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# Bronson Cutting and the Early Years of the American Legion in New Mexico

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RICHARD LOWITT

It was Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., charged by a group meeting in Paris in February and March 1919 to return home and launch a veterans' organization, who involved Bronson Cutting in the American Legion. He asked Cutting to assist in identifying possible New Mexico delegates for a caucus to be held in St. Louis. Cutting wired Roosevelt the names of forty men representing all branches of the armed forces. From this list two names, those of Lieutenant Colonel Charles M. de Bremond of Roswell and Private Canuto Trujillo of Chimayo, were selected by the national organization and included in the formal call issued by the temporary national committee.

Roosevelt then requested that a temporary secretary and a temporary central committee be selected in New Mexico and that a state caucus elect delegates for the St. Louis meeting. In late April in Albuquerque, delegates from throughout the state selected twelve veterans, ten of whom attended, to represent the state at the St. Louis caucus. Thus when Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., on the morning of May 8, 1919 called the caucus of the American Legion to order in the packed Shubert-Jefferson Theater at St. Louis, Bronson Cutting was participating in the general pandemonium.

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Bronson Cutting. Photo by T. Harmon Parkhurst, courtesy of the Museum of New Mexico, negative number 51494.

The New Mexico delegation, though small, was neither inactive nor inconspicuous. Cutting, recently discharged as Captain in Military Intelligence, held the second highest rank among the ten delegates, four of whom had Hispanic surnames. One of their number, a former Seaman First Class, was elected second vice chairman to serve until the first national convention scheduled for Minneapolis convened in November, 1919. Minneapolis received the bid when Chicago was eliminated from consideration because its newly elected mayor, William Hale Thompson, was considered too pro-German after having boasted that Chicago was the largest German city in the world except Berlin.<sup>1</sup>

When the first annual convention of the American Legion of New Mexico was held in the Armory Building in Albuquerque in October 1919, New Mexico had been a state less than eight years. The pattern and structure of the "chaotic factionalism" (Kenneth Owens's term) or "politics of disunity" (Howard Lamar's term) that prevailed throughout the territorial period (1850–1912), longest for any state, was still evident.<sup>2</sup> The state was sparsely populated (360,350 people in 1920) and several of the last territorial political leaders were still active. Much of the state's wealth was controlled by a handful of individuals, Hispanic and Anglo, and by corporations. Two cultures and two religions, leaving aside the Native Americans, helped complicate the political mix. And the unravelling of land grants, some going back to the sixteenth century, brought an unduly large number of lawyers to the territory in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Communities were widely dispersed, and only Albuquerque, with a population of 11,020 in 1910, had any pretense of being a city. Most communities were isolated, and some in the northern counties were not markedly different from what they had been when New Mexico became part of the United States following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. While a social and political infra-structure was in place, it was heavily faction-ridden, poorly funded, and largely unable to sustain the needs of its people. The economy was extractive, exploitative of the state's abundant natural resources, and politics was concerned in many instances in furthering such endeavors, while entrepreneurs all too often sought rapid development through governmental favors.

Though not as outrageous as when "the Santa Fe Ring" dominated

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1. "American Legion: Department of New Mexico, Report of the Department Historian: April 1919 to August 1920," copy in box 5, Bronson Murray Cutting Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

2. Alaska achieved full territorial status in 1912; Hawaii became an unincorporated territory in 1900. Both entered the Union in 1959.

public policy, remnants of the "old gang" continued to seek political power for control of natural resources and for privileges. Factionalism within the Republican party had become so contentious that the Democrats were able to elect the first two governors and Woodrow Wilson, likewise, won the state in 1912 and 1916. The third governor, Washington E. Lindsey, an independent Republican, was elevated to the post following the death of the second governor, Ezequiel de Baca, shortly after entering office. Lindsey was unable to secure his party's nomination in 1918, however, and it went to another independent Republican, a former Democrat and a Hispanic, who won the election and who, before the end of his term was thoroughly disillusioned with the faction-ridden groups within his party. By 1920 ethnic and class divisions had become important factors in New Mexico politics.

It was the large and largely illiterate native Hispanic population that added a distinctly unique dimension to life in New Mexico. U.S. citizens since 1848, most New Mexicans lived in rural isolation and found meaning in their lives through their church and family, and through the *patrons* who assisted them when they were in need and who saw that they voted as they should. In a pastoral economy unable to offer adequate educational or material opportunities for advancement, vast numbers of native-born Hispanic New Mexicans had been entombed in a tradition of poverty for generations. The English language, new codes of competition ushered in by the railroad, mining corporations, large cattle ranches, dry-farming homesteaders, assorted land grabbers, and federal guidelines all were slowly impinging upon the isolation of native-born Hispanic New Mexicans, who in 1916 constituted, according to then Senator Albert B. Fall, a slight majority of the voting population.<sup>3</sup> While such forces were diminishing traditional Hispanic culture by the time New Mexico entered the Union in 1912, they had not become dominant by the end of the first world war.

Sixty percent of the New Mexicans volunteering for military service during the first world war were of Spanish descent. Many could not speak English. Despite this handicap the state had so many volunteers that it was unable to fill its draft quotas completely. Those Hispanic veterans who joined the American Legion would never again become totally engulfed in the restricted world from whence they came. Service in the armed forces had brought them in contact with the modern world; joining the American Legion kept them in contact with portions of it and made them aware of aspects of the New Mexico scene that

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3. Albert B. Fall to Thomas F. Cole, September 19, 1916, box 16, Albert B. Fall Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

never previously concerned them. A traditional prescribed view of the world and their place in it, already in the process of being fractured, could now be shattered.<sup>4</sup>

Bronson Cutting in his role as a prominent figure in the New Mexico American Legion served as a catalyst in this process. Like numerous other Anglos, he arrived in New Mexico in 1910 as a "lunger," a victim of tuberculosis seeking to regain his health. Unlike most other health seekers, thanks to family wealth he was able to purchase in 1912 the Santa Fe *New Mexican*, the state's oldest newspaper, and become involved in public life. Prior to entering military service he was involved in litigation stemming from charges published in his paper that implicated prominent Republican political figures. In addition, he had played a prominent role in Progressive Party politics since 1912, becoming state chairman in 1914. His activities in the American Legion would keep him a prominent public figure and would contribute to continued chaotic factionalism and disharmony in New Mexico politics.

In 1916, following the critical election in which New Mexico again cast its electoral vote for Woodrow Wilson, Cutting attempted to explain New Mexico to Theodore Roosevelt in a penetrating letter and in doing so, gave some indication of why he would later play the role he did in the American Legion. "The fundamental fact about New Mexico," he explained, "is that it is not an American community at all." Conditions in the state, he told the former Rough Rider, were more feudal than they were Latin, analogous, for example, to "medieval Portugal or modern Nicaragua." While the great mass of native New Mexicans, comprising more than half the voters, had been "systematically robbed, degraded and corrupted by the Republican ring," Cutting believed "the best type of native New Mexican has no superior anywhere" and that the only way to make New Mexico an American state was to eliminate all remnants of the Republican ring, an opportunity the American Legion would provide several years later.<sup>5</sup>

In 1919 Cutting was thirty-one years old, a bit older than most who joined the organization and still concerned about his health. He found that he enjoyed the camaraderie and fellowship the American Legion provided in bridging class and ethnic lines, something to which his privileged and sheltered previous experience had not exposed him.

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4. George I. Sanchez, *Forgotten People* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1940), 26. James Baca, New Mexico's Adjutant General, commented on the difficulty with English among Hispanic soldiers, James Baca to Newton D. Baker, October 5, 1917, box 14, Fall Papers.

5. Bronson Cutting to Theodore Roosevelt, November 17, 1916, box 3, Cutting Papers.

To be sure, he had served as a leader of the Progressive Party but he had spent most of his time in Santa Fe. And his military service was spent operating out of the American embassy in London, an assignment that called for meeting with his counterparts in British military intelligence. Through the American Legion Cutting gained a wide range of friends and acquaintances who would serve him well when he sought public office.

At the outset, however, Cutting's involvement with the American Legion centered about organizing local posts. Less than a week after the St. Louis meeting, Cutting wrote the acting secretary of the New Mexico organization: "We made such a big show at St. Louis that I don't want to fall down over enrolled membership. We have a hard state to start posts in, particularly in the Northern counties." What was needed was a "real hustler" who could speak Spanish, be "keen on the whole proposition," and whose honesty must be beyond question, since that person might have to handle money at some of the posts. Cutting had such a person in mind and was willing to "stand for the expenses" involved. A willingness to organize American Legion posts and shoulder some of the expenses was a major preoccupation with Cutting throughout his involvement with the organization.<sup>6</sup>

At the St. Louis meeting, in which Cutting served as chairman of the New Mexico delegation, he and the son of New Mexico governor Octaviano A. Larrazolo, Jr., were elected permanent executive committee members for New Mexico, though neither was elected to office at the first state convention in October. At that meeting a constitution was adopted and, after extended debate, the delegates selected Santa Fe over Albuquerque as the site for their state headquarters. The state chairman, a former lieutenant colonel who had been gassed during the war, appointed Cutting vice chairman and resigned his post shortly thereafter. In addition to filling out the chairman's unexpired term, Cutting served the national American Legion as organizer for Zone Ten, comprising New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, and Oklahoma. His assignment was to provide speakers for posts throughout these states when asked to do so. As acting state chairman, Cutting was determined that New Mexico "get busy at once with the foundation of Posts in all

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6. Bronson Cutting to Miguel Antonio Otero, Jr., May 16, 1919, box 13, Cutting Papers. For a report on the progress of Donald Blevins in organizing American Legion posts see Otero to Bronson Cutting, June 2, 1919, box 4, Cutting Papers. For a discussion of organizational efforts in Roswell and eastern New Mexico, see Fred B. Humphries to Bronson Cutting, May 29, 1919, and Dillard Wyatt to Bronson Cutting, June 10, 1919, box 4, Cutting Papers.

possible parts of the state" and that it send "a representative delegation" to the Minneapolis convention.

During the St. Louis caucus a resolution was introduced "asking the Federal Government to turn over to the Western States the public lands held in the arid sections of the country." Although supported by delegates from New Mexico and other western states, the resolution failed because a majority held that "all controversial matters and specific resolutions" be postponed until the Minneapolis meeting in November. Since the governor of New Mexico and the chairman of the State Council of Defense had sent him telegrams endorsing the resolution, Cutting thought that if the governors of all the western states urged the matter upon their state delegates, it could be adopted at the Minneapolis convention.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, if the national organization was not yet ready to consider resolutions affecting national concerns, perhaps Congress would. With this end in view, Cutting endorsed compulsory military training as a program that would insure preparedness and benefit the nation's youth. Though preparedness made no headway, three years later Cutting's belated interest in another issue, that of pensions, drew him more directly into the maelstrom of New Mexico politics.<sup>8</sup>

In 1919, however, the organization was just getting underway. Its first commander, Herman Baca, relied heavily on Cutting, a fellow member of the executive committee. Writing Cutting in November, 1919, Baca said, "Don't fail to tell me what's right and what's wrong, remember you're the Doctor as far as I am concerned and I always take your good word." All was not work for the young veterans, however, and Cutting got drunk with fellow delegates at conventions. Nevertheless, he maintained an active interest in Legion affairs by endorsing, for example, resolutions adopted by the 1919 state convention favoring land settlement for New Mexico veterans. The legislature responded with a land settlement bill but did not provide adequate funding and tied its endorsement to a measure pending in the Congress that was never approved. The chief political concern of the New Mexico American Legion did not deviate early on from its focus on a meaningful soldiers' settlement measure. Cutting made this point clear when, at a May 1920 meeting of the national executive committee in Washington,

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7. Bronson Cutting to Octaviano A. Larrazolo, Jr., May 16, 1919, box 13, Cutting Papers. Cutting served as acting chairman until October 1919 when the first state convention meeting in Albuquerque selected Herman G. Baca as Commander.

8. Benigno C. Hernandez to Bronson Cutting, October 20, 1919, box 17, Cutting Papers. Hernandez was New Mexico's Congressional Representative.



he insisted that New Mexico was more interested in effective land settlement and home aid measures than in cash payments to veterans in the form of bonuses.<sup>9</sup>

Bonus legislation apparently was not an immediate concern of the national organization. The Minneapolis convention refused to make any demands on Congress, and the New Mexico executive committee, following the decision of the Albuquerque Convention, went on record against bonuses. A land settlement measure was their primary legislative concern, though Cutting personally believed a vocational training provision would be a valuable additional feature. While the Legion lobbied for legislation in Santa Fe and members of local posts endorsed candidates, the organization's national charter prohibited the Legion from entering the political arena directly. In New Mexico this issue came to the fore in 1920 when it became known that Herman Baca, Legion department commander, was a candidate for mayor of Belen on a citizens ticket. Cutting tried to play down the incident, claiming that "all Baca did was to allow the use of his name in what amounted merely to a protest against local conditions in the town." What troubled Cutting was that the national charter provided that a Legion officer should not be a candidate for "a salaried elective office," which implied that he might seek non-salaried posts such as chairman or secretary of political committees. He would have preferred a provision stating that Legion officers "should not be conspicuous in partisan politics," thereby leaving it to the veteran's conscience how to live up to the obligation.<sup>10</sup>

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9. For a discussion of state affairs, see Herman G. Baca to Bronson Cutting, February 4 and February 27, 1920, box 5, Cutting Papers. For an analysis of the Soldiers Settlement Bill enacted by the state legislature, see Otero to Bronson Cutting, March 1, 1920, box 5, Cutting Papers. Frank E. Samuel to Jonathan R. Cunningham, May 19, 1939, American Legion Archives, Indianapolis, Indiana. Frank E. Samuel was National Adjutant; Jonathan R. Cunningham was a graduate student at the University of New Mexico seeking a master's degree in political science. Jefferson D. Atwood, a member of the Legion's national executive committee with Cutting, tried to get the committee to include an amendment offering veterans "the option of purchasing public land and receiving credit on same for their period of service" in the soldier relief measure submitted to Congress. See Jefferson D. Atwood to Herman G. Baca, April 2, 1920, copy in box 13, Cutting Papers. For an indication of drinking habits among New Mexico delegates at Minneapolis, see Roy H. Flamm to Bronson Cutting, August 9, 1920, box 5, Cutting Papers. (The 18th Amendment to the Constitution, though ratified on January 29, 1919, did not go into effect until a year later.) Cutting provided the liquor consumed by the delegates and one member appeared drunk on the convention floor, made "an ass of himself before the convention," and embarrassed his fellow delegates.

10. Bronson Cutting to Atwood, March 17, 1920, box 13, Cutting Papers; Bronson Cutting to Wyatt, n.d. [1920], box 5, Cutting Papers. The mayor's post that Herman G.

It should be emphasized, however, that a major concern of the Legion in its first year was increasing membership and establishing posts throughout the state. Prizes of one hundred dollars and fifty dollars were awarded to Valencia and McKinley counties for enrolling the largest percentage of their ex-servicemen. Organization was no easy task given the great distances involved, lack of adequate finances, scattered population, absence of accurate lists or records, and inability to reach many veterans by mail or telegraph. Thanks to the efforts of Cutting and one or two others, financial support was secured. In addition, Lansing B. Bloom, secretary of the historical service of the state council of defense, rendered great assistance in furnishing names of ex-servicemen. The funds and names enabled the organizing secretary to better carry out his difficult assignment of helping to found thirty-nine of the fifty-one American Legion posts in New Mexico noted in the first annual report of the department prepared in August 1920. At that time there were 2,557 American Legion members in the state, which ranked sixth in the nation among those states subscribing their quota of new members within the time frame set by the national executive committee.<sup>11</sup>

At the outset the Legion was drawn into New Mexico political affairs not because of any direct action on the part of Cutting or the Legion, but rather because of accusations leveled by the controversial editor of the *New Mexico State Tribune*. Carl C. Magee severely censured the proceedings of the Legion's 1920 annual meeting. Magee charged that Cutting controlled the election of officers "by reason of spending his money to round up and bring in from over the state enough of the men he OWNS to have a majority." Similar charges had bedeviled Cutting since he arrived in New Mexico in 1910 and would continue to haunt him the remainder of his life. Magee had a long record of maligning public figures in the state and in a fracas with a former judge in 1925 accidentally shot and killed an innocent bystander. In maligning

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Baca sought on a non-partisan ticket carried no salary. Baca did not win the race. Through an August 1920 editorial in the Santa Fe *New Mexican*, Cutting criticized the Democrats for giving ex-servicemen only one place on their ticket, the lone example that I found of his indicating in a partisan way a possible Legion concern in 1920. See Bronson Cutting to Atwood, August 29, 1920, copy in box 5, Cutting Papers.

11. Report of the Legion historian, April 1919 to August 1920, copy in box 5, Cutting Papers. For a state breakdown of American Legion membership by five-year periods, see Richard Seelye Jones, *A History of the American Legion* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1946), 345. Following the first state convention in October 1919, an executive committee member claimed 2,500 dues-paying members and that "within two months we are positive that our own membership will reach 3,500 to 4,000." See Edward L. Safford to Fall, October 28, 1919, box 13, Fall Papers.

Cutting, however, Magee struck out. Several Legion posts condemned Magee, and Cutting, after a meeting of the state committee early in 1921, reported that he was "greatly pleased and rather surprised to find that the intense political propaganda against me carried no weight in that quarter. . . ." <sup>12</sup>

These charges are not meant to suggest that Cutting, a member of the executive committee, was losing influence in the Legion. The newly elected department commander, like his predecessor, continued to seek Cutting's advice. And as chairman of the Americanism committee, Cutting took a strong stand against a uniform measure proposed by the American Legion that called for instruction in the public schools of every state to be in the English language. Cutting noted its inapplicability to New Mexico where a majority of the people spoke Spanish and where a teacher "equipped with only English was unable to teach English—or anything else." Progress occurred because instruction was offered in Spanish, and English was taught "by people who understood the native language of their pupils." As a result, Cutting argued, the goal of the Legion's Americanization program—the "spread of American ideas and patriotism"—was being furthered in New Mexico. For the present, however, Cutting insisted that "Spanish is still the only possible vehicle by which English can be brought to the people." <sup>13</sup>

Moreover, Cutting insisted that the reasons impelling the American Legion to call for an Americanization program were not meaningful to New Mexico. "We have no anti-American propaganda, no Bolshevism, no I.W.W., no disloyalty, and no organized group of foreign born inhabitants." As for Spanish-speaking natives of New Mexico, citizens "for more than seventy years," despite their difficulties in learning English, there was no more loyal or patriotic group in any state. At least half of the most active Legion members in the state were Hispanic and, Cutting added, "the best war records made by men from this state were made by the same element." <sup>14</sup>

Inevitably and inexorably, however, the Legion was drawn into

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12. Copy of "Resolutions of Condemnation," n.d., prepared by members of Pantalion Madrid Post No. 36, and Bronson Cutting to Olivia Murray Cutting, January 24, 1921, box 5, Cutting Papers.

13. J. W. Chapman to Bronson Cutting, January 20, 1921, box 5, Cutting Papers. Bronson Cutting to Henry J. Ryan, May 6, 1921, box 13, Cutting Papers. Edwin K. Errett remarked that Cutting was regarded as the "daddy of the New Mexico Legion," see Edwin K. Errett to Bronson Cutting, March 27, 1920, box 13, Cutting Papers.

14. Bronson Cutting to Henry J. Ryan, May 6, 1921, box 13, Cutting Papers. That some individuals hoped to use the Legion to pursue "slackers" and draft dodgers is evident from the anonymous letter titled "To the Members of the American Legion," copy in box 5, Cutting Papers.

state politics. By the end of 1921, the New Mexico Legion followed the national organization in giving up its call for a land settlement bill and supported proposals for adjusted compensation or a bonus for veterans. The fact that the state's senior U.S. senator, Andrieus A. Jones, author of an adjusted compensation bill, was concluding his first term meant that veterans most likely would be involved in his reelection campaign. And Jones, of course, was eager for their support and wrote Cutting in August 1921 expressing appreciation for the attention given a speech he delivered on the Adjusted Compensation Bill in the *New Mexican*.<sup>15</sup>

But all was placid until fall 1922. Prior to that time Cutting, now serving a term as commander of the Montoya Post in Santa Fe and continuing member of the state executive committee, was more involved with Legion affairs than with state politics. In 1922 the New Mexico American Legion revised its constitution to conform to that of the national organization and to give small posts better voting strength to prevent the domination of a convention by any one large post. Cutting assisted with drafting the new charter and thus was party to innumerable and seemingly endless discussions lasting until the state convention adopted the document.<sup>16</sup>

By October the Legion and Cutting were deeply involved in state political campaigns. A form letter, either in English or Spanish, went to every ex-serviceman in New Mexico endorsing Senator Jones as one who "has fought for us and can be counted upon to do it again." Although the bulk of the letter was devoted to endorsing Jones, a Democrat, two other candidates, Hilario Delgado, a Republican ex-serviceman and a Hispanic, and M. J. Helmick, a Democratic ex-serviceman and an Anglo, also were endorsed. The letter concluded, "Forget the party labels, comrades! Vote for the Man!" Although the letter in English was signed by E. B. Healy and the one in Spanish by Jose G. Rivera, both letters expressed the non-partisan fusion view that characterized Cutting's approach to politics. There is reason to believe Cutting helped draft both form letters, which were mailed to "more than 14,300 ex-servicemen." Moreover, it was Cutting who assumed responsibility for furthering the cause of Senator Jones among veterans.<sup>17</sup>

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15. Andrieus A. Jones to Bronson Cutting, August 27, 1921, box 5, Cutting Papers.

16. Ed L. Tafoya to Mrs. W. Bayard Cutting, copy of telegram, December 7, 1921, and Bronson Cutting to Edgar F. Puryear, July 6, 1922, box 5, Cutting Papers.

17. Copies of letters titled "To the Ex-Service Men and Women of New Mexico: Santa Fe, N.M., October 9, 1922" and "A Los Exsoldados de Nuevo Mexico, Santa Fe, N.M.,

To win an election in New Mexico four things were necessary: organization; dissemination of arguments in both Spanish and English; protection of voters at the polls; and prevention of actual fraud. Accomplishing these goals required funding, and this Cutting was able to provide. In effect, it could be said that Cutting managed Jones's reelection campaign. He wired Washington for Jones's complete voting record, provided information to veterans speaking on Jones's behalf, requested that ex-servicemen serve as poll-watchers on election day and insisted that each veteran, after visiting a precinct, file a report giving local organization plans and names of promised workers. Cutting supervised mailing of form letters and kept abreast of editorial opinion, noting the letters' impact and the controversy they engendered when endorsing Jones. He carefully read letters from veterans relating to their efforts on behalf of the senator. In addition, Cutting provided funds to campaign workers, at least one of whom intended to use some of the money to pay "the right man to do some pre-election work for Jones" in Republican precincts in his community. By the end of the campaign Cutting had in place a political machine that conceivably could hold the balance of power in the state. His was a personal campaign, rather than one conducted through a general organization. It was expensive, but it was also effective, and it was made more so by a powerful ally that Cutting controlled: his newspaper, the *Santa Fe New Mexican*.<sup>18</sup>

When the results were tallied, Jones had a majority of 12,248 votes,<sup>19</sup> the largest ever accorded any candidate to that time. Moreover, Jones's majority helped elect the entire Democratic ticket. Cutting believed that at least five thousand Republican veterans voted the straight Democratic ticket to make sure that their votes for Jones would not be discounted. Both Jones and Governor-elect James F. Hinkle appreciated Cutting's efforts. So grateful were they that several days after the election, Cutting was offered the Democratic state chairmanship. Though

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October 14, 1922," and Melvin R. Chapin to Bronson Cutting, October 23, 1922, box 5, Cutting Papers.

18. Puryear to Bronson Cutting, October 12, 1922, Bronson Cutting to Puryear, October 17, 1922, Herman Lindauer to Bronson Cutting, October 21, 1922, Joseph W. Hodges to Bronson Cutting, October 17, 1922, Holmer Holmes to Bronson Cutting, October 29, 1922, box 5, Cutting Papers. A report prepared for Andrieus A. Jones after his reelection concluded that the role of ex-servicemen, supervised by Bronson Cutting, was "the most important, if not the deciding factor of the campaign." A copy of the report can be found in box 5, Cutting Papers.

19. Jones received 60,969 votes to 48,721 votes for S. B. Davis, Jr. A canvass of the election returns can be found in the *Official Manual or Blue Book of the State of New Mexico, 1923-24*, issued by Mrs. Soledad Chacon, Secretary of State, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

he declined the offer, Cutting was tempted because the Democratic Party was "so thoroughly disorganized that it would be easy to take it over and control it for a good many years, whereas there will never be any chance of breaking into the Republican ring with any decent element." Rather than play a direct role in the Democratic Party, Cutting's immediate concern was to see that the new governor appoint worthy individuals, including veterans, to public office. With the election over, Cutting shifted attention from Jones, who was "most sincerely grateful" for the support extended him, to Hinkle, in whom Cutting had shown little interest in the recently concluded campaign.<sup>20</sup>

By 1923 Cutting had emerged as an individual to be reckoned with in New Mexico politics. This is not to say he was an unknown figure previously. Almost since his arrival in New Mexico at the end of the territorial period he had been known. His wealth, his ownership of the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, and his role in endorsing the Progressive cause made him a prominent public figure. In addition, for several years prior to his emergence as a central figure in the American Legion, Cutting and his newspaper associates had been involved in litigation which they believed challenged their first amendment rights and which their opposition called character defamation. Begun in 1916, the litigation finally was resolved to Cutting's satisfaction in 1919. In short, while a known figure, Cutting had exerted little direct influence on the course of public life in New Mexico.<sup>21</sup>

Though Cutting emerged after the 1922 election as one of the more significant political figures in New Mexico, he held no prominent public office until his appointment to the U.S. Senate in December 1927. Still he played an advisory role, first in the Hinkle administration and then in that of his successor, Arthur T. Hannett, also a Democrat. After he broke with Hannett, he enjoyed the confidence of Republican Governor Richard C. Dillon, who appointed him to the Senate upon the death of Andrieus A. Jones, the individual who launched Cutting's political career through the American Legion.<sup>22</sup>

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20. Bronson Cutting to Olivia Murray Cutting, November 18, 1922, box 5, Cutting Papers.

21. Harry P. Jeffrey, "New Mexico's Dreyfus Affair: Bronson Cutting and the Freedom of the Press Cases," paper presented at the 19th Annual Meeting of the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association, August 14, 1986. Harry P. Jeffrey kindly provided a copy of this paper to the author.

22. Governor Arthur T. Hannett appointed Cutting a member of the State Penitentiary Board but when disagreement with Hannett developed over Cutting's reform efforts Cutting shifted his support to Hannett's opponent in the 1926 gubernatorial campaign.

Several patterns emerge pertaining to Cutting's role in the American Legion by 1923. First, true to his background, he was not seeking power primarily to further or advance his own career. His concern was to encourage and promote social change. But, as his father and uncle learned previously in New York City, before that could occur, reforms were imperative, such as electing governors who would appoint qualified individuals to the various boards, commissions, and agencies administering the state. Individuals, more than partisan political organizations, were basic to reform in Cutting's view.<sup>23</sup>

A second point is that the New Mexico American Legion allowed Hispanic veterans to enter the political process on an equal footing with other veterans, with few if any ties to a patron or boss, and without needing to abandon their more traditional familial-community base. By playing active roles in all phases of Legion activities, Spanish-speaking veterans began to overcome rural isolation and traditional ways of life that had kept them apart previously. Thus, the American Legion helped provide Spanish-speaking veterans with a greater sense of group identity and personal worth. Whereas their religion, language and ethnicity were responsible for their sense of identity and personal worth, their role in the American Legion helped them gain meaningful recognition in the state in a way never experienced before.

To further this process, Cutting's immediate goal, after helping reelect Senator Jones as a friend of the veteran, was to make sure that qualified Hispanic candidates were not ignored when Governor Hinkle filled appointive offices. In a multi-cultural state with an inadequate educational system, politics characterized by disharmony or chaotic factionalism, and a rural population that was poor and at best semi-literate, Cutting inevitably fell into the role of a don or patron in his efforts to promote the welfare of the state's Hispanic citizenry. His constituency, if that is the correct term, was based not on ties of kinship, county rings, or courthouse machines, but rather on American Legion posts, even though in 1923 Cutting had yet to serve as commander of the New Mexico American Legion. The reason Cutting and the Legion were able to play such prominent roles relates to the New Mexico political structure, with its weak party attachments, which encouraged

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23. Cutting's father, William Bayard Cutting, had been a Civil Service commissioner in the fusion administration of William L. Strong, mayor of New York City, 1895-1899. Cutting's uncle, Robert Fulton Cutting, headed the Charity Organization Society and later the Citizens Union, prominent reform organizations at the turn of the century.

veterans and other voters to cast their ballots on the basis of an identification other than party. An unstable party structure enabled a short-term factor, the American Legion, to play a prominent role in determining voter choices in 1922.

The election of 1922 emerges as the turning point in Cutting's career. What makes that fact so fascinating is that Cutting did not make the decision to support Jones's candidacy in the *New Mexican* and to work through the American Legion on his behalf until the end of September or early October, a little more than a month before the election. Earlier, along with other members of the Independent State Republican Committee, Cutting met with Republican State Chairman O. L. Phillips and other Republican leaders in Albuquerque. The meeting was called at Phillips's invitation prior to either party's nominating convention. After a series of conferences covering a period of several days, Phillips charged that the Independent Republicans had been offered four places on the still-to-be-chosen Democratic ticket and had delayed responding in order to give the regular Republicans an opportunity to present a counter proposal. Cutting and his associates on the Independent [Progressive] Republican state committee, noting that Phillips had initiated the meetings, denied the charges while admitting that they had conferred with the Democrats. The Democratic State chairman likewise denied the charges, which created a furor throughout New Mexico prior to convening the nominating conventions in September.<sup>24</sup>

After turning down the effort of former governor Octaviano Larrazolo to secure renomination the Democrats nominated a slate of political novices. It was Larrazolo's second attempt, having previously failed to secure renomination in 1920. Since Larrazolo, a native of Mexico, had made significant efforts as governor (1918–1920) to further the welfare of Spanish-speaking citizens, Cutting had supported him. Meanwhile, the Republicans had selected what a former territorial governor and prominent Republican said "was not a strong ticket and from the first, faced an uphill and all but hopeless battle." Consequently, Cutting looked at the Democratic ticket, selected in mid-September, and found no Democratic candidates expressing concerns similar to those voiced by Larrazolo. He thought the Republican ticket "as far as

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24. *Albuquerque Herald*, August 22, 1922; *Santa Fe New Mexican*, August 24, 1922; *Raton Range*, August 25, 1922. Cutting's statement is presented in his own newspaper, the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, August 24, 1922. The other newspapers accepted Phillips' version.



personalities the least objectionable they have ever put up," adding that "one might support it on that ground alone." But after pondering the matter, Cutting concluded, "their candidates have not breathed a word on the unspeakable conditions at present existing in the state" and that it would be difficult under these circumstances to support the party that had opposed almost everything progressive Republicans had endorsed. On September 29 Cutting wrote his mother that he had decided to support Jones for reelection. He would participate in the campaign through the American Legion, endorsing Jones as a friend of the veterans, and not get heavily involved in any other way. Less than six weeks before the November 7, 1922, election Cutting made a decision that changed the course of his career in New Mexico and allowed him to emerge as the political figure who sought to provide equal opportunities as well as more equitable services to all citizens in his adopted state. The American Legion provided the vehicle to launch these endeavors.<sup>25</sup>

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25. H. B. Hering, ed., *George Curry 1861-1947: An Autobiography* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1958), 306; Bronson Cutting to Olivia Murray Cutting, September 29, 1922, box 5, Cutting Papers.