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The Demise of the American Convention System, 1880–1911

During the nineteenth century American political parties selected their candidates for elective offices in conventions. Around 1910 most states established a system of direct primaries whereby the voters selected their parties' nominees for public office. The current study examines the transition from the indirect to the direct primary, as well as its implication for American politics. The book offers a systematic analysis of the convention system in four states (New Jersey, Michigan, Colorado, and California) and the legislative history of the regulation of political parties during the Progressive Era. It holds the major political parties responsible for doing away with the nominating convention. As candidates became more open and aggressive in pursuit of their parties' nominations, they played a pivotal role in inaugurating the new nominating system. The convention system was never designed to withstand the pressures exerted on it by a more competitive nominating process.

John F. Reynolds is an associate professor of history at the University of Texas at San Antonio. He received his B.A. and M.A. from Michigan State University and his Ph.D. from Rutgers University. He is the author of *Testing Democracy: Electoral Behavior and Progressive Reform in New Jersey, 1880–1920*, and he has published articles in the *Journal of American History, Social Science History, Historical Methods*, and *The Historian*.

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University of Texas at San Antonio

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To My Teachers:
Bill and Peter
and David O.
and
Richard M. and Richard L.
and especially for Rudy,
who insisted on a second book

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Acknowledgments

A book fifteen years in the making accumulates a mountain of debt of the pecuniary and nonpecuniary kind. I am grateful for the opportunity to acknowledge the professional assistance and many kindnesses tendered me over the years from many quarters. The early stages of the project required extensive research into newspapers on microfilm that were tracked down and accessed through the diligent efforts of Sue McCray in the University of Texas at San Antonio's interlibrary loan office. Every history department deserves a bibliographer on the library staff like Dr. Richard H. McDonnell, who combines his mastery of content with a command of search engines and Boolean logic. Paulo J. Villarreal skillfully digitized and cleaned up the many images in the text that originated from scratchy microfilm. Also at San Antonio, the indomitable Sheryl S. McDonald, the very able Anastasia J. Peña, and the same technologically savvy Paulo Villarreal have run the History Department with such efficiency and quiet professionalism that I could steal time to put the finishing touches on the manuscript, for which I am most thankful.

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tracking down material. A development leave from the University of Texas at San Antonio allowed me time to think and write my way through my research notes and emerge with a manuscript.

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Abbreviations

DEN	*Detroit Evening News*
DFP	*Detroit Free Press*
DP	*Denver Post*
DR	*Denver Republican*
DSG	*Daily State Gazette* (Trenton)
DT	*Denver Times*
LAT	*Los Angeles Times*
NA	*Newark Advertiser*
NEN	*Newark Evening News*
NSC	*Newark Sunday Call*
NYT	*New York Times*
RMN	*Rocky Mountain News*
SFC	*San Francisco Chronicle*
SFE	*San Francisco Examiner*
TTA	*Trenton True American*

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