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FOR THE COMMON GOOD?



*American Civic Life and the Golden Age of Fraternity*

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## INTRODUCTION

### *The Tocqueville Debate—What's at Stake?*

Nothing is more annoying in the ordinary intercourse of life  
than this irritable patriotism of the Americans.

—ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE, *Democracy in America*

Isn't it ironic, Arthur M. Schlesinger once noted, that "a country famed for being individualistic should provide the world's greatest example of joiners?" Indeed, Americans formed and joined thousands of voluntary organizations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, thus creating a landscape of social and economic associations without precedent on our shores and, I cautiously assert, without equal anywhere in the world. By 1944, however, when Schlesinger wrote his now-famous "Biography of a Nation of Joiners," American associationalism was fast reaching its peak, initiating a long decline that numerous pundits and scholars have since come to lament as the end of an era of greatness in American history.<sup>1</sup>

So pronounced was the associational boom of the late nineteenth century that historians and social scientists sometimes refer to it as the golden age of fraternity, a term coined by W. S. Harwood in his 1897 *North American Review* article, "Secret Societies in America." Of course, most American secret societies were only "secret" in name—they proudly advertised their presence in parades and publications. So visible were they, in fact, that Harwood's actual description reads, "So numerous, so powerful, have these orders become that these closing years of the century might well be called the Golden Age of fraternity."<sup>2</sup>

That fraternities were "numerous" and "powerful" at the end of the nineteenth century is not worth disputing—they clearly were. The issue at stake here is what impact, if any, the fraternal boom might have had on the shape and character of American institutions and mores, as well as how and why the boom occurred in the first place.

Rather than engaging the new *civisme* from a presentist perspective, I have elected to tackle this problem at its roots, the period in American history most often cited by scholars as the exemplar of civic virtue in America—the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Robert Putnam, Theda Skocpol, and David T. Beito, among others, have targeted the post–Civil War period as the locus of Americans’ first meaningful experiment with voluntarism.<sup>3</sup> Says Putnam, for example, “During the years from 1870 to 1920 civic inventiveness reached a crescendo unmatched in American history, not merely in terms of numbers of clubs, but in the range and durability of the newly founded organizations,” and “the foundation stone of twentieth-century civil society was set in place by the generation of 1870–1900.”<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, the question remains, How do we rectify Americans’ impressive record as joiners and organizers with their reputation as rugged individualists?

Schlesinger himself tackled the individualism-voluntarism question by declaring, “To Americans individualism has meant, not the individual’s independence on other individuals, but his and their *freedom from governmental restraint*.”<sup>5</sup> French sociologist Alexis de Tocqueville is commonly cited as the progenitor of this view, and indeed, he writes in *Democracy in America*, “The more government takes the place of associations, the more will individuals lose the idea of forming associations and need the government to come to their help. That is a vicious cycle of cause and effect.”<sup>6</sup> Today, any number of pundits and scholars have followed Tocqueville’s lead in decrying the destructive influence of state growth on America’s once vibrant civic sector.<sup>7</sup>

Likewise, Tocqueville has been taken up by another group of scholars similarly concerned with the state of American *civisme*, though driven by somewhat different ideological currents. Led most notably by political scientist Robert Putnam, this group has taken to heart Tocqueville’s assertion that “feelings and ideas are renewed, the heart enlarged, and the understanding developed only by the reciprocal action of men one upon another.”<sup>8</sup> Neo-Tocquevillians like Putnam take associationalism to be a vital force in the creation of what he calls social capital, or “trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action.”<sup>9</sup> Though social capital might be seen to encompass many different aspects of social life, from voter participation to family cohesion to mental health, Putnam focuses on one particular variant of social capital—participation in voluntary organizations—as the key to the personal and political health of nations. Above and beyond the pluralist role associations play in articulating the wants and needs of specific groups in society, social capital theorists cite associationalism as a fount of civility, decency, and trust vital to the functioning of democratic societies. Or, as Tocqueville himself says, “If men are to remain civilized or to become civilized, the art of association must develop and improve among them at the same speed as equality of conditions spreads.”<sup>10</sup>

In contrast, Tocqueville’s contemporary James Madison is the intellectual founder of a rival intellectual tradition, the “associations as interest groups”

school. Though both Tocqueville and Madison saw associationalism as a powerful obstacle to tyranny, they did so for very different reasons—Tocqueville because he viewed associations as extensions of the commonweal, Madison because he saw them as powerful instruments of self-seeking.<sup>11</sup> “The latent causes of faction are . . . sown in the nature of man; and we see them everywhere brought into different degrees of activity, according to the different circumstances of civil society,” writes Madison in the *Federalist Papers*:

A zeal for different opinions concerning religion, concerning government, and many other points, as well of speculation as of practice; an attachment to different leaders ambitiously contending for pre-eminence and power; or to persons of other descriptions who have been interesting to the human passions, have, in turn, *divided mankind into parties*, inflamed them with mutual animosity, and *rendered them much more disposed to vex and oppress each other than to co-operate for their common good*.<sup>12</sup>

Only by encouraging such factionalism, argues Madison, can any one faction be blocked from dominating society to deleterious effect.

Debate about the value of associationalism reflects a political quandary at least as old as democracy itself. In ancient Athens, a series of elite coups in the fifth century B.C.E. left the populace deeply suspicious of secret societies (*synomosiai*) and political clubs (*hetaireias*). Classical authors connect such clubs with bribery, electoral fraud, intimidation of juries and witnesses, and even homicide. Thucydides and Plato, among others, talk of *hetaeries* with fear, disdain, and regret. Nonetheless, participation in such clubs was popular among the Athenian upper classes, particularly as a “necessary and usual means of defense against the attacks of enemies.”<sup>13</sup> Many statesmen in nineteenth-century Europe shared the Athenians’ negative opinion of associationalism, indiscriminately banning clubs and associations for fear that they might lead to treason or conspiracy. In the contemporary United States, however, associations are often viewed in a more positive light. Communitarians, pluralists, and social capital theorists alike extol the social benefits of associationalism and lament its decline in recent decades. Rising crime rates, declining voter turnout, and the deterioration of the American social fabric have all been related to the decline in associational participation.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, others complain that large corporate philanthropies and advocacy groups have replaced fraternal orders and neighborhood associations as primary means of participation in civil society.<sup>15</sup>

In the midst of all this debate lurks one central question: Do people form associations because they aspire to community and cooperation or because they accept the challenges of intrasocial competition? Group membership is a valuable asset in both cases, though each has different implications for our understanding of humanity. Arthur M. Schlesinger (and Tocqueville before him) argues that individuals are more than capable of amicable social relations if gov-

ernment will only keep out of their way. Pluralists (and Madison before them) seem more dubious about associationalism's potential for building consensus. They advocate associational competition as an indirect means of obstructing the prospects of any single faction. In either case, one is left wondering why it is that Americans of yore founded so many various and sundry voluntary organizations and why their enthusiasm for associationalism has lingered in more recent years.

It is the aim of this book to demonstrate how Schlesinger's paradox—"that a country famed for being individualistic should provide the world's greatest example of joiners"—is not a question of national values or state structure or ideological faith. It is a question of historical development, a question most readily solved with a little deductive reasoning and a lot of historical research, none of which requires any *a priori* assumptions about government, association, or humanity *sui generis*.

Although Madison, Tocqueville, and their avatars focus much attention on the desired ends of voluntarism, they generally fail to consider what is unique about voluntary organizations as such, as well as the specific ways in which their organizational structure can affect political development over time. Sociology is a discipline uniquely suited to such questions, and it is thus my aim to reframe what was an age-old question in political philosophy—how best to manage diversity in democratic societies—as a new set of questions in the sociology of organizations: How did the organizational form of the secret society come to dominate American voluntarism in the nineteenth century, and what impact did it have on the social and political development of the American people in the years thereafter?

Madison and Tocqueville take group interests to be somehow primordial—things to be dealt with in the construction of an ideal republic—and they thus look to voluntarism as the single best means of assuring the representation of those interests in the public sphere. I argue, in contrast, that the creation of an organizational form based around secrecy and exclusivity—the fraternal order—helped give rise to, or at least shape the development of, those interests as such. Organization building became an end in itself during the golden age, in other words, and the struggle to create exclusive voluntary organizations prompted many disparate social groups to “find themselves” through organizing. Recruitment, retention, and rivalry promoted a system of social differentiation in America in which voluntarism, brotherhood, and mutual aid became bywords for segregation, not integration. If I am correct, and I muster dozens of charts, graphs, and primary sources in the hope of convincing you that I am, we will both soon believe that there is good cause to reconsider contemporary aspirations for civil society and civic reengagement. All voluntary organizations are not of a piece, and the competitive dynamics of widespread voluntarism can have quite unexpected effects, as you will soon see.

Consider, for example, what sociologists know about the social dynamics of organization building: Two necessities for any organization to survive, let alone flourish, are the presence of members and the availability of relevant resources. But because individuals have limited time, money, and energy, there is a natural limit to the number and diversity of organizations likely to flourish simultaneously. Sociologists refer to this as organizational ecology, or the way in which organizations interact with one another in competition for finite resources and opportunities.<sup>16</sup>

Naturally, exogenous factors like government endorsements, employer incentives, and raw population size may alter the supply and demand for organizational opportunities in a given social space. Net of such factors, however, organizational ecology has internal dynamics of its own. The scope and size of earlier organizations will have a powerful influence on the shape of later organizations, for example.<sup>17</sup> The way in which social spaces come to be filled by rival organizations will determine, furthermore, which organizations flourish and thrive or starve and vanish in that environment over time.<sup>18</sup>

In the case of American associationalism, for example, the religious orientation of many early to mid-nineteenth-century voluntary organizations tended to foster similar efforts among rival ethnoreligious groups. The Knights of Luther, a Protestant secret society formed in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1912, gave the following as their reason for forming: “Fighting the Romanist Church with weapons like those with which it fights.”<sup>19</sup> Social clubs, secret societies, and charitable organizations were all organizational venues used by evangelists to entice newcomers to the fold. The fear that coreligionists might be tempted to convert led many congregations to create comparable organizations in the hope of retaining members. And the more success such groups had with a specific organizational form, the more likely it was to be imitated by others, thus spurring a period of competitive emulation, which helped catalyze the associational boom of the post-Civil War era.<sup>20</sup>

I refer to this phenomenon as “competitive voluntarism,” a general social process whereby the number of voluntary, or nonprofit, organizations in a given society rapidly increases, thus fueling competition among them for members, money, institutional legitimacy, and political power. One unanticipated outcome of such a process is the increasing differentiation of society, largely because of these factors:

1. Recruitment practices tend to bring in new members who share the preferences, backgrounds, and social networks of existing members.
2. Participation tends to reinforce these similarities as members share information and social network ties over time.
3. Those members who do not fit in are more likely to quit the group than those who do, further reinforcing the selection pressures incumbent on the membership attainment process.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, regardless of the aims and motivations of a group's founders, the membership of such groups will tend to become more and more homogeneous over time, a stark challenge to the argument that associationalism can help bridge gaps in the social fabric, joining disparate populations together in fellowship and solidarity.<sup>22</sup>

The primary thesis of this book is that the huge wave of organization building between the Civil War and World War I was motivated by the desire for exclusive social outlets that would allow individuals of different genders, races, ethnicities, and birthplaces to socialize in private, self-segregated groups. Some such organizations were explicitly designed to help their members acquire sickness and burial insurance. A few also served more instrumental ends, helping members coordinate group-related political activities. In concert and in competition, the presence of these groups gave rise to an associational boom that would shape American society for decades to come.

Explaining how, exactly, all this happened will be the task of the first third of this book. Here, I explain how demand for and the cost of affordable sickness and burial insurance increased in the decades after the Civil War. Because fraternal orders were generally exempt from government taxation and regulation, they proved particularly amenable to such pursuits. In addition, the fraternal organizational form lent itself to easy adoption, transformation, and imitation, thus making it an easily replicable form of social insurance agency. This led to the flowering of competitive voluntarism as described above. Though similar organizations existed in Europe during this period, Europeans were generally beginning to replace their guilds, lodges, and *compagnonnages* with trade unions and state-run social service collectives by the mid-nineteenth century, the very beginning of the associational boom in the United States. Thus, associationalism takes its place alongside other classical explanations of American exceptionalism—the absence of feudalism in the colonial United States,<sup>23</sup> sectional competition among the different regions of the country,<sup>24</sup> the weakness of America's federalist political system,<sup>25</sup> the strength of America's courts and parties,<sup>26</sup> the influence of America's wide-open spaces and unsettled frontier,<sup>27</sup> and the unusually middle-class outlook of the American people as a whole.<sup>28</sup> More specifically, *For The Common Good?* sheds new light on an old topic in the study of American political development—the causes and consequences of American voters' fragmentation along ethnic and religious, as opposed to strictly economic, lines.<sup>29</sup>

But why the desire to use associations as a means of self-segregation? Why, in other words, were so many fraternal orders and voluntary organizations segregated by race, religion, and gender? The answer, I believe, lies in the confluence of two factors: On the one hand, immigration helped fuel the desire for self-segregation among immigrants and native-born Americans alike. The period of America's associational boom was, not surprisingly, a period of enormous immigration to this country. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth cen-

turies, many ethnonational and ethnoreligious groups fostered separatism by recruiting newcomers into sectarian voluntary organizations. At the same time, so-called native Americans—those born in the United States to parents of Anglo-Saxon lineage—formed similar groups of their own and expressly kept out blacks, Catholics, and Jews.<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, the associational boom was fueled by a momentum all its own—competitive voluntarism. The emerging success of existing fraternal groups, coupled with their constant need to recruit new dues-paying members, spurred the formation of ever more fraternal organizations, thus creating a period of exponential growth that peaked around 1910. Given the ease with which such groups could be founded, furthermore, minor disagreements among members often resulted in the formation of yet more organizations. In the words of Arthur M. Schlesinger, “A process of splitting and splintering, or what sociologists like to call ‘schismatic differentiation,’ has marked the course of practically every sort of [American voluntary] association.”<sup>31</sup> Although Catholics and Protestants sometimes tried to form fraternal organizations together, for example, religious differences were just as likely to drive them apart, resulting in the foundation of parallel organizations identical in all but name. Similar disputes arose over the participation of women in traditionally male organizations, blacks in white ones, Jews in Christian ones, and so on. Even minor matters of lodge ritual and policy could be grounds for schism. The 1900 Boston city directory lists at least 56 different fraternal and sororal organizations, for example, including 6 separate branches of the Odd Fellows—2 for blacks (1 integrated; 1 for blacks only), 2 for women, and 2 for white men.<sup>32</sup>

Sociologists refer to such groups as “high-exit organizations,” meaning that it is relatively easy for members to quit and to form new organizations, as opposed to sticking around and resolving their differences.<sup>33</sup> The fact that American fraternal and voluntary organizations were so susceptible to imitation and duplication helps explain why the United States—one among many multiethnic, multiracial, and multireligious nations—has historically engendered more ethnic, racial, and religious separatism than most.<sup>34</sup> American associationalism exacerbated existing differences by enfranchising them in exclusive organizations. And by encouraging Americans to bond together along gender, ethnonational, and ethnoreligious lines, associationalism further disposed them to fear one another and thus to fear government itself—particularly any government program that might require the redistribution of income or collectivization of risk.<sup>35</sup> The result was a nation with a rather bizarre sense of self, one rooted not in the benefits of citizenry or in the value of inclusion but in libertarian paranoia and mutual distrust.

That so many pundits should herald this American tradition as a model for the future I find deeply troubling. At the expense of sounding dogmatic, I think the costs of the “golden age” greatly outweigh the benefits. Its most lasting lega-

cies have been those very problems most lamented in America today: a long-standing tradition of racial prejudice and interethnic hostility; a pernicious political system dominated by special-interest groups; an ominous love for guns, accompanied by a menacing fear of government; a weak and subservient labor movement; and a half-hearted tradition of public social service provision, capped by the repeated failure to pass even the most rudimentary universal health insurance legislation.<sup>36</sup>

In documenting this argument, I rely on a number of different sources, most important among them the extensive collections of nineteenth-century city directories currently available on microfilm in research libraries throughout the country. These directories afford historical sociologists a unique opportunity in that they include comprehensive social, political, and economic information about American cities in a form that is easily concatenated both longitudinally and cross-sectionally.

My own work in this vein began with an investigation of voluntary organizations listed in the city directories of 53 major American cities as of 1880. By matching cross-sectional associational density with dependent variables such as voter participation and a raft of variables that reflect different domains of municipal social spending, I was able to show that cities with higher numbers of civic associations (per capita) neither spent less on municipal social services, such as poor relief and education, nor had significantly higher rates of voter turnout.<sup>37</sup> Associationally rich cities did, however, demonstrate interesting patterns whereby the presence of large aggregations of associations devoted to specific sectors of the economy were strongly correlated with higher municipal appropriations in exactly those same areas. Though such conclusions are based on statistical correlation and not observed fact, countless historical monographs have confirmed my hunch that many so-called civic associations of this era were actively engaged in the pursuit of segmental self-interest. Such self-seeking is not irreconcilable with neo-Tocquevillian and communitarian theories of associationalism, but my findings did at least convince me that there was a lot that had yet to be learned about this unique period in American history, the so-called golden age of fraternity.

Excited at the prospect of making a real contribution to a debate of contemporary significance, I soon planned two additional data-collection endeavors: a second, 1890, wave of city directory data to add to my 1880 span, and annual time-series data on a subset of these cities for the years 1880 through 1890. Having completed both of these tasks and published papers reporting the results, I then sought the help of several enterprising young students in collecting longitudinal data on four of these cities for the period 1850–1940 at 20-year intervals.<sup>38</sup> (See the appendix for a complete list of all city directories examined here.) As one last step, I personally recoded all the Boston city directories we collected in order to double-check our analyses and examine the trends in detail.<sup>39</sup>

At this point, armed with thousands of pages of photocopied microfilm and several preliminary hypotheses, I was finally ready to visit libraries and archives to satisfy my curiosity about several foundational questions:

1. What was the original impetus for founding fraternal organizations?
2. How and why did ethnic militias form in American cities in the nineteenth century?
3. What role did fraternal, benevolent, and commercial organizations play in the political life of American cities?
4. Was there notable variation in the way different ethnic, racial, and religious groups utilized the basic form of fraternal organizations?
5. How did associational practice vary in the United States and various western European countries during this period, and how might these differences help add to our knowledge of cross-national variation in political development?

Naturally, many historians and social scientists have already documented bits and pieces of these stories. The primary contribution of this book is, I believe, the attempt to synthesize so many disparate areas of historical scholarship into a single, somewhat counterintuitive account of a particularly important period in American history. Though it proved impossible to read everything or cite every source that contributed to my research, I sincerely hope that all the relevant parties recognize their contributions to my work and take its challenges as collegial invitations to further dialogue rather than adversarial snubs.

Undoubtedly, the thrust of my account of the golden age is biased toward the urban end of the spectrum, and following my initial hunches about these data, my subsequent analyses have tended to focus more on the mutual aid and self-help end of the associational web than the charitable and/or political ends explored in other accounts. Moreover, the American South does not receive the particular attention it deserves, especially the interesting rise of “colored” fraternal orders and militia groups in the Jim Crow era. There is a cost and a benefit to such choices: On the plus side, my purview brings new nooks and crannies of late nineteenth-century associationalism to light; on the minus side, there are discrepancies between my account and others’ that reflect our individual biases more than the facts might merit.

Several caveats remain: First, the data at hand say much more about the number and type of associations listed in city directories than they do about the members. Though I was able to track down several sources of information on members, the bulk of data presented here reflects only the number of organizations, not the size or scope of their membership. Group mergers and membership growth are two sources of organizational change that we were unable to track with any accuracy, though they are clearly relevant to the topic at hand. Furthermore, this study pays far less attention to the various organizational hierar-

chiefs of American fraternal organizations than some specialists might want. In sorting through so much information on so many organizations, I chose to overlook the subtle distinctions among lodges, encampments, cantons, and other groups embedded in the hierarchies of these organizations. For my purposes, these distinctions were less important than the overall presence and number of organized entities.

Second, the bulk of my data is focused around a relatively short period of time, 1880–1900, though one firmly in the midst of the associational bubble. Because these data come from city directories and not archives or newspapers, they are probably also biased toward those organizations with the good standing and reputation to merit inclusion, thus relegating many lesser but equally important associations uncounted. Negro associations in Southern cities are probably the biggest lacuna in my data, though many underground political, labor, ethnic, and women’s groups were probably overlooked as well.

In addition, few city directories of the period actually offer detailed information about the organizations listed. Club names are often ambiguous, misleading, or downright indecipherable. (Misspellings are also common, particularly for clubs with non-English names; when presented with such dilemmas, I use the spelling given in the text rather than what I believe to be the proper one.) Many of the listings either say nothing about the organizations’ primary functions, encompass an usually broad range of functions, or make potentially misleading claims about the functions of the group. A prime example of this last phenomenon is the frequent use of the term “benevolent society” to refer to groups that were actually mutual aid societies. When I consulted the 1880 and 1890 San Francisco directories, which give unusually detailed information about the goals of such organizations, I found descriptions like the following: “Netherlands’ Benevolent Association—Organized 1873. . . . Number of members twenty-six. . . . Object: Relief of its *members* in sickness, want, and distress.”<sup>40</sup> What one might have taken as an ordinary eleemosynary organization was actually just a members-only insurance collective for people of Dutch ancestry.

With so many cases at hand, it was impossible to research the specifics of each organization. Such uncertainties are an inevitable shortcoming of quantitative history, one exacerbated by the high stakes such accounts have come to bear in current political debate. Fortunately, I found much valuable help along the way. Theda Skocpol and her assistants working on the Civic Engagement Project (CEP) were enormously helpful in clarifying questions, offering advice, and sharing with me the spectacular resources accumulated in their group office, just two floors down from mine. Several key associational encyclopedias and reference volumes also filled some gaps.<sup>41</sup> And most fortuitously, the 1880 and 1890 San Francisco city directories (just mentioned) proved a godsend, as they include detailed information about the self-proclaimed “object” of many of the listed organizations. Using the San Francisco directories as a sort of dictionary of late nineteenth-

century American organizational forms and titles, I was able to extrapolate much about the organizations listed in other cities’ directories.

Suffice it so say, I read many thousands of entries, raised more questions than answers, and improved my vocabulary significantly as a result of this endeavor. If there is a lesson to be learned here, and I think there is a good one, it is that the application of simple quantitative methods to real historical data is not only instructive in plying statistical trends but also essential in uncovering nooks and crannies overlooked by historians (who tend to shy away from the systematic codification of such materials). Though most of the analysis presented here does not rely explicitly on the quantitative data over which I and several research assistants so assiduously labored, the basic exercise of reading and coding so many thousands of entries opened my eyes to nearly all of the avenues explored here. Whenever the opportunity exists, this is one of the best ways for sociologists to make distinctive contributions to the field of history. Although I do not suspect that you will agree with every observation or interpretation made here, I do stand by the methods by which they were derived. Extensive city directory collections exist in the holdings of most university and public libraries, and I invite you to look for yourself. City directories are a rich and regrettably underexploited source of information about America’s past.



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## COMPETITIVE COLLUSION

*The Associational Origins of Special-Interest*

*Group Politics in the United States*

When Alexis de Tocqueville visited the United States, the formal business corporation barely existed. There were few if any formal means of protecting capital through legal charter. (As you might recall from chapter 1, the nation's first ever mutual building and loan association was founded in 1831, the very same year Tocqueville and Beaumont toured the country.) By the end of the nineteenth century, however, legal writs of incorporation were absolutely vital to collective enterprise; for-profit firms looked to corporate law as a means of protection from creditors and competitors, and voluntary, nonprofit organizations incorporated as a means of protection from unwanted government interference.<sup>1</sup>

American politics, too, changed dramatically over this same period. America's burgeoning cities and towns created new demand for government-sponsored goods and services, like turnpikes, sewers, and canals.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the rise of national political parties and the appearance of full-blown electoral campaigning lent a new tenor of professionalism to politics.<sup>3</sup>

Seen in tandem, these forces created a world of opportunity for business leaders and politicians alike. On the one hand, there was work for engineers, contractors, planners, and administrators; on the other hand, there was a clear and present need for reliable means of state revenue collection and redistribution. The costs and benefits of lobbying for favorable treatment were thus enormous. Fortunes could be made building America's new cities, and fortunes could be lost paying the tax bill to finance them.<sup>4</sup>

Like the modern business corporation, born in the mid-nineteenth century, the modern special interest-group organization was a nineteenth-century organizational innovation designed to protect its members by creating a common front behind which they might operate. A well-funded interest group could lobby for special dispensation, holding the threat of electoral reprisal and lost campaign funds over the heads of legislators and executives alike. At the same time, the organization's common front would also allow members to participate in

such efforts without exposing themselves to the costs and consequences of influence peddling.<sup>5</sup>

Competition with rival business interests was another pressing problem addressed by this new form of nonprofit organization. Given that small changes in state and municipal policy could have dramatic effects on the business climate for competing concerns, any effort to unify interests behind a common agenda could have huge payoffs over time. Using the voluntary organizational model, doctors and lawyers created professional groups to represent and regulate themselves, manufacturers and railroad owners created employers' associations to share in the fight against labor, and retailers and salesmen formed neighborhood associations and trade groups to support business-friendly urban development.<sup>6</sup>

Seen from a different light, the innovation of the modern special-interest group appears that much more impressive. Consider the dramatic changes that occurred midcentury in the size and scope of American business enterprise: The railroad and steamship had created a commercial revolution of unprecedented proportions, manufacturing had reached unheard of new levels in productivity and product range, and American consumers were just beginning to discover the wonders of retail merchandising.<sup>7</sup> Not only did this create great competition across sectors of the economy; it also created enormous competition within economic sectors for local market dominance. This presented American entrepreneurs with an enormous collective action problem: how to make rival firms cooperate in order to pursue public policies that would benefit them all.

Not surprisingly, the then-popular fraternal lodge model offered a brilliant solution to this and other problems. Since fraternal orders and mutual benefit societies were formally recognized as nonprofit institutions, they were generally unencumbered by either corporate taxation or state oversight (as opposed to for-profit corporations, who were subject to both). Since they were private clubs, they could keep their activities secret and exclude members on any basis they saw fit. And since the early fraternalists had already perfected techniques for founding and coordinating branch lodges, these organizations' sphere of influence could be expanded both quickly and easily.

The basic model of the fraternal lodge thus became the basis for any number of organizational innovations in late nineteenth-century politics, from the formation of professional organizations to the creation of employers' associations. The fraternal form also became useful for the many farmers, factory workers, and female suffragettes then pursuing political influence of their own.<sup>8</sup> In the long run, however, business and professional interests appear to have gotten the better end of the bargain. By using the voluntary organizational model developed and popularized by the early fraternalists, American capitalists gained a tool that would come to dominate American politics of the present day: the special-interest group lobby. Surprisingly few accounts of the golden age of fra-

ternity ever make this connection, choosing instead to adopt James Madison's belief that a proliferation of interests would merely level the playing field.<sup>9</sup>

### Political Associations and U.S. History

Much of the debate about American associationalism implicitly, if not self-consciously, revolves around Alexis de Tocqueville's distinction among the "three types of political association," a progression in size and scope from small to large. In its most basic form, asserts Tocqueville, "an association simply consists in the public and formal support of specific doctrines by a certain number of individuals who have undertaken to cooperate in a stated way in order to make these doctrines prevail. . . . An association unites the energies of divergent minds and vigorously directs them toward a clearly indicated goal."<sup>10</sup>

While this might seem an elegant description of all types of political association, this is only the first step in Tocqueville's trichotomy. The tie that binds the members of this first type of association is only an intellectual one:

Freedom of assembly marks the second stage in the use made of the right of association. When a political association is allowed to form centers of action at certain important places in the country, its activity becomes greater and its influence more widespread. There men meet, active measures are planned, and opinions are expressed with that strength and warmth which the written word can never attain.<sup>11</sup>

So, meeting face to face is a natural step in the progression from mere intellectual coteries to actual political associations. That is, in Tocqueville's words, "in the first of these cases, men sharing one opinion are held together by a purely intellectual tie; in the second case, they meet together in small assemblies representing only a fraction of the party; finally, in the third case, they form something like a separate nation within the nation and a government within the government."<sup>12</sup> In other words, as he states elsewhere, "if the association is to have any power, the associates must be very numerous."<sup>13</sup>

Much recent work on American political development has been oriented around this last conception of associations.<sup>14</sup> By dredging the historical record in search of evidence consistent with Tocqueville's observations on "political association in the United States" (Chap. 4, Part II), historical sociologists have reconstructed a story about their probable impact on American politics. This story, in short, draws on two exceptional features of the sociopolitical landscape in late nineteenth-century America: the system of "courts and parties," in which the party machines supposedly dominated politics at the expense of popular participation,<sup>15</sup> and the unusual number of fraternal organizations founded during this same period.<sup>16</sup>

These two features fit together into a cogent story of American popular mobilization in the following manner: After decades of political domination by the corrupt marshals of state and local party organizations, a broad swathe of Americans came to realize that the fraternal model of extralocal, nonpartisan associationalism could be adopted as a means of putting electoral pressure on politicians, thus creating a people's lobby, or a new way of mobilizing interests outside the traditional confines of the party system:

The late nineteenth century . . . saw the multiplication of voluntary associations, many with formal committees dedicated to drafting legislation, lobbying, or cultivating public opinion. These organizations provided arenas in which individuals reconstituted themselves as political actors, learned to articulate demands for specific policies, and then to monitor the responses of elected officials.<sup>17</sup>

Adoption of the already prevalent fraternal model of organization was key to this development, according to Elisabeth Clemens, who portrays the populist uprisings of women, farmers, and workers during the Progressive Era as a primary case in point. By exploiting an "appropriate" organizational form for new, conventionally "inappropriate" purposes, she argues, these groups were able to garner widespread support through the familiar and seemingly innocuous lure of the fraternal lodge while, at the same time, passing relatively unnoticed by their key opponents, party officials and urban elites.<sup>18</sup>

Theda Skocpol is another proponent of the political potential of fraternalism. Focusing on the emergence and growth of "broad-gauged, cross-class" associations, many modeled explicitly after the fraternal lodge system, Skocpol argues that this implicitly apolitical form of social organization actually served many Americans as a vehicle for the communication and articulation of their social and political concerns.<sup>19</sup> Thus, both Skocpol's and Clemens's observations are implicitly motivated by the belief that the origin of grassroots politics in American politics, specifically the potential for a viable, vibrant civil society, were firmly grounded outside of the party system in large, extralocal membership associations founded during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

#### Reassessing the Political Development Debate

Alexis de Tocqueville's exemplar of an ideal-typical American political association was a convention of 200 delegates assembled in Philadelphia on October 1, 1831, to express their joint opposition to a tariff bill then under consideration in Washington, D.C. At issue were the competing interests of Northern industrialists (who sought vigorous protectionist legislation) and Southern farmers (who complained that protectionist tariffs made manufactured goods unduly expensive), as well as the latent but hotly debated issue of states' rights. In the

final analysis, Tocqueville credits the Philadelphia convention with influencing "the attitude of the malcontents" and preparing them "for the open revolt of 1832 against the commercial laws of the Union," a compromise that only temporarily appeased the Southern secessionists.<sup>20</sup>

I raise this example not for its historical value but because of the light it sheds on several claims made by historical sociologists about the role of associationalism in a later period, the Progressive Era. The simple fact I wish to raise here is that, as in Tocqueville's own discussion of the tariff controversy of the early 1830s, associations representing extrapartisan interests were a natural and frequent entity in American politics before the Progressive Era. More important, Tocqueville's example also illustrates the fact that associationally derived social movements do not have to be large, long-lived, or nationally federated to have a lasting impact on political outcomes.

Nonetheless, whether oriented around class, status, or party, the proliferation of associations in American cities after the Civil War did signify the expansion of the power of special interests in the United States. Capitalizing on the constitutionally derived freedom of association, a freedom duly curtailed in some of the great western European powers, many Americans began realizing, if not cultivating, their segmental interests—as property owners, laborers, religious adherents, ethnics, enthusiasts, do-gooders, and businessmen—through exclusive, voluntary, nonprofit organizations.<sup>21</sup>

Besides providing a locus for communal engagement and fellow feeling, these organizations cultivated the powers that many now associate with the very worst aspects of democracy in America—coercive, fractious enterprises dedicated exclusively to the manipulation of public opinion and political decision making. Not only women, farmers, and workers turned to fraternalism as a way to organize outside the party system; the rich, the powerful, and the well educated all formed clubs of one kind or another with the express aim of influencing political outcomes. Moreover, the rich and powerful often used such organizations to do more than threaten politicians with opposition at the polls; deal making and horse trading were common, though largely undocumented, functions of the early special-interest groups, as they are today.

#### Fine-tuning the Debate: Four Types of Political Association

We have traveled some distance from the ideal-typical conception of fraternalism discussed in chapters 1–3. The connection between political associations and the fraternal movement comes by way of their common organizational form, not their common aspirations. The political associations discussed in this and the next several chapters encompass a special breed. They constitute a species of American association designed specifically for the pursuit of politics; or in the enlightened words of Max Weber, they are groups that "live in a house of

'power.'<sup>22</sup> The question that concerns us here is the extent and manner in which politically oriented civic associations influenced the trajectory of American political development.

Four different types of political association deserve mention here, though such an abbreviated list cannot begin to do justice to the many variants and hybrids listed in the city directories of the period. First, *mercantile and commercial organizations* are economically oriented lobby groups such as manufacturers' associations, employers' associations, and mercantile organizations, each of which brings together actors sharing a common market niche for mutually advantageous collusion and cooperation.<sup>23</sup> Such commercial cadres are probably one of the oldest forms of association known to humankind, though their postbellum incarnations are indeed unique in the degree of organizational sophistication they brought to the process. Like the medieval guilds of yore, traders and manufacturers used this form of voluntary organization to represent their collective interests on a wide (and nearly monopolistic) scale. By banding together within and across industries, they could use their collective strength in dealing with clients, employees, and political figureheads alike. As Albert Shaw, eminent political scientist and editor of the widely read *American Review of Reviews*, commented (in 1897), "We are governed in this city today, and governed splendidly, by the New York Chamber of Commerce."<sup>24</sup> Such organizations were an increasingly prominent feature of every American city's political landscape.

During the postbellum era, there arose two interesting variants on this model, each distinguished by the ingenuity with which political maneuvering could be veiled behind the guise of American associationalism. The first, boards of trade, chambers of commerce, industrial exposition associations, and the like, provided a forum for businesspeople in different fields to congregate and mobilize on behalf of their collective interests. To give only one example, the Board of Trade of the City of Newark, founded in 1868, lists its objectives as follows:

For the promotion of trade, the giving of proper direction and impetus to all commercial movements; the encouragement of intercourse between business men; the improvement of facilities for transportation; the correction of abuses; the diffusion of information concerning the trade, manufactures and other interests of the city of Newark; the co-operation of this with similar societies in other cities, and the promotion and development of the commercial, industrial and other interests of said city.<sup>25</sup>

Though such descriptions make trade organizations out to be apolitical groups working on behalf of the entire population, it should be clear that their primary aim was to see to the interests of prominent manufacturers, brokers, and wholesale traders working in that city. Such interests might well conflict with those of their employees, as well as those involved in other sectors of the city's economy, such as professionals, retailers, and those engaged in the service industries.

Returning once again to the 90-year span of Boston city directories (see appendix for details), we see the number of commercial, mercantile, and trade organizations (excluding those representing laborers and professionals) increasing steadily from 1850 to 1920 and tapering off only slightly over the remaining twenty years (see figure 4.1).

A second, and perhaps more insidious, variety of economic association is the *elite social club*. Such groups are exceedingly difficult to identify in city directories of the period because most elite social clubs did not betray their elitism by name, choosing instead more subtle titles (such as the City, Metropolitan, or Union League Club). I was thus unable to count the number of such organizations in Boston with any accuracy, though I might venture to guess that their number neither increased over time nor was very large to begin with. Nonetheless, according to historian David Hammack, elite social clubs in this period tended to revolve around three interests—those claiming a direct ancestral line to some quasi-mythical, old-city elite; those joined by their wealth and their interest in perpetuating it; and those attached by a common appreciation for the arts and learned pursuits. Although such affiliations did sometimes tend to overlap, members were more likely than not to express their social preferences by joining clubs of one, perhaps two, but rarely all three categories, thus confirming Weber's notion of the social differentiation of status groups within socioeconomic strata.<sup>26</sup>

Once again, European standards set an exceedingly important precedent for the establishment of elite social clubs in American cities. Nearly every feature of America's "top" social clubs was modeled after London's club scene, from membership requirements (women were strictly forbidden, and male guests closely

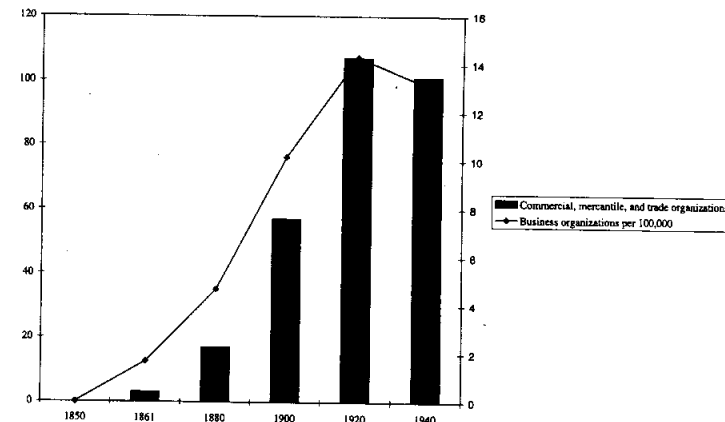


FIGURE 4.1 Commercial, Mercantile, and Trade Organizations in Boston, 1850-1940

monitored) to architecture (McKim and White, foremost architects of America's great nineteenth-century clubhouses, modeled much of their work after the elegant clubs of London's Pall Mall district).<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, American social clubs were less a home away from home than their English forebears and more a place for selective sociability: "There [in England], for the most part, people belong to clubs in order to frequent them, and not by way of reference or passport to high social circles [as in the U.S.]."<sup>28</sup> Like most things in the New World (relative to the Old), American clubs were both easier to join and more instrumental in purpose. Elite club membership was a passport to the highest levels of American society, one that members need feel no embarrassment about using for their own best interests.

Some of these clubs were formed with genuine political purposes in mind. The Union League Clubs which spread across the country during the Civil War were expressly founded to support the Union effort for example, on the other hand, the Union League was not above boosterism, self-promotion, or, influence-peddling.<sup>29</sup> Consider the following apologetic confession in the *Chronicle of the Union League of Philadelphia*:

Ever since 1875 the Union League had abstained from taking part in the discussion or determination of municipal or State politics or elections.<sup>30</sup> . . . The city of Philadelphia was, however, about to pass under the provisions of a new Act of Assembly (the Bullitt Charter), which greatly modified its form of government and the character of the offices to be filled. The mayor of the city was thereafter to be an official of such dignity and power that his qualifications became a matter of vital importance. If nominations had then been made, the Board would simply have urged members to weigh their action carefully, but as no conventions had yet been called it was suggested that a committee of twenty-five members be appointed by the Union League to take public action on the election, selecting a worthy candidate for party support. This resulted in the nomination of Edwin H. Fitler, a member of the Union League, as the Republican candidate and his election as the first mayor of Philadelphia under the Bullitt Charter [1886].<sup>31</sup>

In contrast, a group of prominent New York Democrats established the Manhattan Club in 1865 with the express purpose of countering the political power of the (New York) Union League Club, a known bastion of Republicanism. "None but Democrats" were eligible, and the membership rolls of the Manhattan Club read like an unexpurgated history of Gilded Age excess, numbering among them the leaders of the Tweed ring; various Democratic mayors, governors, and presidents; and a nice handful of robber barons. In his 1873 monograph, *The Clubs of New York*, Francis Gerry Fairfield says the following about the goings-on at the Manhattan Club:

It has been here that most great national questions affecting the Democratic party have been settled; the Manhattan Club being the spider, so to speak, that spins the gossamer webs of policy, and manages the details of campaigns, itself silent within the mahogany doors of its splendid Fifth Avenue den. Here, too, have been incubated the great railroad wars of the last decade. Here Vanderbilt and Drew, both members, have met to play whist, while enacting in Wall Street and the courts the first great railway struggle, and playing the rôles of opposing generals in the great battle of tactics.<sup>32</sup>

Adds Fairfield, "James Fisk, Jr., was not a member, and appears as the only railroad lord who has not made No. 96 a lounging place."<sup>33</sup>

In general, elite club members were among the richest people in the country, and they apparently had few misgivings about collaborating with their comrades in political and economic matters alike. Since the collective wealth and social power of elite club members were simply unmatched elsewhere in society, these clubs proved an important locus for collective mobilization of money and power. The 1894 membership roster of New York's Metropolitan Club includes, for example, "six Harrimans, six Morgans, six Roosevelts, six Cuttings, five Vanderbilts, four Havemeyers, three Duponts, three Auchinclosses, three Frelinghuysens, two Astors and two Rockefellers."<sup>34</sup> Other leading industrialists, such as Charles Schwab, Andrew Carnegie, Henry Clay Frick, and Sir Henry Bessemer, were said to have been frequent guests. Andrew Carnegie's megalithic steel conglomerate, U.S. Steel, is even said to have been "born" in the club library.<sup>35</sup>

The third type of interest group, by far a more legitimate and thus more publicly visible form, was the *professional organization*—medical societies; dental societies; bar associations; teachers' organizations; organizations for civil, mechanical, and electrical engineers; and so on. Professional organizations in Boston grew rapidly in number after 1850, peaking in 1880, dipping, then rising again after 1920 (see figure 4.2). This 1880–1920 dip does seem somewhat surprising, until one considers that both the medical and legal professions were working hard to wrest control over their internal affairs during this period. However, not all nineteenth-century professional organizations were destined to become well-enfranchised national behemoths like the American Bar Association or the American Medical Association. City directories from the late nineteenth century list dozens of professional organizations, representing groups like doctors of homeopathy and eclectic medicine, though the number of such atypical professional organizations did dwindle over time.<sup>36</sup>

Despite such internal disputes, professional groups had a huge stake in local politics, and they were not reluctant to use their sway whenever possible. A good example is the Association of the Bar of the City of New York (ABCNY). Founded in 1870 to represent the interests of a small set of superelite New York lawyers (almost Anglo-Protestant to a man), the ABCNY was active in New York City

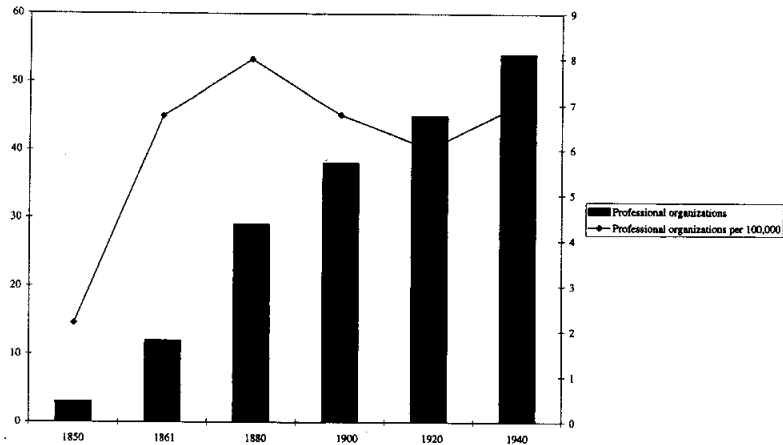


FIGURE 4.2 Professional Organizations in Boston, 1850-1940

politics from the outset, spearheading the Tweed corruption investigation, helping to found various independent councils to investigate city officials, and actively working to gain influential appointments in state and local government for its members. This was typical of big-city professional organizations. Given that most locally relevant laws, appropriations, and appointments are made at the local level under the American system, associations entrenched in local policy networks can be particularly influential in local affairs.<sup>37</sup>

*Neighborhood associations, civic clubs, and citizens' groups* represent a fourth type of political association to emerge during this period (see figure 4.3). This category of political association is somewhat broad, including a variety of voluntary groups organized around specific political agendas, from prohibition to tax, tariff, and immigration reform. Such groups sometimes enter politics through the electoral system, threatening elected officials with retribution if their interests are ignored. At other times, such groups might resort to other forms of political maneuvering, cutting deals, trading favors, and generally conspiring in pursuit of common interests.

The neighborhood association was one form of special-interest group lobbying that became increasingly prevalent in American cities after the Civil War, when expensive infrastructural improvements and large municipal construction projects became essential for community growth and prosperity. Because property taxes pay for most municipal improvements and property values fluctuate with them, local homeowners, merchants, and real estate developers all had a stake in decisions concerning urban development.<sup>38</sup> Historian Joseph Arnold notes that in late nineteenth-century Baltimore, "one locality after another sought

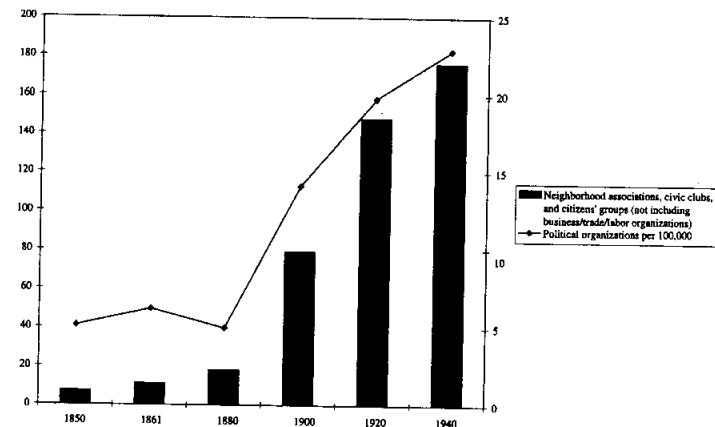


FIGURE 4.3 Neighborhood Associations, Civic Clubs, and Citizens' Groups in Boston, 1850-1940

to organize a nonpartisan neighborhood association of businessmen and property owners. From this organizational effort grew Baltimore's almost century-old tradition of local associationalism—political pressure groups outside the regular party structure.<sup>39</sup> The first neighborhood associations were organized in Baltimore between 1884 and 1886 (the Old Town Merchants and Manufacturers Association and the West Baltimore Improvement Association), and by 1893 there were 21 of them in all, each representing some particular part of the city. Like fraternal lodges, these groups sponsored social events and helped bring community members in contact with one another; but, more important, they represented an early (i.e., preprogressive) form of special interest mobilization outside the confines of the traditional party system.

#### Rhetoric and Reform in American Associational History

In the abstract, the emergence of political associations in the American polity after the Civil War might seem like something of a good thing (normatively speaking). Veterans mobilized to expand government pension awards for their service in the Civil War (figure 4.4 documents the rise of veterans' groups in Boston, 1850-1940); women organized to fight for maternalist welfare policies and the right to vote (figure 1.6 documents the growth of women's groups in Boston, though it should not be assumed that all or even most of these groups dedicated themselves expressly to the cause of women's rights); and workers, too, founded voluntary organizations to represent their interests in collective bar-

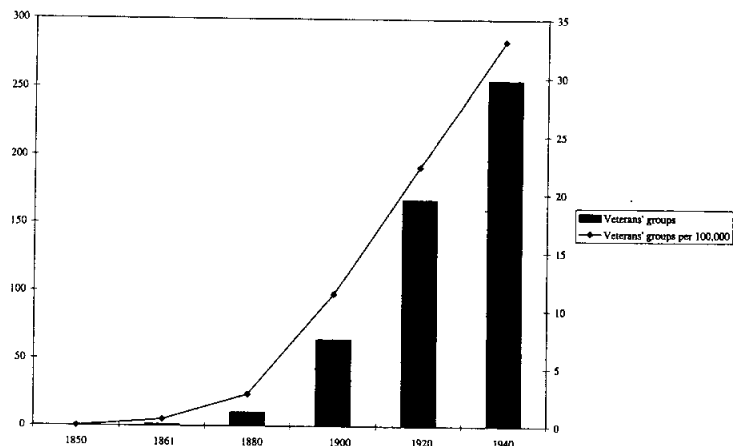


FIGURE 4.4 Veterans Organizations in Boston, 1850-1940

gaining with employers (see figure 4.5). Nonetheless, two important things must be kept in mind in order to weigh the ultimate ramifications of this transformation in American political action.

First, the division of the American polity into ever so many interest-group organizations greatly hindered Americans' ability to unite around what they had in common. Labor, for example, never managed to unify itself as a true political

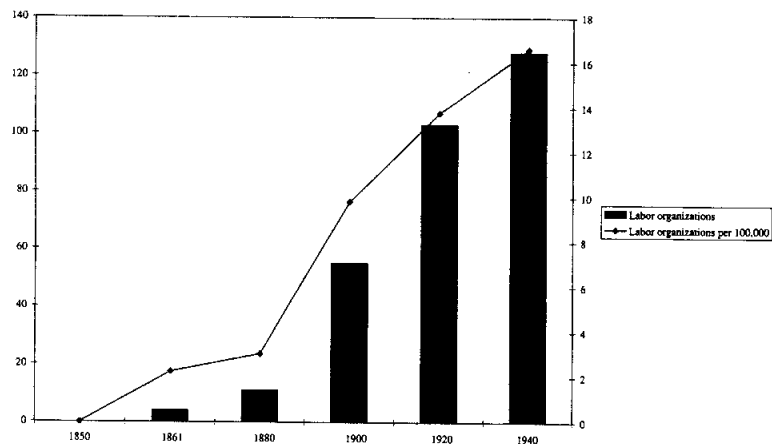


FIGURE 4.5 Labor Organizations in Boston, 1850-1940

coalition by and for workers, relying instead on unions as weak collective-bargaining organizations (see chapter 5). America's ethnic, racial, and religious diversity is often blamed for the failures of its labor unions, but as I show in the next two chapters, the rise of American associationalism actually played a dramatic (and easily overlooked) role in the history of American labor.

Second, it should be mentioned that until the New Deal, American voters were generally reluctant to endorse large-scale, government-run benefit plans, with the exception of an enormous pension scheme for Civil War benefits and short-lived pensions for worthy mothers and their children.<sup>40</sup> Voluntary organizations representing veterans and mothers deserve some of the credit for these legislative successes, but this merely begs the question: Why give benefits to these groups and not others? Why did the rest of the American electorate, namely, the millions of voters who would receive no benefits under either plan, agree to go along with such schemes? The answer lies, I believe, not only in the structure of American government at the time but also in the nature of American social organization, that is, fraternalism.

Fraternal lodges evolved into the primary providers of pension plans for white American males before the early twentieth century (see chapter 2). Millions of dollars were invested in lodge burial and sickness insurance policies, and many fraternities offered health insurance through the lodge system as well. Women, however, were largely excluded from such benefit plans. Thus, social insurance was constructed in the United States as the exclusive privilege of male fraternalists. In the early twentieth century, as the nations of western Europe steadily institutionalized liberal benefit policies for all their citizens, Americans stood by the excesses of fraternal privilege. Working men should buy insurance policies for themselves and their families, they argued; women can rely on their husbands for support, or if that fails, they can appeal to social service agencies for aid. As for those thousands of American men who were either unable to afford or socially ineligible to join fraternities or commercial insurance companies. . . . Well, they would just have to make do.

American labor leaders are often blamed for America's niggardly welfare state. According to many histories of the period, Samuel Gompers and his powerful American Federation of Labor killed national social welfare legislation in the early twentieth century by actively opposing it. This is true to an extent, though the nation's many insurance-providing fraternal orders were equally as vociferous in the fight against expanding benefits for the sick and needy (see chapter 7). The pressing question is not why Gompers opposed national welfare legislation but why such a conservative labor union came to be the primary organization representing the nation's workers in the first place. American workers sometimes experimented with other forms of representation, but they generally failed to hold these organizations together through thick and thin. Part of the problem was the tremendous power factory and railroad owners had to wage war against them

(see chapter 6). An even bigger part of the problem was the astronomical number of other fraternal, social, and religious organizations that were competing for their attention (see chapter 5). Thus, associationalism unconsciously rendered obstacles to lasting labor organization at both ends.

Another reason for the difference in American and western European political development was, as Theda Skocpol argues, Americans' fear of big government, more specifically, their distaste for party patronage and the corruption that presumably went with it.<sup>41</sup> Though there is good cause to be skeptical about such antimachine rhetoric, the historical opposition of American voters to the expansion of government services only reinforces the need to appreciate the impact of new elite and commercial interest groups in the postbellum years, for it was exactly such groups that spearheaded the drive in many American cities to disenfranchise ordinary voters.

Arguably, the accusations reformers hurled at the party machines stemmed from their desire to oust party politicians from office, rather than from any genuine interest in reforming politics. The "ward-o-crat" party system gave special voice to ordinary, working-class voters in the various sections of the city, and under such a system, elites had a tough time getting elected. In response, elites formed reform organizations like New York's Committee of Seventy, a private watch-dog organization put together by leaders of the New York State Chamber of Commerce, Good Government Club, and civil service reforms clubs. One of the committee's primary goals was to lobby for electoral reforms that would limit the power of the parties and their middle- and working-class constituents.<sup>42</sup> There is no more telling example of this type of elite voluntary action than the city manager movement, which swept the country at the beginning of the twentieth century after a terrible storm left the city of Galveston, Texas, in ruins.

Galveston had had its fair share of elite interest groups. The city's Deep Water Committee existed for the sole purpose of lobbying the federal government for subsidies to help improve the city's harbor, a mainstay of the local economy. The Galveston Chamber of Commerce, Citizens' Club, and Good Government Club were all organized around the interests of a select cadre of Galveston elites. And when the hurricane of 1900 left the city with 6,000 dead and \$17 million in property damage, they all worked in concert to capitalize on the opportunity to increase their power and influence.

First, members of the Deep Water Committee blamed the existing city government for the wreckage of the hurricane. Then, they began petitioning the Texas State legislature for permission to abolish the popularly elected city council (in which every ward of the city was duly represented by a council member) and replace it with a five-member city commission. Their argument seemed reasonable enough: Representatives of the committee said that they sought simply to reestablish the city's municipal administration on the firm footing of "efficient business practice." On the other hand, they planned to pursue this goal

by disenfranchising city voters. Rather than running a citywide election for mayor and city council, the governor would now be empowered to appoint five commissioners to oversee city affairs—a general manager and four commissioners specializing in finance and revenue, police and fire, streets and public property, and waterworks and sewage—a modern-day oligarchy, if you will. Furthermore, the plan granted the commissioners the power to both authorize municipal appropriations and oversee their execution, an invitation for corruption if there ever was one.<sup>43</sup>

Galveston's standing mayor, Walter C. Jones, former chief of police and a favorite of the city's four heavily working-class wards, severely criticized the plan, protesting that it endorsed "government without the consent of the governed."<sup>44</sup> Jones's fears were warranted, but the Deep Water Commission ran a vigorous publicity campaign, using every means at their disposal to convince the city's electorate that the status quo meant disaster, that bankruptcy was staring the city in the face, and that the commission system promised the panacea of sound business methods. And though the system was later modified to popularly elect two of the five commissioners, members of the City Club held those seats for years to come, leading some to call E. R. Cheesborough, director of the City Club, "the boss of Galveston." Writing of the incident to a cousin of his some years later, Cheesborough commented that the statement made him laugh, but "to a certain extent it is true."<sup>45</sup>

As journalist George Kibbe Turner described it in his now-famous October 1906 *McClure's Magazine* article, Galveston's reformist elite had rid the city of vice, crime, and "the ward—the most vicious political unit in our democratic government." Turner concluded (somewhat cynically), "There is in Galveston to-day the most powerful motive in the world for good government—the normal, healthy selfishness of the individual citizen opposed continually to the craft and greed of the exploiters of the community. And it is the new form of administration which made this possible." In Turner's opinion, the Deepwater planners were successful because "they viewed Galveston, not as a city at all, but a great ruined business." Turner went so far as to declare that Galveston was now run by "the proper class of men," predicting that "within two years it is believed that every city of consequence in the State" will have followed suit.<sup>46</sup>

Turner was right. When elites around the country got wind of the successful Galveston coup and muckracking magazines like *McClure's* began running stories on Galveston's battle against the electorate, cities all around Texas began adopting the so-called Galveston plan, as Turner had predicted. Soon, cities outside of Texas even started adopting "reform" plans of their own, such as the Des Moines plan drafted by members of that city's Commercial Club.<sup>47</sup>

For a short time, passion for the Galveston-Des Moines Commission Plan swept the nation. Of 267 cities studied by sociologist David Knoke, 107 adopted some form of the commission plan by 1919, though nearly half of those aban-

done it again by 1942.<sup>48</sup> More popular still was the council-manager plan, a related municipal innovation first developed in Staunton, Virginia, in 1908.<sup>49</sup> The council-manager plan combined a popularly elected city council with a professionally trained city manager. It eliminated the old, ward-based system of voting, nonetheless. By 1919, the council-manager plan was incorporated into the National Municipal League's "model city charter," and it gradually emerged as one of the most popular forms of local governance in the United States.<sup>50</sup> Arguably, this streamlined style of municipal governance foreshadowed the broader transformation of American political practice in the later twentieth century, when special-interest lobbies, "policy experts," and single-issue voter blocs would increasingly come to dominate politics at the expense of the ordinary voter.<sup>51</sup>

The origins of this system lie in the period just discussed, when a variety of new interest-group organizations emerged in the midst of the fraternalist fray, many devoted to the pursuit of the segmental self-interest of doctors, lawyers, factory owners, business owners, financiers, and so forth. America's extensive tradition of fraternal organization provided the institutional fodder for these new movements. As exemplified in the case of the city-manager movement, small, exclusive voluntary organizations were created to sell an extrapartisan agenda to the public at large.

In the long run, the emergence of interest-group politics had both positive and negative consequences on American political development. By using organizational innovation to transcend the limits of the normal party system, associations provided new leverage for interest-group organizations in the American political arena. The well-documented successes of temperance reformers, suffragettes, and civil service reformers are important outcomes in this respect. Nonetheless, these same political innovations launched an organizational cascade whereby the extrapartisan efforts of challengers were often matched by their opponents, thus creating a spiraling descent into political gamesmanship, propaganda, and influence peddling. The overall trajectory of the temperance movement provides an excellent illustration in this respect, though similar processes can also be observed in the arenas of labor agitation, institutional reform, and social welfare policy. In each case, one sees a widespread coalition mobilized for social change gradually transformed into a special-interest lobby isolated from its members, not to mention its original mission.<sup>52</sup>

In the next chapter, I examine yet another example of coalition building transformed by organizational pressures, as well as outside competition—the Knights of Labor, one of the most successful and short-lived labor organizations in American history.