"Hoover Dam: The Events, Politicians and the Political Era That Inspired Its Construction"

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The largest public works project in the history of the United States at that time did not happen simply at the drop of a hat. Hoover Dam is a high dam that is located in Black Canyon, thirty one miles southeast of Las Vegas, Nevada. The dam spans the Colorado River at the boundary between Arizona and Nevada. The bill authorizing construction of Hoover Dam was signed into law by President Coolidge on December 21, 1928. Construction of Hoover Dam began in 1931. At the time, it was the largest public works project ever undertaken by the U.S. Government. Flooding on the Colorado River at the turn of the Twentieth Century not only had devastating effects to California’s Imperial Valley but also set the wheels in motion for the project that eventually became Hoover Dam.

Some authors link this dam’s construction with New Deal projects like the Grand Coulee Dam and the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). That connection, however, is not totally true. The bill authorizing construction of Hoover Dam was signed into law before the economic crash of 1929, and talk of building a high dam on the Colorado River began as early as the 1890’s. Hoover Dam legislation was brought before Congress several times in the early and mid 1920’s, but was never passed until 1928. By then the rural parts of America already were being hit by the effects of what became known as the Great Depression. That economic collapse influenced the legislation passed in 1928. Hoover Dam was in other words an antecedent to the policies of the New Deal, and the initiative for this project originated in the first two decades of the Twentieth Century. With the bill authorizing construction of Hoover Dam passed and signed into law in 1928 before the economic collapse of 1929 and with the suggestion that Hoover Dam being an antecedent to New Deal policies, one should consider who was president between the years 1928 and 1931 when construction on the Dam began. The man who was president was

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Herbert Hoover. Upon closer evaluation perhaps Hoover was not a do nothing president.

The Federal Government is made up of people, who, for example, serve as Senators, Congressmen and Cabinet officials. These actors pursue their own agenda. People like Senator Carl Hayden, Congressman Phil Swing, Interior Secretary Albert B. Fall, and Commerce Secretary, and later President, Herbert Hoover were all key people in pursuit of various agendas centered around natural resources and how to best make use of them. In this case the natural resource was water, and their shared goal was a dam.

The four men mentioned above had a lot in common with each other. They were all members of the Republican Party with the exception of Hayden, who was a member of Democratic Party. Thus, it was a bipartisan effort to get the dam constructed. Given historian Richard White’s definition of the West, they all come from that region. White defines the West as the area west of the Mississippi River and east of the Pacific Ocean. The northern border would be the political boundary between Canada and the United States. The southern border is the political boundary line between Mexico and the United States.² More importantly, all of these men came from the Southwest and they were all from Colorado River Basin States. Two of them were the first members of Congress from states newly admitted to the Union. Hayden was the first Congressman from Arizona, and Fall was one of New Mexico’s first two Senators. They were also Progressive Era politicians. As a response an assumption can be made that Hoover Dam was a Progressive Era Project that was an antecedent to the New Deal Era of politics and policies.³

Understanding of the issues that surrounded construction of Hoover Dam, requires a background understanding of the Dam location. Hoover Dam is located on the Arizona -Nevada

border in the middle of the American southwest. The American Southwest is a large region that is dry, due in part to a lack of water. This is a region that is also arid, and it covers nearly one half the continent of North America.4 Within this region lies the Colorado River, the third longest river in the United States at 1,400 miles long.5 The Colorado River drains 244,000 square miles. This basin is approximately the lower left hand corner of the United States. The Colorado River drains water from seven Southwestern states. The river's head waters start in the Rocky Mountains and empty into the Gulf of California. With one major source of water within this basin, it seems that it was a region in need of some way to get more water, for example a dam.

By the year 1877, expansion on the continent of North America was all but over by the United States.6 The United States was by then a bi-coastal country. There were States on the west coast, like Oregon and California. The American Southwest consisted of territories like New Mexico and Arizona. These territories became more populated, and as people began to migrate into these regions. They would need a way to economically make a living. To do that in the American Southwest requires one very important element: water. As previously stated, water was in short supply in the American Southwest. Starting in the decade of the 1870's, following the end of territorial expansion water issues were becoming relevant to the American Southwest and legislation arrived to help the areas that were deemed arid and dry regions of the country.

In 1878, John Wesley Powell demanded reclamation of arid lands. Powell later became the director of the U.S. Geological Survey and of the National Irrigation Survey. As mentioned

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below (pg.10), his nephew later became the head of the Bureau of Reclamation. John Wesley Powell stated that arid regions of the United States embraced a large area roughly 4/10 the area of the entire USA and excluding Alaska. In this region according to Powell "it has a meet annual rainfall that is insufficient for agriculture ...." As a result Powell began to call for ways to sufficiently irrigate the "arid region of the country." Powell's vision of irrigating the arid land was also seen as social progress. Powell envisioned a way to get the arid land irrigated. The answer was very obvious and simple to him. But to increase the amount of water storage and make irrigation possible for such a large area, water was needed and the water would need to be stored reservoirs.

In his annual message to Congress in December of 1901, President Theodore Roosevelt also called for the government creation and maintenance of water works. The president "defined very comprehensively the problem and policy of reclamation by the national government." This was something that had never been done before. A President of the United States was going to give a message to congress in which he called for the federal government to build dams and help make the arid lands useful. This was revolutionary at the time because it had never been done before. President Roosevelt said in his message that:

Great storage works are necessary to equalize the flow of streams and to save the flood waters. Their construction has been conclusively shown to be an undertaking too vast for private effort. Nor can it be best accomplished by the individual states acting alone. Far-reaching Interstate problems are involved and the resources of single states would often be inadequate. It is properly a national function, at least in some of its features. It is as right for the national government to make the streams and rivers of the arid region

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8 ibid, 381.
useful by engineering works for water storage as to make useful the rivers harbors of the humid region by engineering works of another kink. The storing of the floods in reservoirs at the head waters of our rivers is but an enlargement of our present policy of river control, under which levees are built in the lower reaches of the same streams. The government should construct and maintain these reservoirs as it does other public works.\textsuperscript{11}

By 1901, a problem did exist and it was being defined. A large area of land, the American Southwest was dry and arid. Water was very minimal. The one major source of water was the Colorado river. The river would flood its banks in spring and destroy people's crops and homes and livelihood along the river bank. By 1901, it was thought that proper storage reservoirs on the river would tame the river and create water storage. This stored water would be used for flood control and for irrigation purposes. Irrigation boosters began to take note of what John Wesley Powell was envisioning. One of the boosters was Francis Newlands as mentioned below, who used the progressive idea of scientific efficiency and scientific management and adapted it to water resource policy and to help irrigate the arid Southwest.

The regional call for help got enough attention that Congress passed a National Reclamation Act in 1902. This bill was authored by a man from the American Southwest. The man was congressman Francis Newlands, from the state of Nevada. The bill passed both houses of Congress and became law on June 17, 1902.\textsuperscript{12} President Roosevelt gave his approval to the bill and signed it into law. Thus, by 1902, with the Reclamation Act passed, the federal government was definitely initiating steps toward major projects in the last and in particular the American Southwest.

The passage of the reclamation project was just one step toward building a dam on the Colorado River. But still it was not enough to simply get the support needed to build a dam.

\textsuperscript{11} ibid, 18-21.
The year 1905 marked the beginning for strong consideration for building the dam on the Colorado River in the lower basin area. The events of 1905 put a large emphasis on the lower Colorado River including a place in Southern California called the Imperial Valley. The Imperial Valley is 250 feet below sea level at its lowest point. At the rim of the Valley flows the Colorado River. In the Spring of 1905, a heavy snow melt further up stream in the Rocky Mountains caused the river to flood its banks and flow into the Imperial Valley.

A group of boosters created the California Development Company (C.D.C.) in 1900. Before the 1930's Water development in the West was promoted mostly by private developers. That is exactly what the California Development Company was doing. It was a private company promoting water development and the benefits of it. The California Development Company laid claim to 20,000 acre feet of Colorado River water. The company also began to promote to the agricultural prospects of the Imperial Valley. The Imperial Valley was originally named the Salton Sink prior to the California Development Company's claim. The Colorado River carries one of the heaviest silt loads of all the rivers in the world. The River had flooded many times before into the valley. All of the silt carried by the river had deposited on the floor of the sink. Over time all of this deposited silt from the Colorado River had created fertile soil suitable for agriculture. The CDC was aware of this and wanted to promote the possibilities of farming in the Sink. By 1901, just before water arrived to the valley, there were 7000 people living in the area. As word began to spread that water was coming to the valley, people began to migrate into it due to the good prospects of starting a farm and being very successful.

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17 Worster, 96.
The CDC cut a hole in the bank of the Colorado River and installed a gate. From this gate water could flow and be controlled via a system of canals into the Imperial Valley. This system got water into the arid but fertile Imperial Valley of California. This system that allowed water into the sink led fortune seekers to renamed the sink, "Imperial Valley." The name Imperial has a better appeal when trying to get people to come to the valley. As a result by 1904 there were enough people in the valley to warrant cutting a second hole in the banks of the Colorado River to allow for more water for irrigation purposes.

In late spring 1905 the Colorado River flooded. What resulted from a hastily engineered Scheme by the California Development Company was disaster. When the Colorado River flooded it banks water began to flow into the Imperial Valley. Many people felt the CDC overlooked several safety precautions when holes were cut in the banks of the River. The flood swollen river ran through the two intake cuts in its banks and ran into the Imperial valley. At the height of its flood 360 million cubic feet of water had poured into the sink every hour. The entire river was flowing into the Imperial Valley and it did not take long, only a few weeks and the Salton Sink became the Sultan Sea. The Colorado River flowed into the valley until February of 1907. When the river was diverted back to its pre-1905 channel and the breach in the river bank was plugged. But not after millions of dollars were lost, people's communities, farms and homes were lost and a 400 square mile inland lake was created.

By the year 1907, it appears that something was needed to help control the the Colorado river. In that same year, President Theodore Roosevelt urged Congress to enter upon a

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18 Stevens, 18.
19 Stevens, 18.
20 Henry Petroski, "Hoover Dam" American Science 81, no.6 (November-December 1993): 517.
21 Stevens, 18.
22 ibid, 27.
23 Mark Risner, Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water (New York: Viking), 129.
broad, comprehensive scheme for development for all irrigatable land upon the Colorado river.\textsuperscript{24} This was brought to the president's attention because of the flood damage that was inflicted upon the Imperial Valley. Still nothing was done because of the lack of public pressure.\textsuperscript{25}

An argument can be made that a transformation in people's attitudes had taken place. Private capital had been the force behind California Development Company. This was the company that advertised for people to come to the Imperial Valley and farm because Water would get to them. The California Development Company was also the entity that cut two intake holes in the banks of the Colorado River, that when flooded allowed the Imperial Valley to become a lake. Millions of dollars were lost, people's communities, farms and homes were lost and a 400 square mile inland lake was created. This is what the boosterism and private capital had done to the people who had moved to the Imperial Valley, it had ruined their livelihood. In 1909 the remaining assets of the California Development Company went into receivership.\textsuperscript{26} The very symbol of private capital was gone. It failed just as it had failed all the people who moved into the valley on (The CDC's) promise to get water to their farms. Something was needed to be done. These people were looking to the federal government for desperately needed help.

In 1910 the federal government recognized it had an obligation in the matter. Congress appropriated $1 million for flood control works on the Colorado River delta above the Imperial Valley.\textsuperscript{27} In 1915, however, the government stopped apportioning money for this project and the burden of flood control fell on the Irrigation District of the Imperial Valley. One reason for the halt in federal assistance could have been the result of international problems the U.S. was facing at the time. In 1915 the world was fighting a World War I. The water district then began to lobby Congress for a canal. This would be known as the All American Canal because it would

\textsuperscript{24} Hundley Jr., 15.
\textsuperscript{25} ibid, 15.
\textsuperscript{26} ibid, 15.
\textsuperscript{27} Moeller, 9.
\textsuperscript{27} ibid, 11.
be built entirely within the United States. This was to be a high-tech Canal that would be more advanced than the one built by the California Development Company at the start of the Twentieth Century. This canal system was doubtful mostly because of its cost. It would be very expensive to build and no one at the time wanted to take a risk on the project and with good reason.

**Progressivism:**

Progressivism was a reform movement that did not seek to radically replace existing institutions, but sought to simply to modify them. During this era people became aware of their environment. They were becoming conservationists. People were seeing natural resources being exploited, as a result they began to question what they saw. People sought out answers to their questions. Some of them turned to the Federal Government were the progressive idealism saw an America run by experts that was characterized by efficiency and cohesion. This was what people saw and they looked to it for help. As mentioned above (pg.7) when the CDC failed to produce a canal system that would not flood their homes and farm land they turned to the Federal Government.

A full generation of political leaders were influenced by the progressive movement. Political leaders such as Hoover, Swing, Fall and Hayden are all examples of political leaders who thought the government could provide professional expertise over private entities and could achieve maximum efficiency. These four men are also examples of policy-makers of the early Twentieth Century that all shared a sense that society was organized and efficient. They also shared a sense of achieving progress. They all though that whatever was needed to achieve

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28 *ibid*, xiv.
progress would have to be done. Progress is very appropriate since the term that defines the era 
that shaped these four policy makers was Progressivism. Morton Keller has published a 
monograph dealing with the society of the Progressive Era. He discusses that the Progressive 
quest for order and efficiency extended into the 1920’s. The Hoover Dam legislation, all the 
bureaucratic agencies that went along with it, and the policy makers all fit Keller’s description. 
The Hoover Dam legislation of the decade of 1920’s was progressive at heart and is an extension 
of it. Efficiency could be reached if the Federal Government were to get involved in areas it had 
ever before been involved instead of private entities. The government, for example according to 
these Progressives argument, should build the tallest dam in the world at Boulder Canyon. 
Another example of Progressivism in action can be seen with the Reclamation Act of 1902, which 
created the Reclamation Service with a professional administrator.

**Hoover Dam: Legislation, Debate and the Dam Site:**

The floods on the lower portion of the Colorado River demonstrated a need for a flood 
control dam that would also serve as a water storage facility. A long term solution was the only 
option left. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation instigated several studies of the Colorado River in 
the period between 1912 and 1918 to determine feasibility of a dam. By 1919 Arthur Powell 
Davis was advocating the construction of a high dam on the Colorado River. He was a forty year 
vetran of Federal Government service and knew a lot about the Colorado River. Davis had been 
with the Bureau of Reclamation since its creation in 1902. He was the nephew of John Wesley 
Powell who explored the Colorado River in the 1860’s. In 1869 Powell became the first 
American to travel through the Grand Canyon and make extensive documentation of it. The

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31 ibid, 4.
Office, 1941), 3.
33 Henry Petroski, “Hoover Dam" *American Science* 81, no. 6 (November-December 1993), 
517.
34 Bureau Of Reclamation, 9.
areas Davis suggested for possible construction sights of the dam was in one of two places. He suggested either in Boulder or Black Canyons. It was latter decided that Black Canyon would be the best place as the result of geological testing. Davis wanted the high dam on the Lower Colorado River as a way to control floods.

The crisis of flooding had attracted political attention. But was it really about just flooding. Irrigation appears to have been an issue as well. The large storage reservoirs that were champion by John Wesley Powell and Theodore Roosevelt were for flood control and for irrigating the arid land. Traditionally the Army Corps of Engineers dealt with flood issues and especially dam construction issues. The Interior Department and Bureau of Reclamation dealt with water issues and in particular irrigation issues.

Construction of these dams would require a lot of capital. This would be an enormous undertaking and would be a huge risk. Every corporation and person with large amounts of capital at that time did not want to take this risk. As a result irrigation boosters went to the federal government for help. Because they did not want to take the risk themselves they wanted the government instead to take the risk. Also, if the project were to fail as happened with the CDC's failure the Federal Government could be blamed. When the boosters went to the federal government for help they went to the Interior Department. They went to the Interior Department and ask for help in the name of irrigation. Thus the irrigation and flooding crisis attracted political attention.

A Congressional inventory of natural resources, began in 1912 at the hands of Western Congressmen. Between 1912-1926, that inventory explains how to put the the resources to

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36 Ibid, 21.
good use by using them to create economic prosperity for their states. The years between 1912 and 1926 also paralleled the era of progressivism, which emphasized conservation and “wise use” of natural resources. Most of the work that later became the Boulder Canyon Project Act happened during those years.

Phil D. Swing, a lawyer from San Diego, California, went to Washington D.C. in 1917 to lobby Congress for the passage of the All-American Canal, a development project favored by California developers. He lobbied in Washington D.C. on their behalf, and he was on the payroll of the Imperial Irrigation District, (I.I.D.). In 1919, the All-American Canal Bill was brought before Congress. Swing actually wrote and drafted the legislation, and Congressman William Kettner who represented California’s Imperial Valley introduced the bill in Congress. The bill was designed “to assist in increasing the productive agricultural area of the Imperial and Coachella Valleys” according to Beverly Bowen Moeller who has written a book about Phil Swings connection to Hoover Dam. The All American Canal bill was defeated and did not pass Congress. Swing was unconcerned about the All-American Canal bill’s defeat, and seemed to enjoy his time in Washington, D.C. In the summer of 1920 Kettner told Swing he was not going to seek reelection. About the same time Congressman Addison F. Smith, of Idaho, told Swing “the kind of project you are seeking for Imperial Valley is best obtained from the inside of the legislative halls” and that he should consider running for Congress. Swing decided he would run as a Republican candidate, for Congress in California’s Eleventh Congressional District to replace William Kettner, and on November 2, 1920 Phil Swing was elected.

Just after taking his seat in Congress in 1921 Swing studied the preliminary report by

38 Petroski, 517.
40 Moeller, 18.
41 ibid, 18
Arthur Powell and "the more he studied the the grandiose proposal for the world's highest dam the more he liked it." The report urged construction with government funds of a dam that would create a water reservoir at or near Boulder Canyon. The report also called for the construction of an All-American Canal. The canal would run from Laguna dam (is down river from Hoover Dam) to the Imperial Valley. The Federal government was to be reimbursed for the dam by the sales of power and can now was to be reimbursed meant would be replaced from all the lands that would benefit from it. For several reasons Swing like this proposal. First, it solved the problem of flood control on the river. Second Davis's proposal allowed for the Construction of the All American Canal. The report also suggested the possibility that the stored water be used to turn turbines that would generate electricity. The electricity could then be sold, which in return would pay for the cost of constructing Hoover Dam. The construction of Hoover dam had caught the attention of the California congressman and was on its way to becoming a reality.

The idea of a dam had gotten the attention of a lawmaker. Much legislative work needed to be done to get Hoover Dam built. Once Phil Swing bought into Davis's proposal, the race to get Hoover dam was on as well as the Congressional debate, that surrounded much of this legislation. Adding to the debate was the issue of California verses the rest of the Colorado River Basin States. It soon became evident California was out to harness the Colorado River for its own use exclusively. In the summer of 1921, Swing began to draft legislation that would bring Davis's report to the floors of Congress in the form of a congressional act.

The Johnson-Swing proposal stressed the importance of the Federal Government with

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42 ibid, 22.
44 ibid, 170.
45 Moeller, 22.
exclusion of all other possibilities. Anyone at that time period could have built a dam on the Colorado or any other River. It would have required lots of capital and that is why they did not at the time and there was only talk of the Federal Government building Hoover Dam. Moeller points out one interesting element to the Hoover Dam legislation. She notes the Southern California Edison Co. had been making plans for a dam at Boulder Canyon for several years. The Edison Co. wanted to use this dam as a means of producing electrical power, rather than water storage. Private capital appears to have also been trying to get a Dan constructed. As a result there was an entity other than the Federal Government wanting to build this Dam. This fact appears to be lost in the rush to get a dam built on the Colorado River by the Federal Government.

Many people/interests favored a dam on the Colorado River, they differed over but who should build it. Swing must have foreseen this as a potential problem and sought out some help. He went to the Secretary of Interior. At that time the Secretary was Albert B. Fall. Fall, like Swing, came from a Colorado River Basin State: in this case, New Mexico. Swing told Fall that a dam on the river would be very complex and involve several issues. The construction of Hoover Dam would create interstate and international problems. One major international problem would involve Mexico, because the Colorado River flows into that country before it empties into the Gulf of California. Swing also saw some danger in storing huge amounts of water without first appropriating water rights. As a result Swing argued the Federal Government was the only entity that could successfully build this dam and successfully navigate through all of the "delicate issues." It appears that Secretary Fall agreed with Swing and according to Moeller, "the secretary was convinced that no dam should be built on the Colorado River by any

46 Moeller, 21.
47 ibid, 26
48 ibid, 25.
authority except the United States." 49

Fall was not on good terms with Agriculture Secretary Henry C. Wallace. 50 Fall suspected that Wallace was using the Agriculture Department as a way to take over resource management functions that properly belong to the Interior Department. 51 This situation was causing some rivalry between the two men and their respective departments. As a result it appears that Fall, was more than willing to recommend the Boulder Canyon project. Fall was using this issue to gain some high-level attention for his Interior Department and it would allow his Interior Department to be the "resource manager" 52 Swing went to see Fall because the Secretary of Interior controlled public lands and had close ties to Arthur Powell Davis who headed the Bureau of Reclamation as a subdivision of Fall's department. Swing planned to base the Hoover Dam legislation upon Davis's plan.

In 1920 Congress passed the Kinkaid Act. This act directed the Secretary of Interior "to make an investigation of the problems of the Lower Colorado River and report back his recommendations to Congress as to a proper plan of development." 53 Also in 1920 the Colorado River Commission was established. The establishment of this commission "would settle water rights on the Colorado River to the various states concerned," 54 the states concerned would be the states that make up the Colorado River Basin. On August 19, 1921 Congress passed H. R. 6877, public law No. 56. This act allowed for a compact between the states of the Colorado River Commission. The the motions were being set for a dam to be built on the Colorado River. This is very evident because of the preliminary actions that were being taken for, example: the setting up of a commission to divide up the river's water before construction
was ever authorized by Congress.

Then on December 17, 1921 President Harding appointed a Westerner as the federal government's representative to the commission. This man was Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover. Hoover also served as Chairman of the Colorado River Commission. Hoover, who had ties to the state California, also attended Stanford University, as had Hayden and Swing. While at Stanford, Hoover completed an engineering degree. In other words this is one important element that paralleled the progressive tradition of a professional who could construct something for the good of everyone. Who better to construct something than a man with an engineering degree. The Commission epitomizes the progressive impulse. One major element of the progressive era was the conservation of natural resources, and the Commission was a group of experts trying to maintain the most efficient way to distribute the water of the Colorado River. Hoover's presence on this commission represented everything progressive: He was an engineer, a collage trained expert trying to engineer the natural resource of the Colorado River for efficient use while at the same time conserving nature.

Fall submitted his final report to Congress in the form of the Fall-Davis Report on February 28, 1922 as required by the Kinkaid Act. According to Moeller this report could have been submitted earlier than February 28, but was not because of a problem in obtaining the proper signatures. The report had Arthur Powell Davis's signature but not Albert Fall's. In order for Congress to received it as official business it would have to have both men's signature on it. When the report was ready for Fall's signature he was out of Washington and would be gone for several weeks. As a result by the time he got back to Washington D.C. and signed the report it was the end of February. Swing was running out of time. The problem of obtaining the

56 Stratton, xvi.
57 The Congressional Digest, 42.
58 Moeller, 30.
signatures only delayed the process and cost Swing even more time.

Swing did not want to submit his bill until the Fall-Davis Report had been submitted to Congress. Swing wanted this project to slide smoothly along, and, he wanted to get the first Boulder Canyon Project Bill submitted to Congress before Congress adjourned. Swing was running out of time and had already announced on January 22, 1922 he and California Senator Hiram Johnson would introduce legislation at the same time in the House and Senate calling for the government to build a dam on the Colorado river. The dam proposal then became known as the Johnson-Swing bill. On April 25, 1922 Swing introduced the first bill in the House of Representatives. The bill called for the government construction of a dam on the Colorado River. Swing’s bill was officially called H.R.11449 and was a basically to carry out the recommendations made by Davis in his report. The bill was referred to House Committee on Irrigation.

Swing’s inexperience as a freshman congressman left him frustrated at the show speed of which Congress conducts its business. First, with the delay of the Fall-Davis Report and second once introduction to the House it was being held up in committee. Finally in June the House irrigation Committee held hearings on the Johnson-Swing bill. On June 14, 1920 the Interior Department gave its approval of the Johnson-Swing Bill and recommended H. R. 11449. Moeller, notes the June hearings conducted by the House irrigation committee were “inconclusive.” Also at the same time no decision had been made by the Colorado River Commission regarding the issue of equal distribution of water and the Colorado river. It appears that members of the irrigation Committee were wanting to hear the Commissions decision before any action was to be taken by either the irrigation committee or the Congress.

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58 Moeller, 20.
59 The Congressional Digest, 42.
60 Moeller, 32.
Finally, on November 14, 1922 in Santa Fe, New Mexico an agreement was reached in the form of a compact and was initialed by all members and delegates from Colorado River Basin states.\(^{61}\) The agreement divided up the waters of the Colorado River, between the upper and lower basin States.\(^{62}\) The upper-basin states consisted of Colorado, Utah, New Mexico and Wyoming. The lower-basin states would be Arizona, Nevada and California.\(^{63}\) This compact, however, required ratification by all the state legislatures involved.

The pact that was initialed in Santa Fe and Mexico was non-biding, but a promise that things would go forward. It was an interstate compact. In 1923 all seven of the state legislatures mentioned above approved the Colorado River compact except Arizona. In January Arizona's only congressman Carl Hayden gave a speech to the Phoenix Real-Estate Board. He advocated passage of the Johnson-Swing bill.\(^{64}\) But Arizona's Governor, George Hunt objected to the pact. The pact also had a clause in that allowed for allocation of waters to Mexico. As mentioned above (pg.14) the Colorado River flows through Mexico before it empties into the Gulf of California. Hunt objected to this because he thought allocating water to Mexico would result in a large Chinese farming's colony.\(^{65}\) As a result of Governor Hunt's opposition Arizona's Legislature did not approve the pact.

When Arizona refused ratification of the compact it was redone to become a six state Compact. The 1925 sessions of the legislatures in the Basin states except Arizona ratified the six state compact. California ratified the compact with a provision. The provision is known as the Fanney Reservation, which was ratified by the California Legislature on April 7, 1925.\(^{66}\) This resolution stated that California's ratification of the Compact would become effective the day

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\(^{61}\) The Congressional Digest, 42.  
\(^{62}\) ibid, 42.  
\(^{63}\) ibid, 42.  
\(^{64}\) Rice, 111.  
\(^{65}\) ibid, 111.  
\(^{66}\) The Congressional Digest, 43.
congress authorized construction of a storage reservoir of capacity of not less than 20,000,000 acre-feet of water. Hayden who had been an avid supporter of the project was then convinced California was out to use all the water for its benefit only. He was a shame he made so public his effort to have Arizona ratify the pact and he said he would do all he could to see that California did not take more than it needed. He was willing to harness the natural resources for all to benefit from, but he was not going to allow the natural resources to be abused by one state. Hayden thus made every effort to oppose the Johnson-Swing Bill.

Contained in the legislation submitted by Swing to the 67th Congress in addition to the construction of Boulder Dam was a section that would also allow for the All American Canal to be built. Moeller comments that at the close of the Santa Fe session, Herbert Hoover brought pressure upon Swing to do one of two things. One would be to abandon the project altogether or proceed with the Boulder Dam project on the condition that he dropped the All American Canal. The concession of the All-American Canal would have to be made to pacify the northern/upper Basin states. Swing was on a time line with his legislation and he was running out of time. The second session of the 67th Congress was just about to come to an end. Johnson-Swing was dead. Time ran out and Phil Swing was going to have to resubmit his bill in the next session of congress. After the close of the 67th Congress, in the summer of 1923 Swing invited members of the House Appropriations Committee and the House irrigation committee to come west and visit Boulder Canyon and Imperial Valley, so the members could see for themselves what the landscape looked like and what the Johnson-Swing bill should be passed. Moeller comments the members were impressed and with seeing Boulder Canyon first hand.

Starting in March of 1923 the Johnson-Swing bill suffered the first of three minor changes

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67 The Congressional Digest, 43.
68 Rice, 112.
69 Moeller, 34.
70 ibid, 39.
of people who had done some of the early advocating of the legislation. In March Interior Secretary Fall resigned. He was succeeded by Hubert Work. The second setback occurred in June of 1923 just as the hearings on the first bill were concluding and the 67th Congress was adjourning. After three months on the job Secretary Work fired Arthur Powell Davis from his job as head of the Bureau of Reclamation. Thus by June, 1923 both men who had their names attached to the "Bible of the Colorado River" were gone from the public scene.\(^{71}\) Especially Davis who had been so vocal early on in this project as mentioned above (pg. 10).

The third setback occurred on August 2, 1923. President Warren G. Harding died on that day in San Francisco, California. At the time Harding was nearing the end of a West Coast tour. Moeller states "President Harding had been giving signals that he favored the Boulder Dam project."\(^{72}\) One major signal of Harding’s support was his appointment of Hoover to the Colorado River Commission. If the President would have objected to the legislation he would not have appointed a member to represent the Federal Government. The day after Harding died he was scheduled to make a few speeches in San Diego. A speech was discovered not long after his death and it one he intended to give in San Diego. The President was going to announce in this speech that he supported the Boulder Dam project and was going to urge passage of the Johnson-Swing bill in the 68th Congress.\(^{73}\) Harding was not a major player in this issue but perhaps if the President were to have made public his intentions in 1923 that would have been a bold statement at the time. And perhaps his saying so publicly, that he urged passage of this bill, Johnson-Swing may have gained support and passed before 1928.

The 68th Congress convened in November of 1923. Because the previous Congress did not take any action on the first Johnson-Swing bill a second one would have to be to be

\(^{71}\) Stratton, 219.
\(^{72}\) Moeller, 45.
\(^{73}\) ibid, 47.
submitted to the next session of Congress. Swing introduced a second bill and the House of Representatives on December 10, 1923. His bill was called H.R. 2903. On the same-day Senator Johnson introduced a companion bill in the senate. The Senate bill was S. 727. On December 19, 1925 the 68th Congress came to an end without seeing any action taken on the floor of Congress on the Johnson-Swing Bill. During this time the bill however got considerable attention before both the Senate and House irrigation committees. The first bill to come before the 69th Congress was H.R. 6251 and was introduced in the House on December 21, 1925. The companion was introduced in the Senate by Senator Johnson the same day and was called S 1868.

On April 19, 1926 Senator Johnson submitted the majority report and Senator Hayden submitted the minority view of Johnson-Swing. These views were submitted and it was to allow Johnson-Swing to be placed on the Senate calendar for vote. On May 22, 1926 the House irrigation committee voted to “give no further consideration to bills relating to Colorado River development and tell the second session of the 69th congress.” At the start of the second session of the 69th Congress President Calvin Coolidge recommended that legislation to expedite the Colorado River project be done. On January 10, 1927 the Johnson-Swing bill was reported out of the Rules Committee of the House representatives and was given pending status on the House calendar for a floor vote. But as in previous sessions time ran out, and the session ended before action could be taken on the legislation.

As in the past, the two politicians from California submitted Johnson-Swing at the start of the 70th congress. The two men probably were not optimistic about the bill's future. Bills had been submitted several times before by them, and in each case the legislation never made it to

74 The Congressional Digest, 43.
75 ibid, 43.
76 The Congressional Digest, 43
77 ibid, 44.
78 ibid, 44.
the floor for a vote. How could these two men be very optimistic and cheerful about the bill's fate? By 1928, Commerce Secretary Hoover was being considered for president as the successor to Coolidge. In early 1928, Swing went to him and pledged his support to the Hoover campaign. This effort by Swing could have been enough to get Hoover to help speed up the legislative gridlock that had kept the Johnson-Swing from reaching the House and Senate floors in the past. Finally on February 7, 1928 the House irrigation committee reported H.R. 5773 out. On March 17, 1928 the Senate irrigation committee reported the bill of its committee as well. This was what the bill needed to get to the floors of both houses of Congress for a vote. On May 15, 1928 House Rules Committee reported H.R. 5773 out and it would go to the House floor for the first vote since the bill was first submitted six years earlier. On Friday May 25, 1928 the House passed the Johnson-Swing Bill, 139-219. After two filibusters by Hayden, the Senate passed Johnson-Swing on December 14, 1928 by a vote of 64 to 11. Finally on December 21, 1928 President Coolidge signed the Boulder Canyon Act into law. The dam would be built by the federal government after a decade of debate and political maneuvering.

The bill that was signed by President Coolidge in 1928 allowed for a six month grace period. On June 25, 1929 President Hoover signed a proclamation giving Interior Secretary Wilbur the authority to secure contracts for Boulder Dam power. On July 26, 1929 the Boulder Canyon Project Act was declared effective. The Federal Government would finance construction of the dam, but it would pay a private company to do so. Finally on March 4, 1931 the Bureau of Reclamation opened bids for construction of the Hoover dam. The winning bid was awarded to Six Companies Inc. on March 1, 1931. Six Companies Inc. of San Francisco,

79 Moeller, 108.
80 ibid, 108.
81 ibid, 108
82 ibid, 108.
83 Moeller, 120.
California, won the bid at $48,890,995.50, the largest ever labor contract ever awarded by the United States government at that time.\textsuperscript{44}

When work began on this dam Herbert Hoover was president of the United States. Hoover Dam would have been built regardless of the economic Depression. The Johnson-Swing legislation had been submitted to Congress several times in the 1920's. This was done without the fear of an economic depression. Hoover’s administration was planning to build this dam long before before Franklin Roosevelt and his New Deal came to the political stage. In 1928 when this legislation was signed by President Coolidge, Hoover was the President-elect. It was Hoover’s Interior Secretary Ray Lyman Wilbur that secured contracts to sell power and awarded the contract to Six Companies Incorporated. By 1930, however, the country was beginning to feel the effects of an economic depression. The action taken by President Hoover is not that of the do nothing president who was criticized for taking a do nothing approach.\textsuperscript{45} The comment made by Senator George Norris of Nebraska that “another Roosevelt White House would be needed to help restore prosperity to the Depression ridden country” was not totally accurate.\textsuperscript{46} What would Roosevelt do that Hoover was not already doing?

Franklin D. Roosevelt succeeded Herbert Hoover as President and he saw completion of Hoover Dam during his first term in office. Roosevelt dedicated the Dam on September 30, 1935.\textsuperscript{47} For this reason some authors refer to Hoover Dam as a New Deal era project.\textsuperscript{48} This research suggests that since Hoover Dam was a Progressive Era project plus the fact that authors refer to its construction as a New Deal project of President Roosevelt's, as a result the Hoover Dam and its legislation was an antecedent to the New Deal.

\textsuperscript{45} Moeller, 135.
\textsuperscript{46} Lowitt, 2.
\textsuperscript{48} Lowitt, 82.
In a speech at the Mormon tabernacle in Salt Lake City, Utah on September 17, 1932, Roosevelt said that "we can change the conditions of nature that make a place a desert...." This is what Hoover Dam was doing. Changing the landscape by creating a storage reservoir to irrigate land. Roosevelt was trying to sell something in his campaign that already existed.

Roosevelt also had a hint of progressive in him and it came out at the Salt Lake City speech where he stated he was in favor of changing the land to make better use of it. Another hint of progressivism appeared in a speech he gave in Portland, Oregon on September 2, 1932. In the speech he said that if the public did not like the rates they were receiving from private [power] companies, he saw nothing wrong with the construction of of public entities. Hoover Dam was used to produce electric power and was a public entity. The progressive politics that build the Hoover Dam legislation appeared to have influenced Roosevelt thinking as well.

When the legislation was signed into law, it was nine months before the economic crash of 1929 on Wall Street. Hoover Dam was not intended to be used as a means to put people to work during the economic depression that hit the United States starting in 1929. The construction of the Dam would have put people to work, even if there never would have been an economic depression. The legislation was a progressive era bill that was constructed by progressive politicians. The Hoover Dam legislation was intended for flood control and irrigation purposes to benefit a part of the country that was arid and dry. It was simply a coincidence the two events came together at the same time.

Yes, some authors do link this dam's construction with New Deal era projects. Richard Lowitt has published a monograph that discusses the New Deal and its relevance and its to the West and how it affected the west. Lowitt comments that Boulder Dam was the first of many

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89 Lowitt, 5.
90 Lowitt, 5.
91 Moeller, vii.
New Deal projects in the west. Hoover Dam would have been built even if the economic depression had never occurred.

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