

The Post-Disfranchisement Political System

FROM DEMOCRACY TO OLIGARCHY

By 1910 the Southern political system which was to last through mid-century had been formed. The new system posed a striking contrast to that of the eighties and nineties. Figure 8.1 presents the percentages of adult males voting for the Democrats and opposition party candidates, and not voting in selected elections in each decade from 1880 to 1910. During the 1880s, 64 percent of the Southern adult males, on the average, turned out to vote in the elections selected. This figure increased to 73 percent in the 1890s in those states which passed no major piece of restrictive legislation before 1894 (group A), but dropped to 42 percent in those states which did enact such legislation (group B). In the next decade Southern turnout fell to an average of 30 percent. The political system had changed from a democracy to what Dean Burnham has termed a "broadly-based oligarchy."¹

Likewise, one of every four adult males voted for Republican or Independent candidates during the 1880s; whereas, by the first decade of the twentieth century, the percentage had dropped to one in ten. Post-Reconstruction Southern politics had a moderately active electorate and fairly vigorous, if somewhat sporadic, competition between parties. In the early twentieth century the electorate was tiny and party competition almost nonexistent. Between the eighties and the first decade of the twentieth century, there was a decrease of 47 percent in the average percentage of adult males for the Democrats, but a 62 percent drop in the already lower opposition totals.

There was some variance in the amount of competition and turnout from state to state (table 8.1). But only in Tennessee and North Carolina, where mountain Republicanism persisted, was there much party competition or voter participation, and even in those two states turnout

1. W. Dean Burnham, "Party Systems and the Political Process," in William N. Chambers and Burnham, eds., *The American Party Systems*, p. 301.

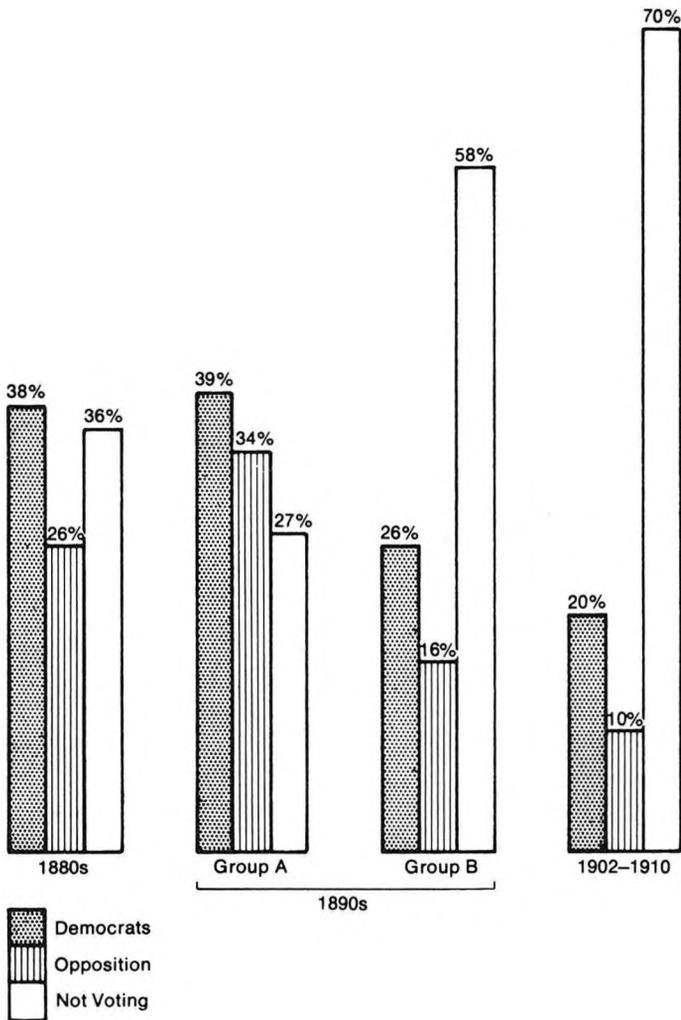


Figure 8.1. Southern Politics from Active Competition to Mandatory Tranquility: Percentage of Adult Males Voting for Democrats and Their Opponents and Not Voting in Selected Elections in the South, 1880-1910.

SOURCE: For the 1880s and 1890s, the elections selected were the gubernatorial races in which opposition candidates ran up their highest percentages (the same elections presented in tables 1.3 through 1.6). For the final period I selected the gubernatorial or presidential election where the turnout was highest in each state after the final disfranchising law was passed. Had the selection for this latter period included only gubernatorial elections, which often went uncontested, the turnout and opposition party percentages would have been even lower. Because each state's polity was somewhat autonomous, and because the elections occurred at different times during the decade, I did not weight the percentages by the population of each state.

NOTE: Group A in this table corresponds to Group II in tables 1.5 and 1.6, Group B corresponds to Group I.

Table 8.1. Apathy Settles In: Voting and Turnout Patterns in Eleven Southern States in the General Election with the Highest Turnout after Disfranchisement and between 1902 and 1910.

<i>State</i>	<i>Election</i>	<i>Percentage of Adult Males</i>				<i>% White Turnout, Assuming No Negroes Voted</i>	
		<i>Demo.</i>	<i>Repub.</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Not Voting</i>	<i>No Negroes Voted</i>	
Alabama	1904 Pres.	17.6	5.0	1.4	76.0	42.0	
Arkansas	1904 Gov.	26.6	15.6	1.1	56.8	60.0	
Florida	1908 Pres.	15.6	5.4	3.8	75.2	42.9	
Georgia	1908 Pres.	12.1	6.9	3.0	77.9	38.9	
Louisiana	1908 Pres.	16.1	2.3	0.7	81.0	33.2	
Mississippi	1908 Pres.	14.7	1.1	0.5	83.8	36.2	
No. Carolina	1908 Gov.	29.8	22.1	0.1	48.0	73.6	
So. Carolina	1908 Pres.	19.2	1.2	0	78.6	41.8	
Tennessee	1908 Pres.	25.1	21.9	0.7	52.3	61.0	
Texas	1906 Gov.	27.8	4.8	3.5	63.9	43.8	
Virginia	1904 Pres.	17.0	10.1	0.4	72.5	40.4	
Unweighted average		20.1	8.7	1.4	69.6	46.7	

never surpassed 52 percent in any election from 1902 to 1910. In most of the Southern states, the Democrats won by landslides, and only about one potential elector in four bothered to cast a ballot. The decline in participation was not confined to Negroes. Assuming that no Negroes voted after disfranchisement, which is certainly an exaggeration, turnout averaged only 46.7 percent of the adult white males.² Under this assumption, a majority of whites could have voted in the elections of only three of the eleven states.

The substitution of intra- for inter-party competition after institution of the Democratic primary amounted to much more than a mere change in name. Table 8.2 demonstrates that participation in the primary with the highest turnout in each state, 1902–1910, averaged only 29.9 percent, or slightly less than the average turnout in general elections in the same period. Assuming that no Negroes voted in these primaries, the maximum possible white turnout averaged a mere 48.8 percent, surpassing 50 percent in but four states. Moreover, the primary did not everywhere immediately replace the general election as the chief arena of combat. In the five border states of Arkansas, North Carolina,

2. Regression estimates indicate that Negro turnout was very close to zero in several states after disfranchisement, and rarely above 10 percent.

Table 8.2. The Primary Did Not Immediately Replace Party Competition: Voting and Turnout Patterns in the Primary with the Highest Turnout in Each State, 1902-1910.

State	Election	Percentage of Adult Males				Percentage of White Males, Assuming No Negroes Voted	
		Leading Candidate	Second Candidate	Other	Not Voting	Highest Candidate	Turnout
		Alabama	1906 Sen.	10.2	7.6	18.2	64.0
Arkansas	1906 Sen. ^b	18.7	15.2	0	66.1	26.0	47.1
Florida	1908 Gov.	16.3	11.7	0	72.0	28.2	48.5
Georgia	1908 Gov.	18.4	16.6	0	65.0	29.2	61.7
Louisiana	1904 Gov. ^a	11.7	8.3	0	80.0	20.8	35.5
Mississippi	1907 Gov. ^a	7.3	7.0	16.1	69.7	16.2	67.7
No. Carolina	none						
So. Carolina	1908 Sen. ^b	21.7	12.2	0	66.1	44.3	69.3
Tennessee	1908 Gov.	15.8	13.6	0	70.6	20.7	37.6
Texas	1910 Gov.	14.6	8.0	13.1	64.3	17.5	42.8
Virginia	1905 Gov.	8.8	4.2	4.2	82.8	12.9	25.2
Unweighted average (ten states)		14.3	10.4	5.1	70.1	23.4	48.8

^aFirst primary.

^bRun-off primary.

Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia, voter participation in the general elections surpassed turnout in the primaries (compare tables 8.1 and 8.2).

The reduction in turnout also meant that politicians could forego trying to reach voters they had had to capture before disfranchisement. During the 1880s, and in the 1890s in those states which did not encumber the franchise before the rise of Populism, the average Democratic candidate won the allegiance of four voters in ten. In the primaries after 1902, the highest candidate attracted one potential voter in seven, on the average. Assuming that no Negroes voted, the average primary winner gained the support of less than one potential voter in four even among the whites. This decrease in the proportion of the populace that a candidate needed to appeal to in order to win, along with the disorganization that always characterizes primaries, increased the power of such interest groups as the Anti-Saloon League and such political machines as those of Simmons in North Carolina and

Martin in Virginia. At the same time, the new order reduced the possibility that the lower socioeconomic strata might be able to use political means to promote their economic well-being.

Between Reconstruction and disfranchisement, Negroes had held governmental posts throughout the South. Negroes sat in every Congress except one from 1869 to 1901. Hundreds of blacks were elected to the state legislatures. Thousands served as sheriffs, judges, magistrates, customs collectors, census officials, and clerks. White Southerners might have preferred to see these posts filled by whites, but they tacitly recognized the right of the blacks to serve. As long as Negroes voted, the Democrats realized, even members of the "party of white supremacy" would have to recommend some Negroes for patronage posts.³

After disfranchisement, however, the prospect of a Negro in or even near office, particularly in an integrated situation, became an anathema to the Southern Democrats. Since no Negro could any longer be elected to a Southern post, the race had to depend entirely on federal patronage for any official recognition. But help from this quarter also diminished under growing Southern pressure and an ever-decreasing Northern Republican commitment to Negro rights. Theodore Roosevelt's famous meal with Booker T. Washington, his nomination of a Negro as collector of the port of Charleston, and his refusal to dismiss a Negro postmistress in Indianola, Mississippi, immediately became causes célèbres. Earlier, such events would have been dismissed as normal patronage politics, as similar acts by President Cleveland had been. And when an avowedly racist national administration took over in 1912, the remaining blacks in federal employ were placed in humiliating segregation and relegated to minor duties.⁴

The loss of offices was both a very real blow to members of the black intelligentsia and a symbolic statement that Negroes were no longer worthy of recognition by their government. At the same time the Southern state and local governments increased the discrimination

3. Logan, *Negro in North Carolina*, pp. 43-44.

4. On Roosevelt's activities, see William F. Holmes, *The White Chief*, pp. 104-105; Willard B. Gatewood, "Theodore Roosevelt and Southern Republicans: The Case of South Carolina, 1901-1904," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 70 (1969): 251-266; William A. Sinclair, *The Aftermath of Slavery*, reprint ed. (New York: Arno Press, 1969), pp. 186-197. On Wilson, see Nancy J. Weiss, "The Negro and the New Freedom: Fighting Wilsonian Segregation," *Political Science Quarterly* 84 (1968): 61-79.

against blacks in the only important service those governments provided—education. By allocating state funds to local school districts on the basis of the total school-age population, but allowing the localities to spend the money in any manner they chose, the Democratic governors and legislatures invited black belt whites to improve their children's education at the expense of the Negroes. By providing state matching grants for localities which voted to tax themselves more heavily and by shifting the burden of educational expenditures to the counties and municipalities, those who controlled state government added to the differential between rich and poor areas.⁵ The results of the combination of suffrage restriction and an educational "awakening," then, were that schools for whites in urban and black belt areas improved substantially, while schools for the Negroes and for hill country whites deteriorated or at least lost ground relative to those in the wealthier counties. Discrimination in voting, in other words, paralleled discrimination in government services, a condition unlikely to have been coincidental.

PROGRESSIVISM FOR MIDDLE-CLASS WHITES ONLY

In such a restricted polity, the programs of the "Progressives" could be little more than expressions of middle-class self-interest. The benefits of the political system trickled down to the rest of the populace only incidentally, if at all. Railroad regulation helped local commercial shippers at the expense of national corporations, while "good roads" (highway) campaigns assisted large merchants and industrialists as well as railroads. Swamp drainage, the key reform of the Florida Progressives, subsidized the rich land speculators.⁶ Warehousing laws in

5. Louis Harlan, *Separate and Unequal: Public School Campaigns and Racism in the Southern Seaboard States, 1901-1915* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1958); Tinsley, "The Progressive Movement in Texas," pp. 181-183; Moore, *Alabama and Her People*, 1: 826-827. According to Harlan's figures. South Carolina spent six times as much for education per white as per Negro child in 1900, but eleven times as much in 1915. Moreover, the proportion of educational expenditures provided by local funds in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia increased from 42.4 percent in 1900 to 72.4 percent in 1915. This meant that white children in wealthy localities got an increasingly better education than whites in poor areas, assuming roughly equal tax rates.

6. On the shippers' leading role in railroad regulation, see Grantham, *Hoke Smith*, p. 132; Steelman, "Progressive Era in North Carolina," pp. 542-562; Kathryn T. Abbey, "Florida Versus the Principles of Populism," *Journal of Southern History* 4 (1938): 467-475; Moger, *Bourbonism to Byrd*, pp. 101, 105; James F. Doster, *Railroads in Alabama Politics, 1875-1914*, pp. 92-100, 112-113, 206. The "good roads" movement was an excellent example of

Texas benefited bankers and commercial warehouse men more than farmers. Such “good government” reforms as the establishment of city commissions and the elimination of patronage jobs cut taxes for the rich and employment for the poor. Progressive governors repeatedly broke strikes and passed laws allowing local business to regulate itself.⁷ If Progressivism had a general theme in the South, it was hardly “democracy” or “the greatest good for the greatest number,” but the stabilization of society, especially the economy, in the interests of the local established powers, at the expense of the lower strata of society in the South, and sometimes at the expense of out-of-state corporations.⁸ After all, neither group voted in Dixie.

One important case may serve to illustrate these points. If any single election could be taken as typical of Southern Progressivism, it was the 1906 governor’s race in Alabama. Son of a black belt plantation owner, the Progressive Braxton Bragg Comer was successively a plantation manager, wholesale grocer, and owner of a huge cotton mill. A large customer of railroad services, Comer became active in efforts to reduce charges to Birmingham shippers, and in 1904 was elected to the state railroad commission. He ran for governor two years later chiefly on his record of opposition to the Yankee-owned railroads. His opponent, Lieutenant-Governor Russell Cunningham, with whom

business-government cooperation in the interest of the former. The United States department of agriculture and J. P. Morgan’s Southern Railroad co-sponsored a “good roads train” to publicize the need for more appropriations. See Steelman, “Progressive Era in North Carolina,” pp. 581–585. On swamp drainage, see Proctor, *Napoleon Bonaparte Broward*, pp. 240–260, 292–295, especially on the role of Everglades speculator Richard J. Bolles.

7. On the warehousing laws and the “goo-goo” reforms, see Tinsley, “Progressive Movement in Texas,” pp. 150–158, 202–212; James Weinstein, “Organized Business and the City Commission and Manager Movements,” *Journal of Southern History* (1962): 161–182; Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age*, p. 45. On strikebreaking, see Wayne Flynt, “Pensacola Labor Problems and Political Radicalism, 1908,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 43 (1965): 315–332; Hackney, *Populism*, pp. 287, 307–310, 316–323. On the failure of labor unions to obtain any real legislative triumphs, see Tinsley, “Progressive Movement in Texas,” pp. 135–149; Steelman, “Progressive Era in North Carolina,” pp. 690–712. On the strong ties of prominent Progressive politicians with the corporations, often the ones they regulated, see Tinsley, “Progressive Movement in Texas,” pp. 45–48, 305–306; Steelman, “Progressive Era in North Carolina,” pp. 275–279.

8. For an interpretation of Southern Progressivism as an attempt to stabilize society, see Pulley, *Old Virginia Restored*. For the attack on out-of-state corporations, see Tinsley, “Progressive Movement in Texas,” pp. 12, 75–90, 97, 98, 113–120; Kaufman, “Henry De La Warr Flood,” pp. 141–143.

he differed only marginally on issues, represented most of the established county politicians.⁹

Only one man in five turned out to vote in the primary. Assuming no Negroes voted, the white turnout rate was only 34.8 percent. These gross turnout figures alone demonstrate that the election represented no massive popular revolt against the Louisville and Nashville Railroad's machine. Moreover, participation appears to have been confined primarily to the middle classes. Among whites, Comer's support correlated +.34 and Cunningham's +.58 with wealth (table 8.3).¹⁰ Whites in the poorer counties did not vote in very large numbers, for the correlation between turnout and wealth was +.49. For every \$1,000 rise in wealth across counties, Comer's vote increased 3.3 percent, Cunningham's 4.0 percent, and overall voting turnout increased 7.3 percent. If subcounty differences in wealth and in the class composition of turnout were fairly small, then these figures show that few poor whites voted. They apparently felt it not worth paying the poll tax in order to substitute a cotton mill boss for a railroad boss.

THE PRIMARY AND THE RISE OF THE "DEMAGOGUES"

From the time of the initiation of direct statewide primaries in the South, the voter found himself faced with a bewildering array of candidates, none easily distinguished from the others. Thus, South Carolinians had a choice of six candidates, all of whom polled respectable

Table 8.3. Progressivism for Middle-Class Whites Only:
Relations between Estimated White Wealth and Voting in the 1906
Gubernatorial Primary in Alabama.

Candidate	Correlation (r) between	
	White Wealth and % of White Males in Primary	% Change in Voting per \$1000 Increase in White Wealth
Comer	+ .342	+ 3.30
Cunningham	+ .577	+ 3.99
Turnout	+ .489	+ 7.26

9. Doster, *Railroads in Alabama Politics*, pp. 92-100, 138-140, 148-153; Hackney, *Populism*, pp. 128-130, 255-287.

10. The election returns used here represent the percent of white adult males for each candidate and not voting. For the method of estimating white wealth per adult white male, see appendix A.

totals for a primary, in the 1902 race for the United States Senate, and five nominees in the contemporary race for governor. In 1906, eight hopefuls filed for governor; in 1908, seven for the Senate; in 1910, six for governor. Similarly, six men stayed in the race for governor of Mississippi in 1907, five for governor of Georgia in 1906, and five for governor of Texas in 1910. In such situations rational choice became well-nigh impossible for the voter and the frenetic re forging of coalitions the rule for the politician. Since, with so many candidates running, the voter had a difficult time telling the "ins" from the "outs," and therefore could not easily express dissatisfaction by ejecting the rascals, politicians had little reason to keep promises or exercise responsibility in office.¹¹

The primary also fostered a politics of personality rather than issues. Historians have often speculated about why the early twentieth-century South witnessed the rise of so many "demagogues"—James K. Vardaman and Theodore G. Bilbo in Mississippi, Ben Tillman and Cole Blease in South Carolina, Tom Watson in Georgia, Jeff Davis in Arkansas, Tom Heflin in Alabama, Jim Ferguson in Texas. How did these men differ from earlier Southern politicians and contemporaries who escaped the label of demagogues? Not in class background, for most Southern politicians of whatever description came primarily from the moderately affluent and affluent classes. Ben Tillman's father and Tom Watson's grandfather were successful planters. Vardaman's father owned fourteen slaves at one time; Davis's had enough money to send him to aristocratic Vanderbilt. Not in the degree of their racism, for the leading antebellum Southerners had thought Negroes fit only for slavery; postwar politicians had actively organized such groups as the Klan and the Red Shirts to overthrow the Republican governments by force and had never hesitated to accuse opponents of racial treason; and more "enlightened" contemporary Southerners often backed the same extreme remedies for racial problems as the demagogues. Many Southern congressmen not usually described as demagogues openly favored repeal of the Fifteenth Amendment and sometimes the Four-

11. On the character of primaries and "nonpartisan" elections generally, and the South in particular, see V. O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* and *American State Politics*; Holmes, *White Chief*, p. 127; Boyce A. Drummond, "Arkansas Politics," pp. 177, 229-232; Charles E. Merriam, *Primary Elections*, pp. 112-132; Julius Turner, "Primary Elections as the Alternative," pp. 197-210; Allan P. Sindler, "Bifactional Rivalry," pp. 641-662; Charles R. Adrian, "Non-Partisan Elections," pp. 766-776.

teenth as well—Senators Bacon of Georgia, Williams of Mississippi, and Carmack of Tennessee, and Congressmen Underwood and Oates of Alabama and William Kitchin of North Carolina, to name a few.¹² Such Southern moderates as Professor R. H. Dabney of the University of Virginia, Florida muckraker Claude L'Engle, Senator Joseph W. Bailey of Texas, and Governor Robert B. Glenn of North Carolina approved withdrawing all white support for Negro education. At least three men with lengthy pedigrees—Virginia historian Philip A. Bruce, educational reformer J. L. M. Curry, and Senator Wade Hampton—endorsed the idea of sending the blacks back to Africa. Nor did most demagogues distinguish themselves by taking radical stands on nonracial issues during election campaigns or conducting their administrations in ways very different from other Southern politicians. Studies of three important canvasses involving Tillman, Davis, and Vardaman find them adopting almost identical stances as their opponents on all the important issues in each election.¹³

The question of whether the demagogues led an “uprising of the poor whites” is more complex. Table 8.4 examines the relationships between white wealth and voting in every primary election in South Carolina and Mississippi from 1902 to 1911 in which a demagogue or a candidate strongly identified with a demagogue ran. These two states were chosen because they allowed more white participation in

12. On the descent of demagogues, see Daniel M. Robison, “From Tillman to Long: Some Striking Leaders of the Rural South,” *Journal of Southern History* 3 (1937): 299–310; Clark and Kirwin, *South since Appomattox*, pp. 120–122. On racial attitudes, consult *Atlanta Constitution*, August 12, 1906; George C. Osborn, *John Sharp Williams*, pp. 155–160; Guion Griffis Johnson, “The Ideology of White Supremacy, 1876–1910,” in Green, *Essays in Southern History*, pp. 136, n. 40, 140; Thomas W. Hardwick, “Negro Suffrage: The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments,” pamphlet (Washington, D.C.: n.p., 1904), p. 4. The liberal aristocrat Edgar Gardner Murphy favored modification of the Fifteenth Amendment to make its execution local—i.e. nullification in the South; see Hugh C. Bailey, *Liberalism in the New South*, p. 122.

13. For the attitudes toward Negro education, see *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, December 6, 1888; *The Outlook* 69 (1901): 810–812; Tinsley, “Progressive Movement in Texas,” p. 178; Joel Webb Eastman, “Claude L'Engle, Florida Muckraker,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 49 (1967): 250; Orr, *Charles Brantley Aycock*, pp. 256–257. For those favoring expatriation, see Wade Hampton, “The Race Problem,” *The Arena* 2 (1890): 132–138; Daniel J. Crofts, “Blair Bill,” p. 186. For an endorsement of deportation by conservative South Carolina governor, D. C. Heyward, see *New York Times*, November 13, 1906, p. 6. On the campaigns of Tillman, Davis, and Vardaman, see Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, pp. 264–272; Paige Mulholland, “Davis-Berry Senatorial Campaign in 1906,” pp. 118–125; Holmes, *White Chief*, p. 180.

Table 8.4 Did the "Demagogues" Represent Poor Whites? Relationships between Estimated White Wealth and White Voting in Elections Involving "Demagogues" in South Carolina and Mississippi, 1902-1911.

State	Election	Candidate	Correlation with white Wealth ^a	% Change in Voting per \$1000 Increase ^b	% Change in Nonvoting per \$1000 Increase ^c
So. Carolina	1902 Sen.	Evans ^d	+ .445	+7.63	-5.09
So. Carolina	1906 Gov (1st)	Blease	+ .041	+0.74	+1.12
So. Carolina	1906 Sen.	Tillman	- .063	-1.52	+0.78
So. Carolina	1908 Gov.	Blease	+ .149	+3.18	-5.24
So. Carolina	1908 Sen. (1st)	Evans	+ .073	+1.17	-9.12
So. Carolina	1908 Sen. (2nd)	Evans	+ .032	+0.55	+2.87
So. Carolina	1910 Gov. (1st)	Blease	- .142	-2.55	+0.07
So. Carolina	1910 Gov. (2nd)	Blease	+ .279	+4.90	-1.44
Mississippi	1903 Gov. (1st)	Vardaman	- .013	-0.15	-1.04
Mississippi	1903 Gov. (2nd)	Vardaman	- .113	-1.07	+0.38
Mississippi	1907 Gov. (1st)	Scott ^e	+ .719	+7.28	+1.71
Mississippi	1907 Sen.	Vardaman	- .607	-6.28	+1.25
Mississippi	1911 Sen	Vardaman	- .669	-7.46	+2.77

^aColumn gives the correlation coefficient (r) between the estimated white wealth, by county, and the percentage of white male adults voting for each "demagogue."

^bColumn gives the percentage change in voting for each "demagogue" for every \$1000 increase in estimated white wealth when Negro wealth is estimated at \$100 per Negro adult male.

^cColumn gives the percentage change in nonvoting among white adult males for every \$1000 increase in estimated white wealth. Thus a positive figure implies that wealthier whites voted in smaller proportions than poorer whites.

^dEvans was identified with the Tillman faction.

^eCandidate endorsed by Vardaman.

the primaries than any other Southern states during this period. By law, the restrictions on voting did not apply in the white primaries in South Carolina, and in Mississippi they seem to have been informally relaxed to a greater extent than in other states. Turnout among whites surpassed 60 percent in each of the elections covered in the table. Moreover, these states produced three of the best-known demagogues, Tillman, Blease, and Vardaman, and these men were the chief demagogues who were candidates in primary elections during this period.¹⁴

14. The quoted phrase is taken from Grantham, *The Democratic South*, pp. 48-50. Of the best-known "demagogues," Tom Watson, Tom Heflin, and James Ferguson did not run for

South Carolina and Mississippi primaries, therefore, provide a good test for the thesis that demagogues attracted mostly lower-class followings.

The table shows that in eight of the thirteen contests there were only negligible correlations between wealth and support for the demagogues. In three others, their support correlated strongly and positively with wealth. In none of the elections did turnout increase very much from county to county as wealth fell, and in three, lower-class whites seem to have participated in considerably smaller proportions than the wealthier whites.

A closer look at a few of the elections demonstrates the propensity of intraparty politics to blur class lines in elections. From the first to the second primaries in 1910, for example, Cole Blease's support shifted from a grouping with a slightly lower-income tinge to one with a fairly heavy upper-income coloration, perhaps because the emphasis he put on his antiprohibition views attracted upper-class followers. In Mississippi, James K. Vardaman, who had fought the Populists and identified strongly with the conservative George-Walthall-Money faction of the Democrats during the nineties, ran as the Delta candidate for governor in 1903 with the support of such aristocratic planter-politicians as Leroy Percy and John Sharp Williams. Locked in conflicts with Williams in 1907 and Percy in 1911, Vardaman did seem to attract much more support from the "wool hat boys" of the hills than the rich Delta planters. Vardaman's faction was, however, much less cohesive and ideologically consistent than a party alignment. In 1907, for instance, Vardaman endorsed Charles Scott, a conservative corporation lawyer whose strength, table 8.4 shows, centered in the upper, not the lower strata. And Vardaman could not transfer his popularity to his chosen successor as governor. Only 15 percent of the electors who voted for Vardaman for governor in 1903 seem to have backed Scott for governor in 1907.¹⁵

statewide public office during the first decade of the century, and Jeff Davis ran in only one direct primary. The young Theodore G. Bilbo ran for his first statewide office, lieutenant governor, in 1911. His support appears to correlate strongly with Vardaman's in the same year.

15. On Blease in 1910, see Stark, *Damned Upcountryman*, pp. 62, 73. On Vardaman's 1907 and 1911 races, see Holmes, *White Chief*, pp. 46-53, 95, 112-115, 183. Holmes has laid to rest the conception that Vardaman was, as Jack Temple Kirby put it in *Darkness at the Dawning* (p. 28), "an implacable enemy of the Delta aristocracy." The fact that Vardaman did not

Francis Butler Simkins has remarked that Cole Blease's lack of upper-class reserve and his ability to speak in the accents of the common people "satisfied the ordinary man more completely than a program of social reform."¹⁶ Such comments are beside the point. No program of real social reform is possible in an elective polity without the sustained support of a party or a very tightly knit faction, organizations which suffrage restriction and the primary had discouraged and, in most Southern states, destroyed. The reason Blease yelled so stridently was not to satisfy anyone, but to get the voters' attention, for otherwise, in a primary, he had no chance of winning.

What set the demagogues apart, then, was their style—the volume more than the content of their remarks, their characterization more than the character of their supporters. Most Southern Democratic politicians opposed Cleveland's deflationary schemes; Ben Tillman announced his intention to impale the president on a pitchfork. Most politicians in an agricultural region claimed to represent agrarian interests; Jeff Davis continually boasted about his followers' sunburnt necks. In a political system without parties, without a regular method of recruiting candidates and culling the competent from the incompetent, sensationalism was usually the shortest route to victory.

All in all, the post-1900 Southern political structure was markedly different from the post-Reconstruction order. In the eighties and nineties, turnout regularly exceeded 60 percent of all adult males, and sometimes reached 85 percent. By 1910, almost no Negroes and only about half of the whites bothered to vote in the most hotly contested elections. Party competition was almost nonexistent, particularly in the Deep South. Such extremely disorganized political systems generally reward elites, who can translate their superior social and economic positions into political power to gain what they desire or at least block

race-bait any more in 1907 than in 1903, and put relatively little emphasis on race questions in 1911 tends to show that lower-class whites did not back him and conservatives did not oppose him primarily because of his strong racism. The election returns indicate that class attitudes toward Vardaman varied, rather, because of his views on socio-economic subjects other than race. The statement about Scott is based on a table not given in the text.

16. Simkins, *Tillman*, p. 488. Simkins' evidence for the ordinary man's satisfaction consists of one reference from a newspaper extremely hostile to Blease, and the article Simkins quotes seems to have reflected postelection sour grapes after an election Blease won. Moreover, the fact that Blease attracted the support of only 35 percent of the white adult males in his third fling at the governor's mansion (he lost the first two) hardly justifies Simkins' view that "the inarticulate masses loved Blease."

what they strongly oppose; whereas, members of the lower strata, lacking comparable resources, require collective organization if they are to assert themselves.¹⁷ Whether this generalization is universally true or not, rough measures of policy outputs during the "Progressive Era" in the South indicate that the combination of partyless politics and low participation levels among socioeconomically deprived groups did, indeed, produce a political system which for the most part assisted only those already privileged.¹⁸ In addition, the new disorderly political system altered the rewards and punishments for certain kinds of behavior, making irresponsibility almost a virtue. Deprived of the normal party channels of rising to power and getting support in elections, politicians were practically forced to blare recklessly in an effort to become known to the amorphous public. Once elected, they had little reason to carry through their promises, for the political system was too unstructured for voters to punish their leaders systematically for poor performance.

17. Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, pp. 403-407; Key, *Southern Politics*, pp. 303-308.

18. There is good deal of political science literature on the relation between inputs and outputs. See, e.g., Richard E. Dawson and James A. Robinson, "Interparty Competition, Economic Variables, and Welfare Policies in the American States," in Charles Press and Oliver P. Williams, *Democracy in the Fifty States* (Chicago: Rand-McNally Pub. Co., 1966), pp. 193-212; Richard I. Hofferbert, "Socio-economic Dimensions of the American States, 1890-1960," *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 12 (1968): 401-418; and Thomas R. Dye, "Income Inequality and American State Politics," *American Political Science Review* 63 (1969): 157-162. I am presently engaged in a large-scale computerized study of the patterns of distribution, by race and class, of educational expenditures and services in the South from 1880 to 1910.