An Unlikely Victory

The Forgotten and Remarkable Story of How the Lincoln-Roosevelt League Thwarted the Political Influence of the Southern Pacific Railroad and Ushered in the Progressive Era in California

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History Thesis
Spring 2010
Introduction

Immediately following his inauguration on January 23, 1911, newly elected Governor of California Hiram W. Johnson fired every single official of the executive branch suspected of having ties to special interests. While this simple act constituted the largest turnover of administrators in the state’s history, it should not have come as a surprise from a candidate whose campaign slogan had been “Kick the Southern Pacific Out of Politics.” Examined in its historical context, however, the shocking nature of Johnson’s first act as governor becomes clear. At the time of Johnson’s election, California had for three decades essentially been governed by William F. Herrin of the Southern Pacific Railroad, his politicians and his lobbyists, a fact that was both evident and openly acknowledged. Johnson, therefore, was sending a message that at last the railroad’s dominance was coming to an end, and that the government of the state would be returned to the people of California. Johnson’s election was the culmination of a ground-breaking reform movement that came about so suddenly and triumphed so resoundingly that it brought about the revolutionary reign of progressivism in California. That reform movement went by the name of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League.

For years, attempts had been made to break the control of the railroad corporation and restore power to the people, but time and again they were squashed under the immeasurable power of the Southern Pacific Political Bureau. Hiram Johnson’s election proved that a transformation had taken place: an organization had finally succeeded in breaking the railroad’s stronghold. Johnson had been the candidate for the Republican Party, for which he was selected by a new reform movement known as the League of the Lincoln-Roosevelt Clubs. This organization started out as an idea shared by two newspaper men, Edward A. Dickson of Los Angeles and Chester H. Rowell of Fresno, who met while covering the California legislative
session in Sacramento. The Lincoln-Roosevelt League was to be a statewide movement with a clear goal: to eliminate the domination of the Republican Party of California by the Southern Pacific Company, and restore power to the people via independent elected officials that would pursue the best interest of the state. Its beginning was no more promising than any number of failed reform movements that preceded it. However, within three years, the Lincoln-Roosevelt League succeeded in putting its candidate, Hiram W. Johnson, into the state capital, along with legislators, mayors, and municipal officers at every level of government. This turnover of power constituted the commencement of what would be more than a decade-long era of progressivism in California, forever changing the face of state politics. The Southern Pacific Political Bureau, which had been the dominant power in California government, had become completely impotent. How was this accomplished so rapidly? Why did the Lincoln-Roosevelt League succeed so thoroughly when so many of its predecessors had failed?

The success of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League was the result of perfect timing, organizational pragmatism, political prudence, and a commitment to democratic principles. The League was formed in a historical moment particularly apt to be receptive to its message – the rule by the Southern Pacific had never been more brazen; meanwhile, President Theodore Roosevelt’s national reform movement had been spreading and the San Francisco graft trials seemed at last to awaken the people of California to the necessity of reform. As a carefully organized statewide phenomenon with a narrow objective, the League had the potential to create a sweeping change that reached to the highest level of state government. Its alignment with and endorsement by newspapers throughout the state was a crucial factor, as the press provided both powerful propagation of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League’s message and portrayed the organization as a formidable threat against the Southern Pacific. By anticipating and responding categorically
to potential pitfalls as well as attacks meant to damage its reputation, the Lincoln-Roosevelt League developed the tenacity to avert being quickly squashed. Selecting the gifted and compelling Hiram Johnson as its candidate for governor facilitated the likelihood of the League prevailing at the top level of state government. These practical measures were combined with the League’s far-sighted and politically prudent alignment with the Republican Party, which allowed the League to take advantage of the party’s well-established reputation and majority constituency. Yet the League also placed the principle of honest government by the people as firmly paramount to party ties, enabling it to maintain a bipartisan appeal that increased its prominence and prestige throughout the state. Through this combination of timing, practical organizational measures, political savvy and ethical primacy, the Lincoln-Roosevelt League succeeded in its objective of eliminating the Southern Pacific Political Bureau from influence in California government.

Historiography

Despite the Lincoln-Roosevelt League’s profound and lasting influence in California politics, it is surprisingly little-known. The fact that the League was so short-lived – lasting only from 1907-1910 – is certainly part of the explanation for its absence from general historical knowledge. A more significant factor is likely the very fact of the League’s success. The Lincoln-Roosevelt League’s explicit goal was to rid California government of control by corporate boss rule; with the election of Governor Johnson in 1910, the League had essentially eliminated the need for its own existence. While little has been written about the League itself, countless works cover the culmination of the League’s efforts: the California progressive era. Although the scholarship of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League in and of itself is limited, it is
worthwhile to acknowledge for a moment the works that have aided in the research for this paper and to identify both their contributions and their shortcomings which this paper strives to fill.

One of the earliest published accounts of the League, and one that stands virtually alone as a work solely devoted to it, is J. Gregg Layne’s “The Lincoln-Roosevelt League: Its Origin and Accomplishments,” originally published in *The Quarterly of the Historical Society of Southern California* (of which the author was president) in September 1943. The author declares in the preface that this twenty-seven page manuscript was written in order that the full story of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League be finally put into print.\(^1\) Drawing on the papers of its founders, Layne presents a brief but useful narrative of the steps that led to the founding of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League, as well as describes its successes, from its earliest local victories to Hiram Johnson’s election in 1910. Layne concludes by commenting that the national impact of the League, as determined by Johnson’s eventual bid for Vice President along with Roosevelt on the new Progressive Party ticket, was immeasurable. The author’s insight as to the initial organization of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League is valuable, as are his few remarks about the crucial role of newspapers in its founding. However, the work as a whole constitutes more of a story augmented by praise rather than a historical analysis, and wants further investigation.

Alice Madeleine Rose offers a thorough picture of the historical context out of which the Lincoln-Roosevelt League emerged in her Stanford University dissertation, *Rise of California Insurgency; Origins of the League of Lincoln-Roosevelt Republican Clubs, 1900-1910*. Rose describes the failed local reform movements which predated the League, and her observations regarding the short-comings of these movements, as well as her detailed account of the 1906 gubernatorial election, have been essential to the research of this paper. However, Rose’s scope

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is limited to the years preceding the formation of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League, which necessarily limits its usefulness for the purposes of this paper.

Arguably the most influential and comprehensive work which incorporates the Lincoln-Roosevelt League is George Mowry’s renowned history *The California Progressives*, which has been significant to the creation of this paper. Mowry offers a complete history of the evolution of California politics prior to the emergence of the League, which includes an analysis of the extent to and the manner in which the corporate bosses were dominant. He elaborates upon Layne’s account of the League’s founding, and further probes the phenomenon of what he terms the “progressive mind,” crafting a widely-recognized profile of the men that changed the fate of California politics. Mowry’s broad work includes the Lincoln-Roosevelt League as an essential component to the establishment of the progressive era in California. The meat of his work, though, is comprised of the transformation of California politics in which the success of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League resulted, ranging from Johnson’s term as governor beginning in 1910 well into the 1920s. *The California Progressives* provides an excellent background to both frame the context out of which the Lincoln-Roosevelt League emerged, as well as to grasp how far its influence reached. However, as Mowry focuses on the profound and far-reaching impact of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League, he leaves unanswered the questions regarding why and how these progressive policies were able to come into fruition.

Historian Spencer Olin’s 1981 work, *California Politics 1846-1920: The Emergence of the Corporate State*, provides a succinct overview of the political progressions in the state spanning nearly a century. A broader-ranged yet much shorter work than Mowry’s, the work shapes the historical environment the Lincoln-Roosevelt League faced yet fails to probe deeply into its workings. Another Olin work, the article, “Hiram Johnson, The Lincoln-Roosevelt
League, and the Election of 1910,” published in *The California Historical Quarterly* in 1966, focuses primarily on Johnson’s 1910 campaign, but provides notable insights concerning the relationship between California Democrats and Republicans at the dawn of the progressive era. His compelling claim that between the reform-minded factions of each party the major differences did not consist of political beliefs but rather of party ties and/or personal ambitions played an instrumental role in the development of this paper.

Olin’s assertion is reiterated in historian William Deverell’s article, “The Neglected Twin: California Democrats and the Progressive Bandwagon,” published in the 1994 anthology, *California Progressivism Revisited*, which Deverell co-edited with fellow historian Tom Sitton. Deverell claims that Democrats played a more prominent role in progressive reform in California than that with which they have been credited. He argues that notwithstanding that the Republican Party has been attributed with the responsibility for California progressivism, reform-minded Republicans and Democrats in fact held alarmingly similar political convictions at the dawn of the progressive era. Deverell’s article, as well as others in *California Progressivism Revisited*, mention the Lincoln-Roosevelt League only in passing, but nevertheless have helped to frame the arguments of this work by emphasizing many of the complex facets of California progressivism.

The final works that warrant mentioning in this historiography concern Hiram Johnson: Richard Coke Lower’s 1993 work *A Bloc of One: The Political Career of Hiram W. Johnson* and Michael A. Weatherston and Hal W. Bochin’s 1995 book *Hiram Johnson: Political Revivalist*. These works have proven useful in clarifying the state of political affairs at the time of the surfacing of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League, as well as in explicating how the legislation implemented by Johnson forever changed the make-up of California government. However, they
do not explicitly encompass the Lincoln-Roosevelt League, which again limits their usefulness for this paper. Progressive California historiography has sufficiently satisfied the subjects of the League’s origin and the long-term transformations in which it resulted. What each of these works lack, however, is an explanation for how and why the Lincoln-Roosevelt League overcame the stranglehold of the Southern Pacific to succeed in putting men like Hiram Johnson in the political position to implement progressive reforms in the first place. This paper will identify and analyze the factors and measures which enabled the Lincoln-Roosevelt League to triumph against the seemingly insurmountable power of the railroad and achieve its objective of restoring California government to the people. First, however, it is important to establish the basic story of the formation of the organization.

**The Founding of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League**

The story of the founding of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League has been well established – it is an inspiring account that exposes how the organization that would go on to accomplish in three years what reform-minded citizens had failed to do over a generation began as just an idea shared between Chester Rowell and Edward Dickson. Rowell and Dickson, each personally dejected by the abysmal disenfranchisement of California voters imposed by the Southern Pacific’s domination of politics, had independently begun reporting the shared observation that the time had come for a widespread, lasting reform prior to launching the League. Dickson’s *Los Angeles Express* appealed to the “liberty loving” rank and file Republicans in 1906: “Will they longer bow their heads to the Southern Pacific yoke?...The time to make a beginning is now.”² Rowell too began to propose that a reform arise in his editorials for the *Fresno Republican*. In a 1907

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article, he wrote, “The time is ripe, and over-ripe, for an organized effort to reform the legislature…It is a fight that only needs to be made to be won.” Rowell and Dickson were prepared to be a part of that struggle, and were eager to be joined with like-minded citizens to challenge the Southern Pacific.

Indeed, soon their resolve would unite under the banner of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League to expel the Southern Pacific Railroad from state politics and change California history. As though by fate, Rowell and Dickson occupied adjoining desks on the press row in the Senate chamber in Sacramento. Upon discovering their shared contempt for the despicable manner in which the legislature were the acting puppets of railroad lobbyists, Rowell and Dickson merged their determination for reform and took the first steps that would lead to the formation of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League. Dickson had initiated a successful local nonpartisan municipal reform movement the previous year in Los Angeles by utilizing the Los Angeles Express, for which he was an associate editor. The two men decided that this Los Angeles group, headed by Dickson and three other instrumental future League members, Russ Avery, Marshall Stimson, and Meyer Lissner, ought to form the core of the statewide movement Rowell and Dickson were now envisioning. Rowell advised Dickson that if he could garner the support of his team in Southern California, Rowell would endeavor to match it with like-minded influential men from the Northern part of the state. Together, Rowell and Dickson’s recruits would constitute a solid group of prominent, like-minded, and committed individuals from across the state – the first essential step to getting their idea off of the ground.

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5 Layne, 8.
6 Mowry, 68.
Dickson and Rowell concluded to bring together the individuals that would partake in the very first meeting of the group that would become the Lincoln-Roosevelt League in Los Angeles in late spring of 1907. Dickson undertook the next several months to bolster support for, and attendance at, this initial meeting, distributing invitational letters which built upon the belief he and Rowell shared that the time was ripe for reform. In a letter to T. C. Hocking, publisher of the *Modesto Herald*, Dickson wrote, “It is hard to get a movement like this actually started. But all it needs is a few determined men; the people will rally to our support when they see that we mean business. I am personally convinced that the time to organize is now.” This recruitment was successful: nearly every man whose support was solicited expressed their intention to attend the initial meeting, or, if their attendance was impossible, to give it their full support.

The men who attended this preliminary meeting, held in Levy’s Café of Los Angeles on May 21, 1907, were prominent Republican professionals, all committed to restoring the government of California to the people. Of the fifteen representatives, seven were editors or publishers of influential newspapers throughout the state. Dickson served as chairman of the meeting, which adopted the provisional name of the Lincoln Republicans. This homage to the former President was likely due to his influential Gettysburg address quote, later adopted into the League’s platform of principles: “That the government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from this earth.” Indeed, this belief in the principle of democracy constituted the core of the League’s ideology and played an instrumental role in its eventual victory. After delivering an overview of the Southern Pacific’s stronghold over the state’s government, Dickson expressed his belief that a bold and organized force within the Republican

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7 Edward A. Dickson to T. C. Hocking, May 6, 1907, in Layne, 9.
8 Layne, 13.
9 Mowry, 70.
Party could succeed in breaking the railroad domination within a space of ten to fifteen years.\textsuperscript{10} Given that the Lincoln-Roosevelt League in fact succeeded such a feat within three years, this early profession of hope, while ambitious at the time, can be judged now as rather modest. On the suggestion of Dr. John Randolph Haynes, a socialist who would go on play a prominent role in California’s progressive movement, the club adopted a set of specific objectives before adjourning their meeting. Paramount of these were the direct legislation tools of initiative, referendum, and recall; additional measures included women’s suffrage and workmen’s compensation.\textsuperscript{11} The delegates concluded to follow up their meeting with a larger one to be held in Oakland, which they determined an ideal location due to the “expressed friendliness” of the city’s Mayor, Frank K. Mott.\textsuperscript{12}

Thus, on August 1, 1907, at Oakland’s Metropole Hotel, some fifty Republican leaders from throughout the state gathered to officially launch what was on the verge of becoming the Lincoln-Roosevelt League. The attendees reaffirmed their allegiance to the policies of President Theodore Roosevelt and crafted a Platform of Principles, recorded by Robert A. Waring, who was selected as the meeting’s secretary. The preamble declared that the “organization and control” of the Republican Party of California had been captured by the Southern Pacific Political Bureau, reaffirmed “fealty to the principles of the Republican Party,” and proclaimed a series of “immediate and essential purposes,” aimed at restoring control of the party to the people.\textsuperscript{13} The first of these, and obviously the over-arching objective of the League, was the “emancipation of the Republican Party from domination of the Political Bureau of the Southern

\textsuperscript{10} Layne, 14.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, 15.
\textsuperscript{13} Robert A. Waring, “Minutes of the temporary and permanent organization of the League of Lincoln-Roosevelt Republican Clubs of California,” August 1, 1907, Waring Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
Pacific Railroad Company and allied interests.”¹⁴ The assembled representatives went on to establish guidelines for the further organization and expansion of the League, as well as to elect a President, Frank R. Devlin of Vallejo, four Vice Presidents and a permanent secretary. Waring’s minutes conclude with reference to an address delivered by a special guest, Francis J. Heney, the highly-reputable attorney of the San Francisco graft trials, who attended both for himself and as a representative of wealthy banker and financier Rudolph Spreckels. Heney stated that he and Spreckels were in full sympathy with the movement, and furthermore suggested that the group incorporate the name of President Roosevelt in its title.¹⁵ Thus, the official title, “League of the Lincoln-Roosevelt Republican Clubs” was adopted, and the meeting adjourned with the first step toward eradicating the Southern Pacific Political Bureau from influence in California politics accomplished (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Frank R. Devlin, President of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League, switches the tracks to prevent the Southern Pacific Train from destroying California. Reprinted from *The San Francisco Call*. September 1, 1907.

¹⁴ Waring, “Minutes.”
¹⁵ Ibid.
An Explanation for the Lincoln-Roosevelt League’s Success

They might not have believed it at the time, but the fifty delegates that met in Oakland on August 1, 1907, had embarked upon a journey that in just three short years would unreservedly triumph in its objective of emasculating the Southern Pacific Political Bureau and restoring political clout to the people of California. How did the Lincoln-Roosevelt League succeed? What factors led to such a fast and resounding victory after decades of Southern Pacific domination? These straightforward questions have multi-faceted answers which indicate the fortuitous timing, astute practicality, political prudence, and principled character of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League’s members and the organization as a whole. The Lincoln-Roosevelt League achieved its objective of eradicating the Southern Pacific Railroad from California politics first by taking advantage of a historical opportunity, when Californians were likely to be receptive to the movement. It also employed pragmatic measures, including prioritizing its status as a statewide movement, exploiting the support of the press, anticipating and avoiding potential hazards and combating criticism, as well as selecting a qualified and likeable candidate to run for the state’s highest office. Equally importantly, the Lincoln-Roosevelt League identified itself strictly as a Republican organization, a politically prudent move which helped establish the League as a concrete political force. Yet the League always prioritized its central democratic principles over party politics, a measure that facilitated the League’s bipartisan appeal and accelerated its influence. These measures together enabled the Lincoln-Roosevelt League to triumph in its struggle for the government of California against the most powerful corporation in the state.

An important factor that fostered the Lincoln-Roosevelt League’s success was that it took advantage of an opportune historical moment. Never before in California history had a governor
been so explicitly tied to the machine, nor the legislature so lamely subservient to it. These open connections initiated statewide disturbance that was augmented by the highly publicized graft trials taking place in San Francisco. The national movement led by President Theodore Roosevelt had established a nationwide push for reform conducive to the League’s emergence. This combination of historical conditions served the purpose of opening the public’s eyes to the prevalence of corruption, which the Lincoln-Roosevelt League was able to utilize in its efforts to mobilize the public. The historical backdrop also sent the message that the corporations in control were not too strong to be challenged, creating an ideal environment for the surfacing of a serious reform movement.

To understand the urgency and resolve which the members of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League brought to their mission, as well as why at last Californians were receptive to reform, it is crucial to take a close look at the Republican Primary Convention of 1906, its aftermath, and the implications it had for the government of the state. This primary, known as the Santa Cruz Convention, resulted in the nomination of James N. Gillett, who by all appearances had been hand selected by the machine in order to maintain their control in state politics. The particularly shameful and transparent manner in which Gillett’s selection transpired not only spurred Dickson and Rowell into action, it also revealed to the public how completely their state government was controlled by the railroad, inciting them to take action and causing their responsiveness to the Lincoln-Roosevelt League’s movement. The primary contest was essentially between three men, two aligned with special interests, and one, incumbent George O. Pardee, more or less independent. Pardee had characteristically been obligated to cut a deal with railroad interests in order to win his nomination for governor under the Republican ticket in 1902. However, he had been sufficiently non-submissive to completely lose Southern Pacific support by 1906, and
future prominent League member A. J. Pillsbury stated in his diary, “Pardee was and is anti-machine.” Moreover, he had been quite a popular governor – but the Republican candidate was not selected by the people, but by delegates whom the Los Angeles Express described as “owned mind and soul by the railroad interests.” The Southern Pacific Political Bureau endorsed the United States House Representative from Humboldt, California, James N. Gillett, who had demonstrated “unswerving loyalty” to the railroad interests (see figure 2). The final

![Figure 2: James N. Gillett (as a mule) surrounded by William F. Herrin and Southern Pacific lobbyists. Reprinted from the Los Angeles Examiner, September 7, 1906.](image)

prominent candidate in the primary was J.O. Hayes, who was aligned with San Francisco boss Abe Ruef. However, when it appeared that Hayes would not likely receive the nomination, Ruef joined forces with the cohorts of William F. Herrin of the Southern Pacific Railroad for the sum

16 A. J. Pillsbury, diary entry, Aug 19, 1906, in Rose, 60.
17 Los Angeles Express, June 26, 1906, in Rose 135.
18 Bogart, 36.
of $14,000 to persuade the delegates to give Gillett the nomination over Pardee.\textsuperscript{19} Thus, the two bosses openly collaborated against Pardee to elect for the Republican ticket the man that would be the most subservient to their wishes, and though Pardee had been a respected governor, he would not be up for reelection.\textsuperscript{20}

The remarkably evident way in which Ruef and the Southern Pacific Railroad defied the principles of democracy at the Santa Cruz Convention incurred an immediate and fuming response from the Republican press. \textit{The Sacramento Bee} wrote, in a characteristically biting editorial, “So the Republican nominee for Governor stands today in his triumph upon the dead bodies of a betrayed people…in order that the corporate politicians might make stepping stones of their prostrate bodies.”\textsuperscript{21} Such criticism was ubiquitous among the papers; one journalist remarked, “Probably never, in the history of California – certainly never in the writer’s recollection – has there been in any convention in California such a brazen and persistent demand that men break their plighted word, that they spit upon every principle of honor.”\textsuperscript{22} Virtually every newspaper covering the Convention reported that Gillett had been selected by corporate bosses expecting his subservience, and they even substantiated this claim with photographic proof: an image of the newly selected Republican gubernatorial candidate surrounded by Southern Pacific Political Bureau politicians, lobbyists, and henchmen, and his hand on Abe Ruef’s shoulder. Taken around midnight on September 6, 1906, immediately after securing the Republican nomination, the image was first published in \textit{The San Francisco Call} on September 10, 1906.\textsuperscript{23} Later deemed “The Shame of California,” the image (see figure 3) was

\textsuperscript{19} Mowry, 59.
\textsuperscript{20} A. J. Pillsbury, diary entry, August 31, 1906, in Rose, 164.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Sacramento Bee}, September 8, 1906, in Rose, 227.
\textsuperscript{22} McClatchy, editorial correspondence from Santa Cruz, September 7, 1906, in Rose, 229.
distributed widely throughout the state by the outraged Republican press, the Democratic press intent upon destroying Gillett’s credibility, as well as nationally for its sheer shock value. 24 With such seemingly irrefutable proof that Gillett, the Republican candidate for governor of California, was the puppet of corporate interests, it is no wonder that a couple of determined Californians at last obtained the drive and the public support to create lasting reform in their state which materialized as the Lincoln-Roosevelt League.

Gillett indeed won the 1906 governor’s race, and by the time the legislature met in January of 1907, it had become clear “to any one [sic] who would look” that once again the California politicians were the puppets of the Southern Pacific Political Bureau. 25 The hired lobbyists were “arrogant and unashamed” 26 and the “shameless servility” 27 of the representatives struck reporters as more notorious than ever before. Dickson observed in a letter, “Bad as past sessions of the Legislature may have been, that of 1907 rises to new heights of infamy;” 28

24 Mowry, 60.  
25 Chester H. Rowell, Fresno Republican, March 13, 1907, in Rose, 366.  
26 Layne, 8.  
27 Rowell, Fresno Republican, March 13, 1907.  
28 Edward A. Dickson to T. C. Hocking, May 6, 1907, in Layne, 9.
Rowell reported, “[T]here was never a session where the vicious element was so ruthless in its control.”

Rowell and Dickson had each long been plagued by the appalling nature of California’s government, but the blatant way in which the railroad carried out its business in the 1907 legislative session finally ignited in them the determination that would lead to the success of their reform movement.

If the notorious nature of Gillett’s nomination and the ensuing legislative session were not enough to open the public’s eyes to the desperate need for political reform in their state, the Lincoln-Roosevelt League also took advantage of the growing sense of moral violation incensed by the San Francisco graft trials. The San Francisco Bulletin’s editor Fremont Older deserves much of the credit for exposing the widespread fraud of San Francisco boss Abe Ruef, Mayor Eugene Schmitz, and their political cohorts. The graft trials were prosecuted by the promising and well-known young attorney Francis J. Heney and later taken over by Hiram Johnson, each of whom would soon play essential roles in the Lincoln-Roosevelt League. Throughout the course of the trials, which lasted from late 1906 to late 1908, Schmitz was stripped of his office and Ruef was indicted on sixty-five counts of bribery of San Francisco Supervisors. The tempestuous nature of the trials won enormous media coverage, and the trials played a key role in stimulating Californians’ consciousness to the rampant corruption in their state. Rowell described the graft trials as a “moral inspiration” and as the “immediate occasion that made the Lincoln-Roosevelt League movement possible.” By seizing the opportunity to create a reform movement not only when corruption was highly publicized, but also when men like Heney were

29 Rowell, Fresno Republican, March 13, 1907.
31 Mowry, 33.
proving that the rich and powerful could be challenged and defeated, the Lincoln-Roosevelt League further improved its chances of victory.

In addition to striking when the state of California politics was at an all-time low and feeding off of the fervor of the graft trials, the Lincoln-Roosevelt League also exploited the momentum of the national reform movement battle waging at the beginning of the twentieth century. President Theodore Roosevelt provided moral leadership for the nation with his promotion of a “square deal” and commitment to trust-busting, and reform movements were sprouting nationwide.\textsuperscript{34} President Roosevelt unquestionably had a significant influence on the Lincoln-Roosevelt League, so much so that they incorporated his name into their title. He was a hero to the rank and file, as well as a personal acquaintance of many of the leading members.\textsuperscript{35} State reform movements also had a formative impact on the Lincoln-Roosevelt League. In particular, Senator La Follette of Wisconsin, who by 1907 had gained a considerable national reputation as a fervent reformer, was very influential to the League’s founding – when he had visited the golden state in early 1907, his words, according to the \textit{Oakland Enquirer}, “rang from one end of the state to the other,” arousing the men that were soon to follow his lead and transform the future of California.\textsuperscript{36} Indeed, by inspiring the inception of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League and providing momentum advantageous to the League’s efforts, the national reform movement paved the way for the League to achieve its objectives.

The result of Gillett’s nomination, the legislature’s brazen incapacity, the graft trials and the national reform movement was the intangible sense that at long last, the voters of California had had enough of being ruled by corporate bosses, and the feeling that putting an end to their

\textsuperscript{34} Rose, 1.
\textsuperscript{36} “Movement for the Emancipation of the Republican Party in California from Boss Rule,” \textit{Oakland Enquirer}, August 1, 1907, in Waring Papers.
reign was possible. Newspapers across the state began asserting that the political machines of the state were in an “UNEASY AND PANICKY CONDITION,” and that one could sense that the frustration of the electorate was rising to the surface. Rowell and Dickson successfully seized the opportunity to take advantage of this environment to launch their new movement when the public would be most receptive to it, which greatly contributed to the League’s success.

In addition to excellent timing, the Lincoln-Roosevelt League utilized practical organizational factors to bolster its ability to challenge the Southern Pacific. As a statewide and well-organized phenomenon, the League improved upon the factors that had caused the downfall of past reform movements. By carefully planning the involvement of newspapers, the League marketed itself as a formidable threat and minimized the risk facing potential members. By foreseeing potential risks to the League’s success as well as the attacks it would receive from opposition parties, it was able to prepare itself and avoid ruin by either of these factors. Finally, by selecting the competent and charismatic Hiram Johnson as its candidate for governor, the League helped ensure the support of the public to get a League man into the state capital. These meticulous organizational measures were key elements in the Lincoln-Roosevelt League’s victory.

By purposefully launching a statewide, carefully organized movement, the Lincoln-Roosevelt League successfully dodged blunders that had hindered the effectiveness of the many movements that preceded it. Sporadic attempts at reform had taken place time and again since the 1890s, yet almost all of them were local and rarely did they succeed in achieving even short-lived improvement. These movements, including, for example, the Citizen’s League (1893), the Direct Legislation League (1985), the Republican Good Government League (late 1890s), the

37 Correspondence from San Francisco, Sacramento Union, February 3, 1906, in Rose, 375. (Capitalization original)
38 Rose, 12.
Municipal League (1901), and the Roosevelt Republican Club (1906), each tended to be slightly more successful than the one that preceded it, but categorically failed to instill concrete, lasting reform.\textsuperscript{39} The rather effective nonpartisan municipal reform movement in Los Angeles that Dickson had helped initiate, which succeeded in electing seventeen of twenty-three officials, though not the mayor, was an exception to the general rule.\textsuperscript{40} It is no surprise that historically citizens disturbed by dishonest government had concentrated their efforts locally. There, they were more likely to achieve at least small victories, and local politicians and administrators were important influences in the daily lives of their constituents. But unless the Lincoln-Roosevelt League could put candidates into high office, it would remain only “potentially dangerous” to the Southern Pacific – true reform required change from the bottom all the way to the top.\textsuperscript{41}

In order to launch an effective statewide movement, the League had to be meticulously organized, a feat the members tackled expertly. \textit{The San Francisco Call} reported that “other revolts against the corrupt rule of the Southern Pacific machine…have been failures largely because of a lack of proper organization. The battle to be waged by the Lincoln-Roosevelt League will be conducted along different lines.”\textsuperscript{42} By thoroughly organizing both centrally and locally, the League was prepared to counter the stronghold of the railroad interests, and it was sure to advertise this fact in order to assure its members that it meant business. A pamphlet of the Alameda County branch of the League elaborated that “only through a centralized, harmonious, and equally well-organized effort can the control of the Republican party be restored to the Republican voters.” It continued, “Organization must be met by organization.”

\textsuperscript{39}Rose, 28; Mowry, 39, 59.
\textsuperscript{40}Mowry, 43.
\textsuperscript{41}Olin, \textit{California Politics}, 59.
and the Lincoln-Roosevelt League adhered to this credo and organized thoroughly both locally and statewide.  

This unique organizational structure is how the Lincoln-Roosevelt League was able to succeed at achieving lasting and widespread reform when so many of its predecessors had failed. Rowell described its broadly organized condition as the League’s “statewide character,” and he was certain it would be a “large element in the success” of the reform movement. As the members of the local branches of the League were concerned with reform at the local level, often they were already members of local reform organizations; the Lincoln-Roosevelt League was able to draw strength by uniting these groups into one formidable movement with the ability to enact reform at the highest level of state government. For example, Edgar Allen Luce of San Diego had been involved with the local Roosevelt Republican Club, and he played a key role in incorporating the club’s members into the much more expansive Lincoln-Roosevelt League. The decision to maintain a statewide focus was intentional and an integral aspect of the League’s organization. Rowell pointed out in a letter that, as other reform movements, such as the Independent Republicans of the 41st Assembly, were predominantly locally concerned, League members could “easily make it evident that we are the only central body about which the others can unite,” thus drawing strength from the many fragmented movements.  

For local organizations to unite around the Lincoln-Roosevelt League, however, required that it devote its efforts exclusively to the central objective of the eradication of the Southern Pacific from politics, and avoid complication with additional side issues. One former Berkeley chapter member recalled that while many of the members were interested in local affairs, the

44 Chester H. Rowell to S. C. Smith, December 17, 1907, Rowell Papers.
45 Edgar Allen Luce Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
46 Chester H. Rowell to Meyer Lissner, December 9, 1907, Rowell Papers.
Lincoln-Roosevelt League “as such was not.” Rowell wrote in a July 1907 letter to recruit the Modesto Herald editor T.C. Hocking, “What we want is to concentrate all efforts on the one thing in hand, and leave everything else out, at least, for the present.” Rowell recognized the power in a “concentrated effort,” and wrote that the Lincoln-Roosevelt League was “first in the field” and further was “already recognized throughout the State as the central anti-machine force.” He continued, “We are already recognized as the band wagon, and while that is a poor reason, it behooves everybody to get aboard.” This appeal was designed to convince citizens to get involved with the Lincoln-Roosevelt League as the only reform movement that could implement honest administration at the very top level of state government. Indeed, politically concerned Californians across the state joined their local branches of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League in great numbers. In this way, the League utilized its unified, statewide presence to achieve its objective of eradicating corporate interests not only locally throughout the state, but also all the way to the state capital.

The Lincoln-Roosevelt League’s endorsement by prominent newspapers throughout the state was another key factor in its success, both because it filled the gap of faith among incredulous would-be reformers and provided critical propagation of the League’s message. One journalist went so far as to say that the story of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League was a story that “confirms the political power of the press in democratic society.” Newspaper men played a formative role at every stage in the development of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League, which translated into lots of press coverage. This phenomenon was an intentional strategy that the founding members employed, and it was essential in getting the movement off the ground,

47 Thelen, 24.
48 Chester H. Rowell to T.C. Hocking, July 26, 1907, Rowell Papers.
49 Chester H. Rowell to Tom Richardson, November 14, 1907, Rowell Papers.
50 Bogart, 1.
particularly because it helped convince people that this movement was not just another hopeless attempt at reform.

Many individuals were doubtful about the possibility of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League’s success, and support of the press was vital in transforming their initial doubts into conviction. Among those dubious were several of Edward Dickson’s colleagues who coordinated the successful municipal reform in Los Angeles in 1906. When Dickson first shared his plans to launch a statewide reform movement, only two of the men, Russ Avery and Marshall Stimson, showed enthusiastic support, while others, including future key Lincoln-Roosevelt League leader Meyer Lissner, believed the plan to be too ambitious for success. Rowell also faced a skeptical reception from his uncle, Senator Chester Rowell and owner of the *Fresno Republican*. Like Dickson’s colleagues, the elder Rowell, according to a letter from his nephew to T.C. Hocking, was “discouraged and pessimistic as to the outlook, and does not think we can succeed, by this or any plan.” Another prominent California progressive, John Randolph Haynes, attended the original Los Angeles meeting but chose not to attend the August 1 meeting in Oakland because he suspected the League would be another “feeble snipe” at the Southern Pacific Railroad. Yet another like-minded but skeptical man was prominent Democrat Franklin Lane, who considered becoming Republican because he believed in the League’s principles, but did not because he thought the League could be “rather easily beaten.”

Lissner was hot off the heels of the successful reform movement in Los Angeles, Rowell was a United States Senator, Haynes championed direct legislation in Los Angeles, and Lane would soon become the United States Secretary of the Interior. The fact that these prominent, prosperous, ambitious men were

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51 Mowry, 68.
52 Chester H. Rowell to T. C. Hocking, July 12, 1907, Rowell Papers.
pessimistic as to the chances of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League’s success indicates that the tank and file Californians too would lack faith – even Dickson originally projected that it would be a minimum of ten to fifteen years before the League could achieve anything. Indeed, many Republican politicians initially “refused to associate” with the League because they simply doubted its ability to challenge the Southern Pacific. In order to succeed, the Lincoln-Roosevelt League desperately needed something to instill faith in its would-be constituents.

To inspire the Republicans of California to believe that their state government could in fact be restored to the people was precisely the role of the extensive press support of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League. Indeed, it was largely due to the support fellow editors lent to Rowell and Dickson’s idea that gave them the resolve to push forward in the face of a colossal challenge. State controller A.B. Nye, a personal friend of Dickson’s, believed that the support of newspapers would help to recruit supporters that might have otherwise been deterred by fear of personal or business retaliation from the corporation. The earliest members of the League knew that with a large contingency of the state’s papers endorsing their movement, the League “must prove irresistible” to the Republicans of California. The Fresno Republican reported that the League was backed by “the strongest organization of newspapers ever formed in California,” and predicted that soon it would be endorsed by “practically every newspaper in the state not absolutely hide-bound to party or machine.” In fact, at its very inception, the Lincoln-Roosevelt League boasted the espousal of thirty odd papers scattered throughout every major city in the California. Branches of the League soon sprouted all over the state and membership

55 Mowry, 72.
56 Ibid, 68.
57 Robert A. Waring to George E. Mowry, November 14, 1949, Waring Papers.
58 Edward A. Dickson to Chester H. Rowell, July 20, 1907, in Bogart, 45.
59 “A Path to Freedom,” Fresno Republican, August 2, 1907, in Bogart, 51.
60 Chester H. Rowell to A.J. Pillsbury, July 22, 1907, Rowell Papers.
remained high, indicating that the press support had indeed convinced the populace to believe in
the reform movement and lend it their support. Thus it was that the active support of the
independent California press succeeded in persuading the Republicans of California to believe in
the possibility of a Lincoln-Roosevelt League victory, as well as contributed the indispensable
distribution of the League’s message far and wide (see figure 4) to gain a broad, committed
membership that by 1910 would overcome their formerly insurmountable opponent.

An additional practical measure that the Lincoln-Roosevelt League employed to ensure
its success was to anticipate, and subsequently avoid, potential pitfalls to the movement, as well
as to foresee and respond promptly and effectively to attacks from opposing interests. One
hazard that Rowell’s uncle had identified was the “danger of merely substituting one boss for another.” The elder Rowell had warned his nephew that he was concerned that if the Lincoln-Roosevelt League achieved any type of success, it would be “immediately pounced upon” by an ambitious individual and made into a “personal machine.” 61 This was a risk to be reckoned with. Abe Ruef, for example, the San Francisco boss who eventually spent jail time after his antics were exposed in the graft trials, had begun as a reformer, but when he acquired muscle as the President of the Union Labor Party he forwent his former virtues for personal gain. 62 While most California reformers, in line with Mowry’s depiction of the typical California Progressive, got involved with politics out of a sense of moral violation rather than personal ambition, the current unbridled domination of corrupt politicians was sufficient to make even men of great faith in humanity concerned that their movement might unwittingly piggy-back a dishonest opportunist. 63

The Lincoln-Roosevelt League took several steps in order to avoid being taken advantage of, a danger which would not only hinder their cause but would constitute a positive inversion of their principles. Not the least of these measures was the explicit refusal by many key founding members to accept nomination for high office. Dickson, Lissner, Avery and Stimson had all made such a pact before embarking on the municipal reform movement in Los Angeles which formed the nucleus of the future Lincoln-Roosevelt League. 64 Shortly following its founding, the League’s executive committee issued a Resolution stating that the League would strive to elect candidates “who are fit by their abilities to legislate with wisdom on behalf of the People of California.” This proclamation was designed to refute rumors spread by the opposition that the

61 Chester H. Rowell to Edward A. Dickson, July 22, 1907, Rowell Papers.
62 Bogart, 29.
63 Mowry, 88.
64 Ibid, 44.
purpose of the League was “either to promote or oppose the senatorial aspirations of certain citizens of California.” 65 Newspapers also aided in refuting accusations that League members were individualistic; for example, *The San Francisco Call* reported that the League did not seek “political advancement of any man or men.” 66 This principle of selfless organization remained intact even when the most widely-renowned League members were offered the most distinguished of positions. For example, Rowell, co-founder and later acting president, received considerable pressure in early 1910 to run as the League’s candidate for California Governor or for the United States Senate. Rowell vehemently insisted that he had not the slightest desire to take office, adding that he felt a “strong impression that it would be impolitic to do either.” 67 Indeed, Hiram Johnson, the candidate for governor that the League eventually chose, similarly felt personally adverse to the position, and only agreed to run after League members went to great lengths to persuade him. 68 That these prominent League members, with the greatest potential to use their connection with the League for their personal benefit, adamantly refused to do so set a precedent that cascaded all the way down to the local level, and proved instrumental in the effort to avoid tarnishing the League’s reputation. However, despite its efforts to avoid becoming the target of an ambitious opportunist, the Lincoln-Roosevelt League did once fall victim to this hazard. Daniel Ryan, one of the League’s original four vice presidents, incited a scandal when he immediately declared his own candidacy to be Mayor of San Francisco. 69 The League was put in the embarrassing position of endorsing a candidate that was not only blatantly

65 “1907 Resolution by Executive Committee,” Waring Papers.
69 Mowry, 77.
self-interested, but who was also opposed by the locally influential Good Government League as well as highly-reputable prosecutor Francis Heney. This put Ryan’s candidacy in direct opposition with the graft trials, which were the highly publicized local hub of reform politics. However, when this embarrassing conflict became apparent, the League dropped its support of Ryan, and sent the clear message that it was serious about honest government. Ryan was subsequently described as the “discarded hero of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League,” and Rowell hired a private detective to screen all other League candidates in order to avoid such a scandal in the future. Notwithstanding this one dangerous but promptly handled embarrassment, the League’s caution in selecting righteous candidates helped it avoid a pitfall.

The Lincoln-Roosevelt League was similarly able to anticipate and successfully combat attacks and criticism from outside of the party. One danger that they correctly predicted was being accused of starting an entirely new political party, an attack likely employed in order to discourage loyal Republicans from joining their ranks and thus belittling the League’s impact. As such, League members and supporting newspapers took every opportunity to set the record straight that they were committed Republicans whose sole interest was to restore the Republican Party to its original principles by removing power from boss rule and restoring it to the rank and file party members. Waldo M. York, a prominent judge and leading member of the Los Angeles branch of the League, published in a letter to the editor of the Los Angeles Times that the Lincoln-Roosevelt League was an “organization within, and not without, the Republican

70 Mowry, 77.
Party…to save the party – not to destroy it.\textsuperscript{72} The \textit{Santa Cruz Sentinel} clarified, “The League is organized, not to fight the Republican Party, but to correct the evils within the party,” and added that the organizers were “made up entirely of Republicans.”\textsuperscript{73} The \textit{Oakland Times} correspondingly published that the Lincoln-Roosevelt League was not a “bolting section” of the Republican Party but rather the “bone and sinew of California Republicanism.”\textsuperscript{74} Together, these and countless more reports left no doubt that the Lincoln-Roosevelt League was anything but a new political party, recommending it to loyal Republicans that believed in the League’s democratic principles.

Other attacks the League faced from the Democratic press were more specific, but failed to seriously hinder the propagation of the League’s message and quick growth. The \textit{Oakland Tribune}, described as the head of the opposition press, and the \textit{Livermore Herald} made allegations that the Lincoln-Roosevelt League was the private party of wealthy San Francisco banker Rudolph Spreckels.\textsuperscript{75} While it is true that the League sought and earned the financial support of Spreckels, the allegation that Spreckels had substantial sway in the organization was entirely fabricated – in fact, Rowell and Spreckels occasionally butted heads, and Spreckels learned that his financial support would not translate into undue influence in the League.\textsuperscript{76} Another accusation by the Democratic press, including the \textit{Los Angeles News} and the \textit{San Francisco Chronicle}, and clearly aimed at tarnishing the League’s reputation, was that the League members were a bunch of “sore heads”: failed politicians seeking revenge against the

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{73} \textit{Santa Cruz Sentinel}, quoted by George A. Van Smith, “Lincoln-Roosevelt League Forges Ahead,” \textit{The San Francisco Call}, September 1, 1907, in Waring Papers.
\bibitem{74} \textit{Oakland Times}, quoted by George A. Van Smith, Waring Papers.
\bibitem{75} Smith, Waring Papers.
\bibitem{76} Chester H. Rowell to Rudolph Spreckels, November 28, 1908, Rowell Papers.
\end{thebibliography}
machine that had ruined them. 77 A common manifestation of this attack was the assertion that the Lincoln-Roosevelt League was a “Pardee” movement – former Governor George Pardee’s retribution for the heedless way in which he was denied candidacy for reelection at the 1906 Primary by the Republican political bosses. 78 This was an attack that Dickson and Rowell had specifically anticipated, and prepared to refute, and it seems not to have caused any measurable damage to the League’s prospects. A more dramatic claim was the San Francisco Chronicle’s accusation that the League was in fact a political attack on the Southern Pacific Railroad by the Western Pacific Railroad. 79 Such obviously spurious allegations were generally not addressed individually, particularly because they appeared in Democratic papers that would not directly influence the League’s target audience. The League continued to respond by simply reasserting its sole objective of cleaning the Republican Party of machine domination. In this way, the Lincoln-Roosevelt League’s practical anticipation of specious accusations prevented it from falling victim to the assaults of opposing interests.

The final practical measure that the Lincoln-Roosevelt League employed to ensure its success was the careful selection of the man to be the League’s selection of a gubernatorial candidate. This man, who would instill honest government independent of special interests all the way at the top, would be, Rowell predicted, “the hero of California,” and his judicious selection was imperative. 80 While Francis Heney was originally Rowell’s preferred candidate, not least due to the fame he gained during the graft trials, it was determined that his history as a Democrat would prove too damaging a factor in his campaign. 81 Rowell wrote that the ideal

78 Chester H. Rowell to Edward A. Dickson, July 22, 1907, Rowell Papers.
79 Smith, Waring Papers.
80 Fresno Republican, April 11, 1906, in Rose, 82.
candidate would be a man “of magnetic power, able to appeal to the imaginations of the people,” yet also “negatively unobjectionable, who would not be regarded as unsafe, except by those whose safety it is desired to menace.” He would furthermore be “a man already known to the state, and known as representing our idea. And he should be a man eminently qualified to be governor.”

Few men fit these strict qualifications more closely than Hiram Johnson. Johnson had made a name for himself taking over the prosecution of the graft trials from Heney, which also established him as a man of ability. He was a remarkable speaker, capable of rousing public enthusiasm and popular support; one paper likened his speeches to a “prophet or crusader of the delivered truth.” Though he was initially reluctant to abandon his thriving law practice in San Francisco, leading League members eventually persuaded Johnson to pursue the governorship of the state. Selecting a commanding figure and magnetic communicator constituted the final and essential practical step the Lincoln-Roosevelt League employed. In this way, establishing a highly organized statewide movement, utilizing the press, anticipating and responding effectively to potential hazards and attacks and choosing a perfect gubernatorial candidate comprised the critical practical measures that led to the Lincoln-Roosevelt League’s triumph.

The Lincoln-Roosevelt League’s politically prudent alignment with the Republican Party, which set it up to utilize the Party’s influence and prestige in California, was a central factor in its achievement of its objective to destroy corporate reign in California. This was largely due to the role of party loyalty, which could not be overestimated. In fact, voters had shown in the 1906 gubernatorial election that they would choose a Republican candidate, even if aligned with the machine, over an independent, or un-bossed non-Republican. Additionally, with the Republican Party the League would be able to take advantage of the newly implemented direct

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82 Chester H. Rowell to J. W. Dinsmore, December 27, 1909, Rowell Papers.
83 Riverside Press, in Bochin and Weatherson, 31.
primary laws, an essential measure that would make the possibility of actually getting high-level candidates into office more promising than ever before. On these grounds, the Lincoln-Roosevelt League’s alignment with the Republican Party was an absolutely crucial factor in its success.

The plainest reason that it was politically prudent for the Lincoln-Roosevelt League to be a movement within the Republican Party is that it was the surest way to actually get a candidate into office. This is true not least because California, at the time, was by and large a Republican state – historians have observed that at this moment in history, to be on the Republican ticket was considered a prerequisite to getting elected into high office in California. Rowell revealed his adherence to this credo when he suggested to a Democratic friend that “if such a good man as you in that county were a Republican, you could, single-handed, rescue the whole county,” implying he believed that to be Republican was a basic qualification to achieving political influence. The Los Angeles Herald observed that “the Republican party being in the majority in this state, the work of purifying politics must be done largely if not entirely through the efforts of that party.” Just how essential a Republican candidate was to win statewide election in California was evidenced by the 1906 gubernatorial contest.

That James N. Gillett, the Republican candidate who had been openly tied with railroad interests, won the 1906 gubernatorial election over a vocally anti-machine Democrat indicates that the Lincoln-Roosevelt’s League’s devotion to the Republican Party was a politically astute step towards victory. Gillett’s Democratic opponent in the 1906 Governor’s race was Theodore A. Bell, an attorney from Napa County, one time member of the U.S. House of Representatives
and self-professed independent individual. In his acceptance speech for the Democratic 
nomination, Bell stated, “Let us not concede that with the ownership of the Republican machine 
goes the ownership of the rank and file of the Republican Party,” a clear bid to distinguish 
himself from Gillett’s transparent alignment with the machine in hopes of wooing the support of 
angered Republicans. 87 In a September 14 “manifesto” that he issued, Bell proclaimed, “I have 
drawn a line, and neither Hearst [the boss historically associated with the Democratic Party] nor 
Herrin shall stand on my side of it. I shall bend every energy to eliminate these two men from 
California politics, and I believe the people will help me do it.” 88 The Sacramento Bee asserted 
in an editorial, “The issue is not between Theodore A. Bell and James N. Gillett. The battle is to 
determine whether or not one corporation shall dominate in the Executive, Legislative and 
Judicial departments of the Government of this state, or whether The People themselves shall 
rule.” 89 Democrats made every effort to paint the contest as between the Southern Pacific-
controlled Gillett and the independent Bell, and indeed, during most of the course of the 
campaign, it seemed that Bell’s strategy was succeeding and that he would win the election. 

However, Bell lost to Gillett, a fact that demonstrates a truism about California politics at 
the dawn of the progressive era – that party loyalty in elections was paramount to any other 
factor. Despite widespread antagonism for the shameful way in which Gillett had received the 
Republican nomination, the Republican press was extremely reluctant to withdraw their support 
for his candidacy. For his part, Gillett did all that he could to refute the allegations that he was 
the railroad’s candidate. In a speech to a crowd of 2,000 cheering Republicans, Gillett asserted, 
“Right here I want to emphasize the fact that I am no man’s and no corporation’s candidate, but

87 San Francisco Chronicle, September 13, 1906, in Rose 252. 
88 San Francisco Chronicle, September 14, 1906, in Rose, 254. 
89 Sacramento Bee, September 13, 1906, in Rose, 256.
am the candidate solely of the best and grandest party that this country ever had.” An editorial in the *Fresno Republican* admitted, “Nobody is called on to deny or defend certain of the performances as Santa Cruz,” yet lamely claimed, “We have Mr. Gillett’s word for it (and no one who has heard Gillett doubts his sincerity) that these votes came to him without any ‘deal’ on his part, or any promises to the railroad bosses.” Yet the heated way in which virtually every Republican newspaper had originally denounced Gillett’s nomination at the primary exposes the passive support he received from Republican newspapers come election time as evidence of the primacy of their stringent partisan loyalty over their desire for an independent candidate. In fact, in spite of the overwhelming evidence and criticism of the role that the Southern Pacific Political Bureau played in Gillett’s nomination, only one Republican newspaper, Dickson’s *Los Angeles Express*, withdrew its support for Gillett’s candidacy. Indeed, Bell’s problem was with party affiliation, rather than his message. The state of California politics, dire and corrupt though it was, was not sufficient to persuade newspapers to break party lines. In the end, Gillett was elected with 41% of the popular vote; Bell received 38% and the candidates for the Independent and Socialist parties split the remaining votes at 14% and 5%, respectively. This shows that if not for the third party, Bell may have indeed won the 1906 election; however, with the Independent faction winning but 14% of the popular vote, it seemed a much surer strategy for the Lincoln-Roosevelt League to concentrate effort within the party that historically dominated the state.

Given the deep-seated Republican loyalty at play in the 1906 election, it is clear why the Lincoln-Roosevelt League intentionally began as and remained a purely Republican movement.

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90 *Berkeley Gazette*, September 24, 1906, in Rose, 264.
91 *Fresno Republican*, October 31, 1906, in Rose 276.
92 Bogart, 38.
93 Rose, 297.
In fact, this status was a key way in which the League was able to market itself to many constituents, particularly Northern Californians, whom Rowell described as “partisans of the extreme type” that regarded “non-partisanship as the most dangerous taint [they] could risk.”94 But in order to subvert the railroad interests and get an honest man selected to run under the Republican ticket, the League members desperately required the adoption of a direct primary. Luckily, the events of 1906 had been so brazen that both the Democrat and Republican parties had demanded of the legislature the enactment of direct primary laws the following year.95 Unsurprisingly, railroad interests in the legislature fought this demand, and succeeded in emasculating the bill to the degree that a few prominent reformers even opposed it on the grounds of its insufficiency. However, the bill did set in place the structure that would allow the Lincoln-Roosevelt League to appeal directly to the people, a considerable step forward in their objective to get a candidate into the state capital.96 By 1909, a new State Primary Law improved upon the bill, making the League’s prospects much more practical and their alignment with the Republican Party an all the more crucial prerequisite to its success.97

Clearly, the Lincoln-Roosevelt League’s status as a Republican movement was a savvy political decision designed to materialize in the successful election of honest candidates. Just as important to the League’s success, however, was the precedence that it placed on principles of democracy and honest government, which endowed the League with widespread appeal and thereby contributed to its resounding victory. This primacy of principle over party politics can be traced to the Lincoln-Roosevelt League’s very inception – recall that the nucleus of the

94 Chester H. Rowell to Ernest M. Simpson, December 17, 1907, Rowell Papers.
95 Rose, 343.
96 Mowry, 82.
97 Bochin and Weatherson, 22.
movement was the leaders of Dickson’s nonpartisan movement in Los Angeles. While the League by definition was completely partisan, the fact that it was built upon a nonpartisan organization set a precedent for the ideology of the League that would not be broken: good, honest government was always its paramount goal, and this fact proved beneficial in facilitating the League’s victory.

The case of Francis J. Heney serves as an example of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League’s bipartisan appeal, and the way in which this appeal helped pave the way to the League’s triumph. As the renowned and popular San Francisco lawyer that worked for President Roosevelt before taking on the graft trials, Heney, to many Californians, represented the reform movement in the state. However, Heney was a Democrat; nevertheless, he played a formative role in the Lincoln-Roosevelt League. Since he was already a household name, his appearance at the founding meeting of the League on August 1, 1907, was highly anticipated, and virtually every newspaper gave ample space to his remarks. According to Waring’s August 1 Minutes, Heney stated that for the present he was not prepared to declare himself a Republican and actually join the Lincoln-Roosevelt League. However, he declared that he was in full “sympathy with the purposes of the movement,” and moreover stated, “I believe there are many Democrats in the State who will follow you in this movement,” thus opening the door for bipartisan cooperation. As it turned out, Heney went on to play a crucial role throughout the existence of the League, and was even considered as the League’s candidate for governor in 1910. According to at least one report from the Los Angeles Herald, Heney did eventually switch party allegiance and become a Republican. In this, he evidences the phenomenon that historians Olin

98 Mowry, 68.
99 Waring, “Minutes.”
100 “Call to Arms by Stalwarts of Party,” Oakland Times, August 2, 1907, in Waring Papers.
and Deverell have observed: Heney was simply, according to the *Los Angeles Herald*, “unable to
discern a very marked difference between the Democratic and the Republican parties in so far as
the relations of the fundamental policies of these two parties to clean politics in city or state are
concerned.” The *Herald* claimed that Heney changed his affiliation after observing that the
Lincoln-Roosevelt League was on the path to victory against the Southern Pacific. This trend
toward less strict party allegiances among the reform-minded Californians certainly aided in the
League’s bipartisan appeal.

The League employed the newspapers, which correctly identified the League’s primary
mission of cleaning up politics as paramount to party ties, as a key method to broadcast its
message to men of all political persuasions. The *Oakland Enquirer* wrote, “This fight against
boss rule is something larger than a party issue. It is a practical movement for the emancipation
of the people from the political dynasty which has been established by Mr. Herrin and his
political satraps.” Statements such as this extended the League’s mission to support by all
political factions; the *Tulare Register* reported that “Hidebound partisan politics is a thing of the
past,” and *The San Francisco Call* depicted the Lincoln-Roosevelt League as “the champion
of the people” to the same effect. While it should be noted that endorsement of the League
came primarily from Republican newspapers, it was by no means limited to them. The *Los
Angeles Herald*, for example, reported that although it was a Democratic newspaper, “as a
journal which professes to stand for good government and pure politics, from which alone good
government comes from, we want to give Godspeed to the Lincoln and Roosevelt League of the

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104 *Tulare Registrar*, quoted by George A. Van Smith, in Waring Papers.
105 “California’s Political Freedom the Issue at Sacramento,” *The San Francisco Call*, May 13, 1908, in Waring Papers.
Republican Party.” In this way, newspaper reports did much to recommend the Lincoln-Roosevelt League to any man who believed in the League’s principle of government of the people, by the people, and for the people, regardless of political persuasion.

The Lincoln-Roosevelt League’s bipartisan appeal was also enhanced by the national reform movement, which had generated a growing faction of reform-minded Democrats loyal to President Roosevelt. Since the League was obviously aligned with Roosevelt and his policies by nature of its title, the fact that Roosevelt was a popular president among many Democrats served greatly to the League’s advantage. In fact, it had been a Democrat, Francis Heney, that had recommended the incorporation of Roosevelt’s name in the organization’s title in the first place. One newspaper proclaimed of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League, “let every Roosevelt Democrat feel that he will be welcomed to the ranks.” Indeed, the popularity of Roosevelt and his policies aided considerably in the League’s efforts to transcend partisan ties.

Additional reform leaders on the national front served to heighten the League’s prestige among men of all political persuasions, and inspired and propagated its principle of honest government over party politics. Prominent leaders such as Robert La Follette of Wisconsin and Joseph W. Folk of Missouri, for instance, consistently emphasized the League’s philosophy. La Follette is quoted proclaiming that the “intelligent and patriotic citizen” would “no longer allow himself to be played as a pawn in party politics to enrich the grafter.” He continued, “Before all things else the honest voter – Republican or Democrat – must hold priceless this vital principle; the public official must faithfully represent the private citizen.” Folk, too, was a champion of placing honest politics over party ties; he stated any man who did otherwise was a “traitor to his

106 Los Angeles Herald, quoted by George A Van Smith, in Waring Papers.
107 Waring, “Minutes.”
108 Tulare Registrar, quoted by George A. Van Smith, in Waring Papers.
109 “For an Unbossed City Government - To the Voters of San Diego,” March 1907, Edgar Augustine Luce Papers.
city or state.”¹¹⁰ The Lincoln-Roosevelt League actively situated itself as part and parcel of the national reform movement, and the fact that the national movement helped broadcast the primary principle shared with the League of honorable government certainly aided in its success.

A final explanation for the Lincoln-Roosevelt League’s bipartisan appeal may be attributed to the deeper values in which its more explicit democratic principles were founded. Perhaps the most essential of these, within the public perception, is the unshakeable belief and trust in the capability and righteousness of the average citizen. Historians have agreed that early progressive reformers had abiding faith in the goodness of people.¹¹¹ Documents of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League reveal the belief of its members that once the corrupting influence of the railroad was removed, people would be free to assert their true nature and a utopian democracy of sorts would be restored. This viewpoint is made explicit in an Alameda County branch pamphlet, which read that the League aimed to eradicate Southern Pacific influence “to the end that the political life of the state be placed on a higher plane, that the position of the office holder be restored to its old time dignity, and that patriotic and able men may be induced to take office in the state without the sacrifice of their self-respect, honor, or common honesty.”¹¹² The objective of rousing Californians to a sense of their civic duty and restoring faith in common democracy was a principle, a San Diego branch flyer proclaimed, that “every honest man can indorse.”¹¹³ The Alameda County branch pamphlet concluded, “Believing in the patriotism, good intent, and common honesty of the members of the Republican Party, long the dominant party of California, the Lincoln-Roosevelt Republican League invites all honest men to

¹¹⁰ “For an Unbossed City Government.”
¹¹¹ See, for example, Gerald Woods, “A Peculent for Probity: California Progressives and the Disreputable Pleasures,” California Progressivism Revisited, 110.
¹¹² The Lincoln-Roosevelt Republican League,” Alameda County Branch.
¹¹³ Flyer, Edgar Allen Luce Papers.
join...that the moral and civic life of the state be quickened and renewed.”\textsuperscript{114} This faith in humanity, the root cause of the League’s faith in democracy, was not bound to a political party or any other distinction, and thus recommended the Lincoln-Roosevelt League to any Californian who shared its confidence. In this way, the trust that the members of the League felt in mankind, which caused its abiding faith in democracy and its prioritization of honest government over party politics, endowed the Lincoln-Roosevelt League with a deep-seated bipartisan appeal, which served as an essential element of its resounding success.

Conclusion

Armed with meticulous preparation, the Lincoln-Roosevelt League was prepared to deliver the fatal blow to the Southern Pacific Corporation in the gubernatorial election of 1910. Hiram Johnson’s victory as the candidate for the Republican Party signaled that the eradication of the railroad influence in California politics was complete. The League’s resounding success defied expectations and occurred in spite of the failure of numerous attempts at reform that had predated it. But this triumph was by no means inevitable. The factors of its success were several: The League seized a historical opportunity; it employed practical measures, including the adoption of a well-organized statewide campaign, the utilization of newspaper support, the anticipation and rebuttal of potential hazards and attacks, as well as the selection of an ideal gubernatorial candidate; it made the politically prudent decision to be an exclusively Republican phenomenon, thereby taking advantage of the well-established majority party; and, finally, it prioritized basic democratic principles, which bestowed it with widespread, bipartisan appeal. The interplay of these factors enabled the Lincoln-Roosevelt League to achieve the quickest and

\textsuperscript{114} The Lincoln-Roosevelt Republican League,” Alameda County Branch.
most categorical political reform in the history of the state, and Hiram Johnson’s election subsequently ushered in the progressive era in California.

The League’s accomplishments forever changed the face of California politics and warrant consideration on many grounds. Perhaps the most meaningful to reflect upon today is that it achieved its overwhelming objective with practically no capital. Its gains were attained through the leadership and organizational skills of dedicated members and the fervent support of morally committed newspapers, not with paid, full-time organizers or expensive advertising. Even more remarkable is the fact that its founders pursued their purpose in the face of incredulity and seemingly insurmountable odds, not requiring proof of the League’s capabilities as a prerequisite to their dedicated involvement. Moreover, throughout its crusade, the League and its elected representatives retained faith in the principle of government of, by, and for the people.

The irony of this narrative is that the very power that the progressive era bestowed upon the people of the state established a threat to the League’s prized principle of democracy free of the influence of special interests. The availability of arguably the most influential reforms of the progressive era in California, the direct legislation tools: initiative, referendum, and recall, to any individual exposes them to abuse by the same wealthy special interests groups which the League had tried so desperately to subvert. It is difficult to imagine the success of a movement built upon the same grounds as the Lincoln-Roosevelt League today. Newspapers no longer possess the strong influence on the public they once did; moreover, journalists and editors rarely have the independence to publish whichever material they please. Perhaps most significant, though, is the prevailing belief that in today’s society, money is the one indispensable factor needed to get any movement off the ground, particularly one that attempts to influence politics. Power to the people today means power to each individual’s money, and his or her ability to dispense with it
politically as he or she sees fit. In short, the achievements of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League created protection for democracy in a world that no longer exists. This is certainly not to say that nothing is to be gained from Chester H. Rowell, Edward A. Dickson, and the members of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League; on the contrary, much can be taken by modern society. Determined and clever organizing, faithful support of independent media, political prudence and the embrace of bipartisan cooperation saved the state of California once from the domination of self-interested corporations, against impossible odds and in spite of prevailing skepticism – and perhaps it will again.
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An Unlikely Victory 1777 to 1783. January 3, 1777 - A second victory for Washington as his troops defeat the British at Princeton and drive them back toward New Brunswick. Washington then establishes winter quarters at Morristown, New Jersey. During the harsh winter, Washington's army shrinks to about a thousand men as enlistments expire and deserters flee the hardships.