To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Connie Lee Lester entitled "Grassroots Reform in the Age of Bourbon Democracy and New South Agriculture: The Agricultural Wheel, the Farmers' Alliance, and the People's Party in Tennessee, 1884-1892." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in history.

James C. Cobb, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of The Graduate School

Grassroots Reform in the Age of New South Agriculture and Bourbon Democracy: The Agricultural Wheel, The Farmers' Alliance, and The People's Party in Tennessee, 1884-1892

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Connie Lee Lester

May 1998

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of

George Cuthbert Lester

and

Dennis Floyd Gowder

By example, they taught me to love the land,
to treasure knowledge,
and to persevere in the face of adversity

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never faltered in their belief that dissertations do have conclusions. Most importantly, I owe thanks to my children, Robert and Sarah Gowder, who gave perspective to everything. You have always been the joy and hope of my life.

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Abstract

As with other southern states, the scholarly investigations of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party in Tennessee focus on the activities of political elites within the Democratic Party and the actions of elected officials in the state legislature. Scholars generally relegate the Tennessee agrarian reform experience to the historical sidelines, probably as a result of the quick demise of the People's Party as an important factor in the state's politics. The Tennessee agrarian reform movement has been characterized as unfocused and inconsequential, and its leaders dismissed as demagogues and self-serving office seekers.

This study proposes that although the agrarian movement in Tennessee attracted landowning farmers to its ranks, the Agricultural Wheel and the Farmer's Alliance developed cooperative agencies, educational programs, and political activism that both questioned and threatened New South industrialism and the political control of the Bourbon planter elite. The agrarian potential for disruption of the state's economic and political *status quo* united the New South and Bourbon leaders of the Democratic party against the rural reformers and ended agrarian political momentum.

Late nineteenth-century Tennessee was divided by geography, history, political partisanship, culture, race, and agricultural production. In order to understand the agricultural problems and the development of the grassroots political organization, this study uses the 1891 Congressional districts to compare agricultural production, tenancy, and electoral behavior. Without the benefit of an 1890 manuscript census, the study relies on aggregate census figures, state agricultural reports, and Congressional investigations to determine agricultural production and the problems

associated with market changes and declining prices. The words and actions of the men and women who filled positions of leadership and made up the rank and file of the Agricultural Wheel, the Farmers' Alliance, and the People's Party in Tennessee provide the sources for understanding the nature of agrarian insurgency. Letters to the agrarian newspapers, Wheel and Alliance minute books, and diaries are the sources of the voices of dissent in rural Tennessee at the turn of the century.

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Introduction

During the bitter gubernatorial campaign of 1892, newspaperman and Democratic stalwart Edward W. Carmack held a rally in Obion County, the heartland of the Agricultural Wheel and the Farmers' Alliance. In the course of his harangue against the candidacy of John P. Buchanan, Carmack offered a description of the Populists who supported the incumbent governor. "If you should dig down under the mudsills of Hell," he intoned, "you would find Populists down there!" [1]

Carmack's statement stands in sharp contrast to most scholarly evaluations, which depict the Tennessee segment of the late nineteenth century agrarian uprising as relatively inconsequential and point to the failure of Alliance legislators to introduce or enact bills to implement the national organizational demands. Likewise, once the Populist heyday ended, contemporaries characterized the state's farmers as lukewarm in their response to the economic and political demands of the Wheel, Alliance, and People's Party.

This study proposes that Carmack's impassioned denunciation of the Populists and the simultaneous marshalling of every major Democratic figure in the state in opposition to agrarian political and economic assertiveness more accurately represents the agrarian threat. The grassroots reform efforts of the self-defined "middle-class" farmers, who joined and led the Wheel and Alliance, threatened to overturn the social, political, and economic control exercised by the Bourbon planter elite and New South industrialists of the Democratic Party. Acting on what one newspaper editor called the "Tennessee Plan," the Wheel and Alliance elected the governor (one of only four

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1 Rebel C. Forrester and Betty B. Woods, *"I Had a Real Good Time": The Making of a Country Editor: The Recollections of James M. Brice of the "News-Banner" of Troy, Tennessee (1862-1926)* (Union City: Lanzer Printing Company, 1984), 172.

southern states to do so) and a significant minority of the Tennessee General Assembly in the 1890 elections. If the governor and farmer-legislators proceeded cautiously, they and their constituents had every expectation of maintaining control of the governor's seat and increasing their numbers in the 1893 General Assembly, thereby positioning the farmers to name Tennessee's next United States Senator. Such a possibility threatened the political power of the Bourbon elites, who held both Senate seats, and alarmed New South proponents, who needed supportive legislation to further their industrial and commercial aims. Indeed, former Democratic governors, legislators, and both U.S. Senators depicted the intraparty struggle as class warfare and successfully exiled the agrarians from the party, thus insuring their political demise.

The origins of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party account for much of the historiographical debate. Did agrarian reform emerge from the economic ravages of late nineteenth-century depression in farm prices, or was it indicative of long-standing class conflict? Historians of southern populism emphasize the economic constraints imposed by the postbellum lack of credit, the emergence of the crop lien system of financing agricultural production, and the resulting dependence on cotton or tobacco production in defiance of plummeting market prices. The work of economists Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch, as well as that of Gavin Wright, provides convincing evidence of the financial trap that ensnared the unsuspecting farmers in a cycle of debt and cotton, limiting not only individual economic options, but regional economic progress. Although Tennessee's climate and soil limited cotton and tobacco production and fostered greater agricultural diversity, the work of Donald Winters and Robert Tracy McKenzie demonstrates that the declining prospects of Upper South

agriculture in the late nineteenth century mimicked that of the Lower South in effect if not in particulars. [2]

State and local studies like that of Steven Hahn support the view of small, safety-first farmers drawn into cotton production during flush times, only to find themselves unable to return to self-sufficiency or diversified agriculture when cotton no longer brought high prices. Hahn's sympathetic presentation of the dilemma generated by the movement from safety-first agriculture to commercial production provides a defining moment, with the arrival of the railroads, when yeomen lost control over the crop decisions and the marketing of their produce, and began the transformation that created agrarian insurgency. [3]

In contrast to the emphasis of historians and economists on the economic constraints that fueled agrarian discontent, sociologists point to persistent class conflict that erupted under the pressure of depressed farm prices. Utilizing mobilization theory and Marxist modes of analysis, Donna Barnes suggests that the Populist uprising coincided with economic depression but tapped a deeper reservoir of class conflict between the adherents of traditional economic organization and the advocates of the modern capitalist system. [4]

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2 Robert Tracy McKenzie, *One South or Many?: Plantation Belt and Upcountry in Civil War-Era Tennessee* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Donald L. Winters, *Tennessee Farming, Tennessee Farmers: Antebellum Agriculture in the Upper South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994); Gavin Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1978); Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (New York: W. W. Norton, Inc., 1986).

3 Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

4 Donna A. Barnes, *Farmers in Rebellion: The Rise and Fall of the Southern Farmers Alliance and People's Party in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984).

Questions about the source of Populist discontent often lead to speculation about the extent of agrarian radicalism. How "radical" were the Populist demands? In his attempts to refute an earlier view of populism as devoid of ideological structure, Norman Pollack tied the writings of midwestern agrarian editors to Marxist and Socialist underpinnings. Students of southern agrarian reform trace its political ideology to that of Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson, but conclude that the cooperative movement and demand for a subtreasury system represented radical alternatives to the late nineteenth-century enthusiasm for a capitalist-industrial economy. Lawrence Goodwyn suggested that the appeal of the Alliance movement rested on the cooperative effort. Indeed, he asserted that the success of Populism can be measured by the intensity of cooperativism. While placing less emphasis on cooperativism and stopping short of accepting the Marxist and Socialist intention of agrarian reform, Robert McMath, Bruce Palmer, and Michael Schwartz promoted a view of the agrarian uprising as a radical restructuring of the politics and economics to place both under the control of the voters and producers. [5]

In separate studies, Barton Shaw, William Cooper, Roger Hart, and Sheldon Hackney raised a note of skepticism concerning the so-called radicalism of the agrarian reformers and Populists. Each of these historians points to the failure of agrarian controlled legislatures to implement their own demands as indicative of their lack of

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[5] Norman Pollack, *The Populist Response to Industrial America: Midwestern Populist Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962). Pollack intended to refute the view of Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955). Laurence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Movement in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Robert C. McMath, Jr., *Populist Vanguard: A History of the Southern Farmers' Alliance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975); McMath, *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); Bruce Palmer, *"Man Over Money": The Southern Populist Critique of American Capitalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Michael Schwartz, *Radical Protest and Social Structure: The Southern Farmers' Alliance and Cotton Tenancy, 1880-1890* (New York: Academic Press, 1976).

radicalism. Another common thread that tied Populists to more traditional political leaders was their adherence to the tenets of white supremacy. These researchers found little evidence to separate the Populist leadership from that of the post-Civil War Democratic party. Pointing to the persistence of old political antagonisms, the desire of younger Democrats for the offices held by aging Redeemers, or the problems of status anxiety among men newly exposed to the rough-and-tumble world of the market economy, these historians suggested an agrarianism fueled by political resentment rather than economic necessity. [6]

The problem of racism and nativism in Alliance and Populist rhetoric and the simultaneous attempts to develop agrarian organizations among African-American farmers raises the question of whether the agrarian reformers represented an alternative to white supremacy and racial strife or a continuation of racial divisions. C. Vann Woodward presented a revisionist's view when he proposed in 1938 that the Farmers' Alliance opened a window of opportunity for improved racial relations, uniting farmers by class rather than dividing them by race. While subsequent scholars also pointed enthusiastically to the presence of African Americans on Alliance committees and the white support for black agrarian organizations, they concluded that Alliance and Populist attitudes represented paternalism rather than a step toward racial equality. [7]

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6 William J. Cooper, Jr., *The Conservative Regime: South Carolina, 1877-1890* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968); Sheldon Hackney, *Populism to Progressivism in Alabama* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969); Roger Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons, & Populists: Tennessee, 1870-1896* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975); Barton C. Shaw, *The Wool Hat Boys: Georgia's Populist Party* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984).

7 C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1938); Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955, 1957, 1974); Woodward, *Origins of The New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951, 1971).

In Tennessee, the problem of white supremacy and racism in the agrarian organization takes on added importance, since the state became one of the first to disfranchise African-American voters, with the aid of Alliance legislators. Southern politics produced numerous claims of election fraud and ballot box stuffing, and Democrats persistently raised fears of federal electoral intervention. The climate of fear surrounding southern elections fostered the willingness to disfranchise African Americans, who routinely voted Republican. In the process, disfranchisement laws stymied agrarian reform efforts by denying the ballot to lower-class whites. [8]

The evidence of mass enthusiasm for the political and economic agenda of the agrarian reformers leads to the final question confronting historians: why was Populism politically ineffective despite modest gubernatorial, legislative, and congressional victories throughout the South and the Midwest? Was Populism defeated by the tactics of stronger political parties, or did it succumb to its own inherent weaknesses? Much of the political historiography focuses on the issue of fusion. In the Upper South, Populist fusion with the minority Republican Party offered an opportunity to gain office in Democratically controlled counties, but inevitably opened the reformers to attacks by the most radical white supremacists. Nationally, fusion with the Democratic Party in the presidential election of 1896 signaled the climax of Populist influence. On the other hand, Bruce Palmer pointed to internal weaknesses and argued that Populism never successfully confronted the

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8 J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); Roger L. Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons, & Populists*; Gerald H. Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Revolt: Ballots and Bigotry in the "New South"* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1977); Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Joseph H. Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow: Tennessee Race Relations in the 1880s* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976).

conflicts between a moderate policy of currency expansion and the radical demand for economic reform implicit in the subtreasury proposal. The recent scholarship of Jeffrey Ostler demonstrates the importance of local political factors in determining the fate of Populism. Third party formation proved most effective in areas previously dominated by single-party politics and provided an alternative avenue of relief for the disgruntled. In an area where both Democrats and Republicans competed for political power, agrarian reformers played one party against the other to achieve their goals, and third partyism langquished. Nationally, Ostler explained the demise of Populism as the consequence of American federalism, which inhibited third party formation. [9]

The progress of Populist historiography follows a clear path. Until the 1960s, historians as widely divergent as John D. Hicks and Richard Hofstadter debated the issues of Populism from the perspective of a national movement, with little regard for the political, social, and economic differences that separated the farmers of various regions. Revisionist and New Left historians of the 1960s and 1970s engaged in state studies, employing quantitative methodologies to illuminate economic problems and political responses to the issues of the late nineteenth century. The newest generation of scholars takes the study of Populism to the grassroots level and incorporates agricultural history and gender studies to understand the farmer and his wife in their own world as well as the political and economic forces that affected them. [10]

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9 Robert F. Durden, *The Climax of Populism: The Election of 1896* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1965); Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*; Palmer, *Man Over Money*; Jeffrey Ostler, *Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, 1880-1892* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993).

10 John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961, first published in 1931); Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*; Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*; McMath, *Populist Vanguard*; David R. Danborn, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Jeanette Keith, *Country People in the New South: Tennessee's Upper Cumberland* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

The story of grassroots reform among Tennessee farmers remains untold. Beginning in the 1880s the state entered a remarkable period of agrarian unrest that lasted until the second decade of the twentieth century. It included the reform efforts of the Agricultural Wheel, the Farmers' Alliance, and the People's Party in the 1880s and 1890s; the Black Patch Tobacco War of the early twentieth century; and the uprising at Reelfoot Lake in 1908. Recent studies on the Black Patch War incorporated the historiography of class, race, and gender with more traditional studies of politics and economics. Paul Vanderwood's examination of the Reelfoot Lake uprising provides the most recent scholarly attention to that conflict. Only two monographs delved into the history of the state's late nineteenth-century agrarian movement. Both Daniel Robison and Roger Hart concluded that Tennessee farmers avoided the radicalism characteristic of agrarian organizations in other states and offered little serious challenge to the political *status quo.* While briefly arousing the fears of the entrenched political elites in both the Bourbon wing and the New South wing of the Democratic Party, the agrarians proved to be "conservative" in their demands and actions, offering few impediments to railroad and industrial development. [11]

The earlier studies focused on the Tennessee General Assembly and the political fortunes of the state's governors, particularly Robert L. (Bob) Taylor and John P. Buchanan. Robison suggested that Taylor's popularity marshaled agrarian forces for its later insurgency, implying that the election of "Our Bob" acted as a

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11 Tracy Campbell, *The Politics of Despair: Power & Resistance in the Tobacco Wars* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993); Christopher Waldrep, *Night Riders: Defending Community in the Black Patch, 1890-1915* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons, & Populists*; Daniel Merritt Robison, *Bob Taylor and the Agrarian Revolt in Tennessee* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935); Paul J. Vanderwood, *Nightriders of Reelfoot Lake* (Memphis: University of Memphis Press, 1969).

lightning rod for agrarian discontent that otherwise lacked political focus. Proposing Taylor as the harbinger of Populism, Robison largely ignored agrarian dissatisfaction in the 1870s and early 1880s. More importantly, he failed to explore the developing perceptions of unity between industrial labor and agrarian reformers. Robison's reluctance to acknowledge the importance of the state's most radical and violent confrontation between labor and the New South industrialists reflected the attitude of his subject. Taylor also distanced himself from the thorniest issues of the day, taking refuge in his fiddle playing and his stock of humorous stories to avoid defining his views on state and national issues. Farmers enjoyed his jokes on the stump, but recognized his limitations in the pursuit of their interests.

In the other major work on the period, Roger Hart explained Populism through a statistical analysis of the voting patterns of farmers and legislators. He meticulously followed voting trends through more than two decades in an attempt to find the economic and political origins of men who voted for Populist candidates. In addition, he compared the voting records of Alliance legislators with those of other Democrats and Republicans in the General Assembly of 1891. His voter data demonstrated the absence of a clear base for voting patterns, since Alliance legislators failed to support anti-trust and anti-railroad laws and often voted against legislation potentially beneficial to their constituents. Hart concluded that the Alliance and Populist uprising reflected discontent produced by status anxiety afflicting men reluctantly drawn into the market economy. He dismissed the Alliance and Populist leaders as demagogues and office seekers, who viewed the agrarian organization as a mechanism for winning elections.

This study of the Alliance and the People's Party begins at the community level, with the farmer and his wife. Farmers interpreted the economic changes and the

impact of markets in the light of their own production. What concerned cotton farmers did not necessarily interest tobacco planters, peanut growers, or women engaged in poultry production. The diversity of Tennessee's agriculture and its conflicting demands produced a cautious attitude among agrarian leaders who hoped to build a statewide organization. No matter how positively New South proponents presented the potential for market development, many Tennessee farmers lacked access to capital to make improvements and diversify production. The demand for capital varied across the state, from a high demand among commercially-oriented western farmers to a smaller demand from self-sufficient farmers in the mountains and on the Cumberland Plateau. Chapter One outlines the economic context in which the Wheel and Alliance emerged and suggests that economic concerns associated with the market decisions made by smaller, landowning farmers account for the stronger support that agrarian insurgency received in the Ninth Congressional District.

The agrarian movement also arose within the context of the most vigorous two-party political system in the South. In addition, the factionalism of the Tennessee Democratic Party occasionally reached such levels of divisiveness that outside political observers renewed their predictions of Republican domination--and indeed, the Republicans managed to capture the governorship in the 1880 election. At the same time, an African-American political reawakening, with its insistence on a share of offices and demands for a proportional share of state educational revenues, added to the political turmoil in which the agrarian movement emerged. Chapter Two provides the political background for understanding the emergence of the Wheel and Alliance and suggests that agrarian discontent was not a sudden phenomenon, but had percolated just below the political surface for more than a decade before the arrival of the Wheel.

Unlike some members of the Southern Farmers' Alliance, many Tennessee farmers had joined another similar agrarian organization, the Agricultural Wheel, before the Alliance made its first appearance. Chapter Three outlines the development of the two organizations and their merger into the Farmers' Alliance and Laborers' Union in 1889. This chapter suggests that agrarian leaders moved cautiously to overcome the historically divisive issue of partisanship and the new problems of race and gender.

Chapter Four discusses the agrarian organizations within the context of social changes and the pervasiveness of southern traditionalism. Agrarian leadership rested on the shoulders of Civil War veterans, who felt the impact of the mythology of the "Lost Cause" and carried the daily reminders of war itself. Since most agrarian leaders in Tennessee fought in the enlisted ranks, the tension between Bourbon leaders, many of whom had served as officers, and the agrarians raises new possibilities for understanding class conflict. In addition to class and tradition, agrarian leaders confronted the demands of race and gender. Both the Wheel and the Alliance provided a form of membership for women and African Americans: local organizations could admit women as non-voting members, while African Americans formed separate but parallel organizations in the Colored Wheel and the Colored Alliance. Even this limited inclusion challenged tradition in important ways and separated the conservative farmers from other political and social conservatives.

The Wheel and Alliance struggled to create unity through concerted action. They developed cooperatives for buying and selling, established a statewide newspaper, and mounted a boycott against the jute cartel. Nevertheless, Chapter Five suggests that too many farmers remained focused on local conditions and problems,

thereby weakening the statewide organization and insuring the failure to make the transition into the People's Party.

Agrarian organizers favored a nonpartisan approach to the political solutions they believed necessary to solve their economic problems. Nevertheless, Wheel and Alliance candidates most often sought office in the Democratic Party. Increasingly successful in their political campaigns, Wheelers and Alliancemen captured control of the Democratic machinery in several counties and worked diligently to remain in the Democratic Party. Indeed, they abandoned the so-called "Tennessee Plan" and left the Democratic Party only after being denied access to the party's nominating process. Chapters Six and Seven outline the political rise of the Wheel and Alliance, the organizations' failures and accomplishments, and the Bourbon and New South resistance to the agrarian movement. The two chapters further suggest that once the agrarian radicals had been removed from the Democratic Party and isolated in the People's Party, efforts at fusion with the Republican Party failed as the result of the focus of Republican leaders on building and protecting personal patronage systems to the exclusion of larger aims.

Throughout their existence, both the Tennessee Wheel and Alliance struggled to overcome a multitude of disunifying factors to build organizations with the "stickability" necessary to bring about agrarian reform. To achieve their goals, agrarian leaders limited aims and objectives and, in their own words, made haste slowly. Yet as the Democratic Party's hostile reactions to agrarian successes in 1888 and 1890 demonstrate, the Wheel and Alliance movement provided what seemed to be a very real threat to the prevailing economic and political order in late nineteenth-century Tennessee.

Chapter 1: Surveying the Barnyards: Tennessee Farmers in the Age of Agrarian Reform

How many heartfuls of sorrow shall balance a bushel of wheat?
W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk,* 1903

Active capital to provide suitable labor and tools, and to enable them to hold their crops for the best prices, is probably one of the greatest needs of the farmers of Tennessee.
Joseph B. Killebrew, *Resources of Tennessee*

Worm or beetle, drought or tempest, on a farmer's land may fall,
But for first class ruination, trust a mortgage gainst them all!
Will Carlton, "The Mortgage," 1888

The principal problem facing farmers in the last decades of the nineteenth century was economic. The transformation of the American economy to an urban, industrial society affected the agricultural sector by drawing increasing numbers of farmers into a cash-based market economy that depended less on local exchanges of goods and services and tied the value of farm products to regional, national, and even international markets. The consequences of this transformation fell on farmers throughout the nation, but no one experienced greater disruption than the southern farmers. Having survived the ravages of civil war, they knew first-hand the struggle of recovery and rebuilding. Now, in the last decades of the century, interest in agrarian organizations like the Agricultural Wheel and the Farmers' Alliance emerged from the economic concerns associated with the market decisions made by smaller, landowning farmers. In Tennessee, the stronger support for agrarian insurgency found in the Ninth Congressional District reflects the problems faced by these small, market-oriented farmers.

Farming has always been a risky undertaking, perverse in its rewards and penalties. Bountiful harvests produce low prices, and meager crops, rescued from drought, flood, or pests, reward the lucky or the persistent with higher prices. By the last decade of the nineteenth century the familiar complaints against weather and prices took on a new intensity as farmers across the South struggled against what they perceived as man-made challenges: national and international markets controlled by futures trading and industrial trusts, differential transportation costs, the agrarian dependence on store credit rather than access to capital, and rising tax burdens to fund the progressive changes associated with an industrializing "New South." In their view, hard work no longer produced its just rewards, but indebtedness and failure. Believing that the farmer of the first half of the century counted himself among the beneficiaries of the American economy, they argued that he now recognized that debt, taxes, and transportation costs combined with downward spiraling prices to produce a situation where "the financial demands made today are not so easily met as in 1850, or thirty years ago." Many farmers complained that debts that could be paid with ten bales of cotton in 1870 required almost twice that many by 1890. To them and their families the benefits of the new industrial society remained out of reach, prompting farm women like Melia Wilburn to ask, "Why is it, that in the great middle class to which we belong as compared with twenty years ago we find ourselves so much lower down in the scale of real possessions?" The men and women of the Wilson County Alliance to whom Wilburn posed that question probably nodded in agreement with her assessment of their lack of progress and thought back nostalgically to better times and brighter hopes. [1]

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[1] *The Weekly Toiler* (hereafter cited as *Toiler*), October 10, 1888. Melia Wilburn's speech was presented at the meeting of the Wilson County Farmers' Alliance at Barton's Creek on 3 April 1890 and reported in the *Toiler*, 23 April 1890.

In the 1890s few seriously doubted the legitimacy of the farmers' complaints about economic decline. The work of early historians of Tennessee's agrarian movement provided the statistical evidence of hard times. Corinne Westphal wrote the first comprehensive study of the state's agrarian uprising, in which the decline in farm size and the drop in prices served as *prima facie* evidence of economic problems. In 1931, Joseph A. Sharp focused on the political aspects of agrarian actions but did not challenge the assumption of economic decline. More sophisticated statistical analyses failed to tie class differences to political action and led Roger Hart to conclude that, although farmers experienced economic difficulties, Tennessee's experience with the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party resulted from the political aspirations of men denied advancement in the established political parties. Finding no evidence of class conflict, Hart attributed the agrarian agitation to status anxiety induced by social changes associated with the Gilded Age. James Tice Moore found Tennessee's farmers' revolt "half-hearted in tone and limited in scope." Moore explained this "reluctant rebellion" by pointing to "the relatively prosperous condition of the state's agricultural economy." His assessment of the relative prosperity rested on a diversified agriculture of cotton, tobacco, corn, wheat, and livestock, coupled with the expansion of owner-operated farms made possible by the state's comparatively low interest rate of six percent. [2]

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[2] Corinne Westphal, "The Farmers' Alliance in Tennessee" (MA thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1929); Joseph A. Sharp, "The Farmers' Alliance and Tennessee Politics, 1890-1892," (MA thesis, University of Tennessee, 1931); Roger Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons, & Populists, 1870-1896*, (Baton Rouge:Louisiana State University Press, 1975); James Tice Moore, "Agrarianism and Populism in Tennessee, 1886-1896: An Interpretive Overview," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 44 (1983): 357-378. For a regional view of agriculture in West Tennessee, see Sarah Frances Smith, "Post-Civil War Agriculture in West Tennessee" (MA thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1945).

Recent historiography raises interesting questions about the complacency of Tennessee's farmers. State studies from other areas involved in agrarian protest demonstrate that the program of the Farmers' Alliance and the political demands of the People's Party had greater appeal for the middle class than previously recognized. In addition, Robert Tracy McKenzie's thorough analysis of agricultural conditions in selected Tennessee counties, in the period 1850-1880, raises new questions about earlier assumptions regarding the prosperity of the state's farmers. McKenzie directed his research toward the problem of continuity and discontinuity in the economic class distinctions between the antebellum and postbellum South. His conclusions suggested a third possibility---the development of internal economic dissimilarity within the southern region. As McKenzie showed, superficially, the rise of tenancy and declining farm size across the state's Grand Divisions supported a view of increasing similarity in outlook and concerns for Tennessee farmers. A closer inspection of the data failed to support the original assumption. Decisions regarding tenancy, market production, and self-sufficiency rested on local factors, including the causes of tenancy, the attitudes toward tenancy, climate and soil fertility, and access to transportation. At least until 1880 the decision to produce for the market proved economically sound for Middle and West Tennessee farmers, who enjoyed the benefits of good soil and better access to transportation. As these farmers looked to the eastern portion of the state, they saw impoverishment as the only reward for self-sufficiency. Although McKenzie did not address the period of agrarian uprising, his call for a closer look at "how southern farmers perceived change within the circumference of their own barnyards," offers a new perspective for understanding the decisions to embrace radical calls for change or uphold the *status quo*.[3]

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[3] Robert Tracy McKenzie, "From Old South to New South in the Volunteer State: The

As historians survey the barnyards, they have chosen a variety of ways to measure its circumference. As already indicated, McKenzie confined his study to selected counties in the mountainous region of East Tennessee, the rolling hills of Middle Tennessee, and the plantation region of West Tennessee. Westphal, Sharp, and Moore all dealt with the state as a whole. Hart's statistical analysis compared political activity as a function of economic indicators in the three geographic divisions of East, Middle, and West Tennessee. McKenzie's local analysis suggests that regional or state groupings may mask important differences that could account for individual decisions regarding agrarian activism. In an attempt to survey the barnyards more closely, this study will focus on the Farmers' Alliance and the Populists by examining change within the political organizational structure favored by the protesters: the local (county) Alliance and the Congressional district association. [4]

Economy and Society of Rural Tennessee, 1850-1880" (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1988); Robert Tracy McKenzie, *One South or Many?: Plantation Belt and Upcountry in Civil War-Era Tennessee* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Recent scholarly work on the economic status of the members of the Farmers' Alliance that focused on the role of middle class farmers includes Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), particularly Chapter 9, "Alliances"; and Jeffrey Ostler, *Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, 1880-1892* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993). Moore, "Agrarianism and Populism in Tennessee": 76, 94; McKenzie, "From Old South to New South," from a quote by Fabian Linden, 67, 273. For a discussion of the effects of agricultural market decisions, see Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the MidWest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); David B. Danborn, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Theodore R. Mitchell and Robert Lowe, "To Sow Discontent: Philanthropy, Scientific Agriculture, and the Making of the New South, 1906-1920," *Journal of Social History* 24 (1990): 317-340.

[4] For the purposes of comparison, the counties for the ten Congressional Districts for each decade have been manipulated to conform to the 1891 districting. In 1891, Tennessee was divided into Congressional Districts, as follows:

District 1: Johnson, Carter, Sullivan, Washington, Unicoi, Hawkins, Greene, Hamblen, Hancock, Claiborne, Cocke, Grainger

District 2: Jefferson, Union, Sevier, Blount, Knox, Loudon, Roane, Anderson, Morgan, Campbell, Scott

District 3: Monroe, Polk, Bradley, Hamilton, James, McMinn, Bledsoe, Grundy, Van Buren, White, Warren, Franklin, Marion, Meigs, Sequatchie

Contemporary observations of southern agriculture associated the economic decline of the region with the breakdown of plantations into small farms, the rise of tenancy, and the continued dependency on cotton. Taken together, the three conditions condemned many of the South's farmers to poverty. Forced to buy provisions on credit, tenants fell victim to the crop lien system and entered into debt peonage. Later, historians of the era pointed to these farmers as the instigators and agitators for the Farmers' Alliance. Populist historiography upheld the view that farm size, tenancy, and agricultural production must be understood both as measures of economic strain and as barometers of potential agrarian protest. [5]

District 4: Sumner, Wilson, Macon, Trousdale, Smith, Clay, Jackson, Overton, Putnam, Fentress, Pickett, Cumberland, Rhea
District 5: Coffee, Lincoln, Moore, Rutherford, Marshall, Bedford, Cannon, DeKalb
District 6: Davidson, Robertson, Cheatham, Montgomery, Stewart, Humphreys, Houston
District 7: Williamson, Maury, Giles, Lawrence, Wayne, Lewis, Hickman, Dickson
District 8: Henry, Benton, Perry, Decatur, Hardin, McNairy, Henderson, Madison, Carroll, Chester
District 9: Weakley, Gibson, Crockett, Haywood, Lauderdale, Dyer, Obion, Lake
District 10: Hardeman, Fayette, Shelby, Tipton

This organization of counties into Congressional Districts is in accordance with the redistricting enacted by the Tennessee General Assembly in 1891 and in effect during the heyday of the agrarian movement. *Acts of the State of Tennessee Passed by the 47th General Assembly, 1891*, 293-294. The only changes that were made from the previous redistricting in 1882 involved Cumberland, Rhea, Franklin, and DeKalb counties in the third, fourth, and fifth districts. See Charles A. Miller, *The Official and Political Manual of the State of Tennessee*, (Spartanburg, S. C., 1974, originally published 1890), 59. See Appendix A-1 for a map of Tennessee counties and Congressional districts for 1891.

[5] Contemporary writings on the subject include Frank T. Carlton, "The South During the Last Decade," *The Sewanee Review* 12 (1904): 174-181; George K. Holmes, "Tenancy in the United States," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 10 (1895): 34-53; George K. Holmes, "The Peons of the South," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 4 (1893): 265-274. Recent historiography focusing on farm tenancy, debt, and agrarian discontent includes Lacy K. Ford, "Rednecks and Merchants: Economic Development and Social Tensions in the South Carolina Upcountry, 1865-1900," *Journal of American History* 71 (1984): 294-318; Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Movement in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); and Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

Other historians of the agrarian rebellion pointed to the introduction of agricultural newcomers to the market economy as the source of discontent. The advancement of the railroads into previously isolated and self-sufficient economies produced demands for reform. Farmers in the upcountry counties gravitated toward radical programs aimed at bringing markets and middlemen under control and increasing the availability of money. While each of these explanations provides a piece of the agrarian puzzle, none fully accounts for the agrarian unrest in Tennessee. [6]

The agricultural history of Tennessee unfolded within the geographic reality of extreme diversity. More than four hundred miles in distance from east to west, the state stretched from the Unaka Range to the Mississippi River. Soil fertility ranged from the hilly, thin soils on the ridgetops of East Tennessee and across the Cumberland Plateau to the rich alluvial soils of West Tennessee. Most important for the development of specialized agricultural production, the variations in climate resulted in growing seasons that ranged from 160 days in the northeastern portion of the state to more than 240 days in the southwestern corner. As a result, statistical similarities between regions sometimes masked important differences in market decisions. [7]

Overall, the size of farms in Tennessee decreased throughout the period 1860-1910. By 1880, if not earlier, "small farms had become the hallmark of Tennessee agriculture." With few exceptions, each federal census recorded the shrinking size of

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6 See Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Albert D. Kirwan, *Revolt of the Rednecks: Mississippi Politics, 1876-1925* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1951); Sheldon Hackney, *Populism to Progressivism in Alabama* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969); and James Turner, "Understanding the Populists," *Journal of American History* 67 (1980): 354-373.

7 J. B. Killebrew, *Introduction to the Resources of Tennessee* (Nashville: Bureau of Agriculture, 1874, r.p. 1974), 1-54; Richard Gildrie, "Ecosytems," in *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, forthcoming 1998).

the region's farms, and McKenzie's recent survey concludes that: "One of the most conspicuous developments in southern agriculture . . . was the rapid disappearance of the plantation system of production . . . and a drastic, widespread decline in the scale of agricultural operations." In the old plantation district in the southwestern corner of Tennessee, median farm size dropped by two-thirds, while in East and Middle Tennessee, median farm size fell by nearly one-half during the same period. As Table 1.1 indicates, both farm size and number of improved acres per farm generally declined across the state. [8]

Table 1.1. Average Farm Size in the Ten Congressional Districts of Tennessee, 1880-1910

	Average Farm Size in Acres			
	1880	1890	1900	1910
State	124.8 (51)*	115.6 (54)	90.6 (46)	81.5 (44)
District 1	130.0 (55)	108.8 (54)	82.2 (52)	73.6 (45)
District 2	141.8 (53)	131.3 (53)	95.5 (38)	84.3 (45)
District 3	161.7 (60)	145.4 (61)	111.6 (44)	110.8 (52)
District 4	113.5 (52)	111.7 (52)	91.6 (44)	85.0 (43)
District 5	107.2 (56)	108.7 (61)	90.9 (50)	83.2 (48)
District 6	135.6 (58)	137.3 (63)	97.8 (51)	90.6 (50)
District 7	135.6 (54)	178.5 (57)	105.1 (49)	102.6 (48)
District 8	127.0 (41)	124.0 (45)	94.4 (39)	92.0 (39)
District 9	87.3 (40)	87.6 (41)	70.9 (44)	58.4 (41)
District 10	110.2 (50)	98.8 (52)	70.2 (38)	57.4 (36)

Source: *United States Census: Agriculture*, 1880, 1890, 1900, 1910.
*Numbers in parentheses represent the average number of improved acres per farm. For purposes of comparison, the Congressional Districts in this table conform to the 1891 apportionment. See footnote 4 in this chapter for a county listing.

[8] McKenzie, *One South or Many?*, 151-152. As McKenzie viewed the change, he suggested that "the combined effect of these changes was to eliminate entirely the disparity in farm size that had distinguished the state's major regions before emancipation."

Overall, the pattern of decline is evident, as the average farm size in Tennessee dropped from 124.8 acres in 1880 to 81.5 acres by 1910, with a thirty-year decline in farm size of almost 35 percent. In 1890, three districts--five, six, and seven--showed a modest increase in farm size. By 1900, however, the brief expansion of farm size in those districts had been reversed and conformed to the state pattern of decline. [9]

Not only did overall farm size decrease within the state, but the average size of Tennessee farms remained persistently below that of most other southern states, with South Carolina the only consistent exception. Table 1.2 shows the average acres per farm in the southern states in the period 1880 to 1910.

Table 1.2. Average Farm Size in the Southern States, 1880-1910

	Average Acres per Farm			
	1880	1890	1900	1910
Tennessee	125	116	91	82
Alabama	139	126	93	79
Arkansas	128	119	93	81
Florida	141	107	107	105
Georgia	188	147	118	93
Louisiana	171	138	95	87
Mississippi	156	122	83	68
South Carolina	143	115	90	77
Virginia	167	150	119	106
North Carolina	142	127	101	88
Texas	208	225	357	269

Source: *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970* (1975), 461.

9 *Eleventh Census: Report on Population of the United States, Part I* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1895); Nannie Haskins Williams Diary, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 6 August 1888.

By 1910, the average farm size in Tennessee was 34.4 percent smaller than farms in 1880. The decrease in farm size is comparable to that of other Upper South states, such as Arkansas at 36.7 percent and Virginia with 36.5 percent. Deep South States reduced the acreage per farm at a faster rate than that experienced by Upper South farms. For example, Georgia farms were 50.5 percent smaller, Alabama farms 43.2 percent smaller, and Mississippi farms 56.4 percent smaller than the average farm size in their state in 1880. Tennessee's farmers might perceive their situation as superior to that of the Deep South, but there were obviously pockets of concern, particularly in the eight counties that composed the Ninth and Tenth Congressional districts, where average farm size was 22-30 percent smaller than the state figures in the period 1880-1910. Declining economic prospects portended a troubling future, particularly for the Ninth District with its good soil, yeoman farm history, and access to both northern and southern markets. Here the agrarian reform movement in Tennessee gained its first adherents and raised up its first and most enduring leaders. Although the Tenth District produced pockets of agrarian concern, only Shelby County displayed strong adherence to Wheel and Alliance ideology. In some measure this disparity probably reflects the greater number of African-American sharecroppers and tenants in this district and the failure of the Wheel and Alliance to fully organize black farmers. [10]

McKenzie found that in the previous two decades, 1860-1880, "the white farm population of Tennessee as a whole increased by two-fifths," although the total

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10 *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970*, Part I (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), 461. Average farm size declined even more sharply during the period 1860 to 1890. Tennessee farms were 54 percent smaller in 1890 than they had been in 1860, dropping from an average of 250.9 acres per farm to 115.6 acres per farm. Other southern states showed a similar pattern, with Georgia farms 66 percent smaller by 1890 and Alabama farms reduced by 64 percent.

number of acres in farm production remained unchanged. Therefore, the growth of the white agricultural population was largely attributable to the expansion of farm ownership. That pattern continued until 1890 when census reports indicated that farm owners operated 69.2 percent of the state's farms. Thereafter the pattern changed in a more alarming way. Although the number of farms increased by 10.7 percent between 1890 and 1900, the percentage of farm owners fell to 59.4 percent. By 1910, despite a further increase in the number of farms by 8.6 percent, ownership stood at 58.9 percent. [11]

Farm ownership cannot be taken as an absolute measure of wealth, and contemporary agricultural economists routinely chastised farmers for retaining large tracts of unimproved acreage. Tennessee's foremost agricultural expert, Joseph B. Killebrew, asserted that "the attempt to cultivate too large a breadth of land is probably as fatal to the prosperity of the farmer as the want of means." He assured farmers that "an acre well cultivated can be made to yield as much as three half cultivated." Rural newspaper editors frequently pointed to excessive land holding among farmers as an extravagance they could no longer afford. But land had been considered a measure of independence throughout the history of the republic, and farmers could be expected to view the loss of land as an indicator of diminished economic, social, and political status. [12]

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11 McKenzie, *One South or Many?*, 154; *Thirteenth Census of the United States: Agriculture: Volume V* (Washington, D. C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1914), 126. By comparison farm ownership in Kentucky fell from 75 percent in 1890 to 66.1 percent in 1910; in Alabama ownership declined from 51.4 percent in 1890 to 39.8 percent in 1910; Mississippi showed a decline from 47.2 percent in 1890 to 33.9 percent in 1910; in Arkansas 67.9 percent of farms were owner-operated in 1890, but only 50.0 percent could make that claim in 1910; while Georgia reported a drop from 46.5 percent in 1890 to 34.4 percent in 1910.

12 Killebrew, *Resources of Tennessee*, 361; Dyersburg *State Gazette*, 2 May 1874.

Moreover, recent scholarly research confirms the view that declining farm size, even when accompanied by expanding ownership, represented a step backward. Farmers who worked smaller tracts of land remained less likely to implement new scientific agricultural practices or purchase expensive new farming technology. The long-term effects included overworked land, a reliance on low-wage farm labor, and regional poverty. [13]

The steady decline in farm size and percentage of owner-operators mirrored a corresponding rise in tenancy. Statewide the rate of tenancy rose from 34.5 percent in 1880 to 41 percent in 1910. By comparison, tenancy rates in other southern states rose as follows: In the South Atlantic States tenancy rates ranged from 36.1 percent in 1880 to 45.9 percent in 1910; in the same period tenancy in East South Central States climbed from 36.8 percent in 1880 to 50.7 percent by 1910; the West South Central States recorded similar changes from 35.2 percent in 1880 to 52.8 percent in 1910. Because of the uneven distribution of African Americans across the state, tenant farmers in East Tennessee were predominantly white. Indeed, whites accounted for the majority of the tenants in every congressional district, with the exception of the Tenth, which was made up of the four counties that most closely mimicked the

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13 Harold Woodman, "Class, Race, Politics, and the Modernization of the Postbellum South," *Journal of Southern History* 63 (1997): 3-22. In 1895, the Alliance Senator William A. Pfeffer recognized the problem of small farmers and suggested a variation on the cooperative effort to address their problems. He proposed farmer-initiated cooperative ventures similar to industrial incorporation. In his scheme, land became the investor's share in the cooperative. Farmers holding contiguous land would form a cooperative, with each farmer retaining full title to his own land. They would share in the purchase of farm equipment in order to reduce the cost and gain the full benefit of new technology. Though there is no indication that southern farmers acted on this suggestion, it demonstrates an awareness of the problems of smaller farms in an age of advancing technology. See *Senate Reports*: 53rd Congress, 3rd Session, No. 986: *Agricultural Depression: Causes and Remedies, Report by Mr. Pfeffer submitted to the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry* (Serial # 3288), 86.

plantation South. Table 1.3 provides evidence of the long-term increase in tenancy across the state, as well as the racial demography of tenancy. [14]

Table 1.3. Rate of Tenancy in the Ten Congressional Districts of Tennessee 1880-1910

	Percentage of Farms Operated by Tenants			
	1880	1890	1900	1910
State	34.5	30.8	40.3	41.0
District 1	25.8	18.7	27.6 (96.5)*	25.4 (97.0)
District 2	26.2	18.1	32.1 (96.5)	27.4 (97.8)
District 3	26.8	25.6	34.4 (93.6)	32.2 (94.8)
District 4	28.9	26.3	33.7 (92.7)	32.5 (93.7)
District 5	35.3	28.5	38.8 (82.3)	39.9 (81.6)
District 6	32.7	24.4	37.1 (73.7)	39.7 (76.6)
District 7	34.1	30.6	39.5 (77.4)	39.9 (78.8)
District 8	33.8	35.4	45.7 (75.2)	45.3 (76.1)
District 9	48.3	44.6	52.0 (62.7)	56.1 (64.6)
District 10	56.5	59.6	71.2 (36.2)	74.5 (27.5)

Source: *United States Census: Agriculture*, 1880, 1890, 1900, 1910. * Percentage of tenants who are white. For the purposes of comparison, the counties in each of the Congressional Districts conform to the 1891 apportionment. See footnote 4 in this chapter for a list of counties in each district.

Although the rate of tenancy showed modest declines in most Tennessee congressional districts in 1890, farmers may not have perceived the differences in rates as significant, since actual numbers of tenant farmers varied little. In West Tennessee, where agrian concerns were most vocal, the number of tenant farmers rose in District 8 from 6541 to 6715; in District 9 the number of tenant farmers declined slightly from 9526 to 9344; and in District 10 they rose from 7143 to 7993. These shifts, while

[14] See Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1986), 118.

important to individual families, may have seemed less than cause for celebration for agrarian leaders who advocated farmer control of the markets as the only sure remedy for ongoing agricultural problems.

Roughly a quarter of all farmers in East Tennessee rented land or farmed on shares despite the region's long-cherished reputation for self-sufficiency. In the middle portion of the state, the rate rose to one-third of all farmers as production shifted to cotton, tobacco and peanuts. By 1900, West Tennessee, the most market-oriented section of the state, recorded tenancy rates of 50 percent or higher, similar to the figures for the states of the Deep South. There was, however, one important difference between the Tennessee figures and those of plantation states: except for District 10, most tenant farmers in the state were white. The growth in white tenancy appeared especially problematic in the Ninth District. Although it had experienced a modest decline in tenancy between 1880 and 1890, and the percentage of tenant farmers (44 percent) fell well below the Tenth District high of 59.6 percent, the Ninth District contained the largest number of tenant farmers in the state at 9,344 compared to the Tenth District's 7,993. More than forty years later, W. J. Cash understood the social implications of this development and viewed the "mighty and always multiplying horde of the landless," whose livelihood now depended on contracts negotiated with landed neighbors as the end to the frontier individualism of past days. [15]

The census bureau recorded the ever-increasing numbers of tenant farmers but insisted that the simultaneous increase in the number of farm owners signified that

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15 W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1941; reprint, Vintage Books, 1969), 161. For recent historiography on the plight of tenant farmers, see Gilbert C. Fite, "The Agricultural Trap in the South,"*Agricultural History* 60 (1986): 38-50; Louis Fergleger, "Self-Sufficiency and Rural Life on Southern Farms," *Agricultural History* 58 (1984): 314-329; Ted Ownby, "The Defeated Generation at Work: White Farmers in the Deep South, 1865-1890," *Southern Studies* 23 (1984):325-347.

tenancy merely represented a temporary rung on the agricultural ladder. Nevertheless, rural reformers balked at the notion that the alarming figures portended upward economic mobility. Recent scholarship supports their concerns. Harold Woodman suggests that in the southern states, "an increasing *proportion* of both races worked as permanent tenants on plots that remained consistently small." McKenzie found that after the war, "landless farmers found it consistently more difficult to acquire farms and landowning farmers found their hold on the land more tenuous." Moreover, the fertile soils of the western counties attracted landless migrating whites, who swelled the tenancy figures in both the former plantation region and the northwestern counties. [16]

In East Tennessee and across the Upper Cumberland, tenancy frequently alternated with periods of industrial wage labor or work in the mines or forests of the region. In the Upper Cumberland, where tenancy rates stood at more than 27 percent in 1890, the work career of Bob Gwaltney might serve as an example of movement back and forth from wage labor to farming. In 1892, Gwaltney married a woman who had inherited a quarter interest in a Smith County farm near that of his parents. From 1897 to 1899, Gwaltney worked for the McCormick Harvester Company before returning to farming, where he remained until 1906. In that year, Gwaltney and his wife moved to Nashville to provide a better education for their daughters. After a year of odd jobs, the desire to return to farm life brought the family back to Smith County. In 1920, when he related his story for a local newspaper, he attributed "any success" to hard work, a good partner, and "studying an economical way of doing things." He

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16 Woodman, "Class, Race, Politics, and Modernization of the Postbellum South," 8; McKenzie, *One South or Many?*, 119.

might also have added his willingness to abandon the farm as necessity dictated to his list of characteristics for "success." [17]

An account of the life of Dorie Woodruff Cope in the mountains of East Tennessee documents the transition experienced by many families as they farmed their own land, rented land from others, and accepted work in cotton mills and logging woods. Although life in the mills provided consumer goods that were out of reach to farm families, the rural life usually held the greater attraction. Men moved their families from farm to town to provide education for children or to supplement the poor economic returns from farming. For many of these men, their experiences as tenant farmers carried no particular onus of decline in status, since they often rented or cropped on land belonging to older family members. Table 1.4 outlines the distribution of white tenancy across the state. [18]

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17 Jeanette Keith, *Country People in the New South: Tennessee's Upper Cumberland* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 22-23. Gwaltney's willingness to leave the farm in order to provide a better education for his daughters demonstrates an event common to many accounts of the period. W. H. Bittick of Obion County rented his own farm to tenants and became a tenant himself in order to acquire land close to Union City and give his children a better education than they could receive in the one-room country schools.

18 Florence Cope Bush, *Dorie: Woman of the Mountains* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992).

Table 1.4 Distribution of White Tenancy Between Farmers Who Were Cash Tenants and Those Who Farmed on Shares, 1890-1910

	Percentage of White Tenant Farmers					
	1890		1900		1910	
	Cash	Shares	Cash	Shares	Cash	Shares
District 1	12.3	87.7	9.8	90.2	8.1	86.7
District 2	11.5	88.5	14.6	85.4	17.1	76.1
District 3	11.9	88.1	14.1	85.9	11.7	86.1
District 4	23.6	76.4	18.6	81.4	11.4	80.6
District 5	22.7	77.3	19.1	80.1	13.5	82.6
District 6	42.2	57.8	27.4	72.6	18.6	74.1
District 7	30.9	69.8	24.6	75.4	17.5	76.9
District 8	32.3	67.7	21.2	78.8	17.8	78.5
District 9	62.5	37.5	57.9	42.1	45.5	50.5
District 10	61.9	38.1	69.4	30.6	56.7	36.2

Source: *United States Census: Agriculture*, 1890, 1900, 1910.
For purposes of comparison, the Congressional Districts in this table conform to the 1891 apportionment. See footnote 4 in this chapter for a listing of counties in each district.

The distribution between sharecroppers and tenant farmers among whites also demonstrates important regional differences. In East Tennessee, where the percentage of African Americans ranged from 7.2 percent in District 1 to 17.4 percent in District 3 (which included Chattanooga), most landless farmers cropped on shares. Moving westward across the state, the percentage of white sharecroppers declined as the percentage of African Americans in the total population increased. In the old plantation districts, landless white men farmed as cash tenants, and blacks sharecropped.

In West Tennessee, where tenancy rates were the highest, the movement away from owner-operated farms constituted an undeniable "revolution" by 1880. It was a revolution that raised new questions about the "relation of master and man, patron and client" and was rapidly "pouring over into the taboo confines of white men" by threatening white supremacy. White tenants generally rented land for cash in the western counties of the state, distinguishing themselves from black sharecroppers in economic as well as social status. Nevertheless, white planters associated tenancy with emancipation and the need for black labor in the days following the Civil War. It should not be surprising that some farm owners attributed the same negative work characteristics to white tenants that they ascribed to blacks, and occasionally assumed similar paternalistic attitudes toward white tenant farmers during periods of acute economic distress. [19]

Robert Cartmell, a Madison county farmer, recorded a litany of labor woes among his hired hands and tenants. He especially resented the Saturday evenings spent in town by laborers of both races and concluded, "There is not as much difference between white and black as is supposed. A good deal of the same kind of Human Nature about both." After a particularly trying episode with his "man" Reeves, Cartmell decided that "there is but little difference between the white laborer, such as we have, and the negro." Indeed, he preferred a black laborer, "when he is disposed to work at all." [20]

J. F. Frank, a merchant and planter, was seventy-three years old when he testified in Memphis before the U.S. Senate Agricultural Committee on the condition

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19 McKenzie, *One South or Many?*, 162; Cash, *The Mind of the South*, 161.

20 Diary of Robert Cartmell, 7 June 1890 and 18 July 1890, Tennessee State Library and Archive (hereafter cited as TSLA), Nashville.

of cotton. In addition to farming, he acted as a cotton factor and furnishing merchant. He admitted that he had acquired eight or ten farms in the Mississippi Valley when the owners proved incapable of paying their debts. But, he argued, their loss was a consequence of their own mismanagement and asserted that, "if a man does not make money at his business, it is his own fault." Frank operated his farms entirely with hired labor because he believed tenancy was a losing proposition, vowing "if I can't have control of my labor, I quit." When the committee pressed Frank on the possibility of similarities between the economic problems of poor whites and blacks, he responded by labeling blacks as "an ignorant people" who required constant supervision. By contrast, "a white man ought to have more sense than a negro," he concluded. Clearly the increasing numbers of whites who struggled with the consequences of tenancy experienced a loss of social status in the eyes of more successful farmers and planters as they were blamed for their own losses and equated with less highly regarded black labor. If farmers in East Tennessee still clung to tenancy as a temporary rung on the agricultural ladder, farmers in the western portion of the state operated under no such illusions. Tenancy increasingly represented for them a visible symbol of poverty and social decline. [21]

Occasionally elites exhibited a sympathetic, if paternalistic, concern for tenant farmers. The disastrous cotton crop of 1889 followed a year of droughts, torrential rains, and invasions of worms and insects. Everyone felt the pinch of hard times, prompting the editor of the *Milan* (Gibson County) *Exchange* to remind readers that "a number of poor renters and croppers will likely suffer if their creditors press them."

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[21] Testimony of J. F. Frank as reported in *Senate Reports*: 53rd Congress, 3rd Session, No. 986: *Report of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry on Condition of Cotton Growers in the United States, the Present Prices of Cotton, and the Remedy; and on Cotton Consumption and Production* (Serial # 3290 Part 1), Volume I, 1473-1474.

The newspaperman expressed the hope that "no man with a heart in him will take the last barrel of corn of a poor man." Although the price of cotton rose to a reported eleven cents per pound as a result of the shortfall, the "small crops naturally hurt the small farmer." Although sympathetic to the plight of tenants and sharecroppers, the editor clearly left the source of relief to the good will of the elites, thereby reinforcing the sense of hopelessness that marked landless men, who presumably lacked the means to better their situation. [22]

West Tennessee's smaller farmers expressed mounting concerns over all forms of debt, but especially what they perceived as a rise in mortgage indebtedness. In 1886, Dun's listed seventy banks of all types, scattered in 38 towns across Tennessee. National banks (of which Tennessee had thirty-three) could be found in the major trading centers. Most of the state and private banks were located in secondary markets or county seats. East Tennessee had eight national banks, eight state banks, and three private banks. The forty-one counties of Middle Tennessee were served by twenty-two national banks, three state banks and eleven private banks. Banks in the mid-state were not evenly distributed, but concentrated in a narrow band of counties north and south of Nashville. West Tennessee, with its cotton market, had the fewest number of banks. The region was served by three national banks, eight state banks, and seven private banks. [23]

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22 Jerry O. Potter, *Problems Relating to the Development of Northwest Tennessee* (Knoxville: TVA, 1973), 33.

23 R. G. Dun and Company, *Mercantile Credit Book: Tennessee*, 1886. For a discussion of post-Reconstruction banking, see John A. James, "The Development of the National Money Market, 1893-1911," *The Journal of Economic History* 36 (1979): 878-897; Richard Sylla, "Federal Policy, Banking Market Structure, and Capital Mobilization in the United States, 1863-1913," *The Journal of Economic History* 29 (1969): 657-686.

Banks were by no means the only, or even the principal sources of credit for farm families. Crossroads stores extended credit to farmers and tenants who produced cash crops, which were sold through the merchant. The farmer agreed to purchase all, or part, of his grocery needs from the store that extended credit. The crop itself served as collateral, and interest rates rose significantly above the legal banking levels of six percent. The evidence for rates of interest charged by merchants is too sparse to make a definitive statement for Tennessee, but ledger book evidence from Georgia indicates that the credit price for corn averaged 53 percent above the wholesale price. Anecdotal evidence supports a similar claim for credit prices in Tennessee. J. H. White of Tipton County estimated the markup for credit "from twenty five to fifty and even to one hundred percent above the actual value." Rural reformers explained the necessity of establishing and maintaining a state cooperative agency for buying goods and selling agricultural produce by holding out the expectation that buying in bulk "cuts off 25 to 50 per cent retail profits," making "a little money go a long ways." [24]

In addition to institutional loans and store credit, small loans could sometimes be arranged between friends or among family members. The diary of Archelaus M. Hughes, a Weakley county farmer, provides a chronicle of personal I.O.U.s exchanged and redeemed in place of scarce cash as the circulating medium for the town of Dresden and throughout Weakley County. Under such circumstances trust, and therefore access to future loans, rested on a public reputation for economic stability and honesty. On more than one occasion Hughes expressed astonishment when the insolvency of a prominent man of the community was revealed by his death and the paucity of the estate. His own overwhelming preoccupation with repaying his debts

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[24] McKenzie, *One South or Many?*, 188; *Toiler*, 5 September 1888; Letter from J. H. White, *Toiler*, 12 December 1888.

and his recognition of the need to maintain the appearance of solvency testified to the personal and communal tensions created under conditions of debt and agricultural price decline. In the privacy of his diary, Hughes recorded his personal fear (and presumably the fears of other farmers) that attended the possibility of public exposure of insolvency and the humiliation associated with losing the land.

> In vain may you preach reformation. I must needs do as my neighbors do, or it will be whispered round 'He is tight. He is broke. He can't pay his debts' and whenever such opinions as these are entertained in any neighborhood about any one of the neighbors that poor suspicioned neighbor begins to lose confidence in himself. His neighbors at first look coldly at him, then neglect and finally slight him . . . Every man that he owes is ready to pounce upon him and seize and sell everything he has liable to seizure and sale. [25]

Nor was Hughes's situation unique; the "pursuing phantom" of debt haunted many agricultural households as farm prices fell. In the changing economy of the Gilded Age, farm families devoted more of their resources to market production, increasing their dependency on industrially produced goods and making them vulnerable to demands for payment by agents of a growing number of agriculturally related businesses, who were far less receptive to the excuses for nonpayment that previously satisfied local merchants. Before the Civil War, farmers produced virtually everything for family consumption and marketed the excess. Farm wives preserved food and spun the thread, wove the cloth, and sewed the garments the family wore. By the last decades of the century, farmers marketed a larger share of their production and scrambled to find new ways to earn cash to pay for goods they once produced themselves. Farm wives still made the family clothing, but now those garments were sewn from cloth bought at the crossroads store or from traveling peddlars.

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25 Diary of Archelaus M. Hughes, 27 August 1875, TSLA, Nashville.

Commercially oriented farmers demanded improved seeds, blooded stock, factory-made plows, and fertilizers, all of which had to be purchased. In order to earn the necessary cash, farmers experimented with new crops, especially strawberries and tomatoes (in areas with adequate transportation) and cut timber for use by the railroads. As Anne Mayhew noted in her discussion of the changing economic picture, "as agriculture was commercialized, the farmer was drawn into the rapidly developing commercial-industrial economy and was no longer exempt from the pressures and consequences of changes in that economy." [26]

Nannie Williams worried endlessly about the cost of maintaining her large family of ten children and stepchildren. After years of living with her "white ghost" Williams described herself as "pinched and sour" and complained that she felt "entirely surrounded sometimes." No doubt some of Mrs. Williams's concern arose from her own part in arranging for the credit that accounted for the largest portion of the family indebtedness. She negotiated the $1300 note with her brother-in-law that her husband Henry signed. As the family fell "distressingly behind in our accounts," Williams revealed that "Henry leaves all these important moves to be made by me which causes me such frightful anxieties at time that I cannot be myself." Clearly, although Williams had no legal standing as a debtor, her familial ties proved critical to the economic stability of the farm. [27]

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26 For a discussion of farm life in the antebellum period, see Fred Arthur Bailey, *Class and Tennessee's Confederate Generation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987). Anne Mayhew, "A Reappraisal of the Causes of Farm Protest in the United States, 1870-1900," *Journal of Economic History* 61 (1972): 474-475; Diary of Archelaus M. Hughes, TSLA, Nashville.

27 Nannie Haskins Williams Diary, 6 August 1888 in the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

The problems of debt eventually affected family life, prompting Williams to describe the aged and careworn disposition of Henry, sadly noting that "he is getting fretful and uncertain in his temper," having lost "the proper forbearance with young children." As agricultural prospects continued to decline, the older Williams children left home to find employment. When the girls found work in Nashville, Williams consoled herself with the observation that "this is an industrious age," when "no one is expected to sit and fold their hands." But the situation did not improve without an act of unexpected generosity. In October 1889, Williams's brother-in-law returned the note and seven years' interest as a gift to the family. "Debt has at last been vanquished," Williams cheered, though she quickly calculated that "next year if we have a good crop of Berries We can pay every cent we owe & which does not exceed three hundred dollars and then oh then--Free--Free--Free." Few of the agricultural debtors could expect the generosity experienced by Williams, but many experienced the mental anguish of overwhelming debts and knew, first-hand, the tension of family life under the strictures of poverty. [28]

Agricultural advisors cautioned farmers against debt and upheld the virtues of self-sufficiency. In a speech before the Giles County Farmers' Alliance, President J. F. Black reminded listeners "we believe in the doctrine 'pay as you go,'" and he urged farmers to abandon the use of credit "as soon as possible." His words echoed those of B. A. Tucker of Decatur County, who encouraged farmers to be "independent by raising our own food, and if need be, our clothing." Tucker believed farmers held the upper hand because "if the capitalist wish to corner on wheat," farmers could "raise our biscuit or eat corn cake." Likewise if they "wish to corner sugar, let us eat

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28 Ibid., 15 September 1888, 8 November 1888, 14 January 1889, 27 October 1889.

molasses." Turning to history, Tucker compared the farmers' struggles against credit and debt to the Boston Tea Party, and like that event, he urged farmers to "heave it [credit] overboard and let them learn a lesson from the farmer." In his report to the Senate Agricultural Committee, Attwood Pierson described the condition in Lauderdale County as "one of debt, poverty, and despair," which he attributed to cotton farmers, "who have nothing but the hopes of a crop of cotton and good prices to pay their debts." He judged that most of the county's farmers were "hopelessly insolvent." Pierson reported that "the owner of land who has raised supplies of all kinds at home and sold to the unfortunate or indigent who did not is in much the best fix." [29]

Despite assurances that self-sufficiency held the key to prosperity, farmers slipped deeper into debt. Even frugal men found themselves in need of credit as prices spiraled downward year after year. Robert Cartmell summed up the year of 1890 with a crop report. Two years of short crops left many in the country hungry. Cartmell believed the problem was not a scarcity of wheat, oats or corn, but "many did not <u>have</u> money to buy with & sometimes credit is not at hand." By the end of January 1891, he had sold the last of his cotton crop, for a total of $364.05. A year of hard work and careful living did not meet his expenses, and early in February, he recorded, "gave my note to R & Sons for my acct. 1890--payable at one of the Banks 1st Dec. next." As if to justify his need for credit, he asserted, "I have tried to avoid that [credit] for the last year or so, but it seems a hard matter to do it. Short crops & low prices does the work--and crops or no crops, expenses keep going on." [30]

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29 *Toiler*, 19 September 1888, 28 November 1888; Response to Questionnaire by Attwood Pierson in *Senate Reports*: 53rd Congress, 3rd Session, No. 986: *Letters to Committee on Agriculture and Forestry* (Serial 3290-3291), 400.

30 Cartmell Diary, 31 December 1890 and 2 February 1891, TSLA, Nashville.

Earlier agricultural advisors had not always advocated self-sufficiency. Properly managed, debt offered a method for advancement rather than the road to destruction. In 1877, Joseph Harris of the *American Cultivator* wrote a short essay entitled "Debt Not an Unmixed Blessing," in which he asserted that "Comparatively few of the real, active, enterprising, energetic young farmers of the country are out of debt." He contended that "the men we all admire and respect are not those who run no risks, who earn little and spend less." Rather than discuss the happy farmer who had no debt, Harris wanted to talk about "the useful farmer who, being in debt, takes off his coat and goes to work with a good heart and a firm determination to be a man and meet his obligations like a man." [31]

Writing almost twenty years later, Attwood Pierson assessed the problem of debt and concluded, "twenty years ago he [the farmer] was the most independent man around; had money all the time; did not mind going in debt for supplies, stock or even a home." Even ten years before, "the pressure was getting hard, but they all looked for better time." By the last decade of the century, however, "no man dares improve with the expectation of getting the money out of the land." Landed, middle-level farmers acted according to the best agricultural advice of the day and borrowed money in the 1870s and 1880s with the intention of making improvements to take advantage of market developments. Now they found themselves trapped in snares of debt repayment in a period of declining prices. [32]

Potentially the most devastating form of debt was the mortgage. New South advocate Henry Grady characterized mortgages as "the bulldog of obligations--a very

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31 Reprinted in the *Rural Sun*, 17 May 1877.

32 Attwood Pierson, *Letters to Committee on Agriculture and Forestry*, 400.

mud-turtle for holding on." Farmers understood Grady's analogy and penned poignant reminders of their own about the tragedy of mortgage debt. In a poem entitled "The Mortgage," Will Carlton depicted mortgage as a worse threat than "worm or beetle, drought or tempest."

We worked through spring and winter, through
summer and through fall;
But the mortgage worked the hardest and
the steadiest of all.
It worked all night and Sunday; it worked
each holiday
It settled down among us and never went
away.
Whatever we kept from it seemed always a
theft;
It watched us every minute, and ruled us right
and left.
The rust and blight were with us sometimes,
and sometimes not,
The hard-browed, scowling mortgage was
forever on the spot.
The weevil and the cut-worm they went as
well as came,
The mortgage staid forever, eating hearty all
the same.
I nailed up every window, stood guard at every
door,
And happiness and sunshine made their home
with us no more.
Till with failing crops and sickness we got
stalled upon the grade,
And there came a dark day on us when the
interest wasn't paid;
And there came a sharp foreclosure, and the
farm was cheaply sold.
The children left and scattered when they
hardly yet were borne;
My wife she pined and perished and I found
myself alone.
What she died of was a "mystery," the doctors

never knew;
But I knew she died of mortgage--just as well
as I wanted to.
If to trace a hidden sorrow were within a
doctor's art,
They'd a found a mortgage lying on that
woman's broken heart.
Worm or beetle, drought or tempest, on a
farmer's land may fall,
But for first class ruination, trust a mortgage
gainst them all! [33]

Some observers held out the prospect of a new start farther west for victims of foreclosure. Archelaus Hughes painted a grim picture of families sneaking off in the night to Kansas or Texas, leaving behind their unpaid debts. The poem "Mortgage on the Farm" told a similar story of years of struggle against debt that ended in foreclosure and the move west.

. . . But I built to the home an "addition,"
And made things all cosy and warm;
And I bought forty acres of "timber,"
And for it we "mortgaged" the farm.

Then hard times grew harder than ever,
Misfortune was followed always,
With failure on failure of harvest,
That no mortal foresight could stay,
The mortgage is closed and our homestead
Is gone for its half and is sold
No help, for it's law, so it's justice,

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[33] Henry Grady's "The Farmer and the Cities Speech" presented at Elberton, Georgia, 23 July 1889, reprinted from the *Atlanta Constitution*, 26 July 1889 in Ferald J. Bryan, *Henry Grady or Tom Watson?: The Rhetorical Struggle for the New South, 1880-1890* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1994): 114-116. Although Grady is not generally associated with agricultural interests, he had a strong following among Tennessee farmers. At his death, the editor of the *Toiler* mourned the loss of "one of the greatest men the South has ever produced." 8 January 1890. For the next several weeks local Wheels and Alliances across the state published resolutions and memorials in honor of Henry Grady. Typical was one from the Obion County Union which asserted "in him we have lost one of our best friends in a cause that is dear to us all." *Toiler*, 22 January 1890. The poem, "The Mortgage" by Will Carlton was published in the *Toiler*, 25 July 1888.

And avarice clusters his gold.

So out--heaven help us--we wander,
Our youth and our labors are lost,
Ah, little we dreamed as we signed it,
The anguish that mortgage would cost.
Out over the prairie tomorrow,
A white-covered wagon will roam,
And eyes that are misty and blinded,
Shall take a last look at the home. [34]

Many southerners believed the consequences of mortgage debt and foreclosure and the resulting slide into tenancy and sharecropping would reduce American agriculture to a plight comparable to that of impoverished Irish farmers. In a speech to farmers at Elberton, Georgia, Henry Grady argued that money paid in interest flowed out of the South to enrich foreign investors in the same way that Irish tenant farmers paid "every tithe of their earnings to deepen the purple luxury of London." Such concern was not limited to the leaders of the urban New South. John McDowell, the editor of *The Weekly Toiler*, the state Wheel and Alliance newspaper, warned that if farmers did not rise up in protection of their liberties they would succumb to "a condition of common servitude, similar to that which exists in Ireland." [35]

Mortgage debt raised such concerns in Tennessee that farmers demanded statistical evidence of the extent of the problem. Farmers' organizations across the state passed resolutions calling upon their congressional representatives to enact legislation to include mortgage data in the 1890 federal census. The pressure exerted by local and county alliances and wheels produced the desired results. Benjamin A. Enloe of the Eighth Congressional District and James D. Richardson of the Fifth

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34 Archelaus M. Hughes Diary, TSLA; *Toiler*, 28 November 1888.

35 Bryan, *Henry Grady or Tom Watson?*, 114-116; *Toiler*, 19 December 1888. No doubt southern farmers were familiar with the problems of Irish tenant farmers. Democratic Party Platforms routinely included a plank condemning the British for the so-called Irish Question.

District introduced a bill into the House of Representatives to include mortgage debt questions in the census. [36]

When the results of the census became known, agricultural critics complained that the severity of the problem was not fully reflected in the data. *The National Economist* labeled the study "the most disappointing document yet received" from the census bureau. According to the editor of the national Farmers' Alliance newspaper, it was "a compilation of deductions and percentages more complicated and bewildering than anything yet produced by government experts or economic theorists." Like the farmers he served, the editor believed the census bureau had been reluctant to undertake the question because it would support the agrarian view that "money and the non-producer were obtaining the lion's share, while the producer and tribute-bearer were forced to be content with the crumbs." As a result, the questions and the manipulation of statistics meant that "every form of mortgage indebtedness possible was eliminated [and] every point that would tend to lessen the amount was utilized." Of particular concern was the failure to record the amount of mortgage indebtedness incurred before 1880. This eliminated from consideration the "deluge of mortgages that followed the panic of 1873, many of which were still burdens to cash-poor farmers." Despite the obvious drawbacks to the study, the editor concluded that the report "furnishes abundant evidence as to the correctness of the position taken by the farmers and laborers." [37]

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36 Typical of the resolutions demanding Congressional action to include mortgagee questions in the 1890 census were those of Wilson County, *Toiler*, 22 January 1890 and White County, *Toiler*, 29 January 1890. The actions of Enloe and Richardson were reported in the *Toiler*.

37 *The National Economist*, May 2, 1891. Critics of the Wheel and Alliance attempted to undermine the effect of the mortgage question by asserting that rural people found the census questions about mortgage indebtedness intrusive and resented being asked about their financial status.

Without the benefit of the 1890 manuscript census, it is difficult to assess the mortagage indebtedness reported by Tennessee farmers. Nevertheless, one important fact emerges from the published statistics: farmers in the Ninth Congressional district felt the pressures of mortgage indebtedness more sharply than farmers in any other part of the state. The census record shows the number of mortgages per year per county for the years 1880-1889. The other nine congressional districts averaged a total of 4,205 mortages, with a range of 3,227 (district 7) to 5,679 (district 8). In the Ninth District, farmers gave a total of 8,791 mortgages, small by midwestern terms, but more than twice the Tennessee average. Thus, in every measure of economic viability--farm size, tenancy, and mortgage indebtedness--District 9 appeared as the state's most significant problem. Its average farm size was the smallest in the state, while mortgage indebtedness and tenancy topped the other districts. [38]

Over the ten-year period covered in the census, the average amount of mortgage per farm in Tennessee rose from $777 in 1880 to a high of $1535 in 1887. It stood at $1286 per farm in 1890. The average mortgage for the decade was $1037. By comparison, the average mortgage for Alabama was $877; Arkansas, $583; Georgia, $552; Kentucky, $950; Mississippi, $759; and North Carolina, $493. Of the eleven former Confederate States, Tennessee's mortgage debt per acre was the highest at $6.64 per acre, though it was lower than the national average of $8.04 per acre. Men forty years of age or older were more likely to own farms (68 percent of the farms were owned by men in this age range), making them more likely to have a mortgage on their land. Fifty-nine percent of the mortgages in 1890 were made on land farmed by men who were forty years of age or older. They were seasoned

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38 *Eleventh Census: 1890, Report on Farms and Homes: Proprietorship and Indebtedness in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1896).

farmers, who now faced uncertainty and the threat of foreclosure and ruin. Survival depended on prices adequate to meet the demands of interest payments. [39]

Concerns about the extent of mortgage indebtedness merged with complaints about interest rates. At six percent, Tennessee boasted one of the lowest interest rates in the country, but farmers claimed they actually paid rates as high as twelve percent. Lenders skirted the law by adding the additional interest to the face value of the loan, or by claiming the added interest as an initiation fee. West Tennessee cotton farmers, who struggled with the inequities of the crop lien system, joined some New South proponents in advocating a legal rise in the interest rate to ten percent. The higher rate offered the advantage of honesty in the negotiation of loans and created an

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39 Descriptions of farmland and crop production for the counties in the Ninth Congressional District can be found in a variety of sources, including *Report on Cotton Production in the United States, Part I, Tenth Census of the United States, 1880*, 11-105; J. B. Killebrew, *Introduction to the Resources of Tennessee*, 1015-1193. Bailey, *Class and Tennessee's Confederate Generation,* argued that the state should be divided into four distinct regions rather than the so-called three grand divisions. His "Northwest/South-central" region encompassed the eighth and ninth district and part of the sixth and seventh. His point was that this designation incorporated similarities in farm size and antebellum slavery, thus confirming the contemporary view of the differences in agriculture and outlook present in West Tennessee. Killebrew's evaluation of recovery following the war is supported by recent historiography. Stephen V. Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 1860-1870* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), Chapter X: "Reunion, Redemption, and Sanctification: White Society, 1865-1870" and McKenzie, *One South or Many?* confirm the recovery of Tennessee agriculture and the re-establishment of antebellum patterns of wealth-holding. *Report on Farms and Homes: Proprietorship and Indebtedness in the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890*, 622. For a discussion of mortgage indebtedness see James H. Stock, "Real Estate Mortgages, Foreclosures, and Midwestern Agrarian Unrest, 1865-1920," *The Journal of Economic History* (44): 89-106; Kenneth A. Snowden, "Mortgage Rates and American Capital Market Development in the Late Nineteenth Century," *The Journal of Economic History* (47):671-691; Barry Eichengreen, "Mortgage Interest Rates in the Populist Era," *American Economic Review* (74): 1005-1015. Interest payments on mortgages in Tennessee in 1890 averaged $41 per farm. Not surprisingly, many of the agrarian reform leaders fell into the age range most likely to have mortgaged indebtedness. The lack of a manuscript census for 1890, however, makes it merely speculative to assert that Tennessee agrarian leaders were debtors.

attractive climate for outside investment in the state--something the farmers felt would improve the availability of money and credit. [40]

Reform of interest rates might offer a measure of relief in the long run, but farmers faced interest and principal payments immediately. In a period of declining agricultural prices, the prospects of repayment shrank and the likelihood of foreclosure and tenancy increased. Contemporaries routinely advised farmers to practice what historian Steven Hahn called "safety-first" agriculture--self-sufficiency in food and household needs, with market sales limited to surplus production. But, as nineteenth-century farmers knew and recent scholars have come to realize, such practices were, at best, stop-gap measures. Woodman suggests that "Those who advocated self-sufficiency and avoidance of debt advised farmers to compete by cutting expenses," even though they could remain in agriculture only by "eschewing modernization and accepting marginal existence." According to Gilbert Fite, such farmers were caught in an agricultural trap--"too small and unproductive . . . [for] a commercial capitalistic economy." Indeed, Jeanette Keith's study of the Upper Cumberland counties confirms that those farmers who consistently avoided debt and practiced self-sufficiency were among the poorest of the state by the opening decades of the twentieth century. [41]

Farmers who produced for the market experienced greater fluctuations in income, but even at its worst in 1890, the average value of farm products (cotton and tobacco) in districts nine and ten were 28-48 percent higher than the more self-

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40 *Toiler,* 26 December 1888; *National Economist,* 2 May 1891; Eichengreen, "Mortgage Interest Rates in the Populist Era," 1008-1009. The support for an increase in interest rates dried up rather quickly after farmers from other parts of the state launched a vigorous attack against the scheme. The whole episode points to the differing needs of farmers in the three geographic divisions, an ongoing problem that adversely affected both the Wheel and the Alliance.

41 Woodman, "Class, Race, Politics, and the Moderization of the Postbellum South," 17; Fite, "The Agricultural Trap in the South," 39; Keith, *Country People in the New South.*

sufficient first and second districts. McKenzie's 1879 comparison of per capita income between market-oriented farm households and subsistence households found market incomes more than five times higher in East Tennessee, more than four times higher in Middle Tennessee, and more than fourteen times greater in West Tennessee. Such evidence led him to conclude that cotton "reward[ed] western farmers . . . at a level that far exceeded that of farmers anywhere else in the state." Little wonder that farmers annually risked everything to plant for commercial production. As farmers surveyed their barnyards, they assessed the greater potential for profits and their own needs for cash to pay taxes and debts. Wherever soil, climate, and access to transportation permitted, farmers planted for the market and prayed for higher prices. [42]

In order to blunt the effect of declining cotton prices, agricultural leaders preached crop diversity. Tennessee farmers, however, were not wedded to cotton production, and only 2.8 percent of the land surface of the state was planted in cotton in 1889. Twenty-eight counties produced no cotton, and five-sixths of the crop was produced in the area between the western portion of the Tennessee River and the Mississippi River. Six counties contributed nearly 50 percent of the total cotton acreage and produced nearly 56 percent of the crop. Three counties in the Tenth District--Tipton, Fayette, and Shelby--had more than 50,000 acres in cotton in 1890. In those counties, agricultural census takers noted, "there is greater density of the productive area than is found in any county in Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana or North Carolina, and one that is exceeded only in a few counties in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina." Another eight counties reported 25,000 to 50,000

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42 McKenzie, *One South or Many?*, 188-189.

acres in cotton, while ten counties planted 10,000 to 25,000 in cotton, and twelve counties had 1,000 to 10,000 acres in cotton. Due to poor weather conditions, the 1889 crop was below average at 190,579 bales (averaging 0.26 bales/acre). By comparison, the 1879 crop produced 330,621 bales (averaging 0.46 bales/acre). [43]

Tennessee farmers were generally of the opinion that the break-even point for those who could produce a half bale of cotton per acre was eight cents per pound. At prices below this level, the production of cotton was a losing proposition. Yet, as John E. Gwin of McNairy County observed, "we are growing poorer every year, but have to raise it [cotton] as a money crop to pay taxes and on debts." [44]

Although observers complained about the crop mixture planted by individual farmers, census statistics indicate a far greater diversity than expected. As Table 1.5 indicates, the average percentage of acres planted in cereal crops suggests that farmers of the western districts were as likely to be feeding themselves as were those of the more mountainous, non-cotton producing districts of East Tennessee. [45]

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43 *Eleventh Census of the United States: 1890: Agriculture*, 57-58.

44 *Letter to Committee on Agriculture and Forestry*, 397.

45 To determine self-sufficiency McKenzie employed minimum per capita consumption requirements of 10.16 bushels of grain and 152.6 pounds of meat per adult, which would be approzimately 30.25 corn-equivalent bushels per capita. See McKenzie, *One South or Many?*, 205, and Chapter 1, "'The Most Honorable Besness in the Country': Farm Operations at the Close of the Antebellum Era," 11-55.

Table 1.5 Cereal Production, 1890

	Average Cereal Production	
	Average % Acres in Cereal Production	Corn/Acre Bushels
District 1	46.8	20.3
District 2	51.8	18.9
District3	51.1	18.9
District 4	52.0	25.2
District 5	51.3	27.3
District 6	42.6	26.4
District 7	49.1	24.9
District 8	39.2	21.3
District 9	39.6	24.4
District 10	24.9	17.4

Source: *U.S. Census, Agriculture*, 1890.
For purposes of comparison, the Congressional Districts in this table conform to the 1891 apportionment. See footnote 4 in this chapter for a listing of counties in each district.

Personal observations upheld the statistical data that Tennessee farmers still relied on home production for much of their food. In his report to the Senate Agriculture Commitee inquiry, James W. Jones noted "a growing tendency" to raise food at home among the farmers of the two cotton producing counties of Hardeman and Madison. John E. Gwin also estimated that half or more of the farmers in the five counties in the eighth district were able to raise all their supplies. And Assistant Commissioner of Agriculture John Barham reported that in his area the low price of cotton increased the food production.[46]

46 *Letter to Committee on Agriculture and Forestry*, 397.

In addition to increasing production of home supplies, Tennessee farmers experimented with the production of new crops. In portions of Middle and West Tennessee strawberries became an important crop that added income and did not greatly interfere with the cotton or tobacco planting. Strawberries were marketed as fresh fruits and made into preserves for later sales. Nannie Williams found that spring was a busy time when in addition to other chores, she "made berry boxes every possible moment." She went on to complain, "Monday--yesterday--and to day and the rest of this week and as long as the berries last we will be busy busy." But the rewards seemed worth the effort in this cash-strapped family, and Williams proclaimed, "I am only too glad to have the opportunity to make something. Today the proceeds have reached $82.00." More money was yet to come because Williams was also busy "making preserves to sell," an endeavor that she proudly noted "made nearly a hundred dollars." [47]

Another avenue for diversification advocated by agriculturalists was poultry production. Long the domain of farm women, by 1890 poultry had attracted the attention of men ready to invest in hen houses and good stock with a view of moving beyond the local markets. A market that many farmers had previously regarded as "beneath the dignity of a grown man" now appeared appealing as cotton prices continued their downward slide. When the Agricultural Census of 1890 enumerated poultry and egg production for the first time, the national value of egg production was estimated at $55,000,000. The relatively low cost of entry coupled with the growth of cities and the availability of rail transportation encouraged the movement into poultry production. The butter, egg, and chicken production of women had long served

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47 Diary of Nannie Haskins Williams, 17 May 1887 and 30 December 1887, Southern Historical Collection.

families as a source of income or barter for household needs, but, as interest in poultry production spread during hard times, it attracted the attention of "prominent poultry men," who initiated investments in improvements that eventually removed production from the domestic sphere to the realm of big business. [48]

Although the diversity of production among Tennessee farmers no doubt cushioned the blows of agricultural depression, as James Tice Moore implies, many farmers felt themselves at a disadvantage in the market as a result of the variety of crops the state produced. From their perspective, the fact that they could not dominate the market in any area put them at the mercy of market monopolies and the farmers of other states, whose share of the production dwarfed that of Tennessee. In 1890 the Meigs County Farmers' Alliance petitioned Governor Robert L. Taylor to "prohibit the importation of dressed beef," since "the cattle growers of our state cannot compete with the cattle kings of the West." Robert Cartmell worried about Tennessee's decreasing share of the cotton production. "Texas will soon make it all," he declared. "It is an empire unto itself." [49]

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[48] Many diaries discuss the production of butter, eggs, and chickens, and their importance to the family economy. See Robert Freeman Diary, 1885-1886, 18 April 1885, TSLA; Mary Kirkpatrick Tinsley, Diary, 1891-1894, TSLA; Robert Cartmell Diary, 8 March 1891, TSLA. Among many articles published by J.B. Killebrew advocating investment in poultry was one entitled "Poultry Yard" in the *Rural Sun*, 28 August 1873. On 2 May 1890 the *Memphis Avalanche* reported a meeting of "prominent poultry men" at the Farmers' Exchange to organize regional production and discuss improvement of stock. The *Toiler* reported that several high level Wheel and Alliance men were poultry breeders. Deborah Fink, *Open Country, Iowa: Rural Women, Tradition, and Change* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,1986), 57-62 offers an excellent discussion of the importance of poultry and eggs for farm women.

[49] *Toiler*, 8 January 1890; Robert Cartmell Diary, 8 March 1891, TSLA. The differences between Tennessee farmers of the post-war period and those of the antebellum period could not have been lost on men and women of the 1880s and 1890s. In the 1840s. Niles' Weekly *Register* praised Tennessee agriculture in glowing terms. "Of all the states in the union,"the editor wrote, "that which problably has, and admits of in the future, the most various production . . . is Tennessee." That praise was not misplaced. On the eve of the Civil War, the state ranked sixth in corn production, tenth in wheat production, third in tobacco, fourth in swine, tenth in sheep, and eighth out of the fourteen cotton producing states. Its livestock production ranked sixth in the nation, while

The complaints of one group of Tennessee farmers found a national audience when the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry held hearings in Memphis in 1894 to determine the causes of poor conditions among cotton farmers. Tennessee Senator William B. Bate was a member of that committee. In its final report the committee concluded that agricultural conditions "in nearly every instance debar the farmers from any enjoyment of the luxuries and elegancies of life, and prevents the education of their children." Although the committee found "absolute destitution" rare in the cotton states, "there [was] but little accumulation," causing "widespread discontent . . . and a disposition to discredit their old-time conservative methods." [50]

The committee attributed the presence of low prices to several causes. Although capitalists and agricultural leaders frequently placed the blame for low prices on overproduction, the committee found "the facts do not bear out this assumption." Noting that "while there has been a large increase in production there has also been a large increase in consumption," the senators attributed the lower cotton prices to high tariffs and trading in futures. [51]

In the estimation of many farmers, the committee findings offered some encouragement but raised the same old straw man. The opportunity to demonstrate their needs for relief bolstered the sagging spirits of hard-pressed farmers. They could also find encouragement in the degree of culpablity for low agricultural prices the

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the state's farmers also produced a variety of fruits and vegetables. Agricultural historian Donald L. Winters concluded that "No other state ranked as high in so many different agricultural goods," fully justifying the *Niles' Weekly Register* observation. See Donald L. Winters, *Tennessee Farming, Tennessee Farmers: Antebellum Agriculture in the Upper South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 179-180.

50 *Report of the Committee on Agriculture*, iv.

51 Ibid., v-vi, viii-xviii.

committee ascribed to the futures market. Futures traders believed that "dealing in futures [kept] prices high because it facilitate[d] the transaction of business and reduce[d] the risks to a minimum," and it had become "as essential to the cotton market as transportation, commissions, and insurance." But farmers argued, and the senators concurred, that "these dealings are pure gambling," and constituted a monopoly. As an important component of interstate and foreign commerce, the committee concluded that futures trading could be "controlled or abolished by Congress." [52]

The assertion that high tariffs played a role found less support from farmers. By the time of the senate hearings, farmers had already rejected that view as a tired partisan position that offered little chance for relief. Tariff reductions promised lower consumer prices, not a rise in agricultural commodity prices. Farmers long understood the difference between the two consequences. In 1874, Archelus Hughes lamented that "all over the land [there is] hard times and scarcity," but in the same journal entry he observed that "Dry goods boots shoes and groceries of all kinds are relatively cheaper now than at any time since the war." The declining price of consumer goods held little promise for men and women with no money to buy. "Little Hatchet" attacked the tariff more forcefully. "I have heard the tariff discussed until I am perfectly disgusted," he wrote in 1888, "and it seems to me that any sane person could see that the message on tariff is only a beautiful spider web constructed solely for the purpose of catching the southern flies." Following the 1888 election, W.C.W. of Obion County hoped "to hear something more than a difference of opinion concerning the tariff." He believed that "the wheel has a work of more importance than tariff

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52 Ibid.

issues." In sympathy for those tired of the constant tariff refrain, one poet offered a humorous rhyme:

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> There's a tariff on salt and saltpeter,
> There's a tariff on sugar and shot;
> There's a tariff on bread for the eater,
> There's a tariff on drink for the sot;
> There's low tariff on trimmings and toggery,
> There's a high tariff on fire and food,
> There's tariff on drink for the groggery
> There's tariff on dress for the dude.
>
> O tariff! great theme of the shouters,
> We have heard of the great lesson you teach,
> 'Til we long for a tariff on spouters,
> And pray for a tariff on speech.
> We'll give in like affable youngsters,
> To the tariff on cheese and on chalk
> If you'd give us a tariff on tonguesters
> And a 95 cent tariff on talk. [53]

By 1890, many farmers believed all the avenues in agriculture that had once held promise of a modest, or even expanding, income were closed. Prices dropped, and the debts that had been contracted when cotton was high had to be paid with additional work. Farm size shrank, and with it opportunities to improve land, diversify crop production, and invest in agricultural technology declined, even as farm ownership rose. An increasing agricultural population meant that tenancy rates also rose, even as the likelihood of climbing the agricultural ladder declined. Individual farm families heeded the advice of agricultural leaders and their own experience to reduce expenses and return to the practice of self-sufficiency. Nevertheless, the

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[53] Archelaus Hughes Diary, 28 December 1874, TSLA; *Toiler*, 19 September, 21 November 1888.

"solutions" offered by political figures, agricultural leaders, and experience held out little hope for ordinary farmers caught in the web of debt and prices.

In Tennessee, census data and anecdotal evidence indicate that although no area escaped the problems of the age, the farmers experiencing the worst difficulties lived in the Ninth Congressional District. These middling-level farmers returned from the war, rebuilt their farms, invested in agricultural improvements in order to produce for the market, and now faced economic disaster. By every measure--farm size, tenancy rates, and mortgage indebtedness--these farmers were at greater risk than any others in the state. They became the first to organize in the 1880s and led other Tennessee farmers into what became an agrarian revolt. As these farmers surveyed their barnyards, they saw no possible relief without enacting laws that would protect their interests. To accomplish that, farmers would have to enter the political realm, a step they heretofore had been reluctant to take. As they moved toward organization and political action, they entered an arena of factionalism and long-standing animosity.

Chapter 2: The People Are Tired of Political Tricksters and One-Horse Lawyers

At this time it is the office broker that rules the people and conventions. It is not a government by the people for the people.
John H. Savage, Tennessee Congressman, 1886

Governments are instituted among men for the purpose of protecting the governed in the full enjoyment of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. When they fail to do this, causes of revolution exist, that [lie] sullenly dormant only waiting an occasion to burst forth with all the fury that a maddened passion and a confidence abused can dictate. W. L. Roddy, Giles County Alliance, 1888

The political arena of Tennessee in the last three decades of the nineteenth century often erupted in heated partisan battles, and the desire to achieve, or maintain, partisan control over state government directed political campaigns toward a familiar drama of inflammatory charges between the opposing parties and unwavering support for partisan platforms that varied little from one election to the next. Within each party, the selection of candidates focused on personalities and fostered independent movements that sometimes threatened party stability. Yet, despite the turmoil that rocked the state biennially, neither party willingly tackled the economic and social problems that accompanied the transition into modernity. The failure to deal with the concerns of the small farmers as they sought protection for their interests in a changing economy produced the most significant threat to political stability that the state would face in the postbellum period. This chapter provides the political background for understanding the emergence of the Agricultural Wheel and the Farmers' Alliance and suggests that agrarian discontent was not a sudden phenomenon but had percolated just below the political surface for more than a decade before the arrival of the Wheel.

When Conservatives (Democrats) met in Nashville in 1870 to write a new state constitution as the first step toward ending so-called Radical rule, observers identified

three interests represented among the delegates: Democrats of the planter class, who had supported secession in 1861; industrialist former Whigs, many of whom had been unionists until secession and then either joined the Confederacy or remained silent throughout the turmoil of war; and small farmers, commonly referred to as "wool hat boys." There were no African-American delegates and only four white Republicans. Former Whigs dominated the proceedings but made few changes from the Constitution of 1834, the purpose of the convention being to obtain a working organic law without generating an adverse reaction from a skeptical and suspicious Republican Congress. [1]

The recognized champion of small farmer interests, former President Andrew Johnson, was not present at the proceedings, and though he, and many of his constituents, read the final product with dismay, farmers had presented no particular demands for consideration to the convention. The one source of dispute identified with farming interests arose over the question of the constitutional requirement of proof of payment of the poll tax as a condition for exercising the franchise. A protest, presented to the convention by John Netherland, an East Tennessee delegate and friend of Johnson, called the elective franchise "a right, dear to every freeman, and necessary to protect him from unjust and unequal laws." He and his fellow protesters objected that the law discriminated against the poor man since the land holder had no comparable requirement to show proof of payment of land taxes. According to this

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1 Roger Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists, Tennessee, 1870-1896* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), Chapter 1, "The Redeemers"; C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South: 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 1-22; Thomas B. Alexander, "Whiggery and Reconstruction in Tennessee," *Journal of Southern History* 16 (1950): 291-305; Alexander, "Persistent Whiggery in the Confederate South, 1860-1877," *Journal of Southern History* 27 (1961): 305-329; James Tice Moore, "Redeemers Reconsidered: Change and Continuity in the Democratic South, 1870-1900," *Journal of Southern History* 44 (1978): 357-378.

view, the poll tax requirement "renewed a system which the past has shown to be odious to the voters of the State," and gave the poor man cause to say "that you require of me to pay the 'uttermost farthing,' all that I own to the State, though I am poor, whilst my wealthy neighbor, who owns lands to the value of many thousand dollars, on which the taxes are due and unpaid . . . is allowed to vote." Andrew Johnson complained in a letter to George W. Nixon that "the new constitution disfranchises every man in the state white or black, transfering the elective franchise, which is the essence of sovereignty from the voter to the Legislature; converting it in fact into an article of merchandise to be bought and sold for a price fixed by law." Furthermore, he believed that "the effect of this policy will be to make a large number of voters dependent upon capital and a few opulent aristocrats and will lead to corruption, fraud and degeneration of the ballot box." He concluded, "I cannot now yet yield my consent to vote for the radification [sic] of a constitution that disfranchises every voter in the state." George W. Jones, a former Congressman and the delegate from Lincoln County, found the poll tax provision so distasteful he refused to sign the constitutional document. Written protests and dramatic gestures failed to persuade the majority of the delegates to vote against its inclusion in the new constitution, and the poll tax obligation became the law of the land when voters ratified the constitution on March 26, 1870, by a vote of 98,128 to 33,872. [2]

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[2] Andrew Johnson to George W. Nixon, 4 March 1870, Papers of Andrew Johnson, Library of Congress; Article IV, Section 1 of the Tennessee State Constitution provided that "there shall be no qualification attached the right of suffrage, except that each voter shall give to the judges of election, where he offers to vote, satisfactory evidence that he has paid the poll taxes assessed against him for such preceding period as the Legislature shall prescribe, and at such time as may be prescribed by laws, without which his vote cannot be received." *Journal of the Proceedings of the Convention of Delegates Elected by the People of Tennessee to Amend, Revise, or Form and Make a New Constitution for the State* (Nashville, 1870), 426; *Ibid.*, "Protests", 397-398.

As the state settled into the problems of self-government following the ratification of the constitution, the contradictory views of the so-called "New South," industrial wing of the revived Democratic party and the unrepentant "Bourbon" planters dominated the political landscape. The interests of the small farmer made brief appearances, most notably in 1875, when Andrew Johnson once again waged war against the "Brigadier Generals" in his successful Senatorial campaign. During the 1880s, the influence of the small farming element rose with each session of the General Assembly as farmers organized to direct legislative action in their own interests. In 1887 the General Assembly included at least ten men whose names would be associated with the activities of the Agricultural Wheel and the Farmers' Alliance. Two years later the farmers identified more than forty legislators as members of their organizations. These farmer-lawmakers felt so confident of their abilities to direct agricultural legislation that they held meetings to express concerns, draft laws, and marshal votes for or against impending bills. The meetings were open to anyone interested in agriculture, but it was clear that the agrarian organizations intended to protect their interests by controlling future agricultural legislation. [3]

As farmers joined the Agricultural Wheel and the Farmers' Alliance and entered the political arena in the mid-1880s, they operated under three widely-held assumptions:

1. Farmers were the political, moral, and economic backbone of the nation. The country owed its very existence to their efforts, and they would not be denied their political inheritance.

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[3] Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 28-55; Nashville, *The Weekly Toiler* (hereafter cited as *Toiler*), 7 November and 14 November 1888, 2 March 1889; Charles A. Miller; *The Official and Political Manual of the State of Tennessee*, (Nashville: Marshall and Bruce Stationers, 1890; r.p., Spartanburg: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1974), 238-246.

2. Control of political parties rested in the hands of economic and social elites, and their political hegemony must be broken in order to achieve the goals of the rural majority.

3. Government functioned to deny special privileges and to uphold equality. Calling upon government to live up to its purpose, farmers demanded institutional and regulatory changes that would implement the ideals by ending the "special privileges," which included regulation of railroad rates and equalization of taxes, especially the imposition of an income tax. [4]

The demands of farmers rested on the recognition that they constituted the voting majority, as well as the economic foundation of the state. The federal census of 1900 recorded 62 percent of Tennessee males over ten years of age engaged in "agricultural pursuits." Less than 3 percent claimed status in the professions, while the three remaining categories of "domestic and personal service," "trade and transportation," and "manufacturing and mechanical pursuits" each claimed around 12 percent. Although manufacturing represented a growing economic potential in Tennessee, the total value of manufactured goods did not exceed that of farm produce and livestock until World War I, with one exception. In the census of 1890, the value of farm products dipped below that of manufactured goods, probably the result of two

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[4] In the early days of the republic, three definitions of republicanism emerged. In the first, educated men defined republicanism in its historic terms and held that the successful republic must be small in size and governed by members of a natural aristocracy, who rose to power as a result of merit. The second definition followed the tenets of Adam Smith, promoting expansion and emphasizing the pursuit of rational self-interest for the benefit of society as a whole. The third definition, the one the Wheelers and Alliancemen found most compatible was more egalitarian. It held that republican virtue was embodied in the people as a whole and believed government should respond to the needs of the people. See Mary Beth Norton, David M. Katzman, Paul D. Escott, Howard P. Chudacoff, Thomas G. Paterson, William M. Tuttle, Jr., *A People and A Nation: A History of the United States,* 4th Edition, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1994), 182.

years of weather-related harvest disasters. Indeed, commerce claimed the largest segment of the non-agricultural economy until well into the twentieth century. Moreover, the nature of Tennessee industry closely bound this sector to the fortunes of agriculture. Flour mills, cotton gins, and cotton seed oil processing made up a significant portion of the industrial wealth. When agriculture suffered, industry and commerce felt the effects. An economic survey of the northwestern corner of the state concluded that with the "farming disaster in the 1880s and the 1890s, the industrial part of the economy suffered greatly." More specifically, in Gibson County, "the period was marked by a large succession of business failures which reached a climax in 1892." Overall, the depression in farm prices "retarded the growth and development of the area for many years." [5]

In addition to the economic contribution farmers made to the state, they claimed a near-mythical position in the political ideology of the nation. The words of Thomas Jefferson supported farmers as "the true representatives of the great American interest," and asserted that they alone were "to be relied on for expressing the proper American sentiments." In the nineteenth century, even as westward expansion fostered economic growth in manufacturing, political leaders, especially Democrats extolled agrarian life as the bedrock of American liberty. Echoing the words of

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5 *Special Reports: Occupations at the Twelfth Census* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1904), 388-390; Thomas H. Freeman IV, *An Economic History of Tennessee* (Nashville: State Planning Office, 1965), 49. Jerry O. Potter, *Problems Relating to the Development of Northwest Tennessee* (Knoxville: TVA, 1973), 34; James C. Cobb, *Industrialization and Southern Society, 1877-1984*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984; r.p., Chicago: The Dorsey Press, 1988), Chapter I: "The Shaping of Southern Growth"; for an earlier, opposing view, see Constantine G. Belissary, "The Rise of Industry and the Industrial Spirit in Tennessee, 1865-1885," *Journal of Southern History* 19 (1953): 193-215.

Jefferson, Andrew Jackson praised the independent farmers as "the best part of [the] population . . . the basis of society and the true friends of liberty." [6]

Such high praise was not limited to pronouncements from long-deceased presidents. Governors of the state and political elites readily acknowledged the agrarian influence both in campaign rhetoric and public addresses. Typical of the genre was a speech made by the former Assistant Agriculture Commissioner, Robert Gates, who wondered, "whither will the patriot turn for hope of the Republic." Quickly answering his own question, he asserted, "upon the farmers of the land, as a body, rests this weighty responsibility." In a time-honored fashion reminiscent of Jefferson and Jackson, he explained that farmers were "removed by their environment and independence from the influences that inspire class prejudice, with the most to lose and least to gain by disorder, they constitute the conservative force in the body politic of the Republic." [7]

Public speakers intended their praise of farmers and the agricultural life to act as a brake against the radicalism commonly assumed to be associated with industrial labor, but farmers interpreted political ideology as literally as they interpreted the scriptures and laid claim to the inheritance offered to them in the national mythology. Warren Smith, a prolific writer and agricultural organizer, utilized the national

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6 Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York: Vintage Books, 1948), 36 fn.; Merrill D. Peterson, *The Jefferson Image in the American Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 82.

7 Robert Gates, "Farmers, the Conservative Force in the Body Politic," An Address delivered before the Farmers' Institute of Middle Tennessee, December 6, 1911, TSLA. Henry Grady, the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution* and the chief advocate of the New South ideology had a healthier respect for the potential of the agrarian class. In his speech to farmers of Elberton, Georgia in 1889, Grady quoted General Toombs when he noted that "the farmer, considered the most conservative type of citizenship, is really the most revolutionary." Quoted in Ferald J. Bryan, *Henry Grady or Tom Watson?: The Rhetorical Struggle for the New South, 1880-1890* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1994), 111.

mythology to recall a sense of pride in his readers when he wrote, "Before the brawny arm of the sturdy and iron-muscled pioneer, the forests disappeared and in their place were seen broad fields of golden grain prophesying of bounteous cheer for all." Smith attributed the garden of America, which "outshone the lands of Nimrod," to "the genius of labor [that] bestowed it all." Ordinary farmers took up the cry and proclaimed that "this glorious producing country of fertile fields was made by the farmer's strokes." [8]

The agrarian view of the nation did not end with praises for physical labor but also claimed a share in the historic defense of liberty. While waging their own battles for equalization of the tax burdens, farmers were reminded of "those humble farmers who were oppressed by the misrule, tyranny and over-taxation which was imposed by the royal government of England." When "wool-hat" boys encountered the hostility of entrenched political interests, they were buoyed by the memory that "the father of our country was a farmer, and he retired from the highest earthly position to enjoy the quiet rural life at Mt. Vernon." Henry Grady attributed the success of the French Revolution to the actions of the peasant farmers in the summer of 1789, and he praised the farmers of Mecklenburg, who "made the first American declaration," as well as the "embattled farmers who fought at Lexington and Concord." Agrarian leaders repeatedly urged farmers to "put their hands to the plow" and "never look back." Their cause was clear: "march onward until the great wheel plow has uprooted all such

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[8] Senator Warren Smith, "A Tribute to Labor," *Toiler*, 25 July 1888; Smith served in the Tennessee Senate, 1885-1887, and in the House, 1895-1897, representing Hardin, Lawrence, Perry, and Wayne counties. He was a presidential elector in 1880 on the Greenback ticket of James B. Weaver and B. J. Chambers. His Greenback interests continued, and in 1888 he ran for Congress on a coalition ticket of Greenback and Republican parties. He published several works on political and moral reform, including *Hard Times, Their Causes and Cure* in 1879; *The Working Man's Destiny, His Past, Present and Future,* 1887; *A Warning Call,*1876; *The Social Evil, How to Remedy It*, n.d.; and *Spirit Monitor, n.d.*. Robbie Ruskins, *Toiler*, 25 July 1888.

pestilent weeds as monopoly, unequal taxation and other glaring inequities." Once the farmers performed their political duty and "cleared the ground around the noble tree of freedom which our fore fathers planted for us of all nauseous and poisonous herbs," they could rest in the knowledge that "our children may partake of the fruits of the said tree to our hearts content." [9]

Farmers clearly saw themselves as the heirs of the revolutionary spirit of 1776, part of a continuum of democratic ideals. Phrasing their convictions in agricultural terms, they drew images of the ongoing and necessary work of preparing the ground for each season of planting. To sustain liberty the political ground had to be cleared of the "weeds" that inhibited the flowering of democracy. Among the "weeds" that sprouted in the fields of the republic, none seemed more poisonous than the "cliques" and "rings" that controlled the parties from the courthouse to the statehouse and stifled reform.

To all outward appearances the active presence of both major political parties in Tennessee offered farmers a unique opportunity to achieve their demands. As Jeffrey Ostler suggested in his study of midwestern agrarian activities, two-party politics inhibited third party formation by providing an opportunity to pit one party against the other to achieve concessions and facilitate reform. And, as will be shown, farmers attempted this strategy in Tennessee, until forced to take more radical action. Some of their failure to achieve greater gains can be attributed to the geographical distribution of power between the two parties. In a statement frequently quoted by

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9 "Tipton," *Toiler,* July 11, 1888; "Welcome Address" by Lillian Lee Hays, *Toiler*, 31 July 1889; J. H. White, *Toiler,* 19 September 1888; Bryan, *Henry Grady or Tom Watson?,* 111. Catherine McNicol Stock recently argued that such views characterized agrarian radicals from Bacon's Rebellion in 1676 to recent outbreaks of violence in the western states, which have been attributed to so-called militiamen. See Stock, *Rural Radicals: Righteous Rage in the American Grain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

scholars of Tennessee political development, V. O. Key aptly described that state as an example of "two one-party systems," rather than a typical two-party state. A close look at party development in the postbellum period confirms this view, and demonstrates the parallel history of the two parties. [10]

Redemption of the state in 1869-1870 did not destroy the Republican Party but largely reduced its control to the mountainous, eastern division of the state, with sizable pockets of support in the plantation counties with large African-American populations and among white populations living near the Tennessee River in the western portion of the state, where union support had been strong during the secessionist crisis. Republicans dominated political offices in the first and second congressional districts of East Tennessee and frequently won hard-fought elections in some counties of West Tennessee, but the real threat of Republicanism rested in its potential as the spoiler in any political battle that threatened to divide the Democratic Party. In 1880, when Democrats split into two opposing factions over the question of the settlement of the state debt, the Republicans captured the governorship for the first time since Redemption and the last time until prohibition offered a similar opportunity in 1912. [11]

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10 Jeffrey Ostler, *Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993); V. O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1949; New Edition, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press), 75.

11 Gordon McKinney, *Southern Mountian Republicans, 1865-1900: Politics and the Appalachian Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978); Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 28-55; Verton M. Queener, "A Decade of East Tennessee Republicanism, 1867-1876," *East Tennessee Historical Society Publications* 14 (1942): 59-85, hereafter cited as *ETHSP*; Queener, "The East Tennessee Republicans as a Minority Party, 1870-1896," *ETHSP*, 15 (1943): 49-73; Queener, "The East Tennessee Republicans in State and Nation, 1870-1900," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 2 (1943): 99-128; Paul E. Isaac, *Prohibition and Politics: Turbulent Decades in Tennessee, 1885-1920* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1965).

Internal dissension and factionalism characterized the Democratic Party of the late nineteenth century, although, in the interests of party unity, candidates who failed to gain the party nomination for office dutifully supported the final ticket and praised the political and personal qualifications of their recent rivals, even as they plotted the next factional battles. Not unexpectedly, the Democratic Party of the period would be better characterized as an amalgam of interests and views rather than a unified political whole. Political expediency joined the interests of the New South industrial heirs of antebellum Whiggery with the plantation-based defense of states rights offered by the Bourbons. The precarious balance of interests that supported the Democratic hegemony over state offices and the Republican regional control left little room for either party to initiate political or economic reform. As a result, Democrats focused attention on the familiar platform staples of low tariff and fiscal conservatism. Republicans responded with their well-known program of industrial protection and sound business practices. Since partisan responses remained fixed, personalities played a large role in the selection of candidates, and family history, war records, and material achievement figured prominently in every election. With neither party willing to tackle the problems associated with the economic and social transition evident to the most casual observer, many voters might have agreed with the farmer who expressed his disgust by noting that "the most difference between the Democrats and the Republicans is a hustle to get there with both feet."[12]

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12 Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 1-84; Daniel Robison, *Bob Taylor and the Agrarian Revolt in Tennessee* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935); Clyde L. Ball, "The Public Career of Colonel A. S. Colyar," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 23 (1953): 23-47, 106-128, 213-238; Sarah McCanless Howell, "The Editorials of Arthur S. Colyar, Nashville Prophet of the New South," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 27 (1968): 262-276. State Party platforms of the period can be found in Robert White, *Messages of the Governors of Tennessee*, Volumes 6 and 7 (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1967); W. Scott Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Alliance* (Hardy, Arkansas, 1889), 254.

Redemption left the Republican party in chaos, but by 1880 the restoration of order created a powerful Republican bloc that survived on the liberal distribution of patronage resulting from the party's apparent monopoly of the presidency. In the Second Congressional District, Congressman Leonidas Houk used his access to patronage to build a political machine comparable to that of later urban "bosses." He kept detailed information on the voters of his district and claimed to be able to call out 2,000 campaign workers at a moment's notice to rally support for the candidate of his choice.[13]

As impressive as his claims sounded, Houk's political control barely survived the 1880s. Factionalism emerged as the party sacrificed its traditional reliance on black voters in West Tennessee in order to entice discontented whites and "Old Whigs" into a New South Republicanism. The national party led the retreat by offering patronage positions to white Democrats in preference to black Republicans. The success of the party's proselytizing efforts among the "Old Whigs" produced the prediction by the Republican National Committee that Tennessee would be "the first state to secede from the solid South." Expectations of the return of genuine two-party politics seemed to be borne out by election results. The steady decline of the Democratic margin of victory from 43,600 in 1876 to 9,180 in 1884 cheered Republican efforts, and the victory of Republican industrialist H. Clay Evans for the Congressional seat in the Third District in 1888 added that district to the Republican column for the first time since Redemption.[14]

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13 McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans*, 143-144.

14 Leonidas Houk died in 1891, and his Congressional seat went to his son, John Houk, who had served his father very capably in behind-the-scenes organizational activities. As valuable as his work had been to his father, it had been accomplished largely through an extensive correspondence due to John Houk's shy and introverted personality, a liability in the more public career in the House of Representatives. By 1894 H. Clay Evans controlled the Republican Party in East Tennessee and

Publicly the Republicans continued their campaigns in the legislature and in newspapers editorials against voting restrictions designed to limit black suffrage, but within the party, and wherever Republicans exercised political control, the party's marginalization of black influence continued unabated. Gerrymandering of voting districts and manipulation of nominating conventions reduced black influence in state and local Republican politics. Indeed, in the close gubernatorial election of 1894, Republican candidate H. Clay Evans suggested that blacks in rural West Tennessee remain at home on election day to avoid the risk of having their votes fraudulently counted. His concern over fraud did not produce a similar request for white voters to abstain from casting their ballots in counties dominated by the Democratic party. [15]

Increasingly, the Republican party valued African-American members only for the votes they cast on election day. Disillusioned black Republicans held a convention meeting in Nashville in 1884 to call for the creation of local political clubs, since "our experience with political parties has taught us . . . that if we want anything done, we must do it ourselves." National black leaders urged African Americans to divide their votes to achieve their demands, while local leaders called upon them to reject candidates imposed upon them by white political leaders.[16]

By threatening, or taking, independent action, blacks achieved a few modest successes. Twelve African Americans served in the Tennessee General Assembly in

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the state. Vincent P. De Santis, "President Arthur and the Independent Movements in the South in 1882," *Journal of Southern History* 19 (1953): 346-363; Joseph H. Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow: Tennessee Race Relations in the 1880s* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), 66; McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicanism*, 144.

15 Gordon B. McKinney, "Southern Mountain Republicans and the Negro, 1865-1900," *Journal of Southern History* 61 (1975): 510-514; Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow*, 241-242.

16 Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow*, 78, 85; Nashville *American*, 18 March 1884.

the 1880s, whereas only one other black man had previously achieved that distinction. In 1886, John J. Irvine was elected as County Court Clerk in Chattanooga in a biracial effort that made use of his active membership in the Knights of Labor. Two years later, in Middle Tennessee's Sixth Congressional District, African Americans gained control of the Republican congressional nominating convention and nominated a black man, William H. Young, for Congress. At the convention that nominated Young, blacks complained "in a bold and uncompromising" manner of the long years of service that had gone unrewarded by the Republican Party. The bitterness of African-American voters toward the unresponsiveness of the Republican Party found its counterpart among the small farmer element of the Democratic Party.[17]

Like African Americans in the Republican Party, white farmers in the Democratic Party loyally voted the party's slate of candidates year after year, but realized few benefits. Throughout the 1870s the Democratic Party remained under the control of men identified with unionist-industrialist leanings, commonly associated with the advocacy of a progressive program of mining, manufacturing, railroad construction, and urbanization that would later receive the title of "New South." The defeat of the party in the elections of 1880 ushered in a new era by raising the Bourbon wing to a position of prominence. [18]

Historians of the postbellum period have engaged in an endless debate over the relative influence of Boubons and former Whigs in the rebuilding of the South. C. Vann Woodward set the tone of the debate with his assertion that "Old Whigs" captured the political advantage during Redemption and built a New South that broke

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17 Miller, *The Official and Political Manual*, 238-244; Chattanooga *Times*, 6 August - 8 August 1886; Nashville *American*, 28 June and 24 August 1888.

18 Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 56-83.

with the old cotton South socially, economically, and politically. A bold and path-breaking view, Woodward's thesis came under attack by a number of scholars who cited the support and investment of planters in the building of textile mills in the cotton fields. In addition to establishing the financial investment of Old South money, other students of the era carefully researched legislative genealogies to demonstrate the persistence of planter control in political affairs, leading to the suggestion that the South pursued a "Prussian Road" to modernity. A recent addition to the debate offers another possibility: whatever economic differences separated New South industrialists from Bourbon planters, they remained united in their determination to maintain control over labor. [19]

Thus, although factional fights erupted between the two views thoughout the last decades of the nineteenth century, they could be counted on to close ranks in the face of any threat against cheap labor, whether the threat emerged from outside their control or came from within the party. For the farming element this closing of the ranks relegated participation in government to the exercise of the franchise. Democrats needed the votes of farmers in order to remain in power, but even as they made promises they would not keep and whipped up partisan support, they tempered radical change by constantly reminding farmers of the need to "make haste slowly." The familiar refrain characterized farmers as "the most law-abiding and conservative class in society" and encouraged them to "see to it that nothing is done that will result in the loss of this justly earned reputation." Perhaps hoping to frighten would-be

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[19] C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951, r.p., 1987), 140-174; Dwight B. Billings, *Planters and the Making of a "New South": Class, Politics, and Development in North Carolina, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); Jonathan M. Weiner, *Social Origins of the New South: Alabama, 1860-1885* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); James C. Cobb, "Beyond Planters and Industrialists: A New Perspective on the New South," *Journal of Southern History* 54 (1988): 45-68.

radicals into compliance, party elites reminded farmers that they possessed "great power," but warned that that power "if not kept within its legitimate channel [may] prove to be a curse, instead of a blessing." The message was clear, whether it came from New South advocates or Old South Bourbons: the party needed the votes of the farmer, but he should not presume to operate outside his "legitimate channel" of asking nothing more than the opportunity to cast his ballot, lest he disrupt the order of society. [20]

With the pressures of economic and social changes that demanded government response in the form of regulatory law and legal protections, farmers became increasingly restless with the *status quo* tactics of the Democratic Party and began making demands for reform. Unfocused and ineffectual at first, farmers spoke with ever more persistence during the course of the 1880s. As they moved toward political activism to gain their demands, complaints arose against the so-called "courthouse rings" that monopolized political power and stymied reform. Mrs. M. E. Hill, a Jefferson County woman, expressed the bitterness of many when she observed that "the men of this nation once voted like kings and were free, but today they look up to monied men and bosses." A Lake County farmer asserted, "we have been voting for cliques and rings, for professional politicians, dead beats and jack-leg lawyers, until we are almost in bondage." Others wanted party leaders to know that "we are sick and tired of old political frauds as representative men, generally in the person of some lawyer that loves the people well, but himself better." Farmers recognized that such a man "knows how to take care of his own interest and represents the people accordingly." A Tipton County farmer summed up the feelings of many when he

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20 *Rural Sun*, 12 June 1873.

complained that famers had "listened to silver-tongued orators, court-house cliques, professional politicians, etc., and did their biddings, voted as they told them, and went on like a blind horse until, alas! they fell into the ditch." [21]

While rotation of offices, particularly in the General Assembly, seems to belie the claims of disgruntled farmers as to the monopoly of power by the few, they were not alone in their complaints about cliques and courthouse rings. Editors of respectable daily newspapers periodically issued warnings against the abuse of power by rings and cliques, and scholarly evidence supports the charge that party control rested on a complex network of friendship and kinship that inhibited fundamental change. Sons and nephews followed fathers and uncles into the state legislature. The trail of political power wound from the courthouse to the legislative halls of the state and nation in a manner guaranteed to stifle grassroots reform. And what friendship and familial ties could not control, manipulation and electoral fraud could. [22]

Manipulation of county nominating conventions had progressed to the form of a fine art by the time farmers entered the political fray. Information about the various tactics county politicians developed was shared among farmers anxious to nominate their own candidates. Farmers in Perry County issued a warning to members of the Agricultural Wheel to beware of "tricky politicians." In order to "get up strife and

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21 *Toiler*, 7 May 1890, 11 July 1888, 4 December 1889, 11 July 1888.

22 An example of an editorial complaint against political control can be found in the *Chattanooga Times*, 8 August 1886; Hart demonstrates the complex kinship and friendship ties of prominent Democratic office holders in genealogical charts, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 64-65. There are many examples of ties that extend across the spectrum of political power, but the case of George Gibbs Dibrell will serve as an example. Dibrell, from Sparta, Tennessee, served as County Court Clerk of White County 1848-1860. After the war, he held a seat in Congress, 1874-1884, while his son served as Clerk and Master of White County, and his cousin, Charles N. Gibbs, held the post of Secretary of State of Tennessee. See William S. Speer, *Sketches of Prominent Tennesseans* (Nashville: Albert B. Tavel, 1888), 226-230.

confusion" within the order, local politicians had nominated two wheelers to oppose one another for the same office. "If we allow our flock to scatter in county elections, how can we expect to unite and send men to represent us in the next General Assembly?" they asked. A Marshall County farmer discussed what was probably a more common mechanism for controlling nominations. As he explained it, Lewisburg, the county seat, had "its little 'town ring' who have so long been accustomed to controlling the action of all of our Democratic conventions that they have become firmly impressed with the idea that it was their especial perogative to select a chairman and secretary of their own choosing." After choosing the presiding and recording officers, a motion would be made to allow the chairman to appoint a committee to select a slate of candidates. In this way the will of the "ring" prevailed, and "it was generally understood that the ring and their little coterie of followers over the county would consider it exceedingly cheeky in any outsider to object to anything the bosses proposed." [23]

Fraudulent voting, ballot-box stuffing, and false reporting became so common as to seem the norm. At every level of government the vote was manipulated to determine the outcome. Indeed, the Redemption of Tennessee in 1869 rested on the willingness of Governor DeWitt C. Senter to replace election officials with men who would ignore registration laws and permit voting by disfranchised ex-Confederates. Seven years later the nation watched in fear and wonder as charges of voting fraud in the Presidential election threatened to split the country into warring camps again. The "resolution" of the conflict, which stole the election from Samuel Tilden and gave it to Rutherford Hayes, while perhaps satisfying southern demands for

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23 *Toiler,* 18 July 1888, 11 July 1888.

an end to Reconstruction, did nothing to reassure voters that their ballots could be honestly cast and honestly counted. [24]

In Tennessee Democrats accused Republicans of the fraudulent use of African-American votes, while Republicans threatened federal intervention against "the despicable methods" that characterized "Ku Klux democratic leadership." Regardless of party affiliation, few voters could have been unaware of the problems of obtaining an honest count of the will of the electorate. Widespread charges of fraud in the election of 1888 produced calls for the voting restrictions that resulted in a series of disfranchising laws that operated against African-American and poor white voters. Many voters called for the use of primaries rather than mass meetings for choosing candidates, but others warned that the primary was "little better than the mass meeting," since it was "open to all kinds of cheating, repeating, ballot box stuffing, etc." These critics offered the view that the ward or district meeting "where citizens meet together and are all known to each other" presented the only legitimate solution. In such meetings, they believed, voters had the opportunity to "choose a number of delegates whose sentiments are known to represent the will of the district." There, "the humblest voter has a fair chance of expressing himself in a district meeting, among his neighbors, without fear of brow-beating from ruffians and politicians." Defenders of primaries offered them as an expedient method of nomination that avoided debacles like that of the Tenth District convention of 1890 that required over 5,000 ballots to

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24 Queener, "A Decade of East Tennessee Republicanism," 70-74; Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow*, 210-220. Also see C. Vann Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1951, r.p., 1966); Marilyn J. Hutton, "The Election of 1896 in the Tenth Congressional District of Tennessee" (PhD diss., Memphis State University, 1976).

name a candidate. But, since primaries were not regulated by the general election laws, fraud abounded and some wards recorded more votes than registered voters. [25]

Every effort to end fraudulant election practices offered partisan advantage and produced little actual reform. In 1890 the Obion County election to determine the location of the county seat was so corrupt that it was reported that one of the competitors, Union City, reportedly adopted the slogan "Win, fairly if you can, but win!" A tally of the votes determined that Union City had won, but only by "voting all of the living and most of those who had been in their graves since the close of the civil war." The Gubernatorial election of 1894 marked the low point of the state electoral process when a reverse of the Tilden-Hayes theft elevated the Democratic candidate to the state executive office by discarding enough Republican ballots to change the final tally. Clearly, cries against courthouse rings and stolen elections reflected serious concerns and should not be lightly dismissed as nothing more than the whining of defeated office seekers or the rantings of demogogues. [26]

Political parties met the demands of farmers with campaign promises and platitudes, but few substantive changes. "Little Hatchet," a regular contributor to the *Toiler* attacked the Democratic Party for its undying support of a low tariff to the neglect of other issues. "I have heard the tariff discussed until I am perfectly disgusted," he wrote, "and it seems to me that any sane person could see that the message on tariff is only a beautiful spider web constructed solely for the purpose of catching the southern flies." After the election, he predicted, "you will not hear

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25 *Toiler*, 18 July 1888; Letter from Houk to G. P. M. Turner, 9 January 1889, Houk Papers, McClung Collection, Lawson McGhee Library, Knoxville.

26 Rebel C. Forrester and Betty B. Wood, *"I Had A Real Good Time": The Making of a Country Editor: The Recollections of James M. Brice of the "News-Banner" of Troy, Tennessee (1862-1926)* (Union City: Lanzer Printing Company, 1984), 148-151.

another word about the reduction of the tariff." In frustration agrarian leaders advised farmers to abandon partisanship and vote for the candidate who would protect agricultural interests. Speeches and editorials attacked the political parties for their failure to listen to agrarian demands and provide reform leadership. "Party spirit has robbed agriculture of its precious boom and lost all of its charms for the tillers of the soil," asserted one letter writer. Farmers recognized that "the ballot box is the only resort and only hope for reform," and accordingly, they "have determined to no longer blindly follow the lead of party spirit or flinch under party lash, but will go for the best thing and best men in sight and teach parties a lesson." It was this determination that agrarian leaders believed "troubles political tricksters." D. A. Vaughan warned farmers that "old party prejudices and ties are so strong that reason and even the general good of mankind are really lost sight of and trampled under foot to gratify this demon of party spirit." A month after Vaughan's appeal, the secretary of his county wheel, J. H. Reed, gave assurances of the non-partisan stance taken by farmers in Bedford County. "We have all, or nearly all, concluded to lay aside politics and vote for the man, let him be Democrat or Republican, from school commissioner to congress and governor, believing it to be the only way we can be successful in electing officers to represent us." To those who could not change parties to bring about reform, Reed offered no remedy but to "scratch, brother, scratch." [27]

The reforms farmers sought in the 1880s differed little from those demanded by earlier agrarian organizations: railroad regulation, protection of agricultural property, and tax equalization. By the 1890s the failure to find relief and the growing

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27 *Toiler*, 19 September, 25 July, 27 June, and 25 July 1888. "Little Hatchet," a frequent contributor to the *Toiler* from Marshall County, was J. F. "Fount" Tillman. He served two terms in the Tenessee General Assembly, 1877-79 and 1883-85. He was secretary of the National Executive Committe of the Farmers' Alliance and was associated with the *National Economist*.

economic dispair pushed the agricultural demands to more radical levels and calls for a third party.

For Tennesseans living in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the railroads presented a problem compounded by the ambiguous desires of farmers and city dwellers for economic expansion and the need for regulation to protect their interests against what many perceived to be the growth of "evil" monopolies. Men and women in small towns and rural counties experienced the rise of corporate America primarily through their dealings with the railroads. The ruthless and impersonal nature of business in an era of industrial building and merger struck many Americans as threatening to the very fabric of the nation. Regulation of the railroads gained popularity and by 1880 fully half the states had railroad commissions. At the same time small businessmen, town boosters, and farmers recognized the economic potential that accompanied railroad growth, and they encouraged it in a variety of ways, including tax exemptions and public bond issues. The confluence of the problems and the potentials associated with railroads sometimes created the paradoxical situation where men who demanded regulation cheered wildly when the railroad finally reached their neck of the woods. [28]

The railroad "bug" bit the Volunteer State early in the 1830s as schemers and visionaries foretold a future tied to that of the coastal cities of Charleston and Baltimore. Railroad building did not meet the immediate expectations of the state's

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[28] For a discussion of the national business changes and the growth of railroads, see Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900-1916* (New York: Free Press, 1963, r.p., 1977); Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977); Henry Demarest Lloyd, *Wealth Against Commonwealth* (1896); Glen Porter, *The Rise of Big Business: 1860-1920,* 2nd Edition (Arlington Heights: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1992); Oliver Zunz, *Making America Corporate: 1870-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

leaders, but by the beginning of the Civil War Tennessee had developed rail connections to the Atlantic coast, as well as to New Orleans and Mobile.[29]

The destruction caused by the war and the changing needs of post-war Tennessee produced a rush of railroad projects--many poorly conceived and under-capitalized. Too much railroad construction was undertaken with public money, which was promptly lost when economic hardship and/or fiscal reality led to bankruptcy. As a result, much of the turmoil surrounding the state debt issue centered on the problem of railroad bonds. The divisiveness generated by the state debt issue and the role played by the railroads in creating the debt left many voters disillusioned. [30]

The railroads worked hard to promote a good public image. Many railroads included an honored ex-Confederate general on the Board of Directors, and former governors also found a welcome home in the corporate structure. The railroads were especially solicitous of their most vocal critics, the farmers, who complained bitterly about rate differentials for local and long hauls. The Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railroad hired the former State Agriculture Commissioner, Joseph Killebrew, as one of its agents and encouraged his promotion of Tennessee agriculture, mining, and immigration efforts. Agents of the railroad aided agricultural fairs, distributed seeds, and encouraged the development of agricultural societies. When the Agricultural Wheel and the Farmers' Alliance made their appearance in the 1880s, the railroads provided reduced rates to state and national meetings. In July 1888, when the State

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29 Robert E. Corlew, *Tennessee: A Short History* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 241-268.

30 Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 28-56; Edward Cameron Duggins, "Background for Regulation of the Railroads in Tennessee" (MA thesis, University of Tennessee: 1939), 13-32.

Wheel met at Dunbar's Cave in Montgomery County, the L&N Railroad offered transportation for Wheelers and their families at excursion rates. No doubt the railroad justified the offer as "good business," since the Wheel hoped to attract 50,000 people to the combination picnic/rally/business meeting. Profit may not have been the only motive for the decision to provide transportation at a reduced rate for delegates to the national meeting of the Farmers' Alliance in Memphis in November 1892. There agrarian leaders debated the future of the Alliance and the newly established People's Party, and presumably plotted stategies for consolidating their recent electoral gains in order to promote regulation of monopolies. In addition to providing cheap transportation for agricultural leaders, the railroads bought weekly advertising space in the cash-strapped Wheel and Alliance newspaper, a potential conflict of interest that no one seemed to notice. [31]

Perhaps the best example of the merging of railroad and agricultural interests occurred in the town of Gates in Lauderdale County. The town was established in 1883 with the completion of the Memphis and Paducah Railroad. One historian of the area asserts that the town was named for Col. Robert Gates, who served as Assistant Commissioner of Agriculture during the William Bate administration (1883-1885) and "look[ed] after the railroad interests in the legislature, and in a general sense promot[ed] good will between the people and the railroads in Tennessee." Both as an

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31 See John F. Stover, *Railroads in the South, 1865-1900: A Study in Finance and Control* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955); Jesse C. Burt, Jr., "Four Decades of the Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis Railway, 1873-1916," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 9 (1950): 99-130; Papers of J. B. Killebrew, "Autobiography," TSLA; *Toiler,* 4 July and 11 July 1888; *National Economist* November 1892. Prominent Tennesseans serving on railroad boards included former Governor John C. Brown, who became president of the Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company, former Governor James D. Porter, a former Confederate general who was associated with the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad, and former Confederate General George Dibrill, who served as president of Southwestern Railroad. See Duggins, "Background for Regulation of Railroads in Tennessee," 70-71.

advocate of farm institutes and as an agent of the Ohio Valley Railway and the Tennessee Midland Railroad, Gates preached diversification from cotton to truck and fruit farming. The completion of the railway and the establishment of the town of Gates fulfilled the expectations of many area farmers who accepted the "gospel" of diversification. Without the railroad, transportation over country roads made cotton the only realistic market crop. Perishable fruits and vegetables required ready access to distant markets. With the coming of the railroad, the area around Gates shifted to the production of other crops, including strawberries and tomatoes. Production increased yearly, and in 1917 the town shipped 107 railroad cars of strawberries. [32]

Although this melding of corporate and agricultural interests continued throughout the period, farmers across the state expressed deep reservations about the unabated growth of railroad power, particularly as it reduced competition through mergers. From the standpoint of small businessmen and farmers, competition provided the surest guarantee of reasonable transportation rates. As the number of independent railroads shrank, the pressure grew for state regulation. In 1881, J. M. Coulter of Gibson County, a future leader in the Wheel and Alliance, introduced a bill in the Tennessee House of Representatives to regulate railroad rates. This weak measure was easily defeated, but the issue was far from dead, and in the next legislative session both the House and the Senate introduced regulatory bills. Agitation for the passage of railroad regulation embraced the concerns of small producers who believed

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32 Bettie B. Davis, *Gates, Tennessee: Now and Then* (Ripley: n.p., 1986). According to D. G. Godwin, Commissioner of Agriculture, 1891-1892, strawberries were first introduced into West Tennessee as a market crop in 1867. The success of the crop encouraged others to plant strawberries, and, in 1892, Tennessee shipped 115,431 crates. Tomatoes enjoyed a similar success, and in 1892 the West Tennessee counties shipped 200,166 cases. See *Biennial Report of the Bureau of Agriculture, 1891 and 1892* (Nashville, 1893). The diaries of Robert Cartmell and Nannie Haskins Williams both discuss the cultivation and picking of strawberries.

differential rates unfairly pitted "our poor land in direct competition with the alluvial prairies of the West, stripping us of the privileges of a local market, which has been developed and matured by the advantage of toil and proximity to market." The East Tennessee Farmers Convention complained about the cost of shipping farm implements, which averaged fifty percent higher than rates through Knoxville to points farther south. Many voters found the practice of distributing free railroad passes to state legislators a despicable breach of ethics and justified the creation of a railroad commission on the grounds of ending the practice. Railroads complained that they had become the victims of a "fierce attack by all classes of citizens," and pointed to the high costs of operation and the frequency with which railroads fell into the hands of receivers. They warned of the potential losses to their investors and begged for a more "thoughtful and considerate" law that would be "of mutual advantage to the railroads and the people." Despite the pressure brought to bear on the legislature by the railroad lobbyists, the measure to create a regulatory commission passed in 1883. Governor William B. Bate appointed John H. Savage, G. W. Gordon, and J. A. Turley to the three-man commission. The commission tackled its duties with a zeal that alarmed the railroads and, no doubt, facilitated the quick demise of the agency. [33]

Demands for rate schedules by the commissioners and subsequent rate regulation drove the railroads to seek relief from the federal courts. In February 1884 an injunction against the commission was issued by the U.S. District Court. The court

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33 Duggins, "Background for Regulation of the Railroads in Tennessee," 49-97; Knoxville *Tribune*, 15 March 1877, 17 December 1882, and 4 March 1883; J. B. Killebrew, the former Agricultural Commissioner and a railroad man, attributed the failure of the Railroad Commission to the demogoguery of John H. Savage, a common tactic for discrediting political adversaries. See Killebrew, "Autobiography," TSLA; *Acts of the State of Tennessee, 1883*, 199. Also see Jesse C. Burt, Jr., "Four Decades of the Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis Railway, 1873-1916," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 9 (1950): 99-130.

found that the act was "a regulation of inter-state commerce, and to that extent an intrusion upon the exclusive legislative authority of Congress." Democrats promised reform of the measure, but Republicans agitated toward abolition of the agency. [34]

The Railroad Commission became the central issue in the 1884 election and doomed regulation with the election of three commissioners who promised to get rid of the agency. When the General Assembly met in 1885, repeal of the Railroad Commission easily passed both House and Senate despite an appeal by Governor Bate to reform rather than abolish the Commission. John H. McDowell, editor of the *Toiler* and vice president of the National Farmers' Alliance, voted for the commission as a member of the House in 1883 and for the repeal as a member of the Senate in 1885. He explained his actions by reaffirming his desire for a railroad commission, but, "considering the fact that commissioners have been elected who are opposed to the principle . . . I favor repeal of the present commission law, and there to let the matter rest until the next session of the General Assembly." [35]

The demand for regulation did not force renewed efforts in the legislature. Perhaps the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Wabash v. Illinois* (1886) that denied states the right to regulate local and long-haul rates dampened enthusiasm. No doubt some could put faith in the 1887 Interstate Commerce Act, though the Knoxville *Tribune* predicted otherwise. "It is not possible," wrote the editor, "that the new Interstate Commerce law can correct all the abuses of railroad operation. There are

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34 Duggins, "Background for Regulation of the Railroads in Tennessee," 93; Nashville *Daily American*, 1 March 1884.

35 Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 72-79; Duggins, "Background for Regulation of the Railroads in Tennessee," 95; White, *Messages of the Governors of the State of Tennessee*, Volume 7; *Journal of the Tennessee House of Representatives, 1885; Journal of the Tennessee Senate, 1885*; *First and Second Annual Reports of the Railroad Commissioners for the State of Tennessee* (Nashville 1884); *Acts of the State of Tennessee, 1885*, 155.

hundreds of cases not touched by the law." Indeed, the editor expected the railroads to take advantage of the abuses not prohibited, and "when the people cry out against them the railroads will say that all the trouble was caused by the Interstate Commerce law." [36]

Problems with the railroads continued, particularly with regard to the protection of livestock. In addition, farmers expressed concerns over the acquisition of public lands by railroads, fearing the monopoly of land and the subsequent growth of tenant farming. At least in Tennessee, regulation of railroad rates retreated to the background as other concerns rose to the forefront, although opponents of the Farmers' Alliance would attempt to tie the organization and its political supporters to state regulation in the 1891 legislative session. When the state did acquire a Railroad Commission in 1895, it was marked by a conservatism that generated few objections from the regulated corporations. No doubt the failure to achieve state regulation of the most visible corporate entity confirmed agrarian views that modern business practices of influence buying and political pressure supported the growth of "monopolies" and "trusts" and rendered the states helpless to deal with the situation. The only recourse for the small producer centered on the creation of active farmer organizations that could command economic respect by behaving in a monopolistic fashion to control costs and prices and protect agricultural interests through national institutional and regulatory changes. [37]

Every meeting of the General Assembly in the late nineteenth century dealt with the problems of protection of property rights and the regulation of common rights

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36 Knoxville, *Tribune*, 21 April 1887.

37 Duggins, "Background for Regulation of the Railroads in Tennessee," 120.

in the form of fence laws, dog laws, and game and fish laws; and every legislature failed to find acceptable and permanent solutions. At the heart of the issue was the question of who would be held responsible and therefore bear the financial burden for the destruction of crops by wandering livestock. Open range laws that characterized antebellum agriculture were no longer acceptable to commercial farmers, who complained of the high cost and waste associated with fencing agricultural land. On the other hand, stockmen and herders pointed to time-honored range laws and accused planters of elitism. Dog laws and game laws followed a similar line of thinking. In Tennessee the problem was compounded by the constitutional power given to the state legislature that inhibited county and city home rule. Whatever the original merits of this line of reasoning, the requirement precluded recognition of the differences in agricultural production across the state. As a result, the General Assembly spent (or wasted) an extraordinary amount of time in every leglislative session reformulating the fence laws and granting exemptions to particular counties. As one Constitutional expert noted, "the Counties which are densely populated, need one kind of road and fence law, and the sparsely settled mountain Counties need another kind, but as it is, the populous suburbs of Nashville and of Memphis, must have the same road and fence laws as the trackless mountains of East Tennessee." Calls for constitutional reform greeted every legislative campaign, but Tennessee continued to struggle with an outdated system for the sake of continuity and political control. [38]

Among historians of the post-bellum South, the fence laws have become the ideological measurement of Populist historiographical interpretation. Advocates of statistical analysis of Populism depict the agrarian advocates of both sides of the issue

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38 Joshua W. Caldwell, *Studies in the Constitutional History of Tennessee* (Cincinnati, 1895), 160.

as acting in their own self interest without evoking a cultural or ideological clash. On the other side of the debate, historians of political culture protest their innocence as the perceived advocates of cultural warfare and defend the view that the local political struggles of stock law controversies were indicative of larger conflicts in the post-emancipation experience. [39]

While the issue never attained the political importance that it achieved in Georgia, perhaps because it was not made a local-option for the electorate, the fence law/stock law debate hovered around the periphery of agrarian concerns and supplied advocates of farmer organizations with a prime example of the way in which their interests had been ignored by lawyer-dominated state government. Every agrarian organization, from the Patrons of Husbandry to the Farmers' Alliance, advocated stock laws and restrictions of dog ownership. Although the Grange strongly supported stock laws and dog laws, later agricultural organizations, while cognizant of the problem, refused to make these issues central to their political agenda. Instead, they focused on the ineptitude of lawyers in trying to determine agricultural policies. The impression their activities foster is one of political expediency based on the recognition that demands for stock laws would reduce their support among tenant farmers and herders in East Tennessee. Therefore, at every legislative session, negotiations began anew to find a compromise that farmers could support, politically and financially. [40]

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[39] For a complete discussion of the historiographical debate see Shawn Everett Kantor and J. Morgan Kousser, "Common Sense or Commonwealth? The Fence Law and Institutional Change in the Postbellum South," *Journal of Southern History* 59 (1993): 201-242; Steven Hahn, "A Response: Common Cents or Historical Sense?," *Journal of Southern History* 59 (1993): 243-258; Shawn Everett Kantor and J. Morgan Kousser, "A Rejoinder: Two Visions of History," *Journal of Southern History* 59 (1993): 259-266.

[40] The agrarian perception of lawyer domination of the General Assembly had some merit. A survey of the legislature in the 1880s shows that lawyers constituted the largest professional group in both the House and Senate in the1880s. In 1881, there were 44 lawyers in the General Assembly and only 9 farmers. By 1885, the farmers had improved their numbers to 25, but were still outnumbered

Fencing the land to keep livestock out of the tilled acres, or to keep livestock within the farm boundaries, involved the agricultural community on every level: political, social, and economic. Robert Cartmell tied the issue to the emancipation of slavery when he noted the proximity of freedom and the appearance of barbed wire. Without slave herders or protectors of planted acreage, free-roaming cattle and hogs trampled corn and cotton, an economic loss market-oriented farmers could ill afford as prices dropped. To farmers the answer was simple: require stock laws to keep livestock penned and make stockmen responsible for damages if gates were left open or animals broke free. Raisers of blooded cattle, horses, sheep, and hogs agreed, since contamination of the bloodlines by wandering animals threatened their livelihoods as well. But poorer stockmen pointed to the traditional rights of free range and argued in favor of fence laws that required farmers to fence in their crops to prevent the entry of roaming animals. Farmers, on the other hand, criticized the waste of fence laws that required the extravagent use of precious timber resources. They were joined by tenant farmers whose contracts often stipulated that they bear the expense of fencing in new fields. When Archelaus M. Hughes rented "about an acre of ground to plant in tobacco" to "Old Frank," he did so "on condition that he finishes cleaning it up and fences it." More than a decade later, as county Farmers' Alliances passed resolutions

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by the 45 lawyers in the House and Senate. More than one-third of the men who listed their occupation as farming were classified as large planters, an indication that their interests may not have coincided with those of the smaller, middle-level farmers. The impact of the election of 1890 can be measured in the number of legislators claiming law as their profession. Thirty-three members of the two houses were lawyers. The effect was felt most strongly in the House, where the number of lawyers dropped from the usual 30+ to 20. Sixty-six men, of whom 54 belonged to the Alliance, claimed agriculture as their occupation. In addition to the persistant strength of the legal profession in the legislature, a growing number of physicians were elected to public office. See Charles A. Miller, *The Official and Political Manual*, 238-248; Robert M. McBride, Dan M. Robison, eds., *Biographical Directory of the Tennessee General Assembly*, Volume II, 1861-1901 (Nashville: Tennessee State Library and Archives and Tennessee Historical Commission, 1979).

in favor of stock laws, a renter from Shelby County complained that such laws taxed the poor when landlords erected fences and charged tenants "from one to five dollars per month for pasturage." As much as market-oriented farmers wanted to reform the laws protecting agricultural property, the reality of the diversity of views and the need to create unity among the farming interests prevented the settlement of this basic issue. [41]

Agitation for a "dog law" centered on the need to protect the sheep industry of the state. Proponents of the law attributed the decline of sheep raising to the threat posed by packs of unrestrained dogs roaming the state and killing sheep. Agricultural leaders encouraged sheep raising as a profitable alternative to cotton or tobacco farming, noting the advantage to sheep raising offered by the protective tariff on wool. On the opposing side of the dog law stood the poor farmer and renter, who made up the majority of the electorate. [42]

When the General Assembly met in 1875, the legislators garnered enough votes to pass "An Act to Encourage Wool Growing," which made the keeping of dogs a taxable privilege. Tax assessors were given the responsibility of enumerating all dogs in the county and tax collectors were charged with collecting fees of one dollar per dog and five dollars per unspayed bitch. As might be expected, the law raised strong opposition, and the next legislature returned to the question with the intention of repealing the law. [43]

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41 Cartmell Diary, 4 January 1892, TSLA; Hughes Diary, 19 February 1875, TSLA; *Toiler*, 27 February 1889.

42 Tennessee produced 427,623 sheep, valued at $832,330 in 1890 according to the report of the State Agricultural Commissioner. See *Report of Bureau of Agriculture of Tennessee, 1889-1890*, 40.

43 *Acts of the State of Tennessee*, 1875.

Defenders of the law charged that "a few demagogues, seeking the favor of the dear people, have in order to curry favor with the populace, persuded themselves that the poor people were terribly oppressed by the dog law." The real problem, according to this view, was that "men of honesty and ability seeking election had not the courage to argue the question and convince the people, as could easily have been done, that a sheep was worth more than a dog." Having called into question the courage of the lawmakers, editorial writers admonished the legislators to "lead public sentiment, direct it in the proper channels, and not be weakly led by the populace." It was clear to the advocates of the dog law that they were fighting a losing battle, as it seemed that when the legislature convened in January 1877, "four out of every five of the members had a bill stowed away in their coat-tail pockets to repeal the dog law." During a legislative break in February, the lawmakers were encouraged "to consult the [county] tax books." There, it was charged, it would become plain that those who kept large numbers of dogs were not property owners. Supporters of the dog law pointed to a case where "a free and independent voter was taxed with five dogs and one poll--nothing else." Clearly, the line had been drawn between property owners and advocates of diversification and the "free and independent," but unpropertied voters. In this case, the poorer class won and the law was repealed, undoing what at least one farmer saw as one of "the blunders of the last two legislatures." Pressure continued from commercial farmers and livestock men to enact a new dog law, but political expediency ruled against further legislation. [44]

The position of the Wheel and Alliance on the matter lends support to the perception that commercial farmers with "middle-class" views dominated the

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44 *Rural Sun*, 8 February 1877; *Acts of the State of Tennessee, 1877*; Hughes Diary, 7 January 1877, TSLA.

membership. Wheels and Alliances in counties as diverse as Stewart, Wilson, and Davidson passed resolutions in favor of dog laws. J. W. Taylor of White County, where sheep raising formed a significant portion of the economy, proposed "a premium on dog scalps" to encourage the killing of "worthless dogs." Supporters of the wool industry kept the public informed of the problem by periodically printing the tally of sheep lost to dogs. But, as with fence and stock laws, not every Wheeler or Allianceman joined the fight to tax dogs. A letter to the *Toiler* from Shelby County complained that dog laws operated in such a way as "to make the poor renter and share worker bear this burden." Men living in towns, it was asserted, could buy their meat, but insisted on taxing the poor man who used his dogs to hunt "possums, coons, squirrels, and rabbits." Taxing dogs took meat from the tables of poor families and reduced their meager pleasures to intolerable levels. The Wheel and Alliance printed county resolutions and opposing letters but took no definitive position, though the editorial comments makes it clear that the leadership favored stock laws and dog laws. In the name of unity, they re-focused the problem to a campaign against the predominance of lawyers in the General Assembly and their historic inability to understand and deal with agricultural problems, rather than championing solutions that might disrupt the organization. [45]

The third area of concern for the agricultural community centered on the problem of tax assessment. Both the amount of the assessment and the mechanism for determining individual tax liability worried farmers. Since taxes on land and personal property remained the chief source of public revenue, periods of economic stagnation or decline fell with greater force on farmers. Even the most austere government

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45 *Toiler*, 27 February 1889.

expenditures came under intense public scrutiny. Small town boosterism, anticipating a New South boom, argued in favor of new, centrally located schools, new courthouses, paved streets, and public utilities. But farmers, who realized few of the benefits, not unexpectedly resented paying for benefits they would be unable to enjoy. Of particular concern was the renewal of the right to issue public bonds to finance the construction of railroads, which had been denied following redemption due to the extraordinary growth in public debt during the Brownlow administration. When the citizens of Nashville were given the opportunity to vote for railroad bonds to build a local line, the Agricultural Wheel urged defeat of the proposition. After giving assurances that the Wheel harbored no ill will toward railroads, and, indeed, "want more of them, and favor encouraging their building by every fair, just and proper means," the Wheel warned its constituents against a repetition of Tennessee's "bitter experience," and the "burdensome debt" that "hangs over us and will be handed down to our children." The argument against public funding of railroad construction argued that "if the merchants of Nashville will show to the capitalists, that the building of railroads will be an investment that will pay a reasonable profit, the roads will be built by those who are to own them and get the profits." Property owners who desired additional facitilites should be encouraged to subscribe, but Wheelers asserted that the subscriber had "no right through the means of unjust taxation, to compel another property-holder to subscribe to an enterprise which he may honestly believe will not in any degree benefit him." The Sumner County Wheel deemed the whole effort "contrary to the principles of wheelerism." Farmers did not oppose progress, but they did take exception to what they perceived as "taxing individuals for the benefit of corporations." [46]

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46 Wayne K. Durrill, "Producing Poverty: Local Government and Economic Development

The concerns of the farmers were not misplaced. Despite the settlement of the state debt issue, the State of Tennessee continued to struggle with chronic problems of public finance attributed to the deficiency of state revenue collections. In 1889 Governor Robert L. Taylor traveled to New York City to obtain loans to make the interest payments on the state bonds. As a result of the state needs and at the urging of the governor, legislators began to look for ways to close tax loopholes and streamline the process of tax collection. Under the postbellum system of tax assessment and collection, assessors selected from each voting district were charged with the duty of visually inspecting all property and obtaining from the property owner an estimate of the market value of the land and a declaration of personal property in excess of one thousand dollars. Constables from each voting district collected the taxes that had been assessed on the basis of the property owners' valuations. Needless to say, the system offered many opportunities for under-reporting and lowered taxes. Assessors and constables were neighbors, and often kinfolk, to the property owners and were subject to personal and communal pressures to recognize the effects of economic hardship and agree to the underassessment of property.

In his message to the forty-third General Assembly in 1883, Republican Governor Alvin Hawkins alluded to the "serious complaints" that had come to his attention regarding the assertions "that much of the taxable property of the state ha[d] not been assessed for taxation." Furthermore, complainants claimed that "much of what ha[d] been assessed ha[d] been assessed at figures far below its true value." Hawkins declared it "manifestly unjust" that one property owner should pay taxes on an assessment at "true value" while "the property of another should be assessed at less

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in a New South County, 1874-1884," *Journal of American History* 71 (1985): 764-781.

than its true value." Governor William B. Bate, Hawkins's successor, presented a more specific condemnation of the assessment laws. After citing the state constitutional requirement for equality, Bate noted that a significant portion of property owned by corporations had been "exempted for years by charter stipulations." Bate, a Bourbon Democrat, claimed to find no justification for this practice and recommended the search for a "practical and efficient mode of ascertaining the value" of business property in order to tax it "as the Constitution requires, according to its value." [47]

Farmers cheered what they perceived as a recognition of their plight as the primary bearers of the responsibility for maintaining the fiscal health of the state. As historian Michael R. Hyman observed, "during the antebellum era, landed property had been lightly taxed and other property owned by small farmers had been generally exempt from taxation," with a large portion of public revenues being raised from a levy on slaves. After the war, the principal source of state and local revenue was the *ad valorem* tax on land. But, as Hyman noted, the increase in taxation felt by the agrarian class "did not translate into increased state services," but serviced the public debt. Throughout the period farmers pressed for equity in taxation and an end to the "special privileges" accorded to manufacturers and railroads. [48]

The demands of Hawkins and Bate produced no significant reforms, and when assessment reform passed during the administration of Robert L. Taylor (1887-1891), it generated a new round of anguished cries for relief and elicited dire predictions of

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47 *House Journal 1883*, 60; Robert H. White, *Messages of the Governors of Tennessee, 1883-1899*, Volume 7, 57.

48 Michael R. Hyman, *The Anti-Redeemers: Hill-Country Political Dissenters in the Lower South From Redemption to Populism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990): 99-100.

the domination of agricultural interests by those of the towns. Instead of reducing the tax burden of the farmers, reform, with its new mechanisms for assessment and collection, increased the annual levy at a time when farmers felt the pinch of declining prices. Under the new system of taxation, the state levy was set at thirty cents per one hundred dollars assessed value, with a school tax of fifteen cents per one hundred. Each county court was required to name a tax assessor to oversee assessment and collection for the entire county. As a result of the change, state revenue collection improved dramatically. In his 1889 message to the state assembly, Governor Taylor reported an increase in state revenues of $223,752, which he attributed to "closer collections and prompt settlements." He expected even greater returns in the following years due to the increased valuation of property under the new assessment law. Additional revenues amounting to $170,000 were anticipated for the coming year. [49]

Complaints against the assessment law filled the newspapers as the General Assembly began its legislative session in 1889. When the Gibson County Wheel met on January 3, the assembled delegates passed a resolution demanding "a repeal of so much of the present assessment law as provides for the election of a county assessor." These farmers urged a return of the system whereby "the assessment of property and polls be made by the magistrates in their respective districts as heretofore, and that the collection of public taxes be made by the district constables." Gibson County farmers were joined in their protest by Wheels and Alliances in Chester, Stewart, and Wilson counties, among others, who made their demands known by passing and publishing similar resolutions. The Gibson farmers did not dismiss the new law entirely. They

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[49] *Acts of the State of Tennessee 1887*, 24-56 ; White, *Messages of the Governors of Tennessee, 1883-1899*, Volume 7, 285.

endorsed the creation of a county board of equalization and urged the creation of a state board, which would set assessments "based upon an average valuation derived from the actual sales of land in each county in order that taxation may be uniform and equal throughout the state dependent upon the ability of the citizens thereof." [50]

While farmers continued to press for equalization, the issue that now concerned them the most was the loss of control to the courthouse-based tax assessor. Already keyed to distrust the "rings" and "cliques" that dominated local politics, the granting of the additional power of determining the valuation of property for taxation placed these politicos beyond criticism or removal. Anticipation of the closing of convenient, local schools, the neglect of farm roads, and the rise of tax rates filled the thoughts of Wheel and Alliance men. If magistrates and constables failed in their duties of assessing and collecting the full measure of taxes, they also reflected the views and concerns of their neighbors and constituents. Now assessments were to be made by town men, who were unknown to individual farmers and whose obligations and responsibilities lay elsewhere. The new tax assessment law confirmed the feeling expressed by A. E. Johnson of Wilson County, when he wrote, "truer and better men never lived than the farmer and to him this whole country belongs. By his ax, hoe, plow, maul, and wedge this country of ours has been changed into a land flowing with milk and honey. The time was once when the politicians and lawmakers had great respect for this class; they were sought after and looked upon as supporters of the world; but not so now." [51]

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50 "Minutes of the Gibson County Wheel and Alliance, 1888-1892," January 3, 1889, xerox copy in the possession of the Gibson County Historical Society; *Toiler*, 23 January, 13 February, 27 February, 13 March, and 20 March 1889.

51 *Toiler*, 20 March 1889.

As Johnson's analysis indicates, farmers were filled with a sense of loss that the events of the past decade confirmed. Like other Americans of the period, they welcomed the benefits of progress. But, increasingly they recognized that the cost of progress included a devaluation of their contributions as producers and as political participants. The combination of political corruption and economic decline marginalized the agrarian community of smaller producers and left their political influence vulnerable to the demands of expediency as the two political parties vied for electoral prizes. The events of the 1880s confirmed the common perception that money and power determined political campaigns centered on personalities rather than issues. Farmers did not need demogogues to convince them of legislative ineptitude; the inactivity of their own General Assembly provided ample proof. Nor were they entirely dependent upon the fiery editorials of the new agrarian newspapers to point out the failure of the political parties to recognize and champion the interests of farmers; their inability to influence political activity at any level confirmed their impotence. If they needed additional proof, three attempts at reform offered ample evidence of the need for greater agrarian input into the political process. The failure of railroad regulation confirmed the power of monopolies to obstruct reform efforts. The lack of success in working through the problems of protecting the property rights and supporting the growth of the agricultural community substantiated the view that agricultural interests were not represented by the lawyers who filled the state legislature. And the creation of a new tax assessment law supported the suspicions of farmers who feared the consequences of the apparent shift in local political power from the yeoman to the townsman.

Chapter 3: Organizing for the Grand Work

Farmers are learning to magnify their office, and are everywhere organizing societies for mutual instruction, and for the protection of their own interests.
Joseph B. Killebrew, *Rural Sun*, 1873

While it is an established fact that the laboring classes of mankind are the real producers of wealth, we find that they are gradually becoming oppressed by combinations of capital, and the fruits of their toil absorbed by a class who propose not only to live on the labor of others, but to speedily amass fortunes at their expense.
Preamble to the Constitution of the Agricultural Wheel, 1882

We have been the great flock, only laboring to be fleeced by those whose person was too good to bathe in the scorching rays of a summer sun; and it is astonishing how we have borne with it, without a murmur.
Robbie Ruskins, 1888

The organization of Tennessee's farmers, though disparaged by opponents for its radicalism, followed a conservative plan of action. Until 1892, Tennessee reformers strictly adhered to the policy of avoiding partisan politics and hotly denied any intention of forming a third party. In the formation of a State Agency to carry out the program of cooperativism, agrarian leaders pursued a conservative course of development that avoided debt and permitted expansion only as cash became available. Though they expressed conformity with national membership policies that encouraged female members and the parallel organization of African Americans, state leaders never rigorously solicited the support of either women or blacks. Until forced into a more radical position, the Tennessee Wheel and Alliance adroitly juggled the competing political, social, and economic demands of a membership divided by class, geography, and race in order to make the movement broadly acceptable.

Skepticism about the ability of the reform organizations to make good the promised benefits abounded among Tennessee farmers mired in poverty and futility.

Wheel and Alliance organizers criss crossed the state to convince farmers that cooperativism would allow them to purchase of farm equipment at lower prices and to market crops at higher prices. They spoke at countless crossroads rallies to convince potential members that an organization of farmers could produce the legislative reforms needed for the regulation of railroad rates, the development of affordable credit, the improvement of rural education, the construction of decent roads, the protection of crops and livestock through fair and affordable fencing laws, and protection against the economic forces that produced cartels, pools, trusts, and monopolies. The failures of earlier cooperative efforts and attempts to enact agricultural legislation haunted Wheel and Alliance organizers. The diversity of the state's agricultural production added to the problems faced by organizers. Subsistence farmers on the Upper Cumberland faced different problems from those of the cotton planters and tobacco growers. Indeed, benefits for some were liabilities for others. For example, fence laws that forced livestock raisers to pen their animals operated against poorer livestockmen who depended on the free range to sustain their herds. Fence laws that required row farmers to fence their fields often placed an undue burden on tenants and sharecroppers to whom the expense of fencing sometimes passed. Likewise, the federal Conger Lard Bill protected the interests of hog farmers, but undercut the potential market for cotton farmers who sold cottonseed to the new cottonseed mills. In order to accomplish their goals, the Wheel and Alliance faced the formidable task of unifying men and women of differing and often opposing agricultural interests, who were further separated by political, social, racial, and regional differences. The successes and failures of the Tennessee effort mirrored the history of the national agrarian reform movement, which faced similar problems on a larger scale.

To understand the challenges of organization, this chapter will focus on two areas:

1. The history of agrarian reform. Although the Wheel and Alliance claimed no kinship with previous agrarian societies, specifically the Grange, their efforts were often measured by the successes and failures of the earlier reformers.
2. Organizational divisions produced by issues based on class, race, gender, and partisanship. These issues touched all the "hot buttons" of the late nineteenth-century South. Politics in Tennessee, as we have seen, operated within the ideological framework of the two major parties, but divided internally into bitter factional and personal rivalries, creating a potential time bomb for the harmony of the agrarian brotherhood. Furthermore, the constitutional inclusion of women as members and the parallel organization of black farmers chipped away at the familiar social hierarchy of race and gender. Even where there were no Colored Farmers Wheels and Alliances, or where the applications for membership by women were rejected, their acknowledged right to participate threatened the harmony of local and county organizations and opened the organization to outside criticism.

Tennessee farmers began forming agricultural societies early in the history of the state. The first such organization was the Cumberland Agricultural Society, organized in 1819 to exchange agricultural information and promote new technology. From this beginning, agricultural societies spread across the state, until most counties boasted similar organizations by the eve of the Civil War. In 1854, the General Assembly acted upon the petitions of farmers and created the Tennessee State

Agricultural Bureau. The Bureau's functions included the certification of the incorporation of county agricultural societies, the distribution of state subsidies, and the sponsorship of agricultural fairs in each of the three grand divisions and at the state level. Biennially, the Bureau reported on agricultural conditions and developments in the state. [1]

Agricultural fairs served as a mechanism for the dissemination of improved agricultural methods. Farmers and their families were drawn to the entertainment provided at fair time, and stopped to admire the newest equipment displayed by manufacturers, or watched the awarding of premiums to fellow farmers for samples of their crops or livestock. Perhaps they read or listened to essays by educators or farm journal editors. In time, the farmers of the county came to recognize those among them whose efforts deserved special recognition, and whose advice could be sought

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[1] Donald L. Winters, *Tennessee Farming, Tennessee Farmers: Antebellum Agriculture in the Upper South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 173-74. For additional sources on agriculture in Tennessee and the South in the antebellum period, see Joyce Appleby, "Commercial Farming and the 'Agrarian Myth' in the Early Republic," *Journal of American History* 68 (1982): 833-49; Edmund Cody Bonner, "Hog Raising and Hog Driving in the Region of the French Broad River," *Agricultural History* 20 (1946): 87-103; Lewis C. Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860*, 2 volumes (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1933; Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1958); Thomas B. Jones, "The Public Lands of Tennessee," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 27 (1968): 13-26; Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhiney, "The Antebellum Southern Herdsman: A Reinterpretation," *Journal of Southern History* 41 (1975): 147-76; Frank L. Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1949); Frank L. Owsley and Harriet C. Owsley, "The Economic Structure of Rural Tennessee, 1850-1860," *Journal of Southern History* 8 (1942): 161-82; Morton Rothstein, "The Antebellum South as a Dual Economy: A Tentative Hypothesis," *Agricultural History* 41 (1967): 373-82; Winters, "The Agricultural Ladder in Southern Agriculture: Tennessee, 1850-1870,"*Agricultural History* 61 (1987): 36-82; Winters, "Farm Size and Production Choices: Tennessee, 1850-1860," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 52 (1993): 212-24; Winters, "Plain Folk of the Old South Reexamined: Economic Democracy in Tennessee," *Journal of Southern History* 53 (1987): 565-86; Harold D. Woodman, *King Cotton and His Retainers: Financing and Marketing the Cotton Crop of the South, 1800-1925* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1968; Columbia: Univeristy of South Carolina Press, 1990); Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War*, (New York: Basic Books, 1986); Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century*, (New York: Norton, 1978).

and trusted. In his study of antebellum agriculture, Donald Winters suggests that the agricultural leaders in counties and regions offered a vital source of information and promotion of advanced farming methods. According to Winters, those with the financial means took the risks "to experiment with new crop varieties and cultivation techniques, to import blooded stock from abroad, and to test new farm machinery." As planters publicized their findings in farm journals and speeches before county societies, poorer farmers found valuable information on the suitability of crop varieties, livestock breeds, and mechanical innovations for their own region. Of course, not all farmers took advantage of the opportunities offered by the fairs and the efforts of agricultural innovators for reasons that ranged from a lack of motivation to lack of financial resources. Nevertheless, by 1860, Winters concludes, "Tennessee agriculture had reached maturity . . . virtually all the land that could be adapted to farming had passed into private hands . . . [and] Tennessee had developed a diversified agriculture." [2]

The Civil War devastated Tennessee agriculture. Whereas the state figured prominently in the national production of wheat, cotton, tobacco, cattle, and wool in 1860, production in the postwar period lagged behind that of other states in every category. Returning to fields and barns ruined by war and neglect, the state's farmers started over with little help beyond their own physical exertions. [3]

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2 Winters, *Tennessee Farming, Tennessee Farmers*, 174-178.

3 Congress estimated the total losses of slave and non-slave property in Tennessee at more than $185 million, which represented 2.5 times the gross agricultural product of 1859. Non-slave losses reached approximately $89 million, just under one-third of the total value of nonslave property. Losses were not equally distributed, and West Tennessee suffered the greater losses.. See Robert Tracy McKenzie, *One South or Many?: Plantation Belt and Upcountry in Civil War-Era Tennessee* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), Chapter 3, "'God Only Knows What Will Result from This War': Wealth Patterns among White Farmers, 1860-1880," 85-120; Stephen V. Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 1860-1870: War and Peace in the Upper South* (Baton

Postwar organization began with the establishment of Farmers' Clubs, encouraged by a variety of commercial interests, most especially, newspapers like the Nashville *Union and American.* As the agricultural editor for the *Union and American*, Joseph B. Killebrew crisscrossed the mid-state organizing clubs and selling subscriptions to the newspaper. In his speeches, he urged farmers to put aside the past and "take those steps for advancement that experience has shown to be necessary." From Killebrew's perspective, the "well-organized farmers' club" offered the most powerful vehicle for change. In addition to his primary program of the advancement of scientific agriculture, Killebrew touched upon themes that characterized later rural reform efforts. "We must . . . organize thoroughly and efficiently against the powerful combination of railroad interests . . . and against the machinations of banking institutions and speculators," he told the Montgomery County Farmers' Club in 1870. Denying that farmer organizations pitted class against class, he assured his listeners that he only wanted to see "each class in the community wield an influence proportioned to its importance." Whatever Killebrew meant by this, he never intended to overturn the hierarchy of power that had characterized rural communities of the past. As his actions and words made clear, he expected yeomen farmers to concern themselves with the improvement of their individual farms while voicing their support for the efforts made on their behalf by men of economic and political power. Killebrew never anticipated that ordinary farmers would step forward to exert political control. Indeed, Killebrew's biographer asserts that his "Farmers' Clubs appealed more to owners of large estates and plantations," than to the yeomen farmers. [4]

Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988): Chapter 8, "Resurrection: Economic and Institutional Recovery, 1865-1870."

[4] Samuel Boyd Smith, "Joseph Buckner Killebrew and the New South," (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1962), 61-68; Joseph B. Killebrew, *Address Before the Montgomery County Farmers'*

With the backing of the Farmers' Clubs, Killebrew and others of like mind moved toward the establishment of a national forum for agrarian interests. On October 3, 1871, delegates from eleven states and forty agricultural and mechanical associations assembled in Nashville for the first meeting of the National Agricultural Congress. William G. Jackson, assistant manager of the Belle Meade estate welcomed the delegates and outlined the purpose of the organization, which he saw as providing accurate information on markets, prices, and crop estimates; dissemination of practical information; and the breakdown of sectional prejudice--common goals of New South agriculture. The delegates elected Jackson to the office of president of the Congress, a position he continued to hold throughout the decade, and installed Killebrew in the position of secretary, an office he held until 1873. [5]

When the National Agricultural Congress met in St. Louis in 1872, it appeared to be gearing up for political action. Oliver H. Kelley of the National Patrons of Husbandry and Samuel Bliss of the Vermont Dairyman's Association were invited to attend the next meeting in Indianapolis scheduled for May 1873. However, in neither meeting did the Congress demonstrate a willingness to confront the problem of primary concern to most of the nation's farmers--railroad rates. Although it failed to pass resolutions in favor of regulation of railroad rates, the Congress focused on improvement of water transportation. The same unwillingness to antagonize railroad interests, in which many planters had an financial stake, and to concentrate on improvement of waterways characterized the organization throughout the remainder of

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Club, White's Chapel, Montgomery County Tennessee, March 12, 1870 (no publisher, no date), 1-11; Killebrew, "Recollections of My Life: An Autobiography," Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, hereafter cited as TSLA.

5 Smith, "Joseph Buckner Killebrew and the New South," 68-69; *Union and American*, 1 October, 4 October, 5 October 1871.

the decade. The Agricultural Congress had reached a critical level of decline when Robert Beverly of Virginia became president in 1880, a position he held until 1888. Although he claimed that the "Congress was the forerunner of the Alliance, and prepared the way for the grand work it is now doing," there seems little in the Tennessee experience to justify this view. [6]

The Farmers' Clubs and the Agricultural Congress met the interests of wealthier farmers, while yeomen farmers met in secret sessions of the Patrons of Husbandry or the Grange, as it was more popularly known. The Tennessee Grange never became as strong as the Granges in the Midwest, or even in other southern states. Although the organization attracted middling and a few wealthier farmers, it never spoke for tenants and sharecroppers. Both Killebrew and Jackson as well as a number of state politicians associated themselves with the Grange, leading one historian to remark that these men did not "enter politics as Grangers, but joined the Grange as politicians." Like the Farmers' Clubs, the Grange programs maintained the social and political *status-quo*. Self-sufficiency through the reduction of expenses and increased production through the use of "scientific" farming methods were common goals of both organizations. The annual Farmers' Institutes sponsored by the Tennessee Agricultural Bureau brought together farmers from these organizations in each of the state's three grand divisions to discuss the use of chemical fertilizers, improvements in livestock breeding, and the latest technical advances of modern agriculture. The Grange advanced a step further than the Agricultural Congress and proposed the reorganization of business relations "to bring producers and consumers,

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6 Smith, "Joseph Buckner Killebrew and the New South," 71-75; *Union and American*, 28 May, 29 May, 30 May, 31 May 1873; Nashville *American* 16 September 1875, 16 May 1879; N. A. Dunning, *The Farmers' Alliance History and Agricultural Digest* (Washington, D.C.: Farmers' Alliance Press, 1891), "The Farmers' Congress," 298-302.

farmers and manufacturers into the most direct and friendly relations possible." But like the Farmers' Clubs, the Grange disavowed political actions in the pursuit of its aims and included in its Declaration of Principles the unequivocal statement that "no grange, if true to its obligations, can discuss political or religious questions, nor call political conventions, nor nominate candidates, nor discuss their merits in its meetings." [7]

The Grange built upon familiar organizational networks of religious and social groups common to every county to create a sense of community among farmers and their neighbors. Indeed, Donald B. Marti characterized the Grange as a "family organization, where men and women regularly crossed the boundary separating their spheres to share work and social enjoyments." The Patrons of Husbandry insisted upon the inclusion of women in the organization, and women played a prominent role in the Tennessee granges, though their activities remained traditional and supportive. In the Wilson Grange No.148 at Clarksville, Montgomery County, six men and six women enrolled as charter members when the organization was established in 1873. By the end of the year, membership stood at twenty males and twelve females. Ten men and seven women presented themselves for membership at the organizational meeting of the Mill Creek Valley Grange No. 182. By the end of the following year, the membership stood at sixty-one men and twenty-seven women. Grange women advanced through a separate ritual within the organization, held offices within their

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7 "Declaration of Principles as Set Forth by the National Grange at Its Seventh Annual Meeting," a pamphlet found in "Minutes of the Wilson Grange, Clarksville, Tennessee, 1873-1876," Manuscripts Division, TSLA. Also see, Thomas A. Woods, *Knights of the Plow: Oliver H. Kelley and the Origins of the Grange in Republican Ideology* (Ames: University of Iowa Press, 1991); Solon Buck, *The Granger Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913).

ritual sphere, presented essays before county meetings, and wrote letters to the *Rural Sun*, the Tennessee Grange newspaper. [8]

Membership in the Tennessee Grange reached a high point of 19,780 families in 1875. Thereafter, it began a steep and steady decline that ended in complete dissolution by 1880. In 1876, the Tennessee Grange reported a membership of 10,216 families. By 1877, it had dropped to 1,474. Perhaps the cause of the organization's demise rested in its view of agriculture. As the effects of the economic depression of 1873 ate away whatever advances farmers had made after the war, the emphasis on the value of scientific agriculture failed to take adequate notice of the credit and debt problems of the majority of the state's farmers. [9]

The gap between planters and livestock men such as B. F. Cockrill and O. P. Temple, whose agricultural achievements were prominently featured in articles on the pages of the *Rural Sun,* and many of the farmers across the state becomes apparent in the diary of one West Tennessee Granger, Archelaus M. Hughes. A former school teacher and farmer, Hughes recorded a depressing litany of struggle and failure in his efforts to hold on to his farm during the period 1874-1877. Education and effort proved to be feeble weapons against debt and bad weather, and Hughes eventually lost his farm in a forced sale. Self-sufficiency provided no relief for him, as he plainly recorded: "I have lived closer, and the whole family have worn old clothes and shoes longer than we ever did before. For myself I have bought one pair of pants and

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8 Donald B. Marti, *Women of The Grange: Mutuality and Sisterhood in Rural America, 1866-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1; "Minutes of the Wilson Grange," Manuscript Division,TSLA; "Minutes of the Mill Creek Grange," Tennessee Historical Society Collection,TSLA; Connie L. Lester, "'Let Us Be Up and Doing': Women in the Tennessee Movements for Agrarian Reform, 1870-1892," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 54 (1995): 80-97.

9 Roger L. Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists: Tennessee 1870-1896* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 111.

3 yards of domestic in the last six months, and not much more for Hattie and the children." Six months later, he recorded no improvement in the family fortunes and used the occasion on the death of a prominent, though impoverished, acquaintance to comment on the problem of debt. "Debt is a grim monster," he wrote, "that drags down a man from his high position." Grange activities apparently brought little relief, and his final cursory reference to the organization included a telling observation. "Was at the grange yesterday," he wrote, "for the first time in five months. Nothing of importance was done." [10]

By the early 1880s farmers were once again organizing across the nation. The Tennessee experience, unlike that of most other southern states, began with the Agricultural Wheel, which later merged with the Farmers' Alliance. Seven farmers in DesArc, Prairie County, Arkansas organized the first Wheel in February 1882. They chose the name "Agricultural Wheel" for two reasons. First, in recognition of the industrial age in which they lived, they proposed that "no machinery can be run without a great drive wheel, and as that wheel moves and governs the entire machinery, however complex, so agriculture is the great wheel or power that controls the entire machinery of the world's industries." The second reason for choosing the name was a political one. Arguing that "the root of evil lay in the laws," they organized for the purpose of addressing the economic inequities through political and legal means. Following in the footsteps of the Jacksonian anti-monopoly ideology, they believed themselves to be surrounded by political "rings" and turned to the biblical symbolism of Ezekiel's wheel to characterize their own position. [11]

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10 Archelaus M. Hughes, Diary, 27 January, 27 August, 5 September 1875, Manuscripts Division, TSLA; Lester, "Let Us Be Up and Doing," 84.

11 The seven founders of the organization were W. A. Suit, W. T. McBee, J. W. Walls,

The Wheel quickly attracted members to its cause. After local incorporation in August 1882, the Arkansas State Wheel organized in April 1883. The State Wheel united with another state agricultural society, the Brothers of Freedom, headed by Isaac McCracken, in 1885. When the National Wheel organized at Litchfield, Arkansas, in July 1886, Tennessee sent five delegates to the convention. In November of the following year Tennessee Wheelers hosted the first national meeting at McKenzie, Tennessee. Membership in the Wheel rose from the initial seven to a reported 5,000 in 1884; 50,000 in 1886; and a half million in 1887. [12]

In Tennessee, J. R. Miles organized the first Wheel at Public Wells, in Weakley County, on February 1, 1884. Despite reports of ridicule and opposition from disbelieving merchants and farmers, Miles continued the work and organized five new

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W. W. Tedford, H. B. Lakey, J. T. Thrasher, and J. W. McBee. Of the seven founders, six were land owners, all were Democrats, and their motive in organizing was "self protection." W. Scott Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Alliance and the Impending Revolution* (Hardy, Ark., 1889), 16, 67,82; Morgan was a member of the Agricultural Wheel and later the Farmers' Alliance. His history has served as a source of information for most studies dealing with the Wheel. Dunning, *The Farmers' Alliance History and Agricultural Digest,* 197. The biblical reference to Ezekiel's vision of the wheels is found in Ezekiel: 10. For a discussion of Jacksonian ideology, see William J. Cooper, *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828-1856* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1990).

12 Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Alliance,* 65-76; Dunning, *The Farmers' Alliance History and Agricultural Digest,* 197-215. Isaac McCracken was born in Canada in 1846. His family moved to Lowell, Massachusetts, when McCracken was eight years old. He was apprenticed to a block cutter before going to sea in 1860. When he returned home, he apprenticed to a machinist, and his first connection with a labor organization was with the blacksmiths and machinists union. He moved to Arkansas in 1870, and settled on a farm, where he organized an agricultural reform effort known as the Brothers of Freedom. In 1885, when the Brothers of Freedom consolidated with the Agricultural Wheel, McCracken's organization claimed 643 subordinate organizations with a combined membership of 43,000. *Toiler,* 5 December 1888. The five Tennessee delegates at the 1886 Litchfield convention were J. R. Miles of Raulston, W. T. Davis of Gleason, A. C. Gardner of Dresden, C. C. Adams of Raulston, and J. A. Welch of Dukedom.

wheels during March. From those modest beginnings, the movement spread across the northwestern counties and moved into the rest of the state. In July 1885, when the State Wheel organized, it recorded 154 wheels in the five counties of Weakley, Henry, Obion, Carroll, and Gibson. Two years later, the State Wheel reported twenty-nine county organizations. At the State Wheel meeting in Clarksville in 1888, organizers claimed to represent over 42,000 members in forty-two counties, in addition to nine county organizations of the Colored Wheel, which represented 177 subordinate wheels. As the organizational reports indicated, there still remained "a large scope of country in Tennessee where the wheel [was] not known." In the heart of the mid-state, the counties of Davidson, Sumner, and Trousdale had not been organized. The same was true for DeKalb, White, and "the counties to the south, while the valley of East Tennessee, as yet, contain[ed] not a single wheel." With much left to be done, the president of the State Wheel, J. R. Miles, could take some pleasure in the organization's accomplishments. Miles firmly established the Wheel in West and Middle Tennessee. Under his supervision, the Wheel organized a state agency for purchasing farm equipment at wholesale prices and selling crops; established associations of tobacco growers and peanut farmers to monitor planting, gather statistics, and sell their crops in bulk; and established a means of communication with members through the pages of *The Weekly Toiler*, edited by J. H. McDowell. As the State Wheel approached the meeting in Meridian, Mississippi, scheduled for December 1888, that set in motion the merger of the Wheel and the Farmers' Alliance, farmers optimistically anticipated success in their efforts to unite for the protection of their interests. [13]

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[13] Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Alliance*, 109-114; Nashville, *The Weekly Toiler*, 1 August 1888, hereafter cited as *Toiler*.

Although many leaders in the Tennessee Wheel traced their reform history to earlier membership in the Grange, they differed from the Patrons of Husbandry in important ways. W. Scott Morgan, the Wheel historian, said of J. R. Miles, that he was "one of the first in his neighborhood to join the Grange." Likewise, J. H. McDowell reportedly joined the Grange in 1871, as a "strong advocate of the necessity of organization among farmers." Nevertheless, Morgan clearly recognized the limitations of the Grange program and noted that it "failed because it didn't go far enough," because while it "sought to correct abuses by abolishing middle-men [it] did not allow political discussion." McDowell echoed Morgan's criticism in his own history of agrarian organization written for the *Toiler*. He asserted that the Grange "sprang into existence on the sole idea of knocking out the middle man." Its policy of "gathering its membership from most all avocations [sic]" hampered reform efforts. Indeed, he claimed, "the very men it proposed to knock out got in and the order went into wild speculation and soon came to grief." McDowell condemned agrarian membership as well, asserting that farmers "went in with the expectation of getting rich in a year." Attempting to distance the new movement from past failures, the editor assured his readers that "the situation is different now." He went on to cite the problems of "unequal laws and class legislation," that created millionaires and monopolies, and made "slaves of the producers." The development of these problems "created a necessity for organization to break up combinations and rescue the country from impending anarchy." He concluded that "the ballot box is the only resort and only hope for reform." [14]

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14 Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Alliance*, 254, 269, 16; *Toiler*, 25 July 1888.

The willingness of the Agricultural Wheel (and the Farmers' Alliance) to venture into politics elicited thunderous denunciations from opponents, who charged that the organization intended to create a third political party. The Wheel (and Alliance) continuously denied the allegation, insisting that members acted individually and collectively in a non-partisan manner to protect their economic interests. In his inaugural address on the occasion of the organization of the National Wheel, President Isaac McCracken brought up the issue of political action. He noted that "party politics are prohibited by our National Constitution," but asserted that "we have the right to advocate collectively such measures and means as we believe would be to the interest of the producers, if the same should become laws." Again, while insisting that the Wheel was not organized as a political party, McCracken proposed that "if there are any laws either State or National which bear oppressively upon the farmer, I think you would be derelict of your duty if you failed to avail yourselves of all means in your power under our wheel laws, whether it be by petition or memorials, of remedying the same." The rank and file membership agreed with McCracken's sentiments. In 1888, J. R. Miles was re-elected to the office of president of the State Wheel by acclamation after one of his supporters outlined his qualifications and concluded by saying, "best of all, he [Miles] is not mixed up in politics, and is therefore the right man to guide the ship safely." [15]

Yet, even in the face of repeated assurances, it seems clear that the leaders of the agrarian movement had no choice but to become increasingly involved in the political process. As W. D. Ferguson of Lake County pointed out, "the old sore-head politicians come around and get hoarse telling us to stand aloof from politics, when

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15 Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Alliance*, 89; *Toiler*, 1 August, 27 June 1888.

every one of them know. . . political action is our only chance for bettering our condition." Robbie Ruskin, a Stewart County Wheeler, voiced a similar view: "We have heard the cry of 'I'm the farmers [sic] friend,' until it has grown to be a monster of deception, grasping the farmer's honest toil with unrelenting claws. No one is the farmer's friend but the farmer." A Marshall County Wheeler asserted, "I have been a Democrat all my life, and it has never made me a bite of meat or bread, or a single rag, so I have followed party long enough . . . now I am for wheelerism and for men who will carry out its objects and aims." The tensions implicit between the necessity of entering the political arena in order to effect legislative change and the fears attached to third party formation never resolved themselves entirely. The excitement and spirit attached to elections pushed some wheelers and Alliance men into stronger political advocacy, while others eschewed politics as the surest road to destruction for the agrarian organizations. [16]

In addition to the derogatory comments leveled against their political activities, Wheelers received intense criticism for their insistence upon the maintenance of secrecy and the limitation of the membership to a clearly defined agrarian core. In order to protect themselves against the laws that favored the interests of bankers, lawyers, manufacturers, and railroads, Wheelers demanded the right of farmers to "manage their own business affairs." Pointing out that "other professionals organize for improvement and do not ask the leadership of people outside the profession," they defended one of the most controversial aspects of their organization, the exclusion of urban leaders. In effect, they declared their independence from the influence of the established political and economic powers, arguing that farmers had "made up their

16 *Toiler*, 1 August, 27 June 1888.

minds to discuss matters relating to their interests among themselves, free from interference by men engaged in other pursuits." Like other men engaged in the pursuit of order in a society disorganized by the advent of industrialization, farmers sought to define and protect their interests. But unlike physicians or lawyers, farmers in American society represented more than an interest group. Although the United States stood on the brink of becoming an urban society, farmers still made up the majority of the population in the 1880s. If adequately marshaled, they represented a formidable voting bloc. Furthermore, farmers represented something more in the collective American mind than an economic interest group--they were the soul of the American mythology. Their own awareness of their voting strength and their exalted place in the American heritage as the builders of the nation and the embodiment of the Jeffersonian utopia made them all the more dangerous. If they succeeded in wresting political and economic control from the proponents of the New South and their industrial colleagues in the North and Midwest, Morgan's assertion of an "impending revolution" represented no idle threat. [17]

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[17] Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Alliance*, 144-145. The unwillingness of urban interest groups to grant farmers the same benefits of organization free from the interference of outside interest groups represents an interesting case of backward-looking thinking among the supposedly progressive elements of the nation. So insistent were urban progressives on directing agricultural interests, one is left with the perception that rural life represented a kind of psychological touchstone that must be maintained in a preconceived and purified form to assure the health of the nation. For a discussion of the organization of American society as a buttress against the disruptions of industrial life, see: Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955); Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); Samuel P. Hays, *The Response to Industrialism, 1885-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982); Vincent P. DeSantis, *The Shaping of Modern America: 1877-1916* (New York: Forum Press, 1973); Sean Dennis Cashman, *America in the Gilded Age: From the Death of Lincoln to the Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, 3rd ed., (New York: New York University Press, 1993); Oliver Zunz, *Making America Corporate, 1870-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

Wheel ideology held that "it is the system that is at fault more than the men." From the organization's perspective, farmers shared no blame for the disorder experienced by late nineteenth-century society; the problem resulted from the natural consequence of the violation of "natural law," particularly the subversion of the law of supply and demand by monopoly power. As Morgan explained it, the growth of industrial society violated the elementary principles of labor. In his view, "man is naturally disposed to take pleasure in remunerative employment," and therefore, "he is justly entitled to the fruits of his own labor." He warned that "any violation of this natural law will breed social disorder," and "a universal violation will bring national calamity." [18]

Acting on these principles, Wheelers condemned the development of monopolistic power as new business practices emerged. For many farmers, the railroad represented their most important contact with the industrial world and therefore the focus of criticism. Morgan, like other wheelers and Alliance men, extolled the benefits of railroads, but concluded that they "should not be used as a means of oppression." Indeed, he argued that "the people owe it to themselves to curtail their powers, and to render them harmless by subjecting them to a series of regulations which shall compel them to respect the rights of the community to whom they are indebted for the very existence of the roads." Railroads had a right to "a fair return on their investments , but they have no right to plunder the public." In Tennessee the anti-railroad sentiment translated into an unwillingness to finance construction with public money. Always eager to encourage construction of new

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18 Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Alliance*, 24-28; Bruce Palmer, *"Man Over Money": The Southern Populist Critique of American Capitalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

railroads, the agricultural community, which considered itself over-taxed already, refused to endorse public bonds for the benefit of private gain. Beyond this, however, Tennessee farmers offered no further reforming regulations, having learned from an earlier attempt that resulted in a powerless agency. Agrarian leaders like John H. McDowell dismissed the agency as worse than no regulation. Having measured the power of the railroad interests in Tennessee, local wheels and alliances abandoned state control in favor of national regulation, though they never expressed an interest in government ownership of railroads. [19]

From the perspective of Tennessee agrarian reformers, their position on railroads embodied the ideology of the Wheel platform set forth at Little Rock in 1886, which demanded that "the rights and privileges of the people shall no longer be trampled upon by monopoly, but shall be respected by all classes." In carrying out this demand, the Wheel gave assurances that nothing should be done "in the name of labor that will tend to destroy capital, or interfere in any way with its legitimate use or increase." They only demanded the "abrogation of all laws that do not bear equally upon capital and labor, and the removal of unjust technicalities, delays, and discriminations in the administration of justice." [20]

In the development of Wheel ideology, the adoption of a set of national demands at the McKenzie, Tennessee meeting in 1887 is worth reviewing, not only because it was the first national meeting of the Wheel, but because of the influence

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19 Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Alliance*, 30; Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 161-165; Cameron Duggins, "Background for Regulation of the Railroads in Tennessee," (MA thesis, University of Tennessee, 1939), 70-71; *Toiler*, 3 April, 6 November 1889, 23 July 1890. See Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

20 Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Alliance*, 72.

exercised by John H. McDowell as chairman of the committee that formulated the list of demands. The fourteen demands embraced a full heritage of reform efforts and included calls for assurances that public lands would be "reserved for settlers only," while aliens should be prevented from acquiring titles to American land. Wheelers demanded the rapid payment of the public debt by the minting of gold and silver at full capacity. They demanded the abolition of national banks and the substitution of legal tender notes issued by the national treasury in sufficient amounts to place the economy on a cash system. They wanted congressional action to prevent dealing in futures. They advocated a graduated income tax. They called for legislation to prevent the importation of foreign labor and an end to the practice of convict leasing. To overcome the threat of public utility monopolies, they called for regulation, or if that did not work, the public ownership of telegraph, telephone, and railroads. Their demands for the election of all national government offices and the enforcement of election laws supported their desire to return government to the "people." Wheelers advocated the repeal of laws that "do not bear equally upon capital and labor," including unequal taxation, tariffs, support for the gold standard against silver, and legislation that permitted the development of monopolies and trusts. They included a demand for the protection of the Chickasaws and Choctaws against encroachments by railroads and wealthy syndicates. To prepare their children for the future, they advocated "a well-regulated system of free schools." Finally, they demanded the end to the practice of renewing patents. The list of demands concluded with a resolution that "this body will not support any man for Congress, of any political party, who will not pledge himself in writing, to use all his influence for the formation of these demands into laws." [21]

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21 Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Alliance*, 123-125. See Appendix B for the demands of

The Wheel constructed parallel arguments to those being formulated at the same time by the Texas Farmers' Alliance. The Farmers' Alliance began in September 1877 when a group of farmers, who described themselves as "comparatively poor," met at the Lampasas County farm of J. R. Allen and organized the "Knights of Reliance" (later the name was changed to Farmers' Alliance). The Alliance entered into what has been appropriately labeled "the culture of protest," a culture that included industrial workers as well as farmers, but whose ideology rested on the social relationships to the land. In Texas the initial organization pitted the small landowners and tenants against the advocates of "scientific farming," fencing of the range, and the railroads. As Robert McMath argued, the poorer western farmers understood that the enclosure movement promoted by their opponents centered on the issue of control, no matter how nicely packaged in campaigns to upgrade herds and protect both cattle and crops. The first organization, after spreading into the surrounding counties, collapsed in the efforts to lead the Alliance into the Greenback Party. [22]

In 1883, the Alliance was saved from oblivion when S. O. Daws, a man Lawrence Goodwyn calls "the first Populist," was named to the newly created position of "Traveling Lecturer." A compelling speaker, the thirty-six-year-old Daws energized the dormant alliances with speeches on the need for a cooperative effort to overcome the effects of monopoly. Daws's enthusiasm drew men with similar perceptions and abilities into the Alliance, including William Lamb, a self-taught frontier farmer from Tennessee. Lamb's sense of indignation over the condition of southern agriculture and

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the Farmers' Alliance.

22 Lawrence Goodwyn, "The Alliance Develops a Movement Culture," in *Problems in American Civilization: American Populism*, William F. Holmes, editor (Lexington: D. C. Heath and Company, 1994), 26; Robert C. McMath, Jr., *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993): 53-55.

his ability to articulate the need for action made him the best choice for state lecturer (1884-1885). Under his guidance, the Texas Alliance grew phenomenally, but, more importantly, he saw the value of a coalition between like-minded organizations, including the Knights of Labor. [23]

The 1886 state meeting of the Texas Alliance took place in an atmosphere of tension brought about by the rapid expansion of the membership, the strain of establishing cooperative ventures across the state, and the agricultural problems associated with a crippling drought in West Texas. However, the real issue facing the delegates at the Cleburne convention was politics. When insurgents drafted a list of "demands" that were adopted after hours of debate, the Alliance split between a conservative minority that eschewed political action and a more radical majority that hoped to use politics without becoming partisan. The organization's president and treasurer and a conservative minority bolted the convention. In the face of what appeared to be a repeat of the fate of the original Lampasas Alliance, the organization turned to the newly elected chairman of the executive committee, Charles William Macune, to serve as acting president. [24]

Macune revitalized the organization by focusing efforts on three objectives: the unification of the local cooperative efforts into a Texas state cooperative, the spread of Alliance beliefs into surrounding states, and the development of a national organization. As Macune explained, all farmers could unite under a universal principle of cooperation "in its broadest sense . . . that we will assist one another, that we will stand shoulder to shoulder in bearing the crosses and burdens of life, that we will

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23 Goodwyn, "The Alliance Develops a Movement Culture," 27-34.

24 McMath, *American Populism*, 77-81. See Appendix B.

intelligently pull together in everything; in buying and selling, in producing and consuming." But, as Macune argued, the solution to the farmer's dilemma extended beyond the borders of his own state and demanded the development of a national organization to exert pressure for change. Macune believed that "as the interests of the cotton-producers were identical, and the evils from which they were suffering general, the greatest good could not be effected without uniting the whole cotton belt." Local dissension would disappear under the grand march to organize and unify the cotton belt into an agricultural business alliance based on cooperative effort rather than self-aggrandizement and greed. [25]

In the winter of 1887, J.F. Alsup, a national organizer, began meeting with Tennessee farmers and in March organized the first suballiance in Wilson County. A year later, the Tennessee Farmers' Alliance organized under the leadership of John P. Buchanan, a Rutherford County farmer and member of the General Assembly. After the Tennessee Alliance merged with the Agricultural Wheel in 1889 under the name of the Farmers' and Laborers' Union of America, the expanded state organization claimed 99,440 white members in 2,436 subordinate unions, covering 93 of the 97 counties of Tennessee. The Colored Farmers' Alliance added another 421 unions. [26]

Not surprisingly, in the early days of organization, tensions arose between the competing organizations of farmers. N. A. Dunning only hinted at the strained relations between the two, but the Tipton County Wheel provided stronger evidence

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[25] Address by President Charles W. Macune to the National Farmers' Alliance and Cooperative Union, meeting at Shreveport, Louisiana, October 12, 1887, as reported in Dunning, *The Farmers' Alliance History and Agricultural Digest*, 69; Michael Schwartz, *Radical Protest and Social Structure: The Southern Farmers' Alliance and Cotton Tenancy, 1880-1890* (New York: Academic Press, 1976), 91-104.

[26] Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Alliance*, 295; Dunning, *Alliance History and Agricutural Digest*, 247; *Toiler*, 4 December 1889, 3 December 1891.

when the secretary reported a "harmonious meeting," which must have contrasted to earlier meetings. He went on to explain that "the alliance was in this county before the wheel, and when the wheel came some jealousy arose, but I find that is now dead." However, the problems between the Wheel and Alliance accounted for fewer difficulties than conflicts of class, gender, and race within the organization. [27]

Michael Schwartz suggested that the Farmers' Alliance brought together the producerism of the yeoman farmer and the political activism of the more substantial planter. As he interpreted the development of agricultural reform in North Carolina, the advent of the Alliance placed wealthier planters in positions of state and local leadership. From their positions of power, these men led the reform effort into partisan politics, but deflected some of the more radical proposals. Roger Hart's analysis of Tennessee agrarian reform found a similar pattern of control of leadership positions by the more substantial farmers, but, as he found little evidence of the implementation of Alliance demands by members elected to the state legislature, he interpreted the presence of economically secure men as a sign of demagogic control by political outsiders who used the Alliance organization as a mechanism for obtaining political office. A closer look at the development of the two farmer organizations reveals a more complex problem. [28]

Both the Wheel and Alliance attracted substantial farmers to positions of leadership, though neither apparently enticed the great planters or the most prominent New South agriculturalists. John P. Buchanan, the president of the State Alliance, raised blooded cattle in Rutherford County, where his landholdings placed him among

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27 *Toiler*, 18 July 1888.

28 Schwartz, *Radical Protest and Social Structure*, 91-102; Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 129-154.

the wealthier men of the area. Oakland House, the Weakley County home of A. E. Gardner, the state and national secretary of the Wheel and the combined Wheel and Alliance, stood as a model of Victorian architecture and a symbol of planter power. When John H. McDowell made a tour of the wheels in the Upper Cumberland counties, he stopped at the home of the Smith County Wheel president, William Ross Shaver. The ex-state senator (1885-1887) showed McDowell over "a magnificent blue grass farm of 500 acres" that encompassed the once-noted Clinton College. Shaver raised Durham cattle, and at the time of McDowell's visit had over one hundred head in the herd, among which was "the 20th Duchess of Crethmore, a pure Bates, [that] cost him $500.00 at three months old." [29]

At the same time however, tax records and anecdotal materials indicate that local and county offices also went to men who seemingly had nothing more to recommend them than the esteem of their neighbors. J. M. Glasgow of Obion County figured prominently in the affairs of the Wheel and Alliance; he was president of the County Alliance in 1890, and served with J. H. Bittick and John McDowell as a delegate to the Populist Congressional Nominating Convention from the Tenth District of Obion County in 1896. The county tax records for 1890 shows that Glasgow, a neighbor of Bittick, paid taxes on ten acres, valued at $150. Of the thirty-two Obion County property taxpayers who can be identified from the 1896 convention, the average land holding was 130.4 acres, with a range of 10 to 519 acres. Nineteen of the thirty-two held property of 100 acres or less. Only four possessed holdings of

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[29] Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 126; *The Nashville Tennessean*, 15 May 1930; Carroll Van West, *Tennessee's Historic Landscapes: A Traveler's Guide* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 419; *Toiler*, 12 September 1888; Robert M. McBride and Dan M. Robison, *Biographical Directory of the Tennessee General Assembly* Volume II: 1861-1901 (Nashville: Tennessee State Library and Archives and Tennessee Historical Commission, 1979), 806-07.

more than 250 acres. The president of the State Wheel, J. R. Miles, described his impoverished background in his Confederate Veterans' questionnaire. His father appeared to be making some economic progress; his property included a three-room frame house and two or three slaves. But at his death, when Miles was twelve, his mother sold the slaves and moved Miles and his siblings to Weakley County. There the mother and children farmed 98 acres and lived in a two-room log house with a split slab floor and "cracks you could run your hand through." One of eight children, Miles claimed only one year of schooling, explaining that his mother could not afford the $1.50 charge per month to provide extensive education for all her children. Miles enlisted in Company I of the 20th Tennessee Cavalry in November 1863. After the war, he returned to farming and twice served as magistrate of his county. [30]

Among the first to join the agrarian cause, Miles paid a high price for his efforts. In July 1888, McDowell called reader attention to the plight of the state president. In order to promote the interests of the state's farmers, Miles leased his farm to tenants, who abused the land and apparently brought the Wheeler to near bankruptcy. Nor was Miles the only one to experience adverse economic consequences as a result of participation in leadership roles in the Wheel and Alliance. In 1889, as the State Wheel closed out its books in anticipation of its merger with the Farmers' Alliance, it became apparent that W. T. Davis, Secretary of the State Wheel,

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30 Union City *The Independent,* 7 May 1896; Obion County Tax Records, 1890, District 10, Obion County Courthouse, Union City; *Confederate Veterans Questionnaires*, TSLA. Tax records present obvious problems to historians attempting to determine the economic standing of members of a rural community. As Wheelers and Alliancemen knew, land values could be easily underrated or overrated. Indeed, the evaluation of land was a constant source of complaint. Although the statistics regarding acreage held by Wheelers, Alliancemen, and Populists cannot be accepted as absolute measures of wealth, they suggest that these men were of the middling level of farmers, a finding consistent with other studies. J. M. Glasgow does not appear in other sources, and his future as a farmer and agrarian reformer is unknown.

had embezzled $2100. His five bondsmen eventually prosecuted their former "brother" and he received a term of five years in the state penitentiary. The bondsmen, of whom Miles was one, struggled to reimburse the organization for the stolen funds. McDowell called upon the members of the Alliance to help. Alliance women became especially interested in this cause and urged one another to take up penny collections, much as they did for missionary work. The episode and the plight of the bondsmen remained a source of news for the *Toiler* for several weeks, and sporadic reports demonstrated a concern for the plight of the bondsmen and a desire to help, but generated only small donations to the cause of the beleaguered bondsmen. [31]

Nor was Miles the only one to experience the economic consequences of engaging in the reform work. The State Agent in Memphis, R. H. White, finally resigned after several months without pay after West Tennessee county and local unions failed to collect the one dollar assessment for the support of the cooperative work. McDowell experienced repeated difficulties in meeting the expenses of the *Toiler* and made weekly appeals for subscriptions, offering prizes and free subscriptions to members who brought in new paying readers. He occasionally reminded readers to enclose stamps if they expected a reply to their letters of inquiry

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31 *Toiler*, September 1888; 31 July 1889; 10 February 1890. Davis left a suicide note, but fled to Alabama, where he contacted A. E. Gardner and surrendered to E. M. Nolan in Chattanooga. Miles told the State Wheel that "every dollars worth of property, his home and all should stand good for the payment of Davis' bond, and that he would make no effort to prevent the sale of his home, if necessary, to pay it off." The other bondsmen included H. B. Thomas of McKenzie and J. M. Coulter of Gibson, plus two unnamed Wheelers. On 13 November 1889, the *Toiler* reported on the recent donations to support the bondsmen. Twenty-seven Wheels and three individuals had donated a total of $41.55. The bondsmen received the least sympathy from their neighbors. At the August 1889 meeting of the Gibson County Wheel, the delegates acted on information supplied by Nebo Wheel # 150, and condemned both Davis and his bondsmen. They refused to aid the bondsmen for their poor judgment, claiming that the embezzlement was only the latest of a long series of questionable activities that were well known in Gibson County. "Minutes of the Gibson County Wheel, 1888-1892," 15 August 1889: 45-46.

about the work of the organization: the *Toiler* could not afford the cost of postage to answer their questions. The financially strapped editor identified other "hidden" economic costs to the assumption of offices in the organization. He received many invitations from local and county Wheels and Alliances to speak at meetings, rallies, and "jollifications." His enthusiasm for the cause kept him "on the road" most of the time, crisscrossing the state by horse, buggy, wagon, and train. While many, and perhaps most, Wheels and Alliances provided meals and a bed for him in the home of a local member when the activities kept him overnight, some failed to do anything. In exasperation, McDowell lectured readers on the costs associated with travel. "When you send for speakers to educate you in the good work that benefits all," he wrote, "remember that the speaker has to pay hotel bills and railroad fare besides loosing [sic] his time, and you should always pay his actual expenses if no more. Don't ask a man to benefit you at his expense." In closing, he referred to the principles of the organization when he reminded them that "the laborer is worthy of his hire, be it in the corn field or lecture room." McDowell pointedly thanked Smith County for the round-trip ticket that accompanied their invitation to speak. R. W. Tucker, a young teacher and farmer from Wayne County, who rose to the position of State Alliance Lecturer, was the subject of a biographical sketch in the August 7, 1889, *Toiler*. He served as the Wayne County business agent for fifteen months from 1887 to 1889, during which he reportedly "rode horseback 3,000 miles and delivered over 100 lectures; during that time, he also paid out three hundred dollars more in expenses than he received as wages." [32]

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32 *Toiler*, 11 July 1888; 7, 14, 21, 28 November 1888; 20 February 1889; 27 March 1889. Salaries for state officers remained surprisingly low. Members of the Executive Committee received $2 per day while on Wheel or Alliance business. The state president received a $300 annual salary and $600 in travel expenses. See *Toiler*, 7 August 1889.

The problems of funding extended all the way to the national levels. When the Farmers' Alliance and Laborers' Union of America met in St. Louis in December 1889 following the merger of the Wheel and Alliance, President Evan Jones reported on the state of the organization. After assuring the delegates of the nobility of their purpose and the surety of success, he confessed to his own misgivings. The dissolution of the two national agrarian organizations and the emergence of the Farmers' and Laborers' Union placed Jones in what he described as "a very awkward and embarrassing situation." With "demands coming from the various States for organizers, new rituals, secret work, and other printed matter, and having no funds in the treasury for defraying expenses," he was compelled "to draw upon my own private funds for the defraying of all my office and official expenses." The expense, combined with the "considerable division and dissension in some of the States," left Jones with "great forebodings." He expressed his considerable gratitude to those who came to his assistance, including J. H. McDowell, who printed 50,000 rituals with the new secret work, and had them "ready for distribution to State secretaries within thirty days from the issuing of our official proclamation." Given McDowell's chronic need for money, one can only speculate that the cost was added to his accumulating debt. [33]

Despite the obvious need to elect men to state offices who were capable of paying their own expenses, Tennessee farmers remained reluctant to permit the domination of the organization by "the best men." Several skirmishes within the organization gave evidence of attempts by wealthier members, or even outsiders, to control the Alliance. Tennessee distinguished itself by becoming the first state to ratify

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33 Dunning, *Alliance HIstory and Agricultural Digest*, 93-105. The financial woes of the Tennessee Alliance continued to the very end. See *Toiler*, 4 December 1891. When the Alliance met in Cincinnati in 1891, the Tennessee delegation could not participate in the balloting because the state organization was not current in its membership dues.

the merger of the Wheel and Alliance in a joint state meeting in July of 1889. Almost immediately, an effort emerged to petition the national organization at the St. Louis meeting in December 1889, for the removal of "Laborers" from the name of the organization. Supporters of the demand justified their position by arguing that farmers would be better served by a farmers' union. Local unions condemned the action. The Coffee County Alliances lectured the proponents of change on the objectives of the organization in tones that made the class conflict inherent in the dispute clear to all: "We are organizing for the mutual protection of the laborer as well as the farmers; for the tenant as well as the land holder; for the men who teach our children to read; for the men who operate machinery or draw water or hew wood for their 'daily bread;' as well as the man who bosses numbers of hands on his large plantation," they wrote. In somewhat more florid prose, the Poplar Hollow Alliance #251 adopted a stronger position and asserted that, "labor is, and always has been the bed rock of civil society . . . and it is clearly self-evident that the fight now on, when simmered down is simply a fight between capital and labor." The Poplar Hollow Alliance men considered it "necessary for the salvation of the country--for the preservation of liberty--and the perpetuation of a genuine republican government, for the United States of America, that the laborers in all the legitimate occupations of the civilized world should join in heartily together in one grand, yea in one gigantic effort to free ourselves from this hydra headed monster, monopoly." At least for farmers in the mid-state, the attempt to exclude laborers from the union represented an effort by the well-to-do planters to control the organization and eliminate the potentially radical element. In a repudiation of planter domination, farmers declared their solidarity with laborers. [34]

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[34] *Toiler*, 4 December 1889. The apparent leader in the effort to change the name was Thomas B. Harwell, a prominent Giles County farmer and four-time member of the Tennessee General Assembly. Harwell practiced medicine for seventeen years before turning to farming. He served as a

At least in Tennessee, planter-dominated organizations remained aloof from the Wheel and Alliance; local farmers' clubs and institutes continued to meet and read papers, in apparent isolation from their scrappier neighbors. In Giles County, the Giles County Farmers' Association, which included a number of prominent planters, provided no evidence of cooperation with the Wheel and Alliance. Likewise in Madison County, local elites determined to build a cooperative creamery, perhaps to counter some of the attention gained by the Wheel and Alliance cooperative efforts. [35]

Nevertheless, it should not be assumed that prosperity blinded all affluent farmers to the needs of their poorer neighbors. Levi Thompson of Giles County praised the efforts of J. F. Black, who led the county farmers in their reform efforts. "When the alliance tocsin was first sounded for our section," Thompson wrote, "Bro. Black was among the first to rally to the call. While other men of prosperity stood aloof and scoffed the institution, he paid no heed to criticisms of the wheel, but threw his shoulder to it side by side with his poorer neighbors." Indeed, the discriminating placement of prosperous farmers in leadership positions represented a realistic assessment of the limited financial underpinning of the agrarian organization and the opportunity to use their education and skills to the advantage of agricultural interests.

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member of the county Democratic Executive Committee and was an active member of the Giles County Farmers' Association, a local planter organization that emphasized the value of "scientific agriculture." Harwell's interest in agricultural organizations dated back to the 1870s, when he served as Master of the Tennessee State Patrons of Husbandry (1878). See: *Biographical Directory of the Tennessee General Assembly*, Volume II, 1861-1901, 392-393; *Pulaski Citizen*, 13 September 1888. As will be shown, farmers maintained a strong suspicion of planter efforts to improve the lot of the impoverished farmers. The Tobacco Association came under intense scrutiny when planters and warehousemen offered relief. The Wheel and Alliance leadership urged continuous vigilence against would-be members, who aimed at domination of the local organizations. One can only speculate on the destructive consequences such vigilence produced. In the end, who could be trusted? Men rose to prominence, only to become suspect when class unity overcame commitments to agrarian reform.

35 *Pulaski Citizen*, 13 September 1888; Diary of Robert Cartmell, 12 September 1892.

Frequently unable to meet even the minor expenses of officers who spent several days a week speaking to farmers across the state, the organization relied on men with the means to purchase their own railroad tickets and pick up their hotel tabs. In addition, officers and lecturers left their own farms for extended periods. It is not surprising therefore to find a number of these men engaged in raising livestock rather than crop production. [36]

Like the problem of class, the issue of gender presented the Wheel and Alliance with a potential source of conflict as well as a mechanism for establishing harmony. As they presented themselves for membership in the Wheel and Alliance, women confronted a variety of personal, social, and organizational ambiguities. Unlike the Patrons of Husbandry, which insisted on female membership and provided women with a separate and complementary role, the newer reform movements encouraged female membership without clearly defining the status or activities of women members. While some states, such as North Carolina, offered few obstacles to the admission of women or their inclusion in public activities and "stressed [female membership] forcefully," Tennessee women received no such support. The best they could hope for were occasional resolutions favoring their admission and the opportunity to defend the case for their inclusion in the "Ladies Column" of the *Toiler*. [37]

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36 *Toiler*, 8 August 1888.

37 Julie Roy Jeffrey, "Women in the Southern Farmers' Alliance: A Reconsideration of the Role and Status in the Late Nineteenth-Century South," *Feminist Studies* 3 (Fall 1975): 72-91. Jeffrey and Robert C. McMath, Jr., *Populist Vanguard: A History of the Southern Farmers' Alliance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), Chapter 5, depict Southern Alliance women as conservative in their views and hesitant to enter the public sphere. MaryJo Wagner, "Farms, Families, and Reform: Women in the Farmers' Alliance and Populist Party" (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 1986). See Marilyn P.Watkins, "Political Activism and Community-Building Among Alliance and Grange Women in Western Washington, 1892-1925," *Agricultural History* 67 (Spring 1993): 197-213; Lester, "Let Us Be Up and Doing," 80-97.

The activities of rural women in agricultural reform organizations has become the focus of recent scholarly investigation. The extent to which women were drawn into political activism and their subsequent demands for equality and suffrage are special areas of interest. While southern women apparently did not play as broad a role in Alliance affairs as women from other regions, they did expand their activities beyond the traditional roles that southern womanhood allowed. Women from the prairie states produced the most vocal and notorious Alliance women. While women in these states played a more expansive role in public and political affairs, historian MaryJo Wagner concludes that "joining the Alliance and supporting the Populist Party did not involve a change in ideology concerning women's roles" in defense of farm and family. Studies of the far western states reveal a similar pattern of utilizing gender-specific roles to further political ends. Marilyn P. Watkins suggests that the maintenance of community ties, a traditional female role, was vital to agrarian reform movements while it furthered women's political awareness and demands. Alliance activities broadened the political outlook of rural women, but the degree to which they could, or did, avail themselves of the opportunity for expanded roles and further demands for equality and suffrage appears to have been dependent upon local and regional expectations and definitions of the proper sphere for women. [38]

Despite its commitment to "equal rights to all, special privileges to none," not all women found admission to the Wheel and Alliance an easy process, and the pages of the *Toiler* frequently carried letters voicing their complaints and concerns. Some women expressed their desires for membership, though a lifetime of inequality made

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38 Lester, "Let Us Be Up and Doing," 80-97; Watkins, "Political Activism and Community-Building," 197-213; Wagner, "Farms, Families, and Reform;" Jeffrey, "Women in the Southern Farmers' Alliance," 75.

them reluctant to be the first to step forward. Mrs. C. A. Mitchell of Cheatham County supported the idea of women in the Wheel and Alliance, yet she was not a member because "we have no lady members in Oak Lawn, and I am only waiting for others to join." Others decided to wait to apply for membership until the most prominent woman (often the wife of the local or county president) joined. Even that strategy did not always work, as a Weakley County woman complained: "some of the best ladies of our community petitioned for membership, but were blackballed." A number of women thought they knew who stymied their entry into the order and pointed accusing fingers at the "old bachelors" and widowers in the local organizations. Women in Sullivan County named the culprit, the first president of the Stony Branch Alliance, "Uncle Jimmie," who openly stated that "he had been both a widower and a bachelor and he thought it best to have no lady members." [39]

Some women cried, "How Cruel Uncle Jimmie!" while others supported a ban on female membership and wrote to the "Ladies Column" to present their arguments. One Sullivan County woman boasted she was "not a member of the Farmers' and Laborers' Union--for this reason: I am a lady and argue in the order is not woman's proper place." On the opposite side of the state, a Lauderdale County "Wheeler's Wife" wrote that "the wheel is a good organization for men but [I] do not think it is for the ladies." She encouraged women to "stay at home and help their husband, father, or brother get ready to go to their meeting." She feared that Wheel activities drew men and women from more important religious duties, and that they would "turn out to their wheeler meetings at any time, rain or shine, [but] when it was prayer meeting at their church they would say it is too cold or too rainy or dark." Clearly,

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39 Mrs. C. A. Mitchell to the *Toiler*, 17 October 1888; "L.E.R." to the *Toiler*, 16 April 1890; "Phoeba" to the *Toiler*, 19 March 1890.

even where Wheel and Alliance leaders welcomed women and encouraged their membership, many women found it difficult to gain admittance to the local unions. Perceptions of propriety, along with the public and political nature of the organizations, operated against their active participation. If women wanted a place, they would have to justify their inclusion in the order. The attempt to provide that justification resulted in a public debate on the pages of the *Toiler* that not only offered a rare look into gender issues, but provided a glimpse into the conflicts that raged within the local unions. [40]

Women joined the Wheel and the Alliance because they agreed with the objectives of the two orders. "I shall ever be ready to perform any duty assigned me that is calculated to promote the cause of the laborer," promised Cora McLean in a welcoming address to the Carroll County Wheel. Her friend, Maggie Gwin, followed her to the podium and read an essay praising the faithfulness of women to the Wheel, describing the Wheel woman as always "ready to help in a cause when there is so much at stake--the prosperity of her people and the liberty and freedom of her citizens." Individual letter writers displayed the same commitment to Wheel and Alliance principles. Describing herself as "a sister who loves the principles of our

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[40] Anonymous to the *Toiler*, 23 July 1890; "Wheeler's Wife" to the *Toiler*, 23 January 1889. As the editor of the *Toiler* explained women were "both members and honorary members since they did not pay assessments and dues." They could "get all the secret work and are initiated like male members. They can hold office, but do not vote unless the subordinate lodge, in making its by-laws, grants them that privilege. Ladies [cannot] be fined for non-attendance unless they accept an office, if the by-laws made by the sub union impose a fine for non-attendance." *Toiler*, 2 April 1890. Many wheels and alliances accepted women without question, but since they were not required to do so, other local groups stubbornly refused to allow women into their organizations. Where women were admitted, they held minor offices, read essays, and at least in one case, contributed to the establishment of a cooperative store. Martha, M. Johnson, the corresponding secretary of the Decatur County Wheel reported that the organization had amassed $1300 for the construction of a cooperative store. Eight men subscribed $100 each, several gave $30 and $40 "and one Lady subscribed $10. She is a wheeler of the right kind." *Toiler*, 8 May 1889.

great and grand organization," Nancy Tarpley of Warren County urged women to join the Alliance "for we should all work together in love and harmony and help to down old monopoly [and] combined trusts." As a former Granger, Tarpley's dedication to Alliance programs displayed a zeal common to many *Toiler* correspondents. "Let us throw off our yoke of oppression," urged a Jefferson County woman, "and fight like men and women and work while 'tis called to-day." It was an enthusiasm born of experience, for women, no less than men, had a stake in the success of the Wheel and Alliance. As working partners they shared the toil, and as petty producers they encountered the risks associated with agricultural production. [41]

Traditionally, women's agricultural work was an extension of their domestic duties. The production of poultry, eggs, butter, jams, and jellies offered them the opportunity to make their own crucial cash contributions to the family farm without upsetting the gender roles dictated by tradition and society. Women took pride in their contributions, but when they met resistance to their participation in the activities of the Wheel and Alliance, they asserted their rights to membership and full participation rested on the recognition of their labors as full agricultural partners with their husbands. Letters from women to the editor of the *Toiler* routinely recorded their work in the fields as they claimed a share in the work of reform. As one woman wrote: "It would be better, methinks if the men would say, 'come join us in the fight against your enemy' with as bold a front as he says 'come Betsy, help me hang the meat and drop the corn and potatoes. Or, while you are driving home the cows, just step over to the next meadow and salt the horses and let down the gap and drive the sheep

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41 "Welcoming Address" presented to the Carroll County Wheel, by Miss Cora McLean, October 1889, printed in the *Toiler* 4 December 1889; essay by Miss Maggie Gwin, ibid.; Nancy Tarpley to the *Toiler*, 14 May 1890.

through.'" The demands of farm life reduced the barriers that separated the work of men from that of women and roused the interest of agrarian women to the work of reform. Fannie Davis, a frequent contributor to the "Ladies Column," defiantly asserted the rights of Alliance women, reminding her readers that "we help to produce as well as to consume." Pressing her point further, she asked: "how many bales of cotton do you suppose the fair daughters of your honest farmers help to prepare for the manufacturers and speculators? Then allow us room among you." Women demanded the right to participate in a fight that affected their interests as fully as those of men. [42]

In the strongest language, women defended their right to full participation in Wheel and Alliance activities. Minnie Herrell of Anderson County sarcastically asserted that "if the union is such a disgraceful organization that ladies can't join they should disband and let monopoly rule." Biblical reference to women as helpmeets and reminders that the value of a good woman exceeded that of rubies filled the "Ladies Column" for weeks. A man from McLemoresville contended that a woman's "place is anywhere in God's universe that she can be instrumental in elevating and reforming any of God's creation." Furthermore, he argued that "her interest is our interest, and no one has more at stake in the upbuilding of the home than the wife and mother." Since, he added, "the Wheel in the beginning only aimed to elevate the conditions of home

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42 *Toiler*, 27 March, 24 July 1889. Nancy Grey Osterud observes in her study of rural women that "socially and culturally, women were defined in direct relation to men rather than in terms of their differences from men." This created the problem of a lack of female autonomy, but it also gave women the opportunity "to redefine the terms of those interactions." See Osterud, "She Helped Me Hay It as Good as a Man," in Carol Groneman and Mary Beth Norton, eds., *"To Toil the Livelong Day": America's Women at Work, 1780-1980* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 92. In a study of the Upper Cumberland, Jeanette Keith has suggested that the money earned by women represented an important cash contribution to families living in subsistence farming conditions. See Keith, *Country People in the New South: Tennessee's Upper Cumberland* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), chapters 5 and 6.

and to strengthen the moral atmosphere of society, it is woman's friend and women will stick with it with all the ardor of their nature." [43]

Women seemed to agree with this assessment of their role. Fannie Davis observed that "not only are the girls calculated to help do up the [farm] work, but they can cheer and assist society by their presence, for if love and peace does not dwell where ladies are, it's not to be found anywhere." [44]

Wheelers and Alliance men found merit in the assertions that women provided a moral atmosphere conducive to harmony and unity. After a particularly vigorous election campaign in 1888, the Wayne County Wheel resolved to exert a special effort to attract women to join the organization in the hope of developing a more harmonious association of farmers. John McDowell favored the admission of women because "all sensible men admit the refining, elevating influence of association with the good women of earth." Furthermore, he believed "the presence of ladies in our lodges prevents rude or uncouth language, one towards the other, and often produces harmony where otherwise strife and dissension would prevail." A man from Giles County agreed with McDowell's view, noting that "their presence [has] a tendency to keep order and their counsel of wisdom certainly [can] be felt and realized. Betty Gay, a contributor to Dunning's *The Farmers' Alliance History and Agricultural Digest*, claimed that the soothing and refining presence of women had the effect of controlling strong tempers and placed "a premium upon politeness and gentility." Without the presence of women in the organization, she declared, "it would be a failure." [45]

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43 Minnie Herrell to the *Toiler*, 9 April 1890; "Mama's Boy" to the *Toiler*, 10 July 1889.

44 Fannie Davis to the *Toiler*, 24 July 1889.

45 *Toiler*, 31 July 1889; 24 October 1888; 26 June 1889; 17 July 1889; Dunning, *Farmers' Alliance History and Agricultural Digest*, 310.

The presence of women in the Wheel and Alliance introduced conflict within those local organizations that resisted female membership by calling into question the proper role of women in late nineteenth-century American society. Where women found a welcome into local unions, they entered with the expectation of providing a source of strength and harmony, and not with the intention of changing the sphere in which they and their sisters lived and worked. Like their husbands and brothers, women participated in the secret work, made speeches, wrote letters to the *Toiler*, served in minor offices, and promoted cooperative efforts. The boldness with which women claimed the rights of membership belied the modesty of their demands. Nevertheless, the presence of women in an organization already suspected of radicalism worried opponents and provided grist for the anti-reform mills.

The record of the Wheel and Alliance on the matter of race has produced various interpretations, from praise for the progress toward unification of class interests to condemnation for consent to disfranchising legislation and Jim Crow laws. In fact, whites in the Wheel and Alliance could and did exemplify both sets of behavior, often simultaneously. For example, the Tennessee Wheels and Alliances managed to project the appearance of encouraging black brotherhood, while actively supporting registration and poll tax legislation. At best, Tennessee Wheelers and Alliance men acted in a paternalistic fashion toward their counterparts in the Colored Wheel and Alliance and largely avoided the overt race-baiting and violence common to the period. [46]

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46 As Gerald H. Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Revolt: Ballots and Bigotry in the "New South"* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1977), points out, the assessment of African-American contributions to the Populist movement has passed through three generations of scholarship. Progressive historians of the 1920s and 1930s "regarded the black man as a puppet, a willing tool with which the opposition emasculated the agrarian movement." By the 1950s, consensus historians viewed the African-American farmer "as an important class ally in the overall

Both blacks and whites made claims for hundreds of sub-unions and thousands of members in the Tennessee Colored Wheel and Colored Farmers Alliance. Without accurate membership roles, it is impossible to completely refute their claims, but available evidence supports the view that the organizations never attained the strength reported by the leadership. In his study of black Populism, Gerald Gaither suggested that inflated membership claims resulted from the practice of never purging the roles of inactive members; attendance at a single meeting with no further activity may have resulted in "membership" in some instances. [47]

Even allowing for inflated membership claims, the Colored Wheel and Alliance engaged in active recruitment, overcoming tremendous odds to establish a viable organization in the western and north central counties of the state. The Tennessee Colored Wheel met at the same time and place as its white counterpart, with joint meetings in the opening ceremonies and an exchange of official representatives during the course of the proceedings. Both the Colored Wheel and the Colored Alliance designated the *Weekly Toiler* as their official organ, and the newspaper periodically carried announcements and news of county meetings, plus occasional letters from individual members. When the Shelby County Colored Wheel experienced internal conflict that threatened the future of the local organization, they invited the white county Wheel president to hear their complaints and settle the dispute. African-American wheelers and Alliance men paid the one dollar assessment and traded through the State Agency "on the same conditions as enjoyed by the whites." Blacks

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agrarian movement." The third generation of historians challenged the "myth of an inter-racial coalition" in the presence of institutional racism.

47 Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Revolt*, Chapters 2 and 3. Tennessee claimed 100,000 members of the Colored Alliance in 1890.

expressed gratitude for the opportunity to use the agency and concluded that the "sympathy among our white members in Tennessee for the poor, oppressed, colored farmer is unexcelled in any other state, north or south." [48]

Whites also praised the efforts of black Wheelers. In July 1888, McDowell made a trip to Covington in Tipton County to address the Colored Wheel on the cooperative system. Several local members of the white Alliance attended, including the county business agent and county president. McDowell spoke for two hours and reported that "the colored people showed an eagerness for information and enthusiasm for our cause and principles, which was unsurpassed by any audience that I ever addressed." He came away convinced that "the colored farmers of Tennessee, if properly educated will make active working members of the order." Warming to his subject, McDowell concluded that "the prejudices growing out of their former condition are rapidly disappearing and if white brethren will only treat them kindly and show them that we are their friends, and that our fight for the elevation and prosperity of agriculture is a common fight for their interest as well as our own--they will join in with us and stand by as unflinchingly in every movement where unity is necessary to success." [49]

McDowell praised the efforts of the Tipton County Colored Wheel president, James Y. Bernard, saying he "makes a good presiding officer and shows a knowledge of parliamentary ruling that would astonish many of the white brethren." Seven months later, his view of Bernard reflected increasing tension between the white and black unions. McDowell reported a number of inquiries "from many parts of the

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48 *Toiler*, 8 August 1888, 19 September 1888, 18 December 1889.

49 *Toiler*, 11 July 1888.

State" from white members, who wanted to organize Colored Wheels at the insistence of local blacks. The editor referred the requests to Bernard, who was also state president of the Colored Wheel. However, McDowell expressed little hope that the requests would be acted upon. "To be plain," he wrote, "the president don't [sic] want any white man to know their secret work, and therefore won't commission them [whites]." Since the editor believed it was "impossible to find a sufficient number of colored men in the State who are able and willing to enter the field and organize the colored people over the State," it seemed obvious that "the poor, colored people who need help even worse than the whites" would be "deprived of the benefits of the wheel." Although McDowell claimed that he favored "only colored organizers organizing colored wheels," the situation under the leadership of Bernard had satisfied the editor that "if the colored people in forty or fifty counties, where not a wheel exists, get the benefits of the order, their white brethren will have to assist them." McDowell attributed the unhappy situation to Bernard's "short-sighted policy of race prejudice." [50]

McDowell's editorial tirade against Bernard illuminates the complexity of the relationship between white and black wheels. As McDowell certainly knew, the by-laws of the two organizations forbade the membership of whites in Colored Wheels, or blacks in white unions. Common signs and symbols permitted recognition between white and black Wheelers, but their secret work remained separate. No doubt whites would have refused to divulge their secrets to black wheelers, no matter how noble the request. Yet, blacks, who refused a similar request from whites, exhibited "short-sightedness" and "racial prejudice." As Bernard clearly understood, black wheels,

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50 *Toiler*, 27 February 1889.

operating in secret and outside the supervision of whites, threatened the hierarchy of white supremacy that supported southern society. Throughout the history of the organizations, an uneasy coalition bound the black and white Wheels and Alliances together. Blacks needed the relatively stronger white organization to establish and maintain the institutions of cooperative buying and selling, but they resented the paternalistic concern for their success that only lightly masked a desire to control the Colored Wheel and Alliance. On the other side, whites needed the support and votes of black farmers. More to the point, since white membership rested on the landowning class of farmers, they wanted a labor force organized in support of their own views toward reform. However, in organizing blacks, whites may have worried that perhaps their opponents were right, and that they were undermining southern solidarity. [51]

The Tennessee Wheel and Farmers' Alliance organized under the shadow of past agrarian failures and contemporary divisions of class, race, and gender. Lack of financial support limited agrarian efforts, both in organizing efforts and in the establishment of cooperative agencies. In every sense of the word, the agrarian reform effort remained a grassroots undertaking. Wealthier men rose to position of leadership, in part because their money provided the means for expanding the membership through lectures and publications. Nevertheless, their constituents kept a careful eye on their activities and pronouncements and voiced loud objections whenever they believed Wheel and Alliance leaders failed to defend their interests. From the establishment of the first Tennessee Wheel in 1886, lecturers and organizers

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51 Although the Colored Wheels refused white help in organizing local units, the Colored Alliance actively solicited white agents to help in establishing suballiances. The differences between the two organizations' willingness to accept white help may have influenced McDowell's position in his conflict with Bernard.

enthusiastically signed up new members and educated them in the work of the order. Defining the membership produced the divisions within the organization and initiated some of the strongest external criticism. The admission of women to the organization created pockets of local turmoil. Wheels and Alliances that readily admitted women defended their presence as an aide to harmony; Alliances that refused admission sometimes found themselves under fire from women angered by their exclusion. Likewise, the Wheel and Alliance walked a tightrope in their relations with African-American farmers. Without abandoning their commitment to white supremacy, Wheel and Alliance leaders adopted a paternalistic attitude toward Colored Wheels and Alliances. Extending their hands in help, whites nevertheless expected the deference accorded to their race. When African Americans protected their Wheels and Alliances from outside interference and insisted on controlling the establishment of local unions, whites reacted in shock and dismay. The veneer of cooperation between the two races proved to be thin indeed. But, as Wheel and Alliance leaders soon discovered, the lack of unity appeared in almost every effort.

Chapter 4: New South Agriculture and Old South Issues

In the eyes of Southern people all Confederate veterans are heroes. Ethel Moore, *Confederate Veteran,* 1898

The new South presents a perfect democracy, . . . a hundred farms for every plantation...a diversified industry that meets the complex needs of this complex age. Henry W. Grady, 1889

There are no three greater duties of practical Christianity, than to strive for the interests of one's own household, and for the interests of one's fellow laborers, and for the interests of ones fellow citizens. John P. Buchanan, 1889

From all over Middle and West Tennessee, reports show that the Negro was practically disfranchised by the law compelling every voter to show his poll tax receipt before voting. Memphis *Avalanche* 1890

In the formative years of the Agricultural Wheel and the Farmers' Alliance (1880s), the members engaged in wide-ranging and surprisingly public debates over the nature of agrarian society. Largely ignored in histories of the Tennessee organizations of farmers, these debates took the form of letters and essays published in the *Toiler*. As men and women expressed their views on topics ranging from religion to economics, they demonstrated both a willingness to embrace the progressive promises of industrialization and a reluctance to abandon the traditions of the past. Like other Americans of the Gilded Age, Tennessee Wheelers and Alliancemen experienced the social conflicts associated with the national development of a modern, industrial, market economy. Many of the state's farmers balanced demands for a greater political voice against the southern Civil War experience that enshrined Confederate officers with an unassailable right to command in war and in peace. They weighed the value of the New South agricultural ideology of self-sufficiency and scientific farming against their need for capital and the lure of market production. In

their debates, farmers appealed to the communal ideas identified with religion and built their organization within communities defined by uncompromising belief. Nevertheless, farmers defied stereotyping by grappling with the most volatile social issues of the day--the role of women and the problem of race. In each of these areas--politics, economics, social change--farmers simultaneously accepted and challenged traditional roles. In doing so, they discovered ways to overcome the divisions of history, partisanship, geography, culture, and economics that divided the state, while at the same time sowing the seeds of disunity.

The most pervasive force at work in the South in the late nineteenth century was the legend of the "Lost Cause." The romanticizing of the military feats of the Confederate army began with the death of Robert E. Lee in 1870 and gained strength with each passing year. Veneration of the southern soldiers and reverence for the imagined harmony and gallantry of the antebellum South captured even the most committed of the New South advocates. Seemingly unmindful of the paradox, Henry Grady, whose most famous line proclaimed the death of the "South of slavery and secession," praised the "imperishable knighthood" of the earlier age as well as the "exquisite culture" of the Old South. Indeed, W. J. Cash proclaimed that "so far from representing a deliberate break with the past, the turn to progress clearly flowed straight out of that past and constituted in a real sense an emanation from the will to maintain the South in its essential integrity." [1]

Ministers imbued the Lost Cause ideology with religious significance as they tied morality and ethics to the fallen heroes of the Confederacy. Public rituals in the

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[1] Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1970), 88, 173; W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1941; Vintage Books, 1969), 183.

form of commemorative celebrations offered the occasions for speeches and sermons in praise of southern virtues. Confederate veterans groups and women's organizations, particularly the United Daughters of the Confederacy, collected contributions to raise statues in honor of the southern war dead. Histories rolled from the presses, and forgotten skirmishes assumed new life in the journals and biographical accounts that vied for public attention. No facet of southern life escaped the imprint of the Lost Cause. [2]

By 1890, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the end of the war, the number of Confederate veterans living in Tennessee had dwindled to 31,727, approximately 7.4 percent of the total number of surviving Confederate veterans. The decrease in the number of veterans spurred the romantics to greater effort to record, justify, and enshrine the Confederate history in an unassailable regional culture of memory. As a result the veterans themselves, particularly those who still lived with the effects of war wounds, became the objects of public philanthropy. Over the course of the quarter century since the end of the war, southerners watched in suppressed fury as the well-pensioned Grand Army of the Republic accepted accolades and tax dollars. Robert Cartmell, a Madison County farmer, was not alone in his sentiments when he complained bitterly about the "paternalistic" government of the Republican Party that voted pensions for what appeared to be a growing army of northern veterans. On the occasion of the Jackson Day celebration in 1891, Cartmell reflected on the recent death of one of the last of the participants in the War of 1812 and commented on the honor due to the heroes of the Battle of New Orleans. Comparing those heroes to the

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2 Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980); Patrick Gerster and Nicholas Cords, eds., *Myth and Southern History* (Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing, Co., 1974); John A. Simpson, *S. A. Cunningham and the Confederate Heritage* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994).

federal pensioners of the recent war, he noted, that of the latter, there was "no scarcity." His condemnation of the practice of granting federal pensions ended with the assertion that "no such fraud and outrage was ever perpetuated by any Party or on any People before." [3]

During the 1880s the Tennessee state legislature enacted two modest pension programs for disabled Confederate veterans. The first act provided a lifelong payment of ten dollars per month for Tennessee veterans who lost their sight as the result of battle wounds. The second act raised the payment to twenty-five dollars per month for sightless veterans and extended the pension to include amputees as well. Finally in 1889, James M. Crews, a former Confederate soldier and member of the Farmers' Alliance from Shelby County, introduced Senate Bill No. 210 to "provide and maintain homes for needy ex-Confederates of good character, with their widows and their orphan children." [4]

The identification of an Alliance legislator with support for veterans' affairs was more than casual. Indeed, a substantial number of county and state agrarian leaders joined Senator Crews in claiming Confederate service in the enlisted ranks. Although some future Wheel and Alliance leaders rose to the positions of junior officers, few reached higher than the rank of captain. Both the president of the State Agricultural Wheel, J. R. Miles, and the president of the State Farmers' Alliance, John P. Buchanan, served in the enlisted ranks of the Confederate army. Miles was a subsistence farmer who owned ninety-eight acres of land in Weakley County when he

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3 R. B. Rosenburg, *Living Monuments: Confederate Soldiers Homes in the New South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 162; Robert H. Cartmell Diary, 8 January 1891, Tennessee State Library and Archives, hereafter cited as TSLA, Nashville.

4 R. B. Rosenburg, 37. Tennessee *Acts* (1887), 105-06; *Acts of the State of Tennessee* (1889), 344.

enlisted in Company I of the 20th Tennessee Infantry in November 1863. A man of modest means with only one year of education, Miles did not advance in the ranks, but his service apparently earned the respect of his neighbors, and he was elected to the position of magistrate twice during the postwar years. Before the war, Buchanan's father had owned substantial holdings in Williamson County. In 1864, sixteen-year-old John joined Roddy's escort and served until the end of the war. Like many others, Buchanan returned to a ruined farm and was forced to start over in nearby Rutherford County. John H. McDowell, the editor of the *Weekly Toiler,* first attempted to enlist in the Confederate Army at the age of sixteen. In 1861, he signed up with the Tennessee 7th Infantry and began training before his age became known. He was sent home, but enlisted at a later date, served honorably, and remained a life-long supporter of veteran's causes. [5]

Obion County, a hotbed of Alliance and Populist sentiment, had also been the scene of considerable wartime military activity and the source of unrest both during and after the war. Bonds forged in the heat of battle and during the course of the postwar disruptions could be expected to remain a source of trust decades later. Indeed, eighteen of the fifty-two known members of the Farmers' Alliance who later joined the People's Party in Obion County served in the 9th Tennessee Infantry. J. H. Bittick held minor offices in the County Alliance, but became a trusted member of the inner circle of men who engineered the election of Buchanan to the Governor's office. As a reward Bittick received an appointment as Supervisor of the State Capitol. Bittick had joined the 9th Tennessee in May 1861 and saw his first action at Shiloh,

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5 Civil War Veterans' Questionnaires, TSLA, Nashville; Robert M. McBride and Dan M. Robison, *Biographical Directory of the Tennessee General Assembly*, Volume II, 1861-1901 (Nashville: Tennessee State Library and Archives and Tennessee Historical Commission, 1979): 128, 109, 570-571.

where he was "desperately wounded." He described his recovery as "a long serious struggle," though he was back with his unit in time for the Battle of Chattanooga. Lingering weakness compelled him to request a transfer to the cavalry. He finished his service in Forrest's Cavalry, where he was elected to the position of First Lieutenant. Bittick's brother-in-law, Thomas Henry Latimer, joined the 33rd Tennessee Infantry. After his capture at Missionary Ridge, he walked to the federal prison at Rock Island, Illinois. In 1896, Latimer was an active member of the People's Party, serving as a delegate to the state nominating convention from his district. T. P. (Pled) Callicott, a Wheeler and Allianceman, as well as a member of the Tennessee General Assembly, shared the experience of capture and imprisonment. Captured at Collierville, Tennessee, in February 1864, he was released from the prison at Johnson Island, Ohio, in June 1865. Twenty-two Obion County veterans attended the 1909 dedication ceremony for the second of Union City's two Civil War monuments. Ten of the 22 men (45 percent) could claim membership in the Wheel and Alliance. Six of the ten had actively participated and held offices in the Wheel, Alliance, and People's Party. [6]

Confederate service, federal imprisonment, and the lingering effects of war wounds characterized many of those who rose to positions of leadership in the sub-

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6 Rebel C. Forrester, *Glory and Tears: Obion County, 1860-1870* (Union City: H.A. Lanzer Company, 1970), "Muster Rolls," 134-160; E. H. Marshall, *History of Obion County* (Union City: H.A. Lanzer Company, 1970), 18-21; Robert H. White, *Messages of the Governors of Tennessee, 1883-1899* Volume 7 (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1967), 370; *Obion County History* Volume I (Union City: Obion County Historical Society, 1981), 243; Union City *Independent*, "The Populist Convention," 7 May 1896, Obion County Historical Society, Union City. The veterans of Obion County felt the effect of their war experiences long after the end of hostilities. Like other counties, Obion veterans collected funds to erect monuments, but unlike others, their 1909 monument memorialized suffering and white supremacy rather than contributing to the mythology of the Lost Cause. The monument remembered those who died, those who suffered as prisoners of war, and extolled their defense of the Anglo-Saxon South. E. H. Marshall, *History of Obion County: Towns and Communities, Churches, Schools, Farming, Factories, Social and Political, Beginning with Goodspeed's Published in 1887, proceeding with Alexander's Reelfoot Lake in 1925, Personal Effort and Interview* (Union City: H.A. Lanzer Company 1970).

alliances and county Wheels and Alliances. Fred Bailey's analysis of the Tennessee Civil War questionnaires suggested that among the 1,253 veterans who responded to the 1,915 inquiries about their military service, the percentage reporting war wounds was equally distributed across economic and class lines. Bailey reported 20.6 percent wounded among the poor yeoman veterans, 24.4 percent among the nonslaveowning yeomen, 23.8 percent among the slaveowning yeomen, and 21.3 percent among the elites. If bullets were no respectors of persons, the consequences of such injuries were anything but equal. Men with little education, no wealth, and few skills faced lives of poverty and pain. Scattered sources indicate that communities may have provided for a few disabled men by electing them to minor political offices as constables and magistrates--livelihoods threatened by the progressive reformers of the 1890s. [7]

Outside observers recognized and frequently commented on the prominence of veterans in the organization and leadership of the Wheel and Alliance in Tennessee. William McClinchy of Maury County noted the initial "Wheeler meeting up the creek" in November 1887 and observed that the organizer, a Hickman County native, had served as a captain in the Confederate Army. Civil War associations provided instant recognition and trust, smoothing the entry of men into an organization that placed a premium on secrecy. Civil War associations extended beyond the local level to state alliances and paved the way for the development of class unity that transcended sectional and cultural differences. McDowell supplied a firmer ground for common cause with farmers outside the southern region by providing weekly column space in the *Toiler* for news from state and local alliances in Kansas and Missouri. He reinforced the common ties between the farmers of Tennessee and Missouri when he

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[7] Fred Arthur Bailey, *Class and Tennessee's Confederate Generation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 160.

presented a biographical sketch of the president of the Missouri State Wheel, H. W. Hickman. Born in Obion County, Tennessee, Hickman served in Company A of the 33rd Tennessee Volunteers. Like many other soldiers from the area, he was captured by federal troops and incarcerated at Johnson's Island. [8]

Locally, county alliances, like other reformers, used the familiar language of war to marshal support for their cause. George A. Foster, secretary of the Williamson County Alliance, sounded the call for action in a letter to the *Toiler* that ran under the headline, "Fall into Line, Left Dress, Right Face, Forward, March!" Foster urged farmers to heed the bugle call, "fall into ranks" and "stand by your colors." Foster warned that "the enemy is . . . strongly fortified, and his breastworks is capital." A fierce fight could be expected against the forces of "General Monopoly," but a "grand victory" awaited the farmers if they remembered their watchword, "unity of action." Giles County Alliancemen called on every "old soldier" with a verse that must have been familiar to many:

> "Stand firmly by your cannon;
> Let your bullets fly;
> Trust in God and the order;
> Keep your powder dry." [9]

Other newspaper editors recognized the role of the veterans and commented on their presence. In 1890 when farmers who were serving as delegates to the State Democratic Convention, met in Nashville to nominate a candidate for governor, they encountered considerable opposition from the established interests in the party. Party insiders confidently assumed that the agrarian influence could be overcome through

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8 William McClinchy Diary, 24 November 1887, TSLA, Nashville; *Toiler*, 9 January 1889.

9 *Toiler*, 4 July 1888.

procedural delaying actions until farmers tired of the stalled convention and went home to tend their crops. But the farmers stayed and stubbornly supported their candidate in vote after vote. The supporters of one candidate, Jere Baxter, a gentleman farmer and railroad attorney, attempted to disrupt agrarian deliberations with noise and intimidation. Seated in the balcony of the House of Representatives, Baxter partisans cheered and stamped their feet, keeping up the din "until even their cast-iron throats were exhausted." The editor of the Memphis *Avalanche* believed the demonstration "went against the gentlemen" since "many of the leaders of the Alliance men are old soldiers and they quickly resent any efforts to bulldoze them." [10]

For all the potential organizational benefits the spirit of camaraderie among Confederate veterans offered the Wheel and Alliance, these associations also harbored threats to the long-term stability of reform programs. One obvious danger was the lingering antagonism between Union and Confederate veterans, which was used so frequently to the advantage of the established political parties in the election of candidates and the support for, or opposition to, particular pieces of legislation. Rhetoric to the contrary, the difficulty of uniting men who once had charged across fields with the intention of killing one another could not be easily overcome with slogans or calls for class identification. Debates over the course of action could and did degenerate into confrontations between past enemies.

At least as great a threat to the development of reform in the South was the promotion of the syrupy depiction of the antebellum nostalgia associated with the Lost

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10 Memphis *Avalanche*, 17 July 1890. For further discussion of the convention, see Roger Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists: Tennessee, 1870-1896* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 135-154; Nashville *American*, 15-17 July 1890; Memphis *Appeal*, 15-18 July 1890; Chattanooga *Times*, 15-17 July 1890; Nashville *Banner*, 15-17 July 1890; J. A. Sharpe, "The Entrance of the Farmers' Alliance into Tennessee Politics," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 9 (1937): 77-92, hereafter cited as *ETHSP*.

Cause. For men bent on reform, an uncritical ennobling of the past spelled disaster. If the past was not open to critical analysis, change was out of the question. As Fred Bailey pointed out in his assessment of the Tennessee Veterans' Questionnaires, most men professed an awareness of class differences in the antebellum period. Suggestive of future discontent, some of the strongest denunciations of the slaveholding society emanated from those areas (Northwest and South-central Tennessee) where the Alliance would later make the greatest gains. From the perspective of the success of agrarian reform efforts, the most troubling answers to questions about upper-class patronage asserted that antebellum elites had done more to assist the lower classes in their struggles for economic independence than was the case in the postwar world. The widespread acceptance of this southern truism left reformers vulnerable to the suppression of their views in the name of southern patriotism. If the men crying for relief became convinced that contemporary elites, like their predecessors, could be counted on to protect the interests of "lesser" men, the movement for agrarian reform would collapse. The avenue for making that claim led through the nostalgic rituals of the defeated Confederacy. [11]

In 1892, when the Democratic Party of Tennessee sought an opponent to the Alliance Governor's claim for a second term in office, they selected the feeble State Supreme Court Justice Peter Turney, whose southern patriotic credentials were impeccable. As the old fire-eater made his way through West Tennessee, his platform partner was Mississippi Congressman John Allen, the "only Confederate Private in the

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11 Bailey, *Class and Tennessee's Confederate Generation*, 58-76, 157-158. Bailey associated class consciousness with both geography and economic status. Intensity of class animosity increased from East to West, and was most severe in the cotton southwest. Likewise, those classified as poor were more likely to express awareness of class based antagonisms; the wealthy were least likely to do so.

U.S. Congress." In the war of words and ideas, upper-class political brokers used every opportunity to remind veterans of the sacrifices made on their behalf by officers who accepted the responsibility of caring for their men. If great importance could be attached to every minor skirmish, so too could small gestures assume great significance and men could be dissuaded from their own best interests in the name of the past. If veterans could be organized by appeals to comradeship and mutual suffering, all but the most committed to the Alliance cause were equally vulnerable to the Lost Cause nostalgia for a return of the paternalistic rule of the elites under the guise of equality. [12]

While Tennessee members of the Wheel and Alliance grappled with the lingering emotions of Confederate service, they also participated in activities that emphasized American unity and an emerging nationalism. In the name of agricultural interests, many former Confederate soldiers laid aside their prejudices and hatreds to make common cause with Union veterans. Twenty-five years after the war, the mythology of the Lost Cause found an active competitor in Americanism. On July 4, 1890, Chattanooga held a highly publicized Independence Day parade in which Confederate veterans marched under a banner that proudly proclaimed, "No More Loyal Citizens Today Than are the Boys That Wore the Gray." Wheel and Alliance leaders encouraged the use of Independence Day as a showcase for the organization. A few weeks before the 1889 celebration, the *Toiler* suggested that "the brethren of the wheel and alliance have big Fourth of July Rallies in every county . . . and try to stir up . . . that spirit of freedom, manhood and resistance to oppression that characterized our forefathers who handed down to us that proud fabric of American

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12 Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 179-198; Cartmell Diary, 30 August 1892, TSLA, Nashville.

liberty and freedom." As for the *Toiler*, the editor reflected on the state of the nation and concluded that "we are today beset by a foe within our domain whose insatiable greed seems to out rival any oppression placed upon our forefathers by British domination." He thought it a "fitting occasion to take our bearings, compare our condition with that of our forefathers and see whither we are drifting." [13]

Other occasions brought out feelings of patriotism as well, including events that held significance for Confederate partisans. The *Toiler* published a poem written by Lula Jockusch of Gallatin, Texas, in honor of Decoration Day, a much venerated postwar southern tradition. The poem entitled "The Blue and Gray" included a stanza that reached beyond the Lost Cause:

> For the ranks are growing smaller,
> And though decked in blue or gray,
> Soon both armies will be sleeping
> In their shelter tents of clay.
> But the loud reverberation
> Of the last salute shall be
> Oft re-echoed for our Union
> And our glorious liberty. [14]

Even more noticeable was the coverage given to Jefferson Davis's death. Buried in the interior of the *Toiler* between a poem with the title "The Incubator Chicken" and testimonials for the cure of blood poison, catarrh, scrofula, and rheumatism through the use of B.B.B.(Botanic Blood Balm), the account used the death of the leader of the Confederacy as a vehicle for upholding the national unity of the Farmers' Alliance. The first paragraph noted that Davis, "the hero of the South,

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13 Gary C. Jenkins, "An 1890s Tour of Chattanooga," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 52 (1993): 242-255; *Toiler*, 11 July 1890, 5 June and 3 July 1889.

14 *Toiler*, 22 May 1889.

during the great rebellion, died in New Orleans." The report depicted a South "draped in mourning" with "evidence of great love and respect for the Southern chieftain shown by the mass meetings in every section of the South." After listing Davis's accomplishments, ending with his service as President of the Confederate States, the author adopted a different tone. "We will not undertake to argue the question of whether secession was right or wrong; the cause did not succeed, " he wrote matter-of-factly. The result of secession and war was a lingering sectional hatred, "blinded by prejudice." Under the circumstances "both of the great political parties have had political demagogues who, to get office, have kept alive these prejudices to the injury of the whole country . . . and the destruction of the free institutions of our government," threatening the "liberties of the people." In contrast, the author thought, "it is significant that the very day that Jefferson Davis, the leader of secession passed off of the stage of action, the Northern and Southern farmers united at St. Louis in brotherly love and fraternal union, wiping out in so far as the farmers of our nation are concerned sectional lines." [15]

In his depiction of agrarian unity, the author pursued a theme expressed by the President of Tennessee' s State Alliance six months earlier on the occasion of the union of the State Wheels and Alliances. John P. Buchanan hoped for a future where farmers "will be so fully imbued with the grand fundamental principles of our organization, that every edict emanating from our National President to resist, disrupt and overthrow monopoly in every form will be as implicitly and cheerfully obeyed as

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15 Ibid, 11 December 1889.

the organized, well-disciplined, brave patriotic soldiers obeyed the order of Lee, or Grant." [16]

By recognizing the bitterness of the past, Alliance leaders hoped to forge unity in the future. State leaders knew that the same hatreds that continued to divide the nation percolated just below the surface in many counties of Tennessee. The June 1861 referendum had been a triumph for the advocates of secession, but everyone knew that many of the state's sons chose the blue rather than the gray, while a significant number quietly sat out the war, and others remained at home to settle old feuds or prey on the weak. The early postwar years witnessed unparalleled violence with the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan and a reign of intimidation and death. Although authorities eventually restored order, the situation remained potentially volatile. Under the circumstances, the persistent focus on the need for unity in the organization assumed a larger meaning than the necessity of casting aside the tendency toward bickering. [17]

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16 Ibid, 31 July 1889. As Charles Reagan Wilson noted, most southerners eventually found a rationale for reconciliation after 1900 and the American experience in the Spanish-American War. *Baptized in Blood,* 161-182.

17 Forrester, *Glory and Tears*, 48, 67; Jeanette Keith, *Country People in the New South: Tennessee's Upper Cumberland* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 8-9; Charles L. Lufkin, "A Forgotten Controversy: The Assassination of Senator Almon Case of Tennessee," *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 39 (1985): 37-50, hereafter cited as *WTHSP.* For a general discussion of violence in the period, see Jerome G. Taylor, "Upper Class Violence in Nineteenth Century Tennessee," *WTHSP* 34 (1980): 28-51; Richard P. Gildrie, "Lynch Law and the Great Clarksville Fire of 1878: Social Order in a New South Town," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 42 (1983): 58-75; Sheldon Hackney, "Southern Violence," *American Historical Review* 74 (1969): 906-925; Albert C. Smith, "Southern Violence Reconsidered: Arson as Protest in Black Belt Georgia, 1865-1910," *Journal of Southern History* 51 (1985): 527-564; Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 153-159; W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993) 1-102; Altina L. Waller, *Feud: Hatfields, McCoys, and Social Change in Appalachia, 1860-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Christopher Waldrep, *Night Rider: Defending Community in the Black Patch, 1890-1915* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993). Many of the Middle and West Tennessee counties with the most notorious histories of post-Civil War violence emerged as hotbeds of Wheel and Alliance activity. Obion County ranks second among Tennessee

While the Alliance struggled with the unresolved conflicts of past decades, it also dealt with the phenomenon called the "New South." Advocates of the New South thundered their sermons on behalf of urbanization and industrialization from the editorial pulpits of the region's foremost newspapers. Once the South realized its full potential, they boasted, it would "out-Yankee the Yankees," restoring the region's lost wealth and national political prominence. [18]

Two editors carried the New South banner in Tennessee: Joseph B. Killebrew and Arthur S. Colyar. Both men began their campaigns in the 1870s, long before the views of Henry Grady achieved national prominence. Colyar's efforts were more clearly recognizable as New South endeavors. This former Whig owned and edited the Nashville *Union and American*, a perennial advocate of industrial development. He developed the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company, which eventually merged with railroad interests to become part of the L&N Railroad system. Finally, Colyar made his mark on Tennessee history as a frequent, though unelected, gubernatorial candidate. [19]

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counties for the number of lynchings that occurred there. Giles, Gibson, Lincoln, and Robertson counties also figured prominently in Klan activity and lynching episodes. See "Lynching" and "Ku Klux Klan" in *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, forthcoming 1998).

18 Dwight B. Billings, Jr., *Planters and the Making of a "New South"* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); Gaston, *New South Creed*; Peter Wallenstein, *From Slave South to New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); Michael Wayne, *The Shaping of Plantation Society* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983); Jonathan M. Wiener, *Social Origins of the New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951, 1987); W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South*.

19 Sarah McCanless Howell, "The Editorials of Arthur S. Colyar, Nashville Prophet of the New South," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 27 (1968), 262-276; Clyde L. Ball, "The Public Career of Colonel A. S. Colyar, 1870-1877," Ibid,12 (1953): 23-47, 106-128, 213-238.

New South advocate Joseph B. Killebrew exercised a greater influence on the agrarian community. An antebellum Whig, the well-educated and well-married Killebrew spent the war years at home in Montgomery County. He apparently suffered few losses during the years of federal occupation and reaped an immediate reward with the postwar rise in tobacco prices. By 1870, Killebrew's agricultural interests could be left safely in the hands of his wife and other farm managers while he pursued a career in agricultural journalism, public service, and New South boosterism. On January 7, 1871, Killebrew launched his career as agricultural editor of the Nashville *Union and American* and began his public advocacy of New South principles: improvement and extension of the system of public education, encouragement of immigration to the South, development of natural resources for industrialization, and improvement of agriculture. [20]

Killebrew's writings attracted immediate attention, eventually leading to his appointment as State Commissioner of Agriculture, Immigration, Statistics, and Mines, a position that provided him with every advantage for publicizing the state's potential for development. Initially, Killebrew did not separate agriculture and industry, arguing that the development of local markets, the promotion of social order, and the establishment of good government, attributes fostered by industrialization, would benefit agriculture. To take advantage of the opportunities that industrial development provided, Killebrew, like other New South boosters, advocated a four-part program that included the breakup of large landholdings into smaller, independent farms; the diversification of crops to reduce southern agricultural dependence on

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20 Joseph B. Killebrew, "Recollections of My Life: An Autobiography," TSLA, Nashville, 1-6, 197, 212-213; Samuel Boyd Smith, "Joseph Buckner Killebrew and the New South Movement in Tennessee," (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1962), 62-75.

tobacco and cotton; enrichment of the soil through subsoiling, crop rotation, and use of commercial fertilizers; and a program to attract immigrants to farm unoccupied land. Killebrew proved to be as skilled in speechmaking as he was in writing, and he frequently traveled to the courthouses of the mid-state to present his program for agricultural development. Despite Killebrew's university education, farmers perceived him as one of their own and clamored to hear his speeches. As one admirer wrote, "Col. Killebrew is a farmer himself and knows how to talk to farmers, and although a man of great erudition and high mental culture, is no mere theorist . . . but a clear headed, strong minded, plain, intelligent and thoroughly informed agriculturist." [21]

As a result of agitation across the state, spurred in no small part by Killebrew, the General Assembly established a Bureau of Agriculture in December 1871. Made up of two appointed citizens from each of the state's three divisions, the bureau published crop reports and provided information about the timber and mineral resources of the state. As secretary of the Bureau, the task of gathering, preparing, and publishing this information fell to Killebrew. In 1875, finding the cumbersome organization inadequate to the needs, the state legislature reorganized the Agricultural Bureau to be administered by a commissioner, and Killebrew was appointed the first Commissioner of Agriculture, a position he held until 1880. [22]

In 1872, Killebrew, with the backing of a number of prominent farmers of Middle Tennessee, published the first issue of a new, weekly agricultural newspaper, the *Rural Sun*. Although he identified the newspaper with "the farmer's interests," Killebrew used the journal almost as an official organ of the Bureau of Agriculture,

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21 Killebrew, "Autobiography," 7, TSLA, Nashville; Smith, "Joseph Buckner Killebrew and the New South Movement in Tennessee," 65.

22 Killebrew, "An Autobiography," 232-288, TSLA, Nashville.

promoting immigration, development of resources, and industrialization. Hailed as one of the "best agricultural papers ever published in the South," the *Rural Sun* provided Killebrew with another vehicle for influencing the development of Tennessee agriculture in the late nineteenth century. [23]

The influence of Killebrew and other New South agricultural promoters is apparent in the writings of the leaders of the Wheel and Alliance and in the actions taken by local Wheels and suballiances. In March 1889, J. R. Warlow, secretary of New Hope Wheel in McNairy County, wrote to the *Toiler* to offer suggestions for farm improvement. Echoing the advice found in contemporary New South journals, Warlow urged "industry and economy" in the pursuit of prosperity. Replacing worn fencing and cleaning ditches would make farms "look like business." He concluded with the theme of the New South agriculturists, "Brethren, let us raise less cotton, more corn, wheat, oats, grasses, and everything for home consumption." A few weeks later Prosperity Wheel in Wilson County reported, that following the organization of local farmers, "signs of thrift and improvement are visible on every hand." The Coffee County Wheel recommended that "farmers living in the partially or unimproved sections of this county, raise more hay and less corn, and spend less time in the timber traffic, and raise more cattle, and thus utilize the wild grass with which nature has so abundantly supplied them." The Gibson County Wheel resolved to "encourage and foster to the extent of its ability the building of manufactories all over the country." [24]

In 1891, delegates to the East Tennessee Farmers Convention, many of whom attended as representatives of their county alliances, listened to speeches praising the

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23 Smith, "Joseph Buckner Killebrew and the New South Movement in Tennesse," 65-67.

24 *Toiler*, 13 March , 3 April, 10 April, and 24 April 1889.

"towns and embryo cities springing up all around us," and the reminder that developments in mining and manufacturing provided "opportunities to engage in an extensive and more profitable system of farming." Railing against "hog and hominy" farming, the speakers warned that "the manufacturing concerns which we want to encourage can and do deprive us of our best labor." In order to deal with the scarcity of labor that a growth in manufacturing would produce, farmers were advised to reduce the size of their farms to free agricultural labor for other pursuits and engage in truck farming as an alternative to staple crop production. With the expectation of smoke stacks dotting "this section in close proximity from one end to the other," speakers confidently predicted truck farming "as the salvation of many farmers." Thus, from one end of the state to the other, in local and county meetings, as well as regional conventions, farmers heard and absorbed the message of the advocates of New South agriculture--reduce cotton production, return to self-sufficient, safety-first farming, use more fertilizer, and support industrial development. [25]

The pervasive New South ideology did not go unchallenged. Risking characterization as ignorant and backward, farmers repeatedly questioned the ability of scientific farming to make good its promises. Challenges centered on two points: the role of agriculture in the industrial South and the likelihood of prosperity that would result by following the dictates of scientific agriculture.

The heart of the New South ideology rested on the supposition that industrialization would produce prosperity in all sectors of the economy. Industrialization came first, and everything else tagged along behind. Farmers repeatedly objected to an ideology that forced them into the role of handmaiden to

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25 Ibid, 3 June 1891.

other interests. As they articulated their position, farmers carefully delineated the centrality of their role in history and vowed that they would not become the victims of industrial society. Official Wheel and Alliance histories included historical surveys of the role of agriculture in the development of western Europe. They attributed the fall of Rome to the decline of landowning farmers. Even Henry Grady became caught up in the spirit and declared that the success of the French Revolution rested on the peasant rebellion of 1789. Wheel and Alliance leaders justified their organization and its political bent by tying their activities to those of "the embattled farmers who fought at Lexington and Concord." Out of their concern over the aggrandizement of huge tracts of land by railroads and other capitalist interests, both the Wheel and the Alliance demanded that the sale of public lands be limited to 320 acres per purchaser. They feared that the acquisition of land by alien corporations would place American farmers in a situation "similar to that which has reduced the people of Ireland and other monarchical governments to a condition of abject serfdom." And they objected to the "millions of acres of . . . fertile lands . . . squandered upon railroads and other corporations." The inevitable result of "this wholesale absorption of land by aggregated capital" would "finally enslave the honest yeomanry of our country and inevitably destroy our much-loved republic." The republic could not survive without a free and independent yeomanry, but without capital and without protective laws, farmers faced the inevitability of sacrifice to more powerful capital and industrial interests. [26]

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26 W. Scott Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Alliance, and the Impending Revolution* (Hardy, Arkansas, 1889); N. A. Dunning, *The Farmers' Alliance History and Agricultural Digest* (Washington: Farmers' Alliance Press, 1891), 75, 102-103; Ferald J. Bryan, *Henry Grady or Tom Watson?: The Rhetorical Struggle for the New South, 1880-1890* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1994), 111.

When the Tennessee General Assembly established the Bureau of Agriculture in 1871, the secretary of the bureau was ordered to "publish annually such statistics and other information as the Bureau may deem necessary to advance the general interests of Agriculture and the material development of the State." More specifically, the secretary should include "such matters as will convey a proper idea of the resources of the State to practical men." Clearly, the responsibilities of the bureau exceeded development of agricultural interests. Joseph Killebrew, who accepted the position as secretary, never doubted the importance of using the bureau to promote timber and mining interests and entice immigration into the state. Within months of his appointment, Killebrew met with Governor John C. Brown and other New South agriculturists to establish the *Rural Sun*, a weekly agricultural journal, edited by the bureau secretary. Although Killebrew declared his hope to "make the *Rural Sun* represent the farmer's interests and reflect his sentiments," the paper did not neglect industrial interests. Indeed, it advertised "the great agricultural advantages, mineral resources, unsurpassed water power, magnificent forests, and genial climate of the state and its surroundings." The journal brimmed with the latest scientific agricultural information on everything from kitchen gardens to tobacco, livestock, and poultry. Heralded as the best journal of its kind, the *Rural Sun* included articles on mining, timber, and increasingly, manufacturing and industry. [27]

By the time Killebrew left the *Rural Sun* in 1873, his role in the Agriculture Bureau was already raising questions in some quarters of the state. In 1877, some members of the state legislature made an unsuccessful attempt to remove Killebrew

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27 *Acts of Tennessee*, 1871, 105-106; Smith, "Joseph Buckner Killebrew and the New South Movement in Tennessee," 79-89; *Rural Sun*, 3 October 1872; Killebrew, "Autobiography," 247, TSLA, Nashville.

from his post as Commissioner of Agriculture. C. F. Vanderford, a professor of agriculture at the University of Tennessee, and B. M. Hord, the man who succeeded Killebrew as editor of the *Rural Sun* and who would eventually become Commissioner of Agriculture during the administration of Robert L. Taylor, led the fight. From Killebrew's perspective, the battle involved nothing more or less than jealousy stemming from Hord's imagined possession of "a world of knowledge about agriculture which no one else had." Killebrew's superior knowledge notwithstanding, a close look at the legislative journals reveals an alternative interpretation for the attempt to remove Killebrew. George W. Martin, state senator from Weakley County, introduced the bill to abolish the Agricultural Bureau. By the time the bill arrived at its third reading, partisans for both sides were ready to present their views. Governor James D. Porter supported Killebrew's work and condemned attempts to abolish the Bureau of Agriculture as "shortsighted." The state needed the Bureau, according to Porter, because "capitalists look for information from official sources and not from parties who wish to sell." From the perspective of opponents of the Bureau, the distinction was less than clear. Senator William A. Millikin of Fayette County "favored the repeal" on the grounds that the bureau acted more as an agent "for the sale of real estate of private individuals than one of agriculture." Indeed, he believed that "agricultural interests had been the last thing thought of." Furthermore, the publication of Killebrew's 1,200 page *Introduction to the Resources of Tennessee* was viewed by some of the senators as "such an exaggeration of the wealth and prosperity of the State as almost to defeat propositions for a compromise of the burdensome state debt." Senator Hugh M. McAdoo favored "a fund for legitimate agricultural purposes," but he noted, "there was a prevalent impression that this Bureau had served rather the purposes of a real estate agency than for the benefit of agriculture." Andrew

E. Garner cited the Commissioner's report, saying that it "virtually admits that it [the bureau] cannot practically improve the agricultural condition." In hard times, Garner stated, it seemed that this was "a good place to apply the pruning knife." Killebrew and the Bureau of Agriculture survived the threatened "pruning," but the views expressed by farmers, who felt themselves ignored by their own agency, were a source of ongoing discontent that resurfaced most importantly at the height of Wheel and Alliance political power. In 1891, the so-called "farmer" General Assembly acted on the recommendation of Alliance Governor John P. Buchanan and passed legislation that separated mining interests from agricultural concerns. The act created the Bureau of Labor and consolidated the new agency with the Bureau of Statistics and Mines, which previously had been a part of the Bureau of Agriculture. [28]

The resurgence of interest in the Agricultural Bureau had begun during Governor Robert Taylor's administration and accompanied the rise of B. M. Hord to the position of Commissioner. Farmers praised Hord as a "brother" in first the Wheel, and then the Alliance. He met with them in the local and county meetings, offering advice, listening to their concerns, holding farmer institutes, offering premiums, and working with their elected leaders. When the issue of funding arose in the 1889 legislative session, the *Toiler* reported that "the farmers in the house [sic] made a strong fight for the agricultural bureau." [29]

The legislative fights illustrate the "class" differences that permeated the different approaches to agricultural issues as articulated by New South proponents and

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28 Killebrew, "Autobiography,"258-266, TSLA, Nashville; *Senate Journal of the 40th General Assembly of Tennessee* (Nashville, 1877), 589; *Daily Memphis Appeal*, 3 January 1877; Robert M. McBride and Dan M. Robison, *Biographical Directory of the Tennessee General Assembly*, Volume II, 1861-1901, 625, 551, 324-325; Nashville *American*, 8 March 1877; *Acts of Tennessee*, 1891, 331.

29 *Toiler*, 6 March 1889.

the leaders of the Wheel and Alliance. Analyses of the identifiable members of the agrarian organizations often fail to uphold strictly economic definitions of class. Nevertheless, the participants, both farmers and political elites, defined the conflicts in class terms. In the agricultural South (and perhaps in many agrarian societies) class was defined by membership in an elite society that measured its status by standards that included, but were not limited to wealth. Often linked by marriage and kinship, the elite society admitted up-and-coming young men to its ranks, but only at its own discretion. Killebrew, though not born into this upper class, was clearly a member as a result of education, marriage (and the acquired wealth that went with it), and elite patronage. Hord and the leaders of the Wheel and Alliance, some of whom controlled substantial wealth, did not belong to that class. Indeed, Killebrew reserved some of his most vitriolic prose for his former assistant, calling Hord's record as Agricultural Commissioner "a perfect farce." Unlike Killebrew, whose writings ignore the Wheel and Alliance, Hord played an active role, even negotiating with the New Orleans Cotton Exchange on behalf of the agrarian organizations during the jute boycott. The Wheel and Alliance farmers supported Hord's efforts and praised him as one of their own. [30]

Theoretically, the University of Tennessee was supposed to offer help to the state's farmers. Under the provisions of the Morrill Act of 1862, which established land grant colleges, the promotion of agriculture was to receive the highest priority. However, farmers claimed to benefit very little from the university or the Agricultural Experiment Station established in 1887. John H. McDowell visited the university campus on one of his many trips to East Tennessee. He reported a courteous

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30 Killebrew, "Autobiography," 255; Smith, "Joseph Buckner Killebrew and the New South Movement in Tennessee," 43-48; *Toiler*, 2 October 1889.

welcome and an informative visit, but declared that "the truth is, the way it [the university] is run it is a farce, and benefits agriculture very little." He suggested that if "Professors [Charles W.] Dabney, [Charles F.] Plumb, and [L. P.] Bown would hold farmers' institutes over the State, and meet with practical farmers . . . this school might be made a power in building up and advancing the agricultural industry in Tennessee." A report in the *National Economist* complained that both the land grant colleges and the agricultural experiment stations had failed to live up to their potential because of joint administration. "Teachers are wanted in the faculty and scientific investigators on the staff of the station," advised the *Economist.* [31]

Farmers elected to the state legislature had already attempted to deal with these issues in the 1889 session, when Dabney asked for an additional appropriation of $12,000 for new construction on the Knoxville campus. McDowell used the pages of the *Toiler* to offer strenuous objections, charging that "every dollar given by the State is just that much thrown away." Calling the university's claim of "giving farmer boys of Tennessee a scientific education" a farce, he scoffed at the supposed benefits farmers received from the college or the experiment station. Charging that "in the past twenty years this school has drawn from the State and national government over a half million dollars in cash," he posed the unanswered question, "what has gone with it?" [32]

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31 *Toiler*, 5 February 1890; *National Economist*, 11 July 1891. The University of Tennessee Board of Trustees voted to establish an Experiment Station in 1882, one year before the passage of the federal Hatch Act. Funding from the Hatch Act ($15,000) began in 1887. That was the same year Dabney arrived at UT, where he served as President of the University and Director of the Experiment Station.

32 *Toiler*, 5 February 1890. In 1887, Charles W. Dabney, Jr., accepted the presidency of the University of Tennessee as a reputed champion of agricultural interests. Having obtained complete administrative powers over university operations and faculty appointments, Dabney set about the task of revamping the curriculum to reflect a new emphasis on agricultural and mechanical studies. Dabney faced muted criticism from the Board of Trustees and near revolt from the faculty. Even Governor Robert Taylor complained when Dabney staffed the agricultural department with faculty from outside the state, noting that the university needed "a Tennessee farmer to teach Tennessee

McDowell demanded two forms of action. He proposed the immediate withdrawal of "every dollar of aid to this school unless a better showing can be made than we have yet seen." Secondly, he wanted an amendment to the federal Hatch Act "to allow the State to control the $15,000 given annually to each State experimental station." Perhaps the second proposal was made in recognition of the memorial passed by the Gibson County Wheel and presented to the General Assembly concerning the issue of the experiment station. The Gibson County farmers demanded that the legislature instruct Tennessee Senators and Representatives to vote for a measure that would allow division of the money appropriated for the state's experiment station to permit "the purchase of an experimental farm in West Tennessee where the soil is widely different from that of either of the other divisions of the State." [33]

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farmers." In West Tennessee, where the Wheel and Alliance were strongest, farmers complained that the location of the university and the Agricultural Experiment Station in East Tennessee isolated them from the potential benefits. Furthermore, they argued, with the differing climates and soils, experiments undertaken in Knoxville had little to offer farmers in the cotton producing counties. See James Riley Montgomery, Stanley J. Folmsbee, and Lee Seifert Greene, *To Foster Knowledge: A History of The University of Tennessee, 1794-1970* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1974), 132-145; Lucius Salisbury Merrian, *Higher Education in Tennessee* (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1893); Kevin Johnston, "Quills into Plowshares: Charles W. Dabney and Technical Education at the University of Tennessee, 1887-1893," (MA thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 1993); The Charles W. Dabney Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, contain the correspondence between Dabney and O. P. Temple regarding Dabney's recruitment and acceptance of the presidency of the university. Later historians and sociologists have voiced criticism of the institutionalization of agricultural experimentation, arguing that governmental and university-directed programs fostered the development of agribusiness and contributed to the decline of family farms. See Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Mid West, 1900-1949* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Lionel J. Beaulieu, *The Rural South in Crisis: Challenges for the Future* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988); Theodore R. Mitchell and Robert Lowe, "To Sow Contentment: Philanthropy, Scientific Agriculture, and the Making of the New South, 1906-1920," *Journal of Social History* 24 (1990): 317-339.

33 *Toiler*, 5 February 1890.

Likewise, farmers increasingly expressed doubts that scientific farming alone held the answer to agricultural woes. In a discussion on the editorial direction of the *Toiler*, McDowell provided assurances that the newspaper would print "exchange[s] of sentiment and discussion vital to [agricultural] interest and prosperity," omitting theories and experiments in farm operation "which are all well enough after the stumps are first cleaned out of the way." McDowell was not alone in his criticism of the benefits of scientific agriculture. In his "Presidential Address to the National Farmers' Alliance and Cooperative Union," Leonidas L. Polk asserted that "the purely technical effort of improving our methods of farming . . . although it be praiseworthy, is not a force or remedy." Furthermore, he added, "the influences that tend to depress agriculture and that render that occupation unprofitable have rapidly gained the ascendancy over and neutralized the beneficent effects that should have followed the introduction of wise methods and new machines." So-called "practical " farmers recognized both the potential benefits and the limitations of every aspect of the progressive reforms and demanded more thoroughgoing changes. [34]

At every level of society, men and women expressed concern over the number of young people who abandoned country life for jobs in the city. P. F. Kefauver of Monroe County described the "exodus of boys from the farms" to Knoxville and Chattanooga, where "the daily application of country boys for employment in the large commercial houses has become a positive nuisance." Nannie Haskins Williams

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34 *Toiler*, 18 July 1888; *National Economist*, 13 December 1890. David Danborn, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) agrees with McDowell and Polk, arguing that soil conditions and climate made the transfer from cotton to grain or livestock difficult and risky due to the presence of funguses and parasitic diseases that constantly threatened southern farmers with disaster. While Tennessee's more temperate climate reduced some disease risks, costs associated with acquiring blooded livestock and the time lapse before realizing a profit on livestock investments made the transfer from crop production prohibitive for many farmers.

tearfully reported the exodus of her children to teaching jobs in Nashville for the girls and work in the iron furnaces for the boys. She reluctantly acknowledged the lack of opportunities in agriculture despite the record of attempts by her and her husband to farm according to progressive suggestions. [35]

Despite the concerns farmers and agricultural elites expressed regarding the exodus of young men and women, the rural population of Tennessee rose steadily in the postwar years. The number of males engaged in agriculture rose from 267,020 in 1870 to 379,443 in 1900, a 42 percent increase. By 1890, Tennessee reported a population density of 42.34 people per square mile, the highest in the Confederate South. The strong Wheel and Alliance counties of West Tennessee's Ninth Congressional District showed some of the most significant growth. In the decade from 1880 to 1890, Dyer County rose from a population of 15,072 to 19,825; Gibson County increased from 32,568 to 35,709; and Obion County grew from 22,793 to 27,166. Since only a small percentage of the population could properly be defined as urban (living in towns and villages of 2,500 or more), it is hard to imagine how the countryside could have seemed anything but crowded. [36]

Putting aside individual family concerns regarding the future occupations of their children, the agrarian concern over a perceived (though not substantiated) migration away from the farms may have unconsciously reflected commonly expressed fears of the larger planters regarding the problems of maintaining an adequate labor

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35 *Toiler*, 5 March 1890; Nannie Haskins Williams Diary, 6 August and 15 September 1888, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

36 *Eleventh Census: Report on Population of the United States, Part I*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1895), 6, 428-429; *Ninth Census: The Statistics of the Population of the United States, Volume I* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1872), 757; *Occupations at the Twelfth Census* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1904), 388.

supply. Planters constantly complained about the migration of African-American farm labor to the North and the West, as well as the intracounty movement of sharecroppers and tenants seeking to improve their situations. The Exoduster Movement in the 1870s attracted considerable support from Tennessee blacks. Led by Benjamin "Pap" Singleton, African Americans migrated to Cherokee County, Wyandotte, and Topeka, Kansas. By 1879, an estimated 2,407 blacks had emigrated from Nashville. And, as we have seen, many planters considered the substitution of white farm labor for black an inadequate and unacceptable solution. The issue of farm size had political and social ramifications as well. The South still regarded landholdings as an indicator of wealth, and hence social and political influence. The reduction of farm size, taken in conjunction with the legal disfranchisement accomplished in 1889, reinforced the loss of political prestige that so concerned yeomen farmers of the late nineteenth century. [37]

Scientific agriculture demanded diversification. But, taken as a whole, Tennessee agriculture exhibited a greater diversity of crops than other southern states. Successful cotton farming occurred in relatively few counties, forcing most farmers to abandon its production long before the crisis of the 1890s. Paradoxically, once the threat of Populism receded, political and agricultural leaders attributed the state's survival of the Depression of 1893 to diversification. Nevertheless, late nineteenth century farmers heard the message of diversification from everyone from the Bourbon cotton planter to the Populist yeoman. [38]

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37 Bobby L. Lovett and Linda T. Winn, editors, *Profiles of African Americans in Tennessee* (Nashville: Annual Local Conference on Afro-American Culture and History, 1996): xxxiii, xxxiv, 110; Lester C. Lamon, *Blacks in Tennessee, 1791-1970* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 49-53.

38 Robert Gates, "Farmers, The Conservative Force in the Body Politic." An address delivered before the Farmers' Institute of Middle Tennessee, 6 December 1911, TSLA, Nashville.

Yet, despite the obvious benefits attached to broader planting, farmers resisted diversification as the solution to their problems. What farmers demanded were higher prices and control over the market. They believed that higher prices for their crops could be achieved through a combination of actions: the establishment of cooperative warehouses, silos, and elevators to hold their produce until prices rose; the passage of state legislation to protect local markets against national distributors; and the enactment of federal regulatory and anti-trust legislation.

The plummeting cotton prices of the 1880s and 1890s compelled West Tennessee farmers to initiate a variety of measures to force up prices. The first unified action of the Wheel and Alliance involved the boycott of the "Jute Trust," following the sharp rise in the price of jute wrapping for cotton bales. Farmers tied their boycott to the history of the early republic and vowed, "not one cent for tribute to an iniquitous combine, but thousands to crush and exterminate it." Their actions centered on finding alternative wrapping for the cotton bales, an effort that occasionally took unusual forms. The Lane Cotton Mills developed a cotton bagging called "osnaburg," which seemed to meet the specifications of cotton buyers. While they waited for the new bagging to become available, farmers took matters into their own hands. One farmer wrapped his bales in old carpeting and hauled them to market. In another report, a farmer used thin wooden slats as wrapping for his cotton crop. Just in case observers failed to understand the point of his unusual wrapping, he scrawled, "Down with the Jute Trust," across the boards. In Tipton County, Alliance leaders urged farmers to bring their cotton to a pre-arranged place and market it in bulk. In January 1892, at the urging of Tennessee Alliance leaders and Governor Buchanan, cotton planters met in Memphis in an interstate effort to limit voluntarily the amount of cotton planted as a mechanism for raising cotton prices. In his report to the Tennessee

state legislature, Buchanan declared a modest success. The convention proposed a reduction of 20 percent and reportedly achieved a reduction of 16.5 percent in the number of acres planted in cotton. This translated into a reduction in yield of two million bales and advanced prices for cotton 40 percent. [39]

While tobacco prices remained high relative to cotton during the 1890s, farmers in upper Middle and West Tennessee organized under Wheel and Alliance leadership to build tobacco warehouses in Clarksville, Tennessee, and Paducah, Kentucky, in order to maintain greater control over prices. In addition, the Clarksville District Tobacco Congress resolved to urge farmers to "determine not even to sow a bed for 1889, [and] put their land in wheat and clover." Such action would benefit tobacco farmers in at least two ways: "besides resting and recuperating their overtaxed land, they will find that they are masters of the situation." Recognizing the hardship such action would impose on farmers facing mortgages and crop liens, Clarksville tobacco merchants vowed to "furnish a million dollars if necessary to carry you over and hold your tobacco for the rise, if you will only bind yourself not to plant so they will be safe in advancing you money on it." Their efforts laid the groundwork for the later tobacco wars that emerged in the wake of the organization of the American Tobacco Company. [40]

In the Middle Tennessee counties of the western Highland Rim, peanut farmers formed cooperatives to market their product. Unsuccessful efforts were made to join

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39 *Toiler*, September, October 1888; White, *Messages of the Governors of Tennessee*, Volume 7 (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission), 439-441.

40 *Toiler*, 3 October and 17 October 1888; for discussions of the tactics of the tobacco wars of the early twentieth century see Tracy Campbell, *The Politics of Despair: Power & Resistance in the Tobacco Wars* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993); Christopher Waldrep, *Night Riders.*

the interests of the peanut farmers of Tennessee with those of the Virginia peanut farmers. In short, farmers planned to fight trusts by creating marketing trusts of their own. Furthermore, the farmers of the Peanut Association of Tennessee paired the solution of their problems to initiatives of cotton farmers by resolving "to use cotton sacks instead of burlaps [for bagging peanuts] . . . to help our brethren who are growing cotton. We must help one another, one hand wash the other, or both go unwashed." [41]

Wheat farmers in the state joined other producers in attempting to control the price they received for their production. In 1889, the Williamson County Wheel #461 heard a report that the Millers' Association, meeting in Nashville, had set the price of wheat "below the actual average cost of production." The Wheel resolved to "encourage the building of elevators and private granaries (to be owned and controlled by farmers) of sufficient number and capacity to secure and hold future crops in good condition until eaters become sufficiently hungry to pay what it is worth." Like the tobacco farmers, these determined wheat producers recognized that their success rested on the resolve of the weakest farmers. Therefore they pledged "to assist any member who might be embarrassed financially by withholding his wheat from the market." The Wheel and Alliance State Agent, T. J. Galloway, was already at work attempting to aid the wheat farmers by securing higher prices. On July 4, he reported successful negotiations for 300,000 bushels of wheat at 80 cents per bushel, a price "two to three cents a bushel more than paid by local buyers." [42]

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41 *Toiler*, 10 July and 15 June 1889.

42 Ibid, 10 July and 4 July 1889.

Organization and cooperative efforts spread to the domestic economy of poultry and egg production. As early as 1873, the *Rural Sun* championed poultry production as an unappreciated money maker in the rural economy. The growth of cities and the availability of rail transportation encouraged poultry production. While census records testify to the growth of poultry production, the marketing of chickens and eggs retained a traditional reliance on the use of local merchants as middlemen between producers and distant buyers. According to J. M. Cummings, a suballiance lecturer from Robertson County, store owners set prices that were "unjust to the producer and perhaps extortionate to the consumer." To address this injustice, he urged women "to organize with us to get the benefits of organization" and sell their products directly to consumers in the larger towns and cities of the state. Likewise, men expressed increasing interest in the poultry production, a phenomenon that would result in the decline of domestic production controlled by farm wives. On May 2, 1890, the Memphis *Avalanche* noted, with approval, a meeting of "prominent poultry men" at the Farmers Exchange for the purpose of organizing regional producers and improving poultry stock. The increasing use of blooded poultry attracted the attention of cotton farmers such as Robert Cartmell in Madison County and John Baptiste of Tipton County. [43]

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43 *Rural Sun*, 28 August 1873; *Tenth Census of the United States*, 1880, Part 5 *Agriculture*; *Toiler*, 30 April 1890. The extra cash Cummings anticipated through the cooperative program amounted to approximately $91 per family per year, a weekly income of only $1.75. Although it appears to be a trifling increase, its value becomes apparent with the realization that the average value of farm production in Tennessee in 1890 was a mere $316. Deborah Fink, *Open Country Iowa: Rural Women, Tradition, and Change* (Albany: University of New York Press, 1986), 57-62; Memphis *Avalanche*, 2 MMay 1890. With the growth of railroads, poultry and egg production could provide considerable economic benefits for farm wives, as shown in a recent study of Tennessee's Upper Cumberland farms. Jeanette Keith, *Country People in the New South*, 76-102.

At the same time that Alliance leaders discussed plans to market the state's corn crop directly to cotton farmers in Alabama and Georgia, their constituency worried about Tennessee's shrinking percentage of the market in meat and cotton. Robert Cartmell, an astute observer of agricultural problems, fretted over the state's marginal position in cotton production. His concerns were mirrored by those of the Meigs County Farmers Alliance on the status of Tennessee cattlemen. In 1890, these East Tennessee farmers petitioned Governor Robert L. Taylor to prohibit "the importation of dressed beef," since the "cattle growers of our state cannot compete with the cattle kings of the West." Improvements in transportation and the use of refrigerated boxcars, along with changes in business organization, meant that the assurances of local markets promised by progressive agriculturists melted as national markets encouraged the growth of specialization. [44]

Like other progressive initiatives, the increased use of chemical fertilizers improved the soil and insured greater productivity but did not improve prices. The application of fertilizers, like the acquisition of blooded stock, was costly. Some farmers avoided progressive improvements out of ignorance, but many, no doubt, found the returns too small to justify the investment. Recent analysis of the seemingly anti-technological decisions made by late nineteenth-century small farmers confirms the practicality of their reasoning. As Mary Neth argues, "the ideology of progress hid [the] contradictions and assumed that farmers who followed progressive practices would increase their profits and raise their standard of living. For those who believed this ideology, farmers who did not practice progressive methods failed not because

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[44] Robert Cartmell Diary, 8 March 1891, TSLA, Nashville; *Toiler*, 8 January 1890; Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982); Jeremy Atack and Peter Passell, *A New Economic View of American History: From Colonial Times to 1940*, 2d. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 376-456.

progressive practices could not help them, but because the farmers refused to become modern." Progress and scientific agriculture demanded capital for retooling that cash-stripped farmers did not have. [45]

A favorite progressive theme in Tennessee focused on the substitution of livestock production for the traditional corn, cotton, and tobacco. Some Alliancemen, like Smith County Alliance President William Ross Shaver, made the transition and prospered. Shaver owned 500 acres of "magnificent blue grass, " on which he raised Durham cattle. But the high cost of blooded cattle (one had cost Shaver "$500 at three months old") precluded that option for most farmers. In addition to the costs, livestock production did not generate immediate returns and held considerable risks. In the South epidemics of cattle diseases, particularly parasitic diseases introduced by ticks, placed livestock production out of the reach of many farmers. Even truck farming offered limited options. The production of perishables required quick and reliable transportation. For anyone located beyond the reach of the railroads, the abominable roads precluded the diversification to truck farming. [46]

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[45] Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 97-98; David B. Danborn, *Born in the* Country, 128; Lionel J. Beaulieu, *The Rural South in Crisis*, 97-98. Beaulieu argues that "the profitable application of the technology of progressive agriculture often required larger farms, more specialization, and higher capital investment. The notion that purchased technology would reduce labor costs rested on the assumption that farm people hired the labor they used. In fact, becoming a progressive farmer required more cash. Yet higher production levels lowered agricultural prices, a side effect that could be borne by large farms, but not by small ones. If people on small farms were to increase their cash expenditures to practical progressive farming and living, agricultural prices would have to go up, not down. The ideology of progress hid these contradictions and assumed that farmers who followed progressive practices would increase their profits and raise their standard of living. For those who believed this ideology, farmers who did not practice progressive methods failed not because progressive practices could not help them, but because the farmers refused to become modern."

[46] *Toiler*, 12 September 1888.

Generally, Tennessee farmers did not begin to institute the changes prescribed by scientific agriculturists until the early twentieth century, when progressive businessmen assisted farmers in the acquisition of Jersey cattle and demonstrated advanced farming techniques through the establishment of experimental farms. In the 1920s, the Kiwanis Club joined with Tennessee Extension agents in the "eradication of the scrub dairy sire" and the replacement of scrub breeds with purebreds "in accordance with the state-wide 'better dairy sire' campaign." At Morristown, the Kiwanis conducted a "scrub bull trial . . . to impress the worthlessness of the scrub sire and the value of the purebred on the minds of the farmers of Hamblen County." Attended by over 300 farmers, the trial was conducted "in regular criminal court form." The jury found "A. Scubicus" guilty of "murder, robbery, vagrancy, and being a nuisance," and sentenced him to be executed. The purpose of the program in the words of club members was to assist the farmer "to realize greater financial returns," which presumably would be spent on the new consumer goods paraded before farm wives in home demonstration meetings and exhibits. [47]

The history of rural women in this period effectively demonstrates the process of decline that characterized agrarian life from the Populist to the Progressive eras. In 1888, farm wives proudly defined their position as agrarian producers and partners with their husbands. As Fannie Davis explained, girls were "a great help about the house," but they also "help papa . . . in the field, dropping corn and other seeds." In addition, "a great many farmers' girls make regular hands in the field, hoeing and picking cotton." Maggie Shelton informed readers of the *Toiler* that she was "raised on the farm, in the cotton fields of Georgia." As a result, she claimed that she "knew

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47 *Tennessee Extension Review*, February, April, and June 1924; Keith, *Country People in the New South*, 183-194.

something of the needs of organization among the farmers," and she urged women to "shoulder your part of the responsibilities of farm life." This recognition of their role in farm life gave women a claim to membership in the Wheel and Alliance, a position that women understood as "stand[ing] at the side of our husbands and encourag[ing] them on to victory." Alliance leaders were acutely aware that the burdens of poverty and subsistence agriculture fell disproportionately on women. Bettie Gay, writing on women's activities in N. A. Dunning's *Farmers' Alliance History* in 1891, asserted that women were "the chief sufferers whenever poverty or misfortune overtakes the family." Nevertheless, the sense of pride and accomplishment and the expectation of success based on the grassroots efforts of rural men and women is evident in the letters penned by farm wives to the *Toiler.* [48]

After the turn of the century, the momentum for changes had shifted from the farmers and their wives to the paid professional reformers who identified problems and prescribed solutions. Progressive descriptions of rural life increasingly focused on the lack of consumer goods in farm households. Deploring the dearth of consumer goods, the federal government's Country Life Commission noted that "whatever general hardships, such as poverty, isolation, lack of labor-saving devices may exist on any given farm, the burden of these hardships falls more heavily on the farmer's wife than on the farmer himself." In general, the report of the commission continued: "her life is more monotonous and the more isolated, no matter what the wealth or the poverty of the family may be." Evelyn Scott reported on the activities of farmers and their families in Clarksville at the turn of the century. Her description of the farm wives reveals a desperate struggle to maintain a semblance of respectability in the face of

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48 *Toiler,* 24 July, 9 October, and 13 November 1889; N. A. Dunning, *The Farmers' Alliance History and Agricultural Digest*, 309.

organizations and the Progressives are critically important to an understanding of the failure of Populism and the history of twentieth-century agriculture. The Alliance advocated increased production and farmer control of the market. The initiatives for agricultural experimentation, dissemination of agricultural information, and marketing strategies would come from the farmers in the fields. Twentieth-century agriculturists, whose origins trace back to the nineteenth-century proponents of scientific agriculture, wanted farmers to produce more and buy more. For them, agricultural information and control of the market belonged to the experts. [50]

Alliance and Populist critiques of American industrial society rested on the need to maintain the bonds of community as the best mechanism for dealing with social, economic, and political change. Thus, the Farmers' Alliance and its political successor, the People's Party, were always closely identified with the rural religious congregations of the South and Midwest. Church buildings offered convenient meeting places for sub-Alliances, and congregations provided ready-made organization. The moral language of Wheel, Alliance, and Populist literature tapped common beliefs and ideas regarding the right ordering of society. Finally, the agrarian reform bridged the demands of "old time religion" and the new Social Gospel, drawing on time-honored traditions and questioning the *status quo*.

Scattered and often isolated families in the rural South formed communities that did not conform to urban concepts of discrete neighborhoods. Historians of the South, from colonial studies to the analyses of the twentieth century, recognize as Jean E. Friedman observed that community consisted of "complex ties of kinship" that

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50 Mitchell and Lowe, "To Sow Contentment," 317, 319. In 1911, the Country Life Commission reported on the problems of rural living, with particular emphasis on lack of consumer goods and labor saving technology available to urban dwellers. *Report of the Commission on Country Life*.

bound rural people together, making "community less a village of proximate neighbors than an understanding of the heart among distant kinfolk and neighbors." Community for rural people involved travel and frequently brought together not one or two, but many people to share in work, celebration, or religious activities. [51]

Thus, it should not be surprising that rural reformers relied on the ties of church and family to build membership. Men and women in the Wheel and Alliance called one another "brother" and "sister," as they did in traditional country churches. Nor were these titles artificial constructs, since many Wheel and Alliance members could say with Mattie Mahaffy: "I have a good portion of friends and relations who are members of the union." [52]

Churches provided convenient and familiar meeting places, reinforced communal ties, and confirmed an ideology of cooperativism and agrarian life. Men and women called upon God to bless their efforts in speeches that allied agricultural reform with the will of the Almighty. Meetings opened with prayer and singing. Women frequently presented the opening speeches in which they reminded farmers, as did Cora McLean, that "man's first duty is to God," and encouraged their listeners to "grasp each other by the hand and resolve by the help of God that our condition shall be bettered and the right of farmers and laborers shall be respected." When the editor of the *Toiler* raged against trusts and unjust laws, he couched his anger in Biblical terms: "God is a just God, and to say that he endorses the burdens of oppressions that

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51 Jean E. Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 3; Darrett B. Rutman and Anita H. Rutman, *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650-1750* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984); Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: Univeristy of North Carolina Press, 1982).

52 *Toiler*, 30 April 1890.

rest upon us as a class on account of unjust laws . . . is certainly contrary to the teachings of the Holy Bible." The Williamson County Alliance forecast the construction of a "noble agricultural and mechanical commonwealth" founded "on the side of truth and right [that] is worthy [of] the highest type of God's created beings." James D. Vaughan reported on the meeting at Bodenham in Giles County, where farmers listened to speeches outlining the principles of the Wheel and Alliance. He assured readers that "if there were any doubting Thomases" in the crowd, "they cried 'we believe,' and will henceforth talk and preach Alliance and Wheel doctrine to rescue our downtrodden farmers from financial destruction." He went on to compare American farmers to "the children of Israel . . . groaning under Egyptian bondage," whose "yoke of oppression" was thrown off by Moses. Farmers could take heart, knowing that "He is the same God, yesterday, to-day and tomorrow, and will listen to the cries of distress just the same now as he did then." Vaughan ended his report with the encouragement: "let no one think of failing in a cause that is just and right. If God be for us, who can be against us." [53]

Many of the Wheel and Alliance methods mimicked those of rural churches. Reformers worried that the intrusion of courts and tort law in the wake of commercial changes would destroy cooperativism and community. To counter the growth in lawsuits, Wheel and Alliance leaders urged farmers to settle their disputes among themselves, using the union as an arbitrator. The plan must have seemed familiar to men and women reared in country churches where family disputes, quarrels between neighbors, and disruptive behavior found resolution in church meetings and councils. W. P. Morris wrote to the *Toiler* in 1888 to demonstrate to readers that wheels could

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53 *Toiler*, 4 December, 27 June, and 9 January 1889; 25 July 1888.

act as arbitrators. Under the headline, "How Wheelerism Works," Morris described how two Wheelers in Obion County, one a member of #445 and the other a member of #112 came into disagreement and filed lawsuits. Members of their Wheels arranged for them to present their views informally, and a settlement was made. In Morris's view, "the trial was private and no meddlesome mischief-makers [were] present to aggravate matters." [54]

Bad roads and long distances presented problems for the development of Wheel and Alliance "communities" just as they did for country churches, and reformers overcame those problems in similar ways to those that had been implemented by rural ministers. County Wheels and Alliances held picnics and rallies and promoted excursions to bring people together for days of fun and edification. These so-called "jollifications" brought together the excitement, camaraderie, and purpose of camp meetings, political rallies, and dinners-on-the-ground.

The Tullahoma Rally in the summer of 1889 brought together an estimated seven thousand people who arrived by horseback, wagon, and on foot, from Moore, Bedford, Franklin, and Coffee counties. A special train, so packed with people "there wasn't hardly standing room," brought farmers and their families from Murfreesboro in neighboring Rutherford County. With banners snapping, the Alliance members marched from the train station in Tullahoma to the rally site in a mile-long parade, spirited along by the music of the Unionville Band, which rode in a forty-foot "carry-all" drawn by four mules. John McDowell reported that "the woods seemed to be literally swarming with men, women and children." The Farmers' Alliance of DeKalb County held a Fourth of July Celebration in conjunction with "the various Sunday

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54 *Toiler*, 22 August 1888.

Schools" of Antioch, Jefferson, and Indian Mound. The Farmers' Alliance clearly initiated and directed the events which included speeches on the Declaration of Independence, "the importance of being true to the order," and "the importance of Sunday Schools," in addition to essays read by Miss Nannie Adkins and Miss Belle Adcock. The Collins River Band provided music. The official ceremonies ended with the reading of the Declaration of Independence. The crowd, estimated to be "something like three thousand people," shared a meal that left everyone "bountifully supplied," and when the leftovers were placed in boxes and baskets, the correspondent was reminded of "the loaves and fishes." [55]

The DeKalb County reporter could not have been alone in his comparision between that July meal and the Biblical story. McDowell made frequent visits to county Alliance meetings, where he reported that when the speeches and organizational business ended at noon, Alliance women performed a familiar task and "spread out before us a bountiful supply of life's essentials and the inner man was truly refreshed." Though not as poetic as McDowell, J. R. Miles, president of the State Wheel, was no less appreciative of the skills of women when he complimented their "baskets and boxes 'chuck full' of as good 'grub' as ever went into a union man's mouth." A Marion County woman reported the activities of Sweden's Cove Union, which included a dinner under a grove of trees. Judging it "one of the best dinners I ever saw," she continued approvingly: "everyone ate until they were perfectly satisfied, and there was much of it left to be taken home." The occasion made such an impression on the writer that she declared it "will be a bright spot in my memory for the rest of my life." Allowing for the overblown rhetoric of the age, the impression

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55 *Toiler*, 28 August and 17 July 1889.

remained that, like the report of the DeKalb farmer, these communal meals offered something more than filled stomachs. Sharing food with men and women of distant communities bound them together in a joint effort. The comparison with the Biblical meal of loaves and fishes provided a living example of the benefits of cooperation that sustained Alliance efforts as readily as long-winded speeches. [56]

As important as traditional religious practices were to the organization of local and county wheels and alliances, the similarities did not end there. Until recently, historians of religion dismissed the South in discussions of the advent of the Social Gospel in the late nineteenth century. Popular adherence to white supremacy precluded southern interest in the religion of reform, according to most histories. While the Social Gospel never achieved the prominence in the South that it did in the urban North, recent studies reveal that it cannot be assumed that it had no influence. Indeed, the similarities between the Social Gospel critiques of society and agrarian reforms are clearly seen in the words of the Alliance and Populists leaders and in the actions advocated by many of the rank and file members. [57]

In at least three areas, agrarian reform touched on issues associated with the Social Gospel: criticism of the accumulation of wealth to the detriment of society as a whole, advocacy of prohibition, and the influence of missionary efforts in reforming

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56 *Toiler*, 5 February, 19 March, and 23 April 1890.

57 See Dale E. Soden, "The Social Gospel in Tennessee: Mark Allison Matthews," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 41 (1982): 159-170; Merwin Swanso, "The Country Life Movement and the Churches," *Church History* 46 (1977): 358-373; Ralph E. Luker, "The Social Gospel and the Failure of Racial Reform, 1877-1898," *Church History* 46 (1977): 80-99; Frederick A. Bode, "Religion and Class Hegemony: A Populist Critique in North Carolina," *Journal of Southern History* 38 (1971): 417-438; Richard C. Goode, "The Godly Insurrection in Limestone County: Social Gospel, Populism, and Southern Culture in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Religion and American Culture* (1992): 155-169; Herman A. Norton, *Religion in Tennessee, 1777-1945* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981); Ferenc Morton Szasz, *The Divided Mind of Protestant America, 1880-1930* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1982).

society and the world. When John P. Buchanan assumed the office of President of the Tennessee State Alliance in 1889, he tied his official duties and those of the membership to religious obligations, saying "There are no three greater duties of practical Christianity, than to strive for the interests of one's own household, and for the interests of one's fellow laborers, and for the interests of one's fellow citizens." The message was clear, rural Christians belonged in the Alliance and in the service of man. "Little Hatchet," a frequent contributor to the *Toiler* professed his belief in "helping people who cannot help themselves; that is what the meek and lowly Jesus taught." But, he continued, "our rulers have reversed it . . . the toilers are the oppressed people and they need protection." Agrarian reformers often expressed their thoughts in poetry. Clumsy and unsophisticated, it quickly passed from public memory, but to the men and women battling political and economic despair, the poems presented the problems in concise terms. Bailey Basford, the Secretary of Oak Lawn Wheel # 1004, submitted a poem entitled "The Toiling Men," which was "written for the *Toiler*." After several stanzas of praise to the "hardy hands and muscles" that built the farms, railroads, bridges, and cities of America, Basford presented the dilemma of the toilers:

The toiling men, the toiling men,
They only ask their portion,
They do not want to dredge on land,
And on the mighty ocean,
To make a few men vastly rich,
To live in pomp and pleasure,
The toiling men they do the work,
And should have part of the treasure.

The toiling men, the toiling men,
Though humble be their station,
They are the purest as a class,
Of any in our nation.

With honest hearts and sturdy frames,
They bravely do their duty,
They make the wilderness to bloom,
Our fields they clothe in beauty.

The proud and rich may loll around
And spend their time in leisure,
And pluck the withered flower of fame
And seek for social pleasure.
But toiling men have ever been
The builders of the nation;
Oh, who can think of their great works,
And scorn their humble station.

Ye toiling men, ye toiling men,
Your burden will grow lighter;
The night at last is giving way,
The day is growing brighter.
Oh, may the light of justice shine,
And men of every station
Love and obey the golden rule
Throughout our lovely nation.

Like Christian social reformers from Thomas More to Washington Gladden and Josiah Strong, the writer of the poem viewed social justice and reform within the context of "the golden rule." The problem was not with the toilers themselves as individuals, but with the subversion of justice. Even more to the point was the anonymous poem "Am I My Brother's Keeper."

My days are filled with comfort,
And nights are passed in ease;
'Tis presumption to annoy me
With questions such as these.

They tell me of the paupers,
The sick and the oppressed,
The worn and weary workers,
The sorrowing and depressed.

The young, whose noble longing

Perish in the sordid fight for grain
Who fall into the tempter's toils
And whose struggles are in vain.

The waifs, half clothed and starving,
The orphan and the widow's wail---
Why haunt my downy pillow
With their specters gaunt and pale?

Yes, we are our brother's keepers;
Who lives unto himself,
To gain, to trade, to barter,
To gather gold and pelf.

To ignore the pleading glances
Of poverty and woe,
Shall have small capital to start with
In that land to which we go.

With hand outstretched and empty
Like the beggar at our door,
Shall we reach those shining mansions
Where our loved have gone before.

Oh, Lord! shamefaced and contrite,
Let us not waiting stand;
By love and suffering sanctified
Let us enter in Thy land.

The best known Tennessee Social Gospeler, Mark Allison Matthews, imbibed the radical politics of the Farmers' Alliance as he preached the Christian gospel in the Presbyterian Churches of North Georgia. A frequent speaker before farmers' meetings in the 1880s and an admirer of Tom Watson, Matthews moved to Jackson, Tennessee, in 1896 and launched a crusade for social reform that left no doubts that the city had been touched by the Social Gospel. In his six-year tenure as pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Matthews started night classes for workers, built a public library and a hospital, persuaded the railroads to provide coal for the poor and to support a

health insurance program for railroad workers, fought for the regulation of cocaine and morphine, established a Ladies Bible Training Class to work with the poor, organized a Humane Society, and brought the YMCA to Jackson. His energy and accomplishments exceeded those of the Alliance rank and file, but he touched a widely felt belief that the solution to the problems of industrial society rested in a re-establishment of social justice. It was an idea expressed by John P. Buchanan in his inaugural address. "Progress does not mean a mushroom growth of 'booms' and wild speculations," Buchanan lectured, "in which a few are enriched to the detriment of the many, but a substantial growth upon the solid basis of an increase in wealth, in taxable property, in resources and revenues bringing lighter burdens of taxation and greater prosperity to the whole people." [58]

Moral reform was as important to many members of the Alliance as economic or political reform. Indeed, at least one recent analysis argues that the unification of moral (religious) goals and economic and political objectives is the defining characteristic of late nineteenth-century populism. According to this view, later so-called "populist" campaigns posed more limited demands than the reform of society. [59]

For social reformers of the South no problem loomed as great as the consumption of alcohol. By the 1880s the public rhetoric had passed from attempts to regulate the sale of alcohol to attempts to prohibit the importation, manufacture, sale, and use of alcohol. In 1877, the passage of the so-called "Four Mile Law," which prohibited the sale of alcohol within four miles of any chartered institution of learning

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58 *Toiler*, 23 July 1889, 19 September, 12 December, and 19 September 1888; Soden, "The Social Gospel in Tennessee," 160-161, 162-168; White, *Messages of the Governors of Tennessee.*

59 Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), Chapter 2.

outside an incorporated town, became, in the words of one historian, "the instrument for drying up the entire state." Nevertheless, prohibition advocates continued to press for a state constitutional amendment to achieve their goals. The acknowledged leader in the efforts to obtain an amendment was John H. McDowell, the editor of the *Toiler*, and future president of the State Alliance. Amending the state constitution had been made difficult by the framers of the 1870 document, who feared radical change. As a result, amendments had to pass in two separate General Assemblies and be ratified by a majority of the voters--a time-consuming process, fraught with many opportunities for defeat. By 1887, McDowell had successfully steered the amendment bill through the two legislative sessions. However, the referendum election of September 29, 1887, dealt the amendment a staggering defeat, with a final vote of 145,000 against the amendment and 118,000 for. The Prohibition Party, which had been organized in Tennessee in 1883, continued to field candidates for state and local elections. As committed as he was to the success of prohibition, McDowell opposed the formation of a third party, saying: "We have been an outspoken opposer of saloons all our life and our record on this question is such that no reasonable man can doubt our sincerity, [but] . . . in our humble opinion, success can best be attained by working within our respective parties rather than weakening and dividing our strength by forming a third party that can never attain a majority." It was a view he would eventually abandon for the sake of agrarian reform, but only reluctantly. [60]

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60 Paul E. Isaac, *Prohibition and Politics: Turbulent Decades in Tennessee, 1885-1920* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1965), chapters 1-3; Grace Leab, "TennesseeTemperance Activities, 1870-1899," *ETHSP* 21 (1949): 52-68; *Tennessee Acts*, 1877, 37; *Journal of the Tennessee Senate*, 1877, 489, 519, 554, 564, 569, 570. It is interesting that despite the interest of many Alliance members, the People's Party of Tennessee did not include a prohibition plank in its platform until 1898. *Toiler*, 31 October 1888.

Alliance members closely identified their activities with a renewal of piety, not only condemning alcohol, but raising concerns about the moral direction of the nation and the availability of recreational activities that seemed to them to undermine home and family. Many Wheel and Alliance leaders self-consciously distanced themselves from activities that Ted Ownby characterized as the masculine culture of field and saloon. Again, McDowell took the lead. In 1885, he introduced legislation to prevent the playing of baseball on Sunday. By the closing decades of the nineteenth century many small towns across the state sponsored baseball teams and engaged in fierce rivalries with neighboring town teams. Prodded by Nashville's leading ministers, Rev. C. H. Strickland of the Baptist Church, Rev. J. B. McFerrin of the Methodist Church, and Rev. Dewitt of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, McDowell condemned the "demoralizing influences of Sunday baseball playing," accusing baseball of "wiping out the sanctity of the Sabbath, demoralizing the youths and turning it [baseball] into a money-making machine for a few individuals." McDowell and his supporters were certain that "many of the children who went to Sunday School in the morning were at the baseball grounds Sunday evening," and some of the boys "were known to wager money on the games, taking the first steps . . . leading to gambling hells and teaching them to disregard the Sabbath as a holy day." McDowell wondered how it was that "if a man is caught plowing [on Sunday] he is arrested and fined," but men could legally profit from baseball played on Sunday. [61]

J. M. A. of Lake County wrote to the *Toiler* to complain about one political candidate who routinely flaunted community proscriptions of Sunday labor to increase

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61 *Toiler*, 4 July 1888; *Acts of the State of Tennessee*, 1885, 256. For a discussion of the nineteenth-century masculine culture of field and saloon, see Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation & Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

his wealth. The writer complained that J. C. Harris, a candidate for the Tennessee House, was "a big merchant and rich land owner," who "cultivates or rents out more land than any other man in Lake County." Year after year, he testified, "as hundreds of his poor tenants can testify . . . he has been enriched from their hard earnings, while they have dragged along in poverty." Indeed, J. M. A. charged, "nine tenths of his tenants don't make a respectable living." What made Harris's activities especially despicable was the fact that "he has neither regard for God nor man nor the laws of his country." The evidence that supported this charge rested on the fact that "his wagons haul cotton and his reapers and mowers run all day Sunday year after year." As a result, "his influence over the rising generation here is demoralizing and ruinous." The message McDowell and J. M. A. conveyed was clear to their readers. The relentless pursuit of wealth corrupted the morals of men otherwise engaged in pleasant and worthwhile pastimes or honorable work. When men flaunted the conventions of church and community, they exerted a "demoralizing" influence on the youth." [62]

The world was full of scoundrels, as Wheel and Alliance men were frequently reminded. W. H. McDonald, secretary of Wheel #187 wrote to warn others against O. Clendenen "who claims to be a doctor." According to McDonald, Clendenen was "expelled from our wheel for unbecoming conduct and from our church also." Calling the fugitive a "hypocrite, a drunkard and a perfect scoundrel in every respect," McDonald warned that "he will try to sneak into some other wheel and is in possession of the pass words and signs." Wheel and Alliance men not only worried about the dishonest men among them, but the state of society in generally. C. W. Macune, national president of the Alliance and editor of the *National Economist,* shook his

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62 *Toiler*, 31 October 1888.

head over the rising number of murders reported in the 1890 census and reprinted an article from *North American Review*, which decried the "festering masses of vice and crime in our large cities . . . [and] shameless political corruption in the shadow of hundreds of church steeples." As one historian has noted, one barricade against the lawlessness of the world was the home, where morals remained unchallenged, protected by women of unassailable virtue. [63]

Paradoxically, in order to make full use of the high moral presence associated with women, they were thrust into new, more visible public roles that simultaneously undermined traditional views of women and upheld them. The churches of the late nineteenth century also provided women with the skills and opportunities to serve in public roles. Indeed, throughout the century, women repeatedly assumed public roles associated with religious events. On occasion they also participated in non-traditional roles by associating their activities with socially acceptable religious forms of female behavior. Joe L. Kincheloe, Jr., argued that revivals and camp meeting in Tennessee in the earlier part of the century tacitly sanctioned more public roles for women. Praising and testifying were acceptable activities that provided opportunities for women to speak. Building on this observation, Jayne C. DeFiore explained the public activities of Tennessee women in the presidential elections of the 1840s by drawing parallels between the style and fervor of camp meetings and political rallies. Seizing a window of opportunity, women moved into public and politically defined areas because they were temporarily sanctioned by their resemblance to religious activities. Within the churches of the 1890s, the roles of women further expanded as the Sunday School movement spread, and women flocked to support the missionary efforts around the

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63 *Toiler*, 7 November 1888; *National Economist*, 14 January 1893; Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 103-121.

world. Tied to the existing religious supports of community, the activities of women in the Wheel and Alliance were easily defined and more readily acceptable.[64]

The subject of woman suffrage found as few advocates in the Tennessee Wheel and Alliance as in the general population of the state. Indeed, McDowell criticized the Prohibition Party for its woman suffrage plank. When a Kansas woman wrote to the "Ladies Column" of the *Toiler* and suggested that "if we women were running the government, as 'ignorant and weak and frivolous' as we are, we could manage to start things around a little faster than they [men] are at the present," a Tennessee woman soon replied, "let the men manage their affairs and we ours." Nevertheless, women moved into new political spheres with the help and encouragement of the Wheel and Alliance. [65]

Following the state election of 1888, the Wheel and Alliance entered the discussions surrounding political appointments when McDowell published the organizations' choices for Embossing Clerk of the House and Senate. Annie Dance of Gibson County received the Alliance endorsement for the House position, and Will A Dromgoole, the Murfreesboro author, was the organization's choice for the Senate. During the 1889 legislative session, women obtained the right to the office of

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64 Joe L. Kincheloe, "Transcending Role Restrictions: Women at Camp Meetings and Political Rallies," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 40 (1981):158-169; Jayne Crumpler DeFiore, "'Come and Bring the Ladies': Tennessee Women and the Politics of Opportunity During the Presidential Campaigns of 1840 and 1844," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 51(1992): 197-212; Sara M. Evans and Harry C. Boyte, *Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988); Michael McGerr, "Political Style and Women's Power, 1830-1930," *Journal of American History* 77 (1990): 864-885.

65 *Toiler*, Fall 1889, 5 February and 23 April 1890.

Superintendent of County Schools, a decision many Alliancemen felt was long overdue. [66]

While women found space within the chaos of political and economic upheaval to become more visible, if only briefly, African Americans did not. Indeed, they faced political oblivion as disfranchising laws took effect, and social isolation under the rule of "Jim Crow." No discussion of the forces affecting reform in the South would be complete without attention to the problem of race and white supremacy. Underlying every aspect of southern life, the racial question affected the agrarian reform movement as well. On the one hand, the Wheel and Alliance encouraged the formation of African-American sub-wheels and alliances, printed news of Colored Wheel and Alliance meetings in the pages of the *Toiler*, and offered blacks the opportunity to participate in the state cooperative agency. Nevertheless, agrarian leaders made these concessions within the context of growing white hostility, the formalization of segregation, and the disfranchisement of African-American voters. Lynchings in Gibson, Crockett, and Shelby counties openly boasted of their racist attitudes and their successes in preventing African Americans from settling in their communities. Within the context, McDowell's attitude toward African-American farmers assumed the paternalistic character more commonly seen among political and economic elites of the previous decade, when "enlightened" southern whites predicted a better day for blacks through education and hard work. [67]

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66 *Toiler*, 5 December 1888; Tennessee House Journal 1889; Tennessee Senate Journal 1889; *Acts of the State of Tennessee.*

67 Joseph H. Cartwright, *The Triumph of Jim Crow: Tennessee Race Relations in the 1880s* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), Chapter 5, "Separation Without Equality";Richard Couto, *Lifting the Veil: A Political History of Struggles for Emancipation* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993): Chapter 2, "Freedom's Demise, 1870-1900"; Gibson County *Herald*, July 1889.

McDowell attended several county meetings and reported favorably on the attendance and the progress of agrarian organization among African Americans. The tone of his praise seems designed to reassure whites that blacks harbored no ulterior motives in their meetings, and to indicate to blacks what was expected of them. At the Tipton County meeting of the Colored Wheel, McDowell spoke to his audience for two hours and declared he had "never had better attention on any occasion." He seemed sure that "the colored people showed an eagerness for information and enthusiasm for our cause and principles, which was unsurpassed by any audience." As a result of his experience that evening, he was convinced "that the colored farmers of Tennessee, if properly educated will make active working members of the order." He believed that "the prejudices growing out of their former condition are rapidly disappearing." Therefore, he assured his readers, "if the white brethren will only treat them kindly and show them that we are their friends, and that our fight for the elevation and prosperity of agriculture is a common fight for their interest as well as our own . . . they will join in with us and stand by as unflinching in every moment where unity of action is necessary to success." McDowell viewed black members as potential allies, but only in a supportive role. [68]

Although documentary evidence of the Colored Wheel and Colored Alliance is scarce, all available sources point to a recognition among black Wheelers and Alliancemen that they recognized the paternalism of the white organization. Information about meeting times appeared in the columns of the *Toiler*, but blacks, unlike their white counterparts, either wrote few letters to the newspaper or their letters went unprinted. White reformers reminded Colored Wheels and Alliances

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68 *Toiler*, 11 July 1888.

several times that they needed to be more supportive of the cooperative buying program. Given the difficulty whites experienced in raising funds to pay cash for goods, it seems obvious that black sharecroppers and tenants would be unlikely participants. Nevertheless, whites, disgusted with the lack of progress, attributed black shortfalls to laziness and lack of interest. Blacks cast a suspicious eye on white willingness to offer too much advice, but organization among African-American farmers required some form of white support to act as a counterbalance to the objections that planter-landlords might raise. Blacks supported Alliance producer ideology, but for many blacks that meant higher wages for farm labor, whereas for whites, it meant higher prices for farm products. The differences became apparent in 1891, when Arkansas Colored Alliances struck for higher wages for cotton pickers. Though roundly condemned by white Alliance leaders, the abortive action supported a growing popular perception that the farmer organization represented a new form of radicalism reminiscent of Reconstruction. [69]

It was in politics, more than labor, that white Alliancemen demonstrated their own racial prejudice. While offering "brotherhood" in support of common economic goals, Tennessee Wheel and Alliance representatives voted in favor of the disfranchising acts that came before the General Assembly. As Roger Hart observed, "The Farmers' Alliance was not wholly responsible for Tennessee's partial disfranchisement of blacks, but Alliance legislators were generally very cooperative." When the Dortch Bill to require the use of a secret ballot came before the lower house,

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69 Gerald H. Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Revolt: Ballots and Bigotry in the "New South"* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1977); Robert Tracy McKenzie, "Freedmen and the Soil in the Upper South: The Reorganization of Tennessee Agriculture, 1865-1880," *Journal of Southern History* 59 (1993): 63-84; Robert M. Saunders, "The Southern Populists and the Negro in 1893-1895," *Journal of Negro History* 54 (July 1969): 240-261.

only two Alliancemen voted against it. Only ten percent of the Alliance legislators voted against the poll tax bill, which was introduced by a Wheel and Alliance member. Other factors entered into the decisions to enact the poll tax and the other disfranchising laws, including support of schools, the end of corruption in the election process, the return of local government to Memphis, and the means to initiate reform (many supporters of prohibition attributed the failure of the prohibition amendment referendum to black voters who were anti-prohibition). But the legislators themselves did not hide behind excuses; they understood their actions and predicted the decline of African-American voting. Their only surprise came in the larger than predicted decline of almost forty percent among urban voters. In this instance, farmers themselves voted in the means to their own political demise. By upholding white supremacy and supporting disfranchisement, Alliance men undermined a potential source of support from African Americans. [70]

The context in which the Wheel and Alliance organized included more than the economic transformation of rural America to industrialism. And more was at stake than politics as usual. The Tennessee Wheel and Alliance movement developed within the context of the traditions and myths surrounding a failed war. The men who led the agrarian reform movement fought in the Civil War, most often as enlisted men. The political conflicts engendered by Wheel and Alliance demands pitted those former soldiers against the officers who led them into battle (most notably Isham G. Harris, William B. Bate, and Peter Turney) and created personal and social discord that pulled at the fabric of the organization. Likewise, Wheelers and Alliancemen made their demands within the changing social reality produced by advocates of a "New South,"

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[70] Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists,* 266-273; J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 104-123.

supporters of woman suffrage, and defenders of white supremacy. Nevertheless, reformers built their organization among friends, kin, and neighbors who shared similar religious beliefs, histories, and social views. Thus, it is not surprising that old comrades in arms and fellow church members joined the Wheel and Alliance and built their reform effort on what they perceived as a more solid foundation than a momentary reaction to economic distress or dissatisfaction with political office holders.

Grassroots Reform in the Age of New South Agriculture and Bourbon Democracy: The Agricultural Wheel, The Farmers' Alliance, and The People's Party in Tennessee, 1884-1892

A Dissertation

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Chapter 5: For Want of Unity of Action

The worst enemy that the wheel has to deal with just now is the disorganizers within, who beguile many well-meaning wheelers into opposition to every aggressive move, either offensive or defensive. Toiler, 1888

If the experiment isn't worth risking a dollar to get us out of the clutches of money sharks, we had just as well disband. Toiler, 1889

Simultaneous with the creation of new local and county Wheels and Alliances, agrarian reform leaders struggled to implement cooperative institutions and maintain harmony among the competing interests of the state's diverse farming community. The unification of farmers in a common cause presented the greatest problem for Tennesseans as well as for the nation's farmers. Wheelers and Alliancemen struggled to create unity through concerted action, but too many farmers remained focused on local conditions and problems, thereby insuring the state organization of the failure to make the transition into the People's Party. Those who joined the Wheel or Alliance grabbed every opportunity to generate unity through concerted action. They risked a public brawl to create an official newspaper for the dissemination of reform ideology, the publication of local and county activities, and the establishment of a public forum to air agricultural views and answer critics. Cooperative efforts like the state agency and boycotts against cartels, trusts, and monopolies engaged the efforts of many farmers. Cotton planters organized against the jute cartel, and tobacco and peanut farmers created marketing associations. While these efforts unified farmers in contiguous counties, the gains made by one group did not offer benefits to farmers as a whole. As a result, although there were success stories, Tennessee farmers

continued to focus on local conditions and problems and failed to achieve the sense of unity necessary to carry the organization into a third party.

From all across the state farmers testified to the need for unity and harmony. Sam Young, a Dyer County farmer and member of the Tennessee General Assembly, expressed his concern that "the greatest difficulty the Wheel has had to contend with is a want of unity of action." Suspended between hope and doubt, he went on to say that "the consolidation of the Wheel and Alliance seems to have infused new life in most of the brotherhood, but we have a few men in our ranks yet who want to use the order to advance and build up their own interests." D. A. Vaughan of Bedford County warned against "the demon of party spirit," observing that "old party prejudices and ties are so strong that reason and even the general good are really lost sight of and trampled under foot." The Knox County Union qualified its assertion that they were "getting along nicely" by adding the disclaimer that they were "getting straightened out, at least." The East Tennessee farmers praised the efforts of their leaders, venturing to predict that they would one day "be recognized as public benefactors." Praise aside, harmony apparently eluded the Knox County organization since the report concluded with three statements for contemplation by the membership: care in admitting new members to the ranks, a reminder to members to "be generous enough to act in harmony," and motivation to avoid becoming "weary in well doing." Conflict seemed to touch the organization at every level, but, as will be shown, since it arose from no single cause, it proved difficult to overcome. [1]

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[1] *Toiler*, 15 January, 27 June, and 22 January 1890. Charles Macune, the president of the National Farmers' Alliance, clearly recognized the problem of disunity, particularly when it involved political action. His ability to refocus the Texas Alliance from their divisions brought about by the political tone of the Cleburne Demands and bring them together in unity under the call for cooperative action among the cotton farmers of the South saved the Alliance from oblivion. Arguing that "the interests of the cotton-producers were identical, and the evils from which they were suffering general," he asserted that, "the greatest good could not be effected without uniting the whole cotton

As Vaughan pointed out, partisanship provided the most obvious source of disunity. In Tennessee, the active presence of the two major political parties threatened the farmers' organization every two years, as state elections moved into high gear. In addition to the disruptive activities of the Democrats and Republicans, Wheel and Alliance members came under pressure from the other reform parties as well. The Greenback Party and the Prohibition Party continued to field candidates throughout the period. Since many agricultural reformers had previous associations with the reforming political parties, they were targeted for campaign literature and attention. Furthermore, even within the established parties, factionalism had become a staple, sometimes producing the greatest fireworks of the election in the nomination process.

Within a very short period after the advancement of the Alliance into East Tennessee, partisan trouble rose within the ranks. Potential candidates for the 1890 gubernatorial election were already working the hustings by the fall of 1889, with Josiah Patterson, a Memphis lawyer associated with the Bourbon wing of the Democratic Party, the most visible candidate. His appearance at a Meigs County meeting of the Farmers' Alliance generated little support for his election and much internal strife for the agrarian organization. Early in October, the *Toiler* carried a letter of complaint from the Republican members of the Alliance who attended the supposedly "nonpartisan" meeting. The protester wanted to know if McDowell, who had been a speaker at the Meigs County meeting, thought it right to call "members of the alliance of all parties to come out to an alliance meeting and put up a Democratic

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belt." Once that was accomplished, he believed, "the dissensions . . . in the early history of the order, in regard to politics and other subjects, have entirely died out, and given place to an enlightened effort to accomplish something grand--a business organization." N. A. Dunning, *The Farmers' Alliance History and Agricultural Digest* (Washington, D.C.: Farmers' Alliance Press, 1889), 84.

or Republican candidate for high office, and give him the chance with no opposing candidate present to get in his honied [sic] words to catch the farmer and render himself popular." The writer warned, "If this policy is practiced by either party I am instructed to say to you for myself and others, both Democrats and Republicans, that it will tear the order all to pieces." He went on to say, "I hope, Mr. Editor, there will be no dodging in your reply, because this question of inviting political office seekers to our regular meetings will have to be settled or some of the best men in the order will pull right out of it." [2]

McDowell answered "plainly on this matter." He claimed to have been made aware of Patterson's expected visit on the buggy ride from Athens and warned his companion, the county secretary, "that it would do harm and give some offense and that it was contrary to the teaching of the order to have political office seekers at our alliance meeting." At the meeting, he again warned county leaders of the harm Patterson's appearance would produce "for it will cause dissensions in our ranks and prevent that harmony and unity of action that is essential to our success." Despite McDowell's obvious unhappiness with the meeting and its outcome, he attempted to calm the waters by attributing the problem to the fact that "the brethren of Meigs County are young in the cause and we have no doubt some ardent Democratic friend of Col. Josiah Patterson invited him to be present without an intention of creating a disturbance in the ranks." McDowell's support for the non-partisan principles of the order and his attempts to re-establish harmony did not end the problem. A month later, the Republican members of the Pearson Alliance petitioned State President John Buchanan to "issue an order to all subordinate lodges in the state not to employ or to

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2 *Toiler*, 17 October 1889.

have any political speaking at any time, in any picnics, barbeques, or at any time when the order is called together, as this is not a political institution." Buchanan complied and directed all unions to keep politics out of the organization, as outlined in the constitution. [3]

In the non-partisan spirit, McDowell, a Democrat with a long history of political activity, repeatedly urged Republican Alliance members to field candidates for state offices, promising newspaper support of all candidates who promised to uphold the agrarian demands. In a particularly bitter campaign for the 1888 state senatorial seat in Gibson County that pitted the Democratic incumbent Sam Williamson against J. H. Koffman, the county Wheel secretary and a Republican, McDowell refused to comment, fearing that his own political feuds with Williamson would become the issue and distract voters from the need to elect legislators who supported agrarian views. Koffman lost the election, but McDowell succeeded in distancing himself from the fray and maintaining his nonpartisan position. [4]

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[3] Ibid., 17 October and 20 November 1889.

[4] Ibid., 12 September 1888. Time and again members were told that they "must fight organization with organization," and that the problems of agriculture could "never be relieved except by legislation," but the discussion of men and measures "should be done fraternally without regard to party alliance, with an eye . . . to the greatest good for the greatest number." *Toiler*, 11 July, 12 September, and 19 September 1888. McDowell continued to maintain the same position of refusing to allow partisan politics within the Alliance on the eve of the advent of the People's Party. In October 1891, when McDowell scheduled an appearance before the White County Alliance, D. L Snodgrass demanded a debate. McDowell offered to debate the merits of the subtreasury at another time and place, but refused to provide a podium for the well-known Democrat to make a partisan appeal to White County farmers. Snodgrass's uninvited appearance and his insistence on being given the right to speak angered the farmers. As tempers flared, pistols were drawn before cooler heads intervened. See *Nashville Banner*, 3 October 1891. Koffman's campaign in Gibson County incited critics, who charged him with dishonesty when he ran as an Independent, without proclaiming a party affiliation. Democrats accused him of dishonesty and warned voters against his secret Republicanism. The hysterical tone of the Democratic campaign suggests that an Independent candidacy was as threatening as that of a Republican. Indeed, the message of the Democratic campaign aimed at convincing voters that an independent candidate could not be trusted.

Nevertheless, when local Wheels and Alliances became embroiled in election campaigns, partisan feelings rose to the surface, producing dissension and turmoil. At the meeting of the Wayne County Wheel in December 1888, the twenty-five Wheels represented took note of the recent election and the problems it had created for the organization by refocusing attention on cooperative efforts, the credit system, and encouragement of active female membership in the Wheels. The members prefaced their resolutions toward these objectives by noting that they acted with the purpose to "shake hands across the sea of political strife, burry [sic] all ill feelings and with a united effort go out anew to win the prize." Likewise, when William Dixon called a meeting of the Colored Wheel of Henry County for the fourth Friday and Saturday of January 1889, he encouraged attendance by reminding the members that "the election is over, now let us rally the old wheel onward." Clearly, despite assurances that the Wheel and Alliance could act to influence politics without being in politics, members felt the pressures of partisanship and found support of the party of their fathers difficult to reject. For many, the security of tradition that surrounded the established parties proved impossible to ignore, and nonpartisan voting on the basis of self-interest remained problematic. Yet, for some Wheelers, the seduction of political campaigning overwhelmed other considerations. Disputing reports that "wheelerism in old Gibson [County] is on the wane," one writer compared the 1889 post-election activities of the organization to "the churches after Christmas." But, he assured his readers, in an obvious reference to future political races, "We are educating, fortifying, drilling for the conflicts of '90 and '92." [5]

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5 *Toiler*, 16 January 1889.

Local conflicts also affected Wheel and Alliance meetings. Obion County became embroiled in a bitter and quarrelsome dispute over the location of the county seat. When, after years of hostility between the opposing factions, the voters elected to designate Union City as the county seat, their adversaries claimed that the victors had voted "all of the living and most of those who had been in their graves since the close of the Civil War." With members on both sides of the issue, Alliance leaders moved to limit the damage to the organization. After a "private discussion" with the State Lecturer, R. W. Tucker, the Obion County Alliance resolved not to "allow local matters to swerve us in questions of general importance." [6]

In 1889, Sullivan County in East Tennessee was immersed in debates over the prospect of funding bonds for the construction of the Midland Railroad through the county. At its October 25-26 meeting, the county union debated the question of whether it "would be judicious for the people of Sullivan County to vote $100,000" for the proposed railroad. Correspondents to the *Toiler* failed to report the outcome of the lengthy discussion, but it is likely that the consensus focused on the stated position of the organization in opposition to the use of public funds for the construction of a privately owned railway. Perhaps not coincidentally, the next morning, word arrived that the barn and contents of the county president had burned the night before with an estimated loss of $1000. Arson was a common tool of dissent or oppression in the nineteenth century South, and the juxtaposition of the fire and the discussion of so vital an issue in a county where the political atmosphere was highly charged by repeated confrontations between the "bosses" and "their sheep" invites

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6 Betty B. Wood and Rebel C. Forrester, eds., *"I Had a Real Good Time," The Making of a Country Editor: The Recollections of James M. Brice of the News-Banner* (Union City: H.A. Lanzer, 1984), 151; *Toiler*, 23 April 1890.

speculation. According to a Sullivan County woman, the usually complacent farmers "had strayed off into the alliance, gone through a training school and come out with their eyes wide open, as free men capable to think and act for themselves." The county's politicians, who presumably supported the railroad bonds, believed "the farmers' alliance is taking the country and ruining us." [7]

Internal dissension also affected the Wheel. As State President J. R. Miles prepared for the meeting of the State Wheel in July 1888, he admitted to the membership that "there is a lack of fraternizing within the ranks," a problem he attributed to "the surrounding circumstances, the rapid organization, the lack of thorough education in the principles of the order, the power of hostile combinations which confront the organization, and the various demoralizing agencies at work." Other observers of the problems afflicting the unions provided more specific assessments of the cause of trouble. Agrarian leaders warned, "our organization, like all others have bad men who enter it for personal gain and care nothing for the principles we advocate." In order to prevent their domination of the organization, Wheelers and Alliance leaders advised members to "keep an eye open for the 'wolf in sheep's clothing,' [and] do not put too much confidence in new converts with an axe to

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7 Ibid., 6 November 1889, 23 July 1890. Michael R. Hyman,*The Anti-Redeemers: Hill-Country Political Dissenters in the Lower South From Redemption to Populism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 54-74; Albert C. Smith, "Southern Violence Reconsidered: Arson as Protest in Black-Belt Georgia, 1865-1910," *Journal of Southern History* 51 (1983): 526-564; Sheldon Hackney, "Southern Violence," *American Historical Review* 74 (1969): 906-925; Wayne K. Durrill, "Producing Poverty: Local Government and Economic Development in a New South County, 1874-1884," *Journal of American History* 71 (June 1984-March 1985): 764-781. As noted in earlier chapters, the Wheel and Alliance supported railroad development as a benefit to agriculture, but discouraged the use of public funds to finance the construction of railroads, arguing that the profits went to wealthy individuals, while farmers paid high rates for transportation of their produce, in addition to the higher taxes to support construction. The *Toiler* made this position clear in its opposition to the public funding of a railway by the citizens of Nashville, see *Toiler*, 3 April 1889.

grind." The Obion County Alliance readily admitted that they had "many weak-kneed brethren in our ranks who are ready to cry out that our order is almost a failure; that they have never benefited by it, and are becoming stupid and very slow to act." Madison County reported that "a few strife producers and bad management on the part of officials have in a number of counties discouraged those who entered the order with pure motives and not for gain, but as these individuals drop out confidence is restored and the grand work moves on." One observer attributed "the want of unity of action" to "too many solomans [sic] in the order, who if they can't work in the lead, they kick out of traces." Another county union traced its problems to "a tattler and strife producer who has nearly destroyed the peace and harmony of two unions." Though the Wheels and Alliances made no secret of their problems, they were careful, as Miles indicated in his 1888 speech to the State Wheel, not to hang out all their dirty laundry for fear of providing their opponents with the means to defeat their efforts. [8]

Solutions took several forms. Words of encouragement filled the weekly issues of the *Toiler*. Calls for "stickability" and jokes about "weak-kneed, cotton-stringed backbone fellows" bolstered sagging spirits. Organizers encouraged members to "strike straight from the shoulder," and "make no half-hearted 'milk and cider' work." Unity and harmony also resulted from at least three Wheel and Alliance activities: the education of farmers in the political economy of the nation, the organization of a state cooperative agency, and the marshaling of agrarian power against trusts and monopolies. [9]

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8 *Toiler*, 18 July 1888, 1 August 1888, 15 January, 19 February , 26 February, and 2 April 1890.

9 Ibid., 12 March 1890.

One of the least discussed but most important efforts of the Wheel and Alliance was in the education of farmers in the political economy of the nation. So important were these efforts, particularly in the largely unschooled and under-schooled South, that Alliance organizers claimed to have "done more to educate the great mass of people in the principles of government than all the schools and colleges have in the past century." In speeches, letters, and editorials, Wheelers and Alliancemen repeatedly voiced the necessity for "opening the eyes" of the masses of farmers and laborers to the need for reform. Before men and women would join the cause, they had to be made aware of the source of their problems. After they joined, they had to be educated in "the sciences of social, financial, and political economy, " an endeavor for which the Alliance molded "its every effort, with the firm belief that every citizen in the U.S. who loves freedom, justice, and law will rally to its support." [10]

From local Wheels and Alliances came praise for the efforts of lecturers and calls for more education in the principles of the organization and the political economy. The Wilson County Alliance passed a resolution in favor of "broader education of the farmer." Three months later, the same Alliance resolved to support "the education of our sons and daughters more fully in the science of government in order that our sons may vote more intelligently and that our daughters may understand more thoroughly the laws to which they are subjected." Tipton County correspondents assured readers of the *Toiler* that "the farmers of Tipton have begun to read and think for themselves, and keep posted on the various matters of the day" with the result that they "are not quite the blockheads they used to be." J. A. Scott of

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10 Dunning, *The Farmers' Alliance History and Agricultural Digest*, 330; *National Economist*, 29 June 1889. For a discussion of the importance of political education in the efforts of the Alliance, see Theodore R. Mitchell, *Political Education in the Southern Farmers' Alliance, 1887-1900* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987).

Maury County believed that participation in the activities of the local union prepared farmers for understanding the issues as well as developing future leaders. The education in pending legislation, the experience in the use of parliamentary procedures, and the public presentation of views developed skills largely absent among farmers. As a result of these grassroots "schools," Scott predicted future legislatures would be more representative of the agricultural element. [11]

Speeches and lectures inspired members to greater activity, but the crucial elements of maintaining an active organization always centered on regular attendance at union meeting and consistent reading of reliable organizational news. Both the Wheel and the Alliance took the position that to be effective as farmers and as voters, members must be informed, it being "utterly impossible to make a good wheeler of a man who neither reads nor takes any interest in his lodge meetings." Wheel leaders believed that "mental indolence [was] far worse than common laziness, and when the two [were] combined in one man, he [was] very near a hopeless case." Advocates for farm journal subscriptions argued that hard work and diligence alone could not produce prosperity and supported their contention with the example of a "Robertson county farmer," who was as "moral and clever as men get to be, but never read a newspaper in his life." His farm presented the picture of good management: fat cows, good fences, and clean fields. Nevertheless, "if he made anything some speculator would get it for less than the cost of production." The lesson was clear: being uninformed left the poor farmer at the mercy of sharper men, a fact that his hard work could not overcome." [12]

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11 *Toiler*, 22 January and 23 April 1890, 11 July 1888, and 13 February 1889.

12 Ibid., 8 August 1888.

County Wheels and Alliances encouraged readership of farm journals and routinely passed resolutions encouraging subscriptions to the *Toiler*. These were duly printed, a seemingly self-serving action that might be dismissed, except for the newspaper's efforts to catechize farmers in the principles of the order and the basics of political economy, as well as promoting awareness of the issues before the state legislature and congress. As a Marshall County farmer noted, the medicine for the "drone fever" that rendered some union members ineffective included attention to the aims and objectives of the organization, participation in the cooperative system, and regular reading of the *Toiler*. He enthused, "I could not do without it [the *Toiler*]" and insisted "on all sickly wheelers taking it." Such enthusiasm supported the views of the organization's leaders, who knew that farmers could be momentarily swayed by speeches but remained long-term supporters only if they continued to be informed through journals and newspapers. [13]

An official organ of the Wheel and Alliance quickly became a necessity. Highly partisan newspapers of the nineteenth century offered no quarter to their political rivals. Indeed, newspaper subscriptions signaled political loyalty. Within parties, each faction relied on newspaper support to present its views. A number of county and urban newspapers claimed to speak on behalf of rural interests, offering reprints of the latest agricultural information on crop management, as well as quotes on farm prices. For the most part, however, these county-seat and urban newspapers served the interests of New South industrialists or Bourbon planters. Agrarian organizers recognized the need for a newspaper identified with their views as a necessary element to the success of their aims. But the creation of an official organ

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13 Ibid., 27 June 1888.

involved one of the most tumultuous episodes of Tennessee Wheel and Alliance history.

Until 1888, two Tennessee journals claimed the status of official organ of the agrarian movement: the *State Wheel*, published by T. B. Ruff at Jackson and *The Weekly Toiler*, published by John H. McDowell and M. V. Ingram at Nashville. No copies of the *State Wheel* now exist, but reprints of articles can be found in contemporary newspapers, including the *Toiler*. By the time McDowell joined the *Toiler* as editor, the paper had been in publication for three years. He apparently instituted a number of editorial changes throughout the spring and summer of 1888 that improved the appearance of the paper and elicited praise from rival journals. The *Clarksville Chronicle* noted the changes and warned its readers that while the *Toiler* "represents the farmer of the country," they should not "conclude from this that there is anything rural in its makeup." Somewhat less enthusiastically, the *Nashville Banner* noted that "the Toiler . . . shows every evidence of increasing support and success." Evan Jones, the first president of the National Farmers' and Laborers' Union, spared no praise when he labeled the journal "the best of its kind in the South." [14]

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14 Ibid., 27 June and 19 September 1888; Dunning, *The Farmers' Alliance History and Agricultural Digest*, 104. McDowell was born near Trenton in Gibson County on December 12, 1844. He attended St. Andrews College before leaving to serve in the Confederate ranks. He first joined Company H, 12th Tennessee Infantry, but was discharged as under age. He later served under Van Dorn and in Forrest's cavalry. He married Emma Sandeford of Gibson County, and they had seven children. Sometime after 1867, he moved to Arkansas, where he was a cotton farmer. On his return to Obion County, he again farmed until elected to the General Assembly. He served in the House (1883-1885, 1905-1907) and Senate (1885-1889). He was a member of the Grange, the Agricultural Wheel, and the Farmers' Alliance. In the Wheel and Alliance, he held national offices as the state vice president. When John P. Buchanan was elected Governor in 1890, McDowell became President of the Tennessee State Alliance. Martin Van Buren Ingram was born in 1832 in Montgomery County. At age 17, he took charge of the family's land and slaves. He supported Douglas in the presidential race of 1860. During the Civil War, he served as a member of Hawkins' battalion, attached to Maney's brigade. He was discharged for disability after Shiloh. He married Annie L. Farmer of Springfield, and they had seven children. In 1865, he launched his newspaper career with the publication of the *Register* at Springfield. He later published the Clarksville *Tobacco-*

The *Toiler* emerged as the only official organ of the Tennessee Agricultural Wheel during the summer of 1888, but not without a fight from the editor of the *State Wheel.* Readers of the journals recognized the developing issue in the weeks before the state convention at Dunbar's Cave in late July. Editorials in the *Toiler* focused on the need for an official source of Wheel information and prodded the membership to action with the fact that Tennessee was the only state in which the Wheel and Alliance had not designated a single official organ. By implication, Tennessee farmers trailed behind their brethren in the work of the order. The necessity for establishing an official newspaper apparently arose, however, from more pressing needs than mere self-image. As State Wheel President Miles later revealed, failure to designate an official organ resulted in a situation where two newspapers with very different editorial policies legitimately claimed to speak for Wheelers and Alliancemen. Both newspapers had received official sanctions from the Wheel: the *Toiler* in 1886 and the *State Wheel* a year later. As soon as Ruff received Wheel support, the *State Wheel* "commenced a wrangle for the organship with the *Toiler.*" The problem became so acute that Miles intervened to demand that the editors behave like brothers, put an end to the strife, and focus on the interests of the order. According to Miles, McDowell complied, but Ruff continued the feud, and the matter occupied three meetings of the state leaders. [15]

By the time of the 1888 state convention, it was clear that the issue would be placed before the delegates. In the final hours of the meeting, a resolution came before the convention to provide the state organization with an official organ, to be

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Leaf. Ingram's interests in tobacco and journalism were still evident during the formation of the Planters' Protective Association and the Black Patch War of the early twentieth century.

15 *Toiler*, 3 October 1888; *Gibson County Herald*, 7 September 1888.

owned by the State Wheel and operated according to the organization's principles. The resolution included a mechanism for funding the purchase of an existing newspaper or establishing a new one, by assessing each member fifty cents, redeemable as a six-month subscription. The resolution passed easily and, in a subsequent vote of 288-143, the delegates designated the *Toiler* as the official organ. [16]

Ruff soon labeled the vote fraudulent due to what he claimed was the illegal manipulation of the ballots in McDowell's favor. His unrelenting campaign through the columns of the *State Wheel* embarrassed the organization as anti-wheel newspapers in Middle Tennessee responded with charges that the organization "would soon fall to pieces on account of corruption in the order." When the state leadership initially reacted to the charges in silence, believing that the charges would fall of their own weight, the work in many subordinate wheels came to a standstill as members tried to sort out the charges and determine the truth. [17]

Ruff maintained that the issue had been left until the final hours to rid the convention of West Tennessee delegates who might otherwise support his newspaper in preference to that of McDowell. Moreover, his description of the proceedings painted a sinister picture of voting fraud, with Miles and selected henchmen counting the ballots in a tiny, darkened room, far away from the scrutiny of the convention's delegates. For weeks, letters to the *Toiler* from delegates and participants in the ballot counting procedure offered their refutations of Ruff's allegations. Several delegates did leave before the convention ended but reportedly deposited proxies with the State

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16 "Official Proceedings of the State Wheel," published in the *Toiler*, 1 August 1888.

17 *Toiler*, 19 September 1888.

Lecturer, J. R. Tillman. A tally of the ballots indicated that the full convention voted. As to the "dark room," every letter writer pointed out that the room where the ballot counting took place had been used for an address by McDowell several hours earlier and was hardly the closet Ruff described. Furthermore, the full convention had determined to settle the matter by secret ballot; to have counted the votes before the eyes of the convention, while marking each county's participation, they argued, would have negated the secrecy of the vote. [18]

Eventually the furor died down as members accepted the explanations of the state leaders, but the episode indicated more than the pettiness of one editor. Nor should it be interpreted as the inherent disorganization of farmers under the leadership of mere demagogues unable to cope with modern political demands. Rather it offers an opening into the thinking of the agrarian leaders as they fashioned a unified, responsive pressure organization to protect their interests. Not unrealistically, they recognized the need to speak with a single voice that followed the principles of the organization and accepted the directives of the elected leadership. Ruff called his newspaper the *State Wheel,* but he apparently pursued his own editorial policy despite his claims of official sanction. His pronouncements caused much internal turmoil and justified the interpretations of outsiders that the Wheel was the work of men without principles. When reined in by the organization, Ruff refused to make peace or follow the principles of the order. Both outsiders and members needed the assurance that the newspaper claiming the Wheel mantle spoke with the Wheel voice. Far from indicating disorganization, the controversy demonstrated the growing power of the

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18 Ibid., 19 September, 3 October , and 10 October 1888.

Wheel to demand compliance from all facets of the order and eliminate rogue journals that claimed to speak for agricultural interests.

The establishment of an official organ did not silence detractors or end intentional misrepresentations about the activities and motives of the agrarian reformers, but it did offer farmers a forum for addressing the charges made against them. In the *Toiler* farmers refuted the assertions that the organization acted as a cloak for the development of a third party. From the pages of the *Toiler* writers attempted to correct erroneous information regarding crop production and prices and answer personal attacks made against the agrarian leaders. McDowell presented the policy of the *Toiler* as "conservative in tone, but firm in the advocacy of what we believe to be the interest of the great brotherhood . . . the wheel and alliance." He promised that the newspaper would remain "non-partisan . . . [to] promote peace and harmony in the ranks." He stated his opposition to formation of a third political party, asserting that "the ambition of my life is to see the tillers of the soil freed from the oppression of combined capital." Despite his intention to "dignify and elevate our calling," however, McDowell seldom avoided fights or minced words when on the attack against the reports of anti-agrarian newspapers. His 1888 attack on the editor of the *Clarksville Democrat* showed a willingness to inject his share of mudslinging and venom. A report in that paper chastising the Montgomery County Wheel for its support of W. M. McDaniel for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination was typical. Not satisfied with berating the wheelers for their opposition to a second term for Robert L. Taylor, the Clarksville editor labeled the *Toiler* a secret Republican paper. In response, McDowell asserted that the editor of the *Democrat* "was himself a Blaine man four years ago." Moreover, charging that "the meat of a polecat offers no attonement [sic] for its scent," he accused the editor of "placing a ruffian in the

management of his paper to besmear people with his filthy garbage while he sets [sic] back wrapped in his ermine as innocent as a lamb, affecting unconscienceness [sic] and no responsibility for the vituperation of his slimy sheet." Such venom endeared the editor to his readers even if it probably confirmed the negative views of political elites in both parties. [19]

Local Wheels and Alliances also published resolutions in the *Toiler* outlining their calls for action against county newspapers that adopted anti-Wheeler and Alliance editorial policies. The Obion County Wheel objected to the attacks on the *Toiler* by the *Obion Democrat* and determined to strike at the newspaper's most vulnerable point: its dependence on local advertising. At the August 1888 county meeting, the wheelers resolved to "give preference in trading to such merchants as do not advertise in said paper." Poplar Grove Alliance in Tipton County objected to "a certain false and scandalous article" published in *The Tipton Record* on 13 July 1888, and resolved that "all members of the alliance who are subscribers to said paper order it stopped at once." Furthermore, they demanded that "no member of the alliance from this date subscribe for, advertise in or patronize in any way the said paper." To give their actions greater threat, they forwarded their resolutions to the *Toiler* and the *Covington Ledger* for publication, inviting all members of the county and state Wheels and Alliances to join their battle against the offending paper. [20]

In addition to its battles against local newspapers, the *Toiler* also refuted reform charlatans who popped up in poorly organized counties to establish unions and publish newspapers. Once the Wheel and Alliance proved its strength in Middle and

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19 Ibid., 12 September and 27 June 1888.

20 Ibid., 5 September and 1 August 1888.

West Tennessee, state lecturers moved into the eastern counties, along with several characters of questionable authority. Reverend A. McHan caused considerable dissension in Hamilton and Polk counties during the fall of 1889. He organized several Alliances before applying for the authority to do so. Although Alliance leaders worried about his activities, they accepted his work on the recommendation of an "excellent gentleman" from East Tennessee. Soon, however, unspecified complaints poured into Alliance headquarters, and the State Alliance rescinded McHan's authority. The would-be organizer continued his activities and established an "Alliance" newspaper, which soon leveled attacks on the *Toiler* and the state leadership, creating turmoil within the eastern ranks. McDowell's public airing of this attempt to circumvent the lines of authority helped restore order, but the organization remained highly vulnerable to the effects of misinformation spread by word-of-mouth and either intentionally or accidentally through the columns of local and state newspapers. [21]

Correct and readily available information became increasingly important as the Wheel and Alliance challenged the established and powerful commercial and industrial interests of the state and nation. Initially dismissed as misguided and impotent relics of a passing economic stage in the nation's progress, farmers made their power felt through the development of buying and marketing cooperatives and the organization of boycotts against the cartels, trusts, and monopolies. Activities in the Tennessee Wheel and Alliance replicated those of farmers in other southern states with two exceptions: the development of a cooperative program proceeded at a slower, more

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21 Ibid., 27 November 1889.

pace and anti-monopoly activities failed to unify the state's farmers into a single program of action due to the geographic and agricultural diversity of the state.

Complaints abounded among the more dedicated members of the Wheel and Alliance against the "converts" whose only aim was "cheap goods." Many Wheelers and Alliancemen thought these do-nothing members often proved to be the most critical opponents when the agrarian organizations failed to meet their elevated expectations for ending the immediate economic problems of southern farmers.

Nevertheless, the role of the cooperative buying program in the success of the Wheel and Alliance should not be underestimated. Many poor farmers desperately needed the cheap goods as an incentive to develop the "sticking qualities" necessary for the long-term challenges of confrontations against trusts and monopolies. The Tennessee Alliance president anticipated the argument of historian Lawrence Goodwyn when, in an address to the state convention, he asserted that "we had but little co-operation in our organization in Tennessee, until we adopted the State Agency system; this, though still in its infancy, has worked wonders for the general interest of those engaged in agricultural pursuits." "Co-operation," he enthused, "is the key that unlocks our future." [22]

Tennessee's cooperative system got underway in the spring of 1888 and met immediate opposition. The Nashville-based state agency, under the direction of the

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22 Ibid., 23 July 1889. Buchanan's view of the cooperative effort fit well with the outline of efforts presented by Charles Macune at the St. Louis meeting in December 1889. Macune offered a three-part plan of attack for the Alliance that included the dissemination of practical information, the adoption of better business methods (cooperativism), and a united effort to "secure such changes in the regulation that govern the relations between the different classes of citizens as are necessary to secure equal rights, equal privileges, and equal chances." In his view, the states should take responsibility for implementing programs to foster better business methods, while the national organization should assume the responsibility for bringing about changes in government regulations. Dunning, *The Farmers' Alliance History and Agricultural Digest*, 110-113.

State Business Agent George A. Gowan, encouraged members to pay a one-dollar assessment in order to trade through the store, which sold farm equipment and bulk items, such as flour, sugar, and salt at wholesale prices. Organizers expected the assessment to provide the fiscal foundation for demanding reduced prices from manufacturers and suppliers, and establishing lines of credit to purchase items for future sales. Operating expenses and salaries came from the interest accumulating on the banked fees. Agency directors opened an account in the Safe Trust and Banking company in Nashville, where Wheel and Alliance funds received four percent interest. [23]

Nashville merchants acted quickly. In late spring, as soon as the venture "began to show signs of success," the state agent was arrested for failure to pay the merchant tax required by law for all retailers. The business community ridiculed agrarian protests that the agent was not a merchant, but acted only on behalf of the farmers' organizations. When the case came before the Nashville city court, the judge ruled against the state agent and fined him twenty-five dollars. [24]

When a Springfield judge apprised agency directors of a different ruling in a similar case, they appealed to the Circuit Court. Letters soon arrived at the *Toiler* office urging unity in the order "to fight the battle with brave hearts and a

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23 *Toiler*, 18 July 1888. When the West Tennessee Agency began operations, a second account was opened in Memphis. George Albert Gowan was born in Georgia in 1859. He moved to Tennessee at age eighteen and settled on a farm in Marshall County, where he also taught school. He was elected to the position of State Wheel Business Agent in July 1888, succeeding W. D. Clark. Gowan continued in his position until Buchanan became governor in 1891. *Toiler*, 5 December 1888. Some wheel and alliance men criticized the cooperative effort as too cheap at a $1 assessment and should be more like the Texas Alliance, which demanded a $5 assessment. J. C. Castles of Shelby County asserted that "some joined because it costs so little (and they are a drawback to the order)." *Toiler*, 24 April 1889.

24 Ibid., 27 June and 25 July 1888.

determination that will gain victory for free men." Local Wheels and Alliances passed resolutions in support of the state agent and collected nickels and dimes to aid in the expense of court action. McDowell warned that if the court ruled against the state agent, the cooperative system "would be closed out at once" and leave farmers "at the mercy of combined capital." His assessment of the situation rested on the realization that if Nashville merchants successfully forced the payment of the tax, other cities and counties would follow suit. In incorporated cities, the cost to the Wheel would be $606 per agent, while in incorporated towns and in counties, the cost would be $404--a prohibitive tax that would effectively end agrarian efforts to control their costs and market their crops. The refusal to capitulate paid off when Judge McAllister ruled in favor of the state agency, and Nashville merchants declined to press the case further. [25]

Fearful that the suit might still produce similar action in counties across the state, the Wheel and Alliance agitated for permanent legal protection. The fall elections elevated forty-six Wheelers and Alliancemen to the General Assembly with the demand that they enact legislation to exempt the state agency from merchant taxes. When the legislature met in January 1889, Wheelers J. M. Crews in the Senate and C. C. Adams in the House introduced the State Agency Bill. Business interests attempted to block the intent of the legislation by tying it to the state funding bill, a ruse to force a biennial defense of agency protection as each new funding bill came under consideration. When the agency bill stalled in the House, Representative John P. Buchanan, the State Alliance president, brought the farmers' legislation to a successful

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25 Ibid., 27 June, 25 July, and 24 October 1888.

vote. In April 1889, Governor Robert L. Taylor signed the act, and Wheelers proudly boasted that Tennessee was "the only State in the Union that ha[d] such a law." [26]

Despite its obvious success in protecting the agency against legal harassment, the Wheel and Alliance still faced serious obstacles in providing adequate funding for the cooperative system. State leaders followed a conservative approach and developed the agency on a cash basis, relying on the accumulating assessment fees to provide the financial support for buying in bulk. Wheel leaders offered no apologies for their decisions and, indeed, "rejoiced to know our agent is steering clear of indebtedness," as this offered the "plain and sure road to success." As a result of this decision, the Tennessee agency developed at a slower pace than most other state agencies. Supporters of the Tennessee Agency acknowledged that "we are not boring with as big an auger as Texas and perhaps some other states," but offered the reassurance that "we are doing wonders for our limited means and steering clear of credit snags, while some other states have got in water too deep to swim, and are struggling hard to keep their heads above water." [27]

On the first anniversary of the agency's founding, McDowell claimed that the "permanent fund has reached nearly ten thousand dollars," with monthly agency transactions of fifteen to twenty-five thousand dollars in plows, sorghum mills, and other agricultural implements. The State Agent negotiated arrangements to buy sugar

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26 Ibid., 3 April 1889. *House Journal*, 1889, 464; *Senate Journal*, 1889, 227; *Acts of the State of Tennessee*, 1889, 346-347.

27 *Toiler*, 28 November 1888. Macune acknowledged some of the financial pitfalls of developing a state agency in his frequent speeches before the national Alliance. Dunning, *The History of the Farmers' Alliance and Agricultural Digest*, 65-196. Also see, Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976) and Robert C. McMath, Jr., *Populist Vanguard: A History of the Southern Farmers' Alliance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), Chapter 2, "Expansion Across Texas," and Chapter 4, "Cooperation in Business and Politics."

directly from Louisiana as soon as the new crop became available. McDowell reported the bustling sale of crops through the agency, but lamented, "complete arrangements could not be made for want of warehouses over the country to store in until buyers could be found." Still he enthused, "the brethren see the necessity of these houses and in some counties are preparing to build them for the coming crop," a claim borne out by numerous county resolutions throughout the following spring and summer. [28]

The enthusiastic anniversary report avoided the thornier subject of the Memphis Agency. Wheel and Alliance leaders bowed to the geographical and agricultural differences in the state and established three agencies, one in each of the Grand Divisions. A Memphis Agency followed the establishment of the Nashville Agency by a few months. East Tennessee, which was still in the early stages of organization, did not receive an agency until 1889. While the Nashville Agency experienced legal problems, the Memphis Agency suffered from indifferent funding.

By November 1888, the failure of the West Tennessee members to pay the one dollar assessment jeopardized the future of the Memphis agency. R. H. White, the

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28 *Toiler*, 28 November 1888. Individual members wrote to the *Toiler* to encourage others to buy through the state agency. Their letters brimmed with enthusiasm over the quality of the goods and the low prices. McDowell claimed that goods bought through the state agent cut off twenty-five to fifty percent from similar purchases bought on credit through local merchants and fifteen percent on cash purchases. *Toiler*, 5 September 1888. Although county wheels routinely encouraged members to pay their assessment and buy through the state agency, none matched the audacity of the Wayne County Wheel. Meeting in a self-described "harmonious and business-like" meeting, the Wheel pledged "to buy at least $15,000 worth of goods within the next sixty days." Each subordinate wheel president was ordered to call a meeting for the purpose of taking orders. The county agent was ordered to keep regular hours in an office located in the county seat, Waynesboro, on Mondays and Fridays, from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m. to enable members to place orders, pick up goods, or ask questions. Those members who had not paid the one dollar assessment were ordered to do so immediately. The meeting closed with appeals "to the honor and stability of the brotherhood to build up and sustain the agencies they have established." There were no further reports on the success of this "get tough" business approach to building support for the state agency.

Memphis agent, received no salary for three months and paid operating costs out of his own pocket. In September, the State Executive Board attended a joint meeting of the Tipton County Wheel and Alliance and complained that funding was "insufficient for them to establish a trade agent at Memphis" and warned members "they could not do it without the assurance of the agent's salary." Tipton county farmers praised White as "the right man in the right place," and recommended that "each member of the wheel and alliance of every county belonging to the Memphis Agency be assessed twenty-five cents per member for the purpose of securing our trade agents [sic] salary." Resolutions in support of the assessment sailed through Wheel and Alliance meetings in other West Tennessee counties. But the expected flow of money was not forthcoming. [29]

At its October meeting, Clopton Wheel in Tipton County reported that twenty-two of the twenty-seven members had paid the one-dollar assessment, while eighteen or twenty had paid the additional twenty-five cent fee. The Executive Board openly chastised the cotton-producing counties of Shelby, Fayette, Hardeman, McNairy, Chester, Madison, Henderson, Gibson, Crockett, Dyer, Lauderdale, Haywood, Lake, and Tipton for their failure to collect the fee and ordered them to "have the matter up at once and arrange to pay it direct to Brother White," if they expected to trade at Memphis. Neither the publication of praises for compliant Wheels, nor the public dunning of recalcitrant wheels raised the needed funds. As late as April 1889, the Gibson County Wheel led all the other West Tennessee counties in collecting the one-dollar assessment, with a total collection of $900, but the total represented payment by approximately 60 percent of more than 1,700 members! [30]

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29 *Toiler*, 7 November 1888.

30 Ibid., 7 November 1888, 24 April 1889.

Individual members wrote letters to the *Toiler* in support of the assessments, offering encouragement to laggers, demanding accountability for the promises made, and predicting doom if the agency effort failed. J. S. Aycock called on White at the Memphis agency and found him "doing a great deal of work . . . undoubtedly saving the counties adjacent to Memphis a vast amount of money." Despite the adversities associated with his position, White appeared "not greatly discouraged [and] has faithfully discharged his duty." J. C. Castles reflected on the failure to follow through with pledges of support and offered the view that "some of our order would be better if they would talk less, pass less iron-clad resolutions, and carry some they have already passed into effect." He expressed amazement that "people claiming to be conscientious, honest, upright, Christian men can take a solemn obligation such as the alliance demands and then willfully disregard it." Both Aycock and Castles predicted dire consequences if the Memphis Agency failed. Proclaiming the farmers "utterly lost" without the agency, they feared the farming community would become "nothing more than monopoly slaves." After castigating those he believed had failed in their duty, Castles pledged a loan of fifty dollars to the agency if a total of two hundred men would do the same or one hundred dollars if fifty men would match his pledge. Despite their efforts, money did not arrive soon enough to aid White. News of his resignation appeared in the November 28 issue of the *Toiler* alongside the usual exhortations to pay the assessments. [31]

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31 Ibid., 28 November and 14 November 1888. White was replaced by T. J. Galloway. Although concern over the payment of assessments continued, nothing more was said about the Memphis agent's salary. Either funds were found to satisfy salary requirements, or Galloway made no complaint.

Although discussions about the West Tennessee agent's salary quickly disappeared from the columns of the *Toiler*, money remained a serious problem, and county Alliances routinely resolved to collect assessments. In 1889, J. C. Castles wrote another letter to the *Toiler* and suggested that when delegates gathered to write a new constitution after the proposed merger of the Wheel and Alliance, they should make it "compulsory on the members to pay all assessments." Echoing the concerns of the Executive Board, he warned, "if it is not I fear we will never be able to raise money enough to give our state agents a good financial standing." Castles attributed the inability of Tennessee to adequately fund the agency to the prevailing wait-and-see attitude of those farmers demanding success before committing to the enterprise. "This talk about being too poor is all bosh," he asserted. "We have as poor men in our subordinate alliances as are in the state and all of them have paid the one dollar assessment and the twenty-five cents assessment . . . and every man in the state could do so if he wished." Rather than poverty, he opined, "we have too many weak-kneed members that are an encumbrance to the order anyway, and the sooner we adopt a sifting process to get rid of such the better." [32]

Castles found some support for his view that a smaller, more committed group of men could accomplish more than a hundred thousand "weak-kneed, cotton-string backbone" followers. Surprisingly, one of the strongest objections to this view came from the editor of the *Gibson County Herald*, a rural newspaper that frequently carried Wheel and Alliance news. Concurrent with Castles' complaint, the *Herald* noted that "in some of the wheels, the knife has been applied (rather vigorously) in lopping off some of the dead timber." The editor doubted the wisdom of the move,

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32 Ibid., 24 April 1889.

but postulated that it might be justified in consideration of "the light burden of dues" demanded of each member. The cutting away of "dead timber" included a ruling by the Executive Board that prohibited representation in the county or state Wheel for any subordinate Wheels with delinquent assessments. The ruling seemed unduly harsh to the editor, who provided additional reasons for the failure to meet Wheel obligations, noting, "there are very few blessed with surplus funds to enable them to do this, the assessments being too insignificant to meet present demands." No doubt each opinion included a grain of truth. Poverty prohibited some farmers from paying even a one-dollar assessment, while others refused to risk any hard-earned cash on unproved schemes. If, however, the low assessment rate prohibited the full implementation of the state agency system, the conservative methods of the Executive Board rightfully came under fire. The Tennessee Wheel and Alliance, unlike their counterparts in other states, apparently accepted little or no support from non-agriculture sources, a source of pride for the agrarian leadership. Nevertheless, their fiscal conservatism represented a stumbling block for the development of state cooperative buying and marketing agencies and limited the organization's appeal to poor farmers who needed economic relief more than political education. [33]

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33 *Gibson County Herald*, 11 April 1889. The question of whether farmers could or could not pay remained a persistent source of conflict among Wheel and Alliance members. Those who paid viewed their delinquent neighbors as lacking in conviction for the reform cause. No doubt their constant cajoling provided the necessary excuse to avoid monthly meetings and eventually abandon the organization altogether. A survey of the published county reports makes it clear that many must have felt as if they were being "nickel and dimed to death," with new assessments appearing at every meeting. No matter what Castles believed about the ability of the state's farmers to pay the assessments, the persistence of reports like that of the Gibson County editor support the belief that poverty played a role in the failure to attract and hold a larger number of the state's farmers. Historian Robert McMath fully agreed that membership in the Alliance fell primarily as a result of the failure of the rank and file members to be able to pay dues and assessments.

County business agents encountered their share of problems as well. From across the state, Wheelers and Alliancemen reported the difficulties of establishing local cooperative stores. Under pressure from merchants, wholesale houses refused to sell to county business agents. Murray, Dibrell & Co., a Nashville boot and shoe wholesaler "positively refused to sell any boots or shoes to any alliance merchant in White and Warren counties." Farmers in those counties furiously called for action to avenge "the slur cast upon the good name of our order," encouraging farmers in the mid-state to inquire about the wholesalers patronized by local merchants. If boots and shoes sold locally came from Murray, Dibrell & Co., buyers should "have the courage and self-respect to just quietly refuse to buy or wear them." [34]

In East Tennessee's Washington County, the Alliance resolved to establish a cooperative store after learning that the retail merchants, who supplied their needs in the previous year, now refused to do so again under pressure from Knoxville wholesale merchants. As one writer noted, "clearly the decree has gone forth. The Knoxville gods declare that we can have supplies if we will come as plain John Smith, but if we come as John Smith, Pete Jones, and Sam Brown, members of the farmers' alliance, not a pound of coffee, ounce of Soda, or yard of calico, can you have." [35]

A Cocke County merchant's experience demonstrated a disturbing level of intimidation. At their second county meeting in January 1889, the Cocke County Alliance appointed a committee to "make contact with some merchant or merchants to sell goods to the Farmers' Alliance." All the local merchants refused to make such arrangements, and in April, the Alliance resolved to "organize a capital stock for the

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34 *Toiler*, 8 May 1889.

35 Ibid., 8 May 1889.

purpose of establishing a store and warehouse at Newport." The organization finally negotiated an agreement with two merchants identified only as Boyd and Clevenger, who agreed to open an Alliance store. Enthusiastic reports followed until July 1890, when the County Alliance formed a committee to negotiate with Valley Home and Fire Insurance company to determine "why they had failed to pay the insurance to the Clevenger firm of Newport, Tenn." The county minute book makes no further mention of the store. It seems reasonable to assume that the firm met the fate of Alliance stores in other states and was burned by men who felt threatened by the organization of farmers. [36]

A letter from "Claudius" outlined the ease with which cooperative efforts could be destroyed by playing to the needs of poor farmers. In Bradyville, an enthusiastic member of the Alliance identified only as Bro. Shacklett, "who owns one of the finest mills both for wheat and corn on Stone [sic] River, offered to grind wheat for alliance members at 1/10, the usual fee being 1/8." Shacklett tendered the offer in a secret session and intended it to stay within the brotherhood. A few "talkative" members soon made the proposition common knowledge, and other millers immediately dropped their fees to 1/12. Farmers reported that some millers even stopped wagons on the road to re-direct them away from Shacklett's mill. As a result, Shacklett was "nearly ruined," and the farmers gained nothing, having fallen for what Claudius regarded as "an old dodge." Unfortunately for the cause of reform, Shacklett's experience proved to be a too common occurrence, and Alliance leaders were hard pressed to hold the ranks in boycotts against local merchants or national cartels. The

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36 Cocke County Farmers' Alliance Proceedings, 1889-1891, January 1889, April 1890, July 1890, McClung Collection, Lawson McGhee Library, Knoxville. Also see, Albert C. Smith, "Southern Violence Reconsidered: Arson as Protest in Black-Belt Georgia, 1865-1910," *Journal of Southern History* 51 (1983): 526-564.

poverty of many farmers led them to value the few cents saved in any deal rather than hold out for long-term savings. [37]

Bedford County farmers reported a more positive experience, In 1888, the county Wheel took action to control the sale of the wheat crop, eliciting the "jeers and scoffs of contempt and ridicule from the select, self-constituted, few merchants, who had heretofore set the price upon all the produce raised." The merchants reminded the farmers that it "took brains as well as money to handle produce and merchandise, and that the wheeler organization had neither." Despite the negativism of the merchants, Victor Flouring Mills at Shelbyville agreed "to pay the farmers the highest price for wheat that either the market for wheat or flour would bear. . . [and] furnish sacks and a suitable warehouse for storing grain free." In return the farmers agreed to "give the mill preference of buying the grain when [it was] ready to sell." The merchants met the news with condescending nods and reassured themselves that "there [was] nothing in this contract with the mills," and that "these wheelers are a set of darnphools [sic]." Their attitudes sobered somewhat when they learned that the Alliance county agent, W. F. McAdams, would receive, grade, and superintend the sale of wheat. Bill McAdams, or "Uncle Bill," was "a household word in this county, especially among wheat growers." Farmers and merchants alike considered him a "regular gilt-edged, diamond breast-pin wheat man from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head." The so-called "darnphools" reportedly handled 250,000 bushels of wheat at ten cents per bushel. The writer, known only as "Plow Boy," concluded that "the organization in this county is solid, and it owes its present state of solidity, in great measure to its solid, level-headed County Agent." Perhaps in recognition of the economic benefits

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37 *Toiler*, 3 July 1889.

available through their local organizations, Bedford County consistently elected Wheel and Alliancemen to the state legislature, and even gave the name "Wheel" to one rural community. [38]

As historians frequently suggest, the success of Wheel and Alliance efforts always depended on the individual decisions of thousands of farmers. Rich or poor, they weighed the value of immediate needs and long-term gains. In every part of the state, farmers' efforts to establish financial independence through cooperative buying met solid resistance from local merchants and distant wholesalers. The fact that the cotton counties experienced greater difficulty in sustaining their regional agency than other parts of the state points to the possible influence of the crop lien system and its ability to inhibit autonomous actions. Even independent farmers faced difficult economic choices, and in the poor market of the 1880s and 1890s, they saw no leeway for error. [39]

Decision making demanded a slow and studied approach in a period when crooks and schemes abounded. J. M. Crews of Shelby County wrote to the *Toiler* to report the fraudulent activities of James Steele, a drummer, who made the rounds in

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38 Ibid., 10 July 1889. C. C. Adams represented Bedford County in the General Assembly. Information about the Wheel community can be found in the Bedford County history in Carroll Van West, ed., *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, forthcoming 1998).

39 In on area, the State Agency enjoyed almost universal support--the substitution of the Chattanooga Chilled Plow for the better known Oliver Chilled Plow. When the State Agency first organized, Chattanooga industrialist Newell Sanders offered to sell his plow to the Wheel and Alliance on the same terms he provided to wholesalers (a savings to farmers of 40 percent). The manufacturers of the popular Oliver Chilled Plow refused to offer the same terms and stood by their regular salesmen. Almost every issue of the *Toiler* carried exhortations to buy the Chattanooga plow. Local and county Wheels and Alliances passed resolutions and memorials in praise of the Tennessee manufactured implement. The issue was especially popular in East Tennessee. On a trip to upper East Tennessee, McDowell reported a county rally in which Alliance men and women marched to the meeting ground under banners depicting the Chattanooga Chilled Plow.

Arlington, claiming to represent David Chesnut of Warrenburg, Missouri. He took orders for flour, tobacco, sugar, and coffee. After collecting the money to pay for the goods, he left, promising delivery by April 19. When the merchandise failed to arrive, customers discovered the hoax, and the company soon confirmed their suspicions with denials of ever having employed a man named Steele. [40]

Skepticism was not confined to drummers; even farmers' organizations had a checkered history for Tennessee agriculturalists. Much of the criticism directed at the Wheel and Alliance emerged from past experiences with the Grange. A Rutherford County Wheeler reported that opponents often "contended that it [Wheel] will fall through as did the grange." Naysayers characterized the Wheel as "nothing but a speculating scheme, as was the grange . . . all excitement, and will soon die out." [41]

Wheel and Alliance leaders distanced themselves from the Grange failures by pointing to what they considered the profound differences that separated them from the earlier organization. In their view, the recent establishment of trusts created a new set of circumstances that made their organization necessary. "Twenty years ago we had no such thing in existence as a pool, trust, or corner to raise and lower values, contrary to the law of supply and demand," went the standard refrain. To bolster their argument, reformers also reminded farmers that "twenty years ago there was not two dozen millionaires in the nation; farmers were prosperous. It was impossible when the Grange went down to bring together five hundred million dollars to buy up all the coffee, sugar, etc., on the market and tax you by raising the price, or to corner the

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40 *Toiler*, 1 May 1889. Crews was not the only one to warn farmers against the claims of traveling salesmen. J. R. Miles, the State Wheel president chided farmers for their desire to reduce their labor through the use of fraudulent claims for technological advancements. They seemed particularly vulnerable to the claims of automatic churn salesmen.

41 Ibid., 14 November 1888.

wheat, corn, pork, or tobacco market, and force the price down just as these products of the soil are ready for market." In 1889, agrarian leaders claimed the nation harbored over three thousand millionaires, "some of whom are worth over two hundred millions each, making possible any kind of combination or the bringing together a thousand millions if necessary to raise and lower values." In other words, reformers argued against basing actions on past experiences and encouraged farmers to recognize the reality of the new business world, even as they used familiar and time-honored language to build a cooperative trust to fight the trusts forged by commerce and industry. [42]

Despite changes in business practices, the politics of anti-monopoly held a time-honored and exalted position in the history of the South. From Jefferson to Jackson to Johnson, the fear of the loss of individual freedom to the power of money and monopoly resonated through the social, political, and economic language like the strains of a familiar hymn. Powerful planters expressed hatred of monopoly as vigorously as the lowliest tenant farmers. The Democratic Party utilized the term as a pejorative for every form of rival activity and legislative position. Nevertheless, when economic monopoly appeared, farmers quickly recognized its presence and acted against it. [43]

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42 Ibid., 5 June 1889.

43 For a review of the anti-monopoly rhetoric of the antebellum era, see J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Harry Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1990); Peter Tenin, *The Jacksonian Economy* (New York: W. W. Norton, Inc., 1969); Gavin Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W. W. Norton, Inc., 1978); Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Wayne Cutler, "Jackson, Polk, and Johnson: Defenders of the Moral Economy," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 54 (1995): 178-189.

In 1888, the jute manufacturers formed a cartel that doubled the cost of preparing cotton for market by raising the price of the bagging that covered every bale of cotton and gave the Wheel and Alliance a ready-made villain against whom farmers could unite without fear of division. Although historians of the Alliance seldom fail to acknowledge the jute boycott that followed the news of the formation of the cartel, it generally receives only cursory attention in their monographs. The exception has been the work of William F. Holmes, whose research demonstrated "the clash between agriculture and business at a pivotal point in the development of the two interest groups." [44]

By the time Tennessee farmers became aware of the jute trust in August 1888, the cartel had already made all the necessary arrangements to carry its plans into action. Jute manufacturers faced the prospect of higher prices for raw materials under a pending congressional bill that called for the removal of jute from tariff protection. Jute manufacturers quickly replaced their initial panic over the price hike with a plan to "coordinate the distribution and sale of jute bagging for the entire nation." Warren, Jones, and Gratz of St. Louis, a firm that controlled approximately twenty-five percent of the baling in the United States, organized the cartel. The eight largest manufacturers agreed to sell their jute products through the largest firm, L. Waterbury and Company of New York, for a set percentage of the profits. In July 1888, the price of jute bagging jumped from 6 1/2 cents per yard to 12 1/2 cents per yard. [45]

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[44] William F. Holmes, "The Southern Farmers' Alliance and the Jute Cartel," *Journal of Southern History* 60 (1994): 59-80. More limited discussions of the jute boycott can be found in Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise* and McMath, *Populist Vanguard*.

[45] *Toiler*, 8 August 1888.

The St. Louis *Dispatch* announcement of the cartel in jute bagging caught the Wheel and Alliance unawares and scrambling to meet the sudden threat. County Wheels and Alliances, meeting in the late summer and early fall, vowed to fight the trust by boycotting the use of jute bagging. When the Tipton County Wheel met on August 30, it "earnestly protest[ed] against the unjust trust or pool on jute bagging by Warren, Jones and Granty [sic] of St. Louis and others," and recommended that farmers of the Wheel and Alliance in all the cotton states "use no jute bagging." In addition, they urged the state and national organization to take "prompt action . . . against this iniquitous trust swindle." W. H. Gouch, president of the Crockett County Wheel, urged "the poverty stricken farmers of the county . . . [to] rise in their might and shake off the chains of slavery that are so rapidly being force on them, or else submit to the money power," which would leave them "in the condition Ireland is in." The Gibson County Wheel joined in the boycott and declared, "a monopoly is just as much an enemy to orderly society as an anarchist." Non-cotton producing counties also passed resolutions in support of the jute boycott in an effort to establish their solidarity with the beleaguered cotton farmers. Hickman, Humphreys, and Benton County Wheels, areas organized in the Peanut Association of Tennessee, loudly voiced their support. In colorful language, one county resolved to "roll the wheel over them at whatever cost, and we can soon land all the thieves on the other side of Jordan, where the sulphur trust reigns supreme, and where they will be treated to a feast of smoke and perpetual conflagration." Support from the peanut growers extended to the determination to avoid the use of burlap bagging "held by the trust" and the recommendation to use "domestic as a substitute." [46]

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[46] Ibid., 12 September, 26 September, 3 October, and 17 October 1888. Frederick M. Culp and Mrs. Robert E. Ross, *Gibson County Past and Present: The First General History of One of West Tennessee's Pivotal Counties* (Trenton: Gibson County Historical Society, 1961), 323.

While most counties looked no farther than their own fields to resist the power of the trust, Hebron Alliance # 80 of Shelby County called a meeting of all Wheel and Alliance members, planters, and merchants "living in the trading bounds of Memphis." Approximately one hundred farmers from West Tennessee, North Mississippi, and Arkansas accepted the invitation and attended the late August meeting at the Memphis Cotton Exchange. No merchants met with the convention of farmers, "as was expected and desired." The physical absence of the merchants did not prevent the presentation of their views. As soon as the meeting got underway, one man rose to urge "co-operation between the merchant and planter as the surest means of success." A. M. Scarborough made a speech in behalf of the cotton buyers, in which he advised conservative action, linking the interests of the merchant and the planter. He cautioned the planters against decisions to withhold cotton from the market as a protest against jute bagging, saying that "they could not afford to hold cotton, as such a course might seriously embarrass commerce." [47]

The convention chairman, J. M. Crews, appointed a committee of six planters and three merchants to write resolutions for the body. When the six planters retired to carry out their mission, they were joined by Pat Gatins, "a well-known cotton buyer," and J. M. K. Speed, the local representative of Warren, Jones and Gratz. The resolutions committee listened to Speed's recitation of the jute industry's economic problems, but presented reports favoring a boycott of jute bagging, which was accepted by the assembly. The determination to boycott jute produced a few last-ditch efforts to forestall the action, as well as exasperated ravings from planters, who advocated stronger action. One man suggested a mechanism for reducing costs by

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47 *Toiler*, 5 September 1888.

increasing the size of cotton bales to 700 or 800 pounds to save on the amount of bagging needed to cover a single farmer's crop. Two planters insisted that farmers lost no money, even at the higher price for bagging, but convention goers dismissed them as "sockdologers." Finally, in the heat of the moment, N. B. Branch declared that he "favored burning cotton rather than sending it into market in 15 cent bagging." Cotton farmers adjourned the meeting with a sense of accomplishment; despite the pressures exerted by the cotton buyers and merchant apologists, and the ravings of more excitable or misinformed planters, the Wheel and Alliance had developed a reasoned and reasonable plan of action to deal with the bagging crisis. [48]

The decision to boycott jute proved easy compared to the search for a reliable substitute bagging in adequate quantities to cover the soon-to-be-harvested 1888 crop. Suggestions ranged from the practical to the ridiculous. News arrived that farmers in North Carolina wrapped bales in straw cloth similar to matting. In North Georgia, farmers covered cotton in pine boards. A Tennessee man offered a similar suggestion for using "thin, tough boards and cheap, light hoop iron." He pointed out that "mills and machinery in Memphis. . . can turn thin boards faster than any mill can manufacture gunny cloth." With an "inexhaustible supply of cottonwood on the Mississippi . . . that can be had for the cost of cutting and floating to the mill," he estimated the cost of wrapping cotton could be reduced to twenty-five or thirty cents per bale. Some farmers simply took matters into their own hands, like the Tipton

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[48] Ibid., 5 September 1888; Holmes, "The Southern Farmers' Alliance and the Jute Cartel," 65. The resolutions committee presented both a majority and a minority report. Both reports advocated the boycott of jute bagging, but whereas the majority report supported the boycott without limitation, the minority report suggested that the decision could be superseded by the action of the National Alliance at its Meridian, Mississippi, meeting scheduled for October 1888.

County man who showed "Alliance Grit," when he brought his cotton into town "wrapped in carpeting." [49]

By far, the most popular substitute for jute bagging was osnaburg, a heavy, durable cotton cloth of a texture "sufficiently open to permit proper ventilation in case the cotton becomes wet." According to its promoters, osnaburg was cheap enough to be used profitably, and its production from low grade cotton provided an added benefit; proponents estimated that cotton bagging in sufficient quantities to cover the entire crop required approximately 150,000 bales of low-grade raw cotton. The Lane Mills at New Orleans took the lead in offering osnaburg for bagging. [50]

In Shelby County, the agitation against the jute cartel went beyond the boycott. As the largest inland cotton market in the country and the supply depot for five states, the Memphis merchants soon felt the effects of the farmers' refusal to cover the cotton crop in jute. Merchants looked nervously at their ledger books, while rolls of jute bagging sat unsold on the docks. Public indignation pressured the fall term of the Shelby County Grand Jury to "look into the operations of the bagging trust," to determine if the cartel operated in violation of state law. Attorney General George P. Peters "made a thorough examination of the law on the subject," calling a number of witnesses to testify. On October 26, 1888, the grand jury returned an indictment against Benjamin Gratz, Anderson Gratz, Joel Wood, and ------- Warren, charging them under the state law with "combining, confederating and conspiring together for

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49 Ibid., 12 September 1888, 7 November 1888.

50 Ibid., 12 September 1888; Holmes, "The Southern Farmers' Alliance and the Jute Cartel," 65-80. Some Tennessee farmers offered an alternative suggestion for obtaining jute bagging at a lower cost. They proposed circumventing the jute industry by producing jute bagging with convict labor. No action was ever taken on the suggestion, but the recommendation surfaced several times during the course of the boycott.

the purpose of oppressing, injuring and interfering with the course of commerce, trade and morals of Shelby County," a felonious offense. The attorney general immediately applied to Governor Robert L. Taylor for authority to issue arrest warrants against the directors of the St. Louis firm. While farmers waited in anticipation of the demise of the trust, the bagging dealers laughed off the indictment with the dismissive statement that "there was no telling what a country judge might do." [51]

Although Memphis newspapers warned that Judge DuBose was "engaged in a righteous cause," and was unlikely to "be silenced in this contemptuous manner," the trust members had little cause to worry. Governor Taylor refused to sign the necessary papers to make the indictments effective, and the case died. At its January 1889 meeting, the Gibson County Wheel prepared a memorial to Taylor in which the farmers expressed appreciation for "the conscientious scruples which his Excellency, the Governor of Tennessee, may have had in refusing to grant the necessary requisition papers." Nevertheless, the wheelers deplored his action and requested that he "reconsider the matter in the interests of the agricultural classes and not in that of the capitalists engaged in this combine." [52]

As farmers soon discovered, appearances of support for the boycott by public officials, merchants, and cotton ginners seldom led to substantive action. Indeed, public declarations of support often masked attempts to consolidate economic advantages at the expense of the farmers. In Gibson County, the cotton ginners met at

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51 Memphis *Avalanche*, 27 October 1888; *Gibson County Herald*, 2 November 1888. For a history of the Memphis cotton Exchange, see Forrest Orren Lax, "The Memphis Cotton Exchange from Beginning to Decline," (MA thesis, Memphis State University, 1970) and Robert A. Sigafoos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street: A Business History of Memphis* (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1979), Chapter 6, "The Power Brokers of Front Street," 53-65.

52 *Avalanche*, 27 October 1888; *Toiler* 23 January 1889; "Minutes of the Gibson County Wheel," January 1889, Gibson County Historical Society, Trenton.

the Trenton Opera House for the purpose of "taking action in regard to buying cotton bagging for the present season." The ginners condemned the jute bagging trust as "a hateful monopoly for the purpose of trampling the cotton industry of the South," and recommended the use of "any substitute that may be agreed upon." After the passage of the resolution, "all who were not members of the wheel remained in private session." During this meeting, the ginners formed a Cotton Association and selected agents to ship and receive cotton. Wheels soon charged that the exchange established by "merchants and grocery men of Trenton" operated at prohibitive costs to farmers. Wheel # 387 urged farmers to avoid the excessive charges and make other arrangements. [53]

If the actions of the local Cotton Association surprised and disappointed Gibson County farmers, they expressed no astonishment over the activities of the local cotton seed buyers. Although the local wheels never addressed the issue, possibly viewing the matter as a conflict between "capitalists," the *Herald* editor attacked the Jackson cotton seed oil mill operators for attempts to control the local market. He recited the tale of a Jackson, Tennessee, firm that purchased the Trenton mill in a deal that required the former owner, R. H. Hammerly, "not to buy seed nor aid any one else in doing so." When Hammerly permitted the county Wheel agent the use of his scales to weigh cotton seed, he received word from Jackson Mill to desist. The editor labeled the action "another of the iniquitous steps of a trust that wants to own the earth hedged by a barbed wire fence." As the editor saw it, this petty demand followed other similar attempts to prevent the establishment of independent mills. In

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53 *Gibson County Herald*, 28 September and 9 November 1888. Among the agents of the Cotton Association was E. Richardson, the proprietor of the Wheel Store in Trenton. Richardson's actions point up the recurring problems experienced by wheels and alliances when they contracted with local merchants to obtain goods at a discount rather than establishing a county agency system.

addition to the most recent confrontation, he cited the "leasing of a lot at Trenton for five years to prevent the Trenton mills from putting in a side-track." Although the editor hoped his reports would open the eyes of farmers to the creation of a cotton seed oil trust, his concern remained with the independent mill operator and not with the farmer. Like other Gibson County businessmen, he viewed the jute boycott upheaval as an opportunity to promote local business interests. [54]

Despite setbacks and attempts by the merchants to control the boycott to their own advantage, farmers ended the 1888 cotton season with a feeling of victory over the jute trust. But by April 1889, it was clear that they had celebrated too soon. The *Toiler* reported that the jute trust, which appeared defunct only a few weeks earlier, now "bounded to its feet again, full of life and vigor." Given the successes of the previous season and more time to deal with the problem of securing suitable alternative bagging McDowell confidently expected the farmers to "deal the monster a blow that will be slow to heal." While the state agents once again scrambled to find enough bagging to cover the crop, writers churned out indignant letters and enthusiastic poems and songs to marshal the agrarian spirit to battle. One such poem was entitled "Fare Thee Well."

Fare well, jute, farewell;
Your race is nearly run,
You have covered many a bale,
Since the day you first begun.

You have traveled over land and sea,
The farmer paid your way;
You have crowded around monopoly's door

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54 *Herald*, 26 October 1888. When the Wheel and Alliance met in the Cotton Convention at Birmingham in May 1889, farmers were urged to keep their cotton seed for use as fertilizer. *Toiler*, 29 May 1889.

You have had your time and day.

As to you, dear jute,
I have no feelings ill,
But to keep bad company
Is against the Maker's will.

Now to you, old friend,
I will say good-bye,
And hope you find a resting place,
But not beneath a tie.

Cotton will help to bury you,
Combines may shed a tear;
As to your resurrection--
You need not have a fear.

Now, upon your tombstone,
I will only write a line--
"Died of combine fever
In eighteen hundred and eighty-nine."

In May 1889, Wheelers and Alliancemen met in Birmingham, Alabama, and discussed further action against the jute trust. Tennessee Alliance delegates included J. P. Buchanan, T. O. Abernathy, J. F. Black, and W. T. Grant. G. A. Gowan, R. W. Tucker, A. E. Gardner, and J. W. Zelner represented the Wheel. Tennessee Agricultural Commissioner B. M. Hord also attended and became one of three men named to the Cotton Executive Committee. Representatives from the jute trust appeared before the bagging committee of the convention and proposed to supply nearly three million yards of jute bagging at reduced prices. The proposal offered to have bagging delivered at Charleston and St. Louis on four delivery dates (August 1, September 1, October 1, and November 1). Prices for the first shipment would range from 8 3/4 cents for one and a half pound bagging to 10 3/4 cents for two and one-fourth pound bagging for the August delivery. The price would advance one-eighth

cent per yard on each subsequent delivery. The bagging committee and convention delegates rightly concluded that this was no bargain and recommended "the permanent use of cotton bagging as a covering for cotton." Furthermore, the delegates appointed a committee to negotiate with the manufacturers and purchasers of cotton to adjust the tare to reflect the lighter weight of cotton bagging. In the event that buyers and manufacturers refused to accept an allowance of eight pounds per bale on cotton-wrapped cotton, the delegates advised the members of the Wheel and Alliance to withhold cotton until the allowances were made. [55]

On September 11, 1889, representatives of fourteen cotton exchanges, Wheel and Alliance leaders, and the agricultural commissioners of five states met at the invitation of the New Orleans Exchange to discuss the question of the tare. The representatives of the exchanges agreed to accept a twenty-four pound tare for jute wrapped cotton and a sixteen pound tare for cotton wrapped bales after October 1. If Tennessee farmers thought they had achieved a victory, they were soon made to realize their error. On October 2, the *Toiler* announced the Memphis Cotton Exchange's opposition to the tare allowance. According to John Zelner, a Shelby County Wheel leader and a delegate to the Birmingham Convention, the decision to abandon the exchange convention agreement came at the insistence of Memphis merchants, who were "loaded with jute," and unwilling to support cotton bagging until all the surplus jute had been sold. McDowell resigned himself to the fact that "Memphis cotton merchants are . . . as clever generally as merchants of other cities, but self-interests come in and dictate their action." [56]

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55 *Toiler*, 29 May 1889; Holmes, "The Southern Farmers' Alliance and the Jute Cartel,"71-74.

56 *Toiler*, 2 October 1889.

In the meantime, negotiations continued with Liverpool, and farmers withheld their cotton from the market. State Agent George A Gowan made arrangements to "store, transfer, and compress cotton assigned to me." He reported the conclusion of contracts with New York and New Orleans agents to obtain the latest market information by wire in order to keep abreast of price fluctuations. In order to take advantage of this arrangement, Gowan encouraged farmers to allow him to use his own judgment in selling their cotton. For a while, the resolve of the farmers held. McDowell crowed that cotton sales in Liverpool "were smaller on Sept. 27 than on any other day since the war." Gowan reported on a trip to Atlanta, where only 300 bales of cotton could be found at the exchanges, where usually thousands of bales stood ready for shipment. But in the end, when news of Liverpool's refusal to accept the agreements reached the United States, farmers had few choices but to sell their cotton. When jute prices dropped, cash-strapped farmers no longer bought the higher priced cotton bagging despite encouragement from Alliance leaders to hold the line against the trusts. As Robert McMath observed, the success or failure of the boycott always rested on the individual decisions of millions of farmer-producers. [57]

The jute boycott represented a high point in Alliance history, despite its long-term failure. The ability of the organization to present a reasoned approach to the problem and to keep the cartel at bay for two growing seasons surprised opponents of the farmer organization. The prominent role played by Tennesseans in the events no doubt gave pause to politicians facing Wheel and Alliance opposition. With their lack of financial support and their inexperience, farmers could be defeated, but it was becoming increasingly evident that they would not be defeated without a fight.

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57 *Ibid.*, 2 October 1889.

While cotton farmers battled the jute trust, tobacco planters waged their own war against monopoly. Throughout the summer of 1888, the *Toiler* carried information about a planned Tobacco Congress scheduled for late July, which was being called to organize growers and warehousemen in a joint effort to gain control over the crop in the Clarksville District in order to raise tobacco prices. When the tobacco men met on July 27, they organized the Western Tobacco Growers Association. As the organizers explained, having been "reduced to poverty by the outrageous robbery of trust combinations," farmers decided to "fight fire with fire," and resort to "the schemes of the tricksters to beat their trickery." What the tobacco men proposed, as would become clear within a few weeks, was the establishment of a growers' trust. Couched in the agrarian language of cooperativism, the organizers argued that the decade-long depression of the tobacco markets and the "continuous depression of our financial condition . . . warrant us as business men [to] organize in the cooperative action that has worked so well for other businesses." Even as they argued for the creation of a farmers' trust, planners recognized the formidable problems that confronted them, not the least of which was the history of agrarian organizational failures. "It has been thought that nothing could be done in the way of organizing farmers to resist the tyranny of combined capital and break up the combinations," they acknowledged. "But, necessity is a mother of inventions and earnest investigation leads to many new things and opens up new ways and outlets to progress," ran the enthusiastic promotional mantra. In an attempt to offset early disappointment with the cooperative effort, the organizers warned that "it is not expected the plan will thoroughly accomplish all desired in a year or two years." Planners encouraged enlistment in the cause and promised much "may be accomplished with the present growing crop if all tobacco growers will promptly go

into the organization." The Congress extended an invitation to all tobacco farmers in the Clarksville, Upper Cumberland, and Western Kentucky districts to join the cooperative effort against the stemmers, speculators, manufacturers, and Regie buyers. [58]

The Congress plan presented a well-thought-out mechanism for achieving producer control over the crop. It seemingly included benefits for the large planter as well as the small farmer. Moreover, it built on the organizational structure already in place in the tobacco region. Organizers assured farmers that the scheme would cost them nothing. The Association collected no dues, since it operated through the existing granges, wheels, and alliances. The plan called for the construction of sheds and warehouses, but relied upon each farmer to sort, classify, and prize his own tobacco. Success depended on the honest packing of tobacco, with "but one kind or quality in a hogshead--no mixing of the short with the long, or packing inferior tobacco in the corners as is the practice with rehandlers and speculators." Congress organizers attributed low prices to underhanded practices, since buyers expected deception and allowed for it in their pricing. Honesty promised to raise the price by drawing buyers to clean, well-packed tobacco and creating competition for their crop. To encourage farmers to bring their tobacco to the Association's warehouses, the organizers promised that farmers could draw half the value of their tobacco

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58 *Toiler*, 1 August and 12 December 1888. Investigation of the tobacco growers has not received nearly enough attention, aside from the conflicts within the Black Patch at the turn of the century. See Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Culture Since 1880* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); Tracy Campbell, *Politics of Despair: Power & Resistance in the Tobacco Wars* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1993); Christopher Waldrep, *Night Riders: Defending Community in the BlackPatch, 1890-1915* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); J. B. Killebrew, *Tobacco: Its Culture in Tennessee with Statistics of Its Commercial Importance* (Nashville, 1876), TSLA, Nashville.

immediately upon deposit. This practice allowed farmers to meet immediate expenses (taxes, mortgages, store credit, etc.) and gave the Association the flexibility to market the crop at intervals or hold out for higher prices. Near the end of the Association's presentation, the organizers touched on the keystone of the plan--controlled planting "to prevent over-production or great surpluses . . . by decreasing or increasing the acreage as the necessity may require--just as the whiskey trust manage their distilleries." As the Congress ended, the Association members confidently advised cotton planters to adopt a similar scheme. [59]

At the November meeting of the Tobacco Congress, the Association adopted formal resolutions justifying the creation of the organization and establishing the hierarchy of officers. The resolutions blamed "unusually large crops in the barns throughout the country," and the "combination of monopolistic capital" for the tobacco prices "far below the cost of production." Blame for the situation also extended to tobacco farmers, who "have hitherto been (as a class) plodding single-handed along in the tobacco business as in all other farm pursuits without any sort of organization or co-operative action." From the defense of their organizing efforts, the resolutions moved to the heart of the Association's program. In order to "avert the evils now pending," and achieve "immediate relief," the Association recommended "the adoption of total abstention of tobacco planting for the year 1889." According to its proponents, the abstention policy offered several benefits in addition to raising the price of tobacco. If farmers "determine[d] not to even sow a bed for 1889, put their land in wheat and clover, make their own bread next year which some are not doing

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[59] *Toiler*, 1 August 1888. The leadership in the Tobacco Congress and the Tobacco Association included a number of men who were founders of the Farmer's Association, an organization of upper class planters. Among the members of both organizations was M. V. Ingram, the former editor of the *Toiler*, who edited the *Tobacco Cultivator* during this period.

now, besides resting and recuperating their over-taxed land, they will find that they are master of the situation." Apparently worried about opposition to the enforcement of the no-planting policy, the Association went on record as favoring "all legitimate means of carrying out the object and intention of these resolutions." [60]

Wheels and Alliances in the tobacco district quickly fell into line with the plan. Hard-pressed farmers pointed to sales of tobacco at $217.50 - $243.50 per hogshead and lamented that the price "won't half way pay expenses of raising and yet it [tobacco] was raised on land worth forty dollars per acre." In October, McDowell spoke to the Stewart County Wheel and visiting Wheelers from Kentucky at Big Rock Church, "crowded to its utmost and many could not get even standing room." He reported that the people listened for two and one-half hours, even postponing dinner to satisfy their interest in the non-planting policy. McDowell found Stewart County "heart and soul for this or any other practical method by which a fair remuneration could be obtained for the present large crop." Among the farmers in the audience was E. P. Bozart, "one of the largest dealers of tobacco in Stewart County." After hearing the proposition of the Association, Bozart pledged that "not an acre on any of his fourteen farms should be planted if the plan was agreed upon." Support for the policy extended into West Tennessee, where both Weakley County and Obion County resolved to abstain from planting tobacco. [61]

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60 *Toiler*, 12 December 1888.

61 *Toiler*, 10 and 17 October 1888. Only a month later, Bozart (or Bogard) was having second thoughts. At the meeting of the Tobacco Congress, he "spoke as a speculator," saying that he had "already rented out his land . . . [and] was carrying now, about forty families, and did not see how he could keep it up." Although he "hoped the scheme would go through," he did not believe "the movement had begun soon enough."*Clarksville Evening Chronicle*, 29 November 1888.

Dissenting voices soon rose to challenge the view that non-planting benefited the smaller farmers. The first voices raised against the proposal came from the Colored Wheel of Montgomery County, in the heart of the Tennessee tobacco district. At the October 13 meeting, the Colored Wheel questioned the justice of allowing "the tobacco men and speculators to dictate to us as to whether or not we shall raise tobacco." They encouraged Wheelers to "give the tobacco question fair consideration and do what they think will be best for the farmer." Perhaps in reference to the Montgomery County resolution, McDowell noted before the November meeting of the Tobacco Congress that "the idea that the Clarksville Tobacco Warehousemen want to use the Tobacco Congress to enrich themselves, regardless of the farmer's interest, seems to deter some good farmers from joining in the cessation policy." By late November, at least one Stewart County Wheel also voiced second thoughts. Oak Hill Wheel, # 845 noted that of the "two crops in American hands--one of the meanest ever raised . . . belongs to the speculator;" the other crop "an extra good one [is] in the hands of the producer." The memory of past ill treatment by the Clarksville warehousemen added to the suspicions of the rank and file wheelers. Stewart County farmers remembered that earlier requests for assistance met with derisive comparisons of the Wheelers to the Grangers, with assertions that like the Grangers, they were "snow-men, and would pass away with the morning's sun." No doubt some farmers had a hard time reconciling the abstention policies of the Clarksville group with the enthusiastic reports of the Fulton Tobacco Warehouse in Fulton, Kentucky. [62]

During the winter of 1887 and 1888, the Tobacco Congress and the Agricultural Wheel of Kentucky met in Fulton, Kentucky, to establish a tobacco

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62 *Toiler*, 24 October and 28 November 1888.

warehouse. Fulton citizens enthusiastically supported the decision, since no other tobacco warehouses existed in the city. The citizens "secured a house to use temporarily" and promised to purchase a lot that the farmers wanted "and present us with it, and were it necessary would erect us a house." With the backing of the town and the banks that "stood by us and let us have every cent we needed," the warehouse prospered and sold more tobacco than we or anyone else expected, and at a higher price." The congenial spirit evaporated, however, when the farmers selected their lot and asked the town to fulfill its promise. Although the town offered to purchase a different lot, the warehouse manager complained that the town acted in bad faith. Yet, despite the rocky beginning, the warehouse reportedly prospered and made no mention of low prices or unsold tobacco from previous crops. [63]

In February 1889, the Fulton warehouse manager, D. C. Reams, issued the "Second Annual circular of the Farmers' Tobacco Warehouse" in Fulton. He reported an increase in the size of the facility to handle 10,000 hogsheads of tobacco. He claimed that "the growth of our market has created the necessity of the organization of a new bank at this place, which will open on the 25th." Stock in the warehouse also increased during the course of the year from $5,000 to $50,000. Reams assessed the past year enthusiastically: "prosperity has smiled upon us; everything seems to have gone our way." Furthermore, he asserted the western markets "singularly clear of old tobacco," and he encouraged farmers to bring their tobacco to Fulton, where he expected to "close the season of 1889 with the best tobacco market in the west." Four months later, the Obion County Wheel confirmed Reams's assessment of the warehouse. The Wheel encouraged farmers to patronize the "oldest and most

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63 Ibid., 1 August, 5 September, and 12 September 1888.

successful co-operative enterprise established by our organization." They provided at least three reasons why farmers should sell their tobacco through the Fulton warehouse:

1. The Wheel warehouse "forced the tobacco buyers to advance their bids on loose tobacco."
2. The immediate needs of producers were relieved with the warehouse "advancing money on tobacco in the hands of the brethren."
3. The Fulton Warehouse "stands the peer of any market in the west in prices and careful handling and honest weights and in impartial inspection."

The Fulton Warehouse claimed to offer the same services as the Alliance of Clarksville warehousemen and showed a profit in what everyone regarded as a disastrous year, without resorting to a non-plant program. [64]

A Stewart County farmer, who identified himself only as "Alpha," posed a thorny question early in the discussions over the non-planting policy. "If I am not badly mistaken," he wrote, "the mission of the wheel and Alliance is to protect and foster our interests as a laboring class and not to combine with monopolies for the purpose of breaking down and cheating each other out of a just reward for our labor to gratify monopolistic greed." He could not reconcile the farming interests with those of the warehousemen, and wondered, "if Clarksville's tobacco warehouse-men entertain such a great degree of sympathy and anxiety for the welfare and prosperity of the toiling tobacco grower why don't they reduce their profits some and give us the benefit of it." His concerns, first dismissed, proved prophetic. [65]

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64 Ibid., 6 February and 5 June 1889.

65 Ibid., 28 November 1888.

The association between farmers and warehousemen fell apart in the spring of 1889, when the Wheel decided to establish its own warehouse in Clarksville to handle the tobacco of Wheel and Alliance members. Located "near the passenger depot," the warehouse was "entirely under the control of [the] order in the Clarksville tobacco district." C. P. Warfield, "an experienced tobacco raiser and a man of unimpeachable integrity," managed the warehouse. Farmers received assurance that Warfield was "well known to the brotherhood of his county," and supporters referred to local resolutions professing "perfect confidence in his judgment, intelligence and ability to manage the Wheel and Alliance Warehouse successfully." [66]

On May 1, 1889, the *Toiler* reported the disturbing news that M. V. Ingram, editor of the *Clarksville Cultivator* (and former editor of the *Toiler*), refused to support the Wheel warehouse. McDowell confessed that he "did not know the facts" and would therefore "withhold comment." When the facts became known, the worst fears of the opponents of the non-planting policy were realized. Three weeks after the first announcement of trouble, McDowell charged that "a number of tobacco speculators" had established the *Cultivator* and placed Ingram in charge with the sole mission "to prove to the ignorant farmer of the Clarksville district that his interest and that of the speculator were identical." The reason for the efforts, just as critics had charged, centered on the abundant crop of the previous year. The speculators overestimated the ignorance of farmers, many of whom "insisted that the object of the Cultivator in advocating the abstention policy . . . was not a mission of mercy to the oppressed farmer, but merely a trick resorted to by the speculators to get rid of a large

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[66] Ibid., 22 May and 5 June 1889. Warfield turned up in another war of farmers and buyers. When the Black Patch erupted in a war to defeat the American Tobacco Company and Regie, Warfield became an important participant. See Campbell, *The Politics of Despair*, 35.

quantity of old stock that was dead weight on their hands." Having discovered the plot, McDowell hoped that the talents of his former partner would be "appreciated by the public in a better cause." [67]

More bad news soon followed. At the end of May, the Wheel warehouse petitioned for membership in the Clarksville Tobacco Board of Trade. The rules of the Board of Trade required that applications for membership lay over for thirty days. The warehousemen saw their chance for revenge, however, and with the knowledge that they represented a majority, moved for a suspension of the rules to act on the application immediately. Buyers voted for admission and warehousemen against, with one exception. The Clarksville Board of Trade excluded the Wheel warehouse from its organization and refused a resubmission of the application. Wheel leaders charged that "inspectors were threatened with expulsion if they dared to inspect a hogshead of Wheel-Alliance tobacco." An editorial in the Clarksville *Chronicle* warned that "buyers will not be allowed to bid on this tobacco, nor will inspectors be allowed to inspect it." Many buyers and inspectors rejected heavy-handed attempts to intimidate them, and inspectors "notified [the Wheel] superintendent that they would inspect our tobacco regardless of what the warehouse men might say." Eighteen buyers soon signed an agreement "to bid . . . without discrimination on all tobacco stored with the Wheel-Alliance house, as from any stored in this city." [68]

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67 *Toiler*, 1 May and 22 May 1889. The episode also raises questions about the nature of the ending of the partnership of Ingram and McDowell the previous year. Neither man commented on the decision of Ingram to leave the *Toiler*, though Ingram did print a farewell editorial that seemed oddly defensive. Perhaps Ingram's ties to wealthy planters conflicted with McDowell's grassroots efforts on behalf of the Wheel and Alliance. The two men certainly followed very different editorial paths after their severance of the partnership, though the absence of earlier editions of the *Toiler* makes a comparison of editorial policies impossible.

68 *Toiler*, 22 May and 19 June 1889.

Organization in the tobacco districts involved more than control of the crop--it demanded a change in the political and social hierarchy. The small growers in the Wheel and Alliance continued their agitation for reform, but they failed to achieve the shift in power necessary to their success. Powerful tobacco planters like Joel Fort made no secret of their hatred for the Wheelers and Alliancemen. When the growers organized to fight the American Tobacco Company and the Regie in 1904, however, Joel Fort was there with the other large planters to create an association that incorporated the same mechanisms for controlling the crop that the Wheel and Alliance advocated in 1888. As Tracy Campbell suggests, the difference centered on the leadership. In 1904, the largest planters presented the membership of the Association with a full-blown plan and left no opening for "popular sentiment." [69]

The organization of Tennessee farmers into the Agricultural Wheel and the Farmers' Alliance proceeded cautiously and pragmatically, both from sentiment and necessity. Forced to overcome a legacy of skepticism produced by the past failures of agrarian organizations and hobbled by a lack of financial support, the Wheel and Alliance moved cautiously into the cooperative effort of establishing a state agency. Divisive local issues and the legacy of the state's history of conflict tore at the fabric of organization. Wheel and Alliance leaders hammered together an organization threatened by partisanship and class divisions. The agricultural diversity of the state denied the organizations a rallying point for unified action. Cotton farmers supported the jute boycott; tobacco farmers fought to control prices; peanut farmers struggled to sustain an association of like-minded producers; cattle farmers fought the national packing companies; and corn and wheat producers watched as the prairie states dominated their markets. Membership rose, but it could not be said that Tennessee

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69 Campbell, "Organizing the Black Patch," in *The Politics of Despair*, 30-52.

farmers acted as one. Ironically, when the farmers finally achieved a measure of unity, it came in the form of political action with the election of John P. Buchanan as governor. Yet, in their moment of triumph, the seeds were sown for the Alliance defeat, as farmers across the state embraced politics and the subtreasury.

Chapter 6: The "Stickability" of Those "Damn'd Alliance Farmers"

I have inquired closely since I came into your state, and I find a great horde of office seekers, in both the Democratic and Republican parties engaged in a miserable scramble to obtain office, simply because there is no other occupation under God's heaven that will pay the men or make them a respectable living. Mary E. Lease, October 26, 1892

There are two old parties before us that stand as two mighty walls; no new fang dang party can surmount them. In one is life and liberty to us . . . where our fathers' hearts are buried. In the other is the force bill and other things that are as odious . . . It will kill our movement to go into a party, and if you will go a great majority of us will shake hands with you over the dangerous chasm and bid you a final farewell. *Pulaski Citizen* July 14, 1892

The need to affect economic change inevitably drew the Alliance into politics. Contrary to the accusations made by political opponents, farmers did not organize initially with the expectation of creating a third party. They recognized the political dimension of their activities, however, and accepted the fact that the protection of their economic interests demanded changes in state and national laws. To this end, Alliance principles permitted the non-partisan support of candidates for office, who promised to vote on behalf of agricultural interests. In Tennessee, support generally went to Democratic candidates despite the non-partisan claims of the Wheel and later the Alliance. The agrarian organizations increased their political clout with every election. At least ten members of the 1887 legislature were associated with the Wheel; by 1889, that number had risen to more than forty, and in 1891, 54 legislators claimed membership in the Farmers' Alliance. In addition, the new governor, John P. Buchanan (1891-1893) was one of six Alliance governors in the nation. Alliance men anticipated greater gains in future elections, and critics worried that their expectations

would be fulfilled. But instead of strengthening their base of support in the Democratic Party, the year 1890 proved to be the high point of the Alliance. Furthermore, once the Alliancemen had been forced out of the Democratic Party and into the new People's Party, the Populist movements in Tennessee, as in many other states, failed to develop an effective fusion with the opposition party. Neither contemporary observers nor historians have adequately explained why the promise of the Alliance movement faded in its moment of triumph, rather than progressing into a viable party organization. [1]

National and regional studies of Populism point to economic changes, outside pressure, internal disagreements, and institutional forces to explain the rapid demise of the once-promising reform effort. John D. Hicks offered the first important analysis of Populism, in which he concluded that the agrarian movement represented a realistic response to economic decline. While Hicks accepted the political failure of Populism, he optimistically concluded that the ideology survived and framed the political and economic paradigm of the early twentieth century. In short, the Populists lost the battle, but won the war. [2]

Hicks's study focused on the Midwest and ignored the Alliance and People's Party in the South, an oversight that was rectified by C. Vann Woodward, first in his study of Tom Watson, and later in his seminal work, *Origins of the New South.*

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[1] For lists of members of the General Assembly, see Charles A. Miller, *The Official and Political Manual of the State of Tennessee* (Nashville: Marshall & Bruce Stationers, 1890; reprint, Spartanburg: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1974). Roger Hart variously counts the number of Alliance members in the 1889 legislature as ranging from 41 to 52. See Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists: Tennessee, 1870-1896* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975). McDowell counted 46 members. *Toiler*, 3 April 1889.

[2] John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnestota Press, 1931; Lincoln: Univeristy of Nebraska Press, 1955): 404-423.

Woodward argued that the shift of the Southern Alliance from the Democratic party to the independent People's party invoked a firestorm of emotions comparable to those previously reserved for abolitionists and carpetbaggers. Adherence to populism invited social, political, and economic consequences that ranged from ostracism to physical violence and even death. Few men and women could sustain their beliefs in the face of such attacks. [3]

Arguing from the position of the consensus school of historiography, Richard Hofstadter suggested that the agrarian movement represented an aberration in American society, an irrational response from men left behind by the industrial progress of the age. Hofstadter viewed the demise of Populism as the inevitable result of a backward-focused movement based on status anxiety. [4]

A number of scholars soon challenged Hofstadter's view. Lawrence Goodwyn offered the most important revision of Populist historiography. Like Hicks, Goodwyn saw populism as a reasonable response to economic and market changes. According to Goodwyn, the development of cooperativism held together the diverse interests of the nation's farmers, while the rise of the free-silver movement represented political suicide in the form of 1896 fusion with the Democratic party. Thus, Goodwyn viewed the demise as the result of external political forces and internal betrayal. [5]

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[3] C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York: The McMillan Company, 1938; New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951; reprint 1987), Chapter IX, "Southern Populism," 235-263.

[4] Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955).

[5] Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

Bruce Palmer also attributed the demise of the agrarian movement to internal dissension. He charged that although the Alliance and People's Party presented a rational critique of industrial progress and American capitalism, they never "justified" the ideological differences that advocated a capitalist economy built on agrarian cooperativism. Lacking the analytical sophistication to construct a new paradigm, they failed to persuade the American voting public. [6]

Jeffrey Ostler's study of Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa is the most recent addition to the Populist historiography. Ostler argues that the economic distinctions between Populists and non-Populists is overdrawn. He suggests that the successes and failures of Populism reflected local political realities. Where the two-party system played an active role, Populism failed to gain a foothold. In those circumstances, farmers adroitly played one side against the other to gain the concessions they needed. On the other hand, where a one-party system prevailed, farmers joined the People's Party as the only avenue to protect their interests. [7]

Within the context of the larger historiography of Populism, historians of the Tennessee Alliance and Populist era generally explain the state's agrarian movement as a sudden upsurge of activity that failed for one of several reasons. Contemporaries pointed to the conservative nature of the state's farmers as an explanation for what they perceived as a lack of radicalism. In 1911, in a new era of general unrest, Robert Gates delivered an address before the Farmers' Institute of Middle Tennessee, in which he called upon the "conservative force in American politics--the farming class" to

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6 Bruce Palmer, *"Man Over Money": The Southern Populist Critique of American Capitalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 199-222.

7 Jeffrey Ostler, *Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, 1880-1892* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993).

avoid "entangling alliances" that might allow farmers to become the "cat's paw for selfish interests." In making his appeal, Gates reminded farmers that their conservatism had served them well in 1890, when there had been "sowing of much bitter and dangerous economic and social seed" by the "spirit of organization." Now in what he perceived as a new era of radicalism, he called farmers the "hope of the Republic." Characterizing them as "conservative by virtue of their calling, equally interested in the good of all classes of citizens, in capital and labor alike; removed by their environment and independence from the influences that inspire class prejudice, with most to lose and least to gain by disorder," he believed "they constitute[d] the conservative force in the body politic of the Republic." In Gates's view, Tennessee's agrarian conservatism had saved the republic from radicalism in 1890, and farmers could be called upon to exert their conservative influence again as the bulwark of democracy. In other words, Gates congratulated the farmers on their "common sense" and proposed that they had never supported radical ideas. [8]

Some later historians pointed to the state's economic progress as the explanation for a comparative lack of political turmoil. According to James Tice Moore, "the attitudes of [Tennessee's] farmers toward the various reform movements . . . were more tentative, more ambiguous, than those of their neighbors to the South and West." Moore suggested that Tennesseans were "decidedly less radical in their rhetoric . . . and in many instances [their] actions were even more cautious than their words." He concluded that the cause for this reticence could be explained by the "relatively prosperous condition of the state's agricultural economy." In

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8 Robert Gates, "'Farmers, the Conservative Force in the Body Politic:' An Address Delivered Before the Farmers' Institute of Middle Tennessee, December 6, 1911." (n.p. 1911), Tennessee State Library and Archives (hereafter cited as TSLA), Nashville.

Moore's view, economic conditions had not declined to a sufficient degree to force farmers from the party of their fathers. As a result he characterized the reform movement as a "reluctant rebellion." [9]

Joseph A. Sharp and Roger Hart dealt more explicitly with the elections of 1890 and 1892, and the activities of the so-called "Farmer's Legislature" of 1891. Sharp viewed the movement as "a desperate attempt of agriculture to regain from industry its lost social, economic, financial, and political prestige." His work suggested that the agrarian involvement in politics divided the loyalties of the membership and doomed the movement to failure. Roger Hart provided the most sophisticated analysis of the political aspects of the agrarian movement. When his statistical analysis of voting behavior failed to demonstrate a correlation between economic status and support for the Populist party and his voting analysis of the 1891 legislature produced no evidence of an Alliance bloc, Hart concluded that although the Alliance and the People's Party attracted men with similar "value expression[s]," it could not break the "iron grip on . . . voters' loyalties" claimed by the Democratic and Republican parties. Therefore, Hart suggested that the agrarian movement attracted political office seekers who had failed to obtain elective office within the Democratic party. They played upon the emotions of voters with a message of status anxiety and a paranoid style of political persuasion, but made no radical demands beyond a transfer of state offices to men previously denied political power. [10]

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9 James Tice Moore, "Agrarianism and Populism in Tennessee, 1886-1896: An Interpretative Overview," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 42 (1983): 76, 94.

10 Joseph A. Sharp, "The Farmers' Alliance and Tennessee Politics, 1890-1892," (MA thesis, University of Tennessee, 1931); Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons, & Populists.*

Each view offers an insight into the problems of the Tennessee Alliance but falls short of a complete understanding of the problems facing agrarian reformers. Although each of these scholars pointed to a facet of the Tennessee Alliance movement that varied from the stated national ideology, no one fully addressed the social and agricultural context that fostered those differences. Furthermore, as scholars focused on the adherence or repudiation of the various planks of the Alliance and Populist demands and platforms, they failed to assess the pressures exerted by the Democratic and Republican parties within the context of state and national events. Without attention to local issues, no other explanation remains for the success of the 1890 election except demogoguery. [11]

Tennessee farmers never placed government ownership of railroads, or even regulation of railroads, at the center of their demands. Too many counties could not claim a single mile of track for Tennessee farmers to focus too narrowly on railroad rates. Cotton farmers complained more loudly than others, but East Tennessee merchants offered as many objections to the high costs of transporting merchandise. After 1889 congressional action, and in consideration of the earlier failure of the short-

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11 Violence was often associated with the agrarian movement into politics, and Tennessee was no exception, although reports tended to downplay the danger and point reassuringly to the calming influences that prevailed. Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 260; Violence, or near violence seemed to increase after the Alliance proved its vote-getting capability in the 1890 election. See Nashville *Banner*, 3 October 1891. At a meeting of the White County Alliance, D. L. Snodgrass confronted McDowell on the question of the subtreasury. Snodgrass demanded an opportunity to present a partisan attack against the plan, which McDowell refused to allow, although he offered to debate the issue at another time and place. Tempers flared pistols were drawn by men on both sides, before cooler heads intervened. Another episode was reported by the *Gibson County Herald*, 4 November 1891. This time McDowell confronted Frank P. Bond at the Brownsville Opera House. On the occasion of a public debate, McDowell told the audience that Bond was "a smart man, but sometimes the smartest man is the biggest rascal." Bond defended himself by attacking McDowell, calling him "an associate of negroes," and asserting that he had been "unfaithful to every cause [he] ever espoused." He ended by describing McDowell as "a piece of corrupt putrification, indecent and unworthy of the association of the lowest hound." At that point calmer heads interceded and persuaded Bond to leave.

lived Tennessee Railroad Commission, farmers directed their concerns to federal authorities for resolution by the new Interstate Commerce Commission. As a general rule, Alliance men argued that railroad expansion and increased competition remained the surest method for reducing transportation rates. As much as they needed railway access to markets, farmers nevertheless refused to accept railroad expansion by means of tax-supported bonds. They expected profit-minded investors to bear the cost of railroad construction, not tax-strapped farmers. The issue for most of the state's farmers was taxes, not rates. [12]

The Dyer County Alliance passed a resolution protesting the differential railroad rate for hauling cotton, which made it more expensive to ship the crop from Dyersburg than from Memphis. Nevertheless, they looked to federal, not state authorities for relief and called on Tennessee congressmen to bring the matter before the ICC. When McDowell addressed the issue, he urged the control of railroads "within the bounds of reason." He was "not prepared to say that government ownership would bring the desired relief." Rather, in true Jacksonian fashion, he warned, "Concentration of power in the government to that extent is a tendency toward monarchy. To place 600,000 railroad officials and laborers and half as many telegraph operators and controlling officials absolutely in the hands of the government, to do their bidding or be discharged, in addition to the great horde of office-holders now under the control of the administration, would give whatever party might be in power, machinery to perpetuate itself to the destruction of the free institutions of that government founded by our forefathers upon the principles of greater liberty and

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12 Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons, & Populists*, 161-165; Cameron Duggins, "Background for Regulation of The Railroads in Tennessee," (MA thesis, University of Tennessee, 1939), 70-71; *Toiler*, 3 April and 6 November 1889; 23 July 1890.

freedom of action of the people." McDowell concluded, "In seeking relief from burdens of oppression we should deliberate calmly, and not rush into acceptance of every proposition offered as a remedy." [13]

While farmers adopted a practical and expedient position on railroads, they adhered to more radical views in other areas, particularly on the question of the subtreasury. First presented at the St. Louis convention in 1889, the subtreasury plan called for construction of local warehouses and silos by the federal government in counties producing over $500,000 worth of agricultural commodities annually. Farmers could store their non-perishables and obtain loans equal to eighty percent of the local current value of the products at an interest rate of one percent. They could use the money to pay taxes, mortgages, and store credits, and wait for higher prices before selling their crops. Commodities not claimed within one year would be auctioned off to the highest bidder. The originator of the subtreasury plan, Charles Macune, anticipated that the subtreasury scheme would contribute to a rise in agricultural prices, increase the amount of money in circulation, and relieve farmers of the burden of debt that precluded their occupational and social advancement. [14]

Local and county Alliances across the state endorsed resolutions in support of the subtreasury scheme. As farmers demanded support for the subtreasury from potential political candidates, office-seekers expediently adopted conciliatory-sounding statements of support for raising farm prices. Few officeholders felt confident enough

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13 *Toiler*, 13 July and 26 March 1890.

14 "Report of the Committee on the Monetary System," St. Louis Convention, National Farmers' and Industrial Union, 7 December 1889 in N. A. Dunning, ed., *The Farmers' Alliance History and Agricultural Digest* (Washington: Farmers' Alliance Press, 1889), 124-130; Palmer, *"Man Over Money,"* 104-110; Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 166-168; Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 90-93, 109-113, 301-307.

to condemn the scheme outright, though many avoided making unrestricted commitments to the plan. Thus, Tennessee farmers embraced what many critics considered the most radical scheme of all, in defiance of the ongoing perception of their caution; tobacco farmers experimented with a similar plan in 1888 and 1889. Ironically, the same tobacco planters who objected to the scheme in the Alliance-era implemented it during the so-called Black Patch War of the early twentieth century, leaving the impression that who advocated the scheme held more importance than what the scheme proposed. [15]

In some measure, Tennessee's so-called "quieter radicalism" resulted from the electoral mechanisms and institutions dictated by the state constitution. As Jeffery Ostler points out in his study of midwestern Populism, Kansas radicalism benefited from near-continuous political campaigning. State elections took place in odd-numbered years, while congressional races occurred in even-numbered years. The excitement associated with political campaigns never completely died down and kept agrarian issues at the forefront of public debate. By contrast, Tennessee Alliancemen looked forward to the political "off-years," when the important work of cooperativism progressed uninterrupted by the potential divisiveness of the election process. Although some members compared the calmer post-election meetings to "the churches after Christmas," most Alliance men seemed ready to "shake hands across the sea of political strife," burry [sic] all ill feelings and with a united effort go out anew to win the prize." [16]

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15 For examples of county resolutions passed in support of the subtreasury plan, see *Toiler*, 12 February, 19 February, and 28 May 1890. See Tracy Campbell, *The Politics of Despair: Power & Resistance in the Tobacco Wars* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 30-52.

16 *Toiler*, 16 January 1889.

Tennessee farmers thus appeared less enthusiastic supporters of the Alliance principles as a result of their seeming lack of interest in the regulation and public ownership of railroads and their willingness to lay aside politics for more constructive efforts. Nevertheless, their initial adherence to the subtreasury plan and their stubborn resolve to support like-minded candidates worried contemporary politicians. Indeed, by undermining the crop lien and furnishing system fostered by southern merchants and planters, the subtreasury threatened the commercial interests of both Nashville and Memphis. [17]

The so-called "Upper-Case" Democrats got their first surprise in the elections of 1888. Angry over the attempts to tax the state agency of the Wheel and Alliance, farmers rallied to elect men to the state legislature for the specific purpose of enacting protective legislation. John P. Buchanan, president of the State Farmers' Alliance and representative from Rutherford County, shepherded the state agency bill through the House. Hart interpreted the "ease" with which the bill passed on the third reading as an indication of the minor importance of the act, but, in fact, business interests fought the bill in ways that did not show up on the final voting tallies. Pro-business legislators made several attempts to attach the state agency's protection against taxation to the House revenue bill. This political ploy provided relief only until the next revenue act in 1891, with the obvious expectation that the farmers would not be in such a favorable position at that time. When the agrarian leaders proved more savvy than

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17 Robert A. Sigafoos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street: A Business History of Memphis* (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1979), 53-65; Don H. Doyle, *Nashville in the New South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985); Michael J. McDonald and W. Bruce Wheeler, *Knoxville, Tennessee: Continuity and Change in an Appalachian City* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982); Testimony of J. F. Frank, *Senate Reports*, 53rd Congress, 3rd Session, No. 986; *Report of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry on Condition of Cotton Growers in the United States, The Present Prices of Cotton, and the Remedy; and on Cotton Consumption and Production*, (Serial 3290-3291, Washington 1895), Volume I.

expected, the Democratic leadership conceded the issue and leaped on the bandwagon as the "true friend" of the state's farmers. [18]

Despite their determination on this one issue, Wheel and Alliance members of the 1889 General Assembly posed no overall threat to Democratic political hegemony. Indeed, they viewed themselves as good Democrats and voted accordingly, an important consideration for the legislative assembly that enacted the disfranchising laws that inhibited African-American voting rights for almost seventy years.

The violent and corrupt election of 1888 gave the Democrats absolute control over the General Assembly. The jubilant party of Jefferson and Jackson used the opportunity to undermine the Republican electorate by enacting a series of disfranchising laws designed to reduce or eliminate the votes of African Americans. At the same time, they gerrymandered the Republican third congressional district to ensure its future control by the Democratic party. In all these activities, the Wheel and Alliance members of the legislature gave their full accord, happy to do their part for the Democratic party. Later events, however, fulfilled the twenty-year-old predictions of Andrew Johnson and George W. Jones, that the poll tax posed as great a threat to poor white farmers as to black sharecroppers. By the time Alliance leaders realized the error of their ways, they had been expelled from the Democratic Party and were fighting for political survival in the new People's Party. [19]

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[18] Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists,* 135; Sharp, "The Farmers' Alliance and Tennessee Politics," 32; *House Journal,* 1889, 464; *Senate Journal* 1889, 227; *Acts of the State of Tennessee*, 1889, 346-347; *Toiler*, 3 April 1889. The law exempted all agents "employed to dispose of the farm products of this State, and to buy agricultural implements and other supplies," from the payment of merchant license and privilege taxes." After Governor Taylor signed the act into law, Tennessee Wheelers proudly boasted that theirs was "the only State in the Union that ha[d] such a law."

[19] Later grassroots agrarian rebellion operated under the burden of the political consequences of disfranchisement. In 1935 in its "Statement to the Governor's Commission on Farm Tenancy," the Southern Tenant Farmers Union pointed to the South's willingness "to withhold economic, civil, and political privileges from white men because we wished to deny them to colored men," as one of the

With two-thirds of the members in both the House and the Senate, Democrats constituted a quorum without the Republican members. The quorum-breaking and filibustering tactics previously adopted by the Republicans to prevent the enactment of racial legislation could not affect the 1889 session or the special session called in 1890. Free to do whatever they wanted, the Democrats passed the Dortch Law, the Myers Law, and the Lea Law; reinstituted the poll tax; and secured the third congressional district for the Democrats through gerrymandering legislation. Senator Joseph H. Dortch of Fayette County sponsored the bill that required each voter to mark and deposit his ballot in secret, with no assistance. Initially the law applied only to Chattanooga, Knoxville, and the counties containing Memphis and Nashville. Although the most controversial of the bills under consideration, Democrats made no pretense of supporting the bill for any reason other than the disfranchisement of black Republicans. The *Memphis Avalanche* responded to Republican charges by confirming that "the Dortch bill is for the benefit of the Democratic party," and commending it as the answer to the "Negro Question." [20]

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root causes of the impoverishment of tenant farmers. As quoted in Donald H. Grubbs, *Cry from the Cotton: The Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and the New Deal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971), 121.

20 Filibustering and quorum-breaking were tried and true methods used by the minority party to defeat legislation that could not be stopped by marshaling a sufficient number of opposition votes. When disfranchising legislation was first introduced in 1885, twenty Republicans bolted the hall before the Sergeant-at-Arms could lock the door. Their quick action prevented a quorum and thus, forestalled action for that session. See Hart: 267. For a thorough discussion of the Dortch Law, see Kousser, J. Morgan, *The Shaping of Southern Politics:Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 110-113. *Memphis Avalanche*, 3 April and 27 March 1889; *Toiler*, 26 March 1890. In the 1890 election, McDowell made no secret of the disfranchising voting records of men supported by the Alliance, though he generally focused on their votes on behalf of agriculture. He called Dortch's farm vote record "exceptionally good," noting that he voted for the State Agency bill, the protection of rights for tobacco weighers, the prevention of combinations and trusts, the prevention of contagious diseases in stock, to compel the redemption of scrip by corporations, and appropriations for the Department of Agriculture---all measures supported by the Alliance.

The Myers law, sponsored by East Tennessee Senator J. C. Myers, required voter registration in all towns and districts with populations of more than 2,500. The law covered some county seats in addition to the cities that fell under the jurisdiction of the Dortch law. The Myers law required that voters present a valid registration certificate at the time they cast their ballots. [21]

To further complicate the voting process, the General Assembly also passed the Lea law, which provided for separate ballot boxes for state and federal elections. The Lea law represented a preventative measure in case the much-discussed federal supervision of elections became a reality. The 1891 legislature repealed this act when Congress failed to enact the so-called "Force Bill." [22]

Democrats increased their political presence in the eastern portion of the state by gerrymandering the third congressional district in their favor. Legislators moved the two Republican counties of Cumberland and Marion to the heavily Democratic fourth district and added Democratic Cannon County to the third district. The change returned the third district in the Democratic congressional column in the 1890 election. [23]

Alliance enthusiasm for the poll tax provides one of the thorniest problems for scholars of the era. The timing of the legislation refutes the contention offered in other

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21 *Acts of the State of Tennessee*, 1889, 414, 416-417; *Acts of the State of Tennessee*, 1890, Extra Session, 59-60.

22 *Acts of the State of Tennessee*, 1889, 437-438. For a discussion of the Lodge Elections Bill, see R. Hal Williams, *Years of Decision: American Politics in the 1890s* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978), Chapter 1: "The Party Setting, 1888," and Chapter 2: "The Republicans Govern, 1889-1891;" and Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1977), 456, 527, 563.

23 Sharpe, "The Farmers' Alliance and Tennessee Politics," 91; Charles A. Miller, *The Official and Political Manual of the State of Tennessee*, 260, 261, 280, 281.

states that the poll tax represented an attempt to disfranchise Populists as well as African-American voters. Two Alliance legislators introduced the Tennessee poll tax measure, an action that figured in their claims for voter support during the 1890 election campaign. Historian Frank B. Williams argued against racism as the principal support for the poll tax. And indeed, Alliance men often tied their backing of the measure to demands for better education, pointing out that revenues generated by the tax went to schools. Both Sharp and Hart refuted non-racial arguments and cited numerous editorial examples of support for the law as a mechanism for "making sure the rule of the white majority in this state." Alliance men never indicated that the poll tax bill presented the either/or dilemma posed by historians. Although the Alliance avoided race-baiting, it never repudiated the tenets of white supremacy. At the same time, overly-taxed farmers supported almost any legislation that benefited schools *and* avoided additional land taxes. For Alliance men, the poll tax offered two potential benefits: the assurance of white, Democratic rule and a mechanism for increasing the school fund that did not fall disproportionately on the farmers of the state. The assurance of white, Democratic control became apparent immediately. As Morgan Kousser noted, with the passage of the four electoral "reforms," the "most consistently competitive political system in the South" ended. In the West Tennessee counties of Crockett, Dyer, Fayette, Gibson, Haywood, Henry, Lake, Lauderdale, Madison, Obion, Shelby, Tipton, and Weakley, Republican votes dropped from 21,785 in 1886 to 7,068 in 1890. The educational benefits never materialized. Only later would white farmers recognize the peril to their own use of the franchise. [24]

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[24] Frank B. Williams, Jr., "The Poll Tax as a Suffrage Requirement in the South, 1870-1901," *Journal of Southern History* 18 (1952): 469-496; Sharp, "The Farmers' Alliance and Tennessee Politics," 85; Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 271-273. For examples of editorial recognition of the effects of the poll tax, see Chattanooga *Times*, 18 January and 10 June, 1890; Memphis *Appeal*, 5 November 1890; and Nashville *Herald*, 16 March and 13 July 1890. Kousser,

At the end of the 1889 legislative session, Alliance men added up their gains and losses. McDowell provided a synopsis of the legislation for readers of the *Toiler*. As expected, he hailed the passage of the State Agency Act as a proud moment in the state's Alliance history. He devoted considerable attention to the defeat of the railroad subsidy bill, which would have permitted the issuance of $600,000 in railroad bonds for the city of Nashville. McDowell opposed the bill so strongly that he took the unusual step of publishing the voting record of the senate on the matter. [25]

In addition to these bills, McDowell mentioned several other pieces of legislation in a three-part series printed in the *Toiler*. He praised the new law to regulate the practice of medicine, saying that "legislation in this direction has been demanded for years." He conceded that the road law failed to meet the demands of everyone, but defended it with the assurance that "in the main it will secure more efficient work and better roads." The law returned the supervision of road work to the county court, made it a misdemeanor to refuse to appear and work, and gave the grand juries inquisitorial power over the management of the road work. McDowell endorsed the stronger legislation as necessary "for the interests are wide spreading and important." A new law that made it a felony to take corn from the stalk with the intent

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The Shaping of Southern Politics, 104. In a *Toiler* editorial on 19 March 1890, McDowell defended the poll tax as consistent with the state constitution. Moreover, he argued "The poll tax goes into the public school fund to educate the children of the state. The rich can send their children to private schools and colleges and pay the tuition-the poor cannot. Therefore, this law is in the interest of more public school money to educate the poor. It is said there are 90,000 voters in Tennessee who never pay their poll tax or one cent in any way to keep up the public schools. The principles of our order are 'equality before the law,' and this law certainly places all on an equality. We are opposed to the principle of restricting the right of suffrage and wish there was some other means of forcing every man to pay his poll tax but the constitution of our state says it shall be done this way, and as a law-abiding citizen we feel it is our duty to abide by and uphold the organic law of the state until the constitution is changed." Despite predictions of an enlarged school fund, poll tax revenues remained small, and the state's schools continued to be underfunded.

25 *Toiler*, 3 April 1889.

of depriving the owner of the use of it was one that "farmers have been demanding .... for years to protect them from ruinous petty thieving." McDowell thought "the law scarcely goes far enough." The legislature passed laws to protect farmers against fraud in sampling, weighing, and selling tobacco; regulated livestock insurance companies; acted to prevent the spread of hog and chicken cholera; regulated fishing and prevented the use of seine and net in running steams from March 15 to June 1; suppressed unlawful combinations in restraint of trade; and provided for a three-wire fence law, which McDowell characterized as "an act of justice to those portions of the state where there is great scarcity of timber." The editor lamented the failure of the bill against cotton scalage. He called the scaling of cotton "a system of robbery" that involves "but little loss ... to the individual, yet ... a heavy one in the aggregate to the cotton producers of the state." He noted that only a few counties produced cotton and implied that the defeat of the bill rested with counties that did not grow the fiber. McDowell called such action against the cotton producers "a mistake which the next legislature will most surely correct." The editor made no mention of the disfranchising legislation in his summation of 1889 legislative action. Although none of these issues fit the list of demands issued by the National Wheel and Alliance, their importance to Tennessee famers cannot be ignored, and McDowell's presentation of the new laws as a demonstration of the effectiveness of the Wheel and Alliance legislators suggests that the national agenda served as a framework for broadly voicing agrarian demands, but that the resolution of local agricultural problems held more meaning for the rank and file members. [26]

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26 *Toiler*, 3 April, 10 April, and 17 April 1889.

Hart viewed the activities of the 1889 Alliance legislators as lackluster, charging that "they did not try to implement an Alliance program because they had none and because their performance was less important to most of their constituents than was the mere fact of their election." While the legislation McDowell outlined seems mundane in comparison to the speeches of Tom Watson, Mary Lease, and "Sockless" Jerry Simpson, it would be a mistake to dismiss them as unimportant to farmers, who demanded the protection offered through the legislation. Under the blanket list of national demands, the Alliance remained a local organization, defined by local needs, and more firmly rooted in long-sought small victories than the much-publicized rallies and inflammatory speeches implied. It existed to protect the "mundane" interests of agriculture. In 1889, Tennessee farmers achieved some gains and anticipated more. In the context of their belief that previous lawyer-dominated legislatures failed to address their needs, they found the activities of the 1889 legislature encouraging. [27]

In 1890, four contenders entered the contest for the gubernatorial nomination of the Democratic party: Jere Baxter, Josiah Patterson, John M. Taylor, and John P. Buchanan. W. L. Clapp, J. D. C. Atkins, and Benton McMillan received support early in the campaign, but quickly dropped out of contention. Davidson County capitalist and raiser of thorough-bred race horses, Jere Baxter received the support of the New South wing of the Democratic party. Former president of the Memphis and Charleston Railroad, Baxter had little in common with the one-gallused, wool-hat boys, but he attempted to win their votes by joining the Davidson County Alliance, an act that gained him little beyond joking references to "Farmer Jere." The best funded

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27 Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 135.

of the candidates, Baxter campaigned heavily in East Tennessee and reportedly bought a considerable amount of advertising for his Maplewood estate in county newspapers, which Alliance leaders regarded as an attempt to "buy off" rural editors and undermine editorial support for Buchanan. McDowell joked that Baxter would "spend a pile of money advertising his Shetland ponies and then get badly beaten." [28]

The Bourbon wing of the party supported Josiah Patterson, a Memphis attorney. An Alabama native, Patterson boasted a Confederate military career few could match. He had served under Nathan Bedford Forrest and, at age twenty-five, he was promoted to full colonel and placed in command of the Fifth Alabama cavalry regiment. Patterson moved to Memphis in 1872 and entered politics in 1882 as chairman of the Democratic state convention. As he lined up delegates for the gubernatorial convention scheduled for July 1890, Patterson campaigned extensively among the farming communities. With the defeat of the agrarian candidate Reuben F. Kolb for the Alabama gubernatorial nomination, the Knoxville *Journal* predicted "Patterson will pay no further attention to the farmers." The *Journal* chided Patterson for what the editor viewed as the candidate's pretense at agrarianism, "when he couldn't have told to save his soul whether turnips or potatoes grew on trees." Although the Memphis *Avalanche* rushed to defend the candidate with stories of his early life on the farm, he remained an "Upper-Case" Democrat. If Patterson had little in common with the farmers, he deplored the New South ideology and "preached . . . the good old doctrines of Democracy" and the rule of the white man's party.

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28 Nashville *Herald*, 1 January 1890; *Toiler*, 15 January, 26 March, and 11 June 1890; Nashville *Banner*, 17 January 1890; W. S. Speer, *Sketches of Prominent Tennesseans: Containing Biographies and Records of Many of the Families Who Have Attained Prominence in Tennessee* (Nashville: Albert B. Tavel, 1888), 570-572; Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 136; Sharp, "The Farmers' Alliance and Tennessee Politics," 43-44.

Supporters affectionately called Patterson "Uncle Josiah," and "the big-brained old champion of Bourbon Democracy." While many Democrats hailed Patterson's support of the tried-and-true party positions of low tariff and anti-paternalism, others found his views dated. [29]

John M. Taylor, Henderson County attorney and former congressman from the Eighth District, drew some support away from Buchanan's campaign among the farmers of West Tennessee. Taylor went on record as an opponent of the "visionary and impractical schemes" of the Alliance, but his campaign never materialized significantly beyond his old district. [30]

John P. Buchanan, president of the Tennessee Farmers' and Laborers' Union, owned a livestock farm in Rutherford County, and had served as that county's representative in the 1887 and 1889 General Assembly. A Confederate veteran, Buchanan entered the army late in the war, at age sixteen. After the war, he returned to his Williamson County home to find it in ruins. His supporters frequently referred to his determination and his success in rebuilding his life. The *Toiler* recommended Buchanan as a "self-made man," "a prosperous farmer and stock raiser," and a "splendid parliamentarian." Buchanan's brief political career had not elevated him to the councils of power but had gained him a reputation as a hard worker on behalf of agricultural interests. Alliance men looked upon Buchanan as a candidate of the

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29 Patterson commanded the support of two powerful state newspapers, Nashville *American* and *Memphis Scimitar*. Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 136-137; Sharp, "The Farmers; Alliance and Tennessee Politics," 45; Speer, *Sketches*, 266-268; Memphis *Avalanche*, 5 June 1890.

30 Nashville, *American* 16 July 1890; Sharp, "The Farmers' Alliance and Tennessee Politics, 51; Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 144.

people, one who, in time-honored fashion, accepted the burdens of the gubernatorial race at the insistence of the state's farmers and laborers. [31]

Political observers discounted Buchanan's race and focused their attention on the campaigns of the two most likely candidates, Patterson and Baxter. As counties held their nominating conventions and primaries throughout the spring, however, newspaper editors and political hacks adopted a more worried tone. In Lauderdale County, a correspondent to the Memphis *Avalanche* reported that the Democratic convention instructed as a unit for Buchanan, after the farmers captured the proceedings in a lightning strike that placed "one of their own in the chair," as soon as the meeting was called to order. The writer accused the farmers of holding a morning meeting in which "they secretly planned the schemes by which they would 'hoodoo' the afternoon Democratic convention." Following their success, the "Alliance men gaily cantered out to the rural precincts, laughing in their sleeves over the inglorious manner in which they had plotted in secret conclave against the untrammeled action of the Democratic party." In Madison County, the Buchanan forces initially "captured the caucus and effected a permanent organization," although observers expected a more heated battle, "after the arrival of the [John] Taylor reinforcements," who were expected to hurry from Jackson in response to the telegraphed pleas of their friends. By the eve of the state convention, editors merely hoped for the best. The editor of the *Avalanche* conceded that "with his strength [Buchanan] ought to be able to name the [gubernatorial] candidate," but that represented the extent of the Alliance strength. "There are innumerable and indisputable evidences," the editor wrote, "that his forces are not well organized, that they lack generalship, and that after having cast a few

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[31] Sharp, "The Farmers' Alliance and Tennessee Politics, 47-48; Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 138; *Toiler*, 26 March, 7 May 1890; *American*, 18 July 1890; *Banner*, 18 July 1890.

ballots for him in an unavailing effort to secure his nomination it [the organized political effort] will go to pieces." [32]

The West Tennessee editor, like many others, misread the political signs. In every section of the state, the groundwork laid by the Wheel and Alliance in previous elections produced a groundswell of support for Buchanan. Urban and county newspapers reported local conventions that were "wild and woolly, and full of fleas" as farmers turned out in unprecedented numbers and refused to be bullied by "county rings" and "wire-pullers." Buchanan, McDowell, and State Lecturer R. W. Tucker crisscrossed the state on behalf of the Buchanan campaign. As the established political interests recognized the threat and focused their opposition on the agrarian campaign, McDowell advised farmers to be on their guard against wily politicians and their deceptive tactics. He suggested that farmer-controlled conventions instruct their delegates by adopting resolutions in support of Buchanan "as long as his name is before the convention." [33]

In East Tennessee, the Alliance Democrats rallied in support of Buchanan to the surprise and chagrin of the local political elites. When the Knox County Democratic Convention met at Staub's Theater on June 21, Buchanan forces joined with the Baxter men to topple Patterson's expected control of the convention and elected the Knox County Alliance President James V. Fulkerson as temporary chairman. Pandemonium reigned throughout the convention. The thirty-nine

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32 *Avalanche*, 25 June and 15 July 1890.

33 *Toiler*, 19 March and 16 April 1890.

uninstructed delegates divided between Buchanan and Baxter, with twenty-five votes for Buchanan and fourteen for Baxter. [34]

In Sullivan County, the Buchanan forces controlled the county convention and instructed for the State Alliance president. Unable to maintain control, Patterson and Baxter supporters bolted the convention and instructed a separate list of delegates for Baxter. These "simon-pure" Democrats charged that the Buchanan followers took control after allowing Alliance Republicans to vote for their candidate. Farmers presented a different view of the situation. A Sullivan County woman's report to the *Toiler* hailed the farmers for their united stand against the "bosses and politicians." She believed it had been "a sad day for 'the bosses,' their sheep had strayed off into the alliance, gone through a training school and come out with their eyes wide open as free men capable to think and act for themselves." [35]

Seventeen Middle Tennessee counties instructed for Buchanan and provided 250 of his 759 votes on the first convention ballot. As the county selection of delegates got underway, a Smith County farmer accurately predicted that county's support for Buchanan. "We will give Hon. J. P. Buchanan 90% of our vote," he wrote in a letter to the *Toiler*. He identified himself as a Democrat, but noted "our Republican brethren say hurrah for Buchanan." A Robertson County farmer confessed, "I have been a Republican and a staunch Prohibitionist, but I have laid them all by until the great question which is of much more importance is settled." He urged all members of the Alliance to set aside their squabbles, warning "if we divide on a man when we come to vote, you may rest assured that we will never get men in office

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34 *Toiler*, 25 June 1890; Knoxville *Tribune*, 22 June 1890; Sharp, "The Farmers' Alliance and Tennessee Politics," 49-50.

35 *Toiler*, 23 June 1890.

who will benefit the poor farmer." He encouraged his Alliance brothers to remember that they "have a power to fight with," but warned them "if we don't pull together we might as well quit." [36]

Hart conducted an economic and geographic survey of Buchanan districts in four representative Middle Tennessee county primaries and concluded that strict economic differences played no role in Alliance support. In Giles, Bedford, Maury, and Robertson counties, Buchanan supporters tended to live farther away from the county seat on less productive, but not necessarily poor land. The Alliance message appealed to men shut out of the political process, who otherwise, by virtue of land ownership and potential economic growth, expected to exert a more important influence over county party politics. Hart interpreted this data in the context of status anxiety, but an equally compelling interpretation recognizes the legitimate concerns of farmers whose location and family backgrounds left them without adequate representation in an era when state and national legislators rewrote economic law. [37]

In West Tennessee, Alliance men fought a particularly difficult battle against fraud and intimidation. The *Toiler* charged that Patterson loyalists stuffed the ballot box in the Memphis Democratic primary and offered as proof the voting tallies in the general election conducted under the provisions of the new Dortch law, where partisans "could not so easily commit such frauds without risking a term in the penitentiary." In the general election, Patterson's vote reportedly "dwindled down to a little over half " of that in the primary election. McDowell warned the farmers of Tipton County that the "Honorable P. T. Glass and a few other citizens of Ripley are

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36 *Toiler*, 2 April 1890; *American*, 16 July 1890.

37 Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 139-141; *American*, 16 July 1890.

trying to boost Col. Josiah Patterson for governor." But, he predicted, "The country boys are not directed and bossed by the small town leaders now. They think for themselves, and will be on hand when the county convention meets." In Hardeman County, the eleventh district supporters of Buchanan and Patterson carried on a war of words in the *Bolivar Bulletin* over the outcome of the district convention held on May 31. Patterson men claimed the convention was held without proper notice, while Buchanan's allies defended their instruction for the Alliance president. Although charges and countercharges filled the columns of the local newspaper, Hardeman County cast all nineteen votes for Buchanan on the first ballot of the state convention. Finally, in Obion County, a hotbed of Alliance activity, the county organization worried that a local dispute over the location of the county seat would overshadow the gubernatorial campaign and alienate a portion of the farm vote. State Lecturer R. W. Tucker conducted a "private discussion" with members of the County Alliance, who resolved not to "allow local matters to swerve us in questions of general importance." [38]

As Buchanan's support increased, Democratic politicians and newspaper editors stepped up their attacks on the Alliance and reassured themselves that the farmer-delegates would abandon their candidate if the convention lasted more than a few days. The best hope for defeating Buchanan rested on prolonging the deliberations until farmers became bored or felt compelled to return to their neglected crops. In the 1890 election, however, the farmers came to stay.

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38 *Toiler*, 19 February, 26 March, and 23 April 1890; *Bolivar Bulletin*, 6 June, 13 June, and 20 June 1890; *American*, 16 July 1890; Betty B. Wood and Rebel C. Forrester, eds. *"I Had a Real Good Time," The Making of a Country Editor: The Recollections of James M. Brice of the News-Banner* (Union City: H. A. Lanzer, 1984), 151.

When the convention opened in Nashville on July 15, the editor of the Nashville *American* advised the delegates to act in the best interests of Democracy and not sacrifice the party to the ambitions of one man. He urged the delegates to conduct their business quickly and not "tie up the convention until Christmas," and reminded them that "the woods are full of small potatoes who regard themselves as some pumpkins." He concluded with the assurance that "there are too many good men to nominate a bad one, too many good Democrats to nominate a mugwump." [39]

Buchanan led the balloting from the beginning, with more than twice the number of votes of his nearest competitor, Josiah Patterson. Nevertheless, he failed to command enough votes to obtain the nomination under the two-thirds rule that had been in effect in the Democratic party since 1832. Contrary to expectations, the farmers held on for four days and twenty-six ballots. As the balloting dragged on, pressure increased to throw out the two-thirds rule, but to no avail. John M. Taylor withdrew on the twenty-fourth ballot, with Baxter and Patterson capitulating on the twenty-sixth. The *American* editor rushed to support the Buchanan nomination and unify the Democratic party. Buchanan "has received the organized support of the farmers of the state," he wrote. "And this has carried him to victory." Casting aside his earlier concerns about the effect of Alliance ideology on the candidate, the editor continued, "he is bound by no narrow ideas or prejudices, and has no policy in view in connection with his policy as Governor of Tennessee which will not be broad enough to encourage the whole people and every interest." For the first time, Buchanan was embraced as an "Upper-Case Democrat." Democratic leaders alternated between considerations for changing convention rules to prevent future agrarian uprisings and

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39 *American*, 15 July 1890.

reassurances that "the result of the Convention was simply to make a sound Platform & to concede to the farmers vote the candidate." Moreover, Democrats suggested that "the American can perfectly defend . . . Buchanan on a sound Platform in Tennessee and can still fight the encroachments of our organization." Privately, "Upper-Case" Democrats assessed the Alliance victory as less than complete. The failure to dictate an Alliance platform or control the State Executive Committee left Tennessee Democrats in a better position than their counterparts in Georgia and South Carolina. [40]

Although the *American* rushed to support Buchanan's candidacy, not every Democratic newspaper proved to be so enthusiastic. The Nashville *Banner* in particular continued to offer strong opposition. Other newspapers followed the campaign with a distinct lack of enthusiasm. Although Hart maintains he could find no statistical evidence of class differences between Alliance Democrats and the so-called "Upper-Case" Democrats, the antagonism generated by the presumption of ordinary farmers in their determination to engage in politics in the defense of their interests would suggest an aextra-economic perception of class. The usual political activists clearly did not accept the "hayseeds" as their equals, and their support for Buchanan represented little more than an unwillingness to allow a Republican victory. Party support was offered grudgingly, and the Alliance knew it. If the Alliance was to continue to exert its influence within the Democratic party, it would have to demonstrate its adherence to the party platform.

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[40] *American*, 15-19 July 1890. For examples of the calls for changes in convention rules, see the Chattanooga *Times*, 16-19 July 1890. Albert L. McNeal provided the assessment of Alliance damage to the Democratic party. Albert L. McNeal to Edward W. Carmack, 23 July 1890 in "Edward Ward Carmack Papers," Box 6, Folder 4, TSLA, Nashville.

The excitement of the gubernatorial convention barely died down before the more volatile congressional conventions got underway, as Democrats reconvened in August and September to nominate candidates for national office. Tennessee farmers clearly understood that the limited power of the states to control trusts and monopolies and regulate railroads made congressional elections more important than state campaigns. A. P. Smith of Lincoln County earlier wrote to the *Toiler* to offer his support for Buchanan's candidacy, but noted, "a governor will not benefit us, as a Congressman would, and the honorable record which Buchanan has made as an indefatigable worker in the Legislature of Tennessee points him out fair and square as the man for the place in Washington." County Alliances passed resolutions in favor of term limitations, popular election of U.S. Senators, and the abolition of the electoral college---all with an eye toward popular control over national office. Congressional candidates found themselves answering questions about their positions on Alliance demands, especially the subtreasury plan. [41]

The most spectacular conventions occurred in the Seventh and Tenth districts, where delegates cast hundreds of ballots before deciding on congressional candidates. The seventh district encompassed the counties of Dickson, Giles, Hickman, Lawrence, Lewis, Maury, Wayne, and Williamson in Middle Tennessee. W. C. Whitthorne stood for reelection after serving seven congressional terms (1871-1883 and 1889-1891). Whitthorne's political service dated to the eve of the Civil War, when he stumped the state for Breckinridge's presidential ticket. In 1861, as Speaker of the House, he signed the document that allied the state with the Confederacy in an "offensive and defensive league." During the war, Whitthorne served under Governor Isham G.

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41 *Toiler*, 12 February 1890.

Harris as Adjutant General of Tennessee. In 1890, he faced competition for the Democratic nomination from L. E. Polk, a Maury County Alliance man, and N. N. Cox, a Williamson County lawyer. Polk withdrew before the convention, leaving the field to Whitthorne and Cox. [42]

The convention deadlocked immediately, with Cox in the lead but lacking the necessary two-thirds for nomination. For three days, delegates cast their ballots with no appreciable change. The Cox forces begged for a suspension of the rules to allow the candidate to be nominated by majority vote, but Whitthorne supporters refused to concede the field. Whitthorne's support came from Giles and Maury counties. The Nashville *Banner* charged that Williamson County led the other counties in a "fight for recognition." The Cox forces charged that "Giles and Maury Counties have secured the Congressmen for forty years," and they demanded change. After more than 1500 ballots, the convention agreed to adjourn and reconvene at Franklin on October 3. [43]

The second convention ended without a nomination. The counties selected new delegates, who met in Franklin again on October 24. This time Cox supporters succeeded in suspending the two-thirds rule (over the protests of Edward W. Carmack, the editor of the Nashville *American* and chairman of Whitthorne's Maury County delegation). The convention nominated Cox, but Whitthorne supporters refused to make the nomination unanimous. Although the Alliance took no overt part in the selection of the Seventh District candidate, the similarity between the distribution of support for Whitthorne and Cox and the identification of the Buchanan forces with political outsiders raises interesting issues. As Sharp suggests, the

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42 Miller, *Official and Political Manual of the State of Tennessee*, 106-108, 174-179; Sharp, "The Farmers' Alliance and Tennessee Politics," 80; *Banner*, 10 September 1890.

43 *Banner*, 10-13 September 1890; Sharp, "The Farmers' Alliance and Tennessee Politics," 82.

disruption caused by the Alliance political activities may have opened the doors for other Democrats, who generally received nothing more for their party support than the exercise of their franchise. The old warhorses of the party had lost touch with the emerging issues, not only among Alliance men, but within the party generally. [44]

The congressional nomination in the Tenth District demonstrated the Alliance strength and "stickability" in a dramatic way. Once again the counties long relegated to the periphery of power demonstrated their displeasure with politics as usual and determined to support their candidate as long as necessary to win the nomination. In August, Alliances in Tipton, Fayette, and Hardeman counties marshaled their forces in support of T. K. Riddick, a Fayette County lawyer, for the Tenth District congressional nomination. Although Riddick's profession precluded his membership in the Alliance, he, like congressmen from the Fifth, Sixth, Eighth, and Ninth districts, indicated his friendliness to Alliance demands. When rural Shelby County joined the insurgents, the *Banner* editor worried that this action, following so closely on the heels of the Buchanan nomination, signaled the Alliance take-over of the Democratic party. [45]

Memphis Bourbons dominated the county and, in spite of agrarian demands, controlled the county convention to nominate J. S. Galloway, a Memphis judge. All 120 Shelby County delegates were instructed for Galloway, giving him a majority of the convention votes.

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[44] *Banner*, 24-25 October 1890; *American*, 24-25 and 31 October 1890; Sharpe, "The Farmers' Alliance and Tennessee Politics," 82-83. Although Cox did not have an Alliance recommendation, Whitthorne's men believed he won the nomination because of the "Damn Farmers' Alliance." Sharp suggested that the Alliance kept its support quiet to avoid further alienation of Bourbon Democrats.

[45] *Toiler*, 23 July and 12 August 1890; *Banner*, 5 August 1890. James D. Richardson, Joseph E. Washington, Benjamin A. Enloe, and Rice A. Pierce served in the Fifth, Sixth, Eighth, and Ninth districts respectively.

When the convention met on September 10, it deadlocked immediately. After nearly 5,000 votes, neither candidate controlled the necessary two-thirds vote to gain the nomination. In ballot after ballot, Galloway received the 120 Shelby County votes and Riddick got the 82 votes of the other three counties. In desperation, the convention adjourned and reconvened on September 15, to no avail. The same deadlock continued. In a third meeting, on September 29, after a period of similarly deadlocked balloting, the two candidates agreed to withdraw. Now the Bourbon Democrats took control of the convention, and Memphis favorite son Josiah Patterson received the nomination. In her study of Tenth District politics, Marilyn J. Hutton described Patterson as "a conservative Bourbon Democrat [who] professed no particular love for the New South." Patterson believed the Old South needed no apologies, and that the New South was but the child of the Old. Such was his antagonism for the New South, that Patterson refused to support the gubernatorial race of Robert L. Taylor in 1888. Patterson outlined the "essence" of the Democratic party: "the liberty of the citizen, the liberty of the state, and the liberty of commerce" plus "the upbuilding of the Southern States, their proper relations to the Federal Union and their proper influence in the administration of its affairs." Although Patterson often presented himself as a son of the soil, he was no friend of the Alliance. [46]

Of the eight remaining Congressmen, the Alliance counted four as friendly and four as either unfriendly or lost to the Republicans. The four friendly Congressmen were James D. Richardson, Fifth District; Joseph E. Washington, Sixth District; Benjamin A. Enloe, Eighth District; and Rice A. Pierce, Ninth District. Only one of

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46 *American*, 26 September-1 October 1890. Marilyn J. Hutton, "The Election of 1896 in the Tenth Congressional District of Tennessee," (PhD diss., Memphis State University, 1976), 33-43; Memphis *Evening Scimitar*, 1 February 1896.

the four, Joseph E. Washington was a member (or eligible for membership) in the Alliance, and only Pierce supported the subtreasury scheme. Nevertheless, each advanced and protected agricultural interests to the satisfaction of most Alliance voters.

James Richardson, from Murfressboro in Rutherford County, had served in the U.S. House since 1885, after single terms in the Tennessee House and Senate in the 1870s. During the Civil War, Richardson entered the 45th Tennessee Infantry as a private and rose to the rank of 1st lieutenant. In addition to his political interests, Richardson served as director of the Safety Deposit Trust and Savings Bank in Nashville, where the Wheel and Alliance State Agency kept its funds. Richardson chaired the state Democratic gubernatorial convention in July, and his brother, John Richardson, placed Buchanan's name in nomination for governor. In 1889, Richardson co-sponsored the Alliance bill to require an enumeration of mortgage indebtedness by the Eleventh U.S. Census in 1890. Clearly, Alliance voters could support Richardson with few qualms, despite his reluctance to embrace the subtreasury measure. [47]

Joseph E. Washington, of the Sixth District, was born in 1851, too late to serve in the Confederate army. He graduated from Georgetown College in Washington, D.C., and Vanderbilt Law School. Washington was elected to the 50th Congress in 1887, and was running for his third term. Washington had never practiced law, but returned to "Wessyngton," the family's 13,000-acre plantation in Robertson County, where tenant farmers produced tobacco. Washington served as director of the Nashville, Chattanooga, and St. Louis Railway and of the Nashville and Decatur

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47 Robert M. McBride and Dan M. Robison, *Biographical Directory of the Tennessee General Assembly* Volume II, 1861-1901 (Nashville: Tennessee State Library and Archives and Tennessee Historical Commission, 1979): 767-768; *American*, 16 July 1890; *Toiler*, 18 July 1888; *Congressional Record*, 1889, XX, 254.

Railroad. A member of the Farmers' Alliance, Washington ducked the question of support for the subtreasury when confronted by a reporter from the Nashville *American*, but it was generally believed that he would not back the scheme. Washington introduced a bill in the 51st Congress to abolish the internal revenue tax on the manufacture and sale of tobacco by farmers. He not only supported Richardson's census measure, but the *Toiler* credited him with the favorable committee report for the bill and with its subsequent enactment into law. Though clearly representing his own interests and those of other large planters, Washington's support of agrarian measures and his commitment to free silver enhanced his credibility among Alliance members. [48]

Benjamin A. Enloe, Eighth District congressman, was born in Carroll County in 1848 and attended Bethel College before graduating with a degree in law from Cumberland University. Throughout his political career, Enloe held office during critical moments in Tennessee history: he held office during the "redemption" of Tennessee state government in 1869 and 1870; in 1878, Governor Albert Marks appointed him to a commission to negotiate the settlement of the state debt; and he served in Congress during the Alliance and Populist era. From 1874 until 1886, Enloe edited the influential Jackson (Tennessee) *Tribune and Sun.* Enloe's politics reflected those of his constituents in the Eighth District, shifting between the Bourbon stance against the so-called "Force Bill" and the McKinley Act, and issues more closely identified with the Alliance demands. In 1889, he and Richardson introduced the farm

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48 McBride and Robison, *Biographical Directory of the Tennessee General Assembly*, Volume II, 956-957; *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774-1989*, Bicentennial Edition (Washington, D.C.:U. S. Government Printing Office, 1989), 2013; *Toiler,* 26 February and 30 April 1890; *American*, 3 July 1890; Carroll Van West, *Tennessee's Historic Landscapes: A Traveler's Guide* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 326.

mortgage bill, and he joined with Washington in supporting the anti-tax bill for tobacco farmers. Enloe introduced a joint resolution to add an anti-trust, anti-agricultural gambling amendment to the constitution, and also introduced a bill for the popular election of U.S. Senators. Although he favored free coinage of silver, Enloe opposed the subtreasury, government ownership of railroads, and abolition of national banks. Once again, in Enloe, farmers knew they had support for some measures but faced opposition on more radical demands. [49]

Benton McMillan, Fourth District congressman, had been in the U.S. House for six consecutive terms, since 1878. As the recognized leader of the Tennessee congressional delegation, McMillan's position seemed unassailable. McMillan supported the farm census bill with the rest of his colleagues and advocated free silver, but beyond that offered no encouragement to the Alliance movement. Except for White, Smith, and parts of Putnam counties, the Fourth District attracted few Alliance members, making a challenge to McMillan virtually impossible. [50]

Republicans dominated the three congressional districts of East Tennessee; only Third District Congressman H. Clay Evans faced a serious fight. Evans faced Henry C. Snodgrass of Sparta, whose opposition to all Alliance programs was well known. As one historian noted, "Republican Alliance men were better Republicans than Alliancemen, and hesitated to endorse these demands which were mostly repudiations of Republican policies." In addition, the economy of East Tennessee

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[49] McBride and Robison, *Biographical Directory of the Tennessee General Assembly*, Volume II, 271-271; *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, 968; *Toiler*, 29 January, 7 May and 21 May 1890.

[50] *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, 583-584; Sharp, "The Farmers' Alliance and Tennessee Politics," 88-89; Jeanette Keith, *County People in the New South: Tennessee's Upper Cumberland* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 12-25.

moved toward industrialization and resource extraction, and away from a strong dependency on agriculture. While the Farmers' Alliance claimed union with the Knights of Labor, the tenuous ties between the two groups had not yet translated into a political commitment in Tennessee. Farmers in the eastern section also found reasons to quarrel with their Middle and West Tennessee brothers. The subtreasury offered little relief to the hog producers of the mountainous regions. But more importantly, their support of the Conger Lard Bill threatened the budding cotton-seed-oil lard compound industry important to cotton farmers in the west. Finally, the East Tennessee Alliance movement had only begun to put down roots; it seemed unlikely that the members were ready to support a political battle with the Houk-Evans-Taylor Republicans. [51]

The most important congressman to the Alliance was Rice A. Pierce of the Ninth District. Pierce, like Buchanan and McDowell, joined the Confederate army while still in his teens. He began law practice in Union City in 1869, and served his first congressional term in the 48th Congress. In the summer of 1890, Pierce outlined his views to a reporter from the *American*. "The passage of a law giving us free coinage of silver," he said," would give the necessary relief now so urgently called for by the depressed agricultural interests of the country." If Congress failed to pass a free coinage act, Pierce was "favorably inclined toward what is known as the sub-treasury bill," though he candidly voiced his doubts that either free coinage or the sub-treasury could pass the House. But Pierce objected to any subtreasury scheme that did not place the appointment of warehouse managers in the hands of the voters. In addition to his support for the subtreasury, Pierce voted for the farm mortgage

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51 *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, 987; Sharp, The Farmers' Alliance and Tennessee Politics," 90-96; Sigafoos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street*, 73, 143.

(census) bill and introduced measures providing for the equalization of taxes, a graduated income tax, and anti-trust measures. Although his Democratic opponent, Frank P. Bond, accused Pierce of pledging his support of the subtreasury only to gain the farm vote, Pierce became the only Tennessee Congressman to run as an Independent (Populist) in the 1892 election. [52]

Campaigning got underway in September, when Buchanan made his opening speech at Franklin. Throughout the fall, most Democratic newspapers gave tepid support to the party's candidate, or remained silent; a few sniped from the sidelines. But the editor of the Nashville *Banner* launched a full-scale crusade against the Alliance leader, foreshadowing the Bourbon attack that followed the November election. From the opening speech, which the *Banner* labeled as "remarkable . . . for its brevity...[and] its lack of anything like original suggestions or vigorous discussion," the criticisms never stopped. In the editor's view, it appeared to be "a mere gathering up of trite and stereotyped platitudes...the work of one who has but a smattering of politics...[and] no proper conception of the fundamental principles involved in the questions discussed." [53]

Throughout the campaign, the editor referred to the Alliance as the "fourth party," placing the farmers' political prospects behind those of the Prohibition party's candidate D. C. Kelley and implying both the future political intentions and the insignificance of Alliance schemes. Buchanan made clear his determination to run as a Democrat on the Democratic platform, but the *Banner* constantly berated him for not discussing the subtreasury plan and clarifying his views on the scheme. A barrage of

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52 *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, 1647; *American* 3 July 1890; *Toiler*, 21 May, 25 June, 2 July, and 13 August 1890.

53 *Banner*, 3 September 1890.

stories hinted at "dark lantern" activities in the secret Alliance meetings and compared Alliance supporters to the Know-Nothings of the 1850s. Both Democrats and Republicans became even more alarmed when the Alliance in Republican Grainger County, followed by the Republican Hancock County Alliance, endorsed Buchanan for governor.

Fears of party collapses and realignments haunted political leaders. The *Banner* editor outlined what he perceived at the significance of the 1890 election, saying that it represented an experiment for the National Alliance, an opportunity to evaluate the "Kansas Plan" and the "Tennessee Plan." According to the editor, the Kansas plan called for the establishment of a third party, while the Tennessee plan aimed at control of the Democratic Party. "If the Tennessee plan works well," the editor predicted, "the Alliance all over the country will be rejoiced, and Brother McDowell will be praised as one the greatest political managers of the secret political order." Although the editor presented a more conspiratorial view of Alliance aims than the facts can support, he correctly stated McDowell's intention to keep the farmers inside the Democratic party, and his perception of the Alliance activities as part of a "Tennessee Plan" gained increasing credibility. [54]

Alliance control of the Democratic party represented a more serious threat to the political and economic *staus quo* than third party formation. The histories of the Greenbackers and the Prohibitionists demonstrated the weaknesses of third party movements. If farmers captured the Democratic party, both the New South and the Bourbons had reason for concern. The editorial sniping of the *Banner* foreshadowed the Bourbon attack on the Alliance that soon commenced. First, the Bourbons

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54 Ibid., 4 September 1890.

focused on McDowell as the only Tennessee Alliance man capable of bringing about the takeover of the Democratic party. If McDowell could be discredited, Democratic leaders believed the Alliance political threat would collapse. Secondly, the attack pinpointed the subtreasury as the issue to divide Alliance support. Bourbons recognized (indeed the Tennessee Alliance made no secret of the fact) that many farmers, who initially supported the subtreasury, had reservations about the inclusion of land in addition to crops as collateral for low-interest loans. If Alliance Democrats could demand that candidates pledge their support for the plan, then Bourbon Democrats could use it as a wedge issue after discrediting the scheme. From the moment Buchanan captured the nomination, the battle commenced between Bourbons and the Alliance over control of the Democratic party.

The November election placed Buchanan in the governor's seat and fifty-four Alliance men in the Tennessee General Assembly. Just as importantly, in the national elections, the Democratic party rode a groundswell of public sentiment against the so-called "billion-dollar" Republican Congress to take control of the House and Senate. President Benjamin Harrison termed the election results a "disaster," and newspaper editors labeled it a "revolution." Democrats now ruled in New England, the Midwest, and the Plains, as well as their traditional stronghold in the South. So many powerful Republicans either lost their seats or retired, that power shifted once again to the southern congressmen, whose seniority placed them in the chairs of important committees. Some political observers worried that the Republican party faced collapse, much as the Whig party did in the 1850s. If the unthinkable occurred, the Alliance waited in the wings, ready to fill the power vacuum. [55]

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[55] R. Hal Williams, *Years of Decision*, 1-70. Following the election losses of 1892, Populists continued to believe "There can be but two political parties in this country. The Republican party is dead. The Democratic party will not do anything on the silver question, and by the time of the next

The moment portended both triumph and failure for Tennessee Democrats. They had recently banished Republicans to the eastern reaches of the state through disfranchisement of African Americans, and now they anticipated national political plums through committee assignments, with the possibility of controlling political patronage should they capture the White House in 1892. The Alliance represented the fly in the ointment. Alliance "stickability" in the summer and fall conventions caught Upper-Case Democrats off guard. Not only did the "hayseeds" and "clodhoppers" capture the governor's seat, but they increased their numbers in the General Assembly and forced congressional candidates to make some concessions to their demands in at least four of the ten districts. If they succeeded in portraying themselves as good Democrats, re-electing Buchanan in 1892, and adding to their numbers in the General Assembly, it was possible for the Alliance to name the next U.S. Senator, when William B. Bate's term ended in 1893. Bourbon Democrats could not let that happen.

Scholarly analysis of the 1891 General Assembly focuses on the failure of the Alliance legislators to enact the tenets of their national program. Indeed, the Alliance failure to introduce legislation favored by the national agrarian organizaiton or vote for railroad bills suggests that Bourbons correctly assessed them as incompetent office seekers. A shift in perspective from vote counts to political infighting changes this view.

Alliance legislators determined to operate within the framework of the Democratic platform. Much to the annoyance of the Bourbons, who wanted a show of radicalism, and to the mystification of historians, the Alliance men made virtually no efforts to enact "class legislation." As Hart's careful analysis shows, they generally

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election things will be ripe for the People's party." See interview with L. K. Taylor of the *Toiler* in *Avalanche,* 15 November 1892.

voted with the Democratic majority. In April 1891, Dr. J. E. Head of Rogana wrote to the *National Economist* to explain the "embarrassing predicament of Alliance legislators." "Any departure from the dictates of Democratic bosses," he wrote, "is regarded as treason to the party." Powerful Democrats constantly reminded Alliance men that "they owe their position to that party, and if they fail to carry out its behests, it is because they are under the control of an iron clad, oath bound, secret organization." Alliance legislators found themselves in a no-win situation. If they voted with the party, the press labeled them as weak greenhorns, unknowledgable in politics and government. If Alliance legislators voted against party-sponsored legislation, journalists denounced them as a dark lantern group. [56]

A review of the bill presented to the 1891 General Assembly also raises the possibility that anti-Alliance legislators introduced some bills as "bait" to trap agrarian rubes into support for radical and class legislation. Bourbon Democrats focused on three issues that emerged during the Alliance term of office: patronage, railroad and tax legislation, and the miner's war of 1891-1892. Buchanan's distribution of the few state patronage positions among his Alliance friends and supporters rankled non-agrarian Democrats. During her 1892 visit to the state, Mary Lease recognized how much the region's poverty enhanced the value of patronage positions. Commenting on the "great horde of office seekers," Lease attributed the "miserable scramble to obtain office" to the fact that there was "no other occupation under God's heaven that will pay the men or make them a respectable living." The loss of patronage, particularly for officeseekers in the winning party, produced as much bitterness as the presence of the "hayseed" governor in the seat normally reserved for men of wealth and power. [57]

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56 *The National Economist*, 11 April 1891.

57 *Toiler*, 26 October 1892.

Officeseekers besieged Buchanan with pleas for appointments. Some even included newspaper clippings or letters of endorsement to "prove" their longstanding commitment to agricultural interests. It was clear, however, that the governor had already determined his appointment list. Buchanan appointed Eth B. Wade of Murfreesboro, an old friend, secretary of the State Farmers' Alliance, and former clerk of the Tennessee House of Representatives to the position of superintendent of prisons. D. G. Godwin, an Alliance man from Arlington, became commissioner of agriculture. W. R. Garrett of Nashville, president of the National Education Association, received the appointment of state school superintendent. Newspapers gave the new governor high marks for these appointments, but his appointment of McDowell to the lucrative position of coal oil inspector supplied the Bourbons with ammunition for their charges of corruption and mismanagement of state offices. In Hart's view, the appointment brought McDowell "under the most severe public attack any Tennessee politician had suffered since the days of Governor W. G. Brownlow." [58]

The *Banner* initiated a campaign to lower coal oil fees and invited other presses to join in the demand. Soon city and county newspapers across the state took up the cry for lower fees, arguing, as the *Banner* did, that although once necessary, the position of coal oil inspector required no effort and had become a source of corruption

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58 Memphis *Appeal-Avalanche*, 21, 27 January 1891; *American*, 27 January 1891; *Banner*, 27 January 1891; Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 155-157. Not the least of the criticisms lodged against McDowell was the fact that he had campaigned unsuccessfully for the office of State Comptroller in 1889. In the view of critics, his actions demonstrated his constant search for office and therefore disqualified him for serious consideration. In 1889, McDowell explained to his readers that he sought the comptroller's position to supplement his meager earnings from the publication of the *Toiler*. The Alliance achieved an important change in the Agriculture Commission. The 1891 legislature separated the minerals and resources from the agricultural component and created a separate Labor Bureau, which was consolidated with the Bureau of Statistics and Mines. Farmers had finally achieved their own agency, an agrarian goal since the creation of the Bureau of Agriculture under Joseph Killebrew.

and a method of political pay-off. Though clearly directed at McDowell, the anti-coal oil inspection campaign promoted the most honorable issue: the elimination of an unnecessary and costly government position. The success of the campaign can be measured in the resolution passed by the Lauderdale County Alliance demanding that the legislature reduce the coal oil inspection fees "to an amount commensurate with the actual service performed." By focusing on the office awarded to McDowell, anti-Alliance editors sowed the first seeds of suspicion among rank-and-file Alliance leaders that, once in power, their leaders pursued the policy of "business as usual." [59]

In his inaugural address, Buchanan identified himself with the "Jeffersonian non-interference theory of government," and asserted that "progress [did] not mean a mushroom growth of 'booms' and wild speculations . . . but a substantial growth upon the solid basis of an increase in wealth, in taxable property, in resources and revenues." Although he assured the legislature that the farmers' problems could only find resolution through federal action, he recommended an increase in the state appropriation for the agricultural department and expanded support for agricultural institutes. He asked the legislature to provide longer terms for schools and expand the curriculum. He also recommended the extension of the Dortch Law to "all places where registration applies under existing law." Purification of the ballot box, according to the governor, "leaves not a shadow of an excuse for Federal supervision." [60]

The legislature passed an education bill establishing graded primary and secondary schools. Primary schools included the first through the fifth grades, and

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59 *Banner*, 1 January 1891; *American*, 11 February 1891; *Tribune*, 4 March 1891.

60 *House Journal*, 1891, 152; White, *Messages of the Governors*, Volume 7, 370.

secondary schools extended from the sixth to the eighth grades. Completion of the secondary level entitled students to advance to high school. Secondary education included instruction in the "Elementary Principles of Agriculture." The legislature passed a number of acts affecting higher education, including an increase in the appropriation for Peabody Normal School and an appropriation for teachers' institutes. A uniform textbook act, a consistent Alliance demand, failed. [61]

The legislature passed a Confederate pension bill, providing twenty-five dollars per month to disabled ex-Confederates, and smaller amounts to partially disabled veterans. They also appropriated $35,000 to construct and maintain a Confederate Soldiers' Home on The Hermitage property. In addition, the legislature passed an act for the scientific inspection of fertilizer, an act to protect against fraudulent livestock pedigrees, and an act "to prevent the running at large of swine, sheep, etc." The agricultural office of D. G. Godwin sponsored a Memphis convention in January 1892 to promote a decrease in southern cotton acreage. Two southern governors and four commissioners of agriculture attended the conference along with other state officials and private citizens. According to the report filed by the United States Department of Agriculture, four states--Virginia, North Carolina, Florida, and Louisiana--met or exceeded the proposed twenty percent decrease in cotton planting. Seven states reduced their cotton planting by at least fifteen percent. Although Alliance legislators enacted no radical reforms, they made modest gains and adhered to the Democratic platform on which they had campaigned. [62]

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61 *Acts of the State of Tennessee,* 1891, 295; *House Journal,* 1891, 175, 190.

62 *Acts of the State of Tennessee,* 1891, 150, 48, 360, and 322; *Biennial Report of the Bureau of Agriculture of Tennessee*, 1891-1892, 97-126; White, *Messages of the Governors*, Volume 7, 439-440.

Several issues raised questions about the intentions of the Alliance and, therefore, deserve closer attention. The National Alliance advocated the regulation of railroads, with the threat of government ownership should regulation fail. The dissatisfaction with discriminatory rates extended beyond the agricultural community and included merchants and industrialists, especially in the small towns and county seats. No doubt most Tennesseans expected a new flurry of anti-railroad legislation from the Alliance legislature. Buchanan made no mention of the need for railroad regulation in his messages to the Assembly, but legislators introduced forty-one railroad bills in the opening days of the 1891 General Assembly. The most important railroad bill originating in the House was submitted by John A. Tipton, a Covington attorney. Alliance representatives split their votes, 17-22, with the majority voting against the measure. When combined with the House Republican vote, the anti-regulation forces prevented the passage of the measure. [63]

In the Senate, Vanleer Polk, a Democrat from Maury County, and Flourney Rivers, a Democrat from Giles County, introduced railroad commission bills. Neither man was a member of the Alliance, indeed, both actively opposed the farmers' organization. When the Senate voted on Rivers' bill, nine Alliance men voted against it, making them the largest group opposing the measure. [64]

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63 *House Journal,* 1891, 295-296; Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 161. Many citizens still harbored anti-railroad sentiments, which were left over from the state debt controversy, where railroad bonds played an important role. The General Assembly created a railroad commission in 1883, but court rulings against the legislation coupled with the power of the railroad interests in Tennessee to render the commission useless, and it was abolished in 1885. Historically, the most controversial railroad bill to come before this General Assembly was the provision for Jim Crow cars, which passed.

64 *Senate Journal,* 1891, 34, 220, 366-367. Eight Democrats and one Republican supported the bill while twelve Democrats and seven Republicans opposed its passage.

Tennessee Alliance leaders looked to federal legislation to regulate railroad rates and promoted stronger interstate commerce legislation. Demands for state regulation in 1891 arose from a rate war between the Louisville and Nashville Railroad and the Nashville Street Railway Company. The high cost of coal carried by the L&N from East Tennessee mines drove up costs for the smaller line, raising charges of unfair competition and fears of forced consolidations. Moreover, the history of the Alliance opposition to the Nashville Street Railway Company's bond issue made it likely that the organization would look suspiciously on the company's support of regulation. The Alliance had nothing to gain in this battle between railroad interests; any regulatory agency emerging from these measures would not reflect the interests of farmers. Thus, for very different and equally pragmatic reasons, both Republicans and Alliance men opposed the Rivers bill. [65]

The General Assembly passed two transportation resolutions that more closely mirrored the demands of the Alliance. By 1891, resolutions no longer bound national representatives to specific views, but they offer scholars a window through which to view the state concerns for national legislation. In the first resolution, state legislators adopted the Jacksonian principle of "equal and exact justice to all and special favors to none" in their demand for a stronger Interstate Commerce Commission to "secure the most rigid, honest and just governmental control and supervision of the means of public transportation." Effective regulation depended on stronger federal laws, not on the creation of state commissions. [66]

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65 *American*, 20 January, 30 January, and 4 February 1891.

66 *Acts of the State of Tennessee* 1891, 340.

In the second resolution, the General Assembly dealt with federal support for alternative transportation systems. Noting that "the tendencies of the time are to combine all great railroads into great and powerful systems and trusts," the legislators pointed to the Cumberland and Tennessee rivers as transportation alternatives to accommodate the "rapid development of the agricultural and industrial enterprises, the opening and working of banks of coal and iron mines and other mineral interests, and the increasing population." The resolution called for federal support for the improvement of waterways and the construction of two canals to facilitate the transportation of farm products to the Mississippi River. The Tennessee Alliance consistently argued that federal regulation and increased competition provided the surest means of reducing railroad rates, ideas embodied by the two resolutions. [67]

The 1891 Revenue Bill united the business interests in wails of dismay over what they perceived as tax "gouging." The long-awaited bill, presented in the waning days of the legislative session, raised the privilege tax on corporations to exorbitant rates. The tax on flour mills soared from $25 to $1,000, while street car companies faced taxes of $5,000 as compared to the previous tax of $350. In addition, the new tax rates discriminated against larger towns and counties by apportioning taxes on the basis of population. Thus, cotton mills in counties of 50,000 inhabitants paid $2,000 in taxes, while mills in counties of 35,000 to 50,000 people owed $500 in taxes, mills in counties of 20,000-35,000 paid $400, and mills located in counties of fewer than 20,000 people paid only $100 in privilege taxes. Critics felt they understood the motives of the authors of the tax when they came to the provision that exempted agricultural associations from the privilege taxes assessed against other merchants.

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67 *Ibid.*, 412.

Clearly, the bill pitted agrarian interests against commercial and industrial concerns, despite Buchanan's earlier assurances that "state policy under my administration will welcome all capital and labor that come to identify themselves with the best interests of the state in the development of its resources." Punitive and indefensible, both Democrats and Republicans demanded changes. [68]

No one wanted to take credit for the bill, which emerged from the Joint Finance Committee. The *Banner* blamed state comptroller J. W. Allen for the measure, but a House member, while acknowledging that Allen had been consulted, refuted the accusation, asserting that the revenue bill was "entirely the result of the committee's action." Some representatives accused J. H. Akin and E. E. Tansail of writing the bill with the help of Senator Vanleer Polk, none of whom were associated with the Alliance. Although no one named any Alliance men as contributors to the measure, the *Appeal-Avalanche* called floor debate over the bill "one of the most determined fights ever made by a minority against an overwhelming majority," incorrectly asserting that "there are 70 farmers in the House, and they supported the committee in an attempt to get all possible out of the corporations." In a statement to the *Banner*, five Alliance legislators took the unusual action of disassociating the state organization from the bill, noting that only one Alliance member sat on the committee and "he rarely attended its meetings." [69]

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68 *Banner*, 19, 20, 21, and 30 March 1891; *Appeal-Avalanche*, 20, 21, and 24 March 1891; Knoxville *Tribune*, 21 March 1891; Knoxville *Journal*, 21 March 1891.

69 *Banner*, 20 March and 4 April 1891; *Appeal-Avalanche*, 21 March 1891. Tansail, a farmer from Weakley County but not associated with the Alliance, defended the tax rates by pointing to increasing expenditures. The measures he specifically mentioned as inflating the state budget had Alliance approval: the construction of the Confederate Home and the pension bill, and the proposed expenditures on repairs to the capitol.

The bill was sent back to committee and hastily rewritten, and by the end of the month the legislature was ready to adjourn, leaving editors and historians to sort through the events. A Memphis editor praised the second bill, noting that "in only one or two instances are the privileges higher, while in many they are reduced." One historian assessed the episode by blaming the messenger. "If not directly responsible for the 'guage [sic] revenue bill'," he wrote, "the Alliance was at least largely responsible for the anti-corporation agitation in Tennessee which had given birth to the high privilege taxes in that bill." The timing of the bill (at the very end of the legislative session), the haste with which a new bill was prepared (after weeks of work on the previous bill), the previous lack of radicalism on the part of Alliance legislators, and the complete capitulation of the measure in favor of reduced rates raise the possibility that the first bill represented a political maneuver, rather than a serious attempt to pass a revenue bill. Alliance foes successfully tied the organization to the measure, while offering no evidence to support their accusations. The Farmers' Alliance became the anti-industry, anti-commerce, anti-urban nay-sayers that many voters had always feared. When coupled with the events of the summer of 1891, the perception became fact. [70]

On July 14, 1891, the Coal Miners' War broke out in East Tennessee, pitting armed and impoverished miners against the governor and the most powerful corporate interests in the state. As the drama played out, the limitations of government and the contradictions between Alliance ideology and agrarian pragmatism became apparent.

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70 *Appeal-Avalanche*, 24 March 1891; Sharp, "The Farmers' Alliance and Tennessee Politics," 123.

In the end, neither the miners nor the Alliance benefited, while Tennessee Coal and Iron Company continued to operate its mines with convict labor. [71]

In the aftermath of the Civil War, state legislatures passed a number of bills criminalizing activities, such as trespass and vagrancy, in an effort to bring black labor under control. In addition to producing the desired effect, the legislation also increased the prison population well beyond the capacity of state prisons. One solution for revenue-poor states struggling to rebuild was the leasing of prisoners to industrialists, who became responsible for prisoner maintenance and paid the state a fee for each prisoner leased under contracts approved by the state legislatures. Tennessee negotiated its first contract in 1865; by 1891, the state was receiving $100,000 per year in convict leasing fees. Tennessee Coal and Iron Company became the largest lessor of convict labor, placing prisoners in the mines at Briceville, Coal Creek, Inman, and Tracy City. [72]

The practice of convict leasing generated criticism almost immediately. Reformers charged that the lease system operated as a mechanism for providing labor rather than rehabilitating criminal behavior. Periodically, tales of poor living

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[71] The most complete scholarly studies of the incident include Pete Daniel, "Tennessee Convict War," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 34 (1975): 273-292; A .C. Hutson, Jr., "The Coal Miners' Insurrections of 1891 in Anderson County, Tennessee," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 7 (1935): 103-121; A. C. Hutson, Jr., "The Overthrow of the Convict Lease System in Tennessee," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 8 (1936): 82-103; G. W. Ford, *Special Report of the Commissioner of Labor and the Inspector of Mines to His Excellency Governor John P. Buchanan,* Extra Session, August 31, 1891 (Nashville 1891) hereafter cited as *Special Report.* For a study of the convict labor in the antebellum period, see Charles P. White, "Early Experiments with Prison Labor in Tennessee," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 12 (1940): 45-69.

[72] Hutson, "The Coal Miner's Insurrection," 105; Daniel, "Tennessee Convict War," 274; *Special Report*, 73-74. Hutson estimated that "Tennessee's convict labor from 1870 to 1890 netted a total profit of $771,391.48." He further noted that "this sum lacked but approximately $176,000 of repaying the state for the expenses of its penal institutions from their beginning in 1829." Hutson, "The Coal Miners' Insurrections," 105.

conditions and inhumane work practices produced public demands for an end to convict leasing. The most persistent calls for reform came from the labor press, which charged that convict leasing constituted unfair competition with free labor. Both the Wheel and Alliance demanded an end to the practice of convict leasing, although in the Tennessee organizations the plight of labor played a minor role in public rhetoric. [73]

East Tennessee mining companies experienced the problems of labor unrest that beset the nation in the last decades of the nineteenth century and looked to convict labor as a solution. Miners protested the payment of wages in scrip, the use of "iron-clad" or "yellow dog" contracts, the employment of company weighers, and the use of convict labor. In April 1891, the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company closed its operation at Briceville for repairs. When the mine reopened two months later, the company demanded that miners sign iron-clad contracts; when miners refused, Tennessee Iron and Coal brought in convict labor. [74]

The first convicts arrived on July 5, and started construction on a stockade to house additional prisoners, who were expected to arrive in two weeks. Just after midnight on July 14, more than 300 miners advanced on the stockade, demanded the surrender of the prisoners, and marched them to Coal Creek (now Lake City), where they were placed on a train and sent to Knoxville. The miners informed the governor that they had "come together to defend [their] families from starvation, [their] property from depreciation, and [their] people from contamination from the hands of

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73 Rebecca Felton, "The Convict System of Georgia," *The Forum* (1887): 484-490; Hutson, "The Coal Miners Insurrection," 104.

74 *Special Report*, 8-16; *Tribune*, 5 August 1891; *Journal*, 16 and 18 July 1891.

convict labor." They asked the governor to intervene on their behalf to resolve the problem and prevent bloodshed. [75]

Responding to the concerns of the miners as well as to the fears of law enforcement officials, Buchanan ordered three companies of militia to the scene and set out for Knoxville, arriving on July 16. Caught in an impossible situation, Buchanan met with the miners and urged them to settle their disputes with the company through the courts rather than by armed confrontation. But miners demanded to know why the state failed to send the militia to force the company to comply with state laws forbidding the use of scrip and iron-clad contracts. Buchanan's failure to reply gave the miners the answer they expected. [76]

The governor made a quick departure for Nashville the next morning after a restless and watchful night anticipating another attack on the stockade. He left behind the militia to keep order. Although many Tennesseans sympathized with the problems of the miners, they praised the governor for his quick action in the protection of property and the establishment of order. The new Commissioner of Labor, G. W. Ford, met with the miners to negotiate a settlement, but the miners adamantly refused to compromise on the placement of convicts in the mines. At best, the situation represented a draw: Buchanan had restored peace and returned the convicts to the stockade, but the miners had not been appeased, and everyone expected additional trouble. [77]

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75 *Special Report*, 19-21; *Journal*, 17 and 18 July 1891.

76 *Special Report*, 22-25; *Journal*, 18 July 1891; Daniel, "Tennessee Convict War": 275-277; Hutson, "The Coal Miners' Insurrection": 109-110.

77 *Special Report*, 24-25; *Journal*, 18-20 July 1891.

In the early morning hours of July 20, the miners launched their second attack on the stockade. Supported by comrades from across Anderson County and nearby Kentucky, they advanced on the facility. The militia commander wisely surrendered the convicts to the larger force of miners. The insurrectionists marched the forty convicts, along with the guards and soldiers, to Coal Creek, loaded them on the train, and sent them to Knoxville for the second time. [78]

The governor dispatched fourteen militia companies to East Tennessee, and followed them to Knoxville on July 22. The miners presented a more formal petition, demanding a return to the *status quo*, the annulment of the lease contract, and the convening of a special session of the General Assembly to repeal the convict lease law. Tennessee Coal and Iron Company refused to negotiate on any point, leaving Buchanan with few choices but enforcement of the law. He did promise to call a special session of the legislature, but he offered no guarantees on how the legislators would vote. [79]

As the convicts returned to the stockade, concerned citizens organized meetings across the state to support the demands of the miners and end convict leasing. In July 1891, most observers praised Buchanan's handling of the affair, frankly admitting that his hands had been tied and that he performed as well as possible under the circumstances. As he promised, Buchanan called a special session of the legislature to consider several problems: the enactment of legislation to empower the governor to use the militia in periods of civil disturbance, repeal or modification of the

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78 *Special Report*, 29-32; *Journal*, 21 July 1891; Daniel, "Tennessee Convict War": 278-279; Hutson, "The Coal Miners' Insurrection": 113-115.

79 *Special Report*, 33-36; *Journal*, 23 July 1891; Daniel, "Tennessee Convict War": 281-282; Hutson, "The Coal Miners' Insurrection": 115-117.

convict lease law, prohibition of the use of scrip, and reform of the criminal procedures of the state to make counties responsible for criminals guilty of minor offenses and to remove the prison to a new location outside Nashville. [80]

The issue of convict leasing brought together divergent and competing interests that overlapped established boundaries. Humanitarian concerns, property rights, labor rights, and political expediency all played a role in the outcome of the session. The state and national Alliance backed away from absolute support for ending convict leasing. When the state Alliance met in August 1891, the delegates adopted resolutions supporting the use of convict labor for road building and urging that leases not be renewed at their expiration in 1895. The *National Economist* pointed to the labor unrest in the East Tennessee mines and also equivocated on the issue of ending convict leasing. "Every labor platform of modern times has announced against the competition of convict labor with free labor," wrote Macune. While "a candidate who desired popularity with the masses has simply announced against it to secure his election," the legislatures continued "to perpetuate the system" for fiscal reasons. Macune admitted that the question brought together three "fundamental principles:" the duty of government to carry out the law, the rights of citizens, and the rights of criminals. Leasing appeared necessary to underwrite the cost of the prisons, but the editor deplored the profit earned at the expense of free labor. In other words, convict leasing needed reform, not necessarily abolition. [81]

When the General Assembly met in September 1891, the Alliance members voted with the Democratic majority to retain the lease contract to its expiration and

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80 *Journal*, 25 July 1891.

81 *National Economist*, 15 August 1891; Nashville *American*, 14 August 1891; *Journal*, 14 August 1891.

strengthen the powers of the governor to maintain law and order, but their votes split on the resolution introduced by J. L. Cochran that the General Assembly would "never again lease its convicts at the expiration of the present lease contract." The failure to act decisively destroyed the compromise worked out by Buchanan in July and led to new unrest. [82]

In November, Anderson County miners released six hundred prisoners. State officials and local sheriffs offered rewards and hunted for the missing men. Robert Cartmell, a Madison County farmer, commented on the situation and, like others, found no easy solution to the dilemma. "Tenn. cannot afford to have the law trampled on in that way," he wrote. "If [it is] a bad law, until changed or repealed, [it] ought to be enforced." In January 1892, the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company provided a temporary truce when the company decided to put the miners back to work at Briceville and place convicts in other mines. [83]

The convict lease war held important consequences for politicians as well as miners. The inability of Buchanan to settle the problem of convict leasing cast him in the role of a weak governor, with important consequences in the 1892 election. Although the General Assembly failed to address the immediate problems of the miners, the practice of convict leasing ended, as the Cochran resolution demanded,

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82 *House Journal*, Extra Session 1891, 61-62; Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 173-175; Hutson, "The Overthrow of the Convict Lease System": 82-86.

83 Robert Cartmell Diary, 3 November 1892, TSLA, Nashville; Hutson, "The Overthrow of the Convict Lease System," 86-91; Daniel, "Tennessee Convict War," 285-287. Although, historians generally praise the decision to end convict leasing that came during the administration of Peter Turney, the legislation promised more than it delivered. Prisoners continued to mine coal for state use at the new Brushy Mountain Prison. Early in the next century, industrialists were once again using convict labor to build their economic empires. Jere Baxter used convict labor to construct the Tennessee Central Railroad across the Cumberland Plateau. See Jeanette Keith, "Jere Baxter," in *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, forthcoming 1998).

when the leases expired in 1895. Faced with the problem of housing the prison population, the General Assembly appropriated funds to build Brushy Mountain Prison and a new state prison in Nashville.

The Farmers' Alliance fared poorly in the contest. Buchanan's leadership ability, and even his manliness, came under public scrutiny. Bourbons, who harbored no great love of labor, reduced the complex issue to a question of the governor's willingness to act, characterizing him as a nice man, but one without the necessary qualities of leadership. The Alliance failure to support labor against capital alienated East Tennesseans, who had always been stronger Republicans than Alliance men. Men who once expressed a willingness to vote for the Democrat Buchanan abandoned the "Independent" Buchanan. In the short run, the miners won the battle to end convict leasing, but at the expense of a genuine political alliance between farmers and laborers and the opportunity to defend their interests in Nashville and Washington on their own terms. [84]

At the end of his first year in office, neither Buchanan nor his Alliance supporters had much to show for their efforts. And yet, in the factionalized quicksand of Tennessee politics, the Alliance politicians viewed their inactivity in behalf of Alliance goals as an asset for retaining their claims to membership in the Democratic party. Democratic Alliancemen expected to solidify their control of the party in the 1892 elections, by promoting themselves as the "purest" and "best" Democrats. If they were successful, and if Republican Alliancemen gained a few seats in the legislature, they could name the next U.S. Senator. But important changes took place

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84 The Alliance Democrats found themselves in an impossible situation in the Coal Miners War. If they supported the miners, they could be painted as too radical for public office. Their support of law and order and a resolution to end convict leasing at the expiration of the contract left them open to the criticism of abandoning their own principles. On this issue, the Alliance legislators left very little except their voting record, which leaves many questions unanswered.

between the 1890 and the 1892 elections. The Bourbons clearly recognized the threat and took advantage of every opportunity to undermine the credibility of Alliance leadership, particularly McDowell. The campaign to reform the office of coal oil inspector chipped at the motives of all the men in appointive office. As often as possible, Alliance legislators received the blame for the 1891 example of the perennial ineptitude of the General Assembly. Finally, the Alliance contributed to its own problems by accommodating too easily to the Democratic platform. As a result, they had nothing to show for their efforts. They lost their most important opportunity, and future votes, in their failure to support the coal miners. Indeed, by the fall of 1891, many Alliancemen viewed the formation of a third party as the only possible mechanism for achieving agrarian goals.

Chapter 7: Under the Mudsills of Hell

If you should dig down under the mudsill of Hell, you would find Populists down there!
Edward W. Carmack, 1892

The time has already arrived when every Democratic orator in the state ought to be upon the stump, warning the people against the wild heresies which have been hatched for the overthrow of Democratic government and the ruin of agriculture itself. The sooner it is demonstrated that McDowell, our modern "Moses" who is leading the people into the wilderness, can never bring water from the rock with his old sub-treasury "Rod," the better it will be for Democracy, for agriculture and the state.
Robert L. Taylor, 1891

Shades of Jefferson, Madison, and Jackson, has it come to this that men call themselves Democrats, professing your faith and claiming to be your followers and disciples, enunciate such doctrines as these and inculcate them under their motto, "equal rights to all and special privileges to none?" Shame, shame, upon such wicked perversion! Truly have evil times come upon us, presaging wrath alike to citizens and government.
William B. Bate, 1891

The fear of another Alliance victory united Bourbon and New South leaders in an unusual show of force against the agrarian insurgency. Upper-Case Democrats mocked the views of beleaguered farmers that Jeffersonianism and Jacksonianism implied government intervention to protect the economic rights of the common man. They countered innovations like the subtreasury with stale demands for lower tariffs, individual self-sufficiency, and crop diversity. A few went so far as to embrace free silver as a palliative to the economic decline of the agrarian sector. Unlike their Alliance foes, however, New South elites neither questioned the consequences of unchecked capitalism nor tallied the costs of progress, while Bourbons maintained their staunch defense of hierarchical tradition and paternal order. The political failure of the Alliance after its recent successes suggests that the "Tennessee Plan" of

operating through the established Democratic Party became a liability in the changing political climate of the 1892 election. Past assurances that the Tennessee Alliance would not support third party formation cast doubt on the whole agrarian reform agenda as soon as McDowell declared for the People's Party. Once the agrarian radicals had been removed from the Democratic Party and isolated in the People's Party, efforts at fusion with the Republican Party collapsed as the result of the focus of Republican candidates on building and protecting personal patronage systems to the exclusion of larger aims.

After an early show of force in the opening days of the gubernatorial nomination process, the Alliance struggled against a united effort by the New South and Bourbon wings of the party to elect Peter Turney. New South industrialists put aside past conflicts with the old planter elite and canvassed vigorously for the Bourbon leader in an apparent belief that an unreconstructed defender of secession was preferable to another Alliance victory.

As the Democratic attack increased in scope and intensity, party leaders picked at the ragged edges of the Alliance coalition of interests. They attacked McDowell as the most obvious and most vulnerable target. Once the darling of the party, McDowell became the epitome of radicalism. Party hacks questioned his motives, integrity, and honesty to keep the dynamic Alliance leader on the defensive. They attacked the subtreasury plan as unconstitutional and a ploy to enrich the landowners at the expense of tenant farmers and sharecroppers. [1]

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1 McDowell became a hero to temperance advocates for his attempt to amend the state constitution. In 1885, some Nashville women presented McDowell with a silver tea set to honor him for his service on behalf of the reform effort. See Roger Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists: Tennessee, 1870-1896* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 156-157; Nashville *American*, 10 January 1885, 1 and 21 March 1885.

Democrats used the desire of Alliance members to remain with the party as a mechanism to force them into compliance or expel them as adherents of third party "heresy." Forced into a third party under conditions that implied weakness and dishonestly among the Alliance leaders, the agrarian reformers struggled to recover from the setback. Republicans, who might have been expected to embrace rejected Alliance members, found themselves divided between two contending camps. As the Republican congressional races heated up, the temptation to sacrifice the Populists for immediate political gains proved too much for the Houk faction, and McDowell's financial association with the party was leaked to the press. The timing of the revelation proved to be the undoing of the Alliance and the Populists in Tennessee. The agrarian movement lost the 1892 election and never recovered. [2]

In May 1891, Martin VanBuren Ingram, the past editor of the *Weekly Toiler*, wrote a "strictly confidential" letter to Edward Carmack, outlining his insider's knowledge of the Alliance and his willingness to advise the Democratic leadership on the best methods of destroying McDowell's credibility among the state's farmers. Ingram assured Carmack that he "underst[ood] the man so well, and [knew] his weak points," and dramatically warned "if let alone his methods are powerful for evil and his strength greater than you have ever supposed." Ingram dismissed McDowell's recent denials that he expected the position of U.S. Senator as the price for leading the

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[2] Recent historiography has dealt with fusion in a more receptive fashion than earlier historians. Both Jeffrey Ostler, *Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, 1880-1892* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993) and Samuel L. Webb, *Two Party Politics in the One-Party South: Alabama's Hill Country, 1874-1920* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997) and Webb, "From Independents to Populists to Progressive Republicans: The Case of Chilton County, Alabama, 1880-1920," *Journal of Southern History* 59 (1993): 707-736, contend that third party formation succeeds where one party dominates the political process. Where two parties vie for power, the farmers fared better by playing one party against the other rather than developing a third party. In Tennessee, the Republican Party, while weakened by recent disfranchising laws, remained strong enough to end the hopes of the Populists.

farmers to political victory. He surmised that McDowell "was simply too previous [sic] in letting his purpose out and now wants it understood that he is not in it, so as to check the fire on him." Ingram predicted that McDowell intended "to hold the balance of power in the Democratic party as was done in the gubernatorial campaign and strengthen the organization which will carry him in, and if let alone he will either succeed or split the party and in either case he will have a soft place to fall on." [3]

Ingram advised the "prompt organization of Democratic Clubs all over the state." He further counseled care in the selection of party workers and the quick establishment of a platform favoring "tariff reform or revenue tariff and free coinage and admit no subtreasury heresy in it." Ingram believed that "the better class of farmers will gain this out [and] leave McDowell with so few that he will be powerless to make the fight." [4]

Ingram warned that McDowell's candidates were "already staked out and if you will watch it is not hard to locate them." He encouraged Carmack to make the fight early "as Georgians are making it," and put Senators and Congressmen on the

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[3] Edward Ward Carmack Papers, Box 5, folder 12, "M. V. Ingram to Edward Ward Carmack, 11 May 1891; Tennessee State Library and Archives (hereafter cited as TSLA), Nashville. McDowell bought out Ingram's share of the *Toiler* in 1888, shortly after he joined the *Toiler* staff. He and Ingram apparently parted on less than cordial terms, although nothing in the *Toiler* indicated their mutual animosity. In 1889, however, McDowell and Ingram took opposing views of the role of the Wheel and Alliance in establishing a cooperative tobacco warehouse in Clarksville. McDowell accused Ingram of becoming a foil for the interests of the warehousemen. Ingram apparently referred to McDowell's April 1891 statement in which he said, "I am not a candidate for Senator and I have not authorized any one to say so. I don't say my name has not been mentioned, for I have been approached by a number, but I have not authorized any one to say I am a candidate. Our people must confer together and agree upon a man." McDowell's less-than-complete denial failed to soothe Democratic fears that he was a "office-seeker" busily organizing his "wool hat boys" for his own benefit. Although there is little doubt that McDowell would have been the Alliance choice for the U.S. Senate, the agrarian uprising cannot be dismissed as a political ploy by McDowell to gain national office.

[4] Ibid.

stump against the subtreasury scheme. He estimated the Alliance strength at around forty thousand, after subtracting Republicans, women, boys, and anti-subtreasury members. With planning and effort, the Democratic party could overcome the Alliance insurgency, "but let alone they can use the whole force in county conventions and control the State Convention." Ingram ended his letter with the hope that Carmack would "call a private conference of prominent Democrats and take steps to organize the state at once, put backbone in men who are converging before the movement and the bulldozing tactics that are being use[d] to silence all oppositions to the grand Cyclops." Ingram's letter found a ready audience, and the party leaders launched an anti-Alliance crusade that followed his plan exactly. [5]

The political campaign of 1892 that established the People's Party in Tennessee passed through several stages. For almost a year, from the early spring of 1891 until February of 1892, the Democratic leadership limited its efforts to personal attacks against McDowell, refutations of the subtreasury scheme, and the organization of Democratic "clubs" that soon identified with the political ambitions of Chief Justice of the Tennessee Supreme Court Peter Turney. In February 1892, the opening of the canvass for the gubernatorial nomination signalled a new phase of the campaign. Turney and Buchanan supporters fought bitterly in county conventions and primaries across the state. Upper-Case Democrats wondered if the farmers would repeat their political victories of 1890, as Buchanan garnered considerable support. In May, the campaign entered its third phase, when radical agrarian reformers abandoned the Democratic party, charging a history of fraud. With the establishment of the People's Party, Bourbons quickly assumed control and dominated the convention to select

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[5] Ibid.

delegates for the Democratic National Convention. Initially, McDowell rejected the third party move, but by the end of June he had joined the radicals. Buchanan eventually withdrew his name from consideration for the Democratic nomination and ran as an Independent, all the while maintaining that he represented the true Democracy. From May to the August nominating convention of the People's Party, the Populists leaders seemed to lack direction, and their contradictory statements and actions confused some voters and alienated others. The August convention should have given the party the direction and momentum it needed to reinvigorate the campaign, but the East Tennessee miners' war flared up again just as the Populist convention met. This time the Bourbons and New South industrialists demanded a violent suppression of the miners and mocked Buchanan's manhood when he failed to act swiftly and with as much force as they demanded. The governor's campaign stagnated. In October, only days before the election, Democrats revealed a $15,000 campaign contribution by the Republicans to McDowell for the support of Populist legislative and congressional candidates. That final scandal ended Populist hopes.

When the subtreasury scheme first appeared at the St. Louis Convention of 1889, Tennessee farmers enthusiastically voiced their support. The plan closely followed efforts already underway in the dark-fired tobacco region. Like the tobacco warehouse plan initiated by the Wheel, the subtreasury scheme offered farmers the opportunity to end their dependence on crop liens as a source of credit and held out the possibility of agrarian control over the commodity market. [6]

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[6] The subtreasury scheme was first presented at St. Louis on 7 December 1889 in a report by the Committee on the Monetary System. The proponents of the plan defended it as "no new or untried scheme" but "safe and conservative," a plan that "harmonizes and carries out the system already in vogue on a really safer plan." Tennessee sent eight delegates to the convention. They were John B. Buchanan, R. W. Tucker, J. R. Miles, John H. McDowell, J. F. Tillman, B. H. Hord, Eth B. Wade, and A. E. Gardner. See N. A. Dunning, *The Farmers' Alliance History and Agricultural Digest* (Washington, D.C.: Farmers' Alliance Press, 1891), 96-128; 336-354. For a discussion of the

By the time of the Ocala meeting in 1890, however, some Tennesseans were having second thoughts. The Farmers' and Laborers' Union now demanded the establishment of subtreasuries on approved security, which included "real estate and non-perishable farm products." Some Tennessee farmers took exception to the inclusion of land as a form of security and voted against the the amendment. Their concerns opened the door to disagreement within the state organization and gave anti-alliance politicians the wedge they needed to erode the "stickability" that brought the farmers to power in the 1890 elections. [7]

Delegates to the Ocala Convention cast only ten votes against the subtreasury amendment, and Tennessee delegates accounted for three of the ten votes. Anti-subtreasury feeling splintered the National Alliance as well as the Tennessee organization. In 1891, anti-subtreasury members withdrew and formed a separate organization. The leader of the Tennessee anti-subtreasury faction was Eth B. Wade, Buchanan's Superintendent of Prisons. Other prominent anti-subtreasury men included J. W. Jones of Chester County, C. C. Shaw of Haywood County, T. B. Carson of Lauderdale County, M. R. Hughes of Rutherford County, and F. S. McClelland of Marshall County. Identified with the agrarian movement from its origins in Tennessee, these Alliance leaders carried an unknown number of farmers with them in their protest against the subtreasury. The Nashville *American* claimed that thirty-six of the fifty-four Alliance members in the General Assembly were opposed to the subtreasury

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sub-treasury scheme, see Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 90-93, 109-113; Robert C. McMath, Jr., *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 109-142; Bruce Palmer, *"Man Over Money": The Southern Populist Critique of American Capitalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 104-110. See Ocala Platform, Appendix B.

7 Dunning, *The Farmers' Alliance History and Agricultural Digest*, 139-165.

scheme. Typically, McDowell denounced the anti-subtreasury members as "traitors and turncoats . . . [who] served the enemy under the livery of alliancemen and spies who . . . come amongst us as hired tools of monopoly." [8]

Senators Isham G. Harris and William B. Bate warned farmers that the subtreasury plan would "allow farm owners to borrow at two percent and then loan to renters and sharecroppers at ten to twelve percent." Other Democrats joined in the charges that the subtreasury represented class legislation that benefited the few at the taxable expense of the many. The *Gibson County Herald* reprinted an article in which the writer speculated that the land-loan bill reflected the interests of the railroad magnates, specifically Leland Stanford. Under the land provisions of the subtreasury bill, railroads and corporations owning land "could borrow money on it from the Government at two per cent as easy as could the farm owner, and in one-tenth the time." The writer warned that "the people would come to general chaos and bankruptcy quicker by this process than any yet proposed and the sooner be the serfs or slaves of corporations." All the anti-monopoly rhetoric that inspired the farmers to organize now operated against their efforts to effect meaningful change. Farmers like the president of the Prospect (Giles County) Farmers' Alliance, who had heeded the organization's biblical call, "Come unto me all you that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest," now concluded, "we want too much if we want the Ocala demands in full." [9]

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[8] Nashville *American*, 2 September, 4 September, and 17 September 1891, 12 August 1891; Joseph A. Sharp, "The Farmers' Alliance and Tennessee Politics, 1890-1892" (MA thesis, Univeristy of Tennessee, 1931), 158-160.

[9] *Weekly Toiler*, 21 October 1891; *Gibson County Herald*, 18 November 1891; *Pulaski Citizen*, 14 July 1892.

The Democrats followed their attacks on the subtreasury plan with the organization of Democratic Clubs that quickly became [Peter] Turney Clubs, once the Chief Justice of the Tennessee Supreme Court agreed to carry the party banner against the agrarian foes. Sixty-five years old and of uncertain health, Peter Turney seemed an unlikely candidate for the rigorous campaign anticipated in 1892. After twenty years on the Tennessee Supreme Court, he appeared better suited to retirement than a new career. An unrepentant rebel, Turney still advocated the right of secession. His frequent declarations in favor of that discredited position met with cheers from some and cries of dismay from others. Typical of his speeches was one made to the Fred Ault bivouac in Knoxville, in which he said, "So strongly do I believe in the right of secession, that when I am dead, I want the word 'secession' carved as an epitaph on my monument." [10]

The son of a United States Senator, Turney distinguished himself in 1861 by organizing a Confederate company and urging his home country of Franklin to secede from Tennessee and join Alabama, when the state first rejected secession. His appearance before the Cheatham Bivouac in 1888 where he reportedly defended the Confederate cause produced a barrage of criticism from the southern press. The Chattanooga *Times* reminded Turney that "the war is over and the questions which then convulsed our country have been forever settled." The editor characterized Turney as "prudent, conservative and thoughtful," but chastised him with the observation that "He belies this character by raising anew these questions and

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10 *Journal*, 15 September 1892. During the gubernatorial nomination convention of 1890, Turney was in East Tennessee making the same declaration. His advocacy of secession compared unfavorably with the Alliance view of ending sectional animosity and organizing farmers to protect their economic and political interests rather than their sectional differences.

accomplishes nothing whatever except to provoke the condemnation of the thinking men of the South." [11]

More condemnation appeared in the Birmingham *Herald.* The Alabama paper reported Turney's speech in which he "claims the right of secession still exists." Mincing no words, the newspaper labeled the Tennessee Supreme Court Justice, "one of those southern Jackasses who are always certain to turn up in the nick of time to furnish the republicans with campaign material." [12]

The Nashville *Banner* defended Turney for his "frank manliness" in speaking his mind, while admitting that his remarks were "perhaps injudicious and untimely." The newspaper claimed that Turney's motive was "to repel the false and ungenerous epithets of 'traitor' and 'treason' so often hurled at the southern man." The editor conceded, however, that "in some respects, [Turney's] points could be elaborated so as to relieve them of an apparently bristling character which is easily misconstrued." [13]

Turney's plain-spokeness, a political liability in most instances, became an asset to the Democratic party in its efforts to draw the agrarian veterans back to the party of the fathers. For men steeped in the emerging myths of the "Lost Cause," supplications in defense of southern history and white supremacy touched old loyalties and evoked powerful emotions. Set against the Bourbon assertions that the Alliance programs represented new forms of monopoly power, Peter Turney's steadfast adherence to the past represented a sanctuary the agrarian voters found difficult to overcome. No one could argue that Peter Turney was not the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. In

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11 *Chattanooga Times*, 16 August 1888.

12 *Birmingham Herald*, 16 August 1888.

13 *Banner*, 16 August 1888.

his unrepentant defense of the Confederacy, "Old Pete" represented undefiled, simon-pure Democracy at its finest.

To complete the symbolic call to arms, Turney appeared in West Tennessee with Congressman John Allen of Mississippi. In a region where former Confederate officers saturated the legislative halls and filled the corporate offices, Allen proudly honored his own service as an enlisted man. His appearance on the platform with Turney placed the common man's stamp of approval on the campaign of the old Fire-Eater. Alliance men clearly understood the implications and countered with their own appeals to dormant Confederate sympathies. At a Marshall County Democratic rally, Captain W. R. Garrett took the platform in response to the demands of Buchanan supporters. After making the obligatory favorable comments on the speeches delivered earlier by ex-governor James D. Porter and the Honorable Frank Wilson in support of Turney, Garrett countered with a defense of Buchanan's administration. He characterized "Buck" as "the champion of the movement to pension the Confederate soldiers and read from the governor's message for an appropriation for the Soldiers' Home," clearly reminding the audience of the Alliance ties to the Confederacy and its veterans. Yet despite the veterans' benefits made available through Alliance sponsorship, many Alliance men found a vote against Peter Turney and the history they shared impossible. [14]

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[14] Robert Cartmell Diary, 30 August 1892, TSLA, Nashville; *Banner*, 6 April 1892. Perhaps not coincidentally, the same year Sumner A. Cunningham, a former reporter for the *Nashville American* and a member of the Cheatham Bivouac, was busily engaged in the work as General Agent for the collection of funds to erect a monument to Jefferson Davis. The following year, with the encouragementof the *American*, and the well-wishes of some of the state's best-known ex-Confederates (including Peter Turney), Cunningham launched his magazine, the *Confederate Veteran*. The monthly magazine remained in publication until 1932 and distinguished itself with its commitment to the presentation of the stories of the common soldier. Although never an insider among the former officers of the southern cause, the editor of the *Confederate Veteran* safely channeled the voices of former Confederate soldiers in the direction of the "Lost Cause" and away

Alliance leaders attempted to shift the campaign away from the "Lost Cause" to the less emotional ground of entrenched officeholding and agrarian interests. The *Toiler* accused Turney of being "a continuous office-holder," who had "drawn a salary from the state treasury for twenty-one years--amounting to over $70,000 in hard cash." Now his selfish demand for office allowed him "to be used by the Nashville *American* crowd to split and destroy the Democratic party forever in Tennessee." The *Toiler* and other agrarian newspapers, like the McMinnville *New Era*, viewed the Turney candidacy as a class-based insult to political rights of rural voters and argued that "the rule has always been to give governors a second term." Pointing to what farmers perceived as an elitist prejudice against agrarian interests, the editors contended that "now because for the first time in thirty years we have a farmer governor, the lawyers almost to a unit say he must be retired to give place to one of their own number." [15]

According to the contenders, the line-up of pro- and anti-Buchanan factions clearly marked the class divisions within the Democratic party. Perhaps participants understood the distinctions that have eluded historians, who have been more firmly tied to economic definitions of "class." When Turney supporters gathered in Nashville at the Maxwell House Hotel, the *Banner* editor heralded their arrival as a great day for democracy, with the return of men of "the better sort," the likes of which had not been seen in Nashville for the past several years. Calling the "presence of so many

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from turn-of-the-century radicalism. See John A. Simpson, *S. A. Cunningham and the Confederate Heritage* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 72-101.

15 Knoxville *Journal*, 10 March 1892; *Banner*, 1 March 1892. Upper-case Democrats countered that in 1880, Albert S. Marks had refused to run for a second term when he could not support the Democratic platform of 1880, and Buchanan should put the party ahead of his own views and do the same.

prominent Democrats . . . one of the gratifying indications in politics in Tennessee," the editor compared the participants with the "small men [who] have crowded to the front" in recent elections. In another scathing article, the same editor chastised the party for abandoning its principles in 1890. In his view, the party reaped what it had sown. Having placed the Democratic stamp of approval on an unworthy man like Buchanan as the party nominee, with the full realization that he advocated the subtreasury scheme, "the mistake [could] not now be remedied by bluster or by the denunciation of Gov. Buchanan or by kicking out of the party in 1892 all Alliancemen who were hugged and slobbered over in 1890." If the *Banner* took dark pleasure in watching the party squirm as the result of its "hobnobbing and colleaguing with heresy," other Democrats adopted the "wild-eyed advocacy" of Turney that drove the Alliancemen from the party and concentrated political power beyond the threat of grassroots insurgency. [16]

There was a noticable rise in reports of violence associated with the Alliance in the aftermath of the organization's political victories. In October 1891, Frank Bond, a perennial congressional candidate in the Ninth District, spoke at a Gibson County rally. The *Milan Exchange* reported that "a few foolish men, or boys, came to town heavily armed . . . for the purpose of taking Bond off the stand if he used the subtreasury people too roughly in his remarks." The *Exchange* dismissed the threat with the implied warning that "Frank Bond would tackle a running buzz saw just for

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16 *Banner*, 29 February and 23 May 1892. No matter how much wealth individual Alliance leaders controlled, they did not belong in the inner circle of Upper-Case Democrats. As previously discussed, political power in Tennessee was controlled by a relatively small number of men bound by ties of marriage and kinship. See Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 63-66.

the past time," and assured readers that "There are not enough subtreasury people in the State to silence him." [17]

With the opening of the campaign for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination in February, the canvass of 1892 moved to a new level of animosity. On March 1, 1892, the Fayette County Democratic primary erupted in gunfire and murder when a polling officer accused a voter of belonging to the Republican party (often a mechanism for denying the vote to Alliance supporters). A few weeks later, during the primary election in Ashland City, George Fielder, a Buchanan man, got into an altercation with a Turney supporter. Frank Fielder, the father of George, attempted to separate the two men and was accidentally stabbed by his son. His wounds seemed slight, but the elder Fielder died several hours later from the loss of blood. [18]

In the opening days of the canvass for the Democratic nomination for governor, Upper-Case Democrats found little encouragement for their campaign. The Buchananites jumped to an early lead by calling a county primary and convention in Shelby County even before the state executive committee had set a gubernatorial convention date. Angry over the "snap" convention in Shelby County, Turney supporters vowed to "fight from Dan to Beersheba, from Cape Cod to Kalamazoo, and from hell to breakfast." They predicted that the early actions of the Buchanan supporters "stirred the Democracy of the state from Carter to Shelby, and roused them to a sense of danger which lurks in the secret methods of a secret society." [19]

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17 *Gibson County Herald*, 7 October 1891.

18 *Banner*, 2 March and 23 May 1892.

19 *Banner*, 10 March 1892; *Weekly Tribune*, 23 March 1892.

The confidence of the Turney supporters sustained another blow when the Rutherford County Democrats met in April. Rain apparently discouraged the attendance of Turney delegates, but the farmers turned out in force. Though the *Banner* believed the Turneyites held the majority, Buchanan men clearly controlled the convention, electing the Reverend P. A. Lyon, the pastor of the governor's church, to chair the convention. When the convention became embroiled in a fight over the method for selecting delegates to the State Convention, they set aside one hour to debate the question. The *Banner* reported that "the Buchanan speakers were frequently interrupted by yells from the Turney side," which behaved like "a howling mob." On the other hand, "Turney men were more attentively listened to." When the supporters of "Old Pete" failed to achieve their method of selection, they bolted the convention. The *Banner* mocked the bolters and quipped, "We believe this is the first instance on record of a majority bolting in hot haste from the overpowering minority." [20]

In East Tennessee, Hamblen County Democrats selected a solid Buchanan delegation during a "turbulent" convention marked by "several fights." Buchanan men dominated the Hawkins County convention and determined to instruct solidly for their candidate, but the Turney backers "began to plead for fair play, claiming that they should not be forced out and were entitled to a division of the delegation." The Buchanan supporters agreed to compromise, and instructed the county delegation to cast twelve votes for Buchanan and four for Turney. [21]

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20 *Banner*, 4 April 1892.

21 Ibid.

Buchanan ended the first month of delegate selection well ahead of his 1890 tally. The eight counties that had met and selected delegates by the end of the first week in April gave Buchanan 119 1/2 votes, sixty-eight more than those same counties gave him in 1890. The *Banner* predicted, "with a gain of 68 votes in the first eight counties that have spoken, his followers will not be inclined to despondency, in the beginning of what promises to be a very bitter and even desperate contest." [22]

Predictably, Turney Democrats called for changes in the electoral process. In Wilson County, supporters of the judge denounced the primary method of selecting delegates as corrupt and demanded repudiation of the subtreasury as proof of adherence to Democratic ideology. Like Rutherford County, two opposing sets of delegates claimed to represent the Wilson County Democracy. Some Democrats advocated a suspension of the two-thirds rule to permit nomination by a simple majority. Others, like the Gallatin *Examiner*, looked ahead to a summer of campaigning and called for an end to the "stump," asserting that the speeches of gubernatorial candidates attracted "not ten per cent" of voters. The newspaper suggested that "half a dozen speeches delivered in each of the three state divisions and well reported would fully inform the people of the views of the candidates." Tying its argument to progress, the *Examiner* championed "the age of steam and printing presses" and denounced "the old-time stumping" as "a slow coach." Unlike the time-honored stump speeches, "the press of Tennessee could speak daily and weekly to crowds ten times more numerous than those of the candidates." The *Examiner* failed to mention the importance of political theater in marshaling the vote, but Alliance leaders knew the necessity of rallies, parades, and stump speeches, if the Democrats

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22 Ibid.

forced Buchanan to campaign as an Independent. McDowell and the Alliance leaders had built a powerful political force through rallies and public speeches, and in the process they mastered the art of public persuasion. Stump speeches clearly favored the Buchananites over the more polished and educated Upper-Case Democrats--a fact recognized by both sides. [23]

In February, McDowell and other Alliance leaders attended a conference in St. Louis where proponents of the People's Party laid plans to hold a national convention to select a party presidential candidate. Though he took no part in the deliberations, McDowell returned to a storm of protest from the Turney press. If McDowell failed to be convinced by the national calls for the creation of a third party, the St. Louis convention did alert him to the need to repair relations with the labor unions of the state. [24]

The State Labor Congress opened in Nashville on February 29, 1892, with one hundred delegates from various local labor unions in attendance. McDowell and other Alliance leaders soon became prominent figures in the deliberations of the Congress. Indeed, the *Nashville American* charged that the Alliance had captured the Labor Congress. Both the Labor Congress and the Alliance denied the charge, but McDowell served as Chairman of the proceedings, and Alliance leaders dominated the constitutional committee. [25]

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23 *Banner*, 5 April and 4 May 1892; *Examiner*, 3 May 1892.

24 *Banner*, 10 February 1892.

25 *American*, 29 February, 1 March 1892; *Banner*, 29 February, 1 March 1892. Labor Congress elections placed McDowell in the position of vice president and made R. W. Tucker, State Alliance lecturer, the treasurer. Serving on the Constitutional Committee were R. W. Tucker, Chairman; H. P. Keller of the Lauderdale County Alliance; R. H. Gitten of the Crockett County Alliance; M. S. Gowan of the Sullivan County Alliance; A. E. Smith of the Lincoln County Alliance; W. D. Hunter of the Sumner County Alliance; and O. T. Allman of the Knox County Alliance. The labor members included W. F. Miller of Briceville, D. S. Sinclair of Knoxville, W. E.

Governor John Buchanan made an appearance before the Labor Congress. In his speech to the delegates, Buchanan clearly felt compelled to justify his recent actions in the convict labor wars, though he never made direct reference to the events. Calling the course of labor organization in Tennessee "for the most part reasonable and conservative," the governor admitted radicalism also played a role in labor demands and methods. Nevertheless, he viewed radicalism as self-defeating and warned when "any class or organization violates the written law of the land . . . there should be universal condemnation." Placing his faith in "respect for law" as the only "safeguard for life, liberty and property," Buchanan assured his listeners that "In this land, where every man makes the law, every man is responsible for the law, and every man has the same recourse to express his will." [26]

Labor delegates approved a list of demands for political action and offered their support to Buchanan. The demands included abolition of the convict lease system, the stamping of prison-made goods with an identifying mark to make consumers aware of their origin, the removal of the Nashville penitentiary, arbitration of labor disputes, prohibition of child labor, the compulsory education of children, uniform state textbooks, industrial schools for youthful criminals, and work safety laws. Although Buchanan's record on the convict leasing issue made him an unlikely recipient of labor support, Turney's anti-labor judicial rulings precluded the endorsement of the labor unions. As Chief Justice of the Tennessee Supreme Court, he upheld the legality of convict leasing and ruled that mine owners could close their operations if miners exercised their legal right and selected check weighmen the

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Wilkes of Memphis, W. T. Hanifer of Nashville, and A. M. Ewell of Nashville. The completed labor constitution closely resembled that of the Farmers' Alliance.

26 *Banner*, 29 February 1892.

owners found unacceptable. Viewed as a "candidate of corporations," Turney received no labor support. Buchanan campaigned as the labor candidate, but in November, East Tennessee labor voters apparently cast their ballots for the Republican candidate. [27]

The Bourbons continued their long-standing attack on John McDowell, Buchanan's friend and political manager, and the president of the State Alliance after the governor's election. Edward Carmack delighted in teasing the bewhiskered Alliance leader. When speculation about McDowell's future as a U.S. Senator rocked the state, Carmack claimed that he had always known McDowell possessed senatorial qualities. After all, the editor wrote, "We know that God Almighty never gave him that mass of storm-stricken and insurrectionary whiskers and made him look like a weather-beaten tintype of Senator Pfeffer for nothing." Marshaling his well-known sarcasm, Carmack hailed the agrarian leader, "United States Senator McDowell, noble knight of the horny hand and stone-bruised heel, we, the played-out Bourbon, moss-back, upper-case Democrats salute thee." [28]

Not all criticism of McDowell proved so amusing. In the early summer of 1891, long before serious campaigning got underway, the *American* ran an exposé of McDowell's past. The Nashville newspaper sent a reporter to Desha County, Arkansas, where McDowell lived for several years during the Reconstruction period, first renting and then buying land for cotton farming. During this period, the American claimed McDowell abandoned his Democratic Party affiliation and ran for justice of the peace with the support of the Radical Loyal League. More importantly

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27 *Banner*, 1 March 1892; Reprinted from the *Chattanooga Union Labor* in the Knoxville *Journal*, 27 March 1892.

28 *American*, 9 April 1891.

in the view of Bourbon white supremacists, the newspaper charged that McDowell shared a meal with a black supporter. The Alliance leader denied all charges and accused the *American* of engaging in a conspiracy to divide his Alliance support with false claims. He obtained affidavits from fifty Arkansas citizens who vowed that McDowell had never been a Republican or a member of the Loyal League. Tennessee Congressman Rice Pierce confirmed his neighbor's status as a Democrat and a gentleman. Nevertheless, the damage had been done. The *American* named the man with whom McDowell supposedly ate, Jehazy Cole. Thereafter, the anti-Alliance press frequently referred to McDowell as "Jehazy" McDowell, thus reminding readers of the questionable past of the Alliance president and, by implication, suggesting that a vote for Alliance candidates threatened white supremacy. [29]

McDowell fought back with an explanation that satisfied some, but not all of his constituents. "The order has gone forth that the Alliance must be destroyed," he charged. "The purpose, therefore, is to fight the Alliance through me to destroy me, and thereby bring the order into disrepute and thus aid in destroying it." Several county Alliances supported McDowell by approving resolutions expressing confidence in his leadership. Others boycotted the *American* to protest its attack on the Alliance president. When the State Alliance met in August, the convention condemned the "unwarranted and unclean methods adopted by some of the political press, particularly the *American* and *Herald* of Nashville and the *News* of Chattanooga, in their efforts to break down the organization and the social, political, and moral character of its

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[29] *American*, 25 June 1891; *Banner*, 25 June 1891; *Appeal-Avalanche*, 25 June 1891 McDowell published his defense three weeks later, on July 13 and 14 in the *Banner* and the *Appeal-Avalanche*.

president John H. McDowell." In a further show of support, the State Alliance changed its constitution to elect McDowell to a second term as president. [30]

The anti-Alliance county presses continued to attack McDowell long after the *American* story first appeared. In March 1892, the *Bolivar Bulletin* reported a description of McDowell offered by the Dyersburg *Times*. Following a speech in Dyer County, the West Tennessee editor penned an inflammatory description of the Alliance leader and his rally: "John Henry Jehazy McDowell the blatest [sic] demagogue from the wild and woolly swamps of Desha, the perjured associate of negro [sic] scoundrels in secret midnight plottings against his white neighbors, made a harangue at night at the court house to some of the faithful and others who had been attracted by curiosity to hear the smallest man that the sun ever shone upon, to have so much said about him." [31]

The Bourbon press, which included many of the major urban newspapers, kept up a steady drumbeat of charges and innuendoes against the Alliance leader. When the Tennessee Alliance followed national directives and created Alliance district organizations to correspond with congressional districts in anticipation of the 1892 election, the Democratic leaders stepped up their criticism. McDowell devoted his full attention to political organization, handing over the editorship of the *Toiler* to L. K. Taylor and appointing an assistant to carry out the coal oil inspector's duties. Critics vacillated between concern that McDowell and his Alliance cohorts would control the Democratic party and fear that their expanded organization signified a determination to establish a third party. Either alternative portended a split in the Democratic party

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30 *Tribune*, 14 July and 13 August, 1891; *American*, 4 August 1891; Sharp, "The Farmers' Alliance and Tennessee Politics," 157.

31 *Bolivar Bulletin*, 4 March 1892.

and the potential return of Republican (Negro) rule. McDowell repeatedly denied any intentions of forming a third party. He declared himself "bitterly opposed to a third party," though he realized that "a third party sentiment is strong in this state, and is growing." Nevertheless, he assured members of the Democratic Party the third party sentiment was not advancing "with my assistance or encouragement, and the Alliance will not develop into a third political party while I am President or have anything to do with it." [32]

The third party movement, a minority sentiment from the origins of the Alliance, gained momentum with the Bourbon determination to oust Alliancemen from the Democratic party. Throughout 1891, county and urban newspapers joined in a chorus of anti-Alliance sentiment. The Nashville *Herald* expressed a popular Democratic view when it denounced the Alliance as a "secret, oath-bound, one-class political party." The daily condemned the farmers' organization for its "insolence" and insisted that Democrats had "too long tolerated" the Alliance as "a political factor." The Fayetteville *Sun* demanded that Democratic Alliance men "must either abjure the eternal principles of Democracy . . . or absolve themselves of all connection with the organization of dangerous heresies and condemnable ideas." Ironically, only the Nashville *Banner* questioned the wisdom of a hard-line approach toward the Alliance. When the Democratic State Committee met to organize a "re-education" for members of the party, the *Banner* objected to the elimination of the "resolutions which made specific mention of the sub-treasury and land-loan schemes as proper subjects for

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32 *Banner*, 4 September 1890; *Journal*, 7 April 1891. McDowell had always rejected the pressure for a third party, both as a temperance advocate and as an agrarian reformer. He recognized the strong partisan ties of Tennesseans and believed third partyism was the surest way of destruction for any reform movement. The preponderance of letters published in the *Toiler* during his tenure as editor supported that view.

discussion in the proposed educational campaign in the state." The editor charged that there was "no reason for omitting the mention of these subjects, as they are admittedly in the forefront of political discussion." The editor worried that the elimination of the subject reflected a "squeamishness on the part of the committee," in contrast to an earlier "wild-eyed desire . . . to make a flat-footed fight against the Alliance heresies and drive the heretics away from their hobbies or else out of the Democratic party." Indeed, as the county conventions got underway in the spring of 1892, some Turney Democrats cautioned against creating an anti-Democratic backlash by antagonizing Alliancemen. Colonel J. H. Holman spoke to the Rutherford County Turney Club in May 1892, and attributed Buchanan's strength in neighboring Coffee County to "the bitter war that is being waged on the Alliance, which is only tending to make the members stick closer together." Holman called for reason, not abuse of "those who have strayed off after the Ocala heresies." The *Banner* agreed and called his speech "a logical and unanswerable argument . . . [which] would do a world of good in securing Democratic success." [33]

The *Banner* failed to convince the state's newspapers or the leading Democratic politicians to exercise caution. The Nashville *Herald* charged that the Alliance "has grown tyrannical, if not insolent and domineering, if not brazen." The Nashville paper warned that the agrarian organization had reached "formidable proportions" and intended to "make the Democratic party the tool with which to open up new possibilities to itself." The *American* declared its position in the fight against the Alliance and assured fellow Democrats that, "If a secret, oathbound, one-class political party captures the next Democratic convention they will realize that they have

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[33] Nashville *Herald*, 11 May 1891; Fayetteville *Sun*, 16 September 1891; *Banner*, 5 October 1891, 9 May 1892.

had a fight when they take the prize." The Knoxville *Tribune* asserted that, "The Democracy should prefer to have its enemies openly arrayed against it rather than to have them inside its camp where under the guise of Democracy they may be enabled to work infinitely more harm." In the "flat-footed" manner decried by the *Banner*, the *Tribune* declared, "Those who are not for Democracy, pure and simple, are against it and must be fought with the same unrelenting and unwavering opposition that Democracy proposes to wage against Republicanism with all the sins of its infamies and its rottenness." [34]

Leading Democrats joined in the chorus of abuse heaped upon the Alliance. Former governor Robert L. Taylor characterized the upcoming election as "the irrepressible conflict . . . for the life of the Democratic party in Tennessee." He urged "every Democratic orator in the state . . . to be upon the stump, warning the people against the wild heresies which have been hatched for the overthrow of Democratic government and the ruin of agriculture itself." Josiah Patterson denounced Alliance leaders as "the most arrogant set of knaves that ever masqueraded in any political guise or any so-called set of principles." He charged Alliance Democrats with being as "unfriendly to Democratic principles as the devil in Hell and all his angels are to purity and truth." Indeed, every able-bodied Democratic leader in the state took to the stump to denounce the Alliance "heresy" in similar terms. Sparing no epithets, they cursed the Alliance and McDowell "from hell to breakfast" in speeches across the state. Initially, the Alliance men defended their rights as Democrats and determined to fight

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34 *Herald*, 7 May 1891; *American*, 15 August 1891; *Tribune*, 13 September 1891; Sharpe, "The Farmers' Alliance and Tennessee Politics," 161-162.

for the re-nomination of Buchanan as the Democratic candidate for governor. By mid-May many had second thoughts. [35]

The Democratic State Executive Committee called for two separate state conventions, the first one meeting in May to select delegates to the national convention and the second meeting in August to nominate the party's candidate for governor. Democrats defended the calling of two conventions as necessary to determine the direction of the national party before writing the state platform. The issue of the gold standard versus free silver dominated Democratic concerns. By 1892, many "simon-pure" Democrats advocated free silver, but Grover Cleveland, a gold standard advocate, seemed the likely Democratic presidential nominee. Tennessee party men postponed the state convention in order to prevent the potential embarrassment of proposing a state platform at odds with the national one. [36]

With Cleveland the probable presidential nominee, Turney supporters anticipated a low turnout of Alliance men at the first convention. They looked forward to the May meeting to bolster enthusiasm for "Old Pete" and start a log-rolling movement for their candidate. On May 7, the *Banner* tallied Buchanan's undisputed delegates at 95 and Turney's at 65, with a total vote of 222 for the governor and 167 for the judge. Two days later, the paper divided the 533 delegates elected to date as 253 for Buchanan and 270 for Turney, but noted that Buchanan was 18 votes ahead of his 1890 total for the same counties. [37]

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35 *Tribune*, 25 September and 18 September 1891; *Banner*. 11 March 1892; Cartmell Diary, 26 March 1892, TSLA, Nashville. Among the well-known Democrats who stumped for Turney were Robert L. Taylor, Isham Harris, William B. Bate, Josiah Patterson, Benton McMillan, J. D. C. Atkins, James D. Porter, Edward W. Carmack, James D. Richardson, Joseph E. Washington, B. A. Enloe, W. P. Caldwell, Frank Wilson, and Frank P. Bond.

36 Sharp, "The Farmers' Alliance and Tennessee Politics," 179-180.

37 Voting tallies and county primary and convention news appeared daily in both the Nashville

The tense expectations that accompanied the county votes and anticipation of the upcoming convention were broken by startling news from the Alliance camp. Faced with the choice of denying their economic interests or leaving the Democratic party, some Alliance members now openly called for the establishment of the People's Party in Tennessee. By the spring of 1892, southern Alliance leaders, who had previously rejected the notion of a third party, now inched toward its endorsement. Early in May, the editor of the *Toiler*, L. K. Taylor, dropped all pretense and came out squarely for the People's Party. Taylor resigned his membership in the Fifth Congressional Democratic Executive Committee and called for a state convention to select delegates to represent Tennessee at the July 4 National People's Party Convention in Omaha. Taylor apparently made the decision on his own, without consulting either Buchanan or McDowell. As one historian noted, "the governor [now] had one foot on the Democratic dock and the other in the Alliance rowboat." Democratic leaders and editors immediately recognized the difficulty of the governor's position and instigated an unrelenting demand for him to clarify his intentions. [38]

Populist Party formation represented both a threat and a promise to agrarian reformers. It split the Alliance between Democrats and Republicans who remained with their traditional parties and those who followed the People's Party banner, thus diluting the effect of the Alliance reformers. At the same time, the People's Party built on the organization already established by the Alliance, but imposed no vocational

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Banner and the Nashville *American*. Voting strengths changed daily, and misunderstandings confused matters further. Generally, the Nashville editors anticipated a Turney victory, but recognized how evenly divided many counties were. See *Banner*, 7 and 9 May 1892.

38 *Banner*, 10 and 11 May 1892; Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 185-186.

limitations on membership, thus expanding the party to include town dwellers, businessmen, manufacturers, and lawyers. [39]

Buchanan quickly declared his "life-long allegiance to the Democratic Party." He reiterated his campaign position that he "was nominated and conducted the campaign of the Democratic Party in 1890" upon the party platform and maintained his support for the "principles of Jefferson, Jackson, Polk, and Calhoun." The governor made it clear that he had "no official connection with the *Toiler*" and exerted no influence in shaping its editorial policy. Editor Taylor also denied that he consulted Buchanan in his decision to declare for the third party and accepted full responsibility for his endorsement. Taylor further denied any pressure or influence from the Conference of Alliance Presidents held in Birmingham the previous week. He acknowledged, however, that he distributed a questionnaire among the state's Alliance lodges to ascertain political support. He claimed that half the lodges responded to the question of whether individual members considered themselves Democrats, Republicans, or Independents ("those who hold principle dearer than party"). Among the respondents, "at least 90 per cent . . . reported as being independent," according to Taylor. Since the Alliance claimed 80,000 members, he anticipated "the third party had a very fair chance of success." Taylor had made his interest in the People's Party evident several weeks earlier in a *Toiler* article reprinted in the *National Economist.*

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[39] The People's Party first received endorsement at the Cincinnati Convention in May 1891. The following February, at the St. Louis Convention, some members of the Alliance called an extra session following the formal adjournment and endorsed the new Populist Party. Charles Macune and most southern leaders expressed grave reservations about the move toward a political party. While these early leaders of agrarian reform established the structure that launched the People's Party, they lost considerable control over the organization once it became the "third party." See *Banner*, 22 February through 1 March 1892; *National Economist*, 30 May 1891, 5 March 1892; Robert C. McMath, Jr., *American Populism*, Chapter 5: "Creating a Political Culture: The People's Party, 1891-1892," 143-179; Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 187-188.

In it, Taylor contended that "party collars are worn very loosely these days . . . [making] the very atmosphere . . . pregnant with the odors of independence." Taylor recognized the political reality that operated against the establishment of third parties, but he compared the "evident dissatisfaction" of his own time to the "fight which put the Republican party in power . . . in 1860." He upheld the Jeffersonian principles that supported the Democratic party, but charged that "since the Whig party went to pieces, and a large element of it went to the Democratic party, we find that its bosses are almost exclusively aristocrats." As he surveyed the political field, Taylor concluded that the loss of Democratic principles and the statewide support for a third party portended success to the People's Party. [40]

The formation of the Populist Party initially brought mixed reviews from the press. The *Banner* editor suggested that the third party did not want Buchanan's nomination, but a "needlessly vituperative campaign" that would give the new party an "enthusiastic boost" and leave "as many people sore over [Buchanan's] defeat as possible" in order to draw them away from the Democrats. The *Memphis Ledger* worried that the "tidal wave of success" that Turney suddenly received boded ill for the Democratic party. The West Tennessee editor suggested that farmers were "discouraged and disgusted" with the Turney campaign and expressed their views by "refusing to vote in the primaries, preferring rather to take their chances with a third

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[40] *Banner*, 11 May 1892. At the Birmingham meeting of Alliance presidents, the body passed a resolution "counseling harmony among Alliancemen, urging them to work together, and declaring all should accept as supreme the principles of the order." The convention acknowledged that the Alliance influence could only be effective "by voting at the ballot box," and offered support to the Northwest in its efforts. The editor of the *Banner* interpreted the simultaneous support for voting Alliance convictions and endorsement of the Northwest organization as evidence that "the Ocala principles are in so many words declared to be above Democracy or any other party system or organization. The spirit of the Birmingham resolutions is in sympathy with and encouragement of third partyism." The editor found the resolution particularly important since John H. McDowell's name "heads the list of signatures." See *National Economist*, 19 March 1892.

party." The *American* offered the amazing suggestion that the Democrats should nominate Buchanan as "a check to the wild rash of the impracticables into the third party." McDowell attributed the defections to the People's Party to "the bitter war which has been made on the Alliance and the vile slanders heaped upon our people." He believed some Alliance members would support Turney if he captured the gubernatorial nomination, but the "majority [would] not." Like the *American*, McDowell predicted the Democratic nomination of Buchanan would put an end to the third party." [41]

As anticipated, Turney men dominated the Democratic State Presidential Convention on May 26. The delegates quickly concluded their business and instructed for Cleveland. The considerable support Buchanan carried from the county delegations showed no evidence at this convention. Bourbon Democrats felt so confident of their power that they instituted the mechanisms to champion "simon-pure" Democracy during a Turney meeting in the ladies ordinary of the Maxwell House Hotel. J. D. C. Atkins chaired the session and Edward W. Carmack acted as secretary. Prominent Democrats, including S. F. Wilson, S. A. Champion, Frank Bond, James D. Porter, William A. Henderson, W. L. Ledgerwood, and Thomas Gregory, offered the usual refutations of the Ocala Demands. The group resolved to present their convictions to the convention and ask the body to declare "unequivocally in its platform against the sub-treasury scheme, the land loan scheme, the purchase of the railroads and the telegraph lines by the general government, and against secret political organizations." As Roger Hart pointed out, the passage of this declaration, "in effect,

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41 *Banner*, 17, 18, and 21 May 1892.

changed the rules in the middle of the game." Democrats now required anti-subtreasury oaths from all would-be primary voters and convention participants. [42]

Since Turney forces now dominated the Democratic party, attempts to gain Alliance demands through the organized Democratic party appeared futile. Nevertheless, many refused to admit defeat and join the People's Party. At a called Alliance meeting on June 1, conservatives controlled the proceedings. The pro- and anti-third party factions compromised on a resolution that required the *Toiler* to "fearlessly and boldly advocate the demands and principles of our order regardless of party." The events of May broke the Alliance momentum, and the agrarian reformers never regained control of the political stage. [43]

In late June, McDowell made his move to the People's Party. He called a party convention for June 28 after issuing his statement renouncing his membership in the Democratic Party. Reprinted in the *National Economist*, McDowell's "Farewell Address" reflected his reluctance to abandon the party and his disgust with the fight just concluded. McDowell acknowledged that he promised "in more than one hundred speeches . . . to make the fight for a redress of our grievances inside the two old parties." Nevertheless, "flagrant outrages," including the denial of "the right of suffrage at the primaries," forced him to change his mind. McDowell charged the executive committee with "misrepresentation, vilification and ridicule" directed against

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42 *American*, 26, 27 May 1892; *Banner*, 26 and 27 May 1892. Hart notes that historians frequently misrepresent Buchanan's political strength in the early primaries and conventions, since his votes did not show up in the August state convention. As he point out, as late as May, Buchanan carried mass meetings in Warren, Cheatham, and Campbell counties, and lost in Sumner County by only 17 votes. See Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 186-187.

43 *Banner*, 31 May, 1 and 2 June 1892; *Journal*, 2 June 1892. Conservative Alliance men quickly organized themselves as "Buchanan Democrats," in order to retain their identification as Democrats but distinguish themselves from Turney supporters.

farmers "because [they] saw fit to join a farmers' organization and exercise the right to have an opinion on public questions." He reluctantly left the Democratic party, but "in no wise depart[ed] from the pure principles of Jeffersonian Democracy." McDowell chastised the simon-pure Democrats who opposed him and reminded readers that "many of the very men who are now using the scare-crow of negro domination in the South, had no fear of it a few years ago, when they bolted and left the Democratic party." He concluded that "the spirit of unrest and discontent . . . throughout the length and breadth of our land" demanded the union of reform forces and the formation of a new party. [44]

When the first Tennessee People's Party Convention met in late June, forty-five of the ninety-six counties sent delegates. McDowell and the radical leadership of the Alliance controlled the convention. The delegates wrote a party platform and selected delegates to the national convention. They waited to nominate a gubernatorial candidate until Buchanan decided what he wanted to do. [45]

Buchanan never wavered in his adherence to the Democratic party. On July 30, in response to the demands of "Buchanan Democrats," the governor withdrew his name from consideration at the upcoming party convention. He attributed his problems to the "sky-blue bolters" of the party and denounced their tactics as worthy

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[44] *National Economist*, 2 July 1892. McDowell referred to the split in the Democratic party in 1880, when the "low-tax" Democrats, led by S. F. Wilson, bolted the party over the question of funding the state debt. As a result of the party conflict, the Republicans won the gubernatorial election with Alvin Hawkins. See Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 28-55.

[45] *Banner*, 29 June 1892; *American*, 29 June 1892; *Appeal-Avalanche*, 29 June 1892. See party platform in Appendix A. The delegates to the national convention included many familiar names, as well as some new ones. At-large delegates included McDowell, Taylor, T. H. Askew of Obion County, J. F. Nelson of Washington County, S. S. Bond of Madison County, and John M. Meek of Jefferson County. District delegates were John Jaynes, 1st; no 2nd district delegate; F. P. Dickey, 3rd; M. P. Young, 4th; J. L. Baxter, 5th; W. K. Campbell, 6th; S. C. Galloway, 7th; William Rush, 8th; D. W. Toney, 9th; and T. V. Nihil, 10th.

of the autocracy of the Czar of Russia. When the Democratic party convened on August 9, the nomination of Turney was a foregone conclusion. In marked contrast to the convention of 1890, Turney received the party's endorsement on the first ballot, though a few delegates voted for Buchanan. In his acceptance speech, Turney made a half-hearted attempt to heal party wounds, counseling Democrats to "talk to [Alliance members] not with epithets, but with argument," especially the argument that "the Democratic party has had no chance to bring them relief." Neither Turney's "argument" nor his belated olive-branch approach persuaded the radicals who moved to the People's Party. [46]

The final phase of the 1892 campaign began with the People's Party convention in mid-August. A rousing convention followed by enthusiastic rallies, parades, and stump speeches still might have given the Populists a credible showing in the November elections. Both internal conflicts and external events undermined the opportunity to reinvigorate the lagging campaign. Following the establishment of the People's Party, county organizations quickly had emerged, but remained divided over how to proceed. The Giles County People's Party resolved to support Buchanan's bid for re-election "in the event he sees proper to became our nominee for governor." The party proved less willing to appoint an advisory committee "to meet the Republican executive committee to confer and decide on a joint slate for congressman, state senator, floater and representative." Some members declared that a joint effort with the Republicans would kill the People's Party. They finally agreed to the substitution of the words "any other party" for Republican, a ruse that fooled no one. The

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[46] *American*, 31 July 1892, 7 and 10 August 1892; *Banner*, 9 and 10 August 1892; *Tribune*, 7 and 10 August 1892.

Lauderdale County People's Party objected to support for Buchanan unless the governor declared himself a member of the party. [47]

The state meeting of the People's Party provided few surprises. The organization offered its support to Buchanan's candidacy without a single dissenting vote. The delegates selected presidential electors and endorsed the national candidates, General James B. Weaver for president and James B. Field for vice-president. Weaver, the 1880 Greenback presidential candidate, served in the Union Army during the Civil War and commanded forces at Pulaski, Tennessee. James B. Field, a former Confederate major, although also called "General," had no previous ties with the agrarian movement. The convention adopted a platform and collected money and subscriptions to finance the campaign. McDowell donated $500, the largest contribution, but more than half the donations were for amounts of less than $25. In all, the party collected $1,625 at the convention. The party obliquely addressed the issue of race. Reverend S. C. Smith, an African-American minister, made a "stirring speech" before the convention (and contributed $5 to the cause). Smith began with a promise of support for the party and its candidate before launching into an address worthy of any Bourbon. After styling himself as the representative of a people who "do not count for much," he called upon the white Populists to prevent their own enslavement. "Will you continue to be slaves to self-seeking politicians," he

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47 *Pulaski Citizen*, 4 August 1892; *Banner*, 17 August 1892. The Lauderdale County People's Party also passed resolutions denying the charges of the opposition press that they were involved in a secret organization known as "Gideon's Band." Though the resolution offers no other information about the supposed band, the tone of the denial suggests a white-capping organization. The Lauderdale County party gave assurances that "all such organizations as that ascribed by the press of our enemies [deserve] the condemnation of all good citizens of whatever party, and we do pledge ourselves, if such a society shall be revealed, to do our utmost to crush it out of existence because of its dangerous character as a foe to liberty, equality and justice, and its inconsistency with free institutions."

asked, "or will you arise in your God-given strength and assert your rights?" Warming to the subject, he berated the Democrats for their use of the force bill as a scare tactic. Calling the threat of "negro domination . . . a political lie," he asked, "Is there a white man here who is in favor of negro domination?" Cries of "no, no" filled the hall. Amazingly, the black minister approved their answer. "You are right," he continued, "if you did, you ought to be kicked off of the tail of creation." [48]

The actions taken at the People's Party convention demonstrated both the limitations and the possibilities of the new political organization. Only several weeks old, and faced with the prospect of creating legislative and congressional slates, the organization had little choice but to ratify existing candidacies for governor and president. Although party leaders could reasonably assess the desires of Alliance members who transferred their political loyalties to the new party, they had less experience with other members from outside the agrarian organization. The influx of competing demands potentially threatened the existence of the party, although the harmony expressed at the convention helped to strengthen the party for what promised to be a bitter election campaign. The financial problems that plagued the Alliance transferred to the People's Party. The new political entity faced an immediate bitter fight against a well-financed and well-organized party. Finally, the sectional and racial

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48 *Banner*, 18 and 19 August 1892. Weaver's candidacy presented particular problems for Tennessee Populists. During the Civil War, Weaver became military commander over an area that included Giles County. When he accepted the nomination of the People's Party, stories quickly surfaced that tied him to mistreatment of prisoners and civilians under his jurisdiction and hinted at self aggrandisement during his command. His commander and even some who lived under his rule denied the tales of high-handed and exploitive tactics, but the questions added another black mark to the Populist record. During the fall campaign of 1892, Weaver and Mary E. Lease spoke to a rally at Pulaski. Unlike the intimidation the pair faced in Georgia, the Pulaski event took place without any reports of intimidation or violence. Within hours of the departure of the Populists, Turney forces also rallied in Pulaski. Predictably, newspapers reported a small turnout for Weaver and an overflowing, enthusiastic crowd for Turney.

tensions represented in the selection of Weaver as the party's presidential candidate and the appearance of Smith at the state convention bespoke the potential for future developments, but in the short run confirmed the worst fears of the Bourbon Democrats and provided a wedge for separating Alliance members from the Populist party.

The least manageable problems came from outside the organization. While the Populists met in Nashville, the coal mines exploded in another round of labor violence. Miners at Tracy City in Grundy County grew angry after the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company laid off free miners but continued to operate the mines with convict labor. On August 13, 1892, the miners confronted the superintendent and demanded equal working hours with the convicts. When the company rebuffed their demands, the miners left, but returned a short time later, burned the stockade, and sent the convicts to Nashville by train. Fifteen of the 362 convicts escaped during the ride to Nashville; one was killed and two others captured. [49]

Buchanan refused to send the state militia until requested to do so by the appropriate county officials, the correct legal stance but not the popular position. The next day, as expected, the miners repeated their actions at the Inman stockade. On the heels of the renewal of the convict lease war, the tensions in Anderson County boiled over again. On August 15, soldiers stationed in the area lynched a miner following a dispute at a local dance. The next day, an estimated one hundred miners attacked Fort Anderson, and a full-scale battle erupted. As news of the fighting spread, miners from across East Tennessee and Kentucky commandeered trains and rushed to the scene.

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[49] Knoxville *Journal*, 14 August 1892; Pete Daniel, "Tennessee Convict War," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 34 (1975): 273-292; A. C. Hutson, Jr., "The Overthrow of the Convict Lease System in Tennessee," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 8 (1936): 82-103.

The next attack came at Big Mount stockade, near Oliver Springs, where 1,500 miners overpowered the thirty soldiers and set fire to the structure. [50]

Pleading "nervous prostration," Buchanan remained in Nashville but urged the miners to exercise restraint. Public opinion quickly turned against the miners and nowhere more thoroughly than in politically charged Nashville. Even as the People's Party convention met, two thousand "representative citizens" held a mass meeting at the Union Gospel Tabernacle (now the Ryman Auditorium) to address the mining trouble. Nashville Mayor George B. Guild chaired the meeting, but Arthur S. Colyar, former board member of the Tennessee Coal, Iron & Railroad, took the leading role. Guild accused the miners of "willingly and knowingly outrag[ing] the laws," and rejected the convict lease system as the immediate problem. "The question is," he intoned, "have we any law or a state?" Someone in the audience then shifted the problem to the political sphere by answering, "We have laws, but no Governor." [51]

Guild rejected "any assistance from the general government" in putting down the rebellion. He assured his audience that "we can and will put down that thing." His meaning immediately became clear with his appointment of a committee on resolutions, chaired by Colyar. The choice of Colyar pleased the assembly; indeed, the colonel received an ovation when he entered the hall, a clear indication of the composition of the audience. "In response to a very flattering call," Colyar gave a speech more political than enlightening. [52]

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50 *Journal*, 15, 16, 17, 18 August 1892; Daniel, "Tennessee Convict War," 287-289; Hutson, "The Overthrow of the Convict Lease System," 94-95.

51 *Banner*, 19 August 1892. Also see *American* 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21 August 1892.

52 Ibid.

The colonel painted a dark picture of "a calamity upon the state." "I never saw anything before, but I could see some avenue of escape," he said, "but here I see none." He believed every man in Tennessee should feel disgraced by such a situation in a state that claimed John Sevier, Andrew Jackson, Sam Houston, and Davy Crockett. The greatest humiliation, according to Colyar, "is that we have reached the point where the people are willing to put a fool in the office of Governor." His remedy for the defence of the state, which he believed "any man with sense enough to go in out of the rain would do," was to "get guns and shoot down the violators." Colyar informed the audience that he had called on Buchanan during the first day of trouble and advised him, "for God's sake go up there and kill a few men and come back and look up your statutes." He attributed "all this trouble . . . to a want of sense on the part of the Governor." The partisan crowd cheered as Colyar reached his finale: "I hope, for the memory of Tennesseans who sleep in their graves, that when this fellow gets out of the Governor's chair he will be rebuked, and every man who has been implicated in this outrage will be severely punished." The cheers of the crowd followed the colonel as the committee retired to write the resolutions. [53]

The committee soon returned and offered its resolutions. The document presented Tennessee as "standing out before the entire American people in the craven attitude of a surrender--a complete surrender--to an armed mob of a few hundred men." The "Indignity" such a situation produced resulted from the actions, or inaction, of the Governor. The committee interpreted the "sense of the meeting" and, indeed, "the sense of all intelligent men in the state" as supporting the conviction that a

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[53] Ibid. In Colyar's absence, a lone voice of protest rose to remind the audience that the source of the trouble lay with "Col. Colyar and the Tennessee Coal, Iron & Railroad Company." The interjection of this embarrassing fact elicited "considerable excitement" as "everybody rose to their feet, some demanding that the man be put out and some wishing to allow him to speak."

"single courageous blow, stricken when the crime had its inception at Briceville one year ago . . . would have quelled the mob spirit." Forgetting their own initial condemnation of Buchanan's willingness to place himself above the law by calling out the troops in 1891, they argued that "the utter failure to either shoot or arrest one of this mob . . . made mobs a desirable substitute for the law." In the present situation the committee condemned Buchanan's refusal to strengthen the guard at Tracy City, his "temporizing policy," and the weakness of his call to "be patient a few days." The resolutions ended with no alternative provisions, but a repudiation of the governor and a "solemn protest against the people of Tennessee being held responsible in the eyes of the world for the calamity brought upon us and for the reproach which the Governor's course has brought upon us." [54]

The resolution seemed destined to pass without protest when Dr. J. M. Lindsley moved to table the resolution, urging the assembly to "save your verdict until the evidence is all in." Tim Hanifin, a local labor leader, seconded Lindsley's motion and chastised the partisanship of the meeting: "If you come here to make capital of Turney, let's do it." Despite his youth, he claimed he "never before saw such resolutions prepared by intelligent men." The rest of Hanifin's speech was "drowned in perfect storm of hisses." Not to be outdone, Lindsley continued the fight. Waving the resolutions over his head, he informed the crowd, "You see they have come here with their resolutions already prepared, written by a type-writer and want you to vote for them like sheep." The mood of the meeting demanded action, not reasoned discussion. Like Hanifin, Lindsley's voice was "drowned by hisses and cries of 'sit down.'" Colyar suggested that "the gentlemen in this audience who favor humiliating

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54 Ibid.

the state had better go off and hold a meeting of their own," while R. L. Morris deemed the resolutions "too mild" and thought the assembly should have "added a calling for the Governor's resignation." He further asserted that the people of the state had been "betrayed" by the governor, calling him either a "traitor" or the "biggest fool in the state." [55]

With the passage of the resolutions, the meeting's leaders moved to implement their threats to battle the miners. Captain John W. Morton called for 100 volunteers with guns, promising to supply the men with three cannon. By the following day, Nashvillians were comparing the miners' uprising to the crisis days of '61. The *Banner* claimed "Hundreds of men, young and old, and men who had seen service in the late war, were ready to shoulder their guns and to the front." An early morning meeting of "ex-Confederates" under Colonel Baxter Smith organized the volunteers in the Criminal Court room. Smith promised to "vindicate the majesty of the law" and throttle "this reckless insurrection . . . in its infancy." The excited ex-Confederates organized five companies under the leadership of captains W. C. Smith, R. L. Morris, Jere Baxter, F. S. Harris, and Matt Allen. When Adjutant-General H. H. Norman met the group at the capitol later that evening, he assured them that troops in East Tennessee had the situation under control and advised the Nashville volunteers to "hold themselves in readiness in case they should be needed." [56]

Troops in East Tennessee arrested over 500 miners and quickly restored order. The August 1892 uprising resulted in twenty-seven deaths and the incarceration of one scapegoat, labor leader D. B. Monroe. The miners failed to bring an end to convict

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55 Ibid.

56 *Banner*, 20 August 1892. The *Banner* printed a complete roster for each company of volunteers.

leasing immediately, but the legislature refused to renew the leasing contract when it came up for renewal in 1895. [57]

The episode illustrates the political effect of the volatile labor problem on the 1892 campaign. Caught between the demands of the miners, whose votes he solicited in February as the friend of the working man, and the demands of the gubernatorial campaign under the disputed title of "Independent Democrat," Buchanan elected to restore order without acting decisively. It opened him to charges of treachery and indecision, and gave the Bourbon ex-Confederates an opportunity to question his manhood and his leadership. In the midst of the excitement over the renewed miners' insurrection, the Populists ended their convention without the usual fanfare and public interest. The opportunity to regain the political momentum that fueled Buchanan's early spring campaign faded with the news from East Tennessee. The miners' war crippled the Independent Buchanan campaign and affected Populist efforts in legislative and congressional canvasses. [58]

Buchanan's most ardent supporters did not join the People's Party. They declared themselves "Buchanan Democrats," independent of the state gubernatorial

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57 Daniel, "Tennessee Convict War," 291-292. As previously noted, convicts continued to supply labor for men with power and influence, as for example, Jere Baxter.

58 Ordinary Democrats, like Robert H. Cartmell, in Madison County, expressed the same views as the Nashville mass meeting. "Gov. Buchanan is not the man to act in an emergency like this, " he wrote on August 20, 1892. He described the Alliance legislature of 1891 as "a poor one" and hoped "we will have no more of it." He noted Buchanan's endorsement by the Populists and claimed that the Madison County delegates to the convention were "no better than the radicals [Republicans]." He believed the party leaders were "pd for the part they acting [sic]" and doubted "if there is one of them that could have been elected to any office from constable up before the people." Cartmell assessed the Populist leaders as office-seekers, who "care nothing for the people or the good of government." Cartmell's observations so closely paralleled the Nashville meeting that they probably indicate the extent to which the Bourbon criticism of the Alliance and Populists drove the political debate of the late summer and fall. Cartmell Diary, 20 August 1892, TSLA, Nashville.

nominee but fully Democratic in their views and commitments. In early September, the chairman of the Executive Committee of the Independent Democrats, J. H. Burman, addressed the cause of the bolt from the party and asked the support of true Democrats for the election of Buchanan. He began with the assertion that the "Alliancemen are the children of Democracy," and supported that position with examples of Democratic positions on the avoidance of the promotion of special interests, the denunciation of national banks, the demand for coinage of gold and silver, the charges against sectionalism and class legislation, and the fight against unequal taxation. He charged that the "Democratic tongues of fire . . . aroused the sleeping giant, uncaged the sleeping lion." The people of Tennessee, who wandered "through the wilderness of 'hard times' and growing harder," responded to the Democratic call but met defeat "like consecrated martyrs" in their calls for reform. It took the Farmers' Alliance, "the most potent of all the schools," to effect "a protest, a resistance, a demand for legal equity with every other class of citizens, a demand for their just and honest proportion of the wealth they created." When their moment of triumph came, when the Alliance "had the unquestioned power to have plastered [the Democratic] platform from beginning to conclusion, with all manner of Alliance tenets, with all the peculiarities of Alliance theory and philosophy, and to have engrafted into the Democratic creeds not only the 'Ocala demands,' but every other distinctive feature of their order," they "handed back the power . . . to the people" and claimed only the nominee. [59]

Burman and the executive committee maintained that Buchanan remained "true and faithful to the enunciated principles upon which he was nominated and elected."

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59 *Banner*, 12 September 1892; Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 191-192.

Furthermore, they characterized him as "a friend of the whole people" and "to every diversity of interest." When the party whips and bosses failed to incite the Alliance to institute its demands on the party, they "dared to question [Buchanan's] honesty" by hammering away at his refusal to discuss the subtreasury plan in his capacity as governor. As the Independents pointed out, "many prominent teachers and leaders have become shaky on the tariff issue, uncertain of the silver question," without incurring the wrath of the party. Indeed, "many of the national banks of the country are being operated and the system defended by our own," they charged. Under the circumstances, the Independents concluded that "it was not Gov. Buchanan so hated as the Farmers' Alliance they despised." Once the party bosses decided to abandon Buchanan, "there was nothing said or done by him that did not call forth criticism, censure, calumny and slander from the press and leaders." When the state faced unprecedented civil disturbance, "these unforeseen happenings became campaign powder in the willing hands of the leaders and bosses, who should rather have gone to his help." None gave him the "sympathy of counsel or assistance" that was the duty of citizenship "in the hour when the peace of the state is threatened and imperiled." The committee favorably compared his efforts to end the convict war to other contemporary rebellions, including those in Pennsylvania and New York. But instead of praise, "the party scorpions were turned loose to sting and poison the public mind against him, and charge him with tardiness, treason, and high crimes and misdemeanors." [60]

While fighting the Farmers' Alliance and Buchanan, the Democratic Party disingenuously wondered at "the absence of the many honest farmer faces" from the

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60 Ibid.

1892 convention. The Independents found it no wonder that farmers abandoned the convention. If the "farmer faces" could have melted the heart of Peter Turney, he would have become the "Moses of Democracy," but to him the Democracy engaged in a "fight for the very existence of the party." If the Turney Democrats had engaged in reason not "sulleness," acted "not as enemies but brothers and friends," banded in common allegiance and march[ed] to a common destiny . . . [they] could have stayed if not prevented this." The Independents concluded with the defiant charge that theirs was "a fight for the right, the 'defenseless' against the strong, for the 'dependent and helpless' against the encroachment of the powerful." It explained their decision to bolt and bolstered their courage to say that the "party lash hath lost its sting." [61]

Democrats confidently predicted the victory of Turney in November. County newspapers rang with assurances for "Old Pete," though some objected to his refusal to declare his determination to resign from the office of Chief Justice, a decision apparently designed to prevent Buchanan from making a last minute appointment to fill the vacated seat on the bench. The *Columbia Current* found the prospect of one man holding both the office of governor and chief justice, "monstrous . . . [and] corrupting," while the *Cannon Courier* declared that the holding of both offices would "show that he either has an insatiable greed for office, or is prompted by the malice he is supposed to hold against Gov. Buchanan, either of which is a very small thing for a great man to indulge in." [62]

With their limited journalistic resources, the supporters of Buchanan cheered one another in the fight. Coffee County reported that "the split in the party is wide

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61 Ibid.

62 *Banner*, 12 September 1892.

and deep; the people are mad and determined to rebuke the leaders of the party. In the towns the sentiment is strong for the ticket, but as soon as your reach the country districts it is just the other way." As the campaign wore on, the Independents and Populists pointed up the class differences between the two sides. The *Columbia Current* described Buchanan's October 31 rally in Maury County as including "not many of the silk-stocking, plug hat, kid glove kind," but made up of "men who, in days gone by, have silently and without ostentation worked for and voted the Democratic ticket." The *Toiler* noted that Turney men dismissed Buchanan crowds as made up of men who came for the rally but did not pay poll taxes and could not vote. The editor assured these naysayers that the Buchanan men "always do pay their poll tax and vote. They have done so for years and have made the Democracy in the country what it has been in the past." Like the Democratic attacks, the *Toiler* charged that the Turney rallies "had as many women and children as voters." More importantly, the editor warned that if Turney men "control the next legislature they will make the infamous Dortch law apply to every district in the state . . . [and] cutt [sic] off fifty thousand farmers and laborers who can't vote under it." He promised that the election of the People's Party slate would result in the removal of "these iniquitous laws" from the statute books. [63]

The final blow to Buchanan's campaign and the Populist hopes came only days before the November balloting, when the Republican Knoxville *Journal* revealed the details of Populist-Republican political fusion and the Republican contribution, or pay-off, of $15,000 to John H. McDowell. As the July Giles County People's Party resolution made clear, the fusion of Republican and Populists interests for political

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63 *Banner*, 16 September 1892; *Toiler*, 2 November 1892.

expediency occurred openly. Tennessee Democrats worried that such an alliance would result in Democratic defeats in heretofore secure legislative and congressional districts. The union of interests between the two parties threatened to undo what the disfranchising laws had guaranteed. The Democrats fought for their political life.

The fusion politics of the Republicans and Populists was more limited than Democrats realized, or perhaps cared to acknowledge. Democrats worried about a Republican withdrawal of their candidate, G. W. Winstead, in favor of Buchanan, though the GOP held out for a minority victory like the one they achieved in 1880. Nor did the two parties agree in their support of presidential candidates. The Republicans maintained their support for Benjamin Harrison, while the Populists rallied behind James G. Weaver. Neither party, however, denied fusion on congressional and legislative candidates. In districts where Republican strength offered a credible chance for election, Populists supported GOP candidates rather than field their own. Wherever Republicans stood little chance of success, they withdrew their candidates and supported the Populists. This expedient alliance offered the greatest opportunity to control the legislature and send like-minded representatives to Congress. Speculation ran rampant that Republican-Populist control of the General Assembly would send John H. McDowell to the U.S. Senate.

On October 23, the Knoxville newspapers printed two letters that passed between Jonathan J. Ivins, editor of the *Knoxville Republican* and D. H. Hill, Republican National Committeeman from Tennessee. The letters described the Republican arrangement with McDowell in the fielding of candidates by the Republican and Populist parties and the payment of $15,000 to McDowell. According to the letter writers, McDowell agreed to keep Buchanan in the governor's race to give Winstead a fighting chance in the November election. He also promised to support

GOP congressional and legislative candidates and offer no opposition to the Harrison presidential ticket. If the Republicans and Populists gained control of the legislature, they would repeal the offensive election laws and elevate McDowell to the U.S. Senate. To make the cash-strapped Populist campaign viable, the National Republican Party provided McDowell with $15,000, some of which went to Buchanan's campaign. [64]

No one offered a satisfactory explanation as to how a Democratic newspaper obtained the letters, but in his letter Ivins expressed dismay that "we find ourselves in with a man of insatiable greed, unblushing corruption, and the most determined political perfidy." He worried that "we, as Republicans, have agreed to put [McDowell] in the United States Senate, to the everlasting disgrace of Tennessee . . . and the utter ruin of Republican hopes in the state and the South." Hill agreed and speculated that the party had "now lost fifteen thousand dollars on McDowell and Buchanan and [had] gained nothing." Hill made clear the self-serving nature of the letters as he explained that the scandal could not injure John Houk or himself, since the two men were "let into it after the bargain was made." [65]

The most satisfactory explanation for the release of the "letters" pointed to Republican factionalism. John Houk took over the second congressional district party reins from his father, Leonidas Houk, at his death in 1891. The younger Houk

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64 *American*, 23, 24 October 1892; *Appeal-Avalanche*, 23 October 1892; Memphis *Commercial*, 23 October 1892; Chattanooga *Times*, 23 October 1892; *Journal* 23-26 October 1892; Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 196; Sharp, "The Farmers' Alliance and Tennessee Politics," 196-202; Vernon M. Queener, "The East Tennessee Republicans As A Minority Party, 1870-1896," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 15 (1943): 70-72; Gordon B. McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans, 1865-1900: Politics and the Appalachian Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 146.

65 *Tribune*, 26 October 1892.

operated the party machinery but commanded little of the power exercised by his father. In 1892, he faced a formidable challenge to his statewide control of federal patronage from H. Clay Evans, the third district congressional candidate. More urbane, and with stronger national ties, Evans seemed the likely state party leader if Harrison won reelection. Houk chafed at the knowledge that the National party provided financial support to the tight third district race, while virtually ignoring his campaign (which Houk was expected to win). Houk's supporters became frantic in their efforts to defeat the Chattanooga "Carpetbagger." Houk's bitterness toward Evans, and his frustration over the Populist congressional campaign of Frank P. Dickey (which Houk believed would split the Democrats and elect Evans) knew no bounds. The Houk camp remains the most probable source of the letters. Houk's close association with both Ivins and Hill and the clumsy attempt in the Hill letter to clear Houk of any complicity in the affair point to a political "dirty trick." When Houk denied complicity and labeled Ivins a "thief" and "traitor," the angry Hill issued a statement through the Chattanooga *Times,* in which he charged that "the express purpose of the publication [of the letters] was to injure H. Clay Evans." He maintained that "the letters were written with the full realization of the effect they would produce" after frequent consultations between Hill, Houk, and Ivins. Whatever the source of the letters, Evans went down to defeat, but so too did Harrison, and the question of the distribution of patronage became a moot point.

On election day, Peter Turney won with 126,348 votes to Winstead's 100,577 and Buchanan's 29,918. The Democratic triumph carried a hint of defeat. The combined opposition of Winstead and Buchanan returned 4,000 more votes than Turney's total. Clearly, Bourbon Democracy faced sizable opposition from several sources. Nevertheless, historians point to the small Buchanan vote as indicative of the

failure of Populism. The People's Party sent only six men to the General Assembly, five representatives and one senator, a dramatic decline from the 54 Alliancemen of the previous General Assembly. Despite the state losses, the dissenters retained significant political strength, especially when they forged fusion alliances with the minority Republican party. Given the previous record for agrarian "stickability" and the political savy of John McDowell, the Democrats could not dismiss the "clodhoppers" yet. Except for the Tenth District, the Populist and fusion candidates made a respectable showing in Middle and West Tennessee, as Table 7.1 shows. [66]

Table 7.1 Congressional Races, 1892

District	Total Vote	Democratic Vote	Populist/Fusion Vote
1	31,938	13,207 17,890 (Rep)	--------
2	28,390	7,875 18,952 (Rep)	798
3	33,683	15,984 15,035 (Rep)	2,171
4	25,235	14,010	11,225
5	22,425	13,709	8,062
6	25,302	15,695	9,002
7	20,952	12,013	8,480
8	25,958	13,038	12,920
9	25,569	14,334	10,883
10	16,949	12,164	4,785

Source: "Congressional Directory" printed in the *Senate Journal, 53rd Congress, 3rd Session, 1893-1894* Serial 3282 (Washington, D.C., 1895), 108-110.

66 Congressional figures can be found in the "Congressional Directory" printed in the *Senate Journal, 53rd Congress, 3rd Session, 1894-1894* Serial 3282 (Washington, D. C., 1895), 108-110.

In the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth districts, the Populist and fusion candidates polled between 35.6 percent and 49.8 percent of the vote. B. A. Enloe of the Eighth district won his race with little more than one hundred votes. The failure to secure a fusion agreement in the third district clearly cost Republican H. Clay Evans the race. At least on the national level, where Alliance leaders had long argued the real fight would take place, the People's Party demonstrated more strength and cohesiveness than analyses of the state's political dissent have indicated. [67]

In the days following the election, as state Democrats celebrated, the Supreme Council of the National Farmers' Alliance and Laborers' Union held a four-day convention in Memphis. Officially concerned with the selection of officers and minor constitutional changes, the meeting became the site of the struggle between Democratic Alliancemen and advocates of the People's Party for control of the organization.

The inflammatory situation that brought the battle to the convention site was an accusation against J. F. "Fount" Tillman, Tennessee Allianceman and secretary of the Executive Committee. Populist members of the Alliance accused Tillman of using the funds and equipment of the Alliance and the *National Economist* to print and distribute pamphlets in support of the Democratic Party during the recent election. By implication, the editor of the Alliance paper and past president of the national organization, Charles Macune, also shared in the responsibility for the act. The delegates soon exhibited strong Macune and anti-Macune sentiments as the organization struggled to deal with the affair. [68]

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67 Ibid.

68 *Appeal-Avalanche*, 15-19 November 1892; *American*, 16-19 November 1892; *National Economist*, 26 November, 3 December, and 10 December 1892.

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[76] The Populists of Obion County met in convention on May 4, 1896, and elected gubernatorial and congressional delegates to the state and district conventions. John H. McDowell presided and T. J. Ogilvie acted as secretary. Two delegates were selected from each district, except districts 4, 6, 8, and 9, to attend the gubernatorial convention in Nashville, scheduled for July 29, 1896. The delegates from each district included: 1. J. F. Swiggert and H. F. Bynum; 2. T. P. Noah and J. L. Glover; 3. Green Cloar and Jonathan Brewer; 4. A. C. Elam; 5. T. R. Ingram and Jno. Barnes; 7. Abe Crittenden and Geo. Phebus; 10. J. H. McDowell and J. H. Bittick; 11. Morgan King and T. P. Finch; 12. R. S. Kendall and W. J. Via; 13. J. T. Wilson and A. Z. Simms; 14. W. W. Hutcherson and Josh Beard; 15. T. J. Ogilvie and James Norman; and 16. C. H. Cathey and R. L. Fowlkes. Union City *Independent*, 7 May 1896. See Appendix D for a complete list of delegates from Obion County.

failure of Populism. The People's Party sent only six men to the General Assembly, five representatives and one senator, a dramatic decline from the 54 Alliancemen of the previous General Assembly. Despite the state losses, the dissenters retained significant political strength, especially when they forged fusion alliances with the minority Republican party. Given the previous record for agrarian "stickability" and the political savy of John McDowell, the Democrats could not dismiss the "clodhoppers" yet. Except for the Tenth District, the Populist and fusion candidates made a respectable showing in Middle and West Tennessee, as Table 7.1 shows. [66]

Table 7.1 Congressional Races, 1892

District	Total Vote	Democratic Vote	Populist/Fusion Vote
1	31,938	13,207 17,890 (Rep)	--------
2	28,390	7,875 18,952 (Rep)	798
3	33,683	15,984 15,035 (Rep)	2,171
4	25,235	14,010	11,225
5	22,425	13,709	8,062
6	25,302	15,695	9,002
7	20,952	12,013	8,480
8	25,958	13,038	12,920
9	25,569	14,334	10,883
10	16,949	12,164	4,785

Source: "Congressional Directory" printed in the *Senate Journal, 53rd Congress, 3rd Session, 1893-1894* Serial 3282 (Washington, D.C., 1895), 108-110.

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In the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth districts, the Populist and fusion candidates polled between 35.6 percent and 49.8 percent of the vote. B. A. Enloe of the Eighth district won his race with little more than one hundred votes. The failure to secure a fusion agreement in the third district clearly cost Republican H. Clay Evans the race. At least on the national level, where Alliance leaders had long argued the real fight would take place, the People's Party demonstrated more strength and cohesiveness than analyses of the state's political dissent have indicated. [67]

In the days following the election, as state Democrats celebrated, the Supreme Council of the National Farmers' Alliance and Laborers' Union held a four-day convention in Memphis. Officially concerned with the selection of officers and minor constitutional changes, the meeting became the site of the struggle between Democratic Alliancemen and advocates of the People's Party for control of the organization.

The inflammatory situation that brought the battle to the convention site was an accusation against J. F. "Fount" Tillman, Tennessee Allianceman and secretary of the Executive Committee. Populist members of the Alliance accused Tillman of using the funds and equipment of the Alliance and the *National Economist* to print and distribute pamphlets in support of the Democratic Party during the recent election. By implication, the editor of the Alliance paper and past president of the national organization, Charles Macune, also shared in the responsibility for the act. The delegates soon exhibited strong Macune and anti-Macune sentiments as the organization struggled to deal with the affair. [68]

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Table 7.2 People's Party Vote: Obion County Elections, 1892, 1894, 1896

	Governor % Total Vote			Congress % Total Vote			Land Value
District	1892	1894	1896	1892	1894	1896	$/ acre
1.	39.2	42.9	32.2	54.9	56.1	53.5	17.16
2.	0.9	2.1	2.7	14.0	9.0	32.2	20.99
3.	30.5	38.7	20.5	37.3	49.1	35.6	6.11
4.	16.3	8.5	0.7	42.2	34.9	28.2	13.16
5.	43.0	50.3	8.3	56.8	67.3	23.0	5.48
6.	33.5	28.0	16.7	44.3	43.5	41.2	10.02
7.	19.8	12.9	7.1	33.7	38.6	15.0	9.57
8.	29.2	29.5	18.6	48.4	54.6	44.8	9.90
9.	30.2	33.6	5.1	42.2	61.8	18.9	8.45
10.	38.0	27.7	12.5	58.6	63.2	58.2	11.96
11.	40.4	40.1	39.8	51.9	52.1	58.2	7.71
12.	48.8	52.1	27.1	58.9	56.9	38.4	5.42
13.	10.4	11.3	2.7	40.0	33.0	34.7	27.75
14.	16.5	12.0	7.1	23.7	13.3	21.2	13.91
15.	17.1	15.0	6.8	37.4	44.9	61.7	17.91
16.	23.2	10.8	2.7	58.2	48.3	35.6	14.62
County	26.4	22.9	10.3	43.8	42.6	36.6	

Source: *Obion County Tax Book*, 1890, TSLA; *Record of Elections, Obion County*, 1892, 1894, 1896

As the chart indicates, the Populists in Obion County enjoyed a respectable support for the gubernatorial candidates until 1896. State General Assembly candidates polled voting tallies that closely resembled those in the congressional races. In 1892, Populist and Independent candidates for the state Senate, Floatorial Representative, and Representative gained 39.7 percent, 40.3 percent, and 40.3 percent of the vote respectively. Two years later, Populist or fusion candidates ran for state Senate and Representative, tallying 44.4 percent and 42.9 percent of the vote. In 1896, the Republicans ran their own candidate in a three-way race for the state Senate; and the Populist vote dropped to less than one percent. The fusion candidate for state

Representative, however, received 37.3 percent of the vote. The 1896 congressional race is particularly interesting since it pitted Democratic candidate Rice Pierce against his friend, neighbor, and former political ally, Populist John H. McDowell. [77]

James M. Brice, the editor of Troy *News-Banner* asserted that the Populists "had an apparently unshakable hold on Obion County." He credited the party with successfully electing county officials whenever the Populists could avoid subjecting their slate to the nominating process of a primary election of a county convention. In Brice's view, control of the county elections did not return to the Democratic party until "John E. Wells, in later years, thoroughly organized the democracy of Obion County, thereby whipping the Populists back into line." His control over the party forced "candidates for county and state offices to offer 'subject to the action of the Democratic Party' and not run independent of any party as they had been doing." As a result, the Democratic nomination became "equivalent to an election." [78]

By 1896, many Democrats embraced the free silver movement as a mechanism to end the effects of the Panic of 1893 and lure back prodigal Populists. In February, as the political cauldron heated up, the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* warned that "The free coinage of silver is simply a thing to talk about, so far as the Populists in this state are concerned, and not a thing to vote for." Nevertheless, Memphis and the

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77 *Record of Elections, Obion County, Tennessee*, 1892, 1894, 1896, Obion County Courthouse, Union City, Tennessee.

78 Betty B. Wood and Rebel C. Forrester, *"I Had a Real Good Time:" The Making of a Country Editor: The Recollections of James M. Brice of the New-Banner of Troy, Tennessee (1862-1926)* (Union City: H.A. Lanzer, 1984), 132-133. Brice remembered E. F. Eskew (Askew?) of the 8th district as the first Populist to obtain a county office, County Trustee. He named McDowell as "the leading Populist," but also listed Col. Thomas R. Inman of near Troy; John White of Hornbeak; Bud Thomas of the First District and J. Holland Bittick, "all farmers of the highest and most respectable character . . . [as] active and zealous supporters."

whole 10th district became the center of the free silver controversy in the 1896 congressional race. [79]

Memphis emerged as the center of the silverites in 1895, when the Central Bimetallic League of Shelby County issued a call for a convention of Democrats to counter the control of the gold Democrats over the party platform. The Memphis silver convention met on June 12, 1895, and included more than 2,000 delegates from over 21 states. Although the majority of the delegates claimed affiliation with the Democratic Party, the convention attracted its share of Populists, Republicans, and Independents. The Populists leader Marion Butler represented North Carolina at the convention. Isham Harris and William Bate, Tennessee's U.S. Senators, attended, as did Edward W. Carmack, the editor of the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* and a very new convert to the silver cause. A significant minority advocated the formation of a silver party, but William Jennings Bryan successfully directed the convention efforts toward change within the Democratic party. [80]

The Memphis convention and the ensuing battle over free silver defined the congressional race of 1896. The 10th district race pitted two Bourbons, Josiah Patterson and Edward Ward Carmack, against one another for the Democratic nomination. Patterson, who variously advocated the gold standard, free coinage, and bimetallism (depending on his political needs), viewed the free silver movement as peripheral to the principles of the Democratic party. Carmack, who spent years blasting the Populists as "queer freaks and demagogues" for their "organized

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79 *Commercial Appeal*, quoted in the Union City *Independent*, 13 February 1896.

80 John M. Eisenberg, M.D., "A House Divided: Silver Democrats and Their Party," *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 29 (October 1975), 86-99; *Commercial Appeal*, 12 and 13 June 1895.

revolutionary form," now apologized for his earlier characterization of the party as "anarchistic" and "utterly violent and vicious in its teachings." Simultaneous with his sudden love of Populists, Carmack emerged as the leading silverite in the state. [81]

Not all Populists proved ready to "kiss and make-up" with the acid-tongued Carmack. McDowell lambasted the silver Democrats for their "half-way measures" and asserted that the Populists were the only "honest fiatists." McDowell and others feared absorption into the Democratic party if the Populists attempted fusion over the silver question. Deep ideological differences between Republicans and Populists always precluded absorption and permitted expedient fusion, but fusion with the Democrats presented a more enticing allure. [82]

By the end of the 1896 campaign the Populist party stood in disarray. Fusion with Republicans at the local level and fusion with the Democrats at the national level undermined the party. Just as McDowell feared, the Populists could withstand alliances with Republicans, but not Democrats. Years of political pressure, uphill battles, and financial and institutional weaknesses took their toll. After 1896, the fear of Populism became more important than the reality. One by one, the Populists and Independents returned to the fold. McDowell was named to the Executive Committee of the Tennessee Centennial Celebration; he became an active participant in Confederate Veterans organizations; and eventually joined his old enemy, Edward W. Carmack, in the prohibition campaigns of the early twentieth century. Ever the renegade reformer, however, McDowell also campaigned for Teddy Roosevelt's

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81 Marilyn J. Hutson, "The Election of 1896 in the Tenth Congressional District of Tennessee," (PhD diss., Memphis State University, 1976), 40-43; *Commercial Appeal*, 17 July 1894 and 31 July 1896.

82 Hutson, "The Election of 1896 in the Tenth Congressional District," 119-126.

Progressive "Bull Moose" Party in 1912. John Buchanan returned to the political scene in the early twentieth century as an "elder statesman." His appearance on the campaign stage with Malcolm Patterson (the son of Josiah Patterson) in his gubernatorial race presumably was still believed to affect the agrarian vote. [83]

The fear of Populism remained a political staple. Carmack attributed every political setback in his own career to the work of the "Pops." As late as 1904, the State Democratic Executive Committee polled county party leaders to assess the strength of the Populist support. In two outbreaks of agrarian violence in the early twentieth century--the Black Patch Tobacco Wars and the Reelfoot Lake Uprising--agrarian leaders and politicians acted to limit the focus of dissent to clearly identifiable goals. As Tracy Campbell notes in his study of the Black Patch, tobacco elites (many of whom participated in the earlier reform movement or opposed it) formulated the organizing principles and lists of demands before approaching smaller farmers for their support. Once dissent moved out of the control of the elites, the protest came to a swift end. In the case of Reelfoot Lake, Malcolm Patterson, who was campaigning for re-election, personally led troops to the area in a show of force that demonstrated his command of the situation. The General Assembly acted quickly to declare the lake navigable to prevent future attempts to reclaim the land. In 1914, the lake came under state protection, where it remains still. In neither instance did dissenters and reformers demand more fundamental changes in the political and economic life of the state. [84]

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[83] Sharp, "The Farmers' Alliance and Tennessee Politics," 200-205; Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 200-223.

[84] Carmack received a letter in May 1906, from J. H. Crass of Murfreesboro, urging him to abandon the thought of running for Governor against Malcolm Patterson. "You are right," he wrote, "the liquor interest, railroads, and the pops hate you and will do you up again." Another letter from William Hill of Gallatin attributed Carmack's primary defeat to Populists: "Populites voted here who said after they had voted that they had no right to vote, but were so anxious to accomplish your defeat that they were willing to do what they knew they had no right to do and what they would not

The battle against the Populists involved more than the marshaling of public opinion to expose the "demagogues'" desire for office. Bourbon and New South Democrats waged a fierce war against threat to their economic and political power. The potential for Alliance control of the Democratic party portended an end to the hierarchical control that had survived the Civil War. By successfully labeling the Alliance and Populist leaders as demagogues, the Democratic party determined that those who demanded popular participation in government were "radical" and "dangerous." The "success" of the Bourbon and New South political elites silenced the "clodhoppers" and "wool hat boys" and bound Tennessee to another half century of economic and political stagnation, until national and international events in the forms of depression, war, and demands for civil rights brought long-overdue changes.

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have allowed in an election for a populite." See "Edward Ward Carmack Papers," Box 4, f. 4, letter from J. H.Crass, 16 May 1906 and Bx 5, f. 2, letter from William Hall, 16 May 1906, TSLA; For the request from the State Democratic Executive Committee, see "Charles B. Simonton Papers," Box 1, f. 5, Mississippi Valley Historical Collection, University of Memphis; Tracy Campbell, *The Politics of Despair: Power & Resistance in the Tobacco Wars* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1993), 30-52.

Conclusion

Every generation of historians seems to return to the Farmers' Alliance and the Populists to analyze their economic position, ponder their motivations, study their demands, quantify their voting records, and fret over the cause of their demise as a reform movement. At times furious debates have enlivened the historical literature over whether agrarian reform arose from immediate economic needs or represented long-standing class conflicts; whether the Alliance and Populist movements represented a radical reorganization of the political, social, and economic landscape or reflected the reemergence of old political antagonisms and the desire of younger men for political offices monopolized by entrenched, aging Redeemers; and finally, whether quick demise of the People's Party arose from internal problems or the failure of fusion. What is often lost in these debates is the farmer in the field. How did he view the list of agrarian demands? Were his views shaped by the national agrarian organizations or did they reflect local and regional conditions? Ironically, the movement that determined to return the yeoman farmer to his rightful position in the political and economic life of the nation often is treated historically by ignoring the farmer and focusing on the political and agrarian elites.

The historiography of the Tennessee agrarian reform movement follows this same pattern. Both Roger Hart and Joseph Sharp approached their studies of the Alliance and the Populists by focusing on political campaigns and voting records in the state legislature. Corinne Westphal and James Tice Moore looked at the economic problems facing Tennessee's farmers in the late nineteenth century. Though sympathetic to the plight of the state's farmers, Westphal attributed the demise of agrarian reform to the overall lack of business experience and the failure to remove the

more radical elements from the Alliance. Moore characterized the Tennessee movement as weak and attributed its lack of success to the relative prosperity of the state's farmers (as defined by low interest rates and the growth of owner-operated farms). Moore did not address the problems of expensive store credit and the difficulties associated with small land holdings in an age of commercial agriculture and increasing mechanization. The work of these four scholars contributed to an understanding of Tennessee's complex political history and pointed to important state and regional exceptions to the national economic pattern, but dismissed Tennessee's agrarian uprising as inconsequential and generally treated it as a sudden, inexplicable event, without precedent or antecedent. [1]

Such was not the case. Tennessee's agrarian reformers emerged from a history of class antagonism and joined the Agricultural Wheel and Farmers' Alliance during a period of political change and economic contraction. As the Civil War Veterans' Questionnaires indicate, class differences predated the war. Although slaveholding planters seemed oblivious to class issues, the questionnaires answered by smaller farmers demonstrated a recognition of the social and economic gap that separated them from their wealthier neighbors--a difference that conferred power on planters but limited poorer men to the role of voters and occasional minor officeholders. In the postwar period, the discontent of smaller farmers first became apparent in the legislative battles of the 1870s over the funding and direction of the Agricultural Commission. Farmers took exception to New South views that relegated agriculture

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[1] Roger Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists: Tennessee, 1870-1896* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975); Joseph A. Sharp, "The Farmers' Alliance and Tennessee Politics, 1890-1892" (MA thesis, University of Tennessee, 1931); Corinne Westphal, "The Farmers' Alliance in Tennessee" (MA thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1929); James Tice Moore, "Agrarianism and Populism in Tennessee, 1886-1896: An Interpretive Overview," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 44 (1983): 357-378.

to the role of handmaiden to industry and attempted to rein in the Agricultural Commissioner in order to make his department responsible to middle-level and small farmers, rather than focusing attention on mineral extraction and immigration.

By the mid-1880s, Tennessee farmers were organizing into local and county units of the Agricultural Wheel and the Farmers' Alliance. Similar in outlook and programs, the Wheel and Alliance demanded economic and political changes that would limit the growing power of the Gilded Age industrialists and place farmers in control of the agricultural market. The establishment of local purchasing and marketing cooperatives and the development of a national plan of legislative action held special appeal for middle-level landowning farmers, who viewed every drop in commodity prices and every rise in taxation as a step closer to poverty and the loss of their land (and their claim to "middle class" status). Although the Wheel and Alliance likely attracted tenant farmers, the identifiable members of Tennessee's organizations were landholders. Many of these farmers indicated in diaries, letters, and testimony before congressional committees that their attempts to diversify agricultural production met with failure. Forced to accept expensive store credit rather than obtain lower interest loans, their efforts produced ever-increasing debt. The ongoing depression in agricultural prices coupled with the changing markets and the chaotic political climate of the 1880s encouraged Tennessee farmers to organize and protect their interests. Thus, while immediate economic problems pushed the farmers into the Wheel and Alliance, long-standing class differences separated the members of the reform organizations from the more prosperous planters who controlled political power--a political and social reality seemingly recognized by both "Upper-Case" Democrats and Wheelers and Alliancemen who generally characterized the ensuing conflict as a "class war."

Previous assessments of the Tennessee agrarian movement ignored the local organizational development of the Wheel and Alliance and failed to address the role of the state's agrarian leaders in the national organizations. The Wheel and Alliance spread rapidly across the western and middle sections of the state where farmers were more likely to be engaged in market production. Local Wheels and sub-Alliances experienced a variety of organizational conflicts as men new to agrarian reform sorted out their personal and partisan differences and struggled for unity. Wheel and Alliance leaders crisscrossed the state educating the newly initiated, arbitrating local disputes, and exhorting the weary to renewed commitment. Their efforts resulted in a statewide organization that increasingly made its voice for agrarian reform heard in the General Assembly.

Moreover, the Tennessee Wheel and Alliance played an important role in the development of the Southern Farmers' Alliance and the National Wheel and Alliance. J. R. Miles joined the Wheel shortly after its inception and organized Tennessee. A. E. Gardner served as national secretary of both the Wheel and the Alliance. John H. McDowell was a national vice-president of both the Wheel and Alliance, lectured throughout Missouri, Kansas, and Arkansas, and edited *The Weekly Toiler* which received critical acclaim from other presses. J. F. Tillman served as national lecturer of the Alliance and was associated with Charles Macune in the *National Economist.* Tennessee commissioners of agriculture under Robert Taylor and John Buchanan negotiated agreements with the cotton exchanges during the jute boycott and organized successful regional efforts to reduce cotton planting. Until the November 1892 National Executive meeting in Memphis, where advocates of the Peoples' Party gained control over the Alliance proceedings, Tennessee Wheel and Alliancemen wielded considerable influence in determining the national agrarian demands.

A close look at the local, county, and state organization of the Wheel and Alliance sheds light on the activities of these agrarian unions and offers the opportunity to examine the programs and tenets embraced by the state's farmers. Neither nostalgic agrarian romantics nor hard-line ideologues, Tennessee farmers supported national agrarian demands in principle, but realistically separated those demands that were attainable locally from those that required national legislation. Furthermore, they seldom accepted the more radical demands completely, but embraced some parts and rejected others. For example, they supported federal railroad regulation but remained skeptical of government ownership of railroads, fearing the creation of a partisan agency capable of holding farmers in economic and political bondage. Tennessee Wheelers and Alliancemen initially favored the subtreasury scheme but denounced it when land was added as a mortgagable property for low-interest government loans. They advocated non-partisan, non-sectional programs to defend agrarian interests, but they failed to overcome the racial and gender biases that characterized the South. Although non-partisan in their speeches and writings, Tennessee agrarian leaders closely identified with the Democratic party and actively fought against the creation of the People's Party.

The cautious pragmatism that characterized the Tennessee Wheel, Alliance, and Populist movements becomes more understandable when viewed from the perspective of the farmers themselves. Tennessee farmers recognized the differences that separated them, as well as the commonalities that united their efforts. Divided by geography into three Grand Divisions, split in their Civil War loyalties, and separated by political partisanship, farmers struggled to find common ground for waging their political and economic battles. The differences they fought to overcome explains much of their conservatism. Building on their common heritage of American

republicanism and past reform experiences (including prohibition and anti-gambling crusades), they organized local unions, established cooperative stores and warehouses, elected men to the General Assembly, captured the governor's office, and forced most of the state's congressmen to acknowledge their demands.

Tennessee's agrarian pragmatism sprang from tradition, political heritage, and expediency. Wheel and Alliance organizers operated within the traditional social conventions of the rural South. They established local unions through the friendship and kinship networks of rural communities. Associations built upon shared Civil War experiences, church affiliations, and memberships in other social reform organizations played a key role in drawing rural people together for reform. As men and women described their experiences in the Wheel and Alliance, they repeatedly referred to their common ties and portrayed their bonds in familial terms. The development of strong communal relationships supported the agrarian criticism of the emergence of a new industrial economic order removed from community control.

The commercialization of agriculture affected farmers across the nation, but for southern farmers, the market changes were added to the problems of rebuilding farms lost to war. Men returned from the Civil War to ruined land and took up the age-old agrarian struggle against nature and the markets. Many came back broken in body and spirit and started over in a setting that W. J. Cash compared to the frontier--an appropriate analogy to the severity of postbellum life, but a less credible analysis of the complex economic forces of the period. In need of capital, many farmers became mired in the crop lien system; to pay the debts and taxes, they wore out their land with cotton and tobacco production, or retreated into the self-perpetuating poverty of subsistence farming. Years of bad weather and low farm prices, punctuated by periodic financial depressions instilled a reluctance to experiment with new crops.

Agrarian reformers initially faced a wall of resistance to cooperative stores, warehouses, and mills from men and women fearful of losing what little they had to unproved schemes. Tennessee's Wheel and Alliance leaders countered these fears with a cautious pay-as-you-go plan of cooperative development, and farmers responded with encouraging words, the payment of assessments, and promises to purchase through the Wheel and Alliance business agents. Poorly capitalized and struggling for survival, the cooperatives stores nevertheless attracted the immediate attention of local merchants and wholesale suppliers, who attempted to stop the farmers' efforts through taxation and intimidation.

Although many of the local and county schemes to build warehouses, mills, and stores never moved beyond the planning stage, individual farmers testified to a scattering of successes that encouraged others. More importantly, farmers began to find ways to aid one another. Peanut farmers supported the jute boycott of the cotton farmers by switching to cotton bags. Middle Tennessee wheat farmers discussed the possibility of selling their crop directly to hard-pressed Georgia cotton farmers. The West Tennessee agent revealed plans to create a regional office to meet the needs of farmers in Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas. Denied admittance to the Wheel or the Alliance, bankers, lawyers, county-seat editors, and merchants watched as the "hayseeds" and "clodhoppers" gained organizational strength. Though the agrarian cooperative efforts ultimately failed, farmers expressed feelings of empowerment as they struggled to gain control over the production and marketing of their crops.

The struggles of the Wheel and Alliance state business agency masked a potentially serious economic threat to the state's entrenched elites. Men with substantial agricultural investments profited in several ways--rents, marketing of the crops and agricultural by-products, and furnishing groceries and supplies to tenants.

The wholesale grocery and furnishing business, warehousing and handling of crops, and transportation accounted for a substantial portion of the commercial success of Memphis, Nashville, and Knoxville in the late nineteenth century. First through cooperative efforts and then with the subtreasury scheme, the Farmers' Alliance attempted to by-pass merchant-planters to supply farmers and market their own crops. As the farmers themselves recognized, their schemes amounted to an attempt to create an agricultural monopoly. Viewed economically, the cooperative schemes had little chance of succeeding, but the Wheelers and Alliancemen did not disappear as quickly as merchants and warehousemen expected. Moreover, the skill with which their leaders managed the political campaigns and the "stickability" of the farmers in support of their candidates portended a stronger organization than the business and political leaders of the state anticipated. In the fall of 1888 and increasing throughout 1889, commercial houses in the major cities, warehouses across the state, millers, gin operators, and wholesalers refused to deal with the Wheel and Alliance, hoping to break the organizations' economic momentum. After the election of 1890, the state's political leaders joined the effort to discredit the agrarian insurgents.

The agrarian reformers accepted and used the traditional political ideology of the South. Like the "Upper-Case" Democrats, they had been reared on the rhetoric of the party of Jackson and Polk and couched their demands in the Jacksonian evangelical language of a political Armageddon, one that pitted liberty against tyranny and freedom against monopoly. Like the coda of the ancient storytellers, the use of the Jacksonian rhetoric provided an instant familiarity. It evoked the bonds of yeomanry that supported republicanism; it defined the enemy; and it sanctioned the agrarian cause.

Reformers also utilized the time-honored electioneering forms to generate political support for their cause. Wheelers and Alliancemen presented their demands and demonstrated their power in the public arena with rallies, parades, and "wild and woolly" conventions. Men and women sang, cheered, and shared meals in displays of their solidarity. In the dusty, sweaty, backwoods settings of the outdoor political arena, they demanded the presence of the candidates in order to hear and see and touch the men who proposed to represent their interests. In face-to-face confrontations, they measured the candidates, watching as they spoke, sang, prayed, partook of the ample dinners, and joked with the people. The longstanding political traditions of rural Tennesseans gave farmers the opportunity to scrutinize the candidates, hear their arguments, and make their own judgments.

The same tradition that perpetuated a dying form of stump politics also fostered an unswerving partisan loyalty. Tennessee voters still held the views common to the antebellum Second Party system, that change of party amounted to apostasy. Indeed, neither the Wheel nor the Alliance advocated the end of the two party system. Both organizations encouraged political participation--reminding farmers that the ballot box offered the only sure protection of their interests--but counseled local units to avoid partisanship. Local unions endorsed the view with countless resolutions supporting harmony and denouncing partisan actions. Even more than partisanship, however, they feared third party formation; the unwritten eleventh commandment read, "Thou Shalt Have But Two Parties."

State agrarian leaders shared the rank-and-file determination to remain within the Democratic or Republican party, even as they demanded radical change in at least four areas: the relationship between state and federal government; an equal voice in the political debate; a reassessment of "progress;" and the end of sectionalism as a

political tool. Although *Toiler* editor John H. McDowell advocated interest over parties, he made his own commitment to the Democrats clear. A tireless campaigner, McDowell marshaled agrarian forces to elect like-minded men to the General Assembly. Increasing the number of farmer-representatives with each general election, the Wheel and Alliance stood on the brink of control of the Democratic party with the election of 1890. With 54 members of the state legislature and the Tennessee Alliance President in the Governor's seat, the farmers anticipated the election of farmers to the United States Congress in the 1892 election. After the disfranchising acts of the previous legislature, control of the party meant political dominance, which might give the Alliance the opportunity to name the next U.S. Senator when William B. Bate's term ended in 1893. In order to achieve their goal, the Alliance-legislators adhered to the state Democratic party platform with bulldog tenacity, confident that their conservatism would win votes later.

Bourbons and Democrats considered the danger imminent enough to lay aside their usual disputes and focus on removing the Alliance influence in 1892. Capitalizing on political gaffes and the decision of the National Farmers' and Laborers' Union to expand the subtreasury concept to include land as collateral for agrarian loans, the enemies of the agrarian movement forced the organization into the People's Party. Initially viewed as the only choice by some members of the Alliance, the removal of the organization from the Democratic party brought its decline. Throughout the period of agrarian reform, Wheelers and Alliancemen prophetically warned against third partyism. McDowell never intended to lead a Populist revolt against the Democrats, and as a result of his hesitancy Tennesseans failed to gain the same influential national positions they claimed in the Farmers' Alliance. It was not, as Sharp claimed, a mistake for the farmers to enter politics. They had no choice but to

elect men of like mind, in order to pass legislation in their interests. Their "mistake" came in their failure to control the state political machinery--the executive committee and the party platform--mistakes they did not make at the local level. Control of the Democratic party in the 1892 election would have made the so-called "Tennessee Plan" a more viable option for the Southern Alliance.

The third source of agrarian pragmatism was simple expediency. When Charles Macune envisioned a national organization of farmers originating from Texas, he recognized that their unity sprang from common agricultural and economic problems. He originally anticipated an organization of cotton farmers. In Tennessee, the Wheel and Alliance enjoyed few economic and agricultural commonalities. In this regard, it mirrored the problems encountered in the creation of a viable national organization.

Tennessee farmers produced a variety of crops and commanded the market in none of them. From the borders of Virginia and North Carolina, to the Mississippi River, farmers raised hogs, cattle, mules, corn, wheat, peanuts, tobacco, and cotton. These various agricultural products generated different market needs and conflicting demands for protection of interests. In East Tennessee, hog farmers cheered the Conger Lard Bill. Its tax on cottonseed oil protected the producers of lard, an animal by-product used in all American kitchens. West Tennessee cotton producers, who faced sharply declining prices, viewed the bill with alarm. They anticipated higher cotton seed prices to meet the demand of the new producers of oleo. Without a single, unifying agricultural need, Tennessee farmers divided their loyalties among cotton cooperatives, tobacco warehouses, and peanut associations. They offered verbal support to one another in their various efforts, but the agricultural diversity of the state made it difficult to present a united front.

The new market relations of the late nineteenth century affected the tobacco and cotton farmers of Middle and West Tennessee dramatically, and it was among these farmers that the Wheel and Alliance developed their earliest and strongest support. East Tennessee, separated by agricultural production, political alliance, and history from the other regions, included a number of farms that produced for local and regional markets, but soil fertility, climate, and transportation limited market production to the valley region. On the Plateau and along the Western Highland Rim, most counties still lacked rail transportation. There farmers practiced subsistence farming, marketing only their excess. The problems of mortgages, crop liens, futures markets, differential rail rates, and monopolies had little impact on their lives.

With the various economic interests, Tennessee agrarian leaders found it difficult to present a unified plan. Cotton farmers advocated an increase in the interest rate to 10 percent, arguing that it would bring outside capital investment and undermine the exorbitant crop lien. But farmers in Middle and East Tennessee found the proposal alarming and quickly voiced their opposition. Debates over fence laws and dogs laws tied up the General Assembly every two years. Farmers wanted to put the burden of fencing on livestock raisers, and stockmen pressured legislators to require farmers to build fences to protect their crops. Tenant farmers worried that whatever the outcome, the economic burden of fencing would fall to them. Likewise, no compromise seemed possible on the issue of dogs. Dogs posed a serious threat to sheep raisers, but poor farmers protested registration and taxation of dogs as a economic hardship, since they depended on hunting to supplement their diets. In one issue after another, reform leaders found similar divergent interests. As a result, the most expedient method of organizing the state's farmers was less radical than that of other states.

The aims of the rural reformers differed from those of the New South and Bourbon wings of the Democratic Party in important ways. New South agriculture focused on the implementation of "scientific" farming--crop diversity, liberal use of fertilizer, crop rotation, and safety-first farming. Both the Wheel and Alliance accepted these suggestions as important steps to be implemented by individual farmers but rejected them as sufficient to address the agricultural crisis of the period. New South advocates assured farmers that industrial development and urban growth provided the keys to agricultural prosperity. Farmers argued that they needed higher prices, access to capital, and control over the marketing of their production, not the promise of local markets at some future date.

Farmers recognized the merits of New South agriculture in its demand for professionalization. But, whereas New South agriculturalists expected professionalization to emerge from the centers of education and the efforts of the agrarian elites, Wheelers and Alliancemen attempted a broad-based professionalization that rested on the collective efforts of smaller farmers. When the Alliance failed, farmers came to accept the views of "experts" and abandoned their own grassroots efforts.

Bourbon leaders, historically tied to agriculture and the most conservative of the Democratic factions, seemed no more capable of grasping the needs of small farmers than New South supporters. The chief advocates of white supremacy and the self-proclaimed guardians of southern history, Bourbons viewed every change through the narrow lens of their own claims to power. The reform criticism of the crop lien and tenancy scored hits against the Bourbon economic base. As the faction of the planters and the furnishing merchants, Bourbons had an economic stake in the defeat of the subtreasury scheme. Moreover, the agrarian determination to end sectional

differences and the tentative alliance with African Americans provided the immediate justification for Bourbon opposition.

Farmers recognized a new relationship between politics and business and demanded the opportunity to defend their interests. It meant the active participation of farmers as voters, petitioners, and elected representatives of agricultural interests. The Wheel and Alliance sent lecturers to local unions to "open the eyes" of the farmers and catechize them in the tenets of the new political economy. They demanded the teaching of political economy in the schools in order that their sons and daughters thoroughly understand the laws and government. Moreover, they recognized the need for a new relationship between the states and the federal government. The emerging national economy and the development of national corporations left farmers and consumers without protection against the perceived injustice of commercial practices unless the federal government took a more active regulatory role. For southern politicians, the introduction of federal regulation raised the specter of "Force Bills" and "radical rule." When combined with the agrarian attempts to overcome sectionalism and forge a new national alliance of agrarian interests, the focus on federal legislation confirmed the worst fears of political elites.

What New South men, Bourbons, and Alliance supporters implicitly understood was that control of the economic institutions of agriculture redefined political and social hierarchies. Planters could not maintain control in a society where farmers themselves controlled the markets. Bourbons correctly interpreted Wheel and Alliance demands as a call for a new Democratic party--one that redefined the relationship between the individual and the state, as well as the state and national governments.

The men arrayed against the "Upper-Case" Democrats represented a more significant threat than a recitation of the fiscal weakness of the Wheel and Alliance and the electoral failures of the People's Party would indicate. As small to middle-level and occasionally prosperous farmers, the men who led Tennessee's agrarian organizations embodied the ideological yeomen foundations of the historic Democratic party--a propaganda advantage they understood and exploited. Their landowning status and their reputations as practical, working farmers provided them with the credibility that many political elites had lost as they became identified with the legal profession, banking interests, and industrial development. In addition to their landowning status, many Wheel and Alliance leaders had been active in the Democratic party, holding local offices as magistrates and trustees and occasionally serving a term or two in the General Assembly. While not members of the inner circle of Democratic power, they were not politically naive. Indeed, they might be characterized as the backbone of the party--the lower-level, locally active, respected men of the rural communities. They were a threat to the Democratic elites because they commanded the respect of their neighbors, understood the political process, developed the extra-party mechanisms for diseminating political information, and marshaled grassroots support from their neighbors, kinsmen, fellow church members, and old comrades-in-arms. By 1890, their organization seemed secure in two of the three Grand Divisions, encountering the most serious resistance on the Upper Plateau and in East Tennessee where the late attempts at organization collided with partisan differences, conflicting economic needs, and Civil War history. Despite these formidable barriers to agrarian brotherhood, the Wheel and Alliance had made some inroads in the eastern part of the state before their political insurgency collapsed.

With the help of the New South wing of the Democratic party, the Bourbons defeated the agrarian reformers in the bitter election of 1892. Out of favor with the more enthusiastic national Populists, the Tennessee party continued to win local elections and field fusion candidates for congressional seats until the end of the century. More "Progressive" Democrats destroyed the national political aspirations of the Populists by adopting a silverite campaign and inviting the dissidents to return to the Democratic Party. The immediate consequence of the demise of the Alliance was the decline of the common voice in state and local politics. First Bourbons, and then Progressives, gained control of the political machinery. Paradoxically, the Tennessee Alliance helped forge the mechanism for ending political participation for poorer whites. The spread of the disfranchising laws, the use of the primary, the reorganization of local and county governments, and the decline of old fashioned stump campaigns signaled the end of political participation for the common man.

Ironically, in the areas where the Tennessee Wheel and Alliance displayed the greatest conservatism they lost opportunities to strengthen the organizations and perhaps carry more voters into a third party. In gender, race, and labor relations, both the Wheel and Alliance rejected the more radical views adopted by other state organizations. Although the Wheel and Alliance encouraged the admission of female members, the unions stopped short of demanding their participation as a requirement for the establishment of local organizations (as the Grange did); and the state's rural reformers never supported woman suffrage. Likewise, both the Wheel and Alliance invited the participation of African-American farmers in segregated parallel organizations but never advocated racial equality. Although the racial paternalism of the Wheel and Alliance leaders contrasted favorably with the explosive actions and fiery rhetoric of county newspapers (particularly in West Tennessee), the agrarian

organizations sacrificed African-American voters to political expediency when agrarian legislators supported the disfranchising acts of 1889. Likewise, the Wheel and Alliance supported labor in principle but backed away from endorsing strikes and other forms of labor radicalism. Indeed, given the opportunity to stand beside their miner-brothers, the Alliance chose to advance their own political agenda and refused to pass legislation to end convict leasing, taking solace in a resolution denouncing the practice and promising that contracts for leasing convicts would not be renewed when they expired. Although Wheel and Alliancemen could defend their positions on gender, race, and labor as necessary to maintaining organizational harmony and an expedient political position, in the long run, the Populists needed the votes of black farmers and white miners.

Historians generally assert that the Progressives and New Dealers implemented the Alliance demands. The direct election of U.S. Senators, a federal income tax, the Federal Reserve system, and the New Deal agricultural programs all claimed a heritage reaching back to the Alliance reformers. Nevertheless, by the time each of these programs or reforms came into being, they could not alter the political and power relationships to provide smaller farmers with a voice in the changing market. The direct election of senators could not benefit men who lost the vote; the income tax and Federal Reserve served other needs than those of farmers who sought tax relief and capital; and New Deal agricultural programs promoted agribusiness rather than smaller farmers.

Far from conservative, Tennessee farmers of the late nineteenth century recognized the changing economy of the period and demanded the tools to participate in that change as independent producers, not hired hands. They questioned the image of progress that trampled men underfoot in the scramble for power and wealth. In

their view, a few millionaires did not represent true progress. Unless all the people moved forward, progress became a hollow vessel. The success of the Bourbons and the New South proponents in retaining political and economic control stifled the voices of the Wheel and Alliance farmers in Tennessee and initiated government by experts and bureaucrats. Recapturing the agrarian critique of American industrial society demonstrates the degree to which their demand for economic justice, their struggle with social change, and their questioning of the definition of progress has resonated throughout the twentieth century.

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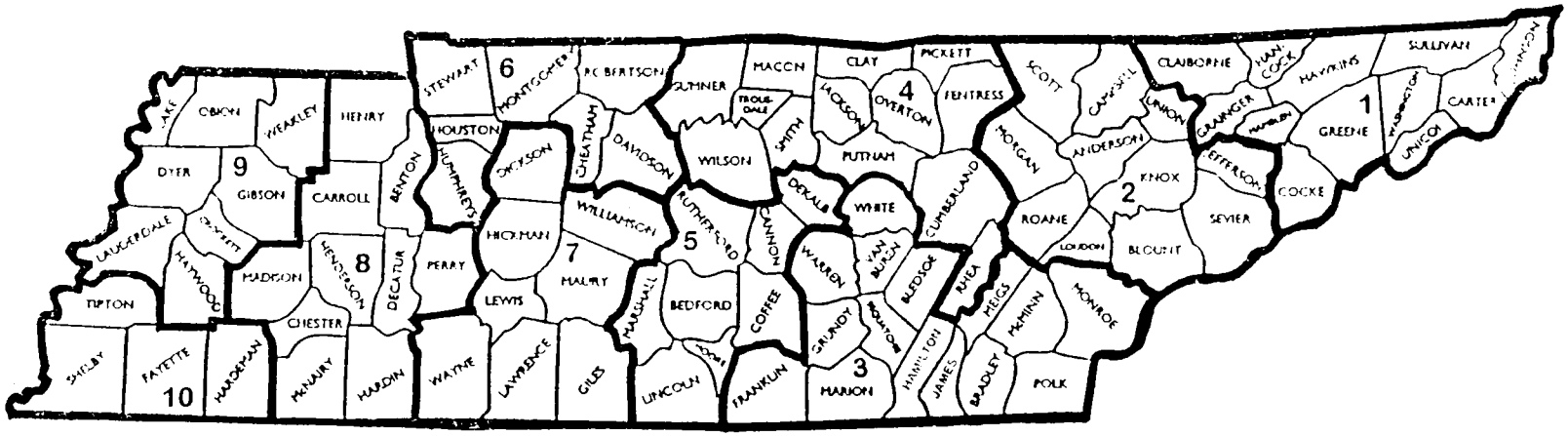
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

TENNESSEE CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS, 1891



Source: *Acts of the State of Tennessee, 1891*, 293-294. Map prepared by Anne-Leslie Owens, Tennessee Historical Society, 1997.

APPENDIX B

DEMANDS OF THE NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL WHEEL, 1887

"We, the members of the National Agricultural Wheel, in convention assembled, at McKenzie, Tennessee, November, 1887, do hereby demand of our national government such legislation as shall secure to our people freedom from the shameful abuses that the farmers and mechanics are now suffering at the hands of arrogant capitalists, powerful corporations, and the seemingly insatiable greed of Shylocks. We demand:--

1. That the public land, the heritage of the people, be reserved for actual settlers only,--not another acre to railroads or speculators,--and that all lands now held for speculative purposes shall be taxed at their full value.
2. That measures be taken to prevent aliens from acquiring titles to lands in the United States and Territories of America, and to force titles, already acquired by aliens, to be relinquished to the national government by purchase, and retain said domain for the use of actual settlers and citizens of the national States, and that the law be rigidly enforced against all railroad corporations which have not complied with the terms of their contract, by which they have received large grants of land.
3. That we demand the rapid payment of the public debt of the United States by operating the mints of the government to their full capacity in coining gold and silver, and the tendering the same without discrimination to the public creditors of the nation, according to contract, thus saving the interest on the public debt to the industrial masses.
4. That we demand the abolition of national banks, the substitution of legal tender treasury notes in lieu of national bank notes, issued in sufficient volume to do the business of the country on a cash system; regulating the amount needed on a per capita basis as the business interests of the country expand and that all money issued by the government shall be a legal tender in payment of all debts, both public and private.
5. That we demand that Congress shall pass such laws as shall effectually prevent the dealing in futures in all agricultural and mechanical productions, preserving a stringent system of procedure in trial that will secure prompt conviction, and imposing such penalties as shall secure the most perfect compliance with the law.
6. That we demand a graduated income tax, as we believe it is the most equitable system of taxation, placing the burden of the government on those who can best afford to pay, instead of laying it on the farmers and mechanics, and exempting millionnaires, bondholders, and corporations.

7. That we demand the strict enforcement of all laws prohibiting the importation of foreign labor under the contract system, and that all convicts be confined within the prison walls, and that all contract systems be abolished.
8. That we demand the election of all officers of the national government by a direct vote of the people, and that all willful violations of the election laws be declared a felony, and a part of the punishment be the prohibition of the party convicted from voting in all future elections.
9. That we demand the repeal of all laws that do not bear equally upon capital and labor, the strict enforcement of all laws, the removal of all unjust technicalities, delays, and discriminations, in the administration of justice.
10. That we demand the tariff laws be so amended as to remove all import duties on articles entering into our manufactures, and that the duties be levied mainly upon articles of luxuries, not above the importing point.
11. That we demand that the government shall protect the Chickasaws and Choctaws, and other civilized Indians of the Indian Territory, in all their inalienable rights, and shall prevent railroads and other wealthy syndicates from overriding the law and treaties now in existence for their protection.
12. That we are unqualifiedly in favor of the education of the masses by a well regulated system of free schools.
13. That we demand that no patents be renewed after the expiration of the time for which they were originally patented.
14. *Resolved*, That this body will not support any man for Congress, of any political party, who will not pledge himself, in writing, to use all his influence for the formation of these demands into law." [1]

The Ocala Platform, 1890

"1. a. We demand the abolition of national banks.
b. We demand that the government shall establish sub-treasuries or repositories in the several states, which shall loan money direct to the people at a low rate of interest, not to exceed two per cent per annum, on nonperishable farm products, and also upon real estate, with proper limitations upon the quantity of land and amount of money.
c. We demand that the amount of the circulating medium be speedily increased to not less than $50 per capita.
2. We demand that Congress shall pass such laws as will effectually prevent the dealing in futures of all agricultural and mechanical productions; providing a stringent

[1] W. Scott Morgan, *History of the Wheel and Alliance and the Impending Revolution* (Hardy, Arkansas, 1889), 123.

system of procedure in trials that will secure the prompt conviction, and imposing such penalties as shall secure the most perfect compliance with the law.

3. We condemn the silver bill recently passed by Congress, and demand in lieu thereof the free and unlimited coinage of silver.

4. We demand the passage of laws prohibiting alien ownership of land, and that Congress take prompt action to devise some plan to obtain all lands now owned by aliens and foreign syndicates; and that all lands now held by railroads and other corporations in excess of such as is actually used and needed by them be reclaimed by the government and held for actual settlers only.

5. Believing in the doctrine of equal rights to all and special privileges to none, we demand---

a. that our national legislation shall be so framed in the future as not to build up one industry at the expense of another.

b. We further demand a removal of the existing heavy tariff tax, from the necessities of life, that the poor of our land must have.

c. We further demand a just and equitable system of graduated tax on incomes.

d. We believe that the money of the country should be kept as much as possible in the hands of the people, and hence we demand that all national and state revenues shall be limited to the necessary expenses of the government economically and honestly administered.

6. We demand the most rigid, honest, and just state and national government control and supervision of the means of public communication and transportation, and if this control and supervision does not remove the abuse now existing, we demand the government ownership of such means of communication and transportation.

7. We demand that the Congress of the United States submit an amendment to the Constitution providing for the election of United States Senators by direct vote of the people of each state." [2]

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[2] Paul D. Escott and David R. Goldfield, *Major Problems in the History of the American South, Volume II: The New South* (Lexington: D. C. Heath and Company, 1990), 133-134.

APPENDIX C

STATE PLATFORM:
PEOPLE'S PARTY
OF TENNESSEE
1892

We, the representatives of the great laboring and wealth-producing classes of the country, assembled as the first convention of the People's party of the State of Tennessee, brought together by the centripetal force of the undying principles for which our patriotic ancestors fought, and which they formulated into a government in order to secure the blessings of liberty to themselves and their posterity, hereby declare our everlasting adhesion thereto, and emphasize our opposition to all violations and departures therefrom, under whatever name or on whatever pretense they may be perpetuated.

We charge both the old parties with the abandonment of the spirit of those principles, while loudly professing loyalty to them. The suffering people are denied the relief which it is the province of their government to provide, and the old parties regard their positions as if they were the idle vaporings of outcasts, thus forcing us to form a party of the people in order that this may be a government of the people, by the people, and for the benefit of the people.

We charge that the corrupt use of aggregated capital threatens the destruction of the liberties of the people, guaranteed to every man by the constitution of our fathers, and unless there is a change in government affairs the great common people will soon be reduced to a condition of degraded servitude to which the manhood of no American citizen can submit. [W]e charge that the Democratic party of our Nation, with its 148 majority in the lower house of Congress, has violated the most sacred pledges made to the people in refusing to give them free and unlimited coinage of silver, and the failure to pass in the lower house a general bill reducing the tariff tax within the bounds of strictest economy.

We charge that both the Democratic and Republican parties are controlled in legislation by the influence of corporate wealth, and that the only hope for the perpetuity of this government is in the organization of all patriotic, liberty-loving,

industrial reform forces into a People's party, untrammeled with political leaders, pledged to or owned by aggregated wealth.

We therefore submit the following as the platform of the People's party and urge all true and honest men to join us and help us maintain its principles.

We demand a national currency safe, sound, and flexible, issued by the general government only, a full legal tender for all debts, public and private, without the use of banking corporations; a just, safe, equitable, and efficient means of distribution to the people on a safe and sound security at actual cost.

We demand that silver be restored to an equal footing with the bondholders' gold by the free and unlimited coinage thereof at the ratio established by our forefathers and in force until 1873.

We demand that the amount of circulating medium be speedily increased to not less than $50 per capita.

We demand a graduated income tax.

We believe that the money of the country should be kept as much as possible in the hands of the people, and hence we demand all national and state revenue shall be limited to the necessary expenses of the government economically and honestly administered.

We demand the rigid and just state and national governmental control and supervision of the means of public communication and transportation.

We demand that congress shall pass such laws as will effectually prevent the dealing in futures of all agricultural and mechanical productions, providing a stringent system of procedure in trials that will secure the prompt conviction and impose such penalties as shall secure the most perfect compliance with the law.

We oppose Federal interference with elections in the states and favor the right of every citizen to cast his vote untrammeled by unnecessary legislation and that every man's vote shall be honestly counted as cast.

We demand that the Congress of the United States submit an amendment to the constitution providing for the election of United States Senators by direct vote of the people of each state.

We demand an abolition of the lease system and condemn the working of convicts with free labor.

We demand the prohibition of the employment of children under 14 years of age in factories and workshops.

We are in favor of equal rights for all and special privileges for none

We are opposed to the present excessive salaries of state and county officials, and favor a reduction in accord with the strictest economy in governmental affairs.

We favor the abolition of the internal revenue law. [1]

STATE PLATFORM: PEOPLE'S PARTY OF TENNESSEE 1894

We, the People's party of Tennessee in convention assembled, arraign before the public bar of the country the party in power for criminal neglect of duty in its persistent refusal to correct the evils with which this country is afflicted. The great financial depression which has spread ruin and consternation in every industrial avocation throughout our land, is but a culmination of a past pernicious policy, dictated by home and foreign gold standard capitalists, which is being pursued with increased vigor and tyranny by the Democratic Administration.

This party refuses, by inaction, to protect the best interests of the masses or in any way to give hope to a distressed people, crying and praying for relief. This party, after professing for years to favor reform and promising repeatedly, if placed in power and given a chance, would repeal bad laws and enact others as would bring relief, have utterly failed to carry out a single promise made, but, to the contrary, in times of profound peace increased the interest-bearing bonded indebtedness of an already overtaxed people, refusing to coin the millions of silver bullion in the United States Treasury.

We regard the action of Grover Cleveland in the use of the veto power to degrade silver and contract the silver currency, as one of the greatest crimes of the

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[1] From the Nashville *Banner*, June 29, 1892, as found in Roger Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists: Tennessee, 1870-1896* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 261-262.

age, and deserving the severest condemnation of the outraged people regardless of party. Divested of his Democratic robes, his back turned upon Democracy, his face fixed upon Wall Street, while he controls and manipulates his party in the interest of home and foreign capitalists, he presents to the American people a spectacle which should bring a blush of shame to every lover of our free institutions of Government, handed down to us by our Revolutionary fathers.

We arraign the Democratic party of Tennessee for the recent issue of $600,000 of interest bearing bonds while the people of Tennessee are unable to pay the interest on the present bonded indebtedness of the State. We arraign the Democratic party of Tennessee for the iniquitous election laws of the State passed for partisan purposes and which deprive more than 50,000 citizens of the right of suffrage.

Realizing the controlling influence of the representatives of Eastern capitalists, who dominate both the Democratic and Republican parties in the halls of Congress, we hail with delight the disposition of the people of the great Northwest and South to unite against the plutocratic East in a determined effort to hurl from power the heartless destroyers of our nation's prosperity, believing that this union is the only hope to perpetuate the liberties and prosperity of the American people.

We, the People's party of Tennessee, make the following demands, and cordially invite all good citizens who love their country, their homes, their families and humanity, who prefer principle to party name, to unite with us in an honest effort to hurl from power the enemies of the people.

1. We demand a national currency, safe, sound, and flexible, issued by the general government only, a full legal tender for all debts, public and private, and that without the use of banking corporations, a just, equitable, and efficient means of distribution, direct to the people.
(a) We demand free and unlimited coinage of silver at the present legal ratio of 16 to 1.
(b) We demand that the amount of circulating medium be speedily increased to not less than $50 per capita.
(c) We demand a graduated income tax.
(d) We believe that the money of the country should be kept as much as possible in the hands of the people, and hence we demand that all State and national revenue shall be limited to the necessary expenses of the Government economically and honestly administered.

We demand the abolition of Internal revenue laws.

We demand that the Congress of the United States shall submit an amendment to the Constitution providing for the election of United States senators by direct vote of the people in each state.

We demand an abolition of the lease system and condemn the working of convicts in competition with free labor.

We are in favor of equal rights for all and special privilege for none.

We are opposed to the present excessive salaries of State and county officials, and favor a reduction in accord with the strictest economy of governmental affairs.

We believe that the will of a majority of the people should control on all local questions pertaining to the public welfare.

We demand the repeal of that part of the poll tax law which makes the presentation of a poll tax receipt a prerequisite to the right of every free citizen to cast untrammeled his vote in the ballot box.

We demand the repeal of the uniform ballot law, which requires that tickets be exact in width and length, as unnecessary and liable to abuse.

We demand the repeal or modification of the Dortch law, which deprives thousands of taxpayers of limited education of the right to suffrage.

We demand that the revenue laws of the State be so changed that all double taxation be eliminated.

J. H. McDowell, Chairman, Frank P. Dickey, S. S. Aughey, Wm. M. Preston, J. F. Black, W. M. Watkins, J. W. B. Hamilton, W. D. Gold, Secretary, A. E. Smith.[2]

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2 From the Nashville *American*, 12 April 1894, as found in Hart, *Redeemers, Bourbons & Populists*, 263-265.

APPENDIX D

OBION COUNTY POPULIST LEADERS, 1896 [1]

Delegates to the Gubernatorial Convention, Nashville, Scheduled for July 29, 1896:

District 1	J. F. Swiggert and H.F. Bynum
District 2	T. P. Noah and J. L. Glover
District 3	Green Cloar and Jonathan Brewer
District 4	A. C. Elam
District 5	T. R. Ingram and Jno. Barnes
District 6	----------
District 7	Abe Crittenden and George Phebus
District 8	----------
District 9	----------
District 10	J. H. McDowell and J. H. Bittick
District 11	Morgan King and T. P. Finch
District 12	R. S. Kendall and W. J. Via
District 13	J. T. Wilson and A. Z. Simms
District 14	W. W. Hutcherson and Josh Beard
District 15	T. J. Ogilvie and James Norman
District 16	C. H. Cathey and R. L. Fowlkes

Delegates to the Congressional Convention:

District 1	H. F. Bynum, J. F. Swiggart, D. W. Huggs, and William White
District 2	Tom Noah and Fate Glover
District 3	J. E. Cloar and J. D. Killion
District 4	W. P. Morris and J. C. Elam
District 5	John White and F. W. Ashley
District 6	E. F. Cunningham, T. R. Inman, F. B. Taylor, and John Barnes
District 7	T. J. Flack, George Phebus, and E. Stovall.
District 8	Robert John Arnold, W. Hopper, and G. W. McNeely
District 9	E. C. Carroll, J. J. Brunden, J. W. Johnson, E. M. Shives, and J. M. McGee
Distirct 10	J. H. Bittick, J. H. McDowell, and J. M. Glasgow

[1] Union City *Independent*, 7 May 1896.

District 11	L. V. Crane, Jerry Pierce, and Esq. King
District 12	W. A. Via, J. H. Travis, and Wm. Blakely
District 13	J. A. Turner, Reb Lockert, and J. T. Wilson
District 14	T. J. Ogilvie, J. A. Beasley, J. H. Norman, Wm Klimer, and Henry Beard
District 15	W. W. Hutcherson, A. A. Grisham, and Josh York
District 16	Esq. Cathey and R. L. Fowlkes

VITA

Connie Lee Lester was born in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, on November 20, 1946. She attended schools in Nebraska, Arizona, Texas, and France, and graduated Valedictorian of her class from Lewis County High School, Hohenwald, Tennessee, 1965. The following September, she entered the University of Tennessee and in June 1969, received a Bachelor of Science degree with Honors in Microbiology. She was employed by University of Tennessee Medical School in Cholera research, before moving to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, where she was employed first in the Biochemistry Department and then in the Pharmacology Department. In 1986, she re-entered the University of Tennessee for upper division courses in history. She received her Master of Arts degree in May 1989.

She is currently employed by the Tennessee Historical Society, where she is Associate Editor for the forthcoming *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*. She also is an adjunct Instructor in the Department of History at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, where she teaches Tennessee History.