



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

Humanities

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

Narrative Section of a Successful Application

The attached document contains the grant narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the Research Programs application guidelines at <http://www.neh.gov/grants/research/fellowships> for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Research Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: Transformed From Within: The Nationalization of American Party Organizations, 1880-1900

Institution: College of the Holy Cross

Project Director: Daniel Klinghardt

Grant Program: Fellowships Program

Transformed From Within: The Nationalization of American Party Organizations, 1880-1900

PROJECT NARRATIVE

It is commonplace to explain the history of political parties in the United States as proceeding from a nineteenth century “golden age,” which came to an end as a result of Progressive Era reforms, to a period of “decline” in the twentieth century. In reality, between 1880 and 1900 national party leaders, not just reformers, saw significant limitations in the capacity of the traditional, decentralized party organizations to engage citizens in an industrializing democracy—despite the legendary mobilizing functions of the urban machines. Their vision became the model for twentieth century parties, which suggests that modern parties are not degraded forms of the “golden age” organizations, but the product of reforms designed to make them relevant to modern democratic politics. Under this model, popular partisan authority came to rest in the construction of national mandates for rule, rather than the authority of local party leaders.

This organizational shift, the result of strategies implemented by mid-level national party elites such as national committee members, leaders of national party clubs, and campaign managers, has gone largely unnoticed; most accounts of party decline focus on Progressive reformers, party machines, and highly visible politicians. Both historians and political scientists should be interested in this change because it completes the historical record, and because these leaders envisioned the institutional tools necessary for modern party democracy. Indications of party weakness in recent years may call their achievement into question, but their analysis provides a more accurate diagnosis of the ills of party politics than do histories that look to the machines as a model for party renewal. In the language of the NEH’s We the People Initiative, this study of archival documents will help Americans make sense of the history of their parties.

Between 1880 and 1900, both parties developed organizational capacities for campaigning in ways that define twentieth century politics. They made their nominating process more responsive to the electorate, displacing state and local leaders as the source of party authority. As president, Grover Cleveland led Democrats by bold proclamations to Congress designed to set a national partisan agenda. In 1896, Republican Chairman Mark Hanna engineered the distribution of national literature directly to voters, bypassing local party elites. His fundraising methods mimicked those of earlier chairmen in both parties, enabled the RNC to pay for printing and delivery of material on an enlarged scale, and became the basis of the parties’ campaign finance networks for the next forty years.

At the peak of the reform period, Republicans founded the National League of Republican Clubs, whose members numbered 2,250,000 by 1896.

Following the Republican lead, Democrats formed a national league that counted 2,000,000 members in 1900. While campaign clubs were standard in the 1800s, they were usually locally controlled and devoted to mobilizing voters. These new clubs were distinct from the regular party apparatus, formed under the aegis of the national committee, met continuously between campaigns, and were devoted to the substantive discussion of literature distributed by the national parties. They became conduits of partisan doctrine, influencing local electorates and informing the national party of popular sentiment.

James Clarkson, a long-time member of the Republican National Committee, devised the Republican League as part of a recommendation that the Committee “do itself the justice of perfecting a systematic organization, whereby all voters could be reached and made to understand our principles,” without the intervention of the state organizations. Clarkson’s plan suggests the ambitious scope of late nineteenth century party reform: this was no routine partisan machination, but a change in how parties were organized. This shift involved the creation of “thorough . . . plans for reaching the people as a mass, and yet with so much system as to reach them with especial appeals to them in their respective interests or classes.”

As Clarkson wrote later, this was “the method of the new generation; just as. . . all other kinds of business have been revolutionized,” the parties revolutionized campaigning. Traditional parties issued vague platforms and delegated campaign work to local organizations; the clubs enabled the national committees to promote a coherent platform across the nation, even while tailoring party appeals to specific interests. The old methods produced unclear mandates and allowed local politicians to obscure the meaning of national partisanship; at worst they alienated those voters most affected by industrialization and thus at the periphery of local power. The new methods built a loyal constituency mobilized behind a national leadership and committed to programmatic agendas. Even as the clubs were disbanded in the twentieth century, their reconstruction of organizational structure shaped twentieth century party politics.

Unlike Progressive reformers, these mid-level national leaders believed that revived partisan organizations could enrich democratic politics. Unlike machine politicians, they doubted that a decentralized network of local party franchises could sustain popular legitimacy in an industrial state facing problems of increasingly national scale. The former eschewed parties as corrupt and parochial; the latter defended the status quo despite the changed circumstances of the late 1800s. Reformers within the parties strengthened the electorate’s loyalty to the national organizations and generated partisan mandates for policy change in ways that neither Progressives nor machines could. These reforms set precedents for twentieth century party organization.

METHODOLOGY

Scholars weakly understand how parties in the nineteenth century—a period of party vitality—relate to parties in the twentieth century—when parties were said to be in decline. This is due partly to political scientists' reluctance to engage in archival research, and partly to the discipline's penchant for appealing to the more dramatic events and personages in history, rather than the subtle and incremental movements in which historians excel. This is being challenged by the burgeoning field of American Political Development, which encourages political scientists to understand historical methods in an attempt to refine their use of history.

The Library of Congress houses the papers of a number of figures who were essential to the shift in party organization. Because these mid-level party officials, less concerned with preserving the purity of their political legacy, were often more frank in writing about party organization, these sources are particularly rich. Much of the logic behind party reforms was not made public, so access to the private correspondence and records of party leaders is important for three reasons. First, national party leaders were not acting on theory, but were responding to specific challenges reported to them by their correspondents at the local level. Their letters to allies in the party clubs and in local organizations sympathetic to national goals describe the difficulties of managing national party affairs in the traditional structure, and explain the emergence of an organizational alternative.

Second, archival evidence suggests the material sources of voter discontent to which party leaders responded. Because these national leaders sought to link reform to conditions within the electorate, their papers address issues that concerned voters in detail, and suggest the policy concerns that national leaders hoped to resolve. Observing change at the national level is important but should be linked to specific motives at the local level, and too few existing works examine the interaction between national, state, and local party organizations.

Finally, a substantive analysis of the national leaders' critique of the old organizations and their hopes for renewed national party democracy is needed. To determine the usefulness of their political thought, scholars need to know to what extent were these reforms grounded in modern concepts of party democracy, and to what extent they were grounded in self-serving political power. Comprehensive analysis of the notes, letters, and speeches of these mid-level figures will reveal the extent to which their reforms reflect theoretical consistency or partisan strategy.

AUDIENCE

Though completed in a political science framework, this project contributes to the humanities in two senses. First, party history continually proves its relevance to the present day, as television pundits and party literature constantly refer to the historical antecedents of the parties. In the 2004 election

the Bush campaign's reference to the McKinley realignment of 1896 was cited as a formative ambition of the president's close advisors. Yet it is impossible to understand party history merely by reference to prominent party leaders when it is organizational structure that provides the most historical continuity to an otherwise fluctuating party label. Making sense of history requires making sense of organizational change.

Second, the interdisciplinary nature of this project is designed to explore how historical methodology and resources can be used by political scientists. The historian's craft can illuminate the nuances of change over time, which are essential to political analysis on a long-term scale. This invites discussion across the fields of history and political science, reinforcing their complementary natures. Additionally, nineteenth century party history is an area in which both disciplines have invested, and which thus poses opportunity for collaboration.

WORK PLAN

Specific collections to be consulted include the James Clarkson papers, the Louis Michener papers, the John Hay Letters, the Matthew Stanley Quay papers, the George Cortelyou papers, and recent additions to the Grover Cleveland papers. Other collections will be identified as work progresses. The Joseph Wannamaker papers in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania will also be of use. Additional research into popular press collections located at the Library of Congress, the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, MA, and at Harvard University's Widener Library in Cambridge, MA, will fill in details about popular reaction to the events described in these private papers.

The project will result in the completion of a manuscript which presently is divided into three topical units, focusing respectively on organizational structure at the local, state, and national levels. Each unit contains two chapters, the first of which explains the traditional party mode and its limitations, the second of which explains how national party leaders attempted to overcome these limitations. Archival research already completed in the nineteenth century press and in manuscript collections provides the base of these chapters, and will be supplemented by the research conducted during tenure with the NEH.

Material from the two chapters on the national level has been presented at the Social Science History Association, and will be published this December in *Presidential Studies Quarterly*. Material from the chapters on state parties and on national parties has been presented at the New England Political Science Association and the Southern Political Science Association, and will be presented at the American Political Science Association in August 2005. Material from the chapters on local party politics was presented at the 2005 meeting of the Urban Affairs Association. Each of these presentations has resulted in valuable feedback for directing future research questions.

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COLLECTIONS LOCATED IN THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS,
MANUSCRIPT DIVISION

James G. Blaine Papers

James S. Clarkson Papers

Grover Cleveland Papers (new additions not on Microfilm)

George B. Cortelyou Papers

Henry L. Dawes Papers

Joseph B. Foraker Papers

Benjamin Harrison Papers
John Hay Letters
Louis Michener Papers
Progressive Party National Committee
Matthew Stanley Quay Papers
Gideon Welles Papers

OTHER MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS

Joseph Wannamaker Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania

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Ashland [Wisconsin] Daily News
Atlanta Constitution
[Boston] Daily Advertiser
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