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PROGRESSIVE ERA AFTERMATH - ANALYSIS OF MUNICIPAL HOUSEKEEPING:  
BERTHA K. LANDES AND DOROTHY McCULLOUGH LEE

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PROGRESSIVE ERA AFTERMATH - ANALYSIS OF MUNICIPAL HOUSEKEEPING:  
BERTHA K. LANDES AND DOROTHY McCULLOUGH LEE

During the Progressive Era, the United States was so invested in its innovations that the byproducts of mass production- corruption and waste, were hastily pushed aside. Out of all the people to take interest in the crisis, clubwomen were the only ones who made an effort to actively clean up their city. From 1890-1920, the nation hustled to reform it's social and economic systems and target the problems caused by overproduction. Among these areas of reform, government corruption was the primary area for change. In the private sector, new technological advances and gadgets flooded into cities and began to fill the homes of nearly every American. The spike in consumerism immensely impacted the economy, as well as public welfare. Communities began to see the negative effects of their materialistic society, and knew something had to change. Cities were overrun with crime, alcohol, and wasteful use of natural resources. Eastern Elite Clubwomen were among the first to institute political and social change in Post progressivism America.

The term municipal housekeeping developed due to the nature of reforms that women instituted in America. The municipal housekeeping era allowed women to get a foot in the door in the political sector. To transition from house to politics, women argued that the welfare of the

city directly influenced the welfare of their own homes.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, in cleaning up the wider public sphere, they would be helping their individual communities.

It was through their club involvement that they were able to voice their opinions about municipal reform. Housewives argued for reform through their feminine instincts and knowledge of housekeeping. Their reforms were aimed at reducing waste and inefficiency and corruption by use of scientific methods, compulsory education, and administrative innovations.<sup>2</sup> The women that carried out these reforms were later called municipal housekeepers and took their newfound power to stretch their boundaries of house and home into the political sphere.

Municipal housekeeping originated in the East as a response to “the prevailing political climate and social conditions.”<sup>3</sup> Initially, women joined clubs because they grew tired of their daily routines and wanted to engage in dialect about literature and religion, volunteer for causes within their community, and have a sense of sisterhood. Through their clubs they were able to volunteer and fundraise. During the war, clubwomen used their membership to participate in relief work. Later, these same organizations lobbied government representatives to pass protective labor legislation, pure food acts, and environmental regulations.<sup>4</sup> This shift in club involvement is attributed to the change in city dynamic at the time. Citizens saw politics as tainted with corruption, and the environment as a diminishing luxury.

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<sup>1</sup> Joan E. Marshall, “The Changing Allegiances of Women Volunteers in the Progressive Era, Lafayette, Indiana,” *Indian Magazine of History*, 96:3 (September 2000), 252.

<sup>2</sup> Jayne Morris- Crowther, *The Political Activities of the Detroit Federation of Women's Clubs in the 1920s: A Challenge and a Promise* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 32.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon Moris Bakken, Brenda Farrington, *Encyclopedia of Women in the American West* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2003), 56.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

Nevertheless, municipal housekeeping in the East eventually died out as consumerism took over and “outmoded” the idea of cleaning up politics and the environment. Years later, the idea of reforming politics and society transitioned into the West. The movement of municipal housekeeping has been described as the “re-creation of eastern organizations by white pioneers.”<sup>5</sup> In contrast, women’s clubs in the west were as much influenced by region, ethnicity, race and class as by gender. They were also much more political than their earlier organizations. Pioneer women had their own western ideal which emphasized shared community, family, and cultural values.<sup>6</sup> And through their volunteerism, “western clubwomen helped shape their society’s politics and distinguish its own unique culture and values.”<sup>7</sup>

Once the municipal housekeeping movement made its way to the West Coast, local women saw it as their opportunity to civilize the wild west.<sup>8</sup> “The hundreds of women's clubs documented by historians point to women's active life outside the home in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”<sup>9</sup> Cities like Portland, Olympia, and Seattle had a number of women’s clubs that took it upon themselves to change their communities. Club members exhibited the same determination that their eastern sisters did in demanding a public role outside the domestic sphere, to humanize their environment with a wide array of projects. They used their organizations to reach social service goals by founding and maintaining orphanages, hospitals, day-care centers, maternity homes, health clinics for babies, and school lunch programs. In

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Karen J. Blair, “Research on Pacific Northwest Women,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 22:3 (2001), 50.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

addition to helping mothers and children, the sole focus of clubwomen's efforts were towards beautification and environmental conservation. Municipal housekeepers created and restored parks, playgrounds, public drinking fountains, war memorials, street trees and gardens.<sup>10</sup> Big cities were finally seeing some much needed attention and cleaning up after the wild, roaring twenties.

Two mayor cities in the Northwest greatly benefitted from the new consumerism era: Portland, OR, and Seattle, WA. By 1920, Seattle had grown in its sectors of tourism, higher education, research and development, finance, and foreign trade.<sup>11</sup> Although the city's economy was clearly reaping the benefits of progressivism, its political infrastructure was falling apart. One local clubwomen took it upon herself to clean up her much beloved city. Bertha Knight Landes became one of the most well known municipal housekeepers because of her ground breaking work in Seattle. To fully understand Landes's reforms as Mayor, it is important to know what she was like growing up, and how that influenced her to be the person she was in politics.

Bertha Ethel Knight was born in Massachusetts on October 19, 1868. She was the youngest of nine children which exposed her to the difficulties of raising a family. From an early age, Landes crossed gender lines. She played equally with boys and girls at school, and never let her male opponents intimidate her in high school and college.<sup>12</sup> When she was almost twenty, she went to live with her older sister as an enrolled student at Indiana University. She studied history

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Carl Abbott, "Regional City and Network City: Portland and Seattle in the Twentieth Century," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 23:3 (August 1992), 305.

<sup>12</sup> Sandra Haarsager, *Bertha Knight Landes of Seattle, Big-city Mayor* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1994), 7.

and political science, and finished her degree in just three years.<sup>13</sup> It was unusual for women to receive any higher level education. As more women ventured into college, complaints sprung up about the weakening of education due to the overwhelming “feminizing” presence. In addition to her degree, Landes was a member of the Congregational church which affected her attitude towards civic responsibility and government.<sup>14</sup> After Landes married Henry Landes, they moved to Seattle where she started her long but rewarding journey in politics. Bertha Landes was born into a time when women struggled to be heard, but this did not deter her from becoming a political figure that women across the country looked up to.

Landes became more involved in club life as her three children grew older. Landes’s political philosophy began to crystallize when she joined the Century Club in 1907. She became a part of and headed the club’s new social service department in 1916. The department was split into 10 sections with the following projects: child welfare, progress, child labor, juvenile court, schools and playgrounds, institutional work, hospitals, education and philanthropy, and immigration station.<sup>15</sup> A few years later, Landes became president of the Seattle federation, which made her part of the Washington federation. The Federation’s primary objective was “to unite the Women’s Clubs of the State for the study of cultural and altruistic subjects, for the consideration of public issues and to secure such concerted action thereon as its members may desire.”<sup>16</sup> The federation’s resolutions mainly called for dramatic changes in the legal and political framework of the state government. At these meetings, Landes was exposed to a

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>16</sup> “Washington State Federation of Women’s Clubs Register, 1896-1923,” box 1, as cited in Haarsager, 34.

“feminist mode that plunged into politics.”<sup>17</sup> This feminine ambience carried Landes far as president of the Seattle Federation of Women’s Clubs. Her work impressed Seattle’s business community so much so that she was the only woman on a five member commission to study unemployment in the city.<sup>18</sup> Landes was involved in, and the president of, many other clubs before she was elected Mayor. She found power and a voice through her work in clubs which made her a strong influence in the sphere of women’s clubwork. But even she had to justify herself by describing her political victories as her devotion to her “larger home.”<sup>19</sup>

Seattle’s corrupt politics and destroyed streets made it the perfect city for municipal housekeepers like Landes to clean up. By the end of the 19th century, Seattle had one of the most transient populations. Unemployed and seasonal workers flooded into Seattle looking for work. While in Seattle, they took advantage of dance halls, card rooms, poolrooms, shooting galleries, and “theaters.”<sup>20</sup> Once elected, Landes capitalized on the domestic metaphor and corrupt view of politics as she portrayed herself as Seattle’s municipal housekeeper.<sup>21</sup> She followed her agenda of “civic betterment” by focusing on controlling card rooms and dance halls, improving traffic, and enforcing liquor laws.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>18</sup> L.E. Bragg, *More than Petticoats, Remarkable Washington Women*, (Guilford: Morris Book Publishing, 2011), 102.

<sup>19</sup> Haarsager, 46.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis, 471.

<sup>22</sup> “Surprised at Magnitude of Her Plurality,” *Seattle Times*, (April 19, 1922), 1; “Mrs. Landes is Modest on Vote,” *Seattle Star*, (April 19, 1922); Sandra Haarsager, *Bertha Knight Landes of Seattle: Big-City Mayor* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 97, as cited in Lewis, 470.

When Bertha Landes ran for Mayor, after a lot of insisting from her peers, she won by a margin of six thousand votes. She vowed to reorganize city government and clean up the streets of Seattle.<sup>23</sup> And she did just that. Seattle's financial mess was ironed out, stricter law enforcement was instituted, the Park Department and recreation programs were expanded, and the railcar system was improved for travel on city streets.<sup>24</sup> In addition to cleaning up the city during her first few months of being Mayor, she stressed the importance of equality. She explained, "Let us, while never forgetting our womanhood, refrain from all emphasis on sex and put it on being public servants." In the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* on October 30, 1927, she said, "I haven't seen any reason, since taking office, why a woman can't fill [being mayor] as well as a man."<sup>25</sup> Landes exhibited poise and elegance but was extremely passionate about what she believed in and would not let anyone stand in her way.

Even before Landes ran for Mayor, she was testing the limitations on her power and authority. While Landes was city council president, she filled in for Mayor Brown who was going on a trip to the East coast. Her first actions was packing up her office supplies and moving down into the mayor's executive suite. Her second act was charging the police department with corruption. She gave the head chief four hours to do something about the "open liquor sales, gambling, and vice that was rampant throughout the city."<sup>26</sup> Bars, pool and gambling halls, and

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<sup>23</sup> Bragg, 104.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

speakeasies were raided and shut down all over Seattle. This act helped her campaign platform against sin and vice and in favor of municipal government restructuring.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to Landes's argument for women's rights, the emergence of domestic technology helped women transition out of their traditional housekeeping roles. Labor saving devices like the electric stove and oven, refrigerator, vacuum cleaner, clothes washer, electric iron, and sewing machine had a liberating effect on stay at home women.<sup>28</sup> Landes commented that "removing from the hood a good deal of drudgery of housework has given women in general more time for outside activities."<sup>29</sup> Women no longer had to devote all of their time tending to the house. This gave them more time for leisure, and club involvement. Nevertheless, the development and welfare of the home still resided in women's hands. And because of this, women still gained a powerful and important role in her marriage and community.

During the 1920s, many societal norms and personal beliefs were challenged with the arrival of progressivism. Cultural and social turmoil marked the extravagant "golden age." One of the most drastic changes made during the decade were women's image. Women could now cut their hair short, smoke cigarettes, wear shorter skirts and dresses, and most importantly: vote. Gaining the vote and other civil rights... hardly made women the quick political equals of men.<sup>30</sup> Landes struggled with this inequality and advocated for equality and the dropping of gender distinctions in public affairs during her time in office.

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>28</sup> Haarsager, 52.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

Landes's municipal housekeeping was justified through her argument of her feminine instincts for moral cleanliness.<sup>31</sup> Seattle, like most cities, was home to immoral behavior like drinking, gambling, and prostitution. Women argued that these "reservoirs of disease and vice" were not suitable places to raise children.<sup>32</sup> By exploiting common beliefs about women's morality to justify her election into office, municipal housekeeping supported the idea that women were inherently more moral than men. Although this argument for morality helped women gain more footing in the political sphere, it stereotyped all women as cleaners of the city. Women were viewed as passive, irrational, and biologically determined, and by this idealized portrait, they "could not be 'like men' when it came to professional and economic self actualization and independence."<sup>33</sup> This double standard did not stop Landes from continuing to clean up Seattle. She argued that public offices needed women's morality because the government had become too corrupt under men's authority.

In *Collier's* Landes wrote, "Men always hate house-cleaning. Women know that it has to be done."<sup>34</sup> Her rhetoric of morality made many of her reform policies more effective. For example, her policies on gambling, dance halls, and smoking weighed in heavily on the issue of morality. No one wanted to live in an immoral and dirty city, the citizen's complaints of corruption were evidence of this. Landes heard the public's cries and hastily cleaned up the immoral corners of the city. Dance halls were one of the first areas that Landes cleaned up in Seattle because she saw them as centers for gambling and promiscuous behavior. Seattle had

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<sup>31</sup> Lewis, 471.

<sup>32</sup> Haarsager, 46.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>34</sup> Landes, "Does Politics," 24, as cited in Lewis, 473.

become corrupt and dirty under the immoral rule of male politicians. Landes assumed dancehalls were a natural concern of women and a problem to solve.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to her morality argument, Landes used femininity and household experiences as a basis for social change. She made it clear that femininity was not the antithesis of political leadership.<sup>36</sup> Before Landes, women worried that taking a seat in politics made them more masculine because of the predominance that men had in office. An overwhelmingly male dominated profession felt very unwelcoming towards women. Because of this, women felt pressured to act less lady-like in order to fit in and not draw attention to themselves. But during her term as mayor, she debunked this myth and gained the support of many women. Landes assured people that she had remained completely feminine, and credited her success to traditional housekeeping. She explained that, “[a] woman’s place is in the home,” but through their housework, women learned to care for the community as a whole.<sup>37</sup> This was the first time that a woman had contributed her success to her own experiences and gender.

As Mayor, Landes faced many controversial decisions. Alcohol had become a dangerous problem in Seattle because of the behavior it encouraged. It was known as the “agent of corruption.”<sup>38</sup> Many citizens were fearful of Seattle’s prohibition laws because of the city’s lack of enforcement and lawlessness associated with previous regulations. Seattle’s citizens demanded a return to moral uplift and “good government.”<sup>39</sup> Landes shared these same concerns

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<sup>35</sup> Landes, “Reminiscence,” 9, as cited in Haarsager, 63.

<sup>36</sup> Lewis, 474.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 475.

<sup>38</sup> Haarsager, 64.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

and instituted strict liquor laws with reinforcement. Not all were fond of Landes's prohibition platform. Bars and other institutions for gambling argued that banning alcohol severely hurt their businesses and the economy. Landes ignored these pleas and enforced the great social reform known as prohibition. Some local businessmen felt she was damaging the masculinity of Seattle men, and that it hurt business with other cities. Others disliked Landes because of her liquor raids and "stringent reforms."<sup>40</sup> Some of these reforms called for a reconstruction of government spending, which ended up cutting employee's wages. However, without the reconstruction of government, Seattle would have most likely succumbed to immoral activity due to the economic propensity that came with it.

Unfortunately, Landes was voted out of office in 1928. Landes's support from the community attributed to her success as a municipal housekeeper. She had effectively cleaned up Seattle through municipal housekeeping. Although she did not win the fight for woman's suffrage during her time as mayor, she changed the way people thought about women and their role in politics. The change in viewpoint of women's roles was crucial in the success of municipal housekeeping, woman's suffrage, and gender equality as a whole.

Despite the success that Landes' term earned for women's suffrage the country was in political ruins following World War II. Corruption had seeped into the government, while prostitution and alcohol whirled around the streets of America. Groups of women took it upon themselves to clean up their cities. Elite Clubwomen in many cities saw it as an opportunity to use their skills to clean up the nation. These strong willed, independent women began their political careers far from the walls of a political office. Housewives grew tired of tending to the home and joined clubs to involve themselves in literature and volunteer work. Twenty

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

years later, 172 miles south, another municipal housekeeper took office as mayor. Dorothy McCullough Lee became mayor of Portland in 1946 when she won in a landslide victory against her six male opponents. As Portland's first female mayor she promised that she would make a "constant and unremitting" effort "to make Portland as free from organized crime and vice as is humanly possible." "By working together," she assured her listeners, "we cannot fail."<sup>41</sup> Postwar Portland was one of corruption and disruption of normal life. Crime increased along with prostitution and alcohol consumption. Americans were worried about how their country was evolving. Their anxieties and fears about vice, reshaping women's public roles, and the discourse of maternalism justified and strutted many women's political involvement.<sup>42</sup> Similar to Landes's term as mayor, Lee had a corrupt city to clean up. But the differences between the two mayors and their time periods plays a crucial role in the success of their terms.

Portland's first female mayor was born on April 1, 1901 in Oakland, California. When she was 23, she moved to Portland because of her interest in the woman's suffrage movement. It was very hard for a women to go through college to receive a higher education, but she was determined to become an attorney. In the same year that she moved to Portland she became a lawyer and opened the first all-female law practice in Oregon.<sup>43</sup> Although it is said that she had the demeanor of a "forty-seven-year-old schoolmarm," she was not to be underestimated.<sup>44</sup> By

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<sup>41</sup> Sarah Koenig, "Maternalism and the Mayor: Dottie Do-Good's War on Sin in Postwar Portland," *Journal of Women's History*, 26:4 (Winter 2014), 108.

<sup>42</sup> Koenig wrote, "I am indebted to Emily Suzanne Johnson's work on maternalism for this observation, see Emily Suzanne Johnson," "Activists, Authors, Apostles: Women's Leadership in the New Christian Right" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2014), as cited in, Koenig, 109.

<sup>43</sup> Meryl Lipman, "Dorothy McCullough Lee (1902-1981)" *The Oregon Encyclopedia* (Portland State University and the Oregon Historical Society: 2017), 1.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

1943, she had served fourteen years in the Oregon House of Representatives and Senate. She was known for being an effective administrator who dealt with infrastructure problems such as the outdated streetcar and bus system. Citizens were fed up with Mayor Earl Riley and voted him out of office in 1948. This gave Lee the opportunity to run for the position. She won the election by a landslide, becoming the second woman to serve as mayor of a major U.S. city.<sup>45</sup>

Lee publicly embodied the domestic ideal of women's rights during a pivotal shift in conservative women's politics. In the postwar era, a new moral maternalism was emerging. Moral maternalists differed from their previous social maternalists in the sense that now they argued that the state's role was to protect its citizens from the influences of communism, vice, and other moral threats rather than the social welfare concerns of their earlier counterparts.<sup>46</sup> The change from social to moral maternalism was fitting for the state of cities after World War II. Crime was higher than ever, and many Americans viewed it as a "conspiratorial threat to national security as serious as that posed by communism."<sup>47</sup> Organized crime infiltrated vulnerable communities that were affected by the breakdown of government and moral order. Crime was seen as a deterioration of morals, which is why Lee's rhetoric of moral maternalism fit so well with the community. Lee allied with moral reformers, churchgoers, and concerned women to fight organized crime and promote a government untainted by "racketeering and graft."<sup>48</sup> This was done by attacking gambling, bootlegging and prostitution.

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* The first woman to serve as mayor in a major U.S. city was Bertha Knight Landes in Seattle, Washington in 1926.

<sup>46</sup> Koenig, 109.

<sup>47</sup> Lee Bernstein, *The Greatest Menace: Organized Crime in Cold War America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002) 26–27, as cited in, Koenig 109.

<sup>48</sup> Koenig, 110.

Alcohol was still a major problem for American cities. Portland struggled immensely with enforcing liquor laws because law enforcement agents and politicians were taking bribes to ignore and help organize criminal rackets.<sup>49</sup> To her surprise, Lee was met with lots of resistance in regards to her liquor laws. Business leaders were especially not fond of her attacks on public immortality. Unlike the national ban on alcohol in the 1920s, Oregon's Liquor Control Act of 1933 was not "a progressive reform designed to improve society," but one "designed to earn revenue."<sup>50</sup> This difference set Dorothy McCullough Lee on a path much different from Bertha Knight Landes's municipal housekeeping one. Lee was fighting against the public on issues she thought were universal, while Landes was fighting with the public against commonly shared problems.

Vice and communism were two of the biggest problems that Lee addressed during her time in office. Anxiety over these topics was high in Portland at the time because of the results they had observed in other cities. Lee's anti-vice campaign targeted these areas of corruption within Portland. The first thing Lee banned was slot machines. Often they were used as a source of revenue for clubs. Many citizens were supportive of the ban of slot machines in dirty bars and clubs, but became concerned when Lee wanted them out of "social clubs and charitable organizations."<sup>51</sup> Lee viewed regulation of gambling as a matter of public welfare, but some disagreed with this viewpoint and accused her of overstepping her feminine bounds.<sup>52</sup> In 1949,

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<sup>49</sup> Warren Niete and Rob Donnelly, "Enforcing Oregon's State Alcohol Monopoly: Recollections from the 1950s," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 115:1 (Spring 2014), 92.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>51</sup> "Slots Banned in Private Clubs," *Long Beach (CA) Independent*, 11:133 (January 14, 1949), sec I, 2.

<sup>52</sup> Koenig, 115.

attorney Maxwell Donnelly filed a petition to recall Lee's law on slot machines. Donnelly represented ten small business owners who accused Lee of placing an "onerous and inequitable financial burden . . . upon the workers and business people of Portland."<sup>53</sup> Although the petition never reached a court, the controversy of Lee's mayoralty had done its damage by dividing her "Republican constituency," with "fiscal conservatives on one side and moral reformers on the other."<sup>54</sup>

Lee's moral crusade was only just beginning. As her term went on, she attacked regulation on bars and liquor, and sexual vice. During this time, her relation with Portland's churches intensified. She described religious faith as synonymous with moral strength and American values.<sup>55</sup> The churches and Mayor Lee also shared a common dislike for homosexuals. Lee started an anti-homosexual campaign in Portland to clean up the vice that had been lingering in the city after the war.<sup>56</sup> The Music Hall was the most notorious for catering to gay and lesbian clientele. This did not sit well with Lee, and she did everything in her power to eliminate the promiscuous behavior going on in Portland's bars and clubs.

Lee faced a lot of resistance on her reforms, but that did not stop her from meeting her goals. Within her first year in office, she sponsored a civil rights bill, fought against the rent decontrol, and ordered 2,000 new units of public housing.<sup>57</sup> All of these actions were quite

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<sup>53</sup> "Group of 10 Asks Recall of Mayor," *Oregonian*, 89:27,718 (September 13, 1949), sec I, 1.

<sup>54</sup> Koenig, 116.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>56</sup> Peter Boag, "'Does Portland Need a Homophile Society?' Gay Culture and Activism in the Rose City between World War II and Stonewall," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 105:1 (Spring 2004), 15.

<sup>57</sup> "Union Men Open Fight to Kill Plan," *Oregonian* 110:28,092 (November 23, 1950), sec III, 1.

costly, and Portland was facing a budget shortfall. Lee suggested to raise taxes rather than cutting programs. But when the business and city service tax were voted on, Portland citizens voted against both.<sup>58</sup> Lee was possibly pushing the public too far with her moral reforms. On top of that, Lee continued to push for anti-gambling reforms and liquor licensing restrictions. She filed five ordinances that would ban all punchboards, slot machines, and sports betting. Tavern and bar owners argued that revenue would be cut dramatically and damage the economy. Lee was not concerned with that and was “determined to end this gambling nuisance once and for all.”<sup>59</sup> Was Lee too drastic in trying to clean up Portland’s morality? Or was it the dynamic of the political sphere and attitudes of the public that led to her downfall? In the next election it was evident that citizens were tired of her approach. Lee was not reelected, but the impact of her reforms lasted.

From the surface, Landes and Lee both seem to be very successful mayors. But as their reform and popularity success is looked further into, it becomes clear that Landes had more public support, and success with her municipal housekeeping reforms. Was this because of a change in municipal housekeeping or something else? One factor that contributed to the difference in success between the two mayors were their backgrounds. Unlike Landes, Lee did not have a background of a civic volunteer.<sup>60</sup> Lee worked solely in the political sphere as an attorney and head of Portland’s public utilities, which distanced her from the public. Because of this disconnect between the public and herself, Lee failed to make laws that would raise support. Lee angered conservatives during her time as mayor because of her tax raising laws and push to

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<sup>58</sup> Paul C. Pitzer, “Dorothy McCullough Lee: The Successes and Failures of ‘Dottie-Do-Good,’” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 91:1 (Spring 1990), 22.

<sup>59</sup> Koenig, 119.

<sup>60</sup> Doris Weatherford, *Women in American Politics: History and Milestones* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2012), 243.

ban racial discrimination in housing and hiring.<sup>61</sup> Lee also fought the public in her reforms regarding prohibition, gambling, and vice. She insinuated that the public despised alcohol and all gambling, but in reality, the common person only wanted the “dirty” parts of the city to be cleaned up- not the slot machines and alcohol in elite bars and clubs. In an attempt to clean up Portland, Lee angered the public and did not win a second term. On the other hand, Landes did not receive a second term because the public as a whole was not ready for gender equality.

Landes’s success in the political office was due to her ability to explain her agenda in a way the public aligned with. During the 1920s in Seattle, gender bias was a big part of the political sphere. Even though Landes disagreed with women’s viewed status, she centered her argument around feminine instincts for housekeeping and care taking. This intelligent move strengthened her support from both women and men. If Landes could convince the public that women were born to clean and care for communities, women worldwide could make their way into office. Landes focused on issues that were current to her time period, rather than trying to be overly proactive in her reforms.

Although gender equality has progressed by the time Lee was Mayor, it was not, and still is not, still completely developed. While Landes built her platform off of femininity and the typical housewife image, Lee did just the opposite. Lee publicly announced that she was a bad cook, and had poor housekeeping skills.<sup>62</sup> Her image made her appear less womanly and more masculine. Men feared that women would eventually become equals to men and take over their positions in the workforce. The conflict with her public image only intensified. The postwar specter of communism made it increasingly difficult for Republicans like Lee to advocate for

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>62</sup> Koenig, 113.

social and moral changes while remaining true to her party. As the political landscape shifted, Lee was “paradoxically receiving criticism as both a dangerous liberal and a reactionary conservative.”<sup>63</sup>

Another contributor to Lee’s downfall in office was the change in municipal housekeeping. During Landes’s term the women’s right movement was in shambles.<sup>64</sup> White women were divided and working for different causes that fell under the umbrella term of “women’s suffrage.” Landes’s offered a solution for women stuck at home cleaning and cooking for a family of five. She showed average housewives that they could be a part of politics. By the time Lee was mayor, she failed to realize that the dynamic of the home had changed. Women were no longer slaves to the kitchen or their husbands.

Although Bertha Landes and Dorothy Lee both instituted municipal reforms in major cities during their time in office, it is clear that they both faced different challenges unique to their decade. This difference in political and public attitude accounts for the difference in municipal housekeeping, which in the end explains the difference in success and popularity between the two mayors. It was not a change in municipal housekeeping that determined the success of the two municipal housekeepers, but rather how well they catered to their public’s feelings and beliefs during the time period. Landes recognized the delicate situation regarding women entering the workforce and centered her political campaign around it. Lee failed to recognize the changed dynamic of the public in Portland during her term. Portland citizens did not feel as strongly for municipal housekeeping as Lee did, which made most of her reforms unsuccessful. What it all comes down to is how well these women read their audiences. Landes

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>64</sup> Lynn Dumenil, “The New Woman and the Politics of the 1920s,” *OAH Magazine of History* 21:3 (July 2007), 24.

had a background in civic volunteering and was able to read her political situation more accurately than Lee did. Regardless, they were both very influential municipal housekeepers in the Pacific Northwest.

The municipal housekeeping era that swept the country during the 1920s was not, and will not, be the only era of female empowerment. Powerful women continue to influence politics and gender roles today. However, they are still met with the same problems Bertha Landes and Dorothy McCullough Lee faced in the 20s. The concept of municipal housekeeping faded, but women still find themselves answering some of the same gender biased questions that women did in postwar progressive America. Gaining the right to vote and moving into a masculine dominated workforce helped push females closer to gender equality, but they are still casted in a prejudice light. Women in positions of power have to constantly justify their actions while their male counterparts receive far less criticism. Additionally, women are being paid less than men and are widely expected to fill a feminine maternal role. While the municipal housekeeping movement moved women into politics, they are still answering the questions posed by municipal housekeeping: a clear representation of the gender inequalities and stereotypes that exist today.

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