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TO PICK UP AGAIN THE CROSS OF MISSIONARY WORK:
THE LIFE OF WILLIAM J. NORTHEN

by

CASEY P. CATER

Under the Direction of Glenn T. Eskew

ABSTRACT

Primarily focusing on his political career (1878-1894) and as an unofficial public figure after his retirement from formal politics (1895-1911), this study considers William J. Northen's efforts in leading Georgia to the vague but resonant ideal of progress by analyzing his combination of religion and politics for social change, modern governance, and economic progress. After Reconstruction, urban middle-class southern Baptists like Northen began to realize the social problems of their civilization. Gradually, these reformers worked to expand their traditional mission of saving indivdual souls into a modern mission of saving the collective soul of society. Whereas personal, localized relationships customarily ordered southern society, under Northen, public policy and an increasingly coercive state informed by Christian princilpes of social outreach began to overtake the role of the individual.

INDEX WORDS: Northen, William J., Georgia, Southern Baptist Convention, Baptists—Georgia, Religion—Georgia, Politics—Georgia,

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CASEY P. CATER

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2005

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2005

TO PICK UP AGAIN THE CROSS OF MISSIONARY WORK: THE LIFE OF WILLIAM J. NORTHEN

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Georgia State University
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN NOTES

AHC	Atlanta History Center
GDAH	Georgia Department of Archives and History
GHS	Georgia Historical Society
SBHLA	Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives

CHAPTER 1

"GOD IN HEAVEN GIVE DIRECTION TO MY THOUGHT AND…MY LIFE"

At the funeral of William J. Northen in late March of 1913, his friend and colleague, the Reverend John E. White, summarized Northen's complex life and work in a most fitting way. White told Northen's mourners that the ex-governor displayed "with unapproached distinctness the ideal relations between religion and politics." The secret of his success in that regard, according to White, was that Northen never differentiated between the two spheres. "Politics was regarded as the form in which common human life expressed itself in civilization," and "religion was the inner spiritual force by which that [civilization] is developed." But, White reiterated, those two seemingly separate realms, were, for Northen, inextricably intertwined. "To him, to be truly religious was to be truly political, and to be truly political was to be truly religious."[1]

In the "Christ-haunted South," to use Flannery O'Connor's term, White's eulogy does not seem to cast Northen as unique. Many southern politicians, especially those seeking broad bases of popular support, quoted scripture and used evangelical tropes. Invoking religion, according to Michael Kazin, was often the best mode of appealing to a popular following on an emotional level.[2] Moreover, historians have found links between southern politics and religion on many fronts. Religion served as the basis of the

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[1] *Christian Index*, April 3, 1913.
[2] Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*. Revised edition. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 32-33.

hierarchical nature of the Early American Republic and inspired the leveling spirit of the Jacksonian Era; it provided a justification for and a critique of slavery as well as Jim Crow; and, among many other things, it served as the foundation for the Lost Cause, the southern civil religion that developed after Reconstruction. Northen's uniqueness, then, was not in his personal devotion to religion, or, like many others, in his occasional use of evangelical language, but in the depth of his resolve to apply Christian principles directly to public policy.

Linking religion and politics, however, does not necessarily mark Northen as unique. As Eugene Genovese writes, "Since religion expresses the antagonisms between the life of the individual and that of society and between the life of civil society and that of political society, it cannot escape being profoundly political." And further, according to Genovese, "religion makes statements about man in his world—about his moral and social relationships—even when it makes statements about his relationship to God." The intermingling of religion and politics, even in the current cynical and rational age, seen in this light, is unavoidable. Perhaps the lengths to which Americans past and present have gone to segregate religion from politics bears witness to this historical inevitability. Usually however, this mixture becomes a conservative and reactionary force that drowns out more progressive thrusts. For his part, Northen, in many ways, reversed this paradigm. A close look at his life reveals that his particular combination of religion and politics worked toward a more progressive and modern Georgia.[3]

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[3] Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 162.

After having been an educator, a participant in the Civil War, a leading planter, a state legislator, and a prominent member of the Southern Baptist Convention, Northen became the governor of Georgia in 1890. His administration faced several major problems that signified the failure of the New South. Between Reconstruction and the 1890s, many small and middling southern farmers fell to the lowest rung of the economic order due in large part to the burgeoning credit system that trapped them in a downward spiral of accumulated debt. In response, many farmers, along with urban workers, organized and protested the New South program through organizations such as the Grange, the Agricultural Wheel, and most importantly, the Farmers' Alliance. Eventually, agrarian discontent culminated in the Populist movement, which challenged many of the basic tenets of the New South as well as many of the long-standing traditions of the South. Northen recognized the farmers' backlash as a breakdown in traditional social relations. But instead of attempting to reunite dispossessed white farmers under the banner of white supremacy with violent episodes against their class or race enemies, Northen sought to take Georgia in a new direction. Where the personal and local social and economic policies of the Old South leadership had left off, a centralized and modern state apparatus, informed by social outreach of urban southern Baptists, would begin.

Following his gubernatorial career, Northen embarked on a moral crusade of social activism, exhorting young people, business people, church congregations, and many others, to see the South through to its place as the paragon of Christian Civilization. The South experienced a boom in urban growth in the decades following the Civil War. The physical and social dislocations of such growth resulted in chaos, confusion, and

social problems. Along with prostitution, poverty, squalor, and crime, racial violence began to tear the weak social fabric. These threats to order, stability, and progress signified more to Northen than the failure of the New South program. To Northen they indicated a breakdown in the basis of the Christian Civilization that was the South, and indeed, in his mind, America. Carrying the New South vision of progress into the twentieth century, Northen worked to depict an image of stability and industriousness to the North and to the world. Rather than resting on the Bourbon method of conventional paternal guardianship of society, however, he advocated, like other New South leaders, a modern, bourgeois ethos of social progress in order, ultimately, to achieve industrial progress. Yet, Northen held to the belief that only a few people were prepared for the rigors of a modern, competitive society. In order to realize the promise of the New South then, it was imperative to fashion modern forms of sociopolitical control, which drew inspiration from older patterns of social control, to guide the unprepared masses, black and white, to success in an increasingly urban-industrial society.

Primarily focusing on his political career (1878-1894) and his career as a public figure after his retirement from formal politics (1895-1911), this study will consider Northen's efforts in leading Georgia to the vague but resonant ideal of progress by analyzing his combination of religion and politics for social change, modern governance, and economic progress. Situated within the broader traditional-progressive, urban-rural conflict, Northen looked to his religion to guide his path through the upheavals of the time. After Reconstruction, urban middle-class southern Baptists like Northen began to realize the social problems of their civilization. Gradually, these Baptists worked to

extend the power of the Southern Baptist Convention, as well as to expand their traditional mission of saving individual souls into a modern mission of saving the collective soul of society. Much like Henry McNeal Turner and Henry Hugh Proctor, who used their positions as leading African American clergymen to influence the political realm, Northen, a politician who used his political position to implement a religious vision, grafted the incipient social awareness among urban Baptists onto his gubernatorial duties, and later onto his social activism, looking to reestablish a sense of order in a South in which physical, social, and economic dislocations signified a breakdown in traditional understandings and definitions of society. Whereas personal, localized relationships customarily ordered southern society, under Northen, public policy and an increasingly coercive state informed by Christian principles of social outreach began to overtake the role of the individual.

Postbellum southern politics is a topic to which scholars have devoted a great deal of attention. Until recently, however, scholars have searched for manifestations of and responses to the chaos and confusion of the New South through the lens of traditional political history. C. Vann Woodward's *Origins of the New South*, for instance, focuses on the struggle between business-minded elites and old guard planters for control over the South after Reconstruction. To be sure, his sympathies were with the masses but his view necessarily privileges elite white men, while largely denying agency to African Americans, women, and small farmers and urban workers, both black and white. Along with this sense of elite white male dominance of politics came a spatial privilege.

Politics, for Woodward, and for his contemporaries, took place in smoke-filled rooms, in the courthouse, or in the legislature.

Naturally, then, with governance so closely linked to elites and business interests, religion had very little influence on politics. Woodward casts the South as an orthodox monolith with no liberal theology and no "emphasis on socialized religion." Rather, conservatism dominated the southern religious landscape, focusing on congregationalism and the salvation of the individual. Woodward does grant, however, that Christian social concern was not completely unknown in the South. He locates a mild social gospel movement in the 1910s, fitting it snugly within the Progressive movement. The implication is that Progressivism bred southern social gospelers; Christian social awareness and activism, according to Woodward, had no influence on the rise of a more liberal view of southern society.[4]

Newer histories challenge this understanding of southern politics. Historians now seek to find politics among the people, positing a permeability among various arenas. A fluid exchange of political interaction, these scholars argue, occurs between the capital and the household, civic organizations, the work place, and the market place. The illumination of new political actors and realms allows for a different view of the South between the 1870s and the 1910s.

Among the new spaces that historians study, the church may have been the most fertile ground for political organization. In *Gender and Jim Crow*, Glenda Gilmore

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[4] C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1971), 450-453.

argues that black women influenced the political realm through, among many other things, "transforming church missionary groups into social service agencies," while segregation and disfranchisement forced black men out of politics.[5] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham finds a political consciousness within the black Baptist church among the women who were its backbone. "[B]lack women influenced their social and political milieu, and they did so through the mediating influence of the church." The Baptist church worked as a forum for the creation, expression, and negotiation of a collective African American political will. Higginbotham admits, however, that hers is not the question of "how religious symbols and values were promoted in American politics, but how public space, both physical and discursive, was interpolated within black religious institutions."[6] While Gilmore and Higginbotham's works are valuable in identifying traditionally non-political spaces that influenced the political arena, this study will examine the use of religion as an instrument for instigating political and social change in the New South.

Other works consider more pointedly the relationship between southern religion as a discursive space—as opposed to the church as a physical space—and politics. In his introduction to *Religion and Politics in the South*, Samuel Hill states that "religion and politics have been related, never mind theory or intentions" to the contrary. Nevertheless, the works he cites in supporting his claim (namely Donald Mathews, *Religion and the*

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[5] Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 150-151.
[6] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 8, 16.

Old South; Charles R. Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*; and Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*) suggest only an indirect connection between religion and politics. Isaac and Mathews discuss the influence of evangelicalism in individual lives and its ensuing political meaning. In the colonial and early national periods, evangelicalism led southerners to question the spiritual/secular hierarchy based on the influence of the Anglican Church over the state. This engendered a leveling spirit, and "republicanism was nurtured by Evangelical denominations that bowed before no superiors and lived by a spirituality that was no respecter of persons." The Old South witnessed a wave of personal piety that "overflowed the banks of church life and made their mark on public life." These models support the notion that Evangelical denominations emphasized an autonomous individual spirituality that eventually spilled over into the political arena. Despite any political results, the intentions were apolitical and therefore indirect.[7]

According to Charles Reagan Wilson, the late-nineteenth century glorification of southern defeat, known as the Lost Cause, which combined religion and southern mythology, manifested itself in concrete public expression. This example points to the development of a civil religion that inspired southern patriotism and provincialism, but does not illustrate a direct, intentional infusion of religion in social and political matters. Rather, it points to a cultural circling-of-the-wagons in which religion helped southerners

[7] Tod A. Baker, Robert Steed, and Laurence W. Moreland, eds. *Religion and Politics in the South: Mass and Elite Perspectives*. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983), xii-xiii.

make sense of the political environment of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century South.[8]

More recent studies explore direct connections between religion and social change. Echoing Lawrence Goodwyn, Keith Harper's 1996 study of southern Baptists posits that the populism that emerged in the late 1880s capitalized on a "movement culture" among southerners that seeped into the minds of Baptists. Late-nineteenth century southern Baptists took the important populist elements of a sense of self-worth, collectivism, and education for their own. Against the rapid advances of industrialism, Baptists saw a materialist crisis on the horizon. Armed with a collective sense of purpose, they saw an opportunity to help save the South from urban-industrial social maladies through the extension of domestic missionary work. But while Harper's analysis challenges previous studies that found no social Gospel in the South, he falls short of showing how Baptist social concern worked through official channels for change.[9]

Paul Harvey's *Redeeming the South* discusses the confluence and divergence of black and white Baptist cultures in the postbellum South. Whereas scholars have long found the black church as center of both social activism and traditional evangelicalism within the black community, they have largely rejected the notion that the white southern church embodied both within their own milieu. Placing his analysis within the broad

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[8] See Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980).
[9] See Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Keith Harper, *The Quality of Mercy: Southern Baptists and Social Christianity*, 1890-1920. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996).

trends of modernization and industrialization, Harvey finds, contrary to convention, that a significant social Christianity movement developed in the 1890s that focused on souls as well as society. White urban Baptist leaders imparted bourgeois values to their congregations and to the public at large, emphasizing piety in private and public affairs. Baptist elites felt that their flocks, trained in Victorian notions of middle class behavior, could help reform the South's backward folkways in religion as well as in southern life as a whole. Reform-minded ministers shifted their focus from individual salvation and chastisement to societal salvation and chastisement.

The scope of Harvey's work does not include searching for a political application of social Christianity. It does, however, discuss one salient example of the union of social Christianity and politics. Southern Baptists, according to Harvey, realized by the 1880s the limits of individual restraint and public moral suasion in ridding society of the evils of alcohol. In an urban context in which saloons were readily available, and able to compound social problems, urban Baptists began to recognize that prohibition was the best means of eliminating the "demon rum." This development marked a fundamental shift in which Baptists realized that "Christian sentiment organized into sophisticated moral campaigns could achieve righteous reforms."[10]

This study will build on the findings of Harper and Harvey concerning Baptist social awareness and activism. It will examine how William J. Northen—a figure Harper and Harvey almost completely ignore—applied those trends to his public life while

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[10] See Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), especially chapter 7, (quote) 218.

striving to find his way through the rift between the old and the new. Previous studies of Northen have placed him within this historical context, but have largely failed to sufficiently consider his faith as his guiding light through the disorder of the time.

James C. Bonner's 1936 master's thesis, entitled "The Gubernatorial Career of W. J. Northen," casts Northen as a politically expedient reformer whose progressive ethos represented an end, or perhaps the beginning of the end, to the Bourbon rule over Georgia. Loyalty to the Bourbon principles of traditional guardianship and acquiescence to the sluggishness of political compromise, however, tempered the extent to which he took reformism. Thus, Northen mediated between paternalistic, dawdling Bourbonism and distant and efficient progressivism. Yet Bonner's work operates within the paradigm of traditional political history, and thus ignores the way Northen's religion informed his politics. Attention to Northen's faith will provide a more nuanced view of his political stance between tradition and progress within the New South.[11]

Joel Williamson's brief consideration of Northen in *The Crucible of Race* takes religion more seriously, citing Northen's intense Christianity, moral crusading, and leading role within the Southern Baptist Convention. Williamson considers Northen's religious work, however, as "another career," which was "in addition" to his political career. For Williamson's Northen, religion was an important element in his political life, yet Williamson shows no direct link between the two.[12]

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[11] James C. Bonner, "The Gubernatorial Career of W. J. Northen," (MA thesis, University of Georgia, 1936), 77.
[12] See Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South since Emancipation*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 288, 290.

David Godshalk's studies of Northen focus on his work surrounding the Atlanta Riot of 1906. Despite his arduous efforts to end lynching, Northen, according to Godshalk, failed because he "measured the early-twentieth-century South against his idyllic memories of a hierarchical antebellum social order that established impenetrable racial distinctions between white masters and black slaves and clear class distinctions between a slaveholding elite and its non-slaveholding white counterpart." Northen's motivation for combating racial strife, then, derived from his desire "to recover the lost antebellum world of his youth" and his belief that the savage behavior of the lower orders of blacks and whites compromised the patriarchical authority of influential white men like himself. Thus, gender also plays a large role in Godshalk's analysis. One the one hand, the black rapist represented a challenge to white masculine authority; on the other hand, the white lynch mob signified a challenge to the elite's prerogative as the rightful and symbolic protectors of southern womanhood. The lens of gender provides for a valuable image of Northen's work, but looking through religion, as Godshalk largely fails to do, will present a more complete picture of Northen's life. Overall, this study concurs with Godshalk's analysis that Northen expressed a "wistful nostalgia for the antebellum Georgia of his youth," that suggested that he had "misgivings about the rapid social changes and dislocations that were occurring in his state." Yet, this study suggests that Northen, well aware that the political economy of slavery was no longer applicable, handled these problems through mixing a burgeoning New South Christian social

consciousness with a fading Old South paternalism that sought to influence public policy, meeting the exigencies of the current day.[13]

In *The Black Image in the White Mind*, George Fredrickson argues that the leaders of the New South engendered a "new paternalism." Elite white benevolence would produce in African Americans the virtues of intelligence, integrity, and industriousness that were necessary to achieve the ultimate goal of progress. Yet, Fredrickson insists, the promoters of new paternalism did not attempt to resurrect a plantation ideal of guardianship. Rather, their program saw that paternalism was deployed not through personal relationships but through public policy.[14]

Northen fits squarely into this group of new paternalists. Fredrickson's concept of new paternalism, however, fails to include religion as a contributing factor. Northen was influenced not only by the New South vision of economic progress, but also by the growing southern Baptist vision of social progress. The new paternalism, in Northen's case, combined Christian social concern with secular economic and political concern in the interest of inculcating a set of values that was absent among the people of Georgia near the turn of the century. To realize the South that men like Henry Grady promoted, reformers like Northen believed that imparting the values of restraint, education, and among other things, obedience to the rule of law was absolutely vital. The absence of

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[13] Quotes from David Godshalk, "William J. Northen's Public and Personal Struggles against Lynching," in Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore and Bryant Simon, eds., *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 141-142, 157. Also see Godshalk, "In the Wake of Riot: Atlanta's Struggle for Order, 1899-1919." (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1992); and Godshalk, *Veiled Visions: The 1906 Atlanta Race Riot and the Reshaping of American Race Relations*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005) chap. 7.

[14] George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Destiny and Character, 1817-1914*. (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), chap. 7

such virtues signified, for Northen, a blurring of the solid Victorian lines between savage and civilized, order and chaos. That blurred line, representing a decline in the structure that upheld Victorian values, prevented the full realization of the bourgeois vision that was the promise of the New South. Northen's persistent attempts to create statewide, legal methods for combating the social maladies of the era began the process of the internalization of restraint within the individual that the local community could not nor would not implement.[15]

Northen's work in the New South thus represents a tug between two ideological standpoints. On the one hand, Northen's devotion to religion and to binary conceptions of civilized and savage point to his Victorianism. On the other hand, his willingness to see the socioeconomic problems of his state and region as systemic, and his attempts to redress those problems through governmental mechanisms indicate his modernism. In *The War Within*, Daniel Singal discusses the transition from Victorianism to modernism in the South, but locates that shift in the period between the two world wars. Northen exemplified the first, or "Post-Victorian," stage of that struggle as early as the 1890s. While Singal's Post-Victorians worked in the realm of ideas, Northen's struggle played out in politics.[16] His inability, or perhaps unwillingness, to abandon the one ideology and embrace the other left him in a state of limbo. His modernist approach clashed with the localist mentality of Georgia as well as with the rising tide of radical racism. His

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[15] See Norbert Elias, *The Civilising Process: State Formation and Civilisation*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978).
[16] Daniel J. Singal, *The War Within: From Victorian to Modernist Thought in the South, 1919-1945*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 7-11.

clinging to Victorianism prevented his ability to imagine what was needed to make real social and economic progress. This state of limbo has largely contributed to Northen's absence from the historical record. Neither traditionalists nor progressives have had much reason to celebrate or criticize his life and work. The pages that follow offer a correction to these oversights.

As a struggling young teacher at the prestigious Mt. Zion Academy in Hancock County, Georgia, William Jonathan Northen etched an entry into his diary on his twenty-first birthday. Contemplating the changes and pressures confronting his native South, as well as those confronting him as a fully mature white male, he prayed, "May the Great God in Heaven give direction to my thought and plan for me my life." Born again in 1853, Northen consistently invoked the help of God for his thoughts and his plans until the end of his life. As a teacher, planter, state legislator, governor, and Baptist leader, through the volatile 1850s, Civil War, Reconstruction, and the New South era, Northen relied on his faith to provide a guiding light for the path he should take in helping to shape, and reshape, his state and region.[17]

Several historians have crafted analyses of Northen's public life from the 1890s—when he was governor of Georgia—through the 1910s—when he engaged in a moral crusade against mob violence. In addition to glossing over the depth of his religious devotion in these time periods, they all fail to consider the influence that Northen's

[17] William J. Northen, "My 21st Birthday," (printed by Annie Belle Northen, n.d.), (quote) 2. Northen Family Papers, MSS # 1298, GHS.

formative years, the time between the 1830s and the 1870s, had on his public life in the New South era. An analysis of his training in the school of slavery, in the political tradition of the antebellum South, especially that of Middle Georgia, in the Civil War, in Reconstruction, and in Redemption provides critical insight into the course he sought for his state, and for his South, in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century.

Northen was born into the slaveholders' world on July 9, 1835 in Jones County, Georgia. The culture of slavery held considerable influence over his young life, as his father, Peter Northen, was a planter in Georgia's wealthy lower piedmont cotton belt. Interpretations of the basis of the social relations of slavery vary sharply. Among the most vital factors in the social ordering of slavery was the balance between forced and freely given compliance to the regime. Credible arguments agree that while paternalism was central to control over the slaves, brutal force formed the foundation of the master-slave relationship. Disagreements emerge, however, over the extent to which the slaveholders were able to mask that violent underpinning. In establishing precedents for Ben Tillman's career as a violent, race-baiting demagogue, Stephen Kantrowitz focuses much less on the concept of the reciprocal obligations of slavery—the most effective and widespread means of obscuring the violent basis of slavery—than on the "reciprocal terrors of slavery." The focus on reciprocal terrors certainly does not deny paternalism's existence, but holds that any modicum of paternalistic sentiment between master and slave could exist only in the space that terror created. Thus, the slaves' compliance to the

regime, the subordination of their will to that of their masters, came first and foremost through physical force.[18]

The foregoing interpretation of the violent basis of slavery depends upon one particular community—Edgefield County, South Carolina—in which there were more slaves than white people in a state with more slaves than white people. To be sure, slaveholders all across the South felt anxiety over the possibility of slave rebellion and insurrectionary plots. But to slaveholders in South Carolina, that anxiety was likely more palpable. According to a leading historian of slavery and slaveholders, South Carolina's "slave society virtually derived from Barbados." Due to large slave populations on each plantation and numerous instances of insurrections, Caribbean patterns of slave management depended much more on the spectacle of violence than did most of the American South. South Carolina, as a derivative of Caribbean slave society, and as the state in which Denmark Vesey plotted a slave revolt in 1822, thus offers a unique example of the more violent face of master-slave relations. Furthermore, Edgefield County, the home of Ben Tillman, presents its own set of experiences within the political economy of slavery. Other southern states, as well as regions and counties within those states, offer their own special models for study.[19]

Slaveholders of different localities, counties, and states undoubtedly shared commonalities in the management of their farms and slave labor forces. What slaveholders held more in common than similarities, though, were differences of

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[18] Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 11-15.
[19] Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 31.

experience on each individual farm within each individual community. The temperament, personality, wealth, education, and among other things, piety of the individual slaveholder, and the characteristics of the local community as a whole, all helped create distinctive circumstances for each farm and each community. Variations, according to John Blassingame, were the rule, not the exception.[20]

In Greene County, Georgia, the county in the heart of Georgia's Black Belt where Northen grew from 5 to 19 years old, the communal pattern of slave control, in contrast to that of Edgefield County, was somewhat lenient. Jonathan Bryant finds that despite occasional calls for increased enforcement of patrol laws, most Greene County citizens found "such vigilance…unnecessarily burdensome….After John Brown's Harper's Ferry raid, when many in the South feared slave insurrections, most citizens in Greene County still ignored the patrol laws." Even with renewed calls to steel their resolve in keeping slaves in subordination, Greene County's leaders did not necessarily intend to restrict the physical mobility of slaves or to encourage more vigorous physical force on the part of the slaveholders. The intention was to "protect" the slaves from the incendiary ideas of strange (read northern) white men. Reflecting the growing tension in the 1850s between the North and the South and between abolitionists and slaveholders, they feared external

[20] See John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), especially chap. 6, 154-183.

agitation much more than internal mutiny. Northen learned this lesson quite well, carrying it with him and often recounting it for much of his life.[21]

Greene County's white residents found other, more subtle ways to control their slave population. Perhaps most importantly, they encouraged the slaves to go to church. In Greensboro, the county seat, the Baptist Church had more slave members than white members after 1830. At Penfield, the home of the Northen family, the Baptist church was even more willing to accept slaves as members. Reinforcing the evangelical notion of the spiritual relationship between God and the individual, Penfield Baptist Church, unlike Greensboro Baptist Church, did not require slaves to seek permission from their masters to attend church. Near the end of the 1840s, Penfield Baptist Church members, through discomfort or magnanimity, helped establish a black church with its own separate building. Called Penfield African Church, it functioned with virtually no white supervision. The church called its own pastor and deacons, and disciplined its own members. Penfield African Church buttressed the idea that God values each individual soul and respects each individual free will. Many of the slaves of Penfield, and most of those of Greene County, thus had a basis upon which to resist the dehumanizing effects of slavery. Their freedom to worship separately from their masters implied a freedom of spirit and afforded them the opportunity to see their worth as human beings.[22]

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[21] Jonathan M. Bryant, *How Curious a Land: Conflict and Change in Greene County, Georgia, 1850-1885*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), (quotes) 29; In *Slave Community*, Blassingame finds that comunal patterns of leniency were not exceptional, 43-44.
[22] Bryant, *How Curious a Land*, 30-31.

But freedom of spirit was not the only message transmitted to the slaves through Christianity. The balancing act between the free will of the individual and the demand to subject oneself to the will of the ruling powers—to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's—is, according to Eugene Genovese, the genius of Christianity. Despite the desire to interpret the teachings of Jesus as radical, anarchic, or revolutionary, one must realize, especially considering that St. Paul's epistles are the basis of the Christian religion, that the history of Christianity is one that has consistently, and successfully, preached submission to the rule of the powers that be. Giving Christianity to the slaves endowed them with the responsibility to submit to authority as much as, or perhaps more than, it gave them a sense of spiritual freedom. Penfield African Church in particular, and the religious indulgences of Greene County generally, created a space in which the liberating and enslaving ideas of Christianity could coexist. Furthermore, these irreconcilably contradictory doctrines of Christianity implicitly acknowledged the slaves' humanity while simultaneously forcing them to accept the conditions of the slave regime. As human beings, slaves had an implicit temporal free will along side their spiritual free will. While this free will tenet allowed for resistance to the slave regime, it also dangled before the slaves their fate in eternity. Their actions on earth echoed throughout the everafter. Disobedience to one's master was a sin that could send the slave to Hell. To be sure, the threat of violent force lurked beneath the surface of the social order in antebellum Greene County; in many instances, the slaveholders saw the lash as the only way to assert their authority. But considering the extent to which religion was a part of

Greene County's social order, especially in Penfield, the basis of order was vested in the ordinance of God as much as it was vested in the hands of the slaveholder.[23]

Positing the relationship of ruler to ruled, in this case master to slave, as an ordinance of God, the more pious slaveholders were, in their minds, simply playing the roles in which God had cast them. In this light, slavery was a burden, a responsibility. The slaveholders were duty bound to uphold their part in this system. As patriarchs, they were obligated to shelter, clothe, feed, Christianize, civilize, discipline, and punish their slaves—just as they tended to family members. The slaves, for their part, were obligated to work, to be disciplined and loyal, and to be obedient to their masters. Christianity bound these mutual obligations together in a single social mechanism that no man could rightfully question. Superordination as well as subordination, different but integral parts of one social system, derived directly from God. It was this tradition of authority and responsibility into which William J. Northen was born.

Peter Northen was a planter whose father, like many veterans of the Revolutionary War, moved his family to Middle Georgia around the beginning of the nineteenth century. Born in 1794 in North Carolina, Peter Northen served in the War of 1812, accumulated for himself land and slaves, and, rising to prominence as a Middle Georgia planter, represented Jones County in the state legislature between 1828 and 1830. In 1840, the elder Northen moved his family to Penfield, Georgia in Greene County after having accepted a position as the director of the Manual Labor Department of Mercer Institute (later Mercer University). When the college suspended that

[23] Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 161-168.

department in late 1844, Peter and his family settled on their farm just outside of Penfield.[24]

Peter was also a committed and prominent Baptist. He and his wife converted to Christianity in 1821 at Flat Shoals Baptist Church in Jones County. From that time onward, Peter dedicated himself to Christ and to Christian work. Not long after his baptism, he became a deacon at Flat Shoals Baptist Church. Upon moving to Greene County, he helped found Penfield Baptist Church, and subsequently answered the call to serve as a deacon of that congregation. In 1845, Peter rose to become the Treasurer of the Georgia Baptist Convention, a position he held until his resignation in 1852.[25]

The religious devotion that Peter exhibited served as a source of inspiration for William. In 1853, the younger Northen moved to Hancock County, which borders Greene County to the southeast, to begin a teaching career. While there, he accumulated a considerable amount of property and slaves. Having grown into an independent white male with a household and slaves of his own, following the example of his father and that of the Greene County of his youth, Northen practiced a plantation-mission ideology. He recalled, "Before my negroes were freed, they were required to assemble in my dining-hall every Sabbath morning, and they were taught in Sabbath School. I *compelled* them to come. This plan I kept up for years, and it ended with the end of the war."[26]

The elder Northen's connection with Mercer University, as well as the tendencies of the landed elite, heavily influenced the younger Northen as well, fostering a great

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[24] "Peter Northen," n.d. Northen Family Papers, GHS.
[25] *Ibid*.
[26] Northen, *Christian Index*, Jan. 6, 1876 (quote), emphasis in original.

respect for education. William attended a grammar school in Penfield as a boy, and at the age of 16, enrolled at Mercer. In 1853, at 18 years old, William graduated from Mercer University with high honors. After taking a six-month respite to allow his health to recover from an undisclosed illness, young Northen decided to make teaching his profession.[27]

Before committing to the profession of teaching, Northen sought the advice of an experienced teacher. A close personal friend of Peter Northen, Dr. P. H. Mell of Mercer University, who would later become Chancellor of the Georgia University system, and president of the Southern Baptist Convention, agreed to counsel William. After a long session of giving helpful advice, Dr. Mell wished to specifically impress one thing on the mind of young William. No matter what a man endeavored to do, Dr. Mell told young Northen, "he must first be sure that he was right, and then proceed, regardless of the consequences." Northen heeded that advise, and took it with him for the rest of his life.[28]

When his health recovered, Northen moved to the village of Mount Zion, in Hancock County, which borders Greene County to the southeast. Mount Zion was an educational Mecca for the young men of Middle Georgia, as well as for those of the South as a whole. Led by brothers Nathan Beman and Carlisle Beman, and earlier by Richard Malcolm Johnston, Mount Zion Academy boasted that it led the state in educating young men for over forty years. The wealth that cotton generated in the surrounding areas only bolstered their claims. Upon his arrival in Mount Zion, Northen

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[27] ["Northen, W. J."], n.d., 2. Northen Family Papers, GHS.
[28] Annie Belle Northen, ["My Father"], n.d., (quote) 1. Northen Family Papers, GHS.

opened a small school of his own, hoping to take advantage of the cultural and financial prominence of the area. In that quest he was successful. While struggling to build a life of his own, he boarded with the family of Thomas Neel, a wealthy and influential planter in Hancock County. Northen made quite an impression on the Neel family, for in December of 1860, Northen married Neel's daughter Martha.

During his first year of teaching, Northen expressed a great deal of anxiety over his success as a teacher. After an examination, however, Carlisle Beman confirmed his success. In 1854, Beman offered Northen a place as assistant at Mount Zion Academy, beyond which Northen had nothing to desire. But after the next school year, the aging Beman retired, turning his school over to young Northen's capable hands. With the exception of the time that he spent as a soldier in the Confederate Army, Northen presided over Mount Zion Academy until 1871. At that point, due to the severely depressed conditions of the cotton belt, as well as the increasing prominence of Atlanta as the financial and cultural center of the state, Northen moved his school to Kirkwood, a suburb of Atlanta in which John Brown Gordon and Alfred Colquitt, among others, resided.[29]

Northen's eventual association with the likes of Gordon and Colquitt, and later Henry Grady and Patrick Walsh, was no accident. His view for rebuilding the South was much the same as that of the Bourbon establishment and the leaders of the New South movement. The upheavals of war and Reconstruction did not alter Northen's philosophy in any fundamental way. In fact, those events strengthened his belief in the need for a

[29] ["William Jonathan Northen"], n.d., 1. Northen Family Papers, GHS.

new direction for the South. Like most of the new men of the New South who lauded the coming of industry and business—men who in Don Doyle's estimation inherited their fathers' support for Whig politics and industrial development—Northen found his particular way to the New South program through the path that his father and other family members laid for him.[30]

Abner Davis, Northen's maternal grandfather, and once state representative from Henry County, supported Whiggish policies for Georgia. Davis was a member of the Internal Improvement Convention which met in Eatonton, Georgia—the county seat of cotton belt Putnam County—in September 1831. The primary objective of that meeting was to establish the foundations for the first railroad lines in Georgia. Although there is no record of his voting inclinations, Peter Northen's activates also suggested that he had Whiggish sympathies. In 1839, Peter Northen was a delegate to the Georgia State Convention. Its expressed purpose was to make the workings of the state legislature more efficient by reducing its membership. Perhaps as telling as the business-like endeavors that Peter Northen and Abner Davis involved themselves with, voting patterns in Middle Georgia generally, and in Greene and Hancock Counties in particular, suggest strong Whiggish sympathies in those counties.

In his study of Greene County, Jonathan Bryant reports that in 1860 Greene County voted for the Constitutional Union candidate for president with 68 percent of the

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[30] For the Whiggish and industrial inclinations of the fathers of the "new men" of the New South see Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, 109-110; Mark Roman Schultz, *The Rural Face of White Supremacy: Beyond Jim Crow*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), argues that Northen's political career bears witness to his Whig heritage, 156-157

vote. The refusal to vote for either Democratic candidate suggests that Greene County's citizens were not ready to leave the Union, but that they were prepared to compromise with the North with John Bell as president. The election results of 1860, however, were no last ditch effort or desperate attempt to forge a political coalition for the purposes of negotiation. The voting patterns of Middle Georgia counties—especially Greene and Hancock—from the beginnings of Constitutional crisis in the late 1820s through the election of 1860 show a consistent pattern of dissent from provincial electoral politics.

Following the disastrous presidency of John Quincy Adams, Georgians looked to one of their own, a veritable southern hero, to redeem them. Andrew Jackson promised the white South, and delivered, favorable policies toward removing Cherokee Indians, dismantling the National Bank and reducing the protective tariff. While they were more than happy with their Democratic president through 1832, the Nullification Crisis in South Carolina began to change some minds. And although most Georgians were glad to know that Jackson would not allow a re-chartering of the National Bank, they grew quite fearful over his removal of all federal deposits from the bank in 1833. Jackson further harmed his and his party's cause in the South when he named a New Yorker as heir apparent to his administration. All of these events taken together, many white southerners became worried that the president and the federal government were growing far too strong at the expense of the rights of the sovereign states. Accordingly, many white men in the plantation belt of Georgia, and in Greene County especially, supported States Rights candidates. In 1835, while the States Rights candidate for governor lost to the Union candidate, Greene County voters decided in favor of the States Rights

candidate by a vote of approximately 62% to 38%. In 1837, George Gilmer won the chief executive position of Georgia as a States Rights candidate. Greene County cast over 93% of their votes for him.[31]

The States Rights Party, however, was not strong enough on a national level to voice the concerns of the white, slaveholding South. The Whig Party took up their cause. By the mid-1830s, the Whigs began to speak the white South's language. They preached that if the South were to cast off the myopic Democrats and vote for the Whigs they would preserve their institutions, their culture, and the rights of the several southern states. Among the more important issues was the cresting abolition movement. Whigs assured southerners that they would ward off the abolitionist threat and preserve the South's most cherished institution, slavery. In the election of 1836, then, Georgia, along with a handful of other southern states, voted for the Whig candidate for president, Hugh White. Although White lost to the Democratic candidate, Martin Van Buren, the Whigs had established themselves as a formidable second party in national and southern politics.

Building on the success of 1836, the Whigs made more inroads into the South by 1840. William Henry Harrison, a native Virginian and military hero, was a suitable candidate for the South for president. With Harrison as their presidential candidate, the Whigs in 1840 again won Georgia along with more southern states, and took the White

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[31] For a discussion of the change of southerners from Democrats to States Rights supporters, see William J. Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 170-192; Georgia voting statistics from Michael J. Dubin, *United States Gubernatorial Elections, 1776-1860: The Official Results by State and County*. (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2003), 34-35.

House as well. They established themselves as serious, long-term players in southern politics.[32]

Where in-state politics was concerned, Georgians were not quite prepared to bolt the Democrats. The Whigs did, however, begin to run candidates to challenge the Democratic stranglehold over the South after their victory in 1840. In the Georgia gubernatorial election of 1841 the Democratic candidate, Charles McDonald, defeated the Whig candidate, William Dawson, by a narrow margin. Greene County, for its part, seemed convinced by the Whig argument. Greene's citizens cast approximately 88% of their votes for Dawson. Greene County's Middle Georgia neighbors, Hancock and Morgan Counties, likewise voted heavily in favor of the Whig candidate. In 1843 George Crawford ran as a Whig and won the governorship for Georgia. Greene County gave well over 80% of its vote to the Whig candidate for governor, and Morgan and Hancock concurred with majorities for Crawford.[33]

Through the rest of the 1840s, the Whigs and the Democrats vied for rule over Georgia and the South. Greene County, along with Hancock and Morgan Counties, consistently voted heavily in favor of Whig candidates. By the end of the decade, however, political alignments once again shifted. The close of the war with Mexico caused a significant rift in the Whig party. Arguments over the fate of the new territories, whether they would be slave or free, led southerners to choose whether they would side with the Democrats or the Whigs. To summarize the conflict in an oversimplified

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[32] Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery*, 184-195.
[33] Dubin, *Gubernatorial Elections*, 36-37.

manner, Georgia Whigs and Democrats who supported Henry Clay's position on a free California and New Mexico joined in a new party called the Union Party. Those who supported John C. Calhoun's call for all new territories to allow slavery joined the Southern Rights Party. Those who followed the traditional Whig ideology went with the Union Party and Greene County's citizens followed suit. In the two elections with Union contenders for governor, in 1851 and 1853, Greene County, along with its neighbors Morgan and Hancock, voted decidedly in favor of the Unionists.[34]

Within this context, Northen moved to Hancock County as a young man trying to make a life of his own in 1853. Political traditions in Hancock were similar to those in Greene, with a planter-merchant leadership class atop the social hierarchy. These elites held considerable influence over the social, economic, and political traditions of the county. Like the Greene County of Northen's formative years, Hancock espoused Whig Party policies through the antebellum period and gave its support to the Constitutional Union Party in the election of 1860.

Although they certainly realized the threat that an increasingly aggressive North, with its political economy of freedom, was making on their civilization, Hancock County's leading citizens, for the most part, maintained a Whiggish tenor to their politics throughout the 1850s. They continued to see their interests in their ties—through prolific cotton production—to the national market economy, to business endeavors, and to scientific and diversified agriculture. Thus they aligned with parties who opposed the Democrats as long as they felt they were able. After strong showings in the Georgia

[34] Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery*, 244-247; Dubin, *Gubernatorial Elections*, 40-41.

gubernatorial elections of 1855 and 1857—Hancock County gave a majority of its votes to the American (Know-Nothing) Party Candidate in both years—the pressures of the irrepressible conflict between two competing political economies brought opposition parties to their collective knees in Georgia and in the South. The perpetual Democratic charge that Whigs, Unionists, and Americanists sided with the abolitionist, free-labor North against the slaveholding interests of the South finally convinced Middle Georgians to change their minds. Hancock County, however, maintained its belief in Whig politics. Although Joseph Emerson Brown won the governorship of Georgia as a Democrat in a landslide in 1859, Hancock County gave 52% of its votes to the Opposition candidate.[35]

Hancock's ties to the larger national commercial market system won out over provincial sentiments in the national elections of 1860 as well. Its belief in a compromise that would preserve the union, and in turn the county's prosperity, led it to side with the Constitutional Union candidate for president. While Lincoln's victory left the South without much hope, Hancock County seemed to hold its collective breath. Much like Greene County, the leading citizens of Hancock County, legislators and delegates to the Secession Convention, opposed parting with the Union until after the secession measure passed.[36]

There is no indication of Peter or William Northen's sentiments concerning cooperation or secession. There is a strong indication, however, that they both supported

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[35] Mark Roman Schultz, "The Unsolid South: An Oral History of Race, Class, and Geography in Hancock County, Georgia, 1910-1950." (PhD. diss., University of Chicago, 1999), 4; Schultz, *Rural Face of White Supremacy*, 156; Bryant, *How Curious a Land*, 47-48; Dubin, *Gubernatorial Elections*, 41-45.
[36] Schultz, *Rural Face of White Supremacy*, 156.

their native South, right or wrong. Shortly after the passage of the secession ordinance, Peter Northen, the veteran of the War of 1812, organized a company of infantry. Known as the Stocks Volunteers, they operated under the 2nd battalion, 2nd brigade of Georgia State Troops. Governor Joseph E. Brown commissioned the company for a six-month term in October of 1861. After some trepidation, William Northen enlisted as a private under the command of his father late in 1861.[37]

Northen's status as a teacher afforded him an exemption from combat duty for the latter part of 1862 and the first half of 1863. In the summer of 1863, following the death of his father in April, and the expiration of his exemption, Northen went to Atlanta to join Hal Beman's company. Shortly after arriving in Atlanta, however, Northen's health began to fail, a recurring problem throughout his life, and he was consequently assigned to serve in the Confederate Hospital service in Atlanta. Early in 1864, Northen was transferred to Pearce Horne's company in Milledgeville after the Confederate hospital in Atlanta relocated there. His health still frail, he continued to serve in the hospital service until the end of the war.[38]

Northen's brief combat duty and his extensive hospital service allowed him to bear witness to the destruction that Georgia suffered during the war. Not only were slaves freed and southerners, white as well as black, killed, but the war had undercut the economic and social foundations of the only civilization he had ever known. These grim realities did not completely discourage Northen. Nor did they lead him to attempt to

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[37] "Peter Northen," Northen Family Papers, 2; Bryant, *How Curious a Land*, 83; ["William Jonathan Northen"], Northen Family Papers, 1; Annie Belle Northen, ["My Father"], 6.
[38] Annie Belle Northen, ["My Father"], 6-7.

violently reassert his white male authority over his community. Rather, Northen's daughter, Annie Belle, recalled that the war seemed to have a softening effect on her father. He avoided violence evermore than he did in the years before the war. Just after the end of the war, Northen resumed his teaching at Mount Zion Academy, and he refrained from resorting to the rod for punishment of his students. He much preferred to influence his students through religion and morals, and exerted his authority in that way.[39]

In addition to reconstructing his own life, Northen desired to reconstruct his community and state as well. In true Whig fashion, Northen believed that the South could regenerate itself through business ventures. Accordingly, in late 1865 Northen invested $10,000 in a mercantile business in Sparta, Georgia that his brother, Henry, and another Hancock County man proposed to operate. When that endeavor failed a year later, Northen was left with $6,000 in debt to creditors from the North. Calls on the debt came frequently and intensely, and the creditors threatened to file suit in federal court to recover their money. Northen was able to hold them off, however, and over the next year he was able to repay the creditors.[40]

Having grown to manhood in Greene County, Northen was well schooled in the perceived dangers that outside agitators presented for the South. The war and the actions of Congress and Georgia Republicans in the wake of the war only worsened that suspicion. The ordeal with his failed business in Sparta and the resulting pressure from

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[39] Ibid, 8-9.
[40] Ibid, 7.

his northern creditors seemed to embitter him toward northerners even more. Whatever the case, Northen, in his first political appearance, agreed to serve as a delegate from Hancock County to the Democratic convention of December 1867. With Benjamin Hill serving as chair, the convention aimed to elect John B. Gordon as governor and to do away with the Republicans and the constitution that their "nigger-New England" convention had created.[41]

That a significant number of African Americans voted in the 1868 gubernatorial election stirred the ire of the unreconstructed Democrats. Also, that many African Americans voted for Republicans worsened the situation from their perspective. For his part, Northen felt that enfranchising African Americans so soon after emancipation, giving them equal political standing with white men, would lead to "anarchy in government [and] wretchedness in society." And further, that in claiming and exercising their ill-gotten political rights, the ex-slaves displayed "insufferable insolence and...impudent self-assertion."[42]

To be sure, Northen did not lay all of the blame for the evils of Reconstruction on the backs of African Americans for he saw them, unable to act for themselves, as largely misled by northern agitators. During Reconstruction, some northerners ventured south ostensibly to share the Gospel with the freed people. But men like Northen thought that these so-called missionaries only wanted to meddle in southern affairs and incite the

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[41] Numan V. Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia*, 2nd edition. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), (quote) 59.
[42] Northen, *Christian Index*, Jan. 6, 1876 (first quote); William J. Northen, "Do the Negroes at the South Need Evangelization?" n.d., (second quote) 4. William J. Northen Papers, AC# 00-074, GDAH.

freedmen to revolt against their former masters. If the North would leave the South to itself, then the white people and black people of the South would be able to work toward common ground. Evangelization was critical to finding this space for coexistence; but southerners must be the pastors. The gap between blacks and whites that emancipation and Reconstruction created could only be closed if southerners were allowed to chart their own course.[43]

Northen's personal course took a fateful turn in 1874. Northen moved his school to Kirkwood in 1871, and after teaching there for three years, and for some twenty years overall, Northen's health once again failed him. This bout with illness seemed worse than any he had previously endured, so he turned his school at Kirkwood over to his brother-in-law, Charles Neel, and retired to his 800-acre plantation in Hancock County. By 1876 the calm, therapeutic rhythms of farm life helped him to recover completely. Over that time period, he was able to settle all of his outstanding debt, and was successful in challenging a lawsuit that the widow of a former business partner brought against him concerning ownership of a plot of land.[44]

Most importantly, in his period of recovery on his plantation, Northen began to develop scientific methods of farming. In addition to raising a small cotton crop, he heavily invested himself in breeding Jerseys and horses. From his cattle, he produced milk with high butterfat content; he extensively diversified his crop output as well. His success in experimenting with dairy products and crop diversification propelled him near

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[43] Northen, *Christian Index*, Jan. 1, 1876; In *Crucible of Race*, Williamson discusses the circumstances and consequences of the separation between blacks and whites after emancipation and Reconstruction, 44-60.
[44] Annie Belle Northen, ["My Father"], 10.

the top of Hancock County's farming community. From this prominent position, he became a founding member and president of the Hancock County Farmers' Club, was elected vice-president of the State Agricultural Society, and also served as president of the Young Framers' Club of the Southern States.

In his association with these various farming clubs, Northen witnessed firsthand the desolation and hopelessness, above and beyond the predicament of his own county, that the average Georgia farmer faced. The policies of the railroads and merchants pressed farmers into the vicious cycle of debt, out of which most had no hope of escape. The excessive consumption of alcohol and the lack of access to education only worsened their lot. These problems threatened not only the small farmers themselves, but also the condition of the state as a whole. As a leading member of a severely depressed farming community who expressed not only an understanding of the plight of Georgia's farmers, but who proposed several measures to remedy the problems they faced, Northen answered the call to enter politics.

CHAPTER 2

"TO BUILD THE STRENGTH OF THE STATE UPON THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES"

In May 1892, nearing the end of his first term as governor of Georgia, Northen addressed the members of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) who had come to Atlanta for their annual meeting. Against the background of the faltering New South program, the rising Populist movement, and increasing racial violence, Northen posited his ideas for furthering "recognized rights…, the peace of communities, and good order in the State." Blending his duties as chief executive of Georgia and as a servant of God, Northen exhorted the delegates of the convention, despite longstanding Southern Baptist opposition to any mixture of politics and religion, to "recognize the helpful influence of religious training in the maintenance of law." The path to good government, to social, economic, and political stability and progress, depended upon a "sympathy of interests between the [church and the state]." Moreover, the task of the faithful, and for the governor himself, was "to build the strength of the State upon the Christian virtues."[45]

Northen's call for establishing order, peace, and good government upon the foundations of Christian principles reflected the changes that he personally experienced following the Civil War and Reconstruction as well as the changes affecting Georgia and the South in a larger sense. The late-1870s through the early-1890s was a time in which

[45] Northen, ["Southern Baptist Convention address"], n.d. (quotes) 1-2. Northen Papers, GDAH.

an emerging industrial-market economy clashed with the agrarian orientation of the South. The destruction of war, with decimated farmlands, the loss of millions of dollars in human property, and, not least, the weight of defeat, compounded the magnitude of this conflict. The South suffered from a poverty that it had never known and was ill equipped for the changes that lay ahead. Some southerners reacted with anger and violence to these changes, looking to reestablish, in as much as they could, the old order. Others sought a new course for the future of the South.

The main thrust of this new path, which newspaper editors like Henry Grady and Richard Edmonds articulated, was for the development of business and industry all across the region. Farming would remain the core of the southern economy, but the New South program held that there would be no recovery or prosperity in the region until southerners diversified their crops and welcomed the development of industry. To be sure, this task was much easier said than done. Not only did the New South promoters believe that the slave system of the Old South had prevented the creation of a vibrant, diversified economy, but it had also forestalled the development of a value system that would embrace scientific agriculture and manufacturing. While the South suffered from physical obstacles to the realization of an industrial economy, it was also mentally unprepared to welcome the new order of things.[46]

Often, the New South prophets used religious language to help southerners cope with the transition from the world of the past to that of the future. In 1887, for instance,

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[46] Paul Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 26-29.

Grady remarked that "the basis of the South's wealth and power is laid by the hand of the Almighty God, and its prosperity has been established by divine law." Edmonds was a Baptist who spoke several times before the SBC, linking the providence of God with the New South. There were people, however, who, recognizing that many southerners suffered from a lack of preparedness for the emerging urban-industrial order, went beyond mere rhetoric. In order for "backward" southerners to be equipped for the rigors of modern life, they first needed an education.[47]

Among the first of those to act on this realization were evangelicals. I. T. Tichenor, who was an educator and preacher from Alabama, began to advocate Christian social activism through his sermons in the 1850s. He believed that all people had a stake in the welfare of their society. As president of Auburn University in the 1870s, Tichenor pushed for agricultural education programs that combined his belief in Christian social responsibility and economic recovery. Some years later, Rev. John E. White, Northen's friend and colleague, showed much interest in educating the underclasses in the South. A "secular" education infused with Biblical principles would prepare the lower orders of southerners for "the work of life, the duties of citizenship, and usefulness as Christians." Thus White combined in his message the importance of economic progress, civic responsibility, and righteous living. Under the auspices of the Home Mission Board of the SBC would this task come to fruition.[48]

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[47] Henry Grady quoted in Ibid, 1; for a discussion on Richard Edmonds as a Baptist, see Harper, *Quality of Mercy*, 44-47.
[48] John E. White quoted in Harper, *Quality of Mercy*, 77; Harper deals with Tichenor's "progressive" activism at some length in *Quality of Mercy*, 37-45.

Northen, as a lifelong teacher and Christian, likewise believed in the virtue of education as an agent that would instill reverence in the people for progress in all facets of life. In the face of the changes with which the South was confronted, to deny the people an education would make them "an engine for evil and a power for harm." It was therefore the Christian's duty to urge society to concentrate energy and resources on education in particular and on the development of humanity in general. In mid-1879, during his first term as a state legislator, Northen relayed this general call in a letter to his son, Thomas. "This poor humanity will fail, if left to itself," he lamented. The Christian's solution to this quandary lay in what Northen identified as life's two chapters: the first was "to resist evil; the other is—to be useful." Each of these principles was equally required, for if a man simply resisted evil, he "leaves the world to go to ruin." The true Christian relied on the strength and guidance of God, devoting himself to making the world better for other people.[49]

Northen carried his burden for helping "this poor humanity" with him to the state legislature. Taking his vision for an educated populace further than White or the Home Mission Board, he pursued an agenda for educational reform that called for greater involvement on the part of the state. As chairman of the Committee on Education in the House of Representatives in the Georgia General Assembly, Northen advocated several measures that encouraged more centralized state power over Georgia's common schools. Perhaps his most aggressive piece of legislation, he several times proposed a bill that

[49] Northen, *Christian Index*, Oct. 11, 1894 (first quote); Northen to My Dear Son [Thomas Northen], Summer 1879, (second, third, fourth quotes) 3-4, emphasis in original. Northen Family Papers, GHS.

would levy a tax of one-tenth of one percent on all taxable property in Georgia for the purpose of funding the state's common schools. Having first proposed the bill to the whole House in mid-June of 1881, he finally pushed the bill to a vote, after several amendments, in late August. Those voting in the affirmative for the bill were in the majority, but it lacked the requisite constitutional majority to pass.[50]

Despite the failure of his property tax bill, Northen persisted in his attempts to aggrandize educational funding at the state level. With a nebulous tone, he proposed that the legislature consider aiding the state school fund by "appropriating thereto the special taxes collected in the State." That proposal gathered little steam, however, and faded away with no further mention. Northen and his committee made a number of other proposals for increasing the state school fund. They suggested a rather insignificant bill that the taxes collected on dogs go to the common schools; that the State Department of Agriculture's excess funds help finance common schools; and that the revenues the state collected from the hiring-out of penitentiary convicts support the education fund.[51]

Not only did Northen propose to increase funding for the state's schools, but he supported several measures for state level regulation of public education. Instead of allowing each county to set the level of compensation for its teachers, his committee proposed legislation that would regulate teacher's salaries across the state. Furthermore, Northen favored a uniform system for evaluating public school teachers. Also, foreshadowing an education reform that Georgia Populists would propose in the 1890s,

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[50] State of Georgia, *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Georgia*. (Atlanta: Constitution Publishing Co., State Printers, 1882), 256, 482,487-488, 532, 554-556
[51] Ibid., 347, 405, 588, 684

Northen and his committee suggested that the state adopt a standardized set of school textbooks. These measures all failed, however, due in large part to opposition from locally minded legislators.[52]

Although Northen made several propositions to push for centralized management of public education, most of the proposed legislation that came through his committee focused on local matters. This was an acknowledgment that, as William Link states, "Real control [over education] lay with communities." His attempts to concentrate educational authority in the state, however, demonstrated his realization that local power presented an obstacle to progress—educational or otherwise. In striving to regulate the evaluation and payment of public school teachers across the state, for instance, Northen ran headlong into what localities considered their prerogative. The intransigence that locally minded legislators displayed regarding education reforms in the early-1880s signified that they would not acquiesce to challenges to their traditional republican mode of governance.[53]

An issue on which Northen and some communitarians agreed, however, was the necessity for more state level involvement regarding the alcohol question. Many people had embraced temperance across the United States since the 1820s. Through the mid-nineteenth century the national movement to diminish the abuse of alcohol gathered some momentum—including the beginnings of the push for legal restraints against the

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[52] State of Georgia, *Journal of the House*, 256, 273-274, 347; For Georgia Populists on education reforms, see Barton Shaw, *The Wool-Hat Boys: Georgia's Populist Party*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 109, 118.
[53] William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), (quote) 5.

production of alcohol—but it remained largely a matter of individual character. The structural changes the nationa faced after the Civil War, however, forced a reconsideration of the management of the alcohol problem. The impersonal nature of the rising industrial order caused many southerners to look beyond individuals for the roots of social problems: excessive alcohol consumption in this context was a sign of societal breakdown. Thus by the 1880s, temperance underwent a fundamental shift, becoming for many a prohibitive crusade not so much against drinking as against the forces that created, distributed, and sold alcohol.[54]

Evangelicals led the way in the campaign to stamp out the liquor trade and the saloon from their civilization. The complexities of the problems with alcohol convinced many southern Baptists that their traditional belief in the separation of religion from politics was, in this case, insufficient. Moral suasion, many Baptists felt, would no longer have much of an impact on the saloon question, especially considering that they perceived the problem with strong drink as largely systemic. Tapping into a broader vocabulary that criticized the corruption of the Gilded Age, urban as well as rural evangelicals who favored prohibition used terms that linked government sanctioning of alcohol with sin. The "traders of iniquity" aligned themselves with the "money power," constituting a "great evil" that threatened to send thousands of "souls to a burning hell." Since the wealthy and powerful controlled the liquor trade and the political machinery that protected it, the only recourse was to seek legislative remedies. Thus in 1880 a small

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[54] John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists*. (University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 49.; Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 214-218; Link, *Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, 41-51.

community in Alabama sent a petition to the governor of that state which asserted that a prohibition law would help restore order and peace in their town, and would prevent the danger and disturbances plaguing their churches and schools. Northen echoed that argument in an 1881 proposal to the Georgia House of Representatives which stated that the law should "protect the public, private and Sunday schools of this state from disturbances" arising from the liquor trade.[55]

During his tenure as a member of the Georgia House of Representatives from Hancock County, which ended in 1882, Northen from time to time acted as a liaison of sorts for temperance groups. On behalf of the Friends of Temperance, Northen requested that their group be allowed to use the halls of the House of Representatives for a meeting in Atlanta. In another instance, Northen motioned to have a petition of the Women's Christian Temperance Union read before the House, which heard the petition and agreed to allow it to be referred to the Committee on Temperance. Occasionally, Northen and his Committee on Education also proposed measures that they recommended to the Committee on Temperance. They proposed regulations and taxes on the sale of alcohol for the purpose of protecting schools in places such as Gwinnett County, White County, and in the town of Louisville in Jefferson County.[56]

After a short period of time, however, measures regarding the sale of and tax on alcohol came under fire. Prohibitionists charged that regulations like these, instead of severing the link between the liquor interests and the government, actually worked to

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[55] Link, *Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, (first quotes) 41-42; State of Georgia, *Journal of the House*, (second quote) 405.
[56] State of Georgia, *Journal of the House*, 29, 131, 264, 402, 414.

legitimize and protect the trafficking of alcohol. Many Georgians, but certainly not all, seemed to desire stronger prohibition laws. Because outright prohibition would have failed miserably, many states across the South passed local option, dispensary, or "Four-Mile" laws. Local option laws placed the decision for or against prohibition within individual counties. The dispensary system, which South Carolina adopted under Ben Tillman, created a state monopoly over the alcohol trade. In this system, the state purchased alcohol and sold it to local retail stores which then sold it to individuals. Like local option, dispensaries were established only after a majority of eligible voters in a locality requested them. The Four-Mile law, which Tennessee passed in the late-1870s, proscribed the sale of liquor within four miles of a school. In Georgia, the legislature embraced the local option law. After having gained election to the state Senate in 1884, Northen authored Georgia's 1885 version of local option. In addition to including all of the requisite provisions for bringing local prohibition to a vote in any particular county, Northen began the statute by framing the issue of prohibition with language that evangelicals appreciated. This law was to be "An Act to provide for preventing the *evils* of intemperance."[57]

Northen declined to run as state Senator from Hancock County in 1886. The tug between his legislative duties in Atlanta and his farming ventures in Sparta, he complained in an 1881 letter, had him "constantly on the go." He was simply unable to

[57] For a discussion of dispensary systems, see Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman*, 181-197; and for Four-Mile laws, see Link, *Paradox of Progressivism*, 46; State of Georgia, *Acts and Resoultions of the General Assembly of the State of Georgia*. (Atlanta: J. P. Harrison & Co., Printers, 1885), (quote) 121, emphasis added.

effectively divide his attention between the two places. He expressed regret over his inability to attend the state's Cotton Planters Convention and Exposition. This exhibit to promote the agricultural achievements of Georgia, he felt, "was the opportunity for our people." The business prospects it created offered hope for many of his neighbors in Hancock County and many farmers across Georgia, whom he feared were "being badly pressed for their debts," and threatened with foreclosure.[58]

Northen spent the next several years tending to his plantation, and, after becoming president of the Georgia State Agricultural Society (GSAS) in 1887, developing a more through understanding of the agricultural conditions of Georgia. This he did through gathering information and statistics on the over 50,000 farms in Georgia at the time. In his presidential address at the meeting of the GSAS in February 1889, Northen revealed the findings of his investigation. First, the state, at that point and in the future, depended upon farming as the basis of its economy; second, the resources upon which farmers depended were steadily diminishing. The driving force behind the exhaustion of resources was the oppressive policies of business and government. Thus, it was the obligation of leading planters, those who had influence with the wealthy and powerful, to see that Georgia returned to the abundance of the past, and to "rise to co-operation [sic] with God himself in building up land, labor, morals, happiness, progress and peace." Small farmers had the responsibility to work hard, practice frugality, and, through

[58] Northen to B. J. Davis, Nov. 25, 1881, (quotes, 2-4), emphasis in original. Susan Davis Papers, MSS# 27, AHC.

scientific methods, diversify their crops, but "the people," Northen told the elite members of the GSAS convention, "are appealing to you to know what of the future."[59]

This speech, with its focus on the influence of powerful planters, revealed Northen's lack of comprehension of the conditions of farming in Georgia. The corporate-consumer economy's steady if uneven usurpation of the individualist-entrepreneurial economy in the late-nineteenth century was dislocating small farmers from their traditional position as the backbone of the Republic. The "money power" monopolized railroads, speculated in land and cotton, and among other things, controlled banks. They used their power and influence, many felt, to strip the reigns of government from the people and waged a class war against the once harmonious, egalitarian American system. Tom Watson, along with his elite following, best articulated this national strain of agrarian protest. Yet for most small southern farmers, these concerns were somewhat remote; the basis of the clash between the agrarians and the money power hit much closer to home. In a quotidian sense, the thing that farmers found most threatening to their social and economic standing was the crop lien system that emerged shortly after the war.[60]

Along with the drop in southern cotton production during the early-1860s, the demand for cotton produced in places such Egypt and India surged in the late-1860s. In response, southern soldiers returning from the fields of battle to their decimated farms

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[59] Northen, "Semi-Annual Address," Georgia State Agricultural Society, Feb. 12, 1889, (quotes) 1, 7. Northen Papers, GDAH.
[60] For a discussion of the two distinct strains of agrarian protest around 1890, see Bartley, *Creation of Modern Georgia*, 92-95.

grew cotton at rates far greater than at any time in the past. While the yeomanry was primarily subsistence farmers in the antebellum era, they seemed compelled to rebuild their farms by engaging in a post-war market that desperately wanted their cotton. Many of the staples they would have produced for themselves were thus ignored in favor of the one and only crop that, substituting for cash, they thought would allow them to recover.

Merchants began to sell cornmeal, molasses, flour, lard, pork and other supplies to small and middling farmers—largely on the basis of credit. Without ready access to cash, cotton was the only acceptable security for goods purchased on credit. In order for a merchant to protect the investment he made in extending credit to a farmer, he received a lien on the farmer's future cotton yield. Yet, with the price of cotton steadily falling and the prices of goods rising with exorbitant mark-ups throughout the 1870s and 1880s, the proceeds on a farmer's crop frequently failed to meet the amount of money borrowed. With no cash or other acceptable security available to the vast majority of farmers to reconcile the balance, merchants often placed a new lien on the farmer's next cotton crop. Added to his previous balance, the farmer had to charge supplies to his account, at whatever price the merchant charged, that would allow him and his family to survive for another year. Thus the cycle of accumulated debt began, pulling the farmer further and further into debt until he could no longer be considered a safe credit risk; eventually the merchant foreclosed on farmer's land leaving him and his family in desolation and hopelessness.

By the mid-1870s, many farmers made it clear that they would not acquiesce to the stranglehold of this "anaconda mortgage" system. To be sure, there were many other

elements of the postbellum political economy with which farmers were displeased, but the lien system was the central feature of agricultural economics after the late-1860s. The Grange arose in response to the economic woes of farmers. It was the first major association through which downtrodden farmers could bypass the merchant and express their collective discontent. It organized the tillers of the soil against merchants and the railroads, enlisting the help of affluent planters to add to its political and economic clout. At annual meetings, however, most of the discussions, which the planters led, focused on labor control and ways to lessen governmental spending and control over markets. After a short time, small and middling farmers found this mode of traditional dealing to be counterproductive. By the end of the 1870s, the influence of the Grange had almost completely diminished.[61]

Yet the pattern that the Grange set forth inspired subsequent farmers' associations. The Farmers' Union, the Agricultural Wheel, the Brothers of Freedom, and the Knights of Labor emerged across the South by the early-1880s. They fought to cut merchants out of the purchasing process and called on the federal government to aid them through a graduated tax structure and more efficient fiscal policies.

The association that emerged as the strongest and most influential in the South, however, was the Southern Farmers' Alliance. Beginning in Texas in the late-1870s, the Alliance made its way to Georgia by 1887. Basing its philosophy on Enlightenment principles of republicanism similar to those of the founders of America, the Farmers'

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[61] Woodward, *Origins*, 180; Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agarian Rebel*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 129-130; Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 214-215.

Alliance was able to mount a formidable protest against the social, economic, and political injustices of the Gilded Age without calling the entire American system into question. Combining that with the leveling spirit of evangelical religion, the Alliance relied on ordinary people, not on more socially prominent citizens as mediators, to articulate its qualms with the system.[62]

Through their seemingly contradictory language of rationalism and spirituality, the Farmers' Alliance called on the government to produce a more flexible currency and to establish controls over the declining prices of the goods that farmers produced. They further demanded that the government recognize labor unions, and regulate the railroads and land speculation. In essence, they advocated by-passing the conventional methods of expressing grievances and soliciting help, through personalism, in favor of making demands on an impersonal state. Employing progressive means to reach a conservative end, the Farmers' Alliance, and the associations that preceded it, demonstrated that the structure of traditional social relations had crumbled under the weight of the new order.

Some prominent southerners preached that the new economic system was forcing heretofore autonomous white men into "hopeless servitude." Along with the ruptures of war, emancipation, and Reconstruction, the crop lien system threatened to destroy what W. J. Cash called the "Proto-Dorian Convention," the adhesive that held white men together in racial solidarity regardless of economic or social standing. With white merchants and planters bleeding small white farmers dry in the postbellum years, however, the possibility of class-based, interracial political coalitions emerged. Those

[62] Ayers, *Promise*, 215-217; Kazin, *Populist Persuasion*, 2, 10-11.

interested in preserving—or reconstructing—white supremacy could never allow that to happen. In response to these threats, some southern leaders, such as Ben Tillman, looking backward in a effort to reestablish an antebellum social order, drew on potent ideas of a glorious southern past and the reciprocal ideas of liberty and slavery. If demagogues like Tillman were able to convince struggling farmers that their rightful place as independent white men was fading, and they were descending into a state of slavery, then they could be roused, in white racial solidarity, to violent revolution against those who would put them in "hopeless servitude."[63]

To be sure, Northen's misapprehension of the growing disconnection between dispossessed farmers and elite planters was not leading him toward violent demagoguery. He did, however, seem to think that a conventional form of personalism would be sufficient to help farmers overcome their indebtedness. Yet, over the course of 1889 he learned that the track he advocated in his February GSAS address was off target. The Farmers' Alliance was more powerful and more independent than he realized, or conceded. The failure of the New South program to pull farmers out of the financial quagmire in which they found themselves forced them, contrary to their founding creed, to politicize their organization, uniting against all the enemies of the small farmer—largely without the help of their social betters.

Yet, because Alliancemen in Georgia were primarily concerned with striking back at the merchants and townspeople who exploited them, powerful planters, like Northen,

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[63] Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman*, (quote) 1; Wilbur J. Cash, *The Mind of the South*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 38-39.

Leonidas Livingston, who was president of the state Alliance in the late 1880s, and, among others, W. L. Peek, were able to reassert their influence over smaller farmers. Although he had been a member of the Alliance for approximately two years, perhaps Northen first realized this possibility in March of 1889 when he received a letter from Henry Grady. In the letter, stamped "Strictly Confidential," Grady gave Northen advice on how to affect this reassertion of influence: "Put yourself in line with the movement to bring about peace between the agricultural and commercial interests of the state….[T]here is a danger that these two interests will find themselves in hopeless opposition unless somebody smooths the friction. The man who does it will be master of the situation."[64]

Northen heeded Grady's advice. Already having established relationships with those who favored the commercial interests, such as Grady and Patrick Walsh, he appeared credible and faithful to the New South faction; having been a farmer and leader of agricultural organizations for quite some time, he had some measure of credibility with the agrarians as well. But as his 1889 GSAS speech showed, Northen was not yet able to speak the language of the Alliancemen. The St. Louis Convention of the Farmers' Alliance in the last month of 1889, however, made very clear that, along with an aggressive political agenda, the Alliance had a distinctive vocabulary that anyone seeking political office must learn in order to gain their support.[65]

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[64] Bartley argues that the Farmers' Alliance was a vehicle, intentionally or not, for the reassertion of planter power in *Creation of Modern Georgia*, 94; Henry Grady to Northen, Mar. 4, 1889, quoted in Woodward, *Tom Watson*, 164.
[65] Kazin, *Populist Persuasion*, 1-29.

After having emerged as a gubernatorial candidate in August of 1889, Northen began to enunciate the language of the Alliance in early 1890. Not only did he discuss social maladies, governmental reform, and the exploits of the plutocrats, but he included in his campaign the language of Christianity, which resonated with discontented farmers across the South. From its beginnings, the Alliance consistently linked agrarian politics with religious activity. Often gathering in churches, Farmers' Alliance rallies and meetings seemed very much like revivals. Its initial constitution only allowed members who claimed a belief in God and who were farmers, farm workers, and rural physicians, teachers or preachers. Furthermore, many of the original Alliance circuit lecturers were preachers, and its first newspaper started out as a Sunday school magazine. It was not enough to speak only to the Alliance's political concerns. It was necessary to appeal to their religious sensibilities as well.[66]

While delivering his presidential speech before the GSAS in Hawkinsville, Georgia in February of 1890, also waging his campaign for the gubernatorial post that John B. Gordon would soon vacate, Northen brought the reform elements of the agrarian platform together with evangelical terminology. Discussing the maladies that many Georgians encountered within the new industrial order, he called for "throw[ing] about [the people] such safeguards and such restraints as will lead [them] into better light and better purposes." Georgia's farmers had, on the one hand, fallen prey to the money power and debt, and, on the other hand, had failed to help themselves through thrift and crop diversification. Caught between these quandaries in a seemingly perpetual

[66] Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 217.

downward spiral, "good government" was to seize the situation and find the way to a solution through "pure morals and Christian supremacy." Good government would furthermore lead the way to progress by "giving help to struggling humanity; morals and virtue to the community and thrift and prosperity to all the people."[67]

Not everyone found his appropriation of this burgeoning populist language convincing. Leonidas Livingston, president of the Georgia Alliance, also a candidate for governor, was first among them. Some Livingston supporters mocked Northen's campaign strategy, claiming that he "believes that he is entitled to succeed…Governor Gordon by Divine right." Livingston, who represented the more progressive wing of the Alliance, and Northen, who represented the more traditional wing, primarily disagreed over the practicality of the Alliance's sub-treasury plan. In response to their quarrels, Livingston portrayed Northen as a Bourbon Democrat who mouthed the Alliance message only as a matter of political expediency. The Alliance, Livingston wrote to a friend in May of 1890, would only benefit from Northen's defeat.[68]

The spat between the two leading contenders for governor developed into a split between the conservative and liberal wings of the Alliance in Georgia. If the farmers were to show solidarity and, as a united power, elect politicians sympathetic to their cause, then this schism had to end. In early-June of 1890, W. L. Peek, head of the state Alliance exchange, called on Northen, Livingston, and "several Alliancemen" to discuss

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[67] Bonner, "Gubernatorial Career of W. J. Northen," 11-17; Kazin, *Populist Persuasion*, 32-33; Northen, "Semi-Annual Address," Georgia State Agricultural Society, Feb. 11, 1890, (quotes) 9-10. Northen Papers, GDAH.

[68] Bonner, "Gubernatorial Career of W. J. Northen," 10-22; Henry County *Weekly*, n. d., quoted in Shaw, *Wool-Hat Boys*, 29; L. Livingston to N. C. Green, May 23, 1890, Northen Papers, GDAH.

a compromise that would "stop anything that tends to distract or divide our people." After their meeting in Atlanta, the proceedings of which remained secret, Livingston withdrew from the gubernatorial race and agreed to run for Congress, in the place of Peek, from Georgia's Fifth Congressional District.[69]

Upon winning the election as the unopposed Democratic candidate, Northen continued the work he began as a legislator for safeguarding the people through the expansion of state power, yet he largely turned his back on the Alliance platform. As governor, he used most of his power, not to bring about reforms for which the agrarians had called, but to challenge the local elite. Local power, Northen contended in his inaugural address, had grown intolerable. The glut of laws geared specifically to local matters—1226 out of 1410 pages of the recent Acts of the Georgia General Assembly—had caused egregious inefficiency in the state government. His calling as governor was to press the General Assembly to pass uniform state-level legislation. In his estimation, this would allow for the "true objects of government," to come to fruition.

The true objects of government, following but intimately linked to ensuring the security and felicity of the people, were the development of material resources. Fertile fields, prosperous manufactures, and thrifty government advanced "the enlightenment of [the] people and…the stability of their institutions." The enlightenment of the people would come, of course, through publicly funded education, which circled back to the goal of progress. Progress, Northen told the General Assembly, could only come through the

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[69]W. L. Peek to W. J. Northen, June 2, 1890, (quotes). Northen Papers, GDAH; for more on Livingston, Peek and Northen, see Shaw, *Wool-Hat Boys*, 24-30.

eradication of ignorance, for "ignorance leads riot and vice, hand in hand, to disturb society, destroy business, and overturn the government."[70]

By the end of the nineteenth century, politicians with an eye for socioeconomic progress considered education reform, which according to Dewey Grantham affected more people than any other initiative of the Progressive Era, as critically important to their mission. Northen's administration was no exception. His own esteem for education as a tool for the "elevation, enlightenment, and virtue of the people" dovetailed with that of Southern Baptists, who in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, established several schools in the South that held in common the mission of preparing southerners for "modern American life."[71]

Challenging the precedents set since the adoption of the Constitution of 1877, Northen proffered a plan for improving statewide public education through pressing for more tax dollars. The governor felt that the place Georgia's educational system held in the nation was unacceptable. Popular opinion, according to Northen, called for a change, and "The honor of the State demands a change." The security of the state, industrial progress, and the responsibilities required of a free people demanded a competent educational system that the state government would control and support.[72]

Using state funds, the governor pushed for the establishment of normal schools, which he regarded as "the most important factor now lacking in our [educational]

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[70] Northen, "Inaugural Address," (quotes) 3-4. Northen Papers, GDAH.
[71] Dewey Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Tradition and Progress*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 246-274; also see Fredrickson, *Black Image in the White Mind*, chap. 7; and Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, chap. 10; Northen, "Inaugural Address," 1890, 4. Northen Papers, GDAH; Harper, *Quality of Mercy*, 73 and Appendix I, 121-123.
[72] Northen, "Inaugural Address," 4. Northen Papers, GDAH.

system." Normal schools, though never fully realized under Northen's administration, were critical to his idea of progress. In Northen's logic, these teacher-training academies would justify and repay the increase in appropriations that he proposed for them. If Georgia had competent teachers, then an intelligent population would rise to "be the safeguard of our liberties and the standard of our civilization, as well as the guarantee of our *material progress*." Without competent teachers, "the *demon*, ignorance," would destroy the "paradise of social and domestic life" as well as the prospect for economic growth.[73]

While Northen's plan for a more centralized state focused largely on the uplift of the lower orders in general, he paid special attention to racial matters. Outside investors looked closely at the conditions and treatment of African Americans, thus New South boosters took a keen interest as well. Reiterating Atticus Haygood's ideas concerning African Americans, Northen felt that an educated black population would ensure"the peace of communities [and] good order in the state." For quite some time, segments of southern evangelicals had promoted the education of African Americans. Although in 1870 the general SBC delegation stated that such an educational program would not conform to "the feelings and views of the Baptists of the South," and would transgress "the plain teachings of God's Word," the Home Mission Board advocated "'raising up[, through Christian evangelism and education,] millions of freedmen to the exercise of all the rights and duties of citizenship.'" Yet by the early-1890s, when the leaders of the

[73] Northen, "Governor's Message," 1891, (first quote) 4-5. Northen Papers, GDAH; Northen, "Governor's Message," 1894, (second quote) 19-20, emphasis added. Northen Papers, GDAH; Northen, "Semi-Annual Address," Georgia State Agricultural Society, (third quote) 8, emphasis added. Northen Papers, GDAH.

SBC like Northen, and I. T. Tichenor embraced the New South program, the Convention reversed its Reconstruction-era position, seeing the continued social and economic failure of African Americans, and the problems that such failures ostensibly produced, as a result of their own inaction. To uplift African Americans from the pitfalls of the New South, the Home Mission Board requested $50,000 annually for 10 years to "settle this race question forever."[74]

For his part, the governor was among those Baptists who had advocated the education of African Americans for many years before the SBC changed its mind. In the 1870s, Northen expressed a missionary zeal for uplifting African Americans through education. Following emancipation, he established a "Sabbath School" in Sparta, Georgia to help African Americans adjust to life without their paternalistic masters. Nearing the end of the century, the preparation that African Americans needed for the obligations of citizenship "must first be met in giving [them] education." Religious leadership, in Northen's opinion, should take the lead in that initiative, as the state, to that point, had failed to provide adequate education for African Americans. Joining his spiritual burden to educate African Americans with his secular duty to do the same, he saw that, fewer than two months into his first term, an industrial college for African Americans, eventually to become Savannah Agricultural and Mechanical College, was

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[74] For a discussion on Atticus Haygood and other promoters of this sort of educational philosophy concerning African Americans, see Frederickson, *Black Image in the White Mind*, 210-214; *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention*, (Atlanta: Jas. P. Harrison and Co. Printers, 1870), (first quote) 13, and *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention*, (1891), (second quote) 27 & Appendix B, xxxvi; Keith Harper discusses I. T. Tichenor's influence on the educational policies of the SBC in *Quality of Mercy*, 37-45.

chartered and funded. He also appointed a commission to procure grounds and buildings for the school.[75]

The thrust toward a more prosperous state through an improved educational system met with a measure of success under Northen's administration. An African American industrial college had been established, and normal colleges, though less successful than the governor had hoped, were coming along as well. The state educational fund grew every year under Northen's watch, with an increase of nearly 25 percent between 1892 and 1893.[76] Yet despite these improvements, racial violence sullied Georgia's reputation throughout the nation. In order to foster an image of prosperity, it was not enough to trumpet the strides that Georgia was making in education. The image of progress also required at least the perception of harmonious race relations. Out of a mixture of Christian compassion and expedient politics, Northen began a crusade against racial violence that he continued until the end of his life.[77]

On May 17, 1892 in Clarksville, Georgia (Habersham County), three black men, James Redmond, Gus Roberson, and Bob Addison, were arrested and charged with murder. The following day, while the three men awaited arraignment, a large mob stormed the jail, seized the men, and summarily hanged them. Governor Northen

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[75] *Christian Index,* Jan. 6, 1876; Northen, "Our Duty to the Negro," *Christian Index,* Oct. 11, 1894 (first quote); Northen, "Governor's Message," 1891, (second quote) 4. Northen Papers, GDAH.
[76] Atlanta *Constitution*, Jan. 4, 1893.
[77] Most of the work done on Northen of late has dealt with his stance against racial violence. See Williamson, *Crucible of Race*, 287-291; W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930.* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 193-197; Godshalk, "Northen's Struggles against Lynching," 140-161.

denounced the lynching as "brutal, cruel, and barbarous." He expressed an inability to conceive of how such an outrage could take place among the "peaceable and law-abiding" citizens of Habersham County. The act was an affront on the honor of the state and the governor demanded that the citizens of Habersham "aid the executive in bringing the offenders to justice"—with a $200 reward for the arrest and delivery of the murderers. Before Northen, no Georgia governor had spoken so harshly against mob "justice." Moreover, none had dared to use state funds and mechanisms, to the extent that Northen did, to suppress further lawlessness.[78]

In the summer of 1892, Northen ran for re-election largely on his commitment to stamp out lynching and to defeat the Populists—two evils that "threaten the security of our system and, therefore, the perpetuity of constitutional liberty in America." Certainly, these two issues were linked. A peculiar feature of the 1892 elections in Georgia, and across the South, was the threat of Populist fusion with African Americans who realized that, under Democratic rule, they could never realize what emancipation promised. Northen's stance against the Populists won for him a broad base of support among the business classes, upper middle-class African Americans, and members of the Farmers' Alliance who could not bring themselves to bolt the Democratic party. Due largely to his position against lynching, including one instance in which he had a black man accused of rape and murder transported to Atlanta for safekeeping from a lynch mob, influential

[78] Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 194-196, 271; Shaw, *Wool-Hat Boys*, 82; Atlanta *Constitution*, May 22, 1892.

African American clergy, including Henry McNeal Turner, pledged support for Northen's campaign for re-election.[79]

Though few were eager to make statements against lynching, Northen's fellow Democrats joined in the fight against the third party threat. Patrick Walsh, editor of the Augusta *Chronicle* and the person whom Northen would appoint to the United States Senate following the death of Alfred Colquitt in 1894, used Biblical metaphor to caution potential defectors to the Populists that they were making a mistake. Recalling the 25th chapter of *Genesis* in which Esau sold his birthright to his brother Jacob out of desperate hunger, Walsh warned the voters of Georgia that "no mess of pottage in the shape of a sub-treasury sop should induce the people to sell their birthright and forsake the party and principles of their fathers." He further charged that the agrarians were "running after false gods."[80]

Northen likewise showed the capacity to use religion negatively—especially when dealing with the Populists. When Charles C. Post, co-founder of the *People's Party Paper* with Tom Watson, and chairman of the People's Party in Georgia, announced his candidacy for the insignificant position of county ordinary in Glascock County in May of 1892, Northen and other prominent Democrats made a special trip to Warrenton, Georgia. Appealing to the religious sentiments of the people who had gathered in the county courthouse to hear him speak, the governor called Post an "infidel" and an

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[79] Northen, Acceptance Speech to the Georgia Democratic Convention for Re-election, n.d., (first quote) 1. Northen Papers, GDAH; Scrapbook II, 251. Northen Papers, GDAH ; Atlanta *Constitution*, Oct. 27, 1892; Shaw, *Wool-Hat Boys*, 83.
[80] Patrick Walsh quoted in Woodward, *Tom Watson*, 167-168.

"atheist." He also read aloud portions of telegrams from outraged citizens. One charged Post with having "no regard for the sancity [sic] of the Sabbath. I had the occasion to pass their house one Sunday, and saw [Post] digging up his flower garden…and Mrs. Post was planting flower seed."[81]

Just two months after Northen's visit to Warrenton, Post left Georgia never to return. This episode was, of course, ultimately designed to discredit Watson, for whose popularity Northen confessed a fear in a letter to President Cleveland the following year. It was no matter: Watson lost the Tenth Congressional District election in 1892—with some 16,000 votes cast in a district with approximately 11,500 qualified voters.[82]

After having garnered double the votes of the Populist candidate for governor, William Peek, and defeating the Populists in general, Northen used his second inaugural address to further discuss lynching and to press for the passage of an antilynching statute. His second inaugural made clear that the race question had become the most salient threat to order and progress. Whereas in his first inaugural he posited that the true objects of government were the enlightenment (through education) of the people and industrial development, in his second inaugural Northen stated that the "true office of government…is to suppress violence, develop wealth and advance civilization." Framing the issue of lynching within evangelical language, he called mob rule "evil" and "wicked" and an abomination to the law and to God. He closed his speech by telling the

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[81] Atlanta *Constitution*, May 29, 1892 (quotes); Shaw, *Wool-Hat Boys*, 47-67; Woodward, *Tom Watson*, 227-229.
[82]Northen to Mr. President [Grover Cleveland], Sept. 15, 1893. Northen Family Papers, GHS; Bartley, *Creation of Modern Georgia*, 100.

General Assembly, "No state or nation can long live in power and influence after it forgets God and abandons righteousness."[83]

After Northen made several impassioned pleas for the passage of antilynching legislation, the General Assembly answered the Governor's request in December of 1893. Up to that point in his tenure in office, mobs had lynched thirty-two black men and two white men in Georgia. The number represented a 36 percent increase over the previous three years. An antilynching measure, in Northen's mind, would reverse that trend.[84]

Although the law represented a departure from previous attempts to combat lynching, it failed to make significant changes because it required local law enforcement officers to uphold vague notions of law and order; it also challenged the conventions of localism. The law compelled local officers to summon a posse to suppress any riot or illegal violence against any citizen of Georgia. It also provided that anyone engaged in mob violence would be charged with a felony; or if death resulted from mob activity, those having caused death would face murder charges. And if a sheriff or law officer were found to have been negligent to the point of allowing mob activity, he would face misdemeanor charges.[85]

While some African Americans expressed great pleasure at the passage of the law, others did not. Sol Johnson, a black journalist from Savannah, complained that "negroes in Georgia were lynched before the proclamation, after the proclamation, and will

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[83] For the election of 1892, see Bonner, "Gubernatorial Career of Northen," chap 3; and Shaw, *Wool-Hat Boys*, 63-77; Northen, "Inaugural Address," Oct. 29, 1892, (quotes) 6. Northen Papers, GDAH.
[84] Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 270-271.
[85] "An Act," n.d., (quote) 1. Northen Papers, GDAH.

continue to be lynched so long as the State winks at the lawlessness of her citizens." Johnson's prediction proved to be true: while 13 men were lynched in the year preceding the law, sixteen men were lynched in the year after its passage.[86]

The ultimate aim of Northen's campaign against "wicked" and "evil" mob rule appeared in an article that the governor wrote in response to the "incendiary agitation" of a northern journalist. Late in April 1894, the editor of a religious newspaper from Boston published an article lambasting "the clergy, the journalists, and the educators of the south" who "are acquiescing in a governmental policy which makes the southern states a reproach to the civilized world." This editor sent a copy of his article to Governor Northen and requested a reply. Most of the governor's rebuttal focused on rebuking the Boston editor for condemning the South, while the North was guilty of lynchings and riotous violence against "Poles and Hungarians," and those involved in the labor movement. He challenged the editor, "in all Christian Kindness," to prove that "the north, from its statutes and from the machinery of its courts and from the record of its governors" had "any more adequate protection by law for life and property" than Georgia. Northen mentioned the instance of his offering a reward for the arrest of lynchers; the passage, and full text of, his antilynching law; and a letter of exhortation sent to every sheriff in the state requiring them to suppress lawlessness and combat

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[86] Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 271-272; Sol Johnson, *Savannah Tribune*, Aug. 13, 1892, quoted in Brundage, 196. Among those African Americans who praised the measure, see H. M. Turner, Atlanta *Journal*, Dec. 23, 1892.

lynching.[87] The final paragraphs of the article, however, exposed Northen's most basic goal for his antilynching efforts:

> If you can find nothing [to vindicate the north], you cannot do better than devote your entire paper during your natural life to advertising…my state as having the most "adequate protection by law for life and property" in the Union, and, therefore, the best state in America "*to invest capital and live in*." This much you owe to the people of Georgia, that you may repair the fearful wrong your editorial has done this state.[88]

The mission of establishing God-honoring law, of uprooting the evil and wickedness of mob violence, was intimately linked to strengthening state power and boosting the state's business potential.

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[87] Atlanta *Journal*, May 10, 1894.
[88] Ibid., emphasis added.

CHAPTER 3

"THE BLAZE OF CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION"

The work Northen started in his political career carried over into his life after his second term as governor. Yet while his blend of politics and religion sometimes took a subtle tone during his gubernatorial career, his post-official career countenanced no such subtlety. Northen laid out his mission for his post-official career very clearly while delivering a speech before a group of Christian young people in Natchez, Mississippi in April 1900. His work in the coming century, he told them, was to speak in a "religio-political" fashion. That is, he set out to influence and "discuss politics from the stand point of Christianity."[89]

The program for progress that Northen began during his political career had met with some success. But progress was not yet nearly realized. While as a legislator and as governor Northen helped pass legislation that increased the number of schools in Georgia, the amount of appropriations for schools, and the length of the school year, Georgia still ranked among the worst states in education. The work he had started as a legislator in the interest of forestalling the evil effects of alcoholism in Georgia had gained a large measure of support, but temperance and prohibition movements had failed

[89] Northen, "Our Country's Need of Christian Young Men," 1900, (quotes) 1-2. William Owen Carver Papers, SBHLA

to prevent the saloon from remaining a significant part of the social landscape. Furthermore, despite the passage of an anti-lynching law, more and more African Americans were lynched every year after Northen's gubernatorial career. With these and many other pressing problems, it was incumbent on him, as a persisting servant of God and of Georgia, to carry his cross further.

The industrial order that Henry Grady and other New South prophets hailed in the late-1870s and in the 1880s brought relative economic success to the region by the 1890s. But the speed with which the transformation from a rural-agricultural economy to an urban-industrial economy was taking place exposed a significant gap between the southern social and economic structures. This gap was especially recognizable for Christians who deplored the drunkenness, poverty, squalor, prostitution, crime and political corruption that, in their eyes at least, came along with urban-industrial life. For those Christians, the maladies of the age signified a contamination of their once "pure" civilization.

Of course, not all southerners agreed on what the solutions to these problems should be. Traditionalists, those whose conception of society rested on localism and personalism, viewed the problems of the era as individual character flaws. Solutions for these problems, if any, would be found within neighborhoods and through personal charity. Another group of people, however, was coming to see the socioeconomic

maladies of the era as systemic. These reformers made it their business to cleanse their society of moral and social disorder through institutional change.[90]

Urban middle-class southern Baptists, as well as other evangelicals, played crucial roles in making this reformist ethos. Contrary to traditional interpretations, Keith Harper shows how in the 1890s and after southern Baptists were quite aware of and concerned over their social landscape. They engaged in programs that addressed issues such as education, health, temperance, and race relations. They advocated religious involvement in society "as a means of securing social and institutional change." Paul Harvey likewise argues that a social Christianity movement grew up in the South in the last decade of the 19th century that "envision[ed] a public role for Christians in reforming and regulating human institutions." While clinging to their primary mission of saving individual souls, some Baptists slowly but unevenly began to look to save the collective soul of society. Despite their inherent conservatism, southern Baptists could no longer afford to ignore the social problems plaguing their land.[91]

Northen's plan for addressing the perplexing social problems of the era, indeed for all of humanity's problems, was in establishing what he and others called "Christian Civilization." Christian civilization was the idea of a righteous bourgeois society in which the spiritual and the secular had a complementary relationship. Religious training

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[90] William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 3-30;. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South,* 260-289.

[91] Harper, *The Quality of Mercy*, 8; Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 198; Although his work has been surpassed by Harvey and Harper, John Lee Eighmy also finds that progressivism and social Christianity were closely linked in *Churches in Cultural Captivity*, chap. 4, 57-71; also see Ralph Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black in White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

and devotion would create pious and diligent citizens. Those "Christian patriots" would then take the reins of government and business and guide their society to the highest ideals of God's plan for humanity, leading inevitably to pure and powerful institutions, and prosperous businesses. In turn, that powerful and wealthy Christian civilization would, with ample resources and influence, spread the Gospel of Christ to the entire world, creating a global Christian civilization. Baptists and other Protestants around Georgia and the South shared in a vision in which Christianity would sweep through their land, leading them to social, political, and economic enlightenment. Northen also shared in that grand vision, yet before America could take over for England as the "head servant in the great household of the world," the idea of Christian civilization had to be implemented in Georgia.[92]

In the years after Reconstruction, southerners were particularly receptive to religion. After the Civil War, the South concentrated on rebuilding itself, with churches as a major component of that regeneration. The increasing concentration of populations in urban centers helped build membership; Baptists and Methodists grew more rapidly than the other southern denominations. Adding religious meanings to politics became more widespread and acceptable in the postbellum era as well. The reclamation of the

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[92] *Christian Index*, Mar. 16, 1899; Northen, "Our Baptist Young People and American Citizenship," (quote) 4, 10. Northen Papers, GDAH; In "'The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough': The Men and Religion Forward Movement of 1911-1912 and the Masculinization of Middle-Class Protestantism." *American Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Sept., 1989), Gail Bederman discusses the redefinition of the relationship between the corporate-consumer economy and religion in order for men to reclaim the masculinity that was lost with the cultural changes taking place around the turn of the twentieth century. Similarly, those who adhered to the idea of Christian Civilization, like Northen, sought to identify economic and technological progress with Christianity in order to forge a link between the religious and the political.

South by and for white southerners was known as "Redemption." Resonating with believers and non-believers alike, Redemption at once signified individual salvation from sin and collective political salvation from the North. For those looking to reestablish white supremacy, Redemption furthermore symbolized salvation from the "tragic era" of Reconstruction in which "ignorant" and "vindictive" ex-slaves ostensibly held their "Negro domination" over the white man's southland. Closer to the turn of the twentieth century, the South developed a civil religion known as the Lost Cause, which combined religion and a misremembered past to inspire a cultural southern nationalism and a celebration of the failed Confederacy. Religion helped southerners make sense of the tumultuous changes they faced in the waning years of the nineteenth century.[93]

Despite the depth and breadth of religiosity in the postbellum South, historians considering Northen's life after 1894 have ignored the idea of Christian civilization within his thought. Instead, merely mentioning religion, they have chosen to analyze Northen's activities in this period within the conceptual frameworks of race, class, and gender. In the *Crucible of Race*, Joel Williamson characterizes Northen as a "peripatetic friend of the Negro," whose "moral crusade," only on behalf of African Americans, was undertaken "In *addition* to his civic effort." Contrary to Williamson's implications, Northen did not believe that the public sphere and the religious sphere were separate. Indeed, the one was necessarily intertwined with the other.[94]

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[93] See Eric Millin, "Defending the Sacred Hearth: Religion, Politics, and Racial Violence in Georgia, 1904-1906." (MA thesis, University of Georgia, 2002), 3-4; also see Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 23-43; and Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*.
[94] Williamson, *Crucible*, (first quote) 288, (second quote) 290, emphasis added;

In his study of Northen's activities in the aftermath of the 1906 Atlanta Race Riot, David Godshalk acknowledges that Northen held the "view that Christianity had a special role to play in resolving [the] region's vexing racial problems." But largely focusing on gender, his analysis merely mentions religion. According to Godshalk, reestablishing white masculine authority provided the thrust for Northen's campaign against lynching and racial strife. That notion of white masculine authority was rooted in an ideal of antebellum social relations between the white elite and the white masses and African Americans. Contrary to Godshalk's conclusion that Northen's "vision for Georgia's future never transcended his memories of the past," this chapter suggests that the scope of Christian civilization embraced a program for Georgia and the South larger than only recovering the sense of control that was lost with emancipation and Reconstruction. The religious elements of Northen's thought and action not only went beyond race and gender, but also encouraged more modern forms of social control.[95]

Furthermore, Williamson's and Godshalk's misapprehensions of Northen's religiosity, and the strict focus on race and gender, lead one to believe that Northen's efforts were solely on behalf of ameliorating racial strife and (re)establishing white male authority. Considering his endeavors to realize Christian civilization allows for a much broader view of his work between 1895 and 1911. To be sure, race and ideas of white manhood played roles in his thinking, but taking his religious devotion seriously reveals not only that Northen's work after September 1906 was not "unprecedented," but that his

[95] Godshalk, "Struggles against Lynching," (quotes) 156-157.

idea of Christian civilization worked toward and closely resembled a wider progressive ethos.[96]

Believing that business and material prosperity were key vehicles through which God would transform the South into Christian civilization, Northen established the Georgia Immigration and Investment Bureau (GIIB) in 1895. A joint venture with Atlanta's railroad companies, the *Southern Cultivator*, and, unofficially, the Atlanta *Constitution*, the GIIB set as its mission to "get closely in touch with our agricultural, mining, manufacturing, and lumber interests" and to "leave nothing undone to bring into the State thousands of immigrants—people with money, enterprise, and good character—who will assimilate with our people and aid them in building up Georgia."[97]

Similar to his approach during his first campaign for governor, Northen's GIIB strategy hinged upon striking a balance between agriculture and industry. Economic diversification, Northen claimed, was the key to building up the state. Excessive cotton cultivation had crippled the productive power of Georgia's farmers, consuming all of the revenues it brought. Furthermore, the capital that the state needed for economic diversification and expansion was concentrated in the North and West. For Northen, these problems represented more than simply dollars and cents. "God has rested the ark of the covenant with the sons of men" in the United States and the "hope of free government on earth" was in their hands. Sectional strife, which economic problems

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[96] Godshalk, *ibid*, states that "Between 1906 and 1907, William J. Northen…undertook an unprecedented campaign against white racial hatred and violence in his state," 140.
[97] Northen, "To Build up Georgia," 1895, (quote) 2. Northen Papers. GDAH.

perpetuated, was forestalling the fullest realization of that vision. The prosperity of a diversified southern economy would not only promote sectional uplift but would strengthen the Union, clearing the path through which the South and the Nation would realize "God's appointed way" toward Christian civilization.[98]

Political reform was also a major component of Christian civilization. Placing himself within a progressive understanding of politics, Northen criticized the current state of government for fostering greedy ambitions, partisan politics, demagoguery, and voting fraud among other things. These usurpations of the rights of common citizens signified a lack of subservience to the rule of law and the laws of God. God, in his view, had ordained law and order, and therefore society "should be kept clean and pure and good." "No good man can stand in the presence of what God has ordained and leave it to decay and rot."[99]

Northen further held that every element of life fell under the purview of politics. Thus, every citizen, "if he discharges his high duty to the nation, to God and to humanity…must become an active politician." Every member of society, most especially Christians, should take an active and informed role in the political process. The character of the people, led by Christians, would determine the standard of government, and nearly as importantly, the development of wealth. The reciprocal relationship between the spiritual and secular within Christian civilization held that Christian businessmen make

[98] Northen, "Augusta Exposition Speech," n. d., (quotes) 13. Northen Papers. GDAH.
[99] Northen, "Our Baptist Young People and American Citizenship," (quotes) 7. Northen Papers, GDAH.

prosperous and pure government, and that pure government allowed for greater development of wealth.[100]

The quest for material prosperity should not, however, descend into acquisitiveness and monopoly. Joining many southern clergy in suspicion over the social implications of the late-nineteenth century shift from entrepreneurial-individualist capitalism to corporate capitalism, Northen condemned the idea that "competition has given way to combination in monopolistic aggregation." The force behind the government should not be in capital, or in the aggregation of capital. "Otherwise, the republic will become a kingdom or an empire, with plutocrats on the one hand and Proletariats [sic] on the other." The development of a proletariat in the South dismayed Northen and other religious progressives. On the one side, it would signify the triumph of capital over the people, and would further result in the loss of personal freedom for all Americans. On the other side, many leading southern Christians, as well as the middle-class as a whole, saw the urban working-class as a throng of uncivilized, immoral hedonists who preferred the vices of the city to the salvation of the church.[101]

First and foremost among these vices, affecting whites as well as blacks, "the saloon stands as colossal sin of the Ages [sic]." But alongside his rebuke of urban workers for their partaking of strong drink, Northen linked the saloon question to the broader complaints of the progressive era. And, with a reference to sin and the devil, he

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[100] Northen, "Our Country's Need for Christian Young Men," (quote) 2. Carver Papers, SBHLA.
[101] Northen, "Our Baptist Young People and American Citizenship," (quotes) 17-18. Northen Papers, GDAH; for the Baptist response to centralized economic power, see Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 204-206; for middle-class responses to urban-industrial workers, see David Carlton, *Mill and Town in South Carolina, 1880-1920*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

characterized it as a danger to Christian civilization. "With [the saloon's] devilish greed for money and power and place, it has, largely, bought the ballot that has made the corruption of government through the very lowest methods in politics." Other leading ministers agreed, seeing the liquor trade as one of the primary obstacles to the Christian and progressive efforts of stopping prostitution, feeding and housing the poor, reforming prisons, and purifying politics.[102]

Considering the connection between alcohol and politics, it was no far leap that ostensibly pious southerners began to use the political process to root out alcohol. Beginning in the 1880s, temperance changed to prohibition among southern Baptists. They realized the limits of the traditional notion of separation of church and state that they so jealously guarded. Moral suasion and public sentiment were only half of the strategy to eliminate alcohol. The hope for recovering their pure civilization demanded that the faithful take temperance a step further. "Hitherfore [temperance] has been looked at as a preachers' issue," a contributor to the *Christian Index* opined. "Now it comes into the arena of living politics." By the turn of the twentieth century, pastors and lay Christians alike began to profess that not only did they stand "emphatically for moral suasion," but "also for the principle of prohibitory legislation."[103]

The politicization of temperance became necessary, especially from Northen's point of view, because of the connection between government and the saloon. The liquor

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[102] Northen, "Our Country's Need of Christian Young Men," (quotes) 16. Carver Papers, GDAH; also see Men and Religion Forward Movement, *The Men and Religion Forward Movement in Atlanta*. (Atlanta: Byrd Printing Co., 1913), 9-10.

[103] For Baptists and systemic measures against alcohol, see Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 215-220; also see Link, *Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, 110-112; *Christian Index*, Aug. 13, 1896 (first quote); SBC, *Annual* (1910), (second quote) 57.

trade bought corrupt politicians at a price; personal morality and collective righteous political action were the only means of severing any and all ties between the state and the saloon. Speaking to a group of young Baptists, Northen asked of his audience, "tell me where is the power, outside of Christianity in politics that can save the nation from disintegration and death. [I]n the name of our Christian civilization, in the name of the State and in the name of our living Christ," as the future religio-political leaders of Christian civilization, "wipe this foul blot from the glory of the Nation."[104]

There was, however, another foul blot on the South. The race problem was a major obstacle to the realization of Christian civilization. Lynching was the most publicized and most sensationalized aspect of racial problems in the South. Since the late 1970s, following the publication of Jacquelyn Hall's *Revolt against Chivalry*, many interpretations of lynching have surfaced. The focal points of those interpretations have varied, with concentrations ranging from gender, to the reestablishment of white supremacy, to economics and labor, and to the cultural meanings of lynching. Eric Millin's 2002 master's thesis examines the uses of evangelical language in not only forming a justification for lynching, but in casting it as a sacred duty. Many of these frameworks could be applied to Northen's resistance to lynching. Yet what is important for this study is to analyze Northen's view of lynching and how it affected Christian civilization.[105]

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[104] Northen, "Our Country's Need of Christian Young Men," (quote) 16. Carver Papers, SBHLA.
[105] Jacquelyn Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jesse Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign against Lynching*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); For an analysis of lynching and the reestablishment of white supremacy, see Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman*, 156-197; for lynching and economics,

Fitzhugh Brundage argues that the driving force behind progressive thought, "in particular the emphasis placed on the link between economic success and social harmony,…reduced the tolerance of some southerners for the most strident forms of racial extremism, including extralegal behavior." And further, Brundage argues that the burgeoning southern middle-class who controlled urban businesses were "self-conscious promoters of the values and behavior that would, they believed, ensure growth and prosperity in their communities." For Northen, the path to Christian civilization would be found, in large part, in aggrandizing material prosperity. That could only be achieved with an influx of desirable immigrants and northern capital. Yet while mob violence was still prevalent, neither people nor money would be inclined to venture south. For Northen, then, the image of violence, or non-violence, was more important than the reality of violence. If the violence done to an alleged black fiend rapist were perpetrated by the state, and not by a lawless mob, then the image of an orderly and just Georgia would be secured. Thus Northen could celebrate the case of Will Price, a black man accused of outraging a "little white girl 14 years of age." With his conviction by a jury of white men, his sentencing by a white judge, and his execution by the state, "the law has been completely vindicated." The violator was "punished with death; the dignity and honor of the state have been preserved…How much better than lynching by a mob." Northen's lauding of the relocation of the site of punishment for a transgressor of the law out of public view signified his desire to project an image of state-managed "restraint,

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see Brundage, *Lynching*; and for cultural meanings of lynching, see Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 198-239; Millin, "Defending the Sacred Hearth."

discipline, control, and order, values that were undermined by public executions and conspicuously absent from most lynchings."[106]

Constantly "distorting" the image of an orderly South through its exacerbations of lynchings in the South, the northern press was ever a thorn in the ex-governor's side. In his famous 1899 Boston speech, entitled "The Negro at the South," Northen, speaking as president of the Southern Baptist Convention, largely took the opportunity to defend the South and lambaste the North. To be sure, Northen was critical of the South, but a great deal of the racial problems in the South at that time, he felt, was due to the interference of the North. The press held a special place in that interference for its ability to influence public opinion and, therefore, public policy. Northen condemned the "course of the Northern press upon lynchings at the South with all the vehemence of an offended nature. It is incendiary, unfair and cruel in the extreme." The true problem, in Northen's view, was that the "unfair" and "cruel" treatment of the South at the hands of the northern press was forestalling the sectional reconciliation that the New South program, as well as Christian civilization, deemed as necessary for progress. The persistence of traditional modes of social ordering, which the New South and Christian civilization would uproot, perpetuated incidences of lynching, as well as the "unfair" and "cruel" accounts of lynchings. "Let us be fair" with one another in the press, Northen told them, "and we will sooner be brethren."[107]

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[106] Brundage, Lynching, (quotes) 210-211, 256; Northen, "Supremacy of the Law as Seen in Two Counties," Atlanta *Constitution*, (quote) Aug. 31, 1907; for an extended discussion on the link between social progress and state monopolies over the means of violence, see Elias, *Civilising Process*.
[107] Northen, "The Negro at the South," May 22, 1899, (quotes) 13, 16. Northen Papers, GDAH.

To aid in the process of reconciliation, Northen not only had to dispel the notion that southern whites were blood thirsty, anarchic barbarians, but he also had to convince the North that southern blacks were not half-civilized animals. It was critical to those George Fredrickson calls neopaternalists or racial accommodationists, who were interested in social and economic progress, to show that blacks were capable of development, and that they had, at least to some degree, already demonstrated that capacity. A great majority of African Americans, according to Northen, had by the turn of the century adopted the standards of the white middle-class. Since their emancipation, they had learned to be business people, to work diligently, and to be efficient. Northen boasted that the ten million African Americans in the South had by 1900 accumulated some $400,000,000 of property. Also, and perhaps most importantly for Northen, black people furnished almost all the labor in the South. Their diligent work was a significant contribution to the prosperity the region had seen since the Civil War. If lynching continued, if the North exacerbated the situation, and if African Americans left the region as a result, Northen feared that the agricultural and industrial strides the South had made would be paralyzed for generations to come.[108]

For Northen and other evangelicals of like mind, the idea of Christian civilization was at once assumed and pursued. Joel Williamson argues that it was only natural for people like Northen to "hold up the image of what ought to be as if it were already present, that they should 'whistle in the dark.'" Northen articulated that mentality best in

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[108] See Fredrickson, *Black Image*, chap. 10; Northen, "Negro at the South," 16. Northen Papers, GDAH; Northen, "Races in Harmony; South Safe as Home," in W. B. Parks, *The Possibilities of the Negro in Symposium*. (Atlanta: Byrd Printing Co., 1904), 74-83.

a 1904 interview in which he declared that the races were at peace with one another. Even after the turn of the century, in the midst of what Rayford Logan has called the "nadir of race relations," Northen chose to see race relations as tranquil and harmonious. While he acknowledged that there was room for improvement, Northen, in that interview, portrayed an almost naïve optimism concerning the issue of race. He stated with the certainty of fact that the courts and law enforcement agents were fully equipped with and willing to use all the machinery of the law to prosecute and stamp out lynching. Furthermore, he believed that "the sentiment of the people in this State [sic] is strongly against mob violence, especially as expressed in lynching."[109]

After the high-water mark of twenty-six lynchings in Georgia in 1899, the number of lynching victims between 1900 and 1903 steadily waned, with an average of approximately ten victims per year. Northen depended on these statistics to state that the institutional apparatuses that he and the state of Georgia had created prevented opportunities for crimes and subsequent lynchings, and that the people were more willing to await the actions of the courts in matters of justice. To bolster his point, he stated that the better classes of African Americans, just as much as the better elements of white people, supported the state-administered death penalty for black criminals. To sell the South, it was important to prove that most African Americans were not predisposed to

[109] Williamson, *Crucible*, (first quote) 291; Northen, "Races in Harmony," (second quote) 79.

conceal and protect the criminals of their race. Moreover, and most importantly, they displayed their willingness to bow before the majesty of the law.[110]

The selling of the South was not as easy, however, as Northen would have liked. Georgia's reputation for extralegal violence and continued atrocities, according to Northen, persisted because of a "good deal of morbid and extravagant statements about conditions at the South upon the subject of outrages and lynchings." The press outside of the South depended upon misinformation, scattering lies across the country "to the great damage of our honor as a State and our best material interests." Thus, again, the image of violence was more important than reality for the ex-governor. Nevertheless, Northen held up an image of his state that he desperately wanted to realize and prove as true: "For all these years I have had occasion to watch closely the relations between the races in this State, and I say to you, most positively, there has not been a time since the war when [the races] were more in harmony than we are today."[111]

The image of a harmonious and orderly Georgia came crashing down with the Atlanta Race Riot of September 1906. With at least 25 black people and 1 white person dead, and with over 150 people injured, the peaceful racial order, and the social order in general, appeared to be a "tragic farce." Atlanta's boosters believed that growing bigger and growing faster were the hallmarks of success. But the increasing social complexity of the city was growing bigger and faster than the municipal administration could handle. The rapid and uneven growth the city had recently experienced made it ripe for chaos.

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[110] Statistics on incidences of lynching in Georgia between 1899 and 1903 from Brundage, *Lynching*, 273-274; Northen, "Races in Harmony," 80-82.
[111] Northen, "Races in Harmony," (quotes), 82.

Traditional southern structures of localized and personalized social orderings held no meaning in a relatively new urban environment in which populations were geographically and socially mobile and rapidly changing. The Atlanta Race Riot provided a radical example of the frailty of these complex social formations absent of the forms of governance required to hold them all together.[112]

While conservative whites quickly worked to restore the farcical image of an orderly Georgia, Northen realized and acted upon the depth of the problem. To be sure, Northen likewise held out an image of Georgia that did not represent the true nature of its social rhythms. Yet, after the riot, in exhibiting a better understanding of the situation than most of his contemporaries, Northen's work began to focus almost exclusively on the race question. He believed that, following the riot, the primary obstacle to Christian civilization was the race problem, and that the solution to racial strife was to be found in "the principles of religion…,or the future of our Christian civilization is doomed." And while for some time, other elite whites sided with him, his persistence in that vein caused him alienation from his former allies. Choosing to ally with the more palatable "progressive" platform, leading Baptists and politicians focused on silencing the race problem by shouting out for prohibition, segregation, and disfranchisement.[113]

Northen did not abandon progressivism; in the wake of the riot, he subordinated his broader progressive program, that is Christian civilization, to his work on behalf of

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[112] Atlanta *Constitution*, Sept. 25, 1906 (quote); for boosterism in Atlanta, see Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, 136-158; for a discussion on social grounding, see Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 3-10.
[113] For Atlanta's image after the riot, which Joel Williamson describes as "Janus-faced", see *Crucible*, 220-223; Northen, "Christianity and the Negro Problem in Georgia," Sept. 4, 1911 (quote), 5. Northen Papers, GDAH.

race relations. Concentrating on Northen's post-riot racial focus, as historians are wont to do, especially when juxtaposed to Georgia's differing progressive thrust at that time, leads to misinterpretations. The argument that Northen "sought to recover the lost antebellum world of his youth," stems from a failure to consider Northen's life and work before the Atlanta riot. Examining his inextricably linked political and religious programs leading up to and past the riot instead reveals that Northen's movement sought a forward-looking, centralized, rationalized, and modernized system of governance for Georgia. Furthermore, Northen implicitly rejected a plantation mission ideology for 20th century Georgia in which a cadre of agricultural elites were charged with all facets of social guardianship. Evangelization, material welfare, and discipline and punishment would be the separate provinces of ministers, businessmen, and the state.[114]

Northen believed that the first line of defense against more violent racial outbursts would be in the hands of the ministers. In line with his overall Christian civilization program, which sought a reciprocal relationship between the spiritual and the secular, under the auspices of the Businessmen's Gospel Union, which Northen and other prominent Atlantans formed in 1904, Northen and his allies around Atlanta organized Law and Order Sunday. On that day, pastors around the city, black and white, articulated the central message of Christian civilization to approximately 30,000 Atlantans: the Christian's duty is to obey and uphold the majesty of the law. The Atlanta *Constitution*, which supported Northen's efforts, desired to show that people around the city understood their religio-political responsibilities more clearly than ever after Law and

[114] Godshalk, "Struggles against Lynching," (quote) 157.

Order Sunday. After hearing Dr. Rice's Law and Order sermon, an unnamed member of Atlanta's Central Presbyterian church remarked that "My duty is plain to me [illegible] have at times sympathized with some offenders of the law, but in the future my sympathy is on the side of God and the law."[115]

Pastors were not simply to preach law and order on Sunday, however, and then go about their normal business for the rest of the week. In Northen's program, ministers of the gospel had the solemn duty to "formulate some wise and conservative platform upon which all of us can stand, white folks and negroes, preserving our…social standing, our community interests, our several rights, and, above all, our priceless civilization." In order to realize this platform, preachers must also bring African Americans up to the level of "civilization." The church had to that point, in Northen's opinion, neglected to sufficiently Christianize black people. Largely due to that neglect, the white people of the South had no regard for African Americans as full members of the human race, or, in Atticus Haygood's terminology, as "Our Brother in Black." In establishing the brotherhood of humanity "lies the whole trouble in the solution of the problem of the races"; there was no more qualified group of people for the formulation of this duty than Christian ministers.[116]

The duty of implementing the ministers' platform and persuading the masses to subject themselves to the rule of law fell largely to Christian businessmen. Speaking to a group of one hundred of the most prominent businessmen from Nashville, Tennessee,

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[115] Atlanta *Constitution*, Dec. 10, 1906 (quote).
[116] Northen, "Christianity and the Negro Problem in Georgia," (quotes) 5, 8. Northen Papers, GDAH.

Northen announced that "Christ has turned the kingdom over to us and has told us to unlock it to the world." The new men of the New South, who were not always new, characterized their success as due largely to personal morality. More specifically, they presented an air of evangelical piety, thanks to the image the New South press created for them, in which discipline, temperance, and honesty ensured their success in building industry, creating jobs, and aggrandizing southern cities. As moral and economic leaders, then, these men held special positions of authority and prominence in their localities.[117]

This initiative indicates, from Northen's perspective at least, a clear break with the traditions of the southern past. This group of "sun-crowned, God-given" business leaders had replaced elite planters as the keepers of society. Their display of the middle-class values of restraint and efficiency corresponded with the set of values that men like Northen believed a modern(izing) society required. Furthermore, the business elite's collective ability to secure the material conditions through Christian civilization would be fully realized, combined with their individual records of moral superiority, granted them social authority. Through their positions as economic and religious leaders, they would lead the way to ending the strife between the races to a realization of Christian civilization.[118]

For a five-month period following Law and Order Sunday, Northen visited more than ninety counties in Georgia in the attempt to recruit the leading businessmen of those counties for an anti-lynching network. Under the auspices of the Businessmen's Gospel

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[117] For the new men of the New South, see Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, 87-110; Atlanta *Constitution*., Mar. 3, 1907 (quote)
[118]Atlanta *Constitution*, Dec. 1, 1906;.

Union, and the Civic League, formed in the wake of the riot, those involved in this law and order network would rouse public sentiment against the mob. Northen's call for stirring public opinion against the mob in localities throughout the state exhibited a modern understanding of the function of law. After having passed anti-lynching legislation that proved ineffectual and unenforceable, Northen realized, and confirmed with his networking effort, that the law's effectiveness rested in the freely given, rather than coerced, compliance of the people. It was his duty and the duty of the legions of honor, then, to convince people to subject themselves to the God-ordained state. As long as savagery continued with a segment of the people administering their own versions of justice, the "law [is] not worth the paper that holds its enactment."[119]

To prevent further crime and lawlessness, Northen's legions of honor, in a strikingly modern fashion, were to gather information on the people of each county, white as well as black. They would then categorize those populations according to the lawful of both races and the criminal of both races in order to know "definitely and fully, the character of all the people among whom we live." Once this knowledge was compiled and categorized, "the idle negro and the indolent, idle white man that grow vicious and get the devil in them" were to be put to hard labor. Finally, this accumulation of knowledge allowed for the operation of a system of surveillance. Leading African American businessmen and ministers, and two representatives from each militia district,

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[119] Northen, ["Recent Canvass over the State"], n. d., (quote) 2. Northen Papers, GDAH; also see Elias, *Civilizing Process*; and Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans., Alan Sheridan. (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

presumably white, would help ensure crime prevention and the upholding of the law by keeping "these folks under special watch."[120]

In order to facilitate the end result of this accumulation of knowledge, Northen and his allies sought to create a commission of lawyers who would pressure the General Assembly to amend the laws that lynch mobs had violated so many times. Furthermore, they were to suggest new laws that would empower and "enable the county committees to handle the idle and vicious that give us so much trouble."[121]

By early 1907, however, Northen's movement began to encounter resistance. White civic leaders around Atlanta repaired the cracks in the social order that the Riots of September 1906 left. The city fired several policemen, incarcerated many of the white rioters (for brief periods of time), and, among other things, reorganized the streetcars so that there would be a clearer separation between the races. It was time to move on, time to silence racial hatred so that the hum of progress could once again be heard. Northen, for his part, however, continued to make public his belief that the race problem was the number one obstacle to progress. No mere turning of a deaf ear, or a blind eye, to the problem would suffice. Christians had to take a leading role in solving the problem and

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[120] Atlanta *Georgian and News*, Mar. 28, 1907 (first quote); Atlanta *Journal*, Mar. 17, 1907 (second quote); Atlanta *Constitution*, Mar. 14, 1907; Foucault discusses the awareness of one's own visibility and the resulting self-inscribed constraints of power. He/she who is aware of constantly being under surveilence takes on both roles of power relations: "he becomes the principle of his own subjection." *Discipline and Punish*, 200-203.

[121] Atlanta *Constitution*, Mar. 14, 1907 (quote).

illuminating the path, "not only to immediate relief, but also to permanent prevention" of racial strife.[122]

Some of the press in Atlanta, particularly the Atlanta *Journal*, saw Northen's continued focus on race relations as "reviving a closed issue." His refusal to acknowledge the progress Atlanta had made since the riot amounted to incendiary agitation of a settled topic. Their problem with Northen's campaign derived largely from the victory of Hoke Smith in the gubernatorial election of October 1906. Because Smith had run largely on the platform of disfranchisement, his rise to chief executive of Georgia, according to the *Journal*, signaled a mandate from the people: Smith's election had answered the vexing race question. Eliminating African Americans from electoral politics, the people had indirectly decided, was the only solution for racial problems. The people had spoken; they called for "progress" in race relations, and it was time to let the race question fade away so that Georgians could confront other "vital questions with which they are concerned."[123]

The first order of business in securing the racial peace was to pass the disfranchisement measure. Many southern whites lauded suffrage restriction as the most important question of the time and as one of the great reforms of the day. Following the political upheaval of the 1890s in which Populists and Democrats accused each other of using blacks voters as bought political pawns, the call for disfranchisement of African Americans became a means to allow white people to disagree over politics with honor

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[122] Williamson, *Crucible*, 220-222; Northen, "An Illustrated Lecture: The Atlanta Riot and the Ministers' View-Point," n. d., (quote) 1. Northen Papers, GDAH.
[123] Atlanta *Journal*, Mar. 17 1907 (quote).

and honesty. It was a way of making progress for white democracy, a way of purifying the democratic process. Within this context, in 1898 the Georgia General Assembly considered a disfranchisement measure to prevent any future revolts on the scale of the Populist movement in which African Americans could fuse with an opposition party. Few blacks had actually joined the Populists, so the Democrats, still very much in control of the legislature, had no real reason to fear fusion or "negro domination." The measure failed miserably.[124]

By 1907, however, things had changed. Urban leaders and white city dwellers feared the tendencies of black people whom they view as untrained in the civilizing school of slavery—the first generation of African Americans born after emancipation. Black Belt planters for their part were distraught over the transient and defiant nature of rural black labor in this period. The perception that alcohol removed any and all of the black man's inhibitions also occupied large spaces in the backs of white minds. The Atlanta Race Riot only worked to dramatize these perceptions. Thus, supporters of disfranchisement in 1906 and 1907 saw suffrage limitation as a legal way to control unruly black Georgians.

Yet, those who identified themselves as "progressives" were not the primary proponents of disfranchisement. The local elites of the Black Belt counties, who overwhelmingly supported Hoke Smith's "progressive" platform of disfranchisement and railroad regulation in the 1906 gubernatorial election, were the driving power behind

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[124] See Steven Wayne Wrigley, "The Triumph of Provincialism: Public Life in Georgia, 1898-1917." (PhD. diss., Northwestern University, 1986), 107-121; and Dewey W. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 112-123;

limiting the franchise. In the 1907 legislative session, Black Belt legislators took the lead in devising a scheme that would remove blacks from the electoral process. Their bill included a poll tax, a property qualification, a grandfather clause, and a literacy test. Perhaps the most important element of the bill was the "good character" clause. A person unqualified under the other provisions of the bill could register to vote if the local registrar deemed that he was of good character. This provision essentially granted the local registrars the power to decide who would constitute the electorate. Combined with the educational and financial requirements of the proposed legislation, the subjective nature of the good character clause gave many upcountry whites reason to fear that they, along with blacks, would be deprived of their votes and that local officials held too much power. Power in the hands of the local elite, despite the results for the white masses, was exactly their objective.[125]

The other great "progressive" reform of the 1907 Georgia legislative session was prohibition. Since the 1880s, prohibitionists had framed their cause in terms of social purity. In the aftermath of the Atlanta Riot, the *Christian Index* published a series of articles that carried that perspective forward. The solution to the race problem would only come after the closing of all the saloons in the state. And furthermore, in the spirit of Romans 8:28, the *Christian Index* believed that "It would be worth a dozen riots, sad and awful as these are, to bring about the prevalence of total prohibition in the State. For this would save us from a hundred riots in the future." Public order and stability would naturally follow the eradication of strong drink. Workers, the group considered most

[125] Wrigley, "Triumph of Provincialism," 117-122.

vulnerable to the temptations of the saloon, would work more efficiently, be better family men, save more of their earnings (instead of squandering them at the saloon), and, perhaps most importantly, be better consumers. For some of the preceding reasons and for other reasons as well, the movement for statewide alcohol proscription is commonly interpreted as a modern, progressive reform in which moral sentiment influenced public policy. The strongest supporters of prohibition in Georgia in 1907, however, were the local elites from the country counties; conversely, urban progressives, especially from Atlanta, were the strongest detractors.[126]

Black Belt elites saw the liquor trade as detrimental to their labor force. It caused indolence and excess among the uncivilized blacks who lived and worked in their localities. Also framing prohibition in terms of urban versus rural, the fight against the saloon was in many ways a fight to restore traditional southern values that city life had ostensibly eroded. Urban elites, for their part, feared that a statewide alcohol ban would eliminate much of the revenue upon which they depended for commercial success. They further saw it as "inefficient" and lacking in sensible "business methods." Some of the central features of the progressive movement were prosperity for cities, efficiency, and the application of business principles to public policy. Seen in this light, prohibition, as it came to pass in Georgia, was hardly a modernizing or progressive measure.[127]

Due to their prominence in the Progressive Era, it is tempting to view disfranchisement and prohibition as modern reforms that were inextricably intertwined.

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[126] *Christian Index*, Oct. 4, 1906 (quote) & Sept. 27, 1906; Wrigley, "Triumph of Provincialism," 127-130.
[127] Link, *Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, 106-112; Wrigley, "Triumph of Provincialism," 126.

On the one hand, these two reforms would insulate the masses of blacks and whites from an increasingly complex and competitive society for which they were ill prepared. On the other hand, the removal of blacks and the influence of alcohol from the political arena would cleanse the debate and political process among leading white men concerning other, more pressing issues. In Georgia in 1907, disfranchisement and prohibition were in fact linked. Yet, they were not linked in the way that one may desire to see them. Instead, considering the way that Black Belt elites led in the fight for and brought about these "reforms," it becomes clear that disfranchisement and prohibition were, in significant ways, measures to weaken the financial and political clout of burgeoning urban centers across Georgia. The county-seat elites, as Numan Bartley called them, along with the pieces of legislation they supported, sought to reestablish a form of domination that drew on the personal and local traditions of the antebellum South while also reinforcing the power of the local community over that of the state.[128]

Northen refused to comment either for or against the disfranchisement of African Americans. Perhaps his use of antilynching sentiments to garner black votes in 1892 prevented an explicit statement on the matter. He seemed to be in favor of the 1898 measure, but he understood the idea of disfranchisement, like other Democrats at the time, as a check against the threat of political fusion between between lower class blacks and whites. Concerning prohibition, he was, and had been for some time, explicitly in favor of it. While the *Journal* and many of Northen's erstwhile friends and allies

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[128] See Grantham, *Southern Progressivism*, 112-127, 160-177; also see Link, *Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, 68-69, 106-112; for a discussion on the county-seat elite, see Numan V. Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia*, 2nd Edition. (University of Georgia Press, 1990), 103-126.

considered the 1907 version of these measures as having answered the race question, Northen continued to press his movement. His unwillingness to lay down his cross indicated the divergence between his ideas for Christian civilization and the solutions to the race problem that the Hoke Smith Democrats and the resurgent Black Belt elite endorsed.[129]

To be sure, Northen agreed to some extent with the Smith Democrats and the rural county elites that white men should dominate the South. He believed, along with most other southerners, that African Americas were low on the civilizational scale. They could not yet expect to occupy a respectable position in the southern social order. Socially, then, African Americas and whites should not, nor could not be equals. Implicitly defending *de jure* segregation in a letter to President Roosevelt, he stated several years earlier that "Social equality would beget amalgamation, and amalgamation would beget miscegenation, and miscegenation would be an open violation of the law of God." Christian civilization could not tolerate social equality between blacks and whites.[130]

Yet concerning the legal protection of African Americans, his tune was somewhat different. The "reform" measures of 1907 perpetuated what Northen saw as a bifurcation of the law. In Georgia, mob law coexisted with state law as a de facto legitimate form of ordering society. The buttressing of local power, however, worked to embolden the mob mentality while discrediting state power. The traditional, foundational

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[129] Northen commented on the 1898 disfranchsiement measure in his speech "The Negro at the South," 13. Northen Papers, GDAH.
[130] Northen to Mr. President [Theodore Roosevelt], Apr. 9, 1908. Northen Family Papers, GHS; Northen, "Negro at the South," (quote) 11. Northen Papers, GDAH.

nature of power in the South was such that it emanated from a man's absolute ownership of himself, his home, and all those who resided in his home. That power extended to larger society, giving white men the prerogative to collectively rule their local communities and all those who resided in their communities; a critical aspect of that governance was the sacred duty of protecting the home and the local community from threats from without as well as from within. Strengthening the power of the local community over the state thus implicitly encouraged individual, locally minded Georgians to decide and execute the law as they saw fit. Commenting on the 12 lynchings between June 1907 and August 1908, then, Northen could aver that "[these lynching victims] were put to death under the authority of the mob. The mob, like Louis XIV seems to be the state, as it executes its own will without let or hindrance."[131]

That forlorn tone indicated Northen's realization that he could not win. His vision for Christian civilization would not come to fruition. Yet he was not completely discouraged, nor was he silenced. He held out hope for his state, a hope that "the blaze of its Christian civilization" could still light "grander victories for the future." Between 1908 and 1912, Northen continued to try to influence his state's future with Christian principles. But instead of directly addressing political matters, he resigned to persuade white Christians, laymen and ministers alike, that it was their duty to change popular sentiment concerning race. They, like the Good Samaritan, should help ameliorate race

[131] Atlanta *Constitution*, Aug. 27, 1908 (quote); For a discussion on lynching as a sacred duty in defense of the home, see Millin, "Defending the Sacred Hearth."

relations without regard to the differences of social standing or enmity between the races.[132]

Organized efforts amongst white Christians were the most effective way to bring harmony to race relations. The efforts that "progressive" Georgia had undertaken since the Atlanta Race Riot concerning African Americans, especially disfranchisement and prohibition, "[touched] but the surface of the negro's deepest needs." African Americans still suffered from criminality, under education, deplorable health and morals, oppressive labor relations, and drunkenness. Many whites exacerbated the situation by completely disregarding the law. The solution to these problems "is not the business nor the work of any individual citizen nor of and single denomination of Christians. It is the work of organized constructive Christianity."[133]

Asking his audiences "to take God's view rather than [their] own," Northen exhorted Georgia's Christians to help change public opinion concerning the race question. Sensationalized accounts of lynchings in particular and the relations between the races in general were "nothing less than cunning devices of the devil to deceive" the people. The duty of the Christian was to seek a scriptural standard for public opinion. Instead of abiding popularly accepted views of the solution to the race problem, Christians should look to the example of Jesus on the matter. Jesus ministered to and

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[132] Northen, "Our Country's Need of Christian Young Men," (quote) 1.
[133] Northen, "Do the Negroes at the South Need Evangelization?" n.d., (first quote) 5. Northen Papers, GDAH; Northen, Constructive Christianity and the Negro Problem," in Men and Religion Forward Movement, *Messages of the Men and Religion Forward Movement*. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Co, 1912), (second quote) 140.

helped all of the downtrodden people he encountered, regardless of what the Pharisees and scribes thought of him.[134]

Influencing public opinion through Christian principles would naturally affect the political realm. The combination of electoral politics and public opinion was, in Northen's mind, largely to blame for the high levels of violence and crime in Georgia. Elected politicians, who came to office through the expression of public opinion, would never enforce laws that they believed a large percentage of their constituency opposed. As long as the public mind in Georgia showed an absolute disrespect for the law, then unscrupulous people would have their own way "regardless of all law and all so-called restrictions by the law." If Christians would wield their righteous influence over Georgia, changing public opinion, then politicians would ensure an end to racial violence.[135]

In September 1911, speaking before the Evangelical Ministers Association of Atlanta, Northen made his "final appeal for the preservation of our christian [sic] civilization." From that point on, Northen's tone revealed even more so than previously that he was prepared to fade into the background and let Georgia's next generation take the reigns. Again appealing to the ministers of Georgia, he told them that they were responsible for Georgia's future. If they did not answer the race question, then their Christian civilization "will be assigned its place among the nations that are dead." To answer that call, the ex-governor told Atlanta's ministers that leading white men like

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[134] Northen, "Do the Negroes at the South Need Evangelization?" (quote) 10.
[135] Northen, "Christianity and the Negro Problem in Georgia," (quote) 17.

themselves owed African Americans two distinct duties. The first was to train and prepare black people for a competitive industrial society; the second was to protect blacks as they pursued their livelihood in that society. Yet, this was not a personal relationship of mutual obligations; he was not looking back to the system of paternalism that planters practiced in the Old South. The labor and service African American had provided over the 40 years since the close of Reconstruction had not been on behalf of individuals, but on behalf of the growing state. As such, it was through institutions of the state that leading white men would ensure the productivity of African Americans. When the lives, liberties, and property of these people were from time to time threatened, then the state would use its destructive force to maintain the law. The soldier with a drawn sword who stands conspicuously among the three pillars of the foundation of Georgia's government—wisdom, justice, moderation—represented the intolerance of the state with transgression of the law. This advocacy of a state monopoly over guidance and protection for African Americans as well as over the means of violence signaled what Northen believed that a modernizing Georgia needed to secure the future.[136]

Northen's final public appearance came at the congress of the Men and Religion Forward Movement. Delivering one of the principal addresses, Northen, like Booker T. Washington, chose to discuss Christianity's relationship to the race problem. Northen's message was much the same as that which he had preached for the preceding three years: Christians had a duty to deliver the message of the Gospel to all people. Social, economic, and political conditions were of no consequence to this call, for "God is no

[136] Ibid, (first quote) 20, (second quote) 5.

respector of persons." Implying that this duty had caused him some loss of prestige, Northen characterized missionary work as "self-sacrificing service," and he further demanded that it be undertaken "regardless of criticism by men." This mode of proselytizing, if genuine, was what Northen termed "Constructive Christianity." The constructive Christian felt a burden to help people, and to find solutions to humanity's problems through the functions of the state. For Northen, the most critical human problem of the hour was the race problem.[137]

The most salient manifestation of the race problem in the South was lynching. Northen depicted lynching as not only a threat to the state, but to the status of Christianity as well. "Nowhere can there be found a place for mobs in our Christian civilization. Our civilization is built upon the enactment and enforcement of wholesome laws, and any violent defiance to the authority of the law is a shock to our Christian standards that we cannot long endure yet preserve the stability of the state or the security of the nation." Mobs circumscribed the law through lynching, and thus challenged the entire moral foundations of society. In order to realize a modern state, then, Christians had the responsibility to convince the masses of the link between Christianity and the law.[138]

Although with a somewhat less grave tone, Northen discussed several other social problems confronting the black community. What these problems had in common with lynching was that they existed due to the lack of a strong state based on Christian virtues.

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[137] For an extended discussion of the larger implications of the Men and Religion Forward Movement, see Bederman, "The Women have had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough"; for Booker T. Washington's M&RFM speech see "The Church in Relation to the Negro Problem," in *Messages of the Men and Religion Forward Movement*, 143-151; Northen, "Constructive Christianity and the Negro Problem," (quotes) 130.

[138] Northen, "Constructive Christianity and the Negro Problem," (quote) 129.

For instance, Northen believed, like many other people in the progressive era, that immorality and poor health were related: "Bad ventilation and uncleanness bread disease and bad morals." And, in particular, "The problem of the negro home is the problem of morals. Living [in squalor] as many of them do, they cannot be kept morally clean." Yet, Northen stopped short of explicitly accusing black people of retrogressing into this symbolically untidy condition. Instead he blamed white Christians for their unwillingness to care for those who were unable to care for themselves. Christians should not however, take on this responsibility individually. They should act collectively and pressure their governments to look after the welfare of these people. The state should implement this paternalistic thrust. Thus, Northen highly praised the Atlanta city council for creating a vice commission—under pressure from the Atlanta chapter of the M&RFM—whose duty it was to extricate moral and physical squalor from the living environments of African Americans and white people alike.[139]

Northen discussed several other social problems confronting African Americans, including alcohol, education, and labor, advocating for each that Christian ministering combined with political activism, that is constructive Christianity, would bring about the solution. He ended his speech to the Men and Religion Forward Movement by once again casting the race problem as the primary obstacle to full realization and preservation of Christian civilization: "I am interested in saving the negro, that we may save our

[139] Ibid, (quote) 136, and 137; In *New Men, New Cities, New South*, esp chap. 10, 261-289, Doyle characterizes the public health crusade in the South around the turn of the century as part of the "New Paternalism"; The racist representation of black homes as unsanitary merged with the idea that African Americans were unclean, literally and symbolically. Mary Douglas argues that "dirt is the by product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate symbols." Quoted in Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 287, n63.

Christian civilization from decay, and save the state and the nation from the dangers that threaten the steadfastness of the one and the security of the other."[140]

By late-1911 Northen was ready to lay down his cross. Telling a representative from the Southern Baptist Convention that he had done his duty and his conscience was clear, he declined an invitation to write a series of articles on the race question. Northen seemed to realize that a modern Georgia, a Georgia that would bow before the majesty of the law, would not, in his lifetime, come to fruition. Elite planters had retrenched themselves, and implicitly, reestablished the primacy of local, republican power over that of a more centralized state. Although Northen set in motion some vehicles for positive change, Georgia would have to wait for a more appropriate reform moment, which would not present itself for some twenty years after Northen's passing.[141]

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[140] Northen, "Constructive Christianity and the Negro Problem," (quote) 142.
[141] Northen to My Dear Brother, Dec. 18, 1911. Northen Papers, GDAH.

CONCLUSION

Between the late 1870s the early 1910s, William J. Northen worked to guide his native state toward the ideal of progress by combining religious principles with political initiatives. In the face of the structural shifts that accompanied the emerging urban-industrial economy, Northen sought to transfer traditional/personal power relations to modern/institutional power relations through the use of religious principles, promoting the idea that bowing to God and bowing to the law were essentially one and the same. Subservience to the rule of law, moreover, would not only symbolize obedience to God, but it would also signify modern notions of subjectivity and internal restraint—for individuals as well as for the state as whole.

Unfortunately, in working for change, Northen could not transcend the cultural and intellectual currents of his time. In holding out an image of a new South, a Christian civilization, that was full of righteousness, lawfulness, and prosperity, Northen simultaneously promoted and bought into what Paul Gaston calls the New South Myth—"a pattern of belief in which Southerners could see themselves and their region as rich, successful, and just." With his efforts so focused on convincing southerners, and outside observers as well, that a new South had arrived, he was unable to imagine the changes that were required to address the underlying socioeconomic failings of the region. Although he realized to some degree that his state and region suffered from many vexing

problems, Northen, like Daniel Singal's "Post-Victorians," proved unable to look on himself, his state, or his region with a truly critical eye.[142]

Yet his efforts were not a total loss. Operating in the realm of religion, Northen's life demonstrated that, despite the triumph of radical racism, there was space for alternatives. His willingness to work with African American clergy and civic leaders under the auspices of the Businessmen's Gospel Union and the Civic League, if only to negotiate within the framework of the Jim Crow system, provides evidence that a degree of flexibility existed even in the midst of the nadir of American race relations. Northen's work then, while ultimately preserving the status quo, laid groundwork for future challenges to the southern racial system.

In the New Deal era, a new group of southerners with the ability and willingness to take a deeply critical view of their region, building somewhat on the ground that Northen laid, came to the fore. These people, including Will Alexander, Clark Foreman, and Jesse Daniel Ames, saw in the desolation of the Great Depression opportunities for positive change. Alexander, who was a Methodist minister, headed the Atlanta-based Commission on Interracial Cooperation, a group that, much like Northen's post-Atlanta Riot network, sought to promote communication between black and white leaders in the interest of progress in race relations. Foreman, who became a New Dealer and trenchant critic of the Jim Crow system, drew inspiration from Alexander's work, which he discovered while reading a book called *Christianity and the Race Problem*. Ames led a women's crusade against lynching, often drawing on religion and calling for the help of

[142] Gaston, *New South Creed*, (quote) 214; Singal, *War Within*, 37-114.

leading evangelical ministers in her opposition to mob violence. Though the work of these reformers and the New Deal moment for change passed with the rise of white backlash in the late 1940s, these reformers, to some extent picking up Northen's cross of missionary work, helped pass that burden to the challengers of the Jim Crow system of the 1960s.

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