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NEGRO DISFRANCHISEMENT IN GEORGIA, 1898 - 1908

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Approved
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June 1970

Honors Thesis
Department of History
Washington and Lee University
1970

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PREFACE

Any scholarly analysis of race relations inevitably becomes intertwined with subjective evaluations. Personal experience and considerable reading have taught me that the Negro, given equal opportunities, is fully the equal of his white counterpart in every respect. Hence, it is my opinion that the racial animosity that did exist and that unfortunately still does exist is nothing short of tragic. In trying to question how and why this all came about, I became interested in the topic of Georgia disfranchisement.

Specifically, my paper reviews the subject from 1898, when Allen Candler was first elected governor, through 1908, at which time the voters of the state officially ratified Hoke Smith's restrictive amendment. But as I quickly discovered while researching the topic, extralegal disfranchisement and other forms of race proscription anteceded 1898. Therefore, I have fairly extensively covered the discriminatory aspects of the preceding quarter of a century in the first two background chapters. Nonetheless, although in many respects black electoral restriction was a fait accompli prior to 1908, in fact even prior to 1898, I feel that the decade primarily covered in this thesis remains a valid topic for several reasons. First, the Negro during the latter part of the nineteenth century occupied a potentially strategic position.

He held the balance of power. Admittedly, this leverage did not prevent whites from literally despising blacks as a race, if not as individuals, but it did keep many white politicians from altogether ignoring their Negro constituents. After the adoption of the white primary and the pertinent constitutional amendment, though, blacks no longer possessed even a potential, albeit typically unused, power base; they were left almost totally defenseless. Secondly, electoral exclusion constituted a formidable barrier which required years of relentless efforts by later civil rights advocates to topple. Of foremost importance, however, was the psychological impact of disfranchisement. Not only were Negroes relegated to a formally sanctioned position of inferiority, but the resultant, invidious antipathy has poisoned race relations ever since.

From the perspective of the nineteen-seventies, disfranchisement seems abhorrent, as indeed it was. But we live in a different world. Prejudice during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was all-pervasive. Whites were taught almost from infancy that they were superior to the lowly "niggers." Science, literature, history, politics, and casual conversation all reinforced this initial dogma among the better educated. For the "Anglo-Saxon" masses, "white supremacy" was a profession of faith virtually on a par with a belief in Jesus Christ. Once entrenched, prejudice proved difficult to overcome. Contrary contentions of Negro equality were viewed as heretical and simply were not tolerated by an aroused white populace. Even the advocacy of such a basic human right as physical security was pathetically a dangerous pursuit. Blacks, in turn, were cowed into submission. Abandoned by former Northern allies, economically dependent upon Southern whites for even subsistence fare, and physically threatened by a resolute, united white community, the disorganized and dispirited Negroes had little opportunity but to acquiesce. This

then was the setting for Georgia disfranchisement. Only by considering persons and events in this light can the historian, armed with more recent data and with a different set of opinions, fairly judge his topic. Therefore, with exceptions I shall tend to be more critical of the era than of individuals.

Before I proceed farther, I would like to thank Drs. Allen W. Moger, Keith Wagner, and Robert McAhren of the Washington and Lee faculty, Miss Martha Cullipher of the Washington and Lee library, Dr. Spencer King of Mercer University, Mr. Bert Struby and Mrs. Mamie Denson of the Macon Telegraph, and Misters George Jones and Royce McCrary of the University of Georgia for their kind aid and encouragement. I would especially like to express my appreciation to my wife, Carolyn, for her perseverance, consideration, and typing. Without her help, this paper seriously would not have been possible.

Milford B. Hatcher, Jr.

Lexington, Virginia
May 28, 1970

I. ADVANCE TO THE REAR:

AN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

The collapse of the Confederacy left more than a mere political void in post-war Georgia. It signalled the downfall of both the social and economic order upon which the society had heretofore rested. Both whites and emancipated blacks were equally destitute and equally uncertain of their future. Nor did Reconstruction resurrect a viable, permanent new order from the literal ashes of the past. Instead, the efforts of Congress to erect and maintain civil and political rights for blacks left only a legacy of racial bitterness and animosity, a legacy which regardless of the veracity of its foundations portended a discordant tomorrow, an unfortunate tomorrow which will constitute the focus of this thesis.

From 1877 through 1908, the Negro was the butt of economic, social, and political discrimination, which cumulatively relegated him to the lowest strata of an evolving caste system, "slavery's post-war replacement." ¹ This first chapter will be devoted to an analysis of the socioeconomic aspects of this pathetic phenomenon in Georgia, including economic and educational dereliction, lynching and legal injustice, and legislated racial separation.

THE POIGNANT ECONOMIC FACTS OF LIFE

Upward economic mobility with neither capital nor business experience as a base from which to start is an extremely difficult, if not impossible, task, even disregarding the impediments presented by a hostile environment. But this was the prospect confronted by the black in 1877.

With the aid of the Freedmen's Bureau, Negroes had increased their property holdings in the state from 10,000 acres in 1866 to a still minimal 457,635 ten years later. ² The total valuation of all black possessions at the latter date was gauged to be between a meager four and five million dollars. ³

Furthermore, the communal, paternalistic existence under the "peculiar institution" was not conducive to development of business acumen. Credit, wages, and fixed hours were a novelty which complicated adjustment. Nor was literacy or commercial experience widespread. ⁴ Consequently, the Negro was ill-equipped to cope with the economic vicissitudes of American capitalism.

As if the black were not already sufficiently handicapped, the white community, especially the poorer whites, resented the black as an economic competitor and sought to limit his job opportunities to menial positions. In part, this response by financially insecure white laborers was an understandable response to their employers' either actual or threatened use of Negro strikebreakers, by means of which wages were kept at near subsistence levels and unionization was discouraged. ⁵

Even with a cheap source of unemployed labor available, frequent references were made during the first decade of the twentieth century concerning a shortage of satisfactory workers. Blacks, encountering difficulty in making the transition from slave to hireling, were alleged to be too unreliable.

Therefore, some, including Governor-elect Hoke Smith in 1907 ⁶ and The Macon Telegraph ⁷ even prior to then, seriously considered the replacement of blacks with Italian or Chinese immigrants. However, aroused nativist sentiment precluded the importation of additional aliens. ⁸

Nonetheless, Negroes did record notable economic gains. By 1900, they had acquired title to over one million acres of land, and the assessed value of their possessions, which actually represented only 50% of the estimated market value, had risen to \$14,118,720. ⁹ But these figures still represented less than four per cent of the state's total acreage ¹⁰ and only \$13.64 of assessed wealth per capita. ¹¹ Admittedly, the black-owned land and assessed wealth continued to advance comparatively rapidly through 1906, when they were 1,400,000 and \$23,216,468 respectively. ¹² However, not only were these statistics continuously small in comparison with those of the white community, but from 1906 to 1908, they began to level off. ¹³ Probably, this was due primarily to the 1907 depression, but the increasing racial friction accompanying the disfranchisement agitation undoubtably did little to ameliorate a deteriorating economic situation.

Urban blacks displayed the greatest "prosperity." Of the total assessed valuation of all private possessions amassed by Negroes in 1906, city dwellers claimed \$5,850,000, or 25%. ¹⁴ However, they comprised only 10% of the total black population. ¹⁵

Numerous job opportunities for Negroes did exist in the cities. Many, such as barbering, carpentry, and masonry, were skills in which blacks had predominated since the days of slavery. But also government employment, especially in the post office, provided a living for many. And as segregationist

ordinances prevented or impeded black patronage of white business establishments and white professionals, a limited number of black counterparts emerged to fill the void. 16

But from 1896 to 1906, the former black monopoly of certain services rendered primarily to whites showed signs of erosion throughout the South. White barbers, carpenters, blacksmiths, railroad employees, and other artisans made significant inroads. In contrast, blacks recorded gains in such diverse fields as teaching, the ministry, and domestic help. Overall, Professor Walter F. Willcox contended that blacks had "lost ground." 17

Nor did the industrialization of the New South offset such losses, for Negroes received "only the crumbs." For example, cotton milling was by far the paramount industry of not only the state but of the entire South. But of the 246,000 cotton-mill operatives in the former Confederacy in 1900, only 1,400 were black. Of the over one million Negroes in Georgia, the most in any state, only 417 were so employed. 18

Of all urban Negroes, 80% earned less than \$500 per annum; 40% less than \$300. 19 Surely, this was not prosperity personified.

If the economic well-being of the urban Negro was less than ideal, the plight of his country brother was barely Malthusian. Ninety per cent of all Georgia blacks, or over 900,000, resided in rural areas in 1900. Of these, 16,719 actually owned the land they tilled. Approximately 50% of said farms were assessed at below one hundred dollars, and only 10% at more than five hundred dollars. In the Black Belt, also in 1900, over 60% of the farms were operated by blacks; and in most of these counties,

anywhere from 50% to 75% of the inhabitants were of Afro-American descent. But only 9.2% of these Negroes owned the land they worked; 90% were either cash or share tenants. 20

With such an inadequate economic base, the Negro did desperately need to improve his lot, for "freedom" and "independence," the alleged fruits of emancipation, must indeed have been hollow, meaningless phrases. If the exigencies of human survival did not require all available time and resources, thereby dampening political initiative, then economic coercion usually proved quite effective, for any financial deterioration threatened even subsistence.

EDUCATIONAL IMPORTUNITY

Post-Reconstruction Georgia was confronted by an alarming educational dilemma; both blacks and whites alike direly needed schooling. But the incumbent Bourbon state administrations responded reluctantly and sparingly. To pleas for increased outlays for education, the Bourbons countered with entreaties for "retrenchment." Children of both races were adversely effected, but blacks especially.

Admittedly, the state's income was insufficient to alleviate altogether the deplorable situation, for its tax base was negligible. But poverty alone was no excuse. In December, 1883, Senator Henry W. Blair of New Hampshire introduced a bill providing for the distribution of the Federal treasury's accumulated surplus revenues in proportion to the prevalence of illiteracy. However, in part because said funds were to have been equitably disbursed between the races, many in the South, which would have been the principal beneficiary, balked, and the measure failed. 21

The existence of a dual school system, which from a purely financial point of view unnecessarily taxed the state's exiguous revenues, was not a uniquely Southern phenomenon. Separate educational institutions were not at all uncommon throughout the nation during this period.²² But in Georgia, as elsewhere in the South, no efforts were made to establish and maintain "separate but equal" facilities. "Allocation of funds to Negro schools for buildings, equipment, maintenance, libraries, supplies, and, in fact, every phase of education was a very small percentage of the allocations for the same purposes to the white schools."²³ From 1871 to 1899, the state budgeted \$17,543,766 for public education. Of this amount, \$14,035,000 were spent for white schools, in contrast to \$3,508,523 allotted to black schools. Furthermore, in 1899, 5,045 schools were being maintained for whites, and only 2,190 for Negroes. But in that very year, 341,521, or 52% of all students enrolled in the public schools, were white; 319,349, or 48% were black.²⁴

The degree of discrimination varied from county to county, for the county boards of education were responsible for determining the distribution of funds obtained from the state and from such additional sources as local taxation. Generally, the larger the percentage of blacks in a given county, the greater was the discrimination; that is, the discrepancy between the annual expenditure for the individual black student in comparison with the outlay for the individual white was much more pronounced.²⁵

Most discouraging was the incompetence, or at best the mediocrity, of the majority of rural black teachers, many of whom were barely literate themselves.²⁶ Consequently, even the more diligent students were seriously handicapped.

Nonetheless, notable progress was made. Enrollment of blacks increased from 28% of the school-age population in 1877 to 50.6% in 1899. Also, from 1870 to 1900, Negro illiteracy declined from 92.1% to 52.4%.²⁷

By the turn of the century, much had been accomplished, but white resolution to continue to finance black education commenced to waver. Each stride forward allegedly evoked apparitions of Negro social equality. Black education was the purported cause of increased criminality among the "innately inferior" minority race.²⁸ During the 1890 and 1891 sessions of the General Assembly, which were dominated by the Farmer's Alliance, legislation providing for the allotment to black schools of only the minimal revenue accruing from taxes paid by Negroes was introduced but not adopted. In 1900 and intermittently thereafter, this proposal was revived.²⁹ Nor was this the only example of popular white pressure to curtail black education. Addressing the legislature in 1901, Mrs. Rebecca Latimer Felton, fearing that a larger percentage of black children were taking advantage of the opportunity presented by free public schools than whites, recommended the enactment of compulsory white school attendance.³⁰ The racial friction accompanying the gubernatorial campaign of 1906, which occasionally manifested itself in the form of violent, criminal outbursts, caused the Atlanta News to advocate that all funds budgeted for blacks schools be diverted to augment the local constabulary.³¹ Governor Hoke Smith, in his annual message to the General Assembly in 1908, espoused a reform of black education which included the de-emphasis of "learning out of books" and greater stress on "manual labor."³² Therefore, many whites, while complaining of the "ignorant, purchasable, venal" Negro vote, were unwilling to educate the black; they were apprehensive that learning might incite invidious aspirations of racial equality.

THE HALLS OF ACADEME

Following the war, Northern philanthropists financed several noteworthy Negro institutions of higher education in the state, including Atlanta University, Atlanta Baptist College, Spelman Seminary, Clark University, Morris Brown College, and Gammon Theological Seminary. Qualitatively, these schools were not centers of academic excellence; they did not threaten the supremacy of a Yale or a Harvard or a Johns Hopkins. Not only was the quality of the instruction "conspicuously inadequate and weak,"³³ but the scholastic curriculum, consisting of Latin, Greek, and philosophy, was of little use to the student upon graduation.³⁴ Nor did these institutions reach and thereby directly benefit the black masses. Nevertheless, they did provide one invaluable service for the Negro community; they trained teachers, who in turn sought to alleviate the ignorance prevalent among the masses.³⁵

Although substandard by national measures, these Negro colleges and universities were virtually on a par with the white University of Georgia or with any white, privately endowed institution in the Empire State.³⁶ This state of affairs provoked an alarmed outcry in 1899 from the Atlanta Constitution, which lamented the plight of "the poor white boy" who "in contrast to the comfortably if not amply endowed" black schools had "only one poorly equipped school of training that holds any promise."³⁷

Tragically, the response of many whites, including those elected to positions of trust and authority, was again negative; they merely resented whatever progress these black schools were achieving without striving to upgrade the white counterparts. Exemplifying this sentiment was Governor Allen D. Candler, who in May, 1901, was disgruntled with a group of Northern

philanthropists led by Robert C. Ogden of New York who had just recently visited Atlanta.

We can attend to the education of the darky in the South without the aid of these Yankees, and give them the education they most need to (sic). I do not believe in the higher education of the darky. He should be taught trades but when he is taught the fine arts he gets educated above his caste, and makes him unhappy.... The field of agriculture is the proper one for the negro.... These Yankees who die and leave their money to negro colleges do not understand the local situation.... You can see from the dome of this capital five colleges for the education of the negroes which represents more money than all the colleges for the education of white boys in the entire state of Georgia.... The negroes who are educated here...will not work...they try politics or preaching or both, hoping to get a government appointment and not only become loafers but exert a bad influence upon their associates and people generally. 38

Other whites concurred that industrial education for blacks was preferable. In fact, the state subsidized the Georgia Industrial College for Negroes at Savannah. 39 But to Candler and to many of his contemporaries, "industrial education" for "the darky" was synonymous with manual training "that would make him a better servant or laborer and not that which would cause him to aspire to social equality with the white man;" it was designed to complement the evolving caste system. 40

Nor did all white Georgians even approve of industrial training in any form. To commemorate its humble origins, Tuskegee Institute exhibited in 1906 a replica of "the henhouse in which the institution started its career." In response, the Macon Telegraph sardonically editorialized as follows:

Tuskegee should not stop at a venerated replica of its ancestral henhouse. A golden hen erected in its inmost shrine would hardly be orthodox and would not be quite American, but it would be entirely excusable and not inappropriate to select a coat-of-arms with a crest composed of a pullet rampant - that is, struggling to elude the grasp of a dusky hand. 41

In June of the same year, Judge Adamson, an elected representative to the United States House, went so far as to suggest that contributions for educational purposes, unless first funneled through "the regularly constituted educational authorities of the state or to religious denominations maintaining religious schools and colleges," should be deemed a felony, punishable by imprisonment. ⁴²

By the first decade of the twentieth century, black education at all levels, and especially at the college level, was viewed by too many whites as subversive to the existing social order and was consequently either discouraged or neglected. The Negro was not to be allowed to rise above his "place."

THE JAWS OF A VICE

The prospects of a Negro accused of committing a crime were not encouraging. If perchance he escaped lynching in transit to the jail or while incarcerated, he still had to face a hostile judge and jury. Acquittal was a rare occurrence. Typically, conviction meant a prolonged sentence as a virtual slave in a work camp.

Throughout this period, and for years thereafter, Georgia earned the dubious distinction of being among the national leaders in lynchings. From 1882 to 1903, 241 blacks fell before enraged, maniacal mobs. ⁴³ The zenith of this senseless bloodshed was during the 1890's. ⁴⁴ But the ensuing decade was not devoid of tragic, sanguinary sequels. Probably the most heinous of all such perversions of justice transpired in August, 1904, when with the complicity of the white deputy sheriffs on duty, two convicted Negro murderers were burned at the stake in Statesboro by an irate mob of sizeable proportions. ⁴⁵ So prevalent were these instances of neovigilantism that blacks came to doubt

the guilt of the victims, ⁴⁶ and unquestionably many innocent persons, as well as many miscreants, were brutally and illegally slain.

The purported criminal act committed by most of the deceased parties was supposedly rape, which was allegedly attributable to aspirations of social equality, which in turn sprang from political equality. Therefore, so long as the black was granted the right to vote, so long would lynchings recur. ⁴⁷ Even while denouncing lynchings, such prominent Georgians as former Governor D. H. Chamberlain resorted to equivocation. Undeniably, lynchings were miscarriages of justice, but the provocations, that is, the rapes perpetrated by "black fiends," inevitably led to "uncontrollable passions in the hearts of white men." ⁴⁸ White womanhood had to be protected at all costs!

Actually, however, only one-fourth of those who fell prey to the lynchings were accused of rape. But because rape of white women by black males was regarded as the most reprehensible of all imaginable crimes, it received the greatest publicity ⁴⁹ and provided a convenient rationalization for extralegal murder, extralegal rather than illegal for rarely did lynchers have to answer for their misdeeds.

Appallingly, those responsible for the administration of lynch law were often "men of at least comparative prominence in their several communities - men who at least believed they were establishing order, and so discharging a public duty." ⁵⁰ But apparently their "public duty" did not encompass the apprehension of white rapists of black women, for these fugitives were frequently ignored or absolved. ⁵¹

If the Negro was permitted to stand trial (and it must be noted that despite the frequency of lynchings, such miscarriages of justice remained the exception and not the rule), his chances of acquittal were not worth the

proverbial "tinker's damn." Fellow blacks were generally excluded from jury duty, and "the better elements of whites" usually opted not to serve. Consequently, the jury of one's "peers" typically consisted of unsympathetic, even inimical, lower class whites. Compounding this initial impediment to any fair and just proceedings was the hostility of many judges, who in seeking higher elective offices often used the bench as a political rostrum and their authority to sentence as a means of placating their wealthy and more powerful constituents who just happened to employ convict labor. As a result, heavy penalties often were imposed for minor offenses by blacks, while whites convicted on the same charges were more leniently punished. ⁵²

Georgia's inhumane convict lease system has appropriately been termed "peonage and debt slavery established to secure cheap labor." ⁵³ It rested upon exploitation and ignored any efforts at rehabilitation. The sanitary conditions were deplorable, and prisoners of both sexes were quartered together - but not necessarily for the purpose of improving morale. Not surprisingly, Negroes comprised a majority of the inmates in the various convict camps. What was astounding, however, was the size of that majority; nine out of every ten prisoners were black. ⁵⁴ Consequently, blacks viewed convict lease as yet another flagrant example of the discriminatory nature of Southern justice.

THE ADVANCING SHADOW OF J. CROW

"The barriers of racial discrimination mounted in direct ratio with the tide of political democracy among whites. In fact, an increase of Jim Crow laws upon the statute books of a state is almost an accurate index of the decline of the reactionary regimes of the Redeemers and triumph of white democratic movements." ⁵⁵ Lacking financial security, further threatened by Negro competition, and seeking at least psychological reassurances that they

were not the lowest strata of a comparatively class-conscious society, the poor whites accepted what W. E. B. DuBois referred to as "badges of superiority," badges which carried with them no tangible, material gains. Instead, they only served to salve wounded egos. The humiliation suffered by Negroes, however, was not considered.⁵⁶ Conservative, upper-class whites were not exceptionally reluctant to relent to popular pressure for segregation or to resort to the tried-and-true appeal to white supremacy, if to do so buttressed the existing social order and satiated the reform ardor of potential, if not present, malcontents. "The result was a widening of the educational and economic gap between the poor whites and Negroes."⁵⁷

Georgia was no exception. The Alliance-controlled 1891 session of the General Assembly enacted the first Jim Crow measure in the state. It provided that the railroads henceforth were to maintain "separate but equal" coaches for the two races;⁵⁸ sleeping cars were excluded. Eight years later, this oversight was partially corrected. Blacks and whites were to be segregated on Pullmans, but separate cars were not required.⁵⁹

Taking its segregationist lead from the state legislature, Atlanta adopted in the early 1890's an ordinance implementing mandatory Jim Crow seating arrangements on street cars. Other cities throughout the state faithfully imitated this precedent. But by September, 1906, the Atlanta News expressed the opinion that the functioning ordinance did not sufficiently separate the races. It was not enough that Negroes had to sit in the rear of the vehicle; only trailer street cars for blacks would adequately preclude racial intermingling on public conveyances.⁶⁰

National political issues were also beclouded by their possible threat to Jim Crow statutes - or at least Southern conservatives rationalized their

opposition to federal regulatory legislation on these expedient grounds. Both the Esch-Townsend Railroad Rate Bill and the Hepburn Act were condemned by the Macon Telegraph, allegedly because they would have empowered the Interstate Commerce Commission to prohibit racially discriminatory seating on interstate trains. The Telegraph's sentiments in regard to the latter measure were echoed on the floor of the U. S. Senate by Macon's native son and loyal Bourbon, Senator Augustus O. Bacon. ⁶¹

THE DENOUEMENT OF LIBERALISM

By the conclusion of the gubernatorial campaign of 1906, Negrophobia, meticulously and demagogically nurtured by office-seeking white politicians, reigned supreme. As lower echelon whites ascended to new levels of prominence, white defenders of the Negro became increasingly reticent. What few whites of liberal proclivity who remained were harassed and threatened by fellow whites. The white community became more and more intolerant of pleas for even basic human rights; advocacy of social equality was deemed an unpardonable and insufferable heresy. Exemplifying this mounting coercive pressure to conform is the following letter to the editor of the Hawkinsville Dispatch, dated July 13, 1891:

Mr. Editor if the ^{SP}foling article appears in your Paper Five Dolers will appear in the (PO) addressed to you. But if it don't appear 25 of your subscribers will sure to stop and we will stop all the rest We can Your White Brothers.

Notice, We hereby forewarn any and all Persons from taking up for the nigroes in any shape form or fashion We the undersign will declare any White man that Takes Sides With any negroes against a white person no matter how lodown he or She is just so they are White We are White men organized For the Perpose of protecting the White Race and we are going to carry out our Plans at the Pearl of our Lives Dark Nights and cool heads Will our work quietly Mr Editor if this fail to appear in the next issue of Your Paper Will Consider you in favor of civil wrights and We Will deal you properly Many Sitersons. ⁶²

The cogency and "persuasiveness" of such intimidation was demonstrated by the fact that this notice was promptly published.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Clarence A. Bacote, "Some Aspects of Negro Life in Georgia, 1880-1908," Journal of Negro History, XLIII (April, 1958), p. 186.

² "The Georgia Disfranchisement," The Nation, LXXXV (August 8, 1907), p. 113.

³ Clarence A. Bacote, "The Negro in Georgia Politics, 1880-1908" (Ph.D., University of Chicago, 1955), p. 3.

⁴ Bacote, "Negro Life," p. 193.

⁵ W. E. B. DuBois, "Georgia, Invisible Empire State," These United States, ed. Ernest Gruening (New York, 1924), p. 326.

⁶ William Montgomery Gabard, "Joseph Mackey Brown: A Study in Conservatism" (Ph.D., Tulane University, 1963), p. 77.

⁷ Macon Telegraph, date uncertain.

⁸ Atlanta Journal, November 13, 1901; Gabard, p. 77.

⁹ Bacote, "Negro Life," pp. 194-195.

¹⁰ The 1969 World Almanac and Book of Facts (New York: Newspaper Enterprise Association, 1968), p. 359.

¹¹ Bacote, "Negro Life," pp. 194-195.

¹² "Georgia Disfranchisement," The Nation, p. 113.

¹³ Ibid; Bacote, "Negro Life," p. 195.

¹⁴ "Georgia Disfranchisement," The Nation, p. 113.

¹⁵ Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 10.

¹⁶ Bacote, "Negro Life," pp. 188, 189, 191, 192, 196.

- 17 Alfred H. Stone, Studies in the American Race Problem (New York, 1908), pp. 493-495.
- 18 Ibid., p. 524.
- 19 Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 10.
- 20 Bacote, "Negro Life," pp. 194-195.
- 21 Ibid., p. 208.
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- 24 Bacote, "Negro Life," p. 210.
- 25 Orr, pp. 315-316.
- 26 Ibid., p. 314.
- 27 Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 15.
- 28 Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Georgia (Atlanta, 1899), p. 27.
- 29 Bacote, "Negro Life," p. 208-209.
- 30 Atlanta Journal, November 14, 1901.
- 31 Atlanta News, August 31, 1906.
- 32 House Journal (1908), p. 36.
- 33 Bacote, "Negro Life," p. 205.
- 34 Orr, p. 313.
- 35 Bacote, "Negro Life," p. 205.
- 36 Ibid., p. 204.
- 37 Atlanta Constitution, December 1, 1899.
- 38 Atlanta Journal, May 13, 1901, quoted in Bacote, "Negro Life," pp. 204-205.
- 39 Bacote, "Negro Life," p. 207.
- 40 Ibid., p. 205.
- 41 Macon Telegraph, April 7, 1906.

- 42 Ibid., June 17, 1906.
- 43 Clarence A. Bacote, "Negro Proscriptions, Protests, and Proposed Solutions in Georgia, 1880-1908," Journal of Southern History, XXV (1959), p. 478.
- 44 Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," page uncertain.
- 45 Atlanta Constitution, August 17, 1904.
- 46 Bacote, "Negro Proscriptions," p. 479.
- 47 Ibid., p. 482.
- 48 Macon Telegraph, July 23, 1905.
- 49 Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 19.
- 50 Hooper Alexander, "Race Riots and Lynch Law: The Cause and the Cure; A Southern Lawyer's View," The Outlook, LXXXV (February 2, 1907), p. 259.
- 51 Bacote, "Negro Proscriptions," p. 479.
- 52 Ibid., p. 486.
- 53 Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 20.
- 54 Ibid., pp. 21-22.
- 55 C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge, 1951), p. 211.
- 56 Du Bois, "Georgia, Invisible Empire State," p. 331.
- 57 Bacote, "Negro Proscriptions," p. 472.
- 58 Ibid., p. 473.
- 59 Elizabeth Hulse Marshall, "Allen D. Candler, Governor and Collector of Records" (M. A., University of Georgia, 1959), p. 122.
- 60 Atlanta News, September 1, 1906.
- 61 Macon Telegraph, May 5, 1905, July 22, 1905, May 8, 1906.
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II. POLITICAL PRELUDE - BLACK AND WHITE

Not until January 1, 1909, did the so-called "disfranchisement amendment" to the Georgia constitution become operative. But for many years prior to that date, in fact even prior to the initial disfranchisement agitation of 1898 and 1899, Negroes were effectively barred from political participation. The exclusion was accomplished by various means, be they legal, extralegal, or illegal. Certain provisions of the state Constitution of 1877 and subsequent legislation tended to restrict Negro suffrage rights. The discriminatory administration of these laws, however, coupled with electoral fraud and corruption, intimidation, and the norms and mores of the society, were probably the foremost obstructions to political equality for blacks. ¹

But to state that the black was effectively barred from political participation by 1898 did not mean that he was ignored. The Negro vote was a "political football." ² He was both "pawn" and "scapegoat." Always, the "ogre of Negro domination" was broadcast by the incumbent Bourbons to maintain white solidarity and to browbeat white dissidents. But when division did occur, both factions solicitously wooed the black voters, who then held the balance of power between the contending whites. ³

THE CONSTITUTION AND THE LAWS

The franchise provisions of the Georgia Constitution of 1877 did not substantially vary from those of the Reconstruction Constitution of 1868. Their administration and impact, though, were decidedly more restrictive.⁴

The 1877 document limited the franchise by three primary means: the payment of all taxes, a residence requirement, and the disfranchisement of felons, all three of which just coincidentally effected considerably more blacks than whites.

The most efficacious of the three was the stipulation that to be eligible to register, a voter "shall have paid all taxes which may hereafter be required of him, and which he may have had an opportunity of paying, agreeably to law, except for the year of the election..."⁵ Included among said taxes was a cumulative poll tax, levied ostensibly "for educational purposes."⁶ Not only was a person required to pay the one dollar poll tax for the year in which he wished to register, but he had to pay the same amount for each year after 1877, or after his twenty-first birthday, in which he had neglected to settle accounts with the county tax collector.

Actually, no mention of the discriminatory aspects of the measure was made at the 1877 convention.⁷ Nonetheless, its results were remarkably discriminatory. "The most effective bar to Negro suffrage ever devised is the cumulative poll tax provision of Georgia."⁸ Not only were many impoverished blacks unable or unwilling to pay whatever amount they owed, but ... "in the black counties, tax-collectors aided this natural disposition of the negroes (not to pay said duties) by neglecting to collect the taxes due, the State being perfectly willing to lose the revenue if at that sacrifice the negro vote could be eliminated."⁹ On December 31, 1904, the comptroller-general

of the state of Georgia reported that of 223,673 black males of voting age,¹⁰ just over 110,000, or approximately one-half, had paid all poll taxes due.¹¹ Most of the remainder were anywhere from 10 to 25 years in arrears.¹²

Payment of all taxes was, as already mentioned, only one of three constitutionally sanctioned devices employed to deprive the black of the suffrage. Even if all duties were paid, a "male citizen, twenty-one years of age," must have resided in the state for one year preceeding the election and in the county for at least six months.¹³ Again, the Negroes, many of whom were migrants or itinerant laborers, were hardest hit.¹⁴ Also, since 90% of all prisoners in convict camps were black,¹⁵ it is probable that more blacks than whites were excluded by the section making conviction for a felony an automatic forfeiture of the franchise.

Supplementing these constitutional provisions were two statutes subsequently enacted by the General Assembly. In October 21, 1891, the Governor signed into law a bill entitled "Protecting Primary Elections," which in addition to specifying the electoral machinery for future primaries declared that henceforth all such primaries were to be governed by the rules and regulations of the party conducting the election.¹⁶ This act "was one of the most significant pieces of legislation ... in debarring the Negro from the primary.... (It) invited exclusion on the part of the Democratic Party by declaring that participants in a primary were subject only to the rules of the party. The Negro, or any other, vote in any other party was by the nature of the situation rendered nugatory."¹⁷

Three years later, in 1894, a "General Registration Law" was adopted. It provided for the appointment of a three-member registration committee in each county to draw up in advance of an election racially separated lists of qualified voters. The resultant Democratic majorities on these committees enabled the purge of many Populists from the lists and allowed the manipulation of the

Negro vote. ¹⁸ Furthermore, rather than submit to interrogation by these white boards, a sizeable number of blacks opted not to register. ¹⁹

For whatever reasons, only 68,000 of the over 110,000 Negroes who were not in arrears in paying their poll taxes in 1904 were registered. In contrast, 205,000 out of all 277,496 potential white voters, not just those who had complied with the cumulative poll tax provision, were listed. ²⁰

POLITICAL TIDES

Whether he voted or not, the black was an ubiquitous political factor in post-Reconstruction Georgia. The specter of "Negro domination," the Southern "bloody shirt," became the omnipresent rallying cry for the solidly Democratic South. To paraphrase a more contemporary dictum, had the Negro not existed, the Bourbons would have been forced to invent him; that is, the black provided the Bourbons with a tangible, internal enemy, against whom the whites were propagandistically united.

Nor were the blacks shunned when Redeemer supremacy was challenged by insurgents. "When the whites divided, the Negroes decided." At such times, blacks did indeed occupy a strategic vantage point; they held the decisive balance of power between the vying white factions. Hence, although publicly excoriating the Negro and "Black Republican" menaces, politicians assiduously courted the vote of the minority race.

If mere solicitation failed, vote buying was a none too infrequent secondary, if not primary, expedient. "The Negro vote was counted when needed and at these times it was no more than any other economic good, to be bartered for, bought, and sold to (the) highest bidder." ²¹ Blacks, who otherwise had little to gain from these elections, willingly sold their ballots for cash or liquor. Such material inducements during contested

elections increased the incidence of Negro voting remarkably. ²²

If both wooing and purchasing did not achieve the desired ends, a resort to illicit Reconstruction tactics was employed. If not the most lawful of devices, intimidation did beget results. Also, the Democratic electoral officials were not above occasionally "stuffing" a ballot box or permitting repeat voting, if the repeaters marked their ballot correctly. And if all else failed, entire ballot boxes "mysteriously" disappeared.

For several reasons, the black voter, although sharing many of the same interests as the poverty-stricken white rebels, usually favored the Bourbon nominee. First, although the conservative Democrats were the representatives of the "white man's party," their condescending paternalism was preferable to the ingrained hostility of the lower class dissidents. Secondly, the Redeemers, being wealthier, could afford to spend more, thereby outbidding their opposition. And thirdly, Bourbon control of the electoral machinery was an invaluable asset, and one which was often exploited. "In general, this tendency of Negroes to line up with regular Democrats as opposed to independents... resulted in the independents joining forces with the Democrats to eliminate the Negro from politics forever." ²³

The impetus of insurgency waxed and waned between 1872 and 1898. In 1872, Georgia was redeemed. For the remainder of the decade, the state remained firmly in the grasp of the renowned Bourbon Triumvirate, which included that chivalric personification of the "Lost Cause," General John Brown Gordon; the political chameleon, Joseph E. Brown; and lastly Alfred H. Colquitt. But in 1880, chafed by agrarian ills and by the ineptly conspicuous political scheming of Governor Colquitt and his cohorts, the independents successfully blocked the renomination of the governor at the state Democratic convention and supported Thomas M. Norwood in the ensuing election.

Both sides actively vied for the Negro vote. Neither refrained from utilizing whatever means were necessary to obtain it, including tactics formerly perfected by the Carpetbaggers and the Ku Klux Klan. From this power struggle, Colquitt, who had displayed while in office certain traits of "fair play" and "justice," emerged as the victor. Although he probably did not carry a majority of the whites, ²⁴ he polled approximately 90% of the votes cast by blacks. ²⁵

Although defeated, the independents were not yet politically dead. But the Bourbons, attributing the election of five blacks to the Georgia House to the white division within organized Democracy, proliferated and intensified their counterattack. When Alexander H. Stephens defected to the opposition and accepted the gubernatorial nomination proffered by the regular Democrats in 1882, the independent movement virtually disappeared.

For the next decade, insurgency was contained within the party; therefore, the black vote was of little importance. One reason for this intraparty containment was the adoption of the direct primary, which enabled the settlement of disputes within "the white man's party." In 1886 and 1888, the primary merely legitimized the selection of organization-backed candidates. During the late 1880's, however, resurgent agrarianism again threatened conservative bastions. In 1890, the resourceful Bourbons, realizing the crescent furore which their intransigence would only further incite, flexibly acquiesced to the gubernatorial nomination of a moderate Alliance candidate, W. J. Northern. The wisdom of this move was graphically displayed by the results of that year's elections, in which 160 of the 219 victorious General Assembly candidates and all of the state's newly elected Congressmen had pledged their support of the National Farmers' Alliance platform. The agrarians were not to be denied.

But the Alliancemen quickly learned the bitter lesson that electoral success

did not necessarily mean legislative enactment, for with only a few exceptions, including the Jim Crow railroad bill and two other relatively minor but highly discriminatory measures, the legislative accomplishments of the following two sessions of the General Assembly were insignificant. This disillusionment bred even more dissatisfaction, the offspring of which was Populism.

Piloting the Populist onslaught in Georgia was Tom Watson, "perhaps the first native white Southern leader of importance to treat the Negro's aspirations with the seriousness that human strivings merit."²⁷ Above all else, Watson was a pragmatist and a realist. First, recalling the early 1880's, he perceived that if the Democrats again carried the overwhelming majority of the black vote, no third party could be expected to triumph. Secondly, he realized that the Negroes and the mainstay of nascent Populism, the poor whites, shared common economic problems and hardships. Hence, the "Agrarian Rebel," then representing Georgia's Tenth District in the U. S. House, strove to cement an alliance of class and interest, not race. He was aware of all of the potential pitfalls, but he contended, or rather wistfully hoped, that "in the long run, self-interest always controls. Let it once appear plainly that it is to the interest of the colored man to vote with the white man and he will do it."²⁸

To reassure his skeptical, would-be black allies of his sincerity, Watson encouraged "tolerance, friendly cooperation, justice, and political rights for the Negro." Blacks were appointed to the highest counsels of the infant party. Lynch law, vigilantism, and convict lease were unequivocally condemned. In 1894, Watson himself seconded the nomination of a Negro. The following year, he scathingly castigated the recently adopted South Carolina disfranchisement amendment as "reactionary" and contrary to the cherished tenets of democracy.²⁹ But Negro doubts persisted; blacks still vividly recalled the discriminatory

measures enacted by the 1891 session of the legislature, which was dominated by their agrarian "allies."

For three consecutive state-wide elections, political warfare prevailed. To thwart Populist ambitions, the regular Democrats resurrected all of their olden tactics. Never before had the specter of "Negro domination" been depicted in such lurid tones. Never before had the frenzied imploration of "white supremacy" been uttered with such vehemence. And never before in Georgia had such violent, unwarranted, deplorable means been used to attain a political end.³⁰ Populists were accused of espousing social equality for blacks. Intimidation of blacks was widespread; during the 1892 campaign alone, 15 Negro Populists were allegedly murdered. And the administration of elections was almost inconceivably fraudulent, corrupt, and dishonest. When browbeating and economic coercion were not sufficient to defeat the Populists, ballot box stuffing, electoral manipulation, and vote buying proved quite effective. Democratic incumbency anteceded the popular will; it was maintained literally at all costs.

But even without Democratic interference, the noble Populist experiment was probably doomed. The hostility between blacks and poor whites was simply too deeply embedded during the 1890's to be easily overcome. "Never before or since have the two races in the South come so close together politically."³¹ Nonetheless, with the possible exception of 1894,³² the Populists did not receive anywhere near a majority of the black votes cast; the regular Democrats remained the prime beneficiaries of Negro suffrage.³³

Nor were many poor whites anxious to become the bedfellows of Negroes. As Watson had so prophetically foreshadowed in 1892:

You might beseech a Southern white tenant to listen to you upon questions of finance, taxation, and transportation; you might demonstrate with mathematical precision that herein lay his way out of poverty into comfort; you might have him 'almost persuaded' to the truth, but if the merchant who furnished his farm supplies (at

tremendous usury) or the town politician (who never spoke to him excepting at election times) came along and cried 'Negro rule!' the entire fabric of reason and common sense which you had patiently constructed would fall, and the poor tenant would joyously hug the chains of an actual wretchedness rather than do any experimenting on a question of mere sentiment. 34

Unremitting prejudice proved more resilient than self-interest, despite the indefatigable efforts of Tom Watson and his fellow Populist leaders.

After 1896, Populism never again posed a serious threat to Democracy. But its repercussions lingered for many years thereafter.

The 1896 election also marked the last time that a comparatively large number of Negroes actively participated in a state-wide election before the disfranchisement amendment was submitted to the voters in 1908. 35

FROM ELEPHANT TO PARASITE

The ascendance of Republicanism terminated with the restoration of home rule in 1872. Because of the GOP's association with "Negro rule," the party no longer provided viable opposition to a Democracy which paradoxically was the recipient of the bulk of the black vote. After 1882, the Republicans did not even contest state elections; instead, patronage became the paramount objective of the party hierarchy. Consequently, the blacks were deprived of a political vehicle through which they could voice their grievances and aspirations.

The national party leadership seemed intent to further ostracize the Negro. During the early 1880's, Presidents Garfield and Arthur, especially the latter, attempted to form a coalition between Southern Republicans and independents. To make the union respectable, its leaders were to be white. The offspring of such maneuvering was a factional split within the Georgia GOP. The "lily whites," consisting of both whites and many blacks, concurred that the party could only recoup by reorganizing under white leadership. But

the predominantly Negro "blacks and tans" resented this incursion upon their rights, which they rightfully regarded as a ruse to exclude them from more prominent patronage positions. Thereafter, not only was the party electorally impotent, but even the remnants of the once Grand Old Party were irreconcilably disarrayed.

Likewise demoralizing to the Negro was the GOP's abandonment of civil and political rights of the minority race. In 1883, the U. S. Supreme Court, a majority of whom were Republicans, invalidated the Civil Rights Act of 1875. Subsequent decisions, Mills v. Green in 1895, Williams v. Mississippi in 1898, Giles v. Harris in 1902, and Pope v. Williams in 1904, legally sanctioned constitutional devices overtly designed to disfranchise blacks.³⁶ Nor did the Chief Executive or Congress, after tabling Senator Henry Cabot Lodge's Federal Election Bill (or "Force Bill") in January, 1891, intervene to prohibit the discriminatory, state-imposed circumscription of the suffrage. The Fifteenth Amendment was in essence reduced to so much hollow, empty, legalistic verbiage.

ECHOES FROM THE UNDERWORLD

By 1898, most blacks despairingly had abdicated all political activity. For many, this involved no renunciation of any consequence, for they had never exercised their constitutional rights. They habitually remained aloof from, or oblivious to, the political scene. Others, however, were becoming increasingly disillusioned. A hostile environment in which intimidation and economic coercion prevailed made voting extremely perilous. And the paucity of choices and results produced a feeling that the inherent danger was just not worth the real or potential expense. No party or faction represented blacks; the black vote, regarded as another commodity to be bought on the open market when needed, was merely exploited.

Several alternative means of resolving the complex racial problem were

tendered by blacks. Four of the most extensively disseminated of these were "Back-to-Africa," "Exodus-to-the-North," Negro statehood, and "stayhereation." ³⁷ Of these four, the first three were escapist in nature, whereas the fourth, which alone recommended continued residence in the South, won by far the most converts.

The foremost exponent of the first and probably the most controversial of these proposals was Atlanta's eminent native son, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Sorely frustrated by the Supreme Court's 1883 abrogation of the Civil Rights Act and by Republican passivity to the abridgement of blacks' rights, Turner cast his lot with the Prohibition Party. But as these injustices against his race continued, the clergyman became increasingly disillusioned. "The negro... is an outlawed inhabitant of the country, for the people divested of their civil rights can hope for nothing but degradation and contempt." ³⁸ Therefore, he disconsolately petitioned Congress for funds to finance a voluntary repatriation to Africa. There, possibly, blacks would not be denied their rights of citizenship.

With the election of Democrat Grover Cleveland and with the recent passage of the Jim Crow statute still freshly in mind, some of the more credulous blacks welcomed emigration in 1892; any means of deliverance seemed preferable to the status quo.

But most black leaders steadfastly opposed "Back-to-Africa" as impractical, unfeasible, and undesirable. Their misgivings were reinforced by the adverse reports of those who had visited the Dark Continent. Nonetheless, as late as 1903, a group of Negro women memorialized the Georgia legislature for an appropriation with which to return to their ancestral homes. ³⁹

Bishop Lucius H. Holsey of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church offered another comparatively radical, separatist suggestion, which probably evoked more

publicity than serious consideration. Believing from his personal experience that "two distinct peoples can never live together in the South in peace, when one is Anglo-Saxon and the other Negro, unless the Negro, as a race or en masse, lives in the submerged realm of serfdom and slavery," Holsey advocated that the Federal government reserve from the public domain a separate state or territory to be occupied by blacks only. 40

White Atlanta journalist John Temple Graves fervently approved of this plan. 41 But he and the Bishop were a minority of two; few other Georgia supporters appeared to champion the cause.

A third proposal was Northern emigration. Had not Northerners fought to emancipate blacks from slavery? Surely, then, these "friends" would not deny them the privileges of first-class citizenship. Blacks who did journey northward found that indeed their liberties were not curtailed. But political and civil rights without economic security were meaningless. Job opportunities for Negroes were not then available in the North. 42

Consequently, not convinced of the merits of escape, most Georgia blacks resigned themselves to what one Savannah minister termed "stayhereation." Exemplifying this sentiment were such esteemed leaders as the Reverend Charles T. Walker of Augusta, who after Bishop Turner was probably the most renowned of all Negro clergymen in the Empire State. In December, 1900, Reverend Walker "advised the Negro to remain in the South, buy land, engage in business, and educate his children, for it was only a matter of time until the best people of the South" - presumably such men as former editor of the Atlanta Journal, Hoke Smith - "would come to his aid and defend him in all of his rights." 43 Economic amelioration would allegedly assure the preservation and extension of political and civil rights.

"And 'stayheration' it was, as the vast majority of Negroes, either by preference or by circumstances over which they had no control, remained in the South despite segregation, political disfranchisement, mob violence, and other forms of race proscription. As the twentieth century wore on, the Negro would find an increasingly hostile environment. Despite his efforts to improve his economic status, his struggle to educate himself, and his attempts to promote his social betterment, his hopes of attaining first-class citizenship were to be engulfed by the wave of white supremacy which grew in volume and intensity after the turn of the century." ⁴⁴ By the First World War, the North, even sans economic opportunity, seemed a much more enticing alternative to many blacks than Southern oppression, and the appeal of "stayheration" diminished accordingly.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Ralph Wardlaw, "Negro Suffrage in Georgia, 1867-1930," Bulletin of the University of Georgia, XXXIII (September, 1932), p. 41.

² Clarence Albert Bacote, "The Negro in Georgia Politics, 1880-1908" (Ph.D., University of Chicago, 1955), p. 91.

³ Ibid., p. 87.

⁴ Wardlaw, p. 41.

⁵ Samuel W. Small, A Stenographic Report of the Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention Held in Atlanta, Georgia, 1877 (Atlanta, 1877), pp. 480-481.

⁶ Ibid., p. 489.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 293-294.

⁸ Alfred H. Stone, Studies in the American Race Problem (New York, 1908), pp. 354-355.

⁹ A. J. McKelway, "The Suffrage in Georgia," The Outlook, LXXXVII (September 14, 1907), p. 64.

¹⁰ Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 404.

¹¹ Hoke Smith, "Speech of Hoke Smith at Columbus, Georgia, January 10, 1906, in His Debate with Clark Howell" (n.p., n.d.), pp. 11-12.

¹² Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 421.

¹³ Small, p. 480.

¹⁴ Wardlaw, p. 47.

¹⁵ Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," page uncertain.

¹⁶ Acts and Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of Georgia, 1890-1891 (Atlanta, 1907), p. 210. This series will hereafter be referred to as Georgia Laws.

¹⁷ Wardlaw, p. 51.

¹⁸ Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 210.

¹⁹ Wardlaw, p. 52.

²⁰ Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," pp. 421, 404.

²¹ Wardlaw, p. 43.

²² Ibid., p. 45.

²³ Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 48.

²⁴ C. Vann Woodward, "Tom Watson and the Negro in Agrarian Politics," Journal of Southern History, IV (February - November, 1938), p. 15.

²⁵ Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 46.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 157.

²⁷ Woodward, "Tom Watson and the Negro," p. 24.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 18-19.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 21.

- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 206.
- 33 Ibid., pp. 176, 219.
- 34 Woodward, "Tom Watson and the Negro," p. 20.
- 35 Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 223.
- 36 Wardlaw, p. 61.
- 37 Clarence A. Bacote, "Negro Proscriptions, Protests, and Proposed Solutions in Georgia, 1880-1908," Journal of Southern History, XXV (1959), pp. 488-498.
- 38 Ibid., p. 489.
- 39 Ibid., p. 490.
- 40 Ibid., p. 493.
- 41 Atlanta Journal, September 23, 1899.
- 42 Bacote, "Negro Proscriptions," p. 492.
- 43 Ibid., pp. 496-497.
- 44 Ibid., p. 498.

III. INCIPIENT DISFRANCHISEMENT

Racist oratory, even invective, was not a unique experience in Georgia; rather, it had become an inveterate, if not laudatory, facet of the electoral process. Prior to 1898, however, no governor had actually dared to espouse a blatantly discriminatory restriction of the ballot. Prior to 1899, no legislator had seen fit to introduce a disfranchisement amendment in the General Assembly. Prior to 1900, the Democratic State Executive Committee had never deemed it necessary to specify that blacks be excluded from the party primary.

THE AICan OPENING

In January, 1898, the amiable, gentlemanly incumbent Georgia Secretary of State, Allen D. Candler, a former Confederate Colonel (whose qualifications were therefore impeccable), announced his candidacy for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination on a platform that included the following pledge:

The presence in our midst of a hundred thousand voters who have never realized the sanctity of the ballot nor the responsibility of citizenship is a constant menace.... A venal vote is the destruction of a republic. The use of money to control elections must stop.

Candler in 1898 was a consummate politician. He denied that it was his intention to deny to any race "the full enjoyment of life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness." No rights or privileges to which the Negro

was entitled were to be abridged. ¹ But the aforementioned "hundred thousand voters who have never realized the sanctity of the ballot nor the responsibility of citizenship" just coincidentally equaled the approximate number of blacks who had fully paid their poll taxes and who were consequently eligible to register to vote.

During the ensuing campaign, the venerable Colonel more candidly injected the race issue. He referred to the black vote as "a constant menace" which "tainted society." ² Addressing an agrarian audience at Zebulon in April, he intentionally piqued the prejudices of his listeners by showing how their taxes were being used to finance Negro education. ³ And yet "virtue and intelligence" were later represented as the sole criteria for determining who was to vote.

A government such as our fathers intended ours to be must rest upon an intelligent and uncorrupted ballot.... The ballot in the hands of an ignorant man, who does not realize that it is not an article of merchandise to be bartered for a price, but a great weapon of defense with which to preserve his liberties, is a constant menace to the safety of the people. Virtue and intelligence must rule. ⁴

In the June primary and the October general election, Candler and "white supremacy" scored impressive triumphs.

SMOKE AFORE THE FIRE

Racially inspired violence recurred throughout the first eight months of 1899, thereby setting the stage in the autumn for the first concerted legislative crusade to curb the Negro's political rights.

One of the most lurid of these incidents took place in Campbell County, where an enraged mob of about 15 "whitecaps" forced their way into the Palmetto jail and fatally shot nine Negro inmates who were accused of arson. Expecting the county's blacks to retaliate, the whites proceeded to arm

themselves.

Informed of the precarious situation at Palmetto, Governor Candler immediately dispatched the Atlanta militia. Asserting that such savage explosions never occurred "during a hundred years of slavery," he cited the unfortunate trouble as the inevitable consequence of quartering "regiments of insolent, drunken negro soldiers" in the state and in the South as a whole. "Still, this does not justify the bloody and barbarous retaliation... The white men who participated in these sanguinary dramas are as unjustifiable for their conduct as the negroes they lynched. Both are a disgrace to civilization and a reproach to our state, and all the power of state shall be used to prevent a recurrence of such crimes and to punish the perpetrators." ⁵

But official remonstrations did not deter subsequent perversions of justice. On April 22, an accused Negro rapist and murderer was first tortured and then burned at the stake before 2,000 ogling onlookers at Newnan in what the Atlanta Constitution called "the most diabolical (offense) in the annals of crime." ⁶ In August, the arrest of a Black Belt Negro politico, Henry Delegal, on charges of raping a white woman eights months previously resulted in a tragicomedy of internecine blunders which nearly ended in interracial warfare. ⁷

While visiting Atlanta on September 25, 1899, Booker T. Washington praised Governor Candler for the latter's equal administration of justice. ⁸ Indeed, the Georgia chief executive did sincerely endeavor to fulfill his campaign promise to dispense "even-handed justice to white and black alike." ⁹ He categorically denounced lynching as well as crimes by blacks. Nonetheless, by depicting neovigilantism as an understandable, but intolerable, response to both Negro wrongdoing and political participation, as if the two were

correlated, ¹⁰ he demonstrated his inability to transcend the biases of his environment. From a mid-twentieth century perspective, his explanation of causation was at times superficial, at other times erroneous.

DOWN, BUT NOT OUT

In October, 1899, Representative Thomas W. Hardwick of Washington County announced his intent to introduce during the forthcoming session of the General Assembly a bill to restrict the suffrage. Hardwick's proposal included an educational qualification similar to one recently adopted by the North Carolina legislature, an "understanding clause" avowedly directed by the measure's author at "'free school negroes' who have learned to read and write only," and a "grandfather clause" to exempt those who on or prior to January 1, 1867, were entitled to vote and their lineal descendants, who needless to say were almost exclusively white. In addition, the residence and tax requirements of the Constitution of 1877 were to be retained. ¹¹

Facilitating the reception of disfranchisement legislation were a number of national and state developments, specifically the discussion concerning the retention of the Philippines, the suffrage restrictions imposed by other Southern states, certain judicial decisions, the electoral abuses of the 1890's, and the frustrations of the Populists and Prohibitionists.

The question of the annexation of the Philippines had been resolved for all practical purposes in February of 1899 when the U. S. Senate ratified the treaty officially concluding the Spanish-American War. But the issue was not allowed to subside by William Jennings Bryan or by many others who continued to debate the merits of the acquisition. Georgia was no exception. The Atlanta Constitution, echoing the argument of "the white man's burden," voiced its approval of the Senate's affirmative action. ¹² Others, however, including

the Governor and the Atlanta Journal demurred; to quote the state's chief executive, "The Philippines are a part of the eastern hemisphere... There is nothing in common between us and their people.... They cannot be assimilated or absorbed." ¹³ Racial overtones, therefore, influenced the stands taken by both sides.

Probably the greatest boon to Georgia disfranchisers were the precedents of Mississippi (1890), South Carolina (1895), and Louisiana (1898), which had already implemented restrictive suffrage requirements, and North Carolina, which after unburdening itself of "fusion" rule was on the verge of following suit. ¹⁴ Adding to the movement's momentum were two landmark United States Supreme Court decisions, Mills v. Green (1895) and Williams v. Mississippi (1898), in which the nation's highest tribunal tacitly condoned the education and property provisions of the South Carolina constitution and the education and understanding qualifications of the Mississippi measure. The importance of these two decisions was not overlooked by Georgia politicians, many of whom had received legal training; these cases irrefutably served as a green light for exponents of disfranchisement.

Intrastate factors also favored restrictionists. Many whites earnestly deplored the electoral malfeasance employed to foil Populism during the 1890's. That whites as well as blacks were guilty of resorting to unscrupulous means was often ignored. That for almost every black vote bartered, a white purchaser was responsible posed still another distasteful reality which was conveniently neglected.

Many discouraged Populists felt betrayed by their would-be black "allies," whose balance of power had merely been used to maintain Democratic incumbency. Nor were Populists the only frustrated political faction.

Prohibitionists blamed their setbacks in various local option elections on Negroes whose votes had allegedly been bought by liquor interests. ¹⁶

Nonetheless, the biracial opposition to disfranchisement was formidable. Together with other whites, organized labor aligned itself against the measure, as did women's clubs, the members feeling that its adoption would lower the moral tone of the community.

Initially, blacks were so reticent in regard to the pending Hardwick bill that on November 7, 1899, Booker T. Washington privately lamented to T. Thomas Fortune:

I am almost disgusted with the colored people of Georgia. I have been corresponding with leading people in the state but cannot stir up a single colored man to take the lead in trying to head off this movement.... It is a question how far I can go and how far I ought to go in fighting these measures in other states when the colored people themselves sit down and will do nothing to help themselves. They will not even answer my letters. ¹⁷

The quiescence of Georgia's black leaders was shortlived, and Washington's complaint premature. Passing through Atlanta only two days after corresponding with Fortune, the eminent Tuskegee educator decided to take the initiative himself. He articulated in typical "Washingtonese" his "fear that the passage of the Hardwick bill will tend to widen the breach between the races, and thus hurt the work that some of the more conservative colored people have been trying to do in bringing about proper relations between the races." ¹⁸

Washington was joined in his resistance by 24 distinguished Atlanta blacks, including professors W. E. B. DuBois and John Hope, who memorialized the General Assembly to reject the Hardwick proposal. Their protests did not encompass the education provision. "It is fair and right to impose on voters an education qualification, so long as the state furnished free school facilities to all children." Property restrictions were also not objectionable so long as they were administered impartially. But the "grandfather clause" and the

"understanding clause," described as "an open door to manipulation and dishonesty," were demeaning, and hence reprehensible, to blacks. In conclusion, the legislators were poignantly admonished that "whatever good government Georgia has enjoyed in the last decade is due in no small degree to men who owe their election to negro suffrage." ¹⁹ This passage was more than a reminder that despite the allurements of Populism, Negroes had continued to support Democrats; it served notice for assemblymen, many of whom owed their incumbency to black backing, to beware of alienating a vital component of their electoral base, thereby jeopardizing their chances for re-election.

Always outspoken, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, addressing a North Georgia convention of black ministers, excoriated disfranchisement, which reconfirmed his belief that emigration alone provided a viable alternative to oppression in America. But first, he vowed to once again take to the stump after an absence of 25 years from political life if the measure was ever submitted to the voters.

Our civil rights have been torn from us by the U. S. Supreme Court, while we are expected to die for this ungrateful nation, and now to rob us of the ballot, which is little more than a mere bagatelle, is simply barbarous. I believe that these deprivations of every right that belongs to citizenship is simply preparing the way for our reenslavement. ²⁰

Nor were Atlanta blacks the only members of their race in the state to remonstrate. The Negroes of Washington County, Representative Hardwick's home, petitioned the legislature to defeat the onerous act. ²¹ Another memorial was circulated among Savannah blacks at the prompting of a white representative from Chatham County. ²²

In his annual message to the General Assembly on October 25, just two days following the announcement of Hardwick's intentions, Governor Candler recommended "that an amendment of the Constitution be submitted to the people for

ratification or rejection, restricting the elective franchise to those who recognize the sanctity of the ballot, and realize the responsibilities of citizenship."

For thirty years we, impoverished by one of the most devastating wars that has blighted the earth in two thousand years, have taxed ourselves heavily to support free schools in which to educate all of our people, and thus bring up to the standard of intelligence and good citizenship the irresponsible class of voters in our midst, but costly as the experiment has been it has failed. The irresponsible, venal vote has increased more rapidly than illiteracy has decreased. We must therefore try another remedy. This dangerous element must be eliminated from our elections; the safety of the State demands it; and the quickest and surest and safest way is to amend the Constitution, as some of our sister States have done, so as to restrict the ballot.

Seemingly, the Governor was committing himself to support disfranchisement. But the wily ex-Colonel faithfully recalled the old military dictum that one should never position oneself in such a manner as to preclude a tactical withdrawal. Hence, he left a major loophole.

Let virtue and intelligence and integrity be the sole test. The man who will directly or indirectly sell his vote is unworthy of a vote, and it should be taken away from him. The man who is virtuous and intelligent, however poor or humble, or of whatever race or color, may be safely entrusted with it. ²³

Candler, whose political antennae were carefully attuned to the ever shifting electoral currents, apparently surmised during the following weeks that it was not propitious at that particular time to advocate such a controversial plan. Re-election was too close at hand. Consequently, purportedly because "it touched only the colored voters," the crafty chief executive did not see fit to champion the Hardwick bill. ²⁴

Candler was not the only ranking official to equivocate. Representative J. M. Pace, chairman of the House Committee on Constitutional Amendments, at first sided with the majority of his fellow committeemen who favorably reported the proposed legislation on November 15. Two weeks later, when it

was time to vote, Pace, undoubtedly after much "soul-searching," deemed the measure unwise. 25

On November 28, 1899, disfranchisement was overwhelmingly defeated by a tally of 137 nays to only three ayes. Hardwick alone spoke in favor of the bill on the House floor. First, he attempted to settle any legal qualms entertained by his fellow lawmakers; no voters were to be denied their constitutionally guaranteed rights "on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Admittedly, more Negroes would purposely be barred, but this was "because they lack virtue and intelligence," not because of race. To forewarn whites of their imminent danger, he cited census statistics revealing that 46.74% of the state's population was Negro, and that blacks comprised a numerical majority in 63 counties. 26

The politicians present were unconvinced. Led by South Georgia legislators with imposing black constituencies, they categorically rebutted Hardwick's contentions. The bill was unconstitutional; the "grandfather clause" had never been tested in the courts. It was unnecessary; blacks were politically apathetic and voluntarily acquiesced to the rule of the "better class" of whites, that is, conservative Democrats.

Rarely had such lofty bombast been used in the august House chamber in defense of the Negro and his suddenly precious rights. To quote Representative Howard of Chattahoochee County:

From the time when the fifteenth amendment of the constitution was enacted up to the present day the best part of the negro race in Georgia has voted with and stood by the party to which I have the honor to belong.

I would take pleasure in going on record as favoring the elimination of the ignorant and purchasable voter of all classes of this state, but I am not in favor of the discrimination which is proposed in this bill.

Representative Holder of Jackson County:

I oppose the bill because I believe it to be a violation of the constitution of the republic.

But were it constitutional it is not right to deprive any man of his ballot on account of his color. ²⁷

Representative William Harrison of Quitman County:

The objection I raise to the bill here... is that it is legislating purposely, positively, and conclusively against one race. ²⁸

The Atlanta Constitution, obviously still under the influence of the General Assembly's rhetorical opiate, viewed the resounding rejection "as emphatic evidence that the white people of the state do not propose to permit the negroes to become the victims of any injustice so far as their rights as citizens are concerned." ²⁹ Equally quixotic was the Atlanta Journal's roseate explanation; "This measure found little favor with the people or press of Georgia...." ³⁰

A more realistic appraisal was made by the Macon Telegraph, which declared that the one-sidedness of the results was not indicative of a public opinion which was fairly evenly divided. "The talk of infringing on the rights of the negroes is mere cant." A more forthright rationale would have been the fear of electoral reprisals. The blacks would still have held the balance of power in the ensuing election. ³¹ Representative Hardwick seconded the Telegraph's exposition. Many legislators, he contended, feared that passage would have unnecessarily served to rejuvenate the Populists, who could then have united with blacks at the polls to defeat both Democracy and disfranchisement. ³² Under the status quo, Negroes rarely voted, and when they did, the vast majority exercised their prerogative "rightly," that is, they voted for good, "safe" Democrats. To have antagonized this ready reserve with Populists still looming in the background would have been exceedingly impolitic.

"WHITE PRIMARIED"

March 16, 1900, marked a somewhat tainted "red-letter day" in Georgia political history. The Democratic State Executive Committee, meeting at the Kimball House in Atlanta, announced that the state-wide party primary to be held on May 15 was for the first time to be limited to whites only. ³³

Primaries were not anything extraordinary in Georgia; they had been conducted locally as early as the 1870's and 1880's. ³⁴ Neither was the white primary that novel; county executive committees, which were practically autonomous heretofore, had restricted participation previously to those of "Anglo-Saxon" descent. ³⁵ Nor, finally, was a state-wide primary unique; it had first been used in 1898. ³⁶ But the combination white, state-wide primary was inaugurated in 1900 by the State Executive Committee, which was empowered to so decree by an epochal 1891 Georgia statute giving the parties free rein to establish primary rules and regulations. ³⁷

The incipient public reaction was tempestuous. No, the exclusion of blacks did not generate any undue alarm or frenzied outcries. What aroused the ire of many, especially rural residents, was the inconvenience not only of another election (in contrast to alternative mass meetings which formerly sufficed) but also of having to register at least ten days prior to the date of the primary. ³⁸

Such Democratic organs as the Atlanta Constitution moved alacritously to assuage the disgruntled farmers. Admittedly, the two additional trips to register and then to vote were a "pain," but a "pain" that was more than offset by the removal of the menace of "Negro domination."

In Georgia, the party nomination constitutes the election.... This led the way...to the primary.... Through it the white people of many rural districts are saved from the horrors of negro rule, whether that vote was cast in phalanx or held the balance of power between contending white parties. ³⁹

Again displaying his acute political sensitivities, Governor Candler, who ironically claimed credit three years later for having authored the white primary, ⁴⁰ professed personally to disapprove of the registration requirement. Nonetheless, he urged all the party faithful to comply. ⁴¹

The white primary was heralded as an enlightened, constructive, perfectly legal reform designed to alleviate electoral corruption. To quote the Atlanta Constitution, which only two years earlier had opposed this very same "reform," on the day of the primary:

It has been reserved to Georgia to discover an escape from negro domination on the one side, and from warfare upon the suffrage on the other. The white men of certain communities in Georgia, recognizing the evil of having their local elections decided by an ignorant horde of voters ... and also recognizing the necessity for a field upon which conflicting interests could fight out to a conclusion their claims, resolved upon white primaries.... Here then we have before us a solution of the whole question of suffrage... This interferes with the right of no man, it deprives no race of men of their full weight in political affairs. If, for instance, the colored voters of Georgia can take advantage of the time remaining before the state election and can present a better ticket in point of morals and character... they have the right to do so... Georgia is to be congratulated that she has set the pace in one of the greatest problems which ever beset a free people. ⁴²

But if the primary objective of its drafters was to remedy electoral abuse, the white primary failed miserably. Furthermore, black voting was not even altogether eliminated. A wholesale purchase of white voters was recorded in the May Chatham County primary. In the November, 1900, Augusta mayoral primary, which allegedly was restricted to whites, votes of both races were openly purchased and cast. The only discrimination in evidence was the going price; whites received five dollars, blacks only two. ⁴³ Apparently, these incidents were not isolated. On August 13, 1904, the General Assembly passed an act making the purchase or sale of votes in a primary a misdemeanor. But such "stringent," punitive measures, which were no more than an official slap on the wrist, proved ineffective. Consequently, Governor J. M. Terrell,

in his 1905 message to the legislature, sought an extension of the regulations governing Federal, state, and local elections to primaries. 44

Exponents of the white primary had argued that exclusion of the "venal darky voter" would improve the caliber of elected officials. Again, these predictions did not materialize. The Reverend Sam Jones, a noted evangelist and a perceptive, outspoken editorial contributor to the Atlanta Journal, was extremely critical of the less than meritorious performance of the 1900 session of the General Assembly; "... the white primaries have nominated some mighty lousy, dirty devils, to say nothing of the last legislature assembled." Satirically, he suggested the implementation of a black primary, from which all whites would be excluded, "to see if they could not nominate from the white people of the state a crowd that would beat the last legislature assembled in Georgia." 45

While some whites recognized that the white primary was not an electoral reform as they had anticipated and hence sought more effective remedies elsewhere, others came to regard total disfranchisement as the prescribed panacea.

DOWN, AND OUT - TEMPORARILY

Both Governor Candler and Representative Hardwick were convincingly reelected, as were the two other representatives who voted affirmatively for restriction in 1899. In fact, one of these two, Roland Ellis of Bibb County, was even promoted to the state Senate by his unrepentant constituents. 46 Emboldened somewhat by their successes, the exponents of disfranchisement renewed their efforts.

On August 4, 1900, Hardwick affirmed that he would reintroduce his controversial, once-repudiated proposal. Concurrently, Senator Ellis proclaimed that if the Hardwick bill was again spurned, he personally would

submit a resolution calling for a constitutional convention, at which fewer political pressures would confront the assembled delegates. ⁴⁷

Ineligible for yet another term, Governor Candler abandoned his former transparent veil of opposition to a disfranchisement measure merely because it intentionally discriminated against a particular race. First, he seconded the suggestion that a constitutional convention be convoked. ⁴⁸ Next, in his annual address to the General Assembly delivered on October 25, 1900, the Governor explicitly excoriated the initial enfranchisement of the blacks as an intolerable crime, "the greatest... ever perpetrated against our system of government." For 30 years, this alien race allegedly had enjoyed the opportunities to attend free public schools and to acquire property. But they had squandered both chances; "through indolence or profligacy or vice," they remained illiterate and indigent. Hence, an amendment to the constitution embodying educational and/or property qualifications was deemed to be justified. Conspicuously omitted, however, was any specific mention of the Hardwick bill or of its two most polemic provisions, the "grandfather" and "understanding" clauses. ⁴⁹

But legislative approval of any form of disfranchisement or of a constitutional convention never materialized during 1900 or 1901. As promised, Hardwick resubmitted his well-publicized bill on November 13, 1900, ⁵⁰ but the measure was not even considered on the floor of the House until the following year's session. When brought to a vote on November 19, 1901, it was once more trounced by a lopsided margin of 17 ayes to 114 nays. ⁵¹ Both the outcome and the arguments presented by both sides were repetitious. ⁵² What nominal gains were made from the even more unequal tally of 1899 were at best pyrrhic, for a similar restrictive proposal was not seriously debated by the legislature

for six years thereafter. Democrats valued the black political presence too highly to eliminate it, for it continued to provide both a unifying scapegoat and an electoral reserve with which to combat white dissidence. The Bourbon rallying cry of "let well enough alone" persisted.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Atlanta Constitution, January 22, 1898.
- 2 Horace Calvin Wingo, "Race Relations in Georgia, 1872-1908" (Ph.D., Emory University, 1969), p. 96.
- 3 Clarence A. Bacote, "The Negro in Georgia Politics, 1880-1908" (Ph.D., University of Chicago, 1955), p. 276.
- 4 Atlanta Constitution, November 30, 1898; Elizabeth Hulsey Marshall, "Allen D. Candler, Governor and Collector of Records" (M.A., University of Georgia, 1959), p. 88.
- 5 Marshall, p. 94.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid., pp. 96-103.
- 8 Ibid., p. 104.
- 9 Atlanta Constitution, January 22, 1898.
- 10 Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 276; Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Georgia, 1899 (Atlanta, 1899), pp. 32-33.
- 11 Atlanta Journal, October 23, 1899.
- 12 Atlanta Constitution, October 31, 1899.
- 13 Ibid., June 15, 1900.
- 14 C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge, 1951), p. 321.

- 15 Ralph Wardlaw, "Negro Suffrage in Georgia, 1867-1930," Bulletin of the University of Georgia, XXXIII (September, 1932), p. 61.
- 16 Atlanta Journal, November 1, 1899.
- 17 Woodward, Origins, p. 338.
- 18 Atlanta Journal, November 9, 1899.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid., November 10, 1899.
- 21 Atlanta Constitution, November 18, 1899.
- 22 Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 287.
- 23 Georgia House Journal, 1899, pp. 32-33.
- 24 Atlanta Constitution, November 18, 1899.
- 25 Atlanta Journal, November 28, 1899.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Atlanta Constitution, November 28, 1899.
- 28 Ibid., November 29, 1899.
- 29 Ibid., December 4, 1899.
- 30 Atlanta Journal, December 9, 1899.
- 31 Macon Telegraph, November 30, 1899.
- 32 Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 290.
- 33 Macon Telegraph, March 17, 1900; Atlanta Journal, March 16, 1900.
- 34 L. M. Holland, The Direct Primary in Georgia (Urbana, 1949), p. 23.
- 35 Ibid., pp. 49-53.
- 36 Ibid., pp. 49-50.
- 37 Wardlaw, p. 51; Georgia Laws, 1890-1891 (Atlanta, 1891), p. 210.
- 38 Macon Telegraph, March 17, 1900; Marshall, p. 124.
- 39 Marshall, p. 124; Atlanta Constitution, March 20, 1900.
- 40 Marshall, pp. 125-126.

- 41 Ibid., p. 125; Atlanta Constitution, April 10, 1900.
- 42 Marshall, p. 126; Atlanta Constitution, May 15, 1900.
- 43 Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 291.
- 44 Georgia House Journal, 1905, June 29, 1905.
- 45 Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 292.
- 46 Ibid., p. 293.
- 47 Atlanta Journal, August 4, 1900.
- 48 Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 296.
- 49 Georgia House Journal, 1900, pp. 44-45.
- 50 Ibid., p. 266.
- 51 Georgia House Journal, 1901, pp. 513-515.
- 52 Atlanta Journal, November 19, 1901.

IV. GATHERING CLOUDS

The year 1902 witnessed the exit of the principals primarily responsible for the initial disfranchisement agitation in Georgia. Until his final day in office, Governor Allen D. Candler continued to fight for constitutional revision. In his annual message to the legislature on October 23, 1902, he reiterated his oft repeated appeal for a constitutional convention; again, "the restriction of the elective franchise and the elimination of the venal and corrupt vote" were cited as being uppermost among the state's most vexatious problems. ¹ Two days later, Candler was succeeded by Joseph M. Terrell, who thereafter painstakingly avoided any reference to disfranchisement.

Likewise, Thomas W. Hardwick relinquished his former political office. Rather than retire to his law practice, he offered for promotion to the United States House of Representatives. With the aid of Tom Watson, whose racial thoughts were then in transition, and on a platform urging the repeal of the questionably ratified Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Federal Constitution, he was successful in transferring the locus of his legislative forum to Washington. ²

But the removal of these two did not necessarily connote a subsidence of Negrophobia. Instead, what had appeared to many to be a resounding rejection of disfranchisement proved merely to be an ephemeral respite. From 1902 through the first months of 1905, the forces favoring restriction reorganized

and reinforced their ranks, adding to their number many notable converts. Abetting their cause were again national as well as state events and processes, which together made white Georgians more amenable to black electoral exclusion.

NATIONAL TRENDS: GREATER TOLERATION OF INTOLERANCE

Such trends as disfranchisement by other Southern states, judicial assent to such circumscription, supposedly scientific and intellectual analyses of Negro inferiority, and literary portrayals of black debasement were not unique. But after the turn of the century, the cumulative inertia of these developments facilitated Northern acquiescence to Southern discrimination.

During the terminal decade of the nineteenth century, three states, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Louisiana, had moved to restrict black suffrage. They were joined by North Carolina in 1900, Alabama in 1901, and Virginia in 1901-1902, the last two of which adopted versions of Louisiana's "grandfather clause."³

Earlier United States Supreme Court decisions had not adjudged the constitutionality of said "grandfather clauses." Nor did the high tribunal explicitly commit itself when the validity of the pertinent Alabama constitutional provisions was questioned. Instead, in the case of Giles v. Harris (1903), Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, speaking for the majority of the court, ruled that equitable relief was unavailable for blacks who wished to register in accordance with the allegedly unconstitutional clauses. If the provisions were indeed invalid, no one could be registered thereunder. If they were upheld, the court had no jurisdiction to intervene.⁴ Furthermore, Holmes implied that Congress or the President, not the judiciary, was

responsible for overruling states in such matters. ⁵

If the Supreme Court retreated in Giles v. Harris, it surrendered in Pope v. Williams (1904). Citing another case, a majority of the justices concluded, "While the privilege to vote may not be abridged by a State on account of race, color and previous condition of servitude, the privilege is not given by the Federal Constitution or by any of its amendments nor is it a privilege springing from citizenship of the United States." ⁶

"In other words, the privilege to vote in a State is within the jurisdiction of the State itself, to be exercised as the State may direct, and upon such terms as it may seem proper..." ⁷ Georgia politico-attorneys, such men as Hoke Smith, Tom Watson, and Thomas W. Hardwick, punctiliously took note.

To "confirm" the innate inferiority of the Negro, professional and lay Social Darwinists of both North and South revived certain ante-bellum and post-bellum "scientific" studies. The Negro's brain was smaller than that of the average white; therefore, the former had less mental capacity. ⁸ Also, only a thin veneer of civilization, derived naturally from contact with the indisputably more advanced "Anglo-Saxon" culture, distinguished the Afro-American from his savage forebears; the high incidence of criminality was attributable then to a regression to a previous primitive state. ⁹ Epitomizing the theory of the supremacy of the "Aryan" race was Count Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, who in Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines contended that "everything great, noble and fruitful in the work of man on this earth, in science, art and civilization, is derived from a single starting point; it belongs to one family alone, the different branches of which have ruled in all civilized countries." ¹⁰ Since natural law, or evolution, had purportedly decreed that whites were the fittest and that blacks were inherently inferior, mere mortals were powerless to do more

than to go along with their predetermined fates. To legislate contrary to established mores was futile.¹¹ Hence, many were led to accept legislation which did conform with established mores and which did recognize the innate subordinacy of the Negro.

Finally, the realm of les beaux-arts was invaded by a racist-inspired literature which probably reached a more extensive audience nation-wide than ever before. Foremost among such popular but controversial writers was the North Carolina Baptist clergyman, Thomas Dixon, Jr., who authored The Leopard's Spots, A Romance of the White Man's Burden -- 1865-1900 (1902) and The Clansman, An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan (1905).¹² So incendiary was the stage adaptation of The Clansman that even many Southern cities barred its presentation.

To say that the aforementioned judicial decisions and intellectual and literary currents directly influenced Georgia disfranchisement is impossible to determine. But to deny that they had an indirect impact of considerable significance is equally impossible, for they undoubtedly served to mitigate opposition both within and outside the state even if they did not specifically persuade a single individual to support restriction.

TEDDY TWO-STEP

President Theodore Roosevelt's attitude toward the Negro and the South was contradictory. Initially, he befriended the black, thereby arousing the ire of Dixie. Later, his efforts to placate the white South seemingly involved a partial sacrifice, if not a total abandonment, of Negro interests. On both counts, the President furthered the cause of black disfranchisement.

During Roosevelt's first term in office, his nondiscriminatory professions and actions incensed paranoiac Southern sensitivities. First, the President

invited Booker T. Washington to dine at the White House on October 18, 1901. For this display of biracial affinity, the Chief Executive incurred the unremitting wrath of the pro-Democratic Southern press, which vociferously denounced him for encouraging Negroes to aspire to social equality. ¹³ Undaunted, the President in January, 1903, extended to five blacks invitations to attend a reception at the White House for the Supreme Court justices. Southern Congressmen indignantly boycotted the affair. ¹⁴

Black patronage appointments also enraged white Southerners in general, and Georgians in particular. In response to a missive by Clark Howell, the Democratic committeeman from Georgia, Roosevelt declared on February 23, 1903, that "the prime tests I have applied have been those of character, fitness and ability.... I certainly cannot treat mere color as a permanent bar to holding office, any more than I could so treat creed or birthplace." ¹⁵ For such a repugnant sacrilege, the Chief Executive was dubbed "the Black President."

Edward the VI has gone down into history as "Edward the Black Prince," so called from the color of his armor.... Roosevelt will as assuredly go down into the history as the "Black President," not from the color of his armor, but armor bearers; on account of the natural black armor or skin that covers his most enthusiastic adherents; and especially because of... his attempt to destroy the color line shown by his appointment of black men to office... his inviting a negro to dine with him, and his determination to sacrifice Anglo-Saxon traditions to secure the votes of the black race. ¹⁶

Following his re-election, however, "the Black President" lightened and brightened his hue considerably. During a whirlwind tour of Dixie in the autumn of 1905, Roosevelt, suddenly recalling his dear mother's Southern ancestry, eulogized the "Lost Cause." ¹⁷ Adhering to the advice of Booker T. Washington, the Chief Executive suspended, with certain noteworthy exceptions, the appointments of Negro officeholders in the South; he

preferred instead to dispense patronage plums to Negroes in states where the black vote was still a significant political factor.¹⁸ Lynching and disfranchisement, which Roosevelt had so vigorously excoriated during his initial years in office, precipitantly became taboo topics.

Georgia blacks felt betrayed; already demoralized, they became even more despondent. Their idol of several years past had abruptly turned "lily white."¹⁹

HANDWRITING ON THE WALL

Such personages as Thomas Hardwick; Mrs. Rebecca Latimer Felton, the wife of a prominent independent leader of the 1880's; and John Temple Graves, a well-known Atlanta journalist, had long expressed dissatisfaction with the onerous "black menace." Therefore, their persistent espousal of disfranchisement and racial separation startled no one. But reversals by Tom Watson, the former Populist champion of Negro political rights, and by Senator Augustus O. Bacon, a faithful Bourbon, augured an unpromising black political future.

In 1892, a more idealistic Tom Watson had aptly perceived that "the argument against the independent political movement in the South may be boiled down into one word - NIGGER."²⁰ Over a decade had passed, but Bourbon tactics remained unaltered. Campaigning as the Populist presidential candidate in 1904, Watson was again confronted by his old bugaboo; from Texas to Georgia, the constructive aspects of his candidacy were eclipsed by "the ominous shadow of negro domination."²¹ Hence, Watson inauspiciously decided to "out-Herod Herod;" that is, he pathetically resorted to the same, deplorable, Negro-baiting expedients employed so invidiously by his adversaries. In one speech delivered in Atlanta on September 1, 1904, the "Sage of Hickory

Hill," the reputed Negrophile of the 1890's, unequivocally repudiated his previous defenses of black liberties.

In the south we are told we must submit to the surrender to Wall Street because of 'the nigger.' What a blessed thing it is for Democratic leaders that they always have 'the nigger' to fall back on! For thirty years they have been doing business on 'the nigger,' and today he is their only stock in trade.

Note the hypocrisy of it!... What can the southern negro do? He has been disfranchised in nearly every southern state, excepting Georgia; and in Georgia they do not dare to disfranchise him because the men who control the Democratic machine in Georgia know that a majority of the whites are against them. They need the negro vote to beat us with.... Organized Democracy in Georgia cannot be maintained by the white vote. Therefore the cry that we are in danger from 'the nigger' is the most hypocritical that unscrupulous leadership could invent. ²²

As a foreboding parting comment, Watson announced that he and his fellow Populists would support any anti-machine Democratic gubernatorial aspirant whose platform included a disfranchisement pledge. ²³

The sincerity of the "Agrarian Rebel's" change of heart was questionable at best. Probably, it was no more than a cheap political power play. Blacks then held the balance of power if and when white Democrats split. But if the Negro was divested of the franchise, the heirs to his strategic preponderance of power would then become the Populists. ²⁴

Regardless of the impeachability of Watson's motives, his reversal was all-important. "Georgia might never have passed a disfranchisement measure had Tom Watson not returned to the political stage." ²⁵

Subsequent events during the presidential campaign of 1904 did little to stem the intensification of racial antagonism. The antipathy directed by white Southerners at Theodore Roosevelt, coupled with the demagogic invective of Monsieur Watson, only aggravated an already explosive situation and augmented white sentiment for electoral exclusion.

On November 28, 1904, soon after the election, Senator Augustus O. Bacon

joined the crescendo of those urging the curtailment of black political liberties. In a letter to Representative Hardwick, the Senator equated Negro domination with "mongrel rule" and urged the repeal of the infamous Fifteenth Amendment. ²⁶ Several days thereafter, he invoked the ultimate Negro-baiting weapon, the sexual motif; "...equality in political association tends to social equality, and social equality leads in the end inevitably to miscegenation and amalgamation." ²⁷

By the advent of 1905, the Negro still officially retained his suffrage rights, but his grasp was becoming increasingly tenuous. Even the alleged "better class" of whites was beginning to abandon its former advocacy of black enfranchisement.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

An erosion of white resistance to circumscription occurred during 1904, but the ranks of those opposed were not depleted to the point of impotence. Rather, they remained a formidable, if no longer insurmountable, impediment to disfranchisement.

Various motives animated the sundry white opponents, but magnanimity in its most liberal sense was not uppermost. Innate Negro inferiority was almost universally accepted as an irrefutable fact. For example, H. H. Perry of Macon, preferring not to further disturb racial harmony by the adoption of discriminatory legislation, contended that white supremacy was inevitable if whites were indeed inherently superior, as they most assuredly were. ²⁸ Others asserted that the white primary sufficiently barred the Negro. Probably the most unbigoted sentiment expressed was that of former Congressman William H. Fleming of Augusta, who courageously castigated Senator Bacon's proposal to repeal the Fifteenth Amendment; such action would again reduce the Negro to a state of virtual enslavement. ²⁹

Still other whites sympathized with efforts to separate the races, but not with the unprincipled, inflammatory tirades resorted to by some who shared their opinions. In reference once more to Senator Bacon, the Reverend Sam Jones damned "bloody shirt wavers" and "fireeaters." 30

The state government similarly was not totally devoid of a sense of fair play. In Howell et al, v. Pate et al, the Georgia Supreme Court on February 15, 1904, invalidated a contested clause in the Warrenton municipal charter which excluded blacks from the general election of city officials. 31

BLACKLASHLESSNESS

Prevented from voting in the decisive Democratic primary, often excluded by illicit means in the general election as well, and bereft of political power or influence even if allowed to cast a ballot, the better educated black by the end of 1904 had understandably become discouraged and practically apolitical. Representative of this sentiment was John Hope of Atlanta University.

Any discussion as to the fitness and honesty of municipal and state candidates hardly touches me, as I know I cannot lift a finger to promote the interests of any one of them. I have no voice. 32

Also, that eminent champion of Negro liberties, W. E. B. DuBois, failed to even register.

Believing with good reason that whites intended to maintain "Anglo-Saxon" supremacy at all costs, including life and honor if need be, blacks refrained from demanding or exercising their political prerogatives; instead, they pled for the more fundamental rights of physical security and property. 33 Efforts to revive the degenerate state Republican Party

were blocked largely by blacks who feared that any activity on their parts would only add to white resentment, thereby promoting the discriminatory legislation which they so avidly hoped to avoid. ³⁴ For the same reason, a majority of Negro leaders opposed a punitive reduction of the congressional representation of those Southern states which had already restricted the suffrage. ³⁵ In lieu thereof, these men chose to speak out - frequently in muted tones - against lynching and intimidation and to encourage economic amelioration. Quite simply, these men were too frightened to do otherwise.

Whereas silence or benign refutation was employed by most prominent blacks, at least one of the best-known members of the minority race, Ben Davis, editor of the Atlanta Independent, publicly seemed to concur with the white restrictionists. According to Davis, the Negro was "innately unfit for the ballot;" since all who paid their taxes and registered supposedly could vote "without intimidation or violence," any black who did not exercise this right just had no "patriotic conception of the duties and responsibilities of citizenship." The initial enfranchisement of the Negro had been an egregious error. Disfranchisement would be a blessing, for the black was not far enough removed from the "degradation of 250 years of slavery to be trusted with the control of government." Rather than politics, the future of the Negro lay in economic security; once the black became prosperous, whites, in Davis's opinion, would presumably extend political recognition. ³⁶

Davis was the spokesman for only a small minority of his race. But the white press seized every available opportunity to construe his comparatively extreme views to be indicative of a much wider spectrum of Negro thought. On August 6, 1904, the Atlanta Constitution published the following editorial:

Here is an intelligent negro editor... who advances the same reasons in proof of the undesirability of universal negro suffrage that the average white Southerner will give for desiring to limit the suffrage privilege to citizens who can read and write.

The degeneracy of the negro race in the south is logically traceable to the insolence and delusion of his political solidarity... There is only one remedy and that the Atlanta Independent has had the courage and wisdom to announce. The ignorant negro must stop his childish attempt to play in the political fire, go to work, go to church, go to school, learn a trade, cultivate some common sense, and with it the good opinion and friendship of fair-minded white people who have become disgusted with the "political nigger." ³⁷

Blacks had more than enough problems without unnecessarily compounding them; but Ben Davis, whether intentionally or not, did just that. His editorial contributions made Negro enfranchisement, which was already endangered, even more precarious.

By 1905, the elements favoring disfranchisement were all present, but not yet combined. All that was needed was a catalyst to facilitate reaction.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Georgia, 1902 (Atlanta, 1902), p. 56.

² Josephine N. Cummings, "Thomas William Hardwick, a Study of a Strange and Eventful Career" (M. A., University of Georgia, 1961), pp. 6-7.

³ C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge, 1951), p. 321.

⁴ United States Reports, CLXXXIX, October Term, 1902 (New York, 1903), pp. 486-487.

⁵ Ibid., p. 488.

⁶ United States Reports, CXCI, October Term, 1903 (New York, 1904), p. 621.

⁷ Ibid., p. 632.

⁸ Charles Wesley, "Negro Inferiority in American Thought," Journal of Negro History, XXV (October, 1940), p. 553; Barton J. Bernstein, "Plessy v. Ferguson: Conservative Sociological Jurisprudence," Journal of Negro History, XLVIII (July, 1963), p. 203.

⁹ Wesley, p. 554; Bernstein, p. 203.

¹⁰ Wesley, p. 555.

¹¹ Bernstein, p. 200.

¹² Woodward, Origins, p. 352.

¹³ Clarence A. Bacote, "The Negro in Georgia Politics, 1880-1908" (Ph.D., University of Chicago, 1955), p. 311.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 314.

¹⁵ Atlanta Journal, March 2, 1903, quoted in Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 321.

¹⁶ Atlanta Journal, April 11, 1903, quoted in Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 322.

¹⁷ Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 368.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 370-371.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 374-375.

²⁰ C. Vann Woodward, "Tom Watson and the Negro in Agrarian Politics," Journal of Southern History, IV (February, 1938), p. 26.

²¹ C. Vann Woodward, Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel (New York, 1963), p. 370.

²² Atlanta Journal, September 2, 1904.

²³ Woodward, Tom Watson, p. 371.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 372.

²⁵ Horace Calvin Wingo, "Race Relations in Georgia, 1872-1908" (Ph.D., Emory University, 1969), p. 102.

²⁶ Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 376.

27 Ibid., p. 379.

28 Wingo, p. 103.

29 Ibid.

30 Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 377.

31 Ralph Wardlaw, "Negro Suffrage in Georgia, 1867-1930," Bulletin of the University of Georgia, XXXIII (September, 1932), p. 54.

32 Wingo, p. 104.

33 Ibid., p. 105.

34 Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 387.

35 Ibid., p. 382.

36 Ibid., p. 393.

37 Atlanta Constitution, August 6, 1904.

V. BAND WAGON

Politicians historically have claimed that they have received a mandate from their constituents to perform a specific act or to press for the adoption of a given piece of legislation. Traditionally, this assertion has been unjustified or at least questionable, for rarely have the issues been so narrowly defined. The Georgia gubernatorial election of 1906, however, was the exception, for the landslide proportions of Hoke Smith's victory virtually ordained the enactment of disfranchisement.

DOWN WITH TH' POPE

Tom Watson had concluded his historic Atlanta speech of September, 1901, with the comment that he would support any anti-machine Democratic gubernatorial aspirant who publicly advocated disfranchisement. On April 22, 1905, such an aspirant appeared on the state political scene in the person of Pope Brown, the former president of the Georgia Agricultural Society. Actually, Brown's reform platform did not embody a restrictive plank,¹ but in a speech at Quitman, he declared himself to be in favor of such a provision. Hence, Thomas Hardwick, the patron saint of disfranchisement, rallied to the cause,² and soon thereafter the "Sage of Hickory Hill," Tom Watson himself, followed suit.³ Neither Hardwick nor Watson,

however, was overly impressed with Brown. Both would have preferred a stronger candidate.

Meanwhile, the Atlanta Journal was enthusiastically urging Hoke Smith, Grover Cleveland's Secretary of the Interior and a former owner of said newspaper, to enter the race. On May 27, Brown, Smith, Hardwick, and Editor James Gray of the Journal met in Gray's Atlanta office to discuss the candidacies of the various principals. There, it was determined that it would be highly inadvisable for both Smith and Brown to oppose each other, thereby splitting the anti-machine vote. Consequently, Smith left the final decision up to Brown. If the latter withdrew, Smith would "toss his hat into the ring;" otherwise, he would remain on the political sidelines - albeit reluctantly. One week later, Pope Brown politely stepped aside to make way for the Honorable Hoke Smith. ⁴

HOKUM

On June 3, 1905, over one year prior to the eventual date of the primary, Hoke Smith officially announced his candidacy for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination. His platform, which further revealed the omnipresent influence of Tenth District Congressman T. W. Hardwick, included the following concise pledge:

I favor a constitutional amendment which will insure a continuation of white supremacy. ⁵

At the official opening of his campaign, which was held at Madison on June 29, Smith expounded his disfranchisement rationale. "Back...of the entire question...(was) the broad proposition that this must be preserved as a white man's country with a white man's government." Admittedly, the white primary then appeared to be a sufficient defense, but this electoral

device was at best a temporary expedient. White division, the primary beneficiary of which would probably be the alien Republican Party and surely not the Populists (for the Pops, whose aid Smith hoped to enlist, were to be wooed and not antagonized), was inevitable. Unless action was taken before such a split transpired, the black vote, which was naturally Republican, would again be decisive. Conceded also was the candidate's previous opposition to the initial Hardwick proposals. But times had changed; more recent decisions by the United States Supreme Court had affirmed the legality of similar measures. One other alleged reason to exclude black voters was to facilitate the adoption of the Australian ballot and other needed electoral reforms, for in 1904, conservatives had raised the specter of an "unsupervised" Negro ballot to defeat the Kelly (Australian ballot) reform bill. And finally, not only did the white primary not bar future white division in the general elections, but it also did not extend to nonpartisan city bond and local option elections. In so many words, Smith resorted to the hoary Bourbon scare tactic; the Negro was unquestionably a potential, if not an imminent, threat. ⁶

Nonetheless, during the early months of the campaign, race was not the number one issue. Instead, it took a back seat to "the great issue..., shall the railroads control the state, or the state control the railroads?" ⁷ In fact, so secondary was disfranchisement that references to it were repeatedly omitted from the published excerpts from Smith's speeches printed in his personal editorial mouthpiece, the Atlanta Journal. ⁸ As late as August 6, the rival Atlanta Constitution, edited by Smith's principal opponent, Clark Howell, termed the railroad question "THE ONE ISSUE."

But several factors contributed to a fateful shift of emphasis to

Negrophobia. Of the utmost importance was the seemingly one-dimensional counsel of Thomas W. Hardwick and the interrelated efforts to win the invaluable endorsement of Tom Watson. Secondly, Clark Howell and his supporters did much to redirect attention to race, thereby diverting Smith's previous focus on corporate corruption and political bossism. And lastly, the impact of inertia was not to be underestimated once Hoke Smith and company hitched their bandwagon to the inherently emotional Negro question.

T. W. Hardwick joined ranks with Smith at the commencement of the latter's campaign. In formally announcing his support, the Tenth District Congressman stated, "If for no other reason, I would be for Smith on one plank of his platform, that of the disfranchisement of the ignorant negro vote." ⁹ Nor was Hardwick's advice, which, needless to say, was not designed to appeal to blacks, disregarded, for he served as an irreplaceable intermediary between Smith and Tom Watson.

Watson's endorsement was avidly sought, and justifiably so, for the agrarian leader's Populist following still represented a potent political bloc. Hence, on June 20, Smith personally corresponded with Watson, intimating how nice it would be for the two to see eye to eye on the pertinent state issues. ¹⁰ Several days later, Hardwick requested Watson to inform him "exactly what reparation you think Mr. Smith ought to make," and he would arrange to have Smith and the Journal "do the right thing."

The "Sage of Hickory Hill" generously recommended several platform changes and other policy revisions, which Smith eagerly incorporated in his public speeches and the Journal in its editorial pages. ¹¹ Greater stress was thereafter placed on racial issues, especially after Booker T. Washington committed the unforgivable indiscretion of dining with John

Wannamaker, a wealthy white businessmen and a former Republican Cabinet member. Not only did Wannamaker invite the eminent Negro, but he allegedly even permitted him to escort his fair daughter into the dining room. The Journal decried this repugnant incident, which purportedly augured of miscegenation and a resultant disappearance of the Caucasian race. Nor did Candidate Smith fail to capitalize on his timely opportunity; during a speech delivered at Warrenton on August 15, he retorted that "John Wannamaker could not eat at my table." ¹²

Nonetheless, Watson was not easily mollified. After all, Smith was a Gold Democrat who had supported the unpalatable Parker just the previous autumn. If that was not sufficient cause for alienation, the Journal had been extremely critical of Watson's 1904 presidential candidacy, which supposedly only played into the hands of the despicable Republicans. But Smith and company did have certain redeeming qualities; they did espouse "negro disfranchisement, white supremacy, and the curbing of the corporate influences in Georgia" - in that order of importance to the master Pop. ¹³ On September 12, Watson wrote Smith, promising to publicly endorse him in the October edition of Tom Watson's Magazine. ¹⁴

Anti-Smith organs immediately and unequivocally denounced this unholy alliance as a calculated conspiracy to defeat Southern solidarity; "HE WILL WORK DEMOCRATS IN 1906 TO MAKE GOOD POPULISTS FOR 1908," read a prominent headline in the hostile Macon Telegraph. ¹⁵ Equally unfriendly was the State Democratic Executive Committee, which in order to curtail Populist participation in the upcoming primary imposed a party loyalty oath as a prerequisite for voting. ¹⁶ But such gestures proved futile, for Watson and his fellow Populists were determined not to be excluded from the polls by vain epithets

or by a "few little words put on the ballot by the printer." ¹⁷ Nor did Clark Howell's scathing comments concerning the contemptible "deal" between Smith and Watson bear too much weight after it was revealed that the editor of the Constitution had himself sought a meeting with Watson to discuss "a number of things" more than a month prior to the Populist's endorsement of Smith. ¹⁸ Thereafter, the sound and the fury surrounding Watson's support continued unabated, but the opposition's phrases appeared more and more repetitious and hollow.

Because of his more conservative stance on the railroad-corporation issue and because of the old-line Democratic credentials of his staunchest backers, Clark Howell was forced almost from the first days of campaign to assume an unenviable defensive position. The Journal, while maintaining that Smith was "the people's candidate," effectively portrayed Howell as the docile pawn of the suspect "corporation ring." Undoubtedly sensing the prevailing reformist sentiment permeating large segments of the electorate, Howell initially sought - with little visible success - to depict himself as the true anticorporation man and to place the corporate onus on Smith. Failing miserably and becoming increasingly vulnerable, "the machine candidate" gladly seized the chance to concentrate on a hopefully more politically lucrative issue, Smith's erstwhile appointment of Negro officeholders in the Interior Department.

On September 2, 1905, the Constitution "dutifully" reprinted an article from the Sandersville Herald, in which it was contended that Hoke Smith as Secretary of the Interior had appointed several Negroes to high-salaried patronage jobs in preference to qualified white aspirants. Included were three relatives of outspoken black "militant" Bishop Henry M. Turner, who

had personally sent a letter to President Grover Cleveland recommending that Smith be named to the Cabinet. Also, the newly named Secretary audaciously appointed "a negro woman to a lucrative position in his department where she was placed upon a footing of equality with white women, working side by side with them." To still further impugn Smith's current anti-Negro sincerity, the Constitution cited the following editorial in Ben Davis's Atlanta Independent:

The negro does not believe half the hard things Honorable Hoke Smith said about them on the stump. We know he wants to be governor. We remember how many of us he took to Washington and gave fat jobs when he was secretary of the interior. Honorable Hoke gave us jobs there when he could have given white boys. The negro will trust him on the record he made then. ¹⁹

Temporarily, Smith found himself embattled. At first, he declared that blacks were assigned to menial posts only. When evidence to the contrary created something of a credibility gap, he rationalized that he personally did not name the persons in question; instead, they were civil service appointees. In the one department where he was solely responsible for patronage distribution, he contended that he dismissed 53 blacks already working there, while hiring only one to a menial position unfit for any white. ²⁰

But Smith and the Journal soon resumed the offensive by vivifying the Negro threat. At Knoxville, "the people's candidate" ranted that "58 of the old counties in Georgia have more negro than white voters. White supremacy has been maintained in these counties by a resort to means that only the exigencies of the case excuse." ²¹ Still, white control remained imperiled. Of the voting population of Georgia, 44.6% were Negro. Coupled with the white Republicans, these blacks constituted a potential absolute

electoral majority. All that prevented Negro domination, in addition to "a resort to means that only the exigencies of the cause excuse," was the absence of effective leadership. If whites refused to act until such leadership emerged, they would have forfeited any advantage they once might have held. ²²

Vague generalities were not nearly so alarming as a concrete example. Conveniently, the experience of McIntosh County provided the needed tangible reality. The county in question had a large black majority, which had successfully employed its political strength to elect the only black representative in the Georgia House, W. H. Rogers, and three Negro justices of the peace. Only the intervention of the Georgia General Assembly had impeded even greater encroachments against white supremacy. Hence, "Redeem McIntosh County" served as a magnetic rallying cry for the Smith forces. ²³

As the campaign dragged on, the rhetoric, which had never been exceptionally subdued, became increasingly inflammatory. Invective replaced whatever vestiges of moderation and rationality had once prevailed. For wishing to exclude white Populists from the Democratic primary while simultaneously "favor(ing) the perpetuation of the negro as a possible political factor in Georgia politics" (that is, by opposing Smith's disfranchisement scheme), Howell was vilely denounced as "a nigger in the woodpile." ²⁴ Perennially, "the people's candidate" had valiantly championed the cause of education for blacks and whites alike. During a joint debate with the editor of the "ring organ" at Albany on July 9, 1906, however, Smith seemingly reversed himself by at least implicitly endorsing a state-sanctioned, inequitable distribution of school funds. ²⁵ Well versed in the law, Smith, a noted Atlanta attorney, was nonetheless quoted as advising

fraudulent administration of his proposed legislation if necessary to preserve the franchise rights of any white.

Whenever and wherever a negro qualifies as a voter, by reason of his educational advancement, it would be an easy matter to handle him as they do in Mississippi, ask him what is the meaning of "ex post facto" law, or some other question couched in such language as you know he cannot answer. And when a poor, ignorant white man, who by reason of his poverty and conditions otherwise unfavorable to his opportunities to qualify as a voter comes ask him some simple question, such as: Can a man be imprisoned for debt? And should it ever become necessary we can handle them as they did in Wilmington. 26

Finally, violence was publicly encouraged. Opening his campaign at Madison, Smith stated, "I have no feeling of hostility towards the negroes. I believe we should see that they have kind treatment." 27

In contrast to such comparative paternalism was his incitive assertion of just one year later.

We will control the negro peaceably if we can, but with guns if we must. 28

Nor was Smith alone infected by the inertia of his Negrophobia.

By 1906, Thomas W. Hardwick was terming blacks "an inferior criminal race." 29

And the ogre of Negro domination had become to a thoroughly transformed, illiberal Tom Watson a "HIDEOUS, OMINOUS, NATIONAL MENACE."

What does Civilization owe to the negro?
Nothing!
Nothing!!
NOTHING!!! 30

THE REST OF THE FIELD

Hoke Smith and Clark Howell were not the only two candidates vying for the Democratic nomination. Joining them were four other men: Richard B. Russell and John H. Estill, both of whom were more or less serious contenders, and James. M. Smith and Dr. G. A. Nunnally, who provided comic relief.

Clark Howell vehemently opposed the constitutional amendment being advanced by his chief adversary, the Honorable Hoke. But his opposition was directed at the means proposed to accomplish disfranchisement and not at the ends, that is, the exclusion of innately inferior black voters.

The negro, measured by any standard, is the inferior of the white man. The negro race is utterly incapable of political or social equality, and no party, however powerful, can establish and secure an equality that is abhorrent to natural law.

The clothing of the negro with the right of suffrage was a crime against the people of the South.... Let us repeal the obnoxious amendments if we can, but let us do it legally!

Just the previous year, during the presidential election of 1904, the black franchise had been portrayed by the Constitution and its editor as a palpable threat to "Organized Democracy" in the state. Twelve months later, such existing restrictions as the white primary and the cumulative poll tax were contradictorily said to have "accomplished the permanent assurance of white supremacy in Georgia," and whites were warned to "LET WELL ENOUGH ALONE." Smith's version of disfranchisement, certain features (especially "the grandfather clause") of which were alleged to violate the U. S. Constitution, would subject the state to a possible reduction of its Congressional representation, thereby enabling the resultant Republican majority to enact pending anti-Southern legislation. Furthermore, unless fraudulently and dishonestly administered, the proposed constitutional amendment would exclude many illiterate whites from the polls while concurrently encouraging Negroes to obtain an education, which would allow them to comply with the registration requirements.

They propose therefore not only to punish the poor illiterate white man for his poverty by taking away his right to vote, but they actually offer the forfeited ballot as a prize to every negro in Georgia, who will get out of the cotton patch and into the negro college.

Already throughout the entire state, countless thousands of negro children are getting bow-legged with the burden of carrying their books to school.

As long as the black passively acquiesced to his inherent state of subservience, he was not, according to Howell, to be unnecessarily disturbed. 31

While a judge of the superior court, Richard B. Russell had justifiably earned a reputation for fairness to all who were tried before him, regardless of their color. On the stump, he lashed out at lynching as a relic of barbarism and as a subversion of good government. Nor was his expressed indignation inconsistent or insincere; in 1904, courageously exercising his judicial authority at a time when such action was regarded as almost heretical, he had ordered the Franklin County grand jury to indict those whites responsible for a recent lynching. 32

As the campaign progressed and the rhetoric of others became increasingly intemperate, Russell, an avowed "anti-ringer," counseled restraint and moderation. Why, he asked, should the discourse be limited to a fait accompli, disfranchisement, to the exclusion of more relevant issues? The judge himself earnestly tried to mute the superfluous question of electoral exclusion, preferring instead to advance a proposal that everyone whose annual income was less than \$300 should be relieved from having to pay all taxes but one, the poll tax. But Negrophobia proved inescapable, for Hoke Smith declamatorily derided this plank as an exemption of blacks from even the minimal share of the tax burden that they then carried. 33

In declaring his candidacy, Colonel John H. Estill, the editor of the Savannah Morning News, eloquently pledged an "impartial enforcement of the laws, and the treatment of all people, and every interest, with justice and fairness." 34 Disregarding the superficial nobility of such tendentious expressions, however, Estill merely parroted the white supremacist arguments

of Howell. The white primary and the poll tax were more than ample protection against Negro domination; the education and "good character" clauses could just as easily be employed by unscrupulous registrars to disfranchise whites from an opposition faction; and the proposed amendment would lead to an unfortunate division of the white vote. Hence, "Let well enough alone," he unimaginatively echoed.³⁵ Understandably, the Colonel, despite his contrary protestations, was viewed by many as a South Georgia stalking-horse for "the ring candidate."

Of lesser importance was the more easygoing, "common sense" race mounted by Colonel James M. ("Farmer Jim") Smith, who professed to "favor any additional lawful restrictions of the suffrage that will make the white dominion of the state more secure."³⁶ But then again, he just could not bring himself to support Hoke Smith's suggested amendment. Instead, he sought an ameliorative to the race problem in the form of an allocation to black schools of only the negligible revenues accruing from Negro taxes; this would have augmented the funds available for the instruction of white youth while presumably assuring the relegation of blacks to menial tasks.³⁷

Lastly came the crusading Baptist fundamentalist, the Reverend Dr. G. A. Nunnally, who concurred that the white primary et cetera made the electoral restriction postulated by "the people's candidate" unnecessary. But such issues did not nearly perturb the good minister as much as certain moral questions, specifically, Hoke Smith's damning part-ownership of the Piedmont Hotel bar. Not only were pernicious alcoholic beverages being sold and consumed in this den of iniquity, but also a profane nude statue had blasphemously been placed therein.³⁸ By May, 1906, however, the ecclesiastic, perceiving the proverbial "handwriting on the wall," withdrew from the race,

thereby leaving the accursed political field to more temporal spirits. 39

OF LANDSLIDES AND MANDATES

When the votes from the long-awaited Democratic primary of August 22, 1906, were tallied, the results showed Hoke Smith to be the resounding winner with 57% of the total and 312 of 364 county-unit votes. Running second was Richard Russell, who polled 13.7% of the ballots cast and carried 24 county-unit ballots. Surprisingly, Clark Howell, who had been expected to provide the most formidable competition, was a distant third. Not only did he receive a paltry 12.5% of the popular vote and only 12 unit votes, but he barely edged out John B. Estill by a mere 48 votes out of more than 184,000 cast. 40

Meeting at Macon in early September, the Democratic convention enthusiastically nominated "the people's candidate" by acclamation. Also adopted was a platform incorporating the victor's various campaign promises, which the unreconciled, home town Macon Telegraph branded with the harshest and most villainous term it could imagine; it deemed the document to be nefariously "radical." Among the pledges, as expected, was one which called for a further restriction of the franchise. Three specific means to accomplish this goal, an educational qualification, a "grandfather clause" of sorts which would enable war veterans and their descendants to register, and a "good character" provision, were recommended. No efforts were made to disguise the intent of the suggested legislation; the phraseology candidly admitted that the design was to bar as many Negroes as possible without endangering the suffrage rights of a single white. 41

Having overcome the major hurdle, the party nomination, Smith was

required to clear the formality of an October general election, where he was nominally opposed by Socialist J. B. Osburn. Smith obviously was extremely apprehensive over the outcome, so apprehensive in fact that he was sojourning in New York on the day of his official election.⁴² The lopsided vote confirmed the basis for this lack of concern; the governor-elect polled 76,962 votes to only 148 by Osburn.⁴³

FOOTNOTES

¹ Macon Telegraph, January 17, 1906.

² Clarence A. Bacote, "The Negro in Georgia Politics, 1880-1908" (Ph.D., University of Chicago, 1955), p. 398.

³ C. Vann Woodward, Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel (New York, 1963), p. 372.

⁴ Dewey W. Grantham, Jr., Hoke Smith and the Politics of the New South (Baton Rouge, 1958), pp. 138-139.

⁵ Atlanta Journal, June 4, 1905.

⁶ Hoke Smith, "Speech of Hoke Smith Delivered at Madison, Georgia, June 29, 1905" (Atlanta, no date), pp. 22-24.

⁷ Atlanta Journal, May 21, 1905.

⁸ Ibid., July 25, 1905, August 5, 1905, August 10, 1905.

⁹ Ibid., July 3, 1905.

¹⁰ Grantham, Hoke Smith, p. 139.

¹¹ Woodward, Tom Watson, p. 374.

¹² Atlanta Journal, August 15, 1905.

¹³ Ibid., October 24, 1905.

- 14 Woodward, Tom Watson, p. 375.
- 15 Macon Telegraph, January 28, 1906.
- 16 Atlanta Journal, May 1, 1906.
- 17 Macon Telegraph, June 7, 1906.
- 18 Ibid., January 14, 1906.
- 19 Atlanta Constitution, September 5, 1905.
- 20 Atlanta Journal, November 11, 1905.
- 21 Ibid., October 16, 1905.
- 22 Ibid., November 12, 1905.
- 23 Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 411.
- 24 Atlanta Journal, November 10, 1905.
- 25 Atlanta News, July 9, 1906.
- 26 Macon Telegraph, March 15, 1906, quoted in Grantham, Hoke Smith, p. 150.
- 27 Smith, "Madison," p. 24.
- 28 Atlanta News, July 1, 1906.
- 29 Macon Telegraph, January 27, 1906.
- 30 Woodward, Tom Watson, p. 380.
- 31 Atlanta Constitution, November 18, 1905; Macon Telegraph, January 11, 1906.
- 32 Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," p. 421.
- 33 Albert Berry Saye, A Constitutional History of Georgia, 1732-1945 (Athens, 1948), p. 338.
- 34 Macon Telegraph, January 14, 1906.
- 35 Atlanta Constitution, November 2, 1905.
- 36 Macon Telegraph, January 6, 1906.
- 37 Ibid., March 1, 1906.

- 38 Ibid., February 24, 1906.
- 39 Ibid., May 18, 1906.
- 40 Atlanta Journal, September 4, 1906.
- 41 Macon Telegraph, September 5, 1906.
- 42 Atlanta Journal, October 7, 1906.
- 43 Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Georgia, 1907 (Atlanta, 1907), p. 86.

CHAPTER VI. A TRAGIC SEQUEL

Racial tension had mounted during the heated campaign throughout the state, and it did not subside with the conclusion of the primary. Instead, the potential for a sudden explosion, especially in Atlanta, was truly without parallel in the annals of Georgia history. All that was needed to incite spontaneous combustion was a single spark, just one incendiary incident. On September 22, 1906, that spark was lit in the Georgia capital, where violence and disorder reigned supreme for four tragic days.

STEERING A COLLISION COURSE

The Negro-baiting tactics of almost all of the candidates vying for the Democratic nomination, and of Hoke Smith and company in particular, had inevitably augmented already strained race relations. Compounding this initial problem of politically inspired friction in Atlanta was the recurrent economic threat to lower class whites posed by the mass of unemployed blacks pouring into the city. On the one hand, many whites feared the competition when blacks actively sought employment and hence tried to circumscribe job opportunities for them.¹ But when unemployed blacks were seen loitering about the streets and in the disreputable "dives" at the time of an alleged labor shortage, whites almost unanimously decried the

vagrancy of the laggard, "besotted, dusky denizens." ² Idleness among blacks, especially in combination with "demon rum" and other evil fermented spirits, fostered crime.

Indeed, Atlanta and vicinity was plagued by a very real crime wave. With a population of 115,000, the city recorded 17,000 arrests in 1905 and 21,602 in 1906. This represented more arrests than New Orleans, which had three times as many inhabitants overall and twice as many blacks. ³ Of course, such petty offenses by Negroes as insulting whites and vagrancy undoubtedly swelled these totals.

Most reprehensible was "the unspeakable crime" of rape perpetrated by a black. Actually, "rape" was often a misnomer, for it became synonymous with any physical assault upon Southern white womanhood by a Negro male. Disregarding semantics, however, 12 reported rapes by blacks took place during the six month period prior to the September conflagration. Investigating these dozen cases, Ray Stannard Baker concluded that only two could be confirmed, three others were aggravated attempted rapes, and another three were possibly valid complaints. But three more were simply cases of fright, and the final incident was an unsuccessful suicide attempt. ⁴

Nonetheless, the four white newspapers in the city dramatically headlined each assault as if it was the gospel truth. In fact, all four, and the three evening journals in particular, seemingly competed to see who could relate the most lurid accounts. Really, though, there was no contest, for the Atlanta News easily outdistanced its rivals - although John Temple Graves' Atlanta Georgian valiantly endeavored to keep pace. Lynchers were termed "patriots" by the News,⁵ and their miscarriages of justice were publicly applauded.

The News would like to see an analysis of the so-called blood which runs through the veins of a man who is not in favor of lynching these black devils at sight. ⁶

After further outrages of the same delicate nature were committed, the paper editorially endorsed a revival of the Ku Klux Klan or the formation of any other vigilance committee to stop Negro crime. "To arms! Men of Atlanta and Fulton County!" ⁷ Less than two weeks later, Editor Charles Daniel assumed the initiative himself by calling for one thousand volunteers to form "The News' Protective League," the purpose of which was to prevent additional assaults upon white women and "to wreak swift and terrible punishment" upon those guilty of such heinous misdeeds. ⁸ Prophetically, the journal forewarned:

If this crime is not stopped, there is going to be a conflict between the whites and the blacks...that will be awful to contemplate.

The white men are going to stop these outrages, if blood flows like water in this state.

The white women of Georgia and of the south must be protected at any cost; and the sons of Dixie Land will see that this is done. ⁹

Not only did the News' prediction materialize, but the newspaper's unpardonably inflammatory invective and its incitive coverage played a significant role in fomenting that terrible outburst.

After the primary, the Constitution and the Journal were comparatively more temperate. Both emphatically deplored any resort to vigilantism, and to varying degrees, both avowedly strove to mute their discussions of rapes and lynchings, preferring instead to press "constructively" for the closing of the "dives" which spawned such miscreancy and the enlargement of the duly authorized city and county constabularies. ¹⁰ Still, neither paper was devoid of guilt, for both played up black assaults on their front pages and in their provocative headlines, if not in their editorial columns. Likewise, three equally dastardly rapes perpetrated by whites during this same period

were virtually ignored. 11

Local officialdom was no more responsible than the newspapers. Seeking an increase of the county police force, Sheriff John W. Nelms, after commending the Atlanta News and its editor for their editorial pronouncements demanding the protection of white womanhood, exhorted:

Gentlemen, we will suppress these great indignities upon our fair wives and daughters if we have to kill every negro in a thousand miles of this place.

The Fulton board of commissioners responded emphatically by trebling the force from 12 to 36 men and by offering a standing reward of \$500 "for the capture, with the proof to convict, of any person guilty of assaulting or attempting to criminally assault, any white woman in the county." 12 The passage "with the proof to convict" was undoubtedly an allusion to lynchings, in which instances actual convictions were quite obviously rendered impossible. Spurred by the county's actions, the Atlanta board of police commissioners on August 28 expanded the city force by 12 men. 13 Less than one week later, the finance committee of the city council, concurring with the News' recommendations, approved funds for yet another 40 policemen. 14

Nor was the judiciary to be outdone by the legislative bodies. On September 3, Judge John R. Pendleton of the Fulton County superior court narrowed the definition of vagrancy and urged a crackdown on all offenders. 15

In such a tense atmosphere, both races were terrified. Whites feared yet more brutal assaults. Blacks, too, were frightened, a consideration generally overlooked by whites. In fact, the threat confronting "better-class Negroes" was twofold. First, they also were endangered by the black criminal element. And secondly, they dreaded impulsive whites. "The Negro knows he has little chance to explain, if by accident or ignorance he

insults a white woman or offends a white man." 16

"KILL THE NEGROES!"

By Saturday, September 22, racially antagonistic passions were at their zenith. The morning and evening journals carried on that day such emotional, front-page stories as the arrest of the proprietor of a Negro saloon for permitting the sensually excitve pictures of nude white women to adorn the walls of his establishment, reports of an organizational meeting of the Klan, and the retributive thrashing of an insolent black who brashly whistled at a white girl. Referring to still another incident, one prominent headline in the relatively sedate Atlanta Journal boldly announced, "NEGRO KISSED YOUNG GIRL ON HAND... HELD FOR INSULTING MISS SARAH JACOBS, FIFTEEN YEARS OLD."

That evening, the tinder was ignited. As extras were freely circulated by the evening papers to announce four more assaults, two of which later proved to be unfounded cases of fright, 17 an unruly crowd of whites began to congregate. When a Negro was spotted sitting near a white woman on a passing trolley, the crowd became a mob, and a senseless, sanguinary outburst ensued. No black caught in the onslaught was spared at least a minimal "roughing up." Whether he had offended any white was totally extraneous; all that mattered was the pigmentation of his skin and his accessibility. Only the judicious disappearance of Negroes from the streets temporarily quelled the disturbance. The enlarged city police force merely demonstrated its impotence, and the state militia, belatedly dispatched by Governor Joseph Terrell, arrived after the outbreak had largely subsided. 18

Sunday was relatively calm, but late Monday the violence resumed in the

middle-class Negro community of Brownsville. Trouble recommenced when a detachment of county police entered the area and proceeded to detain all residents who were found armed. Before the evening had passed, rifle fire was exchanged, killing one policeman and an undetermined number of panic-stricken blacks. ¹⁹ Tuesday morning, the police reappeared to arrest many of the remaining male inhabitants. Before retiring with the 60 new inmates, the law officers shot "in cold blood" one Negro who was found wounded from the previous night and indiscriminantly beat President J.W.E. Bowen of Gammon Theological Seminary. ²⁰

When order was finally restored after four tragic and unnecessary days of bloodshed, 12 persons, 10 blacks and two whites, lay dead, and another 70, with blacks again predominating, were injured. Property damage was also extensive. ²¹

The black community was thoroughly demoralized, as evidenced by the following letter:

...How would you feel, if with our history there came a time when, after speeches and papers and teachings you acquired property and were educated, and were a fairly good man, it were impossible for you to walk the street (for whose maintenance you were taxed) with your sister without being in mortal fear of death if you resented any insult offered to her? How would you feel if you saw a governor, a mayor, a sheriff, whom you could not oppose at the polls, encourage by deed or word or both, a mob of "best" and worst citizens to slaughter your people in the streets and in their own homes and in their places of business? Do you think that you could resist the same wrath that caused God to slay the Philistines and the Russians to throw bombs? I can resist it, but with each new outrage I am less able to resist it. And yet if I gave way to my feelings I should become just like other men... of the mob! But I do not... not quite, and I must hurry through the only life I shall live on earth, tortured by these experiences and these horrible impulses, with no hope of ever getting away from them....

If there was no such thing as Christianity, we should be hopeless.

No longer feeling secure, many despairing Negroes, including the tormented

author of the above letter, emigrated to the North and elsewhere. Already impecunious or "of humble circumstances," many of the less fortunate, that is, those who were injured and/or incarcerated and the dependents of the deceased, discovered themselves to be overwhelmed with cumbrous medical expenses, funeral costs, and legal fees. Hence, the damage to blacks resulting from the riot was inescapably all-encompassing, for its negative manifestations were not only physical but also psychological and material. 22

A MIXED AFTERMATH

The white response to the violence ranged from the inadequacy and misdirection of the incumbent local politicians to the far more laudable, reconstructive endeavors of the city's alarmed civic leaders.

During the early hours of the turmoil, Mayor James G. Woodward took to the streets to quiet the fervid commotion. When his presence was not wholly disregarded, however, his constituents simply did not take the man seriously. 23 The reasons for such disrespect were not difficult to uncover, for the mayor overtly sympathized with the mob if he did not explicitly condone their internecine tactics. Asked by a New York Times reporter how to prevent future outbreaks, he tersely and superficially replied:

...I would say that the only remedy is to remove the cause. As long as the black brutes assault our white women, just so long will they be unceremoniously dealt with. 24

Equally perspicacious was the municipal executive's myopic directive to close the bars, 25 a politically inspired dictum which did more to appease growing prohibitionist sentiment than to alleviate the salient causes of festering racial unrest.

Not to be outdone by its boss, the sanitation department dismissed cowed black employees who did not immediately return to work following the cessation of the violence and announced that after January 1, 1907, only whites would be hired. ²⁶

The reaction of the judiciary was more commendable, but again not altogether exempt from prejudice. First deploring "the recent exhibition of lawlessness... as an unspeakable and unmitigated evil," ²⁷ the Fulton County grand jury unambiguously condemned the unwarranted sensationalism of all of the evening newspapers and the Atlanta News in particular. Such "yellow journalism" was singled out as the primary factor instigating the rioting. ²⁸ Furthermore, the grand jury was charged to bring indictments against all responsible for the lethal outburst. ²⁹ In toto, 24 whites were prosecuted, and all 24 were given the "maximum" sentence, a paltry 30 days in the stockade without the alternative of a fine. ³⁰ Also, two county policemen were punished for their roles, whereas all Negroes tried were acquitted. ³¹ But these blacks were not so fortunate as might be imagined. While the white offenders, after expeditious trials, were serving their terms in the stockade, at least 40 Negroes were incarcerated for over a month, without recourse to bail, on the tenuous charge of murdering the county policeman who was shot in Brownsville. ³²

The post-outbreak performances of the local white journals, both morning and evening alike, were about as meritorious as those of the mayor. All attributed the initial eruption to the repeated incidents of rape; in so doing they flagrantly disregarded the fact that many of the reported assaults were unfounded and that whites, not blacks, were the principal aggressors. The following two lead headlines appearing in the reputedly moderate Atlanta

Constitution on the second and fourth days of the riot respectively were indicative:

ATLANTA IS SWEEP BY RAGING MOB
DUE TO ASSAULTS ON WHITE WOMEN
16 NEGROES REPORTED TO BE DEAD 33

RIOT'S END ALL DEPENDS
ON NEGROES
In Their Power to Stop Trouble
or Bring on War of
Extermination
WHITES KEEPING QUIET
EXCEPT WHEN ATTACKED
OR PROVOKED BY BLACKS 34

Entreaties for more police and the permanent, not just the temporary, closing of any saloons catering to a Negro clientele were re-emphasized. Some clue to the background motivation of at least some of these appeals was candidly revealed by the Atlanta Journal:

...just as the fifteenth amendment, on various grounds, has been relegated to the limbo of ineffective political documents, so the southern white man will have to disregard the fourteenth amendment, so far as it can be done legally in regaining control of the child race that lives and perhaps must ever live among us.

For instance: The old patrol system forbade any negro's traveling without a passport. The patrol was the present county police. It is imperative that the county police should be everywhere increased and made more efficient. They should be given discretion to arrest any man, white or black, who travels in the county districts, without a passport.

Take another example: It would be a violation of the fourteenth amendment for any state to pass a law forbidding the selling of whiskey to negroes, so long as the right to buy whiskey was given to the white man. But the state law can be so framed as to make the revocation of a barroom license possible at any time in the discretion of the governing board of the town or city. It could be easily understood that the barroom that sold liquor to negroes... would find its license revoked without the need of any reason being stated.... 35

Passports were too controversial. But even prior to this editorial, both the municipal and county constabularies had been enlarged, and the Atlanta city council had rejected the application of numerous Negro and "mixed"

establishments seeking the reissuance of their revoked liquor licenses. 36

Somewhat more encouraging was the heartening response of the community's civic leaders. On Tuesday, September 25, just hours after the termination of the rioting, over one thousand citizens attended a mass meeting sponsored by the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce and held at the Fulton County superior court. There, a resolution vigorously denouncing the recent mob violence and lawlessness in general was unanimously adopted, a relief committee to collect funds to aid the victims of both races was established, and a Committee of Ten was appointed to facilitate the restoration of peace and order and to prevent the recurrence of unruliness. One of the first acts of this latter committee, and one which was unique to the South, was to meet with six Negro leaders to discuss mutual grievances; periodically thereafter, representatives of both races again met, thereby opening an invaluable line of communication. 37

CONCLUSION

The most perceptive summary of the Atlanta riot was composed by an eminent Atlanta attorney who witnessed the carnage firsthand, Hooper Alexander.

The Atlanta riot was wholly wanting in responsible leadership, was lawlessness pure and simple, with no redeeming motive, and sprang from an unmitigated race hatred. 38

Despite the sincere efforts of many who were rudely awakened by the sudden outburst to correct some past mistakes, the overwhelming majority, including Mr. Alexander, sought a panacea in even more oppressive race proscription. Hence, the real tragedy of Atlanta, in addition to the 12 lives lost and the 70 persons injured, was pathetically the irrational hatred and prejudice that lingered.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ New York Times, September 24, 1906.
- ² Ray Stannard Baker, Following the Color Line: American Negro Citizenship in the Progressive Era (New York, 1964), p. 1.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Ibid., p. 5.
- ⁵ Atlanta News, August 4, 1906.
- ⁶ Ibid., August 15, 1906.
- ⁷ Ibid., August 26, 1906.
- ⁸ Ibid., August 28, 1906.
- ⁹ Ibid., August 18, 1906.
- ¹⁰ Atlanta Constitution, September 1, 1906; Atlanta Journal, September 2, 1906.
- ¹¹ Baker, p. 5.
- ¹² Atlanta News, August 26, 1906.
- ¹³ Ibid., August 29, 1906.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., September 2, 1906.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., September 3, 1906.
- ¹⁶ Baker, pp. 7-9.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., p. 9.
- ¹⁸ Atlanta Constitution, September 23, 1906.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., September 25, 1906; Atlanta News, September 25, 1906.
- ²⁰ Baker, p. 13.
- ²¹ Ibid., pp. 15-16.
- ²² Ibid., pp. 14, 16, 17.
- ²³ New York Times, September 23, 1906.
- ²⁴ Ibid., September 24, 1906.

- 25 Atlanta Constitution, September 24, 1906.
- 26 Ibid., October 3, 1906.
- 27 Atlanta News, September 26, 1906.
- 28 Ibid., September 28, 1906.
- 29 Atlanta Constitution, September 27, 1906.
- 30 Atlanta Journal, September 24, 1906; Baker, p. 18.
- 31 Baker, p. 14.
- 32 Atlanta Journal, October 20, 1906, October 26, 1906.
- 33 Atlanta Constitution, September 23, 1906.
- 34 Ibid., September 25, 1906.
- 35 Atlanta Journal, October 16, 1906.
- 36 Ibid., October 5, 1906.
- 37 Baker, pp. 18-21.
- 38 Hooper Alexander, "Race Riots and Lynch Law: The Cause and the Cure; A Southern Lawyer's View," The Outlook, LXXXV (February 2, 1907), p. 259.

CHAPTER VII. COUP DE GRACE

Hoke Smith was inaugurated as the Georgia chief executive on June 29, 1907. Already, his proposed disfranchisement legislation, the draftsmanship of which again revealed the ubiquitous presence of Thomas W. Hardwick,¹ was pending before the General Assembly; for on the opening day of the session, June 28, Representative George W. Williams of Laurens County had introduced the measure in the House.² Senator Thomas S. Felder of Macon soon followed suit in the Senate.³

The new administration's measure was patterned after the suffrage provisions of the 1901 Alabama constitution. Existing Georgia restrictive requirements were to be retained. To be eligible to vote, a male had to be 21 years of age, must have resided in the state for a minimum of one year, and must have paid all taxes due the state since the adoption of the Constitution of 1877 at least six months prior to the date of the general election for which he sought to register. In addition, said person would have to comply with at least one of the following qualifications: (1.) he must be a United States, Confederate, or Georgia war veteran or a lineal descendant thereof; (2.) he must be of "good character, and understand the duties and obligations of citizenship under a republican form of government;" (3.) he must be able either to correctly read and write a passage from the United States or Georgia

constitution or to reasonably interpret any paragraph thereof to the satisfaction of the registrars; or (4.) he must be the owner of either 40 acres of land or other property, the tax-assessed value of which totaled \$500. Those unable to satisfy the above requirements were forbidden to participate not only in the primary or convention of any political party, but also in any mass meeting. ⁴

SENATORIAL CONSENT

Proponents of disfranchisement expected relatively little opposition to their proposed legislation in the Senate, and indeed their predictions proved even more accurate than they had initially anticipated. ⁵ On July 17, just four days after its introduction, the Felder bill was favorably reported by the Senate Committee on Constitutional Amendments. ⁶ Two weeks later, after the measure's sponsor reminded his fellow lawmakers that the voters of the state had issued a mandate the previous August, ⁷ the basically unaltered bill was overwhelmingly approved by a vote of 37 to six, a margin far greater than the requisite two-thirds. ⁸

The arguments presented by both sides were perfunctory and redundant. Of greater concern to opponents than the injustice directed at blacks was the possible exclusion of whites. Furthermore, disfranchisement had already been accomplished, thereby making the adoption of additional legislation unnecessary. Only Senator A. E. Lashley of the fortieth district, which included the North Georgia counties of Union, Towns, and Rabun, expressed a seemingly liberal sentiment. He contended that the amendment was unfair to the Negro, for it deprived him of the ballot without simultaneously relieving him of his tax burden. ⁹

Senator Felder discounted the fears of those members who were apprehensive that persons of both races might be excluded. No white would be prevented from registering, and even if perchance one or two were, would not it be better to "disfranchise one white man and yet take four hundred and ninety Negroes away from the polls?"¹⁰ Judging from the one-sidedness of the ensuing roll call, the vast majority of his fellow legislators apparently concurred.

ON TO THE HOUSE

Meanwhile, the lower legislative chamber was proving to be more recalcitrant. On July 20, the House Committee on Constitutional Amendments recommended that the Williams bill, which was identical to Felder's Senate measure, be adopted.¹¹ Only two days later, the bill was recommitted for further consideration at the request of the legislation's primary foe, Joseph Hill Hall of Bibb County.¹² Finally, the Felder bill, having already been passed by the Senate and then sent to the House, was favorably reported by the committee on August 3.¹³

At that time, passage was by no means assured, for the opposition was exceedingly vocal prior to the final showdown. Again, most complaints were not designed to abet the cause of the beleaguered Negro. Instead, it was argued that each and every one of the new provisions was not restrictive enough. W. S. Huff of Lumpkin County, which was predominantly black, maintained that three-fourths of the Negroes could qualify under the property clause and another five-sixths under the educational provision.¹⁴ Professing to support disfranchisement, but not the pending version, Joe Hill Hall concentrated his attack first on the "war veteran" clause, which was a mutated offspring of the parent "grandfather clause":

This bill proposes to put on the registration list those hell-hounds who followed in the wakes of Sherman burning our homes. You put every negro who wore the blue uniform upon the list. You enfranchise hundreds of negroes who were in the Spanish-American War. If you are bound to pass this bill anyhow, for God's sake strike out this iniquitous clause. ¹⁵

Shifting his salvos from the historical "Lost Cause" and divine invocation to more mundane, practical considerations, Hill next lambasted the ominous power bestowed upon the registrars by the educational, property, and "good character" clauses. Such power could easily be utilized unscrupulously for partisan purposes.

You say it's easy to ask a nigger a hard question and disqualify him. I stand here and tell you that it will be just as easy to ask a white man who is not going to vote right a hard question and thus disqualify him, and also to ask a nigger who is going to vote right an easy question and qualify him. ¹⁶

Cumulatively, the Felder-Williams bill would disfranchise "no negroes, but lots of white men." ¹⁷

Proponents naturally disagreed. In so doing, they employed few arguments that had not already been overused. Boykin Wright of Richmond County disputed the often repeated contention that the proposed amendment was unconstitutional, for it allegedly was to be applied equally to men of all races. And even if it was invalidated, the Empire State would be in the fine company of its fellow Southern states. ¹⁸ Representing Cobb County, Joseph C. Foster declared that the concern that the educational clause would provide a loophole enabling Negroes to register was unfounded. To prove his point, he cited a Virginia case in which a black school teacher had been unable to qualify under a similar section. ¹⁹ The remainder of the affirmative pleadings were equally as defensive in nature. Advocates placed the greatest emphasis on refuting opposing arguments. Presumably, they felt that the rhetoric and the results of the preceding campaign had sufficiently emphasized what they had to say.

On the day of final reckoning, August 14, the foes of the bill found themselves isolated. Only W. H. Rogers of McIntosh County, the lone Negro member of the House and the sole representative to oppose the measure ostensibly because of its anti-black bias, dared to speak out against the legislation on the floor of the chamber. ²⁰ If indeed there were enough legislators who at heart were against the amendment to defeat it, as Hardwick had earlier projected, ²¹ they obviously were cowed into submission en masse by constituent and/or partisan, legislative pressures; for the Felder-Williams act was resoundingly approved by a tally of 159 ayes to 16 nays, again far greater than the required two-thirds. As in the Senate, the margin of victory was larger than had been anticipated even by the bill's sponsors. ²²

But the legislation did undergo at least minor surgery in the form of amendments. In a concession to North Georgian representatives wary of white as well as black disfranchisement, ²³ the "good character" clause, under which otherwise unqualified whites were expected to be enfranchised, was made perpetual instead of expiring on January 1, 1910, as provided in the Felder version. Sponsoring this amendment was J. W. Wise of Fayette County. ²⁴ Also, the measure's initial wording forbade participation by those not eligible to register either in the primary or convention of any political party or in any mass meeting. Seconding the recommendation of the Committee on Constitutional Amendments, the House members deleted the reference to mass meetings, ²⁵ thereby making a still onerous act a little less repressive.

BICAMERAL RECONCILIATION

The Senate readily acquiesced to the House's "mass meeting" excision, ²⁶ but the Wise amendment was another matter altogether. At first, Senator Felder

sought what was supposed to be a compromise. Instead of expiring January 1, 1910, as stipulated in the initial Senate version, or extending for perpetuity, as provided in the House enactment, the "good character" clause would remain in effect until January 1, 1911.²⁷ Not feeling that a paltry one additional year was much of a compromise when compared with infinity, the House moved "to non-concur," thereby creating something of a stalemate.²⁸ But a long, hot summer and an impending adjournment amazingly eroded the upper chamber's determination. Desirous of leaving as quickly as possible, the Senate's once firm resolution not to yield degenerated into a pusillanimous retreat to beat the clock, as that august legislative body suddenly saw the error of its ways and magnanimously approved the Wise amendment on August 17, the final day of the legislative session. Six days later, Governor Hoke Smith added his signature.²⁹ Apparently, the only remaining impediment was to submit the proposal to the voters for their ratification.

AN ANALYTIC BREAKDOWN

Of the negative votes in both houses of the General Assembly, the vast majority came from members representing those counties with the highest and lowest percentage of blacks respectively. Seven Georgia counties had a total population that was 75% or more Negro. Of these seven, six, or 86% had at least one representative, whether a member of the House or Senate or members of both to vote nay. Of the 19 North Georgia counties with less than a 12.5% black population, 42% had at least one representative casting a negative vote. In contrast, only 13% of the remaining 120 counties could list a minimum of one representative in opposition.³⁰

Hence, it would appear that two closely related, political considerations motivated the measure's opponents. First, in North Georgia, where the black

population was proportionately small, the fear of Negro domination was irrelevant. Therefore, white lawmakers feared - with some justification - that the restrictive provisions would primarily be used to menace and to disfranchise whites, possibly even some who favored said incumbents. The existing electoral provisions had obviously served the present officeholders well; consequently, why disturb an unobtrusive, beneficent status quo? In the so-called "black belt," the threat of electoral reprisals again predominated, although other rationalizations were offered for the consumption of the home folk. The proposed Negro exclusion would not take place until January, 1909, at the earliest. In the meantime, legislators would be up for re-election in the fall of 1908. Therefore, a negative vote was a judicious palliative to offset their black constituents displeasure.

Opponents then had one common trait; with the exception of black Representative W. H. Rogers, practical politics, coupled in some instances with a personal disdain for Hoke Smith, took precedence over humanitarian concern. Comparatively, many misguided advocates of the measure at least sincerely felt that they were enacting a positive reform.

REACTION TOWARD REACTION

The intrastate reaction to the passage of the bill was predictable. The loyal Atlanta Journal effusively praised the measure's adoption as the greatest legislative accomplishment since the constitutional convention of 1877.³¹ Although still opposed, the Constitution was appropriately subdued. The General Assembly had been obligated to approve it, for the people had so willed. Only the future could judge the wisdom of such action.³² Less reconciled was John H. Estill's Savannah Press, which continued to decry the unconstitutionality

and the imprudence of the legislation. Much of the bill's support was attributed to the anti-saloon element, which sought to eliminate Negroes from prohibition elections. ³³

Outside of the state, The Nation, a magazine published by the New York Evening Post Company, categorically excoriated the recently adopted Georgia disfranchisement amendment as inexcusable and unnecessary:

In a republic based on political equality, the negroes of Georgia are henceforth to be ruled without a voice in their government, taxed without representation, and deprived of the most precious weapon for the preservation of political rights - the ballot. ³⁴

Other Northern periodicals were more sympathetic. Writing in the New York-based Outlook, A. J. McKelway termed the adherents of "this new reform movement... a National asset." ³⁵ Editorially, the Outlook declared that with the exception of the potentially corrupting "good character" clause, it fully understood the need for such Southern efforts to "purify" the suffrage. ³⁶

A SECOND TIME AROUND - WITH ADDED EMBELLISHMENTS

In their haste to eliminate "the venal black vote, the authors of the Felder-Williams bill made one all-important omission, which was also overlooked by the state's perspicacious lawmakers. They forgot to stipulate a date upon which said law, if approved in the coming referendum, would become effective. ³⁷ Hence, the issue had to be resubmitted to the 1908 session of the General Assembly.

Since George W. Williams, the initial House sponsor, had died in the interim, the honor of introducing a duplicate of the previously adopted measure, plus the separate provision that it become effective January 1, 1909, was

bestowed upon a Representative Slade of Muscogee County. Legislative consideration was a mere formality. On July 22, it easily cleared the House with only a single negative vote. Even former adversary Joseph Hill Hall capitulated and joined the affirmative chorus.³⁸ In the Senate eight days later, the Slade bill's adoption was unanimous.³⁹ On August 1, Governor Smith again added his signature to the proposed amendment, thereby setting the stage for an October referendum.⁴⁰

Nor was the disfranchisement bill the only anti-Negro legislation enacted by the General Assembly in 1908. Two other electoral "reforms" just coincidentally seemed to discriminate against blacks. The first of these, which provided for the registration of voters, closely paralleled and supplemented the Felder-Williams bill. It required the payment of all outstanding taxes at least six months prior to the date of the election for which a person wished to register. After the county tax collector compiled a list of all who complied with the tax requirement, and made said list public, the registrars, either at their own initiative or at the instigation of any private citizen, were authorized to challenge and to judge the right of any person thereon. The registrars then amassed a "perfected" list. Those whose names were not included were excluded from any primary as well as the general election.⁴¹

The second law stipulated certain regulations for primaries. First, the elector had to vote in the ward or militia district in which he resided, thereby further reducing the chances for a Negro migrant worker to vote in the primary of any party and not just in the Democratic intraparty squabble. Next, election managers were required to check to see if a voter was registered before he would be allowed to cast a ballot. And thirdly, party officials were still

responsible for rules and regulations not expressly enumerated in this bill. ⁴² Hence, the Democratic hierarchy retained the discretionary prerogative to restrict the primary to whites only.

BLACK RESISTANCE AND RESPONSE

Negro leaders were understatedly less than ecstatic about the disfranchisement amendment. Soon after the legislation was first introduced in the respective houses, several delegations of blacks appeared before the General Assembly to urge the measure's defeat. The unsympathetic, all-white committees to which the Williams and Felder bills had been assigned responded almost immediately thereafter by overwhelmingly approving both acts. In the House, the vote was 11 to one; in the Senate, it was unanimous. ⁴³

Blacks then altered their tactics somewhat. They held mass meetings and submitted memorials to the legislature to dramatize their opposition. Negroes in Forsyth petitioned their two white representatives not to vote for the measure and threatened to boycott their businesses should they not accede. ⁴⁴ In return, one of these two, Benjamin F. Hill, mockingly suggested, to the amusement of his fellow legislators, that the House disfranchise all persons with kinky hair. ⁴⁵ Another petition by 21 of the most prominent blacks in the state concluded as follows:

...For forty years you people have contended that they (the whites) ought to be left alone to regulate the affairs between the races.... The nation has granted your request and some of our ablest leaders have advised their people to trust you and withdraw from politics.... Will you now disregard your solemn vows and trample your honor in the dust by passing this bill? ⁴⁶

Only two days after this plea appeared in the Atlanta Constitution, the Senate overwhelmingly approved the measure. Not long thereafter, the House also "disregarded its solemn vows and trampled its honor in the dust" by a lopsided

tally of 159 to 16.

On September 10, 1907, after the two legislative branches reconciled their differences and the governor penned in his name, Representative William Rogers of McIntosh County submitted his resignation without explanation; ⁴⁷ another 48 years elapsed before the next black was seated in the Georgia House of Representatives. ⁴⁸

Other Negroes vowed not to give up the fight but to organize and to defeat the bill in the upcoming referendum. They were encouraged when Hoke Smith, again resorting to the anti-Negro tirades that had served him so well in 1906, was defeated in the June 4, 1908, gubernatorial primary by Joseph M. Brown, the son of the late Civil War governor and eminent member of the Georgia "Bourbon Triumvirate." But their relief was short-lived, for in his acceptance speech before the Democratic state convention at Marietta in July, Brown, alleged by Smith to have been a "nigger lover," announced his support of the amendment's October ratification. ⁴⁹

The pressure for passage brought to bear by the white community was in itself almost insurmountable. But blacks were further plagued by difficulties within their ranks as well as from without. Negro leaders set as a goal the registration of as many of their racial brethren as possible. However, these leaders could never decide upon a single organization vehicle to mobilize the black electorate. The Colored Association, originally known as the Georgia Equal Rights League, had initially been formed during the 1906 campaign to waylay the resurgent disfranchisement band wagon. But from its inception, it had been opposed by Ben Davis and his Atlanta Independent; commenting on the second annual convention of the Association, Davis disdainfully described it as "the same set of men elected or appointed by nobody, representing nobody..."

(who) elect themselves to empty offices, issue an address and adjourn." The outgrowth of this disidence was the rival Georgia Suffrage League, founded in Atlanta by the editor of the Independent and other principals in June, 1907. Furthermore, even the long dormant state Republican Party could not serve as a rallying point for the vying factions, for that political skeleton was itself strife-ridden. Negro insurgents, including the controversial Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, had split with the predominantly "lily-white" party hierarchy to establish the Republican State League. 50

Nor did any of these quarrelsome organizations have much impact on the Negro masses, who remained largely unmoved by the appeals from the black middle class. Many of the lower socioeconomic strata of Negroes were badly in arrears on their cumulative taxes and had neither the funds nor the inclination to update their payments. Others simply had been apolitical for so long that their habitual electoral abstention, if not their apathy per se, proved to be a major stumbling block. Of course, many whites were quite willing to aid by means of economic or physical coercion any predilection not to register that unprotected blacks might have harbored. A number of black churches and fraternal lodges were burned, and several "uppity darkies" were lynched. 51

Despite a frantic, last-minute campaign, the registration efforts were extremely disappointing. Nor did efforts to enlist white support produce any positive results. In the referendum of October 7, 1908, disfranchisement was ratified by almost a two-to-one margin, 79,968 to 40,260. According to the Atlanta Journal, only an estimated five to ten percent of all whites who voted cast negative ballots. 52 Blacks after 1908 were

legally and politically excluded economically restricted, and socially isolated; postbellum intimacy had been replaced by rampant Negrophobia.

EFFECTIVENESS

In achieving its desired end, the disfranchisement amendment was extremely effective, especially in the rural areas and in the small towns.⁵³ During the period from 1920 to 1940, no more than approximately 10,000 Negroes voted in a given state or national election. Of these, most were concentrated in the Atlanta area.⁵⁴

The registrars, who were given such broad, discretionary powers, were county officials appointed by the respective superior court judges who in turn were elected in the Democratic primary.⁵⁵ Hence, they were patronage appointees whose decisions were often politically motivated. Even after the expiration of the "war veteran" clause on January 1, 1915, poor, illiterate whites were readily registered under the "good character" provision,⁵⁶ whereas blacks were arbitrarily excluded. Only the property qualification, over which the registrars exercised less direct control, provided a significant loophole enabling a sizeable number of Negroes to register.⁵⁷

FOOTNOTES

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VIII. OF MISTERS BOOKER T. WASHINGTON AND HOKE SMITH

Two prominent figures played vital roles in the unfolding drama of Georgia disfranchisement. One, Booker T. Washington, was not even a resident of the Empire State, but in his capacity as the spokesman for his race, he inevitably influenced the state's politics through his statements and his visits. The other, Hoke Smith, ironically once an outspoken admirer of Washington and a defender of Negro political rights within the state, was the real driving force behind a triumphant electoral exclusion.

OF MR. BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

In his address before the Cotton States and International Exposition, held in Atlanta in 1895, Booker T. Washington revealed a dream harbored not by himself alone, but by the vast majority of his contemporary middle class Negroes. The Tuskegee educator foresaw the coming of "a new heaven and a new earth" in the South, the manifestations of which would be "a blotting out of sectional differences and racial animosities and suspicions, in a determination to administer absolute justice..."¹ Also outlined were the means to attain this goal. Blacks, by diligently applying their energies in such diverse fields as agriculture, mechanics, commerce, domestic service, and the professions, were to achieve economic prosperity, a well-earned sense

of pride and human dignity, and the respect of the better element of whites, for financial well-being carried with it prestige and power.

No race that has anything to contribute to the markets of the world is long in any degree ostracized. ²

In the meantime, agitation for "social equality" was to be temporarily foregone.

In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to social progress. ³

The intended meaning of "social equality" was couched in typical, ambiguous "Washingtonese." To whites, it was an all-encompassing phrase, embracing political participation, social intermingling, and abhorrent miscegenation, all three of which were allegedly interrelated. To quote Hoke Smith, "Political and social equality means miscegenation...." ⁴ Or as another white stated more euphemistically, "Do you want your daughter to marry a nigger?" ⁵ Nor did Washington say anything publicly to refute this interpretation. Instead, despite his previously vehement opposition to segregated transportation facilities, the former slave reversed himself after the "Atlanta Compromise" by contending that separate accommodations, if indeed equal, would be satisfactory. ⁶ In addition, franchise restrictions in the form of property and educational qualifications were not only acceptable but necessary to rid the South of ignorant, venal government. However, any such provisions were to be applied equally to both races.

As a rule, I believe in universal, free suffrage, but I believe that in the South we are confronted with peculiar conditions that justify the protection of the ballot in many of the states, for a while at least, either by an educational, a property test, or by both combined; but whatever tests are required, they should be made to apply with equal and exact justice to both races. ⁷

Actually, the bases of Washington's philosophy were twofold. First, he

derived many of his ideas from his social and intellectual milieu, and secondly, his sense of practicality influenced almost all of his decisions.

Intellectually, his philosophy was almost a direct extension of the "rags-to-riches" myth, which was a combination of the Puritan ethic, the "gospel of wealth," and Social Darwinism. Poverty was viewed as an asset, for it taught people how to work and to struggle. Also advantageous was a rural childhood, which served to build a healthy body and to inculcate good morals and independence. Furthermore, reliance upon government, because it stifled initiative, was to be avoided.

Among a large class (of Negroes during Reconstruction) there seemed to be a dependence upon the government for every conceivable thing. The members of this class had little ambition to create a position for themselves; but wanted the federal officials to create one for them. How many times I wished then, and have often wished since, that by some power of magic I might remove the great bulk of these people into the country districts (of the South) and plant them upon the soil, upon the solid and never deceptive foundation of Mother Nature, where all nations and races that have ever succeeded have gotten their start, - a start that at first may be slow and toilsome, but one that nevertheless is real. ⁸

Of even greater importance in the achievement of success, that is, wealth, than the environmental influences of impecuniosity and an agrarian upbringing were such cultivated inner qualities as industry, perseverance, and frugality.

A second integral component of the thought of the Tuskegee educator was a remarkable degree of realism. Washington has often been criticized for the excessive trust he placed in conservative whites, but he was not actually that gullible. W. E. B. DuBois, a one-time admirer of Washington who later split with the Tuskegeean's conciliatory approach, once commented, "Actually, Washington had no more faith in the white man than I do." ⁹ Nevertheless, despite his private misgivings the eminent ex-slave publicly professed his profound confidence in the goodness of the "better class" of whites. Judging

from his "Compromise" address, his tactical objectives were again implicitly practical. Blacks represented in 1895 an impoverished minority largely dependent upon whites for their livelihoods. This dependence was especially pronounced at the time because of the adverse effects of a continuing depression. ¹⁰ Unless "efforts tending to curtail the fullest growth of the Negro" were re-directed into more constructive channels, starvation by many blacks was not that remote a prospect. Rather than explicitly stating this, however, Washington strategically appealed to white self-interests in terms designed to attract influential, business-oriented proponents of the New South:

Nearly sixteen millions of hands will aid you in pulling the load upward, or they will pull against you the load downward. We shall constitute one-third and more of the ignorance and crime of the South, or one-third of its intelligence and progress; we shall contribute one-third to the business and industrial prosperity of the South, or we shall prove a veritable body of death, stagnating, depressing, retarding every effort to advance the body politic. ¹¹

Always the diplomatist, Washington did not seek handouts for two valid reasons. First, he knew that in all probability they would not be forthcoming, for direct relief was frowned upon by the contemporary white upper classes. And secondly, the acceptance of charity would have compounded black dependence upon whites. Instead of alms, he emphasized the need for industrial education for blacks, from which marketable skills would be derived. Concurrently, Negroes would become financially more independent and would demonstrate that as a race they too could compete in the Social Darwinists' acquisitive race.

Washington's disavowal of Negro aspirations for "social equality," at least for the time being, was the result of yet another pragmatic appraisal of his Southern environment. Whites were determined at all costs to prevent the powerless, unorganized Negro from rising above his lowly state at the bottom of the social pyramid. The inflexible resolution expressed by one Southern businessman was pathetically not atypical:

Right or wrong, the Southern people will never tolerate it (social equality) and will go through the horrors of another reconstruction before they will permit it to be. Before they will submit to it, they will kill every Negro in the Southern states. ¹²

Or to once more quote Hoke Smith:

The negro and the white man cannot remain side by side in a state of competition. They cannot live together in peace side by side, where the negro aims at social equality. ¹³

The headmaster of Tuskegee personally adhorred artificial racial barriers.

In an article published posthumously in the New Republic, he caustically stated:

...I have little faith in the doctrine that it is necessary to segregate the whites from the blacks to prevent race mixture....

1. It is unjust
2. It invites unjust measures.
3. It will not be productive of good, because practically every thoughtful negro resents its injustice and doubts its sincerity.
4. It is unnecessary.
5. It is inconsistent.
6. There has been no case of segregation of Negroes in the United States that has not widened the breach between the two races. ¹⁴

Nonetheless, during his lifetime, he counseled acquiescence to Jim Crow regulations. Any other course of action would have constituted protest and agitation, both of which he deprecated. ¹⁵ Also, he believed that separation could be converted into a plus, for it gave the alienated Negro a chance to develop a positive sense of race pride. ¹⁶ Finally, in striking a "compromise" with whites, that is, in temporarily forfeiting "social equality" in exchange for economic opportunity and industrial education, Washington ironically made the black feel that however downtrodden, he, the mudsill of society, was still so important that whites found it judicious to bargain with him. ¹⁷

In regard to politics, the Tuskegeean was somewhat more candid. He publicly confessed that he believed in free, universal suffrage. ¹⁸ He

recognized, though, that many of his race had merely used their votes as articles of merchandise which were sold to the highest bidder and that as a result of such malfeasance (or at least brandishing such venality as a convenient excuse), whites were vociferously clamoring for total Negro disfranchisement. Again, Washington countered by surrendering half a loaf to keep the other half intact; he openly protested against discriminatory restrictions while simultaneously confessing that the exigencies of the situation justified property and/or educational provisions, providing these clauses were impartially applied.

In Georgia, however, the "Atlanta Compromise" and its subsequent corollaries proved by the end of 1908 to be qualified failures. Washington's primary, short-term objective was economic amelioration. But instead of permitting blacks "to earn a dollar in the factory just now," all too many whites resented the resultant interracial economic competition. For example, when the Oxford Knitting Mills in Barnesville hired a Negro knitting machine operative in October, 1899, the white employees indignantly struck.¹⁹ Black business progress was viewed as equally subversive of the existing social order by rancorous, often envious "Aryans." As W. E. B. DuBois aptly observed:

Not Negro poverty, crime and degradation, but Negro wealth, ability and ambition is the great incentive to the white mob.²⁰

A case in point was the Atlanta riot, during which black business establishments and Negro middle class neighborhoods (including Brownsville) were popular targets. One well-to-do, Yale-educated black, Dr. W. F. Penn, related his disillusionment as follows:

What shall we do?.... If living a sober, industrious, upright life, accumulating property and educating his children as best he knows how, is not the standard by which a coloured man can live and be protected in the South, what is to become of him?....

When we aspire to be decent and industrious we are told that we are bad examples to other coloured men. Tell us what your standards are for coloured men. What are the requirements under which we may live and be protected? What shall we do? ²¹

By 1908, probably a majority of whites sought subservience for blacks, not self-improvement.

Economic amelioration was, according to Washington, to be a product of industrial education and hard work, preferably the tilling of the soil in the rural South. To the author of the "Compromise," such honest toil was dignified and ennobling. But common black labor in the fields was for Tom Watson synonymous with relegating Negroes "to the condition of a recognized peasantry." ²² And for Hoke Smith, "industrial education" came to mean no more than a form of menial indoctrination to assure the continued submissiveness of the "darky:"

In developing our educational system we should not be afraid to recognize the vast difference between the white and negro races. I do not believe that the average negro receives much help by learning out of books. A large majority of the race will be found for generations capable only of manual labor. The negro child should be taught to work. He should be inspired with a desire to do that for which he can be best fitted and we must recognize the truth that labor in the fields is his best opportunity. ²³

Probably more forthright was the Atlanta Constitution paraphrase of a Smith speech delivered at Hogansville in August, 1905.

...Mr. Smith declared that he thought it would be advisable to have the negroes only taught how to work like they did before the war.... That a negro was never destined to be anything much better than what he was before the war. ²⁴

Turning to Georgia politics, Washington's role has too often been harshly criticized without sufficient consideration being given to the positive aspects of his "benevolent despotism." In 1899, Washington was almost individually responsible for organizing the black opposition to the Hardwick bill. When Negro leaders in the state neither answered his surreptitious letters nor

appeared to be effectively expressing their displeasure with the onerous, highly discriminatory legislation, ²⁵ the Tuskegeean personally intervened. In early November he journeyed to Atlanta, where he openly conversed with legislators, newsmen, and certain other influential citizens of both races. ²⁶ Soon thereafter, other blacks began to raise their voices in protest against the measure. Unquestionably, this evidence of constituent unrest did cause some lawmakers to reappraise their positions. Hence, Washington's activities were a definite factor in bringing about the resounding defeat of the Hardwick bill.

In 1903, Clark Howell editorially indicated that the Negro leader opposed black officeholding. Washington wished to refute this untruth, but he did not want to directly contradict his white admirer. Therefore, he clandestinely persuaded his friend, T. Thomas Fortune, to set the record straight in the pages of the Age, which the latter edited. ²⁷

By 1905 and 1906, however, Washington had become a mere pawn for all factions. Both supporters and opponents of disfranchisement noted the disappearance of Negroes from the polling places, a withdrawal which the Atlanta Journal attributed in large part to the renunciation of "equality of any sort" by "negroes of much more intelligence than is possessed by the bulk of their race." ²⁸ At Columbus, Hoke Smith contended that such passivity would facilitate the enactment of a restrictive amendment:

The negro, at present, cares little for his right to vote. This fact will make action easy. ²⁹

In contrast, Clark Howell, who had heartily approved of Washington and his philosophy for years, asserted that such quiescence, removed the need to exclude the Negro, who had already voluntarily exited from the political arena:

The Negroes are not even trying to vote in Georgia. They are absolutely indifferent to the matter, and are becoming more so every year. We are securing all of the blessings of disfranchisement without any of its evils. ³⁰

Later, however, when Howell desired to vivify the threat of blacks qualifying under the educational clause, he evidenced no qualms in pointing out the frightening and contemptible fact that Booker T. Washington had been among the first to register in Tuskegee when a similar Alabama constitutional amendment went into effect. ³¹

If Washington's ambiguous, conciliatory arguments, or at least virtually unrecognizable versions of them, were brandished by both white factions, the isolated militancy of Bishop Henry McNeal Turner clearly abetted the cause of the disfranchisers. Addressing the Macon convention of the Georgia Equal Rights League (later the Colored Association) in February, 1906, Bishop Turner berated the country and belittled the flag:

...to the Negro in this country the American flag is a dirty rag. Not a star in it can the colored man claim, for it is no longer the symbol of our manhood rights and liberty. Without multiplying words, I wish to say that hell is an improvement upon the United States when the Negro is involved. ³²

Patriotic whites, who firmly held the reins of power, were enraged at this intolerable, "treasonous tirade," and Smithites adroitly capitalized on this unfortunate faux pas. Hence, ill-advised black militancy seemingly proved to be even more counterproductive of its ends than the "Atlanta Compromise."

In the opinion of this writer, disfranchisement and social and economic race proscription were inevitable even had Washington never uttered a single word. In fact, he probably delayed formal electoral restriction in the state, and other forms of political, social, and economic discrimination anteceded his ascendance. Nonetheless, Washington was not blameless. As time passed and white injustices increased, he became more, not less, conciliatory. ³³

Negro faults began to receive greater emphasis, causing whites to overlook the critical passages directed at them. "To whites the essence of Washington's message was that the solution of the race problem lay primarily with Negroes and that it lay in the acceptance by Negroes of the conditions imposed by the white." ³⁴ This, in turn, served to assuage existing white pangs of guilt, while concurrently enabling continued, more conscience-free discrimination.

OF MR. HOKE SMITH

Hoke Smith has remained over the years a controversial figure. During the 1906 campaign, Major Charles E. McGregor of Warrenton, a former ally of Tom Watson who had only recently parted company with the embittered Populist, impugned the sincerity of "the people's candidate" on the disfranchisement issue. ³⁵ The supporting evidence overwhelmingly corroborated this accusation of expediency. In June, 1906, even after the publication of his platform with its restrictive plank, Smith harbored no concrete, immutable opinions on the issue. Instead, he was undergoing a transitional phase, during which his thoughts were still malleable. Corresponding with Watson on matters pertaining to disfranchisement, Thomas W. Hardwick confided, "I still think that there will be no trouble in getting Mr. Smith to do the right thing, and I will undertake to do my best in that direction." ³⁶ Furthermore, Smith's devotion to the principle of electoral exclusion per se was made suspect by his reluctance to support legislation patterned after the Hardwick bill which was introduced in July, 1905, by a Representative Rose of Upson County. According to Rose, Smith indicated that he basically approved of the measure, providing it was brought more in line with the present Alabama law. But contrary to Smith's promise, no specific recommendations were forthcoming

during the ensuing year. When the House Committee on Constitutional Amendments unanimously rejected the bill on July 18, 1906, many pro-Smith committee members who reportedly favored such an amendment inexplicably sided with avowed opponents of restriction.³⁷ Rose was furious; he accurately concluded, "These men refused to come to the assistance of the disfranchisement bill at this time solely because of their desire to use the disfranchisement cry as a political issue."³⁸

To accuse Smith of expedience, however, is not to brand him as a hypocrite altogether. Admittedly, he did oppose the Hardwick bill, only to "reverse" his stand in 1905. But editorial comment directed against Georgia disfranchisement by the Atlanta Journal during 1899, at which time he edited the paper, was kept to a minimum. At the same time, the Journal openly endorsed the North Carolina restriction.³⁹ Also, in commending the advice given by Professor W. H. Councilll at the Southern Industrial Conference in October, 1899, the newspaper expressed its approval of at least temporary electoral elimination of the Negro until he became a better qualified voter.⁴⁰ Hence, Smith's later "reversal" was one of degree and not of direction, for both before and during his political life, he never believed that the Negro was the equal of the white in any respect:

The white race inherits character from ancestors who fought the battles of human rights and gave the world its highest civilization.

The negro race inherits savage instincts from barbarians of Africa, and has received its chief progress while in slavery from control by the white man.

Any effort to improve conditions in Georgia and the South by treating the two races as equal is stupid and hurtful....

The white man must accept full responsibility and control of the situation. This is the white man's country, and it is the white man's burden....⁴¹

If "the people's candidate" became a demagogue, albeit one of "culture and family" and not "a boor of the Davis and Vardaman type,"⁴² he nonetheless,

"except in matters of race,... was a genuine reform governor." ⁴³ And even in matters relating to race, his record was not without redeeming features. If blacks were disfranchised and Negro education was assailed, the convict-lease system, a long-time Negro nemesis, was also abolished by an extra session of the 1908 General Assembly which was called specially by then Governor Smith. In addition, during the 1906 Atlanta riot, a number of blacks were given refuge in the home of the governor-elect, the very same, "rebel-rousing" Negrophobe of the past two years. ⁴⁴

In conclusion, Hoke Smith was bigoted, as was his age. He was, in fact, a product of his Southern, white environment, an environment which malevolently taught that white supremacy was divinely, scientifically, and culturally sanctioned and which invidiously instilled a deep-seated, often subconscious race hatred. By basely articulating the prejudices and fears of his milieu for the purpose of political gain, however, Hoke Smith irreparably tainted what was otherwise a legitimate reform image. His personal, earnest belief in the racial inferiority of the Negro was tragically understandable, but by no means justifiable. His invective, his demagoguery, and his expediency, though, were unpardonable, and their cancerous consequences were a heightened, sometimes sanguinary, racial antipathy. This then was, and still is, the cumbrous legacy of Georgia disfranchisement.

FOOTNOTES

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³ Ibid., pp. 221-222.

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- ⁶ August Meier, Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915 (Ann Arbor, 1963), p. 108.
- ⁷ Washington, p. 237.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 90.
- ⁹ Eric F. Goldman, Rendezvous with Destiny (New York, 1952), p. 63.
- ¹⁰ Donald J. Calista, "Booker T. Washington: Another Look," Journal of Negro History, XLIX (October, 1964), p. 243.
- ¹¹ Washington, p. 222.
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- ¹⁴ Quoted in Calista, pp. 254-255.
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- ¹⁸ Washington, p. 237.
- ¹⁹ Atlanta Journal, October 13, 1899.
- ²⁰ DuBois, "Georgia," p. 332.
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- ²² C. Vann Woodward, "Tom Watson and the Negro in Agrarian Politics," Journal of Southern History, IV (February, 1938), p. 31.
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- 32 Clarence Albert Bacote, "The Negro in Georgia Politics, 1880-1908" (Ph.D., University of Chicago, 1955), p. 436.
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- 37 Atlanta News, July 19, 1906.
- 38 Macon Telegraph, August 17, 1906.
- 39 Atlanta Journal, September 30, 1899.
- 40 Ibid., October 12, 1899.
- 41 Ibid., October 10, 1906.
- 42 "The Georgia Disfranchisement," The Nation, LXXXV (August 8, 1907), p. 113.
- 43 Grantham, Hoke Smith, p. 179.
- 44 Baker, p. 11.

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Encountered while researching this thesis were a number of pitfalls. First, I had difficulty locating all-important personal papers, and even when I did find the Hoke Smith papers in the University of Georgia library, I discovered that most had been destroyed in a fire. Consequently, I was forced to rely more heavily on newspapers than I might otherwise have liked. In fact, many of my secondary sources apparently did likewise. Hence, a large percentage of my information was derived either directly or indirectly from newspapers. However, I have assiduously attempted to corroborate this information by comparing the various journals with each other and with what other sources I have been able to uncover, and I feel that the resultant product is as authoritative as time and resources have allowed.

Data concerning black opinion, financial and educational condition, etcetera was acquired secondarily. Of particular importance in this regard were the writings of Dr. Clarence A. Bacote of Atlanta University. Nevertheless, because poorer blacks left few records and because most of the remaining data came from possibly unrepresentative, Negro middle class sources, existing knowledge of the black community for the era in question is somewhat suspect, as Dr. Bacote himself readily admits.

Finally, several of the books that I cite, specifically Gunnar Myrdal's An American Dilemma and Paul Lewinson's Race, Class, and Party, have only been sampled; they have not been thoroughly perused.

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