

LAWRENCE M. LIPIN
AND WILLIAM LUNCH

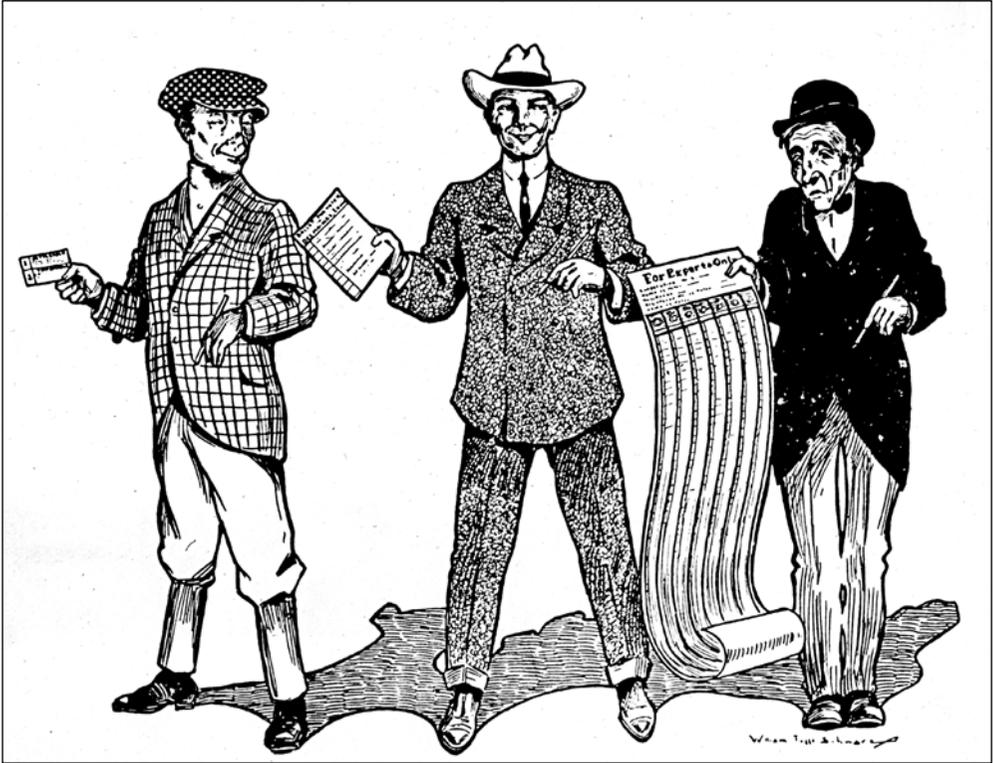
Moralistic Direct Democracy

*Political Insurgents, Religion, and the State
in Twentieth-Century Oregon*



OREGON'S REPUTATION FOR political innovation dates back to the implementation of the system of "direct democracy" embodied by the initiative and referendum systems that were established early in the twentieth century, transforming a constitution that in its original writing reflected less originality than commitment to older, eighteenth-century ideals.¹ No state has utilized these tools more than Oregon, and no other state was earlier in its usage.² Among the states that have had the initiative available, more have appeared on the Oregon ballot, 349, than in any other since the system began in the early twentieth century; only California is close with 331.³ Yet, the patterns have not been consistent, as usage of the tools of direct democracy have waxed and waned over the century since their adoption. More precisely, there have been two significant waves of heavy usage, at the beginning and end of the twentieth century. Political scientist Richard Ellis points out that more measures appeared on the Oregon ballot between 1906 and 1914 than for the entire period between 1920 and 1969 and that during the 1980s and 1990s, more measures passed than in the previous six decades.⁴ If Oregon has been shaped by the use of direct democracy, that formation has been within specific historical contexts. This article examines the moments of frequent recourse to direct democracy, drawing conclusions about the particular influence of moral beliefs on the process.

Both of these moments have been characterized by the deployment of a populist moralism that blended policies regarding the role of the state with a



Critics of the initiative and referendum argued that the public would be inundated with overly complicated proposals. This 1911 cartoon compares the Glasgow, Scotland, voter on the left, who votes simply for his city council from his ward, and the Des Moines, Iowa, voter in the center, who votes merely for five city commissioners, with the overwhelmed Portland, Oregon, voter, who contemplates a three-foot-long ballot with a heading, “For Experts Only.”

rhetorical style that argued “natural” and “traditional” values and economic opportunities had been perverted by elites. The fight for direct democracy at the turn of the twentieth century began in earnest when a group of worker and farmer organizations joined together under the leadership of William S. U’Ren to form the Joint Committee on Direct Legislation. These insurgents perceived the legislature as an obstacle to reforms supported by populist voting blocs, and they believed the tools of direct democracy would permit “the people” to circumvent the corrupt “interests” that seemed to control the votes of legislators. These earliest proponents of the tools of direct democracy decried the growing economic power of corporations and sought to revive a form of Jeffersonian democracy they believed had once characterized

American politics by first establishing the system itself and then proposing new laws that promised a radical transformation of the structures of power and wealth in the state.

Some seventy years later, use of the initiative again intensified as conservative reformers qualified for the ballot initiatives to reduce taxes and limit state spending; they calculated such measures to undo the process of state building that occurred between these two periods of extensive direct democracy. Political scientists have utilized the term “conservative populists” to describe some of the activists who have made frequent use of the initiative process in this latter period. Richard Clucas and Mark Henkels, for example, argue that “conservative populists believe the core problem of modern politics is how government agencies, politicians, and an elitist media interfere with the popular will. They fear that these groups hinder private economic choice, the effectiveness of the market, and the public’s ability to promote broadly shared conservative social values.”⁵ Conservative populists have also favored government intervention to enforce what they perceive as traditional social relations. The advocates of such measures have had strong ties to the evangelical churches, and the mainstream press has often portrayed them as the shock troops for what Patrick Buchanan at the 1992 Republican National Convention called a “religious war going on in this country.”⁶ In fighting this “culture war,” social conservatives have injected religion into politics, in what appears to many of those who resist their efforts to be an attempt to bring religion into the public square, to bridge what has long been understood, certainly by liberals, as a constitutional separation of church and state.⁷ While anti-statist conservatives have made their recent assault on the state, largely through tax limitation measures, social conservatives have placed measures on the ballot that have sought to curtail the influence or rights of homosexuals and to preserve what they consider to be traditional marriage. These two objectives by conservatives have been fueled by a very different kind of populism than that embraced by turn-of-the-century populists like U’Ren, as these latter-day populists have ignored corporate power and have argued that liberal politicians and intellectuals have hijacked government in pursuit of their own pet projects. The moral and economic measures supported by conservatives reinforce the overall project of dismantling the state apparatus.⁸

This injection of moral values and religious language is not the departure from the direct democracy tradition it might seem at first glance; in the first era of intensive deployment of direct democracy, populists and many progressives were motivated by moral concerns, many of which had religious grounding, as they used the initiative process in a radical attempt to transform society.⁹ As historian Michael Kazin puts it, we should not

understand their religious language “as a desire to win more souls for Jesus.” Instead, they “used a Christian vocabulary because it was the only way they knew to speak with great emotion about ultimate social concerns.”¹⁰ Still, there was something relevant in religious language in a movement that aimed to put society back on a natural-law basis. In an era in which Social Darwinism put the imprimatur of science on gross inequality and poverty, religious language provided the means to mount a moral challenge to a corporation-dominated society.¹¹ None less than U’Ren, sometimes known as the “father” of the Oregon System, fought for the initiative, referendum, and recall with a goal of implementing the radical single tax, which was based in a set of religiously grounded understandings about society and natural law. In addition, U’Ren supported prohibition and an increase in women’s political power, tying all of these matters to a larger vision of a less corrupt and less selfish society. It was only after the failure of a series of ballot initiatives that aimed to impose the single tax that progressive forces rallied around the less-radical income tax, which would be compatible with the state-building efforts of the New Deal and which dispensed with the natural-law moralism of the more radical efforts of the Progressive Era.

U’REN’S ROLE IN THE FIGHT for direct democracy and for the radical single tax has been well covered by historians.¹² He came to prominence through connections with a group of horticulturists from Milwaukie affiliated with the People’s Party, from which the term “populist” draws its original and most specific meaning. The party was an outgrowth of the cooperative efforts of the Farmers’ Alliances that had spread through farming communities in the American South and West, preaching the gospel of cooperation to indebted farmers who blamed transport and financial monopolies for their economic woes. Populists drew on earlier labor and agrarian radicalism that had been intellectually grounded in the labor theory of wealth, which held that labor produced all wealth and was a natural-law starting point for free-market political economists such as Adam Smith. Populists interpreted labor to mean manual labor, as generations of American manualists had done before them, and argued that the monopolists who oppressed them were destroying the natural-law basis for an egalitarian and republican society. The People’s Party acted on this belief by calling for government ownership of the means of market exchange, including the railroads, telegraph, and most importantly, the financial system.¹³

U’Ren impressed Oregon Populists with his commitment to the need to overcome monopolists’ power and to restore the producer to his or her deserved position. Prior to coming to Oregon, he had become imbued with a particular form of radicalism through a reading of Henry George’s influential

Progress and Poverty, one of the most widely read books on political economy of its day. Among Milwaukie Populists and Portland trade unionists, U'Ren found others willing to embrace George's condemnation of land monopoly as the source of poverty and misery in the world. George's opus had been published in 1879, and his ideas received a growing audience, particularly in the wake of his nearly successful 1886 run for the mayoralty in New York City. The following year, George retained his hold on the imagination of working-class New York, and Knights of Labor assemblies around the country ran "United Labor" campaigns devoted in part to the ideas first popularized in *Progress and Poverty*. George's influence continued to be felt in populist and labor circles for years; his chief apostle, Louis Post, published *The Public* out of Chicago through the Progressive Era until he was tapped for a post in Woodrow Wilson's labor department. For political activists like U'Ren, George's single tax on land values provided the means to solve the problem of poverty created by capitalism and thereby put history back on the path of natural law and divine will.¹⁴

George's influence derived from his clear explication of capitalist political economy, which was based in Thomas Malthus's arguments that workers were doomed to suffer lower wages as their numbers increased and that great suffering and poverty were inevitable as human populations grew exponentially while food supplies could only grow arithmetically since the best land had already been put to the plow.¹⁵ George rejected such thinking, which had hardened into economic orthodoxy in the mid to late nineteenth century, and argued that poverty was caused not by natural law but by the perversion of it. Like so many other labor types, George insisted that producers had the right to the fruits, or rewards, of their labor. The landlords, however, perverted natural law by seizing the product of labor and capital in the form of rent, the value of which was created by the growing numbers of productive working people and not by anything done by landlords. Even worse, speculating landowners kept property unused, increasing rents that producers paid and depriving communities of productive resources that would employ others. "The wide spreading social evils which everywhere oppress men," George reasoned, "spring from a great primary wrong — the appropriation, as the exclusive property of some men, of the land on which and from which all men must live."¹⁶

Though George was not affiliated with any church, a strong religious sensibility guided his analysis, particularly evident in the concluding chapter of *Progress and Poverty* and in his lectures devoted to Biblical law and Moses.¹⁷ George simply could not accept that natural law and divine intention could doom the mass of humanity to misery and poverty. All social evils, he insisted, "spring solely from social maladjustments which

ignore natural laws, and . . . in removing their cause we shall be giving an enormous impetus to progress.”¹⁸ To charge natural law as the cause of terrible human misery, he asserted, was an “impiety worse than atheism.”¹⁹ In *Progress and Poverty*, George argued, “it is not the Almighty, but we who are responsible for the vice and misery that fester amid our civilization. The Creator showers upon us his gifts — more than enough for all.”²⁰ The single tax promised to rectify all of these problems, because it would force landowners to make the most productive use of their land; speculators would be driven out of business, as they would have to pay an exorbitant tax on purposefully unproductive land or let the land pass back into the public domain to be taken by anyone willing to put it to productive use. By socializing rent, the single tax promised to create a fund by which the state could build museums, schools, and public transportation. But the state-building potential of the single tax was not the point. More critical was the radical transformation that the single tax would bring, reestablishing a truly natural social order. The penultimate chapter of *Progress and Poverty* concludes with a clear assertion of the religious grounding for this transformation:



Henry George’s 1879 work Progress and Poverty inspired leading Oregon activists to work for the adoption of direct democracy.

It is the glorious vision which has always haunted men with gleams of fitful splendor. It is what he saw whose eyes at Patmos were closed in a trance. It is the culmination of Christianity — the City of God on earth, with its walls of jasper and its gates of pearl! It is the reign of the Prince of Peace!²¹

The drive for the single tax in Oregon was not bereft of the kind of moral and religiously grounded concerns that had frequently appeared in George’s writings and speeches, concerns that were not George’s alone but which were widespread in populist circles. With the long-standing support of the Oregon State Federation of Labor (OSFL), U’Ren made a number of unsuccessful efforts to get the single tax passed into law in Oregon, most



William S. U'Ren combined an intense commitment to democracy with strong support for woman suffrage and prohibition.

notably in 1910, 1912, 1914, and 1916. While the single tax advocates' language was not as consistently religious as George's had been, they frequently made explicit the implicit connections between natural law and God's will. As U'Ren put it, "the strongest reasons for the single tax are moral rather than fiscal."²²

A complete enactment of George's panacea would have required the abolition of all taxes except a tax on land values, but Oregonian progressives never put such a measure on the ballot. Instead, they aimed to take incremental steps that would point society in the right direction and provide most of the benefits of the single tax by forcing speculators either to put their land into productive use or to allow it to return to the public domain where someone else could use it. In 1910, U'Ren and the trade-union leadership successfully campaigned

for a ballot measure that provided counties the ability to set their own tax structures, opening the way for single tax advocates to campaign in counties where they could expect success. After that, in 1912 and 1914, U'Ren and his supporters sought to pass a state measure that would adopt some version of the single tax, usually by applying a tax on land with significant exemptions for improvements and any other product of labor. By 1916, the single tax forces extended the exemption to include \$1,500 of any kind of property (including real estate), in order to not tax the land held by poor farmers or working-class homeowners. Consistently, U'Ren and the leaders of the OSFL argued that these measures would ensure that the producers would receive the fruit of their own labor.

As did George, U'Ren argued for the single tax in terms of natural law and divine will. He held that it was divine intention that producers have access to God's creation. Addressing the 1911 convention of the OSFL, U'Ren declared that each generation of producers had the same rights to land and natural resources, arguing "every pioneer baby that comes into this world today has just as good a right to the things that God has here as I did when I

was brought across the plains by my father years ago.” For U’Ren, the single tax established the producerist principle that all taxation should be derived “from the things that God makes as distinguished from the things that man makes.” Rent was a tax on labor, and it sustained those who produced nothing with an unearned increment in wealth that was created by the productivity of others. U’Ren again put the objection in religious terms, asserting before the gathering of trade unionists, “no man or woman should pay any money for any special privilege that God made. And when we have done that we shall have made such a breach in the wall of special privilege that the towering old wall will come toppling down within a very short time.”²³

In his arguments for the 1914 *Voters’ Pamphlet*, U’Ren deployed Biblical language to assert the righteousness of the single tax measure on the ballot.²⁴ The measure promised to exempt the first \$1,500 of personal property and improvements on the land, while mandating that all land be fully taxed. U’Ren crafted his comments to assure farmers that the measure would not harm them, pointing out that farmers would benefit from the measure’s exemption from taxation of “the value of clearing lands, raising orchards and other land improvements.” The measure aimed not to place burdens on small productive landowners, U’Ren concluded, but instead to enable “workingmen” to be able to “secure and retain and own more homes.” To ensure that readers understood the moral implications of such a change in policy, U’Ren described the plight of “workingmen,” declaring “too many of them are wanderers on the face of the earth, and ‘aliens in the land of their birth.’ Let us make Oregon a great Commonwealth, where every man shall build him a home and rest beneath ‘his own vine and fig tree.’”²⁵

Other committed single tax advocates cast their arguments in similar language. Alfred Cridge, printer and long-time follower of Henry George, wrote in his column in the *Portland Labor Press* that political leaders needed to be reminded that “Man is of the earth,” and that he “has an inalienable right to a seat at the Father’s table on earth — the earth itself.” Cridge extended such thinking to the workplace, arguing that the poverty experienced by workers violated divine intent. He charged, “with the extension of a factory comes the employment of people, and from their ill required toil many fortunes are made” but posed that “if God’s table of plenty is thrown open to all His children,” the workers will no longer produce goods “for short pay, long hours, in unsanitary shops and under unjust conditions.” The result would be a truly utopian society “where flowers would bloom instead of thorns bruise.”²⁶

U’Ren’s emphasis on economic reform as a moral imperative was evident in the way he addressed the concerns of women, particularly working women. In an article he wrote for the *California Outlook*, U’Ren urged read-

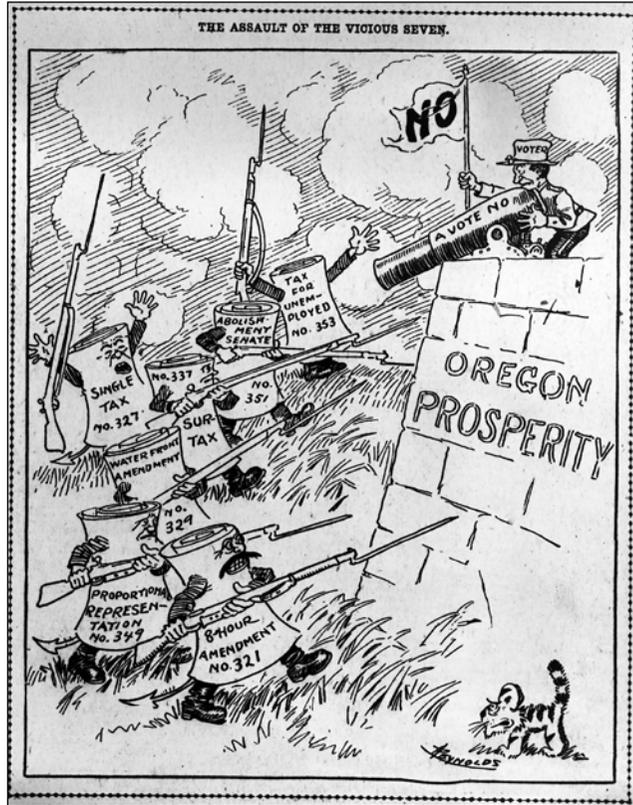
ers to “adopt a minimum wage law for their own locality,” and he used the arguments made by others in the laborite community that low wages might force young women onto precarious moral ground. U’Ren declared: “Our mothers and wives and the mothers that are to be are rebelling against growing girls for the white slave traffic and for mistresses for men whose wages do not permit them to marry a wife and raise a family of good children and decent citizens.” A minimum wage promised to eradicate such evils, and he suggested that businesses “which cannot afford to pay a woman enough to live on and maintain her self-respect had better move out.”²⁷

Similar arguments were made by U’Ren allies among trade unionists. James Maguire, a Portland city councilman and member of International Union of Steam Engineer No. 87, lectured the congregation at the East Side Baptist church in 1911: “with good wages, decent surrounding, immorality is reduced to the minimum.” He provided the example of the 375 female members of the United Garment Workers employed in two Portland factories and relayed a conversation with Lola Baldwin, the policewoman in charge of the Department of Public Safety, who had told him, “during nearly eight years that she has been in charge of this department she could recollect not one instance of any nature reflecting on the character or conduct of these girls.” Maguire explained to the congregation that these union women averaged between \$1.65 and \$2.00 for an eight-hour day and that “reasonable hours, pleasant surroundings, good wages, discipline, comfortable rooms, decent clothes and a living wage” were the reasons women members did “not have to go about the streets rustling for a meal or bed.”²⁸

Some of the most prominent single taxers, men like U’Ren and Cridge, were also supporters of woman suffrage. In this regard, they reflected a strong tendency among progressives who associated self-sacrifice and morality with women, therefore concluding that female voters would help clean up a corrupt political arena. After yet another crushing single tax defeat at the polls in 1920, Cridge offered solace to his fellow activists with his knowledge of the long road taken by advocates of woman suffrage. In a letter to the *Labor Press*, Cridge recalled “dear old Mother [Abigail Scott] Duniway,” who spent nearly her entire life “in the seeming fruitlessness of advocating equal suffrage in Oregon, mortgaged her home and paid for the signatures to again submit the question of equal suffrage after one of the most signal defeats it ever received.” In the same letter, Cridge equated advocates of woman suffrage with abolitionists, focusing on their moral indignation at having been denied natural rights.²⁹

U’Ren also associated the single tax with a panoply of other moral reforms such as temperance, and all of these measures were part of a larger program to restore the dignity of labor and humanity. When he ran for gov-

error in 1914, he declared before a gathering of trade-union men that a primary issue was the ability of “wives and children of working men to be sure of three square meals a day this winter,” and he promised to “use the utmost powers of the Governor’s office to establish permanent conditions under which there will be no hunger and poverty for willing workers in Oregon.”³⁰ For U’Ren, as for many other progressives, poverty and misery could be intensified by drink. Earlier, when he announced his candidacy, U’Ren had promised voters to “give my active help in the future as I have in the past, to the movement for the abolition of the liquor traffic and the saloon business in Oregon.”³¹ Four years later, in 1918, U’Ren’s broader moral progressivism led him to reject fellow Republican James Withycombe in his bid to be reelected governor and to endorse Democrat Walter Pierce. U’Ren explained that despite Pierce’s unwavering hostility to the single tax, the Democrat “has ideals and the courage to back them up,” referring particularly to his “opposition to the liquor traffic.”³² U’Ren was comfortable with the broad moral reformist agenda (including support for temperance) that many women’s organizations had adopted, so it was little stretch for him to address national woman suffrage conventions. He did so twice, in 1905 and again in 1908.³³ Many male reformers who sought to cleanse society and politics of evil perceived women, due to their culturally ascribed moral standing, as natural allies.³⁴



This September 28, 1914, Oregonian cartoon illustrates arguments by opponents of the single tax that the measure, along with other efforts to curtail the power of the wealthy and to improve the conditions of workers, would drive capital out of Oregon.

Perhaps no measure better demonstrates the way in which U'Ren's vision blended morality and democracy than the occupational representation scheme that he attempted, unsuccessfully, to get on the 1920 ballot. The measure is well treated by Robert Johnston, who notes that this, the last of a series of plans drawn up by U'Ren to restructure the legislature in a democratic direction, demonstrates how the reformer could incorporate women's rights into his populist vision. Under the proposal, voters would have voted for and been represented by members of their own occupation, and the number of representatives would be apportioned by virtue of the number of practitioners of the profession. While the measure meant an exit from power for nearly all lawyers, it promised to make the single largest group in the legislature "housewives." Supporters declared that it would make "women equal with men in the power of government," and the *Labor Press* asserted: "This is a recognition of house work and home-making as being a business or occupation paramount to all others." While U'Ren perceived women as economic actors, recognizing that "women have as widely diversified interests from an economical standpoint as men," he took it for granted that women had distinct interests "in matters of juvenile and moral law." He expected that female participation in the political process would have both reformist and democratic results.³⁵

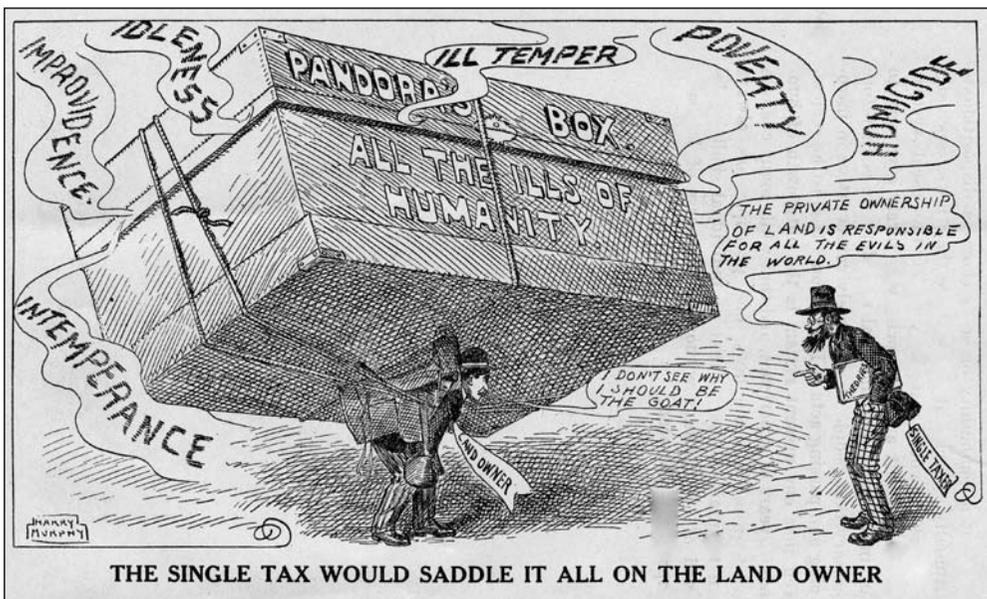
The drive for the single tax lost steam with the entry of the United States into World War I. None of the modified single tax measures on the state ballot had succeeded, and the 1916 Land and Loan Measure had been handily defeated, even in Multnomah County, where the reception to U'Ren's brand of radicalism was warmest. In 1917, U'Ren dropped out, leaving the local single tax movement in the hands of J.H. Hermann. U'Ren continued to represent unions and workers in the courts, and he increasingly became associated with pacifism and civil liberties. Grounded as it was in a natural-law understanding that justice would be achieved through the socialization of rent, the single tax otherwise required little growth in the state bureaucracy or power; U'Ren remained consistent in his opposition to concentrations of power. He would, in the mid 1930s, turn against the New Deal as it became clear to him that it was promoting paternalistic government.³⁶

In the interim, the OSFL continued to speak of the desirability of taxing land values, but it slowly distanced itself from the single tax and, by the mid 1920s, ceased spending its resources in attempts to transform society and make capitalism truly humane and just. In that sense, World War I proved an important dividing line in the development of politics on the non-socialist left in Oregon. U'Ren and the labor movement had sought to restructure property relations within society, taxing land into use, and expecting, as did George, that such a transformation would put society back on a providential

path, one in which economic relations were in line with natural law and poverty was naturally eradicated. Their use of the newly established initiative process to attempt to transform society through direct legislation was the first prolonged effort to use the initiative to redress the ills of capitalism in a systematic fashion. And conservative opponents understood the relationship between the tools of direct democracy and the single tax. C.C. Chapman, editor of the *Oregon Voter*, ruefully warned: “Until all our people realize what has happened in these changes [the initiative and referendum], the property of everyone in Oregon is at the mercy of the thriftless, dreaming classes who follow the demagogue and the theorist into any new path where fancy or greed may lead.”³⁷

As the single-tax movement was losing steam, another proposal to address economic inequality through taxation appeared in the effort to establish a statewide income tax. The Sixteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution had enabled a federal income tax, which was then passed into law by Congress as a portion of the Underwood Tariff bill in 1913. Only a few years later, a group of rural and small-town legislators formed the State Taxpayers’ League out of frustration with high property-tax rates, and they elected Walter Pierce of La Grande as their president. The Taxpayers’ League, supported by both the State Grange and the Farmers’ Union, successfully passed a tax limitation measure in 1917, but many of the members would continue to seek redress in the form of an income tax. In 1922, those efforts began to come to fruition, as the Grange put on the ballot a graduated income tax, one that divided the Taxpayers’ League, with opponents calling it a “class measure.”³⁸ A few years later, the OSFL joined the fight. Oregon voters found themselves embroiled for the rest of the decade in a series of battles over the graduated income tax until the law, passed by the 1929 legislature, was reaffirmed in a referendum in November 1930.

Although the campaign for the income tax united urban and rural producers, they lacked the moral fervor of the single tax campaigns. Arguments for passing the income-tax law were more fiscal than moral. Unlike the single tax, a tax on incomes was a tax on labor, and for the trade-union movement, this required an abandonment of the natural-law single-tax position and the religious grounding that underlay it. While the single tax could have been used to grow the state, financing services and bureaucracies, its main outcome would have been to overcome all social ills and place society on a natural-law foundation. There were no illusions, however, that the income tax would accomplish such lofty goals. The earliest supporters of the graduated income tax were farmers and other rural people who believed they shouldered too much of the financial responsibility for supporting the state. One of the greatest political weaknesses of the single tax movement had



Despite Master C.E. Spence’s support for the single tax, the Grange and most farmers feared that the measure would increase what they already considered an inequitable tax burden on land. This 1912 drawing is by Harry Murphy.

been its inability to garner support from rural Oregonians who distrusted a measure that would have put the entire burden of state finance on land, despite long-time Master of the Oregon Grange C.E. Spence’s enthusiasm for it. Oregon’s farmers felt overtaxed as it was, and the support of farm organizations for the income tax was grounded in their belief that wealthy capitalists who invested in stocks and bonds escaped the burden of supporting the state. In 1922, Spence and Bertha Beck, officers of the Oregon State Grange, insisted that the purpose of the income-tax ballot measure was “EQUALIZATION of taxation, not INCREASED taxation,” and that any “moneys received from income taxes . . . shall be applied in the reduction of state taxes as levied under the present system.”³⁹ A year later, in a referendum campaign, the writers of the argument to defend the income-tax measure all hailed from small towns away from the metropolis — La Grande, Marshfield, Medford, and Albany — with the exception of Grange Master Spence, who came from Oregon City, ten miles upriver from Portland. They portrayed the income tax as “an endeavor to relieve the home, the farm, and real property, representing less than 4 per cent of the tax-paying ability of the state and bearing 80 per cent of the burden of local taxation, from carrying such a large and unfair portion of the too heavy burden.”⁴⁰

Five years later, the OSFL joined the Grange and the Farmers' Union in getting an income-tax measure on the ballot, and President William Cooper and Executive Secretary Ben Osborne joined Grange leaders George A. Palmiter and Bertha J. Beck in submitting the arguments in favor of the measure to the *Voters' Pamphlet*. Despite the shift in personnel, the arguments remained the same: the measure "taxes the individual according to his ability to pay." The income tax would not be used to "provide more money for the legislative assembly to spend," but would rather "reach intangible wealth that is now escaping its share of the tax burden that is now being carried by the direct property taxes." Though the argument warned that "Civilization will perish" unless progress could be obtained "without class hatred," asserting that the measure addressed grave inequalities, the progressive income tax promised little more than greater fairness in taxation.⁴¹

If William U'Ren embodied the unified and transformational goals of the single tax movement, Walter Pierce might serve as the embodiment of the pragmatism of the income-tax movement and of the decline of populist radicalism.⁴² Pierce, who first served as a state legislator from Union and Umatilla counties in eastern Oregon, would gain the governor's office in 1922. There was something chameleon-like about Pierce, whose emphases and loyalties could shift with the wind. In early 1919, for instance, Pierce stoked the fires of class conflict before an OSFL convention by denouncing American "Bolshevists of big business who were controlling commerce and industry to the detriment of the common people," and he told the trade unionists "the hour had come for the producers in Oregon on the farm and in the cities, to pull together to save the country from disaster." A little more than a year later, however, in the midst of the postwar red scare, Pierce took on the radical Non-Partisan League in a speech to the Oregon Taxpayers' League and warned of the dangers of the class politics in which the League engaged and that it would "only hasten the day of chaos that may be near at hand."⁴³ While Pierce worked to reduce the burdens on property taxes, he increasingly recognized the need for the state to take on new roles, and in the 1930s, he became a committed New Dealer. His biographer notes that he supported public-owned hydroelectric plants, old-age pensions, and unemployment relief.⁴⁴ Yet, Pierce was no mere liberal advocate of the state; he was also closely associated with nativist politics. In 1922, Pierce supported anti-Japanese legislation, and he accepted the electoral support of the Oregon Ku Klux Klan in his successful run for governor, following up his election by appointing Klansmen to state office and further igniting assertions that he himself was a Klansman, a matter that remains uncertain. Less in doubt is that Pierce could tell audiences what they wanted to hear.⁴⁵ And in that regard, Pierce helped create the coalition — one considerably larger, though

less utopian than that assembled by U'Ren to fight corporate control over local government — that was necessary to both build and sustain a broader commitment to state action.

IF THE EARLIER PERIOD revealed an adaptation among grass-roots electoral coalitions toward the expanded state and pragmatic politics of the New Deal, the past thirty years have given rise to a new breed of direct democrats. Political forces on the right, at the opposite end of the ideological spectrum from those who brought the system into being, have made repeated use of the initiative and, to a lesser extent, the referendum. Dedicated to overturning egalitarian changes from the 1960s and 1970s, if not the New Deal order, these conservative groups — often led by the same individuals over extended periods — have made repeated efforts to reduce taxes and limit government's influence in the economy, but also to increase government intervention on behalf of traditional social controls, particularly limits on gays and lesbians, and to limit aspects of the lives of women, particularly as they regard access to abortion. As was the case in the earlier era, disagreements about economics and the role of the state were interwoven with cultural and religious beliefs.

Religious conservatives, particularly the Oregon Citizen's Alliance (OCA), made extensive use of the initiative (and, to some extent, the referendum) during the 1980s, 1990s, and the first years of the new century, attempting to reestablish traditional social controls. Some of their efforts have succeeded, such as amending the state constitution to ban same-sex marriage, but most have failed. Nonetheless, there have been times during this period when Oregon has been the focus of a good deal of national attention as a state in which cultural politics with national implications have played out.⁴⁶ This reaction in Oregon has been part of a much broader national reaction among religious conservatives and other groups who felt threatened by relaxation of traditional social controls. An abundant literature, starting with the work of Thomas Edsall, addresses the ways in which the tax-reduction proposals of the late 1970s were part of a truly national backlash against the social, cultural, and political changes that reshaped American life starting in the early 1960s. Supporters of such measures opposed a wide array of social and political changes that emerged during the 1960s and 1970s — from the civil rights movement on, including the feminist and environmental movements that followed — as well as efforts by other minority groups, such as Native Americans, Asians, and Hispanics, to claim more equal status. They sought a return to a more settled, conventional time that may have been more imagined than real but that had very substantial appeal, particularly when articulated by a politician with the skill of Ronald Reagan.⁴⁷

Despite Oregon's reputation for political innovation, this movement experienced its first major statewide success in California, where in 1978, after a number of failures, conservatives passed an initiative — Proposition Thirteen — that severely limited property taxes and became a focus for national attention.⁴⁸ Property taxes were cut dramatically, and the initiative's sponsors, Howard Jarvis and Paul Gann, previously nuisance figures on the fringe in California politics, became celebrities. In the same year, populist conservatives in Oregon qualified for the ballot the first of five (1978–1986) successive initiatives that proposed to effectively cut property taxes almost by half. Because public schools were largely financed through property taxes (and because Oregon, unlike California, did not have a sales tax to provide revenue as a substitute), had they passed, those initiatives would have reduced funding so much that most public schools would probably have been forced to close.⁴⁹

The immediate goal of the tax cut initiatives was, of course, to reduce taxes. But proposals to limit taxes had been made earlier, and repeatedly had either failed to qualify for the ballot or had been rejected. By 1978, the political climate had begun to shift. The connections between national conservative economic politics and cultural resentments were perhaps most outspokenly articulated by Lee Atwater, who was a key Republican campaign consultant deeply involved in both the Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush campaigns for president in the 1980s. He explained:

You start out in 1954 by saying “nigger, nigger, nigger.” By 1968, you can't say “nigger” — that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states' rights, and all that stuff. You're getting so abstract now [that] you're talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you're talking about are totally economic things, and a byproduct of them is [that] blacks get hurt worse than whites.⁵⁰

In 1978, 1980, 1982, 1984, and 1986, anti-tax activists placed initiatives before Oregon voters to reduce property taxes to a maximum of 1½ percent of assessed value but were defeated, though in 1982 and 1984, the margins were extremely thin; in 1982, during a deep recession, 49½ percent of voters supported the tax limit proposal. All the initiatives from 1978 to 1984 proposed to simply cut property taxes from existing levels — then typically between 2½ and 3 percent, depending on the district — almost by half in one fell swoop. The consequences for elementary and secondary schools would have been catastrophic, and opponents, including virtually all state leaders and traditionally influential community organizations, drove the point home successfully, if narrowly, in five consecutive elections. Oregonians working in the movement to limit property taxes articulated a rejection of politicians and bureaucrats that would be used by other conservative activists.⁵¹

The movement picked up steam with the appearance of Ray Phillips, a retired boilermaker and prize-fighter who became a much celebrated spokesperson for those who resented “liberal elites.” Termed by the *Oregonian* a “tax-limitation curmudgeon,” Phillips demonstrated great animus for liberal politicians, whom he was known for denigrating as “the wine and cheese set,” and he took special aim at the Multnomah County Commissioners in 1984 for supporting light rail, which he termed “WPPSS on wheels,” associating the transportation option with a failed public project in Washington. Though he particularly despised Earl Blumenauer, he denounced all the commissioners, “every damn one of them,” for having “lived off the taxpayer all their life. And,” he pointed out, “they talk like they know what’s good for us.”⁵²

The movement reaffirmed Phillips’s resentment toward the social welfare state. Arguments in the *Voters’ Pamphlet* from the Women’s Legislative Council linked the 1978 Oregon measure to a national “People’s Tax Revolt” against “bureaucrats and government waste,” distinguishing between necessary “services such as police and fire departments,” and the “PROLIFERATION OF NEW PROGRAMS AND ‘SERVICES’” provided by liberal politicians.⁵³ Six years later, Ralph Edwards, chair of the Libertarian Party of Oregon, identified the increase in school spending as one of the costs that liberals had allowed to escalate beyond reasonable limits, largely through the hiring of more bureaucrats to administer the schools. Edwards asserted: “Since 1950, the real cost per pupil (corrected for inflation) of government schools has nearly *tripled*; while, by every objective measure, quality has declined.” His argument spoke of “government” schools, instead of “public” ones, and he pointed out that “spending on nonteaching positions has ballooned to 40% of all salaries in government schools,” while it comprised “less than 10% of salaries in many excellent alternative schools.”⁵⁴

Similar points had been made two years earlier, when Vernon White, the research director for the Oregon Taxpayers Union, attended a meeting of the Portland School Board to attack the members for engaging in “scare tactics” in their denunciations of property-tax limitation measures. White informed them, “the law prohibits the use of public resources to influence elections. . . . Yet we saw propaganda broadside after propaganda broadside — thinly disguised as ‘information’ — sent home with school children.” Otherwise, White repeated the basic theme of the movement: that the “district is overloaded with administrators and other non-classroom professionals.”⁵⁵

The conservative movement’s critique of the schools ran broad and deep. Conservatives wanted mandatory school prayer reinstated and opposed the teaching of evolution and secularism more generally. For religious conservatives, who objected to the social changes that had been either formally enacted — as in the Civil Rights and Voting Rights acts — or that had

evolved through altered social customs as well as legal change — as in more equal status for women — the modern curriculum of the public schools was anathema. Many withdrew their children from public schools in favor of either religious schools or home-schooling, so the cost of public education, borne by taxes, was particularly obnoxious for them. In 1986, for example, as religious conservatives organized to challenge the renomination of Senator Bob Packwood at the national level, they were also active at the state level, challenging public school funding. The *Oregonian* reported:

The conservative education agenda would radically reshape public education. Among the programs it wants abolished are preschool programs and kindergarten . . . sex education [and] virtually all school counseling . . . global education and talented-and-gifted programs.⁵⁶

At the same time, a religious conservative, Jack Reynolds, ran for state Superintendent of Education. His candidate statement in the Voter's Pamphlet was revealing:

You should know that evolution is a fraud. No transitional forms exist for man or animal. The evolutionists' "proofs" have [been] hoaxes. For example, "Nebraska Man" was built from a pig's tooth, "Piltdown Man" was a modern ape, and the "Archaeopteryx" was proved to be a hoax. . . . Even more ridiculous are the claims as to the Earth's origin. The evolutionist's theories such as "Steady State," "Big Bang," "Abiogenesis," etc. have all been proved wrong. It is well known that Jesus (GOD) created the earth, man, and animals in six days.⁵⁷

The challenge to Packwood had been made by Baptist Minister Joe Lutz, whose campaign demonstrated how the anti-statist property-tax revolt drew from religious conservatives who, according to the *Oregonian*, felt the "deep-seated anger many evangelical Christians feel toward Packwood's strong support of legal abortion." Lutz, however, did not limit himself to moral concerns regarding individual behavior. He also attacked the Federal Reserve System and called for the return to a dollar redeemable in gold and silver and for the repeal of Social Security. Closer to home, Lutz was critical of Packwood's support for federal control of the Columbia River Gorge and the extension of wilderness protections in Hell's Canyon, and he also attracted voters upset by Oregon's land-use planning laws.⁵⁸

Phillips had assembled a statewide, populist-conservative organization of activists who proved adept at collecting the signatures needed to qualify initiatives for the ballot, and he then campaigned in favor of them in the fall. By the time of his death after the 1986 elections, his organization had split into two factions. One, composed of those anti-tax activists who had followed him since 1978, wanted to use the same approach as Phillips had.

The dissident group was led by Don McIntyre and Frank Eisenzimmer, two health-club owners from Gresham who responded to five straight defeats by adopting a strategy they believed would prove winnable. Their new proposal was to phase in cuts to property taxes over five years, rather than making the cut — almost half in most districts — all at once. The measure they wrote contained language indicating the state would have to compensate local school districts for reductions in revenue caused by property-tax reductions. Because this internecine struggle split the organization, a property-tax limit measure did not appear on the ballot in 1988.

By 1990, the split resulted in a new property-tax limit initiative, Measure Five. Debate over the measure followed familiar patterns, with opposition growing as voters learned how much the property-tax cuts would damage schools (and, to a degree, other public services). It appeared in early October that public support for Measure Five was declining, indicating that it would be defeated as the measures from 1978 to 1986 had been. But during October, property-tax bills began to be delivered, and particularly in the Portland metro area, there were large increases. The higher tax bills were not the result of higher rates but of Oregon's booming economy. By the late 1980s, Oregon had become a favorite location for expansion of high-tech firms, mainly from California, so large numbers of new, relatively affluent workers were moving to Oregon. Moreover, the new workers often brought with them substantial amounts of cash because they had sold houses in markets — particularly California — where values were notably higher. As a result, the newcomers were bidding up housing values in Oregon, and because assessments reflected those higher values, property-tax bills rose quickly in the most urbanized part of the state, where the high-tech industry was concentrated.⁵⁹

In prior elections, property-tax limitation measures had failed in Multnomah County, the largest and most Democratic county in the state, where Portland is located. But in mid to late October, after the arrival of the higher tax bills, public opinion shifted somewhat in favor of Measure Five. Even though the change was not dramatic, it was enough; on election day, Multnomah County voted in favor of the property-tax limit, and it narrowly passed statewide.⁶⁰

Measure Five's final limits were phased in over a five-year period. The initiative had not limited assessments, only the tax rate, and as Oregon's high-tech sector continued to boom through the mid 1990s, assessments continued to rise. In many cases, declining tax rates were offset by quickly rising assessments; as a result, many homeowners did not get reduced tax bills, or if they were less, the reduction was small. In response, the anti-tax forces, organized by 1996 under a new name as the Oregon Taxpayers



Don McIntyre (at the podium) and Tom Denehey (in the foreground, at right), Chief Petitioners for Measure Five, celebrate their property-tax limit victory in 1990, following five earlier defeats from 1978 to 1986. Also in the photograph are, from left, Frank Eisenzimmer, Eileen Bartlett (behind McIntyre), Carl Bartlett, and Craig Flynn (behind Denehey).

United (OTU) and with a new director, Bill Sizemore, sponsored another property-tax limit initiative, which became Measure Forty-Seven on the 1996 ballot. It capped assessments at their 1995 levels and further reduced property taxes by another 10 percent — allowing only very minimal growth, less than inflation, in assessments in subsequent years — which reinforced the effect of Measure Five, requiring the state legislature rather than school districts to fund K-12 schools. That concentration of power in Salem did not go unnoticed, but the conservatives who had sponsored Measure Five in 1990 and Measure Forty-Seven in 1996 were ideologically in favor of forcing reductions in government services, so they were not particularly bothered by the concentration of power in the state government, as long as public services continued to decline.⁶¹ Although Measure Forty-Seven passed, it was found by lawyers to include some provisions that were unconstitutional. The legislature, by this point under the control of Republicans for the first time since the 1950s, responded by redrafting the key provisions in the initiative

into a legislative referral that went to voters during the legislative session in 1997 as Measure Fifty, which voters also approved.

The compatibility between anti-state and moralistic politics, so evident in the Lutz campaign against Packwood, had been demonstrable from the beginning of the late twentieth-century conservative use of the initiative system. As Phillips's organization mounted its first anti-tax initiative campaign in 1978, opponents of abortion fought an unsuccessful battle to forbid the spending of public monies on abortions. Still, the measure focused on the state as much as the tax limitation measure did. Arguments in the *Voters' Pamphlets* spoke of abortion as "a heinous sin" and claimed opponents "are being told by their elected officials that not only will society tolerate the practice of abortion on demand, but that the objectors must involuntarily underwrite the practice out of their own pockets."⁶² The chair of Oregonians Opposed to State-Financed Abortion, Beatrice C. McClellan, asserted that "the state may no longer 'promote abortion,' by advocating its use for birth control, population control, elimination of defective babies or reducing welfare roles." Publicly funded access to abortion certainly was one of numerous reasons conservatives in Oregon sought to reduce the realm of the state.⁶³ Further, there are hints in patterns of the vote in 1978 that anti-tax and anti-abortion constituencies strongly overlapped: the anti-tax Measure Six and the anti-abortion Measure Seven both received 48.3 percent of the vote statewide, and county-by-county results reveal similar patterns.⁶⁴

In the late 1980s, there was a national effort by religious and cultural conservatives, reflected in Oregon by the Oregon Citizen's Alliance (OCA), which sought to revive restrictions on pregnant women by adopting state laws to make abortion illegal, as it had been in most states prior to *Roe v. Wade* (1973). The attempts at recriminalization of abortion were focused at the state level because the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled in a case, *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* (1989), that Pennsylvania could impose a series of restrictions on women. That case seemed to signal a readiness by the conservative court majority to overturn *Roe*, which would have returned abortion policy to the states.⁶⁵ The signal from the court was a powerful stimulus for religious and cultural conservatives, including those in Oregon, where in 1990 the OCA qualified a measure to outlaw abortions.

Even before, in 1988, the OCA had sought to repeal state employment rights for gays and lesbians. In 1992, the OCA qualified its best known initiative, Measure Nine, which threatened to deny legal rights to gays and lesbians. Lon Mabon, leader of the OCA, denounced homosexuality as comparable to bestiality and necrophilia, and he termed gays and lesbians as "abnormal, wrong, unnatural, and perverse." The initiative included language that would have banned state "promotion of homosexuality." If it had passed



As this campaign ephemera demonstrates, the OCA's qualification of Measure Nine (to deny legal rights to gays and lesbians) stimulated political organization — "counter-mobilization" in the language of political science — among those in the targeted community and their civil libertarian supporters.

and withstood judicial challenges, the measure would likely have required state and local governments to fire anyone who was gay or lesbian — and their supporters — that is, those who "promoted" them.⁶⁶ Measure Nine failed, but — given its hyperbolic language (and potential effects) — by a relatively close margin of 56 percent opposed and 44 percent in favor. Two years later, in 1994, the OCA returned to the ballot with a slightly revised initiative that would have had much the same legal effect, but with some of the most extreme language from 1992 removed. The 1994 initiative became Measure Thirteen; it also failed, but quite narrowly, losing by 52 percent to 48 percent. During this period, in 1994 and 1996, two initiatives to weaken the state constitution's guarantee of free expression — broader than guarantees in the national constitution — and to authorize censorship qualified for the ballot. Sponsors focused on clubs with nude dancing, but the measures would have allowed for much wider censorship; both, however, failed.⁶⁷

OCA's founders formed their group in response to the failed Joe Lutz campaign, which had blended anti-statist and religious conservatism. Activists who attended the new organization's first statewide convention in 1987 shared broad hostility toward the various social changes that most conservatives associated with the Great Society and the upheavals of the 1960s. For instance, answers in response to a questionnaire reflect the hostility of the delegates to civil rights laws and policies that protect African Americans, other minorities, and women, as 80 percent responded that they would repeal the Civil Rights Act, 57 percent favored repeal of the Voting Rights Act, and 98 percent opposed affirmative action. The OCA delegates also expressed opposition to changes in the status of women. Nine out of ten expressed opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment, which would have rendered women constitutionally and legally equal to men, but even more telling was the 80 percent who opposed the existence of college women's sports programs. The activists, both male and female, who supported the

OCA campaigns against gays and lesbians often spoke of defending the traditional family; they seem to have meant female dependence on men as well as the defense of white privilege.⁶⁸

Survey results do not fully capture the intensity that subsequent researchers found during interviews with religious conservative activists. In 1994, sociologist Vernon Bates held a series of interviews with OCA activists that reveal the populist and religious foundations of the movement. Bates notes that the leaders, sensitive to charges that they were religious bigots, often deployed “the language of pluralism” and asserted that the OCA was a diverse organization with Jewish and Catholic members. Nonetheless, in interviews, they often were much less careful. One leader, for example, told Bates that the state had a legitimate interest in fomenting cultural and religious homogeneity:

The government’s responsibility is to support the Judaeo-Christian philosophy. This is very clear from the founding fathers. If we are talking about opening up the schools for prayer to Buddhists and Hindus and Satanists, then that is clearly not the intention of the founders of this country. That cannot be tolerated. . . . I do not want an equal playing field for other religions knowing what I know about the founding fathers. I am comfortable saying this and I will be severely criticized for it and I welcome it. . . . Cultural diversity promotes separatism. Why not just have American culture? We have some people in this country who want to be Africans. If they want that they should just go back to Africa.⁶⁹

OCA activists levied some of their harshest criticism at their Republican rivals in ways that stressed their populist disdain for economic elites. Jay Lewis, OCA coalition director, told Bates that the former Republican state party chairman, Craig Berkman, and other economic conservatives like him were not acceptable allies. Lewis rejected compromise within the big tent of the GOP. “We cannot compromise with people like Craig Berkman,” he explained, “because God does not want us to. This is war and you do not compromise.” One activist explained for Bates that economic differences reinforced moral ones, using language that suggests the degree to which OCA politics have been driven by class resentment:

There are two kinds of Republicans, the country club Republicans and the moral conservatives. The country club Republicans just want to pay fewer taxes. They just want money and prestige. They stand for nothing but themselves. . . . The old Republican party is a status party and it will not last. They look down on the poor. We look at the rich and the poor the same way, whereas the rich judge you by what you have.⁷⁰

Despite this activist’s beliefs, the connections between anti-tax and anti-government groups and religious conservatives were underscored in the

1998 gubernatorial candidacy of Bill Sizemore, who became the Director of Oregon Taxpayers United (OTU), the successor to the organization Ray Phillips had originally assembled in the late 1970s. Sizemore took control of OTU prior to qualification of Measure Forty-Seven, the 1996 property-tax limit described above. In 1998, Sizemore ran as a moralistic conservative and easily won the Republican nomination for governor. More conventional Republican politicians who had held public office, and thus had more traditional political credentials, passed on the race because of the popularity of the Democratic incumbent, Governor John Kitzhaber. For Sizemore, whose political career had focused on initiative politics, the potential for growth in name recognition and expansion of fund-raising capacity were sufficient incentives to run, even if victory in November was unlikely. Sizemore ran as a religious conservative who favored the restoration of lapsed social controls — he opposed legal rights for gays and lesbians, legal abortion, and the new state assisted suicide (“Death With Dignity”) law passed by voters in 1994 — but also presented himself as an economic conservative opposed, among other things, to a state transportation package because it included support for a light-rail mass transit system in the Portland area.⁷¹ Richard J. Ellis, writing about the Oregon initiative process, pointed out in 2005 that, by that time, Sizemore had

championed initiatives that have sought to cut property and income taxes, reduce public employees’ pensions, curtail the power of labor unions, abolish Portland’s regional government, block the expansion of Portland’s commuter railway, and link teacher pay to performance. . . . Contributing to Sizemore’s success was that he turned the initiative process into a lucrative business. In 1997 Sizemore established his own signature-gathering firm, I&R Petition Services, Inc. Through this business, Sizemore was able not only to introduce his own initiatives but also qualify them.⁷²

As Ellis points out, a series of court decisions in the early 1980s overturned an earlier state ban on paying petition signature gatherers, so initiative activists such as Sizemore — though hardly limited to him — placed dozens of initiatives and referenda on the ballot, so that of the eighty-two initiatives that appeared on the Oregon ballot between 1990 and 2002, seventy-four had been qualified using paid petition circulators.⁷³

Sizemore’s conservative positions as a candidate, much as the support for conservative initiative measures that he authored, extended across both economic and social issues. This combination of positions — particularly on social issues — would have made it difficult for Sizemore to prevail in a statewide contest in any event, but before the 1998 primary, the *Oregonian* revealed that he had run two businesses into bankruptcy prior to his involvement in politics.⁷⁴ In November, Kitzhaber obliterated Sizemore politically,



Bill Sizemore, the Republican nominee for governor in 1998, exemplified efforts to revive both lapsed social controls (particularly on women and sexual minorities) and economic conservatism in order to dismantle government programs supporting organized labor and city services.

winning by a modern record, 64 percent to 30 percent of the vote. The 1998 elections signaled declining influence for religious conservatives in Oregon politics; the activist base persists, but contemporary religious moralists have had less success in elections in the first decade of the new century than they had in the last decade of the twentieth century

AS OREGON CELEBRATES its hundred and fiftieth anniversary in the union, it is arguable that the most distinctive contribution the state has made to American political institutions — and to American political culture more broadly — has been the system of direct democracy that it was first to use (South Dakota had an enabling law on the books first).⁷⁵ Oregon has had the system of direct

democracy — the initiative, referendum, and recall — for over a century. The extensive use of direct democracy mechanisms in Oregon may well reflect the political culture of the state, one that was and is heavily influenced by “moralism.” Oregon is one of the states in which a “moralistic political culture” has dominated. Daniel Elazar explains that in such a culture,

politics . . . is considered one of the great activities of man in his search for the good society — a struggle for power, but also an effort to exercise power for the betterment of the commonwealth. . . . both the general public and the politicians conceive of politics as a public activity centered on [a] notion of the public good and properly devoted to the advancement of the public interest.⁷⁶

Elazar elegantly captured one of the most important traditions in American political life. “Political culture” establishes the foundation (or context) for political choices; the reason culture is so influential is that it is taken for granted — it consists of the assumptions, expectations, and norms that are so deeply rooted in collective identity that they are almost never examined.⁷⁷ Political conflicts arising from the new waves of immigration since the Irish famine of the mid nineteenth century have reflected profound differences between what Elazar described as the “moralistic” and “individualistic”

political cultures, though others have seen these as differences between Protestant and Catholic cultures.⁷⁸ Whatever the sources, in Oregon (and, to a substantial degree, California and now Washington as well), the moralistic political culture has dominated. Fueled by populist outlooks that blamed elites for the abandonment of principles understood to be both moral and traditional, the groups surrounding leaders such as William S. U'Ren and Ray Phillips have sought to put society back on the proper path by applying the tools of direct democracy.

Moral activists in both the movements covered here were capable of viewing state expansion as a means of imposing moral behavior on individuals. U'Ren and other populist progressives supported prohibition, attempting to help purify society and politics by ridding it of the corrupting influence of drink and the liquor lobby. The impulse has been stronger among OCA and other religious conservatives who have attempted to punitively rewrite state abortion laws and to restrict the legal rights of gays and lesbians. Despite the ideological distance between them, the early progressives and *fin-de-siecle* reactionaries shared an assumption that politics and government provided the appropriate forum in which to propose (and, eventually, to implement and enforce) new policies intended to reflect moral principles and to legislate moral behavior.

As insightful as Elazar's definition is, it does not tell us which public policies moralists favor or oppose. That is, the most influential political cultures can — and moralism does — encompass widely divergent public policies. Moralists agree that shared values writ into public policy should play a prominent role in the lives of citizens, but they differ strenuously over prescriptions the state should demand — that is, over the content of public policy. Nor does Elazar explain the widely divergent approaches taken by the historical movements discussed here. Once we move past the moralistic populism of these two movements, it should become clear that they had fundamentally different positions regarding the relationship between the economy and the state.

Populist progressives of the early twentieth century and populist conservatives of the more recent era generally have conceived of the state as the cause of moral decline and a social fall from grace. For activists like U'Ren — who saw policy and statecraft as remedies for a republic whose foundations were under assault by an emerging corporate order and the power of great wealth — the single tax provided a natural-law remedy that would restore a natural social order that rewarded producers with the fruit of the labor. It was the corporate domination of the state legislature that led U'Ren to find mechanisms by which he could put producers in greater control over their own lives and rid the legislature of lawyers and corporate toadies, replac-

ing them with working people and housewives. While some supporters of the single tax, especially the Oregon State Federation of Labor, would join the subsequent struggle to pass the state income tax, the later movement eschewed the transformative and moralistic grounding on which the single tax movement had been built. Income-tax activists sought to move public policy in the direction of a fairer and more progressive tax system, and their logic would not be incompatible with the level of state growth now associated with the New Deal.

That state has been the target of the late twentieth-century populist conservatives who have used the tools of direct democracy to attempt to reverse policy on the matter of taxes and economic equality. Those conservatives have also drawn on hostility to what they perceive as a liberal state that promotes diversity, gender equality, and toleration and promotion of homosexuality, seeing themselves as defenders of traditional family values. Though these moralistic populists have sought to impose state social controls on women and gays and lesbians, the movement originally gained ideological fervor by attacking the state as an alien and liberal imposition from above. Religious conservatives in Oregon have expressed hostility toward wealthy Republicans, but they have been more than willing to collaborate with that elite group on measures through which wealthy property owners have sought to lessen their tax obligations to the state. The anti-tax and religiously motivated conservatives have therefore drawn on similar visions. Moreover, specific moralistic and economic measures supported by conservatives reinforce the larger project of dismantling the state — if public support for the unemployed or those without health insurance is eliminated, for example, then the vulnerable would effectively be forced to rely on charity, and charitable organizations can enforce far greater cultural conformity on those being helped than can government. In this way, religious and economic conservatives, though they certainly have their differences, both seek to reverse the increased equality that rippled through American politics and, more broadly, culture, during the 1960s and 1970s. Populist conservatives have not simply worked to wither the state; they have especially promoted that reduction through acts that reduce the state's capacity to foster greater levels of economic equality. As it had been for the single taxers, economic budgeting and tax policy for the new right was powerfully informed by moral concerns.

Oregon's embrace of direct democracy has enabled populists to make repeated efforts to restore "traditional" or moral values they believe politicians have a vested interest in ignoring. Going around the party apparatus, political activists like U'Ren and Phillips have sought to provide voters with

a more direct voice in reforming society, and the ease of access to Oregon's ballot has provided motivated groups multiple chances to have just such an impact.

NOTES

1. See David Alan Johnson, *Founding the Far West: California, Oregon, and Nevada, 1840–1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 139–88.

2. Richard Ellis, "Direct Democracy," in Richard A. Clucas, Mark Henkels, and Brent S. Steel, eds., *Oregon Politics and Government: Progressives versus Conservative Populists* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 65. Shaun Bowler and Todd Donovan argue the critical factor explaining Oregon's reliance on direct democracy has been the ease of access to the ballot, something that experienced consultants and activists have become expert at exploiting, as well as the use of paid petition circulators. Shaun Bowler and Todd Donovan, *Demanding Choices* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).

3. Brad Cain (AP), "Lawmakers Push Back against Costly Initiatives," *New York Times*, July 27, 2009.

4. On the waning and waxing of initiatives in Oregon in the last century, see Ellis, "Direct Democracy," 65–69.

5. Quoted from Clucas and Henkels, "A State Divided," chapter one in Clucas, Henkels and Steel, *Oregon Politics and Government*, p. 3.

6. This speech can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=iO5_1ps5CAc (accessed April 30, 2009).

7. Stephen Waldman, *Founding Faith: Providence, Politics, and the Birth of Religious Freedom* (New York: Random House, 2008).

8. Daniel Elazar identified Oregon as one of the states whose political culture is characterized by moralism. He argued that moralists on the both the left and the right believe that politics should reflect "an effort

to exercise power for the betterment of the commonwealth . . . as a public activity centered on [a] notion of the public good . . . and the public interest." Daniel J. Elazar, *American Federalism: A View from the States* (New York: Crowell, 1972), 96.

9. Labor historians have long recognized the importance of religiosity, even when there was a rejection of the institutional church, within working-class communities and the way in which it could fuel worker radicalism. A good place to start would be Herbert Gutman's seminal essay, "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement: The Christian Spirit in the Gilded Age," in his *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American working-class and Social History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 79–117. Readers interested in more recent scholarship on this matter should see the recent special issue on "Labor and Religion" of *Labor: Studies of Working-Class History of the Americas* 6 (Spring 2009).

10. Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York, 1995), 33.

11. Gutman, "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement"; Robert E. Weir, *Beyond Labor's Veil: The Culture of the Knights of Labor* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 67–101; Robert C. Bannister, *Social Darwinism: Science and Myth in Anglo-American Social Thought* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979). The phrase "natural law" refers to laws set by nature or God, as opposed to human-constructed law. Much of the eighteenth-century enlightenment quest for knowledge was an attempt to grasp how natural laws established foundations for progress in politics, econom-

ics, and other aspects of social life, as much as they had in Newtonian physics. Much of these efforts de-emphasized divine presence; instead, they implied that God created the natural law machinery that subsequently ran by itself.

12. See Robert Johnston, *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), chap. 7–9, 11; Thomas C. McClintock, “Seth Lewelling, William S. U’Ren and the Birth of the Oregon Progressive Movement,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 68:3 (September 1967): 196–220; and Robert C. Woodward, “W. S. U’Ren and the Single Tax in Oregon,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 61:1 (March 1960), 46–63.

13. On populism, see Robert C. McMath, Jr., *American Populism: A Social History, 1877–1898* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Movement in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); and Norman Pollack, *The Populist Response to Industrial America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962).

14. On George, see John L. Thomas, *Alternative America: Henry George, Edward Bellamy, Henry Demarest Lloyd and the Adversary Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1983); and Ronald Yanosky, “Seeing the Cat: Henry George and the Rise of the Single Tax Movement, 1879–1890” (Ph.D. diss., UC Berkeley, 1993).

15. Robert L. Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers: The Lives, Times and Ideas of The Great Economic Thinkers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1986), 75–104.

16. Henry George, *Progress and Poverty* (New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1960), 340.

17. Aharon H. Shapiro, “Moses — Henry George’s Inspiration,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 47 (October 1988): 493–501.

18. George, *Progress and Poverty*, 544. George differed from political economists who, also working within the framework of

natural law, saw in working-class poverty the inevitable outcome of natural law. Social Darwinists, like many who preceded them, argued that any attempt by the state, or even private philanthropists acting out of sentiment, to ameliorate the conditions of the poor would reverse progress by diverting society from the path of natural law.

19. George, *Progress and Poverty*, 128.

20. *Ibid.*, 550.

21. *Ibid.*, 554.

22. Quoted in Robert Woodward, “W.S. U’Ren and the Single Tax in Oregon,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 61:1 (March 1960): 49.

23. Oregon State Federation of Labor, *Proceedings of the OSFL* (1911), 15–16.

24. U’Ren came by this honestly; his parents were devout Wesleyans, and William himself claimed later in life to have been especially fond of the “Old Testament leaders, Moses and the rest.” Johnston, *Radical Middle Class*, 128.

25. State of Oregon, *Proposed Constitutional Amendments and Measures with Arguments Respecting the Same* (Salem, 1914), 38.

26. *Labor Press*, November 23, 1911, and February 16, 1911.

27. Reprinted in *Labor Press*, February 29, 1912. Working-class women were not only spoken of in this way; they could utilize this language in effort to improve their own lot. Among the signs that striking women held as they picketed the Oregon Packing Company in June 1913 was one that read “Forty cents a day makes prostitutes.” Greg Hall, “The Fruits of her Labor: Women, Children and Progressive Era Reformers in the Pacific Northwest Canning Industry,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 109:2 (Summer 2008): 239. For Progressive era anxieties about the sexual virtue of low paid women in the work force, see Pamela Susan Haag, “‘Commerce in Souls’: Vice, Virtue, and Women’s Wage Work in Baltimore, 1900–1915,” in Leonard Dinnerstein and Kenneth T. Jackson, *American Vistas: 1877 to the Present*, 7th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 147–64.

28. *Labor Press*, October 12, 1911.

29. *Ibid.*, November 27, 1920.

30. *Ibid.*, October 26, 1914.
31. *Oregonian*, February 8, 1914.
32. *Oregon Journal*, November 1, 1918. The *Oregon Labor Press* characterized Pierce as a candidate who could be “depended upon to give labor a square deal.” November 2, 1918.
33. Johnston, *Radical Middle Class*, 132.
34. Rebecca Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery: Gender in American Party Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 160–64; Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American Experience* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 332–37; Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890–1920* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981), 64–65; Eileen Boris, “Reconstructing the ‘Family’: Women, Progressive Reform, and the Problem of Social Control,” in Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, eds., *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 73–86.
35. Johnston, *Radical Middle Class*, 153–54. Such support for feminist goals waxed and waned in labor circles. See Dana Frank, *Purchasing Power: Consumer Organizing, Gender, and the Seattle Labor Movement, 1919–1929* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
36. Johnston, *Radical Middle Class*, 135. This was not an unusual political trajectory. Michael McGerr claims that most progressives grew hostile to FDR’s New Deal, in no small measure because it lacked the progressive’s emphasis on transformation. As McGerr puts it, FDR understood the task of government to “make sure Americans could afford pleasure, and then get out of the way.” McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America: 1870–1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 316–17.
37. “Oregon’s Constitution,” *Oregon Voter* 6 (October 21, 1916), 358. For hostile analyses of the 1916 measure put forth by U’Ren and the Oregon State Federation of Labor, see A. L. Veazie, “A Clear Explanation of the Full Rental Value Land Tax Amendment,” *Ibid.*, 361–70; and Henry E. Reed, “The Land Rent Tax Amendment,” *Ibid.*, (October 7, 1916), 295–314.
38. Arthur H. Bone, *Oregon Cattleman/Governor Congressman: Memoirs and Times of Walter M. Pierce* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1981), 95 and 217–19.
39. Secretary of State, State of Oregon. *Proposed Constitutional Amendments and Measures (With Arguments) to be Submitted to the Voters of Oregon at the General Election, Tuesday, November 7, 1922* (Salem, 1922), 41.
40. Secretary of State, State of Oregon. *Proposed Constitutional Amendments and Measures (With Arguments) To be Submitted to the Voters of Oregon at the Special Election, Tuesday, November 6, 1923* (Salem, 1923), 13–14.
41. Secretary of State, State of Oregon. *Proposed Constitutional Amendments and Measures (With Arguments) To be Submitted to the Voters of Oregon at the General Election, Tuesday, November 6, 1928*, 11–22.
42. Robert Johnston concludes that Pierce helped “create a synthesis of new and old politics, fighting corporate power with some of the surviving ideological resources of small-producer radicalism while accommodating to, as well as informing, modern liberalism.” *Radical Middle Class*, 253.
43. Oregon State Federation of Labor. *Proceedings of Sixteenth Annual Convention, Oregon State Federation of Labor* (1919), 12; Bone, *Oregon Cattleman/Governor Congressman*, 141.
44. Bone, *Oregon Cattleman/Governor Congressman*, 252.
45. On Pierce’s relationship with the La Grande, Oregon, chapter of the Klan, see David Horowitz, “Order, Solidarity, and Vigilance: The Ku Klux Klan of La Grande, Oregon,” in Shawn Lay, ed., *The Invisible Empire in the West: Toward a New Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 185–215. Pierce awaits fuller historical treatment than he has received. In some ways, his personal history bridges the divide between progressives and

conservative populists that others see as essential to an understanding of Oregon politics. See Richard A. Clucas, Mark Enkels, and Brent S. Steel, eds., *Oregon Politics and Government: Progressives versus Conservative Populists* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

46. Author William Lunch has served as Political Analyst for Oregon Public Broadcasting since 1988. He surveyed and interviewed religious moralist activists from the late 1980s to the mid 1990s, when they were most influential in state and regional politics, and he produced a number of broadcasts based on that information. The pages that follow draw on his observations, surveys, and interviews. Lunch has also published on religious moral activists in "Oregon: Identity and Politics in the Northwest," in Mark J. Rozell and Clyde Wilcox, ed., *God at the Grassroots* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995); and "The Christian Right in the Northwest: Two Decades of Frustration," in John Green, Mark Rozell, and Clyde Wilcox, eds., *The Christian Right in American Politics* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2003).

47. See Thomas Edsall, with Mary Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York, Norton, 1992); Dan Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996); Daniel Smith, *Tax Crusaders & the Politics of Direct Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); James D. Hunter, *Culture Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1991); Jane Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); and Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the new American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

48. See Peter Schrag, *Paradise Lost: California's Experience, America's Future* (New York: The New Press, 1998), particularly part

three, "Mississippification"; and Clarence Y.H. Lo, *Small Property Versus Big Government* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

49. See Donald Balmer and William Lunch, *Oregon in An Era of Uncertainty: The Politics of the Property Tax Limit* (Corvallis: Program for Government Research and Education, 1995).

50. Atwater was at Case Western Reserve University in 1981, following Reagan's victory; he is quoted by Bob Herbert, "The Ugly Side of the GOP," *New York Times*, September 25, 2007.

51. Balmer and Lunch, *Oregon in an Era of Uncertainty*.

52. *Oregonian*, May 7, 1984, and September 30, 1984. "WPPSS" referred to the Washington Public Power Supply System, a public consortium that had issued bonds based on anticipated revenue from electricity expected to be generated from a number of nuclear power plants. By 1982, it had become clear that the plants would not be completed, and the WPPSS bonds went into default. See Daniel J. Chasan, *The Fall of the House of WPPSS* (Seattle: Sasquatch Press, 1985).

53. Secretary of State, *Voters' Pamphlet*, General Election, November 1978, p. 38. Emphasis in original.

54. Secretary of State, *Voters' Pamphlet*, General Election, November 1980, p. 24.

55. *Oregonian*, December 10, 1982.

56. Kathie Durbin, "Fundamentalists Tout Parent's Rights in Education," *Oregonian*, May 5, 1986.

57. Jack Reynolds, Candidate Statement, 1986 *Primary Election Voter's Pamphlet*, (Salem: Secretary of State, 1986), 68.

58. *Oregonian*, March 2, 1986.

59. Bruce Weber and Karen Seidel, "Why Haven't My Property Taxes Gone Down Yet?" *Oregon Fiscal Choices* [white paper] (Corvallis: OSU Extension Service, 1994), 2-3.

60. See Balmer and Lunch, *Oregon in an Era of Uncertainty*, particularly pp. 18-22.

61. See the profile of Bill Sizemore in Ellis, "Direct Democracy," 68-70; and William Lunch, "The Christian Right in the

- Northwest: Two Decades of Frustration,” in John Green, Mark Rozell, and Clyde Wilcox, *The Christian Right in American Politics: Marching to the Millennium* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2003).
62. State of Oregon, *Voters’ Pamphlet, 1978 General Election*, 45.
63. *Ibid.*, 46.
64. We cannot say with certainty that the voters were the same; on the outcome, however, see Bill Bradbury, *Oregon Blue Book* (Salem: Secretary of State, 2007), 303.
65. On the political situation from 1989 to 1991 concerning abortion and other social control policies, see Barbara H. Craig and David M. O’Brien, *Abortion and American Politics* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1993), particularly chaps. 6–8; and for an understanding of the activist women involved on both sides of the issue, see Kristen Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
66. A less expansive initiative in Colorado the same year passed but was eventually overturned by that state’s supreme court as violating the basic civil rights of gays and lesbians; that decision was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Romer v. Evans* (1996).
67. Lunch, “Christian Right in the Northwest.”
68. Author William Lunch attended the 1987 convention and distributed the questionnaires. Of the seventy activists who attended the gathering, forty-six completed them. For more detail, see William Lunch, “Oregon: Identity and Politics in the Northwest,” in Mark Rozell and Clyde Wilcox, eds., *God At the Grassroots* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995). See also Andrew Kohut, et al, *The People, The Press, and Politics* (Washington: Times-Mirror Center, 1987); Kohut, et al, *The New Political Landscape* (Washington: Times-Mirror, 1994); and Kohut, et al, *Scene 96, Take Two* (Washington: Pew Research Center, 1996). Work by Kohut and his colleagues continues through the Pew Center for the People, the Press, and Politics in Washington, D.C., can be found at www.people-press.org.
69. Vernon Bates, “Rhetorical Pluralism and Secularization in the New Christian Right: The Oregon Citizens Alliance,” *Review of Religious Research* (September, 1995), 46–64, quotation on p. 51.
70. *Ibid.*, 54–55.
71. Lunch, “Christian Right in the Northwest.”
72. Richard J. Ellis, “Direct Democracy,” in Clucas, Henkels & Steel, eds., *Oregon Politics and Government*, 69.
73. *Ibid.*, 71.
74. See Nina Baker & Brent Walth, “Sizemore Leaves a Trail of Debts,” *Oregonian*, April 19, 1998.
75. Thomas Cronin, *Direct Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 50–51.
76. Daniel Elazar, *American Federalism: A View from the States* (New York: Crowell, 1966), 90.
77. In a very different context, Thomas Kuhn described scientific “paradigms” that are, while dominant, largely unexamined, such as Newton’s conceptualization of the physical world from *The Principia* in 1687 until Einstein forced a wholesale revision of what Kuhn called “normal science,” beginning in 1905. See Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); and a similar but less radical work by Jacob Bronowski, *The Common Sense of Science* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951).
78. For a political application of these differences on a national scale, see Kevin Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1969). Phillips was a campaign strategist for the 1968 Nixon campaign who has subsequently had second thoughts; see his more recent work, *American Theocracy* (New York: Penguin, 2006), particularly chapters 4–6. His analysis of American political culture remains. See also Michael Barone, *The New Americans* (Washington: Regnery, 2001), particularly chapters three and five, and more generally, Thomas Edsall, *Chain Reaction*.