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Populism in the White Southern Democratic Party With Reference to Alabama and
Mississippi

William Sheward

Department of Politics, Faculty of Social Sciences

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ABSTRACT

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POPULISM IN THE WHITE SOUTHERN DEMOCRATIC PARTY WITH REFERENCE

TO ALABAMA AND MISSISSIPPI

By William Sheward

This thesis investigates and examines the political philosophy and rhetoric of white Southern Democrats in the 1990s. This period has witnessed the development of two party competition and bi-racial politics in the South. The focus of this study is centred on white Democrats because the extent of white cultural and political dominance in the South has tended to obscure deeper analysis of the principal aspects of their political thought. Insufficient attention has been given to Southern white political attitudes because common assumptions of Southern politics are that they are uniformly conservative and, often, reactionary. The purpose of this research is to arrive at a deeper and more complete study of the complexities of white Southern political belief by looking at the political philosophies of white Southern Democrats with reference to Alabama and Mississippi.

The thesis therefore has three aims. First, it shows that to describe Southern political and cultural attitudes as conservative is inadequate and, frequently, misleading. Second, it suggests that a more fruitful and fuller analysis of Southern politics can be developed by examining the region's populist tradition. Third, the thesis argues that should Southern Democrats create an ideology that is based on economic populism whilst recognising the importance to the white Southern voter of conservative social issues such as the rights of gun ownership and religious morality it will position itself to achieve electoral success at the local, state and federal levels.

The first section of the thesis gives the definitions of populism and conservative that the research uses in the specific context of Southern politics. The analysis suggests that there are aspects of conservatism that can be properly applied to Southern politics such as a conservative interpretation of the constitutional prerogatives of state governments to be permitted to run local and state affairs free from federal government interference and conservative stances on family values. However, there is a strong tradition of anti-elitist populist rhetoric in the South which champions the rights of the people and supports the role of federal and state government in alleviating the inequities of the free market.

The second section applies these theories to Southern, and, more specifically, Alabamian and Mississippian political history from the late nineteenth century to the 1980s and argues that the extent of the region's populism has been underestimated. The final section recognises that the rise of the Republican Party since the civil rights 1960s but in two case study chapters advances the view that an application of the populist model by the Democratic Party can craft a message that appeals to both white and black - the 'redneck-blackneck' coalition - and suggests that it may be successfully applied by Democratic Parties across the region, and, by extension, by the national Democratic Party in presidential elections in the South.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Setting

The expression the ‘Solid South’¹ refers to the predisposition of the electorate in the Southern states of America to elect Democratic Party candidates to political office, whether for national, Congressional, state or local levels, regardless of issues and personalities.² The depth and extent of this commitment is evident in analyses of Southern voting behaviour from the end of the Reconstruction period in 1877 to the civil rights era of the mid 1960s. As historian Glenn Feldman has argued,

[i]n most [S]outhern states . . . Democratic solidarity was understood to be one of the loftiest ideals of the day. Any deviation was regarded as a perversion, anathema, an act that threatened to subvert white supremacy, racial integrity, and the [S]outhern way of life.³

During this time the Democrats so completely dominated Southern politics that it would not be inaccurate to describe the region’s politics as one party dominant, as well as white supremacist. The electorate who, except for a few instances, were white, were ‘Yellow Dog’ Democrats who would support any and all Democratic candidates as long as they wore the Democratic Party label.⁴ Fred Hobson, analysing a number of Southern memoirs published in the 1940s, summarised the Southern creed as follows : Southerners ‘believe in God, family [their state], the South and America, in cotton, the Baptist church, and the Democratic [p]arty.’⁵ The only competitive elections were in the Democratic Party primaries where candidates fought to gain the party’s nomination safe in the knowledge that once duly nominated they would win the subsequent general election given the absence of serious opposition, Republican or otherwise. Whilst there were some Southern states which defected to Republican, or ‘Grand Old Party’ (GOP), presidential candidates in the 1928, 1952 and 1956 elections, they were restricted to border South states such as Tennessee, Virginia and Texas. The Deep South states of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi and South

Carolina remained overwhelmingly supportive of Democratic candidates at all levels of elective office. Even when these Deep South states did defect in the presidential election of 1948 they supported the Southern based 'Dixiecrat' candidacy of Democratic South Carolina governor Strom Thurmond in protest at the apparently pro-civil rights policies of the Democratic Administration of Harry Truman.

The object was to clarify the concerns of white Southern Democrats should these policies be applied in the South rather than to begin a deliberate process of political realignment by voting for the Republican Party. During the era of Democratic Party electoral hegemony from 1877 to 1960, before the effects of the civil rights revolution on Southern politics became apparent, the Republican Party won just under 200 of 4200 elections to the U.S. House of Representatives and from 1887 to 1961 failed to elect a single U.S. Senator from any Southern state. Democratic Party presidential candidates were similarly dominant. During the same period the Democratic Party's presidential candidate averaged 66% of the popular votes cast in the South. Meanwhile the Democratic Party held majorities of both chambers in all the state legislatures of the eleven states that formed the former Confederate States of America (1861-1865) throughout the entire 1877 to 1960 period whilst losing only two gubernatorial elections (both in Tennessee) held in these same states during this time.⁶ Therefore, use of the expression the 'Solid South' to describe the extent of Southern loyalty to the Democratic Party would appear to be incontestable.

Election statistics for presidential and U.S. House and Senate elections indicate, however, that Democratic Party one-party dominance begins to diminish in the 1960s. Subsequent trends show an increase in Republican voting across the South recognisable, first, in the presidential election of 1964 and, second, in significant numbers in U.S. Congressional elections by the mid 1990s. For example, in 1964 the Republican Party's presidential nominee Barry Goldwater won five Deep South states. By 1972 Republican President Richard Nixon won all the eleven states of the former Confederacy in his re-election for a second term of office. In the ten presidential elections from 1964 to 1996 the Democratic Party share of the popular vote fell from the 66% average during of the 1876-1960 period to 41%. In U.S.

House elections from 1962 to 2000 the Republican Party won 700 of over 2000 elections held across the South. This constitutes a success rate of over 30% compared to that of 5% in corresponding elections during the post-Reconstruction period to 1960. Of the 125 Southern U.S. House seats in the 106th Congress (1999-2001) the Republicans held 65 (or 52%) and half of the 22 U.S. Senate seats.⁷ By the 1990s many Democratic officeholders began to feel that the Republican Party reflected their political beliefs more than did the Democrats. The trend toward Democrats switching party allegiance, begun in the 1960s by politicians such as the 1948 Dixiecrat presidential nominee Thurmond, gathered pace in the following decades. The 1994 U.S. Congressional elections that resulted in the Republican Party winning control of both Houses of the U.S. Congress for the first time for forty years contributed to the defection of five U.S. white Southern Congressional Democrats to the Republican Party.⁸

The factors behind the realignment of Southern politics during the post-civil rights era are examined in greater depth in subsequent chapters. The theories offered, however, to explain these developments in conventional accounts of Southern political thought and voting behaviour suggested that the Republican Party of the post 1960s era reflected the 'conservative' political culture of the white Southerner much better than the 'liberal' attitudes of the national Democratic Party. The present thesis argues that the designation of the political thought of white Southern Democrats as 'conservative' is unhelpful for two reasons. First, the term conservative (and conservatism) is not defined with adequate depth. As a consequence it does little to illuminate the complexities of Southern politics. Second, this thesis suggests that a more productive analysis of the political thought of white Southern Democrats - and, by extension, of Southern politics generally - can be found by examining the impact of populism on Southern political culture in both historical and contemporary settings.

Literature Review

The literature of Southern political studies is vast (see footnote one). The thesis, however, builds upon three particular works on Southern politics that each provide important perspectives on Southern political history and offer a theoretical and historical framework for the case study analysis of contemporary Southern politics detailed in later chapters. First,

V.O. Key Jr's *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, published in 1949, described the electoral domination of the Southern Democratic Party throughout the region. Written in the aftermath of the 1948 Dixiecrat revolt in which Thurmond won the popular vote in four Deep South states, Key described how the Democratic Party dominated the politics in each Southern state to the extent that the only relevant election was the Democratic Party primary. The Republican Party, whilst drawing on pockets of support in presidential elections in several states was virtually obliterated in state and local electoral races. Key wrote that despite the comparative successes of the Dixiecrats in the 1948 presidential election that 'the strength of the Democratic loyalties of most [S]outhern voters is not to be underestimated.'⁹ Furthermore, Key concluded that 'Republicans [will] have no easy task making converts among the mass of [S]outhern voters. Of course, Republicans make little effort over most of the South to win votes.'¹⁰ Southern politics as described by Key in 1949 therefore conformed to the Solid South model outlined above with the Republican Party marginalised and many poor whites and virtually all blacks systematically disfranchised by strict application of state literacy, residency and poll tax preconditions for voting that many were unable to meet.¹¹ However, Key noted several demographic trends such as a decline in the black population, the expansion of urban areas and the diminution of agriculture that, if developed, could create the conditions that would allow future growth in Republican Party voting. Significantly, Key added, albeit as a footnote, that 'a strengthened [presidential] Republicanism would inevitably interest itself also in state and local politics.'¹²

Although the Deep South states of Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and South Carolina that had voted 'Dixiecrat' in the 1948 presidential election returned to their Democratic Party allegiances in the 1952 and 1956 presidential races Key's observations proved prescient. Dewey W. Grantham's *The Life and Death of the Solid South*, published in 1988, outlined the rise of Republicanism in white Southern voting behaviour in the two decades since the passage of civil rights legislation, such as the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965), that used the powers of the federal government to dismantle Southern *de jure* segregation. Using a historical narrative approach Grantham described the

South's one-party system before outlining the depth of change in the South wrought by the 'Second Reconstruction' of the 1960s which, as in the first reconstruction in the decade after the Civil War's end in 1865, brought blacks into Southern political life. Grantham, writing forty years after Key published *Southern Politics*, described the metamorphosis of the South in the post-World War Two period. These changes including

*the growth of advanced industrial production and modern marketing networks, the formation of new capital from internal and external sources, the continued out-migration of black, the in-migration of industrial entrepreneurs, businessmen, and professional people, the rapid rise of urban and suburban life, and the heightened attractiveness of the [S]outhern region in terms of economic opportunity, tourism, and permanent residency.*¹³

had been foreseen, in embryonic form, by Key in 1949. One of the immediate effects of these developments was the rise, and by the late 1980s the dominance of, the Republican Party in presidential voting and of a GOP challenge to Democratic Party dominance in Congressional, state and local electoral contests. Grantham could declare, therefore, that 'the Solid South is dead!'¹⁴ Grantham concluded that Southern politics was in a period of transition and that 'the historian can only surmise . . . that a more stable pattern of politics will eventually assert itself.'¹⁵

The third principal study of Southern politics used to give the thesis its historical and conceptual framework is *Southern Politics in the 1990s* edited by Alexander Lamis and published in 1999. Lamis's study of political developments in the 1990s in each of the eleven states of the former Confederacy defines Southern politics as clearly two-party competitive with the Republicans in control of presidential politics, notwithstanding the success of Democrat Bill Clinton in winning the popular vote in Arkansas, Louisiana and Tennessee twice and Florida and Georgia once during his 1992 and 1996 presidential election campaigns. Building on Lamis's own *The Two Party South*, published in 1990, *Southern Politics in the 1990s* detailed the depth of Republican advances in Congressional, state and

local races that Grantham had perceived as developing at the end of the 1980s. The chapter titles in themselves give a graphic indication of the trends that the book analysed. For example, the Republican ascent in South Carolina was 'rapid,' the GOP in Virginia had 'surge[d]' whilst Texan Republicans were 'gallop[ing] ahead.'¹⁶ Like Key and Grantham before him, Lamis attempts to anticipate the South's future partisan directions in his final chapter entitled 'The Nation and the South : Toward the Twenty-First Century.'¹⁷ He concluded that 'the region has already accomplished a remarkable feat in the 1990s : By installing a fully functioning, mature system of two-party competition' that stood in clear contrast to the one party South described fifty years earlier by Key.¹⁸ Each of these three surveys of Southern politics is, therefore, of great value in setting the historical framework for the contemporary study of Southern politics that is the concern of this research. However, neither Key, Grantham or Lamis, nor the host of other works on Southern political history explicitly examines the political ideology and thought of white Southern Democrats. Implicitly each makes reference to Southern conservatism on social issues or to its racial reaction to civil rights legislation but a more detailed examination of Southern political culture is often absent since white Southern political attitudes have so frequently been represented as uniformly 'conservative.'¹⁹

Nicol Rae's *Southern Democrats*, published in 1994, provides the most specific recent research into the political attitudes of white (and, to a lesser extent, black) Southern Democrats. In the early 1990s Rae interviewed a number of white Southern U.S. House Democrats asking them why they were still in the Democratic Party given the trend of white Democratic defections to the GOP amongst both office holders and the electorate at large. Whilst a frequent response referred to Democratic ancestral ties and the Democratic social milieu of their state and locale to explain the continuation of their Democratic Party affiliations others responses were more revealing of conceptions of what, in their view, the Democratic Party should stand for. Glenn Browder of the Third District of Alabama, elected in 1989, said

*I'm a Democrat because I think in the battle between the haves and the have-nots both sides are right, but the have-nots are the ones that need help. The haves can take care of themselves.*²⁰

Claude Harris, representing Alabama's Seventh District, elected in 1986, said that '[S]outhern Democrats have a care and understanding of the plight of poor folks.'²¹ Charles Stenholm of the Seventeenth District of Texas, elected in 1978, explaining his Democratic Party attachments, said that '[t]he difference between the parties is that the Democrats believe that there's a place for government . . . The Republicans are anti-government.'²²

These comments highlight that descriptions of Southern politics as conservative fail to recognise the depth of the populist tradition in Southern political and social culture. The attitudes of Browder *et al* indicate that, contrary to assumptions of Southern hostility toward government, white Southern Democrats are supportive of a role for federal and state government in offering a helping hand to the poor and marginalised in Southern society. Rae begins, therefore, to develop a deeper understanding of white Southern Democratic beliefs that go beyond the proposition 'taken for granted . . . that the South is, by definition, conservative . . .'²³ Rae's early 1990s interviews found evidence of conservative attitudes amongst white Southern Democrats. For example, Browder mentioned his belief in 'traditional values - symbolic things like the flag, patriotism and family values.'²⁴ Bob Clement of the Fifth District Tennessee, elected in 1988 said 'I want us to hold onto our traditions and values. I'm proud of the South and its heritage and traditions' whilst Doug Barnard of the Tenth District of Georgia, elected in 1976, said that Southerners seem to be more patriotic and more loyal to moral issues . . .'²⁵ Rae's research was valuable as it deepened understanding of Southern Democratic political thought. However, whilst welcome, it was limited to discussing the views of white Southern Democrats in Congress within national political party contexts. A gap remained to be filled in placing these views more directly within the Southern contexts that they derived from and, more specifically, in locating them within the historical, social and political cultures of the states and districts that these Congressmen represented. It was this aspect, therefore, that this thesis sought to

examine with the aim to arrive at a more complete understanding of the political ideology of white Southern Democrats, with reference to Alabama and Mississippi.

Methodology of Research

The research has utilised primary, secondary sources and case studies. The primary sources are derived from two categories. First, from personal correspondence with politicians and political observers from Alabama and Mississippi the research benefited from the expert inside knowledge that the respondents offered. For example, Scotty Colson was Alabama Democratic Party chairman from 1985-1990 and is currently president of the Alabama Young Democrats. State Representatives Marcel Black and Joe Ford were members of the Alabama House of Representatives during the 1990s. Vagn Hansen, Vice-President of Academic Affairs at Mississippi University for Women is a specialist in twentieth century Mississippi political and judicial affairs. Second, the thesis made extensive use of Internet resources. Frequent use was made of numerous Alabama and Mississippi newspaper websites (as well as print newspapers such as *USA Today* and the *Washington Post National Weekly Edition*), for example the *Birmingham News*, *Huntsville Times* and *Mobile Register* of Alabama and the *Biloxi Sun Herald* and *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* of Mississippi. These extensive sources offered exhaustive detail on contemporary political affairs in each state. They were of particular value in covering state legislative and gubernatorial affairs, as were the web sites of the Alabama and Mississippi state legislatures. Useful reference and statistical material were found at the official state government web sites i.e. the Alabama Information Network and the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. These gave access to, for example departments of state government, official election results and to state universities and educational institutions. The web sites of the Alabama Democratic Party and the Young Democrats of Mississippi were invaluable for providing party documents such as the 1996 Alabama Democratic Party platform and the 1998 platform of the Young Democrats. These, and press releases, gave insight into and primary material for understanding party ideology. Similar primary resources, such as the inaugural speeches, 'State of the State' addresses, legislative aims and accomplishments of the governors of Alabama and Mississippi, were

available from official gubernatorial web sites. Many other state and local politicians, in addition to the governors, maintain their own web sites. For example, those of U.S. Representatives Ronnie Shows of Mississippi and Bud Cramer of Alabama and of Attorney General Mike Moore of Mississippi provided understanding of the political thought and ideology of elected politicians, especially in relation to their reflection of constituent opinion. These sites now offer a crucial historical and contemporary data base which has enabled the thesis to present a wide range of evidence.

The primary source material is illuminated by the research's use of secondary material such as books and academic journals of Southern history, politics and society. Both were of particular value in placing the contemporary case study material within its historical context. Periodicals such as, for example, *Alabama Review* and the *Journal of Mississippi History* contain a wealth of articles and research on the political histories of the respective states written by Southern based academics representing a wide range of disciplines including politics, history, economics, literature and cultural studies. Therefore, the research was grounded within a diverse range of academic specialisms. In consequence, the thesis benefited from a fuller understanding of the social and political contexts within both Alabama and Mississippi and, by extension, within the South. An extensive literature search discovered a large number of works on Southern, and specifically Alabamian and Mississippian political history. Many of these works, for example biographies of key Southern politicians such as James Vardaman, Theodore Bilbo and Jim Folsom, are out of print but were purchased by the author from second hand book dealers in the United States. These biographical materials complemented the academic journals by giving fuller and more detailed portraits of the political significance of key figures such as Bilbo, Folsom, Vardaman, Wallace and others. In addition works such as William Barnard's *Dixiecrats and Democrats* (1974) placed, for example, Alabamian politics within the context of Southern and national politics during the Dixiecrat revolt of the late 1940s. Glen Feldman's *Politics, Society and the Klan in Alabama 1915-1949* (1998) was useful in many respects, not least for references to Alabamian political economy during the Great Depression. Anthony Walton's *Mississippi. An American Journey*

(1996) described white Mississippian mores in the civil rights era and beyond from the perspective of a black Mississippian. Works on the political systems of the two case study states, such as David Martin's *Alabama's State and Local Governments* (1994) and Dale Krane and Stephen D. Shaffer's *Mississippi Government and Politics* (1992) proved to be helpful in describing the mechanics of state politics and government. Other books in print, including Feldman's, but not published in Britain, such as Lamis' *Southern Politics in the 1990s* (1999), William Rogers *et al's Alabama. The History of a Deep South State* (1994), Robert Steed *et al's Party Organisation and Activism in the American South* (1998) and Ruy Teixeira and Joel Rogers' *America's Forgotten Majority* (2000) were also purchased for the purposes of the writing of this thesis. These primary and secondary sources were used to develop a historical and conceptual framework. The extent of these printed sources is set out in the bibliography at the end of this thesis.

The third element of the methodology, the case studies, were designed to apply the populist model to two Southern states in order to test its relevance empirically. Alabama and Mississippi are chosen as illustrative, rather than comparative, examples of the Southern populism and conservatism model. Both states, which have similar political histories, are reflective of the political change in the South since the civil rights revolution of the 1960s that has witnessed Republican Party gains. Both have large black populations that live, often uneasily, with a white majority. Both share similar economic profiles. In each state, until the Second World War, the poor whites and farmers of the hill country were pitted, economically, against the wealthier landowners and planters of the Mississippi River Delta and the Black Belt of Alabama. Whilst each state's agricultural sector has declined in size since 1945 both still have large rural populations. In 1990 Alabama was, according to U.S. Census definitions, 40% rural. Mississippi was, by the same definition, 53% rural.²⁶ Conversely, each has, like much of the South, become more urban and suburban in the post war period. Yet both remain amongst the poorest of the United States. The median household income in Alabama in 1997 was \$31,468. In Mississippi, the corresponding figure was \$27,994 placing them 42nd and 47th in the country, respectively, in this category.²⁷

Alabama and Mississippi can be used to illustrate the proposition that the conventional accounts often used to demonise the South as conservative and reactionary are, as this thesis contends, misleading and inadequate. Natalie Davis writes that the image of Alabama and its politics . . . is negative, primitive and redneck.²⁸ Gordon E. Harvey notes that ‘many accounts [of] Alabama’s political legacy consist of reactionary politics, racism and opposition to the federal government.’²⁹ Anthony Walton’s 1996 memoir of growing up in 1960s segregated Mississippi recalls the racial conservatism of the state. ‘Even black folks in Alabama,’ he writes ‘say forget Mississippi.’³⁰ Lamis notes that ‘even neighbouring [S]outherners had long found it comforting to proclaim “Thank God for Mississippi,” as the state’s backwardness made their own conditions look positive by comparison.’³¹ Yet beyond the derision for its historical resistance to integration and reputation for white conservative intransigence lies a strong populist and progressive tradition. As early as 1884 George W. Cable wrote ‘I left Alabama more deeply impressed than ever before with the fact that behind all the fierce and resentful conservatism of the South there was a progressive though silent South.’³² In 1947 *The Nation* described Alabama as ‘the most liberal state in the South.’³³ Harvey writes that ‘another more positive image merits attention from historians . . . the economic liberalism practised by Alabamians such as John Sparkman, Bob Jones, Kenneth Roberts, Carl Elliott, Tom Bevill and Lister Hill’³⁴ and by Vardaman, Bilbo and Frank Smith in Mississippi. William Barnard observes that in 1957 a writer of public school textbooks felt compelled to say that it was possible for men labelled ‘conservative’ to be elected in the South.³⁵ Barnard, himself, writes that despite the legend of a patrician South, [Alabama and Mississippi were] societ[ies] that [were] fiercely democratic.³⁶ Thus both states are illustrative of Southern Democratic populist and conservative political attitudes in both historical and contemporary settings.

It would be a mistake, however, to categorise either state as *sui generis* to the South. Each has experienced trends common to other Southern states since the civil rights era of the mid-1960, such as growing suburbanisation and absorption of internal migrants, many from the north and mid-west. Consequently, each state provides examples of how the South has

changed, while clinging to a sense of still being Southern. What Feldman argues below in regard to Alabama holds for Mississippi too :

*Alabama is not so distinct that its own patterns cannot illuminate experience in the rest of the South. Alabama is generally representative of the states of the Deep South, and its experience, while often more intense, has usually reflected events elsewhere. The same relationship can often be seen between the experience of Dixie and half of the nation at large.*³⁷

Should the Democratic Party successfully compete against the Republican Party in the heart of the South using the populist model of this research it may provide appropriate models for the replication of Democratic Party electoral triumphs elsewhere in the region and, perhaps, in the nation too.

Presentation of Thesis

Chapter Two outlines the definitions of populism and conservatism that the thesis uses throughout. First, populism and conservatism are analysed using several theoretical perspectives before these definitions are applied to the Southern historical and contemporary political contexts. Anti-elitist rhetoric is highlighted as a fundamental element of white Southern Democratic populism starting with its use, in the first half of the nineteenth century, by Presidents Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson to support the virtue of the 'the people', in their battle against elites that used government for their own selfish interests. The chapter suggests that such rhetoric infused the *raison d'être* of the Democratic Party as the party dedicated to supporting the interests of working families. The chapter introduces a number of examples of practical applications of populist politics in the history of the Alabama and Mississippi Democratic Party. These include the rise of rural populist politicians such as James Vardaman and Theodore Bilbo of Mississippi in the first half of the twentieth century and Jim Folsom and George Wallace of Alabama after World War Two who led 'the people' in opposition to the economically conservative leaders of the business and urban wing of the Democratic Party.

To this end, those white Southern Democrats adopting a populist critique advocated federal and state government economic reform to intervene to correct inequities in the free market system. The chapter argues that populist support of government programmes was aimed at giving 'the people' opportunities to become economically independent. The chapter hypothesises that in order to win office in federal, state or local office Southern Democrats should marry economic populism with recognition of conservative stances popular in the South. These include, for example, the centrality of religious morality in Southern culture, the rights of gun ownership and protection of the rights of the states to oversee their own affairs in accordance with the Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (1791), whereby the federal government's powers are limited to those constitutionally delegated. In this sense Southern Democratic populism is argued as supporting collective action to achieve individualistically conservative aims.

Chapter Three first examines in greater depth, via the presentation of electoral data, the performance of the Democratic Party in Congressional and presidential elections in Alabama and Mississippi in the period referred to in this chapter as the 'Solid South.' The Democratic Party's dominance from 1876 to 1960 is contrasted with the rise of Republican presidential voting after 1960 to 2000, and with the steady gains made by the GOP in Congressional elections during the same period. Analysis of the electoral outcomes in the first period suggests that white support for the Democratic Party was based on defence of the philosophy of states' rights that, most notably, included support of segregationist positions. It was when the national Democratic Party was perceived, in the 1948 and 1964 presidential elections, to be advocating civil rights policies threatening the racial *status quo* in the South that the demise of the 'Solid South' began and led to white partisan political realignment in favour of the Republican Party as, simultaneously, the newly enfranchised black voters overwhelmingly supported the Democratic Party.

By the 1990s Southern whites' increasing affinity, in Congressional as well as presidential elections, with a Republican Party identified with conservative positions on states' rights and social issues would appear to confirm the assumptions of the inherent

conservatism of Southern politics as accurate. As the Republican Party, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, continues to make steady gains in federal, state and local elections, the chapter provides evidence in favour of the argument that the GOP can be considered to be the majority party in the South.

Chapter Four, however, builds on the analysis in Chapter Two that suggested that descriptions of Southern political culture as being simply conservative are inadequate. This chapter recognises an anti-government conservative political tradition in the South but presents evidence that alternative political philosophies such as populism and liberalism have garnered strong electoral support amongst white Southerners who have welcomed federal and state government economic reforms. The chapter uses a chronological framework, using the period 1865 to 1980, to demonstrate the complexities of Southern political thought. This is done by examining, with specific reference to white Democrats in Alabama and Mississippi, four specific periods in the region's political history that illustrate a different facet of white Southern Democratic political philosophy.

First, the dominance of the 'Bourbon' Democrats - the economic conservative faction of the party - is highlighted during the immediate post-Reconstruction period from 1877 to the end of the nineteenth century. The Bourbons resisted change by appealing to the racial solidarity of the white electorate that nullified the possibilities of a white-black alliance based on shared class interests. This era is categorised by racial reaction manifested in the introduction of state segregation laws that kept blacks in a subordinate position. Second, the rise of the Populist Party of the 1890s and its effect on the Democratic Party is used to illustrate white Southern radicalism. The farmers' rebellion against business and banking elites that led to the formation of the Populist Party in the late 1880s did not disrupt Democratic Party hegemony in the South. However, it did lead to the 'revolt of the rednecks'³⁸ in the early part of the twentieth century of rural whites eager to challenge the Bourbon hierarchy and vote for populist politicians who claimed to represent 'the people' and who were prepared to use the power of government to effect economic reform. Third, the popularity of Democratic President Franklin Roosevelt's 1930s New Deal programmes of

federal government aid to alleviate the disastrous economic effects of the Great Depression illustrate overwhelming support for liberalism in the South. Contrary to the assumption of Southern hostility toward federal government intrusion in state affairs the South was the most electorally supportive region in the U.S. of Roosevelt throughout his four presidential election campaigns. Fourth, and finally, the rise of social issue politics in the South in the decades following the civil rights revolution of the 1960s indicates the continuing importance of conservatism in Southern Democratic politics. However, the use of anti-federal government rhetoric - illustrated, for example, in the 1968 independent presidential of former Alabama governor George Wallace - was firmly rooted in the anti-elitist populist tradition illustrated in both this chapter and in Chapter Two. In summary the chapter refutes the 'conservative' appellation of Southern politics by demonstrating both its political diversity and the collision and merging of populist and conservative positions.

Chapters Five and Six apply the theoretical concepts and empirical evidence of the preceding chapters to the case studies of contemporary Democratic Party politics in Alabama and Mississippi. Chapter Five traces the development of populism in the Alabama Democratic Party from the late nineteenth century onward. The chapter argues that the populist traditions which first made their impact felt on the state's politics at the turn of the century have persisted throughout the state's political history and have continue to be relevant in contemporary Democratic Party politics. Illustrative examples of the success of the populist model, as defined in Chapter Two, are provided in an examination of the careers and rhetorical styles of former Alabama governors Jim Folsom and George Wallace. The chapter then turns to an analysis of the 1996 political platform of the Alabama Democratic Party. This document serves as a primary source with which to evaluate party belief at the turn of the twentieth century. The thesis' populist model is then applied to three contemporary issue areas, namely education, religion and economics where conservatism and populism merge. The chapter argues, using qualitative and quantitative evidence in these examples, that anti-elitist populism which, for example, supports publicly funded and government supported education continues to inform the political values of the Democratic Party. In consequence,

the chapter demonstrates that conventional classifications of white Southern Democrats as 'conservative' are, as initially proposed, indeed, inadequate.

Chapter Six - on the Mississippi Democratic Party - introduces the second case study. The chapter follows a similar format to that which discussed the Alabama Democratic Party. It begins by outlining the rural populist challenge to the state Democratic Party leadership at the turn of the nineteenth century. Particular attention is paid to the careers of James Vardaman and Theodore Bilbo that provide illustrative examples of the populist model in Mississippi politics in the first half of the twentieth century. Both men championed the cause of the economically vulnerable and supported a more expansive role for federal and state government to meet the needs of the politically marginalised in Mississippi. As with Chapter Five, this chapter provides examples to demonstrate the persistence of populist rhetoric and politics in the post-civil rights era. For example, a succession of Mississippi governors from this period have utilised the populist model to win office. Particular reference is given, first, to the Democratic Party's success in 1999 in regaining the gubernatorial seat lost to the Republicans in 1991. This campaign serves as an example for the potency of a political style that combines anti-elitist rhetoric with deference to Southern conservative social values. The second example of the application of the populist model is provided in the chapter's discussion of the redemption of the new Democratic governor's populist election pledge to increase the salaries of public school teachers. In summary, the second case study stresses the merits of the populist approach and, therefore, re-emphasises and parallels the conclusions drawn in the first case study.

Chapter Seven summarises the central themes of the thesis. Having suggested that the conventional accounts of Southern politics over-emphasise its conservatism, the thesis, beginning in Chapter Two, provides a broader understanding of Southern political culture by defining populism and conservatism within the region's historical context. The chapter reiterates the relevance to the Southern Democratic Party of marrying economic reformism, government assistance that promotes individual and family opportunity, anti-elite rhetoric and conservative stances on social issues as a model for winning elections at the local, state and

federal levels. The thesis' argument, therefore, is that the decline of the Democratic Party in the South is not irreversible. The Southern Democratic Party does face a number of challenges to its future electoral well being. For example, Chapter Seven highlights the possible effects of Republican Party incumbency and party growth and demographic trends that point to population decline in rural, traditionally Democratic areas and population growth in the Republican voting suburbs. However, adoption of the populist model described throughout this thesis will differentiate Southern Democrats from the Republican Party's anti-government rhetoric and can build on the Democrats' advantages. The Democrats have, as the case studies indicate, proved adept at forming white-black (or 'redneck-blackneck') coalitions and have, in late 1990s elections regained governorships in Alabama, Mississippi and South Carolina by utilising populist rhetoric. Therefore this research concurs with Michael Kazin's view that '[i]t is only when . . . [Democrats] themselves talked in populist ways . . . that they were able to lend their policies a majoritarian cast and help markedly to improve the common welfare.'³⁹ Similarly Robert Kuttner's analysis of the Democratic Party's prospects on the eve of the 1988 presidential election is still valid :

*Democrats can regain their status as a majority party only by rebuilding a majority coalition of ordinary, wage and salary-earning people, whose political and economic interests are not identical to those of the wealthy.*⁴⁰

Southern Democrats can assert faith in the populist tradition that government can act positively by protecting working families in the collective provision of such public goods as education and Social Security when application of free market doctrine in these areas benefits only wealthier elites.

There has been in the post civil rights period, as these chapters indicate, a clear differentiation in political outlook between Southern Democrats and the national party as represented in both its quadrennial presidential nominee and the party leadership in the U.S. Congress. The perception of white Southerners that the national Democratic Party does not share their concerns about states' rights or the importance of religious, family values has

evidently been to the Republicans benefit in presidential elections since the mid 1960s. The similarities in philosophy that can be drawn between the Alabama Democratic platform of 1996, analysed in Chapter Five, with that of the national Democratic Party's of the same year suggested this kind of convergence is possible. It is pertinent to conjecture whether the national party can recover lost ground in presidential elections in the South should it adopt the populist model expounded in this thesis.

Paul Begala, a Texas raised Democratic Party political strategist, and advisor during Bill Clinton's 1992 election campaign, states that the 'first lesson' in understanding Southern politics is that 'Southerners are populists [and that] Populism rules the South.' Similarly Louis Rubin in 1954 described the 'Mind of the South' as 'Rich People versus Poor People.'⁴¹ Describing Southerners as 'economic populists and cultural traditionalists'⁴² Begala suggests that national Democrats need to continue to emphasise the former but to recognise the importance of the latter should the national party want to make gains in the South. This thesis suggests that conservative and populist traditions are deeply embedded in Southern politics. It contends that the Democratic Party is still a viable political force in the region and, specifically, in Alabama and Mississippi. In order to maintain electoral credibility, however, the party needs to stress that it supports those conservative aims relevant to the white electorate. This can be achieved with the use of populist, anti-elite rhetoric. Such rhetoric offers electoral promise for Southern Democrats when voters clearly recognise that the party serves and understands the needs of 'the people' rather than purporting to act in their interests without consulting their opinions. Given the shared values within the Southern states that this thesis describes over the following six chapters the lessons that white Democrats can heed in Alabama and Mississippi are applicable for the Democratic Party throughout the region.

Chapter One footnotes

1 The following works on Southern political history were of particular value in the writing of this thesis : Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics. Social Change and Political Consequence Since 1945* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press 1995), Monroe Lee Billington; *The Political South in the Twentieth Century* (New York : Charles Scribner's 1975); Earle Black and Merle Black, *The Vital South. How Presidents Are Elected* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press 1992); W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York : Vintage Books 1941); Dewey W. Grantham, *The Democratic South* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press 1963) and *The Life and Death of the Solid South. A Political History* (Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky Press 1988); William C. Havard, *The Changing Politics of the South* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press 1972); V.O. Key Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York : Vintage Books 1949); Alexander Lamis, *The Two Party South* (Oxford : Oxford University Press 1990); (ed) *Southern Politics in the 1990s* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press 1999) and Neil R. Peirce, *The Deep South States of America. People, Power and Politics in the Seven Deep South States* (New York : W.W. Norton 1974); Francis Butler Simkins and Charles Pierce Roland, *A History of the South* (New York : Alfred A. Knopf 1972).

2 Butler and Roland, p 544.

3 Glenn Feldman, *Politics, Society and the Klan in Alabama 1915-1949* (Tuscaloosa, Al.: University of Alabama Press 1999), p 166. See also *ibid*, p 194.

4 Michael Young, *The American Dictionary of Campaigns and Elections* (Lanham, Md.: Hamilton Press 1987). See also Billy Bowles and Remer Tyson, *They Love a Man in the Country. Saints and Sinners in the South* (Atlanta, Ga.: Peachtree Publishers 1987), p 92 and Dale Krane and Stephen D. Shaffer, *Mississippi Government and Politics. Modernisers Versus Traditionalists* (Lincoln, Ne.: University of Nebraska Press 1992), p 89.

5 Fred Hobson, *Tell About the South. The Southern Rage to Explain* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press 1983), p 291.

6 Statistics calculated from electoral data contained in *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc. 1985), pp 339-359, 461-486, 579-606 and 790-1001.

7 Figures calculated from electoral data in *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections, The Almanac of American Politics* (Washington, D.C.: National Journal Inc) biennial editions 1984-1990 inclusive; Kimball Brace (ed), *The Election Data Book. A Statistical Portrait of Voting in America 1992*; *Congressional Quarterly's Politics in America* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc) biennial editions 1992-2000 inclusive; Everett Carl Ladd (ed), *America at the Polls 1994* (Storrs, Ct.: University of Connecticut 1995), *USA Today* November 9 2000.

8 These were U.S. Senator Richard Shelby (Alabama) and U.S. Representatives Nathan Deal (Georgia), Greg Laughlin (Texas), Mike Parker (Mississippi) and W.J. 'Billy' Tauzin (Louisiana).

9 Key, p 664.

10 Ibid, p 664

11 Ibid, pp 533-618.

12 Ibid, p 664.

13 Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South*, p 206.

14 Ibid, p 208.

15 Ibid, p 207.

16 Glen T. Boach and Lee Bandy, 'South Carolina : A Decade of Rapid Republican Ascent,' pp 50-80; Margaret Edds and Thomas R. Morris, 'Virginia : Republicans Surge in the Competitive Dominion,' pp 136-164 and Richard Murray and Sam Attlesey, 'Texas : Republicans Gallop Ahead,' pp 305-342 in Lamis (ed), *Southern Politics in the 1990s*.

17 Ibid, Lamis, 'The Nation and the South : Toward the Twenty-First Century,' pp 377-406.

18 Ibid, p 405.

19 Hobson, *Tell About the South*, pp 13 and 228; Chester M. Morgan, *Redneck Liberal. Theodore G. Bilbo and the New Deal* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press

1985), pp 46-47 and 66 and George B. Tindall, *The Ethnic Southerners* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press 1976), p 33.

20 Nicol Rae, *Southern Democrats* (Oxford : Oxford University Press 1994), p 69.

21 Ibid, p 70.

22 Ibid, p 72.

23 Tindall, *The Ethnic Southerners*, p 34.

24 Rae, p 78.

25 Ibid, p 78.

26 *Congressional Quarterly's Politics in America 2000* (Washington, D.C. : Congressional Quarterly Inc 1999), pp 1 and 748.

27 Ibid.

28 Natalie Davis, 'Follow the Money,' *Southern Cultures* Volume 4 Winter 1998, p 62.

29 Gordon E. Harvey, 'Lister Hill, "Godfather of Maxwell Field" : A Case Study in Southern Economic Development,' *Alabama Review* Volume 53 Number 1, p 3.

30 Anthony Walton, *Mississippi. An American Journey* (New York : Alfred A. Knopf 1996), p 150. See also Krane and Shaffer, *Mississippi Government and Politics*, pp 9 and 17 and Pierce, *The Deep South States of America*, p 164.

31 Lamis (ed), *Southern Politics in the 1990s*, p 249.

32 Hobson, *Tell About the South*, p 115.

33 William D. Barnard, *Dixiecrats and Democrats. Alabama Politics 1942-1950* (University, Al.: University of Alabama Press 1974), p 4.

34 Harvey, p 4.

35 Barnard, p 142.

36 Ibid, p 62.

37 Feldman, *Politics, Society and the Klan in Alabama 1915-1949*, p 2.

38 Albert Kirwan, *The Revolt of the Rednecks. Mississippi Politics 1876-1925* (Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky Press 1951).

39 Kazin, p 6.

40 Robert Kuttner, *The Life of the Party. Democratic Party Prospects in the 1988 Election* (New York : Viking 1988), p 5.

41 Hobson, p 260.

42 Paul Begala, 'Southern Comfort,' *George* March 2000, p 38.

CHAPTER TWO

POPULIST AND CONSERVATIVE THOUGHT IN THE SOUTHERN DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Populism

The present chapter outlines the definitions of populism and conservatism that this thesis employs in first, general terms before, second, applying such definitions within the Southern political context. The thesis argues that key elements of Southern populism can be recognised as conservative. At the same time, the chapter outlines five specific applications of conservatism that can, conversely, be defined as populist. The resulting synthesis of these definitions offers a theoretical framework with which to analyse the historical development of populist thought amongst white Southern Democrats in Chapters Three and Four, followed by the empirical analysis of the continuing impact of populist rhetoric amongst white Alabamian and Mississippian Democrats that form the content of Chapters Five and Six, respectively.

Populism requires careful definition given the variety of political movements, parties and individuals that have appropriated the label to suit their purposes. For example, George Tindall cites Webster's Third International Dictionary as defining a populist as 'a member of a political party purporting to represent the rank and file of the people.'¹ The political historian and journalist Dan T. Carter eschews use of the term, believing that 'mainline reporters and liberal academics', have handled it so broadly, and with insufficient rigour, that it has lost any useful meaning.² Moreover, populism in practice and rhetoric has differed in the United States from similarly labelled movements in Europe, South America and elsewhere.³ Kenneth Hoover has noted that 'in the 1990s the label populist [has been claimed] by left and right.'⁴ Consequently, in order to discuss the relevance of populist rhetoric and politics in the South and of whites in the Southern Democratic Party, a clarification of how populism may be defined is of the utmost importance given the contention of the thesis that usage of populist discourse and rhetorical imagery is fundamental to the health of the Democratic Party in the South.

The historian Michael Kazin has provided a basic definition of populism that serves as a springboard for a more definitive, contextual application of populism amongst white Southern Democrats that follows in this, and subsequent, chapters. Populism is, he writes, ‘a language whose speakers conceive of people as a noble assemblage . . . [who] view their elite opponents as self-serving and undemocratic, and seek to mobilise the former against the latter.’⁵ Edward Shils describes populism as a ‘belief in the creativity and superior moral worth of the ordinary, of the uneducated and unintellectual.’⁶ Fundamentally, populism espouses the politics of the common man’s resentment of elites by juxtaposing the virtues of ‘the people.’ Margaret Canovan adds that in addition to anti-elitism and trust in the common sense and decency of ‘the people,’ populism can be defined by a rhetorical style notable for colourful language, denunciations of the machinations of self-serving elites and frequent homilies to the virtues of the ordinary, working American family.⁷ Tindall writes that in this conception of populism, ‘virtue dwells in the simple folk.’⁸ Jack Newfield and Jeff Greenfield in *A Populist Manifesto : The Making of a New Majority* (1972) wrote that populism gained adherents for the perception that ‘there are people, classes and institutions that today possess an illegitimate amount of wealth and power; they use that power for their own benefit and for the common loss.’⁹ Tindall suggests that ‘the point about the location of populist movements is . . . that they are peripheral to economic power.’¹⁰ Hoover notes that populists are ‘concerned with two related forms of inequality: disparities in wealth and power.’¹¹ ‘Populism,’ Canovan argues, challenges not only established power-holders but elite values.¹² The validity of these observations for the present analysis is demonstrated by the way they pervade the practice of populism in the white Southern Democratic Party in this, and subsequent, chapters.

Definitional problems arise, however, in that populism and populists have at times served reactionary ends. That is, populism is frequently less of an ideology than a reactive impulse. Consequently populism can be defined so widely as to encompass the Jeffersonians and Jacksonians of the first half of the nineteenth century, the Populist (or People’s) Party of the 1890s, prohibitionists in the 1920s, Huey Long’s ‘Share the Wealth’ movement during the

New Deal, various anti-communist patriot groups active during the Cold War and the New Right conservatism of Ronald Reagan, amongst many others. Each of these examples illustrate anti-elite resentments yet provide evidence to validate Carter's contention that populism had become so amorphous that its utility in describing political movements and ideologies is redundant.

James Youngdale has, however, usefully identified three models of the populist style.¹³ In addition to anti-elite rhetoric, each model focuses upon attitudes toward the extent of the central government's social and economic role in the American polity. Neither what Youngdale describes as 'Tory' populism's belief in a market economy unencumbered by government regulation nor 'socialist' populism's advocacy of government ownership of production describes the nature of populism of whites in the Southern Democratic Party. Youngdale's outline of what he dubs 'radical neomercantile' populism, supportive of government regulation of monopolies and oligopolies and interference in the market to create fair competition that will allow working families to become independent of the invidious effects of unregulated markets, is a more appropriate model with which to begin an analysis of the nature of populism in Southern politics. Federal and state governments, therefore, have a positive and beneficial role to play in alleviating the inherent inequalities of the free, unconstrained market economy. Additionally, government provision of public goods such as education, highways and welfare can offer means by which the people can maximise opportunities for their advancement. This kind of expanded role for central government delineates the reformist, or modernising, element of populism within the context of the distrust of overweening government fundamental to American political culture. Yet, ultimately, as the following paragraphs indicate, Youngdale's third model is also conservative. This reformist populism evinces no desire to replace or even restructure the system of government in the United States. Indeed, the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights are seen as mechanisms for the protection of individual rights against the potential depredations of government. Youngdale posits that his radical neomercantile model 'represents a halfway step between Tory populism and socialism; and it combines elements

from both poles.’¹⁴ Thus, this thesis argues that populism, defined as a reformist rhetoric in pursuit of essentially conservative aims is a relevant and pertinent form of political dialogue with which to attract votes to the Southern Democratic Party since it marries populist expression with conservative political appeal. Government thus becomes the agent by which the marginalised are enabled, through, for example, government sponsored educational provision, farm subsidies and social security provisions, to make choices that have a direct impact upon their own lives. As Catherine McNichol Stock says, the goal of the Democratic voter is to have ‘the ability to support oneself and one’s family from the fruits of one’s own labour.’¹⁵ According to this aspect of populism only when the individual has gained economic independence, with assistance available from government, can true democracy be achieved.

This model of populism is distinguishable from conservative hostility towards government by its faith in the potentially beneficial effects of Federal and state government reform, if and when it serves ‘the people.’ The authority of the Federal government, according to this expression of populism, should be invoked to challenge the power of corporations, the wealthy who gain from the toils of working people, and their servants in government. The Federal government’s power is used to oppose privilege in order to create a society that permits individualism to thrive free from the constraints that governments can impose. In this way populism pays homage to different philosophies to produce its own congruence. Thus, populist rhetoric upholds egalitarian principles and denounces hierarchies in promoting the following : a return to the values of equality, self-government and virtue mythologised in the Revolutionary era of the late eighteenth century ; reform of corrupt and outmoded economic and social institutions. It is where those egalitarian ethics, for example, equality before the law and the consent of the governed, have been perverted by privilege and the self-serving that populism articulated a radical and yet conservative message. Government should be returned to the people according to the egalitarian spirit of the U.S. Constitution where class differences are obsolete.¹⁶ This conservative aim of a return to a more perfect era is balanced by the radical rhetoric of empowering the people, via expansion of government power, to challenge those elites alleged to have prostituted the political system for their own selfish

ends. The aim, in Kazin's interpretation 'is to make the loci of power serve the people, not to destroy the institutions in the name of some other system . . .'¹⁷ This economically reformist populism, while conservative in opposing left of centre, or socialist, collectivist solutions to economic or social problems, is distinct from Republican Party conservatism which supports unfettered free markets and the power of corporate business elites within it. This model of populism, this thesis contends, is applicable to the Southern milieu and its application is demonstrated in succeeding chapters. The next section discusses the conservative elements of Southern populism which, when combined with the economic critique outlined above, provides the potential for white Southern Democrats to craft a political message that holds resonance for black and white electorates.

Conservatism

The present section outlines five specific conservative stances relevant to a discussion of Southern Democratic political thought. These are, in no order of salience, corporate (or elite); anti-Federal (or states' rights); racial; cultural (or social); and agrarian (or 'traditional') conservatism. The argument presented in this study is that aspects of these five conservative attitudes may also be enlisted to support populist rhetoric. Simultaneously, in adopting conservative positions assumed, particularly since the beginning of the 1980s, to be the province of the Republican Party, the Democrats can eliminate the negative perceptions that have clung to the Party since the mid-1960s (for the latter see Chapter Four). As a result, it is argued, the Southern Democratic Party can create a majority coalition of voters attracted by a rhetoric that satisfies an electorate that evinces conservative and populist inclinations as suggested in Chapters Five and Six.

Here, the discussion of conservatism in general outlines each of the above five themes in conceptual terms, together with appropriate illustrative examples. This provides the theoretical framework to demonstrate the variety of ways in which conservative influences have shaped the political attitudes of the Southern Democratic Party. These number of conservative themes were key to the formation and development of the party during the nineteenth century and have continued to play a part in Democratic Party rhetoric. The

present discussion, and that which follows on populism and the Southern Democratic Party, argues that late twentieth and early twenty-first century Southern Democratic political opinion, in its conservative and populist stances, constitute two apparently separate yet complementary strands of thought.

The argument here is that any discussion of conservatism must consider its usage by political parties in the realm of electoral politics. This is important because while issues of deep intellectual complexity have been debated by a variety of historical and contemporary political philosophers, these tend not to figure in political campaigning. For political professionals the main imperative is to limit the scope of weighty debate by replacing it with readily identifiable rhetorical sloganeering. At the same time, such campaigning rhetoric reveals underlying values and concerns. For these reasons, the present analysis concentrates on how conservative and populist rhetoric is used by Southern Democrats in national and state elections. This analysis takes precedence over debate on the meanings of intellectual conservatism *per se*.¹⁸

There are a number of bases to the five conservative stances raised above.¹⁹ The first of these conservative attitudes relates to the political power of corporate business. Business, favouring *laissez-faire* economics, is opposed to government interference in the running of national (and state) financial affairs. The role of government should be minimal. Its function is to create the conditions for the growth of the economy and to protect the rights of private property holders. As a consequence business priorities are that the government should act to aid their concerns in, for example, the reduction of corporate taxation and in minimising regulations that may hinder the pursuit of maximised profit and restrict the exercise of private property rights. Central government's powers of taxation are viewed as a threat to private enterprise and inimicable to the workings of the free market.

Corporate, or elite, conservatism, exemplified by the industrialists and planters referred to in Chapters Five and Six is capable, however, of pragmatic and populist stances. Corporate conservatives can be pragmatic in accepting reform when it is beneficial to business. For example, Southern businesses in Alabama and Mississippi rejected state

government segregationist policies in the 1960s when business interests perceived that the violence used against civil rights protesters was giving all white Southerners a reputation for racist intransigence. Corporate conservatives can also utilise populism. During the 1980s, businesses opposing Federal government regulations and taxes articulated populist sentiments in suggesting that the cost of compliance with Federal regulation was increased unemployment and freezes on salaries and wages as firms were forced to find ways to save money. Businesses championed their role in job creation and of how they were thwarted in fulfilling that role by Federal bureaucrats unaware of conditions encountered by 'the people.' Using such rhetoric allows conservative Democrats (and Republicans) supportive of, and supported by, business interests, to elicit populist anti-government leanings while remaining as beneficiaries of the *status quo*.

The second stance can broadly be categorised as anti-Federalist, or states' rights conservatism. This attitude, whilst overlapping with aspects of corporate conservatism, for example in belief in the defence of property rights, is particularly distinguished by resolute belief that the Federal government has become too powerful at the expense of the states. Anti-Federalist conservatives cite the relevance of the Tenth Amendment to the Constitution ratified in 1791. The amendment's text - '[t]he powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people' - gave rise to the expression 'states' rights'. Anti-Federalist conservatives interpret the Constitution as having created a central government of limited powers that simultaneously gave the states considerable latitude in matters of local autonomy. This conservatism argues that the best government operates at the most local level, thus permitting the people to control issues that pertain directly to them. Antagonistic to change when dictated by the Federal government, states' rightism has a populist application in supporting the right of 'the people' to run their affairs through the medium of the state governments in which they are, ultimately, perceived to be sovereign. Conservatism, under this definition, need not necessarily preclude the introduction of reformist policies by state government if these decisions are made at the local level with the approval of those affected by proposed

change. States' rightism is, however, conservative in its consistent hostility to Federal government interference in affairs, such as education, believed to be constitutionally the prerogative of the states themselves, according to the Tenth Amendment. As Southern historian and commentator John Shelton Reed has argued this includes the right of the states to decide what should be taught in public schools. 'Let us not forget,' Reed has written, 'that state legislatures are our first line of defence against federal tyranny.'²⁰

The third conservative influence of relevance to Southern politics concerns perspectives on race. From the end of Reconstruction in 1877 (see Chapter Three) until the civil rights revolution of the 1960s (see Chapters Three and Four), the conservative position on race endorsed the *status quo* of white supremacy. The legal end of segregation by the mid-1960s crafted by the national Democratic Party occasioned fundamental shifts in white Southern voting behaviour. In response many white Democrats abandoned their party to vote for Republicans, initially in presidential elections and, by the 1990s, for many Republican Congressional and state candidates as well. The remaining white Democrats left found that the party needed black votes to stay competitive, as the black electorate became loyally Democratic after the passage of federal civil rights legislation in the mid-1960s. The erstwhile reliance on appeals to white supremacy to attract (or mollify) white voters exists no longer in that crude racist rhetoric which, as later chapters show, was endemic during the era of segregation prior to the 1960s. However, racial issues still pervade Southern politics. For example, black voters view the Federal government far more positively than do whites. Whereas blacks are more likely to view government as a protector of political and economic rights, whites are more prone to view its influence as antipathetic to Southern states' rights convictions. The existence of this conflict lies at the heart of the Democratic dilemma in Alabama and Mississippi, and throughout the South. Once again, the resolution to this problem, this thesis argues, lies in presenting to white and black voters alike a message that combines conservative and populist rhetoric and preserves a bi-racial, or 'redneck-blackneck' alliance (see Chapters Five and Six), designed to appeal to both groups without alienating either.

The fourth aspect of conservatism concerns cultural and social issues. Here, conservatism comprises two strands. First, it is based strongly on religious beliefs, specifically regarding Protestant ethics predominant in the South. Cultural conservatism in the South, for example, opposes abortion, supports the reintroduction of prayer in public schools together with belief in the nuclear family. These facets are linked to the second identifiable feature of social conservatism. The belief in the above, which may be described as 'traditional' or 'family values' conservatism, reveals a distrust of reform manifested in hostility to the agents of change, particularly where challenges to tradition emanate from the Federal government. Here cultural, or social, conservatism has clear links to anti-Federalist states' rights conservatism. More generally change *per se* is seen as dangerous and support for the *status quo* is strong.²¹

Both see the Federal government as elitist, arrogant and financially irresponsible. Central government, it is believed, too often penalises hard-working Americans with high rates of taxation that finance welfare schemes seen, by cultural conservatives, as rewarding people who are not prepared to work for a living. Simultaneously, Southerners see Federal bureaucrats as over-educated with little perception, awareness or sympathy for Southern values. Social conservatism blames Federal government social policies since the 1960s for increases in violent crime, sexual promiscuity and a decline in belief in the 'traditional' values of hard work, thrift, sobriety and respect for law and order (see Chapter Three and Four for a more detailed exposition of these trends and their effects on white Southerners' support for the Democratic Party).

As with other aspects of Southern conservatism described above, these beliefs can be articulated using populist rhetoric. The Federal government is attacked as elitist for believing that it knows better than Southerners how to solve social problems. Once again 'the people' are trusted to run their affairs better than over-educated and supercilious bureaucrats in the Federal government who may have impressive educational qualifications on paper but lack the common sense of the 'productive and burden-bearing classes'²² who provide the goods and services that America needs.

The final conservative stance is agrarian or 'traditional', conservatism. This academic philosophy indigenous to the South was popularised by the publication in 1930 of the book by twelve Southern writers based at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, entitled *I'll Take My Stand*.²³ Collectively these writers, including Donald Davidson, Allen Tate and John Ransom Crowe, bemoaned the passing of the South's agrarian traditions. These 'Old South' values 'derived primarily from the planters and did have aristocratic roots.'²⁴ Highly romanticised in advocating a pastoral republicanism that predated mass industrialisation and was rooted in anti-bourgeois sentiment, this conservatism celebrated the stability and order inherent in societies based on hierarchies of wealth, class, and educational attainment. Although not without populist undertones, for example in its distaste for corporate consolidation, it was fundamentally elitist and paternalistic and thus antagonistic to populist taste. Indeed, agrarianism was, at its most generous, sceptical of the levelling rhetoric of democracy and the meritocratic impulses of Jeffersonian and Jacksonian democracy although it did look back with nostalgia to the Jeffersonian era of the turn of the nineteenth century independent yeoman farmer.²⁵ As a result this kind of conservatism, jealous of fixed social strata, had little to offer rhetorically to the Democratic Party in the South. Of all the conservative views outlined here, only agrarianism has no genuine application to the politics of populism, although it could find common ground with the populist critique of the baleful effects of unrestrained individualistic capitalism on rural life. Traditionalist disdain of materialism, however, found few parallels amongst working Americans who aspired to class mobility, and were happy to utilise government programmes that helped them achieve this goal.

That the contemporary Democratic Parties in Alabama and Mississippi can craft a bi-racial coalition of support in defence of populist and conservative values using the most electorally potent elements of each is the central message of this thesis. An understanding of the overlap of populist and conservative ideas within the party is useful in providing the context in arguing that the contemporary party should stress that, first it values its populist roots and, second, that populist rhetoric should be enlisted in support of essentially conservative goals.

Conservatism and the Southern Democratic Party

The Southern Democratic Party that emerged after Reconstruction in 1877 was 'conservative' in three ways. First, the core values of the party centred on homage to conservative interpretation of states' rights. Second, there was an antipathy to social reform that rested on adherence to minimal government as the key element of an ordered society. Third, white supremacy, above all, dominated albeit with a sense of *noblesse oblige*. Party leaders maintained that 'people needed a standard of excellence that could be provided only by a cultivated elite.'²⁶ This conservatism encompassed the belief that the suffrage, never mind the control of government, should be 'restricted to men of substance, those men who by birth and training and position had a genuine stake in society.'²⁷ When referring to the Southern Democratic Party here it is essential to bear in mind that these were the values articulated by its leadership. As will become evident in subsequent chapters it was by no means accurate to state that the electorate shared absolute loyalty to these three factors held inviolate by the party elite. It is in this dichotomy between a conservative leadership and a populist rank and file that we find evidence of a politics rich in class rhetoric and dissent that belies the description of the South as monolithically solid in its deference to a single Democratic Party. Consequently, during this late nineteenth century era (and apparent, as Chapters Five and Six describe in Democratic Party factionalism in the twentieth century), we may speak of two Democratic parties. The 'official' party ran the committees, nominated candidates and organised the machinery of elections. An 'unofficial' party opposed the elite standing for the reform and democratisation of the party structure and was prepared to advocate a more activist role for both state and Federal government. The 'unofficial' party, for example in the guise of the Populist Party sympathisers of the 1890s, occasionally made gestures toward including the interests of blacks in an alliance of the class politics of the dispossessed of both races, adding to the concern of Democratic elites.

The essential conservatism of the post-Reconstruction Democratic parties of the South resulted from their domination by an alliance of commercial, industrial, professional and planter interests. These interests recognised that the key to protecting their concerns lay in

controlling the internal machinery of the Democratic Party organisation and that once this was secured their political power would be assured, given that the South had become a one-party region (see Chapter Four).²⁸ They accepted with pride the label 'Bourbon' that had, initially, been bestowed upon them as an epithet by their political opponents who likened them to nineteenth century 'reactionary European monarchs who had learned nothing and forgotten nothing.'²⁹ (see Chapter Six) This reference, explicitly an analogy to the restoration of the French monarchy in 1815 after the abdication of Napoleon Bonaparte, struck Democratic elites as wholly appropriate for they saw themselves as the inheritors of the conservative belief that an educated and articulate elite should govern, virtuously, on behalf of the masses not capable of prudently governing themselves. More pragmatically, it suited their commercial and financial interests that government be the preserve of business concerns. These views were in accord with the rationalisation that conservatism serve to defend business interests, as cited above. Indeed, Bourbons were comfortable in referring to themselves as Conservatives in the immediate aftermath of Reconstruction. For the rest of the nineteenth century, for example in Alabama, the party officially titled itself 'Conservative and Democratic.'³⁰ This definition was appropriate in that the official party's *raison d'être* was to conserve the results of the counter-revolution that had redeemed the South from the control of the Federal government and the Republican Party. Consequently once returned to power 'their fiscal orthodoxy and *laissez-faire* preachments brought them powerful allies from industrial and urban elements,'³¹ determined to maintain their own positions of power and influence in a society which operated not only a caste system but one that was resolved to deny any semblance of social reform that might encourage the organisation of politics on class lines.

Bourbon Democrats vindicated their hegemonic position by claiming that they were the true inheritors of the party's Jeffersonian traditions. Jefferson was viewed by conservatives as the spiritual and philosophical father of the Democratic Party. They pointed to Jefferson's articulation of states' rights theory and credited him with the belief that the best government was that which governed least. Although this explicit expression, attributed to Jefferson, has never been found in his writings, he did believe that the states were 'the true

barriers of our liberty' against centralisation in government and thus were 'the wisest conservative power ever contrived by man.'³² Jefferson's apparent constitutional conservatism was illustrated by his description of federalism, with its clearly earmarked state and central government responsibilities, as 'the radical idea of the [C]onstitution' In addition, Jefferson considered the Tenth Amendment 'the foundation of our Constitution.'³³ In 1798 Jefferson wrote that '[w]henver the [g]eneral [g]overnment assumes undelegated powers, its acts are unauthoritative, void and of no force.'³⁴ In his first inaugural address in March 1801 Jefferson declared that 'state governments [were] the most competent administrations for our domestic concerns . . .'³⁵ Thus what was, of particular relevance to conservative Democrats was the symbolism of expropriating the name of an American icon to justify policies that supported and resulted in economy in government, minimal taxation and funding for social programmes such as education. For example, in a letter to Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts in 1799, Jefferson wrote 'I am for a government rigorously frugal and simple.'³⁶ Identifying themselves as natural leaders in the paternalistic tradition of the Founding Fathers these Democrats, according to Southern political historian Dewey Grantham, 'stressed the organic character of white society and appealed to the spirit of "*Herrenvolk* democracy" - a democratic society for whites only.'³⁷ Grantham argues that the Southern Democratic Party, as a consequence, represented less a political party than a social code and a state of mind.³⁸ By intoning the rhetoric of Southern nationalism and states' rights (see Chapter Four) Democratic Party leaders could present themselves as the first line of defence against Northern elites in the Federal government. They also used such rhetoric to stand against Northern industrial and financial interests. These interests, it was alleged, had sought to subjugate Southerners both politically and economically, and had imposed military defeat on the Confederacy in the Civil War, thus crushing the goal of the 'Lost Cause' of Southern independence (see Chapter Four). This type of conservatism, which appealed to white supremacy and Southern regionalism, was used by late nineteenth century Bourbon Democrats to forestall the potential for economic and political reform from developing in the population.

Populism and the Southern Democratic Party

Conservatism in the Southern Democratic Party was, however, pragmatic in accepting and embracing these economic trends which moved the South from an agrarian economy towards one that, by the beginning of the twentieth century, was becoming industrialised. It was in this area that Bourbon conservatives parted company with Jefferson agrarianism. Central to the populist Jeffersonian creed mythologised in the folkways of an agricultural society was the notion that the true American was a farmer. Jefferson wrote in *Notes on the State of Virginia* in 1784 that ‘those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God.’³⁹ However, as C. Van Woodward has written, the new conservatives ‘were of middle-class, industrial, capitalistic outlook, with little but a nominal connection with the old [pre-Civil War] planter regime.’⁴⁰ Market-oriented conservatism embraced *laissez-faire* economics in pursuit of profit. Such a system, in producing an aspirational society, was in keeping with the faith that, in America, hard work and initiative would bring its own rewards. One of the effects of industrialisation and the increasing role of capital in Southern economies, however, was the marginalisation of those who worked on the land. These dislocations gave rise to the populist movement of the late nineteenth century (see below and, in greater depth, Chapter Four).

Late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Southern conservatism extolled the virtues of an agrarian society. Here community was the ideal where families lived in ‘a patriarchal world . . . pre-or noncapitalist *because* [emphasis in the original] [it was] familial, located, pious, and “brotherly”; agrarian in order not to produce the alienated, atomistic individual . . .’⁴¹ In the early nineteenth century 95% of the American population were farmers ‘more self-sufficient and self-governing than they have ever been since.’⁴² Southern agrarians felt that capitalism promoted an avaricious individualism destructive of family, community and civic responsibility. This version of a conservatism rooted in the past and, at the very least, suspicious and often actively hostile toward modernity had much in common with the radical agrarian critique of society that was articulated by late nineteenth century populists. Populist agrarianism differed from the agrarian conservatism, as it was hostile to business elites that controlled interest rate levels and limited the availability of credit to

farmers. Agrarian populism saw the idea of America as a meritocracy of independent producers where the willingness to work diligently raised standards of living. By contrast, conservative agrarianism believed in a hierarchical society that endorsed divisions of society based on status and wealth.

Grantham describes the populist strain in Southern Democratic politics as ‘pro-agricultural, anti-urban, anti-merchant [and] anti-banker . . .’⁴³ Bourbon Democrat John Sharp Williams of Mississippi, who served in the U.S. Congress from 1893 to 1909 in the House and from 1911 to 1923 in the Senate (see Chapter Six), characterised the movement as ‘a revolt against all manner of superiorities be they of intellect, education or birth.’⁴⁴ Populists could as readily as conservatives find support for their anti-elitism in Jefferson’s writings. Jefferson, in a letter to Samuel Kercheval in 1816, wrote ‘I am not among those who fear the people. They, and not the rich, are our dependence for continued freedom.’⁴⁵ Similarly, in writing to John Adams in 1819, Jefferson expressed the belief that ‘[n]o government can continue, but under control of the people.’⁴⁶ References to the rights of ‘the people’ were frequent in the lexicon of populism and took cues from the opening words - ‘We the People’ - of the U.S. Constitution. Grantham argues that Populist Party ‘espousal of positive governmental action, business control, and political democracy made a lasting impression on [S]outhern politics . . .’⁴⁷ Well beyond the height of the rural agitation at the end of the nineteenth century, as documented in Chapters Five and Six, the populist, rural persuasion would be present in the Southern Democratic Party to counterbalance the conservative business-dominated and urban-oriented wing. Egon Bittner, as quoted by Tindall, traces the roots of American populism ‘back to the ideals of Jeffersonian Democracy.’⁴⁸ Southern Democrats eagerly seized on those facets of Jeffersonianism that articulated popular control of government, anti-elitism and states’ rights.

The levelling instincts of Democratic Party political rhetoric were added during the presidency of Andrew Jackson (1829-1837). During this era many states, including Alabama and Mississippi, wrote (or rewrote) their constitutions to include universal white male suffrage without property or tax-paying qualifications (see Chapters Five and Six) and made

more political offices elective via the popular ballot. Jackson was viewed by many Americans as an outsider who, born and raised on the frontier, represented ‘simplicity, integrity, and purity . . . against the debased, arrogant forces of entrenched power.’⁴⁹ Senator Thomas Hart Benson of Missouri said, on the occasion of Jackson’s election to the presidency in 1828, that ‘it was a triumph of democratic principle, and an assertion of the people’s right to govern themselves.’⁵⁰ Jacksonian rhetoric viewed government, prior to his election, as aiding the few at the expense of the many. Jackson said, on vetoing the second recharter of the Bank of the United States in 1832 that, ‘[i]t is to be regretted that the rich and powerful too often bend the act of government to their selfish purposes.’⁵¹ Whilst those that labour honestly and show superior industry were entitled to their reward, Jackson was opposed to the artificial elevation of some men above others. When

*the rich [became] richer and the potent more powerful, the humble members of society – farmers, mechanics and labourers – who have neither the time nor the means of securing like favours to themselves, have a right to complain of the injustice of their [g]overnment.*⁵²

This type of Jacksonian rhetoric, in combination with Jeffersonism, was to provide the Democratic Party with its historical *raison d’être* : to defend and protect the interests of the ‘average’ American workingman and his family from the depredations of privileged elites in government and business. Historian Eric Foner wrote that ‘[b]y the Age of Jackson . . . Democrats identified government-granted privilege as the root cause of social injustice.’⁵³ The working man was ‘the bone and sinew’ of America who should be supported to prevent him becoming the ‘[hewer] of wood and [drawer] of water to the monied aristocracy of the country.’⁵⁴ It gave the party a populist language that offered government-sponsored reform while denouncing elites and their privilege yet did not deny the equal right of men to gain wealth and status if honestly achieved. As Foner argues Democrats, beginning in the Jacksonian era, believed ‘labour was the source of all wealth and the worker [was] entitled to the fruits of his toil, . . . [T]he ideal of the autonomous small producer re-emerged . . . as a full-fledged critique of early capitalism.’⁵⁵ Jackson, according to Richard Hofstadter,

‘understood the old Jefferson[ian] bias against overgrown government machinery, the [Southerner’s] resentment of the entrenched East, the new politician’s dislike of the old bureaucracy, and the aspiring citizen’s hatred of privilege.’⁵⁶

The radical element of populism, that went beyond the rhetorical Jeffersonian-Jacksonian homage to the inherent worth of the people, lay in invocation of the powers of the Federal government to mitigate the effects of untrammelled capitalism (see Chapter Four). This was first evident with the rise of a number of agrarian protest movements following the end of the Civil War that culminated in the formation of the Populist Party in the 1890s, gaining its strongest adherence in the plains and Southern states. In recognising the plight of farmers Populists posed a threat to the hegemony of the Bourbon Democracy. Whilst the Populist Party did not achieve permanence as an organised third party in American (or Southern) politics the movement had articulated and reawakened the anti-elitist strain in Southern Democratic politics. From this point onwards the populist element would become a fixture within the party (see Chapters Five and Six).

The populist tendency was solidified by changes to internal party rules during the early years of the twentieth century. One of the results of the Populist movement was a drive to democratise the system of selecting Democratic Party nominees to contest federal and state general elections. The previous conservative dominated method of choosing candidates via state party conventions that were frequently stage managed by the party hierarchy was replaced by the direct primary election where participation was limited to voters who had cast ballots in favour of the Democratic nominee at the last election. The effect, given the absence of competition from the Republican Party, was that the primary decided the election. The promise, however, that the primary would give the ordinary white man (blacks and women were excluded⁵⁷) a means of influence, by virtue of casting an honest ballot, led to the return to the party of dissident Democrats and erstwhile Populists and created greater internal party competition. The exclusion of blacks from the political process enabled issues other than race to assume prominence. The ‘[S]outhern primary did a good deal to legitimate individual and factional competition within the party. In practice the primary contributed to a politics of

personality and rhetorical excess.⁵⁸ Chester Morgan writes that the flamboyance and appeals of this style of campaigning ‘was assuredly aimed at the *demos*.’⁵⁹ The introduction of the primary put a premium on, first, direct political appeals to the electorate and, second, on empathy with the lives of the ‘folks’. Describing the hold that Jim Folsom’s 1946 candidacy for the Alabama governorship (see Chapter Five) held with the electorate journalist John Temple Graves wrote that he ‘hypnotised’ them.

*Folsom [Graves wrote] just stands up before our fine farm people and says ‘fokes.’ Then he says it again – ‘fokes.’ And then he says it a few more times – ‘fokes’ – and you feel all warm and happy and careless.*⁶⁰

During the same campaign Folsom described the proper way to pick, wash and cook turnip greens to show he was a genuine farm boy. When Handy Ellis, one of his Democratic primary opponents, tried to convey the same image by releasing a photograph of himself hitched to a mule plough, Folsom pointed out that the animal was improperly harnessed.⁶¹ Such anecdotes inspired a fierce loyalty to candidates who voters perceived as being on their side. In 1962 the owner of a crossroads store in Abbeville in southeast Alabama said

*Mister, let me tell you something. Jim Folsom is the only candidate that ever came by our store and sat in that old chair and reached in that sack and took a handful of peanuts and talked to us as if he belonged here and was one of us. I want you to know we will vote for him every time he runs.*⁶²

In addition to touting the simple virtues of the ordinary voter and demonstrating a relation to their lives, campaign rhetoric required denunciations, often littered with sarcastic references, of the elitism of political opponents and corporate elites. For example, in 1914 Mississippi U.S. Senator James Vardaman attacked the nomination of Thomas Jones, a director of the International Harvester Company, to the Federal Reserve Board. Vardaman said that ‘I would as soon think of men of that school of thought doing anything in the interest of the toiling masses as I would expect protection for the lamb at the hands of the wolf or the coyote.’⁶³ U.S. Senator Theodore Bilbo, having no regard for senatorial courtesy, poured out his disgust with U.S. Senator Carter Glass of Virginia for his opposition to President

Roosevelt's proposals to reform the Supreme Court in 1937. Bilbo expressed regret that anyone might be convinced by

*[t]he unctuous, high-sounding and hypocritical explosions of old man Carter Glass, the aristocrat . . . and the known sympathiser and manipulator of the predatory interests . . . He is old, feeble, irritable and senile . . . and when he dies [it would be fitting if] old Andy Mellon would pass out at the same time : [then] these two old corporate fossils could be buried in the same grave, on the right-hand side of the House of [J.P.] Morgan where their sympathies and hearts have always been.*⁶⁴

Nor did populist rhetoric demonstrate deference to U.S. presidents. Vardaman, in 1910, described President William Taft as 'addicted to guff, golf and gab, and his smile is set in his face like the grin of a dead pig.'⁶⁵ More recently, in 1990 Alabama U.S. Senator Howell Heflin described his Republican opponent Bill Cabaniss, a resident of the wealthy Birmingham suburb of Mountain Brook as one of those 'Gucci-clothed, Mercedes-driving, Perrier-drinking, Aspen-skiing, rich-society Republicans who don't eat broccoli.'⁶⁶ The persistence of populist rhetoric was evident in Dewayne Freeman's 1998 campaign for the lieutenant governorship of Alabama. Freeman recalled during the campaign how his grandfather had grown potatoes and touted his own working man's background. Freeman said

*[t]he big distinction [between me and my opponent] is, you're going to see me in the position of looking out for the needs of the workingmen and women of this state, and making sure that some of the so-called big boys don't penalise them by taking away some of their rights'*⁶⁷

Similarly, in 1998 U.S. House Democratic candidate for the Third Alabama Congressional District Don Bevill said '[w]e're the guys with the white hats. We represent all the people. [My opponent] represents big business and big-monied interests.'⁶⁸

Conclusion

Populism in the Democratic Party began, by the late nineteenth century, to assume its radical edge in economic issues with the call for government intervention to aid those people in

economic difficulty who were unable to compete in an unequal world where government had, it was believed, been perverted to serve business interests at the expense of 'the people.' Populist politicians in the party traditionally 'articulated what many felt - a vague but general hostility towards wealth and power and towards those who possessed either.'⁶⁹ Such a stance can be witnessed most clearly, for example, in the Southern electorates' overwhelming support of the New Deal measures of the 1930s to alleviate poverty via programmes initiated and funded by central government (see Chapter Four). The Jeffersonian homage to the rights of the people was cited by Democrats during the Depression to indicate that Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal was 'a philosophy essentially Jeffersonian.'⁷⁰ In dedicating the Jeffersonian Memorial in 1943 Roosevelt expropriated Jefferson's heritage for the Democratic Party in saying '[h]e believed, as we believe, that men are capable of their own government . . .'⁷¹ Deprivation was especially severe in the South and no more so than in states such as Alabama and Mississippi that were still heavily agricultural despite the trends toward industrialisation. At times such as this, rigid adherence to states' rights doctrine and limited government was impractical. To accept Federal aid was a pragmatic response to economic crisis amid calls that the extent of the hardships caused by the Depression necessitated more radical solutions. Therefore, descriptions of Southern political culture as conservative fail to recognise the reformist impact of populism and its radical impulses in bringing into politics, by the early years of the twentieth century, poor whites who had hitherto been marginalised in a political process dominated by business elites.

Populism, as intimated above, also encapsulated reactionary and conservative elements. Later chapters consider politicians such as Alabama governor George Wallace (1963-1967, 1971-1979 and 1983-1987) and Mississippi governor Bilbo (1916-1920 and 1928-1932) and U.S. Senator (1935-1947) who used demagogic techniques with rhetoric that included overt and, especially in Bilbo's case, lurid racism. (After the civil rights revolution of the 1960s such racial rhetoric would disappear as blacks became the most loyally Democratic voters in both states.) Wallace, Bilbo and others, such as Jim Folsom of Alabama and James Vardaman of Mississippi, stressed their opposition to those who demeaned the

common folk. Populist politicians such as these consistently referred to the common sense of the ordinary voter and their speeches emphasised how they, themselves, were no different from those they spoke for. Wallace, for example, was described by one of his biographers Marshall Frady as

*the very incarnation of the 'folks,' the embodiment of the will and sensibilities and discontents of the people in the roadside diners and all-night chili cafes, the cabdrivers and waitresses and plant workers, as well as a certain harried . . . population of dingy-collared department-store clerks and insurance salesmen and neighbourhood grocers.*⁷²

Wallace's campaigns both for the Alabama governorship and for the Presidency during the 1960s and 1970s highlighted the culturally conservative strain of populism with its hostility toward change and innovation, together with a desire to return to a time when traditional values were respected, within a language that consistently paid homage to class resentments. Added to a belief that the national Democratic Party had become too supportive of minorities and too willing to fund Federal welfare programmes at the expense of tax-payers white Southerners found themselves increasingly detached from the party on economic issues.⁷³ Similarly, on the social or 'family values' issue the national Democratic Party ceded much ground to the Republicans during the 1970s and 1980s as it was perceived to be 'soft' on issues of personal morality, too willing to side with the rights of criminals rather than with those of the victim and insufficiently attentive to the commitment to religiosity in the South (see Chapters Three and Four). At the same time as Chapters Five and Six demonstrate, however, the Democrats in Alabama and Mississippi continued to win state and local elections in the face of Republican Party gains. These failed, however, to match the extent of those made by presidential Republicans in the post-civil rights era of the mid-1960s and beyond, suggestive that voters were differentiating between state (and local) and national Democratic Party candidates.

This chapter has sought to define populist thought amongst white Southern Democrats. In conclusion, it is argued here that Democratic Party populism is an amalgam of

economic reformism sponsored by federal and state governments and conservative views on social issues within the context of respect for the state's prerogatives of the Tenth Amendment. In addition, populist thought is presented with anti-elite rhetoric that emphasises the virtue of the people and recognises that it is they who are, ultimately, sovereign.

The following chapter demonstrates how the Democratic Party dominated elections for the presidency and the U.S. House of Representatives in both Alabama and Mississippi when it adhered to the synthesis of populist and conservative views that this chapter has outlined. The party would retain the support of the region's white voters only as long as it was perceived to be acting in defence of Southern values and, most notably, of states' rights. Chapter Three considers two key turning points in the Democratic Party's history, i.e. the presidential elections of 1948 and 1964, which signalled the demise of the Democratic 'Solid South, brought into being by the Compromise of 1877.

Chapter Two Footnotes

- 1 George Tindall, *The Ethnic Southerners* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press 1976), p 171. See also Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion. An American History* (New York : Basic Books 1995), pp 3 and 271.
- 2 Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage. George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York : Simon and Shuster 1995), pp 193 and 222.
- 3 Tindall, pp 176-177.
- 4 Kenneth R. Hoover, *Ideology and Political Life* (Belmont. Ca.: Wadworth 1994), p 92.
- 5 Kazin, p 1.
- 6 Tindall quoting Shils' essay 'Intellectuals,' p 174.
- 7 Margaret Canovan, 'Trust the People ! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy,' *Political Studies* Volume 47 Number 1 March 1999.
- 8 Tindall, p 177.
- 9 Ibid, p 182.
- 10 Ibid, p 178.
- 11 Hoover, p 91.
- 12 Canovan, p 3.
- 13 James P. Youngdale, *Populism. A Psychological Perspective* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press 1975). See also Chandler Davidson, *Race and Class in Texas Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press 1990), pp 5-7.
- 14 Youngdale, p 141.
- 15 Catherine McNichol Stock, *Rural Radicals. From Bacon's Rebellion to the Oklahoma City Bombing* (Harmondsworth : Penguin 1996), p 7.
- 16 Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, pp 39 and 70.
- 17 Ibid, p 145.
- 18 For an examination of the ideas of American conservative theoreticians see George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (New York : Basic

Books 1979). See also John P. East, *The American Conservative Movement : The Philosophical Founders* (Chicago, Il.: Regenery Books 1986) and Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Movement From Burke to Elliott* (Washington, D.C.: Regenery Books 1953).

19 For works on conservatism in general and its application to American political thought see Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Indianapolis, In.: Bobbs-Merrill 1955 originally published 1790); Charles W. Dunn and J. David Woodard, *The Conservative Tradition in America* (Lanham, Md.: Rowan and Littlefield 1996); Eugene D. Genovese, *The Southern Tradition. The Achievement and Limitations of an American Conservatism* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press 1994); Allen Gutmann, *The Conservative Tradition in America* (New York : Oxford University Press 1967); Forrest McDonald, 'Conservatism,' in Jack P. Greene (ed), *Encyclopaedia of American Political Cultures* (New York : Charles Scribner's 1984); Robert Nisbet, *Conservatism : Dream and Reality* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press 1986); Clinton Rossiter, *Conservatism in America. The Thankless Persuasion* (New York : Alfred A. Knopf 1955); Melvin J. Thorne, *American Conservative Thought Since World War Two. The Core Ideals* (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press 1990) and Andrew Vincent, *Modern Political Ideologies* (Oxford : Blackwell 1995).

20 John Shelton Reed, *Whistling Dixie. Dispatches From the South* (Columbia, Md.: University of Missouri Press 1990), p 132.

21 Thorne, pp 4 and 9.

22 Kazin, p 283.

23 Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand. The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (New York : Peter Smith 1951 originally published 1930). See also Genovese, p 34; Fred Hobson, *Tell About the South. The Southern Rage to Explain* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press 1983), pp 180-243; Stock, p 53 and Tindall, *The Ethnic Southerners*, pp 26 and 33. For fuller insights into the ideas of Southern agrarians see Mark G. Malvasi, *The Unregenerate South. The Agrarian Thought of John Ransom Crowe, Allen Tate and Donald Davidson* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press 1997) and Michael O'Brien, *The*

Ideas of the American South 1920-1941 (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press 1979).

24 Alphonse Vinh, book review of Clyde N. Wilson's *A Defender of Southern Conservatism. M.E. Bradford and His Achievement* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press 1999), *Southern Cultures* Volume 6 Summer 2000, p 80.

25 Sarah E. Gardner, 'Every Man Has Got a Right to Get Killed ?' *Southern Cultures* Volume 5 Winter 1999, p 33.

26 Alan Wolfe, 'The Revolution That Never Was,' *New Republic* June 7 1999, p 36.

27 William D. Barnard, *Dixiecrats and Democrats. Alabama Politics 1942-1950* (University, Al.: University of Alabama Press 1974), p 65.

28 J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics. Suffrage Restrictions and the Establishment of the One-Party South 1880-1910* (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press 1974).

29 Dewey W. Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South* (Lexington, Ky : University of Kentucky Press 1988), p7. See also Hugh C. Davis, 'Hilary A. Herbert. Bourbon Apologist,' *Alabama Review* Volume 20 July 1967, p 222. Herbert was the co-author of a work entitled *Why the Solid South ? Or, Reconstruction and its Results* published in 1890.

30 Peter Camejo, *Racism, Reaction, Revolution 1861-1877. The Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction* (New York : Pathfinder Press 1976), p 142. See also Grantham, p 12 and Tindall, p 123.

31 Grantham, p 12.

32 Thomas Jefferson on Politics and Government, 'Number 14. The Constitution : State and Federal,' <http://etext.virginia.edu/jefferson/quotations/jeff0900.htm>.

33 David N. Mayer, *The Constitutional Thought of Thomas Jefferson* (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press 1994), pp 187-188. See also Joseph Ellis, *American Sphinx. The Character of Thomas Jefferson* (New York : Vintage Books 1998); Robert A. Garson, *The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism 1941-1948* (Baton Rouge, La.; Louisiana State University Press 1974), pp 276-277 and John Lauritz Larson, 'Jefferson's Union and the

Problems of Internal Improvements,' in Peter S. Onuf (ed), *Jeffersonian Legacies* (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press 1993), p 353. For a disquisition on Jefferson's views on the role of government see Eyler Robert Coates, Sr., 'That Government is Best,' <http://www.geocities.com/capitolhill/7970/jrfpc009.htm>.

34 Thomas Jefferson on Politics and Government, 'The Constitution.' See also Noble E. Cunningham Jr., 'Jeffersonian Democracy,' in Greene (ed), *The Encyclopaedia of American Political Cultures*, p 673. For more general treatments of Jeffersonianism see David Mayer, *The Constitutional Thought of Thomas Jefferson op cit*, Onuf (ed), *Jeffersonian Legacies, op cit* and Merrill D. Peterson, *The Jeffersonian Image in the American Mind*, (New York : Oxford University Press 1985).

35 Cunningham, p 675.

36 Ibid, p 675.

37 Grantham, p 7. See also Ellis, p 356 and Garson, p xi.

38 Grantham, p 5 citing the work of Charles Chilton Pearson, *The Readjuster Movement in Virginia* (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press 1917).

39 Cunningham, p 675.

40 C. Van Woodward, *Origins of the New South 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press 1951), p 20. See also Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South*, p 61.

41 Genovese, *The Southern Tradition*, p 17. See also O'Brien, *The Ideas of the American South*, pp 117-208.

42 See Clay Jenkinson, 'Searching For Jefferson in a Fallen World,' <http://thjefferson.org/html/jenkinson-s-jefferson-writings.html> and Stock, *Rural Radicals*, p 33.

43 Grantham, p 17.

44 Cecil Johnson, 'A Letter From John Sharp Williams,' *Journal of Mississippi History* Volume 23 1961, p 230. See also, William D. Holmes, *The White Chief. James Kimble Vardaman* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press 1970), p 179.

45 Thomas Jefferson on Government and Politics, Number 6 : The Safest Depository, <http://etext.virginia.edu/jefferson/quotations.jeff0350.htm>; Federalist Number 10 and Thomas Jefferson, <http://geocities.com/capitolhill/7970.jefpco.htm>. See also Cunningham, 'Jeffersonian Democracy,' in Greene (ed), *Encyclopaedia of American Political Cultures*, p 675 and Ellis, pp 161 and 297.

46 Thomas Jefferson on Government and Politics, 'The Safest Depository.'

47 Grantham, p 17.

48 Tindall, *The Ethnic Southerners*, p 175.

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53 Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (London : Picador 1999), p 54.

54 Robert A. Rutland, *The Democrats From Jefferson to Carter* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press 1979), p 58.

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- 58 Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South*, p 29.
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- 60 Barnard, *Dixiecrats and Democrats*, p 44.
- 61 George E. Sims, *The Little Man's Big Friend. James E. Folsom in Alabama Politics 1946-1958* (University, Al.: University of Alabama Press 1985), pp 30-31.
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- 64 Morgan, pp 165-166.
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- 66 Patrick R. Cotter and Tom Gordon, 'The GOP Rises in the Heart of Dixie,' in Alexander Lamis (ed), *Southern Politics in the 1990s* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press 1999), p 230.
- 67 David White, 'Freeman Riding Roots in Blue Collar Stance,' *Birmingham News* October 4 1998, <http://www.al.com/news/birmingham/1998-10-04/freeman.html>.
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- 69 Barnard, p 31.
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- 71 Cunningham, 'Jeffersonian Democracy,' p 678.
- 72 Marshall Frady, *Wallace* (New York : New American Library 1976), p 9. See also Rick Bragg, *Redbirds. Memories of the South* (London : Harvill Press 1998), p 60.
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CHAPTER THREE

PRESIDENTIAL AND CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS IN ALABAMA AND MISSISSIPPI 1876-2000

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is threefold. First, it demonstrates that the ideology of Jeffersonianism, predicated on the primacy of states' rights (and detailed in the previous chapter) continued to inform the values and political philosophy of the Southern Democratic Party after the Civil War and into the twentieth century. During this period, until the changes wrought by the civil rights era of the 1960s (which the chapter subsequently expands upon), the Democratic Party's dominance at all levels of electoral office, from local offices such as county commissioner to those running for state and Federal office, was so complete that the term 'Solid South' (see Chapter One) has frequently been applied to describe the dominance of the Democratic Party to the extent that the South was a *de facto* one party region. Throughout the period the Southern Democratic Party remained broadly wedded to the principle that the states were sovereign and no interference in the right of states to conduct matters to their own satisfaction according to the dictates of the Tenth Amendment should be brooked from the Federal government, especially in matters concerning race relations.

Second, having outlined the general philosophy of the Southern Democratic Party in the South in the previous chapter, this chapter turns to the specific examples of Alabama and Mississippi to demonstrate graphically, via a survey of presidential and House of Representatives election returns in these two states from 1876 to 1960, how the dominance of Democratic Party philosophy, centred around fealty to states' rights principles, was evident in voting habits. (State elections are analysed in Chapters Five and Six, on Alabama and Mississippi, respectively)

Third, the chapter highlights two critical phases when the Democratic Party's dominance was threatened as challenges to its hegemony were made in the presidential election of 1948 and in both presidential and House voting in the 1960s. In both instances the

actions of the national Party in promoting desegregationist policies in the South conflicted with states' rights theory embedded in Southern Democratic political philosophy. As a consequence, the Southern wing of the party suffered a loss of support in presidential and House elections, the former first evident in 1948, the latter beginning with the election of 1964, as white voters perceived the national Democratic Party as no longer sympathetic to Southern values of constitutional conservatism and state sovereignty. Instead they found such values being more genuinely, at least rhetorically, upheld by the Republican Party.

Essentially, the chapter argues, the South did not undergo a change of political heart in its increasing endorsement of Republican presidential and House candidates. Indeed its conservative belief that the federal government should not interfere with the states' prerogatives remained constant. Where fundamental change had taken place was in the increasing dominance of the liberal wing within the national Democratic Party, a development that this chapter argues began in 1948 with the passage by the presidential nominating convention of the first pro-civil rights platform in any national Democratic Party platform. This trend continued over the following two decades, as the liberal wing of the party pressed for the passage of landmark civil rights legislation in the mid-1960s and culminated with the selection of a succession of liberal Presidential nominees in the 1970s and 1980s, namely George McGovern in 1972, Walter Mondale in 1984 and Michael Dukakis in 1988. The national Democratic Party was perceived, by the South, to be abandoning core states' rights beliefs. One key consequence was the national party's endorsement of major changes in race relations. Consequently, the Southern voter had little reason to have faith in a party whose fundamental and time-honoured doctrines no longer seemed to apply. Thus a precipitate decline in the party's fortunes at the presidential level in the South is clear, beginning with the presidential election of 1948.

In U.S. House elections, while the decline was not as dramatic or precipitate a demise as at the presidential level, the Democratic Party's prospects also suffered. The process, first evident in the 1964 House elections, was to take longer to arrive than Republican presidential successes had. The chapter concludes by suggesting that it is still possible to recognise a

'Solid South' but it is one that could be more accurately applied to describe Republican rather than Democratic supremacy in both presidential and Congressional politics. More soberly, however, it would be entirely accurate to categorise the South in the early twenty-first century as a region of two-party competition.

While it could be argued, however, that these Republican successes indicate a victory for conservative politics, an alternative explanation suggests that the influence of populism was more powerful. The Republicans, since the civil rights era, played upon traditional Southern states' rights sensibilities in rejecting Federal government intrusion into controversial areas such as race relations and affirmative action. Republicans embellished this by pointing out that such directives were supported by liberal elites in the national Democratic Party and administered by unaccountable bureaucrats in the Federal government. Thus, the Republicans combined states' rights conservatism with anti-elitist populism whilst, simultaneously, damning the Democratic Party for standing in direct opposition to both of these erstwhile Southern Democratic articles of faith.

Evidence for these later developments is revealed in the tabulations of election returns in Alabama and Mississippi from the watershed elections of the 1960s through to 2000, including the 1994 Congressional voting that saw the Republican Party take control of the House of Representatives for the first time since 1955. Republican Party majority rule has the potential to marginalise Democrats in the South further now that its incumbents are no longer part of a House majority. Meanwhile, there are fewer attractions for aspiring politicians seeking entrance to politics via the vehicle of a party lacking power and influence. These developments, and their consequences, are explored in greater depth in Chapter Seven. The present chapter, however, begins with reference to the Compromise of 1877 from which the Democratic Party emerged as the hegemonic political power in the South. The consequences of this arrangement had profound effects on Southern politics over the next seventy years, principal amongst them was the domination of the Democratic Party at all election levels, until the changes wrought by the Civil Rights revolution of the 1960s. These

developments and their effects on the electoral fortunes of the Democratic Parties of Alabama and Mississippi and outlined in this chapter.

The Compromise of 1877

The Compromise of 1877¹ refers to the agreement reached between the national Democratic and Republican Parties following the disputed presidential election of 1876. The Democratic candidate Samuel Tilden of New York, played heavily on Southern perceptions of Republican misrule in the South during the Reconstruction years following Southern defeat in the Civil War (see Chapter Four), received 184 electoral votes. The Republican candidate Rutherford Hayes of Ohio, won 165. The required number to win the electoral college, and hence to be elected president was 185. Exacerbating sectional tensions was the fact that three states - Louisiana, Florida and South Carolina - had each failed to declare a result, each also being under the control of Republican Reconstruction administrations. Clearly, Hayes had to win all these votes plus that of a disputed elector in Oregon in order to win the presidency. Competing sets of electors each proclaimed for their candidate, creating a deadlocked election where neither candidate conceded the election to the other. With the law lacking explicit reference on issues of such a nature e.g. which body was entitled to count, and adjudicate such disputes, the deadlock continued. The compromise that emerged (one complicated by the House of Representatives' refusal to ratify a Hayes victory given its control by a Democratic majority) allowed Hayes to become President. The price for Southern acquiescence in such an outcome was to be guaranteed 'home rule' in the region. Crucially, this meant withdrawal of Federal troops that had guaranteed the Republican governments in the South and the abandonment of the freed slaves. The long-term result was the *de facto* emasculation of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution that had granted ex-slaves citizenship and voting rights.

Thus whilst the Democrats lost the presidency - possibly only for the four years until the next presidential voting scheduled for 1880 - they gained *carte blanche* to run affairs as

they chose in the region. Neither federal interference nor the organised opposition of an alternative political voice to prevent white dominance of race relations, now that the Republican Party was indelibly associated with the invasion of Southern soil during the Civil War and Reconstruction and with the abolition of slavery, could prevail. The South thus remained able to prescribe affairs as it saw fit according to the dictates of states' rights theory until 1957 when President Dwight Eisenhower used federal troops to enforce the integration of the Central High school in Little Rock, Arkansas, mandated by the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown versus Board of Education* three years previously. The immediate and durable outcome of the Compromise of 1877 was the 'redemption' of the South from the 'Yankee' Republicans, and the creation of the 'Solid South', which this chapter describes. The following paragraphs demonstrate statistically the extent of the Party's dominance in presidential and House elections in both Alabama and Mississippi from Reconstruction to 1960.

The Democrats in Alabama: Presidential Elections 1876-1960

In the twenty-two presidential elections from 1876 to 1960, the era of the Democrats greatest dominance (see Table 3.1),² the head of the presidential ticket in general election years averaged 65% in Alabama and ran, on average, 20% ahead of the party's national share of the vote. As a measure of such support no Democratic presidential nominee failed to gain over 50% (even the Catholic and anti-Prohibition candidate Al Smith of New York, least likely of all presidential nominees in this period to be popular in the South,³ scored 52% in Alabama in the Republican landslide that brought victory to Herbert Hoover in the presidential election of 1928). Only Harry Truman during this period was not endorsed by Alabamians. In the particular circumstances of the 1948 election year, recounted later in the chapter, Truman failed to get on the ballot as the Alabama Democratic Party supported the candidature of the states' rights or 'Dixiecrat' Governor Strom Thurmond of South Carolina who, running in

Alabama as the official Democrat, gained 80% of the vote. Apart from this anomaly Alabama supported all Democratic presidential candidates, even those who lost both the popular and electoral college vote by huge margins, such as Alton Parker (1904) who gained 73% of the popular vote in Alabama and only 38% nationally, John Cox (1920) whose 67% statewide total compared to his 34% of the popular vote nationwide, and John Davis (1924) whose 70% of Alabama ballots dwarfed the 29% he won in the U.S. popular vote.

The Democrats in Mississippi: Presidential Elections 1876-1960

A review of presidential elections in Mississippi from 1876 to 1960 reveals a similar trend from that evident in Alabama (see Table 3.1). In terms of raw percentages the figures in support of the Democrats are even more remarkable than in Alabama. For example, Franklin Roosevelt, in his four presidential election victories from 1932 to 1944, averaged 96% of the popular vote. The lowest share of the popular vote achieved by any Democratic presidential candidate from 1880 to 1944 was the 64% scored by Grover Cleveland of New York in 1884. Avowed Republicans were regarded as, at best, unusual, as the following recollection by Kenneth Hilditch, of Tupelo, Mississippi demonstrates. Hilditch recalled that '[w]e also had our village Republican, just one, who cast Tupelo's sole vote for Thomas Dewey in 1948, thereby aligning himself, for all who knew his identity, with the camp of dope fiends and the atheist.'⁴

Such percentages were unprecedented, even in the context of Democratic dominance in the South but the figure should be set in the context of very low voter turnout. For example, in the 1920 Presidential election, less than 10% of voting-age Mississippians turned out, a statistic indicative of the absence of two-party competition and, moreover (see Chapters Four and Six), of the restrictions on the exercise of the franchise in the state.⁵ Not until 1960 did Mississippi turnout figures reach 50% of registered voters ⁶ (but only 25% of those of voting age).⁷ As one point of comparison between the two states, Smith who gained 52% of the popular vote in 1928 in Alabama, was the choice of 82% of those voting in Mississippi. The average share of the popular vote throughout this period for all Democratic presidential candidates was 77% as the Democratic ticket on average ran 30% higher in Mississippi than

in the country at large. As in Alabama, Mississippi rewarded all Democratic presidential candidates with huge percentages of the popular vote even for those that were defeated nationally in landslides by Republican nominees. For example, the share of the popular vote in Mississippi for national candidates Parker (1904), Cox (1920), and Davis (1924) was 91%, 84% and 90% respectively whilst their candidacies received correspondingly 38%, 34% and 29% of the popular vote nationally. However, national Democrats were not guaranteed success if they were deemed to be unsympathetic to Southern interests as the chapter later examines. Truman, whilst managing to get on the ballot in the 1948 presidential election, only achieved 10% of the popular vote and in the presidential voting of 1960 an unpledged slate of electors supported by the segregationist Democratic Governor Ross Barnett won the state's electoral votes, pushing the Party's official nominee, John Kennedy, into second place with only 36% of the popular vote.

Table 3.1 Popular vote (%) for Democratic Presidential Nominees in Alabama and Mississippi 1876-1960

		<u>Alabama</u>	<u>Mississippi</u>	<u>U.S.A</u>
1876	Samuel Tilden	60	68	51
1880	Winfield Hancock	60	65	48
1884	Grover Cleveland	61	64	49
1888	Grover Cleveland	67	74	49
1892	Grover Cleveland	59	76	46
1896	William Jennings Bryan	67	91	47
1900	William Jennings Bryan	61	88	46
1904	Alton Parker	73	91	37
1908	William Jennings Bryan	71	90	43
1912	Woodrow Wilson	70	89	42
1916	Woodrow Wilson	76	93	49
1920	John Cox	67	84	34
1924	John Davis	70	89	29
1928	Al Smith	52	82	41
1932	Franklin Roosevelt	85	96	57
1936	Franklin Roosevelt	86	97	61
1940	Franklin Roosevelt	85	96	55
1944	Franklin Roosevelt	81	93	54
1948	Harry Truman	n/a	10	50
1952	Adlai Stevenson	65	60	44
1956	Adlai Stevenson	56	58	42
1960	John Kennedy	57	36	50

The Democrats in Alabama: U.S. House of Representatives Elections 1876-1960

A brief survey of U.S. House returns in the 1876-1960 period in both states reveals that Democratic hegemony was not restricted to dominance at presidential level (see Table 3.1). Starting with House election returns in Alabama one may quote at random any year's results during this era to indicate the total control of Democrats in the state in U.S. House elections. In summary the Democrats held every U.S. House seat in Alabama from 1878 until 1964 with the exception of the seventh congressional district won by Milford Howard of the Populist Party in 1894 and 1896. The only other exception was in 1878 where a Greenback Democrat, advocating an inflationary policy of circulating paper money, defeated a regular party Democrat.

It was not until 1964 that the Republicans won a U.S. House seat in Alabama, the first such success since the Reconstruction-era election of 1874. In many electoral cycles most Democratic incumbents and nominees had no or only token opposition. Indeed, in 1876 and 1942 no Republican candidates ran in any Alabama House district. Republicans showed such weakness during the presidencies of Franklin Roosevelt that in 1940 only 15,000 ballots were cast for Republican party candidates in nine Alabama House districts compared to over 250,000 for their Democratic counterparts. In this election only two Democrats received any opposition. In 1948, the year when Strom Thurmond was the official Democratic Party presidential candidate in Alabama (see Chapter Three), the highest total share of the vote managed by any Republican House candidate was 18%. In 1950 only one Republican stood for Congress, gaining 980 votes in the fourth congressional district, less than 1% of votes cast for all candidates in elections to the U.S. House of Representatives in the state. Whilst Truman, as a national Democrat, had failed even to get on the ballot in the 1948 presidential election in Alabama, Democrats running for the House as 'Alabama Democrats' continued to receive the overwhelming loyalty of the states' voters. This trend was further in evidence in the 1950s when, despite Republican Presidential candidate Dwight Eisenhower's consecutive election victories including gains in the South including winning the electoral votes of Florida, Louisiana, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia, Republicans continued to show weakness

in U.S. House elections in Alabama and, indeed, throughout the South. In the 1956 House elections only three Republicans ran in Alabama whilst two years later the total Republican vote in Alabama in all nine House Districts was 6,050. Such anaemic performances were to give no hint of the profound electoral changes that were to begin to manifest themselves in House elections in the 1960s that continued over the next several decades, as this Chapter subsequently shows.

The Democrats in Mississippi: U.S. House of Representatives Elections 1876-1960

In the period from the end of Reconstruction to 1960 the trends noted when comparing Alabama and Mississippi’s presidential voting records are repeated for each state’s U.S. House election results (see Table 3.2). Once again, Mississippi voters demonstrated undisputed fealty to the Democratic Party, only to an even greater extent than in Alabama. For example, from 1924 to 1930 inclusive, and in 1934, 1936, 1938 and 1942 no Republicans at all ran for office in any of Mississippi’s Congressional districts. When this run was broken, in 1944, the only Republican to compete for any House district gained only 7% of the total votes cast. These trends continued in the post-war period when the highest Republican share of the vote in any Mississippi district from 1946 to 1960 was 13%. Not until 1964 did Mississippi elect a Republican, Prentiss Walker, the first to serve in Congress since 1875. Indicative of the Republican Party’s invisibility in Mississippi’s House elections prior to 1960 is the performance of the Socialist Party, which in the early years of the twentieth century achieved greater success at the ballot than the Republicans. The Socialists ran more candidates than their Republican counterparts in 1904, 1914 and 1918. Although the total of Socialist popular votes cast in 1918 was 523 this was more than the Republicans who failed to offer any candidates for election to the U.S. House.

Table 3.2 Democratic Party Average Share of the Popular Vote (%) Per Decade in the U.S. House of Representatives Elections in Alabama and Mississippi 1876-1960

	<u>Alabama</u>	<u>Mississippi</u>
1870s	59	65
1880s	69	71
1890s	65	77

1900s	82	98
1910s	85	99
1920s	81	99
1930s	90	99
1940s	94	98
1950s	94	99

Civil Rights and the Presidential Election of 1948: The Dixiecrats

The preceding paragraphs, and the accompanying tables, indicate graphically the dominance of the Democratic Party in presidential and congressional elections, in the South in general, and in Alabama and Mississippi in particular. The term the ‘Solid South’ (see Chapter One) is, therefore, used advisedly to describe Democratic hegemony during the period from 1876 to 1960. As the chapter returns its focus to an examination of the presidential elections of this era, it is apparent, however, that the ‘Solid South’ was breached in 1948. As Jack Bass and Walter DeVries argue this began ‘a revolt of almost three decades against the national Democratic Party, whose leadership had come to realise that a regional system of racial discrimination could not be tolerated after American blacks had fought in World War II to preserve democratic institutions.’⁸

In recognition of this President Truman, as the titular head of the national party, had committed the party to supporting civil rights for blacks. To further this end, in early 1948, he endorsed the recommendations in the October 1947 report of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, chaired by General Electric president Charles Wilson, entitled *To Secure These Rights*.⁹ This was to have a direct impact upon the South and strike a blow at the core Southern ideology that states’ rights were paramount and that the regulation of race relations was a state and not a Federal government responsibility. The Committee recommended the establishment of a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) to monitor racial discrimination in employment practices, the introduction of an anti-lynching law, the abolition of the poll tax and the end of discrimination in interstate transportation facilities. All this would be ratified by Congressional legislation. To Southern Democrats this was blatantly unconstitutional and a clear attack on the South reminiscent of the Civil War and Reconstruction eras when Republican administrations lorded it over the South. What made

these measures all the more galling and unacceptable was that they were being promised by a Democratic president using the apparatus of the Federal government to run roughshod over what were seen as constitutional principles and deeply imbued regional values. This was to lead, in the short term, to the 'Dixiecrat' protest presidential candidacy of Strom Thurmond in the general election of 1948 and, subsequently, to the South's wholesale disenchantment with successive national Democratic presidential nominees over the following three decades (see Table 3.3). The two presidential elections, of 1948 and 1964, constitute key turning points in Southern attitudes toward the Democratic Party and merit discussion in some detail as they serve to illustrate a fundamental Southern creed: that the Democratic Party could only expect the commitment of the Southern voter for as long as it defended the jealously protected Southern belief in the Jeffersonian tenets of states' rights. Governor Fielding Wright (who was subsequently nominated as Thurmond's vice-presidential candidate in the 1948 presidential election) explained the view of many Southern Democrats in his inaugural gubernatorial address of January 19 1948, and the consequences for the national Democratic Party should it fail to take heed of Southern sensibilities in this area. Wright said

[a]s a lifelong Democrat, as a descendent of Democrats, as governor of the most Democratic state, I would regret to see the day come when Mississippi or the South should break with the Democratic Party in a national election. But vital principles and eternal truths transcend party lines¹⁰

Thurmond's supporters, and the putative opposition movement it represented to the national Democratic Party, were labelled the 'Dixiecrats' to indicate that it was a Southern Democratic protest against, specifically, the existence of a civil rights plank in the national party platform accepted by delegates at the Philadelphia presidential convention that nominated incumbent President Truman. It was also, symbolically, a protest against Federal government and the national party interference in state sovereignty such as the abolition by the National Wage Labour Board of wage differentials that had allowed black wages to increase in relation to whites. Before the 1948 convention, the Organisation of the People's Committee of Loyal States' Rights Jeffersonian Democrats was formed, with Wright as

honorary chairman, to emphasise that it was the national party, not the Dixiecrats that were abandoning the principles of the Democratic Party. The motto of the Jeffersonians was 'Let's give government back to the people.'¹¹ In February 1948, according to Gene Wirth of the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, 4,000 Mississippi Democrats - 'blood of the Confederacy and of true Jeffersonian Democracy - gathered in Jackson 'to express and to act upon proposed anti-southern legislation.'¹² The Dixiecrat revolt was highly significant in that it represented the first breach in the 'Solid South's' allegiance to the Democratic Party.

Southern delegates to the convention objected less to the specifics of the language of the civil rights plank than to the assault it made on the principles of states' rights (although racist sentiments were clearly evident). Even before the nominating convention Truman, since his accession to the presidency upon Franklin Roosevelt's death in 1945, had incurred the wrath of Southern Democrats over the creation of a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) and the accompanying measures recommended in the report *To Secure These Rights* of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, which lifted its title from the text of the Declaration of Independence of 1776. Southern Democrats saw these acts as further examples of Federal government intrusion in Southern affairs. In seeking to advance the cause of civil rights in labour relations the Commission struck at the heart of the Southern way of life concerning segregation as it recommended federal investigations into alleged racial discrimination in businesses' hiring and employment policies, and a federal law to end discrimination based on race or colour in voting in state or federal primary elections. In keeping with Jeffersonian belief in constitutional limitations on Federal encroachment in state affairs, Southerners saw this legislation as further diminution of the correct interpretation of the Tenth Amendment (see Chapter Two). To Southern Democrats intrusion into business practice was an area where the Federal government had no remit, particularly when it would have huge impact upon racial issues and segregationist policy. The *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* called the proposals, included in Truman's State of the Union address to Congress of February 2 1948 'a vicious and unconstitutional program[me].'¹³ Senator James O. Eastland of Mississippi characterised the FEPC as 'a carpetbag organisation that has come into the

South and is attempting to destroy Southern institutions and Southern civilization.’¹⁴ In addition to the apocalyptic language the reference to the Reconstruction era Republican ‘carpetbag’ governments would not fail to be understood by a Southern electorate familiar with ‘the Lost Cause’ of the Civil War (i.e. Southern independence) and well versed in the ways of the iniquitous Yankee (see Chapter Four). Eastland’s comment was rather moderate when compared to that of another Mississippi politician, Representative John Bell Williams, who said that Truman ‘has seen fit to run a political dagger into our backs and now he is trying to drink our blood.’¹⁵ Ex-governor Frank Dixon of Alabama (1939-1943) suggested that Southern Democrats should break away from the national party ‘for the Federal government, in Democratic hands, is now tampering with the one thing [i.e. white supremacy] we cannot permit, will not permit, whatever the price to ourselves.’¹⁶ In each instance such comments indicate how the language and rhetoric of states’ rights had permeated the ideology of the Southern Democratic Party and how jealously and tenaciously these prerogatives would be defended.

At the 1948 Democratic convention Minneapolis Mayor Hubert Humphrey, speaking for the liberal wing of the party in support of the pro-civil rights language said that ‘[t]here are those who say to you - we are rushing this issue of civil rights. I say we are a hundred and seventy-two years too late . . . the time has arrived for the Democratic Party to get out of the shadow of states’ rights and walk forthrightly into the bright sunshine of human rights.’¹⁷ The platform affirmed party policy in favour of civil rights and announced that it was committed to ‘continuing its efforts to eradicate all racial, religious and economic discrimination.’¹⁸ The platform stated the Democratic Party’s belief ‘that racial and religious minorities must have the right to live, the right to work, the right to vote, the full and equal protection of the laws, on the basis of equality with all citizens as guaranteed by the Constitution.’¹⁹ Implicit in such language was a commitment by the national party, and a pledge to abide by such a commitment should it win the presidential election, to uphold the intent of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution, passed in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, that granted the ex-slaves citizenship and voting rights. A key component of the South’s

agreement to the Compromise of 1877 (see below) was that it would be allowed 'home rule' in regard to its own affairs. It was clearly understood that Southern attitudes toward race relations would, in effect, be in accordance with common law rather than with Federal law. With the passage of the civil rights section in the party's Philadelphia platform of 1948 the bond the South held with the national Democratic Party began to weaken.

On passage of Humphrey's amendment the entire Mississippi delegation, and half of Alabama's, walked out of the convention hall. The Southern delegates that remained cast their votes 236-13 in favour of U.S. Senator Richard Russell of Georgia over Truman, who was nominated as the Democratic Party's Presidential candidate by 947½ votes to Russell's 263. The only Southern votes Truman received came from the North Carolina delegation. In July 1948 many of those that had left the Philadelphia convention reconvened in Birmingham, Alabama (an exploratory conference of 'States' Rights Democrats' had met in Jackson, Mississippi two months earlier) to nominate Thurmond for President and Fielding Wright as his running mate. These two men headed the ticket of the States' Rights Democrats, or 'Dixiecrats,' calling 'for the segregation of the races and the racial integrity of each race' and adherence to the '[states' rights] principles of Jefferson.'²⁰ The only national Southern politicians to attend, however, were Mississippi's U.S. Senators Eastland and John Stennis.

The Party's intention was to win as many of the South's 127 electoral votes as possible, in order to deny either of the major party candidates a majority of the electoral vote.²¹ If this were to occur the result of the election would be decided in the U.S. House of Representatives where each state's delegation would have one vote. Under such circumstances the South might be able to trade for advantageous concessions with the putative winner of such a vote, for example that the civil rights Committee's recommendations be shelved in return for the South's backing the winner in a reprise of the Compromise of 1877. Whilst this did not occur, as Truman won a majority of the electoral college votes, the immediate result showed that Thurmond had won the electoral votes of four Deep South states (i.e. Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and his home state of South Carolina) with huge majorities of 80% in Alabama (where Truman was not even on the ballot and

where all eleven presidential electors were allies of the States' Rights Party) and 88% in Mississippi. It should be noted, however, that Thurmond's campaign was aided by the efforts of state Democratic Parties' that listed the States' Rights Party as the official Democratic Party in those four states that the Dixiecrats won. Elsewhere, where the party was listed as a third party, it ran behind both the Democratic and Republican tickets. Despite the apparent anomaly of these election returns in the South's refusal to give unbending support to the national Democratic candidate as it always had in the past, the political attitudes of voters remained consistent in favouring the candidate most predisposed to protect and advance Southern interests. Nevertheless, the results indicated the level of loyalty national Democrats could expect in the South if it felt that the individual, or the party, was no longer was attuned to the region's sensibilities. In the judgement of Stuart Little, '[i]n the rhetoric from Thurmond's campaign are early expressions of the post-war political ideology from which would emerge [the state' rights rhetoric of] George Wallace and resurgent Republicanism,'²² which this chapter proceeds to expand upon.

Although Dwight Eisenhower's two presidential candidacies in 1952 and 1956 saw the Republican Party make inroads in the South in winning Florida, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia in both elections, adding Louisiana in 1956, the Deep South retained its allegiance to the Democratic Party after 1948. Alabama and Mississippi supported the candidacy of the Northern liberal Governor Adlai Stevenson of Illinois (who had been, with Humphrey, a principal supporter of adding pro-civil rights language to the 1948 Party platform) giving him solid majorities of the popular vote well in advance of his national share of votes cast (see Table 3.1). The 1952 Democratic national party platform did not include specific civil rights pledges for blacks. Under the section headed 'Constitutional Government' the Democratic Party platforms of 1952 and 1956 testified 'our belief in the Jeffersonian principle of local control.'²³ Whilst the 1956 platform did include civil rights language, it was suitably vague in outlining general commitments to 'support and advance the individual rights of all Americans,'²⁴ rather than making specific pledges to promote civil rights for blacks. Maintaining their dominance in House elections, it seemed that the presidential election of

1948 was an aberration, a response to a peculiar set of circumstances as Democrats, in the Deep South at any rate, returned to their ancestral loyalties.

Civil Rights and the Presidential Election of 1964: Goldwater

The 1948 presidential election, however, when taken with analysis of the key events of the civil rights era of the 1960s, with the benefit of hindsight, becomes an accurate precursor of more fundamental and lasting change in the political dynamics of the South in general and of Alabama and Mississippi in particular. A key factor in identifying disenchantment with the Democrats focuses first on the national party's attitude toward the issue of race, the very same issue that led to the 'Dixiecrat' revolt of 1948. Second, during the 1960s, the national party was faced the same problems as those apparent during the Truman era. The party held the White House and was eventually forced by the weight of public opinion and dissent from the liberal wing of the party to be active in taking anti-discrimination measures in opposing the segregationist *status quo* in the South aware, too, of the potential strength of the black vote in northern urban areas. Clearly, the experience of national Democrats interfering in areas, such as race relations, where the South wholeheartedly felt its prerogatives lay, was to prove disastrous to both the short and long-term health of the party's prospects in presidential elections throughout the region. By the time of the 1964 presidential election the Democratic 'Solid South' was no more as the Deep South turned away from the national organisation despite its nominee that year being President Lyndon Johnson of Texas, a native son to the region. For the first time the South turned, not to a renegade Democratic candidate like Thurmond, but to a Republican, Barry Goldwater. Goldwater won the five states of the Deep South: Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi and South Carolina. By the time of the 1972 presidential election the Republicans swept the entire region's electoral college votes. In order to make sense of these momentous shifts in Southern voting habits it is necessary to return to the issue of states' rights in connection to race that occasioned the 'Dixiecrat' rebellion in 1948 and which form the background to the defection of Southern Democrats in the 1960s.

As mentioned above, in 1960, John Kennedy, the official Democratic Party nominee, failed to capture Mississippi's electoral votes from a slate of segregationist Democratic

electors. This was a continuance of the national party's difficulties in marrying a commitment to improving civil rights for blacks with the need to keep the South in the Democratic column in general elections. Kennedy's campaign was hampered in that his Roman Catholic heritage was viewed with suspicion in the Protestant South, as did Southern perceptions of him as a liberal from the north. But it was not until the 1964 presidential election, when the Deep South voted Republican for the first time since the Reconstruction era, that the process of Southern Democratic discontent, first evident in the post-war era in the presidential politics of 1948, reached the fullest extent of its rebellion with the national party.

The seeds for this split had been planted during the Second World War via the Supreme Court's decision in *Smith versus Allwright* (1944) which, overturning the judgement in the case of *Grovey versus Townend* (1935), determined that the process for nominating candidates - the primary election - was unconstitutional in that, in the South, only whites could participate. In the Court's opinion this contravened the equal rights protections of the Fourteenth Amendment.²⁵ Although the Supreme Court had no power to enforce its decisions, the precedent had long since been established that the Federal government would use its authority to ensure that the states and lesser jurisdictions would comply with the Court's ruling. This was the first attack on *de jure* segregation, part of what became known, ominously for the South, as the Second Reconstruction. It was continued with the 1954 ruling in *Brown versus Board of Education* that public schools be desegregated with 'all deliberate speed' since segregated schools were 'inherently unequal.'²⁶ To the South these rulings were an unconscionable assault on the Tenth Amendment and states' rights. Indeed, after the *Brown* decision of 1954 Mississippi adopted 'a resolution of interposition' based on the nineteenth century constitutional doctrine that it was a state prerogative (if not a duty) to block Federal legal decisions that were deemed to flout the Tenth Amendment (see Chapter Two). Since the Court decision was seen by white Mississippians as an unconstitutional violation of the Tenth Amendment the state believed it was acting within its rights in refusing to implement the judgement. However, the Supreme Court was independent and no blame could be attached to the national Democratic Party for these turns in events especially as the

Court's Chief Justice, Earl Warren, was a Republican appointed by Eisenhower, a Republican President. However, no such mitigating circumstances were evident in the landmark civil rights legislation of 1964 and 1965, which, passed by a Democratic Congress and signed and supported by a Democratic President, was to lead to the demise of the Democratic 'Solid South' in presidential politics. Mississippi governor Ross Barnett had made the Southern position on federal mandates that the South desegregate plain in 1962. In refusing to permit James Meredith to be the first black to attend the University of Mississippi in the face of federal government demands that he be allowed to do so, Barnett succinctly proclaimed the South's stance on states' rights :

*Therefore, in obedience to legislative and constitutional sanction, I interpose the rights of the sovereign state of Mississippi to enforce its laws and to regulate its own internal affairs without reference on the part of the federal government*²⁷

In his account of the 1964 presidential election Theodore White wrote that 'of all the motors in the campaign and politics of 1964, none was more important than [the Civil Rights Act],'²⁸ signed by President Johnson on July 2 of that year. This act, in White's judgement, 'took the Federal government further inside the private lives and customs of individual citizens than any Federal legislation in American history.'²⁹ Establishing a comprehensive programme of anti-discrimination measures, the Act emphasised that the South was part of the nation and would have to abide by Federal law as understood by the rest of the United States. Clearly the era of 'home rule' for the South, established in 1877, was at an end. The Act guaranteed uniform qualification for voting which would apply without prejudice to blacks, as well as to whites. Discrimination in public accommodations was prohibited as all publicly financed facilities, whether at the Federal, state, county or municipal level, were to be open to blacks as well as whites. The act was given teeth as the Attorney General, the nation's highest ranking law enforcement official, was permitted to file suit to desegregate any public school in the country at his own recognisance. Indicating the power of the Federal government, the Act authorised the government to cut off Federal aid to any community

racially discriminating against any citizen that might benefit from that aid. Finally, an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was set up to monitor discrimination by employers and within trade unions.

To Southerners every one of these changes was, at best, unconstitutional and, at worst, a virtual declaration of war on the South. The earlier struggles against the *Brown* decision of 1954 or the attempts by their respective governors to keep the Universities of Alabama and Mississippi segregated in the early 1960s paled into insignificance when set against such a wholesale attack on states' rights and the Tenth Amendment. Johnson tried to reconcile the South to the need for the Act by placing it within a constitutional framework i.e. that blacks, as citizens, were entitled to the protections afforded by the document. In a speech in New Orleans in October 1964 he remarked: 'Whatever your views are, we have a Constitution and we have got a Bill of Rights and we've got the law of the land. And two-thirds of the Democrats in the Senate voted for [the civil rights bill], and three-fourths of the Republicans.'³⁰ As a Southerner he was aware of the visceral rhetoric and appeals to base racial prejudice that generations of Southern politicians had used to keep small town and rural voters from uniting on issues of economic deprivation with blacks. 'All they ever hear at election time' Johnson said in the New Orleans speech, 'is nigrā, nigrā, nigrā.'³¹

In 1964 the Republicans nominated the conservative Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater as their presidential candidate. Goldwater's nomination marked the beginnings of a conservative takeover of the GOP. He stridently declared throughout the Republican Party primaries and at the nominating convention in the summer of 1964 that he intended to 'provide a choice not an echo'³² to voters in the November presidential election. No longer was the Republican Party prepared to offer a watered-down version of Democratic New Deal liberalism. Instead, the party should aggressively announce its core belief of reducing the scope of the Federal government rather than offering candidates of the 'Eastern Establishment,' such as Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts or Nelson Rockefeller of New York, who were afraid to announce their conservative beliefs as they had been co-opted by corporate and bureaucratic elites. It was significant that Goldwater was from the western state

of Arizona which had a strong anti-government, frontier mentality. Goldwater had voted against the 1964 civil rights bill in the Senate and, while declaring support for racial integration in the abstract, his stance on civil rights showed greater affinity with the Southern and Jeffersonian doctrines of states' rights. He stated in his book *Mr. Conservative: Barry Goldwater*, a collection of his political views published in 1961, that he 'believe[d] the matter of school integration is [better] left to the states under the Tenth Amendment.'³³ Goldwater's civil rights views, according to Robert Novak, were the most supportive of the Southern position to come from a national politician since the *Brown* decision in 1954.³⁴ In contrast, the theme of the Democratic platform, ratified by the Presidential nominating convention at Atlantic City, 'was clear: One Nation - One Party.'³⁵ 'In the Platform Committee,' wrote White, 'the great majority of white Southern delegates....freely accepted a revolutionary civil-rights programme and platform that committed them, their state parties and their states to the forward movement of the rest of America.'³⁶ Significantly, three Southern delegations at the convention contained black delegates and on adoption of the platform only Alabama and Mississippi of the Southern delegations walked out in protest. (This was the first time, it is worthy of note, that a Southern Democratic Party delegation had seated black delegates to its national convention.) The position of the Southern Democratic Party in relation to the national Democratic Party had markedly weakened from the era when it had a virtual veto on presidential nominations due to the requirement that the winning candidate garner two-thirds of the delegates' votes at the nominating convention. This regulation, abandoned at the 1936 convention, was replaced by a ruling that required the nominee to win a simple majority of the entire convention's votes in order to become the party standard bearer. Its consequence was to end the possibility of a Southern veto of national party presidential candidacies.

It was left to Republican politicians to articulate the age-old Southern position of the rectitude of limited government and basing Constitutional interpretation on deference to states' rights. George Bush Sr, running as a Republican for the U.S. Senate in Texas in 1964 commented that 'the new Civil Rights Act was passed to protect 14 percent of the people. I'm also worried about the other 86 percent.'³⁷ While Bush failed to defeat the incumbent U.S.

Senator Democrat Ralph Yarborough, the hostile references he made about the Civil Rights Act's 'abuse[s] of Federal power' that 'trampled on the Constitution'³⁸ played exceptionally well for Goldwater as he used similar rhetoric in the states of the Deep South, indicating that the themes of state sovereignty and Southern exceptionalism that had worked so well for generations of Democrats could be used as effectively by any skilful politician regardless of party label.

Goldwater's appeal was apparent in the results of the presidential election as he swept the states of the Deep South, including huge majorities of the popular vote. Goldwater won 70% in Alabama and 87% in Mississippi, galvanising the votes of angry whites who felt abandoned by the Democratic ticket's stance on Civil Rights. 'It would not have mattered' wrote Walker Percy of Mississippi, 'if Senator Goldwater had advocated the collectivisation of the plantation and open saloons in Jackson [Mississippi]; he voted against the Civil Rights Act and that was that.'³⁹ However, according to Dan Carter 'Goldwater's decision to identify with what one aide called the "foam-at-the-mouth segregationists"' weakened the Republican appeals to moderates in the border states [of the South] and in the North.'⁴⁰ Consequently, Johnson was easily able to portray Goldwater as out of touch with the mainstream of American politics and won election in a national landslide in both the electoral college and popular votes.

Civil Rights and the Presidential Election of 1968: Wallace

In presidential contests, while the Democratic Party won decisively in 1964, over the next three decades it lost comprehensively in the South. The finality of the split between national Democrats and Southern voters was made apparent with the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This landmark legislation suspended the use of literacy tests used to discriminate in the registering of voters. One such example was the Boswell Amendment to the Alabama Constitution, passed in response to the *Allwright* decision, that required all those registering to vote be literate and able to 'understand and explain' any part of the U.S. Constitution to the satisfaction of the County Board of Registrars.⁴¹ Also, the Act authorised Federal registrars to register voters in any state or county where such tests had been used, and those in which less

than 50% of those eligible had been accorded the franchise. Johnson's rhetoric on signing the Act made it clear that the national Democratic Party was going to identify itself with supporting civil rights issues as it sought to attract black votes. Their cause, he said, 'must be our cause too. Because it's not just Negroes, but it's really all of us who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice. And we shall overcome.'⁴² Johnson's invocation of the most memorable phrase of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and early 1960s served to encapsulate the marginalisation of the South in national Democratic Party politics. Given his landslide victory it seemed that the Democratic Party no longer needed the electoral votes of the South in order to win general elections. Its blatant racism, witnessed by national and international audiences on television news programmes at places like Selma, Alabama where, in March 1965, voting rights demonstrators were attacked by Alabama state troopers, had, it appeared, been repudiated by the electorate. Johnson, on signing the Act, recognised its significance to his party's standing in the South. Not only had he signed the Act, he said, but in so doing he had signed away the South; never again, he intimated, would it support a party that enfranchised blacks with such disregard for the 'rights' of the states and utilising all the power of the Federal government.⁴³ Truly this was a Second Reconstruction but this time it was the national Democratic Party and not the Republicans that were the villains.

The immediate effect of the Voting Rights Act was hugely to increase black registration and participation levels. In Alabama in 1947 there were 6,000 registered black voters according to estimates by Luther Jackson, or 1.2% of those eligible. By 1968, two years after the Voting Rights Act went into effect, the number of qualified black voters in Alabama was 250,000 or 57% of those eligible. Two years later nearly two-thirds of black Alabamians of voting age were registered.⁴⁴ In Selma, the scene of some of the worst violence perpetrated by state police against civil rights demonstrators during the civil rights era, 8,000 blacks had been registered by November 1965. Prior to this less than 400 had been able to exercise the vote in the entire twentieth century.⁴⁵

At the time of the passage of the Act only 6.7% of the black voting-age population was registered in Mississippi, totalling less than 30,000 people, compared to 19.3% in

Alabama and nearly 25% in the states of the Confederacy.⁴⁶ In Mississippi, by 1972, 59.8%, or 270,000 of the eligible black voters were registered (compared to 70% of whites), according to the most reliable estimates, given that registration forms did not specify colour.⁴⁷ In accordance with the Act's specifications Federal registrars had visited, by the end of the 1960s, thirteen of sixty-seven counties in Alabama and fourteen of eighty-two counties in Mississippi to correct the most glaring patterns of discrimination.

Indicative of the utter disillusion of Southerners with the national party was the insurgent presidential campaign of George Wallace, ex-governor of Alabama, in 1968. Wallace had run in several of the Democratic presidential primaries in 1964 to focus the national Party's attention on Southern discontent with the encroachment of the Federal government in civil rights issues in the South. Wallace had achieved national notoriety for his use of the line 'Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!' in his inaugural gubernatorial address in 1963 and for his unsuccessful attempt to prevent Federal officials from integrating the University of Alabama in the same year. Wallace maintained subsequently that it would have been more appropriate (and electorally appealing) had he replaced the words 'states' rights' for 'segregation' to indicate it was the defence of states' rights he was fighting for and that his use of segregation in the speech should not have been taken to imply racism but was symbolic of the overweening power of the Federal government in interfering in areas constitutionally the purview of the states.⁴⁸ Wallace's performance in the 1964 Democratic presidential primaries in gaining nearly 42% of the popular vote in Maryland, 34% in Wisconsin and 30% in Indiana, and the apparent abandonment by the national Democratic Party of the South, encouraged him to mount a third-party candidacy in the 1968 Presidential election. This campaign was to indicate, to Wallace and many other observers, that Southern antipathy toward the Federal government and bureaucratic elites and belief in limited government was not confined to the South, nor was its fear of the effects of the civil rights revolution restricted to Dixie. As Douglas Kiker observed of Wallace in 1968 '[i]t is as if somewhere, sometime a while back, George Wallace had been awakened by a

white, blinding vision : They all hate black people, all of them. They're all afraid, all of them. Great God ! That's it ! They're all Southern ! The whole United States is Southern !'⁴⁹

The Wallace campaign was significant in both its short and long- term effects on the Democratic Party's standing in the South. In carrying five states (Alabama (with 66% of the popular vote), Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi (with 64% of the popular vote) and coming second in three other Southern states, Wallace had shown that the national Democratic Party had been thoroughly rejected in the South. A case could, indeed, be made to assert that Wallace's ability to get on the ballots of all fifty states and garner 13.5% of the popular vote nationally (compared to the 2.5% won by Thurmond in 1948) cost the election for the Democratic nominee Humphrey who had been the principal backer of the civil rights pledge adopted by the 1948 Democratic convention that had occasioned the 'Dixiecrat' Presidential candidacy of Thurmond. Whilst such an assertion is questionable,⁵⁰ of greater significance is the fact that the themes other than race that Wallace highlighted, were subsequently to be used to devastating effect by a succession of Republican presidential candidates against their Democratic counterparts in general elections over the next twenty years. These themes, such as the attack on 'Big Government' and Federal bureaucracy, the absence of law and order, America's perceived moral decline, working and middle class economic anxieties, the ever present fears of racial change, were heard especially strongly by an approving South which turned with enthusiasm to the policy prescriptions of the Republican Party. The desertion of the South from the national Democratic Party, begun in earnest in the presidential election of 1948, was completed by Richard Nixon, the victor over Humphrey in the presidential election of 1968.

Nixon, in his 1972 re-election campaign, became the first Republican nominee in the twentieth century to sweep all of the Southern states' electoral votes. He had noted Goldwater's (and Wallace's) tactical errors in playing the race issue so blatantly and chose to make far more subtle appeals in winning Southern votes. Dubbed the 'Southern Strategy' to describe the Party's commitment to winning presidential elections in the South, Nixon slowed enforcement of school desegregation and appointed constitutional conservatives supportive of

states' rights and limited government to the Supreme Court and Federal judiciary. He reaped the reward in 1972, in winning 71% of the popular vote in the South (compared to 62% nationally) and 74% and 77% in Alabama and Mississippi respectively. This result began, in presidential elections over the next thirty years, a Republican hold on the electoral votes of the South. The situation was exacerbated by the dominance of the liberal and Northern wing of the national Democrats in choosing Presidential nominees perceived in the South to embody the elitism and 'highpocrisy', as Wallace described it, of academically highly qualified candidates who, apparently, lacked empathy with working families. It was of these elites that Wallace, critical of their lack of practicality, said ' [they] can't even park their bicycles straight.'⁵¹

The Democrats in Alabama: Presidential Elections 1964-2000

In contrast to Democratic hegemony in presidential contests up until 1960 (with the notable exception of 1948), the figures from 1964 (see Table 3.3) reveal a singular lack of voter identification with the party in general elections in Alabama. During the period from 1964 to 1996 only Jimmy Carter (in 1976) won Alabama's electoral votes. He benefited from his status as a native son of the South (and, hence, an outsider to Washington politics) and in his resonant message, in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal that culminated in Nixon's resignation, never to lie to the American people. Despite coming from a neighbouring state, Carter was unable to replicate this success four years later as he lost to the Republican Ronald Reagan by 1.3% of the popular vote in Alabama. Whilst clearly more competitive than such candidates as Humphrey (1968), McGovern (1972), Mondale (1984) and Dukakis (1988) all seen as too liberal to Alabamians, Bill Clinton failed to undermine the Republican candidacies of two nationally weak campaigns in 1992 and 1996, falling comfortably below 50% of the popular vote on each occasion. Clearly Clinton, an Arkansan, was unable to use his credentials as a native son of the region to any advantage. This contrasts markedly with

the 1950s performance of Stevenson who, despite losing comprehensively twice to Eisenhower in the presidential elections of 1952 and 1956, won Alabama's electoral votes comfortably, scoring 65% in 1952 and 56% despite his being the more liberal candidate. In the 2000 presidential election Vice President Al Gore polled only 42%, fourteen points behind Republican George W. Bush. In this comparative example, covering forty years, we can gauge the decline of the Democratic Party as a force in presidential elections in Alabama.

As this chapter has demonstrated the national Democrats' position on issues of key importance in the South, which we may collectively place under the umbrella of states' rights, altered radically, if gradually, in the post-war era. From 1876 to 1964 any presidential nominee was acceptable (except Truman) in Alabama simply for wearing the Democratic label. In this period candidates could be categorised as liberal or progressive (e.g. Bryan, Roosevelt or Stevenson,) or conservative (Cleveland, Parker or Cox), without significantly affecting their chances of winning the state's electoral votes. Since 1960 no Democrat presidential candidate, except Carter, has won the state and even his appeal was limited to one election as he failed to carry the state in his unsuccessful re-election bid. The national Democratic Party since the 1960s has been perceived as too liberal for Alabamian tastes and hence its candidates have been rejected almost as readily as its earlier candidates were embraced. What is evident is a trend of acceptance for Democratic presidential candidates (and a greater rejection of Republicans) in the period to 1960 together with a near mirror image of such returns since 1964. This chapter has speculated on whether and how much the Democrats changed whilst the South stayed the same. Such issues will be expanded in subsequent chapters as will the consequences for candidates running on the Democratic ticket, many of whom tried - and try - to distance themselves from the national Democratic Party by stressing their adherence to state and regional values, to emphasise that they are 'Alabama' or

'Mississippi Democrats, for example. This is indicative that the perception of the national party in the South is largely negative.

Table 3.3 Popular Vote (%) for Democratic Presidential Nominees in Alabama and Mississippi 1964-2000

	<u>Democratic Nominee</u>	<u>Alabama</u>	<u>Mississippi</u>	<u>U.S.A</u>
1964	Lyndon Johnson	31	12	61
1968	Hubert Humphrey	19	23	43
1972	George McGovern	26	20	38
1976	Jimmy Carter	55	50	50
1980	Jimmy Carter	48	48	41
1984	Walter Mondale	38	37	41
1988	Michael Dukakis	40	39	45
1992	Bill Clinton	41	41	43
1996	Bill Clinton	44	45	49
2000	Al Gore	42	40	49

The Democrats in Mississippi: Presidential Elections 1964-2000

The observations made in respect of Democratic Presidential candidacies in Alabama during the post-1960 era are evident also in Mississippi (see Table 3.3). Again, Mississippians turned against those Democratic presidential candidates perceived as too liberal, transferring virtually all their support to the more directly socially conservative candidate in all cases. In the post-1960 period this would benefit the Republicans. Not even Carter carried a majority of the popular vote in Mississippi when winning the 1976 presidential election (although he did win a plurality, and hence won the state's electoral vote) and he failed to carry the state in the presidential election of 1980. Subsequent general elections mirror those of Alabama. Whilst improving on the dismally weak performances of McGovern (1972), Mondale (1984), and Dukakis (1988), Clinton never seriously campaigned in winning Mississippi in the presidential elections of 1992 and 1996. Indeed, Mississippi in 1992 was the only state in the Union that gave Republican candidate George Bush over 50% of the popular vote, whilst Bob Dole four years later too reached this threshold, one of only nine states that he won with a

majority of the votes cast. In the 2000 presidential election George W. Bush won Mississippi, finishing eighteen per cent ahead of Gore.

The Democratic Party in Alabama: U.S. House of Representatives Elections 1962-2000

To provide some perspective on Democratic losses in presidential elections the chapter turns to a survey of Democratic strength in each state's U.S. House elections during the period from 1962 to 2000 (see Table 3.4). The Democrats were defeated in the House elections of 1994, losing the majority in the House of Representatives that the party had held continuously for the previous forty years, with the most significant losses occurring in the South. These losses were compounded in 1996 with the loss of two open seats in Alabama and one in Mississippi all held by popular incumbents who were retiring from public office (see Chapter Six). This gave the party only four of the twelve seats in both states, of which only two, one in each state, were held by white Democrats. Only four years previously, in 1992, Democrats had held nine of these seats, seven of which were occupied by white incumbents. In 1998, however, the Democrats did regain a Republican held seat as the incumbent chose to run for the governorship (see Chapter Six).

These recent changes are in marked contrast to decades of Democratic dominance across the South (see Table 3.2). Indeed, the 1996 House elections revealed that for the first time in 120 years the Democratic Party lost the popular vote in both states, tallying 45% in Alabama and 44% in Mississippi. As has been intimated in this chapter and which will be further explored subsequently in this study, what appears as a revolution in House elections in 1994 and 1996 was, in fact, a long-term evolutionary trend. This chapter has outlined the extent of Democratic losses in both House and presidential elections, suggesting that the national Democratic Party from 1948 onwards not only failed to give reasons as to why Southern voters should continue to support Democratic presidential candidates but that,

increasingly from the 1960s its policy proposals and political philosophy was believed to be hostile to the core Southern values of states' rights and of, at the very least, scepticism toward the Federal government. Given the depth of recent losses in not only presidential but also House elections it is worth considering how the party might maintain their weakened position in the South in general and in Alabama and Mississippi in particular, let alone consider making gains, especially in U.S. House elections. These issues will be discussed in greater detail in the later chapters of this study. More immediately, mention needs to be made of how the Democratic Party fared in House elections in Alabama and Mississippi in the aftermath of the national Democratic Party's embrace of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. First, the chapter turns to House elections in Alabama during this period.

Table 3.4 Democratic Party Share of the Popular Vote (%) in House of Representatives Elections in Alabama and Mississippi 1960-2000⁵²

	<u>Alabama</u>	<u>Mississippi</u>
1960	89	100
1962	83	97
1964	48	90
1966	61	74
1968	61	94
1970	64	86
1972	57	66
1974	68	52
1976	68	59
1978	69	49
1980	63	54
1982	77	57
1984	73	51
1986	64	60
1988	62	66
1990	68	81
1992	59	66
1994	50	57
1996	45	44
1998	45	47
2000	33	51

Note : In the 2000 U.S. House elections in Alabama the Democrats contested only three of the seven allotted lower house seats

Whilst the national Democratic Party had suffered rejection in Alabama in the 1948 presidential election, it was not until 1964 that the party endured defeat in a U.S. House election, which occurred simultaneously to Goldwater's victory in the presidential election in the state. For the first time since Reconstruction not only did the Republican Party win the state's electoral votes but it also won seats in House contests. Remarkably, especially given the weakness, even uninterest, of Republican efforts in competing in House elections prior to the 1960s (see Table 3.2) the outcome of the 1964 election indicated that Goldwater's vote against the civil rights bill aided the Grand Old Party (GOP) in winning five of the eight House of Representatives seats allotted to Alabama as local Democrats were tainted by their association by name with the national Democratic Party. The scale and scope of these victories (it is worthy of reminder the first for the Republicans in elections of this type in Alabama since 1876) were indicative of the disgust felt by Alabamians toward the 'Party of the Fathers.' These successes built on the at-large Alabama House elections of 1962 when, despite the election of all eight Democrats, Republicans totalled 415,000 popular votes to the Democrat's 800,000. These successes were not anticipated but the state Republican Party offered a full slate of candidates, as they perceived the national Democratic Party national ticket as likely to be weak in Alabama in 1960. It is salutary to recognise that only four years earlier, in 1958, the Democrats won 97% of the popular vote in U.S. House elections in Alabama. Significantly, in 1966, without the benefit of a presidential candidate sympathetic to Alabamian interests as in 1964, the Republicans were able to secure the reelection of three of the four U.S. House incumbents who stood for re-election i.e. John Buchanan, Bill Dickinson and Jack Edwards. (James Martin did not run for a further term while Glenn Andrews was defeated by Democrat Bill Nichols.) This suggests that Republican Congressmen could benefit from the advantages of incumbency and accrue seniority in the House of Representatives as had the Democrats to their own enormous electoral benefit in the past.

By the mid-1960s Alabama showed the beginnings of genuine two party competition between Democrats and Republicans. Whilst it was to take nearly thirty years for the Republicans to win the majority of popular votes in U.S. House elections held in the state, by the early 1980s the party could claim at least two safe seats. This allowed the incumbents to build seniority in the committee system in Congress which would translate into tangible power and influence when the Republicans gained control of the U.S. House of Representatives in 1995. By the time of the 1996 Congressional elections three Alabama House Republicans, namely Spencer Bachus, Sonny Callahan and Terry Everett, were winning with unassailable majorities, whilst the two open House seats created by the retirement of Democratic incumbents Tom Beville and Glen Browder were turned into Republican gains. In contrast to the anaemic poll showings of the 1960s described above and illustrated in Tables 3.2 and 3.4, Republicans outpolled Democrats by 800,000 votes to 670,000 in the 1996 House elections, with only one Democratic incumbent, Earl Hilliard, in a seat (created to comply with the requirements of the 1982 amendments to the 1965 Voting Rights Act⁵³ to ensure minority representation in a state with a 25% black population) that was safe. The extent to which such changes can be explained as arising from a metamorphosis within the outlook of each party or due to other societal, cultural and demographic changes in the state of Alabama becomes germane and answers to these questions are developed in Chapters Five and Seven. What is clear from the surveys of Presidential and House elections outlined in this chapter is that Alabama in the post-civil rights era became a two party state in Presidential and House elections.

The Democratic Party in Mississippi: U.S. House of Representatives Elections 1962-2000

The effects of the Goldwater's success in winning five Southern states in the presidential election of 1964 had similar effects on voting in elections to the House of Representatives in

Mississippi as was described above in Alabama. While less dramatic than the Alabama House elections in terms of seats won, the Republicans in 1964 nonetheless picked up their first House seat since 1882. This provided further evidence that the Goldwater candidacy proved advantageous to Republicans, who benefited from the national Democratic Party's apostasy on the civil rights issue and punished U.S. House candidates sporting the Democratic label. In the short term Democratic dominance seemed to have been resumed as in 1964 the party still won 90% of the popular vote in U.S. House elections. Furthermore, in 1966 Prentiss Walker, the only Republican incumbent in the U.S. House, denied the party an opportunity to run on any record by resigning his seat to contest a seat in the U.S. Senate, leaving the Democrats to win the open seat (held, comfortably, from 1966 until 1996 by G.V. 'Sonny' Montgomery). Walker lost the Senate race to Democratic Senator James Eastland. In 1968, in an attempt to return to the U.S. House, Walker polled only 30% in a year when the other four Democrats had no opposition at all. Overall, the Democrats as a whole totalled 94% of the popular votes in 1968 U.S. House election. In contrast, Humphrey, as the Democratic presidential candidate won only 23% of the Mississippi ballots. These results indicated the strength of candidates able to position themselves as Mississippi, but not national, Democrats.

Republican successes in House elections after 1964 were slower in coming in Mississippi than in Alabama, yet in some instances proved to be more enduring. The election of Republicans Trent Lott and Thad Cochran to the U.S. House in 1972 was a sign of changing demographics in the region as both benefited from the growth of the suburbs in their respective Congressional Districts, which included more Republican, inclined voters. Indeed, most Southern cities already showed considerably more Republican voting tendencies than their rural hinterlands, and such demographic trends suggested future difficulties for the Democrats if the rural counties - even if staying loyally Democratic - became marginalised by suburban and exurban voters. Both Lott and Cochran became entrenched without undue

difficulty, comfortably winning re-election at the first attempt in 1974, and subsequently facing only poorly funded and largely token Democratic opponents. The success of Republican Jon Hinson in holding the open seat in 1978, created by Cochran's bid for the U.S. Senate seat vacant upon Eastland's retirement, was illustrative of the changes in the state's voting habits in seamlessly replacing one Republican with another. The 1978 election cycle was significant in marking for the first time the Republicans' majority of popular votes in a set of House elections, a feat not repeated until 1996.

Nevertheless, as recently as the House elections of 1990 the Democrats could still win 81% of the popular vote in Mississippi and held all five seats. The Democrats had the advantage of being the majority party. In consequence Mississippi Democrats were able to advertise the financial benefits that being in positions of power in congress brought. For example, Whitten chaired the Appropriations Committee, whilst Montgomery was chairman of Veteran's Affairs. Both were able to shape the passage of legislation to the advantage of their district, and to Mississippi. The powers of incumbency and seniority that each had accrued were powerful reasons for voters to return Democrats to office as long as the party was in the majority. In addition to showing greater volatility than evident in Alabama, Mississippi U.S. House elections also seemed to indicate greater Democratic abilities in winning and holding House seats despite Republican gains made elsewhere across the South. In 1992, for example, whilst Bush was recording his highest share of the vote in any of the fifty states in Mississippi, the four incumbent white Democrats, i.e. Montgomery, Parker, Taylor and Whitten, were not only all re-elected but averaged 82% of the popular vote, 32% ahead of the Republican presidential ticket and fully 43% in advance of the national Democratic nominee. Such Democratic strength as might be apparent in this example, however, proved to be ephemeral as the party was unable to hold seats that became open upon the retirements in 1994 and 1996 of Whitten and Montgomery, respectively. Further, the Republicans made an additional gain in 1995 as Parker switched parties to be accepted within the Republican caucus (one of four House Southern Democrats to make such a transformation in the aftermath of the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994) and won comfortable re-

election with 61% in the 1996 U.S. House election as a Republican compared with the 68% he won in 1994 in his last election as a U.S. House Democrat. Thus by 1998 the Democrats held two of four two-party competitive seats in the Mississippi House delegation. (The fifth, with a black majority, was assumed to be safely Democratic). These developments and their significance, for example the effect of Republican control in Congress and the seniority and attendant influence accrued by Congressmen in committees of key concern to the state, will be examined in Chapter Seven.

Conclusion

In conclusion, these results indicate a profound shift in the outcomes of presidential and House elections in Mississippi and Alabama over the last thirty years. This chapter reveals that these changes have not been the result of a fundamental change of allegiance of Southern voters in preferring Republicans over Democrats *per se* but that the Republican Party has apparently positioned itself closer to the core values of Southern and, hence, to Alabamian and Mississippian voters in advocating constitutionally conservative anti-government populism. As an example, Dole, the Republican Presidential candidate in 1996, demonstratively carried a copy of the text of the Tenth Amendment in his breast pocket throughout the campaign to symbolise the party's commitment to reducing the scope of Federal government power and returning certain functions such as welfare policy to the discretion of the states. Whilst not using the expression 'states' rights', with its loaded historical connotations of interposition and segregation, the Republicans were more than mindful of the Southern disenchantment with the perceived excesses of 'Big Government.' The perceived failures of federal government were associated with the national Democratic Party. The Republicans used such memories as a means to castigate Democrats in presidential

elections and to tie Democratic candidates for election to the House, anxious to avoid such a link, to the national presidential nominee. Southern voters, in supporting Republican presidential candidates since the civil rights era, and, more recently, electing Republicans to the House, have made the party competitive in all but the minority dominated Alabama and Mississippi congressional districts. In this, Southern voters have been true to long held Jeffersonian traditions of desiring representation by politicians dedicated to minimal government interference in matters of local relevance (for example, Thurmond, who joined the Republican Party in 1964, in a 1997 interview still classified Jefferson as his political hero⁵⁴). This thesis thus concludes that the South is still 'solid' in that it has consistently rewarded with electoral success the party whose political philosophy is most supportive of the region's philosophy that the government which governs closest to the people governs best.

The hypothesis analysed by this chapter is that the national Democratic Party, by the end of the 1960s, had relinquished its hold on the loyalties of Southern voters by adopting the agenda of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and early 1960s. (The considerably greater strengths of the Alabama and Mississippi state Democratic Parties will be analysed in Chapters Five and Six, respectively) The presidential elections of 1948 and 1964 serve to illustrate, in microcosm, the demise of the Democrats in subsequent general elections as the 'home rule' system (established as a result of the Compromise of 1877, whereby the Southern states were left free to conduct race relations according to the dictates of the white majority) was unravelled in a series of Federal government initiatives sponsored by the Democratic administrations of Presidents Truman, Kennedy and Johnson. Whilst Democratic candidates were able to hold onto and win House seats by distancing themselves from the national Party until well into the 1990s, by the middle of the decade the Republicans were in a position to claim that politics in Alabama and Mississippi (and throughout the South) were two-party competitive.

Before moving to the case studies, however, the next chapter analyses in greater depth the dissection of Democratic ideology begun in Chapter Two. Thus far the Southern Democratic ideology has been described as 'conservative.' (See Chapter Two for a discussion

of the meaning and relevance of the term conservative and other political ideologies germane to this study). The purpose of the following chapter is to indicate, with reference to four crucial periods in Southern political history, the depth, complexities and paradoxes of ideology in the South, using specific examples from Alabama and Mississippi. It becomes apparent by looking at these four eras, namely Reconstruction (1865-1877), Populism (the 1880s and 1890s), the Depression and the New Deal (1929-1937) and the post-civil rights era (the 1980s and 1990s) that to term Southern political identity as merely being 'conservative' is to obscure that there has been, and remains, potentially, (given carefully tailored rhetoric and skilful campaigning) strong support for populism and even liberalism in the Southern Democratic Party. In addition, there is much greater sophistication in its ideology than the reactionary parroting of the slogans of states' rights and of subtle, as well as blatant, racism. An awareness and understanding of these strands is helpful as the latter chapters turn to the case studies of the politics and personalities of Alabama and Mississippi and provide a background to the thesis' conclusions concerning the future direction of the Democratic Party in the South.

Chapter Three footnotes

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15 Bass and DeVries, p 5.

16 Barnard, pp 2-3. See also Cohodas, p 142.

17 McCullough, p 639. See also Garson, p 278.

18 Kirk H. Porter and Donald Bruce Johnson, *National Party Platforms 1840-1960* (Urbana, Il.: University of Illinois Press 1961), p 435.

19 Ibid.

20 McCullough, p 645. See also J. Barton Starr, 'Birmingham and the "Dixiecrat" Convention of 1948,' *Alabama Historical Quarterly* Volume 32 Spring and Summer 1970, pp 23-56 and Garson, p 246.

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- 22 Stuart J. Little, 'More Than Race : Strom Thurmond, the States' Rights Democrats and Post War Political Ideology,' *Southern Studies* Volume 4 Summer 1993, p 114. See Barnard, pp 94-127 for an account of the effect on the Alabama Democratic Party of the 1948 Dixiecrat presidential campaign.
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- 36 Ibid, p 282.
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44 Havard, pp 442 and 453. See also Chandler Davidson and Bernard Grofman (eds), *Quiet Revolution in the South. The Impact of the Voting Rights Act 1965-1990* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press 1994); Garson, p 180; Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South*, p 164 and Peirce, pp 235 and 298.

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47 Bass and DeVries, p 206. See also Havard, p 486 and Peirce, p 187.

48 Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich*, p 1. See also Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, p 109.

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52 These figures include the results of special elections held on the death, retirement, resignation etc of an incumbent member of the U.S. House. In these instances, the special election results are included in the totals of the next election cycle.

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CHAPTER FOUR

BOURBONS AND REDNECKS : POPULISM AND WHITE SOUTHERN DEMOCRATIC THOUGHT 1865-1990

Introduction

The current chapter is concerned with the development of Southern Democratic Party belief from the Civil War into the twentieth century. Previous chapters have suggested that the fundamental principles of Southern Democratic belief were predicated on Jeffersonian convictions that limited government, based on states' rights, was the most virtuous, moral and practical form of governance. Moreover, in the minds of many Southerners, it was the mode of government that most closely fitted the intent of the Founding Fathers who feared that tyrannical government would result from the expansion of Federal government influence beyond those powers expressly and specifically authorised and enumerated in the Constitution. This aspect of Southern Democratic philosophy has been described as 'conservative' (see Chapters One and Two) in its focus on a society where such values, tested by the passage of time, provide the basis for a harmonious coincidence of wants amongst all citizens. Government was to provide the means, for example, for the application of a system of law and order, that would enable all inhabitants to succeed (or fail) according to their own abilities without fear or favour from government. In short such conservatism operated on *laissez-faire* principles in political, social and economic realms.

There was much in Southern Democratic rhetoric (and practice) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that bears witness to the conservatism described above and discussed in this and preceding chapters. It is the intent of this chapter, however, to show how Southern Democratic belief, illustrated with reference to Alabama and Mississippi, consists of several other significant political elements beyond the above fundamentals that centred on state sovereignty and minimal government.

In tracing these aspects of the Southern Democratic creed through four distinct eras outlined below, it becomes evident that to describe the Southern Democracy as merely

'conservative' is to engage in a simplistic debate that fails to do justice to the complexities and paradoxes of the politics of the South. Thus, this chapter outlines a more complete and accurate description of the dynamics of politics in the region to intimate that the Southern political heritage includes concepts such as populism and liberalism where the role of government is recognised as potentially positive and beneficial, indeed central, in finding solutions to economic problems. This stands in direct contrast to the conservatism of Southern constitutional interpretation (for example in the totemisation of the Tenth Amendment) and the reactionary defence of segregation when the South's caste system was challenged by Federal officialdom during the civil rights era, as delineated in the preceding chapter.

Each of these eras - the reaction of the Reconstruction era; the radicalism of late nineteenth century populism; the liberalism of the New Deal of the 1930s and the conservatism of the post-civil rights era - illustrates a distinct aspect of Southern Democratic political philosophy. Taken together Southern Democratic ideology, it becomes clear, has considerably greater depth than has hitherto been acknowledged in the conventional accounts outlined in Chapters Two and Three. It should not be assumed that the different creeds identified are isolated within the historical periods indicated above. Indeed, in many instances they co-exist simultaneously. These particular traits, however, are best exemplified with reference to the specific eras that this chapter identifies. The fuller understanding of the Southern political heritage given here leads to a greater comprehension of the contemporary political position of Southern Democrats to be detailed in Chapters Five and Six with reference to Alabama and Mississippi, respectively. Ultimately, the primacy of faith in states' rights remained at the heart of Southern political conviction. Nevertheless, this could co-exist, even if sometimes uneasily, with that populist strain in Southern Democratic politics which denounced the elites of business and government in terms which included overt (and covert) class rhetoric. Such rhetoric was often at odds with the conservatism that denounced the use of government as a mechanism of social change. Before engaging in a deeper discussion of populism and liberalism, the chapter turns initially to the reactionary element of the Southern Democracy, in particular to the rhetorical attacks on the North in response to its treatment of

the South during the Reconstruction era. Here was developed the South's sense of victimhood manifested in an inferiority complex *vis-à-vis* the North as well as a sense of the region's exceptionalism and its embodiment of all that was best in being both American and Southern.

Reaction: Reconstruction¹

In Southern mythology, for several generations after 1865, the pain of defeat in the Civil War (or the 'War for Southern Independence' as it was often referred to in the South) was compounded by the experience of being subjected to the *diktat* of a rapacious and vengeful North eager to punish the Southern rebels for the transgression of secession. As George Wallace himself, in his first inaugural address as Alabama governor, said in 1963:

There were no government hand-outs [after the Civil War], no Marshall Plan aid, no coddling to make sure that our people would not suffer; instead the South was set upon by the vulturous carpetbagger and [F]ederal troops. . . . There was no money, no food, and no hope of either. But our grandfathers bent their knee only in church and bowed their head only to God.²

W.J. Cash, writing two generations after the Civil War's end, was even blunter than Wallace as quoted above had been. In describing the Yankee attitude toward the South, Cash asserted that it was in the Northern mentality to 'rob, to loot . . . [t]o subvert the Southern world and to hold it subverted. Not only to strip the Southern white man of mastery. . . .but also largely to hand over at least the seeming of that mastery to the black man.'³

Southern folk history played upon the 'nobility' of the 'lost cause' of Southern independence and of how the Federal government, in the Reconstruction era (1865-1877) and beyond, deliberately kept the South in economic servitude to prevent it developing its potential as a commercial rival to the North. As Peter Applebome observes 'the myth of the Lost Cause became a Holy Grail, . . . [its] tenets familiar and inviolate: the nobility of the Southern planters and the romantic picture of the old plantation, the cult of the Confederacy – both the governmental entity and the men who died for it – and the evils of Reconstruction.'⁴ This received wisdom created an enmity toward the North in general, and to the Federal

government in particular that continued, so it seemed, to evince the sectional biases against the South that had given rise to secession in 1861. Whilst there was much hyperbole in this account, Southern reaction to Reconstruction continued to be relevant in the twentieth century. As late as the 1960s, Democratic politicians referred to the iniquities of the North in the Reconstruction period to forestall social change in issues of race, labour relations, welfare and the economy. This type of rhetoric flourished whenever such reform emanated from Washington D.C. - the home of the Federal government that had laid waste to the South during the Civil War and Reconstruction. Thus a sense was born in the South of an embattled region, fuelling attitudes of particularism and sectionalism illustrated in the political controversies referred to below and in Chapter Three.

The Southern perspective equated Reconstruction with the indignities of Northern military and political occupation of the South that allowed the ex-Confederate states to be ruled by corrupt Yankee businessmen and malicious freedmen, as the region descended into chaos and degradation. The realities of Northern (and Republican) governance during the Reconstruction era do not bear witness to the horrific accounts of wholesale and calculated Federal mendacity that became part of Southern folklore, although that there were excesses and illegalities by individuals charged with carrying out Reconstruction policies is not denied by the historical record.⁵ Reconstruction era folk memories, however, recalled that it was 'one glorious orgy of graft, lawlessness, and terrorism' conducted to the detriment of the white Southerner.⁶ The literature on the specific policies of Reconstruction and of the details of its implementation is vast and there is insufficient space in a study of this nature to cover this era in depth. Reference needs to be made, however, to two aspects of the period - Presidential and Congressional Reconstruction - in order to provide the context for the ferocity of Southern animus to the North, that helps explain the South's attachment to the Democratic Party.

Presidential Reconstruction

Reconstruction - the attempt to reintegrate the South into the Union - as envisaged by President Abraham Lincoln was intended to be lenient toward the South. In December 1863 Lincoln issued a plan that would have fully restored all the ex-Confederate states into the

United States. When, in any state, 10% of citizens who had voted in the presidential election of 1860 had taken an oath of loyalty to the Constitution and the Union, that state would be allowed to form a new state government that would receive presidential and, hence, legal recognition. Three Southern states had reorganised under this plan by 1864. Since Congress had no say in such a policy, however, it met with opposition from the so-called Radical Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives. In part this opposition was based on constitutional grounds, in that they feared the supremacy of the executive and, significantly, in the belief that the South would not be punished, let alone reformed, under such terms. The Radicals were also aware of the potentially favourable political consequences of Congressional Reconstruction if they themselves were able to dominate the process of the South's reattachment to the Union. The Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution that abolished slavery in 1865 meant that the Republican Party, so the Radicals calculated, stood to benefit if the freedmen - once enfranchised - chose to vote for the party that emancipated them. To the South this would have dire consequences. In addition to losing the basis of its ante-bellum economy and the millions of dollars invested in slaves, the region now faced the prospect of black participation in politics. Furthermore the Radical plan infringed the constitutional guarantee that it was a state, and not a Congressional, responsibility to regulate suffrage qualifications. The Democratic Party, under these conditions, would be threatened with extinction as Republicans saw the safety of the Union resting in their continued hold on power at the national level. Republican dominance would be safeguarded, radicals felt, only when the Southern states were controlled by Republican governments.

The assassination of President Lincoln in April 1865 intensified the debate between Radical Republican and presidential versions of Reconstruction. The Congressional Radicals distrusted Vice-President Andrew Johnson (an ex-Democrat from Tennessee who stayed loyal to the Union as the Civil War broke out but never formally became a Republican) even before he assumed the presidency. Johnson's aim was to liberate the South from the planter elite in order to allow the poor whites and yeoman farmers to gain their share of political and economic power, views that accorded with classical Jeffersonian agrarianism. Johnson

believed that blacks were unfit for political equality but was, nevertheless, utterly distrusted in the South as he was regarded as a traitor to the Democratic Party for his support of the Lincoln Administration.

Johnson, nevertheless, wanted to continue the moderate Reconstruction that Lincoln had begun without recriminations toward the South. Johnson adopted Lincoln's position that since the Union is indissoluble then technically, the Southern states had never left it in the first place. Thus his plans to grant amnesty to former Confederates on the taking of the oath of loyalty to the Union and to restore their property were intended to allow the South to reintegrate with as little rancour as possible. These objectives, however, were diametrically opposed to those of the Republican Radicals in Congress who, as well as fearing intrusion upon their prerogatives by the presidential branch, felt that the South needed to be punished for its transgression in seceding in the first instance. From this perspective, Reconstruction on Johnson's terms would lead to a return to prominence of a white supremacist Southern Democratic Party which would never voluntarily share political and economic power with their former slaves.

Congressional Reconstruction

Radical opposition to Johnson's perceived leniency toward the South led to requirements that the ex-Confederate states disavow their ordinances of secession and ratify the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery.⁷ Since the former was moot and the latter a *fait accompli* Radicals were not mollified and demanded stronger Federal intervention to safeguard the freedman's rights and a greater commitment toward building a durable two-party system in the South. Radical Republican antipathy to the South was compounded as the Southern states enacted 'Black Codes'⁸ that looked much like ante-bellum slave codes in forbidding intermarriage between the races, the right of freedmen to vote and serve on juries and, in Mississippi, the right to own land. The intent was to ensure that, as the old power relations were re-established, the ex-slave whilst officially free could never be much more than a dependent labourer or farm hand. In response the Republicans, with vast veto-proof majorities in both U.S. Houses of Congress, passed the Civil Rights Act of 1866 which guaranteed

freedmen the protections of Federal citizenship afforded to whites, in order to nullify the local Black Codes passed in the South. The necessity of using Federal law to overturn state law indicated to Republicans that the Presidential Reconstructionism of Johnson would indeed return Southern politics to the ante-bellum *status quo*.

In addition in 1866 Congress passed legislation to extend the life of the Freedman's Bureau dedicated to providing health care, education and work to blacks in the South. Since no Southern state was readmitted to the Union until 1868 the South was without any congressional representation when a series of Reconstruction acts was passed in 1867 and 1868. These acts split the South into five military districts each governed by a U.S. Army general with full authorisation to direct police powers over civilian functions. Out of the North's operation of martial law arose that Southern folklore of Northern oppression over a prostrate and defenceless South. Whilst the myth was embellished in order to demonise the vindictiveness of the Yankee for future generations of Southerners, it was not an exaggeration to characterise this aspect of Radical Reconstruction as an oppressive martial law as many constitutional rights were suspended. Readmission of the ex-Confederate states to the Union was set by Republican preconditions that included Southern acceptance of the Fourteenth Amendment that guaranteed all constitutional rights of citizenship to freedmen and required that each state adopt a new state constitution encoding suffrage rights to blacks. To the anguish of defeat in the war fought for the goal of Southern independence was added the humiliations of Reconstruction.

By 1868 all but three Southern states had been readmitted to the Union having written acceptable constitutions. Mississippi, where the constitution was defeated in a state convention over the failure to disfranchise ex-Confederates, gained Congressional approval in 1870. One final requirement for re-entry, added in 1869, was that the South ratify the Fifteenth Amendment forbidding any state from denying the suffrage 'on account of race, colour, or previous condition of servitude.' The intent was to prevent state legislatures from renegeing on the promise to guarantee the vote to the freedmen. The newly created governments were detested by Southern Democrats who feared black political empowerment

and loathed the combination of transplanted Northerners – the ‘carpetbaggers’- who ran the new state governments and their white Southern allies – the ‘scalawags’ - with whom they cooperated. That this state of affairs had come to pass was due, Southerners believed, to the vengeful nature of the Federal government, run by the party of Lincoln, determined to see the South set in economic and political subjugation to the North. Thus, ‘[i]t was in the South that resentment toward the [F]ederal Government, [had been] wired into ancestral synapses from the Civil War’⁹ and Reconstruction. This resentment was built upon states’ rights logic. It was manifest in reactionary support for the Democratic Party, seen as the last line of defence against Yankee Republican imperialism. Southerners ‘saw the[ir] traditional rights and values being overturned by what seemed to them a motley collection of blacks, Northern usurpers, and Southern traitors.’¹⁰ In the Reconstruction era Democratic Party political thought resting upon constitutional conservatism and racial reaction was defensive and included little hint of the development of economic populism that was to be central to its rhetoric in the twentieth century.

Reconstruction in Alabama and Mississippi

Despite the South’s defeat in the Civil War, Alabamians were not reconciled to accepting the freedman as an equal. Reconstruction had upset the tradition that the government of the state of Alabama was to be by, of and for the benefit of whites. When Alabama was ‘redeemed’ from the evils of Republican rule and the Democratic Party restored to power, as a result of the elections of 1874, ‘the one great lesson white [S]outherners learned from the experience of Reconstruction [was] that all issues were subordinate to the need for white supremacy . . . ,’¹¹ for division, as white reactionaries warned, would lead to the return of Republicanism and notions of racial equality.

Chapter Three outlined how the South was allowed to resume control of its internal affairs as a result of the Compromise of 1877. Alabama, however, was effectively free of the restraints of Republican rule two years earlier. In the state and Congressional elections of 1874 the Democratic Party made ‘systematic use of political violence, intimidation, and economic coercion’¹¹ including use of the Ku Klux Klan, which had spread throughout the

South after its formation in Tennessee in 1866, to inspire terror amongst blacks and white sympathisers in order to ensure the state's redemption from Republican rule. The Klan, according to Eric Foner acted as 'a military force serving the interests of the Democratic Party, the planter class, and all those who desired the restoration of white supremacy . . .'¹² On election day in Eufaula, in south-eastern Alabama, blacks attempting to vote were fired upon by a band of gunmen, led by Braxton Bragg Comer (who, from 1907-1911, would be Governor of Alabama), killing between fifteen and forty people.¹³ Despite the presence in town of a small federal military force freedmen exercising their constitutional rights were offered no protection. Indeed throughout the state there were less than 700 Federal troops.¹⁴ None of the Eufaula assailants was masked during the attack yet none would serve any sentence. Southern Democrats on a special Congressional committee that investigated the massacre maintained that whites had only acted in self-defence when the freedmen drew weapons.

The consequences were dire for Republicans as the Democrats swept the polls in 1874. Even though 33 black Republicans were elected to the Alabama state House of Representatives, Democrats won both the state House and Senate and the governorship allowing them to gerrymander Congressional districts to obliterate black majorities. 'Glory! Glory! Glory! Glory!' wrote the editor of the Grove Hill *Clarke County Democrat* after the results of the election were announced.¹⁵ Over the next two years various legal, if unethical, methods such as the necessity of posting bond in order to run for political office and the appointment of Democrats as election officials to supervise polling were used to oust Republicans in positions of influence. These methods were justified by Democrats from the need to prevent the horror of Reconstruction and maintain white supremacy.

Alabama was now in the hands of the Bourbon Democrats, a clique of politicians representing commercial and industrial interests (see Chapters Two and Five). As the French House of Bourbon was restored after the abdication of Napoleon in 1815, thus re-establishing a conservative regime, so were white conservative Alabamians returned to power in 1874. Used pejoratively by Republicans, 'Bourbon' became a label proudly worn by Democrats

who had redeemed state government from the Yankee usurper and returned it to white control. The following example illustrates the totality of the restoration of white supremacy. In the elections of 1874, twelve hundred blacks voted in Eufaula but in the presidential election of 1876 just ten blacks cast ballots for Republicans due to intimidation by the Klan and other private militias such as the White Man's Party.¹⁶ These developments reveal the foundations of Southern Democratic thought specific to the events of the post-Reconstruction era. These foundations stressing constitutional conservatism consistent with Jeffersonian precepts, were used in defence of racial extremism but were without the rhetoric of anti-elitism or of sympathy for the common man that by the 1890s became the party's *raison d'être*.

A similar counterrevolution to that in Alabama occurred in Mississippi as Democrats resumed political control in the state by 1875. Blacks and their white Republican allies had controlled the state legislature in the first half of the decade whilst two black Senators and one Representative took seats in the U.S. Congress. Despite this political power was not in proportion to their numbers,¹⁷ given that Mississippi in 1870 had a black population of 54%. In response to these manifestations of empowerment, reactionary elements, led by the Klan, carried out terrorist activities against leaders of black African American political and religious organisations. For example, in 1871 300 armed whites took over the eastern Mississippi town of Meridian, lynching four community leaders and burning a black church as well as the home of a white Radical Republican.¹⁸ State militias were unable to defend blacks, their situation exacerbated by the opposition of whites, including Republicans, to arming freedmen for the purposes of creating a militia. Violence directed against blacks did diminish on Congressional passage of the Ku Klux Klan Act in 1871 designed to protect freedmen from terrorist attacks. The weakness of enforcement mechanisms in the Act's 1872 revisions, however, and the absence of sufficient Federal forces, as in Alabama, emboldened those who saw the South's redemption from 'Black' Republican rule in violent means.

The decline of Reconstruction was also influenced by a change in political attitudes. President Ulysses Grant, a Republican and the famed Unionist Civil War general, showed

increasingly less inclination to involve the Federal government in Southern affairs in his refusal to ally himself with Radicals in the House of Representatives.¹⁹ Recognising that Grant would face Congressional pressure from Radical Republicans to protect the freedmen's constitutional rights were blatant violence against blacks to reoccur in the South, Bourbon Democrats in Mississippi found that more subtle methods could lead to the end of Republican rule. In criticising the inefficiencies and alleged misrule of the Republican government of Mississippi, local Democrats, by 1875, focused on the increased taxation levels that had been introduced during Reconstruction, charging that taxes exceeded the ability to pay. Moreover, Bourbon Democrats frequently referred to the redistributive nature of Republican taxation. They denounced such a policy as confiscatory and harmful to race relations since the freedman was deemed the sole beneficiary of state spending. The taxation issue provided the means to attack the Republicans using conventional political discourse and marked a return to the traditional Jeffersonian rhetorical values of frugality in government whilst avoiding the crude racism of the so called 'whitecappers.'²⁰ According to the Republican governor Adelbert Ames in 1875, however, 'the true sentiment of the [taxpayers' revolt] was the 'colour line' though the[y] said nothing about it.'²¹

The Democratic Party, which in Mississippi had reorganised in 1875, had now clearly become the repository for the attempt by whites to return to the ante-bellum social order with a platform that pledged to reduce taxes and spending and, moreover, resurrect pre-Civil War attitudes that white masters should hold dominion over their erstwhile slaves. This depended on Democratic success in House elections beginning with that of 1875 as the party unified across the state. Swearing that it was its intention to preserve white liberty the Democrats, in this and the subsequent election of 1876, acquiesced in terror and violence as the national Republican Party based on Grant's lame-duck administration, divorced its concerns from those of the South. In response to the Governor's appeal for Federal troops to provide a semblance of stability Grant responded that '[t]he whole public are tired out with these autumnal outbreaks in the South, and the great majority are ready to condemn any interference on the part of the [Federal] [g]overnment.'²² The death of several whites in racial

violence in Clinton near Jackson in south-western Mississippi in 1875 allowed Bourbon Democrats to present martyrs to the follies of Reconstruction. A Federal grand jury investigating the numerous instances of election intimidation in north Mississippi alone chose not to seek prosecutable indictments fearing further violence and reprisals. Democrats regained control of the state legislature and won four of the six seats in the U.S. House in 1875, completing a clean sweep in the House election held the following year.

With the Compromise of 1877 (see Chapter Three), giving Federal and Congressional blessing to the South's redemption from carpetbaggers, scalawags and 'Black' Republicans, the era of the 'Solid South' began. The Southern Democratic Party's leadership would be dominated by the Bourbons who were determined that the interests of the commercial and industrial elite would be paramount, and that dissent from white supremacy would not be tolerated. As Cash stresses, '[T]he Democratic Party of the South . . . once violence had opened the way to political action . . . became the institutionalised incarnation of the will to White Supremacy. [I]t ceased to be a party *in* the South and became the party *of* the South.'²³ (Emphasis in the original.)

The two decades following the end of Reconstruction, however, revealed that the radical Jeffersonian traditions - where privilege and elitism were disdained and where true liberty and virtue were found only in an agrarian democracy - found renewed expression as the conservatism of the Bourbons faced the challenges of populism. The chapter, so far, has shown how the twin themes of Southern thought, constitutional conservatism and racial reaction, were intertwined. To this was now added the third theme of economic populism.

Radicalism: Populism

An important part of the development of American political thought in the nineteenth century was the rise of the Populist – or People's – Party that was formed in the 1890s. Its purpose was to represent the views of Southern (and Western) farmers facing a variety of threats to their traditional modes of living in an era characterised by rapid technological and industrial change.²⁴ While it is beyond the remit of this thesis to trace this development in depth, the present examination acknowledges the influence and effect on the Southern polity of business

conglomeration and accumulation of monopoly capital. The analysis of populism in the Southern context throughout this thesis, however, refers to populism in general rather than to the historical Populist Party of the 1890s. For the purposes of this study populism is recognised where the people are extolled as sovereign over and above corporate and bureaucratic elites and where true liberty can only reside when the people are in control of their own destiny (see Chapter Two). Here the Federal government, far from hindering individual initiative as conservatives insisted (see Chapter Two), could be an enabler and provider in aiding the people's goal of achieving individual independence. Indeed, as this thesis argues, it was an ideology sufficiently flexible to be embraced by both conservative and populist politicians. That is, as presented at the beginning of the chapter, it is a major element of Southern Democratic thought. The economic populism which it espouses accommodates to (and often encourages), rather than rejects, federal programmes. It is through this populist Southern Democratic perspective that the agrarian challenge to the hegemony of the Southern Democratic Party in the 1890s was apparent. Ultimately the formal Populist Party movement was unable to break the Democratic Party stranglehold as the South, ultimately, stayed 'solid' in its deference to the party. The populist strain in Southern Democratic thought stayed vibrant even after the Populist Party's demise at the end of the nineteenth century.

In order to analyse the populist element in Southern Democratic thought, it is necessary to examine the existence and dynamism of the populism in Southern Democratic politics. This both predated the formation of the Populist Party, and continued to play a durable and vital role in Southern Democratic rhetoric throughout the twentieth century. As historian C. Vann Woodward says,

*[w]hile there is general agreement that the essential characteristics designated by the term [populism] are best illustrated by an agrarian movement in the last decade of the nineteenth century, some of the critics take the liberty of applying it to movements as early as the Jacksonians, or earlier, and to twentieth-century phenomena as well.*²⁵ (see Chapter Two).

A study of populism as an element in Southern Democratic thought reveals it to be a potentially radical, or at least reformist, force in its articulation of the ills of industrialisation and in its prescriptions for the amelioration of those iniquities. This radicalism, in the sense of a challenge to the *status quo* is most immediately, though far from exclusively, evident in what we may term the 'Populist era' i.e. the late nineteenth century when populism found expression in the formation of a variety of social and political movements dedicated to improving the economic position of the American farmer. A major conclusion of this thesis is that populism continues to be relevant in contemporary contexts, and could provide the means by which modern Democrats might seek electoral success in Alabama and Mississippi. (For a more detailed examination of the latter issue see Chapters Five and Six.)

Whilst the major impact of populist thought has been its reformist approach to pragmatic issues of promoting government aid in particular circumstances there is much in populist rhetoric that is fundamentally conservative. For example, in adhering to the fundamental Jeffersonian traditions that only the yeoman farmer possessed the hard-working values of decency and honesty of the true native-born American, the Populist Party was yearning for a mythical Golden Age, before the introduction of industrialisation and the threats to the rural way of life posed by the pace of technological change. According to John Lauritz Larson, Jefferson felt that 'small landholders necessarily composed "the most precious part of a state."' As long as the resource of land existed and republican government prevailed, there would be hope for the American Experiment.²⁶ Yet in their desire to partake of the new economic opportunities offered by expanding markets, even while denouncing those changes when they redounded to their disadvantage, the farmers merely desired their fair share of the wealth created by their labour rather than expressing a wish to overthrow an endemically corrupt system. As Edward Ayers notes, by 1890 'Southern farmers were adamant in their defence of rural life but all too aware of its limitations. They were furious at those who profited unfairly from the new industrial and commercial order but knew that the changes brought undeniable benefits to the South.'²⁷

Viewed in the context of Southern Democratic ideology and rhetoric this analysis of populism provides an example of the contradictions and complexities of party belief and belies simplistic notions that the party's tenets can be summarised in one word. Here we may find a confluence of both populist and conservative influences that shaped the ideology of the Southern Democratic Party. Such a populist stance, it may be argued, may be categorised as economically radical in its critique of the socio-economic system whilst being socially conservative in its faith that a return to the best American values was possible if power was returned to the people as intended in the Founding Fathers' conception of the Constitution. Therefore these two strands of ideology - constitutional conservatism and economic populism - are closely intertwined.

The Appeal and Rhetorical Use of Populism

The existence of a potentially viable third party, the Populist Party, in the 1890s gave the Democratic Party cause for concern. The Populists attempted to articulate the fears and aspirations of the Southern yeoman farmer by suggesting that the Bourbon Democratic leadership did not represent liberty and virtue, since they were the very same plutocratic elites that were causing ruination for the independent agrarian South. After the Compromise of 1877 the nature of Southern politics changed as the fundamental issue for white Southerners during the Reconstruction era i.e. the potential political power of the black freedman, was rendered moot by the reintroduction of Democratic redeemer governments and the denial of constitutionally granted rights to blacks via the introduction of widespread segregationist ('Jim Crow') laws passed by Southern state legislatures. The 1890 Mississippi state constitution introduced poll taxes and literacy tests as qualifications for the exercise of the suffrage (see Chapter Six). These restrictions, clearly designed to minimise the voting opportunities of blacks, were so successful that by 1892 only 8,615 blacks were registered to vote constituting just 6% of adult males over twenty-one. (As a result of the disfranchising clauses in the new constitution only 61% of white adult males were registered.) In 14 Black Belt counties in Alabama black voter registration dropped from 78,311 in 1900 to 1,081 in 1903.²⁸ One consequence of this was that since blacks no longer had a voice in state affairs,

white anti-black racial solidarity began to fracture on economic lines allowing white 'yeoman' farmers to form their own political movements.²⁹ The enduring result was to create a challenge to commercial and industrial interests of the Bourbon Democracy in the form of agrarian discontent hostile to the triumph of monopoly capitalism that the party leadership had connived at and profited from. Many 'born under a Democratic roof, rocked in a Democratic cradle, sung to sleep with a Democratic lullaby and [who] ha[d] always voted with the Democratic [P]arty. . . .[found] that the [P]arty had drifted from the landmarks of its founders.'³⁰ For example, an Alabama Democrat, who changed his party allegiance to the Populist Party, commented in 1892 that 'my own father would not hear me speak and said he would rather make my own coffin with his own hands and bury me than to have me desert the Democratic Party.'³¹ In the 1890s these discontents held the potential for a more radical, populist examination of America's political and economic system as well as creating doubts in the minds of many loyal Democrats of the party's commitment to the wellbeing of the common man.

The significance of the populist legacy for the Democratic Parties of Alabama and Mississippi is examined in later chapters. Here, the analysis focuses on the historical antecedents of Southern populism, beginning with the agrarian revolt of the late nineteenth century. As noted above, one of the effects of the South's 'redemption' following the demise of Reconstruction was to reaffirm the white supremacism of the region's politics. Overt racial conflict in the political arena, however, had been avoided as a result of the denial of black political participation. As a result, the new political cleavages that did occur took the form of class critiques of the Bourbon dominance of the Southern Democratic Party.

Over the next thirty years following the end of Reconstruction in 1877 the Democratic conservatives - the Bourbons - dominated the organisational and structural wing of the party; as well as controlling the electoral machinery, their control extended to the extent of counting of ballots and announcing the winners.³² Fearing the return of the 'Black' Republicanism of the Reconstruction era, the Bourbons refused to countenance debate on social issues that affected farmers, labourers or artisans believing that such discussion might

open up class friction. Such friction could lead to the poor of both races realising that, rather than the enemy being one another, it was the commercial and industrial elites that left both races in economic servitude to monopoly capital who were the oppressors, and that common cause should be made against them. As William Rogers *et al* emphasise, the response of the elites, the 'Bourbon formula,' was 'to exercise the prerequisites and rewards of the class structure, deny class in public debate and attack dissenters as wild radicals if they raised class interests and questions.'³³ This position, while overtly class-based, was in effect that 'all issues were subordinate to the need for white supremacy.'³⁴ Out of such intransigence emerged the rhetoric of populism marrying class, race and economic concerns.

Even before the Compromise of 1877 several agrarian crusades had already begun to challenge the political system that rewarded, so it seemed, those that lived off the toil of the farmer. The Patrons of Husbandry, popularly called 'the Grange', had gained the support of nearly 200,000 members in the South by the mid-1870s.³⁵ The Grange was a collection of voluntary co-operative associations organised at the local, state and national levels. Its leader, Oliver Hudson Kelley, began the movement in the late 1860s after having worked on a presidential commission studying Southern agriculture. Recognising that farmers faced common problems and held similar interests, Kelley began a national recruitment tour of rural America soon after.³⁶ In the post-Reconstruction period other organisations such as the Agricultural Wheel and the Farmers' Alliance publicised the hardship of rural America. Such grievances were particularly keenly felt in the South where 'most Southerners, whatever their class, had ties to a farm of one sort or another.'³⁷ These grievances included the precipitate decline of cotton prices. By 1890, these were at their lowest levels since the end of the Civil War, having fallen to the point where it cost more to grow a crop than it was subsequently worth, and where the high cost of transporting produce to markets via rail, the marginality of farming dependent on credit from bankers and merchants and the threat of foreclosure on mortgages all forced on the farmer extreme hardship.³⁸ Yet, perhaps more than these physical manifestations of their plight, what drove populism was a sense that these changes were fundamentally 'un-American.' It was not that farmers rejected material and technological

progress but there was a feeling that, in addition to being under-appreciated, they were being cheated not only by Eastern bankers and railroad magnates, by the Rockefellers and Carnegies whom Wallace would refer to nearly one hundred years later (see below), but by the Democratic Party which had abandoned its historic mission to allow the producing classes to compete in a fair environment where hard work would bring its own rewards.

It is in this latter sense that Southern populism can be cast in conservative terms as Populists looked to the past for inspiration, '[t]o', as Woodward says 'a great body of native Southern tradition and doctrine.'³⁹ Indeed, Alabamian populism manifested itself in two 'people's' parties: the Populists and in a group that called themselves Jeffersonian Democrats.⁴⁰ The anti-elitism inherent in Jeffersonian-Jacksonian democracy (see Chapter Two) provided both groups with a critique of monopoly capitalism and of corporate domination of Congress in late nineteenth century America. The utopian ideals of Jeffersonian and Jacksonian democracy envisaged virtuous government and the elimination of poverty through the widespread ownership of land. The role of government was to create the equality opportunity conditions and then adopt a *laissez-faire* attitude in leaving the citizen to succeed or fail by his own devices. It was not for the Federal government to intervene to direct economic outcomes by, for example, spending money on internal infrastructure projects that might unduly favour a state or region over another.

Such a version of simon pure Jeffersonianism, however, was no longer practical by the end of the nineteenth century. The equilibrium of the market place of classical economic theory had been thoroughly perverted by the monopolistic and oligarchic triumph of the trusts and combinations. The populist solution, first articulated in the Populist Party's national platform of 1892 stated a new twist on Jeffersonianism: 'we believe that the powers of government - in other words, of the people - should be expanded.'⁴¹ The key difference populists emphasised was that intervention was not to serve the interests of corporate America but was the necessary antidote to the abdication of governmental oversight in favour of the unfettered expansion of big business. These changes, according to the 1892 Populist Party platform were needed to ensure the survival of free institutions 'upon which our individual

prosperity' depends.⁴² Here is exemplified the reformist, yet conservative, strain of Southern populism, felt especially keenly in the heavily rural and agricultural states of Alabama and Mississippi.

To rectify these abuses, and to return the market economy to the equilibrium envisaged by Jeffersonian-Jacksonian democracy, the Populist Party's national platforms of 1892 and 1896 called for three basic changes. First, in the system of banking to include a paper currency system. Second, in the running of transportation and, third, in the management of land. In each instance, from the enlargement of the circulation of currency, to proposals to nationalise the railroads, to the reclamation of land and resources from the trusts, the movement offered a government of the people with its faith placed in the beneficial powers of government to protect the people from the depredations of rapacious business.⁴³ Populists could cite Jeffersonian authority for these beliefs. For example, in a letter to Richard Price in 1789 Jefferson wrote 'whenever the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their government. Whenever things get so far wrong as to attract their notice, they may be relied on to set them to rights.'⁴⁴ Writing to John Taylor twenty-seven years later, Jefferson similarly referred to the people as 'the safest depository of their own rights.'⁴⁵

What is worthy of note is the use of Jeffersonian rhetoric in extolling the virtue of the people, whilst using such rhetoric in the service of the 'un-Jeffersonian' goal of proposing interference in the 'natural' workings of the market by expanding, rather than limiting, the responsibilities of government. This highlights two key points. First, the flexibility of Southern Democratic political thought in its expediency to changing circumstances and second, in illustrating tensions between class interests, in casting doubt on how 'solid' the South was in its deference to the Democratic Party. Fundamentally, it may be suggested that the heart of Southern politics was, potentially, far more receptive to radicalism than has hitherto been acknowledged.

For instance, the Bourbon dominance of the Southern Democratic hierarchy was vigorously opposed by the populist movement. For example, at the end of the 1880s populists, such as Reuben Kolb of Alabama and Frank Burkitt of Mississippi (although Kolb was

happier to label himself Jeffersonian than Populist), ‘turned against the Democratic [P]arty . . . when they became convinced that it would not help the countryside.’⁴⁶ Burkitt stated, in 1892 that ‘[t]he Democratic [P]arty has ceased to hear them [the wealth producers] cry for relief and I cannot follow it further.’⁴⁷ The populism of Kolb and Burkitt, in addition to the economic concerns addressed above, also advocated ‘a fair ballot and an honest count’ and hoped that ‘through the means of kindness, a better understanding and more satisfactory condition may exist between the races.’⁴⁸ These challenges to Bourbon supremacy, particularly the challenge to white supremacy, albeit paternalistic, created ‘precisely the kind of political nightmare most feared by men of property who controlled the Democrats – a class-based alliance of blacks and dissident whites.’⁴⁹ The black writer James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938) in his autobiography, originally published in 1927, in recognising the potential of such an alliance, made a similar, and contemporary observation;

*Among the white people of [the rural South], people who have not tasted social or political power nor yet possessed the rewards of industrialism or come within its brutal field of competition, active antagonism against the Negro is lowest; so low indeed, it would probably die out if it were not continuously and furiously stirred by the . . . politicians bent on preserving their rotten oligarchy by keeping alive the sole political issue [i.e. white supremacy] upon which the “Solid South” rests.*⁵⁰

Here we see the first element of conservative constitutionalism allied most clearly to the second element, racial reaction. The response to such a threat to conservative hegemony soon became apparent. Bourbon Democrats, utilising their control of the election machinery and ballot processes, together with threats and violence, took action to consolidate their position. In the elections of 1892 and 1894, Kolb’s unsuccessful attempts to win the governorship of Alabama on the Jeffersonian Democratic ticket, were characterised by terror and fraud, as was Burkitt’s in the Mississippi gubernatorial election of 1895.⁵¹ Burkitt’s defeat occasioned rejoicing amongst Bourbons. Mississippi Democratic governor Anselm McLaurin said in 1895 that ‘[t]he rest of the country may be given over to Negro rule and



Republican highway robbers, but all Mississippi, God bless her, will always remain true to Democracy, Good Government, and white supremacy.⁵² The following year, 1896, the national Populist Party died as it fractured over whether to endorse the Democratic Party presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan on a fusionist ticket rather than its own nominee and maintain its independent character.

Overt racism challenged the potential of economic populism, whose radical edge was emasculated as conservative planters and business interests introduced changes in state constitutions to disenfranchise blacks and poor white voters, thus ending any possibility of future biracial class alliances. In Alabama, the Sayre election law of 1893 (named for its legislative sponsor A.D. Sayre of Montgomery) introduced complex registration requirements designed to minimise voter participation. Preconditions for voting included onerous literacy and property requirements and a poll tax. Such laws, for example, those contained in Alabama's Constitution of 1901 (see Chapter Five), had by the First World War reduced turnout even in presidential elections to under twenty percent.⁵³ Whilst no property restrictions operated in Mississippi an 'understanding' clause, by which the illiterate could register only if they demonstrated that they could interpret any section of the constitution that registrars chose to ask them about, was included in the constitution of 1890. (see Chapter Six)⁵⁴ Indicative of the power of the conservatives was the refusal to submit the proposals of the 1901 Alabamian constitution to the electorate. The constitutional convention simply declared its work done in proclaiming the document the law of the land. Conservative constitutionalism and racial reaction triumphed.

By the close of the nineteenth century, as the region returned to white supremacy and one party rule, blacks in Alabama and Mississippi were prevented from participation in Democratic Party primaries on the grounds that political parties were private organisations. Alabama Democrats, at the state convention of 1896, declared the party's mission 'to maintain a government in this State, fair and just to all under control of the white men of Alabama.'⁵⁵ The attempt to forge an inter-racial alliance based on class interests of the dispossessed of town and country, of labour as well as of the farmer, floundered on white

fears of black economic and political empowerment should the populists be successful. As Wayne Flynt has observed:

*Rather than directing their aggression and violence into rational patterns such as political reform, labor unions, or toward the goal of economic change, they [poor whites] reacted in traditional ways common to powerless peoples: blind and self-destructive rage, scapegoating that leveled the blame for their troubles on blacks . . .*⁵⁶

In distinguishing themselves from blacks, viewed as a racial and economic underclass, whites tacitly endorsed the political dominance of the conservatives who ran the Democratic parties of Alabama and Mississippi. White supremacy had been preserved and, moreover, power was consolidated in the hands of the planter and commercial oligarchy. 'The true philosophy of the movement,' wrote John B. Knox, president of the Alabama constitutional convention of 1901, 'was to restrict suffrage, and to place the power of government in the hands of the intelligent and virtuous.'⁵⁷ Thus, political power rested not only in the hands of a minority of the voters but with a minority of whites, i.e. the Bourbons, determined not to allow radicalism or reformism, either in the form of rural discontent or urban agitation, to upset their conception of Jeffersonian democracy where a business elite ran a *laissez-faire* economy on behalf of a population that could not be entrusted with power itself. However, the experience of late nineteenth century populism was too deeply rooted in the region's and, hence, the Democratic Party's, psyche not to leave lasting legacies. One led in the conservative and reactionary directions intimated above. The alternative path promised a future for a reformist, even radical, politics. That is, economic populism might still have a role to play despite the apparent triumph of racism and conservative constitutionalism.

Indeed, when the Populist Party collapsed after the 1896 presidential election the rhetoric of populism lived on in the Democratic Party. It was articulated by twentieth century demagogues such as Mississippi Governors James ('The White Chief') Vardaman (1904-1908) and Theodore ('The Man') Bilbo (1916-1920 and 1928-1932) (see Chapter Six). Bilbo, between 1935 and 1947, also served as Mississippi Senator in the U.S. Congress (where he

was an ardent supporter of the New Deal), as did Vardaman from 1913 to 1919. In Alabama the populist style was presented by politicians as diverse in style as Jim ('Kissin' Jim') Folsom 'one of the most liberal [S]outhern politicians in modern history' and 'the self-proclaimed "little man's best friend,"'⁵⁸ and his political protégé George Wallace both of whom became post-Second World War governors of Alabama (see Chapter Five). In these four examples demonstrate the diversity of political rhetoric contained even within the populist political tradition. Vardaman and Bilbo reminded their listeners of the imperatives of white supremacy: no matter how poor rural Southerners might be they were inherently superior to blacks. Upheavals in the socio-economic system that purported to aid the economic circumstances of whites would in practice open possibilities for black advancement and competition with whites which was a most undesirable outcome. Thus although Vardaman and Bilbo used class rhetoric and endorsed popular reforms such as public funding for the uniform provision of textbooks in state schools and for highway improvements, their message remained that of white supremacy. Vardaman, in 1895, calculated that he would find greater electoral appeal by enunciating sentiments that 'to educate a negro is to spoil a good field hand and make an insolent cook.'⁵⁹ By the late nineteenth century Vardaman fought elections imbued with class rhetoric but never compromised his belief in white supremacy (see Chapter Six).

Conversely, in Alabama Folsom's notion of politics of the people was to reject racial classifications for one that groped, tentatively, at the potential for class harmony in the rural poverty suffered amongst black and white alike, 'The Civil War is over,' he said in 1949, '[l]et us join the people together again.'⁶⁰ Here this thesis emphasises the importance of economic populism. Wallace, whilst gaining national notoriety during his first gubernatorial term (1963-1967) and in his subsequent presidential campaigns for his pronouncements on race, made many speeches during these elections calling on businesses, foundations and churches to pay a greater share of taxes in order to reduce the burden placed on working Americans. As quoted by Stephan Leshner, Wallace said in a 1968 speech:

*We're sick and tired of the average citizen being taxed to death while these multibillionaires like the Rockefellers and the Fords and the Mellons and the Carnegies . . . (have) got billions of dollars in tax-shelter foundations and they don't pay as much as you do on a percentage basis.*⁶¹

Few noted during Wallace's national political campaign, as he courted infamy with the candid nature of his analysis of America's racial turmoil, that his 'anti-establishment[ism] - and his attacks on the big newspapers, the banks and the utilities account for that electric current in his shirt-sleeved crowds at least as much as the race issue.'⁶² Such views were frequently described, for example by Leshner, as archetypally 'populist'⁶³ in their instinctive trust in the inherent honesty, decency and patriotism of the average tax-paying and law abiding citizen and in hostility to economic and cultural elites that, it seemed, at least to Southerners, to condescend to the South. Wallace appealed to those he termed the producers of American society and used populist rhetoric that echoed that of the late nineteenth century. This chapter argues that these elements form a vital and enduring element of Southern Democratic heritage.

Liberalism: From the 1890s to the New Deal

The impact of the New Deal on Southern Democratic thought has its roots in the populist movement of the late nineteenth century and the progressive movement of the early twentieth century. Whilst the influence of the Populist Party waned after the movement's defeat in the 1896 election, agrarians maintained an ability to shape the political culture of the Democratic Party in the South. In the early decades of the twentieth century demagogues, such as Vardaman and Alabama U.S. Senator Tom Heflin (1920-1931), denounced wealth and privilege and touted their agrarian heritage. Some 'neo-populists,' like Heflin, shied away from acting upon class rhetoric since to do so would upset 'the notion that white liberty and virtue depended foremost upon the presence of an underclass of brutish folk too degenerate to ascend to citizenship'⁶⁴ but others like Vardaman, Bilbo, Folsom and Wallace proudly exclaimed their affinity with the redneck voter. Such a politics often played upon the base instincts and fears of poor whites with appeals to overt racism (Folsom's refusal to do so

made him unusual in this respect) and added populism's radical analysis of the economic system. Thus the 'redneck revolt' frightened the Bourbon bourgeoisie by making clear that its class rhetoric was designed to appeal to the masses and was intended to be acted upon.

It is possible to argue, therefore, that there is a persuasive alternative vision of populism's legacies. The threat of radicalism in the 1890s pushed Democrats to the left in an attempt to convince voters that the party shared the concerns of the wealth producing classes. This much is evident in 'redneck' rhetoric. Yet the articulation of rhetoric alone would prove to be inadequate when the hard times of the 1890s were revisited in more virulent form during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The severity of the disruption to the capitalist system demanded a change in attitudes toward the Federal government's ability to alleviate economic distress. Conservative Jeffersonianism, whereby the Federal government would allow the market to operate freely and let the states conduct whatever social policy they chose, was insufficient to cope with the depth of the crisis. Southern responses to Roosevelt's New Deal indicate a further aspect to the ideology of the Southern Democratic Party: an acceptance of the beneficial powers of the Federal government to alleviate social and economic problems that were beyond the ability of state to solve. This constituted a direct reversal of nineteenth century *laissez-faire* Jeffersonism.

A forerunner to the expansive liberalism of the New Deal of the 1930s can be found in the Progressive movement of the early years of the twentieth century. The history of Progressivism is widely documented.⁶⁵ The concern of this thesis, however, is with its central tenet: that the power of the Federal government should be harnessed to solve the social problems that had arisen in consequence of the application of free-market doctrine. This aspect of Progressivism is valuable in understanding how the South could embrace so wholeheartedly the expansion of government's scope inherent in the New Deal and reject so much of classic states' rights Jeffersonian doctrine.

In the years leading to the First World War, progressives were to be found in social work, law, education and business. They highlighted their humanitarian concerns in areas as diverse as public health, literacy, the convict-lease system and child labour.⁶⁶ By focusing on

matters of direct concern to the mass of the population, and in indicating the power and willingness of reforming governments to tackle the effects of untrammelled capitalism, progressives 'were therefore able to join hands with the farmers against a common foe in resurrecting many of the goals and programs of the moribund Populist [P]arty.'⁶⁷ Thus, this reformist critique of (and solutions to) the ills besetting the South raised a response by the criticism of business elites (particularly if Northern-based) in a populist rhetoric reminiscent of Jacksonian Democracy (see Chapter Two). According to Francis Butler Simkins and Charles Pierce Roland, 'the conviction that the South was being cheated by crafty and ruthless Northern businessmen . . . could be traced back through the entire body of ante-bellum Southern economic thought to the prolix writings of John Taylor of Caroline [County, Virginia].'⁶⁸

In the period from the end of the nineteenth century to the New Deal, however, the liberal advocacy of Federal spending as an enabling force to insure against unemployment, ill-health or inadequate housing conflicted with the conservative Jeffersonian tradition of opposing the expansion of government functions that to do so was deleterious to the individualistic spirit of unfettered enterprise and to the liberties of free-born Americans. The key to recognising how the South could reject the core mantra of Jeffersonian democracy lies in the long changes wrought by industrialisation after 1865 and the simultaneous decline of agriculture throughout the region. Southern poverty during the populist era has already been alluded to. The depth, length and severity of the Great Depression, which began in 1929, was of such proportions that President Franklin Roosevelt, in July 1938, declared the South 'the nation's No. 1 economic problem.' The Federal government study *Report on Economic Conditions in the South* concluded that '[t]he low income belt of the South is a belt of sickness, misery, and unnecessary death.'⁶⁹ Thus New Deal liberalism could happily find support in the South for its denunciations of monopolistic business elites that had formed a crucial part of the appeal of Jeffersonianism-Jacksonianism in the ante-bellum era (see Chapter Two). For example Louis Brandeis, a member of the U.S. Supreme Court appointed by Woodrow Wilson and a critic of business consolidation over the previous thirty years said

in 1935 '[w]e must come back to the little unit. What was required was a return to 'regulated competition' rather than unrestricted profiteering.⁷⁰ In this sense the ideology of the New Deal was in harmony with the region's underlying economic populism and its antithesis to privilege. Finally, the attractions reformism offered can be linked to a hard-headed pragmatism: in the depths of Southern poverty in the 1930s, the offer of substantial Federal aid simply could not be rejected given the inadequate resources of local and state governments. As Simkins and Roland say, '[t]he poorest section of the nation soon recognised obvious advantages in the outstanding feature of the [New Deal] regime – liberal spending to relieve distress.'⁷¹ No more was the best government that which governed least.

Southern progressivism was, nevertheless, cast in a pro-business mould and largely followed the dictates of commercial interests.⁷² Supporting reforms such as restrictions on child labour, that aided business efficiency rather than reform *per se*, Southern progressivism was essentially conservative, rather than reformist. Reform, such as increased state spending on highway construction, was primarily to aid business. Despite these outbreaks of government activity, the key features of Southern progressivism remained wedded to conservative interpretations of Jeffersonianism that government provide the conditions for low taxation, low wages and minimal government regulation of business. There was little enthusiasm for the higher taxes that increased education spending would demand, nor for educating those citizens required as cheap labour in cotton fields or factories. During the progressive era active government was largely limited, in deference to Southern Democratic conservative constitutionalism, to the offer of tax incentives to Southern businesses in that future economic growth was recognised to rest with industry more than in agriculture. Consequently, conservative Bourbon Democrats remained a powerful force in Alabamian and Mississippian politics, as they were throughout the South in the period from Redemption to Depression, although, as Chapters Five and Six argue, not a pre-eminent one.

By the mid 1930s, however, the South had developed a 'willingness. . . . to exchange Jeffersonian individualism and states' rights for. . . . such Rooseveltian experiments as AAA [the Agricultural Adjustment Agency], PWA [the Public Works Administration], and NIRA

[the National Industrial Recovery Act].⁷³ This acceptance of a philosophy apparently at odds with the conservative values outlined in Chapters Two and Three is unremarkable. The depth of Southern support for New Deal liberalism can be traced to the bitterness of the Depression which hit the South hardest of any region in the U.S. There was, however, far more than pragmatism in Southern acceptance of Federal aid when it was offered. This chapter has argued that populism was deeply ingrained in Southern Democratic politics and in the Southern psyche. It should not be surprising that the latent radicalism of Southern populism, thwarted at the end of the nineteenth century, should become apparent in response to the economic crisis of the 1930s nor that it should find expression in the Democratic Party which drew upon an anti-elitist and anti-monopolist political tradition. Here we can once again demonstrate the inadequacy of the label 'conservative' as a term to describe the Democratic Party of the South, a party with a conservative leadership but with a mass constituency receptive to the politics of class and where both could claim to be the inheritors of Jeffersonian values.

Liberalism: The Depression and the New Deal in Alabama and Mississippi

Even before the Depression many Alabamians were already mired in poverty. It was noted, wryly, that the Depression hit when times were already awful. Agriculture, for example, had begun a depression in the mid-twenties, so that by 1935, according to the President's Committee on Farm Tenancy, 64% of Alabama farmers, far from being the independent yeoman of Jeffersonian lore, were tenants, who farmed leased land.⁷⁴ Yet they were better off than the 68,000 sharecropper families dependent on the landowner whose ground they tilled for supplies and a place to live. Throughout the decade Alabama registered the highest levels of white unemployment of any Southern state. In Jefferson County (Birmingham) alone 100,000 people were on relief. In 1929, before the onset of the Great Depression, Birmingham, in a move reflective of the city fathers' conservatism and conviction that prosperity made it unnecessary, dissolved its welfare department. In contrast, President Roosevelt, in 1935, declared the city the worst hit in the United States, as 40% of its workers in durable goods industries had lost their jobs in the first five years of the Depression.⁷⁵ In

1932, the U.S. Representative for the Birmingham area, George Huddleston, estimated that of 108,000 wage and salaried workers in his district a quarter were unemployed and 60,000 to 75,000 on short-time.⁷⁶ Low incomes and unemployment exacerbated the hardships of substandard housing, unhealthy diets and poor health already extant in Alabama causing ordinary citizens to relay their desperation to the Federal government. For example, Hattie Freeman, an unemployed white widow with several small children, wrote to Roosevelt in 1934 to plead for aid: '[p]lease for God's sake send some one to help me in this distress.'⁷⁷ In the face of inadequate Federal and state relief budgets, the publisher of the *Mobile Post* in 1934 commented darkly that human suffering was so great that 'there are sparks of revolution in the air that may burst into flames at any moment,' a sentiment echoed by Edward O'Neal, the Alabamian president of the American Farm Bureau Federation in 1933.⁷⁸

Mississippi was also deeply poverty stricken.⁷⁹ A Mississippi anecdote referred to the state's leadership's predilection for aiding business at the expense of social reform. Highways, desired by business to facilitate trade and profits, allowed Mississippians to 'ride to the poorhouse on the best roads in the country.'⁸⁰ Already suffering from the effects of the flooding of the Mississippi river in 1927, and then from drought in 1930 and 1931, the Depression gave rise to similar comments in the two states. Governor Bilbo told newsmen in 1931 that in his state, '[f]olks are restless. Communism is gaining a foothold. Right here in Mississippi some people are about ready to lead a mob. In fact, I'm getting a little pink myself.'⁸¹ On one April day in 1932 a fourth of Mississippi's land, in a state where over 70% of farmers were tenants, was under auction, as farmers were forced to sell their holdings. *Shadow of the Plantation*, Charles Johnson's 1934 survey of agriculture in four Southern states, including Alabama and Mississippi, found that very few sharecropping farmers had earned any cash income since the First World War. Those families that did earned incomes averaging \$105.43. In 1930 per capita cash farm income was \$71, compared to mid-west farm states such as Iowa and Illinois where it was \$365 and \$207 respectively.⁸² Per capita income in Mississippi in 1932 was \$126, compared to \$401 in the nation. Many Mississippians made direct appeals to Senator Bilbo for him to pass their concerns on to FDR. A widower from

Corinth in the north-east hill country wrote to say that he had to depend on the Works Progress Administration and that he would 'thank you [FDR] a thousand times if you will help me find work.' A widow, at the age of twenty-five, related how she owed the doctor \$25 but with the crops failing to make money she would not be able to pay her bills. She pleaded that Bilbo 'do all you can for me.'⁸³ Both Alabama and Mississippi suffered grievously from the decline in cotton prices that fell to six cents per pound by 1932-1933 from a peak of twenty-eight cents per pound in 1923.⁸⁴

It became evident that it was beyond the means of local and state governments to deal with the worsening conditions. Only the Federal government had the means to, at the very least, provide adequate relief to alleviate rural and urban poverty. Indicating that Southern Democratic ideology was very far from dogmatic, U.S. Representative William Bankhead of Alabama observed that the severity of the times demanded a revision of Jeffersonian biases against relief whilst Alabama U.S. Senator Smith Brookhart and Birmingham's Huddleston proposed a fifty million dollar federal unemployment relief bill. In dissent, Senator Carter Glass of Virginia chided his colleagues for proclaiming Jeffersonian values of limited government and minimal federal spending whilst protecting their own states' interests with Federal aid. 'Jefferson,' he said, 'would not speak to one of them.'⁸⁵

Pre-New Deal answers to the economic crisis were limited. In 1932 Mississippi, in response to a state deficit of fourteen million dollars introduced a two per-cent sales tax, thus becoming the first state to adopt regressive taxation.⁸⁶ Mississippi state law required a balanced budget, leaving no funding available for city or farm, as the Jeffersonian values of low taxation continued to hold sway with the Bourbon Democrats, industrialists and planter classes that controlled the state legislature in the pre-Roosevelt era (see Chapter Six).

Roosevelt had made no more than a passing reference to a 'New Deal' during his successful campaign for the presidency in 1932 and the Democratic Party's platform adopted at the nominating convention remained faithful to traditional Jeffersonian economic values in stressing the need for economy in government and balanced budgets. The platform proclaimed that the party favoured 'maintenance of the national credit by a federal budget

annually balanced.⁸⁷ Roosevelt's election, nevertheless, occasioned great optimism in the South where, according to Cash, 'it was almost as though the bones of Pickett and his brigade had suddenly sprung alive to go galloping up that slope to Gettysburg again and snatch victory from the Yankee's hand after all.'⁸⁸ Roosevelt's use of a vacation home in Warm Springs, Georgia endeared him as a favourite son of the South, even prior to his election. He farmed the land and tried agricultural experiments on it to educate himself and his neighbours as to how yields may be improved.⁸⁹ Despite his Yankee, patrician background, Roosevelt became a Southern hero, winning four presidential elections in Alabama and Mississippi by huge margins (see Chapter Three). The Democratic Party in the South during the 1930s evinced views that ranged from the reactionary to the radical, as this chapter has demonstrated but the South, according to the Alabama journalist John Temple Graves in 1939, whilst 'looking right, left, up, down and over. . . . still loves Roosevelt.' Southern historian Dewey Grantham in a series of 1962 lectures on Southern politics noted that the support given by Southern congressmen to the New Deal was a reflection of the economically liberal tendencies of their constituents.⁹⁰ Chester Morgan, in his study of Senator Bilbo's unstinting support for the New Deal, argued that 'if Mississippi had a liberal constituency, the rednecks were it.'⁹¹

New Deal legislation *per se* is not the subject of this analysis. But reference to two programmes, the Federal provision of welfare, and aid to agriculture, show the impact of New Deal liberalism. Such progressive reform was popular in Alabama and Mississippi and serves to illustrate once more the depth and variety of political belief within the Southern Democracy.

The immediate necessity in both states was to provide relief from the unemployment and poverty that local and state governments were unable or unwilling to grant. A prime example of the welfare programme is given in the fact that for two years, from 1933 to 1935, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) aided thousands of jobless people in the South in the creation of temporary jobs that were used to build a variety of infrastructure projects. For example, via the Public Works Administration (PWA), workers constructed four

sewage treatment plants in Birmingham. Such projects were in direct conflict with Jeffersonian-Jacksonian admonitions against the utilisation of Federal funds for internal improvements. The desperation of the times elicited reactions that were not sympathetic towards ideological consistency. In the judgement of Alabama historian Wayne Flynt, FERA saved the city's population.⁹²

FERA also had an impact on upon the lives of rural Alabamians through the Rural Rehabilitation Administration. Here the Federal government provided rented land, credit, mules and equipment to poor farmers. By December 1934, 115,000 families were enrolled making the programme the largest of its type in the nation. More significantly, in response to the agricultural depression, Roosevelt's Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) included a variety of measures, such as subsidies and voluntary acreage reduction that, once again, contravened *laissez-faire* Jeffersonianism.⁹³ Nevertheless, such programmes were enormously popular in both states and throughout the South, although some farmers felt that too much AAA funding went to larger landowners than to tenant farmers where need for relief was acute.

One of the most significant achievements of the New Deal for rural Southerners was the introduction of electricity to isolated farms. Prior to the 1930s only three per cent of Southern farms, and less than one per cent in Mississippi, were served by electric power. The New Deal eventually brought electric power to a million farms nationwide. Of greater significance in the context of traditional Southern Democratic antipathy to the Federal government was that not only was this a Federal programme, but that it was organised on the basis of a co-operative system whereby farmers shared the costs of constructing facilities, indicating the existence of a community spirit in rural heartlands and a rejection of absolute individualism. In 1935 Congress appropriated \$4.8 billion for rural power and FDR created the Rural Electrification Administration (REA). Together with the success of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) in providing jobs and cheap electrical power to an area, including parts of northern Alabama and northern Mississippi, which had been the poorest in the nation,

it was little wonder that an Alabama minister believed that FDR's election to the presidency 'must have been God's plan to save this country from ruin.'⁹⁴

By 1935 '[y]esterday's dangerous radicalism [was] the height of conservatism.'⁹⁵ Indeed, but for the ameliorative effects of New Deal relief programmes a more radical politics may have gained support in Alabama and Mississippi. Such support could have come from the redistributive rhetoric of ex-Louisiana governor and U.S. Senator Huey Long who challenged FDR from the left of the Democratic Party. The New Deal was criticised from the left for providing no more than a veneer of recovery through rhetoric, and minimal levels of relief, whilst leaving the capitalist system intact. Conservatives in both the major parties agreed with Glass that the New Deal was undercutting fundamental American values of individualism and self-reliance and that, left unchecked, it would result in socialism. Furthermore, the acceptance of Federal money brought with it alarm in the South that Federal agencies would begin to investigate Southern racial relations as a *quid pro quo* for the giving of economic aid. These debates were largely academic to the vast majorities of Southerners who saw Roosevelt trying to do something for the needy. Southern families on relief did not see themselves, as did Georgia governor Eugene Talmadge in September 1933, as 'bums and loafers.'⁹⁶ Poverty in the South was too tangible for the response to Roosevelt's initiatives to be anything other than one of gratitude that someone in Washington seemed to care about them.

The New Deal programmes referred to above did provide aid to the needy. Whilst the amounts provided failed to offer adequate, let alone substantial, relief they did have an important political effect on the South.⁹⁷ The New Deal was no more popular anywhere in the nation than in the South, if judged by FDR's electoral success. At the end of 1935 Alabama Representative Joe Starnes estimated 'conservatively' that 80% of his district's voters wanted FDR re-elected in the following year's presidential election.⁹⁸ The results bore him out as 86% of Alabamians cast their ballot for FDR. In the 1936 presidential election in Mississippi, the Democratic presidential ticket won 97% of the vote. The significance of these results lies in the South's wholehearted embrace of the New Deal's vision of an expanded role for the

Federal government as an enabler and provider for the marginalised and poverty stricken. The New Deal introduced a minimum wage, a social security act including aid to widows with dependent children, a shortened workweek, the right to join a trade union, and ended the employment of children in the cotton mills.⁹⁹ All of these measures stood in direct opposition to the Jeffersonian ideology of the 'natural', that is to say limited, function of government promoted by conservatives. The New Deal advocated greater centralisation of government and promoted the notion of borrowing money as a means of spending the country's way out of Depression. This flouted ingrained conservative economic attitudes whereby one spent within one's means and where such homely nostrums were transferred to the running of national and state finances, where budgets had to balance. Thus the New Deal advocated federal methods of government intervention while serving the Jeffersonian end of economic equality of opportunity.

The popularity of the New Deal in the South - by no means dependent upon Roosevelt's personal charisma - indicates the amenability of the Southern Democracy to populist, radical and liberal ideas and of their introduction and fruition in the policies of the Federal government. The New Deal, in the judgement of Southern historian Dewey Grantham, 'precipitated an extraordinary popular agitation over political and economic issues. It frightened the conservatives . . . promoted the growth of organised labo[u]r, and encouraged the spread of liberal ideas.' Additionally, it galvanised 'the first stirrings of the [S]outhern "proletariat" - submerged elements like the sharecropper [and] the textile worker . . .'¹⁰⁰ Here Southerners expropriated the most radical elements within the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian traditions, those that championed the people against monopolies and the moneyed interests of Wall Street. Yet such an ideology maintained the traditional Jeffersonian virtues of thrift, sobriety, piety and the rewards due to the individual in pursuit of honest hard work. Consequently, Southern Democratic political philosophy, as this chapter has demonstrated, was sufficiently inclusive and flexible to adapt Jeffersonian values to changing circumstances.

An illustration comes from the way in which disaffected Southern Democrats, opposed to the 'downright Communism' of the relief policies of FERA and the AAA, sent

invitations to 'Jeffersonian Democrats' throughout the South to a 'Grass Roots Convention' to be held in Macon, Georgia in 1936. In this instance conservative Southern Democrats - the Bourbons, the Big Mules (see Chapter Five) and the 'banker-merchant-farmer-lawyer-doctor-governing class' of the county elites - saw themselves as the inheritors of genuine Jeffersonianism which they equated with limited government run by an intelligent and virtuous elite on behalf of those not capable of being entrusted with power themselves.¹⁰¹ The Jeffersonian Democrat label had also been used in the late 1920s by U.S. Senator Tom Heflin after he had been threatened with expulsion by the Bourbon dominated state Democratic Party executive committee for supporting Ku Klux Klan backed candidates in state elections. Heflin, however, had essentially supported the Big Mule agenda in the U.S. Senate whilst only using populist rhetoric (see Chapter Two) to gain electoral support.¹⁰² These interpretations of Jeffersonianism contrasted starkly with the appellation 'Jeffersonian Democrats' applied in the 1890s by Alabama populists opposed to the effects of the policies of the privileged on the farmers and wealth producers, to describe their conception of where their political patrimony lay (see above and Chapter Five). Thus the Southern Democratic Party's ideological lineage embraced two traditions, one reformist and populist, the other conservative and reactionary, centred on vastly differing interpretations of the Jeffersonian heritage.

Conservatism

Whilst reference has been made to the liberal elements and populist roots of the New Deal, concessions were made to key Southern sensitivities in order to establish and maintain Southern Democratic legislative support in Congress. Race relations and states' rights remained key factors in any analysis of those integral conservative values of the South raised in Chapter Three. It was in deference to these sensibilities, and other important issues of personal morality and religion, that the Republican Party was able to make the post-1945 electoral gains in both presidential and congressional elections, referred to in Chapter Three.

Conservative Democrats feared the New Deal for it threatened, through the expanded powers of the Federal government, their control of property, labour and local government and

implied a challenge to white supremacy. After 1935 New Deal measures moved from relief to reform as FDR, looking to defuse Long's challenge from the populist left of the party, advocated increased taxes on the rich and recognition of trade union collective bargaining rights. The New Deal had increased Federal government involvement in state affairs but had been careful to ensure that state and local government officials administered the distribution of funds in deference to Southern states' rights feelings. For example, 'planters controlled the AAA and employed the agricultural program to secure their control over land and labour, without offering protection to tenants.'¹⁰³ Similarly, New Dealism did not interfere with race issues in the South and was not prepared to propose civil rights legislation that might affect Southern racial conservatism. For example, whilst strongly opposed to the existence of lynching, FDR did not pursue a federal anti-lynching statute in deference to Southern states' rights sentiment and, by extension, to white supremacy.¹⁰⁴ In both cases, however, opposition to the changes wrought in the increase of centralisation in the Federal government and in the minimalist steps taken to dismantle Southern racial inequality served to highlight the enduring relevance of Southern Democratic conservatism centred on the icon of states' rights and antipathy toward centralism in the Federal government.

Southern Democrats noted the huge margins of victory gained by FDR in the 1936 presidential election in America's northern urban centres. The millions of votes given to the Democratic ticket here came from liberals, labour and, significantly, blacks. These interests represented attitudes inimical to the conservative establishment in the South. At the 1936 presidential nominating convention, for the first time in its history, the Democratic Party seated black delegates. When a black minister began to offer the convocation prayers at one session U.S. Senator Ellison 'Cotton Ed' Smith of South Carolina led a walk-out of a small group of Southern delegates, foreshadowing the reaction of the 'Dixiecrats' at the 1948 convention (see Chapter Three). Such developments suggested to Southern delegates a reprise of the decline of Southern influence that had occurred in the decades prior to the Civil War and that a concomitant rise in Northern authority in the Democratic Party would be an inevitable outcome. Smith commented that 'the doors of the white man's party have been

thrown open to snare the Negro vote in the North.¹⁰⁵ In short, FDR's achievement in making the Democrats a national party diluted the South's importance in Democratic calculations of strategies to win the majority of votes in the electoral college and in Congress. Indeed, following the 1936 congressional elections the South controlled 26 of 75 Democratic seats in the Senate and 116 of 333 in the House. An indication of this marginalisation was the vote in the House on passage of a national minimum wage law in 1938. While the House voted in favour of the bill by 314 votes to 97, Southerners accounted for 52 of the 56 dissident Democrats. Senator Glass encapsulated the views of the Southern old guard with prescience in 1938 :

*The South would better begin thinking whether it will continue to cast its 152 electoral votes according to the memories of the Reconstruction era of 1865 and thereafter, or will have spirit and courage enough to face the new Reconstruction era that [N]orthern so-called Democrats are menacing us with.*¹⁰⁶

John Temple Graves, writing in *The Nation* in 1939 posited the alternative view. The Southern masses had 'come to include Roosevelt in their tradition as they include the Democratic [P]arty itself. . . . he is their man; they believe in his intentions; they suspect his enemies.' And again: '[f]or the masses [in the South] Roosevelt was the Democratic Party, the rebel yell, Woodrow Wilson [the last Southern President], and Robert E. Lee rolled into one present help in trouble.'¹⁰⁷ In this and in other analyses, the essence of the white Southern Democratic ideology had not changed. It was still economically populist but the national Democrats had become more socially liberal. Influenced by the politics of civil rights and the potential for electoral gain from the black bloc vote, the national Democratic Party turned to social democracy and racial egalitarianism, strains of political thought alien to the conservative Southern tradition.¹⁰⁸ It was in response to such underlying trends, highlighted in attitudes to race and the place of government, that many Southern Democrats would turn, by degree, to the Republicans in the post-war period as this, and the previous chapter have suggested.

Conclusion

This analysis has shown the three strands of constitutional and social conservatism, racial reaction and economic populism in Southern Democratic thought. The Reconstruction, Populist and New Deal eras highlight these strands of Southern Democratic political thought and rhetoric. Southern ideology was conservative and reactionary; it was reformist, even radical. It was frequently, if often only rhetorically, populist. The New Deal began to raise the possibility that economic populism might move Southern politics in socially liberal directions, for example into a recognition by poor whites that they had more to gain by uniting with blacks in pursuit of common class interests than they had to lose in racial division. Indeed, the enthusiasm for FDR and the New Deal was palpable amongst Southern electorates suffering the crushing burdens of poverty. Further advances toward liberalism and reform, however, were to be thwarted by a combination of several factors that reasserted themselves in the post-war era, factors that demonstrate fundamental conservatism in the South.

It is relevant to remark upon a dissonance between political elites in Alabama and Mississippi who were, often, much more reactionary and conservative than electorates which, as this chapter has argued, showed a willingness to accept liberal Federal government policies in response to economic hardship. If the South benefited from the New Deal, it may fairly be asked why, socially and culturally, the region remained politically so conservative? Chapter Three outlined the South's growing antipathy towards the liberal presidential candidates adopted by the national Democratic Party in the post-civil rights era and noted that the genesis of these trends in the presidential elections of 1948 and 1964. The common denominators in explaining the weakness of the national Democratic Party's performance in these returns was identified in successive presidential candidacies' failures to comprehend the strength of states' rightism in the South and in its conservative attitudes toward race relations. The existence of the latter factor, in conjunction with the former (detailed in the previous chapter), created a central barrier to the development and nurturing of liberalism in the South. In 1944 the *New York Post* editorialised that '[t]he South never had a chance in American life. Its

economic relationship to the rest of the nation was always cockeyed and from there it is only a step to cockeyed race relationships.¹⁰⁹ Southern poverty, rather than uniting the races in class harmony, caused racial friction as demagogues reminded whites that, whilst they may be poor, their racial heritage made them superior to blacks. Furthermore, attempts to diminish inequality by legislative means were portrayed as threatening to the financial position of poor whites already keenly aware of their economic marginality. Equality for blacks would result, so whites were led to understand and many widely believed, to competition for jobs and downward pressure on wages. Added to this mantra was the constant refrain that Federal attempts to legislate Southern conduct of race relations interfered with the Tenth Amendment, always backed by rhetorical references that Federal intrusion marked a Second Reconstruction.

Chapter Three outlined the South's disenchantment with the pro-civil rights policies adopted by national Democratic Party presidential candidates. Initially, in 1948 this was manifested in presidential elections by support for the dissident presidential candidacy of the 'Dixiecrat' Strom Thurmond, a mantle later taken up by George Wallace in the presidential campaign of 1968. More significantly, in the post-Civil Rights era the Republican Party was to benefit electorally from the South's disconnection from the national Democrats (see Chapter Three).

Whilst the South did come to terms with the civil rights revolution it did not return its political allegiance to the Democratic Party at the national level. By 1980 the South gave all its electoral votes (bar that of Georgia, the home state of President Jimmy Carter) to the Republican Party. In this context the comments of Virginius Dabney, the editor of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, were auspicious:

Many Southerners who currently profess allegiance to the Democratic Party would be far more congenitally situated as Republicans if they could but forget Thad Stevens and Ben Wade [Radical Republicans during the Reconstruction period], and put out of their minds that to their grandfathers

*the Democratic [P]arty was only slightly less sacrosanct than the Army of Northern Virginia.*¹¹⁰

By endorsing the civil rights movement and in seeking the votes of blacks, the ties that bonded the 'Solid South' to the national Democrats were severed. This, however, is an insufficient explanation of the extent of the Democratic Party's demise in the region and in Alabama and Mississippi in particular. A more complete account of the political changes sweeping the South during and after the civil rights era must include recognition of the success with which the Republican Party picked up 'the social issue,'¹¹¹ first raised by the Wallace campaign of 1968 (see Chapter Four) and described by Ben Wattenberg in his 1995 book *Values Matter Most*.¹¹²

The Republicans tapped into the region's populism by attacking unelected elites of, for example, academia, the Supreme Court and the Federal government, targeting the perception of liberalism's cultural arrogance in demeaning the values of the hard-working, tax-paying patriotic American. Ronald Reagan, during the 1980 presidential campaign, denounced the Voting Rights Act as 'humiliating' to Southerners (although, presumably, not to black Southerners). Republicans stressed the need for limited, economical and efficient government. Reagan's comment, during his first inaugural presidential address on January 20 1981 that 'government is not the solution to our problems' was archetypally Jeffersonian. In a similar vein his view that the 'Federal Government did not create the [s]tates; but the [s]tates created the Federal Government' offered rhetorical encouragement for the advocates of states' rights. During the presidential contest he denounced the inefficiencies and obtrusiveness of government and promised to 'revitalise the values of family, work, and neighbourhood,' and pledged to 'restore our private and independent social institutions.'¹¹³ Such rhetoric may indeed be categorised as Jeffersonian. It may also be seen, rhetorically, as populist in placing the common people's concerns ahead of distant and bureaucratic, elitist government.

In studying voting returns and exit polls psephologists began to refer to the 'Reagan Democrat' as a new category of voter (one recognisable nationally and not confined exclusively to the South).¹¹⁴ For example, in 1980 Reagan won 57% of the white working

class vote, according to political scientists Ruy Teixeira and Joel Rogers in their 2000 analysis of white working class voting habits.¹¹⁵ These were the same type of voters, largely white males, that Wallace had appealed to who had tired of the liberal permissiveness of the immediate post-civil rights era that they perceived as dominated by demonstrations and riots, burning of draft cards, increases in crime, drug use amongst the young, federal welfare for those who simply chose not to work and a sense that America's traditional moral values were no longer respected by bureaucrats and the intelligentsia. In the early 1970s Richard Nixon had noted that these were the issues that national Democrats hated, as attempts to solve these problems were inextricably bound with racial overtones. Nixon praised Southerners' patriotism and remarked that they were a people (the latter word indicative for the sense it gave of Southern exceptionalism) who maintained 'strong moral and spiritual values.'¹¹⁶ This appeal to white Democrats, dubbed the 'Southern Strategy' within the Nixon Administration, emphasised Republican opposition to national Democratic welfare and affirmative action programmes and was aimed at prising whites away from their ancestral party loyalties. It seemed, therefore, that Southerners had 'finally realised that the Republicans were the natural standard-bearers of retrenchment and racial conservatism.'¹¹⁷ Blue collar workers feared 'the impoverished of the nation' for the threats they presented to their fears of job insecurity and resented the higher taxes that they were asked to pay to finance welfare programmes for the poor.¹¹⁸ As Teixeira and Rogers argue these voters felt that the Democratic Party was not serving their interests. They became 'very reluctant to pay for program[m]es that they did not think worked, or worked for everyone but them.'¹¹⁹ in addition 'instead of honouring core values . . . [the Democratic Party] focused on social program[m]es to help gays, women and minorities.'¹²⁰ In the 1972 Presidential election Nixon took over three-quarters of the popular vote in both Alabama and Mississippi for the Republican Party. The national Democratic Party no longer represented Southern views. Several factors had created this impression. White Southerners came to terms with the civil rights revolution but it was 'the fusion of the [national] Democratic Party with the issues of high taxes and a coercive, redistributive [Federal] government'¹²¹ that caused erstwhile Democrats to shift their political allegiances.

Thus we may once again refer to the Southerner (and Alabamian and Mississippian) as having conservative instincts, particularly on social issues. It has been the intention of this chapter to demonstrate the variety of thought in the Southern Democratic Party. To label it simply as 'conservative' by reference to the states' rights philosophy of Jefferson is to fail to appreciate how that canon also included the anti-elitism that would allow Populists to label themselves as Jeffersonian even as anti-New Deal Democrats could do likewise for diametrically different reasons. Building upon this chapter's contents, it is appropriate to turn to the effect of the foregoing political trends by referring to the contemporary case studies of Alabama and Mississippi by examining the beliefs and actions of each state's Democratic Party in the post-civil rights era within the context of the political heritage in their respective states. By so doing a clearer picture of white Southern Democratic political belief can be gained. Chapter Five turns, first, to the Alabama Democratic Party.

Chapter Four Footnotes

1 There are many works on Reconstruction and its effects on the South. The following were of particular value in the writing of this chapter : Richard Nelson Current, *Those Terrible Carpetbaggers; A Reinterpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press 1988); Michael W. Fitzgerald, 'Wager Swayne, The Freedman's Bureau and the Politics of Reconstruction in Alabama,' *Alabama Review* Volume 48 July 1995 and 'Republican Factionalism and Black Empowerment: The Spencer-Warner Controversy and Alabama Reconstruction 1868-1880,' *Journal of Southern History* Volume 64 August 1998; Walter L. Fleming, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama* (Gloucester, Ma.: Peter Smith 1949); William C. Harris, *Presidential Reconstruction in Mississippi* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press 1967); James M. McPherson, *Ordeal By Fire. Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1982); Otto H. Olsen, *Reconstruction and Redemption in the South* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press 1980); Michael Perman, *The Road to Redemption* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press 1984); Edwin C. Rozwenc, *Reconstruction in the South* (Boston, Ma.: D.C. Heath 1952); Sarah Woolfolk Wiggins, 'Amnesty and Pardon and Republicanism in Alabama,' *Alabama Historical Quarterly* Volume 26 Winter 1964 and 'The Scalawag in Alabama Politics,' *Alabama Review* Volume 31 April 1978.

2 Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage. George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Simon and Shuster 1995), p 10. See also Glenn Feldman, *Politics, Society and the Klan in Alabama 1915-1949* (Tuscaloosa, Al.: University of Alabama Press 1999), p 208.

3 W.J Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Vintage Books 1941), p 107.

4 Peter Applebome, *Dixie Rising. How the South is Shaping American Values, Politics and Culture* (New York: Harvest 1997), p 126. See also Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, p 42; Cash, pp 124-126; Dewey W. Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South. A Political History* (Louisville, Ky.: University of Kentucky Press 1988, pp 1 and 4; Fred L. Hobson, *Tell About the South. The Southern Rage to Explain* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press

1983), pp 85-128: G. Ward Hubbs, *Alabama Politics 1819-1997*, <http://www.southernopinion.com.html>; James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (New York: Viking 1989), p 159; Melody Kubassek, 'Ask Us Not to Forget. The Lost Cause in Natchez, Mississippi,' *Southern Studies* Volume 3 Fall 1992, pp 155-170; George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press 1967), p 184; Eric H. Walther, 'Fire-Eaters and the Riddle of Southern Nationalism,' *Southern Studies* Volume 3 Spring 1992, pp 66-77; Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptised in Blood. The Religion of the Lost Cause 1865-1920* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press 1980). See also for references to Southern Democratic responses to Reconstruction Gore Vidal's historical novel *1876* (New York: Random House 1976).

6 Chester M. Morgan, *Redneck Liberal. Theodore G. Bilbo and the New Deal* (Baton Rouge, La.: University of Louisiana State University 1985), p 7.

7 Constitutional amendments do not require unanimous approval from state legislatures in order to be ratified. Consequently, the Mississippi state legislature did not need to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolishing slavery as the amendment had gained the necessary support from three-quarters of state legislatures as in constitutionally required. However, this oversight was rectified in 1995 when the Mississippi legislature symbolically ratified the Thirteenth Amendment. Similarly, it was twenty years after the 1967 Supreme Court decision *Loving v. Virginia*, which declared all anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional before Mississippi declared the provision of the state constitution forbidding marriages between whites and any person of one-eighth 'negro' blood. Anthony Walton, *Mississippi. An American Journey* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1996), pp 124 and 131.

8 Walton, p 125. See also Neil R. Peirce, *The Deep South States of America. People, Power, and Politics in the Seven Deep South States* (New York: W.W. Norton), pp 167-168; Loren Schweninger, 'Black Citizenship and the Republican Party in Reconstruction Alabama,' *Alabama Review* Volume 29 April 1976, pp 83-103; Lou Falkner Williams, *The Great South Carolina Ku Klux Klan Trials 1871-1872* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press 1996), p

3.

9 Applebome, *op cit* p 97.

10 Stephan Leshner, *George Wallace. American Populist* (Reading, Ma.: Addison-Wesley 1994), p 11. See also Sarah Woolfolk Wiggins, 'Unionist Efforts to Control Alabama Reconstruction,' *Alabama Historical Quarterly* Volume 30 Spring 1968, pp 52-64.

11 Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, p 37. See also Grantham, p 6.

12 Eric Foner, *Reconstruction. America's Unfinished Revolution 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row 1988), pp 425-444. See also Carter, *The Politics of Rage* p 36; Feldman, *Politics, Society and the Klan in Alabama 1919-1949*, p 131; Melinda M. Hennessy, 'Reconstruction Policy and the Military; The Eufaula Riot of 1874,' *Alabama Historical Quarterly* Volume 38 Summer 1976, pp 112-125 and Walton, p 127.

13 Chandler Davidson and Bernard Grofman (eds), *Quiet Revolution in the South. The Impact of the Voting Rights Act 1965-1990* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press 1994), p 42. See also Hans L. Trefousse, *Reconstruction : America's First Attempt at Racial Democracy* (New York : Van Nostrand Reinhold 1971), pp 60-66.

14 William Warren Rogers, Robert David Ward, Leah Rawls Atkins and Wayne Flynt, *Alabama. The History of a Deep South State* (Tuscaloosa, Al.: University of Alabama Press 1994), p 263.

15 Ibid, p 264 and Feldman, p 64.

16 Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, p 37. For a more detailed account of north Alabama politics in this era and its consequences see Samuel L. Webb, *Two-Party Politics in the One Party South: Alabama's Hill Country 1874-1920* (Tuscaloosa, Al.: University of Alabama Press 1997).

17 Davidson and Grofman, p 137. See also Peirce, p 197.

18 Peter Camejo, *Racism, Revolution Reaction 1861-1877. The Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction* (New York: Pathfinder Press 1976), pp 146-147.

19 Bradley G. Bond, *Political Culture in the Nineteenth Century South. Mississippi 1830-1900* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press 1995), p 174. See also Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South*, p 3.

20 Bond, pp 288-289. See also Wayne Flynt, *Poor But Proud. Alabama's Poor Whites* (Tuscaloosa, Al.: University of Alabama Press 1989), p 213. For a specific example of vigilantism in Southern society see William F. Holmes, 'Moonshiners and Whitecappers in Alabama 1893,' *Alabama Review* Volume 34 July 1981, pp 31-49 and 'Whitecapping : Agrarian Violence in Mississippi 1902-1906,' *Journal of Southern History* Volume 35 May 1969, pp 165-195. For a more general treatment of this issue see George Rable, *But There Was No Peace; The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press 1984).

21 Bond, p 175.

22 Camejo, p 154.

23 Cash, *The Mind of the South*, pp 131-132. See also Bruce J. Shulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt. Federal Policy, Economic Development and the Transformation of the South 1938-1980* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press 1994), p 8. For a full treatment of the Southern Democratic Party's one-party control see J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics. Suffrage Restrictions and the Establishment of the One-Party South* (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press 1974).

24 Five of the most lucid and analytically acute studies of the Populist Party are: John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt; A History of the Farmer's Alliance and the People's Party* (Lincoln, Ne.: University of Nebraska Press 1961); Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise. The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press 1976); Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform From Bryan to FDR* (New York : Alfred A. Knopf 1985); Bruce Palmer, 'Man Over Money.' *The Southern Populist Critique of American Capitalism* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press 1980) and Theodore Saloutas, *Farmer Movements in the South 1865-1933* (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press 1960). See also Francis Sheldon Hackney, *Populism to Progressivism in Alabama* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press 1969) and William Warren Rogers, *The One-Gallused Rebellion: Agrarianism in Alabama 1865-1896* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press 1970).

25 C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press 1968), p 144.

26 John Lauritz Larsen, 'Jefferson's Union and the Problem of Internal Improvements,' in Peter S. Onuf (ed), *Jeffersonian Legacies* (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press 1993), p 345. See also Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South*, p 14 and Rogers *et al*, p 300.

27 Edward L. Ayers, *Southern Crossing: A History of the American South 1877-1906* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1995), p 134.

28 Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics. Social Change and Political Consequences Since 1945* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press 1995), p 82. See also Peirce, *The Deep South States of America*, p 169 and Walton, p 133.

29 C. Van Woodward, *Origins of the New South 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press 1951), p 336.

30 Ayers, p 145. See also Robert C. McMath, *American Populism. A Social History 1877-1898* (New York.: Hill and Wang 1993), p 197.

31 Ayers, *The Promise of the New South. Life After Reconstruction* (Oxford : Oxford University Press 1992), p 272.

32 Rogers, et al, *Alabama*, p 288.

33 Rogers, *ibid*, p 289. See Palmer, pp 50-66 for an analysis of the populist approach to the race issue in the 1890s.

34 Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, p 37. See also Gerald H. Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Revolt. Ballots and Bigotry in the 'New South.'* (University, Al.: University of Alabama Press 1977) and Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South*, p 33.

35 Ayers, *Southern Crossing*, p 111.

36 See McMath, pp 58-62 and Rogers *et al*, pp 294-296.

37 Ayers, *ibid*, p 138. See also Chandler Davidson, *Race and Class in Texas Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press 1990), p 20.

- 38 Flynt, *Poor But Proud*, p 243. See also Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South*, p 18.
- 39 Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, p 249. See also Ayers, p 152.
- 40 See Carter, p 38; Flynt, p 252; Palmer, *Man Over Money*, pp 154-168; Rogers *et al*, pp 309-316.
- 41 Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, p 250. See also Palmer pp 41 and 49.
- 42 Kirk H. Porter and Donald Bruce Johnson, *National Party Platforms 1840-1960* (Urbana, Il.: University of Illinois Press 1961), p 90.
- 43 See Porter and Johnson, pp 89-91 and 104-106 for the Populist Party platforms in the presidential elections of 1892 and 1896 respectively. See also Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion. An American History* (New York: Basic Books 1995), p 298.
- 44 The Jeffersonian Perspective. *Federalist Number 10 and Thomas Jefferson*, <http://www.geocities.com/capitolhill7970/jefpco55.htm>.
- 45 Thomas Jefferson on Politics and Government. *Number 6: The Safest Depository*, <http://etext.virginia.edu/jefferson/quotations/jeff0350.htm>.
- 46 Ayers, p 118. See also George B. Tindall, *The Ethnic Southerners* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press 1976), p 133.
- 47 Bond, *Political Culture in the Nineteenth Century South*, p 283.
- 48 Rogers *et al*, p 310.
- 49 Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, p 39. See also Leah R. Atkins, 'Populism in Alabama. Reuben F. Kolb and the Appeals to Minority Groups,' *Alabama Historical Quarterly* Volume 32 Fall and Winter 1970, pp 167-180; Catherine McNichol Stock, *Rural Radicals. From Bacon's Rebellion to the Oklahoma City Bombing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1997), p 68.
- 50 Johnson, *Along This Way. The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson* (New York: Penguin 1990), pp 45-46.
- 51 Bass and DeVries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics*, p 58. See also Flynt, p 252; Allen J. Going, 'Alabama Bourbonism and Populism Revisited,' *Alabama Review* Volume 36 April 1983, p 101; Karl Louis Rodabaugh, 'Fusion, Confusion, Defect and Disfranchisement;

The "Fadeout" of Populism in Alabama,' *Alabama Historical Quarterly* Volume 34 Summer 1972, pp 131-154 and 'Kolbites Versus Bourbons: The Alabama Gubernatorial Election of 1892,' *Alabama Historical Quarterly* Volume 37 Winter 1975, pp 275-321; Rogers *et al* pp 311, 314 and Charles Grayson Summersell, 'The Alabama Governor's Race in 1892,' *Alabama Review* Volume 8 January 1955, pp 3-5.

52 Bond, p 284. See also Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, p 331.

53 Peirce, *The Deep South States of America*, p 246. See also David Ashley Bagwell, 'The Magical Process': The Sayre Election Law of 1893,' *Alabama Review* Volume 25 April 1972, pp 83-104; Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, p 40, Rogers *et al*, p 312 and Hubbs, *Alabama Politics*.

54 Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, p 332.

55 Rogers *et al*, p 316.

56 Flynt, *Poor But Proud*, p 217. See also Cash, *The Mind of the South*, p 337 and Malcolm Cook McMillan, *Constitutional Development in Alabama 1798-1901 : A Study in Politics, Sectionalism, and the Negro* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press 1955), p 227.

57 Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, p 331.

58 Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, p 69. For fuller treatments of Jim Folsom's political career see Carl Grafton and Anne Permaloff, *Big Mules and Brancheads : James E. Folsom and Political Power in Alabama* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press 1985) and George E. Sims, *The Little Man's Big Friend. James E. Folsom in Alabama Politics 1946-1958* (University, Al.: University of Alabama Press 1985). Sims, p 32 explains how Folsom acquired the nickname 'Kissin' Jim.'

59 Peirce, p 170. See also Bond, *Political Culture in the Nineteenth Century South*, p 290; Nadine Cohodas, *Strom Thurmond and the Politics of Southern Change* (New York: Simon and Shuster 1993), p 25; Francis Butler Simkins and Charles Pierce Roland, *A History of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1972), pp 528 and 529.

60 Leshner, *George Wallace*, p 155. See also Jim Goad, *The Redneck Manifesto* (New York: Simon and Shuster 1997), p 86; Alexander Lamis, *The Two Party South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1990), p 357, note 24 and Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mocking-bird* (London: Mandarin 1997), p 144 It is notable that Folsom did not use the common Southern terms 'the War for Southern Independence,' 'the War of Northern Aggression,' or 'the War Between the States to describe the Civil War. See also Wayne Powers, 'South Still Oppressed By Revisionist History,' <http://www.dixienet.org/dn-gazette/oppresed.html> and 'The Speech of Alabama State Senator Charles Davidson,' <http://www.dixienet.org/dn-gazette/davidson.html>.

61 Leshner, p 474. See also Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, p 286.

62 Leshner, p 450, quoting Stewart Alsop in *Newsweek* May 4 1970.

63 for example, Leshner, in his 1995 biography of Wallace, refers to Wallace's politics as 'populist' on pp xi, xv, 81, 82, 120, 156, 313, 449-450 and 476-477. See also Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South*, p 172; Kazin, p 5 and Peirce, *The Deep South States of America*, pp 258-261

64 Bond, p 288. See also Kazin, p 100 and Albert D. Kirwan, *Revolt of the Rednecks: Mississippi Politics 1876-1925* (Lexington, Ky: University of Kentucky Press 1951).

65 For discussions of progressivism, Hugh C. Bailey, *Liberalism in the New South: Southern Social Reformers and the Progressive Movement* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press 1969); Arthur A. Erkich, *Progressivism in America; A Study of the Era From Theodore Roosevelt to World War* (New York : New Viewpoints 1974); Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, *Gender, Class, Race and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky Press 1991); Dewey W. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism. The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition* (Knoxville, Tn.: University of Tennessee Press 1983); Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform From Bryan to FDR*; Arthur Link and Richard McCormack, *Progressivism* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson 1983); William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press 1992); David Saransohn, *The Party of Reform. Democrats in the Progressive Era* (Jackson, Ms.: University of Mississippi Press 1989); Page Smith, *America Enters the World. A*

People's History of the Progressive Era and World War One (New York: McGraw Hill 1985) and Richard L. Watson, *The Development of National Power 1900-1919* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America 1982).

66 See Flynt pp 262-275 and Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South*, pp 34, 56, 67 and 80-81.

67 Simkins and Roland, *A History of the South*, p 525.

68 Simkins and Roland, p 527. See also Joseph J. Ellis, *American Sphinx. The Character of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Vintage Books 1998), p 311; Eugene D. Genovese, *The Southern Tradition. The Achievements and Limitations of an American Conservatism* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press 1994); Hobson, *Tell About the South*, p 215.

69 Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, p 3, William D. Barnard, *Dixiecrats and Democrats. Alabama Politics 1942-1950* (University, Al: University of Alabama Press 1974), p 2 and Feldman, *Politics, Society and the Klan in Alabama 1915-1949*, pp 1 and 219. For accounts of how the Depression affected Alabamian tenant farmers see James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (London: Picador 1988, originally published 1939) and Dale Maharidge and Michael Williamson, *And Their Children After Them. The Legacy of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: James Agee, Walker Evans and the Rise and Fall of Cotton in the South* (New York: Pantheon 1989), pp 15-72. See also Peirce, p 267 quoting Albert Burton Moore's *History of Alabama* (Tuscaloosa, Al.: Alabama Book Store 1934) and Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White, *You Have Seen Their Faces* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press 1995 originally published 1937).

70 William E. Leuchtenberg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal* (New York : Harper and Row 1963), p 78.

71 Simkins and Roland, p 547; Frank B. Freidel, *F.D.R. and the South* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press 1965), pp 35 and 37.

72 See George B. Tindall, *Ethnic Southerners* (Baton Rouge, La.: University of Louisiana Press 1976), pp 142-162 and 'Business Progressivism in the South ,' *South Atlantic Quarterly* Volume 52 1963.

73 Simkins and Roland, p 538. See also Monroe Lee Billington, 'The Alabama Clergy and the New Deal,' *Alabama Review* Volume 32 July 1979, p 214 and George E. Sims, *The Little Man's Big Friend. James E. Folsom in Alabama Politics 1946-1958* (University, Al.: University of Alabama Press 1985), p 4.

74 Maharidge and Williamson, p 25. See *ibid*, p 14 for definitions of tenancy and sharecropping. See also Freidel, p 37 and *The Collapse of Cotton Tenancy*, a survey on the position of Southern white tenant cotton farmers published in 1935 by the University of North Carolina.

75 Rogers *et al*, *Alabama*, p 466. See also Roger Biles, *The South and the New Deal* (Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky Press 1994), p 20. For a broad overview of the New Deal's effects on the South see James C. Cobb and Michael V. Namorato (eds), *The New Deal and the South* (Jackson, Ms.: University of Mississippi Press 1984) and Freidel, *F.D.R. and the South*.

76 Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South 1913-1945*, p 355. See also Feldman, p 239; Rogers *et al*, pp 476-477 and William D. Barnard, 'George Huddleston Sr. and the Political Tradition of Birmingham,' *Alabama Review* Volume 36 October 1983.

77 Maharidge and Williamson, p 20. See also Rogers *et al*, p 250 and Robert S. McElvaine (ed), *Down and Out in the Great Depression. Letters From the 'Forgotten Man'* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press 1983). For a contemporary account of Alabama's experience during the Depression see Moore, *History of Alabama*, *op cit*.

78 Flynt, p 291. See also Biles, p 38 Robin D.G. Kelley covers Alabamian radicalism in the 1930s in *Hammer and Hoe. Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press 1990).

79 Vincent Giroux, 'The Rise of Theodore G. Bilbo (1908-1932),' *Journal of Mississippi History* Volume 43 1981, p 182.

80 Schulman, p 11. See also Frank E. Smith, *Congressman From Mississippi* (New York : Capricorn 1964), pp 20-22 for a brief, anecdotal description of the Depression's effects on the Mississippi Delta.

81 Tindall, p 385.

82 Giroux, p 208.

83 Morgan, *Redneck Liberal*, p 157.

84 Biles, p 37. See also Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion. An American History* (New York: Basic Books 1995), p 227; Maharidge and Williamson, *And Their Children After Them*, p 28 and Paul E. Mertz, *New Deal Policy and Southern Rural Policy* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press 1978), pp 3, 9 and 14.

85 Tindall, p 358. See also Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South*, p 107 and Freidel, p 61. See also Walter J. Heacock, 'William B. Bankhead and the New Deal,' *Journal of Southern History* Volume 21 August 1955, pp 347-359.

86 James C. Cobb, *The Most Southern Place on Earth. The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Southern Identity* (New York : Oxford University Press 1992), p 151.

87 Porter and Johnson, *National Party Platforms 1840-1960* p 331. See *ibid* pp 331-333 for the 1932 Democratic Party Platform. See also Biles, *The South and the New Deal* p 35.

88 Cash, *The Mind of the South*, p 350.

89 Morgan, p 190.

90 *Ibid*, p 365. See also Margaret E. Armbreister, 'John Temple Graves II : A Southern Liberal Views the New Deal,' *Alabama Review* Volume 32 July 1979, pp 203-213; Grantham, *The Democratic South* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press 1963), p 72 and *The Life and Death of the Solid South*, pp 103-104 and Schulman, *From the Cotton Belt to the Sunbelt*, p 62.

91 Morgan, p 158.

92 Rogers et al, p 485. See also Wayne Flynt 'Hard Times 1930-1940,' in *Alabama. A History of a Deep South State*, pp 465-493.

93 For more detail on New Deal agricultural policy and its effects on the South see Biles, *The South and the New Deal*, pp 36-57; Gilbert C. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More : Southern Agriculture 1865-1980* (Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky Press 1984); Mertz, pp 68-92; Theodore Saloutas, *The American Farmer and the New Deal* (Ames, Ia.: Iowa State

University Press 1982); Edward L. Schapsmeier and Frederick Schapsmeier, 'Farm Policy From FDR to Eisenhower : Southern Democrats and the Politics of Agriculture,' *Agricultural History* Volume 53 January 1979. See also David E. Conrad, *The Forgotten Farmers : The Story of Sharecroppers in the New Deal* (Urbana, Il.: University of Illinois 1965).

94 Rogers *et al*, p 473. See also *ibid* p 486 Biles, p 54; Monroe Billington, 'The Alabama Clergy and the New Deal' and William Manchester, *The Glory and the Dream. A Narrative History of America 1932-1972* (London: Michael Joseph 1973), pp 80 and 87.

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97 Jim F. Couch and Gina H. Couch, 'New Deal Expenditures in Alabama :Was Economic Need Addressed ?' *Alabama Review* Volume 50 July 1997, pp 181-184.

98 Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South 1913-1945*, p 607.

99 Rogers *et al*, pp 492-494.

100 Grantham, *The Democratic South*, p 70.

101 Tindall, pp 617-618. See also Biles, p 140; Ellis, *American Sphinx*, p 353 and Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South*, pp 107 and 111.

102 Feldman, *Politics, Society and the Klan in Alabama 1915-1949*, pp 194-199, 201 and 206.

103 Schulman, p 44. See also *ibid*, p 15 and Stock, *Rural Radicals*, p 80.

104 See Biles pp 103-124 for an analysis of the effect of New Deal race relations policy on the South. See also Robert A. Garson, *The Democratic Party and the Politics of the Sectionalism 1941-1948* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press 1974); Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South*, p 104; Schulman, p 44; Simkins and Roland, *A History of the South*, pp 547 and 549.

105 Cahodas, *Strom Thurmond and the Politics of Southern Change*, p 47.

106 Schulman, *From the Cotton Belt to the Sunbelt*, p 47. See also Garson, p x. Glass' calculation of what constituted the South was broader than the definition used by this study

(see Chapter One). In the presidential election of 1936 the eleven states of the former Confederacy delivered 124 electoral votes.

107 Garson, p 12 quoting from Graves' *The Fighting South* published in 1943. See also Armbruster, 'John Temple Graves II.'

108 Genovese, *The Southern Tradition*. See also Chester M. Morgan, 'Senator Theodore G. Bilbo, the New Deal and Mississippi Politics (1934-1940),' *Journal of Mississippi History*, Volume 47 1985, p 150.

109 Schulman, p 7.

110 Grantham, *The Democratic South*, p 86. See also Feldman, *Politics, Society and the Klan in Alabama 1915-1949*, p 168.

111 See Ronald Radosh, *Divided They Fell. The Demise of the Democratic Party 1964-1996* (New York: The Free Press 1996) pp 145-149 and Stock, p 152. The term 'the social issue' was popularised by Richard Scammon and Ben Wattenberg in *The Real Majority* published in 1970.

112 Ruy Teixeira and Joel Rogers, *America's Forgotten Majority. Why the White Working Class Still Matters* (New York : Basic Books 2000), p 18.

113 Ronald W. Reagan, First Inaugural Address January 20 1981, <http://www.cc.columbia.edu/acis/bartleby/inaugural/pres61/html>. See also William DeGregorio, *The Complete Book of U.S. Presidents* (Avenel, N.J.: Wings Books 1993), p 659.

114 See Teixeira and Rogers, pp 1 and 7.

115 Ibid, pp 16-18 for an outline of the authors' methodology and definitions of what the authors consider the composition of the white working class in the United States.

116 Dan T. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich. Race in the Conservative Counter-Revolution 1963-1994* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press 1996), p 53. Carter quotes here extracts from the diaries of Nixon's Chief of Staff Bob Haldeman released in 1994. See also Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South*, p 174.

117 Garson. p 321. See also Mac McCorkle, ' "The Dread Handwriting is on the Wall." Confronting the New Republican South,' *Southern Cultures* Spring 1998, p 35.

118 Radosh, p 135.

119 Teixeira and Rogers, p 57.

120 Ibid, p 63.

121 Thomas B. Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction. The Impact of Race, Rights and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton 1991), p 72.

CHAPTER FIVE

POPULISM AND THE CONTEMPORARY ALABAMA DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Introduction

The following two chapters focus on the development of populist rhetoric and political thought of whites in the contemporary Democratic Party in the case studies of first, Alabama and second, Mississippi, to illustrate the current and future electoral viability of the party both within these states and, by extension, within the region as a whole. Before offering conclusions (which, as Chapter Seven suggests, have implications for national politics) the chapter begins by briefly summarising the political trends in the Alabama Democratic Party since Reconstruction to provide the context for a more detailed examination of developments in party thought in the 1990s.

The chapter's focal point lies in an examination of political issues influencing white Alabamian Democrats in the context of their political philosophy. Whilst concerned primarily with issues affecting their state and locale, Alabama Democrats are also, by extension, members of the national party. It is here that we can witness potential conflicts occasioned by loyalty to the party leadership and interests of the national party, particularly when parochial issues may demand that local Democrats adopt a contrary position. When confronted with decisions of this nature white Southern Democrats frequently have labelled themselves 'Alabama' (or 'Mississippi') Democrats to avoid the stigma of being linked with unpopular policies of the national party. Such nuances are of considerably less import to those politicians seeking election to state or local offices. Yet, even here the policies and stances adopted by the national party do affect local Democrats since ultimately, however loosely, they still belong to a party that has a national presence. Thus their own political fortunes can be affected by the electorate's attitude toward the performance of the national party.

Chapters Three and Four provided examples of these factors during the civil rights era when the national party was perceived as no longer representing core Southern values regarding, for example, racial issues. In the 1960s by contrast, the intensity of the conflict

over civil rights diminished as the South came to terms with the desegregating effects of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts of the 1960s, different fundamental issues became prominent. These included fears over the perception of increasing violent crime and disorder, increased Federal government spending on welfare and the growing role of government in the regulation of religion in public schools. These concerns caused divisions between the cultural conservatism of white Southern Democrats and the cultural liberalism of the national party and reinforced the continued relevance of long-standing disputes over the appropriate functions of the Federal government. Moreover, by the mid-1970s Southern Democrats in the U.S. Congress were losing influence within the national party caucus, both in key committees and in positions of power in the party's hierarchy. They were replaced by more liberal (and non-Southern) members more willing to utilise the authority of the Federal government to solve social problems in the traditions of the New Deal and Great Society, and who appeared to have less regard for the limitations on Federal government provided for by the Tenth Amendment. As a result of these developments Southern Democrats at the beginning of the 1980s were increasingly a regional and ideological minority within the national Democratic Party, exacerbating the tendency of Alabama Democrats to stress their affinity with the state rather than the national party, and with their constituents.

The distancing from national party concerns and increased Republican Party gains in state and national elections made it imperative for white Alabama Democrats to attend to local concerns to avoid too close an association with an increasingly unpopular national party. This chapter examines the political beliefs of white Alabama Democrats - be they U.S. Congressmen, state officeholders, administrators or party activists - as a means of assessing the future viability of the Democratic Party in Alabama, and in the South generally. Whilst the background is concerned with national politics the context and focus for this discussion is set firmly in Alabama. This allows comparisons to be made of the political philosophy of white Democrats elected within the state of Alabama (whether to the U.S Congress, at statewide level, such as the governor, or to the state Senate or state House) with those in the national party.

To illustrate national/state comparisons this chapter analyses the Alabama Democratic Party platform of 1996 in juxtaposition to the national party's positions. The platform is a useful primary source in examining the philosophy of the state's Democrats. Although candidates for political office are selected via the primary election and no ideological test is imposed upon them, the existence of the platform acts as a template for deeper debate on political ideas in the state. This chapter includes an analysis of the philosophies of white Alabamian Democrats via the highlighting of several key issue areas - i.e. education, economics and the salience of religion in politics - in the formulation of public and party policy. Fundamentally this methodology is designed to illustrate and evaluate, by examining trends within Democratic philosophy and policy, the potential political success of using populist positions within the Alabamian polity. To arrive at an understanding of what the white Alabama Democratic Party represents is, however, a complex task, given the variety of political offices that can be sought. Hence, a candidate for the U.S. Senate or state governorship will need to appeal to the entire electorate of the state with a wide array of variables in race, region and class. In contrast, a candidate for a state House seat seeks to represent a smaller and more homogenous electorate. Consequently, the rhetoric used by the latter is apt to be more politically partisan than the former. With these provisos in mind, however, this chapter argues that whatever the office sought Democrats can usefully adopt populist rhetoric and conduct populist discourse in their campaigns.

In order to provide the context for the analysis of the political philosophy and belief of white Alabama Democrats, a brief description of the state's political history and geographical particularities is appropriate. This chapter reviews state political history from the end of Reconstruction in 1877 to the 1990s. Following this brief summary the chapter describes in greater depth the effects on the Alabama Democratic Party of the two key political traditions of conservatism and populism with reference to geographical, topographical and demographic factors that have influenced electoral politics. This provides the context and background to explore the practice of ideology, rhetoric and political perspective amongst whites in the Alabama Democratic Party.

Thus, the study of white Alabama Democrats in this chapter underlines and illuminates the contentions made in Chapters One and Two that descriptions of Southern Democratic politics (and Southern political attitudes more generally) as conservative is inadequate. First, too often the use of the terms conservatism and conservative lack definition both theoretically and, more specifically, within Southern state contexts.¹ Second and in consequence, blanket portrayals of Southern politics as being ‘conservative’ serve only to obscure the vibrancy of the populist tradition that this thesis has frequently alluded to. Indeed, as Jack Bass and Walter DeVries write ‘populis[m] [is] a term quite respectable in Alabama . . .’² Thus the case studies provided here illustrate the competitive nature of Southern politics, within (as well as between) parties and amongst the electorate at large. These examples serve the wider purpose of, first, providing indications of the vitality of the Democratic Party in Alabama and, second, in offering lessons for the national party, should it wish to make electoral progress in the South in future presidential, Congressional and state elections.

The following section discusses key elements of Alabama’s political history, in particular the evolution of its populist heritage. More specifically, the following paragraphs examine the rhetoric and influence of demagogic Alabamian governors Jim Folsom and George Wallace, the most dramatic exponents of the populist style of politics in the Alabama Democratic Party as indicated in Chapter Five.

James Elisha Folsom and the People’s Programme

Three historical factors were fundamental to the development of populism in Alabama. First, the state constitution promulgated and ratified in 1819 made Alabama a member of the United States and provided universal suffrage for all white males regardless of property ownership or tax paying status.³ Thus a sense of political equality was imbued in the state’s origins. Second, this equality was constitutionally protected from the threat from corporations and individuals that desired to maximise profit by subverting the state constitution, so it was alleged by the ordinary man, for nefarious purposes. Third, slave ownership in Alabama, in addition to being limited to a minority, was geographically concentrated. Slave owners were more prosperous and more likely to wield political power than non-slaveholders. The power

of the former, located in central Alabama where the soil supported the existence of plantations, was resented by small-holders in the hills of north Alabama and in the Wiregrass region of southeast Alabama where the terrain was not conducive to labour intensive farming or the building of cash crop plantations, and where poverty was harsh and pervasive.⁴ These developments in connection with the topographical factors provide a basis for explanation of the durability and vitality of populist sentiment in Alabama.

The slave owners of the Black Belt of central Alabama (so called for the rich colour of the soil not for the region's intensive use of slavery⁵) established institutions characteristic of a market economy. The development of banks, schools and colleges, and railroads financed by the state, through the issuance of state stocks and bonds, enlarged the power of the wealthy. To many Alabamians outside the Black Belt these institutions appeared as an accretion of power designed to entrench the authority of corporations at the expense of the common man. In Jeffersonian rhetoric politicians served the people, acting as agents of the general will rather than as ciphers doing the bidding of an elite. Such rhetoric provided the background of Alabamian politics in the pre-Civil War era. The 'people' opposed the selfishness of the pejoratively dubbed 'Royal' party of corporate interests.⁶ It should be stressed once again that the form of this style of politics, which can be classified as proto-populist, was reformist yet, ultimately, conservative. Far from overturning established societal mores, ante-bellum Democrats supported states' rights and individualism and mistrusted the government both for its centralising tendencies and for its apparent bias towards business interests. Yet Andrew Jackson carried Alabama in the 1828 elections with a campaign that was, rhetorically, hostile to accumulation of capital.⁷ Jackson's veto against the re-chartering of the Bank of the United States in 1832 on the ground that it was an elitist institution that would create monopolies the banking industry gained approval in Alabama. As Leah Rawls Atkins argues, '[o]pposition to concentrated wealth and power was an Alabamian political characteristic with a long tradition.'⁸ It is evident that the emerging political trend in Alabama during this period was based on class interests. In addition, the evidence points to both the formation of, and interaction between, conservative and populist philosophies.⁹

This confluence can be witnessed in the short period between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and the brief rise of the national Populist movement in the 1890s.¹⁰ Democratic Party philosophy was based on the traditionally Jeffersonian-Jacksonian themes of frugality in government, minimal taxation and states' rights (see Chapter Two). This proved to be a powerful message for small farmers, 'already Jacksonian by temperament, who wanted to be left alone.'¹¹ Thus a similarity of interest existed between the leadership of the party - the 'Bourbon' Democrats - and the farmers, artisans and small businessmen who formed the rank and file. Ceilings were placed on the levels of taxation whilst control of education was placed in the county governments unprepared and unwilling to countenance anything other than the basic, minimum provision of educational services. As a consequence, local government did govern least as in accordance with Jeffersonian dicta. This style of *laissez-faire* governance showed little desire to improve the existence of its citizens by actively involving government in their lives, nor did the electorate make demands of it.

The inability, as well as the reluctance of government to act decisively became relevant during the agricultural depression of the 1890s. Chapter Four has outlined the rise of populist sentiment in demands that the Democratic Party act to defuse the farm crisis. Thus, these details need not be recounted. Of more immediate value in discussing Alabamian Democratic Party political philosophy is the lasting legacy of the Populist Party's challenge to the Democrats' hegemony in Alabama, and the South in general.¹²

Divisions within the party became apparent once the hard times of the 1890s began to affect the state severely. As individuals lost control of their lives two factors germane to the development of the Democratic Party in Alabama become apparent. First, the severity of the agricultural crisis of the 1890s was of such depth as to bring forward demands by farmers that the Federal (and state) government step in to alleviate hardship in order to correct the perceived economic iniquities created by an unfettered market that had redounded to the advantage of large scale corporate business interests (see Chapter Four). The erstwhile adherence to states' rights and limited government philosophies were recognised as confining and dogmatic. In short, government activism was to be positively encouraged. The only way

to keep the coalition of businessmen and planters in check was to use the power of government to regulate the economy to ensure fair competition. Second, this period (see Chapter Four) solidified within Democratic politics the rhetoric of a populism of the dispossessed and disinherited that was to inform the practice of Alabamian Democratic Party politics during the twentieth century.

‘[T]he rights and interests of the masses’ were arrayed against ‘the arts and aggressions of soulless corporations and heartless monopolies and giant combinations,’ in the words of one, unnamed observer of Alabama politics in the late nineteenth century.¹³ Thus the rhetorical populism of Jeffersonian-Jacksonianism was, thenceforth, to be used to support the common man but was combined with support for, rather than opposition to, the power of governmental action. Additionally, Alabamian Democratic populism stood in contrast to the Bourbon, or ‘Big Mule’ wing of the party that represented, and supported, business interests. Examples of the persistence, into the twentieth century, of the populist strain in the Alabama Democratic Party are numerous. The following examples indicate not only the existence, but also the vitality, of populism in the party.

The two key figures in the deepening of populism’s roots and in the development of populist rhetoric in the Alabama Democratic Party are Governors Jim Folsom (1947-1951 and 1955-1959) and George Wallace (1963-1967, 1971-1979 and 1983-1987¹⁴). Each built on existing populist traditions of vigorously defending the social welfare of ‘the folks,’ whilst simultaneously excoriating corporations and the wealthy for their greed and aloofness. For example, Governor Braxton Bragg Comer (1907-1911) used the authority of the state government to regulate the railroads by reducing freight and passenger rates, promote conservation and compulsory public education, although he was unsuccessful in achieving the latter during his term of office.¹⁵ The legislature, at Comer’s urging, created a state tax commission to equalise property values across Alabama. The increase in income this allowed permitted higher expenditure on education including a programme to ensure that every county had at least one public high school.¹⁶ In a similar vein Governor Thomas Kilby (1919-1923)

promoted public works and social spending as investments in the state's economic future. Kilby warned, as he left office, that calls for economy and tax reduction

*may be popular, but . . . they contain a positive and serious menace to the welfare of Alabama and particularly to her educational and health interests and to the unfortunate and helpless wards of the [s]tate. Not only do they threaten those interests but they threaten our agricultural and industrial interests as well.*¹⁷

Later, the 'Little Colonel' Governor Bibb Graves (1927-1931 and 1935-1939) introduced a 'Little New Deal' in Alabama during his second term that included state funding for schools and roads.¹⁸ Graves, according to an Alabama populist of the 1930s 'was in the best [p]opulist tradition, and he did a lot for the state in the New Deal days. He knew how to shake the plum tree in Washington . . .'¹⁹ According to William Gilbert, Graves ran electorally strongest in the rural, hill country sections of north Alabama where 'the major portion of his strength came from the "plain people."²⁰ During Graves' second term the Alabama State Employment Service was established. It issued unemployment insurance and was 'a precursor of the federal social security system.'²¹ Both Graves administrations expanded the role of state government. To finance his programmes, according to William Barnard, 'he sought to place a larger share of the tax burden upon the corporate interests . . . particularly upon the utilities.'²² These instances indicate faith in the potential of government to alleviate poverty and to provide opportunities, for example, via education, to escape its baleful effects.²³ Lister Hill, U.S. Representative (1923-1938) and Senator (1938-1969) and Graves' political contemporary, entered politics on gaining appointment to the Montgomery Board of Education in 1917. A survey in 1925 revealed that Alabama spent only a third of the national average on its schools.²⁴ It was Hill's service on this body that 'convinced [him] that the only way to improve such poor educational conditions was through federal aid.'²⁵ Educational reform became a key element in the rhetoric of successive generations of populist Democrats throughout the twentieth century from Comer to Graves to Folsom and Wallace.

Graves has been credited with adding the expression 'Big Mules' to the rhetoric of populism in his 1930s description of the industrialists of Birmingham, Alabama's biggest city.²⁶ In Graves' homely image, he said they reminded him of the way a farmer's mule straining to pull a heavy wagon laden with corn whilst a big mule eats the same corn without making any attempt to help his fellow creature in sharing the burden. In translation, the Big Mules of Birmingham and Jefferson County - the descendants of the Bourbons - were the businessmen and industrialists of Alabama's biggest city and the landowners and planters of the fourteen counties that constituted the Black Belt, while the 'Little Mules' were those traders and planters from the smaller city of Mobile in Southern Alabama.²⁷ Alternatively described by historian Sheldon Hackney as the 'Bosses', the Big Mules were the equivalent of the Bourbon Democrats of nineteenth century terminology who saddled farmers and the producers of society with regressive taxes and manipulated the state legislature into passing laws against trade unions and political reform.²⁸ Big Mules felt that the biggest threat to freedom was governmental power. They advocated laissez-faire and limited government, states' rights and a limited franchise. Only those who were qualified by education, position or wealth should be in government. Once there they were dedicated to limiting encroachments, such as increases in property and income tax, upon the 'natural' or free workings of the market (See Chapter One). Alabama historian Glenn Feldman described the effects, by the late 1920s, of thirty years of Big Mule economic dominance in Alabama :

*Illiteracy, tenancy, disease, vice, exploitation and miserably low wages followed [the Big Mule] campaign to bewitch northern investors by offering enticements such as subsidies, tax incentives, land grants, corporate welfare and a favourable anti-union climate.*²⁹

In contrast Graves offered a 'program of reform that threatened many of the more conservative values of the state's elite.'³⁰ Feldman writes that Graves' first administration agenda which included a \$600,000 emergency appropriation for the most deprived rural schools and \$20 million to ensure a nine month school year in towns and seven months in the country, 'by Southern standards . . . was remarkable : for Alabama it was miraculous.'³¹

Graves pushed a public health campaign in 1927 in fifty-four of the state's sixty-seven counties to guarantee that all school age children got regular examinations and vaccinations. In the 1934 gubernatorial race he was endorsed by Alabama unions against Governor Ben Miller (1931-1935) who had antagonised many voters by declaring, in 1932, that a dollar a day [is] enough for any working man.³² Overall, Graves' two administrations were notable for their economic liberalism in a state where Bourbon Democrats 'had kept public spending on the social, educational, health and public sectors at atrociously low levels.'³³ Graves' admirers saw him as the forerunner of Franklin Roosevelt as he was 'one of the first leaders to recognise the responsibility of the government to provide certain social services for its citizens.'³⁴

Much of populism's rhetoric originated in the geographical and ideological sectionalism of the state's politics that pitted north and southeastern Alabama against central and southwestern Alabama economically.³⁵ The hills in the north and the Wiregrass region in the southeast supported neither a plantation economy during the nineteenth century nor substantial industrial development in the twentieth century.³⁶ The Black Belt of south central Alabama was settled by pioneers from Georgia and South Carolina in the first half of the nineteenth century. In contrast, the northern hills were settled by independent, though frequently economically marginal, farmers pushed off land by expanding Black Belt plantations. Neil Peirce, writing of Alabama social status of the nineteenth century, concludes that 'the common white farmer lived in degradation not far above that of the ever-growing number of slaves.'³⁷ The hills were isolated from population centres and markets and its roads were poor. The poor whites of north Alabama suffered, until as recently as the 1930s, from the effects of inadequate diet, and from diseases such as hookworm and pellagra. Significantly for the development of class conscious populism the absence of slavery in the hills and Wiregrass enabled both areas to experience considerably less racial tension than that extant in the more heavily black populated Black Belt. In consequence, after Reconstruction, less troubled by the potentially polarising and distracting effects of racial disharmony, the labourers and small farmers of these regions frequently found common cause with one

another against the Big Mules who dominated Goat Hill, the legislative district of the state capital Montgomery. It was from these areas that populists such as Graves, Folsom, Wallace and others emerged.

Folsom was born in 1909 on a farm outside Elba, Coffee County in the Wiregrass region where agriculture was the dominant economic concern. Folsom learned of his family's political heritage from his father, Joshua, who supported the Populist Party (as did Folsom's father-in-law) and won county office in the 1890s. In 1938 he moved to Cullman County in north Alabama. He had witnessed the poverty experienced by the common man in both areas particularly in the latter where he worked as a travelling salesman for a burial insurance company that his brother-in-law had co-founded.³⁸ Earlier, before settling in north Alabama, he had witnessed the direct impact of the Great Depression and the role of government in ameliorating it as a result of his service as the appointed director of the work relief New Deal Works Progress Administration agency in Marshall County. A 'Jacksonian populist'³⁹ to the extent of naming a son Andrew Jackson and a daughter Rachel after Jackson's wife, Folsom saw politics as a 'deadly serious centuries-old struggle of working people versus kings, slaveholders, or corporate elites.'⁴⁰ In the primary election of 1936 he ran an unsuccessful insurgent campaign against the eleven term incumbent Democrat Henry Steagall, chairman of the U.S. House Banking Committee, arguing for an expansion of the Federal government's budget for pensions for the elderly, federal appropriations for public education and for increases in farm electrification. The *Elba Clipper*, endorsing Folsom, commented that 'Mr. Steagall has expended all his efforts during these twenty-two years in Congress in the interests of big bankers . . .'⁴¹

Folsom was to win the governorship ten years later by exploiting the same issues. The 1946 'People's Programme' that he planned to implement as governor - designed, so he claimed, to 'agitate for liberty'⁴² - promised state provision of free school textbooks, a minimum salary for teachers of \$1,800 (a 50% increase), a \$50 monthly pension for those aged 65 and above, the improvement by tarmacing of rural farm to market roads,⁴³ rural electrification, repeal of the poll tax that had contributed to the disfranchisement of poor

whites and blacks in the state (on the latter issue see Chapter Four), reapportionment of the Alabama legislature and rights of trade unions to organise and bargain collectively. Folsom's commitment to the latter gained him the endorsement of the Congress of Industrial Organisations in the 1946 gubernatorial election.

Folsom's style of politicking - of campaigning in the 'branchheads' and 'the forks of the creek'⁴⁴ - including earthy language and hard drinking, accompanied by a country and western band called the Strawberry Pickers (a role filled in the 1954 gubernatorial campaign by the Corn Grinders) demonstrated 'the very qualities that repelled the country-club set [and] convinced those lower on the economic pyramid that 'Old Jim' was one of their own.'⁴⁵ Alabama native and writer William Bradford Huie interviewed by Billy Bowles in 1979 commented on Folsom's appeal to the rural electorate. Folsom, he said, had 'the power of the unknown king. Hell, these country people think he's Jesus.'⁴⁶ In a letter to the author, President of the Alabama Young Democrats in 1999 and vice chairman of the state Democratic Party (1985-1990) Scotty Colson recalled that 'my father would point out things to me in Blount County [in north Alabama] when I was a boy that without Big Jim would not have been there ; like roads and schools.'⁴⁷ Similarly, Grover Hall Jr., editor of the *Montgomery Advertiser*, wrote in 1946 that Folsom 'excited a religious contagion' amongst voters who, according to Irving Beiman of the *Birmingham News* 'looked up at Folsom as though the man were preaching a gospel he could believe in.'⁴⁸ Folsom's victory with 58% in the 1946 run-off election was a record for any candidate for state office in Alabama. As governor he opposed the 1948 Dixiecrat revolt against the national Democratic Party's presidential ticket (see Chapter Three) and encouraged an increase in the scope of state government in social and welfare policies. Folsom's campaign slogan 'Y'all come' used during his bid for a second gubernatorial term in 1954 'was a populist invitation to the common people to take control of the state.'⁴⁹ Folsom's style was *sui generis*.⁵⁰ When trying to deflect criticism about his allegedly excessive drinking habit he said that the only thing better than beer for breakfast was whiskey.⁵¹ He had no hesitation nor qualms, for example, in relating to the editor of the journal the *Southern Farmer* that his grandfather had opposed

Alabama's entry into the Civil War in 1861 and freed his two slaves families.⁵² The implicit suggestion that he may, therefore, have had Unionist sympathies was a brave one to make in a political culture reflexively wedded to states' rights.⁵³ In addition, Folsom had been politically influenced by the populist sentiments of his uncle John Dunnivant and father-in-law Judge J.A. Carnley.⁵⁴

Folsom faced considerable institutional barriers in his attempt to execute populist policy into tangible reform. Although Alabama voters had ratified the introduction of an income tax in 1935 it was to be used to retire debt and to reduce property taxes. By the early 1940s the tax was raising revenue beyond that needed for these dedicated purposes. Whilst Folsom and his supporters in the state legislature favoured using it on public welfare they were confronted by the so called 'Economy Bloc' of fiscally conservative legislators who opposed expanded state services.⁵⁵ Second, the state constitution limited the legislature to a biennial session of thirty-six days maximum allowing Folsom's opponents to defeat legislation they disliked by a variety of dilatory manoeuvres. The Black Belt and Big Mule interests were at a fundamental advantage as the malapportionment of the legislature under-represented the hill country and Wiregrass regions whose combined populations were double that of the Black Belt.⁵⁶ Gessner McCorvey, chairman of the state Democratic Party, was determined that the franchise not be extended to the 'wrong sort' of whites. 'I realise,' McCorvey wrote in 1947, 'that up in [n]orth Alabama the wrong sort of Board of Registrars will register a lot of white people who have no business' voting.⁵⁷

Folsom was far from being alone, however, in articulating populist policies and rhetoric in Alabama Democratic politics during the twentieth century. The populism of Graves and Folsom was rooted in the experience and awareness of Alabama's poverty during the Great Depression. While the depth of the destitution of the Depression era was not witnessed again after World War Two, Alabama still remained one of the poorest states in the nation despite Folsom's efforts as governor.⁵⁸ During, and subsequent to, the Folsom era, the populist cause was espoused by several notable north Alabama hill country Democrats elected to the U.S. Congress. Representative Bob Jones of Scottsboro (1949-1977) championed

increased Federal aid for rural housing and public power as did Albert Rains of Gadsden (1945-1965), who entered Congress after defeating Democratic Representative Joe Starnes in the 1944 primary with support from trade unions. In the estimation of Alabama historian Virginia Van Der Veer Hamilton, Carl Elliott from Jasper, who had lived, as a student, in Tuscaloosa's 'Poverty Ridge,' represented the Seventh Congressional District from 1949 to 1965. Elliott 'believed in using the power of the [F]ederal government to help and assist the underclass . . . of which he was a born representative.'⁵⁹ U.S. Senator John Sparkman (1947-1979), the son of sharecropper parents, financed his university education, where his master's thesis was a study of Reuben Kolb, the Alabama Populist of the 1890s, by shovelling coal. He won the Senatorial primary of 1946 by likening his Democratic opponent as 'a life-long corporation lawyer (who) has made a specialty of obtaining favours from the "Big Mules."' ⁶⁰ Sparkman, once in Washington D.C., brought prosperity to the hill country in making Huntsville ('the town that John built'⁶¹) a centre for Federal government funded space research and military installations. Lister Hill, representing a southern Alabama district 'filled with destitute white farmers,'⁶² in the U.S. House from 1923-1938, lent his name to legislation that, nationwide, built 9500 general hospitals and public health facilities of which 300 were in Alabama.⁶³ Collectively, these politicians brought huge amounts of federal money to the state and showed their constituents how the federal, as well as state, government could better their lives. These examples provide the framework for evaluating the activist role that Folsom believed was the responsibility of government.

Robert Clem's 1996 documentary film *Big Jim Folsom: The Two Faces of Populism* referred to two types of populism in Alabama. Folsom chose to emphasise the economic marginality of the state's poor whites and the duty of state government to provide a safety net for them whilst attacking the privileges of corporations. For example, in his first administration Folsom worked to increase revenue generated by state property taxes. Real property was rarely assessed above a third of its market value, even though under the law it could be assessed up to 60%. In 1947 Folsom announced that the property of public utilities and foreign corporations had been reassessed. For example, the property tax assessments of

four rubber companies were raised from \$4,389,000 to \$8,650,000.⁶⁴ At Christmas 1949 Folsom delivered a radio address in which he articulated his political creed :

*And so we founded in this country, great and far reaching welfare program. These program were not created, nor are they operated as a great leveller, but as an obligation of a democracy to its people, in order that the unfortunate may feast on more than crumbs and clothe themselves with more rags . . . So long as we have a hungry person, ill-clothed or without medical aid, we can take no pride in what has been done.*⁶⁵

Folsom built a coalition based on the farmers of north Alabama with whom he was so familiar together with working-class whites and those blacks who had overcome voting restrictions throughout the state.⁶⁶ In racial matters Folsom did not conform to Alabama's mores on the topic. Folsom asked Boards of Registrars to approve the applications to vote of black war veterans.⁶⁷ Folsom was in advance of his time in implying that whites and blacks had more to gain from a political process based on shared class interests, rather than divisive racial ones. Blacks, Folsom felt, were denied economic and educational chances and legally 'there are sections of Alabama where a negro doesn't stand a Chinaman's chance of getting fair and impartial justice on an equal footing with a white man.'⁶⁸ Folsom could boast, as he left office, that he had used the power of state government to materially improve the lives of its citizens to raise teachers' salaries more than \$2,000 to 81.5% of the national average, pave over 3,000 miles of roads and double the number of people receiving old age pensions.⁶⁹ Folsom continued to refer to his empathy with 'the folks' in their daily struggles. For example, he supported telephone workers who went on strike against the Southern Bell Telephone Company in 1955. Folsom said the telephone company 'is trying to run over the workers and make them work for low wages and I resent it.'⁷⁰ Folsom had threatened that the state would seize Southern Bell if the strike was not settled to the satisfaction of the union.

George Corley Wallace and the Little Folk

The other face of populism, Clem argues, stressed racial conservatism and white supremacy as candidates, including Graves, Wallace and those representative of the Big Mules (but

excluding Folsom) proclaimed unblinking adherence to segregation. It was the latter face, based on states' rights and cultural populism that became associated in the state and, indeed, national consciousness with George Wallace who dominated the state's politics during the 1960s and early 1970s.

To describe Wallace as a racist demagogue and no more, however, is to ignore the deep strand of economic populism that he learned in his southeast Alabama upbringing during the Great Depression and the New Deal and, as an aspiring state legislator, as Folsom's protege during the latter's first gubernatorial term in the late 1940s.⁷¹ Stephan Leshner argues that Wallace's populist instincts have been 'overshadowed by his uncompromising support for, and intensification of, the legal repression of blacks.'⁷² Marshall Frady's 1968 study of Wallace quoted an unnamed Folsom ally to the effect that Wallace's 'economic program[s] surpassed the fondest dreams of every liberal in the state. He did what all the populists have always dreamed of doing.'⁷³ Wallace's association with Folsom (he had been Folsom's gubernatorial campaign manager in southern Alabama in 1954⁷⁴) made him a figure of distrust amongst the banks, utility companies and railroads – the latter day Big Mules and Bosses. For example, Governor Gordon Persons (1951-1955), who had gained the support of corporations for reducing the property tax assessments of utility companies, maintained a secret set of files on state legislators. That relating to Wallace described him as 'liberal' for his support of increased appropriations for social programmes, especially those concerning education. The Alabama Chamber of Commerce described him at this time as a 'radical.'⁷⁵ The following examples illustrate Wallace's putative populism. Responding on Folsom's behalf during the 1954 gubernatorial campaign to opponent's who referred to Folsom as lacking the decorum befitting a chief executive, Wallace charged that 'the first thing [the Persons] decent and dignified administration did was to raise taxes on the [I]ittle [f]olks.'⁷⁶ Wallace had three years before led a filibuster in the state House to defeat a proposed increase in the sales tax that he denounced as a regressive measure that would penalise 'the lathe operators, the brick masons, the welders, the tool and die workers.'⁷⁷ Instead of this 'sock the poor act,' done at the behest of the Big Mules, Wallace recommended that taxes be brought

on corporations.⁷⁸ Wallace, it is worthy of note, as a Alabama Democratic delegate to the 1948 presidential nominating convention did not join that half of the state delegation that walked out of the convention hall in protest when civil rights language was included in the national party platform (see Chapter Three)

Such rhetoric in defence of the 'little man' remained in Wallace's repertoire throughout those years when he was nationally and even internationally demonised as a racist and a fascist. Leshner's 1994 biography of Wallace is subtitled 'American Populist,' whilst Michael Kazin describes Wallace as 'a pro-[trade] union' Democrat.⁷⁹ Even as Wallace uncritically adopted the rhetoric and political tactics of states' rights in the 1960s he never advocated economic retrenchment. Indeed, when interviewed by Larry King on CNN on November 11 1996 in response to the question of how he would like his terms as governor to be remembered, Wallace responded by saying that during his gubernatorial tenure 'trade unions had got all over the state.'⁸⁰ (Wallace had, during his independent bid for the presidency in 1968, refused to conduct an interview at a San Francisco TV station because to do so would have entailed crossing a picket line of striking technicians.) The Reverend Jesse Jackson, civil rights leader of the Rainbow Coalition and PUSH (People United to Save Humanity) interviewed on the same programme – transmitted, as it transpired, on the eve of Wallace's death - related a meeting that he and Wallace had had in July 1987. Jackson said that Wallace talked of 'populism of the government sharing power and sharing responsibilities, [of] not taking advantage of workers.'⁸¹ Recalling how Wallace's image had changed toward blacks by the late 1970s, Ray Jenkins, one time editor of the *Montgomery Advertiser*, said he was struck by how Wallace 'could sit down and talk comfortably with a black legislator.'⁸² In these examples, Wallace spoke of the moral superiority of the common people and of how they had become economically marginal at the hands of elites in government and business. In an interview for a PBS TV documentary broadcast in April 2000 Seymour Trammell, Wallace's 1968 presidential campaign finance director, said that throughout his political career Wallace was believed in by

*the rednecks, the wool hats, the hayseeds, the foot log walker, the square dancers, the guitar picker. They did believe that somewhere out of the ranks of the poor people, that some person would ultimately rise and represent their thought, their ideas, their wants and their wishes . . .*⁸³

Wallace in his second term (1971-1975) introduced improvements in unemployment and workmen's compensation benefits and provided a centre for labour education and research at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

At the same time, the race element cannot be ignored. All but one of his gubernatorial (and presidential) campaigns were dominated by the theme of race, often explicitly so (see Chapters Three and Four). In each instance Wallace showed the two faces of populism, of appealing to racial and to class politics. These appeals, however, showed a level of sophistication in the scope of their political appeal which was often unrecognised by political observers. For example, in a 1964 *Playboy* interview he claimed that liberals once believed in freedom but it was now conservatives that believed in the liberty of the individual. In that amalgamation of populist and conservative rhetoric referred to in Chapter Two, Wallace could claim in his next breath, however, that '[e]ducation, help for the aged and unfortunate, road building – that kind of aid to the people is a legitimate function of government.'⁸⁴ Wallace himself claimed, in a 1974 interview with Neil Peirce, that he was a populist in taking credit for the issuance of free textbooks in schools and for the building of 29 trade schools and 18 junior colleges during his career as state legislator and governor.⁸⁵ Wallace's record, on race or the effective delivery of services, is not the key point of issue here. Of greater immediate significance is the model he provided for the winning and retention of office in subsequent elections. By stressing states' rights and opposition to federal government elitism together with anti-corporate economic populism, he was able to combine conservative and populist messages attractive to the Alabamian electorate. In Wallace's political career we can see consistency with Jeffersonian-Jacksonian philosophies (see Chapters Two and Three). This version of populism supported an active role for government. It was required for only it offered, and regulated, those public goods, such as education, that

the private sector could not equitably provide. Equality of opportunity and freedom of choice was possible if the people had the benefit of good education behind them. Without state aid in this area they would be at the mercy of elites that could exploit them at will.

It is still true to say, however, that Wallace, until his final gubernatorial bid in 1982, had been 'the agent of white Alabamians'⁸⁶ (although the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) endorsed him in the 1958 gubernatorial campaign). In his final gubernatorial campaign Wallace adhered to the position on race that Folsom had attempted, within the limits of a segregationist polity, to articulate. Wallace appealed and gained the support of blacks after asking for forgiveness for his segregationist past. He claimed that the creation of further education opportunities and state provision of free school textbooks helped the 'little man' of both races. His victory with over 80% of black ballots indicated the realities, and potential, of bi-racial politics for Alabama Democrats.⁸⁷ The rhetoric stayed faithful to Folsomite populist tradition. In a 1970 interview, as he prepared for his second gubernatorial term, Wallace outlined his past achievements and aims for the future.

*Teachers got a 42% pay raise and . . . children got free textbooks . . . we raised old age pensions and we started Medicaid in Alabama and unemployment compensation was raised . . . We're gonna take the four per cent tax off your bills and put it on the utilities themselves and make them lower their rates. We're gonna get a strong pollution bill. All these industries have been killing fish up and down the river and polluted the air. They've got the money to do it and they ought to go ahead and do it.*⁸⁸

'We'll talk about people who are unemployed and hungry,' Wallace said during the 1982 general election, 'and about Republicans who only have to worry about who will mow their beachfront lawns.'⁸⁹ Wallace called out that the only issue 'was 'jobs, jobs, jobs' for the common man – white and black.'⁹⁰ Whilst Wallace was consistent in his belief that the Federal government should not burden the 'little people' this did not make him a convert to the Reaganite Republicanism of the 1980s. Indeed far from endorsing the Republican Right

he showed contempt for 'trickle down economics.' Reagan, he said in a 1990 interview, 'lowered taxes for the rich people and raised them on the poor. That's wrong !'⁹¹ Wallace 'emerged as the voice of the truck driver and the coal miner, those sweat-stained and dirt-streaked common white folk who wanted the familiar pathways of their lives protected and preserved.'⁹² In 1986 E.D. Nixon of Montgomery, a black veteran of the civil rights movement, expressing regret on Wallace's retirement, commented that 'Wallace has done more for black people than any other governor.'⁹³

Thus George Wallace provides the prime example of classic populism: first, that the wealthy should pay their fair share of taxes, second, that the state has a compelling interest in regulating big businesses and, third, that the 'producing' classes deserve the reward attendant upon giving of their labour. Above all Wallace, Folsom, Graves *et al* used a fundamentally radical, anti-elitist rhetoric in pursuing the first two of these three elements of populism in order to promote the latter individualistic and conservative goal of allowing the people, ultimately, to determine their own destinies (see Chapter Two). Added to this populist analysis each stayed faithful to the states' rights philosophy of Jefferson and Jackson - the founding fathers of the Democratic Party (see Chapter Two) - and stressed their adherence to the conservative Protestant social values of a state where two-thirds of church members are Baptist.⁹⁴ Therefore, moving beyond the Wallace era into the 1990s, the Democratic Party had created the elements of a populist model that had proven electorally successful in combining the radical and conservative elements of populism.⁹⁵ This thesis suggests the Democratic Party by following this model can gain, and maintain political prosperity in Alabama, the South and beyond.

National and State Party Platforms

The following paragraphs analyse the Alabama Democratic Party's platform introduced, for the first time, for use in the 1996 elections as a common statement of belief for its candidates to espouse. This platform is compared to that adopted at the 1996 presidential nomination convention in Chicago by the national Democratic Party. Its purpose here is to provide an illustration of the similarities and differences in rhetorical outlook and policy of each party.

In response to specific electoral losses in the 1994 state elections and in the context of Republican gains in Alabama at both state and national levels over successive electoral cycles since 1980, the Alabama Democratic Party adopted several significant positions in 1995 and 1996 in an attempt to address its declining political fortunes. Under the leadership of its newly elected chairman Joe Turnham, an Auburn businessman and evangelical Christian, the party introduced a loyalty oath as an attempt to stem the numbers of Democrats switching to the Republican Party (a trend noticeable throughout the South before the Republicans became the majority party in the U.S. Congress as a result of the 1994 federal mid-term elections and which accelerated in the immediate aftermath⁹⁶). Additionally, Democratic candidates running for any office were encouraged to sign a 'Primary Campaign Integrity Pledge' to reduce the tendency for intra-party conflict particularly evident during primary campaigns. The most rancorous example of this trend occurred in the 1986 gubernatorial primary where Lieutenant Governor Bill Baxley was awarded the nomination by the state Supreme Court, despite losing the primary vote, after alleging voting irregularities against his opponent Attorney General Charles Graddick. The inability of the party to reunite around Baxley's candidacy helped enable Guy Hunt to win the general election to become the first Republican governor since Reconstruction.⁹⁷ These elections had become very debilitating in creating dissent and rancour that diminished the levels of party unity needed for general election campaigns.⁹⁸ These developments were noteworthy in indicating that the Democratic response to electoral reverse was to affirm the party's partisan nature rather than to adopt (or modify) the policies that had, apparently, brought the Republicans such success in the state and federal elections in 1994.

Other developments in the mid-1990s saw the adoption, under Turnham's auspices, of a state party platform to 'distinguish the state party from the national party.'⁹⁹ Such a policy was indicative of the belief that any association with the national party headed, in the public mind, by the, at that time, unpopular Clinton Administration, tainted local Democrats. Paradoxically, with this premise in mind, during this period the Alabama Democratic Party officially replaced the state party logo of the rooster adopted in 1948 and which included,

until 1966, the words ‘white supremacy’ and ‘for the right’ in capital letters.¹⁰⁰ In place of the rooster the state party accepted the national party symbol of the donkey indicating a greater degree of convergence between the national and state parties than had hitherto been apparent. At the same time, however, in a further gesture to perceived local mores the party appealed to the concerns of voters motivated by traditional religious values (see Chapters Two and Four) in publishing a ‘Faith and Values’ guide emphasising the party’s commitment to issues, such as abortion, crime and school prayer, of concern to this sector of the electorate.¹⁰¹

The effect of these modifications cast the Democrats as a party aware of the necessity of projecting an identity distinct from that of the Republicans and to highlight partisan affiliations whilst respecting the electoral salience of ‘traditional values.’ Here we may see, as Chapter Two suggests, the Alabama Democratic Party fashioning itself in rhetoric and deed as populist in its economic policy and conservative (or traditionalist) on social issues. Of greater significance, in the context of this thesis, there is some evidence to suggest a convergence in rhetorical outlook between the Alabama Democrats and the national party. As the Alabama Democratic Party highlighted its differences with (and independence from) the national party in the publication of its platform and the ‘Faith and Values’ guide so the platform of the national Democrats published at the presidential nominating convention in 1996 revealed a party anxious to placate formerly Democratic voters alienated by the perception (see Chapter Four) of a party, at best, unaware and, at worst, hostile to the economic and social concerns of aspiring working families. Will Marshall of the Progressive Policy Institute, a Democratic leaning think tank, formed in 1989 by Al From, critical of the ‘big government’ policies of the national Democratic Party during the 1980s, credited President Clinton in the 1996 presidential election with restoring the party’s credibility on economic efficiency and fiscal management and on social issues such as crime and welfare.¹⁰² In 1995 Clinton, speaking before the American Society of Newspaper Editors said that the criteria for the acceptance by the Democratic Party of any policy idea was whether it

expand[s] middle-class incomes and opportunities. Does it promote values like family, work, responsibility and community? Does it strengthen the hand of America's working families in a global economy? ¹⁰³

The national party platform recognised the electoral salience, and approved the merits, of devolved but effective government, taking into account much of the rhetoric used by Clinton above. The result was a campaign document that Alabama Democrats running for Federal, state or local office could feel more comfortable with than in any general election year since the civil rights era.

The Democratic Party Platform 1996

The preamble of the national party platform identified the Democrats' mission to expand opportunity and to increase personal responsibility within the context of recognising the role of the community in a reprise of Clinton's 1991 speech above. The theme of the entire document echoed Bill Clinton's claim in his January 1996 State of the Union address that 'the age of Big Government is over.'¹⁰⁴ Democrats, the party proclaimed, should provide government that does not interfere with people's lives and stated that 'big bureaucracies are not the solution to today's challenges.' In a further disavowal of programmes of governmental activism such as those of the New Deal and Great Society, the platform stated that 'passing legislation is not enough' and that 'the private sector is the engine of economic growth.'¹⁰⁵ Dedicated to the existence of smaller and more efficient government, the document stressed that parents, and not governments, raise children. The platform clarified that government sponsored help for parents was available rather than mandatory participation in centralised programmes. There can be found echoes of this sentiment in the 1955 'Declaration of Constitutional Principles' signed by all but three Southern Congressmen in protest at the Supreme Court mandate that Southern states proceed 'with all deliberate speed' to implement the desegregation of the public school system *as per* the ruling handed down by the Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* the previous year.¹⁰⁶ That document – popularly dubbed the Southern Manifesto – was an aggressive defence of the Tenth Amendment, states' rights and the concept of separate but equal provision of education for each race. In upholding Southern

traditions in race relations it argued that 'parents should not be deprived by government of the right to direct the lives and education of their own children.'¹⁰⁷ Whilst the similarity of the language used here was unwitting, in that the national party by no means sought to endorse the rhetoric and beliefs of pre-civil rights era segregationists, the intention of clarifying Democratic repudiation of the type of bureaucratic centralised government with which they had been associated for a generation is evident. The language was specifically designed to neutralise successful Republican Party attacks on the Democrats as the party of 'one size fits all' big government. Instead the national party now said it respected state prerogatives in executing their own social policies but emphasised that federal support was still available if required.

As a means of buttressing these sentiments this commitment to devolved government was more than rhetorical. The platform detailed examples where the national party was enabling states to conduct social policy free of Federal control. During the Clinton Administration's first term forty-three states had been released from rules regarding compliance with Federal welfare regulations consisting, in total, of seventy-seven waivers - twice as many, the platform boasted, as during the twelve years of the self-professed decentralising Republican Administrations of Ronald Reagan and George Bush.¹⁰⁸ Citing the success of the HOPE (Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally¹⁰⁹) scholarships introduced in Georgia by the Democratic governor Zell Miller (1991-1999) the platform 'applaud[ed] the work of state and local Democrats . . . [that had] developed innovative solutions to make sure our children get the best possible opportunity.'¹¹⁰

The text emphasised that Democratic policy aimed to prove that central government was an enabling friend of the people. The provision of tax cuts to '15 million' low income families via the introduction of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and in the promise to introduce a \$10,000 tax deduction to help families pay for further education was in keeping with the populist tradition outlined in earlier chapters.¹¹¹ In these instances, amongst others, Democrats presented government as offering a helping hand to working families - via, for example, tax credits and low cost loans - who would now be able to pursue the American

Dream of equality of opportunity for all. In this way government served the people without becoming intrusive, allowing the states freedom to conduct their own affairs within the context of decentralised government. This was designed to counteract Dole's rhetorical appeals to the virtues of the Tenth Amendment by suggesting that the Democrats respected the Tenth Amendment too but believed that government could offer something positive and tangible as well.

Where the platform described a more invasive Federal government it was in respect of more punitive policy on crime and punishment. The guidance to states to adopt Federal sentencing laws and to ensure that prisoners serve at least 85% of their sentences before becoming eligible for parole was, however, unlikely to be interpreted in the South as an unwarranted interference in state affairs given the popularity of such positions and the existing utilisation by a number of states across the nation of similar policies.¹¹² By adopting stances such as these the platform neutralised an area of public policy where the party had been vulnerable in presidential elections since the late 1960s (see Chapter Five).

In these examples we may see the convergence of populist rhetoric in pursuit of conservative goals outlined in Chapter Two as a template for potential electoral success for Southern Democrats and, by extension, for the national party too. What is striking is that the platform that the national party adopted contained so much – for example the implicit acknowledgement of the popularity of limited and devolved government amongst white Southern voters and awareness of its potency as a national electoral issue - that was in accord with Southern Democratic political philosophy. This can be illustrated by drawing comparisons with the Alabama Democratic Party Platform adopted in 1996.

The Alabama Democratic Party Platform 1996

Having looked at the 1996 national Democratic platform the chapter turns to a consideration of the 1996 state platform. The preamble of the platform that stated that Alabama Democrats base their values on the 'Judeo-Christian tradition and the [d]emocratic faith of the founding fathers'¹¹³ provides an example of the relevance of religion in the Southern political context. The platform's first section was headlined '[s]trengthening our families and protecting

individual rights and freedoms'¹¹⁴ whilst the fourth section on government stated that 'Alabama Democrats believe that political decisions . . . should be made at the level of government closest to the people.'¹¹⁵ In the latter example we find clear sentiments in favour of devolved government whilst the former example indicates the social conservatism of Alabama Democrats. The platform, however, contained much rhetoric in the populist tradition and a number of nakedly partisan references critical of the Republican Party together with others that tied the state party to the national Democrats. The document therefore advertised Alabama Democrats as a party of social conservatism, economic liberalism and one unafraid to link its identity to that of national Democratic Party.

Whilst Alabama Democrats believe in devolved government in the abstract the document stressed the belief that government should play an active role in a number of areas of economic and social policy. Government should, for example, provide 'protection and services which most citizens need and expect.'¹¹⁶ Further, public education should continue to be made available to all and the party should be committed to 'early educational intervention.'¹¹⁷ The provision of child care facilities for working parents and sustained funding of the Federal government's Head Start programme for pre-school children is clearly endorsed. Also government should 'ensure' – the language was implicitly supportive of activist government – that prenatal and neonatal care be made available to all who require it. In a manner less noticeable than that of the platform of the national party Alabama's Democrats referred more specifically to the party's past in positive terms. For example, the state party pledged to 'continue to fight for a strong and economically sound Medicaid system' and 'to keep our commitment to our older citizens by maintaining a strong system of Medicare.'¹¹⁸ Support for 'big government' reforms such as that for federal health insurance for the elderly (introduced by the Johnson Administration during the Great Society in the mid-1960s) was also evident in the 'reaffirmation of [the Democratic P]arty's historic commitment to care for our senior citizens.'¹¹⁹ A positive reference to the introduction, in 1935, of Social Security payments to retirees as part of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal reforms (see Chapter Four) may be deduced here. The 'Care For the Disadvantaged'

clause in Section One of the platform recognised the role of churches and volunteer organisations in this area yet stressed that government 'must act' to help those unable to help themselves if the Democrats are to continue their 'long and proud history as the Party of compassion.'¹²⁰ Parallels may be found here with the 1996 national Democratic Party platform which rejected 'the misguided call for our citizens to fend for themselves.'¹²¹

Support for the Clinton Administration's efforts at deficit reduction during his first term is shown by the platform's partisan criticism of the Republican Party's economic policies. In citing the quadrupling of the national debt during the Reagan and Bush Administrations (1981-1993) the Alabama Democrats were implicitly critical of the Republican Party's policy of putting tax cuts ahead of deficit reduction. This stance echoed the Jeffersonian-Jacksonian ethos of fiscal responsibility at the heart of conservative Democratic philosophy (see Chapter Two). A further example of a developing similarity of outlook amongst Alabama and national Democrats by the mid-1990s is evident here.

Evidence to support Clinton's State of the Union speech claim that the 'age of Big Government' was over can be developed and illustrated with reference to Democratic attitudes toward welfare. The national platform proclaimed that the welfare system 'when Bill Clinton became President . . . undermined the very values - work, family, and personal responsibility - that it should promote.'¹²² The Alabama Democratic platform, by comparison, asserted that '[w]e believe our people, families and state will benefit through a renewed emphasis on the work ethic . . . '¹²³ The stress here on the value of individualism as the primary means of self-advancement is apparent and consistent with the individualism of Jeffersonian-Jacksonian precepts.

Overall, both documents, however, emphasised the positive powers of government to alleviate economic hardship for those less able to help themselves, such as the elderly. Here, too, the party's philosophy may be read as Jeffersonian-Jacksonian in sympathising with those threatened by the economic power of corporate elites. For example, both Alabama and national Democrats support the rights of trades unions to organise and bargain collectively to defend their rights against businesses that would, in the absence of Federal legislation, sack

striking workers and hire non-union labour in their place. Using stronger, more populist language in support of those rights than the national party, the Alabama Democratic Party platform pledged ‘to insure that rising corporate profits raise the standard of living of all workers.’¹²⁴ Also more radical and expansive in intent than the national party was the Alabama Democrats’ support for ‘an increase in the minimum wage that restores its purchasing power to *at least* (emphasis added) levels of forty years ago.’¹²⁵ The highlighting of this proposal provides a clear contrast to the opposition of the Republican Party to minimum wage increases during the 104th U.S. Congress (1995-1997) and is valuable as an example of Alabama Democrats’ economic populism, and partisanship.

The examination of these two documents indicates that Alabamian and national Democrats held much in common during the second half of the 1990s. Interpretation of the platforms suggests each level of the party was prepared to compromise past principles while reaffirming those beliefs held in common. Whilst the national party stressed the limits to the kind of activist government that had defined its mission from the 1930s to the 1980s, its counterpart in Alabama recognised the Democratic Party’s historic *raison d’être* as the party supporting the interests of the working American. The platform of the Alabama Democratic Party found its principles of devolved constitutionally conservative government and economic populism echoed in the national Democratic Party platform that, by extension, Alabama Democrats ran on in the 1996 presidential and 1998 Congressional general elections. The third element of Alabamian Democratic political philosophy – racial reaction - alluded to so frequently in earlier chapters found no place in the rhetoric of the state party in the 1990s. In the section of the entitled ‘Economic Fairness For All,’ the platform emphasised that

*[w]e oppose all forms of prejudice and bigotry. We are determined to work towards a society in which equal opportunity is a reality . . . we cannot ignore the effects of past discrimination and will work to fashion new tools and opportunities that can help all Alabamians reach their full potential.*¹²⁶

The paragraph quoted above exemplified Alabamian Democratic political philosophy. The intent of the party to work towards a society where equality of opportunity becomes a reality

is, therefore, combined with belief in the necessity of interventionist government to create the conditions whereby the ultimate successes or failures of people will be imputed to the individual alone. The populist faith in activist government, thus, serves the conservative end of allowing the individual freedom to choose his or her own destiny.

The Modern Alabama Democratic Party : Populism in Practice

Since George Wallace's retirement in 1987 the Alabama Democratic Party has not produced a politician able to emulate the intensity of his populist rhetoric. The Democrats have lacked a figure of statewide authority ever since. For example, it was not until 1998 that they won another gubernatorial election. Following the 1996 elections both U.S. Senate seats have been Republican held. The populist legacy, however, remains strong. This chapter contends that the successful articulation of a populist political philosophy need not be personality driven *a la* Folsom or Wallace and, furthermore, stresses that the underlying facets of rhetorical populism in Alabama - the championing of the liberties of working people with the simultaneous aim of diminishing the selfish political and economic influence of corporate elites - remain at the party's *raison d'être*. However, the examples described in the following pages of key, contemporary political issues facing the Alabama Democratic Party indicate that the party has to show awareness and flexibility in addressing the conservative aspects within the Alabamian polity as well as, simultaneously, employing its populist instincts.

This section begins by outlining the electoral health of the modern Alabama Democratic Party defined by the number of Federal and state elective offices and seats held from 1980 to the 2000 elections. Chapter Three has in greater detail outlined the gains made at the expense of the Democrats by the Republicans in Alabama since the civil rights era of the early 1960s. No Democratic presidential candidate has carried the state's electoral votes since Jimmy Carter did so in 1976. The party lays claim to only two of the state's allotted seven seats in the U.S. House of Representatives in the 106th Congress (1999-2001) having held five of these seven seats in the 102nd Congress (1991-1993) and lost both U.S. Senate seats during the 1990s after being incumbent in the entire time since Reconstruction. Similarly, in 1986 in the election held to replace Wallace, the party lost control of the

governorship for the first time to the Republicans. The new incumbent, Guy Hunt, was re-elected in 1990 and Forrest 'Fob' James retained the seat for the GOP in 1994. In 1974 the Republican Party held only two seats in the lower house of the state legislature and none in the state senate. In advance of the 1998 Alabama state elections they held 36 of 105 state house seats and 12 of 35 in the senate. Additionally, Republican strength was augmented by the defection of over 50 Democratic officeholders statewide since the 1994 elections.¹²⁷

Table 5.1 Party Representation in the Alabama State Legislature 1968-1998¹²⁸

	House Democrats	House Republicans	Senate Democrats	Senate Republicans
1968	106	0	34	1
1978	101	4	35	0
1982	97	8	32	3
1988	85	17	28	6
1990	82	23	28	7
1992	82	23	28	7
1994	74	31	23	12
1996	72	33	22	12
1998	69	36	23	12
2000	68	37	23	12

As a measure of the relative attitudes of each party the Republicans had hoped to make sufficient gains in the state senate to allow them to control the chamber for the first time since Reconstruction whilst Democrats were prepared to be content with not losing further ground. (See table 5.1)¹²⁹ Indeed the state Republican Party chairman Roger McConnell had stated in 1997 that the Democrats were so weakened in Alabama that the GOP was now in a position to 'chop their head off.'¹³⁰ The Republicans did achieve successes in the 1998 state elections. Amongst the most high profile achievements was the winning of the Lieutenant-Governorship (one of six victories of the thirteen statewide political offices contested by the two parties).¹³¹ Of great significance, too, was Republican majority control of the nine-member elected state Supreme Court for the first time in the twentieth century. In addition, Republicans had a majority on the Court of Criminal Appeals although Democrats were still in the majority on the Court of Civil Appeals. In elections for the U.S. House Democrats failed to regain seats in either the Third or Fourth Congressional District in spite, respectively,

of running strong candidates in Turnham, the previous state party chairman and Don Bevill, the son of popular former U.S. Representative Tom Bevill (1967-1995).

In 1998, however, the Democrats did comfortably regain control of the governorship as Lieutenant Governor Don Siegelman defeated the incumbent James by 58% to 42%, gaining majorities from male and female voters and from all income, age and education categories and incurred no further losses in either the state House or Senate. Republican Party chairman McConnell's election night comment that '[w]e survived a bad election cycle. It could have been very bad'¹³² was not inaccurate as four of the GOP's victories were of margins below 1%. This evaluation stood in stark contrast to his claim in 1997 that 1998 would be the year that the party would, figuratively, decapitate the Democrats. University of Alabama political scientist William Stewart concluded his study of the election returns by suggesting that 'by no means are we moving swiftly toward Republican dominance [in Alabama]. It's been checked today.'¹³³ Indeed the Democratic share of the vote over the thirteen statewide elections at 52% indicated a considerable recovery from the setbacks of the previous two election cycles in 1994 and 1996.¹³⁴

Whilst analysis of these returns might indicate that Alabamian politics was clearly two-party competitive, the Democrats' ability to check Republican gains was read by the party as a success. This chapter now turns to a study of issues that the Alabama Democratic Party raised to apparent advantage before and during the 1998 campaign. An examination of its political philosophy and rhetoric is illustrated in greater depth by exploring three specific areas, namely education, religion and economics, where populist and conservative positions merged or collided. Collectively they serve to represent the party's strengths and weaknesses whilst emphasising that amalgamating economic populism with respect for the social conservatism of the Alabama electorate can result in the winning and maintenance of political office whether sought at the federal, state or local level.

The gubernatorial race, won by the Democrats, gained the most prominent coverage in the 1998 elections. It, therefore, provides a high profile example of ways in which the Democrats encapsulated, with success, the populist and conservative tendencies of the

Alabama electorate. The centrepiece of Siegelman's gubernatorial campaign was education and it is this area on which the initial discussion focuses. The Democrats used the education issue to promote the populist agenda of government as a promoter of opportunity rather than as a remote and bureaucratic provider of solutions.¹³⁵ The following paragraphs compare and contrast Siegelman's successful use of the educational issue in the 1998 campaign, with the subsequent failure of his attempt to introduce a state lottery as a means of paying for educational reform during his first year in office.

Education and Populism

This chapter has frequently referred to the belief in public, state supported education in the populist language of the Alabama Democratic Party throughout the twentieth century. Democratic rhetoric has consistently stressed the key role of the state government as an enabler in providing educational benefits to its people so that they may, subsequently, have access to greater choices in life. The continuing importance of public education in the Democrats' appeal to the electorate can, for example, be gauged on the party's 1999 web site home page. Prominently displayed is Eleanor Roosevelt's belief that '[a] Democratic form of government, a democratic way of life presupposes free public school education over a very long period.'¹³⁶

In 1998, following in the tradition of governors such as Graves, Folsom and Wallace who had directed education-based populist appeals at the electorate as a way out of poverty and toward Jeffersonian-Jacksonian individualism, Lieutenant Governor Siegelman based his bid for the governorship on inadequacies in the state's educational provision. In emphasising education, Siegelman was drawing on an established political trend in the state. As Alabamian historian Glenn Feldman has argued 'state-sponsored education [is] a decidedly reform minded proposition . . . in the states of the Deep South.'¹³⁷ Anecdotal and quantitative evidence for this situation is abundant. For example, in 1986 Dale Maharidge and Michael Williamson interviewed the descendants of Depression era families whose experiences James Agee and Walker Evans published in *Now Let Us Praise Famous Men*. Debbie (surname not given) in discussing Alabama's education system said that '[s]chools here are terrible. We're

so far behind. I wish we had chances like a lot of people . . . I don't want to spend the rest of my life in a fast-food joint, slinging chicken, even if I am the manager.'¹³⁸

Education in Alabama is funded by property taxes, which are amongst the lowest in the nation.¹³⁹ In 1998 Alabama ranked forty-first in the proportion of its citizens graduating from high school.¹⁴⁰ The state ranks forty-seventh of the fifty states of the union in per pupil educational expenditure¹⁴¹ and forty-eighth in maths proficiency and fortieth in reading.¹⁴² Maharidge, in the late 1980s, summarised the effects of the inadequacies of educational provision thus ;

*even if [property] taxes were doubled, there would still be the problem of a system in rural areas that is set in its ways. How can there be escape when ignorance is so institutionalised ? The third, fourth and fifth-generation children of tenant farmers have little chance of changing their fate . . .*¹⁴³

Much of these educational shortcomings can be traced to the Bourbon control of politics following their dominance in the writing of the 1901 state constitution.¹⁴⁴ Planters, landowners and industrialists were reluctant to educate their workers for fear of losing them to better paying jobs elsewhere. Using their influence in the legislature they kept educational spending low. In the words of Alabama historian Wayne Flynt 'the paucity of [educational] support was excused or justified by a philosophy that denied all but a hard core of governmental responsibility.'¹⁴⁵ The better schools were found in the cities, leaving rural areas, in particular, grossly underfunded.¹⁴⁶

During the 1920s populist rhetoric amongst progressive Democrats supported reforms such as mandatory school attendance for children from the ages of seven to sixteen. Whilst attendance at school until the age of fourteen was state law, many parents suffering economic hardship breached the ordinance. Consequently populist Democrats reckoned education, in the long run, to be the means of escape from poverty for rural whites disfranchised from participation in social and economic affairs by Bourbons anxious to keep such people in political ignorance.¹⁴⁷ Referring to the inter-war years, Feldman argues 'the concern for rural white education had, as its important antecedents, traditional average white concerns with

being caught in the web of disfranchisement . . . that included literacy, property, and education requirements for voters.¹⁴⁸

A full discussion of the educational provision in Alabama is outside the remit of this analysis (details may be found in the works cited in footnote 110).¹⁴⁹ Here, however, the analysis and examples are concerned with the populist approach. This approach promotes government aid to education to advance individual opportunity, and has to be seen within the context of conservative hostility in Alabama towards an active role for government in the development and management of social policy. The political risk of advocating raising property or income taxes as a method of increasing education spending led Siegelman in his 1998 gubernatorial campaign to suggest, instead, reforms of the state's educational provision promoting both conservative and populist political traditions. (Siegelman had run for the Democratic nomination for governor in 1990 on a more radical programme than that of 1998. In 1990 - when he lost the nomination to Alabama Education Association lobbyist Paul Hubbert - he also advocated a lottery to raise funds for education. Additionally, he also called for higher property taxes to be levied, albeit only on lumber corporation owners.¹⁵⁰)

The main plank of Siegelman's educational reforms centred on the introduction of a state-sponsored lottery that would finance a scholarship fund for Alabama university students maintaining a B average; offer free, voluntary pre-kindergarten programmes; and provide computers in every public school. Newspaper reports estimated that the sum raised from a lottery could reach from \$125 million to \$150 million.¹⁵¹ Pointing to the success of the Georgia lottery introduced by state Governor Zell Miller in the mid-1990s Siegelman endorsed a plan that was, apparently, proven and self-financing. Such a proposal, in avoiding invoking the state's tax raising powers, conformed to the fiscal conservatism implicit in the Alabama Democratic Party platform above. Siegelman, after his election, was emphatic in saying 'I think the people of Alabama are taxed enough. We don't need new taxes. I'm opposed to new taxes.'¹⁵² Conversely Alabama Democratic Party populism was evident in the scheme's offer of free kindergarten places and free college tuition. This was a practical illustration of the 1996 manifesto's commitment to offering opportunity sponsored, but not

dictated, by government. Siegelman emphasised that his administration would, through improvements in educational opportunity, bring high-paying jobs to Alabama.¹⁵³

Siegelman's opponent in the election, the incumbent Republican James, opposed the lottery proposal claiming it would be an unstable source of income.¹⁵⁴ A post-election poll conducted by the Christian Coalition of Alabama gave evidence that Alabamian politics continued to demonstrate strong populist and partisan sentiments, particularly in relation to education. In seeking to explain James' defeat the poll reported that 25% voted against James purely on the basis of his Republican affiliation. Notably 21% cited James stand on education as a reason to oppose him while 15% disagreed with his stance against Siegelman's lottery plan.¹⁵⁵ A second poll, conducted in November 1998 for the Alabama Education Association found 48% - the highest response - identifying education as the most important issue facing Siegelman and the state legislature in the coming legislative term due to begin in January 1999.¹⁵⁶ In the gubernatorial election Siegelman drew overwhelming majorities from blacks, women, low income voters and trade union members. The head of the Alabama American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO) Stewart Burkhalter concluded that the promise of free college tuition was a powerful incentive to blue-collar voters to cast a Democratic ballot. With a comment that provides a testament to the aspirations of working families that the Democratic Party platforms sought to reach, Burkhalter said '[t]hey want their kids to do better than them.'¹⁵⁷

The evidence of the opinion polls and election analysis indicated strong support for a state lottery in principle.¹⁵⁸ Prior to his inauguration, due in January 1999, Siegelman pressed for the lottery proposal to be voted on in a state referendum on whether to introduce an amendment to the state constitution to permit a lottery, rather than through the legislature (although the proposed amendment would, first, need approval from three-fifths of the legislature in order for the referendum to be held). Believing support to be strong statewide for his plans and fearful of losing control of the issue to state House and Senate lawmakers Siegelman used populist rhetoric to back his case for a referendum :

*The [education] question is so important to the future of this state that it should not be decided by 140 votes [i.e. the total number of Alabama Representatives and Senators in the state legislature] but by the full 2.3 million Alabama voters. How could any special interest say the people should not have the right to vote on this issue ?*¹⁵⁹

In a speech in Tuscaloosa in December 1998 concluding an orientation session for newly elected legislators, Siegelman used classic populist rhetoric and a reference to a pivotal figure in Alabama's political history to bolster his case for a referendum. 'Like George Wallace, I say, trust the people' he said.¹⁶⁰

Siegelman gave two major speeches at the beginning of his term of office - at his inauguration in January 1999 followed by the 'State of the State' address in March - to publicise his activist education agenda. At his inauguration Siegelman paid homage to his parents, invoking populist, Wallacesque references to their humility and commitment to the virtue of work. 'My mother,' he said 'was a beautician, from the time she was sixteen until she turned seventy-two, and my dad was a salesman' who both strove to provide the best they could for Siegelman and his brother, Les.¹⁶¹ His parents worked so hard to allow their sons to go to college mindful that they were unable to 'for one reason and one reason only : They didn't have the money.'¹⁶² Citing the projected \$96,000 tuition fees it would 'eighteen years from now' cost a family to provide a college education for a single student Siegelman declared 'no child should fail because of the lack of money.'¹⁶³ These factors, allied with his own experiences, made Siegelman determined to make Alabama 'the education state' by destroying the financial barriers preventing capable and deserving students the opportunity, modelled on Georgia's HOPE scholarship programme, to better themselves via a college education. Siegelman devoted over half of the speech to education issues including a pledge to sign, in his first act as governor, an executive order demanding the removal, by 2002, of portable public school classrooms deemed unsafe and overcrowded.¹⁶⁴ He also planned to ask the legislature for a \$5 million for the Public School and College Authority which allocated -

ultimately at the governor's discretion - bonds to aid educational infrastructure and physical plant.¹⁶⁵

The governor's State of the State address on March 2 1999 reiterated the inaugural speech's rhetoric and emphasis on education. Here Siegelman, in using the expression 'the people's agenda' echoed Jim Folsom's 'People's Programme' highlighted during the gubernatorial election of 1946. The State of the State, given in joint session of both houses of the state legislature, re-emphasised the centrality of the lottery proposal and described specific areas where money needed to be spent, such as \$4 million for the Alabama Reading Initiative and funding to cover the salaries of 600 new teachers.¹⁶⁶

Religion and Populism

Despite the popularity of the lottery proposal in outline it faced considerable difficulties in achieving passage once it became subject to the greater scrutiny of a single issue referendum rather than being one of many influential factors decisive in the 1998 gubernatorial contest. After the legislature passed a constitutional amendment to permit a lottery, voters were asked to approve or reject it in a special election that was to be held on October 12 1999.¹⁶⁷ The section below discusses the subsequent defeat of the lottery proposal in the face of a powerful lobbying campaign from, in particular, the state Christian Coalition. This example highlights the salience in Alabamian politics of religious sentiment and the 'social issue' (see Chapter Four) and provides lessons that the Alabama Democratic Party must recognise in future election contests.

Mindful of the opposition of the Protestant (especially Baptist) churches to gambling *per se* the proposed amendment, passed in the spring of 1999, created a specific exception allowing only for a state lottery dedicated to raising funds for public education and forbade the authorisation of any other form of gaming, for example casino gambling. Indicative of the greater scrutiny the amendment was to receive once its wording was released in February 1999 was the view of the Reverend Dan Ireland, executive director of the Alabama Citizen Action programme. He said '[t]here are a lot of questions that need to be answered. You're talking about a pig in a poke here.'¹⁶⁸ In contrast, at a new conference on November 30 1998

Bob Russell, chairman of the Christian Coalition of Alabama, had already publicly expressed opposition to a statewide lottery for education before the legislature had even considered the lottery proposal.¹⁶⁹ Russell, in explaining the Coalition's stance, argued that James' loss to Siegelman should not be interpreted as an endorsement by the electorate of the lottery proposal. In Russell's analysis '[t]here were an awful lot of reasons why people were unhappy' with James.¹⁷⁰

Initially, support for the lottery, however, seemed strong. The Southern Opinion Research conducting polls before the 1998 gubernatorial election, reported 61% of Alabamians in favour of a lottery for education.¹⁷¹ Similarly, after the election, a University of South Alabama opinion poll conducted for the *Mobile Register* in mid-January 1999 indicated that 70% of those sampled believed the lottery was a 'very' or 'somewhat' important issue. The survey also revealed that the lottery ranked only fifth in importance of seven issues raised indicating that support for the lottery was soft.¹⁷²

Siegelman identified himself heavily for the lottery during the referendum campaign, which began in late August. During a series of rallies and speeches in north-east Alabama he cited the cause of the referendum as 'a battle for this state's future.'¹⁷³ A University of South Alabama (USA) poll released on August 29 - six weeks ahead of the poll - showed 61% of those polled as supporters of the lottery.¹⁷⁴ The final statewide polls, one commissioned by the Alabama Education Association and the other by the USA, were released in early October. Here the numbers supporting the lottery, although slipping to 54% and 51% respectively, suggested that Alabama would emulate Georgia in approving an educational lottery.¹⁷⁵ Thus the defeat of the referendum by a 54% to 46% margin came as a surprise to Siegelman and the state Democratic party that had been inextricably identified with lobbying for the lottery's passage. Support for the lottery received 200,000 votes less than Siegelman had gained in the November 1998 gubernatorial election.

The defeat in the referendum is instructive for the Alabama Democratic Party most notably in the role played by anti-lottery church groups. The principal opposition to the lottery was the Baptist Church-based Citizens Against Legalised Lottery (CALL). Although

outspent by \$3 to \$1 by pro-lottery campaigners the influence of the church was crucial both in its rhetoric and its ability to motivate voters to register their vote at the polls.¹⁷⁶ CALL was particularly effective in categorising the lottery as gambling and, hence, in the eyes of the church sinful. Keith Nicholls, a USA pollster categorised the vote as involving 'a social acceptability issue. [I]t's being portrayed as a major moral question . . . and people don't want to be considered immoral.'¹⁷⁷ The churches organised an extensive campaign involving anti-lottery sermons, prayer vigils and full-page newspaper advertisements. Churchmen believed that Siegelman underestimated church opposition to gambling. The Reverend Danny Wood, of Shades Mountain Baptist Church, said that 'it [the lottery] was something that really brought the churches together.'¹⁷⁸

The church campaign against the lottery was notable for providing strong motivations to voters to get to the polls. The Reverend Calvin Kelly of Valleydale Baptist Church, who, like the Reverend Wood contributed \$25,000 to CALL, commented that 'there were a number of evangelicals who were on the fence because of the promise of educational funding but changed their minds because of messages from the pulpit.'¹⁷⁹ Democratic State Representative Joe Mitchell of Mobile conceded that the 'religious community did a superb job of getting out their vote.'¹⁸⁰ In contrast the Democratic leadership was less successful in getting potential supporters to the voting booths. For example, the USA poll of late August found overwhelming support amongst black voters with 78% saying they would support the lottery in the referendum (by comparison 57% of whites polled were in favour of the measure).¹⁸¹ However, turnout at the referendum was, according to Paul Hubbert of the Alabama Education Association, below expectations. His analysis - supported in personal correspondence with the author by Alabama Young Democrats President Scotty Colson - was that black voters were subject to considerable cross-pressures in how to cast their votes.¹⁸² On the one hand, the increases in public education provision promised by the lottery were attractive to black voters, collectively a voting bloc on low incomes, anxious to support an initiative closely identified with the Democratic governor. Conversely, however, many pastors in black Baptist churches were reported to have urged parishioners to reject the

lottery. Faced with such starkly competing options Hubbert believed many in the black electorate did not vote or, given their anti-gambling social conservatism, some black Baptists 'actually converted to the 'no' side.'¹⁸³ Only in majority black precincts was the lottery overwhelmingly favoured, indicating that the second element of Hubbert's analysis was overstated. However, the turnout and support in these areas was below the expectations of local black politicians. Rick Dent, an advisor (and Siegelman's 1998 gubernatorial campaign manager) to the Alabama Education Lottery Foundation, which was backed by Siegelman, estimated that in many black precincts only 70%, rather than the expected 90%, of voters cast a pro-lottery ballot.¹⁸⁴ The lottery was heavily defeated in rural, white majority areas suggesting that, given that these were strongly Baptist, that the church campaign had been successful in motivating voters to reject the lottery. In addition the overall turnout at 53% of registered voters - 9% below that of the 1996 presidential election - provided further evidence to suggest that Siegelman had been unable to excite voters in sufficient numbers to overcome the churches' get-out-the-vote campaign.¹⁸⁵

Baptist churches made strenuous efforts to widen their base to include other denominations - such as Methodists and Episcopalians - more moderate on social issues. Harold Blackburn, a retired Baptist minister from Silverhill, said that in the final week of the campaign he 'called 85 non-Baptist churches and encouraged them to have each member call ten others in their congregation to vote against the lottery.'¹⁸⁶ Similarly, the Reverend Chester Clark of the First Assembly of God in Bay Minette said he reminded his parishioners 'more than once' to vote against the lottery in final week before the election.¹⁸⁷ By contrast, Siegelman and the Democratic Party evinced neither the passion for their cause nor the dynamic get-out-the-vote efforts characteristic of CALL and other organised lottery opponents. *Mobile Register* journalist Joey Bunch found examples of this in reporting from Baldwin County were 'there was never a public groundswell of support for the lottery.'¹⁸⁸ His interviews with lottery supporters indicated a willingness amongst supporters to vote in favour of the lottery's provisions to aid public education but little enthusiasm for actively canvassing and lobbying for its passage. Jennifer Williams, a lottery supporter from Daphne,

in arguing that 'you're not going to beat the churches on an issue like this,'¹⁸⁹ gave testimony to the influence and strength of contemporary religious sentiment in Alabamaian electoral politics, and to the Democratic Party's weaknesses in this attempt to shape social policy.

Economics and Populism

Sean Reilly, a journalist at the *Mobile Register*, in the aftermath of the defeat of the lottery argued that

*there was a case to be made that nothing would have helped – that on a divisive social issue in a Bible Belt state, nothing could have withstood the organised opposition of hundreds, if not thousands, of pastors up in arms over gambling.*¹⁹⁰

Clearly, as the above analysis has shown, the impact of the church in influencing voters on social issues should not be underestimated. However, it can be counter-argued that Siegelman's - and, by extension, the Democratic Party's - lottery proposal failed as its intent was perceived as elitist as it appeared to favour funding for college scholarships ahead of aid to public educational institutions.

Siegelman's rhetoric during the referendum campaign had highlighted the value of the lottery in enabling high school students, previously unable to afford a college education, to qualify for scholarships financed via lottery proceeds. However, many voters questioned whether it was proper to spend so much money, comparatively, to send students to college when the public elementary and secondary school systems were short of funds. Democratic Mobile City Councilman Mabin Hicks said, immediately after the vote to reject the lottery, that he had 'talked to people all over who questioned whether the money wouldn't have been better spent on K through 12' (i.e. pre-schooling, elementary and secondary schools).¹⁹¹ Had emphasis been placed on funding K-12 schools the outcome of the vote, according to Reverend Sid Batts of the Mobile Government Street Presbyterian Church, would have been different. 'I know', he said in an interview conducted by the *Mobile Register* the day after the lottery's defeat 'if the lottery had been to fund K-12 schools you would have seen a

different position from Presbyterians. I think people felt that somehow we've got to fix the foundation before we fix the roof.'¹⁹² These remarks provide evidence of anti-elite, populist sentiment in Alabamian political culture, if imperfectly realised. Batts suggested that lottery money should go to finance services i.e. public education to high school level used by the 'little people' rather than for the significantly smaller section of the population qualifying for a university education. In short the lottery proposal was judged, in the minds of voters such as Batts, as elitist and, hence, unfair. This type of anti-elite economic populism was detected by *Birmingham News* reporter Jon Anderson in a series of interviews in Talladega, west Alabama in late August 1999, six weeks before the vote. Cayla Lackey said that the lottery would take money away from lower income families : '[t]hat's going to mean milk money not gotten. That's going to mean school supplies not bought.'¹⁹³

Batts' analysis also suggested that church attitudes towards the lottery were not monolithic, as Jennifer Williams suggested above, nor, indeed, that the churches' role was the most significant factor in explaining the lottery's defeat.¹⁹⁴ It may, therefore, be concluded that the Democrats committed a significant error in failing properly to research and canvass interest group opinion in respect of the varying attitudes towards the lottery. Once the proposed amendments' wording had passed the legislature in the spring of 1999 the Democrats had little margin with which to tailor their proposals to the electorate once the campaign began in earnest by the late summer. For example, the lottery proposal did not address whether the state's 56,000 low-income students receiving federal Basic Educational Opportunity Grants, or 'Pell' grants (named for Democratic Senator Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island (1961-1997) the scheme's founder) would be eligible for lottery scholarships.¹⁹⁵ In practice prominent black Democrats, such as state Representatives James Buskey of Mobile and John Rogers of Birmingham, urged their constituents to reject the lottery citing fears that federal benefits would be lost should the lottery be approved.¹⁹⁶ Interviewed by the *Mobile Register* after the referendum Buskey and state Representative Yvonne Kennedy both felt that the failure clearly to address this issue, at least, reduced turnout in black precincts and, in some cases, translated into 'no' votes in their constituencies.¹⁹⁷ Both, with Representative

Laura Hall of Huntsville, ran advertisements and distributed literature opposing the lottery because, they said, it would 'exclude hard-working and ambitious low-income students and [help] only the children of the rich.'¹⁹⁸ It is significant that these black Democrats – one of the most loyal of the party's constituencies – explicitly allied themselves with lottery foes, many of whom were found in the state Republican Party. The failure to recognise the concerns of the black community regarding Pell grants undercut a key element of support that Siegelman should have been able to count upon, as well as causing concern amongst the proportionately lower number of low income white families who also qualified for Federal aid.

Siegelman's proposal was vulnerable to attack for being anti-egalitarian. GOP State Senator Albert Lipscomb, a Baptist minister and Sunday school teacher, in addition to fearing that introduction of a state lottery would lead, inevitably, to casino gambling, believed that the lottery would act as a regressive tax on the poor since those on lower incomes would spend, proportionately, more of their earnings on the lottery than the wealthier.¹⁹⁹ The Reverend Clark commented after the lottery's defeat that 'the ones the lottery would hurt the most are the economically depressed, and as far as I'm concerned that's immoral . . . it's the old Robin Hood story in reverse : rob the poor, give to the rich.'²⁰⁰ Therefore under these analyses the lottery could be argued to be elitist, regressive, immoral and, especially from a Democratic perspective, lacking the empathy for the common man central to populist rhetoric. The issue of providing government sponsored improvements in public education is clearly one that can be marketed successfully by the Democratic Party to Alabamian voters. The Democratic Party's failure to pass the October 1999 lottery referendum can be imputed to the insufficient attention it showed to the state's populist inclinations rather than to an overestimation of how much government involvement in social policy the electorate was prepared to stomach.

For example, state Representative Jeff Dolbare, an ex-elementary school headteacher of Bigbee, south-west Alabama, suggested two weeks before the election that the state legislature should drastically cut funding for museums, theatres and other cultural programmes and shift the savings to K-12. Dolbare cited \$1 million given to arts and museum

programmes in Birmingham in the Education Trust Fund for 1999-2000 and linked the provision of that money directly to the closure of two, consequently, underfunded elementary schools in his district in 1998. Dolbare's plan spoke to populist distrust of elites, particularly those centred in Birmingham, Alabama's largest city and to demands that state money should go to help 'the young uns.'²⁰¹ Thus there remains, as this chapter has argued and demonstrated, a strong and potent politics of populism in the Alabama Democratic Party. This chapter concludes, however, by examining the challenges, limits and opportunities facing the party in adopting a populist approach to politics in the context of the state's political culture.

The Limits and Opportunities of Populism

During the 1998 gubernatorial campaign Siegelman highlighted the lottery as a means to finance a variety of educational programmes. As indicated above a number of critics pointed out that the lottery was a regressive, as well as unstable, way to raise state revenues. Given, however, the political culture of hostility towards direct taxation by government in Alabama, Siegelman's options were limited. A general increase in property taxes to finance education and other social services would be strongly opposed by key interest groups such as the 400,000 member 'militantly anti-tax' Alabama Farmers Federation, which had endorsed James in the 1998 gubernatorial election and opposed the lottery, and would not have found significant support in the Legislature where Big Mule influence is still apparent.²⁰² Examining the returns immediately after the election Siegelman ruled out comprehensive tax reform stating that 'if people aren't going to accept a voluntary tax which Thomas Jefferson said a lottery is, why would they accept a mandatory tax?'²⁰³ In the same news conference he stressed that under no circumstance would any future educational improvement plans be funded by raising taxes.

Thus whilst the Alabama Democratic Party has used populist rhetoric frequently in pursuit of its goals, the co-existing conservative philosophy of limited, low tax government, deeply embedded in the Southern Democratic Party, provides a formidable obstacle to the fruition of its aims such as the development of the quality and range of education in Alabama. The potential for change in areas such as these is constricted by the provisions of the 1901

Alabama Constitution 'written,' according to Robert Garson, 'by reactionaries in behalf of corporations and [which has] resulted in restricted taxing power of state and local government.'²⁰⁴ Seventy per cent of Alabama's tax revenue is collected from regressive sales tax whilst corporate tax is pegged at 5% leaving little scope for expansive spending on social projects.²⁰⁵ For example, Alabama's welfare benefits - in 1998 \$164 a month for a family - were the second lowest in the nation.²⁰⁶

Siegelman emphasised his commitment to fiscal conservatism stating, through Finance Director Henry Mabry, a former lobbyist for the Business Council of Alabama (BCA), that given that the budget for the fiscal year 2001 would not include any tax increases 'we've got to manage with what we've got.'²⁰⁷ Mabry stated that the Administration's priority was retrenchment, despite the existence at the end of the 1999 fiscal year of \$7 million unspent by state agencies.²⁰⁸ Accepting criticism of the administration's parsimony Mabry said that 'we cannot be all things to all people' in explaining why Siegelman was not offering expansive spending on social programmes.²⁰⁹ In this instance Siegelman was following the conservative, Big Mule practice of fiscal caution rather than the economic liberalism of the populist, Folsomite tradition.

Advocacy of populist tax reform was not apparent in the Alabama Democratic Party during the first two years of the Siegelman administration but debate on ways to change its taxation system - amongst the most regressive in the nation - was outlined by the Alabama Arise Citizen's Policy Project, a coalition of nearly 140 religious and community groups in the state. Led by executive director Kimble Forrister, the group outlined a plan in January 2000, shortly after the release of the administration's 2001 budget, to redistribute the state's tax revenues more equitably. Taxes would be reduced for a large majority of taxpayers with the shortfall in revenue made up by tax increases on those on higher incomes, especially on the wealthiest 1 percent. Their aim was to lobby members of the legislature in a 'bottom-up' approach recalling the tactics of late nineteenth populists. Forrister explained that 'sometimes our leaders look where the crowd's going and get in front of it. We're going to create the crowd.'²¹⁰ In addition, Forrister promoted a state Earned Income Tax Credit, based on the

programme introduced nationally by the Clinton Administration, to reverse the trend of giving tax breaks ‘to those who need it least [while offering] nothing to low-wage parents’.²¹¹ These proposals, in the populist tradition of government as an enabler of opportunity via regulating instances of economic disparity, were welcomed by state Democratic Representative Howard Hawk of Arab, the chairman of the state House education budget committee.²¹² The opportunity exists for Alabama Democrats to use these proposals for promoting a tax code that is fair, transparent and revenue neutral (i.e. one that neither raises nor lowers overall spending). Thus Democrats can advance a populist message which is, simultaneously, sufficiently fiscally conservative to deflect Republican charges of financial irresponsibility.

This outlook was endorsed in an editorial in the *Mobile Register* summarising its view of what Siegelman should seek in the light of the lottery’s defeat. The paper argued that

*[w]hat’s needed is systemic tax reform that cuts some taxes while raising others, that spreads the tax burden more equitably rather than putting it most heavily on the poor, and that ties new taxes to well defined purpose – especially for education.*²¹³

A similar argument was advanced by the American sociologist Richard Sennett of the London School of Economics. The expansive economically radical populism of, for example, Folsom’s 1946 ‘People’s Programme’ may not be politically viable given the support of fiscal conservatism and retrenchment in the Alabamian (and, indeed, national) polity. However, as Sennett, argued,

*while [Americans] tend to hate government bureaucracy, [they] want the fruits of government : good schools, adequate pensions, a well-regulated environment. The opportunities for the Democratic Party lie just there, in making government work better.*²¹⁴

Despite the defeat of the lottery Siegelman made it clear in his 2000 ‘State of the State’ address that his administration was committed to ‘improv[ing] the quality of education, to improv[ing] student performance, to attract[ing] the best teachers . . .’²¹⁵ In pursuit of the

latter Siegelman vowed a mandatory increase in public school teacher pay to the level of the national average which, in 1999, was \$40,582.²¹⁶ As the average teacher salary in Alabama in the year 1999 was 88% of the national average such a proposal would cost two of every five new dollars spent on education.²¹⁷ A *Mobile Register*-University of South Alabama poll taken in February 2000 indicated 90% public support for the plan indicating that government spending in pursuit of clearly defined, popular social policy goals could, in principle, gain the electorate's favour, even if the costs were reckoned to be considerable.²¹⁸

Overall, as outlined above, Siegelman, in concert with many Democrats in the state legislature, stood for fiscal conservatism. A key figure in aiding the progress of the governor's legislative programme in Alabama is the Speaker of the House. The Speaker appoints committees, assigns bills including the budget, to the various committees and influences appointments to legislative offices and is an intrinsic part of public policy making. At the beginning of the 1999 session Seth Hammett of Andalusia was formally elected the new Democratic Speaker taking the place of Jimmy Clark of Eufaula, retiring after twelve years as Speaker.²¹⁹ Reputed to be a technician and consensus builder, Hammett, a former bank director and president, had close ties to interest groups representing business.²²⁰ Hammett helped raise \$200,000 in campaign funds for Democratic House candidates in the 1998 legislative elections. According to reports filed with the Alabama Secretary of State's office, significant contributions came from such Big Mules as the BCA, which gave \$60,000 and the Alabama Power Company, an independent utility hostile to overpowering state regulation, which gave \$35,000.²²¹

Subsequent tax reforms, passed in the 1999 legislative session, were marked by concessions to key business interests and bore the impression of the pragmatic mood of the legislature suggested by the elevation of Hammett to the Speakership. An overhaul of business tax passed in November 1999 included tax breaks such as a depletion allowance worth several million dollars to oil and gas companies in south Alabama. The bill was needed to compensate the loss of revenue due to the U.S. Supreme Court's invalidation of a state franchise tax that had cost the state \$120 million.²²² Thus the bill was fiscally conservative as

it was revenue neutral and involved negotiation with the Big Mules, rather than by the imposition of increased regulation and/or taxes on them as a more radically populist approach would have demanded. An example of this pragmatism was evident in the success, in the spring of 2000, of the campaign to increase the state corporate income tax from the existing level of 5% to 6.5% beginning in 2001. Superficially such a goal would appear to be in accord with populist values that businesses assume a greater tax burden than hitherto. In addition, since such a change would involve an amendment to the state constitution, the proposal was put to the electorate in the form of a referendum thus conforming to populism's placing trust in the hands of 'the people.' However, the tax increase plan was agreed in negotiations amongst business groups and Siegelman. Lobbies such as the BCA and the Alabama Retail Association saw the new tax as fairer to them than the franchise tax that had, as noted above, been struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court. Describing the measure as a trade off (and, hence, revenue neutral) of one business tax to another Bill O'Connor, president of the BCA said 'we need[ed] to replace the unfair tax we have on the books today with an income tax based on ability to pay.'²²³ Commenting that 'we congratulate the business community,' Carrie Kurlander, a spokeswoman of the governor's, characterised the success of the referendum as an example of the administration and business working together, demonstrating that government can work efficiently in pursuit of economic reform.²²⁴ The measure was supported by populist Democrats, such as Kathy Thomas of the state Department of Human Resources, who had feared redundancies among state employees and spending cuts if the tax increase had been rejected.²²⁵ Thus the tax reform issue, brokered by the Alabama Democratic Party, was one that was highly satisfactory to both populist and conservative elements in the state indicating that the party is capable of providing popular, workable approaches to government such as those suggested above by the *Mobile Register* and Sennett.

In contrast to the pragmatic moves toward bi-partisanship evident in the above example and Hammett's close ties to the Big Mules, the Democratic Party still evinced strong partisan attitudes after Siegelman's 1998 election. Having won the lower house by a 69-36

margin the Democrats used their majority to deny the Republicans any committee chairmanships and to limit the GOP representation on committees to no more than a third of the membership on any panel. Initially opposing this arrangement Hammett agreed to it once the House met in January 1999.²²⁶ The debate over control of the state senate, however, was considerably more rancorous and indicative of Democratic partisanship and animus towards the state's Republicans.

The counterpart to the speaker in the senate is the Lieutenant Governor, the ex officio president of the chamber.²²⁷ Prior to the 1998 election no Republican had been elected to this post since the end of Reconstruction in 1877. However, the election of ex-Democrat and now Republican Steve Windom, who beat Democrat Dewayne Freeman by less than 11,000 votes of nearly 1.3 million cast,²²⁸ left the Democrats with the possibility that the Republicans could control the flow of legislation in the state senate in much the same way that a Democratic Speaker would do in the state House. To avert the likelihood of his legislative agenda being stillborn Siegelman, during his last week as Lieutenant Governor (which he remained until taking the oath of office as governor on January 18 1999) emasculated the office. Siegelman feared, in particular, that Windom would use the position to block the lottery plan from being voted upon by the Senate. The Lieutenant Governor's appointive powers and procedural and legislative prerogatives over bills were to be transferred when the new legislature sat, principally, to the president pro tempore of the Senate (i.e. the senior senator in length of years served in office) or to the Senate majority leader. Democrats Lowell Barron of Fyffe and Tom Butler of Madison, respectively, would hold these posts in the new state Senate as the Democrats held their 23-12 majority in the November state elections.

Windom's complaints that Siegelman's actions in diminishing the Lieutenant Governor's constitutional role (and, as a result, increasing those of the governor's) were an abuse of the separation of powers clause of the state constitution were to no avail as the Senate voted 18-17 on January 12 1999 to transfer his powers to Barron, the president pro tempore of the Senate.²²⁹ Windom, in seeking to put political pressure on Siegelman, used populist, anti-elite language - '[w]e (the Republican Party) lost today, but the people lost' - in

reacting to the vote.²³⁰ Although five Democrats supported the twelve Republicans in opposing the move sufficient Democrats backed Siegelman to allow the measure to pass. Many Democrats were keen to punish Windom - a Democratic state Senator from Mobile from 1989-1998 - for having switched parties prior to announcing his candidacy for the Lieutenant Governorship. For example, Alabama Democratic Party chairman Jack Miller, in his speech to the state Democratic party executive committee at the end of January indicative of Democratic partisanship, extended congratulations to Windom on his victory 'but, in doing so,' he said, 'it is rather important to keep in mind the name Benedict Arnold,'²³¹

Barron, the new president pro tempore of the Senate, promised after the vote that he would co-operate with the seventeen senators who backed Windom. 'I will do my level best,' he said, 'to be a consensus builder. It's going to be a healing process.'²³² The language reverted to pragmatism and moderation once the Democrats had taken control of the Senate in an attempt to mask what Republicans (and some uneasy Democrats) saw as a nakedly partisan seizure of power orchestrated by the governor. More significantly for the prospective health of Siegelman's legislative programme, fifteen of the twenty-one standing committees in the Senate were to be chaired by Democrats perceived to be loyal to Siegelman, with five chaired by Democrats and Republicans who had backed Windom, with one chair pending appointment.¹⁹⁴

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the development of populism in the Alabama Democratic Party during the twentieth-first century. The thesis advanced here is that throughout this period, and, *indeed*, going into the twenty-first century, populism has been integral to the political values and rhetoric used by the party. This chapter highlighted the role of successive Democratic governors, such as Bibb Graves, Jim Folsom and George Wallace, in articulating populist sentiments, especially in the development of a liberal economic critique of the Alabamian polity, to demonstrate both the vibrancy of populist rhetoric and politics and to argue that categorisations of white Southern Democrats as 'conservative' obscures the depth of populist belief in the party.

Whilst there has not been a figure in the Alabama Democratic Party with the demagogic powers of Folsom or Wallace since the latter's retirement from politics nearly fifteen years ago, the examples cited in the second half of the chapter demonstrate that populist rhetoric and policy have remained intrinsic to the party's identity in its campaigning and governing roles. The former aspect was analysed in the examination of the state party's 1996 platform which frequently employed populist rhetoric, often more boldly than that of the national party platform. Similarly, populist language and political tactics have been recognisable since the party regained the governorship in 1998 in debates involving education, religion and economics. However, populism in the modern Democratic Party differs markedly from the economic radicalism of Folsom, or of the Populist Party of the nineteenth century. Modern Alabamian Democratic populism has shown a willingness to cooperate with conservative, Big Mule interests to stress that, in an era of hostility towards government *per se*, for government to be viewed positively by its electorate it must seek consensus and partnership, and show that government can provide practical solutions in areas, such as education, that the private sector cannot.

The successes detailed in the key issue areas discussed in this chapter have sought to show the potential offered by an essentially populist, anti-elite, yet problem solving oriented politics. Democratic failures - most notably in an inability to translate broad public support for education reform in the abstract into passage of the lottery - can be imputed to an insufficient emphasis on core populist rhetoric rather than to an over-reaching sense of how far populist rhetoric can be utilised. The electoral setbacks suffered by the party in the mid 1990s, especially the loss of the governorship in 1994 to the Republicans, seemed, by 2000, to have been stemmed. In May 1999, in response to the author's query about the future of the party in Alabama, Democratic state Representative Marcel Black of Tuscumbia believed that, not only had the party regained lost ground but, 'the Democratic Party will become even stronger in the future.'²³⁴ This view was echoed by state Representative Joe Ford of Gadsden who believed that the outlook for Alabama Democrats was 'good (and) getting better.'²³⁵ for example, the Alabama Democratic Party ran twice as many candidates as the

Republicans in the June 2000 party primaries for Alabama's state and local offices.²³⁶ The answers of Representatives Black and Ford, and the examples given above, suggest a growth in political partisanship in Alabama as the two-party system has developed and solidified in the state over the last two decades. In consequence the type of political conflict shown in the Windom-Siegelman fight over partisan control of the Senate is likely to intensify as the Democratic Party is challenged for control of the state legislature as well as in other statewide offices, even as the party tries to show the electorate that it is a moderate, pragmatic, problem solving party willing, when appropriate, to embrace bipartisanship.

These trends are analysed in greater depth in Chapter Seven where the future political health of the Alabama Democratic populism is examined in the context of political, social and demographic developments that are sure to have an impact upon the party's populist philosophy. However, before attempting to draw wider conclusions, Chapter Six turns to populism within the contemporary Mississippi Democratic Party.

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CHAPTER SIX

POPULISM AND THE CONTEMPORARY MISSISSIPPI DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Introduction

The present chapter, the second of the case studies, examines the historical development and contemporary influence of populism amongst white Mississippi Democrats. The chapter follows a similar format to that preceding on populism in the Alabama Democratic Party in order to compare and contrast the relative strengths and weaknesses of populist philosophy and its application as an electoral, and governing, tactic that the Democratic Party can utilise in each state and, by extension, throughout the South and in the nation. It will become apparent that the populist heritage, as in Alabama, is deeply ingrained in Mississippi politics. Although the Mississippi Republican Party has made significant and steady gains since the 1960s and whilst the state's politics became two-party competitive in the 1990s, the Democratic Party has, as this chapter emphasises, maintained political viability across a wide variety of state and local electoral offices.

As in the previous chapter, in order to provide the context for a discussion of the ideology and political philosophy of whites in the contemporary Mississippi Democratic Party, a review of key features of the state's political, social and economic history is necessary. Thus the first section of the chapter outlines the evolution of populist ideas and rhetoric in the state's political history from the restoration of Democratic Party rule at the end of Reconstruction in 1877 through the post-civil rights era to the 1990s. Prominent in this discussion is an examination of the significance of the political careers of demagogues James K. Vardaman and Theodore G. Bilbo, who each in service as, first, state governor and, later, as U.S Senator, gained notoriety in Mississippi and nationally for the stridency of their populist rhetoric, particularly as each advocated and exemplified the need for an expanded role for government in regulating big corporations and aiding the common man. This chapter is thus able to re-emphasise, this time in the context of Mississippian politics, that broad descriptions of Southern Democratic politics as 'conservative' are, as in the Alabamian polity, not only insufficient but misleading. Populist rhetoric has been consistently employed by

white Mississippian Democrats throughout the period that the following sections discuss, and, as a result, this chapter concludes that (although the two states are by no means the other's mirror image) providing careful attention is paid to the social conservatism of the state's electorate, populist political and electoral strategies and policies can be of benefit to the party's future prospects in Mississippi.

Bourbon Democrats and Mississippian Politics

Mississippi historian Albert Kirwan writes that 'throughout the period from 1876 to 1925 the central thread in Mississippi politics is a struggle between economic classes.'¹ Before the Civil War, however, Mississippi was an agricultural society experiencing broadly harmonious social relations between planters and small farmers, as the economic interest of each was similar. Many farmers on what then constituted the frontier were able to purchase land and slaves and counted themselves within the yeomanry lauded by Jefferson. The ownership of slaves gave all farmers, large and small, a kinship and social solidarity based on white supremacy and a vested interest in the preservation of the plantation economy.

After 1865 this harmony was completely undermined in the wake of the dislocations caused to Mississippi's economy by the war. The Civil War's effect on the state's economy was ruinous. In 1860 Mississippi was the fifth wealthiest state in the United States. By the late 1860s it was the poorest in the union.² The entire cash value of its 437,000 slaves - estimated at \$218 million in 1860 - disappeared at the instant President Lincoln signed the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation.³ Cotton crops were confiscated as Confederate property and land values plummeted affecting wealthy planter and subsistence farmer alike. Only a third of the 78,000 Mississippians who fought in the Confederate Army returned at the war's end. The devastating effects of the collapse of the plantation economy were felt, by many, for generations. Jack Bass and Walter DeVries cite the example of the family of Governor James Coleman (1956-1960). Coleman, born in 1914, grew up on his grandfather's 2,000 acre farm that once required one hundred slaves to work it. After the war 'he plowed a mule the rest of his life just like his former slaves had done. I am the first of his descendants to get a college education ; that's how deep it went in economically.'⁴ The vast majority of the population

remained in the agricultural sector after the war. However, although the political and economic hegemony of the rich planters had been broken as a result of the conflict, a new class of leaders emerged after Reconstruction that created deep economic cleavages in Mississippi society that were, by the turn of the century and for the next thirty years, exploited politically by populists such as Vardaman and Bilbo.

The story of Reconstruction, the 'redemption' from Republican Party-imposed and administered martial law and the introduction of the Mississippi Plan to restore white supremacy was outlined in Chapter Four and, therefore, need not be recounted here.⁵ One of its consequences was to allow a new economic elite to come to power using the Democratic Party as its vehicle to gain, and then to solidify its dominance. As in Alabama, this class began to limit their agricultural interests in favour of diversification into more profitable lines of business in banking, merchandising and railroad investment. Again, as in Alabama, this group was to be familiarly referred to as Bourbon Democrats. Initially, in the aftermath of the Civil War and, then, during Reconstruction, the description Bourbon was applied, initially, to any Democrat unreconciled to the defeat of the Confederacy and hostile to Republican rule. Mississippi historian Willie Halsell described the Bourbons generally 'as a ruling group once dethroned but now returned to power who stubbornly hold to the past and refuse to adapt themselves to a world changing about them.'⁶ Its subsequent, more specific, appellation in both Alabamian and Mississippian political history refers to those Democrats antithetical to reform of any kind, whether in respect of racial, economic or social policy, advocated beyond the boundaries of elite control and white supremacy.

Bourbons, however, were not universally reactionary as they enthusiastically adapted to the economic changes affecting the post-bellum U.S. Significantly for the development of Democratic populism Bourbons, intent on exploiting the business opportunities believed to lie in industrialisation 'turn[ed] deaf ears to the farmers.'⁷ The calls of Mississippi's agricultural sector, by the 1880s, to alleviate the distress caused by falling crop prices and foreclosed mortgages, were pointedly ignored by commercial interests friendly with, for example, the very same banking concerns causing hardship for the state's small farmers. Delta planters

produced greater yields on less land and received a higher price per pound than hill farmers without doing manual labour. Meanwhile hill farmers worked long hours with little, if any, material reward. Bourbon Democrats - small town bankers, businessmen and professionals, as well as Delta planters - were anxious to limit government spending and to reduce taxes to as minimal a level as possible. Policies advocating fiscal conservatism were in direct contrast to the economically liberal demands made by the variety of national farmer's movements that, in the 1890s, culminated in the formation of the Populist Party (see Chapter Four) and provided a focus for agrarian opposition to elite dominance of Mississippi politics that was successfully challenged in the first decade of the twentieth century. Thus, within the first decade after Reconstruction, opposition to Bourbonism had acquired economic and class dimensions.⁸

Bourbon Democrats throughout the period from the end of Reconstruction to the end of the century maintained a firm grip on power in the face of constant agrarian revolt from successive, if short-lived, protest movements such as the Grangers, the Farmers Alliance and the Populists, all of whom found expression and support in Mississippi politics. Governors John Marshall Stone (1876-1882 and 1890-1896), who was appointed to the state railroad commission in 1884 and lawyer Robert Lowry (1882-1890) and U.S. Senators James George Z. George (1881-1897) and Edward C. Walthall (1895-1898) were all lawyers who represented, and tended to support, corporate interests throughout their political careers.⁹ These men, said Will Percy, whose father was a Delta planter and who became a U.S. Senator in 1910, were leaders because of a call from destiny that had endowed them with 'superior intellect, training [and] character.'¹⁰ George, born poor but a self-made man, did defend farmers' interests but favoured developments towards the industrialisation of Southern society that were often to the detriment of the farmer. Walthall was born into an 'aristocratic' society and was wealthy 'far above the average for the time and locality.'¹¹ The farmer was not, as Halsell, has detailed without friends in the government and legislature but those politicians explicitly supporting the agrarian interest were in the minority. More significantly, Bourbon control of Mississippi politics meant 'undertaxed corporations and plantations . . . it meant a minimum of government services for the poor [and] it meant inadequate schools.'¹²

Crucially the Bourbons controlled the administrative machinery of the executive meetings and political conventions that selected Democratic Party candidates for electoral office and decided policy. Once selected, Bourbon-approved candidates invariably faced little significant opposition at general elections as the Republican Party ceased to be a credible political force once the Democratic Party was restored to power as a result of the Compromise of 1877 (see Chapter Three). As Kirwan explains, ‘under the convention system [power] was in the hands of a few who ruled with or without support of the masses.’¹³ Any attempts to challenge Bourbon rule within, or without, the Democratic Party were met with charges that the alternative to Bourbon governance would be black dominance. Thus appeals to racial solidarity, together with reminders not to forget the ‘horrors’ of Republican rule during Reconstruction (see Chapter Four) were sufficient to nullify incipient agrarian revolt.¹⁴

Although the 1890 constitution legally disfranchised blacks and, therefore, reduced the effectiveness of the Bourbon threat that a black takeover of Mississippi politics would be imminent unless whites stood together, Bourbonism remained dominant.¹⁵ The convention system of nominating candidates stayed intact. In addition section 243 of the 1890 constitution contained poll tax provisions that served to disfranchise whites who were delinquent in paying a tax of two dollars, many of whom may have voted for candidates opposed to the Bourbon machine.¹⁶ Bourbons were determined to retain their control of Mississippi’s political process and used the 1890 constitutional convention to solidify their position.¹⁷ At the convention Democratic Judge J.J. Chrisman freely confessed that ‘it is no secret that there has not been a fair count in Mississippi since 1875 . . . we have been stuffing ballot boxes, committing perjury, and here and there in the state carrying the election by fraud and violence . . .’¹⁸ The constitution also contained increased residency requirements as well as section 244 that required voters to demonstrate understanding when asked by registrars to explain the meaning of any section of the state constitution.¹⁹ Mississippi’s *Official and Statistical Register* for 1904 boasted that the 1890 constitution had ‘disfranchise[d] the ignorant and vicious of both races, and place[d] control of the [s]tate in the hands of the virtuous, intelligent citizens.’²⁰

The 1890 constitution was designed, primarily, to disfranchise blacks. Indeed, only 8,600 of 147,000 eligible blacks were registered by 1892.²¹ Though minimal this was a number sufficient for Bourbons to stress the need for cross-class white supremacy to remain as a barrier to black political advancement. However, large numbers of whites were disqualified too. In 1890 120,000 were registered as legal voters yet two years later only 68,000 remained on the voting rolls.²² The political effect in Mississippi of these changes was twofold. First, the disfranchisement of blacks minimised the importance of race in the state's politics. Second, as a result of the former, political divisions after the turn of the century increasingly centred on economic issues that pitted the wealthier Mississippi Delta region which was the centre of the plantation economy against the poorer counties in the hill country in the north and the south-central and eastern piney woods where the quality of the soil supported, at best, only subsistence farming.²³ Despite the effects of the Civil War on Mississippi's economy the Delta region became one of the richest farming regions in the world.²⁴ The rapidity of its recovery was due to the fertility of the Delta's alluvial soil, its plentiful rainfall and access to vast underground aquifers which combined to produce a 'cotton yield per acre [that] exceeded that of all other regions in the United States'²⁵ Here, again, similarities can be drawn in the political histories of Alabama and Mississippi in the development of political divisions between the populist hill country and conservative cotton producing lowlands.

The key factor that permitted the electoral participation of, mostly illiterate, frequently debt-ridden, lower class whites of both town and country - what Kirwan has termed 'the revolt of the rednecks' - was the passage of the 1902 primary law. Bourbon control of the Democratic Party was conditioned on its dominance, not only in the party's executive committees and in the nominating convention, but also in the state legislature. The Bourbons manipulated legislative apportionment on the basis of the state's total population allowing whites in the Delta, with its high concentration of blacks, to outvote whites of the hills and piney woods whose black population was considerably smaller. In consequence, at the end of the century, the Delta counties (i.e. those adjacent to the Mississippi River on the

western edge of the state stretching from Memphis, Tennessee to Vicksburg, Mississippi) elected 68 members of the lower house of the state legislature, representing only 44,500 white voters compared to the 71,000 white voters in the rest of state that elected only 52 state representatives.²⁶ As V.O. Key remarked in *Southern Politics* in the late 1940s, 'the [D]elta planter and the redneck stride on, not as sharply defined geographic groups, but as states of mind formed long ago.'²⁷ The Delta politicians represented fiscal conservatism, economic retrenchment and elite control of government. By contrast, populist sentiment in the hills and piney woods in the rest of Mississippi favoured an expanded government with the means to limit the power of the corporations and active government as the vehicle for the advancement of social reform in, for example, the provision of public education.

As long as the Bourbons controlled the party and electoral administration their power was assured. However, the 1890 constitution had permitted the legislature to hold primaries as one method of selecting candidates to political office although, by 1900, none had been held. The impetus for the eventual passage of the 1902 primary law that mandated the use of the primary election occurred in 1900. The state Democratic executive committee had ordered a primary to be held to choose delegates to that year's national party presidential nominating convention but had arranged no similar primary to choose members of the new state party executive. Unless a new committee was elected, the existing committee would retain authority for, at least, the next four years.²⁸ Charging the leadership with a deliberate oversight to prevent the voice of the people being heard Robert. H. Henry, editor of the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* proclaimed that this inaction constituted 'a fight between the people and the bosses, and the people, who are always right . . . will win.'²⁹ In response the executive agreed to hold a special primary in June 1900 to choose a new committee, as well as nominees to the convention. Following the election numerous charges of ballot-box tampering and electoral fraud were levelled against the party bosses engendering even stronger feelings that 'the people' must be allowed the right to express their preferences rather than for the leadership to act in their own, partisan, interests.³⁰

The 1902 primary law provided that all future party nominations be decided via a primary election, to be held no later than August 10. The winner would be determined by majority vote to be achieved, if necessary, by a run-off election between the top two vote winners in the initial primary. The primary would serve to equalise the influence of the white voter regardless of the section of the state where he resided thus eliminating control of Delta politicians and their business allies and opening the way for the likes of Vardaman and Bilbo, as representatives of ordinary man, to assume statewide political office. In this way the democratic, egalitarian aspects of populism were advanced. However, the democratic influence of the primary did not extend to permit the participation of blacks. In 1903, for example, the executive officially limited participation in the primary to white voters only.³¹

The introduction of the white primary had three immediate consequences. First, it further diminished the racial factor in Mississippi elections that had been central in Reconstruction era politics, replacing it, instead, with class politics centred on geographic sectionalism. Second, new methods were required in campaigning. Successful electoral stratagems would entail candidates retailing their ideas by marketing them to the voters instead of, as under the convention system, canvassing support amongst the state and local party elite that, ultimately, nominated candidates. The key constituency that, henceforth, would be a dominant influence, since they represented a plurality of the state's electorate, was the poor white farmer.³² Third, the ability to construct a political organisation capable of advertising candidates' positions throughout the state would become paramount, as would the personality and charisma of the candidates themselves.

James Kimble Vardaman and the Revolt of the Rednecks

Vardaman, as Governor of Mississippi (1904-1908) and its junior U.S. Senator (1913-1919), dominated the state's politics for a political generation. According to one of his biographer's he 'developed a rapport with his audiences that few politicians ever equalled.'³³ Taking full advantage of the primary law Vardaman won the governorship in 1903 in a run-off by campaigning as the champion of the white masses. Although superficially an unlikely champion of the masses with his dapper appearance in a white linen suit, well-coiffured

shoulder-length hair, and marriage into a family owning a three thousand acre plantation, Vardaman convincingly articulated the aspirations and animosities of the poor white farmer as he felt he was one of them. Although born, in 1861, in Jackson County, south-east Texas Vardaman was raised at the eastern edge of the Delta in north-central Mississippi in Yalobusha and Carroll Counties where his Mississippi-born parents returned after his father's service in the Confederate Army.³⁴ As a young boy Vardaman had worked on his father's farm, suffering a debilitating injury in a corn sheller which denied him use of his right arm throughout his life. His formal education consisted of basic teaching in a one-room log schoolhouse.³⁵ Thus, he gained no loss of credibility despite moving away from farming to become, in the 1880s, a small town journalist. Reminding one's listeners of one's humble origins was a distinct advantage when electioneering, especially in an age where candidates were expected directly to address the voters in the absence of a means of mass communication. For example, in the 1907 primary campaign for the U.S. Senate seat against the incumbent John Sharp Williams he accused the university educated lawyer of never having experienced the realities of rural life, that, Vardaman knew, his audience, often possessed of minimal literacy, would recognise. 'Had [Williams] ever gone barefoot as a boy?' Vardaman asked. 'Had he ever suffered a genuine stone bruise? Did he eat black-eyed peas with a knife?'³⁶ In his successful campaign for the Mississippi state House of Representatives in 1889 Vardaman, the co-editor (with his cousin William Vardaman Money) of the *Winona Advance* had supported the farmer's calls for regulation of railroad freight rates. But in fact his early years in politics were more notable for his conservative, than his populist, stands on economic issues. In the early 1890s, he favoured, for example, granting tax exemptions for state banks and railroads, supported the poll tax and literacy tests for voting, voted against the introduction of a state income tax and endorsed U.S. Senatorial incumbents George and Walthall.³⁷ Whilst sympathising with the plight of the farmer Vardaman viewed the Populist Party programme of 1892 as socialistic for its advocacy of government ownership of railroads and telephone and telegraph lines, and denounced its leaders, such as Frank Burkitt of Mississippi, as traitors to the Democratic Party.

By the mid 1890s, however, as the agricultural crisis deepened Vardaman, became converted to the farm movement's inflationary policies and to government ownership of public utilities. In 1893, for example, in a speech to the Mississippi Press Association he urged his fellow newspaper editors (in 1890 Vardaman had purchased the *Greenwood Enterprise* and in 1896 he founded the *Greenwood Commonwealth*) to be aware of their responsibility to report the baleful effects of 'the concentration of wealth in the hands of a favoured few.' His rhetoric was now clearly consistent with the language of populism. In the speech he said the results of corporate consolidation were 'unjust and immoral legislation [which is] 'enacted for the purpose of robbing the indigent many for the enrichment of the few.'³⁸ By the late 1890s denunciations of the 'money power,' embodied by the likes of John Rockefeller and J.P. Morgan, were ritual in Vardaman's editorials.³⁹ Vardaman supported the rights of labour unions to organise to protect workers' interests and as a means to redress the influence of capital. 'The unlimited accumulation of capital by a few,' he said in 1897, 'could either drive many poor men to attempt social revolution or force the government to intervene and impose a system of socialism.'⁴⁰ This latter comment is indicative of the radical and conservative elements of Southern Democratic populism. Workers' rights are supported, as government authority is invoked in order to protect them. However, there is an implicit fear that should working conditions not be ameliorated then the consequences may include undesirable social upheaval. Although not advocating socialism much of Vardaman's views were those of 'a liberal . . . leader who [was] a generation ahead of his time.'⁴¹

In areas of social policy Vardaman views were markedly radical and were often in advance of contemporary opinion, particularly in relation to the expansion of government influence in the formation of social policy. In 1897 he declared that prisons should be 'moral hospitals' for the purpose of rehabilitating their inmates whom he likened less as criminals and more as 'patients.'⁴² He also did not believe women to be inferior to men and publicly announced that if they wanted to enjoy political and economic opportunity, they had the right.⁴³ In 1914 Vardaman accepted an invitation to address the national assembly of Women Suffragettes with whose cause he allied himself.⁴⁴ (In Vardaman's 1922 campaign for the

U.S. Senate one of his opponents in the Democratic primary was state senator Belle Kearney, the first woman in Mississippi history to run for statewide office.⁴⁵)

None of these views disqualified him from advancement in state politics. After serving six years in the state House of Representatives including two years as Speaker he ran for the 1895 gubernatorial nomination. Defeated in the pre-1902 primary law nominating convention that year and again in 1898 he was well placed, however, to take advantage of the increasing class-consciousness of rural whites when the first gubernatorial primary was held in 1903.⁴⁶ Vardaman won the gubernatorial election that August in a run-off against Judge Frank Critz after former governor Edmond F. Noel was eliminated in the first primary. Despite running a very low cost campaign and with many of the state's newspapers opposed to 'four years of radicalism' that his governorship would bring, Vardaman's candidacy indicated that, indeed, the primary law of 1902 would benefit the candidate most closely attuned to the concerns of the common man.⁴⁷ In September 1903 the *Jackson Clarion Ledger* estimated that Vardaman, in the twelve months before the election, had given over seven hundred speeches that, with an average of two hours per speech, meant he had spoken for fifty-eight days and delivered over ten million words.⁴⁸ Vardaman became known as the 'White Chief' for wearing a white suit and white boots during his campaign appearances. The drama and entertainment value of his rallies added to his appeal in those rural areas where the daily routine of life was often one of drudgery.

Post-election studies, for example that conducted by William McCain of the University of Mississippi in 1930, found that, first, the higher farm tenancy rates in any given county the more likely Vardaman was to have won its votes and, second, that he did particularly well in counties where the Populist Party had been active and polled heavily in the 1890s. Of twenty-three counties falling into this category Vardaman won all but four.⁴⁹ Vardaman also ran in the Delta which suggests that his racial stance was attractive to white voters there for whom white supremacy was overwhelmingly important. Thus his rhetoric conformed to the conservative conventions of the Delta. However, more significantly, his campaign had allowed poor whites to rebel from their deference to the Delta for the first time.

Vardaman pursued an activist agenda after taking the oath of office in January 1904. He listed twenty specific issues of economic and social reform that he intended to tackle.⁵⁰ His inaugural address, in which he made homage to 'the labour of man,'⁵¹ pledged to increase appropriations to public schools and to provide, amongst other reforms, a uniform textbook law. The state could afford, if it had the will, to give every white child a public school education. Citing education as the means of advancement for rural whites Vardaman proclaimed that country students 'need only the sunlight of an opportunity to awaken sleeping genius, one draught from the Peirian spring will create a thirst for knowledge that will remove mountains of obstacles to gratify it.'⁵² He concluded the address with an appeal to abolish the governor's mansion for it represented a relic of aristocracy and explicitly placed the governor at a remove from the people who it was his duty to serve. Vardaman, as the first popularly elected governor, asked that he be allowed to provide his own home.

Of greater significance, given the populist rhetoric of Vardaman's gubernatorial campaign, was his pledge to introduce a system of equality and uniformity in the assessing of taxable property instead of allowing each of the seventy-five counties make their own assessments which rarely were taxed at their full value. In April 1906, introducing a measure to prevent the concentration of natural resources, Vardaman reasoned that '[m]illionaires produce paupers – the concentration of riches in the hands of the few breeds poverty and squalor among the many.'⁵³ The legislature had proposed a maximum-property limit for corporations of \$10 million. Specifically aimed at timber companies aiming to extract lumber in South Mississippi's pine forests, Vardaman intervened, successfully, to reduce the limit to \$2 million.⁵⁴ In vetoing the legislature's original bill Vardaman said that the encouragement of monopoly would serve only 'to close the door of opportunity and hope in the face of the struggling youth of the state, and make them toilers of the favoured rich.'⁵⁵ Also in 1906 Vardaman vetoed the merger of the Mobile and Ohio railroads as inimical to competition. Should the railroads be granted such licence, Vardaman said in his veto message to the Mississippi legislature, 'they will rule the legislature, dominate the courts and ultimately enslave the people.'⁵⁶

The limit of space precludes a full accounting of Vardaman's governorship, which concluded in 1908.⁵⁷ However, some judgement on those areas that Vardaman prioritised is appropriate, particularly in regards to education, a staple issue of populist ideology. It was here, for example, that Vardaman could advance social policy beyond rhetoric and attempt to make significant reform via the influence of holding executive office. In 1908, urging the legislature to consider a child labour law he reminded it of an old saying : ' 'Tis education forms the common mind, as the twig is bent so the tree's inclined.'⁵⁸ Over the course of his four-year administration public school appropriations were increased 25% to \$5million and per capita expenditure enrolment increased to \$9.70 for white children in 1906 from \$5.70 four years previously. In addition, under the same comparison, teacher salaries were raised by nearly half and three hundred new school buildings were completed.⁵⁹ The uniform textbook law was passed in 1904 over the opposition of the American Book Company.⁶⁰ Vardaman devoted much time to the state's eleemosynary institutions. He had said, in 1908, that the highest tests of a civilisation and its government are its attitudes towards its less fortunate citizens. To this end increased funds were spent on institutes for the deaf and dumb and improved conditions were authorised for the state's convicts. His attitude towards criminals was that even if the prisoner was a 'low-bred, vulgar creature' then so much more was his need of 'kindly treatment, a decent bed . . . and sanitary surroundings.'⁶¹

Much of Vardaman's philosophies of government and society can be adduced from his term as governor and illuminate the development of populist thought in the Democratic Party. A proponent of active government, Vardaman equated success with efficiency, of making government respond to the needs and concerns of its citizens. He introduced, or at least advocated, ideas to consolidate government functions in order to make them more transparent.⁶² For example, the legislature created a Commissioner of Agriculture in 1906 following Vardaman's advocacy of such a post as desired by agrarian interests. Similar streamlining led to the abolition of the existing Board of Control that oversaw Mississippi's penitentiaries and its replacement by a Board of Trustees that would be concerned with rehabilitation of inmates and not, as he maintained the present system allowed, of the Board's

becoming an institution for political spoilsmen.⁶³ These measures for reform, as well as others, such as improved roads and increased pensions to Confederate Army veterans and their families, were needed for they fell into areas where the market could not or would not provide. Government regulation of corporations was, in Vardaman's rhetoric, needed to reduce inequities in society and was a reflection of his belief that government's chief purpose was to make life better for as many people as possible, to defend the 'great, silent, slow-thinking, toiling multitude[s] in field and factory.'⁶⁴ Vardaman's populism, although radical in rhetorical assault and, sometimes, in action on special privilege, was in other ways conservative. A self-described Jeffersonian Democrat, he desired that the mass of the population be able to take charge of its own destiny with government as regulator when the interests of capital, labour and agriculture became unbalanced. His view that the great delta plantations be broken up into small farms 'owned by white men who till the soil' was at once radical, conservative and reactionary.⁶⁵

In areas such as regulation, humanitarian reform and civic betterment Vardaman's views were liberal, even radical, for his time and even for future generations. However, in attitudes his ideas conformed to the racial reaction common amongst the majority of whites in Mississippi. The *Sardis Reporter* speculated in 1895 that Vardaman's racial views would find favour with nine-tenths of white Mississippians.⁶⁶ Indeed, his beliefs became more immoderate and intemperate with the passage of time. In 1893, writing in the *Greenwood Enterprise* he described blacks as the greatest obstacle to the South's material progress. Blacks were 'a blight, a catapillar [sic] that destroys everything in sight and leaves nothing behind.'⁶⁷ Comments later in the decade described blacks variously as 'a political ulcer, a social scab,' and 'a lazy, lying lustful animal which no conceivable amount of training can transform into a tolerable citizen.'⁶⁸ In 1901 Vardaman editorialised in the *Greenwood Commonwealth* that 'we would be justified in slaughtering every Ethiop on the earth to preserve unsullied the honour of one Caucasian home.'⁶⁹ Wherever whites had maintained racial purity - as in the United States - there had been progress, he reasoned. Where it had not - as in Haiti - there had been anarchy and a descent into barbarism. Vardaman's egalitarian

belief that all white children deserved a public school education did not extend to blacks to whom only the barest, rudimentary education was merited. To do more would be to waste funds that should go to white schools and to create unrealistic expectations amongst blacks since such an education could not be allowed to lead to social and economic equality.

Vardaman's 1907 U.S. Senate primary campaign against John Sharp Williams featured endorsements by populists such as 'Pitchfork' Ben Tillman of South Carolina and Tom Watson of Georgia. Watson distributed his magazine the *Weekly Jeffersonian* widely throughout Mississippi in the final weeks of the campaign denouncing Williams' affinity with 'the Wall Street element of the Democratic Party.'⁷⁰ Not satisfied with the restriction on black voting imposed by the 1890 state constitution, Vardaman called for the modification of the Fourteenth Amendment and repeal of the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that granted citizenship and voting rights to blacks. Vardaman was heavily criticised by his opponents for such a stance both in this election and in the 1911 U.S. Senate primary when he raised the issue anew. Both Williams and U.S. Senator LeRoy Percy saw no need for such a move given the clauses in the 1890 constitution that prevented black electoral participation, as well as pointing out the impracticalities of unilaterally amending the Federal constitution.⁷¹

This was one of the few instances in Vardaman's political career where the state's rights issue - intrinsic to a full understanding of Southern Democratic belief (see Chapter Two) - was raised, albeit implicitly. Vardaman's primary interest lay in populist reforms that would necessitate an increased role for state and, indeed, federal government. His forays into state-federal government relations were infrequent and ephemeral. He did advocate in the 1911 U.S. Senate campaign the popular election of federal judges. They should be 'brought closer to the great throbbing hearts of their masters, the people.'⁷² However, even here, this was consistent with his belief in furthering direct democracy via the introduction of referenda, the popular election of U.S. Senators and, indeed, the President, rather than in a critique of federalism *per se*. In an interview with the *Wichita Falls Daily News* in 1911 Vardaman held fast to the populist creed that 'the best government . . . is the government that comes most

directly from the people.⁷³ Writing in *The Issue* in 1910 Vardaman defined his political philosophy to answer those amongst his critics who denounced his radicalism :

*A conservative [is] satisfied with what he has already accomplished and is willing to sit down and rest, while the 'radical' is full of unrest and hope and ambition to make matters better [for the masses of the people].*⁷⁴

Vardaman was elected, at the third attempt, to the U.S. Senate in the primary of 1911, defeating the incumbent LeRoy Percy and Charlton Alexander in the first primary with 60% of the vote.⁷⁵ The margin of his 1911 victory can be, to a great extent, explained by the method used to complete the unexpired portion of the term of office caused by the death in 1909 of U.S. Senator Anselm McLaurin. Lacking a method to fill uncompleted senatorial terms, the legislature decided against submitting the election to voters in a primary and to allow members of the Lower House to vote on the nomination in secret ballot. Vardaman's subsequent defeat by Percy by a vote of 87-82 on the fifty-eighth ballot, amongst charges by Vardaman and his followers of bribery and offers of patronage by Percy surrogates, allowed Vardaman to claim that the voters of Mississippi had been denied their right to vote by an elite who, afraid to confront the people, had stolen an election that they knew Vardaman would have won in an open primary.⁷⁶ The primary of 1911 was a classic political confrontation between the Delta planter-aristocrat Percy 'the flower of Delta manhood', descended from French nobility and Vardaman the representative and champion of the people.⁷⁷ The election highlighted the class and sectional schisms in Mississippian politics. Voting intent in Mississippi could be divined, with a reasonable expectation of accuracy, with reference to 'economic conditions, educational opportunities and a recognition of one's 'place' in society.'⁷⁸ For example, Percy referred to a heckling crowd during a July 4 1910 speech at Godbold Wells as 'cattle.'⁷⁹ Vardaman followers had long been aware that his detractors saw them as low brow, uneducated 'rednecks', 'peckerwoods' and 'hillbillies' and treated this latest insult throughout the subsequent campaign as a badge of honour that distinguished them from the reserved, cultured Percy ill at ease with the modern trend of intimate campaigning. In 1947 a political columnist with the *Greenville Delta Democrat-*

Times, recalling the 1911 election, wrote that Percy 'was no campaigner. He couldn't remember faces or names, nor could he tickle babies under their chins and mutter inanities at their mothers.'⁸⁰ In contrast the historian Thomas Clark colourfully described how Vardaman's audiences, '[w]ith tobacco stained mouths agape, . . . drank in the thundering tirade of their patron saint.'⁸¹ A Mississippi voter, in 1910, revealed how one could divine his allegiances : '[y]ou can look at the back of my neck and see that I am a Vardaman voter.'⁸² The size of Vardaman's victory was the most overt manifestation of the revolt of the rednecks, of, as Will Percy described it, 'the bottom rail on top.'⁸³ The *Baton Rouge Advocate* concluded that the margin of Vardaman's victory was a testament to the voter's determination to eradicate practices such as the 'secret caucus, barred door conferences and money control' in Mississippi politics.⁸⁴

During his career in the U.S. Senate Vardaman supported at the national level many of the populist reforms he had advocated in Mississippi such as long-term credit for farmers (achieved in the Federal Farm Loan Act of 1916), government ownership of railroads, telephone lines, shipping companies and coal mines, and increased tax surcharges on high incomes.⁸⁵ Yearning for the agrarian simplicities of the Jeffersonian era he denounced an economic system that denied 'the children of the wealth producers . . . the necessities of life.'⁸⁶ In 1918 he spoke in favour of a government guaranteed pension for the elderly believing it to be a correct function of the federal government.⁸⁷ He retained his popularity in Mississippi until turning strongly against American entry and participation in World War One. Denounced as unpatriotic and even as a traitor he was defeated for re-election in 1918 by U.S. Representative Byron Patton 'Pat' Harrison.⁸⁸

This chapter has devoted considerable attention to Vardaman's political career in view both of its length and its significance. Vardaman's political success lay not just in his ability to connect with the idiom, often including lurid racism, of a newly enfranchised electorate but in discussing, and advocating solutions, to problems of direct concern to a population still heavily dependent on agriculture to earn a living. Populist reforms involving an expanded role for government in the regulation of business to redress economic

inequalities featured heavily in Vardaman's political philosophy. The margins of his victories in the gubernatorial election of 1903 and, particularly, the U.S. Senate primary of 1911 (when no run-off was required), in the face of the combined opposition of the Democratic elite and much of the state's press, are testament to the power of the populist critique. Vardaman's 1911 victory demonstrated that a campaign based on class politics was, at the very least, as potent as one based on race. Moreover, Vardaman's successes were not *sui generis*. His anti-elitism and economic liberalism were passed on to the next generation of Mississippi politicians, most notably, but by no means exclusively, to Theodore Gilmore Bilbo 'who drew heavily from those who had followed populism and those who supported Vardaman.'⁸⁹

Theodore Gilmore Bilbo and the Rise of the Masses

The reforming spirit begun by Vardaman was continued throughout the next four gubernatorial administrations : Edmund F. Noel (1908-1912), Earl Brewer (1912-1916), Bilbo (1916-1920) and Lee Russell (1920-1924). All four acknowledged the influence of Vardamanism in campaigns that were based on populist, anticorporationist rhetoric and in their advocacy of government sponsored reform and regulation. Amongst the many reforms proposed by these governors and enacted by the legislature during these sixteen years were increased appropriations for education, the creation of a junior college system, mandatory school attendance, stronger regulatory powers for the railroad commission, restrictions on corporate land ownership, the establishment of a tax commission and a banking board, the outlawing of interlocking directorates and a workman's compensation act.⁹⁰ Will Percy, looking back from 1941, described this era, with distaste, as one where 'the herd [wa]s on the march.'⁹¹ For Bilbo, in contrast, Mississippian politics in 1910, at the height of the revolt of the rednecks, was a 'fight between the classes and the masses, between the corporate influences and the people . . . and it will be a fight to the finish.'⁹²

The Vardamanite strain in Mississippi politics 'sought to transform state government into an instrument of efficiency and public service, one that was democratic, more wary of corporate power, and more interested in social justice.'⁹³ However, by the mid-1920s agrarian based reform had given way, in George Tindall's description, to 'business progressivism.'⁹⁴

Whilst still concerned with promoting efficiency in government, populist rhetoric and commitment to regulation and increased democracy were de-emphasised during the late 1920s and 1930s by the likes of Governor Mike Conner (1932-1936) and Governor Hugh White (1936-1940), who, in 1909, inherited his father's seventy thousand acre estate in south Mississippi. William Allen White described business progressivism as populism that had 'shaved its whiskers, put on a derby, and moved up into the middle-class.'⁹⁵ By the mid 1920s the Mississippi legislature, particularly the Lower House, was back in the control of Delta politicians, the heirs of the late nineteenth century Bourbons, such as House Speaker Thomas L. Bailey, who wielded considerable power in placing allies such as Laurens Kennedy and Joseph W. George as chairman, respectively, of such influential legislative panels as the Appropriations committee and the tax-writing Ways and Means committee.⁹⁶ Walter Sillers, elected to the Lower House in 1916 and known as 'Mr. Delta,' during nearly fifty years in state politics, opposed progressive taxation to pay for public education reasoning that 'the people that have the children should pay the tax, and you know the favoured few don't have children.'⁹⁷ For example, in concert with Governor Henry Whitfield (1924-1927) the legislature overturned a number of significant Vardaman inspired populist reforms. For example, certain businesses were exempted from taxation, limitations on corporate landholdings were abolished, and railroad mergers were encouraged.⁹⁸ In addition, Delta politicians made effective use of the provision in the 1890 constitution that required a three-fifths majority in the lower House for the approval of revenue measures and tax increases.⁹⁹

However, the constituency that Vardaman appealed to remained. The tenant farmers and sharecroppers that formed Bilbo's core supporters were the descendants of the yeoman farmers who, on losing their land in the agricultural depressions of the late nineteenth century, turned for political and economic salvation, first, to the Populist Party and, later, to Vardaman. Despite industrialising trends affecting much of the South by the 1930s nearly 70% of Mississippi's population still lived on farms.¹⁰⁰ Politicians such as Lester Franklin, Albert Anderson and Ross Collins, once Vardaman's choice for Attorney-General under the Brewer Administration, spoke for agrarian interests during the 1920s and 1930s. Franklin in

1934 presented a programme that he unabashedly termed socialistic for its intent to 'literally and bodaciously take [money] away from the rich and give it to the poor.'¹⁰¹ Paul Johnson, one of ten children (as was Bilbo), supported the farmers and labourers - in his words the 'runt pigs' - who distrusted the lumber interests and corporations that dominated the region. None of these four, however, matched the ability of Bilbo to tap so thoroughly into the hopes and fears, aspirations and prejudices of Mississippi's 'peckerwoods' during a political career that lasted forty years and included holding office as state Senator (1908-1912), Lieutenant-Governor (1912-1916), Governor twice (1916-1920) and (1928-32) and U.S. Senator (1935-1947).¹⁰²

Although business progressives stressed the need for better roads and increased appropriations for public education the lower class white - the 'redneck' - lacked belief that such good government, if it came at all, would involve their participation. As Andrew Nelson Lytle put it in 1930, 'the generals and colonels and lawyer-statesman . . . did not put sowl-belly in the pantry, nor meal in the barrel.'¹⁰³ In the same vein Tindall stressed that the 'progressivism of expansion [of industrialisation] and efficiency' lacked direct engagement with 'the larger economic problems of the underprivileged'¹⁰⁴ such as low levels of per-capita income and literacy, and a 72% level of farm tenancy.¹⁰⁵

Bilbo was born, in 1877, in a log house in Pearl River County in south Mississippi where pine forests spread over the land. The logging interests that had extracted lumber in the early years of the twentieth century had, however, stripped the land barren, leaving it unsuitable for profitable farming.¹⁰⁶ Southern Mississippi resembled the northern hill country in the poverty of its present and its limited prospects for future economic advancement. Southern Mississippi had a higher proportion of sharecroppers and a lower percentage of tenant farmers than the hills and, consequently, it was even more economically marginal.¹⁰⁷ White illiteracy was high and little formal education existed. School buildings were inadequate and, especially during the Bourbon era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the differentials in distribution of education spending heavily favoured the Delta counties. In addition, the low tax base of many south Mississippi counties left little scope for

expenditure on social services.¹⁰⁸ It was into this environment that Bilbo was raised and, throughout his political career, it was with its electorate that he readily empathised. As Percy wrote of Bilbo in 1941, the white masses adored him

*not because they were deceived by him but because they understood him thoroughly ; they said of him proudly, 'He's a slick little bastard.' He was one of them and he had risen from obscurity to the fame of glittering infamy – it was as if they themselves had crashed the headlines.*¹⁰⁹

Some, in a gesture of populist anti-elitism, seemed to take 'a kind of perverse delight in inflicting an ulcer like Bilbo on the body politic just to spite the sensibilities of their social betters.'¹¹⁰

Bilbo's appeal to these 'undiluted Anglo-Saxons'¹¹¹ was even stronger than that of Vardaman. Vardaman had grown up, politically and socially, as a Bourbon Democrat and, despite the populist rhetoric of his gubernatorial and senatorial careers, he maintained a courtly and dignified appearance and manner as well as his wife's three thousand acre plantation.¹¹² By contrast, Bilbo's style was earthy and crude because he not only understood the political value of articulating the visceral, anti-corporationist feelings of the enfranchised lower class white voter but since he had grown up harbouring those resentments too.¹¹³ These people trusted Bilbo because he 'was one of them. He knew how to make them laugh and weep, how to soothe them and to rouse their fury.'¹¹⁴ Consequently, as Chester Morgan's study of Bilbo's political influence has concluded 'it was Bilbo, even more than Vardaman, who recast Mississippi politics along class lines.'¹¹⁵ Will Alexander, an academic engaged in research on southern cotton farm tenancy during the New Deal years, observed Bilbo closely during his studies in Mississippi. Alexander acknowledged that, whilst many 'respectable' people might not take to Bilbo's bombastic behaviour and idiom of the people, he, nevertheless, 'was consistently for the under-dog and every vote he ever cast was on that side.'¹¹⁶

Bilbo promised not only political entertainment for the masses but engendering amongst his listeners a righteousness that their cause was just and that 'The Man' Bilbo was

fighting with them to achieve it. Bilbo rallies were social and political events that excited the voters in ways that the dry speeches of respectable politicians, such as Percy or Williams, could not. Bilbo, a lay Baptist preacher, peppered his rhetoric with Old Testament quotations – ‘bastard King James orotundities’ - that co-existed with risqué jokes and damning indictments of political opponents.¹¹⁷ Enemies were liars and degenerates. That Bilbo, in 1911, should be pistol-whipped by former state penitentiary warden John J. Henry, for referring to him as ‘a cross between a hyena and a mongrel, begotten in a nigger graveyard at midnight, suckled by a cow and educated by a fool,’ only added to his appeal to the ordinary voter.¹¹⁸ Fred Sullens, the editor of the *Jackson Daily News* with whom Bilbo maintained a career long enmity, was, in the 1911 primary campaign, called ‘a degenerate by birth, a carpetbagger by inheritance, a liar by instinct, a slanderer and assassin of character by practice, and a coward by nature.’¹¹⁹ The previous year during a political debate with U.S. Representative Van Buren Boddie, Bilbo was hit in the face by Boddie. Bilbo retaliated by throwing Boddie to the ground and snatching his wig off.¹²⁰ For all these reasons Bilbo, whose mastery of the populist style had no peer in Mississippi, ‘was perfectly equipped to tap the newborn power of the redneck masses.’¹²¹ During his campaign for the U.S. Senate in 1934 Bilbo tapped into this sentiment in announcing that he would

*be the servant and Senator of all the people . . . yea, whether he comes from the black prairie lands of the east or the alluvial lands of the fertile delta ; . . . your Senator whose thoughts will not wander from the humble, God-fearing cabins of Vinegar Bend . . . your champion who will not lay his head upon his pillow at night before he has asked his maker for more strength to do more for you on the morrow.*¹²²

Bilbo’s formula for winning elections and maintaining credibility once in office, from which parallels can be drawn with the political careers of Jim Folsom and George Wallace in Alabama, was to ‘[g]et with the folks, stay with the folks, sympathise with the folks, and discuss with the folks in a positive and uncompromising way the issues and problems that affect them.’¹²³ In 1936, a political opponent of Bilbo’s recognised that his political success

derived from his knowledge of 'every 'pig trail' in the state and [knowing] half the people by their first name.'¹²⁴ Key concluded in 1949, two years after Bilbo's death, that the source of Bilbo's political longevity was that '[t]he people understood Bilbo; and Bilbo understood the people.'¹²⁵

Bilbo was elected to the state Senate in 1907 from a district that included his home county Pearl River in south Mississippi. His programme was almost precisely that of Vardaman's in pushing for an end to special privileges for corporations, and increased financial support for public education.¹²⁶ He supported Vardaman administration (1904-1908) proposals (see above) and targeted, in particular, the Gulf and Ship Island Railroad for profiting at the expense of the areas farmers who had difficulty in paying its freight rates. His first motion in the legislature was an unsuccessful attempt to establish equalisation of the school fund to ensure appropriations were distributed to the counties on a proportionate basis.¹²⁷ Identified with the politics of Vardaman, Bilbo won the primary for Lieutenant-Governor on 1 August 1911, the same day Vardaman won the gubernatorial primary.¹²⁸ Supporters celebrated by wearing red neckties and bandannas to commemorate victory for the rednecks.¹²⁹ Indeed, throughout his career Bilbo often wore red suspenders, red ties and red socks and took pride in being denounced as a 'redneck' by his adversaries.¹³⁰

The limitations of space preclude a detailed narrative of Bilbo's career in state politics. It is relevant to stress, however, that his political agenda was reformist in intent in addition to being populist in style. His most notable successes were between 1916 and 1920, during his first gubernatorial term. In the judgement of Mississippi historian William McCain, '[n]o other leader of the plebian masses in the period [i.e. the forty year span of Bilbo's political career] had either a programme or record to equal his.'¹³¹ Bilbo created the State Tax Commission, in the face of opposition of Delta legislators who feared income and business tax increases, to centralise the administration of the tax code in one body accountable to the electorate. With the approval of the state legislature Bilbo gave the state its highest ever school appropriations funding together with equalisation of its distribution, thus ending the practice of the Delta counties receiving disproportionately higher funding than those in the

hills and pine woods. In addition a regulatory banking board was established, as was a highway commission.¹³² Organisation of the latter was a prerequisite for receiving federal aid for constructing rural roads. Farm to market roads were of critical importance in enabling farmers to get produce to local markets. This was the type of federal aid that was warmly embraced by Bilbo and his core constituency.¹³³ Bilbo's influence waned during the 'business progressive' era of the mid 1920s, although he did retain public attention through establishing, in 1923, a newspaper called the *Mississippi Free Lance* which served as an outlet for his political views.¹³⁴ At its height, in 1926, circulation reached 17,000.¹³⁵ Despite becoming governor again in 1928, his second four year term was markedly less fruitful than his first. The Bourbon leadership in the House rejected Bilbo's spending measures forcing him to accept a parsimonious budget and rejected every major proposal that Bilbo offered, and passed a retail sales tax, the first such regressive tax in the nation.¹³⁶ Whilst the state government returned to business progressivism with Conner's election to the governorship in 1932, Bilbo demonstrated over the course of the next fourteen years the vitality of the populist creed in Mississippi politics.

After defeating U.S. Senator Hubert Stephens, who had served two terms in the patrician style of John Sharp Williams and LeRoy Percy, in the 1934 Senate Democratic primary, Bilbo became one of the New Deal's staunchest supporters in the Senate. On arriving in Washington he declared himself to be 'one hundred percent' for President Roosevelt.¹³⁷ Frank Smith, a Mississippi U.S. Representative from 1950 to 1962, described Bilbo's political style as an example of 'personality politics at its worst.' However, although, in Smith's judgement, he may have been 'vain, corrupt [and] contemptuous of both knowledge and outside refinements,' he was, indeed, a 'one hundred percent New Dealer' whose only wish was to get money in the hands of people who had none.¹³⁸ Bilbo's first term voting record was, according to *Harper's* journalist William A. Carleton's 1947 article 'Why call the South conservative?' the envy of the most liberal northern New Dealer.¹³⁹ In the words of Mississippi historian Chester M. Morgan, '[i]n Bilbo the New Deal found one of its most effective evangelists.'¹⁴⁰ Even after many of the business-oriented Southern Democrats,

who represented large rural constituencies in their home states, such as Arkansas Senate majority leader Joseph Robinson, Texas Vice-President John Nance Garner and South Carolina Senator James Byrnes had defected from the New Deal coalition after the 1936 election, Bilbo stuck fast with FDR.¹⁴¹ While many southern legislators fought against the growth of executive power, and increases in relief expenditure which they considered divisive class legislation, Bilbo remained an unflagging supporter of New Deal measures such as the 1935 Wagner Act which legalised the right of trade unions to strike and bargain collectively and the Revenue Act of 1935 which called for a variety of inheritance and income charges 'whose obvious intent was to redistribute wealth.'¹⁴² Bilbo backed the Public Housing law of 1937 providing \$700 million in loans to cities for slum clearance whilst other rural Southern Democrats voted against it, explaining that it was of benefit to urban, rather than rural, areas.¹⁴³

Bilbo was implicitly - rather than vocally - critical of Roosevelt only when he felt his legislative proposals failed to go far enough in alleviating economic equality. For example, in 1935 when Roosevelt proposed a \$4.8 billion work-relief programme Bilbo backed Wisconsin Senator Robert La Follette's, subsequently unsuccessful, amendment to increase the appropriation to \$9 billion. In 1939 Bilbo fought for a guaranteed federal pension of \$30 per month without a requirement that states provide any contribution of their own which, to Delta conservatives, was an invasion of states' rights prerogatives. Old-age security was, Bilbo believed, a federal government responsibility. His plan would have cost up to four times the amount of the administration bill sponsored in the Senate by Tom Connally of Texas. 'To get the old-age pension,' he declared indignantly at a 1939 rally in Hattiesburg in the heart of south Mississippi, 'you must swear you are a pauper and no [ac]count and that your folks are no [ac]count.'¹⁴⁴ In 1937 Bilbo exclaimed proudly that 'I am a leftist' after casting the decisive vote that prevented Senator Pat Harrison from becoming Democratic majority leader in the Senate. Bilbo backed the administration's preferred choice, Alben Barkley of Kentucky over Harrison who, to Bilbo, represented 'the middle classes of the towns and cities and the Bourbon remnants of the Delta.'¹⁴⁵

Overall, Bilbo supported the New Deal on those matters - unemployment, tenancy and the inclusion of previously marginalised lower class whites into American democracy - that Cash, in *The Mind of the South*, considered fundamental to southern advancement. On agricultural policy Bilbo's views were archetypally populist. The government '[sh]ould grubstake, nurse and supervise purchaser-farmers for five years, and then let them start paying for the lands.'¹⁴⁶ The government was there to provide a helping hand to those in need to allow its beneficiaries to become, in time, self-sufficient by virtue of independent land-ownership. In 1940, after being returned to office with 60% of the vote, Bilbo offered the following paean to FDR, 'the best friend the South ever had in the White House.'¹⁴⁷ Roosevelt had :

fed and clothed our destitute . . . educated and trained . . . our underprivileged . . . given us roads . . . hospitals for our sick . . . modern school houses . . . parks . . . useful public buildings; trained and cared for our blind and crippled . . . increased wages per hour and shortened the hours of labo[u]r. . . provided loans for our cotton . . . paid our farmers . . . parity payments, financed the crops of our poor farmers and tenants when the banks, loan companies, and merchants could not help them . . . loaned money to our distressed industries and business people; saved thousands of homes . . . distributed trainloads of commodities to the poor. . . provided pensions for the old . . . compensation to the unemployed ; retirement funds for the labourers . . . [and] enacted laws . . . to protect our people from the manipulators and 'slickers' of Wall Street.¹⁴⁸

Despite being in Washington, D.C for much of his time Bilbo remained closely concerned with developments in state politics. For example, Bilbo supported Paul Johnson's successful 1940 gubernatorial campaign, which promised to continue the populist reforms initiated under Vardaman's governorship, and continued by Bilbo. The *New York Times* reported that Johnson's was a victory for Bilbo and the New Deal. Johnson inaugural address, in January 1941, was a 'little New Deal.' He promised to provide free school textbooks, pensions for the elderly, hospital care for the indigent, aid to dependent children, repeal of the poll tax and severance taxes on timber and oil corporations.¹⁴⁹

Bilbo, throughout his political career never utilised race as an issue in an election in the way that, for example, Vardaman did in his 1903 gubernatorial campaign. This was largely because Bilbo found that an appeal to class was more effective. He declared on the floor of the Senate in 1940 that he had ‘never sought to win an election by trying to arouse or [appeal] to race prejudice.’¹⁵⁰ It is not to say, however, that Bilbo was not a defender of white superiority nor that he did not believe in black inferiority. In an example of the crudity and crassness deplored by Percy and others, Bilbo, during his last U.S. Senate campaign in 1946, said that ‘the nigger is only one hundred and fifty years from the jungles of Africa where it was his delight to cut him up some fried nigger steak for breakfast.’¹⁵¹ Bilbo did not explicitly address racial issues until the mid-1940s when sections of the Democratic Party began to advocate civil rights for blacks (see Chapter Three). He had, in the late 1930s, opposed the federal anti-lynching bill on the grounds that federal intervention on this issue could be the beginning of a wider process whereby federal action could threaten white supremacy. In 1943 Bilbo opposed the Roosevelt Administration’s attempts to outlaw the poll tax which, in Mississippi, had served to disfranchise blacks and many poor whites. Less concerned with the denial of voting rights to the latter, Bilbo feared that abolition of the poll tax would lead to the breaking down of barriers to black voting. In opposing the bill, and in viewing it as inspired by northern politicians and bureaucrats, Bilbo said that the South ‘was stripped to the waist. We are going to do what our daddies could not do - that is whip ‘the hell’ out of those Yankees.’¹⁵² Bilbo’s reaction to these issues provides examples where he, first and foremost, conformed to traditional Southern racial conservatism, and defence of states’ rights.

Bilbo’s death in 1947 precluded any potential future involvement in the Dixiecrat movement of 1948 (see Chapter Three). However, an indication where Bilbo might have stood is given by the attitudes of key Bilbo supporters in 1948. The only group staying loyal to the national party presidential ticket of Harry Truman and Alben Barkley, as Mississippi Democrats became Dixiecrats, were former Bilboites. John W. Scott, secretary-treasurer of the ‘loyalists’ said, in October 1948, that ‘[i]t certainly is not inappropriate that the Mississippi Democratic Committee [i.e. the loyalist Democrats] headquarters should be in the

old headquarters of the late Senator Bilbo because he certainly was a party man, a Roosevelt Democrat and a close political and personal friend of Senator Barkley.¹⁵³

Southern political historian T. Harry Williams has argued that the reformist style of populism faded, after 1945, because there were few leaders who 'could provide [the] psychological outlets that a rural and poor people craved and needed : a sense of identification with their spokesmen.'¹⁵⁴ Bilbo had a programme to offer the electorate and, despite Dewey Grantham's criticism that Bilbo's 'excesses and irrelevancies' damaged prospects for reform, he remained consistent in its advocacy and delivered much of what he intended.¹⁵⁵ In the 1950s Frank Smith continued Bilbo's reformist agenda, winning election to the U.S. House from a district that straddled the Delta and Hill country. To appeal to the conservative sensibilities of the former Smith 'made the customary homage to economy in government and opposition to governmental regimentation.' Smith, however, was more concerned with attitudes in the hills. 'I knew,' he wrote in his 1967 memoir *Congressman From Mississippi*, 'that the largest portion of my supporters were people who felt that government activity in various forms was essential to their own economic security and the progress of the region.'¹⁵⁶

The populist cause, however, moved towards racial reaction and constitutional conservatism after World War II. For example, both candidates - Ross Barnett and Carroll Gartin - in the gubernatorial run-off election of 1959 were from the hill country, where appeals to class issues had worked so effectively for Vardaman and Bilbo, yet the election outcome hung on which candidate was more rabidly segregationist. Barnett, the victor, gained notoriety for the words of his campaign song 'Roll with Ross.' It included the lines, 'He's for segregation one hundred percent. He not a mod'rate like some other gent.'¹⁵⁷ Earlier chapters have referred, at some length, to the rise of the Dixiecrat movement in the late 1940s and of how, over the next twenty years, the issue of race dominated Southern politics, with particular vehemence in Alabama and Mississippi. Thus, that story need not be repeated here.¹⁵⁸ The following section discusses the effects on the Mississippi Democratic Party of the civil rights revolution, and argues that the populist critique and style, although modified in eliminating the bombast and racial crudities of Bilbo, remained central to its *raison d'être*.

Mississippi Democratic Party in the Post-Civil Rights Era

One result of the civil rights revolution that enfranchised blacks in Mississippi was the beginning of the end of the hills versus Delta class distinctions that had characterised the state's politics in the first half of the twentieth century. Henceforth, candidates for many statewide and local offices would have to appeal to black, as well as white, voters in their attempts to achieve election. The last statewide figure to run as an avowed segregationist was John Bell Williams, who won the gubernatorial election of 1967. Over the following twenty years, dealt with in this section, the conduct of Mississippi politics was a reflection of the emergence of three, broad and competing constituencies. These were first, fiscally conservative, wealthier whites, second, less affluent whites amenable to appeals based on economic reform and populist anti-elitism and third, blacks. A recurring theme of this period was the attempts made by a succession of Mississippi Democrats to attract the latter two constituencies - what has been termed a 'redneck-blackneck' coalition¹⁵⁹ - based around the populist economic and social themes used by Vardaman and Bilbo, shorn of their racist rhetoric and intemperate language but still articulating the anti-elitism central to populist political critiques.

Five Democrats, namely William Waller (1971), Cliff Finch (1975), William Winter (1979), Bill Allain (1983) and Ray Mabus (1987), won the governorship from 1971 to 1987 employing, to varying degrees, populist economic and anti-elite rhetoric during their campaigns.¹⁶⁰ The results of these reformist administrations generally lagged behind the expectations their campaigns raised, because of, amongst other factors, the weak powers granted the governor in the 1890 constitution *vis a vis* the state legislature.¹⁶¹ Nevertheless, each provides further evidence to support the view set out in Chapter One that the South's reputation for 'monolithic conservatism' is unfounded.¹⁶²

Waller, in the Democratic Party primary run-off against Lieutenant Governor Charles Sullivan ran as a 'redneck' and 'appeared as something of a modern-day [p]opulist.'¹⁶³ He was raised in the hills, although he was a lawyer practising in the state capital, Jackson, when he ran for governor. Waller depicted Sullivan, who was from the Delta, as the establishment

candidate of the 'Capitol Street gang,' namely the banks, the corporations and the Jackson press.¹⁶⁴ Once in office, 'reflecting genuine populist instincts,'¹⁶⁵ Waller supported consumer protection and attacked the big banks, particularly on issues such as the charging of maximum interest rates on small loans. In a gesture of anti-elitist politics, Waller removed the influential Hederman family (three brothers and a cousin), who controlled the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* and *Jackson Daily News*, from various state government boards to which they had been appointed by previous segregationist gubernatorial administrations with whom the newspapers were sympathetic.¹⁶⁶

The voting returns led Charles Fortenberry and F. Glenn Abney, in *The Changing Politics of the South*, to conclude that the economic and social divides between the hills and the Delta still held resonance.¹⁶⁷ The key difference between earlier manifestations of this sectional cleavage was the first significant participation since Reconstruction of blacks in a gubernatorial election. It was in recognition of this factor that Waller noted that 'in addition to some 170,000 blacks who are classified in . . . poverty in Mississippi, there are approximately 160,000 whites who fall into the same category. It is no longer a black or white problem, but an underprivileged problem.'¹⁶⁸ Waller's figures, for both blacks and whites, were considerably lower than that reported by the 1970 Census. In any event, a racial coalition of shared material interests appeared to hold electoral promise for the Democratic Party.

In 1971 the legislature, long heavily influenced by business lobbies like the Mississippi Economic Council and the Mississippi Manufacturers Association – the equivalent to the Big Mules of Alabama – passed a law increasing the dollar value of workmen's compensation by nearly 60% extra a week. In the late 1940s Mississippi had been the last state to introduce a workmen's compensation law.¹⁶⁹ Before the 1971 reforms compensation benefits were the lowest in the nation.¹⁷⁰ Waller did get an increase in teacher salaries approved by the legislature but was, generally, frustrated by the powers of the legislators who, in Waller's own words 'draw up the budget, recommend it to themselves for approval and then . . . tell the agency heads how to spend the money.'¹⁷¹

Unable to succeed himself Waller was replaced by Finch who won the 1975 gubernatorial election. Finch formed a redneck-blackneck coalition by using familiar populist rhetoric and class images. His campaign symbol, the lunch pail with his name on it, was frequently seen as Finch devoted one day a week to working in different blue-collar jobs, such as truck driving or bagging groceries.¹⁷² In this manner, his campaign recalled the advice of Bilbo, above, who reminded political candidates to always 'get with the folks,' and, in Alabama, of Jim Folsom's use of the 'suds bucket' to collect small contributions at political rallies (See Chapter Five). The *New York Times* attributed Finch's win, with 52% of the general election vote, to the 'workingman theme' that 'elicited blue-collar sympathy across racial lines.'¹⁷³

Finch was given credit for setting the agenda for the unification of the two factions – black and white – of the Mississippi Democratic Party. In 1976, for the first time, the party sent a unified delegation to the national presidential nominating convention with one black and one white co-chairman.¹⁷⁴ Symbolically, this act ended the segregationist era in Mississippi Democratic politics and formalised the existence of a black-white coalition. U.S. Senator James Eastland (1941 and 1943-1979), described by *Time*, in 1960, as 'the nation's most dangerous demagogue,'¹⁷⁵ and by *The Nation*, in 1965, as the symbol of what so many negroes, liberals, labourers, intellectuals, seekers, mystics and mavericks are trying to remove from the world,¹⁷⁶ responded to the integration of blacks to the party by saying, calmly, that 'the Democratic Party is a big tent.'¹⁷⁷

The black-white alliance held together to elect William Winter in 1979, who made educational reform a central feature of his campaign. He was a key figure in assuring passage of the 1982 state Educational Reform Act, a forty-six point plan that included the re-introduction of compulsory school attendance, random audits of school districts' finances and incentive scholarships to be funded by a variety of tax changes, notably the addition of a new five percent bracket on personal incomes above \$100,000. Whilst Winter's campaign style and administration lacked the oratorical flourishes that were the trademark of many a Southern populist, his stress on education and the introduction of a tax on elites was in

keeping with its spirit.¹⁷⁸ In 1983, Bill Allain, Attorney General in the Winter administration, ran a populist campaign that focused on his opposition to utility company price rises. Drawing together the redneck-blackneck coalition Allain won the governorship, and publicly thanked blacks for their support at the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) state convention two days after the election, saying 'I know the people who elected me and I won't forget you.'¹⁷⁹

These electoral successes, and that of state auditor Mabus in the gubernatorial election of 1987,¹⁸⁰ demonstrate that the Democratic Party can attract sufficient black and white votes to win office when economic issues are made salient. Stephen D. Shaffer has argued, using polling evidence from the Social Science Research Centre of Mississippi State University, that on issues such as the responsibility of government to provide jobs and spending on aid to the poor white Democrats are in closer agreement with black Democrats than they are with white Republicans. On social issues the obverse tends to be true. Consequently, he notes, '[w]hen [Mississippi] elections turn on economic issues, it is obviously easier to maintain Democratic unity than when social issues rise to the fore.'¹⁸¹ This may be contrasted with the experience of the national Democratic Party during the same period i.e. the 1970s and 1980s when its presidential nominees were deemed too socially liberal in areas such as abortion and lacking fiscal conservatism in areas such as welfare, where, nationally, blacks were perceived to be disproportionately favoured compared to whites (see Chapter Three). When Mississippi Democrats stressed those areas, notably, for example, education, where government could deliver services demanded by the public, Republicans were, by contrast, at a disadvantage. The Democrats in Mississippi did not suffer, as the national party did after it passed civil rights legislation in the South in the 1960s, for the eventual rapprochement between blacks and whites that took place in the mid 1970s. As Mississippi political scientists Shaffer and Dale Krane argue, although 'whites increasingly cast their votes for Republican presidential candidates, [they] continued their traditional support for Democratic candidates for state and local office.'¹⁸²

The populist tone of the campaigns of Waller *et al* indicates that an ability to ‘get with the folks’ remains of electoral value. This can be further illustrated with reference to the candidacy of Wayne Dowdy for the Fourth Congressional District, which had a forty-five percent black population, in 1982. Dowdy, who won a special election for the seat in 1981, stressed his constituency service. The *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* summed up Dowdy’s appeal :

Some observers remain baffled by Wayne Dowdy’s aw-shucks political success, but not folks in [the] tiny southwest Mississippi community of Progress.

*‘He meets with his people.’ says J.D. Jones. ‘You can talk with him. A lot of people who get elected to Congress are above all that. But Wayne will come and talk, shoot a game of pool.’*¹⁸³

The Mississippi Democratic Party and the Persistence of Populism in the 1990s

The Republican Party made considerable advances towards becoming at least equal in status to the Democrats in Mississippi during the 1990s. Significantly, Republican electoral gains were achieved by playing on traditionally Democratic anti-elitist themes. Republican populism, however, was conservative as it identified government as the cause of problems rather than as a potential solution. Under this analysis, the people were shackled by an overly intrusive, bureaucratic government. Thus government should be dedicated to deregulation and allow people to make their own decisions, and to reduce taxes to permit people to spend a greater proportion of their income how they chose. Additionally, Republican populism played strongly on social issues, often relating to religion such as school prayer, limiting access to abortion providers and traditional marriage, to link the Democratic Party in Mississippi with the social liberalism associated with the national party.

For example, in 1991 Kirk Fordice was elected as the first Republican governor since 1874, five years after Guy Hunt became the first post-Reconstruction Republican governor of Alabama (see Chapter Five). His defeat of the incumbent, Mabus, can be read in the context of Republican gains across the South (and, indeed, nationwide) at the Democrats’ expense. A closer analysis reveals that Fordice’s success can be attributed to Mabus’ mistakes during his administration and, moreover, his ability to tap into Mississippi’s populist anti-elite political

culture. Rather, however, than stressing economic issues as per Waller *et al* above Fordice ran a campaign that highlighted conservative, anti-government populism (see Chapter Two), with the Democratic Party cast as the elite, serving their own interests instead of the people's.¹⁸⁴ Mabus, in contrast to Winter and the Education Reform Act, had no major piece of reformist legislation to present to the electorate. (Mabus was the first governor to have the opportunity to run for re-election as a consequence of the Mississippi legislature's passage of a bill during his administration allowing the governor to succeed himself.) His BEST (Better Education for Success Tomorrow) plan played on traditional Democratic themes of increased funding for public education. His attempts to fund it via an education lottery, with which parallels can be drawn to the experience of Alabama in 1999 (see Chapter Five), were defeated in the state legislature after intense opposition from the Mississippi Baptist Convention. Mabus had pledged, - as had Alabama governor Siegelman during his 1998 gubernatorial campaign - not to increase taxes to pay for his proposed reforms, saying 'I don't think Joe Six Pack wants his taxes raised.'¹⁸⁵ The \$180 million reforms were paid for by a variety of budget cuts, including denying pay raises to state employees and teachers, thus alienating a core group of key Democratic supporters. This led Dowdy, who had served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1981 to 1989, to enter the Democratic gubernatorial primary using the slogan 'Save Us from Mabus.' Lacking funds, he relied on political rallies and speeches using his rapport with 'the folks' to advantage, although eventually losing the primary vote by 51% to 41%. His focus on economic issues such as Social Security and access to health care for those in rural areas failed to mask the fact that the race was one based on personality and style. Dowdy gained endorsements from ex-governors Winter and Allain but not from the state's most prominent black Democrat U.S. Congressman Mike Espy. Even here, Espy stressed that his endorsement was not anti-Dowdy but an expression of support for the backing the black community had received from Mabus who was judged to have delivered educational and employment gains for blacks. Most significantly, the race, once it became personal, for example Dowdy ridiculed Mabus' claims to be a farmer since he was educated

at Harvard, turned in Fordice's favour. The Republican Party, united behind his candidacy, presented a positive contrast to Democratic factionalism.

Fordice, a construction company executive from Vicksburg, emphasised in the general election that he was not a professional politician. Mabus lacked, according to Bill Minor of the *Jackson Clarion Ledger*, a 'rapport with rednecks.'¹⁸⁶ Fordice's anti-government, anti-elite conservative populism proved sufficient for a narrow, three percent victory over Mabus, in November 1991.¹⁸⁷ Eddie Briggs won the lieutenant governorship, defeating the incumbent Democrat Brad Dye, with a similar populist, anti-elitist message, decrying Dye as beholden to 'the tired, old worn politics of the past.'¹⁸⁸ Four years later Fordice, outspending ex-Secretary of state Dick Molpus, his Democratic challenger, by \$3.16 million to \$2.38 million and taking advantage of a strong economy, was re-elected by 56% to 44%, carrying all but seven of the state's 58 white majority counties.¹⁸⁹ Together with increasing Republican gains in other statewide and local offices, state legislature (see Table 6.1) and in Mississippi contests for the U.S. House, it appeared that, by the mid 1990s, the Mississippi Democratic Party was experiencing the same kind of wholesale rejection that, beginning in the 1960s, the national party had suffered in the state, and in much of the South, and from which it had failed to recover. State Republican Party chairman Mike Retzer believed that Fordice was 'the right kind of candidate for this state, more populist; some of the edges are a little rough, but he was sure enough genuine . . . and a lot of people like that.'¹⁹⁰ This was, in essence, the Bilbo formula of winning elections through getting to know and being trusted by 'the folks.' Fordice was, however, a Republican. His success, gained with an emphasis on anti-elite, anti-government populism, begged the question whether this triumph, and, by extension, the Republican Party's, was based more on the personal than the partisan, and was, therefore, an aberration and not the herald of a political realignment in Mississippi politics that would end with the GOP as the majority party.¹⁹¹ Table 6.1 indicates how the Republican Party has made notable gains in elections to the Mississippi Legislature over the thirty years of the post civil rights era. However, whilst elections to a number of state

and national offices are highly competitive, the Democrats have remained solidly in control of both houses of the state legislature.

Table 6.1 Party Representation in the Mississippi State Legislature 1967-1999¹⁹²

	House Democrats	House Republicans	Senate Democrats	Senate Republicans
1967	119	2	51	1
1973	119	2	50	2
1979	117	4	48	4
1987	113	9	44	8
1991	98	23	43	9
1993	91	29	37	15
1995	87	32	34	18
1997	86	33	34	18
1999	84	33	34	18

Throughout the 1990s there were, however, a number of indicators that suggested Republican gains were being solidified. For example, a federal district court ruling in 1992 judged that the state's 1991 legislative redistricting had failed to meet the criteria for expansion of minority electoral influence under the Voting Rights Act. The legislature responded by creating fifty black-majority districts designed with the election of a black in mind. Consequently, many neighbouring seats were whiter in composition and more likely, although not guaranteed, to elect a Republican.¹⁹³ Seven Democrats in the legislature switched to the GOP in Fordice's first year in office in 1992, of whom six subsequently won re-election as Republicans. Similar Republican gains were recognisable in opinion polls conducted by Mississippi State University to gauge party identification. Whereas in 1990 whites had divided their support evenly between the parties, by 1992 the Republicans had a 16% lead in this category. Four years later, in 1996, the lead had extended to 21%, with 43% of whites calling themselves Republican.¹⁹⁴ In 1990, 45% of all respondents in Mississippi called themselves Democrats, with 27% as Republicans but Republicans led by 37% to 32% amongst whites.¹⁹⁵ By contrast, a survey of Mississippi whites conducted in 1967 found only 6% of those questioned identifying themselves as Republicans.¹⁹⁶ A more detailed socio-economic survey, although one that did not factor for race, taken in 1996 showed 69% of families making less than \$20,000 categorised themselves as Democrats as did 68% of high school dropouts. Conversely, 63% of college graduates and 57% of those earning \$40,000

called themselves Republican.¹⁹⁷ This data indicate that Mississippi politics maintains a class dimension.

Collectively, these figures show a strong residual attachment to the Democratic Party, but, significantly, 1996 general election day exit polls found that 50% of Mississippi voters classed themselves as 'conservative.'¹⁹⁸ Mac McCorkle, in a 1998 *Southern Cultures* article on the rise of Southern Republicanism, quoted a former Democratic party county chairman, in the early 1990s, who said, 'I'm a Democrat but I vote for the man. All the men are Republicans.'¹⁹⁹ The Republican National Committee reported that defection of 'at least' thirty-five elected Democrats to the Republican Party between 1992 and 1997.²⁰⁰ Former state Republican Party chairman Clarke Reed viewed his party's gains in terms of the attention the GOP had paid to social issues. 'You know,' he said in 1996, 'there are more churches in Mississippi per capita than anywhere else . . . The liberal excesses on social issues have really helped a lot.'²⁰¹ In November 1995 Democratic U.S. Representative Mike Parker joined the Republican Party. He had said on television earlier in the year that 'I'm a little more conservative than a lot of Republicans.'²⁰² In the 1996 election the Democrats lost another U.S House seat when the Republican Chip Pickering claimed the vacancy created by the retirement, after thirty years in Congress, of Democratic U.S Representative G.V. 'Sonny' Montgomery.²⁰³ (In 1998 Pickering was unopposed for re-election and received 73% of the vote two years later.²⁰⁴) The election of Republican Roger Wicker to the First District seat held, for 51 years, by Democrat Jamie Whitten, chairman of the influential Agriculture Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee until his 1992 retirement, gave the GOP three of the five U.S. House seats.²⁰⁵ In 1990 the Democrats had held all five. Taken together these changes showed that the Republicans had made significant strides towards parity with the Democrats in Mississippi. The populist perception of a Republican, according to a mid 1970s Mississippi Democratic Party circular as 'a silk stocking type that holds Coca-Cola and coffee drinking parties in the big houses on the hill,' was in need of sharp revision by the mid to late 1990s.²⁰⁶

A problem remained for white Mississippi Democrats, who feared in the wake of the above desertions, 'that a more activist . . . agenda and enforcement of party discipline would spark further defections to the GOP.'²⁰⁷ Democrats in the state House had stayed sufficiently disciplined in 1992, however, to override Fordice's veto of a one-cent sales tax increase citing the need to protect the public education budget from proposed recession induced budget cuts. Also during Fordice's first term, the blackneck-redneck coalition overrode the governor's veto of a bill that contained 20% 'set-aside' finance to aid 'socially and economically disadvantaged individuals.'²⁰⁸ Although Fordice won re-election to the governorship in 1995, the Republicans won only 33% of the vote in four contests against Democratic incumbents holding statewide office, including only 24% against popular Attorney General Mike Moore and only 39% in open races for secretary of state and agriculture commissioner. In addition Lieutenant Governor Briggs was beaten by 53% to 47% in his re-election bid by Democratic state senator Ronnie Musgrove, who had formed strong relations with black and teacher organisations as chairman of the state senate education committee.²⁰⁹ Although his hopes of winning Mississippi's seven electoral votes in 1996 were never realistic, Bill Clinton lost the presidential vote in Mississippi to Bob Dole by only 5%, as Mississippi Democrats touted the administration's successes since 1993 in raising the national minimum wage, passing a family medical leave bill, reducing Mississippi's unemployment rate from 6.7% to 5.1 and achieving a 4.1% drop in the state's poverty rate.²¹⁰

Opinion poll surveys in the 1990s from Mississippi State University (MSU) suggested that the electorate, while conservative on social issues, were strongly supportive on government sponsored programmes such as education and highway improvement. For example, in 1996 61% to 39% of white Democrats (and 47% of Republicans) favoured the proposition that 'jobs and living standards be ensured by the federal government.' The same margin (and 39% of Republicans) supported, in the abstract, state and local spending for the poor.²¹¹ Successful Democratic candidates in the 1995 election, such as Attorney General Moore, inoculated themselves against being charged with permissiveness by highlighting their attitudes on social values, rather than being defensive and letting the Republicans set the

agenda. For example, a Moore TV campaign commercial featured a prominently displayed Bible as a backdrop to a message on the importance of personal responsibility.²¹² Commenting after the Democrats won seven of the eight statewide contests in the 1995 election, the state party executive director Alice Skelton said the successes were due to dealing 'with real pocketbook issues . . . you saw Mississippi Democrats talking about Mississippi issues.'²¹³ One of the winners, secretary of state Eric Clark, referred to the latter by suggesting that the party had shown its belief in 'family values [and] respect for life,' - a coded phrase for anti-abortionism - without forgetting about traditional Democratic goals of expanding educational and economic opportunities.²¹⁴

The Democrats continued, after the 1995 elections, to control both houses of the state legislature and the victories of 'The Magnificent Seven,' as Moore termed the Democratic winners of the seven statewide races, would seem to belie U.S. Representative Gene Taylor's 1998 opinions on the state party's health.²¹⁵ In the summer of 1998, when asked in an interview with *Congressional Quarterly Weekly* about the condition of the state party Taylor responded by saying 'there is none,' and that the party had 'barely a pulse.'²¹⁶ By contrast, Shaffer *et al* concluding their chapter on Mississippi politics, written in advance of the 1999 gubernatorial election, wrote that Mississippi's politics was being vigorously contested 'between two resourceful and dynamic parties.'²¹⁷

Fordice was obliged to leave office after the 1999 gubernatorial election having served the constitutionally permitted two terms. The election of a new governor was a key test of whether Fordice's eight years in office had conferred legitimacy upon the notion of voting Republican in Mississippi state politics, or whether, instead, Fordice's 1991 and 1995 victories owed more to a personal vote combined with a set of circumstances, unlikely to be replicated, that favoured the GOP in those particular elections. Lieutenant governor Ronnie Musgrove comfortably won in the Democratic primary in August. Musgrove won 57% of the vote, to face Democrat turned Republican, ex-U.S. Representative, Mike Parker in the general election in November.²¹⁸ Musgrove's campaign website highlighted his partnership in a Batesville law firm 'in his native Panola County,' in north Mississippi at the Delta's edge, to

emphasise his continuing attachment to his roots. Musgrove's service as a deacon in a Batesville Baptist church and his wife's job as a public elementary school teacher attended by his two daughters were similarly emphasised.²¹⁹ The aim was to indicate here was a local candidate who, despite his elevation to political office, was still close to the people and who had a supportive family. Fordice, by contrast, had lost considerable support late in his second term after announcing in June that he was divorcing his wife to marry his 'childhood sweetheart.'²²⁰ Musgrove's background, and Fordice's foibles, had the effect of diminishing the socially conservative 'family values' issue that had often been used to Republican advantage. Musgrove's appearance at a American Legion Boys state convention led one delegate to praise Musgrove for being 'down to earth.' Indeed, emphasis on Musgrove's humble origins was an important element in his campaign. His father, a state highway department employee, died of pneumonia when Musgrove was eight. Soon after Musgrove helped the family by driving a tractor on a north Mississippi farm. These elements allowed Musgrove to appeal to a wide cross-section of Mississippians, according to political scientist Joseph Parker of the University of Southern Mississippi.²²¹ Musgrove, in Parker's analysis, did particularly well amongst blue-collar whites 'who were yellow dog Democrats at one time but straight off and became Reagan Democrats . . . The fact is that Musgrove is a genuine-article Baptist, he is genuine-article anti-abortion and he is a genuine-article hunter [who was endorsed by the National Rifle Association (NRA) in the final week of the election].'²²² In addition, Musgrove had strong support from education groups to whom he promised pay increases (See 'The Musgrove Story,') and were impressed that his wife was a teacher, and from blacks who noted Musgrove's intervention to insist that Batesville high school reunions be integrated.²²³ Also, in 1997, Musgrove, as lieutenant governor had successfully led a coalition of legislators in overriding Fordice's veto of a bill to correct inequities in state education funding.²²⁴ Summarising Musgrove's appeal, Marty Wiseman, a political scientist at Mississippi State University, said that 'he's [Musgrove] got enough country in him that he doesn't come across as a slick city guy.'²²⁵

Musgrove won the election with 49.6% to Parker's 48.5%. Tubby Harrison, Musgrove's pollster, said the election was a *prima facie* example of the success Southern Democrats could achieve by running moderate candidates able to still appeal to the party's core support : 'Mississippi shows that if you're a Democrat and not regarded as liberal on social issues, and you hit pocketbook issues, you can win.'²²⁶ In addition, Amy Tuck won the lieutenant governorship, vacated by Musgrove, with 53% of the vote, to become only the second woman elected statewide in Mississippi history. Tuck had also stressed education in her campaign. Citing her 'passion' for education she recalled her experiences as a college teacher to emphasise that education must be made a priority.²²⁷

Musgrove's campaign, therefore, utilised the Bilbo formula of 'getting close to the folks,' and constructed the post civil rights blackneck-redneck coalition on economic issues whilst observing conservative populist positions on social concerns. In six statewide races, the Democrats won five, losing only the State Auditor's race and winning, overall, 58% of the vote.²²⁸ The Democrats also gained the Mississippi Southern District Public Service Commissioners post. In state legislative races the Democrats polled 56% of the vote in the senate and 50% in the lower house.²²⁹ The party's popular vote percentage is considerably underestimated in that 61 Democrats were elected unopposed. In over 60 two party contested local races for offices such as county supervisor, courts of justice and sheriff, the Democrats lost only one to the Republicans. These 'down ballot' races were indicative of the persistence of the 'yellow dog' Democratic tradition in Mississippi, and viewed in the context of the party's 1999 victories in high profile statewide elections, show that the Republicans have a considerable gap to close upon the Democrats in order justifiably to be labelled the state's majority party.

These successes in the 1999 state elections built upon the party's retaking of the Republican held Fourth District seat in the 1998 congressional elections. Southern Mississippi Transport Commissioner Ronnie Shows defeated Jackson lawyer Delbert Hoseman to fill the open seat left vacant by Parker's decision to run for governor in 1999. Shows' candidacy, and victory in the general election, highlight the strength of the electorate's residual attraction to

the Mississippi Democratic Party in state and local races, provided candidates conform to 'Mississippi' values. Shows, like Musgrove, frequently reminded voters that he was a public school teacher and basketball coach, and had lived in the same house in Bassfield, a south Mississippi town with a population of 250, for thirty years. Political scientist Wiseman of MSU said this biography was 'the perfect pedigree' for a candidate hoping to win the seat.²³⁰ Hosemann, his opponent, was handicapped in rural areas for his Jackson connections. Shows, in an example of traditional anti-elitist populist rhetoric, said, prior to the election, that 'I just don't see people down here [Pike County] voting for a rich Jackson lawyer. By contrast, as transport commissioner Shows was in a prime position, 'a trump card'²³¹ according to Wiseman, to direct road construction projects throughout the state, and, thus, to gain support from Fourth District business and consumers who rely upon good communications in a seat with a rural population of 47%.²³² Shows, in the campaign, supported improved funding for rural health care and increases in the federal minimum wage.²³³ The latter stance was popular in a district with a black population of 40% and with a median income, at \$20,000, that was in the nation's bottom third.²³⁴ Shows' socially conservative stances on abortion and rights of gun ownership left few targets for Hosemann to attack. Shows won by 53% to 45% in the 1998 election and, widened his margin of victory to 18% in the U.S. House elections of 2000.

This section concludes with some remarks upon Musgrove's performance as governor following his inauguration in January 2000. Musgrove had - like Siegelman of Alabama in 1998 - made education the centrepiece of his election campaign. Invited by the *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* in the final week of the 1999 gubernatorial election to articulate why he wanted to be governor, Musgrove responded that 'there are two reasons I decided to run for governor. They are my children . . . I want them to get a good education and build a career in Mississippi.'²³⁵ Musgrove's thirteen minute inaugural address did not include any specific policy proposals. He did, however, indicate where his priorities might lie. 'Salaries for teachers . . . are higher,' he said, 'but they're not high enough.'²³⁶ Musgrove, at an inauguration day breakfast for legislators, administrators and campaign supporters, said that '[t]he future of Mississippi depends on a well-educated society . . . it's only appropriate to

start off the celebration here with the challenge of the new century recognising the importance of education.²³⁷ The first group he met on his first day as governor was the state Parent-Teacher Association to whom Musgrove assured teacher pay raises were essential.²³⁸ During the gubernatorial campaign Musgrove had specifically pledged that public school teacher salaries would be raised to reach the Southeastern U.S. average.²³⁹ The average across the region (including Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North and South Carolina and Tennessee) was \$38,000 in 1999, compared to \$31,000 in Mississippi and \$40,000 nationally. Raising teacher salaries, to make the profession more financially secure, Musgrove declared was 'the most critical issue facing the people of Mississippi.'²⁴⁰ In April 2000 the legislature passed the largest teacher pay increase in Mississippi history fulfilling the promise that Musgrove had made in his first 'State of the State' address to the legislature the previous February.²⁴¹

Musgrove's focus upon education was consistent with the populist Democratic tradition in Mississippi traceable to the Vardaman era in the first decade of the twentieth century. Furthermore, parallels can be drawn between Musgrove's stance on teacher pay as the most critical issue facing Mississippi with Siegelman's single-minded focus upon the introduction of an education dedicated lottery as the means to solve the problems of funding adequate educational provision in Alabama (see Chapter Five). Musgrove signed into law a six-year teacher pay raise worth \$337.9 million. In addition he pledged to waive the budgetary requirement that the pay raises could only go into effect in years where the economy grows by five per cent.²⁴² The ambition of educational spending was in contrast to the parsimonious amount of social expenditure elsewhere in the budget. Democratic state Senator Jack Gordon of Okolona said that acceptance of the plan would have the effect of negating any new spending on other programmes.²⁴³ The ease with which Musgrove got the pay raise bill passed through the legislature provides, first, further testimony to the popularity, and political support, for publicly funded education in the state. Second, attitudes toward public education provide evidence of clear differences between the political philosophies between southern Democrats and Republicans. During debate on the bill it was Republicans who questioned whether the state could afford to pay for salary increases on the scale

Musgrove proposed. Republican State Representative Keith Montgomery of Clinton said the bill 'was more Democratic ideology, feel good things without specific solutions. The solutions [Musgrove] did have seemed to have a hefty price tag.'²⁴⁴ The Democratic commitment to educational spending in Mississippi (and Alabama) shows a party whose belief in government sponsored reform is closer in philosophy to the reformism of the national Democratic party than to the Jeffersonian fiscal restraint and limited government often associated with the Southern political conservatism of the Bourbon (and Big Mule) traditions.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the development of an anti-elitist, economically reformist, socially conservative populism in the Mississippi Democratic Party that, beginning in the early twentieth century with the 'revolt of the rednecks' against Bourbon control of the party, continues to inform the political philosophy of white Mississippi Democrats. Although the Democrats have not produced figures to approach the charisma of Vardaman and Bilbo and whilst the rhetorical flourishes they favoured have been toned down the essential message they imparted – i.e. that electoral and political success depends on developing a rapport with the electorate that is believable – remains as valid in the early twenty-first century as it did nearly one hundred years ago. For example, Musgrove and Shows touted their local roots and continuing attachments to the rural and small town environments they grew up in. Moreover, Musgrove's priority on becoming governor was the fulfilment of a campaign pledge to introduce a bill to increase public teacher salaries by nearly 25% over six years. Musgrove did not shy away from using traditional anti-elitist populist rhetoric in his first state of the state address in February 2000 in the section on health care. Pledging to help senior citizens get affordable medication, he said that '[w]e're not here to turn a profit for the pharmaceutical companies.'²⁴⁵ His inaugural address had included the phrase 'working families' which was prominently used in national Democratic Presidential nominee Al Gore's populist acceptance speech at the national party convention in August 2000. Indeed, Musgrove, in the spring of 2000, endorsed Gore for the presidency reversing a trend of national party presidential

nominees being shunned by Mississippi Democrats fearful of being tainted, by association, with national candidates unpopular in the South (see Chapter Three).

Like Musgrove, Shows stressed his religious commitment and belief thus helping to inoculate themselves against potential charges that they were outside the Mississippi mainstream. For example, Shows published a message to his constituents in July 2000 entitled 'Protecting our Values and Freedoms' in which he reported that he had introduced a bill in the U.S. House to encourage 'In God We Trust' to be posted prominently on federal government buildings. He said this phrase, and the Ten Commandments, were displayed in his office.²⁴⁶ In an earlier weekly column Shows wrote that his values that included '[p]rotecting religious freedom, being pro life and supporting the second amendment [was] not a knee-jerk ideology.'²⁴⁷ Shows' social conservatism had led some to believe that he might be a future convert to the Republican Party. However, saying he would never switch parties he said, 'I'm going to be that way [a Democrat]; I'm going to stay that way; and they're going to bury me that way.'²⁴⁸

This thesis concurs with the view of James Glaser, writing after the Republican Party's victory in winning control of the U.S. Congress in the 1994 Congressional elections, that

*the Democratic Party's fate was not sealed by the civil rights movement and the political changes it engendered. Democrats, in fact, adjusted well to the dramatic changes in the political environment, including racial changes in this environment, and political strategy surrounding race actually helped the Democratic [P]arty keep its tenuous hold on many lower-level positions in the South.*²⁴⁹

Indeed in the years since Glaser wrote the above, the electoral victories of Musgrove and Shows indicate that white Democrats can win in the South. Indeed, as Chapter Seven points out, the Democrats' gains in Mississippi were repeated elsewhere in the South. In Mississippi Musgrove, having established apparently unimpeachable socially conservative credentials, confidently outlined an activist legislative and executive agenda. The above pages have

already referred to the teacher pay proposals. In addition, a summary of his 2001 State of the State address produced by the governor's office listed twenty-eight separate items, under six headings beginning with education, that Musgrove pledged to introduce in the coming four-month legislative term.²⁵⁰ The 'people's priorities,' according to Musgrove, were 'educating our children in strong public schools, targeting new and better jobs for our working men and women' to be achieved by government investment.²⁵¹ These proposals, and the rhetoric employed in introducing them, differentiated the Mississippi Democratic Party from the GOP, offering the electorate a party whose political philosophy is economically populist and socially conservative, where government offers a helping hand, for example in the provision of public education, to allow the individual and families to acquire skills that promote opportunity and choice. The final element of Democratic Party philosophy that this thesis has frequently alluded to is constitutional conservatism. Whilst the party has supported federal programmes such as social security, Medicare and the minimum wage, Musgrove cited the states' rights position in opposing a central element in the education proposals of newly inaugurated Republican President George W. Bush. Bush wanted every child in grades three to eight tested every year in reading and mathematics. 'If the testing is on a different content you have to restructure your curriculum. Then you have Washington driving content,' he said in January 2001. 'Decision-making and testing should be at the state and local level.'²⁵²

Despite considerable GOP gains in the post civil rights era the Democrats, as this chapter has described, are still in a strong position in state and local electoral races in Mississippi. It can be argued that statewide the Republicans have had to appropriate Democratic issues as their own in order to appeal to a wider constituency. For example, the Republicans control both U.S. Senate seats. Their incumbents, Trent Lott and Thad Cochran have both sought re-election by advertising the dollar amounts of federal money they have funnelled back to Mississippi, and have supported federal programmes locally, even where these have been criticised by the national party has been critical of. Nadine Cohodas cites Strom Thurmond's advice to Cochran in 1979 after the latter's election as U.S. Senator : '[y]our black friends will be with you if you be sure to help them with their projects.'²⁵³

Shaffer has argued that Cochran has 'cultivated a moderate image by backing such Mississippi friendly programmes as food stamps, rural housing and aid to black colleges.'²⁵⁴

In conclusion, the position of whites in the Mississippi Democratic Party is far healthier than acknowledged by U.S. Representative Taylor's gloomy outlook above. Taylor himself has remained with the Democrats since his 1989 election, despite voting with more often than not with the House Republican majority.²⁵⁵ The final chapter analyses the political prospects for white Alabama and Mississippi Democrats, and, by extension, for the Democratic Parties of the South in future electoral contests at both statewide and national levels. The success of both parties in, at least, not losing any further ground to the Republican Party since the mid 1990s suggests that the Democratic fortunes, in each state, will not fall further. The concluding chapter speculates on whether the future holds out hope for Democratic gains in Alabama and Mississippi, and whether the evidence of late 1990s electoral victories of white Southern Democrats may offer lessons that the national party can heed as it seeks to regain the presidency in 2004.

Chapter Six footnotes

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4 Bass and DeVries, pp 190-191.

5 See Kirwan pp 1-17 for an account of the overthrow of Republican rule. See also Bass and DeVries pp 191-192.

6 Willie D. Halsell, 'The Bourbon Period in Mississippi Politics 1875-1890,' *Journal of Southern History* Volume 11 1945, p 519. See also ibid, 'Democratic Dissension in Mississippi 1878-1882,' *Journal of Mississippi History* Volume 2 1940, pp 123-135. For deeper treatments of post Reconstruction politics in Mississippi see Stephen Cresswell, *Multi-Party Politics in Mississippi 1877-1902* (Jackson, Ms.: University of Mississippi 1995) and James G. Revels, 'Redeemers, Rednecks and Racial Integrity,' in Richard Aubrey McLemore (ed), *A History of Mississippi Volume 1* (Jackson, Ms.: University of Mississippi Press 1973), pp 590-621.

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15 See Mississippi Historical Society Online at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, <http://www.mshistory.k12.ms.us.feature/features/10/1890/stateconstitution.html> for the text of the 1890 Mississippi Constitution. See also James P. Coleman, 'The Mississippi Constitution of 1890 and the Final Decade of the Nineteenth Century,' in McLemore (ed), *History of Mississippi Volume II* (Jackson, Ms.: University of Mississippi Press 1973), pp 5-10, Jerry Mitchell, 'Constitution Debated After Election,' *Jackson Clarion-Ledger* November 4 1999, <http://www.clarionledger.com/news/99/11/04/04/process.html> and Frank E. Smith, *Congressman From Mississippi* (New York : Capricorn 1967), p 110.

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62 See Osborn, p 70 for a complete list of reforms proposed by Vardaman in his final message to the Mississippi Legislature on January 8 1908.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

The Problem and its Setting

The research set out to analyse the inadequacies and contradictions in the explanations of the 'conservatism' of white Southern Democratic Party political philosophy and belief and to refute the common assumption that all white Southern politicians hold to 'conservative' ideologies and values. To address this problem the research drew upon an extensive body of literature for the purpose of setting a conceptual framework within which to discuss Democratic Party ideology in the South. In addition to an in-depth research of the literature, two case studies were undertaken to illustrate the hypothesis of the thesis. The hypothesis that the thesis sought to demonstrate, with the use of these two case studies, was that Southern Democratic politics can more usefully be examined from a populist perspective. This approach was adopted as theoretically illustrative of the ideological positions being advanced by white Southern Democrats and, empirically, of the electoral politics being researched. The two case studies of Alabama and Mississippi were chosen as illustrative examples because their similar political, social and cultural histories offered opportunities of comparison and contrast, and because they have been considered archetypically conservative and even reactionary.

The key finding of the research was that populism is as important as conservatism in understanding and explaining white Southern Democratic Party ideology and politics. These findings lead to a further important conclusion : that the Democratic Party in the South must combine populism and conservatism in order to win elections, and maintain office, at local, state and federal levels. These conclusions in turn suggest that future research should examine in detail the ideology of other Southern state Democratic Parties to examine whether a similar electoral strategy can achieve success beyond Alabama and Mississippi. Indeed the findings of this research suggest that a marriage of populist and conservative positions that can bring

political success in the South may also usefully be applied by the national Democratic Party to presidential elections in the South and beyond.

The Analysis : Chapters One to Six

Chapter One introduced the main themes of the thesis. It explained that the thesis is a work of analytical and empirical research into Southern Democratic Party ideology and politics with a particular emphasis on the political philosophies of whites in the party. The latter aspect was examined for it is to Southern whites that the blanket term 'conservative' is often applied. The thesis aimed to demonstrate two interrelated findings. First, the label conservative, when applied to Southern political mores has lacked clear definition and, therefore, has not proved conducive to a fuller understanding of the nature of Southern politics. Second, the thesis contended that the tendency to describe Southern political culture as conservative, without clear and detailed examples as to the meanings of the term, has obscured the importance of populism as a competing, and often complementary, ideology to conservatism in the South.

The introductory chapter outlined the methodology on which the thesis was based. This included a literature review that traced some of the important scholarship on Southern politics in the second half of the twentieth century. This review indicated key changes in Southern political history. The works of several seminal works were highlighted for this purpose. First, the publication in 1949 of V.O. Key Jr's *Southern Politics in State and Nation* described a 'Solid South' united in support for the Democratic Party. Here the only political competition was in the Democratic Party primary where the victorious candidate was virtually assured of winning in the general election given the weakness of the Republican Party. Second, in contrast Dewey Grantham's *The Life and Death of the Solid South*, published in 1988, outlined the changes in Southern voting behaviour wrought since the national Democrats' passage of civil rights legislation in the 1960s. Key amongst these developments were changes in the voting habits of the region's white voters who switched allegiance to the Republican Party in presidential elections. Third, Alexander Lamis's *Southern Politics in the 1990s* examined Republican gains at state and local levels in the South during the 1990s in addition to continued GOP presidential victories across the South. The contributors to Lamis'

work suggest, in stark comparison to Key's conclusions fifty years earlier, that Southern politics has become two-party competitive at the state and local levels with the Republican Party dominant in presidential elections.

These works provided a historical and conceptual framework to examine the effects of these developments in respect of the case studies of Alabama and Mississippi. The political histories of the two states were examined in some detail in order to establish whether Democratic politics in them was indeed 'conservative.' In order to evaluate the contemporary attitudes of white Democrats in each state material was compiled via extensive research into internet sources that included examination of online newspapers, political manifestos, candidate and office-holders' web sites and archival documents including, for example, voting returns and party platforms. In addition use was made of qualitative material in the form of electronic mail correspondence with informed observers and state politicians.

The conclusions presented were that Southern Democratic politics has a strong populist background and that the populist strain of anti-elitist politics in the service of a party of 'the people' still persists in contemporary Alabamian and Mississippian politics. Thus, the thesis' hypothesis, that a combination of populist and conservative ideological positions can present Democratic Parties in the South with an opportunity to win elections at local, state and federal levels was supported. Chapter One thus provided a conceptual framework for the research and served as an introduction for the chapters that followed.

Chapter Two, entitled 'Populist and Conservative Thought in the Southern Democratic Party,' provided detailed definitions of the thesis' use of the terms populism and conservatism within the Southern political context. The chapter analysed several theoretical perspectives on populism and conservatism in the abstract before beginning an examination (developed in greater detail in Chapters Three and Four) of their practical application in Democratic Party history, starting with the use of anti-elitist rhetoric by Presidents Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson in the first half of the nineteenth century. The chapter's hypothesis suggested that the Southern Democratic Party could profitably blend populist and conservative positions in counterpoint to the *laissez-faire* conservatism of the Republican

Party. It argued that the Democrats have adopted a programme of anti-elitist, populist rhetoric that serves federal and state government sponsored economic reform. This economic stance goes together with constitutionally conservative stances in respect of states' rights, and awareness of the political importance in the South of advocating conservative positions on social issues such as abortion, the rights of gun ownership and the depth of religious faith. The thesis argued that populist support of government programmes was designed not to promote government *per se* but to use it to give 'the people' a helping hand so that they may become economically free of government dependence. It is in this latter sense that the rhetoric and aims of Democratic Party populism supports ultimately conservative ends.

The chapter introduced a number of examples of the practical applications of this model of populist politics with reference to the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian rhetoric of the first half of the nineteenth century. Jeffersonian-Jacksonian rhetoric provided the post-bellum Southern Democratic Party with an anti-elitist, egalitarian creed that simultaneously extolled the virtues of the 'common people' while denouncing the selfishness of elites, such as those in banking, that preyed upon the people. The hypothesis suggested this proto-populism, built upon by late nineteenth century populists, became a counterweight to the business and urban economic conservatives - the Big Mules and Bourbon Democrats - that dominated the Democratic Parties of Alabama and Mississippi until the 'revolt of the rednecks' that, by the early twentieth century, brought into prominence populist 'men of the people' such as Mississippians James Vardaman and Theodore Bilbo. Similarly, later twentieth century politicians such as Alabamians Jim Folsom and George Wallace campaigned in the plain-speaking anti-elitist, pro-working man Jacksonian style and took their appeals directly to 'the folks.' Chapter Two suggested that the Democratic Party dominated elections in the South until the civil rights era by synthesising conservative positions, such as states' rights, with populism on the basis of the definitions of each outlined in the text of the chapter.

Chapter Three was entitled 'Presidential and Congressional Elections in Alabama and Mississippi 1876-2000.' The chapter contextualised its broad themes by examining presidential and congressional election returns in both Alabama and Mississippi during the

period of the Democratic Party's greatest dominance of electoral politics before the civil rights revolution of the 1960s. The chapter outlined the following proposition. It demonstrated that white Southern Democratic ideology from the post Civil War era to the early years after the Second World War was predicated on belief in the primacy of the defence of states' rights. This included strict support of segregation to the extent of the rejection in the South generally, and specifically in Alabama and Mississippi of national Democratic Party candidates, notably in the 1948 and 1964 presidential elections. The chapter explained that it was Southerners' identification of the national Democratic Party with support of civil rights reform in these two elections that began the process of the demise of the 'Solid South' and of Southern whites' political re-alignment towards the national Republican Party.

The electoral data supplied in the chapter indicated that by the 1980s the Republican Party had begun to make significant gains in Congressional elections as well as continuing to consolidate its dominance in presidential elections that had first become apparent in the 1960s. The Republican success in identifying with Southern positions on states' rights and in support for conservative stances on social issues appeared to support the commonly held belief of the inherent conservatism of Southern politics. As a result, a case could be made with some conviction that by the mid-1990s, as a considerable number of white Southern Democrats defected to the GOP, the Democrats were in danger of becoming the minority party in the South in state and local elections as well as presidential ones.

Chapter Four, entitled 'Bourbons and Rednecks : Populism and White Southern Democratic Thought 1865-1980,' argued, however, that conventional analyses had not acknowledged the ideological complexities of Democratic Party history in the South. To rectify these omissions the chapter showed that Southern political heritage in addition to the conservatism defined in Chapter Two includes support for populism and liberalism. Here federal and state government is viewed positively in finding solutions to social and economic problems in, for example, offering antidotes to the economic iniquities of the free market

system such as state sponsored public education provision and construction and improvement of public highways.

The chapter illustrated these aspects of white Democratic Party political philosophy by referring to the rise of economic populism in the late nineteenth century and the liberalism of the New Deal in the 1930s. The analysis demonstrated the popularity in the South of Democratic President Franklin Roosevelt's federal government programmes designed to alleviate the depth of poverty during the Great Depression. The chapter concluded with a section that recognised, first, the continuing salience of social issue conservatism in the South in the decades following the civil rights revolution of the 1960s and, second, its exploitation by the Republican Party in subsequent presidential elections. However, the hypothesis suggested that this aspect of conservatism, most visible in the 1968 presidential campaign of George Wallace, was fundamentally centred on an anti-federal government rhetoric that was firmly based in the anti-elitist and anti-bureaucratic Southern populist tradition outlined in Chapter Two.

Chapters Five and Six applied the theoretical framework and empirical evidence of the preceding chapters to the case studies of the contemporary Alabama and Mississippi Democratic Parties, respectively. Chapter Five, called 'Populism in the Contemporary Alabama Democratic Party', traced the development of populist sentiment in the Alabama Democratic Party from the late nineteenth century. Specifically, it showed that key figures elected to national, state and local office have conformed to the model that combines government supported economic populism, conservative positions on social issues and defence of state prerogatives, with anti-elitist rhetoric. This was specifically illustrated in the political impact on the Democratic Party of populist politicians such as Folsom and Wallace. The chapter contended that these populist traditions persist in the state's political culture to the present day. This was illustrated through, first, an analysis of the 1996 political platform of the Alabama Democratic Party, which served as a primary source with which to analyse party belief at the turn of the twentieth century. To demonstrate the persistence of populism amongst Alabama Democrats the thesis' populist model was applied to three issue areas,

namely, education, religion and economics where conservatism and populism merge. The research found that anti-elitist populism, for example in support for publicly funded education provision, continues to be integral to the political values and rhetoric used by the Democratic Party and that, in consequence, conventional categorisations of white Southern Democrats as simply 'conservative' are, indeed, inadequate.

A second case study - concerning white Mississippi Democrats - was used to indicate that the research findings applicable to the Alabama Democratic Party are not unique to that state. Chapter Six, entitled 'Populism and the Contemporary Mississippi Democratic Party,' followed a similar format to that which preceded it. The chapter outlined the evolution of populist rhetoric in the state Democratic Party from the turn of the nineteenth century to the present day. Particular significance was attached to the political careers of Vardaman and Bilbo who served as spokesman for rural Mississippians in the first half of the twentieth century. Both Vardaman and Bilbo supported an expanded role for state and federal government in serving the needs of an economically marginalised and hitherto politically impotent population.

The chapter gave evidence from the post civil rights era to support the proposition that populist politics and rhetoric has persisted in the contemporary Mississippi Democratic Party. The case study cited the Democrats' success in regaining control of the state governorship in 1999 after eight years of Republican control. The Democratic campaign was notable for its combination of populist anti-elite rhetoric and deference to conservative social issues. Finally, qualitative and quantitative evidence for the validity of the thesis' populist theoretical model was given with detailed reference to the prioritising of state funded public education during the new Democratic governor's first year in office, most specifically in redemption of the pledge to increase the salaries of public school teachers. The second of the two case studies re-emphasised the salience of using populist perspectives in the study of Southern Democratic political thought.

The Main Findings and Future Research

The problem that the thesis examined was that white Southern Democratic Party politics has been conventionally assumed to be 'conservative.'¹ The thesis claimed that such an appellation fails to define the meaning of the term with sufficient depth. Furthermore, the hypothesis argued that a more fruitful analysis of white Southern Democrats might, instead, be found in an examination of the impact of populism in Southern politics. The findings of the research found that, indeed, populist positions have had, and continue to have, a considerable role to play in Southern political developments in the Democratic Party. Of particular importance was the thesis' intent that populism be carefully defined within the context of Southern political history in order to establish a theoretical framework of value when these concepts were applied to the case studies of Alabama and Mississippi.

The thesis defined Southern populism as believing that federal and state government has a beneficial role to play in regulating the effects of the free market to ensure that those marginalised by its effects are able to benefit from government provision of economic and social goods such as education and health insurance in old age. In this manner Democratic Party rhetoric supports an expanded role for government to allow people opportunities to materially improve their lives. This model of populism is also conservative in two principal ways. First, it does not seek to overturn or alter the U.S. or state constitutions. Each are believed to protect individual rights from the unwanted encroachments of government. Second, it fundamentally supports conservative individualism whereby individuals and working families, although eager and able to benefit from government assistance, become free only when economically independent of government. It is the marriage of reformist populist rhetoric in pursuit of conservative goals that the thesis argues the Southern Democratic Party must adopt should it hope to prosper in future elections at the federal, state and local levels.

The returns of the 2000 presidential election show that the weaknesses of the national party's candidates, first evident in the mid 1960s, have not abated. According to CNN's exit polls in Alabama Democratic Vice President Al Gore won only 42% of the popular vote,

gaining only 25% of the white vote, and just 22% of white males. In Mississippi Gore took only 40% of the popular, 17% of the white vote and only 13% of white males.² These figures indicate that the national party, which spent little time campaigning in Alabama and Mississippi, is still viewed with suspicion by white voters. Indeed, 14% of Alabama Democrats and 11% of Mississippi Democrats reported that they had voted for Republican presidential nominee George Bush³ Clearly Gore, in common with national Democratic candidates since the demise of the Democratic Solid South in the 1960s, had not built the redneck-blackneck coalition that had been successfully constructed by a succession of Alabama and Mississippi Democrats running for statewide office in the post civil rights era.

Thus the findings of the thesis suggest that future research in Southern Democratic politics could profitably focus on the following three areas : first, in monitoring the progress of white Alabama and Mississippi Democrats in forthcoming federal, state and local elections; second, to examine whether the findings of the case study research in Alabama and Mississippi are replicated in other states in the South; and, third, whether the hypothesis of the populist model outlined throughout the thesis can be applied to advantage to the national Democratic Party.

There are several issues facing the Alabama and Mississippi Democratic Parties that will have a bearing on their future electoral prospects and which merit examination and more detailed research. Amongst these are the effects of Republican Party incumbency and party growth and demographic trends. Both of these factors present a challenge to Alabama and Mississippi Democrats.

First, the Alabama Democratic Party failed in the 2000 U.S. Congressional elections to elect Marsha Folsom, the daughter-in-law of Governor Jim Folsom, to the Fourth Congressional District seat held by Republican Robert Aderholt. Folsom's candidacy stressed a number of themes, such as education, opportunity, responsibility, federal and state aid for working families in, for example, health care and support for student-led school prayer that conformed to the populist model that this thesis has outlined.⁴ However, Aderholt, first elected in 1996, winning with 61% of the vote, benefited from his incumbency and

membership of the House Republican majority. He could claim, therefore, to be in a better position to materially aid his constituents than would Folsom as a member of the House's Democratic minority. Joe Turnham, a pro-gun rights, anti-abortion, businessman and evangelical Christian, resigned as Alabama Democratic Party chairman to run against U.S. House Republican Bob Riley in 1998 in the eastern Alabama Third District. Despite these credentials, Turnham was defeated by 58% to 42%. Turnham noted that he had been outspent by a candidate able to use the advantages of incumbency to gain a significant fundraising edge. 'For every sign I can put out by the side of the road,' Turnham noted, 'my opponent can put five signs.'⁵

The potentially attractive candidacy of white Democrat Joe Grist in First Mississippi's U.S. House District falls into the same category as Folsom. Republican Roger Wicker, elected in 1994, won 70% of the vote and gained political and fund raising advantage as a consequence of his membership on the influential U.S. House Appropriations Committee.⁶ The gradual successes that the Republican Party has had in state and local elections since the mid 1960s has given the GOP the advantages of incumbency to the detriment of Democratic candidates seeking to regain Republican held seats.⁷ Additionally, Alabama Young Democratic Party chairman Scotty Colson, in correspondence with the author, believed that the weakness of the national party's 2000 presidential ticket severely affected Folsom's chances of winning the U.S. House seat. This analysis suggested that should national voting trends in the South be paralleled in future state and local elections then the state Democratic Party would be in danger of minority status in Alabamaian politics.⁸

A further trend of significance for Democrats in Alabama and Mississippi is the apparent growth in Republican Party identification in each state as measured by turnout levels in the gubernatorial primaries in Alabama in 1998 and Mississippi in 1999. For example, in the 1994 gubernatorial primaries the Democratic turnout at 703,000 was nearly 500,000 ahead of that in the Republican primary. Four years later the GOP turnout in the corresponding election at 358,000 was marginally ahead of the turnout in the Democratic primary.⁹ Although the Republican primary between Governor Fob James and challenger Winston Blount¹⁰ was

highly competitive in contrast to the Democratic primary where Don Siegelman was the clear favourite, University of Alabama political scientist William Stewart suggested that the results show a growth in Republican Party identification. They were 'another piece of evidence of the party shift in Alabama and it's something that needs to be taken note of.'¹¹ By contrast, in 1972, the Republican Party turnout of only 53,000 had led Alabama Democratic Party chairman Robert Vance to declare that the GOP was really just a country-club party' with no widespread electoral appeal.¹² In Mississippi, in advance of the 1999 gubernatorial primaries Marty Wiseman said '[t]he turnout issue has become very, very important.'¹³ The 1999 Mississippi Democratic gubernatorial primary turnout of over 520,000 was well over three times as large as that in the corresponding Republican primary.¹⁴ Levels of turnout in primary elections are a key indicator of party strength. Therefore this is an area worthy of future research and analysis in determining political change in Southern politics.

Linked to the issue of turnout are the effects of demographic changes. One of the greatest challenges facing Alabama and Mississippi Democrats in the near future is the reapportionment of their legislatures to reflect the shifts in population that will be revealed upon publication of the 2000 census. *Birmingham Post-Herald* writer Ted Bryant speculates that 'as the population shifts from the rural counties, where the Democrats have the advantage, it moves to the suburban counties [such as Shelby and Blount counties near Birmingham] where Republicanism is strongest.'¹⁵ These trends have led Alabama political historian Samuel Webb to suggest the Alabama legislature will become more economically conservative as it becomes more Republican.¹⁶ Similar trends are observable in Mississippi where rural areas have lost population. For example, in the period 1992 to 1997 the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported that full-time farms in Mississippi declined by 12% statewide.¹⁷ Dale Krane and Stephen D. Shaffer contend that in Mississippi voters under thirty and migrants from other states are more likely to be Republicans.¹⁸

The Democratic Party in both Alabama and Mississippi has, however, continued to show electoral strength. As Alexander Lamis has noted the 'standard manner that ha[s] been used by scores of statewide Southern Democratic victors . . . [has been the] forming [of] a

potent, ideologically diverse black-white coalition.¹⁹ Krane and Shaffer in their study of Mississippi politics suggest that [t]he increased number of legislators sympathetic to progressive ideas – blacks, progressive whites, and white legislators from districts with a large number of blacks – has led to the adoption of more progressive public policies.²⁰ The enduring success of the ‘redneck-blackneck’ coalition has been demonstrated in the case study chapters. The ability to maintain this coalition is evidently important to the Democratic Parties of the South. Chapter Five suggested that Alabama Governor Don Siegelman’s failure to carry the 1999 education lottery to passage can, in part, be explained by the failure to address the concerns of black voters towards the issue. Similarly, Turnham’s 1998 campaign for election to the U.S. House in eastern Alabama was hampered by an inability to motivate sufficient numbers of the district’s 75,000 registered black voters to the polls.²¹ At the very least, however, recent evidence of increased black voter participation in the South will keep the Democratic Party competitive in Southern politics and places additional importance on the maintenance of the redneck-blackneck coalition.²² George Tindall’s description of the Populist Party’s hope that ‘producer rhetoric’ would provide ‘for a political unity that rose above race’ is, in this context, still relevant to the Southern Democratic Party.²³

In addition to keeping this coalition Democrats must stay attuned to Southern religious sentiment. As Colson argued in personal correspondence with the author, ‘Democratic candidates . . . must play up religious values and in campaign ads should at some point be seen near a church building with a well scrubbed smiling family.’²⁴ White Democrats stressing their commitment to Southern religious mores, as Colson advocates, have inoculated themselves from Republican charges of cultural liberalism. For example, both Siegelman (who is Jewish), in Alabama and Ronnie Musgrove, in Mississippi, touted their religious beliefs in their respective gubernatorial campaigns. In 1997 Siegelman, when lieutenant-governor, proposed a constitutional amendment requiring public school teachers to read a prayer each day and to hold discussions on the nation’s Judeo-Christian tradition.²⁵ In the 1999 gubernatorial election Republican Governor Fob James attempted to focus on religious and cultural issues, such as his support for Alabama federal judge Roy Moore who hung a

copy of the Ten Commandments in his chambers in apparent defiance of the first amendment's establishment of religion clause. Even so Siegelman, however, won one-third of the votes of self-described Christian conservatives in the gubernatorial election.²⁶ The victories of Siegelman and Musgrove, in Colson's view showed that 'white [Southern] Democrats can win' and that 'God is not synonymous with the GOP.'²⁷

Particular opportunities for the Democratic Party in the South lie in those states such as Alabama and Mississippi (and Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina) that have elected (or re-elected) white Democratic governors (and in Georgia and North Carolina) in recent years. (Democrats have made gains in Georgia and North Carolina by electing white Democrats in previously Republican held U.S. Senate seats.) As this thesis has emphasised, it is in running reformist administrations that keep the populist model in mind, which will enable white Democrats to show that government can work. Such achievements were ably demonstrated, for example, by the increase in public teachers salaries in Mississippi and investments in public school construction in Alabama.²⁸ For example, Mississippi Governor Musgrove stressed the state government's responsibility for public education in his January 2001 State of the State address. 'Mississippi's Adequate Education Program,' Musgrove said, 'ensures schools can open and operate in quality facilities with quality resources for learning. Don't gut these programs and leave counties holding the bag.'²⁹ In Alabama, Governor Siegelman remained popular despite his defeat in the 1999 education lottery. A statewide opinion poll conducted by John Anzalone and William Canary in September 2000 recorded an approval rating of 74% for Siegelman.³⁰

The possibilities for the development of more expansive reformist policies in Alabamian and Mississippian Democratic Party politics have been increased by the current healthier finances of each state's budget. In consequence, gubernatorial and legislative spending priorities will offer fruitful avenues for research in short-term Southern Democratic politics. In 2000 the Mississippi state treasury reported that the Health Care Trust Fund was \$750 million in the black whilst tax revenues reported at the beginning of the 2000 fiscal year were \$2 million in advance of expectations, largely due to increased corporate tax

collections.³¹ The development of the Mississippi Delta and Gulf coast as centres for casino gambling offer additional sources of tax revenue, particularly since proposals for major tax revisions require a 60% approval in the state legislature.³² Indeed in 1998 taxation from Mississippi casinos funded about ten per cent of the state's budget.³³ Meanwhile, Alabama, which has the lowest per capita tax burden in the United States,³⁴ finished the 2000 fiscal year with a \$60 million state budget surplus.³⁵ However, forecasts of fiscal revenue project that while the state's general fund is just above revenue expectations, the education trust fund is 6.2% below forecasts.³⁶ The future of party politics in these two states, and throughout the South therefore, remains a potent area of research for the themes put forward in this thesis.

Political scientist Ferrel Guillory commenting on Southern politics has suggested that 'Democrats [like Siegelman and Musgrove] . . . have learned to focus on issues that resonate with Southern voters without touching ideological nerve ends, stressing fiscal restraint while championing such issues as education, health care and security problems for the elderly.'³⁷ Ex Georgia Governor Zell Miller, elected as the state's junior U.S. Senator in 2000, suggests that the electoral successes Southern Democrats have had in focusing on economic issues may have application for future national Democratic presidential candidates in the region. 'When the average American family stays up late at night [Miller said] . . . They are worrying about how to balance the checkbook or where they will find the money to pay for junior's college tuition.'³⁸ This thesis concludes by concurring with Miller's analysis and with that of Dale Maharidge. Referring to what Ruy Teixeira and Joel Rogers have termed 'America's Forgotten Majority,' the 55% of the electorate that they define as the white working class, Maharidge reminds us that

*the few among the descendants [of the 1930s sharecroppers and tenant farmers] who have such managerial or white-collar positions are outnumbered by those who have jobs that still require back power, long hours behind the steering wheels of trucks, on the decks of ships, on factory assembly lines, in textile mills.*³⁹

It is for these reasons that the populism emphasised in this thesis holds relevance for the national Democratic Party as well as for Southern Democrats. As Jefferson Morley, writing in *The Nation*, has commented Democrats 'must turn to national leaders who can perform comfortably in the culture of poor and middle-income Southern whites.'⁴⁰ A populist critique, with due regard for social conservatism, thus has validity whether the economy is in an era of prosperity or decline. Rather than being used to affirm the need for relief as in the Great Depression of the 1930s, it is now needed as a medium to articulate the concerns and alleviate the difficulties of those in the 'forgotten majority'⁴¹ having difficulties in paying bills for education, health and care for the elderly. In this way Southern Democratic Party populism can serve the conservative instincts of family values by offering the economic helping hand of government in areas where the market has not provided. Furthermore, it offers a model that, if recognising the salience to Southern whites of core social concerns such as rights of gun ownership and religious morality and backed with tangible examples of electoral successes, can usefully be applied in the South by the national Democratic Party.

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