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Lebaron Bradford Colt. This photograph, taken by E. Chickering, is dated December 1, 1915. Photograph courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 4660).



A Senator of Principle: Some Correspondence Between Lebaron Bradford Colt and William Howard Taft

Leonard Schlup

LeBaron Bradford Colt, a judge and senator from Rhode Island, has been neglected by historians and largely forgotten by the people of his state, but he was a prominent personality who deserves proper recognition. Born on June 25, 1846, in Dedham, Massachusetts, he was the son of Christopher and Theodora Colt, and the nephew of Samuel Colt, who had invented the revolver in 1835. After attending a village school in New Hartford, Connecticut, and Williston Seminary, young LeBaron graduated from Yale University in 1868 and from the law department of Columbia College in New York City two years later. After a one-year sojourn through Europe, he gained admittance to the bar in 1871 and began his practice in Chicago, Illinois.

In 1875, Colt relocated to Bristol, Rhode Island, and joined a law firm in Providence. His political career quickly moved forward after his return to New England. He served as a member of the Rhode Island State House of Representatives from 1879 to 1881; on March 21, 1881, President James A. Garfield appointed him United States district judge for the first judicial district. In this position, Colt earned respect for his impartial decisions and sound judicial temperament, and he came to the attention of President Chester A. Arthur, who, in July 1884, promoted him to serve as the presiding judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the first circuit.

Colt's role in national politics accelerated in 1912 when he surrendered his judgeship to accept election as a Republican to the United States Senate from Rhode Island. At that time, state legislators chose the individuals to serve in the upper chamber, but Colt later won reelection in 1918 by direct popular vote as mandated by the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution. Although he seldom spoke in open debate on the Senate floor, Colt gained a reputation as a skillful orator possessing a superb command of the English language. He represented his constituents well during a decade of service that catapulted him into dealing with the major issues of the Progressive Era, World War I, and the early 1920s.

When Senator Colt died of heart failure at his summer home, Linden

Mr. Schlup teaches government at the University of South Alabama.

1. General information pertaining to Colt can be found in standard biographical directories of Congress, dictionaries of prominent American politicians, local histories, and obituaries. See, for example, *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1961* (Washington, D.C., 1961), 723-724. See also Colt's obituary in the *New York Times*, Aug. 19, 1924.

2. William Howard Taft served as Secretary of War from 1904 to 1908 under President Theodore Roosevelt.

Place, in Bristol, on August 18, 1924, he had established solid credentials as a respected member of the Senate. He had worked diligently for the people of his state and the best interests of the nation. Following Episcopal funeral services, his body was interred in the Juniper Hill Cemetery in Bristol, thereby bringing to a close his contribution in a long line of political forebears to the history of Rhode Island.¹

Colt has remained an enigma to historians primarily because of the paucity of his political letters and the difficulty in locating these papers. Those pieces that do exist reveal several qualities about the Rhode Island politician and provide scholars with material to supplement his speeches reported in the *Congressional Record*. His letters merit consideration because they shed new light on Colt's career as a public figure and on his conception of the role of the national government in domestic and foreign affairs.

A small but important part of Colt's political legacy can be found in the papers of William Howard Taft, President of the United States from 1909 to 1913. This large collection, located in the manuscripts division of the Library of Congress, contains several hitherto unpublished letters which Colt and Taft exchanged between the years 1906 and 1919. They bring to light certain qualities of Colt as a public figure and disclose his reactions to events and ideas on leading issues. In addition, the correspondence reveals that, on the one hand, a strong personal friendship existed between the two men, and on the other, that they had forged a clandestine political alliance.

These two leaders shared several outstanding characteristics. First, Colt and Taft both acquired their educational training at Yale University, and moreover, they both belonged to the Republican party. Both men were lawyers and judges, for Taft had served as judge of the Superior Court of Cincinnati, Ohio (1887-1890) and on the United States Circuit Court (1892-1900), and he was later appointed chief justice of the United States Supreme Court, in which capacity he served from 1921 to 1930. Lastly, Colt and Taft found themselves in agreement when they espoused domestic reform and advocated an international role for the United States in the twentieth century.

The first four letters reprinted below deal with politics and patronage during an era of professional partisanship. Although Colt was an appellate judge at the time, he maintained a profound interest in the legislative victories and the executive appointments of Republican candidates.

United States Courts
Boston
Oct. 23, 1906

My dear Judge Taft,²

The present situation in Rhode Island is far from satisfactory. The result is very important since the next Legislature will be called upon to elect a U.S. Senator. Is it possible for you to arrange to make one

speech in our State? Senator Aldrich³ tells me he has communicated with you on the subject. I have a personal interest in this election because my brother has a hope that if the legislature is Republican he will be chosen senator. I am aware of the demands made upon you at this time. I would, however, esteem it a great personal favor if you could comply not only with my wishes, but with those of all the good people of our State by spending one day or evening with us.

Most sincerely yours,
LeBaron B. Colt

October 25, 1906

Hon. LeBaron B. Colt,
Boston, Massachusetts

My dear Judge:

I have your letter of October 23rd.

The itinerary which has been arranged for me makes it entirely impossible for me to go east to make any speeches in this campaign. Had I not been obliged to go to Cuba for a month it would have given me pleasure to speak in Providence, where I remember having had such a fine audience in the last campaign.

With regards, believe me,

Sincerely yours,
Wm. H. Taft

United States Courts
Boston
Dec. 28, 1908

My dear Judge Taft,⁴

I know I need not tell you anything about Sam Elder;⁵ his qualities of mind and heart, his intense loyalty, the love and respect we all feel for him, and the gratitude that would fill the hearts of everybody in this part of the world if he were personally identified with your administration.

Permit me, however, to say a word as to his professional standing. I have known him long and well, and I believe there is no man in New England who, in respect to legal attainments, ripe experience, character, and temperament, is better qualified to fill the responsible and difficult position of Attorney General.

With the highest esteem believe me

Very sincerely yours,
LeBaron B. Colt

3. Nelson Wilmarth Aldrich was a Republican United States Senator from Rhode Island (1881-1911).

4. Having defeated William Jennings Bryan in the presidential election of 1908, Taft was President-elect at the time Colt mailed this letter.

5. Samuel J. Elder was an attorney in Boston, Massachusetts, and a member of the prestigious law firm of Elder and Whitman. Taft and Elder knew each other and had corresponded numerous times.

6. President Taft selected George W. Wickersham of New York as Attorney General.

Augusta, Georgia
January 4, 1909

Hon. LeBaron B. Colt,
United States Courts
Boston, Mass.

My dear Judge Colt:

I have your letter of December 28th and note what you have to say about Sam Elder. I shall place your letter on file for future reference, and thank you for writing me.⁶

Very sincerely yours,
Wm. H. Taft

The next eleven letters offer an enlightening glimpse into the working relationship of Colt and Taft on the League of Nations in 1919. Taft began the correspondence that year by notifying Colt of his stand in support of the League, urging his friend to keep him quietly informed on Senate proceedings. Because Colt and Taft favored America's entrance into the League with only minor clarifying statements, they became natural allies when President Woodrow Wilson's Versailles peace treaty encountered opposition in the upper house from irreconcilables and strong reservationists. The Democratic President needed a two-thirds vote from the Republican Senate for ratification of the treaty. Unfortunately, the personal and political animosity between the unyielding Wilson and Henry Cabot Lodge, Republican majority leader and Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, intensified the debate and compounded the difficulty for "compromise" Republicans such as Colt and Taft. For these two leaders, the compelling reason for approving the agreement was their firm conviction that the United States would have to work with other nations to rebuild a European balance of power. Fundamentally their decision stemmed from their belief that paramount universal necessities must be recognized in order to deal effectively with those nations in the future.

In a speech to his colleagues on the Senate floor on July 17, 1919, Colt outlined his position in detail. Claiming that the League represented an association of free nations to prevent war through international cooperation, he explained that the age of neutrality had passed forever. He pointed out that previous means for preventing war had failed and that new methods were necessary to avoid international anarchy and to minimize the danger of another global conflagration. Colt repeatedly warned the senators of the extreme peril of a second world conflict and predicted its occurrence unless the nations established a stable and effective world organization.

Declaring that the American people supported the League, Colt emphasized that the United States should bring its great military under-

taking that had begun in 1917 to a logical and fitting conclusion. The nation's role in the war compelled the United States to help create a new world order, and the League, said Colt, would operate as the instrument to achieve this goal. He further argued that the League would not destroy American sovereignty or impose a superstate on others. To satisfy those individuals who abhorred the League because of these fears, Colt admitted that some safeguards should be formulated. Along these lines, Colt called for a clarification and maintenance of the Monroe Doctrine, and he stressed the need for assessing the impact the League would have on domestic policy, especially concerning immigration laws.

Like Wilson, Senator Colt not only endorsed the general principles embodied in the League but insisted that the League was inseparable from the Versailles peace treaty. Several statesmen for various reasons contemplated divorcing the two issues, but Colt insisted that the treaty, without a League of Nations, could not be properly enforced. In other words, the new organization would provide the machinery for the restoration of peace and stability.⁷ In confidential letters over the next three months, Colt reiterated and Taft echoed these views.

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

Pointe-a-Pic, P. Q., Canada,
July 15, 1919

Hon. LeBaron B. Colt,
United States Senate
Washington, D.C.

My dear Senator Colt:

I haven't written to you on the subject of the treaty, but it is not because I haven't followed your course in respect to the matter and haven't prayed that your view in respect to the treaty might be like mine. Hays, of the Republican National Committee, telephoned me and asked me to send him what I thought could be granted in the war of reservations and interpretations, and I enclose copies of my letters to him, together with a copy of the final draft of the suggested reservations.⁸ I feel as if these might go through without anything more than an exchange of ratifications. The five years of Article X would enable us all to find out how the League of Nations operates, and with my confidence that it is going to be useful, I am entirely willing to trust to that experiment, especially in view of the fact that we could withdraw after two years.⁹ I have tried, so far as I could, to conform my recommendations to Mr. Root's.¹⁰ I seriously object to a failure to define the Monroe Doctrine. I think the nations of the world are entitled to it, and for us to say that we are going to have the Doctrine mean just what we choose it to mean is to assume a spirit of German domination that we ought not to manifest after this war. I sincerely hope that you will not go beyond a concession of these reservations,

7. *Congressional Record*, 66th Cong., 1st Sess., July 17, 1919, LVIII, Part 3, 2721-2722.

8. William Harrison Hays was an Indiana politician and Chairman of the Republican National Committee from 1918 to 1921. He later served as Postmaster General (1921-1922) during Harding's administration.

9. The controversial tenth article of the covenant stated: "The Members of the League undertake to respect and preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and political independence of all Members of the League. In case of any such aggression or in case of any threat or danger of such aggression the Council shall advise upon the means by which this obligation shall be fulfilled." See Alfred E. Zimmern, *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law*, 1918-1935 (London, 1945), 515.

10. Elihu Root was president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (1910-1925), Secretary of War (1899-1904), and Secretary of State (1905-1909) under Presidents William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt, Republican Senator from New York (1909-1915), and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize for 1912.



William Howard Taft (1857–1930). Photograph of an engraving courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 4659).

11. Thomas Sterling, a Republican from South Dakota, served in the United States Senate from 1913 to 1925.

12. Selden Palmer Spencer was a Republican United States Senator from Missouri (1918–1925).

and I don't think the concessions should come until after you have voted down the amendments and reservations that come out of the Foreign Relations Committee. When those are voted down, if they can be beaten, then the issue will arise as to a compromise between the majority, or the half of the Senate which has defeated the proposed amendments, and so many of the other half as wish to ratify the treaty, and will do so on the basis of reservations like those enclosed.

I beg to call your attention to the distinction between the second reservation in respect to the position of Congress in the performance of Article X, and the effect of the Sterling¹¹ or Spencer¹² resolutions on this subject. They destroy the obligation of Article 10 altogether. My suggestion keeps the obligation of Article X for five years, but puts its final interpretation in the power of Congress, where it must be under the present Covenant, for there is nobody else ultimately to determine for the United States what in honor and under a reasonable construction its duty should be. I feel that the reservation as to the two year's withdrawal clause merely clears up a badly drawn clause of withdrawal and that nobody can object to this interpretation, which merely retains jurisdiction over the withdrawing member for the purpose of asserting a claim for damages through the tribunals of the League, and entirely releases the withdrawing member from any further obligations of membership than this.

I would consider it a favor if you could drop me a line to indicate what the situation is in the Senate and what your view of it is.

Sincerely yours,
Wm. H. Taft

Pointe-a-Pic, P. Q., Canada,
July 16, 1919

Send as straight message.

Charge to the account of Mr. Taft.

Hon. LeBaron Colt,
United States Senate,
Washington, D. C.

Please regard my letter of yesterday in respect to reservations as strictly confidential until you hear from me.

Wm. H. Taft

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

Pointe-a-Pic, P.Q., Canada,
July 17, 1919Hon. LeBaron B. Colt,
United States Senate,
Washington, D. C.

My dear Senator:

I sent you a telegram yesterday, as follows:

"Please regard my letter of yesterday in respect to reservations as strictly confidential until you hear from me."

I have had a conference with Mr. Hays over the telephone, and I have understood from him that he fully approves the reservations that I have suggested to you as a basis of compromise, but he thinks they should be kept confidential in order that they may not be treated as an offer and the beginning of a trade, and that they should be regarded as a limit to which interpretations can go without involving an indefinite delay in the exchange of ratifications giving the treaty life. I concur with him. I think perhaps it would be very unwise to have it known that I have suggested them, because the attitude of many Senators toward me is such that my authorship would prejudice and embarrass their acceptance of any proposition. I enclose copies of further letters that I have sent to Mr. Hays, which I think explain themselves.

Baron de Constant is probably coming to Washington.¹³ If he does, I hope you will have the opportunity of seeing him and hearing him on the absolute necessity for Article X, especially if the special agreement proposed by the President between France and Great Britain and the United States does not go through, as seems likely. You will observe that I was convinced, after my talk with Baron de Constant, that the five years in the first reservation should be changed to ten. The sixth reservation is a pure interpretation of the Government, and one that I hope may satisfy some of the requirements of Mr. Root's first letter to Mr. Hays, as well as answer the bitter criticisms in respect to British influence, which Mr. George Wharton Pepper seems to be responsible for, and which has been used to stir up Irish feeling against the treaty.¹⁴ I am writing to you and to Senator McCumber¹⁵ and to Senator McNary¹⁶ with the hope that you three will deem it proper to vote against amendments and reservations which would prevent the exchange of ratifications and delay the treaty. When the issue then is up as to whether the treaty should be rejected or not, might I suggest that these reservations, already submitted to you, or something within their limit, might be made the basis of a proper compromise?

Sincerely yours,
Wm. H. Taft

13. Paul Estournelles de Constant, a member of the French Chamber of Deputies (1895-1904) and Senator from 1904-1924, was an advocate of international arbitration who had attended the First and Second Hague Conferences (in 1899 and 1907), which formulated several significant new principles of international law. In 1909, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work.

14. George Wharton Pepper, a lawyer, professor of law, and member of the Republican National Committee, was Chairman of the Pennsylvania Council of National Defense (1917-1919). From 1922 to 1927, he served as a United States Senator from Pennsylvania.

15. Porter James McCumber, a confirmed internationalist unreservedly in favor of the League of Nations, served as a Republican in the United States Senate representing North Dakota from 1899 to 1923.

16. Charles Linza McNary was a Republican United States Senator from Oregon from 1917 to 1944. He received the Republican vice-presidential nomination in 1940. He was known in the farm states for cosponsoring the ill-fated McNary-Haugen farm bills during the 1920s.

17. Taft, a professor of law at Yale University from 1913 to 1921, was president of the League to Enforce Peace in 1919, an organization formed in 1915 to gain popular support for the establishment of a league at the close of the war.

United States Senate
Washington, D. C.
July 18, 1919

Honorable William Howard Taft,¹⁷
Pointe-a-Pic,
Province of Quebec, Canada

My dear Judge Taft:

I received your telegram and have just this moment received your letter. I shall certainly follow your instructions and keep your letter strictly confidential until I hear from you. I am just leaving to spend Sunday with my family in Bristol, R. I., and will read with care your letter and enclosures.

I am enclosing you a copy of a few remarks I made in the Senate yesterday which define my position at this time. So far as the Senate is concerned, I think the whole subject has settled down to the proposition of the adoption of the Covenant in its present form or with reservations, and if with reservations, the form of such reservations. Of course, like a good Judge, I withheld my decision on the question of reservations until the arguments are closed. From the spirit of my address you can easily infer my attitude of mind with respect to this whole momentous subject. I shall be very glad to hear from you further.

Please excuse this hasty line.

With my warmest regards, believe me

Very sincerely yours,
LB. B. Colt

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

Pointe-a-Pic, P. Q., Canada,
July 20, 1919

Hon. LeBaron B. Colt,
United States Senate

My dear Senator Colt:

I am afraid you will think I am overwhelming you with correspondence, but the dispatches from Washington seem to show that the minds of all are occupied with the treaty, and therefore a discussion of it continues to be relevant and competent.

I enclose copies of two letters I have written to Mr. Hays. I had a telephone from him this morning, the substance of which you can see from my letters.

I felicitate you on the admirable speech which you delivered in the Senate on the subject of the League. I sincerely hope that Senators McCumber and McNary will follow in your footsteps. Indeed Senator

McCumber has already made a speech indicating that his state of mind is exactly like yours.

Sincerely yours,
Wm. H. Taft

P. S. Of course you know better than I do, for my opportunities for observation are limited, but it seems to me that if by the voice of yourself and Senators McCumber and McNary, the probably radical amendments of the majority of the Foreign Relations Committee can be defeated, the psychological moment for effecting reasonable compromise along the lines I have suggested will then come.

Pointe-a-Pic, P. Q., Canada,
July 24, 1919

Hon. LeBaron Colt,
U. S. Senate

My dear Senator:

I have read your speech on the League and it is a most admirable statement. It reads like a fine judicial opinion demonstrating its conclusions. I hope you have received my final suggestions to Hays as to possible interpretations to remove the fears of moderate Republicans favoring the League and a reservation serving notice to terminate our obligations under the League ten years hence unless we conclude affirmatively to go on with it.

I tried to keep my suggestions confidential but they seem to have been given publicity. I don't know that it makes much difference except that it may be used to claim that the supporters of the League are losing faith. That is far from the fact. I would vote for the League as it is without hesitation, if in the Senate and I do not think that the adoption of such interpretations as I last suggest would lead to any substantial difference in the operation of the League from that which it would have without them.

With the earnest hope that you and Senators McCumber and McNary will save us from any real amendments, believe me, as always,
My dear Senator,

Sincerely yours,
Wm. H. Taft

United States Senate
Washington, D. C.
July 29, 1919

My dear Judge Taft,

On my return to Washington yesterday after a few days rest I found your kind letter of the 24th inst. Two of your letters reached me be-

18. Henry Cabot Lodge represented Massachusetts in the United States Senate from 1893 to 1924.

fore leaving Washington and two others were forwarded to me at Bristol, R. I. All of your communications have been carefully guarded by me as I understood from the receipt of your first telegram that these matters were strictly "personal and confidential"; and in order that there might be no mistake about this I have kept these letters in my personal possession all the time.

I knew your only wish was to help the cause and that in the carrying out of your plan it was best that these letters should not be made public; besides these letters were of themselves of a personal character and not intended for publication as was evident upon the face of the letters themselves.

You have now made it perfectly clear to every one that the letters were "personal and confidential" which was all it was possible for you to do.

I can discover no change in the Senate situation. I am, however, very hopeful of the final result. It looks now as if it would be some weeks before the Foreign Relations Committee finish their work, meantime many senators who favor the League are giving close attention to the subject of reservations, and the form of reservations which has been suggested by yourself and others.

With my kindest regards believe me

Sincerely yours,
LB. B. Colt

New Haven, Connecticut
October 5, 1919

Hon. LeBaron B. Colt,
United States Senate,
Washington, D. C.

My dear Senator Colt:

I think I left you, in lead pencil, some suggested verbal changes in the revision of the proposed reservation of Article X, which Senator McCumber tentatively agreed upon with Senator Lodge.¹⁸ I don't like the reservation, but if some such reservation has to be adopted, I suggest that it is made clearer by this form which I enclose. Its chief difference from the McCumber-Lodge suggestion is the transposition of the words "under any article of the treaty for any purpose," so as to make certain that they limit only the words "to employ the military and naval forces of the United States," and do not expand the meaning of the words "to interfere in controversies between other nations, members of the League or not" beyond the provisions of Article X. Confidentially, I think by substituting for the word "unless" the words, "except as," the reservation does not destroy the obligation, but it only points with emphasis to the fact that the obligation is one which Congress must specifically determine to exist, under Article X or under any other article, in respect to military and naval forces.

I saw Senator Kellogg¹⁹ again on the subject of the Johnson amendment.²⁰ He said that Senator Lenroot was drafting a reservation which he proposed to move as a substitute for the Johnson amendment.²¹ In effect it was a declaration that the United States assumed no obligation to be bound by any action of the Assembly in which any member and its self-governing dominions had in the aggregate more than one vote.²² It seemed to me that that was very objectionable. The truth is that in most decisions we would rather have the votes of the British colonies than we would the votes of some countries like Haiti and Honduras and Siam. More than this, if such a reservation were moved, it would not be accepted by the Johnson-Borah group,²³ because they told McNary they would not accept it, and the Democrats would vote against it, so that it would be left in the air, with a comparatively small minority supporting it. The way to beat the Johnson amendment, in my judgment, is to vote against it, and I am hoping you will impress Senator Kellogg with this view, because I understood from you that that is what you think.

I thank you for giving me the opportunity of seeing you and having the very satisfactory discussion that we had. I understood you to say that you gathered from Senator Shields that he would vote against the Johnson amendment.²⁴ If that is clear, I think the Johnson amendment will certainly be beaten.

With best wishes,

Sincerely yours,
Wm. H. Taft

New Haven, Connecticut
October 23, 1919

Hon. LeBaron B. Colt,
United States Senate,
Washington, D. C.

My dear Senator:

I can not understand what is being done in the Senate now with the reservations. Have the mild reservationists completely surrendered to the "Bitter Enders?"²⁵ Do they expect to have the Allied nations accept such a qualified entrance to the League by the United States, that she is to be relieved from every one of the obligations, and they are to be bound by all of them? Did Senator McCumber consent to that which relieves the United States from the obligation to enter into a boycott? I can not understand it. Couldn't you advise me what the actual situation is? Most of us will thoroughly sympathize with a vote by the Democrats to reject the treaty under the conditions of such reservations as those which were adopted by the committee yesterday. After having made so great a fight and defeated the amend-

19. Frank Billings Kellogg was a Republican United States Senator from Minnesota (1917-1923), Secretary of State (1925-1929) under President Calvin Coolidge, and coauthor of the Kellogg-Briand Peace Pact signed in 1928.

20. Hiram Warren Johnson, the Progressive and Republican United States Senator from California during the years 1917 to 1945, proposed an unsuccessful amendment that provided for equality of voting in the Council and the Assembly of the League of Nations.

21. Irvine Luther Lenroot, a Republican from Wisconsin, served in the United States Senate from 1918 to 1927.

22. The Covenant of the League of Nations provided for a Secretariat to be located at Geneva, Switzerland, an Assembly of member nations, and a Council consisting of representatives from Great Britain, Italy, France, Japan, the United States, and four other nations.

23. William Edgar Borah, a Republican isolationist from Idaho who served in the United States Senate from 1907 to 1940, vehemently condemned and opposed the League of Nations.

24. John Knight Shields, a Democratic United States Senator from Tennessee (1913-1925) who served on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, opposed United States membership in an international organization, though he was willing to consider certain safeguards and restrictive amendments.

25. The "bitter enders" were the Senate irreconcilables, such as Borah, who abhorred the Versailles Treaty, rejected compromise, and remained adamant in their intense opposition to United States participation in the League of Nations.

26. George Higgins Moses, a Republican, represented New Hampshire in the United States Senate from 1918 to 1933. His amendment, defeated on October 27, 1919, by a vote of 49 to 32, dealt with equality of voting in the League of Nations. See Henry Cabot Lodge, *The Senate and the League of Nations* (New York, 1925), 178-179.

ments, it is impossible for me to understand how Senator McCumber can have yielded everything after the battle was won.

Sincerely yours,
Wm. H. Taft

United States Senate
Washington, D. C.
October 25, 1919

Honorable William H. Taft,
New Haven, Conn.

My dear Judge Taft:

I hardly know how to reply to your kind letter of October 23rd. I saw Senator McCumber this morning, and he said that he had written you in regard to his position. I understand from the Senator that he objects to several of the reservations of the Foreign Relations Committee as now framed. I quite agree with him, however, that the Committee's reservation in regard to Article X as now framed does not relieve us from the obligation of economic boycott under other articles.

I have been fighting to defeat all amendments to the Treaty. The Johnson amendment was very popular, and I was afraid at one time that we could not muster enough votes to defeat it. The amendment came to a vote this morning and we succeeded in beating it by a close margin. As the vote was unexpected, several of our Democratic friends who would have voted against it were absent. The vote stood 38 for, to 40 against, with six of those who would have voted against absent, making the actual vote, had all been present, 44 for, to 52 against. The Moses amendment is next in order,²⁶ and to this amendment Senator Shields (of Tennessee) has offered a substitute. It is also understood that various other amendments will be offered before we reach the consideration of reservations.

Now, what I want is to have eight or nine of us Republicans hold together and vote against every amendment, and then we can take up the question of reservations. It is not true that all of the Committee's reservations are satisfactory to the entire body of Republicans, and the question of what reservations should finally be adopted is still open to be fully considered when we dispose of the amendments.

With warm regards, believe me

Very sincerely yours,
LB. B. Colt

New Haven, Connecticut,
October 29, 1919

Hon. LeBaron B. Colt,
United States Senate,
Washington, D. C.

My dear Senator Colt:

I owe you an apology for a misunderstanding on my part of the 11th reservation of the committee. As reported in the *New York Times* and elsewhere, this reservation seemed to cut the heart out of the boycott under Article XVI.²⁷ It reserved to the United States the absolute power of permitting its nationals to deal with the nationals of the covenant-breaking country. It left out the limitation altogether that the nationals of the covenant-breaking country thus to be dealt with should live either in the United States or in any other country, not in the country breaking the covenant. I haven't any objection to the reservation as it is. I was not made aware of what the true reservation was until yesterday, when I received the full print of all the reservations. I congratulate you on carrying out your plan to get nine Republicans to stand together to vote against amendments. This is a great victory. As I conceive it now, your difficulties are with the Shantung reservation and with the reservation in substitution for the Johnson amendment.²⁸ I should think that the Shantung reservation might be drawn in such a way as not to affront Japan, and yet insist upon the condition of Japan's withdrawal, and reserving full liberty of action on the part of the United States, if she does not withdraw in a reasonable time, and that within the judgment of the United States.

I begin to hope that you will be able to get the treaty through in such a form that the other powers will accept it, if you can get over the Shantung difficulty, and if you do, it will be a great triumph for your devoted band of mild reservationists. I am very impatient with the Democratic attitude. The suggestion that they will reject the resolution of ratification on account of the reservation as to Article X is one of those foolish statements that will return to plague them. The country is most impatient for ratification. The delay in the treaty has created a condition in respect to our foreign trade that is distressing and is going to grow more so. The Democrats can not afford to defeat the treaty. If they had good sense, they would now be conferring with you and your sacred nine as to reservations. Indeed they ought to have done so long ago.

Dr. Lowell of Harvard is to be in Washington today, and I sincerely hope that he will have an opportunity to call on you and talk over the matter.²⁹ I presume that the preamble and Article XIV,³⁰ suggested by Reed,³¹ can be beaten by the union of your own group and the Democrats. The preamble is unnecessary and invidious, and of course reservation No. 14, suggested by Reed, emasculates the whole League.

With best wishes and great respect, believe me,

Sincerely yours,
Wm. H. Taft

27. The sixteenth article permitted the expulsion of members who violated agreements. Other articles over which Colt and Taft labored included Article I (provisions for withdrawal), Articles IV and V (voting procedures), and Article XXII, which stated that no government had to accept a mandate against its will.

28. Germany resigned all its rights and privileges in the province of Shantung to Japan rather than to China. Although Wilson reluctantly consented to this section of the Versailles Treaty, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee adopted amendments to restore to China the rights renounced by Germany in Shantung. All the Republican members on the committee supported the propositions except McCumber, who voted with the solid Democratic membership against them.

29. Abbott Lawrence Lowell, president of Harvard University (1909-1933), was chairman of the executive committee of the League to Enforce Peace.

30. The fourteenth article dealt with compulsory versus voluntary arbitration.

31. James Alexander Reed, a Democrat from Missouri, served in the United States Senate from 1911 to 1929.



*Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924).
Photograph of an engraving
courtesy of Rhode Island
Historical Society Library
(RHi x3 4658).*

President Wilson committed a serious error in judgment by not working closely with Colt regarding the modifications that were needed to secure passage of the covenant. Colt would have made an important and loyal ally had Wilson possessed the foresight and political courage to invite him to accompany the American peace delegation to Paris in 1919. By stubbornly refusing to include Colt and Taft in his inner circle of advocates, Wilson inadvertently fostered the belief that the League was a political issue and weakened his bargaining power with moderates and reservationists. This fatal flaw in Wilson's character cost him the League and probably his health.

Colt and Taft, on the other hand, were correct in their assessment of the chances for ratification of the treaty without reservations, and they displayed a more realistic attitude toward compromise than did Wilson. These two former judges were mild reservationists in 1919 who sponsored modest interpretive clarifications that would have protected the United States Constitution without destroying the purpose of the League. Moreover, unlike certain Senate Republicans, they entertained no thoughts of opposing the covenant merely to discredit Democrats and the President. In fact, Colt and Taft attacked offensive partisanship as well as obstructionism and vacillation in the conduct of American diplomacy.

The Colt-Taft letters are significant in several respects. First, they demonstrate the durability of a political relationship. Second, the correspondence traces the agonizing dilemma which confronted both statesmen during the imbroglio over the League of Nations. Third, these Republican leaders agreed on the necessity of keeping their messages strictly confidential and usually wrote the word "personal" at the top of the letters.

Colt expressed in these letters to Taft his concern over several matters with which he had become involved during his political career. From a lawyer's office in Providence to a senatorial chair in Washington, he had traveled a road that took him through local, state, and national politics. His close connection with President Taft, a relationship overlooked by presidential scholars, highlighted one meaningful phase of his life as a public official.

The Great Textile Strike of 1934: Illuminating Rhode Island History in the Thirties

James F. Findlay

URGENTLY REQUEST YOU DIRECT ADMIRAL ELLIS USS ARKANSAS NEWPORT RI TO DETAIL IMMEDIATELY FIVE HUNDRED TRAINED MEN FOR SERVICE AT MY DISCRETION. RIOTOUS MOBS DESTROYING CITIES AND TOWNS IN NORTHERN PART OF STATE. . . . ALTHOUGH ORIGINAL DISORDER WERE IN TEXTILE AREAS PRESENT LAWLESSNESS AND VIOLENCE DUE TO COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES AND GENERAL LAWLESS ELEMENT, NOT STRIKERS. . . . MANY INJURED IN WOONSOCKET MANY CASUALTIES IN CENTRAL FALLS, ALSO AT SAYLESVILLE. EXPECT TROUBLE IN OTHER LOCALITIES, PROBABLY MARCH ON STATE HOUSE TODAY. DRASTIC ACTION MUST BE TAKEN TO RESTORE LAW AND ORDER.

Governor Theo Francis Green¹

These dramatic words of Governor Green, dispatched in the early hours of the morning of September 13, 1934, to the President of the United States, suggest something of the tumult, excitement, and tension created in Rhode Island by the massive textile strike of 1934. Although part of a nationwide walkout of textile workers, the Rhode Island portion of that great industrial conflict illuminates a number of historical tendencies which by 1934 were powerfully affecting the fundamental economic, political and social structures of the Ocean State. It is the intention of this essay not only to sketch out the specific contours of the strike of 1934 as it affected Rhode Island, but also to discuss some of the broader implications of this upheaval for the state in the 1930s and afterward.

The immediate background of the textile strike of 1934 rested in the national depression of the early thirties and the beginnings of the New Deal. The textile industry in New England, already in a depressed condition throughout most of the 1920s, experienced further decline as the Great Depression gathered momentum between 1929 and 1934. The National Industrial Recovery Act, one of the earliest efforts of the Roosevelt administration to provide help to foundering businesses,

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1. Telegram, Theodore Francis Green to Franklin D. Roosevelt, Sept. 13, 1934, Official File, Box 407-B, folder entitled "Cotton Textile Strike (1)," Roosevelt Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, N.Y.

2. *Report of the Board of Inquiry for the Cotton Textile Industry to the President*, Sept. 1934, 3, *ibid.*, hereafter cited as *Board of Inquiry Report*. At the end of Oct. 1933, when NRA code provisions were achieving maximum effects, there were an estimated 71,467 textile workers employed in Rhode Island. This was in contrast to an all-time low of 57,101 workers tabulated just a year earlier before the textile code had been formulated. See Rhode Island Department of Labor, *Annual Report, 1935*, 97, 99.

3. A brief, excellent summary of these conditions is in "General Textile Strike, September, 1934," a memorandum prepared by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Jan. 15, 1935, in folder entitled "General Textile Strike," File #4476, Textile Labor Relations Board, NRA files, National Archives, Washington, D.C., hereafter cited as "General Textile Strike, 1934."

4. *Board of Inquiry Report*, 3-4; *Textile Worker*, XXII (1934), 208-209; *Providence Journal*, Aug. 31, 1934; Editha Hadcock, "Labor Problems in Rhode Island Cotton Mills, 1790-1940," 2 vols. (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Brown University, 1946), I, 176; II, Chap. 6. The summer of 1934 was also a time of general labor unrest throughout the nation. A massive general strike in Minneapolis provoked widespread violence and eventually required the use of the National Guard to restore order. Frustrations with the inadequacies of the NRA codes produced work stoppages among garment workers in Brooklyn and Newark, among 12,000 printers in New York City, and among 18,000 longshoremen in San Francisco. In early August strikes also occurred among shoe workers in Malden and Lynn, Mass., and in the aluminum mills of the Mellon industry in and near Pittsburgh. See *Providence Journal*, Aug. 1, 2, 8, 11, 12, 1934.

sought immediately to grapple with the problems in the textile industry. The new law required that "codes of fair competition" be created to establish nationwide standards for wages, production quotas, and working conditions within a given industry. Representatives of the textile industry were the first group to come forward with a proposed code, which was implemented under the National Recovery Administration in July 1933. The textile code, backed by the power of the federal government, seemed at first to improve the lot of workers in the industry. The basic work week became forty hours, a major reduction in time spent on the job for many laborers. The wage differential between northern and southern textile plants was significantly reduced (but not eliminated as the workers desired), with the weekly minimum wage in both regions being increased from pre-1933 levels. Child labor also was to be abolished. For a brief time, nationally and in Rhode Island, employment levels rose and average earnings per worker increased.²

Caught in the vise of a long-running national depression, however, the industry was unable to implement fully the provisions of the new textile code. In May 1934, the NRA approved a twenty-five percent reduction in work hours, and corresponding pay cuts, in textile plants throughout the nation. By August 1934, average earnings in the industry were about \$11.50 per week, forty percent less than the average for all other manufacturing workers. At the same time, the industry was experiencing widespread worker discontent.³

In 1934, the foremost union in the industry was the United Textiles Workers (UTW). Founded in 1901, the UTW had always been conservative to moderate in its basic philosophy. Sponsored from the beginning by the AFL, it had opposed in its early days the International Workers of the World (IWW), a much more radical workers' organization which had developed broad support in textile mills in East Coast cities during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The IWW lost influence during and immediately after World War I; union organizing among textile workers seemed at its nadir in the 1920s. However, with the onset of general hard times and the coming of the New Deal, a renewal of worker militancy came about in the early 1930s. As late as 1932, the UTW possessed a membership of little more than 20,000 workers in the entire industry. Shortly after adoption of the NRA Code, however, the UTW undertook a nationwide organizing campaign. In May 1934, the union claimed a membership of about 300,000 workers, North and South, in cotton plants alone.⁴

There had been two moves by the UTW to call a national strike in the summer of 1934. Following the NRA's implementation of the twenty-five percent reduction in work hours, a walkout was threatened in June, but that job action was called off when officials of the supervisory federal agency made conciliatory gestures. In August a threatened strike in woolen and worsted mills across the nation was averted when a new federal arbitration board was set up to cover that portion of the industry. But the basic demands and grievances of the workers remained unmet.



Theodore Francis Green and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Photograph courtesy of Theodore Francis Green II.

These demands included ending the practice of the "stretch-out" (increased workloads in the mills) which had been going on since the early 1920s; halting the decline in wage scales and weekly work schedules; and preventing the continued mistreatment by mill owners of workers who engaged in union activities (such mistreatment clearly violated Article 7[A] of the National Industrial Recovery Act, which recognized the workers' legal right to participate in collective bargaining).⁵

In mid-August, the UTW held its national convention, and the growing unrest among the rank and file of its members was readily apparent. The convention approved a definite strike date (the first Tuesday in September), if the grievances previously noted were not recognized and dealt with by that time. In the intervening two weeks there were several efforts by federal officials to initiate effective negotiations, but all these attempts failed. On Labor Day, September 3, 1934, the first nationwide strike in the textile industry began.⁶

From the onset the strike seemed well organized in Rhode Island, partly because the UTW itself was relatively well organized in the state. Much of the national and regional leadership of the union was from the Ocean State—Thomas McMahon, the national president; Francis Gorman, the first national vice-president and the chairman of the national strike committee; and John Powers, member of the national executive council and an important strike leader and organizer in the New England region. Other AFL-affiliated unions in the state provided financial and picketing support. A small competing textile union, the National Textile Workers, joined the strike at the outset. The NTW represented left-wing militancy among textile operatives and had affiliations with the Communist Party. The Independent Textile Union of Woonsocket, a key local workers' organization in that major textile center, called its 3,000 members out of the mills on Sep-

5. "General Textile Strike, 1934," 2, 4; *Providence Journal*, June 1, 2, 3, 1934.

6. "General Textile Strike, 1934," 3, 4; *Providence Journal*, Aug. 14, 15, 17, 30, 31, Sept. 2, 1934; Hadcock, "Labor Problems in Rhode Island Cotton Mills," II, 380-381.

Governor Theodore Francis Green had mobilized the National Guard on September 10, 1934, after the outbreak of violence in Saylesville. Here troops prepare to string barbed wire in the riot area. Photograph courtesy of the Providence Journal Company.



7. Hadcock, "Labor Problems in Rhode Island Cotton Mills," II, 382-383; Gary Gerstle, "The Mobilization of the Working Class Community: The Independent Textile Union in Woonsocket, 1931-1946," *Radical History Review* (Spring 1978), 161-172; *Textile Worker*, XXII (1934), 222.

8. *Providence Journal*, Sept. 4, 6, 7, 1934.

9. Hadcock, "Labor Problems in Rhode Island Cotton Mills," II, 381-384; *Woonsocket Call*, Sept. 10, 1934.

10. The newspapers from the largest cities in the northern part of the state provided detailed daily coverage of the strike. The *Providence Journal* and the *Evening Bulletin* were quite sympathetic to the mill owners, though the *Pawtucket Times* gave the most favorable coverage of the strike. The *Woonsocket Call* provided more penetrating reporting and balanced analysis of the events. The *Providence News-Tribune*, a Democratic paper, also provided important details and a general perspective on the strike not found elsewhere. The smaller dailies and weeklies around the state, such as the *Pawtucket Valley Times* (Warwick) and the *Westerly Sun*, showed less concern in the reporting of events. These newspapers summarized developments more often and devoted less space to recapitulations of events.

tember 10. The ITU, which played an important role in the strike in Rhode Island, differed considerably in philosophy and character from the UTW. It was organized more along the lines of an industrial union, tried to take full account of the powerful French-Canadian ethnic connections of the majority of the work force in Woonsocket, and generally was far better disciplined and cohesive as a local workers' organization than was the UTW.⁷

In most mills those workers strongly committed to the strike were in the minority. Nevertheless, the UTW developed a technique to sustain mass picketing at numerous sites simultaneously with a minimum number of people available as pickets. They created mobile units of picketers, up to thirty-five persons per unit, who moved from place to place by car. Dubbed "flying squadrons," apparently they were effective because they provoked much negative comment from newspapers sympathetic to the mill owners; newspaper accounts made repeated reference to "outside agitators" and "unwanted picketers from outside" who were preventing "workers who wanted to work" from doing so.⁸ Some of these mobile picketers were from the large textile centers of Fall River and New Bedford in nearby southern Massachusetts, and their enthusiasm and geographical proximity greatly aided the strikers' cause. Later in the strike, after violence had occurred, picketing was more carefully monitored according to informal arrangements worked out between Governor Green, the head of the State Police, and the strike leaders.⁹

The mill owners and their supporters vigorously resisted all these strike efforts. Injunctions against mass picketing were secured in Pawtucket. Newspapers were for the most part noticeably pro-management, both in their editorial columns and in their daily news reports about the strike.¹⁰ Law enforcement officials, especially at the outset,

were notoriously unsympathetic to the strikers. In Pawtucket, Central Falls, and elsewhere, citizens were sworn in as deputy sheriffs to aid in enforcing order. They lacked suitable training and experience to perform their duties properly. Many of these people were paid by the mill owners. The manhandling of strikers by deputy sheriffs was a major factor leading to the outbreak of violence, especially at Saylesville, where conflict occurred only a week after the strike began.

The strike gathered momentum slowly. Many Rhode Island mill owners, convinced their workers would not join the walkouts, initially tried to keep their businesses open. However, as more and more picketers appeared, the mills closed down, especially the larger factories in the northern section of the state, including plants operated by the Lorraine, Berkshire, Manville-Jenckes, Lonsdale, and Interlaken companies. At the peak of the strike's effectiveness, between September 10 and September 13, 1934, it is probable that two-thirds of the laborers in Rhode Island textile mills were not at work.¹¹

The state police were mobilized for strike duty by September 7. They first used tear gas that same day against "agitators from Fall River" in Warren, Rhode Island. On September 10, the state police attempted to break up mass picketing at the entrance to the huge Sayles Company Mill and Bleachery in Saylesville, Rhode Island. Rioting broke out, especially as non-union workers changed shifts at 3:00 and 11:00 P.M. The police were not numerous enough and lost control of the crowd. More than a thousand people attacked the mill property. Deputy sheriffs and state police responded with gunfire. Two people were shot, and twenty-five others were injured by flying bricks, rocks, and police billy clubs. Seven hundred workers were trapped inside the Sayles complex, unable to leave without physically endangering themselves.¹²

On September 11, even more serious disturbances developed in Woonsocket. Twenty-four hours later, on the night of September 12-13, an estimated 10,000 people thronged the mill and downtown districts of the city, smashing windows and looting stores. Governor Green had mobilized the National Guard on September 10 as the violence escalated in Saylesville. Shortly thereafter he also ordered National Guard troops into Woonsocket. Trying to contain the disturbances, guardsmen used their guns to fire "bullets over the heads" of the crowd "or on the street in front of the mob." In the midst of the tumult in Woonsocket one person was killed and a number of people wounded.¹³

As suddenly as they erupted, the riots died away. By September 13, the National Guard, two thousand strong, had been fully mobilized, and the threat of federal intervention with troops was also present. Governor Green had made several public appeals for calm and restraint and had called the Rhode Island legislature into special session to deal further with the emergency. Franklin Roosevelt, ironically on his way to Rhode Island on September 13 to watch the start of the America's Cup Races off Newport, received aboard his yacht a report of "decided

11. Figures cited in the newspapers of the number of people on strike reflected editorial biases. The *Providence Journal* reported estimates of workers on strike more frequently and comprehensively than did other newspapers in the state; moreover, the *Providence Journal* provided estimates of workers on strike not only in Rhode Island, but also for New England and the nation. This newspaper, however, usually accepted and reported data supplied by the mill owners, figures which were consistently many thousands below those provided by the UTW. For examples of these differing estimates see *Providence Journal*, Sept. 5, 6, 7, 8, 1934; *Providence News-Tribune*, Sept. 5, 6, 7, 1934; *Woonsocket Call*, Sept. 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 1934. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated in Jan. 1935 that 375,900 workers throughout the nation had been involved in the general strike, out of a total workforce in the industry of 450,000. "General Textile Strike, 1934," 7.

12. *Providence Journal*, Sept. 7, 11, 1934; *Woonsocket Call*, Sept. 8, 10, 11, 1934; *Providence News-Tribune*, Sept. 7, 10, 1934.

13. *Woonsocket Call*, Sept. 12, 13, 1934.

14. *Providence Journal*, Sept. 14, 16, 1934; radiotelegram, Stephen Early to Roosevelt, Sept. 14, 1934, Official File, Box 407-B, folder entitled "Cotton Textile Strike (1)," Roosevelt Papers. See also Roosevelt to Theodore F. Green, Sept. 8, 1934, and telegrams, Early to Roosevelt, Sept. 13, 1934, and Early to Marvin McIntyre, Sept. 13, 1934, Presidential Personal File, Box #1796, Roosevelt Papers.

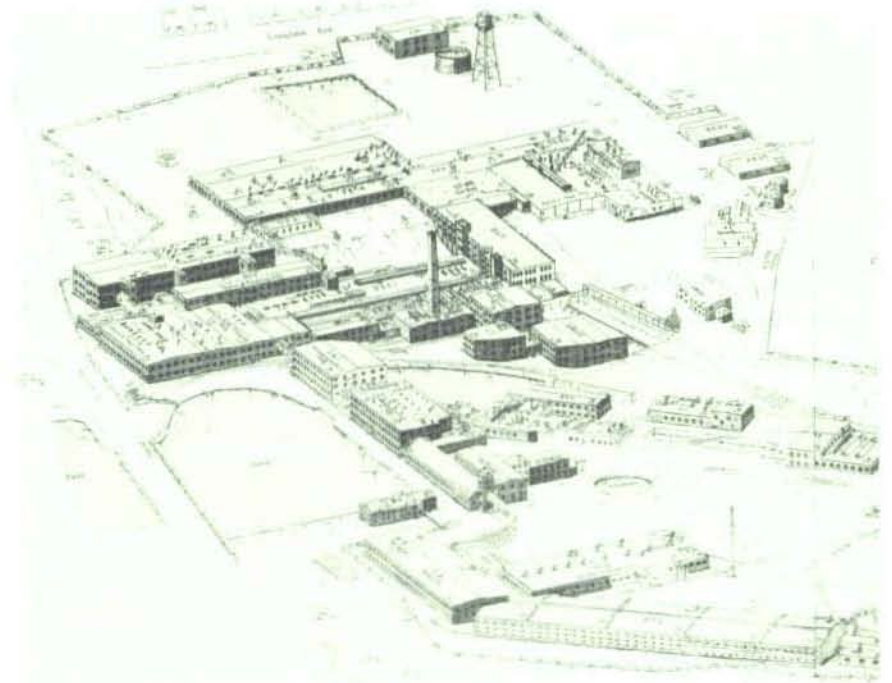
15. Dresser strongly opposed efforts to remove the deputy sheriffs from the riot-torn scene even after both the State Police and the National Guard had been dispatched by Governor Green to Saylesville. The Sayles plant manager also opposed Green's decision on Sept. 10 to replace the superintendent of State Police, who was sympathetic to management, with a more moderate person. *Woonsocket Call*, Sept. 8, 10, 12, 13, 1934; *Providence News-Tribune*, Sept. 7, 10, 11, 1934; Hadcock, "Labor Problems in Rhode Island Cotton Mills," II, 383.

16. *Woonsocket Call*, Sept. 8, 1934.

easing of tention" and word that Theodore Green had announced that "Federal troops request [was] improbable as situation improves."¹⁴

There were many spots in the mill areas of Rhode Island where major physical conflicts *could* have broken out. Why did the riots occur specifically in Saylesville and Woonsocket? The question seems easiest to answer in regard to Saylesville. The Sayles Company's complex, one of the largest in Rhode Island, employed almost two thousand people at the time of the strike. Shutting down a plant of that size would be a major tactical victory for the UTW. Moreover, the management at Sayles was recognized as being strongly anti-union. They vowed to keep their workers on the job. The plant manager, Robert Dresser, like other mill owners, was active in hiring deputy sheriffs to protect the Sayles's property and to serve as the principal law enforcement officials at the outset of the strike. These deputy sheriffs were instrumental in creating the earliest incidents of violence with their heavy-handed use of billy clubs and shotguns on protestors milling about outside the gates to the Sayles plants.¹⁵ Public statements by the Sayles management on September 7, that "they were determined to stop picketing at the plant," surely inflamed an already tense situation. The decision by Sayles officials to open the plant for a full day's work on Saturday, September 8, "in an effort to catch up with time lost on the [Labor Day] holiday," also seemed to be a provocative act.¹⁶

Bird's-eye view of a portion of the Sayles Bleacheries, Saylesville, Rhode Island, as surveyed in 1930. Courtesy of the Rhode Island Historical Society Library (RHi x3 4689).



The steady escalation of conflict and violence in Saylesville from September 10 to September 12 was caused by several factors. Among the most important was the strikers' determination to force the closing of the Sayles complex. The situation was also exacerbated by the efforts of law enforcement authorities to maintain control. The State Police, with a force of only fifty officers in the entire state, were seriously hampered in their attempts to control crowds. All of the law enforcement officials involved in the incident were inexperienced in dealing with large crowds of protestors, and this ultimately led to excessive displays of force by the State Police and the deputy sheriffs.¹⁷ On September 13, Governor Green ordered the Sayles Company plants closed. Significantly, the rioting there all but ceased on the same day, for the union's objective had thus been achieved.¹⁸

The reasons for the disorders in Woonsocket are not as easy to explain. The UTW was not a significant force among textile workers in the city. It had only one local in Woonsocket, representing about seven hundred workers. The dominant organizational force among workers in the Woonsocket mills was the Independent Textile Union (ITU). On the day the strike began, September 4, the mills in Woonsocket were reported to be "operating normally," and workers were "taking no part in the general strike."¹⁹ One should note, however, that the strike was centered initially in the cotton textile industry, where the UTW was strongest, whereas most Woonsocket mills produced woolen and worsted goods, and the ITU's influence centered in those mills. Perhaps, too, the ITU was reluctant to be drawn into the conflict because they possessed at the time a one-year agreement with local manufacturers.²⁰

But there were also other factors in Woonsocket which pushed the workers there towards involvement in the strike. Representatives of the UTW had cautiously approached the ITU a few days before the strike began and had asked for cooperation. Although nothing specific was achieved then, surely the idea of possible participation in the strike was planted in the minds of Woonsocket workers. The woolen industry was faring a bit better than cotton textiles, but already in 1934 Woonsocket mills had closed or were idle for lengthy periods because of the depression. Unemployment was certainly affecting the Woonsocket work force. The ITU, always a more militant and cohesive organization than the UTW, probably found it hard to stand by idly as a great conflict between management and workers engulfed the textile industry. And perhaps, too, the leaders of the ITU viewed participation in the strike as a way to solidify and to expand their organization among workers not yet organized in local mills. Whether planned or not, one of the practical results of the events in Woonsocket was that from 1934 to 1936 the ITU doubled its membership from three to six thousand.²¹

On Wednesday, September 5, the first UTW pickets appeared in the city at the gates of the Guerin mills. The presence of these pickets ap-

17. On the night of Sept. 10, the State Police set up a machine gun, "ready to fire at a moment's notice," at one of the key intersections near the Sayles plant. One newspaper report vividly recorded the role of the deputy sheriffs in provoking the overall violence. The sheriffs, according to this account, "adopted real wartime sniping tactics. . . . Their shooting was cold and calculated. Shots were fired at intervals at such human targets as offered themselves." On Sept. 12, two of three rioters shot by law enforcement officials were found to have been wounded in the back. *Ibid.*, Sept. 11, 1934; *Providence News-Tribune*, Sept. 10, 11, 13, 1934. It should also be noted that Guardsmen suffered many injuries caused by the volleys of rocks and bricks that were tossed into their ranks by strikers and their sympathizers.

18. *Providence News-Tribune*, Sept. 13, 1934; *Woonsocket Call*, Sept. 13, 1934.

19. *Woonsocket Call*, Sept. 4, 1934.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Gerstle, "Mobilization of the Working Class Community," 166.

22. *Woonsocket Call*, Sept. 5, 6, 10, 1934.

23. An account in a Providence newspaper of the first stage of rioting in Woonsocket reported that the rayon plant was "specifically exempted from picketing by the UTW," yet it still became the focus of attacks by the rioters. *Providence News-Tribune*, Sept. 13, 1934. There is, however, no evidence of a disagreement between the ITU and the UTW over strike tactics or of a breakdown in communications between the two unions. Similarly, there is no evidence to suggest that there had been a mix-up in plans.

24. *Woonsocket Call*, Sept. 12, 13, 1934.

parently crystallized a sense of the need for united action among all textile workers in Woonsocket. The next day the ITU decided to hold a strike vote among its rank and file on September 8, and UTW representatives continued circulating throughout the city urging workers to join them. On Saturday, September 8, in a pouring rain, the ITU membership voted by an "overwhelming" margin to leave their jobs. The following Monday the local newspaper reported that "only two Woonsocket mills remained open," which suggests something of the organizational power and effectiveness of the ITU among Woonsocket workers.²²

One of the two mills still operating on September 10, a rayon plant in the Social District, became the focus of intense pressure from both the ITU and the UTW to cease operations. The six hundred workers in this mill belonged to a company union, which helps to explain why they were being harassed. Perhaps the attacks upon the mills in Saylesville during and after September 10 planted similar thoughts in the minds of people in Woonsocket. Perhaps there are other explanations which available historical evidence does not provide.²³ In any event, rocks were thrown at the windows of the rayon mill late in the evening of September 11, and the violence grew sufficiently that night so that the National Guard, already on duty in Saylesville, was called into Woonsocket.

As noted earlier, the downtown area erupted into an orgy of rioting and looting on the night of September 12-13. It seems clear that this crowd action expanded well beyond labor-millowner conflicts. One newspaper account spoke vaguely of a "gang of hoodlums" who mingled with the extremely large crowd and who incited them to attack business establishments entirely unrelated to the textile mills. Unlike the preceding night when the crowd focused its attention solely on the rayon plant and left local police alone, now the guardsmen were also harassed. Even ambulances carrying injured people were attacked by the mob. The riots in Woonsocket raged out of control for a night, and were no longer meaningfully tied to the efforts of textile workers to achieve concrete goals in their great struggle with the millowners. The following day, September 13, as additional National Guard troops entered the city and a form of martial law was imposed, the spasm of violence ended as suddenly as it had begun. Interestingly, the rayon plant, which had been the original focus of attacks, opened again for business, virtually forgotten following the night of destruction.²⁴

The period of the most intense public tumult differed in basic outline in the two communities of Saylesville and Woonsocket. The tensions leading to the rioting in and around the Sayles plant built steadily for more than a week, the function largely of a power struggle between workers and management over whether the textile mill should, and could, be closed. A large-scale public confrontation seemed almost inevitable. The events in Woonsocket grew out of different local labor-management conditions, but the first stage of the strike there focused



Rock throwing on September 12 in the Moshassuck Cemetery, Central Falls, not far from the Sayles Company complex. Photograph courtesy of the Providence Journal Company.

on grievances and utilized tactics not unlike those in Saylesville. But somehow on the night of September 12–13, the union people in Woonsocket, previously disciplined and effective in their efforts to close the textile mills of the city, lost control of the situation and severe rioting spread throughout the downtown business area. Available sources do not fully explain this turn of events, but some suggestions are possible.

The rapid deterioration of the textile industry in Rhode Island and New England, especially in the late twenties and early thirties, probably created conditions which eventually helped to trigger the outbursts in Woonsocket. There were numerous mill closings throughout the region, and, of course, in Woonsocket. Manville-Jencks, one of the largest corporations with plants in the Woonsocket area, began major mill liquidations there as early as 1927. Closings continued into the thirties. In early 1933, for example, the Manville-Jencks Globe Mill, located in the downtown Social District, shut its doors permanently, throwing more than three hundred operators out of work.²⁵ Surely such mill liquidations must have nurtured deep resentments and anxieties among Woonsocket's working class. The Social District was the center of mill activity; it was also where most mill workers lived, their homes nearby or adjoining the plants where they worked.²⁶ The presence of empty mills in the working class neighborhoods stood as daily reminders of the workers' declining economic fortunes, a focus of resentment or reproach. The strike in September 1934 might easily have ignited these smoldering feelings into a moment of intense rioting.

Looting and widespread physical destruction also may have occurred because the general business area of the city was immediately adjacent to many of the large textile factories. Small stores and business establishments suddenly became convenient targets of a very large, undisciplined crowd. In contrast, the Sayles Company complex, located in a small village, was somewhat isolated from any major business cen-

25. *American Wool and Cotton Textile Reporter*, May 23, 1935, 33; *ibid.*, June 13, 1935, 34. My comments here are based on a number of helpful suggestions made by Gary Gerstle. Kate Dunnigan provided essential documentation.

26. *Woonsocket Call*, Sept. 12, 1934. This newspaper report noted that workers' row houses, many of them abandoned, across the street from the rayon plant where the riots began served as a gathering spot and "cover" for those attacking the plant on the night of Sept. 11.

27. Ernest Levine, *Theodore Francis Green: The Rhode Island Years, 1906–1936* (Providence, R.I., 1963), 169–172.

28. The *Woonsocket Call* explicitly linked the events in 1922 to Green's situation in 1934. *Woonsocket Call*, Sept. 8, 1934. The most recent and best analysis of the 1922 strike is Susan E. Jaffe, "Ethnic Working Class Protest: The Textile Strike of 1922 in Rhode Island" (honors thesis, Brown University, 1974).

29. *Providence Journal*, Sept. 12, 1934.

30. *Ibid.*, Sept. 14, 1934.

ter. Thus the strike issues could always remain uppermost in the minds of participants in the disturbances there.

In both Saylesville and Woonsocket the rioting ended quickly, but for somewhat different reasons. When the Sayles plant closed on September 13, a major tactical objective of the strikers had been achieved. In Woonsocket, crowd activity ended quickly on September 13 because it had no meaningful, long-term focus and the brief emotional frenzy had spent itself.

In the rush and swirl of these events public officials struggled to maintain some semblance of order. Governor Green always seemed to be at the eye of the storm. In a state as small as Rhode Island, only the governor had resources, actual and potential, available to deal effectively with the crisis. All parties in the conflict looked to him for support. The governor himself had much at stake. His first term as the chief executive of the state was just ending, and he was running for reelection. The strike occurred just two months before voting was to take place. How Green handled events at this point could greatly affect his chances in November.²⁷ As the potential first two-term Democratic governor in more than a decade, Green mirrored the new urban constituencies reshaping his party nationally under the aegis of the New Deal. His political position was especially dependent upon the votes of the workers in the heavily urbanized areas of the state—precisely where the textile industry was concentrated. Green had been actively involved in Rhode Island politics long before he became governor. Surely he remembered the fate of Governor Emery San Souci (a Republican) in 1922 during another great textile strike in Rhode Island and New England. When violence broke out in that bitterly contested struggle, San Souci mobilized the National Guard to put down the strikers. The public reaction was so unfavorable that San Souci was not renominated and his party lost the governorship in 1924.²⁸

Green moved carefully and cagily. Although he committed the State Police early in the strike, he was very reluctant to mobilize the National Guard. He did so on September 10 only when it became obvious that public order was clearly threatened; to delay longer perhaps would have incurred greater political wrath than to leave things alone. The public announcement of his decision to call in the National Guard was a masterpiece of political fence-straddling. These troops, he said, "were not called out to break the strike or to favor any individuals, but simply to see life and property preserved and order maintained and the rights of employers, workers, and strikers, and especially the general public, respected." Several times Green repeated this theme: the Guard, he insisted, was being used to keep the peace, not to destroy or to end the strike.²⁹

At the height of the crisis Green added one further element to his maneuvers. He charged that the rioting was fomented by Communists and not by any of the principal parties in the strike.³⁰ As noted earlier, a small Communist-oriented union, the National Textile Workers, had

existed since the 1920s, but it possessed minimal influence among the rank and file textile workers in Rhode Island. The UTW vigorously sought to disassociate itself from this union when the strike began.³¹ The Communist Party maintained a small office in Providence and members of the party did participate in strike activities. But their numbers were so small that it is impossible to take seriously the charges that Green made public on September 10. However, any threat to public order from this group, potential or real, was ended on September 13, when the police raided the party's offices in Providence, confiscated materials, and arrested eleven people.³²

By raising the specter of Communist influence, Green was shrewdly capitalizing on the deep-seated fears of the American public towards radical groups in general and, since the end of World War I, the fear of Communism in particular. It was also an effective way to divert public attention from explanations of the rioting which might become politically damaging to him. He also used the charge of Communist influence to strengthen his request for the ultimate intervention of federal troops in Rhode Island.³³

On September 13, Green went before a special session of the Rhode Island Assembly and requested extraordinary emergency powers in order to end the crisis in the state. First, he asked for the power to close immediately any textile mill in the state if social disorders warranted it. Second, he sought immediate passage of a bill to augment the State Police with a thousand volunteers recruited from the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Fortunately, cooler heads and the normal processes of politics prevailed. National leaders of both veterans' organizations adamantly opposed the participation of their members as specially recruited law enforcement officials. The state senate, controlled by the Republicans, refused to enact the governor's proposals. Most significantly, however, on September 13 a hastily called Democratic caucus also opposed Green. Newspaper accounts of this meeting reported that the heaviest opposition came from representatives of "Woonsocket, West Warwick, and Providence," who "actively fought the suggestion to call Federal troops into Rhode Island."³⁴ These localities were, of course, among the key textile centers of the state and also crucial political constituencies to whom Green would have to listen. On the day these unusual political maneuvers occurred, the disorders in northern Rhode Island died away and life seemed to return somewhat to normal. Potential political problems related to the strike seemed to be disappearing.

In retrospect Theodore Green's political image was not badly tarnished by the difficult days in mid-September 1934. In early October 1934, at the state AFL convention, a resolution reached the floor asking for workers to vote against Green in the coming election. This resolution was easily defeated after it was reported to the delegates that "the textile union leaders were satisfied with Governor Green's actions during the strike." Thus on November 6, 1934, Green was reelected gover-

31. Francis J. Gorman, a national vice-president of the UTW, instructed workers as they prepared for the strike to "beware of disruptive elements, . . . particularly beware of Communist intrigue. Keep your ranks free from Communism and Communist trickery. Stamp it out wherever it raises its head. Be stern about this." *Ibid.*, Aug. 30, 1934. See also the comments of Horace Riviere, another national leader of the UTW, in *ibid.*, Aug. 28, 1934.

32. Only one of the eleven people arrested was later proven to be at Saylesville during the time of the disorders. There was no evidence that any of those arrested were involved in the riots in Woonsocket. *Providence Journal*, Sept. 14, 1934; *Providence News-Tribune*, Sept. 14, 1934. The Boston office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, in a formal report, made no mention of Communist influence in the riots which occurred in Rhode Island. Memorandum, J. Edgar Hoover to Attorney General of the U.S., Sept. 15, 1934, copy in Official Files, Box 407-B, "Cotton Textile Strike (1)," Roosevelt Papers.

33. Superficial analysis of the communique between Green, Roosevelt, and the latter's closest advisors on Sept. 12 and 13 might lead one to believe that Green was on the verge of panic over the crisis unfolding in his state. More realistically, however, Green's stridency can be seen as simply his way of applying pressure upon the President to intervene, with the hope that Roosevelt's involvement would ease the pressure on Green. Stephen Early's scepticism about Green's tactics is revealed in his memorandum to Marvin McIntyre, Sept. 13, 1934, Presidential Personal File, Box #1769, Roosevelt Papers. See also telegram, Early to the President, Sept. 14, 1934, Official File, Box 407-B, "Cotton Textile Strike (1)," *ibid.*

34. *Providence Journal*, Sept. 14, 1934; *Providence News-Tribune*, Sept. 14, 1934.

35. *Providence Journal*, Oct. 10, 1934; *Providence Journal Almanac*, 1933, 181; *ibid.*, 1935, 209; Levine, *Theodore Francis Green: The Rhode Island Years*, 173-176.

36. President Roosevelt moved quickly to implement the Winant board's suggestions. He established the Textile Labor Relations Board by executive order on Sept. 26, and he immediately authorized federal studies of wage differentials and the possibility of higher pay scales. "General Textile Strike, 1934," 5-7; *Providence Journal*, Sept. 5, 11, 21, 22, 23, 1934; *Board of Inquiry Report*.

37. Examples of the impact of the TLRB's mediation of discrimination cases against workers in Rhode Island are in *Providence Journal*, Feb. 1, 12, 1935; six letters of W.C. Taylor to Dr. Squires, Nov. 19, 1934, File #4304, Textile Labor Relations Board, NRA, National Archives; and folder entitled "Priscilla Worsted Mill, Thornton, R.I.," File #4297, *ibid.*

38. These developments in Rhode Island are traced in Hadcock, "Labor Problems in Rhode Island Cotton Mills," II, 547-549. For the efforts of the CIO to organize the textile industry in 1937 see *ibid.*, II, 398-402; *Providence Journal*, Apr. 13, 1937; memorandum, Samuel McClurd to "Mr. Kerwin," Mar. 15, 1937, in folder entitled "Textile Workers' Organizing Campaign by CIO," File #4342, Textile Labor Relations Board, NRA, National Archives.

nor by a larger majority than he had received in 1932, and by a total vote only slightly less than that of two years earlier, unusual for an off-year, non-Presidential election. Democratic political hegemony in Rhode Island was beginning.³⁵

The textile strike did not end with the cessation of rioting in Rhode Island but the walkout did seem to lose momentum thereafter. By mid-September national efforts at mediation were beginning to bear fruit. On September 5, President Roosevelt had appointed a Board of Inquiry, chaired by the governor of New Hampshire, John G. Winant, to examine the issues which had led to the strike. The board was instructed to act as an arbiter of the issues if both sides agreed (they did not) and to submit an independent report to the President. The board completed its inquiry and submitted a detailed report to the President on September 20, 1934. The recommendations of the board were as follows: 1) to create a new Textile Labor Relations Board (TLRB) to administer all labor provisions of the cotton, silk, and wool codes of the National Recovery Act, as well as Article 7 (A) of that act (this proposal considerably widened regulatory powers of the federal government over labor relations in the textile industry); 2) to form a special committee under the Textile Labor Relations Board to regulate the use of the much disliked practice of "stretch-out" throughout the industry; 3) to conduct studies by governmental agencies regarding regional wage differentials and to inquire whether higher wages could be supported in the industry without reducing the work force.

The Board of Inquiry, relying on its own recommendations, urged the UTW to call off the strike. The UTW's national strike committee, interpreting the board's report as an "overwhelming victory" for the union, terminated the strike on September 22, 1934.³⁶

Nationwide the long-term effects of the strike can only be described as disappointing for workers in the textile industry. The establishment of the Textile Labor Relations Board, with its powers of review into local instances of job discrimination against workers, did ameliorate some abuses in the immediate aftermath of the strike, especially concerning the rehiring of union supporters. But these efforts were limited and spotty, and the small staff of the TLRB often found it difficult to persuade management to "cease and desist."³⁷ More significantly, the continued depressed state of the textile industry throughout the remainder of the thirties worked against any fundamental improvement in wage structures, working conditions, and the spread of unionization. Not until 1937, under the leadership of the newly formed CIO, were major organizing drives again undertaken throughout the industry. But even these drives were not very successful.³⁸

The events described in this essay point to at least two fundamental historical developments which affected Rhode Island in the early 1930s. First, the strike dramatized the parlous condition of the textile industry, which had served as the foundation of the state's economy for seventy-five years or more prior to 1934. In retrospect we can see that

striking workers were unable to affect in any significant way their declining economic fortunes by walking off their jobs. The events of September 1934 cast into sharp relief the agonies Rhode Islanders were enduring as the flagship industry of their economy began to founder and break apart on the rocks of the depression.

Secondly, and perhaps more positively, the events in the late summer of 1934 revealed with a dramatic flourish the coming to power of a new social and political order in Rhode Island (and in the nation at large). In the tense moments of mid-September, Governor Green's political acumen and agility were tested to their fullest. His reelection in November 1934 confirmed that his maneuvers during the strike had prevented his political coalition from falling apart just before a decisive testing at the polls. Indeed, one might well argue that the testing of Green in September, coupled with his success soon after at the ballot box, were key factors in emboldening him and his supporters to assert absolute Democratic control over the Rhode Island General Assembly through a so-called "bloodless revolution" in January 1935.³⁹ When combined together—the strike as a political event, Green's reelection, and the "bloodless revolution"—these events seemed to put the final seal of approval on Democratic party hegemony in the state. The events also signified the acceptance of the New Deal by the people of Rhode Island, and pointed to the full emergence of an urban, ethnic, working class to a place of social recognition and power alongside the more traditional, rural, Yankee, Republican groups who had controlled the state for so long. Here, perhaps, rested the ultimate historical meaning of the Great Textile Strike of 1934.

39. Scholarly treatments of this event may be found in Matthew J. Smith, "The Real McCoy in the Bloodless Revolution of 1935," *Rhode Island History*, XXXII (1973), 67–85; Levine, *Theodore Francis Green: The Rhode Island Years*, Chap. 9; Ellen Hartwell, "Political Extremism and the Quest for Absolutes in Rhode Island, 1900–1935" (honors thesis, Brown University, 1980), Chaps. 2–4.

Antifederalism and the Perils of Homogenized History: A Review Essay

John P. Kaminski

The Complete Anti-Federalist. Edited by HERBERT J. STORING, with the assistance of MURRAY DAY. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981. 7 vols. \$175.00.)

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Scholars have long studied the debate over the ratification of the Constitution from 1787 to 1790 because it sheds light on the history of the period and helps to explain the Constitution as it was understood by contemporaries. Federalist arguments have been minutely studied; the Antifederalists have also been examined, though their philosophy and motivation have not been understood as well as they might be. The latest contribution to this literature is Herbert J. Storing's *The Complete Anti-Federalist*. The first volume, entitled "What the Anti-Federalists Were For," presents in one hundred pages Storing's analysis of the Antifederalists' philosophy. Volumes II-VI contain a documentary history of the major Antifederalist essays and excerpts from a few speeches. Volume VII consists of a general index.

In his first volume Storing sets out to discover "the underlying unity in the Anti-Federal position." He concludes that Antifederalists thought their opponents threatened four basic values: the law, political stability, the principles of the Declaration of Independence, and the federal relationship between the states and the central government of the Confederation. Antifederalists accused the delegates to the Constitutional Convention of (1) exceeding their state instructions to revise the Articles of Confederation, (2) disregarding the limitations put upon the Convention by Congress, and (3) ignoring the amendment procedures of the Articles that required unanimous approval of amendments by the state legislatures. This wholesale disregard for the existing federal constitution ensured future political instability. Antifederalists believed that the Articles of Confederation embodied the principles of the Declaration of Independence, and that the new Constitution was in reality a counter-revolution in government. The most fundamental charge, of course, was that the Constitution abolished the federalism of the Articles—a system whereby sovereign and independent states bound themselves together in a confederacy established to address a limited range of issues; the new Constitution severely restricted the

power of the states and gave, what Antifederalists believed to be, unlimited powers to the central government.

Antifederalists also attacked the structure of government created by the new Constitution. The President was either too weak or too strong. The Senate was too aristocratic and was dangerously given a portion of executive authority over treaties and appointments. The House of Representatives was too small and was too weak to balance the aristocratic Senate. And finally, the federal judiciary was uncontrollable. Quoting a number of contemporary essayists, Storing also describes Antifederalists as anti-commerce, anti-immigrant, pro-isolationist, and pro-religion.

Storing's description is sometimes enlightening. He makes plain, for instance, the heart of the Antifederalist philosophy by noting that the Antifederalists "agreed that a Union was wanted, that it required an efficient government, and that the Articles of Confederation did not provide such a government. . . . An efficient federal government need not, however, imply one so powerful as that proposed in the Constitution. The broad grants of power, taken together with the 'supremacy' and the 'necessary and proper' clauses, amounted, the Anti-Federalists contended, to an unlimited grant of power to the general government to do whatever it might choose to do" (I, 28).

Despite this strong beginning, Storing never fully develops his analysis of the Antifederalists. He approaches the topic as a political scientist—not as a political historian—and he isolates ideas from their political context. Consequently he takes similar ideas from essayists in different states and combines them to create his view of Antifederalist philosophy. Unfortunately, in the process, Storing tends to simplify and homogenize what is really a mosaic of Antifederalist positions varying throughout the country. Storing seldom sees the differences among Antifederalists, nor does he explain why Antifederalists in one state often disagreed with those in other states. Thus, Storing misses the most important consideration necessary for an understanding of the debate over the Constitution: the debate was actually thirteen separate debates carried on in the context of long-established political rivalries within each state. The generalities Storing makes in describing Antifederalism are, therefore, misleading.

A serious weakness in Storing's methodology is his tendency to define Antifederalism as the obverse of Federalism. But it is not correct to argue, as Storing does, that Antifederalists always took an opposing point of view. Storing compounds this error by allowing Federalists to define what Antifederalism meant. Storing states that Antifederalists were incorrect when they, quoting "Brutus," argued that "in a republic, the manners, sentiments, and interests of the people should be similar. If this is not the case, there will be a constant clashing of opinions; and the representatives of one part will be continually striving against those of the other" (I, 45). Storing rejects the "Brutus" analysis by referring to Federalists who "contended that such a homogeneous republic

was possible only under the primitive, harsh conditions of a precommercial society." (The only specific Federalist disquisition cited to support this position, however, is John Adams's *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*—a work published before the Constitution was even drafted.) Storing thus labels the Antifederalist argument as "the half-hearted criticism of children of the modern commercial world who worried about its implications." In reality, "Brutus" referred to the dangers inherent in combining two such profoundly dissimilar sections as the North and the South under one energetic national government.

Perhaps the greatest disappointment in this volume is Storing's failure to address one of the prime issues in the scholarly analysis of Antifederalism—namely, who were the Antifederalists? Historians have claimed that the struggle over the Constitution was a conflict between commerce and agriculture, creditors and debtors, upper classes and lower classes, coastal areas and backcountry, aristocrats and democrats, and personal property rights and real estate property rights. Trying to identify the composition of the opponents of the Constitution is no easy matter.

In any attempt to identify Antifederalists, several general points must be made. (1) About 90 percent of the population of the United States in 1787 was involved in agriculture. (2) Virtually everyone in the country believed that the Articles of Confederation were too weak and that Congress had to be strengthened. (3) Everyone in the country objected to some portion of the new Constitution. (4) There were several different, easily identifiable stages in the ratification of the Constitution. Within these different stages, the attitude of Antifederalists changed.

The initial stage of ratification occurred during the first five months after the promulgation of the Constitution. During this time Congress transmitted the Constitution to the states, and five states—Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Georgia, and Connecticut—ratified the new form of government. Federalists, riding a wave of strong public support, were adamant in their "take it or leave it" attitude. Antifederalist pleas for more time to consider the Constitution maturely, for limited-term ratification, and especially for a second constitutional convention to consider a bill of rights and other amendments to the Constitution were totally rejected by Federalists. This Federalist adamancy, however, changed dramatically when Massachusetts Federalists realized that they could not get their state convention to ratify the Constitution unconditionally. Therefore, on January 31, 1788, Federalists proposed that the Massachusetts convention recommend to Congress that a bill of rights and structural amendments be added to the Constitution in the manner prescribed by the Constitution itself. In other words, Massachusetts would ratify the Constitution only after going on record favoring a bill of rights and other amendments. These amendments were to be considered by the first federal Congress under the Constitution. This proposal persuaded a minority of the Massachusetts conven-

tion's Antifederalists to combine with Federalists to form the small majority that voted 187 to 168 in favor of ratification. This tactic, although bitterly attacked by some Federalists outside Massachusetts, was the single most important event leading to the eventual ratification of the Constitution, and it heralded the second stage in the ratification process.

The remainder of the second stage of ratification was a period of uncertainty. Federalists suffered their first defeat when the New Hampshire convention adjourned without ratifying the Constitution in February 1788. This shocking event was followed by the overwhelming rejection of the Constitution by a vote of 2,708 to 237 in the Rhode Island state referendum on March 24, 1788. These two setbacks spurred Federalists on in Maryland and South Carolina where the Constitution was adopted in April and May 1788, respectively. The end of the second stage of ratification occurred when New Hampshire and Virginia both acceded to the Constitution in June 1788.

The third stage of ratification occurred during July, August, and September 1788. Even though ten states had already adopted the Constitution, grave doubts remained over whether a viable Union could be formed without New York. Thus, while the New York convention met in July 1788, Congress did almost nothing to implement the new Constitution. Antifederalist delegates composed two-thirds of the New York convention, and they too realized the gravity of the situation. They promised Federalists enough support to obtain ratification if Federalists gave unanimous approval to a circular letter to Congress and the states calling for a second general convention to amend the Constitution. Federalists throughout the country believed that New York's ratification had cost too high a price. But the movement for a second convention never gained much support in other states, and Congress soon passed the Election Ordinance of September 13, 1788, implementing the new Constitution.

The final stage of ratification occurred when the two obstinate states of North Carolina and Rhode Island ratified the Constitution in November 1789 and May 1790, respectively, long after the new government under the Constitution had begun to function.

It is important to keep these four stages of ratification in mind when trying to identify Antifederalists. With each successive stage, the ranks of the Antifederalists dwindled. When Massachusetts Federalists proposed their amendments to the Constitution, many Antifederalists ceased their opposition. Samuel Adams, perhaps the most prominent Antifederalist in Massachusetts, even voted to ratify the Constitution in the state convention. The twin setbacks in New Hampshire and Rhode Island convinced Federalists to ramrod the Constitution through Maryland, but in each of the remaining six states, Federalists followed the Massachusetts example and ameliorated their opponents by agreeing to support subsequent amendments to the Constitution. Once the necessary number of states had ratified, Antifederalists in the remaining states had a difficult choice to make. They could keep their states

1. Clark to Thomas Sinnickson, July 23, 1788, Conarroe Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

2. *Ibid.*

out of the Union—an untenable situation at best—or they could allow their state conventions to ratify with proposed amendments. Once in the Union, they would be in a position to work for the adoption of those amendments.

When all is said and done, the debate over the Constitution must be analyzed as thirteen separate debates conducted within each state with the internal politics of each state playing the predominant role. Events in other states generally had only a secondary effect. The complex interplay of forces within each state determined the course that the debate was to take. Much depended upon how men perceived their state was faring within the Union and under the administration of a particular state political “party.”

New Jersey presents an interesting example. In 1787 the state was in the midst of an economic depression and public creditors in particular were suffering. The state legislature took action to pay the interest and principal of both the state and federal debt held by Jerseymen, thus assuming some of the central government’s responsibilities. Added to the depression of 1786–1787 was the particularly vexing problem Jerseymen faced of paying commercial duties to their neighbors for the foreign goods that were imported into New Jersey via Philadelphia and New York City. The new Constitution seemed to be the answer to New Jersey’s economic plight—the strengthened central government would be able to pay the domestic public debt and import duties would accrue to the central government’s treasury, not to any individual state. No New Jersey politician could publicly oppose such a new form of government, even if he had serious reservations about it. Thus, Abraham Clark, the democratic leader who actively opposed any attempts to centralize authority during the war, did not publicly oppose the Constitution but privately admitted that “I never liked the System in all its parts. I considered it from the first, more a Consolidated government than a federal, a government too expensive, and unnecessarily Oppressive in its Operation: Creating a Judiciary undefined and unbounded.”¹ Clark covertly discussed the Constitution with New York Antifederalists in an attempt to gain economic concessions for his state in exchange for New Jersey’s rejection of the Constitution. Because of the overwhelming popularity of the Constitution in New Jersey, however, Clark’s efforts were unsuccessful. He had to content himself with the hope “that in Case of a general Adoption, the Wisdom of the States would soon amend it in the exceptionable parts.”²

Each of the other twelve states viewed the new Constitution from its own perspective. Rhode Island’s situation was truly unique. In May 1786 the agrarian-minded Country party won control of the state government. The Country party had run on a platform of easing the state’s economic crisis by loaning government-issued paper money to needy farmers. The Mercantile party bitterly fought this inflationary program and its opposition had a disastrous effect as the state’s paper currency depreciated rapidly. The Country party saw a benefit to be derived from this depreciation. The state’s wartime public debt, concentrated in the

hands of a relatively few speculators—most of whom were supporters of the Mercantile party—could easily be abolished by redeeming it with the depreciated currency. Such a policy was begun in March 1787.

The new Constitution, which prohibited state paper money, threatened this ingenious fiscal program. Leaders of the Country party vehemently opposed the Constitution using all the rhetoric of the Antifederalists. Once the redemption of the state debt was completed in 1789 and the new federal government was operating, however, Rhode Island Antifederalist leaders searched for a way to adopt the Constitution without giving the impression that their two-year campaign against it had been contrived. Through several adroit political maneuvers, the Country party managed to adopt the Constitution in May 1790, while still managing to keep control of the state government.³

These two examples, which have both been greatly simplified, illustrate the importance of state politics in the debate over the ratification of the Constitution. Without a thorough awareness of the complex interplay of the political, economic, and social forces operating within each state, no complete understanding of Antifederalist philosophy can be attained.

Volumes II–VI of *The Complete Anti-Federalist* contain a selection of newspaper essays, pamphlets, and speeches. The volumes, averaging about 300 pages each, are generally arranged by state—Volume III, Pennsylvania; Volume IV, Massachusetts and New England; Volume V, Maryland, Virginia, and the South; Volume VI, New York. Volume II contains the objections of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention who opposed the Constitution, the serialized essays by “Cato,” “Centinel,” and “Brutus,” and the two pamphlets by “The Federal Farmer.”

The documents in these volumes are grouped together by series—all of the “Centinel” essays appear together, all of the “Cincinnatus” essays appear together. Given this format, along with Storing’s emphasis on developing a national Antifederalist philosophy, it is difficult to understand why the volumes were arranged on a state by state basis. Even with the state arrangement, scholars interested in an individual state must still examine several different volumes. For instance, the Pennsylvania scholar must examine volumes I, II, III, and VII; the New York scholar, volumes I, II, VI, and VII; and so on.

The selection of documents presents a serious concern. Although the series is entitled *The Complete Anti-Federalist*, it is far from being complete. Perhaps 15 percent of the available Antifederalist material is published. Most of the Antifederalist pamphlets and serialized newspaper essays appear in the volumes. The collection, however, contains few speeches and individual newspaper essays, and only one private letter from an Antifederalist. No documents are included from North Carolina and only one document each from Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Georgia. These omissions are serious. Rhode Island and North Carolina, after all, were the states where Antifederalists had their greatest success. In each of these states there are numerous Antifederalist items

3. John P. Kaminski, “Political Sacrifice and Demise—John Collins and Jonathan J. Hazard, 1786–1790,” *Rhode Island History*, XXXV (1976), 90–98.

4. Papers of the Continental Congress, Item 64, State Papers of New Hampshire and of Rhode Island Providence Plantations, 1775–88, pp. 600–603, National Archives.

5. December 17, 1787, McIntosh Papers, Georgia Historical Society.

6. Gale Papers, Bienecke Library, Yale University.

that would have strengthened Storing's collection. In Rhode Island, for instance, the legislature sent a letter to the President of Congress, dated September 15, 1787, explaining why the state refused to send delegates to the Constitutional Convention. The legislature wrote that it was "actuated by that great principle which hath ever been the Characteristic of this State, the Love of true Constitutional liberty, and the fear we have of making innovations on the Rights and Liberties of the Citizens at Large."⁴ In Georgia, Lachlan McIntosh wrote an insightful letter to John Wereat, future president of the state ratifying convention, explaining why he favored a limited-term, conditional ratification of the Constitution as opposed to an outright rejection or complete ratification.⁵

In Connecticut, Doctor Benjamin Gale delivered an eloquent speech to the Killingworth town meeting on November 12, 1787, outlining his objections to the Constitution in which he forcefully attacked the constitutional provisions protecting slavery and the slave trade: "what Man that has the Feelings of a Man can once Think it Right to send our Ships across the Atlantic to Tear Parents from their Children—Children from their Parents—Husbands from their Wives and Wives from Their Husbands, Stifle one Half of them in their Crowded ships, and the remainder sell as we do our Cattle to Drag out the Remainder of their Lives in Slavery, to be whipt and Lashd Like Horses, without being Struck with Horror, and shudder at the Deed, it might have been sufficient one would have Thought, not to have Said any thing About it, in those Articles of This Blessed Constitution, Planned out for us by the Convention, and Hurried on to be Established with as much Precipitation as though the Salvation of our Souls depended upon Our adopting it *Immediately*. But it Fills my Mind with the Highest Resentment to read that they Lay a restraint upon Congress that they shall not Restrain or Prohibit that Antichristian and Most Abominable and Wicked Practice of Trading in *Bodies and Souls of Men* for the space of 21 Years Yet to Come—They Need not have Extended it to one Half of that Period for my mind for in Less than one Half of that Time if we adopt this System of Government $\frac{3}{4}$ of us will be Slaves to All Intents and Purposes whatsoever without any Trouble or Expencc of sending to Affrica for slaves for it is as Perfect a System of Slavery as I ever saw Planned out by any Nation Kingdom or State whatever—for what have we been Contending, and Shedding our Blood and Wasting our substance, But to support the Natural Rights of Men."⁶ The town of Preston, Connecticut, meeting on November 26, 1787, to instruct its delegates to the state convention, wrote that "it is our ardent wish that an Efficient Government May be Established over these States so constructed that the People may retain all Liberties Previlidges & Immunities Usual & Necessary for Citisans of a free Country and yet sufficient Provision made for carrying into Execution all the Power Vested in Government, we are willing to give up Such Share of our Rights as to Enable Government to Support Defend and Preserve the Rest, it is Difficult to Draw the Line." From the remainder of the instructions it is

obvious that the town of Preston did not believe that the Constitutional Convention had drawn the line properly.⁷

In addition to these errors of omission, Storing has also made some errors of commission. In all but one case, Storing's transcriptions of documents are generally very good. The worst text is supplied for the only letter Storing publishes—William Symmes to Peter Osgood, Jr., November 15, 1787. Storing took his text from a woefully incorrect and incomplete nineteenth-century printed edition even though the original manuscript is readily available at the Maine Historical Society.

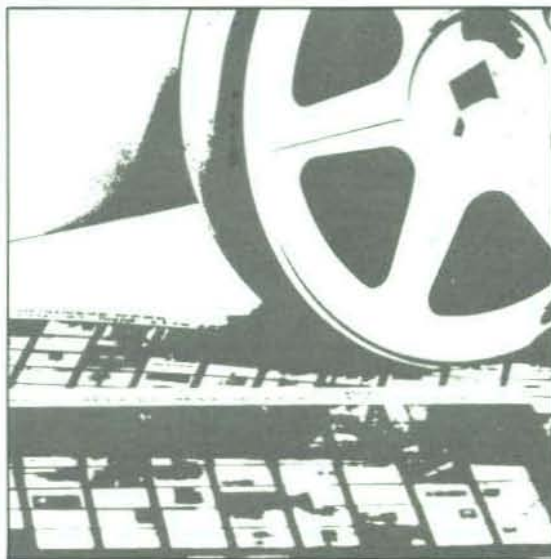
Storing's annotation is often inadequate. Headnotes to a great extent are devoted to summaries of the documents—a practice usually avoided by most editors. Individuals and events mentioned in documents are not identified. Authors of some documents are also not identified, even when evidence exists as to their identities. When Storing does attempt to identify authors, he generally does not provide all of the relevant information. Furthermore, he has made significant misinterpretations that tend to obscure rather than clarify.

One example of this type will suffice. In Storing's headnote to the "Cincinnatus" essays, he states that Richard Henry Lee was "often" cited as the author. To illustrate his point, Storing quotes a correspondent in the *Boston Massachusetts Gazette*, December 7, 1787, who commented that "Richard Henry Lee passed through this town a few days ago, on his way to Virginia. He spent a whole evening in reading his Cincinnatuses." The fact that Lee left Congress in New York City to go home to Virginia by way of Boston seems to have raised no question in Storing's mind. In reality, the *Massachusetts Gazette* reprinted this item from an "Extract of a letter from Wilmington, Delaware, November 17," which was first printed in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* on November 21. Storing goes on to say that the *Salem Mercury*, December 11, 1787, also identified Lee as the author. But Storing does not indicate that the *Mercury's* identification came directly from the "Extract of a letter from Wilmington. . ." which the *Mercury* also reprinted on December 11. The author of the "Cincinnatus" essays was Arthur Lee. Storing relegates one identification of Arthur Lee as the author to a footnote, while he totally ignores another contemporary attribution of Arthur Lee as the author. (This identification was made by Lee's brother-in-law, William Shippen, Jr.) This mishandling of the sources is not atypical in Storing's volumes.

The primary problem faced by Storing and all other historians who have attempted to understand the movement to draft and ratify the Constitution is one of size. Professor Storing's *The Complete Anti-Federalist* represents a great deal of work and thought. Unfortunately the task he set before himself was too great for any one person to accomplish. Only when all of the available documents are collected and published will historians be able to comprehend the movement to draft and ratify the Constitution in every state and then put the thirteen pieces together to get the overall picture.

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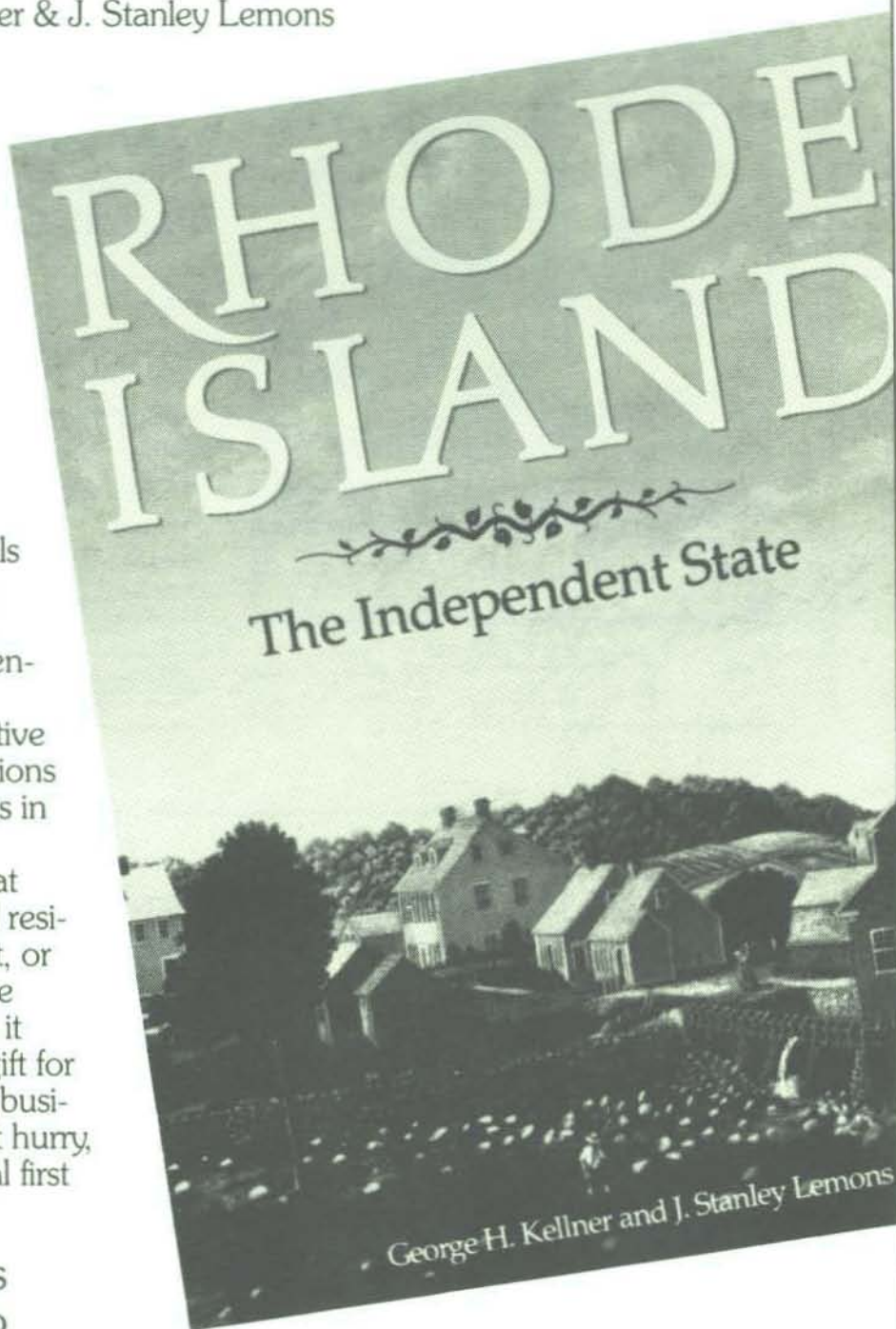
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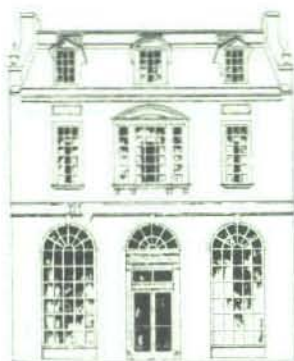
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