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## **UNIT IX Connecticut—Crash to Korea**

Curriculum Unit 81.ch.09  
by Francis Peter Lynch

Time: Variable

World War II provided a second great common experience for those who lived through it. War in Europe was from 1939 until 1945, and America entered the war late in 1941. But Connecticut was affected by war orders from Europe before the first draft calls. One of our senators (Danaher) was strongly isolationist, although a majority of the people did not appear to hold that position. Anyone whose memory goes back to first hand experiences in World War II will have to be past forty, and since it involved so many people, anyone who lived through the period, regardless of age, will have some memories of it.

Ask if any of the students have any World War II artifacts in their houses—helmets, flags, battle ribbons, ration books, or wartime publications. Were any of their parents in the service? (Try to make sure it was the right war.) Military people love to talk about their experiences, and will at almost any opportunity. Those who worked on the home front or who remained at home may have memories which need prodding but which offer glimpses of those who worked in the Connecticut defense plants when they grew into war industries.

1. What kind of things were you doing between 1939 and 1945?
2. Where did you work? What kind of a job was it? What was your company making? What kind of hours did you work? What was it like getting back and forth to work?
3. How did rationing work for you? What things were hardest to buy under rationing? Were there any other shortages of consumer goods? What happened to prices? Did the Office of Price Administration work well? Was there a black market in your neighborhood?
4. Did you take part in Civil Defense drills, or were you an airplane spotter? Did you save cooking fat and toothpaste tubes?
5. What was life like in your neighborhood with so many men gone into the service?
6. Were there any dissenters from the war that you heard about? What did they do? What did people say about them?
7. What was it like where you were on VE Day? On VJ Day?
8. What was your biggest worry for the time after the war?
9. What was it like to find a place to live in Connecticut during and right after the war?
10. What happened to prices and jobs when the war ended?

Findings by the students may be brought together in a class discussion that might fill several class periods. Comparisons can be made with our way of life today, or even during the Viet Nam War. Don't lose the artifacts students will bring in—catalogue them as they arrive.

## ***Connecticut 1945-1950***

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The last months of 1945 were spent making adjustments from a wartime to a peacetime economy in Connecticut—in having the veterans come back home and finding them a place to live. 1946 was a year of great stresses in Connecticut. Prices rose sharply, housing was in desperately short supply, strikes were frequent, but despite all these problems and more, adjustment to peacetime proceeded rapidly. The Serviceman's Readjustment Act, passed by the United States Congress in 1944, commonly called the G.I. Bill of Rights, provided on-the-job training and educational benefits for returning veterans, as well as loan insurance on mortgages. The educational provisions of the G.I. Bill were highly popular in Connecticut and had the effect of taking many veterans out of the full time job market until they finished college. Pent-up consumer demands left over from wartime rationing helped get Connecticut's factories running again. In spite of many problems and strikes in 1946, recovery was rapid after a brief postwar slump. The role of the state government expanded as a veteran's bonus was proposed, and the people looked to the state for help in housing and providing educational facilities and social services, elements which, in 1930, were not considered state government responsibilities on such a scale.

Housing shortages were especially severe in the years immediately after the end of World War II. Little housing had been built during the Depression or the war, yet population of Connecticut increased twenty-five percent between 1930 and 1950. Trailers, prefabricated buildings and other makeshift arrangements were necessary for young couples and returning veterans. The grounds around rapidly expanding state colleges were filled with 'prefabs' being put to various uses. In some cases, landlords used rent gouging practices which led tenants to demand some form of rent protection or state-subsidized housing. In some cases, landlords evicted tenants so they could charge more. Families were separated and eviction cases became a major factor in court cases in Connecticut. <sup>33</sup>

Connecticut rode with the tide of the Republican sweep in the elections of 1946. James McConaughy, President of Wesleyan University, a Republican, won the governorship over Wilbert Snow, an English professor at Wesleyan, and a Democrat. The 1947 session of the General Assembly created a \$15 million fund to guarantee local bonds for housing construction. It also appropriated \$20 million to towns for school construction under a traditional formula for state aid which granted rural communities almost four times as much money per pupil as the larger cities. This session also approved Connecticut's first sales tax, starting at a rate of three percent. Newly elected Democratic State Chairman John M. Bailey, who first won the post in 1946, carried out a carefully calculated criticism of the 1947 Republican General Assembly for providing too little and doing it in a way far too awkward to have positive effects for the people. Bailey's actions upset the Republicans, but shortages of school rooms and housing were no less acute because of Republican inaction and Bailey's attacks. It was there, and the people wished to have it dealt with by state government. <sup>34</sup>

Chester Bowles of Essex, former Director of the federal Office of Price Administration, won the Democratic nomination for Governor in 1948. With the support of John Bailey, Bowles waged a vigorous, fighting campaign, and despite polls which predicted certain disaster, won the governorship by 2225 votes. Bowles was a clear departure from the mold of conservative Connecticut politicians. He advocated immediate action

by the state to build housing for sale and rental, to provide rent subsidies, to expand state teachers colleges (formerly called normal schools) and the University of Connecticut, and to supply greatly increased state help to towns for school construction.

Bowles and the small-town-conservative-Republican General Assembly clashed repeatedly over his program. The Assembly refused to pass the Bowles budget, claiming it would bankrupt the state. During Bowles's term as governor, the last of the two year governor's terms, five special sessions of the General Assembly did produce some action by the state for school construction and human services, but it fell far short of what Bowles felt was necessary. Overall, the protracted wrangling between the progressive Governor and the conservative General Assembly was not productive. <sup>36</sup>

Among much else, Bowles felt that the structure of state government in Connecticut was clumsy and out-of-date. Governmental reforms which Wilbur Cross had won in the 1937 session of the General Assembly were outmoded, and politicians from both parties viewed the state government primarily as a source of jobs for themselves and their friends. Bowles found himself as a Governor with 202 committees for various purposes, with membership overwhelmingly Republican. In 1949, Bowles appointed a Commission of State Government Reorganization to study the structure of the whole state government and make recommendations for making it more efficient. The Commission was chaired by Carter Atkins of Simsbury, head of the Connecticut Public Expenditures Council, and included four Republicans. <sup>37</sup>

The Commission made its report to Bowles in February of 1950. The *Commission Report to the Governor*, usually called the Bowles Report, called for restructuring the General Assembly, Constitutional revisions, a direct primary, reducing the 202 existing commissions to fourteen, with three central service agencies and the Governor's office, as well as many other recommendations which would modernize Connecticut's government structure and put it on a businesslike basis. A special session of the General Assembly was called to discuss and act on the Bowles Report. The Commission's recommendations received strong editorial support around the state and was backed enthusiastically by groups interested in good government. <sup>38</sup>

However, when hearings were called by the General Assembly to receive public comments on the Bowles Report, there were strenuous objections from a wide variety of special interest groups ranging from the insurance industry and education to sportsmen and sheriffs. Each of these many groups insisted that their particular area of interest must be excluded from the proposed reforms and allowed to continue as it had been. This selfish reaction shocked Bowles and the Commission members, but vested interests proved to be overriding. Political power and jobs were at the root of the objections, since modernization and an efficient, business-like approach would eliminate much of the political patronage in state government, and with that, pockets of personal power would disappear.

In the end, most of the Bowles Report was rejected, clearly a defeat for the modernizers of government. Bowles and the Commission members attributed the unexpected result to the reality that they had tried to do too much too soon, not taking into account Connecticut's conservative traditions or human selfish interest intent on protecting what existed. They felt that since their recommendations were sensible and logical, also badly needed, that others must see it that way, too. Their political naivete' brought them down the path of defeat. <sup>39</sup>

When war broke out in Korea in June of 1950, Connecticut was recovering rapidly from a brief economic downturn of 1949. The gubernatorial election of 1950 was between incumbent Chester Bowles and Republican John Lodge of Westport as they competed for Connecticut's first four-year term for Governor, the result of a

Constitutional change. Emotions ran high about Communism in 1950 while Joseph McCarthy campaigned from his base in the United States Senate to expose Communists wherever he thought they were. Bowles had been one of the founders of Americans for a Democratic Action, a strongly liberal national organization frequently attacked by conservatives. Lodge made strong criticisms of Bowles' programs as Governor, calling them incomplete and spendthrift. During the campaign, Lodge also implied that Bowles himself was a dangerous leftist, if not a Communist sympathizer.<sup>40</sup> Lodge thus took advantage of the specter of Communism often raised by Republicans during the 1940s, usually directed against policies and people in the federal government. During most of the 1940s, Communism was a bitter issue in Connecticut, especially among Italian and Polish groups as well as Catholics generally.<sup>41</sup>

John Lodge won the election by 16,000 votes, and proved himself to be much more in the conservative Connecticut tradition than Bowles. The House of the General Assembly was to remain solidly in small-town-Republican control until the great Democratic sweep of 1958. Wilbur Cross was a mild variation from Connecticut's conservative traditions during his time in office, but Cross did play an important part in increasing the role of government in Connecticut life. Chester Bowles was a major variation from tradition during his term in office, an active, driving force for change in the state. Between the comings of Wilbur Cross and the Bowles loss in the 1950 election, Connecticut underwent a major change in the role played by state government and of people's expectations of what a state government ought to do.

In 1950, Connecticut clearly had moved away from its isolation and laissez-faire attitudes of 1930, although many pockets of solid conservatism remained, largely in small towns. Pay-as-you-go policies had been abandoned and bonding was used regularly to fund state purchases of parks, highways, for hospitals, schools, and other capital improvements. In 1951, Connecticut's general bonded indebtedness stood at \$91,386,000. As a point of information, in 1981, the general state debt is approximately \$2,226,550,000.

In 1950, hard surface roads connected all towns with all other towns. Major highways crossed the state, but not yet in a network of limited access high speed roads. There was a television station operating in New Haven and radio stations in almost every city. The four state colleges (no longer called normal schools) and the University of Connecticut (no longer Connecticut Agricultural College) graduated record large classes in 1949 and 1950. Public housing complexes were a reality in most Connecticut cities. There was a basic parity between the two major parties. Jasper McLevy was no longer a power at the state level, but he was still mayor of Bridgeport. The people in 1950 expected that state government would play an active role to help employment, protect workers, maintain a good road system, provide public education through college, buy and maintain parks and beaches, take care of the sick and those who could not help themselves. Government was not something that sat in Hartford doing as little as possible, but an entity which played a major role in roads, police protection, education, and more. Continued expansion in the role of government was to come in succeeding decades.

In 1950, the New Haven Railroad was beginning to slip backward, but it was still a power in Connecticut. Trolley lines were gone, and steamship passenger service was dead. Airports were expanding. For better or worse, Connecticut was in the age of the automobile, television, and jets.

### **LESSON PLAN THREE: A Debate Between John Bailey, Democratic State Chairman, 1950 and J. Henry Roraback, Republican State Chairman, 1930**

Attached are two pages of comments which each of these men might have made about their ideas of government. They lived in very different times, and the character of the state was very different. These men talk about different things, but those things were important to them. It amounts to one man believing in as

little government as possible, the other holding that government must play a vital role. In light of recent changes at the federal level in America, which of these men would be most in favor with the President now?

Items that can be brought in, based on the attitudes shown by these readings:

- a. special education
- b. state run day-care centers
- c. an expansion at the Norwich State Mental Hospital
- d. more state control of the local high school program
- e. a new state beach on Long Island Sound

My name is J. Henry Roraback. I am State Republican Chairman, and have been since 1912. I believe in a good, sound, businesslike government that pays for things as it needs them. Let's have none of this bonding for things like hospitals and highways. Let's pay for them as we use them. Keep taxes down. Keep spending down. When you get a lot of state services they cost a lot of money, and then taxes have to go up, and this hurts the businessman.

You ask me how I felt about women voting. Well, the bad part about that was that since women didn't vote at the time, it was not really a constitutional question. Neither Governor Holcomb nor I were in favor of it because that would upset the political balance. Oh yes, Holcomb called a special session and Connecticut ratified the Nineteenth Amendment, once Tennessee was the thirty-sixth state. Then it was official anyhow, so we had to set up mechanics to make it go.

I know that Connecticut never ratified the Eighteenth Amendment about prohibition. None of our business anyhow. No, I didn't come out for repeal in 1930. Would have made a lot of good folks upset if I did. More important to balance the state budget and keep the size of state government small.

I come from a small town. Small towns are the heart of this state, and we aim to keep control of the House. That way we can keep those city folks in line. They can't get anything past us.

Yes, they say I am a political boss. True enough, I guess. But what is a political leader supposed to do? I want low taxes and just enough government to get by. Farmers don't want a lot of high paid people in Hartford telling them what to do. My electric power company doesn't want the state telling us what to do. We know what is good business, and we want to do it. Yes we needed help from the state for legal rights to water flow so we could build the dams at Stevenson and to flood the area for Candlewood Lake, but that was for the good of the people—and the power company too, of course. What's the matter with that?

Yes, I am a boss, I guess. But I don't go around and make demands and order people around. I just let it be known what I want, and I have enough friends so they let me have my own way most of the time.

Welfare? Let the towns take care of it. Make the agricultural school at Storrs a university? Why? We got Yale, don't we? Build more hard surface roads? What's the matter with trains and trolley cars? Of course I don't want the state to build airports. I know John Trumbull does, but he is a nut on flying so let him worry about it. Let the cities that want them build them.

Candidates? Get good, solid people, Yankees, Republicans. Run an Italian for state office in Connecticut? Maybe, but not now. A Pole? Yes, maybe. Next thing you know you'll want a Catholic for Governor or a Jew in Congress. State's not ready for any of that. It's only 1930. A woman politician? Ha.

My name is John Bailey. I am a lawyer and also the State Democratic Chairman. Managed to last in that job for almost thirty years. Won a lot of elections. No question that I would have a woman run for office. My policy is that the best candidate should run. Have good programs for all the people. Be able to pay for them. Run the best people you have. Win the election. That's the name of the game, isn't it?

Funny you should ask me if women should be allowed to vote. Why not, for heaven's sake? When I make up the state Democratic ticket, I like to have balance—ethnic balance. I like the best people, yes, but there are a lot of good people in every group, so let's have Italians, women, Poles, Jews, agnostics and whatever on the ticket—but only if they are good people.

Is the state government too big? Only if it doesn't serve the people. That's what state government is for. Big is not the thing, and neither is small. Quality is the name of the game. Look at Abe Ribicoff a Jewish Governor of this state, and one of the very best, and those people said it would never happen. Look at Ella—don't think of her as the first woman Governor, think of her as Connecticut's first Italian Governor. Why not?

You say Connecticut ran up some pretty heavy deficits during the 1960s? Yes, we did. There were a lot of services the people of the state wanted in the sixties, and we have to pay for them. We needed hospitals, the state colleges, the community colleges, the University of Connecticut—they had a lot of expansion pressure, so we built. What about Mansfield and Southbury for the retarded? We had to put those kids somewhere. How about the new prisons, the highways?

So taxes went up. They sure did. The state debt went up sky high too, but we got better state aid for town roads, and school buildings. We built the UConn Medical School in Farmington. Those are all things the state had to do. We also have a highway system now, and downtown New Haven and Hartford and Bridgeport have all undergone urban renewal. Nowadays everybody uses a car. Towns just can't control things for themselves anymore. The state government has to step in and do things it never did before. It costs money, it takes people, and each of us has to lose a little freedom so that other people can be protected.

Remember, we have more than fifty percent more people in Connecticut now than we did in 1950. There have been thousands of black people move into Connecticut since 1950, and in the last ten years, thousands of Puerto Ricans have come to Connecticut. We have suburbs now and people live in patterns that nobody expected thirty years ago. Of course the state government has to do more. Independence is another name for hiding your head.

Will government get bigger? Yes. It has to.

## ***Appendix A***

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### SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR INDIVIDUAL INVESTIGATION BY STUDENTS CONNECTICUT 1930 1950

1. Floods along the Connecticut River 1936.

2. Great Hurricane of September 1938.
3. The Circus Fire in Hartford, 1944
4. Harry Truman comes to Connecticut, 1948.
5. Relief and work projects in your town 1933-1940.
6. Bursting of the Greenwoods Dam, 1936.
7. Civilian Conservation Corps or work Projects Administration projects in your town.
8. The poor house (poor farm, city farm) in Connecticut in the 1930s.
9. Roads in your town in 1930 location, surface, condition.
10. Building the charter Oak and/or Gold Star Bridges.
11. What buildings were opened in your town 1930-1950?
12. Hurricane of 1944.
13. Growth of a state teachers college, normal school, or state college 1930 1950.
14. Travel on board one of the Long Island sound steamboats.
15. Riding the trolley around Hartford or New Haven during the 1930s.
16. Franklin Roosevelt visits Connecticut 1936 1940.
17. What was your own town like in 1930 in terms of roads, schools, population, jobs and living conditions?

## ***Appendix B***

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### ***Governors of Connecticut 1930 1950***

John H. Trumbull      Plainville      R 1925-31

Wilbur L. Cross	New Raven	D	1931-39
Raymond E. Baldwin	Stratford	R	1939-41
Robert A. Hurley	Bridgeport	D	1941-43
Raymond E. Baldwin	Stratford	R	1943-46
Wilbert Snow	Middletown	D	1946-47
James L. McConaughy	Cornwall	R	1947-48 died in office
James C. Shannon	Bridgeport	R	1948-49
Chester Bowles	Essex	D	1949-51
<i>Senators from Connecticut Serving in the United States Congress</i>			
Hiram Bingham	New haven	R	1924-33
Frederic C. Walcott	Norfolk	R	1929-35
Augustine Lornegan	Hartford	D	1933-39
Francis T. Maloney	Meriden	D	1935-45 died in office
John A. Danaher	Portland	R	1939-45
Brien McMahon	Norwalk	D	1945-52 died in office
Thomas C. Hart	Sharon	R	1945-46
Raymond E. Baldwin	Stratford	R	1946-49 resigned
Willlam Benton	Fairfield	D	1949-53

## Notes

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1. *Connecticut State Register and Manual* . Hartford: State of Connecticut, 1974. pp. 614-619.
2. Edwin M. Dahill Jr., "Connecticut's J. Henry Roraback." unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1971. pp. 156-158.
3. Ibid., pp. 208-215.
4. *Connecticut State Register and Manual* , 1974. pp. 614-619.
5. Wilbur L. Cross, *Connecticut Yankee: An Autobiography* . New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943. pp. 217-226. Duane Lockard, *New England State Politics* . Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959. pp. 233-241.
6. Dahill, p. 247.
7. Work Projects Administration Papers. Archive Record Group 33, housed in the State Library, Hartford.
8. Newton Brainard, *Report of the Emergency Relief Commission to the Governor, January 1933 December 1934* . pp. 94-96.
9. Ibid., pp. 94-96.
10. Albert E. Van Dusen, *Connecticut* . New York: Random House, 1961. pp. 297-298.
11. Work Projects Administration Papers, Box 33.
12. There are numerous accounts of the floods of 1936 in newspapers and other secondary sources. Many families who went through the floods have scrapbooks and clippings about it. Such an event offers students an opportunity to do their own oral or written research project. This large flood brought demands for better protection, and led to various flood control projects in the state.
13. William E. Leuchtenburg, *Flood Control Politics: The Connecticut River Problem 1927-1950* . Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953. pp. 74-75.



14. Cross, pp. 396-406.
  15. Joseph I. Lieberman, *The Power Broker: A Biography of John M. Bailey, Modern Political Boss*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1966. pp. 60-61.
  16. Van Dusen p. 314. From all sources, Cross appears to have been respected and fondly regarded by members of both parties, even his political enemies. But he lost the election.
  17. Cross, pp. 415-418.
  18. Curtis S. Johnson, *Raymond E. Baldwin: Connecticut Statesman*. Chester, Connecticut: Pequot Press, 1972. pp. 64-66.
  19. *Ibid.*, pp. 67-71. Cross, p. 417.
  20. Cross, pp. 416-419.
  21. Johnson, pp. 108-114.
  22. Chester Bowles, *Promises to Keep: My Years in Public Life 1941-1969*. New York: Harper and Row, 1971. pp. 226-231.
- Various sources agree on the general sequence of events in this unusual resignation. Baldwin claimed that a seat on the Supreme Court of Errors had always been his highest ambition. Family considerations appear to have been a major factor, also. Some state Republicans felt betrayed by Baldwin's resignation, since he had been the party's best vote-getter.
23. John W. Jennings, *Testing the Roosevelt Coalition: Connecticut Society and Politics in the Era of World War Two*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1979. pp. 94-96.
  24. Herbert F. Janick Jr., *A Diverse People: Connecticut 1914 to the Present*. Chester, Connecticut: Pequot Press, 1975. p. 65.
  25. Bowles, pp. 20-25.
  26. Janick, p. 60.
  27. Jennings, pp. 108-111.
  28. *Ibid.*, pp. 98-112.
  29. Janick, pp. 65-66.
  30. Johnson, p. 66.
  31. *Ibid.*, pp. 120-128, 158-177.
  32. Jennings, pp. 206-208.
  33. *Ibid.*, pp. 218-221.
  34. Lieberman, pp. 108-116.
  35. Van Dusen, pp. 380-382; Bowles pp. 176-200.
  36. Van Dusen pp. 384-386.
  37. Bowles, p. 209.
  38. *Ibid.*, pp. 210-212.
  39. *Ibid.*, pp. 212-217.
  40. Van Dusen, pp. 386-388; Bowles, p. 240.
  41. Jennings, pp. 232-250.

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