

ARTICLE

Race, Corruption, and Southern Republicanism

The Patronage Scandal of the 1920s

Boris Heersink¹ and Jeffery A. Jenkins² 

¹Department of Political Science, Fordham University, New York, NY, USA

²Price School of Public Policy, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA, USA

Corresponding author. Jeffery A. Jenkins; Email: jjenkins@usc.edu

Abstract

While Republicans enjoyed unified control of the national government during the 1920s, scandals involving executive patronage and GOP state bosses in the South dogged the national party throughout the decade. The Republican Party in the South had been a set of “rotten boroughs” for decades, used by national politicians—especially presidents—for the sole purpose of controlling delegates at the Republican National Convention. This patronage-for-delegates arrangement was generally understood among political elites, but the murder-suicide involving a U.S. postmaster in Georgia in April 1928 brought the Southern GOP’s patronage practices to national light. This forced Republican leaders in an election year to call for a Senate investigation. Chaired by Sen. Smith W. Brookhart (R-IA), the committee investigation lasted for eighteen months, covered portions of two Republican presidential administrations, and showed how state GOP leaders in Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas engaged in office selling. The fallout would be a thorn in the side of President Herbert Hoover, who tried to clean up the corrupt GOP organizations in the South—and build an electorally-viable Republican Party in the ex-Confederate states—but largely failed.

Keywords: Republican Party; Lily-Whites; Black-and-Tans; Corruption; Congress; Office Selling; South; Jim Crow

Introduction

The Republican Party dominated national politics during the 1920s. Beginning in 1896, the GOP relied on a relatively stable electoral coalition that produced a series of landslide presidential election victories and sizeable Congressional majorities. While the party experienced a brief split between regulars (supporters of incumbent president William Howard Taft) and progressives (supporters of former president Theodore Roosevelt) in the 1910s, which allowed Woodrow Wilson to capture the presidency in 1912 and 1916, Republicans were able to mend their intraparty disagreements and return to electoral dominance in the ‘Roaring Twenties.’

But while the economy boomed and prosperity spread in the 1920s, temptation for ‘even more’ ran rampant within the party—and the Republicans faced various charges of corruption. The best-known cases occurred during the Warren G. Harding (1921–1923) presidency, when major financial scandals rocked the Interior Department

(Secretary Albert Fall was convicted of accepting bribes worth \$400,000 in exchange for leases on government oil reserves at Teapot Dome), the Justice Department (Attorney General Harry Daugherty was charged with accepting payoffs to not prosecute alcohol bootleggers), and the Veterans' Bureau (Director Charles G. Forbes was convicted of defrauding the government by padding costs and pocketing the difference in the construction of hospitals).¹ These scandals lingered for years and hobbled both the Harding and (after his premature death) Calvin Coolidge administrations.

But the GOP faced another set of scandals in the 1920s—less well known—concerning the role Southern Republican delegates played in Republican National Convention politics. By 1877 Democrats had regained control of all Southern state governments in the aftermath of Reconstruction, and in the twelve presidential elections between 1880 and 1924, the GOP nominee won only one state in the ex-Confederacy—Tennessee in 1920 (carried by Harding). To ensure they would remain in power, Southern Democrats used fraud, violence, and eventually legal provisions to disenfranchise Black citizens, who were almost exclusively Republican. This drove Southern GOP organizations into near extinction as electorally competitive parties (Key 1949). Despite this, Southern Republicans remained important in intraparty politics, as Southern states continued to enjoy representation at the national convention every four years. Indeed, around twenty to twenty-five percent of Republican convention delegates came from the South during the first three decades of the twentieth century, which provided Southern Republicans with considerable influence in GOP presidential selection (Heersink and Jenkins, 2020).

This conundrum—no electoral power for the GOP in the South, but continued convention power—created perverse incentives and opened the door for corruption. The classic corruption scenario involved Republican “bosses” in Southern states lining up delegates at each convention for particular presidential nominees, who sought to use the South as a foundation to build a majority-winning coalition. In exchange for their delivery of delegates, Southern GOP bosses often received direct payments from presidential hopefuls. But more important was the compensation they received *after* a victorious election: federal (executive) patronage, which they would distribute directly or indirectly to recipients in their state.² The bosses expected patronage recipients to compensate them for those federal jobs—via kickbacks and “voluntary” contributions to the state GOP organization.

Executive patronage came in various forms, but the most common was postmaster-ships.³ Each county had a postmaster, which gave some Southern states (like Texas) well over 200 such positions. The distribution of postmasterships would be at the heart of GOP corruption scandals in the South during the 1920s and involve multiple states. The Republicans largely weathered these scandals until a murder-suicide occurred in 1928 involving a Georgia postmaster and postal employee. The national media jumped on the story, which included multiple suicide notes and specific details of alleged GOP corruption, and Democratic senators demanded an investigation (in an election year). Republican leaders acquiesced, and the investigation stretched from the summer of 1928 through the spring of 1930. The results of this investigation had immediate and lasting effects on the composition of the GOP in the South.

Scott C. James (2006) argues that “patronage parties were intimately involved in the construction of the nineteenth-century American polity” (p. 39). The standard story of patronage parties during this era is straightforward. Two major parties competed in close elections for office, and mobilizing voters was key to party victory. Political operatives worked to turn out the vote, and if they were successful in getting their party's candidates elected, they would demand payment in the form of public employment (executive patronage positions) funneled through state party bosses. Party bosses also benefitted financially from these arrangements. As Jeffrey D. Broxmeyer (2020) has argued, because demand for patronage positions was so high—and the number of claimants exceeded the

number of jobs available—“a party leader ... was well situated to hold bidding wars” (p. 9). Patronage sales thus reflected a form of “electoral capitalism ... a category of entrepreneurship in which the capture of public office and the accumulation of private wealth are mutually reinforcing endeavors” (Broxmeyer 2020, p. 6).

The story we tell is similar but different. Republican operatives in the South expended effort on behalf of their party—but *not* to elect GOP candidates, who by and large did not run for office in the Jim Crow South. Rather they worked to arrange and enforce delegate slates at the Republican National Convention. If successful—that is, if they delivered the promised delegates to the GOP nominee and he went on to win the presidency—they were compensated with control of (most or all) executive patronage in their state, which they could distribute to trusted lieutenants and/or sell outright to ambitious job seekers.

This non-standard story of patronage parties in American politics is less known and deserving of greater attention. We also think it highlights an issue that remains relevant today: in a competitive democratic system, fear of voter backlash might keep politicians from engaging in immoral activities, but what happens if those political actors are *not* constrained by voters?

The rest of the article is organized as follows. We first provide some background on the Republican Party in the South from the end of the Civil War through 1920. We then cover the rising awareness of GOP corruption in the South in the 1920s, before discussing the flashpoint—the murder-suicide involving Postmaster L. S. Peterson in Georgia in 1928—that led to a Senate investigation into the sale of federal offices. We then review the specifics of the Senate hearings, with a focus on the four states at the heart of the investigation: Mississippi, Georgia, South Carolina, and Texas. We conclude by considering how the results of the investigation affected national Republicans’ approach to the composition of the GOP in the South.

The Republican Party in the South, 1865–1920

Prior to the Civil War, the Republican Party—founded on anti-slavery tenets—was a non-entity in the soon-to-be Confederate states. After the war, thanks to supermajorities in Congress, Republicans sought to establish a partisan footprint in the South. By ensuring that formerly enslaved Blacks were granted citizenship and suffrage right and by temporarily banning Whites with connections to the Confederacy, the Republican-led Reconstruction program created a pro-GOP voting base in the South (Donald et al., 2001; Foner 1988).

Thanks to their early Reconstruction efforts, the Republicans enjoyed electoral victories throughout the ex-Confederacy. But GOP success proved fleeting. With Democratic-aligned terrorist groups like the Ku Klux Klan and Red Shirts intimidating and attacking Black voters, and Whites regaining access to the franchise, Democrats quickly regained control of Southern state governments. Indeed, by 1877 every ex-Confederate state was under unified Democratic control (Heersink and Jenkins, 2020).

Starting in the 1890s, Democratic governments in the South began adopting legal remedies—like poll taxes and literacy tests—to disenfranchise Black voters. This led very quickly to the destruction of the GOP in the South, outside of a select few areas, as a viable electoral party (Kousser 1974; Perman 2001). But as the GOP was collapsing in the South, the party was ascending elsewhere in the nation. Beginning in 1896, the Republicans enjoyed a series of landslide victories in presidential elections combined with reliable GOP congressional majorities—all without meaningful Southern support. As a result, national Republican leaders gave up on trying to regain a foothold in the South (Heersink and Jenkins, 2020).

In the decades that followed, even as most GOP organizations in the South ceased to actively compete in elections, Southern Republicanism remained relevant. Specifically, Southern states continued to enjoy representation at Republican National Conventions. With roughly a quarter of GOP delegates at conventions prior to 1916 coming from the South, the region remained influential in presidential nominations (Heersink and Jenkins, 2020).

Over time, national GOP leaders realized that the combination of the South's ongoing influence at national conventions and lack of electoral relevance created a unique opportunity. In exchange for support at national convention, presidents and presidential hopefuls often offered Southern party leaders direct cash payments prior to the convention. But the bigger prize was control over federal (executive) patronage for their states after the election. Famously, William McKinley, in advance of the 1896 national convention, rented a house in Thomasville, Georgia, and met with Southern party leaders to discuss "patronage and other political possibilities in a relaxed atmosphere" (Kehl 1981, p. 198). McKinley's approach proved successful, as he received nearly 88% of Southern votes at the convention.

With Republicans winning presidential elections consistently, this system provided Southern party leaders with an important stream of income: since federal jobs were assigned largely based on their personal recommendation, they could sell their recommendation to the highest bidder. This meant that control of Southern state parties remained appealing even though they had little electoral value. Thus, in most Southern states, competition existed over control of the party organization and local patronage. Much of this intraparty conflict centered on race: while all GOP state parties in the South were run initially by mixed-race coalitions (known as the Black-and-Tans), over time White segregationist Republicans (known as the Lily-Whites) took control of these organizations (Walton 1975).

The Lily-White takeover represented a major decline in Black influence in the Republican Party. For example, while almost 45% of Southern GOP delegates in 1892 were Black, only 20.5% were in 1920 (Heersink and Jenkins, 2020). But this reduction in Black Republican participation did not happen at the same rate everywhere. Some states (like North Carolina and Virginia) effectively expelled all Black leaders from the party, while others (like Louisiana and Florida) maintained a minority Black faction. By the 1920 Republican convention, only three Southern states still had substantial Black involvement in GOP organization: Mississippi, Georgia, and South Carolina.

Allegations of Federal Office for Sale in the South

By the 1920s, the "rotten borough" system that allowed Southern Republicanism to remain relevant began to exhibit cracks. Throughout the decade, allegations that GOP leaders in the South were selling federal offices were widespread. For example, Joseph W. Tolbert, the (White) Republican boss of South Carolina and a member of the Republican National Committee (RNC), received considerable attention as early as 1922 for "trafficking in offices."⁴ Tolbert—known as "Tieless Joe" for his antipathy for neckties—was under consideration for U.S. Marshal from the Western District of South Carolina, and Senator Nathan B. Dial (D-SC) sought to block his nomination based on the widespread sale of federal office. According to Dial:

Tolbert had divided the State into districts, in each of which he had stationed a henchman who sold the Federal plums for one-half the first year's salary, in sums ranging from \$600 to \$2,000. The Senator said an affidavit declared that Tolbert expected to realize \$100,000 out of the system.⁵

Dial's charges led to multiple Senate investigations and threatened Tolbert's nomination. In the interim, Harding twice placed Tolbert in the position via a recess appointment.⁶ Finally, in November 1923, with no resolution in sight, Tolbert resigned. The *New York Times* speculated that his resignation followed a prearranged plan, as President Calvin Coolidge, having succeeded Harding following his death in August, immediately nominated Tolbert's nephew (Joseph A. Tolbert) for the position of Federal Attorney in the Western District of South Carolina.⁷ Tolbert declared that he was "entirely satisfied with this arrangement" and did not believe "he was being thrown overboard at all."⁸

But charges of selling federal patronage was a story that would not go away. At the urging of Senator Robert La Follette (R-WI), who challenged Coolidge for the presidency in 1924, further investigation into the Southern GOP followed.⁹ In October 1924, a Senate subcommittee found that Republican operatives in Virginia and South Carolina had been "assessing" federal office holders (mainly postmasters) for the GOP campaign fund. John T. Doyle, secretary of the Civil Service Commission, testified that he was told that Tolbert had promised a postmaster that he would be reappointed "if [his] heart and pocketbook will get right."¹⁰ Doyle also testified that he was told an assistant postmaster was charged \$500 to get promoted to postmaster, and that the money was paid to a "collector" for Tolbert.¹¹

In January 1925, Postmaster General Harry S. New responded to the allegations:

After a thorough consideration of the report made by Secretary Doyle of the Civil Service Commission ... followed by an investigation instituted by myself, conducted by Post Office Inspector Williamson, I can say that there is nothing in these reports that call for any action by this department. So far as I am concerned, the matter is closed.¹²

Coolidge disagreed, and in early March 1925, he ordered the Justice Department to investigate the alleged sale of federal patronage in Georgia and South Carolina. The impetus was due largely to Senator Walter F. George (D-GA), who provided reports to the White House regarding the sale of federal jobs in his state.¹³ And as long as Georgia—and (Black) Republican boss Henry Lincoln Johnson—was being investigated, a more thorough investigation of South Carolina and Tolbert could also be conducted. Rep. William Francis Stevenson (D-SC) had been pushing to investigate Tolbert for months, and he supplied evidence of corruption alongside the reports provided by Sen. George.¹⁴

Yet nothing happened. A year went by with no report from the Justice Department. On March 3, 1926, Rep. Stevenson discussed what he knew on the House floor:

Assistant Attorney General [William J. Donovan] [...] said "We are going to prosecute there wherever it is necessary, and there is evidence to sustain a prosecution." Then they sent two other fellows down there, and they got case after case which would warrant an indictment and made a report. I went to call on them and found that Mr. Donovan had been transferred to another position, and they said, "Take it up with the Attorney General." I could not get anything out of them.¹⁵

Stevenson proposed to introduce a new resolution calling on the Attorney General's office to share their report, but few believed that his efforts would be successful.¹⁶

That same day, however, Rep. Harry M. Wurzbach (R-TX) restarted the push for an investigation of GOP patronage policies in the South. Wurzbach was in his third term representing the 14th district (comprising San Antonio and outlying areas) in Texas. He had been a prosecuting attorney and judge in Guadalupe County before winning election to the House in 1920. During his time in office, Wurzbach fought with Rentfro B. Creager,

the (White) Texas Republican boss, for control of executive patronage, and typically found himself on the losing end. In 1928, Wurzbach was one of only three Republican House members from the ex-Confederate states.¹⁷

Wurzbach announced on the House floor that he would speak on “the vicious system and practice of Federal patronage distribution in Southern States.” He declared that the GOP had inherited, rather than created, the system, but regardless of origins, “the cancerous growth that is sapping the vitality of southern Republicanism must sooner or later be removed, root and branch, or the party is doomed in the South” because “the system and practice of exchanging or ‘swapping’ southern patronage for southern delegates to Republican national conventions, or vice versa, is bringing our party into disrepute and contempt with the best people of the South.”¹⁸

Wurzbach spent the remainder of his floor time assailing the “pie counters” who controlled the GOP organizations in the South, as well as national Republican leaders who benefitted from the patronage-for-delegates arrangement. Such a system should not be permitted to continue, he argued, “if national Republican leadership expects to elect Republican Congressmen from that section of the country.” “We have thousands upon thousands of good, faithful, and true Republicans in the South,” he stated, “who love their party and are devoted to its principles and traditions, but they despise [...] the ‘pie Republicans.’”¹⁹ But Wurzbach hinted that neither state Republican leaders in the South nor national Republican leaders wanted a vibrant GOP in Southern elections.

Wurzbach’s comments were covered extensively in the press,²⁰ and other members joined in criticizing Republican patronage policies in the South. A week later, on March 10, Rep. Thomas Jefferson Busby (D-MS) offered a resolution to investigate corrupt practices by (Black) Mississippi Republican boss, Perry W. Howard. Busby announced: “It has been publicly charged that Federal patronage is sold to the highest bidder in Mississippi by Perry W. Howard and his subordinates. No Federal appointments in Mississippi are made without the approval of Perry W. Howard.”²¹ Busby then claimed that the sale of positions extended beyond postmasterships and that two of Howard’s half-brothers had recently offered a U.S. marshalship for \$1,500. Rep. Thomas W. Wilson (D-MS) followed that day by offering a resolution calling for the Department of Justice to investigate the alleged sale of post-office positions in Mississippi.²²

Almost two weeks later, on March 22, Rep. Wilson called on the House to adopt his resolution. He asked: “How much longer must my people bear the humiliation of seeing Federal office sold like bales of cotton in an open market?” Wilson’s outrage contained a clear racist element, as he complained that “the control of Federal patronage is almost entirely in the hands of the negroes. God save my country from the sad day when negroes are placed in the seats of the mighty and political control passes into their black hands.”²³ That same day, Rep. Wurzbach introduced a bill that would compel federal appointees to file an affidavit that they had made no campaign contributions in the hopes of securing a federal position. Wurzbach believed his bill would eliminate the patronage brokers in Southern GOP organizations and turn control over to the “real Republicans.”²⁴ Not to be outdone, on March 26, Rep. Stevenson introduced a bill to prevent the purchase and sale of public office, by imposing a fine of \$1,000, a year in jail, or both to anyone convicted of paying (or promising to pay) to secure a federal appointment.²⁵

While the House Judiciary Committee reported against Busby’s resolution, finding no evidence to implicate Perry Howard in the alleged patronage abuses,²⁶ pressure from both parties led the panel to positively report the Wurzbach and Stevenson measures back to the House floor.²⁷ They were considered together on June 7, 1926, and passed unanimously, after which they were reported to the Senate Judiciary Committee.²⁸ On June 21, both measures were reported positively back to the Senate floor, and on July 2, they were both passed unanimously with light amendments.²⁹ The following day, the House agreed to the

Senate amendments.³⁰ The bills were presented to President Coolidge on December 8, and he affixed his signature three days later.³¹ They became Public Law #525 (Stevenson) and #526 (Wurzbach).

While many saw these two new laws as beneficial in cleaning up fraudulent patronage practices among Southern Republicans and its connection to delegate bartering at the Republican National Convention, not everyone was so sanguine. Black Republicans believed the laws would unduly harm them, and this argument was made extensively in the Black press. For example, the *Pittsburgh Courier* reported:

Colored Republican leaders believe that these two new laws strike a death blow at the Negro in politics in the South. They point out that there will be no incentive for the Negro to be active in politics in the South, if he is denied appointment to Federal office and at the same time prohibited by law from bartering his influence in the distribution of patronage. The expenditure of large sums of money is necessary to obtain political control in the South, colored Republican leaders assert. Money for the holding of state, district and county conventions must be provided. The colored Republican in the South does not have the money to supply for the holding of these conventions and calls upon those who are the political beneficiaries for funds in exchange for Federal appointments. With this source of revenue cut off, there is nothing for the Negro in the South to do, they assert, but permit the white man to gain control of Republican politics.³²

Thus, from the perspective of Black Republicans in the South, these laws merely redistributed the control of state GOP organizations from the Black-and-Tans to the Lily-Whites.

The next year (1927) passed, to Republican leaders' delight, with little attention given to the bartering of federal offices in the South. Most political observers were focused on various questions in advance of the presidential election of 1928: would Calvin Coolidge run again?; if he did not, who would get the GOP nomination?; and could Democratic Governor Al Smith of New York get his party's nomination, despite his Catholicism and pro-liquor stance?

A Murder-Suicide in Georgia and its Repercussions on the Southern GOP

The first three months of 1928 were more of the same. Republican leaders in the South were concerned about Governor Al Smith getting the Democratic nomination. If that were to occur, they feared Smith's candidacy would result in an anti-Catholic, anti-liquor backlash that might elect Republicans to the House, creating "too many hands in the fire."³³ Their preference was to elect a Republican president but for their states to elect (only) Democrats to Congress. In February, as Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover's presidential candidacy gained momentum (Coolidge had declined to run again in August 1927) his campaign quickly and efficiently picked up the endorsement of multiple Republican bosses in the South. While this caused consternation among Hoover's GOP opponents and generated talk of reviving the investigation into the sale of Republican patronage positions in the South, through the end of March nothing concrete was done.

But things changed quickly thereafter. On April 2, news of a murder-suicide shook Georgia. The culprit was L. R. Peterson, the postmaster of Douglas County, who shot and killed Elton Kirkland (a money-order clerk) before turning the gun on himself. Peterson, a Democrat who had just been relieved of his post after serving for more than twelve years, left behind a suicide letter addressed to his brother:

The Republican party has pulled me over for \$2,000 in the last five years and they are still claiming more money on me now. Thomas W. Overstreet, the inspector, and Elton Kirkland, money-order clerk, are to blame for it all. They have done everything against me that they could do. They have framed me. These donations are responsible for my financial condition. What they have taken away from me is why I am in debt today. I understand they are going to put me out tonight. For this reason I cannot face my friends any longer.³⁴

Authorities also found in Peterson's pocket a note directing him to send money to Benjamin J. Davis, the (Black) Republican National Committeeman for Georgia, through an intermediary. Peterson was reported to have been embroiled in disagreements with Overstreet and Kirkland for some time. Rep. Lankford (D-GA) declared that he had received a letter from Peterson, detailing why he had lost his postmaster's job, and demanded that a full investigation be conducted.³⁵

The next day, more details emerged: Peterson was reportedly fired for a \$214 shortage in his books.³⁶ Peterson's annual salary was \$2,700, and if his letter was correct, he was required to pay \$2,000 over five years, or almost fifteen percent.³⁷ Senators George and Harris of Georgia relayed some of the details to their colleagues on the floor.³⁸ George claimed that Peterson had been "bled to death" by the "Republican state machine," and he and Harris sought a "Senate investigation of the most searching character."³⁹ In the House, Rep. Lankford declared: "The spoils system is criminally wrong and can only lead to corruption and such tragedies as occurred at Douglas."⁴⁰

Republicans were put on the defensive. Davis denied demanding or receiving funds from any postmaster in the state and declared that he was the subject of a "frame-up."⁴¹ Postmaster General New claimed ignorance of forced contributions, but quickly announced—at the behest of President Coolidge who was "strongly incensed by reports of the Peterson tragedies"—that his department would begin a thorough investigation immediately.⁴²

While New sprang into action, firing two postmasters in Florida who declared they had paid (or would be willing to pay) to secure a federal postmaster position,⁴³ Democrats sought to keep the pressure on the Republicans. On April 9, Sen. George introduced a resolution to investigate the barter of federal offices in Georgia.⁴⁴ The resolution (S. Res. 193), which was referred to the Post Offices and Post Roads Committee, called for the creation of a special Senate committee to conduct a thorough investigation, including the holding of hearings and the subpoenaing of witnesses. On May 3, the Post Offices and Post Roads Committee reported back favorably, authorizing a subcommittee to investigate the bartering of federal offices not just in Georgia but in various States, with a promise that Georgia would be given first attention.⁴⁵ On May 19, the full Senate authorized the investigation.⁴⁶ A three-man Senate subcommittee was named to conduct the investigation: Smith W. Brookhart (R-IA), as chair; Tasker L. Oddie (R-NV); and Cyrus Locher (D-OH).⁴⁷

Brookhart announced that the first set of hearings would start in Atlanta, Georgia, in July 1928.⁴⁸ Brookhart was a western progressive in the mold of Robert La Follette and often ran afoul of his Republican colleagues, as did many progressives of the time, for his opposition to business interests and frequent criticisms of President Coolidge (McDaniel 1995).⁴⁹ With regard to the sale of federal offices and his role as subcommittee chair, Brookhart promised to "get to the root of this evil if there is an evil."⁵⁰

The investigation would comprise six separate hearings across eighteen months. During a break in the second hearing, two additional resolutions were adopted unanimously by the Senate: S. Res 311, which extended the investigation through the end of the first regular

session of the next (71st) Congress, and S. Res. 330, which expanded the investigation's scope beyond postmasters to include "any person appointed to Federal office if the committee or subcommittee deems such investigation advisable."⁵¹ An additional resolution (S. Res. 42) was agreed to between the third and fourth hearings, when it appeared the committee would need additional time to complete their investigation.⁵² Kenneth McKellar (D-TN) replaced Locher on the committee beginning in the second hearing, while Daniel O. Hastings (R-DE) replaced Oddie beginning in the fifth hearing.

As Table 1 indicates, most of the witnesses (124 in all) provided testimony in DC, but the Brookhart committee also traveled to Georgia and Texas to conduct interviews. Evidence was also submitted from a variety of states. For example, the committee sought to measure the extent to which postmasters had donated to Republican causes, and asked the Postmaster General to collect affidavits from all postmasters in Georgia, Tennessee, South Carolina, and Mississippi describing "all their campaign contributions, and all expenditures they had made of any kind to secure their appointments to their offices."⁵³ After responses were collected, majorities in Georgia and Tennessee claimed to have provided some donation while only minorities made such a claim in South Carolina and Mississippi.⁵⁴

With limited time, the Brookhart committee chose to focus its investigation on four Southern states: Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas. The committee report itself (Senate Report No. 272) was presented by Brookhart to the House on March 15, 1930.⁵⁵

Case Studies: Federal Office Sales in Mississippi, Georgia, South Carolina, and Texas

In the following subsections, we provide detailed case studies of the Brookhart committee's investigatory work. Before getting into the nitty-gritty, however, we begin each case with a brief overview of how the state GOP was organized at the time of the investigation, and how it had developed to that point since the end of Reconstruction.

Mississippi

After a period of post-Civil War Republican rule, Democrats regained control of the Mississippi state legislature and governorship in the mid-1870s. The Mississippi GOP ceased to be a competitive force in state elections thereafter and focused instead on national

Table 1. Subcommittee Hearing Dates, Locations, and Coverage

Part	Congress (Session)	Dates	Location(s)	Witnesses	Scope
1	70th (2nd)	July 9-12, December 11 & 13, 1928	Atlanta, GA & Washington, DC	28	GA, SC
2	70th (2nd)	Jan. 29-30, Feb. 5, 16, 28; March 1, 5-6, 1929	Washington, DC	21	TX, MS
3	71st (1st)	March 23 & April 5, 1929	Washington, DC	4	SC
4	71st (1st)	June 21, 27, 29; July 1, 1929	Washington, DC & Dallas, TX	65	TX
5	71st (1st)	Aug. 26; Sept. 3; Oct. 18, 22-23; Nov. 15 & Dec. 10, 1929	Washington, DC	5	SC, TX
6	71st (1st&2nd)	June 28, 1929; March 12, 1930	San Antonio, TX & Washington, DC	1	TX

convention representation and federal-patronage division when a Republican was in the White House. Some White party leaders attempted to exclude Black Republicans from the state organization, but by the early twentieth century Black and White leaders formed a truce, leaving the organization under the control of Lonzo B. Mosley, a White man. After Mosley's death in 1918, Michael Joseph Mulvihill, a White man who at one point had been postmaster in Vicksburg, became the state party leader. Unlike his predecessor, Mulvihill refused to nominate Black candidates for patronage jobs. This put him in direct conflict with Black GOP leaders in the state.

One of these Black leaders was Perry W. Howard. One of seven sons born to two former slaves, Howard earned a law degree at Illinois College of Law in Chicago. After passing the Mississippi bar exam, he began working as a lawyer. He eventually left the state and moved to the District of Columbia in the 1910s to become partner at Howard, Hayes, and Davis, the leading Black law firm in town (McMillen 1982).

Before moving, however, Howard had become active in the Mississippi GOP and was viewed by many as a rising star. In 1920 he sought a seat on the Republican National Committee from Mississippi but lost to Mulvihill. The following year, he was appointed special assistant to the Attorney General by President Harding. In 1924, Howard again challenged Mulvihill for the RNC seat and this time won, which made Howard the *de facto* leader of the Mississippi Republican Party, despite living and working in Washington. He thus gained the ability to nominate job applicants for federal positions in the state and became "the Washington referee for all patronage in Mississippi."⁵⁶

By all accounts, Howard used this power to enrich himself and his associates. In doing so, he became the subject of two federal prosecutions. The Brookhart committee's assessment of Howard was based largely on evidence collected for these federal prosecutions, which found that Howard benefitted financially from selling federal offices. For example, the federal investigation found that Howard's bank accounts contained over \$31,000, while Howard's secretary, John T. Risher, had roughly \$14,000 in his account. Combined with other smaller amounts stored in different places, Howard and Risher had roughly \$50,000 socked away—an amount equal to roughly \$830,000 today. Since Howard made only \$6,000 a year from his position, it was unlikely that he (or Risher) could gather such wealth through their employment.⁵⁷

Testimony collected during the investigation of Howard showed a clear (and, at times, ruthless) approach to selling federal offices. The process of receiving a federal appointment often required interactions between multiple individuals before reaching Howard, whose nomination was vital. Job seekers typically relied on an intermediary to appeal on their behalf to Republicans in the state, who subsequently sent them to DC to meet with Howard. For instance, John P. McHenry stated in an affidavit that he had attempted to secure a postmastership in Okolona for a "Mrs. Pilgreen." McHenry contacted Clem Bascom, a Black man and key contact of Howard's, who informed him that the office:

[would] cost \$500, \$200 of which was to be in cash and the rest to be aid at the rate of \$50 a month after the appointment was received. Bascom told me that one half of this money was to go to Perry W. Howard and that he (Bascom) was to retain the other half. He stated that this money was to be used for campaign expenses, and that there was no other way for the Republicans to secure money for campaign expenses in Mississippi.⁵⁸

McHenry subsequently traveled to Washington to meet with Howard who, after complaining that "very little of the money secured by these county chairmen got to him,"⁵⁹ instructed him to meet with Risher to settle any details about the transaction. Risher told

McHenry that other candidates were also bidding for the position—Bascom had already endorsed a different candidate, and the current postmaster in Okolona was lobbying Howard to support his reappointment—and thus the ‘expenses’ related to securing the appointment now warranted \$1,000. McHenry told him that was too much money and then described for the committee the remainder of the conversation:

We squabbled over the amount for a while, but finally agreed on the arrangements which I had with Bascom—that is \$500, \$200 of which was to be paid in cash. Risher stated that he would have to have this \$200 before he could do anything at all because of the expenses he had to pay. I offered to give Risher a check for the \$200 because I had sufficient money in the bank to cover that amount, but Risher stated that he would not take a check and that he wanted cash, and he told me that I could wire home for the money.⁶⁰

McHenry eventually gave Risher \$200 in cash and agreed to provide the additional \$300 indirectly, also in cash, at a later date. Despite these payments, Howard did not place Pilgreen on the ‘eligible’ list of candidates for the office. That Pilgreen was unable to secure her appointment for \$500 was not surprising, however, as the Brookhart committee found other postmasterships went for anywhere from \$700 to \$2,000.

Howard was also accused of selling U.S. marshal appointments in Mississippi. In one case, Howard double-crossed some of the other players in the sale. He had made an agreement with one A. P. Russell and two other parties that he would nominate Russell for the U.S. marshal position for the southern district of Mississippi in exchange for a payment of \$2,000. However, the Brookhart committee found that:

Howard got Russell to one side and instructed him to come back to Washington himself and bring the cash. So Howard double-crossed the other parties interested with him in Mississippi and sold the office for \$1,500 and deposited it to his credit in a Washington bank. This only goes to show that Howard has no scruples and would double-cross his best friend, providing he could get away with it.⁶¹

The connection between the payment and Howard’s endorsement for the position was strong: Russell paid Howard on March 14, 1927, and the next day Howard sent a letter to the Attorney General recommending him for the position. But, while Russell was confirmed, he resigned after just ten months, after which Howard again sold the office, this time for \$2,000.

Russell paid roughly eight percent of his expected earnings to get the job. Others may have paid a considerably higher ‘tax.’ As Howard required most of these payments up front, the Brookhart committee noted multiple cases of job applicants having to borrow money to be able to bid their way into a federal position.

While the Justice Department began investigating Howard in 1925, no charges were filed as it was not yet illegal to sell federal offices. After legislation was passed in 1926 that outlawed this practice, Howard continued to profit from his nominations until, finally, he was indicted in July 1928 by a federal grand jury.

While Howard had long been unpopular with national Black leaders,⁶² after his indictment, he received support from Black luminaries like W. E. B. DuBois and Howard University dean Kelly Miller. More important, Howard also received the backing of Democratic leaders in Mississippi, including Governor Theodore Bilbo, who believed that as long as Howard ran the Mississippi GOP, they would not face any meaningful opposition. If Howard were to be convicted and White Republicans regained control of the

party, they feared an electorally competitive GOP might arise.⁶³ To prevent this, Democrats allegedly raised money for Howard's defense and his attorneys reminded the all-White jury that 93% of Howard's appointments had been Democrats and that he and other Black Republicans were "white men's negroes" who had "been good to the Democratic party" (McMillen 1982, p. 219).⁶⁴ These efforts proved successful, as Howard was acquitted twice.

The Brookhart committee was not persuaded by Howard's "not guilty" verdicts. They were clear in their final assessment of the Mississippi case:

Your committee feels that notwithstanding action taken by the trial juries in Mississippi, that there is an abundance of evidence in the record to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Perry W. Howard was guilty of the sale and barter of public offices in the State of Mississippi, and your committee condemns such practice as most reprehensible and in violation of Federal law. Your committee recommends that such method of appointing public officials should be abolished without delay.⁶⁵

Georgia

The Republican Party's post-Civil War decline was particularly swift in Georgia. By 1870, Democrats had taken control of the state and, in the decades that followed, the GOP was an electoral non-entity: from 1874 onwards, Republicans won no seats in Congress and usually claimed only single digits in the state legislature. Indeed, the state party often failed to even field candidates in races against the now-dominant Democratic Party (Heersink and Jenkins, 2020).

In this period, the Georgia GOP was consistently a mixed-race organization, though White Republicans frequently (but unsuccessfully) tried to oust the party's Black leaders. In 1912, after Walter H. Johnson, the leader of the state GOP, had voted with Theodore Roosevelt's delegates a number of times at the Republican National Convention, President William Howard Taft ordered him to be removed and replaced with a new leader: Henry Lincoln Johnson, a Black man and the recorder of deeds in Washington, DC. While Johnson faced challenges to his leadership from White Republicans, he was able to seat his delegates at the 1916, 1920, and 1924 national conventions, thereby ensuring that he was seen as the leader of the GOP in the state (Heersink and Jenkins, 2020).

After Johnson's death in 1925, control of the party switched to Benjamin Jefferson Davis, a Black man and the publisher of the Atlanta *Independent* newspaper. Davis—who disdained both White segregationists and the "Negro aristocracy" of Black officeholders in the state (Matthews 1984)—dominated the state party until the 1928 national convention, when he was replaced as RNC member by Roscoe Pickett, a White man who had been chair of the state committee since the early 1920s.⁶⁶ While Davis was named secretary of Georgia's GOP organization, his influence had waned.

Still, prior to Pickett's challenge, Davis—and Johnson before him—was highly effective in controlling the appointment process for federal positions in Georgia when the GOP controlled the White House. In testimony to the Brookhart committee, Davis described the process:

If the vacancy occurred before the commission of the incumbent expired the Postmaster General would notify the chairman [of the Republican State Committee] and the national committeeman that the vacancy occurred and ask them to make a suggestion as to an acting postmaster. If the commission of the postmaster expired and examination was held, when an eligible list came out the Postmaster General

would send a copy of that list, one to the chairman and one to the national committeeman and we, as a rule would make a suggestion.⁶⁷

Davis testified that in determining this “suggestion” he would often reach out to local officials, including Democrats: “if it was in some settlement where I did not think it was safe for my folks to have anything to do with it, I would ask some white man that I knew in the settlement.”⁶⁸

The Brookhart committee concluded that Johnson, Davis, and Georgia GOP treasurer John W. Martin regularly sold offices, and generally collected between five and ten percent of the total wages the federal appointees received. These payments came as donations to the Georgia Republican Party. During his testimony, Martin acknowledged, in a back-and-forth with Sen. George, that the donors to the state party were principally postmasters and carriers:

Senator George: Now, Mr. Martin, as a matter of fact, practically without exception every postmaster in the State does make some contribution to your organization?

Mr. Martin: I wouldn't say every postmaster.

Senator George: I don't mean every single postmaster, but I am speaking in general terms; generally they make some contributions to your committee?

Mr. Martin: I don't know how many postmasters there are. A good many of them make them; I would say that. Some of them.

Senator George: And they make them monthly; do they not?

Mr. Martin: Some of them monthly, and some annually.

Senator Harris: What percentage of your revenues is from postal employees?

Mr. Martin: Why, the greater part, or percentage.⁶⁹

And, while Martin insisted these donations reflected postmasters' genuine desire to support the GOP, many of those who got federal jobs and made payments to the Republican Party were in fact Democrats.⁷⁰

Sen. Brookhart also noted that the Georgia GOP maintained permanent headquarters and paid staff, including Martin and Davis, year-round, which (he believed) was unheard of in state politics at the time. Indeed, Brookhart concluded that “the only business, it would seem, that has developed here that kept them busy, is the collecting of these assessments from the postmasters.”⁷¹ The Brookhart committee also unearthed letters to Martin suggesting a clear connection between donations to the party and federal appointments. For example, one donor wrote Martin “inclosed [sic] please find free donation. I suppose everything is moving along all right. I have not received my commission yet. I suppose it will come on.”⁷²

Indeed, according to the Brookhart committee's findings, the Republican leadership received payments in exchange for job nominations from “the postmasters and practically all the other Federal officers appointed in the State of Georgia” in the 1920s. As in Mississippi, these payments in Georgia were generally made at the time of appointment and directly to the party's collection agents. However, the committee found that Davis and Martin were flexible: “If it was impossible to secure a lump sum, then they resorted to a monthly payment proposition and the Federal officer was requested to pay a stipulated amount monthly to the treasurer of the State organization.”⁷³ Records showed that some postmasters donated once, like the postmaster at Blairsville who contributed \$370 to the state GOP, while others donated the same amount every month over a considerable period of time. The postmaster at Hamilton, for example, donated \$12.50 every month to the Republican state committee through the entire year 1927, while the postmaster at Shellman made similar monthly payments of \$8.50.⁷⁴

The state organization laundered the donations to party leaders in the form of wages or payment for expenses. Johnson, for example, received a monthly wage of \$250 to \$300 during his time as party chair, while Davis and Martin both received a monthly wage of \$250, with additional payments to cover travel expenses. Based on checks provided by Martin, the Brookhart committee found that the GOP state office in just one month in 1925 paid out \$1,600 in salaries—roughly \$26,000 in today's dollars.⁷⁵

Payment was required for reappointment as well. For example, the postmistress at Conyers secured her original appointment via an indirect payment of \$500 to the Davis machine—five percent of her four-year salary. At the end of her term, she was advised to contribute another \$500 to be nominated for reappointment. After contacting a U.S. marshal and learning that such a contribution was not required, she did not make it. But soon afterwards, the Conyers post office received notice that a search would begin for a new postmaster. Alarmed, the postmistress arranged to pay another \$500.⁷⁶ Others paid considerably more.

After his inauguration, Hoover made clear that he would not follow recommendations from either Davis or Pickett. Instead, Hoover selected his own local Republican leader—Josiah T. Rose, a White man and internal revenue collector in Atlanta. By spring 1930, Rose had allied with Pickett and formed a Lily-White faction recognized by Hoover. Indeed, by March 1930, the Brookhart committee's report concluded that office sales in Georgia had effectively ended:

Your committee is pleased to report that conditions have greatly improved in Georgia and the new organization handling patronage down there seems to have met with success. We have information from influential citizens of Georgia that the barter and sale of Federal offices has practically been eliminated.⁷⁷

South Carolina

The GOP dominated politics in South Carolina for almost a decade after the Civil War. However, after a long campaign of violence by terror groups against Black militiamen and voters, Democrats regained control of state government in 1876. With Republicans boycotting the 1878 elections, mostly with the goal of preventing further violence, Democrats ran uncontested in the gubernatorial election and won nearly all seats in the state assembly and senate. By the 1890s, the South Carolina GOP failed to run candidates in gubernatorial elections as well as in many down-ballot races (Heersink and Jenkins, 2020).

Rather than focus on winning elections, the South Carolina GOP pivoted to patronage and national convention politics. In doing so, the party organization remained mixed-race throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. Indeed, Black Republicans strategically sought out White Republicans as allies, believing they had to “accept the existing repressive order and attract white men into the party who were willing to cooperate with Negroes in return for occupying the most conspicuous offices” (Gatewood 1969, p. 252). By the early twentieth century, “Tieless Joe” Tolbert had taken control of the state party. Tolbert's party machine revolved around “himself, a few other whites,” including his brother Robert Redd Tolbert, “and handpicked Negroes over the state” (Key 1949, p. 288).

The Tolbert organization focused exclusively on selling offices and using its influence at national conventions for financial gain. Controlling the state GOP when Republicans held the White House was highly profitable for the Tolberts and their associates. While some witnesses at the Brookhart committee hearings described job applicants paying Tolbert directly, others indicated payments went through Republican leaders at the county level.

The payments were presented as necessary to cover campaign expenses. For example, James H. McCord, a postmaster at Hodges, stated under oath that Tolbert's brother informed him in 1924:

when my reappointment was pending [...] that the expenses connected with maintaining the Republican organization and assisting with the political campaign were too heavy for 'us' to bear alone and that 'we' believed postmasters who held their positions should assist in paying these expenses. It was insinuated that those who contributed would retain their positions and the impression was given me that I would meet opposition for reappointment and retention if I failed to contribute.⁷⁸

McCord testified that he paid Tolbert annually to retain his position, generally \$100 each year and sometimes \$50, though in those years Tolbert reportedly "objected and stated I should do better than that." In explaining the need for such 'donations' Tolbert stressed "the heavy expenses incident to the Republican National Convention, transportation of delegates to the convention and expenses connected with the presidential campaign."⁷⁹

Testimony from other postmasters suggests that Tolbert's machine could be quite flexible in how much it charged for different officers. A postmaster in Bowman reported that he paid \$250 in 1927 for his appointment, which was "in line with what others had contributed."⁸⁰ The postmaster at Parris Island reportedly told Tolbert that he was willing to pay \$100 a year as long as the position came with a salary of \$2,500 a year, thus paying roughly the same as McCord had. Meanwhile, the postmaster at Gaffney, who was facing reappointment in 1926, reportedly paid Tolbert \$500 in cash to keep his job, while the postmaster at Yorges Island paid \$750. The highest payment identified was for the postmaster position at Anderson, sold for \$1,250 (over \$20,000 in today's money).⁸¹

Paying the Tolbert machine did not guarantee appointment. For example, the committee found that G. W. Kennington Jr., a candidate for the position of postmaster at Pageland, paid \$500 to one of Tolbert's associates, Parnell Meehan. When the candidate failed to pass the examination necessary to be placed on the eligible list,

he had a hard time getting his \$500 returned by Meehan, Meehan at first refusing to pay anything. However, at the point of a pistol Meehan paid Kennington \$200 back and then paid him monthly out of his salary until he had paid him \$490 of the money back. The committee has information that this office was then offered to one of the eligible on the list for \$800.⁸²

But without payment, appointments were highly unlikely to go through. For example, Rep. William F. Stevenson (D-SC) testified on a case in which a postmaster at a fourth-class post office in Ruby requested a transfer to a different position:

[T]here was a vacancy on route No. 1. He applied to be transferred from the office to the route. I got an order for that transfer, and both the First Assistant and the Fourth Assistant concurred in that. After it had been ordered and before it went into effect it was held up. A man in my county who claimed to be representing the powers that be showed up and demanded \$150 from Mr. Graves as a consideration for the transfer; it could not go into effect until he paid it. Graves indignantly declined to pay it [...]. And another man was transferred. [...] In other words, Mr. Graves declined to pay, the other man that was anxious for the better route was charged with having paid \$150 and got it.⁸³

Tolbert never appeared before the Brookhart committee, but he was allowed to provide a statement. He did so, sworn and notarized, on May 10, 1929. Among other things, Tolbert made the following declaration.

I have never, directly or indirectly, sold an office for money or anything of value whatsoever, nor have I ever, directly or indirectly, authorized any person so to do, either on their own account or for me. I have never recommended anyone for office on condition that they would after appointment pay any money or other thing of value to me or to anyone for me or on my account. Any man who says the contrary is an unmitigated liar and the truth is not in him.⁸⁴

Despite Tolbert's claims of innocence, the collective weight of the evidence led the Brookhart committee to a simple conclusion:

From testimony taken by the committee and summing up of the affidavits submitted with other testimony, it would indicate beyond a reasonable doubt that practically all the Federal office were placed on sale by J. W. Tolbert or through his representatives.⁸⁵

Texas

Following the Civil War, the Republicans controlled the Texas state government for several years before losing their majorities in both the state senate and assembly in 1872 and the governorship the following year. By then, George Ruby, the leader of the Black Republicans in the state, moved to Louisiana where he continued to support GOP candidates and Black causes (Moneyhon 1982). One of Ruby's protégées, Norris Wright Cuney, then became Black Republican leader in Texas. Like Ruby, Cuney—who was born the son of a Black slave and a White planter and Democratic politician—would wield influence by working with White party leaders (Hales 2003). However, unlike Ruby, Cuney would aspire to more and by 1883, he had become the leader of the Texas state party.

Cuney remained Texas GOP boss through 1897. During his leadership, the party regularly refused to field a ticket for state-wide offices—with Cuney instead supporting fusion tickets and sometimes moderate Democrats.⁸⁶ Between 1882 and 1894, the GOP had no state senators and few assembly members (Dubin 2007). In state-wide races, the party typically received less than a quarter of the vote and occasionally got outpolled by third parties.

Texas was the first state to have an explicit Lily-White Republican coalition, founded in 1889, which sought to oust Cuney in order to create a state GOP that actively contested elections.⁸⁷ Cuney held them off for years until he failed to endorse William McKinley for the Republican presidential nomination in 1896. After McKinley's nomination and election, Cuney lost his RNC membership and was voted out as chairman of the state party convention. Several Lily-White Republicans succeeded Cuney as GOP party boss, but they continued to work with Black Republicans in the state. Then, in 1920, Rentfro B. Creager came to power.

Creager was a lawyer, businessman, and former customs collector in Brownsville.⁸⁸ He worked his way up through the GOP state organization and got his big break when he endorsed Warren Harding for president in 1920, when Harding was still largely an unknown. In time, he became close friends with Harding and used that relationship to help secure firm control over executive patronage in Texas and delegate seating at the

Republican National Convention. Creager, like Cuney before him, made no effort to contest elections in Texas. As boss, he also was a more hard-core Lily White, seeking to push Blacks out of the party and otherwise marginalize them.

But Creager was plagued throughout the 1920s by Rep. Harry Wurzbach (R-TX), who supported a more Black-and-Tan party. Wurzbach wanted his share of federal patronage, but Creager refused. They had countless battles over the decade, which Creager mostly won. Thus, for the Brookhart committee, Texas was different from Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina, in that it was a Southern state in which a Republican *could* win a meaningful (in this case, federal) election. This influenced their proceedings, as they examined not only the state of the Texas GOP organization and how they used executive patronage, but also whether they worked to support a serious electoral party.

The Brookhart committee determined that Creager had built his party organization around a fundraising system first created by Postmaster General Will Hayes in 1921.⁸⁹ Creager's variation involved unsecured personal notes. Prospective office seekers were urged to sign notes and thus promise to pay—via equal installments over a two-year period—sums ranging from \$25 to \$5,000. Taking on the note was ostensibly voluntary,⁹⁰ with the stated purpose being “to support and aid of the movement to strengthen the Republican Party in the State of Texas.” A copy of a blank note was provided in the committee report (see Figure 1).⁹¹

This system, per Roger M. Olien (1982), offered the GOP obvious advantages:

It provided a continual flow of funds to support the permanent headquarters operation, and it did not interfere with fund-raising during political campaigns. Moreover, it did not involve raising funds immediately after elections, when patronage decisions were made; and it thus deflected the recurrent charges that the party in power essentially extorted funds from federal officeholders and sold federal posts (p. 19).

While Creager's initial scheme targeted office seekers, the committee found that over time the majority of notes were secured from federal employees or those anticipating receiving an appointment: of the 350 active notes, 242 of them were employees of the Post Office

Fig. 1. Copy of a blank note used for GOP collection purposes in Texas

\$.....	No.....	Texas.....
<p>In support and aid of the movement to strengthen the Republican Party in the State of Texas, and in consideration of similar subscriptions made and to be made by other persons for the same purpose, and in further consideration of the expenses and expenditures incurred and to be incurred in connection with and in support of such movement, and for other good and valuable considerations, receipt of all of which to my entire satisfaction is hereby acknowledged, I hereby subscribe and promise to pay to the order of R. B. Creager, chairman of the Republican State Executive Committee of Texas, at Brownsville, Tex., the sum of (\$.....) dollars, to be paid in eight (8) installments of \$..... each.</p> <p>The first of said installments to be due and payable on the 1st day of..... 192....., and one such installment each three (3) months thereafter until the total amount of this subscription and note shall have been paid.</p> <p>Each installment is to bear interest at the rate of 8 per cent per annum from maturity until paid.</p> <p>In event of failure to pay any installment when due, the entire amount of this note at the time remaining unpaid, shall, at the election and option of the then holder thereof, become at once due and payable.</p> <p>I further agree that in the event of default in payment of this note or of any installment thereof when due, as hereinbefore provided, and this note is placed in the hands of an attorney for collection, I will pay 10 per cent additional upon the principal and interest then due, as collection or attorney's fees.</p>		

Department. And the scheme generated significant revenue. The committee discovered that from 1921 through 1928 the Republican state committee received cash payments in the sum of \$165,170. And in 1929 alone, the GOP state headquarters in Texas collected almost \$43,000.

The committee received testimony from a number of individuals who signed such notes. One was Lloyd E. Hill, a former Major in the U.S. Army, who sought the postmaster appointment at Fort Worth. In May 1921, Hill agreed to take on a note that would pay, over the course of several installments, \$1,200 total, which would cover a two-year period. The Fort Worth postmaster's salary was \$6,000 annually, so Hill's payment would correspond to ten percent. Despite having endorsements from several GOP county and district officials, Hill did not receive the appointment.⁹²

The committee did not feel that Creager was enriching himself directly from these note payments, which differentiated him from other Republican bosses in the South. However, the committee believed that Creager benefitted indirectly. That is, he controlled the GOP state organization and made it known that he was the party "referee" for patronage in Texas, which (he claimed) allowed him to develop good relationships with men in power at the federal level. As a result, the committee argued, Creager received significant retainer fees for legal work done in Washington. Records indicated, for example, that Creager accepted a fee in the amount of \$80,000 from three wealthy Texans to represent them before the Internal Revenue Service against a charge of excess profits. It was thought that Creager accepted fees like this routinely "off the record" via a silent law partner in Houston.⁹³

As to whether the promissory-note scheme led to the strengthening of the Republican Party in Texas, the committee was dubious. As was stated in the committee's report:

Creager's only interest in building up a two-party system in the State of Texas is to perpetuate himself in office as national committeeman of that State. Creager did everything he possibly could to defeat Congressman Wurzbach, the only Republican Congressman from Texas, and [we] believe that the sole purpose in his endeavor to defeat Congressman Wurzbach was to give himself absolute control of all Federal patronage in the State, which would better enable him through the distribution of public offices to retain his hold as leader of the State organization.⁹⁴

Indeed, the committee found that one way that Creager used the large fund collected from federal employees was to recruit and underwrite candidates to defeat Wurzbach. At other times, Creager altered the rules—like raising the filing fee to get on the ticket in one or more Texas counties—to try to push Wurzbach out of the race.⁹⁵

The committee also read into the record statements made in letters to Creager (or his Texas associates) that supported their argument. One letter was written by Majority Leader of the U.S. House, John Q. Tilson (R-CT), in March of 1926. The key portion of the letter was:

For all practical purposes, there is no Republican Party in Texas, except for the fourteenth district, which elects a Republican to Congress who stands by the Republican President and loyally helps to carry out the Republican program. It looks to us here in Washington that the remainder of the Republican Party in Texas is purely an organization for the purpose of distributing and enjoying the patronage of a Republican administration.⁹⁶

Another letter was written by Rep. William R. Wood (R-IN), chairman of the national Republican congressional committee. In it, he stated:

I have been endeavoring to assist, as much as possible, Republican organizations throughout the South. I fear, however, that the leaders and managers of the Republican organization in many States of the South and in your State are not desirous of having a real, militant Republican Party. It seems that those so-called Republican organizations are more desirous of the “loaves and fishes” than they are of Republican success based upon principles.⁹⁷

The committee summarized their position as follows:

Both Congressman Tilton’s letter and Congressman Wood’s letter substantiate [our] contention that Mr. Creager’s main purpose was to run a pie-counter organization, distributing those Federal offices to parties whom he could depend on to deliver to him the delegates from the State of Texas to the national convention, and he had absolutely no interest in electing Congressmen or State officials.⁹⁸

Further testimony indicated that Creager worked to ensure that Republican candidates *failed*, and that he often cooperated with Democratic leaders in Texas to this effect.⁹⁹

Separate from the committee report that he signed, and that Brookhart submitted, Sen. McKellar filed his own report. While Creager “created rather a favorable impression upon me,” McKellar stated, “I agree with Senator Brookhart entirely that Mr. Creager’s system of collecting money for party purposes in Texas was beyond the pale, and while not illegal, might well be prohibited by law.” At the same time, McKellar concluded with grudging respect: “Mr. Creager has adopted and used the plan openly and above board.”¹⁰⁰

The Aftermath of the Brookhart Committee

The Brookhart committee concluded its report with the following recommendations:

Your committee believe that the practice of dispensing Federal appointments, as shown by this report and the evidence obtained in the investigation surrounding the barter and sale of Federal offices, should be abolished at once, and your committee condemn this practice as most reprehensible.

Your committee further recommend that the Department of Justice make a careful survey of the evidence obtained by your committee, and if the facts warrant, that they start proceedings against all persons who have violated the statute covering the barter and sale of public offices.

It is further recommended that the Federal corrupt practice act be amended so as to include any person soliciting funds from a Federal officeholder or Federal employee for political purposes, or for carrying on any organization work connected with any political organization, or accepting notes for such purpose from any Federal officer or Federal employee.¹⁰¹

What was the result? The investigation—notably the public hearings—drew considerable media attention, and this made the Republican situation in the South such that Herbert Hoover, the incoming president, felt it necessary to take swift action. He did not wait long after entering the White House.

On March 26, 1929, less than a month into his new administration, Hoover discussed Southern GOP organization: “It has been the aspiration of Republican Presidents over many years to build up sound Republican organization in the Southern States of such character as would commend itself to the citizens of those States.” He praised the GOP

leadership and organization in Virginia and North Carolina, before noting that in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, and Florida “the Republican leadership has in recent times shown increasing strength and is now rendering able and conscientious service in maintaining wholesome organization under whose advice the appointments to public office have steadily improved and commended themselves to the citizens of those States with increased confidence in the party.”

Hoover’s mood then darkened. The Brookhart committee had completed the first two parts of its investigatory hearings, and Hoover responded to the testimony gathered:

Recent exposures of abuse in recommendations for Federal office, particularly in some parts of the States of South Carolina, Georgia, and Mississippi under which some of the Federal departments, mainly the Post Office, were misled in appointments, obviously render it impossible for the old organizations in those States to command the confidence of the administration, although many members of these organizations are not subject to criticism. But such conditions are intolerable to public service, are repugnant to the ideals and purposes of the Republican Party, are unjust to the people of the South and must be ended. The duty of reorganization so as to correct these conditions rests with the people of those States, and all efforts to that end will receive the hearty cooperation of the administration. If these three States are unable to initiate such organization through the leadership of men who will command confidence and protect the public service, the different Federal departments will be compelled to adopt other methods to secure advice as to the selection of Federal employees.¹⁰²

The next day, Postmaster General Walter Brown made clear Hoover’s intention “not to recognize the national committeemen from Mississippi, Georgia, and South Carolina as the legitimate leaders of their state parties” (Lisio 1985, p. 124).¹⁰³ Some saw this as a gambit to make the Southern GOP exclusively Lily-White.¹⁰⁴ But it was largely about cleaning up abuse, and the main patronage abusers were members of the Black-and-Tan faction, whether their leadership was Black (as in Georgia and Mississippi) or White (as in South Carolina). Senator Brookhart was described as “especially pleased with the views of the President.”¹⁰⁵

Hoover designated two Lily-Whites to unofficially head up the Republican Party in Mississippi and South Carolina: J. Carl Hambright, a lumber merchant, and Lamont Rowlands, a wealthy business man, respectively. In Georgia, the party avoided an administrative purge by creating its own reorganization. Josiah T. Rose, a White collector of internal revenue and a member of the Black-and-Tan coalition, became the new unofficial party leader.¹⁰⁶ Thus, even as the Brookhart committee continued its work, Hoover and his aides had systematically moved against the alleged GOP patronage abusers in the South.

On March 18, 1930, shortly after the Brookhart committee’s report was made widely available, President Hoover was asked about his thoughts on it. He responded:

I have asked the Department of Justice to consider the report of the Senate committee on Federal patronage in the South. As a matter of fact the report refers to incidents, men, and conditions which have already been cleaned up by the action I took on the 26th of March last. Under instructions to the various departments of the Government, a system has been established by which these reprehensible practices have been absolutely stopped and the system of purchase and sale of appointments, so far as it existed, has been ended. All Federal officials known to have engaged in such practices have either resigned or been removed.¹⁰⁷

Brookhart, though, was not satisfied. On June 5, 1930, he spoke on the current conditions of patronage in certain of the States:

I am informed that the President has corrected the situation in Mississippi, Georgia, and South Carolina, but not in Texas. The referee in charge of those recommendations for appointment to Federal offices in Texas is Mr. R. B. Creager. I think he is the worst of all the leaders of that referee crowd, because he is smart, he is shrewd, and he has worked up a more scientific scheme of coercion in collecting money from Government employees than any of the other referees in the country.¹⁰⁸

But Hoover rejected Brookhart's arguments about Creager's guilt. He believed that Brookhart had developed a vendetta against Creager, based on Creager's angry pushback in the hearings and his criticism of the committee for believing the testimony of witnesses who had personal agendas. Moreover, as Donald J. Lisio (1985) notes, "Hoover had ordered a secret FBI investigation that failed to uncover evidence to substantiate the sensational corruption charges" (p. 170). Hoover's decision to keep the Lily-White Creager as Texas GOP leader, however, gave more ammunition to those who believed that his administration sought to reorganize the GOP South in ways that would exclude Blacks from serious leadership positions in the party.

How did the Hoover-engineered changes in Mississippi, South Carolina, and Georgia work out? Unfortunately for Hoover, Perry Howard and Tieless Joe Tolbert would not go quietly, and they used their political skills to slow down appointments and undermine the new leaders' authority. And while it looked for a time like Rose would be able to unite various GOP factions in Georgia, he eventually stumbled due to poor political skills, personal scandals, and rear-guard actions by rivals (Lisio 1985).

Moreover, the corruption charges did not stick. Neither Ben Davis nor Tolbert were indicted due to insufficient evidence. And while Howard was indicted twice, he was acquitted each time. Thus, all three alleged patronage abusers were still active and seeking to regain their prior status. And Howard and Tolbert in fact benefitted from Hoover's perceived overreach, as Black-and-Tan leaders in May 1932 were able to convince GOP national committeemen that "the president's reform was a very serious challenge to the autonomy and authority of the national committee itself... [and] that the sole authority to recognize and depose national committeemen resided with the Republican National Convention" (Lisio 1985, p. 261). After some spirited discussions, the RNC recognized Howard and Tolbert as the legitimate leaders of their respective delegations.¹⁰⁹ Davis, on the other hand, had quietly worked various sides in Georgia and ultimately emerged as the one that national party leaders trusted most in a dysfunctional state party (Lisio 1985).¹¹⁰

While Howard and Davis maintained their positions and were seated at the 1932 Republican Convention, Tolbert was ultimately left out.¹¹¹ While he won with the RNC, he lost with the credentials committee at the convention. This occurred for a variety of reasons. He had run afoul of the Black community in South Carolina and the NAACP, as he talked up Black rights but too often passed over Black applicants for important federal positions. Hambright had also worked hard to disavow his Lily-White image and had chosen four prominent Black Republicans for his rival delegate slate. All of this helped Hoover aides convince Black leaders at the convention and influential members of the credentials committee not to seat Tolbert—and seat Hambright instead. This allowed the Hoover administration "to save some face for its largely discredited southern reform program" (Lisio 1985, p. 264).¹¹²

Conclusion

The Brookhart committee's investigation into patronage sales by Southern GOP officials in the 1920s represents a particular version of "electoral capitalism." In the traditional form of office selling, party bosses used their control over the nomination to federal offices to charge applicants money. In turn, they would use at least part of that income on expenses related to voter mobilization. These party bosses also benefitted from these sales, to be sure, but part of the strategic calculation was that party machines needed financial resources to ensure that their side would win future elections and thus would be able to continue controlling patronage in the future. But no such considerations were at play in the South in this period. With Democrats fully entrenched through Jim Crow electoral rules, local GOP bosses had no illusions that they would be able to compete electorally in the region. Indeed, Republican organizations in the South often failed to even field candidates in elections.

Republican leaders in South Carolina, Texas, Mississippi, and Georgia thus faced a set of perverse incentives. With their party in control of the White House, they were in de facto control of patronage division. And, since the state party had no real expenses, any income derived from patronage sales could go directly into their pockets. Party leaders like 'Tieless Joe' Tolbert, Perry W. Howard, Benjamin Jefferson Davis, and Rentfro B. Creager responded to these incentives by building machines that forced individuals to hand over large amounts of money for the privilege of being considered for a federal job. As the Brookhart investigation shows, these machines relied on a series of collaborators at different levels negotiating with job applicants or their representatives. While payment did not guarantee a job, many applicants were willing to pay as much as eighteen percent of their expected earnings to be considered.

As a result, Republican bosses in these states reaped tremendous financial benefits from this system. The incentive structure also, ironically, meant that these party leaders had a clear interest in keeping the Republican Party non-competitive at home: while the GOP would need to win presidential elections for state party bosses to maintain their power over patronage allocation, local electoral victories only complicated the system by adding more players to the game. Meanwhile, Democrats in these states largely encouraged the corrupt GOP machines, as it reduced any future electoral threats against them.

The result was a system of corruption that was able to continue for decades in large part because nobody involved faced real electoral consequences: Republicans were not regularly running candidates for public office, and thus faced no reputational consequences, while Democrats were running unopposed and had no incentive to challenge the existing system. It was not until the massive media attention surrounding the murder-suicide of a Georgia postmaster connected to patronage sales in a presidential election year that national Republicans began to fear potential electoral consequences for allowing this system of Southern office sales to continue. Thus, the cases laid out here present not just a unique story of corruption in American history but also spotlight the broader question of electoral accountability in the United States: in areas where there are effectively no competitive elections, who can prevent abuse of power or government resources?

Acknowledgement

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2022 annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, IL. We thank Wendy Schiller, Tony Madonna, and Jeff Broxmeyer for comments and Nicholas Napolio for data assistance.

Notes

- ¹ These scandals are discussed in Murray (1969), Trani and Wilson (1977), McCarty (2008), and Stevens (2016).
- ² For more details, see Heersink and Jenkins (2020).
- ³ Beginning in 1883, federal law divided post offices into four classes based on their gross receipts, with salaries of first-to-fourth class postmasters adjusted accordingly. See Prechtel-Klusgens (2014) for more information.
- ⁴ Hull Flays G.O.P. In Tolbert Case, *Louisville Courier Journal*, October 24, 1922, 6.
- ⁵ Dial Charges Sale of Federal Offices in South Carolina, *The New York Times*, July 31, 1922, 1. Per this article: "One of Tolbert's peculiarities is that he never wears a necktie, leaving his brass collar button to flash brilliantly and unashamed in the sunlight."
- ⁶ Tolbert in Office Despite Senate, *The New York Times*, October 20, 1922, 16; Renews Fight on Harding Choice, *Baltimore Sun*, October 23, 1922, 2.
- ⁷ Tolbert Gives Up Office of Marshal, *The New York Times*, November 24, 1923, 15.
- ⁸ Tolbert Out, But Nephew Appointed by Coolidge, *Boston Daily Globe*, November 24, 1923, 5.
- ⁹ Sale of Patronage in South Carolina Charged at Hearing, *The Washington Post*, October 31, 1924, 4.
- ¹⁰ Jobholders Taxed, Senators Are Told, *Baltimore Sun*, October 31, 1924, 8. This informal tax system had raised over \$21,000 in Virginia.
- ¹¹ Charge Collection of Campaign Funds from Postmasters, *Hartford Courant*, October 31, 1924, 1.
- ¹² New Sees No Reason to Prosecute Tolbert, *The New York Times*, January 20, 1925, 12.
- ¹³ Alleged Sale of Patronage Ordered to be Investigated, *The Washington Post*, March 2, 1925, 1.
- ¹⁴ Wide Ramifications Expected in Patronage Investigation, *Baltimore Sun*, March 9, 1925, 1.
- ¹⁵ *Congressional Record*, 69th Congress, 1st Session (March 3, 1926): 4948-49.
- ¹⁶ Stevenson in fact proposed a new resolution a week later. See *Congressional Record*, 69th Congress, 1st Session (March 10, 1926): 5370.
- ¹⁷ The other two would be R. Carroll Reece and J. Will Taylor, from the 1st and 2nd districts of Tennessee.
- ¹⁸ Quotes from *Congressional Record*, 69th Congress, 1st Session (March 3, 1926): 4940.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4940-41.
- ²⁰ See, e.g., Assail Republicans on Jobs in South, *The New York Times*, March 4, 1926, 23; Patronage of G.O.P. in South Is Assailed, *The Washington Post*, March 4, 1926, 4; Raps 'Pie Counter' Texas Republicans, *Boston Daily Globe*, March 4, 1926, 15.
- ²¹ *Congressional Record*, 69th Congress, 1st Session (March 10, 1926): 5347.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 5370.
- ²³ *Congressional Record*, 69th Congress, 1st Session (March 22, 1926): 6036-37.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 6051; Sale in South of Patronage Hit in House, *Atlanta Constitution*, March 23, 1926, 1; Patronage Issue in South Raised, *Baltimore Sun*, March 23, 1926, 2.
- ²⁵ *Congressional Record*, 69th Congress, 1st Session (March 26, 1926): 6419.
- ²⁶ House Declines to Aid Busby Probe, *Afro-American*, March 27, 1926, 2.
- ²⁷ *Congressional Record*, 69th Congress, 1st Session (May 5, 1926): 8785; (June 3, 1926): 10690.
- ²⁸ *Congressional Record*, 69th Congress, 1st Session (June 7, 1926): 10840-41; (June 8, 1926): 10888. See also House Bars Sale of Jobs, *The New York Times*, June 8, 1926, 16; Senator George Plans to Amend Patronage Bills, *Atlanta Constitution*, June 8, 1926, 1.
- ²⁹ *Congressional Record*, 69th Congress, 1st Session (June 21, 1926): 11653; (July 2, 1926): 12612-13, 12629. See also Senate Passes Patronage Bills, *Atlanta Constitution*, July 3, 1926, 18.
- ³⁰ *Congressional Record*, 69th Congress, 1st Session (July 3, 1926): 13040-41.
- ³¹ *Congressional Record*, 69th Congress, 2nd Session (December 8, 1926): 80; (December 15, 1926): 516.
- ³² Bill Blow to Republicans of the South, *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 18, 1926, A1.
- ³³ Republican Policy in South Held Help to Smith if Named, *The Washington Post*, January 5, 1928, 4.
- ³⁴ Quoted in: Constant Demands for Money by G.O.P. Given as Cause of Suicide of Georgia Postmaster, *Atlanta Constitution*, April 3, 1928, 1.
- ³⁵ Georgia G.O.P. Under Fire, *Austin Statesman*, April 3, 1928, 6.
- ³⁶ Tells Senate G.O.P. Demands Caused Suicide, *Chicago Tribune*, April 4, 1928, 24; Pulled for \$2,000 by Republicans, Claim, *Baltimore Sun*, April 4, 1928, 2.
- ³⁷ Double Killing Laid to Georgia Political Gouge, *New York Herald Tribune*, April 3, 1928, 10; Blame Put on 'Levy' in Georgia Killings, *The New York Times*, April 3, 1928, 2.
- ³⁸ *Congressional Record*, 70th Congress, 1st Session (April 3, 1928): 5826-27.
- ³⁹ Demand Inquiry in Georgia Killings, *The New York Times*, April 4, 1928, 20. See also: Senators Demand Patronage Inquiry, *The Washington Post*, April 4, 1928, 4.
- ⁴⁰ G.O.P. Spoils System in Georgia Will Face Probe by Congress, *Atlanta Constitution*, April 4, 1928, 1.

- ⁴¹ Constant Demands for Money by G.O.P. Given As Cause for Suicide of Georgia Postmaster, *Atlanta Constitution*, April 3, 1928, 1.
- ⁴² Douglas Deaths Throw Spotlight Upon G.O.P. Graft, *Atlanta Constitution*, April 5, 1928, 1; Coolidge Demands Report on Sale of Post Offices by G. O. P. Bosses in Georgia, *Atlanta Constitution*, April 6, 1928, 1.
- ⁴³ Drops Postmaster in Patronage Case, *The New York Times*, April 7, 1928, 4; New Ousts Two Fla. Postmasters, *Baltimore Sun*, April 7, 1928, 2.
- ⁴⁴ *Congressional Record*, 70th Congress, 1st Session (April 9, 1928): 6062-63. See also: Demands Senate Scan Patronage Scandal in South, *Chicago Tribune*, April 6, 1928, 17; Asks Inquiry into Sale of Patronage, *The Boston Globe*, April 10, 1928, 13.
- ⁴⁵ George-Harris Win Probe Fight, *Atlanta Constitution*, May 4, 1928, 1. The expansion in scope of the investigation beyond Georgia was request by Senator Kenneth McKellar (D-TN).
- ⁴⁶ *Congressional Record*, 70th Congress, 1st Session (May 19, 1928): 9143. See also: Senate Authorizes 4 Investigation, *The New York Times*, May 20, 1928, 22; Federal Patronage to Be Investigated, *Hartford Courant*, May 20, 1928, 3A.
- ⁴⁷ Way Paved for Inquiry Into Sale of U.S. Jobs, *Baltimore Sun*, May 25, 1928, 4; Appoint Senators to Probe P.O. Patronage, *Chicago Defender*, June 2, 1928, 1; Brookhart to Lead Probe on Federal Jobs, *New Journal and Guide*, June 9, 1928, 9.
- ⁴⁸ Patronage Probe of Post Offices to Open in City, *Atlanta Constitution*, June 2, 1928, 1; Probe of Patronage Sale Charges to Begin in July, *Baltimore Sun*, June 2, 1928, 9.
- ⁴⁹ Brookhart was known as one of “those sons of the wild jackass”—with La Follette being the wild jackass—so coined by Sen. George H. Moses (R-NH), a GOP regular. As Tucker (1930) noted in his piece on the Senate rebels: “His middle name is ‘Wildman’ and he lives up – or down – to it” (p. 230).
- ⁵⁰ Senate Probe of Alleged Job Sales to Start, *New Journal and Guide*, June 9, 1928, 2.
- ⁵¹ *Congressional Record*, 70th Congress, 2nd Session (February 26, 1929): 4387; (February 18, 1929): 3657.
- ⁵² *Congressional Record*, 71st Congress, 1st Session (May 6, 1929): 886. The hearings appear as six separate documents, which are often combined into one that is nearly 1600 pages. The first part is entitled *Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Post Office and Post Roads, Pursuant to S. Res. 193, A Resolution Directing an Investigation of the Barter of Federal Offices in the State of Georgia, Part I* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1929).
- ⁵³ S. Res. 193, p. 201.
- ⁵⁴ The percentages of postmasters admitting to making donations to GOP causes were 81.9 (267/326) in Georgia, 64.3 (169/263) in Tennessee, 33.3 (60/180) in South Carolina, and 41.7 (111/266) in Mississippi.
- ⁵⁵ *Congressional Record*, 70th Congress, 2nd Session (March 15, 1930): 5356. The report was titled: *Influencing Appointments to Postmasterships and Other Federal Offices*, Senate Report No. 272 (71st Congress, 2nd Session).
- ⁵⁶ *Influencing Appointments to Postmasterships and Other Federal Offices*, Senate Report No. 272, 3.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 3-4.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ⁶² NAACP leader Walter White, for example, reportedly dismissed Howard as someone “who for the sake of personal gain would knife every Negro in the country” (McMillen 1982, p. 214).
- ⁶³ As Frederick Sullens, the editor of the Jackson *Daily News*, noted: “A Republican party in Mississippi under the leadership of negroes offers no peril to white supremacy. A Republican party led by white men backed by almost limitless wealth and greed for power and prestige, would constitute a decided menace” (McMillen 1982, pp. 217-218).
- ⁶⁴ The grand dragon of the Mississippi KKK also showed up in court to express support for Howard.
- ⁶⁵ *Influencing Appointments to Postmasterships and Other Federal Offices*, Senate Report No. 272, 11. In addition, Senator McKellar said this in a separate statement: “It was quite clear that the grossest corruption existed in office mongering in Mississippi... Perry Howard was shown to be guilty of selling Federal offices in Mississippi and apparently acquired quite a sum from these sales.” See: *Influencing Appointments to Postmasterships and Other Federal Offices*, 41.
- ⁶⁶ *Influencing Appointments to Postmasterships: Hearings Pursuant to S. Res. 193 Part I* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1929), p. 56.
- ⁶⁷ *Hearings Pursuant to S. Res. 193, Part 1*, 7.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁷¹ Ibid., 63.

⁷² Ibid., 61.

⁷³ *Influencing Appointments to Postmasterships and Other Federal Offices, Senate Report No. 272*, 3.

⁷⁴ *Hearings Pursuant to S. Res. 193, Part 1*, 46, 65.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 114.

⁷⁶ *Influencing Appointments to Postmasterships and Other Federal Offices, Senate Report No. 272*, 2.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 11.

⁷⁹ *Hearings Pursuant to S. Res. 193, Part 1*, 247.

⁸⁰ *Influencing Appointments to Postmasterships and Other Federal Offices, Senate Report No. 272*, 11.

⁸¹ Ibid., 11-12.

⁸² Ibid., 12.

⁸³ *Hearings Pursuant to S. Res. 193, Part 1*, 262.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 761

⁸⁵ *Influencing Appointments to Postmasterships and Other Federal Offices, Senate Report No. 272*, 11.

⁸⁶ The Republican Programme in Texas, *Dallas Morning News*, September 16, 1888; Collector N.W. Cuney: His Views Fully Expressed on State Politics, *Dallas Morning News*, February 13, 1892.

⁸⁷ Also important for the Lily-Whites was getting control of federal patronage. See Heersink and Jenkins (2020).

⁸⁸ For more on Creager, see Casdorph (1965), Olien (1982), and Thorburn (2021).

⁸⁹ Hays created the system to solve the Republican Party's recurrent financial problems. See Olien (1982), 19.

⁹⁰ As the committee noted in their report: "It is true that Mr. Creager had sent to the committee at his request letters from numerous appointees stating that they had not been compelled to contribute ... but [we] found that they had contributed, and if they had not in all probability they would never again have been recommended for office." *Influencing Appointments to Postmasterships and Other Federal Offices, Senate Report No. 272*, 21-22

⁹¹ See Ibid., 21.

⁹² Ibid., 19-20.

⁹³ Ibid., 32.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 20.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 22.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 23.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 24.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 24-25.

⁹⁹ One letter the committee received was from Elmer S. Schlegel of Edinburg, Texas (dated February 20, 1929). It stated: "R. B. Creager, by manipulating the Republican State majority so that the Republican Party should not get the names of its candidates printed on the ballot and could not get their supervisors in the polls on election day, enabled the Democratic ring to control the last election and thereby perpetuate themselves. Most of the people feel that R. B. Creager is largely responsible for their present plight." See Ibid., 25.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 43.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 40.

¹⁰² Herbert Hoover, Statement on the Reorganization of the Republican Party in the South. March 26, 1929. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/211022>.

¹⁰³ See also: Hoover Demands Reform of Party in New-Won South, *The New York Times*, March 27, 1929, 1; President Act to End Abuse of Patronage, *New York Herald Tribune*, March 27, 1929.

¹⁰⁴ Hoover to End Negro Control of Dixie G.O.P. *Baltimore Sun*, March 27, 1929, 1; Mr. Hoover to the South, *The New York Times*, March 27, 1929, 21.

¹⁰⁵ Hoover Demands Reform of Party in New-Won South, *The New York Times*, March 27, 1929, 1.

¹⁰⁶ Ben Davis had earlier stepped down as leader but stayed on as party secretary.

¹⁰⁷ Herbert Hoover, Statement on Federal Patronage in the South. March 18, 1930. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/211669>.

¹⁰⁸ *Congressional Record*, 70th Congress, 2nd Session (June 5, 1930): 10111.

¹⁰⁹ Chicago Sees Southern Rift on Patronage, *New York Herald Tribune*, June 9, 1932, 15; 2 Hoover G.O.P. Factions Lost Chicago Posts, *The Washington Post*, June 11, 1932, 1.

¹¹⁰ See also: Georgia Lily Whites, Aided by Ben Davis, Win Contest, *Atlanta Daily World*, June 11, 1932, 1; Ben Davis in Camp of 'Lily Whites' As Convention Opens, *New York Amsterdam News*, June 15, 1932, 1.

¹¹¹ Perry Howard Gets Mississippi Seats, *The Washington Post*, June 15, 1932, 2; South Carolina Tolbert Group Loses Its Seats, *New York Herald Tribune*, June 15, 1932, 8; Hoover Group Wins Credentials Fight, *The New York Times*, June 15, 1932, 11.

- ¹¹² Even this defeat did not keep Tolbert down long. He reemerged four years later—when Hoover was long gone—and led the successful seating of a Black-and-Tan delegation at the 1936 Republican National Convention. See: Credentials Committee Ignores 1932 Reform Move in the South, *The New York Times*, June 11, 1936, 18; Negro Delegates From South Carolina Are Seated by Credential Group, *New York Herald Tribune*, June 11, 1936, 7.

References

- Broxmeyer, Jeffrey D. (2020). *Electoral Capitalism: The Party System in New York's Gilded Age*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Casdorff, Paul (1965). *A History of the Republican Party in Texas, 1865–1965*. Austin, TX: The Pemberton Press.
- Donald, David Herbert, Jean Harvey Baker, and Michael F. Holt (2001). *The Civil War and Reconstruction*. New York: Norton.
- Dubin, Michael J. (2007). *Party Affiliations in the State Legislatures: A Year by Year Summary, 1796–2006*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc.
- Foner, Eric (1988). *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Gatewood, Willard B. (1969). Theodore Roosevelt and the Southern Republicans: The Case of South Carolina, 1901–1904. *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 70(4): 251–266.
- Hales, Douglas (2003). *A Southern Family in White and Black: The Cuney's of Texas*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press.
- Heersink, Boris, and Jeffery A. Jenkins (2020). *Republican Party Politics and the American South, 1865–1968*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- James, Scott C. (2006). Patronage Regimes and American Party Development from ‘The Age of Jackson’ to the Progressive Era. *British Journal of Political Science*, 36(1): 39–60.
- Kehl, James A. (1981). *Boss Rule in the Gilded Age: Matt Quay of Pennsylvania*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Key, V. O., Jr. (1949). *Southern Politics in State and Nation*. New York: Knopf.
- Kousser, J. Morgan (1974). *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Lisio, Donald J. (1985). *Hoover, Blacks, and Lily-Whites: A Study of Southern Strategies*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Matthews, John H. (1984). Black Newspapermen and the Black Community in Georgia, 1890–1930. *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 68(3): 485–504.
- McCarty, Laton (2008). *The Teapot Dome Scandal: How Big Oil Bought the Harding White House and Tried to Steal the Country*. New York: Random House.
- McDaniel, George (1995). *Smith Wildman Brookhart: Iowa's Renegade Republican*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press.
- McMillen, Neil R. (1982). Perry W. Howard, Boss of Black-and-Tan Republicanism in Mississippi, 1924–1960. *The Journal of Southern History*, 48(2): 205–224.
- Moneyhon, Carl H. (1982). George T. Ruby and the Politics of Expediency in Texas. In Howard N. Rabinowitz (Ed.), *Southern Black Leaders of the Reconstruction Era*, pp. 366–378. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Murray, Robert K. (1969). *The Harding Era, 1921–1923: Warren G. Harding and His Administration*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Olien, Roger M. (1982). *From Token to Triumph: The Texas Republicans Since 1920*. Dallas, TX: SMU Press.
- Prechtel-Klusgens, Claire (2014). *First-, Second-, and Third-Class Post Office Receipts and Postmasters' Salaries, 1895–1905*. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration.
- Perman, Michael (2001). *Struggle for Mastery: Disfranchisement in the South, 1888–1908*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.
- Stevens, Rosemary (2016). *A Time of Scandal: Charles R. Forbes, Warren G. Harding, and the Making of the Veterans Bureau*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Thorburn, Wayne (2021). *The Republican Party of Texas: A Political History*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Trani, Eugene P., and David L. Wilson (1977). *The Presidency of Warren G. Harding*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.
- Tucker, Ray T. (1930). “Those Sons of Wild Jackasses.” *The North American Review*, 229(2): 225–233.
- Walton, Hanes, Jr. (1975). *Black Republicans: The Politics of the Black and Tans*. New York: Scarecrow Press.

Boris Heersink is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at Fordham University. He is the co-author (with Jeffery A. Jenkins) of *Republican Party Politics and the American South, 1865-1968* (Cambridge University Press, 2020)—which covers the history of the expulsion of Black leaders from Republican state parties in the South in the late 19th and early 20th century and has received the Southern Political Science Association's V. O. Key award for best book in Southern politics and the American Political Science Association's J. David Greenstone prize for best book in politics and history. His most recent book is *National Party Organizations and Party Brands in American Politics: The Democratic and Republican National Committees, 1912-2016* (Oxford University Press, 2023), which assesses the role and historical development of the DNC and RNC in American politics. His research on parties, campaigns, and elections, and American political development has also appeared in journals such as *The Journal of Politics*, *Political Analysis*, *Party Politics*, and *Studies in American Political Development*.

Jeffery A. Jenkins is Provost Professor of Public Policy, Political Science, and Law; Maria B. Crutcher Professor of Citizenship and Democratic Values; and Director of the Political Institutions and Political Economy (PIPE) Collaborative at the Price School of Public Policy, University of Southern California. Two of his recent books include: *Republican Party Politics and the American South, 1865-1968* (2020) with Boris Heersink—which won the 2021 V. O. Key Award and the 2021 J. David Greenstone Prize—and *Congress and the First Civil Rights Era, 1861-1918* (2021) with Justin Peck—which won the 2023 V. O. Key Award. He was Editor in Chief of *The Journal of Politics* (2015–2020) and recently started two new journals: the *Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy* (2020) and the *Journal of Historical Political Economy* (2021). His research focuses on American Political Institutions, American Political Development, and Historical Political Economy. He has published in a host of journals including *American Journal of Political Science*, *Political Science Research and Methods*, *Political Analysis*, and *Studies in American Political Development*.

Cite this article: Heersink, Boris, and Jeffery A. Jenkins (2024). Race, Corruption, and Southern Republicanism: The Patronage Scandal of the 1920s. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, 21: 50–76. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X23000176>