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CONSTRUCTING THE NATURAL CENTER: AIRPORT PLANNING AND THE FAILURE OF LIBERALISM IN CHICAGO, 1918-1946

By

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ABSTRACT

CONSTRUCTING THE NATURAL CENTER: AIRPORT PLANNING AND THE FAILURE OF LIBERALISM IN CHICAGO, 1918-1946

By

MICHAEL STEPHEN CZAPLICKI

An examination of airport policy in Chicago from 1918 to 1946 reveals that Chicago's political leaders have traditionally viewed their city as another type of business corporation. Because of this vision, local urban policy has been focused on solving one "problem": how could policymakers keep Chicago growing? In the 1920s, constrained by a political structure that divided governmental power over several levels, Chicago's political leaders answered this question by developing extensive partnerships with businessmen to plan for future urban economic development — plans in which airports played a prominent role. A consequence of this alliance, however, were that groups with a different vision of the city would be ignored, while business was given many rights and very few obligations.

The 1930s witnessed the rise of a centralized planning ideal that offered the possibility of checking this alliance, but it was an ideal about which policymakers were deeply ambivalent. This ambivalence was reflected at the local level by groups like the Chicago Regional Planning Association who refused to claim the power necessary to realize their regional goals, and at the national level by federal policymakers' commitment to a New Deal liberalism that accepted the need for a more activist state even as they refused to jettison laissez-faire liberalism's protection of individuals' right to maximize profit and suspicion of centralized authority. Faced with this ambivalence, the federal government retreated from the centralized planning ideal.

Instead, the federal government, like regional planning groups, pursued a functionalist strategy that saw airports as an isolated problem that could be solved through cash transfers and zoning. This decision would be consolidated during the postwar years as federal policy was geared towards urban decentralization. Federal policymakers supplied money and expertise but did not integrate policy into a coherent whole. As a result, the federal government was unprepared to deal with the urban crisis of the 1960s.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In many ways, this thesis is a tale of two cities and the highway between them. I have worked out many problems and written many mental drafts on the three hour drive from East Lansing to Chicago, and submitted these drafts as conversations with friends upon arriving in one of these places. My colleagues often wonder why I am interested in transportation and I hope this opening goes some way towards explaining why.

In Chicago, I would like to thank Neil Harris and Robert Coven for teaching me much about writing history and for getting this project off the ground. Archie Motley and the staff at the Chicago Historical Society introduced me to the impressive collections of that institution and somehow always had a useful answer to my questions. Sarah Owsowitz, Henry Pitzele, and Rudy Faust also offered me their insightful opinions. Bill Bielke, Art Lee, and Tim Wilkie kept me grounded and housed me at a very early stage. Special thanks must also go to Melissa Chambers, Kerry Tulson, Keith Murphy and Sabine Maucksch who shared so much of their lives (and their home) with me for so long.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACC Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce

ACI Aero Club of Illinois

CAA Civil Aeronautics Authority

CAC Chicago Association of Commerce and Industry

CRPA Chicago Regional Planning Association

NIPC Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission

INTRODUCTION

Accounts of urban development and transportation histories have tended to ignore the ideological context in which decisions effecting the form and quality of life of cities were made. As a result, urban development ends up appearing to be the preordained result of either shortsightedness on the part of elected officials or of technological and economic inputs. An analysis of airport development in Chicago from 1918 to 1946 demonstrates that while Chicago's airports were effected by technology, specific decisions made by policy makers guided by a particular vision were far more important in determining their location, form and effect. This vision was composed of two strands: a commitment to the tenets of American liberalism and a simultaneous belief in/anxiety about Chicago's destiny as a great commercial center. Chicago's political leaders' commitment to the former forced them to negotiate among various groups within Chicago's fragmented political structure, while their commitment to the latter ensured the decisions they made would ignore concerns for social justice and lay the roots for the urban crisis of the 1960s.

In making this argument, I stand in good company. Maureen Flanagan, Terrence McDonald, and Eric Monkkonen have forcefully argued for the need to recenter urban history around ideology and politics rather than ethnocultural, functionalist, or technoeconomic interpretations.[1] In addition to this strand of thought, I also incorporate H.V. Savitch's idea that "the state often possesses a definable will of its own."[2]

I am concentrating on airports and Chicago for two reasons. First, there is a surprising lack of scholarly work on airports. Aside from three dissertations and a few articles, the work that has been done on airports is more antiquarian than historical.[3] Moreover, the dissertations are problematic. David Brodherson's study of airport planning in the United States provides a good overview of the various changes in design that

[1] See Maureen Flanagan, Charter Reform in Chicago (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), Terrence McDonald, The Parameters of Urban Fiscal Policy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), and America Becomes Urban (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

[2] H.V. Savitch, Post Industrial Cities (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 7.

[3] There were many studies done of airports in the 1920s, but these are useful more as primary documents on airport planning than as secondary works on the development of the airport.

occurred over the twentieth century, but is more descriptive than analytical.[4] Brodherson's focus on federal sources also leads him to credit federal planners with fostering policy changes and deemphasize the contribution of private groups. As the case of Chicago reveals, however, local governments helped shape the character of American airport policy and businessmen were at the center of the planning process. Richard Doherty's study of O'Hare is a fine chronology of the history of O'Hare, but fails to answer larger questions about urban development or tie in to the historiography.[5] Finally, Douglas Karsner's comparative study of airport development in Tucson, Detroit and Tampa, while much more analytical and useful than the other two dissertations, suffers from a strong current of technological determinism, his contention that airport policy only arose in the New Deal, and his implicit belief in the existence of such a creature as a rational, disinterested planner.[6]

Karsner makes these errors in large part because of his reliance on Paul Barrett's 1987 article, "Cities and their Airports: Policy Formation, 1926-1952." By far the best work on Chicago's airports, Barrett's article argues that federal policies, mediated by politicians and interest groups, denied planners a role in "determining the relationship between the airport and the city."[7] This denial resulted in airports that "were not effectively integrated into metropolitan planning."[8] Barrett is off the mark, however, since he, like Brodherson, only focuses on reports released by the Civil Aeronautics Authority. An examination of the records of the Chicago Regional Planning Association reveals that planners, at least in Chicago, did have a say in "determining the relationship between the airport and the city" and went along with federal policy — in large part because their vision was very much in line with the vision that was developed by local politicians from 1918-1926. In light of this, historians need to jettison the idea of the noble, rational planner who

[4] David Brodherson, "What Can't Go Up Can't Come Down: The History of American Airport Policy, Planning and Design" (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1993).

[5] Richard Doherty, "The Origin and Development of Chicago-O'Hare International Airport" (Ph.D. diss., Ball State University, 1970). Although his source base is mainly newspaper articles, Doherty also relies on useful letters from and oral interviews with Chicago's key figures in airport planning — many of who are now dead and left no personal papers behind.

[6] Douglas Karsner, "'Leaving on a Jet Plane': Commercial Aviation, Airports and Post-Industrial American Society, 1933-1970" (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1993).

[7] Paul Barrett, "Cities and their Airports: Policy Formation, 1926-1952," Journal of Urban History (November 1987): 114.

[8] Ibid., 113.

would have brought order and beauty to the city if he was simply given the tools he needed to do so. Planners were not innocent bystanders of political forces and ideological currents beyond their control. Furthermore, records of the debates surrounding the creation of the CAA in 1938, debates which traced the contours of American liberalism, show that the organization was never given the mandate for the kind of sweeping power Barrett expected it to exercise.

Second, and more important, is that the development of Chicago's airport makes an excellent case study. Municipal airports did not come into being in any large numbers until the 1920s and they rapidly expanded in physical and financial scale, exerting a powerful effect on cities. The ways cities helped foster the growth of commercial air travel and handled the problems this development raised answer larger questions about the intersection of American liberal ideology with the American political structure. While this intersection allows cities to perform very well as economic growth machines, it severely handicaps the ability and will of cities to address issues of social justice.

CHAPTER 1

ENVISIONING A CITY PROFITABLE

World War I was an important catalyst in the development of aviation. The war had proved the military value of the airplane, while the exploits of the various combat pilots seized hold of the popular imagination. With the end of the war, established American aviation companies feared a cutback in government production subsidies as did other capitalists who were trying to break into what they saw as a growing enterprise. As M.H. Workman of Britain's Handley Page aircraft firm wrote to James Stephens in 1919, "commercial aviation is the biggest coming proposition in the world today ... The money made out of railroads, ships, steel, electricity, telegraph and telephone in the past, will be duplicated out of commercial aviation."[9] Capitalists, politicians and pilots joined in an extended campaign to keep government money flowing and foster the growth of the American aviation industry.

This campaign was organized along three lines of action: lobbying national and local political leaders for aviation-friendly legislation, forming national networks from local aviation clubs and associations, and promoting a vision through print media, lectures, and aerial demonstrations. These three strategies and the nature of the industry ensured that the campaign would be profoundly urban in character. Cities had the labor pool and infrastructure necessary to aircraft manufacturers, businessmen's vision of commercial aviation assigned cities the role of traffic generating hubs, urban centers had greater numbers of businessmen willing to spend their time and money on local clubs, and the lobbying efforts were more effectively carried out by accessing the robust political, information, and capital networks of cities. This is not to say the various groups always worked with a unity of purpose. As the case of Chicago demonstrates, there was a unified commitment on the part of all groups to develop commercial aviation and some form of

[9] M.H. Workman to James Stephens, 24 September 1919, Aero Club of Illinois Papers, Box 15 folder 89, 3.

regulation of the industry; who would get to shape policy was an entirely different matter.

Three major private associations had a great influence on aviation policy in Chicago from 1918-1926: the Aero Club of Illinois, the Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce, and the Chicago Association of Commerce. In addition to these three, various veterans groups lobbied for particular policies as well. To all of these groups must be added "the State," which had its own particular interests. In the case of Chicago, however, "the State" is a complicated term. The City Council, Board of Education, Lincoln, South, and West Park Boards, the State of Illinois, the U.S. Post Office, and U.S. military were all interested in promoting aviation and setting policy.

The Aero Club of Illinois was the oldest private group dedicated to promoting aviation. Officially incorporated February 10, 1910, the Aero Club was chartered as a nonprofit corporation "to foster the science of aeronautics, to encourage aerial navigation, excursions, congresses, expositions, conferences and inventions. To promote aerial and other interests, races, trials, meets, games, exhibitions and shows."[10] The club's first meeting was held February 9, 1910 at the Congress Hotel, where such luminaries as Octave Chanute and Harold McCormick were elected to the board of directors.[11] From the beginning the club's membership drives targeted businessmen. In a letter to John Jones eleven days after the club had incorporated, club secretary James Plew claimed "more than 150 good Chicago businessmen" had joined and warned membership was limited to 500.[12]

To help attract new members, the club decided to hold an air show and planning commenced quickly. William Wrigley Jr. offered a $2,500 five foot, bronze, sterling silver, and marble trophy in his own name as the grand prize[13] and the South Park Board agreed to the use of Grant Park for the proposed International Aviation Meet of 1911.[14] By

[10] Charter of the Aero Club of Illinois, 10 February 1910, ACI Papers, Box 1 folder 1.

[11] James Plew to Charles Cutting, 7 February 1910, ACI Papers, Box 1 folder 1.

[12] James Plew to John Jones, 21 February 1910, ACI Papers, Box 1 folder 1. The number was exaggerated, for Plew revealed at a special meeting of the club directors that only 35 new members had signed up, and only 12 had paid. See "Special Meeting of the Directors," 1 March 1910, ACI Papers Box 1 folder 1.

[13] William Wrigley Jr., 1 June 1910, ACI Papers, Box 1 folder 2.

[14] George Bushnell "The International Aviation Meet of 1911" Chicago History (Spring 1976): 12-18 in ACI Papers, Box 1.

all accounts, the meet seemed to be a success, as the event drew three million visitors.[15] Because of this success, the Aero Club would make use of aviation meets to generate favorable publicity in the future (as would Chicago politicians). Curiously, there is no mention of the meet in the annual report of the South Park Commissioners for 1911.

During World War I, the Aero Club acted as an information bank for people interested in entering the Army Air Service, aided in the formation of combat units, and sponsored various meetings and functions.[16] These functions usually involved speeches by famous aviators and were held for the purpose of establishing networks between club members, financiers, city officials, and aircraft industry figures. The guest list for dinner and a French film on aircraft construction at the Blackstone hotel held July 15, 1918 included Harold McCormick, William Wrigley Jr., engineer Bion Arnold, Chicago Plan Commission head Charles Wacker, Henry Dawes, Nathan MacChesney, Alderman John Lyle, and aircraft manufacturers William Stout and Glenn Martin.[17] Attendees were also treated to a speech by French Lieutenant Georges Flachaire who called Chicago "a splendid location for the manufacture of airplanes."[18]

This particular event highlighted the primary purpose of the Aero Club of America. Although club members were interested in the war, they were far more interested in fostering air commerce. One club letter clearly spelled this mission out:

> The Aero Club should be a tower of strength to our air offensive; it should be laying out commercial routes, mail routes, etc., of the future — in fact, should in time of war be preparing for peace so that the aircraft manufacturer now straining every effort for a maximum war output should not be left high and dry with the coming of peace.[19]

In its commitment to using the airplane as one more tool of commerce, the Aero Club did not differ from the other interest groups in Chicago.

Much less material is available on the other two major private groups pushing for government assistance in developing air commerce, the Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce (ACC) and the Chicago Association of Commerce (CAC). The ACC does not

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[15] Ibid., 18.

[16] See letters of 22 April 1918, 28 June 1918, and 13 July 1918, ACI Papers, Box 15 folder 85.

[17] Guest List, ACI Papers, Box 15 folder 86.

[18] Chicago Tribune, 16 July 1918, ACI Papers, Box 15 folder 86.

[19] [illegible signature], 24 June 1918, ACI Papers, Box 15 folder 85.

have any records, but its vision can be ascertained from an article in the major American aeronautical journal of the time, Aviation. The ACC promoted the development of a national policy dedicated to fostering air commerce through the publication of statistics and reports of major aeronautical events.[20] Like the ACC, the CAC's records are not located in a single location or collection and no internal documents are available for this period. From the name of the association and the fact that members of the CAC were appointed to a special commission in 1919, it seems probable that the CAC's vision was in line with the Aero Club and ACC.

These private groups were not the only ones interested in using the airplane as a tool for commercial development. Various levels of government also had an interest in the commercial possibilities of the airplane and took steps to facilitate development. While private groups certainly brought pressure to bear on politicians through their meetings and journals, the interest government officials had in promoting commercial aviation must be seen as arising from an independent impulse. Boosterism by private interest groups served to reinforce the vision of the state rather than dictate it.

The federal government's primary interest in aviation during these early years was for military purposes. Orville Wright foreshadowed the development of American deterrence policy when he argued:

> Twenty years ago my brother and I thought that the airplane's use would be principally scouting in warfare, carrying mail and other light loads ... But we did not forsee the extent to which the airplane might be used in carrying the battle line to the industrial centers and into the midst of non-combatants, though we did think it might be used in dropping an occasional bomb about the heads of the rulers who declared war and stayed at home. The possibilities of the airplane for destruction by bomb and poison gas have been so increased since the last war that the mind is staggered in attempting to picture the horrors of the next one. The airplane, in forcing upon governments a realization of the possibilities for destruction has actually become a powerful instrument for peace.[21]

For military leaders, Wright's sunny conclusion was valid only if the United States developed an air force capable of staggering the mind. A visit from the Duke of Sutherland, Britain's Under Secretary of State for Air, where he claimed America was lagging behind Britain and Canada in aviation, set off a wave of panic among American

[20] See "American Aeronautical Accomplishments in 1923," Aviation, 14 January 1924, 38-39.

[21] "A Radio Speech by Orville Wright," Aviation, 14 January 1924, 42.

policymakers.[22] Congressman Roy Fitzgerald warned that "the lack of a proper military air policy leaves this area undefended from hostile air attacks."[23] The editors of Aviation were quick to feed this panic by publishing sections of a report prepared by General Patrick, Chief of Air Service of the Army, that lambasted "the total inadequacy of the Air Service" and bemoaned the lack of equipment and trained aviators.[24] Federal policymakers hoped a strong commercial air industry would fulfill its military "needs" by acting as a reserve fleet of aircraft and trained pilots.

Unlike the federal government, Chicago's business and political leaders were far less interested in the military applications of the airplane. Although they frequently linked their appeals for aviation development with national defense, their real concern was in establishing Chicago as the nation's preeminent center of air commerce. This concern was organized along two ideological axes; a commitment to a vision of a "city profitable" and an urban identity based on Chicago's role as the transportation hub of the United States. As Maureen Flanagan has argued, the conception of a city profitable was "dedicated to mastering and controlling the environment for specific uses through centralized planning" and was at the heart of both the city beautiful and city functional movements.[25] Moreover, this vision, advanced primarily by male planners, operated in parallel with a vision, advanced primarily by women, of a city livable — that is, a city ordered by a municipal government committed to "protecting and preserving the environment for common use and common good."[26] Equating their own ideas with rationality and progress, male politicians and planners relegated the city livable to the domestic, and therefore, private realm and elevated the construction of a city profitable to the most important mission of municipal government. This commitment on the part of municipal officials to developing Chicago as a city profitable is obvious in several resolutions adopted by the city council from 1918-

[22] "The Duke of Sutherland's Impressions," Aviation, 21 January 1924, 67-68.

[23] "Our Wanting Air Policy," Aviation, 14 January 1924, 33.

[24] "An Indictment and a Warning," Aviation, 28 January 1924, 86-88.

[25] Maureen Flanagan, "The City Profitable, the City Livable: Environmental Policy, Gender, and Power in Chicago in the 1910s," Journal of Urban History (January 1996): 183.

[26] Ibid.

1926.[27]

Related to the city profitable vision was Chicago's urban identity as the transportation center of the United States (Figure 1).[28] In justifying actions taken to help develop air commerce, politicians and planners often referred to Chicago's position as the "natural" center of transportation in the U.S. For example, an essay by J. Paul Goode of the University of Chicago titled "The Why of a Great City • Chicago: Interpretation of the Metropolis" explained Chicago's rise as due to particular locational advantages bestowed by geography and the "character of the dominant strain of the population."[29] This naturalizing discourse elides the important role played by people through policy in developing Chicago. The construction of the Illinois and Michigan Canal, Sanitation and Shipping Canal, and granting of railroad rights of way were all political, contingent decisions.

Even as prominent Chicagoans advanced this idea, however, they simultaneously revealed their anxiety that Chicago's continued growth was less certain than they claimed. In one resolution passed by the city council in 1919, Chicago's political leaders practically grovel for government favoritism: "Whereas, Chicago was unfortunate in losing the aviation training field which was moved from Chicago to Rantoul, Illinois, and Whereas there is now an opportunity for Chicago to show its appreciation of the government's willingness to give Chicago another chance to have one of the most important government aviation centers."[30] To make matters worse for Chicago boosters, other cities were actively developing favorable air commerce policy including Chicago's old nemesis, St. Louis. Committed to developing Chicago as a commercial growth machine and with their identity threatened by the possibilities opened to other cities by the advent of the airplane, Chicago's leaders embraced the airplane and attempted to develop policies favorable to continued aviation development.

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[27] See Journal of The Proceedings of the City Council of the City of Chicago. In particular, 25 January 1922, 1748, 3 December 1924, 4180, 23 December 1924, 4351, and Resolution of Alderman Frank Link, December 1919, ACI Papers, Box 15 folder 91.

[28] "The Public Record," Dever Mayoralty Papers, Box 6 folder 44.

[29] J. Paul Goode, "The Why of a Great City • Chicago: Interpretation of the Metropolis," 24 May 1925, Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission Papers, Box 4 folder 2.

[30] Resolution of 24 March 1919, Proceedings of the City Council, 1869.

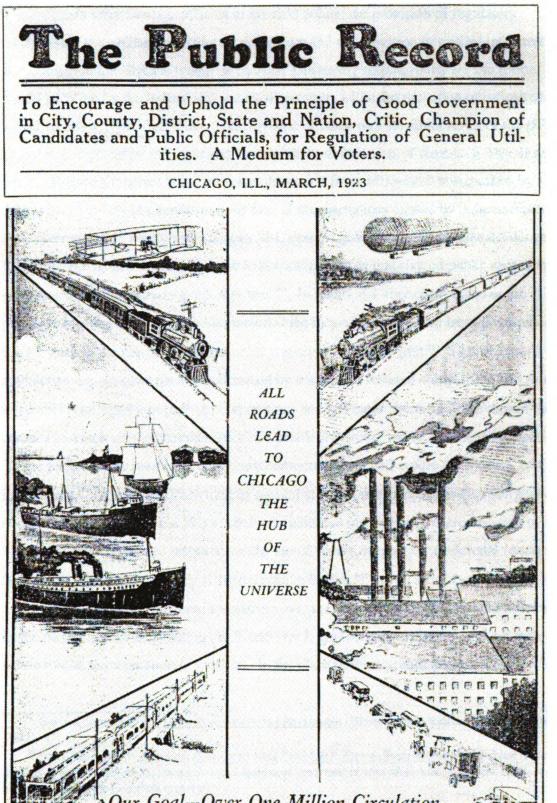

Figure 1 Chicagoans clearly saw their city as the transportation center of the world.

There were two components to aviation policy; the provision of regulatory mechanisms to stabilize and foster air commerce and the provision of critical infrastructure, without which the airplane would be useless. Ultimately responsibility for the former would be taken by the federal and state governments, while the provision of infrastructure would be left to individual cities. This division of labor was the direct result of the policy limitations imposed by policymakers' commitment to the tenets of American liberalism.

Ballard Campbell has argued that the period from 1880-1920 was marked by a great debate over the fate of liberalism in the face of the disruptions caused by industrialization and urbanization: "Traditional ideology had depicted government as the greatest danger to freedom. But as private groups came to possess resources that rivaled public authority, government no longer monopolized power."[31] In traditional liberalism rooted in the philosophy of John Locke, freedom included the individual's freedom from government interference in the rational, self-interested pursuit of economic gain.[32] This philosophy envisioned a more open society guaranteed by a state that fostered competition and refused to protect privileged groups.[33] As corporations became more powerful at the turn of the century and took on the characteristics of a privileged group, many Americans supported "some form of state intervention" to curb corporate power and ensure the protection of individuals.[34] Other Americans took an antistatist position, especially as the resurgence of conservative thinking in the 1920s "revived traditional ideas about the preservation of liberty, which ... required restraints on the use of power, respect for traditional (dual) federalism, and the supremacy of representative bodies."[35]

Aviation policy mirrored this debate over the proper role of government in society. In the period immediately following World War I, the federal government did not take an active role in the regulation of aviation. In the place of this vacuum, state and local

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[31] Ballard Campbell, The Growth of American Government (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 57.

[32] See Alan Brinkley, The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 8-11, for a good explanation of the tenets of liberalism and how these tenets were modified during the twentieth century.

[33] Ibid., 9.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid., 58.

authorities attempted to regulate commercial flying. The Illinois General Assembly attempted to pass several uniform aviation laws, but was unsuccessful until the Aeronautic Act of June 8, 1928 and 1929, when it provided for a commission to study the state of aeronautics in Illinois and prepare aviation legislation.[36] Unfortunately, the Illinois House and Senate Journals do not contain a record of the debates on proposed legislation so it is unknown why the aviation legislation was so long in coming. Chicago's city council also considered several ordinances regulating aviation within the city but did not have the power to establish any comprehensive system of aircraft regulation.[37]

What role the federal government did play was limited to the military and Post Office. The Post Office was allowed to start an experimental airmail service in 1918 using Army Air Service pilots. Under the leadership of Second Assistant Postmaster Generals Otto Praeger and Paul Henderson (a Chicagoan), the Air Mail Service established six routes, four of which connected with Chicago, between 1918 and 1925. Henderson established a central repair depot at Speedway Field in Maywood, Illinois in 1922, and regular day and night service on the Chicago-Cheyenne leg of the transcontinental route was started on July 1, 1924.[38] Even this experiment was under fire from conservative Congressmen who objected to government intervention in the marketplace and whose cuts in the postal appropriation in 1920 resulted in the elimination of the Chicago-Minneapolis, Chicago-St. Louis, and Washington-New York routes.[39]

Events within Congress offered the possibility for change. From 1921 to 1924, Congress considered the Hicks-Wadsworth and Winslow Aviation Bills which provided for the creation of a "Bureau of Civil Aviation in the Department of Commerce, and makes it the duty of the same to foster civil aviation in every way possible."[40] Although the city council endorsed the Hicks-Wadsworth bill because it "would be highly beneficial to this

[36] See Illinois Legislative Reference Bureau, Final Legislative Synopsis and Digest: 56th General Assembly, 1929, 381 and 417.

[37] See Proceedings of the City Council, 31 March 1923, 2189.

[38] Material on the Airmail Service taken from William M. Leary, Aerial Pioneers: The U.S. Air Mail Service, 1918-1927 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985).

[39] Benjamin B. Lipsner, The Airmail: Jennies to Jets (Chicago: Wilcox & Follett Company, 1951), 194.

[40] "Endorsement of the Hicks-Wadsworth Aviation Bill," Proceedings of the City Council, 25 January 1922, 1748.

community, on account of the growing commercial aviation in the City of Chicago," the Aero Club opposed both measures.[41]

Club president Charles Dickinson was in favor of comprehensive federal regulation of aviation but, as he wrote to Charles Glidden, believed the "Wadsworth-Winslow legislation kills commercial flying."[42] Dickinson's objection was made clearer in a series of letters written in 1924 and signed by the president of the Wallace Aero Company. The president's signature is absent from the letters, but given the Wallace Aero Company's location in Davenport, Iowa where Dickinson's grain and seed interests were, the writer was probably Dickinson. In a letter to Senator Smith W. Brookhart, Dickinson claimed that the "Winslow Bill is the instrument that the National Aeronautic Association is using, at the behest of the Air Trust, to accomplish its purpose."[43] In a letter to a Mr. Heath of the Heath Airplane Company of Chicago two days later, Dickinson wrote that "any legislation at all outside of uniform Federal Air Traffic Laws would be detrimental to professional and amateur aviators, flying field owners and operators, and the small builders."[44] Here then, was the crux of Dickinson's argument; although both Chicago political leaders and the Aero Club wanted uniform legislation to help foster air commerce, Dickinson felt the Wadsworth-Winslow legislation would be favorable to a few well connected companies, thereby violating the liberal tenet of free competition. Dickinson's position won as the Wadsworth-Winslow legislation was defeated, but the heated debates engendered by this legislation would continue when Congress passed the first major piece of aviation legislation, the Kelly Mail Act.

The Kelly Act is important because it marks the commercialization of the air mail service. Passed February 2, 1925, the act did not establish any regulatory structure for the aviation industry aside from the setting of mail routes and rates. Carriers would bid for contract air mail routes (CAMs) and if they won a contract, would be paid according to the weight of mail they carried.

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[41] See Ibid. and Pamphlet No. 1147, 4 February 1921, ACI Papers, Box 16 folder 93.

[42] Charles Dickinson to Charles Glidden, 5 February 1923, ACI Papers, Box 16 folder 94.

[43] Unsigned to Smith W. Brookhart, Washington D.C., 12 April 1924, ACI Papers, Box 17 folder 97, 2.

[44] Unsigned to Mr. Heath, 14 April 1924, ACI Papers, Box 17 folder 97, 2.

The debate over the Kelly Act reflected the issues raised by Dickinson. New York Congressman Anthony Griffin assailed the bill:

> The Government's experimentation has made the art [air transportation] feasible. These foxes have been watching the tree blossom and ripen. They have only one idea, and that is the fruit is ready to be eaten. They want to grab the air mail transportation service. ... On the contrary, I take a liberal and progressive attitude in regard to air transportation. I am for the innovation, but I want the Government—not private, selfish interests—to profit by it.[45]

Although Griffin, like Dickinson, was upset by government subsidies to private corporations, it was for a very different reason. Unlike Dickinson, Griffin saw air mail as a public good best ensured through continued federal control and operation of the air mail service. In his eyes, private corporations were interested only in making a profit rather than providing a public service. Griffin's argument would find more sympathetic ears during the New Deal, as the Kelly Act passed the House 292-15. The conservative position was expressed in an article by Paul Henderson introduced during debate:

> We must, in brief, make it profitable for the public to utilize aircraft for economic purposes; we must put aircraft to work. And having done so, nothing in heaven or on earth can stop us from achieving complete commercial dominion as far as is humanly possible over time and space. And from this dominion will come this commercial reserve, will come our real security in the air.[46]

Furthermore, Henderson had a very specific public in mind when he penned this article:

> And what might have proved the nemesis of aviation has been a patriotic cheer from the public, with rarely a cent of real money paid out for the services aircraft can perform. If you could hear what bankers, manufacturers, transportation men, and others have said or written to the Post Office Department about the air mail there would be no lingering doubt as to what points the way for national aviation policy. *These men have the farthest vision.* They are utilizing the air.[47]

In this conception, the only activities of value are those that produce profit. The majority of Congressman did not want government interfering with the "natural right" of men to participate in these activities.

For those who supported a "city profitable" vision, the act was a smashing success. Within five months of its enactment, several airline companies were organized; most notably Henry Ford's private air freight service in Detroit and National Air Transport

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[45] Congressional Record (17 December 1924), vol. 66, pt. 1, 753.

[46] Congressional Record (7 December 1924), vol. 66, pt. 1, 252.

[47] Ibid., 253 [italics added].

(NAT) in Chicago. NAT was particularly impressive in its organizational structure. It was financially backed by William Wrigley Jr., Marshall Field III, Edsel Ford, Curtiss Aeroplane and Motor Company and the Wright Aeronautical Corporation. Additional financial support came from Howard E. Coffin of the Hudson Motor Car company, Lester Armour of Armour and Company, and John J. Mitchell of the Illinois Merchant's Bank. As their manager, the board of directors chose none other than Paul Henderson, who quit his post in order to join NAT.[48] With strong companies like these being developed, America's aviation industry seemed to be getting off to a flying start.

All of this legislation would be meaningless if there was no infrastructure to support aircraft. The framers of the Kelly Act, however, had not mandated government provision of perhaps the most important piece of infrastructure: the airport. Laissez-faire liberalism dictated that the airport was a problem for private interests and municipalities to solve. Chicago's leaders did not seem to mind taking responsibility for airport development, but they would need to navigate the fragmented political structure before a municipally owned and operated airport could be built.

Before 1926, the best airport Chicago had was Ashburn Field. The problem with Ashburn was that it was located outside the city limits at 79th Street and Cicero Avenue, south of present day Midway Airport., and was owned and operated by the Aero Club of Illinois. The U.S. Army Air Service and Post Office operated some aircraft out of Ashburn Field and also made use of Checkerboard Field in Maywood, just outside Chicago's borders. Faced with this situation, city officials made several attempts after World War I to obtain a suitable site within the city limits for a municipal airport.

Unfortunately for the city, other parties were interested in choice city land. The Lincoln Park Board, for example, seems to have been interested in developing aviation facilities in Lincoln Park. According to the Report of the Commissioners of Lincoln Park—1915, "during the summer of 1914 the operation of two hydro-aeroplanes, making flights from hangars located at the east end of Cornelia St. Beach, were enjoyed by a multitude of interested spectators."[49] It is unclear whether the Lincoln Park Board paid for

[48] "$10,000,000 Airline Freight Company is Organized Here," Chicago Tribune, 22 May 1925, 3.

[49] Report of the Commissioners of Lincoln Park—1915, 13.

and operated the hangers and for how long the landing area was operated since there is no mention of the area under the board's financial reports. Eleven years later a meeting of commercial fliers was held at Lincoln Park "for the purpose of demonstrating to the Park Board and the State authorities the feasibility of using this tract of land as a municipal flying field."[50]

Unlike the South Park Board, however, the Lincoln and West Chicago Park Boards were appointed by the governor. The directors of Lincoln Park saw themselves as answerable to the governor, not to Chicago's mayor or city council, and the governor saw things this way too. As Governor Len Small expressed it: "two of the great park systems in Chicago are part of the State administration inasmuch as their commissioners are appointed by the Governor by and with the advice and consent of the Senate. These are the West Chicago Park System and the Lincoln Park system."[51] The park boards may have had land, but if city officials wanted to ensure control of the municipal airport, they would have to look elsewhere.

The next best possible source of airport sites was the Chicago Board of Education. The Board was in possession of many parcels of land that were granted by the state for the purpose of using as school sites or leasing and selling to raise money for the Board. There were two drawbacks to approaching the Board of Education for land. First, the Board of Education was an independent authority and any land Chicago used would be leased, jeopardizing the the city's sole claim to control of any facility that might be built on such land. Second, in the wake of scandals involving leases of school board land at prices far under market value to businessmen, the Board of Education was wary of making any more deals involving its land.[52] The Board cited this as a main reason for rejecting Charles Wacker's (of the Chicago Plan Commission) proposal to lease the Clearing School Fund Land for airport purposes in 1924:

> At the present time the Board is deriving a revenue of some $4,000.00 annually from the rental of this property for farm purposes. Considering the development that is going on in this portion of the city it will be feasible to sub-divide and lease for residence and business purposes. Boards of Education in this city have been

[50] E. Heath to Charles Dickinson, 22 April 1925, ACI Papers, Box 17 folder 99.

[51] Biennial Message of Governor Len Small of Illinois, Delivered to the 56th General Assembly, January 1929, 145.

[52] See Flanagan, Charter Reform in Chicago, 149.

> severely criticized in the past for relinquishing school land and for leasing school property for small considerations. While legally it undoubtedly would be possible to perfect a lease with the city ... practically it would be almost impossible to terminate such a lease.[53]

This argument should not be taken to mean that the Board of Education was opposed to the development of airports on school land. A small airport already did exist on the Clearing land and one month after spurning Wacker, the board's business manager recommended a lease extension on the existing airport — revealing yet another competitor for control of Chicago's airports.

Phillip G. Kemp, of the Chicago Aeronautical Bureau, the local affiliate of the Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce, and the Air Service Officer's Association, held a preexisting lease of 75.50 acres of Clearing land that was due to expire November 29, 1924.[54] Kemp claimed that the City of Chicago was willing to provide $15,000 to improve the airport for municipal purposes provided the airport was open to the public.[55] Kemp proposed two ways of making the airport public, both of which would gave him and his organizations substantial control over operation of the airport. Kemp's first proposal was that the Board of Education assign the lease to the federal government at a rate of one dollar per year, while maintaining control over hanger leases, provided that anyone using the airport "agree to abide by any rules or regulations that might be promulgated by the Air Service Officer, United States Army, in charge, looking toward safeguarding flying to and from this field until such a time as there shall be national legislation enacted."[56] One presumes that Kemp would be the Air Service Officer in charge of the field.

Kemp's second proposal was for the Board of Education to lease the field to the Air Service Officers' Association, through Kemp, for $510 per year, any revenue exceeding $510 to be split between the Board and the Association.[57] This was the option recommended by the business manager. In addition, Kemp promised that the presence of U.S. government facilities would allow Air Service Reserve officers to continue their

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[53] Proceedings of the Board of Education of the City of Chicago, 24 September 1924, 243.

[54] Ibid., 22 October 1924, 327.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

training and help bolster the national defense. Under this plan, the City of Chicago would still not have control although it would technically have a municipal airport. This is undoubtedly what made Kemp's proposal so attractive to the Board of Education; he was using a much smaller parcel of land and the school board would have a much easier time removing Kemp from its land than the City of Chicago.

Chicago was forced to look to the Board of Education and the Park Boards because its state sanctioned charter did not give it the power to acquire land outside of the city limits for airport purposes or to create additional taxing authority for airport purposes. This last restriction was key because assembling land sufficient for future airport expansion within the city would be extremely expensive and Chicago had committed most of its funds to other public works projects like Wacker Drive, carrying out Burnham's Chicago Plan, and the Lake Michigan water cribs and tunnels. Without the authority to acquire additional land or raise additional funds, Chicago's leaders had to go outside for help.

Nor was the State of Illinois quick to come to the aid of Chicago. Not until 1927 did the General Assembly pass a law amending the incorporation laws of Illinois. Senate Bill 2 added a provision allowing cities "to acquire or lease real estate, either within or without the corporate limits of said city or village, for the purpose of establishing landing fields for air craft."[58] But, by 1927 Chicago had already secured a site from the Board of Education for Chicago Municipal Airport. Even after this law passed, other airport legislation passed by the Illinois legislature would deliberately deny power to Chicago. For example, H.B. 440, passed in 1929, allowed "park districts in counties of less than 500,000 population to acquire land and construct and operate airdromes, and to levy a tax therefore."[59] This law essentially applied everywhere but Cook County.

To get around the obstacles raised by Chicago's fragmented political governmental structure and the various interest groups — and pursue their goal of establishing Chicago as the commercial aviation center of the U.S. through the construction of a city-owned and operated airport — Chicago's political leaders had since 1919 relied heavily on appointed independent commissions. The creation of such commissions allowed the city to bring

[58] Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Illinois, 1 March 1927, 124.

[59] Illinois Legislative Reference Bureau, Final Legislative Synopsis and Digest: 56th General Assembly, 1929, 291.

politicians, planners, and private interest groups together in one body, whose purpose was to formulate unified aviation policy. This reliance on independent commissions, composed of men committed to the city profitable and the tenet of liberalism that mandated restraints on government power, and insulated from public scrutiny and accountability, would have an important consequence: the institutionalization of a vision of the city profitable to the exclusion of a concern for social justice called for by the city livable.

In 1919 the Aero Club of America and the Aerial League of America made plans to hold a Transcontinental Air Derby. The organizations were very straightforward about the purposes of the Derby:

> To establish and open the first transcontinental airway by first establishing landing places at every fifty miles across the continent, from coast to coast, and then given inducements to aviators to fly over the airway, landing on the established landing places. It is hoped that this Derby and the Aerial Tours that will follow will lead to the establishment of permanent air lines across the continent for carrying mail, passengers and express.[60]

The national organizing committee included aircraft manufacturers W.E. Boeing and Reed Landis, and the presidents of the state Aero Clubs, including Charles Dickinson.[61] To prepare for the event, Chicago business and political leaders held a meeting October 3, 1919. Eleven members of the Aero Club, including Charles Dickinson, James Stephens and Bion Arnold, were represented as were three members of the Chicago Association of Commerce.[62] Representing the city was the Municipal Aviation Commission, which was really a special City Council committee made up of Aldermen Guy Guernsey, George Maypole, Dorsey Crowe, Frank Link, and John Lyle.[63] While at this meeting, the attendees decided to form a Joint Committee on Aviation with:

> the object of in view of the different organizations represented, working together for the advancement of Aeronautical interests in Chicago, and that other Chicago organizations interested in Aeronautics and promotion of Civic Affairs be each invited to appoint three of their members to cooperate with this committee.[64]

The Aero Club appointed six members of the committee, the Chicago Association of Commerce appointed six (including Merrill Meigs), and all five members of the Municipal

[60] F.T.D.A. Press Release, 17 September 1919, ACI Papers, Box 15 folder 89, 1-2.

[61] Ibid., 1.

[62] "Meeting of the Joint Committee on Aviation," 3 October 1919, ACI Papers Box 15 folder 90, 1.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid., 2.

Aviation Commission were appointed.[65] It is unclear how long the Joint Committee operated and what specific actions it took since there are no other papers in existence from the Committee.

The Committee, in fact, may have folded quickly. The Aero Club Papers include two resolutions by Aldermen Link, Crowe and Maypole providing for the establishment of official commissions that broadened the membership. Link's resolution stated:

> whereas the Government of the United States of America desires the cooperation of the City of Chicago for the purpose of establishing landing fields, in said City, for the use of the Army Air Service and of the Air Service of the Post office Department ... the Mayor shall forthwith appoint a commission which shall be known as the Chicago Municipal Aviation Commission and which shall consist of fifteen members, five of whom shall be members of this City Council and ten of whom shall be citizens of the City of Chicago, having knowledge in regard to matters of aerial navigation.[66]

Crowe and Maypole's resolution ordered the mayor to

> appoint a Commission, to consist of eight members of the City Council, a representative of the South Park, West Park and Lincoln Park Boards and four citizens who are interested in aeronautics, to give consideration to the matter of providing in suitable places in the City of Chicago landing fields for aircraft, and to formulate ... such ordinances regulating the operation of air craft in the City of Chicago.[67]

Both resolutions showed the Progressive Era commitment to incorporating experts into government, both ensured the city wouldn't give up all control by providing a strong council presence, and both tried to accommodate the various interest groups in Chicago — Link by appointing ten citizens and Maypole-Crowe by reserving spots for the various Park Boards.

There is no record to show that Link's resolution was adopted, but something resembling Maypole and Crowe's probably was. The Board of West Chicago Park Commissioners received a communication January 22, 1920 asking the Board to "appoint a Committee on Aviation, in order that the West Chicago Park Commissioners might be represented at a conference to be held in the Council Chamber, City of Chicago ... 'for the purpose of organizing a general committee to promote commercial aviation in our City,' also for the 'consideration of the acquisition of aviation landing fields for the City of

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[65] Ibid.

[66] Alderman Frank Link, undated resolution, ACI Papers Box 15 folder 91.

[67] Aldermen George Maypole and Dorsey Crowe, undated resolution, ACI Papers Box 15 folder 91.

Chicago.'"[68] Chicago's leaders once again employed a commission to organize the various groups around the common vision of Chicago as a commercial center.

These early attempts at commission formation all failed to achieve the goal of providing Chicago with a municipal airport owned and operated by the city. Unfortunately, the reasons for these failures are not clear because the various commissions left no records behind. Chicago officials finally did succeed in achieving their goal after creating the most stable and successful commission, the Chicago Aero Commission, in 1924.

After Wacker had been rebuffed by the Board of Education, Dorsey Crowe presented a resolution authorizing and justifying the creation of the Chicago Aero Commission that was structured around the same two ideological axes that had structured the local response to the development of the airplane:

> Whereas, The City of Chicago is indisputably the greatest railroad center in the world; and whereas, because of our geographical position and vast acreage there is no reason why the same distinction should not apply to Chicago as an airport; and whereas, it has been publicly stated that the War Department has regarded Chicago as being in an apathetic state so far as aviation is concerned, an unusual, but warranted reputation for America's most progressive City; and ... Aeronautical achievements both military and commercial, of recent years, have been so rapid that Chicago and other municipalities have failed to keep commensurate pace therewith.[69]

Once again a policymaker cited Chicago's "natural" central location, despite the airplane's transcendence of geographical barriers, and once again a policymaker revealed his anxiety that perhaps Chicago would fail to maintain commercial supremacy.

The council adopted Crowe's resolution and Mayor William Dever appointed the members of the Aero Commission. Kemp was named chairman of the committee. He was joined by George Foster, Wacker, South Park Commission President and future mayor Edward Kelly, Raymond Smith, R.R. McCormick, Roy Keehn, William McCracken, Albert Pressler, and Aldermen Crowe and Joseph McDonough.[70] The Aero Club got to work quickly. In April of 1925 Dever wrote a letter to John Byrnes, the Board of Education's business manager, in which he asked the Board to allow the city to

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[68] Journal of the Proceedings of the Board of West Chicago Park Commissioners, 27 January 1920, 11360.

[69] Proceedings of the City Council, 23 December 1924, 4351.

[70] Ibid.

immediately occupy the 75.50 acre tract Kemp had held, stating that "The Chicago Aero Commission have made certain recommendations and plans concerning landing fields in Chicago. One of the proposed fields is to be located on the south half of Section 16-38-13, Clearing School Fund Property."[71]

In response to Dever's letter, Byrnes reported that upon the expiration of the Chicago Aeronautical Bureau's original lease on November 29, 1924, the tract had "been held in abeyance, as the City was considering the feasibility of establishing a municipal landing field on same" and recommended that Dever's request be granted.[72] Kemp's commission chairmanship, then, may have been a consolation prize for losing his lease; although this is not to say Kemp was a figurehead. He was a high ranking member of the Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce and apparently played an important role in securing final school board approval of Chicago's request to lease the entire southern half of the Clearing section.

The city council passed an ordinance April 1, 1925 authorizing city real estate agent Joseph Peacock to negotiate with the Board of Education.[73] The city's request to lease part of the Clearing section was bounced around various committees, however; traveling to the Committee on Buildings and Grounds, who sent it back to the business manager because it "requested the privilege of making sub-leases" and the Board did not favor such leases.[74] When no action was taken by July, Kemp wrote a letter to Board president Edward Ellicott, asking to appear before the committee considering the city's proposal so he could explain "the proposition in full ... I find there are a great many misapprehensions as to the purpose, scope, and intent of this lease which can be cleared up very easily."[75] Kemp's pitch must have worked, because the Board voted 9-0 to allow the business manager to open lease negotiations with the city.[76] The 18 farmers on the Clearing property would have their leases canceled and Chicago would soon have its airport.

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[71] Proceedings of the Board of Education, 8 April 1925, 988.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Proceedings of the Board of Education, 22 April 1925, 1038.

[74] Proceedings of the Board of Education, 27 April 1925, 1418.

[75] Proceedings of the Board of Education, 8 July 1925, 11.

[76] Proceedings of the Board of Education, 12 August 1925, 179.

As the city developed the field over the end of 1925 and into 1926 before its opening date of May 8, 1926, there is evidence of conflicts over who was to control it. On May 26, 1926 the council ordained that "the Commissioner of Public Works shall take and have control, authority, and jurisdiction over the establishment, operation, and maintenance of any municipally-owned or municipally-operated field or tract of land used in connection with or for the purposes of aviation."[77] On the surface, this may have been a move by the city to forestall any possible conflicts. However, section two of the ordinance ordered the Commissioner of Public Works to take "into consideration the recommendations of the Chicago Aero Commission and the Committee on City Planning, Parks and Athletics."[78] Dorsey Crowe, who introduced the ordinance, was chair of the Committee on City Planning, Parks and Athletics, and based on his past actions, Kemp presumably still wanted some say in how the airport was run.

This ordinance is also important because, like the independent commissions, it institutionalized the networks among private interest groups and public officials who shared a vision of Chicago as the "city profitable." This vision would carry over into the succeeding decades as Chicago planned bigger and "better" airports. By institutionalizing this vision at this early stage, Chicago's leaders effectively insulated the decision making process from outside pressure groups who did not share their vision. As part of this insulation, city officials limited the opportunities people had to gain insights as to how the process worked. Many ordinances were printed in the Commercial Bulletin, which catered to a select readership, and the Proceedings of the City Council, while available to a greater number of Chicagoans, never contain debates and rarely print letters of opposition.

Furthermore, the ideological climate of the time helped ensure this insulation; federal officials fervently believed in a laissez-faire liberalism that allowed some regulation, but otherwise left cities on their own. Only with the shift in liberal thought during the New Deal would other groups with different visions be able to influence Chicago's airport policy — scoring their biggest triumph by defeating plans for a lakefront airport. As other events of the 1930s reveal, however, even this shift would not go far enough.

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[77] Proceedings of the City Council, 26 May 1926, 3593.

[78] Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

THE FAILURE OF LIBERAL PLANNING

The institutionalization of the city profitable vision complete, Chicago's leaders set out to develop the infrastructure necessary to realize their dream of establishing Chicago as the "natural" aviation center of the United States. Their plans ran into some difficulty, however, as the city's fiscal crisis and the Depression dried up the cash and political will to further develop Chicago's airport facilities. Fearing stagnation, and spurred on by prodding from airline companies and the realization that the airplane had rendered traditional measures of distance moot, Chicago's business and political leaders used statistics and completed projects as evidence for their claims that the city was a natural air center, and stressed the need for planning to maintain their favored position. Ideology and practice reinforced one another as each completed project, justified in terms of its necessity to maintaining Chicago's place as the aviation center, became further proof of Chicago's national eminence. Chicago's political leaders' desire to plan and develop more airport facilities provided a moment of opportunity when cities could have been organized around principals of social justice, rather than around a vision of the city as growth machine. Politicians' emphasis on planning and need for money helped increase the role of two groups that had the potential power to transcend the fragmented political structure of Chicago and open up the planning process to concerns other than profit: the Chicago Regional Planning Association and the federal government. Unfortunately, the moment would be closed since the Chicago Regional Planning Association saw only a city profitable, while the federal government remained committed to the tenets of American liberalism.

Although Chicago's aviation boosters successfully obtained their airport in 1926, further improvements were hindered by opposition to increased spending by the city. As early as 1924 the Association, upset at Chicago's short-term debt and overspending by the City Council, had asked the city to "limit the total of its appropriations to its resources for the year as estimated by the City Comptroller" since doing otherwise was "bad business

and bad morals."[79] The Municipal Voters League, meanwhile, had drafted a similar resolution only a month earlier.[80] In 1927, Chicago's Corporation Counsel, Francis Busch, sent Mayor William Dever an ominous letter warning that the "City is going to be in a mighty bad way to meet its budget obligations."[81] It was within this context of growing concern over the city's finances that, on April 3, 1928, the Citizens' Association of Chicago recommended the defeat of 31 bond issues, including a $500,000 issue for municipal airport improvement, totaling $77,959,000 at the April election.[82] The Association quickly got its wish when voters rejected all of the bond issues; the airport bonds failed by a vote of 195,901-368,611.[83]

In this context, the rejection of airport bonds totaling $500,000 does not seem particularly alarming, yet this rejection alarmed the members of the Chicago Aero Commission, which had been reorganized a few months earlier. The City Council had authorized Mayor William Thompson to appoint a new commission consisting of three aldermen (one from each of Chicago's three main regions) and any additional citizens the mayor desired to add for the purpose of developing a landing field survey and promoting aviation in Chicago.[84] The usual politicians and businessmen who actively pushed for the expansion of Chicago's airport facilities composed the initial batch of appointees, including Paul Henderson as Chair, Alderman Dorsey Crowe, George Foster, Merrill Meigs, Reed Landis, and P.G. Kemp.[85] Like previous commissions, this new Aero Commission formalized the networks between policymakers and private groups committed to developing Chicago as the aviation center of the United States and as a city profitable.

One month after the bond issue was rejected, the Aero Commission, through Paul Henderson, went on the offensive. In a strong letter to Mayor Thompson and the City

[79] "Meeting of Directors," 14 March 1924, Citizens' Association of Chicago Papers, Box 1, 2.

[80] "Minutes of the Municipal Voters League," 31 January 1924, Citizens' Association of Chicago Papers, Box 16.

[81] Francis X. Busch to William E. Dever, 21 February 1927, Dever Mayoralty Papers, Box 2 folder 15.

[82] "Meeting of Directors," 3 April 1928, Citizens' Association of Chicago Papers, Box 1.

[83] Proceedings of the City Council, 6 June 1928, 3035.

[84] Proceedings of the City Council, 2 November 1927, 1311.

[85] Ibid. The other members were: James Simpson, John Glenn, R.R. McCormick, Edward Steadman, South Park Board Commissioner and future mayor Edward Kelly, Aldermen Joseph McDonough and Albert Horan, M.L. Bromberg, J.W. Dissette, and R.W. Schroeder.

Council requesting $155,000 for the operation of Chicago Municipal Airport, Henderson played off of policymakers' anxieties that Chicago's position was anything but natural, as well as the cost-cutting mood in the city:

> The Failure of the five hundred thousand dollar airport bond issue in April has prevented the completion of the Chicago Municipal Airport ... to permit the present situation to continue not only endangers Chicago's position in the air transport development in this country, but may easily render of little value some of the improvements already started.[86]

Henderson expanded on this point by comparing Chicago to many rival cities of smaller size and went on to argue that "there are at least four landing fields on the air line from New York to Dallas better than the Chicago field, and there are at least five landing fields between New York and San Francisco on the Transcontinental line better than the Chicago field."[87] This statement is particularly provocative since Henderson seemed to be speaking as the president of National Air Transport and employing a tactic that would be used by airlines 17 years later — threatening to use other airports. Henderson finally closed his argument by simultaneously reassuring and threatening his audience:

> Chicago today is truly the air transportation center of the United States. We must hold it in that position, but we cannot hold it unless we have a landing field suitable for this rapidly growing service ... Chicago will not be able to maintain the fortunate position in which its geographic location and circumstances have placed it in so far as aeronautics is concerned.[88]

This statement is significant because Henderson used the natural center myth to explain how Chicago became the nation's aviation center, erasing the role he had played as Second Assistant Postmaster General in Chicago's development, but warned that the city's future position depended on favorable policy. His formulation became very prevalent in the following years.

Henderson's speech had the desired effect, for the City Council quickly passed Alderman B.A. Cronson's resolution promoting an airway from Chicago to Atlanta; a resolution that touched on many of the themes raised by Henderson and introduced a new one, the need for planning:

> Whereas the wealth of talk, claims and boasts and the poverty of intelligent planning and constructive action on "Chicago as the Air Center of the Nation", has

[86] Proceedings of the City Council, 9 May 1928, 2794.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

> been detrimental, harmful and injurious, as indicated by the following comparison: New York business and capital have weighted and appreciated the enormous value of airplane service and are continually in Washington pleading for and obtaining new air ways.[89]

Cronson's resolution continued Henderson's work of destroying any illusions Chicagoans had that the naturalness of their city's position alone would guarantee future prosperity through leadership in aviation. The example of New York was invoked as a threat, since Cronson went on to discuss the amount of interest saved by New York businesses through the faster speeds of the airplane and argue that "more millions daily is drained from this southern territory to New York. This southern territory from Atlanta westward logically belongs to Chicago but commercially it is being switched from Chicago to New York and tied up there by airway."[90] To eliminate this threat, Cronson recommended that the city petition the federal government for an airway to Miami via Atlanta and that the Committee on Parks, Playgrounds, Aviation and Athletics report "what can and should be done to promote Chicago to its proper sphere of influence on the air map of the country."[91]

This resolution is remarkable for the ideological strands it contains. It follows Henderson's lead in showing that unfavorable government policy — in this case, airways — can make any argument of "natural" moot, while still holding onto a belief that Chicago is destined to be a great commercial center. Although Chicago did have a geographically favorable position, and commercial airplanes able to perform nonstop, transcontinental flight were far from development, Cronson, like Henderson, was arguing that Chicago's political leaders needed to actively exploit the city's geographical position, rather than passively wait for traffic and benefits to come to the city. At times, this argument took on a note of imperialistic fervor — as Cronson demonstrated with his "sphere of influence" metaphor. Moreover, as the example of New York shows, these spheres of influence could be extremely large since the speed of airplanes collapsed distance to the point where it was measured in time and dollars. Finally, Cronson connects all of these strands together with an accusation of planning failures lost among talk. If Chicago was to avoid being undermined by the Octopus that was New York, it would have to apply planning to airport

[89] Proceedings of the City Council, 28 May 1928, 2980-81.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid.

development.

Chicago had a strong planning tradition dating back to the 1893 World's Fair, but little attention had been paid to airports. The Chicago Regional Planning Association did address the airport during the 1920s but did not consider it a major planning problem until the 1930s. Although these early attempts were tentative, they are still instructive, revealing who had access to decision making authority and the CRPA's vision of the city. Ultimately the CRPA's discourse of comprehensive planning would serve as a justification for constructing Chicago as a city profitable.

In 1924 the CRPA established a committee on airways to create a map of existing airports in the Chicago region. While this task seems innocuous when compared to the CRPA's ambitious highway plans, it was far from it. Mapping is never an innocent exercise since the cartographer negates alternative definitions of space with a totalizing gaze that defines and orders the space of the city. Through this practice, maps become the carriers of truth, snapshots of "how things really are." In fact, "the 'reality' represented mimetically by the map not only conforms to a particular version of the world, but to a version which is specifically designed to empower its makers."[92] To legitimate this reality, the map veils its constructed character behind a "rhetoric of scientific accuracy and truth"[93] and reproduces its own authority through the complicity of readers who use the map to give directions, navigate the city's spaces, or, in the case of the CRPA, develop planning policy.

The committee on airways' task of mapping, then, was the first step towards integrating the airport into the CRPA's vision of the city. This vision, like those of the Chicago Aero Commission and the City Council, was premised on Chicago's natural position and saw Chicago as a city profitable. The CRPA's added a special twist, however, by envisioning Chicago as a *regional* growth machine through the promotion of decentralization. This twist was made clear by a pamphlet which argued that the CRPA:

> should help the outside communities to maintain their political independence while they are working together to plan for their common future needs ... Chicago is, and will always remain, the great center of the region in finance, art, recreation,

[92] D. Pinder, " Subverting Cartography: The Situationists and Maps of the City," Environment and Planning A (1996): 406. Pinder also persuasively argues that the power of maps is not something restricted to elites and can be employed to subvert dominant representations of society. I have chosen to emphasize his negative reading since it is more applicable to this case study.

[93] Ibid., 407.

> commerce, and business administration ... Industries are moving out of the city and new ones coming to the district are going outside. Further, there is a great flow of population out of Chicago to the purely residential suburbs. Why? Because land is less expensive, transportation is available, living conditions are better, — business is more efficient and living is more agreeable ... This outflow of business and residence is called Decentralization. Decentralization is a good thing. It tends to relieve congestion, — congestion on the streets and on the land. It makes for more efficient and agreeable life.[94]

The CRPA's vision erased those who were unable to gain access to the "more efficient and agreeable life" of the suburbs. The erasure of humans, and with them, the messy implications of class and racial conflict, and emphasis on decentralization naturalized Chicago as a self-regulating machine: allowing the CRPA to see itself as an engineer whose responsibility was to tweak the machine to maximum efficiency.[95]

Congestion was the bane of this vision of the city. Because the city was envisioned as a system of flows — of goods, people and capital — maximum efficiency would only be achieved through the creation of an urban superconductor. This vision explains why the CRPA paid little attention to housing and so much attention to highways, railroads, zoning, utilities, and, increasingly, airports. This was a vision dedicated to the facilitation of capital accumulation and circulation and devoid of any concern for social justice.

Even had the CRPA been committed to social justice, however, it is doubtful whether it would have been a successful organization since it was also bound by its commitment to American liberalism. As the pamphlet showed, the CRPA helped suburbs "maintain their political independence" and "plan for their common future needs." Ironically, an organization that stressed taking a regional view eschewed claiming the power necessary to transcend the various political boundaries that divided the various communities in the Chicago metropolitan area. The CRPA's plans to increase the efficiency of capital accumulation met with success not because it brought various communities in line behind a comprehensive vision, but because its vision matched the vision of policymakers in those communities. Economic growth was a common need for communities in the competitive urban system of the United States. Planning for the displaced was Chicago's

[94] "The Chicago Regional Planning Association — Why it was organized," undated, NIPC Papers, Box 4 folder 12, 4.

[95] On the planning profession's concern with efficiency and facilitation of capital accumulation see M. Christine Boyer, Dreaming the Rational City (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1983), especially 59-95.

problem.

Why did the CRPA's vision fit so snugly with the visions of Chicago's policymakers? Although professional commitment to efficiency was a factor, the composition of the CRPA's membership was the major reason for the congruence of visions. The 1924 committee on aviation was composed of Charles Dickinson, president of the Aero Club of Illinois, George Foster, vice-president of Commonwealth Edison and chair of the Chicago Association of Commerce committee on aviation, Major M.L. Bromber, aircraft advisor for the State of Illinois, and Reed Landis of the Aircraft Society of Illinois, with additional unnamed representatives of the Lincoln Park Board, South Park Board, State of Indiana, and State of Wisconsin.[96] This composition was strikingly similar to that of the Chicago Aero Commission in the balancing of interests and who was appointed. The major business organization in Chicago, aviation interest groups, and political entities were all represented on this committee. Moreover, Foster and Dickinson had served on earlier Chicago Aero Commissions and Foster would be named to the Chicago Aero Commission along with Bromber and Landis in 1927 and again in 1931. This degree of overlap ensured that the CRPA would develop plans in line with those of Chicago's aviation boosters.

Having deemphasized the natural center myth in favor of planning, Chicago's leaders set out to develop what they saw as an integral part of the city profitable: a lake front airport. In pushing this plan, policymakers followed the familiar pattern of recycling the same arguments that had been used over the previous decade and relying on the Aero Commission to bring together various prodevelopment groups from the public and private sectors. Alderman Cronson quickly followed up on his May speech with a resolution calling on committee chairs to hold a joint meeting, along with civic organizations, to discuss submitting a bond issue "for the construction of an airport in Lake Michigan between East 16th and East 31st streets."[97] Alderman John Toman used the opportunity provided by Cronson's resolution to present an order that provided a justification for further airport construction, stressed the importance of planning, and highlighted the vision

[96] "Organization Plan of the Chicago Regional Planning Association," 20 November 1924, NIPC Papers, Box 4 folder 12.

[97] Proceedings of the City Council 6 June 1928, 3049.

of the city as a system of flows:

> Whereas the airway transportation problem is bound to make itself felt in the Chicago regional area within the next forty years and should be given adequate thought and consideration in city planning activities at the present time ... Adequate landing fields must be considered in developing the Chicago regional airway system plan, which should be located near terminal centers and connected with such centers by rapid transit facilities.[98]

The speeches of Henderson, Cronson and Toman had a marked effect. Airports were very much on the minds of aldermen and they responded by appropriating $157,600 out of the corporate fund for airport expenses on June 20.[99] Three weeks later, the Committee on Finance recommended passage of Cronson's order that "the Commissioner of Public Works prepare plans for a lake front airport in Harbor District No.3."[100]

The city, however, did not have funding to construct an airport in Harbor District No.3, nor a clear right to execute such a project. In September of 1928, Mayor Thompson presented to the City Council letters from the Chicago Aero Commission asking the city to submit a $450,000 bond issue for municipal airport improvements, estimating the cost of improving the airport, and "recommending that no bond issue for the construction of the Lake Front Airport shall be submitted at the election this fall."[101] Since the Chicago Aero Commission members did support the development of a lake front airport, their opposition most likely came from fear that the bond issue would be defeated at the election — especially in light of voters' earlier rejection of municipal airport bonds. If this was their reasoning they made the correct decision. After the City Council approved the submission of the $450,000 municipal airport improvement bond issue over the objections of 4 members of the Council's Committee on Parks, Playgrounds, Aviation and Athletics, the voters rejected these bonds 318,832-503,486;[102] bonds for an entirely new airport would have been even less popular with Chicago's voters.

Chicago's lack of clear jurisdiction over Harbor District No.3 was just as

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[98] Ibid., 3059.

[99] Proceedings of the City Council 20 June 1928, 3226-29. The amounts appropriated matched the amounts Henderson had asked for, including $15,000 for expenses of the Chicago Aero Commission.

[100] Proceedings of the City Council 11 July 1928, 3351.

[101] Proceedings of the City Council 26 September 1928, 3578. I was unable to locate any copies of the Aero Commission's letters.

[102] Proceedings of the City Council 17 October 1928, 3819 and 19 December 1928, 4116.

problematic as its lack of funds. The U.S. War Department and State of Illinois apparently both had some claim to Harbor District No.3. Alderman John Massen submitted a resolution proposing, among other things, that the city obtain the needed permits from the War Department to facilitate the construction of an airport in Harbor District No.3.[103] No action seems to have been taken on Massen's resolution beyond council approval of his recommendations. At the state level, Charles Weber, a Chicago Democrat, offered House Resolution 20 that would have provided for "a committee of seven Representatives to investigate the ways and means of expediting establishment of an island airport on Chicago's lake front."[104] The resolution was quickly tabled. The state legislature also tabled legislation (S.B. 254) that would have allowed counties over 500,000 to take land, issue bonds and levy taxes for airport construction, even though they did pass H.B. 440, which allowed park districts in counties under 500,000 to acquire airports.[105] Through these actions, the state legislature continued its pattern of constraining Chicago's development opportunities. For the immediate future, Chicago's political leaders would concentrate their energies on improving Chicago Municipal Airport.

Although the fiscal crisis that had been building during the 1920s deepened during 1930 as Chicagoans launched a tax strike, the year was a productive one for Chicago's aviation boosters.[106] Airport funds were untouched by Mayor Thompson's appropriations vetoes and were 10.5% of the post veto appropriation for the Bureau of Parks, Recreation and Aviation, the highest percentage airports had ever received.[107] Then, Chicagoans approved a $450,000 municipal airport bond issue in April over the objections of the

[103] Proceedings of the City Council 12 December 1928, 4096. Massen's resolution also called for the maximum use of Chicago Municipal Airport, including the expansion of the airport to all 630 available acres of Clearing School Fund land.

[104] Illinois Legislative Reference Bureau, Final Legislative Synopsis and Digest: 56th General Assembly, 1929, 429.

[105] Ibid., 93 and 291.

[106] For an overview of the tax strike and fiscal crisis in Chicago, see David Beito, Taxpayers in Revolt: Tax Resistance During the Great Depression, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989) and Ester Fuchs, Mayors and Money: Fiscal Policy in New York and Chicago, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), especially Chapter 3. For a contemporary view, see Mayor Thompson's veto message in Proceedings of the City Council 8 January 1930, 1912.

[107] Proceedings of the City Council 8 January 1930, 2295.

Citizens' Association by the slim margin of 256,017-249,103.[108] Finally, the City Council heeded Massen's earlier advice and successfully negotiated with the Board of Education for a 50-year lease on 588.69 acres of Clearing land, which would pay the Board of Education six percent of the assessed value of the land as yearly rent in addition to 10 percent of gross receipts from the airport.[109]

The City Council quickly put the bonds to use for the construction of taxiways, runways, sewers, and concrete ramps.[110] Chicago Municipal's position as the busiest in the world had drawn attention to its lack of an adequate central passenger terminal so $100,000 of the bond money was spent building the Air Passenger Terminal. The terminal was designed by the city architect, Paul Gerhardt, Jr., and opened on November 2, 1931.[111] In addition to these structural improvements, the city also took this opportunity to redesign its hangar leasing policy.

Hangar leases are a particularly important aspect of airport development since much of the revenue brought in by an airport comes from these leases. Because Chicago's political leaders were committed to developing their city as the aviation center of the United States, however, they were forced to accommodate airline companies' demands by pressure from their own Chicago Aero Commission. The strong business presence on the Aero Commission ensured it would advocate policies favorable to Chicago's airlines.

A.A. Sprague, Commissioner of Public Works, showed how willing the city was to accommodate the major airlines when he submitted a bill to the City Council amending a law requiring advertisement of any lease greater than five years for four successive weeks. Sprague wanted to exempt any leases that were less than 20 years from the advertising requirement because

Several large operating companies are very anxious to sub-lease hangar lots ... on

[108] "Board of Directors Minutes," 4 April 1930, Citizens' Association Papers, Box 2 and Proceedings of the City Council, 5 November 1930, 3773. It is unclear why the bonds succeeded this time around. A possible explanation may be that because previous airport improvement bond issues had been submitted with many other bond issues, voters, concerned with high government spending on "bricks and mortar" projects, rejected them to send a message. This particular bond issue was on the ballot with only four other bond issues and was by far the least expensive.

[109] Proceedings of the City Council, 29 July 1930, 3673-78.

[110] Daphne Christensen, Chicago Public Works: A History, (Chicago: Department of Public Works, 1973), 200.

[111] Chicago Evening Post, 2 November 1931.

> account of the rapidly increasing business at the Airport and the lack of facilities we desire to have these leases entered into and the building operations commence at the earliest possible moment. Advertising for bids for a period of a month would seriously delay operations and prove embarrassing to the City and the operators, in that the City would not have its choice of tenants and old established airplane lines would not be able to extend their operations.[112]

This bill would greatly reduce public awareness of major decisions by the city and was designed to allow the large airline companies the luxury of a noncompetitive bid for hangar space. Implicit in Sprague's statement is the threat that Chicago's position as an aviation center would be jeopardized if the large airlines were not accommodated. The "old established airplane lines" were quick to use Chicago's reliance on their presence.

In making demands of Chicago's policymakers, the airlines were ably assisted by the Chicago Aero Commission. Soon after his victory over Thompson, Mayor Anton Cermak appointed a new Aero Commission. Although the Commission was new, its vision was not since Cermak included Commission veterans Merrill Meigs, George Foster, Reed Landis, P.G. Kemp, R.W. Schroeder, Ald. Dorsey Crowe, and B.B. Lipsner. The South Park Board was represented by Commissioner, and future mayor, Edward Kelly.[113] Two years later, Edward Kelly, as mayor, appointed P.G. Johnson, President of United Airlines, W.A. Patterson, Vice President. of United Airlines, E.O. Sessions, and Irene Behnke to the Aero Commission.[114]

The appointment of the United Airlines representatives is especially significant in light of a report prepared for the City Council dealing with the possibility of raising hangar rentals high enough to make Chicago Municipal Airport self-supporting. The Commission recommended that the city continue to support the airport from the corporate fund and implied that a *decrease* in hangar rentals would be the proper course of action. Like Paul Henderson's letter to the City Council five years earlier, the Commission report showed, through a series of threats, who had more power in the relationship between the airlines and the city.

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[112] Proceedings of the City Council, 27 April 1931, 33.

[113] Proceedings of the City Council, 6 May 1931, 95.

[114] Proceedings of the City Council, 11 July 1933, 838 and 11 October 1933, 866. Irene Behnke's presence is interesting because she was the only woman on the Aero Commission and was appointed by a Democrat despite having been President of the Illinois Woman's Republican Club in 1922. I thank Maureen Flanagan for pointing this out.

> The rental of airport sites at a low figure, which was without precedent at the time, and designed specifically to be an inducement, has attracted to Chicago Municipal Airport some of the largest operators of air transportation. At the time these sites were originally offered for rent, the figure quoted was designed to secure the position of Chicago as the Air Transportation center of the country ... The location in Chicago of air line terminals and repair shops has brought a large number of employees who receive and spend substantial payrolls in Chicago. These shops could have been located at other points on the air lines involved at much lower rentals than those being charged in Chicago. The ambitious desire of Chicago citizens that their city become the air transportation center of America has been realized largely because of its original offer of fair rental policy for hangar space. Any attempt to make the operators pay the entire cost of airport upkeep and maintenance would undoubtedly result in retarding this important development or in diverting present activities to localities where greater civic appreciation could and would be shown.[115]

The message was clear. If Chicago's political leaders tried to make Chicago Municipal Airport self-sustaining, Chicago would not be able to maintain its position as the center of air transportation.[116] Since Mayor Kelly and the City Council undoubtedly realized this, why did the Aero Commission send such a heavy handed message?

Although the economic shocks of the Depression did not encourage subtleties when it came to matters of revenue, what angered the Aero Commission was the idea that the city might violate the tenets of laissez-faire liberalism. Later in the report, Merrill Meigs wrote "the tenants of the airport therefore should not be expected to support fully the facilities which of their very nature cannot be exclusively granted to them. [Municipal support] is founded on the sound precedent in the maintenance of docking and wharf facilities for marine transportation."[117] Liberalism did not allow for the taking or redistribution of private property without just compensation. Thus, Meigs argued that subsidizing others' use of the airport through charges on its tenants amounted to redistribution of the tenants wealth; depriving the tenants of their property without just compensation. Despite Meigs rhetoric, Chicago's policymakers had precedent for their plans. As far back as the 1830s, government engaged in "creative destruction" of private property when it did so for the

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[115] Proceedings of the City Council, 6 December 1933, 1176-77.

[116] Claims that Chicago was the aviation center of the United States were not merely the exaggerations of boosters. Of the 32 contract airmail routes (CAMs) that existed in 1930, eight of them connected to Chicago, including Chicago-Atlanta, Chicago-New York, Chicago-Dallas, Chicago-Minneapolis, Chicago-San Francisco, and Chicago-St.Louis. This was more than any other city in the U.S. could claim. By comparison, New York was part of only three CAMs: New York-Atlanta, New York-Chicago, and New York-Boston. See Congressional Record (21 April 1930), vol. 72., 7375.

[117] Ibid., 1177.

public good.[118] However, Chicago was constrained from exercising creative destruction since the airlines were threatening to eliminate the need for any future construction. Although the airlines' superior bargaining position strengthened Meigs' hand, he was also assisted by Chicago's policymakers' own commitment to liberalism.

Despite the disagreement between the city and its Aero Commission over hangar rentals, they did share a commitment to establishing a lake front airport. With the continued development of Chicago Municipal Airport assured, in 1933 the Aero Commission seized upon the opportunity offered by the Depression to launch another push for what they failed to get in 1929:

> The Aero Commission of the City of Chicago realizing the necessity of the construction of an airport close to and approximate to the center of business activity of the City of Chicago is desirable and urgent; and Whereas, the construction of such an airport would increase employment locally in this time of emergency and provide a needed public work.[119]

The Chicago Aero Commission's statement, which also agreed with the Chicago Plan Commission's plans for a island airport east of Northerly Island and urged Mayor Kelly to apply for federal funds, offered an attractive package to Chicago's policymakers. A lake front airport would perform a vital service to the city profitable, building it would provide work relief, and it might cost nothing if the federal government paid for the project. Chicago's political leaders, however, could not realize these benefits without the legal right to construct a lake front airport.

Three days after the Aero Commission issued its resolution, the state legislature removed the legal obstacles blocking the construction of a lake front airport. On July 10, 1933 the Chicago Park consolidation act was approved, combining all 22 park districts into the entity known as the Chicago Park District. More importantly for backers of a lake front airport, Section 15 of the act gave the Park District power "by gift, grant, or purchase, or by condemnation and to incur indebtedness for the purchase of any and all real estate lands, riparian estates or rights" for a variety of purposes, including airports, while Section 20 allowed the Chicago Park District to issue bonds to pay for a variety of projects, including

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[118] Stanley Kutler, Privilege and Creative Destruction: The Charles River Bridge Case (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1971).

[119] Proceedings of the City Council, 7 July 1933, 673-4.

airports.[120]

Although constructing a lake front airport was now legally easier, fiscally it was impossible. The airports of the early 1920s had been built with a mixture of public and private funding; these soon gave way to airports constructed with money raised from the sale of municipal bonds. Most municipal bonds were general obligation bonds, which meant they were retired through city-wide property taxes. In the case of Chicago, the fiscal crisis, its brief splurge on Chicago Municipal Airport in 1930, and the Depression drastically reduced the amount of private and municipal capital available for civic improvements. If Chicago was to have a lake front airport, the federal government would need to pay for it.

Unfortunately for Chicago's aviation boosters, the federal government was not particularly interested in paying for a lake front airport because Harold Ickes, Secretary of the Interior and director of the Public Works Administration (PWA), did not wish to do so. According to Ickes' diary, Mayor Kelly engineered a meeting in June of 1934 between Ickes and Meigs, who was also the publisher of the *Chicago American*. Ickes claims he "told him [Meigs] very frankly that I thought it would be a great mistake to build an airport in the lake, which ought to be preserved at all time for the benefit of the people."[121] Soon after that meeting, Ickes apparently had a meeting with Franklin Roosevelt about the lake front airport and thought he had nudged Roosevelt toward his point of view.[122] Of course, Ickes may have been posturing as well since he disliked the Kelly-Nash machine and Kelly's cozy relationship with Ickes' rival, Harry Hopkins.

Proponents of the lake front airport were dealt another blow on September 12, 1934 when Robert Kingery, director of the Department of Public Works and Buildings for the State of Illinois, rejected Chicago's plan, submitted on February 7, 1934, for a stone fill airport in Lake Michigan because "the construction of an airport in Lake Michigan at this location, and in this manner, does not preserve or beautify the public waters of the State of Illinois, and that it would be an unwarranted encroachment into Lake Michigan without

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[120] Chicago Park District, First Annual Report, 231-239.

[121] Harold Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes: The First Thousand Days, 1933-1936, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953), 167-68.

[122] Ibid., 168-9.

commensurate benefits to the public."[123] This rejection is significant because it directly attacked the Chicago Aero Club's assertion that a lake front airport was a needed public work.

Nor was Kingery alone in his opposition. The Citizens' Association, who had attacked previous airport bond issues on the grounds of economy, issued a strong statement that the lake front "forever be preserved inviolate for park purposes."[124] The opposition of Ickes, Kingery, and the Citizens' Association, backed by the check writing power of the federal government, was the first significant resistance to airport boosters by groups with a different vision of the city. In addition to this parallel opposition, the Citizens' Association formed a link with Ickes' Public Works Administration by nominating Joshua D'Esposito, engineer in charge of the PWA in Chicago, to a directorship.[125] On the same day D'Esposito was nominated, the PWA office replied to an Association protest of May 27 against "allocation of funds for the construction of an island airport on park lands," promising that a grant application of $8,600,000 had been denied March 27, 1935.[126]

Despite this resistance, airport boosters would not give up. Abraham Cohen sent a letter to the City Council on July 10, protesting against construction of the island airport.[127] The council placed Cohen's letter on file and continued to plan a lake front airport. They were greatly aided yet again by the state legislature, which passed an act on July 11 allowing "cities and villages of 150,000 or more" to construct airports in waters within their jurisdiction, build roads to connect island airports to the mainland, and issue revenue bonds without referendum. The state still ensured it would have some say in any plans the city developed since the law required cities had to get approval for any roads or bridges to the airport from the Department of Public Works and Buildings.[128] The city moved quickly to take advantage of this new law and on July 22, passed an ordinance establishing a lake

[123] Proceedings of the City Council 12 September 1934, 2709.

[124] "Board of Directors' Minutes," 18 April 1935, Citizens' Association Papers, Box 2.

[125] "Board of Directors' Minutes," 13 June 1935, Citizens' Association Papers, Box 2, 2.

[126] Ibid.

[127] Proceedings of the City Council, 10 July 1935, 278. I did not find any information on Abraham Cohen, who, from the City Council proceedings, seemed to be acting alone.

[128] Illinois Legislative Reference Bureau, Final Legislative Synopsis and Digest: 59th General Assembly, 1935, 234.

front airport between 7th (Balbo) and 24th Streets, in Lake Michigan pursuant to the act that had been passed by the legislature two weeks earlier.[129] Once again, however, boosters' plans would founder on the lack of funding.

On December 10, 1936, at the Citizens' Association's Board of Directors meeting, D'Esposito was asked about the proposed airport in Burnham Park. D'Esposito replied that the city appeared to be unable to proceed without a federal grant and there "was reason to believe that the City had no chance of getting federal funds for the purpose."[130] Without federal money, the Aero Commission and City Council could not realize their dream of a lake front airport. This turn of events highlights the significant moment of opportunity offered by the New Deal, which had brought forward the idea of more centralized and comprehensive national policymaking. Embodied in such federal projects as TVA and Rexford Tugwell's Greenbelt towns, this idea offered the possibility of transcending fragmented political boundaries and disciplining competitive, profit maximizing cities. Ultimately, centralized, comprehensive federal planning was rejected in favor of piecemeal reforms to fix flaws in the capitalist structure of the United States without challenging the structure itself.[131] As federal airport policy in the 1930s shows, this rejection resulted from politicians' commitment to laissez-faire liberalism.

The most significant piece of aviation legislation that effected airports after the mail acts of the 1920s was the Watres Act of 1930, passed at the urging of Postmaster General Walter Folger Brown, who wanted the airlines to be able to subsidize their passenger service with mail revenues. As Congressman Kelly argued in support of the bill, "This amendment we are now considering will grant special aid to many companies now carrying an air passenger service and losing money each month in doing so."[132] In addition to passenger subsidization, Brown also wanted to establish a network of three east-west airways extending across the north, central, and south of the continent and linked by

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[129] Proceedings of the City Council 22 July 1935, 386-388. This volume also includes plans for the lake front airport. Once again airport boosters shielded their plans from the public by publishing the ordinance in the Chicago Journal of Commerce, as opposed to a mainstream paper. Proceedings of the City Council, 1 October 1935, 617.

[130] "Board of Directors' Minutes," 10 December 1936, Citizens Association Papers, Box 2, 1.

[131] Brinkley, 268.

[132] Congressional Record (21 April 1930), vol. 72, pt.7, 7375.

smaller north-south feeder routes.[133] Brown hoped to realize his plans by paying the airlines for available mail space rather than actual mail weight, exercising route extension powers, and replacing mail contracts with ten-year certificates. The Watres Act gave Postmaster Brown all of these powers.

By paying airline companies on the basis of space, Brown also encouraged the development of large aircraft like the Boeing 247 and DC-3, as it would be more profitable for the airlines to build a large plane and carry passengers along with a handful of mail. By using his route extending powers, Brown was able to avoid the complexities of creating new postal routes through the extension of existing ones. This tactic is reminiscent of the one used by New York public works czar Robert Moses, who would issue new bonds periodically in order to keep alive the various authorities he controlled.[134] Finally, Brown used his power to grant ten-year certificates to those airlines he felt were best able to operate his new system of airways. This was a classic example of government working in the service of business.

Unlike the Kelly Act, however, the Watres Act faced opposition from some Congressmen who felt that it went against one of the fundamental tenets of liberalism: free competition in an open market. In their minority report, James Mead and John Morehead argued that the certificate provision of the act made "the Postmaster General a law unto himself, eliminates competition, and is nothing more than a subsidy in the interest of the aircraft industry."[135] They later went on to say that they did support "liberal appropriations," but the potential for centralized control was too powerful a threat and antithetical to these men's liberal ideology.

While the bill was passed over Mead and Morehead's objections, it became clear that they had cause for concern. Brown developed this system because he felt that large, well financed companies would be in the best position to operate the routes profitably

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[133] National Committee to Observe the 50th Anniversary of Powered Flight, Fifty Years of Aviation Progress: Background Information on Aviation's First 50 Years (Washington, D.C.: Privately printed,1953) 26.

[134] For an exhaustive, and unflattering, account of Moses' activities, see Robert Caro, The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York (New York: Vintage, 1975).

[135] Congressional Record (21 April 1930), vol. 72, pt. 7, 7377.

without carrying mail.[136] He used his power to crush any airline company that stood in his way, as when he settled the Century Air Lines strike of 1932. When E.L. Cord, owner of Century Air Lines, tried to break into Brown's system by cutting his costs (including pilot's pay) so as to be able to underbid the larger companies, his pilots went on strike. Brown did not wish to allow Century access into his carefully planned system so he refused to give any air mail contracts to Cord on the grounds of safety and reasons. Cord was fortunate, however, since he didn't have to take a loss on his tangle with Brown; American Airlines quickly bought out his company.[137]

Practices such as this ultimately led to the temporary dismantling of Brown's system after Franklin Roosevelt was elected in 1932. A Committee led by Senator Hugo Black of Alabama investigated Brown's conduct and charged him with collusion. Roosevelt ordered the cancellation of the mail contracts on February 9, 1934 and the army began flying the mail.[138] After the army suffered twelve fatal crashes in three months of operation, Postmaster General James Farley decided to turn the mail service back over to the commercial airlines, provided they reorganized. These actions by Farley and Roosevelt combined to destroy the system Brown had created and it would be several years before the system resembled its form under Brown.

The most important effect of the Watres Act was not on small operators, but rather the strain it put on the nation's airports. Brown did not stop to consider the affect his plan would have on airports. The development of larger planes and the higher traffic loads spawned by Brown's desire to create major hubs of activity on trunk lines, required major changes to existing airports. Luckily for the cities, they avoided paying for the brunt of airport rehabilitation through the massive government aid programs of the New Deal designed to put the millions of jobless Americans back to work on public works projects.

Airport projects were run successively by the Civil Works Administration, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) under the leadership of Ickes' rival, Harry Hopkins.[139] Relief projects ranged from simple

[136] Lipsner, 226-227.

[137] Lipsner, 232-237 passim.

[138] Lipsner, 246.

[139] Karsner, "Leaving on a Jet Plane," 16-21 passim.

maintenance and expansion of existing airports to the construction of completely new landing fields. Naturally, Chicago had its share of aid coming and it arrived in 1935 in the form of WPA project number 1097, which provided $3 million dollars for various improvements at Chicago Municipal Airport.[140] By the end of the decade, the WPA would provide $6 million for improvements at Chicago Municipal including "a sewer system, a water system, 8 asphalt macadam runways, taxiways, lighting, field lighting and rehabilitation of some buildings."[141] Train tracks of the Chicago and Western Indiana Railroad which bisected Chicago Municipal were also moved to the north during this period, allowing the airport to take advantage of all but 20 acres of its 640 acre site.[142] Ultimately, close to 600 airports would be built by the WPA and federal funds would account for 71.4 percent of capital expenditures for civil airports during the period 1933-1940. This figure would climb to 89.6 percent from 1941 to 1944.[143]

It would seem from these figures that the federal government had finally decided to take an active role in airport planning and development, but this is not the case. Most of the airports built by the CWA and FERA were smaller fields, often of poor quality, that were abandoned after several years when small towns found they lacked the money to maintain them.[144] Some fields were developed to a high degree of quality, but this was the exception rather than the rule. Only the WPA, and a few PWA, projects helped alleviate overburdened airports and created the first pieces of a national system of airports.[145] Generally, the federal government was not concerned with the quality of the airports that were built as long as people were working. Dams, roads, and airports were particularly popular projects during the Depression, but the massive government intervention required by these projects ran counter to laissez-faire liberalism. Americans accepted it in the face of

[140] Chicago Department of Public Works, Report of 1936, (Chicago: Department of Public Works, 1936), 239.

[141] John Casey, "Chicago Aviation and Airports: The First Forty Years, 1926-1966, 68," (Chicago: Chicago Municipal Reference Library), 13, Photocopied.

[142] Before the tracks were relocated, the airport was confined to the southern half of the bisected field.

[143] Eugene Kirchherr, "Airport Land Use in the Chicago Metropolitan Area," (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1959), 35.

[144] Karsner, "Leaving on a Jet Plane," 17.

[145] Ibid 28-31.

a "grave external threat."[146]

The opportunity for action afforded by the Depression did result in some acceptance of the need for federal government involvement since The Civil Aeronautics Act of 1938 was the first comprehensive piece of aviation legislation in the United States, setting up procedures for the regulation of rates, equipment, pilots, airlines, wages, and foreign commerce by an independent Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA). Whereas the government had a tradition of establishing airways (consisting of lights, emergency landing fields and other navigational aids), it had always left airport development to the cities. Under the provisions of the 1938 act, landing areas (runways) were included in the definition of airways. For the first time in a non-emergency situation, the federal government could give money directly to cities for the improvement of one of the most expensive parts of the airport. In addition to this provision, the CAA was directed to undertake a study of the nation's airports and "present to the Congress not later than February 1, 1939, definite recommendations (1) as to whether the Federal Government should participate in the construction, improvement, development, operation, or maintenance of a national system of airports."[147]

The debate over the Civil Aeronautics Act (H.R. 9738, S.3845) was a debate over the boundaries of the new liberalism Alan Brinkley describes in The End of Reform. According to Brinkley, the New Deal gave rise to a reform liberalism that accepted the capitalist system and sought to guarantee the prosperity and security of consumers through government regulation of the economy. The old idea that government would work for individuals and promote healthy competition remained, but a new idea emerged that allowed for a much larger and active government with new tools — fiscal policy, monetary policy, stronger executive power — to effect change.[148]

Some Congressmen opposed the Civil Aeronautics Act because of its provision to set up an independent authority to regulate the aviation industry. As Congressman James

[146] Carl Abbot, "The Impact of Ideology on American Town Planning" in Planning the Twentieth-Century American City, Mary Corbin Sies and Christopher Silver, eds., (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 446.

[147] Congressional Record (11 June 1938), vol. 83, pt. 8, 8848.

[148] Brinkley, 4-7.

Wadsworth argued:

> This adds another great Federal commission or authority to do the kind of work that under the traditions and the policies of the Congress has been confided to the Interstate Commerce Commission. ... I have been in legislative bodies long enough to know that once you establish a commission, give it pretty good salaries, allow it to accumulate a vast staff and send its agents and inspectors all over the United States, acquire to itself adherents of one kind or another, people who become accustomed to rely on that particular kind of commission for information, assistance, or relief—in other words, when it throws its roots down into the soil and gets itself established, you have the devil's own time passing any act abolishing it.[149]

Supporters of this position were tired of the proliferation of New Deal agencies, feeling that they expanded government for the sake of expansion and encouraged dependency on government, and yearned for a return to the values of laissez-faire liberalism.

Others adopted a position along the lines of New Deal liberalism, although they crafted their arguments from the rhetoric of laissez-faire liberalism by arguing for the necessity of the bill in the interests of efficiency and the promotion of healthy and fair competition. The Congressman who introduced the bill, Clarence Lea organized his introduction of the bill around these themes, arguing that "the plan worked out by the subcommittee provides a more efficient method for covering these duties than any existing set-up in government" and that "those two things are the fundamental and essential needs of aviation at this time, security and stability in the route and protection against cutthroat competition."[150] Far from rejecting active government intervention, Lea felt government was best able to provide security and insulation from the shocks of capitalism, thus positioning himself as a proponent of the New Deal liberalism Brinkley describes.

Finally, another group of individuals argued for a larger federal role, although they were motivated by different concerns than Lea. This group was composed of city mayors and municipal airport officials who wanted government to develop a national airport plan and take a larger role in the financing of airports. Richard Aldworth, representing the U.S. Council of Mayors, presented a resolution at a hearing on the act that stated that municipal airports performed a public service to the nation and were the backbone of national defense, but were threatened with obsolescence by improvements in airplane design and a lack of

[149] Congressional Record (9 May 1938), vol. 83, pt. 6, 6503.

[150] Ibid., 6407.

funds for expansion.[151] The Council of Mayors wanted the government to establish a national airport plan, since their cities would undoubtedly rate a high priority in any comprehensive plan, and to provide substantial funding for airport construction. The programs of the WPA and PWA had given mayors a taste of the benefits active federal participation could bring to a project and, with the memory of rejected bond issues and uncompleted plans fresh in their heads, they wanted to ensure that there would be a flow of free dollars in the future; dollars which would be better insulated from local voters.

This is not to say that municipal officials wholeheartedly embraced New Deal liberalism. Cities still had deep fear that federal intervention would force them to lose a substantial portion of their autonomy, so while they were in favor of an influx of federal money, they did not want the federal government to take control of the airport or tell them how to spend federal grants. Aldworth expressed the position of city officials:

> It is my opinion that the Federal Government is not and should not be an operating agency. They do not operate docks nor build piers, nor operate anything on any highway project. It is my personal opinion that the obligation of the Federal Government should cease just like it does now under the harbor policy, that the landing field itself is a passing way for ships of the air just like the waterway is a passing way for ships on the water ... They [Federal Government] should construct our runways and maintain the landing field itself, which corresponds to the waterways.[152]

Clearly, the Mayors were listened to since the provisions for airports in the Civil Aeronautics Act were based, almost verbatim, on the U.S. Council of Mayors' resolution. The tension of New Deal liberalism between the desire to harness federal power and the desire to maintain local autonomy was thus written into the act.

The 1930s witnessed the rise of a centralized planning ideal, but it was an ideal about which policymakers were deeply ambivalent. This ambivalence was reflected at the local level by groups like the Chicago Regional Planning Association who refused to claim the power necessary to realize their regional goals, and at the national level by a government that passed the Watres Act; attempted to break up the national airline system spawned by the act; built scattered airports for work relief, then built airports in a more

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[151] Congress, House, Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, To Create a Civil Aeronautics Authority: Hearings before the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, 75th Cong., 3rd sess., 22 March 1938, 106.

[152] Ibid., 111.

coordinated fashion; and passed an act that provided cities with airport funding while preserving cities' planning autonomy. Furthermore, this ambivalence stemmed from policymakers' commitment to a new reform liberalism that accepted the need for a more activist state even as they refused to jettison laissez-faire liberalism's protection of individuals' right to maximize profit and suspicion of centralized authority. Faced with this ambivalence, the federal government retreated from the centralized planning ideal in favor of maintaining the status quo through piecemeal reforms that would minimize its flaws. By retreating, the federal government missed the opportunity to curb the city profitable.

Cities were fully complicit in this retreat, preferring to keep their autonomy. As Paul Henderson's and the Aero Commission's threats reveal, however, Chicago politicians were becoming more dependent on the airline companies they needed to maintain their position as the nation's aviation center and realize their vision of the city profitable. Events in the post World War II years would increase Chicago's dependency as federal policies augmented the decentralization strategy of the Chicago Regional Planning Association and ensured the dominance of the city profitable. Chicago, like all American cities, would be left on its own, forced to be a growth machine because of its position as an individual in a competitive market lacking any referee. By the time they realized the destructive effects of these developments, Chicago policymakers would be powerless to change them.

CHAPTER 3

CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR CRISIS

World War II brought about important changes in the air transport industry, not the least of which was new technology that would exacerbate the nation's airport problem. While most of the aircraft produced between 1939 and 1945 were military, the industry was developing production techniques and technology (such as radar and jet engines) that would be applied to the commercial aircraft industry once the war ended. Large four-engined planes such as the DC-6 threatened the nation's airports with obsolescence. Luckily for the cities, they had laid the groundwork for more comprehensive intervention by the federal government during the drafting of the Civil Aeronautics Act of 1938. The Federal government also came out of the war convinced of the superiority of air power and with a dual desire to increase the number of airports in the United States. First, the government wanted to develop airports for defense purposes, such as greater mobility of its air forces and the organization of a civil defense program. Second, government officials, newly committed to Keynesian theory, wanted to sustain the aircraft industry's high rate of production and lessen the shock of retooling for civilian production.[153]

In response to these demands, Congress passed the Federal Aid-Airport Act (S.2) on May 13, 1946. This act provided for $500,000,000 to be distributed over seven years into two separate programs: the state program, which covered the development of class three or lower airports, and the urban program, which covered the development of class four and five airports.[154] The act also provided for the Administrator of Civil Aeronautics to apply for the transfer of government owned lands necessary for airport projects to the communities building the airport. Most importantly, the federal government was given the power to formulate a comprehensive national airport plan that would be used in determining

[153] See Campbell, 110-11, and Brinkley, 230-35 and 250-5, on the linkage between federal fiscal policy and full employment.

[154] Class 3 airports served "important cities on feeder line airway systems ... General population range: 25,000 to several hundred thousand," while Class 4 and 5 airports served "major industrial centers of the nation and important junction points or terminals on the airways system." Civil Aeronautics Administration, Airport Design, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1944), 9.

funding for airport projects.[155]

The desire of cities to maintain local autonomy sharply circumscribed this federal planning power. As the hearings on S.2 reveal, cities welcomed government money but were intent on keeping control of their airports. New York mayor Fiorello LaGuardia put in a strong plea for local control on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, arguing in favor of a separate urban program because "up to the present time, states have done very little in the field of airport development. Aviation has been *and is* peculiarly and largely a matter of local and federal concern. There is very little in it of statewide significance."[156] In the event Congressional leaders took this as a mandate for increased federal control of airports, they were quickly set straight by a U.S. Conference of Mayors report which stated:

> Cities take pride and definite local interest in airports. They are useful at the points of concentrated population and should therefore be the responsibility of those local and political subdivisions of government, whether those local subdivisions of government be cities or counties.[157]

Cities made their position very clear during these hearings; airports were local business and, except for funding, should not be interfered with by the nation or the state.

Federal power was also limited by members of Congress who felt the urban program gave the federal government too much power by allowing it to bypass state government and deal directly with municipalities. Illinois Congressman Howell attacked the bill, arguing that "existing State agencies are the appropriate bodies to deal with their own political subdivisions" and asking fellow House members if they "wanted further concentration of power in Washington, or do they want to retain some semblance of balance between the National Government and the governments of the 48 states."[158] Howell's objections are significant because federal power was already restricted in the conference report: the urban program could receive only 25 percent of the allowable funds in any given year (section 6), these funds were subject to the approval of Congress (section 8), and municipalities could not apply for federal funding if they were prohibited from

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[155] For the provisions of the act, see Congressional Record (2 April 1946), vol. 92, pt. 3, 2972-2976.

[156] Congress, Senate, Committee on Commerce, Federal Aid For Public Airports: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Commerce, 79th Cong., 1st sess., 16 March 1945, 130. [italics added]

[157] Ibid., 157.

[158] Congressional Record (2 April 1946), vol. 92, pt. 3, 2979.

doing so by the state legislature (section 9).[159] Even these restrictions were not enough for politicians who were deeply committed to liberalism's prohibition on centralized government authority. While the act provided for a massive infusion of needed government cash into airport development and the development of a national airport plan, it was embedded with the liberal ideology of the Civil Aeronautics Act of 1938 that restricted the federal role in order to preserve local autonomy. Far from comprehensive, the federal planning and regulatory role would be confined to safety and technical factors. The act required states to establish departments of aviation, set guidelines for safety equipment and runway lengths, and provided for the removal of structures that violated zoning restrictions in the airport approach zones. This focus on technical factors, however, meant that planners ignored issues such as the social impact airports would have on the cities they served. This ignorance was costly, for nothing less than comprehensive regional planning powers were warranted to deal with the problems created through the construction of airports on a scale never seen before.

At the same time congressmen were arguing over what form, if any, federal aid to airports should take, Chicago's political leaders were developing plans to solidify Chicago's position as the air transportation center of the United States. Continuing the pattern set in the 1920s and 30s, these plans were insulated from popular opinion and shaped by a coalition of politicians, interested businessmen, and planners who saw the airport as an important component in the infrastructure necessary to maintain Chicago as a regional growth machine.

In 1941, the U.S. Army decided to build an airplane factory in the Chicago area that would be leased to the Douglas Aircraft Corporation. The Army appointed a special officers board to locate the plant, but the board was advised by Lieutenant Matthew Rockwell, of the Army Corps of Engineers and CRPA, Robert Kingery, of the CRPA, and three members of the Chicago Association of Commerce.[160] The board chose Orchard

[159] Ibid., 2974. As Howell pointed out, Section 9 of the bill was not a very rigorous check on federal authority, since it would be politically difficult for state legislatures to pass legislation prohibiting municipalities from applying for outside funding. Senator Brewster's amendment, which provided for the channeling of all funds to the states, passed but was left out of the conference report.

[160] Doherty, 15. Kingery was the same man who had rejected Chicago's plan for a lake airport in 1934. The Chicago Association of Commerce members were F.J. Ashley, L.S. Lyon, and E.P. Querl.

Place, located northwest of Chicago's central business district, because Douglas wanted a "suburban" type of worker and Chicago offered to provide water to Orchard Place.[161] Although the board officially chose the Orchard Place site, the CRPA undoubtedly influenced the process since the CRPA had presented the sites the board looked at and the final decision was made in Kingery's office.[162] Upon approval of the site in June 1942 by the department of airplane production for the War Production Board, Chicago had a major war plant responsible for the production of C-54 transport planes.[163]

The plant was closed at the end of World War II, however, as government contracts dried up and the site attracted the attention of policymakers in Chicago. In 1944 the Chicago Plan Commission had wanted to develop "an airport which will make Chicago the center of aviation" and Kelly had applied to the Civil Aeronautics Board for port of entry status for Chicago, which would help the city establish itself as an international gateway.[164] The Douglas plant was an obvious site for such an airport and Kelly went to Washington with Merrill Meigs, chair of the Aero Commission, Ralph Burke, director of the Postwar Economic Advisory Council, Oscar Hewitt, Commissioner of Public Works, Daniel Burnham, Jr., president of the CRPA, and Holman Pettibone, president of the Chicago Association of Commerce, to probe the federal government about the possibility of obtaining the Douglas Plant after the war.[165] Although nothing seems to have come of this trip, it is still instructive for the delegation was composed of the same groups that had shaped airport development in Chicago since the 1920s.

Despite not having a site for a new airport, Chicagoans approved a $15 million bond issue for airport expansion in June 1945.[166] Chicago would soon have a site, however, for Kelly appointed the Chicago Airport Selection Board, which first met September 5, 1945. Like the Aero Commissions appointed by Kelly's predecessors, the Selection Board brought together city politicians, planners, businessmen and the airlines to

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[161] Ibid., 19.

[162] Ibid., 21.

[163] Ibid., 22. The Chief of the Department of Airplane Production was none other than Merrill Meigs.

[164] Ibid., 44.

[165] Ibid., 47-48.

[166] Ibid., 51.

develop Chicago's airport policy and insulate it from popular pressure. The Selection Board was chaired by Merrill Meigs and included Robert Kingery, who was secretary, and the president of United Air Lines, William Patterson.[167] In a letter to the newly appointed board, Kelly made its mandate clear: "Chicago desires the best airport — the safest, most convenient and with the most capacity — of any airport on this continent. Otherwise, Chicago cannot really aspire to become the center of aviation in even this country, not to mention the world."[168] Throughout the 1920s and 30s, Chicago's political leaders wanted to be the aviation center of the United States; now their ambitions had grown.

A report prepared by the Airlines Technical Committee for the Chicago Regional Planning Association, the Chicago Association of Commerce, and the Chicago Plan Commission in June 1944 revealed the dimensions of policymakers' ambition and the importance of the airport to realizing this ambition. According to the report:

> The economic strength and position of the city is directly dependent on the size and velocity of these income streams which pour in through cash and credit transactions, as well as on the persons or through the control of individuals who travel to Chicago for the purpose of buying goods and services there.[169]

This statement reflected the same vision that had shaped urban policy since the 1910s: the city was and should be, above all, a city profitable. The airplane was a tool to be used in facilitating the growth of the city profitable, since

> An expansion in the volume of air traffic in and out of Chicago will make it possible for the city to exploit its present trade area more completely and to extend the radius of the existing wholesale trade area by several hundred miles. Such an achievement could result by increasing the velocity of conventional air traffic in and out of the city and by extending the marketing range of certain Chicago goods and services depending upon extreme speed as the chief competitive factor.[170]

Reminiscent of Alderman Cronson's 1928 resolution, this statement argued that the airplane

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[167] The Selection Board also included Ralph H. Burke, who later developed the master plan for O'Hare Airport, Oscar Hewitt, Chicago's Commissioner of Public Works, John Doherty of the United Steel Workers of America, John Fitzpatrick, President of the Chicago Federation of Labor, Aubrey Mellinger, Frank Rathje, Rudolph Schroeder, Werner Schroeder, Ellis Stewart, Robert Strauss, and Aldermen Dorsey Crowe, James Bowler, Arthur Lindell, William Lancaster, George Kells, and John Grealis. "List of Members," NIPC Papers, Box 4 folder 16.

[168] Mayor Kelly to the Members of the Chicago Airport Selection Board, 5 September 1945, NIPC Papers, Box 4 folder 16.

[169] "A Report Prepared by the Airlines Technical Committee," undated, NIPC Papers, Box 4 folder 16, 2.

[170] Ibid.

would allow Chicago policymakers to realize their imperial ambitions through its obliteration of distance. Moreover, gone was Cronson's analogy of imperial spheres of influence; the authors envisioned nothing less than the usurpation of New York as the commercial center of the United States:

> Economic penetration involves the diversion to Chicago of income from the eight or more large cities now beyond the active wholesale trade area. With a modern, large-scale, and well-located airport system, Chicago might well successfully outbid New York for a large portion of the wholesale, jobbing, and related income which that city now derives from these eight places ... Further, if Chicago is made more accessible through air travel, the city might even enhance its current prestige as a place for business conferences and meetings. Moreover, readiness of access by air might indicate to business organizations the suitability of Chicago as a location for corporate or administrative control ... There is growing intensiveness in the trade rivalry between cities; and the momentum generated by the first major city to adopt a comprehensive air terminal plan could easily provide a competitive margin sufficient to insure for it permanently the highest position in the national economic scale.[171]

This report is remarkable for it spelled out the development strategy Chicago ultimately followed, updated the city profitable to take into account the coming postindustrial economy, and linked the successful realization of this vision to aggressive action by the city. The city needed to be aggressive since trade rivalries between cities, unfettered by government interference, were intensifying. The report also contained an implicit theory of urban systems, a theory that assumed cities were arranged hierarchically with little chance for upward mobility. The convergence of a changing economy with new transport technology represented a rare moment of opportunity for upward mobility in an otherwise static system. By taking advantage of this moment, the report argued, Chicago could move up to the top before the system stabilized itself, leaving Chicago secure in its dominance.

Even as they stressed the importance of planning, however, the authors also attempted to naturalize Chicago's position through a distorted map that depicted all highways, railroads, and waterways as feeding into an out-of-scale Chicago, erased the people and cities under images of commodities in various regions of the United States, and portrayed the airplane as the tool which would tie the United States, through Chicago, into

[171] Ibid., 3. Underlining in the original.

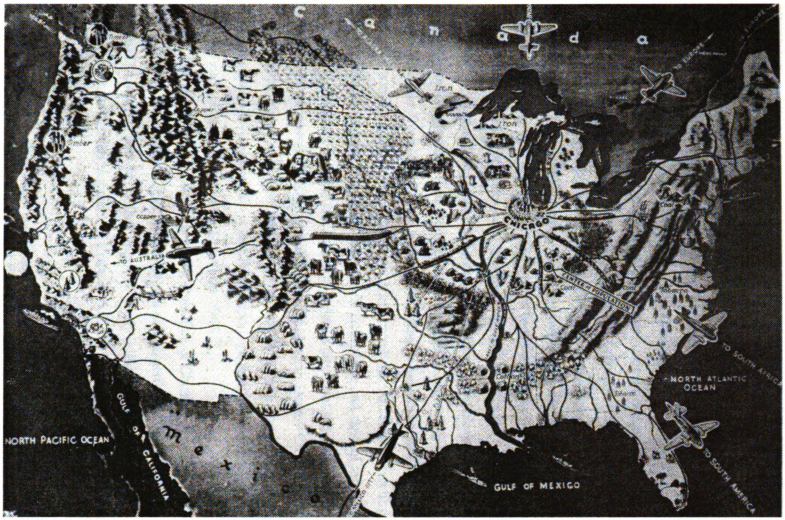

Figure 2 Constructing the natural center through maps. Notice the shrinking and darkening of New York.

the global economy (Figure 2).[172] Whether through planning or favorable geography, Chicago, according to the report, seemed destined for commercial greatness.

The composition of the Selection Board ensured this vision would be carried out. The only points of contention apparent in the minutes of the board were over the layout of the runways at the new airport, and the fates of a lake front airport and Chicago Municipal Airport. Although the layout of runways seems to be a mundane technical issue, it was at the center of a struggle between labor and the airlines over the degree of freedom pilots would have in flying passenger aircraft. The airlines favored a tangential runway pattern since it would allow greater capacity, a fact that ensured city support of their position, while the pilots supported a parallel runway layout for what were ostensibly safety issues. In actuality, pilots objected to the tangential pattern because such a pattern required more stringent use of air traffic control and "hardly an aircraft could make a move unless it was controlled."[173] The airline pilots lost their case since Chicago's policymakers feared lower capacity would undermine their plans to attain commercial supremacy.

The lake front airport, long a dream of Chicago's business community, was also the subject of some conflict between Selection Board members. At the third meeting of the board on September 17, 1945, E.P. Lott, of United Airlines and chair of the Airlines Technical Committee, and William Patterson argued a lake front airport would be prohibitively expensive. TWA's Arthur Jens and Alderman Dorsey Crowe argued that, except for the high cost, a lake front front was most desirable. As a result, the Selection Board reviewed several plans for a lake front airport and considered the lake front as a possible site until its final report in November 1945.[174]

The final point of contention was over the fate of Chicago Municipal Airport. City officials were anxious that the development of a new airport would mean the closure of Chicago Municipal, something they opposed. Early in the board's deliberations, Alderman Kells moved that the development of a new airport did "not mean the abandonment of the

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[172] Ibid., i.

[173] David Behncke, Airline Pilots' Association to Theodore Wright, Administrator of Civil Aeronautics Authority, 29 January 1945, NIPC Papers, Box 4 folder 16.

[174] "Minutes of Meeting No.3, Airport Selection Board," 17 September 1945, NIPC Papers, Box 4 folder 16.

Municipal Airport."[175] Kells had some cause for concern, since the airlines wanted to concentrate operations at a single airport and envisioned a separation of function whereby the new airport would house scheduled commercial traffic and Chicago Municipal would be relegated to a cargo and general aviation airport.[176] At the eighth meeting of the board, Kells moved that the Clearing site be removed from consideration since its selection would require the abandonment of Chicago Municipal.[177] Despite this victory, the city did not get a firm commitment from the airlines regarding Chicago Municipal's future since the final report contained a section that advanced the idea that Chicago's airports would be separated by function — a section that was crossed out.[178] This failure to resolve the issue foreshadowed future tension between the city and the airlines over the location of commercial operations.

Because of the lack of serious disagreements, the board sailed through its work, meeting regularly until November 6, 1945, when it recommended "the Douglas site, enlarged, as the location which meets all of the requirements for a principal airport for Chicago."[179] Douglas was particularly attractive because it was a level site, had few obstructions, and the existing plant and sparse development around the plant promised to ease the burden of land assemblage.[180] Although the site had these advantages, its location 20 miles northwest of Chicago meant it would only be acceptable to the airlines if it was connected to the city by an express highway.[181]

After the Selection Board chose the Douglas plant as the site for Chicago's next airport, Mayor Kelly went to Washington to have the field declared surplus. Upon arriving in Washington, he met with his former aid Gael Sullivan, who, appropriately enough, was

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[175] "Minutes of Meeting No.2, Airport Selection Board," 10 September 1945, NIPC Papers, Box 4 folder 16.

[176] "Minutes of Meeting No.4, Airport Selection Board," 24 September 1945, NIPC Papers, Box 4 folder 16, 2.

[177] "Minutes of Meeting No.8, Airport Selection Board," 22 October 1945, NIPC Papers, Box 4 folder 16, 3.

[178] "Report of the Chicago Airport Selection Board," November 1945, NIPC Papers, Box 4 folder 16, 4.

[179] Ibid., 1.

[180] Ibid., 7.

[181] Ibid., 4

serving as Second Assistant Postmaster General — the same position held by native Chicagoans Edward Shaughnessy and Paul Henderson 25 years earlier.[182] After meeting with officials from the Surplus Property Administration, Kelly proudly reported back home: the "deal is in the bag."[183] The Douglas plant was declared surplus January 21, 1946 and deeded to Chicago by the War Assets Corporation on March 21, 1946.[184]

Ralph Burke's plan for the airport called for financing by the federal government, through the Federal Airport Act, the City of Chicago, and the State of Illinois, and kept control of the airport firmly in the hands of the city. In September 1948 economically minded Mayor Martin H. Kennelly announced the trimming of the new airport plan from $75 million to $37 million, phase one to be $10,675,000. Illinois was to give $1,800,000, the federal government was to give $4,375,000 and Chicago would provide the remainder out of the 1945 bond issue.[185] A technically beautiful plan was drawn up, including plans for a highway to connect the site to the Loop, but the plan did not address issues of housing, employment, or environmental impact. Following the earlier pattern set by the city and the Chicago Regional Planning Association, the comprehensive airport plan concentrated on integrating the airport into the metropolitan infrastructure network and ignored its social costs.

As massive airports such as Idlewild (JFK) in New York, Dulles in Washington D.C., and O'Hare were planned and plugged into the urban periphery, they "significantly altered the urban and suburban environment by attracting many types of businesses."[186] The highways that connected these giants to their downtowns facilitated white flight to the suburbs and the destructive decentralization of the urban core. New settlements sprang up as developers tapped the new utility lines that ran out to the airport[187] and people settled closer to their jobs. The area around O'Hare boomed during the late 1950s as industrial

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[182] "Kelly Arrived in Washington" Chicago Daily Tribune 10 November 1945, 9.

[183] Chicago Daily Tribune, 11 November 1945, 31.

[184] Doherty, 60. The city received 1,080.60 acres for free, while the military kept 281.24 acres and the assembly plant.

[185] Doherty, 74.

[186] Douglas Karsner, "Aviation and Airports: The Impact on the Economic and Geographic Structure of American Cities, 1940s-1980s," Journal of Urban History (May 1997): 428.

[187] Ibid., 429.

firms and hotels clustered around the airport; industrial land values rose from $1,000 acre in 1949 to $15,000 in 1959 and residential land value near the airport increased two hundred percent over the same period.[188] By 1961, O'Hare had attracted one hundred new businesses.[189]

O'Hare's steady growth fueled the Frankenstein-like growth of the suburbs around it, confirming fears raised in 1952 over "the continued well being of central Chicago as an employment and business center, and its effect on suburban development."[190] This statement was a far cry from the CRPA's earlier claim that "decentralization is a good thing." With the decentralization of downtown, Chicago became locked into a struggle with its suburban competitors. The city fought a difficult battle to add to the narrow strip of land that connected O'Hare to the city, preventing its capture by the suburbs. Meanwhile, the Chicago Regional Planning Association was superseded by the Northeast Illinois Planning Commission, a group that catered more to the needs of the suburbs than to the needs of Chicago.[191]

While the city fought its suburbs, it also fought with the airlines it needed to realize its dream of becoming the world's aviation and commercial center. The city had lost $726,375 on airport operations between 1939 and 1947 and decided to stop giving "hidden assistance to commercial carriers."[192] In response, the airlines formed the Chicago Airlines Top Committee to develop unified policy positions on behalf of the airlines.[193] The city attempted to get the airlines to transfer some flights from Midway Airport to O'Hare in the early 1950s, but the airlines refused because the highway connecting O'Hare to Chicago was not completed, fees were lower at Midway, and the airlines preferred to concentrate operations at one airport.[194] Chicago did not have the power to force the airlines to transfer

[188] Herman O. Walther, "Effect of Jet Airports on Market Value of Vicinage Real Estate," The Appraisal Journal (October 1959), NIPC Papers, Box 133 folder 18, 467.

[189] Karsner, "Leaving on a Jet Plane," 447. See Chapter 7 for a good discussion of the spatial effects of airports located in Tucson, Tampa, and Detroit.

[190] 28th Annual Meeting of the Chicago Regional Planning Association," 22 April 1952, NIPC Papers, Box 4 folder 1.

[191] See Doherty, especially 90-119, and NIPC Papers, Box 133.

[192] Doherty, 86.

[193] Ibid., 85.

[194] Doherty, 155-169 passim. Chicago Municipal Airport was renamed Midway Airport in 1949.

their operations; only the Civil Aeronautics Board had such power and it did not use it in Chicago's struggle against the airlines. Eventually, the airlines did reach an agreement with the city and transfer their operations to O'Hare. This move led to a landmark agreement whereby the airlines guaranteed a $120 million revenue bond issue on June 28, 1958 and the city agreed to apply all airport revenue toward payment of the bonds.[195]

Because of this agreement and the development of jet aircraft, the airlines transferred their operations to O'Hare — a move which devastated the economy of the area around Midway. In 1959 Midway handled 10,040,353 passengers but by 1962 it handled only 659,549.[196] The desire of the airlines to centralize operations and retire the revenue bonds, rather than the development of jet aircraft, must be seen as the main reason for the abandonment of Midway since 60 percent of O'Hare's traffic was composed of propeller planes that had normally used Midway.[197] Chicago's political leaders could do nothing but wait for the airlines to return to Midway, which they eventually did as O'Hare's traffic quickly reached the saturation point. Chicago's politicians' commitment to the city profitable, and to a liberalism that rejected centralized planning, had placed Chicago in this tenuous position.

The Federal Aid Airport Act, despite its provision for a comprehensive national airport plan, must be seen as a planning failure. The federal government could have made its funding conditional on it being allowed to link funding for other urban programs together into a comprehensive national urban plan that provided for social, over economic, development. The failure of liberalism to allow for this possibility, especially in the climate of the Cold War, made it impossible for policymakers to grant the federal government this mandate. Instead, the federal government, like regional planning groups, pursued a functionalist strategy that saw airports as an isolated problem that could be solved through cash transfers and zoning. City policymakers were given the responsibility of planning for the future, a task they were woefully unprepared to handle since they did not have the power to transcend local political divisions and plan on the regional scale that was needed, nor, given their commitment to the city profitable, did they want to.

[195] Ibid., 214.

[196] Ibid., 284.

[197] Ibid., 285.

Even if the federal government had been allowed to develop a national urban policy, however, there is real doubt as to how effective it would have been. As a report by the Civil Aeronautics Administration reveals, federal policymakers realized the potential airports had for generating growth:

> It should be assumed, however, that a fair amount of commercial activity will center in the vicinity of the airport, with attendant facilities for shopping, service, storage, and training. Among these facilities, one of the most prominent will be shopping centers built in connection with automobile parking areas on the fringes of the airports.[198]

Like the CRPA 20 years earlier, the flaw in the thinking of federal planners lay in their belief that urban centers were the "hub of a unified metropolitan community."[199] No matter how much suburban development occurred, planners felt it would always be tied to the central city. They were quickly proven wrong, pitting cities against their suburbs and against each other in a struggle to maintain their political power and tax base in the face of economic restructuring. The failure of cities to win this struggle resulted in the confluence of intensified racial and class segregation with an expanding low-wage economy, crumbling infrastructure, and fiscal crisis — a confluence characteristic of the urban crisis that emerged in the 1960s and continues even now.[200]

Committed to a vision of the city profitable and operating in a competitive urban system, Chicago's political leaders saw their city as another type of business corporation. Because of this vision, local urban policy was focused on solving one "problem": how could policymakers keep Chicago growing? In the 1920s, constrained by a political structure that divided governmental power over several levels, Chicago's political leaders answered this question by developing extensive partnerships with businessmen to plan for future urban economic development. The partnership would thrive well into the 1950s and was successful at developing infrastructure and creating a city profitable. Some

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[198] Civil Aeronautics Administration, Airport Planning for Urban Areas, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1945), 7.

[199] Carl Abbot, "Five Strategies for Downtown: Policy Discourse and Planning since 1943," in Planning the Twentieth-Century American City, Mary Corbin Sies and Christopher Silver, eds., (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 409.

[200] Thomas Sugrue, Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 3-6.

consequences of this alliance, however, were that groups with a different vision of the city would be ignored, while business was given many rights and very few obligations. The most important consequence was that the prodevelopment policies of Chicago laid the groundwork for the postwar decentralization that would help lead to urban crisis.[201]

In making these plans, Chicago was ably assisted by politicians and planners at the regional level. The Chicago Regional Planning Association was just as committed to the city profitable as Chicago's political leaders. Moreover, the members of the CRPA were committed to the tenets of liberalism and never claimed the broad power necessary to develop a truly comprehensive regional plan that would curb competition between the city and its suburbs. Instead, the CRPA fostered suburban growth and would ultimately be captured by the suburbs in the 1950s.

In light of the lack of power cities had and the refusal of the CRPA to claim it, the federal government was the only institution with the power capable of curbing the city. During the New Deal, it looked as though federal policymakers would institutionalize a centralized planning ideal and develop more balanced policy. As the debate over the 1938 Civil Aeronautics Act reveals, however, this moment of opportunity would be closed by policymakers' refusal to jettison their commitment to American liberalism. This decision would be consolidated during the postwar years as federal policy was geared towards fostering urban decentralization through the Federal Housing Authority, defense spending in the Sunbelt, highway construction, and airport development. In developing these policies, as the Federal Airport Act shows, federal policymakers supplied money and expertise but did not integrate policy into a coherent whole. This decision would leave the federal government unprepared to deal with the urban crisis of the 1960s, a crisis federal policy had helped create.

[201] See Kenneth Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) Campbell, especially chapter 5, and John Mollenkopf, The Contested City (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983) for a discussion of the connection between federal policy and decentralization. See Sugrue and Arnold Hirsch, Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), for an analysis of the importance of local interests in determining how federal programs would be administered.

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