

**Urban Politics with Ethnic Characteristics:
Ethnicity, Organizations, and Political Institutions in West Coast Cities, 1880-1910**

Extended Abstract

Recently, as Critical Race Theory, Black Lives Matter, and theories like Racial Capitalism have captured sociological headlines, we continue to learn the various ways the institutions of U.S. society are built upon a White, Protestant supremacist understanding of the world. In many parts of the U.S. this was likely the case. However, on the West Coast, diverse ethnic and immigrant organizations that were Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant successfully pressed for and sometimes controlled early political and economic institution building, particularly in the cities. In this paper, I map the ethnic organizations, political networks, and population demography of Seattle, Portland, and Los Angeles to uncover this story. In particular I ask, how did ethnic and immigrant organizations play a role in building the political power of their communities during the early formation of West Coast cities?

Current theories of understanding ethnic and immigrant political incorporation rarely, if ever, conceive of these organizations as being critical parts of initial state formation. Most often non-White, Protestant communities are often seen as challengers to dominant state institutions or are assimilated into those institutions at a later stage. Neither of these two processes of political incorporation describe incorporation from the beginning. Further, while not the case for challengers, assimilation into mainstream political institutions is most often described as a process of whitening—ethnic identity is whitened and organizing on the base of identity is seen as illegitimate. The West Coast challenges these narratives by having ethnic identity be a present and legitimate way that politicians organized themselves as they built the foundations of their new urban political institutions. This case allows us to re-approach fundamental questions about the development of political institutions, the political incorporation of immigrants and ethnic

groups, and the political activity of community groups. This case allows me to approach the theoretical questions of why were different ethnicities seen as valuable contributors to politics and how, organizationally, were the communities able to build power and insert themselves into mainstream politics? These questions are similar to the research by Skocpol (1992) and Clemens (1997) on the way women's groups developed political power in the United States. However, I am concerned with immigrant and ethnic groups at the point of state formation as opposed to challenger groups based on gender.

Seattle, Portland, and Seattle all grew from small towns to major cities at the very end of the 19th century. At this time these cities were either majority foreign-born or only had a slim native-born majority. Further, most of the native-born were only second-generation and were still heavily connected to their parents' sending country. Senior political officials from Mexico, China, Japan, Germany, Sweden, and Norway were frequent visitors at the cities whose communities frequently engaged in remittances, return trips, and trade with their countries. Unlike the immigrant transnationalism literature that sees transnationalism as a recent phenomenon, these communities were highly transnational in the 19th century. For example, the Chinese in the U.S. were the largest funders of the successful revolution in China in the early 20th century, while many Mexicans in Los Angeles were part of volunteer militias in Mexico and would be called to service regularly. It is transnational organizations like these that spoke different languages and had different foreign reference points for political organizing and institutions that were involved in these cities' early political networks.

Answering the research questions above involve three separate data collection and analysis processes. First, I am building a novel dataset of names of politicians and their offices as well as organizational membership from annual city directories. This allows me to create both an

organizational census of the cities as well as build networks based on shared organizational membership that demonstrates the political and civil society power structure of the city. Second, I create an ethnicity identifier based on last name from the 1% U.S. census samples from 1850-1910. This provides probabilities for each individual in the city directories as to their likely ethnic identity. Lastly, I have conducted extensive archival research in the three cities, focusing specifically on their ethnic organizations and political institutions, to understand the activities and perception of these communities and their organizations. I have collected this data over a 20-year period—the 10 years before and after the city reached a population of 100,000 people. This research design allows me to look over time, how these networks and demographics change as the city develops; across organizations, which ethnic organizations, and of what kind, were connecting people in various political offices; across ethnicities, how were different ethnic groups connected to the political structure, and across cities, to what extent and to what effect did cities develop distinctive ethnic and political networks.

Preliminary results are beginning to tell a complex story of these communities. For example, in all three cities, Irish Catholic individuals hold relatively numerous and prominent roles in politics throughout the time period. However, only in the early time period are they organized politically, and this occurs mostly through the Irish National League, a political party in Ireland. In contrast, German Jews, who are a larger percentage of the city population, hold relatively few official political positions. But those who are political officials are deeply embedded with well-connected German Jewish organizations, including fraternal, relief, and Zionist societies. Still differently, Scandinavian organizations are the most numerous ethnic organizations in Seattle and Portland, yet they are almost completely disconnected from the political networks. In general, the centrality of ethnic organizations wanes over time in all of the

cities, except for the German Jewish organizations. There are also significant differences across cities. Most notably Portland's ethnic organizations are deeply embedded in the political structure, while they are more sparse in Seattle, and largely peripheral in Los Angeles.

While I am still making sense of these early results they suggest several early findings. First, they confirm the idea that ethnicities that are usually considered to have been excluded from politics in early urban U.S. history were relatively central and organized in early, mainstream political institutions on the West Coast. However, this integration varied by ethnic group, over time, and over place—that is, the political organization was highly contingent. Surprisingly, what this integration does not appear to be contingent on was the size of the ethnic group in the local population (ex. despite Scandinavians making up less than 1% of Los Angeles's population and 30% of Seattle's population, there were similar percentages of Scandinavian political officials and organizations involved in political networks in both cities). A story that also seems to be emerging is that connections to business groups is a large factor in ethnic political representation. If an ethnic group can claim sizable economic capital and connect that capital to its ethnic networks, then the group can leverage its business connections can into political power. It may be the case that the West Coast's late development enabled rapid economic mobility regardless of ethnicity that could be translated into political capital.

As I solidify these results I also seek to understand the impact that these ethnic organizations had on the city's political institutions. For example, while Irish organizations in California aggressively lobbied for racist, particularly anti-Chinese, laws that institutionalized racism, their fear of being disenfranchised based on their Catholic beliefs also enshrined religious freedom and pluralism into the California constitution that made the government more

open to minority groups of all kinds. This example is part of the goal of this paper: how and to what effect did ethnic organizations build the political institutions of the West Coast?