THE

ATLANTA RIOT

RACE, CLASS, AND VIOLENCE IN A NEW SOUTH CITY

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Gregory Mixon

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"Sowing Dragon's Teeth"

WATSON, HARDWICK, AND PROGRESSIVE REFORM, 1904–1906

For more than a generation "the nigger" has been the stock-in-trade of the Democratic Party in the South.

Thomas E. Watson, 1905 editorial

Thomas E. Watson and Thomas W. Hardwick spent a decade promoting the antiblack attitudes behind the Atlanta riot. Not Atlantans, they did not take an active role in the riot itself. Rather, as leaders of the state Democratic Party, they used antiblack rhetoric as the principal means of uniting a politically fragmented white population.[1] To gain control of the party, they organized political support around black disfranchisement and other antiblack policies promoted as "reform" or as a "revolution of the people" against corporate control of state government.

In 1905, the *Atlanta Journal*'s Hoke Smith and James R. Gray adopted Watson and Hardwick's antiblack platform in order to unseat Democratic Party boss and *Atlanta Constitution* owner Clark Howell. That platform promised to generate the mass appeal needed to place Smith and Gray in power. An urban-based Progressivism aimed at regulating corporate power and influence over local government then would provide Smith with national recognition as a Progressive reformer and give Gray a local agenda for leading Atlanta's development as a modern metropolis. While Watson promoted Smith nationally as a champion of Progressivism in *Tom Watson's Magazine* in 1905–6, Watson and Hardwick's disfranchisement movement enabled Smith and Gray to overcome the "boss politics" and corporate control of Georgia's Democratic Party by rallying the white masses.

First, however, a yearlong process was required to heal the political wounds that had separated the Populist Watson of the 1880s and 1890s from the Democrats Hardwick, Smith, and Gray. That same process united an older generation of politicians, Watson and Smith, with the new generation of Hardwick and Gray in the endeavor to manipulate the white electorate.

Dubbing themselves "reformers," Watson and Hardwick developed black disfranchisement as a pivotal issue in Georgia politics and thereby secured the governorship and domination over the Democratic Party. The 1906 gubernatorial primary offered them the chance to change Georgia's political structure and gave Gray and Smith the opportunity to remove Clark Howell as boss.

Each of the four politically ambitious men pursued the pathways to power that might have made him "boss" of Georgia politics. Urban leader Hoke Smith was emerging from a self-imposed political exile in the mid-1890s. Less than a decade later, Gray discovered the power of the press in politics and urban development. Watson rallied the remnants of Populism to join the Democratic Party in order to transform it from within and gain a more secure way of controlling electoral politics. From 1906 to 1920, Smith and Watson competed for control of the party. In 1905, Gray and Hardwick accepted the roles of public mouthpiece and campaign manager, but while Gray continued to use the *Atlanta Journal* as his primary source of power, Hardwick became first congressman, then senator in 1914 with Smith's support, and governor in 1920 with the help of Watson.[2]

In March, April, October, and November 1906, Watson defined the "people's revolution" as a "great revolt" against black autonomy. As examples of the black elite's violation of established racial boundaries, he cited African Methodist Episcopal bishop Henry McNeal Turner's antilynching protests and charges that the American flag was "a dirty contemptible rag." According to Watson, Turner had claimed that black southerners had attained progress, prosperity, and knowledge "more rapidly than the whites of Russia, of Hungary, of Italy, and of Spain!" Watson charged that Turner's claim showed that blacks were "ungrateful," failing to acknowledge that the white man opened "the door of opportunity to the black [man] and gave him a chance in every field of human endeavor." Since the Civil War, whites had given blacks all the tools to acquire homes, banks, colleges, manufacturing, newspapers, magazines, and modernized farms. Turner's sons received federal appointments from Hoke Smith in the 1890s. In Watson's estimation, they had "ungratefully" abused white charity.[3]

Watson asserted that black preachers and teachers also misused the "white

man's money." In Baltimore, Chicago, New York City, and Washington, D.C., black federal officeholders held "white women in a state of slavery" and used their political power "to *minister to their lusts.*" Consequently, Watson carried on, it was "utterly [impossible] to free these white slaves from the bestial degradation in which they are held by their black masters." Yet that effort had to be undertaken. "Whites made this Republic . . . and if it is to be kept up to its high standard of civilization the whites must boss the job."[4]

According to Watson, the Atlanta riot occurred because "Northern editors, preachers and book writers . . . denounce[d] the South for . . . lynching . . . negroes" without seeing "the matter from the point of view of the father, the brother, and the husband" of the "southern white woman who is the [real] victim." In 1906, "every community in the South [was] standing with its hand close to its weapons." These white people, Watson noted, universally realized "that a great change was taking place" in the attitudes of blacks toward whites. In taking stands "for absolute equality in all things, civil, political, and social," both elite and working-class blacks were "sowing dragon's teeth which will spring up armed [white] men."[5]

Watson also claimed that before the riot, a northern white man, Leonard Brown, had circulated a document "filling the negro with a blind raging hatred of Southern whites." Black newspaper editors T. Thomas Fortune of the *New York Age* and Atlantan J. Max Barber of the *Voice of the Negro* also allegedly promoted antiwhite attitudes before and after the riot.[6]

The final cause Watson gave for the riot was the failure of white people to present a unified face to blacks. African Americans, on the other hand, were finding ways to act in a centralized manner through "negro secret societies," evidently meaning the charitable and benevolent organizations. Should whites fail to meet this challenge of unity, "the Booker T. Washingtons" among blacks will "practice social equality." It even was possible "that the negroes of Atlanta will kill the whites in retaliation for the whites killing the blacks," Watson warned, for an organized black population would enjoy "the immense advantage which a disciplined army has over a mob." Whites faced a black "revolution" in 1906 exactly like the Haitian Revolution of 116 years earlier where "the black man ruled the white."[7]

Watson captured the Democratic Party in 1906, reversing his failure in 1896 to institutionalize a political agenda under Populism. Over the intervening ten years, his vision of a biracial farmers' coalition governed by white decision making had been replaced by the reality of an all-white group of reformers dissatisfied with a corporate- and boss-controlled Democratic Party.

Thomas Edward Watson was born in 1856 on the family plantation near Thomson, Georgia, shortly before the Civil War and Reconstruction destroyed the family's agricultural prominence. Watson restored his family's position and plantation through the lucrative practice of criminal law in Screven County. Intending to improve the South's economy and polity as well, Watson embarked upon his career as a self-styled reformer in the 1880s. His goals were to help farmers adapt to "an age of progress" and to "win back the empire" for agriculture by merging farming with industry.[8]

Supported by some African Americans, Watson was elected to the Georgia legislature in 1882. He had promised to push the legislature to reestablish free public schools for African Americans and reform convict leasing. Watson succeeded only in having the convict lease system investigated. When he later embraced Populism and used it to get elected to the House of Representatives in 1890 and 1892, Watson encouraged blacks to support the Farmers' Alliance but assured whites that he did not endorse social equality between the races, only the need for farmers to close ranks against corporate capitalism. At Watson's political rallies, blacks appeared on the same platform with him, signifying his compassion for black agriculturalists and one of the few circumstances in which he gave black political goals any consideration.[9]

In the early 1890s, the Populists dominated Georgia's state government and passed Georgia's first Jim Crow laws segregating public transportation. The Democrats, in response, targeted and defeated Watson's attempts to retain his seat in Congress. Watson, however, blamed black corruption for the Democrats' success in preventing white farmers from reforming the South.

After the collapse of Populism in 1896, Watson set out to transform "the hidebound rock ribbed Bourbon South" with his own answer to "the Negro question." For Watson, African Americans were pawns manipulated by Democrats, Republicans, Populists, and independents against various white political opponents.[10] Although historians have identified the 1904 presidential campaign as the moment when Watson publicly committed to disfranchisement, a private letter Watson wrote in 1902 to political independent, feminist, and racist commentator Rebecca L. Felton establishes the earlier landmark transformation in Watson's personal beliefs. In a passionate and angry, but friendly, correspondence with Felton, Watson outlined his thoughts on politics and the black and white lower classes. He questioned whether the ignorant and easily manipulated lower classes were the "real evil." "At the other end of the line," for example, could be found the "rich, educated white who debauches [the] poor white &

nigger—isn't he the really dangerous man?" Wall Street, the cities, and banks were parasites feeding upon the "real" producers, the farmers. To circumvent—rather than directly confront—these "evil" powers, Watson proposed not just terminating black access to political influence but also disfranchising "white trash."[11]

With the political defeat of 1896 and the Populist disintegration that followed, Watson had withdrawn from politics, and four years later he declared himself politically dead. Nevertheless, he returned to public life in September 1904 as a reformer. Typically, for a reformer in the Progressive Era, he turned on the victims of electoral fraud. He assumed that African Americans and working-class whites were inferior, unable to resist the resources of the wealthy. Although Watson espoused the reformers' notion that only the qualified and educated southerners should vote, he maintained a general commitment to farmers and sought to make the remaining fragment of Populism the "balance of power" in Georgia.[12]

In 1904, Watson planned to prevent the Democratic Party from using "the negro to beat us" in the way that party heads had undercut the white primary of the 1890s to impose the dictatorship of the "solid South." Watson offered his name, Populist support, and his public endorsement of disfranchisement to any candidate who would confront the Democratic machine and "perpetuate white supremacy in Georgia." Watson hoped to join forces with political independents and disaffected Democrats who wanted to reform their party. In August 1904, Atlanta attorney Hooper Alexander advised Watson that "Georgia needs you" to overthrow "machine politics" to install "a progressive and virile democracy." The Populists now could "turn the wavering balance" by joining Democrats sympathetic to "the new ideas" percolating within the "white party of Georgia."[13]

Watson at last saw a real chance to change Georgia's political structure. By returning to "Jeffersonian Democracy," which was an exercise "in the principles of [southern white] popular self-government," whites would control corporations and own public utilities. Opponents, he warned, would find reformers "as white as you are" who "love our wives and daughters as dearly as" the Democrats who fought "negro domination." What was needed was to put "into law the exclusive rights of the white man to govern this state."[14]

Throughout the South, Progressive reform appealed to disenchanted members of the commercial-civic elite. Ministers, lawyers, editors, businessmen, young politicians, railroad commission experts, and agricultural scientists were

the nucleus of southern reform. They pursued order and racial solidarity as the foundation for a stable white community. To attain those ends, Progressives wanted to utilize the power of state and local government to purify institutions and public morals. They did not intend to replace the white employer's person-to-person supervision of black employees, but they did mean to set social boundaries with governmental regulations. As a result, city ordinances, licensing, and police raids extended the arm of the municipal or state agency into race relations. Similarly, antitrust legislation, railroad regulation, and restricted suffrage all reaffirmed virtue and gave southern reformers absolute control over the New South.[15]

Reformers invoked whiteness to overcome the divides of class, labor, politics, and culture. Members of the reforming commercial-civic elite, however, set the reform agenda, believing that their class alone possessed the education and qualifications to do so. They favored businesslike efficiency, a "responsible electorate," and "good government" to reduce the influence of corporations, political machines, and black voters.[16] As Thomas W. Hardwick put it, he and his fellow Progressives felt trapped between the unchecked power of the corporation and the expanding population of strangers moving unrestrained on the roads, streets, and streetcars.[17]

Removing the few remaining black voters from the electorate ensured Progressives a degree of dominance over the Democratic Party, which, in turn, provided them with the governmental power to institutionalize disfranchisement and other antiblack measures. By those measures expanding Jim Crow segregation and regulating black labor, the reformers established social controls over the daily lives of African Americans.[18]

In 1905, Populists and Progressives, once polar opposites, were drawing closer through the use of government to regulate race relations, African Americans, and corporations for "the public good." Both wanted to roll back the influence of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to moderate the autonomy that industrialization had given to urban workers regardless of race. Both movements claimed these goals represented the desires of "the people." In this context, rural and urban reformers came together in 1904 and 1905 to implement Thomas E. Watson's vision of reform.[19]

The early twentieth-century occupant of Watson's Tenth District congressional seat was Thomas William Hardwick, Georgia's "father of disfranchisement." Hardwick also was the one who cemented the reform coalition of himself, Watson, Smith, and Gray into the political juggernaut of 1906. Violating

custom, Hardwick returned from Washington to rush "into the fight." In doing so, he said, he "was guided only by his love for the [white] people . . . and inspired by the utter sincerity of his own motives."

Hardwick was born in 1872 in Thomasville, in southwest Georgia. He graduated from Mercer University in 1892 and completed a law degree the following year at the University of Georgia. Like Hoke Smith, admitted to the Georgia bar at a very young age, he represented the new breed of southern politicians who led antiblack and disfranchisement campaigns in the New South during the 1880s and the late 1890s and attained political office as a result of their efforts. These politicians grew up in the post-Reconstruction period and carved out their own business and political careers in the early twentieth century. Assuming that they were qualified to run government efficiently and utilize its regulatory power, these "new men" were determined to correct the mistakes of the Civil War generation.[20]

Hardwick began his political career in 1895 with a two-year term as Washington County prosecutor. He also headed the county's Democratic committee and became a delegate to the 1896 gubernatorial convention. Always a loyal Democrat, Hardwick was an ardent opponent of Populism. He met Thomas E. Watson in 1894, when James C. Black fraudulently defeated Watson for Congress. This election initiated a relationship between the two men that continued until Watson's death in 1922. In 1898, however, Hardwick attacked the Populist agenda in his own successful candidacy for the Georgia House of Representatives. Hardwick took on taxation, appropriations, and prohibition, but made his political reputation in the Georgia legislature advocating black disfranchisement as the solution to political corruption. He was a Progressive Era reformer despite rejecting the label "progressive."[21] The bills Hardwick began promoting in 1899 to terminate black voting rights finally became institutionalized in 1908 as the disfranchisement amendment to Georgia's constitution. Disfranchisement and disdain for corporate exploitation thus bridged the ideological gap between Watson's Populism, Hardwick's Democratic dissidence, and southern Progressivism.[22]

In 1902, when Hardwick ran for Congress, Watson declined to campaign for him but encouraged family members to stump the district for the "Fighting Gamecock." As a Democrat, Hardwick won the previously Populist congressional seat by advocating electoral honesty and revocation of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution.[23]

In 1904, Hardwick and Watson jointly laid the groundwork for the political

machine that sustained them for five years. In March and April, Watson used his editorial position to attack former president Grover Cleveland for publicly dining with prominent African Americans Frederick Douglass and C. H. Taylor. Reading Watson's editorials into the *Congressional Record,* Hardwick claimed that Watson had exposed the ex-president's "delight" in knowing "negroes socially."[24] On September 4, 1904, Watson publicly argued that reformers would protect the "white man's interests" and "white supremacy in Georgia" better than "the men who control the democratic machine in Georgia." Shortly after that speech Hardwick met privately with Watson and confirmed before "Almighty God" Watson's commitment to disfranchisement. They sealed their union with simultaneous "All rights." Hardwick recommended that they find a "fearless man to make the race for governor," a person who would "forever put into law the principle of the white primary."[25] Nominating Hardwick would violate Georgia's unwritten political rule that a politician who served in one office did not campaign for another public position from outside the state. Hardwick, therefore, remained the liaison between the Populist Watson and the Democratic Party and volunteered to do the legwork linking Watson to their chosen disciple of disfranchisement, James Pope Brown.[26]

Contemporary journalist Ray Stannard Baker described Pope Brown as "the best type of the new Southerner" who worked to improve his community. He was a "black belt" plantation owner and a veteran state legislator who had served five years as president of Georgia's Agricultural Society and a term chairing the Georgia Railroad Commission. Brown's politics put him squarely in the Watson and Hardwick antiblack camp.[27] He vowed "to come out as explicitly as one could desire on three propositions": the white primary, the Negro question, and the anticorporation line. The *Atlanta Journal* in June 1905 added that Brown possessed the virtues of drive, conscientiousness, executive ability, outspoken sincerity, and honesty, but his most important "virtue" was that he was "not a politician in any sense of the word." In the end, that "virtue" killed his candidacy for governor.[28]

Brown's commitment to Hardwick's "three provisions" thrilled Hardwick and Watson, but Brown's decision to delay a public presentation of "the platform" until October 1, 1905, distressed them. True, the primary would not be held until August 22, 1906, but Watson and Hardwick wanted immediate results or at least a "hot fight." Brown's slow start forced them to seek another "hot candidate."[29]

Atlanta Journal owner James R. Gray wanted reform but not through Pope

Brown. Gray, who initially had endorsed Clark Howell, told Howell he was switching to Hoke Smith to achieve "revolutionary reform."[30] For five years Gray had been using the editorial page of the *Journal* to initiate reform. He called for a county reformatory, better education for Atlanta's white youth, and an end to both convict leasing and child labor. Gray promoted urban growth, including infrastructure improvements, but opposed corporate corruption, especially on the part of the railroads. He argued against the free railroad passes given to public officials, and endorsed public ownership of utilities. Along with his criticism of black political involvement, these positions placed Gray firmly on the side of reformers Hoke Smith and Judge George Hillyer.[31]

In 1905, when Gray became managing editor of the *Journal,* he began to create a political machine as powerful as those of his journalistic predecessors Henry W. Grady and Hoke Smith. From 1900 to 1905, he did not publish Watson's editorials and political statements with the consistency that Watson expected, but in 1905 Gray and Watson became political partners to oppose black political participation and change the Democratic Party.

In May and June 1905, Gray serialized Thomas Dixon's inflammatory new book, *The Clansman,* on the *Journal*'s editorial page. That novel, set in the Reconstruction era, portrayed African Americans as puppets of unscrupulous white northerners who made the black man "the enemy of his former master." It consequently legitimized violence against self-assertive African Americans. Young members of Atlanta's commercial-civic elite such as Aldine Chambers enthusiastically shared the novel with associates.[32]

At first, Gray and Watson worked separately to organize political support against Clark Howell while *Journal* staff member John S. Cohen and former *Journal* editor John Temple Graves served as go-betweens from Gray to Watson and Hardwick.[33] Cohen learned from their "mutual" friend Hardwick that Watson believed in preserving white "racial integrity," an issue "[m]ore dear to us all than silver and gold." Cohen then suggested that if Watson made this attitude public, he could win the electoral support of Georgians. Gray likely had more direct lines of communication with Hardwick and Watson and was a driving force behind the choice of Hoke Smith as their new "hot candidate."[34]

On May 25, 1905, Gray opened the *Journal*'s offices to Hardwick, Watson, Brown, and Smith. The group concluded that Brown needed to withdraw and allow Hoke Smith to replace him. In early June 1905, the *Journal*'s headline read: "Hoke Smith Is Urged to Run for Governor." Nine Hoke Smith clubs appeared immediately, pledging in the words of the Coweta County Club just outside

Atlanta their "support and best endeavor, to secure Smith's election."[35] That same month Hardwick became the liaison between Watson and Smith. Madison, Georgia, was selected as the site of Smith's first speech because the location made it easy for Smith and Watson to meet and establish an understanding on their mutual aims. Hardwick assumed that Smith need only have the "right attitude" about disfranchisement to satisfy Watson, but Watson still resented Smith and Gray's refusal to print his editorials. Hardwick requested that Watson write "exactly what reparation you think Mr. Smith [and Gray] ought to make." The solution was a double-column editorial authored by Hardwick extolling Watson's antiblack answer to Booker Washington's comparison of African Americans and Italian immigrants. Smith's previous opposition to Populism, however, forced Hardwick to justify why Smith was their "hot" property, and this led Watson to delay endorsing Smith until September 12, 1905, when he promised to do so publicly in the October issue of *Tom Watson's Magazine.*[36]

In fact, Smith had been a racial moderate before political opportunity pushed him to embrace the antiblack attitudes of Watson and Hardwick in 1905. According to the black editor of the *Atlanta Independent,* Benjamin Davis, Smith had been a respected advocate for the African American community, but Smith's political ambition changed that in 1905. Smith had fervently opposed disfranchisement as unnecessary given the whites' demographic majority over African Americans. He had condemned lynching and acknowledged that blacks had the right to be free, to work, and to vote if they submitted to white supervision. In 1904 and early 1905, he even had endorsed the Peabody Fund's allocation of monies for black education.

Although Smith, like Watson, never accepted social or political equality, he tolerated black self-assertion as long as white people upheld their moral obligation to educate and govern African Americans.[37] Three years before his first speech of the gubernatorial campaign, Smith had used his credentials as a city, county, and state board of education member to try to get Atlanta University to "conform to the Booker Washington idea of education for the negro." To popular acclaim along the gubernatorial campaign trail, Smith "suggested restricting black education" to make African Americans "more like the higher type of antebellum negroes."[38]

In the shadow of Smith and Howell, there were three additional gubernatorial candidates. John H. Estill of the *Savannah News* did not have a major role in the debate about race. Judge Richard B. Russell Sr. aligned himself with

Howell in arguing that blacks were already disfranchised in practice, so no new laws were needed. James M. Smith, owner of the Smithsonia plantation and private town, represented farmers who wanted to force blacks to pay to "educate Negro children." James Smith followed Watson and Hardwick's belief about disfranchisement.[39] Hoke Smith finally convinced Watson that he also had the "right attitude" on "negro disfranchisement."[40]

Black disfranchisement united the rural and urban reformers in a coalition to take over the Democratic Party just as Watson and Hardwick had bridged the political divisions between the Populists and dissident Democrats. Hardwick was the catalyst who represented a new generation of southern politicians willing to use antiblack attitudes, disfranchisement, and violence to implement southern Progressive reform and keep power in the hands of "the best men." The campaign of Watson, Hardwick, Gray, and Smith mobilized whites in the way the "new men" of North Carolina in 1898 had disfranchised blacks and spawned the Wilmington riot of 1898. Indeed, by combining antiblack attitudes, racial violence, and a reform agenda that included disfranchisement, James R. Gray consciously adopted the Wilmington model to promote reform in 1905 and 1906.

5

"The Seeds of Incendiarism"

THE GUBERNATORIAL CAMPAIGN OF 1905–1906

Hoke Smith . . . proposes to banish the fear of negro domination by disfranchising the negro. If he can do it he will have done a splendid work for Southern independence and Southern progress.

Thomas E. Watson, 1905 editorial

Reform dominated Georgia's gubernatorial campaign in 1905 and 1906. As early as June 1905, the *Waycross Journal* noted that prohibition, regulation of child labor, disfranchisement, and terminating railroad passes were popular among white voters, but *Atlanta Constitution* owner and gubernatorial candidate Clark Howell did not stand right "on any public questions." In July 1905, political independent and federal judge Emory Speer warned Howell to address the political dissent and desire for reform festering among the white Georgians, ruled by Howell's Democrats, or "be shocked . . . by a massacre of negroes." Howell met the challenge by declaring himself a "reformer" with a more established record than his new opponent, Hoke Smith.[1]

This chapter examines the campaign for governor between Hoke Smith and Clark Howell, whose longtime political rivalry reached a climax during the gubernatorial debates. Their fight was reduced to a political contest over disfranchisement as the best program for controlling African Americans. In defense of the status quo, Howell argued that measures put in place since 1890, such as the white primary and secret ballot, kept blacks sufficiently regulated. On the other hand, the sort of blatant disfranchisement Smith proposed would lead to racial violence and federal intervention. Smith and the reform coalition

of Thomas E. Watson, Thomas W. Hardwick, and James R. Gray had presented black disfranchisement as the panacea for all of Georgia's problems. Pointing to North Carolina's "war" against black political power, the *Atlanta Journal* claimed "revolutionary reform" had reaffirmed white dominance and ensured prosperity for all white North Carolinians. The gubernatorial campaign that culminated in the white primary of August 22, 1906, was thus a referendum on the institutions that defined black and white relations in Georgia.

Clark Howell had begun his political career in the Henry W. Grady machine in the 1880s. In the 1890s, after Grady's death, Howell carved out his own political niche as a "reformer," being elected as "Speaker of the first reform House in [the] Georgia Legislature—the Alliance House of 1890." Never a Populist, the loyal Democrat presided over the Populist-dominated "Alliance House," which passed the first Jim Crow laws in Georgia.

In June 1904, at the Democratic nominating convention for governor, Howell and Governor Joseph Terrell called for "a radical change" in electoral practices to implement "pure elections." During his speech accepting nomination for a second term, Terrell noted that the white primary had "become the most essential part of our party machinery" because "[o]ur nominations are equivalent to elections."[2]

To reinforce the white primary in June 1904, Howell's *Constitution* called "in no uncertain terms" for implementation of the "Australian ballot law" in both primary and general elections. The secret ballot initially had been utilized in 1898 as an "electoral reform" to end corrupt elections. Translated, this meant that even in the hands of "machine" Democrats, it was an instrument for reducing the black vote. The Australian ballot prevented semiliterate voters from identifying their choice of political party by the color of the ballot and so reduced the visibility of the Republican Party and black voting potential, ongoing efforts since the mid-1870s.[3]

Howell felt that his "reform" credentials qualified him for automatic promotion to the governorship as Terrell's successor after 1906.[4] Most people believed that Howell would succeed without opposition because, having attained the power of a political boss, Howell would use county officials, editors, and Terrell to get elected. Howell already had "the vote of all the oil and fertilizer inspectors and city court judges and solicitors." Naturally he was assured that he could ride out "the Smith furor."[5]

Howell's political organization charged Hoke Smith with promoting black "social equality" and being a "negro lover." As secretary of the interior in the

early 1890s, Smith had provided federal jobs to Bishop Henry McNeal Turner's sons. Consequently, Howell's supporters charged, Smith now endorsed disfranchisement solely for opportunistic personal gain, not a true reform.[6]

In January 1906, Howell summed up his case against Smith. A reformer "for office only," Smith advocated disfranchisement to frighten whites into panic voting over one concern, "the Negro question." As had past candidates, Smith used the Civil War's "bloody shirt" and black political power, which were symbols of defeat, disgrace, and anger, to dodge the public policy and political questions he was afraid to address. Preying on white "prejudices and passion," Smith threatened Georgia on three levels. First, by claiming that blacks were so far out of control that they invited a violent white response, Smith jeopardized "peaceful relations between whites and negroes." Howell warned in big thick capital letters in one editorial that Smith's fear tactics were "Sowing... The Seeds of Incendiarism," with "The Possibilities of Riot, Bloodshed, and Friction."[7] Second, Smith's anticorporate reforms would undercut city building and industrial development, and finally, his association with Thomas E. Watson resurrected Populism, imperiling the Democratic Party's survival. A Smith victory, Howell concluded, would open Georgia to unimaginable consequences of which violence would be the most destructive.[8]

Howell himself hoped to use the "Menace of [the] Educated Negro" to defeat Smith. He argued that black disfranchisement would introduce literacy tests that, in turn, would lead blacks to pursue educational opportunities. As a result, disfranchisement would encourage "every negro in Georgia... to get out of the cotton patch and into the negro college," signaling the end of "the old time darky" who avoided politics and resurrecting "the dude negro" who represented "negro [political] domination." According to Howell, black working people who had been urged to value education more than white workers would gain undue political influence, and a unified black voting bloc would hold the "balance of power" in 48 of Georgia's 137 counties.[9]

During a debate in January 1906, Howell asserted that the threat of disfranchisement would encourage 93,000 "largely unqualified educated negro voters" to make their voices heard in the upcoming August white primary. In anticipation of the link between literacy and voting rights, black women endured squalor so "that their children may be qualified to kill the white man's ballot." Every hill in the city of Atlanta was "crowned with vast negro colleges, whose combined endowment from northern philanthropy far exceeds the total endowment of every white college in Georgia."

Disfranchisement, therefore, would hurt working-class whites to a greater extent than Smith's promises of liberation could overcome. Yet the white primary already kept educated African Americans in check. Disfranchisement, moreover, made federal interference in Georgia politics a near certainty, along with a return to the dark days of black-dominated Reconstruction. Howell would "protect my own people with my life . . . [rather] than dodge behind the cowardly expedient of a statute of subterfuge [such as disfranchisement] hatched in fraud." He reminded everyone, "This is a white man's country, and it must be governed by white men."[10]

Atlanta's reformers countered Howell's attacks by appealing to popular reform sentiments. Evangelist and *Atlanta Journal* columnist Rev. Sam Jones called for "a spontaneous uprising . . . of the people." A "revolt" of "free men" organized to defeat an overwhelming foe, the corporation-controlled government that manipulated black votes. Hoke Smith was "leading a great revolt against . . . Wall Street" and lighting the way for a white "reconquest" of popular government through black disfranchisement.[11]

According to *Tom Watson's Magazine,* Smith's reform effort was part of the national Progressive movement or a new American Revolution of whites to overthrow the "tyrannical suppression of individuals and classes." Georgia's "revolution," the former Populist's journal claimed, was part of a "people's revolt" against urban populations that gambled, drank to excess, fought in the streets, and got "into trouble with the police." Susceptible to manipulation by "boss regimes" and the "criminal rich," such populations frequented "the saloons, dives, and all the hosts of graft and shady business, [who] hold the balance of power." If not for the revolution, the African Americans who patronized institutions of ill repute would seize that "balance of power" in local politics over such issues as prohibition and urban development.[12]

Hoke Smith opened his reform campaign for governor on June 25, 1905, with the claim that "the people" had "called" him to save Georgia from corporate abuse, "boss rule," and "negro domination."[13] In McIntosh County, where blacks had elected African American county officials and a representative to the Georgia legislature in the early twentieth century, Smith confronted "three thousand Negroes" when he presented his antiblack platform. Described by the press as "the gigantic tribune of white democracy," Smith conspicuously placed a traveling bag on the platform as he delivered his speech. According to Herbert Quick, a contemporary reporter examining Progressivism, the bag contained a revolver that symbolized Smith's commitment to control blacks either by disfranchisement or by bullets.[14]

Smith praised the Georgia General Assembly elected in 1905, whose members were "fresh from the people" and willing to implement their desires. In August 1905, that General Assembly disbanded the state-supported black volunteer militia companies, a sign that Georgia politicians heard the popular outcry arising not only in Georgia but also in Alabama, North Carolina, and Virginia. In those states "reformers" had disbanded their black militia units and instituted the white primary and disfranchisement, using racial violence as needed.[15] In this context, Hoke Smith argued that the next governor of Georgia had to be as committed as the 1905 General Assembly was to controlling blacks.

Reinforcing the white primary with disfranchisement was necessary because whites faced a "new threat" from the Republican Party in 1905 and 1906. The Republicans, Smith charged, promoted "class legislation" that divided "the white vote in national elections" by luring members of the commercial-civic elite to break Democratic ranks and vote in favor of corporate business. In Perry, Georgia, Smith spelled out the rationale for white unity across party and class lines. Utilizing national census data that Congressman Thomas W. Hardwick probably provided, Smith told his audience that blacks made up 44.6 percent of the state's population and had enough votes to return "negro domination" in seventy-nine counties if just a tenth of the white Democrats succumbed to Republican inducements. Disfranchising black voters would preserve the "white man's government" while giving white Republicans the opportunity to vote on issues as independents. Smith's "reform party," as it was sometimes called, claimed to represent "150,000 white men" united in a movement to make Georgia modern.[16] In pursuit of reform, the *Atlanta Journal* and Smith placed more emphasis on controlling the African American vote than on fighting corporate corruption and boss rule, seizing upon Republican postmaster general John Wanamaker's public meeting with Booker T. Washington to rail against "social equality."

For his part, Smith ousted blacks from his political rallies or, as in Calhoun and Baxley counties, ordered them into the balcony. He hired all-white musicians, unlike Clark Howell, who employed a black band from Savannah for his Swainsboro rally. Smith's forces pounced on Howell's "social" error, which the *Griffin Farmer* saw as evidence that Howell would utilize black voters to win the governorship. Nevertheless, the *Farmer* claimed, farmers, the mill people, prohibitionists, merchants, and every lawyer, editor, and doctor solidly opposed further "participation of Negroes at the ballot box."[17]

During the last three months of 1905, the *Atlanta Journal* published an edi-

torial series on the lessons more "progressive" southern states had learned from disfranchising black voters.[18] For example, Maryland Democrats had allowed "the negro" to organize an opposition to disfranchisement. As a result, black voters in Baltimore aligned with Polish and Jewish citizens to defeat disfranchisement. The "Lesson to Georgia," the *Journal* said, was that the "negro should be eliminated from the political situation" as soon as possible.[19]

In contrast to Maryland, North Carolina was the model for Georgians to emulate because North Carolina and Georgia were more alike in their black to white population ratios than Maryland and were politically and economically similar. *Journal* reporter Milt Saul interviewed the leaders of North Carolina's Democratic Party who had successfully led the disfranchisement effort and nurtured antiblack violence in Wilmington, where, on November 9, 1898, local Democrats, supported by state party leaders and white women, had overthrown the legitimately elected, biracial government. Through the long-term benefits of antiblack violence and disfranchisement in 1900, white North Carolinians had secured "a great industrial expansion with "more than three times as many corporations" investing in the state during the last four years.

Racial harmony and contented labor were additional benefits. According to North Carolina's secretary of state, J. Bryan Grimes, disfranchisement made blacks submissive and therefore "much better off." White racial hatred "engendered by fusion" between the Populist and Republican Parties in 1896 and "negro rule" had given way to "friendliness and harmony." Black disfranchisement also ensured a future for large plantation owners, with the restoration of a "contented" black laborer committed to agricultural employment. By removing "corruption" and an "incompetent [black] government," reform produced a stable society, white prosperity, and modern industrial development.[20]

Former North Carolina governor Charles B. Aycock outlined for Saul "How the Tar Heel State Was Redeemed." When whites fragmented politically in 1894, "black rule" resulted in a government that was "incapable of enforcing the law and preserving order." White women regularly were forced to flee from "Black brutes." White North Carolinians consequently determined that they needed "to disfranchise the negro" and purge the state with "streams of blood and agony mountains high." *Journal* owner James R. Gray asked, "Do we want to pass through the same experience that North Carolina passed through?" Ironically, he seemed to answer yes in posing his second query. The violent Wilmington riot in 1898 and disfranchisement in 1900 saved North Carolina from black rule, "so why not Georgia?"[21]

Milt Saul's interviews reiterated the benefits of racial violence. Senator Furn-

ifold Simmons had headed the Democratic Party's state executive committee in 1898 and "the war on negro rule." According to Simmons, North Carolina was plagued by 1,000 governmental officials, economic stagnation, the loss of "millions of dollars" in development, and intolerable social conditions. In Wilmington and New Bern, where large numbers of black officeholders "dominated," the troubles with blacks exceeded "the days of reconstruction," but Wilmington's riot and passage of black disfranchisement vanquished "negro domination."[22]

Simmons's senatorial colleague Lee S. Overman explained that white "revolution" had required a comprehensive societal cleansing in which sex and gender roles, race relations, economic development, jobs, social deference, and politics were all transformed by white violence. In one illustrative public gathering, "a beautiful North Carolina girl, dressed in pure white . . . on a pure white horse [carried a] pure white banner." Following her were twenty more young white women dressed and mounted in a similar fashion. The most important "feature came next. It was a body of thirty stalwart young [white male] North Carolinians each with a Winchester rifle over his shoulder." In rural communities and eastern cities, white men walked around perpetually armed and "[b]lood flowed in many streets. In Wilmington they ordered a gatling gun."[23]

Gray and Saul noted newspapers "led" whites in Wilmington to organize each ward into "white government unions" whose members "publicly 'drummed' out" black officials and burned black press facilities. In Georgia, immediate action for disfranchisement was necessary, given the problems whites encountered in Maryland and North Carolina when they failed to respond promptly. Georgians, in fact, faced "a far more dangerous situation" than Maryland and North Carolina, because it had a larger black population.[24]

Thomas W. Hardwick's letter "To White Voters of Georgia," published in the *Journal* in conjunction with this series, claimed 99 percent of the black voters, whether educated or illiterate, were "absolutely venal." In Georgia's cities and towns, however, they could seize the "reins of power." Atlanta's black electorate of 7,896 made up more than a third of the 23,141 voters in the city. Ten other unnamed Georgia cities had black majorities. White men had to act because "we are walking over a veritable powder magazine ready to explode."[25]

South Carolina senator "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman weighed in with the assertion that Georgia's problem was qualitatively as well as quantitatively greater than North Carolina's. According to Tillman, black Georgians were more resistant and would not submit to white dominance without a struggle.[26]

In May 1906, the *Journal* reprinted Milt Saul's North Carolina "lessons" and

added supportive letters from the public in Georgia and other states. Rev. Dr. J. B. Hawthorne, a former Atlantan, claimed that white Virginians, too, had nearly lost the balance of power to an organized black political bloc. Disfranchisement, however, pacified black "passions . . . [and ensured] the goodwill and friendship of the white man—his superior and his ruler." It also decreased the incidence of "criminal assault," a category of crime the *Journal* had begun to report more frequently (and more sensationally) after Hoke Smith's first campaign speech in June 1905.[27]

On July 2, 1906, a less prominent Georgia editor wrote that violence served a definite purpose, for whites finally had decided to resist black rapists, murderers, and arsonists who committed "crime out of resentment and hatred toward the white man."[28] "Editor Beasley" of the *Lee County Journal* floridly raised the specter of violence—and Wilmington—in an editorial that the *Journal* reprinted, also on July 2. The theme seemed to be "ballots now or bullets later."[29]

In mid-July, Thomas W. Hardwick looked back to the Civil War as a moment when white violence was justified. Resorting to corruption, force, and intimidation, the Civil War fathers had acted with a "heroic patriotism [and] . . . a purer pride of race," but in the end "[t]here was no other way open to them and they were right to take it." In Hardwick's view, because white violence struck at the basic structures of modern government, eroding respect for the law, disfranchisement offered a way to avoid teaching lawlessness as a solution to black political power.[30]

In reaching all the way back to the Civil War for his examples, Hardwick gave short shrift to the late nineteenth-century South's penchant for violence. Since "Reconstruction" and "Redemption," white "reformers" repeatedly had used violence to revive the Democratic Party and undermine black voting. One of Milt Saul's prize interview subjects, Ben Tillman, had mastered the use of antiblack violence in Hamburg, South Carolina, thirty-seven years earlier. White Georgians, too, had killed black voters, laborers, and landowners in random and organized acts of violence from 1868 to the end of the nineteenth century. Henry W. Grady in the late 1880s had celebrated the Danville, Virginia, riot of 1883, now recalled by Reverend Hawthrone.[31]

In 1905 and 1906, disfranchisement was the foundation upon which reformers usurped power from the Democratic Party. It was a popular proposal that politicians Thomas W. Hardwick, Thomas E. Watson, Hoke Smith, and James R. Gray used to win the 1906 white primary, promising it would produce "good times" for all whites, but especially for working men. Watson and Hardwick in

1905 recruited Smith and Gray into a coalition that used antiblack rhetoric to rally the Populist remnants and newly emerging southern Progressives with images of North Carolina's "armed revolution."

Clark Howell, Smith's main gubernatorial opponent, claimed that black disfranchisement threatened the resurrection of the "educated negro" and "negro domination" from the mythical days of Reconstruction. Howell argued that blacks had already been disfranchised by the white primary, the Australian ballot, and white solidarity. At the same time, Howell entertained the possibility of antiblack violence should black political power again approach the federally supported "negro domination" of the past. He pledged to man the barricades personally to defend white rights against renewed federal intrusion. Howell, nevertheless, stood for a system that dissident Democrats increasingly viewed as unworkable.

Hoke Smith argued for new methods and new party leadership. Citing North Carolina, he and his backers contended that disfranchisement made blacks return to the land as deferential laborers who worked for whites. It also opened the state to investment and new jobs for whites. Just as Henry W. Grady, Thomas E. Watson, and Clark Howell separately had promised prosperity to white workingmen during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Hoke Smith in 1906 offered similar promises in exchange for working-class support. For southern Progressives and Thomas E. Watson, reform was a long, hard road littered with the failures of Populism, prohibition, and the 1890 white primaries. Success required what *Atlanta Georgian* editor John Temple Graves called "an illegal revolution." That was the Atlanta riot.