

LBJ's 1948 Senatorial Election:
A Catalyst For Change In Texas Politics?

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Introduction

The 1948 U.S. senatorial race in Texas proved to be a highly turbulent political event in modern Texas history. It represented the beginning of Lyndon Johnson's senatorial career, the broad revelation of a brazenly corrupt system of governance in south Texas, and the inability of the State of Texas to keep its own house in order. The epicenter of this turbulence was focused on a single precinct in the south Texas county of Jim Wells, where an amended return of 202 votes played a crucial role in the outcome of the election. Lyndon Johnson, then a congressman from central Texas, ran for the position against popular ex-Governor Coke Stevenson. As this was a Democratic primary, and there were more than two candidates running, there was a possibility that if no one gained a majority of the vote, there would be a runoff between the two frontrunners. As it turned out, this indeed happened, and Johnson was forced to make up the deficit of 71,000 votes by which he trailed Stevenson after the first primary. Through aggressive campaigning, Johnson was able to pull close to Stevenson by election day, and as the results came in, it was clear that the winner would have an extremely slight margin of victory. Six days after the election, it appeared that Stevenson had won by 157 votes, but an amended return of 202 votes from Jim Wells County gave Johnson a total of 200 more. That amendment proved to be critical, as after the final precincts reported, Johnson had won the election by 87 votes out of 988,295 cast.¹

Those amended returns from Jim Wells County prompted a great deal of interest across the state of Texas, especially from Coke Stevenson. He launched an investigation in south Texas that would reveal to people all over the state a corrupt political system

¹ Robert A. Caro, *Means of Ascent* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) 176, 265-266, 317.

headed by political bosses, or *politicos*, and in particular boss George Berham Parr. Those familiar with south Texas politics knew George Parr and his father Archie as the Dukes of Duval. They resided in Duval County, which borders Jim Wells County, and exerted control over both. Their positions as political bosses in south Texas allowed them to “vote” the citizens of those counties, particularly in Duval, *en masse* to the highest bidder, or to those who would cooperate with their wishes. Stevenson had slighted Parr when he was governor, and Johnson was willing to pay good money for his votes. As a result, Parr made sure that Johnson got his money’s worth. After Stevenson exposed this system to the unaware, as well as the highly suspicious manner in which the votes from Precinct 13 were amended, the outcome of the election became a full-blown scandal.² After all the dust settled, and there was a lot of dust, LBJ remained the winner of the election, and went on to be seated in the U. S. Senate.

The historiography of what occurred after the 1948 election tends to focus on Senator Johnson’s rising influence in the federal government. Historians such as Robert Caro and Robert Dallek, biographers of Johnson, rarely return to the effects the 1948 election had on Texas politics. While Dallek gives a fairly straightforward and balanced account of the election before turning to Johnson’s career in the U.S. Senate, Caro spends a substantial amount of time detailing the election. Caro’s account argues that Lyndon Johnson unfairly won the election, even naming one of his chapters “The Stealing.”³ In her book *Ballot Box 13*, Mary Kahl focuses solely on the Box 13 scandal and its resolution. One of her conclusions states that the ’48 election brought about a change in Texas election laws. While she correctly attributes the causality of the reform to the 1948

² Ibid., 184-191.

³ Ibid., 303.

election, she incorrectly inflates their importance in curbing electoral fraud. Dudley Lynch focuses solely on the Parr family and the ensuing fall of George Parr, which he claims was a political hatchet job by the Nixon White House.⁴

It is necessary to consult more general histories in order to place the 1948 election in the proper context. V.O. Key's *Southern Politics in State and Nation* contends that by the end of the 1940s, Texas was more ideologically divided between liberal and conservative lines than any other southern state. George Norris Green continues with this narrative in *The Establishment in Texas Politics*, where he details the clashes between different ideological factions in Texas politics. Green argues that corporations and conservatives gained power in the 1930s, and retained power up through 1957. David Montejano's *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas* traces the socio-economic history of Tejanos from the origins of the Republic of Texas to the mid-80s, providing excellent contextual information for the south Texas region. Numan Bartley's *The New South* and Bruce Schulman's *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt* both document the South's transition from "the Nation's No. 1 economic problem" to the modern era.⁵

The question this thesis seeks to answer is whether or not the 1948 election was a catalyst for change in Texas politics. This thesis argues that the 1948 election was a

⁴ see Caro, *Means Of Ascent*; Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson And His Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Mary Kahl, *Box 13: How Lyndon Johnson Won His 1948 Senate Race By 87 Contested Votes* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1983); Dudley Lynch, *The Duke Of Duval* (Waco: Texian Press, 1976).

⁵V. O. Key, *Southern Politics in State And Nation* (New York: Knopf, 1949); George N. Green, *The Establishment in Texas Politics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979); David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1987); Numan V. Bartley, *The New South: 1945-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995); Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

significant link in a chain of events that led to the fall of a solid Texas Democratic Party, resulting in a Republican insurgency. I also argue that the 1948 election played a major role in the 1951 recodification of Texas election law, but that the Texas legislature watered down the provisions of the code due a conservative fear of a powerful central authority, thus compromising its ability to fight election fraud. Additionally, the 1948 election did not act as a catalyst for change in reforming the distinct kind of corrupt politics prevalent in south Texas. This thesis therefore focuses on three main issues. First, how the 1948 election aggravated the rivalry between liberal and conservative Democrats within Texas' one-party system, which would eventually lead to a Republican insurgency and eventual domination. Second, how Texas state officials reacted to the 1948 election with regards to election laws and fraud prevention. Finally, this thesis will examine efforts to clean up boss politics in south Texas, and examine why that venture ultimately failed, especially considering that similar efforts throughout the American South were bearing fruit at the time.⁶

This thesis will contain four chapters relevant to the assertions above. Chapter One describes the political culture of Texas, including its state constitution. Of particular interest will be the political culture specific to south Texas, where Spanish and Mexican influences create an environment unique and separate from other regions of Texas. It also describes the beginnings of the Parr machine in south Texas, as well as the events of the 1948 senatorial election itself. Chapter Two examines how the 1948 election produced further internal strains upon the Democratic Party in Texas, an organization that already contained stark divisions between its different internal factions. Chapter Three

⁶ See Key, 190 for one such example.

investigates how state officials approached the issue of election fraud in the post-'48 era, and the changes that resulted from the work of the state legislature. Chapter Four examines efforts to clean up south Texas politics in the 1950s, and then compares the effort to the concurrent drive for reform in Texas and amongst other southern states.

While the 1948 election's significance as a link in the chain that ended the Democratic Party's one-party rule in Texas is interesting, it is also remarkable that the election produced no concrete results in combating electoral fraud or cleaning up boss politics in south Texas. With the amount of publicity the election received in Texas and elsewhere, it is significant that such a bold system of corruption could remain in place while politicians and good government groups elsewhere purged their governments of corruption. This lack of change highlights unique characteristics in Texas politics with regard to its leadership and to the distinctive political culture found in areas of south Texas.

Chapter One:

Contextual Analysis of South Texas Politics and the 1948 Senatorial Election

“So far as I being boss, if I exercise any influence among these people [it is] because in the forty-one years I have lived among them I have tried to conduct myself as to show them that I was their friend and they could trust me. I take no advantage of them in their ignorance. I buried many a one of them with my money and married many a one of them: it wasn't two or three days before the election, but through the year round, and they always been true to me; and if it earned me the title of boss, every effort and all my money went for the benefit of the Democratic ticket from president to constable; and if that is what earned it, I am proud of it.”

~Boss James B. Wells, 1919.¹

“We've got a rule now - never to get beat by more than 1,300 votes.”

~Johnson Campaign Manager John Connally, 8/31/48²

This chapter focuses on the background to, and the events of, the 1948 senatorial election in Texas. In order to fully understand the events in 1948, the historical context of the south Texas border region must be addressed. Mexican political and societal culture heavily influenced south Texas, especially the practices of patronage and the ranch culture of northern Mexico. This chapter explores the development of boss politics in the area as Anglo ranchers moved into the area and assimilated into this particular culture. Additionally, the Constitution of the State of Texas bolstered the rise of boss politics in south Texas, as its creators drafted the document with a severe distrust of central authority. The amalgamation of Mexican and Texan cultures resulted in an environment suited for boss politics and electoral fraud. With this context in place, this chapter then discusses the family history of the Parrs, the political bosses in Duval County, and the

¹ O. Douglas Weeks, “The Texas Mexican and the Politics of South Texas,” *The American Political Science Review* 24, no. 3 (1930): 614.

² Mary Kahl, *Ballot Box 13: How Lyndon Johnson Won His 1948 Senate Race By 87 Contested Votes* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1983), 104.

political aspirations of Lyndon Johnson. The political alliance between LBJ and the Parr regime in 1948 formed a major point of contention in the outcome of the senatorial election. The chapter concludes with LBJ's eventual victory over his opponent and charges of electoral fraud.

* * *

Stephanie Blank gives an excellent description of the patronage system that existed in colonial Spanish America in her article "Patrons, Clients, and Kin in Seventeenth-Century Caracas." Blank asserts,

A patron-clientele system is a network of individuals extending from a small group of the most important members of the elite down through the upper, intermediate, and lower sectors of the society... The social structure in which a patron-clientele system functions is of necessity hierarchical, a condition amply fulfilled in colonial Spanish America from the beginning... Patron-clientelism probably tends to flourish in an environment such as the Spanish Empire where formal, institutionalized, central authority is too weak to provide adequate security and justice.³

Of particular interest is Blank's assertion that a weak central authority is a presupposition to a flourishing patron-client relationship. From this, there are two implications that need to be addressed: first, if a central authority cannot provide security, economic and physical, for its subjects, those subjects will find that security elsewhere (i.e. a patron); second, patron-clientelism will thrive in areas where a central authority cannot exercise governmental control over its wealthiest subjects, meaning the patron-clientele system will remain unchecked. Often these patrons broke the laws of the colonial motherland and

³ Stephanie Blank, "Patrons, Clients, and Kin in Seventeenth-Century Caracas: A Methodological Essay in Colonial Spanish American Social History," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 54, no. 2 (1974): 260-262.

church, going unrebuked from either. Additionally, Blank states that these patrons shared common traits: “Ownership of large estates, lordship over a subject population and large following of retainers (clients).”⁴ This kind of patronage system that Blank describes parallels the kind that existed in south Texas, and serves as a helpful framework towards understanding the unique political situation there.

Historically speaking, people of Mexican descent comprised a large proportion of the south Texas population. Therefore, an understanding of Mexican political culture proves useful for interpreting south Texas patronage systems. Mexican President Porfirio Díaz embodies the kind of Mexican *politico* that engaged in the politics of patronage. During his reign, he had a specific style of governance influenced by patronage systems. Historian Paul Garner writes,

The guiding principles of *porfirian* political management emphasized (1) the maintenance and extension of a wide network of patronage based upon rewards for personal loyalty; (2) the careful personal supervision of the selection of political candidates and *jefes politicos* at local, regional and national level; (3) the subsequent manipulation of and control over appointees and protégés, through a variety of strategies ranging from flattery, tact, duplicity, and appeals to loyalty and patriotism, to the provision of opportunities for personal enrichment and , in the last resort, the threat of force or federal military intervention.⁵

The strategy used by Díaz proved to be hierarchical, in keeping with Blank’s framework, as well as adding the aspect of manipulation of politics in a democratic system in order to retain power. In addition to the example of governance emanating from the country’s leader, the socio-economic environment in northern Mexico produced patron-client

⁴ Stephanie Blank, “Patrons, Brokers, and Clients in the Families of the Elite in Colonial Caracas, 1595-1627,” *The Americas* 36, No. 1 (1979): 91-93.

⁵ Paul Garner, “Pragmatism, Patriarchy, and Patronage: Porfirio Díaz and Personalist Politics in Mexico,” in *Authoritarianism in Latin America Since Independence*, ed. Will Fowler (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996): 36.

relationships between its residents. In the north, large landowners who specialized in cattle ranches constituted the last line of defense between their workers (clients) and any hostile, indigenous peoples. Furthermore, landowners in northern Mexican states tempted poor Mexicans to their property with paternalistic gestures such as education and health care. Historian Friedrich Katz makes special note of this with regard to the northern Mexican state of Coahuila, which shares a border with southwest Texas and is only one county away from the Parr's home county of Duval.⁶ Mexicans on one immediate side of the Rio Grande clearly had much in common with Mexican-Americans living on the other immediate side; patterns of Spanish patronage in Mexico had parallels in the Spanish part of the U.S.

Upon examining the south Texas area, one can readily see the influence of these patronage systems on the Hispanic population. The population of Texas that came from Spanish origins was culturally traditional and geographically static. Terry Jordan describes their lack of expansionistic drive as a "locational tenacity," with many inhabiting the same places that their forefathers colonized many years ago.⁷ Due to this lack of movement, coupled with the overall isolation of the south Texas region, the populace retained many of the traditions held by older generations of Hispanic peoples in the Americas. David Montejano writes, "For several decades after annexation, life along the border continued in much the same way as before...The cattle *hacienda* remained the dominant social and economic institution of the border region, and the work relations that

⁶ Friedrich Katz, "Labor Conditions on Haciendas in Porfirian Mexico: Some Trends and Tendencies," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 54, no. 1 (1974): 31-34.

⁷ Terry Jordan, "Population Origins in Texas, 1850," *Geographical Review* 59, no. 1 (1969): 96.

linked Anglo *patrón* and Mexican worker remained paternalistic and patriarchal.”⁸ Much like in Coahuila, cattle ranches in south Texas proved to be the foundation of the patron-client relationship for Mexican Americans. All that was needed to perpetuate the system for the Anglo-American patrons was to duplicate the behavior of the previously Mexican patrons.⁹

As Anglos moved into Texas in increasing numbers in the nineteenth century, it became beneficial for those who wanted land, money, and power to take on the persona and characteristics of the Mexican-styled *patrón*. Ranchers like the Kings, Klebergs, and Kenedys all recognized the role of the *patrón-peones* relationship in the political and social culture of the region, and profited greatly from their understanding. Montejano writes,

The general success of Anglo ranchers along the Texas border rested on the ability of the owners to assimilate the ways of the *patrón*...a critical factor was the [rancher's] understanding that the necessary ingredients for labor relations...consisted of the ‘personal regard and responsibility of the *patrón*’ and the ‘personal faith and loyalty of the *gente* [people].’ So effective were such paternalistic work arrangements that they survived as a feature of South Texas ranch life well into the twentieth century.¹⁰

In an earlier article, O. Douglas Weeks also states, “The cattle barons inevitably established themselves as lords protector of those Mexicans who became their tenants and ranch hands, the resulting relationship being essentially feudal. This feudalism was

⁸ David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1987), 76.

⁹ The Patron-Client system will henceforth be referred to as the *patrón-peones* system, as *patrón* is the Spanish equivalent to patron, and *peones* is a word with regional ties to the American southwest that indicates unskilled workers/laborers. It is also the preferred nomenclature of the residents of south and southwest Texas.

¹⁰ Montejano, 81.

economic, social, and political.”¹¹ Here again, the elite landowner was in a hierarchical relationship with those that he took care of in return for labor, loyalty, or whatever else the *patrón* required.¹²

The Texas State Constitution further consolidated and entrenched the power and influence of the *patrón*. Originally a reactionary measure to combat the constitution ratified by Unionists and blacks in the Reconstruction era, the current constitution, which went into effect in 1876, was much more conservative, favoring weak state government.¹³ Perhaps the most visible statewide public official is the governor, but the constitution limits the governor’s power in significant ways. First, legislators amended the constitution in 1869 to omit a phrase that “vested” the executive power in the governor. Instead, the section reads, “The Executive Department of the State shall consist of a Governor, who shall be the Chief Executive Officer of the State.” As legal scholar Janice May writes, “Judges have interpreted the elimination of the vesting clause to mean that the governor has no inherent executive powers; the powers must be derived from the constitutional text or by the statutes.”¹⁴ Thus, unless the Constitution or statutes dictate certain powers, the governor has very little room to maneuver without acting unconstitutionally. Such restraints make for a weak central authority in the office of the governor. This benefits localized bosses, who are largely free from a central authority overseeing and meddling in their activities.

¹¹ Weeks, 610.

¹² For more information concerning Tejanos and their socio-political beliefs in the early twentieth century, see V.O. Key, Jr.’s influential text *Southern Politics In State And Nation*, 271-275.

¹³ Richard Kraemer, Charldean Newell, and David Prindle, *Texas Politics* (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005), 38-40, 44-45.

¹⁴ Janice May, *The Texas State Constitution: A Reference Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 178.

The relationships between the state attorney general, the county courts, and the district courts of Texas must also be examined due to their relevance for local and state level judicial interactions. The Texas constitution defines the attorney general's role in the executive branch. Article IV, Section 22 states, "He shall...give legal advice in writing to the Governor and other executive officers, when requested by them, and perform such other duties as may be required by law." May points out that this sometimes comes into conflict with the jurisdiction of the district and county courts. She states, "Some courts have limited the powers of the attorney general to statutes and the constitution...but the question of common law or inherent powers has not been settled." Indeed, there have been conflicts of jurisdiction between district and county attorneys who feel they should represent the state of Texas in district or county court and the attorney general, who wants to represent the state as well.¹⁵ This gray area of jurisdiction, combined with the unsettled issue of common law, can lead to local entrenchment of courts when the attorney general is not granted authority to act as the state's prosecutor. This entrenchment increases when one factors in that county and district judges are elected locally, rather than appointed by the executive or legislature.¹⁶ Therefore, if a political boss can control the elections for these two offices, he/she can more readily withstand an assault by the central authority of the executive branch of the Texas state government on his power.

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¹⁵ Ibid., 197-198, 231-233

¹⁶ Ibid., 216-217, 225.

One of the Anglos who moved into south Texas in the early 1880s was Archie Parr, George Parr's father. Born in 1860 on an island off the east coast of Texas, Archie learned to take on responsibility at a young age, as his father's death forced him to drop out of school and work to support both his mother and sister. After gaining knowledge of ranching, Archie moved to Duval County in 1882 to set up residence in the town of Benavides. Archie started his career in Duval County as a foreman on a large ranch in Benavides, eventually saving enough to buy his own tract of land. Well respected by those in the Benavides area, he became known as *patrón* to his ranch hands. He advocated Mexican-American involvement in the local political arena, a demographic that made up around ninety percent of the population in Duval. Like most successful bosses in south Texas did, Archie assimilated into the culture of the Tejanos.¹⁷ As Evan Anders writes, "Parr adapted to this Hispanic community by learning the Spanish language and acting as the *patrón* who looked after the special needs of his workers. When the former cowboy decided to enter politics, the local constituency rallied to his cause."¹⁸ He cemented his status as *patrón* for the majority of Mexican-Americans in Duval County when, after the murder of three Tejanos by Anglos, he successfully intervened and prevented any further bloodshed between whites and Mexican-Americans. He also forestalled any involvement by the Texas Rangers, who were notoriously harsh with Mexican-Americans.¹⁹ This was an example of a landowner and cattle rancher siding with a group of people unable to protect themselves or rely on a strong central

¹⁷ Evan Anders, *Boss Rule in South Texas: The Progressive Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 173-174.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 174.

¹⁹ John Clark, *The Fall of the Duke of Duval* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1999), 25-30; Dudley Lynch, *The Duke of Duval* (Waco: Texian Press, 1976). 4; Montejano, 119, 122.

authority (the State of Texas) to protect them. Coupled with Archie's paternalism (he would regularly hand out money for groceries, medical costs, and other personal expenses to the needy) and willingness to manipulate the vote of his *peones*, his style of political leadership closely resembled the type of Spanish patron-client relations discussed above.²⁰

Archie consolidated power within Duval County, and was eventually elected to the Texas State Senate in 1914, where he stayed until allegations of corruption and tax evasion led to his downfall in 1934. After losing the 1934 election, and aged 73, he removed himself from politics altogether.²¹ The stage was now set for the ascendancy of Archie's son, George Berham Parr, to the seat of power in Duval County. While Archie definitely won the hearts of the Tejano population of Duval, he had always been seen as an outsider of sorts; George, on the other hand, was viewed as a native. George Parr's biographer, Dudley Lynch, writes, "[George] had learned Spanish with his English, and of the two, he spoke Spanish better. Fluently and with much gusto. His metaphors were Spanish metaphors, and his profanities were Spanish profanities."²² George was obviously next in line for the succession of political power in Duval County, and when Archie lost his senate race, George was there to step in.

Unfortunately for George, a run-in with the federal government in the 1930s limited his freedom in political matters. His failure to report \$42,140.46 of income (bribes and kickbacks) for the year 1928 led to a 1934 guilty plea in federal court,

²⁰ Clark, 28-29.

²¹ Lynch, 41-43; Evan Anders, "Parr, Archer," The Handbook of Texas Online, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/PP/fpa35.html> (accessed March 8, 2007).

²² Lynch, 35.

resulting in two years of probation with a stipulation that he stay out of politics.²³ George ignored the stipulation. Unfortunately for Parr, this failure to comply with the court ruling landed him in a federal prison in 1936, having breached the terms of his probation by physically assaulting a state legislator and by altering an oil and gas lease to benefit himself. He was paroled the following year, but he had lost certain civil rights as a felon, including the right to hold office.²⁴ Nevertheless, George Parr was still the undisputed Duke of Duval, and he performed as such with no real challenges to his authority until he sided with LBJ in the 1948 Democratic primary for a U.S. Senate seat.

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The first time Lyndon Johnson came into any serious contact with the Parr family was during his first run for U.S. Senator during a 1941 special election. Johnson was running against Governor W. Lee "Pappy" O'Daniel, and both camps were competing for the south Texas vote. Johnson, whose only personal connection to the Parr family was that of the friendly relationship held between his father, State Senator Sam Johnson, and Archie Parr, had to vie for votes that had previously gone overwhelmingly to O'Daniel.²⁵ Luckily for Johnson, he had the backing of financial heavy hitters Brown & Root, as well as Alvin Wirtz, a former state senator who worked with Archie Parr on a number of issues in the state senate. With Wirtz's support, and the money supplied by Brown & Root, Johnson bought the south Texas vote. It was through this first statewide election

²³ Ibid., 39-41.

²⁴ Ibid., 45-47.

²⁵ Ibid., 36-37.

that LBJ developed his relationship with south Texas bosses, purportedly calling George Parr himself to secure the votes he knew were for sale.²⁶

While Johnson had locked down the south Texas vote, his lead in the polls grew. However, on election day, Johnson committed a significant mistake that cost him the race. To make it appear as if his lead was increasing, Johnson ordered that the south Texas counties report their vote totals.²⁷ As a rule in this era of Texas politics, one refrained from reporting the votes from counties that one controlled in order to “amend” voting returns once votes from uncontrolled or hostile counties were reported. When Johnson ordered the returns from south Texas to be made public so early, he allowed the O’Daniel faction to prepare a response from their controlled counties in east Texas.²⁸ The returns from east Texas eventually overtook Johnson’s lead of 4,500 votes to give O’Daniel the win by 1,311.²⁹ Johnson never forgot this lesson, which proved useful in his next run for the U.S. Senate.

In 1948, Johnson again eyed a U.S. senate seat, but this time his main opponent was venerated ex-Governor Coke Stevenson. Stevenson was not only as well-known as O’Daniel, but was also considerably more popular. One member of the state legislature said, “Coke Stevenson was just like Coca-Cola. He was a state-known product. Everybody knew who he was. And the *Dallas News* had built up his image as our ‘cowboy governor’...[He was] the household word of conservatism.”³⁰ He served as governor from 1941 to 1947, the longest streak of consecutive terms for governor at the

²⁶ Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Path To Power* (New York: Knopf, 1982), 722-723.

²⁷ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 222.

²⁸ Robert A. Caro, *Path To Power* (New York: Knopf, 1982), 733-738.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 737-740.

³⁰ Dallek, 315.

time. His margins of victory were testament to his popularity as well.³¹ Johnson, although receiving statewide recognition during the 1941 campaign, was less well known, and less popular than his opponent; he thus faced a significant challenge. Further complicating matters was the fact that, unlike the 1941 special election, the 1948 election would require Johnson to give up his congressional seat. Johnson thus faced the possibility of losing, at least temporarily, his political career.³² The connections Johnson forged in the south Texas region with George Parr again came into play, but Johnson remembered the lessons of the '41 election, and made sure to use the south Texas bloc votes to their full potential.

The 1948 election was unlike anything that Texas politics had experienced. In the second volume of his biography on Johnson, Robert Caro juxtaposes the campaign styles of both Stevenson and Johnson, crediting Johnson with ushering in the modern age of political campaigns in Texas.³³ Stevenson campaigned by going town to town and making speeches to small groups of people, while Johnson used weekly polls, a massive radio campaign, and a helicopter in order to capture votes. The helicopter was an especially interesting addition to this race, as the general populace, especially in rural areas, had no conception of what a helicopter was. In addition to these endeavors, Johnson's hectic schedule saw him making upwards of twenty-four public appearances a day.³⁴ Johnson's efforts were indicative not only of an astute political mind, but also of

³¹ Eldon S. Branda, "Stevenson, Coke Robert." *The Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/SS/fst48.html> (accessed March 8, 2007).

³² Dallek, 295-297.

³³ Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Means of Ascent* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 193.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 192-193, 216-218, 251.

the will that he put forth to win this election. After election day, these efforts paid off in that he held Stevenson to a plurality of the vote. Johnson received 34% of the vote, Stevenson received 40%, and George Peddy, a highly conservative candidate, received 20%. All of the other candidates received a total 7% of the vote. As Stevenson did not receive a majority, there was a runoff between himself and Johnson. Johnson's chances appeared slim, as it was widely believed that Stevenson would pick up most of the Peddy votes in the runoff. Therefore, Johnson had to make up the 71,460-vote margin that Stevenson had over him, while making sure that the former Peddy-voters would not turn into Stevenson-voters.

Johnson kicked off the runoff campaign deep in George Peddy territory in an attempt to sway conservative voters in that area away from Coke Stevenson. LBJ and financiers Brown & Root began to spend large amounts of time and money in order to gain the vote in the east Texas area. When Ernest Boyett, Stevenson's top aide, called east Texas politicians in order to ask for their support, he discovered that they had been given money in return for their support of Johnson.³⁵ While Johnson was busy securing votes in east Texas, the Stevenson camp was busy shooting itself in the foot. Communication between the Stevenson campaign and county leaders was almost non-existent, and even encouraged some leaders to take their pre-planned vacations instead of helping with the runoff. In fact, two counties that Stevenson had won in the first primary did not bother with holding a runoff election, believing that Stevenson would win the election regardless.³⁶ This attitude seemed pervasive among Stevenson supporters, while Johnson supporters were determined to secure every possible vote in order to win.

³⁵ Ibid., 284-285.

³⁶ Ibid., 286.

Political scientists Dale Baum and James Hailey estimate, “113,523 voters who had cast ballots for Stevenson in the first primary shunned the runoff balloting. By way of contrast, an estimated 4,054 Texans who had voted for LBJ in July failed to return to the polling places in August.”³⁷ The runoff was close, and the lesson Johnson had learned in 1941 helped him edge out Stevenson in the final count.

Nearly one million people voted in the runoff election of August 28th. As the unofficial results came in, the Texas Election Bureau (TEB) showed Stevenson holding a slim lead. Over the next days, as votes from counties were tallied and released by the TEB, the Johnson team tried to muster more votes from areas they controlled. People from Johnson’s campaign placed calls to county managers to squeeze more votes out of the returns. One call accidentally went to one of Stevenson’s county managers, inadvertently alerting the Stevenson camp to what was occurring.³⁸ Worse still, Stevenson received reports that John Connally, Johnson’s campaign manager, was seen in Duval County, possibly soliciting Parr for more votes.³⁹ They had reason to be worried, as on the sixth day after the election, south and southwest Texas counties began to report corrections and amendments after most of the votes had been tabulated. A few counties like Dimmit and Cameron reported just a few corrections in Johnson’s favor, but Jim Wells County called in an extra 200 votes for Johnson. This gave Johnson the lead

³⁷ Dale Baum & James L. Hailey, “Lyndon Johnson’s Victory in the 1948 Texas Senate Race: A Reappraisal,” *Political Science Quarterly* 109, no. 4 (1994): 599.

³⁸ Caro, 313.

³⁹ Kahl, 104; These reports gain credence when compared with the recently released Oral History of Archer Parr, George’s nephew. Archer asserts that Johnson never directly solicited Parr for more votes, on the phone or in person, and that it was Connally who came down to ask for votes. Transcript, Archer Parr Oral History Interview 1, August 23, 1984, by Joe B. Frantz, page 5, LBJ Library, Austin.

with 87 votes out of 988,295 cast.⁴⁰ The Johnson campaign had waited until they knew the margin they had to beat, and had let the south Texas counties they had in their hip pocket lead LBJ to victory.

Of course, Stevenson immediately cried foul, setting in motion an investigation that gripped Texas for the next few weeks. Enlisting the aid of Texas Ranger Frank Hamer, Stevenson traveled to Jim Wells County to investigate the Precinct 13 voting list, the source of the amended 200 votes. Using Hamer to force his way into the bank where the voting list was kept, Stevenson and his aides Dibrell and Gardner memorized (they were forbidden from writing down anything by the county attorney) as many names as possible from the final 200 people that supposedly cast their vote. Not only did they observe that all of those names were in different ink than the ones that came before, but that they were all written down in the same handwriting. After failing to get the 200 votes for Johnson nullified through legal means within Jim Wells County, Stevenson looked toward the State Democratic Convention as a means of challenging LBJ's apparent victory.⁴¹ The State Democratic Convention chose which candidate's name appeared on the final ballot for the general election. If Stevenson could win the convention's approval, his name would appear on the ballot regardless of what the final runoff tally was.

During the first day of the convention, the State Democratic Executive Committee met to decide which candidate, Johnson or Stevenson, would appear on the ballot for the general election. The Executive Committee members, much like the delegations that came from around the state, were divided ideologically between themselves. These factions were divided between Truman loyalists, and Thurmond Dixiecrats, with the

⁴⁰ Caro, 317.

⁴¹ Kahl, 121-122, 129-130.

more liberal Johnson being associated with Truman and the conservative Stevenson with Thurmond.⁴² The Truman loyalists carried the day, with the State Democratic Executive Committee voting 29-28 to appoint Lyndon Johnson as the Democratic nominee for U.S. Senate. However, Stevenson had one more chance, as the delegates could overturn the Executive Committee's decision on the second day of the convention. The Truman loyalists, however, purged all pro-Thurmond delegations to ensure a loyal delegation to the National Democratic Convention and to ensure Johnson's nomination.⁴³ Stevenson could no longer count on the state Democratic machinery to help him in his cause to expose the voter fraud in Jim Wells County.

Stevenson recognized that he had one last avenue of action: the federal government. He thus filed a petition with a federal judge, T. Whitfield Davidson, claiming that his civil rights had been violated by the fraudulent voting practices in Jim Wells County. Judge Davidson granted a temporary restraining order keeping Johnson's name off of the ballot. Davidson further instructed officers of the court, known as Masters in Chancery, to collect evidence and depositions in Jim Wells County in preparation for a trial to decide if Stevenson's civil rights had, in fact, been violated. Johnson had to appeal this decision and hope for an injunction to halt this investigation, but as the deadline approached for his name to appear on the November ballot, time was an important factor. Johnson turned to the legal mind of Abe Fortas. Fortas' strategy was to appeal to the Fifth Circuit Court with the intention of deliberately losing that appeal. Upon losing that appeal, the Johnson camp could thus appeal directly to the Supreme

⁴² Key, 256-258.

⁴³ Dallek, 335-336; Transcript, Stuart Long Oral History Interview I, August 13, 1968, by Paul Bolton: 16, LBJ Library, Austin.

Court Judge who held administrative jurisdiction over the Fifth Circuit Court, which happened to be Justice Hugo Black. Johnson would thus fast track his way to a Supreme Court Justice, bypassing an arduous appeals process when considering the time restraints he faced. Black eventually issued an injunction against Davidson's investigation until the whole Supreme Court could weigh in on the matter. However, the Supreme Court refused to hear Stevenson's case, and Johnson's name went on the ballot for the general election, which he won handily.⁴⁴

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Lyndon Johnson had thus weathered the storm of the 1948 Democratic senatorial primary, but his victory was tainted by the party in-fighting, legal maneuverings, and his association with an obviously crooked political regime that was the Parr machine. The precinct in which the 200 votes were fraudulently cast for him, otherwise known as Box 13, became legendary in Texas, and the national press as well, and if George Parr was not a household name amongst Texans before 1948, he was now. The 1948 election had cast a spotlight on south Texas voting abnormalities, as well as the Texas election code in general, but how the Texan government would react to this sudden publicity remained in doubt.

⁴⁴ Caro, 363-364, 369-373 380, 384; Dallek, 336-338

Chapter Two: A Link in the Chain

This chapter discusses the rift in the Texas Democratic Party and how the 1948 election aggravated pre-existing tensions. The chapter first places the '48 election in context with a previous division that took place during the 1944 State Democratic Convention. The chapter then discusses the 1948 convention and the importance of Johnson's close senatorial election in furthering the tensions inherent in the party. Finally, the chapter explores how the continuing agitation between the fractious party led to a Republican insurgency and how the Republicans used the 1948 election as a method to gain support in Texas.

Around 1944, Texas Democratic Party unity began to show serious cracks. These divisions continued up through the 1948 Democratic convention in Fort Worth, where a particularly cantankerous atmosphere prevailed as state politics and national politics combined. Johnson's 1948 election particularly exacerbated the differences between the sections of the Texas Democratic Party. The 1948 election aggravated old issues as well as creating new ones, contributing to the fall of a cohesive Democratic Party in Texas and the rise of the Republican Party.

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The intra-party divisions showcased by the 1948 State Democratic Convention were rooted in the 1944 presidential election and an influx of new wealth into the state of Texas. While Roosevelt and the New Deal retained their popularity in Texas through most of the war years, certain conservatives abhorred the kind of big government that

FDR advocated. Economics established the dominating factor for party division in Texas. Political scientist V.O. Key contrasts this aspect of Texas politics to the rest of the South, where race instituted the lines of party division. Key states, "In 40 years a new-rich class has arisen from the exploitation of natural resources in a gold rush atmosphere...imbued with faith in individual self-reliance and unschooled in social responsibilities of wealth, many of these men have been more sensitive than a Pennsylvania manufacturer to the policies of the Roosevelt and Truman Administrations."¹ In 1944, a conservative faction of politicians representing this new class caused a rift within the Texas Democratic Party, and created a new party called the Texas Regulars.

The first battle between the factions that came to be called the Regulars and the loyalists took place in the state convention that would select a delegation to send to the national convention to choose presidential electors.² This dramatic battle in the state convention in Austin foreshadowed the passionate struggle for control of the party for the next few years. Conservatives achieved a major victory by installing their former Governor Dan Moody as the chairman of the convention, over another former governor and pro-New Dealer, James Allred. Subsequently, party loyalists found it difficult to maintain a united Democratic front. Robert Garson writes,

Alvin J. Wirtz, former undersecretary of the interior, tried to introduce resolutions endorsing a fourth term and requiring the state's electors to vote for the party nominees. Pandemonium broke out after Wirtz had made his proposals. Anti-Roosevelt delegates insisted that the question of the status of electors should not be put up for a vote. When the chair sustained the objections to the Wirtz resolution, a Mrs. Alfred Taylor

¹ V.O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Knopf, 1949), 254-255.

² *Ibid.*, 256.

called upon “true Democrats” to walk out of the assembly and hold their own convention across the hall in the House of Representatives chamber.³

The loyalist faction of delegates proceeded to defiantly walk out of the regular convention, boisterously singing “The Eyes Of Texas Are Upon You,” and formed a rump convention, where they named their own delegates to the National Democratic Convention. In this heated moment the loyalists nearly accused the “regular” convention (hence the name Texas Regulars) of treason. They wrote,

...we could not trifle with the safety of our country by permitting a meeting of the enemies of democracy – republicans masquerading as democrats – to make it possible to throw the election of a president of the United States into a contest before the lower House of Congress, and thus cause confusion and disunity in the midst of this cruel and desperate war.⁴

As a compromise, the national convention “seated both delegations and split the state’s vote between them.” However, at Texas’ second Democratic Convention, loyalists purged the anti-Roosevelt electors from the slate, who then went on to form the Texas Regulars party.⁵

The Texas Regulars party was short-lived, but the conservatives who comprised it continued to flex their political muscles at liberal Democrats. The Regulars were welcomed back into the Democratic Party in 1946, where the former members fought numerous liberal Democrats for state offices. Public enemy number one was Homer Rainey, former president of the University of Texas, who was running for governor. As the opponent of the ex-Regulars candidate of choice, Beauford Jester. Rainey received

³ Robert Garson, *The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, 1941-1948* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974). 109.

⁴ George N. Green, *The Establishment in Texas Politics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), 48.

⁵ Key, 256.

the brunt of conservative attacks. Rainey placed third in the final election, while Jester won the majority of votes. Other conservative candidates made inroads statewide, resulting in a reversal of fortunes for conservative Democrats when compared to the 1944 ordeal. According to Key, "There was however, a general consistency, in that those who had been most ardent Texas Regulars were the most fearful of Rainey: those who supported Rainey had in the main been sympathetic to Roosevelt. And many liberal leaders in the 1948 convention had been Rainey supporters in 1946."⁶ Thus, even though the Regulars were back in the Texas Democratic Party, the same ideological fault-lines existed, and the conflict between the two sides simmered on through the 1948 campaign.

In the 1948 convention, state and national politics merged in a way not previously seen in the two earlier conventions. Conservatives were unhappy with President Truman's stance on issues such as civil rights, state ownership of offshore seabed containing oil (called the "tidelands"), and New Deal economic policies. They sought to take over the convention in order to select presidential electors who would vote for Strom Thurmond, candidate of the new States' Rights Party instead of Truman.⁷ Party loyalists naturally opposed this move, and searched for ways to ensure Texas' votes went to Truman. LBJ and his aides sought to use this contentious environment to their advantage. As mentioned in a previous chapter, the State Democratic Executive Committee had voted on the first day of the convention 29-28 for Lyndon Johnson as the Democratic nominee for senator, but all of the delegates at the convention would have a chance to overturn their decision with a vote on the second day. Johnson aide Stuart Long confided

⁶ Ibid., 257-258.

⁷ Garson, 161-165; Transcript, Robert Calvert Oral History Interview I, May 6, 1971, by David McComb, page 19, LBJ Library, Austin; Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Means of Ascent* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 332.

that if the legally elected delegates were to vote on the issue, there was a good chance that Johnson would lose. Therefore, he explained,

...[we] combined this Loyal organization with the Johnson organization. We kind of did this informally, we never did announce we were doing that but...there were those that accused us of making a deal because the so-called Liberals came out in control of the State Democratic Executive Committee out of the same convention that Johnson got the certification as a senate nominee. But at any rate we worked pretty hard on that, [and] lined up delegations [to vote for Johnson and the with the loyalists].⁸

Johnson and loyalist forces had combined in order to accomplish two things; first, that Johnson would be assured the vote of the full convention of delegates, and second, that the convention would remain in loyalist control so that Truman would receive Texas' electoral votes, which would mean a purge of all Dixiecrats. As loyalist Bob Eckhardt explained, "[Johnson] helped us on the seating. In return we took care of the Johnson crowd on the ballot boxes." Johnson helped by making sure that delegates he could pressure, mainly from central and south Texas, would vote in favor of a loyalist-dominated convention.⁹

During the second day of the convention, Democratic loyalists attempted to purge the Dixiecrat delegations in order to ensure votes for Truman. Chairman of the State Democratic Executive Committee Robert Calvert remembered, "The pro-party people's first move in the convention was to unseat the Harris County [Houston] delegation that had been sitting there, on the grounds that they were not Democrats, they were Republicans. This motion carried by a convention vote. This put out of the convention the biggest delegation which was pro-Stevenson and anti-party." After the Harris County

⁸ Transcript, Stuart Long Oral History Interview I, August 13, 1968, by Paul Bolton, page 16, LBJ Library, Austin.

⁹ Caro, 332, 349.

delegation was replaced by a loyalist delegation, more disloyal (and anti-Johnson) delegations from Dallas and Tarrant Counties (which comprised the cities of Dallas and Fort Worth, respectively) were purged, and the loyalist, pro-Johnson delegates were seated.¹⁰

Without Johnson's prodding of the delegations from central and south Texas, the loyalist faction may not have been able to purge the Dixiecrats. The alliance between the Johnson campaign and the loyalist faction of Texas Democrats insured that the Democratic political machinery would not deny Johnson a place on the ballot (although the court issues were still unsettled). It also promised Harry Truman Texas' electoral votes for the presidential election, and severely agitated the conservative/Dixiecrat element of the Texas Democratic Party. The loyalists would have faced a much tougher challenge in ousting the rebellious delegations had this alliance not existed, and the alliance only existed due to the close nature of Johnson's '48 election. Sam Rayburn perhaps realized this after the successful purge when he invited George Parr onto the Convention's platform and called him, "[T]he hero of the Democratic party in Texas."¹¹ The break in the Democratic Party in Texas cannot be attributable to any singular event, but rather to episodes like the 1944 conventions and the 1946 election, which elevated tensions between Texas liberals and conservatives. The 1948 senate contest was undoubtedly one of the more important episodes.

Such conflict ultimately gave rise to a Republican insurgency, and the 1948 election continued to play a part in their rise in power. Reacting to the controversy of the

¹⁰ Calvert, 20.

¹¹ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908-1960* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1991), 336.

1948 election, the Texas legislature passed a bill reforming the electoral code. This bill further fractured the Texas Democratic Party by giving more political clout to minority parties. Established in 1951, this electoral reform, also called the “Duval Law,” contained a new provision that allowed for candidates to “cross-file.” The law stated, “The name of no candidate shall appear more than once upon the official ballot, except as a candidate for two (2) or more offices permitted by the Constitution to be held by the same person or as the nominee of two (2) or more political parties for the same office.”¹² Thus, any number of political parties could name the same candidate for office. This served to destabilize and divide the Texas Democratic Party further. One editorial read, “[Cross-filing] is regarded as having the effect of giving the Republicans, who are very much in the minority, and the Dixiecrats who play in and out of both Republican and Democratic folds, very much greater weight in the nomination and election of candidates for public office.”¹³ Hypothetically, a Republican or Dixiecrat could enter a Democratic primary race, as well as their own respective party’s primary races, and fight for the Democratic Party nomination among the other Democratic contenders. If the vote splits between all candidates involved, and the Republican or Dixiecrat looks attractive to enough Democratic voters, then that candidate would receive the Democratic nomination. If that candidate wins their own party’s primary, then they are virtually assured political office. Conversely, the dominant, Democratic Party would now have to contend with added candidates in their primaries who would divert more time, money, and votes away from

¹² The State of Texas, *General and Special Laws of The State of Texas: Passed By The Regular Session of the Fifty-second Legislature*, 1951 (Austin: A.C. Baldwin & Sons, 1951), 1120.

¹³ The Editor’s Notebook, “‘Duval Law.’ With Defects, Passes,” *The Austin American*, June 1, 1951.

Democratic candidates than was usual. Had this law been introduced by itself, it is likely that it would not have been passed, but as it was a part of the “Duval Law,” the only opposition it faced was from editorials after the bill had been passed. It was this law, coupled with Governor Shivers’ endorsement of Republican Dwight Eisenhower for president in 1952, that led to “Every Democrat running for office, except agricultural commissioner John White, allow[ing] his name to be cross-filed as a Republican.”¹⁴

Republicans also used the 1948 election as a political tool whenever they competed against any politician with links to LBJ. When Johnson’s former campaign manager John Connally ran for the office of governor against Republican Jack Cox in 1962, Republicans hammered the Box 13 issue as much as they could. In his memoir, Republican strategist John Knaggs describes, “[Cox’s] first major contrived thrust against Connally was an ‘expedition’ to Duval County where Cox was to speak in San Diego on July 28, to dramatize the LBJ – Connally ties to George Parr.” According to Knaggs, “Cox...reaped a tremendous amount of publicity from the event.”¹⁵ The Texas GOP also referenced the 1948 election in both the Goldwater presidential race in 1964 and Republican Senator John Tower’s re-election campaign in 1966. In fact, for Senator Tower’s campaign, the Republicans again went to south Texas to highlight the connection between boss politics and the Texas Democratic Party. At a rally in Alice, a man from neighboring Duval County said, “We are sick and tired of the things the Democratic machine has done to us in Duval County. We believe it is time to build a

¹⁴ Green, 143-147.

¹⁵ John R. Knaggs, *Two-Party Texas: The John Tower Era, 1961-1984* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1986). 25-27.

strong two-party system and we want to help our good friend, Senator John Tower.”¹⁶

While not a main thrust of any election campaign, the 1948 election and the controversy surrounding it was, in Knagg’s words, “...indelibly etched in the political memories of Texans...”¹⁷ Such a contentious and divisive event was harped on by the rising Texan Republican Party in order to drive up support for the Democrats’ opposition. The shadow of ’48 stretched into the 60s, and the Republicans gained votes because of it.

* * *

The 1948 senatorial election exacerbated the divisions within the Democratic Party of Texas. It did not create the divisions, nor did it crack them wide open, but it applied enough pressure on the disputing sides to become a significant link in the diminution of the power and influence of the Democratic Party in Texas. What had started in 1944 was continued through the events and aftershocks of the 1948 election, with enough apparent influence to warrant Republican references to it eighteen years after the fact in an attempt to gain votes. The ’48 election aided the fragmentation of the Democratic Party and helped foster the growth of the Republican Party in Texas.

¹⁶ Ibid., 81.

¹⁷ Ibid., 24.

Chapter Three: Under the Big Top

This chapter analyzes how the state government of Texas reacted to the 1948 election. A dichotomy of conservatism versus progressivism characterized the legislative debate over electoral reform, resulting in a bill that, while granting new powers to executive branch officials, still reflected the old Texan suspicion of a powerful central government. Additionally, when the executive branch investigated Parr in the 1950s, the restraints upon executive officials, in conjunction with the advantages that local authorities enjoyed, resulted in no major victories against political corruption. While the events of 1948 had provoked a response from the Texas state government, no discernable changes in Texas politics occurred besides a lackluster election reform bill.

After the widespread publicity caused by the 1948 election, the fallout within the Texas Democratic Party, and Stevenson's last-ditch effort to involve the federal government, it became apparent that state officers would have to react in order to appease the outraged public. Governor Jester took the first step by creating a committee to study the Texas election code, but died in office shortly thereafter. Jester's successor, Governor Allen Shivers, at first did not seem interested in pursuing George Parr, but after a personal dispute with the south Texas boss, he turned Parr and his machine into one of his major concerns. He urged the Fifty-second Legislature of Texas to recodify the state's election laws, which it accomplished in mid-1951. These new laws granted more power to the executive branch of Texas, but also allowed local authorities to retain much sovereignty, resulting in an uncertain balance of power between state and local officials with regard to election fraud. With this minor victory in the state legislature, Shivers and the attorney general of Texas, John Ben Shepperd, positioned themselves as wanting to

clean up south Texas politics, launching investigations into the Parr machine. However, their focus was mainly on personal political gain from the public scrutiny they were focusing on the Parr machine. After all of their efforts, they had failed to dislodge the Parr machine from south Texas.

* * *

Following the general election of 1948, Governor Beauford Jester convened a committee to study and amend the Texas election code. The motivation behind the “Governor’s Committee on Election Laws” became clear at its very first meeting on December 8, 1948. Van M. Kennedy, from Corpus Christi, proposed the first motion, which cut to the heart of the matter. He moved, “That the primary policy and objective of this committee is the recommendation of legislation safe-guarding the sanctity of the ballot and to propose such reforms so as may provide for honesty and fairness in the conduct of elections.”¹ Thus, the primary goal of the committee was a direct reaction to the ’48 senatorial race. Governor Jester felt the need to take steps so that another Box 13 fiasco would not happen again, or that it would appear he took at least some measures to prevent another incident of electoral fraud.

Additionally, the committee sought to give officials in the state government more power in the fight against election fraud. The three most important recommendations were as follows:

¹ Governor’s Committee On Election Laws, Organizational Meeting, December 8, 1948, Shivers Papers, Texas State Archives. Austin.

1. That the Attorney General be given authority to investigate and prosecute election irregularities if local authorities fail to do so.
2. That the State Supreme Court be given jurisdiction over district and county contests, whether or not the validity of a statute is involved, and that such appeals be given precedence in that court.
3. That it not be necessary to allege fraud in order to contest or secure a review of an election before the Executive Committee.²

The committee recognized that more power had to be given to state officials, who had limited power due to Reconstruction's influence in the Texas Constitution, if the kind of election fraud perpetrated in Jim Wells County was to be avoided in the future.

Governor Jester never had the chance to pursue the committee's findings, as he died of a heart attack July 11, 1949, leaving Lieutenant Governor Allan Shivers as the top executive officer in the state.³ Before Jester's death, Parr had solicited and received Jester's word that a Parr-backed man would receive a judicial appointment in San Antonio. When Jester died, Parr went to Shivers to see where he stood on the subject. According to Dudley Lynch, Shivers said, "Boys, if you want anything from Corpus, from anywhere in our district, whatever you say goes." However, Parr had assumed that Shivers would appoint another Parr-backed man to replace the one going to San Antonio, an act that would clash with some of the business elite in Corpus Christi, where there would be a vacancy in the local district judge position. Shivers did not make the appointment, and then proceeded to make other appointments in Parr's region without checking with Parr.⁴ After that, George Parr mobilized against Shivers in the 1950 Democratic gubernatorial primary, giving Shivers 108 votes to his opponent's 4, 239.

² Letter from Chandler to Jester, March 7, 1949, Shivers Papers, Texas State Archives, Austin.

³ Tommy W. Stringer, "Jester. Beauford Halbert," *The Handbook of Texas Online*. <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/IJ/fje8.html> (accessed March 8, 2007).

⁴ Dudley Lynch, *The Duke of Duval* (Waco: Texian Press. 1976), 65-66.

These returns clashed with the statewide returns, which totaled 829,730 for Shivers, and 195,997 for Caso March, a roughly 4-to-1 margin of victory.⁵ While Jester's dealings with south Texas and election fraud were political in nature, Shivers now had a personal reason to pursue Parr and his regime.⁶

In 1951, Governor Shivers exhorted the Texas State Legislature to pass a bill recodifying the Texas electoral code. In a message to the Texas House of Representatives on May 2, Shivers said, "The election machinery of this State is seriously in need of strengthening, and for this reason I wholeheartedly support the revision and recodification of our election laws. I sincerely hope that you will do every thing in your power to see that House Bill No. 6 is passed." He specifically stressed that the office of attorney general needed more power to pursue alleged electoral fraud independent of local authorities, a solution originally proposed by The Governor's Committee on Election Laws.⁷ This aspect of the proposed bill proved to be one of the more controversial parts of the bill, as some legislators were concerned that the code would give too much power to the attorney general. As one opponent said, "This change in law would give the attorney general power to run any local election."⁸ This distrust of centralized government parallels the underlying principles of the Texas Constitution of 1876, highlighting the reluctance to grant more powers to the state's executive branch. However, the final version of the bill passed the House with a resounding majority of 114

⁵ Lynch, 66; Carolyn Barta, "Elections," Texas Almanac, <http://www.texasalmanac.com/politics> (accessed March 8, 2007).

⁶ Ben Barnes, interviewed by Matthew McCarroll August 21, 2006.

⁷ Texas House of Representatives, *Journal of The House of Representatives of the Fifty-second Legislature*, (Austin: A. C. Baldwin & Sons, 1951), 2023-2024.

⁸ Dave Cheavens, "House Passes Bill Designed To End Corruption At Polls," *The Austin American*, May 9, 1951.

to 12, indicating, to some extent, a willingness to break from the traditions of the past in order to remedy political issues like electoral fraud.

That said, both traditional and more progressive factions compromised to ensure passage of the bill. For instance, the Texas Senate amended Section 130, Subsection 1, to weaken the attorney general's power to investigate local elections. This part of the bill, which stipulated the powers of the attorney general when investigating electoral fraud, stated,

In any special, general, or primary election in this State for any office, national, state, district, county, precinct, school, or municipal, or any election on any proposition, the Attorney General of Texas, in the case of elections involving two (2) or more counties, and the district and county attorneys, in the case of elections involving less than two (2) counties, may on their own motion...investigate the conduct of such election and the making, canvassing, and reporting of returns.⁹

The attorney general could thus only investigate electoral fraud in a case where an election involved more than one county. Otherwise, local officials in the offices of the district and county attorneys, who were more likely to be controlled by regional political bosses, would have jurisdiction.¹⁰ Furthermore, the attorney general and both the district and county attorneys had to petition the district judge in order to seize any relevant records.¹¹ Additionally, local officials retained significant power over the conduct of elections. Precinct judges, the presiding judge in particular, wielded enormous power at individual polling locations. These judges, appointed by the county commissioners'

⁹ Texas Senate, *Journal of The Senate of The State of Texas: Regular Session of the Fifty-second Legislature*, (Austin: A.C. Baldwin & Sons, 1951), 1256-1257.

¹⁰ It must be noted that Duval County's legislative, congressional, and judicial districts encompassed more than two counties, thus giving the attorney general jurisdiction in election fraud cases concerning those offices.

¹¹ The State of Texas, *General and Special Laws of The State of Texas: Passed By The Regular Session of the Fifty-second Legislature*, (Austin, A.C. Baldwin & Sons, 1951), 1152.

court.¹² could exert considerable influence over their polling stations as dictated by law.

With regard to the power of the presiding judge, the law stated,

The presiding judge of election, while in the discharge of his duties as such, shall have the power of the district judge to enforce order and keep the peace. He may appoint special police officers to act as such during the election and may issue warrants of arrest for felony, a misdemeanor or breach of peace committed at such election, directed to the sheriff or any constable of the county, or such special peace officer, who shall forthwith execute any such warrants, and, if so ordered by the presiding judge, confine the party arrested in jail during the election or until the day after the election.¹³

With such authority, a presiding judge could effectively control the election, any way he wanted to by arresting any person creating a “breach of peace,” a clause that could be interpreted fairly liberally. Any supervisors from political parties or newspapers who stepped out of line might face arrest. Although the Texas legislature moved to combat electoral fraud by granting the attorney general more authority, compromises with conservative interests favoring local authority still allowed political machines a great deal of room to maneuver.

Significantly, debate amongst politicians and Texas media with regard to the recodification of the election laws centered on the George Parr machine. In the Texas House of Representatives. Representative Zivley spoke of “rumors and propaganda” surrounding the 1948 senate race, but he said, “Nobody has proved one dishonest act in Duval...If they like what they’ve got, it suits me just fine.” In response, Representative Waggoner Carr said, “Do you take a stand for what’s been going on in some parts of the

¹² A local entity comprised of the county judge and four officials from separate precincts in the county.

¹³ The State of Texas, *General and Special Laws of The State of Texas: Passed By The Regular Session of the Fifty-second Legislature*, (Austin, A.C. Baldwin & Sons, 1951), 1140.

state...Are you stamping approval on what's been going on in Duval County?"¹⁴ When the bill was signed into law, the *Austin American* ran an editorial calling it the "Duval Law."¹⁵ The discourse in 1951 made it clear that these revisions were a direct reaction towards the 1948 election, and the legislature recognized that something had to be done, or at least seem to be done, to rectify the situation.

Concurrent with this statewide focus on election laws and the George Parr machine, the national media turned a spotlight on south Texas. In June of 1951, the national weekly *Collier's* produced a piece advertised on its front page entitled, "Something is Rotten In The State Of Texas."¹⁶ The article lambasted George Parr, his "dukedom," and the way the 1948 election was handled.¹⁷ The article caused such a stir, that even Lyndon Johnson wrote a carefully drafted response to the editor, expressing shock that such "allegations" were arising again.¹⁸ In addition to the national press, it can be assumed that the '48 election left a bad taste in many conservative Democrats' mouths, as staunch conservative Coke Stevenson, favored by influential conservative newspapers like the *Dallas Morning News*, seemed to have had an election stolen from him by a south Texas political boss. Shivers did not forget this, and after Parr snubbed him in the 1950 Primary, Shivers turned Duval County into a pet project, claiming to be

¹⁴ Dave Cheavens, "House Passes Bill Designed To End Corruption At Polls," *The Austin American*, May 9, 1951.

¹⁵ The Editor's Notebook, "'Duval Law,' With Defects, Passes," *The Austin American*, 1 June 1951, page 4.

¹⁶ Gordon Shendel, "Something Is Rotten in the State of Texas," *Collier's Magazine*, June 9, 1951, Front Cover.

¹⁷ Shendel, 13-19.

¹⁸ LBJ letter to Editor Ruppel, Draft, Pre-Presidential Confidential File, *Collier's Magazine*. LBJ Library, Austin.

cleaning up politics, while receiving the praise heaped upon him by many conservative Texans who wanted to see Parr's comeuppance for the '48 chicanery.

Events in 1952 provided Shivers with the excuse to launch his attack on the Parr regime. On September 8, a hit man by the name of Alfredo Cervantes was hired by someone in the Parr regime to kill a long-time opponent, Jacob Floyd, Sr. George Parr's lawyer, Nago Alaniz, called Floyd and asked him to meet at a nearby restaurant. Once he arrived, Nago tipped Floyd off that there was a hit man out to get him. Unfortunately, by this time, Cervantes, who was hiding in Floyd's garage, had already fatally shot Jacob "Buddy" Floyd, Jr. four times, mistaking the son for the father. Parr decried the botched assassination attempt, "I sincerely hope that the perpetrators of this atrocity will be brought to speedy justice." However, he then proceeded to pay for the defense of one of the assassin's accomplices, Mario Sapet, thus casting doubt on his sincerity.¹⁹ This event, coupled with a dissatisfied public employee by the name of Diego Heras who came forward with evidence of Parr's embezzlement, jump-started Shivers' case against the Duke.²⁰

Shivers used the information obtained by Heras and the death of Jacob Floyd, Jr. as campaign tools in his future electoral candidacies. For his re-election campaign in 1954, Shivers planned for a statewide radio tour highlighting the death of Jacob Floyd, Jr. He had three teams of supporters, including Jacob Floyd, Sr., travel through central, east, north, and west Texas detailing the assassination of the young man in sixty-three different broadcasts.²¹ This statewide tour coincidentally occurred immediately before the Texas

¹⁹ Lynch, 69-72.

²⁰ Ibid., 74.

²¹ Map of Jacob Floyd Jr. Radio Tour, Shivers Papers, Texas State Archives, Austin.

Democratic primary. Additionally, the letters of support sent to Shivers could only have reinforced Shivers' determination to clean up of Duval County.²² While Shivers seemed perfectly willing to work with Parr before their confrontation over a judicial appointment, the snubbed Shivers found out that his personal grudge with Parr could become a fairly effective campaign tool.

One of Shivers' compatriots during the fight with Duval County was John Ben Shepperd. From 1952 to 1956. John Ben Shepperd served as the attorney general of Texas, and was at the forefront of the state's battle with George Parr. Working off of the information given by Diego Heras and others like Alice resident Mark Williams, Shepperd began to use state apparatus like the Bureau of Identification and Records, as well as the State Auditor, to check out reported irregularities in Duval County.²³ Through these means, Shepperd was able to uncover gross negligence, especially in the handling of records by the Benavides Independent School District (one of Mark Williams's claims), the unconstitutional practice of payroll advances (without substantial documentation of later deductions to balance the monthly salary). and the forging of state officials' names on endorsed checks.²⁴ These revelations came to light just as Duval County and George Parr were making headlines throughout the state for other reasons.

Due to George Parr and his *pistoleros* intimidating dissidents at an opposition rally, a warrant was issued for his arrest. Texas Ranger Joe Bridges was charged with

²² C.E. Palmer's Letter to Shivers, March 5, 1954. Shivers Papers, Texas State Archives, Austin.

²³ Memorandum re: Situation In Duval Co., November 24, 1952, Shivers Papers, Texas State Archives, Austin; Letter to John Ben Shepperd from Bureau of Identification & Records, February 18, 1954. Shivers Papers, Texas State Archives, Austin.

²⁴ Report to Attorney General re: Seventy-ninth Judicial District Court of Duval County, Texas, February 17, 1954, Shivers Papers, Texas State Archives, Austin.

carrying out this warrant. He was one of two Rangers (the other being Ranger Alfred Allee) sent to Duval in order to protect political opposition to George Parr's regime. In the process of serving the warrant, Ranger Bridges was publicly humiliated by George's nephew, Archer Parr, resulting in a small melee between both Rangers and both Parrs. After the altercation, George Parr was charged with unlawfully carrying a pistol at the opposition rally, a charge to which he pleaded not guilty.²⁵ A few weeks later, a Jim Wells Grand Jury indicted both Ranger Bridges and Allee on the charges of assault with intent to murder George Parr, a charge that Parr claimed he knew nothing about.²⁶ Further complicating matters was Parr's hiring of the civil rights lawyer Arthur Garfield Hays, who was known for being on the defense team of the Scopes monkey trial, the Sacco and Vanzetti trial, and the Reichstag trial on behalf of Georgi Dimitrov.²⁷ Parr's tussle with the Rangers only served to sensationalize the matter of corruption in south Texas, with state and national press covering the story as best they could.²⁸

With attention focused on the south Texas situation, John Ben Shepperd fought long and hard to ensure that his efforts in cleaning up Duval County and the Seventy-ninth Judicial District would bring noticeable changes. After all, many considered him to be an ideal candidate for a future Governor of Texas.²⁹ In order to wage an effective

²⁵ *Corpus Christi Times*, "Parr Jailed, Released on Bond in Pistol Case," January 18, 1954.

²⁶ *Corpus Christi Times*, "Rangers Allee, Bridge Indicted By Alice Jury," February 4, 1954.

²⁷ Lynch, 78; Biographical Sketch, Arthur Garfield Hays Papers. Seely G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton, New Jersey, http://infoshare1.princeton.edu/libraries/firestone/rbsc/finding_aids/hays.html (accessed March 8 2007).

²⁸ Lynch, 83.

²⁹ *San Antonio Express*, "Where and How Far Shepperd Going Anybody's Guess," March 7, 1954; Lynch, p. 80; George E. Christian, "Shepperd, John Ben," *The Handbook*

battle against Parr within the Texas judicial system, Shepperd had to use a local grand jury and the district judge. However, as these were two entities that were pro-Parr or manipulated by Parr, Shepperd could not prevail. He therefore set in motion plans to re-panel the Duval County grand jury and to dismiss District Judge Woodrow Laughlin. First, Shepperd compiled a list of those on the grand jury, documenting their ties to George Parr.³⁰ Additionally, eleven attorneys from Judge Laughlin's district appealed to the Texas Supreme Court to remove Laughlin from office. These lawyers charged that Laughlin was biased towards the Parr regime, that he obstructed the investigation into Jacob Floyd, Jr.'s murder, and that he illegally ruled on a case in which he was a defendant.³¹ On March 17th, 1954, the Texas Supreme Court removed Laughlin from his position, a move heralded as a significant event in combating the Parr regime.³² A new judge was appointed, who then appointed a new jury commissioner. Shepperd, aided by a now cooperative judge and grand jury, proceeded to bring charges against Parr and his regime.³³

Unfortunately for Shepperd, the dismissal of the first grand jury was deemed illegal by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals. In October of 1955, one hundred and four indictments were nullified, setting back Shepperd's investigation. The ruling in the case stated:

of Texas Online, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/SS/fsh65.html> (March 8, 2007).

³⁰ "Information on Grand Jury Commissioners," and "List of Accumulated Information on Members of the Grand Jury Panel," 1954, Shivers Papers, Texas State Archives, Austin.

³¹ *Tyler Morning Telegraph*, "When Home Rule Fails," December 30, 1953.

³² *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, "Supreme Court Ouster Of Laughlin A 'Crushing Blow' to Parr Empire," March 18, 1954.

³³ Lynch, 85.

It is apparent that the dismissal of the grand jury by Judge Broadfoot was without lawful authority and that the grand jury thereafter impaneled and which returned the indictment against the appellant in this case was illegally organized and was therefore without lawful authority to sit as a grand jury.³⁴

Therefore, all of the work accomplished after the ousting of Judge Laughlin proved to be moot.

Unfortunately for those opposed to George Parr's rule, things only went downhill from there. Every one of the state's charges against Parr were either overturned or dismissed.³⁵ The Duke had weathered the legal storm of the fifties without any convictions. Interestingly, John Ben Shepperd, a close conservative ally of Governor Shivers, had said that he had wanted more power in order to deal with the situation in Duval. Although Shepperd was reluctant to enhance the attorney general's powers, he recognized that the weak powers of Texas' executive branch would be insufficient to deal with Duval County.³⁶ John Ben Shepperd was unable to clean up Duval due to fears of an executive power's potential to become despotic. The local government was too entrenched and insulated to be successfully challenged by state agencies alone.

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The failure of Shivers and Shepperd to produce any lasting changes in south Texas is indicative of the limitations still in place on state officials when combating corruption. Even though the Texas legislature enacted electoral reforms granting the

³⁴ *Austin Statesman*, "Jury Said Without Authority," October 5, 1955.

³⁵ Lynch, 102.

³⁶ *Corpus Christi Caller*, "Shepperd May Ask Special Laws To Deal With Duval," February 27, 1954.

attorney general more power to pursue suspected electoral fraud, the entrenchment of the local machine outweighed any advantages gained by the executive branch. Although responsive to, and motivated by, the Parr regime's activities in the 1948 election, the legislative branch failed to overcome the conservative fear of a powerful executive, resulting in an inadequate attempt at electoral reform. Consequently, the environment and individuals that represented one of the most publicized political scandals in Texas, and in perhaps the American South, remained in place. The 1948 senatorial election, while prompting the attempt at election reform, as well as giving Governor Shivers the backdrop to pursue his personal agenda for political gain, did not result in any significant changes in Texas politics.

Chapter Four: The Failure of Good Government

This chapter first discusses the process of modernization occurring through the South and Texas from the 1920s through the 1950s. With this as background, this chapter discusses the advent of good government officials and groups appearing in the 1940s and 1950s, both in the South and in Texas. The chapter then examines the effects of good government reform on Duval County, and why that reform failed.

Although no significant changes occurred within Duval County after the '48 election and the siege by Governor Shivers, there were good government movements taking place throughout the American South and Texas in general that succeeded in bringing about progressive changes for their respective regions. These movements owe much to the modernization that occurred at the behest of liberal, progressive, white urbanites. The changing socio-economics and demographics of the South and of Texas resulted in the migration to the cities by rural minority groups, where they aligned themselves with business-moderates against conservative, rural interests. It was against this backdrop that good government movements formed. Good government groups sought reform in the areas of government efficiency with tax dollars, clean and open elections, education, infrastructural development, and honest government officials. While the 1940s and 1950s saw the successes of many good government groups, Duval County remained immune from attempts to clean up its politics. A combination of Duval's history with the Parr family, the changing socio-economic landscape of south Texas, and the inability of state and federal governments to successfully challenge Parr resulted in the machine's survival through this era.

* * *

White, urban liberals in the American South and the south Texas region held similar beliefs towards previous segregationist policies practiced by the ruling elites. They believed that segregation disadvantaged their respective regions by holding back economic development, and they sought alleviate racial tensions, which they viewed as “inefficient and counterproductive.”¹ The means by which they intended to accomplish this feat entailed further industrialization and urbanization of local and state economies. Investments in industry from the federal government and northern corporations began to change the character of the South’s economy. Bruce Schulman writes,

The development of new industry in the postwar South, however, divided the business community from the entrenched leadership...these employers required access to distant markets, as well as to skilled workers and experienced managers...These demands placed a premium on efficient, growth-orientated state governments that could accommodate the federal government in the era of growing national expenditures and entitlements.²

This drive for modernization produced a number of politicians in the South who implemented progressive measures to support these goals. The city of New Orleans elected DeLesseps S. Morrison as its mayor in 1946, Hot Springs elected Sid McMath as prosecuting attorney for their judicial district the same year, and the state of Alabama elected Jim Folsom as governor, also in the same year. These politicians, all former veterans and part of the “G.I. Revolt” that occurred in the immediate post-war years, opened up their respective areas for industrialization.³ Industrialization brought increased migration to southern cities. Numan Bartley writes, “During the 1950s some 5.5 million

¹ David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 263.

² Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 124.

³ Schulman, 124-125.

farm people left the land...Federal farm programs encouraged planters to replace sharecroppers with hired laborers and then through subsidies provided the capital for mechanization, eliminating the need for much labor.”⁴ As the industrialization of agribusiness progressed, the need for rural labor decreased, which lowered wages and placed rural laborers in a more disadvantaged position.

This same trend of industrialization and urbanization holds true for much of Texas as well. V.O. Key writes, “Rapid population growth, partially by immigration, extensive migration within the state, large-scale urbanization, and the wholesale manufacture of new members of the upper economic orders are among the forms of flux in a fluid social structure.”⁵ Although not as reform-minded as some of his colleagues in other states, Governor Beauford Jester encouraged developments such as road improvements in rural areas, education reform providing for better-funded and efficient schools, and newly constructed hospitals.⁶ These developments resulted in significant changes in the social and economic structures in Texas. In south Texas, the burgeoning growth of commercial farming and agribusiness radically departed from the economic order of ranching, the formerly dominant mode of south Texas socio-economics.⁷ Texas liberals believed that

⁴ Numan V. Bartley, *The New South: 1945-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 124-126.

⁵ V.O. Key, Jr. *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), 259.

⁶ Tommy W. Stringer, “Jester, Beauford Halbert,” *The Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/JJ/fje8.html> (accessed March 8, 2007); Oscar Mauzy, “Gilmer-Aikin Laws,” *The Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/GG/mlg1.html> (accessed April 18, 2007); George N. Green, *The Establishment in Texas Politics: The Primitive Years, 1938-1957* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), 110.

⁷ Montejano, 159, 263, 272.

this kind of development would lead to better race relations between Texas Mexicans and Texas Anglos, resulting in better regional economic performance.

To a certain extent, race relations in urban areas did improve. White urban merchants were now in direct competition with one another for the business of the growing urban Tejano population. Competition encouraged merchants to treat Mexican Texans better. Urban Anglos would also recognize that an increased income for Texas Mexicans would translate into more profits for merchants. In this regard, the interests of the Anglo merchant clashed with the interests of the Anglo farmer, who depended on the cheap labor of Tejanos for increased profits.⁸ Evidence from the American South parallels this behavior of a minority group aligning with urban business interests. Bartley writes, "Most frequently, black racial diplomats entered into alliances with the central-city business leadership, thereby joining the poorest people, the inner-city blacks, with the most affluent people, the business and professional white urbanites."⁹ These businessmen not only gained more customers, but they challenged rural political interests, which dominated state legislatures throughout both the South and Texas. Representation in state legislatures was skewed towards rural areas, which in south Texas meant Anglo farmers, who were more conservative and more inclined towards the subjugation of Texas Mexicans.¹⁰ In order for urban interests, which increasingly encapsulated minority interests, to gain political influence in state politics, the reapportionment of state legislatures would be an important step. This did not occur in Texas until 1965, when the Supreme Court ruled in *Kilgarlin v. Martin* that the state

⁸ Montejano, 238-240, 263.

⁹ Bartley, 175.

¹⁰ Bartley, 166-167; Montejano, 274-275.

needed to readjust the malapportioned districts to better represent the developing urban areas.¹¹ Unfortunately for rural Tejanos, this consolidation of power in the hands of rural interests would result in exploitation and subjugation until the mid-1960s.

As development continued through the 1930s and 1940s, more Mexican Texans left rural south Texas for urban areas, and the remaining Tejanos experienced increasing mistreatment at the hands of the large, corporate farm owners. As these farm owners, many of whom immigrated to south Texas from other locales, began to develop their land, they treated the Texas Mexicans much like the rural whites of the American South treated rural blacks. As David Montejano observes, “[T]he most striking aspect about the new social arrangements was its obvious racial character. The modern order framed Mexican-Anglo relations in stark ‘Jim Crow’ segregation.”¹² Not only did treatment in the rural towns become harsher for Tejanos, relations with their employers suffered due to the preference of commercialized farms to hire migrant workers. Texas Mexicans who stayed in the area were displaced by a migrant workforce that would be cheaper and expected less patronage.¹³ The Bracero Program, put into effect by the United States and Mexico during World War II to aid the war effort, brought laborers from across the border into south Texas, bringing many illegal immigrants as well.¹⁴ Due to the increasing number of laborers, farmers could now afford to pay workers less and allowed them a free hand to mistreat their workers, as there was a sizable pool of labor available to replace any disgruntled hired hand. The same pragmatic business decisions held for

¹¹ Montejano, 277.

¹² Ibid., 160.

¹³ Ibid., 175-178.

¹⁴ Juan Ramon García. *Operation Wetback: The Mass Deportation of Mexican Undocumented Workers in 1954* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 21-36.

rural blacks as well. Bartley writes, “The traditional paternalistic obligations of planters to their tenants and hands had limited observable effect on their rush to modernize.”

Discussing the modernization of farming, one Alabama farm worker said, “[W]e’re raising more cattle every year, and when cotton out west gets too tough for us to match we’ll just stay with the cattle. Don’t know what’ll happen to all the niggers then. Guess they’ll have to go north.”¹⁵ The modernization of agriculture in the American South and in south Texas resulted in the deterioration of relations between rural minorities and the ruling farm class. Those that did not immigrate to the cities were subject to racial segregation, mistreatment, and control by whites.

The modernization and development that produced these socio-economic structural changes also set the stage for good government movements throughout the American South and Texas in the 1940s. In Louisiana, reform candidates like Sam Jones, Jimmie Davis, and DeLesseps Morrison entered office on the promises of good government.¹⁶ In Arkansas, Sid McMath, a well-known reformer from Hot Springs, won the 1948 gubernatorial race on a good government platform. Key writes, “McMath advocated the issuance of bonds to finance road construction...He also urged more generous provision for education and hammered at the issue of honest elections.”¹⁷ In 1942, reformer Ellis Arnall, who repealed Georgia’s poll tax, triumphed in the state’s gubernatorial race, giving good government advocates freedom to operate locally.¹⁸

Reverend Ralph Mark Gilbert was one of these advocates. Leader of the NAACP chapter in Savannah, Gilbert made the most of Arnall’s tenure by pushing for reform of

¹⁵ Bartley, 128.

¹⁶ Key, 164-166.

¹⁷ Ibid., 189-194.

¹⁸ Schulman, 130.

local government. Stephen Tuck describes his methods as having “it’s emphasis on youth participation, mass community involvement, and the adoption of more confrontational forms of protest.” His efforts, including his advocacy of using the ballot box for change, resulted in better funding for black schools, more equitable police enforcement, and other infrastructural developments.”¹⁹ Governor Arnall and his reform ideology was, in part, a reason for this success.

In 1929, a good government group formed in south Texas called the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). This group sought to teach Mexican Americans about their civic duties as Americans in addition to advocating Mexican American involvement in American political and social life. Craig Kaplowitz writes, “LULAC councils ran three main thrusts of activity: community education and encouragement, desegregation of public facilities, and improved education for Mexican American children.”²⁰ Indeed, LULAC lobbied the Texas government to provide funding for Tejano children so that they could learn the English language, thus giving them the tools for participation in American political, economic, and social life.²¹ LULAC viewed education reform as a way to involve Texas Mexicans in mainstream American life. They hoped that the effect of this assimilation would result in better race relations and cooperation between Texas Anglos and Mexicans, paralleling the desires of white, urban liberals at the time.

¹⁹ Stephen G. N. Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2001), 44-49.

²⁰ Craig A. Kaplowitz, *LULAC: Mexican Americans and National Policy* (College Station: Texas A&M Univeristy Press, 2005), 21, 29.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 64-66.

Along with LULAC, the G.I. Forum represented another move towards good government in Texas. Formed after World War II, the G.I. Forum focused on education reform as well. Collaborating with LULAC, the G.I. Forum initiated a preschool program named the “Little Schools of 400.” Ramos writes, “These were community-supported preschools that taught basic English to children from non-English-speaking homes. The program produced impressive results...The success of the Little Schools of 400 program encouraged the Texas legislature to fund similar programs and later inspired the federally funded Operation Headstart program for preschool youngsters.”²² In addition to education reform, the G.I. Forum fought against Texas’ poll tax. The Forum battled the poll tax by holding poll tax drives in conjunction with LULAC, hoping that increased Tejano voter turnout would mark an important step in the tax’s repeal.²³

Other, more localized, good government groups sprang up across Texas as well. In San Antonio, the Loyal American Democrats, the West Side Voters League, the Alamo Democrats, the School Improvement League, and the Good Government League appeared in the post-war years. Montejano writes,

The [Good Government League] leaders were primarily interested in economic growth and desired “an environment free of political and social conflict.” To this end, the conservative business element was convinced by the liberals within the reform coalition that all groups in the city...must progress together if San Antonio was to progress in general.²⁴

This idea of racial conflict being set aside or lessened for the greater economic good of the region falls into place with what white, urban liberals throughout Texas and the South desired.

²² Ramos, 51.

²³ Ibid., 81-82.

²⁴ Montejano, 280.

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Even though effective good government movements existed throughout Texas and the South during this time period, attempts by local good government movements to clean up Duval County politics failed. Efforts to displace George Parr and his regime faltered due to a unique set of circumstances, including the relative socio-economic position of Texas Mexicans in Duval County as compared with the rest of south Texas, the history of the Parr family's influence, and the failure of federal government to provide effective support to investigations that targeted George Parr.

Veterans returning from World War II formed the foundation of what little good government movement Duval County possessed in the post-war years. Some of these ex-soldiers felt that the Parr family stifled the kind of liberty and democracy that they had fought for overseas, although it is important to note that not all returning veterans sought to change the power structure of the county.²⁵ Neither LULAC nor the G.I. Forum had much success in starting chapters in Duval County.²⁶ The obvious reason for their failure stems from the fact that south Texas political bosses favored maintaining their position as *patrón*, a position that would be threatened if a reform candidate entered their political domain. Additionally, LULAC and the G.I. Forum focused much of their energies on reforming schools to better educate Tejano children, which would draw attention to George Parr. Much of the patronage that Parr dispersed came from school coffers. Thus the efforts of LULAC and the Forum threatened to disrupt one of his major methods of

²⁵ Frank García, interview by Matthew McCarroll, August 17, 2006.

²⁶ Ramos, 24.

patronage.²⁷ Due to the absence of statewide good government groups in Duval County, the veterans founded their own group and called it the Freedom Party.

The Freedom Party espoused an agenda similar to other good government movements in Texas and in the South. As Dudley Lynch observes, “They’d dreamed of cleaning up their county government, getting their taxes in line, cutting out the graft and waste, and putting Duval on its feet so perhaps the county could attract some industry.”²⁸ However, the Freedom Party never quite became a force within Duval County until George Parr’s mental health started to deteriorate in the early 1970s. Throughout the 1950s, George Parr kept the Party in check through intimidation and coercion. The loss of business and income, or the threat of physical violence deterred individuals from joining the party or attending their rallies.²⁹ Aside from intimidation, local Mexican Americans had other reasons to adhere to the status quo. As explained earlier, during the industrialization of south Texas, Anglos moved in and subsequently Texas Mexicans had become marginalized and abused, as “a new Anglo order [brought] labor exploitation, untempered by paternalistic concessions, and complete exclusion from the political process.”³⁰ Even though Boss Parr could exert enormous control over Tejanos in Duval County, their situation could be much more dire if a good government movement ousted

²⁷ Ignacio M. García, *Hector P. García: In Relentless Pursuit of Justice* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2002), 210; Henry A. J. Ramos, *The American G.I. Forum: In Pursuit of the Dream, 1948-1983* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1998), 55-56; Kaplowitz, 31-33; “Report to Attorney General on Special Examination of Records Made Available Under Order No. 6049: 79th Judicial District Court of Duval County, Texas,” 1954. Shivers Papers, Texas State Archives, Austin.

²⁸ Dudley Lynch, *The Duke of Duval: The Life and Times of George B. Parr* (Waco: Texian Press, 1976), 88.

²⁹ Frank García, interview by Matthew McCarroll, 17 August, 2006; Lynch, 76, 81.

³⁰ Evan Anders, *Boss Politics in South Texas: The Progressive Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 266.

his regime, only to be replaced with corporate farmers who would subjugate the local populace. Duval County under the Parrs had remained a ranching community; moreover, many of the landowners were Mexican, who probably balanced the idea of “true democracy” in Duval County with what might happen if George Parr left power to be replaced by a “new Anglo order.” It is no surprise that George Parr characterized the Freedom Party’s activities as “the intrusion of the gringo.”³¹ Framed in such a way, it would only serve to remind his *peones* of what might happen if he ever left power.

This outside threat of Anglo dominance in the era of modernization fit into a larger narrative of Anglo control over Texas Mexicans in which the Parr family played an important role as protectors of *La Raza*. After Archie Parr intervened on the behalf of Mexican-Americans, and after George Parr continued his father’s legacy in this regard, many Tejanos in Duval County were grateful to the family. One opponent of George Parr, speaking in 2006, injected emotion into his voice when he said, “He [George Parr] means it when he says he’s going to defend *La Raza*! But you would have to be a Mexican in that era [to understand the devotion to him].”³² Even a person who opposed the Parr regime in his youth related to a sense of pride and unity that the Parr family brought to residents of Duval County in an era of white encroachment and mistreatment.

As change from within the county proved a fruitless venture, the Freedom Party looked towards state and federal intervention to remove Parr from power. As already explained, the state’s efforts ultimately failed, leaving Parr in place. During the 1950s, the Internal Revenue Service sent two agents to Duval County to investigate George Parr. Throughout their investigation, the agents complained that they received little to no

³¹ Anders, 136; Frank García, interview by Matthew McCarroll, 17 August, 2006.

³² Frank García, interview by Matthew McCarroll, 17 August, 2006.

assistance from the state IRS offices, and were in fact threatened with termination by their immediate superiors. In a letter to the governor, one of the Freedom Party's leaders Jacob Floyd wrote.

It occurs to the writer that this is provoked, among other reasons, as result of the fact that strong Democrats who are influential in Washington have been tipped off that Governor Shivers has taken an active interest in this prosecution. It is hard to believe that these people would be moved to take such drastic action, completely for the unwholesome purpose of protecting a racketeer who has voted for them in the past.³³

Whether or not the insinuation implicating LBJ as hindering the investigation was true, the IRS discovered nothing that helped dislodge Parr from his position in Duval County politics. While this first venture failed, subsequent investigations by federal authorities did produce some results in the late 1950s. Parr was eventually charged with multiple counts of income tax evasion, but the appeals process forestalled a speedy conviction, and the Kennedy/Johnson Administration replaced the Eisenhower Administration. Attorney General Robert Kennedy then dismissed all charges against the south Texas boss.³⁴ Whether through incompetence or interference, the federal government ultimately failed in dislodging Parr from his seat of power.

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While good government groups across the South and in Texas proliferated during the 1940s and 1950s, the situation in Duval County remained relatively free from interference. George Parr's success in keeping well-known groups like LULAC and the

³³ Jacob S. Floyd, letter to John Osorio, September 14, 1954, Shivers Papers, Texas State Archives, Austin; W. H. Ninedorf, letter to Jacob S. Floyd, September 6, 1954, Shivers Papers, Texas State Archives, Austin.

³⁴ Lynch, 102.

G.I. Forum out of Duval constitutes one reason why his machine remained intact. The dichotomy of Parr's benevolent and retributive qualities comprised part of his machine's tenacity as well. Parr could extort or threaten with violence those who joined the Freedom Party, a point made clear to those like Jacob Floyd, who lost a son to the regime. However, Parr also represented a defense against the encroachment of Anglo farmers. Set against the backdrop of modernization, Duval County Tejanos faced the possibility of losing their patronage and protector if Parr fell from power. The prospect of commercial Anglo farmers moving into Duval would not sit well with many of its residents. Finally, the failure of the Texas and federal governments to produce any lasting changes through their investigations ruled out any possibility that a good government movement would have any success at toppling Parr. The machine that had been the focus of the 1948 senatorial election scandal thus prevailed over the threat of good government reform.

Conclusion

As to whether the 1948 senatorial election acted as a catalyst for change in Texas politics, the results are mixed. On one hand, the election strained the divisions within the Texas Democratic Party, forming an important link in a chain that started in the State Democratic Convention in 1944 and eventually led to the decline of the once-dominant Democratic Party and the rise of the insurgent Republican Party. The election also prompted the Texas legislature to recodify Texas election laws, giving the attorney general more authority to investigate and prosecute election fraud. On the other hand, that same election code suffered from the Texas legislature's fear of a powerful central authority. Local authorities still retained a great deal of control over the running of elections, thus increasing the chance that election fraud could occur if the local authorities were corrupt.

The attempts to clean up boss politics in Duval County reflect the same kind of Texas conservatism that the legislature injected into the new electoral code. The roadblocks encountered by Governor Shivers and John Ben Shepperd in their pursuit of George Parr came directly from the Constitution of the State of Texas. The fear of a powerful executive prompted the framers of the constitution to limit the reach of the state officials. As a result of this conservative mindset, Texas counties, like Duval, and county officials were insulated from outside authority.

The failure of the state to exact justice for the corrupt actions of the Parr machine is interesting enough. Perhaps even more interesting is that good government movements also failed to bring down George Parr during a time period where they were clearing out corruption and making government more efficient throughout the South. This case is

particularly striking due to the fact that the Parr machine garnered statewide and national attention because of its involvement in the 1948 senatorial election, arguably one of the biggest electoral scandals in Twentieth-century Texas, or even Southern, history. This case highlights a combination of unique factors that led to the tenacity of the Parr regime. The south Texas system of *patrón-peones*, as well as Parr's family history, resulted in a loyalty to George Parr and his machine from most of the local Duval County residents. This loyalty to their protector and benefactor, combined with the advent and spread of commercial farming throughout much of the south Texas region, would reduce the amount of Duval residents wanting to join a good government group. The Parrs had protected the Mexican population from the Anglos before, and George could conceivably protect them again from the commercial farm.

Ultimately, the 1948 election acted as a catalyst for change in Texas politics only insofar as it served as an agitating event between the separate wings of the Texas Democratic Party. The actions taken by the Texas legislature to combat this kind of electoral fraud were far too weak to do any good, and Governor Shivers only pursued Parr after a personal feud with the man. This kind of conservatism and *quid pro quo* mindset allowed for the corrupt situation in Duval County to continue for years, despite the high level of visibility attributed to the Parr machine after the '48 election. Instead of using the election as a prompt to clean up Texas politics, the Texas government simply let this opportunity pass by, as a turning point that never turned.

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