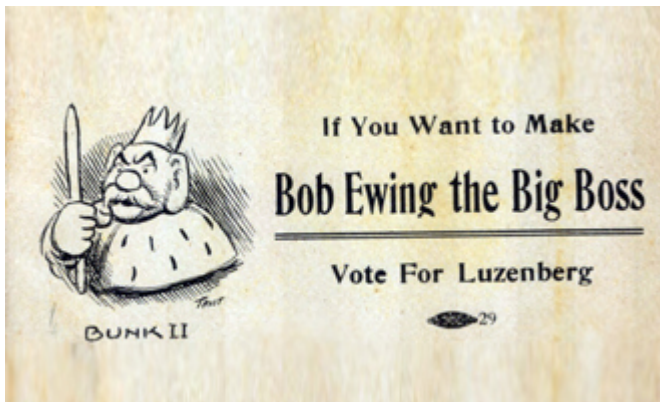


The Trivia and Treasure of Political Zeitgeist

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Amid the bustle and bluster of any election, below all the prognostication and punditry typically preserved in memories and textbooks, lies an immense and often untapped wellspring of unintentionally rich historical record: the collection of brochures, flyers, stickers and campaign literature referred to en masse as political ephemera.



This negative political ad from 1912 denigrates Bob Ewing, a journalist who worked to organize the Choctaw Club, an organization that exerted political influence in New Orleans at the turn of the 20th century. It is one of the pieces in the political ephemera collection of the Louisiana Research Collection at Tulane University.

For Leon Miller, head of the Louisiana Research Collection, whose responsibility it is to capture and preserve the scholarly potential of this often overlooked resource, each component within Tulane's own newly digitized Louisiana political ephemera collection, dating from 1860 to 1920, is a gold mine of useful or relevant data.

"Campaign literature contains a surprising wealth of information," says Miller, noting that anything from everyday political issues of the day to an image of a candidate can be gleaned from the seemingly trivial items. Ephemera can provide details on

the candidate's sex, race, age, family status, social status, occupation and religion, as well as the general style of rhetoric and zeitgeist of the political moment.

In the interests of further enhancing the utility of the political ephemera collection, the Louisiana Research Collection recently completed digitizing older items through 1920, a feat Miller described as “very unusual,” and a significant step forward. The process consisted of uploading high-resolution images of each political flyer or brochure, packaged with contextual and identifying information known as metadata, to a freely accessible [online location](#).

Political items from 1920 to present day are available in the department's offices in Jones Hall. Miller emphasizes that in order to keep the collection current — from a chronological as well as technological perspective — archivists must rely on people hanging on to political flyers they may pick up or receive in the mail.

“We try to pick up every Louisiana politician's campaign card or brochure, and encourage people to do the same and donate them to us,” says Miller. “It's a constant, ongoing activity.”

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