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SECTIONALISM, NATIONALISM, AND THE AGRARIAN REVOLT, 1877-1892

A Dissertation  
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Department of History  
The University of Mississippi

by

BENJAMIN HOUSTON TURNER PURVIS

MAY 2014

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## ABSTRACT

The Southern Farmers' Alliance led the largest coalition of late-nineteenth-century farmers' and urban reformers. The reform movement called for laws opposing speculation on agricultural prices, restricting the powers of business trusts, regulating railroad freight rates, and increasing the circulation of currency based on silver. Advocates also strongly opposed the proponents of sectionalism who emphasized differences and conflicts between the primary sections of the country, the North and the South. Differences between the North and South largely revolved around the issue of slavery and emerged shortly after the founding of the nation. Tension accelerated in the years following the Mexican-American War and reached a climax during the American Civil War and post-war Reconstruction. Although the Civil War and Reconstruction ceased by 1877, for decades the legacy of sectionalism continued to heavily influence regional identities and politics. Because of its continued prevalence in the late-nineteenth century, Alliance supporters identified sectionalism as a major barrier to national economic and political reform. Agrarian supporters depicted regional, gender, and racial identities as artificial compared to shared interests of the producer class. Reformers described the producer class as the vast majority of Americans who labored in urban and rural settings to create tangible goods of value for sale. The Southern Alliance led this coalition of the producer class by 1890. In its efforts to mobilize a national movement, the Alliance consistently emphasized sectional reconciliation. This work shows that sectionalism ultimately played a great role in the destruction of the farmers' reform crusade by 1896.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Rachel, whose support and encouragement pushed this project to conclusion. I also dedicate the dissertation to my grandparents, Mary Nell and McDowell Turner. Grandma Turner proofread the dissertation. Grandpa Turner always loved “the land.”

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project would not have been completed without the unrelenting support that I received from family, friends, and professors. There was considerable overlap between these categories. Without the support of Rachel Smith Purvis this project would not be complete. Rachel provided the encouragement needed to keep writing the dissertation. She also listened to my ideas and allowed me to complain, which I greatly appreciate. My parents, Susan and Joe Purvis, also gave me lots of support during the dissertation. They also raised me in an environment that greatly valued curiosity about the world outside of our home. Coupled with the influence of my grandparents, Mary Nell and McDowell, “Mac,” Turner, I was immersed in a family that cherished history and learning. My grandmother, Mary Nell, generously spent her time proof-reading the dissertation. After teaching journalism to high school students, her work continues. She consistently tried to get me to use commas correctly. Any errors that remain are certainly mine alone. My grandfather, Mac, provided me with a great appreciation for nature and he continues to teach me the values of patience and persistence. Born on a farm, his family moved to town when he was young. Grandpa Mac never lost his desire to have some land in the countryside. While providing lots of laughs and happiness, my sister Elizabeth never lets me forget that whatever toughness I possess, I owe it to her.

I am fortunate to have a great group of friends that helped get me through graduate school. Throughout graduate school, Audrey Uffner shared my obsession with details. Audrey set a high standard for learning and teaching undergraduates. She also formed part of a writing group that offered an opportunity to discuss ideas and accelerate the writing process. I also

formed a highly appreciated friendship with another graduate student, Calvin White. Calvin and I spent a lot of valuable time talking about historical and non-historical topics. He provided highly appreciated advice and encouragement throughout the graduate school process. He continues to do so. Jack Carey, Will Hustwit, and Dave Ray furthered my thinking about many topics and provided much needed humor during the degree-seeking process. Ben Vogelgesang, David Heister, Stewart Irving, Ryan Alverson, Jeremy Spann, Holt Short, David Spatz, and Donna Foster also deserve great thanks for their support during various stages of the dissertation.

Dr. Charles Reagan Wilson deserves much credit for seeing the project through to completion, providing guidance and patience throughout the process. Dr. Wilson's graduate seminars shaped much of my thinking related to this project. Dr. John Neff graciously gives much of his time to students. He gave me some of this time and I am grateful. I was lucky to benefit from his model as a scholar and teacher. This project began in his Civil War Memory Research Seminar. Dr. Ted Ownby also shaped much of my thinking about U. S. Southern History. Dr. Ownby always provided probing questions that led to much contemplation. Dr. Katie McKee kindly agreed to serve on the dissertation committee. Like Dr. Ownby, Dr. McKee provided a perspective that pushed me to think about topics and themes that I had not considered. Throughout my educational training, I benefited from excellent guidance, advice, and instruction from teachers at all levels of the education system. Although rarely acknowledged, teachers at Gibbs Magnet Elementary, Pulaski Heights Junior High, and Central High guided me through the learning process and stimulated my thinking on many issues. I would not be here without their help and instruction. Mary Jones, Kathy Buford, Wayne Knight, Sara Gadberry, and

Charlie Brown deserve special thanks. Dr. Charles Sallis of Millsaps College and Dr. Jeannie Whyne at the University of Arkansas served as mentors during my undergraduate education. Their example, as scholars and teachers, provided me with excellent models for emulation. Both greatly influenced my decision to pursue graduate studies in History. I owe professors Charles Ross, Charles Eagles, Nancy Bercaw, and Winthrop Jordan special recognition for going out of their way to assist and encourage me during graduate school.

Financial assistance allowed me to start and complete this project. I thank the University of Mississippi Department of History, Graduate School, and Office of Financial Aid for providing graduate assistantships. Funds provided by the Graduate School Summer Research Assistantship, Department of History Chair, Dr. Joe Ward, and from my parents and grandparents, allowed me to conduct research trips to the University of North Carolina, the University of Texas, and the Kansas Historical Society. Without their contributions, I could not start or finish this task. I am forever grateful.



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## INTRODUCTION

In December 1889, the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union, or Southern Alliance, met in St. Louis, Missouri to discuss reforms and mutual issues. The meeting involved the Knights of Labor and a host of agrarian organizations, including the National Farmers' Alliance, or Northern Alliance, the Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association and the National Colored Farmer's Alliance. The meeting represented the culmination of efforts to build a national agrarian campaign that would improve the economic and political welfare of American farmers and laborers. Delegates agreed to support laws opposing speculation on agricultural prices, restricting the powers of business trusts, regulating railroad freight rates, and increasing the circulation of currency based on silver. The meetings also produced a larger and truly national organization when state Alliances from Kansas, North Dakota, and South Dakota formally joined the Southern Alliance. In another act to broaden its appeal, the Southern Alliance elected officers from north and south of the Mason-Dixon line. As the largest organization present, the Southern Alliance celebrated these actions as a victory over a major barrier to interregional agrarian unity.

Charles Macune, editor of the Southern Alliance newspaper, *The National Economist*, celebrated the St. Louis meeting as a victory over sectionalism. As the major leader of the Southern Alliance, Macune had overseen the rapid growth of the Alliance during the previous two years. He now lauded the meeting because prior attempts at uniting laborers' and farmers' groups fell prey to various divisions, including "sectional prejudice." Macune reveled in the

ability of the Southern Alliance to unite without “the slightest evidence of sectional prejudice shown, not even the least trace of it felt.” According to the agrarian leader, this victory for sectional reconciliation proved that Southerners and Northerners realized “that a union should be effected, fully believing that without this there was no hope for economic reform.”<sup>1</sup>

Less than three years later, the remnants of the Alliance gathered at Omaha, Nebraska in the first meeting of the national People’s, or Populist, Party. The party nominated candidates for national office and issued the Omaha Platform, which advanced many of the same reforms advocated by the Alliance at St. Louis. Upon approval of the platform convention, participants celebrated while a band played “Dixie” and “Yankee Doodle.” Like the Alliance, the Populist Party nominated a Southerner and a Northerner to its highest leadership position. The nominees, James B. Weaver and James G. Field, fought on opposing sides during the Civil War and delegates chose them with these credentials in mind. Whether measured by the 1889 Farmers’ Alliance meeting or by People’s Party convention, the agrarian movement consistently demonstrated that sectionalism was a major foe in the fight to achieve economic and political reform.<sup>2</sup>

Over a decade later the national agrarian movement had dissolved. Several previous agrarian leaders demonstrated the continuing power of regional identity and sectionalism within the United States. In 1904, former Populist Vice Presidential nominee Tom Watson published *Bethany: A Story of the Old South* as a memoir of his youth in Georgia. Watson dedicated the book to “THE MAGANIMOUS MEN OF THE NORTH WHO ARE WILLING TO LEARN THE TRUTH ABOUT THE SOUTH.” In 1905, Thomas Dixon, a former Baptist minister and

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<sup>1</sup> *National Economist*, December 14, 1889.

<sup>2</sup> Barton C. Shaw, *The Wool-Hat Boys: Georgia’s Populist Party* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 56-57; John D Hicks, *Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers’ Alliance and the People’s Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931), 236.

supporter of the farmers' movement, published *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*. Dixon wrote the book because he encountered stiff northern opposition to his views of Reconstruction and southern race relations. The novel later served as the inspiration for the film *A Birth of a Nation*, which helped popularize a white supremacist interpretation of Reconstruction and revitalize the Ku Klux Klan. A few years earlier, in 1900, Kansas Mary Elizabeth Lease addressed her former affiliations with the agrarian revolt and contemporary campaign efforts on behalf of the Republican Party. Lease no longer supported Populism because she thought that "the issue has resolved itself into the old issue of copperheadism versus Republicanism, and as the daughter of an old Union soldier I feel that my place is with the Republican party." During the next presidential election Lease added "My father and brothers died on the field of battle defending the flag and the Union that the Democratic party, represented by [William Jennings] Bryan and [Adlai E.] Stevenson, sought to destroy."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas E. Watson, *Bethany: A Story of the Old South* (New York: D. Appleton, 1904), v; Joe Creech, *Righteous Indignation: Religion and the Populist Revolution* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 143, 181-82; *Leavenworth Times*, September 22, 1900 in O. Gene Clanton, *Kansas Populism: Ideas and Men* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1969), 225 (first Lease quote), newspaper clipping dated September 27, 1904, in Kansas Biographical Scrapbook, Kansas State Historical Society in Clanton, *Kansas Populism*, n.46 282 (second Lease quote). Lease's father died at Andersonville Prison, while two brothers died at the battles of Fredericksburg and Lookout Mountain respectively. Dixon publicly supported Populists, but voted against them in national elections. He later regretted voting for Democrat Grover Cleveland in 1892, but could not support Democrat-Populist William Jennings Bryan because of his monetary policy in 1896. Interestingly, Dixon corresponded with Populist North Carolina Senator Marion Butler until 1898, which was four years into a fusion agreement between Populists and Republicans in the state. A former Democrat, Butler helped initiate Populist-Republican fusion in North Carolina, which earned him the wrath of prominent Democrats. Among his Democratic enemies were Josephus Daniels, Furnifold Simmons, and Charles Brantley Aycock, who accused Butler of betraying his race. According to Glenda Gilmore, Dixon joined Daniels, Simmons, and Aycock in a cadre of the "New White Man." Although Dixon viewed African Americans as inferior to whites throughout the 1890s, it is interesting that he continued to write Butler well after the advent Republican-Populist fusion. For his part, Butler did not view blacks as equals to whites either. He embraced, however, a coalition with black leaders and voters, opposed lynching, and tried to stop disfranchisement laws. For the correspondence between Butler and Dixon, see Joe Creech, *Righteous Indignation: Religion and the Populist Revolution* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), n.8 204. For more on Dixon and the "New White Man," see Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 66-70, 135-38; for more on Butler, see James L. Hunt, *Marion Butler and American Populism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

Within a decade of its collapse, many former members of the farmers' crusade affirmed their loyalty to regional identities and their retreat from a national identity based on the value of laborers and farmers. How did supporters of the Alliance and Populism switch from advocating economic reform through the conquest of sectionalism, to supporting values and attitudes that were peculiar to specific regions? This project seeks to answer that question by showing that sectional reconciliation played an essential role in mobilizing the national agrarian movement and that sectionalism greatly influenced the destruction of the farmers' reform crusade.

Advocates of the agrarian cause consistently described sectionalism as a major barrier to the unity of the producer class. American reformers touted the producer class as those who labored to create tangible goods of value for sale. According to the Alliance and other organizations, this group represented a plurality of Americans and with this majority status producers had the right to use the U.S. government to reform the country economically and politically. Agrarian supporters argued that to achieve reforms, the American majority needed to eschew artificial identities tied to region, gender, and race, and embrace their true interests as members of the producer class.

The agrarian movement concerned itself with sectionalism because of events in the mid-nineteenth century. Differences between the North and South caused division within the federal government from the founding of the nation, but tension accelerated in the years following the Mexican-American War. A product of these rising hostilities between North and South, the American Civil War became the ultimate expression of sectionalism where each section waged war against the other. The Reconstruction era that followed the end of military combat witnessed the continuation of sectionalism. Violence and bitter fights within the federal government prolonged strife between the North and South. Although the Civil War and

Reconstruction ceased by 1877, for decades the legacy of sectionalism continued to heavily influence regional identities and politics. When the Southern Alliance spread from its Texas base in 1887, sectionalism affected its movement. The organization first moved into other southern states, rather than toward states that fought for the Union.<sup>4</sup>

This project seeks to connect the historiography of sectionalism to the farmers' movement. While scholars of sectionalism after the Civil War have shown the enduring legacy of sectional conflict in the memories of Americans, they have not connected their findings to the agrarian groups with much depth. When Civil War memory scholars mention the Southern Alliance or Populism they usually depict the Lost Cause as a powerful weapon used against agrarian reform. Few historians in the sub-field look within the farmers' movement to find competing memories of the war and the Reconstruction that followed.<sup>5</sup> This absence is understandable, given that few scholars of the Alliance and Populism examined the role of sectionalism, except as a tool used against the agrarian reform crusade. Because of a focus on the political and economic policies of the farmers' movement, and due to a tendency to glorify

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<sup>4</sup> Leonard L. Richards, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> David Blight and Gaines Foster are examples of this depiction in post-Civil War historiography. Blight also mentions the 1896 Republican strategy of linking Unionism and McKinley against the "disorder" they associated with William Jennings Bryan and his class appeals. See Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 294, 346. Foster notes that some members of the agrarian movement tried to appeal to white Southerners with references to the Confederacy. Ultimately, he concludes that Conservative Democrats succeeded in using the Lost Cause to promote deference, order, and tradition over the rebellion associated with the farmers' revolt. I agree with this interpretation and add more evidence from other sources to show how northern agrarians responded to southern farmers' references to the Confederacy. See Foster, *Ghosts of Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913* (1985, repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 86, 114, 194-95. For other works that focus on sectionalism and Civil War memory, see Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1980); Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); William Blair, *Cities of the Dead: Contesting the Memory of the Civil War South, 1865-1914* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); David Goldfield, *Still Fighting the Civil War: The American South and Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2004); John R. Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead: Commemoration and the Problem of Reconciliation* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2005); Barbara Gannon, *The Won Cause: Black and White Comradeship in the Grand Army of the Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

its participants, many historians viewed sectionalism as an artificial ploy used by scheming politicians and their business supporters.<sup>6</sup> In reaching these conclusions, scholars followed the arguments of agrarian revolt supporters.

The general absence of sectionalism in scholarship on the Alliance and Populism suggests a false division between the pro-reconciliationist farmers' crusade and the pro-sectionalism of moneyed interests in the late-nineteenth-century North and South. Not only did business interests and politicians, like William McKinley, promote sectional reconciliation, but agrarian reformers held closer to their regional identity than to their association with the national agrarian movement.<sup>7</sup> Sectionalism was especially prevalent in the history of the Southern Farmers' Alliance. Before the advent of People's Party, the Alliance contained many white southern members who celebrated their regional identities through the Democratic Party, white supremacy, and the Confederacy. Some white Southerners failed to make the transition from the Alliance into the People's Party because of their allegiances to their region.<sup>8</sup> When some Populists in Kansas became convinced that white Southerners did not truly wish to join a national third party, they returned to the Republican Party. Rather than support Democrats and policies they associated with the Confederacy, these Kansans retreated to the party of tradition, the Grand Old Party. Sectionalism reduced the ranks of the agrarian revolt prior to the first

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<sup>6</sup> Some older and several recent scholars note the importance of sectionalism within the agrarian rebellion. See Charles Postel *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 173-204; Peter H. Argersinger, *Populism and Politics: William Alfred Peffer and the People's Party* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974), *passim*. Argersinger discussed sectionalism, but since he wrote on Kansas Populism, he did not focus on the diversity found in the southern context and the relationship between sectionalism and the larger national agrarian movement.

<sup>7</sup> During an 1885 visit to Virginia, McKinley told the audience "the Republicans of the North harbor no resentments....They wish you the highest prosperity and greatest development." In Vincent P. De Santis, *Republicans Face the Southern Question: The New Departure Years, 1877-1897* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1959), 219.

<sup>8</sup> Like Robert McMath, I see a break between the Southern Alliance and the Populist Party. Many Alliance members did not join the People's Party. While I emphasize the role of sectionalism in the destruction of the Southern Alliance, McMath stresses the effects of cooperative failures. See McMath, *The Populist Vanguard: A History of the Southern Farmers' Alliance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975).

national election to feature the People's Party in 1892. Even with the onset of Populism, the power of sectionalism and regional identities did not die. As the expressions of Lease, Watson, and Dixon demonstrate, the emotional attachment to regional identities remained within most Populists and found common expression in the aftermath of the farmers' revolt. This study demonstrates the strong connections between sectional attitudes and the agrarian movement. While the policies of the farmers' revolt differed from both major parties, Alliance and Populist supporters frequently held racial, gender, and sectional attitudes that mirrored those of most late-nineteenth-century Americans.

The early historiography of the farmers' movement largely ignored these similarities. Historians initially depicted the agrarian revolt as a progressive democratic movement or as a movement of paranoid provincials, who were unable to adapt to change. John D. Hicks, C. Vann Woodward, and Lawrence Goodwyn fit into the first group of scholars. Hicks published the first major scholarly assessment of Populism in 1931 with *The Populist Revolt*. Hicks argued that the agrarian rebellion arose out of dire economic conditions in former frontier regions of the country. Farmers appeared to be "radical" in the 1890s because they argued that the influence of business should not trump the power of the American people. Through Progressivism and the New Deal agrarian critiques became mainstream political reforms achieved by the 1930s. Hicks viewed Populism and Progressivism as similar movements because their supporters both believed that "the voice of the people was the voice of God."<sup>9</sup>

Woodward followed Hicks with a portrayal of Populism as a movement of common people against an economic elite. In several publications in the 1930s and 1950s, Woodward viewed the agrarian movement as a challenge to unequal racial and economic relationships.

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<sup>9</sup> Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, 406.



Woodward celebrated Populism as movement in the American hinterlands of the West and South where a biracial coalition of farmers and urban industrial workers challenged the supremacy of Northeastern financial interests. Like Hicks, Woodward noted the role of sectional animosities in weakening the Populist coalition. Both historians identified sectionalism largely with groups external to the farmers' movement. A just biracial movement of common people, Populism could not overcome the influence of oppositional economic groups who wielded the powerful instruments of sectionalism and political violence.<sup>10</sup>

In the 1970s, Goodwyn continued many of these themes by focusing on the “movement culture” of the agrarian revolt. He argued that farmers organized a cooperative crusade at the grassroots level to challenge the power of business elites. More than Hicks and Woodward, Goodwyn focused on the cultural power of sectionalism and noted its destructive effects within the movement. Goodwyn concentrated most of his work, however, to chronicling the “movement culture” and its destruction by dishonest false-Populists. Outside of the classroom, Woodward and Goodwyn actively supported mid-twentieth-century liberal multiracial causes, which influenced their interpretation of the farmers' movement. Both scholars portrayed agrarians as representatives of the people who held fairly enlightened racial attitudes for the 1890s and fought for economic justice.<sup>11</sup>

Richard Hofstadter challenged the interpretation of Hicks, Woodward, and Goodwyn. Rather than a noble democratic movement, Hofstadter saw Populism as a frightening crusade of provincial farmers who lashed out at Jews and immigrants because of their declining economic

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<sup>10</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson Agrarian Rebel* (1938. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Savannah, GA: Behive Press, 1973); Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).

<sup>11</sup> Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 350, 507-08; *Duke Today*, “Duke Flags Lowered: Historian Lawrence Goodwyn Dies,” Duke University, <https://today.duke.edu/2013/09/goodwyn> (accessed March 21, 2014).

and social status. Published in 1955, Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform* demonstrated a fear of mass politics, which had recently delved into European fascism and McCarthyism in the U.S. Influenced by these recent developments, the historian argued that the agrarian movement acted irrationally with its over-simplistic remedies and nostalgia for the eras of Jefferson and Jackson.<sup>12</sup> While he showed that Populism did not fit mid-twentieth-century liberal standards, Hofstadter did not discuss the diversity and appeal of agrarian protests. He also failed to note internal divisions within the agrarian movement, including the role of sectionalism. Unlike Hicks and Woodward, however, Hofstadter looked within Populism rather than without to find the reasons for its collapse. Hofstadter also correctly noted the influence of nostalgia within the farmers' movement.<sup>13</sup>

The two camps defined much of the scholarly work that came in the 1950s and 1960s. In his *That Noble Dream*, Peter Novick found that each group of scholars fit interesting patterns. Novick noted that critics of the agrarian movement tended to be Jews from the urban northeastern United States. Scholars with a favorable view of the farmers' revolt came from the Protestant Midwest and South, where the movement found its greatest support. Into the 1960s, Alliance and Populist scholars reflected the Northeast versus "West" and South dynamic prevalent in the agrarian movement of the 1890s.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> From William F. Holmes, "Populism: In Search of a Context," *Agricultural History* 64 (1990): 26; Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 60-93. Victor C. Ferkiss also identified Populism with fascism because the party supported immigration restriction in its 1892 platform. See Ferkiss, "Populist Influences on American Fascism," *Western Political Quarterly* 10 (June 1957): 350-73.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Postel argues that Hofstadter overstated the backwards perspective of the farmers' movement. Postel shows that modern business organizational strategies figured prominently in the thinking of many agrarian movement leaders; *The Populist Moment*, especially 45-68, 103-72

<sup>14</sup> Replicating the dominant trend of the profession, all of these scholars were white men. Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 337-41. Novick noted one exception in each of the interpretive groups: Norman Pollack in the pro-Populist camp and Talcott Parsons in the anti-Populist group.

After the 1960s most studies of the agrarian movement focused on a state or region at the expense of the national dynamics of the movement. These scholars concentrated on the agrarian movement's relation to race, Christianity, labor ideology, republican ideology, and encounters with a market economy.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, this study applies a national perspective to emphasize the relationship between events and people in the several states and regions. It focuses on states where the Alliance and Populism experienced the most success in order to determine the true prospects for an interregional agrarian movement in the 1890s. As the home of the Southern Alliance, Texas provided much of the early leadership for the Alliance, sent lecturers to spread the Alliance message in other states, and experienced the heavy influence of Populism in state political contests. Agrarian organizers in the South and Midwest viewed Georgia as an important state for spreading their message. In 1890, Alliance supporters won an overwhelming number of seats in the state legislature, which showed the impressive influence of the farmers' organization in the state. Georgians also held prominent positions within the Southern Alliance. Like Georgia, North Carolina provided significant leaders to the agrarian movement. The

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<sup>15</sup> Studies that focus on the South include Sheldon Hackney, *Populism to Progressivism in Alabama* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969); William F. Holmes, "The Demise of the Colored Farmers' Alliance," *Journal of Southern History* 41 (May 1975): 187-200; McMath, *Populist Vanguard*; Gerald H. Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Revolt: Ballots and Bigotry in the "New South"* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1977); Bruce Palmer, "Man Over Money:" *The Southern Populist Critique of American Capitalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Shaw, *The Wool-Hat Boys*; Marion K. Barthelme, ed., *Women in the Texas Populist Movement: Letters to the Southern Mercury* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997); Creech, *Righteous Indignation*; Matthew Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists: Farmer-Labor Insurgency in the Late-Nineteenth-Century South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007); Joseph Gerteis, *Class and the Color Line: Interracial Class Coalition in the Knights of Labor and the Populist Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). For studies that concentrate on the Midwest see, Norman Pollack, *The Populist Response to Industrial America: Midwestern Populist Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962); Walter Nugent, *The Tolerant Populists: Kansas, Populism, and Nativism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963); William H. Chafe, "The Negro and Populism: A Kansas Case Study," *Journal of Southern History* 34 (August 1968): 402-19; O. Gene Clanton, *Kansas Populism: Ideas and Men* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1969); Peter H. Argersinger, *Populism and Politics: William Alfred Peffer and the People's Party* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974); Jeffrey Ostler, *Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, 1880-1892* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993); Michael L. Goldberg, *An Army of Women: Gender and Politics in Gilded Age Kansas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

Alliance and Populism also influenced North Carolina elections throughout the 1890s. As the home of the People's Party, Kansas figures prominently in this study. The Southern Alliance rapidly spread throughout the Sunflower state and Kansas agrarians worked hard to turn the Alliance into a national political party. Because of the absence of personal papers from many farmers' activists, newspapers in Texas, Georgia, North Carolina, and Kansas form a crucial evidentiary source for the study.

Chapters in this work focus on the process of forming a national agrarian movement amidst an environment that promoted sectionalism. The chapters, therefore, are primarily organized chronologically. Chapter 1 provides a background to the formation of the farmers' movement. The chapter also demonstrates that the Southern Alliance avoided controversial political and sectional issues during this "honeymoon" phase of early growth. General economic critiques and cooperative efforts allowed the organization to form a powerful base of support throughout the South and Midwest by the end of 1889. Chapter 2 focuses on the first national meeting of various agrarian organizations and the Knights of Labor, held in December 1889. The Southern Alliance failed to achieve a grand conglomeration of the major farmers' and laborers' unions at St. Louis, but the organization accomplished its first triumph over sectionalism to produce a genuine national agrarian crusade. Northern state Alliances officially joined the Southern Alliance and elections produced an interregional leadership within the agrarian order.

Chapter 3 breaks somewhat from the narrative structure of other chapters to analyze an underappreciated facet of the farmers' crusade. In the aftermath of the St. Louis convention the Southern Alliance worked hard to broaden its appeal throughout the U.S. Utilizing newspapers and public speakers the organization promoted a concept of national identity that vigorously

attacked sectionalism, endorsed reconciliation, and emphasized the essential value of the producer class to the nation. The agrarian vision of American identity became just as important as policies and cooperative activities in gaining and losing followers of the Alliance and, later, Populism. In Chapter 4, the focus is on the use of this American identity by the farmers' movement during 1890. Reacting to increased criticism from political opponents, the Alliance reinforced group solidarity with references to its national identity concept. Throughout these efforts the Alliance advocates emphasized sectional reconciliation. Since many of its leaders served in the Civil War, the agrarian group utilized the credibility of veterans in its assaults on sectionalism.

Chapter 5 chronicles the rise of friction within the movement at the 1890 meeting of the Alliance in Ocala, Florida. After several years of interregional harmony, politics and sectionalism emerged and subsequently became a major threat to the agrarian movement. Chapter 6 demonstrates how sectionalism increasingly overwhelmed the Alliance throughout 1891 and 1892, despite great efforts to dilute its importance. These years witnessed the birth of the Populist Party. From its origins the People's Party wrestled with problems that took root in the Southern Alliance. Sectionalism weakened unity in the agrarian rebellion and ultimately destroyed the movement in 1896.

Although Mary Lease, Tom Watson, and Thomas Dixon lost hope in the farmers' revolt, many Southern Alliance reforms ultimately became federal laws. From business regulation to the election of U.S. senators by popular vote, farm loans, and the federal income tax, the agrarian crusade achieved many of its goals. The dream of uniting the producer class and promoting their values and interests had to wait another generation. Most Civil War veterans and supporters of the farmers' revolt did not live to see the implementation of these reforms. Charles Macune was

one former agrarian leader who witnessed the achievement of Alliance goals. In a 1920 reflection on the farmers' movement, Macune contented himself by focusing almost exclusively on economic issues, celebrating the achievements of the organization, and nearly ignoring the issue of sectional difference.<sup>16</sup> If the agrarian rebellion did not defeat sectionalism, its economic reforms eventually won popular approval. This is the story of the rise and fall of the first major attempt to achieve national reform for the producer class and its destruction through sectionalism.

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<sup>16</sup> Charles W. Macune, "The Farmers' Alliance." Unpublished. Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin, 1920.

CHAPTER ONE:  
UNIFYING FOR THE CAUSE: THE ALLIANCE HONEYMOON PERIOD, 1877-1889

J.B. “Buck” Barry was a happy man. In 1887 the Texas resident returned to his native North Carolina to organize farmers. Sent by the fledgling Southern Farmers’ Alliance as a traveling lecturer, Barry successfully organized farmers into local Alliance chapters, called sub-Alliances. During his trip, he reported to the Texas-based Alliance that, “in spite of all opposing influences that could be brought to bear in Wake County, I met the farmers in public meetings twenty-seven times, and twenty-seven times they organized.” After traveling to Cumberland County North Carolina, Barry found additional evidence that farmers longed for help. In his letter to the Texas Alliance newspaper, the *Southern Mercury*, Barry reported that “I was accosted by a crowd of farmers, all strangers to me” who “demanded of me the right to assist in the noble and patriotic effort of reform, which I readily granted by going up into the public hall above the market and organized them at once.” The lecturer assessed the state favorably, stating that “the farmers seem like unto ripe fruit—you can gather them by a gentle shake of the bush.”<sup>1</sup> Leonidas L. Polk, an agrarian organizer, and future president of the Farmers’ Alliance, also celebrated the quick ascent of the farm association in North Carolina. Polk claimed there was “hardly an interval of five miles...that does not have an organization.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W. L. Garvin and S. O. Daws, *History of the National Farmers’ Alliance and Co-Operative Union of America* (Jacksboro, TX: J. N. Rogers & Co., 1887), 49-50.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 92.

Barry and Polk testified to the intense emotions among farmers and dramatic growth of the Southern Farmers' Alliance. Their statements also reveal a climate where farmers were "ripe fruit," ready to take action to address their financial and social grievances. Railroads, speculators, banks, cotton ginneries, millers, even drought and locusts made it increasingly difficult to achieve financial prosperity in late nineteenth-century agriculture. Barry described North Carolina farmers as "ripe fruit," suggesting that someone or some group only needed to gently pluck the fruit by sympathizing with their frustration and channeling their discontent to achieve relief for struggling farmers.

Passionate lecturers, like Barry, were ready to heed the call. Based on the evidence, Barry's description accurately captured the spread of the Farmers' Alliance. The organization established sub-Alliances throughout the South by 1887 and looked to expand into the Midwest. Alliance membership grew rapidly in both regions. A growing Colored Farmers' Alliance also raised awareness for agrarian discontent and mobilization among African Americans. Several Colored and Southern Alliance newspapers began publication during the same years. By 1890, politicians were aware that the Southern Alliance was a very important group in deciding elections. Alliance organizations grew rapidly from 1886-1890 through a combination of three methods. First, the farmers' movement made general criticisms against those who earned wealth from the labor of another. Second, agrarians emphasized cooperative efforts to enhance the economic position farmers. Because of cooperative endeavors the Alliances created social bonds among isolated rural people. Third, the farmers' movement avoided direct political action and took a "non-political" stance toward elections and sectional concerns. Through general economic critiques, cooperative efforts, and the avoidance of controversial political and sectional issues the Alliances formed a powerful base of support throughout the South and Midwest by



1890. This chapter chronicles the rise of the Southern Alliance as a national force and provides background necessary to show how sectionalism was a constant issue in the agrarian movement.

Agrarian organizers found a changing nation during their travels in 1887. In the late nineteenth century, the United States grappled with various challenges unleashed by four years of bloody civil war and dramatic economic growth. Although Congress ended slavery and established the guidelines for citizenship and voting after the Civil War, the country continued to ponder the full implications of the laws. As the nation debated what made one American and who truly exemplified American characteristics, the context of the debate shifted. In the decades after Appomattox, urban growth, immigration, and economic development transformed the image of the country. Cities rapidly grew demographically and geographically as foreign and domestic migrants searched for new promises and opportunities. Building upon pre-Civil War foundations and stimulated by wartime demands, industrialization and commercial agriculture extended their pre-war growth. In the process, technological advances reduced the need for skilled workers. New production methods stressed efficiency, taking production controls from laborers and giving them to employers. Railroads spawned new settlements and connected previously isolated towns to national networks, leading to an influx of financial institutions and consumer goods, while the shipment of commercial agricultural products increased. New credit arrangements and falling agricultural prices increased rural debt and farm tenancy. Economic depressions and panics in 1873, 1877, and 1893 showed that an increasing number of Americans felt the effects of economic growth and decline. The nation entered a new and uncertain era.

During the last three decades of the nineteenth century these economic and social transformations spawned various protests across the country. Industrial workers turned to unions, strikes, and more subtle forms of protest to show their objections to increased corporate

control. Many strikes turned violent, whether in company towns or bustling cities. Over the final three decades of the century strikers displayed new levels of interstate coordination, as laborers increasingly transgressed state lines to plan and execute work stoppages. As the economy became more national and international in scope, businesses formed corporations to coordinate their operations. Workers joined the nationalization trend in their efforts to protest loss of control over production, falling wages, unsafe working conditions, and other complaints. Increasingly, Americans became more aware of each other as they looked beyond their “island communities” to see commonalities with their fellow countrymen and women.<sup>3</sup>

Like the industrial workforce, American farmers also turned to protests, and occasionally violence, to combat the social and economic changes. Shortly after the Civil War agrarian organizations, such as the Greenback Party and the Patrons of Husbandry, or Grange, arose to address economic grievances. Neither group succeeded, but their currency reforms, use of cooperatives, and anti-monopoly rhetoric remained popular after their decline. Building on Grange and Greenback ideas and tactics, the Farmers’ Alliance and Populist Party produced the largest and most successful farm protest movement of the nineteenth century.

The origins of the Farmers’ Alliance began in New York and in Texas. In 1877, farmers and merchants in western New York felt exploited by high railroad freight rates on lines running between the East Coast and the Midwest. F.P. Root, a wealthy farmer and member of the Patrons of Husbandry, called for a meeting of agrarian organizations in Rochester, New York. Root suggested the formation of a Farmers’ Alliance to unite members of the Grange, the Western New York Farmers Club, and the State Agricultural Society. The Alliance called for the state legislature to lower taxes and address discriminatory freight rates, although the

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<sup>3</sup> See Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

organization considered itself to be “political but non-partisan.” Plagued by internal differences concerning participation in direct political action, the organization soon dissolved in New York. Prior to disbanding in New York, Milton George, an Illinois farmer and editor of the Chicago-based *Western Rural*, brought the group west. In 1880 George started a Farmers’ Alliance in Illinois and soon formed the National Farmers’ Alliance, commonly known as the Northern Alliance. A supporter of the Grange, George viewed the Alliance as a more effective means of combating the power of monopolies over government at all levels. The editor feared that the country would be torn apart by the growing concentration of wealth in the hands of monopolies, and he used the *Western Rural* to defend farmers from injustice. Although George thought farmers were the nation’s best leaders and the true backbone of the country, he also saw them as the most exploited group of Americans. To check the power of railroads, and other business monopolies, he urged agrarian clubs, such as the Grange and the Alliance, to send petitions to Congress requesting the regulation of railroads and other monopolies. Throughout the Midwest and as far south as Texas, Milton George built a following by demanding relief for farmers through his *Western Rural* and the National Farmers’ Alliance. From 1880 until 1887, the offices of the newspaper also served as the headquarters for the National Farmers’ Alliance.<sup>4</sup>

Texans formed a similar agrarian organization in 1877. At a meeting of farmer-stockmen in Lampasas County they started a club known as the Knights of Reliance. Later the association changed its name to the Farmers’ Alliance. Composed of landowners, the members were not wealthy. They formed the organization to help recoup lost cattle, to capture cattle thieves, and oppose monopolies. Unlike their northern counterparts, the Texas Alliance relied on secret oaths, rituals, and passwords. Similar to the New York Alliance, the Texas Alliance largely

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<sup>4</sup> Robert McMath, *American Populism: A Social History 1877-1898* (Hill & Wang: New York, 1992), 4-5 (quote 5); Roy V. Scott, “Milton George and the Farmers’ Alliance Movement,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 45, no. 1 (June 1958): 92, 94-96.

dissolved over the issue of political participation. In 1878, members voted to support the Greenback Party in the upcoming Texas election. Based on the “political” act, many members left the Alliance and the organization languished for several years. Surviving Texas Alliancemen gradually increased the size of their club and eventually created the National Farmers’ Alliance and Industrial Organization, commonly known as the “Southern” Farmers’ Alliance.

As Robert McMath notes, the Texas and northern Alliances inherited three common themes from labor organizations of the 1830s. First, both groups emphasized the rights of producers to receive ample reward for their labors. In this formulation, owners and “middlemen” stripped profits from the producers of material goods. Second, the Alliances also jointly opposed the power of monopolies, which they viewed as dangerous in democratic society. Finally, members of the farm associations disagreed about how to impress their demands upon a resistant political system. Should the Alliance merely seek to inform the public of their complaints? Or, should they apply pressure to elected officials so that they addressed their grievances when the political system failed to acknowledge their problems? Should the Alliance endorse candidates for public office, or should they remain non-partisan? The relationship between the Alliance and political activity served as a divisive force throughout the history of the Alliance.<sup>5</sup>

While the National Farmers’ Alliance of Illinois slowly grew, a combination of events led to the rapid statewide expansion of the Southern Alliance by 1886. In 1884 the Texas organization appointed S.O. Daws, a lay preacher and farmer, lead lecturer. Born in Kemper County Mississippi in 1848, Daws joined the post-Civil War migration to Texas, settling in Wise County in 1868. He joined the Alliance and by 1881 Daws became an organizer of Wise County

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<sup>5</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 6-7.

farmers for the agrarian organization.<sup>6</sup> Relying on his experiences in the pulpit and field, personal charisma, and communication skills, Daws espoused anti-monopolism and producerism to connect with struggling farmers. Through his energetic efforts, sub-Alliances emerged across north and central Texas. A proliferation of railroads, the passage of fence laws, the increased presence of the Knights of Labor, and renewed vigor for agrarian clubs in the Great Plains and South also established a climate favorable to the expansion of the Southern Alliance. Additionally, intense population growth produced more potential members for the Southern Alliance.<sup>7</sup> Railroads and fence laws brought greater difficulties for farmers who increasingly relied on commercial agriculture for their subsistence. Organizations like the Alliance and the Knights of Labor, helped mobilize growing numbers of farmers, agricultural workers, and railroad workers against those seen as stripping common Americans of the fruits of their labor. During the summer of 1885, both groups held joint rallies, barbecues, and picnics, while also making plans for a cooperative store. The Alliance also supported Knights' boycotts in Galveston and Dallas, and provided food and money to the latter union during a strike against Jay Gould's Southwestern rail lines in 1886. Growing class-consciousness combined with the rise of a more nationally integrated economy to create contests between producers and corporations throughout the United States. Daws and the Farmers' Alliance provided one outlet for the growing frustration. As a result, the farmers' organization boasted a membership of 90,000 and 2,200 sub-Alliances by 1886.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Garvin and Daws, *History of the National Farmers' Alliance*, 140-41.

<sup>7</sup> Between 1860 and 1890 the population of Texas grew 270 percent. As Patrick Williams notes, this rate was far greater than other southern states and similar to western states. Williams also notes that most of the new Texans came from southern states. See Patrick Williams, *Beyond Reconstruction: Texas Democrats After Reconstruction* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 4. Since many southern migrants moved west to escape limited economic opportunity, their reaction to restricted economic opportunities in Texas, would have sparked a desire to challenge those deemed responsible for their struggles.

<sup>8</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 71-72, 74-76; Garvin and Daws, *History of the National Farmers' Alliance*, 142.

From the gains made in the two previous years, the Alliance continued to grow in 1886. The year proved to be important to the Southern Alliance three ways. First, the Alliance produced a series of organizational principles that gave the association structure and purpose. Second, the agrarian group gained new leadership that oversaw a period of swift expansion. Third, the Colored Farmers' Alliance formed in Houston County, Texas, providing both a partner and an independent wing of the Alliance reforming crusade.

As was the case at its founding, and foreshadowing its later history, Alliance members faced the divisive issue of direct political activity in 1886. In a move that mimicked the experience of the Grange, Alliance associates split over how best to pursue advocacy of their programs. Some in the organization wanted to endorse candidates who supported their reforms, while other Alliance members wanted to remain neutral from the tricky world of politics. Meeting at Cleburne, Texas, the association split over whether the Alliance should unite with the Knights of Labor to nominate candidates for political office, or remain neutral. The meeting also produced fifteen principles, known as the Cleburne Demands. All but four of the planks came directly from the Knights of Labor, who in turn received them from prior antimonopoly groups. The Knights-inspired policies included an endorsement of cooperativism, issuing greenbacks to allow easier debt repayment, equal rights for labor and capital, the elimination of land speculation, greater protection of laborers' wages and liens, and the end of the convict labor system. Original Alliance reforms included the end of agricultural commodities speculation, the abolition of illegal fencing, railroad regulation through an Interstate Commerce Commission, and the full minting of silver and gold. While the Cleburne Demands drew heavily from traditional anti-monopolism and producerism, they contributed a stronger emphasis on increased government powers to protect the rights of farmers and laborers. Finally, the Demands also

established a system of political education that combined fraternal and evangelical appeals, while offering a series of farmers' cooperatives. A vote of 92-75 carried the Cleburne Demands. Although not directly political, the platform pushed the Alliance closer to third-party political principles. Unlike the Grange, the Alliance did not dissolve over the issue of political participation, at least not in 1886.<sup>9</sup>

At Cleburne, the Southern Alliance also gained a strong leader in Charles Macune. Born in 1851 at Kenosha, Wisconsin, and raised in Freeport, Illinois, Macune lost his father at a young age. As a boy Macune attended a debate between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas. He met both men afterward and especially cherished the memory of his encounter with Lincoln. Macune learned German when he worked on the farm of a German family in Wisconsin. He later became fluent in Czech. As a young man Macune moved to Chicago to try a career in pharmacy. From 1869 to 1873 he worked with a circus and traveled from Illinois to California. These travels also took him through Kansas and Texas, where his fluency in Czech and German were useful for interactions with immigrants. By 1873, he settled in Burnet, Texas, and worked as a physician, lay Methodist preacher, and newspaper editor of the Democratic Burnet *Bulletin*.<sup>10</sup>

From his post as editor Macune criticized Reconstruction rule in the state, particularly singling out what he saw to be the misguided leadership of Northern Republicans. The editor argued, “the vitality of the South rests upon the issue between the carpetbagger and honest Democrat.”<sup>11</sup> In his assertion that the future of the state depended upon the contest between “carpetbagger and honest Democrat” rule, Macune excluded any pretext of black political

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<sup>9</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 78-80.

<sup>10</sup> Charles W. Macune, Jr., “Biographical Sketch of C. W. Macune” 1964, Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin; Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2007), 34-36.

<sup>11</sup> *Burnet (TX) Bulletin*, November 7, 1874.

leadership, and left governance of the state to whites exclusively. He saw two choices available for Texas: ruin or redemption.

The transplanted Illinoisan described his disdain for Texas carpetbagger rule in several editorials. Macune revealed a stout mistrust of the Grant Administration by comparing the President to Julius Caesar and questioning his frequent use of the military to enforce Reconstruction in the South. As turmoil embroiled neighboring Louisiana in 1875, Macune portrayed the Grant Administration as “corrupt,” and led by a group of “thieves” and “reprobates.”<sup>12</sup>

The editor went further to describe the ill effects of carpetbagger rule by juxtaposing the favorable condition of Texas with Mississippi and Louisiana. In a February 1875 piece, he claimed that Texas prospered because African Americans did not rule and that “negro mastery is everywhere fatal to honesty in office.” Macune said that African Americans tended to congregate in towns where “these are ravaged by thieves elected by negroes co-operating with the floating white rabble,” who imposed high taxes that hurt farmers. The editor called for changes to the state constitution so that the “legislature may restrict suffrage, in all town, city and county elections, to freeholders,” thus ending high taxation. He concluded by stating “when Northern people ask why Texas prospers, and why the best population of the whole South and Middle and Northwestern States seek homes in Texas, we find the answer in the simple fact that Texas is a white man’s State, redeemed by courage and sacrifice first from red men, and then from saffron faced Mexicans, and never intended by God Almighty to be victimized and

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<sup>12</sup> *Burnet (TX)*, February 27, 1875.



desolated at last by Africans.”<sup>13</sup> In a contest of the races, Macune clearly saw whites as the victorious conquerors.

Macune’s version of Texas history echoed familiar white southern Reconstruction themes with a unique Texas flavor. Like white Southerners, he placed the Redemption of Texas in Christian terms by connecting white rule to divine favor. Macune then used a white Texas historical memory that celebrated white mastery over a host of groups deemed less superior peoples, including Native Americans, Mexicans, and African Americans. In identifying a series of white conquests of Texas, Macune suggested that Reconstruction and Redemption were not unique to the post-Civil War years. Instead, he identified white struggle and victory over racial inferiors as a pattern in Texas history. In the contemporary context Macune argued that an endorsement of Republican rule meant governance by racial inferiors who voted for “thieves” and “reprobates.” Simply put, Texas could not afford to go down this road to ruin, less it end up as Louisiana and Mississippi.

The editorial ignored a major issue that uniquely affected Texas during Reconstruction. Unlike other southern states, Texas Republicans had to fund defense forces to quell Indians. Texas rangers and state troops fought against Indian raiders from Mexico and a group of Kiowas, southern Cheyenne, and Comanche who left Indian Territory to hunt buffalo. Combined with more traditional southern Reconstruction state expenditures, such as public schools, railroad subsidies, and law enforcement, Indian defense spending contributed to high tax rates for Texans. As Macune’s editorials show, Democrats frequently criticized Republicans for endorsing black rights and raising taxes.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Williams, *Beyond Reconstruction*, 1-4.

In another editorial Macune returned to the theme of Reconstruction misrule and the dangers posed by black political power. He stated that race war threatened the South because of the “unprincipled machinations of a set of villians who, for mercenary purposes, are inciting the blacks to disturbances.” The editor continued by arguing that since whites outnumbered blacks around Burnet the races lived “in harmony, peace and good will.” Macune compared black-majority areas unfavorably, claiming “that where the blacks are in the majority, they have been incited by villians to uprisings in order to control their governments.” In Macune’s formulation, African Americans were not equal to whites, but they did not bear the burden of responsibility for their actions. Like children, Macune held that black Americans were prone to violent emotional reactions due to their manipulation by superiors: self-profiting white “villians.” To prove his point, the editor cited cordial race relations in counties where white outnumbered blacks. Left to their own devices, African Americans could not properly lead themselves or the general community. Instead, black-majority areas formed the feeding ground for white parasites looking to enrich themselves at the expense of the broader public.<sup>15</sup>

In the same newspaper issue Macune reinforced his opinion by republishing an article from the Cincinnati *Commercial* that criticized the future Civil Rights Bill of 1875. Penned by “Redfield,” the letter aimed to reinforce the notion of African American inferiority and attack the notion of establishing racial equality in the South. Redfield began with a warning to the country: “THE THREATENED OURAGE A NATIONAL DANGER.” He continued, “the history of the world presents no instance of a race highest in the scale of intelligence living upon terms of equality with the race lowest in the scale; and the attempt in America, as contemplated by the authors and supporters of the Civil Rights bill, will be a failure, and we may be thankful if it is

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<sup>15</sup> *Burnet (TX) Bulletin*, September 26, 1874. “villians” in the original source.

not a bloody failure. The feeling in the South is one of desperation.” Redfield suggested fears of racial warfare and the unstable emotional conditions in the South. In the next sentence the writer drew from John C. Calhoun, the chief southern source on matters relating to nullification and secession: “we have been warned by the wisest philosophers and most eminent thinkers that when our government fails it will be on account of a majority driving a minority to desperation.”<sup>16</sup> Less than a decade after the Civil War, the issue of minority versus majority rule reappeared as an issue worth consideration. Redfield’s discussion of majority and minority rights served as a veil for discussing the debate over federal versus states’ rights, a disagreement that created intense sectional debates and seemed to be settled by the Union victory over the Confederacy. The mostly southern-born readers of the *Bulletin* probably recognized Redfield’s indirect reference.

Redfield moved to the issue of panic felt by white Southerners. “We may laugh at their prejudices, and say that it is a foolish sentiment; but this sentiment and prejudice against the equality contemplated in the Civil Rights bill is of two hundred years growth, it is flesh of the flesh and bone of the bone, and you cannot get it out of the heart of a southern born man without taking off his head at the same time.”<sup>17</sup> While the author did not devote considerable space to the moral correctness of racism, he did assert his belief in the foolishness of efforts to enforce racial equality in the South. After “two hundred years growth” in the “heart of the southern born man,” it would be impossible to end racism “without taking off his head.” The writer argued that emotional reactions cannot be altered without first changing the mentality of individuals. In 1874, the nation did not possess the desire to launch the immense effort needed to transform the mind of the white South.

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<sup>16</sup> *Burnet (TX) Bulletin*, September 26, 1874.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

When Macune republished the article in the *Bulletin* without comment, he displayed the preservation of white Southern prejudice toward black Southerners. Although not a white Southerner by birth, Macune knew that his audience agreed with Redfield's statements. Like Redfield, the editor did not believe in the Civil Rights Bill because he did not believe in racial equality. The Cincinnati *Commercial* letter also communicated an important message to Democratic readers in Texas. By 1874, Northern support of equal rights for African Americans in the South was on the decline. This primary objective of Congressional Reconstruction was no longer widely accepted by Northerners. While Cincinnati was not the heart of the Northern opinion, it was nonetheless above the Mason-Dixon line and represented a state that fought with the Union during the Civil War. Ultimately, federal or Northern authority would retreat from the South, leaving white Southerners to reestablish its authority over black Southerners. The article also announced that white supremacy was a national belief. Now that the North acceded to white southern racial attitudes and showed signs that it would abandon the social experiment of Reconstruction, white reconciliation might be pursued. For *Bulletin* readers it was inferred that the United States might now move beyond the bitterness caused by the Civil War and enter a new more prosperous era led by whites from the North and South. White Texans could now envision a brighter future for their relatively young state in a reformed United States.

Under Macune's editorship, the *Bulletin* continued to stress the theme of white reconciliation. Directly below the anti-Civil Rights Bill letter was an article on the formation of "The order of the Blue and Gray" in Vicksburg, Mississippi. The organization was formed "to foster and encourage kindly relations between soldiers of the late war and to form a bond of mutual friendship and good feeling." Both Union and Confederate veterans apparently participated in the meeting in equal numbers. The *Bulletin* concluded "The speeches delivered

were indicative of the utmost good feeling and relief at this public acknowledgement of a break in the dark cloud of prejudice which has been oppressing all alike.”<sup>18</sup>

Taken together, the anti-Civil Rights Bill article and the celebration of Confederate-Union reconciliation showed Macune’s preference for a nation where whites ruled. Like the hint of reconciliation in Redfield’s letter, the reconciliation of white Union veterans with white Confederate veterans conveyed hope for the *Bulletin* and readers of the newspaper. Macune suggested that if white Americans could escape the shackles of bitter Civil War memories, which had “been oppressing all alike,” then the country could put itself on the right path. The Burnet editor thought that improvement could only be established with a government free from “villians” elected by manipulated black voters and replaced by “honorable Democrats,” who best represented the intelligent Anglo-Saxon race.

During his time as editor of the Burnet *Bulletin*, Macune showed patterns of thought that stayed with him and came to represent major fault lines within the future agrarian movement. Macune heavily supported Democrats in Texas, while forcefully criticizing the Republican Party. Like other future Alliance leaders, the editor strongly asserted white supremacy and black inferiority in his state, the South, and the United States. Macune asserted the necessity of white rule over non-white populations. In several instances under his editorship, the *Bulletin* supported sectional reconciliation for white northern and southern veterans. Macune emphasized other themes that became prominent to the Farmers’ Alliance and Populism. The recent Texan mentioned the necessity of a West-South allegiance against the high tariff. He declared his loyalty to impartial judgment, a claim often repeated by the Alliance leaders. In a time when

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<sup>18</sup> *Burnet (TX) Bulletin*, September 26, 1874. Although the newspaper promoted reconciliation it also published material that supported the Lost Cause. In the November 7, 1874 edition, the *Bulletin* ran a front-page article on a proposed monument to Confederate General and hero, Robert E. Lee. The article praised his leadership and provided information about the type of marble to be used in the construction of the monument.

politicians commonly hurled charges of partisanship, Macune and other agrarians tried to stake their claim to objectivity and truth. The editor also showed an affinity for the Grange, anti-monopolism, and his identification with farmers, mechanics and merchants. The *Bulletin* reveals a record of an editor in favor of agrarian reforms, clean government, and sectional reconciliation. Macune editorials also show a deep distrust of the Republican Party and African Americans, which cast doubts about their inclusion in any future efforts for agrarian reform, clean government, and sectional reconciliation.<sup>19</sup>

Overall, Macune could be described as a strong southern Democrat with preferences for agrarian reform. Although he supported greenback ideas, such as printing more cash and curbing the abuses of monopolies, Macune remained a strong Democrat throughout his adult life. As an Alliance member, he consistently warned against allowing the organization to participate directly in politics. What this came to mean was that Macune rejected political action through a third party and preferred working through the Democratic Party to achieve reform. At an early point in his Alliance participation he blamed non-Democrats for trying to infuse the Alliance with political purposes, a charge he repeated continually during the agrarian revolt. When it later came to choosing between the Democratic Party and the Populist Party, Macune showed extreme reluctance to leave the party identified with southern heritage and tradition. He also demonstrated that he thought African Americans should play a subservient role in the Farmers' Alliance. In the later history of the Farmers' Alliance and Populism, Macune's

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<sup>19</sup> *Burnet (TX) Bulletin*, February 6, 1875. In this newspaper edition the *Bulletin* proclaimed that it was a newspaper that farmers, mechanics, and merchants could not "afford to be without." While Macune claimed that railroads could hurt the economy by becoming monopolies, he also praised railroads since they could assist in the economic development of isolated Texas towns; McMath, *American Populism*, 81.

attitudes caused significant friction with other agrarian reformers as a biracial group of Southerners and Midwesterners tried to unite in the Populist Party.<sup>20</sup>

Macune ended his editorship of the *Burnet Bulletin* in late February 1875. In 1879 he purchased a farm outside of Cameron, in Milam County, to supplement his medical practice. During the next seven years Macune became a member of the County Democratic Executive Committee and joined the Farmers' Alliance. He served in the Alliance with little distinction until 1886. At the Alliance meeting in Cleburne, Texas, Macune became the foremost spokesman for the organization and he put the farm association on a new path.<sup>21</sup>

At the time of the Cleburne meeting, Macune had been a member of the Alliance for only four months. He quickly rose to prominence at Cleburne by mediating between rival factions of the association. Macune left the Alliance gathering as the chairman of the state executive committee and became president of the organization the same year. During the next three years he oversaw the rapid expansion of the Southern Alliance across the South and into the Plains states.<sup>22</sup>

In one of his first moves after the meeting Macune acted to maintain the unity of the Alliance. When many conservative members, including Alliance president Andy Dunlap, resigned from the organization Macune summoned Dunlap and radical leader, Evan Jones, for a compromise. The new Alliance president knew that significant numbers were needed to continue the prominence of the farm association. He convinced Dunlap and the conservatives to remain in the organization, even though they would have diminished power and numbers. To satisfy radicals, Macune suggested that the Alliance embark on an expansion campaign to

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<sup>20</sup> C.W. Macune, "The Farmers Alliance" 1920, Center for American History, University of Texas Austin, 14, 39; Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 35-36.

<sup>21</sup> Macune, Jr., "Biographical Sketch of C. W. Macune," 6; McMath, *American Populism*, 81-82; Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 34-36.

<sup>22</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 81-82.

increase membership. Thereafter, Alliance representatives went to Louisiana to seek a merger with the struggling Louisiana Farmers Union. During the next six months other Alliance lecturers helped the association spread across the South. By January 1887 the organization claimed 200,000 members and 3,000 sub-Alliances, or local Alliance chapters.<sup>23</sup>

The growth of the Southern Alliance in 1886 coincided with the rise of the Colored Farmers' Alliance. The organization was produced by the same harsh economic climate affecting white farmers and by the official policy of racial exclusion in the Southern Alliance. Due to the social acceptance of racial segregation and pressure from Texas Democrats, the Southern Alliance voted to restrict membership to whites in 1882. Other organizations of the era followed similar policies. For example, although the Knights of Labor was an interracial association, black members met separately from white members. When the Farmers' Alliance absorbed the Agricultural Wheel in 1888, the latter organization ended its interracial membership policy. In response, black Arkansans formed a Colored State Agricultural Wheel to resume their activities. Some African Americans in Tennessee and Alabama continued to meet in black Wheel chapters after the Farmers' Alliance-Wheel merger.<sup>24</sup>

Within four years of the decision to officially prohibit African American membership, several Colored Farmers' Alliances emerged in Texas. Although associates of the Colored Alliance wanted to maximize cooperation with white Alliance members, some also embraced racial separation to more effectively advance the organization. Unlike other Colored Alliances,

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<sup>23</sup> Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 84-86. Garvin and Daws put the 1887 figures at 250,000 members and 4,000 sub-Alliances. See Garvin and Daws, *History of the National Farmers' Alliance*, 147.

<sup>24</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 70; Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 415. Like the Knights of Labor, members of the Agricultural Wheel usually held segregated local meetings. Besides its interracial membership policy, the Agricultural Wheel also differed with the Southern Farmers' Alliance in its support for political candidates. During the 1880s, Arkansas and Texas Wheels endorsed third party candidates who were also members of the Wheel. See Matthew Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists: Farmer-Labor Insurgency in the Late-Nineteenth-Century South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 62-63, 75-77, 88-90, 115-22.



the largest group voted to form an all-black association. While African Americans served as president and secretary of the Colored Alliance, the organization chose Richard Manning Humphrey, a white man, as general superintendent. Humphrey worked with Texas blacks as a lay Baptist minister and through this relationship he hosted the founding meeting of the Houston County Colored Alliance on his farm.<sup>25</sup>

Humphrey followed an unlikely path to leadership in the Colored Farmers' Alliance. Born in 1834 to Northern Irish immigrants in South Carolina, he graduated from Furman University before moving to Alabama prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. After serving as a captain in the Confederate Infantry, Humphrey relocated to Texas where he farmed, taught school, and worked with African Americans as an lay itinerant Baptist minister. In 1888 he ran as the second congressional district candidate for the Union Labor Party. Although Humphrey lost the contest by a wide margin, he gained the ire of his Democratic opponent because Humphrey, "in slipping around at night with a lantern in his hand to organize the negroes into alliances, was doing so for mercenary and political ends." For his courtship of black voters, Humphrey gained support among African Americans. After the formation of the Colored Farmers' Alliance he became a logical choice for leading the organization. As Gerald Gaither claims, the Colored Alliance chose Humphrey as superintendent because of his relationship with black members and because of his racial status. As a white man, Humphrey allowed the organization to voice more radical beliefs and maintain closer ties to the Southern Alliance than

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<sup>25</sup> *Galveston Daily News*, October 14, 31, 1888. Quoted in Floyd J. Miller, "Black Protest and White Leadership: A Note on the Colored Farmers' Alliance," *Phylon* 33, no. 2 (1972): 171; Omar H. Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth: Black Populism in the New South, 1886-1900* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 57; Gerald H. Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Movement: Ballots and Bigotry in the New South*, revised edition (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 1-9; Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 41-42.

would have occurred with an African American superintendent. Early on, he developed cordial relations with the leaders of the Southern Alliance and earned their trust.<sup>26</sup>

The Houston County Colored Alliance quickly spread throughout Texas for several reasons. First, low cotton prices and a two-year drought produced a desperate climate for Texas farmers. To address growing debt during the 1880s, African Americans increasingly turned to associations that emphasized economic self-reliance. Like the Southern Alliance, the Colored Alliance taught members farming techniques, established local cooperatives, and sponsored prominent cooperative exchanges in Norfolk, Charleston, New Orleans, & Houston. Through these services black farmers could expect to increase farming efficiency, save money, and reduce debt. Black farmers liked the practical economic self-help offered by a group like the Colored Alliance.<sup>27</sup>

A second cause of the speedy rise of the Colored Alliance was its practice of engaging in a variety of activities. Unlike the more narrowly focused Southern Alliance, some Colored sub-Alliances criticized wage levels, protested rent prices, and called for better work conditions. A central Georgia sub-Alliance objected to the exclusion of black Americans from juries when an African American was a plaintiff or defendant. Oktibbeha County, Mississippi members started a fund for the needy. The broader outlook of the Colored Alliance contrasted with the Southern Alliance, but closely resembled the activities of black churches and the Knights of Labor. Many Colored Alliance members also belonged to the Knights of Labor, church organizations, or secular societies. Because of membership links, communication networks developed among various black organizations in the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth*, 56-57; Miller, "Black Protest and White Leadership," 172; Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Movement*, 1-9; Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 41.

<sup>27</sup> Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 414-17; Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth*, 51-52.

<sup>28</sup> Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 414-17.

The involvement of rural African-American preachers was a third cause of the rapid Colored Alliance growth. When ministers joined the Colored Alliance, they usually brought large numbers of church members and social prestige with them. Preachers assumed special importance in nineteenth-century southern society because literacy was not widespread, and, therefore, public speakers became especially influential community leaders. Since black churches frequently combined religious, philanthropic, and formal political functions after emancipation, churches and preachers occupied a prominent role in African-American society.<sup>29</sup>

The use of secrecy and ritual provided a fourth reason why African Americans joined the Colored Alliance. Following the violent years of Civil War and Reconstruction, secret organizations, like the Union Leagues, provided blacks with some of the most effective means for organizing. Through secrecy, associations built trust among members and enhanced group identity, since information was relegated to members only. The use of secret rituals served similar purposes. The Colored Alliance maintained their privacy and secrecy in contrast to the Southern Farmers' Alliance. Whereas the white organization held frequent barbecues, parades, and picnics attended by hundreds, Colored Alliances generally avoided public celebrations. The contrasting public practices of the white and black Alliances demonstrated how race produced different possibilities for late-nineteenth century American farmers. A public meeting of white farmers did not generate suspicion and hostility comparable to that of a gathering of black farmers. Before emancipation, whites viewed black meetings with great suspicion and forbid their occurrence after the Nat Turner rebellion. When slavery ended, Black Codes served to prevent public gatherings of African Americans. During Congressional Reconstruction African-American mass public meetings drew the attention of whites, but they were initially met with

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<sup>29</sup> Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 41; Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth*, 50.

little white hostility. By the 1880s and 1890s black Americans had few opportunities to publicly demonstrate as white Southerners increasingly seized control of public celebrations to commemorate holidays, political rallies marking holidays. Collective African American action had again become taboo and threatening to white Southerners.<sup>30</sup>

A final appeal of the Colored Alliance lay in its open standards for membership. Like churches and the Knights of Labor, the Colored Alliance allowed men and women to join. According to Steven Hahn, agricultural, railroad, domestic, sawmill, and factory workers all belonged to local chapters of the Knights and black Alliances. Cumulatively, the social and economic attractions of the organization caused swift expansion of the Colored Alliance. In 1888 the various Texas Colored Alliances met at Lovelady, Texas to apply for a federal charter. From the meeting, the Colored Farmers' National Alliance and Cooperative Union was born. Expansion soon followed. By 1891 The Colored Alliance had sub-Alliances in every state of the former Confederacy. In that year, Superintendent Humphrey claimed that the organization had 1.2 million members. Most scholars contend that the number was inflated, but conservative estimates still put Colored Alliance membership at 250,000.<sup>31</sup>

Talented recruiters helped the Colored Alliance gain such impressive membership totals. Reverend Walter A. Pattillo, of North Carolina, was one African American who helped the organization spread. Pattillo was born to a slave woman in 1850. His father was a white man, which apparently led to better treatment for his enslaved son. Pattillo taught himself to read and

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<sup>30</sup> Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth*, 74; Elsa Barkley Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom," in *Black Public Sphere: A Public Culture Book*, ed. Black Public Sphere Collective (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 111-50; Kathleen Clark, *Defining Moments: African American Commemoration & Political Culture in the South, 1863-1913* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Stephen Kantrowitz, "One Man's Mob Is Another Man's Militia: Violence, Manhood, and Authority in Reconstruction South Carolina," in *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics From Civil War To Civil Rights*, ed. Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, Bryant Simon (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 28-66.

<sup>31</sup> Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 414-17; Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Movement* 1-9; Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 41-42; Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth*, 52-53.

write, he did not work in the fields, and by the late 1860s he worked as a wagon driver and at a sawmill. As a young man, he studied at seminary, was ordained, and became involved in black Baptist churches in Granville County, North Carolina. From this high-status position, Pattillo achieved considerable influence among African Americans in black majority Granville County. He ran unsuccessfully as the Republican candidate for registrar of deeds in 1883, but achieved success as the school superintendent of Granville County. The Baptist preacher helped establish the first black orphanage in the state and gained a reputation as an advocate for cordial race relations.<sup>32</sup>

Pattillo brought these considerable experiences to his recruitment of members for the Colored Alliance. As the Knights of Labor declined in the late 1880s, the Colored Alliance gained prominence and inherited former Knights members. Pattillo joined the agrarian association amidst the upsurge and was named North Carolina State Lecturer in 1890. He then journeyed throughout the state to organize Colored Farmers' Alliances and by 1891 membership totals reached 55,000.<sup>33</sup>

Like the Colored Alliance, the Southern Alliance experienced rapid growth from 1886 to 1891. In 1887 the Southern Alliance held its first national convention at Shreveport, Louisiana and renamed the organization the National Farmers' Alliance and Co-Operative Union. Macune won election to the presidency of the organization and the farm group made plans to expand beyond Louisiana and Texas. During the next year, the Alliance experienced impressive growth fueled by the poor agrarian economy and the ability of traveling lecturers. Speakers, such as Texans S.O. Daws and J.A. "Buck" Barry, promoted Alliance reforms by speaking to gatherings of farmers throughout southern and midwestern states. In the wake of visits from traveling

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<sup>32</sup> Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth*, 59-61.

<sup>33</sup> Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth*, 61, 63.

lecturers, sub-Alliances, or local Alliance branches, were frequently established. Alliance newspapers commonly followed the founding of a sub-Alliance. Daws and Barry experienced great success partially because of their speaking abilities and knowledge of local social networks. As a native of Mississippi, Daws successfully recruited farmers in his home state during his eight-month stay. In March 1887, he established the first sub-Alliance in Mississippi and within six months, thirty Mississippi counties had a chapter of the Alliance. Farmers soon organized a state Alliance. Barry accomplished similar results in his place of birth, North Carolina. Through the work of traveling lecturers and newspapers more Americans discovered the Farmers' Alliance. Membership totals rose rapidly as the movement expanded beyond Texas.<sup>34</sup>

While the talents and social relations of lecturers often produced expansion, the Alliance also grew thanks to its avoidance of electoral politics and the attractiveness of reforms. In these early years of ascendance the Alliance appealed to a variety of social classes. Large landholders found the anti-monopoly critiques appealing. As planters saw their profits dwindle in the 1880s, they agreed that the blame lay with exorbitant railroad freight rates, Wall Street speculation, and foreign investors. Modest and poor farmers liked the Alliance emphasis on the rights of the producer class and the cooperative nature of its agricultural remedies. While planters wanted to protect their political, economic, and social positions, poorer farmers engaged in significant biracial alliances and expressed their anger through organizations such as the Knights of Labor and the Agricultural Wheel. Some of these farmers participated in the Union Leagues during Reconstruction. Planters tended to avoid these organizations and worked through more traditional agricultural associations like state agricultural societies and farmers' associations, which frequently stressed scientific agricultural methods, crop diversification, and increased

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<sup>34</sup> Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 91-92; Daws and Garvin, *History of the National Farmers' Alliance*, 143; McMath, *American Promise*, 91.

industrialization. The Colored Farmers' Alliance contained a similar class dynamic. In the upper South the association tended to contain landowners and renters. Membership in the lower South contained more sharecroppers and wage laborers.<sup>35</sup>

The anti-monopolism, self-help, and collective rhetorical appeals combined with multiple activities to unify a biracial, multi-class movement of farmers, planters, and wage-laborers in both Alliances. During the rise of both Alliances, agricultural cooperatives provided a key point of attraction for many members. As early as 1884 the Texas Alliance engaged in cooperative agreements for the benefit of its members. These included agreements with local merchants, the creation of joint-stock stores to provide discounts to members, and buying and marketing enterprises. In 1884, Texas farmers experienced some success by selling their cotton in bulk. The largest effort took place in 1887 as the Texas Exchange. Appointed as business agent, Charles Macune undertook plans to purchase supplies and obtain the best cotton price for Alliance members throughout the state. The Texas Exchange hoped to sell farm goods at the cheapest price and provide credit to Alliancesmen. Every Alliance member was required to fund the Exchange through a two-dollar contribution. The Exchange also worked to deal directly with New England and European buyers and avoid Dallas and New Orleans cotton agents. When farmers paid only \$20,000 of the estimated \$500,000 in capital, banks refused to offer loans to the Exchange. By 1889 the Exchange had to shut down.<sup>36</sup>

Although they experienced several failures, Alliance members continued to promote cooperative efforts during the late 1880s. As the Texas Exchange experienced difficulty, most southern Alliances started statewide exchanges or cooperatives with more limited objectives. For example, the Georgia Exchange operated from a building provided by the Atlanta

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<sup>35</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 87-88; Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 416-17.

<sup>36</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 73-74, 84-86.

*Constitution*, where it mostly sold fertilizer. The North Carolina Alliance established a tobacco warehouse in Durham. The Colored Farmers' Alliance created the Norfolk Exchange where black and white farmers sold their cotton. A Florida Alliance member founded an exchange in New York to sell oranges. Cooperatives provided the most practical benefit to Alliance membership and helped the agrarian association spread across the South.<sup>37</sup>

While the Colored Alliance and Southern Alliance were separate organizations, more than a common name united the groups. White and black associates publicly acknowledged cohesion on numerous occasions. Reverend John L. Moore, an African American who served as superintendent of the Putnam County, Florida Colored Alliance, told white Alliance members, “we are aware of the fact that the laboring colored man’s interest and the laboring white man’s interest are one in the same.”<sup>38</sup> During the 1888 Meridian meeting of Alliances, members of the Southern Alliance resolved “That it is detrimental to both white and colored to allow conditions to exist that forces our colored farmers to sell their products for less and pay more for supplies than the markets justify.”<sup>39</sup> At separate meetings during the Meridian convention, white and black Alliances agreed to condemn monopolist practices by railroads and banks.<sup>40</sup>

At times biracial cooperation went beyond rhetoric. In Louisiana the white and black Alliances combined to oppose the lottery system. The Alliances argued that farmers borrowed money to play the lottery, which increased their indebtedness. Although the opposition failed to eliminate the lottery system, the biracial cooperation showed that white and black Alliances would unify when there was mutual interest. In some states the Southern and Northern alliances offered financial assistance to Colored Alliance organizers. Some scholars suggest that whites

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<sup>37</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 94-95.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Herbert Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States* (New York: Citadel Press, 1951), 808; Miller, “Black Protest and White Leadership,” 172; Ali, *In the Lion’s Mouth*, 64.

<sup>39</sup> *National Economist*, March 14, 1889, quoted in Ali, *In the Lion’s Mouth*, 62.

<sup>40</sup> Ali, *In the Lion’s Mouth*, 61-62.



offered financial assistance so that they could control the Colored Alliance. Omar Ali argues persuasively, however, that Colored Alliance leaders considered the overall benefits before they chose whether or not to accept help from white Alliancemen.<sup>41</sup>

Another cooperative effort of the Alliances garnered the attention of black and white farmers and brought the white organization to the peak of its popularity. In 1888, manufacturers of jute bags colluded to raise their prices by more than sixty percent. Cotton farmers used the bags to wrap bales and could not long afford the sharp increase. After suffering through the 1888 crop season, farmers waged a strike of the jute bags in 1889 through the state Alliance cooperatives. Colored Alliances in Alabama and Georgia joined the Southern Alliance in the three-year boycott. Lecturers and a growing number of Alliance newspapers encouraged farmers to use cotton wrapping instead of the jute bags. The strike proved successful in much of the South, especially South Carolina and Georgia, and jute bag manufacturers lowered their prices by 1891. Through its communication networks and group discipline, the Alliances won a considerable victory over a monopoly and reached new heights of influence.<sup>42</sup>

As the Southern and Colored Alliances reached new heights of popularity the Northern Alliance also broadened its influence and membership. Transferred from Rochester, New York to Chicago in 1880, the Northern Alliance maintained a small base of support under the leadership of Milton George. From his Chicago base, George primarily restricted his actions to the issuance of charters, including several for Colored Farmers' sub-alliances in the South. George claimed he issued the first Colored Alliance charter in 1882 to African Americans in

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<sup>41</sup> Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth*, 61-65.

<sup>42</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 95-97; Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth*, 64.

Prairie County, Arkansas. George also claimed that he offered to assist in paying the publication costs for Colored Alliance newspapers.<sup>43</sup>

Renewed economic struggles initiated a transition in the movement in the late 1880s. In 1887, George lost control of the Alliance to Ignatius Donnelly, August Post, and Alston Streeter who promoted land, transportation, and financial reform through formal politics. With its more aggressive stance, the Northern Alliance moved closer to the position of the Southern Alliance. Both organizations vied for new recruits in midwestern and Plains states over the next four years.<sup>44</sup>

As a state that experienced considerable economic shock in the late 1880s, Kansas proved fertile ground for Southern and Northern Alliance recruitment. The severity of the economic downturn in Kansas originated with the grand promotional efforts by railroad and real estate companies in the 1870s and 1880s. Land promotion in Kansas and further West accelerated after the Civil War when more people were willing to move westward. The conquest of Plains Indians also opened vast lands to American settlers. Railroad construction and operation also accelerated the movement of Americans to the West. In 1865, the state had seventy-one miles of railways. Within five years there were 1,234 railway miles. Kansas ranked second in the nation with 8,797 by 1890. During the 1870s and 1880s, railroad corporations and land speculators heavily promoted the abundance of fertile soil in Kansas, leading to railway expansion. The promotions worked for a time as the Kansas population grew steadily thanks to increasing land values, healthy crop prices, good weather, and confidence in the future. Through births and

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<sup>43</sup> Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Movement*, 5; Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 179.

<sup>44</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 99-104; Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Movement*, 5.

migration, the state population increased from 100,000 in 1860 to 1,060,000 in 1890. The 1870s saw the largest increase with 630,000 new people in Kansas.<sup>45</sup>

In the 1880s Kansas farmers experienced very good economic times, fueled by good weather, big crops, high prices, an increase in land value, and confidence in the future. A reversal came in 1887-1888 when low rainfall and drought hit the prairie. Many Kansans suffered when the drought destroyed their wheat and corn crops. The western and central portions of the state particularly bore the brunt of the economic decline. As grain prices fell, more of the crop was required to repay lenders, leaving little to sell for profit. Debt and foreclosed mortgages became commonplace throughout the state.<sup>46</sup>

The Northern and Southern Alliances entered the state amidst the debt and drought crisis. While other farm organizations, such as the Patrons of Husbandry, had been in Kansas prior to the Farmers' Alliance, they did not advocate reform aggressively. Tapping into agrarian outrage, organizers from both Alliances experienced rapid success in the Sunflower state. Thomas and Cuthbert Vincent formed the first Southern Alliance chapter in 1888. The brothers heard about the Southern Alliance and went to Texas where they became members of the farm association. Returning to Cowley County, Kansas the Vincents started a sub-Alliance. In the years ahead the brothers exercised considerable influence over the Alliance and Populism in the state from their perch as editors of the Winfield *The American Non-Conformist and Kansas Industrial Liberator*. Leo Vincent joined his brothers as editor, along with William F. Rightmire. The Vincents, however, did not start all of the Kansas Alliances. In the summer of 1888 the Northern Alliance formed a State Farmers' Alliance in the state. Over the next two years Kansans founded sub-Alliances across the state. The struggling Northern Alliance expanded in the state, founding

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<sup>45</sup> O. Gene Clanton, *Kansas Populism: Ideas and Men* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1969), 19.

<sup>46</sup> Peter H. Argersinger, *Populism and Politics: William Alfred Peffer and the People's Party* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974), 11.

almost 700 sub-Alliance charters by the end of 1888. In 1889 the organization claimed 100,000 members, although many Alliance scholars contend that 60,000 is a more accurate figure.<sup>47</sup>

Several factors caused the speedy growth of the Alliance in Kansas. First, economic conditions created a sense of outrage and motivation to seek solace in an agrarian reform organization. Second, cordial social relations proved very influential to the spread of the Alliance. Scott McNall found in Jewell County, Kansas that neighbors tended to join the organization. Members also tended to live near roads that passed by other members' homes. McNall additionally found that Alliancemen and women in Jewell County attended the United Brethren Church, where the Alliance held meetings. Third, as in the South, lecturers proved essential to the formation of sub-Alliances.<sup>48</sup> Like Dawes and Barry before them, Alliance lecturers proved instrumental in the spread of the organization in Kansas. S.M. Scott was one of the lecturers who toured Kansas throughout 1888 and 1889. He claimed to establish ninety alliances in sixty days. Scott left an account of his travels, which he published in 1890 as a guide for other Alliance recruiters. In his book, *The Champion Organizer of the Northwest*, Scott warned other lecturers to avoid controversy and arguments when they spoke. He stated that, "there is no such thing as convincing a person against his will, for they will be of the same opinion still." Instead, Scott thought it best "to speak the truth at all times, and have the documents to prove what you say."<sup>49</sup>

In another account, again Scott showed his reluctance to offend prospective members. As he toured Kansas as a lecturer, Scott wore two outfits to appeal to farmer audiences. One

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<sup>47</sup> Scott McNall, *The Road to Rebellion: Class Formation and Kansas Populism, 1865-1900* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 191-192, 243; McMath, *American Populism*, 133; Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 12.

<sup>48</sup> McNall, *The Road to Rebellion*, 234.

<sup>49</sup> S.M. Scott, *The Champion Organizer of the Northwest: Or, My First Sixty Days Work as an Organizer* (McPherson, KS: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1977), 15, quoted in McNall, *The Road to Rebellion*, 205, 225.

wardrobe consisted of a work shirt and an old hat, while the other was a white shirt and a bowler. Accessing his German audience at a Bloom Valley schoolhouse, Scott donned the work shirt and old hat. Because of his casual attire, the leader of the crowd did not believe that Scott was an Alliance organizer. The German man took offense to Scott's dress, leaving the lecturer to eventually abandon his efforts at Bloom Valley. The Alliance organizer concluded that it was "a mistake to wear the old cap. This was the first and last meeting I ever called for the purpose of organizing which failed."<sup>50</sup>

Scott's cautious tactics resembled those used by the Southern and Colored Farmers' Alliances during their initial expansion in the 1880s. In Texas, Charles Macune labored to maintain consensus in the Alliance after the divisions produced at the Cleburne meeting of 1886. When the Southern Alliance spread beyond the Lone Star state, the group used a broad language of anti-monopolism and enticed followers with cooperative efforts to alleviate agrarian hardships. The Colored Alliance followed a similar pattern to achieve a broad base of support. Pursuing such tactics, the Colored and Southern Alliances appealed to farmers from a variety of social and economic classes. Scott followed a similar pattern as his lecturers focused on safe topics, including unfair interest rates, unjust practices of railroads, and critiques of the concentration of wealth in America. As in the South, the Kansas Alliances pledged to be non-partisan and apolitical. The topics had broad appeal among struggling American farmers in the late 1880s. Through general criticisms and cooperative solutions, the Alliance gained momentum as a trans-regional force.<sup>51</sup>

As the Alliances grew in various states, leaders of the organizations agreed to meet to discuss cooperation, loose association, or the possibility of a formal merger of several groups. In

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<sup>50</sup> Scott, *The Champion Organizer of the Northwest*, 121, in McNall, *The Road to Rebellion*, 225-26 (quote 226).

<sup>51</sup> McNall, *The Road to Rebellion*, 200-201, 205.

December 1889, officials representing the Knights Of Labor, Northern Farmers' Alliance, Southern Farmers' Alliance, and Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association met at St. Louis. Representatives of the National Colored Alliance met separately in the city, although the white and black meetings exchanged speakers and committees. For the first time white and black farmers from the Midwest and South met with labor organizers at a national meeting. The conference would test the durability and feasibility of a national movement of the producer class.

CHAPTER TWO:  
“UNION IT IS”: THE SOUTHERN FARMERS’ ALLIANCE GOES NATIONAL

As the year 1889 came to a close, *The National Economist* struck a triumphant tone. The official newspaper of the Southern Farmers’ Alliance celebrated the accomplishments of the organization’s annual conference with headlines like, “Union It Is,” “Meeting and Consolidation,” and “Working In Parallel Lines.” The headlines revealed a growing sense of success and momentum that inspired the Southern Alliance in the aftermath of its third annual national meeting. Like previous meetings at Shreveport, Louisiana and Meridian, Mississippi, the organization met to discuss regular business, including the election of officers, hear reports on the condition of the organization, and, most importantly, consolidate with other agrarian groups. Before the convention, the Southern Alliance invited the National Farmers’ Alliance (Northern Alliance), the Farmers’ Mutual Benefit Association, and the Knights of Labor to attend the St. Louis meeting. The Colored Farmers’ Alliance continued its tradition of meeting simultaneously, though separately, in the same town. Although the Southern Alliance wished to maintain separation and cooperation with Colored Alliance, its leaders greatly hoped to merge with the other groups present. Since 1886 the Texas-based Southern Alliance had steadily broadened its membership throughout the South and the farm association absorbed other agrarian organizations like the Louisiana Farmers’ Union, the Florida Farmers’ Union and the North Carolina Farmers’ Association. In the months prior to the St. Louis meeting, the Southern Alliance expanded into the Plains states of Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa where drought and debt

combined to cripple the agrarian economy. In these states they competed with Northern Alliance for members.<sup>1</sup>

Conscious of moving beyond the region of its birth, the Southern Alliance increasingly promoted itself as a national association of farmers. In March 1889 Alliance leader Charles Macune launched *The National Economist* newspaper. Besides its title, another indication of the newspaper's attempt to legitimize the Southern Alliance as a national organization was the location of *The National Economist* offices in the nation's capital. From Washington D.C., Macune hoped to pressure Congress to enact Alliance reforms. He also wanted to receive American political news straight from its source and relay it directly to Alliance readers. When *The National Economist* replaced the *Southern Mercury* as the official newspaper of the Southern Alliance in the summer of 1889, Macune and the Alliance indicated their transformation from a southern agrarian movement into a national crusade of farmers.<sup>2</sup>

The St. Louis meeting offered the farmers' organization an opportunity to continue its growth. For the first time the Alliance stood ready to absorb non-southern agrarian societies and create a unified movement of farm and labor associations. Although the annual convention revealed divisions between the various groups assembled, positive results suggested prospects for a coalition in the near future. The southern agrarian organization also emerged from the meeting with new members. State Alliances from Kansas, North Dakota, and South Dakota formally joined the southern order. The St. Louis conference provided the Southern Alliance with its first triumph over sectionalism and produced a genuine national agrarian movement.

In the months before the convention, the first issue of *The National Economist* clearly communicated the new national orientation of the Southern Alliance and set the tone for the

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<sup>1</sup> *National Economist*, December 14, 1889; Robert McMath, *American Populism: A Social History 1877-1898* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1992), 20-21, 105-106.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 37.



newspaper. Editors of the newspaper expressed joy over the upcoming admittance of Montana, Washington, North Dakota and South Dakota into the United States because they were states that produced agricultural and craft goods and they would represent these interests in Congress. Put in class and sectional reconciliationist terms, *The National Economist* proclaimed, “The growing sympathy between the producers of the West and South is gradually sweeping away the old sectional bitterness, and an alliance between the peoples of these great sections promises to create the power which is to bridle the rapacity of the speculative element which is bearing so seriously upon them. Hail to the new born States!” The passage shows the Alliance opinion that sectionalism prevented reform since the Civil War. Adding new states where producers outnumbered speculators, and where sectional memories might be less important, would contribute to the agrarian reform cause.<sup>3</sup>

In addressing the conquest of sectionalism, the article created visions of a renewed alliance between the West and the South. During the early nineteenth century the West and the South united against the Northeast to form a dominant combination within Thomas Jefferson’s Republican Party. In 1800, the West included the states west of the Appalachian Mountains. During the 1820s and 1830s the West expanded to include territories and states acquired with the Louisiana Purchase. In these decades the West and the South stood as the backbone of Andrew Jackson’s Democratic Party. Throughout the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian years, common frontier characteristics of the West and South included agriculture, small entrepreneurs, forests, abundant wildlife, low population density, and to varying degrees, Native Americans. The similarities unified the West and South against the more urban and commercial Northeast during the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian eras. During the thirty years following the end of the Jacksonian

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<sup>3</sup> *National Economist*, March 14, 1889.

presidency, the bonds of the regions had disintegrated over the issues of slavery and national unity as the Northwest partnered with the North and the Southwest joined the South. With the removal of slavery as a point of contention, and the onset of bad economic times, the similarities between the West and South reemerged post-Civil War. After some political partnerships in the late 1870s, *The National Economist* called for the renewal of ties between the West and the South in 1889. The suggestion came from a man who lived in both regions, Charles Macune. Although western features had diminished in many of the states since the 1830s, Macune believed that the West and South shared a common identity as producing regions in contrast to the urban, industrial centers of Northeast that also served as the home of large corporations, banks, and speculators.<sup>4</sup>

The combination of regions is significant because an alliance of the West and South did not strictly address the key groups involved in the greatest example of American sectional animosity, the Civil War. A truly reconciliationist vision would have to include the combatant regions, the North and the South. Besides evading the primary antagonists, the West-South combination allowed southern states to maintain their identity by referring to a South, while Northerners shed their Civil War-era affiliation to become Westerners. As Alliance supporters used the term, Westerners broadly included residents in the states from Ohio west to the Pacific Ocean. Specifically the term applied to Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota, Illinois, and Ohio. At times the organization noted the involvement of farmers from New York or Massachusetts, but overwhelmingly focused on the “West.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 48-49. Macune was born in Illinois, grew up in Wisconsin, traveled throughout the West, and settled in Texas.

<sup>5</sup> The term Northwest was also commonly used by the Southern Alliance. For examples, see *Kansas Farmer*, April 18, May 2, 1889; *National Economist*, December 28, 1889, March 15, 1890.

The choice to emphasize a West-South combination over a North-South combination accomplished a primary goal of the Southern Alliance: to eradicate sectional lines by failing to note their significance. Although Alliance leaders used the term “North,” primarily they applied the term to discussions of the past, especially the Civil War. In multiple speeches and newspaper columns, the Southern Alliance attempted to respect the service of Union veterans in the late War of the Rebellion. The North-South divide, however, was a conflict of the past, which no longer contained relevance in the minds of Southern Alliance advocates living in the 1880s and 1890s. Sectionalism was now a false source of difference. Northerners became the ally Westerner, or the less friendly, Easterner. While the West-South combination had historical roots, the agrarian reformers of the 1880s and 1890s wished to see themselves as a break from the recent Civil War past. The Southern Alliance viewed itself as a contemporary movement with new solutions to problems that had emerged since the end of the war.

The Western label was not solely a southern creation applied to those who lived outside of the South. During 1889 several Southern Alliance allies in Kansas used the term as well. Benjamin Clover referred to “farmers of the West” and “Western farmers” during his denunciation of twine manufacturers and as he addressed a negative depiction of the Southern Alliance by the New York *Sunday Courier*. William Peffer, an ally to both Alliances in Kansas, used similar language to describe “the universal protest of the farmers of the West against the extortions of the binder twine trust has reached New York and other large manufacturing cities, and the visitor from the West is frequently interrogated about the movement of the Alliance in that respect.” Peffer concluded, “This farmers’ fight is being watched throughout the East with eagerness and interest.” Again, it is significant that “West” is used instead of North. In the above examples, Kansans viewed themselves and other farmers from the Sunflower state as

residents of the West rather than the North. Agriculture was associated with the “West,” while the East is associated with “manufacturing.” A couple of decades after the Civil War, some Kansans now identified themselves and their region with the West, rather than the North. Differences rooted in the economy and the societies that the economies helped create, now split the North into the East and the West.<sup>6</sup>

Besides their emphasis on reconciliation and the emergence of a Western regional identification, various Alliance leaders and allies paid increased attention to a national movement of farmers in other ways during 1889. In Peffer’s *Kansas Farmer* readers found reports of the battle between the Alabama Alliance and jute bagging manufacturers. John H. McDowell of Tennessee published news from state and local Alliances in Kansas and Missouri in his Nashville-based *Weekly Toiler*. *The National Economist* reported on various stories throughout the nation. Prior to the meetings at St. Louis Southern Alliance supporters devoted more attention to agrarian struggles beyond their local communities and displayed increasing signs of nationalizing the farm reform movement. Based on this expansionist momentum, it appeared that Southern Farmers’ Alliance had reasons to hope for consolidation with non-southern farm and labor groups as it gathered for its December meetings in St. Louis.<sup>7</sup>

As the Southern Alliance descended upon St. Louis, the farmers’ organization conveyed its expansionist impulse in two other ways. First, unlike the two prior meetings, the 1889 Southern Alliance convention took place in a border state. After sweeping the South, the Southern Alliance looked to spread into other regions of the country. Specifically, the southern organization sought to broaden its support in Midwestern and Plains states, where farmers were already organizing with the National (Northern) Farmers’ Alliance and the Farmers’ Mutual

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<sup>6</sup> *Kansas Farmer*, April 18, 1889 (Clover quotes); *Ibid.*, May 2, 1889 (Peffer quotes).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, April 4, 1889; Connie L. Lester, *Up From the Mudsills of Hell: The Farmers’ Alliance, Populism, and Progressive Agriculture in Tennessee, 1870-1915* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 76.

Benefit Association. St. Louis served as a logical place to hold a meeting between competing, though not hostile, agricultural clubs. The city lay in between the South and Midwest, in a border state that had old economic and social ties to both regions. As a metropolis on the Mississippi River and near the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, St. Louis was a major site of commerce prior to the arrival of the railroad. Southern cotton and midwestern grains poured into the city during the nineteenth century and the city took on a mixed identity as Civil War began. Missouri and parts of Illinois and Kentucky near St. Louis served as contested ground during the Civil War as the area supplied Union and Confederate armies. After the Civil War railroads and the expansion of grain and cotton cultivation in the Midwest and South helped the city continue to thrive economically and maintain its regional borderland character. The choice of St. Louis as the site of its annual meeting showed that the Texas-based Southern Alliance wished to become a national organization for the promotion of the interests of the American, producing, majority.

A second gesture by the Southern Alliance revealed the expansionist impulse of the farm group. Prior to the St. Louis convention, the Southern Alliance changed its name to enhance its ties with industrial labor unions. In September 1889, the Farmers' Alliance and Co-Operative Union renamed itself the Farmers' and Laborers' Union after its merger with the Agricultural Wheel. Throughout its seven-year existence, the Wheel promoted an outlook similar to the Southern Alliance by emphasizing a producerism and cooperativism among struggling farmers. Founded in Prairie County Arkansas in 1882, the organization spread to Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi. Compared with the Southern Alliance, the Wheel was more adamant about its involvement in politics, its biracial membership, and its association with the Knights of Labor. The incorporation of the Wheel into the Southern Alliance helped push the Alliance closer

toward industrial labor unions. The new title Farmers' and Laborers' Union made it clear that the agrarian organization wanted to broaden its appeal to urban industrial workers and truly become an association for the producing classes of America.<sup>8</sup>

While the St. Louis meeting primarily served as the annual Farmers' and Laborers' Union conference, other agrarian and labor associations also came to St. Louis to discuss consolidation, cooperation, and mutual points of interest. The other organizations present at St. Louis included the National Farmers' Alliance (Northern Alliance), the Colored Farmers' Alliance, the Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, and the Knights of Labor. While none of the groups rivaled the Southern Alliance in terms of numbers, each association offered to broaden the appeal and influence of the agrarian movement.

Since the National Farmers' Alliance and the Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association had strong followings in the Midwest, the Southern Alliance sought consolidation with both groups to create a truly national agrarian reform movement. The Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association started in southern Illinois in 1883 and had 50,000 members by the St. Louis meeting. The organization attracted farmers primarily through its sponsorship of cooperatives, though it also served as a social club and dabbled in politics. After several years of little activity, the National Farmers' Alliance experienced resurgence after 1887 when control of the organization moved from Milton George to a collection of more active organizers including Ignatius Donnelly, August Post, and Jay Burrows. Under the new leadership the Northern Alliance promoted land, transportation, and financial reforms more vigorously. Since the Northern and Southern

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<sup>8</sup> Melton Alonza McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 176. The Agricultural Wheel had closer ties to the Knights of Labor than the Southern Alliance. Another difference between the Southern Alliance and Wheel was that the former group contained a larger number of female members. Whereas the Southern Alliance leadership contained a significant number of planters, the Wheel leadership did not. See McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor*, 148; Matthew Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists: Farmer-Labor Insurgency in the Late-Nineteenth-Century South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 58-60, 100.

Alliances advanced several common reforms, and because they competed for new recruits in midwestern and Plains states, Southerners pursued consolidation at St. Louis.<sup>9</sup>

The Northern Farmers' Alliance sent seventy-five delegates to St. Louis from Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Kansas, and Washington. In at least one of these states, agrarian reformers began to support consolidation between the Northern and Southern Alliances. Although not a member of either Alliance since he was not a farmer, William Peffer enthusiastically greeted the Southern Alliance upon its 1888 entry into Kansas. Through his newspaper, the *Kansas Farmer*, the official organ of the Northern Alliance in Kansas, Peffer called for a consolidation of the Alliances on multiple occasions. The Kansas editor explained his opinion writing that, "Their objects are identical, and it is only a matter of time when they will both merge into one grand organization." Besides supporting the Southern Alliance in print, Peffer announced that Southern Alliance Vice President John H. McDowell of Tennessee would speak in Meriden, Kansas. Peffer also announced that McDowell stopped by the offices of the *Farmer* and expressed his belief that the Northern and Southern Alliances would soon merge. As the St. Louis convention approached, it thus appeared there was significant support for an Alliance merger in at least one midwestern state.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 37; John D. Hicks, *Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1931), 114; McMath, *American Populism*, 99-104; Gerald H. Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Movement: Ballots and Bigotry in the New South*, rev. ed. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 5; Roy V. Scott, "Milton George and the Farmers' Alliance Movement," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 45, no. 1 (June 1958): 105. Hicks claims that the Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association had at least 150,000; Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, 114. Postel claims 50,000; Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 37.

<sup>10</sup> *St. Louis Republic*, December 4, 1889; Peter H. Argersinger, *Populism and Politics: William Alfred Peffer and the People's Party* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1974), 22-23; *Kansas Farmer*, April 18, 1889 (quote). Peffer supported consolidation throughout 1889. See *Kansas Farmer*, March 21, April 18, 25, and October 2, 1889. The Southern Alliance chose not to endorse Peffer's newspaper as its official state newspaper in order to avoid alienating the more radical editor of the *Meriden Advocate*, Stephen McLallin, and his followers in Kansas: Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 22-23.

While the Southern Alliance desired official merger with several midwestern farm groups, they also sought to expand their influence among industrial laborers. The presence of the Knights of Labor at St. Louis offered the Southern Alliance this opportunity. Prior to the St. Louis meeting the Knights and Southern Alliance shared a cordial relationship in Texas and Arkansas. During the summer of 1885 the groups held joint rallies, barbecues, and picnics, while they also made plans for a cooperative store. The Alliance also supported Knights' boycotts in Galveston and Dallas and provided food and money to the latter union during strikes against Jay Gould's Southwestern rail lines in 1885 and 1886. Several prominent members of the Southern Alliance also belonged to the Knights, including J.B. "Buck" Barry, William R. Lamb, and H.S.P. "Stump" Ashby.<sup>11</sup>

During and after the strikes the Knights experienced a surge in southern membership. Through a combination of various factors, however, the Knights southern and national prominence proved short-lived. In the wake of the Haymarket Square bombing, anti-union newspapers branded the Knights as a violently radical organization. The labor union also suffered from three major self-inflicted wounds. Since the Knights excluded few potential members, the organization contained a wide variety of workers from various gender, racial, and class categories. One scholar has suggested that the diverse membership made it extremely difficult to identify common goals and unify to accomplish common goals.<sup>12</sup>

A second major problem within the Knights lay within the ranks of its leadership. Most southern Knights leaders were not natives to the region and most leaders placed personal political ambition above the interests of the organization. As a result, they frequently clashed with one another, causing harm to the Knights. Many members objected to the pursuit of

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<sup>11</sup> Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists*, 101, 113, 140.

<sup>12</sup> McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South*, 149-50.



political activities within the union. A majority of leaders also lacked experience working as laborers. Instead, they came from the ranks of the professional classes where they served as teachers, small businessmen, printers, and contractors.<sup>13</sup>

A third internal difficulty centered on racial divisions. Although a biracial organization, few local assemblies contained white and black participants. When white and black union members met collectively, disharmony frequently arose. African American members complained of white efforts to prevent black leadership within the organization. Whites complained that loose racial policies might hurt the union's success in the South. Southern blacks and whites also disagreed on cooperating with local Republican or Democratic parties with blacks favoring the former and whites supporting the latter.<sup>14</sup>

The combination of internal weaknesses and outward hostility from southern politicians and press members spelled trouble for the Knights of Labor. By 1888, the union contained fewer members than in the peak years of 1885-86. Many skilled white workers left the Knights in favor of more exclusive unions such as the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Remaining southern members included the most economically and socially vulnerable workers: renters, sharecroppers, African American day laborers and domestic workers from the southern countryside. In an effort to revive the struggling union, Knights delegates accepted the invitation to attend the 1889 Alliance meeting in St. Louis. The invitation stemmed from efforts made by national and state Alliance leaders. *The National Economist* editors Charles Macune and Reuben Gray wrote to Grand Master Terrence Powderly throughout 1889 to encourage a closer partnership between the two organizations, noting their similar membership requirements and shared principles. Gray also spoke at the Knights' November 1889 national meeting held in

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<sup>13</sup> McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South*, 151-57.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 148, 159-60.

Atlanta. There, Gray and Leonidas F. Livingston, the Georgia State Farmers' Alliance president, addressed the convention and struck a chord with union members. The Alliance asked the union to send delegates to its upcoming meeting in St. Louis and the labor organization obliged. From the Alliance perspective, the Knights' diminished numbers and influence still surpassed those of the next largest industrial union, the American Federation of Labor.<sup>15</sup>

As the various groups converged in St. Louis, public and private meetings were held to discuss the possibilities for consolidation and cooperation. About two hundred delegates from the Farmers' and Laborers' Union met in the Entertainment Hall of the Exposition Building. Around seventy-five Northern Alliance delegates met at the Planters' House. Representatives from the Northern Alliance, the Farmers Mutual Benefit Association, and the Knights of Labor attended some of the sessions of the Farmers' and Laborers' conference. As was the practice at the previous Southern Alliance national convention, the Colored Farmers' Alliance met separately from the main gathering. Although black delegates did not participate directly in the Southern Alliance meeting, the Colored Farmers' Alliance representatives maintained communication with the former group through the attendance of Superintendent Richard Humphrey at the Southern Alliance convention. Delegates from various organizations attended and sometimes spoke at each other's conventions. For instance, Humphrey and John H. McDowell spoke to the Northern Alliance convention. Humphrey also spoke to the Southern Alliance convention, which included a Northern Alliance delegation in the audience. When official proceedings ended for the day, informal meetings continued in private. Charles Macune's hotel room was a major hub of after-hours gatherings.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South*, 168, 176; Joseph Gerteis, *Class and the Color Line: Interracial Class Coalition in the Knights of Labor and the Populist Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 125, 161; Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists*, 126.

<sup>16</sup> Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, 119; *St. Louis Republic*, December 4, 1889; *National Economist*, December 14, 1889.

During the week of the Southern Alliance meeting, there were signs that consolidation and camaraderie would prevail at St. Louis. Speeches delivered at the convention indicated that sectionalism and regional differences formed an obstacle to unification. During the first day of the convention John H. McDowell, stressed anti-sectionalism and class solidarity in his speech. McDowell spoke to the general rights and superior morality of the middle class and working poor when compared to those of the wealthy, claiming, “It is an acknowledged fact, proved by all history, that purification always comes from the poorer and middle classes, while corruption comes from the rich.” The Farmers’ and Laborers’ Union leader urged the majority of Americans, from the middle and working classes, to unite to check the growing influence of the upper class over American laws. Unification was possible because

The sectional animosities of the past are rapidly dying out, and we can form a united brotherhood that will extend from Maine to California, and sweep the whole country; a union of States bound together by the ties of common interest, non-partisan in spirit, but recognizing the fact that political prejudices in the past have blinded men against us, and seeking only such legislation as will relieve us from the evils under which we now suffer.<sup>17</sup>

McDowell pointed to sectionalism and its divisive manifestations in the two-party system as the primary barrier to the unification of poor and middle class Americans who formed the majority of citizens and the true Americans. As editor of the *Weekly Toiler* in Nashville, Tennessee, McDowell had a history of promoting sectional reconciliation, which was especially important in a state with significant numbers of Union Army veterans. Connie Lester notes that although the Lost Cause proved enticing to many Tennessee farmers in the 1880s, a statewide agrarian movement could not afford to alienate those farmers in middle and eastern Tennessee who fought against the Confederacy. McDowell reinforced appeals to sectional reconciliation in the *Toiler* by also publishing news from state and local Alliances in Kansas and Missouri. A

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<sup>17</sup> *St. Louis Republic*, December 4, 1889.

Confederate veteran who served under Earl Van Dorn and Nathan Bedford Forrest, McDowell possessed the necessary authority to emphasize reconciliation. As the first public expression from the Farmers' and Laborers Union at the convention, his words carried significance for setting a conciliatory tone for the St. Louis meeting.<sup>18</sup>

Other speakers expressed a positive and pacifying tone in their speeches. Leaders from the Southern Alliance and the Knights of Labor showed particular interest in establishing closer relations between their organizations. Upon arrival in St. Louis, national lecturer and chairman of the national legislative committee of the Knights, Ralph Beaumont, spoke about the great similarities between his union and the Farmers' Alliances, stating, "There is very little actual difference between what we are striving for and what the farmer is endeavoring to secure. We came to find out just how far we are apart." He stressed the common identity found in the organizations as they both tried to unite "the people who labor. We are aiming at the same goal, though traveling different roads. The farmer has just realized that he is not the possessor of his own farm."<sup>19</sup>

Like Beaumont, Terrence Powderly also spoke about the similarities between the Knight and the Southern Alliance. As Grand Master Workman of the Knights, he asserted that both organizations "are of one mind" concerning the regulation of railroads, the free coinage of silver, and mortgage relief. Unlike Beaumont, Powderly acknowledged the differences between the Knights and the Farmers' Alliance, citing the former's support for workshop regulations and safety inspections of factories. He, therefore, supported cooperation with the Alliance, but not "amalgamation." During his speech delivered to the Southern Alliance convention, Powderly emphasized likenesses between the associations. Since a bomb was hurled at Chicago police

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<sup>18</sup> Lester, *Up From the Mudsills of Hell*, 75-76.

<sup>19</sup> *St. Louis Republic*, December 4, 1889.

during the Knights' Haymarket Square demonstration in 1886, the union had been branded as an extreme group bent on violence to achieve greater rights for workers. Perhaps to eliminate these fears in the minds of Alliance members, Powderly claimed that the Knights purged all radicals from the union. In distancing his organization from extremism and by emphasizing points of mutual agreement, the Knights official hoped to make cooperation with the Alliance a greater possibility.<sup>20</sup>

Powderly addressed the topic of race relations in the South where some observers charged that the union was "too free with the negro." The Knights' leader insisted that the South was best left alone to deal with its race relations, but he stated "where THE BLACK MAN'S CONDITION is taken advantage of to oppress the white laborer that you protect him, and that no man, black or white, shall be oppressed." The audience applauded his comments. It is unclear whether Powderly alluded to the use of African Americans as strike breakers or whether he meant to draw attention to the general economic plight of white and black Southerners. Powderly, however, clearly favored the triumph of color-blind justice and cordial race relations in the South. In the years ahead, Populist leaders from Tom Watson to Ignatius Donnelly advocated a similar sense of racial cooperation and justice in the South.<sup>21</sup>

Powderly emphasized another point of agreement with the Alliance when he discussed the un-American practice of owners controlling the votes of their employees. He supported the Australian or secret ballot as a remedy to purify politics and prevent the passage of damaging "class legislation" that worked against farmers. In subsequent years the Southern Alliance continually emphasized the virtues of a secret ballot to clean up politics. During his speech, the Knights' Grandmaster concentrated on a variety of measures including racial justice, free and

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<sup>20</sup> *St. Louis Republic*, December 5 (quotes), December 6, 1889.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, December 6, 1889. "THE BLACK MAN'S CONDITION" is found in the original quote.

fair elections, that showed the similarities between the Southern Alliance and the Knights of Labor. Like McDowell, Powderly established a conciliatory tone that suggested a logical coalition between national organizations of farmers and industrial workers.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the similarities between the groups, the appeasing tone of speeches, and several days of negotiations, consolidation did not occur at St. Louis. Each organization contained members opposed to unification with other associations. Not all members of the Southern Farmers' Alliance supported a merger with the Knights. Alliance delegates from Alabama objected to a merger between the two organizations, while Tennessee delegates refused to participate in any discussion of consolidation between the Knights and the Alliance. Although not present at the St. Louis meeting, several Knights of Labor members objected to the Farmers' Alliance. North Carolina Knights complained about the oppressive nature of the Alliance on several occasions. In an article in the official newspaper of the union, a Knights member charged that Alliance members refused to pay farm workers in cash and would only pay with store credit. The writer concluded that, "We fear that this so-called Farmers' Alliance in our State means nothing more nor less than oppression and death to the laborer." Another member wrote to a national Knights official claiming that Alliance members refused to hire day laborers or lend money to those who belonged to the labor union. Several scholars claim that these tensions reveal the class conflict between members the respective organizations. Melton Alonza McLaurin states that the Alliance contained more landowners and planters, while rural members of the Knights of Labor tended to work for planters and landowners as renters, sharecroppers and farm hands. He further states that it was in the financial interest of landowners to have a cheap

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<sup>22</sup> *St. Louis Republic*, December 6, 1889.

and unorganized workforce, therefore, creating contradictory motives for members of the Knights and the Alliance.<sup>23</sup>

Relations between the Northern Alliance, Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, and the Southern Alliance took a similar path. No formal agreement was reached with the Southern Alliance. The Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association opposed the Southern Alliance's subtreasury plan because it wanted farmers to gain access to credit based on their land holdings rather than the value of their crops stored in government warehouses. Several causes prevented the consolidation of Northern and Southern Alliances. First, Northerners did not like the title of the southern group, the Farmers' and Laborers' Union. They wanted "Alliance" to be included in the title of the organization. In response, Southerners consented to adopt the name National Farmers' Alliance & Industrial Union.<sup>24</sup>

A second Northern objection was that the Southern Alliance excluded African Americans from membership. Southern Alliance leaders responded by allowing states to determine who to admit, abolishing their constitutional requirement that only "white" persons could qualify as members. The rule changes did nothing to alter the racial segregation of the Southern Alliance since state Alliances could, and did, still choose to exclude blacks from membership. Additionally, black Americans could not serve as delegates to the National Southern Alliance convention. Other factors prevented the racial integration Southern Alliance. Many African Americans preferred to join the Colored Alliance because it was a mostly segregated organization that emphasized self-help and cooperative economic action for its members.

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<sup>23</sup> *St. Louis Republic*, December 6, 1889; McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South*, 142, 148; Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists* 102, 111; *Journal of United Labor* August 2, 1888, cited in McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South*, 142. Terrence Powderly also expressed doubts about the Farmers' Alliance as late as April 1890. Although he continued to correspond with its leaders and attend Alliance conventions, Powderly thought that the agrarian association wanted to eliminate the Knights and gain its members. See McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South*, 142-177.

<sup>24</sup> Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, 119-120.

Simply put, many blacks wanted to act independent from white control. Secondly, although other protest organizations such as the Knights of Labor and the Agricultural Wheel officially did not enforce the separation of the races, in practice white and black Southerners belonged to segregated local assemblies. In contrast, the Northern Alliance remained open to whites and blacks. Despite its nonexclusive racial policy and the positive relations between African-American farmers and Northern Alliance, black representation in the northern farm organization remained miniscule largely because of demographic realities. Roughly ten percent of African Americans lived outside of the South, with most of the population concentrated in cities where farm associations had little appeal. Interracial agrarian and labor organizations were extremely rare in the late nineteenth century. The Southern Alliance and Colored Alliance did not contradict this general social trend.<sup>25</sup>

A third issue that prevented Northern merger with the Southern Alliance was secrecy. Since the Southern Alliance (and Colored Farmers' Alliance) made secrecy mandatory, the consolidation of the white Alliances would have forced Northerners to adopt the practice. Northerners wanted secrecy to be determined by each state Alliance and not compulsory for all Alliances. The Southern Alliance contended that its attractiveness, discipline, and unity came partially from the use of secret handshakes and rituals. Southerners, therefore, refused to yield on the point. In practice, Nebraska Alliances associated with the Northern Alliance already

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<sup>25</sup> Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, 119-120; Scott, "Milton George and the Farmers' Alliance Movement," 107-08; *National Economist*, December 14, 1889. Examples of good relations between southern black farmers and the Northern Alliance include Milton George's claims to have issued a Northern Alliance charter to black Arkansans in 1882 and George's pledge to financially assist the Colored Farmers' Alliance with printing costs in 1889. See Scott. "Milton George and the Farmers' Alliance Movement," 107-108.



utilized secrecy and within a year the Northern Alliance adopted secrecy. At St. Louis the issue proved another insurmountable goal to Alliance consolidation.<sup>26</sup>

A fourth contributing factor was the sheer size of the organizations. Northern Alliance leaders feared that they would lose their leadership positions if they consolidated with the much larger Southern Alliance. Since the Southern Alliance contained a greater number of members, it was also feared that Northern Alliance members would have little influence within a joint Alliance. Northern Alliance writers acknowledged many of these points two years later when they published a history of their organization. Besides noting the role of segregation and secrecy, the Northern organization cited the greater power of Southern officials within the Southern Alliance, “natural” factors emanating from living in different regions, and differences over the most important reforms. The Northern Alliance preferred to emphasize legislation for the additional coinage of silver, a prohibition on speculation in agricultural futures, and an anti-trust law, while the Southern Alliance promoted the subtreasury plan as the most crucial reform. In this summary of events, basic differences separated the Alliances and prevented consolidation.<sup>27</sup>

While the Northern Alliance politely emphasized the differences between the agrarian associations as justification for maintaining separation, leaders of the Southern Alliance interpreted the differences in a more optimistic tone. In the first edition published after the St. Louis convention, *The National Economist* reported that the National Farmers’ Alliance, or Northern Alliance, did not join the Southern Alliance for justifiable reasons. The paper claimed

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<sup>26</sup> Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, 120. N.B. Ashby, a Northern Alliance leader, also elaborated on these differences in an 1890 publication. Ashby cited secrecy and the looser structure of Northern Alliance compared to the Southern Alliance as points of disagreement. He particularly noted the editorial oversight of Southern Alliance newspapers by national leaders. See N.B. Ashby, *The Riddle of the Sphinx* (Chicago: Mercantile Publishing and Advertising Co., 1890), 417-19.

<sup>27</sup> Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, 117-18, 122; Ashby, *The Riddle of the Sphinx*, 417-19.

that the Northern Alliance “fully indorsed the consolidation, but returned home to lay the matter before their people, convinced that when the next annual meeting shall occur at Jacksonville next December all will be represented, and a complete amalgamation result, to comprise nearly or quite forty States and Territories.” Cast in this glowing light, *The National Economist* editors portrayed the leaders of the Northern Farmers’ Alliance as cautious democrats who wished to confer with their members before accepting consolidation of the two associations. Despite evidence to the contrary, the Southern Alliance newspaper also suggested that the assimilation of Northern and Southern Alliances seemed inevitable. According to this narrative, minor differences between the Northern and Southern Alliances would be resolved within a year. *The National Economist* reaffirmed this version events a week later when it pronounced, “The disposition and sentiment expressed on the part of all the delegates in both bodies, without a single exception, were heartily in favor of consolidation into an organic union.” The newspaper claimed that both organizations agreed to basic principles that would form a constitution for the merged Alliance.<sup>28</sup>

*The National Economist* took a similarly confident tone as it reported that the Colored Alliance would not combine its membership with the Southern Alliance. Although the Colored Alliance was “anxious for co-operation and confederation” its members did not support “consolidation.” The newspaper concluded that the “fact that this order is strongest in States well organized by the whites suggests a mutual dependence credible to both races.” Like its statement on the failure of merger with the Northern Alliance, the absence of consolidation between the Colored and Southern Farmers’ Alliances was not dire news in the eyes of *The National Economist*. White Alliance leaders thought that cooperation between the mutually

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<sup>28</sup> *National Economist*, December 14, 21, 1889.

dependent organizations would continue in accordance with the wishes of both organizations. The newspaper expected “a system of close co-operation,” in the years ahead “to include both business and political action.” Verification of the positive relations came from the St. Louis speech of Colored Alliance Superintendent Richard Humphrey. The Superintendent praised the association of the Colored and Southern Alliances and encouraged the Northern Alliance to cooperate with “your white brethren” of the Southern Alliance. During the next two years, members of the Colored and Southern Farmers’ Alliances seriously tested the durability of their collaboration. At the conclusion of the St. Louis conference, however, the Southern Alliance reassured its readers that relations between the black and white Alliances were cordial, cooperative, and sympathetic.<sup>29</sup>

Continuing its triumphant narrative of the convention, *The National Economist* reported that the “most notable feature of the meeting was the presence of the Master Workman and executive committee of the Knights of Labor, and the complete harmony prevailing between the two great orders.” The newspaper expected the partnership of the Knights of Labor and Farmers’ Alliance to form a powerful coalition. In reality, the Knights did not carry the membership totals and status that once made it the most powerful labor union in the country. Additionally, Grand Master Workman Terrence Powderly privately expressed unease with the prospect of aligning with the Southern Alliance. Powderly feared that the Alliance wanted the Knights of Labor to endorse a third party so that the latter union would dissolve and leave the Alliance as the sole national organization available to farmers and industrial workers. In short, Powderly worried that the Alliance wanted to eliminate a competing union. Despite his worries,

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<sup>29</sup> *National Economist*, December 14, 28, 1889.

Powderly continued to cooperate with the Alliance, although Ralph Beaumont increasingly took the lead in relations with the agrarian group.<sup>30</sup>

Although the Southern Alliance cast the failures of consolidation in an overly positive manner, there were reasons to believe that the agrarian and labor groups could consolidate or at least cooperate in the future. Foremost, significant points of accord existed between the agrarian and labor groups. The publication of several agreements in the final days of the national convention by the Northern Alliance, Southern Alliance, and Knights of Labor showed the nearly identical principles shared by the various groups. On the final day of the convention the Knights of Labor and Southern Alliance produced a joint statement outlining their common goals and designs to cooperate in the future. The accord supported the abolition of the national bank, the end of speculation on agricultural and mechanical goods, the coinage of silver, the abolition of alien land ownership, limits to the property of railroad corporations, the end of tax dollars to favor one “class at the expense of the other,” and government ownership of the “means of communication and transportation.” Both organizations agreed to support legislation promoting common points of interest and “only” the representatives who supported said legislation, which suggested a firm political stance by the groups. Although the Northern Alliance did not sign the document, they supported anti-trust, anti-speculation, railroad regulation, and silver coinage laws. The degree of emphasis on particular reforms might vary, but generally, the groups endorsed similar policies to improve the condition of Americans who worked in physical labor.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *National Economist*, December 14, 28, 1889; McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South*, 177; Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 165-66.

<sup>31</sup> J.E. Bryan, *The Farmers' Alliance: Its Origin, Progress and Purposes* (Fayetteville, AR: 1891), 33-35; *St. Louis Republic*, December 7, 1889. Signers included H.S.P. “Stump” Ashby, Ben Clover, N.A. Dunning, R.F. Peck, W.S. Morgan, and S.B. “Syd” Alexander. Other Alliance signers included S.B. Erwin (chair of the committee), U.S. Hall (Secretary of the Committee), J.D. Hammond, F.M. Blunt, M. Page, J.R. Miles, W.H. Barton, S.M. Adams, A.S. Mann, J.W. Turner, J.D. Hatfield, D.K. Norris, and R.C. Patty. Signers from the Knights of Labor included Terrence Powderly, Ralph Beaumont, and A.W. Wright.

In the aftermath of the St. Louis meeting, Southern Alliance leaders could find additional hope for unification when they examined other principles that they shared with the Northern Alliance and Knights of Labor. Each group espoused identical positions on the role of their organizations in politics and on the central role played by farmers and laborers in American politics, society, and economy. Concerning politics, the vast majority of leaders of both Alliances and the Knights of Labor opposed the formation of a political party as the best means to advance reforms. As Terrence Powderly expressed in his letter mentioned above, many reformers of the era viewed third parties as a sure path to discord and extinction. Seen as far back as the abolition movement, American reformers divided over the role of politics in advancing their cause. Most famously the supporters of William Lloyd Garrison viewed politics with great suspicion, while Frederick Douglass and his compatriots pursued political activity as a method to achieve the abolition of slavery. After the Civil War the debate continued among financial and political reformers. The Greenback Party, Readjusters Party, Union Labor Party, and countless independent local parties attempted unsuccessfully to challenge the Democrats and Republicans. External attacks combined with internal divisions to cripple the energy and momentum of third parties. Political violence, political corruption, and cries of racial and sectional betrayal seriously weakened third party efforts after the Civil War. After each defeat, reform forces fell into disarray and their demands went largely ignored by government at all levels. As witnesses to these defeats, most labor and agrarian leaders of the late nineteenth century urged their members to stay out of politics.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> James Brewer Stewart, *Abolitionist Politics and the Coming of the Civil War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 158-59; Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 81-203 *passim*; Kenneth C. Barnes, *Who Killed John Clayton?: Political Violence and the Emergence of the New South, 1861-1893* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists*.

Besides Terrence Powderly, Charles Macune was another veteran of political activity who warned against third party political involvement. In his speech before the St. Louis convention, Macune claimed that participation in electoral politics nearly destroyed the Alliance in earlier years. Instead of creating a third party to enact reforms, Macune suggested that Alliance members use their considerable numbers to influence the two major political parties. He claimed that farmers composed at least half of the members of the Republican and Democratic parties. With such large representation and influence, Macune urged farmers to pressure the parties to enact reforms.<sup>33</sup>

The editor put further distance between the Alliance and political parties when he associated the latter with partisanism and acrimony. Whereas “partisanism is the life of party,” in the Alliance “We dissolve prejudices, neutralize partisanism, and appeal to reason and justice for our rights, and are willing to grant to all other classes the same.” Unlike political parties that wrote platforms to address a variety of controversial issues and created an oppositional stance toward another group, Macune stated that the Alliance should concentrate on a single issue. He told the St. Louis crowd, “it must be plain that we would only weaken our cause were we to attempt to construct a platform after the custom of political parties. Our strength lies in an entirely different and opposite direction. We should unite every effort on the accomplishment of the one reform first necessary, and the most important, and rest assured that the accomplishment of that will insure as a development of strength sufficient to then carry other necessary reforms in their turn.” Once the reform was enacted, he believed the Alliance would gain momentum, making it easier to pass additional policies. Using military language found so often in the Southern Alliance, the editor suggested “let us carefully consider which is the most urgent, most

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<sup>33</sup> *National Economist*, December 14, 1889.

important and necessary reform to be dignified as the battle cry of the order temporarily till accomplished.”<sup>34</sup>

Northern Alliance president, Jay Burrows, shared Macune’s reservations about starting a third party. At a January 1889 meeting Burrows cited previous failures of independent movements in his home state of Nebraska. He called a third party a “fatal mistake” and proclaimed that the Alliance would not become “a political party, until the time comes when a new party is organized based on living issues.” The comments suggest that Burrows felt that loyalty to the Democratic and Republican parties was strong and that the parties held voter loyalty by appealing to dead or old emotional issues. The emotional issue forging party loyalty in 1889 was still the Civil War. Burrows understood that party bonds would not be broken until a stronger set of concerns replaced those made during the 1860s. He believed that bitter Civil War memories trumped concerns with the economic plight of average Americans.<sup>35</sup>

Like Jay Burrows and Charles Macune, influential Kansas editor William Peffer thought third party activity unwise in 1889. As some Kansans in the Southern Alliance began to advocate third-party politics in the late 1880s, Peffer wrote editorials in favor of trying reform through the Republican Party, a successful tactic in the 1870s and early 1880s. He stated that politicians would “turn their attention to matters in which their constituents are most directly and most vitally interested.” Peffer further said that reforms could be enacted “without any breaking of old party lines,” because farmers could agree on reform policies, “while as to some matters of political policy there is and will be divisions and they insuperable. Men of all parties are in the

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<sup>34</sup> *National Economist*, December 14, 1889.

<sup>35</sup> *Des Moines Homestead*, January 18 1889, in Jeffrey Ostler, *Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, 1880-1892* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 101. In 1890 Burrows changed his opinion and supported the formation of the People’s Party in Nebraska. He justified switching parties because he felt that railroad corporations exorbitantly influenced the Republican Party in his home state. See Ostler, *Prairie Populism*, 113-15, 120, 123-24.

grange, in the alliance, in the wheel, in the Knights of Labor, in every similar association of people, and there they talk as citizens, not as partisans, about matters of immediate concern to them.” In short, Peffer thought that farmers should keep divisive political issues out of the labor and agrarian organizations. Contrarily, he urged members of the Knights of Labor, Alliances, and Wheel to bring their reforms to political party meetings, saying “let them talk the same things there and thus carry good influences into the parties and bring the party machine into action.” When a reader wrote the editor to ask if he supported the formation of a third party, Peffer responded that his newspaper supported Alliance principles that required no political party. While it is clear from the letter, other newspapers, and reports from St. Louis that some Alliance members favored the formation of a new political organization, it is also apparent that at the end of the 1889 St. Louis convention, a majority of those assembled preferred to take political action through the two major American political parties. The convention had not changed this attitude among the majority of members from the Knights of Labor, Northern Alliance, Colored Alliance, and Southern Alliance.<sup>36</sup>

Besides their consensus opposition to a third party, several of the major farm associations shared a strong faith in the importance of farmers to the American political system. Following the Jeffersonian tradition, agrarian leaders portrayed the farmer as the purest form of American identity. N.B. Ashby, an officer in the Northern Alliance conveyed these ideas in *The Riddle of Sphinx*, his book on the agrarian crisis. In the dedication of the book Ashby wrote, “THE AUTHOR RESPECTFULLY DEDICATES THIS BOOK TO THE AMERICAN FARMER, WITH WHOM RESTS THE WELFARE OF THE REPUBLIC.” Ashby clearly communicated the idea that the core and heart of America could be found in the countryside. In his view

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<sup>36</sup> *Kansas Farmer*, June 6, 1889 (quotes); June 27, 1889 (letter to the editor); Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 14-16.



farmers also possessed unique capabilities to solve the major economic issues of the late-nineteenth century because “as both laborer and capitalist,” the farmer “occupies the position of natural arbitrator between capital and labor, but that the farmer can reach the solution only by well-directed farm organization. It lies in the power of the farmer to give new industrial conditions to the world. This cannot be done without the concentration of the powers of an educated farm yeomanry.” Ashby wrote *The Riddle of the Sphinx* to educate farmers, suggest some remedies for their economic hardships, and show that farmers were essential to solving the problems.<sup>37</sup>

Charles Macune wrote about a nearly identical theme. In the inaugural issue of the *The National Economist*, Macune communicated the purpose of the newspaper. Rather than report all the daily news, the *Economist* aimed “to appeal to the reason and judgment of its readers and to educate in the principles of society, finance, and government.” The newspaper further declared that, “the agriculturalist is the great conservative and thinking element of the nation—the ballast, as it were. He it is who holds the volatile elements of society from running into extremes, and he it is who must step forward and insist upon reforms.” Macune assigned farmers an extremely important place in the American republic. In a time of a growing wealth disparity, rising debt for farmers, increasing hostility between producers and non-producers, farmers stood as the voice of moderation and reason. Because of their unique position in the nation, Macune asserted that farmers should direct reform efforts. Since self-government lay at the foundation of the United States government, the editor believed citizens must stay informed of the evolving nature of American “principles of society, finance, and government.” He wished for his newspaper to serve as a source of knowledge for agrarians in their development into local, state,

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<sup>37</sup> Ashby, *Riddle of the Sphinx*, 5.

and national leaders of reform. Like Ashby, Macune emphasized the importance of farmers to America and the need to educate rural Americans in order to bolster reform efforts.<sup>38</sup>

In North Carolina and Kansas, Leonidas Polk and William Peffer also stressed the importance of farmers to the nation and the need to promote knowledge among agrarians. Polk acted in numerous ways to improve the social and economic standing of farmers. In his home state he partook in efforts to establish a Department of Agriculture, a university devoted to teaching progressive agricultural practices, and he established *The Progressive Farmer* newspaper to further educate and praise farmers. Like many agrarian reformers, Peffer argued that farmers were the largest and most important group of Americans. Because of their numbers and importance, Peffer thought they should have a major voice in the political system of the United States. He stated that farmers needed to organize and “purify politics, and then the way would be clear for permanent reform.” Peffer, like Polk, praised farmers, and viewed his newspaper as an impetus to agrarian organization and education in the ways of economic and political affairs. *The Progressive Farmer* and *Kansas Farmer* joined a growing number of successful agrarian newspapers, scattered across the country. These journals echoed common themes of pride, education, and reform. Increasingly agrarian newspapers cited each other in the late 1880s and editors developed closer relations with one another.<sup>39</sup>

Together, the growing number of agrarian reform newspapers, their support of farmers and workers, their common opposition to a third party, and their shared set reform ideas, created a basis for cooperation between the Knights of Labor and farmers’ groups. Even if they did not

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<sup>38</sup> *National Economist*, March 14, 1889.

<sup>39</sup> Stuart Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk: Agrarian Crusader* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1949), 87-182; *Kansas Farmer* (Peffer quotes) in Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 8. Each edition of *The National Economist* contained a page devoted to excerpts from the “Reform Press,” which included newspapers from across the country. For instance, the November 2, 1889 edition contained entries from newspapers from Arkansas, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Texas.

merge into a single association significant points of agreement allowed the organizations that met at St. Louis to work with each other after the meeting. As the largest and best-coordinated association, the Southern Alliance led consolidation efforts at the meeting. Although it failed to absorb the Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, Northern Alliance, and Knights of Labor, three events at the convention bolstered the position of the Southern Alliance. The election of a new Southern Farmers' Alliance president, a proposal for the creation of a National Press Reform Association, and the incorporation of non-southern agrarian organizations led to the peak of the Southern Alliance influence. As a result, the Southern Alliance became a truly nationwide movement and the most effective vehicle for achieving national reform.

Although the Southern Alliance failed to absorb any new organizations at St. Louis, it succeeded in becoming a national organization. Frustrated with the passivity of the Northern Alliance and attracted to the active nature of the Southern Alliance, the state Alliances of Kansas, North Dakota, and South Dakota voted to secede from the Northern Alliance and join the Southern Alliance. *The National Economist* also stated that state chapters of the Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association from Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio joined the Southern Alliance. The newspaper confidently stated that the state Alliances of Minnesota, Nebraska, and Iowa, "simply wait for ratification by their respective State bodies" before formally joining the Southern Alliance. Although the Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association refuted the claims of consolidation, the Illinois organization did acknowledge cooperation with the Southern Alliance on future matters.<sup>40</sup>

Upon the absorption of the Plains states and with hopes to increase organizing among industrial laborers, the Southern Alliance renamed itself the National Farmers' Alliance and

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<sup>40</sup> *National Economist*, December 14, 21, 1889. The claim of consolidation with the Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association was disputed in *National Economist*, January 4, 1890. *The National Economist* chose not to challenge the author of the article, Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association leader, F.G. Blood.

Industrial Union. The election of officers to the newly named group at St. Louis reflected the influence of the new members. In a departure from the past, the Southern Alliance leadership now consisted of a mixture of Southerners and Midwesterners. At the Shreveport and Meridian meetings of the Southern Alliance national officers came solely from southern states, reflecting the overall membership.<sup>41</sup>

The presence of Midwesterners and Southerners at the highest leadership levels gave credibility to the Southern Alliance as a national organization that represented farmers across America. Such an assertion carried significance in an era where Civil War memories led to political arguments and animosity among the general public. Conscious of the lingering distrust between regions, *The National Economist* chose to describe consolidation as a union “between the great grain-growing States of the North and the cotton-growing States of the South.” The newspaper further noted, “In the deliberations of the united body there was not the slightest evidence of sectional prejudice shown, not even the least trace of it felt. No such spirit will be tolerated in the ranks of the Farmers Alliance and Industrial Union, and it is the duty of every member to discountenance that selfish, cowardly, and unmanly feeling wherever or in whatever form expressed.” Such expressions show that the Southern Alliance viewed sectionalism as a barrier to their objectives. *The National Economist* editors did not choose to portray the union as a merger of “Western and Southern states.” Instead, they felt that it was necessary to stress the consolidation of “States of the North” and “States of the South” to prove the Alliance’s ability to

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<sup>41</sup> Officers in 1887 included President Charles Macune of Texas, Leonidas Polk of North Carolina as 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President, eleven other vice presidents from Kentucky and former Confederate states, Secretary E. B. Warren of Texas, and Treasurer Alfred E. Gardner of Tennessee. Officers elected in 1888 were President Evan Jones of Texas, Vice President Isaac McCracken of Arkansas, Secretary A.E. Gardner of Tennessee, and Treasurer Linn Tanner of Louisiana. Ben Terrell served as National Lecturer both years. Officers elected at St. Louis included President Leonidas Polk of North Carolina, Vice President Benjamin Clover of Kansas, Treasurer H. W. Hickman of Missouri, and Secretary J. H. Turner of Georgia. Ben Terrell of Texas won reelection as National Lecturer. See *National Economist*, March 14, December 14, 1889; Nelson A. Dunning, *The Farmers’ Alliance History and Agricultural Digest* (Washington, D.C.: Alliance Publishing Company, 1891), 71-75, 90.

overcome sectional bitterness. The newspaper announced the significance of northern incorporation into the southern farmers' association: without the defeat of sectionalism and the existence of interregional cooperation at St. Louis, many Americans believed that "there was no hope for economic reform."<sup>42</sup>

The results of the St. Louis meeting created greater possibilities for the Southern Alliance. From its new broader foundation, the Alliance could recruit additional non-southern members. With justification, the group could also tell skeptical white Southerners that their former northern enemies now sought partnership with the South in a national agrarian movement. Incorporating northern and southern states into the farmers' movement validated the rhetoric of unity espoused by farmers' leaders. The Southern Alliance promised not only to solve national economic problems, but also to demonstrate through words and actions that it could heal the lingering scars of sectional disunion.

After the 1889 meeting, the Southern Alliance also had a leader who would bolster the expansionist and reconciliationist impulses of the order. As president, Leonidas Polk initiated a vigorous national recruiting effort that sought to broaden Alliance membership geographically and numerically. During his two and a half years in office, Polk constantly traveled across the country on railroad lines from his native North Carolina to California, and to many points in between. Discussed in the next chapter, Polk's message to American farmers contained a mixture of outrage and hope. He consistently stressed the immorality of agrarian exploitation by the wealthy, the virtues of a rural Christian life, and the need to end the bitterness caused by the Civil War in order to enact needed reforms.

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<sup>42</sup> *National Economist*, December 14 (second and third quotes), 21 (first quote), 1889.

Polk's election as Alliance president came at the expense of Charles Macune. Although Polk ran against Isaac McCracken *and* Macune, the contest was particularly close between Polk and Macune. When deadlock threatened, Macune's supporters agreed to withdraw his name from consideration. His allies expressed "satisfaction" with the election of Polk, while the new president's supporters claimed to vote against Macune "only because of his great usefulness as editor of the official organ, *The National Economist* of Washington, D.C." These voters claimed that Macune could not hold both positions at once. Although a rivalry would later emerge between Polk and Macune, in the two years after the St. Louis convention Macune helped the Alliance further bolster its expansion efforts through his editorial and executive committee responsibilities.<sup>43</sup>

Defeated as president, Macune now devoted more time to two tasks that helped centralize the Southern Alliance and strengthen its national influence. Based in Washington D.C., Macune and his allies led congressional lobbying efforts on behalf of the Alliance. In another sign of the close relationship between the Knights of Labor and the Southern Alliance, the Knights' Ralph Beaumont helped Macune learn how to lobby congressmen. Besides lobbying, the Alliance leader also continued to heavily shape the Southern Alliance from his editorial position at *The National Economist*. As the official newspaper of the Southern Alliance, Macune used *The National Economist* to shape the overall narrative of reform. The weekly newspaper gained a circulation of 100,000 in the years following the St. Louis meeting. Macune communicated Alliance reforms to his audience while continuing earlier themes of sectional reconciliation and republishing stories from agrarian and reform newspapers throughout the nation. The newspaper

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<sup>43</sup> *St. Louis Republic*, December 7, 1889.

served to unify the agrarian organization and it gave readers a sense that the movement was actively working in their interest.<sup>44</sup>

Macune acted to further tighten the unity of the Southern Alliance and maintain his leadership position within a growing organization at the St. Louis convention. On the second day of the convention he spoke to the Alliance gathering and proposed the confederation of *The National Economist* with state Alliance newspapers to form a National Reform Press Association. He further recommended that the Southern Alliance president chair a committee of three that would officially endorse editorials written in support of Alliance doctrine. The committee would then ensure that all Southern Alliance newspapers would publish the editorial. Macune supported his plan by claiming that it would lessen publication expenses, create “a uniformity of sentiment”, and increase the “usefulness and efficiency” of the agrarian organization’s newspapers through the formation of a “central editorial bureau”. He thought that tighter relations between Southern Alliance newspapers could serve to bolster the organization nationally: “This will be by far the most potent agent at our command in the impending struggle, since by it we can keep our own ranks thoroughly posted and unified, and at the same time we can meet the opposition at no disadvantage in an effort to secure the influence of the great class that now stands comparatively neutral but will sympathize with and assist us when convinced that our objects are right and our methods fair.” Although they did not officially adopt the National Reform Press Association until a year later, Macune’s suggestion moved the Southern Alliance to broaden its thinking and aspirations for national reform. A centralized newspaper association would encourage a more national outlook, increase Southern Alliance membership, spread its goals, enhance its national influence, and, ultimately, enact its improvements. Further

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<sup>44</sup> Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists*, 128; Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 37.

evidence of greater centralization of the Alliance emerged at St. Louis when the president and executive committee received enhanced powers. Macune served as leader of the executive committee. Additionally, the primary officers of the agrarian order now were required to have their chief office in Washington D.C.<sup>45</sup>

Despite the failures of consolidation at St. Louis, future prospects appeared bright for the growth of the Southern Alliance movement. The incorporation of non-Southerners into a southern association made the Alliance a national union. Additionally, a new leader took over the organization and began an aggressive recruitment campaign of farmers outside of the South. The past president of the agrarian group, freed from the responsibilities of the office, concentrated on the proliferation of the Alliance by lobbying U.S. Congress and publishing a weekly national newspaper. The Alliance was ready to reach its apex.

Together, leaders of the agrarian group faced the new challenges of a national organization, including expanding the membership and increasing the organization's influence across America. Collective memories of national disunity served as a major obstacle to these tasks. Less than thirty years after Appomattox, the ghosts of the Civil War continued to plague national organizations and movements.<sup>46</sup> The farmers' crusade did not avoid the acrimony

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<sup>45</sup> *National Economist*, December 14, 1889; Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk*, 213. The proposal served to centralize the Southern Alliance and further consolidated authority with Macune. At the time of his suggestion on December 4, he held the office of the presidency and seemed to think a third term was extremely likely. As leader of the Reform Press Association and president, Macune potentially stood to gain greater control over the Alliance. The election of Leonidas Polk, two days later, ended the possibility of power consolidation in Macune. In the aftermath Polk and Macune worked toward the common goal of expanding the Southern Alliance. At the next Alliance national convention in December 1890, however, Macune and Polk were investigated for wrongdoing relating to the Georgia Senate campaign. The details will be discussed in Chapter 5, but it is important to note that the leaders supported opposing candidates. By 1892, a rift in the Macune-Polk relationship became more apparent as Polk moved his Washington office out of the building occupied by Macune's offices. See Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk*, 257-59. The deterioration of their relationship was indicative of larger divides that surfaced within the Alliance by 1892. A further discussion of the split will be included in Chapter 5.

<sup>46</sup> For example, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians continued to organize along sectional lines; neither major political party had nominated a Southerner as president or vice president since before the Civil War; and veterans organizations competed over how the war should be remembered and commemorated. Started in 1866, the Grand Army of the Republic was the first major Civil War veterans' association. Confederate veterans and their supporters



caused by these divisive memories. As it grew to become a national organization opponents hurled charges of sectionalism at the Southern Alliance. Many members and potential members of the Alliance fought in the Civil War. Conscious of the barrier sectionalism formed to expansion, the agrarian organization responded by increasing discussions of sectional reconciliation in the months and years after the St. Louis convention. Alliance leaders also more frequently celebrated the common values associated with rural life and occupations that produced wealth. Through an emphasis on reconciliation and shared rural experiences, the Southern Alliance sought to build trust and convince non-Southerners to join their cause. In the months and years after the St. Louis convention, sectional reconciliation proved a daunting challenge and a constant issue to consider as the Southern Alliance built a national movement.

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formed the United Confederate Veterans in 1889, the Daughters of the Confederacy in 1894, and the Sons of Confederate Veterans in 1896. For more on the growth of southern identity in the late-nineteenth century, see Charles Reagan Wilson, "The Invention of Southern Tradition: The Writing and Ritualization of Southern History, 1880-1940," in *Rewriting the South: History and Fiction*, ed. Lothar Hönnighausen and Valeria Gennaro Lerda, in collaboration with Christoph Irmscher and Simor Ward (Tübingen, Germany: Francke, 1993), 3-21.

### CHAPTER THREE: THE SOUTHERN ALLIANCE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

After four years of expansion in Texas and the South, the Southern Farmers' Alliance met in St. Louis for its annual national convention. Among the most notable achievements of the December 1889 meeting was the incorporation of state Alliances from above the Mason-Dixon line. At St. Louis, state Alliances from Kansas, North Dakota, and South Dakota chose to leave the Northern Farmers' Alliance and join the Southern Alliance. Although it continued to be known as the Southern Alliance, the agrarian organization adopted a new name to become the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union. The Southern Alliance could now legitimately claim status as a national union. Hoping to maintain unity among members and increase the size of the organization, the Alliance utilized speakers and newspapers to advance its vision of American identity during the three years after the 1889 St. Louis convention. Through this concept of national identity the Alliance vigorously attacked sectionalism, endorsed reconciliation, and emphasized the essential value of the producer class to the nation. This American identity became just as important as policies and cooperative activities in gaining and losing followers of the Alliance and, later, Populism.

Confident that they offered an attractive vision for improving the nation and encouraged by its membership growth and geographical expansion, the Southern Alliance flexed its political muscle soon after the St. Louis convention. In April 1890 Alliance President Leonidas Polk and Charles Macune appeared before the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry to support

passage of a law to enact the subtreasury plan. Macune proposed the subtreasury system at the 1889 St. Louis national Alliance meeting. The subtreasury system called for the construction of government-owned warehouse located near railroad lines. Farmers could store their crops in these warehouses until they received an adequate price for their product. As crops sat in the warehouse, Macune proposed that the federal government advance one percent interest loans to farmers, enabling them to pay for necessities and debts. Instead of flooding the market with the entire crop's harvest, Macune hoped the subtreasury plan would limit supply and maintain demand over a longer period of time. The proposal represented the Alliance's central effort to stem the tide of escalating agrarian debt and poverty. At the urging of Macune and other Alliance leaders, the subtreasury became the main reform advanced by the agrarian organization from 1890-1892.<sup>1</sup>

Southern Alliance members also began directly requesting support from political candidates in 1890. Alliacemen across the country began applying the "Alliance yardstick" to politicians by publicly and directly asking them whether they supported or opposed the subtreasury plan and other reform principles. When many politicians responded with lukewarm or dismissive replies, support for a national third party grew within the agrarian organization. Debate over third-party formation created a small measure of tension within the national movement, however, as many Alliacemen also balked at supporting all agrarian reforms and abandoning the two dominant political parties. Since most Alliance leaders did not endorse a third party, but wished to maintain the growth and harmony of their order, they emphasized an American identity based on producer values and sectional reconciliation. Most leaders,

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<sup>1</sup> Stuart Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk: Agrarian Crusader* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1949), 219-20.

including Polk and Macune, chose to encourage Alliance members to participate in the political process as American citizens, but they avoided endorsing any particular political party.<sup>2</sup>

Agrarian organizers faced something of a dilemma as they spread the order across the country. Most Alliance national officers wished to encourage a national movement of farmers and other workers, without creating a national political party. Agrarian leaders, however, endorsed approaching politicians with demands for application of Alliance reforms into law. In the wake of the 1889 national convention, Alliancemen showed an eagerness to agitate for Alliance policies in state and national governments. In Kansas, these activities eventually resulted in a third party during the summer of 1890. Alliance supporters in most other states worked through the Republican or Democratic parties. While the formation of a political party lingered in the background, it was not the primary problem confronting the Southern Alliance.

At the start of 1890 the Southern Alliance was less concerned with creating a political party and more focused on continuing its growth as an organization. Throughout 1890, the farmer association intensified its national recruiting campaign. Alliance leaders primarily relied on two methods crucial to the fulfillment of their goals. First, they used the pages of *The National Economist* to centralize information about their organization. Based in Washington D.C., the newspaper had access to the latest news from Capitol Hill. Through the *Economist* agrarian reformers could read political news written by an “unbiased” advocate of the organization, Charles Macune. Thanks to his work as a major leader and thinker within the Southern Alliance, Macune possessed great authority as a source of information and he knew how to keep a large association unified and organized. These talents became useful as Macune edited the *Economist* to include articles written by Alliance-friendly newspapers from the

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<sup>2</sup> Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk*, 268-69.

Midwest, Plains, South, Northwest, and Northeast. As editor of the official newspaper of the Southern Alliance, this was an important task. Macune, and his assistants, decided what was published and was not published. In effect, Macune defined what the Alliance stood for and stood against in the pages of *The National Economist*. The newspaper, with a weekly circulation of 100,000, provided readers with news from Washington D.C., while also publishing Alliance information from various American locales. Through this exchange of local and national news, the editor hoped readers would recognize the similar problems that plagued working Americans. From this realization, Macune hoped farmers and laborers would come together to solve their problems. He promoted the Alliance as the vehicle to achieve results. Essentially, Macune wanted to serve as the director at a crossroads of information, who helped unite workers who lived across the country. The pages of *The National Economist* served as the primary source of information for Alliance followers, and, therefore, the newspaper became a major instrument in promoting expansion to members and potential members of the agrarian group.<sup>3</sup>

A second tool in the Alliance arsenal came in a more personal form. In an era when many Americans experienced rural isolation, when books and newspapers might be sparse, and oratory was a highly valued talent, public speakers possessed the great potential to excite and inspire rural and small town people. From its origins the Alliances relied on recruiters and lecturers to establish local chapters. These efforts continued and multiplied as the farm organization continued to grow in the years after the 1889 national convention. When members chose Leonidas Polk over Charles Macune as president of the order, the Alliance gained a very able orator. As *Raleigh News and Observer* editor Josephus Daniels later recalled, “It was the day of the personal equation, and when farmers were thrilled by Colonel Polk’s eloquence they

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 37.

wished to read his paper. The spoken word was more effective than the printed page.” Polk was free from the constraints imposed on Macune, who served as editor of the official newspaper of the Southern Alliance and one of its chief Congressional lobbyists. In short, unlike Macune, Polk was a capable orator who could devote more time to traveling the country, speaking with audiences, recruiting members, and building the bonds necessary to achieve a truly national farm association.<sup>4</sup>

Macune and Polk became the two major advocates of the national expansion of the Southern Alliance. Under their direction the Alliance sought to gain new members with an emphasis on reform policies and the promotion of a common identity that they hoped would unify the majority of Americans. While historians have written extensively about Alliance and Populist policies, the Alliance and Populist vision of American national identity has been underappreciated and underestimated.<sup>5</sup> The contours and content of that identity are crucial to any understanding of who agrarian reformers thought they were and what they believed America was all about. Any understanding of the agrarian movement is incomplete without an exploration of all agrarian appeals to the American public. During the three years after the 1889 St. Louis convention the agrarian organization aggressively spread its message across the country through the use of speakers and a growing newspaper network. This chapter will focus on Polk and his efforts to promote the Southern Alliance and its conception of an American

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<sup>4</sup> *Raleigh News and Observer*, July 29, 1926, in Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk*, 210. The difference between speeches by Macune and Polk is clear. While Macune demonstrated a great depth of thought concerning policy implications, Polk focused on conveying his message through the use of stories and humor. See Macune in *The National Economist*, December 14, 1889 and Polk in the *Winfield (KS) Courier*, July 10, 1890.

<sup>5</sup> John D. Hicks, *Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1931); Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956); Robert McMath, *American Populism: A Social History 1877-1898* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1992); Matthew Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists: Farmer-Labor Insurgency in the Late-Nineteenth-Century South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007); Postel, *The Populist Vision*; Lawrence Goodwyn and Peter H. Argersinger have done the most to emphasize this identity. See Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Argersinger, *Populism and Politics: William Alfred Peffer and the People's Party* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1974).

national identity. Chapter 4 will touch on the application of the Alliance American identity during the political campaigns of 1890.

Sectional reconciliation became a major theme in Southern Alliance newspapers and speeches during the national expansion of the agrarian order. The Alliance viewed sectional animosity as a real impediment to their success. Polk was particularly well disposed to promote reconciliation as he traveled throughout the nation as Farmers' Alliance president. Through his pre-war politics, his combat experience, and his editing of a Reconstruction-era newspaper, Polk demonstrated moderation and a desire to work for the good of the nation. During his speaking tours of the 1890s, the agrarian leader drew upon these experiences as he promoted the Alliance national identity.

Before the Civil War, Polk was active in North Carolina politics as a member of the Whig Party. Despite the decline of the national party, Whigs experienced a revival in the Old North State where they promoted internal improvements and Unionism against secession and wasteful spending in the late 1850s. Polk attended an 1859 Whig rally that criticized the Democratic Party for promoting sectionalism and unnecessarily encouraging confrontation. They urged "every conservative man in the Union" to reject partisanship to "defeat this sectional and slavery agitating party, and to unite himself to the great national party—the National Whig party." In contrast, the Whigs favored the "good of the whole people," to "restore peace" and "cherish a cordial, habitual, and immovable attachment to the Union." The Whigs resolved to oppose "any attempt to alienate any portion of country from the rest" and stated that they were "tired and sick of the useless agitation of the slavery question." Borrowing from Henry Clay during an earlier era of sectional discord, North Carolina Whigs summarized their position

proclaiming, “we are determined to know no geographical parties, no sectional distinctions, no North, no South, no East, no West—but our country—our whole country.”<sup>6</sup>

Such political rhetoric could be dismissed as campaign posturing, yet the words had resonance for Polk. The North Carolinian used nearly identical language as a leader in the agrarian movement of the 1880s and 1890s. Particular echoes could be found in his rejection of sectionalism as an enemy to the American people, his use of the phrase “No North, No South,” and his promotion of Union and nation over any regional identity. Polk’s involvement in the Whig Party also demonstrates that he was not an avid Democrat throughout his life. In his younger years he admired Henry Clay far more than Andrew Jackson. Although he became an active supporter of the Democratic Party during and after Reconstruction, he was not a lifetime loyalist. As members of the Farmers’ Alliance flirted with the formation of a third party in the early 1890s, Polk could consider breaking ties with the Democrats more easily than many white Southerners. He also did not emphasize his Southern identity at the expense of his American identity and he demonstrated a willingness to work with regional outsiders.<sup>7</sup>

Polk put his Unionist and unifying political beliefs into practice in 1860. When secession increasingly became the major political issue in the 1860 elections, he continued to support Union and made the position his central campaign piece. At the age of twenty-three, he won election to the North Carolina House of Commons where he served from 1860-1861. Polk joined other Whigs in asking voters to oppose secession during the state’s secession convention, which they did in February 1861. When Confederates fired on Fort Sumter and President Lincoln called for troops from all states, Polk and most Whigs felt there was no further room for compromise. Throughout the secession crisis of 1860-61, he claimed to consistently oppose

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<sup>6</sup> Wadesboro, *North Carolina Argus*, April 14, 1859, in Noblin, *Leonidas Lafayette Polk*, 41.

<sup>7</sup> Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk*, 40-41.



“Lincoln’s fanatical horde.” Polk described himself as a compromiser stating, “I was then a Union man, exerting all my power to aid in averting civil war, and continued to labor untiringly until the last hope was extinguished.” He said “*I am now for resistance to the bitter end.*”<sup>8</sup>

As North Carolina organized for war, Polk won election as colonel in his home county militia. Friends and supporters commonly referred to him as Colonel Polk the rest of his life. Although he never reached the position of colonel in the Confederate Army, Polk’s combat experience in the Civil War further solidified his military credentials and gave his reconciliationist testimonials added authority in the 1890s. Rising to the rank of lieutenant, he fought in several small battles in North Carolina and Virginia, and in bigger clashes such as Seven Days’, Malvern Hill, and Gettysburg.

Polk’s wartime service was not without controversy. He was twice court-martialed for relatively minor offenses that seemed to involve personal disagreements with his commanding officers. He was acquitted at both trials and received ample support from his fellow soldiers. Throughout the war Polk’s wife, Sallie, reported rumors circulating in Anson County that Polk fled from combat. Using his court martials as proof over two decades later, Farmers’ Alliance opponents repeatedly accused the North Carolinian of cowardice during battle. As he told his wife at the time and as Alliance president, Polk claimed that the reports came from “*parlor warriors*” who employed substitutes and stayed behind to seek military contracts during the war. In his speeches as Alliance president, Polk consistently associated “*parlor warriors*” with provoking feelings of sectional hatred. Overall, Polk did not relish his time as soldier, which may have limited the amount of nostalgia in his later recollections of the war.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 40-47; *North Carolina Argus*, April 25, 1861 (quote), in Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk*, 47.

<sup>9</sup> Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk*, 49-72, quote on 68.

After the Civil War Polk returned home to a farm that was devastated. Most crops were seized and slaves departed, or were “taken,” with Union troops as Sherman March’s tore through North Carolina in March 1865. Over the next eight years Polk worked with his family to restore the farm to prosperity. He was elected to represent his home county at the state constitutional convention called by President Andrew Johnson during 1865-1866. At the convention delegates took an oath to the United States, unanimously repealed the secession ordinance, overwhelmingly abolished slavery, and repudiated the Confederate state debt. Although he would become a harsh critic of Radical Reconstruction, Polk’s participation in the 1865-1866 convention showed his consistent moderation in the politics of his times. As an opponent of secession until April 1861, a war-weary soldier, and an advocate of restoring North Carolina to the Union as quickly as possible, he avoided taking positions of the “unreconstructed rebel.” While others fled the country, mourned the passing of the Confederacy, celebrated the Lost Cause, or took up arms against Reconstruction supporters, Polk struck a more moderate path that resembled his later stance as an agrarian leader. He promoted his dissatisfaction with government policies in newspaper editorials and public speeches. Polk contrasted his views, which he associated with honesty, justice, reconciliation, and nationalism, with the bitter divisive tactics of sectionalism and dishonesty.<sup>10</sup>

Despite his post-war moderation, the Colonel made his opposition to Congressional Reconstruction clear. Polk thought many laws contained an unhealthy amount of malice that made reunion of the North and South more difficult.<sup>11</sup> He also made distinctions between the two major political parties during the election of 1876. Polk used his North Carolina newspaper,

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<sup>10</sup> Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk*, 73-76. For more on the unrepentant acts of some former Confederates see Gaines Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), especially 11-21.

<sup>11</sup> See *Polkton*, (NC) *Ansonian*, June 4, 1874, September 20, 1876.

the *Ansonian*, to criticize the state Republican Party's campaign for "pandering to the worst passions of the ignorant, and by an unceasing effort to keep alive the bitter memories of the war. No means were spared to inflame the jealousies, bitterness, and hatred between races and sections." Repeating the contrast made between North Carolina Whigs and Democrats in 1859, Polk asserted that Democrats in 1876 nobly "plead for reconciliation, peace, and a fraternal Union." He concluded, claiming, "Let us hope that the 'bloody shirt' is furled forever." The North Carolinian juxtaposed those who stood for "ignorance," "corruption," and the "'bloody shirt'" with those who stood for "reconciliation" and clean government based on "the higher and nobler instincts of true manhood." Alliance President Polk used similar language and comparisons during his national speaking tours of 1890-1892. Although his criticisms in later years failed to single out the Republican Party, reconciliation, reform, nobility and manhood remained cherished ideals for Polk.<sup>12</sup>

Polk remained calm when the nation stood on the brink of civil war during the controversial presidential election of 1876. While Democrat Samuel Tilden won the popular vote, the electoral votes from Louisiana, Florida, and South Carolina were disputed thanks to widespread intimidation and fraud. What appeared to Polk and many other white Southerners as a clear Democratic victory now became an intense dispute. As Congress debated a resolution to the election results, many southern and northern newspapers discussed the formation of armed militias to support their candidate. Amidst this atmosphere, Polk chose a tone of moderation. Rather than stoke the burning fires of sectional animosity, he advised readers to "Keep Cool." He suggested everyone remain calm and refrain from rash speech or action. The *Ansonian* editor

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<sup>12</sup> Polkton, (NC) *Ansonian*, November 15, 1876. For more on Polk's racial attitudes and racial reconciliation, see Chapter 4.

believed that Tilden was fairly elected and he would become president, declaring “keep cool and await with patience and confidence, that vindication of right, which is in store for us.”<sup>13</sup>

When an independent committee decided that Republican Rutherford B. Hayes was the victor Polk maintained a moderate and nationalist stance, although it was peppered with frustration. The Colonel called the events leading to Hayes’ election, “the most palpable and outrageous fraud, ever perpetrated on a free people.” He also declared if Hayes ignored the “fanatical demagogues of his party,” and embraced policies “with a coloring of patriotic manliness, the South should be the first to recognize it.” The editor elaborated on the point by stating “should his course prove, that he is desirous of restoring peace, fraternity and prosperity to the country, the Democratic party,” should support the new president. Distancing himself from Southern nationalism, Polk said, “This country, whether wisely or wickedly ruled, is OUR country—this government whether good or bad, is OUR government.” Although over a million white men voted against Hayes, Polk said that they should share their opinions with the President to create a better country, “if he really desires to see the wounds of the past healed.”<sup>14</sup>

In Polk’s account white Southerners could keep Hayes accountable and ensure that the country forgot the divisiveness of sectionalism and the Civil War. He assumed that southern whites stood for fairness and supported forgetting the bitterness of the Civil War, despite the abundance of violence in the South. The Colonel hoped that Hayes would buck Republican patterns of vindictiveness and authoritarianism to move closer to the position of fairness and justice embodied in the majority of the nation’s white population. Together he hoped white Americans and Hayes could achieve peace and prosperity. Although condemnatory, Polk favored a conditional reconciliation with the Republican administration in the promotion of

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, November 29, 1876. For more on the 1876 electoral crisis see C. Vann Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1951).

<sup>14</sup> *Polkton, (NC) Ansonian*, March 14, 1877.

peace and prosperity. At no time during the electoral dispute did Polk advocate armed resistance, secession, or the outright rejection of federal authority.

In the 1870s and 1880s North Carolina politics moved away from the intense competition of Reconstruction. Polk worked to promote economic diversification, agricultural knowledge, and prosperity for his home state. As he rose to the highest levels of leadership in the Southern Alliance a decade later, Polk returned to the theme of reconciliation. His prior experiences showed that he sought out a moderate and reconciling position. As an opponent to secession until April 1861 and as a soldier who did not relish his wartime years, he did not extensively celebrate the Lost Cause after 1865.<sup>15</sup> He was elected to the 1865 North Carolina Constitutional Convention where he took the loyalty oath to the United States. There, the delegates ratified the Thirteenth Amendment and repealed the secession ordinance. Polk did not leave the country after the war, nor did he renounce the U.S. government. Amidst the Reconstruction era, he opposed the Republican Party and Reconstruction laws, but he did not advocate violence to oppose the state or federal governments. During the tense election of 1876, he urged readers to stay calm and respect the outcome, unlike many northern and southern newspaper editors. Cumulatively, Polk established a moderate record favoring unity and nationalism, which gave his reconciliation efforts authenticity in the 1890s.

Polk demonstrated his commitment to reconciliation and other aspects of the Alliance agenda during a speech delivered in 1890. On July 4, he arrived in Winfield, Kansas, tired from travel and ill with a cold. The North Carolinian came to the Cowley County town with a raspy voice worn from multiple speaking engagements throughout the Midwest. Halfway through his

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<sup>15</sup> As his speech in Winfield, Kansas demonstrates, Polk did not completely ignore recollections of the Confederacy. While serving as editor of the *Ansonian* in the 1870s he published reminiscences of his regiment and discussed the sad neglect of Confederate graves. See the April 5, 1876 edition. Polk also appeared at monument unveiling to honor North Carolina Confederate soldiers. See Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk*, 76.

first year as president of the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union, he worked hard to maintain the steady growth of the organization. A crowd of six thousand assembled to hear what the Alliance president offered to struggling farmers. After several years of abnormally high rainfall and healthy grain prices, many Kansans fell on hard times after a series of droughts. Cowley County was located in the part of the state that experienced the most extreme effects of the drought. Falling grain prices also hit Kansans very hard during 1889 and 1890. Many farmers were lured to the state during the previous decade by land speculators and railroad companies who strenuously promoted the fertile and available land. After several years of high profits during the mid-1880s, thousands of farmers now sank deep into debt. High railroad freight rates and an unresponsive state government further contributed to the frustration felt throughout the state. In response, thousands of Kansas farmers rapidly flocked to the Southern Alliance, and other agrarian organizations. On the day commemorating the independence and birth of the United States the inhabitants of Cowley County, Kansas sought remedies to their increasing problems. Polk obliged his audience and conveyed a message of hope for the birth of an improved nation.<sup>16</sup>

Standing before the assembled crowd at Winfield, Kansas, Polk was outsider in many ways. The Confederate veteran and North Carolinian spoke in the state that was created out of the conflict over the expansion of slavery and where Union veterans had held the highest political offices. He also led a Farmers' Alliance, dominated by Southerners that absorbed Kansans into its organization. Working with these differences in mind, Polk tried to put the audience at ease by surrounding himself with allies and complementing Kansans.

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<sup>16</sup> Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk*, 3; Gene O. Clanton, *Kansas Populism: Ideas and Men* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1969), 19-20, 28-32.

Before speaking to the crowd, Polk conveyed his stance as a unifier and reconciliationist. The southern-born Alliance president joined Northerners in a celebration of U.S. independence on the Fourth of July. Ralph Beaumont, a leader of the Knights of Labor, and Benjamin Clover, Southern Alliance leader in Kansas and vice president of the national organization, greeted Polk as he arrived at the rail station. The presence of Beaumont communicated the growing unity between the largest agrarian organization in the nation and the largest industrial labor union. Clover acted as a host for Polk. As vice president in the Southern Alliance, he acted as living example of the non-sectional nature of the growing farmers' association. Like Polk, Clover was a vocal critic of sectionalism. In his speech Polk aimed to convince Kansans of his earnest allegiance to reconciliation and promoting economic improvements for farmers.<sup>17</sup>

Polk began his speech by complementing the people of Kansas for the physical beauty of their state and "Your indomitable pluck and invincible manhood and love for the equal rights of men." The Alliance leader said he traveled all over the country and he felt that "on my first trip to the great West I see many evidences of skill, industry, and enterprise." Polk saw no reason why Kansans should not be prosperous. He referenced the "opulence and wealth" associated with cities, but claimed they did not compare to the superiority of rural life. At the heart of what was most admirable in the American countryside, the speaker identified the "Christian family, -- the patriotic father, the godly mother surrounded by their helpful, bright and happy boys and girls." Polk relished to "listen to their words of wisdom gained by their conservative course in life; and look at that type of Christian manhood and womanhood illustrated in that home." Upon observation of farm families he came to realize "it is then that I forget for the time being, all this magnificence of wealth and show of power I say in my heart, after all, the great power and

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<sup>17</sup> Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk*, 3-5.

strength of this country rests upon the perpetuity of this humble Christian home of its farmers.’  
(Great Applause.)”<sup>18</sup>

With his statements Polk described the characteristics of the ideal American family. First, they lived away from the “opulence and wealth” of cities in a “humble Christian home.” While he acknowledged some positive aspects of city life, the speaker suggested that urban areas were more prone than the countryside to lead humans away from Christian might and simplicity. Second, the “patriotic father” led the family and served as the public representative of his family. When the nation called, the father volunteered. In this role fathers should defend the wife and children from outside threats, relying upon “Christian manhood.” Third, the “godly mother” stood as the moral force in the family, setting the tone for the household. Mothers taught children right from wrong and served as models of behavior. Fourth, children showed obedience to solid parental instruction as active participants in farm labor who acquired work and educational skills through diligent study of their mother and father. The result was “happy boys and girls” who perpetuated the virtues of farm life to the next generation. In the eyes of the Alliance president these cumulative characteristics made family farms the bedrock American institution and the backbone of the nation. If farmers were the middle-class “bulwark” of America, agrarian families represented the source of middle-class strength. Essentially, farm families were real Americans, and, therefore, they deserved the utmost respect and attention from the nation. For the good of the nation, farmers needed to organize and vocalize their concerns.

Polk launched into autobiography to further persuade his audience of the merits of friendship with the Alliance and the South. Through the communication of personal tales, the North Carolinian hoped to build trust with Kansans. Although he did not shy from noting

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<sup>18</sup> *Winfield (KS) Courier*, July 10, 1890.



aspects of his life that would have been foreign to most of the audience, Polk stressed many stories that were common to farm life to show that he could personally relate to them. If Kansans could recognize these connections with Polk, they could see that he was similar to them and trustworthy. Since Polk presented his story within the context of the South, he suggested that he was a typical Southerner. The Alliance president inferred that if Kansans could trust a Southerner like Polk, they could trust others from his native region. More generally, he hoped to prove that Southerners and Northerners could reconcile whatever differences remained from the divisive past by focusing on their shared experiences.

The Alliance speaker began his autobiographical account by stating that he was raised on an average farm where a tough but fair father taught the value of hard work. He then noted “my only associates of my childhood hours, and they were the sweetest of my life, was the old black mammy and my little colored playmates. I did have good society. I had the best mother God ever gave to any man, except your mother.” (Laughter).” The North Carolinian noted his Confederate service and quickly moved onto describing the difficulties he confronted after the Civil War. He returned home to find destruction on his farmstead.

Through this autobiographical story Polk hoped to endear himself to the audience. He discussed aspects of his life that were similar to the experiences of the crowd. First, as a child on a “plain farm,” Polk suggested he was not the product of a privileged upbringing. Second, like most of his audience he grew up on a farm rather than in a city. A third similarity lay in the depiction of his father as “an old fogy.” While stern and old fashioned, Polk’s father taught him hard work and honesty. The Alliance leader expressed gratitude to his father for these lessons,

for they greatly assisted him in times of tribulation. When faced with rebuilding his farm after the Civil War Polk felt that he possessed the necessary values and mindset to be successful.<sup>19</sup>

The Alliance speaker's post-Civil War experiences provided a fourth example he used to develop bonds with the Kansas audience. Polk told the crowd that his wife, Sarah, bravely confronted the hardships of life after the Civil War. Reared in the "true southern style," Sarah knew little of manual labor before the war. Instead, she enjoyed a leisurely life of playing musical instruments. The Civil War altered the circumstances for Sarah Polk. When faced with the reality of a ruined farm, Sarah forfeited her standing as a privileged southern belle and engaged in manual labor to help the family. Colonel Polk claimed that she "rolled up her sleeves and slapped those little hands into the face of the world and said 'I for one will accept the situation.' (Applause)."

In the process of transforming from a prewar dainty southern belle into a hardworking woman, Leonidas depicted Sarah as a model American laborer. At least temporarily, she forfeited the privileges of a white southern lady and transformed into a woman ready to do whatever necessary to ensure the survival of her family. Sarah's actions represented a hardworking spirit and sense of self-sacrifice that many Americans cherished in the late nineteenth century and today. Polk placed himself into this narrative when he informed the Kansas crowd that if he did not join his wife in hard work "I would not have been worthy of the name of man." Like his wife, Leonidas also depicted himself as a hard worker. Unlike his wife, he placed his story into a gendered context rather than a class context. Raised on a "plain farm," Polk already knew hard work, unlike Sarah. Since he did not avoid hard work, and the daunting task of reconstructing the Polk homestead in the aftermath of Confederate defeat, the Colonel

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<sup>19</sup> *Winfield (KS) Courier*, July 10, 1890.

portrayed his actions as masculine and morally just. The Alliance leader finished his personal revelations noting that he “refused to hold any political office since the war.” Polk suggested that he preferred to work hard on improving life for farmers, rather than practice politics.<sup>20</sup>

Kansans could relate to this image of struggle and self-sacrifice. The founding of the state coincided with the violence and social disruption of Bleeding Kansas. During the Civil War parts of Kansas experienced brutal guerilla warfare. Both periods overlapped to create great ruin and uncertainty for settlers of the Sunflower state. For those who moved to Kansas after the Civil War, other memories could be recalled. While the postwar years brought improved economic times, four straight years of declining agricultural prices and drought devastated the land in 1890. Kansans also faced harsh weather and the occasional grasshopper plague. Polk’s tale of hardship after the Civil War, therefore, sounded familiar to male and female Kansans who struggled to profit and subsist from their farms. A description of the whole family working hard together to rebuild and thrive made sense to the crowd. The audience could also admire the transformation of Sarah Polk from privileged lady to female worker. Many Kansas women participated thoroughly in farm labor. They were not used to leisure. More respect would be assigned to a woman who gave up niceties for the benefit of the family.

The story also served to distance the Polks from antebellum stereotypes of lazy white Southerners and from the image of elite white southern planters who relied solely on African-American labor for their wealth. Since Polk and the Alliance blamed Wall Street speculators and middlemen for taking money from those who worked to make products of wealth, he wished to reject association with slothfulness and exploitation. Instead the Alliance leader suggested that

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<sup>20</sup> Margaret Mitchell wrote about a similar transformation of white southern ladies into members of the American middle class in *Gone With the Wind*. For more on the connections between Mitchell and the acceptance of southern values in America, see Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From the Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970; Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 258-68.

idleness and the avoidance of hardship were marks of cowardice and un-American. He identified his family with courage in the face of a challenge, pride in hard work, and the production of tangible objects of value for sale. The North Carolinian assumed that Kansas farmers agreed with the Polks' conduct.<sup>21</sup>

Although the crowd could identify with much of Polk's autobiography, his story contained at least one foreign element. He spoke fondly of his early years spent exclusively with African Americans as the "only associates of my childhood hours." The speaker did not mention that "the old black mammy and my little colored playmates" were slaves, but the audience may have deduced the point. As a middle-aged Southerner, thirty-five years removed from slavery, telling tales of a childhood spent with slaves would not surprise the Kansas listeners. Unknown to the crowd, Polk inherited seven slaves from his parents upon their deaths in 1852 valued at \$3,100. He also inherited 353 acres valued at \$1,600. In 1860 he owned thirteen slaves valued at \$17,000. Lest the crowd grow uncomfortable with the allusion to African-American slavery, the North Carolinian labeled his early years with black slaves "the sweetest of my life." Speaking on the Fourth of July holiday and in a state that had a bloody history because of the issue of slavery, Polk carefully chose his words. When the Alliance president said, "I did have good society. I had the best mother God ever gave to any man, except your mother.' (Laughter)," he distanced himself from any taint brought about by frequent association with slaves. He received proper "society" from his mother, not his "old black mammy" or "little black playmates." The association of mammy and African-American friends with his early years suggested that they were symbols of a youth full of carefree times and childish fun. He asserted

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<sup>21</sup> Christine Stansell, "Women on the Great Plains 1865-1890," *Women's Studies* 4 (1976): 87-98; Glenna Riley, *A Place to Grow: Women and the American West* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1992); William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (New York: G. Braziller, 1961); James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 25-26.

that African Americans did not have a lasting impact on the development of his personality. Motherly “society” and fatherly tough love endured beyond youth to make Polk into the man he became.<sup>22</sup>

Despite efforts to note similarities between his early years and those of the Kansas audience, Polk’s life experiences stood in distinction from that of most Kansans. Most Kansans in 1890 did not grow up with slaves and Sunflower state defined its history in opposition to the “peculiar institution.” During the years of Bleeding Kansas pro-slavery and anti-slavery factions engaged in fierce violence to determine the presence of slavery in the territory. When the state virtually outlawed slavery by rejecting the Lecompton Constitution in 1858, Kansas became identified with free states. As Brent Campney contends, the violence surrounding slavery led Kansans to identify the state as a land that “had been born of the struggle for freedom for all people and baptized with the blood of abolitionists dedicated to the destruction of slavery.” During the Civil War Kansas contributed large numbers of soldiers to the Union, including the first African-American regiment. The state also had the highest proportion of Union casualties in the nation. In the years after the Civil War, Kansans used this history to promote an image of the state as staunchly loyal to racial equality, freedom, and Union. As the *Topeka Daily Capital* wrote, “Kansas fought, bled and died for the negro.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Winfield (KS) Courier*, July 10, 1890; Slave Schedules on Ancestry.com. 1860 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2009. Images reproduced by FamilySearch. Polk’s only siblings were three much older half-brothers. He therefore grew up primarily around the family’s slaves and his parents. Little other evidence survives beyond this speech to chronicle Polk’s childhood years. See Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk*, 28-29.

<sup>23</sup> *Topeka Daily Capital* July 31, 1909 in Brent M.S. Campney, “‘This is Not Dixie’: The ‘Imagined South,’ the Kansas ‘Free State’ Narrative, and the Rhetoric of Racist Violence,” *Southern Spaces* (September 6, 2007), <http://www.southernspaces.org/2007/not-dixie-imagined-south-kansas-free-state-narrative-and-rhetoric-racist-violence#section2> (accessed April 11, 2013); Thomas C. Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas, 1865-1915: A Social History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 18; Scott G. McNall, *The Road to Rebellion: Class Formation and Kansas Populism, 1865-1900* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 83; Clanton, *Kansas Populism*, 81.

Largely because of this image Kansas became the destination for at least ten thousand southern African Americans during the late 1870s and early 1880s. These migrants, or Exodusters, came to the sunflower state to escape southern oppression and to pursue economic prosperity and freedom. Although some Kansas towns prohibited African-American settlement through the passage of ordinance or threatened use of violence, several towns provided assistance to the migrants. Overall the migrations served to reinforce the association of the state with racial equality and pride in American freedom. The migration years and subsequent decades revealed some ugly truths about racial attitudes in Kansas. According to Brent Campney, Kansas experienced at least 603 separate incidents of racial violence between 1865 and 1915. These events ranged from brawls to lynchings, burnings, and body mutilations. Although attitudes varied throughout the state, Kansas, like the rest of the nation, and especially the South, wrestled with racial strife in the late nineteenth century. Polk's passing reference to African Americans and black slavery, therefore, may not have caused much alarm among the Cowley County crowd.<sup>24</sup>

While some Kansans realized that Polk alluded to African-American slaves, others in the audience may not have made the connection. Since Polk wanted to build trust with Kansans by showing what they had in common with white Southerners, he did not directly identify “mammy” and his “little colored playmates” as family slaves. Through the avoidance of

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<sup>24</sup> On the reception of the Exodusters see Craig Miner, *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 151-55. For racial violence in Kansas see Campney, ““This is Not Dixie.”” While Kansans promoted their adherence to Unionism in the decades after the Civil War, they did not advance the cause of racial equality. For anti-black sentiment during the territorial era of the state see Eugene H. Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967), 98-122. In 1867, voters rejected suffrage rights for African Americans and women. See in Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Perennial Classics, 1988), 315. For Kansas and public school segregation after the Civil War see Davison M. Douglas, *Jim Crow Moves North: The Battle over Northern School Segregation, 1865-1954* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 67, 78-79, 87.

explicitly speaking about slavery Polk reduced the potential for alienating his midwestern audience.

Rather than focus on these differences, Polk stressed what he shared in common with Kansans. He launched into the poor state of American agriculture in 1890. Despite the availability of fertile land, the means to ship a crop to market, and the desire to succeed, American agriculture was in a period of decline that started in 1865. In contrast, Polk said the farmer “sees that everything else is prosperous while he alone is at a standstill, and he would not be worthy his heritage if he did not seek to know the reason for this great discrimination.” The Alliance president feared the widening disparity of wealth and the decline of the middle class. He considered farmers part of the “middle class,” which “has been the great source of strength; they have been the bulwark of this country.” Polk said, “They have fought the battles, and have preserved our free institutions. I want to see the middle class rise up.” He thought improvements possible with encouragement from the Alliance. The agrarian leader dismissed ideas that overproduction was the source of farmer difficulties, since he encountered hungry citizens on the streets of Washington D.C. Instead, he blamed Wall Street and other opponents of reform for agrarian struggles.

Polk elaborated on the opponents of agrarian reform by criticizing Wall Street servants and partisan politicians. He claimed that these dishonest politicians used issues such as the tariff and sectionalism to keep Americans divided, while the rich grew richer and the common American grew poorer. The Alliance president encouraged all Americans to look beyond partisan emotions where they would find “arrayed on the one side the great magnates of the country, and Wall street brokers, and the Plutocratic power, and on the other you will see the people.” He criticized Congress for failing to act to help find a remedy for struggling farmers

because they feared Wall Street instead of “the people.” He suggested that Kansans replace their congressional representatives if they failed to act on the farmer’s behalf.

Polk knew an ideal substitute for partisan politicians and Wall Street pawns. The agrarian spokesman called for men of honesty to cleanse the American government. He asked the audience, “tell me who has a better right in America to go into politics than the farmers?” Polk confessed his sin of following partisanship in the past, but he pledged never to vote for a candidate who “is not a true and loyal friend of my people. (Applause.) And if that be political treason, make the most of it, and turn up your noses.” Here, Polk suggested that Americans should vote their consciences, not their party. While the rhetoric of such a claim was not radical, in 1890 the reality of voting against the Democrats in the South and the Republicans in the North was fairly radical. As the Populist Party soon discovered in Kansas, opposing the regionally dominant political party drew stiff criticism from many politicians and journalists. Southerners experienced identical opposition when they moved toward the Populists in 1892. He then cited George Washington who had warned the nation about the crippling effects of “party spirit.” The reference to a Founding Father of the United States served to reinforce Polk’s emphasis on commonality in an effort to build a national agrarian movement.

Since Polk considered farmers to be better public servants than partisan politicians and because they represented the “strength” and “bulwark” of the nation, he encouraged them to unify and reform the political system and economy. He told the crowd that every group of economic actors organized, except agrarians. Without unity, Polk stated that the farmer “was an open prey to every other interest.” Too many agrarians avoided collective action because they operated under the assumption that “I have been brought up under that law of God which says I must earn my bread by the sweat of my face,” Polk rejected excessive individualism by



paraphrased another Biblical verse claiming “No man liveth to himself alone.” The agrarian leader utilized the Bible as an authoritative source to appeal to Kansas farmers who may have been skeptical of the Southern Alliance and agrarian organizing in general.

The Alliance president was also careful to show his respect for individualism, a traditional value important to Americans and farmers. He emphasized that there were limits to Alliance support for collective action. Prior to initiation, Polk stated that all Alliance members were told that membership in the farm group would not “interfere with your freedom of political or religious views.” Rather than force Alliance members to follow all organizational views Polk said “No, Sir, we take him by the hand and say you are a freeman.” Polk carefully navigated a middle ground between collective action and independence. Contrary to partisan politicians, he described Alliance leaders as respectful of individual autonomy and independence.

The Alliance leader continued to juxtapose his organization with those Americans who economically and emotionally exploited the average citizen. Polk next described the use of sectionalism as a barricade to relief for struggling American farmers. He noted

Some people have stirred up sectional feeling and have kept us apart for twenty-five years. I tell you that I believe in my heart of hearts that the man, north or south, who urged on the war, I care not what his name may be, or what position he may hold; that man who helped to light the flame of war and when it was ablaze all around the horizon, fired your minds and sent you to the front and then skulked out of it himself. And who in 1865 found out that we had a war, got mad and has been mad ever since. That man who was invisible in war and invincible in peace. The man who never smelt gun powder or heard a minnie ball. The man who has to use the sacred dust of the grave and has scattered it to the winds, and tried to work upon our passions. The man who has waived the bloody shirt. The man who has taught his children the poisonous doctrine of hate, I say, and I have declared it before, I believe him to be the worst of our enemies on the face of the earth. (Applause.)<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The Polk quotes in the six paragraphs above come from the *Winfield (KS) Courier*, July 10, 1890.

The Alliance president indicated that the Southerners and Northerners most in favor of war pushed others into conflict by appealing to “sectional feeling,” “passions,” and “fired your minds.” Polk suggested that these war fanatics appealed to emotion and angry rhetoric rather than logic and reason. Once the supporters of war “helped to light the flame of war,” they “skulked out” of service, like cowards. The Confederate veteran attacked the legitimacy of those who promoted sectionalism, declaring that they “never smelt gun powder or heard a minnie ball.” Although they did not know what it was like to fight or to see their comrades perish in battle, the advocates of sectionalism used the dead to perpetrate division by waving the “bloody shirt.” Instead of allowing the dead to lie in peace, the perpetrators of bitterness “used the sacred dust of the grave” carelessly and taught anger to the next generation. Polk clearly disliked Civil War memories that conveyed resentment and lingering divisiveness. He connected the continuation of these memories to repulsive individuals who promoted sectionalism and anti-patriotism. The Alliance president preferred to forget the controversies of the war and convey the redemptive aspects of forgiveness between former enemies.

While Polk said that Northerners and Southerners encouraged sectionalism, his reference to the term “waving the bloody shirt,” reveals a subtext of blame. The slogan originated in the divisive Reconstruction years during Massachusetts Republican Senator Benjamin Butler’s anti-Ku Klux Klan speech made before Congress. During the address Butler supposedly held up a bloody shirt to demonstrate the terror of the Ku Klux Klan against democratically elected and Republican-controlled southern state governments. Although there is no record of Butler showing any bloody shirt during his speech, opponents of Reconstruction used the fictional event to discredit Republican references to violence in the South. “Waving the bloody shirt” came to mean overly dramatic, and probably fabricated, stories concocted by Republicans that were told

for political gain. Through this association the term also inferred that those who “waved the bloody shirt,” encouraged continued bitterness and hatred between the North and South.

Whether Polk meant to blame Republicans or not, the “bloody shirt” phrase was a direct attack on the sincerity of the Grand Old Party and its primarily Northern supporters. In effect, he also dismissed bitterness as an authentic emotion felt by Northerners those who lost friends and family on Civil War battlefields.<sup>26</sup>

“Waving the bloody shirt” also became a slogan to encourage Americans to reconcile after the Civil War. Reconstruction opponents associated the “bloody shirt” with bitterness, anger, and hatred. They also assumed that animosity toward the South was artificial and merely a political ploy used by Republicans who brought up old and painful memories. Under this line of criticism, Republicans wanted voters to remember which major party supported the Union and opposed secession and which party continued to harbor those who showed disloyalty to the U.S. government. Reconciliationists, such as newspaperman Horace Greeley, offered an alternative of forgiveness, mutual respect, and unity. After all, they contended, most Northern soldiers fought to save the Union by preventing southern secession and destruction of the republic. During the 1870s, reconciliationists argued that the best way to honor soldiers who gave their lives for the Union cause was to reunite with the formerly rebellious South. The dead wanted

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<sup>26</sup> Stephen Budiansky researched the history of the “bloody shirt” myth and explains why it became a popular phrase. Among the facts found in the myth are the beating of a white northern school superintendent, Allen P. Huggins, in 1871. Because he oversaw the biracial public school system in Monroe County, Mississippi, Klansmen asked Huggins to leave the county. When the superintendent refused, he was beaten unconscious. In 1871 Huggins testified before Congress on Klan violence in the South as part of a wider congressional effort to chronicle and eliminate violence against southern Reconstruction governments. Butler cited Huggins’s beating as one of many in the South and the Congressman called for the use of federal troops to destroy the Klan. Federal troops were eventually used with modest results. Because of Butler’s prior notoriety among white Southerners as Union commander of occupied New Orleans during the Civil War, he was the ideal figure for anti-Reconstruction adherents to associate with political pandering and dishonor. For more see Stephen Budiansky, *The Bloody Shirt: Terror After Appomattox* (New York: Viking, 2008), 2-5. John R. Neff describes many Northerners who chose not to forgive the Confederate South in *Honoring the Civil War Dead: Commemoration and the Problem of Reconciliation* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2005).

peace and they wanted Southerners and Northerners to come together to “clasp hands across the bloody chasm,” as Greeley stated. Without reconciliation and reunion the Union dead would have given their lives to a failed cause.<sup>27</sup>

Polk invoked the “bloody shirt” slogan for nearly identical purposes. He suggested that sectionalism was a sham issue used merely to distract the American people from more immediate and pressing problems. Where the reconciliationists of the 1870s encouraged reunion primarily for the sake of the Union, Polk identified reconciliation with Christian forgiveness.

Reconciliationists generally disregarded that bitterness was a legitimate emotion felt by those who lost friends and family on the battlefields of the Civil War. Polk and the reconciliationists also ignored the evidence that supported a continued pursuit of wartime goals, namely, violence against Reconstruction governments and their supporters. Although Polk did not directly attack the Republican Party, he inferred that Republicans were the prime perpetrators of sectionalism. Since the base of the Republican Party was in the northern states, the North Carolinian suggested that Northerners were responsible for “waving the bloody shirt.” As seen in his 1870s editorials and in his 1890 speech, the Alliance president portrayed the South as a victim who bore little responsibility for continued sectional hostility. While not as aggressive as a growing number of former Confederates who defended the South against northern interpretations of the Civil War

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<sup>27</sup> For more on the role of the Union as a motivation for Northern troops and the Northern war cause, see Gary Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011). Gallagher writes that the destruction of slavery served to bolster the primary war aim of restoration of the Union. John R. Neff writes about the effects of the Union cause on Northern memories of the war in *Honoring the Civil War Dead*. Like Gallagher, Neff places restoration of the Union as the primary goal of postwar Northern memories. Gallagher and Neff note the persistence of white American racial prejudices against African Americans during *and* after the Civil War. Neff describes northern postwar efforts to restore the Union quickly in order to accomplish this wartime goal. He labels this myth of reunion the Cause Victorious. Focusing on war casualties, Neff also argues that many black and white veterans did not accept reconciliation on the grounds proposed by many former Confederates and some Northerners. Other scholars contend that emancipation became a war aim that was equal to restoration of the Union. Protecting African-American citizenship and establishing a biracial republic became key goals beside reunion during Reconstruction. For this view see David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001); James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013).

and Reconstruction, Polk's description of sectionalism resembled other white southern accounts written in the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>28</sup>

In his Winfield, Kansas speech, the agrarian leader was careful not to assign average Americans with blame for continuing sectional animosities. Polk indicated that those who "waved the bloody shirt" to the detriment of the nation held positions of political and economic power. Unlike the reconciliationist Alliance, these proponents of division, used sectionalism to enslave voters against their interests. He said "The politician would keep you and me apart, and by so doing they have chained us hand and foot. They have placed upon us manacles that are worse than those that have fallen from the African slaves."<sup>29</sup>

Nineteenth-century Americans commonly used references to slavery as motivation for whites who defined their personal freedom in juxtaposition to the non-free or enslaved. Invoking John Locke, a republican ideology emerged after the American Revolution to define freedom, independence, and liberty as the characteristics of an American citizen. Slavery, in contrast, suggested dependence and subservience. As the country industrialized in the mid-nineteenth century, labor advocates consistently used this comparison to inspire workers to demand rights as American citizens. Agrarian reformers continued this class theme in their calls for greater farmer rights against exploitative banks and corporations. Although the comparison between slaves and free wage laborers contained a strong dose of class protest, it also contained appeals to racial identity. As scholars such as David Roediger and Alexander Saxton have shown,

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<sup>28</sup> For more on the rise of white southern interpretations of the war and their acceptance by white Northerners, see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 72-85; Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 139-160; Gaines Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 115-126, 180-191; Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 158-299; Karen Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: The University of Florida Press, 2003).

<sup>29</sup> *Winfield (KS) Courier*, July 10, 1890.

nineteenth-century Americans from all regions came to associate freedom with whiteness while slavery was linked to blackness. Polk suggested both class and racial identities when he called partisan “manacles...worse than those that have fallen from the African slaves.” While dismissive of the horrible experiences of African-American slaves, the agrarian leader used slavery rhetoric to inspire Kansans to act as free men, not as subservient slaves incapable of making decisions independent from politicians.<sup>30</sup>

The Alliance leader continued his verbal assault on dishonorable politicians by comparing unfavorably to morally sound farmers. He stated, “I know how the parties are run in my section of the country. They are run by bosses who sprang up while we were trying to get something to eat after the war, and they have managed things so long that they have come to the conclusion that all the farmers ought to do is to vote as they tell them, and pay taxes.” Polk associated politicians with laziness and emotional exploitation. Farmers were identified with work, struggle, and honesty. A clear parallel could be drawn from this description of the 1870s to 1890. Farmers and other laborers worked to produce items of value for the economy, while another class of Americans sat idle and took wealth from the producer classes. Instead of respecting the producers of wealth, the agrarian leader said that politicians took them for granted and expected subservience from farmers. Polk urged farmers to act independently to free themselves from the mental slavery of dishonest politicians.

Because he emphasized the falseness of sectionalism, the Alliance leader also pointed to the Civil War as the start of farmer troubles. Polk denied the continued relevance of the ideas

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<sup>30</sup> See Eric Foner. *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970; David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991). As Eric Foner demonstrates free labor ideology did not always include support for racial equality. For other examples of agrarian reformers who used the language of slavery see J.A. Barry in W.L. Garvin and S.O. Daws, *History of the National Farmers' Alliance and Co-Operative Union of America* (Jacksboro, TX: J.N. Rogers & Co., 1887), 50; *National Economist*, September 20, 1890; *Southern Mercury*, January 1, 1891; Mary Lease in McNall, *The Road to Rebellion*, 214; Kansas Alliance supporter John Davis in Clanton, *Kansas Populism*, 80.

that started the Civil War. Slavery, states' rights, and southern rebellion mattered little to the economic and social livelihood of nation in 1890. New issues arose that had a greater impact on average Americans. Rather than face these new problems, Polk believed that politicians manipulated the past for personal gain. For the Alliance president and much agrarian reform movement the Civil War led to economic exploitation and produced a startling deluge of dishonest politicians. If farmers could break free from the spell of partisan politicians, better times lay ahead. He concluded, "They know that if we get together and shake hands and look each other in the face and feel the touch of kinship, their doom is sealed. (Applause.)" Polk suggested that without the influence of politicians farmers were naturally inclined to reconcile and work together.<sup>31</sup>

Supporting his claims that the Southern Alliance wanted to work with farmers from across the country, Polk utilized additional stories that buttressed his autobiography and emphasized reconciliation. He assured Kansans that other Southerners wanted to work with them in a national farmers' movement. The Alliance president leader also cited the desire for reconciliation among Confederate and Union veterans. Collectively the stories suggested that reconciliation was authentic and that veterans approved. He implied that sectionalism should no longer prevent the unification of American farmers in efforts to improve the national economy and politics. Polk supported his claims when he told the crowd that "I stand here to-day, commissioned by hundreds of thousands of southern farmers, to beg the farmers of Kansas to stand by them, and they assure you that they will never, no never, never, no never give prominence to any man who stirs up this question which was settled by Lee and Grant at Appomattox." In response to men who did not serve in Civil War combat, yet encouraged

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<sup>31</sup> *Winfield (KS) Courier*, July 10, 1890.

continued bitterness between North and South, Polk cited better model of emulation, “a man who did not fear to fight. I point these men to a man whose name will last when their’s have been forgotten. None other than Ulysses S. Grant. He was a great general, and as true to his flag as ever a man was.” In contrast to the patriotic Grant, Polk said “I want to take these men, when they are flaunting the bloody shirt, to the bedside at Mt. McGregor, and let them hear his last parting word.”<sup>32</sup>

Like his multiple references to God, Polk utilized a familiar example to communicate the nobility of reconciliation to Kansans. The reference to the Union commander by a Confederate veteran suggested that Polk was not bitter about the Civil War and that he respected General Grant for his military skills and patriotism. Rather than use an older symbol of American national unity or Robert E. Lee, Polk used a Northern example to communicate reconciliation to an audience perceived to be Northern.

U.S. Grant was a useful symbol of reconciliation for Colonel Polk. In his 1885 *Personal Memoirs*, written at Mount MacGregor, New York during the final year of his life, Grant described the Confederate surrender at Appomattox, Virginia in sympathetic terms. The General described his orders for Union troops to avoid celebrations upon the conclusion of Lee’s surrender. Grant also noted in his *Memoirs* that he felt sad at the sight of Lee whom he regarded as a “foe who had fought so long and valiantly, and had suffered so much for a cause, though that cause was, I believe, one of the worst for which a people ever fought, and one for which there was the least excuse.” The Union commander concluded, “I do not question, however, the sincerity of the great mass of those who were opposed to us.” Although Grant led the combat forces that destroyed the Confederacy, slavery, and restored the Union, his memoirs cast him in

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<sup>32</sup> *Winfield (KS) Courier*, July 10, 1890.



reconciliationist terms. As David Blight notes, Grant's writing promoted a "shared grief at war's costs coupled with Northern respect for the *sincerity* of Southern devotion to their cause, even when that cause was judged repugnant." Blight also states that Grant devoted little space to the ideological conflict of slavery, which stood as the cause of the war. Instead, the General chose to discuss military matters. In a fitting tribute to reunion, the pallbearers at Grant's funeral included Union and Confederate veterans.<sup>33</sup>

In his statements to Kansans, Polk mirrored Grant's description of Confederate surrender. Like the Union General, Polk chose to avoid references to the ideological divisions that caused the Civil War. He selected, rather, to focus on the common bravery shown by Union and Confederate soldiers. Since Polk wished to express reconciliation he did not discuss Grant's role in Reconstruction. The Alliance spokesman also failed to mention his personal opinions concerning Reconstruction under President Grant. Instead, the Alliance president also suggested that all veterans truly wanted to forget the bitterness of the war. Polk demonstrated that he wanted peace and reconciliation between the sections of the nation and he used Grant as another example of these sympathies.

Polk informed the audience that Grant was not the only veteran who shared these feelings of reunion between North and South. Upon his return from the national Alliance convention of 1889 he told his family, Raleigh residents, and "ex-rebel soldiers," how Northern Alliacemen "had received us, and there was not a dry eye in the house when I got through." He claimed that a "strong Democratic" Kentucky audience welcomed the news with "shouts of applause."

According to Polk, Union veterans reacted the same way. The North Carolinian contended, "The

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<sup>33</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant* (1885-86; repr., Old Saybrook, CT: Konecky & Konecky, 1992), 629-30; Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 215 (quote), 216, italics in the original. Union veterans General William T. Sherman, General Philip Sheridan, and Admiral David Porter joined Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston and General Simon Bolivar Buckner as pallbearers at Grant's funeral. Buckner and Grant were roommates at West Point. Like Grant, Union and Confederate veterans buried Polk. See Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 111.

spirit of love and fraternity is growing.” Using rural Christian terms he addressed Alliance Vice President Ben Clover, exclaiming, “Thank God, Brother Clover, the day has come when a man from the south and a man from Kansas, Kentucky or the eastern states are permitted to stand on the same platform. (Applause) So long as they can contrive to keep us apart, they will succeed in keeping us down.” Polk repeated his description of sectionalism as an artificial feeling and he presented northern and southern farmers as natural allies in a “spirit of love and fraternity.” The Alliance leader said that feelings of animosity caused by the Civil War were now dead. He thought it was time for common Northerners and Southerners to come together to achieve change for the collective good.<sup>34</sup>

The Alliance spokesman continued to assure the crowd that the predominantly southern organization stood with them. He claimed “Brothers of Kansas, sisters of Kansas, whether you believe it or not, whether you will aid each other or not, whether you join in this fraternal spirit in which God intended you should join, whether you believe it or not, I want to tell you people of Kansas here today that the farmers of North Carolina, Georgia, Texas, South Carolina is your brother, whether you want it so or not. (Applause.)” Polk again sought to appeal to Kansans using a common rural Christian language. He described Southerners in Christ-like and Godly terms when he asserted their loyalty for Kansans “whether you want it so or not.” Like a passage from the Lord’s Prayer, he promised that Southerners would forgive any trespasses from Kansans and be their “brother.” Although not a preacher, the Alliance president used common Christian rhetoric and fiery emotion to speak like an evangelical preacher.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Winfield (KS) Courier*, July 10, 1890.

<sup>35</sup> *Winfield (KS) Courier*, July 10, 1890. Polk was a devout Baptist who served as a state delegate to the Southern Baptist Convention. He also worked to create Meredith College, a Baptist school for women in Raleigh, North Carolina. See Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk*, 183-89.

In a stirring climax of the speech Polk combined the themes of Christianity, sectional reconciliation, trust and mutual interest. The North Carolinian stated:

Thank God, that I can stand on this platform this afternoon without being interfered with any sectional feeling, and tell you that your destiny. (Applause.) Tell you that you are my brother. Tell you that there is a common interest between us. Tell you that we are bound by common peril. Tell you that we have a common interest and must make common cause in spite of all that sectional feeling. Tell you that we must acknowledge but one name and one flag. (Applause) And one common country, and the struggle is not between the North and the South. Thank God, no! (Applause.) And so long as we live there will never be a north and south.<sup>36</sup>

The Alliance president pointedly praised the end of sectionalism. A white Southerner publicly lectured to what he considered a Northern audience and did not receive their ire in contrast to the divisive years surrounding the Civil War. To encourage the crowd and reinforce Christian bonds Polk referred to them as “brother” and “sister.” He also reassured Kansans that other Americans felt their pain, leading him to identify a second indication that sectionalism had waned. Polk stated that Americans in other regions experienced similar economic troubles to those found in Kansans, making the problems national in scope. He suggested that unlike previous decades, the Americans who sympathized the most with Kansans lived below the Mason-Dixon line. Southerners also suffered under the current state of the agricultural economy and they received little sympathy from their political leaders. Due to the similarities, the Alliance leader stated that regional variations mattered no more. Problems created by railroads, currency circulation, and high interest rates were now more important than the disagreements of three decades before. Polk argued that the bloodshed of the Civil War should no longer prevent

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Quote in *Winfield (KS) Courier*. Noblin has the first sentence of this quote as “Thank God that I can stand on this platform this afternoon without being interfered with any sectional feeling, and tell you that your destiny is my destiny!” Another difference between the *Courier* and Noblin’s transcription of the speech are in the placement of punctuation. See Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk*, 12. Noblin states that he took this quote from the *Courier*. The differences can be attributed to use of a different edition of the *Courier* or to errors of transcription.

cooperation between people who shared hard times. The past should now be forgotten to preserve the future of the agrarian republic.

Beyond the ties created by tangible economic realities, Polk claimed that God wanted cooperation among American farmers. He suggested that humans might fail to recognize God's work in the bonds created by their common situation. Polk did not cast the goals and efforts of the Alliance in strictly economic terms, but also as the work of God's children. Members of the Alliance were not the selfish materialists of Gilded Age cities. The Alliance drew inspiration from more respectable and holy sources to suggest that their mission had a higher purpose. Polk finished the speech by reinforcing cordiality and reconciliation when he invited Kansans to North Carolina and promised, "you will receive a hearty welcome. There shall be no Mason and Dixon line on the Alliance maps of the future. It shall be one nation and one flag. (Applause)."

Polk mainly used the Kansas speech as an opportunity to stress the commonalities between late nineteenth-century American farmers, which served three main purposes. First, by emphasizing the shared culture of Northern and Southern farmers, Polk hoped to attract additional supporters to the agrarian movement. Speaking as a recruiter the Alliance leader highlighted the values of American farm life. He assumed that these values formed the basis of traditional agrarian culture and that his endorsement of these beliefs struck a common chord with farmers across the country. The agrarian leader argued that farmers were noble and true Americans who placed importance on home life, hard work, Christian beliefs, and did not hold sectional grudges. He asserted that his image of American farmers matched the identity of the Southern Farmers' Alliance. Kansans could trust the Southern Alliance because the organization shared the same American agrarian attitudes.

Through an emphasis on mutual values Polk also wanted to fulfill a second objective by countering charges that the Alliance was a group of “old hayseed socialists--demagogues.” The Alliance president connected the agrarian organization with traditional values to eliminate association with radicalism. Polk used the Bible, the typical farm family, allegiance to a strong work ethic, and Christian reconciliation to demonstrate that the Alliance wanted nothing more than justice for Americans who produced goods for a living. He worried about the great economic changes that swept the country within his lifetime. The agrarian leader referred to his childhood when there were only two millionaires in the United States and farmers owned “seventy per cent of the wealth.” Now there were “millionaires by the thousands” and farmers possessed “less than twenty-three percent” of the wealth, yet they paid the same percentage of the nation’s taxes. Polk hoped that Kansans would share his concern for the dangerous imbalance of wealth distribution and associate Alliance remedies with traditional American values. The farmers’ group did not want to destroy the country in a bloody socialist revolution. They called for government action to restore fairness to the American economy so the nation could be great again.<sup>37</sup>

A third goal that Polk hoped to achieve with his emphasis on mutual values was to persuade Kansans that he and the South no longer felt antagonistic toward Northerners. The North Carolinian used autobiography to convince the audience that the South was not a threat to national unity. Through his personal tales, Polk tried to endear himself to the audience and provide them with a model for identifying with someone from the South. If he described himself as a typical Southerner, then Kansans could imagine themselves relating to other Southerners. If Kansans could relate to and trust Southerners, effective bonds could be created, and a strong

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<sup>37</sup> *Winfield (KS) Courier*, July 10, 1890.

farm organization could form. Through a united front, Alliance reforms could be enacted. Seen from this view Polk resembled an ambassador who helped non-Southerners assimilate with Southerners into a national group based on common values and shared economic interests against the forces of economic exploitation.

Despite his efforts at appeasement, not everyone believed that Polk and the Southern Alliance truly stood for sectional reconciliation and the true America. The Topeka *Capital* ran a series of articles that accused Polk of passionately advocating secession, demonstrating cowardice in combat during the Civil War, stealing state money while Secretary of Agriculture, leaving business partners to pay debt after failing at business ventures, and becoming president of the Alliance so he could take money from farmers. The newspaper also referred to Polk and Ralph Beaumont as “worthless schemers,” “tramps,” “enemies of God and man,” and “would-be revolutionists.” When Kansas Alliancemen ran as Populists in the fall 1890 elections, the *Capital* intensified its attacks by accusing Polk of executing Union prisoners at Gettysburg. The newspaper used eyewitness accounts to charge that Polk ran cruel Union prisoner camps at Salisbury and Morgantown in North Carolina. Although Polk’s biographer finds that these stories were made up to keep voters loyal to the Republican Party, it would not be the last time that journalists accused the Alliance of disloyalty.<sup>38</sup>

Polk received ample criticism from a rival North Carolina newspaper. The Raleigh *News and Observer* accused the Colonel of using the Alliance as a political organization against the Democratic Party. After his Kansas trip, Polk became convinced that the *News and Observer* supplied the Topeka *Capital* with the false stories published in the latter newspaper. The Alliance leader and editor of *The Progressive Farmer* published this opinion and received a

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<sup>38</sup> *Topeka Weekly Capital*, July 24, September 18, October 16, 30, 1890, September 24, October 29, 1891 in Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk*, 224-26.

response from Samuel A. Ashe, editor of the *News and Observer*. Ashe accused Polk of stirring up trouble by “appealing to prejudice and by inflaming the passions of the people.” The *News and Observer* editor then called the Alliance president a failure as a “soldier,” “farmer,” “Commissioner of Agriculture,” in “journalism,” and in “medicine.” Ashe predicted failure in Polk’s Alliance endeavors, stating “He was born to failure as his lot and inheritance in life, and it will be so to the end. The good people will not let him have his will in this matter.”<sup>39</sup>

While some Kansas and North Carolina newspapers responded with extremely personal attacks against Polk, many Alliancemen rallied around the agrarian leader. As he toured the nation supporters frequently wrote into Alliance newspapers to thank Polk and endorse his reconciliationist efforts. Alliance newspapers also reprinted articles from other regions to show national support for the Alliance President. In Texas, the *Southern Mercury* reprinted the *Free Press* who said, “Pres. L.L. Polk’s short visit in Kansas has done more to blot out sectional hate and cement more firmly the ties of brotherly love in the Alliance, than any other one man could have done.” The newspaper continued, “Being a southerner he fully understands the situation between the north and the south and no man, woman or child after hearing Bro. Polk talk for an hour, could go away with out having their hearts melted, unless sectional hate had become second nature by being bred and born in them.” The *Free Press* contrasted Polk’s opposition to “sectional hate” with his kinship to other farmers and his ability to touch their “hearts.” Through this juxtaposition the Alliance was portrayed as a positive and forgiving force, while those who opposed the farm organization stood for bitterness and hatred. The republication of the story in the Dallas-based *Southern Mercury* served to convince readers that Midwesterners embraced partnership with the Southern Alliance. Polk and other Alliance leaders chipped away at an

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<sup>39</sup> *Raleigh News and Observer*, September 2, 4, 1890 in Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk*, 232-34.

artificial barrier to collective agrarian action. True reconciliation of the North and South appeared to be a reality. The day of a truly national agrarian crusade was at hand. Tales of success from the Midwest tour served to bolster the confidence of southern agrarians and build hope in Alliance reform efforts.<sup>40</sup>

Readers of Polk's *Progressive Farmer* found similar evidence of the decline of sectionalism and the success of a growing national farmers' movement. Kansan P.B. Maxson wrote the *Progressive Farmer* about the enthusiastic crowd of 20,000 who assembled at Emporia, Kansas to see "the well advertised *Rebel Brigadier*." Appearing on July 5, 1890, the day after the Winfield rally, Polk and Ralph Beaumont spoke to a "spellbound" audience. Maxson said that after the speech many in the crowd approached Polk "to press the hand of their Southern brother and friend of humanity." Maxson concluded, "Let me add *there was no Mason's & Dixon's line here*, and may God grant that there may never be heard more of that or any other line to separate the people possessed of one common interest and a common humanity. United we must stand if divided we must fall a prey of organized capital." Again, an Alliance newspaper in the South published statements from a midwestern writer who characterized Polk and the Alliance as a positive force for destroying sectionalism and promoting cordial relations among American farmers.<sup>41</sup>

Southerners returned the favor by expressing their thanks for the generous treatment shown to Polk during his midwestern tours. When Polk returned to North Carolina from his summer midwestern trip he told Alliance members that he was received well during his journey and found much support for the agrarian order. After listening to Polk the Greensboro, North Carolina sub-Alliance passed resolutions to thank "our brethren of the North and West in their

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<sup>40</sup> *Southern Mercury*, August 7, 1890.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, July 29, 1890. Italics are in the original quote.



efforts to eradicate sectionalism as manifested in our honorable president and reported faithfully and touchingly to us, and that we will join hearts and hands with them in this undertaking, and ask the blessing of God upon our endeavor.” The sub-Alliance requested that copies of their resolutions be sent to Kansans Benjamin Clover and Alonzo Wardall. The North Carolinians further asked that the resolutions “be published in all our organs in the West and Northwest.”<sup>42</sup>

Letters from the Midwest continued to pour into the *Progressive Farmer* during the Alliance president’s tour. After Polk visited Ohio, Alliance member John Hall also wrote to the *Progressive Farmer*. Hall claimed that for many years he advocated “non-partisan politics” and “regretted the sectional animosities that have occurred on the eve of each election, promoted by professional politicians, who had no other interest but a selfish one to obtain office or aid others to do so.” Through manipulation by these “professional politicians,” Hall argued that the nation suffered as Americans continued “fighting the war over and over for twenty years.” The Ohioan claimed, “The farmer in particular,” now “realizes what a fool he has been.” Nearly repeating Polk’s words from the Winfield, Kansas speech, Hall blamed politicians for stirring up the bitter emotions of a sectional and divisive past. According to both men the majority of Americans did not harness such bitter feelings and they were not responsible for advocating sectionalism. The Midwesterner noted specifically that farmers viewed sectionalism as an artificial barrier to national unity and reform.<sup>43</sup>

Like Hall, C.W. Stevenson, wrote the *Progressive Farmer* in the wake of Polk’s appearance in his home state. Stevenson served as lecturer for the Southern Farmers’ Alliance in Illinois and was a Union Army veteran. Like Polk, he drew on his military service to attack those who opposed agrarian reform and reconciliation. The Union veteran described Northern

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<sup>42</sup> *Progressive Farmer*, August 12, 1890. *The National Economist* also gave the article national coverage; see *National Economist*, August 2, 1890.

<sup>43</sup> *Progressive Farmer*, November 4, 1890.

sectional agitators as “some politician who was too cowardly to go down and fight you, and therefore have no idea of your bravery, or else they are so blinded by party that they cannot be honest.” Stevenson chose not to address any lingering differences between Northerners and Southerners leftover from the Civil War era. The Alliance lecturer preferred to draw attention to the mutual courage of Confederate and Union soldiers and its role in the agrarian organization.

Stevenson continued to use memories of the Civil War to describe his support for a national coalition of farmers. Similar to General Grant, he said that Union soldiers thought that the Confederate cause was wrong. Also like Grant, Stevenson respected Confederate “honesty” and “bravery,” despite their defeat in battle. The Union veteran continued, “But the war is passed and its memories should be buried with the heroes upon both sides. We have no North or South, but one common country, one common flag, and in this fight between the producers and the man who steals his reward from him, we have a common cause, but put them down for the sake of our children, and in the name of Almighty god, for the good of humanity, wipe out that imaginary line that politicians have tried to divide us with.” He referred to Polk as “Bro. Polk” who “has touched the hand and he has touched the hearts of the great common people of the North and West,” which inspired similar speeches and good feelings in the regions. Echoing Polk’s message of Christian forgiveness, Stevenson portrayed reconciliation as a morally just act.

At the next national Alliance meeting Stevenson wanted agrarians to “form a soldiers’ Alliance, composed of the blue and the gray.” “Let us clasp hands;” he urged, “let us dig a grave across the Mason and Dixon line. In the grave let us put the bloody shirt with all its bitter remembrances; let us bury that shirt and its bitterness deep from human eyes and damned be the man that ever resurrects it to divide the people of this government.” Like Polk, Stevenson wanted to bury sectionalism forever and forget the resentments of the past. Echoing the Alliance

leader, Stevenson harshly condemned politicians who used memories of sectionalism for political gain and he strongly ridiculed sectional agitators as cowards. The Union veteran told veterans to ignore sectional pleas from “the cowardly curs, both North and South, who got under the bed, lurked on the river or conveniently got into the hospital or run a suttlers’ camp or stayed at home and robbed our wives and children.” He challenged the masculinity and bravery of these cowards who not only avoided the battlefield, but also stole from women and children who lacked patriarchal protection.

Unlike sectional cowards, Stevenson asserted that most Northerners stood ready to cooperate with Southerners to address current economic and political problems. The Illinoisan claimed to be “pretty well acquainted with the sentiment of the working people of the North,” and said that any man or newspaper that claimed that the North was still bitter about the Civil War was a “liar.” He urged farmers, “Let us refuse to vote for any man who attempts to make a campaign on the bitterness of the past or calls up the memories that we wish to bury.” Stevenson concluded with a note of reconciliation, “We are brothers of the same household; we may disagree and even fight, but that is no reason we should always be divided.” Again, a supporter of the Alliance used rural Christian language to promote a brotherhood of farmers. The Union veteran suggested that it was natural for farmers to unite and overcome past “household” squabbles. After reconciling, American farmers could collectively confront the issues of the present.<sup>44</sup>

Although Polk, Hall, and Stevenson clearly found sectional agitators to be repulsive, the three Alliancemen stressed the importance of the common people. As Hall argued, “Take the farmer out of our social and economic affairs and this country wouldn’t be ‘worth a shuck.’”

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<sup>44</sup> *Progressive Farmer*, August 12, 1890.

When he is counted out the country is gone.” Hall claimed that farmers historically served to create order in all societies stating, “When the well to do, independent, educated, industrious farmer becomes a renter, a tenant and a serf, then we may look for the vandals.” The Ohioan relied on Jeffersonian and Lockean notions of property as a guarantor of liberty and freedom. He associated the loss of farm property with an erosion of independence and the ascent of thieves. The identification of farmers with essential American values of independence, education, and hard work led Hall to the conclusion that farmers stood as the guardians of liberty, justice, and the true American way of life. Agrarians formed the backbone of the nation and their decline meant the downfall of America.<sup>45</sup>

Besides their role as producers, Alliance supporters admired the unity that the organization inspired in its members. Frequently agrarian reformers expressed this approval in masculine military language. Stevenson wrote about the need to create a “soldiers Alliance,” while William Peffer spoke of “the constant and rapid increase of recruits in the People’s army.” Polk told a Kansas audience “I believe that when we shall all come together, Kansas will stand in the front rank and will own the post of honor.” The *Southern Mercury* reprinted the *Alliance Sentinel*, which celebrated the growth of the Michigan Alliance by associating it with the military, non-partisanship, anti-monopoly attitudes, and patriotism. The *Sentinel* wrote “There is something magic about the touch of the Alliance, when you get into this army, now three million strong, you feel that you are shoulder to shoulder with the ‘patriotic liberty-loving people’ of the country. A people who live above partisanship and love their country better than any political

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., November 4, 1890.

party, and who would not haggle about the methods or names so long as the people are freed from the grasp of monopoly.”<sup>46</sup>

J.E. Bryan, an Alliance lecturer in Arkansas, used similar language to describe the agrarian organization. Referring to the 1889 national convention, Bryan reported that various groups came together representing a multitude of political parties, from various states of the Union, and “old soldiers, there from both armies of the late conflict.” Bryan summarized the mission of the St. Louis meeting: “thirty-five States respond to the call, and are ranged in line against sectionalism and favoritism in our government.” He emphasized the dual mission of the Alliance. Sectionalism and the influence of large businesses perverted the federal government and prevented it from serving the needs of the majority of Americans. The lecturer concluded that the gathering of groups at St. Louis showed that “partisanism was sunk in patriotism.” Bryan appealed to the Alliance narrative that characterized the farmers’ organization as a true protector of the people in the face of selfish minority with exorbitant control over the country.<sup>47</sup>

The use of military terminology reinforced the image of the Alliance as a patriotic, courageous, and honorable organization devoted to an active defense of righteous morals. Memories of combat celebrated the bravery of veterans and provided Alliance supporters with a model for proper behavior and conduct. Military combat served as a useful way to express the extraordinary acts of courage needed to solve the ills of the country. Using military language also appealed to the masculinity of potential Alliancesmen by calling for a vigorous defense of farmers and their families. The Alliance suggested that true men fought to correct wrongs and recognized bravery in others. Since a rejection of sectionalism and reconciliation stood as primary Alliance goals, references to the shared experience of soldiers helped create bonds

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<sup>46</sup> *Progressive Farmer*, August 12, 1890 (Stevenson); *Kansas Farmer*, July 29, 1891 (Peffer); *Winfield (KS) Courier*, July 10, 1890 (Polk); *Southern Mercury*, June 19, 1890.

<sup>47</sup> J.E. Bryan, *The Farmers’ Alliance: Its Origin, Progress and Purposes* (Fayetteville, AR: 1891), 31-32.

between Civil War veterans. Because the agrarian group wanted to unite American farmers from different regions and heal the divisive wounds of the Civil War, Alliance members avoided discussing the causes of the war and instead emphasized the common bravery Confederate and Union troops.

Polk took time to reflect on his positive reception in the Midwest. The Colonel wrote *The National Economist* to share “One thing I note with great pleasure, any and all expressions from me against sectionalism are hailed with genuine and enthusiastic approval.” On another occasion Polk summarized his trip through Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, and Ohio. He wrote the *Progressive Farmer* to tell readers that “The masses of the people are rebelling against boss rule and the fight there, as in localities South, is between the people who make and constitute the parties and the leaders who have hitherto ruled the parties.” The farmer advocate further exclaimed that “The members of our order in the great West feel deeply the absolute necessity of locking hands with the people of the South in this effort to break the shackles of corrupt money power and henceforth the ‘bloody shirt’ will be powerless in arraying them on sectional lines. They sincerely and honestly desire unity and fraternity between the people of the sections. This is the first and grand work to be accomplished through this great organization.” Clearly Polk placed great emphasis on reconciliation and he believed that it was truly happening among American farmers.<sup>48</sup>

The agrarian leader also drew attention to the resumption of a cross-regional alliance. Kansas, Illinois, Missouri, and Ohio contributed troops to the Union, yet Polk referred to the states as “the great West” rather than the North. He noted the presence of the “bloody shirt” in these states, but identified the embrace of reconciliation as well. Like other Alliance advocates,

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<sup>48</sup> *National Economist*, July 19, 1890; *Progressive Farmer*, November 11, 1890.

Polk used the North-South relationship to describe past sectional differences and the need for reconciliation in the 1890s. Alliance leaders used the West-South relationship to address a coalition of the 1890s, particularly the unification of the producing class. References to West-South unity were not usually paired with discussions of the divisive sectional past, nor, specifically, the Civil War.<sup>49</sup>

The experiences of Alliancemen during the Polk tours of 1890 show that while the agrarian group mainly promoted economic and political reforms, the organization also stressed that true change could only take place if the producing classes of the United States unified. Lingering memories of the Civil War still divided producers and the rest of the nation. Through the promotion of reconciliation in newspaper articles, speeches, and personal interactions, Alliance leaders like Polk hoped to serve as models of progress and healing. The consistent publication of messages of reconciliation in speeches and newspaper articles shows that the Alliance wanted these tales to be read by farmers across the nation. Newspapers in the Midwest and South printed reconciliation stories to reassure readers that regional differences did not matter while railroads, banks, and speculators exploited the producers of wealth. Alliance leaders and members wanted to convince their audiences that friendship and national bonds could and did exist between the North, South, and West. The Civil War was over and a new war had begun. As Polk explained to the Winfield crowd, it was “A revolution of honest, earnest thought. And it will go forward until it shall accomplish the glorious mission for which it is inaugurated.” In the years ahead the Alliance worked hard to build upon the momentum created by lecturers like Polk. During the next two years, the Southern Alliance relied on its newspapers

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<sup>49</sup> *Progressive Farmer*, November 11, 1890.

and a steady wave of speakers to spread a message of economic reform, sectional reconciliation, and American identity throughout country. A promising and bumpy road lay ahead.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *Winfield (KS) Courier*, July 10, 1890.



CHAPTER FOUR:  
“PATRIOTIC DEVOTION” OR “SECTIONAL BITTERNESS”: RECONCILIATION,  
PRODUCERISM, AND POLITICS

During the year between the Alliance conventions in St. Louis and Ocala, Florida the Southern Farmers’ Alliance accelerated its influence and asserted its newfound strength as a national reform organization.<sup>1</sup> The organization lobbied U.S. Congress to pass a subtreasury bill and the Alliance supported successful candidates throughout the South and Kansas during the 1890 elections. When delegates arrived at the Ocala convention a month after the elections, Floridian William Rogers welcomed them and reflected on the successes of the previous year. Rogers told the assembly ““The Alliance has revolutionized American politics and filled the bloody chasm. Let the solid west lead off, and the south in solid phalanx will join with it, to tame and chain the lion of the east.””<sup>2</sup>

Rogers’s quote demonstrates that Kansans joined Charles Macune, Leonidas Polk, and other Southern Alliance leaders in assertive action to spread the agrarian movement. Kansans took the first steps toward forming a political party that encompassed Southern Alliance demands. When Sunflower state residents gathered in June 1890 to form the People’s Party at Topeka, they transformed the agrarian cause. A nominally political farmers’ crusade now directly entered the electoral process and threatened the power of the two major political parties of the country. Previously the Alliance seized the offensive by criticizing politics and

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<sup>1</sup> The title of the chapter comes from the *Kansas Farmer*, August 27, 1890 and the *National Economist*, March 14, 1889.

<sup>2</sup> *Southern Alliance Farmer*, December 9, 1890.

exploitative economic practices. The introduction of a third party that espoused Alliance reforms put the farmers' movement on the defensive and required Northerners and Southerners to support their policies and their group from a rising number of Republican and Democratic attacks. Amidst these attacks, the national agrarian campaign maintained solidarity in 1890 by promoting sectional reconciliation and producer class identity.

Critics of the Alliance multiplied after Kansans started a new political party. Prior to widespread southern support for a third party, Kansas farmers initiated the People's Party because they confronted different circumstances from those found in the South. First, the quick pace of agrarian indebtedness brought a unique intensity to the Kansas Alliance. Whereas Southerners experienced mounting debt over two decades, an agricultural depression hit Kansans over the course of two growing seasons. When wheat and corn crops failed in the harsh winters of 1887 and 1888, many mortgages proved unbearable. Central Kansas, from Chautauqua to Comanche and from Marshall to Phillips counties, felt the worst of the agrarian collapse. The western third of Kansas also suffered, although the region had the lowest population density and worst soil for profitable agriculture. Eastern Kansas felt the effects of the agricultural depression least. Political power and Republican Party strength were also highest in the eastern region of the state. Additionally most prominent Republican leaders usually participated in non-agricultural business enterprises in eastern Kansas, rather than farming. As a result, the extreme southeast, central and western Kansas became the site of most Alliance growth in the state. Calls for reform came loudest and most frequently from central and western Kansas. Alternatively, the Republican Party, based away from the worst of the agricultural depression, was very slow to listen to Alliance calls for reform. The apathetic response of the dominant political party in

Kansas to Alliance demands formed a second major difference between Kansas and southern states.<sup>3</sup>

A third difference between agrarians in the South and in Kansas was the near absence of farmers' cooperatives in Kansas and the quick turn to political action. Unlike Alliances in southern states, the organization grew so quickly in Kansas that members did not have time to establish farmers' cooperatives as the focal point of the association. In the absence of cooperatives and because of the more immediate intensity of agricultural ruin, politics became an early focus of the Alliance. Prior to similar action by Southerners the Kansas Alliance issued a statement in November 1889 that all sub-Alliances should write and urge their congressmen to endorse Alliance reforms including the replacement of the national banking system with treasury notes, a graduated income tax, the use of private voting ballots, no alien land ownership, and government ownership of transportation and communication. The political history of Alliance leaders partially explained the vigorous communication with elected officials in Kansas Alliance.<sup>4</sup>

A fourth distinction from southern states was the presence of many third-party veterans in leadership positions of the Southern Alliance in Kansas. Henry Vincent, Dr. Stephen McLallin, John Davis, Percy Daniels, John Willits, and John Grant Otis had supported Greenback and Union Labor Party efforts in the 1870s and 1880s. Earlier than their southern brethren in the Alliance, these third party men spoke openly about breaking from the Republican and Democratic parties in order to enact reforms. Because they had already left the dominant

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<sup>3</sup> O. Gene Clanton, *Kansas Populism: Ideas and Men* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1969), 21, 28-29.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 54. On the role of cooperatives see Robert C. McMath, *Populist Vanguard: A History of the Southern Farmers' Alliance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975).

political party of their region, McLallin, Davis, and Otis were less concerned with the consequences of supporting a third party in opposition to the party of their fathers.<sup>5</sup>

A series of mergers in 1889 bolstered the confidence of the Kansas movement. The state Northern Alliance merged with the state Southern Alliance in August. At the December meeting in St. Louis the state Alliances of Kansas, South Dakota, and North Dakota formally left the Northern Alliance for the Southern Alliance. In another indication of Alliance growth, the Knights of Labor, Colored Farmers' Alliance, and Northern Alliance issued proclamations of their cooperation with the Southern Alliance. Convinced that agrarian and industrial organizations stood united in pursuit of economic and political reform, Kansans continued their organized action.

In 1890 the disproportionate effects of the drought, a detached dominant political party, the rapid increase of Alliance activity, and the momentum produced by the St. Louis principles combined to create a political crisis in Kansas. Responding to sub-Alliance letters calling for the endorsement of the St. Louis principles, most Kansas congressmen wrote back with vague answers or stated that they could not support the reforms. Only Senator Preston B. Plumb answered requests in the affirmative. Senator John Ingalls, in contrast, was the lone congressman who failed to respond to Alliance inquiries.

Known as an acerbic politician, Senator Ingalls made many enemies throughout his eighteen years in Washington as a senator. Opponents claimed that his election in 1873 and reelection in 1879 occurred through bribery. Hearings in the Kansas legislature and U.S. Senate eventually cleared his name during the 1879 investigation, but Ingalls made strong statements against his foes during and after the investigation. Besides antagonizing his enemies within the

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<sup>5</sup> Clanton, *Kansas Populism*, 53, 80-84.

Kansas Republican Party, Ingalls also lauded partisanship stating that everyone should be, “a partisan,” in all aspects of life, “partisan in religion, morals, education as well as politics.” In contrast to the Alliance, he called the non-partisan “a hypocritical, sanctimonious, canting parasite.”<sup>6</sup>

Ingalls put his support of partisanship into frequent practice by habitually attacking the Democratic Party as the party of the Confederacy. He considered most Democrats to have suspect morals and loyalty to the Union. Ingalls served as a commissioned colonel in Kansas and Missouri during the last year of the war. Afterwards the Senator vigorously supported the Grand Army of the Republic and Union veteran pensions. He claimed that those who opposed raising veterans’ benefits possessed an unhealthy devotion to the South and the Confederacy. Generally, these antagonistic characteristics ran counter to the rhetoric of the Southern Alliance. The differences between the agrarian group and the Senator were amplified when Ingalls responded to Peffer’s letter by stating that his response would arrive in “a few weeks.” Ingalls added that his reply would not appear in the editor’s newspaper, the *Kansas Farmer*. Peffer published both letters in the *Farmer* on February 26. Through his actions Senator Ingalls added to his reputation as a cold public persona who generally opposed reform measures.<sup>7</sup>

In the wake of the latest callous Ingalls remark, the county presidents of the Kansas Southern Alliance met on March 25, 1890 to discuss forming a third party. The group also pledged to oppose Ingalls’ reelection and support unity between farmers and industrial workers’ unions. Over the next two months plans proceeded and state Alliance president Ben Clover called for a convention in June with politics as its object. Following the March meeting, the

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<sup>6</sup> Clanton, *Kansas Populism*, 54; Burton J. Williams, *Senator John James Ingalls: Kansas’ Iridescent Republican* (University Press of Kansas: Lawrence, 1972), 72 (quote), 73-76, 92-95.

<sup>7</sup> Williams, *Senator John James Ingalls*, 45, 50-51, 72, 156; Craig Miner, *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000* (University Press of Kansas: Lawrence, 2002), 175-77; Clanton, *Kansas Populism*, 55 (quote).

Republican press in Kansas responded with additional indications that the party did not sympathize with agrarian complaints nor did they see the farmers' movement as a serious political threat. One G.O.P. editor set the tone by warning "the Alliance that no attack upon the policy of the Republican party will be tolerated." Despite maintaining his resistance to third-party activity and his support for the G.O.P., William Peffer could not help but respond with irritation. Peffer wrote that "this movement has grown so great that it cannot be checked by rehearsing patriotic memories, reviving buried prejudices, or appealing to old party associations." He concluded, "Nothing can save the parties and party leaders but prompt and earnest response to the popular will." At this juncture Peffer still thought that reform could take place within the Republican Party. Clearly he objected to continued Republican resistance to agrarian reforms and their reliance on the work of the party in the fight to save the Union and defeat the Confederacy. Like Alliance leaders, Peffer depicted the needs of the present as more important than the sectional loyalties forged during the Civil War.<sup>8</sup>

Over two months after Peffer asked Senator Ingalls to state his position on Alliance principles, the latter had not responded. Ingalls, however, took the time to be interviewed by the *New York World*. The Senator set off a storm of criticism and added fuel to the Kansas third-party movement with his comments. When asked if "political ends justify the means," Ingalls replied by calling morally clean politics an "iridescent dream." He further compared politics to warfare saying, "the republicans and democrats are as irreconcilably opposed to each other as were Grant and Lee in the Wilderness." He concluded, "The commander who lost a battle through the activity of his moral nature would be the derision and jest of history. This modern cant about the corruption of politics is fatiguing in the extreme." Amidst an agricultural

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<sup>8</sup> Clanton, *Kansas Populism*, 55-56; *Kansas Farmer*, February 12, April 2, 16, 1890 in Peter H. Argersinger, *Populism and Politics: William Alfred Peffer and the People's Party* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1974), 30.

depression, mounting public frustration, and during the last year of his senate term, these comments proved very insensitive and politically unwise.<sup>9</sup>

Although the Republican Party held the vast majority of state and local offices and despite the Party's pledge to support reform efforts in its 1888 platform, little improved for Kansans by 1890. Ingalls' comments turned an unresponsive Republican Party into an arrogant and callous representative of a people in need. The Senator's statement fit directly into Peffer's criticism of Republican editors. Ingalls emphasized sectional divisions, equated each major party with the armies of the Confederacy and Union, and promoted allegiance to a Civil War-era identity above increasing cries for reform. He explicitly dismissed the very objects of many Southern Alliance speeches, editorials, and actions. Ingalls ridiculed sectional reconciliation, non-partisanship, moral politics, and the pleas of his constituents.

Unsurprisingly agrarian reformers reacted negatively to the Senator's words. Clover, a longtime critic, admitted that Ingalls possessed great "Democratic skinner" credentials. The Alliance leader claimed that Kansas farmers also knew that "'brigadier' skins are the thinnest clothing a shivering family was ever wrapped up in." Other agrarian leaders expressed their disgust with Ingalls. In late April and mid-May Peffer announced that he would not support Ingalls' reelection. The editor favored Alliance candidates over the Republican Party. Peffer's announcement carried significance because previously he suggested that voters should have patience with the Grand Old Party. Unlike many Kansas Alliance leaders Peffer supported Republican candidates throughout the 1870s and 1880s. As late as the summer of 1889 he stated that improvements could be enacted "without any breaking of old party lines," and encouraged reformers to take their demands to political conventions. In late April 1890 his patience with the

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<sup>9</sup> *New York World*, April 13, 1890 in Clanton, *Kansas Populism*, 56-57.

GOP reached its limit. For third party supporters the news was encouraging. Any hope for a successful challenge to Republican supremacy in Kansas depended on gaining additional defections from the dominant party. As a lifelong GOP advocate, a Union veteran, and a very influential farm spokesman, Peffer's departure demonstrated that other Kansas Republicans should leave the corrupted party in the name of justice, honesty, and the majority of citizens. As he stated in an editorial, "Nothing short of a rebellion of the people will regain the power they have lost and restore justice in public administration."<sup>10</sup>

Farmer allies in the South joined Kansans in a chorus critical of Ingalls. Applauding the Kansas Alliance for opposing the Senator's reelection by using the "Alliance yard stick," *The National Economist* claimed that the "Alliance men of Kansas fulfill a God given duty to themselves and their country when they use it, and they will stand by their verdict, no matter to what political party each may belong." The newspaper viewed the Alliance stance as a sign that "sectional hate" had steadily lost ground since the Civil War. An *Economist* editorial described Ingalls as a true example of "professional politicians, thieves, and speculators who desired class legislation" and the promotion of the "DOCTRINE OF SECTIONAL HATE," which created "a solid North and a solid South." *The Economist* concluded, "look out, gentlemen politicians who depend on the doctrine of hate to fan the flames of sectionalism and prejudice." Farmers now wore "Alliance spectacles" and traveled with "the Alliance yard stick in his hand." In the months ahead, Ingalls received ample attention from Alliance leaders in Kansas and in the South. Through speeches and newspaper articles Alliance supporters denounced the Senator as the

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<sup>10</sup> *Kansas Farmer*, June 6, 1889 (first quote); Clanton, *Kansas Populism*, 57-58; *Kansas Farmer*, June 4, 1890 in Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 32 (second quote); *Kansas Farmer*, June 25, 1890 in Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 35 (third quote). As Clanton notes Clover spoke from personal experience. The Cowley County, Kansas farmer held an \$18,000 mortgage and owed \$1,800 in interest.



prototypical “professional” politician who promoted sectionalism and consciously ignored the economic struggles of American producers.<sup>11</sup>

On June 12, 1890, third party supporters met in Topeka. Present were twenty-eight members of the Knights of Labor, four Single Tax Club members, ten from the Farmers’ Mutual Benefit Association, seven Patrons of Husbandry (Grange), and forty-one Alliancemen. The ninety delegates present voted unanimously to nominate a full slate of state candidates for the November elections. Delegates chose the name People’s Party to represent the group. On August 13, 1890, the first People’s Party convention chose candidates for the upcoming election. The nominees included Benjamin F. Foster, an African-American minister from Topeka, and Fanny McCormick of Barton County. Foster and McCormick were selected for state auditor and state superintendent of public instruction, respectively.<sup>12</sup> Foster was a former Republican who helped rally African Americans from Equality Political Leagues and the Negro Independents and Democrats of Kansas to form the Negro Populist League. The pastor toured Kansas during 1890 on behalf of the Populists who rewarded him with the nomination for state auditor. Born into slavery in 1856, he attended Trinity School and Emerson Institute in Alabama, and achieved a degree from Chicago Theological Seminary. In the late 1880s and 1890s he served as minister of the Lincoln Street Congregational Church.<sup>13</sup>

Although the Alliance dominated the convention, members of the State Citizens’ Alliance also contributed mightily. The new association’s secretary, William Franklin Rightmire, received the People’s Party nomination for Supreme Court chief justice. Since the Southern

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<sup>11</sup> *National Economist*, March 29, 1890.

<sup>12</sup> Clanton, *Kansas Populism*, 58-61.

<sup>13</sup> See *Kansas City American Citizen*, December 30, 1892, September 7, 1894, in William H. Chafe, “The Negro and Populism: A Kansas Case Study,” *Journal of Southern History* 34, no. 3 (Aug. 1968): 408, 410; Randall Woods, *Black Odyssey: John Lewis Waller and the Promise of American Life, 1878-1900* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1981), 101.

Alliance barred non-farmers from membership, the State Citizens' Alliance formed in 1890 to organize urban reformers. Started in Olathe, Kansas, the Citizens' Alliance helped the budding People's Party broaden recruitment efforts and increase the party throughout state. The convention also pledged to look at current and future issues, declaring, "Old issues are dead." Principles from the St. Louis 1889 Southern Alliance convention formed the basis of the party platform. Some of the policies included the free coinage of silver, restrictions on railroad rates, the abolition of national banks, and government ownership of the means of transportation and communication. Throughout the Sunflower state, citizens took to singing "Goodbye, My Party, Goodbye" as the farmers' movement pulled supporters from the Democratic, Republican, and Union Labor parties.<sup>14</sup>

Despite momentum the fledgling People's Party had to confront the deeply entrenched power of the Republican Party. The days of Bleeding Kansas had forged the state's identity when slavery advocates and opponents engaged in brutal acts of violence to determine the fate of the newly formed territory. When anti-slavery supporters triumphed, opposition to slavery, notions of freedom, and the Republican Party intertwined to create an identity for the state. In the decades after Bleeding Kansas and the Civil War, Union veteran status became an unofficial requirement for access to political office.<sup>15</sup>

Bolstering the importance of Union veterans was the resurgence of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) during the 1880s. The state GAR also reinforced the idea that Kansas played a special role in the Civil War. At the 1890 encampment GAR leader Harry Booth encouraged further membership growth of the veterans' association that was "founded to

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<sup>14</sup> Clanton, *Kansas Populism*, 61-62.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 18; Brent M.S. Campney, "'This is Not Dixie': The 'Imagined South,' the Kansas 'Free State' Narrative, and the Rhetoric of Racist Violence," *Southern Spaces* (September 6, 2007), <http://www.southernspaces.org/2007/not-dixie-imagined-south-kansas-free-state-narrative-and-rhetoric-racist-violence#section2> (accessed April 11, 2013).

perpetuate the memories of that great struggle, and to increase and strengthen that loyalty and patriotism which knows only one country and one flag.” GAR officials identified the state as a place where the organization should thrive because “This great soldier state of Kansas, whose soil drank the first drop of blood shed for the great principle for which the late war was waged,” contained over one hundred thousand veterans. Booth suggested that the Sunflower state possessed a unique and patriotic history because he identified Bleeding Kansas as the beginning of the Civil War. The first guardians of the Union cause, Kansans chose “to defend with their lives, if need be, the institutions under which we lived, and to maintain the honor of the flag.” Like the Southern Alliance, the GAR officially maintained a non-partisan stance toward politics. In reality the veterans’ group heavily supported the party of the Union and Lincoln. Amidst a climate where memories of the Civil War, patriotism, and the Republican Party intertwined to define state identity, many state residents viewed opposition to the Republican Party as a threat to liberty, freedom, and equality.<sup>16</sup>

William Peffer described what happened when Kansans challenged the power of the Republican Party. During the 1880s the editor noted that leaving the dominant Republicans would be considered “treason” and further warned of the “seclusion” of those who left the GOP. Peffer, a loyal Republican, wrote, “Such is the prejudice in this matter that these men are covered with opprobrium, and made to endure insult, suspicion, and sometimes even violence.” Clearly Peffer considered political defection a delicate matter. The Union veteran’s statements also show how seriously Kansans, like other Americans, considered political identity. In the eyes of

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<sup>16</sup> *Proceedings of the Annual Encampments, Grand Army of the Republic, Department of Kansas (1884-1890), Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Encampment: 6.*

many Kansans, to betray the dominant Republican Party was to defy the community and to express loyalty to outsiders.<sup>17</sup>

In the 1890s Kansans still considered white Southerners to be outsiders. Despite the official end of Reconstruction in 1877, Kansas Republicans continued to warn the public about the persistence of Confederate sympathies in the South. When the Kansas Alliance acted to form the People's Party during the summer of 1890 these criticisms intensified. Republicans argued that the Alliance represented a southern Democratic effort to weaken the GOP in the North and dismantle Republican accomplishments made since 1861. As an outgrowth of the Alliance, the Populist Party represented treason and the Confederacy in headlines proclaiming, "The People's Party Is the Scheme of Ex-Rebels." Republican papers further attacked Populists with claims that Alliance President Leonidas Polk "murdered in cold blood a number of [unarmed Union] prisoners of war."<sup>18</sup>

Into the autumn these attacks continued. The Republican *Topeka Daily Capital* warned African Americans that staunch racists Polk and Ben Tillman ran the Southern Alliance. One writer in the Winfield *Courier* compared Polk and other visiting white Southerners to those Southerners who came to establish slavery in territorial Kansas. The writer claimed, "His father stood shoulder to shoulder with John Brown and Jim Lane to repel the first invasion" and establish a "free" Kansas. He pledged to honor his father "faithfully at the ballot box" to ward off the present southern threat. Republicans also prominently featured Union veterans at rallies during the campaign of 1890 and received strong support from the official Grand Army of Republic newspaper. Through these actions the Republican Party connected the Civil War,

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<sup>17</sup>*Kansas Farmer*, July 5, August 9, November 15, 1882, January 26, 1887, July 26, 1888 (Peffer quotes) in Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 10.

<sup>18</sup>*Topeka Daily Capital*, August 15, September 28, October 12, 18, 23, 1890 in Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 45.

freedom, and nationalism to the Grand Old Party, while it described the Alliance as oppressive and un-American.<sup>19</sup>

Such tactics worked in limited instances. Some Republican members of the Shawnee County Farmers' Alliance resigned from the latter organization, stating that they "would no longer affiliate with an organization which was officered by southern brigadiers and run in the interest of the Democratic party." Many Alliancemen, however, supported the People's Party and criticized Republican rhetoric as nothing more than political posturing.<sup>20</sup>

At other times Republican efforts to use Civil War memories on their behalf backfired. During a debate for the Seventh Congressional District seat for U.S. House of Representatives, the Republican candidate Colonel James R. Hallowell challenged the Union record of the Populist nominee, Jerry Simpson. Although Simpson served in an Illinois regiment he became ill and did not see combat. In their debate Hallowell stated that Simpson never smelled rebel gunpowder. Simpson responded by calling Hallowell "Prince Hal" and claimed that the Republican wore silk slippers. Summarizing the exchange a Republican editor countered that Simpson wore no socks at all. The Populist accepted the nickname and Jerry "Sockless" Simpson became recognized nationally for his unusual moniker. He also won the election over Hallowell.

The story reveals several important attributes about Populism. First, the narrative became important to Populism by portraying its followers as ordinary people attempting to change an unresponsive political system tied too strongly to wealthy corporate interests. Republican Hallowell and his "silk stockings" contrasted with Simpson and other Kansas farmers who

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<sup>19</sup> Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 45; *Winfield (KS) Courier*, October 30, 1890; Kyle S. Sinisi, "Veterans as Political Activists: The Kansas Grand Army of the Republic, 1880-1893," *Kansas History* (Summer 1991): 96.

<sup>20</sup> *Fort Scott Daily Monitor*, July 13, 1890 in Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 45. For examples of Kansans expressing support for Polk see *Progressive Farmer*, August 12, 27, 1890.

suffered so much from the effects of economic downturn that they went “sockless.” While Republicans offered no remedies to counter corporate exploitation, the Populists understood and proposed changes for the common good. Second, the Simpson tale shows that Populists did not choose to define their masculinity solely through wartime service and military. Like Polk’s Fourth of July speech in Winfield, Kansas, Simpson promoted hard work as an equally manly and American characteristic. Third, the story displays how the Populists responded to Civil War references. Instead of engaging Hallowell in a debate over the relation between patriotism and his Civil War service, Simpson chose to ignore the war and shift the debate to the present economic problems that touched the lives of many Kansans in 1890. Railroads, financial speculators, and bankers posed a greater threat to American farmers than Southern Rebels of yesteryear.<sup>21</sup>

Other Kansas Populist candidates followed a similar pattern. In 1890 the People’s Party nominated John Grant Otis as the Populist candidate for the fourth Congressional District of Kansas. Before the Civil War, Otis was an adamant abolitionist. When the war began he helped organize the first Union African-American regiment, the First Kansas Colored. Otis led troops in battles in Kansas, Indian Territory, Arkansas, and Missouri. After the war he left the Republican Party in the 1870s to pursue reform through the Patrons of Husbandry (Grange), Greenback Party and by promoting prohibition. Although his Union Army credentials were important in a state like Kansas, Otis did not rely solely on his military record to win political office. Instead he promoted the importance of economic and moral issues.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Clanton, *Kansas Populism*, 82-87. Simpson understood the plight of Kansans in a very personal way. The severe winter of 1886-1887 killed his cattle and wiped him out financially.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-82; Kansas Historical Society, “African American Civil War Soldiers,” kansapedia, <http://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/african-american-civil-war-soldiers/15122> (accessed June 18, 2013); Kansas Historical Society, “First Kansas Colored Infantry,” kansapedia, <http://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/first-kansas-colored-infantry/12052> (accessed June 18, 2013).

Percy Daniels was another Populist who served in the Union Army, but did not depend on these credentials alone. Born in Rhode Island, Daniels joined the Union Army and served with the Army of the Potomac in major battles. He thereafter was transferred to the Southwest, where he fought for Burnside and Sherman. In 1864 he rejoined the Army of Potomac and served the rest of the war in the eastern theater. When the war ended Sergeant Daniels had been promoted to Colonel. After the war Daniels moved near Girard, Kansas where he farmed, surveyed land for railroads, and served as a Brigadier General in the state militia. During the worsening economic crisis in Kansas the Union veteran broke with the Republican Party in a very public way. Daniels wrote a letter the Girard, Kansas *Press* published, saying that “THE TIME HAS COME WHEN EVERY INSTINCT OF CHARITY, JUSTICE AND PATRIOTISM DEMANDS THAT THE POWER OF CAPITAL FOR WRONG AND OPPRESSION BE CURTAILED.” The state Republican Party reacted unfavorably and Daniels lost the GOP nomination for the state senate. In the next several years Daniels became a leader of the state Populist Party and won election to lieutenant governor in 1892. He also served as the commander of the Kansas National Guard.<sup>23</sup>

William Peffer combined many of the same attributes. Born in Pennsylvania Peffer grew up in a family that opposed slavery and supported temperance. Prior to the Civil War Peffer farmed in Indiana and Missouri. Because of his anti-slavery beliefs, in 1861 Peffer moved his family to Illinois where he joined a Union regiment and served in the western theater as an infantryman and quartermaster. During his spare time he continued his habit of the previous decade by studying law. As the end of the war approached, he served as judge advocate of civil cases on a military commission in Clarksville, Tennessee.

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<sup>23</sup> *Girard (KS) Press* August 1, 1888 in Clanton, *Kansas Populism*, 43 (quote), 42-45. The letter was dated July 18, 1888.

Peffer next established a law practice and moved his family to Clarksville. The Union veteran dabbled in politics, publicly encouraged respect for the law, and promoted reconciliation between Tennessee's Confederate and Union veterans. He also maintained his support for equal rights when he supported African-American enfranchisement, the right to sit on juries, and the unbiased application of the law. In principle he supported Congressional Radicals, but Peffer opposed their tone and methods. Like Congressional Radicals, he believed that Governor William G. Brownlow's Radical Republican policies promoted continued animosity rather than peace, reconciliation, and reunion. Peffer initially joined the Conservative Tennessee political faction, but over time he became alienated from the group due to their abandonment of black rights and their open support for the Democratic Party.

During the late 1860s prospects dimmed for reconciliation between whites and blacks, Unionists and Confederates in Tennessee. When violence against African Americans increased and with the ascendance of Democrats in state government, Peffer's consistent political beliefs then placed him in the Radical camp. Former allies accused Peffer of deception and life in Clarksville became very unpleasant. As he wrote a decade later, his family was treated "as common enemies, politically, socially, and religiously ostracized...slighted upon all occasions, on the streets, at the concert, at the schools, in the social circles, in the churches." The Peffers chose to leave Tennessee.<sup>24</sup>

The Peffer family moved permanently out of the South in 1870 and into Kansas. During the next two decades Peffer practiced law, served as state senator, and edited the *Fredonia Journal*, *Coffeyville Journal*, and *Kansas Farmer*. When he broke with the Republican Party in April 1890 Peffer emphasized economic reforms and sectional reconciliation. Like other

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<sup>24</sup> Coffeyville, *Kansas Journal*, December 4, 1880, quoted in Peter Argersinger, "The Conservative as Radical: A Reconstruction Dilemma," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 34 (1975): 168-87, (quote 186-87).



Populist candidates in Kansas, Peffer stressed the importance of current issues over any strict adherence to the Civil War-era Union and Republican Party. As the nomination of Simpson, Otis, Daniels, and Peffer demonstrated, the third party did not ignore the significance of Union veteran status and former allegiance to the Republican Party within the Sunflower state.

Populists, like Peffer, encouraged the presence of veterans and former Republicans on the party's 1890 ticket. The party emphasized these facts when it promoted candidates like Simpson as "a good soldier; he is a practical farmer and has been a long time."<sup>25</sup>

William Peffer also served as an important figure in the national agrarian movement. Like Leonidas Polk, Peffer demonstrated a consistent advocacy for the reconciliation of opposing sides, modern farm methods, and economic reform. Similar to other Kansas Populists, Peffer believed that the Farmers' Alliance promoted friendship between the North and South. He believed that white and black Southerners would join Kansans and other Northerners in a national People's Party. Like Polk, Peffer traveled outside of his native region to promote reconciliation and the national agrarian movement.

Kansas Populists needed patient and calm leaders, like Peffer, when they tried to attract Southerners into a national third party during 1890. Despite Alliance membership growth, ample efforts to promote reconciliation within the organization, and a growing faith among Kansans that a national political party would best advance Alliance ideas, most Southerners did not support joining a third party. In large measure Southerners preferred to work within the two major parties because of recent regional history and due to the reception that white Southerners received from Democratic leaders. Although Republican and Independent parties challenged its control since the end of Reconstruction, the Democratic Party dominated politics in most

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<sup>25</sup> Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 1-2, 37-38. Peffer also compared the People's Party to the early Republican Party, *Ibid.*, 42; *Kansas Farmer*, August 6, 1890.

southern states. At the end of Reconstruction Southerners tended to racially segregate themselves into the two major parties. Since the Democratic Party ended Reconstruction and supposedly eliminated the corrupt and inept rule of white “scalawags” and “carpetbaggers” and “inferior” blacks, it became the party of the white Southerners. Because Republicans supported the emancipation of slaves, citizenship and enfranchisement rights for ex-slaves, and acted to uphold these laws, the GOP became the political home for most southern African Americans. Like Kansans, many white and black Southerners held strong emotional attachments to their political party, attitudes which the Civil War and Reconstruction forged. Although some Southerners rejected these party identities and embraced challenges to both major parties, support of a national Populist Party was not strong in 1890.<sup>26</sup>

Unlike the Republican Party in Kansas, initially the Democratic Party generally extended a friendly hand to the Alliance in the South. When southern Alliance members emerged from the 1889 St. Louis Alliance convention ready to apply the “Alliance yard stick” to politicians, most responded with support for some agrarian principles. In Georgia, the greatly influential editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, Henry Grady, expressed affinity for Southern Alliance goals. Grady invited Leonidas Polk to the 1889 Cotton Exposition in Atlanta. Polk accepted and Grady paid for his rail passage along with that of Mrs. Polk, Josephus Daniels, and Mrs. Daniels. The *Constitution* editor welcomed his guests with an elaborate celebration. A key figure in the Georgia Democratic Party, Grady presided over Alliance Day at the Cotton Exposition. Grady heaped praise on his guests during their visit to Atlanta. Other prominent Democrats in the state

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<sup>26</sup> There were exceptions to the political segregation of white and black Southerners. North Carolina and Tennessee were two southern states that continued to promote a successful bi-racial Republican Party after the end of Reconstruction. For biracial third-party political movements before Populism see Kenneth C. Barnes, *Who Killed John Clayton?: Political Violence and the Emergence of the New South, 1861-1893* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Jane Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Matthew Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists: Farmer-Labor Insurgency in the Late-Nineteenth-Century South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007).

courted the organization, including John B. Gordon “the hero of Appomattox” and member of the Patrons of Husbandry. Georgia Alliance president Leonidas Livingston possessed ties to some members of the Democratic Party. Livingston served in both house of the state legislature as a Democrat from 1876-77 and 1879-83. The relationship between the Democratic Party and the Farmers’ Alliance in Georgia remained cordial throughout 1890.<sup>27</sup>

In other southern states the reception of the Alliance varied. Reuben Kolb of Alabama served as Commissioner of Agriculture in 1887 as a Democrat. While some Democrats wished to ignore the Alliance, Kolb embraced the group and received its support. In Texas Stephen Hogg found substantial Alliance backing for his efforts to create a railroad commission. Hogg, however, alienated many Alliance supporters for opposing the subtreasury and he clashed with many agrarians throughout his time in office. Although his relationship was tenuous with the agrarian group, Benjamin “Pitchfork” Tillman courted the Alliance in South Carolina. Tillman earned support from many farmers for his producerist rhetoric, opposition to the monopolistic control of railroad corporations, support for the establishment of an agricultural college, Clemson College, and his initial embrace of the subtreasury plan. Simultaneous to the rise of the Alliance, Tillman staged a challenge within the Democratic Party that channeled much agrarian frustration with political, social, and economic conditions. Many Alliance members in the Palmetto state,

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<sup>27</sup> Stuart Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk: Agrarian Crusader* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1949), 212; Josephus Daniels, *Tar Heel Editor* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1939), 381-83; Gaines Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 11; Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists*, 19; Barton C. Shaw, *The Wool-Hat Boys: Georgia’s Populist Party* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 24, 30. Grady promoted the free coinage of silver, improved agricultural practices, agricultural and economic diversification, and expressed concern over the concentration of wealth and power in monopolies. In another similarity to the Alliance Grady encouraged sectional reconciliation between whites by praising brave Union and Confederate soldiers. See Raymond B. Nixon, *Henry Grady, Spokesman of the New South* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1943), 308-310, 343. For a less flattering view of Grady see Harold Davis, *Henry Grady’s New South: Atlanta, a Brave and Beautiful City* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990), 120-23, 130-32.

however, remained skeptical of his commitment to the agrarian orders' principles and viewed Tillman as a power-hungry politician.<sup>28</sup>

Throughout the South, many Democratic politicians pursued a similar strategy with the Alliance. Most southern elected officials avoided directly embracing the full slate of agrarian reforms. Gordon, Tillman, and Hogg, for example, did not support the subtreasury plan, which was the primary reform championed by Alliance leaders in 1890. Due to the partial embrace of agrarian principles, many Alliance members were left with a tough decision. Should they vote for candidates who pledged to enact some of their reforms, or should they only back a candidate who supported the full slate of agrarian demands? Alliancesmen considered their options throughout the South in 1890.

The Alliance's relationship with North Carolina Senator Zebulon Vance demonstrates the nuanced relationship between the Democratic Party and the agrarian organization in the South. Senator Vance was an old friend of Alliance president Leonidas Polk. Both men belonged to the state Whig Party before the Civil War and Polk served under Vance in the Confederate Army. A native of mountainous western North Carolina, Vance possessed a folksy charm that contributed to his popularity during and after the war. As wartime governor of the state Vance was extremely popular because he resisted efforts by Confederate President Jefferson Davis to centralize power in Richmond. Governor Vance refused to procure supplies and troops for the Confederacy, demanded that North Carolina troops serve only in the Tar Heel state, and he protected state officials from Confederate conscription. Vance remained popular after the war.

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<sup>28</sup> Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 225-30; Francis Butler Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman: South Carolinian* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1944), 148, 204-05; Stephen David Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 245-53. Tillman founded an agrarian organization, the Farmers' Association, to promote farmers' interests in South Carolina. The Farmers' Association and the Alliance competed for a similar constituency and remained rivals. Many in the Alliance viewed the Farmers' Association as Tillman's personal political machine. Simkins and Kantrowitz agree with this conclusion.

Pardoned in 1876, he won election as governor in the same year. Polk campaigned in favor of “Redemption” and his friend Vance. During the Vance administration Polk worked successfully to establish the Department of Agriculture and he became the first Commissioner.<sup>29</sup>

Because of his popularity in North Carolina, his general support of reform, and his relationship with the Alliance president, Vance sponsored a subtreasury bill in the U.S. Senate, at the behest of Polk and Charles Macune. Vance obliged the request and introduced legislation in February 1890. Several months later Senator Vance wrote a North Carolina Alliance member that he could not support the subtreasury bill. Vance shocked many Alliancemen by publicly explaining his reasoning in a July 1890 open letter. The Senator stated that he supported the principles behind the bill, but he doubted the constitutionality of the measure. Macune took to the *National Economist* to denounce the Senator for lacking the “moral courage” necessary to push the bill against opposition in the Senate. He also asked why Vance waited so long to express his opinion. Although Polk was in Kansas, J.L. Ramsey, the editorial manager of the *Progressive Farmer*, directly questioned Vance’s explanation. Ramsey asked what Vance found unconstitutional in the proposal and chastised him for failing to abide by the will of his constituents.

Vance supporters in the Democratic press reacted with heavy criticism for Polk, whom they assumed penned the critical editorial. Polk then defended Ramsey and provided a thorough account of Vance’s earlier support for the subtreasury bill, which Polk claimed the Senator considered flawed, though the best available relief measure for farmers. The Alliance president also expressed dissatisfaction with Vance for releasing his message of opposition after Polk left Washington D.C. Overall, Polk’s account conveyed a feeling of surprise at Vance’s about-face.

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<sup>29</sup> James M. Beeby, *Revolt of the Tar Heels: The North Carolina Populist Movement, 1890-1901* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 17; Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk*, 50, 85-86, 240-41; <http://civilwarexperience.ncdcr.gov/vance/narrative-vance3.htm> (accessed July 25, 2013).

Polk also announced that the *Progressive Farmer* would not support a senate candidate who opposed the subtreasury.<sup>30</sup>

Other Alliance members wrote Vance directly and expressed their feelings of betrayal with less polite words. One writer stated, “We have followed blind folded for 25 years—now we propose to contend for our principals in our party, we intend to meddle awhile, let the consequences be as they may.” The author concluded tartly, “Hoping that your ardent duties (as well as those of all the should be representatives) may soon permit all to return home on a short vacation (at least) and become acquainted with the people and changes, I am yours etc.” W.A. Harbold, a tenant farmer from Chapanoke, expressed similar frustrations with the post-Civil War Democratic Party. Harbold said, “We feel sir that we have been deceived and we have become dissatisfied with those who make promises only to be broken.” Others wrote to support the senator. A Tarboro man who belonged to the Alliance said, “I think you exactly right in opposing the Sub Treasury bill. The Farmers doesn’t need any new laws for their relief but a repeal of the obnoxious laws already in force and all this we can get inside of the democratic party with full possession of the legislation of the Country.”<sup>31</sup>

Throughout the summer and fall Polk and Vance supporters explained their respective positions as the expiration of Vance’s senate term loomed. While his reelection was not much in doubt, the two sides differed on how much instruction the Senator should take from the Alliance. Polk and his supporters wanted Vance to pledge his support for the subtreasury bill. Vance allies resented Alliance efforts to dictate the senator’s actions. Although the two sides did not engage in outright public hostility, throughout the summer and fall emissaries from each camp met in

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<sup>30</sup> Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk*, 240-47.

<sup>31</sup> “Alliance” [Ridgway, North Carolina] to Zebulon Vance, July 15, 1890; Harbold to Vance, July 14, 1890; H.C. Bourner to Vance, July 11, 1890, all in Zebulon Vance Papers, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Southern Historical Collection and quoted in Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 242-43.

private negotiations. Ultimately, a state legislature that contained many Alliance members reelected Vance. The legislature passed a resolution that required Vance to support legislation in accordance with Alliance principles. Through subtle maneuverings by Alliance members in the North Carolina legislature, the resolution, however, failed to specify which particular reforms Vance must follow, leaving the senator free to interpret when legislation contained Alliance principles. Polk approved of this compromise, but some Alliancemen claimed to be taken by surprise.<sup>32</sup>

The relationship between the Southern Alliance and Senator Vance reveals three important points about the broader agrarian movement in the South. First, not all Alliance members favored third party action. Unlike Kansans, a majority of Southerners were not ready to abandon the dominant political party of the region in 1890. Because of the somewhat favorable reception from Democrats and due to over two decades of loyalty to the two major political parties, third party formation gained little traction in the South. Second, Alliancemen exhibited varying levels of loyalty to organizational goals. Members disagreed over which improvements were most important to the agrarian group and when they should apply the principles. Because many reforms lacked specificity they appealed to a wide audience. Once the Alliance began the process of defining and applying its policies, the membership responded with varying degrees of enthusiasm. After 1890, this process increasingly created divisions within the Alliance. Third, politicians in the South and in the other parts of the country responded with a flexible strategy in their relations with the Alliance. Vance, for instance, supported Alliance calls for silver coinage and a lowered tariff. He did not, however, favor government ownership

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<sup>32</sup> Daniels, *Tar Heel Editor*, 444-52; Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk*, 248-51. Noblin suggested that Polk and other Alliance members engaged in negotiations to reach the compromise. Daniels portrayed the settlement as a surprise to some Alliancemen, conveying the sense that the agrarian organization turned against the will of some of its members.

of railroads or the subtreasury plan. As stated above, other southern politicians followed a similar pattern. Because many politicians responded by partially embracing Alliance demands, they effectively divided Alliancemen and left voters with a choice. Agrarians could either vote for the candidate who embraced the full slate reforms or a candidate who supported a few Alliance policies and tended to possess broader popular appeal. In 1890 most Alliance members in the South chose the latter option.<sup>33</sup>

The divergent positions taken by members of the Southern Alliance toward the formation of a third party subtly but significantly affected the national agrarian cause. While momentum and growth continued in the movement, external challenges to Alliance unity made it necessary to reaffirm the national character of the organization. Republicans in Kansas put the farm association on the defensive when they ridiculed the Alliance as a Democratic and white southern conspiracy to weaken the Union and its faithful political party, the G.O.P. The attacks questioned Southern Alliance claims of sectional reconciliation and also suggested that these latest southern “rebels” did not have loyalty for the people of the Sunflower state. Kansas Republicans challenged the ties that linked farmers in an infant national agrarian movement.

While the Kansas People’s Party responded in part with the nomination of several Union veterans for political office, the leadership of the Southern Alliance reacted with increased efforts to promote sectional reconciliation and trust between American producers of wealth. Although Alliance President Leonidas Polk left for his tour of the West and Midwest to encourage membership growth and enthusiasm between active Alliancemen and women, he also went to reinforce trust between farmers of Kansas and the South. Polk left North Carolina at the end of June, almost two weeks after the establishment of the People’s Party in Topeka, Kansas.

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<sup>33</sup> William Holmes makes similar points in “The Southern Farmers’ Alliance and the Georgia Senatorial Election of 1890,” *Journal of Southern History* 50, no. 2 (May 1984): 197-224.



As seen in the previous chapter, Polk emphasized economic policies and sectional reconciliation during his tour of the Midwest. Alliance newspapers followed a similar pattern. Reports of Polk's speaking engagements appeared frequently throughout the summer and fall of 1890. Many letters to the editor and editorials emphasized sectional reconciliation. The coverage of sectional reconciliation in agrarian newspapers served to maintain unity within the Southern Alliance. Through the espousal of an identity based on producerism and a rejection of partisan and sectional bias, the Alliance acted to keep the organization strong and assure Kansas Populists that the agrarian association pursued the same goal through different methods.

Alliance editors did not exclusively author material that advanced the cause of producerism and sectional reconciliation in their newspapers. Rank and file members of the Southern Alliance wrote into newspapers in reaction to speeches and articles by leaders of the farm association. Agrarian editors and supporters provided a recurrent theme by arguing for the artificiality of sectionalism and the glory of the producing classes of America. R.W. Coleman wrote an article for *The National Economist* describing the natural cordiality of American producers that emerged with the removal of sectionalism. Coleman described the Civil War as a time when trusted political leaders misled the people for the sake of financial profit. He wrote that these Americans, "who subordinated all feelings of patriotism to a selfish greed for gain," manipulated the emotions of Northerners and Southerners. Citing the authority of the late President Lincoln, Coleman argued that the postwar years saw a continuation of rule by the gluttonous thanks to their use of sectionalism. He continued, "They have played upon the prejudices of the people as predicted by President Lincoln, and thereby maintained a supremacy of the money power." Attempts to challenge this "money power" ended because "we are helpless so long as one particle of sectional prejudice remains in existence. Whenever a

movement for the amelioration of the masses originates in either the North or South, the other side is always ready, with a vast deal of bloody-shirt waving, to oppose bitterly its going into operation.” Here Coleman described the “bloody-shirt” as a weapon of greedy sectional agitators from both regions, rather than the exclusive tool of Northerners.

In true Alliance form, Coleman offered solutions to the problems of sectionalism and economic exploitation. He asserted that brave acts of forgiveness were required if average Americans wished to fix their economic problems. Coleman declared, “The only hope for our common country is to hurl from the land the spirit of bitterness between the sections, and let common sense do its ‘perfect work.’ The people North and South must combine to turn on the sunlight of truth. We must destroy the blind prejudice that makes us grope helplessly when, could we open our eyes, the way is clear.” He argued “Our interests are identical, and we must join hands in a strong, fraternal grasp that will cement our brotherly relations and make it impossible for a rupture to ever occur again between us.” Like Polk and other Alliance members, Coleman urged a manly reconciliation of Americans to overcome the false divisions of sectional bitterness. He also wrote to encourage the continued national unity of the Alliance as Kansas Populists faced a deluge of Republican attacks questioning the motives of white Southerners.<sup>34</sup>

More signs of support for the Alliance emerged from rank and file members. In the wake of the midwestern speaking tour by Alliance President Polk, the Marble Alliance of North Carolina passed several resolutions. The sub-Alliance responded to newspapers in the North and South who attacked Polk. Declarations from the North Carolinians described these newspapers as “working tools of Wall street, whose corruption is as black as outer darkness.” Marble

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<sup>34</sup> *National Economist*, October 18, 1890.

Alliance members pledged to boycott these newspapers and keep them away from their families. The sub-Alliance next announced its support for Polk. They resolved, “that Col. Polk has done more to harmonize the war prejudice than any man or set of men, and should be waised *while living* for his noble acts.”<sup>35</sup>

Other agrarian newspapers joined the chorus of producerist solidarity against sectionalism. In Kansas, the *Topeka Advocate* republished an editorial from the *Progressive Farmer* that declared the end of the “old Mason’s and Dixon’s line. It is a thing of the past. It is history.” According to the writer “The Farmers’ Alliance is now obliterating the old line by giving us a new policy.” Thanks to the Alliance a new boundary emerged running from Toledo, Ohio south to the Potomac River. Northeast of the line manufacturing characterized an economy run by “plutocracy” and “money power.” While the Northeast possessed half of the national wealth and less than third of the population, the region controlled both major political parties. The writer concluded by stating that “If the people are true to themselves, to their country and to their God, the days of the plutocracy are numbered.”<sup>36</sup>

Some Alliance newspapers characterized the agrarian group as a blend of sectional reconciliation and class appeals. The *Kansas Farmer* reprinted the Republican *Topeka Capital*, which asked if Kansas senators would ““establish the supremacy of the producing region over the exchangers of Wall Street?”” The *Farmer* concluded, “The farmers have undertaken to unite the South and the West and –the whole country.” Later in the summer the newspaper continued the theme stating “There is no one object of the Alliance more sincerely and earnestly sought at this time than the nationalization of the people on a basis of patriotic devotion to the best interests of

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<sup>35</sup> *Progressive Farmer*, December 23, 1890. I have taken these quotes from the original. The final quote above is likely a typographical error in the original newspaper publication. Most likely the authors meant to write that Polk should be praised rather than “waised.”

<sup>36</sup> *Topeka Advocate*, July 16, 1890.

all the people—a union of North and South in sincere fellowship. When a Southern Alliance man comes North he comes with an olive branch in his hand and a message of peace and goodwill in his mouth. Not a word does he utter in ill temper or in unmanly mood. A fraternal spirit moves the whole body South. It is constantly giving evidence of a sincere effort to obliterate all unfriendly feelings between the sections.”<sup>37</sup>

Texans echoed these sentiments. At the state meeting of the Southern Alliance delegates endorsed a resolution to “grasp with a tightened Alliance grip the hands of our Alliance brothers of the north and west, determined to hold together with locked shields, despite all efforts to arouse prejudice and sectional strife between us until the financial emancipation of the laborer and producer is accomplished.” The *Southern Mercury* further bolstered its feelings of sectional reconciliation and producerism with news from the Midwest and Northeast. Readers found multiple reprinted articles that announced the feverishly rapid spread of the Alliance in New York, Illinois, Michigan, and Illinois during 1890.<sup>38</sup>

Several accounts of Polk’s tours of the Midwest went beyond rhetoric to show acts of reconciliation taking place during Alliance gatherings. The *Ohio State Journal* wrote that Polk was a “union man up to the outbreak of the war, when he went with his native State. He fought through the Shenandoah and last night locked arms and discussed incidents of the battle of

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<sup>37</sup> *Kansas Farmer*, May 14 (first quote), August 27, 1890 (second quote).

<sup>38</sup> *Southern Mercury*, June 19, September 4, 1890 (quote). Next to the June 19, 1890 articles celebrating the spread of the Alliance in northern states lay an ad for the Louisiana Lottery, a notoriously corrupt institution of postwar Louisiana. The ad contained the signed endorsements of Jubal Early and P.G.T. Beauregard, two former Confederate generals and leaders in early efforts to celebrate the Lost Cause. Early was particularly virulent in his denunciation of Northerners, African Americans, reconciliation, and change in the postwar South. Initially he refused to live in the South until the Confederacy returned to sovereignty over the land. Although he returned in 1869 he continued to loudly criticize change. The location of Early’s endorsement next to the reconciliationist articles reveals the at times contradictory loyalties of southern white farmers during the rise of the agrarian movement. Particularly with the emergence of the Populist Party, southern white men felt the pull between political principles and an increasingly powerful southern white identity. For more on this tension see Chapter 5. For more on the Louisiana Lottery see C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (1951; repr., Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 11-14. For more on Jubal Early and his resistance to change, see Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*, 54-55.

Winchester with those who were on the other side.” The mini-veterans reunion demonstrated the national healing possible in the Alliance and the willingness of Northern and Southern farmers to reconcile past battles for the sake national farmer cooperation. The *Journal* further emphasized the absence of sectionalism in the Alliance president’s heart, stating “Colonel Polk is a warm friend of General W.S. Jones, of Delaware, the latter having been the guest of the colonel at his home in the South as he was returning to the North at the conclusion of the war.” Through this account Polk appeared as a consistent reconciliationist and Southerner who truly forgot the bitterness of the Civil War era. In the hands of such men, the Alliance appeared to legitimately embrace sectional reconciliation.<sup>39</sup>

Rank and file members also expressed their joy over acts of reconciliation during Polk’s tour. Kansas Union veteran, E.P.C. Webster wrote Polk a letter that reappeared in the *Progressive Farmer*. Webster told Polk “I shall not soon forget the greeting you and the Georgia delegation gave us when we reached the hall where were assembled the delegates to the State Alliance. This meeting with you and the others of your party I shall cherish as among the happiest events of my life.” Webster continued, “Oh how thankful I am to believe that the old sectional hatred that the G.O.P. would like to keep rife, is disappearing. When I was in the army I used to hear the Southerners called hot blooded people. I have found them warm hearted, as well.” Webster celebrated the forgiveness of past enemies and hoped that from the acts of reconciliation farmers could join together and create positive economic, political, and social changes. The stories of Polk and Webster encouraged midwestern and southern farmers to trust each other and unite under the Alliance banner.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The *Ohio State Journal* was reprinted in the *Progressive Farmer*, November 4, 1890.

<sup>40</sup> *Progressive Farmer*, December 9, 1890.

During this particular visit Alliancesmen from Georgia and Kansas discussed one of the most controversial and bitterest memories of the Civil War, Andersonville prison. The Confederate prison for Union captives operated from February 1864 to April 1865. Andersonville held over 45,000 Union inmates, 13,000 of whom died at the prison camp. Memoirs from former Union prisoners appeared in great numbers after the war and stimulated outrage in the North. Combined with the assassination of President Lincoln, the passage of Black Codes in southern states, and several race riots, Andersonville memoirs created public pressure for the prosecution of ex-Confederates. Because of the lurid stories and visual proof of emaciation of Union soldiers that emerged from Andersonville, the superintendent of the prison, Henry Wirz, became the only Confederate soldier or government official executed after the war. Even with the punishment of Wirz, Andersonville remained a source of much bitterness. David Blight claims that accounts by prisoners of Union and Confederate wartime camps worked against reconciliation for years. Into the 1890s, the personal accounts of prison experiences induced animosity among the public. Many of the most non-reconciled writers came from the ranks of prison narrators.<sup>41</sup>

The grounds of the former prison became a tourist attraction during the years immediately following the Civil War. In 1865, Congress made the Andersonville cemetery into a national cemetery. Federal soldiers, hired workers, and a former Confederate cleaned the cemetery, reburied exposed corpses, and built a fence around the cemetery. The Women's Relief Corps (WRC) maintained the cemetery for several decades. Over these same decades the prison grounds became useful in a variety of ways. Local residents took apart the stockade for personal use. The grounds of the prison served as the site of an African-American school, a place for

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<sup>41</sup> John R. Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead: Commemoration and the Problem of Reconciliation* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2005), 145; David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 152, 183-85.

black church gatherings, and a cotton farm. In 1889 the Grand Army of Republic (GAR) helped organize a Memorial Day commemoration on the former prison grounds. Local newspaper accounts characterized the Memorial Day celebration as festive and populated by a majority African-American crowd. The commemoration featured grave decorations, speeches, and a crowd of an estimated three thousand. Memorial Day commemorations increased in popularity during the 1890s with attendance rising to 4,000 in 1890 and 10,000 in 1892.<sup>42</sup>

GAR involvement with Andersonville began with the formation of the Georgia Division in 1889. Dr. J.W. Stone and Captain I.D. Crawford helped create the post with the intention of raising funds for the purchase of the Andersonville prison grounds. After its formation, Crawford became commander of the post. Initially Stone and Crawford wanted to make the old prison into a for-profit park, but public pressure caused them to alter their plans. The group decided to purchase the former prison grounds and create a public park. Stone traveled to the North to raise funds to purchase the land. In October 1890, his efforts led him to Topeka, Kansas in the company of two Confederate veterans, Alliance President Leonidas Polk and Georgia State President Leonidas Livingston, and Judge W.A. Wilson.<sup>43</sup>

The Southern party arrived in Topeka during the Kansas State Alliance annual meeting and they met a group of Union veterans at the train station who escorted the guests to the

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<sup>42</sup> Robert Scott Davis, *Ghosts and Shadows of Andersonville: Essays on the Secret Social Histories of America's Deadliest Prison* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2006), 37-44; Benjamin Cloyd, *Haunted By Atrocity: Civil War Prisons in American Memory* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 74-76.

<sup>43</sup> Davis, *Ghosts and Shadows of Andersonville*, 42-43. The Georgia GAR did eventually purchase the Andersonville property in September 1892. Due to a lack of funds and inability to care for the grounds, the Women's Relief Corps, an Auxiliary of the GAR took possession of the property in 1893. In 1896 the WRC built an informal visitors center, created paths, and constructed fences and bridges on the property. Because of these improvements more visitors came to the former prison. The WRC decided it could not maintain the grounds and in 1910 it donated the Andersonville property to the National Park Service. See Cloyd, *Haunted By Atrocity*, 79 and Davis, *Ghosts and Shadows of Andersonville*, 43. Dr. J.W. Stone was a pharmacist from Atlanta and chaplain of the only GAR post in the city, the O.M. Mitchell Post, No. 21. During the Civil War he served a Private in Company G, 8<sup>th</sup> Ohio Infantry. See Wallace Putnam Reed, *History of Atlanta, Georgia: With Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Some of Its Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Syracuse, NY: D. Mason & Company, 1889), 491; Grand Army of the Republic, *Roster and History of the Department of Georgia (States of Georgia and South Carolina) Grand Army of the Republic, 1894* (Atlanta: Syl. Lester & Co. Printers, 1894), 15.

convention. Annie Diggs recounted the visit in an article for the *Progressive Farmer*. Diggs was a reform advocate and co-editor of Topeka's *The Advocate* with Dr. Stephen McLallin. Diggs related that initially three Union veterans were to escort the Southerners, but so many applied for the "privilege" that eighty-two Union veterans met Polk, Livingston, Stone, and Wilson. The Union veterans paid military tribute to the group, which contained two Confederate veterans and one Union veteran, and "marked step and kept time in the triumphal march of that procession." When the group entered the meeting hall, "cheer after cheer arose, and hand clasping and voices broken with emotion testified that no barrier lay between these reunited loyal sons of our great republic." An Alliance song was then sung to the tune of "Marching Through Georgia." Diggs added, "Oh! how changed the time since those far off, terrible years. In this glad, new time Georgia comes marching through Kansas on a mission of peace and good will and right royally is the progress hailed."<sup>44</sup>

Each southern visitor addressed the Kansas convention. After Stone's address the Kansans raised \$100 for the Georgia GAR purchase of Andersonville. Diggs continued to describe positive interactions at the convention, calling it "a veritable love feast of reminiscences of the old sad days when the war cloud shadowed the land. The utmost test of fellowship came when 'Andersonville' was recalled. With bravery of another and nobler kind than ever was on a battlefield, these men of the North and men of the South spoke of the bitter *past*, and the spirit they displayed revealed the truth that not one little, least, last spark of sectional hate remains. No

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<sup>44</sup> *Progressive Farmer*, October 28, 1890. I have not confirmed that Judge W.A. Wilson was a Confederate veteran. According to W. Scott Morgan, Livingston served in Cobb's Legion as a private in 1861. Also known as the Georgia Legion, Howell Cobb formed this legion, which left for Virginia in 1861. In 1862 Livingston transferred to the western theater of war where he served under General Braxton Bragg. See Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Alliance and the Impending Revolution* (1891; repr., New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), 314-15; National Park Service, "Cobb's Legion, Georgia," National Park Service, [http://www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-regiments-detail.htm?regiment\\_id=CGACOBBL](http://www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-regiments-detail.htm?regiment_id=CGACOBBL) (accessed August 1, 2013). Polk served in the 26<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the North Carolina Volunteers. See Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk*, 50. For Dr. Stone's Civil War service see footnote n. 41 above.



demagogue, North or South, can rekindle fierce flames in the hearts of these true patriots.”

Diggs emphasized the discussion of Andersonville and acknowledged the emotional weight contained in memories of the prison. She rejoiced at the absence of conflict and presence of courage when Alliancemen from the North and South discussed Andersonville. Diggs portrayed the discussions as acts of reconciliation and “true” love of nation, in contrast to the continued sectional bitterness of the “demagogue, North and South.”

Diggs provided further proof of the desire of farmers to reconcile and join in a strong national movement. Pouring rain and muddied roads did not prevent the arrival of “several thousand farmers and laborers and their families” to hear Polk and Livingston speak. Polk addressed the crowd without discussing “partisan politics.” Only the “cause of the world’s toilers had glorious pleading.” Diggs mentioned that some were present who tried to portray the Southern Alliance as an enemy to Kansans. The journalist claimed that these men must have felt “inward shame” as they listened to Polk and Livingston as “these two noble specimens of Southern manhood uttered patriotic sentiments and breathed through all their discourse the spirit of reconciliation and fraternalism. How immeasurably above the slaves to party prejudice and sectional hate these two patriots towered. They maintained a dignified silence concerning the malicious and vindictive assaults made by the corrupt and partisan press on the very day of the meeting.” Diggs compared these “patriotic sentiments and philosophies” favorably to those of Ingalls’ statements concerning the absurdity of the purification of politics. As a visual reminder to the crowd, these quotes from the Senator lay on a banner near the speaker’s platform. In contrast to the greedy and corrupt Ingalls, Polk and Livingston appeared as brave and manly American loyalists.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Progressive Farmer*, October 28, 1890.

At the largest rally later that evening in Topeka, Polk followed Mary Lease on the speaker's platform. Lease gained fame throughout the United States for her speaking abilities made on behalf of the Alliance and Populist Party and her famous words to encourage farmers to "raise less corn and more hell." Lease moved to Kansas from Pennsylvania in 1873 and became one of the few female lawyers in the Sunflower state. She abandoned the GOP in 1888 and campaigned for the Union-Labor Party. Like Diggs and other women, Lease supported the Alliance and Populism because of its critiques of monopolies, support of temperance, and advocacy of female suffrage. During 1890 she spoke frequently to crowds on behalf of the Populist Party, which may explain why Diggs did not report her words to the Topeka crowd. Whatever the case may be Lease had a personal connection to Andersonville. As she revealed publicly several years later, Lease's father died at the prison as a Union captive. If Lease discussed the matter during her Topeka speech, it is hard to believe that Diggs would have neglected to include the comments in an article devoted to Andersonville and sectional reconciliation. For reasons unknown, Lease chose not to discuss Andersonville on this day.<sup>46</sup>

Following Lease, Polk took the podium after receiving a handshake from Benjamin F. Foster, the African-American Populist candidate for state auditor. Diggs noted the significance of the moment writing, "What changes hath not time wrought." As these two men, one an ex-slave, the other an ex slave owner, shook hands heartily the enthusiasm knew no bounds. Mr. Foster testified to the good treatment he had always received in the South." Diggs depicted the greeting between Polk and Foster as further confirmation to the Kansas audience that white Southerners in the Alliance truly sought reconciliation with their Northern brethren. She asserted

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<sup>46</sup> Clanton, *Kansas Populism*, 125-27, 136, 143. Kansas Populists consistently dodged the evocation of Civil War memories that emphasized conflict. Lease's avoidance of Andersonville could be seen as another example of this general pattern. Recalling the death of her father may have caused too much pain for Lease to discuss the memory publicly. Perhaps Lease sought to prevent any outpouring of bitterness that was connected to the memory given that the Topeka gathering was devoted to promoting the reconciliation of northern and southern farmers.

that Polk no longer viewed black Americans as slaves. Like white Northerners, white Southerners now thought of African Americans as worthy of respect. Diggs suggested that African Americans were welcome in the farmers' movement as equal and valued partners. The Kansas audience responded to act of racial and sectional reconciliation with great approval, as the journalist wrote, "the enthusiasm knew no bounds."<sup>47</sup>

Foster confirmed this interpretation by telling the crowd that he always received fair and positive treatment from white Southerners. This act of friendship suggested to the Kansas audience that Republican depictions of the Southern Alliance as a neo-Confederate scheme carried no validity. White Southerners, like Polk, treated African Americans with respect and decency. The Republican press and Senator Ingalls made statements to the contrary to distract the public with negativity, sectional hatred, and lies to protect the monopolies that stole from hard working, true Americans. Diggs asserted these ideas when she summarized the impact of the meetings. She wrote, "Sectionalism has received its death blow. The monster will die hard because it is the only hope of evil men who strive to prolong it that they may retain political supremacy. The unparalleled viciousness of the present campaign is but a symptom of the expiration of sectionalism in politics." In contrast, the writer proclaimed that the agrarian movement would bring about "a time of prosperity, of good fellowship and growth of all things excellent." Diggs portrayed the Alliance as a vehicle for sectional reconciliation and racial reconciliation. In her depiction, the agrarian movement put into action its cherished mottos, such as the slogan borrowed from Andrew Jackson followers, "equal rights to all, special privilege to none."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Progressive Farmer*, October 28, 1890.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*; Robert C. McMath, *American Populism: A Social History 1877-1898* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1992), 52.

Since she wrote for the North Carolina audience of the *Progressive Farmer*, Diggs also reassured white Southerners that most Kansans possessed trust and acceptance for their agrarian allies south of the Mason-Dixon. The southern party of guests in Topeka received a warm and enthusiastic welcome. Diggs hoped to return the favor of paying the South a visit. She noted that the Kansas Alliance convention elected Diggs and “three old Union soldiers” delegates to attend the next Georgia State Alliance meeting. Once again sectional reconciliation received ample attention with the Southern Alliance and its press. Diggs and three Union veterans planned to prove their allegiance to reconciliation by visiting the South. In a reversal of Polk’s tours of the Midwest and West, the Kansans planned to go to the South as ambassadors from the North. Both visits served as a veterans’ reunion for agrarians where healing and national unity received ample attention. The trips also contained the added objective of building a national movement for the betterment of the agrarian economy and political life in America. Through an emphasis on reconciliation, members of the Alliance thought they would strength their cause for national reform. During 1891 and 1892, the validity of these beliefs would be tested.<sup>49</sup>

Although the reconciliationist feeling was prevalent in Topeka, the choice of “Marching Through Georgia” was an interesting tune to use for an Alliance song. Henry Clay Work, a Connecticut-born abolitionist and Chicago printer, wrote the popular 1865 song, which sold half a million copies by 1877. The song focused on the emancipation of slaves and defeat of the Confederacy during one of the most infamous examples of “total war.” General William Tecumseh Sherman led Union troops on a march that left a path of destruction that crippled a large portion of the Confederate breadbasket and railroad corridor. The fall of Atlanta won President Lincoln a second term, while the march to Savannah and the subsequent movement

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<sup>49</sup> Northern visits to the South are addressed in the next chapter.

into South Carolina and North Carolina, provided the devastation necessary to hasten the end of the Civil War. Sherman made his reputation from this carefully planned military operation and became a national hero in the North. Many white Southerners remembered the march with intense bitterness. In the memories of these white Southerners, the march came to represent the brutality and dishonorable methods employed by the Union Army during the Civil War.<sup>50</sup>

While there is no record of a negative reaction from the southern guests, Sherman's March had personal meaning for at least two of the southern guests at Topeka. Polk and Livingston served in the Confederate Army. Sherman's March also destroyed the farms of both men. Livingston farmed in Newton County, Georgia, just outside of Atlanta. Sherman's troops destroyed the Polk farm when they moved north from Georgia and tore through South Carolina and North Carolina. Polk's slaves left the farm with Union troops. Although Sherman's March resulted in the destruction of their personal property, neither Polk nor Livingston left any evidence to suggest irritation with the hearing "Marching Through Georgia" in Topeka.

Kansans clearly did not think that their guests would mind hearing the tune. No evidence exists to show that they chose the song out of maliciousness. More likely, the Kansas Alliance delegates considered the past to be dead, as Alliance leaders consistently said. Indeed, playing the tune seemed to validate Alliance reconciliationist pronouncements. Diggs' article in the *Progressive Farmer* suggested reconciliation by contextualizing the visit and song within the

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<sup>50</sup> Edward Caudill and Paul Ashdown. "Long Remember: Sherman on Stage and Screen, in Song and Poetry," in *Sherman's March in Myth and Memory*, ed., Edward Caudill and Paul Ashdown (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), 140-141. White Southerners were not the only people who hated Sherman's "Marching Through Georgia." Because bands and choirs performed the song at nearly all his public appearances, Sherman hated it as well. During an 1890 GAR parade in Boston, 305 bands played the song as they passed the General on the grandstand. One observer saw Sherman turn his head in disgust as the song began yet again. Sherman once said, "If I had thought when I made that march that it would have inspired anyone to compose such a piece, I would have marched around the state." Despite his opinion, the song became popular worldwide among military bands that played the tune through World War II. The song was also played at Sherman's funeral. See Caudill and Ashdown, *Sherman's March in Myth and Memory*, 140 (quote in footnote); Charles Royster, *The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 364-65.

Kansas State Alliance convention. Immediately after chronicling the entry of the Southerners to the cheers and the tune of “Marching Through Georgia,” she celebrated “this glad, new time Georgia comes marching through Kansas on a mission of peace and good will and right royally is the progress hailed.”<sup>51</sup>

Diggs’ comments suggest a second explanation for playing the song. Adapting “Marching Through Georgia” for use in an Alliance song also contained military connotations. As addressed in the previous chapter, Alliance leaders and members viewed the agrarian order as a nonviolent reform army. The farmers’ movement portrayed itself as a brave and loyal coalition of noble warriors bent on reducing the power of the wealthy and restoring the rule of “the people.” Like Sherman’s conquering army, the Alliance sought to sweep the nation and destroy those who stood in opposition to pure American democracy. Perhaps the Kansas Alliance members simply liked the immensely popular song. Whatever the reasons, Kansans playing “Marching Through Georgia” for a white southern audience carried significance for advancing the reconciliation agenda of Farmers’ Alliance. Intent on spreading the southern-based movement into other sections of the country, the events in Topeka contributed to evidence that the Alliance truly sought forgiveness between old foes for the sake of advancing better economic and social conditions for the American working majority.<sup>52</sup>

Beyond the direct implications, Diggs’ account reveals more about the character of reconciliation in the Alliance movement in 1890. The article highlights a rare instance when agrarian efforts to promote sectional reconciliation involved more than white men. Written by a white woman, Diggs’ article highlighted the involvement of an African-American man in a

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<sup>51</sup> *Progressive Farmer*, October 28, 1890.

<sup>52</sup> See Caudill and Ashdown, *Sherman’s March in Myth and Memory* for more. For more on the attitudes of Northern soldiers and the association between the Union and democracy, see Gary Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 33-74.

public act of sectional and racial reconciliation. When Foster greeted Polk on stage with a “hearty handshake” the act served as an indication to Northerners that race relations in the South had improved. Because the white South appeared to be racially reconciled to African-American citizenship and equality before the law, sectional reconciliation between whites of the North and South could take place.

Acts of racial reconciliation and their discussion in print continued in the agrarian movement. The Foster-Polk handshake set the terms and limits for future acts of interracial cooperation moments. Whenever southern whites and southern blacks showed public affection for one another or spoke about cordial race relations in the South, they focused on positive past experiences, but failed to account for African-American Civil War service. When the agrarian movement based sectional reconciliation on military and masculine memories of Civil War combat, they did not include black Americans. This form of reconciliation, focused on battlefield courage, was for whites only. Incentives existed for white Northerners and Southerners to avoid discussing the role of African-American combat troops. Taught that African Americans were an inferior race, the specter of black Union troops produced extremely negative reactions for many southern whites. Most white southerners bitterly remembered black soldiers during and after the war as a symbol of injustice and Northern misrule. Since many white Southerners in the Alliance grew up in the presence of slaves, some may felt betrayed when slaves ran away during the war or left with Union troops, or were “taken” by Union troops never to return, as in Polk’s case. Southern whites generally could not accept former slaves as social equals and, therefore, could not acknowledge black combat bravery and heroism. Combined with post-war economic and social struggles, many whites viewed the success of some African Americans as proof of further erosion of white superiority and black inferiority.

Whatever the particular reason, most southern white men failed to recognize African American combat service during the Civil War.<sup>53</sup>

White Northerners also avoided references to African-American combat during the Civil War. Even though several prominent Kansas Populists, including William Peffer and John Otis, supported abolitionism before the war, white Northerners ignored the topic in the interest of reconciling with white Southerners. Racism also played a role. Before and after the War of the Rebellion, many Northerners viewed African Americans as inferior racially, even if they respected the extension of civil rights to former slaves. For the sake of the youthful national agrarian movement, whites from the North and South agreed to exclude African Americans from discussions of sectional reconciliation based on masculine battlefield bravery. Having compromised on the issue of racial segregation in sub-alliances at the 1889 St. Louis convention, it is highly possible that white Northerners were willing to do so again on an issue so historically divisive. Nor were agrarian supporters alone in the exclusion of African Americans veterans from Civil War commemorations and memories. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century racially integrated parades and Memorial Day festivities decreased and many predominantly African American celebrations suffered from dwindling participation. During the peak of Civil War monument construction in the 1890s and 1910s, few Union monuments included depictions of black soldiers.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> For the bitterness of southern whites after the Civil War see Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*; Blight, *Race and Reunion*; Ted Ownby, "The Defeated Generation at Work: White Farmers in the Deep South, 1865-1890," *Southern Studies* (Winter 1984): 325-47.

<sup>54</sup> For racism among Union troops during the war see Gallagher, *The Union War*. For racism in Kansas after the war see Ben M.S. Campney, "'This is Not Dixie.'" For the role of African Americans in Civil War commemorations see Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, And Monument In Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 19; W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "Race, Memory, and Masculinity: Black Veterans Recall the Civil War," in *The War Was You and Me: Civilians in the American Civil War*, ed. Joan E. Cashin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 151-52; Kathleen Clark, *Defining Moments: African American Commemoration & Political Culture in the South, 1863-1913* (Chapel Hill: The University of North



A variety of factors explain why African Americans failed to press for the recognition of black Civil War combat service within the framework of Alliance sectional reconciliation. First, the organizations most identified with the commemoration of black military service, such as the GAR and its auxiliaries, possessed strong ties to the Republican Party. As Frederick Douglass, a staunch Republican supporter and the major advocate for remembering black Civil War military service, stated, “the Republican Party is the ship, all else is the ocean.” Many Union veterans in the GAR agreed. Most all-black GAR posts existed in areas where the Republican Party fared well. The confluence of GAR membership and Republican support handicapped the prevalence of African-American Union veterans in the Alliance. In most southern states Democrats proved more sympathetic to the farmers’ association and, therefore, tainted the Alliance in the eyes of many African Americans. In short, those most active in the commemoration of black military service tended not to be among the agrarian constituency.<sup>55</sup>

A second reason for the absence of blacks in agrarian accounts linking battlefield courage and sectional reconciliation is that many African Americans who participated in the agrarian movement were too young to serve in Civil War combat. Black leaders, such as John Rayner and Walter Patillo, did not have battlefield experiences to recall and place into the context of Alliance sectional reconciliation stories. Without memories of combat, black agrarian leaders may have been more willing to sacrifice these references for the sake of achieving Alliance economic reforms. Several scholars have shown that the Farmers’ Alliance and Populism attracted African Americans for reasons both ideological and practical. Often the immediate needs of black Americans, such as higher prices for agricultural products, improved farm

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Carolina Press, 2005); Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning In African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

<sup>55</sup> Barbara Gannon, *The Won Cause: Black and White Comradeship in the Grand Army of the Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 61-62, 68-70, 72, 201-207; *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave Written by Himself* (New York: Signet Classic, 1997), xiv.

techniques, and protection under the law took precedence over references to manly courage in a war nearly three decades past.<sup>56</sup>

Immediate needs also served as the primary focus of women in the agrarian movement. The Civil War proved transformative to the lives of some Alliance spokeswomen, but for different reasons than their male counterparts. Bettie Gay, a fervent Alliance member from Columbus, Texas, documented her struggles running a plantation during the Civil War. California Alliance organizer Anna Ferry Smith served as a wartime nurse in Pennsylvania. Civil War experiences were points of pride for Gay, Smith, and other Alliance women since the war “was the common point of reference for the emergence of the self-reliant woman.” Devoted to the cause of female empowerment, Civil War memories served different purposes for female and male Alliance members. The recollection of Civil War memories informed the goals of many women in the agrarian movement, which included woman’s suffrage, temperance, reducing female rural isolation, raising good kids, and scientific agriculture. Unlike the veterans’ memories, however, the content of women’s Civil War memories rarely advanced the sectional reconciliation of North and South. Agrarian female reformers worried less than male reformers about resolving the contested memory of the War Between the States. Women worked more on building consensus to solve the social, economic, and political problems of the late nineteenth century. Resolving differences over woman’s suffrage, increasing support for temperance, and

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<sup>56</sup> Omar Ali, Gerald Gaither, and William Chafe chronicle the practicality and flexibility of African Americans amidst the racially constrained environment of the late nineteenth century. See Omar H. Ali, *In the Lion’s Mouth: Black Populism in the New South, 1886-1900* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010); Gerald H. Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Movement: Ballots and Bigotry in the New South*, rev. ed. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005); and William H. Chafe, “The Negro and Populism: A Kansas Case Study,” *Journal of Southern History* 34 (August 1968): 402-19. It is also possible that white editors of the Alliance press omitted references to black Civil War combat from their newspapers in the name of keeping the peace. African American references to the Civil War, though infrequent, did occur in the agrarian movement. These memories will be discussed in the next chapter.

improving education in the home proved more important to women in the agrarian movement than promoting sectional reconciliation.<sup>57</sup>

Despite the exclusion of African Americans and women, and the divergent views taken toward the formation of a new political party, agrarians rejoiced when Populists achieved victories in Kansas. Populists won election to attorney general, five of seven congressional seats, and 96 of 125 places in the state legislature. Just two years before Republicans carried 120 of 125 seats in the legislature and won the governor's race handily. Although Republican Governor Lyman Humphrey won reelection in 1890, it was a narrow victory. With John Ingalls' up for reelection to the U.S. Senate and a Populist majority in the legislature, GOP prospects were further damaged.<sup>58</sup>

The People's Party triumphed for several reasons, including a high voter turnout. Populists performed well in counties where there were a high percentage of mortgaged farms. The party did well by ignoring controversial issues such as prohibition, which was a favorite issue of many Alliance women, but divisive among men. A greater number of elected Populists previously belonged to the Republican Party than the Democratic or Union Labor parties. Dissatisfaction with the Republican Party equaled victory for the Populists in 1890. In the years ahead Kansas Populists faced a difficult task in uniting its diverse coalition drawn from

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<sup>57</sup> Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 69-101, quote 74; Marion K. Barthelme ed., *Women in the Texas Populist Movement: Letters to the Southern Mercury* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997). For examples in the reform press, see "An Alliance Woman's Yard Stick" and "Duties of Ladies in the Alliance," in *The National Economist*, July 12, October 25, 1890. For one case of an Alliance woman who used Civil War memory to support reconciliation, see Annie Diggs' speech at the Ocala convention in *Southern Alliance Farmer*, December 9, 1890. Although women rarely discussed sectional reconciliation or Civil War commemoration in the agrarian movement, outside of the farmers' crusade women participated heavily in the commemoration of the Civil War. See Karen Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: The University of Florida Press, 2003); Mary B. Poppenheim et al., *The History of the United Daughters of the Confederacy* (Richmond, VA: Garrett, and Massie Inc., 1938); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2005), 12-54.

<sup>58</sup> Clanton, *Kansas Populism*, 87-88.

Democrats, Union Laborites, and Republicans. These concerns mattered little to most Populists in 1890 who celebrated their dramatic upset in the staunchly Republican Sunflower State.<sup>59</sup>

Good news came from the South, too, where Alliance candidates won multiple victories. Candidates who supported some Alliance reforms won four races for governor, nineteen of twenty-seven congressional races, eight of eleven state legislatures. Since Alliance legislators formed a majority, supporters hoped that eight Alliance candidates would win election to the U.S. Senate. Prospects appeared bright for the agrarian movement.<sup>60</sup>

In Kansas and the South, Alliance members celebrated their victories. E.P.C. Webster, a Union veteran in Kansas, used military language to describe the victory. Calling Republican criticisms “missils,” Webster claimed, “While we have gone through a hotly-contested battle and won,” Populists would not rest on their victory. The organization was “working hard all the time to re enforce our ranks.” He continued, “While we vanquished the enemy and routed him, we are still in the field and drilling all the time so as to be ready to be called on to go and fight for our principles.” The veteran explained his comments further: “I mean by fighting for our principles, the same kind of a fight we have just gone through, as we believe them to be true and consistent with the will of God and the betterment of the masses.” Webster relied on familiar Alliance themes when he claimed that the movement actively defended the divinely sanctioned beliefs of the American majority.<sup>61</sup>

Another Kansan celebrated Populist success with an article titled “Sectionalism Bound to Go.” The author, listed as “Blair” from Oak Valley, Kansas, stated that “The people are awakening to their interest; prejudice is laid on the shelf. We will stand shoulder to shoulder and

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<sup>59</sup> Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 58-79.

<sup>60</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 129-30.

<sup>61</sup> *Progressive Farmer*, December 9, 1890.

keep the good work moving on.” Blair continued the military theme by noting that Ben Clover spoke to a crowd with “Mr. Dunsmore and Mr. Frybus.” The author said “The two last being old soldiers, they made an impression upon their comrades who still are widening the breach between North and South, and a blush of shame could be seen on their cheeks.” After lamenting the performance of Congress, Dunsmore and Frybus caused a few Republicans in the audience to “sneak off one by one.” Blair ended the article asserting, “Let the good work prosper, both North and South.” The article used common Alliance themes to connect the agrarian organization to masculine military terminology and reconciliation. Happy with the electoral victories, the *Progressive Farmer* said, “We put down the triumph of the party in Kansas as the most significant political action that has occurred in the history of our country, and it was precipitated and inspired by the bitter sectional speech of Senator Ingalls in the Senate last February.” The newspaper remarked with great satisfaction that the party “was literally a mighty uprising of the industrial classes to assert their manhood and they did it gloriously.”<sup>62</sup>

The electoral victories of 1890 were cause for celebration throughout the Alliance organization. In less than five years a movement of local farmers grew from small beginnings to elect public officials across the country to state and federal offices. The victory in Kansas was the most shocking and satisfying. A political party that encompassed Southern Alliance demands ousted the Republican Party where it was most synonymous with state and national identity. The national agrarian crusade survived criticism and rallied members around Alliance reforms and an identity based on producerism and sectional reconciliation.

Fresh from these triumphs the Alliance faced its annual national convention with great anticipation and confidence. Difficult questions, however, lay ahead for the agrarian

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<sup>62</sup> *Progressive Farmer*, November 11, 1890.

organization. United by policies, members debated whether a separate political party was necessary to turn Alliance reforms into law. While southern Democrats embraced some Alliance reforms, the existence of the Populist Party in Kansas and its electoral successes of 1890, created the possibility of forming a third party in the South. After 1890 the temptation to join Kansans, to prove the legitimacy of their reconciliationist rhetoric, and confirm their loyalty to all Alliance platforms weighed heavily on white Southerners in the Alliance. Should the Democratic Party fail to enact Alliance reforms and work with members of the People's Party, how should the Southern Alliance react? If popular elected officials like Zebulon Vance opposed Alliance reforms, would Southern Alliance members abandon them in favor of candidate more loyal to the agrarian cause? Which reforms would the Alliance compromise and which were essential to their support for the Democratic Party?

Kansas Populists faced similar questions. How long could the Populist Party wait for Southerners to join their political party before their reconciliationist rhetoric rang hollow? How long would former Republicans remain loyal to the People's Party in a state with a rich identity that combined freedom, Union, and Republicanism? Could the Populist Party continue to win elections and pass laws or would it be forced to compromise with Republicans and Democrats? Southerners and Kansans were about to discover the limits of loyalty to Southern Alliance principles.

## CHAPTER FIVE: OCALA, POLITICS, AND SECTIONALISM

Fresh from the electoral victories of 1890 the Alliance faced its annual national convention with great anticipation and confidence. Held in Ocala, Florida, the December conference tested agrarian solidarity. Although the organization agreed on a platform, politics and regional distinctions created difficulties at the meeting. Kansans and other Midwesterners increasingly lobbied for a national third party to enact Alliance reforms into federal law. Most white Southerners preferred to use the Democratic Party to achieve agrarian goals. Transitioning from a general movement for the American producer majority into an organization that criticized specific politicians and policies exposed differences within the Alliance. While the political and regional divisions that arose during the conference did not immediately destroy the Alliance, they would ultimately spell trouble for the Southern Farmers' Alliance as a national organization. After several years of inter-regional harmony, politics and sectionalism emerged at Ocala and subsequently became a major threat to the agrarian movement.

The 1890 national convention produced three specific issues that revealed the internal divisions within the Alliance. All three matters revolved around politics, ranging from the election of an "Alliance" senator, to the formation of a national third party, and the Lodge Federal Elections Bill. The troubles began the prior month with the November election of a U.S. Senator in Georgia. Alliance supporters won the vast majority of seats in the state legislature during the 1890 election, and everyone expected that they would elect a Senator who advocated

the agrarian order's principles. The presence of four Senate candidates who championed the Farmers' Alliance complicated the process. In the ensuing struggle the Alliance confronted problems that arose when it entered the political arena and tried to implement its reforms into law.

Senatorial candidates in Georgia included James K. Hines, a circuit judge and attorney from Atlanta, Thomas M. Norwood an Alliance member and former U.S. Senator, Nathaniel J. Hammond, a former congressman and Alliance foe, Patrick Calhoun, Atlanta railroad attorney, and Governor John B. Gordon. When Gordon announced opposition to the subtreasury plan in August 1890, all of the other candidates joined the race. Only Gordon opposed the subtreasury plan, which was frequently used as the Alliance "yard stick" in 1890. Among the candidates Patrick Calhoun was the most curious because his dearth of governmental service. The grandson of John C. Calhoun, Patrick had amassed a large fortune by the age of thirty-four by specializing in corporate law. He served as attorney for the powerful Richmond and West Point Terminal Railway and Warehouse Company and sat on its board of directors. The Richmond Terminal controlled nearly 9,000 miles of rail in the Southeast by 1890, ranking second nationally. Calhoun also invested in real estate, farming, railroads, manufacturing, street railways, and mining.<sup>1</sup>

Calhoun received the support of two powerful Alliance leaders who promoted his candidacy. Leonidas "Lon" Livingston, president of the Georgia Alliance, and Charles Macune encouraged Calhoun's political ambitions by promoting the lawyer in state and national Alliance newspapers. Macune used *The National Economist* to praise the attorney as a legitimate reformer with sound ideas on finance and statesmanship. Macune also provided Calhoun with

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<sup>1</sup> William F. Holmes, "The Southern Farmers' Alliance and the Georgia Senatorial Election of 1890," *Journal of Southern History* 50, no. 2 (May 1984): 199, 211.



opportunities to communicate his views, which included supporting railroad connections between the South and West, railroad regulation, denouncing the tariff as a thorn in the side of farmers, and portraying Republicans as the pro-tariff and pro-sectionalism party. He praised the Alliance for advocating reconciliation, the subtreasury, and the free coinage of silver. These articles also appeared in the *Southern Alliance Farmer*, an Atlanta-based paper owned in part by Macune. Livingston and Macune also directly lobbied Alliance state legislators on Calhoun's behalf.<sup>2</sup>

*The National Economist* took a far different approach with Governor Gordon. The newspaper devoted a great amount of attention to attacking Gordon during the fall of 1890. After Gordon criticized the Alliance and its leaders, the *Economist* published a speech made by William L. Peek who described the Governor as an enemy of farmers. Peek warned Alliance members not to allow Gordon and his allies to “stampede us with the old soldier racket. They are making it merchandise.” The newspaper also published letters critical of Gordon written by Alliance members. H.L. Smith of Merritt, Georgia wrote that farmers loved Gordon “for his

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<sup>2</sup> Stuart Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk: Agrarian Crusader* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1949), 257-58; *National Economist*, October 25, December 6, 1890; Holmes 211-12. While Macune's support for Calhoun appears very odd, part of the explanation can be traced to their similar views on railroad policy. Macune consistently stated that farmers should use railroads as an asset rather than a source of their rage. The Alliance leader also embraced modern business organizational structures. When Macune repaired internal cleavages within the Alliance in 1886 he did so largely through a business strategy for economic improvements, which included utilizing the latest business methods. He also praised Henry Grady in the pages of *The National Economist* with an extremely positive obituary. See the *National Economist*, January 4, 1890; Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 33, 35-36. According to Berton Shaw the Georgia Farmers' Alliance supported railroads. Shaw states that most Alliance members in the state lived in the wiregrass, piedmont, and western black belt, which were more recently settled than the eastern part of the state. Shaw contends that Alliance sought railroad development so that they could get their crops to market and profit. As a small planter on the northern edge of the cotton belt, Lon Livingston represented these Alliancemen. Like Macune and Calhoun, Livingston favored railroad regulation rather than the St. Louis platform policy of government ownership. See Berton Shaw, *The Wool-Hat Boys: Georgia's Populist Party* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 24, 26-28. Alliance supporters in other states, such as North Carolina, Texas, Kansas, and Nebraska took a more hostile position toward railroads. See Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk*; Josephus Daniels in Joseph Morrison, *Josephus Daniels: Small-d Democrat* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 20; Jeffrey Ostler, *Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, 1880-1892* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993); Peter H. Argersinger, *Populism and Politics: William Alfred Peffer and the People's Party* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1974).

gallantry; we honor him for his record as a soldier and statesman, but while this is true, we are forced to believe that he has been induced by some means to throw himself between us and our platform of principles.” Smith continued, “If Gordon is elected to the Senate, then the Alliance of Georgia has been whipped and put to shame, (unless Gordon changes his tactics.)” Smith argued that “educated” and “loyal” Alliance members would not vote for Gordon. Smith finished his letter by promoting Alliance reform over place of birth or past political party allegiance, a clear reinforcement of agrarian reconciliation and reform.<sup>3</sup>

A. Barnwell, president of the Bibb County, Georgia Alliance wrote the *Economist* to argue that Gordon opposed the principles, leaders, publications, secretive nature, and subtreasury plan of the agrarian organization. Barnwell asked why the Alliance would support such a candidate for political office? He sarcastically suggested an answer, “Because he fought the Yankees! and is a true Democrat!” The Alliance officer claimed that Gordon supported farmers in the past, but that the Governor failed to make changes demanded by farmers. Barnwell said “The Georgia farmer of to-day don’t want to fight any Yankees, and in as much as he is making some very staunch, very true, very important Republican friends, he can stand less talk about party than about anything else.” Barnwell concluded, “Now, laying all sentiment aside, Gordon is an enemy, and a dangerous enemy, to the Alliance, and they know it at last.” The Alliance leader said that Gordon’s record made clear that “gold greatly attracts him, and in any sort of a scuffle between the laborer and the money power Gordon is not the sort of man to stand out for labor.”<sup>4</sup>

Gordon provided the Alliance with ample reasons for distrust. In a career that spanned three decades, Gordon represented the economic and political status quo in 1890 Georgia.

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<sup>3</sup> *National Economist*, September 20, October 4, 1890.

<sup>4</sup> *National Economist*, October 18, 1890. Attempts to ascertain Barnwell’s first name have proved unsuccessful, but I am continuing the search.

Known as the “hero of Appomattox,” Gordon led workers from his father’s north Georgia mines to enlist in the Confederate Army where they served under Robert E. Lee. Gordon earned his nickname for leading the final charge of Lee’s army at Appomattox, Virginia. During Reconstruction Gordon joined the Ku Klux Klan and helped “redeem” Georgia from Republican rule. Like the Reconstruction leaders he criticized, Gordon established ties with railroad companies and made investments in numerous New South enterprises. He profited handsomely from the railroads and mining investments and utilized extremely cheap convict labor that he leased from the state. Although not as close as C. Vann Woodward suggested, Gordon formed a “Bourbon Triumvirate” with Joseph Brown and Alfred Colquitt. The men exchanged positions as governor and senator from 1872 until 1890. Gordon resigned from the Senate in 1880 to work for the state-managed Western and Atlantic Railroad. In part, these railroad connections led Gordon to work with other white Southerners, including L.Q.C. Lamar, in achieving the Compromise of 1877, which effectively ended Reconstruction.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout his postwar career Gordon promoted himself as a chief proponent of the Lost Cause. Gordon and his ally, *Atlanta Constitution* editor Henry Grady, heavily emphasized the General’s Confederate veteran status during his successful gubernatorial campaign of 1886. When the United Confederate Veterans formed in 1888, Gordon became its leader. Gordon promoted the Lost Cause and sectional reconciliation by appearing at Confederate soldier

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<sup>5</sup> W. Todd Groce, “John B. Gordon,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/government-politics/john-b-gordon-1832-1904> (accessed September 23, 2013); Matthew Hild, “Bourbon Triumvirate,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/government-politics/bourbon-triumvirate> (accessed September 23, 2013); C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 17, 28, 44-46.

reunions and making speeches on behalf of the New South on northern tours. He worked with the GAR to fund a Confederate veterans' home and create a Blue-Gray veterans' association.<sup>6</sup>

Besides his work to promote sectional reconciliation and the Lost Cause, Gordon possessed other qualities that made him attractive to certain elements in the farmers' movement. Gordon joined the Patrons of Husbandry, or Grange, which tended to represent large and middle landowners in much of the South. The Governor also favored the free coinage of silver, supported a low tariff, and claimed to be a friend to farmers. When the Alliance elected two-thirds of the state senators and three-fourths of the state representatives, Livingston and Macune acted to ensure Gordon's defeat. A caucus of Alliance legislators, however, dissolved after disagreement erupted over a pledge to vote against "the hero of Appomattox." When a group met again to support Calhoun over Gordon, about 53 of the 125 Alliance legislators showed up. Some non-Alliance members, such as Gordon adversary, Clark Howell were present. Howell edited the *Atlanta Constitution*, supported Calhoun, and had recently been elected Speaker of the state House of Representatives by the "Alliance legislature." Although the *Constitution* supported the Alliance from its origins in Georgia, the newspaper could hardly be considered a supporter of all agrarian reforms, including the subtreasury. The Georgia Senate election involved the Alliance in seemingly bizarre partnerships.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Groce, "John B. Gordon"; Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 111-112; Rebecca Latimer Felton, *My Memoirs of Georgia Politics* (Atlanta: The Index Printing Company, 1911), 624-40.

<sup>7</sup> Robert McMath, *American Populism: A Social History 1877-1898* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1992), 147; Noblin, *Leonidas Lafayette Polk*, 257; Shaw, *Wool-hat Boys*, 30-31; Holmes, "Georgia Senatorial Election of 1890," 198, 213; Matthew Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists: Farmer-Labor Insurgency in the Late-Nineteenth-Century South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 19. In 1888 the friendship of Henry Grady and John Gordon ceased when the latter refused to support Grady for a Senate nomination. See Raymond B. Nixon, *Henry W. Grady, Spokesman of the New South* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1943), 255-56, 294-96. Nixon provides evidence to suggest that Gordon was jealous of Grady's national fame in the aftermath of the latter's famous New South speech made before the New England Society of New York in 1886. As Grady's newspaper partner, Howell continued opposition to Gordon.

As the above letters in *The National Economist* demonstrate, many Alliance members did not trust Gordon's loyalty to the agrarian order. Like Macune, Leonidas Polk viewed Gordon as a false representative of the Alliance. While *The Economist* clearly opposed Gordon and supported Calhoun, Alliance President Polk endorsed Norwood. Polk made several speeches in Georgia where he asked farmers to vote for a candidate who favored the subtreasury, but not one who served as a railroad attorney. He also urged Alliance members of the state legislature to vote only for candidates who supported the full slate of Alliance reforms. Although Polk probably did not know it, Norwood formerly served as attorney for several Georgia railroads and counsel to the Southern Pacific. Clearly the convoluted Senate election created tough choices for Georgia voters, state Alliance members, and the national Alliance leadership. The agrarian order did not respond with unity, nor did it emerge from the election in a healthier state.<sup>8</sup>

When the state legislature made its decision, on November 18, 1890, Gordon emerged the victor. Norwood finished second, Calhoun third, Hines fourth, and Hammond fifth. The vote count revealed that the Gordon won handily, Calhoun did not come close to winning, and that the majority of Alliance legislators favored Gordon. The combined total number of votes for Norwood, Calhoun, Hines, and Hammond did not come close to the total number cast for Gordon. William Holmes concludes that Gordon won because none of the alternative candidates attracted Alliance members, the agrarian order represented a diverse lot of interests, and the appeal of Gordon as a familiar candidate who represented the state's Confederate heritage. Regardless of the explanation, the Gordon victory seemed perplexing to outside observers. The Farmers' Alliance elected an official from the political establishment that the agrarian organization had ridiculed and pledged to change. Electing Gordon, with his business

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<sup>8</sup> Noblin, *Leonidas Lafayette Polk*, 257-58; Shaw, *Wool-hat Boys*, 30; Holmes, "Georgia Senatorial Election of 1890," 213.

connections, promotion of his Civil War service, weak reform record, and strong ties to the region's dominant political party, was in many ways the equivalent of reelecting John Ingalls Senator in Kansas.<sup>9</sup>

Gordon's election by an Alliance-dominated legislature sent shock waves throughout the South and Midwest. Kansas Republicans used the results as evidence that the Alliance truly was a scheme of unreconstructed Rebels working through the Democratic Party. The Republican *Topeka Capital* noted that Alliance Democrats had "forgotten" the subtreasony when they elected Gordon, "a Democrat, a distinguished Southerner, a gallant soldier, a loyal Confederate, a man whose eloquence would be a strong fortress for the solid South in Congress." The *Capital* appealed to the Republican Alliancemen elected to the Kansas legislature and asked them why they should exclude Ingalls from the Congress since the South included one of its foremost spokesmen. If Ingalls lost and voters sent Gordon to the U.S. Senate, the newspaper claimed that Alliance would achieve a major victory by sending "the champion of the South and eulogist of the late Confederacy." The *Capital* called Alliance reconciliationist rhetoric a mask for its true purpose, "the exaltation of the insolent South and the suppression of every Northern voice brave enough to speak for justice and the constitution on the problem of the ballot." The latter claim referred to electoral violence and fraud in the South, and the Lodge Bill, then in consideration in Congress. Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge proposed the bill as a means to promote fair

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<sup>9</sup> Holmes, "Georgia Senatorial Election of 1890," 215. The final vote was Gordon 120, Norwood 45, Calhoun 25, Hines 13, Hammond 9. Holmes found that most Alliance legislators voted for Gordon (45% in the House, 35% in the Senate), while Calhoun received 25% voted for him in the Senate, 12% in the House. Norwood received 25% of the Alliance votes in the House and 19% in the Senate. Non-Alliancemen voted at 86% for Gordon in the House and 88% in the Senate, showing a much higher level of unity. See Holmes 215-16. Gordon's outspoken opposition to the Lodge "Force" Bill during the summer and fall of 1890 reaffirmed his image as staunch defender of the white South. The Lodge Bill proposed that federal election supervisors could be called into any area when voters petitioned Congress. White Southerners immediately ridiculed and criticized the bill as a return of Reconstruction, "negro rule," and sectionalism with the intrusion of federal authority into state and local affairs. Gordon played a role in ending Reconstruction with the Compromise of 1877. Some Georgia state legislators may have viewed Gordon as a dependable and capable leader in the Senate who could help defeat the Lodge Bill in the Senate and protect white Southerners from this latest "invasion" of Northern (federal) authority. The House of Representative narrowly passed the bill in July 1890, while the Senate voted to table to the bill in September of the same year.

elections in the South. The proposed law sent federal supervisors to any congressional district where fifty citizens requested their presence. Many white Southerners decried the legislation as a Republican scheme to control the region. Foremost among the southern critics was John B. Gordon.<sup>10</sup>

With Populists in control of the Kansas legislature and the election of a new senator yet to be decided, Alliance newspapers in the North and South needed to reaffirm the national commitment of the agrarian order. Since Kansas Populism relied heavily on former Republicans for support, the People's Party had further incentive to address charges that southern Alliancemen merely represented the Civil War-era Democratic Party. Kansas Populists expressed disappointment with Gordon's election in the *Topeka Advocate*, but they also published remarks from Georgia Alliance members disheartened by his victory. The newspaper concluded that Georgia proved the necessity of forming a political party to directly achieve reform. Because members formed the People's Party largely in reaction to Ingalls, the *Advocate* did not expect to see Kansas mimic Georgia by sending an old guard politician to the Senate. In the *Kansas Farmer* Peffer portrayed Gordon's victory as a result of Alliancemen splitting their votes for other candidates. Peffer called on Alliancemen to stand firm in their opposition to Ingalls, "like the patriot fathers of the Revolution," since they had carefully weighed their options and chosen a course. The editor claimed that "new issues" necessitated leaving the "old parties." Peffer then compared the correspondence between Gordon and the state Alliance newspaper of Georgia with Ingalls letters to Alliance press in Kansas. Like Ingalls, Gordon expressed his opposition to some Alliance reforms, but Gordon treated the Alliance press with

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<sup>10</sup> The *Topeka Capital* was reprinted in the *Kansas Farmer*, November 26, 1890. For the Lodge Bill see Stanley Hirshson, *Farewell to the Bloody Shirt: Northern Republicans & the Southern Negro, 1877-1893* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), 202-38; Vincent P. De Santis, *Republicans Face the Southern Question: The New Departure Years, 1877-1897* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1959), 196-232. On Gordon's resistance to the Lodge Bill see Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 255.

courtesy and respect. Peffer concluded that this treatment earned Gordon a few Alliance votes, whereas Ingalls would receive none in Kansas.<sup>11</sup>

In North Carolina, the *Progressive Farmer* also tried to limit the damage of the Gordon election. The newspaper printed Gordon's public thanks to all of his supporters in the Senate election. An article also appeared that suggested that Alliancemen would vote only for their principles and not for Vance, Gordon, or Ingalls out of allegiance to political party. Another republished article from the *North Carolina Intelligencer* claimed that Gordon and Vance favored the subtreasury plan and that they would work to enact Alliance reforms. Despite their public opposition to the subtreasury bill before Congress, the *Progressive Farmer* depicted Vance and Gordon as supporters of the Alliance.<sup>12</sup>

Although Alliance newspapers downplayed the negative results of Gordon's victory, the Georgia Senate election continued to cause turmoil within the farmers' organization. In the weeks after the affair, parties who favored opposing candidates charged one another with various misdeeds, including bribery. Because of the lingering effects from the Senate appointment, the agrarian order formed an investigative committee two weeks later at its annual national meeting. The committee consisted of one member from each state represented in the Alliance and sought to determine whether any member acted improperly during the campaign. The committee focused on Livingston, Macune, and Polk, who publicly supported candidates in the election. After hearing testimony from the three men, the committee exonerated Alliance leaders, but chastised them for becoming too involved in the election.

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<sup>11</sup> Peter H. Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 51; *Topeka Advocate*, December 3, 1890; *Kansas Farmer*, November 26, 1890.

<sup>12</sup> *Progressive Farmer*, December 16, 1890. For Vance's opposition to the subtreasury bill and plan, see Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk*, 240-51. For Gordon's opposition to the bill and plan, see Shaw, *Wool-hat Boys*, 26, 30-31.



The controversy did not end there. A day after the committee issued its report Uriah Hall of Missouri demanded to speak before the convention. As the only member of the twenty-six-person committee who refused to sign the report, Hall wanted to explain his actions. Hall had a history of criticizing Macune's leadership, and some Macune supporters did not wish to allow the controversy to continue. The convention, nonetheless, granted Hall an opportunity to speak. He told the convention that Macune's testimony revealed misdeeds, including spending sixteen days in Atlanta lobbying for Calhoun's election, accepting free railroad passes from Calhoun, and receiving a \$2,000 loan from the Senate candidate without proper collateral. Hall claimed that the committee overlooked these facts and unjustly exonerated Macune. The accusation created a stir at the meeting that Leonidas Livingston successfully silenced during a recess in the proceedings. When the convention resumed later that evening Hall agreed to cease his attack. Macune took the floor and explained that the loan covered costs for *The National Economist*, he possessed proper collateral, and that newspapermen frequently received railroad passes. Although he remained editor of the official newspaper of the Southern Alliance, Macune's reputation suffered from his actions in Georgia.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Holmes, "Georgia Senatorial Election of 1890," 217-18. In an indication that the Georgia senatorial affair weakened Macune's position, Alliancemen who favored the formation of a national third party surrounded him on the newly formed National Reform Press Association editorial board. The committee was responsible for selecting editorials written in support of Alliance doctrine and ensuring that Southern Alliance newspapers published them. Other board members included Cuthbert Vincent of Kansas, William Lamb of Texas, and Ralph Beaumont of the Knights of Labor. W. Scott Morgan of Arkansas won election as the secretary. See Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 230-31, 643 n. 27. In the following year, Hall continued to attack Macune. Hall decried the limited investigation made at Ocala, which relied solely on testimony from Polk, Macune, and Livingston. The *Missourian* also noted that the state Alliance newspaper of Georgia, the *Southern Alliance Farmer*, dropped its support of the Olive Bill when Macune became part owner of the publication. The bill prevented the state from making leases with out-of-state companies who engaged in monopolistic practices. Had it passed, the Olive Bill would have prevented the Richmond Terminal from leasing the most important rails in Georgia. Hall claimed that the *Southern Alliance Farmer* changed its position on the Olive Bill because of Macune's close association with the Richmond Terminal. William S. McAllister supported Hall by also attacking Macune. McAllister, the Mississippi Alliance lecturer, published a private letter from John H. McDowell, Alliance president in Tennessee and a member of the Alliance investigatory committee at Ocala. McDowell claimed that 10 of 26 committee members initially voted against exonerating Macune. In the interest of unity, these dissenters eventually altered their stance and by a vote of 25-0 found Macune had committed no wrong. Hall refused this action and was the only member to withdraw from the committee. In a

Though less dramatic, the dispute continued in other forms at the Ocala meeting. In a veiled attack on Macune, Calhoun, and Livingston, Polk criticized the influence of railroad corporations in state legislatures. He thought that railroads used their influence to control legislators and dilute the regulatory might of railroad commissions. The Alliance president endorsed the Alliance's St. Louis platform of government ownership of railroads as a more effective remedy. Livingston responded by supporting government ownership only if state and federal regulatory commissions failed. When delegates voted on the Ocala platform at the end of the convention, they altered the official Alliance stance and advocated Livingston's stance of railroad commissions.<sup>14</sup>

Besides the Georgia Senate election and railroad policy, a second issue divided the Alliance at its Ocala meeting. Emboldened by their electoral success, Kansans and other Westerners hoped to use the convention as a launching pad for a national third party. Westerners called for a conference to be held in early 1891 where delegates would form a national party. Colored Alliance Superintendent Richard Humphrey joined with Westerners by endorsing independent political action. Fresh from electing Alliance candidates to state offices, most white Southerners resisted these efforts. The southern group included the majority of the delegates and leaders such as Polk and Macune. In the end, the Alliance decided to postpone consideration of

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letter to Alliance members in the August 15, 1891, *The National Economist*, McDowell criticized McAllister for publishing the private letter. McDowell also stated that he was suspicious of Macune at Ocala. Since corresponding with other Alliance members, the Tennessean claimed he was convinced that Macune acted in the best interest of the agrarian association. See Holmes "Georgia Senatorial Election of 1890."

<sup>14</sup> Holmes, "Georgia Senatorial Election of 1890," 218. By July 1891 Calhoun earned the ire of many Georgia Alliance members when he allegedly arranged a deal that gave the Richmond Terminal a monopoly of the most important rail lines in Georgia. When the Richmond Terminal subsequently found itself overextended, the company increased freight rates creating devastation for Georgia vegetable and melon growers. The popular outcry led to proposals in the state legislature to cancel railroad leases and to prohibit manipulating railroad stock prices. Calhoun and other railroad lobbyists led a successful campaign to squash the railroad bills. See Shaw, *Wool-Hat Boys*, 31-32.

forming a national political party until February 1892, but it agreed to immediately launch a political education campaign.<sup>15</sup>

Led by Kansans, the Western group pledged to proceed with plans to hold its conference. Several Kansans made conciliatory statements to show that they were willing to wait on the South to join them in the future. Alliance Vice President and Kansas leader, Ben Clover, told the *Southern Alliance Farmer* that his state favored a third party. Clover allowed other states to determine their political fate when he explained, “If you can manage without a third party in other states, it is all right with them, but on financial matters we must be together.” Other Kansans expressed similar patience with the South. The *Southern Alliance Farmer* reported that John F. Willits, a potential senatorial candidate, “emphasized the declaration that the war was over, and sectionalism is buried, but did not in so many words, urge the formation of a new party.” Although delegates did not intensely debate the subject of starting a national political party, it was another example of sectional differences within the agrarian movement. The topic did not go away and it only increased in significance over the next year.<sup>16</sup>

Debate of the Lodge Federal Elections Bill became a third divisive issue within the Alliance convention. Mississippi delegate William S. McAllister initiated a motion to officially condemn the Lodge Bill. Like Uriah Hall, McAllister did not hold typical Alliance opinions. McAllister opposed the subtreasury program, a third party, and the leadership of Charles Macune. Alonzo Wardall of South Dakota asked the convention to delete from convention records any reference condemning the Lodge bill. Wardall, a Union veteran, had a history of organizing farmers, was a member of the Knights of Labor, and he orchestrated one of the most

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<sup>15</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 139-40; *Atlanta Constitution*, December 4, 1890.

<sup>16</sup> *Southern Alliance Farmer*, December 9, 1890.

successful Alliance cooperatives in South Dakota. In the vote that followed, Alliance members reflected sectional divisions within the nation.<sup>17</sup>

Introduced in March 1890, the Lodge Bill represented the work of congressional Republicans who labored for several years on crafting a bill to eliminate fraudulent elections. The South was a particular focus of the bill since Congress received a high number of contested election complaints from the region. After the election of Benjamin Harrison in 1888, Republicans felt emboldened to pass a law that supplied federal supervisors to all voter registration and polling places when voters requested their presence. The proposal also gave the president authority to use the U.S. military to enforce the measures. Democrats immediately objected to the bill. The minority party claimed that the proposal represented an unnecessary federal intrusion into state affairs. Democrats also charged that Republicans would use the bill's enforcement guidelines to achieve electoral victories for their party in the South. Opponents simplified their criticisms by referring to the legislation as the "Force Bill." During Reconstruction, white Southerners used the term "Force Bill" to attack the Enforcement Acts of 1870 and 1871, which gave the federal government the right to prosecute those who infringed upon the free exercise of the vote and fair elections. The intent of the Enforcement Acts was to protect newly given franchise rights for African-American men. In the early 1890s Democratic opponents again resisted what they viewed as an infringement upon individual liberty and a threat to their political power. Democrats conjured negative memories of Reconstruction-era "bayonet rule," racism, and charges of partisanship and sectionalism to ridicule the Lodge Bill.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 101-02; *The National Economist Almanac*, (Washington, D.C.: National Economist Print, 1890), 72.

<sup>18</sup> Hirshson, *Farewell to the Bloody Shirt*, 202; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Perennial Classics, 1988), 454-55. The Lodge Bill required that federal supervisors enter an area when Congress received a petition from 100 citizens of a congressional district or a city of 20,000 or more, or 50 citizens living in any section forming a part of a congressional district. For more on the details of the bill see De Santis, *Republicans Face the Southern Question*, 198-99. Michael Perman chronicles a split within the Republican

After the bill narrowly passed the House on July 2, Democratic opposition to the Lodge Bill intensified in the South where comparisons were constantly made between the proposal and Reconstruction. Southern Democratic newspapers claimed that the region made it through “one reconstruction,” but “It remains to be seen whether it will meekly submit to another.” The *Atlanta Constitution* confidently reminded white Southerners of their victory over Reconstruction by writing, “What we did twenty years ago we can do again.” Additional opposition appeared in a collection written by southern congressmen, entitled *Why the Solid South? Or Reconstruction and Its Results*. The articles described the similarities between the Lodge Bill and Reconstruction and explained why white Southerners considered the previous era a negative and unjust time. Chief among the objections were northern interference in the South and the incompetent rule of African Americans in the region. Alliance allies Zebulon Vance and Ethelbert Barksdale penned essays that chronicled the horrors of Reconstruction in North Carolina and Mississippi respectively. Dedicated “to the business men of the North,” *Why the Solid South* carried with it an economic threat made clear in the statements of John B. Gordon who advocated boycotting northern goods if the Lodge Bill passed the Senate.<sup>19</sup>

Far from ignoring the Lodge Bill controversy, Alliance newspapers joined in the condemnation of the Republican proposal. In July *The National Economist* cited the Lodge Bill as an example of politicians using “old animosities” to “array the sections against each other,” which resulted in their reelection and division between American producers. The paper

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Party that handicapped the passage of the Lodge Bill in Congress. Perman and J. Morgan Kousser show how fears of implementing the Lodge Bill led to efforts to legally disfranchise African Americans in Mississippi, which in turn provided the blueprint for restricting the franchise in other southern states. See J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 20-33, 140-41; Michael Perman, *Struggle for Mastery: Disfranchisement in the South 1888-1908* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 38-43, 75-77.

<sup>19</sup> *Jackson (MS) Clarion-Ledger*, December 5, 1890; the *Atlanta Constitution* was quoted in the *Richmond (VA) State*, July 19, 1890. Both newspaper quotes and the Gordon information are taken from Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 254-55. Hilary A. Herbert, *Why the Solid South? Or, Reconstruction and Its Results* (Baltimore: R.H. Woodward, 1890), iii.

associated “New England,” “the East,” “monopoly,” and “money owners” as a group arrayed against the “wealth producers” of the “South and West.” Other Alliance criticisms used pro-slavery southern antebellum arguments by emphasizing the familiarity of southern whites and blacks, the less than ideal nature of northern urban populations, and error of northern interference in southern matters. *The National Economist* published a letter written by H. M. Cross of Newburyport, Massachusetts. Cross wrote to his U.S. Senators whom he requested to act as “statesmen and patriots, and not as partisans” by rejecting the Lodge Bill. The writer said that he had lived in the South where he observed great progress in race relations and economic growth after the withdrawal of federal troops and “carpet bag government.” Cross also noted that “Business, social, political, and educational interests are now uniting the North and the South as never before.” He worried that the Lodge Bill would retard the “promise of the peaceful solution of every race and political problem” and end “the present friendly relations and future peace and prosperity of both races in the South.” Cross compared African-American enfranchisement to conditions in the North where “even such mixture of immoral and ignorant voters as we have in our greatest cities is already a source of present evil and of serious anxiety for the future.” The writer then stated that “if voters of this description were five times as numerous as they are and could be controlled in a solid mass by unscrupulous demagogues,” this would describe the South made by the Lodge Bill.<sup>20</sup>

Alliance newspapers featured interpretations of the Lodge Bill as the work of partisan politicians who worked in the interest of monopolies and money interests. The Lodge Bill threatened to sour the “friendly relations” between southern whites and blacks and between Northerners and Southerners. Ignoring contemporary turbulent race relations, voter fraud and

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<sup>20</sup> *National Economist*, July 26, November 15, 1890. In the first entry, the newspaper used another description of the producers of wealth to characterize inter-regional unity when it portrayed a coalition of “the farmer of the North and West, together with the planter of the South.”

intimidation, and economic and political progress made during Reconstruction, Cross expressed standard southern Democratic views of the Lodge Bill. It is unclear if the Alliance realized the contradiction between its position and Cross's statements concerning the "progress" of the South since the end of Reconstruction. Unlike Cross, the Alliance depicted the post-Reconstruction years as an era of decline, characterized by uneven progress, excessive greed, rampant corruption, and economic struggle for most Americans. The agrarian organization was a movement built around the notion that the "progress" of the South and the country were not reaching millions of farmers and laborers and that actions were necessary to improve the lives of the American producing majority.

Like the Alliance, Cross described the South as an environment of positive race relations and sectional reconciliation. His letter also demonstrated to southern Alliance readers that many Northerners disliked the Lodge Bill. The Cross note, therefore, reinforced the Alliance reconciliationist agenda. In the judgment of agrarian leaders, their opinions were not "partisan" or biased, but based on sound judgment and concern for the country. Alliance leaders suggested that Northerners and Southerners were mutually capable of thinking in this unbiased manner. Through the work of its organization, Alliance members believed that the sectional prejudices of the past could be eliminated and the nation could progress to a more just future.

*The National Economist* demonstrated its version of reconciliation in the aftermath of the 1890 elections. The newspaper cited the Lodge Bill as the cause of Republican defeats and stated, "The war closed a long time ago, hence the old-fashioned bloody shirt campaign of sectional hate fails to draw the votes." In another column in the same edition, *The Economist* stated "Dead as any door nail. That is, sectional hate." The newspaper continued its assault writing, "Mr. John Cabot Lodge, the scholar in politics, can now contemplate the ruin he has

wrought.” Editors of *The Economist* concluded their gloating by noting that “The people of Kansas don’t seem to hate the people of North Carolina so all-fired much after all.” Unaware that they could be irritating former Republicans in the Kansas Populist Party, Southerners in the Alliance focused their ire on the dominant political party of the North. Southern politicians who represented orthodox regional beliefs, like John B. Gordon, did not receive similar criticism by Alliance newspapers in the South.<sup>21</sup>

At Ocala William McAllister justified opposition to the Lodge Bill because the measure resurrected “the gory ghost of sectional estrangement.” The Mississippian also said the bill would excessively curtail states’ rights and contradict the Alliance “holy war which we have declared against sectionalism.” He further labeled the proposed law an “unpatriotic measure, which can result in nothing but evil to our common and beloved country.” Reacting to McAllister’s proposal, Alonzo Wardall requested, “that no reference in the minutes be made to the resolution condemning the Lodge bill.” In response, Uriah Hall requested Wardall’s motion be tabled. The vote supported Hall and the anti-Lodge bill advocates. A review of the vote shows a strong adherence to regional voting patterns. While Texas, Alabama and half of the Arkansas representatives joined states north of the Mason-Dixon line, the rest of the former states of the Confederacy voted to table Wardall’s request. The border states of Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri joined former Confederate states in voting to table Wardall’s request. All of the northern states present voted against tabling Wardall’s request.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *National Economist*, November 8, 1890.

<sup>22</sup> *Southern Alliance Farmer*, December 9, 1890 (first quote); *National Economist*, December 13 (second and third quotes), December 20, (fourth quote) 1890. The final vote to table the Wardall motion was 48-31 among the delegates, but 13-9 by the states, with the Arkansas and West Virginia delegations evenly split. Colorado was not present for the vote, while the Indiana group chose not to vote. One member of the Missouri delegation voted against tabling Wardall’s request, while the four other members voted in favor of the motion. Likewise, one Florida delegate voted against tabling Wardall’s motion, while two others voted in the affirmative. Both Indian Territory votes went to the northern group. The northern states represented in the vote included Illinois, Kansas, Michigan,



Northern votes supporting Wardall did not necessarily equal votes in favor of the Lodge Bill. Many may have thought a condemnation outside the boundaries of the “non-political” Alliance, while others may have been afraid of alienating potential Alliance supporters in their home states. Unlike newspapers produced for a primarily southern audience in the Alliance, Kansas newspapers did not publish anti-Lodge articles prior to the Ocala convention. Since they relied largely on former Republicans as voters in the Populist Party, Kansas newspapers may have sought to avoid addressing a proposed law that had little to do with Senator Ingalls, agrarian debt, the price of wheat and corn, or the power of railroad corporations. Whatever the exact reasoning, Kansas Alliance and Populist newspapers did not deem the Lodge Bill to be a partisan act of “money owners” worthy of public condemnation. The absence of criticisms of the Lodge Bill in the Kansas agrarian press and the North-South vote at Ocala demonstrate that regional differences played a disruptive role in the Alliance and the infant Populist Party.<sup>23</sup>

While the Lodge Bill exposed regional differences at Ocala Alliance it also demonstrated racial divisions within the farmers’ movement. Following the pattern set at the St. Louis and Meridian conventions, the Colored Alliance held its annual national convention separately, though simultaneously in Ocala. The black agrarian group received statements welcoming them to Ocala, had white delegations from the Northern and Southern Alliances visit their meeting, and returned the favor by sending committees to each of the white meetings. Although the Colored Alliance reached a confederation agreement with the other Alliances, the African-American group also expressed its autonomy when its delegates voted unanimously to support the Lodge Bill. In a resolution passed December 5, two days after McAllister’s call for protest,

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North Dakota, Pennsylvania, and South Dakota. California voted to table Wardall’s request. The vote can be found in *National Economist*, December 20, 1890.

<sup>23</sup> Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 227-28.

the Colored Alliance passed a resolution to “urge upon Congress to pass the Lodge election bill, and let it apply to all sections.”<sup>24</sup>

In its original statement on the Lodge Bill the Colored Alliance openly criticized the Southern Alliance for condemning the Republican legislation. According to the *Mobile Daily Register* Colored Alliance delegates did not speak in support of the Lodge Bill as much as they expressed disapproval of their white agrarian allies “for going out of its way to intermeddle with politics.” Newspaper accounts suggest that organization members divided over support for the Lodge Bill. Superintendent Humphrey stated that members felt that the bill was some twenty years “too late.” Other accounts from the *Atlanta Constitution* claimed that Georgia and Alabama delegates strongly favored the proposed law. Regardless of their lack of unanimity on the Lodge Bill, the farm group stood united in questioning the necessity of condemning the legislation. During its first day of conference, the Colored Alliance stated that Southern Alliance’s “action has no reference whatever to the aims and purposes of the organization, and was calculated to check the growth and influence of the alliance.”<sup>25</sup>

The existing evidence supports the conclusion of the Colored Alliance. McAllister intended condemnation of the Lodge Bill to prevent the formation of a third party by dividing white Southerners from Kansans. The Lodge measure was a controversial issue throughout the nation. White Southerners and some Northern Democrats had already widely condemned the congressional proposal. In an organization with a white southern majority, the Alliance did not need to address the issue. The Lodge Bill was clearly unpopular in the South. Aware of white

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<sup>24</sup> Gerald H. Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Movement: Ballots and Bigotry in the New South*, rev. ed. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 40; *Atlanta Constitution*, December 6, 1890. In its December 23, 1890 edition, the *Progressive Farmer* condemned the Lodge Bill and noted that it would probably fail to pass the Senate because “the Lodge bill is coming to be more distinctly seen by the best men of all parties.” The article below provided the membership totals of the Colored Farmers’ Alliance in each state, but made no mention of the organization’s endorsement of the Lodge Bill at Ocala.

<sup>25</sup> *Mobile (AL) Daily Register*, December 5, 1890 (first and third quote); *Atlanta Constitution*, December 4 (second quote), 5, 1890.

southern opinion, McAllister and his ally Uriah Hall, knew the proposed law would create controversy at the Alliance convention. Hall and McAllister were the most consistent advocates for the Lodge condemnation measure. Both men also opposed the formation of a third party and may have wished to prevent the spread of a political party in light of the recent success of the People's Party in the Sunflower state. Dividing the Alliance along sectional lines was a good way to divide white Southerners from black Southerners and Northerners. Unfortunately for the farmers' movement it was not the last time that sectional tension weakened the agrarian crusade.

McAllister and Hall had good reasons to fear independent action within the Alliance. Kansans brought political momentum to Ocala where many acted to achieve official Southern Alliance support for a third party. Frank McGrath, Kansas Alliance President and a participant at the Ocala convention, expressed disappointment with the Lodge affair. McGrath stated, "The agitation in the South over the Lodge bill precludes the possibility of an independent movement at this time." Although editors of the official Southern Alliance newspaper, *The National Economist*, downplayed the drama surrounding independent political action, other newspapers did not. Accounts of the Ocala convention from the *Atlanta Constitution* and the *Mobile Daily Register* mostly printed articles dealing with the third party and the Lodge Bill. In the weeks following the convention, *The Economist* explained its opposition to a national third party, but it also published letters to the editor in support of an independent political party. Writers from North Carolina, Kansas, and Illinois expressed their support for political action in accordance with their Alliance principles and sectional reconciliation. While Alliance leaders acted to limit the internal controversy caused by discussing third party action, the topic was of great interest to members of the farmers' organization.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> William DuBose Sheldon, *Populism in the Old Dominion: Virginia Farm Politics, 1885-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1935), 73 (quote); *National Economist*, February 21, 1891. *The Atlanta Constitution*

While the Ocala convention of the reform forces revealed internal divisions within the national movement, the six-day conference produced several positive developments. Like the St. Louis meeting the year prior, the 1890 meeting of agrarian forces failed to produce any mergers among the Colored, Northern, and Southern alliances. The Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association and the Knights of Labor, also present at Ocala, did not fuse with the Southern Alliance. A confederation agreement among all of the organizations was reached, however, which bode well for the continuation of a national movement. The associations agreed to uphold the "common citizenship...commercial equality and legal justice" of its members. Colored Alliance Superintendent Richard Humphrey later remarked, "this agreement will be known in future ages as the burial of racial conflict, and finally of race prejudice." The Southern Alliance Supreme Council passed a resolution stating that "equal facilities, educational, commercial, and political, be demanded for colored and white Alliance men alike, competency considered, and that a free ballot and a fair count be insisted upon and had for colored and white alike."<sup>27</sup>

The agreement showed that although the Lodge Bill divided the Colored Alliance and some southern whites in the Southern Alliance, both parties agreed to the legal equality of the races. The inclusion of the "competency considered" phrase, however, showed that the alliances supported qualifications for exercising the franchise. Parts of Tennessee and the Mississippi Constitutional Convention of 1890 set the standard for other states when they enacted the poll tax, a two-year residency clause, and the interpretation clause as requirements for exercising the franchise. In the years ahead, these voting laws characterized an era of racial exclusion and oppression that would not be undone until the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Within the context of

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and the *Mobile Daily Register* note more intense opposition to the Lodge Bill condemnation than *The National Economist*. See the *Daily Register*, December 5, 6, 1890, the *Constitution*, December 4, 5, 1890, and *National Economist*, December 13, 1890.

<sup>27</sup> Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Movement*, 38-39.

the 1890s many white Southerners viewed these laws as necessary reforms that would eliminate the corruption of “ignorant” voters. Many southern whites claimed the laws would reduce racial conflicts and allow debates concerning the passage of reforms to receive primary consideration among the public and elected officials. In the immediate aftermath of the Ocala Convention, however, the agreement provided a basis for future cooperation between the white and black alliances.<sup>28</sup>

Beyond the confederation of reform associations, a second positive development at the 1890 Alliance convention was the agreement on a set of principles, known as the Ocala Platform. Like the St. Louis Platform of 1889, the Ocala Demands called for the abolition of national banks, an increase in currency circulation, unlimited coinage of silver, a graduated income tax, a limited tariff, and the direct election of U.S. senators. The new Alliance platform also included a land-loan agreement within the subtreasury plan, and advocated for the strict regulation of communication and transportation industries. During the next two years, Alliance members used the Ocala Platform as the basis of their reform activities.<sup>29</sup>

A third accomplishment of the Ocala convention was the survival of the Southern Alliance and its national prestige. No states or individual delegates chose to leave the organization, despite the emergence of internal differences. Additionally, the election of Alliance allies across the South and in Kansas promised the implementation of reform in the years ahead. In Kansas, a third party ousted the powerful Republican Party from the state house.

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<sup>28</sup> Kousser, *Shaping of Southern Politics*; Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Dewey Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983). Mississippi voters sent a high number of Alliance members to the Constitutional Convention of 1890, which was largely called to restrict African American access to the vote. See Stephen Cresswell, *Rednecks, Redeemers, and Race: Mississippi After Reconstruction, 1877-1917* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), 26-29.

<sup>29</sup> Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 230. Produced by the dissatisfaction of Western grain farmers, the land-loan agreement proposed that the federal government allow farmers to borrow cash against the value of their farmland. The initial version of the subtreasury based loans solely on the value of crops.

The defeat of Senator John Ingalls, a major symbol of sectionalism, corruption, and monopoly, seemed imminent in the Sunflower State. A supporter of the Farmers' Alliance seemed poised to replace Ingalls. The agrarian organization also launched its National Reform Press Association, which pledged to spread the Alliance gospel throughout the country, educating the American people in a manner that mainstream newspapers, controlled by monopolies, could not.

Membership totals in the Southern Alliance and Colored Alliance reached their peak in 1890 and an educational campaign promised to increase its ranks and influence. Finally, reformers from many stripes continued to view the agrarian movement as the best opportunity to effect social, economic, and political change. The National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union, the National Alliance, the National Colored Farmers' Alliance, the Knights of Labor, and the Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association continued to agree to work toward mutual goals. The farmers' movement appeared unified as 1891 dawned.

After the Ocala convention Alliance newspapers turned their attention to events in Kansas. Supported by the Populist majority in the state legislature, the agrarian movement seemed poised to oust incumbent Senator John Ingalls and elect the first Populist to the U.S. Senate. Throughout the country Alliance newspapers launched criticisms at Ingalls, while they portrayed the People's Party as the representative of farmers and sectional reconciliation. Newspaper articles reminded readers of Ingalls views on the role of the golden rule in politics and compared his statements on morality and politics unfavorably to Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Other articles cited Ingalls as the inspiration for the People's Party, predicted his defeat, and portrayed it as victory over sectionalism. The *Southern Mercury* predicted that General John H. Rice would replace Ingalls as Senator. The newspaper noted that Rice lived in

Georgia prior to 1865, indicating that he understood people from both regions and he would serve as a leader who was free from sectional hatred.<sup>30</sup>

When the newly elected Kansas legislature met to nominate a U.S. senator, members of the People's Party predominated numerically with 92 seats, compared to 66 Republicans and 10 Democrats. This majority was significant because it allowed the People's Party to outnumber Republican and Democratic representatives in the lower and upper houses of the legislature, only if the third party stayed unified. Since Ingalls reelection was the central issue of the 1890 campaign, the People's Party could feel good about staying united against the Republican Senator. The Georgia Senate election, however, demonstrated that Alliance supporters could be divided and the Republican Party launched a strong campaign to divide Populist legislators immediately after the November election.<sup>31</sup>

Kansas Republicans relied on the results of the Ocala convention and Civil War memory to persuade the state legislature to return Ingalls to the U.S. Senate. Republican newspapers across the state quickly noted that Southerners in the Alliance refused to join Kansans in a national political party. The *Emporia Republican* noted that Southern "brethren" remained faithful to the Democratic Party, did not stop Westerners from leaving the GOP, and then "doubtless did a large amount of laughing in their sleeves." For these actions the *Topeka Capital* added that Southerners at Ocala were "very slick."<sup>32</sup>

Foremost the Republicans hoped to appeal to Civil War memory in their efforts to reelect Ingalls. Since the Populists hosted Polk and other white Southerners who represented a "second

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<sup>30</sup> *Topeka Advocate*, December 3, 24, 1890; *Progressive Farmer*, November 11, 1890; *Southern Mercury*, January 1, 1891.

<sup>31</sup> In the lower house there were 91 Populists, 28 Republicans, and nine Democrats. The 40-seat Senate leaned heavily in favor of the 38 Republicans, compared to one Populist and one Democrat. From the *New York Times*, December 22, 1890.

<sup>32</sup> Both quotes are reprinted in the *Winfield (KS) Courier*, December 11, 1890.

invasion” of the state during their 1890 visits, Republicans questioned the patriotism of Kansas Populists. According to Republican newspapers, Populists demonstrated their lack of commitment to America by failing to attend Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) meetings, unlike Republicans. The GOP also turned to its supporters in the GAR for reinforcements. The party sent the Union veterans’ organization petitions asking Ingalls to be reelected, which the GAR in turn sent to the state legislature in large numbers. Although officials remained silent, the official GAR newspaper also promoted Ingalls’ as a patriot, a friend to farmers, an advocate for bimetallism and a lower tariff, and an enemy to eastern bankers.<sup>33</sup>

The GAR went further in its support for Ingalls’ reelection to the U.S. Senate. During its annual departmental meeting a month before the November election the GAR hosted President Benjamin Harrison and other speakers who encouraged the audience to vote for Republicans who would send Ingalls back to the Senate. At other public rallies, veterans claimed that the Alliance was unpatriotic and acted to promote the Democratic Party in Kansas. Speakers charged that the South treated Union veterans poorly and hated Ingalls. Other veterans claimed that if Ingalls were not elected it would be a “direct blow to the defenders of our country in the hour of her greatest need.” The message was clear. Ingalls believed in patriotism, loyalty, and honored Union veterans. Populists did not respect those who fought for the United States and they supported Confederates who tried to destroy the Union.<sup>34</sup>

Besides heavy opposition from the Republican Party and some members of the GAR, the People’s Party had other worries as the state legislature met to elect the next Kansas Senator.

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<sup>33</sup> *Winfield (KS) Courier*, October 30, 1890; Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 51-52; Kyle S. Sinisi, “Veterans as Political Activists: The Kansas Grand Army of the Republic, 1880-1893,” *Kansas History* (Summer 1991): 96-97.

<sup>34</sup> Kyle S. Sinisi, “Veterans as Political Activists,” 96; Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 51, in the *Topeka Daily Capital*, December 5, 12, 1890, January 24, 25, 1891. As the election results demonstrated the GAR did not persuade Kansas veterans to oppose the Populists. GAR membership declined throughout the 1890s until late in the decade when Populism waned in Kansas. During their successful years the Populists successfully appealed to veterans. Some members of the GAR supported the Populists, while other veterans formed rival organization such as The Boys in Blue. For more see Sinisi, “Veterans as Political Activists,” 98-99.



Aware of the use of bribes, intimidation, and general scheming during past Senate elections, the People's Party took precautions to avoid these pitfalls of politics. Populist legislators stayed at cheaper hotels off the main streets and appeared in public with an entourage of bodyguards. As in the Georgia senatorial election, multiple candidates appeared who supported Alliance reforms. The People's Party caucus considered seventeen nominees during its deliberations. Unlike the Georgia representatives, the Kansas caucus eventually reached a consensus. After five hours the caucus chose William Peffer on the eighteenth ballot.<sup>35</sup>

Populists held firm in the final vote for the Senate and Peffer defeated Ingalls 101-58. Populists celebrated their victory. The new senator addressed a large crowd of supporters in Topeka the day after his election. He thanked the crowd and told them that it was time for a new party to do the people's bidding. Addressing Republican questions concerning the patriotism of the Populists, Senator Peffer reminded the audience, "I, too, was a soldier; not a kid glove soldier, but a man in the ranks. Is it reasonable that a man who fought for years in the union army and spent the best part of his life on the field should ever forget the old soldiers? If trouble ever comes upon this nation the old soldiers who now belong to the alliance party would shoulder their guns and march back to the field of battle as readily as we did in '61. As soon as I could get my family out of the reach of the guerillas, I became a union soldier." Through his statements, Peffer asserted that he and the Populist Party were just as patriotic, brave, and masculine as Republicans. Peffer continued this theme by telling the crowd, "In '92 the great army of the farmers will win its first grand victory and in '96 they will control the nation." He

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<sup>35</sup> Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 47-50, 52-54. As the Populist chosen to publicly debate Ingalls during the campaign, the editor of a newspaper that championed Alliance reforms, and the choice of the Populist state convention to replace Ingalls, Peffer had been the favorite. John Willits and Peter P. Elder were the two next closest candidates to Populist caucus. Willits had narrowly lost his bid for governor in the 1890 election. Elder won his race to the U.S. House of Representatives and held the sympathies of most of the former Union Labor supporters who now supported the People's Party. Former Republicans tended to support Peffer, while Populists with previous allegiance to third parties favored Elder and Willits. Alliance President Leonidas Polk endorsed Peffer prior to the November election.

denied that the Populists were radicals, saying “We are not anarchists; anarchists don’t carry the grand old flag that we love as dearly as our lives.”<sup>36</sup>

Populist allies in the South celebrated the victory over Ingalls and sectionalism. Polk called Peffer’s victory over Ingalls “the greatest blow at sectionalism that has been struck for twenty-five years.” Peffer also received congratulations from his former southern neighbors. The Montgomery County Tennessee agrarians sent Peffer a note of congratulations and applauded the “admirable selection” made by the Kansas legislature. The Peffers lived in Montgomery County during Reconstruction, only to flee when members of the community ostracized Peffer for his political stance. After twenty years, a note of best wishes carried significance for an agrarian movement that emphasized sectional reconciliation. Peffer published the note in the February 25<sup>th</sup> edition of his *Kansas Farmer*.<sup>37</sup>

In the months following Peffer’s election the Alliance acted to continue the momentum of the movement. Kansas leaders sought to address accusations made by the Republican opposition and demonstrate the health of the national agrarian crusade. In early 1891 Alliance leaders in the Sunflower state published newspaper articles to convince Kansans that white Southerners in the Alliance truly desired reform, did not represent a Democratic scheme to hurt Republicans, and that whites in the South genuinely sought a partnership with Northerners. Through these newspaper articles Kansans also acted to build consensus with Southerners in hopes of establishing a national Populist Party in time for 1892. After Ocala Northerners also launched speaking tours to demonstrate their desire to partner with Southerners in the agrarian movement and to persuade southern voters to join the third party. Southerners also wished to

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<sup>36</sup> Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 55; *Topeka State Journal*, January 29, 1891 in Kansas Biographical Scrapbooks, volume 2: 24-25, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka.

<sup>37</sup> Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk*, 228; Peter H. Argersinger, “The Conservative as Radical: A Reconstruction Dilemma,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 34 (1975): 168-187.

remain allied to Northerners in hopes of implementing Alliance reforms into state and national laws. Aware of internal divisions, but confident that their objectives could be achieved, leaders of the Alliance communicated a message of solidarity to Northerners and Southerners in early 1891.

During the first few months of 1891 the Alliance press used the Lodge Bill to portray a united agrarian front, obscuring regional differences that the legislation evoked at Ocala. After tabling the bill in August, the Senate began to consider the proposal in December 1890 and January 1891. The bill had little chance of passing the Senate, but that did not stop commentary on the Lodge Bill in the national press. Alliance newspapers joined in the national discussion and used the Federal Elections Bill to enhance harmony within their organization. Statements by Alliance journalists also revealed regional differences within the agrarian movement that hampered future efforts to promote a national reform coalition.

In the wake of the Ocala convention the two major Alliance newspapers in Kansas glossed over regional differences exposed by discussion of the Lodge Bill. William Peffer's the *Kansas Farmer* reported that the Alliance unanimously condemned the Lodge Bill at Ocala. Dr. Stephen McLallin's *Advocate* avoided this inaccurate statement, but published several critiques of the Elections Bill in the days that followed the national Alliance convention. *The Advocate* objected to the proposal because of the expenses created by enforcement and due to the presence of federal troops at polling stations. In an article two weeks later the newspaper expressed opposition to the bill based on grounds that it gave too much power to the federal government, took away local "home rule" of elections, and, therefore, allowed "political managers" to exert party wishes into electoral contests. Neither newspaper mentioned Wardall's objection to the

Lodge Bill condemnation nor the North-South split of votes cast in favor of denunciation at Ocala.<sup>38</sup>

Like Kansans, southern newspapers also criticized the Lodge Bill after the Ocala convention. Unlike Kansans, Southerners expressed more hostility toward the legislative proposal. *The National Economist* portrayed the Farmers' Alliances as a more effective force for advancing justice and good race relations than the Lodge Bill with its heavy doses of "sectionalism" and "political demagogism." In another instance the newspaper declared that the election bill was "the real sentiment of but one section of this country—New England." *The Economist* claimed no state "Outside of that section" would pass a bill meant to "rekindle the almost extinct fires of sectionalism" and "the old feeling of animosity between the North and South." Again the newspaper argued that the bill encouraged "sectional hate" and only benefited "the interest of the politician and not of the people." Through such depictions Alliance newspapers encouraged readers to view the Lodge Bill as a struggle of New England politicians against the American majority who lived in the South and the West. Agrarian newspapers suggested that the sectionalism of New England no longer found resonance in other parts of the country.<sup>39</sup>

In an article first published in the *Progressive Farmer* and republished in the *Southern Mercury*, Alliance newspapers described the Lodge Bill as irrational and potentially dangerous. The *Progressive Farmer* writer claimed that a friend met an old African-American man who asked for an explanation of the Lodge Bill. After the friend summarized the bill in the "simplest way," the old man reflected on the information and supposedly remarked "Hit 'pears to me dey's

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<sup>38</sup> *Kansas Farmer*, December 10, 1890; *Topeka Advocate*, December 10, 24, 1890. Neither newspaper discussed the widespread problems surrounding elections in the post-Civil War South, which Peffer experienced firsthand. See Peter H. Argersinger, "The Conservative as Radical."

<sup>39</sup> *National Economist*, December 28, 1890 (remainder of quotes), January 10, 1891 (first two quotes).

fixin' ter git some moah niggers killed.” Although the author offered no commentary, the article conveyed that even those people deemed the “simplest” understood that racial violence would accompany the enforcement of the Lodge Bill in the South. The article implied that white and black Southerners understood the full ramifications of the proposed law, while the bill’s New England authors did not comprehend seemingly unalterable southern race relations. In an important addition to Southern Alliance criticisms of the Lodge Bill the story suggested that southern African Americans opposed the Federal Elections law.<sup>40</sup>

Reverend Thomas Dixon also told his Twenty-Third Baptist Church congregation in New York City that African Americans did not want the Lodge Bill. Dixon, a North Carolina native, frequently appeared in Alliance newspapers because of the mutual appreciation between the minister and Alliance leaders, like Leonidas Polk. During sermons the Baptist preacher often praised the Farmers’ Alliance as a just movement of farmers acting in accordance with Christian teachings. Polk and many others, including John D. Rockefeller, viewed Dixon as an excellent modern preacher for modern times. Noting that some within and without the congregation did not agree with his views on the Lodge Bill, Dixon launched into an assessment of the legislation because of its evocation of social, economic, political, and moral issues. The *Progressive Farmer* printed his sermon in its January 27, 1891 issue.<sup>41</sup>

Dixon supported his views of the Lodge Bill with several points. The minister first stated that the congressional plan was foolish because it repeated the mistakes of Reconstruction, which he called “the errand of a fool.” Dixon claimed that Reconstruction proved that African Americans were not ready to exercise the vote responsibly. Supporting his views he cited the

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<sup>40</sup> *Progressive Farmer*, December 9, 1890 (original publication), reprinted in the *Southern Mercury*, January 1, 1891.

<sup>41</sup> *Progressive Farmer*, January 27, 1891; The *Progressive Farmer* praised Dixon frequently. See the June 17, December 9, 23, 1890 editions.

views of an African-American journal from the Hampton Institute in Virginia. The journal did not mention the Federal Elections Bill, but it expressed belief in the “educational and moral reconstruction of the South” that would “never come from any legislative hall.” Dixon believed that Reconstruction served as a poor model for legislation that was “inspired by memory, not fact.” A second problem Dixon identified with the Lodge Bill was that African Americans did not request the law. He argued that most black Americans opposed the proposed law and that the bill originated in Massachusetts, the home of “a certain narrow New England fanaticism that yet lives, wedded to a chronic sectionalism.” A third fault in the voter legislation was that it unnecessarily provoked “race bitterness, hatred and suspicion” in a region where conflicts were disappearing. Although Dixon saw black-white relations in terms of a “weaker race” and a “stronger race,” he also thought that the groups were mutually dependent. As he told his New York congregation “The stronger race is beginning to see that it could not get along without the weaker—that they are bound in life by ties economic, industrial, social and fraternal, that cannot be broken, without doing violence to the civilization they are jointly building, whether will or not.” The Baptist minister stated that a final problem with the proposed election law was that it diverted attention from more pressing problems of the era such as taxes, education, and monetary policy.<sup>42</sup>

Through Dixon’s sermons and articles in newspapers run by Macune and Polk, white Southerners in the Alliance communicated stronger opposition to the Lodge Bill than Kansans. Rather than focus merely on the costs of the legislation and the politics of its implementation,

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<sup>42</sup> *Progressive Farmer*, January 27, 1891. Although Dixon was not an elected official in the Alliance, the consistent publication of his sermons in a newspaper owned by the president of the farmers’ organization suggests a similarity in thought between Dixon and the Southern Farmers’ Alliance. Dixon’s views of racial equality and Reconstruction matched those of Polk, Macune, and other Alliance leaders. By 1891 Polk no longer published editorials that promoted racial inequality. For past writings by Macune, see the *Burnet Bulletin*, September 26, November 7, 1874, February 27, 1875. For Polk see *Ansonian*, June 4, 11, 1874, February 11, 1875, December 6, 1876.

white Southerners involved African Americans in their arguments. White Southerners contended that southern African Americans did not want a law intended to effectively promote the free exercise of the franchise in the South. Through its reasoning, these Southern Alliance spokesmen asserted that the southern race relations were cordial and that the Lodge Bill was created to fix a problem that only existed in the New England imagination. In reality, white Alliance leaders claimed that African Americans were content in the South. White Southerners published tales of healthy race relations in part to prove that the South of 1891 was not the South of 1861. Citing African Americans who agreed with their condemnation of the Lodge Bill demonstrated white Southerners' claims that progress had occurred in the region since the end of slavery. Black voices also stood as evidence that Kansans could trust white Southerners as partners in the national agrarian crusade. Contrary to the charges of Kansas Republicans, southern whites in the Alliance did not represent the South of the Civil War era. Southern whites were reconstructed.

Despite this narrative of unity, African Americans in the agrarian movement expressed support for the Federal Elections Bill. Contrasting with the Southern Alliance and its white Superintendent, Richard Humphrey, the Colored Alliance unanimously supported the Lodge Bill at Ocala. After the convention members of the agrarian organization continued to endorse the election legislation. In March 1891 *The National Economist* published a strong letter by Colored Farmers' Alliance leader and African Episcopal Methodist Reverend John L. Moore. The Crescent City, Florida minister responded to a Jacksonville, Florida editorial that accused the Colored Alliance of supporting the Lodge Bill only to promote Republican political power. Moore countered that the Colored Alliance endorsed the bill because it was one way to ensure a "free vote and an honest count." He said that the proposal had problems, but it was the best

proposal available at that time. Speaking in Alliance language that promoted biracial class unity, Moore encouraged farmers and laborers to vote as a block and to reject party affiliation. Whites and blacks had common interests as laborers, and Moore concluded, “Anything that can be brought about to benefit the workingman, will also benefit the negro more than any other legislation that can be enacted.” The reverend said that African Americans wanted equal access to equal facilities rather than forced social relations with whites.<sup>43</sup>

While the agrarian movement did not reach a consensus on the Lodge Bill, the alliances did establish several compromises on issues pertaining to the legislation. Specifically, the Alliance promoted alternatives to the legislation to address free and fair elections and better race relations. The agrarian association advertised the Australian ballot system or private ballot as a substitute to federal supervisors. In August 1890 William Peffer published an article that described how the private ballot system functioned and summarized a Massachusetts law based on the Australian method. Essentially, the Australian ballot system acted to reduce manipulation at the polls by making voting a private, rather than public process. Under the system states assumed the financial cost of printing ballots for elections. The law also allowed voters to support candidates in multiple political parties since all candidates were featured on the state-sponsored ballot. Because voters cast their vote at a polling station in private, rather than publicly dropping the party ticket in a ballot box, their vote remained secret in theory.<sup>44</sup>

Other agrarian leaders endorsed the Australian ballot at the Ocala convention. L.D. Miller of the Colored Alliance delegation told the Southern Alliance Ocala convention that

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<sup>43</sup> *National Economist*, March 7, 1891. Moore’s article is a very strong assessment of the problems that affected race relations in 1891. African Americans outside of the Colored Farmers’ Alliance did not uniformly support the Lodge Bill. Like most white Southerners in the Alliance, many southern middle-class African Americans expressed concerns that the legislation would fail to produce fairer election or better race relations. High profile leaders such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and J.C. Price openly opposed the proposal. See Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Movement*, 60-62.

<sup>44</sup> *Kansas Farmer* August 8, 1890. The private ballot became law in many states during the 1890s.



African Americans supported the Australian ballot as a reform measure. Miller said that the Alliance would “give” blacks the private ballot, which would promote reform over partisanship. Kansans too demonstrated a willingness to move beyond their disagreement with white Southerners on the Lodge Bill. Published soon after the end of the Ocala convention, Stephen McLallin’s *Topeka Advocate* supported the Australian ballot system as a favorable alternative to the use of federal troops. The newspaper called the Australian method of voting “a great safeguard against organized ignorance assaulting the sanctity of the ballot.” Through these endorsements of the Australian secret ballot system, the Alliance found consensus on a measure that promised fair elections and enhanced the ability of reform candidates to win contests against corrupt politicians. Advocacy for the Australian system also allowed white Southerners to deny that they opposed the Lodge Bill solely because the legislation favored black voting rights and the Republican Party.<sup>45</sup>

Like the Australian ballot system, the Alliance promoted racial justice prior to the Ocala meeting. After the Alliance meeting the organization intensified its efforts to promote reforms for white and black agrarians and improve race relations in the South. In the summer of 1890, William Peffer argued that the agrarian crusade would unite the South and West and end racial animosity below the Mason-Dixon. Peffer wrote, “The farmer will solve the southern problem with his friendly grip in social greeting.” Leonidas Polk’s newspaper published a similar depiction of the agrarian movement. The *Progressive Farmer* ridiculed the notion that the Colored Alliance was an organization that intended to create poor race relations by quoting from the official newspaper of the Colored Alliance, *The National Alliance*. Noting that the Colored Alliance publication emphasized cooperation between white and black farmers to resolve their common financial struggles, the *Progressive Farmer* said that the black agrarian group stood for

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<sup>45</sup> *Southern Alliance Farmer*, December 9, 1890; *Topeka Advocate*, January 10, 1891.

“peace and the Subtreasury.” The article ended by concluding, “Does it not look as if the farmers, the hayseeders, would settle the race question? Get the politicians out of the way and the farmers will settle it at once.”<sup>46</sup>

At the 1890 national convention of the Alliance, agrarians continued to tout the benevolent effects of their organization for race relations. Colored Alliance delegate L.D. Miller told the audience to forget past Republican or Democratic political affiliations. Miller pledged to serve in the agrarian cause, which enabled him to “act and live for the people and devote my future to their cause.” Harry Tracy, a Southern Alliance organizer, followed Miller and told the convention and according to the *Atlanta Constitution* “the farmers were going to solve the negro problem. They were the friends of the negro whom they had been separated from by the chicanery of politicians.” Tracy then pledged that neither Democratic nor Republican politicians would lead the Alliance. Through the Alliance, whites and blacks pledged to solve racial problems.<sup>47</sup>

Kansans joined in Alliance discussions of racial issues in the aftermath of the Ocala convention and added a political twist. When asked about the prospects of a national third party, Stephen McLallin told a Kansas newspaper that third party considerations would be delayed. McLallin stated that white Southerners were considering the question and that southern African Americans were “ready to join a third party as soon as they know that the whites will leave the Democratic party.” The Kansas Alliance portrayed southern blacks and whites as a united front that was ready to move as one toward joining Midwesterners in a new political party.<sup>48</sup>

Amidst sweeping Populist victories in Kansas, the *Topeka Advocate* urged readers to remain patient with the South. The newspaper claimed that white Southerners were not opposed

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<sup>46</sup> *Kansas Farmer*, May 14, 1890; *Progressive Farmer*, July 8, 1890.

<sup>47</sup> *Southern Alliance Farmer*, December 9, 1890; *Atlanta Constitution*, December 5, 1890.

<sup>48</sup> *National Economist*, December 28, 1890.

to a third party and it predicted that the South would join Kansans in the Populist Party. In its efforts to counter Kansas Republicans who continued to charge that the Alliance represented a southern Confederate conspiracy, *The Advocate* said that “The Alliance third-party movement will also settle the race question of the South, and black and white will vote together for the common interest of all. The declaration of the Ocala convention upon this subject is worth more than force bills, and will be far more effectual.” Despite opposition to southern participation in a third party, *The National Economist* reprinted the article.<sup>49</sup>

Throughout 1891 the Alliance faced pivotal questions. With the creation of a third party in Kansas, the organization faced increased pressure from its political foes. Many supporters began to worry about the validity of accusations hurled against the agrarian movement that it was a conspiracy initiated by sectional outsiders who wished to cripple the political and social stability in the region. One Populist wrote *The Advocate* to discuss these charges of disloyalty to state and regional loyalties. The writer stated that “In the south, people are told that this movement is of northern origin, a Republican device to disrupt the Democratic party of the south, strike down white rule, and establish black supremacy instead, while in the north, politicians tell us the movement is a southern institution, devised by southern Democrats...and designed to destroy the Republican party of the north...and thereby abrogate all the results of the war.”<sup>50</sup>

The 1890 meeting at Ocala exposed meaningful differences within the national agrarian movement for the first time. At the heart of these differences stood politics and their association with regional identities. The formation of a third party by Kansans fundamentally altered the character of the Alliance. Kansans took the bold step of supporting all Alliance reforms through

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<sup>49</sup> *National Economist*, February 21, 1891.

<sup>50</sup> *Topeka Advocate*, February 25, 1891, in Gene O. Clanton, *Kansas Populism: Ideas and Men* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1969), 268 n.39.

a new political party. In the aftermath of its electoral victories, Kansas Populists felt pressure to incorporate the South into the third party and prove that the agrarian movement was willing to truly throw aside all past allegiances to political parties and regional identities in order to form a truly national political movement of the American producer majority. Kansans followed Alliance ideology to its purist conclusion and they now asked black and white Southerners to honor their loyalties to the Alliance banner and join in the People's Party. While many southern African Americans demonstrated their willingness to join Midwesterners, most southern whites hesitated. In the wake of experiencing success within the Democratic Party, most southern whites saw little need to abandon the regionally powerful party. Publicly, Northerners, black Southerners, and white Southerners politely debated a third party at the 1890 Ocala convention. Emboldened by their electoral success and the election of William Peffer as U.S. Senator, Kansas Populist continued to patiently promote the third party to hesitant southern whites in 1891. As the Senate elections in Georgia and North Carolina revealed, the Democratic Party did not stand completely with the Southern Alliance. Kansas Populists saw potential in the South and intensified their political recruiting in the region.

Hoping to silence critics and to enhance the political power of the agrarian movement, Kansans set out on a "Southern Crusade" in 1891. Kansas Populists hoped to convince Southerners that a national third party was necessary to achieve the reforms of their cherished Alliance movement. In the South, African Americans and whites considered their options as they awaited the implementation of Alliance reforms by state legislators who were friendly to the agrarian movement. A critical year lay ahead for the farmers' crusade.

## CHAPTER SIX: SECTIONAL POLITICS AND THE SEEDS OF DESTRUCTION

Agrarian enthusiasts had great hope for their prospects in 1891. At the December 1890 national convention in Ocala, Florida the Alliance endorsed an educational campaign to send speakers across America to promote its reforms. Through the communication of the farmers' program, Alliance leaders hoped to produce more supporters and exert greater political pressure to enact reforms into law. Agrarians emphasized the benefits of cooperatives, the subtreasury plan, an increased circulation of cash, and greater control of banks, railroads, and speculators. Throughout its promotional activities the Alliance also attacked sectionalism as a barrier to the unification of the American producer class majority. During the two previous years this Alliance formula of reform and sectional reconciliation achieved unity and growth. The trend began to change at the 1890 national meeting. Ocala exposed meaningful fissures within the Southern Alliance. At the center of the differences stood politics, which revealed sectional tension. Despite great agrarian efforts to dilute its importance, sectionalism increasingly overwhelmed the Alliance throughout 1891 and 1892, and planted the seeds of destruction that ended the farmers' movement in 1896.

In the aftermath of the Ocala convention, however, positive trends continued to suggest success for agrarian reform. Leonidas Polk continued to generate enthusiasm in his tours of the country. In an October 1891 visit to southern California, Polk spoke to agrarian supporters, including a group of Union and Confederate veterans. Californians wrote "Linked Evermore:

The Grey and the Blue” and dedicated the song to Polk. Elsewhere Alliance supporters received a warm welcome. In New York City Baptist Reverend Thomas Dixon Jr. praised the Southern Alliance before his congregation. Dixon called Alliance efforts to “throw off the curse of traditional sectionalism” a victory for “The Christian manhood of America.” The Reverend criticized the perpetrators of Civil War bitterness as “ghouls” who “began their ghost dance over the fields made rich with the blood of heroes” when veterans returned home after the war. Dixon charged “They have made progress impossible because they have made issues of memories, and marshaled the hosts of the living to fight the hopes of the dead.” But, the North Carolina native argued, “The battle has ceased. We are children of a common Father.” Through organizations like the Alliance he saw a new “day of fraternity.” For agrarian supporters Dixon linked Alliance political, social, and economic goals to a strong religious base. The minister’s success in the North further demonstrated that white southern farmers could trust regional outsiders and participate in the national reform movement.<sup>1</sup>

At the Ocala convention, Kansas agrarian Annie Diggs also showed that the Alliance was a vehicle for sectional reconciliation that united North and South. In a rare exception to the male dominated rhetoric concerning Civil War memory, Diggs told the crowd that she was “happier today than I have ever been in my life,” because she met southern women who treated her well. During the Civil War, Diggs heard that the women “would scratch our eyes out if we came south.” When Diggs passed by a Confederate cemetery she noted that became overwhelmed with “a sense almost of guilt, so intensely did the terror of those dark days and the full appreciation of what you people suffered rush upon me.” Diggs claimed that many kept

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<sup>1</sup> A copy of “Linked Evermore: The Grey and the Blue” is in the Polk Papers at the University of North Carolina. See L.L. Polk Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Box 1, Folder 99. Dixon quotes in the *Progressive Farmer*, December 9, 1890.

“sectional hatred” alive for too long, but with the People’s Party victories in her home state sectionalism received its “death sentence.”<sup>2</sup>

Diggs celebrated the unity of the “solid west and the solid south” at Ocala. She also alluded to a worry that prevailed among a growing number of farmers’ advocates. The agrarian reform journalist expressed hope that party loyalties would not prevent the combination of western and southern farmers, whether it was through the People’s Party or not. Although temporarily avoided at Ocala, the issue of forming a national third party to advance the goals of the Alliance did not go away. Diggs pointed to a major problem for the national agrarian crusade. In the wake of Populist electoral victories, Kansans pressed white southern members of the Alliance to join them in a national third party movement. Rebuffed by white Southerners at Ocala, Kansans reluctantly agreed to delay a convention of national third party supporters until 1892. Kansas Republicans immediately declared that white Southerners postponed endorsing a third party because they had no intention of breaking with the Democratic Party. Republicans claimed that Democrats controlled the Alliance and sought to weaken Republicans in the North. Pressured by these criticisms, Kansas Populists quickly reversed course and endorsed the Cincinnati meeting to discuss the formation of a national third party.<sup>3</sup>

The southern reaction to the third party convention was less than satisfying to midwestern Populists. No southern state Farmers’ Alliance endorsed the Cincinnati meeting of the third party advocates. Macune and Polk continued to reject the idea behind the conference. Both Alliance leaders preferred that action be postponed until southern Democratic state legislators had a chance to implement Alliance reforms. Other white Southerners demonstrated their

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<sup>2</sup> *Southern Alliance Farmer*, December 9, 1890.

<sup>3</sup> *Southern Alliance Farmer*, December 9, 1890; Peter H. Argersinger, *Populism and Politics: William Alfred Peffer and the People’s Party* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1974), 81-82.

irritation with Kansan efforts to establish a third party by saying “We are Democrats first and Alliancemen next.”<sup>4</sup>

Despite southern requests for patience, Kansas Populist leaders continued to advocate a national third party and put pressure on white Southerners. Frank McGrath, President of the Kansas state Alliance, urged Southerners to match their words with their actions. McGrath noted criticism that portrayed the Alliance as a Democratic tool and described southern participation in the upcoming Cincinnati conference as test of their dedication to “a union with us in the ‘middle of the road’ between the old parties, or whether the South is working to divide the North and place the Democracy in unlimited power in our national affairs in 1892.” McGrath extensively quoted Polk who encouraged Southerners to follow “our brethren of Kansas” and defeat “all the old war leaders who show incapacity to rise above the sectional questions which have so long divided and harmed our common country.” The Kansas Alliance leader asked if Southerners would be true to these words. If Southerners did not join the third party, McGrath said that Midwesterners would rejoin the Republican Party. He stated that the “the union of the West and South,” would then “be deferred for another generation.” McGrath demonstrated the urgency of forming a union of the South and the West and the growing internal pressure within the agrarian movement for a national political movement. Kansans now directed the momentum of a national farmers’ crusade begun by white Southerners.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout 1891 most white Southerners reaffirmed their rejection of a third party and remained patient with Democrats who pledged support for Alliance reforms. The sole exception to this pattern occurred in Texas, the birthplace of the Southern Alliance. Throughout the existence of the Alliance, Texas members debated whether to enter politics directly or to remain

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<sup>4</sup> Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 83.

<sup>5</sup> *Kansas Farmer*, April 15 1891; Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 84.



officially apolitical. Pressed by the sentiment of Midwesterners, like Frank McGrath, Alliancemen in the Lone Star State quickly grew dissatisfied with the pace of reform set by Democrats. Texas agrarians particularly became disenchanted with the new governor James Hogg. Elected with strong Alliance support in 1890, Hogg irritated many farmers' advocates by achieving few reforms during the first state legislative session. When Alliance spokesmen criticized Hogg, the governor denounced the subtreasury plan and accused the Alliance of seeking a third party. Nearly two-dozen Alliance Democrats from the state legislature joined Hogg in his denunciation. The attacks alienated many Alliance members who considered themselves Democrats.

On April 21, 1891, Texas agrarians met at Waco to discuss their educational campaign whereby lecturers informed the public about the aims of the Alliance and recruited supporters. The true intent of the meeting was to discuss the formation of a third party. Aware of the actual purpose of the conference, participants arrived from across the state and beyond. Third party supporters, including Kansan Henry Vincent and Knights of Labor leader Ralph Beaumont, attended the meeting. Joining them were anti-third party advocates and Alliance Democrats, recruited by Charles Macune, including Lon Livingston of Georgia, South Carolinian E.T. Stackhouse, and Alonzo Wardall of South Dakota. As the potential link in a third party movement of southern and western states, Texas became a key battleground state in the farmers' crusade.<sup>6</sup>

Rather than create a split in the national agrarian movement, the 1891 Waco meeting showed that divisions within the Alliance were not at a fatal impasse. While debate became tense at times, the conference produced compromises that favored third-party supporters.

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<sup>6</sup> Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 234-37.

Alliance members pledged to send delegates to the May Cincinnati meeting of third party advocates. In exchange, Alliancemen who favored independent political action agreed to hold their assemblies outside of regular Alliance meetings. During the separate conferences Texas Alliancemen agreed to form a state Reform Press Association, which third-party supporter William Lamb led. The meetings also resulted in the formation of the Texas Citizens' Alliance, an association created for those who were sympathetic but not eligible to join the Farmers' Alliance. In Kansas, the Citizens' Alliance proved an instrumental organization in the formation of the People's Party. Collectively, the Waco conference produced momentum for the partnership of Southerners and Midwesterners in a national third party.<sup>7</sup>

Despite these positive developments for supporters of a national third party, Texas and Arkansas were the only southern states to send significant representation to the Cincinnati conference. Kansas, Ohio, Illinois, and Nebraska sent large numbers of delegates, while other midwestern states accounted for the rest of the 1,417 attendees. Senator William Peffer chaired the conference of labor and farm organizations. The meeting resulted in the formation of the National People's Party and the appointment of an executive committee with instructions to attend the February 1892 conference of industrial organizations. Comments from Southerners at the conference, however, caused alarm among some third party supporters. Georgia Alliance leader and Democratic congressman Leonidas Livingston told the *Cincinnati Commercial-Gazette* that white Southerners were "naturally Democratic." Livingston stated that southern whites would delay supporting a third party until they determined that Democrats opposed

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<sup>7</sup> Robert C. McMath, *American Populism: A Social History 1877-1898* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1992), 144-45; Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 239-40.

agrarian reforms. The Georgia Alliance president said, “If that party will recognize the Alliance demands, they will take no step toward a third party.”<sup>8</sup>

While many Northerners were disappointed with the southern presence at the conference, they continued to promote Alliance reforms, including the Ocala platform and sectional reconciliation. In a symbolic gesture of support for reconciliation, Texan James H. “Cyclone” Davis joined Indianan C.A. Power on stage for a handshake. Both men were veterans of the Civil War. In an act of improvisation, a member of the Colored Alliance took to the stage behind the two white men. The embrace and the presence of an African American on stage with two veterans reminded attendees that the agrarian movement sought to destroy sectionalism, reunite Confederate and Union veterans, and encourage good race relations. North and South, whites and blacks, all were welcome in the national farmers’ crusade.<sup>9</sup>

Besides the acts of reconciliation at Cincinnati, third party advocates encountered little southern participation in the national political movement. Greater concerns emerged when the Alliance “yardstick” strategy played out in Democratic legislatures in the South. Throughout the region state legislatures failed to pass laws implementing the Ocala platform. Georgia produced a particularly disappointing record. Alliance supporters dominated the legislature, but the passage of acts favoring collectors over debtors and the failure of stronger regulations of railroads and other out-of-state corporations created great disappointment for many reform advocates. Additionally, the legislature enacted racial segregation on streetcars. A combination

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<sup>8</sup> O. Gene Clanton, *Kansas Populism: Ideas and Men* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1969), 95-99; McMath, *American Populism*, 145-46; Argersinger, *Populists and Politics*, 87 (Livingston quote).

<sup>9</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 145-46; Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 181. Kansas sent the most delegates with a total of 407. As Postel notes, the uninvited appearance of the Colored Alliance member on stage reinforced notions among some Northerners that the agrarian movement supported equal rights for all. A measure to racially segregate members on the convention floor went down to defeat. Although stymied at this Northern dominated convention, additional signs of uneasy race relations would emerge within the alliances during 1891.

of powerful lobbying from business interests, the anti-regulation sentiment of the state press, and the weak commitment of many elected officials to Alliance proposals coalesced to handicap success in most other southern states.<sup>10</sup>

In North Carolina the legislature produced a more reform-oriented record. The assembly approved increased funding for public schools and the state's agricultural college, and it established an African-American agricultural and manufacturing college, a Normal and Industrial school for women, and a school for the deaf and mentally handicapped. Unlike Georgia, the legislature created a State Railroad Commission to prevent excessive and discriminatory freight rates.<sup>11</sup>

Although satisfied with progress in North Carolina and the unity at Cincinnati, the absence of significant southern commitment loomed large for agrarian advocates of a national third party. If the National People's Party wanted to achieve success, southern support was essential. Some third party supporters looked to the Alliance lecturing system as a tool in their efforts to spread third party sentiment throughout the country. Enlarged at the Ocala convention, the lecturing system sent Alliance speakers into congressional districts to inform farmers about the goals of the agrarian association. Texans particularly recognized that they could pull voters away from the dominant political party and into the People's Party by highlighting the rejection of the subtreasury plan by the James Hogg Democrats. Some leaders of the Alliance, such as Charles Macune, favored the promotion of the subtreasury as a lecture topic in hopes that the Democrats would consent to the proposal. Macune opposed third party action and thought that the Alliance lecture system would create mass appeal that Democrats could not ignore. Other

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<sup>10</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 147; Gerald H. Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Movement: Ballots and Bigotry in the New South*, revised edition (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 102-03. Gaither notes that the Georgia legislature also passed a law to fund an African-American school in Atlanta.

<sup>11</sup> Stuart Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk: Agrarian Crusader* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1949), 251-52.

Alliance officials, such as Leonidas Polk, also opposed a national independent party and supported an aggressive Alliance speaking campaign in 1891.<sup>12</sup>

Drawing inspiration from the Alliance lecture plan, Kansans launched a speaking tour below the Mason-Dixon they dubbed, the “Southern Crusade.” The term suggested a religious journey into a land of non-believers where the converted sought to educate and enlighten a populace. Since Midwesterners wanted to convert Southerners to their righteous cause of a national third party, friendly newspapers used the term “crusade” freely and referred to the most numerous group as the “Kansas missionaries.” Throughout the summer of 1891 Northerners toured the South where they spoke to crowds in support of the Ocala platform and the necessity of a national People’s Party.<sup>13</sup>

Populist supporters could rely on John Willits in their efforts to organize the speaking tour. Since the Southern Alliance agreed to launch a more expansive educational campaign at the Ocala convention, the association enlarged its lecture bureau. The agrarian order chose Willits as head of the Southern Alliance lecture system. Willits also sat on the Populist National Executive Committee and the Kansas Populist State Central Committee. Clearly he possessed a desire to see a national Populist Party flourish and the Kansan used the Alliance lecture system to advance this goal. He particularly targeted July sub-Alliance meetings where delegates to Alliance state conventions were chosen. The state conventions in turn selected delegates for the national meeting of the Southern Alliance. If Midwestern Populists wanted the South to join

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<sup>12</sup> Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 240-43; James M. Beeby, *Revolt of the Tar Heels: The North Carolina Populist Movement, 1890-1901* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 22-23.

<sup>13</sup> *The Advocate*, April 22, May 6, 1891; *Girard Western Herald*, May 30, June 13, 1891; J. C. Ruppenthal Scrapbooks 1: 427 KSHS; Topeka *Daily Capital*, July 18, 1891 in Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 86-87.

them in a national third party, it was essential that Southerners choose delegates who supported a third party.<sup>14</sup>

With these hopes in mind, Willits placed Midwesterners throughout the South during the summer of 1891. Senator Peffer spoke to audiences from West Virginia to Texas. Representative John Otis visited border states. Congressman Jerry Simpson toured Alabama and Georgia with Annie Diggs and Mary Lease. Simpson also spoke to crowds in Arkansas and Texas. Throughout the tour the speakers received cordial greetings from crowds. Georgia Alliance leader Lon Livingston introduced Simpson and third-party advocate James Weaver to audiences throughout the state.<sup>15</sup>

Speakers consistently addressed two main themes during the Southern Crusade. First, Populists addressed the failures of the Democratic Party to effectively embrace Alliance reforms included in the Ocala Platform. Second, Northerners consistently asked Southerners to join in the rejection of sectionalism advocates, like Senator John Ingalls. Since Peffer defeated Ingalls, the new Populist senator was a popular speaker in the South. Reporting back to his *Kansas Farmer*, Peffer noted that from West Virginia to Texas pleasant crowds greeted him. Like Polk, Peffer interpreted his experiences as a regional outsider and Civil War veteran. The Union

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<sup>14</sup> Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 87, 91. White Southerners knew of Willits's preference for independent political action and still named him as head of the lecture bureau. Clearly white Southerners did not intend to destroy a third party at this point in the development of the Alliance movement. Consenting to Willits's leadership conveyed that white Southerners remained uncertain about the future political fate of the farmers' organization. Choosing Willits provided white Southerners with more time to allow the "yard stick" strategy to develop within the Democratic Party, while satisfying third party advocates from the Midwest and Texas.

<sup>15</sup> Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 87; Berton Shaw, *Wool-Hat Boys: Georgia's Populist Party* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 36. Although Southern leaders like Livingston, Macune, and Polk did not support a national third party, they consented to placing Willits in this position. Some believed they did so as part of a compromise to delay the convention to consider a national third party. Since these Southern leaders did not criticize Willits' actions as head of the Alliance lecture bureau, it can be inferred that they did not strongly oppose his efforts to link the agrarian organization with Populism in early 1891. Aware that white Southern opinion did not openly favor abandoning Democracy for Populism, Livingston, Macune, and Polk proceeded cautiously. Lawrence Goodwyn argues that Macune and Polk strongly considered joining the third party in 1891, although they were not ready to publicly announce support. See Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 247. Berton Shaw contends that Livingston flirted with Populism throughout much of 1891. See Shaw, *Wool-Hat Boys*, 36.

veteran noted, “Men who served in the rebel armies are particularly obliging. They say to me— ‘Tell the old ‘Yanks’ when you go home that we are friends now, and if they want any proof of it to come down among us and see for themselves.” Peffer concluded, “It would be impossible for any people to receive a stranger more kindly than we Northern men are received in the South.”<sup>16</sup>

Like Polk the year before, Peffer served as a regional ambassador to demonstrate genuine friendship between Northerners and Southerners. Also similar to Polk, Peffer used his newspaper to publicize personal stories of friendly treatment in a formerly hostile region. The Senator carefully referred to the kindness of Confederate veterans to show his Kansas readers that North and South had reconciled. Since Civil War veterans witnessed the horrors of war firsthand they were assumed to be the bitterest Americans. Because of their combat experiences many Americans expected veterans to determine public opinion concerning the forgiveness, or ridicule, of enemies. From this position of authority former soldiers took the lead in advocating reconciliation within the agrarian movement. Peffer suggested that if a Confederate veteran accepted a Union veteran and vice versa, then sectionalism was a dead issue. If veterans could forgive, then the general public should forgive as well. Any lingering bitterness could be attributed to dishonest politicians and businessmen.

Democratic Attorney General Parker Watkins Hardin of Kentucky fit into this narrative when he told Peffer that he did not appreciate his presence because it represented a second Northern “invasion” of “Republican emissaries” and an effort “to recruit for the Northern armies.” The Kansas Populist dismissed these criticisms and instead noted that Democratic reforms could not solve the economic struggles of American farmers. Democrats proposed tariff reduction and the free coinage of silver, which Peffer said did “not reach the core of the trouble.”

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<sup>16</sup> Argersinger, *Ibid.*, 89, 94; *Kansas Farmer*, July 29, 1891.

He believed that neither policy helped farmers significantly reduce their debts. The Senator asserted that the subtreasury would prove far more effective.<sup>17</sup>

Where one person sees a liberation campaign, another sees a wave of oppression. Kentucky Attorney General Hardin was not alone in condemning the Southern Crusade. Many southern Democratic newspapers also interpreted the arrival of Northerners as an aggressive act of coercion made by unwanted regional outsiders. After Mary Lease criticized Democrats during her Georgia visit, the Sparta *Ishmaelite* called her a “watery-eyed, garrulous, ignorant and communistic old female from Kansas.” Northern newspapers also reported that Southerners threatened Simpson, Peffer, and other Populists with violence during their tour.<sup>18</sup>

Despite ridicule from the Democratic press, southern agrarian newspapers responded positively to the Southern Crusade of Midwestern Populists. The *Southern Alliance Farmer* wrote “Our Western brethren have shown the faith by their works, and Southern Alliancemen should now meet them halfway.” The editor further contemplated, “With what consistency can Alliancemen in the South ask their brethren of the North to throw the mantle of oblivion over the dead past, and still keep aflame the old war feeling themselves?” Kansan J.T. Howe used a similar phrase to encourage Populist support in the South. Howe described the process of Alliance members leaving the Republican Party for the Populist Party in his native state. He told

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<sup>17</sup> *Kansas Farmer*, July 29, 1891. Although Kentucky never seceded from the Union, the state contained a sizeable number of Confederate supporters. A majority of Kentuckians supported the Union, but supported the constitutionality of slavery. William C. Harris contends that most white Kentuckians disapproved emancipation, but disliked the idea of black Union troops even more. Because of the prevalence of these opinions in Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri, President Lincoln did not apply the Emancipation Proclamation to states in the Union. When Attorney General Hardin identified Kentucky with the South, he referred to a largely post-Civil War development. See William C. Harris, *Lincoln and the Border States: Preserving the Union* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011); Anne E. Marshall, *Creating a Confederate Kentucky: The Lost Cause and Civil War Memory in a Border State* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Sparta *Ishmaelite*, June 5, 1891, quoted in Shaw, *Wool-hat Boys*, 36. Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 115.



an Alliance crowd in Bell Spring, Virginia, “They have already made sacrifices by leaving their party and say they are willing to meet you halfway. Are you willing to go the other half?”<sup>19</sup>

The uses of the phrases “meet you halfway” and “meet them halfway” resembled the acts of reconciliation upon which Alliance leaders placed great emphasis. Agrarian newspapers reported accounts of Polk shaking hands with white Union veterans, the Alliance president’s handshake with African American Benjamin Foster, and James “Cyclone” Davis’s handshake with C.A. Power at the Cincinnati conference. Such events demonstrated the commitment of the agrarian movement to the reconciliation and unity of Northerners and Southerners. The *Southern Mercury* displayed its admiration for this image of sectional healing and solidarity when it ran a cartoon that featured a white Union soldier and a white Confederate soldier meeting half way across a divide to shake hands. The troops stood on pieces of rock labeled “A Solid North For Fear Of Rebel Brigadier Rule” and “A Solid South For Fear Of Negro Supremacy” respectively. Beneath the soldiers a dark divide populated with human bones is labeled “The Bloody Chasm.” Behind the soldiers a large rising sun emerged from behind clouds to brightly highlight the start of a new day for the nation. Horace Greeley’s quote, “Let Us Clasp Hands Across This Bloody Chasm” sat beneath the drawing, which was labeled “The Blue And The Gray.” Attached to the Greeley quote, the *Mercury* wrote, “Horace Greeley anticipated the inevitable. The Farmers’ Alliance takes up his burden twenty years after he laid it down.”<sup>20</sup>

Beyond images of reconciliation and unity, some white Southerners in the Alliance took action to match their words. Amidst the Southern Crusade eleven state Alliance conventions in

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<sup>19</sup> Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 91 (first and second quotes); *The National Economist*, July 4, 1891 (third quote), quoted in Argersinger, *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>20</sup> Worth Robert Miller, *Populist Cartoons: An Illustrated History of the Third-Party Movement in the 1890s* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2011), 100. The *Southern Mercury* published “The Blue And The Gray” on September 3, 1891 just as sub- and state Alliances in the South debated the necessity of pursuing reform through a third party.

the South voted heavily in support of the subtreasury system by the end of August 1891.

Alliance newspapers and many state leaders increasingly devoted more time to promoting the subtreasury system. These votes occurred amidst increased Democratic attacks upon the subtreasury plan. Many Democrats who criticized the subtreasury owed their election to Alliance voters.<sup>21</sup>

Democratic newspapers joined elected officials in criticizing the subtreasury and also turned to race-based regional identity to weaken the southern agrarian movement. For example, the *Raleigh News and Observer* denounced a “foreign-born fanatic like Peffer.” Edited by an Alliance opponent, Samuel Ashe, the newspaper continued its assault proclaiming, “The farmers of the South will not follow such men. The chivalry of Anglo-Saxon manhood, reverence for the virtue of Southern women, and respect for ancestral and race pride, all condemn and repudiate such self-confessed demagogues.”<sup>22</sup>

Some Alliance writers asserted their opposition to a third party and similarly relied upon a race-based regional identity as a basis for resistance. *The Farmers' Alliance: What It Aims to Accomplish* noted general white southern disapproval of independent political action. The publication cited a Mississippi Alliance member who expressed support for a third party in the Midwest because it weakened the Republican Party and helped Democrats. In a quote that surely reflected the worst fears of Kansas Populists, the Mississippian concluded that Democratic loyalties remained strong in his home region. He said that a third party movement “will not be supported by the white Alliance men of the South.” Some Alliance outlets in the South

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<sup>21</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 93-94; Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 248-57; Governors in South Carolina (Ben Tillman), Georgia (William Northen), Texas (James Hogg) attacked the subtreasury. In Tennessee Governor John P. Buchanan delayed addressing the subtreasury in an effort to prevent disunity within the state Alliance and his political coalition. Buchanan was also president of the Tennessee Alliance.

<sup>22</sup> *Raleigh News and Observer*, June 27, July 1, 9, 1891, quoted in Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 95. Ashe edited the *News and Observer* until 1893.

announced analogous opinions. In its continued vacillation between the Democratic and Populist parties, *The National Economist* reported its resistance to any third party movement in November 1891. The editor of the *Progressive Farmer* quit over the increased emphasis on the subtreasury and criticism of politicians who resisted the plan. Support for the subtreasury now came to denote third party advocacy.<sup>23</sup>

Politics began to weaken the Southern Alliance from within as well. Beginning in 1891 active member totals began to decline in most southern states. Local and state Alliances began to divide over support for the Democratic or Populist parties. Georgia lost two-thirds of its active Alliance members by the summer of 1891. Another half of active members quit the association before the election of 1892, leaving the state with 16,000 adherents. Totals for North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and Missouri lost some ten to twenty-five percent of its numbers. Whether Democrats or Populists controlled local and state Alliances, the organization continued to decline in 1892 as national elections approached.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the increasingly divisive role of independent political action, Alliance activists published several works to spread their beliefs and maintain unity within the farmers' organization in 1891. Robert McMath argues that such materials, in conjunction with sub-Alliance meetings, traveling lecturers, and newspapers, served as the educational tools of the agrarian movement. In this vein, W. Scott Morgan published the *History of the Wheel and Alliance and the Impending Revolution* to educate readers about the goals of the agrarian cause

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<sup>3</sup> H. R. Chamberlain, *The Farmers' Alliance: What It Aims to Accomplish* (New York: The Minerva Publishing Co.: 1891), 58-59; *The National Economist*, November 21, 1891; Noblin, *Polk*, 231. J. E. Bryan expressed similar opposition to independent political action in Bryan, *The Farmers' Alliance: Its Origin, Progress and Purposes* (Fayetteville, AR: 1891), 113-14.

<sup>24</sup> McMath places greater emphasis on the collapse of economic cooperatives than the advent of independent political actions. He cites the cooperatives as the key source to rapid Alliance growth in the 1880s and states that with their decline, the individual tangible benefits of membership ended. Among southern states, only Alabama and Texas experienced increased Alliance membership in 1891. See Robert McMath, *Populist Vanguard: A History of the Southern Farmers' Alliance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 122, 139.

and their place in American history. Morgan set the tone for the book by dedicating his writing “To the Wives, Mothers and Daughters of the Farmers and Laborers of America, whose heroic devotion and patient fortitude helped to establish American liberty, and who now, as in the past, are nobly aiding in the second struggle for independence, this volume is respectfully dedicated, as a slight token of the author’s appreciation of their unselfish devotion.” The Alliance writer described women as instrumental to a revolution comparable to the American Revolution. Selecting the 1890s rather than the Civil War, Morgan described America in the midst of a second dire conflict to determine the fate of the nation.<sup>25</sup>

Morgan addressed various aspects of the Wheel and Alliance history in the first half of the book and a forecast of the “Impending Revolution” in the second part. Throughout the second half of his work the agrarian leader discussed the Alliance interpretation of American history, which viewed the ascent of business and finance and the decline of producers in the American economy with great concern. According to Morgan and other agrarian leaders, such as Charles Macune, Alliance reforms aimed to check the increasing greed and power of non-producers and restore greater economic stability in the lives of the American producing majority. Interpreting the previous decades of the nineteenth century, Morgan saw a façade of race, slavery, Civil War, and Reconstruction that hid a sinister conspiracy to destroy the freedoms of U.S. citizens.

Morgan supported his concerns by using quotes from American regional and national heroes. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, John C. Calhoun, Daniel

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<sup>25</sup> Robert McMath described sub-Alliance meetings as classrooms, lecturers as teachers, and publications as textbooks of the farmers’ crusade. See McMath, *American Populism*, 148. W. Scott Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Alliance and the Impending Revolution* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968 [reprint]), iii. Morgan led the Agricultural Wheel prior to its absorption into the Alliance in 1888 and he previously supported the Union-Labor Party in his home state of Arkansas. He supported third party action, but like Kansas Populists, he was willing to be patient with white Southerners who opposed a third party. For more on Morgan, see Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 148, 176, 231, 498-500.

Webster, Abraham Lincoln, and Thaddeus Stevens expressed similar anxieties about the role of monopolies and banks in the Republic. Morgan also cited freely from Pennsylvania Radical Republican congressman William D. Kelley who also supported producer rights against those of banks and monopolies. From his perspective in 1876, Kelley interpreted the Civil War as creation of European money interests. Morgan cited Kelley who said, “Sectional strife, hatred and animosity were created, engendered and encouraged. Slavery was made the bone of contention, and Northern and Southern ears were rubbed by the emissaries of the gold king, until both factions were wrought to a pitch of wild frenzy.” Morgan continued this narrative and applied it to the post-war period, stating “when careful, dispassionate and unbiased investigation shall prove that the yoke which the slave king had placed upon four million blacks has been transferred by the money king to the necks of fifty million whites, people will discover that the battles of the rebellion were not fought in the interest of humanity, or to perpetuate the will of the people.”<sup>26</sup>

The Alliance author stated that both major political parties started as honorable vehicles of democracy, but that they became negatively transformed with the Civil War. He praised the Republican Party for it “was born of the spirit of opposition to chattel slavery.” Likewise Democrats began as the party of the American Revolution, fighting “ostentations and concentrated power.” The party failed, however, when it became the “champion” of slavery. Democrats went further from their origins after the Civil War as they mimicked Republicans’ policies that embraced corruption and favored business interests over common citizens.

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<sup>26</sup> Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Alliance*, 533-34. Alliance and Populist newspapers contained many cartoons that communicated messages of international economic conspiracy against the producer class majority. See Miller, *Populist Cartoons*. Other Alliance publications also mentioned Jefferson, Jackson, John C. Calhoun, and Abraham Lincoln on numerous occasions. See Chamberlain, *The Farmers’ Alliance*, 58; J.H. Turner, “The Race Problem,” in *The Farmers’ Alliance History and Agricultural Digest*, ed. N.A. Dunning (Washington, D.C.: Alliance Publishing Company, 1891), 176; *The National Economist*, March 19, April 9, June 4, July 9, November 5, 1892.

Contrasting the partisan gridlock that paralyzed late nineteenth century government, Morgan cited Washington and Lincoln who warned about the dire consequences for the nation when the wealthy worked the emotions of the people and when sectionalism dominated American politics. The agrarian reformer concluded “It becomes, then, the duty of every patriotic citizen and member of labor organizations to discountenance partisan spirit and prejudice.”<sup>27</sup>

Unlike the two major political parties, Morgan argued that Alliance principles “were in line with the teachings of Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln and Stevens. As such they should have been endorsed by the grand old parties, and incorporated into their platforms.” Far from radical, the Alliance promoted reforms that reflected their descent from generations of American political heroes. Democrats and Republicans, meanwhile, invoked memories of the Civil War and Reconstruction to prevent the implementation of Alliance policies. Both parties “Cry negro domination; low tariff; high tariff; radical; reconstruction; Powell Clayton; rebel; liar; thief; scoundrel; anarchist; bloody shirt; war; rebellion; blood and thunder. Anything to get up an excitement, and rouse men’s passions.” Morgan, like other Alliance leaders, viewed these as false issues that distracted the public from their economic exploitation.<sup>28</sup>

Morgan’s economic interpretation of American history created a narrative that was useful to the agrarian reform cause. Alliance members could blame non-producers for creating sectionalism, starting the Civil War, and causing economic ruin for most Americans in the years

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<sup>27</sup> Morgan, *Ibid.*, 715, 717-20.

<sup>28</sup> Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Alliance*, 266, 268. Powell Clayton was the leader of Republicans in Reconstruction Arkansas. As governor Clayton used martial law and biracial militia to destroy the Ku Klux Klan. For his use of military force to achieve order, critics labeled him a tyrant. See Thomas A. DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword: Arkansas, 1861-1874* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2003), 174-200. John Clayton, Powell’s brother, also served as a state leader in the Arkansas Republican Party during Reconstruction. During the 1880s John helped form a coalition between Republicans and the Union Labor Party, which combined African Americans, white farmers, and white labor advocates. Morgan supported the Union Labor Party and would have familiarity with the Claytons. John Clayton was murdered while gathering evidence to prove that electoral fraud produced his loss in an 1888 federal congressional election. For more, see Kenneth C. Barnes, *Who Killed John Clayton?: Political Violence and the Emergence of the New South, 1861-1893* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

since the war. This argument enhanced reconciliation since neither North nor South could truly be blamed for starting the Civil War. Because they did not start the war, the common people of neither region should have felt any lingering hostility. While Morgan admitted that slavery was immoral, he identified non-producers as the ‘true’ culprit of the war. The Alliance author argued that only the government, wielded by the American people, could check the immense power of bankers, monopolies, speculators, and other parasitic non-producers.

Interpreting recent American history through the lens of economics also allowed Morgan to blend regional heroes such as Jefferson, Jackson, Calhoun, Lincoln, and Stevens into a single historical narrative to support Alliance beliefs. Emphasizing the worries of these statesmen concerning the power of banks and businesses allowed Morgan to ignore their differences on issues such as slavery, tariffs, and federal authority over states. Morgan’s interpretation also eliminated race as a legitimate division in American society and instead placed class as the true source of tension. For instance, Morgan cited President Lincoln who warned “I affirm it as my conviction that class laws, placing capital above labor, endangers the Republic more fatally at this hour than chattel slavery in the days of its haughtiest supremacy. The effort to place capital above labor will shake the Republic, and when the attempt grows into law it will be used to fasten still greater burdens upon the people until all liberty is lost.” The economic driven narrative advanced by Morgan downplayed the suffering of African-American slaves and highlighted the potential suffering of the American producer class.<sup>29</sup>

Through their interpretation of American history Alliance leaders like Morgan hoped to demonstrate the artificial nature of sectional and racial divisions and the unity possible through the agrarian organization. Like agrarian spokesmen before him, Morgan wrote to educate the

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<sup>29</sup> Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Alliance*, 730.

public and achieve reform. He predicted, “The North and South will join hands against a common foe. The New England farmer will grasp the hand of his sun-tanned brother of the South and West.” In masculine language that echoed other Alliance writings that described the movement as a military force the agrarian reformer stated, “The independent manhood of the country is rising up in defense of its liberties. An army of oppressed producers are organizing for victory...A million hearts are beating in response to this settlement, and millions of arms are ready to defend it. The march of this mighty army is already felt by the enemy, entrenched behind the fortresses of King Mammon...The Wheel and Alliance stand to-day like a young army flushed with victory, without regret for the past, or fear for the future.”<sup>30</sup>

Other official Alliance publications continued many themes included in Morgan’s work. The works especially emphasized unity within the farmers’ movement. Nelson A. Dunning edited an 1891 history of the agrarian association that also included a collection of essays written by Alliance activists. The articles in *The Farmers’ Alliance History and Agricultural Digest* addressed a variety of topics including race relations, women’s rights, sectionalism, partisanship, and monetary policy. Throughout the work, essays emphasized the common financial struggles of ordinary Americans and the unjust actions of monopolies throughout various levels of the economy. Dunning’s edited work advanced the Alliance argument that the struggles of the producing class should unify a majority of Americans and create political and economic reforms. Identities tied to which side one favored during the Civil War, race, region, and political party mattered greatly in the past. The Alliance argued that times had changed and that Americans needed to recognize the realities of the nation in 1891. Agrarians stated that the consolidation of economic and political power into the hands of an exclusive minority threatened the liberty,

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<sup>30</sup> Morgan, *Ibid.*, 17-18. “Entrenched” and other grammar errors in the original.



freedom, and equality of the majority. Failure to recognize the great forces at work would mean the further decline and ultimate doom of American citizens. In short, the Alliance asked Americans to remember the past, but to focus on the present and future of the country. According to agrarian leaders, economic considerations and a producer class identity more accurately reflected the true status of the American majority than allegiances to race, region, and political party.

Throughout 1891 it became increasingly apparent that Alliance goals could only be achieved by working through the political process. Although agrarian leaders did not uniformly endorse pursuing Alliance objectives through an independent party, the possibility of a national third party movement influenced organizational activities in 1891. The Dunning collection was not immune from these political considerations. Articles in the volume addressed potential constituencies needed for a successful national third party challenge in 1892. Women, African Americans, white Southerners, Northerners, farmers, and laborers all received individual attention in the Dunning tome. Each article demonstrated that the social groups could find a common voice in the farmers' movement, which sought unity among the American producer class.

Because women actively participated in the Alliance from the beginning and due to their possible enfranchisement, the Dunning collection included an essay devoted to women. As the woman's suffrage movement gathered momentum throughout the West and Midwest in the 1890s, some agrarians looked to women as a potential source of votes in efforts to turn Alliance reforms into laws. Like Morgan, Bettie Gay of Columbus, Texas testified to the centrality of women to the Alliance. Gay stated that the agrarian order gave women fair treatment and an equal voice at meetings. The Texan argued that society no longer viewed women as

intellectually inferior to men. Like the general Alliance historical narrative, Gay said that women entered a new era where their talents and interests received recognition. She contended that the Alliance recognized women as equal contributors in the struggle to bring justice to the American producer class. Like other essays in *Farmers' Alliance History*, Gay suggested that a female identity did not exclude women from participation in the movement on behalf of American producers. While women had been excluded from many social movements in the past, the Alliance welcomed them into a crusade that confronted contemporary economic problems. In short, women were not excluded from the producer class because of their gender identity. The Alliance recognized that the political and economic problems of the late nineteenth century affected all members of the producer class, including women.<sup>31</sup>

Other essays focused on two formidable obstacles to a strong national agrarian reform movement, sectionalism and partisan feeling, and their solution, reconciliation. In his essay, "Sectionalism," Ben Clover portrayed animosity between the North and South as a means to exploit the producer class. Clover stated, "sectional hate and its other self, party prejudice, have been the means by which monopoly has been enabled to bind the people." Clover asked the South to forget the past and join the West to accomplish shared reform goals. The Southern Alliance vice president suggested leaving the divisions of the war behind, while honoring the troops when he wrote "why should not we, in our memories, let them lie side by side, and over their graves clasp hands." Clover asked, "Will not the proudest monument we can build to their memory be a just and righteous government, that will protect the weak, do justice to all, and be of, for, and by the people?"<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Bettie Gay, "The Influence of Women in the Alliance," in *The Farmers' Alliance History*, 308-12.

<sup>32</sup> B.H. Clover, "Sectionalism," in *The Farmers' Alliance History*, 256.

Like Clover, Jerry Simpson attacked sectionalism. He portrayed Kansans as a model for reconciliation since they “cast aside the chief apostle of this doctrine of hate, John J. Ingalls, and thereby set an example to the rest of the country, particularly to the South.” Simpson said that voters in his home state realized “that for long years they had been blinded to their own interests by designing politicians, who kept alive the old war issues and prejudices.” The Kansas Congressman claimed that the citizens of his state looked past sectionalism to identify “new issues” that needed to be addressed. He triumphantly concluded that Alliance reforms started “a political revolution that bids fair to sweep from one end of the country to the other, and drive from place and power the men who fattened upon the labor of the people.” Like other Alliance writers, Simpson and Clover described sectionalism and partisanship as false social divisions. The shared class identity of producers against monopolies stood as the true demarcation of America. Since both men favored a national third party, the Kansans also appealed to Southerners who considered joining the Populist Party.<sup>33</sup>

Although he did not yet advocate joining the Populist Party, Leonidas Polk, like other white Southerners, joined Simpson and Clover in calling for the forgiveness of past grudges and the embrace of new allegiances. In his essay, “Sectionalism and the Alliance,” Polk stated that the agrarian “order recognizes the fact that the war ended in 1865, that chattel slavery is gone, and that the prejudices and divisions, born of its existence, should go with it.” The North Carolinian described the Alliance as an organization that joined “the ex-slave holder of the South” with those “born and reared an abolitionist” into “a common cause – the cause of a

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<sup>33</sup> Jerry Simpson, “The Political Rebellion in Kansas,” in Dunning ed. *The Farmers Alliance History*, 283.

common country.”<sup>34</sup> Like Simpson and Clover, Polk wanted to address more current matters. In strongly religious language he urged his audience to

‘Let the dead past bury its dead,’ and let us, with new hope, new aspirations, new zeal, new energy, and new life, turn our faces toward the rising sun of an auspicious and inviting future, and reconsecrate ourselves to the holy purpose of transmitting to our posterity a government ‘of the people, by the people, and for the people,’ and which shall be unto all generations the citadel of refuge for civil and religious liberty.<sup>35</sup>

Unlike their Kansas allies, Polk and other white Southerners devoted part of their articles to addressing the failures of the recent American past. In so doing, white Southern Alliance leaders sought to establish a consensus interpretation of the Reconstruction era, while also calling for a rejection of past loyalties. Following increasingly prevalent trends in late-nineteenth-century America, the farmers’ movement allowed a white southern narrative of Reconstruction to predominate. Polk used the biblical story of King Jeroboam in a slightly veiled attack on the Reconstruction-era goal of African-American equality. Like sectional agitators, Polk said that King Jeroboam of Israel attempted to unify his people through division. Jeroboam segregated his people into two groups and “made high priests of the lowest people,” but “the avenging hand of outraged of justice” destroyed him. The Alliance president asked if “high priests” had not also been made of America’s “lowest people” and wondered if history would repeat itself. He urged Americans not to divide as Jeroboam’s people had.<sup>36</sup>

Instead of seeing the period as a positive time of democratic expansion, Polk conveyed the opinion that Reconstruction upset the social order and created sectionalism. Northerners created animosity with white Southerners when they attempted to institute full rights and social equality for black Americans. African Americans also acquired an artificial hostility for white

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<sup>34</sup> Leonidas L. Polk, “Sectionalism and the Alliance,” in *The Farmers’ Alliance History*, 251.

<sup>35</sup> Polk, *Ibid.*, 252-53.

<sup>36</sup> Polk, “Sectionalism and the Alliance,” 252.

Southerners, thanks to the machinations of unscrupulous Northerners. Polk's interpretation identified sectionalism with Reconstruction, not with the Civil War. While Polk noted the end of slavery and paid homage to the Civil War dead, he assertively dismissed Reconstruction as an unjust period that created artificial racial and sectional divisions in American society.

Other white southern leaders in the Alliance expressed similar attitudes demonstrating that when white Southerners discussed sectionalism they could not avoid addressing race and Reconstruction. Georgia Alliance President Leonidas "Lon" Livingston hinted at race and Reconstruction in his essay, "The Needs of the South." Livingston, who flirted with endorsing the Populist Party during 1891, started his essay by addressing what the South did not need. Foremost, he stated that the region did not require "*advice*" from "people either ignorant of our needs or wilfully opposed to the betterment of our condition." The Georgia agrarian thought that partisan outsiders with sectionalism in their hearts sought the ruin of the South and wanted to prevent the region from returning to its former glory. Livingston claimed that the Alliance recognized the true needs of the region, which included education, greater exchange of goods with those from other sections of the country, less of the national tax burden and, a flexible monetary system controlled by the federal government. He concluded by calling for good relations between the regions and the elimination of laws that favored one section over another as prerequisites for national peace and prosperity.<sup>37</sup>

Like Polk and Livingston, J.H. Turner also criticized Reconstruction and accusations of constant southern racial strife from a southern white perspective. Born and raised in Georgia just before the Civil War, Turner discussed southern race relations to "bring about a better understanding all over this country, that will bring peace and prosperity to the great common

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<sup>37</sup> L.L. Livingston, "The Needs of the South" in *The Farmers' Alliance History*, 284-87, 284 (quote).

people, both white and black.”<sup>38</sup> In his article, “The Race Problem,” the Alliance Secretary-Treasurer addressed past race relations in the South and presented a case for greater interracial cooperation through the farmers’ movement.

Turner began his essay by describing how Northerners misled African Americans during Reconstruction. He stated that the Northern “carpet-bagger” falsely promised ex-slaves social equality and economic assistance. Misled and given false hope, African Americans failed to recognize that ex-masters were their true friends. Once the promises of the “pretended friends” went unfulfilled, black Americans turned to self-help, pursuing happiness through education and property. In the years since Reconstruction, the Alliance officer claimed that race relations improved despite the false claims made by journalists who wished to maintain sectional hostilities and party affiliations. Like Livingston, Turner argued that the South should be left alone to resolve its racial problems.<sup>39</sup>

Turner also blamed both major parties for using race as a sham issue to perpetuate party loyalties and avoid making agricultural reforms. He indicted Democrats who continually warned of “negro supremacy,” while Republicans repeatedly charged that white Southerners were un-Reconstructed. In contrast, Turner described the Southern Alliance and Colored Alliance as vehicles for true political progress. He contended that after being used during Reconstruction, African Americans were “willing and anxious to sever all past party affiliations” to join with western and southern white farmers to improve their circumstances. While Turner admitted that white Southerners showed less desire to abandon Democrats, he claimed that whites were “perfectly willing and ready to take the negro by the hand and say to him: We are citizens of the same great country; we have the same foes to face, the same ills to bear; therefore our interests as

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<sup>38</sup> J. H. Turner, “The Race Problem,” in *The Farmers’ Alliance History*, 272.

<sup>39</sup> Turner, *Ibid.*, 272.

agriculturalists are one, and we will co-operate with you, and defend and protect you in all your rights.”<sup>40</sup>

From this base of common interest, Turner encouraged more positive interactions between blacks and whites in the South. The Georgian relied heavily on Henry Grady’s famous 1886 New York speech to explain past, current, and future race relations. In his speech Grady admitted to northern righteousness in the fight to end slavery, but he also stated that southern whites understood blacks better, and they should therefore lead African Americans to education, enlightenment, and citizenship. Grady argued that the Civil War demonstrated the strong ties between the races in the South. The Atlanta editor claimed that black slaves protected white women, while slave masters fought against emancipation. The loyalty and devotion that slaves showed their masters justified equal legal rights for ex-slaves after emancipation.

Grady also provided Turner and the Southern Alliance with a formula for keeping race relations constructive. *The Constitution* editor said that “social equality” would not be achieved through law, but should be left to the “conscience and common sense” of individuals. “Social equality” referred to removing all social barriers from white-black interactions, including restrictions against interracial marriage. Southern whites viewed “social equality” as a threatening concept that suggested “negro domination” and the corruption of white female sexuality purity. Many late-nineteenth-century African Americans expressed mixed feelings toward the desirability of social equality. Some blacks wished to remove all social and legal barriers based on race, while others rejected assertions that African Americans wanted to force interactions with whites.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Turner, “The Race Problem,” 276 (first quote), 277 (second quote), 278 (third quote).

<sup>41</sup> Turner, “The Race Problem,” 276. For more on the variety of opinions expressed by African Americans on the topic of social equality, see Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Movement*, 50-51, 93-94. For similar debates over

Turner provided evidence to suggest that many African Americans fell into the latter group who rejected the enforcement of “social equality.” Supporting his assertion he quoted another Southerner, a black Methodist minister and member of the Colored Farmers’ Alliance from Florida. Reverend John L. Moore claimed that African Americans did not want “social relations with the whites either. We do not want to eat at their tables, sleep in their beds, neither ride in the cars with them; but we do want as good fare as the whites receive for the same consideration.” Indicating that a rejection of social equality did not prohibit political and economic cooperation, Moore said that his Putnam County Colored Alliance was “willing and ready to lay down the past” and support a political movement that favored laboring men, “irrespective of party, race, or creed,” to promote the “motto ‘Equal rights to all, and special privileges to none.’”<sup>42</sup>

Turner’s article summarized the racial attitudes of the Southern Alliance and, later, Populism. The Georgian claimed that black and white Alliance members agreed that racial separation could provide progress in race relations. This position suggested that whites and blacks should separate until education reduced the likelihood of racial violence and animosity. Turner and other Alliance leaders asserted that a rejection of “social equality” did not prevent the equal application of civil laws or the political partnership of economically distressed farmers. Unlike the more hostile and aggressive views of Ben Tillman or the more liberal views of George Washington Cable and Frederick Douglass, the farmers’ movement promoted what was considered a progressive position of late-nineteenth-century race relations. Although New South proponent Grady provided the framework for Alliance views of race relations, agrarians went

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social equality in the Knights of Labor, see Melton Alonza McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 143-44.

<sup>42</sup> Turner, “The Race Problem,” 274-75 (first quote), 275 (second quote).



further by repeatedly supporting equal civil, political, and economic rights for African Americans.<sup>43</sup>

Convinced that white and black Southerners in the Alliance could produce racial harmony in the region, Kansas Populists expressed confidence in the internal unity of the farmers' movement. Unlike white Southerners, northern agrarians avoided discussing Reconstruction and instead focused on contemporary race relations. Kansans like Senator William Peffer did not contest white southern interpretations of Reconstruction and only indirectly referenced legacies of the era. Indicating that he viewed racial and sectional prejudices as interrelated, Peffer pledged that Kansas Populists would never support laws motivated by sectional hatred and they would avoid "Northern lecturing," which he considered ineffective. As a former anti-slavery advocate and a resident of Reconstruction-era Tennessee, Peffer understood the sensitivity required when discussing southern race relations with residents of the region. When Northerners told white Southerners how to treat black Southerners they aroused sectional hostilities that harkened back decades to debates concerning slavery.<sup>44</sup>

Since Northerners believed that white and black Southerners resolved past differences under the banner of the Alliance, they attacked racial and sectional identities as artificial barriers

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<sup>43</sup> For differences between the racial attitudes of Tillman and Cable see Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984) 93-107, 116-17. On racial segregation as a southern Progressive era reform see Dewey Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983). Scholars such as Charles Postel and Omar Ali contend that Moore and other African-American leaders of the agrarian cause did not truly believe in racial separation. Postel and Ali convincingly assert that black agrarians viewed segregation and white paternalism within the farmers' crusade as a temporary compromise that would allow African Americans to pursue educational and economic advancements necessary for the cause of black progress. See Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 202-03; Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth: Black Populism in the New South, 1886-1900* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 5-10. William H. Chafe finds a similar pattern in Kansas where many African Americans supported Populism for greater access to patronage and protection, and out of frustration with Republicans. See Chafe, "The Negro and Populism: A Kansas Case Study," *Journal of Southern History* Volume 34, No. 3 (August 1968): 404. Thomas Cox also cites Populist opposition to lynching and the convict leasing system a key to black support in Kansas, rather than labor ideology. See Cox, *Blacks in Topeka, Kansas, 1865-1915: A Social History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 127-30.

<sup>44</sup> Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 90.

to producer class unity. Like Turner and Moore, Peffer promoted equal treatment for whites and blacks under the law. The Kansas senator also went further than white and black Southerners to denounce racial segregation since he believed that race no longer mattered in the South. Peffer denounced barriers to black membership in the Kansas Alliance and Populist Party and he urged the South to follow this example.<sup>45</sup>

Other Northerners praised the arrival of a new era where southern whites and blacks lived in peace. Emboldened by southern pledges and by their experiences during the “Southern Crusade,” Northern agrarians expressed confidence in the national farmers’ movement during the summer and fall of 1891. With race no longer a barrier, northern agrarians hailed the end of sectionalism and partisanship. The Populist majority Kansas state legislature voted to condemn the Lodge Bill as partisan ploy to rekindle sectional prejudice. Populist Congressman Jerry Simpson confidently stated “the Southern bloody shirt, fear of Negro domination, can no longer be waved successfully to hold the white people of the South solidly in the Democratic party.” Kansan Frank McGrath predicted that Populists would receive full southern black support in the 1892 election. Senator Peffer wrote, “It is wonderful how men are breaking away from the restraints which have held them.” Minnesota agrarian leader Ignatius Donnelly claimed that the Populists hoped “to wipe the color line out of politics.” These utterances represented genuine faith in the South as a political partner in the Populist Party. Northerners made the comments to encourage Southerners to join a third party movement based on Alliance reforms. Midwesterners also wanted to ease worries in their home states where opponents described the Southern Alliance as nothing more than a Democratic tool to divide the Republican North. In

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<sup>45</sup> *Kansas Farmer* November 26, 1890; Peffer “The Farmers’ Alliance,” *Cosmopolitan* 10 (April 1891): 699; *Atchison Daily Champion*, January 29, 1891, in Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 90.

the year before a national election, Northerners found it critical to reduce doubts and build a trans-regional base of support.<sup>46</sup>

When Northerners conveyed their understanding of Southern Alliance assurances of racial harmony below the Mason-Dixon, they drew the ire of some white Southerners. Particularly vexing to these southern whites were Northern statements concerning segregation and biracial politics. Responding to Donnelly's comments that "the New Order of things would wipe out the color line in the South," a white southern member of the Alliance asked a Georgia audience if they wanted to eat and sleep with African Americans. During a June 1891 interview with Josephus Daniels, Peffer repeated his opposition to racial exclusion. When Daniels asked if a biracial Populist Party would split the white southern Democratic vote and produce black domination, the Kansas senator responded that he cared little. Peffer told Daniels that he cherished Populist principles above the Democratic Party. The Kansan said that Populists opposed efforts by politicians to invoke racial and sectional biases because they prevented the enactment of reform. Daniels contended that Democrats did not create the problems that plagued the nation, but he promised that the party would solve them once it gained control of the federal government. As a supporter of the Alliance and friend to Leonidas Polk in their home state of North Carolina, Daniels held opinions shared by other white Southerners. Given a choice between Alliance values found in a biracial People's Party and the Democratic Party, many white Southerners chose the later.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Postel, *The Populist Vision*, 325 n.30; Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 98, 101; *Kansas Farmer*, July 29, 1891; *Nashville Banner*, Oct 4, 1891, *Philadelphia Press*, Oct 24 1891 quoted in *Public Opinion* 12 (1891-1892): 99, in Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Movement*, 70. Donnelly published several novels that supported the common ties between whites and blacks and criticized southern race relations. See Martin Ridge, *Ignatius Donnelly: The Portrait of a Politician* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962), 289-90, 304-05.

<sup>47</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, February 26, 1892; *People's Party Paper*, March 10, 1892; *National Economist* March 5, 1892; Northern Scrapbooks, Vol II, p. 38-39 in C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson Agrarian Rebel*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Savannah, GA: Beehive Press, 1973), 174; Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 90. Lon Livingston was the white Southern Alliance member who criticized Donnelly's remarks. By the time of his comments Livingston had

Sympathetic to the economic and political remedies of the agrarian movement, many white Southerners could not support a party that threatened Democratic domination in the region because it might result in the return of the Reconstruction era “negro domination.” Besides increasing momentum for the establishment of the Populist Party in the South in 1891, some white Southerners became increasingly concerned with African-American activism. One Alabama newspaper expressed reservations with the black wing of the Alliance. The Anniston *Weekly Times* warned white Southerners of a looming threat that harkened back to Reconstruction. The newspaper stated,

Here is the old Loyal League back upon us again, with its yearning for the lands of the white man, with its ambition that the Federal flag shall float over every school house and over every ballot box. Here is the force bill again with congressional troops and bayonets to decide elections for a free people. Here is the old secret society going in and out with pass word. This new Loyal League comes to us this time under the wing of the Farmers’ Alliance.<sup>48</sup>

Further evidence emerged to shake confidence in the harmony between Colored and Southern alliances. Encouraged by some Colored Alliance members Superintendent Richard Humphrey announced a region-wide cotton pickers’ strike for September 20. The strike revealed economic differences between landholders and farm workers in the Colored and Southern alliances. Many Colored Alliance members announced they would not support work protest. The opposition, which included Georgia Superintendent E. A. Richardson, said that the strike would hurt the biracial farm movement. Richardson stated, “we were banded together for the purpose of educating ourselves and co-operating with the white people for the betterment of the

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rejected Populism and pledged his loyalty to the Democratic Party. Daniels became a major voice within the North Carolina Democratic Party and opponent to Populism. During the 1898 election he played an instrumental role in defeating the biracial Populist-Republican coalition that controlled many state and local offices in the Tar Heel state from 1894-98 by spreading propaganda concerning the frequency of black rape of white women. See Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 83-84.

<sup>48</sup> Mobile *Register* quoted in the Anniston *Weekly Times*, July 2, 1891, in William Rogers, “The Negro Alliance in Alabama,” *The Journal of Negro History* Vol. 45 No. 1 (1960): 43.

colored people...such a step as this would be fatal.” Southern Alliance leaders denounced the strike since many property-holders could not afford to pay pickers the demanded one-dollar per hundred pounds plus boarding. When the day of the proposed work stoppage arrived, Colored Alliance members mostly failed to participate. African-American cotton pickers went on strike in South Carolina, eastern Texas and eastern Arkansas. All ended with the firing of agricultural workers and their eviction from farms. The Arkansas protest turned violent and resulted in fifteen deaths, including the lynching of black strikers. In the aftermath, the Colored Alliance quickly dissolved as its members lost faith in the organization and because of hostility from whites.<sup>49</sup>

The strike failed to gain a widespread biracial following largely because of class differences. Roughly sixty-four percent of Colored Alliance members and two percent of Southern Alliance members were farm workers. Most black opposition came from landowners, while Southern Alliance antagonism can be attributed partially to the two-thirds of members who owned their farms. Polk announced his opposition to the strike because he claimed that property-owners could not afford to pay farm workers more. Many African Americans supported the strike because it addressed their immediate economic needs. Alliance remedies such as the subtreasury and cooperatives usually favored landowners and did little for farm workers. Although the strike destroyed the Colored Alliance, biracial cooperation continued though largely through political organizing. Walter Patillo of North Carolina and John T. Moore of Florida became two of several former Colored Alliance leaders who advocated for the

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<sup>49</sup> Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth*, 71-74 (quote 71); William F. Holmes, “The Demise of the Colored Farmers’ Alliance,” *Journal of Southern History* 41 (May 1975): 187-200. For Southern Alliance opposition to the strike see *Progressive Farmer* Sept 15, 1891; *The National Economist* September 26, October 10, 1891. Because of opposition to the strike within the Colored Alliance, Humphrey formed the Cotton Pickers’ League to lead the protests. Despite the move, public opinion continued to associate the strike with the Colored Alliance.

Populist Party. Others such as Richardson allied with Democratic politicians like Georgia Governor William Northen.<sup>50</sup>

Besides southern troubles, Midwesterners encountered setbacks in their efforts to effect Populist victories in Iowa and Kentucky during the fall of 1891. Midwestern agrarians constantly visited Kentucky and Iowa where off-year elections offered an early opportunity to expand Populist victories outside of the Sunflower State. When election day ended, Populist candidates polled three percent of the vote in Iowa and six percent in Kentucky. Republicans and Democrats in both states realized the popularity of the Alliance and adapted some of its anti-monopoly reforms. Unlike Kansas, each state also had a competitive two-party system. Despite the sizeable defeats, Populist national chairman Herman Taubeneck declared, “the ‘solid south’ is broken.” Kansas Republicans seized on the losses to remind voters that the Alliance only represented a Democratic conspiracy. They warned that Kentuckians failed to join the Populists and other Southerners would remain Democrats.<sup>51</sup>

Events in Georgia further added to Midwestern difficulties in establishing a national third party. Many Midwesterners viewed Georgia as fertile ground for the Populist Party since the state had a strong Alliance that produced national leaders for the agrarian movement, including Lon Livingston and J.H. Turner. Populist leaders thought that Georgia could serve as a foothold for additional party growth in the South. When the state Alliance met in August 1891 third party advocates hoped to win control of the body. Lon Livingston won reelection as president and foiled Populist aspirations. After flirting with Populists throughout much of the year, Livingston

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<sup>50</sup> Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth*, 71-74, 76-77; Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Movement*, 27-30. Robert McMath found the following percentages for Southern Alliance members: farmer 35%, small farmer 8%, & planter 23%. See McMath, *Populist Vanguard*, 163.

<sup>51</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 154-56.

clarified his position prior to the convention. He announced his staunch loyalty to the Democratic Party and thereafter became a vocal critic of Populism.<sup>52</sup>

Populist aspirations in Georgia did not die with the reelection of Livingston. Despite the setbacks at the state convention, third party supporters founded a newspaper to represent their views. In October, Tom Watson began publishing *The People's Party Paper*. A month later third party allies from the state won several victories at the annual meeting of the Southern Farmers' Alliance in Indianapolis. Foremost, Georgian Mell Branch sponsored a resolution that would forbid any U.S. congressmen who received Alliance support from caucusing with a party that did not support the Ocala platform. The plan effectively forced Alliance-backed congressmen to abandon Democratic and Republican caucuses where the Speaker was chosen and the House of Representatives organized. Notwithstanding vocal opposition from Livingston, the resolution passed. Livingston also removed his name from consideration when it became apparent that he would lose his bid to oust Polk as National Alliance president. Polk favored the Branch resolution and a national third party. The election of many Populist allies to Alliance offices and the passage of the Branch proposition effectively made the Alliance a subsidiary of the Populist Party.<sup>53</sup>

Tensions between agrarian supporters became increasingly hostile as 1892 began. Since politics became the primary source of divisiveness, it was only appropriate that events in Washington D.C. set the tone for a tumultuous year. Despite his opposition to a third party, Charles Macune hosted a meeting of southern congressmen. While some forty southern Democrats received Alliance support in the 1890 election, only seventeen attended the meeting. In a further blow to the Branch resolution, sixteen of the congressmen pledged to reject the

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<sup>52</sup> Shaw, *Wool-Hat Boys*, 38-44.

<sup>53</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 158-59.

Indianapolis instructions and join the Democratic caucus. Democrats planned to elect Charles F. Crisp, a Georgian who opposed the subtreasury plan, as the Speaker of the House. Tom Watson stood as the lone dissident from the Southerners present. Watson exchanged bitter words with Livingston who had to be restrained before attacking his fellow Georgian. When emotions settled somewhat the sixteen southern Democrats left Watson with eight Western and Midwestern Populists. In Senator Peffer's office the eight representatives held the first caucus of congressional Populists and elected Watson as its Speaker of the House. Livingston and the other fifteen southern Democrats supported Crisp, who easily won election as Speaker. In a final measurement all but one Southerner failed the application of the Alliance "yardstick."<sup>54</sup>

Further signs emerged to demonstrate the destructive role of politics within the national agrarian movement. *The National Economist*, the official newspaper of National Alliance, praised the actions of the southern Democratic congressmen who elected Crisp. The newspaper also praised the congressmen for opposing the Branch Resolution made at the national Southern Alliance meeting. When Kansan Stephen McLallin arrived in Washington D.C. for a National Citizens' Alliance meeting he criticized Livingston and other Alliancemen from the South. Livingston responded by stating that Kansans were foolish to believe southern Alliancemen would ever leave the Democratic Party. Other Southerners elected by Alliance members supported Livingston, including Ben Tillman's lieutenant, South Carolina Senator John Irby. When Peffer approached his senate colleague and expressed his hope that they could cooperate on legislation, the South Carolinian replied, "Well, sir, we Alliancemen in the South are all Democrats." Georgia Senator John B. Gordon also refused to work with Peffer.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *The National Economist*, November 21, 1891; McMath, *American Populism*, 159-60; Shaw, *Wool-Hat Boys*, 41-42.

<sup>55</sup> Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 108-09 (quote, 108).



Such actions drew further criticism from politically vulnerable Kansas Populists. Representative John Otis noted that the congressmen had “cut loose from their Kansas brethren on everything. With the exception of Watson, the Southern alliacemen have agreed to act with the Democrats in everything; in fact they declare they never had any other intention.” Otis expressed the frustrations of agrarians in his state when he said “The Kansas men feel bad about it, and some who thought the Southern alliacemen would be with them in everything are really mad about it. They declare openly that the Southerners have gone back on them.” Based on his tours through the South during the previous summer Representative Jerry Simpson stated his surprise at southern inaction in Congress. Simpson claimed that the Southerners forgot “the pledges they made the people and have forgotten the people too.”<sup>56</sup>

Despite these frustrations Alliance members from the Midwest and South continued to cooperate in the promotion of a national Populist Party. When various reform organizations met at St. Louis in February 1892 the Southern Alliance sent the most members of any association. Most Southerners present supported a third party. Polk won election as chairman while Frances Willard won the vice chair position. The assembly approved the Alliance Indianapolis platform and added several others to their calls for reform. Delegates supported public ownership of railroads, referred female suffrage to state legislatures, while bypassing the extremely controversial issue of prohibition that created divisions among Westerners. The convention also called for a national nominating convention for the Populist Party. On July 4, 1892, 1,776 delegates would assemble in Omaha, Nebraska.<sup>57</sup>

Southern Democrats reacted assertively to the threat of a third party. At St. Louis whole southern delegations refused to support the platform and the People’s Party. Livingston again

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<sup>56</sup> *Topeka Daily Capital*, December 26, 1891, January 20, 1892 in Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 109.

<sup>57</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 160-63.

damaged the hopes of Midwestern Populists when he told the Republican *Topeka Daily Capital* that “We don’t care what they do in Kansas and other western states.” The congressman stated that it would be better for Kansans to have a third party since it would “overthrow the Republican party, and in that good work we wish them success; but in the South we want no third party.” A Tennessee delegate made a similar comment, saying that he supported the endorsement of a third party at St. Louis because the South would remain Democratic and “the Republican party is the sufferer.” These statements repeated Republican charges made since the founding of the Kansas People’s Party. Third party opponents portrayed the South as a firmly Democratic region committed to the destruction of the Republican Party through the Alliance and Midwestern Populism. As a major southern leader in the Alliance who toured Georgia with Midwestern Populists the summer before and as an astute politician who chose Democratic allegiance over the third party, Livingston surely realized the impact of his comments. Now firmly supporting Democratic efforts to weaken Populism in the South and nationally, the Georgian knew where to hit the agrarian movement hardest. The rhetoric of sectional reconciliation and Alliance brotherhood rang hollow as intense struggles ruptured the agrarian crusade in 1892.<sup>58</sup>

Following these disagreements among national Alliance leaders in St. Louis and Washington D.C., conflict erupted throughout the ranks of the southern farmers’ revolt. Starting in 1892, these struggles continued throughout the 1890s. The Democratic state conventions of Texas and Tennessee required attendees to swear an oath not to support the Alliance or its principles. South Carolina Democrats under Ben Tillman’s direction approved the Alliance platform but pledged support for the Democratic presidential nominee whether he endorsed

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<sup>58</sup> Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 109-110; Shaw, *Wool-Hat Boys*, 42-44.

agrarian reforms or not. Outside of the convention halls communities, churches, and families split over support for Democracy or Populism. North Carolina congregations removed ministers who supported the opposite political party, including Thomas Dixon, Sr. Alabama Populist congressman Milford W. Howard later remembered “My own father would not hear me speak and said he would rather make my coffin with his own hands and bury me than to have me desert the Democratic Party.”<sup>59</sup>

Populist appeals to racial reconciliation also came under attack. The third party endorsed Alliance statements supporting African American political, economic, and legal rights, while rejecting “social equality.” Democrats including Livingston and Georgia Governor William Northen accused Populists of betraying white supremacy in their conduct of race relations. The *Atlanta Constitution* wrote that “The old issue of sectionalism is confronting the South and White Supremacy is more important than all the financial reform in the world.” Since Populists threatened to split the white southern vote, Democrats forecast a return of Reconstruction-era “Negro domination,” Republican rule, and the Lodge “Force” Bill. Democrats made clear that Populism represented a betrayal of regional culture and identity.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 110; Joe Creech, *Righteous Indignation: Religion and the Populist Revolution* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 143-44; McMath, *American Populism*, 165 (quote).

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 111-112 (quote 112); McMath, *American Populism*, 165. While he never advocated for black rights, three years earlier Livingston expressed more paternalistic and less hostile attitudes towards African Americans. Speaking to an all white assembly of the national convention of the Knights of Labor in Atlanta, he denied that black Americans caused southern economic problems. Livingston said that as long as African Americans had some money “they are as satisfied as a mortal can be.” The Georgia Alliance president continued, “Some of you are from Ohio, and your state is covered with mortgages. Surely, the negro is not the cause of your troubles... We are all in the same boat, and must endeavor to save it as best we can.” Knights of Labor, *Record of the Proceedings of the General Assembly*, 1889, cited in Joseph Gerteis, *Class and the Color Line: Interracial Class Coalition in the Knights of Labor and the Populist Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 161. Northen won reelection in 1892 with the support of African-American leaders and Republicans. He gained black support largely by supporting an anti-lynching bill and funding for African-American education. After blaming blacks for his 1894 defeat, he later demonstrated more sympathetic attitudes toward black Georgians when he participated in a 1906-07 anti-lynching campaign. See Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Movement*, 144-45; David F. Godshalk, “William J. Northen’s Public and Personal Struggles Against Lynching” in *Jumpin’ Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights*. Eds. Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, Bryant Simon.

Despite these Democratic criticisms, Populists held out hope that they could win the South. These hopes rested largely on fielding a presidential ticket that featured agrarian leaders from the South, Midwest, or West. Front-runners included Leonidas Polk and Kansans William Peffer, John Willits, and John Davis. After keeping his Populist sympathies unofficial for months, Polk endorsed the party in late May 1892. He became the favorite for the Populist nomination based on his years of campaigning across the country in favor of sectional reconciliation and agrarian principles.<sup>61</sup>

Populists from the West, Midwest, and Northeast wrote encouraging letters to Polk throughout the spring and summer. Former Grand Army of the Republic Grand Commander Paul Van Dervoort of Nebraska and Colorado Governor Davis Waite also endorsed Polk because he was popular in the South and gave the party hope for “breaking the ‘Solid South.’” The Union veteran, Van Dervoort wrote that “We have the opportunity of our lives to bind the North and South together and we both represent a clan that did the fighting and held malice the shortest time.” Massachusetts reformer and journalist H.H. Boyce told Polk that a ticket of former veterans would be unstoppable. Polk’s nomination seemed assured as the July 4 convention approached.<sup>62</sup>

Surprising many, Polk did not receive the nomination. A month before the convention he died of complications from bladder cancer on June 11, 1892. The North Carolinian suffered frequent bouts of sickness as he followed a rigorous travel schedule during the three preceding

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(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 140-61. Clearly political considerations largely dictated the public racial attitudes of Livingston and Northen.

<sup>61</sup> Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 111; Creech, *Righteous Indignation*, 131-32.

<sup>62</sup> H.H. Boyce to L.L. Polk, April 4, 13, 1892, L.L. Polk Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Box 7, Folder 102; Paul Van Dervoort to Polk, April 12, 1892, L.L. Polk Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Box 7, Folder 102. Boyce suggested that Van Dervoort would make an excellent Vice Presidential nominee since he was a Union veteran who promoted reconciliation with Confederate veterans. The journalist also claimed that Van Dervoort was a veteran “whom the ‘Boys in Blue’ will follow as faithfully as ever they followed Grant and Logan.” John A. Logan was a founder and the first Grand Commander of the GAR. In H.H. Boyce to Polk, April 13, 1892, cited above.

years. This time Polk did not recover. His death marked a major blow for Populism. The major southern leader capable of uniting West, Midwest, and South was now gone. In a final gesture to his work as a sectional reconciliationist, Kansans Peffer, John Grant Otis, and William Baker served as pallbearers at Polk's funeral. Like Polk, Peffer and Otis possessed Civil War veteran credentials.<sup>63</sup>

Despite the bad news, Democrats provided Populists with renewed hope when they nominated Grover Cleveland for president. Additionally, the national ticket rejected the controversial subtreasury plan. The convention also refused to endorse increased silver coinage, a measure favored by many western and southern Democrats. Since the Democratic Party blatantly rejected all Alliance reforms, southern agrarians reconsidered their political position.<sup>64</sup>

Meeting in Omaha, Nebraska on July 4, Populists continued much of the work started under the Alliance. The Populist platform asserted previous reforms on increasing the amount of paper money in circulation and placing the responsibility with government rather than private banks. Delegates also endorsed government ownership of railroads, telegraph, and telephone. Checking the power of monopolies and big businesses, the People's Party proposed a graduated income tax, an end to alien ownership of land, protection of labor unions, and they denounced corporate use of private detectives to break strikes and intimidate Western cattle raisers. In a move to counter the Lodge Bill and political partisanship, Populists proposed a secret ballot printed by the government to replace party tickets and ballot boxes. The platform also called for the popular election of U.S. senators, the subtreasury system, and an eight-hour workday. Celebrating its claims to oppose sectionalism and partisanship, the Omaha preamble attacked

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<sup>63</sup> Creech, *Righteous Indignation*, 132; Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 111.

<sup>64</sup> Creech, *Righteous Indignation*, 132.

both political parties, while two whites and an African American stood on stage to wave an American flag.<sup>65</sup>

Reaffirming its commitment to sectional reconciliation and hoping to maximize the possibility of victory, the People's Party selected two Civil War veterans to its ticket. James B. Weaver of Iowa won the presidential nomination by a wide margin. Weaver was a Union veteran and a longtime third-party activist. In 1880 he won three percent of the popular vote as the Greenback-Labor Party presidential candidate. Because of his association with losing causes and his Union background some Populists did not want to select Weaver. Few other choices existed for the third party. Believing he could do more for the cause by serving in the Senate, William Peffer refused to be considered. Chicago Republican Judge Walter Q. Gresham endorsed tariff and monetary reform, but he also declined the nomination. Populists ruled out Ignatius Donnelly due to eccentricity and Leland Stanford because of his association with monopoly.<sup>66</sup>

Seeking balance for the ticket James G. Field received the Vice Presidential nomination. Delegates chose Field largely due to his southern background. A Virginia native, he lost a leg while serving under A.P. Hill as a major in the Confederacy. Excluded from Alliance membership because of his practice of law, Field also farmed and maintained an allegiance to state agrarian reform causes. Like Weaver, Field brought considerable flaws to the ticket. Popular locally, Field was unknown to most supporters of the national agrarian movement. He also committed to Populism only three weeks before the Omaha convention. The People's Party ticket included a man stigmatized for being a constant losing third-party candidate and a man without firm connections to the national agrarian crusade. Still, since the Civil War neither

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<sup>65</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 167; Ali, *In the Lion's Mouth*, 93.

<sup>66</sup> Noblin, *Polk*, 293; McMath, *American Populism*, 169-70.

major party had selected a Southerner for their presidential and vice presidential tickets. The Populist ticket contained a Confederate veteran and a Union veteran. Unlike Republicans and Democrats, the People's Party nominated men who fought on opposing sides in the Civil War. Through the reconciled ticket, Populists hoped to break from the past and reform American political and economic systems.<sup>67</sup>

Internal and external divisions threatened Populist unity during the 1892 campaign. Prohibition and women's suffrage formed two major issues that split Populists in the West. Since Populists cooperated with Democrats in western states, prohibition received no support from the third party. Southerners also rejected prohibition and women's suffrage. Based largely on southern opposition, women's suffrage was not included in the Omaha Platform. In Rocky Mountain states and in Kansas women's suffrage received widespread support. Female suffrage received strong support among Kansans, but the Populist majority in the legislature split over the issue and eventually defeated the legislation with the help of Republicans. Many Populists expressed great disappointment with their legislators.<sup>68</sup>

Race became a more powerful weapon used by external critics of the People's Party, particularly in the South. Since the People's Party threatened Democratic rule and because the third party included African Americans in its national and state conventions, Democrats charged white Populists with betraying their region and race. As the *Atlanta Constitution* wrote, "The old issue of sectionalism is confronting the South and White Supremacy is more important than all the financial reform in the world." The *Richmond Dispatch* and the *Raleigh News and Observer*

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<sup>67</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 169-70; William DuBose Sheldon, *Populism in the Old Dominion: Virginia Farm Politics, 1885-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1935), 83-85. Campaign ribbons featured the candidates and a drawing of a handshake. The cuff surrounding one hand read, "Blue," while the cuff around the other hand read "Gray." James L. Roark, et al. *The American Promise: A History of the United States*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009), 706.

<sup>68</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 170-71.

echoed similar claims that reminded readers that Democrats saved southern states from the inept rule of Reconstruction governments by reinstating white supremacy.<sup>69</sup>

In the person of James B. Weaver, Democrats also found a target ripe for recalling hostile memories of the Civil War. Through speakers and newspapers Democrats charged General Weaver with instituting total war in Pulaski, Tennessee. During the war the Union commander supposedly ordered the execution of Confederate soldiers. Democrats also charged that Northern soldiers harassed, stole, and imprisoned local residents. After a month of such stories, Weaver arrived in Georgia to campaign with his wife, Field, and Lease. He received a lackluster reception from crowds in some towns, while at other campaign stops he was booed. At Columbus a fight almost occurred on stage. Worse still, after Democratic prodding, a crowd hit Mrs. Weaver with an egg, shouted down General Weaver, and drove the Populist speakers from their hotel balcony with shouting and more eggs. At Cordele, Vice Presidential nominee and Confederate veteran James Field faced a similar situation and sought refuge with the mayor. The hostility was not solely reserved for Northerners. Native Georgian and Populist Tom Watson faced a hostile crowd in Atlanta that required a police escort upon his exit. Scheduled to appear at the same hall the next evening, Weaver cancelled his appearance and all others in the state. The Weavers and Mary Lease left the state and the Populist national campaign committee declared Georgia unsafe for speakers during the rest of the electoral campaign.<sup>70</sup>

Throughout the rest of the 1892 campaign Georgia witnessed a revival of political violence that harkened back to the Reconstruction era. Threats, fights, shootings, and murders accompanied the autumn. Georgia was not alone. In Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas similar activities accompanied the electoral season. Bribery, ballot box stuffing, and intimidation

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<sup>69</sup> Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 90, 112 (quote); Sheldon, *Populism in the Old Dominion*, 72; Creech, *Righteous Indignation*, 131.

<sup>70</sup> Shaw, *Wool-Hat Boys*, 69-70.



became widespread on election day. As a result Populists suffered defeat across the South. Watson lost his reelection bid and no southern Populist won election to the U.S. Congress. Weaver received less than a third of the vote in all southern states, save Alabama where Populists narrowly lost the gubernatorial race. In most states People's Party candidates finished third.<sup>71</sup>

Results from the West and the Plains gave the third party more hope. Weaver won Kansas, Colorado, Nevada, and Idaho. He also received a share of the electoral votes in North Dakota and Oregon. No third party since the Civil War had won any electoral votes. Weaver won twenty-two in 1892. He also gained one million national votes. Cooperation with Democrats produced People's Party victories in the Colorado and Kansas gubernatorial elections. Throughout the West and the Plains the third party won state and local elections.<sup>72</sup>

Despite these positive achievements, the People's Party experienced disappointments that crippled efforts to win control of state and national governments during the rest of the 1890s. First, Weaver won less than five percent of the popular vote in states east of the Mississippi River and north of the Ohio River. Cleveland won most of the votes in the demographically dense northeast, including the support of most industrial workers. Results in the South created a second major Populist failure. Although the third party and Alliance devoted much time to educating Southerners on agrarian reform policies, the outcome proved disheartening. Many white Southerners proved unwilling to abandon the Democratic Party, the party of tradition and Redemption. White Southerners also failed to effectively and consistently appeal to enough African-American voters. Many black Southerners voted for Populists, but others avoided the

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<sup>71</sup> Shaw, *Wool-Hat Boys*, 71-75; C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1971), 259-60; McMath, *American Populism*, 177-78; Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 113-14.

<sup>72</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 177-78.

party because they associated candidates with past repression or a losing cause. Fraud, intimidation, and violence also persuaded many Southerners on election day. Despite its efforts, the People's Party failed to break the "solid South."<sup>73</sup>

Defeats in the northeast and especially the South caused a third impediment to the national agrarian reform effort. Since the beginning of their challenges to Republican political control, Kansans and other farmers' advocates in the Midwest and West denied accusations that the Alliance represented a southern Democratic conspiracy to weaken the national power of the Grand Old Party. Kansans like William Peffer urged fellow Populists to have patience with their southern "brethren." The South would join with Kansas and other Northern states to form a national agrarian crusade that would break the grip of sectional agitators who served the interests of monopolies over those of "the people." Now the electoral results of 1892 left Northern Populists vulnerable to charges that they helped elect Democrats by taking votes from Republicans in state and national elections.<sup>74</sup>

In Kansas, the heart of Populism, third party support began to decline as many expressed great disappointment with the South. The momentum began prior to election day. Mary Lease denounced Peffer's attempts to downplay the significance of attacks on Weaver in the South. In a widely published interview, Lease criticized Peffer and denounced the South. Other Kansans said that the South turned its back on the farmers' movement and they promised to return to the Republican Party. D.G. Ollinger, a Populist congressional District chairman, suggested

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<sup>73</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 177-78. Berton Shaw discusses the political violence committed by Populists against African Americans in Georgia. Shaw also notes numerous Populists who previously supported racially oppressive laws. See Shaw, *Wool-Hat Boys*, 46, 78-90. For Georgia Populists who blamed African Americans for their 1892 defeats, see Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Movement*, 144.

<sup>74</sup> While it is likely that no Populist ticket would have resulted in victory, some scholars contend that a Polk-Peffer ticket would have shown the true strength of Populism in 1892. The Weaver-Field ticket lacked the enthusiasm and resonance earned by Polk and Peffer during their travels to the North and South respectively. Weaver lacked a base of support outside of his native Midwest and he proved inept at acquiring such a following. Nor did not Field prove capable of rallying Southern voters to the Populist cause. McMath, *American Populism*, 169-70, 177-78.

Republican-Populist fusion nationally to “consolidate the north against the solid south.” Before the election he returned to the Republican Party and called Populism “only a Democratic sideshow, the principal object of which is to beat the Republican party out of the presidency.” Ollinger warned that a vote for Weaver was a vote for Cleveland. While he recognized that reform was still needed, Ollinger predicted that without southern support Weaver would not win.<sup>75</sup>

Defections intensified as some Populists increasingly worked with Democrats to secure state and local elections in Kansas. After Populists lost state House seats in the 1891 election, some third party leaders began to believe they could not win elections alone. Since most of these Populists had a history of opposing the Republican Party and supporting the Union-Labor Party or Democrats, they turned to the latter group. Many fusionists focused on local and state politics, rather than the national political movement, and they acted to influence local nominating conventions during the spring of 1892. In parts of the state where Democrats had greater numbers they replaced Populists with Democratic-Populists. Several committees went against convention votes and used other forms of deception to secure the nomination of fusionists.<sup>76</sup>

William A. Harris represented an extreme example of the new Kansas Populism after 1892. Born in Virginia, Harris served in the Confederacy during the Civil War. At the end of combat he migrated to Leavenworth County, Kansas where he became a successful cattle rancher. Harris became popular among many Populists, including Topeka *Advocate* editor Stephen McLallin. The Virginia native endorsed increased silver coinage but opposed many other Alliance reforms, such as the subtreasury plan. Throughout his association with Populists

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<sup>75</sup> Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 118-19, 145 (quote).

<sup>76</sup> Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 120, 126-31, 140.

Harris encouraged closer cooperation with Democrats, who predominated in his home county of Leavenworth.<sup>77</sup>

Thanks to a population increase in the 1890 census, Kansas gained an additional seat in the House of Representatives. At the state Populist Convention of 1892, Fred J. Close, a one-armed Union veteran, nominated Harris for the position. Close justified the selection with the reconciliationist language common to the national agrarian movement. According to a witness, the Union veteran pointed to his empty sleeve and the American flag when he claimed that he sacrificed for his country in the past. Close said he possessed no bitterness toward “the boys who wore the gray” and he claimed that Harris “would shoulder his musket now as quickly as any Federal soldier to defend the stars and stripes and to keep this one united country.” Another Union veteran, a Captain Evans, spoke in favor of Harris citing a desire “to shake hands across the bloody chasm.” Capping the proceedings several hundred Union veterans reportedly stood to salute Harris. The witness at the convention claimed that the events marked the end of “the great rebellion,” which “started in Kansas in ’56.” While the nomination symbolically denoted the desire of Kansas Populists to reconcile with white Southerners and forgive the trespasses of former Confederates, many Populists did not like Harris. Many of these third party advocates came from a Republican background, suggesting a willingness to oppose Democratic influence. Harris did little to gain their trust after winning the Populist nomination for Congress. He claimed he was still “a good Democrat.”<sup>78</sup>

A growing number of Kansas Populists found these political developments distasteful. Many Populists resisted fusion within the party. Much of the opposition came from former Republicans who also formed the bulk of third party leadership in 1890. William Peffer, John

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<sup>77</sup> Clanton, *Kansas Populism*, 120; Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 94, 134.

<sup>78</sup> The witness was T. J. Smith from McPherson, Kansas. His letter to the editor appeared in Topeka’s *The Advocate* on July 8, 1892. See Clanton, *Kansas Populism*, 120. Harris quote, Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 134.

Willits, Stephen McLallin, and Mary Lease actively denounced fusion as a political strategy that contradicted Populist principles. Most Populists who fought fusion viewed the party and agrarian movement from a comprehensive and national perspective. The group thought that only national reforms could solve the economic problems of the nation and they looked to the South as a natural and necessary partner. Other Kansans withdrew from the People's Party and formed a new political party. When Populists nominated a Democratic lawyer and the Republicans nominated a banker in the Third Congressional District opponents formed the Abraham Lincoln Republican Party. The group communicated its adherence to the principles of the early GOP and its reverence for a regional and national hero to represent their position.<sup>79</sup>

Other Kansas Populists chose to return to the Republican Party. This pattern continued throughout the decade as leaders and rank and file members left the Populists. The trend gained momentum around the 1892 election as the People's Party failed to win in the South and as Democrats increased their presence in the state party. Early Populist advocate and former national lecturer of the Southern Alliance Frank McGrath rejoined the Republican fold in 1892. After urging Populists at the state convention to support William Harris for Congress, Samuel Worthington had a change of heart. Upset at Democratic victories in the South, Worthington moved back to the GOP. He said he supported Harris "not because of any love for the ex-Confederate soldier, but because I wanted to show the South that we were willing to lay down the bloody shirt and ready to shake hands over the bloody chasm, but recent developments in Georgia show that they are not willing to do the same. It has been made perfectly clear to me that the South is still solid, and that there is no possible show for the people's party in a single southern state." Worthington resolved to stop voting for Populists because "I would help to send

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<sup>79</sup> Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 123, 126-27, 143.

Democrats to Congress, and help elect a Democratic president. The Democratic party is a party of negation and we can never hope to accomplish anything through it.” Several Populist newspapers also ceased production or transferred their loyalty to other parties. The agrarian movement began to divide and alter its focus.<sup>80</sup>

Disappointment with the South and national Populist aspirations reached a new low at the 1892 convention of the Southern Alliance. Held in Memphis just after the November elections, the meeting demonstrated serious internal disagreements within the farmers’ movement. President Henry L. Loucks used his address to blame the South for Populist failures in the election. The South Dakotan questioned the loyalty of Southerners to the agrarian cause. When Charles Macune announced his intention to run against Loucks for the presidency, further animosity emerged. Henry Taubeneck of Illinois and other Populists accused Macune of campaigning against the People’s Party during the recent elections. Macune denied the charges, but he eventually withdrew his candidacy when it became clear he would not win and resigned all of his positions in the order. He also claimed that outside influences posed a threat to the cohesion of the Alliance. Twenty-three delegates sponsored a resolution to cease criticism of Macune and the South. All but three of the delegates came from southern states. Loucks won the presidency and North Carolinian Marion Butler carried the Vice Presidency. The Alliance continued to promote sectional reconciliation, but clearly unity ran thin.<sup>81</sup>

Alliance unity continued to erode during the Memphis conference. Macune opponents questioned the designation of *The National Economist* as the official Southern Alliance newspaper. Critics charged that Macune worked secretly to support Democrats during the elections, received funding from the Democratic National Committee, and circulated Democratic

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<sup>80</sup> Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 140-41, 143-45, (quote 145).

<sup>81</sup> McMath, *Populist Vanguard*, 144-45.

literature as official Alliance material. Several southern Populists affirmed the accusations and materials bearing the signature of Macune's associate, J.F. Tillman, proved the charges. Kansas Populist John Otis demanded that Macune be replaced or "we of the West will have to withdraw from the national order, for we have had enough of the purchased allies of the Southern Democracy." With circulation already in decline, the *Economist* lost its official designation in February 1893 and the paper ceased publication by the summer.<sup>82</sup>

Although Populism survived the 1892 election, the Southern Alliance did not. A few state and some local Alliances continued to operate for several more years, but the energy, numbers, and national organization effectively died in 1892. The agrarian movement lost its base in rural communities and now became a political party increasingly run by a new group of leaders who wanted to win elections rather than build cooperatives, wage boycotts, and educate farmers with the latest agricultural methods. Many Alliance reforms and rhetoric continued into the third party, but a few important tools of mobilization did not. While some Populists continued to speak the Alliance language of sectional reconciliation, its depth and frequency sharply declined. With the death of Polk, the foremost Alliance spokesman for reconciliation, Populism failed to continue efforts to heal wounds from the Civil War and truly reconcile American farmers from their sectional pasts. Texan, James "Cyclone" Davis, became the foremost national agrarian spokesman. Following the trend of the farmers' movement after 1892, Davis emphasized economic issues far more than sectional reconciliation.<sup>83</sup>

The election of 1892 proved extremely important to the future of the agrarian reform movement in two interrelated ways. First, white Southerners in the Alliance divided over the

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<sup>82</sup> McMath, *Populist Vanguard*, 145-46; Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 345; Argersinger, *Populism and Politics*, 151 (Otis quote).

<sup>83</sup> McMath, *Populist Vanguard*, 141. Davis denied the radicalism of Populist ideas by associating them with Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson. He did not devote much attention to memories of the Civil War. See Goodwyn, *Ibid.*, 367-75.

issue of joining a third party to achieve reforms. The issue quickened the collapse of the Alliance and split the southern farmers' movement. White southern divisions caused the second major result of the 1892 election. Because of southern failures many Northerners lost faith in the ability of the People's Party to win local, state, and national elections. Without the support of the South, Populists in states such as Kansas became ripe for attack from their Republican foes. Since 1890 Northern Populists assured voters that the South would join them in a national political effort to put aside the distrust of the Civil War era and improve the lives of the American producers. After two years and efforts to further agrarian reform through a Southern Crusade, the political prospects of the farmers' movement regressed. Southern Democrats who won election with support from the Southern Alliance now criticized the farmer association and its major remedies. Opponents now characterized Alliance members as radicals, anarchists, and socialists who threatened the nation. Some southern Democrats even encouraged Northern Populists because they helped sap Republican strength.

Division in the South negatively impacted affairs in the North. Without victories in the South, Northerners appeared to stand alone. The reconciliation and reform promised by a national coalition of farmers and other producers now seemed impossible through the People's Party. Populists could not win local and state elections based on claims that they represented a national movement of farmers and producers. Many Northerners and Southerners called for continued patience with the South, but others lost faith. Some Northerners returned to the Republican Party, while others pursued fusion with Democrats. The momentum gained during the initial Alliance and Populist victories of 1890 stalled in 1892. The national agrarian movement received a major blow with the elections of 1892 and it did not recover.



Without a proven national political following, many farmers' advocates chose fusion as the path to electoral victory. Although fusion gave Populism a greater chance to achieve limited goals, coalition with the major parties spawned defections among third party supporters. Beyond losing early commitments to Populism, fusion also fractured the national unity of the People's Party. Political concerns on the local, state, and regional levels became more important than the national agrarian movement. Simultaneously, fusion agreements alienated the third party from the predominant party in important states like Kansas and Georgia. Opponents labeled Populists as traitors to the region. Kansas Populists became Rebel sympathizers, while Georgia Populists were associated with ushering in a return of Reconstruction-era "Negro rule." When the third party ran national elections it became impossible to unite state parties. Kansas Populists became increasingly allied with Democrats, while many southern Populists made agreements with Republicans in state elections.

In an attempt to maintain national unity and attract more moderate voters, many Populists moderated their campaign platforms after 1892. Following the Panic of 1893 Populists emphasized economic issues at the expense of sectional reconciliation. The conservative reaction of Democratic President Grover Cleveland contributed to an increase in public calls for reform. Seeking to distance themselves from the violent confrontations between laborers and employers at Homestead, Cripple Creek, and Pullman, Populists like Tom Watson and Marion Butler promoted silver coinage as a practical remedy that would help the middle and working classes. In the South, the party also distanced itself from African Americans by endorsing political and legal equality, while strongly opposing social equality. The shift yielded results in the South, but fraud prevented victories. In the Midwest and West, Republicans benefited more than Populists from anti-Democratic opinion. Overall, votes cast for Populists rose from one

million in 1892 to one and a half million in 1894. More and more Populists called for silver coinage as an economic remedy capable of winning elections. A growing number of Republicans and Democrats appeared willing to join the third party in a pro-silver coalition. Many Populists, however, proved unwilling to endorse silver at the expense of all other reforms. Silver and fusion became a topic of great debate within the third party and further contributed to the erosion of national unity.<sup>84</sup>

The 1896 elections demonstrated the chaos and difficulties involved in uniting a fractured and localized People's Party that increasingly pursued fusion. When the party nominated Democratic presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan as its choice for president too, many Populists reacted in anger. After four years of competing with, and sometimes physically fighting, Democrats, the third party asked Southerners to support a Democratic for president. Many Kansas Populists also recoiled, since they spent four years fighting Democratic influence in their state party. Further conflicts erupted when Democrats refused to replace vice presidential candidate and Maine banker Arthur Sewall with the Populist nominee. Demonstrating their commitment to sectional reconciliation and hoping to inspire Southerners, Populists nominated Georgian Tom Watson for vice president. When Democrats failed to drop Sewall, many Populists objected. In Georgia, Texas, Alabama, and North Carolina Populists entered agreements with Republicans whereby they supported McKinley for president in exchange for support of congressional candidates. Other Populists acquiesced, especially from the West. As a result Watson failed to appear on many ballots throughout the country, including his home state of Georgia.

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<sup>84</sup> McMath, *American Populism*, 195-96.

Compounding internal disagreements, the Republican Party utilized conservative memories of the Civil War to portray Populists and Bryan Democrats as radicals. Republicans associated the Democratic platform with class warfare, social upheaval, and radicalism. Ignoring their history of supporting “radical” issues, such as social and political rights for African Americans, Republicans branded themselves as the party of the capitalism, property-rights, patriotism, and social stability. The party warned that the nation faced its gravest threat since the secession crisis of 1860-1861.<sup>85</sup>

Through various activities the McKinley campaign specifically targeted Union veterans to communicate its message. In one example, McKinley supporters warned veterans that increased silver coinage would devalue their pensions. Mark Hanna, manager of the McKinley campaign, also sponsored flag days to honor his candidate and link the Republican with patriotism and the gold standard. A Sound Money club in New York City held a flag day parade of 750,000, which featured Union veterans donning “Sound Money” buttons and carrying American flags. The *New-York Tribune* reported, “many of those who marched yesterday have known what it is to march in war under the same flag that covered the city in its folds yesterday all day long.” Hanna sent former Union generals to the Midwest, where Bryan received strong support. On this tour, “Patriotic Heroes” visited ten states in trains decorated with banners that read “1896 is as vitally important as 1861.” Reinforcing the point, buglers and a cannon supported the Union veterans as they made speeches to endorse McKinley, patriotism, and sound money.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Patrick J. Kelly, “The Election of 1896 and the Restructuring of Civil War Memory,” in *The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture*, ed. Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 181, 191, 207.

<sup>86</sup> Mary Rulkotter Dearing, *Veterans in Politics: The Story of the G.A.R.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 456-65; Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 528-29. McKinley carried eight of the ten states toured by

As a Union veteran, McKinley possessed a prestige that Bryan could not match. Responding to McKinley campaign, Bryan affirmed his loyalty to veterans and denounced bankers as the enemies of common people in 1861 and 1896. Bryan echoed a similar message advanced by Leonidas Polk in earlier years by claiming that financiers let others fight the war, while they stood aside profited. These same men, Bryan charged, now tried to “enslave seventy millions of people, whites and blacks, in this country.” Without veteran credentials, however, Bryan proved incapable of countering McKinley’s use of Civil War memory. A *Harper’s Weekly* cartoon demonstrated his impotency on the issue. On one side of the cartoon stood a uniformed McKinley at guard and ready for combat against southern rebels. Above him read, “In 1861 William McKinley was upholding his country’s honor, -- and he’s doing it yet!” On the other side of the cartoon, a baby Bryan waved his shaker as he sat in a gown in his cradle. Above Bryan, the cartoonist wrote, “In 1861 this is what William J. Bryan was doing, -- and he’s doing it yet!” Bryan’s baby-like protest of 1861 and 1896 stood juxtaposed by the intense bravery and patriotism of McKinley.<sup>87</sup>

When Bryan lost the election, the Populist Party lay in shambles. Democrats incorporated the class rhetoric and major reforms, while ignoring the existence of the third party. Fusion agreements produced short-lived victories that did not last through the next election. Although the third party remained popular in some locales, it was effectively dead after 1896. Many agrarian supporters shared Watson’s sentiment: “Our party, as a party does not exist any more.” The Georgian concluded, “Fusion has well nigh killed it. The sentiment is still there, but confidence is gone.” Many Populists chose to return to the two major parties. Because he

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the “Patriotic Heroes.” Hanna ordered and distributed large quantities of American flags to promote McKinley as the patriotic candidate.

<sup>87</sup> R. Hal Williams, *Realigning America: McKinley, Bryan, and the Remarkable Election of 1896* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 144.

opposed the state party's endorsement of Democratic-Populist fusion, William Peffer lost his senate seat to a Democratic Confederate veteran. Peffer rejoined the Republican Party two years later and cited the "too much Democracy" as the main reason for the decline of the Populist Party. The Populist death began in 1892 with losses in the South and fusion in Kansas. Without the national cohesion generated by the Southern Alliance from 1889 to 1892, the farmers' movement staggered until 1896. Traditional affiliations to regional identity and the necessity of focusing on local politics combined to kill the agrarian crusade.<sup>88</sup>

Although the agrarian movement failed during the 1890s, much of its rhetoric and reforms gained popularity in subsequent decades. Anti-trust laws, government regulation of public utilities, the direct election of U.S. senators, the private ballot, women's suffrage, prohibition, the income tax, and federal loans for farmers became federal laws by 1930. Criticism of banks and big business carried great influence during the Great Depression. An expanded federal government did more to protect the working and middle classes from an economic downturn by the 1930s. Sectionalism played virtually no role in these developments. The later achievements provided little solace for many of the Civil War generation who did not live to see their implementation. Instead, the failures of the 1890s left many in the agrarian movement bitter and ready to retreat back to regional and state affiliations.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> *People's Party Paper*, November 13, 1896, quoted in Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 289; Clanton, *Kansas Populism*, 219. Peffer did not think that Democrats could achieve Populist reforms because they favored states' rights over a strong federal government. For more see Clanton, *Kansas Populism*, n. 52, 300.

<sup>89</sup> Clanton, *Kansas Populism*, 239. For others who stress the accomplishments of the farmers' movement, see Connie Lester, *Up From the Mudsills of Hell: The Farmers' Alliance, Populism, and Progressive Agriculture in Tennessee, 1870-1915* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006). Lester focuses on the state level, which is an area ripe for further study since most state studies of the agrarian crusade end with the defeat of Populism, rather than tracing the long-term impact of the farmers' efforts to achieve reform.

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### **Publications and Conference Presentations**

“Unifying for the Cause: Populism and the Problem of Nationalism,” Southern Forum on Agricultural, Rural, and Environmental History, Millsaps College, Jackson, MS, April 2012.

“The Mississippi Farmers’ Alliance” in *The Mississippi Encyclopedia* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi). Edited by Ted Ownby and Charles Reagan Wilson, forthcoming.

“J. William Fulbright: The Cautious Leader.” *Flashback* 53, No.4 (2002), Washington County Historical Society, Fayetteville, AR: 39-46.

### **Awards**

Summer Research Assistantship, Graduate School, University of Mississippi, 2012  
Graduate Instructor, Department of History, University of Mississippi, 2009-2012  
Graduate Teaching Assistantship, Department of History, University of Mississippi, 2007-2009  
Award for Best Biography, Autobiography or Memoir in a County or Local Historical Journal, Arkansas Historical Association, 2003  
George V. Ray Memorial Award, for support of scholarly studies of Western Civilization, Department of History, University of Arkansas, 2003

### **Professional Organizations**

Southern Historical Association  
Arkansas Historical Association

## **Service**

Meals on Wheels driver, 2009-2012

Docent for the L.Q.C. Lamar House Museum, Oxford, Mississippi, March 2012-July  
2012