



J. V. Conran and Rural Political Power: Boss Mythology in the Missouri Bootheel

Will Sarvis

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James Vincent Conran (1899-1970) was the most significant political organizer in the history of rural America. Serving as a rural Missouri prosecutor for 32 years, Conran was the much sought political friend of statewide and national candidates, such as President Harry S. Truman, U.S. Senator Thomas F. Eagleton, and Governor Warren Hearnes. His singular political influence was inextricably linked to the unique demographics of his home region, the Missouri “Bootheel,” which was a part southern, part mid-western, and part frontier community where African Americans enjoyed unusual political power. Though contemporary media depictions portrayed Conran as a traditional, corrupt political boss—like his notorious contemporaries, Tom Pendergast of Kansas City or Ed Crump of Memphis—this view is flawed. In *J.V. Conran and Rural Political Power*, Will Sarvis aims to paint a more accurate picture of Conran by revealing the true extent and limitations of his power and influence.

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