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# 3rd Place Contest Entry: “The Good of the Country Rises Above Party”: Roosevelt, La Guardia, and O’Connor and the Works Progress Administration in New York City During the Great Depression

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## Essay:

When I began my research two years ago, my first task was to find a topic that I was interested in. I decided to utilize the Leatherby Library's resources and accessed the Frank Mt. Pleasant Library of Special Collections and Archives online by locating the Research section on the library's homepage. By scrolling through the collections, I found the John J. O'Connor Collection, which includes scrapbooks outlining a New York Congressman's political career during the Great Depression. Once I decided that I wanted to use this collection for my thesis, I visited Special Collections in person to view the John J. O'Connor Collection in 2014. I visited Special Collections a few times each semester to read through the scrapbooks and photocopy the sources that would help support my thesis. When I was not able to view the scrapbooks in person, I accessed them online at numerous times through Chapman's Digital Commons website. This convenient resource also enabled me to download the digitized scrapbooks to have access to them whenever I desired.

Throughout my research, I also met with the Special Collections and Archives librarian, Rand Boyd. He gave me valuable advice and showed me where to find collections and databases for my research, including the La Guardia Papers, ProQuest Congressional, and U.S. Election Statistics from the Library of Congress. I also attended an instruction session conducted by Rand Boyd on how to effectively utilize newspaper databases. The *New York Times* Historical and the *Wall Street Journal* Historical databases were extremely helpful in terms of obtaining primary source material. In fact, I discovered my title, "The Good of the Country Rises Above Party," by looking through *New York Times* articles covering the 1938 elections. To narrow down my sources, I specified a date range to ensure that I would only use articles written during the 1930's. I also used quotation marks around certain phrases or people in my search to guarantee that only relevant sources would be included.

I also utilized the library's general online databases, including EBSCOhost, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, and ProQuest Congressional by locating them on the library's homepage under the general databases section. ProQuest Congressional proved to be the most helpful database for my research because it allowed me to access Congressional debates, hearings, and legislation regarding O'Connor and the Works Progress Administration. I also used the History LibGuide to look for additional useful databases, including the Historical Statistics of the United States and the Famous Historical Speeches databases. Also on the History LibGuide was the Citation/Style Guide for Chicago Manual of Style. Through this guide, I followed specific guidelines for the quotations and citations in my thesis.

One of the most valuable services that the library provides is the Interlibrary Loan. I requested sources through ILLiad and was able to obtain Mayor La Guardia's *Community Improvement Appraisal*, a primary source written by La Guardia himself, and Richard Polenberg's "Franklin Roosevelt and the Purge of John O'Connor," one of the only secondary sources written about Congressman John O'Connor. Additionally, I checked out a substantial number of books at the Leatherby Libraries pertaining to the New Deal, Franklin Roosevelt, Fiorello La Guardia, and the WPA. I used the Discover tab and library catalog tab on the library's website to look up secondary sources. Secondary sources were vital in laying the foundation of my research because they provided me with the critical background information I needed in order to analyze my primary sources more effectively. In these secondary sources, I also referred to the author's footnotes and bibliography to lead me to additional primary source material. Because I used these books in various ways, I often accessed my library account online to renew them for extensive periods of time.

Last, I completed research at the National Archives and Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. and Maryland. As a recipient of an Office of Undergraduate Research grant at Chapman, I was able to travel to Washington, D.C. for ten days to collect primary source material for my thesis. I collected letter correspondence between the three political officials,

New York City newspaper articles, WPA government documents, and speech transcripts. I used the National Archives and Library of Congress catalogs and finding aids to request sources relevant to my thesis, including the Records of the WPA from and the Records of the House Committee on Rules.

Throughout my research, I discovered easy and quick ways to maximize my research opportunities. I was able to not only acquire more patience for the research process, but also be exposed to legislation and government documents. I learned how to balance different arguments and utilize various pieces of evidence in order to construct my own thesis. These skills will be crucial when I continue my education and research in law school.

### 3. Summary and Bibliography Instructions

Please provide a 250-500 word abstract of your paper/project along with a complete works cited list, reference list, or bibliography in APA, MLA, Chicago, or other recognized style. Do not submit your entire paper!

#### Summary and Bibliography:

On May 6, 1935, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 7034 to create and appropriate federal funds for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during the Great Depression. This work relief agency had two major purposes: “to operate a nationwide program of “small useful projects” designed to provide employment for needy employable workers and to coordinate the activities of the ‘Work Program.’” The WPA introduced a new and hopeful era of governance. It initiated a government that was committed to serving the people and alleviating their dire conditions. However, in the struggle to implement this agency, public officials faced severe challenges that pushed them to adopt unconventional methods to help their constituencies.

Roosevelt, along with the Republican mayor of New York City, Fiorello La Guardia, worked together despite their different political party affiliations. These public servants utilized their personal and political relationship to institute New Deal programs in New York City. However, New York Congressman John O’Connor, a member of Roosevelt’s own party, did not participate in this political cooperation. Instead, O’Connor obstructed New Deal initiatives, particularly the WPA, and often worked passionately against the President and the other New Dealers. With Roosevelt and La Guardia working across party lines and government levels, and O’Connor ardently opposed to their efforts, the WPA endured a political seesaw. Despite the dominating party polarization over the New Deal during the Great Depression, the alliance between Roosevelt and La Guardia against O’Connor over the WPA in New York City was exceptional because it demonstrated an instance in which ideology triumphed over party.

This federal program inaugurated a different era of politics – one that allowed a liberal Democratic President and liberal Republican mayor from different parties and levels of government to enact widespread changes for the American people, while altogether marginalizing a conservative Democratic Congressman. La Guardia and Roosevelt were passionate in their support of the WPA, but O'Connor was also passionate in his opposition. Ideology rather than party played a major role in the political decisions and policymaking of these particular public servants. The argument over work relief in New York City demonstrated the emergence of a Democratic conservative faction and the reality of bipartisan cooperation during the Great Depression. In a telling declaration at a national press conference in 1938, Roosevelt proclaimed that “the good of the country rises above party.”

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