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New Orleans, the New South, and the Fight for the Panama Exposition

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
In
History
Public History

by

Victoria Baiamonte

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Abstract

For various reasons, the city of New Orleans has often been ignored in discussions of the New South movement. New Orleans politicians joined the movement during the Progressive Era, much later than other Southern municipal leaders. In becoming a New South city, the Crescent City was launched onto the international trade scene. By an examination of city leaders' efforts to gain federal rights to host an exposition in celebration of the Panama Canal, this study argues New Orleans not only became a New South city, but an international trade entrepôt. Though the exposition efforts failed, the efforts of the city to cultivate its business and hospitality potential served the city well.

New South, New Orleans, Progressivism, Progressive Union, Panama Pacific Exposition, Panama Canal, International Trade

Introduction

In the 1910s, New Orleans bustled with public works projects organized by the city government and controlled by the Democratic Organization, the Choctaw Club. The energetic mayor, Martin Behrman, led efforts to drain the wetlands, improve city sewerage, expand railroads, and clean the streets among other public works. The Choctaw Club worked tirelessly to lift New Orleans out of its post Reconstruction economic stagnation with the cooperation of the Progressive Union, an association of businessmen. The Union combined the politics of the Choctaw Club and the business spirit of the New South thus creating the perfect vehicle for New Orleans to carry out major reforms. These reforms gave the city a new feeling of confidence and helped the city catch up with its New South municipal competitors.[1]

City leaders felt a burgeoning confidence from their successful transformations of the city and aggressively endeavored to boost New Orleans onto the national and international trade scene. The substantial transformation of public works during this period prepared the city for the role of host to an exposition or World's Fair. The construction of the Panama Canal presented the perfect opportunity for political machine to propose the city as the host of an exposition set to showcase the canal. This exposition would provide an opportunity for the New Orleans business community to demonstrate the fact that New Orleans was no longer a cesspool of disease, crime and racial strife; it was now a New South city capable of economic success from trade and tourism. This study suggests that New Orleans entered the ranks of New South cities as a result of the civic improvements in the early twentieth century. An expression of the New South ideology can be found in the failed campaign for the Panama Exposition, which ensured a prominent position for the city among other economic entrepôts of the South. These efforts

[1] Edward F. Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City: New Orleans in the Progressive Era, 1896-1902* (Ruston, Louisiana: McGinty Publications, 1988).

showed a surge in confidence from New Orleans business leaders as they ushered the city into the twentieth century.

Scholars seldom link the city of New Orleans to the New South movement; in fact, the city has been portrayed as a resistor to the movement.[2] The New Orleans community had many issues to work through before it was ready to move past the Reconstruction Era. Political, racial, and economic issues dominated through the end of the nineteenth century. This paper will demonstrate how the New Orleans political machine, through aggressive leadership in technological and economic development, reinvented the city and propelled it onto a level playing field with other major cities not only in the South, but also across the nation by adopting the Progressive agenda.

This study also examines the tactics employed by the Progressive Union to boost New Orleans as the exposition destination.[3] Despite its best efforts, the city failed to gain the rights to host this exposition; however, the Progressive Union put up a good fight.[4] Union leaders created an entire bureaucracy to handle exposition affairs and spread propaganda throughout the city, the country, and foreign countries. Local businesses were invited to participate in planning and investing. From propaganda to city improvements, the Progressive Union revolutionized the attitude of New Orleanians and the use of promotional campaigns in order to garner support to host the exposition. Though their efforts were in vain, their painstaking preparations to gain the rights for the exposition brought them a measure of success in gaining the support of the nation. The city's failure to acquire the Panama World's Fair Exposition provides an interesting case

[2] For a parallel study of New Orleans' involvement in the New South see: Rafael E. Degadillo, "A 'Spanish Element' in the New South: The Hispanic Press and Community in Nineteenth Century New Orleans," (Masters Thesis, University of New Orleans, 2006).
[3] Matthew James Schott, "John M. Parker of Louisiana and the Varieties of American Progressivism," (PhD dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1969).
[4] The Progressive Union was the forerunner to the Chamber of Commerce in New Orleans.

study in New Orleans' struggle to join the New South movement and insinuates that the investigation of policy failures, as well as policy successes, reveals much in the study of cities and their development.

New Orleans and the New South

In studies of the New South and its transition from postbellum and Reconstruction eras to more modern times, scholars include New Orleans awkwardly and infrequently. For example C. Vann Woodward, in *Origins of the New South 1877-1913*, discusses the involvement of New Orleans only in issues of Populism, labor movements and race riots. Woodward's chapter on "The Redeemers" depicts the Louisiana struggle between the Redeemers (Southerners with an agenda to rid their government of carpetbaggers) and the carpetbag organization, the Lottery. In 1877, Louisiana had two governors and two state legislatures—one rogue and the other legitimate. Woodward further argues that Redemption was "a new phase of the revolutionary process begun [in the South] in 1865."[5] In fact, it would take over thirty years from the end of the Civil War for New Orleans to organize its political arena. Fascination with the Civil War, romanticizing of the Old South, and the race for political power within the state distracted the city's political leaders from developments in other Southern cities—most importantly the New South business movement.

Historian Michael A. Ross hones in on the shortcomings of New Orleans policymakers and politicians in his article, "Resisting the New South: Commercial Crisis and Decline in New Orleans, 1856-85." He shows how the city's failure to modernize and capitalize on industry "compounded the problems the city faced as a result of structural changes in the postbellum economy, and helps to explain the late nineteenth-century economic decline of what was once

[5] C. Vann Woodward, *The Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 22.

the South's most prosperous city."[6] Ross describes how city business leaders believed that the geographic location of the city would sustain New Orleans as an economic capitol; the Mississippi River served New Orleans well before the Civil War and was expected to continue to do so. These business leaders employed dilatory tactics in terms of expansion of interior trade via railroad and general modernization of the city infrastructure. Eventually, New Orleans fell behind the northern cities that expanded their trade contacts via rail connections to interior cities and opened their markets to new opportunities.[7]

Ross also claims there existed a backlash toward northern inspired reforms from carpetbaggers and their supporters.[8] He argues that New Orleans policymakers inflicted long-term damage to the city's economy and created a difficult atmosphere in which to adopt political reform. For example, Ross mentions the Battle of Liberty Place, "a coup d'etat which caused the Republican governor to flee, and the President to send federal warships and troops to restore order."[9] Ross writes "when New Orleans's Conservatives regained political control of the city in 1877 after the collapse of Reconstruction, they would be haunted by the economic consequences of their 'rule or ruin' strategy."[10] By 1884, the political and economic atmosphere of the city was so unorganized that the Cotton Centennial Exposition or World's Fair was an economic failure. Ross claims that local business leaders and even the President of the Cotton Exchange antagonized exposition organizers by criticizing the project. The community at large believed that the city could not accommodate the crowd a World's Fair would draw. The lack of support

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[6] Michael A. Ross "Resisting the New South: Commercial Crisis and Decline in New Orleans, 1865-85," *American Nineteenth Century History*, vol. 4, No. 1, (Spring 2003): 1-76.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Carpetbaggers were Northerners who came to the South for personal gain during the Reconstruction Era.
[9] Michael A. Ross, "Resisting the New South," 65.
[10] Ibid, 66-67.

from the community, the inherent anti-Northern attitude of New Orleanians, and inclement weather tarnished the city's reputation.[11]

New Orleans was slow to change and late to change. Edward Haas states that

> [B]y 1900, most of the components of the Louisiana conservative oligarchy that had controlled state politics in the last quarter of the nineteenth century were gone or in sharp decline. The Louisiana Lottery Company was already dead. Major Edward A. Burke, the lottery's chief political manipulator, had taken refuge in Honduras. Disfranchisement had reduced the power of the big planters who no longer had pliant black voters to control.[12]

In the late 1890s, the conservative Democrats of New Orleans organized into one of the most powerful political machines of the South—the Choctaw Club. This organization reflected many of the typical business-oriented Progressive policies employed by Southern leaders to ensure white supremacy and disfranchisement of black voters subtly and insidiously while placating the capitalist tendencies of business leaders.[13] Louisiana politicians John Fitzpatrick and Martin Behrman were at the forefront of this political machine of New Orleans. These men manipulated the voting population by disfranchising the black vote and pushing the immigrant vote.[14] As historian George Tindall explains this phenomenon, "whatever the motivations of its authors, the consequence of disfranchisement was to stabilize and secure the Solid South."[15] New Orleans was not only joining the progressive movement that took hold of the country, she was joining the New South by ensuring conservative Democratic leadership consistent with the Solid South.

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[11] Ross' argument is confirmed by: Thomas D. Watson, "Staging the 'Crowing Achievement of the Age': Major Edward A. Burke, New Orleans and the Cotton Centennial Exposition," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, vol. 25, no. 3, (1984), accessed March 15, 2011, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4232358?seq=8.
[12] Edward Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*, 100.
[13] Matthew James Schott, "John M. Parker of Louisiana and the Varieties of American Progressivism" (PhD dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1969).
[14] Edward Haas, *Political Leadership in a Southern City*.
[15] George Tindall, *The Persistent Tradition in New South Politics*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 68.

Samuel Shepherd argues that Louisiana and New Orleans have been largely ignored by scholarship dedicated to progressives, especially scholarship with a national perspective. He claims "anyone in pursuit of Louisiana progressives will find ample evidence of reforms in public education, agriculture education, child labor laws, settlement house activity, and public health campaigns."[16] Recent historiography demonstrates that the dichotomy of machine politics and reformers as represented in older scholarly works was not so much disjunctive as it was conjunctive. Progressive leaders like Mayor Martin Behrman cooperated with social change, albeit change that largely ignored race, gender, and the progressive obsession with morality, and demonstrated that New Orleans leadership had joined the Progressive movement. Shepherd adds, "even as the mayor and his critics campaigned against each other, they still managed to create a strange type of synergy that produced valuable social reforms, most notably in the areas of public health and education."[17]

New Orleans growth was two sided. On one side major reforms, such as public works, improved the city in various ways. The other side exposed the traditional southern values still held by New Orleans leadership through the disfranchisement of the black vote and the disregard of the women's movement.[18] Under this progressive leadership, New Orleans underwent changes geographically, economically, and socially. The sum of these changes amounted to

[16] Samuel Shepherd, "In Pursuit of Louisiana Progressives," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol. 46, No. 4, (Autumn, 2005),: 401, accessed March, 8 2011, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4234136.
[17] Ibid, 404.
[18] Robert Dupont, "Progressive Civic Development and Political Conflict: Regular Democrats and Reformers in New Orleans, 1896-1912," (PhD dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1999).; Matthew James Schott, "John M. Parker of Louisiana."; Samuel Shepherd, "In Pursuit of Louisiana Progressives."

modernization of the city as it entered the twentieth century.[19] The development of New Orleans wetlands, the advancement of the education system, the expansion of the railroad, and the efforts the rid the city of disease clearly demonstrate the city's enthusiasm to join its peer cities as a modern center of business.

New Orleans Expands its Interests

The New Orleans leadership embraced many aspects of the New South philosophy in the first decade of the twentieth century. For example, business and trade expansion highlighted the city's modernization and alignment as part of the New South. Constrained by the city's geography, New Orleans' boosters realized their failure with the railroads and looked to the historical advantages of the Mississippi River and the port.[20] Transportation technologies such as railroads presented unfavorable challenges in New Orleans. The topography of the city proved a difficult environment on which to build tracks, but the city still maintained its position as a necessary east-west and north-south rail trade junction. Laying tracks was difficult and expensive, but essential to growing trade. City business leaders sought economic recovery by increasing the river trade by expanding the docks and providing for railroad access to river trade. The combination of water way and rail was necessary for economic growth, especially the distribution of crops, natural resources and other products.[21]

New Orleans business leaders looked south to Mexico and other Latin countries for trade, which eventually proved lucrative for the city. As early as the 1850s,

> New Orleans merchants envisioned the construction of a Central American canal to open Latin American markets to the Mississippi Valley and redirect traffic to

[19] See chapter one: Richard Brown, *Modernization: The Transformation of American Life 1600-1865* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976).
[20] Ross, "Resisting the New South."
[21] The Industrial Canal, though it opened much later in 1923, demonstrated part of the system of canals used to facilitate the distribution of trade within the city.

> New Orleans. Still, in 1860, New Orleans ranked as the second port of the United States six percent of the country's total import tonnage passed through the city.[22]

In the first decade of the 1900s, the Southern Pacific Railroad, which linked New Orleans to San Francisco, dissipated much of the Mississippi River trade. Instead of shipping goods from the port of New Orleans to San Francisco by the complicated process of boat to donkey led cart across Mexico or Panama to boat again, the railroad provided a straightforward journey. Trade with Latin America became essential to maintaining the success of the port of New Orleans. Through the toil of Minor Keith and the United Fruit Company in the late 1800s, New Orleans began to receive regular shipments of bananas from Central America. This trade relationship augmented American business leaders' desire to build railroads across the isthmus of Central America to ease trade between American east and west coast cities. However, out of the construction of railroads came an unexpected commodity trade—the banana. Without railroads in Central America, there would have been fewer bananas, and without bananas, there would have been fewer railroads. The two were symbiotic. As a result of these ventures, the port of New Orleans received additional business as the principal entrepôt for the banana trade. The construction of railroads in Central America boomed because "all the Central American republics, at one time or another, dreamed of building ocean-to-ocean railroads, taking advantage of the narrowness of the continent."[23]

Minor Keith, a Brooklyn businessman, along with his uncle, Henry Meiggs, planned for the construction of a Costa Rican railroad from San Jose to Limon. Meiggs negotiated a contract with Costa Rican President Thomas Guardia in late 1870, and received permission to build.

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[22] Even though the city lagged behind the Southern growing centers of trade such as Mobile and Savannah due to railroad expansion towards the interior of the United States and Northern east west expansion, the port still ranked high. Matthew Schott, "John M. Parker of Louisiana."
[23] Stacy May and Galo Plaza, *Seventh Case Study, The United Fruit Company in Latin America* (National Planning Association, 1958), 9.

Constructing the railroad presented a long and arduous task. Plans for the tracks set the railroad straight through the jungle. Minor found some of his labor force in New Orleans. He had learned of the success of bananas from Panama selling in New York and decided he would defray the cost of the railroad by selling the fruit in New Orleans. In 1874, Keith negotiated a deal with the Frank Brothers Banana Company for shipments of bananas to New Orleans. The first shipment on the *Meiggs* held 250 bunches, and returned about a dollar per bunch. Keith's banana plantations would eventually spread to Nicaragua, Panama, and Columbia. Keith later partnered with Bostonian Andrew Preston, owner of the Boston Fruit Company. The Boston Fruit Company and Keith's business merged to become the United Fruit Company. With the profits accrued from banana sales, Keith finished the railroad in 1890.

New Orleans became the gateway for the banana trade, "Latin American exports of fruit to the United States expanded rapidly during the first decade of the [twentieth] century, and New Orleans was a natural point of entry."[24] In 1908, The United Fruit Company projected an increase in banana imports from 4,000,000 bunches per annum to 8,000,000.[25] Chronicler Charles Wilson claims that New Orleans was the "banana capital of the world."[26] According to Philip Werlein, President of the Progressive Union in 1910, the port of New Orleans had "become one of the most important banana ports in the world by reason of the introduction of modern methods of handling bananas."[27] With the growth of the banana trade, the port technologically advanced and economically grew. In 1910, the Progressive Union complained that the docks, in spite of recent improvements, were still too small to handle the volume of trade

[24] Robert Dupont, "Progressive Civic Development and Political Conflict," 235.
[25] Ibid, 241.
[26] Charles Wilson, *Empire in Green and Gold: The Story of the American Banana Trade* (New York: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1968), 72.
[27] "Annual Address of President Philip Werlein of the New Orleans Progressive Union," Chamber of Commerce Collection (66-3).

the port attracted. The Union subsequently worked with the Dock Board to expand and modernize port facilities.

There were many New Orleans-based banana companies, including the Vaccaro Brothers, J. L. Philips and Company, The Southern Pacific Steamship Company, Orr and Laubenheimer, Weinberger Steamship Company, the Caribbean Banana Company, Standard Fruit, and the Snyder Banana Company. Minor Keith eventually took over the Snyder Banana Company and their assets in Bocas del Toro, Panama. Out of the many companies serving New Orleans, there was occasionally a merger like United Fruit. But relations among some of these companies became so toxic that they tended to fracture. For example, Jake Weinberger of Weinberger Steamship Company also had the Bluefields Banana Company, along with the New Orleans-Belize Royal Mail Steamship Line, the Oteri and Company, and J.B. Camors merged to create the New Orleans Banana Importing Company. The newly formed importing company immediately failed, the *Times-Picayune* stated, 'because of friction among members.'"[28]

The activities of the banana companies indicate an increasing focus of New Orleans on international trade, in particular trade with Central America. Bananas were not an isolated case; other commodities augmented international trade. The lumber industry also accounted for a large portion of trade through the port of New Orleans. Before the 1880s, the lumber trade in Calcasieu in Lake Charles Parish developed a route between New Orleans and Mexico. This trade waned slightly when the Southern Pacific Railroad extended into Southwest Louisiana because rail trade cost significantly less than water.[29] In spite of this temporary reduction in

[28] Ibid, 96. See also Wilson, *Empire in Green and Gold*.
[29] Donald J. Millet, "The Lumber Industry of "Imperial" Calcasieu: 1865-1900," first published in *Louisiana History*, 7 (1966) reprinted in Thomas A. Becnel, editor, *Agriculture and Economic Development in Louisiana*, Vol. 16 in Glenn R. Conrad, General Editor, *The Louisiana Purchase*

trade, Anna Burns contends, "the golden age for lumbering in Louisiana was during the period 1900-1920."[30]

According to the findings of James W. Porch and Fred Muller published in the *Panama via New Orleans: Report of Board of Trade Committee Made from Personal Observations*, New Orleans had a large trade business with Panama and other Central American countries. The city's location provided Central America with a market for its goods in cities along the Mississippi River. Ships brought coffee to New Orleans and returned to Panama empty. The value of goods imported to the United States via Panama amounted to $316, 636 over the course of six months in 1904.[31] "Carts, trucks, cement, flour, wheat, hams, rubber, lard, canned goods, oars, petroleum, phonographs, rosin, turpentine, and typewriting machines" were amongst those items shipped into the United States from Panama.[32] Porch understood the importance of cementing trade ties with Latin America for the city. As early as 1908 he argued, "that New Orleans would benefit more from a steamship line through the canal than it would from an exposition."[33]

Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History, Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1997: 153-156.

[30] Anna C. Burns, "The Gulf Lumber Company, Fullerton: A View of Lumbering During Louisiana's Golden Era," first published in *Louisiana History*, 7 (1966) reprinted in Thomas A. Becnel, editor, *Agriculture and Economic Development in Louisiana*, Vol. 16 in Glenn R. Conrad, General Editor, *The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History*, Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1997: 167-175.

[31] $316,636 amounts to $7,463,846.05 in 2009. S. Morgan Freedman, "The Inflation Calculator," accessed March 11, 2011, http://www.westegg.com/inflation/.

[32] James W. Porch and Fred Muller, *Panama via New Orleans: Report of Board of Trade Committee Made From Personal Observations* (1904), 27, Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana. The Historic New Orleans Collection will be abbreviated as HNOC throughout the rest of the document.

[33] John Wilds, *James W. Porch and the Port of New Orleans* (New Orleans: International Trade Mart,1984), Special Collections, Earl K. Long Library, New Orleans Louisiana, 94.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, in anticipation of the construction of the Panama Canal and the potential for vast amounts of merchant vessels sailing through the port of New Orleans, organizations such as the Dock Board and the Corps of Engineers worked to modernize the entrepôt. The docks needed to be expanded and updated. Bigger wharves and terminals were built to accommodate larger shipments. The Mississippi River was too shallow for barges and large sea vessels to navigate, so the Corps of Engineers began the dredging of the Mississippi in the first decade of the 1900s.

It soon became apparent that manufacturing materials necessary to the construction of the Panama Canal in the United States and shipping these materials to Panama would be fiscally advantageous to New Orleans. This meant guaranteed business for most southern ports, especially New Orleans. However, in 1908 the Frye Bill passed in Congress.[34] This bill provided that the shipment of all construction materials destined for Panama must be on American vessels. New Orleans business owners along with other southern port town businessmen fought the bill since most, if not all, vessels in the Gulf of Mexico belonged to foreign powers.

Campaign for the World Exposition

The idea of business progressivism in New Orleans began with this fight for the World's Fair. New Orleans was a natural trans-shipping port to Central America, so city business leaders proactively contrived various means of accentuating the Crescent City's assets. With all the trade and business invested in Latin American countries, New Orleans' policymakers, considering the city a premier port town in the United States, pursued any and all opportunities to cement ties with those countries. Such an opportunity arose with the anticipation of the completion of the

[34] "American Ships to Panama: Passage of Frye Bill Regarded as Step Toward Ship Subsidy," *New York Times*, March 14, 1908, http://www.newyorktimes.com (accessed February 21, 2011).

Panama Canal and the possibility of hosting a World's Fair to celebrate the new waterway.[35] Hosting a World's Fair was an honor for a city. It provided a chance for the city to demonstrate its economic prowess, social standing, and loyalty to its trade allies. Hosting an exposition would bring publicity to the city, highlight connections with Latin America, and develop land within the city to be used as fairgrounds.

New Orleans was not the only city that aspired to host the anticipated celebration. In early 1910, San Francisco and San Diego had similar ambitions. A political and public relations competition began. San Diego dropped out of the race rather early and left a bitter battle to be fought between San Francisco and New Orleans for the rights to the exposition. New Orleans and San Francisco lobbied in Washington D.C. not only because the federal government had an enormous interest in the development of the Panama Canal, but also the potential of financial assistance from Washington. The fight between leaders of the two cities became more and more heated with each battle fought, not only lobbying in Congress but also through extensive propaganda campaigns in newspapers and pamphlets.

Leaders of New Orleans energetically organized their campaign to become the exposition site. The Choctaw Club orchestrated the exposition efforts similar to the way it ran political

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[35] For information on Panama U.S. Relations and canal construction see: Michael L. Conniff, *Panama and the United States: The Forced Alliance* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1992).; Lawrence O. Ealy, *Yanqui Politics and the Isthmian Canal* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State Press, 1971).; Walter LaFeber, *The Panama Canal: The Crisis in Historical Perspective Updated Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).; Thomas M. Leonard, *Panama, the Canal and the United States: A Guide to Issues and References* (Claremont: Regina Books, 1993).; William D. McCain, *American Imperialism: Viewpoints of United States Foreign Policy, 1898-1941* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1970).; G. A. Mellander, *The United States in Panamanian Politics: The Intriguing Formative Years* (Danville: The Interstate Publishers, Inc., 1971).; Jean Gilbreath Niemeier, *The Panama Story* (Portland: Metropolitan Press, 1968).; Matthew Parker, *Panama Fever: The Epic Story of the Building of the Panama Canal* (New York: Anchor Books, 2009).

campaigns. Its activities paralleled those of the Progressive Union, which delegated tasks concerning the exposition to various subcommittees at their disposal. In particular, the World's Panama Exposition Company, which formed in July of 1910 and thereafter became a subcommittee of the Union, and the Merchants and Manufacturer's Bureau took on projects related to the exposition effort. The Progressive Union designed a public relations campaign centered around grand networking schemes. Part of that campaign called upon members of the Progressive Union to capitalize on their connections and "enter into correspondence with kindred organizations in Louisiana and throughout the United States to secure their co-operation in having the exposition held in this city."[36] These organizations promoted an image of the city as the logical geographical point to host this exposition.

State politicians also wanted to prove that Louisiana was capable of competing with other major cities in the country. They needed New Orleans to host the exposition to boost both the city's and the state's economic potential. Governor Jared Sanders did not belong to the New Orleans machine, but his involvement in the exposition efforts, "revealed that political factions could join together on issues they perceived as important," at the municipal and state level. Governor Sanders traveled to Washington D.C. more than once to rally support for New Orleans.[37]

The governor was not the only benefactor for New Orleans. The Progressive Union also enlisted local businessmen to promote political support. In an effort to raise enthusiasm throughout the state, Leon C. Simon ventured along the rail routes of the state in order to gain the support of the rest of the state. The Progressive Union called his trip the Trade Boosters' Trip.

[36] Progressive Union papers, Chamber of Commerce Collection, Series II N.O. Progressive Union scrapbook, Jan 13 1910-Jan 4, 1911, Special Collections, Earl K. Long Library, New Orleans, Louisiana.
[37] Robert Dupont, "Progressive Civic Development and Political Conflict," 315.

Simon stopped at almost every Louisiana train station promoting the city of New Orleans for the exposition. This trip facilitated positive relations between many state parishes and New Orleans. When the Progressive Union pushed a state tax to raise funds for the exposition, it had the support of much of the state partially thanks to efforts such as Simon's campaign.

Prominent men such as Governor Sanders, Mayor Martin Behrman, Charles Janvier, Philip Werlein, James Porch, and M.B. Trezevant worked with the Progressive Union and therefore took on much of the responsibility of the public relations campaign to host the exposition.[38] They sent letters to members of congress across the country. They invited President Taft to use the port of New Orleans as a gateway to Panama. These men even negotiated competitive rail rates on lines entering the city to facilitate tourism. The Merchant's and Manufacturer's Bureau, at the request of the Progressive Union leadership, sent a delegation to the Yucatan to guarantee cooperation for New Orleans from Guatemala, Panama, and Costa Rica. New Orleans business leaders extended the campaign for the exposition beyond the boundaries of the U.S. They solicited support in bilingual newspapers, cemented banking connections and negotiated terms with foreign presidents.[39]

In addition to spreading propaganda, the Progressive Union had to prove to the country that New Orleans no longer battled epidemics of tropical diseases. The city had to overcome its reputation from yellow fever epidemics. Due to epidemics of the 1800s and early 1900s, ships leaving the port were often subjected to periods of quarantine. Some ships bypassed the port merely to avoid the inconvenience of time spent in quarantine as well as the disease itself. The

[38] M. B. Trezevant was the Secretary Manager of the Progressive Union.
[39] "Special Report of Secretary-Manager on Central American Trip, May 28-June 24, 1910 to President and Board of Directors, New Orleans Progressive Union." Chamber of Commerce Collection, Series II. N.O. Progressive Union scrapbook, Special Collections, Earl K Long Library, New Orleans, Louisiana.

major cities of the United States took notice of New Orleans when work began on the reclamation of more than 34,000 acres of wetlands, the areas now known as Lakeview, Gentilly, and the old Milneburg area, to create suburbs and farmland within the city limits. According to an article in the *New York Times*, as of 1910, "for the first time in history New Orleans will possess suburbs."[40] The city inevitably grew in terms of population and economy because of the projected productivity of the reclaimed lands. The publicity surrounding such drainage feats helped the city shed its reputation as a pit of disease, thus encouraging more port business. Improvements in public works thanks to the new drainage system eventually eradicated the disease. After 1905, no widespread outbreaks of yellow fever were recorded.

The city had many supporters for the exposition nationwide, especially among trade commissions, politicians, export businesses and people in the lower Southern and Mississippi Valley states. New Orleans boosters employed many schemes to gain support for the celebration. They wrote letters to politicians at municipal and state levels, distributed post cards and pamphlets, and conducted push polls in some states. For example, in response to a postal card vote in Nebraska, which Nebraskans were given to vote on which city they thought best suited to host the exposition, New Orleans was cited as the logical geographic location for the exposition. A. L. Krause of West Point, Nebraska, demonstrated his enthusiasm for New Orleans in a statement made to the postal card vote: "Our preference is New Orleans for reasons too numerous to mention. For a World's Fair, San Francisco is too far from the center of

[40] "New Orleans Plans for Great Suburbs," *New York Times*, June 12, 1910, http://www.newyorktimes.com (accessed November 11, 2009).

population. When we attend the Exposition we want to visit Panama, Porto Rico and Cuba on the same trip, therefore we are for New Orleans."[41]

J. H. Grosvenor of Aurora, Nebraska, also supported New Orleans. According to Grosvenor, the city was booming in trade, economy, and tourism and therefore, it was the best place to host an event such as the Panama Exposition. The postal card vote in Nebraska revealed great enthusiasm towards New Orleans with many comments akin to those of Grosvenor and Krause. Reasons for Nebraskan support were straightforward: trade, cost, geographic proximity to Panama, and center of larger population. The comments collected in the postal vote reflected the strengths of New Orleans' proposal. It verified New Orleans as the logical point.

On November 9, 1910, New Orleans Mayor Martin Behrman penned a letter to Mayor A. B. Dalthrop of Volga, South Dakota, seeking additional out of state support. Mayor Behrman asked Dalthrop if he were attending the "Convention of The Lakes-to-the-Gulf Deep Waterways Association" and if so, would he help spread "the gospel" of New Orleans as the "logical point."[42] Berhman explained that, "[W]ithin 500 miles of New Orleans there are 17,500,000 people as against only 2,000,000 in that radius from San Francisco; and within 1,000 miles of New Orleans there are 65,000,000 people as against only 6,000,000 people in that radius from San Francisco."[43]

In order to garner more outside support, New Orleans boosters executed public relations operations surprisingly sophisticated for the time. The leaders of the campaign printed and distributed elaborate letterhead, maps, and pictures on a massive scale. Letters and postal card votes were not the only means of gaining support. A series of illustrative cards circulated during

[41] Porch, James W., and Fred Muller, *Panama via New Orleans: Report of Board of Trade Committee Made From Personal Observations*, 1904, HNOC.
[42] Martin Behrman, Letter to A. B. Dalthrop Volga, November 9, 1910, HNOC.
[43] Ibid.

the years 1910 to 1915 exemplified many of the arguments by boosters that New Orleans should be named host to the 1915 Panama Exposition. An illustrative card entitled, "New Orleans-Center of the World!" claimed that New Orleans was the geographic center of population, navigation, production, and the western hemisphere.[44] The card's vignette showed the distance from New Orleans to Panama as shorter than the distance between San Francisco and Panama, thus making New Orleans the logical geographic location to host the celebration. The phrase "the logical point" became the slogan for New Orleans. New Orleanians pushed the geographic advantages of the city and its superior ability to entertain visitors en masse.

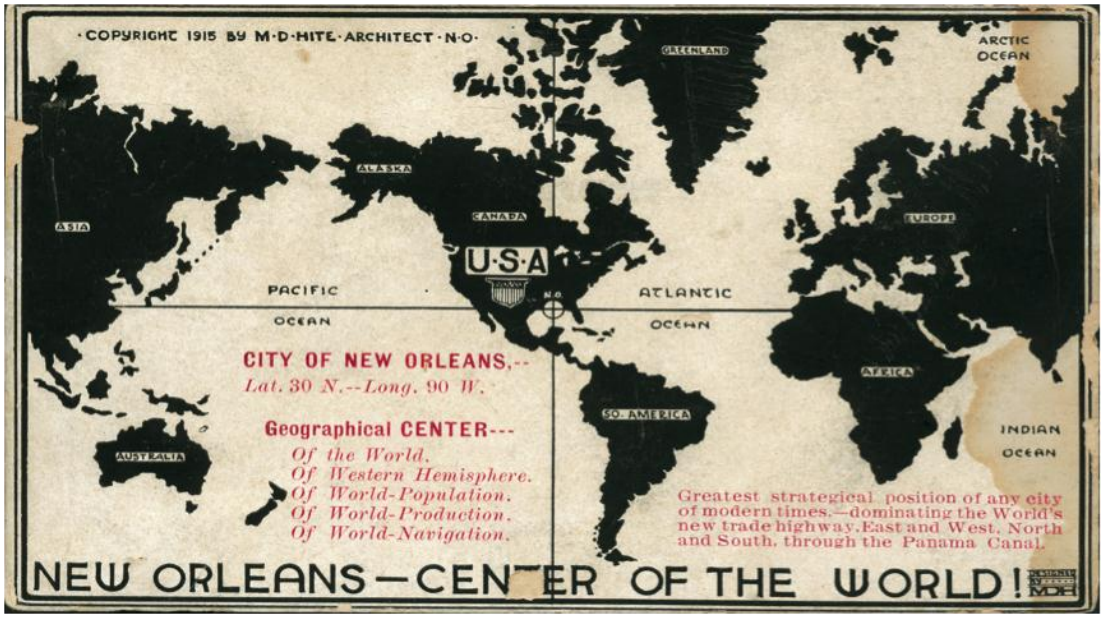

Figure 1. New Orleans—Center of the World! Picture from The Williams Research Center Historic New Orleans Collection.

Promoters displayed the "logical point" slogan on another postcard containing a visual representation of Mayor Behrman's argument to Mayor Dalthrop. This postcard showed that New Orleans attempted to gain the support of other states. It depicted two sets of circles, one around New Orleans, and the other around San Francisco. Each circle was labeled with the

[44] New Orleans—Center of the World postcard, M.D. White, c. 1915, HNOC.

population count within the radius from the respective points of interest. According to the postcard, it was clear that a densely populated area surrounded New Orleans, while San Francisco had little population in its vicinity. This postcard also carried an underlying tone of "southern hospitality." On this card the phrase "we can take care of you" accompanied the "logical point" slogan.[45] In his 1911 speech before the House Committee on Industrial Arts and Expositions, Governor Sanders of Louisiana pleaded with Congress to grasp an understanding of New Orleans' desire to entertain.

Figure 2. Map showing New Orleans as the "Logical Point" for 1915 World's Fair Exposition. Picture from The Williams Research Center Historic New Orleans Collection.

[45] Curt Teich Co., Map Showing New Orleans as the "Logical Point" for 1915 Worlds Fair Exposition, Lipsher Specialty Co., ca. 1910, HNOC.

Yet another postcard displayed an advertisement for the St. Charles Hotel in the city. This postcard acted as more than propaganda for the campaign for the exposition. The picture showed that if you were to stay at the St. Charles, you will see all the sights of New Orleans from a convenient location and you will leave with lasting impressions. Also, according to the postcard the weather was gorgeous and mild in New Orleans, a sentiment reflected in the newspapers, demonstrating how ideal a location the city was for a celebration and for visitors. This postcard contained no message of the logical point slogan; it was merely an advertisement for the hotel and the city. However, this was not to say that this postcard held no significance to the fight for the Panama Exposition.[46] Although, the postcard does not mention the exposition, it drives home the message of the potential merriment available for visitors to New Orleans.

[46] The St. Charles Hotel served as the site for a business meeting that yielded $250,000 for a health campaign in 1905, thus providing evidence that New Orleans was good for the money. "Exposition of Big Ideas Indorsed [sic] At Mass Meeting Eloquent Leaders Address Govenor Hall, Mayor Behrman." *Times Picayune* published as *The Daily Picayune*, December 10, 1913, America's Historical Newspapers http://infoweb.newsbank.com (accessed November 3, 2009).

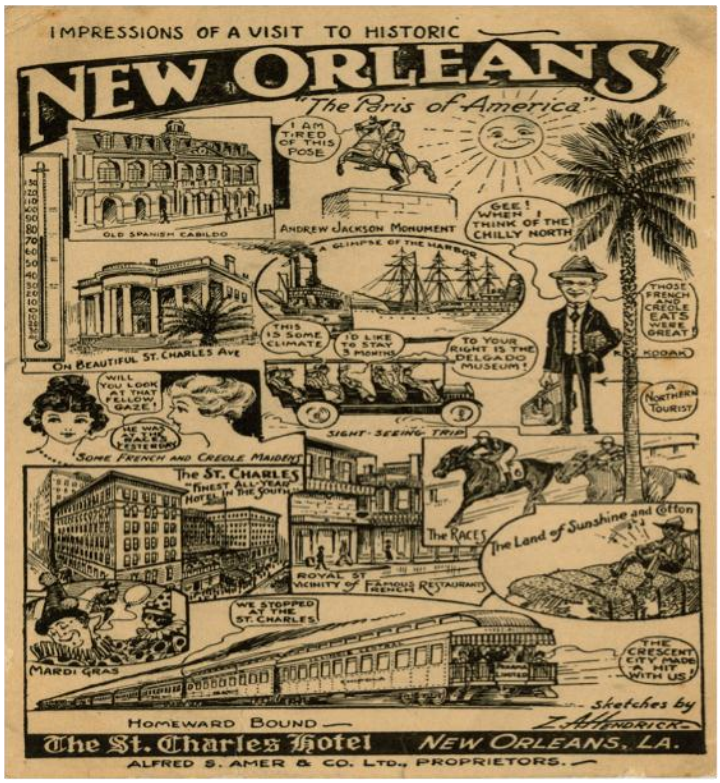

Figure 3. Impressions of a Visit to Historic New Orleans: "The Paris of America." Picture from the Williams Research Center Historic New Orleans Collection.

In addition to postcards, letters and soliciting polls, city boosters distributed pamphlets, magazines, and posters. Figure 4 shows the cover of a monthly magazine that was circulated to boost the exposition. One interview quotes businessman Crawford H. Ellis,

> If I were so fortunate as to be a citizen of either Central America, South America or Mexico, and if I were asked what would do more towards bringing about closer relations between the twenty-one Central and South American Republics, and what would do more to increase the trade between the said Republics, particularly with the United States, and these Central and South American Republics, I would answer by saying: 'The holding of an International Exposition in the city of New Orleans to celebrate the formal opening of the Panama Canal.'[47]

[47] Crawford H. Ellis, "International Exposition at New Orleans," in *The Logical Point*, August 1910, New Orleans Public Library, http://nutrias.org.

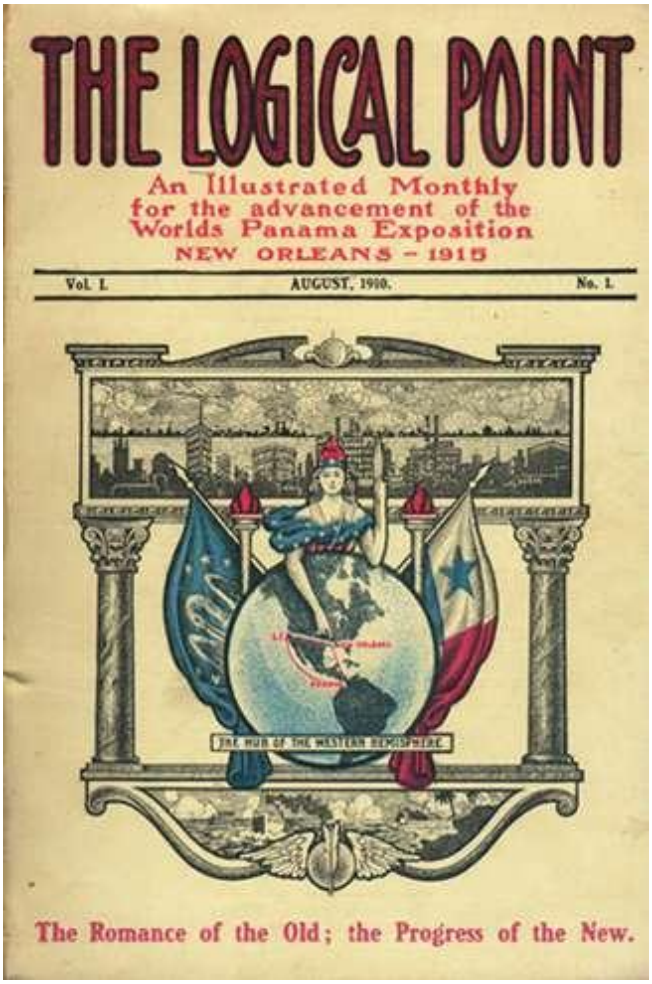

Figure 4. The Logical Point, 1910. New Orleans: Gateway to the Americas. Photo from nutrias.org.

Despite the image of New Orleans as the logical geographic point, the city's downfall came in the form of financial issues. The Progressive Union originally decided to collect private subscriptions to fund the exposition. Businesses tended to give few hundred or a thousand dollars while individuals tended to donate about ten dollars. By July 29, 1910, subscriptions amounted to $1, 193,000.00.[48] City leaders knew that such a paltry amount would not sustain a World's Fair, so the Progressive Union proposed a tax on the citizens of Louisiana. This three-

[48] Board of Directors, World's Panama Exposition Company meeting minutes, July 29, 1910, Papers of the Louisiana Commission of the World's Panama-Pacific Exposition. The Louisiana Historical Center. The Louisiana State Museum.

eighths mill tax was passed on May 24, 1910.[49] It provided for the collection of $4,000,000 for the city to use if the exposition rights fell to New Orleans. If the city failed to gain the exposition, the funds were to be repaid to each parish in proportion to their payments into the fund. Subscriptions continued to be accepted and together with the projected tax revenue allowed T. P. Thompson, Chairman of the Exposition Executive Committee, to claim that New Orleans' exposition fund amounted to $10,000,000. This amount of money should have looked impressive in Washington D.C. However, San Francisco managed to amass $18,000,000 by the date of the Congressional debate.

In January 1911, representatives of both cities appeared before the House Committee of Industrial Arts and Expositions. While each city gave favorable evidence for their location, each also pointed out the other city's shortcomings. Despite New Orleans' promotional efforts demonstrating the city as the most "logical point" geographically, the debate inevitably returned to the issue of finance. Governor Sanders of Louisiana asked the government for assistance with funding whilst Julius Kahn of San Francisco asked for only the approval of the federal government. The people of San Francisco raised their own funding, $18,000,000 by 1910, for the exposition with the help of the California state government.[50]

The federal government had grown weary of financially supporting expositions by the early 1900's because there were so many expositions around this time and the federal funding required by states for such expositions was expensive. Expositions such as the ones held in St. Louis (1904) and Chicago (1893) had increased the popularity of world's fairs across the country. Due to the large number of federally funded world's fairs at this time, San Francisco was a more

[49] *Acts Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Louisiana at the Regular Session* (Baton Rouge: *The New Advocate Official Journal*, 1910), Special Collections, Earl K. Long Library.
[50] "Northwest Press," *Olympia Record*, published as *Olympia Daily Recorder*, January 19, 1910, America's Historical Newspapers http://infoweb.newsbank.com (accessed November 3, 2009).

attractive location for the exposition. It was refreshing for the United States government to see San Francisco's leaders demonstrate the ability to raise their own funds.

Despite New Orleans' vested interest in trade with and through Panama, the spurt of economic growth in the city from the new drainage system, and the resulting increase in real estate for the creation of suburbs, efforts to attain federal support failed. In the 1911 debate before the House Committee on Industrial Arts and Expositions, Louisiana Governor Sanders argued, "money talks, and God knows in California it seems to out-talk anything else." Mayor Kahn of San Francisco challenged New Orleans' "ability and willingness" to pay the exorbitant bill required of a city hosting a world's fair. Kahn mentioned the state of California's plan to pass a state amendment for taxation intended to fund the exposition.[51] Sanders also discussed an article from the *Los Angeles Times*, claiming that the amendment created in San Francisco was merely permission to enact a law and if California did not make the amendment permanent soon, "the fair may go to New Orleans."[52]

Gov. Sanders insisted that the amendment held little meaning because of the insurance recovery money that was pumped into San Francisco after the earthquake in 1906. He pointed out that no aid was given to New Orleans after the flooding in the years 1883 through 1885.[53] The city did not receive federal money after the floods, yet San Francisco had received funds after the earthquake of 1906. New Orleans solicited the assistance of federal funds for the exposition based on necessity. City leaders believed it was their civic right to petition for federal funding. Gov. Sanders also claimed that there was no debt left over from the 1884 World's

[51] J.Y. Sanders, Speech of Governor J.Y. Sanders of Louisiana on behalf of the city of New Orleans in the matter of the World's Panama Exposition, before House Committee on Industrial Arts and Expositions, January, 1911, HNOC.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition. He stressed that New Orleans was not money hungry; however, its citizens were entitled to beseech the federal government for funds and reap the benefits of belonging to the Union. In addition Sanders argued that the federal government should be flattered that a state demonstrated financial dependency—New Orleans understood its place under the federal government of the United States of America.[54]

The governor's arguments proved temporarily successful. In January of 1911, New Orleans won the debate before the house committee in Washington D.C. with a vote of 9 to 6. Committee members supporting New Orleans hailed mostly from Southern or Mississippi River Valley states, "Rodenberg, (Illinois), Langely, (Kentucky), Murphy, (Missouri), Woods, (Iowa), Rhinock, (Kentucky), Heflin, (Alabama), Collier, (Mississippi), Cullop, (Indiana), and Covington, (Maryland)."[55] Though New Orleans won this skirmish, Congress no longer favored funding expositions, and Gov. Sanders' insistence that New Orleans would be somewhat dependent upon the federal government only served to steer Congress towards awarding the fair to San Francisco. The city may have won the committee debate, but it was a temporary victory. In the full House of Representatives, Congress favored San Francisco 188 votes for to 159 votes against. New Orleans accepted defeat and declined to fight in the Senate.

Politics, as well as geography and finance contributed to the loss in Congress. New Orleans held the approval of President Roosevelt during his term of office, and managed to keep the respect of President Taft as well. Both presidents were made honorary members of various organizations in New Orleans and invited to use the port as the gateway from the United States to Latin America. But, in December of 1910 when Congress planned to decide the fate of the

[54] Ibid.
[55] "Victory for New Orleans: House committee votes to have the Exposition there," *New York Times*, January 21, 1911, http://www.newyorktimes.com (accessed November 11, 2009).

exposition, President Taft used his influence to sway the vote towards San Francisco. There was speculation that, "Taft brokered a deal with California to support the exposition in San Francisco in exchange for withdrawal of anti-Japanese legislation in California, which threatened Taft foreign policy."[56]

Governor Sanders had argued "money talks" in California.[57] San Francisco had shown that it was much better organized with plans for raising funds while New Orleans was underfunded and required outside financing. New Orleans asked for a $1,000,000 government exhibit as well as a government commission, whereas San Francisco had asked for nothing.[58] Of course the latter would look more attractive to a government where "money talks."[59]

Business leaders in San Francisco had used harsh tactics to discredit New Orleans as a host site. Anti-New Orleans booklets were distributed pointing to the large "negro population," intense weather, poor sanitary conditions, bad drinking water, and lack of accommodations.[60] *The Summit Sentinel* of Summit, Mississippi sent its condolences to New Orleans in an editorial: "We were all sorry to see San Francisco take the Panama Exposition, and realized that it was done through political connivery."[61]

The San Franciscans also capitalized on the failure of the 1884 Cotton Centennial Exposition. New Orleans failed to attract visitors and lacked the financial means necessary for a successful

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[56] Robert Dupont, "Progressive Civic Development and Political Conflict," 325.
[57] J.Y. Sanders, Speech of Governor J.Y. Sanders of Louisiana on behalf of the city of New Orleans in the matter of the World's Panama Exposition, before House Committee on Industrial Arts and Expositions, January, 1911, HNOC.
[58] "San Francisco gets Panama Canal Fair," *New York Times*, February 1, 1911, http://www.newyorktimes.com (accessed November 11, 2009).
[59] Ibid.
[60] Kevin Gotham, *Authentic New Orleans: Tourism, Culture, and Race in the Big Easy* (New York: University of New York Press, 2007).
[61] "Foreign Lands Favor The Big Fair Idea Here Consuls From the Tropics Recognize the Greatness," *Times Picayune*, 11/28/1913, America's Historical Newspapers http://infoweb.newsbank.com (accessed March 15, 2011).

World's Fair. Months after the decision was made in favor of San Francisco while the city was preparing for the exposition, Col. Henry T. Scott, the director of the Panama-Pacific Exposition expressed the sentiment that his city, San Francisco had in fact lost the debate before Congress, and New Orleans should bear the burden of the exposition. He knew San Francisco would be bankrupted by the financial burden of a world's fair. In a newspaper interview, Scott said the whole affair would cost San Francisco $17,000,000 and all the city would get in return was a $1,000,000 auditorium.[62] His sentiments were a slight vindication for the city of New Orleans—leaders in San Francisco finally understood the burden of hosting a world exposition.

On February 20, 1915, the city of San Francisco was abuzz with the goings on of the Panama Pacific International Exposition. Picture a forty-three story high building, the Tower of Jewels, seemingly encrusted with jewels (colored glass) that glimmered in the sun, surrounded by other beautiful palaces and gardens. This opulent scene greeted exposition attendees upon entrance to the exposition site in San Francisco. Among the revelers were businessmen, tourists, and leaders both foreign and domestic.[63] This was the sort of spectacle New Orleans hoped to present to the world, but San Francisco demonstrated superior political savvy.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that New Orleans, and Louisiana in general, were not in tune with other southern cities after Reconstruction and missed out on domestic expansion, the New Orleans

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[62] "Frisco Pessimistic. Seventeen-Million Exposition, With No Big Ideas," *Times Picayune*, published as *The Daily Picayune* (December 18, 1913): 9, America's Historical Newspapers http://infoweb.newsbank.com (accessed November 12, 2009).

[63] San Francisco held celebrations for many big cities during the fair. These celebrations usually consisted of a day commemorating the city. For instance, New Orleans Day was held on November 19, 1915. See: "New Orleans Day. Panama Pacific International Exposition, San Francisco. Nov. 19, 1915," Charles C. Moore albums of Panama Pacific International Exposition views v.3, Calisphere, University of California, http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/hb096nb0z7/?order=39&brand=calisphere.

business community was not idle. It looked to Latin American countries as a means of capital investment and expansion of trade. The economic relationship between New Orleans businesses and countries such as Panama, Belize, Mexico, etc. would come to play a huge role in boosting the city as not only a New South city, but an international trade venue. When President Roosevelt of the United States announced the construction of a Panamanian Canal, New Orleans' Progressive leaders pounced on the idea of hosting an exposition to celebrate the opening of the canal. They entered negotiations with President Taft and Congress when Roosevelt's term ended. However, the various efforts made by the Progressive political machine failed to gain the city federal permission for the exposition. The noise made by New Orleans boosters through the political machinations of the Choctaw Club gained a plethora of positive publicity for the city not only on a national scope, but also on an international scope.

Business leaders and boosters of the city had known it would take more than enthusiasm to win the exposition. City leaders did not possess the same political strength San Francisco had forged with President Taft. President Taft originally supported New Orleans; however politics intervened and he chose to use the exposition as leverage to quiet anti-Japanese legislation emanating from California. Requesting federal support proved detrimental to the New Orleans cause. However, New Orleans' defeat was not in vain. Due to the highly publicized fight for the exposition, the city gained many new fans across the country. It was also great advertising for the city in terms of tourism. New Orleans leaders maintained the enthusiasm they demonstrated in organizing for the fair and the positive attitude of progress beyond the loss of the fair.

The Progressive Union regrouped and rebounded quickly. On February 1, 1911, the Progressive Union professed a strong desire to trade in Asia. James Porch wrote to Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson asking permission to send the first merchant vessel through the Panama

Canal. In 1912, the Mississippi Valley, South American and Orient Steamship Company also known as Pan American Mail, launched its first venture on the *Inkum* ship. Porch sailed with the merchandise on the *Inkum* to South America, and his cargo was received upon arrival. However, the port refused to send merchandise back to the United States with Porch because of an English shipping trust's monopoly in the area. Though the trip was unsuccessful, as were each successive trip made by the company, Porch was determined to reap the benefits of the Panama Canal for the benefit of New Orleans. As John Wilds claimed, Porch was "one of the most active and enthusiastic boosters New Orleans ever had."[64]

Also in 1911, Crawford H. Ellis, a Progressive Union member, founded the Pan American Life Insurance Company with the help of Dr. Edward G. Simmons, life insurance salesman, Dr. Marion Souchon, physician, and Eugene J. McGivney, a lawyer.[65] These businessmen realized the potential for a New Orleans corporation based on the Central American market including, but not limited to, trade corporations and individuals.

Support from abroad played a role despite the fact that the exposition went to San Francisco. For example, an article in the *Times Picayune* in November of 1913 reported,

> The Persian Government will participate in the Panama-Pacific Exposition, and will send a valuable collection of Persian art objects, including rugs and jewels, and a number of Persian lambs and blooded Arabian horses to make up its exhibit…in view of the fact that we plan to bring our exhibit to the United States several months before the exposition opens at San Francisco, it might be arranged to show at least a portion of it at New Orleans during the Southern States Fair.[66]

[64] John Wilds, *James W. Porch and the Port of New Orleans*, 101.
[65] "History of Pan-American Life." Pan American Life Insurance Group, http://www.panamericanlife.com/about/history.aspx.
[66] "Foreign Lands Favor The Big Fair Idea Here Consuls From the Tropics Recognize the Greatness," *Times Picayune*, 11/28/1913, America's Historical Newspapers http://infoweb.newsbank.com (accessed March 15, 2011).

New Orleans decided to hold a fair, the Big Idea Fair, in 1913. An "exposition army," or an army of citizens, was created to bolster excitement and to prevent "knockers," or detractors, from ruining the momentum for success of the fair. The people of New Orleans believed that the exuberance of the young men and women would make the fair a success.[67] The Persian government expressed its interest in supporting the New Orleans Big Idea Fair. If invited, they planned to bring Arabian horses, jewels, rugs, and the like for a presentation better than any seen before in the States.

Efforts to expand the city of New Orleans continued throughout the twentieth century. The reclamation of wetlands in the first decade of the twentieth century was expanded in the 1920s. The sea wall built along on the outskirts of the city along Lake Pontchartrain facilitated the draining of the Milneburg and other neighborhoods in the area. This newly acquired land attracted resorts, clubs, and amusement parks.

The well-oiled political machine of New Orleans went through the painstaking efforts enumerated in this study to boost city business onto the international trade scene thus creating an aura of the city as a flourishing New South city. The transition from the Reconstruction Era to the Progressive Era was difficult for New Orleans. However, the political acumen of the conservative Democratic politicians at the turn of the nineteenth century was just what the city needed to prosper. They succeeded in molding the Crescent City into a business and tourism powerhouse.

[67] Ibid.

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