, the paper reminded readers to be wary of the commission and of its use in New Orleans during Reconstruction. The editors of *the Daily Picayune* softened their stand two days later, calling for “considerable discussion” regarding commission government, and asking for details of any plan. “Publico” responded to the request with the outlines of a commission government, printed by the *Daily Picayune* February 12, 1912. It called for a mayor and four administrators to form an executive board. Combined with a review board of seven taxpayers, the executive board would choose other city officers. Whatever changes might occur, the paper opined, should be ratified by the voters, although it seemed that “many citizens believe that the affairs of this great city would be better conducted under [a] commission form of government.” At the end of March, the Good Government League “unanimously endorsed commission government” and arranged for a public meeting and lecture to explain the benefits of the new form of government. The next week, John Z. White of Chicago spoke glowingly of commission government. His Good Government League hosts endorsed the “fights for commission government and the betterment of conditions in the city” and appointed John Parker to lead the effort.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Daily Picayune*, January 30, 1912, 3; February 1, 1912, 8; February 12, 1912, 3; February 16, 1912, 8; March 27, 1912, 8; March 28, 1912, 1; March 30, 1912, 6; April 3, 1912, 8; April 4, 1912, 4; April 5, 1912, 4.

In June, 1912, League supporters proposed a bill to the legislature to redesign the government of New Orleans along the new commission lines. The machine, however, retained significant strength in the state's legislative branch, and it found the original draft objectionable, particularly those sections that reduced elective offices and required extensive constitutional change. Ring loyalists presented a substitute for the commission bill which, though it retained much of the commission form, gave considerable flexibility to those who would serve as commissioners. The Good Government League objected to the substitution, but ultimately supported the revised bill and an amendment to require a local referendum before the change in government would go into effect. The legislature agreed to these changes and set the referendum date for August 28, 1912. The acquiescence of the Regulars in this major structural reform ran counter to at least one view of the political culture of urban machines. "The hostility of the 'boss-immigrant-machine complex' . . . to structural reforms" wrote John D. Buenker, "has been . . . thoroughly documented." Perhaps the relatively low level of immigrants in New Orleans or Behrman's confidence in his organization's ability to thrive under any political system were sufficient to deflect otherwise natural antagonism toward the structural reform.<sup>27</sup>

The results of the legislative session encouraged members of the League, but political developments were not as favorable. Although the Regulars had not supported

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<sup>27</sup> *Daily Picayune*, June 14, 1912 through June 28, 1912; Fitzmorris, "Pro Bono Publico," 68-71; Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 193-195; John D. Buenker, "Sovereign Individuals and Organic Networks: Political Culture in Conflict During the Progressive Era," 197.

Governor Hall in the recent election, he began to accommodate the machine in several ways, especially regarding appointments. The Governor faced a difficult financial situation and needed machine support for an overhaul of the tax system. In addition, he found himself drawn to Mayor Behrman and at odds with the self-righteousness of League members. Behrman later suggested that Hall and the Good Government League leadership had a falling out over campaign finances. As the summer progressed, presidential politics began to attract attention, and both Behrman and Hall could see the advantage of cooperation in the election of Wilson and control of federal patronage.<sup>28</sup>

In July, 1912, national politics dealt an additional blow to League aspirations. John M. Parker was a friend of Theodore Roosevelt. When the former president had begun his challenge to President Taft for the Republican nomination, Parker declined to switch parties and declared his loyalty to the Democrats. But Taft's victory at the Republican convention, and the subsequent third party efforts of Roosevelt, changed the situation for Parker. Although he was the chairman of the Good Government League--officially a Democratic organization--Parker admitted that he would support Roosevelt's bid for a third term under the banner of the Progressive Party. On July 11, 1912, Parker officially resigned as leader of the city League efforts. Behrman later downplayed the effects of Parker's departure. "I do not think," he wrote, "that the absence or the presence of the Hon. John M. Parker anywhere would have affected me as much as one

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<sup>28</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 22, 1912, 1; Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 206; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 260-265; Schott, "John M. Parker," 119.

hundred votes,” but Behrman admitted that “general opinion” disagreed. The *Item* called Parker’s move “desertion.” Although his hopes of nomination for vice-president on the Roosevelt ticket did not materialize, Parker supported the Progressives in the presidential election.<sup>29</sup>

Parker’s defection to the Progressive Party harmed the League in at least two ways. It removed one of the organization’s most effective spokesmen and organizers. In addition, it presented the Regulars with ammunition to attack once again the party loyalty of the League membership. In a state where voters identified such loyalty with racial solidarity, this was no small weapon. The League carried the burden of a reform past that flirted with Republicanism on more than one occasion. To complicate matters further, Parker’s replacement was Donelson Caffery. He had been a resident of New Orleans for only three years, and, in 1900, had run for governor on a fusion ticket, supported by Populists and Republicans. The reconciliation between Colonel Ewing and the Regulars also damaged the hopes of the League. Ewing served as national committeeman to the Democratic Party and attended the convention that nominated Woodrow Wilson. Behrman and the other Regular leaders postponed decisions on parochial candidates until Ewing returned. Though the ring did not publicly disclose the

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<sup>29</sup> *Daily Picayune*, July 9, 1912, 1, 4; July 12, 1912, 1; August 13, 1912, 10; Schott, “John M. Parker,” 121, 171-210; Fitzmorris, “Pro Bono Publico,” 95-100; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 270.



terms of the agreement to the public, Ewing rejoined the regulars in time for the parochial and municipal elections.<sup>30</sup>

Prior to the those elections, the city faced a referendum on the question of commission government. Both political factions supported the change, although many League members objected to the changes made to their original bill. On July 15, James F. Coleman, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the League, announced that organization's support for the referendum. He regretted that the legislature did not present the original League plan to the voters, but stated that the substitute-- the Regular bill--was a step in the right direction. With both sides on record supporting the commission plan, there was little controversy over the referendum vote. The *Daily Picayune* reported rumors that the League's support for the plan was not sincere and printed numerous editorials urging a high turnout in favor of the plan, but the spirited contest between the League and the Regulars for offices in Orleans Parish (the elections for which would occur only one week after the referendum) held the public's attention. Mention of the commission plan was infrequent during the August campaign. Ward and precinct meetings endorsed commission government, but almost as an afterthought, when the campaign orators had finished extolling the virtues of various candidates.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 37-38; *Daily Picayune*, July 9, 1912, 4; July 12, 1912, 1; July 18, 1912, 3; August 4, 1912, 3; Schott, "John M. Parker," 185-189. League members later charged that the Regulars supported Luzenberg for District Attorney because he was Ewing's "favorite," and that this was the price paid for Regular unity. See the *Daily Picayune*, August 21, 1912, 6. Reynolds gives the impression that Ewing opposed the ring during the city elections. This was clearly not the case. Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 206.

<sup>31</sup> *Daily Picayune*, July 16, 1912, 9; August 9, 1912, 8; August 14, 1912, 3.

The principal contest of the parochial fight involved the election of a District Attorney. Parker's successor as Leader of the Good government League, Donelson Caffery, stood as the candidate of the reform forces. The Regulars surprised political observers by nominating Chandler C. Luzenberg. Regular loyalist Joseph Generelly had expected the nomination, partially as a reward for his effective service in the state legislature when the original commission bill was debated. When denied the ring endorsement, Generelly bolted and ran as an independent. The split in the machine ranks encouraged the League's expectations of victory.<sup>32</sup>

Donelson Caffery was a former candidate for governor and the son of a United States Senator. His campaign oratory assailed the misrule of the machine and proclaimed the integrity of the League alternative. Occasionally, his rhetorical excesses embarrassed the reformers. He explained away a hasty call to arms in the middle of the election campaign, but rarely restrained himself when predicting the inevitable downfall of the ring. In a campaign speech in early August, he attempted to wrap the League in the banner of municipal reform and to identify it with the commission plan. "What is the universal cry for the commission in New Orleans," he said, "but a verdict of the people that the ring has made the old form of government abominable? What is the half-hearted adoption of that cry by the ring but a . . . confession that it has failed?" He continued with a declaration of the purity of League motives. "Our motive is not office;

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<sup>32</sup> Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 195-205; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, July 19, 1912, 1; Fitzmorris, "Pro Bono Publico," 101-103.

it is to enlarge the political freedom and the commercial greatness of our . . . city and state.”<sup>33</sup>

Machine orators took a more cynical view of the League intentions. They pointed out that Caffery had been a political candidate before and that his recent move to New Orleans demonstrated political opportunism. In addition, League supporters were hardly political newcomers. At the same time that Caffery was telling the crowd that League motives did not include office, he was also extolling the support of Edgar M. Cahn, a veteran of the reform fight of 1904. Dr. Henry D. Bruns, a close associate of John M. Parker, addressed a League rally with the words, “This looks like old times.” Bruns was in a position to know. A League spokesman had introduced him as a man “who has been fighting [along with] the reform movements for the last twenty-five years.”<sup>34</sup>

The leadership of the Good Government League in New Orleans reflected its bias toward the business and professional classes. An executive committee of ten included seven attorneys and three men of commerce. At the ward level, the League showed a more varied leadership. There were three attorneys and five men of commerce, but there were also two clerks, a worker for the city, a contractor, a druggist, a hotelier, and a car repairer. The leadership of the Regular organization generally held government jobs, ranging from U.S. Congressman to clerk for the mayor. Only five

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<sup>33</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 21, 1912, 6.

<sup>34</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 21, 1912, 6; Matthew J. Schott, “Progressives Against Democracy: Electoral Reform in Louisiana, 1894-1921,” 251.

ward leaders, for example, held positions outside of government employment. These included a publisher (Robert Ewing), a saloon-keeper, a transportation executive, a grocer, and a contractor.<sup>35</sup>

League partisans traded charges with ring supporters on a number of issues during the campaign, but questions of patronage frequently arose. Good Government leaders viewed the machine as insatiable in its appetite for jobs. Colonel Ewing, Regular boss in the Tenth Ward, had particular influence in obtaining positions for his constituents, a talent that League members held up as an example of the evils of machine rule. But supporters of the League were not ignorant of the possibilities for patronage. Governor Hall had distributed some jobs to the League forces and they pressed for more during the campaign.

Donelson Caffery demonstrated the League's ambivalence regarding patronage issues during a precinct rally in the Tenth Ward. He condemned Ewing's influence in obtaining patronage and held up the machine's treatment of Joseph Generelly as an example of ring duplicity. Yet in response to a question about jobs from a resident of the ward, Caffery said that "the Good Government League may rest assured that they

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<sup>35</sup> Names of ward leaders were obtained from newspaper accounts of the election. Occupations were those listed in the New Orleans City Director for 1912. The composition of the reform leadership (i.e., the executive committee and the state organizers) tends to support the conclusions of Samuel P. Hays regarding the origins of municipal reform. However, the occupations of the reform ward leaders suggests a wider base of reform leadership than is at first apparent. For insights into the origins of urban reform see Samuel P. Hays, "The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era," 157-169 and James Weinstein, "Organized Business and the City Commission and Manager Movements," *Journal of Southern History*, 28 (May 1962): 166-182.

will be remembered in this regard.” A few minutes later, as reported by the *Daily Picayune*, Caffery promised the assembly that “after September 3 [the date of the election for District Attorney] the city will be run as any corporation on a business basis strictly.” The Good Government League may have believed its own rhetoric regarding government jobs, but patronage issues proved troublesome from the beginning of the campaign. An executive committee of League members assigned potential jobs and allocated places on the reform ticket, a process remarkably similar to that of the Regular caucus. Some members complained that the process passed over hard-working League loyalists. Such disputes were not unique to the League, but the occurrence of patronage arguments in the Good Government ranks undercut the righteous oratory condemning the practices of the Regulars.<sup>36</sup>

Under the instructions of the League’s Executive Committee, the Fifth Ward received the position of Criminal Sheriff on the ticket. John Cruso won rank and file support for the nomination, but the leadership would not support his candidacy because of the opposition of the *Times-Democrat*. “We can’t afford to invite such opposition,” commented a League spokesman, “and Cruso will be replaced.” Cruso operated a saloon in which gambling was reported to take place in an upper room. During the state campaign, a Regular spokesman charged that Cruso had gone over to the League because the Mayor insisted on enforcing anti-gambling laws. In a similar manner, Dr. John T. Jones, physician for the longshoremen’s and screwmen’s organization, learned

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<sup>36</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 10, 1912, 3; July 18, 1912, 3.

that League would not back him for the position of coroner. Two weeks before the parochial elections, the *Daily Picayune* reported additional disputes within the League ranks. "There had been considerable dissatisfaction among the leaders and their followers regarding the jobs and in some wards there were threats of disaffections." Harry Mournay, speaking on behalf of the Regulars, addressed a meeting of Seventh Ward loyalists and refuted "the idea that [Good Government League candidates] were running for offices for honor and uplift of the city affairs." J. C. Hicks, described as a "convert from former reform movements," said that League members were "largely a bunch of office-seekers." Behrman echoed these assessments of the reformers and dismissed them as "the outs wanting to get in."<sup>37</sup>

Searching for an effective issue, Caffery accused the machine of financial impropriety in its dealings with the Sewerage and Water Board. The proceeds from a bond issue had been deposited in two New Orleans banks; officers of the institutions included prominent machine supporters Charles Janvier and Sol Wexler. However, the Board of Liquidation, a blue-ribbon panel which included many League supporters, had approved of the financial arrangements. Most members of the Sewerage and Water Board and the Board of Liquidation joined Mayor Behrman in condemning Caffery's charges.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Daily Picayune*, July 18, 1912, 3; August 18, 1912, 3, 8; August 14, 1912, 3; August 21, 1912, 6; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, xxii.

<sup>38</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 11, 1912, 6; August 13, 1912, 4. Although some pro-League members of the Boards were not enthusiastic about criticizing Caffery, most went along with the Mayor.

In the midst of the heated parochial campaign, the public lost sight of the pending vote on the commission plan. The city's newspapers predicted a low turnout in the ratification vote and voiced concern that under such circumstances a minority could reject the commission government. Editorials warned against overconfidence among commission supporters, and the League and the regulars traded charges over the sincerity of each group's work for ratification. The *Daily Picayune* reminded readers that the plan put before the voters was not the bill that the League had proposed in the state legislature, but the newspaper agreed with the argument of the Regulars that the Good Government League bill had been constitutionally inadequate. The editorial urged support for the commission plan, stating that it included all the main features needed for effective government. On the day before the ratification vote, another editorial repeated arguments in favor of commission government, including the assertion that the new form would result in the election of "the best men for the office" and would reduce "ward influences and the old time conditions."<sup>39</sup>

The result of the ratification vote proved that fears of a low turnout were justified, but the plan won by a wide margin. Out of approximately twenty-six thousand voters, the commission plan triumphed by ratio of more than eleven to one. Wards Three and Fifteen, strongholds of the Regulars, supported the plan by nearly twelve to one; the pro-League Twelfth and Fourteenth wards voted in favor by a ratio of about ten

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<sup>39</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 9, 1912, 8; August 15, 1912, 8; August 17, 1912, 6; August 20, 1912, 7; August 25, 1912. On the reformers point regarding the election of "good men" as office holders, see Weinstein, "Organized Business," 173.

to one. Downtown support was slightly higher than the uptown wards, but the overwhelmingly favorable vote indicated strong support from all political factions.<sup>40</sup>

The vote for parochial offices followed the commission vote by one week. The three-way race for District Attorney had attracted the most attention, but voters selected from among candidates for thirteen offices, school board seats, and parish Democratic committeemen. Only Caffery came close to defeating the machine candidate, assisted by the Generelly-Luzenberg split. The machine majority in other races averaged four to six thousand votes. Caffery stated that the patronage practices of the ring caused his defeat and suggested after the election that the state should adopt an amendment to its constitution disenfranchising city officials and workers. Turnout increased when compared to the commission election; over thirty-six thousand New Orleanians participated in the parochial vote, but even this figure was lower than the governor's race held earlier in the year. Observers blamed the three thousand vote drop off on the summer heat and the absence of many voters. League partisans claimed that at least two thousand of the city's "prominent people" were on vacation and that if the election had been in October Caffery would have triumphed. Other League supporters blamed Governor Hall for the ring victory, claiming that "if the distribution of the state places had been made more promptly, it would have helped the parish fight." A candidate who lost in the parochial contest added, "I think they ought to hurry up with the jobs."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Daily Picayune*, August 29, 1912, 1.

<sup>41</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 5, 1912, 1, 3, 7, 8; September 6, 1912, 3; Fitzmorris, "Pro bono Publico," 114-116.



Voters of New Orleans faced another election in one month. According to the terms of the commission plan, an election would be held in early October to select a mayor and four commissioners. All would be elected at large, and both the Regulars and the League would offer full slates of candidates. Although the ring had won the parochial elections, the commission plan seemed particularly suited to reform candidates. Prominent businessman and reform advocate J. F. Coleman expressed confidence in the outcome of the municipal elections in spite of the earlier results. The leadership of the League met immediately after the parochial elections to select a slate for the commission contest. While the Good Government League and the ring decided on candidates, the newspaper printed rumors of dissatisfaction among League supporters. Although Joseph Generally declared allegiance to the reform organization, the League suffered from the defection of other ward and precinct organizers. Within a week of the election, newspapers printed accounts of League members' overtures to the ring. "It was stated yesterday that a number of League men who are disappointed and alarmed about getting nothing through the League have been to the Regulars recently and offered to come over with all their friends for a consideration of getting something in the deal."<sup>42</sup>

John Cruso, denied a place on the League's parochial ballot, announced his decision to join the ring; many precinct leaders followed his example. Cruso explained his decision as the result of a patronage dispute. He complained of the League's lack of

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<sup>42</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 6, 1912, 3; September 12, 1912, 3.

effective organization, the defection of Parker, and the failure of the leadership to follow through on promises of jobs. The account of the *Daily Picayune* was more colorful.

“Cruso [has] decided to leave the League after having failed to secure any of the plums, peaches, and apricots promised him, and getting a box of lemons.” League troubles were not limited to Cruso’s Fifth Ward. A dispute in the Eighth Ward caused ill feelings among League supporters and increased defections. W.R. McCarthy, leader of the League in the Eleventh Ward, also joined the Regulars. He complained of bad management within the reform group and of its failure to follow through on patronage promises. In addition, Edward Nulty, Good Government League president of the Tenth Ward, joined the ring. There were some defections of ring members to the ranks of the League, but no ward leaders of the machine went over to the other side.<sup>43</sup>

Publicity surrounding the commission plan emphasized the parallels between business and efficient government. The identification of commissioners with business practice put a premium on selection of candidates with business backgrounds. The close race for District Attorney and the strong vote for the commission plan convinced Regular leaders that the organization should draw its candidates from among city businessmen. Regular leaders sought to avoid possible League charges of a politicized commission by precluding city officials from seeking commission posts. Although Behrman would lead the ticket as candidate for mayor, no other individual associated with the ring’s political leadership would run for commissioner. The discipline of the

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<sup>43</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 13, 1912, 3; September 14, 1912, 3; September 15, 1912, 5.

machine enabled its leaders to enforce such a decision. Otto Briede, a Ewing loyalist from the Tenth Ward, was City Treasurer, and sought Ewing's support to run for commissioner. Briede reasoned that since he was not a ward leader, he should be allowed to contest for a commission seat. But the caucus had "determined on the course of eliminating active politicians. Mr. Briede could not see the point, but that was the leader's ultimatum."<sup>44</sup>

On Thursday, September 19, less than two weeks before the election, the Good Government League announced its choices for mayor and commissioners. A committee of sixty ratified the selections of the Executive Committee and presented the names to the public. The ticket reflected the reform antecedents of the League and the commission system's emphasis on business experience. Charles F. Claiborne led the ticket as candidate for mayor. He was a descendant of the first governor of Louisiana and a prominent city lawyer. Claiborne confidently predicted victory by three thousand votes. He stated, "I am not a politician," but admitted to frequent participation in prior reform movements. He had served as councilman during the reform administration of Mayor Shakspeare and returned to the council in 1896 during the administration of reform mayor Walter Flower and the Citizen's League. The four commission candidates of the League had similar political backgrounds, although all were businessmen as well. Louis Pfister had been active in the drive for public ownership of utilities and served on the city council with Claiborne during the Flower administration.

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<sup>44</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 16, 1912, 3. The account emphasizes the role played by Ewing, regular leader of the Tenth Ward in spite of his earlier defection.

George M. Leahy had also served on the reform council, and Andrew McShane was a member of the Fire Board during the same administration. Only Oscar Schumert lacked a political connection with previous reform efforts. He was President of Fidelity Homestead Association, but retained strong contacts with organized labor.<sup>45</sup>

The Regulars announced their ticket the following day. As expected, Behrman lead the ticket as mayoral candidate; he predicted a regular victory of seven thousand votes. The other four members, though, were newcomers to Regular electoral politics. Determined to avoid the appearance of politics as usual, the ring demonstrated its ability to attract prominent members of the community and to offer a business slate of its own. W. B. Thompson was a Behrman favorite, who had offered the Mayor crucial support in 1908. A graduate of Columbia University and a four-time President of the New Orleans Cotton Exchange, he had served the city on both the Public Belt Railroad Commission and the Dock Board. His social contacts included membership in the Boston, Pickwick, and the Southern Yacht Clubs.

The other regular choices were nearly as impressive. Harold W. Newman was also a lawyer turned businessman, an expert in stocks and bonds. A graduate of Tulane University, he was president of the New Orleans Stock Exchange and of the Young Men's Hebrew Association. E.E. Lafaye, although only thirty-two years old, was a respected businessman and land developer. The fourth member of the commission

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<sup>45</sup> Profiles of the League candidates were printed in the *Daily Picayune*, September 19, 1912, 1. Candidates endorsed by the paper were given more complete coverage on subsequent days.

ticket was A.G. Ricks, a Confederate veteran over seventy years old. Ricks, ironically, had served on the city council with Claiborne and other members of the League ticket, but had broken with the reform elements. He was connected to the city's brewing industry and served on the boards of several financial institutions.<sup>46</sup>

The composition of Behrman's ticket caused problems for League strategists. The regular candidates were not ward leaders nor city department heads; their business credentials were as impressive as, or exceeded, those of the reform group's candidates. Only Mayor Behrman remained a plausible target. He was the leader of the machine and the embodiment of its patronage arrangements; yet the voters had already shown their support for Behrman in two previous mayoral elections. To be successful, the League needed issues other than the Mayor's political connections. Donelson Caffery attempted to turn the public against Behrman with charges of public corruption. He held meetings with a New York detective who had exposed the New York City machine and invited him to come to New Orleans. Behrman diffused the issue, though, by welcoming any investigation.<sup>47</sup>

At the time of the municipal elections, the Regulars had controlled city government for twelve years; Behrman had served eight years as mayor. Unfortunately for the League, the city administration was responsible for impressive public improvements in the areas of drainage, public utilities, promotion of commerce,

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<sup>46</sup> For descriptions of the regular ticket, see the *Daily Picayune*, September 20, 1912, 1, 6.

<sup>47</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 19, 1912, 1.

sanitation, and public health. The League might have claimed that the ring operated the city inefficiently, or that patronage raised the cost of improvements, but it could not question the evidence that New Orleanians saw every day. The Regulars made use of their achievements by showing films of the improvements during public rallies. One advertisement in the *Daily Picayune* promised “free admission, fine music, and no speeches” while the audience would view moving pictures of public improvements constructed during Behrman’s tenure.<sup>48</sup>

The *Daily Picayune* enthusiastically endorsed Behrman for mayor. During the two weeks before the election, it printed numerous articles about the city’s progress. Although it backed two League candidates for commission seats, it supported two Regulars as well. Reports of campaign speeches showed a repeat of League rhetoric about the evils of machine rule and pleas to the voters to recall the reform victories of previous years. But the League failed to identify its ticket with the newly-adopted commission plan or to build any public case that only a reform group could govern effectively under the new municipal structure. The commission plan was in place after legislative action and a referendum by the voters, but the city’s political alignments showed no change from the pattern of the previous two or three decades.<sup>49</sup>

On October 1, Behrman and the entire Regular ticket easily defeated the League candidates. The Mayor’s prediction of a 7,000 vote margin proved modest; the results

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<sup>48</sup> Robert W. Williams, “Martin Behrman: Mayor and Political Boss of New Orleans, 1904-1926;” *Daily Picayune*, September 20, 1912, 3.

<sup>49</sup> *Daily Picayune*, September 21, 1912, 6

showed a Behrman majority of over 9,000. The only bright spot for the League was the showing of Andrew McShane, who ran ahead of Claiborne in every ward and polled the highest total of any reform candidate since the 1890's. Nevertheless, League members were shocked at the magnitude of the defeat; one called it "not a defeat" but "a massacre." Post-election comment speculated on the future of the League and the reasons for its poor showing. Spokesmen for the reform group announced that they had drawn up a charter to make the organization permanent, but realistic members assumed that the League would die out as a result of the lost election. One member commented, "They talk of charters and keeping the thing alive. That sounds nice in the official journals, but it is all bunk. We are dead." The *Daily Picayune* pointed out that the reform vote had not increased since the 1904 election. League strategists consistently overestimated their support, causing one election authority to state, "The whole trouble is that some people have the idea they can win without votes."<sup>50</sup>

The defeat of the League resulted from several factors: the unity of the Regulars, weak support from the Governor, the defection of Parker, lack of issues, the flexibility of the Regulars, and a failure to translate the commission victory into a mandate for new politicians as well as a new structure. The flexibility and pragmatism inherent in Behrman's view of politics allow the Regulars to coopt both the idea of commission government and the climate of change. Voters could see no reason for replacing a successful and popular mayor. A League member, in enumerating reasons

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<sup>50</sup> *Daily Picayune*, October 2, 1912, 1, 6; October 3, 1912, 1, 3.

for his organization's defeat, paid reluctant tribute to Behrman. Claiborne, he said, was not the man "to lead this movement against a progressive like Behrman. Yes, I say progressive. He is one. He is a ringster, if you will, but he is a progressive. I give that." Behrman parlayed that combination into five victories for mayor.<sup>51</sup>

The voters of New Orleans knew that progressive reform did not require the adoption of a commission plan. Such reform was well under way by the time the Good Government League seized upon the commission idea. The change in governmental form promoted by the reform element was an effort to promote political change--the overthrow of the Regulars--not policy change. Voters chose the Regulars because that faction, under Behrman's able leadership, had successfully guided the city's consensus in favor of progressive civic development.

The League's effort to reform New Orleans politics had not been a total failure. In its two years of operation, the Good Government League had achieved many of its objectives. The voters chose a League-backed candidate for governor, the legislature passed a series of laws revising election procedures, and the citizens of New Orleans adopted a commission form of government. But the League did not defeat bossism. The Regular Democrats of New Orleans accepted the new form of city government, kept their organization intact, and soundly defeated League candidates for municipal office. For New Orleanians, the adoption of a municipal commission altered the structure of their government, but the Good Government League did not transform institutional

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<sup>51</sup> *Daily Picayune*, October 3, 1912, 3; Chudacoff, *The Evolution of American Urban Society*, 161.



reform into electoral victory. The city was the largest in the country to attempt commission rule at that time. But the power and flexibility of the New Orleans machine enabled it to accept structural reform in government, while retaining its electoral superiority. Until the reformers understood and practiced the exercise of political power, the machine would control the government of New Orleans.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Rice, *Progressive Cities*, 113-125; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 316. The pragmatism and flexibility of the New Orleans Regulars regarding commission government was not unique. Boss Crump of Memphis “solidified his grip on Memphis” after than city adopted commission government in 1909. The organization of Tom Dennison in Omaha similarly adjusted to the new form of government in 1912 by running candidates and “dominating that body for the machine’s benefit.” See Chudacoff, *The Evolution of American Urban Society*, 161-162.

## CONCLUSION

The victory of Martin Behrman in the 1912 mayoral election marked a renewal of commission government in New Orleans, once tried in the Reconstruction era. In early 1913, in an address to the Society of Economics at Tulane University, Behrman spoke about the commission form of government as an experiment. He was uncertain about its future and expressed some skepticism about its efficacy in large cities. But the Mayor's third term proved that he, and the Regular organization, could adapt to the new structure, continue to win elections, and persist in the progressive policies started at the turn of the century. By 1916, no serious political opposition to the Mayor had emerged, and he easily won yet another term. It would be four years later, in the election of 1920, that Behrman, after four terms as mayor, lost to a reform candidate. After years of opposition to Behrman and the state Regulars, John M. Parker won the governor's office early in 1920. With his assistance, along with a breakdown in the normally efficient Choctaw organization, Andrew McShane defeated Behrman, and the reform faction enjoyed its first mayoral victory in the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Behrman, *An Address by Honorable Martin Behrman, Mayor of New Orleans, Louisiana, Made at Invitation of Society of Economics*, 8-9; Schott, "John M. Parker," 317-408. For a thorough account of the Behrman administrations under the commission government, 1912-1920, see Fitzmorris, "Pro Bono Publico," 136-448.

The third and fourth terms of Martin Behrman followed the patterns set in his first two terms. In spite of considerable progress, New Orleans had not conquered its substantial problems. Street paving, general sanitation, and regulation of street railroads and other utilities remained difficult, if not intractable, issues. Public resources were meager in the best of times, and the city discovered no solution to the constant demand for greater revenue. But the three major civic reforms of the early progressive era continued to thrive.

The Sewerage and Water Board made excellent progress on the water, sewerage, and drainage systems during 1899-1912, but additional work remained. Connections between residential property and the new systems occurred slowly. Not until 1925 did sewer connections exceed ninety percent. Subsurface drainage and an extensive network of canals gradually improved the ability of the Board to remove rain water from the streets, but the capacity of the city's pumps limited the effectiveness of the system. New, higher capacity pumps provided the answer, and, by 1925, pumps handled 13,000 cubic feet of water per second. By the same year, investment in the infrastructure reached \$30,000,000--nearly double the original estimate.<sup>2</sup>

The first decade of the reorganized Port of New Orleans saw consolidation of the Dock Board's authority, an enormous building program, and the beginnings of important public facilities. The second decade expanded publicly-owned facilities, including the completion of the public cotton warehouse, the building of a public grain

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<sup>2</sup> *The Waterworks, Sewerage and Drainage System of New Orleans*, n.p..

elevator, and the construction of special facilities for handling bananas, coffee, coal, and lumber. Total tonnage handled by the port doubled from 5,000,000 tons in 1912 to 10,000,000 tons in 1920. By 1925, tonnage reached over 14,000,000 tons. By the early 1920s, the Dock Board completed the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal linking the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain. These accomplishments occurred against a backdrop of political intrigue. In spite of the Dock Board's supposed isolation from politics, wholesale changes in the membership of the Dock Board took place in 1916, 1919, and 1921.<sup>3</sup>

The Public Belt Railroad also thrived after the adoption of commission government, although the city and the Public Belt Railroad Commission fought to establish authority immediately following the 1912 election. The courts upheld the independence of the Commission, and the commercial exchanges continued their influence over its membership. The bureaucratic battles did not stop belt road expansion. In 1912, it consisted of twenty-eight miles of track; by 1925, it had expanded to eighty-two miles. The railroad operated seven locomotives in 1912 and sixteen in 1925. Tracks and switching locomotives served not only the Mississippi River wharves, but also the new industrial and transportation sites along the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal. In 1921, the Constitution of the State of Louisiana authorized the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad Commission to take responsibility for a railroad

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<sup>3</sup> Cass, *Facts of Interest about the Port of New Orleans*, 18-21; *Port Handbook of New Orleans*, 8, 11.

and automobile bridge across the Mississippi River, though the great project did not reach completion until a decade later.<sup>4</sup>

The three public works projects did not exclusively depend upon the city government for finances or leadership during the period 1912 to 1920. Behrman served as president of the Sewerage and Water Board and as president of the Public Belt Railroad Commission, and he took an active interest in both entities. Though not a member of the Dock Board, the Mayor often advised the governor regarding appointments to that body. The reasons for Behrman's defeat in 1920 had little to do with his leadership in the areas of public works or substantive policy disagreements. The 1920 election replayed most of the themes of New Orleans political factionalism: antagonism of reformers toward the boss system, calls for efficiency in government, and reform of registration and voting procedures.

A new, state-level reform organization--the Democratic Liberty League--joined with a city reform group--the Orleans Democratic Association--to oppose the Choctaw Regulars in 1920. Behrman had reason to fear the Orleans Democratic Association. Unlike previous attempts at unseating the Regulars, the 1920 reform movement compromised ideological purity in favor of practical politics. Among the members of the new association were found not only uptown reformers and commercial leaders, but also disaffected Choctaws and ward bosses. John Patrick Sullivan, a former prominent Choctaw, who had broken with the organization in 1913, eagerly led the Orleans

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<sup>4</sup> *The Behrman Administration: Work Accomplished During the Eight Years. . .*, 6-7; *Port Handbook of New Orleans*, 42-43.

Democratic Association. By election time, he was joined by Robert Ewing, once more an apostate from the Regular cause. Behrman's long tenure in office, and the decrease in the number of elective offices under the new commission system, frustrated ambitious Regulars, some of whom aspired to municipal office. Adding to Behrman's troubles, Governor Rufus Pleasant opposed Behrman, and, in 1919, had begun a program to reduce the Mayor's influence over local patronage.<sup>5</sup>

Behrman also faced two other negative factors in the election of 1920. Never a favorite of the social control advocates of progressivism, the Mayor had refused repeated requests to close Storyville. What uptown reformers and Baptist ministers could not accomplish, however, the United States government did; in 1917, Storyville was shut down, declared a moral hazard to military installations in the New Orleans area. Yet the closing of the official district did not end the vice associated with it. Behrman received the blame, and in the months before the 1920 election, his administration drew the ire of local newspapers. One paper printed a lurid series of articles on the supposed corruption of young New Orleans schoolgirls. Behrman also suffered from the natural decline in electoral support for an administration that had been in power for so long a time. In spite of all the disadvantages, however, Behrman almost won a fifth term. The sixteen-year incumbent lost by 1,450 votes out of more than 44,000 cast. Behrman attributed the defeat to three causes. He was ill for part of

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<sup>5</sup> Fitzmorris, "Pro Bono Publico," 465-490; Bodet, "Sixteen years of Enemies is a Lot of Them," paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Louisiana Historical Association, 1992, 3; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, One measure of John P. Sullivan's talents was his ascent to national office in the Elks at the age of 35.

the campaign and lost valuable time recuperating in Biloxi. He blamed Parker for hypocritical use of patronage to defeat the Regulars, particularly jobs controlled by the dock Board. And Behrman recognized the inevitable accumulation of enemies over the course of his four mayoral terms. "No matter what you do in public office," Behrman later recalled, "you still make enemies. Sixteen years of enemies is a lot of them."<sup>6</sup>

Behrman did not retire quietly to his Algiers home. He won election to the state constitutional convention in 1921 and waited for an opportunity to vindicate his record. Some satisfaction arrived in 1922 when his long-time antagonists at the New Orleans *Item* became disillusioned with the performance of the new mayor, Andrew McShane. The *Item* also broke with Governor Parker for his refusal to carry out a promised civil service bill. Behrman began to write a series of columns for the *Item* detailing his political career, which also had the effect of keeping his name before the public. Although he retired as chair of the Regular organization, Behrman remained active in the caucus. When a fight over the Regular leadership of the Fourteenth Ward caused a split in the organization, Behrman stepped in and reasserted his authority. At the same time that Behrman consolidated his power, public attitudes towards the reformers began to parallel those of the former mayor. The good intentions of the reforms was not

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<sup>6</sup> Bodet, "Sixteen Years of Enemies is a Lot of them," 10-11; Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 164; Herman Deutsch, "La Politique," in Chase, *et. al.*, *Citoyens, Progres et Politique de la Nouvelle Orleans, 1889-1964* (New Orleans: E. S. Upton, 1964); Fitzmorris, "Pro Bono Publico," 488-515, Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 305-316; Williams, "Martin Behrman: Mayor and Political Boss of New Orleans, 1904-1926," 118-130; Reynolds, *Machine Politics in New Orleans*, 208-213. Fitzmorris provided slightly different election figures which put McShane's majority at 1,365.

matched by a practical knowledge of politics nor by any apparent administrative abilities.<sup>7</sup>

The Regulars nominated Behrman for a fifth term in late 1924. His enthusiastic supporters adopted the slogan, "Papa's Coming Home!" to welcome him back to the campaign trail. He faced two other candidates: Paul Maloney, who had split from the Regulars, and Mayor McShane. In a spirited contest, the *Times-Picayune*<sup>8</sup> and the *Daily States* endorsed Maloney, but the *Item*, though an adversary of Behrman for years, endorsed the former Mayor. Behrman's platform promised to deliver what McShane had failed to provide, particularly street paving, and pledged an ambitious transportation program that included bridges across the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain. He also advocated development of the New Orleans lakefront, better regulation of private utilities, and enlargement of City Park. In the first ballot, Behrman received 35, 837 votes. He outpolled Maloney by slightly more than 2,000 votes, but failed to obtain a majority. McShane's vote was only 4,654. Unable to sustain an additional election against Behrman, and discouraged by reports of his supporters going over to the side of the former Mayor, Maloney withdrew and Behrman won election. The headlines

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<sup>7</sup> Schott, "John M. Parker," 385-387; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 320; Fitzmorris, "Pro Bono Publico," 618-633.

<sup>8</sup> The *Times-Democrat* and the *Daily Picayune* had merged operations in 1914, creating the *Times-Picayune*.



proclaimed "Papa's Back," but his return last barely eight months. He took the oath of office in early May, 1925, and died on January 12, 1926.<sup>9</sup>

Behrman and the Regular Democrats dominated New Orleans political and civic life during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The southern variety of national progressivism flourished in New Orleans during that time because of, not in spite of, the leadership of a political machine. In an era of increased specialization and organizational development, the New Orleans Regulars honed the skills of professional politicians, who knew how to win elections for the purpose of gaining power, and public administrators, who knew how to use power in order to effectively run government. Their skills brought New Orleans into the new century by nurturing a consensus in favor of progressive civic development. The consensus promoted the construction of much-needed public services, the reconstruction of the city's docks, enhancement of the municipal economy, and improvements in transportation, education, and public health. New forms of government mobilized public finance, public administration, and the assistance of professional expertise in the service of the progressive agenda.

The reform faction of New Orleans deserves credit for advocating and, in some instances, initiating the legislation that encouraged municipal progress. During the years that followed the takeover of city government by the Regulars, the reform faction

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<sup>9</sup> Deutsch, "La Politique," in Chase, et. al., *Citoyens . . .*; Kemp, *Martin Behrman of New Orleans*, 335-341; Fitzmorris, "Pro Bono Publico," 637-670. The election cycle differed from earlier contests due to a change in state law, which sought to move the New Orleans mayoral election from proximity to the governor's race. Thus, McShane's term was extended, and Behrman was elected to a term that would have extended to 1930.

claimed such credit in urging its return to power. There is no way of knowing whether or not the reformers would have been successful implementers of the progressive policies. But their record, in office and in opposition, suggested that the reformers were uncomfortable with political power, suspicious of democracy, and less than attentive to the details of public administration. Even when holding political office, reformers could not transcend their view on the necessity of disinterested officials. Independent boards and commissions provided the bridge between their uncertainties and the necessities of modern governance. The reformers occasionally attempted to copy the Regular organization, but in their commitment to oppose patronage, reformers cut off their leadership from the practical side of power and administration. In its organization, the League fell far short of what was necessary for political permanence. The contribution of the reformers to New Orleans, apart from their advocacy of progressive policies while in office 1896 to 1900, consisted mainly of mobilizing support for the community consensus for progressive civic development.

The Regular administrations by no means solved all of the city's problems, nor were all aspects of national progressivism adopted. But New Orleans in 1912 was a far more modern city than the New Orleans of 1896. The New Orleans Regulars were not reluctant to seek political power, nor were they reticent about the practice of public administration. Weak on theory, they embraced pragmatism and flexibility. Alert to public opinion, the Regulars adopted progressive initiatives and adapted to evolving forms of governance. In the Regular organization, power flowed from patronage, the

influence of the elected leadership, and its day-to-day connection with voters and the machinery of government. Most Regular leaders held offices that kept them in touch with voters and provided constant information useful to administration. Whether through boards, commissions, or new forms of municipal government, the Regulars persisted at the work necessary to transform New Orleans. By all sensible measures, that work involved progressive policies. New Orleans did not require a reform government to adopt those policies.

The progressive civic consensus of 1896-1912 transformed New Orleans, mainly as a result of the public works projects initiated and implemented by both political factions. The new sewerage, water, and drainage systems improved public health, enhanced the appearance of and quality of life in the city, and, most of all, secured a stable public health environment. No longer would the yellow fever pose a threat to the city's inhabitants. Increased drainage capacity also allowed the expansion of the city, especially to the north, towards Lake Pontchartrain, and to the east, along the route of Bayou Gentilly. Although significant residential development in those areas would not take place until after World War I and later, the city's new infrastructure made those new neighborhoods habitable.

The commercial developments along the river front similarly transformed the city. The work of the Dock Board cleared away the last remnants of the nineteenth century wharves and landings. The Board constructed modern sheds and docks along a new levee system. Responding to changing patterns of international trade, the Board expanded the port and built special cargo facilities for the coffee, banana, and lumber

trades. Asserting its full legal authority, the Board upheld public control of the river front's vital commercial assets and expanded the role of public facilities with the construction of the Board-owned cotton warehouse, a grain elevator, and the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal.

The Dock Board's interests extended to river front transportation and coincided with the efforts of the city to establish the Public Belt Railroad. The improvements at the port could not stand alone. Construction of the belt transfer system for cargo was a crucial ingredient in the transformation of the port. The New Orleans Public Belt Railroad assured that river front commerce, vastly expanded by the efforts of the Dock Board, would move easily among port facilities and between the docks and the various railroad lines serving the Crescent City. The Public Belt also preserved competition among the private railroads by preventing any one or more companies from securing favorable treatment in the port. As the business of the Public Belt grew, so did its responsibilities. Its tracks expanded as the port grew, spurs connected new industrial sites, and the Public Belt built the first railroad crossing of the Mississippi at New Orleans.

The policies leading to the transformation of the city in the years 1896 to 1912 illustrated many of the tenets of southern progressivism: municipal reform, dependence upon experts, changes in voting laws, regulation of railroads, economic development, new forms of governance, public health, and promotion of education. New Orleans also joined the ranks of cities which adopted the commission form of government, a reform which embodied the quintessential progressive elements. Less laudably, the city

conformed to southern progressivism by operating a government “for whites only” in which blacks lost the right to vote and suffered the indignities of a solidly Jim Crow society.

Among the wide range of progressive era initiatives, the New Orleans city government--under the control of Regular Democrats for most of the period-- embraced most with enthusiasm and resisted only those associated with strict control of behavior, such as prohibition and suppression of gambling. The avoidance of strictures on personal behavior did not disqualify the Regulars from inclusion among the ranks of southern progressives. No southern or national progressive embodied every single notion of the movement. In spite of an inclination for historians to posit a necessary connection between reform elements and progressivism, the evidence clearly shows that the city’s Regular Democrats were responsible for the New Orleans progressive civic consensus. The Regulars were members of the machine, bosses, and “ringsters,” but they were also southern progressives.

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- Williams, Robert W., Jr. "Martin Behrman: Mayor and Political Boss of New Orleans, 1904-1926." M.A. thesis, Tulane University, 1952.

## VITA

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DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

**Candidate:** Robert L. Dupont  
**Major Field:** History  
**Title of Dissertation:** Progressive Civic Development and Political  
Conflict: Regular Democrats and Reformers  
in New Orleans, 1896-1912

**Approved:**

*Aainer M Foster*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Major Professor and Chairman  
*J. M. L. L.*  
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Dean of the Graduate School

**EXAMINING COMMITTEE:**

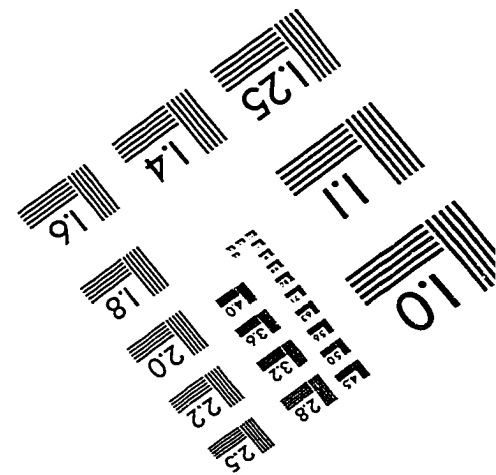
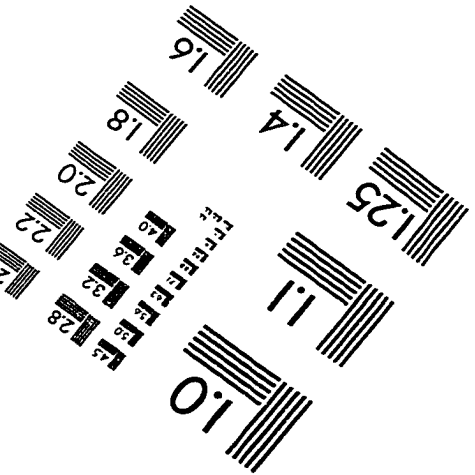
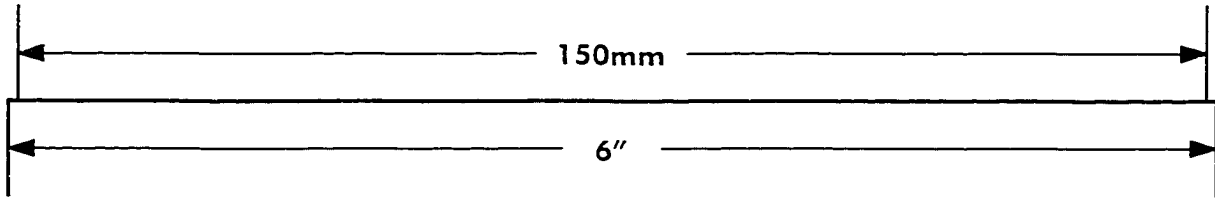
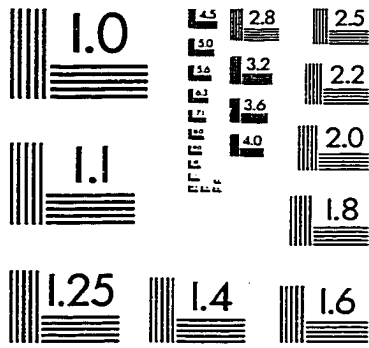
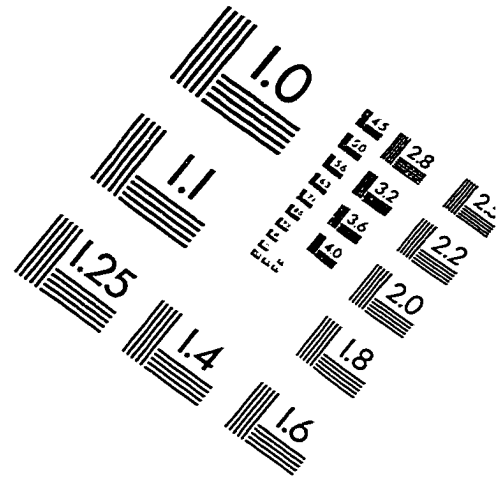
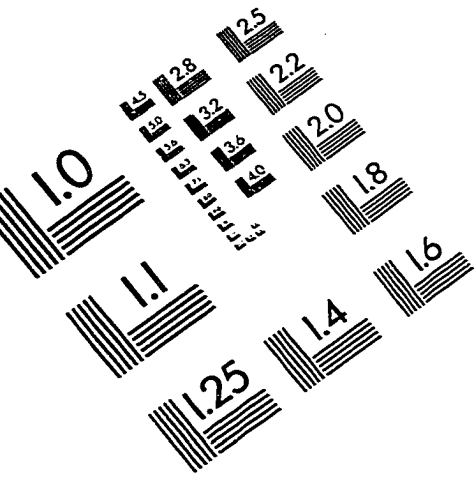
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**Date of Examination:**

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# IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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