

“NEW DEAL REPUBLICAN:”
JAMES A. RHODES AND THE TRANSFORMATION
OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY, 1933-1983

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Ohio governor James Allen Rhodes (1909-2001) lived both an authentic American success story and an embellished populist myth. The son of a coal miner, Rhodes survived the insecurity that characterized the lives of early twentieth-century working-class Americans, matured after an extended adolescent aimlessness, and became Ohio's most powerful governor. He also exaggerated key parts of his biography and omitted other events in order to authenticate his credentials as a champion of the common man. From this odd mix of fact and fiction emerges a story of an important but overlooked politician.

This dissertation is the first full length investigation into Rhodes' life and political career, placing him in a larger context of regional political change, the rise of the consumer culture, and the working-class origins of populist economic security. Before Rhodes, Midwestern Republicans opposed the New Deal and saw nothing more than slavery in Democratic President Franklin D. Roosevelt's promise to deliver economic security to American voters. As Ohio's longest serving governor (1963-1971 and 1975-1983), as a child of the insecure working class, and as a young politician maturing in the 1930s, Rhodes made security the central part of his Republican philosophy. That concern led him to challenge Midwestern Republican orthodoxy, pioneer Republican Party efforts to

capture the working-class vote, and attempt to radically alter the Rustbelt economy of the Midwest.

Dedicated to my parents

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INTRODUCTION

“NOT FIT TO SLEEP WITH THE HOGS.”¹

RHODES, REGION, AND REPUBLICANISM

Ohio governor James Allen Rhodes (1909-2001) lived both an authentic American success story and an embellished populist myth. The son of a coal miner, Rhodes survived the insecurity that characterized the lives of early twentieth-century working-class Americans, matured after an extended adolescent aimlessness, and became Ohio's most powerful governor. He also exaggerated key parts of his biography and omitted other events in order to authenticate his credentials as a champion of the common man. From this odd mix of fact and fiction emerges a story of an important but overlooked American politician.

Journalists have published the only histories of Rhodes. These essay length overviews cover his sixteen years as Ohio's governor from 1963-1971 and 1975-1983. They recall his engaging personality, appreciate his political talents, and criticize him for being a short-sighted politician. When most people remember Rhodes – and increasingly that number is fewer and fewer -- they

¹ James Rhodes summarizing how Democrats described him. Republicans, Rhodes said, defended him and said he was in fact fit to sleep with the hogs. Stanley Aronoff and Vernal G. Riffe, eds., James Rhodes at Eighty (Columbus, OH: n.p., 1989), p. 39.

remember specific, unrelated actions rather than complex, long-term patterns. Positive stories include his crisis leadership during a blizzard in 1978 and Rhodes' Raiders, the development team he sent to other states and nations to attract business to Ohio. The most important negative event was the May 4, 1970 tragedy at Kent State University. Rhodes sent the Ohio National Guard there to quell campus unrest. Guardsmen opened fire on anti-war protesters and bystanders. Four were killed, nine wounded.

As these specific events recede from memory, Rhodes becomes less than real, distorted even, much like the statue that stands outside of the downtown Columbus state office building that bears his name. Affecting a too-trim physique, a button-down business suit, and an ever-present briefcase, the statue subdues his spontaneous, earthy vitality and his forceful, constant motion. Just as the statue hides the real Rhodes, the most commonly repeated anecdotes and published essays fail to suggest his subtle legacy.² This dissertation will contribute to our understanding of Rhodes by placing him in the larger context of regional political change, the rise of the consumer culture, and the working-class origins of the populism of security.

Chapters One and Two analyze the major strains of Midwestern Republicanism that Rhodes encountered when he started in politics in the 1930s and 1940s. When he first began in local Republican politics, the party was struggling with the legacy of nineteenth-century Republicanism. It was rooted in

² The only published works on Rhodes to date are Richard G. Zimmerman, "Rhodes' First Eight Years, 1963-1971," and Lee Leonard, "Rhodes' Second Eight Years, 1975-1983," in Alexander P. Lamis, ed., Ohio Politics (Kent, OH: The Kent State University, 1994), pp. 59-83 and 101-135.

a producer culture worldview, one that emphasized hard work, thrift, delayed gratification, and character. Material scarcity rather than abundance shaped the reality of most American's circumstances. A religious impulse animated Midwestern Republicans. They sought to pursue their own self-interest even as they served others. Many Midwesterners turned to various crusades to enact that moral spirit: anti-slavery, temperance, and Progressive era political, economic, and social reforms. Their activity in the public sphere stemmed from the private beliefs. As historian Andrew Cayton wrote, middle class "morality was to the Middle West what racism was to the South, the central, defining issue in people's lives."³

And yet in the late nineteenth century a new impulse began to challenge that middle class morality. Working class people started to agitate not for moral reform but for material security. Instead of freedom through opportunity and dignity through free labor, working class people pushed for a "living wage," defining their freedom in terms of their ability to consume. They were not in pursuit of middle class status and their push to consume was not a capitulation to capitalism. Their struggle for a "living wage" was rather a critique of capitalism and an assertion of their value as human beings in a capitalist system that often degraded them through dirty, dangerous, deskilled work.⁴

³ Andrew Cayton, "The Middle West," in William Barney, ed., A Companion to 19th-Century America (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), p. 284.

⁴ See, for example, Lawrence B. Glickman, A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of a Consumer Society (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997) and Ronald Edsforth, Class Conflict and Cultural Consensus: The Making of a Mass Consumer Society in Flint, Michigan (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987).

The workers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were leaders in the making of a consumer society. This put them directly at odds with Midwestern Republicans whose political philosophy was inseparable from the producer ethic. Instead of hard work, thrift, and delayed gratification, workers spoke of spending and leisure, not because they were lazy and improvident but because they were asserting a set of class concerns within the market system.

The key was security. This working-class concern became the common element that stitched together the hodge-podge, patchwork reforms called the New Deal. Historian David Kennedy wrote that “the New Deal left in place a set of institutional arrangements that constituted a more coherent pattern than is dreamt of in many philosophies. That pattern can be summarized in a single word: security.” It was the “leitmotif of virtually everything the New Deal attempted.”⁵

Because James Rhodes had a working-class background and because he came of age politically during the New Deal, Rhodes made security the central part of his Republican philosophy. Security was his contribution to the Republican Party, and that is why I call him a “New Deal Republican.” He never used the term himself and in fact never used any term to describe his philosophy. Of political ideology he would admit only that he tried to find out what the people wanted and then tried to give it to them. The term “New Deal Republican” actually was an epithet used by conservative Republicans (mostly in Ohio) to describe Republicans who sold out, who embraced the Roosevelt revolution in

⁵ David Kennedy, Freedom from Fear: The American people in Depression and War, 1929-1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 365.

order to win votes. These Republicans had given up on true freedom in exchange for crass materialism.

The charge of New Deal Republicanism would follow Rhodes throughout his career. For Rhodes, however, material security transcended party labels and presidential administrations. His concern for security stemmed from his working-class background. In Chapters Three and Four I examine that background. My arrogance and presumption aside, I try to reclaim Rhodes' youth from Rhodes, and the myths he created over a six decade long political career. His stories always contained bits of truth, misdirection, and fabrication. I reconstruct his early years, beginning with those stories but pushing beyond them to see what the myths tell us about the truth.

The truth is that security mattered to him, and his political agenda was an expression of that concern. But that led him to challenge party orthodoxy, to challenge the very basis of the Midwestern Republican legacy he inherited. He struggled with party regulars to control what the party stood for. In chapters Five, Six, and Seven I document this struggle. Chapter Five turns away from Rhodes briefly to explain how Ray Bliss, chairman of the Ohio Republican Party from 1949-1965 and chairman of the national Republican Party from 1965-1969, reshaped the party organization to accommodate someone like Rhodes – perhaps not Rhodes specifically but someone like him. Chapters Six and Seven connect Rhodes' working class background to his political style and policy innovations. Chapter Eight describes the evolution of Rhodes' working-class politics and traces the decline of security as a potent political issue.

In the rise and fall of security we see why Rhodes was important in the Republican Party. In 2002, conservative political columnist George Will recently described the essential difference between conservatives of Robert Taft's generation and their successors in the post-Ronald Reagan era. "The conservatism that defined itself in reaction against the New Deal, minimal-government conservatism, is dead." Pre-Reagan conservatives like Taft had been "doomed to perpetual disappointment as marginal critics of an uncongenial political culture." By 2002, however, Republican President George W. Bush had "positioned his party as 'pro-choice' where it will matter most to most Americans in coming years:" choice in attending schools, in investing Social Security taxes, and in shopping for health care plans.⁶ Abortion is purposefully and conspicuously absent from his list, but Will correctly detected a shift in conservative thinking. To legitimate that shift, Will eliminated Robert Taft from the conservative's list of heroes. Though formerly known as Mr. Republican, Taft was now merely a "marginal critic" because he never spoke about choice. Choice has come to replace security as the political keyword, but the two are related. The rise of security as an issue was directly related to the rise of the consumer culture. The rise of choice, in turn, represented an evolution of the politics of the consumer culture. Taft was a "marginal critic" of the consumer culture; Bush fully embraced it.

What happened to turn conservative Republicans from critics to supporters of the consumer culture? Rhodes happened. When Rhodes focused

⁶ Columbus Dispatch, 4/25/02, p. A17.

the party on security, he brought the consumer culture within the GOP, pushing out Taft's producer culture values. But when Rhodes and other New Deal Republicans made the GOP a congenial place for the consumer culture, they created an environment that encouraged the development of a new kind of conservative, a conservative in sync with the rhythms of the consumer citizen and fundamentally incompatible with his nineteenth century ancestor, the producer-era American.

Republicans since the late 1960s have articulated an increasingly sophisticated though often incomplete message of choice, claiming to offer new policies that give back Americans control of their economic and political lives. They have articulated a new kind of populism: anti-statist, free market populism that promises to protect average people not from the vagaries of insecurity as Rhodes did, but from effete, controlling, distant bureaucrats. However different they may be, Rhodes and the practitioners of this new populism have the consumer culture in common, and have Rhodes to thank for transforming Republicans from a "marginal critics" to a full supporters of the consumer culture.⁷

The rise of the new populists had two ironic consequences. First, they killed off Rhodes' populism of security and replaced it with populism of control. Security, implied the new populists, meant lack of freedom while control returned

⁷ On the new populism, see, for example, David Greenberg, Nixon's Shadow: The History of an Image (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2003); Michael Kazin, The Populist Persuasion: An American History (New York: BasicBooks, 1995); Dan T. Carter, The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, The Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995); and Matthew Dallek, The Right Moment: Ronald Reagan's First Victory and the Decisive Turning Point in American Politics (New York: The Free Press, 2000).

it. Rhodes began to adapt to the new populism late in his career. He did so just enough to win two more terms in the 1970s and 1980s. Though he extended his career, his adaptation cost him the issue of security. The second irony is that this new populism has often been centered in the South, Southwest, and West. Its regional flavor made Rhodes a reluctant regionalist. He never spoke of region, but the force of the new populists and the force of the economic and demographic growth that fueled them signified a shift. The Midwest, with its rust, with its aging population, with its miles of transportation networks that once made it a flourishing region but now helped people and businesses move out, was dying, and so to was security. In the 1960s, Rhodes became a spokesman for that dying political culture and economic system.

I met Governor Rhodes near the end of his life. He was living in a senior care facility in Columbus, Ohio. He greeted me in the lobby. He was in a wheelchair, not because he could not walk but because his poor balance made it difficult to walk. He wore dress slacks and dress shoes, and an Oxford shirt unbuttoned at the neck. He had a sport coat, too, with a snazzy, colorful pattern one sees more on the golf course than anywhere else. We shook hands. His grip was firm, his eyes focused on the face of his visitor.

About halfway through our conversation, a nurse pushed another resident into the lobby. He looked every bit the stereotypical senior care facility resident. He was slumped in his wheelchair and hooked up to an oxygen tank, lifeless as one could possibly be. He was not in the lobby waiting for someone. No one

came to see him anymore. He was in the lobby to see other people; not to talk to them, or shake hands with them, or in anyway make real contact. The staff probably forced him to leave his room every so often. They probably deposited him in the lobby where he could watch a small part of the world go by. I noticed him and glanced at Rhodes to see if he had any reaction. His eyes darted in that direction once or twice, but he did not say anything or change his facial expression.

After Rhodes and I finished our conversation, I started to walk toward the door, passing the frail, lonely man on my way. I kept going, not thinking twice about the “object” inconveniently parked right in the middle of the busiest path in the building. The thought did not occur to me then, but now the nurse’s action was purposeful: she placed him there to make it difficult for anyone to avoid even the most casual contact with the man. Preoccupied, I thwarted her plan. When I reached the door I turned to see Rhodes for what I assumed would be the last time. Just a quick check to see what he would do next, without an audience. He had quickly and quietly rolled his chair over to the man, slung one arm around his neck, grabbed his hand, and pushed his face to within a few inches of the man’s ear.

Suddenly the beaten, listless man was alive. His head jerked up, his eyes widened. A smile broke out on his face. Somehow Rhodes had summoned some of that old electricity, that elemental energy that forced him to always keep moving, that kept him from being another working-class kid in Springfield, Ohio who went to work at International Harvester, earned a good wage, raised a

family, and played in the industrial league softball games. Rhodes summoned some of that old electricity and shot it straight into the man. At 91 years old, Rhodes was still looking for the next hand to shake, joke to crack, and promise to make. At 91 years old, Rhodes was still campaigning.

And whether he was “fit to sleep with the hogs” or not, James Allen Rhodes had made that old guy’s day.

CHAPTER 1
THE LINCOLN IDEAL IN THE ERA OF PRODUCERISM:
FREEDOM AND SECURITY, 1865-1920

Though he claimed to be adverse to the abstract, Ohio Republican James Allen Rhodes played a pivotal role in the ideological transformation of his party. In the early 1930s, when Rhodes first entered local politics in Columbus, national Grand Old Party (GOP) leaders offered countless screeds against the New Deal and little hope of campaign victories. Often dismissed by historians as so much “fatuous intensity,” the Republican attack on the New Deal nevertheless marked an important shift in American politics.¹ The shift involved a struggle between two value systems, a nineteenth-century producer ethic and a twentieth-century consumer culture. A crisis for entrenched GOP leaders, the New Deal provided a new generation of Republicans with an opportunity to recast the party. Rhodes voted for change, both because his biography suggested different values than his party elders and because he believed his political survival hinged on philosophical change.

In the Midwest, Republicans struggled to define the party, wavering between the producer and consumer cultures. Important Midwestern

¹The phrase describing conservative opposition to the New Deal belongs to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Roosevelt: The Coming of the New Deal, (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1958), p. 496.

Republicans such as Ohioan Robert Taft (United States Senator from 1938-1953) resisted the rise of the consumer culture and its attendant political economy. This order challenged the nineteenth-century producer ethic, a set of values that served as the foundation for the Republican Party. These Republicans often abandoned the complexity of Abraham Lincoln's legacy to the party, a philosophy that accounted for the cupidity of man but persistently placed value on social justice to dignify the market system.

In 1938, Ohio Republican Robert A. Taft (1889-1953) won the first of three terms as a United States Senator and emerged as a nationally known critic of the New Deal. In his analysis of the New Deal, Taft drew on the cultural and political traditions of the Midwest. Dwight Eisenhower's defeat of Taft for the GOP presidential nomination in 1952 ended mainstream political opposition to the culture and politics of consumerism and diminished the relevance of a peculiar Midwestern tradition that allowed for the interplay of selfishness and sacrifice in American politics. This useful, if often misused, tradition defined the dignity of the individual independently of material security. A pragmatist, Rhodes inherited Taft's obsolete doctrines. In order to win and thus ensure his livelihood, Rhodes contributed to a change in the party's conceptual framework, exchanging a regionally distinct and floundering political philosophy for a nationally standardized and successful model. This change redefined the word freedom. For Taft, freedom meant opportunity. For Rhodes, freedom meant economic security. At stake was the legacy of Abraham Lincoln. Did one achieve freedom through the dignity of opportunity or through the dignity of economic security?

From the 1865 through the 1920, the legacy of Lincoln shaped how politicians approached public policy. Each generation dealt differently with the paradox inherent in the legacy: balancing the selfish nature of humans with altruistic impulses. From 1865 through 1920, progressive reformers and proponents of the status quo battled for the right to apply Lincoln to the urban, industrial, corporate world that developed after the Civil War. Advocates of change and stand-patters offered two Lincolns: a Lincoln who sought to ensure humanity in the new economic system and a Lincoln who defended individual and property rights in the free market. Though Rhodes rarely mentioned Lincoln except in the most prosaic and platitudinous ways, the legacy of Lincoln and nineteenth century Republicanism shaped the political options available to Rhodes. A discussion of the history of the Lincoln legacy provides necessary background for the changes Rhodes wrought on the Republican Party.

In the early 1850s, the Republican Party's ideological underpinnings developed amidst the nativist movement and anti-southern, "Slave Power" conspiracies. Republicans, however, also relied on a set of principles associated with market capitalism.² The success of the Republican Party, in fact, marked the solidification of a competitive, acquisitive, individualistic economy. Sobriety, self-reliance, discipline, delayed gratification, and character contributed to one's ability to rise socially and economically. The end was economic independence; the means was hard work. Republicans therefore exalted free

² See, for example, William Gienapp, Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-54, (New York: Oxford University, 1985). See also, Michael Holt, The Political Crisis of the 1850s, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc, 1978).

labor. In it, Republicans found the opportunity to improve one's condition. In opportunity, Republicans found the source of individual dignity within capitalism.³

The Republican Party was, as well, the political expression of an emerging middle class, Midwestern worldview.⁴ The Midwest originated in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, the document that framed the development of the territory now divided into Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin. The Ordinance outlawed slavery, made public education a priority, mandated religious freedom, and established the processes of governing the area. Thousands of Americans from diverse backgrounds and with different ambitions populated the Old Northwest in order to take advantage of economic opportunity. Given the fluid nature of economy and society in this nascent region, migrants attempted to act consistently with their past practices and values. They sought to recreate what was familiar to them and, at the same time, exploit the commercial possibilities that the region's natural resources offered. Yet without necessarily intending it, the people made their society into a bastion of commercial capitalism, a market economy integrated into the nation's political and economic system. "The rise of middle class values and the institutions of capitalism," concluded historians Andrew Cayton and Peter Onuf, "were synonymous with the rise of the Midwest."⁵

³ Eric Foner, Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) and Foner, Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995 [1970]), especially pp. 11-39.

⁴ Andrew Cayton and Peter Onuf, The Midwest and the Nation, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 84-102.

⁵ ibid, pp. 39-42, 84, 118. The quotation is on p. 118.

The Republican Party became the political agent for bolstering the economy and culture of the region. Republican leaders envisaged governments that shaped both the private and public worlds of their constituents. As a result, Midwestern Republicans blended morality and self-interest, connecting private ethical decisions to public economic activity. To be sober, industrious, and thrifty served as both a prescription for a moral life as well as a foundation for economic success.⁶

Republicans pushed temperance, for example, as a means to change the lives of workers. Sobriety fit well with the market values of self-restraint and orderly behavior. Drinking wasted resources better spent on self-improvement. Republicans sought to transform as well their physical environment. The creation of transportation networks, the support for education, and the establishment of financial channels to spur investment all required a positive role for state governments. As Richard Yates, the Republican governor of Illinois, said in 1865, “The war now being waged has tended, more than any other event in the history of the country, to militate against the Jeffersonian idea that ‘the best government is that which governs least.’”⁷ Republicans built their state governments to support, materially and spiritually, a budding market system.

Two consequences flowed from the connections among the Midwest, the GOP, and market capitalism. First, Midwestern Republicans linked production to

⁶ Allen C. Guelzo, Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), pp. 57-63.

⁷ Cayton and Onuf, The Midwest and The Nation, p. 88, 92-95. The Yates quotation is on p. 94.

citizenship. A citizen's status as a producer defined his status as a citizen.⁸ This link caused problems for some members of society. Men, for example, often defined women as outside of the labor market, differentiating their sphere, and thus their citizenship, from men.⁹ The rise of industrial, corporate America, too, threatened the average worker's economic independence, a key element in citizenship.¹⁰

Second, an ideological paradox shaped the political economy not only of this region, but, over time, the nation as well. According to Cayton and Onuf, "part of the original appeal of bourgeois values lay in the promise of prosperity and salvation to those who could reconcile the demands of individual freedom and social responsibility."¹¹ Despite the value they placed on the acquisitive individual and his role within market capitalism, residents of this region maintained an interest in the greater good. Cayton and Onuf suggested that by the end of the nineteenth century, Midwesterners had failed to address this paradox creatively, and that, as a result, Midwestern society and culture ossified.

To the contrary, however, the promise remained vital into the twentieth-century. The paradoxical promise began with the rise of the Midwest and market

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 118.

⁹ Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, p. xxix.

¹⁰ The literature on the transformation of the workplace and in worker's lives in the late 1800s is vast. See such works as Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Knopf, 1975); David Montgomery, *Worker's Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); Daniel Nelson, *Frederick W. Taylor and the Rise of Scientific Management* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980). For an overview of Midwestern workers, see Daniel Nelson, *Farm and Factory: Workers in the Midwest, 1880-1990* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

¹¹ Cayton and Onuf, *The Midwest and the Nation*, p. 103.

capitalism. As the GOP and the Midwest became increasingly intertwined, the paradox defined the party as well as the region. After Abraham Lincoln's assassination, Americans identified this paradox as part of the Lincoln legacy to the nation. Because the legacy became synonymous with Lincoln, the Midwestern, Republican paradox informed national political debate well into the twentieth century.

From the 1880s through World War I, this promise of "prosperity and salvation to those who could reconcile the demands of individual freedom and social responsibility" kept Midwestern politicians and intellectuals nationally relevant. These Midwesterners based their ideology on past ideals but stayed vibrant by adapting the promise to a present dominated by industrialization, corporatization, and urbanization. In this period, the legacy of the Midwest and of the GOP was a debate over what freedom meant, how prosperity related to it, and where considerations of economic justice impinged on self-interest. This debate necessarily forced Americans to discuss the role of the government not just in creating prosperity, but also in defining and defending freedom and in describing and ensuring the dignity of the individual. This unique promise of Midwestern bourgeois values shaped the Progressive Era.¹²

These values were forged in the crucible of the Civil War. Republicans had hoped to use the crisis to create a new national political economy. They

¹² Rarely do scholars and almost never does the public at large consider the Midwest as a vibrant region in the early twentieth century. For initial explorations into this theme, see Kenneth H. Wheeler, "The Apex of Midwestern Culture?: Recent Historiography and Reinterpretations of the Midwest," Organization of American Historians, Midwest Regional Conference, Ames, Iowa, August 4, 2000. (copy in author's possession)

professed four basic tenets to their doctrine. First, labor created value. Without labor, no one could create capital. Labor, therefore, was the basis of capitalism. Second, all participants in the capitalist system had interests that harmonized rather than clashed. Both workers and employers worked toward prosperity and opportunity. Third, saving and investment, not consumption, led to prosperity. As the head of the Ohio Bureau of Labor Statistics wrote in 1888, there was “glory in the spirit of money-making and money-keeping” and delight in “the accumulating possibilities of thrift and enterprise.”¹³ Fourth, the state built the framework of the economy within which individual effort flourished, meaning that government was consistent with, rather than inimical to, individual initiative. The ideal system would create a nation of independent, prosperous, socially mobile producers, free of all binds except voluntary ties.¹⁴

The unintended consequences of Republican wartime measures, however, created a political economy at odds with the party’s antebellum ideals. Instead of a society of small manufacturers, farmers, and independent, ambitious laborers, the party’s policies encouraged the rise of corporate, industrial America. The state, instead of nurturing opportunity and dignified, free labor, allowed bureaucracies to monopolize wealth and denigrate labor. At the core of this irony, historian Heather Cox Richardson concluded, was not greed “but self-righteous optimism.” A sense of economic justice had contributed to laws that enabled workers to prosper and advance according to their effort and not their

¹³ Ohio Bureau of Labor Statistics, Annual Report (Columbus, OH, 1888), pp. 1568-1569.

¹⁴ Heather Cox Richardson, The Greatest Nation of the Earth: Republican Economic Policies During the Civil War, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). Cayton and Onuf, The Midwest and the Nation, p. 118.

station. Republicans, however, failed to account for narrowly defined self-interest and held fast to a theory born, in part, of religious faith, but rapidly proven irrelevant in an age of bureaucratization, urbanization, and industrialization.¹⁵

These economic developments and their attendant social problems led to the Progressive Era, a period when Americans sought to redress the imbalances of corporate, industrial capitalism. Scholars have produced numerous works that demonstrate the diversity of peoples and priorities that made progressivism work.¹⁶ The core Progressives, however, came from the educated, professional, middle and upper classes who were native born, Protestant, and white. Though they had varied political affiliations and occupations, these Progressives shared in common the belief in the Midwestern paradox that shaped bourgeois capitalism: balancing personal liberty and social responsibility led to both an individual's and a society's prosperity and salvation. Though it originated in the economic and cultural development of a particular region, this paradox forced Americans to consider how their self-interest meshed with the common good, leading to a movement that tried to temper the excesses and negative consequences of the market economy. By the early 1900s, Americans had

¹⁵ Richardson, The Greatest Nation of the Earth, pp. 251-259. The quotation is on p. 251.

¹⁶ Among the many works on the Progressive Era, see, for example, Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R., (New York: Knopf, 1955); Samuel P. Hays, The Response to Industrialism, 1885-1914, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); Robert H. Wiebe, The Search for Order, 1877-1920, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); David P. Thelen, The New Citizenship: Origins of Progressivism in Wisconsin, 1885-1900, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1972); Arthur S. Link and Richard L. McCormick, Progressivism, (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1983); Theda Skocpol, Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political origins of Social Policy in the United States (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Daniel T. Rodgers, Atlantic Crossing: Social Politics in a Progressive Age (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998). Daniel T. Rodgers offered an overview of the literature to that date in "In Search of Progressivism," Reviews in American History, 10 (December 1982): 113-32.

assigned the previously regional paradox to a national symbol, Abraham Lincoln, the moral guide from beyond for Progressive reformers.

The spirit of Lincoln animated Progressivism, sustaining from the 1880s through 1920 an altruistic drive for individual reform and the moral regeneration of American society. Scholars have discussed the significance of Lincoln to the Progressives in a multitude of works, yet have missed how this theme relates to changes in the Republican Party. In his 1958 Altgeld's America: The Lincoln Ideal Versus Changing Realities, Ray Ginger dealt directly with the enduring influence of Lincoln. Quoting Ralph Waldo Emerson, Ginger asserted that "The history of reform is always identical; it is the comparison of the idea with the fact."¹⁷ Progressives compared the fact of modern, industrial life to the idea of Lincoln, and found that fact needed reform. In their resurrection of Lincoln, though, progressive reformers had to overcome obstacles. The Lincoln myth evoked a rural, white, Protestant, pastoral, individualistic life while reality forced recognition of a brutish, urban, ethnically diverse, regimented, bureaucratic life. Lincoln served as a model to the Progressives not because Lincoln was immediately familiar with late nineteenth-century urbanization, immigration, and industrialization. Rather, he played the same role for Progressives that George Washington did for Americans in the early Republic. Lincoln's life story, however fractured, exaggerated, and mythologized, served as a model for citizenship in the new world. When Progressives celebrated the Lincoln who pushed not only

¹⁷ Ginger, Altgeld's America: The Lincoln Ideal Versus Changing Realities, (Quadrangle Books: Chicago, IL, 1958), p. 1.

for the expansion of capitalism, but also spoke about dignity and equality within that system, they told as much, if not more, about their values than Lincoln's.¹⁸

Moreover, the legacy of Lincoln was complex. Intellectual historian John Patrick Diggins identified contradictory strands to Lincoln's philosophy, contrary ideas that Lincoln reconciled into a coherent synthesis. Lincoln was a moralist in search of Truth who bobbed and weaved with fact to suit political expediency. He was a Christian thinker of no particular sect who injected religious justice into mercenary behavior. He acknowledged the presence of ambition and profit-seeking in human nature, yet tempered those drives with a sense of sin and sacrifice.¹⁹

In the context of this complexity, Americans stretched the memory of Lincoln in different directions. After the Civil War, people satisfied with the economic status quo justified their position with one aspect of Lincoln's philosophy. They venerated that part of the Lincoln ideal that viewed disciplined, obedient wage-work in the market economy as a key to self-worth and improvement. These values, on one hand, formed the foundation for the "American Dream." Hard work, thrift, and character allowed the individual to take advantage of opportunity and to prosper in the market economy. Individuals could rise above the station into which they were born.²⁰ Yet, on the other hand, inequalities of wealth and power derived from hard work and character; thus,

¹⁸ Barry Schwartz, Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 107-187.

¹⁹ John Patrick Diggins, On Hallowed Ground: Abraham Lincoln and the Foundations of American History, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 1-40.

²⁰ Gabor S. Boritt, Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

inequality of outcome was only natural. Justifiers of privilege evaluated an individual's and a society's moral worth by economic progress.²¹ Advocates of government programs to protect the weak or ameliorate their condition were, therefore, misguided. "The balanced paradoxes of Lincoln were gone," Ray Ginger ruefully noted. "In their stead was the single goal of Success."²²

Reformers, rather than despair over the possibility of failure, acted to restore those "balanced paradoxes." Lincoln, according to Ginger, inspired a diverse group of Progressives, including novelist Theodore Dreiser, social worker Jane Addams, and socialist Eugene V. Debs. Because Lincoln embodied for these activists key parts of the story of Christ, they found the principal paradox in the Bible. Their version of the Lincoln myth thus celebrated his "humility, his mystical identification with 'the people,'" and his death that summoned forth "sacrifice and atonement." The principal paradox was Matthew 10, verse 39: "He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." For Lincoln's sake, the Progressives found their lives not in themselves, but in a commitment to social justice and moral reformation.²³

In 1921, social gospel theologian Walter Rauschenbusch not only summarized this altruistic bent, but demonstrated the paradox. He contended that no one begrudged "Such wealth as a man can earn by evident ability and public service." Rauschenbusch objected, though, that "no one has yet been able to persuade the common sense of the people that the great fortunes of

²¹ Foner, Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men , pp. 38-39.

²² Ginger, Altgeld's America, p. 7.

²³ ibid, pp. 339 and 363.

capitalism are earned by useful ability.” Conceding “that the masterful men of wealth have done great things,” Rauschenbusch nevertheless charged “that they have mortgaged our children to their children to pay for it, and we instinctively withhold our love.” Rich men had gained the esteem of the public, including Ohio mayors Samuel “Golden Rule” Jones of Toledo and Tom Johnson of Cleveland. “But they won it by proclaiming their own wealth to be derived from injustice and by leading the people to an assault on the sources of it. Their civic religion began with an act of repentance and confession of sin...”²⁴ One could seek personal success respectably only as long as one balanced it with the social gospel, as long, that is, as one brought a contradictory sense of transgression, atonement, and humility to the accumulation of wealth and power.

Reformers blamed self-interested Americans for cheapening the legacy of Lincoln and using their patron saint for coarse ends. But these “professional altruists” too twisted what Lincoln was.²⁵ John Burnham, historian of the Progressive Era, asserted that altruism differentiated Progressives from any other reform movement. Interest in the public weal dominated the philosophy of all Progressives, whether social workers, politicians, or businessmen. Though the altruism found expression in many pieces of legislation, Burnham viewed the Progressives as essentially apolitical and anti-statist. Wary of the selfishness and ambition inherent in politics, Progressives created voluntary associations and tried to reform democracy, meaning that Progressives tried, as an all still too

²⁴ Walter Rauschenbusch, Christianizing the Social Order, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1921), pp. 304-305.

²⁵ The phrase belongs to Roy Lubove, The Professional Altruist: The Emergence of Social Work as a Career, 1880-1930, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

commonplace campaign slogan suggests, “to take politics out of politics.”²⁶

Lincoln the Christ-like figure might have proposed this very solution, but Lincoln the mere human never conceived of eliminating ambition and self-interest from public life. Just as the business class erased Lincoln’s emphasis on dignity and equality within the marketplace, the reformers purified Lincoln of his venial sins.

Historian Robert Crunden also noted the influence of Lincoln in the Progressive Era. “To progressives,” wrote Crunden, “Lincoln was not only a legendary hero who haunted their dreams and talked to their ancestors, but he was a living ideal against which they constantly measured themselves, their friends, and their leaders.”²⁷ As with Ginger and Burnham, Crunden focused on a variety of individuals. Progressives, therefore, ranged from Jane Addams, to philosopher John Dewey, and to politician Robert LaFollette. Crunden also included, however, architect Frank Lloyd Wright, insurance executive and composer Charles Ives, and poet Vachel Lindsay. As a group, these individuals created a progressive culture, a “climate of creativity” in which art, literature, and philosophy flourished.

Crunden’s artists and intellectuals also watched politics, though, especially the 1896 presidential election when Ohio industrialist and political mastermind Marcus Hanna engineered a victory for fellow Ohioan William McKinley. “So important to Midwestern progressives,” that election pitted two Midwestern candidates, Democrat William Jennings Bryan against Republican McKinley,

²⁶ John C. Burnham, in John D. Bunker, John C. Burnham, and Robert M. Crunden, Progressivism, (Rochester, VT: Schenkman Books, Inc., 1986 [1977]).

²⁷ Robert Crunden, Ministers of Reform: The Progressives’ Achievement in American Civilization, 1889-1920, (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, IL, 1984), p. 4.

who, in the minds of progressive intellectuals, represented, respectively, the forces of reform and reaction. For several progressive era intellectuals Hanna symbolized America, or at least America as these writers understood it. In a 1919 poem, Vachel Lindsay recalled 1896 with the words, "Where is McKinley, Mark Hanna's McKinley/ His slave, his echo, his suit of clothes?" Lindsay knew, however, that the hero, "the Heaven-born Bryan," had gone "where the kings and the slaves and the troubadours rest."²⁸

Lindsay was significant because he perceived that the GOP had distanced itself from its Midwestern paradox. The party of Lincoln, implied Lindsay, no longer served as the party of reform. Its leaders had declined from the sublime Lincoln to the crass Hanna. Lindsay mocked Lincoln's heirs in the GOP, "the elephant plutocrats" and the "low-browed Hanna" who promised "manna."²⁹ Lindsay's Republicans of 1919 no longer considered both halves of Lincoln's legacy, emphasizing, instead, economics at the expense of ethics. Voters needed to account and atone for their self-interest, not ignore or, worse, celebrate it. Lindsay himself confessed that he was unjust and unkind, but asserted that was precisely why he voted for justice and kindness.³⁰ As the Progressive Era closed in 1920, a disappointed Lindsay still sought this Christ-like leader, a Lincoln who allowed for human frailty yet transcended it.³¹

²⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 101-102.

²⁹ Vachel Lindsay, "Bryan, Bryan, Bryan, Bryan," in *Collected Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1969 [1925]), pp. 96-105.

³⁰ Lindsay, "Why I Voted the Socialist Ticket," *Collected Poems*, pp. 301-302.

³¹ Lindsay, "Abraham Lincoln Walks at Midnight," *ibid.*, pp. 53-54. On the importance of Lincoln to Lindsay's poetic imagination, see also Merrill D. Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 163-164. In 1919, Lindsay, repulsed by the narrow economic agenda of McKinley and attracted to the moral crusade of Bryan, offered

Throughout these fruitless searches, Lindsay lamented the ever more feeble Lincoln legacy within the GOP, the unbalancing, Ray Ginger might argue, of Lincoln's "balanced paradoxes."

His stinging criticisms of Marcus Hanna notwithstanding, Lindsay failed to command the sole Progressive Era interpretation of this Midwestern Republican. In 1912, Herbert Croly, the founder of the New Republic magazine, wrote a biography of Hanna, viewing him as a useful model of adaptation to corporate, industrial, urban America. Croly offered Hanna as an updated and personified version of Lincoln's legacy, a representative of the best that American economics and politics could create. The key for Croly was loyalty to traditional ideas, but flexibility to meet new challenges. Croly told of large corporations that created economies of scale, challenged existing concepts of capitalism and democracy, redefined the relationship between employer and employee, and skewed the distribution of wealth. "The balance of the whole system was upset," causing Americans to voice concern over how businessmen exercised economic power. Politicians had to respond.³² Hanna responded in a way that, to Croly, stayed true to past ideals yet adapted to new situations, a response Americans should have studied and copied.

Croly's Hanna adapted for industrial America a practice with roots in pioneer days: using self-interest to promote the common good. "The primary

impressionistic observations about a process of political change that historians would, fifty years later, detail and analyze. See Paul Kleppner, Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850-1900, (New York: Pub., 1970) and Richard Jensen, The Winning of the Midwest: Social and Political Conflict, 1888-1896, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

³² Herbert T. Croly, Marcus Alonzo Hanna: His Life and Work, (Macmillan: New York, 1923 [1912]), p. 470.

task of the pioneer," Croly wrote, "was that of appropriating and developing the land and natural resources of a continent, a task which combined and confused individual and social profits." This paradox was deeply seated within the American pioneer who was, fundamentally, "an aggressive, energetic, hopeful, grasping individual. He worked and fought primarily for his own advantage, but his individualism did not prevent him from being the maker of society." As they moved westward, Americans operated "on the theory that the individual and social profits were indistinguishable." The ideal American, in other words, pursued his self interests, yet, at the same time, invested in the greater good. Government encouraged the individual investor by stimulating economic activity. Social good accrued from the collection of well-meaning individual interests.³³

Whether his vision of pioneer America was right or wrong, Croly dealt with the problem of the Lincoln legacy. Croly defined the "most vital social and economic American tradition" as the problem of balancing self-interest and concern for the common good.³⁴ Hanna embodied this tradition as he managed his industrial enterprises. He never merely made money as an investor or financier, nor did he acquire a business without intending to place his personal stamp on its management. He was, essentially, a combination of old and new management, at once a personal and local employer rooted in a specific place and familiar with his employees, yet also an organizer of sizable bureaucratic institutions that had national and international interests.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 467.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 466-467.

In this unusual combination, Croly found his reconciliation of Lincoln's paradox. Admitting inequalities of wealth and power between Hanna and his workers, Croly asserted that Hanna was more democratic than any of his peers. More quickly than they, Hanna recognized his employees' right to organize and bargain collectively. Croly's Hanna understood that his link to his "employees was a human as well as an economic relation." The "aggressive individualism of his private business life obtained dignity from its association with an essential task of social and economic construction." Croly concluded that "when, if ever, Mark Hanna's way of behavior towards his fellows becomes common instead of rare, we shall not need so much reform or so many reformers." Thus did Croly recognize the essential challenge facing American politics in the early twentieth century. By producing useful goods and treating his workers with a measure of dignity, Croly's Hanna created wealth for himself and society. Politicians had to build an activist political system based on these values.³⁵

If Lindsay's Hanna focused entirely too much on material values and Croly's Hanna balanced public and private interests, then William Allen White, the Kansas newspaper man, offered three different views of this seemingly enigmatic Midwestern Republican. In the 1890s, White had been a staunch Republican, fearful of the reforms that the Populists and Democrats had advocated. More out of emotion than logic, he claimed, White admired and was

³⁵ For Croly's description of Hanna's labor relations and business management, see *ibid.*, pp. 84-109. The quotations are from pages 95, 107, and 478 respectively. Labor historian Melvyn Dubofsky generally agrees with Croly's description of Hanna's openness to unions and collective bargaining, and even cites Croly's biography. See Dubofsky, *The State and Labor in Modern America*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), pp. 40-42.

devoted to Hanna, whom he saw as a protector of the country. Hanna impressed White as being “an earnest, honest, courageous, though somewhat hotheaded and impulsive man, not like the politicians who hid behind the mask of imperturbability.” The “forthright” Hanna often “sputtered on, even God-damned,” and, to the journalist’s liking, talked far too much for his own political good. In the 1890s, when many Midwesterners conflated Republicanism and patriotism, White’s support for Hanna derived from White’s “patriotic” interest in “national security.”³⁶

By the late 1920s, White had revised his view of Hanna, still taking a professional journalist’s pleasure in this colorful politician, yet beginning to question how Hanna’s action shaped society. White concluded that “little social altruism tinged the simplicity of [Hanna’s] creed.” He rejected welfare and uplift because “the failures in life were failures. He did not mince matters, nor go into heredity nor environment in locating the blame for their condition.”³⁷ Still, some of White’s first impression remained. Hanna’s efforts on behalf of business “were only incidentally corrupt; corrupt where he felt corruption a necessary weapon; for Hanna was the best of the plutocrats.”³⁸ White even respected the honesty of Hanna’s economic agenda, assigning its origins to Hanna’s character and experience. “Now, a man whose business leads him to the daily contemplation of men working in their undershirts is not going to sit down and dream up an

³⁶ William Allen White, The Autobiography of William Allen White, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), pp. 278-279, and pp. 274-275.

³⁷ William Allen White, Masks In A Pageant (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), pp. 220-221.

³⁸ ibid, p. 227.

economic system for a world full of men in Nile-green neckties and lavender trousers. The spectacle of human perspiration was never so shocking to a man of Hanna's habits and antecedents that any plan of his would eliminate it from human existence." No utopian dreamer, Hanna saw dignity in the tradition of "more work, more sweat, more business, more dividends," and aimed to provide more of each.³⁹ White concluded that Hanna worked "with material problems in a material way for material ends," and that "he was fair according to the lights of his generation."⁴⁰ By the late 1920s, then, White viewed Hanna no longer as a protector of the country, but as a necessary compromise. Hardly altruistic and generally lacking in moral imagination, White's Hanna of this period had moved away from Croly's Hanna, but nevertheless was socially useful because he tried to create an economic system that dignified toil. In the 1920s, then, a decade popularly known for its celebration of leisure, White, the old Midwestern, progressive Republican, found redemptive Hanna's appreciation of work.

In the mid 1940s, though, White revised his portrait of Hanna again. Hanna the quotable politician still attracted the journalist in White, so Hanna remained a "tender hearted brigand," and, "on the whole, he meant well." White was otherwise not so kind. White recalled in the 1940s that, in the early 1900s, he had become a reformer, a follower of Theodore Roosevelt. As a result, Hanna became part of "the plutocracy of a blithe, irresponsible immorality." Had Hanna lived past 1904, "perhaps he too would have seen how evil was his rollicking economic lechery; how badly those whom they robbed of pennies

³⁹ *ibid*, p. 206.

⁴⁰ *ibid*, p. 221.

needed the largess which those accumulated pennies made. But in the puckish impudence of his poaching, he did not see its sad consequences.”⁴¹ White now more nearly saw Hanna as did Vachel Lindsay. Reaching this conclusion in 1946, after the Great Depression and New Deal, White reinterpreted Hanna’s greed as socially destructive, but, significantly, unlike Lindsay, White sought redistribution of wealth rather than spiritual renewal.

Throughout his intellectual journey, White described different Hannas for different times, yet he judged each Hanna with a consistent standard. White constantly measured Hanna’s private actions against the social good he thought Hanna accomplished. After first meeting him, White the staunch Republican saw a Hanna who defended America from dangerous, demagogic reformers. The crassness of his business agenda was acceptable given the more meaningful fight. In the late 1920s, White grew uneasy with the rule of Hanna and his fellow plutocrats. Yet Hanna included disciplined, dignified, hard work in his economic theory, which redeemed him in the eyes of White. By the mid 1940s, though, White saw no social benefit in Hanna’s grab for money. Only a Hanna who redistributed wealth would have met White’s approval.

Three Progressive Era intellectuals, Lindsay, Croly, and White, clashed over the essential character of Hanna, an influential Midwestern Republican. They agreed, however, on the terms of the debate. Each writer assumed the same priority for American politics: balancing self-interest and a concern for the common good in order to maximize the dignity of the individual within a capitalist

⁴¹ White, Autobiography, p. 349-350.

system. This priority had originated in the ideological environment that connected the Midwest, market capitalism, and the Republican Party. The promise of that mix was alive in the twentieth century, but unfulfilled.

As they approached the 1920s, Americans had missed an opportunity to reconcile self-interest and altruism. Though debated, how precisely to extend both human dignity and capitalism still eluded Americans. Lincoln had offered a synthesis for his heirs, but they struggled to apply his philosophy to a society changed by corporations, machines, cities, and immigrants. Reformers and standpatters alike placed a priority on that part of Lincoln that justified one view of modern industrial society over another. Neither side fully explored the possibilities of Lincoln's legacy.

Reformers, tweaked Ohio-born writer Ambrose Bierce, ignored human nature as they sought to eliminate poverty, oppression, and disease. Bierce playfully asked what would happen “if reform reformed?” Without poverty, good and necessary human impulses like benevolence, providence, charity, and gratitude would disappear. Bierce concluded that “having no oppression to resist and no perils to apprehend, we no longer need the courage to defy, nor the fortitude to endure. Heroism is a failing memory and magnanimity a dream of the past; for not only are the virtues known by contrast with the vices, they spring from the same seed, grow in the same soil, ripen in the same sunshine, and perish in the same frost.” Conversely, George F. Babbitt, Midwestern writer Sinclair Lewis’ representative of the status quo, knew that Lincoln, had he been alive in 1920, would have campaigned for the candidate of “Sound Business.”

Dismissing the Lincoln who expressed concern for the dignity of the individual, this all too real fictional man of Zenith preached that uplift was "nothing in God's world but the entering wedge for socialism." Ignoring the Lincoln who valued economic mobility, Babbitt asserted that social work and settlement houses merely planted into the minds of working-class children "a lot of notions above their class."⁴² Americans by the 1920s still struggled to balance their narrow interests with impulses toward the greater good. Lincoln's paradox was still relevant to American society, but the tension signified the lack of a consensus on how to define individual dignity within capitalism.

Babbitt's presumptuous working class was crucial to the eventual resolution of the tension. Throughout much of the nineteenth century, workers considered wage earning as "wage slavery," a condition that degraded the individual. To work for another person was to be unfree. Wage earning was at best a temporary status to be endured only as long as a person saved or invested with the goal of becoming economically independent. As Lincoln said, "The man who labored for another last year, this year labors for himself, and next year he will hire others to labor for him." By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the rise of big business and the spread of the factory system ensured that most Americans worked for wages. While many workers still asserted the dream of independence, if not for themselves then at least for their children, persistent wage labor was increasingly the reality. How then could wage labor be dignified and free?

⁴² Ambrose Bierce, "If Reform Reformed," Cosmopolitan, Vol. 46, December 1909, p. 1; Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt, (Signet Classic: New York, 1998 [1922]), pp. 169-172 and p. 16.

The working class answered that question by leading a revolution in the definition of wage labor. They began to demand a “living wage.” American Federation of Labor president Samuel Gompers defined a living wage as “sufficient to maintain an average-sized family in a manner consistent with whatever the contemporary local civilization recognizes as indispensable to physical and mental health, or as required by the rational self-respect of human beings.” To workers, the living wage meant the ability to consume enough to provide for the family, engage in leisure, and participate in the community. The ideal antebellum American saved, invested, and owned. By the late nineteenth century, however, workers began to change that ideal. A worker was free because he or she earned security, and thus freedom, through high wages and consumption. Spending in the working class conception was not wasteful, but productive. In asserting the value of consumption, workers created the basis of a new “moral capitalism,” a capitalism that could contain both self interest and the pursuit of the common good. To fulfill Lincoln’s legacy, owners would have to meet wage earner demands for secure consumption.⁴³

From the 1930s through the 1950s, this working class innovation animated the debates amongst Midwestern Republicans. Could one find freedom through the security of consumption or did one have to find freedom in the opportunity to work? The cultural background of this political debate involved the shift from a producer culture to a consumer society. This cultural shift confused political

⁴³ This discussion of the living wage is based on Lawrence B. Glickman, [A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of A Consumer Society](#) (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), especially pp. 1-34, 155-162. Glickman quoted Lincoln on p. 12 and Gompers on p. 3.

loyalties and threatened the basis of Midwestern Republicanism. In the 1930s, James Rhodes began his political career just as the battle was at its height. He would have to choose which variety of Midwestern Republicanism he would support. Would he follow Robert Taft, the staunch defender of nineteenth century, producer culture Republicanism? Or would he strike out on his own, creating a new Republican Party?

CHAPTER 2
THE LINCOLN IDEAL AND CONSUMERISM
FREEDOM AND SECURITY, 1920-1952

In the 1920s, Americans changed Lincoln's legacy. At issue was still the problem of reconciling altruism and avarice and protecting individual dignity within capitalism. Americans, however, had transformed their society from a producer ethic into a consumer culture. For politicians, this shift created an occasionally confusing and an always complex set of loyalties, loyalties that influenced how Republicans and Democrats appealed to voters. During the 1930s and 1940s, New Dealers pursued policies that encouraged the consumer culture while its critics tended to oppose the New Deal. These people, however, were hardly consistent. On the one hand, some advocates of the consumer culture denounced the New Deal. Producer-oriented politicians, on the other hand, often failed to question the power of businessmen as they contributed to the rise of the consumer culture. Everybody involved made his case with Lincoln, twisting yet again the martyred president's myth.

Americans of the producer culture era espoused the value of thrift, hard work, and, above all else, character. These cultural ideals fit particularly well with the emerging market capitalism of the mid 1800s, a system that initiated workers

into a nascent bureaucratic, industrial work environment. Despite the relative increase of cheap, standardized goods, most Americans assumed economic scarcity. The ideal citizen, then, was a moral, disciplined, inner directed worker who out-produced his predecessors but who consumed just as little.¹

By the late 1800s, however, American production capabilities had expanded, allowing intellectuals to consider for the first time the consequences of material abundance. During the 1890s in particular, American economists and businessmen concluded that overproduction and underconsumption caused serious economic and social disruption. The problem, though, extended beyond the important technical question of smoothing out the process of production and distribution. Indeed, abundance required a new ideal citizen. Whereas the producer citizen worked hard, spent little, and disciplined himself for delayed gratification, the new consumer citizen valued spending, fulfilled desires, and sought immediate gratification through the consumption of material goods. Personality, moreover, challenged character as the essential trait to exhibit, transforming ideal behavior from sublimation of needs to self expression and individual empowerment.²

¹ On the ideals of the producer culture, see Warren Susman, Culture As History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century, (Pantheon Books: New York, 1984). Susman viewed the twentieth century as a struggle between the producer-consumer worldview and contrasted the two cultures throughout the book, but see especially p. xxiv. On the consumer culture in general, see also Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears, eds., The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983); Gary Cross, An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

² Susman, Culture As History, pp. xxiv and 280. On new intellectual approaches to abundance in the 1890s, see Daniel Fox, The Discovery of Abundance: Simon N. Patten and the Transformation of Social Theory (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967); Alan Brinkley, The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War, (Vintage Books: New York, 1996), pp. 67-71.

In the 1920s, the cultural clash between consumerism and the producer ethic intensified, but not until the 1930s and 1940s did Midwestern Republicans debate the public policy consequences of the consumer culture. Politicians, successful ones anyway, have never promised a return to scarcity, but, during the 1930s and 1940s, they did disagree about the meaning of prosperity. That conflict continued the debate over Lincoln's legacy. The rise of the consumer culture affected politics. Just as the consumer society required a new citizen, the new citizen needed a new politics. In this new world, politicians disputed whether or not widely distributed affluence constituted the moral side of Lincoln's equation, whether or not, in other words, secure access to material goods offered dignity and freedom to the individual.

New Dealers argued that they, and not the Republicans, had fulfilled Lincoln's legacy. As originally conceived, the Democratic New Deal began in 1933 with an attack on monopolies, "plutocrats," and "economic royalists." Led by President Franklin Roosevelt's boundless capacity to experiment, New Dealers devised numerous plans to end the Great Depression and reform the structure of modern capitalism. From 1933 to 1937, the dominant ideas that shaped the New Deal owed much to the American progressive past. Supporters of these ideas recognized the market's inability to create an orderly, efficient economic system. Most of their plans attempted to solve the predicaments of producers and only incidentally, if at all, attended to consumers. New Dealers thus designed government programs to foster solutions to the problems of production and to encourage cooperative industrial associations. Corporate

power, moreover, challenged individual freedom, prevented an equitable distribution of wealth, and threatened democracy. New Dealers wrestled with this problem, torn between the corporation's productive capabilities and its power to crush individual autonomy, torn between eliminating the evil of monopolies through anti-trust action and checking their negative influence through regulation. Thus, however intermittently and inconsistently, anti-monopoly sentiment shaped New Deal legal theories and policy initiatives.³

Two important factors, however, set the New Deal on a different path than progressivism. First, the New Dealers were different people than the progressives. Historian William Leuchtenburg described the essential difference between progressives and New Dealers as the difference between a sentimental moralist who believed people could change and a tough-minded, hard-nosed realist who scoffed at the possibility of uplift. "The progressive," wrote Leuchtenburg, "grieved over the fate of the prostitute" while New Dealers "would have placed [her] under a code authority." The cold calculation of production regulations came before the concern for moral reform, a concern rooted in the progressive's "Methodist parsonage mentality."⁴

The most important consequence of this change from moralism to realism was a new reliance on organization and collective action to achieve political and economic ends. Increasingly, individuals acted primarily as members of distinct

³ Ellis W. Hawley, The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966); Brinkley, The End of Reform, (Vintage Books: New York, 1996), pp. 31-64, 106-136.

⁴ William Leuchtenburg, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940, (Harper and Row: New York, 1963), pp. 338-339.

cultural and economic groups, often called anything from pressure groups or interest groups to special interests. The federal government served as a broker amongst the different organized interests. In a telling comment, Rexford Tugwell, an economist and New Dealer, said that “the New Deal is attempting to do nothing to people, and does not seek at all to alter their way of life, their wants and desires.” Tugwell pointed to the New Deal’s rejection of the impulse to reform individuals, an impulse that had shaped the Republican Party in its earliest days and had found expression in twentieth-century progressive reforms. At best, Tugwell’s words suggest New Dealers reformed institutions, not individuals, marking an abandonment of nineteenth-century individualism.⁵

The second factor that set the New Deal apart from Progressivism was the economic recession of 1937. It pushed New Dealers to rethink their policies. Ever mindful of the need to balance the budget and suspicious of deficit spending, Roosevelt, in the spring of 1937, cut government spending. By the winter of 1937, these cuts and other deflationary monetary measures, some influential New Dealers believed, diminished mass purchasing and led directly to the recession. It created, as historian Alan Brinkley concluded, “a new sense of urgency.” As a result, a new theory gained momentum within the administration. The problem of the depression was underconsumption, not over production. To solve the problem, policy makers considered using fiscal policy to stimulate mass purchasing power, even if deficits resulted. By the spring of 1938, a new policy idea found legitimacy. New Dealers now began to think of consumption as

⁵ ibid., p. 317.

important as production.⁶ Whereas Midwestern, antebellum Republicans idealized saving and investment as the path to prosperity, as of 1938 New Deal Democrats began to pursue the idea that consumption was crucial, taking the first step toward radically changing the Midwestern formula.

The experience of war pushed New Dealers to rearrange further what Midwestern Republicans considered a proper political economy. Reformers before the New Deal era viewed class as significant, defined freedom as economic independence, criticized economic centralization, and linked citizenship to one's role as a producer. By the end of World War Two, however, New Dealers had accommodated themselves to the presence of big business, had narrowed their definition of social progress to economic growth, had placed a higher priority on consumption than production in the search for prosperity, and had redefined citizenship so that it weakened a person's role as a producer and strengthened his role as a consumer. In this new environment, the federal government sought principally to stimulate mass purchasing power, making savings a secondary goal. Federal policy makers, moreover, tinkered with the business cycle in order to achieve full employment, avoiding a reform of the fundamental structure of the American economy.⁷

The push for full employment marked a changed direction of American politics, a hesitant and uneven change that eventually made individual freedom and dignity dependent on economic security and material abundance. At his unprecedented third inaugural in January 1941, Roosevelt delivered an uplifting

⁶ Brinkley, The End of Reform, pp. 65-85. The quote is on p. 85.

⁷ ibid, p. 265-271.

message that muted concern for material goals. Evoking the Bible, he said that “It is not enough to clothe and feed the body of this nation. For there is also the spirit. And of the three the greatest is spirit.” The spirit of America was, in fact, the foundation of its democracy.⁸ By August of 1941, the language changed slightly, reaffirming traditional values but hinting at philosophical innovations to come. The National Resources Planning Board argued that full employment was “the key to national prosperity as well as individual welfare. . .” The Board warned, though, that the government must not create full employment at the expense of free employment because “even material prosperity is not worth the price to men who cherish freedom and the dignity of man.” The rhetoric of federal officials in late 1941 presaged new goals, but still evoked an older definition of freedom that transcended material concerns.⁹

Beneath that persistent traditional rhetoric ran a current of change. In January 1941, even as he elsewhere waxed eloquent about the spirit of America, Roosevelt announced the “four essential freedoms,” two of which were rooted in material security. These “Four Freedoms,” freedom of speech and religion and freedom from want and fear, became, over the course of the war, America’s war goals and post-war ambitions. Roosevelt had not yet changed the definition of freedom, but he had created that possibility. Freedom from want and fear had less to do with the absence of control and more to do with the presence of

⁸ Samuel Rosenman, ed. The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, (New York: Harper and Bros., 1950), vol. #, pp. ??; James Macgregor Burns, Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom, (New York: Smithmark Publishers, 1996 [1970]), p. 35.

⁹ National Resources Planning Board, After Defense -- What?: Full Employment, Security, Up-Building America, (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1941), p. 1.

security.¹⁰ By the 1944 State of the Union message, the priorities of the federal government had clearly changed. Roosevelt said that “true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence.” He asserted that “People who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships are made.” “Necessitous men,” said Roosevelt, “are not free men.” He issued, therefore, an “Economic Bill of Rights,” a new list of rights “to assure us equality in the pursuit of happiness.” The rights included the “right to a useful and remunerative job” and the “right to earn enough to provide adequate housing and clothing and recreation.” With this speech, Roosevelt asserted a mutually reinforcing link between individual liberty and the collective, secure material welfare of all citizens.¹¹ Widely spread material abundance would now be the basis of “true individual freedom” and a just, stable society. As historian David Kennedy argued, whatever else the New Deal accomplished or failed to accomplish, however patchwork and improvised its programs, it “left in place a set of institutional arrangements that constituted a more coherent pattern than is dreamt of in many philosophies. That pattern can be summarized in a single word: security.”

Americans expressed the redefinition of freedom and the focus on jobs in both odd and understandable ways. In 1894, the Pabst Brewing Company had celebrated its fiftieth anniversary by giving away tin serving trays. In 1944, Pabst

¹⁰ David Potter, People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1954), pp. 137-138. David Kennedy, Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 469-470.

¹¹ Rosenman, ed., The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 13:40-42. Kennedy, Freedom from Fear, pp 363-380. The Kennedy quotation is on p. 365.

publicized its one-hundredth anniversary with an event that, given the wartime crisis, company officials thought more appropriate than handing out free trinkets. The brewery sponsored a contest for the best plan to achieve high post-war employment. The prize money totaled fifty-thousand dollars in war bonds. The competition was open to all United States citizens. Economists of all stripes, including government employees, soldiers, clergy, farmers, laborers, housewives, and doctors, submitted 35, 767 essays, said at the time to be the largest number of contestants ever for a popular contest.¹²

A professional economist, Herbert Stein, authored the winning essay. He allowed that government had a role in certain areas of modern life, but rejected identity group politics and connected unfettered economic behavior to freedom. Stein was then an economist with the War Production Board, but from 1972-1974 served President Nixon as chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors (CEA). In his plan, Stein, advocated a favorable political environment for business, calling for a prompt disposal of goods in government possession, a sale of government owned plant facilities not relevant to munitions production, and an elimination of price controls and production regulations within a year after the end of hostilities.¹³ Stein asserted that executing a successful free market within a

¹² The Winning Plans in the Pabst Postwar Employment Awards, (Milwaukee, WI: Pabst Brewing Company, 1944); New York Times, Dec. 2, 1943, p. 22 and May 18, 1944, p. 10; Emile Benoit-Smullyan, "Seventeen Post-War Plans: The Pabst Post-War Employment Awards," The American Economic Review, Vol. 35 (Mar., 1945), pp. 120-127; Lyle Fitch and Horace Taylor, eds., Planning For Jobs: Proposals Submitted in the Pabst Postwar Employment Awards, (Philadelphia, PA: The Blakiston Company, 1946); Herbert Stein, Presidential Economics: The Making of Economic Policy From Roosevelt to Reagan and Beyond, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), p. 391, n. 4. Leon Keyserling, who served President Truman as chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors from 1950 through 1952, won second place.

¹³ New York Times, May 18, 1944, p. 10.

democracy required that the masses understand the proper relationship of government and business. The American political and economic system would fail if the government made “frequent incursions into the market mechanism in pursuit of the temporary or imagined interests of particular groups.” “The high operation of a free, private, competitive economy,” Stein concluded, “is a necessary condition for the existence of political and personal liberties.”¹⁴

Partisan reaction to the winning essay reflected the political disagreements over how and why the government should create prosperity. John Milton Hancock, a Wall Street investment banker and partner with Lehman Brothers, delivered the keynote address at the awards ceremony. He observed that Americans were greatly concerned with post-war planning, commenting that it recently had been the “great indoor sport of the nation.” Hancock’s contribution to this “indoor sport” included a negative assessment of interest group politics and the broker state. The federal government must “abandon that habit of mind which induces whole groups to lean on Washington.” Federal policy should “spur individual responsibility and a withdrawal from the pressure group approach to the nation’s problems.” Government should reject the responsibility of providing jobs and should, instead, encourage individual initiative so that there were more employers and fewer employees. Hancock conceded that no one could compel someone to be an employer rather than an employee, but the government should make “the attempt to lead the natural leaders of men to become employers.” Only the “old proven economic principles” could restore prosperity. The “self-

¹⁴Herbert Stein, “A Plan for Postwar Employment,” in The Winning Plans in the Pabst Postwar Employment Awards, pp. 8-9.

reliant” would need to teach people “who have been inclined to rely upon others” the lessons of “the America we knew.” Hancock’s ideas originated in traditional Republican Party doctrine, doctrine that emphasized opportunity and mobility, that devised government policies to unleash individual initiative, and that celebrated the individual rather than the group.¹⁵

Though he glorified the rugged individual of past generations, Hancock transformed that ideal citizen from a producer into a consumer. In consumption, Hancock found that elusive harmony of interests among the classes, which nineteenth-century Republicans tried to find in production. Hancock’s reviled “pressure groups” were, in fact, a symptom of a mindset in which people saw themselves primarily as producers. “Until we all give major attention to our problems from the point of view of ourselves as consumers, where our interests are identical, we will not get the results we want.” Americans should act as individual consumers and not as members of pressure groups. Only then would full employment occur. This ideal required a courageous and spiritual leader to mount “a modern crusade” which would change the minds of the populace. Hancock certainly celebrated individualism and generally looked to the past as his guide to political economy. By privileging the consumer over the producer, though, Hancock conceded a crucial point to a changed world.¹⁶

That concession was hardly enough for the editors at The New Republic. Though Americans of various political stripes increasingly talked of consumers

¹⁵ John M. Hancock, An Address Delivered by John M. Hancock at the Pabst Post-War Employment Awards Dinner, May 24, 1944, (New York: no publisher, 1944), pp. 5, 8, 15; New York Times, May 25, 1944, p. 27.

¹⁶ Hancock, Pabst Post-War Employment Awards Dinner Address, pp. 11-13.

and consumption instead of producers and production, considerable disagreement existed over the appropriate policies to create a new political economy. In its merciless criticisms of Stein's essay, The New Republic offered a different vision than Hancock and Stein. "If the wish of the Pabst Postwar Employment Awards was to encourage unknown genius to come forward with an original and epoch-making idea," the editors opined, "the donors have a right to feel cheated" by the winning plan. Stein's essay was nothing more than "a composite of suggestions which might be heard almost any day on the floor of Congress, at business conventions or in newspaper editorial rooms. Its temper is conservative; its pace pedestrian." The editors wondered further what the contest results said about the American intellectual climate. They guessed "that not many in this country know the kind of world they are living in, or are prepared to take measures adequate to the demonstrated needs and opportunities. It is not so much that we are afraid as that we are asleep."¹⁷

What were these new measures required to rouse Americans from their sleep? The editorialists dismissed Stein's "strange" link between a "free, private, competitive economy" and "political and personal liberties" and implied that government intervention in the economy was necessary to ensure freedom. To "assure high steady employment" required more than "nostalgia for laissez faire." Thus, indispensable government spending picked up the slack when timid businessmen failed to take risks and invest. Stein's political economy was a "seductive utopia" because it offered "a job to every man and woman who wants

¹⁷ The New Republic, May 29, 1944, pp. 730-731.

one, simply by virtue of a few prohibitions and pats on the back.” The editors agreed with Stein’s goal, full employment, but argued that a new kind of “business economy” was necessary, one that accepted government intervention. The point of government, which The New Republic editors thought obvious, was to ensure political and personal liberty. Everyone agreed, if only on this point. The editors, however, made material security a crucial part of liberty; Stein and Hancock, in contrast, made individual initiative and opportunity the cornerstone of liberty.¹⁸

Many politicians held these same contrary positions, which led to a muddled Employment Act of 1946, the legislative version of the public’s intense interest in post-war economic policy. Not quite as intriguing or as successful as Pabst’s publicity stunt, the Employment Act nevertheless marked an important shift in American politics. Originally called the Full Employment Act, this bill gave the federal government the responsibility “to promote maximum employment, production, and purchasing power.” Conservatives of both political parties had watered down stronger language in earlier drafts. Critics wondered what “full employment” meant and no one agreed on how to achieve it. As a result, the bill as passed failed to describe the means to accomplish the stated ends. Nevertheless, this act committed, both ideologically and materially, the federal government to a new, if vague, goal.¹⁹

¹⁸ ibid., p. 731.

¹⁹ Brinkley, The End of Reform, pp. 227-264; Kenneth Weiher, America’s Search for Economic Stability: Monetary and Fiscal Policy Since 1913, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), pp. 104-109; Stephen K. Bailey, Congress Makes a Law: The Story Behind the Employment Act of 1946, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950).

Predictably, federal agencies and policy advocates adopted the language of full employment, consumption, and economic security to gain support for their particular programs. Advocates of spending money to develop science and technology, for example, justified their position by talking of material welfare and economic security. In 1947, the President's Scientific Research Board advised that "If we are to remain a bulwark of democracy in the world, we must continually strengthen and expand our domestic economy and our foreign trade." To expand the economy and provide for high levels of employment, the government should invest in "research and more research." These policy advisors concluded that "Scientific discovery is equally the basis for our progress against poverty and disease." Science and technology could contribute to social progress, which the Scientific Research Board defined as full employment and material security. Because these goals were in the public interest, research and development programs deserved federal tax dollars.²⁰

Amidst this philosophical change and policy activity, the spiritual presence of Lincoln remained constant, and with it the legacy of antebellum Midwestern Republicans. During the Great Depression, the popularity of Lincoln surged. Politicians of all stripes laid claim to Lincoln. Republicans began observing their traditional Lincoln Day dinners with more regularity than in the past. Roosevelt found Lincoln in agreement with the New Deal's hostility to greedy businessmen who destroyed the common man's liberty and perversely opposed any government protection of the common man as a destruction of all liberty. Even

²⁰ The President's Scientific Research Board, Science and Public Policy, (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1947), pp. 3-4, 68.

Earl Browder and the Communist Party of the United States interpreted Lincoln as a working-class revolutionary whose legacy only the Communist Party could resuscitate. Arthur Vandenburg, a United States Senator from Michigan, concluded that “It is not easy to pursue political genealogy in this puzzling, volatile age.”²¹

The conflict between the producer and consumer cultures made this period a “puzzling, volatile age.” Republicans and Democrats alike employed the memory of Lincoln to serve the political economies of both the producer and consumer cultures. This process began most noticeably in the New Deal when Democrats tentatively broached consumption oriented policies, and continued through World War Two, during which liberals actively constructed the political and economic framework for a consumer society. In this “puzzling, volatile age,” Americans debated how politics would resolve the traditional Midwestern paradox. Where, in the consumer culture, did private interest meet public responsibility? This theme echoed a traditional concern: how to create a vibrant capitalist system that also protected the dignity of the individual. Critics of the New Deal continued to find dignity in opportunity and mobility while New Dealers changed dignity to mean material security which the federal government sponsored in concert with organized interests. Thus, Americans remained divided over not just how to create prosperity, but why.

The sides in these debates were never clearly delineated. The political careers of Henry Wallace, Bruce Barton, and Robert Taft exemplified the

²¹ Peterson, Lincoln in American Memory, pp. 316-321. The Vandenburg quotation is on p. 316.

transition period and the curious loyalties it fostered. Republican-turned-Democrat Henry Wallace, a Midwesterner and peripatetic New Dealer, embraced the idea that material abundance formed the basis of individual freedom, yet Wallace, ironically, traced his political lineage back to the Midwestern Republican Party, the group most at odds with the New Deal. Advertiser and author turned short-lived Republican politician Bruce Barton celebrated consumer culture values but nevertheless opposed the New Deal. Ohio Republican Robert Taft, a three-term U.S. Senator and a three-time candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, disliked men who merely made money and criticized the crass materialism they peddled, but became a favorite of the business class as he attacked the New Deal. Of the three men, Taft was the most significant because he represented a dying breed of politician. Taft was among the last of a generation of politicians to critique the consumer society.

Like Barton and Taft, Iowan Henry A. Wallace (1888-1965) had deep roots in the soil of the Midwest and in the traditions of the Republican Party. Yet he among the three men did the most to redefine his roots. A minister and farmer, Wallace's grandfather, also named Henry, served Theodore Roosevelt's administration on the Country Life Commission, a commission charged with investigating the material, physical, and spiritual strengths and weaknesses of modern farm life. Henry C., the father of Henry A., was the Secretary of Agriculture in the Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge years. Though a registered Republican until 1936, Henry A. showed early signs of political independence. In 1912, he supported Republican turned Progressive Party

nominee Theodore Roosevelt. During the 1920s, his political loyalties continued to weaken. In 1924, Wallace urged people to vote for Progressive Party candidate Robert LaFollette and, in 1928, for Alfred Smith, the Democratic candidate. In 1932, Wallace supported Democrat Franklin Roosevelt. From 1933-1941, Wallace served as FDR's Secretary of Agriculture. In 1941, he became Roosevelt's vice-president. In 1944, in order to placate both southern and big city machine Democrats, who feared Wallace's reform-oriented idealism, Roosevelt chose Harry Truman to run as the vice-president. In 1945, as a consolation, Wallace became the Commerce Secretary. He remained in that position until September of 1946 when President Truman fired him, citing Wallace's increasingly vocal criticisms of Truman's aggressive posture toward the Soviet Union. In 1948, on the Progressive Party ticket, he ran for president, a dismal failure of a campaign. By the end of his political career, Wallace had articulated a new vision of capitalism and individual dignity, a vision that redefined traditional Midwestern Republican ideas but still invoked Lincoln as its founding father.²²

Wallace updated his producer-era philosophy to the new world of abundance, retaining the old tradition's grounding in moral concerns yet grafting onto that morality the pursuit of a collective material security that ensured individual dignity. Historian John Blum described Wallace as "an austere

²² For a general source of the Wallace family history, see Russell Lord, The Wallaces of Iowa, (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947). See also John Blum, Liberty, Justice, Order: Essays on Past Politics, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993), pp. 143-205; Richard S. Kirkendall. "Wallace, Henry Agard," <http://www.anb.org/articles/07/07-00319.html>, American National Biography Online (Feb. 2000), Access Date: Wed Jun 15 20:37:13 EDT 2005.

moralist, impatient less with impiety than with sloth, deceit, selfishness, and materialism.”²³ These values were the foundation of the producer culture, modes of behavior ideally suited to a society with both material scarcity and nascent market capitalism. Commerce itself, moreover, served a moral purpose. Though he did not trust distant, centralized businesses, Wallace was hardly anti-business, sentiments which many Midwesterners held in common. Economic activity ideally brought diverse people together, harmonized their interests, and created a peaceful, democratic brotherhood of man.²⁴

In Paths to Plenty, published in 1938, Wallace wrote of the connections among capitalism, religion, and democracy. He defined capitalism the same way his Republican ancestors did. Capitalism was “the system whereby men work hard and save money in the hope of someday starting a business of their own, the system whereby men who do not have capital work for those who do.” The best capitalists delayed gratification and saved. Thrift, discipline, and mobility, in other words, were the foundation of capitalism. As did antebellum Midwestern Republicans, Wallace tempered his stern economic vision with a concern for a “humanized capitalism.” The “Golden Rule,” he suggested, should inform individual economic decisions as much as the profit motive.²⁵ With economics and religion combined, Wallace argued, a democracy of educated, self-disciplined citizens pursuing the common good would result. Economics covered the individual's concerns; religion addressed the common good. Paraphrasing

²³ Blum, Liberty, Justice, Order, p. 159.

²⁴ ibid, pp. 150, 187-188.

²⁵ Henry Wallace, Paths to Plenty, (Washington, D.C.: National Home Library Foundation, 1938), pp. vi-6, 85. The quotes are on pp. 2 and vii, respectively.

Roosevelt, Wallace, the old farmer and seed specialist, concluded that democracy was the hybrid of economics and religion, the "worldly expression" of a philosophical system that served singular interests even as it created "a vigorous zeal for the welfare of whatever portion of the population may at any time be ill-fed, ill-clad, and ill-housed." Wallace thus linked capitalism, religion, and democracy to advocate the continuation of the central paradox of the Lincoln ideal: prosperity and salvation came to those people who balanced freedom and responsibility.²⁶

In Paths to Plenty, Wallace asserted the immediacy of this legacy, a legacy that the First World War, the rise of communism and fascism, and the Great Depression had threatened. Capitalism, for example, "with its emphasis on thrift, hard work, and the development of new methods of production," still could contribute to the welfare of the country. The climate for businessmen, however, had changed. No longer could they do as they pleased. "From now on, more and more they will enjoy only that liberty which they have purchased by continuously exercising self-restraint on behalf of the general welfare." The political and economic crises of the previous twenty years had led to a new era, focused neither wholly on the individual nor completely on the community. Wallace instead asked for "a continual interplay between the parts and the whole." From this interplay, citizens "could see that the individual welfare is best served by keeping in mind the restraint which the general welfare imposes. The general welfare has ultimate significance only insofar as it expresses itself in the

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 52-54, 65. The quotes are from pp. 54 and 52, respectively.

individual welfare, and the individual gains his fullest and richest experience when he comprehends most fully the way in which he, as an individual, merges into the activity of the whole organism." Wallace struggled to maintain a sense of balance between traditional American values of individualism and self-sufficiency, and the world-wide movement toward political and economic corporatization. He relied on his Midwestern roots to find that balance.²⁷

The world had changed, however, forcing Wallace to revise two key aspects of his Midwestern Republican heritage. First, Wallace described the transition from individualism to interest group politics. Second, he redefined freedom to include economic security. The first part dealt with how Americans could distribute material abundance widely while the second part addressed why Americans should distribute abundance at all. By emphasizing the group nature of politics and by reconceptualizing freedom as material security, Wallace broke with his nineteenth-century ancestors. He did so only, as he insisted, to perpetuate the legacy of Lincoln.

As Wallace conceptualized the modern state, its primary task was to harmonize the divergent interests of different classes through group politics. This "broker state" contrasted with the nineteenth-century ideal in which individuals harmonized their interests in the common pursuit of economic opportunity and mobility. Generally in favor of this change, Wallace still cautioned against the selfishness inherent in group politics. As the broker, the government had the responsibility to ensure the general welfare. He criticized industry, agriculture,

²⁷ Ibid, pp. 24-26 and 134-135. See also pp. 29, 36, 67, 70-71, 77, and 80.

and labor leaders who told their constituents that "certain perquisites can be obtained as a matter of divine right when, as a matter of fact, they can be obtained only by giving in exchange a very definite discipline." Prosperity, in other words, came only when one disciplined himself for the greater good. Though he supported the shift from individualism toward the group, Wallace subjected group politics to the ideal of traditional Midwestern political thought.²⁸

Group politics was important only in so far as it delivered freedom, which Wallace defined as economic security. Capitalism, Wallace argued, had succeeded in creating material abundance but had failed to ensure economic security. Capitalism would not survive unless it enabled "all of the people to participate in the consumption of that abundance." Democracy hinged on an economic system that provided "security, decent homes, decent food and decent clothing for those who have always felt insecure with respect to their health and their jobs." Wallace advised businessmen to heed the insecurity of the poor. "Even poor people," he wrote, "read and listen to radios and they ask more and more if the 'Freedom' for which their forefathers bled was 'Freedom' for them or 'Freedom' for corporations." Corporations should use their power "to raise the underprivileged to a higher level of security and economic well being." Wallace had transformed freedom, then, from opportunity and mobility, which implied the freedom to fail, into security, which promised the ability to consume.²⁹

As in his analysis of group politics, Wallace measured the value of individual economic security against its ability to foster group welfare. When the

²⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 23-24, 46-47, 83, 97-100, 103, 128-135. The quote is on p. 83.

²⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 13, 19-20, and 30.

government stimulates mass purchasing power, citizens must, in turn, "recognize their obligations to society." With the right of consumption came a responsibility to work hard. In Wallace's worldview, a citizen could have "an increase in the good things of life" only in exchange for increased productivity and a concern for the greater good. In material abundance, widespread consumption, and economic security, Wallace found Lincoln's synthesis of the moral and the mercenary.³⁰

Not surprisingly, then, Wallace invoked Lincoln's name whenever possible in order to justify his vision of the New Deal. In 1939, Wallace spoke to scientists gathered in New York City for the "Lincoln's Birthday Committee for Democracy and Intellectual Freedom." He noted the countless ways in which scientists had enriched the lives of all Americans, but lamented that scientific discovery had also helped create an industrial system in which a few people rule and the many workers have no sense of participation in a common enterprise. He happily noted, though, that, on this 130th anniversary of Lincoln's birthday, science was finally "working actively for economic security and is actively coming to the defense of 'government of the people, by the people, for the people.'" Wallace interpreted Lincoln's description of government to mean "meeting the material need of men for work, for income, for goods, for health, for security, and to meeting their spiritual need for dignity..." In 1944, Wallace criticized people who sought to return to the old days, "the days of hunger and despair." For Wallace, it was not only bad business but bad morals "to allow believers of

³⁰ Ibid, p. 128.

scarcity to hold down production while people need goods and men are out of work.” Believers in scarcity were “not of the stature to which Lincoln grew.” Like Lincoln, the New Deal “stood for human rights first and prosperity rights second.” As one of the Founding Fathers of the New Deal, Wallace argued, Lincoln defined freedom the same way as New Dealers. Freedom was the “economic right of the people to the great abundance of the America of tomorrow.” Personal liberty, moreover, “must move hand in hand with that abundance.” For Wallace, Lincoln served a dual purpose. As a practical matter, politicians always quote American heroes to gain legitimacy for a particular agenda. More important, however, Lincoln offered Wallace a symbolic way to retain his Midwestern roots even as he modified the tradition his Republican ancestors bequeathed to him.³¹

Like Wallace, advertiser Bruce Barton (1886-1965) integrated his Midwestern roots into the consumer culture. Barton’s father, William Eleazar Barton, was an Oberlin College graduate, Congregational minister, and author of several serious studies of Abraham Lincoln. Reared mostly in Illinois, the minister’s son used advertising to evangelize to a mass audience. His favorite sermon was the value of consumption. In simple, direct language, Barton wrote copy that acknowledged the rise of a mass society built on a foundation of technology, communication, and organization. Two of Barton’s lasting advertising creations were Betty Crocker, the model housewife, and the Salvation Army’s motto, “A man may be down, but he is never out.” These two contributions suggested an interest in matters material and spiritual, an interest

³¹ Henry Wallace, Democracy Reborn, (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1944), pp. 156-157, 255-256, and 253-254.

that Barton developed in his publications. In 1925, Barton published The Man Nobody Knows, a best seller for two years. In that work, Barton sought to demolish the Sunday school stereotype of Jesus as flabby, meek, and feminized. To make Jesus, and thus the idea that service to the greater good must accompany the quest for profits, relevant to businessmen, Barton transformed Jesus into a hardy, masculine, charismatic business executive. Jesus, in this context, was the source of the Midwestern ideal: the promotion of the collective good served individual interests.³²

Bridging the producer era with the modern consumer culture, Barton preached that consumption of products helped an individual retain and fortify his or her dignity and identity. Thus the problem of capitalism was not a problem of production, as many nineteenth-century thinkers had concluded. Rather, because technology, communication, and organization had created abundance, consumption was the problem to solve. Mass purchasing power, therefore, became the "foundation on which we all have to build."³³ Individuals could create their dignity and identity through consumption, if one could afford Betty Crocker, or through charitable uplift from the Salvation Army, if one needed temporary help until Betty Crocker was within reach. Whatever the means, the improvement of the individual, for both moral and economic reasons, was Barton's goal, a goal that antebellum Midwestern Republicans and early

³² Susman, Culture As History, pp. 122-131; Leo P. Ribuffo, "Jesus Christ as Business Statesman: Bruce Barton and the Selling of Corporate Capitalism," American Quarterly, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Summer 1981), pp. 206-231; Dennis Wepman, "Barton, Bruce Fairchild," <http://www.anb.org/articles/10/10-00105.html>; American National Biography Online (Feb. 2000), Access Date: Wed Jun 15 2005.

³³ Ribuffo, "Jesus Christ as Business Statesman," p. 215.

twentieth-century Progressives had sought in their time. Barton, though, chose consumption, pleasure, and self-expression as the means to an end.

Nineteenth-century Republicans and twentieth-century Progressives, in contrast, relied on thrift, industry, and self-denial.

Whereas he excelled in advertising and writing, Barton failed in elective politics. He served only three years in the U.S. House of Representatives and opposed most of the New Deal. Barton was nevertheless politically significant because he challenged the GOP's traditional values. As a Republican, Barton ran for the U.S. Congress in New York's wealthy "Silk Stocking District." First elected to the House in a special election in 1937 and reelected in 1938 Barton in 1940 lost a race for the U.S. Senate. Life hailed Barton as "a Salesman of a Liberal G.O.P." He aimed to sell "the stodgy, defeatist Republican Party a new, dynamic philosophy" and then "to resell the Republican Party to the nation."³⁴ His tenure in office was brief, but his agenda for the GOP indicated yet another possible path for the Midwestern ideal, a path that, despite its common source, diverged from Wallace's.

What was this "new, dynamic philosophy?" Too easily if often rightly caricatured as a hypocrite, Barton offered a complex blend of producer and consumer values. He celebrated the new consumer culture values of spending and enjoying, but insisted that individuals, and not government, initiate these values. Barton counseled his colleagues to convince the American public, in the same way they were taught that "children cry for Castoria," that business was

³⁴ "Bruce Barton of New York is a Salesman of a Liberal GOP," Life, Vol. 9 (Oct. 21, 1940), pp. 100-101.

more reliable than the government in satisfying wants.³⁵ To Barton, consumer society values were private, to be encouraged through a citizen's voluntary association with advertising. The government should not force acquiescence; rather, the private sector should persuade.

Barton concluded that the New Deal had force in mind. So, even as he preached the value of the consumer culture, Barton opposed New Dealers who sought to create a political economy for that culture. Like Wallace, Barton often used Lincoln imagery to make his point. The device came naturally to Barton. He recalled that his father's obsessive research made Lincoln "a member of our household" who was "more real to my father than any living man. He was the unseen guest at our table." The elements of Lincoln's character "impressed themselves indelibly upon" the Barton children as they heard their "father talk about [Lincoln] day after day."³⁶

At a 1940 Lincoln Day dinner speech broadcasted nationally, Barton satirized FDR's well known words about one third of America being "ill-fed, ill-clothed, and ill-housed." Opening his speech with a noticeable Lincoln-esque cadence, Barton said, "We are met here to honor the memory of an American who was ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-housed -- and did not know it." Echoing his roots in the producer culture, Barton described "the faith of Abraham Lincoln," the idea that there was more to life than material welfare. "All our talk for too long has been of our stomachs and our pocket books." New Dealers fixated on the

³⁵ Bruce Barton, Printer's Ink, Vol. 173, #1 (December 12, 1935), pp. 17, 20, 24.

³⁶ "Remarks of Congressman Bruce Barton, Before the Oneida County Republican Club, Annual Lincoln Day Dinner, Utica New York, February 11, 1939" (n.p.: 1939), p. 1.

standard of living, forcing Americans to “cower before the golden calf of purchasing power.” What bothered Barton was not that people pursued material welfare, but that New Dealers had appropriated the goal for the public sector. Lincoln knew, according to Barton, that continuation of liberty and democracy “depended not on bureaucratic controls,” but on the many private decisions of individuals, decisions “expressed through their own freely managed activities, big and small.”³⁷ The “centralized and regimented economy” of the New Deal also worried Barton. He reinterpreted Lincoln’s comment that no nation can endure “half slave and half free” to mean that freedom would wither under the New Dealers’ coercive organization of consumption. New Deal policies had failed to create a free nation, producing, instead, “only a collection of organized appetites.” Ignoring the businessman’s role in organizing appetites, Barton pondered the consequences of consumption-oriented public policy. “Are we Americans,” he asked, “or merely members of organized pressure groups? This is the question we ultimately shall have to face and decide if we are to continue as a nation.”³⁸

Despite the considerable differences between Wallace and Barton, Christianity was central to both of their philosophies. Each man sought to meld the moral and the mercenary, a combination that had formed the basis of the Lincoln’s ideal. Neither man believed materialism necessarily inconsistent with morality. A citizen could, in fact, find dignity in consumption. To secure that

³⁷ Bruce Barton, “A Lesson for Today,” Vital Speeches of the Day, (New York: City News Publishing Co.), Vol. VI, March 1, 1940, pp. 292-294.

³⁸ Bruce Barton, “Life Is a Picnic at Government Expense,” Vital Speeches of the Day, pp. 572-574.

dignity, Wallace elevated the community's role in assisting consumption, thus placing it in the public sphere. Barton, in contrast, viewed the consumption ethic as private and individualistic. Wallace and Barton, however, shared a fundamental assumption. Abundance, mass purchasing power, and consumption fulfilled the seemingly contradictory goals of salvation and self-interest. In twentieth-century consumer capitalism, they concluded, the intersection of material and spiritual welfare created dignity.

In contrast to Wallace and Barton, Robert Taft (1889-1953) ignored spiritual concerns, drawing narrowly from the Midwestern traditions of political and economic individualism. Born to privilege and security but not ostentatious wealth, Taft's public service contributed to one of America's most successful and substantial political dynasties. Alphonso Taft, Robert's grandfather and the founder of the dynasty, was born in Vermont in 1810. He graduated from Yale University and Yale Law School, and, in 1838, moved west, breaking with several generations of Tafts who were New England farmers. In 1839, Alphonso settled in Cincinnati. During the trip, he stopped in New York where he witnessed the base desires of that city's crowded humanity. The "notorious selfishness and dishonesty of the mass of men" disgusted the thrifty Alphonso. Their single-minded pursuit of money offended his sense of austerity and industry. In Cincinnati, Alphonso cultivated a legal and political career, rising from an unknown migrant in 1839 to a Whig Party city councilman, to a loyal Republican delegate to national conventions, to a superior court judge, to the Secretary of War and Attorney General in the Grant administration, and, finally, in the 1880s,

to the ambassadorship of Austria-Hungary and Russia. Alphonso died in 1891, his estate consisting of his house and \$482. 80. His five sons, however, had political connections and social position. They all attended Yale. All were Republicans. The oldest son, Charley, married the daughter of a wealthy businessman, became a philanthropist, and owned a newspaper, the Cincinnati Times-Star. Robert's father, William Howard, followed in his father's political and legal career, becoming, in 1889, a superior court judge, then, in 1890, the solicitor general in the Harrison administration, and, in 1892, a judge on the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit. In 1898, as an appeals court judge, he wrote an opinion which ordered that a monopolistic combination of cast-iron pipe businesses be dissolved, foreshadowing his aggressive trust-busting as president. In 1900, William Howard became the governor of the Philippines. In 1904 he took over as Theodore Roosevelt's Secretary of War. In 1908, he was elected to his only term as president. In 1921, he reached his dream job, Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court. Thus, Alphonso's sons capitalized on the connections their father had established. The most important part of Alphonso's legacy, though, was his producer culture values. Accordingly, to be a Taft meant that his "character for sobriety and industry and integrity was without blemish." Robert Taft's biographer, James Patterson, described Alphonso as neither "flashy, profound," nor "even reflective." He preferred problem solving to philosophy. Educated, well traveled, and open-minded, Alphonso nevertheless lacked imagination, never developed an interest in literature or the arts, and rejected the mores of high society. Robert learned

these values well and, in his defense of the Midwest against the New Deal, applied them to his political worldview. His selective reading of the Midwestern tradition contributed to a forceful critique of the consumer society, but ultimately stifled his ideological vitality.³⁹

Like Bruce Barton, Taft attacked the New Deal because it created “a collection of organized appetites.” Unlike Barton, Taft also rejected the distinction made between the private decisions that created the consumer culture and the public policies that encouraged it. Taft cared little for the consumer culture in either incarnation. Rather, he defined the dignity of the individual in abstract terms of liberty, equality, opportunity, and mobility, terms straight from the political and economic traditions of the Republican Party. He drew a line between nineteenth- and twentieth-century prosperity. The former was built on the tangible and tested values of character, thrift, production, and delayed gratification. The latter was illusory, imagined from restless and undisciplined spending and consuming.

Taft criticized the New Deal on three points that stemmed from his definition of prosperity. First, he said that the New Deal cheapened the meaning of freedom. In a 1936 speech, Roosevelt had said that people want “an opportunity to make an honest living; a reasonable chance to improve your condition in life as you grow older; a practical assurance against want and suffering in your old age; and with it all the right to participate in the finer things of

³⁹ James T. Patterson, *Mr. Republican: A Biography of Robert A. Taft*, (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972), pp. 3-12. The Alphonso Taft quotations are from pp. 9 and 11, respectively. The Patterson quotation is on p. 11.

life.” Taft responded that Roosevelt had attributed “rather limited” and “unambitious” ideals to Americans. Moreover, these ideals omitted “that personal liberty which every American must regard as the basis of American life.”⁴⁰ For New Dealers, Taft said, “the be-all and end-all of political action is apparently to improve the economic and material welfare of the citizens. Programs are judged on the question of whether they give men more money, more bathtubs, more automobiles, and less time to work.” To the contrary, Taft argued, the “only object” of government was to help citizens develop their character, honor, industry, and self-reliance. New Dealers had cravenly subordinated “nearly every intellectual and moral purpose” to better “plumbing.”⁴¹

Consequently, Taft rejected both Henry Wallace’s and Bruce Barton’s link between freedom and material security. Opportunity was, in fact, the source of freedom. Security merely made free citizens into slaves. The Declaration of Independence, Taft pointed out, offered only the pursuit of happiness, not its guarantee. Security, furthermore, had never been important to the American tradition. “This nation would never have been founded if our forefathers had not considered freedom ahead of security, ahead of wealth, ahead of peace itself.” As in the nineteenth century, opportunity and freedom meant the opportunity and freedom to succeed or fail. The “burden of security” hindered the diligent worker.

⁴⁰ Roosevelt, New York Times, April 14, 1936; Taft, The Papers of Robert A. Taft: Volume 1, 1889-1939 (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1997), p. 506.

⁴¹ Taft, Congressional Record, 80th Congress, 1st Session, pp. A793-A794; Caroline Thomas Harnsberger, A Man of Courage: Robert A. Taft (Chicago: Wilcox and Follett Company, 1952), pp. 132-137.

Opportunity worked best for the disciplined individual who understood that “the ways of freedom do not always give instantaneous results.”⁴²

Second, he persistently argued that prosperity depended on the delayed gratification associated with thrift and investment rather than on the instant rewards gained by consumption. New Dealers, therefore, wrongly believed “in the upside-down economics theory that [they] can produce prosperity by increasing purchasing power arbitrarily while discouraging increased production.”⁴³ In a debate with Walter Reuther, president of the United Auto Workers, Taft criticized Reuther’s notion that government could create prosperity by building from “the bottom-up,” by stimulating, in other words, the mass purchasing power of the average American. Taft charged that “a certain amount of [money] has to be saved. In fact, the whole standard of living depends on somebody saving - whether it is corporations whether it is individuals. You want people to spend every cent they get, to give it to people who spend it entirely for consumer goods. Then you will have exactly what happened before and a depression continuing indefinitely in the United States.”⁴⁴ Prosperity occurred when the thrifty investor delayed his gratification, not when the consumer fulfilled his desires immediately.

Third, Taft rejected the interest group society. Rights and rewards were due individuals through their “industry, ability, intelligence, and thrift.” Yet New Dealers subsidized the demands of “organized voters” by attaching a senseless

⁴² A Republican Program, pp. 44-47; *Colliers*, Vol.119, No. 5 (February 1, 1947), pp. 13 and 58.

⁴³ A Republican Program, pp. iii, 26, 42-43, 50. The quotation is on page 26.

⁴⁴ Prosperity Which Way? (Detroit, MI: UAW-CIO, 1948), p. 2-3, 7.

virtue to deficit spending.⁴⁵ The more serious problem, though, was that the “the tyranny of special groups” threatened liberty. Central to the American tradition of freedom was a respect for “voluntary organizations.” Any group, a union, for example, that forced an individual to join violated his liberty. As with his nineteenth-century counterparts, Taft idealized individuals who were unfettered except by voluntary ties.

This theme of force versus voluntary action informed every argument that Taft made. In a 1947 article for Collier's magazine, scholar and Democratic partisan Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. dismissed it as merely a “deceptive coloration of his rhetoric, with its weary complaints about ‘regimentation’ and ‘bureaucracy.’”⁴⁶ Yet this concern was the crucial component of Taft’s philosophy. It echoed fears first articulated by Tocqueville in Democracy in America. Tocqueville speculated that despotism in America, should it develop, would not be cruel and thuggish. Rather, the government would endeavor “to procure the petty and paltry pleasures with which [humans] glut their lives.” The state’s power would be “absolute, minute, regular, provident, and mild.” It “chooses to be the sole agent and the only arbiter of happiness; it provides for their security, foresees and supplies their necessities, facilitates their pleasures, manages their principal concerns, directs their industry, regulates the descent of property, and subdivides their inheritance: what remains, but to spare them all the care of thinking and all the trouble of living?” Such a government “covers the surface of society with a

⁴⁵ The Papers of Robert A. Taft: Volume 1, 1889-1939, Clarence Wunderlin, Jr., ed., (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1997), p. 507; A Republican Program, pp. 22 and 45.

⁴⁶ “His Eyes Have Seen the Glory,” Collier's, Vol. 119, No. 8 (February 22, 1947), p. 13.

network of small complicated rules, minute and uniform, through which the most original minds and the most energetic characters cannot penetrate to rise above the crowd. The will of man is not shattered, but softened, bent, and guided; men are seldom forced by it to act, but they are constantly restrained from acting. Such a power does not destroy, but it prevents existence; it does not tyrannize, but it compresses, enervates, extinguishes, and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to nothing better than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd.”⁴⁷

Unlike Henry Wallace, who elevated material welfare to a civic priority, and unlike even Bruce Barton, who made spiritual the private decisions of consumers, Taft feared that the New Deal created precisely the enervating and stupefying government that Tocqueville predicted. The seductive siren call of material security baffled Taft. “It was strange,” he said, “that our people in recent elections have tended to support the theory that the government should be the source of all planning, of all control, and of bread and circuses for the multitude.”⁴⁸ Taft’s “weary complaints” about regimentation logically developed, not from his concern about the tyranny of material pleasure, but from the dictatorial standardization of it. Taft said that ideally a person “might rise in material wealth and acquire a greater comfort and luxury, if he desires it,” and that “he might earn a simple living on which he could base the development of true happiness for himself and his family without either wealth or power.” In contrast to Wallace’s

⁴⁷ Democracy in America, Phillips Bradley, ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), Vol. 2, pp. 318-319.

⁴⁸ “The Future of the Republican Party: Address of Robert A. Taft at the McKinley Memorial,” January 28, 1949, p. 2.

idea, the individual and not the New Deal gauged the level of material security required for personal happiness. In contrast to Barton's formulation, individual fulfillment did not require "greater comfort and luxury"⁴⁹

Taft was different than Wallace and Barton primarily because Taft defined the pursuit of material welfare as inner-directed and individualized. Wallace's version of consumption subjected needs and desires to the test of community interest. Barton's required a relationship with advertising, which instructed the consumer not just on what to buy or why, but that consumer needed to buy in the first place. In both cases, other people helped to define what was necessary and what was luxury. Either way, the individual relinquished control and the ability to think for himself.

In drawing these conclusions, Taft made the same mistake as Tocqueville. Both men viewed government and not the private sector as the "sole agent" of comfortable tyranny.⁵⁰ In Tocqueville time, this criticism made some sense, for there was no national, integrated market that delivered goods efficiently, no large scale businesses that created inexpensive products through economies of scale, and no sophisticated communications networks and marketing analyses that stimulated buying. Federal and state governments were the only institutions with the potential to reach anywhere. By Taft's time, however, the private sector had developed the technological capability and strategic expertise "to procure the petty and paltry pleasures" which Americans sought, even before they knew they

⁴⁹ A Republican Program, p. 46.

⁵⁰ For this insight into Tocqueville, see Caleb Crain, "Tocqueville for the Neocons," The New York Times Book Review, January 14, 2001, p. 12.

wanted them. Though Taft disdained people who merely made money, he never criticized them for their role in changing his ideal of an acquisitive, self-governing individual into an unthinking, regimented, faceless cog in the machine of consumption, the very thing that he accused Roosevelt of doing.

Taft was no agrarian rebel protesting the ill-effects of industrialization. Material progress mattered to Taft more than religion or community tradition. He celebrated the acquisitive nature of man and understood the psychological underpinnings of material ambition. Prosperity occurred when government unleashed the common man's desire to "rise above the average standard of living and enjoy a little more luxury or a little more power." Government had only to assure that "reasonable success" would receive the "recognition it deserve[ed] from [a person's] friends and neighbors." Economist Thorstein Veblen, in 1899, denounced this process as "invidious distinction." In 1939, Taft called it progress.⁵¹

But these were the thoughts of a nineteenth-century mind, a mind ill-prepared for the way materialism changed in the twentieth century. Over time, consumers moved beyond the utilitarian purpose of consumption, beyond a world of scarcity in which ownership of certain goods could distinguish the disciplined from the improvident. With industrialization, material abundance spread to the masses. The producer status of the consumer was difficult to discern because ever more people had access to the same goods. In this "democracy of goods," buyers and sellers sought new distinctions. As a result, goods increasingly took

⁵¹ Taft, A Republican Program: Speeches and Broadcasts (Cleveland, OH: David S. Ingalls, 1939), pp. 29-31, 43, 45-47. The quotations are on pp. 29-30 and 43.

on special niche characteristics and attitudes. Signifiers of joy, rebellion, inclusion, nostalgia, and generational affiliation, for example, were among the many potential identities attached to products. Here the atomized individual was empowered and consumption was torn from the social context described by Taft and Veblein.⁵²

Taft was not a part of this new world of consumption. It unmoored consumption from the consumer's ability to produce and severed the link between citizenship and production. Material goods no longer reflected character, thrift, and intelligence, but instead symbolized personality, spending, and pre-packaged attitude. Standardization, bureaucratization, regimentation, and centralization of decision-making made possible the new world of consumption. To the extent that the New Deal furthered these changes, Taft attacked. But he did not merely attack government policy. He protected a regional identity. To him, the Midwest was not the provincial, sclerotic, Klan-friendly region of the 1920s. It was, rather, the dynamic, prospering, freeing, individualistic region that flowered in the 1850s and dominated American politics and economics from the 1880s through 1920.

His defense, however, omitted any substantive discussion of religion. He was not particularly pious and, to his credit, never made a pretense to suggest otherwise.⁵³ The American public usually described him as a cold, aloof, austere

⁵² Gary Cross, An All Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 235-240; Thomas Frank, The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 31.

⁵³ Patterson, Mr. Republican, *passim*.

scold. This led even the shrewd salesman Bruce Barton to miscast Taft as an “Old Testament prophet.”⁵⁴ Barton was superficially right. In his anti-New Deal jeremiads, Taft constantly warned against a degraded, impoverished, and enslaved America. But religion simply did not inform his worldview. Consequently, a fuller critique of modern America and a stronger defense of the Midwest were stifled. Without religion, Taft could not offer any regionally based commentary on the dignity of the individual within a mass society. Wallace and Barton had incorporated moral concepts into their view of mass consumerism. They tried to account for the complex blend of the moral and the mercenary. Taft, though, could only complain that the pursuit of material wealth was no longer what it used to be.

Taft had an alternative. His model, ironically, could have been his younger brother Charles. They had the same parents, upbringing, and Ivy League education. As a journalist noted, however, “It was after law school that the roads forked irrevocably for Robert and Charles. Both looked to public service. Robert chose party regularity and a good corporate law practice. Charles chose indignation, reform, and applied Christianity.”⁵⁵ Like his mother, Charles was an active Episcopalian. In 1946, Charles was the first layman ever elected president of the Federal Council of Churches, the ecumenical organization which tried to give divided sectarian Protestants a common voice in political and economic matters. He used that position to reinvigorate the social

⁵⁴ Leo P. Ribuffo, “Jesus Christ as Business Statesman: Bruce Barton and the Selling of Corporate Capitalism,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 2. (Summer, 1981), p. 227.

⁵⁵ *The Reporter*, “The Brothers Taft,” January 8, 1952 (Vol. 6), p. 7.

gospel, especially in mixing Christian justice and collective bargaining in labor-management relations.⁵⁶

Charles saw a unique political role for religion. He argued that Christians should criticize the crude materialism of both Marxists and *laissez-faire* advocates. He found an odd, and to his brother Robert, unsettling common ground between communists and American businessmen. Both sides, Charles asserted, believed in economic determinism and dismissed non-economic incentives in human behavior. Charles scoffed at the notion “that imaginary economic man who was moved solely by logical self-interest.” Economists had “dreamed up the falsehood that if an immense herd of such individuals were turned loose in a free market without any government intervention, the laws of supply and demand would automatically produce harmony and justice.” Churches must condemn *laissez-faire* policies because they deny spiritual motives. Obsessive materialism, whether spouted by Robert Taft or Karl Marx, simply ignored the complexity of the human experience.⁵⁷

Charles continued a Midwestern Republican tradition by deploying Lincoln to justify his positions. Charles was again unlike his brother in that Lincoln was conspicuous by his absence in much of Robert’s public statements. Lincoln played little to no role in Robert’s imagination. To Charles, Lincoln was the ideal politician. He was shrewd, but not “slick or devious.” In defending his principles,

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8; “Charlie Taft’s Big Chance,” *Fortune*, August 1947 (Vol. 36), pp. 84-87; Charles Taft, *Why I am for the Church: Talks on Religion and Politics* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Company, 1947), pp. 33-42.

⁵⁷ Charles Taft, *Democracy in Politics and Economics* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Company, 1950), pp. 36-39. The quotations are on p. 37. See also Taft, *Why I am for the Church*, pp. 43-52, 56-67.

Lincoln exhibited “a hardness of steel,” but no “cruelty, ruthlessness, [or] deceit.” Lincoln was a man of ideas who was also a man of action. Charles, however, claimed to be no hero-worshiper. He recalled that once he had insulted a Lincoln admirer at a Rotary luncheon. There Charles had described Lincoln “as a failure at forty, and a man whose character grew under strain from mediocrity to mastery.” Charles had adroitly drawn his version of the Lincoln paradox. Lincoln balanced the pursuit of justice with compassion. He was an imperfect person who strove to do better. He recognized the relevance of the “cash nexus” in human relations, but achieved “mastery” during a crisis that transcended materialism.⁵⁸

Charles applied his spiritual beliefs to his critique of modern America, allowing him to push beyond his brother’s narrow defense of the Midwest. Charles lambasted outdated ideas of rugged individualism and blamed business for destroying the independent, self-governing citizen. “If our national self-reliance has been sapped, it has been sapped far more by the rather autocratic industrial system that began with the industrial revolution than it has or can be by any paternalism of Government.”⁵⁹ Charles recognized what his brother did not and what Tocqueville could not. In the twentieth century, threats of stupefying regimentation and centralization of authority emanated first and most dangerously from the private sector.

Charles responded to these threats in a characteristically Midwestern fashion. “The age-old problem of government,” he wrote, “is how to reconcile

⁵⁸ Taft, Why I am for the Church, pp. 33, 60.

⁵⁹ Taft, you and I – and Roosevelt (New York: Farrar and Reinhart, Inc. 1936), p. 95.

liberty” with the “satisfaction of community needs.” He found his answer in the non-economic incentive of group action. Charles described as “profoundly true” the theory that “if a number of individuals worked together to achieve a common purpose, a harmony of interests will develop” and “each will willingly subordinate his self interest.” Buried in this platitude was an important thought. In collective activity, Charles found the “security” which Robert found in opportunity and freedom, which Wallace had found in material welfare, and which Barton had found in consumerism. Charles’ security was decidedly spiritual and aimed ‘to replace what the industrial revolution nearly destroyed:’ the communal context of individual dignity.⁶⁰

Henry Wallace, Bruce Barton, Robert and Charles Taft. In 1952, these four men represented the range of possibilities for Midwestern Republicanism. As he started to rise in Ohio politics, James Rhodes had to make a decision. Would he follow one of these versions or create one of his own? Robert Taft was by far the most successful politician of the four men. He was also, however, the most out of step with an increasingly powerful consumer culture. His success testified to the persistence of Republicanism based on nineteenth-century producer values. As a young politician, Rhodes needed a model to help him define himself. It would have been logical for Rhodes to continue the traditions of the most successful politician in Ohio, a man known and respected nationally as “Mr. Republican.”

⁶⁰ Taft, You and I – and Roosevelt, p. 95; Taft, Democracy in Politics and Economics, pp. 36-39.

By 1952, however, the Midwest had changed, and the environment in which Rhodes had matured. English journalist Graham Hutton traveled the Midwest throughout the 1940s and discovered that the greatest problem facing the Midwest was standardization and regimentation of culture. In the mid-1800s, new transportation and communication networks – canals, railroads, telegraph – had made the Midwest. Ironically, however, by the mid-1900s advances in those same networks were slowly unmaking the Midwest. Highways, airplanes, automobiles, radios, film, television all sapped the vitality of the Midwest's regional identity.⁶¹

What, then, would happen to the Midwestern influence on national politics? James Allen Rhodes played a pivotal role in answering that question. He would take the Republican Party in a radical new direction. He would tap into the New Deal and its standardizing effect, seemingly ruining any chance that the Midwest would shape the Republican Party. One crucial element influenced Rhodes that was missing from the middle-and upper-class ideas of Wallace, Barton, and the brothers Taft: working class security. In this area Rhodes distinguished Midwestern Republicanism from the post-World War Two libertarian, free-market conservative populism that developed in the West and Southwest. Rhodes' childhood brought him to that unique contribution.

⁶¹ Graham Hutton, Midwest at Noon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), pp. 325-343.

CHAPTER 3
BORN TO INSECURITY:
FROM JACKSON TO JASONVILLE AND BACK AGAIN, 1909-1920

When James Rhodes died in March 2001, major newspapers throughout the English-speaking western world ran his obituary. They all led with Kent State, an event that has come to symbolize America's loss of innocence through its tragic involvement in Vietnam. In Australia, however, readers of media mogul Rupert Murdoch's newspapers learned a startling fact about Ohio's longest serving governor. James Rhodes was "the grandson of black, Filipino, and Chinese immigrants, a true example of the American racial melting pot."¹ This assertion is hilariously wrong, and causes even the most casually informed reader to slacken his jaw, stupefied to "learn" that Rhodes was not just the grandson of immigrants, but that these immigrants had roots in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific Islands. As with any other story about Rhodes' life, however, exaggerations and fabrications can reveal as much about him as commonly accepted facts and conventional wisdoms.

When Rhodes died, the Murdoch news empire in Australia offered its helpless readers that bizarre description of Rhodes' ethnicity, leaving what had to

¹ See "Governor's Call Killed Four," The Australian, 3/13/2001, p. 16.

be only a handful of Australians puzzled as to how Murdoch's reporters blundered so completely on such a simple fact. Yet Americans, having regained their composure, could ask only, "Why was Rhodes' obituary in an Australian newspaper?" The question implies that notice of Rhodes' death did not deserve its wide-ranging distribution. Rhodes simply was no longer important, not in Ohio, not in the nation, and certainly not in the world. Rhodes understood that would happen to him. Assuming, for example, that no one else would erect a monument for him, Rhodes pushed the state legislature to build one while he was still in office. One journalist wrote that the statue was "a tribute in bronze to his brass."² That writer nailed Rhodes' penchant for self-promotion, yet Rhodes, and not the reporter, has defined the meaning of the statue. When asked once what people should remember about him, Rhodes answered with a calculating, but elegiac and reflective wisdom: "Nothing," he said. "Why should anyone push anything upon themselves? Ten years from now they'll look at that statue and say, 'When was he governor?'"³

For television pundit and Wall Street Journal columnist Albert Hunt, it was precisely this quality, an incisive -- if often earthy -- mind that explained why Rhodes was more important than people realized. Four days after Rhodes' death, Hunt wrote against the prevailing wisdom: Rhodes was not simply and solely Kent State.

² Abe Zaidan, Akron Journal Beacon reporter, quoted in William Russell Coil, "James A. Rhodes and the 1960s Origin of Contemporary Ohio," in Warren Van Tine and Michael Pierce, eds., Builders of Ohio: A Biographical History (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2003), p. 284.

³ Stanley J. Aronoff and Vernal G. Riffe, James A. Rhodes at Eighty (Columbus, OH: n.p., 1989), p. 43.

He was plain spoken and more than a little crude. Few, however, better captured the frailties of fellow politicians. Watching [Michigan Governor] George Romney run for president, [Rhodes] once said, was like watching a duck make love to a football. George Herbert Walker Bush, Rhodes noted, was the sort of guy 'who stepped out of the shower to take a leak.'

Hunt informed his readers that these quotes had been "sanitized," but nothing, he suggested, could sanitize the fact that Rhodes openly used his sharp mind to enrich his friends and himself as often as he helped the state. When Rhodes left the governor's office in 1971 he was asked what his plans were. Rhodes remarked that he had made millionaires out of many Ohio Republicans: "Now it's their turn." Still, Hunt concluded, as historians look back on this "poor Midwestern [boy] who rose from humbled roots -- and compare [him] to those that succeed today -- he may start to look a lot better."⁴ Historians should flesh out Hunt's vision of a reconsidered Rhodes, and we should begin with the way the Western world remembered Rhodes.

Class is a central theme in American politics, and Rhodes inconsistently engaged it throughout his six-decade-long political career, ranging from a heartfelt honesty to a creativity that bordered on mendacity. Class made Rhodes unique in the Republican Party, but not because he was a working class descendent of multi-racial grandparents. More than any other Republican in his

⁴ Hunt, "They Were More Interesting Than Their Obits," The Wall Street Journal, March 8, 2001, p. A23. Hunt wrote about Rhodes and Harold Stassen, the longtime Republican politician from Minnesota who died around the same time as Rhodes. Stassen's multiple and futile campaigns for the Republican Presidential nomination and "his ill-fitting toupee" turned a once bright, energetic, decent man into a "laughing stock."

generation Rhodes experienced first-hand the transformation of class. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, class was based on one's status as a producer. Material scarcity ruled the lives of most people. Their economic aspirations centered on security rather than comfort. By the time Rhodes reached young adulthood in the 1920s, Americans began to define class by a person's ability to consume mass market goods. Material abundance was increasingly within reach of a large number of Americans. They sought to enjoy life beyond a mean survival. Rhodes was born into the first world and matured during the second. As an adult, he would govern using the lessons he learned in both.

English and Australian newspaper obituaries dealt directly with Rhodes' class whereas most American newspapers reported his humble roots and his Horatio Alger-esque rise to prominence. The Guardian in London, for example, wrote that Rhodes' father provided "his family with comfortable middle-class living." Even after the father died prematurely in the influenza pandemic of 1918, the "family was not quite as penurious as his son liked to suggest. Even in the depression years, which hit Ohio more severely than many other states, there were still funds to send him to university, though he did not finish his course." Because "class warfare sharply divided the state in the New Deal period," because Republican politicians tried to clamp down on "the excesses of the local [working class] strife," and because "Columbus and its hundreds of small factory owners stayed staunchly Republican," then, the Guardian implied, the Republican Rhodes exaggerated his working class background as part of a

reactionary strategy to pacify labor unrest. As they pursued anti-union policies, Republicans distracted the working class with a candidate seemingly from their own ranks.⁵

What was at stake in these obituaries? The American writers, generally less class conscious than the British, emphasized Rhodes' humble roots, hard work, high accomplishments, and Kent State. The British writers, in contrast, wrote about well-defined class divisions, concluding that anyone who failed to follow prescribed class positions was a tool, a fraud, or both. Analyzing whether Rhodes grew up poor or precariously comfortable, however, allows Rhodes to continue to define his historical legacy. We tell his story on his terms and are limited to catching him in little lies and tall tales. All of these stories are entertaining, and even sometimes true, but they obscure the world into which Rhodes was born and the very different world in which he became governor. Rhodes' significance -- what Albert Hunt hoped to read someday, what the Australian editors were thinking when they ran his obituary -- can be found in the contrast between those two worlds.

Dean Jauchius, a longtime Rhodes assistant and confidant, once said of Rhodes' biography that "[s]ifting legend from fact is some job."⁶ For certain, Rhodes was born September 13, 1909, but even that fact is not without twists. Rhodes and his friends have reported different birth years. Relying on

⁵ The Guardian (London, England), March 7, 2001, p. 24. See also the Daily Telegraph (London, England), March 7, 2001. Regarding class, the Daily Telegraph remarked only that Rhodes "created educational programmes for unskilled labourers."

⁶ Dean Jauchius quoted in Richard Zimmerman, "Rhodes' First Eight Years, 1963-1971," in Alexander P. Lamis, ed., Ohio Politics (Kent, OH: The Kent University Press, 1994) n1, p. 353.

information that Rhodes provided, Jauchius wrote that Rhodes was born on September 13, 1907. Another political colleague, Tom Dudgeon, correctly offered September 13, 1909 as Rhodes' birth date, and most sources have followed Dudgeon. Still, a third choice exists. The 1948-1949 edition of Who's Who in America listed the date as September 13, 1910. The information in Who's Who is self-reported -- either Rhodes supplied the wrong date or the editors botched the entry.⁷

Complicating the story, the 1910 census failed to record young Jim. The Census Bureau hired legions of temporary workers to travel from house to house, making the mandated inquiries and filling out the appropriate paperwork. The agency required more than record-keeping competence. Undesirable applicants included people who had speech defects or facial deformities, or who were "otherwise so different from other people as to be noticeable." The enumerator who visited the Rhodes family must have passed the appearance test, but probably fared less well on the competency exam. The enumerator asked Susan (Howe) Rhodes, James' mother, how many children she had. The

⁷Rollin Dean Jauchius, "Gubernatorial Roles: An Assessment by Five Ohio Governors," (The Ohio State University: unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 1971), p. 47; Tom Dudgeon, Ohio's Governor of the Century: James A. Rhodes, Ohio Governor 1963-1971 and 1975-1983, (Ohio Editorial Enterprises: Columbus, OH, 1991), p. 1. For the 1909 date, see also Mike Curtin, The Ohio Politics Almanac (The Kent State University Press: Kent, OH, 1996), p. 56 and Mike Curtin, "The Old School," The Columbus Dispatch, October 12, 1986, accessed via on-line archive through the Columbus (Ohio) Metropolitan Library at www.columbuslibrary.org (hereafter "Old School"); Anna Rothe, ed., Current Biography: Who's News and Why, 1949 (The H.W. Wilson Company: New York, 1949), p. 518; Richard G. Zimmerman, "Rhodes' First Eight Years, 1963-1971," in Alexander P. Lamis, ed., Ohio Politics (The Kent state University Press: Kent, Ohio, 1994), p. 59; James A. Rhodes at Eighty (n.p.: 1989) a birthday greeting produced by then Speaker of the Ohio House Vernal Riffe and President of the Ohio Senate Stanley Aronoff, quoted directly from the Jauchius dissertation for information about Rhodes' childhood, but changed the birth date to 1909; Who's Who in America (The A.N. Marquis Company, Chicago, 1948), Vol. 25, p. 2059.

recorded response was three. The enumerator then noted that only two were living. The list of children residing at the Rhodes' home included only two daughters, Florence and Garnet. The third, unnamed child was probably a reference to the deceased Katherine, who died at 6.⁸ Did the parents not mention their eight month old son? Did the enumerator make a mistake? Most enumerators were paid two cents per name, so either way the enumerator did not get paid as much as he could have.

Rhodes' childhood home provides a second factual inconsistency. Where did he call home? He was born in Coalton, Ohio, located in Jackson County. In 1910 the Rhodes family moved to Jasonville, Indiana. In November of 1918, the father died in the influenza pandemic. The family then moved back to Jackson County, settling in Jackson until about 1923. They then moved to Springfield. The first published source to indicate that Governor Rhodes lived anywhere but in Ohio appeared fifty-two years after Rhodes began his political career. Only then, in 1986, did central Ohio newspaper readers discover that Rhodes had spent a significant part of his youth in Indiana. Throughout his public life, Rhodes had constructed an image of the "all-Ohio boy" who made good in his home state. His eight years in Jasonville shaped him more than his five in Jackson, yet the all-Ohio image is still largely intact.⁹

The minor problems of establishing Rhodes' birthday and his hometown point to a big difference between the world of 1909 and the world of 2005. Most

⁸ Wellston Sentinel, 12/23/1909, p. 5; 1910 U.S. Census, Microfilm edition, T-624, Roll # 1197, Vol. 096, Sheet 10B, Enumeration District 0052, family #0250, The State Library of Ohio (hereafter 1910 Census); for mention of Katherine, see Curtin, "Old School."

⁹ See Curtin, "Old School."

Americans in 2005 are used to having their personal information collected, collated, and analyzed, either by government agencies or, more likely, by private companies. People are defined by these information profiles; their identities equal their information. As a result, identity theft -- the theft of personal information -- causes much anxiety. In 1909, however, public and private sector organizations were only beginning to develop their capacity to collect and manipulate information. Historians must rely on the inconsistent availability of information, so in that sense “information” is not critical to Rhodes’ working class identity. Rather, it stemmed from his ability to omit, include, and reconstruct bits and pieces of information over time, all the while still maintaining the essence of truth.

Rhodes followed this pattern as he presented and re-presented his working-class background to Ohio voters. He was authentically working class, but his poverty is distorted for present-day Americans because of the transition from economic scarcity to material abundance. Rhodes seemed so poor growing up because we -- and he -- were so wealthy in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Health care, for example, was far different in 1909, the year of Rhodes’ birth, and 1970, the last full year of Rhodes’ first stint as governor. In Ohio’s rural mining towns, the influenza epidemic of 1918 ravaged laborers worse than in urban, working class neighborhoods. One health investigator complained that “In the presence of an epidemic the mining company and the local union follow the policy of non-interference, leaving it quite entirely up to the supervision of

whatever local health authority is at hand.” The “inadequacy of health supervision” in these communities led to the “glaring omission” of latrines and to tainted drinking water.¹⁰

During the 1920s, Robert and Helen Lynd studied community health practices in Muncie, Indiana. They found that “the pioneer background” of Muncie still influenced the medical decisions of the town’s residents. One commonly reported cure included a visit to “the old nigger” outside of town “who is alleged to drive disease down through a patient’s feet into the ground by waving his hands before him.” Other Muncie residents talked about a downtown barber who took “patients into a back room for magical treatment for everything from headache to cancer.” Still other people believed “that an old leather hat band wrapped about each breast of the mother at childbirth will prevent all forms of breast trouble” and that “an old leather shoe-string wrapped about a child’s neck will prevent croup.” Finally, “[if] one rubs a wart with a bean picked at random from a sack of beans and then drops the bean back into the sack the wart will disappear.”¹¹

The Lynds attributed these “pioneer” behaviors to the working class, but also indicted city leaders. Contagious diseases were generally ignored. “Recurrent epidemics” the Lynds observed, “were taken for granted.” In Muncie, and in many other towns throughout Indiana and across America, capricious and deadly diseases were part of the life cycle. Quarantining sick people was the

¹⁰ Emery R. Hayhurst, Health of Ohio Coal Miners (Columbus, OH: Ohio State Department of Health, 1919), pp. 18 and 22.

¹¹ Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1929), p. 435.

most common form of public health strategy. When that was lifted, the Lynds complained, “the popular mood was not one of inquiry into the factors lying back of such an untoward interruption of the ordinary business of living.” Instead, people blew horns, lit fires, and marched in the streets.¹² Rather than science and action, patience and celebration characterized responses to public health crises.

The Rhodes family experienced disease and death within that framework. Young Jim was the third of five children, but only three children made it past childhood. Rhodes’ younger brother, Carl, died in infancy and a sister, Katherine, died around age 6.¹³ Jim underwent a life threatening operation for empyema, a condition which fills the lungs with pus. Doctors tried to drain the lung, and did so, but collapsed it in the process, rendering it useless. Two versions of this story exist, both told by Rhodes’ older sister Garnet. She told The Columbus Dispatch in 1986 that “the corrective surgery was done on the right lung at a Terre Haute [Indiana] hospital.”¹⁴ Garnet’s second version, which she told to Rhodes’ daughter and son-in-law, Sue and Dick Moore, was more gruesome than the first. The operation occurred at home on the kitchen table; blood and other fluids spattered the wall; and Garnet, still a young girl herself,

¹² ibid., p. 436 and p. 447.

¹³ I have yet to track down Carl’s or Katherine’s death certificate. Their deaths are reported in Mike Curtin, “The Old School.”

¹⁴ ibid.

assisted in the operation, holding Jim down while the doctor worked. Garnet became a nurse, she claimed, because of this experience.¹⁵

Whichever version is true, Rhodes and his siblings lived and died within a children's health care system that consisted of patchwork, localized efforts. In 1920, the Children's Bureau, a division of the United States Department of Labor, reported that "within the first year after birth, the United States loses 1 in 10 of all babies born," ranking the powerful and prosperous America behind ten other countries in the world.¹⁶ For a stark contrast of the world into which Rhodes was born and the world in which he was politically powerful, consider these mortality statistics: in 1909, the year of Rhodes' birth, life expectancy at birth for males and females was 52.1 years; in 1918, the year of the influenza pandemic, the age for both sexes was 39.1, but only 36.6 for males. In contrast, by 1970, the last full year of Rhodes' first stint as governor, life expectancy at birth had risen to 70.9. Moreover, some diseases that ravaged the world of Rhodes' youth had mostly disappeared by the time he had reached the pinnacle of his power. Note the lethality of tuberculosis. In 1909, the second highest cause of death was

¹⁵ Sue and Dick Moore, Interview with author, 12/06/2004. Audio tape in author's possession. The Moores also remember that the operation occurred in Jackson, Ohio, not Terre Haute or Jasonville, Indiana.

¹⁶ Eight Annual Report of the Chief, Children's Bureau, 1920, p. 10, cited in Theda Skocpol, Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 499. The Children's Bureau based their figures on 1918 data, which had spiked from 93.8 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1917. In 1919, the number declined to 86.6, which still would have given the United States a disappointing international ranking. The increase in 1918 resulted from the influenza pandemic of 1918. See United States Census Bureau, Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976), part I, p. 57, Series B 136-147. On the struggle to create well-funded, geographically comprehensive programs to promote health care for mothers and children, see Skocpol, Protecting Soldiers and Mothers, pp. 302-304 and 480-524.

tuberculosis, responsible for 156.3 deaths per 100,000 population. In 1970, TB claimed only 2.6 deaths per 100,000 population.¹⁷

Attitudes toward public health slowly changed during Rhodes' youth, but not quickly enough to stabilize his family. In 1909 in Wellston, Ohio, for example, a local newspaper editor reported signs of reluctant, hesitant progress. Rhodes' father grew up in Wellston, and Coalton, Jim's birthplace, was only a few miles away. With tongue in cheek, the editorial writer lamented the emergence of "smart people," experts who told ordinary Americans the best way to live life. Too often, the writer said, these "smart people" cared little for traditions such as drinking well water from dirty buckets and infected wells, or providing one washcloth for an entire hotel full of lodgers. A little communicable disease was nothing next to community tradition.¹⁸ The "smart people" were in fact progressive reformers, a new breed of political activists and business people who used emerging scientific, managerial, and communication technologies to transform daily life. Their reforms often centralized decision-making about daily life into a government agency or a distant corporate headquarters, challenging local folkways.

Americans at the time of Rhodes' birth in 1909 were both pleased and shocked by industrialization, pleased because it had created unprecedented prosperity and opportunity, shocked because it created innumerable excesses. Poverty seemed worse than ever despite such great progress; cities were

¹⁷ Historical Statistics of the United States, part I, p. 55, Series B 107-115 and p. 58, Series B 149-166.

¹⁸ Wellston Sentinel, 9/25/1909, p. 3.

overcrowded and dirty; the newly industrialized food production process was hazardous and unsanitary. Progressive reformers, “smart people” in the gently sarcastic words of the Wellston editor, sought to ameliorate the pernicious effects of industrialization. Public health experts advocated new laws that promoted, or forced, quarantining of sick people, that improved water supplies and sewage systems, and that purified food and drug production. Rhodes was not born into the improved world the progressives sought; he was born into the imperfect and dangerous world they tried to reform.¹⁹

That improved world came too late to save Rhodes’ brother, sister, and father. The death of the father especially changed the family’s trajectory, and the history of Ohio politics. James Sr. seemed to be a striver. The 1910 census listed his occupation as a miner. He could read and write, but had not attended school within the last year. He was a wage earner who rented rather than owned his home. His wife, Susan, listed no occupation. Governor Rhodes claimed that his mother finished high school and that his father graduated from a business college.²⁰ If true, then Rhodes’ parents were unlike most Americans at the time. In 1900, only 6.3 percent of Americans teenagers earned their diplomas. If James, Sr. graduated from a business college, then he was exceptional among working class men. Even in the higher paid working class families, saving for

¹⁹ On progressive reform, see Samuel P. Hays, *The Response to Industrialism 1885-1914* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995, 2nd ed.), especially pp. 25-46, 67 and 92-119. On health movements see, John C. Burnham, *How Superstition Won and Science Lost: Popularizing Science and Health in the United States* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), pp. 45-84. See especially pp. 56-62 for public health reforms in the early twentieth century.

²⁰ 1910 U.S. Census; Rollin Dean Jauchius, “Gubernatorial Roles: An Assessment by Five Ohio Governors,” (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation: The Ohio State University, 1971), p. 47.

education was a hardship. The masses of unskilled, poorly paid wage earners lived with insecurity, rarely acquiring personal items beyond clothes, modest furniture, and eating utensils. Generally, the working class worried about a difficult present that could quickly become an arbitrary future. Education was a rare extravagance. If Rhodes' father completed some post high school education, it either came before he had a family or it came at a cost to his family's short-term financial well-being.²¹

One cannot conclude precisely how much the elder Rhodes earned. No will is extant in the Greene County courthouse. In 1971 Governor Rhodes said that his parents were "middle income" and that his father had left the shafts below the ground and had become a superintendent above the ground. If this upward mobility occurred, then it most likely happened in Jasonville because in the 1910 census, Rhodes' father identified himself simply as a miner. Whatever the father's occupation, his son's phrase "middle income" is anachronistic, an inapt way to describe working class people circa 1900. The phrase suggests "middle-class," a group definable mainly by their employment in public and private sector bureaucracies and by their ability to consume mass market products. The working class had no chance of becoming middle class until industrialists like Henry Ford pioneered the "high-wage-low price" formula that facilitated consumption and until the credit revolution of the 1920s allowed the

²¹ Historical Statistics of the United States, p. 379, Series H 598-601; Daniel Horowitz, The Morality of Spending: Attitudes Toward the Consumer Society in America, 1875-1940 (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 19-20. Assuming an 18 year old graduation age, Rhodes' father would have graduated high school in 1899 while his mother would have finished in 1904. The 1910 Census has the couple married at age 21 for Mr. Rhodes and 16 for Mrs. Rhodes. She would have finished high school while married.

working class to consume beyond their income levels. As the chairmen of General Electric said in the 1920s, there was a difference “between an income which provides only an uncomfortable house, inadequate food and insufficient clothes and no provision for the future and an income which provides margins above suitable living conditions for education and health and recreation and provision for the future.” Increasingly in the 1920s, Americans defined middle class as the ability to consume beyond survival levels. Through consumption, the working class became part of a loose-knit, widely ranging middle class.²²

For most of the elder Rhodes’ life, however, his working class status derived from his identity as a producer, not as a consumer. What he did was more important than what he bought. His son was born into this world. The “high-wage, low price” paradigm spread only after the elder Rhodes died. If in fact he did rise into management, then he would have entered the new consumer middle class at the lowest level. His wages as a miner, though, kept him in the producer working class.

One can only speculate on his income as a miner. In 1908, Ohio coal miner wages ranged from a top average of \$497.31 per year for machine cutters down to a low of \$189.54 for trappers. The average daily wage peaked at \$3.63 per day and hit bottom at \$1.17. In Jackson County, however, wages for mine workers were lower than the state average. Machine cutters earned an average

²² Jauchius, “Gubernatorial Roles,” p. 47; Olivier Zunz, Why the American Century (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 74--85. The GE chairman’s quote is on p. 82.

of \$468.18, or \$2.89 per day. Trappers eked out \$156.00 on \$1.00 per day. All Ohio mine workers averaged less than 200 hundred days of work per year.²³

Whatever his salary, the elder Rhodes' striving was more about security than about comfort. If we believe his son, then the elder Rhodes apparently had just enough ambition to get out of the dirty and dangerous mines in order to provide a measure of long-term stability for his family. As his oldest child Garnet recalled, "We lived just like the other families around Coalton. We never really realized we were poor, but I suppose we were. We always had enough to eat."²⁴ The key to that recollection is that only in retrospect did the family seem to be poor. Only after seventy six years, after a post-World War Two revolution in the definition of poverty and the distribution of material wealth, did Garnet think her family was poor. They always had enough to eat and they lived like everyone else in Coalton. They could consume, but only at survival levels.

By 1910, local economic conditions frustrated Rhodes' ambitions. The Jackson County mines produced less and less each year. Coalton is in rural Jackson County in the southeastern portion of the state. The hilly topography, the rugged landscape, and the stores of coal combined to make mining and not agriculture the main economic activity. The peak years for the mines were from the late 1880s to the early 1900s. From 1883-1886, miners produced less than one million tons of coal per year. From 1887-1894, output in Jackson mines increased, generating over one million tons of coal each year. From 1895

²³ State of Ohio, Thirty-Third Annual Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Springfield, OH: The Springfield Publishing Company, 1910), pp. 449 and 453.

²⁴ Curtin, "The Old School."

through 1903, production jumped to over two million tons in each year. After 1903, however, the coal industry in Jackson struggled, never matching its earlier numbers. In 1909, the year Rhodes was born, the mines yielded just over 800,000 tons. Two days after Rhodes was born, the Jackson Herald commented that “The mines are running some better now than a few months ago, but the work is still very slack in this county.” The decline of the mine industry continued permanently. World War One provided quick, temporary relief when demand spiked the output to slightly over one million tons per year in 1917 and 1918. From 1921 -1955, however, tons produced never rose above 600,000.²⁵

Rhodes made the decision to move his family where economic opportunity would allow him to create a better life for his family. As Garnet recalled, he moved the family to Jasonville, Indiana “because the mines out there were doing good.”²⁶ Located in the southwestern portion of the state, Jasonville is in Greene County. Unlike Jackson County, Ohio, the coal mining industry there boomed. In the 1880s, little mining occurred. By 1920, however, the Greene county mines accounted for 10.7 percent of Indiana's coal.²⁷ Clearly, Jasonville in 1910 offered a better economic future than did Coalton.

The elder Rhodes, however, chose Jasonville for security as well as opportunity. He was ambitious enough to pick up his family and move to another state, but he softened the risk by moving to a place that was physically,

²⁵ Jackson Herald, 9/15/1909, p. 1. The figures are from Frank C. Morrow, A History of Industry in Jackson, County Ohio (Wellston, OH: n.p., 1956), p. 82.

²⁶ Curtin, “The Old School.”

²⁷ Clifton J. Phillips, Indiana in Transition: The Emergence of an Industrial Commonwealth, 1880-1920 (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana Historical Society, 1968), pp. 186-187.

economically, and culturally familiar. Jasonville attracted the same kinds of people who settled in Jackson: coal miners who had roots in Kentucky's Appalachian Mountains. They followed a working-class circuit. The 1910 Census, for example, listed James Sr.'s and his parents' birthplace as Kentucky. They had moved to Wellston sometime in the late 19th century when Jackson County mines were active. Many other people had done the same. From 1870-1900, Jackson County's population grew from 21,759 to 34,248.²⁸

By 1910, however, the Wellston newspaper was full of tidbits on people's travels out of the county. One Wellston resident had taken a trip to Kentucky where "he encountered many old Wellston people, all of whom are doing well." Other reports indicated that a common place of migration was Indiana, especially southwestern Indiana. One article announced that a couple, "formerly of Wellston," was married in Jasonville the week prior.²⁹ Even an editorial optimistic about the rebirth of Jackson County told the story of decline. Called, "Coming Back To Dear Old Wellston," the piece documented the decline of the coal industry and the consequent out-migration:

With each mine closed, hundreds of miners were thrown out of employment and lost their means of earning a livelihood, and matters continued in this downward movement until a halo of blue could be seen around the countenance of many. Men losing their jobs left town and scattered in all directions, many of them having gone so far now as to be beyond the sound of the roll call.³⁰

²⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, Population, 1910: Reports by States with Statistics for Counties, Cities and Other Civil Divisions (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913), Vol. 3, p. 408.

²⁹ Wellston Sentinel, 4/7/1910, pp. 3 and 4; 6/30/1910, pp. 7 and 8; 7/28/1910, p. 8; 8/25/1910, p.

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³⁰ ibid, 8/18/1910, p. 5.

Indeed, from 1900-1910 Jackson County lost 10.1 percent of its population, declining from 34,248 to 30,791. In that same period, Greene County, Indiana increased its population by 29.2 percent, rising from 28,530 to 36,873.³¹ The 1910 Census reported that Rhodes was employed as of April 1910, the period during which the Census was taken. Most likely, he moved willingly, unlike the many unemployed Jackson County workers before him. There has also been some suggestion that Rhodes had family already in the Jasonville area.³² It is possible, therefore, that the elder Rhodes chose Jasonville because he knew people there already. The risk of staying put was greater than the risk of starting over.

The familiarity of people, place, and culture in Jasonville allowed Rhodes' father to quickly integrate himself into the community. In the 1910s, Jasonville was a dynamic town, unpredictable, perhaps, and even a bit rough and tumble. One resident recalled the town when his family first arrived in 1904. A town band performed at the train depot, greeting all newcomers. The band pleasantly diverted attention from the makeshift infrastructure of the growing village. Jasonville "was nothing but dirt in dry weather and mud in wet weather." Despite the disagreeable look of the town, the resident fondly recalled that he had "seen my mother being carried across the street many a time by some good hearted person." Around 1906 or 1907, the resident continued, town officials paved Main

³¹ U.S. Census, Population, 1910: Reports by States with Statistics for Counties, Cities and Other Civil Divisions (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913, Vol. 3, pp. 408 and 552.

³² Sue and Dick Moore, interview with the author, 12/6/2004. Audio tape in author's possession; Max Griffith, a postmaster of Jasonville and local historian, also suggested this possibility. E-mail from Griffith to author, 11/16/1999. Hardcopy in author's possession.

Street, mainly so that Prohibition supporters could have a parade. In the 1910s, prohibition played an important role in one local election. Jasonville incorporated as a city only because its township had voted dry. State law allowed an incorporated city to vote separately on the issue. In 1912, Jasonville “wets” defeated the “drys” by eighteen votes, so the town became a “wet” city. One local historian estimated that during the 1910s saloons outnumbered groceries.

The Jasonville political scene reflected the fluid character of the town. Laborers, specifically mine workers, exercised political power, an unusual situation in Indiana. Symbolic of the presence of labor, the local business advocacy organization, usually named the Chamber of Commerce in other cities, called itself the Jasonville Industrial Bureau. Businessmen distanced themselves from the anti-labor policies of the United States Chamber of Commerce. Jasonville’s historian suggests, in addition, that many area workers supported socialist labor leader Eugene Debs, whose hometown was nearby Terre Haute. Town legend, most likely apocryphal, holds that election authorities robbed Debs of votes and that locals, for years, found pro-Debs ballots stuffed in sewers. This kind of “Chicago-style” politics probably would not have been possible in the early 1900s. The town had few paved roads, so how many sewers could there have been?

The story, even if inaccurate, suggests something about the town. Sympathetic to Debs and his cause, the story persists in town lore. Jasonville residents broadly defined legitimate political activity. Partisanship certainly existed, but outside the confines of the narrow two party system. In the 1910s

and early 1920s, local voters sought political leaders who reached beyond party labels and offered non-partisan programs for progress. In the first city election in 1912, for example, four candidates from four different parties vied for mayor. In addition to the Democratic and Republican candidates, the Union Party and the Citizen's Party also entered the race. Renegade Democrat S.D. Dempsey headed the Citizen's party. Even though he was a dry, Dempsey won. The Union Party won the rest of the offices, shutting out the Democrats and Republicans. In the early 1920s, moreover, Jasonville elected socialists to power, a victory based largely on their promise to build a new high school gymnasium.³³

What was life like for the Rhodes family in Jasonville? Was Rhodes' father the business college graduate and mine superintendent his son claimed? The World War One draft registration card of James Sr. required him to state his present occupation. The instructions were quite clear: "This means your present occupation, trade or employment. Do not state what you once did, nor what you have done most of the time, nor what you are best fitted to do. Simply state what your job is at this time." Rhodes said "miner." For employer, Rhodes listed "Tower Hill No. 18." Rhodes, Jr. may have embellished his father's status, or

³³ The preceding paragraphs describing Jasonville were based on Max Griffith, e-mails to author, 11/15/1999, Hardcopy in author's possession. Griffith had an audio tape on which an elderly former resident, whom Griffith identified as Luther Atkins, recalled life in Jasonville from 1904-1912. Atkins' oral history is undated. Griffith supplied me with a transcript via e-mail on 11/15/1999. See also a series of columns published by local newspaper, Ben Sink, The Jasonville Story: 1858-1958, 100 Years of Progress in Jasonville (Jasonville, IN: The Jasonville Leader 1980 [reprint edition]), especially pp. 61-67. My thanks to Judy Farnsworth, a librarian with the Bloomfield-Eastern Greene County Public Library, for providing me with this source.

perhaps his father's working class identity was so strong and persistent that even once out of the mines he still described himself as a miner.³⁴

As a wage earner in 1917-1918, Rhodes most likely fit the same pattern as other wage earners across the country. About 90 percent earned less than \$1,000 per year. Two-thirds of all males fell below \$750 per year while another third failed to make \$500. Labor economist Scott Nearing estimated that "unless a family" of five (the size of the Rhodes family) had "an annual income of \$800 or more it can not maintain a healthful standard." Even then, \$800 was merely "adequate subsistence." Irregular employment and disease continued to threaten working class security.³⁵

In the eight years he lived in Jasonville, the elder Rhodes nevertheless seemed to thrive. He apparently became friends with S. D. Dempsey, a neighbor who was not only the newspaper publisher, but the mayor as well. James' Sr. probably used that connection to receive a mayoral appointment to the Jasonville school board. Garnet said that he was a precinct committeeman and "was always mixed up in politics," constantly working for candidates.³⁶ Rhodes was

³⁴ James Rhodes World War One Draft Registration Card, accessed through www.Ancestry.com at The State Library of Ohio, 3/10/2005. Hardcopy in author's possession. He listed his street address as "229 Main." I have not yet tracked down whether he owned or rented, or what the value of the home was. On the instructions, see John j. Newman, Uncle, We Are Ready! Registering America's Men, 1917-1918: A Guide to Researching World War I Draft Registration Cards (North Salt Lake, UT: Heritage Quest, 2001), p. 15.

³⁵ Warren Van Tine, The Making of a Labor Bureaucrat: Union Leadership in the United States, 1870-1920 (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1973), p. 152; Alexander Trachtenberg, ed., The American Labor Yearbook, 1917-1918 (New York: The Rand School of Social Science, 1918), pp. 163-164.

³⁶ Griffith, e-mail to author, 11/15/1999; Curtin, "The Old School." There is no way to prove this. There are no extant election records for the town during this period. The local newspaper never reported any partisan precinct election results. I have searched the 8 year run and have not come across the elder Rhodes name, except for his obituary. The only political position it listed was the school board. I could find no evidence to back that up, however. No appointment

connected politically and potentially headed for a solid future in the community.

In this Hoosier environment, the younger Rhodes learned to walk, talk, and think, watching as his father strove for stability, security, and modest comfort in a world dominated by instability, insecurity, and scarcity.

In 1918, the unpredictable demographic effects of the influenza pandemic thwarted his father's efforts. James Sr. was then a thirty-eight year old healthy man, medium height, stout build, blue eyes, and dark hair. His signature on his draft registration card was bold and steady with just a hint of flourish. The "J" in James dipped below the line, curled up and around, crossed over to enclose the loop, continued and then came to a rest, forming a short parallel to the signature line and pointing the eye to the rest of his name. The "d" in Rhodes fell below the line as well, diving straight down, curving backward and toward the start of his name, and heading slightly up again as if to form another "J" reaching to meet the first. He signed on September 12, 1918. Two months later he was dead.³⁷

Historian Alfred Crosby concluded that the influenza pandemic of 1918-1919 "killed more humans than any other disease in a period of similar duration in the history of the world" and killed an unprecedented number of people who should have otherwise survived. The pandemic was "an actuarial nightmare," killing healthy men, ages 20-40.³⁸ The only other comparable twentieth-century event that created a similar "demographic catastrophe" was World War Two.

announcement, no listing of members, no initiatives, started by Rhodes. I have also been unable to locate any records for the school district.

³⁷ James Rhodes World War One Draft Registration Card, accessed through www.Ancestry.com at The State Library of Ohio, 3/10/2005. Hardcopy in author's possession.

³⁸ Crosby, America's Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 215.

Influenza “killed tens of millions, rolling across continents and oceans so swiftly that public health institutions were still preparing for the onslaught after it had passed.”³⁹

The family’s experience with influenza was generally consistent with national demographics. First, the entire family was sick, but the parents, both in their thirties and healthy, were hit the hardest. The Jasonville Leader, the local newspaper, reported that “The entire family was stricken at the same time and since Mr. Rhodes was so seriously sick it was thought best to remove him to the hospital. Mrs. Rhodes is dangerously ill at the home now. The three children are reported better.”⁴⁰ Had young Jim, then age nine, and his sisters been just slightly younger, the statistical likelihood of their deaths would have increased dramatically.⁴¹ Second, the father died in November of 1918. The highest mortality rates occurred during three months of 1918: September through November. The disease spread so rapidly that most towns and cities were unaware of the rising threat in the few months before it hit.⁴² In April of 1918, The Jasonville Leader ran no front-page articles concerning the flu, content instead to report on a German bar owner in a nearby town who, the headline announced, had been “disloyal.” A mob had visited the bar owner with tar, feathers, and a rope and took him “to a room where he was given the third degree.” Soon

³⁹ ibid., p. xiv and xii.

⁴⁰ The Jasonville Leader, November 20, 1918, p. 1.

⁴¹ Males age 5-9, died at a rate of 28.4 deaths per 1,000 while females within the same group, including Jim’s younger sister Loretta, died at a rate of 40.9 per 1,000. Garnet, Jim’s older sister, fell into the 10-14 age group, which claimed 34.3 females per 1,000. Under age 5, however, males died at a rate of 175.3 per 1,000 and females at 207.6 per 1,000. See Crosby, America’s Forgotten Pandemic, p. 213.

⁴² ibid., pp. 17-18, 219.

thereafter, the “crowd became impatient” and drove him “to the corner of Main and Third streets where “he made promises to aid the Red Cross movement, subscribe for the Liberty Loan and to do anything that the citizens wanted him to do.” When, in contrast, on November 20, 1918, The Jasonville Leader ran Rhodes’ obituary on the front page, flu stories dominated.⁴³ They pushed even patriotism off the front-page. Third, men succumbed more often than women. Here the Rhodes family offered a slight twist to the statistical averages. Women aged 30-34, Mrs. Rhodes’ group in 1918, died at a rate of 111.3 per 1,000 women while Mr. Rhodes’ age group, 35-39, died at 95.5 per 1,000 men. Though she had reportedly been “dangerously ill,” Mrs. Rhodes beat odds that were worse than her husband’s.⁴⁴

These contingencies of life and death affected young Jim’s life. The flu unaccountably killed people who normally survived it. Public health strategies were unsophisticated and impotent. No reporting system existed until after the pandemic of 1918. Had government agencies been able to spread reliable information, towns and cities across America could have prepared better. More people could have survived. No one knows what would have happened had any of these contingencies changed. We can be certain only that the world into which Jim Rhodes was born was far less secure than the world in which he governed.⁴⁵

⁴³ The Jasonville Leader, April 10, 1918, p. 1 and November 20, 1918, p. 1

⁴⁴ Crosby, America’s Forgotten Pandemic, p. 213.

⁴⁵ I am not arguing that the public health system is perfect in the early twenty-first century. Indeed, Alfred Crosby, writing during the 1980s AIDS crisis, worried that “Scientists know amazingly more about molecular biology, pathogens, and immunology that they did fifteen or twenty years ago, but the bad guys, the pathogens, particularly the newly recognized ones, seem

Rhodes' boyhood experiences with death and disease shaped his life in silly and serious ways. For example, as an adult he used his own boyhood illness and his father's death to explain away a bad habit: spitting. He expectorated in private and public. His daughter Sue remembered not just the constant cigar-chewing, but the spewing mix of saliva and masticated cigar. On too many family trips, Rhodes' wife had to chastise her husband for spitting inside the car -- not through an open window, but on to the floorboard.⁴⁶ Spitting in public, too, caused minor political problems. Given that Rhodes had pus-filled lungs as a boy and that his father died with fluid-filled lungs as a result of the flu, it is not surprising to learn that a doctor told him to clear his lungs rather than swallow the phlegm. Rhodes's mother, too, repeated the advice. Somewhere along the line, however, clearing one's throat became spitting in public, a behavior that did not fit the image of a respectable political leader. His detractors, especially middle and upper-class people in the Republican Party, complained about these plainly improper behaviors all the time. By putting this bad habit in the context of life, death, and his past, and offering as authority legitimate, if perhaps carelessly executed, medical advice, Rhodes deflected criticisms from the "respectable classes" that dominated the leadership of the Republican Party. He transformed the bad habit. According to Dean Jauchius, "The doctor told him, 'Every time you cough, spit; don't swallow.' It's like he was programmed by his

to the general public to have become nastier faster than scientists have become smarter." Crosby, *America's Forgotten Pandemic*, p. xi. John C. Burnham went so far as to argue that by the late twentieth century "Health popularization was no longer a vehicle for extending advocacy of a robust scientism and uplift as well as a sound body." Rather, "[e]ach piece of health advice was reduced to just another among the many amoral, unconnected, often unreasoned assertions that passed for popular science." Burnham, *How Superstition Won and Science Lost*, p. 84.

⁴⁶ Sue Moore, interview with author, 12/6/2004. Audio tape in author's possession.

mother and his doctor.”⁴⁷ Rhodes did not spit because he was crude, but because he was health-conscious.

More seriously, Rhodes learned to ameliorate his fragile, precarious position through family loyalty and personal determination. Before the New Deal, working class people used the family as the first line of defense against insecurity. Family was security. Accordingly, very soon after Rhodes’ father died in Indiana, the Rhodes’ moved back to Jackson County, Ohio, settling in Jackson, the county seat. They sought a supportive network of close relatives.⁴⁸ As Rhodes’ daughter recalled, however, Rhodes’ mother was not well liked and family support was not forthcoming.

The source of the friction is unclear. It might have stemmed from her relationship with John Barrett. According to the 1920 census, Barrett was the only boarder in the Rhodes house, paying Mrs. Rhodes for room and board. She was listed as a proprietor of a restaurant. Barrett was a telegraph operator for the Detroit, Toledo, Ironton (DTI) railroad, which passed through Jackson. Around 1923 or 1924, however, Mrs. Rhodes, the children, and Barrett moved to Springfield, Ohio, another link on the DTI. City directories from 1925 and 1927 listed her as Mrs. John Barrett. In 1928 and 1929 she continued to use Barrett as her last name, but John Barrett was no longer listed as a resident, disappearing from the Springfield directories for good. By 1931, she had reverted to Rhodes as her last name and was listed as “the widow of James.”

⁴⁷ Jauchius quoted by Mike Curtin, “The Old School.”

⁴⁸ The elder Rhodes’ obituary announced the family’s planned return to Ohio: “The funeral arrangements have not been made at this time, but it is probable that the body will be taken to his old home at Wellston, Ohio.” The Jasonville Leader, 11/20/1918, p. 1.

The precise nature of the relationship is unclear. Rhodes' older sister said only that her mother and Barrett were married, that he died a few years after the marriage, and that very little was "known or said" about him.⁴⁹ Contrary to Garnet's version, however, there is no Ohio death certificate for Barrett and no marriage or divorce records. It is possible that Barrett and Susan Rhodes had a common law marriage. But whatever course it took, the Rhodes-Barrett relationship might have started in circumstances that could have caused problems with in-laws.⁵⁰

Sue Moore thought that her grandmother's strong will and forceful personality alienated the extended family.⁵¹ Whatever the specific event that caused a rift, Moore was probably right. Her grandmother was fierce and aggressive. Dean Jauchius described her as "tough as nails."⁵² When I interviewed Governor Rhodes toward the end of his life, I asked him to tell me about his mother. He chose to demonstrate how his mother used to discipline him. Sitting in a wheelchair, Rhodes leaned forward quickly, grabbed my shirt collar and repeatedly yanked it. He then poked me in the shoulder several times. Leaning in ever closer, Rhodes then began swearing, theatrically threatening me the way an angry parent instills fear into an errant boy. Finally, Rhodes slumped back into his chair and said, "That," he paused, "was my mother."⁵³ The

⁴⁹ Curtin, "Old School."

⁵⁰ I still need to double check the Jackson County and Clark County records. Clark County clearly had no record of a marriage or divorce, so if the marriage record does exist, it would be in Jackson County. But when I last looked, the Jackson County records were not in good shape or clear order. Most of the 1920s era records were in a dark, dirty attic, stacked randomly.

⁵¹ Sue Moore, interview with author, 12/6/2004. Audio tape in author's possession.

⁵² Jauchius quoted by Curtin, "Old School."

⁵³ James Rhodes, interview with author. Audio tape in author's possession.

extended family might have objected to the way Mrs. Rhodes created stability and security for her family after the death of young Jim's father, but any long-standing personality conflicts no doubt exacerbated the rift and undermined family solidarity. As a result, in the short term Rhodes, his sisters, and his mother had only themselves and Barrett for support.

In the long-term, they did not have even Barrett. His absence after a few years -- whether from death, divorce, or disappearance -- made it necessary for Governor Rhodes to minimize Barrett's role. Thus, the Rhodes family moved to Springfield not because Barrett's job took him there, the simplest and most direct explanation. Rather, the Rhodes family was poor in the early 1920s, but the mother was too "proud and stubborn" to "turn to any level of government for help."⁵⁴ Consequently, Governor Rhodes recalled:

The county people came out to our house to get the kids, to take us to a home. My mother grabbed a broom and chased those people clear out through the front gate. She shook that broom at them, and told them not to come back; never to come back, that this was a family, and by God it was going to stay a family. So we moved away from there, and went to Springfield, and I was hustling all kinds of jobs. And we never looked backed, and we never had any aid -- any level of support at all -- from any government.⁵⁵

This dramatic but still light-hearted story could be true. His mother was the kind of woman to take a broom to county officials in order to protect her family. Other than family recollections, however, there is no independent evidence to corroborate the story. The 1920 census offers no reason to believe that the

⁵⁴ Rollin Dean Jauchius, "Gubernatorial Roles: An Assessment by Five Ohio Governors," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation: The Ohio State University, 1971), p.49.

⁵⁵ *ibid*, p. 49.

Rhodes' were so poor that intervention was necessary. Mrs. Rhodes was a proprietor of a business that had one boarder -- though we do not know for certain if she had any others at other times. Garnet also recalled that her mother worked in a cigar factory, an emerging industry in Jackson County that welcomed unskilled female laborers.⁵⁶ John Barrett's income, presumably, also helped the family. The family was probably no worse off than anyone else in Jackson. Governor Rhodes' recollection seems manufactured, an attempt to draw attention to his work ethic and character, and away from John Barrett.

Accompanying these abrupt family changes during his youth -- four different towns and two different male authority figures before Rhodes was in his teens -- one constant remained: his mother. According to Jauchius, Rhodes "prominently displayed" a picture of his mother in every office he occupied. The caption, placed there after she died in 1950, read, "This is a family."⁵⁷ In 1918, attempting to explain the difficult times ahead, Rhodes' mother had spoken precisely these words to her children after their father had died.

As an adult, Rhodes worked to instill that ethic into his children: family was more important than anything else.⁵⁸ What did Rhodes' version of "family values" mean? Did Rhodes think of his family before he ran for office? In 1986 Rhodes' wife was dying of cancer. She begged him not to run. He did so anyway, campaigning during several of his wife's last months. Did he consider

⁵⁶ See, for example, the Jackson Standard Journal, March 7, 1923, p. 2 for notice of opportunities for female laborers. For hopeful notes that the cigar industry might bring jobs to Jackson County, see the Wellston Sentinel, March 10, 1920, pp. 2 and 5. Curtin, "The Old School," reported that "Susie Rhodes worked in a cigar factory and operated a boarding house used by coal miners and workers of the Detroit, Toledo, and Ironton Railroad."

⁵⁷ Jauchius, "Gubernatorial Roles," p. 55.

⁵⁸ Sue Moore interview.

how his public life might affect his kids? Rhodes warned his children that when they left the house, fifty percent of the people they saw on the street would hate them simply because of who their father was; the rest might like them for the same reason. Beyond this cautionary note, however, Rhodes never curtailed his ambitions in order to allow his children to grow up like most children: anonymously. The children enjoyed the benefits of their father's power, of course, especially when Pat Boone, at the height of his popularity with teen audiences, stayed at the Rhodes house after a Columbus concert. Both Sue and Dick Moore deflected any suggestion that Rhodes' public life "cost" them anything in their private life and instead insisted that Rhodes found a "balance" between his family and his career. Most parents, however, never have to warn their children that they might be prejudged simply because of their father's politics. Speaking of a balance suggests, if not a cost, then at least a calculation; calculation suggests weighing positive and negatives. All families experience that calculation, but few do so over six decades in public life.

So what did Rhodes mean when he talked about valuing family? Far from a gauzy slogan useful only for campaigns, and not solely an attempt to sugarcoat the life of James Rhodes, this version of "family values" was rooted in Rhodes' difficult childhood experiences. By family, said Dick Moore, Rhodes meant immediate family, the ones who were around when he was in trouble the most as a youth, not the extended family of cousins, aunts, and in-laws. Family was mothers, brothers, and sisters, a close knit group that served as the first and last bulwark against a threatening world. Rhodes' mother was unsparing as she

explained to her children the hard realities of life after their father had died. As Rhodes remembered:

When my father passed away, my mother called all three in the night before Christmas, and presented some fruit and nuts, and said: 'This is a family. Divide it [the food] up.' We divided it up, and she said: 'There's no Santa Claus, and we're together against the world.' My mother said, 'When you leave this door, all your loved ones are in this house. Now if you get hit by a car, the only people who will comfort you are here.'⁵⁹

Neither righteous blather to distract voters nor political bludgeon to use against opponents, Rhodes' "family values" were hard-edged conclusions about life forged in dire circumstances.

Death was part of that life, and as a boy Rhodes learned how to respond to it. Sentimentality was useless; perseverance was necessary. Again, his forceful mother repeatedly taught the lesson. Rhodes said that:

I had probably the most enlightening boyhood of any boy. I had a mother that believed in discipline and obedience. My mother had one thing she taught us all. It was to pray every morning and every night, and the prayer was this: Oh God, help me be somebody. That was her whole theme, that anybody can be what they want to be if they work at it.⁶⁰

Recalling her father's death decades later, Garnet said "Dad had never been sick a day in his life, and he couldn't take it. He just gave up." Her mother, however, "was the other way around. She fought for every breath." Garnet revealed a tangled view of her parents: as she celebrated her mother, a slight bitterness

⁵⁹ Rhodes quoted by Jauchius "Gubernatorial Roles," p. 47.

⁶⁰ ibid, p. 48. Emphasis original.

toward her father emerged, evoking a sadness made hard by a lack of sentimentality. "He just gave up."⁶¹

But young Jim never did. Thus every account of his life always includes his extensive Tom Sawyer-esque resume. To help his family make ends meet, Rhodes went to work at age nine, saying as an adult that he "has never known not to have a job:" collecting scrap metal, carrying newspapers, picking berries, cutting grass, caddying, running errands, and selling crawdads for a nickel. Rhodes even said he trapped muskrats and sold their pelts for forty cents apiece. As a teen in Springfield, Rhodes played sports, sold suits and ties, booked bands, ran dances, and even employed five people to deliver his newspapers. The market for muskrat pelts must have been small and unprofitable. Nevertheless, Rhodes knew that he had to work, "and it made me stand apart in any group. I was probably the only one making any money in the crowd, and helping support a family. I gave my mother every cent I earned."⁶²

Though admirable, Rhodes was not as unique as he thought. Working class people in the early twentieth century often pooled their resources for both daily subsistence and long-term security. This child labor separated the working and middle classes, and usually thwarted working class efforts to rise to the middle class. Child labor came at the expense of education; lack of education slowed class mobility. When Mrs. Rhodes emphasized family as the first line of defense against a hostile world and when young Jim worked every job he could

⁶¹ Garnet Rhodes quoted by Curtin, in "The Old School."

⁶² Jim Rhodes quoted by Jauchius, in "Gubernatorial Roles," pp. 48-49.

create to help the family, they used the same strategies as most working class people.⁶³

The survival strategies thwarted the prayer that Rhodes learned from his mother. How could he “be somebody” if all he did was work to survive? The family’s experience in Springfield taught them that they were not progressing beyond the status quo, and that because other people were rising economically the Rhodes’ were in fact falling behind. No longer could Garnet claim that “We lived just like the other families around Coalton. We never really realized we were poor, but I suppose we were.” For the first time, the Rhodes’ would see economic stratification and racial diversity. Not everyone was a coal miner and not everyone white.

Suddenly, the Rhodes’ ability to consume -- or inability -- marked them. Sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd observed that in the 1890s class was a series of rigidly marked plateaus. In the 1920s, however, “the edges of the plateaus have been shaved off, and everyone lives on a slope from any point at which desirable things belonging to people all the way up to the top are in view.” This fluidity ironically only redoubled the social pressure to stay above those people below and inch closer to those above. Lack of mobility signaled personal failure. Rhodes’ efforts to support the family did stand out in Springfield, highlighting the family’s inability to enter the middle class.⁶⁴

⁶³ Zunz, Why the American Century?, pp. 78-80.

⁶⁴ Robert and Helen Lynd, Middletown, p. 83; Gary Cross, An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 23.

Now a young man, Rhodes looked much like his father. He inherited his father's stout build, blue-eyes, and dark hair. The family placed their aspirations on Jim's broad shoulders and barrel chest. Education was one way to enter the middle class. The Rhodes women first planned to work while Jim attended school, but he would prove ill-suited to formal education. It required delayed gratification, rewarding a steady temperament and a disciplined intellect. Rhodes' sharp, incisive, but restless mind could not find the proper intellectual stimulation in a classroom. What alternative entrance was there to the middle class? His mother would focus his capacious store of energy, directing him toward another route that people from the economic margins took to middle class stability: government.

CHAPTER 4

“OH, GOD, HELP ME BE SOMEBODY.”¹

FROM SPRINGFIELD TO COLUMBUS, 1920s-1930s

In Springfield Rhodes discovered an America distinctly different from the rural, industrial, homogeneous hill country towns of his boyhood. For the first time, not everybody was like him: a child of a white coal miner. His father's position in the world stayed steady even though unpredictable employment, subsistence-level scarcity, and arbitrary disease constantly threatened the family's stability. James Sr. strove for a secure life and his son later tried to promote him, but neither act changed how the elder Rhodes consistently identified himself. He was a miner. Rhodes men had worked in and around mines for at least two generations. Rhodes men were working class. Governor Rhodes struggled to achieve that kind of clarity.

He inherited a working-class history from his father, but little else. What the son produced in the 1920s no longer defined his class. What he consumed did. Because he was not a laborer he could not lay claim to the same working-class mantle his father had. Nor did Rhodes want to. The Rhodes family sought

¹ James Rhodes summarizing the prayer his mother taught him, quoted by Dean Jauchius, “Gubernatorial Roles: An Assessment by Five Ohio Governors” (unpublished dissertation: The Ohio State University, 1971), p. 48. Emphasis original.

to move up, to provide more than scarcity-level subsistence. As other Americans did, the Rhodes family in the 1920s sought to surround themselves with the comforts of newly attainable material abundance, to become part of the loose, ill-defined, but secure middle class of consumption. But Rhodes, his mother, and his sisters did not have the means to accomplish this goal. The Rhodes' were stuck, neither working class as Jim's father and grandfather were, nor consistently able to demonstrate their middle-class status with consumer goods. This ambiguity influenced Rhodes' personal life in Springfield and Columbus as well as his six-decade-long political career.

Precisely when the Barrett-Rhodes family arrived in Springfield is unclear. They still lived in Jackson when the federal government took the 1920 census. A 1986 article in The Columbus Dispatch dated the Springfield move to "about 1923." In 1925, they first appeared in the Springfield city directory.² Though we cannot exactly date their move, we can be certain that instability and insecurity continued to shape their lives.

Springfield was a new experience for the Rhodes family. The city was by far the largest, most racially diverse place in which they had lived. In 1920, the population of Jasonville was 4,461. The census recorded no African Americans or other minorities. The total population of Jackson was 5,842; African-Americans numbered 61. Springfield, in contrast, counted a total population of

² Mike Curtin, "The Old School," The Columbus Dispatch, October 12, 1986, accessed via the Columbus Dispatch on-line archive at www.columbusmetropolitanlibrary.org, The Columbus (Ohio) Metropolitan Library; Springfield City Directory for 1925 (Cincinnati, OH: The Williams Directory Company, 1925), p. 97 (for John and Susan Barrett, and p. 537 for Garnet Rhodes, Jim's older sister. Jim and his younger sister Lauretta were not listed).

60,840, roughly twelve times the size of Jackson or Jasonville. 7,029, or 10.5 percent, were African American. By 1930, the population of Springfield had grown to 68,742; 8,249 were African-Americans. In 1930, only two other counties in Ohio had higher proportions of black people than Clark County.³

Springfield was also economically stratified. Compared to Jackson County in 1930, Clark County had far more occupations and more people employed in those occupations. For example, in 1930 the two biggest occupations in Jackson were farming and coal mining. Only three industries employed over five hundred people: farming (2,117, of whom 827 were either wage laborers or unpaid family workers); mineral extraction (815, mainly coal); and wholesale and retail trade (730). Springfield, in contrast, reported 16 industries with over five hundred employees. Significantly, mineral extraction employed only 70 people. There were almost as many Clark County residents employed at automobile agencies and filling stations (550) as coal miners in Jackson (815). Thus, in Springfield the Barrett-Rhodes family encountered scores of mechanics, bankers, steel workers, lawyers, farmers, iron forgers, telephone operators, automobile workers, managers, clerks, domestic servants, electricians, insurance agents, and printers, but few coal miners. All kinds of work -- physical, domestic, office, retail, service, professional -- were represented. Coal had defined Rhodes men, their families, and their

³ Bureau of the Census, Population, 1920: Composition and Characteristics of the Population by States, Vol. III (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922), pp. 301, 790, 785; Population, 1930, Vol. III, Part 2, Montana-Wyoming, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932), pp. 496, 477, 479-484. Numbers one and two were Greene County (Xenia) and Franklin (Columbus). Hamilton (Cincinnati) and Mahoning (Youngstown) followed.

communities for at least two generations. That work -- that life -- was no longer important.⁴

As a traditional way of life disappeared, a new economy arose. Vibrant industries were in Clark while sick industries were in Jackson. Though prosperity spread generally throughout the 1920s economy, farm and coal sectors lagged significantly. In 1930, Jackson's coal mines employed 815, fewer than the 891 employed in Clark's hotels, restaurants, and boarding houses. Meanwhile, Clark benefited from new industries. The chemical industry prospered nationally because the federal government seized German patents during World War I and gave them to American companies. Federal policy also subsidized chemical research and protected domestic firms against foreign competition. In 1930, Clark County chemical industries employed five times as many people as in Jackson. The construction industry, too, boomed. From housing, to skyscrapers, to roads, construction workers built a new America, their projects symbolizing new mobility, new prosperity, and new aspirations. The power of electrical machinery, moreover, replaced steam engines, contributing to a sharp increase in productivity. Electricity also transformed the home, running new consumer products like lights, appliances, and radios. The automobile industry, finally, created new wealth and opportunity throughout all sectors of the economy, stimulating spending on housing, roads, rubber, glass, steel, oil, and, even, roadside "hotdog stands" and "billboards." Combined, in 1930 the building, road construction, electrical machinery, and automobile industries employed 5,117

⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 508 and 510.

Clark County workers, ten times as many as the 500 workers in Jackson. In 1928, moreover, Clark County had 20,481 residential electric customers while Jackson had only 711. When the Barrett-Rhodes family moved from Jackson to Springfield, they moved from a decaying to a growing economy, an economy that offered the potential to participate fully in the consumer revolution.⁵

Because of a general rise in prosperity, Americans changed their expectations of life. In 1900, the working class rarely had the same aspirations as the middle class. By 1930, however, those two groups held more similar expectations. The transition from a “pain” to a “pleasure” economy led the working class to expect a new standard of living. Americans were living longer. In 1900 life expectancy at birth was 47.3 years; by 1930 the average had increased to 59.7. Americans were also more productive. In 1914, only thirty percent of American industry had electrified. By 1929, the figure had jumped to seventy percent. Consumers had more money as well. After remaining stable from 1890-1918, per capita income and purchasing power dramatically increased throughout the 1920s. As a result, Americans bought luxuries in greater quantities than ever before. From 1900 to 1929, spending on personal care products increased 199 percent, accompanied by a 285 percent increase in recreation and leisure spending. Credit democratized the ownership of cars, appliances, and houses. Optimism about the future abounded. In 1928, Herbert

⁵ William Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 178-87, 195 (effect of automobile is on p. 186); 1930 US Census, *Population*, pp. 508 and 510; Bureau of Business Research, *Industrial and Commercial Ohio Yearbook, 1930* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University, 1930), pp. 58-59. Jackson County residents may not have had electrified homes, but they were prodigious consumers of cars. In 1929, 4,970 cars were registered in Jackson County, yet its total 1930 population was only 5,922. See *ibid.*, p. 59.

Hoover declared that “We shall soon, with the help of God, be in sight of the day when poverty will be banished in the nation.” Lincoln Steffens, once a progressive reformer and critic of big business, said that “Big Business in America is producing what the Socialists held up as their goal; food, shelter and clothing for all. You will see it during the Hoover administration.” Robert S. Lynd wrote that “Science, technology, improved merchandising, extension of personal credit facilities, and rising standards of living have created outright, brought into volume production, or raised to the position of necessities of life a long list of new goods and services. These involve new standards of health, child rearing, comfort, convenience, labor saving, cleanliness, leisure, travel, personal attractiveness, and variety of living.” Historian James T. Patterson concluded that “poor adults in 1930 shared more middle class aspirations of economic success than they had in 1900,” their expectations inflated by general prosperity and by new communications technology that made “them more aware of what they were missing.”⁶

The radio was a crucial instrument in the spread of new expectations. In the first half of the 1920s, the radio was still largely an elite-owned device. By 1930, however, ownership had quickly spread throughout the masses. Radio

⁶Leuchtenburg, The Perils of Prosperity, p. 178-179; Gary Cross, An All Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 17-27; James T. Patterson, America's Struggle Against Poverty, 1900-1985 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986 [2nd edition]), pp. 15-20; Robert S. Lynd, “The People As Consumers,” in President's Research Committee on Social Trends, Recent Social Trends in the United States (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1970 [1933]), Vol. II, p. 858. The Hoover quote is from Patterson, America's Struggle, p. 15. Patterson is quoted on p. 19. The Steffens quote is from Leuchtenburg, The Perils of Prosperity, p. 202. The description of a “pain” to “pleasure” economy belonged to economist Simon Patten, quoted in John F. Kasson, Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), p. 98.

sets then cost about \$100.00, but Americans had decided the expenditure well worth the sacrifice. An estimated 14.5 million American households had radios. As a new form of communications technology, the radio informed and persuaded, helped and manipulated. It created a national but still intimate community, forging new values and beliefs that celebrated amusement, desire, and fulfillment.⁷

In Muncie, Indiana, the Lynds noted the radio was “rapidly crowding its way in among the necessities in the family standard of living.” For “bank clerks” and “mechanics” alike, the radio was a “new tool” for “rolling back the horizons of Middletown.” Though it could open the world to previously parochial people, the radio also operated “as yet another means of standardizing many of Middletown’s habits.” The Lynds documented both the transformative power of radios and their widespread use among all classes. A Muncie resident -- whom the Lynds described as “a shabby man of fifty” -- said that he did not “use my car so much any more. The heavy traffic makes it less fun. But I spend seven nights a week on my radio. We hear fine music from Boston.” During the 1920s, the radio had become so important to Americans that the federal government

⁷ Roland Marchand, Advertising the American Dream: Making Way For Modernity, 1920-1940 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 88-94, 105-110; Warren Susman, Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), pp. 158-160; Cross, An All-Consuming Century, pp. 62-65 (p. 62 for the cost of a radio); U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970, Part 2 (Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), p.793. The number of households with radios came from the 1930 census, plus a survey sponsored by the Columbia Broadcasting System, which, according to the compilers of Historical Statistics, “purported to show 2,450,000 households with radios not enumerated in the 1930 Census of Population. Accordingly, the [National Association of Broadcasters, an industry trade group,] adjusted the figure to 14,499,000.” Historians commonly write that by 1930 about 40 percent of Americans families owned radios. See, for example, Ellis Hawley, The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order: A History of the American People and Their Institutions, 1917-1933 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979), p. 86 and Cross, An All Consuming Century, p. 62.

counted owners in the 1930 census. The Rhodes family owned one. They could no longer judge themselves by the local, scarcity-based standards of Coalton.⁸

As their expectations rose, however, their family life and economic status remained unstable. In the seven years the Rhodes family appeared in the Springfield city directory, they lost John Barrett, whose income supplied security, and they moved at least five and perhaps six times.⁹ They rented all of their homes. Throughout American history, Americans have been mobile. During the 1920s moving was still common but ultimately socially undesirable, for it suggested lack of community standing and insecurity. After Barrett, that description seemed to fit the Rhodes family. Only in 1928 did Rhodes' mother list an occupation: demonstrator. A demonstrator could be anything, but perhaps she showed department store customers how new appliances worked or tested finished products on a factory line.¹⁰ Most likely, the job was a lower-

⁸Robert S. and Helen Merrell Lynd, Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1929), pp. 269-271; 1930 U.S. Census, accessed on-line via www.Ancestry.com, 3/25/2005, The State Library of Ohio (hereafter U.S. Census, 1930). The Rhodes family was in Ward 7, enumeration district 12-54, Sheet #14A. As different as Springfield was from Coalton, other cities surpassed Springfield in the number of consumers. Measured by the number of telephone subscribers, electric and gas consumers, individual tax returns, and car registrations, Springfield and Clark County in 1930 did not rank in the top eight Ohio cities and counties. With slight variations within specific categories, the top eight were Cleveland, Cincinnati, Columbus, Toledo, Dayton, Akron, Youngstown, and Canton. All of these cities were the most industrialized, urbanized, and bureaucratized in Ohio. See Bureau of Business Research, Industrial and Commercial Ohio Yearbook, 1930, pp. 56-62.

⁹ John C. Barrett last appeared in the Springfield directory in 1927. From 1925-1927, he was listed as a ticket agent for the Detroit, Toledo, Ironton Railroad. See Springfield City Directory 1925 (p. 97), 1926 (p. 96), and 1927 (p. 100). For the different Barrett-Rhodes addresses, see ibid for 1925-1927. For the remaining years, see 1928 (p. 96), 1929 (p. 87), 1930 (p. 478), 1931 (p. 454), and 1932 (415). Mike Curtin, "The Old School," offered a potential sixth address, reporting that "About 1923, the family moved to Springfield, taking up residence on W. Columbia St. on the west side." On rates of mobility and their social implications, see Kenneth T. Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 50-51.

¹⁰ Springfield City Directory, 1928, p. 96. She could have had other jobs as well; compilers of city directories make mistakes or sometimes follow irregular reporting standards.

middle-class, white-collar job, a job far different from the working-class, outdoor, physically demanding labor available in Jackson. In 1927, the city directory listed Rhodes, then age 18, as a manager of a grocery store, but as student from 1928-29 and 1931-32. Rhodes also continued the pattern he set in Jackson: creating and working any job possible to help the family. His high school principal recalled that Rhodes “was a real promoter” who “booked bands” and who was “always hustling some way to make a buck.” To his friend Dean Jauchius, Rhodes said that he “was always in something competitive. I respected good competitors.” He sold “all the suits, ties, and shirts for the senior class graduations. Booked bands in senior high school; ran dances as a junior. Had five people working for me passing papers. Was assistant caddy master.” Rhodes said that in Springfield he learned the art of “selling, promotion, booking bands, newspapering, and business management.” All of this entrepreneurial activity led Jauchius to conclude that “[w]hen the elder Rhodes died, James A. Rhodes assumed a new role. Susan Rhodes was the head of the family now, but her son was the breadwinner.”¹¹

The evidence, however, suggests that after Barrett the Rhodes sisters were the only regular wage earners, that the Rhodes women were the breadwinners. In 1925 19-year-old Garnet, Rhodes’ older sister, first appeared in the city directory as a clerk in a corset shop, but from 1926 through 1932 she consistently reported “nurse.” In 1928 Lauretta, Rhodes’ younger sister, first

¹¹ Rhodes’ high school principal quoted by Richard G. Zimmerman, “Rhodes’s First Eight Years, 1963-1971,” in Alexander P. Lamis, ed., Ohio Politics (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1994), p.60; Rhodes quoted by Jauchius, “Gubernatorial Roles: An Assessment By Five Ohio Governors,” (unpublished dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1971), p. 48-49.

surfaced as a clerk when she was just sixteen years old and then turned up in 1929 as a seventeen-year-old bookkeeper for the Springfield Daily News. In the 1930 Census, the Rhodes family made their strategy clear. Only Garnet and Lauretta claimed to have occupations. They had not worked recently, so the enumerator counted them as officially unemployed. Rhodes and his mother did not qualify. They had no regular occupations. Whatever money Rhodes made selling suits and ties, booking bands, and caddying no doubt contributed to the family's well-being; but in the late 1920s the sisters provided the family's economic security.¹²

Rhodes' mother expected him to earn an education and bring the family into middle class security and respectability. Rhodes struggled to fulfill her ambitions. With all of the changes in Rhodes' life -- the death of his father, the introduction and disappearance of a second male authority figure, the transitory childhood and teen years, and the new demographic and economic environment of Springfield -- Rhodes acted out. He called one of his high school coaches "a son of a bitch."¹³ He refused the punishment of extra hours after school and either quit or was kicked out. Columbus Dispatch reporter Michael Curtin wrote that [e]ither way, Rhodes was gone from Springfield High from October 1926 to January 1928." He did not return until "his mother visited the superintendent."¹⁴ At age 19 Rhodes was a high school student again.

¹² 1930 US Census; Springfield City Directory, 1925, p. 537; 1926, p. 530; 1927, p. 549; 1928, p. 547; 1929, p. 467; 1930, p. 478; 1931, p. 454; 1932, p. 415. In 1932, Lauretta, like James, was listed as a student.

¹³ Rhodes quoted by Dean Jauchius in Zimmerman, "Rhodes's First Eight Years," p. 353, n. 3. See also, Curtin, "The Old School."

¹⁴ Curtin, "The Old School."

Reports vary about how long he served his second stint in high school. Curtin wrote that Rhodes graduated in 1930 while a second journalist claimed only that Rhodes “secured a modest basketball scholarship to the Ohio State University in 1932.”¹⁵ Including no dates, Jauchius reported that Rhodes “had no desire to go to college, but was graduated with a basketball scholarship. Restlessly, he tried the University of Kansas, at Lawrence, ‘a prep school outside of Chicago, and finally Wittenberg, back at Springfield.’”¹⁶ From 1928-1932, the Springfield city directory and the US Census recorded his uninterrupted presence in Springfield and indicated that he was a student. Regardless of the variations in dates and places, for certain 1928 was the crucial year. The following key events happened that year: Barrett and his income were no longer part of the family; Rhodes returned to school only at his mother’s insistence; she and her youngest daughter went to work. Rhodes clearly had become not the guardian of the family’s present, but the hope of its future. Rhodes’ mother returned to work for the first recorded time in Springfield and Laretta interrupted her high school education so that Jim could continue his. The family needed that income while the only male attended school to improve his and his family’s prospects.¹⁷

¹⁵ Curtin, “Old School;” Zimmerman, “Rhodes’ First Eight Years,” p. 60.

¹⁶ Jauchius, “Gubernatorial Roles,” p. 49.

¹⁷ Springfield City Directory 1928 , p. 96, 547; 1929, p. 467; 1931, p. 454; 1932, p. 415. The 1930 Census recorded that Laretta, then age 18, had not attended school anytime since September 1, 1929 while her brother had. See 1930 US Census. Neither Laretta nor James was listed in the 1930 city directory. See p. 478. In 1931, the city directory simply listed Laretta as living in the Rhodes family house -- no occupation or student status noted -- while the 1932 edition recorded that she was a student. She probably returned to school because of the Depression. See pages 454 and 415, respectively. Curtin, “The Old School,” wrote that while Rhodes was out of school he worked for a railroad company in some unknown occupation. Garnet told Curtin that Rhodes “went with a girl whose dad was a big wheel with the railroad, and he got Jim a job.” Rhodes never spoke of this job. If he did work for a railroad, then a more straight forward explanation could be that Barrett, an employee of a railroad, arranged the job for his step-son.

Using 1929 studies of Ohio's wage earners, we can speculate that Garnet and Laretta competently supported the family while Jim supposedly focused on the future. In Ohio's hospitals, approximately 28 percent of women age 18 or older earned less than \$10.00 per week, averaging less than \$520.00 per year. About 25 percent averaged between \$10.00 - \$14.00, or \$520.00 - \$728.00 annually. Another approximately 25 percent took home \$15.00 - \$24.00 dollars per week, or \$780.00 - \$1,248.00 per year. Between 16 and 17 percent earned \$25.00 - \$34.00 dollars a week, or \$1,300.00 - \$1,768.00 per year. Approximately 5 percent took home \$35.00 or more per week, grossing a minimum of \$1,820 annually. In Ohio's printing and publishing industry, 46 percent of the bookkeepers, stenographers, and office clerks who were women under the age of 18 earned from \$5.00 to \$15.00 dollars per week, their annual wages thus averaging anywhere from \$260.00 to \$760.00 a year. Approximately 45 percent earned \$15.00 to \$25.00 dollars per week, or \$760.00 to \$1,300 per year. Just over six percent earned less than \$5.00 per week, averaging less than \$260.00 per year. Slightly over 1 percent earned \$25.00 - \$30.00 dollars weekly and took home \$1,300.00 to \$1,560.00.¹⁸

Even though they were most likely in the lower half of the wage averages, Garnet and Laretta provided the foundation for the family's consumption.

¹⁸ Industrial Commission of Ohio, Rates of Wages, Fluctuations of Employment, Wage and Salary Payments in Ohio, 1929 (Columbus, OH: F.J. Heer Printing Company, 1931), pp. 32-33 and 142. 189 hospitals reported 8,014 women over the age of 18 as wage earners. The report did not break down hospital wage earners into specific categories, so nurses, clerical staff, janitorial, and miscellaneous workers could have been included. 861 printing and publishing firms reported 64 women bookkeepers, stenographers, and office clerks under the age of 18 working for wages. Laretta's age made her an atypical bookkeeper. 42,216 industries in Ohio reported a total of 179, 527 bookkeepers, stenographers, and office clerks. 1,298, or less than one percent, were women under the age of 18. See ibid, p. 132.

National per capita income in 1929 dollars was \$750.00 while Ohio's was \$795.00. The average Ohio wages suggest that the sisters probably could have mustered at least \$1,000 in wages. In 1929, families with income in between \$1,000-1,500 spent an average of \$448.00 on food, \$334.00 on housing, \$265.00 on attire, and \$235.00 on miscellaneous spending.¹⁹ In 1930, the Rhodes family rented their home for \$30.00 per month, putting them slightly above the average for this income class. Of the sixteen households listed on the same 1930 US Census enumeration sheet as the Rhodes family, twelve rented their homes while four owned. The average monthly rental price was \$21.17.²⁰ The availability of credit, too, no doubt boosted their ability to consume. Only nine of the sixteen households included radios. Rhodes and his neighbors most likely bought their radios on installment given that Americans by this time bought 75 percent of all radios this way.²¹ The Rhodes sisters earned the bulk of the family budget. They allowed the family to live a slightly higher standard of living than several of their neighbors.

Garnet and Lauretta, however, were vulnerable workers. They were young women with limited educations. As women, they were largely shut out of the dynamic industries of the 1920s. In 1930, Springfield automobile factories

¹⁹ The per capita income averages are from Maurice Leven, Harold G. Moulton, and Clark Warburton, America's Capacity to Consume (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1934), p. 173. The figures included farm and non-farm income. Lynd, "The People as Consumers," p. 859, pegged 1929's national per capita in 1913 dollars at 437.00. The income average and consumption figures are from Historical Statistics, p. 327, Series G 843-848, which is based on information in Leven, et al, America's Capacity to Consume.

²⁰ 1930 US Census.

²¹ ibid; Lynd, "The People as Consumers," p. 862. Lynd also reported that 50 percent of all electrical household goods, at least 60 percent of furniture sales, and 18 percent of jewelry were bought on installment.

employed 1,333 men, but only 53 women, the building industry 1,910 men and 19 women. Outside of wholesale and retail trade, semi-professional service, and domestic service Springfield women found employment in significant numbers only in the electrical machinery industry (nearly 25 percent female) and in printing, publishing, and engraving (35 percent). Garnet and Lauretta worked jobs in which market prospects improved not from post-secondary education but from experience. In times of prosperity, they did well despite their inexperience; but when the Depression hit, they were among the first to lose their jobs. Of the 29 people who were listed as having occupations on the same enumeration sheet as the Rhodes sisters, only three had not worked recently. Two were Garnet and Lauretta.²²

After the elder Rhodes had died, John C. Barrett had resecured the family's economic status. In 1926, railroad ticket agents and clerks earned an average wage of \$1604.00.²³ After Barrett was no longer a part of the family, the sisters restabilized the family's position even though they probably now earned less together than Barrett had alone. The family was most likely on a border between minimum comfort and subsistence, yet they had gotten a taste of middle class consumption and could afford Mrs. Rhodes' decision to keep the only male Rhodes out of the regular wage earning market.²⁴

²² U.S. Census Bureau, *Population, 1930*, Vol. III, part 2, p. 508; 1930 U.S. Census.

²³ Paul Douglas, *Real Wages in the United States, 1890-1926* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1930), p. 361. The figure was a national average and included all kinds of clerks in railroad companies, including ticket agents.

²⁴ Leven, at al, *America's Capacity to Consume*, p. 87, classified 1929 family income ranges into minimum comfort (1,500 to 3,000) and subsistence and poverty (under 1,500). These two groups constituted 76.3 percent of the total population.

The Depression pushed the Rhodes family farther away from their goal of middle class security. At this point Rhodes' inventiveness must have helped the family. Rhodes and his sisters inhabited different worlds. Garnet and Lauretta constituted part of an emerging lower-middle-class office culture. Whether in a corset shop, hospital, or newspaper business office, Rhodes' sisters had to meet other people's expectations, to adjust to standards of personal interaction, manners, dress, and speech. Lauretta especially owed her job to the bureaucratization of the workplace. In 1930, economist Paul Douglas wrote that "It was, indeed, this expansion of clerical work which enabled the high school graduates and students to be absorbed to the degree to which they were." Garnet and Lauretta left behind the working class world and joined the crowd of wage earners inside buildings full of telephones, typewriters, staffs, and supervisors.²⁵

Rhodes, in contrast, crossed boundaries. He caddied by day for the respectable classes and consorted by night with musicians. The former involved the predictable norms of middle and upper class white society. Rhodes was a servant here, but able to observe both the prescriptive norms and the realities of this culture. The latter involved unstructured experience and individual initiative within a subculture of American society, a subculture dominated by musicians and governed by rules and values far more fluid than the bureaucratic culture

²⁵ Douglas, Real Wages in the United States, 1890-1926, p. 368. Emphasis mine. On the development of bureaucracies in the late 19th and early 20th century and their effect on American life generally, see Robert Wiebe, The Search for Order, 1870-1920 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967). For the effect of that change on the definition and expression of "self" and "personality" in the 1920s, see Susman, Culture as History, pp. 271-285.

Rhodes' sisters experienced. His ability to make work rather than find it returned a bit of his sisters' lost income, if only slightly easing the burden of the depression and their inconsistent ability to reach the middle class.²⁶

As Rhodes hustled to help his family, he created an identity unrecognizable to past Rhodes men. They had been working class. Rhodes retained some of the rough, unpredictable elements of working class life; office culture would neither smooth his rough-hewn manner nor channel his capacious store of energy toward someone else's goals. Unlike his father and grandfather, Rhodes lived in tension, merging the creativity and spontaneity of a wheeler dealer with an intimate knowledge of and aspiration to middle class respectability. Living in tension, Rhodes networked and negotiated through a stratified urban setting.

The racial environment in Springfield created even more tension. During the early 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan gained power throughout northern cities where native born whites, immigrants, and African-Americans competed for economic and community resources. In Ohio, the Klan had by 1923 an estimated membership of 400,000, making it one of the largest Klan organizations in the nation. They especially held sway in cities like Akron and Youngstown, places where immigration and industrialization rapidly transformed communities. Some northern cities, like Springfield, had fewer foreign born residents and experienced a less intense industrialization than either Akron or Youngstown. In such places,

²⁶ The obvious question is, "Did the Rhodes family receive financial assistance from the government?" We have only Rhodes' comment, made to Dean Jauchius, that, "we never had any aid -- any level of support at all -- from any government." See Jauchius, "Gubernatorial Roles," p. 49.

the Klan grew because its leaders promised efficiency and competence in controlling the vice industry and in recreating a wholesome, democratic, community. The Klan in the North thus appealed to racism and more, finding support among middle class people concerned about tradition, authority, and respectable virtues in a changing world, and among the lower middle class who competed with each other, with blacks, and with immigrants to benefit from industrialization and the consumer revolution. The Klan thus attracted people similar to the Rhodes family -- the marginal, lower middle class who wanted to be solidly middle class -- and the people that Mrs. Rhodes wanted her son to be -- respectable.²⁷

When Rhodes moved to Springfield between 1923 and 1925, he entered a fragile racial environment. After World War I, black and white veterans returned to Springfield hoping to find a prosperous town. Yet the local economy had contracted as wartime spending disappeared. Veterans and new black migrants from the South competed for fewer jobs. During the summer of 1919, several race riots across the nation erupted, foreshadowing the racial problems of northern cities in the coming decade. In Springfield, black veterans feared the

²⁷ In 1920, the foreign born population of Springfield was 4.5 percent. In comparison, Youngstown's foreign born population was 25.6 percent. See Bureau of the Census, Population, 1920, Vol. III, p. 785. On the Klan in the North, see Leonard J. Moore, Citizen Klansmen: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921-1928 (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991) and Kenneth T. Jackson, The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967). Jackson's book established the thesis about blue-collar, lower middle class economic competition leading to racial and ethnic confrontation. Moore argued that the middle class, broadly conceived, reacted against town elites whom the Klan described as incompetent and undemocratic. Moore's Klan foreshadowed the persistence of populist, right wing politics while Jackson's Klan was largely the backward looking, anxious, last gasp of marginal workers. On the Ohio Klan, see brief overviews in Raymond Boryczka and Lorin Lee Cary, No Strength Without Union: An Illustrated History of Ohio Workers, 1803-1980 (Columbus, OH: The Ohio Historical Society, 1982), pp. 177-178 and Andrew Cayton, Ohio: The History of a People (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2002), pp. 310-311.

rise in violence, so they armed and trained themselves, preparing for the day when whites would attack. In March of 1921, that day came. A young white girl was assaulted. A newspaper reported that a black man had been seen walking with the girl. After three days, the police had failed to arrest a suspect. In response, a white mob mobilized and headed toward the black community. Blacks gathered to protect themselves and their homes. An ensuing confrontation led to the shooting of a white policeman and then later to the white mob reforming and moving directly toward the heart of the black community, which, according to one writer, “began at the intersection of Yellow Springs and Pleasant Streets.” There on Pleasant, blacks waited for the white mob, not allowing any car with a white person to cross into the black neighborhood. The mayor, the city manager, and the city attorney arrived, exited their car, and asked that the blacks return to their homes. A hail of gunfire rained down on the car, but did not injure anyone. The Ohio National Guard was activated and its officers negotiated with blacks. When the Guard confirmed that white mobs had disbanded, the black defenders went home.²⁸ After the 1921 riot, racial tensions continued. By 1923, the Springfield Klan thrived enough so that it could hold large parades led by a fully outfitted brass band.²⁹

Though they moved often, the Rhodes family lived the longest on West Pleasant, very near the epicenter of the 1921 race riot. Their two homes on

²⁸ Darnell Edward Carter, “The 1904, 1906, and 1921 Race Riots in Springfield, Ohio and the Hoodlum Theory” (unpublished master’s thesis, The Ohio State University, 1993), pp. 60-73. The quote is on p. 69.

²⁹ For a picture of the Springfield Klan band, see Boryczka and Cary, No Strength without Union, p. 178.

West Pleasant were in Springfield's 7th ward, the ward with the highest proportion of African-American residents. In 1920, the 7th ward was 30 percent African-American. The Rhodes family was on a border again, this time a color line that the 1930 Census documented. On April 18th the enumerator visited 16 families on two streets that intersected, West Pleasant and Miami. All seven families on Miami were black; all nine families on West Pleasant were white. The Rhodes family lived in a racially mixed but still finely separated neighborhood.³⁰

Complicating matters, the vice district was only several blocks away. Two sections of town -- known as the "Jungles" and the "Levee" attracted drinkers, gamblers, pool players, and prostitutes. The property owners were white, the employees black, and the customers both. Historian Leonard J. Moore has written that among their many enemies, the Klan listed "gamblers, bootleggers, [and] thrill seeking teenagers." The geographical segregation of the vice district allowed whites to blame African-Americans for underworld activity. Because the white, respectable class found the vice industry in or nearby black communities and because the Rhodes family lived along the color line, they lived between the Klan "reformers" and the targets of their "reform."³¹

³⁰ 1930 U.S. Census. In 1920, the ward had a total population of 7,980. 2,406 were African-American. See 1920 US Census, Population, Vol. III, p. 806. For a street by street description of the ward boundaries, see the Springfield City Directory, 1924, pp. 49-50 and Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, "Census Descriptions of Geographic Subdivisions and Enumeration Districts, 1830-1950," Microfilm Roll 81, Vol. 52 (Ohio: Adams to Cuyahoga County), National Archives.

³¹ Carter, "The Springfield Riots and the Hoodlum Theory," p. 11; Warren M. Banner, A Review of the Economic and Cultural Problems of Springfield, Ohio (New York: National Urban League, 1962), pp. 12-14; Moore, Citizen Klansmen, p. 3. See also pp. 78-79, 102-104, 175-179 and 190-191 for the Klan's focus on enforcing Prohibition and combating vice.

During the 1920s, then, Rhodes received conflicting cues. He had reasons to reject racism. Rhodes had rarely encountered black people before Springfield. Living around African-Americans for the first time afforded Rhodes an opportunity: to know black people rather than white stereotypes of black people. He could know that some black families struggled the way his did, coping with the pain of infant mortality, adjusting to new communities because of high rates of mobility in the 1910s and 1920s, surviving with single female-led households, and constantly searching for security. Both Rhodes and his black neighbors could trace their roots to south of the Ohio River. Like Rhodes' father, most of the African-American parents on Miami Street listed Kentucky either as their birthplace or the birthplace of their parents. Like Rhodes, the children listed Ohio. Rhodes potentially could live and witness first hand the problems of class that bound racially diverse people on the economic margins.

Yet there were also cues to embrace racism. His opportunity was a challenge. He was an impressionable teen when he first arrived in Springfield. He had just moved to his fourth hometown in two different states; his father had died and been replaced by another man; and Springfield promised not only better economic opportunities for his family but also the abrupt social change and anxiety that accompanied that promise. He struggled to adjust, as his expulsion from high school demonstrated. By 1927 he lived on Pleasant along the color line. He had a job, but no prospects. By 1928, Barrett was gone and the family was again economically insecure. Their attempts to improve were frustrated. According to the Census, all but one of Rhodes' neighbors worked for wages as

either laborers or clerks. Three of the nine white neighbors owned their homes. The remaining six rented for an average of \$27.16 per month. The lowest rent for whites was \$20.00 while the highest was \$33.00 Six of the nine white families owned a radio. Compared to their white neighbors, the Rhodes family was middling in a lower middle class neighborhood.³²

Rhodes, his sisters, and his mother were above average consumers only when one factors in race. By the late 1920s, Klan membership had subsided dramatically, but racism endured. Whatever experiences Rhodes and some black people might have had in common, Rhodes was still white. He saw that African-Americans on Miami lived in homes half the value of white houses on Pleasant. Averaging \$15.16 in monthly rent, African-Americans rented at half the value of Rhodes' house. The one black-owned home was valued at \$1,500.00, half the lowest valued white-owned home, 75 percent less than the highest valued.³³ "They" and "their" vices dragged the neighborhood down, Rhodes could have concluded. A socially and economically frustrated white teen could easily have adopted racist views about the black people who surrounded him. Their very proximity, Rhodes could have thought, were daily reminders of his family's inability to get ahead.

How did Rhodes respond? Evidence from Springfield offers only a sketchy, speculative answer. Rhodes possibly relied on African-Americans for some of his income. His newspaper route -- or routes if we believe Rhodes -- might have included black customers, especially if he -- or the five assistants he

³² 1930 U.S. Census.

³³ 1930 US Census.

claimed -- delivered in his racially mixed neighborhood. While out of school, he also managed a grocery store located on Cedar Street, parts of which bordered another, smaller black community. He might have had black customers.³⁴ As a promoter of dances, Rhodes dealt with musicians. He quite possibly interacted with African Americans, making contacts, constructing multi-party deals, and sealing relationships using an early version of his masculine charisma. African Americans were probably a crucial part of Rhodes' skillful cajoling and promoting. Without them, he lacked a necessary partner. Rhodes might also have been one of those "teenage thrill seekers" that the Klan targeted, a young man familiar with musicians living on the color and crime lines. In this case Rhodes would have rejected the values of "respectable reformers" and adopted a libertarian view of the vice industry.³⁵ The best evidence from Springfield, however, is that there is no evidence of racial antagonism. Some people forget stories while others die never having told theirs. We cannot know specifically what happened every day along the color line at the intersection of West Pleasant and Miami. We do know that when Rhodes acted out, he did so against a white male authority figure, not an African-American peer.

³⁴ See the Springfield City Directory, 1927, p. 549. The grocery was called Paden Rowe and its address was 330 Cedar. See also, David White, "Map of Springfield, Ohio: [showing] Negro Density (population) 1870-1910 [and] 1920s (approximate)," (Boston, MA: Map Corporation of America, [1966], 1951, SP REF 912.771 MAP, Clark County (Ohio) Public Library.

³⁵ John C. Burnham, Bad Habits: Drinking, Smoking, Taking Drugs, Gambling, Sexual Misbehavior, and Swearing in American History (New York: New York University Press, 1993), pp. 1-22, described the embrace of the minor vice industry during the 1920s as evidence of the decline of producer values like character, industry, and thrift and the rise of consumer culture values like immediate gratification. In Burnham's book and Moore's Citizen Klansmen "respectable" people ran the gamut from decent, well meaning people to bigoted Klansmen. Moore, in fact, connected Klan popularity to the failure of Progressive era reformers. The Klan embraced the moral crusades of the Progressives and wanted to succeed where they had failed (p. 191).

By 1932, the Rhodes matriarch had decided that Springfield offered few opportunities for her son to improve himself and his family. "Nothing was working out," Rhodes said of Springfield. The Depression had thwarted her ambitions, but so too had her son. She clearly wanted him to attend college and for whatever reason -- failure once there, inability to gain admission, too expensive private school tuition -- Wittenberg, the local Lutheran-affiliated college, was out of the question. Ohio State University, the subsidized, open enrollment state university in Columbus, was a realistic alternative. One legend, told by Jauchius, is that in 1932 Rhodes "stuck out his thumb on Route 40, and a Model A picked him up. He got out at Broad and High," facing the grand, imposing State Capitol. Rhodes "waited for a trolley to go to OSU" and "looked at the Statehouse," wondering, "Wouldn't it be something to be governor? To be governor would really be somebody." Jauchius told a great story. It fit American myths of mobility and individuality. Hoping to make a better life for himself and taking the initiative, a young man moved on. Rhodes' individualism was the key. The Model A picked him up, not his family. He had himself and, for a short time, an anonymous but providential driver who quickly disappeared once Rhodes met his destiny at the corner of Broad and High. Jauchius also told a second story explaining Rhodes' move to Columbus, a simple but profound story: because "nothing was working out," "the family moved to Columbus." That was it. However they arrived -- by their own car, by a ride from someone else, by a bus - - they arrived as a family, their fortunes tied to Rhodes.³⁶

³⁶ Rhodes quoted by Jauchius, "Gubernatorial Roles," p. 49; Jauchius quoted by Curtin, "The Old
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The problem with Mrs. Rhodes' strategy was that, by his own admission, Rhodes did not want to go to school.³⁷ He seemed to devise every strategy possible to ensure failure. He told Jauchius that he played basketball and worked "about" five jobs, including booking bands, selling blotters, running an employment agency, distributing magazines, and owning part of a neighborhood newspaper. Rhodes then "asked the coach to find me one job, because I did not want my mother to have to work." The coach obliged, arranging a waiter's job at a fraternity house where Rhodes claimed to pledge. "I was the only one paying dues! In those days everybody was on credit." Insulted, Rhodes repeated his Springfield run-in with a male authority figure. He "handed the basketball to the coach" and "said, 'if this is what athletics leads to, here.' And I walked away from it."³⁸ He also apparently walked away from his studies. Through some intrepid and perhaps illegal reporting, one journalist acquired a copy of Rhodes' transcript. In the one quarter he was officially enrolled, Rhodes earned a "D" in English and Geography, and failed hygiene, physical education, and military science.³⁹

School." I do not know if the Rhodes family owned a car at this point or at any time in their past. Car ownership was fairly widespread by the early 1930s, so the Rhodes' might very well have owned one. In 1930, there was one car for every five Americans. It had become, in the words of historian Kenneth T. Jackson, "an essential part of normal middle class living." If the Rhodes' did not own a car, that fact more than any other would certainly have announced their failure to improve their status. See Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, pp. 161 for the quote and 157-189 more generally for the effect of cars on communities. Page 163 compared car ownership per population in major western nations.

³⁷ The 1933-34 *Columbus City Directory* listed Rhodes as a student, living with his mother and sisters at number 5 on 13th Avenue, the far southeastern edge of campus. Garnet was listed as a nurse, Lauretta (now spelled Loretta) a student, and Mrs. Rhodes simply as the widow of James. In the archives for The Ohio State University, the index cards to the alumni magazine record Rhodes as entering school in the Winter Quarter, 1936.

³⁸ Jauchius, "Gubernatorial Roles," p. 49.

³⁹ Zimmerman, "Rhodes' First Eight Years," p. 60.

Rhodes explained his lack of effort by placing his mother at the center of the story. During that quarter, he claimed, she was diagnosed with cancer. Numerous reporters have observed that she did not die for another 17 years, but that complaint misses the point. Rhodes gave Jauchius a lengthy, misleading, and meaningful justification for failing and quitting school:

I had to make a choice. This was my mother, and this was *my* family. It costs a lot of money to fight cancer, and there wasn't any Medicare, or Social Security then. I made up my mind that education was status, but this was my mother, and I was going to take care of her. She took care of me. The education I was getting was not meaningful, in my evaluation. I'm not anti-education, but it just didn't mean much then. It would help me in status, but it couldn't help my mother.⁴⁰

Rhodes did have a choice to make, but not between caring for his mother and pursuing his education. His mother obviously drilled into his head that status was important and that education increased status. She wanted that life for her son and, by extension, herself and her daughters. Rhodes was right that education would have helped him in status, but wrong because it would have, in turn, helped his mother. He would have fulfilled her ambitions. Instead of school Rhodes worked at a variety of jobs: from 1935-1936 as a clerk at the Ohio House of Representatives; in 1937 as a laborer at the City Water Works; and, by 1938, as the manager of "Jim's Place," a campus area hangout spot that played music and sold doughnuts, hamburgers, soft-drinks. Unwilling to earn a college

⁴⁰ Rhodes quoted by Jauchius, "Gubernatorial Roles," p. 50. The italic emphasis was original while the underline emphasis is mine.

degree, Rhodes had to choose another way to bring middle class security to his family.

He outlined that choice in those seemingly fleeting and insignificant jobs. The first two jobs were political patronage. He created the third job as a way to establish business credentials, to prove that he was a responsible, credible candidate for office. Politics was his choice. Rhodes credited his mother for making the choice. During the height of the depression, how could a young man with no college degree “be somebody?” He was an energetic, kinetic young man with a demonstrated skill for moving superficially, quickly, and fluidly through different social classes. If not along the disciplined path of education and management training, then where could Rhodes find security? If the world of the middle class manager or the credentialed professional was closed, then where was an opening? In the early twenty first century, technical experts dominate politics. We easily forget that urban, local politics was once the province of the poor and lower middle class, groups who used government to rise out of the lower class. Regardless of the nation’s unemployment rate, regardless of a person’s credentials, there were always openings in politics, especially when one possessed a sense of urgency, that potent combination of initiative, persistence, and ambition. A person with a sense of urgency could create his own opportunity. And so, Rhodes said, “My mother wanted me to run for ward committeeman and in 1934 she put up six dollars. I bought six dollars worth of

campaign cards and I walked every street in the ward, and knocked on every door. I defeated a man who had been committeeman for sixteen years.”⁴¹

He had created his first opening, but he needed plenty more. His mother could not get him any farther, nor could he rise alone. He was not the skilled broker that he would become, far from the governor who always counseled that “You can’t get so mad at somebody one day that you can’t reach a compromise the next morning.” As a young man, Rhodes exhibited a penchant for getting so mad at someone that he could not in fact make a deal the next morning. He had derailed his life twice. His mother had to clean up the mess sooner, as in Columbus, or later, as in Springfield. His annoyance with male authority was both a blessing and a curse. He would move even if older, more experienced incumbents were ahead of him, creating opportunities according to his and only his timeline. In brief moments of anger he could also create problems, obstacles of his own design that could defeat his ambition. His mother could solve some problems, but could not stop him from creating more.⁴²

In the 1960s, one Columbus woman wrote to then Governor Rhodes, recalling that she, a single mother, had moved to the city “in 1937 with two children, no money, and no job. Your mother employed me in the Resteraunt [sic] there at 17th and High Street. We became very good friends. We would sit out in back of Resteraunt [sic] and talk about having raised our kids alone and had such a good visit.” No doubt they commiserated on the difficulties of single

⁴¹ Rhodes, quoted by Jauchius, “Gubernatorial Roles,” p. 50.

⁴² Rhodes, quoted in Stanley J. Aronoff and Vernal G. Riffe, Jr., eds., James Rhodes at Eighty (Columbus, OH: n.p., 1989), p. 42.

motherhood, poverty, and men. The unpredictable twists and turns in her life had left Rhodes without a credible, consistent male role model. As strong as his mother was, Rhodes acted in ways that suggested he needed guidance from a father figure, someone to teach Rhodes how not to get so mad at somebody one day that you could not reach a compromise the next morning.⁴³

Grant P. Ward was that person. Ward was a native of Wellston, Jackson County Ohio. His father had been an executive with a railroad company and then a Democratic chief of police. Ward graduated from high school in 1904 and taught thereafter for several years in the county's public schools. An athlete, Ward played football at Ohio State, served as assistant coach, and, in the 1920s, ran the university's intramural athletic programs. In 1924, he graduated from Ohio State's law school. He was as well a veteran of World War I, having served as an ensign in the Navy. From 1926-1936, he was a Republican member of the Ohio House of Representatives from Franklin County. In 1936, he ran unsuccessfully as the Republican nominee for the United States Congress. In 1938, he was elected to the Ohio Senate.

In his spare time, Ward was a colorful figure around Columbus. He was a radio broadcaster for Ohio State football games. He wrote a newspaper column about football. According to Keith McNamara, a longtime Columbus lawyer, Republican politician, and lobbyist, Ward also wrote a "True Crime" column, titillating readers with stories about the underworld and fallen women.

McNamara recalled that the Ohio State Journal published a supplement once a

⁴³ Letter from Ruth M. Bryant to James A. Rhodes, 2/20/63, Box 2, folder 7, James A. Rhodes Papers, MSS 353, Ohio Historical Society. No response is recorded.

week. The paper had done a marketing study, asking readers to circle the news stories they had read. They found that people read scandalous pieces about murder, bribery, and gossip. On assignment Ward researched old murder cases and wrote about them as if they had occurred yesterday. The editors often included posed photographs that reenacted the crime, showing women suggestively sprawled and pretending to be dead.⁴⁴

Ward was a man about town in the 1930s, a Jackson County native who had made it in the big city. He was a member of the right fraternal organizations: American Legion, Veteran's of Foreign Wars, War Veterans Republican Club, Elks, Masonic Lodge, and Eagles. He was married to the daughter of an Internal Revenue Service official who had been a Franklin County probate judge. He had two kids and a home in Clintonville, a stable, respectable, tree-lined neighborhood in north Columbus. In 1930 his house was valued at \$10,000. In comparison, the 1928 average mortgage value of all properties in Franklin County was approximately \$4,300. Nationally, the 1930 Census recorded 29.9 million homes; 46.8 percent were owned. Of all the non-farm homes that Americans owned, the median value was \$4,778. Only 8.6 percent were valued between \$10,000 and \$14,999, placing Ward's house in the top 17 percent. Here, then, was a man to follow. Athletic. Active. Ambitious. Able to consume. And his place in the community was secure.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Author interview with Keith McNamara, 9/07/2000, notes in author's possession. I have not yet located a copy of the supplement, which McNamara remembered was either called the Sunday Star or the Sunday Evening Star.

⁴⁵ The biographical details in the preceding paragraphs were based on several sources. Opha Moore, History of Franklin County, Ohio (Topeka, KS: Historical Publishing Company, 1930), Vol. 2, pp. 720-721; "Senator Grant P. Ward Dies of Heart Attack," The Columbus Dispatch, 12/6/41,

Ward was a constant presence around the university when Rhodes first arrived in Columbus. As a legislator, Ward often represented the university's needs, earning the alumni magazine's description as a "stalwart friend" and "champion" whose "predominant interests" were the "welfare" of the university. In one fight to restore a slashed salary appropriation for the school, Ward forcefully argued on the floor of the Ohio House using language that seemed to come from one of his "true crime" columns: "You can kill a great state university in two ways. You can wipe it out by cutting its throat, or you can do what [Democratic Governor Martin Davey] is doing, you can slowly bleed it to death."⁴⁶ The first meeting most likely came from this campus connection. In a 1948 Kiwanis Magazine profile of Rhodes, a reporter said that Rhodes worked as a salesman at Hill's tailor shop, located near the university. "Here he met the late Grant P. Ward ... a member of the Ohio House of Representatives." Ward was a regular customer and "soon backed [Rhodes] in starting a restaurant just off the campus, a few doors from Hill's."⁴⁷ Having met, what made the relationship evolve? Rhodes said only that Ward had "bad eyesight. I was his driver." Ward most likely did not have bad eyesight, for he was, after all, a well known football radio announcer. If he could not see to drive, how could he see the field? Still,

pp. 1 and 3; "Ward for Congress," Ohio State University Monthly Alumni Magazine, Vol. 27, #4 (Jan. 1936), p. 5.(hereafter OSU Monthly); "Senator Carried into Neil House, Was 54 Years Old," Ohio State Journal, 12/6/41, pp. 1 and 5. The value of Ward's home came from the 1930 US Census. For 1928 mortgage values of Ohio properties, see The Industrial and Commercial Yearbook, 1930, p. 122. I took the total value of all Franklin County mortgages (\$79,960,838) and divided by the total number of mortgages (18,305). On national figures for home ownership and value, see the 1930 Census, U.S. Department of Commerce, Population: Families, Vol. VI (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1933), pp. 6 and 18.

⁴⁶ OSU Monthly, Vol. 27, #2 (Nov. 1935), pp. 1-2; Vol. 27, #4 (Jan 1936), p. 5; Vol. 33, #3 (Dec. 1941), p. 31.

⁴⁷ Kiwanis Magazine, Vol. 33 (May 1948), p. 23.

Rhodes' daughter and son in-law recalled that he did drive Ward around town.⁴⁸

So how did he go from salesman, to driver, to protégé?

Perhaps Rhodes used the same survival technique as his father: a Jackson County mutual aid society. The elder Rhodes had chosen Jasonville in part because Jackson County people had moved there before him. They provided a network of friends and family, a ready made community in a new town. Jackson County residents might have done the same thing in Columbus. Rhodes, for example, met his wife, Helen Rawlins, in Columbus. She was a native of Byer, a small town in Jackson. At some point after her father died in 1927, she and her family moved to Columbus and lived with the eldest son who, in 1930, worked at an auto assembly plant. They lived in the campus area and she attended North High School. Rhodes' daughter recalled that her parents met at the restaurant on campus. Perhaps the Jackson network helped move the relationship forward. There were plenty of Jackson connections around the campus area. Ward himself had spent a great deal of time in Byer as a young man, so much so that in 1910 the Wellston newspaper reported on Ward's trips. The piece described "two pedagogues of this city" who "seem to have been infused with the microbe of restlessness and as a result C.A. Carl took a trip to Columbus and G.P. Ward, less restless or with a remedy more close at hand, stopped at Byer. It is said that these trips are by no means an unusual occurrence." Whatever he was doing in Byer -- the tone of the article implied that he was visiting a woman -- he might have established connections that carried

⁴⁸ Rhodes interview with author; Sue and Dick Moore, interview with author.

through to Columbus. Just like his father, Rhodes tapped into the Jackson County network.⁴⁹

Ward changed Rhodes' life. Reports from the 1940s described Ward as the crucial figure in securing Rhodes' first political post as committeeman. Only in 1971 did Rhodes elevate his mother's role in his first campaign.⁵⁰ The earliest recorded evidence of the Ward-Rhodes relationship dates to December 1935. The Ohio State Journal ran a photograph of the two discussing plans for an upcoming banquet marking the inaugural of the new Republican mayor. Ward was preparing to run for the 12th District Congressional seat while Rhodes was the President of the Young Republican's Club for the same district.⁵¹ As Dick Moore said, Rhodes saw something in Ward that Rhodes admired and wanted.⁵² Ward had celebrity and stability; Rhodes had neither.

Ward became Rhodes' mentor, helping create a solid foundation on which to build a political career. Ward financed Jim's Place and most likely secured Rhodes his clerkship at the Ohio House. In 1935, the Republicans had a one seat margin in the House. According to Keith McNamara, two Republicans

⁴⁹ On the Rawlins family, see the 1930 US Census; the 1935-1937 Columbus City Directory (Columbus, OH: R.L. Polk and Co.), p. 918 (1935), p. 1031(1936), p. 1011 (1937); Ohio, Department of Vital Statistics, Certificate of Death for William Lincoln Rawlins, 2/17/1927, #11739, Ohio Historical Society; Sue and Dick Moore interview with author. On Ward in Jackson County, see "Migratory Pedagogues," Wellston Sentinel, 5/5/1910, p. 5.

⁵⁰ See Anna Rothe, ed., Current Biography: Who's News and Why, 1949 (New York: H.W. Wilson Company, 1949), p. 518; Jauchius, "Gubernatorial Roles," p. 50. Jauchius never mentioned Ward in his dissertation, which was based in part on an extensive interview with Rhodes. Perhaps that meant that Rhodes and Jauchius never talked about Ward, or did and decided to leave Ward as part of their confidential relationship. Rhodes rarely talked about his father (other than as a symbol of working class life), never about Barrett, and not extensively about Ward. On the subject of adult influences in his life, Rhodes spoke almost exclusively about his mother.

⁵¹ Ohio State Journal, 12/30/1935, p. 5.

⁵² Dick and Sue Moore, interview with author.

switched their votes for the leadership team, putting the Democrats in charge. They did this down the line until the House members chose the clerks. At that point the renegade Republicans came back into the fold, allowing the Republicans to control the patronage and allowing Rhodes to become a clerk. McNamara had always wondered what Rhodes had on those two Republicans. The answer was Ward. His efforts were so pervasive and so obvious to everyone in Columbus that when Rhodes first ran for mayor in 1943, his opponent, Franklin County Sheriff Jacob Sandusky, questioned Rhodes' maturity and experience. He did so by making Rhodes a dependent of Ward. Rhodes had alleged that Sandusky was a tool of gamblers. Sandusky charged in response that Rhodes was no "financial wizard," a "reckless young demagogue who owned no property." Sandusky then played the Ward card: "His only business experience was a two year stint as the owner of a 'hamburger joint' financed by the late Grant Ward."⁵³

Ward was critical in other ways. He taught Rhodes how to tell his story to voters. Ward's obituaries sounded the same themes as the stories Rhodes told about himself. About Ward, The Wellston Telegram wrote that "old friends" in Wellston remembered him passing newspapers as a boy. They recalled "his plodding ambition, how he put his little earnings in the family purse ... his abiding sense of personal responsibility." Most of all, they remembered "how his devoted

⁵³ On the House patronage job, see Keith McNamara interview; Ohio State Journal, 1/4/35, pp. 1 and 9; and the Columbus City Directory, 1935 (p. 933) and 1936 (p. 1049). In 1937, the directory listed Rhodes as a laborer for the City Water Works, most likely another patronage job (p. 1030). The Journal, 8/26/1937, p. 2, described the job as an "investigator." See also the Ohio State Journal, 8/26/1935 for continuing Republican attempts to retake and reorganize the House. On Sandusky's correct accusation that Ward financed Rhodes, see Ohio State Journal, 10/29/43, pp. 1 and 8.

mother, in the manner of devoted mothers everywhere, used to predict that her boy would go through college and succeed in life.” She said often, “Grant will get through college and he will be heard from. You’ll see.” Ward, the obituary writer continued, “justified his mother’s faith. He started from the merest scratch and by any standard he achieved his success.” Ward “had no fine spun intellect” and “no personal advantage, either of friends or family. Wherever he was he fought a good fight.”⁵⁴ Few of these “recollections” were accurate. Ward had well connected friends and family in Jackson. He had not one but two university degrees in an era when most Americans did not have even one. He had the security that most people did not.

After experimenting with different variations of his biography, Rhodes eventually settled on an image remarkably similar to the one created in Ward’s obituary. By 1962, the outline had taken shape. Ed Heinke, the statehouse bureau chief for the Scripps Howard news service, typed the script the day after Rhodes had been elected governor. Heinke’s colleagues often called him a “Rhodes scholar,” tweaking Heinke for following Rhodes’ line rather reporting the facts.⁵⁵ The headline read “Rhodes Finally Makes It.” Heinke’s lead set the tone: “Jimmy Rhodes has finally slugged his way to the top.” The second paragraph continued the theme: “The political road never has been easy for this born scrapper ...” After his coal miner father died, Rhodes worked to support his mother and sisters. His mind was middlebrow at best, for he attended Ohio State

⁵⁴ Wellstone Telegram, 12/11/41, pp. 1 and 8.

⁵⁵ Aronoff and Riffe, eds., James Rhodes at Eighty, p. 16. Heinke apparently was one of several “Rhodes scholars.”

only for “a short time” and appreciated more than anything else an evening at home with his family, eating popcorn, drinking Coke, and “watching Gunsmoke, or any western that happens to be on.” In a sidebar profile, The Columbus Dispatch announced “The Third Time a Charm” because Rhodes had sought the governorship twice before and lost both times. Rhodes’ 1962 victory had “climaxed a long, tough and often discouraging struggle from committeeman on Columbus’ north side.” The Cleveland Plain Dealer announced that “Rhodes’ Persistence Wins Top State Job” and reported that “The election of James Rhodes to the Ohio governorship is proof of how far a man can go in politics if he keeps his eye on the main chance.” Like the image of Ward presented in his obituary, Rhodes had a determined and “plodding ambition,” a devoted mother, a humble past that required the son to support the family, a lack of well connected friends, a modest intellectual capability, and, most crucially, a fighting spirit. Rhodes learned from Ward how to mix “plodding ambition” with an instinct for the “good fight.” Remember the long term goal -- to keep your eye on the main chance as the Plain Dealer reported it -- and pick the fights that will help you reach that goal. Or, as Heinke repeated the script, Rhodes ran his 1962 campaign on a “high-level, statesman-like plane, even though basically he is a bare-knuckles fighter.” In Springfield and at OSU Rhodes had fought unwinnable fights. Ward taught Rhodes to fight, but not to pick fights that would derail his career.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Heinke, “Rhodes Finally Makes It,” Columbus Citizen Journal, 11/7/1962, pp. 1 and 3; Howard Thompson, The Columbus Dispatch, 11/7/1962, p. 22A; The Cleveland Plain Dealer, 11/7/1962, p. 9. Michael DiSalle, the incumbent Democratic Governor would not have said that Rhodes ran

On December 5, 1941 Ward had a heart attack. As Rhodes told the story, Ward was stricken at William McKinley's Statehouse monument, an apt symbol because all legendary political leaders in literature -- from Shakespeare's Caesar to Robert Penn Warren's Willie Stark -- have died at their Capitol building. Ward was taken to the Neil House, a hotel across the street from the Statehouse. Rhodes, described as one of Ward's "closest" and "most intimate" friends, was with Ward when he died.⁵⁷ According to the legend, Rhodes in 1932 arrived in Columbus at the very spot where the heart attack would later strike Ward. Rhodes was poor and on his own, a nobody in a new city. On December 5 1941, Rhodes at age 32 was two weeks from marriage, was in his second term as the city auditor, and was a fast rising politician. He looked out of the Neil House windows toward the intersection of Broad and High, gazing down on the Statehouse from the mezzanine floor. His mentor had just died, leaving Rhodes alone once again at his destiny just as that nameless, faceless driver had done nine years before. Ward had taught Rhodes, in ways that we cannot fully appreciate today, "how to be somebody." Rhodes still had work to do. He could be *somebody* now, but who?

a statesman like campaign. "Tax-hike Mike," as Rhodes labeled DiSalle, held a long grudge against Rhodes for his "bare-knuckles" street fight. See Richard G. Zimmerman, Call Me Mike: A Political Biography of Michael V. DiSalle (Kent, OH: The Kent State University, 2003), pp. 235-251.

⁵⁷ Ohio Department of Health, Certificate of Death for Grant Pliburn Ward, 12/5/1941, #73406, Ohio Historical Society; The Columbus Dispatch, 12/6/41, p. 1; Ohio State Journal, 12/6/41, p. 1.

CHAPTER 5
THE “PRICE OF BACON” AND A “DEGREE OF SECURITY:”¹
RAY BLISS CHANGES THE OHIO G.O.P., 1949-1962

Ray Bliss needed a specific answer to that question. Bliss (1907 - 1981) headed the Ohio Republican Party at a pivotal point in its history. From 1949, when Bliss assumed the state chairmanship, to 1965, when he left Ohio to run the Republican National Committee, Ohio Republicans hotly debated the extent to which, if at all, the G.O.P. should accept the New Deal. By “New Deal,” Ohio Republicans meant first and foremost the attempt of government to ensure security for working class people. In Ohio security played out most divisively in the area of labor-management relations. Would Ohio Republicans recognize the right of unions to collectively bargain? This debate over security for the working class tore apart the state's GOP. Bliss concluded that to end the debate and save the GOP he had to change the party.

Republicans did not want to change. In 1952, United States Senator Robert Taft lost his third and final bid for the Republican presidential nomination.

¹ Ray Bliss, describing what working class people were concerned about. See the transcript of Bliss' press conference on 4/23/1966, p. 10, box 141, folder “1/24-12/20/66, MSS 768, Raymond C. Bliss Papers, Ohio Historical Society (hereafter Bliss papers).

He lost a bitter, close battle to Dwight Eisenhower, a fellow Midwesterner but one who did not share Taft's critique of the New Deal. Many of Taft's supporters, mostly from the Midwest, charged that Eisenhower was the agent of eastern bankers and international elites who wanted to shove the New Deal down the throats of Midwestern industrialists. In the especially angry Texas primary, Taft and Eisenhower supporters fought for control of a meeting. When the Eisenhower backers managed to assert their will, Taft delegates stormed out, shouting, "Farewell, New Dealers." After the national convention, several of Taft's supporters wrote and urged him to consider a third party insurgency. Taft's cousin complained that after Eisenhower's nomination "something went out of the lives" of "millions of Americans." Sensible people -- conservatives and moderates -- had been pushed aside by "Mr. Roosevelt's New Dealers, Mr. Truman's Fair Dealers, and General Eisenhower's socialist Republicans." A third party "wouldn't be so bad after all." To another writer who had suggested the same thing, Taft said that a third party was "absolutely impossible" because of overwhelming organizational obstacles in the short term, but that "if Eisenhower is elected and things go badly, it might be well to build up such a party during the next four years." Taft feared above all else that Eisenhower would be controlled by New York Governor Tom Dewey, the symbol to many Midwestern Republicans of capitulation to the New Deal and internationalism. Eisenhower, Taft worried, would "put into power a New Deal Republican administration."²

² James T. Patterson, Mr. Republican: A Biography of Robert A. Taft (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1972), pp. 535-587. The quotations are from, respectively, pp. 541, 570, 575, 574.

Taft and Eisenhower managed to downplay their differences and unify the party in order to defeat the Democrats, but privately Taft continued to rail against “New Deal Republicans.” If he lost the battle at the national level, then the states offered a last redoubt. “We are all fighting for a cause,” Taft wrote, “to keep the Republican Party free of New Deal influences.” His failed candidacy meant only that soldiers for the “cause” would have to choose another battlefield. Taft urged his supporters to “carry on that fight in the states both before and after the election in the fall.”³

Ray Bliss was a crucial figure in that fight. Reared in Akron, Ohio Bliss was the son of German immigrants. His father Emil was an electrician, a skilled laborer whose talents afforded the family a measure of security unavailable to unskilled laborers. In 1932, when the unemployment rate was 37.3 percent in Ohio and close to 50 percent in Akron, the Bliss patriarch was steadily employed. He worked for the Imperial Electric Company, and in April of 1932 they sent him to Columbus to finish construction on a new state office building. Trusting the quality of his work, the company often sent him on such trips and in Columbus they assigned him “to direct installation of motors and other electrical equipment.” Unbeknownst to everyone, a faulty gas line lay beneath a sub-basement near the area where Bliss worked. Gas had seeped into the ground. In the afternoon of April 14, an electric spark touched off an explosion that twisted steel girders twelve floors up. Bliss’ skull was fractured, but he did not die for another four days. He lived long enough for his wife Emilie to rush to Columbus to see him in

³ Robert A. Taft letter to William Dane, 8/18/52, box 31, folder 1, MSS 279, Clarence Brown Papers, Ohio Historical Society (hereafter Clarence Brown Papers).

pain “tossing on a hospital cot.” Ray, then 23, and his mother collected \$6,500 from the state workman’s compensation fund. They then sued the Columbus Gas and Fuel Company for negligence, settling out of court for \$15,800. Even in tragic, painful death, Emil provided security for his family.⁴

If Ray Bliss’ personal life taught him a difficult lesson about security, then his professional career reinforced it. Akron was a crucible for Bliss’ political philosophy. The city was the center of the world’s rubber industry. Between 1910 and 1920, Akron was the fastest growing city in the nation. Many of the new residents were migrants from West Virginia in search of high wage jobs. The population spurt and the dirty, demanding factories created a rough and tumble town. As with any boomtown, the inevitable economic sloughs matched the prosperous highs. The city’s economy was so tied to the automobile industry that when it declined slightly, Akron suffered a jolt.⁵

The rough and tumble boomtown had rough and tumble politics to match. In 1931, Bliss started to volunteer at the Summit County Republican Party, making himself indispensable to Republican boss James Corey. The two developed a mentor/protégé relationship that often seemed more like father/son. An editorial in the Summit County Labor News derided Bliss as Corey’s “good

⁴ Emilie M. Bliss, Administratrix of the Estate of Emile Bliss, deceased, v. The Columbus Gas and Fuel Company, case numbers 138903 and 138904, Appearance Docket, #238, Franklin County Common Pleas Court, Columbus, Ohio; Daily Reporter (Columbus), 6/8/1933, p. 1 and 9/26/1934, p. 4; Akron Beacon Journal, 4/15/1932, p. 1, 4/19/1932, p. 1, 5/7/1932, p. 13; Last Will and Testament, Emil Bliss, #2771, Summit County Probate Court, Akron, Ohio. On the 1932 unemployment rate in Ohio see Andrew Cayton, Ohio: The History of a People (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University, 2003), p. 313.

⁵ Jon Teafor, Cities of the Heartland: The Rise and Fall of the Industrial Midwest (Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 107-108, 181; Daniel Nelson, “The CIO at Bay: Labor Militancy and Politics in Akron, 1936-1938,” Journal of American History, Vol. 71 (December 1984), p. 566-567.

man Friday.” The pro-labor newspaper had reason to take shots at Bliss. The editors saw him as part of a City Hall Republican machine that resorted to violence to stop the union movement, a machine that was merely a tool of the rubber barons.⁶

The Labor News made that observation about Bliss in the heat of the 1937 mayoral race. This campaign was no ordinary local election, for it pitted the power of industrial capitalists against the emerging force of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). If the CIO-backed candidate could win, then unions might be able to flex their muscle in Akron and elsewhere, becoming not a junior partner in the Democratic Party but the key player. Defeat, however, might set back the cause of a laborite party. To many people at the time, the election was a test case that would determine the national fortunes of labor and business in the political arena. The CIO/Democratic candidate lost, in part because rank and file union members were not nearly as monolithic as the CIO leadership had hoped. They rejected authoritarianism whether from management bosses or labor bosses, maintaining an independent streak. As a result of this defeat, the CIO remained a partner with rather than a leader of the Democratic Party.⁷

The election was critical for Bliss. He played a prominent role in the GOP’s success and consequently gained the attention of Republicans across the nation. He had beaten the mighty House of Labor, often using devious, shrewd, and effective tactics. He met secretly with Martin Davey, the anti-union, anti-New

⁶ Summit County Labor News, 10/15/1937, pp. 1, 5; William Hershey, “Fifty Years of Bliss: Looking Back with the Grand Old Politician,” Beacon Magazine (The Sunday supplemental for the Akron Beacon Journal), 6/7/1981, p. 16.

⁷ Nelson, “The CIO at Bay,” pp. 565-566, 584, 586.

Deal Democratic governor of Ohio. Davey offered to send his political cronies to help Bliss in Akron even though they were on the state payroll. Bliss accepted. Bliss also found out that Earl Browder, the head of the American Communist Party had planned to endorse the Democratic candidate at a speech. Bliss paid for it to be broadcast over the radio, thus financing the Communist Party but tainting the Democrats with the connection.⁸

The best story, however, is more myth than fact. According to Alex Arshinkoff, currently the head of the Summit County Republican Party and a protégé of Bliss, the city's economic leaders desperately wanted to beat the CIO. They asked Bliss what he needed to accomplish that. Bliss said when he asked for something, no matter how odd, follow through. Bliss knew that every summer the factories closed for a short time to clean, repair, and retool. He asked that the owners hold off until he gave his permission. The executives balked, but eventually went along. A week before the election, Bliss ordered the factories closed. Why? Hunting season in West Virginia was in full swing. As soon as the plants closed, the workers took off, returning home to hunt and to see family. They would not be in town to vote.⁹

There is no evidence that this occurred, but the story is significant because Bliss revealed how he dealt with the political power of unions. As with Rhodes, the myths Bliss told about himself provide an entry point to the truth. He preferred, in all of these stories, to finesse the labor problem rather than attack it

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 576.

⁹ Alex Arshinkoff, interview with author, 5/12/2000, notes in author's possession (hereafter Alex Arshinkoff interview).

directly. Owners itched for a fight, but Bliss would not give them one. Why attack head-on when a little misdirection would do? The direct approach only riled and unified the opposition.

The crucible of Akron politics was important for two reasons. First, Akron politics taught him to cast himself as a “nuts and bolts” manager, a technocrat who delivered victories, not debates. He spent his entire career developing this image. People in politics, especially Akron politics, were so passionate, so intense that factions often broke out, spoiling party unity and threatening the job security of the party’s management team. In the mid-1960s, Bliss recalled that “back in the thirties when I first got in the Republican Party we had twenty [factions].” In the 1960s at the national party, Bliss felt that same heat. “They are after me on all sides,” he reportedly said. “One slip up and I’ve had it.” As a reporter noted, Bliss was then in the “torturous position of having to walk a tightrope between furiously divergent elements and factions.” A tough, passionate partisan could do great volunteer work for the party, or scuttle unity and cause defeat. To survive, the manager had to be above the partisan bickering. He learned that in Akron.

Bliss mastered a second lesson from the crucible of Akron politics. He claimed to have gained insight about working class voters. As national chairman in the mid-1960s, Bliss had to rebuild the moribund party after Barry Goldwater’s disastrous run for the presidency in 1964. Reporters constantly questioned Bliss on his strategy. Many political pundits wondered if the party was beyond resuscitation. Bliss insisted that as the minority party, the GOP “must

aggressively pursue the course of enlisting new people on our side if we're to become the majority." Too many Republicans assume that "every laboring man is a Democrat ... but in my experience -- I come from a highly industrialized city and it's heavily union, heavily Democratic -- my experience is the average man in the shop ... is concerned about the price of bacon just as everybody else is and he wants some degree of security."¹⁰

These lessons were contradictory. To appreciate the necessity of security was to take a precise ideological stand. To dilute union power was also to reject its outright destruction. Bliss accepted that unions had the right to collectively bargain for worker security. Holding these views, Bliss not only managed to survive but thrive in the party of Taft. He persistently sold himself as a "nuts and bolts" manager and pointed to his strong, successful Republican organization in a "heavily unionized, heavily Democratic" city. His victories provided plenty of evidence of his organizational expertise, but also blinded people to how he won. Over the course of the 1950s, he tried to turn the GOP toward the New Deal and the issue of security.

All the more ironic, then, that he owed his statewide power to Robert Taft. In 1951, Bliss testified at a United States Senate sub-committee hearing. He offered the reasons for his appointment as chairman of the Ohio GOP and described his methods and goals. Led by Taft, many Ohio Republicans despaired of the organization's showing in the 1948 presidential election.

¹⁰ "Republican Coordinating Committee Press Conference Transcript," p. 11, 8/30/1965, box 138, folder 5, Ray Bliss Papers; Letter from Robert B. McCall to Bliss, 11/5/65, box 138, folder 8, Ray Bliss Papers; "Press Conference Transcript," 4/23/1966, p. 10, box 141, folder "1/24-12/20/66," Ray Bliss Papers

Republican candidate for president Thomas Dewey lost to Democrat Harry Truman and the incumbent Republican governor lost to Frank Lausche, a conservative Democrat. Of eight statewide races that year, Republicans elected only one candidate. The GOP also lost control of the state legislature. In the 1944 Senate election, Taft squeaked by a marginal Democratic opponent. With his 1950 reelection campaign looming, Taft needed a stronger organization. He convinced Bliss to accomplish that task.

Bliss set out "with the firm conviction that my job was that of revitalizing the [Ohio] Republican Party organization." He started by analyzing why Ohio Republican candidates fared so poorly in 1948. He found approximately 140,000 Republicans unregistered to vote in the state's rural areas and 150,000 unregistered in urban areas. He dedicated his efforts, therefore, to an "all out" registration drive, an attempt to attract an increasing number of independent voters, and a plan to strengthen contacts with county chairmen.¹¹

Bliss also demanded that the party pay for his services. He was the organization's first salaried chairman, earning \$12,000 plus expenses in 1949. By 1957, that figure had climbed to a total of \$18,000 per year. Bliss justified the salary because it "helps reduce public gossip as to 'what's the Chairman getting out of this.'" Bliss attempted to protect his reputation and to professionalize what in the past had been an amateur, part-time staff. Indeed, the Toledo Blade

¹¹ 1951 Statement of Ray Bliss before the Senate Sub-Committee on Privileges and Elections, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1951.

remarked that Bliss turned the party into "a working political organization" that "has modernized its methods and streamlined its operations."¹²

The state GOP saw immediate results. In 1950, Taft won reelection by the widest margin ever in an Ohio Senate contest. Republicans also beat Democrats in five of seven statewide races. Though they failed to defeat Lausche's re-election as governor, Republicans did recapture control of the state legislature. This victory was important because it allowed Republicans to manage the redistricting process in 1951.¹³

Though Bliss worked boldly and quickly to modernize the bureaucratic apparatus of the party, he had to carefully manage ideological divisions. On one hand he promoted Robert Taft's brand of conservatism. L. E. Judd, director of public relations for Goodyear Tire and Rubber, advised Bliss on how to portray Taft's philosophy. "It is not a Dewey-like attitude of mincing around the catch traps of the new or fair deal school. It is not a philosophy of mere opposition." If Republicans "develop an intelligent campaign of offense, keyed to the ENLIGHTENED and POSITIVE labels, I think we can demonstrate where Dewey fell down and also set a pattern for future Republican success." Judd touched on the problem confronting all Republicans: how to oppose the New Deal without

¹² Bliss to Al Loucks, 8/26/57, box 1, folder 21, Ray Bliss Papers; Toledo Blade editorial cited in "State Government Report," Vol. XVI, 3/31/51 - 4/6/51, box 1, folder 2, MSS 840, William Halley Papers, Ohio Historical Society (hereafter Halley Papers).

¹³ Political journalist Samuel Lubell, in The Future of American Politics (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951) argued that the key to Taft's victory was not Republican organization, but, as in 1937, rank and file discontent with heavy-handed labor tactics. See pp. 189-197. See also labor historian Nelson Lichtenstein's favorable assessment of Lubell's book in Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., A Companion to Post-1945 America (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), pp. 529-533.

seeming merely against it, or, conversely, without appearing to simply and uncreatively water it down.¹⁴

On the other hand, Bliss encouraged the rise of "New Deal Republicans." The 1952 Republican presidential and gubernatorial nominations revealed the pervasive ideological divisions within the Ohio G.O.P. The split between the conservative wing and the moderate-to-liberal one focused on two members of the same family: Robert Taft--the conservative contestant for the Republican presidential nomination--and Charles Taft, Robert's liberal younger brother who sought his party's nomination for the governor's race. In the past, Charles, a lawyer, had represented the CIO and written a book called You and I -- and Roosevelt (1936) that supported many New Deal programs and failed to condemn Franklin Roosevelt. Many Ohio Republicans expressed outrage over these doctrinal "lapses" and sought to block Charles' run for statewide office. Unions, in contrast, were inclined to endorse Charles. The Akron-Beacon Journal suggested that union leaders were in a "curious position" concerning the Taft brothers. "After throwing the book at Robert Taft [in 1950], they may well turn around and support his brother."¹⁵

Several political observers noted the ideological split. One columnist reported that "Old-line Republicans are pulling their hair out these days over the prospect that Charles P. Taft, [Robert's] liberal minded younger brother, will be a G.O.P. candidate for Governor." Another journalist wrote that "political

¹⁴ L.E. Judd to Bliss, 3/9/49, box 9, folder 22, Bliss Papers (emphasis original).

¹⁵ Patterson, Mr. Republican, p. 508; Charles Taft, You and I -- and Roosevelt (New York: Farrar and Reinhart, Inc., 1936). ABJ, December 23, 1951.

peacemakers" met, "representing the Party chairman, professional and trade association executives, business and civic leaders." These people decided that "life would be simpler if Senator [Robert] Taft could have the support of the Ohio delegation unencumbered" by his brother. Newsweek reported that "G.O.P. regulars considered Charles too much of a liberal." The publisher of State Government Reports, a capitol city political tip sheet, recorded the concerns of some of the rank-and-file Republicans. One woman scolded Charles for running, saying, "And what about this Charles Taft--tch-tch." Many Republicans in Ohio, then, expressed their distaste for a Republican who seemed too liberal.¹⁶

Even stalwart Republican businessmen mustered only reluctant support for Charles. Robert Weaver, a reliable source of Republican campaign contributions, voted for Charles only because incumbent Democrat Frank Lausche endorsed Adlai Stevenson. Weaver wrote to Lausche, "For many years I have been one of your ardent and enthusiastic supporters." Weaver claimed that Lausche "bitterly disappointed" him by supporting "the political trash which surrounds" Stevenson, a reference to the political scandals of the Truman administration. Weaver then asserted that he would vote for Taft and would encourage friends to do the same. A.A. Searle, a banker, declared that "I had been quite outspoken among my friends that I consider Mr. Lausche the stronger man after the CIO and AFL endorsed Mr. [Charles] Taft. As with Weaver,

¹⁶ Columbus Dispatch, March 11, 1951; The Ohio Letter, July 23, 1951; Newsweek, September 17, 1951; SGR, Vol. 22, 5/12/51 - 5/18/51, box 1, folder 2, Halley Papers.

however, this banker changed his mind when Lausche backed Stevenson.¹⁷

Charles received support from some Republican businessmen only when the conservative Lausche actually campaigned for a fellow Democrat, a rare event indeed.

So how did Charles earn the nomination? More troubling than tepid support among Republican regulars was a personal fight. Robert publicly offered only a statement of neutrality. He privately pleaded with Charles not to run. Charles' political beliefs were an "embarrassment." Robert confided to his wife, "I don't see why [Charlie] is always on the wrong (or at least opposite) side."¹⁸ In the winter of 1951 and 1952, Charles nevertheless gained momentum, earning the endorsement of several county organizations. What was the source of his momentum? Roscoe Walcutt, a conservative Republican state legislator wrote to Clarence Brown, a political confidant of Robert Taft. Walcutt said, "I think I can see the Bliss influence and perhaps in one or two instances our young friend Rhodes, who I think is working closely to him."¹⁹

Bliss managed a party headed in two different directions. The entrenched forces that represented the glorious, hallowed past of the party pushed one way; the emerging and uncertain forces of the future pulled another. These factions hampered Bliss' ability to run an effective machine. Robert lost his race for the

¹⁷ Robert Weaver to Frank Lausche, 10/24/52, box 10, folder 34, Bliss Papers ; A.A. Searle to Ohio Citizens for Eisenhower-Nixon, undated, box 10, folder 34, Bliss Papers.

¹⁸ Robert Taft's response to his brother's run for the gubernatorial nomination is documented in Patterson, Mr. Republican, pp. 507-509. The Taft quotation is on p. 508. Patterson used the word "embarrassment" to describe Robert's feelings toward Charles candidacy (p. 508).

¹⁹ Roscoe Walcutt to Clarence Brown, 1/5/52, box 18, folder 52, Clarence Brown Papers.

GOP presidential nomination to Eisenhower. Charles, despite opposition from high and low places, won his primary race. The following November, though, conservative incumbent Democrat Frank Lausche whipped Charles. Most important to Bliss, donations to the state organization declined and rank-and-file discontent increased. Both resulted from the factional brawl.

As late as the fall of 1952, the state GOP was short of money.²⁰ This financial shortage curtailed G.O.P. operations. In October, Robert Goodwin, the director of the Republican Farm Division of the Republican National Committee, expressed doubts about the organization's ability to advertise in African American newspapers. Goodwin knew that Bliss "too [was] concerned about it but [was] short of money." The editor of The Cleveland Herald, a black newspaper, had heard that "publicity from your headquarters have been delayed because up to the present you have only obtained 52% of your budget." This deficit indicated the disappointment many conservative Republicans felt as a result of the success of Dwight Eisenhower and Charles Taft, both of whom had vanquished Old-Guard Republicans.²¹

Charles Upton, a businessman who worked for Bliss' finance committee, worried about "New Deal Republicans." Upton had read that Eisenhower considered his brother Milton an informal source for policy ideas. Upton also knew that Milton had "associations in the past with Henry Wallace, Rexford Guy

²⁰ For letters documenting this shortfall, see Bliss to J. Penfield Seiberling, 9/22/52, box 10, folder 33, Bliss papers; Bliss to Robert Weaver, 10/2/52, box 10, folder 34, Bliss Papers; Bliss to Ronald B. Woodyard, 10/2/52, box 10, folder 33, Bliss Papers.

²¹ Robert K. Goodwin to Bliss, 10/8/52, box 1, folder 23, Bliss Papers; Ormond A. Forte to Bliss, 10/8/52, box 1 folder 23, Bliss Papers.

Tugwell, and other New Dealers in the Department of Agriculture." Upton found these connections "terribly disquieting and certainly would put the Republican Party in the New Deal class right up to its neck." Upton concluded that "this certainly is not good reading for Taft Republicans or others who are interested in a change in our administration and who desire to get away from New Deal principles."²²

Bliss responded with two letters, one to Upton and one to Arthur Summerfield, the Chairman of the Republican National Committee. Bliss acknowledged Upton's concerns and said that "I have twice pointed out to Mr. Summerfield on the telephone ... that if we are to carry the Mid-western states, General Eisenhower must put on a fighting campaign, clearly a program that cannot be constructed as another campaign of me-tooism." Bliss then stated that if Republicans in 1952 failed to reject New Deal principles, "that will be fatal to the Republican chances." Bliss then mailed Summerfield a copy of Upton's letter and wrote, "I only send this to you because it is typical of the phone calls and letters I am receiving from ardent Republicans" in Ohio. He then argued that a "me-too" campaign would have an "adverse affect" in Ohio and other states in the Midwest.²³

These exchanges are important because Bliss avoided the issue on which Upton sought agreement: the wisdom, the morality even, of New Deal policy. He instead calculated the power and influence of Republicans who opposed the

²² Charles B. Upton to Bliss, 7/21/52, box 1, folder 41, Bliss Papers.

²³ Bliss to Charles B. Upton, 7/23/52, box 1, folder 41, Bliss Papers; Bliss to Arthur Summerfield, 7/23/52, box 1, folder 41, Bliss Papers.

New Deal, and sympathetically listened to their concerns and faithfully reported them to Summerfield. Bliss understood that in Ohio and the Midwest, Republican support for New Deal public policy would place unnecessary obstacles in front of victory. That understanding did not mean he agreed with Upton. As party chairman, Bliss said he had "to be tolerant of the deeply held views of other people in your party. The chairman had a responsibility to support all nominees "whether you like them or don't." That practice, Bliss said, "has paid off because we've had bickering under my chairmanship in Ohio."²⁴

Ohio Republicans often tested Bliss' tolerance. In August 1952, an official with the Republican National Committee forwarded to Bliss several flyers that an Ohio citizen had produced and distributed. These flyers criticized Eisenhower and denounced the Republican Party for not choosing Robert Taft as its candidate. The aspiring pamphleteer claimed that "New Deal stooges" controlled the Republican nominating convention, hated Eisenhower because he was too friendly with "me too--New Deal Republicans," and demanded that voters "kill the Republican New Deal with all its New Deal tricks." The party official who sent the flyers accurately commented that "There seems to be one hell of a lot of this stuff in your State ..." Indeed, both Bliss and the national staff understood the situation in Ohio: bitter over the defeat of Robert Taft and reluctant to endorse a "New Deal Republican," Ohioans caused serious organizational problems.²⁵

²⁴ Transcript of Press Conference, 7/23/1966, box 141, folder 1/24-12/20/1966, Bliss Papers.

²⁵ Wayne J. Hood to Bliss, 8/25/52, box 1, folder 30, Bliss Papers. Arthur Summerfield wrote Bliss several letters in the summer and fall months of 1952 in which Summerfield expressed sympathy for Bliss, given the stormy political climate in Ohio. For examples, see Bliss Papers, box 1, folder labeled "Arthur Summerfield." On the Taft-Eisenhower rift in Ohio see also Dwight

Yet even as he acknowledged the problem, he continued to encourage it. He did so because he wanted to push the party away from the past. After 1952, Bliss tried to change the party so that it reached a quiet political accord with organized labor, lessened its reliance on rural voters, and increased its support in fast growing metropolitan areas. Not until after 1958, however, could Bliss really change the party, and only then because the supporters of the old Republican order destroyed themselves.

After 1952 and with Bliss at the helm, Republican office-holders reached a tentative, pragmatic peace with certain tenets of New Deal political economy. In particular, the Ohio GOP avoided direct fights with labor unions. From 1949 through 1958, the state legislature, for example, passed no legislation that attacked the right of unions to organize and bargain collectively. Throughout most of these years, Republicans controlled the statehouse and, from 1956 to 1958, also held the governorship. Yet the federal Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 allowed states to pass "right-to-work" laws that would have outlawed union shops. GOP donors itched to rollback New Deal policies that facilitated gains made by unions. During the first several years of the 1950s Ohio Republicans had plenty of opportunity and incentive to revisit how the state treated labor, but Bliss, contrary to the nuts and bolts image he constructed, held anti-union legislation in check.

Joyce to Robert Weaver, 7/31/52, box 10, folder 31, Bliss Papers; Bliss to R.O. Gates, 8/5/52, box 10, folder 31, Bliss Papers; Lawrence Burns to Dwight Eisenhower, dated 8/11/52, box 10, folder 31, Bliss Papers; Thomas D. Wolfe to Abbott Washburn, 7/21/52, box 10, folder 31, Bliss Papers; Martin Coyle to Eisenhower, 8/8/52, box 10, folder 31, Bliss Papers; Charles Upton to Bliss, 8/4/52, box 10, folder 31, Bliss Papers.

Some Ohio Republican lawmakers frequently introduced bills to curtail the economic strength and political activity of labor organizations. Proposals included guaranteeing the "right-to-work," prohibiting secondary boycotts, and limiting the use of union dues for political causes. Significantly, however, all anti-labor legislation died in committee.²⁶ Republican leaders in the legislature let rank-and-file representatives submit anti-labor measures, but eventually allowed them to fade. This strategy represented not an ardent embrace of New Deal labor policy, but a hesitant protection of the status quo. Within this framework, the Ohio GOP prospered throughout most of the 1950s.

Demographic and ideological trends forced a confrontation with this situation. Urban growth outpaced that of rural areas. Business associations increasingly lost patience with mere promises of action. Combined, these pressures forced Bliss to contend with the conflict between the old and new orders, between those party regulars who wished to attack the New Deal and those politicians who opted for compromises.

Bliss viewed the party's rural base as a weak foundation. In 1951 he attempted to expand the party's base through a redistricting plan he aggressively supported. Adopting the plan would force the party to incorporate urban voters into its coalition because rural and small town voters could no longer produce electoral majorities statewide. The prolonged population decline in rural areas

²⁶ For specific examples of anti-labor legislation, see the Ohio Senate Journal and Ohio House Journal (Columbus, OH: F.J. Heer Printing Co.) For House bills, see 1949 (Vol. 123), H.B. 569 and 417; 1951 (Vol. 124), H.B. 338 and 339; 1953-54 (Vol. 125), H.B. 545; 1955 (Vol. 126), H.B. 802; 1957-58 (Vol. 127), H.B. 303. For Senate bills, see 1955-56 (Vol. 126), S.B. 101; 1957-58 (Vol. 127), S.B. 309 and 146. Bliss also made a list of "controversial" labor bills from 1949 to 1957, all of which failed to pass. Memo from Jack Flanagan to Bliss, undated, box 18, folder 29, Bliss Papers.

made the need for reapportionment ever more compelling. After the plan passed, a columnist for the Cleveland Plain Dealer expressed surprise that the legislature had completed any redistricting plan that year. The columnist suggested that Bliss played an important role. Bliss, "whose mild manner cloaks his resoluteness," made "the issue a matter of party policy." Although Bliss usually portrayed himself as merely a "nuts-and-bolts" bureaucrat, in this case he stepped directly and forcefully into the policy making process.²⁷

The redistricting diluted the power of urban wards by connecting them to suburban ones. This gerrymander, especially as applied to Cleveland, meant that Republicans began to see the value of enhanced "urban" representation. One political observer noted that "for the first time [in] many, many years two urban men head the" GOP organization in the legislature. Statehouse Republican leaders relied increasingly on "amalgamated" voting blocs of rural and urban legislators. Still, Bliss' efforts were as much as an evasion of urban power as recognition of it. As he often said, "Just remember this, it isn't necessary for us to always carry these big cities to achieve victory statewide. I pounded home to our chairmen" this advice: "let's reduce the losses."²⁸

The power of the rural-urban demographic shift played out disastrously in the "Right-to-Work" (RTW) crisis of 1958. The RTW crisis highlighted the split between those Ohio Republicans who had retreated from tentative acceptance of the New Deal and those who searched for compromise. For Bliss, the RTW

²⁷ Alvin Silverman, Cleveland Plain Dealer, March 11, 1951; New York Times, June 4, 1951.

²⁸ SGR, Vol. 1, 12/9/50 - 12/15/50, box 1, folder 2, Halley Papers; SGR, Vol. 26, 6/9/51 - 6/15/51, box 1, folder 3, Halley Papers; Press Conference Transcript, 11/10/1966, box 141, folder "1/24-12/20/1966, Bliss papers.

issue meant that he could not run his party smoothly, that strife obstructed the search for consensus. The electoral disaster that accompanied RTW, however, allowed Bliss to consolidate his power. He then tried new ways of reaching the rank-and-file union member and led the national G.O.P. to rethink how they handled the electoral power concentrated in urban areas. These shifts in strategy shaped the public policy programs that Republicans offered in the 1960s.

By 1957, many business leaders had concluded that Republicans legislators suffered from a severe case of political timidity. Frustrated by the dilatory tactics of statehouse politicians, business groups such as the Ohio Chamber of Commerce and the Ohio Manufacturers Association decided to utilize the initiative process to achieve their goal. If politicians would not act forthrightly, businessmen reasoned, then the public would. Several trends convinced them that the time was right for RTW. Nationally, by 1958 eighteen other states had enacted "right-to-work" laws. Indiana, for example, had passed a similar law in 1957, becoming the first northern state to take this action. National organizations, moreover, reported and encouraged the efforts of business groups in states such as California and Kansas.²⁹

In addition to national trends, unions in Ohio seemed politically impotent. Despite an unprecedented union effort on behalf of the Democratic candidate, unions failed in 1950 to unseat Senator Taft. In 1955, furthermore, business

²⁹ See, for example, the National Right to Work Committee's newsletter, "National Right to Work Newsletter." See also Robert E. Jackson, "The Public Relations Campaign of the National Right to Work Committee," (Ohio State University: unpublished master's thesis, 1967).

groups and Republican allies successfully defended the state's unemployment compensation program against the poorly coordinated efforts of unions to modernize the system. Also, supporters of RTW believed that rural, agricultural interests would automatically oppose labor and negate any votes they could garner. On the basis of this evidence, many Ohio business leaders concluded that national trends and a weak and divided Ohio labor movement would guarantee the success of RTW.

Business groups, however, overestimated their unity. From the beginning of the "right-to-work" initiative process, medium-to-smaller-sized businesses enthusiastically backed RTW while larger, heavy industrialized concerns advanced, at best, only lukewarm support. In June 1958, RTW supporters met to organize their campaign. Many of the participants represented small, independent businessmen, including several from the retail trades. As the campaign progressed, one political writer remarked that while both business and labor were engaged in a bitter fight, "a few important units [big businesses] are taking somewhat a middle of the road attitude." In late September, the Youngstown Vindicator reported that "little money is coming in from industrialists, fearful of disturbing their labor relations." After the election, one rubber company executive admitted to the Wall Street Journal that he failed to vote for the issue and that the company was "on good relations with the union now. I'm afraid of what might happen if we changed that."³⁰

³⁰ Fenton, "Right-To-Work," p. 242; Legislative Digest Review, Vol. 6, No. 10, March 14, 1958; "Labor Plans Drive in Congress on 'Right-To-Work,'" Wall Street Journal, November 6, 1958. On the split among business interests in Ohio, see also Glenn Miller and Stephen B. Ware,

Supporters spent approximately \$250,000 in the petition drive and over \$700,000 in the fall campaign.³¹ Donations that might have gone to the state GOP instead went to pro-RTW organizations. In August 1958, Bliss reported to his executive committee that "the Ohio Republican Finance Committee was encountering great difficulty in raising campaign funds this year." At that late date, the committee had raised only twenty-one percent of its budget. The dearth of funds forced the party to send a letter to "Republican candidates for state-wide office, cautioning them against" overspending. Thus, in 1958, as in 1952, ideological divisions caused donations to the party to dwindle.³²

This paucity of funds forced Republican candidates to rely on other means, primarily those businessmen and organizations that supported RTW. Incumbent Republican governor C. William O'Neill, for example, reluctantly turned to these back-up resources. In the several months preceding the 1958 general election, O'Neill avoided the RTW issue, heeding the advice of Bliss. As November approached, however, polls indicated a close race between O'Neill and Democratic challenger Michael DiSalle. In September, O'Neill endorsed the issue, this time rejecting Bliss' advice. O'Neill did so, in part, in order to differentiate himself from DiSalle, who opposed "right-to-work." More

"Organized Labor in the Political Process: A Case Study of the Right To Work Campaign in Ohio," Labor History, Vol. 4 (1963), p. 55; and Michael Zavacky, "Interest Groups in the Initiative Referendum Process: The 1958 Ohio RTW Initiative, A Case Study," (University of Pittsburgh: unpublished dissertation, 1968), pp. 36-37 and 41-42. More generally, on policy agenda differences in the business community see Howell John Harris, The Right to Manage: Industrial Relations Policies of American business in the 1940s (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982) and Robert Collins, The Business Response to Keynes, 1929-1964 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

³¹ Miller and Ware, "Organized Labor in the Political Process," pp. 61-62.

³² Meeting Minutes, Republican State Central and Executive Committee of Ohio, box 17, folder 40, Bliss Papers.

importantly, though, donors from the business community threatened to withhold vital financial backing if he failed to support RTW.³³

By the late 1950s, some businessmen in Ohio decided to challenge the status quo. In contrast, Republican politicians, however irresolutely, had accepted a central principle of the New Deal. Unions had gained legitimacy as bureaucracies that bargained with management on behalf of workers. Significant parts of the Ohio business community compelled unwilling Republican politicians to question that legitimacy. According to historian David Stebenne, this movement was part of a national trend, “a managerial revolt against” the post-war political economy. This revolt had its roots in the severe economic downturn that began in 1957 and in the attempt by managers to regain “lost prerogatives.” Arthur Goldberg, a prominent labor lawyer, observed that “throughout American industry there is a widespread movement to replace genuine acceptance of and cooperation with unions by a philosophy of labor-management relations keyed to keeping the unions at arms length, of working with unions as little as possible, to go around unions to its members rather than deal with the union as a living institution.”³⁴

The party's internal search to define the identity and aspirations of the working class shaped the GOP's response to the right-to-work movement. In 1955 and 1958, Bliss attended campaign schools created by the national party.

³³ Fenton, "Right-To-Work Vote," p. 243.

³⁴ David Stebenne, Arthur J. Goldberg: New Deal Liberal (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 153-187. The Stebenne quotations are on pp. 153, 154. The Goldberg quotation is on p. 185.

These seminars taught state chairman how to run effective organizations. In 1955, party functionaries debated how to win the labor vote. A Republican from Oregon suggested that the party appeal to these people "through their varied interests." LeRoy Greene, a Pennsylvania Republican, echoed that theme. The worker, the Pennsylvanian argued, probably "had to join the CIO because the plant he worked in has a closed-shop contract. Perhaps he is a real unionist. Perhaps also he is a doggone Republican." The union might be but "one of his many affiliations Sure, he belongs to the Military Order of the World Wars, too." The worker, then, according to Greene, defined his identity through his multiple and overlapping affiliations. Republicans, as a result, could exploit these several loyalties to create a schism between labor leaders and workers.³⁵

In Green's eyes the labor leader was probably a Democrat. Green described the leader as educated, articulate, and left-wing. Green then asked, "Is he the fellow you are after? Do you want his one lousy vote? No, you do not." Republicans should instead focus on the average worker. To Greene, the ideal worker/Republican was a woman, "a pretty good-looking kid." "She is just coming out of the factory [in my scenario]. She is cleaned; she is washed and ironed; she is starched; She is a nice, clean all-America kid." Greene then asserted that Republicans foolishly assumed the union leader represented the opinions of the rank-and-file. The leader "casts, under our wonderful and beautiful republic a vote, just one vote, period." Republicans "can afford to have

³⁵ Comments of Hal Short of Oregon, "Transcript of the 1955 Campaign School," p. 6b, box 1, folder 17, Bliss Papers; Comments of LeRoy Greene of Pennsylvania, *ibid*, p. 11a.

no further delusions on the subject of these fine people, at the core and substance of America, being captives of any political party. Let's end that nonsense here and now."³⁶

Green proved Goldberg right. Republicans sought ways to “get around” unions and appeal directly to workers, to treat unions not as “living institutions” but as caricatures. If Green was any guide to Republican thought, then many in the G.O.P. pictured workers as independent from union leadership, as hygienically scrubbed and middle-class in appearance, as reliant on various social groups to shape her worldview, and, most obviously from that passage, as women. His choice of a woman as an ideal worker betrayed how he saw unions and workers. His comments suggested an unspoken comparison. Collectively, workers were unions. Unions in turn were dirty, sweaty, threatening Democratic men. Alone, a worker was clean, attractive, and feminized. Workers were vulnerable in their diversity. Green articulated a commonly accepted but idealized portrait of the American working class: a tamed working class that in its “washed, iron, and starched” appearance was more interested in middle class status through consumption than in strikes.³⁷

Republicans hoped that their idealized American worker created an opportunity for their party to gain access to the labor vote. In practice, however, Bliss failed to implement any substantive program to attract blue collar voters. In 1957, the year before the RTW initiative, Bliss outlined his organization to

³⁶ ibid, p. 11a.

³⁷ See Elizabeth Cohen, A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), pp. 152-165.

another state party official. Bliss proudly pointed to the strength of his "Women's Division," a group which operated under the leadership of the state committee's female vice chairman. He also observed that the Ohio Federation of Republican Women's Clubs "consists of some 375 women's clubs throughout Ohio, involving approximately 30,000 plus members. They have a full time executive secretary in Republican State Headquarters." Yet when he described the labor division, Bliss tersely wrote, "you will note that while monies have been budgeted into this Division, hardly any has been spent on it." Bliss, known for his meticulous planning and preparation, failed to create even the semblance of a labor program. As a consequence, the party struggled through the election of 1958 without having forged any links to blue-collar voters, links that might have softened the electoral outcome.³⁸

In 1958, Bliss attended another campaign school. Republicans there continued to assert that a division existed between the rank-and-file and its leadership. To that fervent hope, Republicans added a discussion on what program to offer the working class. Several party officials argued that the GOP should "develop a crusade" to energize the electorate. Thad Hutcheson of Texas advocated "the idea of losing some battles while standing on principle instead of a wishy-washy compromise that we try to treat as a Republican victory." He then criticized the deals Eisenhower had struck with Congressional Democrats. Republicans, he said, did not want to take credit for those policies. A Wisconsin official concurred. "Whether you like Mr. [Joseph] McCarthy or didn't like

³⁸ Bliss to Al Loucks, 8/26/57, box 1, folder 21, Bliss Papers.

McCarthy, he had them storming to the polls. He had an issue [anti-communism], and he stood for something. Whether you liked it or not, that's not the point." Congressman Richard Simpson, chairman of the Republican Congressional Committee forcefully summarized the prevailing opinion, stating "I'd rather be licked on principle" than "win a wishy-washy victory" that forced Republicans to compromise with the Democrats. Applause then interrupted the proceedings.³⁹

Bliss stood to speak at the end of this session. Unfortunately, the moderator noted that time had run out, so Bliss' thoughts remained unrecorded. On other occasions, however, Bliss dismissed the electoral strategy supported by Simpson and other, like-minded Republicans. When Ohio businessmen met to plan the RTW campaign, Bliss told them not to put this divisive issue on the ballot because blue collar workers would punish Republicans at the voting booth. Bliss pleaded that Ohio Republicans under his guidance won elections "because [he] kept issues out of elections."⁴⁰ In the 1960s, furthermore, a New York Times journalist summarized Bliss' advice to Republicans. "Stop worrying about [ideological] position, collect a lot of money, put up as many attractive faces as [you] can, advise them to adapt themselves ... to the conditions of the local electorate, and run like hell, shouting 'me too' if necessary. That way the

³⁹ "Transcript of the 1958 Campaign School," pp. 12-19, box 1, folder 19, Bliss Papers.

⁴⁰ Bliss quoted in Fenton, "The Right-To-Work Vote in Ohio," p. 242. Fenton, a political scientist, interviewed several Republican officials after the campaign concluded. Fenton failed to note whether he talked to Bliss directly or heard this quote second-hand.

Republicans might win back enough offices to make a position mean something."⁴¹ Bliss rejected the approach favored by his ideological colleagues.

How then did Republicans plan to reach the average worker and win while standing on principle? During the 1958 campaign school at a panel discussion called "Reaching Labor's Rank and File," Republican Party officials debated how to sell RTW to workers. The chief presenter was Edward J. Ray, a New York state Republican and member of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen. An audience member asked Ray whether New York had passed a RTW law and, if so, "how do you handle it with your labor people?" Ray said New York passed no such law "because the Republican Party in New York state is not for it and does not support it, and the workers do not want it." Apparently not listening, Alphonzo Bell of California responded that in his state the Republican candidate for governor favored the right-to-work cause. "How is it possible to get [to] the rank-and-file and to get the story across ...?" Ray pressed on, doubting restating his doubt that Republicans could be successful. His reservations failed to make a difference. For many Republicans nationwide, RTW provided the issue that could get voters "storming to the polls." Even if the electorate stormed against Republicans, RTW was a principle on which the GOP could proudly stand. In Ohio, GOP donors coerced Republicans to "stand proud." In the end, RTW forced these party bureaucrats into a difficult position. As partisans they aggressively cheered a principled stand on a divisive issue. Yet as practical

⁴¹ Stephen Hess and David Broder, The Republican Establishment: The Present and Future of the GOP (New York: Harper and Row, 1967) p. 399. Hess, an historian, and Broder, a journalist with the Washington Post, cited NYT journalist Tom Wicker as the source, but provided no clue about when and where Wicker made these comments.

politicians, they recognized that their ideological position could translate into a loss. They had no idea whether they could persuade blue-collar voters. In 1958 Republican leaders across the nation willingly took a risk. Bliss did not.⁴²

More significantly, because of reliance on donations from business interests, Republican candidates in Ohio could not take a principled stand against RTW. Ohio Republicans consequently defined RTW not as a problem of principle, but as a strategic question of how to get around the leadership of unions and how to convince the worker that RTW was in his/her self-interest. One audience member reminded the conference participants that, according to a Michigan University survey, from 1952 to 1956 the Eisenhower ticket gained nine percentage points in the labor vote. "So we have made some definite gains with the rank and file." Another person argued that the worker viewed RTW as "an attempt to accomplish by law an invalidation of the kind of contract he has with his employer." This issue could negate that opening. If, on the other hand, Republicans promised to "help the rank and file legislatively with cleaning up the unions, to keep the racketeers out, to see that there is democracy in their unions," the GOP could build on Eisenhower's gains. A third participant hit on the method that eventually became the one for James Rhodes, arguably the most popular Republican governor ever in Ohio. "You listen to Republicans make speeches and they will talk about a piece of legislation or a program and

⁴² Transcript of the 1958 Campaign School, pp. 110-111. For an overview of the 1958 gubernatorial campaign in California and the role of the RTW issue, see Totten J. Anderson, "The 1958 Election in California," The Western Political Quarterly, Vol. 12 (1959), pp. 276-300.

they will say this is good for business. Now in itself that is a confession by the speaker that his mind is on profits. Why doesn't he say that this makes jobs?"⁴³

As Ohio GOP politicians headed into the 1958 election, external and internal pressures shaped the way they responded to RTW. Throughout the 1950s, many party leaders had carefully avoided a direct confrontation with labor organizations. The dependence on business donations reversed that course. Just as pivotal as external forces, though, internal inclinations limited the way Republicans defined workers. Republican leaders too often hoped that workers would ignore the economic gains their union membership had brought and would instead see RTW as an issue of freedom and democracy, as corrupt labor bosses versus the virtuous rank-and-file. GOP leaders also argued over the necessity of emotional issues in campaigns. Some people believed stirring disputes energized the party regulars, providing a firm foundation necessary for success. Others argued for practical, "pocket-book" themes. Bliss preferred the latter alternative.

For their part, Ohio unions went on the offensive. In a telling tactic, union spokesmen portrayed RTW as an attack against security. Labor strategists had calculated that forty percent of the Ohio electorate consisted of women. An important part of the union campaign therefore addressed this segment directly, especially through a pamphlet called "Mrs. Ohio Homemaker: Beware the Quirk in Right to Work." It emphasized that RTW did not provide freedom; rather it

⁴³ "Transcript of the 1958 Campaign School," pp. 112-119.

attacked unions. Without unions, wages declined. The decline of wages eroded family security.⁴⁴

Unfortunately for Bliss, the results of the 1958 election confirmed his instincts and proved wrong the analysis of RTW supporters. Union members, in fact, voted in full force in 1958. Ohio's union leaders and members demonstrated for the first time an ability to unify and organize in the pursuit of a political goal. Republican politicians feared precisely that outcome. Ohioans defeated the RTW issue by a two to one margin. Republicans, in the process, lost control of a U.S. Senate seat and both houses of the state legislature. Governor O'Neill lost to Democrat Michael DiSalle.⁴⁵

In other states, too, the issue of RTW contributed to the defeat of Republican candidates. The rout across the nation was so thorough that journalist Samuel Lubell wondered in the Saturday Evening Post, "Are the Republicans Through?" Even the Columbus Dispatch, a bastion of Republicanism, pessimistically evaluated the vitality of the GOP. In an essay entitled "Needed: A Party," a columnist described the election as a "collapse of one of our major political parties. Republican machines, issues, and candidates lie scattered across the landscape as if they had been victims of a jet explosion." A Dispatch editorial cartoon pictured an infirm elephant in the hospital. The cartoon, however, also included a caricature of Bliss as a doctor, complete with

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-1960 (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994), pp. 273-274.

⁴⁵ Warren Van Tine, et al, In the Workers' Interest: A History of the Ohio AFL-CIO, 1958-1998 (Columbus, OH: Center for Labor Research, 1998), pp. 1-27.

white lab coat and black bag. Bliss lectured his "patient," prescribing four to five years in rehabilitation.⁴⁶

The cartoon was important because the Dispatch simply assumed that Bliss would control the GOP revival. Some GOP observers, of course, questioned Bliss' future. In the week after the RTW disaster, one former state chairman said "something different will have to be done" and then knocked Bliss because he accepted a salary. The editor of the Legislative Digest and Review wrote that "highly paid leadership has been busy manufacturing stories to get themselves off the hook." Republicans must "make an agonizing reappraisal" and change the weak leadership that allowed "internecine strife." These voices were within the minority. No one offered a serious challenge to Bliss. In part, nobody wanted to shoulder the responsibility, which, according to the conventional wisdom at the time, seemed overwhelming. More meaningful, however, Republicans across the state recognized that Bliss had been right. The blame for the defeat lay elsewhere, not with Bliss.⁴⁷

After the 1958 election, Bliss concluded that the urban vote now outnumbered the rural vote, a traditional source of Republican power.⁴⁸ He also

⁴⁶ Samuel Lubell, "Are The Republicans Through?" Saturday Evening Post, February 14, 1959; Larry Connor, "Needed: A Party," Columbus Dispatch, November 8, 1958; for the cartoon, see box 4, folder 5, Bliss Papers. For another example of gloom and doom scenario, see the Wall Street Journal editorial, 11/6/58, p. 12. The Journal thought the problem in 1958 was that Republicans tried to "out-liberal" the liberals. When Republicans relied on "me-tooism," the editors thought, Democrats won. Curiously, next to that editorial, the Journal ran an article on Republican Nelson Rockefeller's success in New York's gubernatorial race. Rockefeller won precisely because he was a liberal. "He managed," according to the writer, "to keep most of his Republican support despite masquerading as a Democrat."

⁴⁷"GOP Leaders Say Defeat Traced to RTW, Dem Trend," Columbus Dispatch, 11/9/58; LDR, Vol. 6, 11/7/58.

⁴⁸ Fenton, "Right-To-Work Vote in Ohio," p. 249.

later reminded himself that "A state chairman can develop a sound organization, capable candidates with adequate financing, and still lose an election because of an unfavorable image created by an emotional issue over which he had no control. But that's the way it goes in politics."⁴⁹ With that comment, Bliss not only deflected blame for the RTW disaster, but also indicated the importance of not dwelling on defeat. The next election cycle forced him to move on. But in what direction would he move?

The Dispatch predicted a lengthy rebuilding program. The impending presidential election in 1960 obliged a quicker pace. In January 1959, Bliss and several business leaders met to regain the consensus they had lost. Bliss said that first he "had to determine the extent of the desire to win and the financial support. Both were there."⁵⁰ Bliss stayed with the general organizational framework he created in 1949. The difference between 1958 and 1960 was the lack of ideological division. Richard Nixon, the Republican nominee, was far more acceptable to rank-and-file Ohio Republicans than other potential options, including liberal Republican Nelson Rockefeller, governor of New York. Also, donations from Ohio businessmen flowed to the party organization rather to issue oriented groups. Bliss controlled much of the Republican war chest. In the end, Nixon won Ohio by over 270,000 votes, in spite of pre-election predictions to the

⁴⁹ Ray C. Bliss, "The Role of the State Chairman," in James M. Cannon, ed., Politics USA: A Practical Guide to Winning of Public Office (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., Inc, 1960) pp. 159-170. The quote is on p. 170; Press Conference Transcript," 6/21/1966, box 141, folder "1/24-12/20/1966, Bliss Papers.

⁵⁰ "Unexpected Ohio Victory Shows Firm GOP Organization," Congressional Quarterly Weekly, Vol. 18, No. 53, 12/30/60, p. 2004.

contrary. Democrat John Kennedy won the presidency in a close race, but Nixon took Ohio, the biggest upset of the election.

Afterward, the GOP searched to explain their razor thin loss in the national vote. According to Bliss, analysis of the 1960 campaign "revealed one undeniable fact: the Republican Party lost the 1960 election in the Big Cities of this nation." Republicans therefore formed a national committee, the goal of which was to "analyze the means and methods of cutting down losses in metropolitan areas." In 1961, Bliss, well respected by his colleagues, accepted the chairmanship of the group. For Bliss, the opportunity marked a departure in technique. In 1951 he had watered down urban votes by connecting city wards to suburban ones, thus temporarily diluting the increasing significance of the urban voter. Bliss learned after 1958 that the GOP could not ignore voters in big cities. In 1961, he tried to teach Republicans across the nation the same lesson, this time by emphasizing the necessity of organization within urban areas.⁵¹

Bliss never thought Republicans would, or needed to, win the urban vote outright. GOP candidates, rather, should cut into Democratic majorities within the city limits and increase Republican votes in suburban wards. Even though the GOP called the commission "the Committee on Big City Politics," Bliss used the key word "metropolitan" to describe the focus of his group. This terminology implied that Bliss recognized not just that city wards were more important than they were a decade ago, but that metropolitan areas offered a critical source of votes for Republicans if they expected to counter heavy Democratic majorities

⁵¹"Oklahoma City Presentation," January 12, 1962, box 9, folder 30, Bliss Papers.

within city limits. Balance in these new metropolitan areas, not complete victory, was the key.

Consistent with his strengths as a manager and demonstrative of his reluctance to engage ideas, Bliss rejected any attempt to "get involved in issues or political principles." He directed the group instead "to examine and report on the mechanics and techniques of campaigning in the big cities." Some grumbling occurred as a result of Bliss' narrow reading of the committee's mandate. Committee member Judson Morehouse, state chairman of the New York Republican Party, criticized the "automatic opposition to Democratic backed social welfare" policies. Republicans had failed to recognize "the problems of people who live in the cities," including health care for the aged, crowded schools, and unemployment. "Balanced budgets" too often preoccupied the GOP. Morehouse wanted the committee to consider what policies they should offer to big city dwellers, not just the mechanics of winning elections.⁵²

Bliss stuck to the party's organizational weaknesses. As leader of the group, Bliss shaped the analysis to reflect his strengths and his understanding of how to win elections. The report offered practical instructions on how to set up a headquarters, how to organize ethnic and minority groups, how to reach the rank-and-file unions without the support of the union leaders, and how to use polls.

⁵² George Hinman to Bliss, 4/13/62, box 17, folder 49, Bliss Papers. Morehouse had publicly announced his criticisms. Hinman then summarized Morehouse's position and offered angry rebuttals in the letter to Bliss.

The report, however, remains interesting less for what it actually recommended and more for what Bliss decided to leave out. In one instance, an Ohio GOP staff assistant gave Bliss a report that studied black voting patterns in Detroit. The unidentified writer argued that blacks in Detroit failed to support Republican candidates who staunchly advocated civil rights and instead voted for Democrats who promised economic gains. The writer avoided suggesting "that the so-called 'civil rights' issue may not have intrinsic merit quite apart from the exigencies of day to day politics." Rather, he advocated "a radical assessment of the supposed relation between such issues as 'civil rights' and actual Negro voting."⁵³

In a second case, Helen Evans, a staff member for Bliss, wrote a memo on the black vote and the power of unions. Evans proposed an ambitious program for Republicans to lessen union influence over blacks and contribute to their economic advancement, thereby regaining their electoral support. She asserted that the "CIO is undoubtedly the greatest enemy of the Republican Party, as far as the Negro is concerned." She also observed that "the greater proportion of Management is either owned or controlled by the Republican Party." Evans then recommended that management should "become more liberal in its hiring and integration policies" and "begin a training program through which Negroes could be integrated into the skilled crafts and trades." This plan,

⁵³ Unidentified to Frank Avren, with "Some Notes on the Detroit Negro Vote" attached, no date, box 9, folder 35, Bliss Papers. In the letter, the writer pleaded with Avren, "Please don't discuss the source of this thing except with Ray. Believe me, 'I don't want any credit for it.'"

she concluded, "would break the stranglehold that unions now so conveniently claim."⁵⁴

In both cases, Bliss failed to respond. Neither of the ideas found expression in Bliss' report. The plans, of course, were extreme for that time. One flirted with abandoning civil rights as a political issue; the second invited the GOP to pressure businesses to hire and train African-Americans. Whatever their merits, Bliss no doubt considered them beyond the pale of his mandate. He tried to build a party that won elections, not one that pressed emotional ideas. Whether he was accurate or not, Bliss believed these two goals were often mutually exclusive. Right-to-work in 1958 re-enforced his belief.

Bliss also rejected a practical observation. In a preliminary report to the Committee on Big City Politics, its subcommittee on Public Relations, Use of Surveys and Educational methods reported results of a survey on the image of the Republican Party. Across the nation people responded overwhelmingly that the GOP was the "party of the plutocrats," the party that responded only to the interests of big business. The subcommittee suggested that "recent elections in the big cities seem to indicate that successful Republican candidates are those who 'break through' the image of the party or exhibit personal" qualities that attract voters regardless of party identification. These comments hardly reached the inflammatory level of the previous examples, nor were they policy debates. Bliss removed them anyway. He offered no reason, but he likely wanted to avoid

⁵⁴ Memo from Helen Evans to Bliss, 2/20/61, box 9, folder 35, Bliss Papers.

publicizing in his own document the fact that voters perceived Republicans as callous plutocrats.⁵⁵

He may have removed those comments, but he did pay attention to them. He argued that the GOP must “determine and then act upon” the issues that people care about the most. “There must be a perceptive presentation of those issues based upon a realistic consideration of wants and needs rather [than] the usual abstract reference to ideology terms.” Bliss spoke “not only philosophically but as a practical politician who” for many years “has urged candidates and Party organizations in my home town, in my home state, to follow this process.” His life in Akron and the RTW crisis had taught him that people care most about “some degree of security.” The RTW crisis had also reinforced the image of his party as the “party of the plutocrats.” He needed a candidate who could “break through” that image, who could talk about “wants and needs rather [than] the usual abstract reference to ideology terms.” He needed someone who could talk authentically about security to working Ohioans.⁵⁶

Throughout the 1950s, the Bliss team had considered James Rhodes as nothing special. He was certainly a reliable down-ticket vote getter and capable of holding minor statewide offices. Bliss also understood that Rhodes was not the cleanest character in town. He had “friends” who would need to be taken

⁵⁵ “Committee on Big City Politics: Report of the Subcommittee on Public Reactions, Use of Surveys and Educational Methods,” pp. 11-12, box 9, folder 36, Bliss Papers. While many citizens connected the GOP to big business, residents of Louisiana provided a notable exception. To the question “What does the Republican Party stand for in this state?,” most residents responded first with the answer “pro-integration,” testifying to the persistence of southern anti-Republican attitudes.

⁵⁶ Transcript of Press Conference, 1/25/1966, pp. 8-9, box 141, folder 1/24-12/20/1966, Bliss Papers.

care of should he win higher office. But Rhodes was virtually the only statewide candidate left standing after 1958. He had longed to be somebody. Could he be what Bliss needed? Could Rhodes, in short, credibly promise security to workers, cut Republican losses in urban areas, and contain suicidal Republican passions against the New Deal?⁵⁷

⁵⁷ On the Bliss team's view of Rhodes in the 1950s, see Alex Arshinkoff, interview with author; James Baker, interview with author, 6/30/1999, notes in author's possession.

CHAPTER 6
HAVE A LITTLE CLASS:
JAMES RHODES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF
THE WORKING MAN'S G.O.P., 1940s-1960s

In November of 1966 business executive Charles John wrote to his friend, the recently reelected Republican governor of Ohio who had thoroughly trounced his Democratic opponent. "Dear Governor Jim," John began. Just two years before, dark days had descended on the Ohio GOP when conservative Republican presidential nominee Barry Goldwater led the ticket to electoral disaster. There were nevertheless brighter days ahead. "Most people are moderates and won't support Democrats and Republicans per se. When men like you and other moderates with reasonable points of view are at the helm, the ship of state is considered safe." Then, in a "ps," he wrote, "You, the friend of labor, will break the backs of executives. My osteopath can provide you with a written statement to prove my condition. Should I continue to support somebody who breaks my back?"¹

John pointed to the quality that turned James Rhodes into "Governor Jim." After 1958 and right-to-work, Ray Bliss needed a "friend of labor." By 1966,

¹ Charles A. John to James A. Rhodes, letter dated 11/26/1966, box 3, folder 1, MSS 353 James A. Rhodes Papers, Ohio Historical Society.

Rhodes' working-class character and personality had become legend. Yet Rhodes took years to master the expression of his authentic working class background. "Governor Jim, the friend of labor," was both who Jim Rhodes naturally was and a political construction, both a real person and an image built in response to changing political needs. Three elements formed the basis of his working class identity: coalition politics during World War Two; masculinity during the Cold War; and the promise of economic security during the 1960s.

In the 1940s, Rhodes began to construct his working class identity. It initially had less to do with who Rhodes was as a person and more to do with the context of the times. Rhodes was first elected mayor of Columbus in November of 1943, right in the middle of World War Two. The election turned on his opponent's alleged connections to gambling interests and Rhodes' skill at interest group politics. Rhodes called for the creation of a civic welfare group, for example, which would include "representatives of the Ministerial Association, the Catholic Diocese, the Jewish welfare group, the PTA, the Council of Social Agencies, organized labor, the Chamber of Commerce," and other relevant groups. Rhodes promised to give this diverse community group a particular mandate: clear slums and build better housing. He also claimed that he would intently focus on curbing juvenile delinquency, providing recreational facilities, and improving city services. "Columbus," Rhodes said in an advertisement in the local African American newspaper, "is a group of neighborhoods each with its own individual character and special needs. Your neighborhood is one of them. . . . These needs include housing, good schools, transportation, slum clearance,

better garbage collection, improved street lighting, and other important services.”

After he won the mayor’s office, Rhodes continued to court the black vote through strategic appointments to his City Hall staff and by naming an African American policeman to the rank of captain, a first in the city’s history.²

His campaign rhetoric and his actions afterward were important symbolically and substantively, but the subject he carefully avoided was critical to his development as a politician. His silences instruct us on the evolution of his working-class image. One would expect a mayoral candidate to appeal to voters by promising improved city services, and during the war one would expect that candidate to appeal to all groups in the community. Every propaganda message from Washington D.C. told Americans that racial, religious, and class cooperation were essential to the war effort. Reality never matched the rhetoric, but Rhodes followed FDR’s script.³ Remarkably, however, Rhodes stayed silent about his biography. Nowhere in 1943 did he appeal for votes because he had grown up poor, fatherless, and underprivileged, or because he had succeeded despite those obstacles. Nowhere did he appeal to common men as a common man. He was an aggressive and blustery promoter of his city and of himself. But the Rhodes of legend -- the Rhodes who was so thoroughly working class -- never made an appearance.

² Ohio State Journal, 10/30/1943, p. 1; The Columbus Dispatch, 10/31/1943, p. 1; Ohio State News, 10/11/1947, p. 4 and 10/18/1947, p. 5. See also my master’s thesis, “Mayoral Politics and the New Deal Political Culture: James Rhodes and the African-American Voting Bloc in Columbus, Ohio, 1943-1951” (unpublished Master’s thesis, The Ohio State University, 1996).

³ On the push toward pluralism and its failures, see Gary Gerstle, American Crucible: Race and the Nation in the 20th Century (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

His first step toward a working class G.O.P. happened because Democratic President Franklin Delano Roosevelt fostered and enforced a wartime management-labor accord. Immediately after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt met with business and labor leaders in order to discuss how best to ensure uninterrupted wartime production. Both sides rhetorically criticized lockouts -- management's tool to discipline labor -- and strikes -- labor's tool to discipline managers. They could not agree, however, on the principle of the union shop. The corporate representatives insisted that the status quo before the war should define labor relations during the war. They insisted that non-union shops be allowed to continue where they already existed. Union leaders demanded that in exchange for a no-strike pledge, unions in return should receive security, which they defined as the union-shop. Of all the issues that divided labor and management, union security was the most thorny and emotional.⁴

Through the National War Labor Board (NWLB), Roosevelt and his aides brokered a new labor relations system, offering each side victories in some areas and defeats in others. The goal was to ensure maximum cooperation for the war effort. The arrangement made contracts binding throughout the duration of the war, assured unions of "maintenance of membership," and required companies to check-off union dues from paychecks. The ruling forced businesses to recognize and collectively bargain with unions, provided penalties if managers failed to do so, helped enroll millions of new dues paying union members, and

⁴ Melvyn Dubofsky, The State and Labor in Modern America (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), p. 182-183.

diluted the principle of the open-shop. For business leaders, huge profits were assured, and the legitimization of unions only seemed like an irreversible problem. Government authority and wartime patriotism circumscribed union activity, limiting how unions could oppose management. As businessmen increasingly headed government agencies or as agency heads deferred to corporate influence, government decisions subtly shifted power to management. However business and labor leaders measured their won-lost record, the Roosevelt administration created a labor relations system that ensured a maximum and relatively peaceful production effort throughout the war, but one that relied heavily on the threat of state power against the partner who failed to follow the agreement.⁵

Because of his background, Rhodes might have been inclined to support unions no matter what the context. Yet one cannot assume that his working-class roots automatically translated into support for unions, and in the 1930s he did not leave a trail of evidence indicating his stance toward them. He was a Republican, and in the 1930s many Columbus Republicans were anti-union. Unions, moreover, were divided between skilled and unskilled laborers. In the first half of the 1930s, Columbus' most politically active and influential unions included skilled crafts, especially the local Building and Trades Council (BTC). They controlled the Columbus Federation of Labor (CFL), the local affiliate of the American Federation of Labor. The CFL tended to support Republicans and, in terms of union goals, placed a priority on protecting their privileged position in the

⁵ ibid, pp. 184-185; David L. Stebenne, Arthur J. Goldberg: New Deal Liberal (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 46-47.

working class hierarchy. As George Strain, the secretary of the BTC said, “we are reluctant to place the fate of our wage rates and working conditions in the hands of a predominate group of unskilled laborers.” By the mid 1930s, however, unskilled laborers became more aggressive than in the past. In mid 1935, they had enough influence to persuade the CFL to support a wave of local strikes involving unskilled workers. By 1936, they also had managed to gain administrative control of the CFL and began pushing a left-leaning political agenda. From summer through fall of 1936, for example, the CFL campaigned for Roosevelt and against local anti-union Republicans. In November and December, the CFL assisted the United Auto Workers in a local strike which turned political as the Republican mayor used the police force to help break the strike. In 1937, leaders of the local skilled crafts and the national AFL stopped the CFL’s militant drift. Its progressive leaders had become increasingly supportive of the Congress of Industrial Unions (CIO), the newly organized and militant union for unskilled laborers that had recently spun-off from the AFL. In May, concerned that its Columbus local was too supportive of the CIO, the AFL forced the resignation of the CFL’s progressive leadership, allowing the conservative, skilled trades to recapture control. Campaigning for city auditor in 1939, Rhodes earned his first ever union endorsement from the CFL, a once and again conservative working class organization.⁶

⁶ On the CFL endorsement of Rhodes, see the Ohio State Journal, 9/8/1939, p. 5. The history of the CFL is recounted in Warren Van Tine, “George DeNucci and the Rise of Mass-Production Unionism in Ohio,” in Van Tine and Michael Pierce, eds., Builders of Ohio: A Biographical History (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University, 2003), pp. 254-268. Strain is quoted on pp. 261-62. See also Warren Van Tine, Columbus Timesheet: A Chronological History of Labor in Ohio’s

In the late 1930s, Rhodes therefore had every political reason to stay away from the militant CIO. Using the CFL endorsement, he could claim working-class support without actually supporting most workers as they struggled for better working conditions, higher wages, and security. The CIO, moreover, was far less powerful in Columbus, where the manufacturing base was smaller and lighter compared to Akron and Youngstown. Columbus' business leaders were never confronted with an aggressive and dramatic sit down strike as Detroit automakers were in 1937; nor were Columbus' political leaders challenged with an equally aggressive and dramatic political campaign as in Akron's 1937 mayoral election. In the late 1930s, the CIO was on the rise just as Rhodes was. Neither was established enough in Columbus to force the other to deal.

World War Two changed that calculus. With Roosevelt holding the shotgun, the forced marriage of labor and capital during the war gave Rhodes either a political opening or a political shove to endorse mass union organizations. The turning point for the CIO began in September of 1940 when, to prepare for the possibility of war, the federal government approved a loan to build a Curtis-Wright airplane plant just outside Columbus. In April of 1941, the United Auto Workers won the right to represent the employees. By 1944, at its peak production the plant nearly doubled the number of Columbus' pre-war manufacturing workers. Mass unions were now established as a political and economic force in the city.⁷ In 1944 Rhodes too, in his first term as mayor, was

Capital, 1812-1992 (Columbus, OH: The Center for Labor Research, The Ohio State University, 1992), pp. 17-21.

⁷ Van Tine, "George Denucci," p. 266 and Columbus Timesheet, pp. 21-22.

established. Whatever his personal inclinations or political constraints might have been before the war, Rhodes now had to deal with industrial unions. With the federal government controlling labor relations and with the patriotic impulse to cooperate rather than confront, Rhodes could also fend off any anti-union pressure exerted by the Republican Party's business base.

The real test came after the war. In peacetime, the wartime labor relations system broke down. Corporate executives sought to regain lost prerogatives, control the cost of labor, increase productivity, and guarantee consistent production. Union leaders sought to protect their right to organize and collectively bargain, to make-up for wages lost to wartime controls and post-war inflation, and to create economic security for their members.⁸ In the year after the end of World War Two, nearly five thousand strikes across the nation included five million workers and cost about 120 million workdays. One Columbus strike, for example, included 8,000 steel workers who picketed eight local plants for three months.⁹

How did Rhodes respond to union activity after the war? He no longer had the protection of the federal government. His Republican base could pressure him to use the police force against Columbus' working class, to return, that is, to the standard practice of the Columbus Republican Party in the 1930s.

⁸ Howell John Harris, The Right to Manage: Industrial Relations Policies of American Business in the 1940s (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), pp. 129-158.

⁹ Dubofsky, The State and Labor in Modern America, pp. 191-194; Van Tine, Columbus Timesheet, p. 24. See also more generally George Lipsitz, Class and Culture in Cold War America: A Rainbow at Midnight (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981), pp. 37-86. Lipsitz interpreted the strikes of 1946 as evidence that a working class identity persisted in America despite constant exhortations to the contrary. Workers, Lipsitz argued, were self-consciously at odds with the interests of capitalists, against the dehumanizing and undemocratic work experience, and in favor of collective political action to accomplish their particular class interests.

Historian Howell John Harris observed that during the war “[m]anagement had discovered that federal regulation of labor relations could be to its advantage, so long as the government entered on the side of “order” and against the exercise of labor power, where that was overwhelming.”¹⁰ Businessmen expected local government also to “enter on the side order.” Rhodes had to make a decision.

In both symbol and substance, Rhodes sided with unions. In October of 1947, not long after Republicans had passed the anti-union Taft Hartley Act in Congress and just one month before local elections, Rhodes declared a “Labor Relations Day.” He sponsored both a proclamation and a parade to honor unions and workers. In the proclamation, Rhodes noted that Columbus had “been singularly free from labor strife and from prolonged strikes and labor difficulties generally,” a spirit of cooperation that both employers and unions had fostered. Always the sideshow barker, Rhodes promised that the parade would be the biggest in the country, a unique display of the community’s appreciation for workers. An estimated 40,000 Columbus residents watched a parade of 10,000 union men and women representing 100 labor organizations. Running for reelection, Rhodes had to show support for a newly powerful local interest group.¹¹

In addition to coalition politics, Rhodes treated unions as contributors to the city. When Rhodes and other city leaders decided in 1945 to modernize Columbus’ aging infrastructure and expand its city boundaries, Rhodes included union representatives on the key decision making steering committees that

¹⁰ Harris, Right to Manage, p. 116.

¹¹ Ohio State Journal, 10/1/1947, p. 1; Van Tine, Columbus Timesheet, p. 24

guided the process. When the Curtis-Wright plant scaled back production after the war, Rhodes helped to recruit unionized industries to take up the slack, most notably General Motors in 1946 and Westinghouse in 1953. He could have encouraged non-union economic development, but instead saw unions as contributing to rather than detracting from prosperity. Most significantly, in 1949, the Timken Corporation tried to break a local union. Rhodes used the police not against the workers, but against company agents who harassed them. As mayor, Rhodes accepted the post-war social contract, earning the CIO's endorsement every time he ran for mayor.¹² No wonder, then, that after Rhodes ran unendorsed for the 1950 Republican gubernatorial nomination against the endorsed conservative party elder, a Republican insider said that Rhodes represented "upheaval and revolution." No wonder, too, that he lost.¹³

Before the war, Rhodes had no political reason to get out in front on the labor issue, so he did not. After the war, political calculations led him in two different directions: support unions and suffer potential political problems from the financial base of the party; or hold with industry leaders and suffer potential problems at the polls. There were costs either way. Rhodes chose to support unions, but did not make explicit appeals to any common bond that he might have shared with the working class. Youthful and inexperienced but still shrewd, Rhodes distanced himself from his very recent past. In 1932 he arrived in

¹² Warren Van Tine, "A History of Labor in Columbus, Ohio, 1812-1992," working paper # 010, Working Paper Series, Center for Labor Research, The Ohio State University, 1992, pp. 63-64. Copy in author's possession.

¹³ State Government Report, Vol. 24, 5/26/51-6/1/51, William Halley Papers, MSS 840, box 1, folder 2, Ohio Historical Society.

Columbus with nothing and in 1943 he led the local Republican ticket. He had advanced at an astonishingly quick pace, yet was still in many ways the under-educated, ambitious young man from the economic margins. His opponent's taunt in 1943 -- that Rhodes was a "reckless young demagogue who owned no property" -- was too close to the truth. However well his biography might have played to a working-class audience, Rhodes had to appeal to the middle and upper classes as well. He would not help his opponent by drawing attention to his potentially negative biography. To pull labor within his coalition, he instead used Roosevelt's wartime labor-management accord to help him accomplish what he had no political power to force on his own. After the war, he calculated that by courting the CIO he could gain more votes than he lost through potential Republican defections. Rhodes's political math in local politics was excellent. In 1951, state Republican Party bosses in Cincinnati sought to punish Rhodes for his 1950 primary run. They tried to run a Republican opponent against him in his third mayoral campaign. They failed.¹⁴

World War Two, then, was the first step toward Rhodes' version of a working class GOP. He appealed to the working class through urban coalition politics. He was in fact better at it than most Ohio Democrats. Yet the legacy of the war triggered a new phase in Rhodes' construction of a working-class identity. After the war, millions of men returned home having proved themselves as they fought to protect American freedoms. Their image of themselves as men shaped post-war culture and politics. During the Cold War,

¹⁴ State Government Reports, Vol. 34, 8/4/51-8/10/51, MSS 840, William Halley Papers, box 1, folder 3, Ohio Historical Society and Vol. 13, 3/10/51-3/16/51, box 1 folder 2.

masculinity became a key part of politics and public policy. How did Rhodes measure up?

He was raised by a strong-willed mother and supported by two sisters. He and his wife had three children, all daughters. Rhodes often joked that at home, “The women are in charge.” The comment had a patronizing quality to it, suggesting that Rhodes allowed women authority only in their proper sphere. Rhodes, however, was quite serious. Women had been steadfast in his life whereas men had abandoned him. His mother and sisters were crucial in his early life while his father and Grant Ward had died, and John Barrett either had died or disappeared. Fellow politicians, mostly men, were fickle, opponents one day, allies the next, out of office the following week. The women in his life were strong and steady influences, so strong and steady, in fact, that he in turn made working-class masculinity a key part of his public persona.¹⁵

In 1918, his father died in the influenza pandemic. Rhodes also had a younger brother, Carl. He was born in Indiana and died in infancy. Yet in the late 1940s Rhodes reported that he lost his father in a Jackson County, Ohio coal mine accident and that he was his father’s only son. In the early 1980s, a group of Jasonville residents invited Rhodes to return “home” to celebrate the “native son” who had succeeded. Rhodes declined, saying that his memories of Indiana were too painful. That pain partially explained why Rhodes erased from his

¹⁵ On the frequency of Rhodes’ comment about women in charge, see, for example, Mike Curtin, “The Old School,” The Columbus Dispatch 10/12/1986, accessed via the Dispatch’s on-line archive at www.columbuslibrary.org at The Columbus Metropolitan Library. (hereafter “Old School”)

official biography Indiana, the influenza pandemic that took his father, and the death of his younger brother.¹⁶

Rhodes replaced those difficult memories with a story that evolved from his political needs. Rhodes laid claim to his father's name and to the sole legacy of Rhodes men, a masculine legacy potentially feminized by disease and infant weakness. The family apparently believed that their patriarch had, in the words of sister Garnet, "just given up." Men did not "just give up." Dying in a mine accident was a far manlier way of meeting your maker than the flu.

The mine accident story generally did not outlast the 1950s. By 1962, reporters wrote simply that as a boy Rhodes lost his father, skipping the specific cause. Yet the legend persisted, popping up in odd, obscure places. In November of 1968 a mine exploded in Farmington West Virginia. Stewart L. Udall, then Secretary of the Interior, invited Rhodes to a conference on mine safety. "Because of your position and personal interest," Udall wrote, "I especially desire" your participation. Rhodes' reply is not recorded, nor do newspapers suggest that Rhodes took extra special interest in this explosion. But Udall's use of the phrase "personal interest" indicated that perhaps Rhodes' 1940s era embellishment had quietly survived.¹⁷ In 1976, Current Biography ran

¹⁶ On the invitation to return to Jasonville, see Max Griffith, Jasonville's postmaster and unofficial local historian, e-mails to author, 11/15/1999, hard copies in author's possession. Griffith wrote the letter extending the invitation. The daughter of S.D. Dempsey, the newspaper publisher who apparently was a friend and political patron of the elder Rhodes, sent the letter. No record of the letter exists independent of this conversation with Griffith. Sue Moore remembered one trip to Jasonville. The trip occurred sometime in the 1940s and involved Rhodes, his wife, his mother, and a very young Sue. She recalled only that the trip was long. Sue and Richard Moore interview, 12/5/2005, tape in author's possession.

¹⁷ Telegram from Stewart Udall to James Rhodes, 11/26/68, James A. Rhodes Papers, MSS 353, Box 6, folder 12, Ohio Historical Society (hereafter JAR).

an updated version of their 1949 entry, but kept the mine accident story. In 2003, a biographical history of Ohio carried it as well. In Jasonville, Indiana a few people are still under the impression that the elder Rhodes died in a mine accident, ironic given that Jasonville was the site of his death.¹⁸

So why did Rhodes invent the mine accident story? Why did he find it necessary to make his father's and thus his own past more "masculine?" The key is timing. The story was not reported until after World War Two. Rhodes was part of a generation of men who had survived the Great Depression and who fought fascism. Rhodes was eligible for the draft, but claimed that he was unable to serve because of the childhood surgery that collapsed a lung.¹⁹ Supported by his mother and sisters in the 1920s and early 1930s, and unable to serve in the military, Rhodes experienced the defining moments of his generation differently than many American men. Though he went to great lengths to say otherwise, Rhodes could not accurately claim that he was the prime breadwinner of the family. Nor could he claim that he had defended his country from the forces of totalitarianism. Rhodes' medical exemption connected him back to what his sister perceived as their father's weakness. So Rhodes instead created an

¹⁸ The mine accident story seems to have first been published in the 1948 and 1949 editions of Anna Rothe, ed., Current Biography (New York: The H.W. Wilson and Company, 1949), pp. 518-520. For the persistence of the story I relied on my phone interview with Kathy Farnsworth, Greene County director of the Library, 4/10/05, notes in author's possession. She heard the story from Max Griffith.

¹⁹ I have made an inquiry to the Selective Service System to check this claim and am waiting for a reply. Draft classification records are part of the public domain and are accessible to anyone who asks. In October of 1940, the chest x-ray was recommended for "all registrants in whom underweight, pallor, [and] abnormal chest findings ... increased the likelihood of pulmonary tuberculosis." Thus, Rhodes most likely had to submit to a chest x-ray that would have discovered his collapsed lung. See Christina Jarvis, The Male Body at War: American Masculinity During World War II (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois Press, 2004), p. 62.

alternative source on which to base his masculine political image: his working-class background. Rhodes was a man not because he had provided for his family or protected his country, but because he was the son of a coal miner who died a coal miner's death.

Rhodes was hardly the only male to be rejected by the military. In the summer of 1940, the federal government instituted the draft. By December 8, 1941, 1.1 million men were "IV F." By the end of the war some four million men had been rejected for a variety of medical and educational shortcomings. These figures offered little comfort to "IV F" men. During the war, American men so classified endured daily reminders of their failed masculinity. One popular song was "Four-F Charlie," about a man who "was a complete physical wreck" and who was always "wheezing." His physical description indicated his lack of masculinity. "Men won't sing of his wild daring/Girls won't praise his martial daring." "Four-F Charlie," the songwriter suggested was, an impotent coward.²⁰

After World War Two and throughout the Cold War, veteran status was an important symbol for politicians. Nearly two-thirds of all American men aged 18-34 served in World War Two. In 1947, they and their immediate families comprised nearly 25 percent of the population. Veterans and their families therefore shaped post-war politics for the next several decades, helping to elect

²⁰ Jarvis, The Male Body at War, pp. 60-62; David M. Kennedy, Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 710. Kennedy also reported that an additional two million men "were rejected for neuropsychiatric reasons," including homosexuality.

in six straight presidential contests a World War Two veteran.²¹ After a break with James Carter, who was a peace-time veteran, the last two World War Two vets (Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush) were elected. Lyndon Johnson, a congressman when the war started, persistently pulled strings to see action in the Pacific and was able to earn a commission in the Navy despite kidney ailments, sinusitis, and rashes caused by nervous tension. Johnson understood that politicians with ambitions for higher office ought to have a wartime record. Johnson served mostly as an administrator, reporting to Navy officials about morale and logistical problems. He saw action once after begging General Douglas MacArthur for permission to observe a bombing mission. MacArthur relented, allowing Johnson to catch a ride on a bombing raid over New Guinea. Johnson's plane took hits while another in the convoy was destroyed. MacArthur awarded Johnson a Silver Star, mainly so that he would then return to Washington as MacArthur's advocate. Johnson never failed to use his military record in his later campaigns. As a journalist later observed about Johnson's medal, it was "one of the least deserved but most often displayed Silver Stars in American military history."²²

Dwight David Eisenhower established the masculine standard. He was, in the words of historian James T. Patterson, "America's most popular hero," a fact which helped the political newcomer to win the Republican nomination against

²¹ James T. Patterson, Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 13; John Morton Blum, V Was For Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), p. 339, and pp. 333-340 more generally on how WWII veterans shaped politics for the next several decades.

²² Robert Dallek, Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908-1960 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 230-241. Dallek quoted the journalist on p. 241.

Robert Taft, Ohio's senior United States Senator. Taft was "Mr. Republican" and he, not the interloper Eisenhower, was the choice of the party's faithful regulars. Eisenhower carried himself with a straight and strong military posture. He was a doer not a talker, describing an intellectual as a "man who takes more words than are necessary to tell more than he knows." In the 1952 general election campaign against the privileged, witty, eloquent Adlai Stevenson III, Eisenhower used Richard Nixon, the Republican vice-presidential candidate to attack Stevenson. A veteran, Nixon called Stevenson, who had not served in the war, "Adlai the Appeaser" and told Americans that they would be safer with a "khaki-clad President than one clothed in State Department pinks." Eisenhower and Nixon clearly questioned Stevenson's masculinity. As president, concluded Patterson, Eisenhower "understood military matters and kept abreast of technological changes in weaponry. For many Americans, it was comforting, amid the otherwise harrowing nuclear build-ups of the Cold War, to know that Eisenhower was in charge."²³

Democrats, too, learned how to play the masculinity card -- against each other. In 1960, John F. Kennedy and Minnesota Senator Hubert Humphrey tangled for the Democratic presidential nomination. West Virginia was the key primary, the make or break state. If Kennedy could win in heavily fundamentalist Protestant West Virginia, then his Catholicism might not turn off voters in the rest of the country. Humphrey simply needed a win to stop Kennedy's momentum. Humphrey was by far the better legislator and could deliver a speech as well as

²³ Patterson, Grand Expectations, pp. 243-255. Eisenhower's definition of an intellectual is on p. 244. Nixon's quote is on p. 255. Patterson is quoted on pp. 251 and 248.

Kennedy. Yet Kennedy was a self-styled and well publicized war hero while Humphrey had not served. Kennedy partisans, including presidential son and World War Two veteran Franklin Delano Roosevelt Jr. fanned out across the hills of West Virginia, speaking about the war in front of all of those coal miners. There, wrote political journalist Theodore White, in “a state of heroes and volunteers, the stark courage of the Boston candidate in the Straits of the Solomons in the Fall of 1942 found a martial echo in every hill.” A Humphrey staffer complained that “to listen to their stuff you’d think Jack won the war all by himself.” The state that had produced Chuck Yeager, the ace fighter pilot of World War Two and the top test pilot of the Cold War era, voted for Kennedy, sealing his nomination.²⁴

Masculinity shaped Kennedy’s foreign policy as well as his campaigns. Kennedy and many of his national security advisors had grown up in elite northeastern boarding schools and college campuses, places where they learned through competition in the classroom, on athletic fields, and in social settings the value of leadership, duty, and honor. Along with success in competition, they learned to stoically accept failures. The highest value was service to the state. These elite males were trained to believe in the legitimacy of the patrician’s prerogative to lead the masses. World War Two was the turning point in their lives, for elite male voluntary service laid the foundation for patrician claims of leadership in a democratic society. Like Johnson, Kennedy did whatever he

²⁴ Theodore White, The Making of the President, 1960 (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1961), pp. 104-125 (p. 115 for the quotes). On Yeager, see Tom Wolfe, The Right Stuff (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), especially chapter 3.

could to join the Navy, including hiding chronic and congenital medical problems. Kennedy and his generation of World War Two veterans emerged from war convinced of the necessity and efficacy of using power to shape the world's political and economic order. Cold War McCarthyism only reinforced their impulse to demonstrate their masculinity. By cultivating an image of toughness, they countered Republican efforts to reclaim power by emasculating the opposition. When Nixon said Americans would be better off with "khaki" rather than "pink" leaders, the Kennedy men learned a political lesson. Electoral success depended on popular perceptions of masculinity. Early in his presidency Johnson, for example, feared what Robert Kennedy would do if Johnson de-escalated in Vietnam. "...there would be Robert Kennedy ... telling everyone that I had betrayed John Kennedy's commitment to South Vietnam.... That I was a coward. An unmanly man. A man without a spine." Vietnam happened in small part because the Kennedy men connected the continuation of their power and their service to their masculine willingness to "bear any burden," to not, as Garnet Rhodes might have said, "just give up."²⁵

²⁵ This paragraph was based on two sources. First, and mainly, see Robert D. Dean, Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001). Dean quoted Johnson on p. 201. Second, see also the perceptive review by Mark Atwood Lawrence, "Brothers in Arms," Reviews in American History Vol. 30 (2002), 671-679. Dean argued that Kennedy and his men used masculinity to distinguish between classes, to reinforce a line between elites and masses. Elite masculinity was disciplined, educated, and purposeful; mass masculinity could be arbitrary and destructive. Lawrence, in contrast, observed that common definitions of masculinity ranged across class lines and pointed out that several of Kennedy's most hawkish advisors came from non-elite backgrounds. Dean Rusk and Lyndon Johnson, for example, were subject to the same pressures as Kennedy. Lawrence therefore concluded that "popular, rather than patrician, notions of masculinity may have done the most to drive Washington toward disaster in Vietnam (p. 678)."

These themes of masculinity and war shaped Ohio politics too. In the late 1940s and 1950s, the rising star in the Ohio Republican Party was not Rhodes but World War Two veteran C. William O'Neill. At age twenty-two O'Neill was first elected to the Ohio House of Representatives; at thirty, he became speaker of the House; in 1950 at thirty-four, he won election as Ohio's attorney general. He had been the youngest person to serve in those positions and, in 1956 at age forty, became the youngest person elected governor of Ohio. He had risen quickly in state politics and hoped for higher office. From the earliest days of his governorship, his closest supporters spoke of an O'Neill presidency. His dreams came to a swift end in 1958, stopped by his support of right-to-work.²⁶ But while O'Neill dashed to the top of Ohio's GOP, Rhodes plodded, having to remain content from ages thirty-four to forty-three with being the so-called "boy mayor" of Columbus. Journalists meant the title to be positive, to show how much responsibility the young man had and to hint at a bright future that could be quickly realized. After the war, however, the nickname could easily emasculate Rhodes. While the younger O'Neill served his country, the older Rhodes was merely a "boy mayor." When Rhodes ran for the 1950 Republican gubernatorial nomination against the wishes of party elders, they belittled Rhodes, fearing that his heterodox Republicanism might challenge the establishment. The publisher of a capitol city political tipsheet described their reaction. Rhodes, according to

²⁶ On O'Neill, see Mike Curtin, "The O'Neill-DiSalle Years, 1957-1963," in Alexander P. Lamis, ed., Ohio Politics (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1994), pp. 43 and 47.

“some old timers” was “too big for his britches.”²⁷ The language was instructive. Rhodes was a disobedient boy who had outgrown his pants. He was a growing boy for sure, perhaps even a boy in a man’s body; but he was still a boy and not a man. In 1952, the forty-three year old Rhodes won the state auditor’s office and for the next several years bided his time while the educated, articulate, veteran O’Neill captured the attention of the GOP rank and file.

The governor’s role as commander-in-chief, moreover, increased in symbolic value. In the 1950s, civil defense and disaster relief were the main concerns of the National Guard, but during the 1960s urban riots and student protests dominated the Guard’s agenda. Governors had to project a facility for commanding troops. Michael DiSalle, the one term Democratic governor from 1959-1963, was ill at ease with these kinds of rituals. He had no military experience, but was once required to inspect Ohio’s troops at Fort Knox, Kentucky. Standing at five feet, five inches tall, DiSalle struggled to appear as a leader of soldiers. “This was a tank outfit,” DiSalle recalled, “and early in the morning I had to get up and walk around those tanks. Well, I didn’t know what I was looking at. I could hardly see the top of them.”²⁸ Politically, too, DiSalle struggled to lead. He began his administration by antagonizing his union base and completed his only term by first announcing that he would not seek reelection and then by reversing himself. In the 1962 Democratic primary he

²⁷ State Government Report, Vol. 21, 5/5/51-5/11/51, William Halley Papers, MSS 840, box 1, folder 2, Ohio Historical Society. Halley, a Republican, was the publisher of this insider’s tipsheet.

²⁸ DiSalle quoted by Dean Jauchius, “Gubernatorial Roles: An Assessment by Five Ohio Governors” (unpublished dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1971), p. 153.

barely fended off the Democratic state Attorney General, who had entered the race after DiSalle opted out and who, with the endorsement of the Cuyahoga County Democratic Party, the largest county party in the state, remained when DiSalle opted back in.²⁹

No political opponent ever questioned Rhodes' lack of wartime service. Yet, in burnishing his masculinity, Rhodes nevertheless made a rational calculation. In the late 1940s, he had ambitions beyond city hall and had to consider the likely possibility that a veteran would eventually oppose him. The mine accident story first appeared in national publications -- Current Biography, for example. Rhodes created the story as an initial and rather clumsy introduction to an audience outside of central Ohio, but he never let the invention define him. Tom Moyer, Rhodes' chief of staff in the 1970s, was surprised to hear the mine accident story. With a smile, Moyer said, "I guess he cleaned up that story."³⁰ Rhodes at some point must have realized that anyone could expose the truth and he must have understood that his father was authentically working class. Lying about his death only dishonored his father and distracted from the hard reality of coal mining that shaped Rhodes men. Yet Rhodes still sought votes in an electoral climate shaped by World War Two and the Cold War. In this context, Rhodes could not rely on wartime service to help establish his masculinity. What could he do?

²⁹ On DiSalle and unions, see Warren Van Tine, et al, In the Worker's Interests: A History of the Ohio AFL-CIO, 1958-1998 (Columbus, OH: Center for Labor Research, The Ohio State University, 1998), pp. 38-51. On DiSalle's back and forth on seeking a second term, see Curtin, "The O'Neill-DiSalle Years," pp. 55-56.

³⁰ Tom Moyer, interview with author, 10/27/1999, tape in author's possession. Moyer is currently the Chief Justice of the Ohio Supreme Court.

The Rhodes of legend made a clear choice. This Rhodes -- the Rhodes that Ohio journalists and politicians continue to talk about, some with reverence for his awesome political skills and some with distaste for his decisions that rewarded friends and led to the death of students -- this Rhodes accented his natural working-class character and personality. This Rhodes sprang forth from the belly of a coal mine, his character fully formed by the hot, dirty darkness that raged below the earth's surface. This Rhodes had no need to prove his masculinity; indeed his every breath, his every utterance, his every act was suffused with working-class mannerisms. This Rhodes was raised in tough circumstances, taught by the street more than by the book. This Rhodes had all of the traits stereotypically associated with working-class men. This Rhodes always understood the political power of those traits.

The Rhodes of legend was athletic and active, preferring constant motion to sedentary reflection. He favored ribald jokes, especially one about a mythic Jackson County dog that had an overactive sex drive. His natural speech was a mixture of hill country Hoosier and Buckeye: "feesh" for fish, "poosh" for push, "Ohiah" for Ohio. His vocabulary was not extensive and sometimes included malapropisms. Rhodes once intended to call Ohio University a "venerable" institution but instead said "venereal."³¹ His definition of politics was direct and decisive: "Politics is a tough business. You take what you can get, and what you get is what you have. You have to have some intellect and all guts. Period.

³¹ Examples like these can be found all over the place, but these particular ones were drawn from Richard Zimmerman, "Rhodes' First Eight Years, 1963-1971," in Lamis, Ohio Politics, p. 65.

That's all politics is."³² No political opponent could accuse Rhodes of pretty talk that disguised indecision.

The Rhodes of legend knew he challenged middle-class manners when he coarsely tweaked wealthy people to their faces. Nelson Rockefeller, the grandson of oil baron John D. Rockefeller, was often a friendly target. In the early 1960s, Rockefeller was the Republican governor of New York and a candidate for his party's 1964 presidential nomination. Rockefeller had also just divorced his first wife and had remarried. He was concerned about how voters would react to a divorced office holder, so he asked Rhodes for political advice. "It's bad politics," Rhodes said. And "Rocky," Rhodes continued, "if I had your money, I'd build a castle, fill it full of naked women and sit around with a whip."³³ His favorite movie was "Smokey and the Bandit" (1977), in which Burt Reynolds played a Georgia good old boy bootlegger whose genial but technically illegal exploits undercut the symbol of conventional middle-class authority -- law enforcement. Reynolds' character committed crimes that hurt no one, offending only the repressed sensibilities of supposedly respectable people. The actors were not the key elements of the movie. Burt Reynolds, Jackie Gleason, and Sally Field all took a back seat to roads, miles and miles of roads that allowed Reynolds to elude capture. How could Rhodes not love the movie? It was about

³² Rhodes quoted by Lee Leonard, "Ohio Loses Political Icon," The Columbus Dispatch, 3/5/2005, p. A2.

³³ Rhodes exchange with Rockefeller told by "several [unnamed] Rhodes aides," in Stanley Aronoff and Vern Riffe, Jr., eds. James Rhodes at Eighty (Columbus, OH: n.p., 1989), p. 49. For his part, Rockefeller seemed to enjoy his relationship with Rhodes. According to one observer, "Rhodes impressed Rocky because Rhodes is such a free spirit. It's like the rich kid getting infatuated with the poor kid across the tracks. Rhodes talked up to Rocky and he liked it." Ibid, p. 49.

a good natured, masculine guy who taunted the respectable class, and used the highway system to get away with it. “Smokey and the Bandit” was an ideal movie for a man who was an outsider in the effete country club Republican Party establishment and who became governor in part by promising “to expedite” the building of Ohio’s highways.³⁴

The Rhodes of legend could be provincial as well. Though he traveled the world and met leaders of foreign countries, Rhodes’ unrefined manner and tastes remained constant. In 1979, Rhodes traveled to China on a trip to promote trade with Ohio. As he was introduced to Chinese government officials, Rhodes immediately began selling, waving his index finger in the face of a top Chinese bureaucrat: “Ohio is Number 1 in rubber, Number 1 in glass, Number 1 in machine tools, number 1 in auto parts!” He then pulled out a dollar bill and said, “We’re here to make China green.” He finished his show by bragging about Ohio’s place in the history of technology: He flapped his arms to simulate flight and exclaimed, “Wright brothers!” On these trips to foreign countries, Rhodes always packed and ate his own food: crackers, cheese, and canned tuna fish. Inside the US, he behaved similarly. He and his wife attended a governor’s conference in Denver. She dressed up and asked him to take her to an expensive restaurant. He agreed. They took a limousine but before they got to the restaurant, Rhodes had the chauffeur stop at a grocery store. Rhodes

³⁴ On Rhodes’ favorite movie, Sue and Dick Moore, interview with the author, 12/5/04, tape in author’s possession. The word “expedite” was a common Rhodes term for highway projects. See, for example, the transcript of the “Interstate Coordinators’ Conference and Toledo Regional Comprehensive Transportation and Land Use Study Meeting,” 4/18/68, JAR, box 6, folder 13. Rhodes constantly repeated the word “expedite” on pp. 2, 3, 4, 14, 18, 21. At the end of the conference, Rhodes promised that Toledoans would “get a big appropriation this afternoon (p. 35).”

hopped out, went in, and came out with a hunk of bologna and a loaf of bread. They ate in the car.³⁵

The legend of Rhodes accurately described the politician he eventually became, but also froze him in time. That legend locates the source of Rhodes' political strength in his working-class personality. We see only the Rhodes who mastered the common man image and conclude that since we see that image and no other he must have consistently and expertly deployed it. The Rhodes of history, however, struggled to find consistency in how he presented himself to voters. This occurred for two reasons. First, Rhodes tried to appeal to Democratic union members who had risen or were trying to rise from the working into the middle class. Post-World War Two prosperity enabled workers to move beyond insecurity and scarcity and toward security and material abundance. The working class family in 1960 was not the same as in 1909, when Rhodes was born into a working class family. Second, he also had to persuade middle and upper class Republicans that he was reliable, forthright, and solid. These Ohioans were the respectable voters who constituted the rank and file of the Republican Party. Rhodes spoke with a twang common in southern Indiana and Ohio. He rose to prominence, but seemed tainted by the ambition, dirtied by the toil and sweat rather than polished by the disciplined, character building climb. The legend of Rhodes -- the unambiguous working-class masculinity -- incurred serious political costs, costs he sought to avoid. In the late 1950s, he tried to

³⁵ The China and Denver stories are quoted from, Aronoff and Riffe, eds., James Rhodes at Eighty, pp. 44 and 45, respectively. The information on Rhodes' eating habits abroad came from Sue and Dick Moore, interview with author, 12/05/2004, tape in author's possession.

refine his image so that he could both represent the hopes of Democratic blue-collar voters and allay the fears of Republican primary voters. He equivocated just as Ray Bliss needed someone with blue-collar authenticity.

After the 1958 right to work debacle, Rhodes emerged as the leading Republican politician in the state. Some Republicans expressed their displeasure that the uncultured Rhodes might soon head the ticket. One Columbus woman angrily wrote to Ray Bliss, then the state party chairman, demanding that he “please use care -- get a man with education.” Avoid the “rough politician. This is describing Rhodes -- he has no education.”³⁶

Rhodes, concerned that he was too rough-hewn for many Republican voters, tried several tactics to change people’s perceptions of him. Out on the stump, Rhodes changed who he was. Rhodes at times aped the manners of Robert Taft, an upper-class Ivy League lawyer, and John Bricker, a lawyer who grew up in a modest but secure farm owning family. Since the late 1930s, Taft and Bricker had been the most popular Ohio Republicans.

Rhodes’ ploy failed miserably. A Republican from northwestern Ohio complained to Bliss that Rhodes in one speech “was about as warm as a cold mackerel.” His subject “would have been fine for a group of professors.” The letter writer described Rhodes as “cultured and urbane,” and concluded that Rhodes’ manner was “too good for the public.” Rhodes “has got to become a little more common” and learn how “to mispronounce an occasional word” for effect. Bliss replied that other observers had noted the same problem and that he

³⁶ Letter from Mrs. Wright to Ray Bliss, 9/26/61, MSS 768 Raymond C. Bliss Papers, box 18, folder 28, Ohio Historical Society (hereafter RCB).

would speak to Rhodes. In his effort to appear intellectual and polished, Rhodes simply came off as stiff and disconnected.³⁷

Rhodes also tried writing to improve his coarse image. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Rhodes co-wrote books with his friend and political associate Dean Jauchius. These publications were designed to show that Rhodes was in fact cultured and literary. Two historical novels, The Trial of Mary Todd Lincoln (1959) and The Court-Martial of Commodore Perry (1961) attempted to redeem the tarnished reputations of public figures, showing how connivers had hurled false accusations that slandered the two wrongly. A third historical novel, Johnny Shiloh traced the life of a responsible, heroic, duty-minded nine year old boy who, during the Civil War, joined the Union Army. A work of non-fiction, Teenage Hall of Fame (1960) described the lives of hard-working Ohioans who began their climb to fame and fortune before age twenty. Rhodes and Jauchius also concocted a play, set in 1959 and titled "Cloakroom." The main character was a Democratic United States Senator from the South who, when confronted with a key civil rights vote, rejected party discipline, voted his conscience, and supported the just cause. Taken together, these works cautioned against judging a person simply by his or her reputation, celebrated dedicated and determined youths, and lionized independent-minded politicians who, in pursuit of the common good, transcended party labels. These portraits, in retrospect, indicated how Rhodes wished voters would view him: not as the uneducated person who

³⁷ Letter from H.W. Kane to Bliss, 8/17/61, box 18, folder 28, RCB. In private, Bliss assigned an assistant to speak with Rhodes. See the memo from Bliss to Jack Flanagan, 8/22/61, box 18, folder 28, RCB. If the aide ever spoke to Rhodes, his response was not recorded or has not survived.

spat in public but as the hard working boy loyal to his mother and as the politician who rejected strict ideology in favor of good public policy.³⁸

Of all these creative endeavors, the play merits a closer look, for behind its celebration of the pragmatic but principled pol is a world full of ambiguity. The major characters were uncomfortable with themselves because their true natures remained hidden to families, friends, and colleagues. The character Vera Hairston, for example, was “a beautiful Mulatto stenographer whose color is so nearly white that she often is mistaken for a white woman.” She “yearns to cross over” the color line to avoid racial discrimination and refused to marry the “handsome Negro sergeant of the Capitol Police” because his dark color would thwart her ambition to pass. That desire was so strong that a white racist lobbyist, “taken by Vera’s striking beauty of face and figure, and sensing her strong desire to ‘become white,’ offered her that opportunity, as well as ‘big money’ if she permitted herself to be used as a ‘party girl’ to influence clients.” Rhodes and Jauchius described her character as a woman of “strong moral convictions whose psychosis about the treatment of her race is tending to overcome her basic morality...Her essential gaiety is smothered [at the beginning of the play] by her somber concentration upon ‘passing white’ and her longing to become identified as a white woman.”

³⁸ Rhodes and Jauchius, The Trial of Mary Todd Lincoln (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1959); The Court-Martial of Commodore Perry (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1961); Johnny Shiloh (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1959); Teenage Hall of Fame (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs Merrill Company, Inc., 1960); “Cloakroom,” unpublished manuscript, Rare Books Collection, The State Library of Ohio (hereafter “Cloakroom”).

Her African-American love interest, named Martin Luther O'Brien, had a quiet dignity. Few people knew that he earned the Congressional Medal of Honor during World War Two. Speaking both of his racial pride and his wartime service, Rhodes and Jauchius wrote that "The man's courage is bound to be masked, at times, by magnificent self-control."³⁹

The main characters were United States Senator Jefferson Lee Davis, Jr., and his female executive assistant, Mary McGuire. She was "a quite plain former school teacher" who hid from her boss not just her liberal activist background -- she once was president of Hunter College's "Marxist youth organization," an "honorary member" of the NAACP, and a tutor of black inner city children -- but her voluptuous body as well. He was the son of a "late, great senior Southern Senator." The son was appointed to take his father's place in the Senate, the heir to his father's political legacy. Davis and McGuire loved each other, but struggled to admit it. Since the new Senator was a decisive man, once he realized he loved Mary he instantly proposed. She "accept[ed] and promptly commence[d] worrying about her rather masculine appearance." She then sought the help of a longtime Capitol Hill reporter, a man who knew plenty of feminine apparel saleswomen. Much to the delight of the Senator, McGuire's new clothes and lingerie transformed her "from the shabby, plain-looking professional woman to a delightfully beautiful woman with a lovely figure."

They married quickly, but their wedding night was filled with frustration. Mary, "still confounded at her transformation to a beautiful woman," refused to

³⁹ "Cloakroom," Synopsis p. 2 and 3, and Description of Characters, p. ii-iii.

consummate the marriage. More than virginal nervousness, however, informed her reluctance. She wanted her husband to support a civil rights bill and refused “the Senator his privilege” until he agreed. He complained that he had to fight political opponents all day and then his new wife at night. She challenged him to list the people who prevented him from acting the part of the high-minded Senator, delivering grand speeches on the fate of the Republic. Davis listed those “daffy bitches” of Hunter College, Mary’s alma mater. They resolved their argument when she retorted, bumping and grinding with each word, “Well! Didn’t -- any -- of -- you -- distinguished -- dignified -- sophisticated -- sonsabithches ever listen” to any of those Hunter College alumni? Rhodes and Jauchius wrote:

This display of [a] well proportioned figure in such sensuous movement is too much for the weakening, staring, eager spouse. [He caves to her pressure and] runs for her outstretched arms as the curtain falls.⁴⁰

Just before they consummate the marriage Davis exclaimed, “I feel like the South’s greatest lover tonight!”⁴¹

One should not overstate the importance of this play. It was a lark, bluntly mixing sex, slapstick, stereotype, and seriousness. Rhodes and Jauchius intended the play to reach a low common denominator: an audience just curious enough about how politics really works but still incurious enough to reject the subject matter without titillating sexual content. The relationship between Davis and McGuire was unsubtle male fantasy. Ugly duckling Girl Friday assisted her

⁴⁰ “Cloakroom,” Synopsis pp. 2-5, and Description of Characters, pp. i-ii.

⁴¹ “ibid,” Synopsis p. 5 and Act II, Scene ii, p. 33.

boss professionally then transformed into a graceful swan and assisted her boss/husband sexually. Rhodes and Jauchius' literary model was most likely Alan Drury. He was a popular 1950s era writer who wrote Advise and Consent, a tale of the behind the scenes machinations of the Senate confirmation process. One of Drury's key characters, a young Senator, has hidden his true homosexual identity. Because his vote could have confirmed or rejected the nominee for Secretary of State, opponents of the nominee threatened the young Senator with outing. He committed suicide rather than suffer the revelation of his true self. The main characters in "Cloakroom," however, found peaceful ways to resolve their ambiguities, eventually allowing their public identities to match their inner convictions.

Whatever its value as entertainment, "Cloakroom" nevertheless revealed that, like his characters, Rhodes tried to mask his basic nature. He failed to persuade everybody, for voters in central Ohio had known him since the 1930s. The rest of the state, however, had just started the close look that down-ticket politicians receive when they position themselves for governor. A long-time Rhodes watcher, the angry Republican woman from Columbus had therefore described Rhodes as "rough" and "uneducated" while the novice from northwest Ohio had described Rhodes as "cultured and urbane," as "too good for the public." Which Rhodes was the real Rhodes? Was he the son of a coal miner who grew up in rough towns and lean times? Or was he the tall, stoutly built, distinguished-looking adult who had held important executive offices for two decades? Was he too common or not common enough?

Rhodes and Jauchius channeled that ambiguity into their play, using it to say things that in 1959 they could not say publicly. Jefferson Lee Davis was everything that Rhodes was not: an educated, eloquent son of privilege and a Democrat. Notwithstanding those differences Davis said things that people later attributed to Rhodes. Davis, for example, complained that too many people were hounding him on the civil rights issue. No matter what he did, someone would be angry with him. “I get pushed around, lobbied, married, and then denied my wedding night, all in one 24 hour period. By God, I’m like a bitch in heat! If I stand still, I get forced intercourse and if I run, I get bit in the behind.”⁴² Likewise, journalists later often heard Rhodes saying, “The press are like dogs in heat. If you stand still, you get screwed. If you run away, they chase after and bite you in the ass.”⁴³

Rhodes and Jauchius extended their indirect honesty to a criticism of Republicans. In the play, the hero and the other major characters were both Democrats and decent, fair-minded people. Republicans, in contrast, served mainly as comic foils, revealing themselves as shallow and cynical politicians, tools of the capitalist’s agenda. Senator Charlie Black, for example, was “a rich old man of questionable morals” and a “heel.” He wanted to pass legislation favorable to small businessmen, “especially those of the Republican faith.” Senator Addington, Black’s G.O.P. colleague, said, “No one pays any attention to the small businessman, Charlie, except in a presidential year. In the

⁴² “ibid,” Act II, Scene ii, p. 45.

⁴³ Rhodes quoted in Stanley J. Aronoff and Vernal G. Riffe, eds., James A. Rhodes at Eighty (Columbus, OH: n.p., 1989), p. 39. The context of the quote is “Rhodes allegedly giving advice to an unidentified aide.”

meantime, we've got to cater to our big friends: big business, big monopolies, and big profits. That's Republicanism."⁴⁴

Rhodes' most pressing political concern found expression in the play. Was he too much the "rough politician" to lead the traditional party of respectable Ohioans? Would they defect or stay at home and, if so, where would he find the votes to make up the difference? In the play, Davis had supported civil rights and the white vote backlashed against him. Rhodes and Jauchius wrote that during election day "areas which delivered substantial majorities to his father show[ed] him to be in a neck and neck race while areas which did not support his father [were] unreported." On election night Davis cleared out his desk, thinking his constituents had punished him for rejecting tradition.⁴⁵

Yet Rhodes and Jauchius saved Davis at the last minute. Precincts that had not supported the father now voted large majorities for his son. Who were these non-traditional Democratic voters? African-Americans. Rhodes and Jauchius made this final twist possible by having the state's segregationist senior senator repent. He somehow not only managed to find a block of black votes in a southern state, but also then controlled them, cutting them loose to support Davis.⁴⁶ The senior Senator had changed his view, in part, because of the Bible selection on which Davis had relied to help him make his difficult decision. From Second Samuel, Davis had read, "Yea, Thou liftest me up above them that rise up against me; Thou deliverest me from the violent man. Therefore, I will give

⁴⁴ "Cloakroom," Description of Characters, p. v; Act I, Scene 2, p. 34.

⁴⁵ "ibid," Synopsis, p. 6.

⁴⁶ ibid, Synopsis, p. 6.

thanks to thee, O Jehovah, among the nations.”⁴⁷ Rhodes did not need deliverance from “the violent man;” the Republican base, after all, was white, middle and upper class men and women. There was some evidence, however, that they were “against him.” Who could deliver Davis/Rhodes from the hidebound forces of tradition? In the play, African-Americans unexpectedly supplied the winning margin. In real life, Rhodes surveyed the state in 1959 and speculated that Democratic working-class voters -- with their aspirations for a more secure life -- might have to play the same role for him.

If the play guides the reader to Rhodes’ unspoken thoughts, then he had a dilemma. In 1959, he was within reach of his only ambition. He wanted to be governor. No other Republican politician stood in his way. The field was clear except for the rank and file Republican voter. Could Rhodes be the candidate they had come to expect: a respectable if stuffy, articulate if platitudinous professional man? For a short time Rhodes acted that way, but was actually another person. That other person was the “rough politician” who made some Republicans uneasy. Rhodes’ inner ambiguity found a creative outlet in “Cloakroom.”

As late as 1961, Rhodes therefore had not mastered his working-class image. By the end of the 1960s Rhodes had obviously learned to be himself, for the legend of Rhodes -- the legend of the unambiguously working-class man -- was in place by then. That legend, however, obscures Rhodes’ hesitant approach and the contingent nature of his victory in the 1962 governor’s race.

⁴⁷ “ibid,” Act 3, Scene ii, p. 33

Observers today reflect on Rhodes' career and suggest that his victory over incumbent Democrat Michael DiSalle was a forgone conclusion. One writer described the campaign as a "predictable, even routine" contest in which the "basic roles at the start were as set and cast as the protagonists in a classical Greek drama."⁴⁸ The Democratic incumbent was, after all, a man who raised taxes, failed to make sufficient progress in building highways, fought regularly with the legislature, antagonized influential unions, and barely survived the 1962 Democratic primary. The outcome, however, was far from predestined. The election turned when state GOP chairman Ray Bliss showed Rhodes a poll that at once shocked the would-be governor and provided an outline for his policy agenda.

In the spring of 1962 Rhodes too thought his time had come, that the voters would reward him because he had patiently served as Auditor of State. His turn was at hand. Bliss, however, polled Ohioans after the Republican primary and found that the Democratic slate would beat most of the Republican ticket. The only Republican who stood a chance was William Saxbe, the candidate for state Attorney General. Bliss also noted that the percentage of voters who identified themselves as Republican had declined precipitously. In 1956, forty-five percent of Ohioans considered themselves Democrat; forty-five percent Republican; and ten percent independent. By June of 1962, those figures had changed to forty-four percent Democrat; thirty percent Republican and twenty-six percent independent. In a post mortem analysis of the election,

⁴⁸ Zimmerman, "Rhodes' First Eight years," pp. 65-66.

Bliss wrote of the “increase in independents [and the] swing away from R’s.” He also noted that at this point in the race, Rhodes trailed DiSalle and asked, “Then how did we win?”⁴⁹

His answer was not recorded. In retrospect, however, several themes coalesced. In the summer, Bliss advised Rhodes to stress economic development and vow to increase jobs. The issue seemed an obvious one. What politician, after all, ever promised to decrease jobs? To that point, Rhodes had underscored only the need to cut taxes and decrease the size of the state government, two traditional Republican themes that excited only the Republican rank and file. Yet Bliss knew that the successful Republican candidate would have to appeal to independents and Democrats, especially blue-collar voters. If Rhodes wanted to win, he would have to make these traditional Republican appeals in a charismatic way, but also add economic security to his policy agenda.

The polls also told Bliss that Ohioans placed priorities on highway construction, modernized state park facilities, and the economy. Bliss therefore designed an aggressive summer campaign around these themes, and Rhodes proved to be a disciplined candidate. Week after week, Rhodes delivered speeches and appeared at photo opportunities, pounding away exclusively at these three topics, singling out DiSalle’s ineffectual efforts at economic growth. Rhodes was so repetitious that one anecdote had Rhodes excusing himself from dinner, saying that he had to “make my 300th speech.” His wife then remarked,

⁴⁹ Notes for a Presentation Before the Ohio County Chairmen,” June 18, 1964, box 1, folder 7, RCB.

“No, Jim, your going to make the same speech for the 300th time.” Covering Rhodes on the campaign trail, bored journalists often bet how many times he would say the word “jobs” in his speeches. One reporter quipped that “an inventor in the state House Press room has produced the Rhodes doll - you wind it up and it goes out and finds a job for you.”⁵⁰

Despite Rhodes’ discipline and Bliss’ expert advice, the fall campaign almost collapsed. Two problems threatened to bear out Rhodes’ concern that he was too “rough” to be governor. First, in early October William Coleman, the state Democratic Party chairman, revealed that in the 1950s the IRS had investigated Rhodes. They found that he had failed to pay taxes on \$54,000 originally received as campaign donations but which Rhodes spent on personal items. The IRS, Coleman told reporters, allowed Rhodes to amend his 1954 tax return to claim \$18,000 he diverted from a “flower fund” and to recategorize the remaining \$36,000 as a personal loan from his campaign committee. Second, a former FBI investigator had been hired by Democrats to research Rhodes’ past for any indiscretions. He looked into Rhodes’ restaurant, “Jim’s Place,” that Grant Ward had financed. DiSalle encouraged the spread of the investigator’s findings. According to Richard Zimmerman, the report was mostly “innuendo.” Many reporters, including Zimmerman, received a copy of the report, but did not publish the findings because they found “most of the allegations too inferential,

⁵⁰ On Bliss as the source for Rhodes’ policy agenda -- especially jobs -- James H. Baker, interview with the author, June 30, 1999. Tape in author’s possession. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Baker was an aide to Bliss. The exchange between Rhodes and his wife and the “jobs” betting pool quoted in Zimmerman, “Rhodes’ First Eight Years,” p. 66. The Rhodes doll story is from Legislative Digest and Review, Vol. 10, #31, 8/17/1962. This newsletter was the successor to State Government Report, published by William Halley (cited above).

unprovable, dated, or in several cases, very personal and in bad taste.” At the core of the report were rumors that Rhodes had sold pornography and betting slips from his restaurant.⁵¹

Rhodes was not unique in his use of a slush fund. Both Adlai Stevenson and Richard Nixon, for example, had private funds. They were uncovered in 1952 when Nixon was the Republican vice-presidential candidate and Stevenson the Democratic presidential nominee. Nixon, in fact, nearly lost his vice-presidential nomination because of it. He fought back on national television, delivering the “Checkers” speech in which he cast himself as a common man, said his wife wore no mink coats, only a “Republican cloth coat,” and claimed that the only personal gift he ever received was a pet dog for his daughter, named “Checkers.” Rhodes had probably had a slush fund since his years as mayor. Late in his 1947 reelection campaign, Rhodes announced that he had booked a flower show and convention to promote tourism to Columbus. His opponent quipped in the paper, “The only person who will be buying flowers is Rhodes,” a sly hint that Rhodes’ personal slush fund, or flower fund, was in operation even then.⁵²

⁵¹ Richard Zimmerman, Call Me Mike: A Political Biography of Michael DiSalle (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2003), pp. 243-246, 306 (footnote 19).

⁵² For an overview of the Checkers speech, see Stephen Ambrose, Nixon: The Education of a Politician, 1913-1962 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), pp. 276-291. David Greenberg, Nixon’s Shadow: The History of an Image (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2003), pp. 50-54 described the “Checkers” speech as important because liberals interpreted Nixon’s success as evidence that the masses could be fooled with emotion and images and that fascism might be possible in America, but not that liberals had somehow failed to make their own case to the American public and that conservatives had. For Rhodes and the flower show, see Ohio State Journal, 10/1/47, p. 4

The story of Rhodes' slush fund is important because there was only one group of voters most likely to punish Rhodes. The story never gained much traction with the general public. Rhodes had the most to fear from Republican middle and upper class women who formed the backbone of the party's volunteer network. Rhodes had a long-standing commitment to speak to the Federation of Republican Women's Organizations. Just two days before the event, the slush fund story broke. What should have been a friendly atmosphere to rally the troops turned into a nightmare. According to James Baker, a longtime assistant to Ray Bliss, a panicked Rhodes went to Bliss, sobbing that all he ever wanted was to be governor. The women were, in Baker's words, "pissed off." Rhodes saw his entire political career collapsing, and at feet of the feared "respectable classes." Baker claimed that Bliss stood by Rhodes and instructed the women to do the same. Without Bliss, Baker implied, Rhodes had no chance to persuade Republican women that he was a worthy candidate.⁵³ Rhodes gave his speech, defending himself and his family though not quite explaining why he needed \$54,000 in the first place, nor why the IRS had found his accounting less than acceptable. The Republican women gave him a standing ovation.⁵⁴

Rhodes whipped DiSalle one month later, scoring fifty nine percent of the vote. More significant than the landslide victory, Rhodes reversed past Republican failures in industrialized counties. In 1960 Nixon lost Cuyahoga (Cleveland), Lucas (Toledo), and Mahoning (Youngstown) counties. In 1962, Rhodes carried Cuyahoga and Lucas. Where Nixon won 38.7 percent of the

⁵³ James Baker interview, March 9, 2000, tape in author's possession.

⁵⁴ Zimmerman, *Call Me Mike*, p. 245.

vote in Mahoning, Rhodes lost there by fewer than 100 votes. In the two elections after the 1958 catastrophe, the GOP increased its share of the vote in these urban counties.⁵⁵ Rhodes had managed to peel away working class voters from the Democratic Party.

The sluggish Ohio economy certainly played a role in convincing union voters to turn away from DiSalle, but Rhodes had to offer something in return. He was a Republican, after all, a member of the party that just four years prior tried to destroy unions and the security they brought. What did Rhodes offer to convince them that he was different? First, in the 1940s he began to practice coalition politics. Challenging Republican orthodoxy, Rhodes believed unions helped to foster growth and rising living standards. Celebrating Governor Rhodes' reelection in 1966 a former Rhodes aide attested to the persistence of this view: "Your reelection resulted in part from your firm belief that government working in harness with labor and business fixes the line of growth for any city, state, or nation"⁵⁶ Second, after the war an authentic if hesitantly mastered working class masculinity became the bond between Rhodes and workers. Rhodes was at ease with working class people, and eventually figured out how to both naturally express that ease and politicize it. When Rhodes' eldest daughter was married in 1963, Rhodes invited Teresa Heinz, the president of an Ashtabula county Republican women's club. She told Rhodes that an acquaintance worked

⁵⁵ "Unexpected Ohio Victory Shows Firm GOP Organization," Congressional Quarterly Weekly, Vol. 18, No. 53, 12/20/1960, pp. 2012-2013; Legislative Digest Review, Vol. 10, No. 43, 11/9/1962.

⁵⁶ George Wilson to James Rhodes, letter dated 11/14/1966, MSS 353, box 3, folder 12, James A. Rhodes Papers, Ohio Historical Society (hereafter JAR).

at the Fisher Body plant in Cleveland where “the workmen there were most impressed with the fact that you would invite the ‘Little Man,’ as they expressed it, to this affair.” Heinz’s husband also worked “with a great many union men” and found they were more impressed with this fact than with anything you have done so far for the working man ... They now feel you consider the little fellow and you may be sure we will publicize this to the hilt.”⁵⁷

Third, and finally, in the 1960s Rhodes promised what had long been the central concern of working class people generally and his life specifically: economic security. Rhodes personally experienced insecurity in his own life. Coal mining was dirty and dangerous, and offered irregular employment. Disease and death had taken two siblings and his father. Times of unemployment or under-employment hit his family first. There was no safety net. He struggled to bring his family into a secure economic footing, failing through education but succeeding through politics. Rhodes, like many other working-class people, defined security as a job that paid a living wage, not a wage to facilitate accumulation of great wealth but to allow dignity and secure consumption. The Great Depression, Roosevelt’s New Deal, and the crucible of World War Two turned that typical working-class concern into government policy.⁵⁸ Rhodes followed, in part because the federal government exerted its

⁵⁷ Teresa Heinz to James Rhodes, letter dated 8/27/1963, JAR, box 2, folder 9. Heinz was most likely not working class herself. She said her husband worked “with” union men, but did not say he was a union man. Plus, she continually referred to working men as “they” rather than “we.” Heinz nevertheless lived in Ashtabula County, far away from Rhodes’ power center in Columbus. That she was not part of the ruling class made her, in the eyes of union men, a “Little Man” herself.

⁵⁸ On security and consumption as central concerns to working class people, and working class politics expressing that class concern, see especially Lawrence Glickman, A Living Wage:

pressure on state and local governments. That pressure allowed him the political space to bring unions within his coalition and fend off his anti-union financial base. He also followed in part because unions became powerful enough to force the issue. He had to deal with unions, either by losing the blue-collar vote in large chunks or by peeling away just enough to blunt the Democrat's sharp advantage. But he also followed because those external pressures matched his worldview. As his Department of Development director wrote to Rhodes, "Many are the times I have heard you say that when an able bodied man is unable to find a job he loses faith in the system that has made America great. Those without a job look to the government to provide either the job or the way to get one."⁵⁹

That the government was a central actor in creating jobs was a New Deal innovation. Rhodes said that "what we have to do as public officials, Democrats and Republicans alike, is to perpetuate a system that creates jobs and employment for people." He remembered the Bonus Army march in 1932, the protest movement by World War I veterans to receive their government bonus then instead of 1945. They went to Washington and sat on the White House lawn "for the simple reason they could not get a job." They had "sawed-off shot-guns and machine guns denouncing everyone in public life because they could not get a job." Making this speech in 1970, Rhodes remembered the Bonus Army

American Workers and the Making of Consumer Society (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Frank Stricker, "Affluence for Whom? Another Look at Prosperity and the Working Classes in the 1920s," Labor History Vol. 24, #1 (Winter 1983), pp. 5-33; and Lizabeth Cohen, A Consumers Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Post-War America (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2003), pp. 152-164.

⁵⁹ George Wilson to Rhodes, letter dated 11/14/1966, JAR, box 3, folder 12.

as more violent than they actually were. They did not sit on the White House lawn; they remained outside the city in Anacostia Flats. Yet, in well publicized moves, the White House was put under armed guard, the gates locked, and the streets cleared. Rhodes probably remembered that overly dramatic response. He was clearly influenced by the urban riots and student protests of the late 1960s. He sounded as if all politicians and capitalism generally were under attack. Feeling a bit like Herbert Hoover, Rhodes said the bonus marchers, their guns, and their threatening comments about public officials were merely forerunners of 1960s social unrest. In his mind, all of it related to economic security.⁶⁰

Relying on his own working-class background, Rhodes expressed the essence of the problem when he said that “what people really want is security through a job. That’s what this civil rights agitation, crime, and social problems all stem from -- lack of jobs.” He defined his new brand of Republicanism by continuing, “Democrats every Labor Day stand up and say we’ll get you jobs and the Republicans, like damn fools, stand up the next day and say it can’t be done.” Courting labor leaders, Rhodes said that “I know you guys don’t like Republicans, but here is one Republican who gets you jobs; and you know as well as I do that guys who aren’t working don’t join unions. Guys on welfare don’t pay dues to you.”⁶¹

⁶⁰ Rhodes speech to Ohio elected officials, 1/12/1970, JAR, box 1, folder 1. On the Bonus Army, see William Leuchtenburg, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940 (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 13-16.

⁶¹ Rhodes quoted in Stephen Hess and David S. Broder, The Republican Establishment: The Present and Future of the G.O.P. (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), pp. 367-368.

These passages are remarkable. The key is not that Rhodes promised jobs. All politicians do that. Rhodes instead promised security, and then pointedly made unions a part of security. Security, more so than coalition politics and more so than his masculinity, was crucial to Rhodes' conception of a working-class Republican Party. Security is hardly the stuff of class consciousness and even suggests class cooperation rather than class conflict. Yet workers challenged capitalists when they failed to provide security. It meant the ability of a working class family to have a good diet, adequate medical attention, and some protection against the arbitrary future. The promise of security was Rhodes' unique contribution to the history of the Republican Party. He brought into the G.O.P. a particular class concern, one born of industrialization and material abundance. Rhodes' working-class concerns led him to reject the producer-era values of Robert Taft and adapt the party to the consumer society. To repeat the words of one of his antagonists from 1950, Rhodes did indeed represent "upheaval and revolution."⁶²

Rhodes, however, had a problem. He became governor and made this promise of security just as Ohio's industrial base started to rust. How could he deliver security when jobs were fleeing south or disappearing altogether? Rhodes' solution forced him to build the capacity of the state government, highlighted the shift of political and economic power from the industrial Midwest to the South and West, and exposed the political pressures that limited the possibilities of security. As Rhodes' business executive friend Charles John

⁶² State Government Report, Vol. 24, 5/26/51-6/1/51, William Halley Papers, box 1, folder 2.

joked, “Should I support somebody who breaks my back?” Rhodes would have to find a way to be “the friend of labor” and not break the back of executives.

CHAPTER 7
RHODES, RUST, AND REVOLUTION
THE POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITS OF SECURITY, 1940s-1960s

In 1962 James Rhodes accomplished his life-long goal at the precise moment when the citizens of Ohio, leading businessmen, and political leaders declared that Ohio was in economic crisis. In the stiff competition for manufacturing plants, Ohio in the 1950s had lost to other states in the Midwest and, increasingly, the South. By the early 1960s, Ohio political leaders, led by Senator Frank Lausche, complained too that other states received most of the federal government's research and development contracts, excluding Ohio and the Midwest from potentially lucrative areas of growth. Into this environment stepped Rhodes, who, given his background, understandably touted the curative powers of a thriving economy and preached the positive social consequences that would occur if every person had a job. The pressing economic conditions, the consensus that new political leadership should address those conditions, and the individual qualities of Rhodes created a political moment in which Rhodes led Ohio Republicans to revolutionize the role of the state government in economic development. The Rhodes program, as one advocate remarked, pushed "the State of Ohio [to] assume an aggressive role in stimulating R and D

performance" instead of "the passive role that probably would be more palatable to those who are more traditionally minded."¹

However powerful a governor Rhodes was, he alone could not force the state into this "aggressive role." From the end of World War Two until the eve of Rhodes' first term, political and economic leaders in Ohio modified the conventional expectations of permissible government intrusion in the economy. The rules changed only slowly and haltingly. Traditional points of view persisted well into the 1960s as even some Republicans opposed the determined Rhodes and his energetic development plan. During the immediate post-war period, those people opposed to any change in the status quo of Ohio's economy held sway.

The Ohio economy thrived during World War Two. Military contracts stimulated the heavy industry sector. Farmers benefited from the increased demand for agricultural products. Job openings attracted laborers from rural Ohio, Appalachia, and the deep South. Despite its low tax rates, the thrifty state government reaped the benefits as the state's revenue accumulated into record surpluses. Business and political leaders, nevertheless, worried about reconversion to a peacetime economy. In order to plan for reconversion, the state legislature created in 1943 the Ohio Post-War Program Commission. Though Republican Governor John Bricker signed the bill, the responsibility to follow or reject the commission's counsel fell to his successors. They were

¹ Letter from G.C. Carter to Robert W. Cochran, March 15, 1963, Ohio Department of Development, Director's Correspondence, 1961-1971, Series 650, Box 3915, "Memos/Proposals, Bill 270 File," Ohio Historical Society.

reluctant to add to the responsibilities of the state's bureaucracy and failed to act on the economic advice offered by the Commission.

The Legislature instructed the Commission to gather "all available pertinent data relative to post-war problems which will confront the state and its inhabitants," to investigate and determine "how, and to what extent, the state can help restore" veterans to private industry, and to "do such other things as may be pertinent to the post-war effort of the state of Ohio."² Pursuant to this wide-ranging brief, the Commission, through its constituent committees, made recommendations concerning a number of issues, including stopping beach erosion, building new state parks, enacting prison reform, and financing public libraries.

One key committee included under the rubric of "such other things as may be pertinent" was the Science Committee. This group evolved from the wartime "Cyclotron Committee," organized to study the feasibility of the state building a cyclotron to aid in atomic research. The Cyclotron Committee resolved that Ohio should "take the leadership in this type [of] post-war development. Investigation supports the conclusion that out of the Cyclotron may come products that will form the basis for vast new industry, providing permanent substantial employment in the future."³ The Cyclotron Committee pointed out to Ohio policy makers for the first time the connections among government sponsored scientific

² Michael Desmond, ed., Ohio Post-War Program Commission: Committee Organization Preliminary Research, (The F.J. Heer Co.: Columbus, OH, 1946), pp. 2 and 29.

³ Ohio Looks Ahead: General Report of the Ohio Post-War Program Commission to the 96th General Assembly and the Governor, 1943-1944, (Columbus, OH: F.J. Heer Printing Company, 1945), p. 48.

research, links between public and private sector institutions, and sustained economic growth.

The successor to the Cyclotron Committee developed this advice. Headed by the distinguished scientist, entrepreneur, General Motors executive, and native Ohioan Charles Kettering, the Science Committee attempted to impress upon Ohio's civic leaders the importance of scientific research to economic development. Because of the state's reliance on industry and industry's reliance on research and development, Ohio, according to Kettering's committee, must make every effort "to aid and encourage scientific research." The members of the Science Committee further hoped to establish a state sponsored "Science Foundation" which would help Ohio "take its rightful place as one of the leading states of the country in the field of science."⁴

Kettering described the ideal post-war political economy he thought Ohio politicians and businessmen should create. The crises of the war, Kettering argued, provided a "swell" opportunity for Ohioans to peer into the future of industry, and then shape a course that altered the pre-war economic structure of the state. The war had "brought out the relationship between what can be done by government, what can be done by universities and what can be done by industries, and the fundamental co-relation between those things."⁵ Kettering contended that Ohio's economy would be stronger tomorrow if the state

⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 27 and 30.

⁵ "Minutes of the Meetings of the Committees of the Ohio Post-War Program Commission," 12/17/1945, Post-War Program Commission, p. 65, Ohio Legislative Service Commission Library. The meeting occurred in Columbus, Ohio. Thanks to the Ohio Legislative Service Commission for making this document available to me.

encouraged technological development today, and that this process necessarily would blur the lines separating public and private organizations.

Kettering admitted that some political and economic decision-makers would object to this break with the past. "You see," Kettering said, "most people get afraid of the thing we are talking about because they think that means you are going to throw away what you have." The most difficult obstacle to surmount was that Ohio, in terms of its economic situation, was "a pretty good going concern" that "ran this far without us [the Science Committee] and without our individual help." Why should Ohioans want to change?⁶

Kettering's language was significant, for it suggested why Ohio specifically and the Midwest generally fell behind other regions in the pursuit of federal research and development contracts. Ohio was "a pretty good going concern." He meant that Ohio was a business, and a profitable one at that. Ohio and the Midwest rose to industrial dominance by applying cutting edge technology to the production process. This combination allowed Midwestern industrialists to mass produce inexpensive goods for mass consumption. The technology was so sophisticated that complex machines (cars, for example) could be made durably and cheaply, their use intended for an unsophisticated mass audience. Unskilled labor could easily run the production line. Military contracts required a different mindset, placing emphasis on technological innovation in the design rather than production process, massive capital investment in a constant process of high-performance advances, and skilled labor often working in a flexible rather than

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 63, 78.

standardized production system. Before World War Two was over, Midwestern businessmen began to plan for reconversion. This decision was not a short-sighted misunderstanding of the profits to be had in government contracts. After every other war in America history, military spending nearly dried-up. There was nothing in World War Two that told these businessmen that would change. Government in the past had been an unreliable customer. The two customers -- private consumers and the federal government -- were so different that Midwestern businessmen deemed serving both too difficult and unprofitable. Individual consumers far outnumbered federal contracts, required fewer regulations and guidelines than federal bureaucrats, and could be persuaded through advertising, a less mysterious art than the byzantine task of lobbying the Pentagon and Congress.⁷

Kettering's "pretty good going concern" worked well enough to dominate the world economy for the next three decades, yet he saw a chance for improvement. That meant change. The Legislature ignored the Science Committee while they actively pursued the recommendations made by the other committees. In their final report, dated January 1947, the science advisors remarked that "research and creative ventures, which provide for the development of our scientific, technical, and human resources, has received little financial support from the State or municipalities." The advisory group also

⁷ Ann Markusen, Peter Hall, Scott Campbell, Sabina Deitrick, The Rise of the Gunbelt: The Military Remapping of Industrial America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 51-79. On the shift of federal resources to the South, Southwest, and West during the Cold War, see Bruce J. Schulman, From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) and Margaret Pugh O'Mara, Cities of Knowledge: Cold War Science and the Search for the Next Silicon Valley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

asserted that "[t]he stockpile of scientific knowledge is not sufficient for our present and future purpose. The State of Ohio should invest funds in research and in the application of new knowledge in the interest and general welfare of its citizens." The Science Committee concluded that science and "its importance in the world of tomorrow to Ohio's industries and Ohio's seven million citizens cannot be overestimated." The martial metaphor of "stockpiling scientific knowledge" indicated the underlying and unspoken assumption of the committee: the 'welfare' of Ohioans began with military spending on research and development. But the commanding hold of the mass production/mass consumption economy -- commanding because it was profitable -- meant that few people would press politicians for change. Kettering asked for more time to study topic. The Commission rejected his request, eliminating the science committee from the agenda of the next Commission.⁸

Democrat Frank Lausche, governor from 1945-1947 and from 1949-1957, and Republican Thomas Herbert, who governed in the brief interregnum from 1947-1949, failed to make the advice of the Science Committee a priority.⁹

Seven months after the final Science Committee report, Herbert told his fellow governors that "our constant scientific advancement" has caused "great

⁸ Michael Desmond, ed., *The Ohio Post-War Program Commission: Biennial Report to the Governor and the 97th General Assembly*, (Columbus, OH: The Ohio Post-War Program Commission, 1947), pp. 99-100; *Ohio Post-War commission: Biennial Report to the Governor and the 98th General Assembly*, (Columbus, OH: The Ohio Post-War Commission, 1949), p. 2, which lists all of the approved study committees.

⁹ On Herbert's legislative priorities, see *Ohio Post-War Program Commission: Biennial Report to the Governor and the 98th General Assembly*, (Columbus, OH: Ohio Post-War Program Commission, 1949), p. 14. The Commission noted four programs of "major importance" to Herbert, including the highway system, the state building code, state office space, and education for the blind and deaf. The report, on pages 14-15, also listed bills which the Commission had helped to pass. None of the bills covered science policy.

economic changes,” suggesting that Herbert understood the thrust of what the Kettering committee argued. Herbert, though, was uncertain as to the appropriate role of a state government in science policy. He said that “[b]y an open-minded approach and even the use of the trial and error method . . . we know that we will ultimately strike a new balance between federal and state functions.”¹⁰ Herbert ceded research and development policy to the federal government and used the platitude of the “trial and error method” to shift the cost of technological improvement to the federal government. Kettering's call to transform the state's political economy fell on willingly deaf ears. For Ohio's political and business leaders, the end of the war was not a “swell” opportunity to re-evaluate Ohio's economic progress and to extend to the state level the public-private associations that the federal government fostered during World War Two. Rather, the time was right to continue the practices that they believed had made Ohio's economy successful before depression and war.

Governor Lausche, in particular, opposed efforts to expand the power of state government, even when business lobbies suggested that he do so. In 1946, for example, the Ohio Chamber of Commerce (OCC) and Lausche appointed a team of economic development specialists to study the promotional efforts of state agencies in the industrial Northeast and the South. The committee concluded that Ohio should create an agency in charge of planning and development to help retain existing Ohio industry and to attract new

¹⁰ “Can the States Do the Job?,” Speech of Governor Thomas J. Herbert at the Governor's Conference in Salt lake City, Utah, July 14, 1947, MSS 342, Thomas J. Herbert Papers, box 27, folder 71, Ohio Historical Society.

business. The Chamber endorsed the plan. Lausche rejected it, arguing that it would cost too much.¹¹ In the 1940s and 1950s, Lausche had more than one occasion to expand the powers of the state, to spend public resources on economic growth, and to imitate other industrial states and their policies. He declined, marking a clear limit to the lengths his state government would go in the competition for jobs.

Lausche suffered no political penalty for his reluctance to follow the public policy recommendations of prominent businessmen and their lobby, the Chamber. Cordial relations between the two continued because from the late 1940s to early 1960s, the Ohio Chamber of Commerce shared Lausche's ambivalence about government involvement in economic development. In 1952, the Chamber produced a report which noted "an increasing tendency" of state and local governments to offer special tax rates to spur development, but also observed the decline in Southern states of government sponsored relocation inducements to industry. These contradictory findings suggested to the OCC that Ohio businessmen could probably withstand the aggressive tactics of Southern states, but should worry about the competitive programs in Midwestern

¹¹ See the memo from Al Redman to unidentified, 4/14/1947 and "Report of the Governor's Committee on the Desirability of Establishing a State Industrial Development and Advertising Program," 12/6/1946, both located in box 3, folder 5, MSS 597, Koder Collison Papers, Ohio Historical Society (hereafter Collison Papers). Some disagreement exists about Lausche's lack of support. Koder Collison, an industrial developer who ran the Department of Industrial and Economic Department for Democratic Governor Michael DiSalle, self-published a book that attributed the failure of the plan to Lausche's untimely defeat in the 1946 election. See Koder Collison, Ohio—Its Development and Its Developers: An Overview of the State's Economic History and Programs and Activities for Promoting the Economic Well-Being of Ohio, (Columbus, OH: Collison K.M., 1977), pp. 20-23. Yet this view cannot explain why, after voters reelected Lausche in four subsequent gubernatorial elections, he failed to revive the OCC's plan. Collison's papers indicate that Lausche thought the plan was too expensive, a typical position for the thrifty Governor.

states such as Michigan and Pennsylvania. The report offered no clear advice to policy makers, indicating the Chamber's indecision about the role of government in economic development. The OCC thought these programs inappropriate, but watched nervously and wishfully as businesses in surrounding states seemed to enjoy the benefits.¹²

In the ensuing years, the OCC blurred its already unfocused view. They at once retrenched in their opposition to federal intrusion into local development, yet considered the possible positive consequences if the state government assumed new responsibilities for economic growth. From the mid-fifties to the early sixties, the OCC consistently opposed federal efforts to redevelop economically depressed areas. The Chamber lobbied in particular against the Area Redevelopment Act of 1956 (ARA). The OCC worried that federal assistance would drive private developers out of business. In addition, the ARA was inconsistent with the Chamber's "long-standing policy" which opposed "government competition with private industry."¹³ On behalf of the OCC, Charles Slayman, a Cleveland, Ohio real estate agent involved in industrial and commercial development, testified in a U.S. Senate hearing against the bill. Slayman opined that growth "should be allowed to continue without these strange efforts to distort the natural laws of economics." He claimed that "[p]ublic opinion continues to grow for the government's policy of unfettering business, allowing it to follow normal channels and operate with reduced Government competition,

¹² Albert Redman, Report of Study on Special Inducements to Influence Plant Location, (Ohio Chamber of Commerce: Columbus, OH, 1952), pp. 1 and 3.

¹³ Meeting Minutes, Industrial Development Committee of the OCC, March 27, 1956, box 1, folder 3, Collison Papers.

and interference." Slayman concluded that redevelopment "activity is being done soundly by private capital where local conditions admit such development. This unfettered private system is the very core of our present thrilling growth and expansion."¹⁴ The OCC strenuously opposed federal laws to stimulate redevelopment, contradictorily fearing both the clumsy interference of distant bureaucrats as well as the possibility of that interference being competent.

Slayman also described redevelopment as a local effort, implying that local governments could offer help. By the early sixties, even as they continued to decry federal assistance to depressed areas, the OCC began to include the state government in its definition of local effort.¹⁵ In one Chamber meeting, officials discussed how the state could finance industrial development. One OCC member pointed out a contradiction. "Just a thought here," the participant began. "It seems inconsistent to be seeking on the one hand for development funds and on the other hand to be against depressed areas." A simple, "Well, we have to try something" ended the brief and one-sided philosophical debate.¹⁶

Why did that Chamber member think that "something" had to be tried? In the late 1950s, the State of Ohio had assumed some responsibility for retaining and attracting industry. In 1957, Republican Governor C. William O'Neill signed legislation based on the OCC proposal that Lausche had rejected in the 1940s.

¹⁴ March 23, 1956, 84th Congress. Testimony on Bill S. 2663, Area Redevelopment Act, United States Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Subcommittee on Labor, p. 887.

¹⁵ For examples of the OCC's opposition to the ARA in the early sixties, see Letter from C.J. Fuhrman to Albert Redman, 2/2/61, Collison Papers, box 1, folder 8. Fuhrman was struck by the "revolting thought" that Ohio "taxpayers will be subsidizing financial and tax incentives" so that industries could locate in neighboring states. See also Memo from Albert Redman to the Industrial Development Committee of the OCC, 1/10/61, Collison Papers, box 1, folder 8.

¹⁶ Meeting Minutes, Industrial Development Committee of the OCC, 3/22/61, p. 15, Collison Papers, box 1, folder 9.

The law established a division within the Commerce Department, called the Division of Economic Development and Publicity.¹⁷ In 1959, Democrat Michael DiSalle, who defeated O'Neill in the 1958 election, went several steps further than O'Neill. DiSalle created the Department of Industrial and Economic Development (D.I.E.D.), raising the status and significance of the state's function as an economic development and planning unit. DiSalle also supported the creation of Development Credit Corporations and Community Improvement Corporations, both of which offered financial assistance for industrial development projects. Both O'Neill and DiSalle had the counsel and support of the OCC on these pieces of legislation.¹⁸ So Ohio politicians were doing "something," usually in coordination with the Chamber. Why was the Chamber still worried?

They worried in part because they watched as federal government helped other regions. The industrial development specialist for the Dayton Power and Light Company wrote the OCC complaining of federal assistance to the South. He was stuck by "the revolting thought" that federal legislation would "ruin Ohio's competitive position in so far as our industrial growth program is concerned." Ohio "taxpayers will be subsidizing financial and tax incentives" to help industry move out of Ohio. The "subject was political dynamite. It's impossible to expect a coalition of Southern Democrats and Republicans to oppose these bills

¹⁷Collison, Ohio--Its Development and Its Developers, p. 32.

¹⁸ibid., pp. 38-40.

because the Southern states stand to gain too much.” He saw no “chance to defeat them.”¹⁹

He had identified yet one more reason for Ohio businessmen to hate the New Deal and post-war federal programs. They helped other regions before the Midwest. In 1938, Roosevelt announced that the South was “the nation’s No. 1 economic problem -- the Nation’s problem, not merely the South’s.” It was a persistently backward, deprived, and depressed region. Roosevelt’s comment triggered a decades long process that shifted federal resources away from the Midwest and toward the South. Transportation networks, defense and aerospace spending, and social programs began to alter the southern landscape, challenging its predominantly rural, agricultural, and poverty stricken history and introducing industry and high tech suburbs. As novelist William Faulkner observed in 1956, “Our economy is no longer agricultural. Our economy is the Federal Government.” That fact bothered both Faulkner and Ohio businessmen.²⁰

As federal resources flowed to historically disadvantaged areas, Ohio’s economy began to decline. In frustration, the Chamber official snapped, “Well, we have to try something.” “Something” had to be done because other regions were growing wealthy off the federal government while Ohioans struggled. Tepid local and state-sponsored development programs simply could not compete with federal efforts. In the late 1950s, Ohio business leaders set out to define the

¹⁹ C.J. Fuhrman to Albert Redman, director of the Industrial Development Department, Ohio Chamber of Commerce, 2/2/1961, box 1, folder 8, Collison Papers.

²⁰ Schulman, From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt, pp. 112-173. Schulman quotes Roosevelt on p. 112 and Faulkner on p. 135; O’Mara, Cities of Knowledge, pp. 182-222.

problem. Their definitions shaped their solutions. Academic and OCC sponsored-studies helped outline Ohio's structural weaknesses. These studies attributed the state's difficulties to a persistent, structural vulnerability to downturns and to a dependence on corporate decisions made outside of Ohio.

Two Ohio State University scholars noted that manufacturing in Ohio was not dispersed throughout a variety of industries. The entire economy of Ohio balanced industrial, agricultural, and service sectors. Manufacturing concerns, however, consisted mainly of industries especially sensitive to recessions and depressions. These businesses included, among others, automobile, iron, steel, stone, clay, and glass, or products made from these basic materials. In 1952, two-thirds of Ohio's manufacturing was concentrated in the "marked cyclical sensitivity" category, surpassed only by Indiana and Michigan. The rest of the nation, in contrast, had close to one-half of its industries in this category.²¹ These figures meant that when the nation's economy went into recession, Ohio was hit harder and longer than most other states.

The Ohio Chamber of Commerce also studied the trends in Ohio's economy. In December 1962, one month after Ohio voters had elected Rhodes, the OCC produced a report that asked why companies left Ohio. The authors rounded up the usual Chamber suspects, blaming disobedient labor unions and

²¹ Paul G. Craig and James Yocum, Trends in the Ohio Economy: Industrial Composition and Growth, (Columbus, OH: Bureau of Business Research, The Ohio State University, 1955), pp. 17-20.

high taxes.²² Significantly, though, the report made assertions that departed from past Chamber practices.

The study concluded that "Ohio lost more plants because of consolidations and mergers than for any other single reason."²³ The OCC, while surprised at this new trend, failed to speculate on what drove these mergers. The report instead noted which states benefited the most from Ohio's losses. Pennsylvania led the way while Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan, California, New Jersey, and Connecticut all received a portion of Ohio's wealth.

The Chamber's response to this information marked a new attitude toward the state government. The OCC noted that formerly they had "dismiss[ed] the subsidization programs offered by other states as appealing to and attracting only those firms who were already on financially shaky ground." If a company needed governmental assistance, "Ohio was better off not to have that industry at all." The Chamber then asserted that "a second war between the states" was occurring, a war in which the "battlefields are the corporate offices of manufacturing firms." The new weapons in this war were "public financing programs for private industry." The writers of the report shared "a conviction" that Ohio had lost industry because its anemic state sponsored development programs failed to compete with the ventures of other states.²⁴ The OCC therefore discarded its long-held reservations regarding public subsidies and, in

²² Industrial Development Committee Report on Plant Movement Out of Ohio during the Period From 1955-1962," 12/10/62, pp. 6-7, Collison Papers, box 3, folder, 3.

²³ ibid, p. 6.

²⁴ ibid, pp. 1-2.

an election year, called for a revitalized government bureaucracy to aid private industry.

Throughout the 1950s, then, studies of the Ohio economy indicated that the state was losing manufacturing facilities and that a large portion of the remaining industrial plants were highly sensitive to cyclical fluctuations. Structural weaknesses limited future growth possibilities. As business and political leaders called for the state to renew its commitment to growth, though, they avoided simply advocating action without direction. In the late 1950s and early 1960s several organizations and individuals instead urged that the state attack those fundamental barriers to sustained economic growth. Echoing the Kettering Science Committee of the 1940s, civic leaders championed a new economy based on technological research and development.

The Ohio Chamber announced in 1958 that they believed in the "importance of technology in the healthful growth of the state and national economy." The OCC wanted its local affiliations to spread information about Ohio's technological capabilities because "technically trained personnel and research facilities" contribute to "effective industrial development." These assets played a role when companies made decisions to expand or relocate.²⁵

The 1957 Soviet launch of the satellite "Sputnik" triggered the OCC's awareness of and interest in education and science. At a conference of Great

²⁵ Ohio Chamber of Commerce News Bulletin, January 1958, Vol. 12, No. 1, p. 2. Academic reports backed the Chamber's claim. See Henry Hunker and Alfred Wright, Factors of Industrial Location In Ohio, (Columbus, OH: Bureau of Business Research, The Ohio State University, 1963), pp. 135-136; and Craig and Yocum, Trends in the Ohio Economy, pp. 64-65. However, the OCC's 1962 report on plant movement out of Ohio made no mention of research and development.

Lakes states industrial development groups, a Columbus, Ohio research scientist made "a strong appeal that is becoming an old story to my industrial development friends." Research and development was necessary to spur future economic growth, and was crucial because of the "alarming Sputnik revelations this fall." The same thing happened across the nation. But the needs of Ohio's businesses, naturally, drove the OCC's reorientation. The Ohio power companies, particularly, made sure the Chamber understood the connection between science and growth. A. N. Prentice, vice-president and general manager of the Ohio Power Company told Herschel Atkinson, the executive vice-president of the OCC, that the OCC needed to think how the quality of higher education in Ohio affected development. Prentice warned that while he had "seen statements that Ohio is ahead of most states," he was concerned. "I have on authority of a prominent Ohio educator that Ohio will be near the bottom [ranked in comparison to other states] unless we make immediate efforts to expand our colleges."²⁶ The Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company sent the Chamber a study that concluded investment in Ohio manufacturing had declined in the 1950s and that "manufacturing investment often follows research expenditures." The Cleveland company recommended that the Chamber promote the building of research facilities for higher education. They also encouraged businesses, universities, and development groups to work together.²⁷

²⁶ Letter from Prentice to Atkinson, 2/3/59, Collison Papers, box 1, folder 9.

²⁷ Speech of Richard J. Lund, Great Lakes States Industrial Development Council, Proceedings of the 6th Annual Conference, January 1958, box 1, folder 4, Collison Papers; "Some Suggested Guides to Area Development in Northeast Ohio," by the Market Research Unit of the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company, September 1960, box 1, folder 5, Collison Papers.

As influential as businesses and their lobby were, a brief Defense Department publication triggered the reemergence of technology as a policy issue. In June 1962, the DOD published The Changing Patterns of Defense Procurements. Mostly a compilation of statistics with minimal text, this slim volume delivered a devastating jolt to Ohio politicians. The study revealed that during the 1950s, the Midwest, in general, and Ohio, specifically, consistently failed to receive its share of federal research and development contracts. Making matters worse, the DOD predicted that this trend would continue. In effect, the document indicted Ohio politicians. They had failed and would continue to fail to bring home choice government largess.

Ohio's politicians wanted to know why they had failed and what to do about it. The General Assembly investigated the research and development capabilities of the state. The Ohio Legislative Service Commission, the research agency of the General Assembly, appointed an advisory committee to assess the importance of research and development to Ohio's economy and the implications for higher education. The Legislature actually formed the committee before the DOD published Changing Patterns. Yet its conclusions influenced the committee's final report, which cited the DOD study six times in the first eight pages.²⁸

²⁸ Research Facilities in Ohio: A Report of the Research Facilities Study Committee, (Columbus, OH: Ohio Legislative Service Commission, 1963), pp. 8-12. The members of the Research Facilities group also cited a second DOD study, Military Prime Contact Awards by State, 1950-1962, which recorded a decline of 54.6 percent in prime contracts awarded to businesses in Ohio (p. 13).

The group consisted mainly of research scientists who worked for corporations, but also included educators from prominent Ohio institutions.²⁹ The purpose of the "Research Facilities Study Committee," the type of people who served as members, and the official connection to the General Assembly all recalled the Kettering Committee of the 1940s. The 1962 advisors, in fact, started their study with the assumption "that Ohio's economy would now be considerably stronger if a concerted research and development effort had been launched several years ago."³⁰ The group leveled that criticism in the first paragraph of the first page. The Research Facilities Study Committee prominently positioned the pointed remark in order to warn of the consequences of ignored advice and missed opportunities.

The aggressive tone of the consultants grew more ominous as they wrote their summary. They "contend[ed] that unless the Ohio industrial, governmental, and educational community undertakes to participate far more in this technological and economic revolution than has been the case thus far, the general economy of this state will suffer some very real deterioration in the future." To answer why Ohio lagged in "R and D" capabilities and failed to receive federal contracts, the committee blamed the "astonishingly low" commitment to research in universities. To reverse the trend, they suggested that the State of Ohio invest in graduate student research, create competitive salary

²⁹ Meeting Minutes, May 11, 1962, General Assembly/Legislative Services Commission, "Minutes and Reports, 1947-1985," frame 113, Series 1609, Ohio Historical Society.

³⁰ ibid p. 5.

packages for research faculty, and encourage both public and private research facilities. Stated more directly, they instructed the Legislature to spend money.³¹

The scientists and educators who served on the panel applied as much pressure as scientists and educators could. The report was a blunt critique of the woeful political commitment to higher education. But was the pressure enough? The General Assembly had rejected similar advice from Kettering, whose credentials as a scientist, businessman, and favorite Ohio son were unrivaled. However important and persuasive their counsel, the Research Facilities Study Committee still answered to a thrifty legislature that had proven unwilling to reorder its priorities. The emerging technology agenda still required a political leader willing to spend political capital on the issue.

Initially, briefly, and ironically that leader was Frank Lausche. As governor in the 40s and 50s, Lausche failed to act when presented with comparable suggestions. In 1962, as a United States Senator about to begin his second term and as Ohio's leading politician, he provided key support that focused the agenda and coordinated the action. His actions indicated that he defined the problem in two ways. First, the inability of Ohio and Midwestern businesses to earn government contracts derived partially from the inability of Midwestern politicians to leverage their political power. Second, both the image and reality of the Midwest needed to change. People saw Ohio as either backwardly rural or blue-collar urban with grimy industrial smokestacks. Both views contributed to the perception that the region was technologically deficient.

³¹ ibid, pp. 12, 25-28.

In order to address the problem, Lausche devised two different strategies. To exercise political pressure in the nation's capitol, Lausche and other Midwestern politicians formed the Midwestern Resources Association. This consortium included both state and federal representatives from the entire Midwest. They sought to apply the combined pressure of Midwestern Senators, Representative, Governors, and other elected officials. Their goal was to bring federal R and D contracts to the Midwest.

The second part of the problem, however, required more than a marshaling of influence. The perception and reality of the Midwest as having limited scientific capabilities demanded not just that politicians deliver blustery speeches about the great State of Ohio to skeptical Pentagon procurement officials. Rather, the situation required that Ohioans take seriously the structural faults of their economy and transform it through public policy. To solve this dilemma, Lausche set into motion events that led directly to the formation of the Ohio Research and Development Foundation (ORDF), a vital policy advocacy group.

In August of 1962, two short months after the DOD published Changing Patterns, Lausche called together industrial, legislative, and educational leaders from throughout Ohio. As a result of this meeting, this group agreed to create an organization that would accomplish three goals. First, the proposed association would “inventory and evaluate” Ohio’s research and development capabilities in both public and private institutions. Second, it would measure how well the federal government used Ohio’s R and D capabilities. Third, and most

importantly, it would “create and foster plans” that would “significantly improve the collaboration between higher education and industry” and “increase the state’s research and development capacities.” In late October, the ORDF officially organized and assumed the responsibilities set forth in Lausche’s August meeting.³²

James Nance, an industrialist turned president of Cleveland-based Central National Bank, served as chairman of the ORDF. Nance had been an executive in the consumer appliance sector and the automotive industry. He wanted to transform the image and reality of Ohio’s R and D capabilities. To “stimulate and establish the public climate” the ORDF ran promotional programs such as science fairs to attract the interest of public schools, children, and their parents.³³ To “sponsor ties between education and industry” and to establish and maintain a close working relationship with the agencies of state government,” the ORDF pursued a targeted audience, one less mass-oriented than public schools and their constituents.³⁴ The ORDF needed to convince business leaders, educational administrators, and government officials. To this influential group of decision-makers, the ORDF and industry representatives wrote about the importance of research and development. In fact, the ORDF published Ohio’s Participation in Research and Development: A Basic Source Document, a book nearly identical to one published by the Columbus, Ohio-based Industrial

³² “The Ohio Research and Development Foundation, Inc.: Its History and Objectives,” n.d., pp. 1-2, MSS 700, Ohio Research and Development Foundation Papers, box 1, folder 23, Ohio Historical Society (hereafter ORDF).

³³ Minutes, January 17, 1963, p. 1, ORDF, box 1, folder 10.

³⁴ Annual Report, 1963, p. 4, ORDF, box 1, folder, 1.

Nucleonics Corporation.³⁵ Wilbert Chope, president of Industrial Nucleonics Corporation and a member of the executive committee of the ORDF, published Research and Development - The Key to Ohio Growth.³⁶ This book detailed the decline in Ohio's manufacturing base, the rise of a technologically modern economy, the shift in federal military procurement practices, and the importance of higher education to research and development. The ORDF and Chope, who identified his firm as "a representative Space Age company," circulated their respective books so that "those who share the responsibility for the planning and encouraging [of] industrial growth" would realize that "research and development has captured the nation's attention and commands its respect as a dynamic stimulant to general economic growth."³⁷ Whether an Ohio citizen was part of the lay public or held a specialized and powerful position, the ORDF had a program to convince him/her that R and D was "the harbinger of Ohio's future economic health."³⁸

The ORDF's agenda depended too on the cooperation of the Governor of Ohio. In the past, the lack of gubernatorial support doomed attempts at technology policy. As Lausche and Nance began organizing the ORDF in the late summer and fall of 1962, the race for the governor's office was underway. Though formed as a non-political group, the ORDF had much at stake in the contest between the Democratic incumbent, Michael DiSalle, and the Republican

³⁵ Ohio Research and Development foundation, Inc., Ohio's Participation in Research and Development: A Basic source Guide, (Columbus, OH: Ohio Research and Development foundation, Inc., November 1962).

³⁶ W.E. Chope, Research and Development - The Key to Ohio Growth, (Columbus, OH: Industrial Nucleonics Corporation, 1962).

³⁷ ibid, "Foreword."

³⁸ Annual Report, 1963, p. 10, ORDF, box 1, folder 1.

challenger, James Rhodes. The ORDF had to work with whomever won. The ORDF would necessarily tailor its program to the new governor's agenda. The goal would certainly remain the same: "[to] make every effort to make known the vital story of research and development and, furthermore, [to] attempt to stimulate our state to appropriate and effective action."³⁹ How the ORDF accomplished this goal rested, in part, on the person who occupied the executive branch.

In the 1962 contest, Rhodes promised in speech after speech to create jobs. He never precisely defined how he would create these jobs, except that it would probably involve miles of newly paved roads and millions of dollars worth of expedited highway projects. He never once said the words research, development, or technology. He never joined in the statewide conversations about Ohio's science problem. Rhodes' strength as a leader was not as an original thinker. He was not someone who reflected on problems, considered their nuances, and sought to resolve their consistencies and contradictions into a new solution. He was instead adept at scanning his environment, listening and looking for ideas to co-opt. His skill was then in applying that idea to a political situation and shepherding it through the process of making public policy. He was especially adept at finding a crisis, exploiting it to build his political power, and tossing it aside when he thought he had gotten what he could out of the deal. Rhodes followed that pattern with technology policy. Once he latched onto the

³⁹ Ohio Research and Development Foundation, Inc.: Its History and Objectives," p. 5, ORDF, box 1, folder 23.

idea he pushed , pulled, cajoled, forced, teased, and blew over the opposition to create Ohio's first ever coherent technology policy.⁴⁰

The emerging idea of late 1962 was restructuring Ohio's economy by fostering technological research and development. This issue, first championed by the Kettering Science Committee in the 1940s, had found in the late 1950s and early 1960s new advocates. Frank Lausche, whom Rhodes admired and tried to emulate, pushed the issue from the U.S. Senate. Business interests had expressed the need to reinvest in this area. Even the General Assembly had cautiously investigated the state's R and D facilities. The issue also had, in the ORDF, an active, aggressive, well-connected group of people who believed unequivocally in their cause. After he beat DiSalle, Rhodes called on civic leaders to supply him with ideas, the raw material with which he could create "Jobs and Progress." Nance and the ORDF responded.

The Ohio Chamber of Commerce coordinated the project. In November 1962, they asked each local Chamber to submit its recommendations for the Governor-elect's job program. In charge of writing the final report were Nance and George Wilson, who in January 1963 became Rhodes' first director of his new Department of Development. Described as young, hard working, and "an avid fisherman and a lousy golfer," Wilson headed the Akron Area Development Committee and helped organize the Tri-county Regional Planning Commission.⁴¹

⁴⁰ John C. Mahaney, interview with author, 5/28/99. Mahaney is the president of the Ohio Council of Retail Merchants, the lobbying group for Ohio retail merchants. He was a close friend to Rhodes beginning in the 1970s.

⁴¹ Letters from Samuel Stites to Frank Warren, 9/12/63 and 9/6/63, MSS 462, Ohio Planning Conference Papers, box 6, folder 4, Ohio historical Society (hereafter OPC).

He was, in effect, an industrial developer for the Northeast portion of the state, a developer who coordinated the efforts of both private and public institutions and who believed in the necessity of planned economic growth that relied on cooperation between government and industry.

Nance and Wilson submitted their report to Rhodes on December 10, 1962.⁴² They had a narrow window of opportunity after the election and before the inauguration to grab the busy Governor-elect's attention. The report proclaimed in the most candid terms possible the necessity of governmental intervention into the economy. "As an economic entity, Ohio's economy is roughly the same size as the entire Canadian economy. We must, therefore, THINK BIG and BOLD if we are to plan a program" which will spur economic growth. Nance and Wilson told Rhodes that their recommendations were "competitive AND bold." Rhodes must recognize that "the health of the economic base of the state needs and deserves major attention." The Nance-Wilson report outlined "the minimum therapy indicated by Ohio's obvious symptoms of economic discomfort." Most importantly, though, Nance and Wilson declared the time right to put "into the hands of state government, and thereby the citizens of Ohio, a necessary and timely fair share of the responsibility for increasing the rate of Ohio's industrial growth."⁴³ The report attempted to take advantage of the change in Ohio's leadership and served as a summary of the sense of frustration caused by Ohio's recent sluggish economic performance.

⁴² "Special Report: An Outline of the Recommended Points Needed in an Ohio Act Providing for Statewide Industrial and Economic Development," OPC, box 1, folder 11(hereafter Nance-Wilson Report). All emphasis is original.

⁴³ Nance-Wilson Report, "Introduction."

The authors anticipated opposition to their proposed new direction. Some business and political leaders might wonder whether this new role was historically and philosophically appropriate. Nance and Wilson casually dismissed that worry. They noted that numerous other states had created competitive development programs, so many in fact that “the discussion is purely academic as to whether or not” our plans “are in the American tradition.”⁴⁴

In short, Nance and Wilson proposed a new cabinet level department to administer two kinds of programs. One program concerned short-term goals while the other addressed long-term goals. The short-term goal included a “competitive package” of inducement to “IMMEDIATELY attract industrial growth” and bring “NEW JOBS NOW.” Nance and Wilson intended the short-term goal to bring traditional, blue-collar, industrial jobs, to stop plant migration out of Ohio.⁴⁵

The long-term goal attacked the structural problems of Ohio’s economy, problems that had led to the creation of the ORDF. Again, Nance and Wilson drew attention to the “big and bold package” of ideas. They wanted the state to foster the “activity necessary to attract and produce the scientific and engineering research, development, education and training necessary NOW to create and ensure NEW JOBS IN THE FUTURE!” This new activity would “capture the nation’s imagination,” changing the image of Ohio from an aging, industrial power of the past to an agile, vibrant economy of the future. Specifically, Nance and Wilson proposed the formation of the Ohio Research and Development Commission. Similar to Kettering’s proposed “Science Foundation” of the 1940s,

⁴⁴ *ibid*, p. 1.

⁴⁵ *ibid*, “Introduction.”

the Commission would finance or aid in financing the construction of R and D facilities, attract scientists to live and work in Ohio, apply for federal funds related to R and D, and fund graduate education. Nance and Wilson offered that 100 million should be spent on these programs. Money would come not from increased income taxes. Rather, bonds sales would finance the project. These bonds would be repaid from the taxes on liquor and cigarette sales, amounting to a regressive tax.⁴⁶

The task of reforming Ohio's aging political economy was now in Rhodes' hands. In the past, Ohioans had created sophisticated "manufacturing know-how," but new kinds of technology were "impinging on Ohio's economic health." The state was rusting and Rhodes knew it.⁴⁷ Nearly twenty years had passed since the "Cyclotron Committee" and the "Science Committee" had favored comparable changes. The proposals had failed in the 1940s when a relatively prosperous economy obviated the immediate need for reforms and when political leaders steadfastly opposed any additions to the responsibilities of the state. As Ohio's economy weakened, business and educational leaders sought remedies. Key politicians, Frank Lausche in particular, called for action. The people of Ohio too seemed to support action and change, their overwhelming vote for the energetic Rhodes a vote for some kind of action, however ill-defined.

In Rhodes, Ohio citizens had elected a skillful politician unwed to past philosophies, a politician capable and willing to alter both the goals of

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, "introduction and pp. 12-14.

⁴⁷ Tom Dudgeon, then an assistant to James Nance and later a political aide to Rhodes, to George Wilson, 5/24/1963, box 1, folder 10, ORDF.

government and its administrative structure. The Nance-Wilson report required that Rhodes and his fellow Republicans redefine the role of the state government and adapt the capacities of the state to perform those new responsibilities. This process played to Rhodes' strength: co-opt existing ideas and make them work in a political context. Building on the momentum that Lausche triggered, the Governor-elect made the Nance-Wilson report the priority of his budding administration.

When Governor Rhodes spoke about economic development he spoke with an uncommon passion. Even the most mundane problems of every day life he related back to jobs, and jobs to technological advancement. In the late 1960s, he had hoped to build "a research and development center for transportation that'll be the largest in the world." His goal was to create highways that were better engineered, more efficiently designed, and more quickly built than before. These new highways would eliminate bottlenecks around urban areas. Now, "the reason we're emphasizing and placing all of the endeavor and energy into bottlenecks is that we believe the number one problem happens to be jobs. And we think bottlenecks drive industry out of communities. We think bottlenecks create slums, creates ghettos, unemployment, joblessness, and all the misery that goes within the inner-city." He put quite a burden on bottlenecks, but defended himself. "Let me say, in behalf of myself, I'm a little provocative in this ... [I'm] a little revolutionary once in awhile."⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Transcript, Interstate Coordinators Conference and Toledo Area Regional Comprehensive transportation and Land Use Study Meeting, 4/18/1968, pp. 3, 33, 50. Box 6, folder 13, MSS 353, James A. Rhodes Papers, Ohio Historical Society (hereafter JAR).

Rhodes was right -- not about the bottlenecks but about his revolutionary agenda that was revolutionary only "once in awhile." He was not revolutionary because he accepted how Ohio businessmen thought about government contracts and technology. Rhodes and other politicians might have dreamed about getting their fair share of federal R and D contracts, but business executives quickly pushed the Ohio Research and Development Foundation and Rhodes' own Department of Development to consider the traditional Midwestern view that technological change is about creating cheaper, more efficient ways of building consumer products.

Nance argued that "Ohio's short end of the rope in obtaining research and development contracts compared to some East and West coast states could be a blessing in disguise." Most government contractors did not understand "commercial needs, commercial markets, and commercial customers." State policy should focus on the commercial uses of technology recently created by or in conjunction with a federal program. The state should foster R and D activities, but only "to optimize the probability that government produced technology will be utilized within Ohio's consumer oriented production network." Robert Chollar, a vice-president at Dayton's National Cash Register, "warned that we should not gear" our purpose to "getting more government business for Ohio industry." A.G. Brandt, a banker, described California's economic growth as "stationary." The once exotic areas of space and electronics were now "firm." Rhodes would make a mistake if he tried to be a "Johnny-come-lately." He should not "fight" in this competitive area that is overdeveloped and overdeveloping." Warren Chase, the

director of the Department of Commerce at Ohio State University, said that while military contract were lucrative “this present situation should not keep reasonable men from losing sight of the fact that over the long term the civilian applications” of R and D will “play the major role.” No one could predict “how long government will continue its gigantic efforts in the R and D field. On the other hand, it is becoming increasingly evident that R and D efforts for civilian application is here to stay.” Consultants advised Midwestern governors that they should emphasize the transfer of major R and D “results to consumer products and services.” That purpose suited the traditional strengths of the Midwestern economy. Much of this talk was spin, a way to put a silver lining on a dark cloud. If politicians had failed to bring home pork and if businessmen had missed the Cold War technology revolution, then everything was still fine. Military contracts were old, unprofitable news.⁴⁹

But a persistent idea informed the spin. Nance said that the economy was no longer “directed toward satisfaction of the basic needs of the consumer, but rather toward catering to the wants and tastes of the consumer.” The “critical national challenge” was not building faster jets, but economic growth and increased employment opportunities “so that the affluence of our nation can be more widely shared by all citizens.” Midwestern businessmen had created the

⁴⁹ Nance, News Release from the ORDF, undated, box 1, folder 22, ORDF; “Annotated Listing of publications and Activities and Plans of the ORDF,” 10/28/1964, p. 3, box 1, folder 1, ORDF; Robert Chollar, “Report on the Presentation of the Ads Hoc Evaluation Group to the Capabilities Study Committee of the ORDF, 10/3/1963, p. 3, box 1, folder 2, ORDF; memo from A.G. Brant to Thomas Dudgeon, 4/19/1964, pp. 3-4, box 1, folder 4, ORDF; Warren Chase, “Research and Development: Key to Ohio’s Future,” undated report, box 55, 256, folder “Chancellor’s Correspondence, 63-80,” Series 2172, Ohio Board of Regents Collection, Ohio Historical Society; Meeting Minutes of the Midwestern Governor’s Conference Steering Committee, 1/31/1964-2/1/1964, p. 7, box 7, folder 1, JAR.

mass production, mass consumption economy. They should now use the government to help create technology that would make that consumer economy more equitable and more profitable.⁵⁰

Rhodes was unrevolutionary in the purpose of his technology program, but his tactics qualified him as a “once and awhile” revolutionary. The early stages of the Rustbelt, federal assistance to other regions, and economic competition between the states pushed Rhodes and his advisors to recreate Ohio’s political economy. Nance said that the “struggle to lure new industries was a ‘new war between the states’ because there are no fewer than 16,000 separate development agents in the nation, representing almost as many separate localities.” Rhodes therefore had to act boldly to make Ohio’s program standout.⁵¹

His plan had five elements. First, Rhodes sought to provide tax incentives and a governmental climate that encouraged profits. There was nothing new there. In fact, the director of the Ohio Chamber of Commerce quickly made research and development a problem of taxes. He claimed Ohio taxed R and D facilities at a higher rate than other sorts of businesses. The tax was admittedly “obscure,” but how could “Ohio be expected to reverse its downward trend in manufacturing employment and investment if it imposes a tax penalty on the very kind of business investment it is encouraging and seeking with every resource at its disposal?” There was the key. Rhodes was revolutionary because he used

⁵⁰ Nance, News Release, 1/19/1965, box 2, folder 5, ORDF.

⁵¹ Nance News Release, 11/20/1963, box 1, folder 22, ORDF.

“every resource at his disposal” and created new resources where none existed.⁵²

The remaining four elements had been suggested before, but Rhodes was the only Ohio politician who made them a priority. Rhodes wanted to create a financing system to facilitate capital investment, build a state bureaucracy to implement programs, emphasize the inherent relationship between education and economic growth, and cultivate R and D to stimulate prosperity. All of these goals required him to revolutionize Ohio’s government.

Rhodes took his first step with the Ohio Development Financing Commission. Its function was to sell bonds and make loans to businesses “unable to finance the proposed project through ordinary financial channels.”⁵³ Rhodes created a state agency to redirect the investment decisions of the private sector. He had taken the oath of office assuming that his development plans were so necessary that any discussion was “purely academic as to whether or not” our plans “are in the American tradition.” Yet several of his Republican colleagues were not persuaded by his grab for power. William Saxbe, Ohio’s Republican Attorney General, contended that “creation of the commission was an unconstitutional delegation of legislative power, that commission loans would be an unconstitutional lending of state credit to private enterprise as well as an unconstitutional spending of public funds for private purposes.” The lawyers for

⁵² Herschel Atkinson, director of the OCC, to JAR, 9/14/1964, box 1, folder 8, ORDF. Rhodes promptly sent Atkinson’s letter to the Tax Commissioner and asked him to study the problem. Rhodes then released the exchanges to the press.

⁵³ William T. Blair, Director of Development, Ohio Chamber of Commerce, memo to Selected trade Associations, Chambers of Commerce, and Industrial Development Executives, “Industrial Development (An analysis of Substitute House Bill 270), 4/29/1963, p. 5, box 1, folder 12, OPC.

the Commission answered that Rhodes' program had a "clear public purpose: providing employment, promoting the welfare of Ohioans, stabilizing the economy," and promoting research. Saxbe retorted that "if direct financial assistance to private enterprise was needed it should be undertaken in response to a vote of the people. The need can never be so great and the time can never be so short that we can afford to suspend legislative and constitutional activities."⁵⁴

Saxbe leveled a stinging rebuke against Rhodes. Even worse for Rhodes, in 1964 the Ohio Supreme Court agreed with Saxbe. Ruling Rhodes' plan unconstitutional, the Court said that he had improperly loaned the state's credit to private corporations. In private deliberations, several justices attacked their fellow Republican. One exclaimed that Rhodes' plan sounded the "death knell to private enterprise." Justice C. William O'Neill, former Republican governor and rising G.O.P. star, concluded that the "state should stay out of private enterprise." Chief Justice Kingsley Taft, part of the extended Taft clan, read widely to find precedents. He marked an Idaho case as especially significant. There the court ruled that "an incidental or indirect benefit to the public cannot transform a private industrial enterprise into a public one, or imbue it with a public purpose." At best, Rhodes was wrong to make economic growth a public purpose. At worst, he was a socialist.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Newspaper clipping, "Dual Roadblocks Paralyze Ohio Development Agency," Canton Repository, 1/14/1964, located in box 3, folder 4, Collison Papers.

⁵⁵ "Series #38466, 2/18/1964, Case Notes -- Gongwer Series, box 35, folder 7, MSS 183, Kingsley Taft Papers, Ohio Historical Society.

Undaunted, Rhodes bypassed the Court, persuading Ohio voters to amend the state constitution. Most newspaper publishers, university presidents, businessmen, union leaders, politicians, and bond lawyers supported Rhodes' cause. A few hold-outs voiced traditional concerns. The Sun, a Springfield newspaper, said that Rhodes wanted to establish "a socialized lending and credit agency to take the place of the state's private, and highly adequate, banking structure." Rhodes was "a pretty amiable fellow," but somehow wrongly "arrived at the idea that bureaucrats in Columbus could handle new business financing better than" the private sector. The Dayton Daily News worried about the "ethics of public money being used to promote private gain." Well run businesses could get loans through normal channels. "Only those denied bank loans would be eager to hitch their prospects to public credit." Nevertheless, in May 1965, Ohioans voted to add section thirteen to Article 8 of the Ohio Constitution. Anyone who had ever heard a Rhodes speech was familiar with the amendment's first words: "to create or preserve jobs." The Ohio Constitution now allowed the state to borrow money, make and guarantee loans, and issue bonds in order to fund economic development projects that specifically related to "industry, commerce, distribution," and, significantly, "research." Rhodes now had the constitutional authority to make the priorities of the private sector the state's proper public purpose."⁵⁶

While Rhodes waited for the court case to be resolved and the amendment to be voted on, he forged ahead in revolutionizing the state

⁵⁶ Newspaper clippings found in box 3,918, Springfield Sun file and Dayton Daily News file, Series 650, Ohio Department of Development Collection, Ohio Historical Society.

government. To provide a skilled work force to staff Ohio's proposed new economy, Rhodes expanded the public university and technical education system. To manage education policy, Rhodes created the Ohio Board of regents, an agency that centralized decision making about budget requests, curriculum standards, and spending priorities. Rhodes also authorized the Regents to coordinate research and development programs with the federal government and the private sector.

Elsewhere in state government, Rhodes transformed the Department of Industrial and Economic Development, the agency Rhodes' Democratic predecessor created to stimulate growth. Renamed the Department of Development (DOD), this agency prepared plans to develop the state's natural resources, cooperated with federal and local governments to coordinate growth, encouraged research and development, and collected economic information to determine where, when, and how businesses could expand. At its peak, the DOD's precursor had forty-two employees. In contrast, less than two years into its existence, Rhodes' DOD had seventy-four employees and a budget of \$1.8 million, a budget three times the size of the previous agency's fund.⁵⁷

To help the state analyze economic information, Rhodes invented the Economic Research Council (ERC), charged with "clearly defining our economic assets and problems," so as to "bring state policy to bear effectively in these areas." Rhodes instructed the ERC to assist state officials "in designing the

⁵⁷ William Russell Coil, "James A. Rhodes and the 1960s Origin of Contemporary Ohio," in Warren Van Tine and Michael Pierce, eds., Builders of Ohio: A Biographical History (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University press, 2003), p. 295.

framework for growth.” A DOD worker concluded that Rhodes had the “organization, the program, and the personnel to do the very necessary job and very involved job of coordinating economic and industrial development in Ohio.” Previous governors lacked either the inclination or the ability to engage in such a sweeping project.⁵⁸

Rhodes also changed Ohio’s place within the federal system. Robert Taft had observed that with the onset of mass society, Americans received their news and entertainment uniformly across the country. Mass culture, which celebrated mass consumption of mass produced goods, challenged the peculiarity of cities and town, and sapped America of its pluralistic variety, a critical element of democracy. The national government affected local governments the same way. A strong state government, Taft concluded, served as a bulwark against mass society, protecting distinctive local ways from homogenizing federal power. Rhodes, however, carved out a niche within the parameters of federally designed programs. In a debate with Michigan’s Republican governor George Romney, Rhodes outlined his philosophy of federalism. Romney complained about the inability of governors to shape federally funded poverty programs, highway projects, and educational measures. Romney also naively suggested that the states quit competing for federal funds. Rhodes scoffed at Romney’s hand wringing. “Any new programs they devise, Rhodes boasted, we’ll take it and master it and get every cent we can out of it. This pattern has been set and there’s no escape.” In the 1940s, Taft had envisioned a strong state government

⁵⁸ Fred Neuenschwander, speech before the Board of ORDF Trustees, 12/14/1964, box 1, folder 1, ORDF.

that could protect distinct local institutions. In the 1960s, Rhodes envisioned a strong state government that could exploit federal largess.⁵⁹

Rhodes swaggered his way through the maze of federal-state relations. The State Technical Services Act (STSA), a 1965 federal law pleased him. Under the STSA, federal officials created a partnership among business government, and higher education in order to disseminate technical information to the private sector. Before doling out matching funds, federal administrators required state policy makers to write a five-year plan in which they described the economic problems of their area, designed solutions, and explained the strategy to execute their plans. In Ohio, these conditions forced officials to inch toward a mixed economy in which government bureaucrats helped set priorities for the private sector. Rhodes was so enthusiastic about the program that hailed the act as one of the most important ever passed by Congress, excited rhetoric he normally reserved for highway appropriations bills. Anxious to expedite activity, Rhodes announced in September 1965 that Ohio had asked for \$500,000. A U.S. Commerce Department spokesman praised Rhodes' eagerness, but said the federal government was not yet ready to accept applications.⁶⁰

Rhodes thrust himself and his state into this whirlwind of revolutionary activity to create security within certain boundaries. He saw unions as partners in that process, but security and unions did have their limits. In May of 1963, as Rhodes was elsewhere designing a massive shift of the state's resources to help

⁵⁹ Coil, "James A. Rhodes and the Origins of Contemporary Ohio," pp. 290-291, 294.

⁶⁰ Rhodes quoted in the Dayton Daily News, 9/23/1965, clipping located in box 7, folder 2, JAR; Coil, "James A. Rhodes and the 1960s Origin of Contemporary Ohio," pp. 294-295.

employers, he weakened the unemployment and workman's compensation programs. The AFL-CIO held a massive rally in Columbus to protest the cuts, but Rhodes and the Republican legislature ignored them. David Kane, the president of the AFL-CIO lobbied Rhodes to veto the pending cuts. Kane reported, "We had a meeting with our good friend Governor Rhodes. After twenty five minutes of his hogwash, and everything, he finally tells us, 'Look, fellows, you have lost an election, suffer the consequences.' As the meeting broke up, he put his hand on Joe Murphy's [Building Service Employees] shoulder and Tom McDonald's [Structural iron Workers, both of whom endorsed Rhodes] and said, 'These two boys I have allegiance to.' After we walked out, they stood back and had their little conference.'"⁶¹

Rhodes took his cue from businessmen who pitched these cuts in terms of economic development. H.G. Schmidt, the president of Cleveland-based North American Coal Corporation, wrote to John McElroy, Rhodes executive assistant, to complain. "I repeat what I told you in your office recently relative to costs of production. It is impossible to create jobs by increasing costs and our present Workmen's Compensation costs in Ohio are very much too high, particularly in coal mining." If the new reform bill passed, "we are almost assured of a new mine which will open, employing over 250 people --but we need this reform measure to do the job." Rhodes turned his back on his own history.⁶²

⁶¹ Warren Van Tine, et al, In the Worker's Interest: A History of the Ohio AFL-CIO, 1958-1998 (Columbus, OH: Center for Labor Research, 1998), pp. 65-67.

⁶² H. G. Schmidt to John McElroy, 5/21/1963, box 2, folder 12, JAR.

Two years after the “reform” bill passed, Rhodes’ aides bragged about their accomplishment. Staff members of the Bureau of Workman’s Compensation celebrated a Wall Street Journal article that noted that Ohio’s average workmen’s compensation cost was lower than the national rate. “This should encourage industry not only to come to Ohio”, one administrator said, “but to remain in Ohio.” Security meant the promise of a job, a union, and any wage that could be bargained for. Even for coal miners, Rhodes did not extend security any farther.⁶³

Rhodes applied his formidable energy, skill, and power to the pursuit of security as long as it fell within economic growth. The Ohio Research and Development Foundation summarized the boundary well: “More Ohio Jobs through Research and Development.” This core philosophy also found expression in the national Republican Party. Under Ray Bliss, the G.O.P. issued a position paper on solutions to poverty. The authors concluded that “the most powerful weapon against poverty is economic growth ... [L]eadership in innovation and the systematic use of science and technology to serve ordinary people is the *sine qua non* in our anti poverty efforts.” But Rhodes and Bliss were simply following the lead of Democrat Lyndon Johnson and his Great Society. As the Columbus Dispatch noted, Rhodes’ social and economic programs stemmed directly from “federal Democratic policy.” Despite that fact, James A. Rhodes has given “the undertaking a distinctly Ohio and Republican kind of success.” Rhodes exploited Great Society policies to circumscribe the

⁶³ Elmer Keller to W.E. Taylor, 7/29/1965, box 4, folder 10, JAR.

possibilities of security, ironic given that he had exploited New Deal policies to introduce security into the Republican Party.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Annual Report, 1963, p. 20, box 1, folder 1, ORDF; "Improving Social Welfare," Task Force on Job Opportunities, draft dated 11/25/1967, box 137, folder 12/11/1967, RCB; Columbus Dispatch, 8/2/1966, located in box 1, folder 11, JAR.

CHAPTER 8

“A BRIGHT THREAD OF RAGE” RAN THROUGH IT:¹

THE DECLINE OF SECURITY, 1970-1974

Novelist John Steinbeck predicted the May 4, 1970 tragedy at Kent State University. Steinbeck wrote in The Winter of Our Discontent that 1960 was a year of transition, a time “when discontent stops being dormant and changes gradually to anger.” The nation and indeed the whole world stirred “with restlessness and uneasiness as discontent moved to anger and anger tried to find an outlet in action, any action so long as it was violent -- Africa, Cuba, South America, Europe, Asia, the Near East, all restless as horses at the barrier.”² Steinbeck might just as well have included Ohio in his list, for Ohioans too “gradually” succumbed to “restlessness and uneasiness,” turning by the end of the decade toward anger and then violence. At the time, Kent State sparked a wave of protest and reaction, yet today Americans rarely recall May 4th, 1970 as anything more than a thing of the past, an event dimly if at all remembered as the inspiration for an old rock song by Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young. Kent State

¹ Rhodes' political aides R. Dean Jauchius and Thomas H. Dudgeon, describing the Ohio electorate in the 1974 gubernatorial campaign. See Jauchius and Dudgeon, Jim Rhodes' Big Win: The Making of an Upset (Columbus, OH: Policom, 1978), p. 12

² John Steinbeck, The Winter of Our Discontent (New York: Viking Press, 1961), pp. 280-281.

was, however, part of Steinbeck's changing America, an America in which anger replaced security as the political keyword.

From 1970-1974, Rhodes adapted his working-class identity to accommodate this change, re-presenting his masculinity in terms of resentment rather than security. In 1974, while Republican candidates at all levels of government lost elections because of Watergate, Rhodes improbably won a third term as Ohio's governor. His skilled and subtle reorientation of his working-class image allowed him to succeed where many other Republicans failed. His success, however, cost him the one issue that was his contribution to the GOP, the one issue he hoped would be his legacy: economic security.

By the 1970s, Rhodes was no longer a leader in the creation of a new Republican Party. As quickly as he adapted in the early seventies, he was still behind other politicians -- especially fellow governors George Wallace of Alabama and Ronald Reagan of California. Where Rhodes stuck to the New Deal paradigm in the 1960s -- the broker state fostering security for the working class -- Wallace and Reagan challenged the working class basis of the Roosevelt revolution. They combined populist appeals with anti-statism, promising to protect the common man not from insecurity but from the depredations of a liberal, effete, controlling, out-of-touch federal bureaucracy.

The sixties began with the lofty aspirations of Camelot and ended with the dismal tragedy at Kent State. In between, two Kennedys and two civil rights leaders (Martin Luther King and Malcolm X) had been assassinated. The civil rights movement had fragmented, splitting between an integrationist, multi-racial,

non-violent agenda and a separatist, black power, confrontational movement. Student protests began as movements for more democracy, justice, and equity but seemed to many Americans to degenerate into long hair, free love, and drug use. Violent crime was on the rise while the “traditional” two parent household was on the decline. Urban riots exposed long simmering racial antagonisms while deindustrialization and white flight sapped cities of economic resources. Feminists began to push for gender equality, but alienated a number of working class women who felt their lives were being derided by middle and upper class women. The War on Poverty overextended itself, some Americans thought, into rewards for indolent people who shirked their responsibility. The Cold War, meanwhile, had gotten bogged down in Vietnam, claiming not just thousands of American lives but the credibility of a president and the average citizen’s trust in American government. Rising inflation began to slowly eat away at the economic gains of the middle and working classes. As historian James T. Patterson noted, they began to use the word “‘squeeze’ to capture their plight.” Demands from below and requirements from above “provoked an often bitter rage that rested in part on unabating class and ethnic identifications.”³

This “bitter rage” sparked a backlash against liberalism, shattering the New Deal coalition. As historian Jonathan Rieder noted, the New Deal partnership of business, government and labor, of working, middle and upper classes could no longer contain “the resentments of so many ordinary

³ James T. Patterson, Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974 (New York: Oxford, 1996), pp. 637-637 (quote on p. 676). See also Allen J. Matusow, The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s (New York: Harper and Row, 1986).

Americans.” While many voters were unwilling to break completely with the Democratic Party, “surging passions” coursed “through the electoral system without the channeling restraint of party attachment.” Into the vacuum stepped new politicians. The leader of the assault, the harbinger of politics to come was Alabama’s governor George Wallace. In his attacks on the welfare state, student radicals, unbathed hippies, and foppish intellectual elites, Wallace capitalized on the changes in American society. These changes seemed to many Americans more like challenges to America’s freedom, its traditions, its work ethic, its very social order. According to historian Dan T. Carter, Wallace pioneered “the politics of rage.”⁴

Though he did not like Wallace, Rhodes tapped into this rage. For example, he treated student disturbances in much the same way that most other governors did. In December of 1969, just six months before Kent State, African American student activists had taken over an administration building at Akron University. Rhodes called their actions “a disgrace” and pledged that Ohioans would not tolerate their behavior. As he would do later at Kent, Rhodes called out the National Guard to help resolve the problem. At Akron he talked from a tough “law and order” script, called out armed troops to make his point, and, unlike later, paid no price. Compromises were made; the students went home; administrators reclaimed their building.

⁴ Jonathan Rieder, “The Rise of the ‘Silent Majority’,” in Steven Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 243-268 (quote on pp. 243-244); Dan T. Carter, The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, The Origins of the New Conservatism, and The Transformation of American Politics (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995).

Ohioans wrote to Rhodes approving of his actions. “Best news on the front page,” wrote one. A second person said, “Go get ‘em tiger! Now you’re talking like my governor.” A third Ohioan claimed that Rhodes had “restored my faith in law in order.” A fourth complimented Rhodes’ “consistent firmness and common sense in dealing with these university fiascos.” That was the only way to deal with law breakers. He hoped Rhodes would become a senator.

Before May 4, 1970, a patterned response encouraged Rhodes’ actions: approval for law and order, approval of the National Guard, and approval of Rhodes becoming a senator. Lonzo Green, a retired Akron minister, best articulated the support that drove Rhodes to continue his tactics. Green thanked Rhodes for his “immediate and forceful dealing with the Black Power demonstration in Akron” and, crucially for Rhodes, “for your forceful, straight-forward T.V. statement.” Green continued, saying that “a great many patriotic citizens, including myself, are pretty sick and tired of the coddling that has been going on in so many places -- coddling of black anarchists by politicians who should seek their unholy votes.” Together they would do “anything to sow dissent and to bring nearer their intended Revolution, Communist inspired.” Green trusted that Rhodes would continue “to lower the boom, including the National Guard if necessary.” He concluded by thanking God “for a Governor of Ohio who is alert to this situation! We need a Senator from Ohio to take such a stand on the National level, and trust that you may be that Senator.”⁵

⁵ Anonymous to James A. Rhodes, 12/15/1969; Edwin L. McCoy to JAR, undated but received in governor’s office 12/12/1969; Jeffrey Crosby to JAR, 12/10/1969; Richard Hedington to JAR, 12/11/1969, Ernest Browning to JAR, 12/9/1969; Mrs. Ed Hoban to JAR, 12/11/1969; Lonzo S.

Prior to May 4, 1970, Rhodes scored many political points for “lowering the boom” on college students, but he used anger primarily to attack the root cause of economic insecurity. This subject was far more personal to him than misbehaving college students, but also less prominent an issue. Few photo-ops could result. He nevertheless spent more energy on economic security, using the issue to explain the true problem of late 1960s American society. If like most politicians he had hoped to exploit college students in order to look tough and win votes, Rhodes tried to stand out from the crowd and establish a national reputation by analyzing why the poor and working class were economically insecure and by offering a policy agenda to resolve this most pressing of problems.

Rhodes therefore saved his most vitriolic comments for an educational system that he believed had failed the most vulnerable people in American society: young, poor, unskilled workers, lacking the ability or desire to attend college and unable to find a well paying job because of deindustrialization. He defended students who were much like he was as a boy, asserting their needs to an educational system he called snobbish, misguided, and purposeless. The stakes were crucial. Without jobs, Ohioans would experience “civil disturbance and civil disobedience.” The only thing these restless and angry young people wanted, Rhodes said, was “an opportunity for a job.” The unemployment

Green to JAR, 12/10/1969. All letters are in MSS 353, James A. Rhodes Papers, box 8, folder 6, Ohio Historical Society (hereafter JAR). Generally these notes of support received form letters in response. The gist of the form letter was that Rhodes intended to “protect state property at all times” and that he had “received a very large number of letters concurring with his stand on handling the situation” at Akron. See, for example, Mrs. Vernon Reid, deputy assistant to the Governor, to Reverend Lonzo Green, 12/12/1969 and Reid to James C. Dodge, 12/26/1969. For letter regarding Kent State problems prior to 1970, see JAR, box 8, folder 9.

problem, in turn, stemmed from the “lack of vocational education training.” He had “always had faith in young people,” Rhodes told the Catholic Education Association. “I believe they need help, and guidance, and training, and encouragement. I know. I needed it as a boy.”⁶

In Rhodes’ education proposals one can understand why John Steinbeck sensed “restlessness and uneasiness,” why he saw “discontent” turning to “anger,” the anger then searching for action, “any action so long as it was violent.” Rhodes outlined the problem and offered his solution in a 1969 publication, Alternative to a Decadent Society. The educational system created “millions of unskilled and untrained graduates and dropouts,” sending them “into a workforce that has no place for them.” Because higher education was not a possibility for most young people, Rhodes argued, high school education must “prepare each youth to graduate with a diploma in one hand and a job in the other.” He then exposed the consequences of failure. “The alternative is clear -- we either provide him with a job or fight him in the streets.”⁷

According to Rhodes, anger consumed the entire country. It “is locked in a fierce struggle with itself, and is hanging on the ropes from the deadly blows of creatures and conditions of its own making.” The urban riots of the sixties, in “Watts, Cleveland, Detroit, and Trenton,” were “society’s cancers,” cancers that

⁶ Rhodes, 1/12/1970 speech to Ohio elected officials, p.2; Rhodes 9/20/1967 speech to the Ohio Municipal League, “Urban Problems and Solutions, p. 3; Rhodes, undated speech before the Catholic Education Association. All speeches found in MSS 353, James A. Rhodes Papers, box 1, folder 1, Ohio Historical Society (hereafter JAR).

⁷ Rhodes, Alternative to a Decadent Society (Indianapolis, IN: Howard W. Sams and Co., Inc. and The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1969), p. 5. See also Rhodes, Vocational Education and Guidance: A System for the Seventies (Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1970).

were “angry with inflamed malignancy.” As a result, “the social dynamite of the closely packed unemployed youth in our major cities had exploded.” The mixed metaphors of cancer and dynamite aside, Rhodes consistently found anger in society that originated in the frustration of both the young rebels and the adults watching in fear.⁸

Security was still central to his vision, but was now buried beneath pages of working class resentment against an educational system designed by and for the middle and upper class. The solution to the nation’s problems in fact rested “in jobs and employment, and the security these provide.” Americans lived “in a productive society; yet the educational system does not concern itself with education for productive work -- educational snobbery keeps it this way.” What kind of schooling did working class people get? “The general college preparatory program which prepares many for nothing -- except unemployment.” Educational opportunity should be open “to *all* youths and adults -- not the chosen few.” The “caste” system of education frowned upon “paycheck education,” the kind of education relevant to the working class, the kind of education that, Rhodes said, would help them “develop self-realization” through a job. “The forward movement of our society is not as dependent on our enjoyment of the arts as it is on the investment of ourselves in that society through our work.” Instead of “paycheck” education, “parents of intellectually able students” and parents “who want their children to enter a profession” had foisted upon the working class an irrelevant program. For them, technical and vocational education was the only

⁸ Rhodes, Alternative to a Decadent Society, p. 9.

way to security. Lack of security led them toward “the destruction of hope and ambition,” which in turn led to “violence and destruction through despair and anger.”⁹

Rhodes thus saw the problem of the late 1960s as not simply pampered youths liberally doing whatever made them happy, impertinently flaunting respectable values, and spitefully rejecting the traditions of their parents. Whatever contempt he held for student radicals -- and he did hold them in contempt -- he was more concerned about working class and poor youths. They were at risk; their anger threatened order and stability; they were the ones for whom Rhodes imagined “an alternative to a decadent society.” He aimed his resentful rhetoric toward high-handed intellectuals and “pontifical” industry leaders who forced these students, the students who reminded him of himself, to learn a classical, arts and humanities-based education. Rhodes believed that he had to “push” technical education on campus administrators, using his control of the state budget to give preference “to this effort over other degree programs, including any further expansion of doctoral degree programs.” He had to force technical and vocational education because “there is evidence that this decision” would be “overruled” by university administrators “who don’t want two year programs.” He was angry too with middle and upper class parents who forced all students to follow the primary and secondary educational curriculum that their privileged children followed. In pushing vocational and technical education,

⁹ ibid, pp. 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15. Emphasis on “all” is original.

Rhodes encountered resistance that he defined as nothing less than the “authoritarian tyranny” of snobbish elites.¹⁰

Rhodes used the same language of working class resentment often heard from George Wallace, but flipped the prevailing political paradigm. The decadent society showed itself less in elite, lazy, long-haired college students than in aimless, unskilled, and economically insecure working class youths. The source of their problem was “educational snobbery” from middle and upper class adults. By disdaining technical education, they endangered the economic security of poor and working class youths and threatened the productivity of society. These adults perpetuated a system of “odd values” that held “that the study of history is more honorable than the study of automechanics.” They organized the school system around “the middle class concept that the only worthy goal in life is college graduation.” Parents sincerely wanted a better life for their children, “but the desires of the young people often become confused with the desires of parents. Graduation from college means status to most adults; too many parents urge college on their youngsters,” even as the parents were “unconscious of their own status-seeking interests.” Betraying his personal struggle with school and with his resolute, forceful mother, Rhodes said that “too many parents use their children as pawns in their game for status seeking.” Too many at risk youngsters were raised “in a mother or female dominated household with little opportunity to observe male role models.” The “decadent society” was fundamentally a

¹⁰ ibid, p. 28; John Millett, chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents, to Bernard F. Phelps, director of Miami University, Hamilton Branch, 1/17/69, JAR, box 8, folder 4; Rhodes, Vocational Education and Guidance, p. 5.

problem of poor and working class males ill-served by the status seeking middle and upper class. Young men from the lower end of the socio-economic scale needed security not status. Finding neither, they had only frustration and anger.¹¹

Rhodes therefore explained the turbulence of the late 1960s differently than the other major politicians of the day. For them, the problem of law and order was fundamentally a break down in traditional middle-class values. Weak political leaders exacerbated the problem because they dithered when decisiveness was necessary. "The leadership gap," as Ronald Reagan called it in 1966, "had permitted the degradation of the once great University of California." Student behavior there was "so contrary to our standards of decent human behavior," Reagan charged, "that I cannot recite them to you from this platform in detail." He then proceeded to do just that, describing a dance party at Berkeley. There were lurid movies, Reagan claimed. "They consisted of color sequences that gave the appearance of different-colored liquid spreading across the screen, followed by shots of men and women, on occasion shots were of the men's and women's nude torsos, and persons twisted and gyrated in provocative and sensual fashion." The students were "seen standing against the walls or lying on the floors and steps in a dazed condition with glazed eyes consistent with" drug use. "Sexual misconduct was blatant. The smell of marijuana was prevalent all over the building." Reagan's charges in this particular speech were either largely exaggerated or entirely baseless, but he had successfully defined

¹¹ Alternative to a Decadent Society, pp. 24, 26-27, 37, 60-61.

the problem. Students at Berkeley were attacking “our standards” and “our” political leaders had failed “us” in a time of moral crisis. Previously seen as an extremist right-winger, Reagan thus successfully redefined himself as the protector of the sensible middle. He articulated, according to historian Matthew Dallek, “the anger that voters felt toward a counterculture that seemed to flout traditional American values of work and economic success.”¹²

According to Wallace and Reagan, hard-working, rules-abiding average people were part of a wide ranging middle class, from blue-collar workers to lawyers and everyone in between. They needed protection from indolent, law-breaking students, welfare recipients, and criminals, and from the permissive politicians and bureaucrats who coddled them. According to Rhodes, poor and working class youths wanted to be hard-working and rules-abiding, but were thwarted by and needed protection from “Caesar on high,” middle and upper class people who would consign poor and working class youths to a life of economic insecurity.¹³ For Wallace and Reagan, the “decadent society” stemmed from the rejection of middle class values; for Rhodes the “decadent society” started with the middle class rejection of working class concerns. Wallace and Reagan built their “alternative” on working class and middle class collaboration against elite liberals who betrayed the sensible, traditional middle; Rhodes planned his “alternative” by asserting distinct working class interests and by finding that the middle and upper classes had betrayed the working class.

¹² Matthew Dallek, The Right Moment: Ronald Reagan’s First Victory and the Decisive Turning Point in American Politics (New York: The Free Press, 2000), especially pp. 188-211, 240-242. Reagan is quoted on pp. 193-194; Dallek on p. 241.

¹³ Rhodes, Alternative to a Decadent Society, p. 23.

Rhodes' "alternative" lost. His explanation of the late sixties, his version of working class politics, his unique way of talking about "us" and "them" never found an audience outside of Ohio. His "alternative" now exists only in the words of his obscure books on vocational education. Meanwhile Wallace, according to historian Dan T. Carter, "was the most influential loser in twentieth-century American politics." And Reagan, Dallek concluded, "did the most to shatter" the "liberal shibboleths" of the New Deal, to change politics "like no one since Franklin Roosevelt."¹⁴ Their explanations of the 1960s live on, animating the Republican Party and putting the Democrats on the defensive.

Why did Rhodes fail to spread his view beyond Ohio? Jack Chester, a lawyer-lobbyist in Columbus and a close political confidant to Rhodes, explained that however well Rhodes understood Ohio, he was lost outside the state.¹⁵ He could never quite pick a winner in a presidential race. In the 1964 Republican convention, Rhodes cut loose Ohio's delegates, allowing them to join the stampede for conservative Barry Goldwater. In return, Rhodes' actions annoyed Ray Bliss, who had been trying to hold the Ohio delegation and leverage its strength. Rhodes also disappointed moderates like his friend Nelson Rockefeller. Then in the fall campaign Rhodes stayed home, distancing himself

¹⁴ Carter, Politics of Rage, p. 468; Dallek, The Right Moment, pp. ix, 242. David Greenberg, in Nixon's Shadow: The History of an Image (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2003), pp. 1-35, argued that Nixon "pioneered the use of populist language and imagery in the service of free-market economics long before the Reagan revolution" and championed the "forgotten man" in 1946, long before Wallace in the 1960s (pp. 7-8). Jonathan Rieder, "The Rise of the Silent Majority," in Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980 (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 242-268, assigned the origins of the new populist conservatives to Senator Joe McCarthy, whose anti-communist speeches and anti-State Department barbs were "laced with seeming class resentment" (p. 246-247).

¹⁵ Jack Chester, interview with author, date. Tape in author's possession.

from a losing candidate. Rhodes had helped Goldwater when his victory at the convention seemed inevitable, but had also avoided Goldwater in the fall when his defeat was imminent. In 1964, Rhodes' manipulations made no one happy. In 1980, Rhodes waited to the last possible minute to endorse Ronald Reagan. When asked by a reporter what had taken so long, Rhodes quipped that "Yesterday was too early and tomorrow was too late." Reagan, standing behind Rhodes at the time, heartily approved of Rhodes' clever line.¹⁶ Yet the point was made. After Rhodes made his central innovation to national politics -- bringing working class security as an issue to the GOP -- he could never quite again lead a national trend.

And, too, the tragedy at Kent State defined his legacy across the nation. He had hoped to describe for Americans the basic problem of the 1960s: economic insecurity. Through May 3, 1970 he had played the "law and order" card as shrewdly as any other politician, but Rhodes had used tough talk as an expedient. He cared and believed more in the power of security. Yet after May 4, the law and order issue marked him in the eyes of Americans, obscuring how he really thought about the nation's problems. Charles Kurfess, the Republican speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives in the late 1960s and early 1970s, said that after Kent State, people outside of Ohio called him, shocked, incredulous, asking, "What's going on in Ohio?" Ohioans meanwhile told Kurfess

¹⁶ Stanley J. Aronoff and Vernal G. Riffe, eds., James Rhodes at Eighty (Columbus, OH: n.p., 1989, p. 49. Note especially the picture of Reagan, the depth of his laughter bending him slightly backward.

that more students should have been killed.¹⁷ After Kent State, Rhodes would go on to win two more terms as governor, but whatever hope he had of national power, whatever hope he had of explaining economic security to America, ended on May 4, 1970.

In the spring of 1970, Rhodes was locked in a fierce primary fight to win the nomination for an open United States Senate seat. His opponent was Robert Taft, Jr., the son of Mr. Republican, the son of the man whose vision of the Republican Party Rhodes had demolished. This primary fight was Rhodes' only truly competitive primary in his long career. He exploited the student protests, using them as photo-ops to look tough. He had successfully done so in the recent past, so he would continue that tactic. He flew to Kent on May 3, two days before the Republican primary, and delivered what seems today as an intemperate speech. Then, however, his words were nothing special, nothing that he had not said before, nothing that Reagan had not said of Berkeley students, Wallace of Ivy Leaguers, or Nixon of any long-haired "enemy." Flanked by law enforcement officials, Rhodes announced that the destruction of the ROTC building the day before was "the most vicious form of campus-oriented violence yet perpetrated by dissident groups and their allies in the state of Ohio." Recent similar events at other Ohio campuses had convinced him that:

We have the same groups going from one campus to the other and they use the universities state supported by the state of Ohio as a sanctuary. And in this, they make definite plans of burning, destroying, and throwing rocks at police and at the National Guard and at the Highway Patrol.

¹⁷ Charles Kurfess, interview with author, date. Tape in possession of author.

[These rioters were] worse than the brownshirts and the communist element, and also the nightriders and the vigilantes. They are the worst type of people we harbor in America. And I want to say this -- ... It is over with in the state of Ohio.

In a now chilling statement, Rhodes promised to “eradicate the problem.”¹⁸

The difference between every other time and Kent State, between every other politician and Rhodes, is unexplainable. As in Akron, Rhodes flew into Kent to make his “forceful, straight-forward T.V. statement.” As in Akron, he then left town as quickly as he arrived. Unaccountably, in the fog of tension and strain, in the haze of discontent and anger, violence erupted. Unaccountably, the National Guard had opened fire on students. On May 4, four students were dead; nine were wounded. The expedient was now tragic.

On May 5, Rhodes lost the Republican primary to Robert Taft, Jr. Both candidates were moderate Republicans, showing that Rhodes’ brand of Republicanism was so successful that it forced even Robert Taft’s son to change. The contest was not, therefore, ideological in nature. The candidates were nevertheless opposites in at least one respect. The race pitted different personalities: Taft’s sober, responsible, intelligent, respectable qualities against Rhodes’ working class, wheeler-dealer, ward-politician character, which Taft often implied was a lack of character. Polls taken over the last week of the

¹⁸ The President’s Commission on Campus Unrest, The Kent State Tragedy: Special Report (Salem, NH: Ayer Company Publishers, Inc., 1970), p. 36.

campaign had Rhodes losing to Taft by seven or eight points. On May 5, however, Rhodes lost the race by only 5, 270 votes.¹⁹

Had Kent State given Rhodes a surge? Had Ohioans liked what they had seen so much that Rhodes was able to close the gap significantly? Or had Rhodes been surging anyway, the old warhorse marshalling support in the waning days of the race? Had Kent State, in other words, thwarted his comeback? The answer is unknowable and most observers ask instead why Rhodes was losing in the first place. They tend to point out that voters willingly accept certain candidates for “lower” offices, but then judge those same politicians to be unqualified for “higher” offices. Voters, these observers conclude, “allowed” Rhodes the “trivial” governor’s office, but found him unfit to be senator. Perhaps these observers are correct, and perhaps too much cynicism informs the observation that voters have a long history of elevating empty suits, hacks, and fools to the Senate and “keeping” capable men in “lower” offices.” Is one governor, the chief executive of an entire state, really less important than one of hundred senators?

The most important thing that Rhodes lost was not a Senate seat, nor even the personal satisfaction of having been deemed “worthy” of elevation. Rhodes instead lost what was most important to him: the issue of economic security. After May 4, 1970, he would be Kent State and nothing else. The “politics of rage” rather than the politics of security would define the rest of his career. Because voters were moving in that direction anyway, Rhodes most

¹⁹ Richard Zimmerman, “Rhodes’ First Eight Years, 1963-1971,” in Alexander Lamis, ed., Ohio Politics (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1994), pp. 80-82.

likely had no choice but to adapt. He had incorporated anger into his analysis of Ohio's educational system and its failure to create security. After 1970, he would develop the anger, but lose the security. The electorate had changed. He had to adapt.

Rhodes began by reaching back into his history, by summoning his father in order to reconnect to the evolving working class voter. In the 1940s, Rhodes had un-artfully called forth his father, creating for him an heroic miner's death to serve as a surrogate for the son's seemingly un-masculine history. In 1971, the son resurrected his father again. This time Rhodes was skilled and subtle, if no less spurious than before.

In 1971, Rhodes for the first time explained his affiliation with the Republican Party. Why, after all, at the height of the Great Depression had he chosen to be a Republican? Why choose the symbol of privilege and wealth over the party of the common man? Rhodes said he had Republican roots because of his working-class background. He claimed that his coal miner father was a "Republican for a cause," a term he explained to his friend Dean Jauchius:

It came from John L. Lewis of the Mine Workers. My father belonged to the United Mine Workers before he was in the managerial side of the coal mine. Lewis was fighting for free school books, and Lewis was a Republican. So my folks followed him. They were Republicans for a cause.²⁰

Rhodes deftly appropriated an important symbol of the 20th century working class: Lewis was its fighting spirit, the protector of labor against capital, of men

²⁰ Rhodes quoted by Dean Jauchius in "Gubernatorial Roles: An Assessment By Five Ohio Governors" (unpublished dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1971), p. 47.

who worked for a living against men who did not. If we take the story at face value, then Rhodes was a Republican because working class men -- his father and Lewis -- brought masculinity and humanity to the refined and austere party of big business. They worked hard to provide for others. If they were Republicans, then how could Rhodes not honor their legacy? Rhodes saw himself as bringing that same masculinity and humanity into the party of Robert Taft.

As with many Rhodes stories, the Lewis recollection contains bits of truth, misdirection, and haze. At this point in my research, I cannot prove or disprove that the elder Rhodes was either a Republican or a member of the United Mine Workers. The story, however, is not really about the elder Rhodes. Lewis is the key. To understand the meaning of Lewis in the younger Rhodes' life, we should begin with three questions. Could Rhodes' father have known about Lewis? Would the elder Rhodes have been inspired by Lewis? Was Lewis a Republican?

Could Rhodes' father have known about Lewis? The elder Rhodes and Lewis might have crossed paths between 1912 and 1918. In 1911, Lewis lived in the west-central Illinois town of Panama, was a miner running a local affiliate of the United Mine Workers, and was trying to rise in the union bureaucracy. He successfully attached himself to more powerful men in the American Federation of Labor, with which the UMW was affiliated at the time. In October of 1911, he earned a job as an organizer and special agent of the AFL and was sent to New Mexico to help pass a pro-labor state constitution. In 1911, the elder Rhodes

was most likely in Jasonville, Indiana and would have had no reason to have heard about Lewis.²¹

Lewis' organizing job forced him to spend most of his time on the road. In 1912 he worked in the industrial Midwest, the deep South, and the Southwest. When in Indiana that year, he was usually in Indianapolis, meeting at the headquarters of the UMW. In 1915, he traveled Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia. By 1917, when he left the AFL job, Lewis had spent most of his time in non-union or partially unionized places. Southwestern Indiana coal mines, where the elder Rhodes worked, were heavily unionized, thus seemingly decreasing the likelihood that the elder Rhodes would have had much of an opportunity to learn about Lewis.²²

Yet Lewis was an ambitious union politician and he always tended his coal miner base. Though working for the AFL in this period, Lewis, according to his biographers, "regularly circulated among the miners of Illinois and Indiana." In 1916, Lewis ran for his first union elective position. He wanted to be a UMW delegate to the AFL convention. He lost, but earned almost 49,000 votes from rank and file miners, not nearly enough to beat the two leading vote-getters who polled over 100,000 votes each but a decent showing that demonstrated that Lewis had built name identification among the rank and file. In 1917, Lewis became the statistician for the UMW, a patronage job that marked his formal entry into the UMW hierarchy. Lewis again traveled extensively, but mainly as a

²¹ Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine, John L. Lewis: A Biography (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986 [abridged edition]), pp. 18-23.

²² ibid, pp. 23-25.

behind the scenes negotiator rather than as a public speaker. His travels took him from Springfield, Illinois (his new home), to Indianapolis, Indiana, New York City, and Washington D.C. His contact with rank and file coal miners came from his position as business manager of the UMW's Journal, which he added to his responsibilities in the summer of 1917. He was effectively the editor of the Journal, able to publicize the accomplishments of his patrons and make his own name familiar to readers.

Lewis therefore owed his union positions to the patronage of better known men rather than his own widespread base. In October of 1917, Lewis was appointed acting vice-president of the UMW, a remarkable feat, Lewis' biographers noted, "for without once winning election to an international union office, Lewis had become the UMW's second ranking official." In the spring of 1919, he became acting president, again without having won an election.²³ Lewis achieved his most prominent union position only after Rhodes' father died. Had he closely followed union politics, intently read the Journal after the summer of 1917, or fortuitously caught Lewis speaking as he whizzed about the coal mining circuit, the elder Rhodes might have known Lewis' name.

If Rhodes Sr. knew of Lewis, then why would he have been inspired by him? Governor Rhodes told Jauchius that Lewis "was fighting for free school books." Since the elder Rhodes served on the school board in Jasonville, this part of the story fits with what we do know about him. A school board member and parent might well advocate free books, but we do not know for certain if

²³ ibid, pp. 26-34. Dubofsky and Van Tine quoted on pp. 26 and 31-32.

Rhodes' father or if even Lewis did so. The important point is that Governor Rhodes said the free books were a "cause." As laudable as the principle is, how inspiring would the free book cause be? Would Lewis, as he traveled about from mining town to mining town preach sermons about free books?

He might have mentioned free books as part of a larger cause. Between 1911 and 1918, Lewis mastered two kinds of speaking styles. One, fact-based, bureaucratic, realistic, and cautious, he reserved for negotiations with businessmen, politicians, and other labor bureaucrats. A second, emotional, eloquent, aggressive, and caustic, he reserved for public occasions, relying heavily on a few selected Biblical and Shakespearean quotes to impress listeners. This second style could have inspired the elder Rhodes, but for a "cause" most likely larger than free books. Lewis not only mastered two kinds of speech, but the language of class conflict as well. When he needed to, Lewis could taint a rival union leader with the sin of class collaboration, of selling out the rank and file. If the elder Rhodes knew of Lewis, then he most likely knew of this Lewis, the one who divided the world into worker and non-worker, the oppressed and the oppressor, the virtuous and the sinner. Lewis would have pitched any "cause" to the rank and file in terms of militant working class interests.²⁴

If the elder Rhodes knew of Lewis and if he found him inspiring, then not surprisingly the elder Rhodes would have followed Lewis politically. So was Lewis a Republican? Here Governor Rhodes' story begins to fall apart, but in a

²⁴ ibid, pp. 27, 33-34, 43, 50, 167-168, 183-184.

way that allows us to understand why Rhodes, so late in his career, first appropriated Lewis as a symbol. From 1912 to 1919, Lewis was a committed Wilsonian Democrat. His first union job organizing workers in New Mexico had gone so well that Samuel Gompers, the president of the AFL, assigned him to continue organizing workers in the Southwest in support of Wilson's 1912 presidential campaign. After Wilson's victory, Lewis continued to do political tasks at the behest of Gompers, including the evaluation of federal judicial appointees when Wilson sought labor's recommendation.²⁵ So if the elder Rhodes followed Lewis politically, then Rhodes would have been a Democrat. This party affiliation makes more sense for the elder Rhodes given that the Democratic mayor of Jasonville apparently gave Rhodes his seat on the school board.

Yet, there are too many "ifs" and "mights" to take Governor Rhodes' recollection at face value. Rhodes' father *might* have heard of Lewis and *might* have been inspired by him, but *probably* for his passionate if often platitudinous class rhetoric rather than his advocacy of free books. Most importantly, the elder Rhodes could have known only the Democratic Lewis. There were, however, other incarnations of Lewis, incarnations the *younger* Rhodes most certainly would have known. These versions of Lewis evolved after Rhodes' father died in 1918 and in response to the changing political needs of Lewis and his union. Likewise, Rhodes recalled these later versions of Lewis for his own political needs.

²⁵ *ibid*, pp. 25, 55.

In the 1920s, Lewis broke with the Democratic Party. The Republican Party was in ascendancy, so Lewis followed the prevailing political winds. In 1924, he endorsed the new president, Republican Calvin Coolidge, explaining simply that “I judge that President Coolidge will be re-elected.” He also forged a working friendship with Herbert Hoover, then Coolidge’s influential Secretary of Commerce but later the President himself. Lewis became, his biographers wrote, “the nation’s most prominent labor Republican,” and, in the eyes of business leaders, “the one American labor leader who grasped the reciprocal relationship between capital and labor and who devoted himself to harmonious labor relations.”²⁶

Governor Rhodes might have recalled this union leader, the one who cooperated rather than fought, the collaborator with capitalists rather than their critic. That view of Lewis would have suited Rhodes well. He was a Republican from the working class who helped businessmen rather than antagonized them. Rhodes, however, was a young boy, teenager, and young adult during the 1920s. He might have followed the comings and goings of Lewis, who first began to receive press coverage in the 1920s; but Rhodes had no special reason to take note of this Lewis. In 1971, Rhodes instead recalled the Lewis of the 1930s and 1940s, the Lewis who hit the height of his national power just as Rhodes began his political career.

This Lewis was utilitarian, a collaborator in the New Deal coalition one moment, its harshest critic the next. He was at all times a politician willing to

²⁶ ibid, pp. 81-85. Lewis quoted on p. 83. Dubofsky and Van Tine quoted on pp. 83 and 85.

discard tradition, to create his own rules rather than play by the rules of others.

In the 1932 presidential election, Lewis publicly endorsed Republican incumbent Herbert Hoover but privately supported Democratic challenger Franklin Delano Roosevelt. After Roosevelt's victory, Lewis became an "ardent New Dealer."²⁷

The Lewis-Roosevelt political relationship helped produce groundbreaking rights for coal miners, rights they had sought and failed to achieve for five decades.

Under the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) passed in 1933, coal miners earned a contract that covered all soft coal mines, thus standardizing wage rates and working conditions. They won the eight hour workday, the five day work week, and the end of company housing and company scrip. Lewis shrewdly played the militancy of the rank-and-file miners as his trump card while he spoke of compromise with politicians and businessmen. They could either deal with the bargaining Lewis or the fighting miners. Their militancy provided Lewis with leverage. He knew, his biographers concluded, that he derived power from "masses of angry workers."²⁸

By 1934 -1935, Lewis calculated that he needed to channel that anger into politics, for only through votes could he influence politicians. Because labor's economic future depended on its political future, and because most workers were unskilled and unorganized, he realized labor's true political power lay in the masses of unskilled, unorganized workers. Organizing them meant attacking the tradition and rules laden AFL, the union that had first given him a comfortable salary and national political power. At the 1935 AFL convention

²⁷ ibid, p. 260.

²⁸ ibid, pp. 131-150. Dubofsky and Van Tine quoted on pp. 139-140.

Lewis gambled. Knowing that he would most likely lose, he challenged the Old Guard AFL leadership. They rejected Lewis' plan to organize mass production workers and even refused to allow rank and file AFL delegates to speak about the plan. Lewis complained about the dictatorial, unresponsive methods of the leadership. William Hutcheson, the leader of the carpenters union objected to Lewis' characterizations. The two argued. Hutcheson called Lewis a "bastard." Lewis sprung out of his chair, lunged toward Hutcheson, and punched him in the face. Other men separated the two, leading a bloody Hutcheson out of the meeting while Lewis calmly readjusted his tie and relit his cigar. The moment, Lewis' biographers concluded, was the result of "cool calculation, not passion; purposeful tactics, not anger." Yet Lewis' theatrical anger played well with the working class. As one Kansas carpenter wrote, "Congratulations, sock him again." Lewis' punch was a symbolic break with the established order.²⁹

Lewis used that symbolic break to create what ultimately became the Congress of Industrial Organization. From 1935 to 1940, Lewis scored several of his greatest union advances as well as his best publicity. Lewis' punch and subsequent resignation from the AFL was national news. In 1937, the CIO successfully organized auto and steel workers, two smashing victories against the largest and most anti-union industries in the world. Millions of Americans listened to his radio addresses. Politicians sought his support. Workers saw him as a hero, a rebel against unresponsive, unrepresentative politicians, industry executives, and union bureaucrats. Ever the politician, Lewis still supported

²⁹ ibid, pp. 151-161. Both the carpenter and Dubofsky and Van Tine are quoted on p. 161.

Roosevelt in this period, but explored the possibility of creating a labor-farm alliance to keep his options open and better leverage the political power he gained from mass production workers. In the second half of the 1930s, Lewis became the face of labor, its symbol of emerging political power. Lewis expertly cultivated that symbol, creating, according to Dubofsky and Van Tine, “an image of size, strength, and anger.”³⁰

This Lewis would have caught the attention of a young, aspiring politician. Professionally and personally, the younger Rhodes rather than the elder Rhodes found Lewis compelling. Even before he had power, Rhodes Jr. knew where to look for it, to see who had it and why, to analyze who would lose it tomorrow and who would gain it the following day. Big, strong, and angry, labor was emerging just as Rhodes was. He would have to adapt. Personally, both Lewis and Rhodes descended from Welsh ancestry and grew up in a Midwestern coal mining family. Both Lewis and Rhodes sought to escape the hard, unpredictable reality of working class life. Each man experienced the deaths of infant siblings and the geographical mobility common to working class families. Lewis and Rhodes escaped that life through politics, the one as a union bureaucrat, the other as an elected official, the both often revising and exploiting their backgrounds for personal political gain. In the late 1930s and 1940s, Rhodes could not avoid Lewis. His name, his face, his voice was in the newspaper or on the radio constantly.

³⁰ ibid, pp. 164-207. Dubofsky and Van Tine quoted on p. 207.

The 1940 presidential election was crucial to Rhodes' view of Lewis. By 1940, Lewis had broken with Roosevelt. In part, Lewis blamed Roosevelt for making unemployment "a chronic fact in American life." But Lewis also feared both American intervention in Europe's problems and Roosevelt's increasingly powerful presidency. Roosevelt seemed to be slowly leading Americans to war and strengthening his imperial presidency. War could only distract American working men from the failures of the New Deal, Lewis said on Labor Day in 1940. War could lead only to the end of American democracy. By late October, most political insiders knew that Lewis would soon publicly denounce Roosevelt and endorse the Republican nominee, Wendell Willkie. Most Americans, however, had no idea whom Lewis would support.

And they cared enough to listen when Lewis spoke. On October 25, some 25-30 million Americans tuned in to all three national radio networks, eager and expectant to hear Lewis' scheduled prime time speech. Lewis spent the first half of his speech denouncing Roosevelt. He craved power and was "disinclined to surrender" it, contrary to the "traditions of the Republic." America wanted "no royal family," especially one that lied about war. Roosevelt claimed to hate war and to support peace even as "his acts do not match his words." Willkie, in contrast, was no "aristocrat. He has the common touch. He was born in the briar and not to the purple. He has worked with his hands, and has known the pangs of hunger." Lewis then called for the CIO and working men to support Willkie. Lewis promised to resign if his followers instead voted for Roosevelt. "You," Lewis dramatically asked the young men in the listening audience, "who may be

about to die in a foreign war, created at the whim of an international meddler, should you salute your Caesar?" To the mothers of these young men, Lewis advised that they "lead the revolt against the candidate who plays at a game that may make cannon fodder of your sons."³¹

We do not know if Rhodes and his mother were among the millions of Americans who listened to Lewis that night. We can nevertheless speculate that in 1971 Rhodes recalled this Lewis, the Lewis who had so clearly and forcefully broken with the Democratic Party and urged working men and their families to do the same. Lewis failed to persuade them, for Roosevelt won reelection. The working class especially had voted overwhelmingly for the President. Even Lewis' own coal miners had overwhelmingly supported Roosevelt. One aide to Roosevelt observed that in Ohio coal mines Lewis was hanged in effigy while accompanying placards denounced him as a "Judas, Traitor, Dictator."³² So what might have Rhodes been thinking as he recalled this Lewis, seemingly a Lewis who had shown so poor political judgment? Why celebrate someone unable to move working people politically?

Lewis' decision had lost him considerable support within the labor movement, but he gambled, as Dubofsky and Van Tine, wrote, "that labor had received all it would from the New Deal, that continued support of Roosevelt would only vitiate labor's political influence and, worse yet, lead the nation into war." During the war, too, Lewis continued his confrontational stance toward Roosevelt and the Democratic Party. With his miner base agitating against wage

³¹ *ibid*, pp. 253-258. Lewis quoted on pp. 253-254, 257-258

³² *ibid*, p. 259.

controls designed to check inflation, Lewis led his angry miners on a strike in 1943, violating the “no strike pledge” many union leaders gave to the government to ensure maximum wartime production. Why, Lewis asked, must workers restrain their wages when owners refused to restrain their profits?³³

More significantly for Rhodes, Lewis described working class militancy in 1943 as “the unanimous protest of men tired of serving as guinea pigs for Washington’s campus theorists.”³⁴ Here then has emerged the Lewis that Rhodes recalled in 1971. As Rhodes began his political career, Lewis became the face of labor, a powerful, strong man leading angry workers. He fought for working class men, regularly upsetting the established order if he believed it had failed his men. Whether the target was autocratic and unresponsive leadership of the AFL, the timid and constrained CIO’s junior partnership within the Democratic Party, or even Roosevelt and patriotic duty during World War Two, Lewis was ready to fight. That his fights often secured his power and authority at the expense of the labor movement mattered little, and, in fact, provided a pattern of self-advancement that Rhodes would mimic. Rhodes saw in Lewis a leader of men who kowtowed to no one, someone willing to oppose a president in time of war. He saw in Lewis a man who believed that the needs of working class men could not be met through a regular, consistent, and intertwined relationship with the Democratic Party.

³³ On Lewis during the war, see *ibid*, pp. 303-322. See also Nelson Lichtenstein, Labor’s War at Home: The CIO in World War II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 30-31, 76-78, 157-177. Lewis is the hero of Lichtenstein’s book, the one labor leader willing to question the government and the Democrats, the only person willing to question the passivity of union bureaucrats and assert working class interests.

³⁴ Lewis quoted by Dubofsky and Van Tine, John L. Lewis, p. 321.

This is the Lewis that Rhodes recalled, the Lewis that he attributed to his father, the Lewis that could give guidance to workers in 1970s: break with the party that holds you back, that oppresses you, that alienates you, that treats you like “guinea pigs for Washington’s campus theorists.” Here was Rhodes’ message to workers in the 1970s: if a working class hero like John L. Lewis can break with liberal, elitist Democrats who have failed to serve working class interests, so too can you.

Rhodes’ appropriation of Lewis was deftly opportunistic. Just as Lewis’ shifting political alliances were calculated to move his cause (and coincidentally labor’s) cause forward, Rhodes embraced the GOP in the 1930s in order to press his personal interests rather than party principles and organizational success. Rhodes was a Republican mainly because his mentor Grant Ward was a Republican. Rhodes then adopted New Deal coalitional politics, with security for the working class as the centerpiece, because in part it accorded with his biography but also because he calculated that more votes could be found within the New Deal paradigm rather than within Robert Taft’s traditional conservative Midwestern Republicanism. Rhodes upset the established order of the GOP to achieve his own ends.

Rhodes timed his use of Lewis well. Lewis died in 1969 and two years later Rhodes first mentioned him. Lewis could not complain that Rhodes had distorted the record. As important, union leaders did not have to compete with the cantankerous, obstreperous, and now deceased Lewis. Because he was no longer a powerful, uncontrollable rival, his apotheosis to the labor pantheon was

well underway by the time Rhodes latched onto him. Most importantly, Rhodes needed a new way to appeal to working class voters. The New Deal Democratic coalition was splintering. Security was no longer the compelling political issue that it had been in 1958. Workers were angry and alienated from authority. Dubofsky and Van Tine wrote that “John L. Lewis’s dramatic 1940 retirement as CIO president symbolized his break with the New Deal phenomenon of which he had been an integral part.”³⁵ Likewise, Rhodes’ sudden embrace of John L. Lewis in 1971 signified Rhodes’ break with the New Deal phenomenon of which he had been an integral part. He had forced the Republican Party to recognize the chief concern of working class families: security. By 1971, however, those working class men and women had moved on. So too would Rhodes.

In the 1970s, insecurity still dominated the lives of working people, more so than in the recent past because deindustrialization led to the loss of hundreds of thousands of factory jobs. Yet working class protests in the 1970s more often than not expressed the anxiety and fear of insecurity less in terms of secure consumption and more in terms of alienation and lack of control. Sixties-era attitudes -- empowerment, fulfillment, authenticity -- began to shape working class discourse.

A 1972 strike at the Lordstown, Ohio General Motors plant illustrated the change. To meet the small but growing threat of Japanese economy-sized cars, General Motors began production of the Vega at Lordstown. In 1971, managers introduced a series of reforms designed to increase productivity, including work

³⁵ ibid, p. 281.

speed-ups, absenteeism crack-downs, and technology up-grades. They also stalled union grievances in an excessively bureaucratic process and challenged the informal production arrangements workers had made with foremen. In 1972, workers started a slowdown strike, a public repudiation of what was then one of the most productive plants in the automobile industry. Their strike, according to labor historian James R. Green, was led by a new generation of workers, “not as disciplined by the fear of poverty and insecurity” as their parents, more educated and less easily intimidated by arbitrary authority.” The strike “drew national attention to the issue of alienation.”³⁶

Gary Bryner, the leader of the local Lordstown United Auto Workers, emphasized not the material concerns of insecure workers, but the emotional and philosophical problems of working on the line. As he told Studs Terkel, managers:

use time, stopwatches. They say it takes so many seconds or hundreds of seconds to walk from here to there. We know it takes so many seconds to shoot a screw. We know the gun turns so fast, the screw’s so long, the hole’s so deep. Our argument has always been: That’s mechanical; that’s not human.³⁷

Workers have long been concerned about the dehumanizing and alienating effects of industrial labor. Indeed, in the 1936 film Modern Times Charlie Chaplin presaged Bryner’s complaints. Chaplin, satirizing the typical workday at a

³⁶ James R. Green, The World of the Worker: Labor in Twentieth Century America (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), p. 218-219.

³⁷ Bryner interviewed by Studs Terkel, in his oral history of work and workers, Working: People Talk about What They Do All Day and How They Feel about What They Do (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), pp. 190-191.

factory, has his “Little Tramp” character comically assaulted by owner-controlled technology that force-fed workers so that they could quickly finish lunch and return to work. There the “Little Tramp” did meaningless, repetitive labor. Because the owner constantly sped-up the pace of the line, Chaplin’s character had a nervous break down that culminated with him being literally swallowed up by the industrial machinery.

Bryner, however, perceived something new in how workers responded to these long-standing concerns.

The workers said, ‘We perspire, we sweat, we have hangovers, we have upset stomachs, we have feelings and emotions, and we’re not about to be placed in the category of a machine.’ When you talk about that watch, you talk about a minute. ... We talk about a lifetime. We’re going to do what’s normal and we’re gonna tell you what’s normal. We’ll negotiate from there. We’re not gonna start on a watch-time basis that has no feelings.³⁸

“Feelings,” Bryner asserted, had more to do with the slowdown strike than material concerns. This sentiment, he believed, represented a new kind of masculinity, a new way to measure the manliness of his generation of males.

“Fathers used to show their manliness by being able to work hard and have big, strong muscles and that kind of bullshitting story. The young guy, now, he doesn’t get a kick out of saying how hard he can work. I think his kick would be just the opposite: ‘You said I had to do that much, and I only have to do *that* much. I’m man enough to stand up and fight for what I say I have to do.’ It isn’t being manly to do more than you should. That’s the difference between the son and his dad.”³⁹

³⁸ ibid, p. 191.

³⁹ ibid, p. 189.

Bryner's father was a one time foreman who quit that job to return to the line, mainly because the foreman's quasi-managerial status placed him in the awkward position of pushing people, telling them what to do. He preferred instead simply working hard and earning a living. Security, not striving, defined his goals. He felt, according to his son, "patriotic" about his pursuit of security, which his son then too quickly dismissed as a pursuit of money. Bryner claimed that he was after more than just "the almighty dollar." Being treated well, having a say about "what I do, how I do it"-- these things were worth a strike. Easing his initial criticism of his father, the younger Bryner allowed that the difference "might be that the dollar's here now. It wasn't in my father's young days." The son nevertheless believed that feeling "good" at work was now important. He felt good when he could concentrate on the "social aspects of his job," and fight for someone else's dignity.⁴⁰

Thus Bryner defined his masculinity as expressing himself, seeking contentment, and fighting unresponsive, oppressive bureaucracies. He said that the young worker had only one goal in mind: to control the pace of work. "He had to have some time," to read a book or newspaper, to step away for a drink of water, or best of all according to Bryner, to talk with the person next in line. Even if a loose screw went by, or a part did not get installed, "somebody'll catch it, somebody'll repair it, hopefully." Bryner had determined that life was better, more fulfilling "to say what he had on his mind." The technology "doesn't stand

⁴⁰ ibid, pp. 189-190.

there and talk, doesn't argue, doesn't think. With us it becomes a human thing. It's the most enjoyable part of my job, that moment. I love it." For the sons, masculinity was now asserting these qualities, and in the process "being able to stand up to the giant." For their fathers, masculinity "was in working hard." For all of the technology GM had put into Lordstown plant, managers could not have accounted for the generational redefinition of masculinity. "We've been telling them since we've been here," Bryner said. "We have a say in how hard we're going to work. They didn't believe us. Young people didn't vocalize themselves before. We're putting human[s] before property value and profits."⁴¹ Liberal student activist Tom Hayden could not have said it better.

Masculinity was no longer about security but about emotion. This new theme shaped the lives of working class people not just in Lordstown, Ohio but the rest of the nation as well. Investigators for the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare concluded that the Lordstown strike "portend[ed] something more fundamental than the desire for more money. Allegiance to extremist political movements may mean something other than hatred of those of another color." The rise of alienation and anger was in fact part of the evolving politics of the consumer culture. Where security had once been the foundation of working class politics in the consumer culture, now personal empowerment and fulfillment began to dominate. A 1970 opinion survey of high school students found a significant decrease from 1960 in the number of students who sought security from their jobs and a marked increase in the expectation of "freedom to

⁴¹ ibid, p. 192-193.

make my own decisions” and the desire to do work “that seems important to me.” Young workers, moreover, placed “more importance on the value of interesting work and their ability to grow on the job than do their elders. They also place less importance than do older workers on such extrinsic factors as security ...” Finally, younger workers were challenging all authority. “Young blue collar workers,” for example, “who have grown up in an environment in which equality is called for in all institutions, are demanding the same rights and expressing the same values as university graduates.”⁴²

At stake for many working class people was control. In 1969 journalist Peter Shrag described their concerns:

“Somewhere in his gut the man in those communities knows that mobility and choice in this society are limited. He cannot imagine any major change for the better; but he can imagine change for the worse. And yet he is the one who has been asked to carry the burden of social reform, to integrate his schools and his neighborhood, has been asked by the comfortable people to pay the social debts due to the poor and the black. In Boston, in San Francisco, in Chicago (not to mention Newark or Oakland) he has been telling reformers to go to hell.”⁴³

Tom Wolfe caught that same sense of anger and control, but found that some working men had discovered a way out. Wolfe observed that intellectuals had always wished to reform the allegedly alienated common man. Intellectuals

⁴² U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Work in America (Washington D.C.: NTIS, 1972), pp. 31, 40, 47.

⁴³ Peter Schrag, “The Forgotten American,” Harper’s Magazine, Vol. 239 (August 1969), 30. See also J. Anthony Lukas, Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families (New York: Knopf, 1985). Lukas suggested that race was not the only factor shaping the busing crisis of the late 1960s and 1970s. Class remained a powerful force, especially in that it determined who would “carry the burden of reform.” See also Alan Brinkley’s perceptive review of Lukas in Jean Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., A Companion to Post-1945 America (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 2002), pp. 521-524.

desired to turn working class men into aesthetes, to improve their minds but not their wallets. Yet, as Wolfe wrote, the thirty year economic boom gave that target of reform independence from the reformers:

But once the dreary little bastards started getting money in the 1940s, they did an astonishing thing – they took their money and ran! They did something only aristocrats (and intellectuals and artists) were supposed to do – they discovered and started doting on Me! They’ve created the greatest age of individualism in American history! All rules are broken! The prophets are out of business! Where the Third Great Awakening will lead – who can presume to say? One only knows that the great religious waves have a momentum of their own. Neither arguments nor policies nor acts of legislature have been any match for them in the past. And this one has the mightiest, holiest roll of all, the beat that goes ...Me...Me...Me...Me...⁴⁴

Shrag’s “forgotten man” told reformers to go to hell; Wolfe’s new “Me Decade” citizen did the same. Yet Shrag’s forgotten man was angry, trapped and resentful where Wolfe’s “Me Decade” citizen was blissful, mobile, and awakened. Both kinds of Americans, however, rejected the authority of intellectual and political elites. Shrag’s group did it with confrontation – Boston bus riots and “hard hats” beating up Vietnam protestors. Wolfe’s group did it with a highly individualistic search for fulfillment, a new kind of spiritualism fueled by the post-WWII unprecedented surge in material wealth. Shrag’s group wanted control to escape not their neighborhood, or their jobs, or their families, not, in short, those things that bound them, but, rather, their lack of autonomy in so many other areas of their lives. Work was a dead end; advanced education was not a

⁴⁴ Tom Wolfe, Mauve Gloves and Madmen, Clutter and Vine (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1976), 167.

realistic option; moving out of the neighborhood was generally not possible, and frowned upon if possible. The one area left they thought they could control was their neighborhood. They met reformers' zeal with a physical, gut-level hatred. Wolfe's group, in contrast, had sought to escape their everyday lives, to relieve themselves of those mundane things that prevented them from fulfilling their desires. Choice for Wolfe's group, therefore, was not a sliver of control in a life otherwise filled by constraint, but, rather, lifestyle options and opportunities to re-imagine the self.

In the 1974 gubernatorial campaign, Rhodes and his political aides played to the anger of working class people and the desire to escape the control of reformers. R. Dean Jauchius and Thomas Dudgeon, two of Rhodes' closest political and longest political associates wrote after the election that "a bright thread of rage was running through most Ohioans." Jauchius and Dudgeon believed that they saw wavering voters out there who had been reliably Democratic. They were "largely marginal or poor, and able to see a growing threat to their economic well-being." The looming threat was from "bureaucrats who want to bus their children, tax their wages to support loafers, and destroy their way of life." Even younger voters would soon learn the truth about the real threat. "The cops, the city, the parents, and the church," these were the symbols of authority that they opposed, the authorities that were "always waiting to hassle them for their life-style, bust them for weed in pocket or pouch, or lecture them on the intrinsic evil in long hair, patched jeans, or bare bellybuttons." In time, however, they would start families, buy homes, and accumulate material

possessions. “Inevitably they discover the truth that bureaucrats are always infinitely more dangerous and persisting than cops.”⁴⁵

The trick, however, was to present Rhodes authentically as possible. Rhodes would have sounded stiff and unnatural had he tried to deliver a speech like Wallace. Rhodes by nature was not an angry man and, unlike his new patron saint John L. Lewis, did not possess the theatrical skill to fake it. How then could Rhodes and his team harness the rage that they believed ran through Ohioans, to underscore that Rhodes’ opponent belonged to “them” and Rhodes to “us?”

They were helped immeasurably by their opponent, the Democratic incumbent John “Jack” Gilligan. Gilligan had not only raised taxes, but had instituted Ohio’s first income tax. And too he had a sharp wit that often backfired on him. Once at the state fair he visited a radio booth that was broadcasting live. The announcer asked where the Governor was headed. “To the sheep shearing,” replied Gilligan. “Gonna sheer a sheep?” “Nope,” said Gilligan. “I shear taxpayers, not sheep.” He also seemed aloof and arrogant, his intellectual approach a strange new world after Rhodes. He was the very essence of the modern liberal. His opponents said he was a tax and spend Democrat. His supporters said he enacted a series of much needed if costly social reforms aimed at improving the quality of life for all Ohioans.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Jauchius and Dudgeon, Jim Rhodes’ Big Win, pp. 12-13.

⁴⁶ On Gilligan see Hugh C. McDiarmid, “The Gilligan Interlude, 1971-1975,” in Lamis, ed., Ohio Politics, pp. 84-100; David Richard Larson, “Ohio’s Fighting Liberal: A Political Biography of John J. Gilligan” (unpublished PhD dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1982).

Rhodes attacked Gilligan's intellectual, cosmopolitan image, slyly connecting that to the negative perception of liberal Democrats as effete, out of touch reformers who knew nothing of the world of working class men. This strategy required Rhodes to once again reach back into his history and reshape the masculine, working class image he had spent several decades learning to master. The new version was about working class resentment rather than security. This Rhodes had Lewis as his patron saint.

Gilligan, the professorial, dapper, witty, Democrat had trouble connecting to his working class and African American base. Rhodes exploited and exacerbated that difficulty. Note the script of one Rhodes ad:

ANNOUNCER:

Jim Rhodes talks about jobs with a *special* feeling. He learned before a child should have to what hard work is all about.

RHODES

My father was a coal miner in Jackson County. And I want to say that when you get out on your belly and dig that coal out, it's a little rough.

VOICE OVER

Jim Rhodes was born in a mining town in the hills of southeastern Ohio. His father died when Jim was only nine. He worked at every job he could find, often three and four jobs at a time, to help support his mother and two sisters, trapping muskrats he sold at forty cents a pelt; selling crawdads twelve for a nickel, delivering papers, working in a print shop. He did a *man's* work, and still found time for school and athletics. There wasn't a sport he didn't play well. At nineteen, he was a *man*, used to earning his own way. With six dollars in his pocket, Jim hitchhiked to Columbus. ... Now Jim

Rhodes is running for Governor. His message is the same as it always has been: *the governor must lead...*⁴⁷

Rhodes talked about the rough, but honest work that his father did while the voice over stressed that Rhodes was a *man* who did *man's* work -- taking care of his family in whatever way necessary, including hitchhiking -- and a *man* who played like a *man* when not at work -- achieving at all sports even with the burden of working like a *man*. The ad subtly exploited an emerging stereotype of liberal politicians: effete, out-of-touch, intellectuals who knew nothing of the world of men's work, who rewarded sluggards who "refused" to know that world, and who taxed citizens who accepted manly responsibility. The ad makers never drew an explicit contrast between Rhodes and Gilligan, but left a clear message: Rhodes was a man; Gilligan was not.

Unlike Rhodes, Gilligan was a World War Two veteran. But that status seemed no longer to make a difference in the definition of masculinity. Rhodes' ad aggressively played to a particular assumption that his political aides claimed was fundamental to working class people. Rhodes' aides asserted that working class people believed that "life consists of making sure you don't get unduly screwed by the system."⁴⁸ That would not happen with Rhodes, his ad implied, because he understood that concern. Gilligan was part of the permissive liberal

⁴⁷ Ad quoted in R. Dean Jauchius and Thomas H. Dudgeon, Jim Rhodes' Big Win!: The Making of an Upset (Columbus, OH: Policom, 1978), p. 113-114. All emphasis on the word *man* and *leadership* is original to the text.

⁴⁸ Jauchius and Dudgeon, Jim Rhodes' Big Win, p. 108. Jauchius and Dudgeon were quoting from Brian Groombridge, Television and the People (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, Inc.), p. 113.

elite who could not possibly understand. Security had disappeared from Rhodes' rhetoric, to be replaced by masculinity, resentment, and anger.

Rhodes' success with blue collar voters was mixed. Officially, most of the state's major unions endorsed and funded Gilligan. Leading the pack for fundraising was the United Auto Workers, but large donations also came from the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, Restaurant Workers, Communications Workers, Ohio Education Association, and steelworkers. Traditional labor support was vital, in other words, but so too were the newer service sector unions. Missing, however, were the Teamsters. Jackie Presser, the leader of the Teamsters, had agreed that they would endorse Gilligan only if he promised not to aid Cesar Chavez's efforts to boycott California agricultural products. Gilligan nevertheless appeared with Chavez at a Dayton rally. Presser called Gilligan's campaign manager and told him that he was going to support Rhodes. "Tell your boss to go fuck himself," Presser bellowed. The money Presser funneled to Rhodes was crucial. It allowed Rhodes to air the ad in the waning days of the campaign. "Jackie opened the door," the campaign manager said later. "That was the beginning of the unraveling of the campaign."⁴⁹

As Jauchius and Dudgeon wrote later, Rhodes and his team targeted the ad blitz where Gilligan was strongest: Cuyahoga county and northeastern Ohio. Rhodes attacked Gilligan in the heart of industrialized Ohio. Jauchius and Dudgeon used the words of a political reporter to summarize Rhodes' strategy. He sought "the Democratic 'little guy' he has won over before -- the workingman

⁴⁹ Lee Leonard, "Rhodes' Second Eight Years, 1975-1983," in Lamis, ed., Ohio Politics, pp. 102-103.

who may be put off by Gilligan's style and is not impressed by his programs."

Gilligan, meanwhile, appealed "to some Republicans and the independents Rhodes badly needs to win. These people include the suburban, better educated voters who may be disenchanted" with Rhodes and interested in Gilligan.⁵⁰

Rhodes won the election by the narrowest of margins: 11, 488 votes. Jauchius and Dudgeon believed that their ads had attracted just enough blue-collar and minority voters or, crucially, had driven down the vote because of the relentless negativity of Rhodes' total ad package. Rhodes tried to "hit every tender spot discernible among the Democrat voters," Jauchius and Dudgeon said. Presser's money helped Rhodes "go for broke to switch those voters if it could be done, or keep them from voting ... if they would not switch." Rhodes' polling showed that Democratic blue collar voters felt obligated to stick with Gilligan because of traditional party identification, yet were more attracted to Rhodes and his issues. Rhodes and his team concluded that "voters subjected to such cross pressure are likely to have less interest in the campaign and are *less likely to vote*. Thus "the strategy with cross-pressured normally Democrat voters was" to maintain the conflicting messages these voters received, which would "keep them from Gilligan by keeping them from voting." If Cuyahoga's vote tally is any guide, then Jauchius and Dudgeon were happy. Turnout in black wards had dropped from 74,594 in 1970 to 46,279 in 1974. Rhodes' vote total in these wards remained roughly the same as the Republican candidate in 1970, meaning that a key Democratic constituency stayed home. Overall, Gilligan's

⁵⁰ Jauchius and Dudgeon, Jim Rhodes' Big Win, p. 109.

plurality in Cuyahoga sharply declined from 201,000 in 1970 to 87,503 in 1974. Rhodes clearly had achieved his goal: reinforcing Gilligan's negative image by using a revised form of his working class masculinity. Security no longer brought workers to the polls. Anger kept them home.⁵¹

Rhodes survived after Kent State, long after many of his gubernatorial colleagues of the 1960s had disappeared. He did so by changing his working class identity to fit the new "politics of rage." The upside was that he continued in power. The downside was that he had to jettison the one innovation he had forced on the party: the politics of working class security. Working class voters had moved on, and so would the Republican Party. As the 1970s and 1980s wore on, Rhodes could only watch as other Republicans eclipsed him, promising to liberate workers from the burdens of security.

⁵¹ ibid, pp. 49-50, 91, 109, 134.

CONCLUSION

JAMES ALLEN RHODES:

TUMOR OR TRANSITION?

James Allen Rhodes was uncomfortable with history. When the state turned his childhood home in Coalton into a tourist attraction, Rhodes dutifully visited the grand opening but promptly criticized the project as a waste of money. When I visited him near the end of his life, he expressed surprise that anyone would want to write a book about him. He suggested that I instead write about William “Brit” Kirwan, who was then the new president of The Ohio State University. Kirwan had made the requisite pilgrimage to visit the elder statesman of Ohio politics. Rhodes was charmed by a story Kirwan told. As a boy growing up in Kentucky, Kirwan had looked to Ohio – with its lights, its cities, its factories, its schools, its highways – and had thought of Ohio as the place of progress. Rhodes, Kirwan said, was at the center of that progress. So why not, Rhodes told me, write a book about someone who looks to the future, to progress. At every opportunity Rhodes turned our conversation away from the past and toward some project he had going, including an air purifier system for homes and a chair that somehow treated Alzheimer’s. Throughout his political career,

Rhodes never used false modesty as a cover for his feelings, so what was behind his unwillingness to have history reckon with him?

For a politician, history means finished. Career over. No more campaigns. No more victories. No more deals. No one needs a politician who is history. To Rhodes, the historian circling overhead meant that he could be admired but not feared, criticized for the past but not a part of the future, honored the morning of his funeral but forgotten that evening when the powerbrokers went back to work. When you are out, Rhodes often said, you are out. History is as out as one could get.

Rhodes was wrong. Ohioans have relegated Rhodes to the dim past, but even after his death he continues to shape Ohio public policy. Rhodes bestowed on policy makers a tricky legacy. Republicans under Rhodes devised an economic security policy that focused not so much on the poor and working class as on institutional partnerships between public and private entities, creating in the process a new level of power in state government. Rhodes hardly ensured security. At the very least, however, his approach authentically accorded with his biography and with then-prevailing theories on poverty, social instability, and economic growth. For the most part, his Republican and Democratic successors have operated within the framework of "Jobs and Progress." Lacking Rhodes' authenticity but using his vocabulary, Ohio politicians deftly espouse their concern for the poor and working classes, but actually spend valuable resources on business.

If the legacy has empowered Rhodes' heirs, they have also experienced constrictive boundaries. Rhodes' legacy has limited their imaginations and stunted their abilities to ask new questions appropriate to a different time. In the early twenty first century, Ohio's leaders have focused on declining industry, lagging technological development, and persistent pockets of poverty and unemployment. They have noisily publicized their solution: foster high tech industry by spending massive community resources and by creating public and private alliances. Ohioans, business, political, and educational leaders say, must purge the Rustbelt mentality and recreate Ohio in the image of Silicon Valley.

Rhodes advocated these programs forty years ago, suggesting not only that he failed to head off the Rustbelt, but that he fought political battles then that led to a consensus today. Ohio's leaders continue to push the Ohio Research and Development Foundation's slogan from the 1960s: "More Ohio Jobs through Research and Development." That consensus remains so strong that Rhodes' heirs possess the power to distribute wealth selectively in the name of state-sponsored economic dynamism, but lack the creativity to rethink social problems. Rhodes seems to some observers as at best a quaint relic of the Rustbelt past. Yet Rhodes was a transition figure, having more in common with the political leaders who came after rather than before him.

If he was a transition figure in terms of wielding power and building state capacity, Rhodes was a tumor to the traditions of the Republican Party. Through security, Rhodes changed the Republican Party, killing off the nineteenth-century Midwestern Republican tradition that Robert Taft had extended well into the

twentieth century. According to that tradition, workers in industrial capitalism found dignity through work and freedom through opportunity. Rhodes, following his working-class roots, found dignity in consumption and freedom in security. To achieve security, Rhodes adapted to the Republican Party what historian David Montgomery called “the New Deal formula: state subsidization of economic growth, the encouragement of legally regulated collective bargaining, and the marriage of the union movement to the Democratic Party.”¹ Rhodes energetically revolutionized the state government to accomplish the first; made the second both a basic tenet of and outer limit in the quest for security; and seduced workers just enough to make the third an unhappy marriage. In his pursuit of security, Rhodes eliminated from the Grand Old Party Robert Taft's dour if prophetic criticism of a homogeneous, materialistic modern America. Ohioans readily embraced Rhodes' philosophy because, increasingly over the twentieth century, Americans have defined their own progress, and indeed their own freedom, in terms of their ability to consume material goods. Rhodes was a tumor, his impressive political success helping to silence traditional views within the party.

And yet even Rhodes “the tumor” leads back to Rhodes “the transition figure.” As historian Lawrence Glickman argued, working class people were central to the making of the American consumer society. Their push to find dignity in consumption and freedom in security became a central part of the

¹ David Montgomery, Worker's Control in America (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 161.

union movement, the New Deal, and the post World War Two political economy.² Rhodes combined his own working class experience and the New Deal Revolution to adapt the Republican Party to the consumer society. Even as he killed off the producer ethic – the basis for nineteenth-century Republicanism -- he provided a transition for Republicans who came after him. That Republicans have since moved away from security represents not a rejection of Rhodes' innovation but its evolution. Rhodes' populism of security gave way to George Wallace's populism of control. For President George W. Bush, control has evolved into privatization as the foundation of American freedom. Risk is the key word now, not security.

Rhodes was significant because in the 1960s he offered a vision of a new Republican Party, a vision that differed from the nascent Southern and Western variations that ultimately won out. If one studies the Southern origins of the New Right, one concludes that racism was central.³ If one studies the Western origins, middle class, suburban parents become the key. The New Right was not a product of racist extremists, nor kooky, paranoid anti-communists, but of mainstream, educated, prosperous people who believed, because of their own experiences, that a leviathan liberal state was unnecessary for individuals to

² Lawrence Glickman, A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of Consumer Society (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

³ See especially Dan T. Carter, The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995) and Carter, From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963-1994 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996). See also Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1991).

achieve the American dream.⁴ If one examines Rhodes and the industrial Midwest, however, the origins of the new Republican Party lie in the working class pursuit of security, the working class role in shaping a consumer society, and the evolution of consumer culture politics.

Being relegated to history did not mean that Rhodes' career was necessarily over. In this first full length treatment of Rhodes I have tried to place Rhodes at the center of important, lasting changes in American politics. His cajoling, his wheeling, his dealing, his bending the rules to suit his own goals, his obfuscation of his past, his direct and honest assessment of other people, his gut-level understanding of politics, his working-class roots, his constant motion, capacious energy, and cunning mind, all of these different characteristics led Rhodes to challenge Old Guard Republicanism in its bastion – Ohio. His battles, lost and won, tell us how the Republican Party changed in the aftermath of the New Deal.

⁴ Lisa McGirr. Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

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