The political terrain of New Jersey was a landscape unknown to Wilson. In no state of the union did lenient corporate laws attract more “trusts” than in New Jersey, and in no state did boss-controlled political machines, often in alliance with large corporate interests, wield greater power. There were, to be sure, progressives in both parties who had protested the machine–special interest combination since the turn of the century. Most of these progressives, and the best organized ones, were in the Republican party. Known as the “New Idea” men, they were suspicious of Wilson, whose nomination the Democratic bosses had sponsored and secured. That fact also continued to trouble many Democratic progressives. Moreover, the mainline Republican party had dominated state politics since the 1890s. These were hard realities, and the university president would need help in dealing with them.

He would also need help in presenting himself to the press and the public. As one authority on New Jersey’s history observed, “Voters never take to a highbrow, nor admire a theorist, nor do they turn out at the polls to vote for a man whose face and life is unknown to them.” Even some of his erstwhile promoters worried that he was too much identified with concerns apart from or beyond those of the state and too little associated with matters the average Jerseyman deemed important. Wilson would need favorable press publicity to overcome these difficulties. However, New Jersey Republican newspapers outnumbered Democratic ones 92 to 52. When the state’s 86 independent newspapers are added to the equation, the problematic nature of the support Wilson could expect from the state’s newspapers can be appreciated. In fact, the mainstream newspapers in most of the state’s major cities were either independent or Republican. Then there were the large metropolitan dailies of New York and Philadelphia to consider. The *New York Tribune*, for instance, made a habit of targeting New Jersey commuters with news...
and opinion about their state, and the Philadelphia Record claimed a circulation of about forty thousand in South Jersey. Just as Wilson could expect support from the orthodox Democratic newspapers in New Jersey so he could expect similar support from some of the major papers in New York City (e.g., the Evening Post, the Times, and the World). Nevertheless, Republican standards like the Tribune and the Press maintained a formidable presence there and had an influence across the Hudson. As for Philadelphia, Republican newspapers dominated the press in that city.

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As the campaign opened, Wilson had to feel encouraged by the way the press received his nomination. Democratic newspapers across the state applauded it. This was also the response of two of the states’ most influential progressive newspapers, the Republican Jersey Journal of Jersey City and the independent Newark Evening News, the largest papers in their respective cities championing New Idea insurgency. The Jersey Journal’s editor complimented the Democratic party on “the excellence of its judgment” and pledged his support of Wilson. He would be “the candidate of thousands of Jerseymen who had never been allied with the Democracy,” predicted the Newark Evening News while the Trenton True American proclaimed “A NEW ERA IS DAWNING.”

That sentiment also permeated Wilson’s mail from New Jersey journalists. The managing editor of the Paterson Guardian told him that his election would “mean the dawn of a new day for Democracy in New Jersey.” The editor and publisher of the Passaic Daily Herald wrote to Wilson that “scores of Republicans” were flocking to his office to report that they planned to vote for him. His newspaper encouraged that movement in laudatory terms. “It now behooves all the people who love their state . . .” ran its postconvention editorial, “to throw aside all minor differences and save the state and the nation from the despoiling hands of Special Privilege, and, regardless of party, march a united, invincible host for Liberty, Justice, and Peace, under the stainless banner of Woodrow Wilson.” In fact, the idea that Wilson would have pulling power among Republicans and independents was a primary reason his spirited supporters in the press cheered his candidacy, and there was reason for their enthusiasm. Even Thomas B. Delker, the editor and publisher of the Hammerton South Jersey Star, who held that he was a confirmed independent but who normally supported Republican candidates wrote to Wilson, “Unless . . . the Republican