

REMAKING MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT?  
CHARTER REFORM IN WILKES-BARRE,  
PENNSYLVANIA, 1968-2001<sup>1</sup>

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*... our machinery of government is nothing more nor less than the instrument by which citizens convert their will into action.*

—Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, "On Being an American"  
*Reform is when your guys are out and our guys are in.*

—Chicago Politician

The city of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, located in the Wyoming Valley of Luzerne County, experienced seven different governmental structures between 1806, the date of the initial borough charter, and 2001, the year of the most recent charter reform.<sup>2</sup> The structures established between 1806 and 1913 were mandated by state legislation, which gave communities no direct role in organizing municipal government. Local control expanded for cities of Wilkes-Barre's size with two historic changes in the Pennsylvania constitution.

In 1957, the Pennsylvania Optional Third Class City Charter Law permitted limited home rule and allowed cities to adopt the strong mayor or city manager plans, or keep the previously mandated commission form. In 1968, the State Constitutional Convention developed a proposal for full home rule. The General Assembly approved the enabling legislation, called the Home Rule Charter and Optional Plans Law, and Governor Milton

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Shapp signed the measure. Voters approved the act in a statewide referendum on April 23, 1972. As part of the transfer of broad powers from the state to the locality, the Home Rule Law gave citizens a wide choice in municipal and county government arrangements. Wilkes-Barreans, along with citizens in several other Commonwealth cities, have since changed their charters and instituted various alterations in the structure and operation of local government.<sup>3</sup>

One result for Wilkes-Barre has been exceptional sequence of structural transformations between 1968 and 2001. Voters adopted the city manager form in 1968 and then the strong mayor form in 1976. With these reorganizations, Wilkes-Barre became one of the few cities to have experienced all three types of American local governments—commission (through 1967), manager (1968–1976), and strong mayor (1976–present)—and perhaps the only city to have experienced all three within so short a time span. In 2001, yet another charter reform reduced the number of council members from seven to five and reinstituted ward-based elections. The latest changes are scheduled to take effect in January 2008.<sup>4</sup>

We wanted to study Wilkes-Barre's string of charter reforms to understand what, if any, generally relevant conclusions could be drawn. We were concerned with questions such as: why did the changes occur? Which political actors and social forces lay behind them? Can the city's charter history help explain the modifications? Were the changes the result of competitive politics or some other aspect of the political culture? Did factors outside the local political system come into play? Did the major flood disaster that hit the city in 1972 figure into the reform of 1976? We were particularly interested in what light the Wilkes-Barre case could shed on the long-standing debate within political science on the relative influence of government structure versus political culture in shaping the local polity.<sup>5</sup>

The task required that we understand four aspects of Wilkes-Barre's governmental institution: (1) the municipal history dating from the first charter in 1806; (2) the political history including the economic and social groups that laid the foundations of the political culture; (3) the political culture itself and how it may have influenced the recent charter changes; and (4) the influence of two external factors, namely, home rule and Tropical Storm Agnes flood of 1972.

After reviewing Wilkes-Barre's early municipal structures in the first part of the paper, we turn to the 1968–2001 period when two major charter reforms and one minor one occurred. We found that the reorganizations must

be understood within the context of the city's political culture and history, particularly the tradition of rancorous conflict, party competition, and ethnic and class-based politics. We further discovered that the alterations in Wilkes-Barre have reflected broader trends in Pennsylvania urban politics. We also learned that, regardless of structure and circumstance (including the disastrous effects of a major flood), a highly competitive political culture has remained vitally important in shaping the politics of charter reform. Finally, we found a major weakness within the city's political culture over the past half-century: the inability of the main actors to generate effective policies to address pressing economic, social, and demographic problems.

On March 17, 1806, the Pennsylvania General Assembly passed a bill establishing Wilkes-Barre's original governmental form. Governor Thomas McKean signed the measure into law. Based upon size, the legislation chartered Wilkes-Barre as a borough organized around a burgess and nine-member governing council. About 100 property-owning citizens gathered to select the first burgess and council. They chose Judge Jesse Fell as burgess, a prestigious citizen who became well known for inventing the iron grate that allowed the region's main natural resource, anthracite coal, to burn in an indoor fireplace. They also selected a council consisting of prestigious community members. The first charter endured for the 65 years.<sup>6</sup>

The second form of government began on May 4, 1871, when the General Assembly re-chartered the growing borough as a city. The more broadly democratic charter called for a "weak" mayor (i.e., having few executive powers) and a 21-member council. Fifteen council members were elected through partisan, ward elections while the other six were appointed by the President Judge of the Luzerne County Court of Common Pleas. Within a few years, a minor charter revision made the entire council elective.<sup>7</sup>

The third modification took place in 1898 when continued population growth moved the city into third class status.<sup>8</sup> The charter kept the weak mayor but established two councils, a common and a select, both having one member from each of the city's 16 wards. The bicameral arrangement modeled the General Assembly itself and, of course, the Congress of the United States.<sup>9</sup>

In 1913, as part of the state's Progressive Era reforms, the General Assembly passed legislation mandating the commission form of government for all third class cities. The commission plan sought to de-politicize and decentralize municipal government by weakening the executive and

combining administrative, legislative, and executive duties in the hands of a small governing body. The law required five commissioners elected at-large on a non-partisan basis. Each commissioner also headed one of the city's departments (Public Affairs, Accounts and Finance, Public Safety, Streets and Public Improvements, and Parks and Public Property). The charter further specified a weak mayor who was to be selected, not by the citizens, but by fellow commissioners. The mayor would serve as council president and ceremonial head of the city. The General Assembly amended the law in 1918 to allow for the direct election of the mayor as well as partisan elections of candidates.<sup>10</sup>

The commission plan endured between 1913 and 1967. During the mid-1960s, Wilkes-Barre's political leaders, particularly in the Republican Party, became severe critics of the plan. They argued that because commissioners held executive, administrative, and legislative responsibilities, they retained too much power. Moreover, they had too little modern management expertise. The Republicans called for a new arrangement that would professionalize city administration and meet the demands of newly enacted federal programs for economic development and urban renewal—both desperately needed by a city suffering the decline of its main industry, anthracite coal.

Consequently, in 1967, the Republicans initiated a charter reform campaign (detailed below). They were encouraged by the state constitutional reform of 10 years earlier, which permitted limited home rule. The referendum passed, a charter study ensued, and in 1968 Wilkes-Barre adopted a fifth government, the city manager with a seven-person council.

A movement to abrogate the manager plan began only four years later, shortly after the Tropical Storm Agnes disaster of June 22, 1972. The Agnes flood devastated Wilkes-Barre and much of the surrounding Wyoming Valley, as well as large areas of Pennsylvania and the Northeastern United States. The Democrats quickly emerged as the main critics of manager government. They argued that the city needed strong centralized leadership to recover from the country's most destructive natural disaster to date. They initiated a reform movement (also detailed below) that culminated in the approval of a new charter in 1974, bringing the sixth structure—a strong mayor accompanied by a seven-member council elected at large with partisan labels. The new government took effect in January 1976.

Citizens approved the seventh and most recent charter revision in November 2001. The latest alteration retained the strong mayor and partisan labels but reduced the council to five members and reinstituted ward-based

representation. As discussed later, Republicans were among the leaders of this reform. After several court challenges and delays instigated by the Democrats, the new system is set to take effect in 2008 following the elections of November 2007.<sup>11</sup>

To understand the recent charter reforms, we first delved into the political history and development of "The Diamond City." That history begins with the privileged class which dominated the political, economic and social landscapes for over a century. A colonial stock elite that migrated to the Wyoming Valley from Connecticut in the latter part of the eighteenth century, the so-called "anthracite aristocracy," began as farmers and merchants.<sup>12</sup> Members experienced an immense expansion of wealth after 1850 with the growth of the anthracite industry. Some established coal companies while many others prospered by leasing mineral rights to the large mining corporations. The windfall brought capital for further investments in mining, railroads, manufacturing, and other enterprises in the expanding local and national economies. With wealth came an extravagant upper class, Gilded Age lifestyle.<sup>13</sup>

After 1860, the elite's children and grandchildren began marrying persons of high rank who had migrated to the city from surrounding areas to participate in the growing economy. By the end of the Civil War, Wilkes-Barre had an upper class consisting of 65 families who held economic position and social status, as well as political authority and influence at the municipal and county levels. Large Victorian residences in an exclusive district along River and Franklin Streets in the city's center (much of it now the campus of Wilkes University), along with memberships in exclusive associations like the Westmoreland Club and the Malt Club, reinforced their prestige and status.<sup>14</sup>

Despite being one of the finest examples of an urban upper class, members of the "aristocracy" were not as single-minded when it came to politics. They dominated both major political parties, with the Democrats holding sway during the middle of the century and the Republicans emerging in the 1860s and 1870s. The last quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed considerable inter-party rivalry based around issues as varied as growth, taxation, services, and order.

The charter reform of 1871 helped tip the power balance in favor of the Republicans and convinced most of the elite to consolidate within that party's ranks. As described, the charter of 1871 replaced the long-standing burgess-council system with a weak mayor accompanied by a 21-member council. The scheme expanded citizen representation and, therefore, had the potential

to weaken the political control of the elite. Conversely, it had the potential to strengthen the political influence of immigrant groups who labored in mining, railroading, and manufacturing industries. This working-class ethnic population leaned toward the Democratic Party but were susceptible to pressures from employers to vote Republican.<sup>15</sup> The GOP opposed the new structure when it was first proposed while the Democrats supported it. Both parties sought to influence the General Assembly's actions on the measure. According to Smith and Harvey in their classic study of Wilkes-Barre, when it became apparent that the new government form would become law, the Republicans decided to make the best of it.

"Seeing that the advancing ways of progress could not be stayed," Smith and Harvey argued, "the opponents of the city charter [i.e., the Republicans] decided that the best thing to be done was to fall in with the movement and try to elect their own candidates to office under the new charter."<sup>16</sup>

The Republicans succeeded in consolidating power. Upper class members operating through the Republican Party held or otherwise controlled the key elective and appointive positions for the next three decades. As Davies reported, "With few exceptions, colonial stock leaders occupied the positions of mayor and council president every term from 1871 through 1900."<sup>17</sup>

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, as the anthracite industry began a long decline, most elite families moved to Philadelphia, New York and other metropolitan centers. Some of their descendants remained in the area and married or otherwise formed social and economic alliances with high-ranking newcomers from the business, banking, legal, and medical professions. During the second half of the twentieth century, the social heirs of the aristocracy still constituted an elite, albeit in more diverse form. They maintained upper class social institutions such as the Westmoreland Club, typically belonged to one of the main Protestant churches in center city, and maintained wide community influence through politics, civic associations, and local businesses.

Partially because of their out-migration early in the century, the elite began to lose their grip on political power. The elections of Mayor John V. Kosek in 1911 and 1915 signaled the trend. A Republican and a businessman, the popular mayor enjoyed support not only from traditional upper-class Republicans but also from the newer immigrants, despite their Democratic leanings. The son of a successful merchant, Kosek bridged the gap because he was a Catholic (as were most of the newcomers) whose father had emigrated from Bohemia during the late nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup>

The first election to break the Republican control occurred in 1919. The Democratic nominee, Daniel Hart, an Irish Catholic coal miner's son, ran against the Republican candidate, Charles Loveland, who came from a pioneer Quaker family. With the support of the city's Catholic working-class population, Hart won and, for the first time in decades, Wilkes-Barre had a Democratic mayor. It marked the beginning of an ethnic as well as a class divide, with middle and upper-class British and German Protestants tending to favor the Republicans while the more working and middle-class Irish, Polish, and German Catholics favored the Democrats. Hart was reelected in 1923 and 1927, defeating Loveland each time. Just as importantly, with his second election the Democrats gained the majority on the governing commission.

Hart gained a fourth term in 1931 but died unexpectedly two years later. Following established procedure, the Republican-controlled Luzerne County judiciary appointed a new mayor to complete Hart's term. They selected none other than his long-time rival, Loveland. The divide between the social classes and ethnic groups was bridgeable, especially when pressures from employers were applied, so when Loveland ran for mayor in 1935 he won, bringing a GOP commission majority with him. The rejuvenated Republicans proceeded to hold the mayor's office and the city commission for the next 30 years, led by Loveland's reelections in 1939 and 1943. Luther M. Kniffen, a German Protestant, became the most successful Republican mayor by winning the elections in 1947, 1951, and 1955. Only two Democrats held the top office during this period and both were Irish Catholics: Cornelius J. "Con" McCole, elected in 1943, and Frank P. Slattery, Jr. victorious in 1959 and 1963. McCole had to work with Republican commission majorities, as did Slattery during his first term.<sup>19</sup>

The Democrats were particularly heartened by Slattery's second election because the party's first commission majority in three decades accompanied it. The contest also marked the beginning of the modern era of inter-party competition, for despite their own factional differences, the Democrats were beginning to reemerge as a political force.<sup>20</sup>

The Republicans were shaken by Slattery's triumphs and the general threat of the surging Democrats, who were also in power in Harrisburg under Governor David L. Lawrence and in Washington under President John F. Kennedy. Both candidates reversed historic patterns by carrying Luzerne County and the city of Wilkes-Barre. A lawyer who cultivated a loyal following, Slattery behaved more like a strong mayor than the weak commission



mayor that he was. Indeed, in a 1964 survey on Wilkes-Barre's government over 50 percent of the respondents believed that the city operated under the strong mayor rather than weak mayor-commission form.<sup>21</sup>

The Republicans grew increasingly critical of the Democrats' governing philosophy. They rebuked Slattery and the Democratically-controlled commission for granting special treatment and exceptions to favored constituents. They charged their opponents with ignoring modern administrative practices and offering unimaginative leadership at a time when industrial decline and federal and state programs required professional and pro-active government. Some reform-minded Democrats and Independents expressed similar concerns.

For Wilkes-Barre's Republicans the key questions were how to overcome Slattery and the surging Democrats and re-establish political control, while at the same time rebuilding the city's economic base and modernizing the government? Party leaders found the answer in a charter reform based on the city manager plan of government.

Modern management and business efficiency constitute the core of the city manager philosophy. Another outcome of Progressive Era reform, its purpose was to professionalize and de-politicize municipal governance by placing day-to-day operations in the hands of an appointed, professionally-trained manager.<sup>22</sup> To lead the movement, in the spring of 1965, the Republicans established the Citizens' Committee for the Charter Study Commission. The effort was facilitated by the aforementioned Optional Third Class City Charter provision of 1957.<sup>23</sup>

Wilkes-Barre's Republicans were divided into two factions at this time. One consisted of high-ranking leaders from financial institutions, large retail stores, law firms, and medical profession. These were the social and political heirs of the original elite, but their ranks included only a handful of "aristocratic" descendants. By this time, all but a few of the elite had left the city for the distant metropolitan areas or Wilkes-Barre's suburbs. The other faction drew upon small business owners and managers, minor professionals, and political operatives. The lower-ranking element was more ethnically diverse but the British and German Protestant element remained foremost in both factions. Although most of the party's officers, candidates, and campaign workers came from the second group, the higher status faction spearheaded the reform effort.

The Democrats, who were also broken into two factions, did not possess sufficient political strength to stop the drive. Their electoral support had



been inconsistent (recall that they had not been in the council majority for over 30 years) and they were associated with a very unpopular wage tax recently promulgated by Mayor Slattery. The Republicans railed against the wage tax, which they said harmed economic development, and they continued to criticize the "old time" politics and administrative inefficiencies associated with the current mayor and commission.

Politicians with roots in the Irish community led both Democratic factions. The group led by Mayor Slattery at first opposed any structural reform. They argued in favor of retaining the commission. After realizing that the study referendum would likely pass, however, they sought to convince the study commission that the strong mayor plan would best serve the city. They knew that the strong mayor form would fit Slattery very well and they believed it would allow the Democrats to solidify power under Slattery's third term. After all, hadn't strong mayor government been associated with Democratic preeminence in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and nearby Scranton?<sup>24</sup>

Commissioner Robert Brader (the longest serving elected official in city history and the only person to have served on council through all three forms of government) led the other faction. This group remained fully committed to the commission form. They argued that the Democrats were gaining strength. They held the mayor's post and the council majority. Why change a good thing? Moreover, Brader liked running the Public Works Department under the commission form, a position he would surely lose with other types of government.

Nevertheless, should the study commission concur with what everyone knew was the GOP's preference for the manager form, both factions agreed on a common strategy to control the managerial appointment, maintain the mayoral and city council positions, and continue governing as the majority party. The Democrats were not going to surrender their newfound power without a fight.<sup>25</sup>

In November 1965, Wilkes-Barreans were scheduled to vote for the charter study referendum and simultaneously elect members to a charter study commission. Both the Democratic and Republican organizations agreed not to blatantly politicize the process by sponsoring slates of candidates for the study commission. Instead, the aforementioned Citizens' Committee for the Charter Study Commission acted as a power broker by secretly allowing Democrat and Republican leaders to propose candidates and veto any of their opponents' "nominations." From this winnowing process the Citizens' Committee selected a list of 10 candidates and eventually endorsed seven. Critics deplored this "back

room” nominating process and, in protest, an independent slate of five aspirants ran for the study commission.<sup>26</sup>

Amid traditional concerns about voting fraud, the electorate approved the charter study question by a 3–1 margin, as all seven of the Citizens’ Committee’s endorsed candidates were elected to the study commission.<sup>27</sup> After a few months of deliberation, the group recommended a new charter incorporating the city manager, a seven-member council elected at-large in a partisan manner, along with a weak mayor selected by fellow councilors.

The Citizen’s Committee was buoyed by the results and joined with the League of Women Voters, the Junior Chamber of Commerce, and the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce in establishing another *ad hoc* committee called Citizens for Council-Manager Government. The coalition initiated a vigorous campaign to secure passage of the charter reform question when it was placed on the November 1966 ballot. The Democrats mobilized a “vote no” drive that mustered far less support. Voters approved the measure by a 5–1 margin, as Wilkes-Barre became the largest city in Pennsylvania (population nearly 60,000) with city manager government. The new government would take effect in January 1968, with the council chosen in the November 1967 elections.<sup>28</sup>

Mayor Slattery believed that the reform movement reflected negatively on his leadership and decided not to run for a third term. With the incumbent out of the way and a new structure in place the Republicans looked forward to the election. The strategy proved successful as the GOP won the council majority by a margin of 5–2. John V. Morris, who had won his first election, was selected mayor by fellow councilors. After eight years in the minority, the Republicans had returned to power. The new council immediately appointed an interim city manager as well as a search committee to find a permanent manager.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the initial enthusiasm, the managerial plan soon foundered. The discontent came, surprisingly, from the Republicans, especially Mayor Morris. The conflict had two sources. The first involved feuding between the higher- and lower-ranking Republican factions, the former including two council members and the latter Mayor Morris. The second was the mayor’s unwillingness to accept his diminished role in the new system.

Factional strife began when Morris and the city Republican Party chairman joined forces to complain that the Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce and its ally, the Pennsylvania Economy League—organizations traditionally associated with Republican business interests—favored one particular

candidate. His name was Frederick S. Wegner of Philadelphia.<sup>30</sup> Wegner had been serving as deputy director of a Philadelphia municipal department and a member of the Zoning Board of Appeals. Because his application either did not impress the search committee or, as one Republican suggested in an anonymous interview, his credentials were “not so accidentally lost,” Wegner did not appear among the three finalists. But after intense infighting among GOP leaders, his name joined the list.

The candidate interviews did not produce a clear favorite, but on March 20, 1968, after two months of heated debate, council chose Wegner as the first city manager. The vote was 4–3, with the mayor voting in the minority with two other Republicans. Wegner’s reputation as an effective administrator and person of high moral character had apparently won sufficient support. In protest of his appointment, the discontented mayor put a fresh coat of paint on his first floor office while relegating the soon-to-arrive manager to a small, dimly-lit room on the top (fourth) floor of city hall.

The Democrats relished and actually abetted the conflict among their opponents. Two of the four votes for Wegner came from the two Democratic councilmen. They supported his candidacy not because they were impressed with his credentials but because they knew his appointment would further split the GOP. One of the Democrats, John B. (Jack) McGlynn, a party stalwart who had risen to a leadership position, freely admitted that his vote and that of his colleague, Robert Brader, were designed to fracture the majority party. In fact, he said, since the Wegner vote in 1968, the two Republican camps have not come together. McGlynn—who will appear again later as a leader in the post-Agnes charter reform movement—accurately predicted that Wenger’s selection marked the beginning of the end of Republican power in Wilkes-Barre.<sup>31</sup>

At his first city council meeting, Manager Wegner appeared shocked to hear the mayor and certain council members discuss changing the administrative code so as to limit his powers.<sup>32</sup> Wegner protested that the manager form was not supposed to work this way. Tensions between the council and the manager mounted. Turmoil at city hall held the front page of both metropolitan dailies. In one instance, the mayor clashed with the manager over the latter’s reporting the firemen’s wage increase to the press before council had reviewed the figures. The manager replied that the mayor did not request that he keep the information private, to which the mayor exclaimed that he had. At the next council meeting, an angry Morris castigated Wegner:

You're not going to be permitted to bulldoze your way through this meeting. I resent sitting here and hearing you say that I'm a liar. My reputation in this community is more than all of yours in Philadelphia. I will not let you nullify my character. If I had enough [votes] to approve a resolution I'd ask for your immediate dismissal as manager. You have already done more to discourage the good in this city than all the good that God ever created. You're a pawn of the Pennsylvania Economy League and [the] special interests of this growing town. You're trying to make unmitigated asses out of us.<sup>33</sup>

Wegner threatened to resign after only two months. Morris wanted to fire him even sooner. Opponents viewed the manager as an outsider with little understanding of, and an apparent unwillingness to learn about, the local political culture. His high principles, rigid interpretation of managerial government, and formalistic demeanor came across as arrogance. Lower-ranking Republicans continued to resent his on-going support from the high-ranking faction. In a panic, the League of Women's Voters organized a forum to discuss the conflict. Republican business and civic leaders formed yet another *ad hoc* group, The Citizens Committee to Save Manager Government.

Wegner resigned on February 4, 1969, less than one year after taking office.<sup>34</sup> Over the next few weeks, a succession of administrative resignations shook city hall, including the city planner, engineer, and director of administration. The conflict attracted the attention of the Legislature's Subcommittee on Urban Affairs, which conducted hearings in Wilkes-Barre twice in 1969 and once in 1970. Wegner stood as the key witness during one hearing. When asked by a committee member, "Could you tell me if you resigned because of politics or because of the personalities involved?" he responded, "Neither. The government was hopeless."<sup>35</sup> The Subcommittee summoned the mayor and council to Harrisburg to receive the final report whereupon Representatives delivered a reprimand for political pettiness and administrative ineptitude. They threatened state intervention if matters did not improve.<sup>36</sup>

Council soon appointed a second interim manager and a new search committee. One editorial quipped that the city was looking for its "second annual city manager." Frank Vanore, an official from Long Branch, New Jersey, assumed the post after receiving a unanimous vote on May 6, 1969. Vanore enjoyed a brief honeymoon but discord soon appeared. The mayor and council charged him with administrative inefficiency, lack of communication with

elected officials, and personal use of a city vehicle. He was suspended on November 6, 1971, and resigned on December 7, 1971, after 31 months in office. Notwithstanding the troubles, a survey indicated that most citizens still favored the manager structure.<sup>37</sup> Council appointed a third interim manager and another search committee.

By this time, the Democrats had begun to reap political advantage over the ongoing turbulence. Although they were in the minority when the new charter took effect in 1968, in the November 1969 election they regained the edge on council, 5–2, with one of their fellows, the aforementioned Jack McGlynn, selected as mayor. In the November 1971 elections, the Democrats retained the council majority. Conrad “Firpo” Salwoski, an old-time political operative with roots in the Polish community, was chosen mayor as McGlynn decided not to run for office.

In March 1972, about three months before the Agnes disaster, council picked the third full-time manager. Fifty-five candidates had applied and many had extensive professional experience. However, the person chosen was Bernard Gallagher, the acting manager, who had previously served as the county engineer. A loyal Democrat and party regular, he had no city management experience. After difficulties with two outsiders, certified expertise apparently seemed less important than political familiarity and local credentials. In a twist of bad luck, or as a symbol of the troubled history of manager government in Wilkes-Barre, Gallagher was scheduled to assume office on June 23, 1972, *the day* Tropical Storm Agnes struck.<sup>38</sup>

Between June 19th and 23rd, 1972, Agnes traveled up the eastern seaboard causing a record \$3.5 billion damage across nine states. Floodwaters damaged over 100,000 homes, businesses, schools, churches, and other buildings. The inundation affected some 5000 square miles in 223 counties and cities, displacing a quarter million victims evacuated and killing 118. President Richard M. Nixon called it the worst natural disaster in American history. General George A. Lincoln, director of the Office of Emergency Preparedness, said that expenditures for the Agnes recovery were “nearly double the combined outlays to repair damage caused by the five largest previous disasters.” George A. Romney, Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, reported that his department’s temporary housing of over 28,000 families “exceeded by more than 10,000 the total temporary housing assistance undertaken by all 16 major national disasters of the past three years.”<sup>39</sup>

Pennsylvania incurred the most severe damage, over \$1.5 billion, including \$531 million for highways and bridges, \$50 million for schools, and \$35 million for crops. More than 50,000 lost their jobs. Governor Milton J. Shapp toured the devastated areas and requested federal aid. The President made the official disaster declaration on June 24, 1972. Congress passed the Agnes Recovery Act in August 1972, providing the most generous federal recovery package ever. The Pennsylvania General Assembly approved an emergency \$150 million disaster appropriation in June 1972, and adopted other fiscal relief measures in 1973, making total outlays the largest ever offered by a state for any disaster.<sup>40</sup>

The Wyoming Valley area including Wilkes-Barre suffered nearly 70 percent of Pennsylvania's losses. The Susquehanna River, which drains the largest watershed east of the Mississippi, crested at 20 feet above flood stage. Over 100,000 of the county's 342,301 residents evacuated, including over 16,000 senior citizens. Wilkes-Barre's downtown sat under 12 feet of water after a 36-year-old earthen levee gave way. Floodwaters affected 70 percent of the city's manufacturing firms and 37 percent of the residential land area. Six local deaths were attributed to the calamity.<sup>41</sup>

In the weeks and months that followed, council members routinely criticized the manager for his decisions and (in)actions. The public, which only two years earlier had been favorably disposed to managerial government, became increasingly critical. Three grass roots organizations emerged—the Flood Victims Action Council, the Committee United For the Future (CUFF), and the South Wilkes-Barre Council of Organizations (SWIBCO). They sought to pressure and monitor city government in the administration of flood recovery programs.<sup>42</sup> Banking, business, and legal interests formed another interest group, the highly influential Flood Recovery Task Force, at least in part because of a perceived leadership vacuum in city government.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, Wilkes-Barre witnessed an outpouring of citizen activism that few other disaster-stricken communities had (or have) seen, and municipal government's inadequate response facilitated the conscription. As late as one year after the flood, citizen discontent remained extraordinarily high.<sup>44</sup>

Both factions of the Democratic Party concluded that the sitting manager and the entire managerial system had to go. Joseph Williams, who was the only council Democrat to originally support managerial government in 1967, characterized the situation: "A good manager might have been able to save the form after the flood. But we had to put constant pressure on him to get

this or that job done. We'd have to tell him to have a task completed within 48 hours or we'd reevaluate his [job] status."<sup>45</sup>

Top Democratic Party leaders envisioned problems well beyond the individual managers, for the structure itself presented immediate and long-term worries. Political retribution stood as the immediate concern. Because they were in the majority and had one of their fellows as manager, party officials feared that the voters would blame recovery problems on the Democrats. Their long-term concerns centered on control of city hall. They argued that the appointed managers had been too unpredictable and uncontrollable, while an elected chief executive connected to and endorsed by the party organization could provide greater certainty and access.

Therefore, despite their superior position, the Democrats moved to reorganize the government in September 1972, only three months after the flood. As had been the case with the Republican-led reform drive in 1968, an important state law facilitated the action. The 1968 Constitutional Convention led to the Home Rule Charter and Optional Plans Law, which passed by statewide referendum only two months before Agnes. The possibility of restructuring local governments within flood-ravaged Wyoming Valley cities and towns received the full support of state Department of Community Affairs Secretary William Wilcox, who urged citizens to adopt home rule charters and modernize their governments so as to more effectively deal with the recovery.

Under the direction of former mayor Jack McGlynn and councilman Robert Brader, the Democrats petitioned council for a charter study referendum. Members agreed to place the charter study question, along with a list of candidates for a charter study commission, on the May 1973 ballot.<sup>46</sup> Unlike the 1965 study referendum, the high-ranking Republican faction did not become involved and instead left the matter to their lower-ranking colleagues. Both political parties presented endorsed slates of candidates and some independents also ran. The Republican-leaning Chamber of Commerce urged a "no" vote on the referendum fearing that the Democrats would push through the strong mayor form and use it to solidify power. Overall, however, the campaign had none of the rancor surrounding the 1968 referendum. The general lack of intensity surprised some political observers, but it had become apparent even to the Republicans that the massive recovery required some change in the government.

Voters overwhelmingly agreed to the charter study and simultaneously elected a study commission consisting of five Democrats (three endorsed and two unendorsed by the party), and two Republicans (both endorsed). Jack



McGlynn won a seat as an endorsed Democrat and the body elected him as chairman. The election of the two unendorsed Democrats puzzled party leaders as both were in their early 20s and political neophytes who drew support from their neighborhoods. Although it was too early to comprehend, their victories signified the beginning of a generational shift in political representation as well as a weakening of the party's control over candidate selection.

After nearly a year of deliberation, the study commission recommended a home rule charter with a strong mayor and a seven-member council, all elected in an at-large, partisan manner. The proposal included a new position called the Director of Administrative Services (DAS) which functioned like a city manager but was appointed by and responsible to the mayor. Because of the DAS provision and the need to get on with the recovery, the Chamber of Commerce endorsed the referendum when it appeared on the November 1974 ballot. Most post-flood citizens' organizations, which by this time had sprouted in virtually every neighborhood, also backed the proposal. Although some old guard Democrats, including Brader, opposed a stipulation in the charter forbidding a member of council from holding office in a political organization (Brader was the Democratic Party chairman), the Democrats initiated an active political campaign based on the idea that the strong mayor form would provide the necessary leadership at this time in the city's history.<sup>47</sup>

The electorate approved the measure by a 5-1 margin. On January 1, 1976, Wilkes-Barre became one of a small number of American cities to abandon city manager government, and one of the few (perhaps the only) city to have experienced all three types of government—commission, manager, and strong mayor—within a span of only nine years, 1967-1976.<sup>48</sup>

As they had hoped, the strong mayor form produced significant advantages for the Democrats. Despite fears of post-flood retribution, they not only avoided electoral disaster but actually prospered to levels heretofore unseen. By acknowledging the citizenry's dissatisfaction, Democratic leaders channeled popular grievances away from the party toward individual managers, the managerial structure, and the Republicans who originally proposed the manager plan. They argued that Wilkes-Barre's problems were not caused by council's irresponsibility in appointing an inexperienced manager just as Agnes hit, or their inability to meet pressing post-flood demands; rather the blame lay with the city's bad luck with individual managers as well as managerial government itself.

For most party leaders, however, the government form was a secondary, if not a bogus, issue. Political control remained the primary concern. Recall, for

example, the Slattery faction's earlier preference for the strong mayor form because they realized its potential to consolidate power. The Democratic leaders' intentions were clearly stated by one of the party's top leaders, Jack McGlynn:

After the flood we thought the time was ripe to bring in home rule and change the charter. We had been under the thumb of the Republicans on and off over the years and we thought that a strong mayor form would solidify our position. We were right weren't we?!<sup>49</sup>

The electoral results proved his point. The first election in anticipation of the new charter, in November 1975, saw the Democrats—despite a factional split in the primary—win the mayor's office and three of the four contested (and staggered) council seats, giving them an 6–1 majority. In the 1977 election, after the charter had been instituted, the council seats were again staggered and the Democrats again took six of seven seats. In 1979, the first election under the new charter when all seven council candidates ran for four-year terms, the Democrats won all of the offices. However, the 1979 campaign experienced significant intra-party discord, a specter that would haunt the Democrats in the years ahead.<sup>50</sup>

While it might be argued that the 1975 and 1977 electoral outcomes were a result of the national shift toward the Democrats in the post-Watergate era, subsequent elections showed that a full and lasting realignment had begun.<sup>51</sup> For example, although the Reagan-Bush ticket carried Luzerne County in 1980 and 1984, and although the Republican Thornburgh Administration occupied Harrisburg for most of the 1980s, Wilkes-Barre's Democrats held unanimous control of city council from 1979 until 1983, when voters elected a lone Republican. In 1985, Democrats reestablished unanimity and, based on the most recent election in 2003, will have retained it through 2008. In most elections since 1979, only a relative handful of Republicans have even bothered to run for council.<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, Democratic control of the mayor's office began with the 1975 election and is guaranteed through 2008. These were clearly the greatest run of victories for the Democrats, surpassing those in the 1920s and early 1930s under Mayor Hart. Wilkes-Barre has witnessed a historic and durable realignment. Indeed, it was not too long before Independents, Republicans, and even some Democrats began sounding the dangers of one party rule.

However, an unexpected change in the nature of leadership accompanied the turnabout. In the election of 1975, a younger, well-educated, and decidedly more independent group of Democrats emerged. The average age difference between new and the old council members was 27 years. The newly elected mayor, Walter Lisman, a German Catholic, age 45, replaced "Firpo" Salwoski, a Polish Catholic and also a Democrat, 68 years old. A group of four Democratic councilmen who often voted together became known as "the young turks." All were college graduates, middle class, and, keeping with the city's political history, three of the four were of Irish background. They were not party regulars nor did they come up through the Democratic organization but rather they gained political experience through neighborhood associations, post-flood citizens' groups, and other voluntary associations. They were often resented by old-guard regulars such as McGlynn, Brader, and Salwoski.<sup>53</sup> Their ascendancy precipitated a fracture among the Democrats based not as much on ethnicity or class position, but age and education.

The triumph of younger candidates continued in the November 1979 elections. Councilor (and "young turk") Thomas McLaughlin, age 35, became mayor as Lisman decided not to run for a second term. McLaughlin won reelection in 1983. In 1987, another member of the group, councilor Lee Namey, was elected mayor, at age 42. Namey won reelection in November 1991. His successor, councilor Thomas McGroarty, age 35, won the post in November 1995. He gained re-election in 1999, but lost in 2003 to another councilor Thomas Leighton, age 42. A similar youthful trend has continued on the city council to the present.<sup>54</sup>

Although the Democrats gained complete control under the home rule charter of 1976, the results were not exactly as the party leadership had expected. Not only did the newly elected leaders have a more youthful appearance but during the decade following the flood, recovery-oriented citizens' committees wielded significant influence across a range of issues including safety, flood and fire protection, recycling, and candidate selection. With regard to the latter, in many instances the committees replaced the party in launching and sanctioning candidates. Several members of the committees ran for office and were elected to council and the mayor's office. For example, Lee Namey began his political career through a neighborhood association and eventually rose to the mayoral position.<sup>55</sup> In subsequent years the party weakened even further such that running unendorsed was no longer a detriment. Indeed, in the most recent election of 2003, 23 Democrats ran for seven council seats, the large majority without party endorsement.<sup>56</sup>

The realignment brought other political problems. Additional cracks have appeared in the Democratic "machine." For example, a reform-minded faction called Democrats United emerged in the mid-1980s. The group engaged in regular disputes with the party organization and often endorsed separate slates of candidates.<sup>57</sup> Intra-party clashes came from another source in the late 1990s and early 2000s, during the eight years of Mayor McGroarty's tenure. Conflict raged between the mayor and the council over issues as diverse as downtown development, public pensions, city finances, and hiring and firing of city employees. McGroarty's administration amassed a debt of nearly \$11 million. Wilkes-Barre looked to the state for a bailout with one particularly mismanaged downtown project. The state balked and the financial mess prompted Governor Mark Schweiker to call the mayor "inept." As a result, another tear appeared among the Democrats between a small pro-mayor element and a much larger anti-mayor group. Rancorous intra-party conflict has replaced the inter-party disagreements of previous times.<sup>58</sup>

Councilman Thomas Leighton overwhelmingly defeated incumbent McGroarty in the November 2003 primary, signaling a desire by the party and the electorate to move beyond the quarrels, stabilize the government, and engender some effective policy-making. Importantly, in this and other recent elections, the ethnic factor appears to have been less important for the Democrats (both McGroarty and Leighton are of Irish heritage) as compared to policy issues related to downtown development, economic expansion, neighborhood integrity, and leadership qualities.

Along with the internecine party relations, the latest charter reform in 2001 has also presented a challenge to the Democrats. The movement began in 2000 when the Wilkes-Barre Taxpayers Association (WBTA), a good government group, began studying the existing charter. In compliance with the Pennsylvania Home Rule Charter law, WBTA members gathered enough signatures to petition city council to revise the charter by placing two questions before the voters.

The first question concerned the size of the council. The organization judged the seven-member council, elected at-large, as outdated. Members argued that a city of Wilkes-Barre's size (43,123 residents as of the 2000 census, down from just over 50,000 in 1976) would function more effectively with a five-member council. The second question related to at-large versus ward elections. Because certain neighborhoods such as South Wilkes-Barre have been most successful in electing officials (Mayors McLaughlin, Namey, McGroarty, and Leighton, as well as a disproportionate share of council

members, have hailed from South Wilkes-Barre), the group requested a change from at-large to ward representation. They argued that the ward system would guarantee broader neighborhood representation.<sup>59</sup>

In the November 2001 election, voters approved both questions amid a very low turnout. Democratic leaders were stunned. They did not take the movement seriously. They soon launched a legal challenge arguing that the referendum's wording was unclear.<sup>60</sup> The District Court agreed and negated the election results in 2003. Upon appeal, however, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court overturned the decision in 2004.

To comply with the ruling, the city council appointed a committee to draw the ward boundaries. Those appointed were mainly Democratic Party regulars and the draft they produced proved unsatisfactory to numerous constituencies because it largely ignored neighborhoods, something which would have helped the Party with its organization but hurt independent candidates with neighborhood name recognition and appeal. When the reformers complained and the newspapers chimed in, council was forced to relent and appoint a new committee to draw districts. A second committee produced acceptable ward designations. After considerable delay and remonstrance, the councilors voted to begin the new government structure starting with the November 2007 elections. It will officially take effect in January 2008.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, the failure of the first committee indicated the growing power of the reformers coupled with the increasing vulnerability of the Democrats.

Through the latest reform, the WBTA has mustered a compelling challenge to the *status quo* of Wilkes-Barre government and politics. Some reformist Democrats and Independents joined with Republican leaders, indicating that the latter have not stopped testing their rivals. The Republicans have broadened their ethnic and social base so they are now a more diverse group. For example, one WBTA and charter reform leader, Christine Katsock—of Slavic and Irish background—ran unsuccessfully as the Republican candidate for mayor in 2003.

Wards have been shown to produce greater political conflict than at-large systems because council members tend to fight for the interests of their geographic constituents. As a result, disagreements and quarrels can be expected to increase at city hall. If this pattern holds true, the discord may eventually benefit the Republicans and could be an avenue to their gaining at least some office-holding authority.<sup>62</sup>

Yet, despite the recent charter revision, Wilkes-Barre remains strongly Democratic. In the election of 2003, only four Republicans ran for seven

council seats (all lost) while, as mentioned, 23 Democrats appeared on the ballot. Mayor Leighton won over challenger Katsock by a 20-point margin. The national Democratic ticket of Kerry and Edwards carried Wilkes-Barre by a landslide. Wilkes-Barre remains a Democratic stronghold within a firmly Democratic Luzerne County, much like the situation in Scranton and Lackawanna County, this during a period when Democrats in many cities have lost considerable ground.<sup>63</sup>

Therefore, despite cracks and challenges, as well as problems associated with a declining population, tax base, and downtown, the Democrats will have maintained virtually complete political dominance in Wilkes-Barre for at least 32 years (1976 to 2008). Conversely, Republican participation in the formal operation of government has been practically eliminated. The election of November 2007, under the newly revised charter, may provide some indication as to whether the inter-party and intra-party rivalries have taken a new direction.<sup>64</sup>

The Democrats' success in Wilkes-Barre notwithstanding, controlling government is not the same as governing. The most glaring disappointment of the past 30 years of Democratic rule have been in the area of policy-making. During the first decade of the strong mayor system (1976–86), the government focused less on efficiency and management than on meeting the flood recovery and safety needs of the neighborhoods as well as the economic problems facing the entire community. During the second decade, economic development and downtown rejuvenation assumed the highest priorities as Democratic officials worked with some of their historical opponents in the Chamber of Commerce and its affiliate, the Committee for Economic Growth. For much of the third decade, the McGroarty administration had a falling out with the city council (which blocked many of his proposals) and the Democratic Party, and also with economic development and private sector leaders. As a consequence, policy-making languished as the city's problems grew.

Like many Pennsylvania communities, Wilkes-Barre witnessed severe erosion in its manufacturing sector. The two major industries of anthracite coal and ladies' garment manufacturing expired along with numerous other smaller manufacturing firms in steel cable, cigars, shoes, and silk. To compound the problem, the population (which peaked in the early 1930s at over 86,000) has fallen from 58,856 in 1970, to 43,123 in 2000, to 41,630 in 2003. Wilkes-Barre was one of six Pennsylvania cities to experience population losses greater than three percent between 2000 and 2003.<sup>65</sup>

Among the main social consequences of the decline have been persistently high unemployment and underemployment, a declining property tax base, a dwindling downtown business district, and growing social problems. One emerging social issue relates to the growing number of Hispanic and African-American residents. Even though the population remains over 96 percent white according to the latest U.S. Census, the growth of minorities over the past decade has precipitated racial and ethnic tensions related to schools, housing, and public safety.

To be sure, the government has made some progress on some fronts. The city has garnered considerable industrial development experience since in the 1950s, although in the current post-industrial economy, manufacturing firms have become more difficult to attract.<sup>66</sup> Renewed efforts have been under way to refurbish the downtown business district and attract retail and service businesses. Related discussions have been set in motion to draw a major bookstore and other shops to take cater to the nearly 6,000 students who attend the two central city colleges (King's College and Wilkes University). Design plans have been fashioned to construct an inflatable dam in the Susquehanna River that could bring boating and other forms of water recreation to the central city's edge. The rehabilitation of the historic Hotel Sterling just off the Public Square in center city is in progress. Also, religious and civic groups, as well as the public schools, have been working to address racial and ethnic tensions through community forums and educational dialogues.

It remains to be seen whether the Democrats, despite their guaranteed dominance through 2008, can muster the resources to to redirect the city's economic and social future. In reality, the task is enormously difficult for municipal governments, for the institution has in many ways remained the weak link within the federal system, as James Bryce observed long ago.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, the contemporary problems associated with economic and social viability have become all the more acute in the face of de-industrialization, free trade, and globalization—national and international trends over which local governments have little control. Nevertheless, policies to confront the post-industrial world can and have been undertaken in many cities, large and small, including Wilkes-Barre and neighboring Scranton.<sup>68</sup>

Regarding the research questions that guided the study, five conclusions seem evident. First, it is clear that the political culture associated with competitive, and even rancorous, politics between Democrats and Republicans undergirded the three charter reforms between 1968 and 2001.



Second, changes to the state constitution allowing greater home rule served as essential contextual factors for the reforms. Third, with regard to the influence of a major disaster, the study indicates that the change to strong mayor, as well as the political ascendancy of the Democrats, can be linked directly to the after-effects of Tropical Storm Agnes. The Wilkes-Barre story illustrates that the stresses associated with a natural catastrophe can have a major impact on local government structure and regime. However, unlike the Katrina disaster in New Orleans where, despite severe criticism, the mayor was recently re-elected and the city council remained in Democratic hands, Wilkes-Barre in the wake of Agnes acted more like Galveston and Dayton, as well as Waco, Texas and Gulf Springs, Alabama. In each of these cases the disasters had significant political repercussions on government structure and political realignment.<sup>69</sup>

Fourth, regarding the debate between political culture and government structure, it is obvious that Wilkes-Barre has witnessed some of the most sweeping changes in its political history during the past four decades. They include home rule, two new charters, one revised charter, political realignment, and a new generation of elected officials. Nevertheless through it all, a highly competitive and conflict-ridden political culture has endured. Internal Democratic rivalries have replaced the often-heated Democrat-Republican clashes of the past. Despite their powerlessness, the Republicans have not given up the fight and are trying to re-establish their position by broadening their constituency and by successfully altering the charter in 2001. It seems clear, therefore, that the deep-seated political cultural patterns have endured regardless of government structure. Perhaps one journalist summarized the situation best when she wrote, "Politics, of course, is the name of the game in city hall. One can never forget that small fact. . . ."<sup>70</sup>

Finally, to place the Wilkes-Barre study in a larger context, the three charter changes given special attention here must be considered as reflections of two major trends in twentieth-century Pennsylvania politics, namely, the decline of urban Republican machines and the movement to home rule charters. The Republican Party dominated politics across the Commonwealth following the Civil War and, by the late-nineteenth century, powerful and corrupt Republican machines ruled most cities. In Wilkes-Barre, as in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, an alliance of business elites, political operatives, and elected officials ran the machine, while the rank and file consisted of a coalition that included the middle classes, Protestants, and a broad group of minorities and others who depended on the machine in a variety of ways.

In most Pennsylvania cities, Republican ascendancy was cemented by the economic crises of the 1890s, for which the Democrats received blame. Ironically (and perhaps fittingly), it was another economic crisis—the Great Depression of the 1930s—that facilitated the dissolution of the Republican’s supremacy. Unlike in the 1890s, however, the transition from Republican to Democratic control was rather slow. Democrats captured Pittsburgh as early as 1936 but Philadelphia did not fall from Republican hands until 1951. Scranton also witnessed the demise of its Republican machine beginning with the election in 1941 of four-term Democratic mayor James T. Hanlon.<sup>71</sup> With this backdrop, Wilkes-Barre’s multiple transitions can be seen as part of the death knell of urban Republican dominance in Pennsylvania and its replacement by a “New Deal” Democratic coalition, albeit decades later.<sup>72</sup>

The other trend broadly affecting the state’s politics in the twentieth century was the home rule charter. As discussed, the state Legislature traditionally specified the powers of local political units. Initially, this was done by granting unique charters to each city, but eventually the legislature began to rationalize the process by adopting broad rules that classified municipalities by size. (See note 8) One Progressive Era reform shifted control over the details of local government from officials in Harrisburg to local citizens who could adopt charters theoretically more suited to their situation. Although the state Constitution was amended in 1922 to allow the legislature to grant cities the general right to adopt such charters, it was not until 1949 that the general assembly allowed Philadelphia alone to do so. Philadelphia acted quickly and, in 1951, adopted a home rule charter, in the same year that voters elected Democratic reformer Joseph S. Clark as mayor and thereby broke the Republican juggernaut.

In 1957, the legislature extended a limited form of home rule to the third class cities and, in 1972, provided even more home rule options. By the end of 1972, seventeen such cities had adopted home rule charters. Therefore, once again, Wilkes-Barre’s movement in this direction must be considered as part of a broader trend in Pennsylvania urban government and politics.<sup>73</sup>

## NOTES

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Ronald Slusser, Edward J. Davies, as well as anonymous peer reviewers. David Wenzel, mayor of Scranton between 1986 and 1990, provided important information about the political history of Scranton and Lackawanna County. The study is dedicated to the memory of Roberts (1912–1991) and Shaw (1935–1993), who on numerous occasions graciously and patiently shared their experiences with and knowledge of Wilkes-Barre's municipal government.

2. On Wilkes-Barre's governmental structures see *An Act to Incorporate the City of Wilkes-Barre* (May 4, 1871); *Ordinance Book of Wilkes-Barre, 1971*; *Ordinances of the City of Wilkes-Barre* (Wilkes-Barre: Union Leader, 1880); *Charter and Ordinances of the City of Wilkes-Barre* (Wilkes-Barre: Robert Baur and Son, 1890); *Synopsis of Laws Government Cities of the Third Class* (Wilkes-Barre: City of Wilkes-Barre, 1899); Louis Richards and Frank P. Slattery (compilers), *A Digest of the Laws and Ordinances for the Government of the Municipal Corporation of the City of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania* (Wilkes-Barre: Robert Baur and Son, 1903); *Wilkes-Barre Ordinances, 1913–1916*; Oscar J. Harvey and Ernest G. Smith, *A History of Wilkes-Barre Volume IV* (Wilkes-Barre: Smith-Bennett Corporation, 1929); *Wilkes-Barre Ordinances, 1967–1968*; "Administrative Code of the City of Wilkes-Barre," File of Council, Number 16 of 1968; "City of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, City Charter and Administrative Code," 1976.
3. On the details of home rule in Pennsylvania see C. Hoffman, "Pennsylvania Legislation Implements Home Rule," *National Civic Review*, 61 (1972), 390–93; Joseph J. Karlesky, "Municipal Home Rule: Some Notes on Development," *National Civic Review*, 61 (1972), 394–96; Larry Gamm, "Pennsylvania Local Government Study: Observations By Commissioners," *National Civic Review*, 64 (1975), 400–03. On the efforts of the Department of Community Affairs see *Department of Community Affairs Reports* (Harrisburg: Department of Community Affairs, 1973).
4. American cities generally adopt one of three types of government structures: mayor-council, city manager-council, or commission. While all three have a mayor, the nature of the office varies with each form. In the mayor-council form, the mayor is either "strong" (having considerable budgetary, appointive, veto and other powers), or "weak" (few powers). With city manager-council, the mayor is usually weak because a professionally trained manager serves as the chief executive and administrative officer. Under the commission, a weak mayor is selected by peer vote among the elected commissioners and, other than serving as presiding officer at commission meetings, has mainly a ceremonial role.

The commission form combines administrative, legislative, and executive functions such that each commissioner sits on a governing council but is also the chief executive of a city department. During the nineteenth century, the mayor-council form usually with a weak mayor became the most widely adopted structure. In the Progressive Era, reformers instituted the manager-council and the commission forms, hence their reputation as reform structures designed to depoliticize and professionalize local governments.

5. Political culture refers to a community's broadly shared beliefs and values regarding the operation and purpose of local politics and government. Daniel Elazar discussed three typologies of political cultures in American communities: individualistic, moralistic, and traditionalistic. He characterized the political culture of Luzerne County as combination of "individualistic" and "moralistic." An individualistic culture "holds [politics] to be just another means by which individuals may improve themselves socially and economically," while a moralistic culture "conceives of politics as a public

## REMAKING MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT?

- activity centered on some notion of the public good properly devoted to the advancement of the public interest." The fusion of the two types creates a condition in which citizens accept a centralized authority capable of exercising considerable powers in the name of personal interests as well as the common good. See Daniel J. Elazar, *American Federalism: A View From the States* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), quotes from pp. 115 and 117.
6. Oscar Jewell Harvey and Ernest Gray Smith, *A History of the Wilkes-Barre*, Volume III (Wilkes-Barre: The Reader Co., 1927), 1764–68.
  7. Harvey and Smith, *A History of Wilkes-Barre*, Volume IV, 2105–07.
  8. City classifications have been established by the Pennsylvania legislature pursuant to the state Constitution. They are based mainly on population but cities have some choice in their designations. Periodically, the legislature adjusts the population criteria required of each class. Philadelphia is the only first-class city, Pittsburgh the only second-class city, and Scranton the only second class "A" city. Since 1992, cities with populations under 250,000 and which have not elected to become a "second class A" are categorized as third class cities. (See P.L. 789, No. 126, 1992, and The Pennsylvania Manual, Vol. 116) 6–47. Wilkes-Barre is a third class city according to these criteria.
  9. Harvey and Smith, *A History of Wilkes-Barre*, Volume IV, 2107–08.
  10. A.M. Fuller, "Commission Government for All Third Class Cities of Pennsylvania," *American City*, 10 (1913), 123–23; Allied Civic Bodies of Pennsylvania, "City Government by Commission," *Bulletin of the League of American Municipalities*, 12 (1910), 193–94; Richard N. Bennett, "One Year of Commission Government in Wilkes-Barre," *Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce Journal*, 10 (1915), 2–19. On the Commission form of government in the Progressive Era reforms see Ernest S. Bradford, *Commission Government in American Cities* (New York: Macmillan, 1912); Ford H. MacGregor, "City Government by Commission" *Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin*, Volume 1, 1911; William B. Munro, *The Government of American Cities* (New York: Macmillan, 1912 & 1920); and Bradley R. Rice, *Progressive Cities: The Commission Government Movement in America, 1901–1920* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977). On Progressive Era urban reforms in general see Jon C. Teaford, *The Twentieth-Century American City*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 30–43; Howard P. Chudacoff and Judith E. Smith, *The Evolution of American Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), Chapter 7.
  11. The 2001 alteration to the charter is called a revision because it did not change the fundamental structure of government but brought these two adjustments to the strong mayor form.
  12. Edward J. Davies, "Large-Scale Systems and Regional Leadership: Wilkes-Barre's Upper Class and Urban Elites in the Northern Anthracite Region, 1920–1930," *The Public Historian*, 4 (1982), 39–68; Edward J. Davies, "Class and Power in the Anthracite Region: The Control of Political Leadership in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, 1845–1885," *Journal of Urban History*, 9 (1983), 291–334; Edward J. Davies, *The Anthracite Aristocracy: Leadership and Social Change in the Hard Coal Regions of Northeastern Pennsylvania, 1800–1930* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1985).
  13. On the region's economic and social history see Harold W. Aurand, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers: A Social Ecology of an Industrial Union, 1869–1897* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1971); Donald L. Miller and Richard E. Sharpless, *The Kingdom of Coal: Work, Enterprise, and Ethnic Communities in the Mine Fields* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985); Anthony F.C. Wallace, *St. Clair: A Nineteenth Century Coal Town's Experience With A*

- Disaster-Prone Industry* (New York: Knopf, 1987); Robert P. Wolensky, Kenneth C. Wolensky, and Nicole H. Wolensky, *The Knox Mine Disaster* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1999); Kenneth C. Wolensky, Nicole H. Wolensky, and Robert P. Wolensky, *Fighting for the Union Label: The Women's Garment Industry and the ILGWU in Pennsylvania* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2002); Harold W. Aurand, *Coalcracker Culture: Work and Values in Pennsylvania Anthracite* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2003); Thomas Dublin and Walter Licht, *Facing Industrial Decline: The Pennsylvania Anthracite Region in the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).
14. Davies stated that, "Organizations such as the Westmoreland Club and the Malt Club . . . were exclusive, confined to the top levels of local society." *The Anthracite Aristocracy*, 14. Paul B. Beers quipped that, "[Governor Gifford] Pinchor's economic conservatism appealed even to the dinosaurs at the Union League, the Duquesne Club, and the Westmoreland Club," in *Pennsylvania Politics Today and Yesterday* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1980, 1988). The Westmoreland Club remained a males-only establishment until the late 1980s. See "Harris Remains Firm Despite Daughter's Westmoreland Entry," *Sunday Independent* (Wilkes-Barre), September 23, 1990, Sec. 3, 1.
  15. Taped oral histories with Ambrose Meletsky (December 16, 1983), Min Matheson (November 30, 1982), and Joseph Kopcza (December 21, 1988) discussed the longstanding pressure exerted by the coal companies to influence on voting. (The tape-recorded interviews are part of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Oral and Life History Project, hereafter NPOLHP) The Republican Party enjoyed pre-eminence in Luzerne County during the first half of the twentieth century. John S. Fine, the county Republican boss between 1922 and 1955, stood as the most eminent and powerful Republican leaders. Fine was elected judge in the 1940s and governor in 1950. Until the 1960s, when Democrats gained the majority at the county level, the situation for those outside of the Republican machine proved very difficult. According to former Democratic State Senator and President Pro Tempore of the Senate, Martin L. Murray: "The county was political even in business. If you weren't a Republican you couldn't get a job in the mines, in the utilities, in the banks. The special interests controlled everything. The Fine organization even gave property assessment breaks to registered Republicans, and the coal companies didn't pay taxes. What we had here was a fear built up among the people." (Quoted in Beers, *Pennsylvania Politics, Today and Yesterday*, 178–79). On the Republican's dominance, Pat Solano, who was a perennial County Republican leader beginning in the 1940s, and party chairman from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, said ". . . the mine owners, the big corporate people, Pennsylvania Coal [Company], Kehoe-Berg Coal, Glenn Alden Coal, Lehigh Valley Coal—they were all there. They were all Republicans. It was the Party. You know, they controlled it all. They controlled the patronage. They controlled the state. They controlled the county. They controlled the mines. In those days, it was easy to build a big powerful machine." (Pat Solano, taped interview, July 31, 1993, NPOLHP, tape 1, side 1)
  16. Harvey and Smith, *A History of Wilkes-Barre*, Volume IV, 2106.
  17. Edward J. Davies, "Class and Power in the Anthracite Region," 314. Wilkes-Barre's upper class persisted into the twentieth century, unlike the situation in Scranton where the elite had dissipated by the latter part of the nineteenth century. See Burton Folsom, Jr., *Urban Capitalists: Entrepreneurs and City Growth in Pennsylvania's Lackawanna and Lehigh Regions, 1800–1920* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981). For a general theoretical discussion on urban political

## REMAKING MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT?

- development in the American city see Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
18. William V. Lewis Jr., "The Biographies of the Mayors of the City of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania," 978, Unpublished manuscript, Luzerne County Historical Society, Wilkes-Barre, PA.
  19. William V. Lewis Jr., "The Biographies of the Mayors of the City of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania." See also Davies, *The Anthracite Aristocracy*. On the old stock versus newcomer split in Pennsylvania see Elazar, *American Federalism: A View From the States*, especially Chapter 8. On the politics of economic decline in the anthracite region see Thomas J. Keil, "Disinvestment and Economic Decline in Northeastern Pennsylvania: The Failure of a Local Business Elite's Growth Agenda." In Scott Cummings, ed., *Business Elites and Urban Development: Case Studies and Critical Perspectives* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), 269–95.
  20. "30-Year Hold By Republican Party Ended," *Wilkes-Barre Record*, November 6, 1963, 11; "Democrats Control City Hall after Thirty Years," *Times Leader Evening News* (Wilkes-Barre), January 6, 1964, 3. See also Ellis Roberts, un-taped interviews, August 5, 1989 and September 16, 1990; and Ellis Roberts, taped interview, August 8, 1989, NPOLHP, tape 1, side 1. Roberts won a seat as a Democrat on the city commission in the election of 1963.
  21. "Survey Finds 38 Percent Don't Even Know of Any Charter Study," *Wilkes-Barre Record*, September 23, 1966, 22. Prof. Donald Buzinkai, Department of Political Science, King's College, Wilkes-Barre, conducted this survey of 200 registered voters.
  22. Richard J. Stillman, *The Rise of the City Manager: A Public Professional in Local Government* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974). See also Martin J. Schiesl, *The Politics of Efficiency: Municipal Administration and Reform in America, 1880–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977). Research has indicated that reformed governments more often benefit middle and upper class constituencies at the expense of lower-ranking populations. See Robert L. Lineberry and Edmund P. Fowler, "Reformism and Public Policy in American Cities," *American Political Science Review*, 61 (September 1967), 701–16; and Clinton B. Jones, "The Impact of Local Election Systems on Black Political Representation," *Urban Affairs Quarterly*, 11 (March 1976), 346–56; Susan Welch and Timothy Bledsoe, *Urban Reform and Its Consequences* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988).
  23. Analysis of the 1968 charter reform relied on un-taped interviews with two members of city council in 1966, the last "commission" mayor, two of the three "city manager" mayors, the third full-time city manager, the third interim city manager, the executive director of the Pennsylvania Economy League in 1966, and four civic leaders active in the reform movement. The analysis also relied on local newspaper accounts as well as *The Final Report of the Charter Study Commission of Wilkes-Barre* (1974), which presented the testimony of numerous persons.
  24. Frank P. Slattery, taped interview, May 28, 1983, NPOLHP, tape 1, side 1; "Ludicrous Situation in City Government Tied to Archaic-type Government," *Times Leader Evening News* (February 3, 1966), 3; "Slattery Supports, Brader Dissents, Strong Mayor Type of Government Here," *Wilkes-Barre Record*, December 24, 1965, 18. When Slattery realized the impossibility of implementing the strong mayor form he advocated retention of the commission as reported in, "Mayor Asks No Change in Type of City Government," *Times Leader Evening News*, September 15, 1966, 3.
  25. Robert Brader, taped interview, August 18, 1984, NPOLHP, tape 1, side 1.

26. Respected labor leader Henry DePolo decided to run as an independent candidate. "I don't think any individual or group of individuals should ask the rest of the citizens to step aside while a certain block is elected without opposition," he said. See "Charter Study Independents Form Slate," *Wilkes-Barre Record*, October 26, 1965, 13.
27. Commenting on voting fraud, Beers observed: "The hard coal region was almost as bad as Philadelphia and Pittsburgh for stealing votes. . . ." (Beers, *Pennsylvania Politics, Today and Yesterday*, 93).
28. Between 1957, when the new state law passed, and 1965, when Wilkes-Barre began a charter study, voters in 17 of Pennsylvania's 48 third class cities approved referenda to undertake charter studies. Of the 17, nine study commissions recommended the city manager form; five backed a strong mayor-council form; one recommended the manager form but quickly did a second study and recommended the commission form; and one kept the commission. Of the nine cities where the study committee recommended the manager plan, voters approved only two. See Pennsylvania Economy League, "Citizens' Guide: The People's Choice," Harrisburg, no date.
29. "Republicans Take Over Council Control," *Wilkes-Barre Record*, January 2, 1968, 2; John V. Morris, taped interview, June 25, 1992, NPOLHP, tape 1, side 2.
30. "Kasper Says Economy League Trying to Hand Pick Manager," *Wilkes-Barre Record*, March 19, 1968, 20. The Pennsylvania Economy League (PEL) is a private-nonprofit organization headquartered in Harrisburg. With the support of a coal company, it established a regional office in Wilkes-Barre in the early 1950s. The organization provides information on taxes, business climate, government performance, economic development, and other matters of concern to the private sector. PEL released a special report on the 1957 Pennsylvania Optional Third Class City Charter Law entitled, "Citizens' Guide: The People's Choice." Former PEL executive director, Raymond Carmon, provided a detailed account of PEL's involvement with the charter reform in a taped interview on May 31, 1983, NPOLHP, tape 2, side 1.
31. Un-taped interviews with John B. McGlynn, May 24, 1973 and December 17, 1982; see also John B. McGlynn, taped interview, August 16, 1984, NPOLHP, tape 1, side 1.
32. "Council Denies Wegner Right to Set Qualifications for Persons in His Job," *Wilkes-Barre Record*, May 18, 1968, 9; "New Council Coalition Adopts Amended City-Manager Ordinance," *Wilkes-Barre Record*, May 22, 1968, 13.
33. "Morris, Wegner in Fiery Clash; Mayor Would Ask His Dismissal," *Wilkes-Barre Record*, September 18, 1968, 11.
34. "Wegner Resigns as Manager," *Wilkes-Barre Record*, February 5, 1969, 1 & 12. This story quotes Wegner's resignation letter: "Changing from the commission form of government to the council-manager is accomplished by many adjustments and frequently some turmoil. These troubles usually smooth out in time as both the citizens and the council become more experienced in the provisions and operation of the council-manager form of government. However, in Wilkes-Barre, let me make it plain, the council-manager plan has never been allowed to get under way. In my opinion this is either because some members of council and their advisers do not yet understand the function of the council-manager plan and the optional third class city charter law of the State of Pennsylvania; or there is deliberate and calculated action on the part of some political factions, sometimes overt, sometimes covert, to hold Wilkes-Barre in the vice of government and politics. Whichever the cause, the method has been personal and professional attacks on me, unwarranted and unfactual, and also



## REMAKING MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT?

- injury to those who have been closely associated with me. Under these circumstances I find it futile to carry on indefinitely the operation of the council-manager plan in Wilkes-Barre."
35. "Apology is Made by Morris; Wegner Only Other to be Heard," *Times Leader Evening News*, April 24, 1969, 3 & 32. See also "21 to Testify at State Probe of Wilkes-Barre," *Sunday Independent*, March 9, 1969, Sec. 1, 1 & 2.
  36. "Straighten Out Problems or State Will, Council Told," *Wilkes-Barre Record*, September 23, 1969) 17; "City's GOP 'Ruthless' Power Hit As Council-Manager Flaw," *Wilkes-Barre Record*, March 27, 1969, 20.
  37. "Poll Shows Most Still Favor Council-Manager Government, House Subcommittee Told," *Times Leader Evening News*, July 27, 1970, 3 & 21.
  38. "55 Applications in for City Manager," *Wilkes-Barre Record*, February 2, 1972, 22.
  39. See "\$2.2 Billion Agnes Cost is Record for Disasters," *Times Leader Evening News and Wilkes-Barre Record*, jointly published following the Agnes disaster, August 11, 1972, 3. The Romney quote was taken from Leslie Danoff, "The Storm over Agnes," *New York Times*, September 7, 1972, 43.
  40. On the state-level funding see *Pennsylvania Department of Community Affairs Reports*, 3 (February) entire issue; "A Status Report by the Governor's Council of State Agencies for the Flood Recovery of the Wyoming Valley," Department of Community Affairs, Harrisburg, October 5, 1972. On the federal outlays see Peter J. May, *Recovery from Catastrophe: Federal Disaster Relief Policy and Politics* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), Chapter 2.
  41. "Flood Disaster Facts in Northeastern Pennsylvania as a Result of Tropical Storm Agnes with Special Reference to Luzerne, Schuylkill, and Carbon Counties," Economic Development Council of Northeastern Pennsylvania (August 8, 1972).
  42. Rev. J.W. Marchant, "SWIBCO—A Report and an Evaluation," unpublished report authorized by VOICE (Vehicle for Organizing Interactions Among Citizens for Equality) (Wilkes-Barre, PA, 1977); Robert P. Wolensky and Edward J. Miller, "The Everyday Versus the Disaster Role of Local Officials: Citizen and Official Definitions," *Urban Affairs Quarterly*, 16 (1981), 483–504; Anthony J. Mussari, *Appointment With Disaster* (Wilkes-Barre: Northeast Publishers, 1974), Chapter 5.
  43. Robert P. Wolensky, "Power Structure and Group Mobilization Following Disaster: A Case Study," *Social Science Quarterly*, 64 (1983), 96–110; Robert P. Wolensky, *Better Than Ever: The Flood Recovery Task Force and the 1972 Agnes Disaster* (Stevens Point, WI: UWSP Foundation Press, 1993).
  44. William King, "A Year After the Flood, Wilkes-Barre is Still Troubled," *New York Times*, June 24, 1973, 1.
  45. Joseph Williams, taped interview, October 18, 1984, NPOLHP, tape 1, side 1.
  46. Analysis of the 1976 charter reform relied on un-taped interviews conducted with all seven members of the charter study commission, all seven members of city council, the second mayor elected under the new charter, five directors of city departments, seven leading businessmen, and 15 citizens who were active in the charter reform movement. Several discussions with Andrew Shaw Jr., consultant to the charter study commission and director of the Institute for Regional Affairs at Wilkes University, provided information on the inner workings of the study commission. The analysis also relied on local newspaper accounts, as well as *The Final Report of the Charter Study Commission of Wilkes-Barre* (1974), which included the testimonies of 40 individuals (former mayors, council members, political and civic leaders, and other citizens).

47. Clifford Morse, "A Disservice by the Chamber of Commerce," *Wyoming (Pa.) Observer*, October 6–12, 1974, 12; "Flood Victim's Action Council Urges 'Vote Yes' for Charter Study," *Times-Leader Evening News*, November 1, 1974, 4; Min Matheson, taped interview, November 30, 31, 1982, NPOLHP, tape 2, side 2.
48. On city manager plan abandonments see A.W. Bromage, *city manager Plan Abandonments* (New York: National Municipal League, 1964), and David Knoke, "The Spread of Municipal Reform: Temporal, Spatial, and Social Dynamics," *American Journal of Sociology*, 87 (1982), 1314–39. Those advocating government reform in two other Pennsylvania cities stand in sharp contrast to the advocates in Wilkes-Barre. Neighborhood and other voluntary associations led the Pittsburgh movement, while in State College the impetus came from a coalition of business, law, civic, and university leaders. See J.V. Cunningham, "Drafting the Pittsburgh Charter: How Citizens Participated," *National Civic Review*, 63 (July), 410–15; and E. Smedley, "State College Borough Adopts Home Rule," *National Civic Review*, 63 (1974), 569–76.
49. John B. McGlynn, un-taped interview, December 17, 1982.
50. Following 1977, elections were held every four years, with the mayor and all other offices on a simultaneous election cycle. The 1975 Democratic primary pitted Anthony J. Mussari, a college professor and citizen activist, against councilman Walter Lisman. Despite the party's endorsement, Mussari lost the election. In 1979, Mussari ran again, this time without party backing, and lost to the endorsed candidate, councilman Thomas McLaughlin. The party split, though rancorous, did not harm the Democrats' overall political control but did presage some intense intra-party conflict that was to follow. On the 1979 split see "Councilmen Cite Unfair Attacks," *Citizens' Voice* (Wilkes-Barre), April 17, 1979, 3.
51. William Schneider discussed the 1973–74 progressive Democrats' resurgence at the national level in "JFK's Children: The Class of '74," *The Atlantic Monthly*, 263 (March 1989), 35–58.
52. In the 1975 primary, 23 Democratic candidates ran for four council seats while the Republicans fielded only four candidates. In the 1977 primary, ten Democrats and only five Republicans ran for three seats. For the 1979 election, the Democrats offered 15 candidates for seven seats compared to eight for the GOP. In 1991, perhaps the low point of Republican participation, only one GOP candidate ran for a council seat, the other six seats going uncontested to the Democrats in the general election. In 2003, four Republicans ran for the seven council seats compared to 23 Democrats. See Carol Kane, "Lone Republican Candidate Loses Bid to Gain Seat on City Council," *Citizens' Voice*, November 6, 1991, 4.
53. "Blaum, Namey, Reilly, Council's Young Turks, Will Seek Re-election," *Sunday Independent*, February 18, 1979, Sec. 1, 1 & 2. One of the so-called "young turks," Bob Reilly, had served on the charter study commission and decided to run for city council. However, as he said in an un-taped interview (November 12, 1973), because of his youth and the fact that he was one of the unendorsed Democrats elected to the study commission, he garnered the wrath of the commission chairman and party leader Jack McGlynn. When McGlynn learned of Riley's candidacy for city council, he allegedly promised that the young candidate would never be elected without party endorsement and vowed to do everything in his power to defeat Riley's candidacy. The generational split apparently had begun during the charter study process.
54. With the election of Mayor Thomas Leighton in 2003, four of the five mayors under the 1976 charter have been of Irish ancestry, as have the majority of council members. Mayor Walter Lisman was

## REMAKING MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT?

- the only exception, as a German Catholic. Three of the recently (2003) elected councilpersons have Irish heritage and another is married to a person of Irish ancestry. Nevertheless, as stated later, the ethnic component has become less important in city politics than other factors. See the taped interviews with Lisman (November 25, 1995), McLaughlin (July 10, 1997), and Namey (December 19, 2002), NPOLHP.
55. Namey began with the Riverside Park Residents Association following the Agnes flood. See his taped interview, December 19, 2002, NPOLHP, tape 2, side 1. The position of citizens' groups as a powerful force in Wilkes-Barre is examined in Robert P. Wolensky, *Power, Policy, And Disaster: The Political-Organizational Impact of a Major Flood* (National Science Foundation, Grant #CEE8113529, 1984); especially Chapter 5; and also Robert P. Wolensky, "POWER: Collective Action and the Anthracite Region Water Crisis," in Stephen R. Couch and Stephen Kroll-Smith, (eds.), *Communities at Risk: Collective Responses to Technological Hazards* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 229–62.
  56. The inability of the Democratic organization to maintain hold over candidates and other aspects of governance and policy had parallels on the national and state levels. See William Crotty, *American Parties in Decline* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984).
  57. Dave Kaszuba, "Demos United Head Quits; Cites GOP Play," *Sunday Independent*, October 27, 1991, Sec. 2, 5.
  58. See, for example, "It's About Time the Mayor and City Council Stopped Acting Like Children," *Citizens' Voice*, September 20, 2002, 4; "Bashing McGroarty Occupies W-B Council," *Times Leader*, November 15, 2002, 34; "'Worst' Mayor! We need the 'Best,'" Editorial, *Citizens' Voice*, May 1, 2003, 28.
  59. "Kevin Donlin, 'Drive Starts to Change City Charter,'" *Citizens' Voice*, June 20, 2001, 5.
  60. "Michael McNarney, 'Suit by 14 Challenges Ward Plan for W-B,'" *Times Leader*, December 12, 2002, 1.
  61. Elizabeth Skrapits, "W-B Redistricting Plans Unveiled," *Citizens' Voice*, November 11, 2002, 3; "Delay on W-B districts legal, lawyer says," *Times Leader*, October 15, 2005, 3.
  62. In their extensive national study of ward vs. at-large elections, Welch and Bledsoe (*Urban Reform and Its Consequences*, Chapter 3) highlighted the greater levels of political conflict in ward systems.
  63. However, in 2005 Lackawanna County voters elected the first Republican majority Commission in 20 years. Beginning in the mid-1960s, Luzerne County had mainly Democratic majorities on the Commission. A Republican majority won in the early 1980s but it lasted only one term. Earlier Republican domination in Luzerne County mirrored the state pattern, where between 1921 and 1952, the GOP dominated local as well as state elections. Allegheny and some surrounding counties were the exception. See Edward F. Cooke and Edward G. Janosik, *Pennsylvania Politics* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 14–15.
  64. The Republican loss of political influence in the city had parallels at the county level. Not only has Luzerne County government remained solidly Democratic for the past three decades, as mentioned, but three Republican-led efforts at county-level charter reform failed during this period. The first occurred in 1975, when members of the upper Republican faction led an unsuccessful referendum to change the county structure from a three-member Commission to a professional manager with a seven-member council. A broader coalition of Republicans, Independents, and some Democrats mobilized two other reform campaigns, in 1989 and 2003. In both cases voters approved the

- charter studies but defeated the referenda. On these reform campaigns see Sr. Marie Turnbach, "A Report on an Administrative Internship with the Committee for the Charter," (M.A. Thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1975); Robert J. Bogdon, "Home Rule Concept Sparks Debate," *Citizens' Voice*, June 22, 1990, 25; Kalen Churcher, "County Home Rule: Possibility GOP Will be Shut Out Stirs Debate," *Times Leader*, May 17, 2003, 3A.
65. The other cities were Altoona, Hazleton, Johnstown, McKeesport, and New Castle. See [http://www.dsf.health.state.pa.us/health/lib/health/Vital\\_Stat/2003/2003\\_Pop\\_Highlights\\_for\\_web.pdf](http://www.dsf.health.state.pa.us/health/lib/health/Vital_Stat/2003/2003_Pop_Highlights_for_web.pdf).
  66. On Wilkes-Barre's and the Wyoming Valley's industrial development see Richard Cronin, Taped Interview, May 24, 1983, NPOLHP; Harold Landau, "Industrial Development in the Wilkes-Barre Area," (M.A. Thesis, University of Scranton, 1967); and Sheldon Spear, *Wyoming Valley History Revisited* (Shavertown, PA: JEMAGS & Co. Publishing, 1994), especially pages 224 to 236. For an introduction of the area's economic transition from anthracite see Kenneth C. Wolensky, "Diamonds and Coal," *Now and Then—The Appalachian Magazine*, 14 (Winter 1997): 20–24.
  67. James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth* (New York: Macmillan, 1934 [1888]), especially Vol. I, chapters 48–52. On the difficulty municipal governments have had with one particular policy area, disaster management, see Robert P. Wolensky and Kenneth C. Wolensky, "Local Government and the Disaster Management Problem: A Literature Review and Structural Analysis," *Policy Studies Review*, 9 (1990), 703–25.
  68. See note 71 on Scranton's economic development.
  69. On the Galveston and Dayton cases see Wolensky, *Power, Policy, and Disaster*. On Waco see Harry E. Moore, *Tornadoes Over Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1958). On Gulf Springs see D.R. Godschalk, "Rebuilding After Hurricane Frederick," in M.T. Charles and J.C. Kim eds., *Crisis Management: A Casebook* (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1988). The classic study on natural disaster and political change is by R.G. Abney and L.B. Hill, "Natural Disaster as a Political Variable: The Effect of a Hurricane on an Urban Election," *American Political Science Review*, 60 (December 1964), 974–81. For a broad analysis of the politics associated with the Katrina disaster see Ronald J. Daniels, Donald F. Kettl, and Howard Kunreuther, eds., *On Risk and Disaster: Lessons from Hurricane Katrina* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).
  70. Janine Dubik, "Ending a Beat," *Citizens' Voice*, September 5, 1990, 4.
  71. Although Wilkes-Barre and Scranton have had shared many social, cultural, and economic similarities and differences, they have also been characterized by three distinct political contrasts. First, as discussed, Scranton has been a Democratic city for a much longer period. Following the Civil War, with some exceptions, Republicans dominated the municipal government. However, beginning in 1945, when James T. Hanlon, a Democrat, won the mayoral election, the Democrats have been in the clear majority. Elected four times, Hanlon remained in office between 1945 and 1961 and enjoyed Democratic councils or council majorities throughout his tenure. Scranton has had only three Republican mayors since 1945, and only one (Eugene Peters) served with a Republican council majority and for only one of his two terms (1969–73). Given Scranton's ethnic history, it should come as no surprise that *all* of the city's Democratic mayors have been of Irish heritage. Labor leader Terrance Powderly, though also Irish, won the mayoral election three times in the late nineteenth century under the Greenback Labor Party. The much earlier decline of Scranton's upper class

(as compared to Wilkes-Barre's) no doubt figured prominently into the earlier political emergence of the ethnic Democrats. (See Folsom, *Urban Capitalists*).

Second, Scranton established the strong mayor form with a five-member council the 1920s and has retained it to the present. The three charter changes enacted since the 1930s were the rather minor alterations to the tax office (1933), the business affairs office (1976), and the wage tax (2003). Consequently, Scranton has witnessed none of the politically driven structural reorganizations found in Wilkes-Barre. It would seem that Scranton's lack of intense inter-party competition during most of the twentieth century could explain much of the stability in government structure.

Third, the cities have differed on policy-making, particularly with regard to economic development and downtown viability. Although, as mentioned, Scranton experienced severe fiscal problems in the 1990s, the city has been more aggressive and successful in developing the central business district. A relatively new center city mall adjacent to the relatively new Steamtown National Historical Site, a railroad museum operated by the National Park Service, has aided this effort. Furthermore, Scranton and Lackawanna County have been much more successful in developing a tourism industry because of Steamtown, the Lackawanna (County) Coal Mine tour, two sites operated by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (the Anthracite Heritage Museum and the Scranton Iron Furnace), a minor league baseball park, the Montage ski resort, and a geographic location near the tourist centers in the Pocono Mountains. Downtown Wilkes-Barre experienced a renaissance following the Agnes disaster, but over the past two decades the central business district has declined as the economic geography has shifted retail growth to outlying malls and shopping centers. Furthermore, Wilkes-Barre has developed no anthracite-related or other forms of tourism.

72. On Pennsylvania politics see Randall M. Miller and William A. Pencak, eds., *Pennsylvania: A History of the Commonwealth* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2002), chaps 5–7, especially 329 and 343. On the specifics for Philadelphia, see Peter McCaffery, *When Bosses Ruled Philadelphia: The Emergence of the Republican Machine, 1867–1933* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1993), and Russell Weigley, ed., *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982), 436–43, 531–63, 581–7, and 649–703.
73. *Home Rule in Pennsylvania*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Governor's Center for Local Government Services, 2003), 4. On Philadelphia see, Weigley, *Philadelphia*, 725.