The Southern Populists and the Negro in 1892

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This paper proposes to examine the view that the Populist Party was a group that went significantly beyond other late nineteenth century organizations in racial cooperation. Because of the broadness of the subject the paper will concentrate on those Southern states where the Populist movement had an important impact. Likewise the time span will be limited to 1892. It is believed that this will not distort the essential nature of the Populist appeal to the Negro. If anything, the Populists were more idealistic and more intent upon fashioning an alliance with the Negro in 1892 than they were later.

Examples of Populist liberalism on the race question can easily be cited. As historians well know, the Populists condemned lynching and the convict lease system. Moreover, they organized Negro rallies, and called for Negroes to serve on juries.[1] These efforts should not be denigrated as worthless or hypocritical; yet it should be recognized that the campaign to reach an understanding with the Negro was cautious and in low key. Often the instances of racial liberality are more atypical than typical of the movement. Of the major Populists, only Tom Watson and Joseph Columbus Manning of Alabama made any serious, sustained appeals to the Negro in 1892.

Populist leaders hesitated to antagonize the rank-and-file by being too bold on the race issue. An element of opportunism also enters into the picture. Many Populists must have felt that they had only to offer the Negro minimal encouragement to obtain his support. At the same time, the Populists could not afford to treat his colored neighbor too lightly; for in the early 1890's, unlike a few years later, a large number of Negroes voted.

Populist attempts to gain Negro backing should not be interpreted to mean that white Democrats willingly forfeited this bloc of voters. For the most part, Democrats emulated Populists practices. If there were Populist picnics, meetings, and rallies for Negroes then very likely there would be similar Democratic outings.[2] If the Populists

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1. C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, vol. ix of *A History of the South*, edited by Wendell H. Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter (Baton Rouge, 1951), 267.

2. At times the Democrats' enthusiam outran that of the Populists. See the *Virginia Sun* (Richmond, Virginia), October 26, 1892 for a Popu-

condemned lynching and the convict lease systems the Democrats would reciprocate.[3] Moreover, control of the state house placed a strategic weapon in the hands of the Democrats unavailable to the Populists. The Populists could only lament verbally legal injustices to the Negro. Democratic governors, on the other hand, won the gratitude of Negroes through the use of the pardoning power. A timely pardon could wipe away Negro bitterness over the fact that the original conviction may have been on the flimsiest of evidence by an all-white Democratic jury.

About all that can be said safely for the examples of Populist racial liberalism in the early 1890's is, as C. Vann Woodward asserts, "it was a time of experiment, testing, and uncertainty—quite different from the time of repression and rigid uniformity that was to come toward the end of the century." [4] In this light the crucial test of Populist uniqueness in race relations would appear to be whether or not in fact they cooperated more closely politically with Negroes than other insurgent white political groups.

C. Vann Woodward in his most recent version of *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* states that "Negroes were not put off with nominal duties and peripheral appointments but were taken into the inmost councils of the Party." [5] Furthermore, Woodward argues that the Populists went beyond earlier agrarian efforts to attract Negro support and attempted to convert individual Negroes to their cause by bringing them into the party organization.[6]

Woodward is very likely mistaken, for the Southern Populists' tactics were not unprecedented among earlier agrarian movements. There is no evidence that Negroes belonged to the Grange in the South,[7] but they participated in Greenback Party activities. C. W. Thompson, a Negro from Richmond who headed the Tobacco Laborers' Union, attended the founding convention of the Greenback Party in Ohio in 1875. Three years later approximately ten Negroes were among the forty delegates to the first state Greenback convention in Texas. The Party platform, reflecting the Negroes' presence, called for equal protection of the rights of all regardless of "section,

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list complaining that Democrats at a rally served food at the table for both races and they "ate side by side, shoulder to shoulder."

3. For example, *The News* (Birmingham, Alabama), August 21, 1892.
4. C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (2nd revised edition; New York, 1966), 33.
5. *Ibid.*, 64.
6. *Ibid.*, 60.
7. Solon Justus Buck, *The Granger Movement* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1963. First printed by Harvard University Press, 1913), 59.

state, riches, poverty, race, color or creed." [8] In 1880 the Texas Greenbackers continued to appeal for Negro support by denouncing disfranchisement of voters.[9]

In the same year a state Greenback convention in South Carolina seated four Negroes among its forty-five delegates.[10] Shortly after this event, a small group of South Carolina whites and Negroes from Colleton and Charleston counties organized a People's party and declared that the party needed "nothing but the organization of the working class of white men and the colored men, as they would largely be in the majority, to defeat any party or parties who desire to oppress either the one or the other." [11]

In northern Alabama in 1888 a white Agricultural Wheel voted to admit Negroes from a colored Wheel to their convention on a segregated basis. The Negroes, however, were not allowed to make speeches. Despite these restrictive rules, a proposal to offer a mixed political ticket barely failed.[12]

The most important pre-Populist agrarian organization was the Farmers' Alliance for whites, and in the late 1880's a Negro branch, the Colored Alliance, led by R. M. Humphrey, a white Baptist missionary, was formed.[13] The Alliance movement established a pattern of segregated farm organizations. The constitution of the North Carolina Farmers' Alliance, for example, explicitly excluded Negroes.[14] In Alabama the Montgomery *Alliance Journal* went so far as to oppose the organization of Negro Alliances.[15] Yet on the whole the Negro and white Alliances cooperated closely. At the Ocala, Florida Alliance convention of 1890, they met simultaneously and agreed to elect friendly state legislatures, to work for equality in education and politics, and to coordinate activities on the local level.[16] The Virginia Alliance in implementing this policy passed a

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8. Quoted in Jack Abramowitz, "The Negro in the Agrarian Revolt," *Agricultural History*, XXIV (April, 1950), 90.

9. *Ibid.*

10. George Brown Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes 1877-1900* (Columbia, S. C., 1952), 50.

11. Quoted in *Ibid.*

12. William Warren Rogers, "Agrarianism in Alabama 1865-1896" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1959), 228-29.

13. Ralph Smith, "The Farmers' Alliance in Texas, 1875-1900 A Revolt Against Bourbon and Bourgeois Democracy," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XLVIII (January, 1945), 369.

14. Frenise A. Logan, *The Negro in North Carolina 1876-1894* (Chapel Hill, 1964), 84.

15. Rogers, "Agrarianism in Alabama," 257.

16. Abramowitz, "Negro in the Agrarian Revolt," 93.

resolution in the spring of 1892 that authorized district lecturers "to give the Colored Alliancemen such attention as they may in their judgment think best . . . ." [17]

This is not to suggest that the two groups agreed on every issue. The Negro Alliance favored independent political action more strongly than the white, and it supported the so-called Lodge Force Bill which the white Alliance opposed.[18] The closest the white Alliance came to recognizing Negro demands for suffrage guarantees was an alternative offered by the *National Economist,* a leading Alliance newspaper, in early 1891 that called for "equal facilities, educational, commercial and political . . . and that a free ballot and a fair count be insisted upon and had for colored and white alike in every Alliance in America." [19]

The Alliance continued the Greenback policy of giving Negroes representation at conventions. At St. Louis in early 1892 the Colored Alliance was allotted ninety-seven seats. In addition, W. H. Warwick of Mecklenburg County, Virginia, who was superintendent of the Virginia Colored Farmers' Alliance, was elected an assistant secretary of the convention with just one dissenting vote.[20] J. Brad Beverley, a prominent Virginia delegate, praised all the Negro delegates at the convention and denied Associated Press reports that the election of Warwick was a joke.[21]

It was in this atmosphere of mutual forbearance and arms-length cooperation that the Populist Party was born. Consequently, the Populist party maintained the policy of recognizing Negroes at conventions on both the national and state level. In Omaha, at the People's party presidential nominating convention, Warwick was once again present and was joined by Negro delegates from other states.[22]

On the state level Negroes attended many Populist conventions in 1892. While the exact number of Negroes present is not always possible to determine, it seems clear they were always in a decided

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17. *Virginia Sun,* May 11, 1892. William DuBose Sheldon, *Populism in the Old Dominion Virginia Farm Politics, 1885-1900* (Princeton, 1935), 36, asserts there was no cooperation between white and Negro Alliances in Virginia.

18. Woodward, *Origins of the New South,* 220-22; Abramowitz, "Negro in the Agrarian Revolt," 92.

19. Quoted in Abramowitz, "Negro in the Agrarian Revolt", 92.

20. John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the Peoples' Party* (Minneapolis, 1931), 226. The total number of delegates seated at the convention was 702. *Ibid.*; *Virginia Sun,* Feb. 27, 1892.

21. *Virginia Sun,* March 5, 1892.

22. *Virginia Sun,* July 13, 1892. Texas sent two Negro delegates. *The Dallas Morning News* (Dallas, Texas), June 24, 1892.

minority. The Wilmington *Morning Star* in North Carolina, a strong opponent of Populism, stated that half of the delegates to the first Populist convention were ex-Republicans, but it contended that only "a few negro representatives" were present.[23] In Georgia two Negro delegates attended the state Populist convention.[24] In Louisiana Negro representation was substantially higher than in Georgia with twenty-four Negro delegates present at the state convention.[25] At the first state-wide Populist meeting in Virginia it is impossible to determine definitely whether there were any Negro delegates. Yet it appears that W. H. Warwick attended since he was selected as one of the representatives for the Fourth congressional district of Virginia.[26] Undoubtedly a Negro delegate to the Populist convention in Dallas, Texas, characterized Negro participation in People's party gatherings in 1892 for the entire South when he stated: "You look over this large assembly and find very few of my people represented in this great movement." [27]

The real key to Populist success in attracting Negro support depended not on token Negro representation at conventions but on how effectively the Negro at the local level was brought into the partv organization. For the South as a whole little was done along these lines. Either some type of fusion with the Republicans which left the individual Negro immune to organization efforts was resorted to or separate Negro Populist clubs were formed. The latter method, of course, varied little from the segregated Alliances and was basically an extension of this arrangement.[28]

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23. *The Morning Star* (Wilmington, North Carolina), August 17, 1892.

24. Clarence Albert Bacote, "The Negro in Georgia Politics, 1880-1908" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Chicago, 1955), 165-66.

25. Lucia E. Daniel, "The Louisiana People's Party," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XXVI (October, 1943), 1080.

26. *The Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), June 24, 1892. Charles E. Wynes, *Race Relations in Virginia 1870-1892* (Charlottesville, 1961), 48, states no Negroes were present.

27. Quoted in *Dallas Morning News*, June 25, 1892.

28. In Alabama and Texas, for example, Negro Populist clubs were organized. Charles G. Summersell, "The Alabama Governor's Race in 1892," *The Alabama Review*, VIII (January 1955), 22; *Dallas Morning News*, June 24, 1892. In Louisiana the Populists formally fused with the Republicans by combining electoral and congressional nominees. Melvin J. White, "Populism in Louisiana During the Nineties," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, V (June, 1918), 11. In Arkansas there was no formal fusion but Populists and Republicans tacitly cooperated. Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, 246. In Tennessee the Populists agreed to support Republican congressional and state legislative candidates in areas of Republican strength in return for similar support for its candidates in Populist strongholds. J. A. Sharp, "The Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party in Tennessee", *The East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications*, X (1938), 105.

Two Negroes were placed on the state executive committee in Texas in 1891. Similarly in eastern North Carolina in 1892 several Negroes ran for county offices on the Populist ticket.[29] Yet this did not constitute the organization of Negroes in the Populist party on the county level. Rather it appears to be an attempt to escape such action. At a time when thousands of Negroes voted in Texas and North Carolina this was clearly the most opportune way to attract Negro support without bringing them into the party organization. The use of Negro speakers, a tactic employed by Tom Watson and others, was an even easier method.

Only in Virginia did the Populists make any serious plans to bring the Negro into the party on the local level. In late April, 1892, the *Virginia Sun* issued a call for Democrats, Republicans, Prohibitionists, Knights of Labor, members of Women's Rights Groups, and Negroes to join the Populist party.[30] Shortly afterward the official report of the organization of the People's party at Appomattox Courthouse indicated that this invitation was honored. In the election of county officers one Alfred Jones, a Negro, was elected for the Stone Wall district of the county.[31] Moreover, the Appomattox party issued a call for "every honest laboring man, white and colored, . . . to stand up for his rights . . . ." [32]

Most importantly, the state party committee in mid-summer issued instructions on organizing Virginia. According to these plans, each county was to be divided along voting precincts with a precinct chairman. To aid the chairman there was to be a precinct committee of two or more with at least one Negro.[33] Soon after the initial instructions, C. H. Pierson urged the county chairman not to cease their efforts until every precinct was organized, and he reminded the chairman that each precinct committee "should have one or more colored citizens on it to look after the colored vote." [34]

It is unlikely that these plans were implemented on any large scale. By fall, in fact, the Virginia Populists had shifted their strategy to that of organizing separate Negro clubs. One W. L. Stevens of Orange county in a letter to the *Virginia Sun* claimed that he had organized a Negro club of thirty-six members. Stevens'

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29. Jack Abramowitz, "The Negro in the Populist Movement," *Journal of Negro History,* XXXVIII (July, 1953), 267; *Charlotte Daily Observer* (Charlotte, North Carolina), August 13, 1892.

30. *Virginia Sun,* April 27, 1892.

31. *Ibid.,* May 11, 1892.

32. *Ibid.* For a similar pronouncement by the same group see the *Virginia Sun,* June 8, 1892.

33. *Ibid.,* July 6, 1892.

34. *Ibid.,* July 20, 1892.

advice to those who wished to emulate his efforts was to select the most influential Negro in the community, convert him to Populism, and then go from there.[35] In the same issue Pierson urged Populists to help Negroes organize clubs. This brought Virginia in line with the practice in other Southern states.

Based on the organization efforts in Virginia and elsewhere in the South, it appears safe to conclude that the Negro never came close to being an equal partner with his white Populist colleague. The Negro never performed more than a smattering of duties, held anywhere near the percentage of offices his number warranted, nor had any real voice in shaping programs and decisions in the Populist party. Undoubtedly too much has been made of the political cooperation between white Populists and Negroes, especially if one means cooperation in the machinery of a mutual party on a basis of equality.

Perhaps one could argue that the attractiveness of the Populist appeal to the Negro overcame the noticeable reluctance to grant him a substantial voice in the party. Tom Watson, who certainly had the best interest of the Negro at heart, immediately comes to mind. Politically, he hoped the Populist party would offer an alternative to the division of whites and Negroes along racial lines.[36] Economically, he argued that the plight of the Negro and white tenant was identical.[37] The subtreasury provided the solution for Watson to the downward spiral of the tenant and the landowner as well.[38]

Watson approached the question of social equality in a cautious manner. This, of course, was the great *bête noire* of white southern society. Watson undoubtedly approved of the statement issued by the Georgia People's party convention that "there is no southern man who will advocate social equality." [39] Yet he was bold enough in an article in the *Arena* to suggest that social equality was an issue to be decided by the individual.[40]

Watson, however, should not be taken as representative of Populist leadership throughout the South. Other than Watson only Joseph

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35. *Ibid.*, Sept. 14, 1892. The article is partially mutilated.

36. Woodward, *Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 61. Watson's appeal was blunted somewhat by the fact that the Farmers' Alliance with which he was closely connected had pushed a Jim Crow law for railroads through the state legislature in 1891. Bacote, "Negro in Georgia Politics," 158-61.

37. Thomas E. Watson, "The Negro Question in the South," *Arena*, VI (Sept., 1892), 548-49.

38. The sub-treasury plan called for government loans on staple crops at a low rate of interest when the market price was too low to justify selling. The crops were to be stored in warehouses constructed especially for that purpose.

39. *People's Party Paper* (Atlanta, Georgia), July 22, 1892.

40. Watson, "Negro Question," 550.

Columbus Manning stood out as a champion of the Negro. Manning was born in Clay county, Alabama, in 1870, was graduated from the State Normal College in 1888, and moved to Atlanta in 1890, where he became editor of the Atlanta branch of the American Press Association.[41] With the coming of the People's party, he moved back to Alabama in the spring of 1892 and became the editor of the Populist newspaper, the *Alabama Reformer*.[42]

Manning, who described himself as "simply a fraternizing good fellow," wrote the *Fadeout of Populism* in the late 1920's in which he sympathetically portrayed the plight of the Negro in the South.[43] Undoubtedly, Manning's views in the 1920's are simply an extension of his Populist heritage. In *Fadeout of Populism* he deplored the disfranchisement of Negroes and argued, as did Watson, that the agricultural depression of the late 19th century had placed small white farmers and Negro tenants in the same situation.[44] Yet Manning was not really interested in the economic condition of the Negro. To him political reform was paramount to all other issues. In a speech in 1917 he ridiculed the idea of advising Negroes to obtain property by purchasing a hog:

> The colored South can neither protect themselves nor the hog and have no more rights than a hog and are killed and burned with no more feelings, on the part of their murderer, than if they were a hog. The man who keeps his head to the ground, as does the hog, soon finds himself without a place to root . . . as does the hog, and lands in the chain gang pen to be treated like a hog . . . .[45]

The Populist party in Alabama led by Manning represented only a fragment of the dissident elements that broke with the reigning

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41. Joseph Columbus Manning, *From Five to Twenty-Five His Earlier Life as Recalled by Joseph Columbus Manning* (New York, 1929), 5, 8, 26. Clay county is in east-central Alabama just above the Black Belt. It is also the home of Hugo Black.

42. *Ibid.*, 33; William Warren Rogers, "Alabama's Reform Press: Militant Spokesman for Agrarian Revolt," *Agricultural History,* XXXIV (April, 1960), 65.

43. Joseph Columbus Manning, *Fadeout of Populism* (New York, 1928), 82; Manning, *From Five to Twenty-Five,* 18.

44. Manning, *Fadeout of Populism,* 120, 27.

45. "The Autocratic South Lynchers of Constitutional Government and Mob Murderers of American Citizens," Speech by Joseph C. Manning (Before the Allen Christian Endeavor League, and Great Assemblage of Citizens, in Bethel A. M. E. Church, Dr. A. R. Cooper, Pastor, New York, Sunday Afternoon, July 15, 1917), 12. After the collapse of Populism, Manning went North and continued to defend Negro rights. Manning, *Fadeout of Populism,* 138-146.

Democratic party. Reuben Francis Kolb, the former state commissioner of agriculture, headed the largest and most important group. Kolb's party, which went under the name Jeffersonian-Democrats, never formally fused with the Populists although they worked closely together.

Kolb and the Jeffersonian-Democrats vacillated in their outlook on the Negro problem. In early 1892 the *Huntsville Gazette,* a Negro newspaper, asserted that Kolb in a recent speech in Huntsville had "exhibited a spirit of intolerance and hatred to the black man." [46] Yet when Kolb broke with the Democrats, in a bid to capture the governorship, his party appealed for Negro votes. The party platform called for the protection of the legal and political rights of the Negro, and Jeffersonian-Democratic speakers, while urging the Negro to vote, claimed that the re-election of the incumbent, Thomas C. Jones, would bring Negro disfranchisement.[47]

After his defeat Kolb, angered by Democratic manipulation of the vote in the black belt, posed as the white man's candidate. To confirm this stance the Kolb supporters called for a white primary to select candidates in 1894 for state offices. The Populists broke with the Kolbites over this issue and refused to support the primary plan. But they could not stem the tide. In 1894 Alabama adopted new election laws that disfranchised many Negroes and poor whites.[48]

Throughout the rest of the South the predominant characteristic of Populist leaders' racial attitudes was a distinctly anti-Negro sentiment. In North Carolina Marion Butler, editor of the Clinton *Caucasian,* stated, just a few weeks before he announced his support of the state Populist ticket, that "whatever difference may exist among North Carolinians over a question of national policy, there should be none in the State where Anglo-Saxon rule and good government is the paramount issue . . ." [49] A short while later Butler acknowledged that the Populists had two Negroes on the ticket in Edgecombe county, but he conceded that it was unwise.[50]

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46. *Huntsville Gazette* (Huntsville, Alabama), January 2, 1892.
47. Summersell, "Alabama Governor's Race," 18, 24; Rogers, "Agrarianism in Alabama," 367, 372-73.
48. Rogers, "Agrarianism in Alabama," pp. 408, 411, 558; Woodward, *Origins of the New South,* 275.
49. Quoted in William Alexander Mabry, "Negro Suffrage and Fusion Rule in North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review,* XII (April, 1935), 83. Butler was already supporting the Populist cause on the national level. But as late as mid-July he supported Democratic candidates on the state level. *The Caucasian* (Clinton, North Carolina), July 14, 1892.
50. Clinton *Caucasian,* August 25, 1892. Edgecombe county is in eastern N. C. and had more than 50% Negro population in 1890.

Butler's Populist colleagues in North Carolina shared his viewpoint. Harry Skinner of Pitt county was nominated for governor, but the nomination was withdrawn when he announced that he would quit the race if it threatened "white supremacy." [51] Skinner explained his actions by stating "While I believe in financial reform and indorse the Omaha platform, I do not believe in negro political rule in the Southern States." [52] Skinner's replacement as the People's Party Gubernatorial nominee, William P. Exum, was quoted by the newspaper as preferring Negro rule to what had come before. He was accused also of trying to bribe the editor of the *Goldsboro Headlight* to keep the statement from being made public.[53] To compound his troubles Exum was arrested in the course of the campaign for cursing in the presence of ladies, and he shocked North Carolinians by assaulting Charles B. Aycock, one of his opponents, with a knife.[54]

The *Progressive Farmer,* the major Populist organ in North Carolina, expressed no positive attitudes toward the Negro either before the death of Leonidas LaFayette Polk in June, 1892, or after J. L. Ramsey of Wake county became editor.[55] Both Polk and Ramsey largely ignored the Negro. When the *Progressive Farmer* broached the Negro issue under Ramsey, it was to fend off charges of cooperating with the Negro or to attack the Democrats for endangering white supremacy.[56]

An attitude similar to that of North Carolina permeated Texas Populism. Thomas Lewis Nugent, the Populist candidate for governor in 1892, was deeply religious and without being aware of it

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51. Helen G. Edmonds, *The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina 1894-1901* (Chapel Hill, 1951), 26.

52. Quoted in Clinton *Caucasian,* Sept. 25, 1892. By 1897 Skinner had shifted his position and favored cooperation with the Republicans, Edmonds, *Negro and Fusion Politics in N. C.,* 61-62.

53. Theron Paul Jones, "The Gubernatorial Election of 1892 in North Carolina" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of North Carolina, 1949), 42.

54. Josephus Daniels, *Tar Heel Editor* (Chapel Hill, 1939), 502.

55. In 1891 the *Progressive Farmer* under Polk's editorship encouraged state support of Negro education. Stuart Noblin, *Leonidas LaFayette Polk Agrarian Crusader* (Chapel Hill, 1949), 253. But see Florence Emeline Smith, "The Populist Movement and Its Influence in North Carolina," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1929), 78 for Polk's fear of "Negro Supremacy" in the spring of 1892.

56. *Progressive Farmer* (Raleigh, North Carolina), August 30 and October 11, 1892. Helen G. Edmonds, author of a careful study on North Carolina politics in this period, contends the North Carolina Populists were anti-Negro throughout the 1890's. According to her, they simply subordinated their feelings in order to achieve victory in 1894 and after. Edmonds, *Negro and Fusion Politics in N. C.,* 136.

was close to the Social Gospel in outlook.[57] But his sense of Christian charity did not extend to the Negro. Nugent vigorously supported segregation in schools and on railway cars where Negroes were "prevented by law from close association with white people." [58] Furthermore, Nugent wanted to extend the system to a complete separation of the races, on the grounds that social equality was out of the question. Specifically, he suggested segregating prisons. He ventured the belief that Negroes would gain valuable training by supervising and running their own prisons. Nugent also expressed the opinion that Texas Populists supported his views on this issue.[59]

James H. Davis, or Cyclone Davis as he is better known, the Populist candidate for Attorney General in 1892, certainly agreed with Nugent. The *Dallas Morning News* quoted Davis as saying:

> The worst sight of social equality to be seen in this land is the sight of a sweet white girl hoeing cotton in one row and a big burley negro in the next row. Talk of social equality, when your industrial system forces a good woman's precious Anglo-Saxon girl down on a level with a burley negro in a cotton row. Oh, my God! and this in free America! [60]

The fear that low cotton prices would drive white women into the fields alongside Negroes appears to be a driving motive for Davis' desire to reform the American economy.[61]

The most ugly and vicious expressions of Negrophobia in an area of strong Populist support occurred in Mississippi. A secret terroristic group called the White Caps, because they wore hoods and their targets were said to be "white capped," sprang up in the lower half of Mississippi in late 1891. There is no evidence that the White Caps were organically tied to the Populist party in any way, but it is clear

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57. Wayne Alvord, "T. L. Nugent, Texas Populist," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LVII (July, 1953), 66, 69-72.

58. Interview with Nugent in the *Dallas Morning News*, Aug. 9, 1892. Texas passed a Jim Crow law for railroads in 1889. Logan, *Negro in N. C.*, 180.

59. *Ibid.*, For a slightly different version of what may have been the same interview see Catharine Nugent (ed.), *Life Work of Thomas L. Nugent* (Chicago, 1896), 338-339. In this version Nugent advocates segregation not only in prisons but asylums as well. Nugent asserted that "my idea is that segregation, as far as possible, is best for the negro." *Ibid.*, 339.

60. Quoted in the *Dallas Morning News*, July 31, 1892.

61. For a similar pronouncement by Davis as that quoted above see *Dallas Morning News*, July 23, 1892. Davis was also greatly concerned about the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. See James H. (Cyclone) Davis, *A Political Revelation* (Dallas, Texas, 1894), *passim*, but especially 245-247.

that a close relationship existed between the two groups. They were strong in identical areas; the White Caps enjoyed protection from the law through intimidation of witnesses, cooperation with local law enforcement agents, and sympathy from the populace.[62]

The literate members of the White Caps imbibed Populist literature. The preamble to their organization was based upon the "Populist Manifesto" that Kansas Populists promulgated in November, 1891.[63] This statement with a few modifications by Ignatius Donnelly became the preamble to the St. Louis and Omaha Populist platforms. Instead of being "a ringing denunciation of the existing ills of society" as John D. Hicks characterized the Donnelly work, the White Cap embellishments reveal the corruption that ignorance and prejudice brings to idealistic goals.[64] Rather than condemning the industrial system in an impersonal fashion like Donnelly does, the White Caps' author indicts the "accursed Jews" for the ills of the farm economy.[65]

The original impetus for the White Caps was a desire to harass Jewish merchants, but the campaign soon branched out to include all merchants and Negroes as well. The rationale for intimidating merchants in general was that people who acted like Jews deserved a "Jew's fare." [66] Despite this anti-merchant psychology, in the end, the Negro suffered the most at the hands of the White Caps. In fact, the White Cap preamble stated that the "first object" of the organization was "to control Negro laborers by mild means, if possible; by coercion if necessary." [67] Furthermore, the White Caps called upon "the white farmers to combine forces and gain control of the negro labor, which is by right ours, that we may tend the soil under white supremacy . . . ." [68] Soon the instances of beating and brutalizing Negroes who worked for absentee landowners or merchants led a group of Negroes to appeal to the governor for protection. The posting of a reward by Governor John M. Stone and his assurances of aid did little to stem White Cap attacks which increased in number during 1893.[69]

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62. James Sharbrough Ferguson, "Agrarianism in Mississippi, 1871-1900 A Study in Nonconformity" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1952), 583, 604, 593-95.
63. *Ibid.*, 584-85.
64. Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, 227.
65. The entire White Cap Preamble and Oath of Allegiance is quoted in Ferguson, "Agrarianism in Miss.", 583-84. For a comparison with the Populist platform see Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, 427-44.
66. Quoted in Ferguson, "Agrarianism in Miss.," 583.
67. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 584.
68. *Ibid.*
69. *Ibid.*, 585-86, 589-91.

Whether the Populist party was directly involved with the White Caps made little difference to the Negroes who tended to see a White Cap and Populist as one and the same. The Democrats supported the Negro view by blaming the White Caps for the rise of Populists.[70] Clearly neither the Democrats nor the Negroes were entirely wrong.

Compared to Mississippi the intensity of Negrophobia in Virginia was rather mild. Yet after the summer of 1892, when well-meaning if sporadic appeals were made to the Negro, antagonism towards Negroes increased markedly in the leading state Populist newspaper, the *Virginia Sun*. This was part of a noticeable shift in Populist journals throughout the South. No doubt as the election approached it became increasingly expedient to counteract Democratic cries of Negro rule with similar tactics.

Whether the Populist papers had any overall coordination in employing this strategy is impossible to say. But it may well be that the *National Economist* in Washington launched the campaign at the direction or at least tacit consent of national Populist leaders. In mid-September it attacked Cleveland for inviting Frederick Douglass and his wife to the White House.[71] Since the *National Economist* had a wide circulation and since small local Populist papers copied material from larger party organs, James B. Weaver, James G. Field and other national Populist leaders certainly realized the significance of this attack.[72] At any rate, the *Virginia Sun*, the *Progressive Farmer*, the *Southern Mercury* (Dallas, Texas), and probably others soon pressed the charge.[73]

Another issue that the *Virginia Sun* and other Populist papers raised against Cleveland in October was that he had signed a bill while governor of New York providing for mixed schools. Usually the Populists presented the story in the form of a verbatim extract of the 1884 New York law accompanied by a headline such as

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70. *Ibid.*, 604, 602-603.

71. The *National Economist* (Washington, D.C.), Sept. 17, 1892; Abramowitz, "Negro in the Agrarian Revolt", 95, footnote number 47.

72. See the *National Economist*, Sept. 24, 1892 for Weaver's and Field's letters of acceptance for the presidential and vice-presidential nominations respectively that stressed the appeal of the Populist party to Southern whites.

73. *Virginia Sun*, Oct. 12, 1892; *Progressive Farmer*, Oct. 11, 1892; *Southern Mercury* charge quoted in Abramowitz, "Negro in the Populist Movement", 279. This is not to say that the use of the Douglass story was new to the South. Cyclone Davis and other Texas Populists were repeating the tale months before. *Dallas Morning News*, July 29, and July 30, 1892.

"Grover Cleveland's Record in Favor of Mixed Schools" or by an editorial condemning the measure.[74]

Besides using material supplied from elsewhere, the *Virginia Sun* pressed the anti-Negro campaign on its own. In an editorial, probably written by C. H. Pierson, the *Sun* contended that election returns in state campaigns in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, and Georgia showed that the Democrats won because of Negro votes. Pursuing the theme further, the editor reminded Virginians that United States Senator John S. Barbour had used Negro stump speakers on occasions and that United States Senator John Warwick Daniel had clasped the hand of a Negro preacher at a rally and had stated he approved of the best men of both races cooperating. The *Virginia Sun* writer concluded that the Democratic party was the Negro party and the People's party the white man's party.[75]

Ironically, at the same time the *Virginia Sun* was increasing its criticism of the Negro, it presented Tom Watson's article from the *Arena* on the "Negro Question" which appealed for a rational approach to the race issue. The *Sun* endorsed Watson's proposals and stated that they were the "way to mutual forbearance and respect, to prosperity and happiness" between the races.[76] Furthermore, the *Sun* urged the reader to consider the article on its merits and not on prejudices.[77]

The greatest single weapon the Democrats had to blunt all other issues and to stifle a reasonable approach to politics and to the race issue was the Force Bill. Democratic newspapers with varying degrees of fervor drummed into the heads of white Southerners that a Republican victory for the presidency with a corresponding control of Congress would bring the passage of the Force Bill and a repetition of the horrors of Reconstruction. It made little difference to the Democrats that the Populists stood united as a bloc in opposition to the bill.

Populists, in fact, claimed that the Alliance, the father of the Populist party, was responsible for defeating the Force Bill in 1890. According to the *Virginia Sun*, the Alliance "stood bravely for liberty in that hour of her great need."[78] Jerome C. Kearby, in accepting the nomination for the United States House of Representatives for the sixth district of Texas, summed up white Southern

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74. *Clinton Caucasian*, Oct. 27, 1892; *Virginia Sun*, Oct. 19, and 26, 1892.
75. *Virginia Sun*, Oct. 12, 1892.
76. *Ibid.*, Oct. 19, 1892.
77. *Ibid.*
78. *Ibid.*, May 25, 1892.

Populist opinion when he stated that he supported the Omaha platform but opposed the Force Bill.[79] Even Tom Watson argued that outside interference with Southern political practices would only aggravate the problem.[80] Despite this overwhelming opposition to the bill, Southern Populists felt compelled to deny that the election of their candidates would result in the passage of the Force Bill.[81]

C. Vann Woodward in his most recent edition of *Strange Career of Jim Crow* contended that the Negro was attracted to the Populist cause. He stated that "certain it is that the Negroes responded with more enthusiasm and hope than to any other political movement since their disillusionment with radical Republicanism." [82] Even if one were to concede that this is true among the rank-and-file, there is little evidence that more than a handful of the Negro leadership espoused Populist doctrines in 1892 or later. Only a few examples of Negro ministers and politicians joining the Populist party can be found. Similarly, the Negro press in 1892 exhibited a noticeable lack of enthusiasm for the People's party. That the Populist party had essentially a rural base and the Negro newspapers an urban one may account for much of this attitude.

When the Negro press supported the Populist party, it was for opportunistic reasons. Editor John Mitchell, Jr., for instance, in answer to an inquiry on why the Richmond *Planet* in particular and the colored press in general did not support the People's party, replied that Negro votes for Populists on the national level would indirectly lead to a Democratic victory.[83] Yet Mitchell pointedly excluded strictures against Negroes voting for congressional and state Populist candidates. In fact just a week prior to the above statements Mitchell, in an editorial on the nomination of Walter E. Grant of Henrico county for the United States House of Representatives by the Populists, reminded his readers that the success of the Populist candidate depended on the Republicans. In an obvious effort to put pressure on the Populists, Mitchell calmly asserted that if the Republicans nominated a candidate, Grant was sure to lose.[84] The nearby *Washington Bee* reacted in a similar vein. It advised Virginia Negroes to vote for Benjamin Harrison for President and any congressman that suited them since no Republicans were on the

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79. *Dallas Morning News*, July 15, 1892.
80. *Virginia Sun*, Oct. 19, 1892.
81. *Ibid.*, Sept. 14, 1892.
82. Woodward, *Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 64.
83. Richmond *Planet* (Richmond, Virginia), September 10, 1892.
84. *Ibid.*, Sept. 3, 1892.

ticket.[85] In Georgia Tom Watson drew the support of the major Negro newspaper, the *Savannah Tribune.* The *Tribune,* while not enamored with Populist principles, appreciated the stand Watson and his party took against lynching.[86] But it also looked favorably upon the Populists because they would "cut a terrible path in the Democratic ranks." [87] The most blatently opportunistic of the Negro newspapers was the *Huntsville Gazette* in Alabama. The *Gazette* urged its readers to vote for the Populist party electoral ticket. According to the *Gazette,* a vote for Harrison was useless but if Republicans threw their support to the "anti-Cleveland" ticket they could defeat Cleveland and help Harrison.[88] The *Gazette* apparently expected grateful Populists to reciprocate by voting for Republican congressional candidates.

By the early 1890's Southern Democrats had effectively neutralized Negro participation in the democratic process. Many Negroes, if they voted at all, voted only in presidential elections.[89] Whites, mindful that the president, like the Russian Czar, was far away, contented themselves with letting the Negro vote for the party of Lincoln and freedom. The Populists represented a threat to this *modus vivendi* by giving the Negro for the first time in many years alternative candidates to the Democrats for state and congressional offices who had a chance to win. The Negro responded to this opportunity with an aggressiveness and shrewdness that historians have largely overlooked. Instead of being docile drones that sold their birthright for whiskey or a few dollars, many Negroes participated in the sophisticated vote-swapping arrangements.

In Virginia the Negroes voted for Harrison for president and for Populist candidates for the United States House of Representatives in eight of the ten congressional districts. As a result Populist congressional candidates received nearly 80,000 more votes than Weaver and Field.[90] In southside Virginia the strategy was so successful that the Populist candidate, probably aided by the Democratic manipulation of the vote, barely lost.

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85. *The Washington Bee* (Washington, D.C.), October 15, 1892.
86. *The Savannah Tribune* (Savannah, Georgia), October 29, 1892.
87. *Ibid.,* April 16, 1892.
88. *Huntsville Gazette,* Oct. 22 and 29, 1892.
89. Southern states such as Alabama, Arkansas, Florida and Georgia encouraged this development by holding state elections at different times from national elections.
90. *The Tribune Almanac for 1893,* 304-305; Sheldon, *Populism in the Old Dominion,* 90. William Mahone apparently originated this idea, but it is unlikely that the Negroes would have acted differently even without Mahone's advice.

North Carolina Republicans failed to reach an agreement with Populists in 1892. Yet they left themselves open for an alliance until late in the campaign. Not until September did the Republicans despair of fusion with the Populists and nominate a candidate for governor.[91] This split the opposition to Elias Carr, the Democratic candidate for governor, who won the election although the combined vote for the Populist and Republican nominees was greater than his. The result of the presidential election was identical.[92]

Despite the failure to reach an understanding with the Populists in North Carolina on a state-wide basis for either the gubernatorial or presidential elections, many Negroes voted for Populist candidates for Congress when they had no alternative except a Democratic nominee. In New Hanover county, where Wilmington is located, the Populist nominee for governor polled only 187 votes and General Weaver, the Populist Presidential hopeful, received 38 votes. Yet the Populist candidate for the United States House of Representatives pulled in 1620 votes.[93]

In Georgia the state elections were held some six weeks before the presidential election. The Republican party and the Negro Alliance endorsed W. L. Peek, the Populist candidate for governor. Peek received nearly 68,000 votes, or 33% of the total.[94] By contrast, Weaver in the presidential election received just short of 42,000 votes for 19.1% of the total.[95]

The returns in Fulton county, where Atlanta is located, show vididly the fate of Populist candidates without Negro support. The Negroes preferred to vote for Harrison rather than Weaver; as a result Harrison received 1,261 votes to Weaver's 129. On the other hand, the Negroes voted for S. W. Small, the Populist candidate for the United States House of Representatives, and he received 1,782 votes.[96]

Alabama like Georgia held its state election shortly before the national elections. The returns in the gubernatorial race were com-

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91. Hicks, *Populist Revolt*, 245-46.

92. For the gubernatorial election figures see the *Tribune Almanac for 1893*, 292. For the Presidential election figures see W. Dean Burnham, *Presidential Ballots, 1836-1892* (Baltimore, 1955), 660-61.

93. Wilmington *Morning Star*, Nov. 11, 1892.

94. *Report of the Comptroller General of the State of Georgia, 1893*, 179. All percentages in this paper have been computed by the writer or taken from the appropriate issue of the *Tribune Almanac*.

95. Burnham, *Presidential Ballots*, 332-33.

96. *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, Georgia), November 9, 1892. For a similar development in Nashville, Tennessee see *The Daily American* (Nashville, Tennessee), November 10, 1892.

plicated by a great deal of fraud in the Black-Belt. In this area Democrats resorted to wholesale ballot-box stuffing and to widespread scratching of its opponents' votes on the flimsiest of excuses. In Montgomery county Thomas G. Jones, the Democratic candidate, was credited with 7594 votes to R. F. Kolb's 1340.[97] In the presidential election, which the Democrats were not nearly as fearful of losing, Montgomery county cast 3702 votes for Cleveland and 2784 votes for Weaver.[98] The Alabama Negro in the presidential election either supported Weaver or stayed at home. Harrison received less than 10,000 votes, only 4% of the vote.[99]

In Texas a split in the Democratic ranks even after the Populists' defections complicated the situation. George Clark, a conservative Democrat, broke with the party upon failing to wrestle the nomination away from James S. Hogg the incumbent, a Populist-type Democrat. Hogg and T. L. Nugent, the Populist nominee for Governor, vied for essentially the same vote—that of the white farmer. Clark relied on the city vote and obtained the endorsement of the most powerful Negro leader in the state, Norris Wright Cuney.[100] Cuney swung the support of the Republican party to Clark and in the election Clark received the vast majority of the Negro vote. A few Negro Populists like J. B. Rayner were unsuccessful in neutralizing Cuney's efforts. In the November elections most Negroes voted for Harrison for President and for Clark for governor.[101]

The Negro rank-and-file differed little for the most part in outlook from its leaders' views on Populism. Few Negroes voted a straight People's party ticket. Instead they continued to vote for the Republican presidential nominee, except in Alabama, and whatever other candidates that suited their purposes. In cases in which the Negro voted for Populists the degree of commitment varied tremendously.

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97. *Tribune Almanac for 1893*, 260.
98. Burnham, *Presidential Ballots*, 270-71.
99. *Ibid.*, 260-61.
100. *Dallas Morning News*, Sept. 15, 1892.
101. This statement is based on the fact that the vote for Nugent and Weaver was almost identical, 24.9% and 24.2% respectively. On the other hand, Clark's share of the vote was some 12 percentage points higher than Harrison's, indicating a split among the Clark supporters with the whites voting for Cleveland and the Negroes for Harrison. This is further borne out by the fact that if the difference of 12% between Clark and Harrison is added to Hogg's vote then it approximates almost exactly Cleveland's vote. This indicates that white farmers who supported Hogg and conservative white city dwellers who championed Clark's cause united to vote for Cleveland. For the gubernatorial election figures see *Tribune Almanac for 1894*, 347-50. For the presidential election see Burnham, *Presidential Ballots*, 764-65.

A Tom Watson might generate genuine support. But many Negroes, if they voted for Populists at all, simply intended their vote to be a means to defeat hostile Democrats.

After the elections many Populists, like Saturday night revelers, undoubtedly swore they would never touch the vile bottle labeled "Negro vote" again. The *Virginia Sun* righteously claimed that the votes Weaver and Field received were from whites with the Negro vote going for Harrison or being sold to Cleveland.[102] The *Sun* neglected to add that thousands of Negroes had voted for Populist congressional candidates. The North Carolina Populist journals echoed the *Virginia Sun* position. Marion Butler's Clinton *Caucasian* contended that the Democrats bought the Negro vote.[103] The *Progressive Farmer* simply ignored the Negro throughout the rest of 1892.[104] Finally in early 1893 it twitted the Negro for selling himself for whiskey and a few dollars in the election. The *Progressive Farmer* reminded the Negroes that before the Civil War some of them had been worth $2,000.[105]

Only Tom Watson of the major Populist leaders is on record with a positive confirmation regarding the Negro vote. He asserted that the People's party intended to continue to deal fairly with the Negroes and to work to obtain an honest count at the ballot box.[106] It is unlikely that many of Watson's Populist colleagues genuinely shared his viewpoint.

The appearance of the Populist party made little difference in Southern race practices in 1892. Populists appeals for racial comity were rare, sometimes opportunistic, and seldom evinced any genuine commitment to obtain justice for the Negro in practice. Moreover, the Populists failed to bring the Negro into their party machinery. The few Negroes who participated in Populist party activities were showcase examples designed to attract Negro attention and support but not their membership in the party, a fact realized by many Negroes who voted for Populist candidates only when it served their best interest. The Populists sought to divide the South politically, but Negroes understood, as U. B. Phillips has asserted, that whites stood united in their determination to keep the South a white man's country.

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102. *Virginia Sun,* Nov. 16, 1892.
103. Clinton *Caucasian,* Nov. 10, 1892.
104. There is no mention of the Negro's role in the election in the *Progressive Farmer* issues of Nov. 15, 22, 29; Dec. 6, 13, 20, 1892; or Jan. 3, 10, 17, 1893.
105. *Progressive Farmer,* Jan. 24, 1893.
106. *People's Party Paper,* Dec. 23, 1892.