

TRIUMPH OF THE NEW SOUTH:
INDEPENDENT MOVEMENTS IN POST-RECONSTRUCTION POLITICS
Volume I

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ABSTRACT

"Triumph of the New South: Independent Movements in Post-Reconstruction Politics" examines Southern independent political movements during the post-Reconstruction period. It compares the Readjuster Movement in Virginia with its less successful counterparts in the rest of the region. The dissertation is divided into two sections. The first section follows the course of the Readjuster Movement in Virginia with emphasis on the Eastern Shore counties of Accomac and Northampton. It shows how a controversy within the dominant Conservative (Democratic) Party over the state debt created the Readjuster insurgency and explains how that insurgency evolved under the leadership of United States Senator William Mahone first into a coalition with black Republicans and then into a political institution. The second section describes Republican President Chester A. Arthur's Southern policy, explores the origins of Southern independentism, and, focusing on the congressional elections of 1882 when Arthur threw his support behind several of the insurgencies, analyzes the movements in each of those states. The conclusion compares the Readjusters with

the independents and with the Populists of the 1890s.

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"So he left then. It was in the middle of the morning, and hot, but he started back to Jefferson at once, riding across the broad, heat-miraged land, between the cotton and the corn of God's long-fecund, remorseless acres, which would outlast any corruption and injustice. He was glad of the heat, he said; glad to be sweating, sweating out of himself the smell and the taste of where he had been" (William Faulkner, Knight's Gambit [New York: Random House, 1949], pp. 59-60).

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INTRODUCTION

Although federal Reconstruction of the South ended in 1877, Southern politics remained turbulent. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, independent movements challenged Democratic rule in almost every state of the old Confederacy. In Virginia a dispute over the repayment of the state debt split the dominant Conservative (Democratic) Party into Funder and Readjuster factions. In 1881, a coalition of Readjusters and Republicans, led by United States Senator William Mahone, won a stunning victory over the Funders, capturing the governorship and majorities in both houses of the legislature. Republican President Chester A. Arthur had greatly aided the Readjusters by conferring on Mahone the exclusive control over the federal patronage in Virginia. Sensing an opportunity to rend further the heretofore solidly Democratic South, Arthur in 1882 offered similar assistance to insurgent coalitions in most of the other Southern states. Arthur's experiment proved disappointing. Only in Virginia did the coalition perform to expectation. Elsewhere, the insurgents managed but few victories.

Having survived the independents, Southern Democrats would continue secure in their power until the Populist revolt of the 1890s.

The Readjusters succeeded where other insurgents failed because the state debt provided them a unifying issue, because in Mahone they had a superb leader, and because the Arthur administration gave them its wholehearted support. They also succeeded because among their ranks were numerous merchants, professional men, and commercial farmers who appreciated the value of cooperation and organization and who were amenable to party discipline. The Southern insurgents, on the other hand, too often lacked an overriding issue, suffered from incompetent leadership, and endured the whimsies of the national administration. The insurgents usually (but not always) were politically inexperienced hill-country yeomen. Fiercely independent, they rebelled against party restraints and often balked at uniting with black Republicans. Unlike the wealthier and more sophisticated Readjusters, they were no match for their well-heeled, well-drilled, and astute Democratic adversaries.

The parameters of the historical debate over post-Civil War Southern politics were set by William A. Dunning in the early years of this century. Dunning and

his disciples, whose views prevailed into the 1950s, described Reconstruction as an orgy of corruption and misrule perpetrated by carpetbaggers and scalawags who in the interest of self and the Republican Party unscrupulously manipulated an ignorant black electorate. The Dunningites depicted the Redeemers, the white Democrats who overthrew the Republicans, as patriots who reestablished honest and efficient government in the South. In recent years, especially since the civil rights revolution of the 1960s, new generations of scholars have stood the Dunningite interpretation on its head. These revisionists maintain that the blacks, aided by the carpetbaggers and scalawags, made Reconstruction a noble experiment in political and economic democracy. They insist that the Redeemers imposed on the South racist, parsimonious, and brutal regimes which benefited only the economic elite.¹

If Reconstruction with its inherent and compelling dichotomies--white versus black, Democrat versus Republican, conservative versus liberal, oppressor versus victim--tends to make the historian a partisan, the post-Reconstruction period tends to make him a

¹See E. Merton Coulter, The South During Reconstruction, 1865-1877 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1947), the culmination of the Dunning School; and Eric Foner, Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877 (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), the revisionist interpretation masterfully stated.

cynic. By 1880, revolutionary and counter-revolutionary fervor had dissipated. Most politicians, irrespective of race and party, now interested themselves in survival and personal aggrandizement. The reform impulse, though still alive, had coursed off into any number of channels. Coalitions, curious amalgams of idealism and opportunism, formed and dissolved as Southerners searched for the boundaries of the politically possible.

Although overshadowed by the high dramas of Reconstruction and Populism, the intervening years have not altogether escaped the attention of historians. A number of scholars have undertaken studies of independent movements in the individual states; Stephen Hahn and Michael R. Hyman have examined the politicization of the hill country farmers; J. Morgan Kousser has detailed the process of disfranchisement; Vincent P. De Santis and Stanley P. Hirshson have studied the movements from the viewpoints of Washington and the national Republican Party; and C. Vann Woodward and Carl N. Degler have provided brief overviews. In "Triumph of the New South," I undertake the first comprehensive description and analysis of the Southern independent movements. While I pay close attention to the various farmer insurgencies, I show that those movements which included other interest groups provided

the strongest challenge to Democratic rule and enjoyed the greatest success.²

I have divided "Triumph of the New South" into two parts. In the first part, I tell the story of the Readjuster Movement from the infamous Funding Act of 1871 through the pivotal election of 1885. In order better to illuminate Readjuster organizational techniques, party composition, grievances, and reforms, I examine the movement not only on the state level but also in a particular locality--the Eastern Shore counties of Accomac and Northampton.³ This close examination of the Readjuster Movement on the Eastern Shore forms the basis for my contention that the

²Steven Hahn, The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Michael Russ Hyman, "Response to Redeemer Rule: Hill Country Political Dissent in the Post-Reconstruction South," Ph.D dissertation, City University of New York, 1986; J. Morgan Kousser, The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); Vincent P. De Santis, Republicans Face the Southern Question: The New Departure Years, 1877-1897 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1959); Stanley P. Hirshson, Farewell to the Bloody Shirt: Northern Republicans and the Southern Negro, 1877-1893 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962); C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); Carl N. Degler, The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

³Today, Accomack County is spelled with the vestigial "k," but in the late nineteenth century it was most commonly spelled without the "k."

Readjusters differed from their Funder opponents more for ideological than for social or economic reasons. In the second part of the dissertation, I look at independent movements in the rest of the South. I devote sections to the Arthur administration's Southern policy, to the origins of Southern independentism, and to the elections of 1882 in each of the states. I conclude by comparing the Readjusters with the Southern insurgents and both with the Populists.

My decision to treat each state separately has the advantage of emphasizing the immense complexity of late nineteenth-century Southern politics. It also shows how profoundly those politics were shaped by structure, process, personality, and chance. An uncooperative federal officeholder, an ill-informed patronage decision, an inept candidate, or an untimely death could as easily determine the outcome of an election as those impersonal forces that so bewitch most historians. Finally, the separate analysis of the states illustrates that for Southerners politics was much more than an abstraction. It was a deadly serious business. The opportunity to live decently and to provide for the future hinged on the casting and counting of a few ballots. Politics was often practiced in desperation. Intimidation and violence were all too frequent. Treachery and deceit were commonplace, confusion

axiomatic.

As will become apparent, I recognize heroes and villains (more of the latter than the former). Of the heroes, I find William Mahone the most appealing. Mahone had the sterling virtue of offending the orthodox. As a repudiationist, an advocate of black political rights, and a Republican, he drove Virginia conservatives into a rage. As a sharp businessman, Confederate veteran, and machine politician, he left the Mugwumps, the liberal reformers so aptly characterized by Roscoe Conkling as "the man-milliners, the dilettante and carpet knights of politics," aghast.⁴ Mahone and his Readjuster followers were pragmatists. Appeals to tradition or scruple could not dissuade them from implementing needed reforms. Nor could utopian visions tempt them to try the impossible.

In concluding, I should comment on the Eastern Shore as a case study of the Readjuster Movement. Although geographically isolated by Chesapeake Bay from the rest of Virginia, the Eastern Shore was racially, socially, and economically no more or less typical of the commonwealth than the Northern Neck, the Piedmont, the Shenandoah Valley, the Southwest, or the Southside. My primary reason for selecting the Eastern Shore is

⁴David M. Jordan, Roscoe Conkling of New York: Voice in the Senate (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), pp. 278-279 (quotes Conkling).

simple: I have lived there all my life. I know intimately the peninsula's topography--its roads, its towns, its creeks and inlets. As part of my work, I have helped assemble the sources for its history. I have the material at hand, I know it well, and I want to use it.

Perhaps as much as my academic training, my being an Eastern Shoreman has shaped my view of history. The Eastern Shore's peculiar geographic situation has encouraged some outlandish misconceptions by Western Shoremen of local poverty, ignorance, and provinciality while its small population has encouraged the state government to neglect the peninsula's interests. Not surprisingly, Eastern Shoremen tend to be a prickly, independent-minded, and plain-spoken people, resentful of both authority and innovation. For better or worse, I share these attitudes. They have conditioned me, as an historian, to greet with skepticism received wisdom both old and new. They also have given me an appreciation for the ironic and the absurd--phenomena frequently encountered by the historian of the South.

VIRGINIA

"The only way Mahone will bury the hatchet is in the heads of every one who opposes him" (John S. Wise quoted in Nelson Morehouse Blake, William Mahone of Virginia: Soldier and Political Insurgent [Richmond: Garrett & Massie, 1935], p. 266).

THE OLD DOMINION IN THE NEW SOUTH

In 1830 the commonwealth of Virginia seemed locked in decline. East of the Blue Ridge Mountains a preoccupation with tobacco had led to exhausted soil, plummeting land values, and massive emigration. West of the mountains an absence of good roads and navigable waterways had hindered commercial agriculture and had contributed to a sense of isolation from the rest of the state. Both east and west had experienced little industrial development and so were heavily dependent on the North for processed and manufactured goods. Meanwhile, the conservative eastern planters who dominated Virginia's political life had failed to exercise constructive leadership. Instead of dealing with problems of intrastate sectionalism and economic stagnation, they had devoted their energies to arcane defenses of slavery, states' rights, and their own privileged position in Virginia government and society.¹

¹Avery Odelle Craven, Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1926), p. 122; John T. Schlotterbeck, "The 'Social Economy' of an Upper South Community: Orange and Greene Counties, Virginia, 1815-1860," in Class, Conflict, and Consensus: Antebellum Southern Community Studies, ed. Orville

In the late 1830s, however, the Old Dominion began to emerge from its doldrums. The rapid expansion of the plantation system in the Lower South greatly increased the demand for Virginia tobacco products. More important, Edmund Ruffin and other agricultural reformers finally succeeded in convincing eastern planters that their lands could be restored through crop diversification and rotation and through the use of improved farm implements and plowing techniques, cover crops, and fertilizers. Virginia farmers thus were better able to meet the demands of national and international markets. They sent ever-increasing quantities of grain to Baltimore and Richmond for processing and shipment to Europe, the West Indies, and South America. Farmers in the Tidewater responded to the growth of Baltimore and other Northern cities and to the development of steam navigation by devoting increased acreage to truck crops. They entered into a rapidly expanding trade in fruits and vegetables with commission merchants in Baltimore and in Philadelphia,

Vernon Burton and Robert C. McMath Jr. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), p. 3; Virginius Dabney, Virginia: The New Dominion (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971), pp. 275, 276; Claude H. Hall, Abel Parker Upshur: Conservative Virginian (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin), pp. 38-39; Daniel P. Jordan, Political Leadership in Jefferson's Virginia (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983), pp. 222-224.

New York, and Boston.²

The late 1830s also saw the emergence of more pragmatic leaders. Outstanding among them was Henry A. Wise of Accomac County on the Eastern Shore of Chesapeake Bay. During the late antebellum period, Wise served as United States congressman, minister to Brazil, and from 1856 to 1860 governor of Virginia. He consistently championed the use of state funds to encourage the construction of canals, turnpikes, and railroads. He believed that an extensive system of internal improvements would promote industry, urban markets, port facilities, and a diversified agriculture. He also predicted that the improvements would bring Virginia unity, prosperity, and freedom from Northern economic domination. Doubtless, Wise's vision of a new Virginia owed much to his Eastern Shore origins. The peninsula's farmers had long ago abandoned tobacco in

²Craven, Soil Exhaustion, pp. 128, 131-143, 145, 147-152, 154-156; Kathleen Bruce, "Virginian Agricultural Decline to 1860: A Fallacy," Agricultural History VI (1932), pp. 3-13; Edna Green Medford, "The Transition from Slavery to Freedom in a Diversified Economy: Virginia's Lower Peninsula, 1860-1900," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1987; David R. Goldfield, Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism: Virginia, 1847-1861 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), p. 196; Thomas J. Wertenbaker, Norfolk: Historic Southern Port (Durham: Duke University Press, 1931), pp. 313-314; Alexander Crosby Brown, Steam Packets on the Chesapeake: A History of the Old Bay Line Since 1840 (Cambridge, Md.: Cornell Maritime Press, 1961), pp. 8-47; A. Hughlett Mason, History of Steam Navigation to the Eastern Shore of Virginia (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1973), p. 1.

favor of grains, livestock, and timber and now were taking advantage of the expanding market for trucks. Their adaptability brought them prosperity and considerable freedom of action. Henry A. Wise wanted no less for the entire state of Virginia.³

During the two decades before the Civil War men of similar vision controlled the Virginia General Assembly, and they invested millions of the state's money in the stock of internal improvement companies. The expenditures helped fuel a period of economic expansion. The railroad companies received the greater portion of the public largess, and they laid section after section of track. In 1840 Virginia rail mileage stood at 341; by 1860 it had reached 1,731, highest in the South and third highest in the Union. A network of railroads encompassed much of eastern Virginia and a few lines penetrated the fringes of the western part of the state. Cities grew and manufacturing boomed. Alexandria, Lynchburg, Petersburg, and Danville rivaled Richmond in the processing and distribution of tobacco, grain,

³Nora Miller Turman, The Eastern Shore of Virginia, 1603-1964 (Onancock, Va.: Eastern Shore News, 1964), pp. 173-174; Craig M. Simpson, A Good Southerner: The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), p. 86. Another Eastern Shoreman, Joseph Segar of Northampton County, championed in the legislature public expenditures for internal improvements (Robert F. Hunter, "The Turnpike Movement in Virginia, 1816-1860," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 69 [1961], p. 287).

textiles, and iron. The growth of urban markets and the proximity of rapid transportation encouraged the diversification of crops and the raising of livestock. "The increase of our population and of the comparative activity of trade in the eastern portion of the State," wrote Governor Wise in 1857, "has changed the large plantation system of culture into a smaller horticultural and arboricultural farming, and the immense fields once scourged by tobacco are brought under a rotation of cereal and garden products, or made green again by manures and grazing."⁴

Unfortunately, the revitalization of the Old

⁴J. D. Imboden, "Virginia," in U.S. Congress, House, Report on the Internal Commerce of the United States, House Document 7, Part II, 49th Congress, 2nd session, 1886, pp. 20-22; Peter C. Stewart, "Railroads and Urban Rivalries in Antebellum Eastern Virginia," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 81 (1973), p. 18; Craven, Soil Exhaustion, pp. 128-133, 156; Allen W. Moger, "Railroad Practices and Policies in Virginia After the Civil War," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 59 (1951), pp. 424, 425; Schlotterbeck, "The 'Social Economy' of an Upper South Community," p. 21; Gavin Wright, Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War (New York: Basic Books, 1986), pp. 21, 22; Goldfield, Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism, pp. 182, 190, 192-196, 198-199; Fred Siegel, "The Paternalist Thesis: Virginia as a Test Case," Civil War History XXV (1979), pp. 250-251; Frederick F. Siegel, The Roots of Southern Distinctiveness: Tobacco and Society in Danville, Virginia, 1780-1865 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), pp. 115-117, 120-135; Dabney, Virginia, p. 280; Crandall A. Shifflett, Patronage and Poverty in the Tobacco South: Louisa County, Virginia, 1860-1900 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), p. 8; Henry A. Wise, "The Wealth, Resources, and Hopes of Virginia," DeBow's Review XXIII (1857), p. 66.

Dominion proved incomplete and costly. Fierce urban rivalries thwarted the full development of the railroad system in eastern Virginia and most of the vast western hinterland remained without rail service. Prosperity and political compromise submerged western resentment but failed to drown it. In the east many Virginia farmers managed to slip tobacco's yoke, but others, particularly those living on the Southside of the James River, continued singularly devoted to the cultivation of the weed. Northern advantages in transportation, skilled labor, and business experience kept Virginia dependent on the Yankee for most manufactured and processed goods. Indeed, the locomotive and the steamboat did less to liberate the commonwealth than to bring her even more closely under the sway of the Northern market. Internal improvements also proved expensive. By the late 1850s, Virginia's bonded debt stood at around \$30,000,000, and in the wake of the panic of 1857 Governor Wise only narrowly saved the state from bankruptcy. Still, on the eve of the Civil War, Virginia continued solvent and her debt seemed manageable. More important, the eastern half of the commonwealth had in place a Northern-style agricultural economy based on crop diversification and an extensive transportation system. The structure of her economy would stand the Old Dominion in good stead, in the trying

years ahead.⁵

The Civil War devastated Virginia. Many of her best young men were killed in combat or succumbed to disease; her capital was depleted; her factories torched; her canals and railroads worn out or destroyed; her farms plundered; her slaves set free; and her western counties torn from the body politic. In the immediate post-war years agricultural production in the remaining counties declined by one-half or more from antebellum levels and taxable assets declined by two-thirds. Meanwhile, the debt, in the absence of payments on principal or interest, spiraled to nearly \$46,000,000 in 1870. Three years later, a national depression brought additional hardship. "The panic of 1873," observed United States Senator John W. Johnston, "had the same effect in Virginia as elsewhere; diminished revenues, prostrated business, [and] destroyed sources of taxation."⁶

⁵Craven, Soil Exhaustion, pp. 133-134; Goldfield, Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism, pp. 201-214, 235-247; Schlotterbeck, "The 'Social Economy' of an Upper South Community," pp. 6, 21; Charles Chilton Pearson, The Readjuster Movement in Virginia (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917), pp. 5-7; Simpson, A Good Southerner, pp. 141-142, 152.

⁶Imboden, "Virginia," pp. 23-24; Charles T. O'Ferrall, Forty Years of Active Service (New York and Washington: Neale Publishing Company, 1904), pp. 193-194; Pearson, The Readjuster Movement in Virginia, pp. 7-8; Richard L. Morton, History of Virginia, Volume III: Virginia Since 1861 (Chicago and New York: American Historical Society, 1924), p. 184; William C. Pendleton,

All was not unremitting gloom, however. Virginia's railroads, although often under-financed and jerry-rigged, resumed operation soon after the close of hostilities. By 1880 most of the destroyed track had been replaced and better than 400 new miles constructed. The rail system, extensive navigable waterways, and the abundance of raw materials and water power facilitated the revival of manufacturing. During the 1870s, Virginia's urban population soared as rural folk sought opportunity in the cities. Laborers took jobs in the factories, and the sons of prominent rural families assumed positions in industrial management, commerce, or the professions. Those gentry who chose not to abandon the countryside nevertheless contributed to urban growth by investing in railroads, factories, utilities, and land development corporations.⁷

Across much of the commonwealth agriculture also

Political History of Appalachian Virginia, 1776-1927 (Dayton, Va.: Shenandoah Press, 1927), pp. 294-295; John W. Johnston, "Repudiation in Virginia," North American Review 134 (1882), p. 152.

⁷Imboden, "Virginia," pp. 22-25; Moger, "Railroad Practices and Policies," p. 448 (n. 111); Allen W. Moger, "Industrial and Urban Progress in Virginia From 1880 to 1900," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 66 (1958), p. 311; Pearson, The Readjuster Movement in Virginia, pp. 91-92; James Tice Moore, Two Paths to the New South: The Virginia Debt Controversy, 1870-1883 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974), pp. 3, 5-6; John Burdick, "From Virtue to Fitness: The Accomodation of a Planter Family to Postbellum Virginia," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 93 (1985), pp. 14-35.

made a rapid resurgence. The Southwest, the Shenandoah Valley, and the upper Piedmont experienced great wartime destruction, but, once the railroads were repaired, those regions supplied Northern and local markets with large quantities of livestock and dairy products, grains, fruits, and vegetables. In the Tidewater the war hardly interrupted the lucrative coastal trade with Baltimore and other Northern cities, and, during the post-war years, the commerce in trucks continued apace with the feverish expansion of the Northern market. Other regions, however, altogether failed to recover. In the lower Piedmont and on the Southside farmers found themselves restricted by soil and climate to the cultivation of tobacco. Unfortunately, the Virginia leaf failed to recapture markets lost during the Civil War, and beginning in the panic year of 1873 prices for the local product went into decline. The Virginia tobacco country steadily came to resemble the Southern cotton belt as more and more tobacco farmers descended into debt, poverty, and sharecropping.⁸

⁸Moore, Two Paths to the New South, pp. 8-10; New York Times, November 13, 1881; Susie M. Ames, "Federal Policy Toward the Eastern Shore of Virginia in 1861," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 69 (1961), pp. 432-459; Wertenbaker, Norfolk, pp. 313-316; James Egbert Mears, "The Virginia Eastern Shore in the War of Secession and in the Reconstruction Period," manuscript in Eastern Shore Public Library, Accomac, Va., pp. 368-370; Barbara Jeanne Fields, Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland During the Nineteenth Century (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 174-175;

A decade after Appomattox, Virginia's economy exhibited a mixture of strengths and weaknesses. It suffered from the lingering effects of war and depression, the hopeless dependence of a large area of the state on a single, increasingly unprofitable crop, and a public debt so large that it repelled outside investment, entailed heavy taxation, and engrossed a large portion of the state budget. Yet, it profited from an excellent transportation system, an expanding industrial sector, a growing urban population, and a diversified agriculture.⁹ Many of the localities within the state were prospering or on the verge of prospering. Accomac and Northampton, the two Eastern Shore counties, were among them.

The Eastern Shore of Virginia is a narrow peninsula bounded on the north by the Maryland counties of

Shifflett, Patronage and Poverty, p. 64; Julius Rubin, "The Limits of Agricultural Progress in the Nineteenth-Century South," Agricultural History 49 (1975), p. 364; Siegel, The Roots of Southern Distinctiveness, pp. 68-74; William DuBose Sheldon, Populism in the Old Dominion: Virginia Farm Politics, 1885-1900 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1935), pp. 4-5, 7-10. "Millions of pounds [of tobacco] go to Danville, Lynchburg, Richmond and Petersburg, Va. In these cities North Carolina tobacco occupies the position of honor" (New York Herald, September 27, 1882).

⁹Dwight B. Billings Jr., Planters and the Making of a 'New South': Class, Politics, and Development in North Carolina, 1865-1900 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), pp. 51-52; "Studies in the South," Atlantic Monthly 49 (1882), p. 67.

Somerset and Worcester, on the east by the Atlantic Ocean, on the west by Chesapeake Bay, and on the south by the convergence of bay and ocean. The predominantly flat land is penetrated on the bayside by a myriad of broad tidal creeks bearing names evocative of the Indian and of the English settler--Old Plantation, King's, Hunting, Occohannock, Nandua, Pungoteague. On the seaside the peninsula is protected by a string of barrier islands separated one from the other by shallow inlets. The Eastern Shore's climate is mild and damp and permits a long growing season. The light sandy loam is naturally fertile and quite amenable to commercial fertilizers and to the pine shatter manure favored by the sweet potato farmers of the post-Civil War era. "The soil," observed a Delaware man in 1884, "is very responsive. It appears to be the most easily cultivated and the most readily improved soil in the world. The laziest man would not starve in Accomac county." Travelers in the 1880s also remarked on the abundant woodlands. Numerous species of hard and soft woods flourished, but the loblolly pine dominated the landscape. The Delaware visitor described the atmosphere as "fragrant everywhere with the pungent odors of the pine." The forest, the flat terrain, the broad creeks and marshes gave the peninsula a tranquil,

hypnotic beauty.¹⁰

In 1880 Accomac, the northernmost and larger of the two Eastern Shore counties, was inhabited by 24,408 persons of whom 38 per cent were black; Northampton by 9,152 of whom 58 per cent were black. The great majority of the people made their living from soil or sea, and the population was fairly equally distributed throughout the peninsula. The only areas considered densely populated were those adjacent to the great Pocomoke Sound oyster ground on the upper Accomac County bayside and the Chincoteague Bay ground on the upper Accomac seaside. A handful of the Eastern Shore islands were inhabited--Tangier and Saxis in Chesapeake Bay and the barrier islands of Assateague, Chincoteague, Hog, and Cobb. Most of the islanders worked as oystermen but a few tended livestock, catered to vacationers and sportsmen, or labored in the factories which converted fish into fertilizer and oil.¹¹

¹⁰E. H. Stevens, Soil Survey of Accomac and Northampton Counties, Virginia (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920), pp. 5, 6-7, 9, 23, 59; [Frank P. Brent,] The Eastern Shore of Virginia: A Description of Its Soil, Climate, Industries, Development, and Future Prospects (Baltimore: Harlem Paper Company, 1891), p. 5; Orris A. Browne, "The Eastern Shore," Accomac C. H. Peninsula Enterprise (hereafter cited as PE), April 11, 1885; Wilmington Morning News quoted in PE, November 22, 1884; New York Evening Post, April 25, 1885, in PE, June 13, 1885; Richmond Dispatch, December 13, 1883.

¹¹U.S., Department of the Interior, Census Office, Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census (June 1, 1880) (Washington: Government

Most Eastern Shoremen resided in the countryside, but wharf and crossroad communities played an important part in their lives. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, steamboats out of Baltimore, Norfolk, and New York regularly called at twenty-three wharves on the bayside and at eight on the seaside. From these wharves the peninsula's farmers shipped their produce and its merchants stocked their shelves. The most important wharf communities were Wachapreague on the seaside and Cherrystone and Onancock on the bayside. In 1882 a Baltimore newspaperman described Onancock, the Eastern Shore's largest town, as "a thriving business place, has about twenty stores, some of them quite large and well stocked; two drugstores, several good churches, a town

Printing Office, 1883), p. 412; Stevens, Soil Survey, p. 10; George Toy to William Mahone, February 21, John D. Parsons to John W. H. Parker, July 12, in Parker to William Mahone, August 3, 1882, William Mahone Papers, Duke University, Durham, N.C.; "A Peninsular Canaan," Harper's Magazine 58 (1879), p. 810; "Chincoteague: The Island of Ponies," Scribner's Monthly XIII (1877), p. 738; PE, April 26, May 17, June 14, 1883, March 1, August 2, 1884; Norfolk Landmark, August 15, 1874; Baltimore Sun, June 13, 1882. Statistics not available in the printed United States census compendiums were obtained from computerized data taken from the 1880 manuscript censuses of population and agriculture for Accomac and Northampton counties. The agricultural census database includes everyone listed in the manuscript while the population database includes only males aged sixteen and older. The agricultural database also integrates information on each individual's race, age, and occupation from the population database. For a more detailed description see Appendix I: The Census Computer Databases. The databases are hereafter cited as "1880 Population" and "1880 Agriculture."

hall, a good hotel, a canning establishment and daily mails, some days two. There is also a coal and lime yard, four or five wharves and a bridge across the creek, which adds much to the convenience of the country people." More representative of the waterfront communities, though, was Read's Wharf in Northampton County. When George H. Read offered his property for sale in 1883, he advertised the wharf, a storehouse, a barroom, and a two-story dwelling. Nearby stood several private residences.¹²

Read's Wharf was replicated time and again on the creeks and at the crossroads. In 1880 more than 200 mercantile establishments served Accomac and Northampton counties and around most was a hamlet. Typical was Eastville, the ancient seat of Northampton County. "A broad sunny high-road running through it from end to end composes the main street," reported a Northern visitor in 1879. "A row of disconnected houses lines its either side, broad, cozy, and home-like, low-roofed and whitewashed. . . . The business interests of the

¹²Mason, History of Steam Navigation, pp. 2-3; Ralph T. Whitelaw, Virginia's Eastern Shore: A History of Northampton and Accomack Counties (Richmond: Virginia Historical Society, 1951), I, 44; II, 782-783; PE, February 22, June 14, December 6, 1883, August 15, 1885; George Toy to William Mahone, February 21, 1882, John J. Wise to Mahone, May 29, 1883, Mahone Papers, Duke; Kirk Mariner, Revival's Children: A Religious History of Virginia's Eastern Shore (Salisbury, Md.: Peninsula Press, 1979), p. 316; Baltimore Sun, June 5, 1882; Richmond State, July 24, 1883.

community are embodied in two or three country stores, a couple of broad, comfortable-looking taverns facing each other jealously across the street, and a barber shop modestly withdrawn from view behind the corner of a house." Few Eastern Shoremen lived more than a mile or two from places like Eastville or Onancock and in these they found much in the way of merchandise, fashions, information, and ideas that the national market had to offer.¹³

In 1880 six out of every ten Eastern Shoremen worked on farms where they tended a wide variety of crops. They grew for the market grains, onions, peas, cabbages, strawberries, and Irish potatoes. Their most important crop, though, was the sweet potato. With some exaggeration an Accomac farmer declared in 1885 that "We raise yaller backs, nothin else, plant 'em in March, set 'em out in May, dig 'em in August, cart 'em down to Nancock and send 'em all over the world. Net us \$3 a barrel early, and \$2 later. A right smart drap is fifty bushels to an acre; some farmers make a thousand barrels to a crop." In 1879 Accomac ranked first and Northampton third among Virginia counties in sweet

¹³Dun's Mercantile Agency Reference Book 47 (July, 1880); "A Peninsular Canaan," p. 804 (quote); Richmond State, July 24, 1883. See the Charles Albert Van Ness Journals, 1874-1885, transcription in ESPL, for Van Ness's almost daily trips into Johnstontown, Bridgetown, or Eastville.

potato production.¹⁴

For generations Eastern Shoremen shipped their produce from Onancock and other wharves to markets along the east coast. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the peninsula's sailing craft carried grains, lumber, and meat to the West Indies, the Carolinas, Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. In the antebellum period trade centered on New York, Norfolk, and Baltimore, and in response to the rapid expansion of the Northern urban market and to the development of railroads and steam navigation local farmers diversified into the production of fruits and vegetables. Until immediately after the Civil War, steamboat service to the peninsula, while important, was limited and unreliable. Beginning in 1867, however, steamboats out of Norfolk and Baltimore began to call regularly at Eastern Shore wharves. The Eastern Shore Steamboat Company of Baltimore engrossed much of the bayside trade of Accomac and upper Northampton counties while the Old Dominion Steamship Company of Norfolk controlled that of lower Northampton. The Norfolk company also handled much of the commerce between the seaside wharves and New

¹⁴"1880 Population"; Browne, "The Eastern Shore"; New York Evening Post, April 25, 1885, quoted in PE, June 18, 1885; Richmond Dispatch, December 13, 1883; U.S., Department of the Interior, Census Office, Report on the Productions of Agriculture as Returned at the Tenth Census (June 1, 1880) (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), pp. 208-209, 319, 321.

York City.¹⁵

The coming of reliable steamboat service failed to eliminate the need for wind-driven transport. In 1880, 358 sailing vessels were registered in the Eastern Shore customs district, more than in any of the other six districts in Virginia. Most of these schooners and sloops carried to market trucks in the summer and oysters in the winter. Eastern Shore commodities brought by sail or steam to the great port cities seldom were consumed there. Instead, either bulk or processed, they were transshipped along the nation's ever extending rail system to points south, west, and north.¹⁶

In the post-war years the relentless growth of the national railroad network and of the urban North combined with the coming of regular steamboat service to

¹⁵Brooks Miles Barnes, "A Brief History of the Eastern Shore of Virginia," manuscript in ESPL, pp. 3-5, 17-18, 34; Mason, History of Steam Navigation, 1-3; PE, August 25, December 15, 1881, March 16, 1882, June 7, 21, 1884; J. H. Chataigne, ed., Virginia Business Directory and Gazetteer, 1880-81 (Richmond: Baughman & Bros., 1880), p. 399; John R. Waddy to William Mahone, January 23, John J. Wise to Mahone, March 14, 1882, Mahone Papers, Duke.

¹⁶Annual Statements of the Chief of the Bureau of Statistics on the Commerce and Navigation of the United States, June 30, 1880 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880), p. 847; June 28, July 17, 25, October 29, 1877, June, August, 1880, Van Ness Journals, ESPL; Richmond Times-Dispatch, August 12, 1907; Browne, "The Eastern Shore"; Onancock Eastern Virginian (hereafter cited as EV), September 22, 1877; PE, August 16, 1883, November 15, 1884, December 2, 1922.

precipitate an agricultural boom on the Eastern Shore. In the 1870s the harvest of fruits and vegetables on the peninsula increased dramatically. Potatoes led the way. Irish potato production rose from 159,000 bushels in 1869 to 345,000 in 1879; sweet potato production from 292,000 bushels to 613,000. At the end of the decade a 34 per cent increase in price further encouraged the planting of the sweet potato. During the harvest months Eastern Shore wharves bustled with activity. On a Monday in June 1882 the steamer Tangier loaded at Onancock and at nearby Finney's Wharf 1,000 barrels of peas and nearly 50,000 quarts of strawberries. "Pratt street, in Baltimore," boasted a local newspaper editor, "never presented a more business-like appearance than did the Onancock steamship wharf on that occasion. Every available space around the wharf for a hundred yards or more was so crowded for hours with carts that one walking could with difficulty thread his way through them."¹⁷

The increased production brought prosperity to the Eastern Shore. Despite the deflationary trend of the

¹⁷U.S., Department of the Interior, Census Office, The Statistics of the Wealth and Industry of the United States . . . Compiled From the Original Returns of the Ninth Census (June 1, 1870) (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), pp. 268, 272; Report on the Productions of Agriculture . . . 1880, pp. 319, 321; Baltimore Sun, June 10, 1882; PE, June 8, 1882; B. T. Gunter Jr. to editor, PE, July 25, 1891; Richmond State, March 1, 1883; Richmond Dispatch, December 13, 1883.

1870s, the value of the peninsula's farms increased by 16 per cent during the decade. In 1880 the average per-acre value of farmland and buildings in Accomac County stood at \$21 and in Northampton at \$16, both well above the Virginia average of \$11. Of the commonwealth's ninety-eight counties Accomac ranked ninth and Northampton seventeenth in per-acre value. Property values were further enhanced by the frenzied construction of wharves, storehouses, and dwellings. Contractors had so much work that they could not secure enough mechanics. "Indeed," remarked an Accomac man in 1882, "in every section of our county building is booming." With opportunity available at home fewer Eastern Shoremen felt compelled to seek it elsewhere. In any single decade between 1800 and 1870 local population increased at most by 8 per cent, but in the decade 1870 to 1880 it grew by 18 per cent.¹⁸

¹⁸The Statistics of the Wealth . . . 1870, pp. 266, 270; Report on the Productions of Agriculture . . . 1880, pp. 137-138; Charles H. Barnard and John Jones, Farm Real Estate Values in the United States by Counties, 1850-1982 (Washington: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1987), pp. 102, 104; E. Spencer Wise, "Notes on the History and Ownership of Finney's Wharf," typescript, 1990, ESPL, pp. 2-3; PE, August 18, 1881, August 10, September 21, October 12 (quote), December 14, 1882, October 25, December 20, 1883, May 3, 1884; Journals of the House of Delegates of the State of Virginia, For the Session of 1874-5 (Richmond: Superintendent of Public Printing, 1875), p. 329 (journals for all sessions hereafter cited as JHD); JHD, 1877-1878, p. 535; JHD, 1879-1880, p. 221; Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Virginia, 1874-1875 (Richmond: Superintendent of Public Printing, 1875), p.

The pressure of an expanding population increased the number of Eastern Shore farms from 2,096 in 1869 to 2,926 in 1879. It also reduced the average size of the farms from 112 acres to 79 in Accomac and from 167 to 107 in Northampton. The rising value of farmland convinced landowners to hold on to their property and to charge high rents for its use. In 1879 only 42 per cent of Eastern Shore farm operators owned the land they worked while 36 per cent rented it for cash and 22 per cent for a share of the produce. Share renters ran larger operations than the cash renters. In acreage, in the value of farms and produce, and in expenditures for fertilizer, wages, and the construction of fence share renter averages approached those of the owners. The cash renters, on the other hand, lagged well behind the owners and share renters in all categories. For their farm produce, for example, the cash renters received an average annual income of \$268 while the share renters received \$352 and the owners \$374. A frequent visitor to the Eastern Shore believed that the reluctance of landowners to sell their excess holdings retarded the peninsula's economic growth. "There is one crying evil on the Eastern Shore," he remarked in 1891. "It is the evil of landlordism. . . . So long as the

314 (journals for all sessions hereafter cited as JS); JS, 1875-1876, p. 157; JS, 1876-1877, pp. 275, 280, 360; Onancock Eastern Shore News, October 11, 1940.

majority of farmers have to rent their farms, the farmer himself as well as the soil must remain poor. The poverty of one insures the poverty of the other. . . . If capitalists would invest in something else than real estate, and poor men make it an object to secure an humble home of their own, times would be better."¹⁹

Yet, despite the prevalence of tenancy, most Eastern Shore farmers enjoyed good times in the 1870s and 1880s. Kindly soil, proximity to the urban North, and a splendid transportation system gave peninsula yeomen great flexibility. In the national market they readily sold a wide variety of produce at good prices. "[A] man owning a farm on the Eastern Shore of Virginia," exclaimed John S. Wise, son of former Governor Henry A. Wise, "is the most contented and independent being in the world."²⁰

Also of great importance to the local economy was oystering. In 1880 about one fifth of the Eastern Shore's male population worked full- or part-time in the oyster industry. They gathered oysters in Chesapeake Bay and in all the peninsula's smaller estuaries. In

¹⁹The Statistics of the Wealth . . . 1870, pp. 266, 270, 364; Report on the Productions of Agriculture . . . 1880, pp. 94-97; Barnard and Jones, Farm Real Estate Values, pp. 102, 104; "1880 Agriculture"; OBSERVER, New York, to editor, September 20, 1891, PE, September 26, 1891.

²⁰[Brent], The Eastern Shore of Virginia, p. 5 (quotes Wise).

Northampton County especially productive grounds were located in Hog Island Bay on the seaside and in Cherrystone Inlet on the bayside. Western Shoremen considered the small Cherrystone oyster a great delicacy. Much more important, though, were the immense grounds in Pocomoke Sound on the upper Accomac County bayside and in Chincoteague Bay on the upper Accomac seaside.²¹

Two of the factors that spurred the Eastern Shore's agricultural boom of the post-war era--the expansion of the national rail system and the growth of the Northern cities--joined with the development of steam canning to cause a similar boom in local oystering. Chincoteague Island and the nearby mainland village of Greenbackville already were doing a brisk water-borne trade with New York and Philadelphia in Chincoteague Bay oysters when in 1876 a Maryland railroad company laid tracks from Snow Hill in Worcester County to a point on the bay just inside the Virginia line. There, adjacent to Greenbackville, was established the town of Franklin

²¹Browne, "The Eastern Shore"; Ernest Ingersoll, "The Oyster Industry," in The History and Present Condition of the Fishery Industries, by G. Brown Goode (Washington: Department of the Interior, 1881), pp. 162, 180-181, 182; "1880 Population"; "A Peninsular Canaan," p. 811; P. McCarrick to William Mahone, January 14, 1882, J. H. Robinson to Mahone, October 27, 1883, Mahone Papers, Duke; Alexander Hunter, The Huntsman in the South (New York: Neale Publishing Company, 1908), I, 202; "The Chesapeake Peninsula," Scribner's Monthly 3 (1872), pp. 519-520.

City. From Franklin City's long wharf a small steamer made a circuit of Chincoteague Bay, carrying passengers and cargo to and from Chincoteague Island and points on the mainland. Some farm produce was loaded on the cars at Franklin City, but the great bulk of the lading consisted of oysters. During the winter of 1879-1880, for example, 166,000 bushels of oysters left the Franklin City depot for the Northern markets.

Meanwhile, steamers and sailing craft carried from Chincoteague Bay another 152,000 bushels. The oysters brought good prices that winter and continued to do so for the next several years. In the 1880s, Chincoteague Island, Greenbackville, and Franklin City enjoyed prosperity, population growth, and the construction of numerous homes, businesses, and wharves.²²

The 1870s and 1880s also proved good years for the bayside oyster industry. Throughout the period, good prices prevailed as urban appetites for the oyster seemed insatiable. To meet the demand, production escalated until in 1884 the harvest for the entire Chesapeake Bay peaked at 15,000,000 bushels. Most

²²John R. Wennersten, The Oyster Wars of Chesapeake Bay (Centreville, Md.: Tidewater Publishers, 1981), pp. 14-16; Kirk Mariner, "Ghost Town on the Marsh," Chesapeake Bay Magazine 10 (December, 1980), pp. 41-42; Ingersoll, "The Oyster Industry," p. 183; PE, December 29, 1881, June 21, 1883; JHD, 1881-1882, pp. 346, 347; JHD, 1883-1884, p. 730; JS, 1879-1880, pp. 323, 478; JS, 1883-1884, pp. 542, 590.

bayside watermen sold their oysters to buyers out of Crisfield, a waterfront railhead established in 1867 in Somerset County, Maryland, or out of Baltimore, the great oyster market of the United States. During the winter, trains of thirty to forty boxcars filled with barrels of raw oysters left Baltimore daily for markets as far west as Detroit. Meanwhile, the city's canneries supplied prodigious quantities of steamed oysters to the far west and to Europe.²³

Oystermen made their catch either by dredging or tonging. Tongers worked alone or with another man in a small sailboat. Using a long and heavy pair of tongs, they tediously scraped the oysters from the bottom. Tongers continually found themselves at risk from hard labor, from exposure to damp and cold, and from drowning. Few of them ever lived to an old age. At the mercy of wind and wave and to a large degree dependent on luck, tongers earned even in the booming post-war years only about \$200 a season.²⁴

Eastern Shore tongers generally worked natural oyster ground, but in Chincoteague Bay some of them tended hitherto barren ground which they staked off and planted with seed oysters brought from the Chesapeake.

²³Wennersten, The Oyster Wars, pp. 16-18, 55; Ingersoll, "The Oyster Industry," p. 168.

²⁴Ingersoll, "The Oyster Industry," pp. 181, 182.

When in two or three years the seed matured, the planters often realized a handsome profit. Because the purchase and preparation of oyster ground required a substantial initial investment, oyster planters usually were a bit better off than the average oysterman. The more prosperous of the planters could afford not only ground and seed but also the hired labor of less fortunate tongers.²⁵

The dredgermen were more efficient than the tongers. They outfitted their swift sloops and schooners with iron-mesh dredges which by windlass they lowered to scrape oysters off the bottom. A dredge when filled would hold two or three bushels of oysters, far more than would a pair of tongs. A productive dredge boat could make such a huge profit for its owner and captain that many, if not most, of the skippers were tempted into lawlessness and cruelty. A contemporary described them as "daring and unscrupulous men, who regard neither the laws of God nor man." They contemptuously ignored state boundaries and statutes, and they willfully violated the rights and endangered the health of their crewmen.²⁶

Should the weather become bitter or heavy, the

²⁵Ibid., p. 183; PE, June 21, 1883. A few men also planted oysters on the bayside (PE, May 4, 1882).

²⁶Ingersoll, "The Oyster Industry," pp. 158, 159 (quotes R. H. Edmonds).

tongmen could call it a day and turn their canoes toward home. The dredger crewmen knew no such luxury. Should the captain persevere, so too must they. Buffeted by the winter wind, their clothing coated with ice, the crewmen labored at the windlass and at the culling board. For two weeks or more at a time they remained at sea. Their wages averaged \$11 a month or \$77 a season.²⁷

The skippers worked hard the Eastern Shoremen whom they employed, but, bound by ties of community and kinship, they seldom criminally abused them. The low pay and harsh working conditions, however, often convinced local men to avoid dredge work, and the skippers were forced to seek help in Baltimore. The crewmen recruited (or shanghaied) there often were recent immigrants who understood little of the English language or of the ways of the sea. Many skippers exploited them mercilessly. They cheated the immigrants out of their wages, threatened them with revolver, knife, or belaying pin, and brutally beat them. On occasion a skipper even would contrive to knock a crewman overboard. On the Chesapeake in mid-winter "paying off at the boom" meant certain death.²⁸

²⁷Ibid., pp. 160, 162.

²⁸Ibid., p. 160; PE, October 25, 1884, February 21, 1885; Wennersten, The Oyster Wars, pp. 55-58, 62.

In their ruthless and efficient quest for profits the dredgermen dangerously depleted the oyster grounds. In the late 1870s the tongers, fearing for their livelihood, petitioned the legislature for protection, and in 1880 the General Assembly passed an act prohibiting dredging on public grounds in Virginia waters. Unfortunately, the law failed to provide for its enforcement, and the dredgermen merrily continued their depredations. In these they often were joined by interlopers from Maryland with whom Virginians engaged in a fierce and often bloody rivalry.²⁹

Except perhaps in its unremitting harshness, the life of the dredger crewman was similar to that of the typical wage earner. The life of the tonger was something entirely different. The oysters that the tonger gathered were sold in national and international markets, but, nevertheless, the tonger's life was not attuned to the market economy. The unhealthy nature of the tonger's calling and its uncertain rewards discouraged steady industry. A Baltimore man observed in 1881:

A tongman can, at any time, take his canoe or skiff and catch from the natural rocks a few bushels of

²⁹JHD, 1877-1878, p. 286; JS, 1879-1880, p. 446; Ingersoll, "The Oyster Industry," p. 180; Gov. Oden Bowie of Maryland to G. C. Walker, December 27, 1870, JHD, 1870-1871, doc. no. 6; Communication from Gov. James L. Kemper, December 2, 1874, JHD, 1874-1875, pp. 10-12; Wennersten, The Oyster Wars, pp. 46-48, 49.

oysters, for which there is always a market. Having made a dollar or two, he stops work until that is used up. . . . Unless spent in the indulgence of intemperate habits, a small amount of money will enable a oysterman to live in comparative comfort. He can readily, and at almost no expense, supply his table in winter with an abundance of oysters and ducks, geese and other game, while in summer, fish and crabs may be had simply for the catching. So long as they are able to live in this manner, it is almost impossible to get them to do any steady farm work.³⁰

The tonger had few ties to merchant or landlord. Unlike the farmer, he did not need to buy or rent arable land. Nor did he need credit at the store for the purchase of farm tools and implements, fertilizer, seed, barrels, and other supplies. All he needed was a canoe, a pair of tongs, a few baskets, and a clear day. The tonger sold his oysters in personal dealings on the wharf or at the side of a buy boat anchored in the oyster grounds. Unlike the farmer, he did not need to communicate with commission merchants in Norfolk, Baltimore, or New York. He did not need to read market reports, product directions, contracts, or bills of lading. In 1880 the literacy rate for white farmers in Accomac County was 80 per cent while that for white oystermen was only 55 per cent. Because the tonger's business connections were face-to-face encounters with the storekeeper and the oyster buyer, he had little opportunity to learn, as the farmer did, to trust and

³⁰Ingersoll, "The Oyster Industry," p. 157 (quotes R. H. Edmonds).

work with individuals whom he might never see--the commission merchant, the steamboat purser, the railroad freight master, the fertilizer manufacturer. Again, unlike the farmer, the tonger usually resided in isolated, lily-white villages on the fringe of the marsh. He was inbred, clannish, provincial, and prejudiced. He professed disdain for the Eastern Shore aristocracy, but more often he directed his hatred toward the blacks.³¹

In 1880 Eastern Shore blacks trailed whites in almost every economic category. While comprising 56 per cent of the population, whites accounted for 73 per cent of the farm operators, 86 per cent of farm acreage, 89 per cent of farm property value, and 85 per cent of farm product value. Among the white farmers, 49 per cent owned their own land, 21 per cent rented for a share of the produce, and 29 per cent rented for cash. Among the blacks, 58 per cent fell in with those least prosperous of Eastern Shore farmers, the cash renters, while 27 per cent rented for shares and only 15 per cent owned their own farms. The average white farm contained more than twice as many acres as the average black farm, and white farmers spent four times as much on wages and

³¹"1880 Population"; William Mayo to William Mahone, September 8, 1882, Mahone Papers, Duke; Thomas Crockett, Facts and Fun: The Historical Outlines of Tangier Island (Berkley, Va.: Berkley Daily News, 1890), p. 38.

eight times as much on fence and fertilizer as did their black counterparts. In 1879 white farm production averaged \$391 while black production averaged \$183. Only in product value per acre did blacks exceed whites. Although white farmers expended much more on wages, fence, and fertilizer and had in use a slightly higher percentage of their total acreage, black farmers nevertheless took \$3.91 out of each acre of their land while whites took \$3.80.³²

Most blacks, however, made their living not as farm operators but as farm laborers. In 1880, 56 per cent of adult black males worked as laborers, and blacks accounted for 80 per cent of all laborers. They earned from \$7 to \$12 a month. At various times of the year many of them abandoned the farms for somewhat better wages in the fisheries or on the oyster grounds. In the face of the resentment of white oyster tongers, few blacks tonged either part- or full-time. Instead, they more often found employment as dredger crewmen. Blacks filled a majority of berths on many Eastern Shore dredge boats. The tendency of black laborers to seek better pay on the water infuriated white farmers who occasionally saw their produce rot in the fields for lack of labor at harvest time. Throughout the post-war

³²Statistics of the Population . . . 1880, p. 412; "1880 Agriculture".

years, the labor scarcity exacerbated black-white relations.³³

The transition from slavery to freedom on the Eastern Shore was marked in its initial stages by outbreaks of violence--the arson of a black school and of a black church, the disarming of black Union veterans by white nightriders, and a pair of minor race riots at Accomac Court House. By 1869 the more dramatic manifestations of racial conflict had ended as through a process of withdrawal and delimitation a segregated society emerged. In the formation of their own churches and fraternal organizations blacks had a hand in the process, but whites in their insistence on their own supremacy did much more to implement segregation. Through pressures subtle and overt, they restricted the options and opportunities of blacks in the political, economic, and social spheres. The whites enjoyed advantages in numbers, wealth, and education and thus seldom felt the need to employ violence to maintain their dominant position. During the 1870s and early 1880s, most of the recorded incidents of racial strife

³³"1880 Population"; "1880 Agriculture"; Charles P. Finney Account Book, 1871-1888, pp. 106, 107, 108, 182, 185, 189, 194, ESPL; January 18, 1876, April 10, 1877, January 2, 1878, January 2, 1879, Van Ness Journals, ESPL; John R. Waddy to William Mahone, December 1, 1881, Mahone Papers, Duke; Norfolk Virginian, March 3, 1883; PE, February 9, March 23, April 6, May 18, 1882, May 17, 1884; Baltimore Sun, June 10, 1882.

on the Eastern Shore occurred in or near those areas inhabited principally by white oystermen. Indeed, Guilford, an Accomac community on the edge of the upper bayside oyster district, was the only precinct in either county where blacks were afraid to vote. In most of Accomac and in black-majority Northampton blacks and whites shared intimate ties of propinquity and consanguinity going back generations, and they experienced daily contact and cooperation in kitchen and field and at wharf and store. Here, whites insisted on black deference, but that did not necessarily preclude mutual expressions of tolerance and of affection.³⁴

Visitors found Eastern Shoremen to be a genial and pleasure-loving people. In 1877 a Norfolk man described them as "fast horse & card-playing men, [who] love whisky & jolly good fellows." Nothing brought more delight to the peninsular Virginian than contests of speed on water or track. "For the riding of horses,"

³⁴Mears, "The Virginia Eastern Shore in the War of Secession and in the Reconstruction Period," pp. 367, 12R-26R, ESPL; Mariner, Revival's Children, pp. 138, 142; D. B. White to O. Brown, September 5, 1868, U.S., National Archives, Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Drummondtown and Eastville, Virginia, Record Group 105, vol. 156, pp. 59-63; Whitelaw, Virginia's Eastern Shore, II, 998-999; PE, December 8, 1881, January 24, April 18, June 13, 1885; Norfolk Landmark, December 23, 1873; EY, June 29, 1878; Richmond Times-Dispatch, August 12, 1907; John E. Bradford to William Mahone, March 30, List of the Most Prominent Accomac Readjusters, May, 1883, Mahone Papers, Duke.

observed a newspaperman, "the Eastern Shore boys shame the Mamalukes, and in the sailing of a canoe, any one of them can beat a Cape Cod fisherman out of his waterproof boots." Harness racing drew large crowds and paid substantial purses at McConnell's Track at Pungoteague on the lower Accomac bayside, and in 1876 Sadie Bell, a trotter trained on one of the barrier islands, finished first in her class at the centennial races in Philadelphia. The mare's numerous triumphs at tracks along the east coast led an Accomac man to brag that "if there was any trot in a colt, salt grass and deep sand would fetch it out."³⁵

Eastern Shoremen also took a great deal of pleasure from drinking. A store stood at almost every wharf and crossroad in the two counties, and almost every store sold liquor by the dram or bottle. So commonplace was drinking that an admission of abstinence from a Northern traveler drew from a Chincoteague oysterman the shocked query: "If you don't drink, stranger, up your way, what on airth keeps your buddies and soulds together?" Unfortunately, evidence indicates that the effects of local drinking were not as beneficial as the oysterman imagined. Sober citizens frequently complained of the

³⁵H. W. Burton to William Mahone, July 25, 1877, Mahone Papers, Duke (first quote); PE, August 18, 1881; Norfolk Landmark, November 20, 1873, April 8, 1877 (third quote), November 20, 1877 (second quote); EY, October 6, 1876; Richmond Dispatch, December 13, 1883.

sights and sounds of overindulgence--boisterous parties in public houses; inebriates asleep in ditches; profanity on the streets; drunken brawls, knife fights, and shooting affrays; and even murder. Homicides occurred often enough that in 1885 a local editor complained that "murder as a fine art seems now to be in Virginia as a business. We here in Accomac are keeping up our end of the pole. . . . Just now when we are all so anxious for the welfare of our county, goes forth to the world a career of murder, and attempted murder, enough to damn a country infested by cowboys of the worst class."³⁶

If drink occasionally induced rowdy behavior, it more often inspired conviviality, a mood more congenial to the Eastern Shore temperament. To natives and strangers, Eastern Shoremen were invariably friendly, polite, and generous. They seldom committed crimes against property or, unless besotted, against person. A Northern observer was struck by the harmony and conformity of local society: "All are hail-fellow-well-

³⁶John J. Wise to William Mahone, September 12, 1883, Mahone Papers, Duke; Mariner, Revival's Children, p. 174; Nathaniel H. Bishop, Voyage of the Paper Canoe: A Geographical Journey of 2500 Miles. From Quebec to the Gulf of Mexico. During the Years 1874-5 (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1878), p. 136 (first quote); John S. Wise Jr., "Memories of Accomac, 1890," PE, August 21, 1937; EY, October 6, 1876; PE, December 29, 1881, March 23, 1882, May 10, 1884, June 6 (second quote), September 12, 19, 26, 1885.

met with each other and with any visitor whom chance might fling among them," he wrote in 1879. "All have the same peculiarities of speech; all dress alike roughly. . . . At first it is difficult to distinguish between classes."³⁷

This homogeneity owed much to deep ties of community and kinship. In 1880, 93 per cent of the local population had been born in Virginia, and the great majority of those were Eastern Shore natives of English descent. When a Norfolk excursionist attended a tournament in Northampton County in 1877, he somewhat facetiously reported that among the spectators, "Those who were not Nottingham were Goffigan. . . . The Nottingham family is so numerous that there are not enough christian names on the Eastern Shore to go round. . . . [A]fter they are all exhausted they resort to descriptive prefixtions to the same names"--Chatter Bill, Long John, Johnny Short, Red-faced Bob, Lean David, Pussy Joe, Cross-eyed Jimmy.³⁸

Evangelical religion also bound Eastern Shoremen together. In the early 1880s, seventy-three of the peninsula's eighty-five congregations were either Baptist or Methodist. The Methodists with fifty-seven

³⁷Wise, "Memories of Accomac, 1890"; "A Peninsular Canaan," p. 805 (quote).

³⁸"1880 Population"; Browne, "The Eastern Shore"; Norfolk Landmark, July 26, 1876, November 20, 1877.

congregations easily predominated. The religious enthusiasm of regular Methodist services had moderated since the great awakening of the early nineteenth century, but the spirit of the old church lived on in the heavily-attended summer camp meetings. A journalist described a camp meeting held "among the great pines of Chincoteague" in 1877: "at night their huge trunks are illuminated by the light of the 'pine chunk' bonfires, in the gleam of which the distant trees flash forth for a moment and then vanish into obscurity again,--and [then] the solemn measured chant of the Methodist hymns is heard and the congregation sways with the mighty religious passion that stirs them, while over all hang lurid wreathings of resinous smoke."³⁹

The legacy of Methodism on the Eastern Shore involved even more than the profound drama of the camp meeting. Methodist theology rejected the necessity for election or the conversion experience. Salvation, it held, was available merely through the acceptance of Jesus Christ and the subsequent dedication to the Christian life. Thus inherent in Methodism was

³⁹Mariner, Revival's Children, pp. 135-144, 147-152, 158-163; "Chincoteague," pp. 742-743 (quote); August 20, 1876, Van Ness Journals, ESPL. An Accomac woman visiting Washington told a friend that "the churches here are always full. . . . It is with great difficulty you can get a seat. Such a contrast to the congregation at home" (Sadie to Hennie Parramore, April 12, 1884, Accomac Bicentennial Collection, 1786-1986, Collection, ESPL).

tolerance and charity.⁴⁰ The Methodist faith happily combined with the easy-going nature of Eastern Shoremen to help discourage political and racial violence.

The physical environment also confirmed Eastern Shoremen in their relaxed ways. The mild climate, benevolent soil, and ready markets made agriculture productive and profitable. The oyster grounds and menhaden fisheries offered an alternative to farm labor. The woods and marshes teemed with game and the creeks and bays with finfish and shellfish. "I think it is generally conceded that although few residents of the Eastern Shore of Virginia get rich," remarked a Northampton man, "it is as easy a region to make a living in as any in the world."⁴¹ The peninsula's bounty made survival certain, comfort easily attainable, exploitation somewhat difficult, and competition problematic.

The convivial and comfortable Eastern Shoremen were not isolated in what one writer called their "Peninsular Canaan." They were very much a part of the larger world. Their extensive commerce brought steamboats to their wharves on almost every day of the year. Most of

⁴⁰Mariner, Revival's Children, pp. 29-32.

⁴¹Thomas T. Upshur, "Eastern-Shore History," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 10 (1902-1903), p. 71. For similar statements see "A Peninsular Canaan," p. 85, and Bishop, Voyage of the Paper Canoe, pp. 124-125.

the wharf and some of the crossroad communities received a daily mail. The Franklin City steamer supplied the Chincoteague Island news agent with thirty different Northern dailies while the mainland communities received a regular supply of the New York, Baltimore, Norfolk, and Richmond papers. The steamboats also brought to the Eastern Shore musicians, actors, showmen, and peripatetic orators. Meanwhile, the sidewheelers carried from the peninsula excursionists to Baltimore and Norfolk and merchants to the Northern cities where they purchased stock for their stores back home in Onancock or Messongo or Eastville or Shady Side.⁴²

Because so much of their trade and news came from the North and because of their geographic separation from mainland Virginia, Eastern Shoremen in the late 1870s felt somewhat removed from state politics and resentful of state politicians. "And as far as Richmond & the Legislature is concerned," a Northampton man complained early in 1878, "I don't think they know that the E. Shore belongs to the state of Va., except for the purpose of taxing it, and they don't neglect to do

⁴²John W. H. Parker to William Mahone, August 31, 1881, James A. Hall to Mahone, September 15, 1882, John E. Bradford to Mahone, February 8, 1884, Mahone Papers, Duke; January 27, 1877, Van Ness Journal, ESPL; PE, August 11, December 15, 1881, April 26, August 30, December 6, 1883; EY, September 22, 1877, July 27, 1878.

that very efficiently."⁴³ Soon, a growing controversy over the state debt would involve Eastern Shoremen as deeply as any Virginians in bitter political battles over taxation and the expenditure of tax revenues. More important, the divisions over the state debt would reflect differing concepts of public morality and of civic responsibility and differing visions of Virginia's future.

⁴³Severn Eyre to William Mahone, January 21, 1878, Mahone Papers, Duke.

MAN AND MOMENT

When in late 1869 the first legislature of the reconstructed commonwealth of Virginia met in Richmond, the Conservative Party held firmly the reins of power. Conservatives easily outnumbered their Radical Republican rivals in the General Assembly, and they counted Governor Gilbert C. Walker, nominally a Republican, as one of their own. Walker and his Conservative allies faced a number of difficult problems--the revitalization of the state government, the implementation of an educational system mandated by the state's new constitution, the rebuilding and rationalization of the state railroad network, and the settlement of a massive state debt.

The Conservatives considered themselves eminently qualified to meet these challenges. Their councils dominated by the state's legal, banking, and corporate interests, they boasted that they represented the wealth, intelligence, and virtue of the Old Dominion. They advertised themselves as Virginia's natural leaders and as such morally superior to the carpetbaggers, scalawags, and blacks of the Republican Party. The Conservatives would cling to this flattering self-image,

but in reality their administration of public affairs would be marked by venality and stupidity equal to that of any Reconstruction regime. Indeed, Virginia Conservatives would make much the same mistakes and suffer much the same consequences as did Republicans elsewhere in the South.¹

The most important issue on the legislative agenda was the state debt. The Civil War and Reconstruction had interrupted payment on the debt, and unpaid principal and interest had accumulated until in 1870 Virginia stood encumbered to the amount of \$45,000,000. Governor Walker, anxious to restore the credit of the state, confident that impending prosperity would greatly increase revenues, and mindful that his brother Jonah had invested heavily in state securities, importuned the legislature to convert outstanding interest into principal and fund the entire debt. In this he was joined by John W. Jenkins of New York and Bradley T. Johnson of Richmond, lobbyists employed by the Northern

¹See Jack P. Maddex Jr., The Virginia Conservatives, 1867-1879: A Study in Reconstruction Politics (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970). For the failures of the Republicans in the South see J. Mills Thornton III, "Fiscal Policy and the Failure of Radical Reconstruction in the Lower South," in Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 349-394, and Mark W. Summers, Railroads, Reconstruction, and the Gospel of Prosperity: Aid Under the Radical Republicans, 1865-1877 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

and European syndicate which held most of the bonds. When some legislators opposed Walker's scheme as overly optimistic of the state's ability to repay and as remarkably generous to the bondholders, the governor and the lobbyists used whatever means necessary to overcome their resistance.²

The efforts of Walker and his friends were successful. In March 1871 the legislature passed a bill that closely followed the governor's specifications. It provided that two-thirds of the principal and interest be funded in 6 per cent bonds and that certificates of indebtedness be issued for the remaining one-third in anticipation that West Virginia would assume that portion of the debt. The bill also made tax receiveable the coupons attached to the bonds. In order to service the debt, as well as to meet the expences of the educational establishment and of other government services, the legislature levied a poll tax and heavy

²Charles Chilton Pearson, The Readjuster Movement in Virginia (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917), p. 24; Maddex, The Virginia Conservatives, pp. 96-97, 98; John S. Wise, The Lion's Skin: A Historical Novel and a Novel History (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1905), pp. 285-286; Otho C. Campbell, "John Sergeant Wise: A Case Study in Conservative-Readjuster Politics in Virginia, 1869-1899," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1979, pp. 27-29. For a sympathetic sketch of Walker see Crandall A. Shifflett, "Gilbert Carlton Walker: Carpetbag Conservative," in The Governors of Virginia, 1860-1978, ed. Edward Younger and James Tice Moore (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1982), pp. 57-68.

taxes on real and personal property. The passage of the funding measure thoroughly disgusted its critics. "The funding bill passed the House last night . . . -- every Radical in the House voting for it!" complained Richmond insider Richard F. Walker. "They were bought night before last! Senator [John T.] Hamlett told me yesterday that Jay Cooke and Gilbert C. Walker were the heaviest jobbers! and will make thousands of dollars. . . . [The lobbyists] gave a large supper at Zetelles to about fifty Conservative members. The Rads got money for theirs!!! Is not all this enough to cause one to pray that the Capital may fall upon these scoundrels to-day and kill every mothers son of them?" Equally infuriated was Harrison H. Riddlebeger, editor of the Woodstock Shenandoah Democrat. Riddleberger described the funding legislation as

that horrible abortion of the shallow brain and abject imbecility of the last legislature. . . . It has cast upon us at once a debt of over \$30,000,000 in the way of taxes compelling us not only to pay interest upon the principal, but interest upon interest--compound interest.

These bonds are held with very few exceptions, by the very people who robbed us of one-third of our territory, robbed us of our property, burned our homes, devastated our lands, killed our fathers, sons and brothers, and by foreign capitalists, who aided and abetted this crusade upon all that was holy and sacred in the South--Wall Street brokers and stock gamblers who acquired them by payment of a few cents on the dollar.

Still there are Virginians who would take the last pound of flesh from the carcass of their poor old mothers to give to these cormorants--strange

indeed!³

The Funding Act so displeased the general public that in the fall elections most of the legislators who voted for the bill were turned out of office. The new legislature immediately suspended funding and, over Governor Walker's veto, reduced the rate of interest on the bonds to 4 per cent and prohibited the use of the coupons for the payment of taxes. In November 1872, however, the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals declared the act a binding contract and disallowed the legislature's prohibition of tax-receiveable coupons. The justices nevertheless upheld suspension, thereby granting favored status to those creditors who already had funded their bonds. These "consol" holders could use their coupons for the payment of taxes; those possessing unfunded "peeler" bonds could not.⁴

³Pearson, The Readjuster Movement, pp. 26, 29-30, 32; Maddex, The Virginia Conservatives, p. 170; James Tice Moore, Two Paths to the New South: The Virginia Debt Controversy, 1870-1883 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974), p. 16; William C. Pendleton, Political History of Appalachian Virginia, 1776-1927 (Dayton: Shenandoah Press, 1927), p. 302; Walker to William Mahone (hereafter cited as WM), March 29, 1871, WM Papers, Duke University, Durham, N.C. Riddleberger quoted in Shenandoah Democrat, August 1, 3, 1871, in Catherine Silverman, "'Of Wealth, Virtue, and Intelligence': The Redeemers and Their Triumph in Virginia and North Carolina, 1865-1877," Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York, 1971, p. 221.

⁴Nelson Morehouse Blake, William Mahone of Virginia: Soldier and Political Insurgent (Richmond: Garrett & Massie, 1935), p. 160; Maddex, The Virginia Conservatives, pp. 235-236.

Peculation tainted the passage of the Funding Act and so too it tainted the attempt to weaken the act. Certain that the business conservatives on the Virginia Supreme Court would repel any challenge to the original legislation, Bradley T. Johnson and others cynically encouraged the assault on the measure. Meanwhile, they purchased consols at discounted prices from nervous bondholders. When the court upheld the Funding Act, Johnson and his friends realized a handsome profit in the suddenly enhanced value of their bonds.⁵

The Funding Act proved a disaster for Virginia. The Panic of 1873 abruptly put an end to Gilbert Walker's happy vision of surplus revenues. The commonwealth was unable to pay the annual interest on the debt, much less retire the principal. Between 1871 and 1877 unpaid interest increased the total debt by over \$3,000,000. In their futile struggle to meet the state's obligations the Conservatives imposed on the public a tax burden both oppressive and discriminatory. On the one hand they levied heavy property taxes on landowners and extracted numerous license fees from small businessmen; on the other they demanded only a pittance from the wealthy and powerful banks, railroads, and insurance companies. Meanwhile, the consol holders

⁵Campbell, "John Sergeant Wise," pp. 55-57; H. H. Riddleberger, "Bourbonism in Virginia," North American Review 134 (1882), p. 420.

used their depreciated coupons to pay taxes, thus enjoying an advantage not only over the holders of peeler bonds but also over ordinary taxpayers forced to pay cash in a deflationary decade.⁶

In its inequity the Conservatives' tax policy fostered resentment and encouraged underassessment and evasion. Many hard-pressed landowners and small businessmen also blamed the tax legislation for scarce currency, low property values, and the depletion of investment capital. In 1878 a native bondholder noted that "the condition of our people in South-side Virginia is such that they can bear no more than they now pay, and even the present tax is so onerous that the public officers have great difficulty in making collections; and when property is levied on for taxes, very often it can not be sold at all for want of buyers." Even on the much more prosperous Eastern Shore where assessors valued property at only two-thirds of its real worth, tax evasion occurred with disturbing frequency.⁷

The debt forced the Conservatives not only to

⁶Maddex, The Virginia Conservatives, pp. 170-172, 219; Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1877 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1878), p. 758; Moore, Two Paths to the New South, p. 20; Pearson, The Readjuster Movement, p. 41.

⁷Maddex, The Virginia Conservatives, pp. 171-172; Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia, . . . 1878, p. 823 (quote); Orris A. Browne, "The Eastern Shore," Accomac C.H. Peninsula Enterprise, April 11, 1885; "A Virginian Atlantis," Ibid., October 8, 1887.

increase taxes but to curtail government spending. They eliminated offices, slashed salaries, and reduced appropriations for colleges, prisons, and asylums. They also allowed the state auditor to divert for debt service monies earmarked by the constitution for the school fund. The belt-tightening entailed severe hardship. The asylums and prisons became so crowded that lunatics had to be lodged in county jails and convicts placed in the brutal hands of corporate lessees. The diversion crippled the school system. Revenues declined by 47 per cent between 1875 and 1878, and by the latter year nearly half the schools in the commonwealth were closed. On the Eastern Shore the number of schools decreased by only two, from sixty-eight to sixty-six, but state revenues fell from \$9,883 to \$4,226. Where in 1875 they accounted for 50 per cent of the Eastern Shore's school budget, in 1878 they accounted for only 27 per cent. Increased local revenues partially compensated for lost state aid, but total school expenditures nevertheless declined by more than \$4,500. Meanwhile, the number of pupils grew from 3,937 in 1875 to 4,216 in 1878.⁸

⁸Maddex, The Virginia Conservatives, pp. 217, 220-229, 246-248, 264; George W. Cable, "The Convict Lease System in the Southern States," Century Magazine XXVII (1884), p. 596; Fifth Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. For the Year Ending July 31, 1875 (Richmond: Superintendent of Public Printing, 1875), pp. 8, 9, 11, 12, 20, 21; Eighth Annual

In depriving the schools the Conservatives were playing with political fire. "There were some . . . who bitterly opposed free education," recalled the superintendent of Accomac County schools, "but the mass of the people rallied to its support, and the system has steadily gained favor as the years rolled on. . . . The opposition to the system has ceased to be openly made, and so great is the popularity of the schools, that should any candidate for popular favor openly oppose them, his defeat would be inevitable." Many in Accomac and across Virginia wondered why the Conservative Party favored the interests of the bondholders over those of the schoolchildren; why it would sacrifice the future to a corrupt past.⁹

Taxation and retrenchment proving a failure, the Conservatives attempted in 1874 to negotiate with the bondholders. Those gentlemen, however, proved obdurate, and the sickening spiral of debt continued. On March 5, 1878, Abram Fulkerson of Washington County addressed his fellow members of the State Senate. "There was only \$103 in the Treasury this morning--not a dollar more,"

Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction For the Year Ending July 31, 1878 (Richmond: Superintendent of Public Printing, 1878), pp. 90, 91, 93, 94, 102, 103.

⁹James C. Weaver, "An Epitomized History of Education in Accomac County, Va.," in Fifteenth Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction For the Year Ending July 31, 1885 (Richmond: Superintendent of Public Printing, 1885), pp. 50-51.

he exclaimed.

The banks have refused to loan the state another dollar; the State owes the banks now \$175,000 borrowed money; it is behind with the appropriation to the asylums \$121,000; there is \$1,000,000 of uncollected taxes, and \$864,000 of coupons on the market, with \$600,000 to mature on the 1st of July next. So that we will have less than \$150,000 to run the government to the end of the fiscal year, while the necessities of the government during that time will require \$900,000! What, then, shall we do?¹⁰

Most Conservative leaders believed that there was nothing to do but to persevere in their efforts to pay the debt. These "Funders" maintained that because the Supreme Court of Appeals had upheld the Funding Act the state had no legal recourse. Anyway, they added, repudiation of even a portion of the debt would frighten away much-needed Northern capital and, more important, sully Virginia's sacred honor. A few Funders possessed such a fine sense of public morality that they were ready to bleed the taxpayers of whatever was necessary to pay the debt. Others were less concerned with honor than with profit. These were the financial vultures--the bondholders, the bankers, and their attorneys--and the political hyena--hacks who played on the fears of the consol holders to fill the party coffers. Most Funder leaders, however, were ordinary politicians torn between the obligations imposed by the debt and the

¹⁰Pearson, The Readjuster Movement, 51-53; Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia . . . 1878, p. 822 (quotes Fulkerson).

financial, social, and political costs of its repayment. Faced with a desperate situation but too timid to take desperate measures, they drifted from one failed solution to another, all the while hiding their inertia behind a facade of increasingly meaningless platitudes.¹¹

Funder rhetoric about Virginia's honor would have been more convincing had the Conservative regime been less tainted by corruption. The first Conservative legislature lowered the standards of political morality not only with the Funding Act but also with the "free railroad" act. In 1871 Governor Walker urged the General Assembly to offer for public sale the state's stock in the railroad companies it had helped finance during the antebellum period. Walker maintained that the state should not be directly involved in private enterprise, that its railroad investments had shown little profit, and that the stock sale would pay much of the state debt. Allied with the governor were John W. Garrett of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and Thomas A. Scott of the Pennsylvania Central, both of whom were anxious to expand their rail networks through the

¹¹For the Funders see Moore, Two Paths to the New South, pp. 18, 22, 28, and Maddex The Virginia Conservatives, pp. 260-261. See also George C. Round to "Church," September 9, 1880, newspaper clipping in Round to WM, October 15, 1880, WM Papers, Duke, and John S. Wise, The Lion's Skin, p. 303.

purchase of state stock. Among their lobbyists was James Walker, another of the governor's brothers.¹² The free railroad bill provoked intense hostility. Opponents argued that the stock was potentially of great value. More important, they declared that, should the stock fall under the control of the Baltimore and Ohio and the Pennsylvania Central, Virginia's railroads would be run to suit Northern economic interests and trade would be diverted from Norfolk to Northern ports. The free railroad policy won an easy victory, however, as liberal supplies of Northern money, whisky, and prostitutes convinced legislators of its wisdom. In the ensuing sale the Orange and Alexandria Railroad came under the sway of the Baltimore and Ohio while the Richmond and Danville and Richmond and Petersburg lines went to a syndicate headed by Tom Scott. Contrary to Governor Walker's prediction, the sale failed to retire the debt. Indeed, Virginia lost nearly \$11,000,000 on the transaction.¹³

Gilbert C. Walker left the governorship in January 1874 and was succeeded by James L. Kemper, a man of

¹²Maddex, The Virginia Conservatives, p. 153; Allen W. Moger, "Railroad Practices and Policies in Virginia After the Civil War," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 59 (1951), pp. 437-440; Blake, William Mahone, p. 120.

¹³Maddex, The Virginia Conservatives, pp. 154-155; Moger, "Railroad Practices and Policies in Virginia," p. 439.

different moral cast. Within the year Kemper had exposed a series of scandals in state government. He removed as Register of the Land Office William P. M. Kellam of Accomac County for habitual drunkenness and gambling, he fired the general agent and a director of the penitentiary for attempting to defraud the commonwealth in the purchase of supplies, and he instigated legal proceedings against the state treasurer and one of his subordinates for the illegal manipulation of state securities and for arrearages in the sinking fund. Treasurer Joseph Mayo Jr. avoided punishment by a plea of insanity, but William D. Coleman, his accomplice, was sentenced to four years in prison.¹⁴

The transgressions of Mayo, Kellam, and their ilk deeply offended James Kemper, but they failed to elicit a similar response from others in the Conservative hierarchy. In 1874 the Conservatives of Richmond, that citadel of honor-obsessed Funderism, elected Gilbert C. Walker to a seat in the United States Congress, and in 1875 they placed Kellam in the House of Delegates. When Mayo and Coleman returned to the capital city following their brief period of incarceration, local

¹⁴Robert R. Jones, "Conservative Virginian: The Post-War Career of Governor James Lawson Kemper," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1964, p. 244; Maddex, The Virginia Conservatives, pp. 113-117, 224.

Conservatives quickly readmitted the reprobates to their social and political circles.¹⁵

The Richmond crowd was at their most hypocritical, however, in their favored treatment of the infamous Bradley T. Johnson. Even after public revelations of some of his darker deeds--his lobbying for the Funding Act, his speculation in consols, his Reconstruction-era collaboration with a Republican judge in looting the assets of insolvent Virginia banks--Richmond Funders elevated him to the state senate. Johnson's independent opponent contested the election before the senate election committee and offered seemingly overwhelming evidence of Conservative fraud. Nevertheless, committee chairman John W. Daniel, considered by many the epitome of Conservative honor, rejected the contest on a technicality. Nor was this all. In 1877 the state attorney general indicted Johnson on charges of defrauding the commonwealth of over \$200,000 in legal fees. Yet, less than two years later, Kemper's successor, Frederick W. M. Holliday, appointed Johnson state's counsel in an important case before the United States Supreme Court. Bradley Johnson departed Virginia for his native Maryland in 1880, but

¹⁵Campbell, "John Sergeant Wise," pp. 37-40; Richard F. Walker to WM, September 4, 1875, WM Papers, Duke; Accomac C.H. Peninsula Enterprise, January 19, 1882; Maddex, The Virginia Conservatives, p. 116.

he remained popular in the Richmond. When he returned for a visit in 1882, the city's legal, mercantile, and religious elite honored him with a testimonial dinner.¹⁸

Against a background of corruption and spiraling debt, the Funder argument increasingly seemed to lack moral authority and to defy common sense. By the mid-1870s, growing numbers of Conservatives had concluded that the commonwealth must "readjust" at least a portion of the debt. "The repudiation of the Funding Bill must come," wrote a Prince William County politician,

and the sooner the better. We invite immigration and capital, but it will not come to a State involved in hopeless bankruptcy. We desire to lengthen the terms of our Schools, but we cannot, because the School Fund is borrowed annually, and never returned. We wish to improve our Roads, and build Bridges and encourage Railroads, but we are told we cannot do it, because our State taxes are so burdensome.

The Readjusters were adamant that the wealthy Northerners and foreigners who held most of the bonds should no longer profit at the expence of Virginia's schoolchildren. "I charge upon [the Funders]," growled a Northampton County Readjuster, "that their immaculate Court of Appeals, decided that a legislature (said to be bribed) could & did make a law binding us & our children & our children's children, for all time & that

¹⁸Wise, The Lion's Skin, p. 197; Campbell, "John Sergeant Wise," pp. 46-55, 59, 62-65; Maddex, The Virginia Conservatives, pp. 117, 272; Washington Post, April 23, 1882; Richmond Dispatch, October 24, 1884.

this law was unchangeable, unalterable, & irrepealable, a law from which if there was no escape doomed five-sixths of the children of Va. to total ignorance and degredation."¹⁷

Readjusters were present everywhere in Virginia, but they remained a minority in the Conservative Party. In the face of the State Supreme Court's intransigence on the debt issue, the Readjuster cause appeared quixotic, and, because the great financial interests of the commonwealth were closely linked to the bondholders, the Readjusters received little in the way of monetary aid or of support in the influential urban press. Nor could the Readjusters expect much help from outside the Conservative organization. The Republican Party was a battered hulk moored to the black belt and weakened by poll tax and gerrymander and by factional disputes over the control of the federal patronage. Its white leadership catered to the same constituency as did the Funders. Its black rank and file resented both retrenchment and their white bosses, but they could not bring themselves to ally with their old enemies in the

¹⁷George C. Round, "To the People of the First Virginia District," Onancock Eastern Virginian, October 26, 1878; James B. Dalby to WM, October 17, 1880, WM Papers, Duke. See also Riddleberger, "Bourbonism in Virginia," p. 425.

Readjuster camp.¹⁸

More damaging to the Readjuster movement, though, was its lack of leadership. The Readjusters enjoyed the services of several distinguished orators, but they needed someone who could do more than fan the flames of discontent. They needed someone with the organizational skills to transform anger and frustration into broad and effective political action. In 1877 the Readjusters found such a man in William Mahone.

William Mahone was born the son of a tavern keeper in Southampton County in 1826. In 1844 Mahone earned an appointment as a state cadet at the Virginia Military Institute. After his graduation in 1847, he fulfilled his obligation to the commonwealth by teaching for two years in the Rappahannock Academy in Caroline County. Mahone then embarked on a career as a civil engineer, first working as a surveyor and then as an assistant engineer for the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. In 1852 he became chief engineer of the Fredericksburg and Valley Plank Road Company but a year later left to supervise the construction of the Norfolk and Petersburg

¹⁸Moore, Two Paths to the New South, pp. 19, 45, 46-47, 53, 69, 70; Pearson, The Readjuster Movement, pp. 48, 50, 66; Gordon B. McKinney, Southern Mountain Republicans, 1865-1900: Politics and the Appalachian Community (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), pp. 100, 101; Wise, The Lion's Skin, p. 299.

Railroad. His work on the Norfolk and Petersburg involved the laying of track across the Dismal Swamp. This Mahone accomplished with such skill and efficiency that in 1860 at the age of thirty-three he was elected president of the company.¹⁹

When the Civil War broke out in 1861, Mahone, an ardent secessionist, volunteered for Confederate service and rapidly attained the rank of Brigadier. There he languished. His superiors in the Army of Northern Virginia considered him a diligent officer but believed him somewhat contentious and perhaps overly solicitous of the welfare of his men. Mahone blossomed as a military leader only after his advancement through seniority to divisional command during the climactic campaign of 1864-1865. U. S. Grant's relentless drive on Richmond pushed R. E. Lee's army to the limit and many of its officers gave in to fatigue and despair. Mahone, however, seemed possessed of a phenomenal energy and tenacity. He developed into a master of the thrust and counterthrust of trench warfare. "Whenever Mahone moves out," remarked his friend Henry A. Wise, "somebody is apt to be hurt." Lee came to rely on Mahone's division as his shock troops, and at the Battle of the Crater on July 30, 1864, they routed the Union attackers

¹⁹Blake, William Mahone, pp. 5-6, 10, 12-15, 19, 21, 22, 25-26, 27-32.

and won for their commander an honored place in the Confederate pantheon. Mahone's men continued for the rest of the war to see hard fighting, but so great was their general's care and discipline that his division surrendered at Appomattox more muskets than any other in the army.²⁰

The Confederacy was lost, but among the ashes of defeat and ruin William Mahone nevertheless saw opportunity for Virginia. "If there are to be found any good results from the late struggle it is that we are now standing on a new field and the whole products of the country are seeking new centers of trade," he observed in 1868. "If we fail to act now, our time will be lost and the old trade lines will be resumed and re-established; and when this occurs we will find, no matter how much we may be better off pecuniarily, that we will have the greatest difficulty upsetting them." Mahone believed that Norfolk with its magnificent harbor should develop as the great entrepot of the commonwealth. To this end he wished to build a railroad

²⁰Ibid., pp. 38-69; Douglas Southall Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), III, xxxviii, 374-375; John S. Wise, The End of an Era (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899), p. 319 (quotes Wise). E. P. Alexander considered Mahone "as hard as nails & thoroughly at home in [his] business" (Edward Porter Alexander, Fighting for the Confederacy: The Personal Recollections of General Edward Porter Alexander, ed. Gary W. Gallagher [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989], p. 513).

that would provide Norfolk with a through connection with the Mississippi River Valley. By 1868 he had the project well under way by obtaining the presidencies of three contiguous railroads extending along the Southside of the James River from Norfolk through Petersburg and Lynchburg to Bristol. To finance additional construction to Cumberland Gap and points west, Mahone needed an act of the General Assembly allowing the consolidation of the three lines into a single company capable of executing a sizeable mortgage on its property.²¹

Mahone's dream of a consolidated railroad excited bitter controversy. Business interests in Richmond feared that consolidation would divert trade from their own city to Norfolk while those in Lynchburg believed that it would change their town from a busy rail junction to a quiet way station. More potent opposition came from John W. Garrett of the Baltimore and Ohio. Garrett was closely allied with the ownership of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad and through that line engrossed much of the trade of central and western Virginia for the port of Baltimore. Fearing competition, Garrett exerted his considerable influence against consolidation. Mahone, on the other hand,

²¹Blake, William Mahone, pp. 72-73, 75, 85, 90 (quote).

firmly maintained that his plan represented Virginia's best interests. "My belief has been and ever will be," he later explained, "that our duty is and our fortunes are to be found in the direction of the East & West lines. Our safety is in the management of our public works, by those who are identified with the welfare of the Commonwealth, and understand that the first duty of the public works, is the power and constituency which created them."²²

If Mahone was to push a consolidation bill through the legislature, he needed the aid of a sympathetic governor. Radical Republican Henry H. Wells, the provisional governor appointed in 1868 by the federal military, had fallen under the influence of John S. Barbour, president of the Orange and Alexandria and John Garrett's cat's-paw in Virginia. In the 1869 gubernatorial election, Mahone endeavored to defeat Wells by supporting Gilbert C. Walker, the candidate of a coalition of moderate Republicans and Conservatives. Mahone considered Walker, the president of a Norfolk bank and director of one of the Southside railroads, reliable on the consolidation issue. During the campaign, Mahone worked with a fierce intensity. He

²²Moger, "Railroad Practices and Policies," pp. 432-434; New York Times, October 28, 1868; Norfolk Virginian, April 21, 1870; WM to John S. Wise, April 24, 1877, Letterbook, WM Papers, Duke.

mobilized his numerous contacts across the state, and he provided Walker and the rest of the Conservative ticket with funds, rail passes, and political intelligence. Mahone's hard work was rewarded on election day when Walker defeated Wells by a large majority.²³

The scene of conflict now shifted to the General Assembly. Mahone and Garrett placed intense pressure on the legislators. The former championed state development while the latter appealed to local interests. Both undoubtedly offered gifts to the more venal members. This time Mahone proved the better advocate. On June 17, 1870, Governor Walker signed the consolidation bill. It provided for the organization of the three Southside lines into the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Ohio Railroad and granted permission to the new company to execute a mortgage on its property to the sum of \$15,000,000. In November the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Ohio organized. Its directors, all citizens of Virginia, elected Mahone president at the substantial annual salary of \$25,000. A year later Mahone reached an agreement with a London syndicate for the distribution of its bonds in Britain and on the

²³Blake, William Mahone, pp. 99-101, 105, 106; Richard Lowe, "Another Look at Reconstruction in Virginia," Civil War History XXXII (1986), pp. 72-73, 75; Patricia Hickin, "Henry Horatio Wells: The Rise and Fall of a Carpetbagger," in The Governors of Virginia, 1860-1978, pp. 53-54.

continent.²⁴

Mahone's victory in the consolidation struggle did not win him rest from politics. Into the mid-1870s he kept close watch on the legislature lest it sell him out to the Northern railroads. Of course he bitterly opposed the free railroad bill, and he considered Governor Walker an apostate for his role in that affair. Mahone lost the free railroad battle to Garrett and to Tom Scott of the Pennsylvania Central, but in 1873 he gained a measure of revenge by arranging the election as governor of James L. Kemper, a steadfast critic of Scott and his railroad.²⁵

Economic depression, more than politics, eventually cost Mahone his rail empire. For the first couple of years following consolidation, the A., M., & O. enjoyed good receipts and easily serviced its debt. The Panic of 1873, however, forced the line to suspend interest payments. In late 1875 Mahone travelled to London where he attempted to reassure the British bondholders that his railroad shortly would meet its obligations. He

²⁴Moger, "Railroad Practices and Policies," pp. 431-432, 433, 434; Blake, William Mahone, pp. 111-117, 118-119, 121-122, 125.

²⁵Moger, "Railroad Practices and Policies," pp. 438-439; Maddex, The Virginia Conservatives, p. 106; Blake, William Mahone, pp. 138-145. For Mahone's efforts to keep an Eastern Shore legislator in line see William A. Thom to WM, July 12, Thom to John M. Robinson, July 13, Robinson to WM, July 17, Abel T. Johnson to WM, November 13, 1873, WM Papers, Duke.

returned to Virginia believing his trip a success, but he soon learned that the bondholders had gone back on him. In March 1876 they instructed their brokers to file a complaint against the A., M., & O. in federal court, and in June a district judge ordered the railroad placed in receivership. Having no recourse in the courts, Mahone sought a pass to the situation in politics. Before the loss of the A., M., & O., he had never seriously considered holding public office, but now he saw it as the key to regaining control of his railroad or, at least, of keeping it out of Northern hands. Late in the year, Mahone informed his friends that he would run for the Conservative gubernatorial nomination in 1877.²⁶

The fifty-year-old gubernatorial aspirant was a man of singular appearance and personality. William Mahone stood barely five and a half feet tall and weighed less than 110 pounds. He dressed peculiarly and wore his gray hair and beard long and untrimmed. In an era when it paid for a politician to speak in deep and resonant tones, he was afflicted with a thin, piping voice. Yet, this somewhat outre character excited the deepest

²⁶Moger, "Railroad Practices and Policies," p. 434; Blake, William Mahone, pp. 126-130, 132, 147; H. T. Squires, The Land of Decision (Portsmouth: Printcraft Press, 1931), pp. 182-183; Maddex, The Virginia Conservatives, p. 249; Abel T. Johnson to WM, December 1876, WM Papers, Duke.

loyalty and the wildest hatred. The man seemed to exude an almost palpable dynamism. A political enemy conceded that Mahone "had great personal magnetism and will-power. . . . He was a bundle of nerves and a prodigy in energy." When engaged in earnest conversation his eyes, which usually darted restlessly below his trademark gray slouch hat, steadied and blazed a brilliant black.²⁷

Mahone directed his business and political operations from a basement office in his Petersburg home. As surveyor, engineer, business executive, and soldier, he had travelled extensively, and he knew well the geography and personalities of every corner of the Old Dominion. He engaged in an immense correspondence, often writing fifty or more letters a day. So close was his attention to detail that he regularly worked into the small hours of the morning. Indeed, a Northern journalist claimed that Mahone's preferred time for receiving visitors was at midnight or later. And receive them he did. He enjoyed the reputation of a genial host, and his home often was filled with company. He entertained his guests with good whisky, fine cigars, and long sessions of poker at which he displayed

²⁷Blake, William Mahone, pp. 248-249, 271; Cincinnati Commercial Appeal, May 12, 1885, in John S. Wise to WM, May 16, 1885, WM Papers, Duke; Wise, The End of an Era, p. 325; Charles T. O'Ferrall, Forty Years of Active Service (New York and Washington: Neale Publishing Company, 1904), p. 211 (quote).

legendary prowess. Mahone, gushed a Washingtonian, "is the best host that ever did honors since Governor Henry A. Wise dispersed lavish hospitality at the gubernatorial mansion. . . . Mahone has wonderful tact, wonderful memory . . . and great personal magnetism, and his generous disposition has made staunch personal friends all over the State." Among those friends he counted old veterans of the political wars such as Richard F. Walker and S. Bassett French and rising young politicians such as Abram Fulkerson, William E. Cameron, John Paul, H. H. Riddleberger, and John S. Wise.²⁸

For all his graces, the little general could also be a difficult man. He was a relentless taskmaker who demanded as much from his followers as from himself. He could be patient and tactful, but in the end he required obedience. Used to getting his way, in the heat of the moment he could be curt, sarcastic, and preemptory. Immensely forgiving of the contrite, he harbored the darkest animosities against those whom he believed had betrayed him. Mahone's older friends forgave him his

²⁸Blake, William Mahone, pp. 11, 267, 270, 274; New York Times, August 7, November 20, 1881; Carl N. Degler, The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), p. 278; Cincinnati Commercial Gazette, May 12, 1885, in John S. Wise to WM, May 16, 1885, WM Papers, Duke; The Capital, May 22, 1881, in Scrapbook 20, p. 61, ibid.; O'Ferrall, Forty Years of Active Service, p. 211.

imperiousness, but the younger men came increasingly to resent his high-handed methods and almost all eventually broke with him.²⁹

Mahone's gubernatorial candidacy provoked heated opposition. "Enemies to General Mahone are to be found scattered through the State," noted a Norfolk editor.

This results from many causes. The strength of his will makes him an inflexible man, and in his career he has encountered many people who played the part of the earthen pot to his brazen kettle. In the army he was exact, and uncompromising in requiring the full measure of duty from every man in his command, and this again made him enemies. In the administration of the road, which his genius and energy created, he had a large appointing power, and in its exercise he made enemies again of men who failed to receive either for themselves or their relatives positions which they desired. His whole life has been a conflict, and as a consequence of this perpetual combat, he has left in his rear numbers of persons who cherish for him a bitter animosity.

Among the most bitter were John S. Barbour and John W. Daniel, the tools of the Northern railroads; Bradley T. Johnson, the darling of the Richmond set; Jubal Early, a failed Confederate general soon to be a front man for the corrupt Louisiana Lottery Company; and numerous courthouse lawyers, single-mindedly devoted to the sanctity of contract and jealous of Mahone's wealth and far-reaching influence. The opinions of Mahone's enemies carried weight, and from the beginning his campaign experienced heavy going. The five other

²⁹Blake, William Mahone, pp. 267-269.

Conservative gubernatorial candidates ganged up on him, most of the urban newspapers criticized him, and the party's executive committee made rulings that restricted the number of his delegates. "I believe you will be forced, finally, to be cheated out of your nomination." complained Dick Walker in mid-June. "Before I would submit to be unjustly dealt by, I would burst things wide open!"³⁰

Mahone soon dropped his bombshell. In a series of letters in late June and early July he became the only candidate to come out for readjustment of the state debt. "Virginia is now in process of practical, though unwilling repudiation," he wrote on July 4.

To persevere in this path is to sacrifice the last vestige of the faith of the State and of the hope of the creditor. . . . It does seem to me to be the part of practical wisdom, and in the direct pursuit of an honest purpose, to deal fairly and justly with the public creditors; that we should seek and insist upon, urge and, if necessary, demand a compromise and readjustment of the debt of the Commonwealth and of the annual liabilities thereunder, which shall be within the certain and reasonable capacity of the people to regularly meet.

Previous to the gubernatorial contest, Mahone had not

³⁰Norfolk Landmark, June 17, 1877; Gaines M. Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 54-55; Maddex, The Virginia Conservatives, p. 249; Blake, William Mahone, pp. 148-149, 258; WM to E. W. Hubbard, July 7, 1877, Edmund Wilcox Hubbard Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Richard F. Walker to WM, October 19, 1874, June 16, 1877, WM Papers, Duke.

publicly embraced readjustment, and his late conversion smacked of opportunism. The general's position, however, had a logic that transcended the exigencies of the moment. He had suffered at the hands of foreign bondholders, he had defended Virginia against Northern interests, and his most venomous enemies seemed invariably to be Funders. Mahone's debt letter horrified the bondholders and their friends ("You have knocked the stuffing out of the consols," crowed John S. Wise. "They have fallen from .72 to .64 [cents on the dollar]."), but it heartened most of his supporters and brought new life to a heretofore stalled campaign. "The masses are greatly pleased with it," an Accomac follower reported. "I feel confident of success."³¹

In Accomac and Northampton counties, as elsewhere in Virginia, William Mahone relied on his extensive network of friends and business associates to organize his forces. Among his Eastern Shore operatives were an old friend who years earlier had accompanied Mahone when he surveyed the peninsula for a projected railroad, a former employee of a Southside line, a pair of investors in the A., M., & O., and a Confederate army surgeon who had served under the general at Petersburg. Most active

³¹WM to M. M. Martin, July 4 (broadside), John S. Wise to WM, July 12, John J. Wise to WM, July 23, 1877, WM Papers, Duke; WM to E. W. Hubbard, September 15, 1877, Hubbard Papers, UNC; Maddex, The Virginia Conservatives, pp. 250-251; Moore, Two Paths to the New South, p. 57.

of the Mahone lieutenants was Abel T. Johnson of Accomac Court House. Exceptionally tall and possessed of such a sonorous voice that he had earned the nickname "Ocean's Roar," Johnson had several times won election to the state legislature. Although self-interested and a bit melodramatic, he nevertheless was a capable and hard-working politician. During his legislative career he had consistently supported Mahone. Johnson later recalled that

when my opponents made a charge against me for voting for the bill for your Road and taunted me for being your special champion, then it was I told the people who you were, and what the great ends & objects you were seeking to accomplish by your policy. . . . How a dirty infamous radical Judge had been chosen to snatch away from the hands of a Virginian & from Virginia, the only Road in the State that looked immediately toward building up the waste places of the State and carrying out the great policy . . . of bringing to our own seaport towns the productions of the boundless west. How that policy if successfully maintained and supported by the State, would have made our own E. shore sustain the same relation to Norfolk, that Long Island now wealthy & prosperous sustains to N. York.

Also playing a prominent part in the Eastern Shore canvass was John S. Wise, son of the former governor. Although now a resident of Richmond, young Wise returned frequently to his ancestral home. Wise, Johnson, and the others worked long hours travelling the two counties, attending meetings, exhorting the faithful, countering the antagonistic, and persuading the uncommitted. For his part, Mahone supplied tactical advice, campaign funds, railroad passes for

conventioneers, printed circulars, and complimentary copies of his newspaper, the Richmond Whig.³²

The Eastern Shore supporters of the other five Conservative candidates attempted to check Mahone's momentum. In Northampton they combined in a parliamentary maneuver designed to limit the number of Mahone delegates from the county, and in Accomac, where they were weaker, they tried unsuccessfully to strike a deal for a split delegation. William P. M. Kellam visited his native Eastern Shore in behalf of the candidacy of John W. Daniel as did a Western Shore liquor dealer who enjoyed an established trade on the peninsula. Abel Johnson informed Mahone "that every counter hopper clerk that came from Baltimore during the canvass was for any body as against you." Johnson blamed the clerical troublemaking on John Garrett. These efforts met with scant success. The opposition to Mahone on the Eastern Shore was pretty well confined to the lawyer cliques at Eastville and Accomac Court House, and in the end the general captured all twenty-five of the delegates from Accomac and seven of the eight from

³²Blake, William Mahone, p. 148; Richard F. Walker to WM, July 5, 1873, John S. Wise to WM, April 20, 21, June 15, Abel T. Johnson to S. Bassett French, May 11, July 25, Johnson to WM, May 21, June 15, 22, 1877, December 25, 1879 (quote), John M. Robinson to WM, June 1, July 21, James C. White to WM, July 12, William H. Parker to WM, July 17, 1877, WM to John S. Wise, April 23, 1877, Letterbook, WM Papers, Duke.

Northampton.³³

Mahone failed to achieve everywhere in Virginia the same sweeping victory that he realized on the Eastern Shore. He arrived at the August convention leading all other candidates in total delegates but lacking the needed majority. After six ballots had winnowed the field, Mahone found himself deadlocked with Daniel and Frederick W. M. Holliday of Winchester. Mahone now considered the situation. He decided that his opponents simply would not allow him the nomination and that, if Holliday withdrew, Daniel would seize the prize. Mahone loathed the elegant but shallow Daniel and knew him to be a committed Funder. Holliday, on the other hand, had indicated just before the convention that he would follow the lead of the legislature on the question of readjustment. Shortly, John S. Wise received the recognition of the chair. "I am commissioned by the hero of the Crater," he cried, "to appeal to every friend of his within these convention walls to remember his watchword, 'Follow Accomac,' and cast his vote for

³³Abel T. Johnson to WM, December 1876, May 21, June 22, July 10, August 3 (quote), Johnson to Stith Bolling, May 28, Richard F. Walker to WM, March 2, John J. Wise to John S. Wise, July 2, William H. Parker to WM, July 10, 17, James C. White to WM, July 12, 23, John S. Wise to WM, July 24, H. W. Burton to WM, July 25, John W. H. Parker to WM, July 31, George T. Scarborough to Charles B. Duffield, July 31, WM to John S. Wise, May 5, 1877, Letterbook, WM Papers, Duke; Norfolk Landmark, July 26, 1877.

the one-armed hero of the Shenandoah Valley, Colonel F. W. M. Holliday." When the balloting resumed, Abel Johnson, head of the Accomac delegation, cast the county's vote for Holliday who then proceeded easily to the nomination.³⁴

Mahone felt keen disappointment at his defeat. Because the Republican bosses had determined not to run a gubernatorial candidate for fear that a heated campaign might place the Funding Act in jeopardy, Holliday's nomination was tantamount to election. Soon after the convention Mahone told H. H. Riddleberger that, had he won the nomination, he was certain to have regained control of his railroad. "As to the Public Debt," he continued. "No measure of readjustment but my nomination would have been needed. The Bondholders would have asked quickly for terms."³⁵

Mahone nevertheless could derive some satisfaction from the results of the convention. If he had not won the nomination for himself, he had at least named its

³⁴Blake, William Mahone, pp. 152-153; O'Ferrall, Forty Years of Active Service, p. 210 (quotes Wise); James Tice Moore, "Frederick William Mackey Holliday: Paradoxical Patrician," in The Governors of Virginia, 1860-1978, pp. 85-86.

³⁵Jack P. Maddex Jr., "Virginia: The Persistence of Centrist Hegemony," in Reconstruction and Redemption in the South, ed. Otto H. Olsen (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), p. 146; WM to Riddleberger, August 19, 1877, Harrison Holt Riddleberger Papers, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va.

winner. Also, a plank in the Conservative platform pledged in somewhat ambiguous language to bring debt repayment "within the resources of the state." In mid-August John S. Wise consoled Mahone with a cheering letter:

This I want to say. You emerged from that Convention better understood, more thoroughly vindicated from a storm of slander, on higher ground, & more popular than you ever were in Virginia. On every hand even in this rotten political hole [Richmond] I hear men who have heretofore traduced you acknowledge that no man could wield and sway his followers as you did without having great qualities. That no man who was selfish, base or heartless could resist so glorious an opportunity to ride to power upon the wreck of the party as you had. And I believe that this day you are more beloved, more respected, than ever before in Virginia. It is idle to say to you that the 'old guard' are always watching for your return from Elba.³⁸

³⁸New York Times, August 11, 1877; Wise to WM, August 14, 1877, WM Papers, Duke.

ORGANIZING FOR VICTORY

William Mahone failed to win the Conservative gubernatorial nomination in 1877, but his candidacy focused public attention on the issue of readjustment and encouraged Readjusters across Virginia to seek places in the General Assembly. Mahone had a clear idea of how the Readjusters should proceed. The debt question, he told H. H. Riddleberger on August 19,

is the line on which the reformation of parties, with us, must quickly take place. . . . The thing to be done, is in every election district for the general assembly, to draw the platform in our own unmistakeable language and require the candidate to stand openly and squarely upon it. Then to form all such elected members . . . upon all questions and elections coming before the legislature. . . . In this way we can promptly get control of the influence at the capital.¹

When the new legislature convened in December, Readjusters held a majority of the seats in both houses. Unfortunately, while Mahone played a major role in defining Readjuster strategy, he lacked the power to

¹William Mahone (hereafter cited as WM) to H. H. Riddleberger, August 19 (quote), 31, December 10, 1877, Harrison Holt Riddleberger Papers, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va.; WM to E. W. Hubbard, September 15, 24, 1877, Edmund Wilcox Hubbard Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

maintain discipline in Readjuster ranks. The Readjuster caucus split into factions and allowed the better-organized Funders to fill the various legislative and administrative offices. The Readjusters also proved incapable of agreeing on comprehensive debt legislation, passing only a pair of weak bills which restricted the percentage of revenue devoted to debt service and prohibited the use of coupons for the payment of school taxes. These tepid measures nevertheless served to force Frederick W. M. Holliday to reveal his true colors. Holliday, who before receiving the Conservative gubernatorial nomination had vowed to abide by the decision of the legislature on the debt issue, now vetoed both of the bills. "The proposition, that the legislature is bound to support the free school system at the expense of the state's creditors . . . I beg leave most respectfully to deny," he stated in his veto message. "Public free schools are not a necessity. The world, for hundreds of years, grew in wealth, culture, and refinement, without them. They are a luxury, adding, when skilfully conducted, it may be, to the beauty and power of the state, but to be paid for, like any other luxury, by the people who wish their benefits." Holliday's duplicity further demoralized the Readjusters. They failed to override the vetoes, and

the legislature soon adjourned.²

Superior organization and discipline (as well as the aid of a friendly governor) allowed the Funders to triumph over the Readjusters in the spring of 1878, and these political virtues gave them the advantage in the fall congressional campaigns. The lawyer-dominated courthouse cliques saw to it that only reliable Funders received the Conservative nomination in each of the commonwealth's nine congressional districts. Forced to run as independents, Readjuster candidates catered to public demand for a more flexible currency by embracing the greenback fad. Not to be outdone, most Funder candidates renounced their heretofore sacred vow of fiscal conservatism to become, for a few months at least, pronounced inflationists. In the end, the issue of party regularity proved decisive. Fearful that a split in Conservative ranks would mean the election of Republican congressmen, most Conservative voters cast their ballots for the party's official nominee. Only two Readjusters won election to the House of

²Jack P. Maddex Jr., The Virginia Conservatives, 1867-1879: A Study in Reconstruction Politics (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), p. 262; James Tice Moore, Two Paths to the New South: The Virginia Debt Controversy, 1870-1883 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974), pp. 58-60; Holliday to House of Delegates, February 27, 1878, Journal of the House of Delegates of the State of Virginia. For the Session of 1877-8 (Richmond: Superintendent of Public Printing, 1878), pp. 425-430 (journals for all sessions hereafter cited as JHD).

Representatives.³

Despite the outcome of the 1878 congressional elections, the growing strength of the Readjuster movement made the more ardent Funders apprehensive. Late in the year, William L. Royall, law partner of Bradley T. Johnson and attorney for the bondholders, organized in Richmond a Committee of Thirty-Nine. The committee was chiefly composed of prominent Conservative bankers, lawyers, and bondholding doctors of divinity. It also included several Republicans, among whom was Williams C. Wickham, sometime chairman of the state party. The committee called for a 40 per cent increase in the state property tax in order to service the debt. It also urged the establishment in each of the counties of affiliated committees which would support Funder legislative candidates irrespective of party.⁴

The formation of the Committee of Thirty-Nine proved a serious mistake. In the committee's willingness to back the candidacies of like-minded Republicans it legitimized the Readjusters' milder

³Moore, Two Paths to the New South, pp. 32-33, 60-61; Maddex, The Virginia Conservatives, pp. 266-267; New York Times, October 7, 1878.

⁴Nelson Morehouse Blake, William Mahone of Virginia: Soldier and Political Insurgent (Richmond: Garrett & Massie, 1935), pp. 171-172; Charles Chilton Pearson, The Readjuster Movement in Virginia (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917), pp. 83-84; Maddex, The Virginia Conservatives, p. 267.

political irregularity, and in its demand for increased taxation it disgusted a public already resentful that its tax money was diverted from the school fund to debt payment. Indeed, the committee's tax proposal came at a time when the school situation was going from bad to worse. Between 1877 and 1879, the number of schools in Virginia declined from 4,672 to 2,491 and the number of pupils from 204,974 to 108,074. By February 1879, the school fund was in arrears by over \$1,000,000. "The closing of the schools, which is rapidly going on, is the finale of the Funding Bill villainy," a Readjuster told Mahone. "It reaches the masses and touches a tender point."⁵

The Readjuster insurgency alarmed not only the Committee of Thirty-Nine but Northern and foreign bondholders as well. When the legislature reconvened in December 1878, the bondholders sent to Richmond a delegation headed by former Secretary of the United States Treasury Hugh McCulloch to negotiate a refunding of the debt. The resulting McCulloch Bill called for the issue of replacement bonds bearing an interest rate

⁵Pearson, The Readjuster Movement, p. 120, n. 11; WM to H. H. Riddleberger, October 7, 1878, Riddleberger Papers, College of William and Mary; Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1879 (New York: D. Appleton, 1880), p. 844; Carl N. Degler, The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), p. 277; Edward Daniels to WM, September 23, 1878, WM Papers, Duke University, Durham, N.C. (quote).

of only 3 per cent with gradual increases to 5 per cent over the next thirty years. Funder legislators boasted that the bill ended the debt controversy, and with the aid of a few lukewarm Readjusters they passed the measure into law in late March 1879.

The more resolute Readjusters heartily denounced the McCulloch Act. They maintained that, like the Funding Act, it was based on an overestimate of future revenues. They pointed out that it converted interest into principal, that it retained the tax-receivable coupons, that it made the new bonds tax-exempt, and that it failed to guarantee that the school fund would be favored over debt service. They described the measure as ultimately little more than a stockjobbing device--a "Brokers' Bill"--because it required that the new bonds be funded through a New York and London syndicate. H. H. Riddleberger complained that the McCulloch Act allowed the members of the syndicate to "enrich themselves without benefit to the State. . . . It made every holder of bonds present them through the syndicate and pay it a commission, although he might prefer to attend to his own business with the State auditor."⁸

⁸Moore, Two Paths to the New South, pp. 61-62; William D. Henderson, Gilded Age City: Politics, Life and Labor in Petersburg, Virginia, 1874-1889 (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1980), pp. 69, 71-72; H. H. Riddleberger, "Bourbonism in Virginia," North American Review 134 (April, 1882), p. 423.

The organization of the Committee of Thirty-Nine, the deteriorating condition of the schools, the furor over the McCulloch Act--all combined in early 1879 to galvanize the Readjuster movement and to embolden its leadership. Mahone had for some time advocated a separate Readjuster organization, but other insurgents, reluctant to disrupt the Conservative Party, had resisted the idea. Now, Abram Fulkerson and other Readjuster leaders joined Mahone in calling for a convention to be held at the Mozart Hall in Richmond in late February. One hundred seventy-five delegates representing fifty-nine counties and three cities attended the meeting. The delegates endorsed an "Address to the People of Virginia" which roundly condemned Governor Holliday, the Committee of Thirty-Nine, and the McCulloch Act. They also adopted a centralized plan of organization in which authority radiated from a three-member executive committee down through state, district, county, and city committees. The convention then ratified the appointment of William Mahone as chairman of the executive committee. With his wealth, his newspaper, his network of contacts, his administrative experience as a businessman and soldier, and his personal dynamism, Mahone would give the Readjuster movement the management and direction that it

had heretofore lacked.⁷

Mahone immediately set to work organizing the state for the fall legislative campaign. He appointed county chairmen who in turn formed Readjuster committees in their localities. In the limited time before the election Mahone and his subordinates built a remarkably thorough organization. In a few eastern counties, however, they found progress inhibited by the fear that a Conservative division would result in Republican ascendancy.⁸

With the party apparatus largely in place, Mahone next sought to educate the electorate. "The people have only to be undeceived as to the infamie of the Brokers' Refunding Bill to be enraged," he told Riddleberger. Mahone did not eschew brass bands, banners, and public speaking, but, following the innovative practice of Samuel Tilden in New York, he placed a greater emphasis on personal contact and on the dissemination of printed materials. In this he found the press of his newspaper, the Richmond Whig, particularly useful. In early September, for example, he enclosed with a circular

⁷WM to H. H. Riddleberger, August 19, 1877, March 2, 1878, Riddleberger Papers, College of William and Mary; Pearson, The Readjuster Movement, pp. 80, 98, 99-100; Henderson, Gilded Age City, pp. 70-71; Moore, Two Paths to the New South, p. 97.

⁸Pearson, The Readjuster Movement, p. 119; Maddex, The Virginia Conservatives, p. 272; John D. Parsons to William C. Elam, September 16, 1879, WM Papers, Duke.

letter to local canvassers copies of the Whig, "containing some valuable information for the people, wherefore they should oppose the Brokers' Bill. Please take care to place a copy of the paper in the hands of persons who are wanting light, and are open to conviction."⁹

Although confident of success, Mahone understood that the Readjusters faced a potent enemy. "I know that the people, the white voters of the state, are with us on the question of Readjustment . . . and we need only give them the confidence of leadership and the agency of organization to effect results," he told Bassett French. "With such odds in our favor we are yet at disadvantage for the want of means. It is the people on the one hand and the money power on the other. The latter may for a time arbitrarily rule, only to lay the foundation for an upheaval that must come, with the consequence which oppression always bears." The Funder majority on the Conservative State Committee soon provided Mahone with an example of arbitrary rule. Frightened by evidence of Readjuster skill at organization and

⁹Blake, William Mahone, pp. 180-182; Degler, The Other South, p. 280; WM to H. H. Riddleberger, March 13 (quote), April 2, 1879, Riddleberger Papers, College of William and Mary; Re-Adjusters' Organization, September 3, 1879, WM Papers, Duke. For Tilden see Michael E. McGerr, The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865-1928 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 71.

communication, they voted in early August to make support of the McCulloch Act the litmus test of party regularity.¹⁰

As the struggle for the legislature intensified, both the Funders and the Readjusters tried to control the Republican vote. A few white Republicans were anxious for an alliance with the Readjusters. They saw in the Virginia insurgency an opportunity to break the Democratic grip on the South. "I have not been, heretofore, what is known as a Readjuster and . . . I stated to the leading Republicans, that I did not care a fig for the Debt question," Robert M. Mayo of Westmoreland County informed Republican President Rutherford B. Hayes. Mayo nevertheless concluded that "the true policy for the Republicans is to act in a body in concert with the Readjusters, requiring of them a quid pro quo in a reasonable proportion of offices. This course of action together with the common abuse heaped on them by the Bourbons would raise a brotherhood which would sweep the State for the Republicans [in 1880]."¹¹

¹⁰WM to S. Bassett French, June 17, 1879, Letterbook, WM Papers, Duke; Pearson, The Readjuster Movement, pp. 119-120.

¹¹Robert M. Mayo to "Dear Col.", November 27, 1879, in Mayo to Hayes, November 28, 1879, Rutherford B. Hayes Papers, Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center, Fremont, Ohio. See also John Tyler Jr. to Arthur A. Spitzer, November 8, 1879, quoted in Blake, William

Mayo and his ilk found themselves in a distinct minority. Many white Republican leaders enjoyed personal and business contacts with the bondholding coterie, and all knew that President Hayes and most leading national Republicans recoiled with horror from the idea of debt repudiation. More important, the state party bosses cared much more about controlling the United States patronage than winning elections, and they feared that a coalition with the Readjusters (especially a successful one) might require them to share the slops in the federal trough.¹²

The Readjusters therefore concentrated on winning the support of black Republicans. Beginning in August 1879, they urged blacks to vote either for Readjusters or for Republicans pledged to readjustment. They struck a responsive chord. Utterly sick of defeat at the polls, many blacks believed that the Virginia Republican Party was nothing more than a machine for producing delegates to national conventions. They resented the fact that white Republicans held most of the federal offices or, worse, sold or otherwise granted them to Conservatives, who, in the words of a black politician, "would blush Judas-like were Republican sentiments

Mahone, p. 197.

¹²Pearson, The Readjuster Movement, p. 127; Moore, Two Paths to the New South, p. 71.

imputed to them." Blacks also abhorred high property taxes and, especially, the closing of the schools. They therefore had little sympathy for the white leadership's debt-paying proclivities. A Northern journalist identified the attraction of the Readjuster movement to the black politician:

He has seen white debt-paying carpet-baggers carry off all the available plunder, in the shape of Federal offices, while the white debt-paying 'brigadiers' have all the State offices. To the 'colored readjuster' this looks like a conspiracy between Democratic and Republican debt-payers to 'perpetuate the color line,' and he accordingly favors repudiation as a means of splitting up the dominant parties and giving his race a chance.

Still, some black leaders profited from doing the bidding of the white bosses, and many in the rank and file, despite Readjuster promises to protect them in the exercise of their political rights, hesitated to defy the national administration and enter into an alliance with hitherto bitter foes.¹³

Meanwhile, the Funders worked hard to keep the Republican Party in the debt-payer camp. On the state level they devised strategy and exchanged political intelligence with the Republican leadership. In several localities they openly fused with the Republicans, and

¹³Henderson, Gilded Age City, pp. 73-74; James T. Moore, "To Carry Africa Into the War: The Readjuster Movement and the Negro," Master's thesis, University of Virginia, 1968, pp. 130, 133; Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia . . . 1875, p. 751 (first quote); Nation 30 (March 18, 1880), p. 204 (second quote).

in others they secretly bankrolled the campaigns of Republican candidates. They also organized clubs of black debtpayors and hired black speakers. In two places the Funders even voted for blacks. At a meeting in Lynchburg John W. Daniel paraded arm-in-arm on the platform with a pair of black preachers. "When the best men of both races unite in a cause it must prevail," he exclaimed.¹⁴

In the fall elections the Funders and Readjusters evenly divided the Conservative vote. Readjuster success in the General Assembly now depended on maintaining discipline within their own ranks and gaining the cooperation of the Republican legislators. The stakes were high. The legislature was not only to address the debt issue but was also to elect a United States Senator, administrative officers of the commonwealth, a full slate of county judges, and functionaries of the General Assembly. "We must win," Abram Fulkerson told Mahone in late November. "Failure to secure the organization [of the legislature] and elect the officers will demoralize our forces in the state, to an extent, that would be fearful, if not

¹⁴Williams C. Wickham to Rutherford B. Hayes, October 6, 1879, Hayes Papers, Hayes Presidential Center; Pearson, The Readjuster Movement, p. 128; William C. Pendleton, Political History of Appalachian Virginia, 1776-1927 (Dayton: Shenandoah Press, 1927), p. 345 (quotes Daniel).

disasterous."¹⁵

Now commenced a game of political poker matching Mahone and his lieutenants on the one side versus President Hayes and the state Republican and Funder leaderships on the other. The President busily and conspicuously reminded fellow Republicans of the orthodoxy of debt-payer views. In November Hayes told a visiting delegation of the Virginia G.O.P. that those who cooperated with the Readjusters should cease to be considered good Republicans, and in December he sent emissaries to Richmond in an attempt to effect a Republican alliance with the Funders. While Hayes appealed to principle, debt-payers in Virginia sought to reclaim erring legislators by offering a perhaps more attractive inducement. "Look out for money and plenty of it," John S. Wise warned Mahone.¹⁶

The Readjusters had a few bargaining chips of their own. Shortly after the election, Robert A. Richardson of Smyth County suggested to Mahone how to play them:

¹⁵Moore, Two Paths to the New South, p. 64; Paris V. Jones to WM, November 22, Fulkerson to WM, November 26, 1879, WM Papers, Duke.

¹⁶Baltimore American, undated clipping in Robert M. Mayo to Rutherford B. Hayes, November 28, 1879, Hayes Papers, Hayes Presidential Center; James T. Moore, "Black Militancy in Readjuster Virginia, 1879-1883," Journal of Southern History 41 (1975), p. 171; Wise to WM, November 26, 1879, quoted in Otho C. Campbell, "John Sergeant Wise: A Case Study in Conservative-Readjuster Politics in Virginia, 1869-1889," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1979, p. 86.

I can see no way except . . . by going in at the first hop of the party ball to show that our colored readjusters are to get beyond all doubt their full share of the party patronage. Can it be possible that with their people standing behind them as unqualified opponents of the Mc[Culloch] Bill they will dare sell their constituencies for a mere mess of National Politics? . . . I see the so called Conservatives cannot afford to buy the faithless representatives of such outspoken constituents; but by getting them to assert their national politics in this matter would be a smart dodge and a trying one to us. . . . I would say give to some republican from that great Southside vote one of the basement offices & then say one of the door-keepers & then give some smart black boy the promise of position of page in the house. Do these things and let republican readjusters . . . name the men & in my humble view we will fix them so fast to us that they will now & hereafter cling to their friends & forget national politics except so far as we become interested.

Like Richardson, Mahone understood the importance of the spoils. Imposing a tight discipline on the Readjuster caucus, he saw to it that nominations for the legislature and administrative offices were politically and racially inclusive and geographically balanced. Before settling on nominees for the county judgeships, Mahone consulted with local Readjusters. To ensure that nothing went awry, he made frequent and friendly contact with Readjuster and Republican legislators. His bill for the lavish hospitality he dispensed in his rooms at Richmond's Exchange Hotel was reported to have reached \$18,000.¹⁷

¹⁷Richardson to WM, November 23, 1879, WM Papers, Duke; Moore, Two Paths to the New South, pp. 64-65, 66; Washington Post, June 18, 1882. For correspondence regarding the Eastern Shore judgeships see Abel T.

The Readjusters' discipline and diligence paid off. By backing blacks for a few minor offices and a white Republican for the position of second auditor, the insurgents won the support of a majority of the Republican legislators. The Readjusters thus were able to organize the General Assembly, to place their own men in the administrative offices and in most of the judgeships, and to elect Mahone to a six-year term in the United States Senate. In March 1880, the Readjusters pushed through the legislature a bill which called for the repudiation of two-thirds of the debt. Governor Holliday promptly vetoed the measure. The Readjusters failed to override but had the satisfaction of knowing that they had nullified the hated McCulloch Act. "The funding [under the McCulloch Act], of course, has ceased in presence of this opposition, and a majority of the General Assembly propose to abrogate its provisions," Holliday groaned.¹⁸

By the spring of 1880 the Readjusters had won control of the legislature and had voided the Funder

Johnson to WM, November 29, 1879, William T. Fitchett to WM, December 20, 1879, January 1, 1880, Fitchett to D. F. May, January 3, 1880, Ellison L. Costin to May, January 3, 1880, Hamilton S. Neale to WM, January 20, 1880, WM Papers, Duke.

¹⁸Moore, Two Paths to the New South, pp. 64-65, 66; Blake, William Mahone, pp. 183-184; Holliday quoted in Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia . . . 1880, p. 709.

debt settlement. Yet they had failed to pass into law debt legislation of their own, and the upcoming presidential election threatened to wreck on the rock of national politics their coalition with black Republicans. William Mahone knew well that in presidential election years state issues became for the moment forgotten and party regularity assumed overriding importance. Nevertheless, in the face of Funder resources and resolve Mahone decided that he could not risk allowing the coalition to disintegrate during the 1880 campaign in the hope that it would reassemble with sufficient strength to capture the governorship in 1881. He determined then to chart an independent course in national politics while digging deeper into the grassroots on the local level.

In January 1880 Mahone suggested that the Readjusters and the Republicans unite behind a slate of independent, unpledged presidential electors. In the event of a deadlocked election, he could offer the vote of the coalition ticket to the highest bidder in exchange for the federal patronage.¹⁹ Because the old party ties were so strong, Mahone needed to convince both Readjusters and Republicans of the efficacy of his plan. In the meantime, he worked to strengthen and expand the Readjuster organization in the counties of

¹⁹Moore, Two Paths to the New South, p. 72.

the commonwealth.

Only slowly did the Readjuster movement gain momentum in the Eastern Shore counties of Accomac and Northampton. Mahone was personally popular on the Eastern Shore and public opinion there seemed sympathetic to the debt revolt, but the Conservative Party apparatus remained firmly in the hands of the peninsula's largely Funder legal fraternity. In 1877 William T. Fitchett of Eastville in Northampton County, one of the few Readjuster lawyers, ran against fellow townsman Thomas W. Walston, a Funder attorney, in the Conservative primary for the Eastern Shore's State Senate seat. Walston's narrow victory led the editor of the Onancock Eastern Virginian to declare that

the Conservative voters of [Accomac] County are opposed to compromising the honor of the State and are in favor of paying every dollar of the State's indebtedness which in law and equity their obligation require of them. And [the outcome of the primary forces] a striking contrast to the July Convention which sent a solid Mahone delegation from this County. We stated then that Accomack was as sound as a nut on the public debt question, and now . . . the people . . . have proven their fidelity to the true interests of the Commonwealth.

Fitchett, however, blamed his defeat less on the electorate's debt-paying zeal than on the "gross misrepresentation" of his position by Benjamin T. Gunter, Accomac's leading Funder politician.²⁰

²⁰Onancock Eastern Virginian (hereafter cited as EV), September 22, 1877; Fitchett to WM, December 20, 1879, January 1 (quote), 8, 1880, Samuel T. Ross to WM,

The 1878 congressional election proved, as Fitchett suspected, that the Eastern Shore was something other than "sound as a nut" on the debt issue. George C. Round, a Prince William County Republican who embraced readjuster principles, failed to carry the First Congressional District (which included Accomac, Northampton, and fourteen Western Shore counties), but he made a strong showing on the Eastern Shore. The editor of the Eastern Virginian thought that Round's Conservative rival would have done better on the peninsula had he been an Eastern Shoreman ("It is a lesson that our Western Shore friends will do well to remember two years hence," he warned) but acknowledged that "it is useless to disguise the fact, that Mr. Round's pronounced views on the School Question, the Funding Bill, and other State matters . . . certainly had some weight with the masses and at least helped to keep the people at home."²¹

Still, the Readjuster movement made scant progress on the peninsula. In February 1879 Readjusters in Atlantic, the northernmost of Accomac County's five

January 27, John W. H. Parker to Fitchett, February, 4, 1880, WM Papers, Duke.

²¹Richmond Whig, December 12, 1878; Joseph Patrick Harahan, "Politics, Political Parties, and Voter Participation in Tidewater Virginia During Reconstruction, 1865-1900," Ph.D dissertation, Michigan State University, 1973, p. 147; EY, November 9, 1878.

magisterial districts, elected delegates to the Mozart Hall convention, but neither the Atlantic men nor anyone else from Accomac or Northampton counties bothered to attend the Richmond meeting. When shortly thereafter Mahone began organizing the state for the Readjusters, he could not find worthies in either county who would assume the local chairmanships. In the fall Eastern Shore Readjusters offered no opposition to Funder candidates in either the Conservative primary or the general election. "The debt question was not made an issue in the late canvass here at all," reported Mahone's old friend Abel T. Johnson.²²

The energetic Johnson might have filled the leadership void that so retarded the growth of the Readjuster movement on the Eastern Shore, but he had gone over to the Funders during the legislative session of 1877-1878. Johnson continued to profess friendship for Mahone but refused to endorse readjustment. Fortunately, the display of Readjuster strength and cohesion during and after the campaign of 1879 convinced other Eastern Shoremen that the time had come to aid Mahone in organizing the two counties. In consultation with William T. Fitchett and others, Mahone secured the services of John R. Waddy as chairman in Northampton

²²Scrapbook 9, pp. 26, 27-28, Johnson to WM, November 24, 1879, WM Papers, Duke; EY, August 9, 1879.

County and John W. H. Parker as chairman in Accomac. Parker, aged 61, was a well-educated (Indiana University, University of Virginia, College of William and Mary) Onancock lawyer who had served in the Virginia State Senate before the Civil War. Waddy, aged 46, was an Eastville farmer who in antebellum days had pursued a career as a professional soldier (the Virginia Military Institute and the old United States Army) and during the war had attained the rank of colonel in the Confederate service. A veteran staff officer, Waddy diligently and thoroughly carried out his duties as county chairman. While frank in his correspondence with Mahone, he nevertheless was a model of obedience to the dictates of the state chairman. Perhaps because of his age or perhaps because of his contemplative nature, Parker lacked Waddy's vigor. Though well-intentioned, he at times appeared indecisive and sluggish. Whatever their personal characteristics, Parker and Waddy faced a pair of difficult problems. Not only would they have to organize the local Readjusters, they would also have to negotiate with wary Republicans.²³

²³S. H. Moffett, N. P. Oglesby, and I. C. Fowler to WM, February 14, 1878, Abel T. Johnson to WM, November 24, 1879, January 27, 1882, William T. Fitchett, January 1, 8, February 6, Samuel T. Ross to WM, January 27, February 3, John W. H. Parker to Fitchett, February 4, John R. Waddy to WM, February 24, S. Bassett French to WM, April, 1880, WM Papers, Duke; Samuel T. Ross, "Recollections of Bench and Bar of Accomack: An Address Delivered 19 June 1900," in James E Mears Scrapbook 1,

The Republican Party on the Eastern Shore was rooted in race, religion, and the federal patronage. Peninsula blacks overwhelmingly voted the Republican ticket. In Accomac they composed 34 per cent of the potential electorate and in Northampton 53 per cent. Their access to the ballot was inhibited by the poll tax and by the occasional sentencing of petty criminals to the whipping post, a punishment that carried with it automatic disfranchisement. "Yesterday was [Judge George T.] Garrison's Court," remarked a Northampton man in June 1877. "Nothing doing except whipping a black skinned Republican for stealing a bull." Physical intimidation at the polls, however, posed little problem for the blacks. Except at Guilford precinct on the edge of the Accomac oyster district, blacks in both counties enjoyed a free vote and a fair count, and in black-majority Northampton they consistently elected men of their own race to public office.²⁴

Only a handful of white Republicans (probably less than thirty) resided in Northampton. In Accomac,

p. 19, Eastern Shore Public Library, Accomac, Va.; Norfolk Landmark, February 17, 1903.

²⁴Warrock-Richardson Almanack, 1883, pp. 32-33; William H. Parker to John S. Wise, June 19, 1877 (quote), John E. Bradford to WM, March 30, List of the Most Prominent Accomac Readjusters, May, 1883, WM Papers, Duke; June 18, 1877, Charles Albert Van Ness Journals, ESPL; Harahan, "Politics, Political Parties, and Voter Participation," pp. 184, 201-202.

however, their strength was more appreciable. Although living nearly everywhere in the county, most were concentrated on the islands of Chincoteague and Tangier and in and around the mainland town of Onancock. Chincoteague Islanders had deep ties of trade and of blood with the North. In 1880, while 93 per cent of all Eastern Shoremen were Virginia-born, only 71 per cent of Chincoteague's inhabitants could claim that distinction, and many of their fathers and grandfathers had come to the island from Maryland, Delaware, or New Jersey. Chincoteague shared with Tangier a similar economy and recent history. Both were predominantly-white oystering communities whose residents in pre-war days had had little interest in slavery and, unlike the rest of Accomac and Northampton, had decisively rejected secession in 1861. During the Civil War, both had remained loyal to the Union. In postbellum elections, white Republicans cast about 60 of Chincoteague's 200 ballots and about 40 of Tangier's 60.²⁵

²⁵"1880 Population" (see chapter 1, note 11); Susie M. Ames, "Chincoteague Island During the Civil War," Accomac Court House Peninsula Enterprise (hereafter cited as PE), June 15, 1961; James Egbert Mears, "The Virginia Eastern Shore in the War of Secession and in the Reconstruction Period," Eastern Shore Public Library, Accomac, Va., p. 206; Thomas Crockett, Facts and Fun: The Historical Outlines of Tangier Island (Berkley: Berkley Daily News, 1890), p. 38; Abel T. Johnson to WM, November 24, 1879, Thomas W. Taylor to WM, October 27, 1881, WM Papers, Duke. Of the Eastern Shore's forty-eight identifiable white Republicans, thirty-three lived in Accomac County and fifteen in

Most of the white Republicans of Onancock also could trace their party preference to the antebellum period. In 1844 the national Methodist Episcopal Church divided along sectional lines over the issue of slavery. A year later most of the Southern congregations united to form the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The great majority of the Methodist Episcopal churches on the Eastern Shore eventually joined the Southern denomination, but Cokesbury at Onancock and a few other nearby congregations stubbornly remained under the old discipline. The passions engendered by the sectional disputes of the 1850s, the secession crisis, the Civil War, and Reconstruction poisoned relations between adherents of the old church and the Southern church, and legal disputes over the control of church property exacerbated the situation. During the war, the Cokesbury men and their denominational brethren held to the cause of the Union, and in the post-war years they often supported the Republican Party. In 1880 only five Methodist Episcopal congregations remained on the Eastern Shore--Cokesbury (called the "eelpot" by Conservatives), Leatherbury and Ayres Chapel near Onancock, Christ on Chincoteague, and Mariner's Chapel

Northampton. Statistical information on politically active Eastern Shoremen was obtained from a computer database (hereafter cited as "Politicians") described in Appendix II. Tangier was almost exclusively the home of native Virginians.

on Tangier.²⁶

A pair of white carpetbaggers from Maryland and a former slave ran the Eastern Shore's Republican Party. The carpetbaggers filled the most lucrative and prestigious of the federal offices. George Toy, a Union veteran and alleged keeper of a mulatto mistress, held the collectorship of the customs at Cherrystone. Thomas W. Taylor, a barrel factory owner connected by marriage to a family prominent in Maryland politics, served as Toy's official deputy at Onancock. Peter J. Carter, the former slave, represented Northampton County in the House of Delegates from 1871 until gerrymandered from his seat by the Conservatives in 1879. Once out of the legislature, Carter assumed a well-paying federal job as keeper of the screwpile lighthouse at the mouth of Cherrystone Inlet. Although prospects of an election victory now and then excited Carter and his associates, their constant concern was the manipulation of the federal patronage. On the Eastern Shore they controlled forty-four postmasterships, two or three mail-freight teamster posts, a dozen positions in the lighthouse service, and a half-dozen in the customhouses. They

²⁶Kirk Mariner, Revival's Children: A Religious History of Virginia's Eastern Shore (Salisbury, Md.: Peninsula Press, 1979), pp. 95-135, 145-146. Twenty-seven per cent of the Eastern Shore's identifiable white Republicans were members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in comparison with only five per cent of the white Conservatives (see Appendix II, Table A15).

also exerted influence over the appointment of workers in the departments in Washington. Because federal salaries ranged from \$400 to over \$1,200 per annum at a time when the average Eastern Shore farmer grossed \$375 and the average laborer \$200, the Republican bosses wielded considerable clout.²⁷

Although blacks comprised the great bulk of the Republican Party on the Eastern Shore, they received few of the offices--a mail-freight teamster post, a minor place or two in the customhouses, and five or six keeperships in the lighthouse service. Most of the offices, then, went to white Republicans or Conservatives. In 1880 Conservatives filled at least two of the lighthouse positions and half of the postmasterships. The absence of qualified Republicans undoubtedly necessitated the appointment of some of the Conservatives, but the profit that the Republican bosses derived from the sale of the offices better explains the

²⁷Edgar J. Spady to WM, March 18, Carlton R. Moore to WM, June 18, 1881, January 28, 1882, William H. Parker to WM, May 31, 1882; Onancock Accomac News, February 29, 1908; Record of Appointment of Postmasters, 1832-September 30, 1971, microfilm M841, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Record of Appointment of Lighthouse Keepers, Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26, National Archives; Richard A. Pouliot and Julie J. Pouliot, Shipwrecks on the Virginia Coast and the Men of the Life-Saving Service (Centreville, Md.: Tidewater Publishers, 1986), pp. 12-15, 16; H. Wayne Morgan, From Hayes to McKinley: National Party Politics, 1877-1896 (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1969), p. 251; "1880 Agriculture" (see chapter 1, note 11).

large number of Conservatives (some of them bitter partisans) holding federal appointments. "It has always been the boast of the Democrats of this Co.," remarked an Accomac man, "that they can take a few dimes and procure from Republicans (the officials) any aid for most any office they want."²⁸

Unhappily for the Republican leaders, the Life-Saving Service--the largest federal establishment on the peninsula employing fifty-six keepers and surfmen in seven stations scattered along the barrier islands--stood out of their reach. The superintendent of the Eastern Shore stations was Benjamin S. Rich, a native of Massachusetts who had come to Accomac County before the Civil War. When interviewed for the post in 1875, Rich had intimated that he was a Republican. His actions belied his words. Within a year, Peter Carter complained that "Mr. Rich is the enemy of the Republican party, is obnoxious to the Republicans, and has made most objectionable appointments." In 1876 and again in 1880 Rich survived the attempts of Carter and other local Republicans to have him removed. Rich's superior,

²⁸Israel Townsend to B. H. Bristow, March 8, 1876, Benjamin S. Rich File, Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26, National Archives; Record of Appointment of Lighthouse Keepers, *ibid.*; *PE*, December 24, 1921; Record of Appointment of Postmasters, 1832-September 30, 1971, microfilm M841, National Archives; "Politicians"; John E. Bradford to WM, July 4, 11 (quote), 1881, WM Papers, Duke.

Life-Saving Service General Superintendent Sumner I. Kimball, had for his time the queer idea that performance counted for more than politics. Kimball respected Rich's skill, resourcefulness, and efficiency and so extended him his protection. By 1880 the political result of Rich's duplicity and Kimball's professionalism was clear. More than forty of the Life-Saving Service personnel on the Eastern Shore were avowed Conservatives, none of whom Rich bothered to dissuade from actively participating in politics.²⁹

While Toy and Taylor shared with Carter the control of much of the federal patronage, they could not rival his influence with black voters. Carter, observed William T. Fitchett, "is omnipotent with the colored people on this shore." Brought up as a house servant in Northampton County, Carter enlisted in the Union Army during the Civil War. In 1868 he entered the Hampton Institute where, acknowledged an enemy, "he acquired a tolerable fair education for an ordinary man." Returning to the Eastern Shore about 1870, he entered politics. A handsome man with a commanding presence and

²⁹Carter et al. to B. H. Bristow, January 18, 1876, Carter to John W. Woltz, May 12, 1880, George Toy to Zachariah Chandler, September 6, 1876, Memorandum on B. S. Rich, May, 1881, Benjamin S. Rich File, Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26, National Archives; John R. Waddy to WM, August 2, 1881, New York Times, undated clipping in Memorandum for Senator Mahone, April 5, 1885, WM Papers, Duke; Pouliot, Shipwrecks on the Virginia Coast, pp. 5, 50.

impressive oratorical skills, Carter soon replaced a carpetbagger (George Toy's brother) as Northampton's member of the House of Delegates. Carter's rapid and ruthless rise, his self-interest, his acid tongue, and his courage made him some bitter foes. An envious carpetbagger denounced him as a "corrupt Villain" while a Conservative described him as "about the most cordially disliked representative [Northampton] county ever was disgraced with."³⁰

Publicly Conservatives mocked, ridiculed, and reviled Peter J. Carter, but privately they were forced to cooperate with him. So well organized was Northampton's black majority that four times it sent Carter to the legislature, and in 1873, although nearly every eligible white man voted in the gubernatorial election, it gave the Republican candidate a victory margin of 155 votes. Had they chosen, Northampton blacks might have elected a man of their race to almost every office in the county. Carter, however, worried that such exclusiveness would incite racial strife, and neither he nor local Conservatives desired that unhappy

³⁰Fitchett to WM, July 12, 1881, WM Papers, Duke; Israel Townsend to B. H. Bristow, March 8, April 4 (second and third quotes), 1876, Benjamin S. Rich File, Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26, National Archives; Norfolk Virginian, November 6, 1873; Norfolk Landmark, November 20, 1873 (fourth quote). For a biographical sketch of Carter see Luther Porter Jackson, Negro Office-Holders in Virginia, 1865-1895. (Norfolk: Guide Quality Press, 1945), p. 7.

consequence. The result, then, was tacit fusion. Black Republicans received some of the minor offices--constables, justices of the peace, overseers of the poor--while their white Republican allies shared with the Conservatives on a roughly five to four basis the higher positions--sheriff, treasurer, commonwealth's attorney, clerk of the court, commissioner of the revenue, and the three district supervisorships. For his part, Carter claimed the county's seat in the legislature. As tribune for Northampton's blacks, Carter perhaps countenanced an unequal arrangement, but his constituents enjoyed a free vote and a full count, and the pistol, the knife, and the faggot played no role in county politics.³¹

Throughout the readjustment controversy, the Republican leaders on the Eastern Shore, obedient to the state party bosses, had consistently toed the debt-payer line. In the spring of 1880 they feared, as did numerous Republicans elsewhere in the state, that a coalition with the Readjusters behind Mahone's unpledged ticket would jeopardize their exclusive control over the local party organization and the federal patronage. When Peter J. Carter and Thomas W. Taylor departed in late April for Staunton and the state Republican

³¹Norfolk Virginian, November 6, 1873; Norfolk Landmark, November 11, 1873, June 3, 1875.

convention, they were convinced that the party should field its own electoral ticket. In Staunton they found that a majority of the delegates shared their point of view. Carter articulated the prevailing sentiment when upon assuming the temporary chairmanship he remarked that he was "now looking Mr. Republican Party in the face, and he is prettier, in my mind's eye now, than he ever was before." Despite the strenuous efforts of delegates favoring a coalition with the Readjusters, the convention selected a slate of electors pledged to the nominee of the national Republican Party.³²

The Staunton convention dealt the unpledged ticket a double blow. It not only greatly reduced the chances of an effective coalition, but it also encouraged Readjusters as well as Republicans to heed the siren song of party regularity. In May the Funders increased the discomfort of skittish Readjusters by placing in the field a slate of electors pledged to the nominee of the upcoming Democratic national convention. "The Funders . . . are too willing to have all state issues kept quiet, for the interest of our [Conservative] party," warned John R. Waddy. "They hope to ignore all such issues & lead the people off, by the cry of national Democracy as

³²John R. Waddy to William C. Elam, April 9, 1880, John J. Wise to WM, May 4, 1881, WM Papers, Duke; Richmond State, April 22, 1880 (quote); Moore, Two Paths to the New South, p. 73.

opposed to national Republicanism." Concerned by signs of faint-heartedness and determined to preserve the Readjuster organization, Mahone brought his followers together in Richmond in early July. The Richmond convention abandoned the unpledged ticket in favor of a slate committed to Winfield Scott Hancock, the Democratic nominee.³³

Three rival electoral tickets now were in the field, and, to complicate matters further, three rival candidates appeared in four of the nine congressional races. In the First Congressional District, Republican John W. Woltz, a federal officeholder from Fredericksburg, vied with Funder George T. Garrison, circuit judge of Accomac County, and with Readjuster John Critcher, a former judge from Westmoreland County. Republicans favoring coalition had attempted to prevent their party from making a nomination, but, by cracking the patronage whip and by employing a parliamentary stratagem, Woltz had overcome their resistance and secured the official blessing of the Republican district convention. Woltz's candidacy frustrated the Readjusters. "There is but one difficulty in my way," complained Critcher.

It is the 3rd candidate [Woltz]. He cannot possibly

³³Richmond State, May 19, 20, 1880; Waddy to WM, May 29, John W. H. Parker to WM, April 29, May 24, 1880; Moore, Two Paths to the New South, pp. 73-74.

be elected. But he may defeat me. Wherever he shows any strength, many whites to defeat him will pass over upon the old ticket. He gives strength to the funders. They encourage him to remain in the field; and I am told by republicans that democrats are prepared to give him material aid. I may be able to remove him out of my way, but, [in] a Presidential year, the negroes might be easily persuaded to vote for such a man.

Garrison, the Funder candidate, had supported Mahone in 1877 and was rumored to have been sympathetic to readjustment in the recent past. During the campaign, he largely ignored state and national issues, counting on party regularity and on his considerable personal popularity on the Eastern Shore to carry him to victory in the district.³⁴

On the Eastern Shore in 1880 the Funders enjoyed clear advantages over their Readjuster opponents. They controlled the old Conservative organization and thus laid claim to party regularity; in Garrison they had an attractive local man as their congressional candidate; and they had access to the vast resources of the bondholders. The Funders' strategy consisted of unbridled personal attacks on William Mahone as an

³⁴G. L. Meenley to William C. Elam, August 9, William H. Parker to Richard A. Wise, August 23, Critcher to WM, August 26 (quote), H. T. Bragdon to WM, September 20, John W. H. Parker to WM, September 30, To the Voters of the First Congressional District [broadside], October 1, George C. Round to WM, October 15, James B. Dalby, October 17, 1880, WM Papers, Duke. See also To the Republicans of the First District [broadside], September 13, 1880, Scrapbook 13, p. 126, and Critcher to Garrison, October 9, 1880, newspaper clipping, Scrapbook 13, p. 137, *ibid*.

ambitious and unprincipled demagogue and of pleas to Conservatives to prevent a Republican victory by uniting behind what they called the "Garrison ticket." They broadcast their message through the columns of the local newspaper, the Onancock Eastern Virginian, through campaign papers and pamphlets funded by the bondholders, and through stump speakers recruited locally or brought over from the Western Shore. The best work, though, was done in a more quiet way by their numerous precinct canvassers. In mid-October a Capeville Readjuster complained that "the Funders have repeatedly been here & those fire side or fence corner politicians have been busily poisoning the minds of those who do not think for themselves."³⁵

The Readjusters countered with copies of the Richmond Whig and with sundry documents and speakers of their own. In June Mahone, accompanied by Richard A. Wise (another son of Henry A. Wise), visited Northampton and in August John E. Massey came to Accomac. Massey, a Baptist minister and veteran Readjuster whose oratorical ability was exceeded only by his

³⁵Accomack County All on Fire For Hancock and English and Garrison [broadside], Virginia Historical Society, Richmond; Richard F. Walker to WM, May 7, William H. Parker to WM, August 31, October 9, John W. H. Parker to WM, September 30, James B. Dalby to WM, October 17 (quote), 1880, WM Papers, Duke; James T. Moore, "The Death of the Duel: The Code Duello in Readjuster Virginia, 1879-1883," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 83 (1975), p. 263.

shamelessness and ambition, delivered addresses on Chincoteague Island, at Guilford, and at Accomac Court House. His speeches were answered by local Funder potentate Benjamin T. Gunter. A Readjuster described their encounter at the county seat before a large crowd gathered for August court:

Massey . . . was full of facts and figures and made I think a telling speech. . . . When the funders saw the effect he was making on the crowd and fearing he would carry them by storm, they could stand it no longer and Mr. Jno. Edmonds [a member of the House of Delegates] interrupted him and was quickly silenced by Mr. Massey. Then there was a cry for Gunter which was started by Mr. Edmonds. . . . As soon as order was restored Massey concluded and apologized for detaining them so long and said that he should have concluded much sooner but for the frequent interruptions. He spoke in all two hours and five minutes. Then Mr. Gunter as mad as a bull rose on the stand, and took his text on one Billy Mahone. . . . He pardoned all the readjusters of their sins by making Billy Mahone the scape goat of the party.

Gunter's resort to personalities angered some of the Readjusters, and one of them soon vented his fury on one of Gunter's sons. Shortly after the speechmaking ended, Alfred Gunter, aged 22, joined a political discussion in a nearby store. When he indiscreetly opined that Parson Massey was a coward, he was knocked to the floor by John D. Parsons, Confederate veteran and former member of the House of Delegates.³⁶

³⁶William T. Fitchett to WM, January 8, Samuel T. Ross to WM, February 3, John W. H. Parker to WM, February 4, September 30, Parker to William C. Elam, March 5, John R. Waddy to Elam, April 9, Goodwyn G. Joynes to WM, July 28, T. H. Bayly Browne to Elam,

Despite Massey's skill at oratory and Parsons's at fisticuffs, the Eastern Shore Readjusters failed to make much headway. They complained of a scarcity of imported speakers and of local canvassers. They believed that if only they could make their message heard they would win converts by the score. Their complaints had substance, but more damaging to the Readjuster cause on the peninsula was the tug of party loyalty in a presidential election year. "These people," an astute Northampton Readjuster observed, "are deluded by the stale cry of 'straight out ticket,' 'the white man's party,' &c. They seem determined not to be convinced."³⁷

Although things were going badly for the Readjusters on the Eastern Shore and in many other Virginia localities, Mahone hoped to retrieve the situation by some sharp dealing on the state and national levels. Lobbyists for the Readjusters importuned the Democratic National Committee to extend official recognition to their slate of electors rather

August 17, Browne to WM, September 5, William H. Parker to WM, August 31 (quote), John H. Snead to WM, October 7, 1880, John Brittingham to WM, October 4, 1881, WM Papers, Duke; Richmond Dispatch, June 18, 1880; September 29, 1880, Bessie Gunter Diary, 1880-1881, ESPL.

³⁷T. H. Bayly Browne to William C. Elam, August 17, William H. Parker to Richard A. Wise, August 23, Parker to WM, October 9, John W. H. Parker to WM, September 30, October 23, John H. Snead to WM, October 7, James B. Dalby to WM, October 17 (quote), 1880, WM Papers, Duke.

than to that of the Funders. One of Mahone's operatives told him that the national committee had informed an agent of the Funders that "they cared nothing for the debt question or the pretence about regularity, that what Hancock needed was the Electoral vote of Virginia." With this admonition in mind, the Funder central committee offered in mid-September to fuse the Funder with the Readjuster tickets. The Funders would name five electors, the Readjusters five, and one would be selected by the national committee or chosen by lot. Mahone summarily rejected the Funder proposal. He knew that the debtayers had good friends on the national committee, and he suspected, should Hancock gain the presidency, that the committee would turn the federal patronage over to the Funders. He also had received advices from the North that James A. Garfield, the Republican candidate, would win in November, and he worried that fusion with the Funders might alienate both Garfield and those Virginia Republicans inclined to support the Readjusters in 1881.³⁸

In mid-October the Democratic National Committee confirmed Mahone's suspicions by recognizing the Funder

³⁸William E. Cameron to WM, August 21 (quote), John Critcher to WM, September 7, George C. Round to "Church," September 9, newspaper clipping in Round to WM, October 15, James H. Clements to WM, September 10, Absalom Koiner to WM, September 15, Minutes of Meeting of Readjuster and Conservative State Committees in Whig Office, September 15, 1880, WM Papers, Duke.

slate of electors as the party's official ticket. In response, Mahone prepared an "Address to the Re-Adjusters of Virginia" which consisted in part of whistling in the dark:

Coming now, as it does, after our party has been thoroughly organized; after our people have been thoroughly aroused; after they have been accustomed to regard the National Committee as their foe; after they have won their fight and hold their victory in their grasp, the antagonism of the National Committee is as harmless as the heat lightnings of a summer afternoon.

And in part of astute political analysis:

We are not prepared to support candidates of a faction which, if it wins and obtains the Federal patronage of this State, will fill every office with Funders, whose influence and salaries will be used to defeat us in the next campaign!³⁹

Despite the results of the Staunton convention, Mahone still had hopes of forming a coalition with the Republicans. President Hayes, Senator James G. Blaine, and other leading Republicans maintained that an alliance with repudiators would bring dishonor to the party, but other national leaders like Simon and Don Cameron, bosses of the Pennsylvania machine, took a more practical view of the matter. They saw in the Readjuster movement an opportunity to break the Democratic grip on the South. In 1880 James Garfield shared Hayes's disdain for Mahone, but Stephen Dorsey,

³⁹Nation 31 (October 28, 1880), pp. 297-298; Address to the Re-Adjusters of Virginia, October 22, 1880, WM Papers, Duke.

the unscrupulous carpetbag senator from Arkansas who was secretary of the Republican National Committee and something of a loose cannon on the deck of the Garfield campaign, was more open-minded. Conceding Virginia as lost to Garfield, in late October Dorsey and some other members of the national committee sent to the state a pair of agents to convince its Republicans to vote the Readjuster ticket. Claiming to bear the imprimatur of the national committee, the emissaries joined with James D. Brady, collector of the customs at Petersburg, in distributing circulars that declared "that the best interest of the Republican party of Virginia, and of the whole South, demands the defeat of the Regular, Bourbon, or Funder electoral ticket . . . and . . . the only way to accomplish this . . . is by Republicans supporting the Re-Adjuster electoral ticket."⁴⁰

Horrorified, the Virginia Republican leadership secured from Garfield and the full national committee a

⁴⁰Thomas V. Cooper and Hector T. Fenton, American Politics (Non-Partisan) From the Beginning to Date . . . (Philadelphia: Fireside Publishing Company, 1882), I, 263; Vincent P. De Santis, Republicans Face the Southern Question: The New Departure Years, 1877-1897 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1959), pp. 142, 143-144; Stanley P. Hirshson, Farewell to the Bloody Shirt: Northern Republicans and the Southern Negro, 1877-1893 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), p. 95; Allan Peskin, Garfield (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1978), pp. 486-487, 504-505; James D. Brady to "Dear Sir" October 28 (quote) [broadside], A Card From Col. Brady, October 30 [broadside], 1880, WM Papers, Duke.

quick disavowal of the Brady letters, and Williams C. Wickham, state Republican chairman, fired off circulars of his own in which he warned the black rank and file of "traitorous Republicans" who conspired with Readjusters "to defraud you of your inestimable privilege of voting for the Republican candidate for President." Wickham's damage control proved effective. "The niggers here will vote the Garfield . . . ticket from top to bottom. We will get no help from them," complained an Accomac Readjuster.⁴¹

Party regularity reigned supreme on election day. In Virginia the Funder Hancock ticket received 96,449 votes, the Republican Garfield ticket 84,020, and the Readjuster Hancock ticket 31,527. In the congressional race in the First District Funder George T. Garrison garnered 11,595 votes to 10,250 for Republican John W. Woltz and 2,217 for Readjuster John Critcher. Returns on the Eastern Shore fit the state and district pattern. The Funder elector received 2,585 votes on the peninsula, the Republican 2,101, and the Readjuster 383. The popular Garrison easily carried Accomac and Northampton with 2,891 votes to Woltz's 2,067, and

⁴¹Attention Republicans of Virginia [broadside], October 29, Williams C. Wickham to S. M. Yost [broadside], October 30 (quote), A. H. Lindsay to Asa Rogers, November 1, WM Papers, Duke; John J. Wise to John S. Wise, November 1, 1880 (quote) in Moore, "Black Militancy in Readjuster Virginia," p. 175.

Critcher's disappointing 118. John W. H. Parker explained why the Readjusters failed to attract more Conservative support:

it must be conceded that the pressure brought to bear was great and likely to swerve Democratic Re-Adjusters by the seeming orthodoxy--`regularity`--of the Funder ticket, and in the midst of the debate as to whether it or ours should be supported came the `recognition` manifesto of the National Democratic Committee, in the nature of an appeal . . . to the Re-Adjusters to forego all objections and vote the [Funder ticket]; that, aided by the Garfield ticket maintained in the field and thrust conspicuously and threateningly to the front by the Funders turned the scale.

As for the Readjuster failure to form a coalition with the Republicans, a Richmond black put it succinctly: "We are willing to support [the Readjusters in 1881], but we cannot unite with them on a national issue." Still, all was not lost. In western Virginia, where the Republican Party was weakest both as organization and as bogeyman, the Readjusters had elected John Paul and Abram Fulkerson to congress. More important, Mahone had preserved the Readjuster organization and had kept open its options. His battle-hardened cadre, disgusted by their treatment at the hands of the Democratic National Committee, was ready to follow him anywhere.⁴²

⁴²Moore, Two Paths to the New South, p. 76; Richmond Whig, November 17, 1880; Parker to WM, November 24, John R. Waddy to WM, November 24, 1880, WM Papers, Duke; J. Wesley Jones to editor, September 24 (quote), in New York Times, October 4, 1880; Guide to U.S. Elections, 2nd ed. (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1985), p. 645.

Having gone it alone in 1880, William Mahone and the Readjusters resolved to rebuild their coalition with the Republicans in 1881. Fortunately for them, some national Republican leaders were anxious to encourage the Virginia insurgency. These pragmatists--"Stalwarts" such as the Camerons and Roscoe Conkling of New York and "Half-Breeds" such as George Frisbie Hoar of Massachusetts--were dismayed at James A. Garfield's poor showing in the South. Garfield had failed to carry a Southern state, and he had received 57,000 fewer votes in the region than had Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876. The pragmatists blamed the debacle in the South not on Garfield but on the weak Southern Republican Party. They now looked to independents rather than to Republicans to redeem the South from Democratic rule, and they saw in the Readjusters the vanguard of independentism. A Stalwart United States Senator informed a Virginia Republican that

he was for the Readjusters, because he was in favor of 'successful politics'; that the Republicans of the South had done nothing for the success of their party; that all they did was come up to Washington and beg for office; that they always send delegates to the national Republican conventions who acted in opposition to the wishes of the best element of the Republican party, and that if it was necessary to defeat the 'Bourbons' he would repudiate the whole

State debt.⁴³

In regard to the Readjusters, Garfield stood somewhere between the opportunism of the pragmatists and the idealism of Hayes. Like Hayes, he believed the Republican Party should have little truck with debt repudiators, but, like the pragmatists he saw the need for a change in his party's Southern policy. Garfield would have liked more time to consider the options, but in the first days of his administration he was confronted by a crisis that required immediate action. In March 1881 Democrats and Republicans enjoyed equal representation in the United States Senate. The organization of the chamber therefore depended on the course of independent senators David Davis of Illinois and William Mahone of Virginia. Davis soon announced that he would caucus with the Democrats. If Mahone followed, the Democracy would prevail, but, if the Readjuster joined the Republican caucus, the Senate

⁴³Justus Doenecke, The Presidencies of James A. Garfield & Chester A. Arthur (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1981), p. 52; Hirshson, Farewell to the Bloody Shirt, p. 96, 109; Richard E. Welch Jr., George Frisbie Hoar and the Half-Breed Republicans (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 101-102; A. W. Jones to WM, November 6, 1880, interview with William E. Chandler in Boston Traveller, Scrapbook 18, p. 19, WM Papers, Duke; Vincent P. De Santis, "President Hayes's Southern Policy," Journal of Southern History 21 (1955), pp. 492-493; New York Times, June 17, 1881; "Republican" to editor, Baltimore American, July 28 (quote), in Richmond State, August 1, 1881; Richmond State, August 12, 1881.

again would be deadlocked and the vote of Vice President Chester A. Arthur would allow the G.O.P. to control the chamber.⁴⁴

With a close friend of Senator Conkling as intermediary, negotiations commenced between Mahone and Republicans in the Senate and the administration. Mahone eased Garfield's qualms about repudiation by making vague assurances that the debt would be honorably adjusted. The Republicans then offered the general the nomination of a couple of Senate administrative officers, seats on five committees including the agriculture chairmanship, and, most important, a share of the patronage in Virginia. Garfield, however, made it clear that on Mahone's behalf he would remove from federal office Democrats but not Republicans. The bargain received the approval of Mahone and most G.O.P. leaders. Holding back, though, were influential Secretary of State James G. Blaine, the special champion of the banks and brokers, and the small but noisy "Mugwump" clique, genteel moralists loath to consort with debt evaders. The Mugwump editors of the Nation shuddered that "the repudiating tendency of the Mahone movement, unless speedily and honestly abandoned . . . ,

⁴⁴Peskin, Garfield, pp. 565-567. James G. Blaine later recalled that on the question of recognizing Mahone the Garfield cabinet was "divided about as evenly as seven men can divide on any question" (Chicago Tribune, September 19, 1882).

will seriously affect the credit of the Republican party."⁴⁵

Mahone's entrance into the Republican caucus brought howls of outrage from Funders across Virginia and from Democrats across the country. Shortly after Mahone made his decision public, Benjamin Hill of Georgia (conveniently forgetting his recent suggestion to Garfield that conservatives of both parties unite in a new political organization) violently excoriated the Readjuster on the floor of the senate for refusing to pledge allegiance to the Democracy. When the Republicans tapped Mahone men for the promised administrative posts, filibustering Democrats held up the business of the Senate for two months until the nominations were withdrawn.⁴⁶

Mahone took in stride the cries that he was a traitor, an apostate, a Judas. He realized that he had

⁴⁵David J. Rothman, Politics and Power: The United States Senate, 1869-1901 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 32-33; Blake, William Mahone, p. 212, n. 77; De Santis, Republicans Face the Southern Question, p. 150; James A. Garfield to John Hay, May 29, 1881, in Theodore Clark Smith, The Life and Letters of James Abram Garfield (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925), II, 1117; Hirshson, Farewell to the Bloody Shirt, pp. 97-98; Matthew Josephson, The Politicos, 1865-1896 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1938), pp. 56-57, 269-270; Nation 33 (November 17, 1881), p. 383. Matthew Josephson observed of Garfield that "the deep inner weakness of his character, a fatal want of insight and decision, led him eternally to fall between two stools" (The Politicos, p. 282).

⁴⁶Peskin, Garfield, pp. 566, 567, 570.

no other choice than to cut the best deal he could with the Republicans. Without Republican support, the Readjusters could not capture Virginia, settle the debt, or enact any of the reforms they envisioned. Mahone also knew that he had no future in the Conservative Party. He insisted that he remained a Conservative forced into the Republican caucus by Funder intransigence, oppression, and calumny, but in reality he had severed forever his ties with his old party. It was unthinkable that he would reconcile with the Funders, or they with him. For the moment at least, Mahone could take comfort in the support of his Readjuster comrades. "We are not afraid . . . of the company you may bring us into if it is for our good and of this we intend to be satisfied," an Accomac lieutenant assured him.⁴⁷

Having gained the aid of the national administration, Mahone now directed his attention to coalition building in Virginia. As always, he impressed on the Readjusters the need for organization. "A thorough organization is the surest implement of success," he told H. H. Riddleberger late in 1880. "It binds the whole party together, cements their purpose,

⁴⁷Blake, William Mahone, pp. 206-213, 260; Pearson, The Readjuster Movement, p. 138; Richmond State, March 15, October 11, 1881; PE, October 20, 1881; T. H. Bayly Browne to WM, March 7, October 9 (quote), Severn P. Nottingham to WM, April 29, 1881, WM Papers, Duke.

unifies their action, gives courage and confidence to all, and defies confusion in the ranks." In his quest for organizational perfection Mahone drove himself and his top lieutenants to the limit of their endurance. In April 1881 S. Bassett French, Mahone's private secretary, took momentary offense at the general's peremptory manner. French indignantly reminded his old friend that he worked "16 to 18 hours per day, day in and day out, including Sundays"; that he had "to open, endorse, assort, answer and make abstracts of your daily mail, keeping apace with your current correspondence"; and that he was interrupted "almost hourly by persons calling to see you & failing so to do then calling on me." Mahone managed to mollify French, but others of his followers also were to find his relentlessness and his imperiousness grating.⁴⁸

Among the more important tasks Mahone faced in 1881 was the selection of a ticket of candidates for the fall elections. Many of Mahone's friends urged him to reserve the gubernatorial nomination for himself. Dick Wise told the general that "you must be our candidate and our next Governor. All will unite on you." Mahone, however, gave the idea little consideration. By

⁴⁸WM to H. H. Riddleberger, November 25, 1880, Riddleberger Papers, College of William and Mary; Blake, William Mahone, pp. 188-189; French to WM, April 22, 1881, WM Papers, Duke.

remaining in the United States Senate, he could better monitor the subtle crosscurrents of national politics and better influence the dispensation of the federal patronage. With Mahone out of the running, the delegates to the Readjuster convention which assembled in Richmond in early June divided their support between several candidates including William E. Cameron of Petersburg, John S. Wise of Richmond, and John E. Massey of Albemarle County. Mahone declined to endorse either of the candidates but privately preferred Wise or Cameron (both Mahone confidants) to Massey. Mahone valued Massey's oratorical skills but considered the popular parson too vain and selfish to work in harness.⁴⁹

Through three ballots the convention failed to make a nomination, but Massey appeared capable of breaking through at any moment. Before the fourth ballot Wise withdrew. The Accomac delegation (which with Northampton had backed Wise as a favorite son) switched to Cameron, and a stampede began which ended in Cameron's securing the necessary majority. Although keenly disappointed, Massey moved that the nomination be made unanimous. The convention rounded out the ticket

⁴⁹William H. Parker, March 17, John S. Wise to WM, April 19, Richard F. Walker to WM, April 22, 1881, WM Papers, Duke; Richard L. Morton, History of Virginia. Volume III: Virginia Since 1861 (Chicago and New York: American Historical Society, 1924), p. 202.

by nominating for lieutenant governor John F. Lewis, a former United States Senator and a Stalwart Republican, and for attorney general Frank S. Blair, a Southwestern Greenbacker famous for his remark that "honor won't buy a breakfast."⁵⁰

The convention placed this diverse ticket upon a broad platform. While making the usual demands for readjustment, lower and more equal taxes, and increased appropriations for the schools, the delegates also called for sectional reconciliation, railroad regulation, a protective tariff, and a state government more responsive to all classes of the citizenry. The Readjusters openly sought black support by promising a free vote and a full count and by pledging to eliminate the poll tax. "I don't propose to carry the war to Africa," Cameron told the convention, "but to carry Africa into the war."⁵¹

Mahone already was at work enlisting the aid of Africa. In an effort to organize black Readjusters, he helped arrange a March convention of Virginia blacks in his hometown of Petersburg. Delegates allied with

⁵⁰Moore, Two Paths to the New South, p. 79; Campbell, "John Sergeant Wise," p. 110; T. H. Bayly Browne to WM, April 28, Severn P. Nottingham to John S. Wise, May 4, 1881, WM Papers, Duke; New York Times, June 4, 1881; Pearson, The Readjuster Movement, p. 122.

⁵¹Richmond State, June 1, 2, 3, 1881; Cameron quoted in Richmond Weekly Whig, June 24, 1881, in Moore, "Black Militancy in Readjuster Virginia," p. 178.

Williams C. Wickham and other "Straightout" Republican leaders tried to control the meeting but, finding themselves outmaneuvered, walked out of the hall in protest. The convention, enthused by the announcement that just hours earlier Mahone had voted in the Senate with the Republicans, then passed a resolution calling for a combination with the Readjusters. The Petersburg convention reflected the growing black enchantment with the Readjuster movement. Tired of defeat and degradation, many Virginia blacks believed that union with the insurgents would earn them meaningful participation in the political process and a better lot in life. "Gen. Mahone and the Readjusters' movement have done more practical good to the colored people of Virginia than all the laws that were ever passed or proposed in Congress," a black Virginian maintained. "Now for the first time colored men begin to feel that they are men." In June blacks were further encouraged when the Readjuster convention included among its 756 delegates more than 100 of their race.⁵²

Still, despite black defections to the Readjusters and despite Garfield's partial recognition of Mahone, a

⁵²Henderson, Gilded Age City, pp. 96-98; George C. Round to "Church," September 9, newspaper clipping in Round to WM, October 15, 1880, WM Papers, Duke; New York Times, April 27, 1880 (quote), August 4, 1881; Peter J. Rachleff, Black Labor in the South: Richmond, Virginia, 1865-1890 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), p. 102.

goodly number of Virginia Republican leaders, both white and black, continued to reject coalition. Some of these Straightouts hated the idea of repudiation, and all feared that the Readjusters would replace them as brokers of the federal patronage. The Straightouts took courage from Garfield's refusal to remove them from office in favor of Readjusters and from his acrimonious dispute with Mahone's friend Roscoe Conkling over the New York patronage. They hoped to retain enough support among the Republican rank and file to deny the Readjusters victory in the fall and thus to convince Garfield of his error. If the Readjusters were to overcome the Straightouts, Mahone would have to neutralize their influence not only in Washington but also in their local strongholds, one of which was the Eastern Shore.⁵³

Some of the lesser Republican leaders in Accomac and Northampton counties already had come over to the Readjusters, but the party bosses--customs collectors George Toy and Thomas W. Taylor and black potentate Peter J. Carter--held back. Taylor and Toy mused privately about joining the insurgents, but both

⁵³Moore, Two Paths to the New South, p. 79; John W. H. Parker to WM, May 9, John J. Wise to WM, May 12, 1881, WM Papers, Duke. For the Garfield-Conkling imbroglio see David M. Jordan, Roscoe Conkling of New York: Voice in the Senate (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), pp. 380-409.

declined to make the leap. Carter attended the Petersburg convention but walked out when he discovered that it was to be a Readjuster love feast. Along with other bolters, he signed an address in which the Straightouts decried "the unjust, unfair and injurious intermeddling of white Readjusters" and called for Republicans to "act in the coming [gubernatorial] contest as a party." Eastern Shore Readjusters appreciated the importance of Taylor and Toy, but they regarded Carter as the key player. They told Mahone that "Peter is king with our colored people" and that he "has more influence with the Republican voters of the First Congressional District than any man in the district." Readjuster success in eastern Virginia depended on Carter's seduction or destruction.⁵⁴

After the Petersburg convention, Carter traveled to Richmond where he conferred with Williams C. Wickham. Returning to Northampton, he organized in early April a Republican convention to nominate candidates for the May elections of county officers. To the Readjusters'

⁵⁴Carlton R. Moore to WM, December 16, 1880, June 6, 1881, Severn P. Nottingham to WM, April 29, John R. Waddy and Nottingham to WM, April 30, John J. Wise to WM, May 4, Edgar J. Spady to WM, May 5, in William T. Fitchett to WM, May 5, George B. Mason to WM, June, Fitchett to WM, August 4 (third quote), Ambrose S. Taylor to WM, September 29 (second quote), An Address to the Republicans of Virginia and our Sympathisers Beyond the Borders of this Commonwealth, March (first quote), 1881, Scrapbook 17, WM Papers, Duke.

consternation, the Republican ticket included a pair of Funders--Thomas A. Downes, present member of the House of Delegates, for a supervisor's post and Edward D. Pitts, a young man of prominent family, for clerk of the court. The Pitts nomination clearly was an attack on William T. Fitchett, incumbent clerk and one of the county's leading Readjusters. Fitchett felt confident that he could beat Pitts in a head-to-head race, but, because the Funder organization planned to place a third candidate in the field, he believed himself doomed to defeat. Fitchett considered it obvious that Carter and the Funders had cooperated to embarrass him and the Readjusters, and he wanted the guilty parties taught a lesson. On April 16, he suggested to Mahone that George R. Pitts, a Funder and brother of Edward Pitts, should be replaced as postmaster at Eastville. Eleven days later, the Post Office Department removed Pitts in favor of a Readjuster.⁵⁵

The decapitation of George Pitts thoroughly dismayed the Straightouts. "It is a bomb in their camp," an Eastville Readjuster chortled. Hoping to have the department's order rescinded, Carter, Taylor, and

⁵⁵John R. Waddy to William E. Cameron, April 9, William T. Fitchett to WM, April 16, May 5, Severn P. Nottingham to John S. Wise, April 17, Carlton R. Moore to WM, April 17, May 9, 10, Post Office Department Notice, April 27, 1881, WM Papers, Duke; Northampton County Bible Records, ESPL, VII, 96.

Toy hastened in early May to Washington where they had a series of unsatisfactory interviews with administration officials and with Senator Mahone. They returned to the Eastern Shore much diminished in prestige. By the end of May, Fitchett had lost the election for the clerkship to Edward Pitts, but the Eastern Shore Readjusters had won their war with the Straightouts.⁵⁸

In mid-June Carter held a number of meetings with leading Readjusters of Northampton County. He told them that he was ready to cooperate and that he would work to prevent the Republican state convention scheduled for early August in Lynchburg from making a nomination for governor. He complained that the Funders, while offering him covert aid should he mount a Straightout candidacy for the House of Delegates, intended to make the color line the overriding issue of the campaign. Carter also hinted at the appropriate reward for his conversion. He pointed out that Accomac and Northampton counties were part of the internal revenue district that included the Eastern Shore of Maryland, suggested that Senator Mahone might assist in creating a separate collectorship for the Virginia counties, and intimated

⁵⁸John R. Waddy and Severn P. Nottingham to WM, April 30 (quote), James H. Marr to WM, April 30, and WM to William T. Fitchett, April 30, in Fitchett to WM, May 5, John J. Wise to WM, May 4, Nottingham to John S. Wise, May 4, Nottingham to WM, May 18, Carlton R. Moore to WM, May 10, June 6, 1881, WM Papers, Duke.

that he was the man for the job.⁵⁷

On August 3 Carter made public his change of faith when he addressed a mass meeting of Northampton Republicans gathered to elect delegates to the Lynchburg convention. Fitchett reported that Carter's speech

did credit to his head and heart, and full and entire justice to the great cause of Re-adjustment. . . . [He] Bade a farewell to funders and funderism forever. . . . I never heard a political party more completely ridiculed and used up generally than the Funder party was by him in his speech. He knew something of their 'by ways' and 'short cuts' and he did not fail to expose them in the most glaring terms.

The meeting responded by selecting Carter and a sympathetic scalawag as its delegates to the convention. Carter's influence also was felt in Accomac where, despite Thomas W. Taylor's best efforts, only one of the county's three convention delegates favored fielding a Straightout ticket.⁵⁸

The defection of Peter J. Carter to the Readjusters was only one of many losses that the Virginia Straightouts suffered during the summer of 1881. Mahone's skillful manipulation of the patronage and the attraction of black Republicans to readjustment were much to blame for the Straightout's troubles, but so too

⁵⁷John R. Waddy to WM, June 18, June 24, Severn P. Nottingham to WM, June 25, William T. Fitchett to WM, July 12, 1881, WM Papers, Duke.

⁵⁸Fitchett to WM, August 4, John R. Waddy to WM, August 4, Severn P. Nottingham to WM, October 17, 1881, ibid.

was the grievous wounding of President Garfield by an assassin on July 2. In anticipation that Vice President Arthur, a zealous Mahone supporter, would soon ascend to the presidency, several high-ranking administration officials and their subordinates in Virginia threw their support behind the Readjusters. In mid-July nearly one hundred prominent Virginia Republicans issued a call for coalition, and by the eve of the Lynchburg convention four of the commonwealth's five internal revenue collectors, as well as the postmasters of Norfolk and Richmond, had defected to the insurgents. The convention demonstrated the strength of coalition sentiment. Amid great acrimony, the meeting split into separate camps. The coalitionist conclave attracted the greater number of delegates, and it endorsed the Readjuster ticket. The Straightout splinter insisted on nominating Williams Wickham for governor, but Wickham, realizing the hopelessness of the situation, declined the honor.⁵⁹

Peter Carter came home from Lynchburg anxious to continue his work for the Readjuster cause. He accepted speaking engagements in Accomac County and on the Western Shore, but he devoted most of his time to organizing clubs of black voters in his native

⁵⁹Moore, Two Paths to the New South, p. 80; New York Times, July 25, August 4, 1881; Richmond State, August 9, 10, 11, 1881.

Northampton. So tireless were his labors that Readjuster county chairman John R. Waddy felt compelled to plead on his behalf for the collectorship. In early October Mahone promised Carter that the office soon would be his, and at mid-month the Senator learned from an Eastville correspondent that "Northampton will give us a sold col[ored] vote for our ticket. Not one will vote against us."⁶⁰

The Lynchburg convention left Carter's erstwhile allies George Toy and Thomas W. Taylor in an uncomfortable predicament. They had wanted the convention to nominate a Straightout ticket and thus had put themselves in bad odor with Mahone and the Readjusters. If they kept to the Straightout path they would be without influence and, perhaps, without position. They therefore told local Readjusters that, if Mahone would assure them that they would not be "molested in their offices," they would work for the insurgents. They also attempted to undercut Carter by intimating that the black leader and the Funders planned to revive their old scheme of placing Carter at the head

⁶⁰Peter J. Carter to WM, August 25, September 4, 9, John R. Waddy to WM, September 6, 29, October 5, William Lamb to WM, September 23, J. M. M. Allan to WM, October 15, William T. Fitchett to WM, October 16, Severn P. Nottingham to WM, October 17 (quote), Nathaniel B. Meade to WM, October 27, 1881, WM Papers, Duke.

of a Straightout legislative ticket.⁶¹

Well aware that a poor man like Carter was might be vulnerable to Funder bribes, Fitchett and Waddy interviewed the black leader on a Sunday in mid-October. Carter indignantly denied that he was a candidate, and he composed for the Readjusters a public statement in which he declared that "all who circulate reports [to that effect] do so for the purpose of injuring the cause of Readjustment." Immediately after his encounter with Fitchett and Waddy, Carter further demonstrated his loyalty to the Readjuster cause by making a swing through Accomac County where some "lukewarmness" had been reported among the blacks. Along with William F. Giddings, a white Republican from Chesterfield County, he held rallies at Accomac Court House and at points in the upper county. "The colored voters have been holding off," a New Church insurgent observed, "but since Peter Carter has been up amongst them they appear to be all right."⁶²

⁶¹George E. Winder to WM, August 8, William H. Parker to WM, August 31 (quote), Severn P. Nottingham to WM, September 5, October 17, Goodwyn G. Joynes to WM, October 14, John W. H. Parker and William H. Parker to WM, October 15, 1881, WM Papers, Duke.

⁶²John Brittingham to WM, October 4, 24 (second quote), John J. Wise, October 10, 24, Peter J. Carter to William T. Fitchett et al., October 16 (first quote), in Fitchett to WM, October 16, Fitchett to WM, October 16, William F. Giddings to James D. Brady, October 21, 1881, WM Papers, Duke; PE, October 20, 1881.

A few days before the Republicans met in Lynchburg, the Funders held their convention in Richmond. There they chose as their gubernatorial candidate that exemplar of post-Civil War Virginia chivalry--John W. Daniel of Lynchburg. Daniel was a handsome man who walked with a limp from a wound sustained in Confederate service. He was renowned for his personal magnetism and for his emotional eloquence on the stump. Daniel had strenuously opposed the passage of the Funding Act, but, once it became law, he just as strenuously maintained that Virginia's honor depended on the faithful fulfillment of its provisions. Along the way he even made the unfortunate remark that "it were better for the State to burn the schools" than to cheat the creditors out of a penny. Daniel's conscience was not so tender, however, that it prevented him from aiding other Conservative politicians like Bradley T. Johnson in their attempts to disfranchise blacks or defraud independents. To his friends he appeared the **very** soul of honor; to his enemies he seemed a stuffed shirt committed to the suspect ethical code of lawyers and stockjobbers. The platform on which he ran might have appealed to his sense of the ironic (had he one). The Funders pledged to use all "lawful and constitutional means" to effect a debt settlement, guaranteed full funding of the public schools, and

called for biracial jury service and fair elections.⁶³

Some Funder leaders were less disingenuous. John W. Edmonds, Accomac Funder chairman, urged the convention to abandon the party's policy of temporizing over the debt and equivocating over race:

If we mean to deal fairly with the creditors of the State, let the Convention say so in language too plain to be wrested into any other meaning. . . . Let us trust that the well merited contempt which has everywhere been heaped upon this petty device of political trickery--this humiliating confession of the inability of Virginia statesmen to rise to the level of honest dealing with their constituents on a great question--will insure from this Convention some definite pledge of fair treatment to the creditors of the State, involving, of course, a plan for raising the means necessary to its redemption.

Lastly and mainly let the Convention set the seal of its condemnation upon any alliance, for whatever purpose, which will give the political control of this State to the negroes. . . . Henceforth let us incur neither the ignominy of making promises which we intend to break, nor of having to keep promises with certain consequences of social and political degradation. If this is to be a white man's government, let it henceforth be party treason in a Democrat, for any purpose, to attempt to make it otherwise.

The state Funder leaders had not the intellectual honesty nor the political courage to heed Edmonds's counsel on the debt, but, as the 1881 campaign progressed, they did draw the color line. Forgetting their own earlier flirtation with black voters, they attacked Mahone as a power-mad demagogue and his

⁶³Richmond State, August 3, 4, 5, 1881; Daniel quoted in Richmond Whig, December 3, 1880, in C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), p. 61; Pearson, The Readjuster Movement, p. 140.

lieutenants as unprincipled adventurers who in their lust for state and federal office would sell out Virginia to Black Republicanism. "IF YOU VOTE FOR THE CAMERON TICKET," Edmonds thundered on election day,

You vote yourself and your State a Repudiator. You vote for mixed schools and mixed marriages in the future. You take the African side in Cameron's war on your own race. You vote that maimed Confederate soldiers must be kicked out of office to make room for negroes. You vote to perpetuate strife in Virginia. . . . You reject the National Democracy and embrace your enemies.⁸⁴

Eastern Shore Funders enjoyed ample means of disseminating their message. The peninsula's heretofore lone newspaper, the Onancock Eastern Virginian, had been joined in the first half of 1881 by the Eastville Eastern Shore Herald and the Accomac Court House Peninsula Enterprise. All three supported the Funders. Indeed, the Peninsula Enterprise, edited by John Edmonds, was little more than a Funder propaganda sheet. Edmonds and his ink-stained brethren filled the columns of their papers with exhortation and invective and with biased accounts of speeches and debates. They also reminded their readers of election regulations and of party gatherings and informed them of the activities of Daniel clubs and of the speaking schedules of local

⁸⁴PE, July 28 (first quote), August 11, 18, 25, September 15, 22, 29, October 13, 20, 27, November 3 (second quote), 1881; William H. Parker to WM, March 17, T. H. Bayly Browne to WM, April 21, October 9, Severn P. Nottingham to WM, June 25, 1881, WM Papers, Duke; Pearson, The Readjuster Movement, p. 140.

canvassers and visiting orators. The numerous native speakers did yeoman work, holding forth to small gatherings at seemingly every crossroad and wharf on the peninsula. The visiting dignitaries delivered their addresses in the more substantial villages before crowds attracted by the traditional conviviality of court day or by the promise of a barbecue or an oyster roast. The climax of Daniel's election-eve tour of the two counties was a "grand Barbecue" at Eastville.⁶⁵

The local Funder leaders sought to supplement Daniel's appeal with that of a strong legislative ticket. Worried that the present legislators (one of whom was Edmonds) were considered by undecided voters as too extreme in their debt-paying proclivities, the leaders jettisoned the incumbents by substituting a convention for the customary primary. The maneuver caused some hard feelings but nevertheless resulted in the nomination of attractive candidates. The convention tapped Dr. Frank Fletcher of Jenkins Bridge in upper Accomac County for the State Senate and Dr. John T. Wilkins of Franktown in upper Northampton for one of the two seats in the House of Delegates. Although veteran

⁶⁵James Egbert Mears, "Virginia Eastern Shore Newspapers, Past and Present," ESPL; PE, August 18, 25, September 1, 8, 15, 22, October 6, 20, 27, 1881; November 3, 1881, Bessie Gunter Diary, 1880-1881, ESPL; T. H. Bayly Browne to WM, October 13, John R. Waddy to WM, October 13, 1881, WM Papers, Duke; November 1, 1881, Van Ness Journals, ESPL.

Conservatives, neither had served as a party spokesman or had previously sought elective office. Both were respected community leaders who resided in areas that the Funder chieftains considered politically volatile. However, lest the nomination of these relative neophytes prove that for the Eastern Shore Funders the past was really past, the convention selected for the second seat in the House of Delegates William P. M. Kellam, disgraced former register of the state land office. Kellam recently had returned to his native Accomac to practice law. "He has stopped drinking," his brother reported, "which is a great blessing to him and his family."⁸⁶

In their quest for victory, Kellam and his associates played their usual tricks. During the campaign, they funded the activities of black Straightouts and, on election day, they bought black votes with cash and liquor. "The Funders had money aplenty," observed Peter J. Carter, "& they did not fail to use it."⁸⁷

Eastern Shore Readjusters were better organized in 1881 than in previous years. They formed county

⁸⁶PE, July 28, September 1, 8, 1881; Stewart Kellam to W. W. Wing, April 7 (quote), Severn P. Nottingham to WM, September 5, 1881, WM Papers, Duke.

⁸⁷PE, September 29, 1881; Carter to WM, November 9, 1881, John J. Wise to WM, October 13, 1882, Leonard Treherne to WM, September 18, 1885, WM Papers, Duke.

committees and compiled lists of potential voters arranged by party preference. They placed in the field a full legislative ticket, nominating for the State Senate Thomas A. Northam, an Onancock merchant, and for the House of Delegates John Brittingham, a prosperous farmer from New Church in upper Accomac County, and George E. Winder, a well-liked hotel keeper from Pungoteague in lower Accomac. In community standing the slate was the equal of its Funder counterpart. Although the Readjusters suffered from the absence of a sympathetic local newspaper, they partially overcame their handicap by freely distributing the Richmond Whig and issues of the Congressional Record containing Mahone's speeches. They also brought in party bigwigs William E. Cameron, Robert A. Richardson, and John S. Wise to deliver addresses at various points on the peninsula.⁸⁸

Wise provided the insurgents with what they considered the most gratifying moment of the campaign when on August 29 he met Congressman George T. Garrison

⁸⁸Stewart Kellam to W. W. Wing, April 7, T. H. Bayly Browne to WM, April 21, September 26, October 9, 28, Charles L. Byrd et al. to WM, April 27, Frank Hoskins to WM, April 30, William T. Fitchett to William E. Cameron, July 12, Fitchett to WM, July 12, Accomack County Committee of Re-Adjusters, August, William H. Parker to editor of the Richmond Whig, August 26, John R. Waddy to William C. Elam, September 16, Waddy to WM, September 29, October 13, George E. Winder to WM, September 30, John Brittingham to WM, October 24, 1881, WM Papers, Duke.

in debate at Accomac Court House. Garrison was as good a stump speaker and debater as any man in the First District, but his windy eloquence was no match for Wise's more muscular style. Wise was acidic, quick-witted, and possessed of a long memory. A warm and amiable man much loved by his friends, he nevertheless was hot-tempered and utterly fearless, as likely to resent an insult with a slap to the face as with a witty retort. His speeches were invariably interesting and his debates electric with excitement and anticipation. His opponents respected his abilities. A Staunton Funder once complimented him on delivering "the smartest, most adroit, dangerous, & meanest speech against funders that ever had been made in that town."⁸⁹

Garrison opened the joint discussion. He wasted little time on the debt issue, concentrating instead on the Readjuster alliance with the Republicans. He accused the Readjusters of being ambitious officeseekers who, having failed to convince the white electorate of their merits, were now attempting "to ride into power on the backs of the blacks." The insurgency, he continued, was merely a disguise under which Mahone and his followers intended to Africanize Virginia and break

⁸⁹Wise to WM, May 27, 1880 (quote), WM Papers, Duke. See Campbell, "John Sergeant Wise"; and Curtis Carroll Davis, "Very Well-Rounded Republican: The Several Lives of John S. Wise," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 71 (1963), pp. 461-487.

the Solid South. Wise replied that "the man who brings up an issue of races should be stuck through the body and buried at the cross-roads." He said that in politics he knew no distinction between black and white. He did not, however, subscribe to a theory of social equality. Indeed, many white men "could not cross legs under his mahogany." Wise also impaled the hobgoblin of party regularity. He declared that he was not a Republican, or a Democrat, but a Readjuster. He called on his fellow Virginians to abandon the party labels and financial vassalage of the past, to repudiate the corruption and incompetence of the Funder regime, and to welcome a new era of education, development, and prosperity.⁷⁰

While acknowledging that Wise had "presented a bad cause perhaps as well as any one could have done," John W. Edmonds awarded the contest to Garrison. Eastern Shore Readjusters formed a different opinion. "It was a complete victory for us," an Eastville insurgent declared.

Johnny was himself, his argument was unanswerable, he poured hot shot into Garrison & the Funder ranks for over two hours with telling effect. He received hearty & frequent applause from white & black, and from what I could see and hear gained many converts to our cause. I heard many voters say that they had voted with the Funders last year but would not vote

⁷⁰PE, September 1, 1881.

with them again.⁷¹

Wise and other visiting orators generated much enthusiasm on the Eastern Shore, but good leadership was necessary to exploit it. Such leadership was more evident in Northampton County than in Accomac. Northampton Chairman John R. Waddy and his friend William T. Fitchett were vigorous and attentive to detail. They anticipated problems, and in time of crisis they saw opportunity as well as danger. Accomac Chairman John W. H. Parker, on the other hand, often was flustered by events, and his style of leadership was more appropriate to a majority party than to an insurgency. He too often worked through intermediaries, and he lacked aggressiveness and a sense of urgency. "We lack but one thing and that is action." observed an Accomac man the day after Wise's speech. "The breach has been made here and it ought to be kept open. . . . There are plenty of Re-Adjusters here, but they lack back-bone, they need to be started, and encouraged." State Senate candidate John Brittingham decried Parker's failure to recruit local canvassers. "The funders are making a dead effort to carry this county, using money

⁷¹Edmonds in Ibid.; William T. Fitchett to WM, August 30, T. H. Bayly Browne to WM, August 30, George E. Winder to WM, August 30, John W. H. Parker to WM, August 31, William H. Parker to WM, August 31, John J. Wise to WM, September 1, John R. Waddy to WM, September 1, Severn P. Nottingham to WM, September 5 (quote), 1881, WM Papers, Duke.

and abusing the Readjusters, and keeping the ignorant people undecided how to vote, going to every corner to speak and we have no one to reply to them," he complained. The Accomac leadership thoroughly disgusted William F. Giddings, the white Republican who accompanied Peter J. Carter on his tour of the upper peninsula. "There is a great deal of latent Readjuster feeling through this county," Giddings told a friend,

and with a bold and energetic leader and efficient organizer the county could have been made to give 500 majority for the ticket. But not one of the leaders or candidates have a bit of moral courage & hardly dare say their souls . . . in the presence of one of the funder leaders or in a funder crowd. Peter Carter has more pluck & political ability than the whole pile.⁷²

One of William Mahone's strengths was his ability to judge men, and he soon took the measure of John W. H. Parker. Mahone therefore came to rely less on the county chairman for advice and political intelligence than on John J. Wise and T. H. Bayly Browne, alert and hardheaded Readjusters of Accomac Court House. Browne was a cousin of John S. Wise and a grandson and great-grandson of congressmen. At age seventeen he enlisted in the Confederate Army, serving for the duration of the war as a private soldier in the Stuart Horse Artillery.

⁷²R. A. King to WM, April 8, John E. Bradford to WM, July 18, 25, January 23, 1882, George E. Winder to WM, August 8, T. H. Bayly Browne to WM, August 30 (first quote), Giddings to James D. Brady, October 21, Brittingham to WM, October 4, 24 (quote), 1881, WM Papers, Duke.

In 1867 he graduated from the law department of the University of Virginia and returned to the Eastern Shore where in the early 1870s he served a term as commonwealth's attorney. Browne drank too much but when sober was an indefatigable worker. In 1881 he organized a "Mahone Club" at Accomac Court House and met Funder orators in debate.⁷³

John J. Wise, another cousin of John S. Wise, was educated at Indiana University and at the University of Maryland. In 1857 he began the practice of medicine at Accomac Court House and during the war years served the Confederacy as a military surgeon. In the immediate postbellum period he twice won election as county treasurer. Wise was known for both his benevolence and his irascibility. An ardent secessionist, he had once knocked a Unionist senseless with a loaded cane. A man who knew him after the war later recalled that "when angered [Wise] could almost shoot fire. . . . His swearing was sulphurous and almost musical." The man also recalled that Wise's violet-blue eyes were "the kindest . . . anybody ever saw" and that "having no money was no excuse for not calling him. Pay or no pay he wanted nobody to suffer for need of his attention."

⁷³Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1971 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1971), p. 653; Browne to WM, April 21, October 9, 13, 26, 1881, WM Papers, Duke.

In 1881 a number of Readjusters urged that the popular physician head the party's legislative ticket. Wise declined, citing the demands of his practice.⁷⁴

Mahone was an admirer of John J. Wise. He had known the doctor since their days in the Petersburg trenches and in 1879 had unsuccessfully attempted to persuade him to assume the Accomac chairmanship. Mahone now entrusted Wise with a task that logically should have gone to Parker. He gave him the control over the federal patronage in the county. Wise found the task congenial. During the campaign, he had a half dozen "stinking" Bourbon funder" postmasters removed from office in favor of Readjusters. Meanwhile, Peter J. Carter effected the removal of two other Funder postmasters in Northampton. Unhappily for Carter and Wise, because of Garfield's edict, they were unable to reach even the most recalcitrant of Republican officeholders. Nor were they able to force Sumner I. Kimball, head of the Life-Saving Service, to withdraw his protection from hard-bitten Funder Benjamin S. Rich,

⁷⁴Betty Belle DeCormis, "Glimpses of Medical Progress on the Eastern Shore," PE, July 29, 1938; John S. Wise Jr., "Memories of Accomac, 1890," PE, August 21, 1937 (quote); J. G. Potts, Address to the People of Accomac and Northampton in General, and Particularly to the Mechanics, Tenants and Laborers (Baltimore: Bull & Tuttle, 1862); PE, March 23, 1895; Severn P. Nottingham to John S. Wise, April 17, George E. Winder to WM, August 30, John J. Wise to WM, October 31, 1881, WM Papers, Duke.

superintendent of the Eastern Shore's large Life-Saving establishment.⁷⁵

Besides wielding the patronage ax, Wise aided the Readjuster cause by helping to meet local campaign expenses. Mahone also made a generous contribution, but Readjusters on the Eastern Shore, as elsewhere in Virginia, realized that to win the election they needed an influx of additional monies to pay the poll tax of their delinquent supporters, most of whom were black. During the summer, John S. Wise, James D. Brady, and other Mahone associates made fruitless attempts to beg funds from Northern Republican politicians and financiers. In late August Wise reported that New York banker Isaac Seligman "says we must wait until the President dies. . . . He concluded by saying 'Now I'm

⁷⁵William T. Fitchett to WM, January 1, 1880, John W. H. Parker to WM, May 4, John J. Wise to WM, May 12 (quote), 16, August 15, Post Office Department Notices, May 25, June 6, 16, August 10, 25, 26, November 7, James H. Marr to WM, June 9, Wilbur F. Nottingham to WM, October 31, in Peter J. Carter to WM, October 31, Carter to WM, October 31, 1881, WM Papers, Duke. For the attempt to remove Rich see George Toy to Sumner I. Kimball, April 18, Edgar J. Spady to Kimball, April 18, John R. Waddy to WM, April 18, June 18, August 2, Severn P. Nottingham and William T. Fitchett to Kimball, April 19, William H. Parker to WM, April 21, Jesse N. Jarvis to WM, April 22, May 1, newspaper clipping, April 23, in Waddy and Nottingham to Wm, April 30, WM to Kimball, April 23, John J. Wise to WM, May 2, George B. Mason to WM, June, John E. Bradford to WM, August 17, 1881, WM Papers, Duke; and Ira A. Allen to William Windom, April 23, Memorandum on Benjamin S. Rich, May, 1881, Rich File, Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Record Group 26, National Archives.

with you, but this is no time. Go home. Trust me. And don't return until this is over."⁷⁶

It was over on September 19 when Garfield finally died from the assassin's bullet. Within a month, his successor, Chester A. Arthur, had thrown the full weight of the presidency behind the Readjusters. Arthur turned all the federal patronage in Virginia--around 2,000 jobs--over to Mahone and warned officeholders to cooperate with the insurgents or face dismissal. As object lesson, several Straightout internal revenue officers were decapitated. The Republican National Committee became involved on behalf of the Readjusters. Revenue officers across the United States were asked to contribute, and Brady, as State Republican Chairman, assessed local officeholders at 2 per cent. Meanwhile, Don Cameron and other Northern leaders persuaded Republican fatcats to fill Readjuster coffers. By late October, Mahone had money enough to pay delinquent poll taxes in all of Virginia. Accomac County alone received

⁷⁶Wise to WM, August 26 (quote), 28, Severn P. Nottingham to WM, September 5, Goodwyn G. Joynes to WM, October 14, John R. Waddy to WM, October 14, William F. Giddings to James D. Brady, October 21, John W. H. Parker to WM, October 24, John Brittingham to WM, October 24, 1881, John J. Wise to WM, October 13, 1882, WM Papers, Duke; Campbell, "John Sergeant Wise," pp. 112-114; Blake, William Mahone, pp. 214-215.

around \$900.⁷⁷

The Readjuster-Republican coalition swept to victory in the elections of 1881. The coalition captured both houses of the legislature, and William E. Cameron, the Readjuster gubernatorial candidate, defeated John W. Daniel, his Funder opponent, 113,464 votes to 100,757. Cameron ran well in the lily-white Southwest and in the overwhelmingly black counties below the James River. Statewide, he received about one-third of the white vote.⁷⁸

On the Eastern Shore Cameron carried black-majority Northampton 930 votes to 760, but in Accomac, where whites composed 66 per cent of the electorate, he lost to Daniel, 1,447 to 2,064. In the legislative races on the peninsula, the Funder majority in Accomac doomed the Readjuster ticket to defeat. The coalition vote on the Eastern Shore fell 111 ballots behind the combined Republican-Readjuster total of 1880. Republican absences or defections more than accounted for the

⁷⁷Hirshson, Farewell to the Bloody Shirt, pp. 106-107; Richmond State, September 28, October 4, 7, 12, 1881; Nation 33 (September 22, 1881), p. 223; John W. Johnston, "Repudiation in Virginia," North American Review 134 (1882), p. 157; Cooper and Fenton, American Politics, I, 264; Moore, Two Paths to the New South, 81-82; John R. Waddy to WM, October 24, John W. H. Parker to WM, October 26, T. H. Bayly Browne to WM, October 26, John J. Wise to WM, October 31, 1881, James T. Rapier to WM, May 3, 1882, WM Papers, Duke; PE, November 3, 10, 1881.

⁷⁸Guide to U.S. Elections, p. 532; James T. Moore, "Black Militancy in Readjuster Virginia," p. 181.

decline. Northampton Readjuster Chairman John R. Waddy lamented that 150 blacks dredging for oysters in Chesapeake Bay were prevented by rough weather from returning to the county in time to vote. In Accomac, the Janus-faced Thomas W. Taylor dampened Republican enthusiasm for readjustment. Indeed, in Taylor's hometown of Onancock 75 blacks reportedly voted the Funder ticket. Meanwhile, on Tangier Island, irregularities at the polls caused the disqualification of that Republican stronghold's entire vote which included 30 to 40 ballots cast for the Readjuster candidates.⁷⁹

The 1881 returns indicated that the coalition depended on its Republican wing for 80 per cent of its strength. Of the 2,373 coalition voters, around 1,825 were black Republicans, 100 white Republicans, and 450 Readjusters. Together, the white Republicans and the Readjusters accounted for about 17 per cent of the white electorate. Waddy believed that the Readjuster candidates would have received more white votes in Northampton County had not the Funders so skillfully drawn the color line. "Now & then," he told Mahone, "a white Readjuster . . . allowed himself to be over awed &

⁷⁹Warrock-Richardson Almanack, 1882, p. 30; Warrock-Richardson Almanack, 1883, p. 30; PE, November 10, 1881; Arthur Watson to WM, November 14, John R. Waddy to WM, December 1, 1881, John E. Bradford to WM, January 23, 1882, WM Papers, Duke.

bulldozed on the eve of the election, which was, in part attributable to the spread eagle display and exhibition made of & by Maj. Daniel just one week before election at Eastville." Accomac Readjusters also acknowledged the effectiveness of the Funder appeal to race ("It was the nigger, represented in every phase of social equality that could be imagined to drive off the whites," a Locustmount storekeeper complained), but they placed most of the blame for their defeat on the malign influence of Thomas Taylor and Benjamin Rich and on the poor quality of their own leadership. "I told you last winter that with proper management Accomac would vote Readjuster," an Onancock Republican reminded Mahone,

and my prediction would have been verified had any considerable effort been made. Neither of the candidates for the Legislature and Senate could take the stump, nor were they capable of making a strong canvass. They were good men but wanting in tact and experience. And outside of the candidates there was very little done, while on the funder side nothing was left undone that could advance their interests. The consequence was that a large number of Readjusters did not vote, or were induced to vote the funder ticket. It is now admitted that if the election was to be held to-day the county would vote Readjuster.⁸⁰

⁸⁰Warrock-Richardson Almanack, 1882, p. 30;
Warrock-Richardson Alamanack, 1883, p. 30; Arthur Watson to WM, November 14 (third quote), Carlton R. Moore to WM, November 14, George E. Winder to WM, November 17, John E. Bradford to WM, November 23 (second quote), 1881, January 23, 1882, Waddy to WM, December 1, 1881, Return of the Registered Vote for First Congressional District, October, 1882, WM Papers, Duke. Of the 595 white Eastern Shoremen whose political preferences are known, 203 (34%) were coalitionists ("Politicians" [see Appendix II, Table A1]). On the other hand, a close

Even before the 1881 campaign was over, William Mahone had resolved not to let the victory won at the polls slip from his grasp in the corrupt atmosphere of Richmond's saloons, hotels, and capitol corridors. In September he secured from Readjuster legislative candidates a written pledge to support the measures of the party caucus. As John S. Wise later explained: "We knew the fate of prior legislatures elected by the people to settle the debt, but [being] unorganized, were duped and seduced into follies worse than crimes. We knew that adherents of the Funder party, this party of high moral talk, has boasted of the favor of the bondholders' money to seduce and corrupt the Readjuster majority." After the election was won, Mahone remained on guard against the Funder jezebel. In late November, he held a conference of selected Readjuster leaders at which he outlined an agenda for the party caucus, and, when the legislature convened a couple of weeks later, he took over the capitol office of the public printer from which he kept a watchful eye on Readjuster

examination of eleven Accomac County precinct poll books surviving from the congressional elections of 1882 indicates that if every black voted the coalition ticket (highly unlikely) only 11 per cent of the whites voting at the precincts were coalitionists (see Appendix III). All evidence considered, the coalitionists probably accounted for slightly fewer than two of every ten white voters. This proportion seems to have been maintained throughout the rest of the period under consideration.

initiatives.⁸¹

Under Mahone's tight discipline, the Readjusters enacted an extensive program of reforms. They repudiated a third of the state debt, reduced the interest on the remainder from 6 to 3 per cent, and made extremely difficult the use of coupons for the payment of taxes. They slashed the tax rate on real estate from fifty to forty cents per hundred and reduced the levy on liquors. They provided for the collection of delinquent taxes and for the speedy settlement of the accounts of defaulting county treasurers. They tripled the taxable value of railroad and other corporate property by ending the pernicious practice of allowing the corporations to assess themselves for tax purposes.⁸²

True to their promise to revitalize the public schools, the Readjusters paid arrearages plus interest to the school fund and increased the annual appropriation by nearly one-half. They also granted generous increases to the state colleges, asylums, and penitentiary. They chartered labor unions and fraternal organizations, provided for the state inspection of

⁸¹Wise quoted in Richmond Daily Whig, September 25, 1883, in Campbell, "John Sergeant Wise," pp. 120-121; Blake, William Mahone, pp. 216-219.

⁸²Moore, Two Paths to the New South, pp. 87-88; Pearson, The Readjuster Movement, p. 144-145; Charles E. Wynes, Race Relations in Virginia, 1870-1902 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1961), pp. 22-23; Maddex, The Virginia Conservatives, p. 148.

fertilizers, and tightened regulations on the bonding of insurance companies. For their black allies, they established near Petersburg the Normal and Collegiate Institute (now Virginia State University) and an asylum for the insane, abolished the whipping post, and provided for a constitutional referendum on the poll tax to be held in November 1882.⁸³

Intent on sweeping away the rotten remnants of the old regime and on rewarding the stalwarts of the new, the Readjusters embarked on a purge of Funder officeholders. They elected H. H. Riddleberger to the United States Senate in place of John W. Johnston. They removed board members and administrators of the state asylums and colleges and replaced them with more reliable, energetic, and innovative men. They retired the state superintendent of education and numerous of his underlings on the local level. They removed various county and circuit judges and, to guarantee the acceptance of the debt settlement, elected a new bench

⁸³Pearson, The Readjuster Movement, pp. 145-147; Moore, Two Paths to the New South, pp. 88-89; Blake, William Mahone, p. 192; Wynes, Race Relations in Virginia, pp. 22-23. The Eastern Shore representatives generally opposed the Readjuster program. However, John T. Wilkins of black-majority Northampton County voted to establish the Normal and Collegiate Institute and to abolish the whipping post (JHD, 1881-1882, p. 353, and JHD, 1882, p. 91). One Funder congressman lamented the passing of the whipping post. He maintained that it had had "a very salutary effect upon the niggers" (New York Tribune, December 15, 1881).

of justices to the State Supreme Court of Appeals.

"The guillotine in France was not more deadly or far-reaching than in political beheading under order of our Marat," wailed a Charlottesville Funder.⁸⁴

The Mahone terror advanced the careers of some Northampton Readjusters. William T. Fitchett replaced Benjamin T. Gunter as judge of the Eastern Shore circuit; Peter J. Carter won election as doorkeeper of the State Senate; and James B. Dalby, a Capeville farmer with a deep commitment to public education, claimed the office of Northampton superintendent of schools.

Accomac insurgents did not fare as well. John W. H. Parker failed to secure a circuit judgeship, and James C. Weaver, Accomac superintendent of schools, retained his position only after being berated by fellow party members for neglecting to take a more active role in the recent campaign.⁸⁵

The Funder minority fought back by trying to

⁸⁴Blake, William Mahone, pp. 216, 221; Moore, Two Paths to the New South, pp. 88-89; Pearson, The Readjuster Movement, pp. 148, 149; James T. Moore, "The University and the Readjusters," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 78 (1970), pp. 87-101; Daylesford to editor, Nation 34 (March 2, 1882), pp. 184-185 (quote).

⁸⁵John W. H. Parker to WM, May 2, November 31, December 3, Samuel T. Ross to WM, November 15, Peter J. Carter to WM, November 24, John R. Waddy to WM, December 1, John E. Bradford to WM, December 2, 1881, January 23, 1882, William T. Fitchett to WM, December 5, Virginus D. Groner to WM, December 29, 1881, WM Papers, Duke; PE, December 1, 15, 22, 1881, January 19, March 23, 1882. Carter had not yet received his internal revenue collectorship.

cripple the legislative process. They filibustered and made numerous quorum calls and motions to adjourn. They also sparked debate on diversionary issues such as the chartering of new railroads and the holding of local referenda on the sale of liquor. The Eastern Shore legislators made their principal contribution to the Funder effort by presenting from their constituents a dozen petitions praying for local option. The motive behind the petitions was not entirely cynical. In response to pervasive public drunkenness, temperance societies had formed on the Eastern Shore in the late 1870s, and the meeting in Charlottesville in December 1881 of a statewide local option convention generated considerable enthusiasm on the peninsula. The Readjuster judge of Accomac County (himself no teetotaler) even turned over his courtroom to a local temperance orator.⁸⁶

In the end obfuscation and delay did the Funders

⁸⁶Moore, Two Paths to the New South, p. 111; July 26, 1876, Van Ness Journals, ESPL; EY, July 27, 1878; PE, December 15, 1881, January 5, 12, 19, 26, February 2, 9, 16, 1882; JHD, 1876-1877, p. 368; JHD, 1877-1878, p. 320; JHD, 1881-1882, pp. 200, 223, 254, 278, 302, 320, 351, 355, 372, 399; JHD, 1882, p. 84; Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Virginia, Extra Session, 1882 (Richmond: Superintendent of Public Printing, 1882), p. 66 (journals for all sessions hereafter cited as JS). During the period 1873-1880, Eastern Shore members of the General Assembly introduced seven petitions calling for local option (JHD, 1872-1873, p. 196; JHD, 1874, p. 181; JHD, 1874-1875, pp. 296-297; JHD, 1879-1880, p. 341; JS, 1874-1875, pp. 187, 197, 263.

little good. They won the occasional victory only when joined by a handful of dissident Readjusters, foremost among whom was John E. Massey. The Baptist parson considered himself the "father" of the Readjuster movement and deeply resented Mahone's appropriation of the chief leadership role. Massey believed himself cheated out of both the gubernatorial nomination and the United States Senate seat claimed by H. H. Riddleberger. He broke openly with his old comrades when Riddleberger informed him that his reelection by the legislature as auditor of public accounts depended on his supporting the decisions of the Readjuster caucus. Massey's fulminations against Mahone and his friends encouraged the independent stance of four Readjuster state senators who, either through qualm of conscience or hope of gain, had refused to take the caucus pledge. The Big Four (as they were called by the grateful Funders) joined with Funder senators to defeat Readjuster bills designed to gerrymander the congressional districts, to replace minor officials such as notaries public and school trustees with Readjusters, and to create a myriad of new patronage jobs--commissioners of judicial land sales for each county, tobacco inspectors, and railroad commissioners possessing the authority to fire railroad

employees.⁸⁷

The failure of the patronage measures hindered Mahone's effort to institutionalize support for the Readjuster machine, but the senator nevertheless could view with satisfaction the results of the campaign and legislative session of 1881-1882. The Readjusters had worked the miracle of a biracial coalition and had gained the wholehearted support of the national administration. They had decisively defeated the Funders at the polls. They had enacted almost the whole of their program and had purged the state government of their enemies. They were proud of their achievement and confident of the future for themselves and for Virginia. The Funders, on the other hand, were bewildered and downcast by unaccustomed defeat. Riddleberger gleefully observed that "the political coast of Virginia is strewn with wrecks, from the 'tall admiral' who undertakes the championship of a State's honor he has done so much to injure, to the petty fishing-smack of the cross-roads politician."⁸⁸

⁸⁷Blake, William Mahone, p. 222; Moore, Two Paths to the New South, pp. 99, 111; John E. Massey, Autobiography of John E. Massey, ed. Elizabeth H. Hancock (New York and Washington: Neale Publishing Company, 1909), p. 204; Campbell, "John Sergeant Wise," pp. 126-128; Morton, History of Virginia, Volume III, pp. 205, 206.

⁸⁸Riddleberger, "Bourbonism in Virginia," p. 426. For the woes of Eastern Shore Funders see PE, November 10, December 8, 1881; November 14, 1881, Bessie Gunter

Diary, 1880-1881, ESPL; and T. H. Bayly Browne to WM,
December 29, 1881, WM Papers, Duke.

FROM INSURGENCY TO INSTITUTION

Having settled the debt, the Readjusters now felt the insistent tug of ancient party ties. Some, including veteran leaders John E. Massey and Abram Fulkerson, returned early in 1882 to the Conservative fold. Most Conservative Readjusters, however, balked at the idea of reunion with their Funder antagonists. They remembered too vividly the bitter calumnies of recent campaigns. "I have suffered persecution the most violent, slander the vilest & round about, abuse the most vindictive," complained a Northampton insurgent. More important, they believed that a resumption of the old politics would be a betrayal of Virginia. In a letter to William Mahone, an Accomac man confessed his hatred of the Funders, revealed his hope for the future, and proclaimed his fealty to his leader:

There is not a man in Va. that would feel prouder and happier than I would if Va. would go right, not only for her welfare and future prosperity, but as well to see these stinking Funders have meted out to them the just deserts for the tyranny and ostracism they have so lavishly practised. Yes, my dear General, I would be the recipient of a pleasure too great for words to measure--it cannot be put into verbal shape nor can it be written. I can only feel it, and I shall use every energy to accomplish that result, the only road Old Va. can travel to prosperity. Would to God that Va. was to-day in

your hands--then her destiny would be safe and she would soon occupy her rightful place.¹

The Republican wing of the insurgent coalition also held firm. The Readjusters had defended the right of their black Republican allies to an untrammelled franchise, had included them in their counsels, and had given them offices, schools, a college, and an asylum. "Our allegiance," declared a committee of black politicians, "is due to the party and the people who are willing, and who have shown that willingness by their acts, to give us the SAME CHANCE IN THE RACE OF LIFE THAT OTHER MEN HAVE." President Chester A. Arthur's continued recognition of the Readjusters also helped hold the coalition together. A Northern Neck man observed that for the blacks "the will of the administration at Washington is the law."²

Not all national Republicans supported Arthur's alliance with the Readjusters. The Mugwumps, already apoplectic that the president would tacitly endorse

¹James B. Dalby to William Mahone (hereafter cited as WM), December 5, 1881 (first quote), Carlton R. Moore to WM, February 8, Richard F. Walker to WM, February 10, Abram Fulkerson to William C. Elam, May 24, John S. Wise to WM, July 28, John E. Bradford to WM, September 6, 1882 (second quote), WM Papers, Duke University, Durham, N.C.

²"An Address to the Colored Voters of the State of Virginia," in U.S. Congress, Senate, Report Upon Danville, Virginia. Riot, November 3, 1883, Senate Report 579, 48th Congress, 1st session, 1884, p. 788; William Mayo to WM, September 8, 1882, WM Papers, Duke.

repudiation, were further stricken when Mahone proved an enthusiastic manipulator of the federal patronage.

"Senator Mahone is said to be carrying the 'boss system' to the highest pitch of perfection in Virginia, and to be using the power of the patronage, with the consent of the Administration, in the most unscrupulous way,"

groaned the Nation. Ironically, also opposing Mahone was the bete noire of the Mugwumps, former Secretary of State James G. Blaine. Although Blaine loathed repudiators, his animus toward the Readjusters was now principally motivated by ambition. He desperately wanted to be President, and he knew that Mahone and his followers were bound to support Arthur in 1884. Blaine therefore encouraged the Virginia Straightouts in their attempt to undermine the coalition. Despite their best efforts, Blaine and the Mugwumps failed to do the Readjusters much harm. Their influence was more than offset by the good offices of Mahone's powerful friends in the Republican establishment. The Virginia senator enjoyed the support not only of Arthur's associates in the "Stalwart" wing of the party but also of prominent blacks such as John Mercer Langston and Frederick Douglass and of influential members of Blaine's "Half-Breed" faction, including William Sherman, George Frisbie Hoar, Marshall Jewell, and Secretary of the Navy William E. Chandler, principal manager of the

administration's Southern policy.³

Because Mahone enjoyed Arthur's imprimatur, the control of the patronage, and the allegiance of black Virginians, he was for practical purposes a Republican senator. Over the next couple of years, he gradually led his fellow Readjusters into the Republican Party. For most, the transition was an easy one. They already had embraced Republican tenets of equal political rights, a protective tariff, and aid to education. The Funders claimed that the Republicans had gobbled up the Readjusters, but on the state level quite the reverse was true. Mahone and his lieutenants took over the Virginia Republican Party lock, stock, and barrel. Those Straightouts who did not capitulate were consigned to political oblivion. "It really looks now like the tail is wagging the dog, and Jonah is swallowing the whale," moaned a Northampton scalawag in

³Stanley P. Hirshson, Farewell to the Bloody Shirt: Northern Republicans and the Southern Negro, 1877-1893 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), pp. 108, 109-110, 112-114; Nation 35 (October 26, 1882), p. 346; New York Times, April 14, 1882; Chicago Tribune, September 19, 23, 1882; Washington Post, September 22, 1882; Justus Doenecke, The Presidencies of James A. Garfield & Chester A. Arthur (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1981), p. 52. A reporter observed that "Mr. Blaine's influence with the colored voters in very slight, and . . . leading colored men will call the attention of the colored voters to the fact that Mr. Blaine has never been a prominent friend of their race" (New York Evening Post, October 2, 1882).

1883.⁴ The metamorphosis of Readjusters into Republicans involved more than a change of name. It also involved the transformation of an insurgency sustained by reforming zeal into a professional organization rooted in self-interest and institutional loyalty.

Having guided the Readjuster initiatives through the Virginia legislature, Mahone turned his attention to the congressional elections scheduled for the fall of 1882. He continued to beat the drums for organization. "Thorough and efficient organization is the instrument of success--in war, in business, and in politics," he reiterated. With his habitual assiduity, Mahone concerned himself with every aspect of the campaign. He devised strategy, recruited a corps of speakers, and oversaw the printing of reams of documents. He pressed his local chairmen to identify potential Readjuster voters, to educate them, to pay their capitation tax, and to get them to the polls. When Accomac Readjusters

⁴John S. Wise, "The New South," in The Republican Party: Its History, Principles, and Policies, ed. John D. Long (New York: M. W. Hazen Co., 1888), pp. 316-321; Montgomery (AL) Advertiser, May 4, 1882; Eastville Eastern Shore Herald, April 6, 1883 (quote). "A colored mail agent on the Richmond & Danville Railroad says that the Readjuster Democrats and niggers are having a good time in Virginia, but that it is mighty hard on old fashioned white Republicans" (Greensboro (NC) North State in Raleigh (NC) News & Observer, April 15, 1882).

failed to provide promptly the name of a reliable man to be appointed collector of delinquent taxes for the county, Mahone exploded: "No reply. Great God! What an organization. . . . Think of it!" Mahone helped to finance the canvass by soliciting funds from Northern businessmen and by cracking the patronage whip. To the horror of the Mugwumps, he assessed federal officeholders in Virginia at 5 per cent over and above the 2 per cent already demanded by the Republican Congressional Campaign Committee. Eastern Shore Readjusters used their share of the proceeds to pay poll taxes, to meet the expenses of black leaders, and to charter a sailboat to bring dredgers home to the peninsula in time to vote.⁵

⁵Nelson Morehouse Blake, William Mahone of Virginia: Soldier and Political Insurgent (Richmond: Garrett & Massie, 1935), p. 223-224 (quotes WM); Peter J. Carter to James D. Brady, September 11, John J. Wise to WM, October 13, John R. Waddy to WM, October 14, Brady to C. C. Clarke, December 7, 1882, Samuel T. Ross to Clarke, January 17, John E. Bradford to WM, April 13, 1883, WM to Wise, October 8 (quote), 16, WM to Waddy, October 9, 12, 1882, Letterbook, WM Papers, Duke; Nation 35 (August 31, 1882), p. 165; Richmond State, July 27, 1883; Testimony of Thomas E. Leatherbury, February 14, testimony of John E. Wise, March 1, 1883, in U.S. Congress, House, Testimony and Papers in the Contested-Election Case of George T. Garrison vs. Robert M. Mayo, from the First Congressional District of Virginia, House miscellaneous document 18, 48th Congress, 1st session, 1884, pp. 163, 226-227; Accomac Court House Peninsula Enterprise (hereafter cited as PE), November 2, 1882. For the assessment of Eastern Shore officeholders see WM to Mrs. V. C. Otwell, July 25, WM to R. W. Nottingham, August 1, WM to Willis E. Thompson, August 1, V. C. Otwell to WM, August 14, R. P. Read to WM, August 14, 1882. For another account of the 1882 campaign see

As their primary campaign theme, the Readjusters emphasized their good work for the commonwealth. They reminded the voters that they had settled the debt, rescued the schools, and provided for a referendum on the poll tax. They warned that should the Funders regain power the debt legislation and other reforms would be repealed and that corruption and privilege would again hold sway. The Readjusters also boasted of their ties with the national administration. Aware of a Blaine influence at work among the Straightouts and anxious to remain in Arthur's good graces, in early April Mahone had his newspaper, the Richmond Whig, declare itself an administration organ. "We are for Arthur," proclaimed the Readjusters, "because Arthur is for us."⁶

The 1880 census had entitled Virginia to an additional seat in congress. Because the Readjuster legislature had failed to pass a reapportionment bill, the new member would represent the state at large. In June the Readjusters nominated Mahone's young friend John S. Wise for the at-large seat. Wise was an

Brooks Miles Barnes, "The Congressional Elections of 1882 on the Eastern Shore of Virginia," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 89 (1981), pp. 467-486.

⁶PE, August 31, November 2, 1882; New York Times, April 11, 1882; James Tice Moore, Two Paths to the New South: The Virginia Debt Controversy, 1870-1883 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974), p. 112.

excellent choice. His illustrious name won him recognition in all sections of the commonwealth, his burning ambition made him a tireless campaigner, and his skill as a stump speaker made him a match for anyone that the Funders might send to meet him.⁷

The Readjusters also fielded candidates in each of the nine congressional districts. In the First District (which included Accomac and Northampton counties on the Eastern Shore and fourteen counties and the city of Fredericksburg on the Western Shore), the nomination went to Robert M. Mayo of Westmoreland County. Mayo was something of a trimmer, having been at various times a Conservative and a Republican before becoming a Readjuster in 1880. He brought to his candidacy a distinguished lineage, an admirable war record as a Confederate officer, and considerable wealth, but he also carried the awkward weight of his political vagabondage and of a mental instability exacerbated by heavy drinking. Mayo did not win the nomination easily. The Straightouts, led by former congressional candidate John W. Woltz, attempted to sow discord in the coalition ranks. They reminded Republican coalitionists of their substantial contribution to the insurgency and wondered aloud if Mahone would consent to the nomination of a

⁷Moore, Two Paths to the New South, p. 112; Robert M. Mayo to WM, June 15, 1882, WM Papers, Duke.

Republican of purer party antecedents than Mayo's. A couple of Republican veterans took the Straightout hint and announced their candidacies. Robert Mayo's brother warned Mahone against allowing either of them to claim the honor:

It is imperatively necessary for the success of our cause . . . that we should bring out some man of the new departure who can divide the white vote sufficiently to ensure success. . . . We are likely to have some trouble with the 'Old Liners' who are ever full of tales of sacrifices made and ills suffered for the cause of Republicanism in the past. But such will have to be informed that the day has passed when they can hatch up a little teaparty convention, get themselves nominated, get defeated and then be rewarded as self sacrificing patriots and martyrs by appointment to office under the government. Such men can rally to their support only the colored vote which is always true to the Republican party and Peter Carter can do the same. But that is not sufficient to carry this district.⁸

Mahone publicly professed neutrality but privately backed Mayo. He rebuked the Straightout challenge to his authority by having Woltz sacked from his position in the Interior Department and by having his operatives make clear to federal officeholders attending the

⁸John Critcher to WM, January 2, William Mayo to WM, June 3 (quote), September 8, Robert M. Mayo to WM, July 9, Edgar J. Spady to WM, July 14, August 10, John A. Parker to WM, July 15, John S. Wise to WM, July 25, Edwin Brown Jr. to WM, July 27, newspaper clipping, August, 1882, John J. Wise to WM, September 1, 1884; John S. Wise, The Lion's Skin: A Historical Novel and a Novel History (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1905), p. 318; Charlotte Jean Shelton, "William Atkinson Jones, 1849-1918: Independent Democracy in Turn-of-the-Century Virginia," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1980, pp. 89-91; EE, July 20, August 24, 1882, December 20, 1883, June 20, 1885.

district convention that "it was to [their] interest to be fair" to Mayo. His methods proved most persuasive. When the convention met in Tappahannock in August, the delegates chose Mahone ally Peter J. Carter as chairman and gave Mayo the congressional nomination by a comfortable majority. A few days later, Woltz, intent on spoiling Mayo's chances, entered the race as an independent Republican. "I understand Mr. J. W. Woltz is going to be a candidate," Carter remarked. "Well he can't hurt anyone. . . . Mr. Woltz has no following & he only represents himself & a few more sore heads."⁹

Meanwhile, the Funder hierarchy searched frantically for winning issues and candidates. Of course, they wanted nothing more to do with the state debt. "The debt question is . . . to be taken altogether out of our politics," the editor of the Richmond State asserted, "and after this will have to fight its own battle through the courts, standing by the final decision reached in that of last resort." Tariff reduction seemed attractive to some, but the presence of so many firm protectionists in the Funder ranks dissuaded the party leadership from attempting to deploy their troops under that ancient Democratic banner. The

⁹Edgar J. Spady to WM, July 14, August 10, Robert T. Fletcher to WM, August 6, 12, 28 (quote), John W. Woltz to WM, August 10, WM to Woltz, August 12, John R. Waddy to WM, August 25, Peter J. Carter to WM, August 30, 1882, WM Papers, Duke; PE, September 7, 1882.

leaders, then, decided to continue portraying Mahone as a power-hungry autocrat, his followers as corruptionists so greedy for office that they were more than willing to debase themselves before a boss, and all Readjusters as betrayers of race and party.¹⁰

Maddened by the fear that their recent defeat portended their political extinction, the Funders plumbed new depths of calumny and distortion. In a single paragraph John W. Edmonds of the Accomac Court House Peninsula Enterprise likened the Readjusters to New Zealand savages, to pirates, and to Cains, forced to wear the mark of "Boss" Mahone. In another passage Edmonds declared that for the Readjusters "The cry is no longer to the negro 'come with us,' but by the negro 'come to us!'" Edmonds maintained that the blacks demanded of their willing allies nothing less than "complete assimilation" with the white race. The Accomac editor also launched savage personal attacks on Mahone. Observing that "Barnum announces that he will employ all curious specimens of the human race, and freaks of nature for his great show," he told the diminutive and flamboyant Mahone to "Go in Billy, and carry your hat."¹¹

¹⁰Richmond State, February 15, 1882; New York Times, June 9, 1882.

¹¹PE, January 19 (third quote), March 30 (second quote), April 6 (first quote), 13, July 13, 1882.

Nothing better reflected the Funders' desperation and intellectual bankruptcy or better mocked their claims to be the guardians of Virginia's sacred honor than their choice of candidate for congressman-at-large. Although refusing to make a formal nomination, the Funder state committee threw its support behind John E. Massey--the old repudiator whom the debt-payers had rotten-egged, denounced as a liar and a thief, and accused of burning his house to collect on the insurance. Not surprisingly, the cynical endorsement of Massey disturbed many of the Funder faithful. "I think that Parson Massey is about the most disagreeable pill that has been presented to the Democratic stomach within my recollection," a Readjuster reported from Onancock. Most Funder leaders, however, swallowed hard and made the best of the situation. After years of reviling the "arch demagogue," Edmonds reluctantly declared that Massey "is entitled to our cordial and unqualified support. Our reason for this conviction, of course, is not because he is the candidate of our choice. But while we do not love Massey, we hate more that deepest and most damnable of all curses that ever afflicted any people--Mahoneism."¹²

¹²John E. Massey, Autobiography of John E. Massey, ed. Elizabeth H. Hancock (New York and Washington: Neale Publishing Company, 1909), p. 237; William C. Pendleton, Political History of Appalachian Virginia, 1776-1927 (Dayton, Va.: Shenandoah Press, 1927), p. 354; Testimony

Massey's undoubted ability as a campaigner made his candidacy more palatable to the Funders. "He was a powerful advocate on the hustings," his sworn enemy John S. Wise later admitted. "He had as bitter and reviling a tongue as ever was in human head, and his vituperation and slanderous assaults were veiled under a semblance of meek and polished humility which made them all the more irritating. It was impossible to insult him or ruffle his temper." Massey's political skills were not limited to oratory and debate. He immediately gave a demonstration of his expertise as a wirepuller. With the connivance of his Funder friends, he attempted to deprive Wise of black support by inducing John M. Dawson, a black Straightout, to mount a third candidacy for the at-large seat.¹³

On the Eastern Shore, the Funder leadership worked hard for Massey but gave its best effort for the

of Samuel T. Ross, April 9, 1883, in U.S. Congress, House, Papers and Testimony in the Contested-Election Case of John E. Massey vs. John S. Wise, House miscellaneous documents 14-15, number 27 (parts 1 & 2), 48th Congress, 1st session, 1884, I, 212; W. N. I. Godwin to S. Bassett French, July 19, 1882 (first quote), WM Papers, Duke; Richmond Whig, February 18, 1882; PE, February 16 (second quote), April 13, July 6, 20, 27 (third quote), 1882.

¹³Wise, The Lion's Skin, pp. 310, 314 (quote); Otho C. Campbell, "John Sergeant Wise: A Case Study in Conservative-Readjuster Politics in Virginia, 1869-1889," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1979, pp. 128-129; Chicago Tribune, July 27, 1882; Moore, Two Paths to the New South, p. 112.

reelection of native son George T. Garrison as congressman from the First District. Funder orators and editors attempted to bury Garrison's opponent, Robert M. Mayo, under an avalanche of invective and innuendo. They recalled Mayo's checkered political past and accused him of being "the pliant tool of Billy Mahone." They frequently pointed out the prominent role played by black leader Peter J. Carter in his nomination. They harshly criticized his record as a state legislator, drawing the attention of local farmers and watermen to his votes in favor of taxing the fertilizer and oil manufactured by fish factories and against allowing fishermen and oystermen to exempt from taxation their boats and tackle up to \$100 in value. The Funders also sought to injure Mayo by helping bankroll the Straightout candidacy of John W. Woltz, by bribing black leaders to work for the Straightout ticket, and by trying to purchase with whisky the votes of young blacks.¹⁴

To better sustain their assault on Mayo and his allies, Accomac County Funders selected a new chairman, adopted a new form of organization, and even took a new party name. In February John Edmonds prevailed on his

¹⁴PE, August 24 (quote), September 14, 21, October 19, 26, 1882; Testimony of Littleton D. Wharton, February 17, testimony of C. L. Bunting, February 17, 1883, in Garrison vs. Mayo, pp. 116, 118; Richmond Whig, February 8, 18, 1882.

fellow Funders to drop the Conservative label and "plainly assume . . . that which belongs to us only, Democratic." In September Accomac Funders drastically restructured their organization. Under the old plan a chairman and county committee devised campaign strategy while about a dozen orators carried the party's message to the electorate. The new plan retained these features but also called for separate oversight committees for each of the five magisterial districts and for canvassers for the half-dozen or so road precincts within each district. The canvassers were expected to list voters within their localities by race and party and to identify those of the Funder persuasion who needed to be registered and to have their poll tax paid. In its attention to detail and in its emphasis on voter identification and registration, the new plan paid silent tribute to William Mahone.¹⁵

On the same day that Accomac Funders approved their new plan of organization, they elected Benjamin T. Gunter party chairman. Gunter's career was representative of the Eastern Shore Funder leadership. Before the Civil War, he had served as commonwealth's attorney and as colonel of militia. A red-hot secessionist, he took a prominent role in the

¹⁵PE, June 30, 1881, February 9 (quote), September 28, 1882.

persecution of local Unionists. Gunter was only thirty-one when the war started, but he offered the Southern cause nothing more than rhetoric. While John J. Wise, T. H. Bayly Browne, Frank Fletcher, and other young Eastern Shoremen crossed Chesapeake Bay to join the Confederate military, Gunter remained on the peninsula. His oft-expressed secesh sympathies got him in trouble with the federal army of occupation, but a few months confinement in Baltimore's Fort McHenry cooled his ardor. After the war, Gunter resumed his political career. He worked tirelessly for the Conservatives as an organizer and stump speaker, and he made numerous contacts in the party hierarchy. He served three terms as a county supervisor and in 1878 unsuccessfully sought his party's nomination for congress. In 1881 Governor Holliday appointed Gunter to an unexpired term as circuit judge, but the Readjusters soon turned him out of office. Gunter possessed a creative intelligence and a bulldog tenacity. He also displayed the moral certainty peculiar to his Baptist faith. A Readjuster later recalled that "there were two principles with Judge Gunter that stood out preeminently paramount to all others: his devotion to his church and to his political party. The man who in his presence made a remark reflecting upon either might rest assured that it would at once be resented." In Accomac, Ben Gunter and

party reorganization made even more efficient an already smoothly functioning Funder machine.¹⁶

Accomac Readjusters also experienced a change of command. In September Mahone finally persuaded John J. Wise to accept the party chairmanship in the place of John W. H. Parker, who had resigned. From now on, Wise and his friend T. H. Bayly Browne would give the Accomac party the same high quality of leadership that John R. Waddy and William T. Fitchett gave its counterpart in Northampton.¹⁷

Almost immediately Wise and his advisers had to deal with a serious threat to the coalition. In early October Wise received reports of dissatisfaction among black voters in lower Accomac. He learned that Rozier D. Beckley, a black Straightout from the Western Shore, had quietly canvassed the Pungoteague area for nearly a

¹⁶PE, September 28, 1882, February 12, 1898; J. G. Potts, Address to the People of the Counties of Accomac and Northampton in General, and Particularly to the Mechanics, Tenants and Laborers (Baltimore: Bull & Tuttle, 1862); James Egbert Mears, "The Virginia Eastern Shore in the War of Secession and in the Reconstruction Period," Eastern Shore Public Library, Accomac, Va., pp. 115, 163; Onancock Eastern Virginian, July 13, 1878; Samuel T. Ross, "Recollections of Bench and Bar of Accomack: An Address Delivered 19 June 1900," in James E. Mears Scrapbooks, ESPL, I, 20 (quote); Blanche Sydnor White, History of the Baptists on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, 1776-1959 (Baltimore: J. H. Furst Co., 1959), p. 45. For a biographical sketch of Gunter see Ben T. Gunter, "Benjamin Thomas Gunter," ESPL.

¹⁷John E. Bradford to WM, August 5, Robert P. Fletcher, August 28, T. H. Bayly Browne to WM, September 21, 1882, WM Papers, Duke.

week on behalf of John W. Woltz and that some Pungoteague blacks were demanding pay for their support of John S. Wise and Robert M. Mayo. Wise also suspected that Customs Collector Thomas W. Taylor, symbol of federal authority in Accomac, was secretly working to turn the county's blacks against the Readjusters. Wise called on the Accomac Republican Committee for help. The committee, composed with a single exception of blacks, met on the night of October 5 to "heartily endorse" the nominations of Wise and Mayo and to resolve that "the conduct of a few disappointed men in seeking to elevate themselves by creating dissension in our midst . . . is the trick of the Bourbon Funders." Taylor was "conspicuously absent" from the meeting, leading Bayly Browne to assert that Beckley's proselytizing together "with the lukewarmness of Taylor has caused the crookedness." A few days later, John J. Wise sent a black emissary into the lower county "to attend to a few refractory fellows." By the end of October Wise was convinced that Accomac blacks were solidly behind the Readjusters.¹⁸

Taylor's "lukewarmness" helped convince Wise to press for the eradication of the Eastern Shore's small

¹⁸T. H. Bayly Browne to WM, October 4, 6, Accomac Republican Committee Minutes, October 5, in Browne to WM, October 6, John R. Waddy to WM, October 6, John J. Wise to WM, October 13, 18, 28, 1882.

nest of uncooperative federal officeholders. He urged Mahone to arrange the removals of Taylor, of Life-Saving Superintendent Benjamin S. Rich, and of Perry A. Leatherbury, the "grip sack son of a bitch" who served as postmaster at Onancock. Wise advised, however, that the ax not fall

until the election is over. Taylor has no influence with the masses of the colored people, but has some influence with a few of the leaders about Onancock and Pungoteague. If any damage should occur by his removal it is now too near the election to counteract it. Rich has no influence except with his station men and that will be used against us anyhow. But there may be two or three aspirants for his place, and the disappointed ones might throw their rump up.¹⁹

When the returns were counted, the Readjusters appeared to have won a clear victory over their Funder opponents. The Readjuster-sponsored constitutional amendment repealing the poll tax passed by an overwhelming margin, and the insurgents elected six of the ten congressmen. In the at-large race John S. Wise received 99,992 votes to John E. Massey's 94,184 and John M. Dawson's 4,342 while in the First District Robert M. Mayo received 10,505 votes to George T. Garrison's 10,504 and John W. Woltz's 168. Mayo

¹⁹Wise to WM, October 18, 1882. See also John E. Bradford to WM, July 4, November 23, 1881, September 6, 1882, John R. Waddy to WM, December 1, 1881, Petition of John E. Bradford and C. L. Bunting, March 18, in Petition of A. J. Ward, March 10, William H. Parker to WM, May 31, John S. Wise to WM, August 28, T. H. Bayly Browne to WM, September 21, 1882, WM Papers, Duke.

achieved his narrow victory, however, only after the Readjuster-controlled State Board of Canvassers threw out on technicalities the returns from Northampton's Hog Island precinct and those from the entire county of Gloucester. Charging fraud, Garrison contested Mayo's election before the House of Representatives. Two other unsuccessful Funder candidates also mounted official contests. Massey challenged Wise's election, and Charles T. O'Ferrall challenged that of John Paul in the Seventh District.²⁰

Although the Democrats held a large majority of the seats in the House of Representatives, Massey's contest went nowhere. In Virginia the Funder state chairman mishandled the gathering of evidence in the case while in Washington John S. Wise benefited from the friendship of former Speaker Samuel J. Randall, the powerful high-tariff Democrat from Pennsylvania. Wise later recalled that Randall instructed his lieutenants that "whatever else happened I was not to be molested." Randall's protection allowed the fiery Virginian to taunt his Funder opponents. During the taking of depositions in Richmond, Wise twice slapped the elderly Massey across

²⁰Charles E. Wynes, Race Relations in Virginia, 1870-1902 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1961), pp. 24-25; Warrock-Richardson Almanack, 1884, pp. 34, 35; Garrison to Mayo, December 22, 1882, in Garrison vs. Mayo, pp. 1-5; Moore, Two Paths to the New South, p. 113.

the face, afterward assuring the parson that "I would box your jaw . . . if you were a hundred-and-fifty years old and in the pulpit which you disgrace." Later, from the floor of the House, he bitterly assailed the Funders all the while defying them to have him removed. The other contestants were more fortunate than Massey. The Democrats seated O'Ferrall after Paul was elevated to a federal judgeship, and Garrison ousted Mayo on the merits of the case.²¹

On the Eastern Shore the Funders carried Accomac and the Readjusters Northampton. In Northampton Wise defeated Massey 927 votes to 687, and Mayo outpolled Garrison 908 to 713. Neither Dawson nor Woltz received a vote in the county. In Accomac Massey polled 2,000 votes to 1,269 for Wise and 16 for Dawson while Garrison polled 2,044 to 1,240 for Mayo and 17 for Woltz.²²

Off-year congressional elections generally attracted fewer voters than state and presidential

²¹John J. Wise to WM, February 19, 1883, WM Papers, Duke; Testimony of Samuel T. Ross, April 9, 1883, in Massey vs. Wise, I, 212; John S. Wise, Recollections of Thirteen Presidents (New York; Doubleday, Page & Company, 1906), p. 157; Massey, Autobiography, pp. 245-246; New York Tribune, February 23, 1882 (quotes Wise); Baltimore American, February 19 in PE February 22, 1883; PE, March 29, April 26, May 10, 1884; Curtis Carroll Davis, "Very Well-Rounded Republican: The Several Lives of John S. Wise," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 71 (1963), pp. 474-475; Campbell, "John Sergeant Wise," p. 152.

²²Garrison vs. Mayo, pp. 373, 381.

ACCOMAC COUNTY PRECINCT RETURNS
 FUND/DEMOCRAT

	<u>1873</u>	<u>1881</u>	<u>1882</u>
Chincoteague Island	54	117	180
Greenbackville		48	60
Hall's Store	107	86	43
Saxis Island		59	44
Temperanceville	137	117	118
New Church	105	104	79
Happsville	79	68	56
Muddy Creek			
Masonville			
Gulford	325	280	252
Newtown	99	82	106
Accomac Court House	292	313	327
Onancock	237	267	252
Tangier Island			
Locustmount	111	164	155
Hawk's Nest			
Pungoteague	<u>299</u>	<u>359</u>	<u>372</u>
	1,845	2,064	2,044

SOURCES: Norfolk Landmark, November 7, 1873; Accomac Court House
Peninsula Enterprise, November 10, 1881; November 9, 1882.

ACCOMAC COUNTY PRECINCT RETURNS
READJUSTER/REPUBLICAN

	<u>1873</u>	<u>1881</u>	<u>1882</u>
Chincoteague Island	138	78	34
Greenbackville		8	0
Hall's Store	10	5	8
Saxis Island		0	0
Temperanceville	73	115	101
New Church	114	145	100
Mappsville	59	67	53
Muddy Creek			
Masonville			
Guilford	6	21	21
Newtown	41	82	71
Accomac Court House	178	230	216
Onancock	155	172	159
Tangier Island			
Locustmount	61	114	136
Hawk's Nest			
Pungoteague	<u>333</u>	<u>410</u>	<u>370</u>
	1,168	1,447	1,268

SOURCES: Norfolk Landmark, November 7, 1873; Accomac Court House
Peninsula Enterprise, November 10, 1881; November 9, 1882.

contests, and 1882 proved no exception. In Northampton the decline in the number of voters amounted to only 2 per cent and came exclusively from the Funder column. Garrison, the leading Funder vote-getter in the county, fell 31 votes behind John W. Daniel's total of the previous year while Wise, who led the Readjuster ticket, exceeded by 1 vote William E. Cameron's total. In Accomac, however, the vote declined by 6 per cent, and most of the loss came from the coalition ranks. Garrison ran only 20 votes behind Daniel while Wise lagged 178 behind Cameron.²³

The coalition losses undoubtedly included a few from the Conservative wing of the party who agreed with Massey that the Readjuster movement had served its purpose--those whom an Accomac Readjuster described as "the 'weak-kneed' . . . who know not Republicanism in Readjustment." Most of the losses, however, came from the Republican wing of the party. Bayly Browne maintained that the Readjusters actually gained Conservative votes. "The loss," he said, "was Republican and confined to Chincoteague Island mostly." On Chincoteague the Readjuster total indeed fell off by 44 votes, but it also declined at other Republican strongholds. At New Church in upper Accomac the

²³Ibid., pp. 75, 373, 381; PE, November 10, 1881, November 9, 1882.

Readjusters lost 45 votes, and at Pungoteague in the lower county they lost 40. Mayo's votes in the legislature against a tax exemption for oystermen and for a tax on the products of the fish factories probably accounted for some of the Chincoteague defections, but Readjuster losses on the island and elsewhere in the county owed more to the resentment of Thomas W. Taylor and other Republican leaders at their subordinate role in the coalition. Few of them were foolish enough to work openly for a Straightout or a Funder; so they sabotaged the Readjusters by neglecting to encourage their followers to attend the polls. Although some disgruntled Republicans (particularly those on Chincoteague and at Pungoteague) indicated their disapproval by voting for the Funder or Straightout candidates, most stayed at home.²⁴

The attitude of Taylor and his cronies was in striking contrast to that of Peter J. Carter. The Northampton leader remained steadfast in his devotion to the Readjusters, and his followers voted solidly for coalition candidates. No wonder that John J. Wise regretted that the obnoxious federal officeholders in

²⁴John E. Bradford to WM, September 6 (quote), T. H. Bayly Browne to WM, November 8, 9 (quote), 1882, WM Papers, Duke; PE, November 2, 1882; Testimony of John E. Bradford, February 15, testimony of Frisbee W. Rayfield, February 20, testimony of George B. Mason, February 22, 1883, in Garrison vs. Mayo, pp. 102, 128, 138.

Accomac had not been removed long ago. "Had this been done when you first went into the Senate," he told Mahone, "we would now have a much stronger organization." In 1882 recalcitrant Republicans probably cost the Readjusters a congressional seat. Had Mayo received 100 of the votes that went to Woltz, he would have been in much better position to withstand Garrison's contest.²⁵

The elections of 1882 sent a mixed message to the Funders. They had halved the Readjuster victory margin of the previous year, but they also had suffered another statewide defeat. Many Funders cherished the hope that the Readjusters had reached the limits of their strength, but they also feared that a Funder resurgence was impossible so long as the debt remained a live issue. In March 1883 the Funders received a somewhat unexpected boon when the United States Supreme Court rejected a challenge to the Readjuster debt settlement. Funder leaders had for some time insisted that the debt issue had left the realm of politics for that of jurisprudence, and now they hastened to declare the Supreme Court's decision final. "The decision is not in accord with our notions of justice," explained John W. Edmonds of the Peninsula Enterprise, "but as nothing can

²⁵Wise to WM, October 10, 1882, Wm Papers, Duke.

be gained now by a further agitation of the subject, and relief is furnished by the decision from a question the most vexatious that ever disturbed our people, we cannot but rejoice . . . that the debt question is to be no longer a disturbing element in Virginia."²⁸

Having bid adieu to the honor issue, a much relieved convention of Funders assembled in Lynchburg in July. Enthusiastic, aggressive, and determined to achieve victory in the legislative elections of 1883, the delegates embarked on a complete reorganization of the Funder Party. Their reforms almost exactly fit the pattern of those initiated by Accomac County Funders in 1882. The dropped the Conservative label in favor of the Democratic, selected a dynamic new chairman, and adopted a detailed party structure on the Mahone model. They chose as chairman Congressman John S. Barbour of Alexandria. Barbour had served for many years as president of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, a subsidiary of the Baltimore and Ohio. Skilled in all aspects of railroad management including the manipulation of legislators, Barbour had done much to divert Virginia's trade from her own ports to Baltimore. As the agent of a Northern rail empire, he had clashed

²⁸Richard L. Morton, The Negro in Virginia Politics, 1865-1902 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1919), pp. 117-118; Richmond State, March 6, 1883; PE, March 8, 29, May 10 (quote), June 28, July 12, 1883.

repeatedly with Mahone, toward whom he bore an intense enmity. The convention made Barbour chairman not only because of his skills as an organizer and wirepuller but also because he could be relied on to raise large sums of money from railroad and other corporate interests in Virginia and in the North.²⁷

Barbour cared little for platforms, brass bands, or stump speakers. What he wanted were new leaders unsullied by defeat and a thorough organization in every county in the commonwealth. As for an issue, he thought sufficient "Mahoneism" and all that it allegedly implied--Republicanism, bossism, corruption, and black rule. Fortunately for Barbour and his cohorts, recent events seemed to lend credence to their racial argument. In some eastern counties (particularly on the Southside) blacks had taken over local Readjuster conventions and had reserved most nominations for themselves. Meanwhile, the ambitious Governor William E. Cameron, intending to set up a power base independent of Mahone and therefore needing to ingratiate himself with blacks, had appointed two black members to the Richmond school board. Citing these developments as harbingers of the future, Democratic spokesmen conjured up the most horrific visions of black domination and racial

²⁷Allen W. Moger, "The Origin of the Democratic Machine in Virginia," Journal of Southern History 8 (1942), pp. 187-189, 208; New York Times, August 30, 1883.

amalgamation.²⁸

The Democrats also devoted much time to assailing Mahone as an unscrupulous autocrat. Indeed, a Democratic mass meeting at Eastville resolved "that the only issue in Virginia at present is whether the people . . . shall control their own affairs or be ruled by a boss." Democratic critiques of Mahone the boss as often as not degenerated into vitriolic attacks on Mahone the man. So ferocious were some of the blasts that the editors of the Nation believed that certain Funder leaders intended to goad Mahone into a duel. An effusion by John W. Edmonds (not one of the would-be duelists) was typical. Edmonds denounced Mahone as a coward, a liar, and a sneak; the defamer of dead comrades; the stigmatizer, with radicals of the worst stripe, of his brothers in arms . . . ; the seller of his votes in the Congress of the United States; the persecutor, to further his political ends of the widow and fatherless; this wrecker of railroads and debaucher of men; this 'illhumored, rapacious, snappish malcontent'; this 'most aggressive of Arabs'; this 'shyster' whose dealings have won for him the name of 'Bunko Billy'; this scab upon the body politic of the State.

Invective this bitter was a compliment. Only a skilled, indomitable, and successful politician could excite such

²⁸Charles Chilton Pearson, The Readjuster Movement in Virginia (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917), p. 163; Moger, "The Origin of the Democratic Machine," p. 189; Moore, Two Paths to the New South, p. 115; James T. Moore, "Black Militancy in Readjuster Virginia, 1879-1883," Journal of Southern History 41 (1975), pp. 181-182, 184; WM to John R. Waddy, June 11, 1885, Letterbook, WM Papers, Duke; Richmond State, March 8, July 24, 1883; New York Sun, in Richmond State, November 10, 1883; PE, May 17, August 30, October 4, 11, 1883.

hatred, fear, and resentment.²⁹

With the debt issue out of the way, Eastern Shore Democrats resumed their old practice of holding a primary to select candidates for the peninsula's two seats in the House of Delegates (Frank Fletcher's term in the State Senate had not yet expired). By small pluralities in multi-candidate races, incumbent John T. Wilkins and newcomer Teackle T. Wescott won the nominations. Wescott was a Confederate veteran, farmer, and local option advocate from near Locustmount in lower Accomac County. He replaced on the Democratic ticket William P. M. Kellam, who recently had resigned from the legislature to assume the position of Accomac commonwealth's attorney.³⁰

In the general election Wescott met opposition not only from the Readjuster candidate but also from a disgruntled Democrat, Frank Hollis of Chincoteague Island. Hollis was a native of Massachusetts and Union

²⁹PE, July 12 (first quote), August 23, October 18, November 1, 1883; Nation 37 (October 11, 1883), p. 301; Charles T. O'Ferrall, Forty Years of Active Service (New York and Washington: Neale Publishing Company, 1904), p. 227. For another frenzied attack on Mahone see Richmond State, July 24, 1883. "You are hated with a venom and hatred not known or comprehended by fair-minded men" (F. U. Northup to WM, November 16, 1883, in Carl N. Degler, The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth Century [New York: Harper & Row, 1974], p. 314).

³⁰PE, May 17, June 28, July 12, August 16, 23, 30, 1883; Onancock Eastern Virginian, June 30, 1883. For a biographical sketch of Wescott see Richmond Commercial and Tobacco Leaf, March 1, in PE, March 15, 1884.

veteran who had settled on the Eastern Shore and married into a prominent local family. He worked as a house and sign painter while devoting his leisure hours to writing poetry and to Democratic politics. Hollis was a skilled orator and writer and an indefatigable canvasser, but his Northern origins, island residence, and overbearing ego combined to deny him the recognition he craved from the party leadership. In 1883 he entered the Democratic primary but withdrew when he received little encouragement from the party bosses. He then announced as an independent candidate and published a broadside denouncing Benjamin T. Gunter as the head of a courthouse clique determined to elect only those subservient to its will.³¹

Anxious for revenge, Hollis wrote Republican State Chairman James D. Brady that, if the Accomac Readjusters would endorse his candidacy, he would bring them a handsome majority in the fall. Brady forwarded the letter to Mahone who, impressed by Hollis's epistolary eloquence, asked John J. Wise for his opinion. "Col. Frank Hollis is a d-d crank destitute of influence or character. A political nondescript," Wise replied.

Has been writing to me twice a week for the past two

³¹PE, January 18, July 5, 12, August 9, 1883, June 27, 1896; Onancock Eastern Virginian, June 30, July 7, 1883; Independent Candidate for the House of Delegates, Col. Frank Hollis [broadside], in Hollis to James D. Brady, September 27, 1883, WM Papers, Duke.

weeks. I have written him that our plans were already made and would be announced in a few days. He was a candidate for the funder nomination, but withdrew a few days before their primary knowing his defeat was certain. I heard him make one speech in the canvass. He was and always had been a better democrat than anybody else, and did not forget to denounce Mahone and the Readjuster party. We can't afford to take up such a creature. I am very sure he can't control fifty votes in the county.

When Mahone afterward politely rebuffed Hollis, the erstwhile Democrat told him that the Readjusters were making a dreadful mistake but that he would remain in the race if for no other reason than to injure Wescott on Chincoteague Island.³²

Wescott's local option sympathies caused Eastern Shore Democrats some concern. They worried about alienating the influential liquor dealers and saloonkeepers and their numerous clientele. They also considered local option a distraction from the work of organization so crucial to victory in the fall. "The side issues of local option--and all of that ilk--are but the inventions of that arch fiend of political chicanery, Wily William Mahone, to divert the people from the true issue," Edmonds thundered.

The true issue is, simply, solely, and only this: Will you vote to place Virginia back into the ranks of honesty and democracy, or by your votes, or worse still, your supineness, let her remain in the clutches

³²Hollis to Brady, August 30, September 10, 27, Hollis to WM, October 3, 20, Wise to WM, September 12, WM to Hollis, October 15, 1883, Letterbook, WM Papers, Duke. Hollis returned to the Democratic fold in 1884 (PE, August 30, 1884).

of Mahoneism? . . . When local option comes, we will deal with it. But now, NOW, let us close up in full battle array, crush out Mahonery in all its forms; give to the democratic party our fullest fealty, and largest vote.³³

The Readjusters sought to take advantage of the uneasiness in Democratic ranks over the issues of local option and ring rule by backing independent Henry C. White for one of the seats in the House of Delegates. White, a popular carpenter from Accomac Court House, had recently (but less noisily than Frank Hollis) bolted the Democratic Party. For the other seat, the Readjusters supported T. H. Bayly Browne (who also ran as an independent). Both men campaigned vigorously, Browne meeting almost every Funder champion, both local and imported, who took to the stump on the peninsula.³⁴

Eastern Shore Readjusters also instructed Mahone to initiate the long-awaited purge of uncooperative federal officeholders. Customs Collector George Toy had worked closely with the Readjusters in recent campaigns and so kept his position, but Thomas W. Taylor, deputy collector at Onancock, lost his place to John J. Wise. Nathaniel S. Smith, deputy collector on Chincoteague, remained in office despite the scant support that the

³³John J. Wise to WM, September 12, 1883, WM Papers, Duke; PE, September 20, 27, October 4 (quote), 1883.

³⁴PE, September 6, 13, 27, 1883; John R. Waddy to WM, October 1, T. H. Bayly Browne to WM, November 2, 1883, WM Papers, Duke.

island's Republicans had given the coalition ticket in 1882. Wise tried to think of a replacement for Smith but gave up in despair. "There is not much very good material on our Islands," he sighed. The creation of an inspectorship for a brother of Northampton Readjuster Chairman John R. Waddy completed the customs reorganization.³⁵

Mahone also had a couple of postmasters removed. John D. Parsons, the former member of the House of Delegates who in 1880 had fought with a son of Ben Gunter, had recently renounced the Readjusters because Mahone had ignored his patronage requests. Now, Mahone had Parsons's wife removed as postmistress at Atlantic in upper Accomac County. Also decapitated was Perry A. Leatherbury, Republican postmaster at Onancock. The Democrats tried to arouse public disgust over Leatherbury's dismissal. Calling attention to his twenty years of service, they portrayed him as a victim of vindictive bossism and circulated a petition demanding his reinstatement.³⁶

³⁵Wise to WM, October 18, 1882, July 10 (quote), John R. Waddy to WM, July 23, August 4, October 1, George Toy to the Secretary of the Treasury, July 23, 1883, WM to Wise, October 16, 1882, Letterbook, WM Papers, Duke.

³⁶John D. Parsons to John W. H. Parker, July 12, in Parker to WM, August 3, 1882, John J. Wise to WM, March 7, Wise to Robert P. Fletcher, July 2, in Fletcher to WM, December 2, Fletcher to WM, April 27, Post Office Department Notice, May 17, John D. Tyler to WM, June 21,

Readjusters across the state tried to shift attention from the Democratic rant about Mahoneism to more substantive issues such as railroad regulation and the protective tariff. They dismissed as base demagoguery appeals for racial solidarity. "Our party," declared the editor of the Richmond Whig, "encourages each race to develop its own sociology separately and apart from unlawful contamination with each other, but under a government which recognizes and protects the civil rights of all." A lack of funds, however, hampered Readjuster efforts to educate the public. A recently resurgent Democracy had convinced Northern Republican fatcats that their money would be better spent in their own region than in Virginia. Mahone therefore had to rely even more on the assessment of federal officeholders. Naturally, the hard-hit clerks in Washington began to resent him as much as they did the tax collector.³⁷

1883, WM Papers, Duke; PE, April 5, June 7, 21, 1883, March 1, 1884.

³⁷Richmond Whig, September 21, 1883, quoted in Moore, "Black Militancy in Readjuster Virginia," pp. 180, 184; Moore, Two Paths to the New South, p. 113; New York Times, November 9, 1883; New York Sun in Richmond State, November 10, 1883. For the Readjusters' lack on funds on the Eastern Shore see John J. Wise to WM, September 12, John H. Arbuckle to WM, October 23, 1883, WM Papers, Duke. A Readjuster told the New York Times that "we are out and out protectionists. Gen. Mahone will go as far as Pennsylvania in that direction" (August 30, 1883).

As election day approached, the Democrats placed increased emphasis on their plea for white supremacy. John W. Daniel, who in 1879 had promenaded arm-in-arm with a pair of black politicians and as late as November 1881 had suggested forming an alliance with the blacks, now solemnly intoned that "I am a Democrat because I am a white man and a Virginian." As the rhetoric became more divisive, racial violence, heretofore largely absent from Virginia politics, reared its head. White thugs threatened or assaulted blacks in Halifax, Madison, and Powhatan counties, and three days before the election a riot in Danville left four blacks dead and nearly a dozen wounded. The Democrats most likely plotted the Danville affray. Blacks were in the majority in that Southside city, and they held seats on the town council, several minor administrative offices, a couple of positions on the police force, and twelve of the twenty-nine stalls in the public market. In late October, John S. Barbour authorized the circulation of a misleading and inflammatory pamphlet detailing the horrors of so-called black rule in Danville, and within hours after the riot the Democrats published accounts of the conflict which inaccurately depicted the blacks as the aggressors. The Readjusters had too little time to correct the Democratic distortions, and on election day many white voters across Virginia took counsel of their

racial fears.³⁸

When the ballots were counted, the Readjusters polled 13,000 more votes than they had in 1881. Despite scattered instances of Democratic bulldozing, they made substantial gains in both the black belt and in the white counties of the Southwest. Nevertheless, they lost the election. The Democrats increased their vote by fully 44,000 over 1881, and they gained firm control of both house of the legislature.³⁹

On the Eastern Shore the returns followed a similar pattern. Democrats John T. Wilkins and Teackle T. Wescott defeated Readjuster T. H. Bayly Browne and independent Henry C. White for the seats in the House of Delegates. Dissident Democrat Frank Hollis received only 50 votes, all of them on Chincoteague Island. Browne, the most popular coalition candidate, polled

³⁸Richmond Dispatch, October 26, 1883 (quotes Daniel); Moore, Two Paths to the New South, p. 110; Moore, "Black Militancy in Readjuster Virginia," p. 185; William D. Henderson, Gilded Age City: Politics, Life and Labor in Petersburg, Virginia, 1874-1889 (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1980), p. 165; Degler, The Other South, pp. 293-298; Wynes, Race Relations in Virginia, pp. 29-32; Walter T. Calhoun, "The Danville Riot and Its Repercussions on the Virginia Election of 1883," East Carolina College Publications in History 3 (1966), pp. 25-51.

³⁹Moore, Two Paths to the New South, p. 117; Wynes, Race Relations in Virginia, pp. 32-34; Gordon B. McKinney, Southern Mountain Republicans, 1865-1900: Politics and the Appalachian Community (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), p. 106; Baltimore Sun in PE, November 15, 1883.

ACCOMAC COUNTY PRECINCT RETURNS
FUND/DEMOCRAT

	<u>1873</u>	<u>1881</u>	<u>1882</u>	<u>1883</u>
Chincoteague Island	54	117	180	135
Greenbackville		48	60	87
Hall's Store	107	86	43	121
Saxis Island		59	44	59
Temperanceville	137	117	118	190
New Church	105	104	79	115
Mappsville	79	68	56	116
Muddy Creek				81
Masonville				
Guilford	325	280	252	264
Newtown	99	82	106	131
Accomac Court House	292	313	327	380
Onancock	237	267	252	299
Tangier Island				35
Locustmount	111	164	155	173
Hawk's Nest				
Pungoteague	<u>299</u>	<u>359</u>	<u>372</u>	<u>391</u>
	1,845	2,064	2,044	2,577

SOURCES: Norfolk Landmark, November 7, 1873; Accomac Court House
Peninsula Enterprise, November 10, 1881; November 9, 1882;
November 8, 1883.

ACCOMAC COUNTY PRECINCT RETURNS
READJUSTER/REPUBLICAN

	<u>1873</u>	<u>1881</u>	<u>1882</u>	<u>1883</u>
Chincoteague Island	<u>138</u>	78	34	72
Greenbackville		8	0	8
Hall's Store	10	5	8	9
Saxis Island		0	0	0
Temperanceville	73	115	101	86
New Church	114	145	100	95
Mappsville	59	67	53	78
Muddy Creek				33
Masonville				
Guilford	6	21	21	0
Newstown	41	82	71	59
Accomac Court House	178	230	216	236
Onancock	155	172	159	108
Tangier Island				19
Locustmount	61	114	136	112
Hawk's Nest				
Pungoteague	<u>333</u>	<u>410</u>	<u>370</u>	<u>374</u>
	1,168	1,447	1,268	1,289

SOURCES: Norfolk Landmark, November 7, 1873; Accomac Court House
Peninsula Enterprise, November 10, 1881; November 9, 1882;
November 8, 1883.

2,205 votes in the two counties, 9 more than John S. Wise in 1882 but 168 fewer than William E. Cameron in 1881. On the other hand, Wilkins, Browne's opponent, received 3,393 votes, 636 more than George T. Garrison in 1882 and 585 more than John W. Daniel in 1881. In Northampton County the Democrats' percentage of the total vote increased from 45 in 1881 to 48 in 1883 and in Accomac from 59 to 65. Wilkins' total was the largest any candidate had ever received on the Eastern Shore.⁴⁰

Both parties benefited from an increased white turnout. Virtually all the new Democratic voters were white while the Readjuster leaders estimated that they had added "not less" than 150 white votes to their column. Some of the 150 were white Republicans. On Chincoteague Island, where Nathaniel S. Smith went to work for the coalition ticket and where Teackle T. Wescott's local option views were especially unpopular, Readjuster strength returned to its 1881 level. Unfortunately for the Readjusters, their white gains were offset by black losses. Browne estimated that the black vote had fallen off by 15 per cent. Democratic bribes neutralized several of the peninsula's black

⁴⁰Scrapbook 32, p. 7, WM Papers, Duke; PE, November 8, 1883; Benjamin T. Gunter to John Randolph Tucker, November 8, William Alexander Thom to Tucker, November 8, 1883, Tucker Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C.

leaders, and the sacking of Thomas W. Taylor injured the Readjusters among his barrel factory employees and other blacks in the Onancock area (the Readjuster vote at the precinct declined from the 1882 total by 51 votes, double the decline at any other precinct).⁴¹

The Democrats so dramatically increased their vote not so much by seducing Readjusters (less than one in ten Eastern Shore Readjusters defected to the Democrats in 1883) as by attracting the support of previously nonvoting whites. Ironically, many of these new voters, particularly those in the Southwest, had been enfranchised when the Readjusters repealed the poll tax. Of nearly equal importance were those who had paid the poll tax but up to now had remained oblivious or indifferent to the blandishments of Readjusters and Democrats alike. For example, of the 4,600 or so white males of voting age residing on the Eastern Shore in 1881, about 3,400 voted in the gubernatorial election of that year. Of the nonvoting 1,200, fewer than 700 were delinquent in their payment of the poll tax. In 1881, 80 per cent of the adult male population voted in Northampton and 64 per cent in Accomac. In 1883, the percentages climbed to 84 in Northampton and 71 in

⁴¹John J. Wise to WM, November 8 (quote), November 26, John R. Waddy to WM, December 31, 1883, T. H. Bayly Browne to WM, June 15, 1884, clipping from Onancock Eastern Virginian in Frank Hollis to WM, November 13, 1883, WM Papers, Duke; PE, April 26, 1883.

Accomac.⁴²

For the white nonvoter, the most compelling of the Democratic arguments was the call for racial solidarity. "The [Democrats'] main point was that Mahone was trying to put the niggers above the whites," John J. Wise complained. More important, however, than the appeal to race (or, for that matter, anything else) was a greatly improved Democratic organization. The Democrats had drawn the color line before (albeit not so deeply), but it had won them few victories. Now, they had in place a machine so efficient that it not only got the message to the people but got the people to the polls. Close observers of Virginia politics knew to whom the credit belonged. In an astute post-election analysis a New York Sun reporter concluded that John S. Barbour "is a man of great executive capacity, an organizer as able as ever Mahone was thought to be. . . . He soon collected an enthusiastic lot of workers, and their work began to

⁴²McKinney, Southern Mountain Republicans, p. 106; Warrock-Richardson Almanack, 1883, pp. 30, 32-33; Massey vs. Wise, pp. 261-269; Garrison vs. Mayo, pp. 237-238, 241, 245; Scrapbook 32, p. 7, WM Papers, Duke. Nineteen of the 203 Eastern Shoremen identifiable as Readjusters defected to the Democrats in 1883 (see Appendix II, Table A16). Statistical information on politically active Eastern Shoremen was obtained from a computer database (hereafter cited as "Politicians") described in Appendix II. The great majority of the nonvoting Eastern Shoremen of both races lived in Accomac County. In Northampton a more even balance between the races and political parties encouraged competition and thus higher voter turnout.

be felt from the Tennessee line to the Potomac." John W. Edmonds lauded Benjamin T. Gunter for the Democratic gains in Accomac, but he too reserved his highest praise for Barbour:

Entering upon his duties, he found a party anxious to meet the enemy, but utterly without organization. Quietly, quickly, he went to work, with the instinct of a born leader he mobilized the party, and put it face to face with the enemy. . . . The result has been a surprising victory for the democracy. All honor to him. When Virginia gathers her jewels, John S. Barbour will receive his crown.⁴³

Having defeated the Readjusters, Barbour and his followers were not so foolish as to attempt to turn back the political clock. When the new Democratic General Assembly met in December it tacitly acknowledged the triumph of Readjuster principles. The legislators endorsed the debt settlement; continued the generous appropriations to the schools, colleges, and asylums; and let stand the abolition of the poll tax and whipping post. Nevertheless, while the Democrats dared not reverse popular Readjuster initiatives, they gleefully made war on Readjuster officeholders. They removed judges (Gunter claimed William T. Fitchett's seat on the circuit bench), revoked municipal charters, replaced the administrative officers of the commonwealth, and vacated

⁴³James C. Weaver to WM, October 13, John J. Wise to WM, November 26, John R. Waddy to WM, December 31, 1883, WM Papers, Duke; New York Sun in Richmond State, November 10, 1883; PE, November 15, 1883 (quote), April 19, 1884.

the boards of local and state institutions. They also gerrymandered the congressional districts and enacted the Anderson-McCormick Bill which beginning in 1885 placed the electoral machinery of the state in the hands of the Democratic Party. Finally, the Democrats passed a resolution, both petty and futile, demanding Mahone's resignation from the United States Senate.⁴⁴

The elections of 1883 cost the Readjusters the control of the state offices. The upcoming presidential election threatened a much worse deprivation--the loss of the federal patronage. A change of national administration would transfer offices, income, and influence from the Readjusters who sorely needed them to the Democrats who already were well-heeled, possessed of the state spoils, and in control of most of the state press. William Mahone recognized the danger. "Democratic success in the Presidency would be fatal to us in Virginia," he told a friend.⁴⁵

Throughout his administration, President Chester A. Arthur remained steadfast in his support of the

⁴⁴Pearson, The Readjuster Movement, pp. 165-167; Morton, The Negro in Virginia Politics, p. 122; PE, December 20, 1883, February 2, 9, 1884.

⁴⁵WM to James Longstreet, July 7, 1883, in Degler, The Other South, p. 302 (quote); WM to John E. Bradford, January 7, 1884, Letterbook, WM Papers, Duke; New York Tribune, December 15, 1883.

Readjusters. He granted Mahone nearly absolute control over the federal patronage in Virginia. "Has there ever been a man in the history of this country who has had conferred on him the power given to Senator Mahone by this Administration?" moaned a Straightout. "Not a five-dollar postmaster can be appointed in the State without his sign manual." A newspaperman marveled at Mahone's diligence in exploiting the patronage:

No new members of congress ever did more tramping from one department to another, or more interviewing of heads of those bureaus and chiefs of divisions than does Senator Mahone. His persistency with officials is extraordinary, and his requests are in the nature of demands and commands. The most insignificant employee hailing from Virginia is not beneath his notice and becomes a lever in his hands to move the readjuster forces.

The federal government, however, was a formidable bureaucracy, and the desires of even the active and powerful Mahone often were thwarted by the machinations of his enemies, by the advance of civil service reform, or by simple inertia.⁴⁸

Mahone made most of his patronage demands on the Justice, Navy, Treasury, and Post Office departments. He worked well with Secretary of the Navy William E. Chandler and with Attorney-General Benjamin H. Brewster,

⁴⁸John F. Dezendorf to Chester A. Arthur, May 11, in New York Tribune, May 14, 1883 (first quote); Boston Globe, September 5, 1882 (second quote); Chicago Tribune, September 19, October 3, 21, 1882; New York Tribune, September 23, October 26, 1882; New York Sun in Richmond State, November 10, 1883; Richmond Dispatch, February 19, 1884; PE, February 23, 1884.

the officials most concerned with the implementation of the administration's Southern policy. He also enjoyed smooth relations with Postmaster-General Timothy O. Howe, but he faulted Howe's successor, the reform-minded Walter Q. Gresham, for seeming to be "afraid to turn out Bourbons." Treasury Secretary Charles J. Folger proved accommodating, but certain branches of his sprawling department had been irredeemably contaminated by the reform virus. Sumner I. Kimball had made the Life-Saving Service immune from the importunities of patronage-hungry politicians while the Lighthouse Board allowed them to name replacements for retiring keepers but not to dictate the removal of the politically obnoxious.⁴⁷

On the Eastern Shore, Mahone's failure to remove Democrat Benjamin S. Rich as Life-Saving Superintendent acted, in John J. Wise's phrase, as a "cold water douche" on the growth of the local Readjuster Party. In 1882, forty-two of the fifty-three keepers and surfmen

⁴⁷Dorothy Ganfield Fowler, The Cabinet Politician: The Postmaster General, 1829-1909 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), pp. 180-187; WM to John J. Wise, September 17, 1883 (quote), WM to Frank Hollis, January 25, 1884, Letterbook, WM Papers, Duke; Richard A. Pouliot and Julie J. Pouliot, Shipwrecks on the Virginia Coast and the Men of the United States Life-Saving Service (Centreville, Md.: Tidewater Publishers, 1986), p. 5. First Assistant Postmaster General Frank Hatton, a practical politician from Iowa, actually ran the Post Office Department during Howe's tenure (Fowler, The Cabinet Politician, p. 181).

on the Eastern Shore stations were Democrats. "Had we all republicans and Readjusters in the stations it would be worth to us hundreds of votes," a Chincoteague Republican told Mahone. "Those who were in would not vote against us and those who aspired to get in would all vote with us." A couple of years later, John R. Waddy lamented that Rich's "retention is our curse. Far better for us if his removal had never been mooted. His retention presupposes we are powerless and that the Funders are masters of the situation."⁴⁸

The Democrats and Straightouts won few victories in the patronage war, but they kept up a guerilla struggle that cost the Readjusters time and effort. They discovered that being out of power allowed them the luxury of posing as civil service reformers. Typical was John F. Dezendorf, Straightout Republican of Norfolk. Having lost to the Readjusters his seat in congress and his control over the patronage in the Norfolk Navy Yard, this adroit carpetbagger suddenly recognized the unfairness of assessments and of

⁴⁸Joseph T. Kenney to William T. Fitchett, July 25 (quote), in Fitchett et al. to James D. Brady, August 10, Fitchett to Robert M. Mayo, September 28, John J. Wise to WM, August 10, John R. Waddy to Brady, August 14, 1882, Waddy to John J. Wise, August 6 (quote), Waddy to WM, November 28, 1884, Frank Hoskins et al. to Brady, August 25, John S. Wise to WM, August 28, Peter J. Carter to WM, August 30, October 16, William H. Stewart to WM, November 16, 1882, WM to Waddy, November 15, 1884, WM Papers, Duke.

appointments to federal office as rewards for political service. In 1883 Dezendorf wrote public letters to the President, the Secretary of the Navy, and other federal officials in which he protested boss rule in Virginia and described its deleterious effects on the operation of the Norfolk yard. Dezendorf's accusations elicited such a howl from the Mugwump and opposition press that Secretary Chandler soon announced (tongue in cheek) that the charges would be "thoroughly investigated" and that "the navy-yards shall not be used for political purposes by anybody." Privately, the secretary cautioned Mahone to moderate his demands on the department.⁴⁹

⁴⁹Israel Townsend to T. D. Williams, December 15, 1881, newspaper clipping in Charles L. Sanders to Secretary of the Navy, January 25, 1882, WM Papers, Duke; James D. Brady to William E. Chandler, December 26, 1882, William Eaton Chandler Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; New York Tribune, May 14, 24, October 25, 1883; Nation 36 (May 24, 1883), p. 435 (quotes Chandler); 37 (August 2, 1883), p. 85; New York Times, May 29, 1883; Harper's Weekly XXVII (May 26, 1883), p. 322; Hirshson, Farewell to the Bloody Shirt, pp. 114-115; Leon Burr Richardson, William E. Chandler, Republican (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1940), pp. 312, 313-314. On September 1, 1882, 435 men were employed at the Norfolk Navy Yard; on November 1 (election eve) 1,248; and, on December 1, 289. Chandler's reply to Dezendorf was a masterpiece of sarcasm: "Your familiarity with the yard, as a constant candidate for Congress since 1878 seeking special support from the voters there employed, will undoubtedly enable you to make many more suggestions for the suppression of abuses therein. . . . That you should, although now for the first time, invite the attention of the Department and the public to such abuses, after you have ceased to expect any personal benefit from the management of the yard, is a most commendable performance of public duty by a private citizen" (Chandler to Dezendorf, May 17, in New York Tribune, May

The Straightouts and their Democratic friends only occasionally caused trouble for the Readjusters on the national level, but they managed constantly to annoy them in the localities. On the Eastern Shore, Straightout Thomas W. Taylor and Democratic Congressman George T. Garrison combined their influence to delay for three months the removal of the customs house from Onancock to John J. Wise's premises at Accomac Court House. Both John S. Wise and Mahone had to visit the Treasury Department before the matter was resolved to John J. Wise's satisfaction. Eastern Shore Straightouts and Democrats also conspired to embarrass and harass the more partisan Readjuster postmasters. They persuaded their friends to refuse to post bond for the Readjusters, and they diverted the neighborhood mail to less objectionable postmasters, thus depriving Readjuster partisans of income from the cancellation of stamps. Meanwhile, Congressman Garrison frequented the Post Office Department in never successful but always irritating efforts to have new offices established under Democratic postmasters.⁵⁰

23, 1883).

⁵⁰J. W. Reid to WM, January 24, Wilbur F. Nottingham to WM, May 18, June 20, December 9, 1882, John E. Bradford to WM, February 8, John J. Wise to WM, May 13, July 2, 30, Wise to John S. Wise, June 25, in John S. Wise to WM, June 27, George Toy to WM, May 15, John S. Wise to WM, June 27, 1884, WM Papers, Duke.

Besides fending off the forays of their enemies, Mahone and his lieutenants had to reconcile the demands of the constituent parts of the Readjuster coalition. Federal Judge Robert W. Hughes of Richmond perhaps best illustrated the Readjusters' problem when he informed Mahone that in regard to his deputies, "My idea is to appoint a colored man in Norfolk, a Republican in Alexandria, and a Readjuster in Richmond, which would be a recognition of all the elements of our party." The Readjusters were careful not to offend their Republican allies. John J. Wise would have preferred a Readjuster to replace decapitated Republican Perry A. Leatherbury as postmaster at Onancock, but he instead asked Mahone to nominate John D. Tyler, "an old Republican . . . in full sympathy with our party. His appointment would shut the mouths of Perry's party friends." Eastern Shore Republicans fared well at the hands of the Readjusters. Few of those who held federal office lost their positions while several nonofficeholders received posts previously held by Democrats. Peter J. Carter was not indulging in hyperbole when in 1883 he told a Republican mass meeting at Eastville that "more Republicans now were holding office under Mahone than under any former administration."⁵¹

⁵¹Robert W. Hughes to WM, May 3, 1882, John J. Wise to Robert P. Fletcher, April 25 (quote), in Fletcher to WM, April 27, Wise to WM, December 24, 1883, WM Papers,

Carter and other blacks found the Readjusters much less reluctant than had been the white Republicans to afford them a share of the patronage. The Readjusters opened to blacks positions in the state government--a messenger for the governor, clerks in the auditors' offices, prison guards--and expanded their opportunities in the federal bureaucracy. Carter, as the Eastern Shore's most influential black leader, benefited greatly from Readjuster largess. He claimed two state offices--doorkeeper of the senate and rector of the Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute--as well as a prestigious and lucrative collectorship in the United States Internal Revenue Service. Other Eastern Shore blacks received responsible positions in the lighthouses and, for the first time, in the postal service. Black postmasters were appointed at Cherrystone and at Bridgetown in Northampton County, and a black served as an assistant to the postmaster at Pungoteague in Accomac.⁵²

Duke; Eastville Eastern Shore Herald, April 6, 1883 (quotes Carter).

⁵²"An Address to the Colored Voters," p. 789; John R. Waddy to WM, February 20, 1883, September 12, 1884, Peter J. Carter to WM, March 29, 1883, December 24, 1884, George E. Winder to WM, December 2, 1884, WM Papers, Duke; Record of Appointment of Postmasters, 1832-September 30, 1971, microfilm M841, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Carter lost his collectorship in a departmental reorganization in 1884 (Carter to WM, July 8, 1884, WM Papers, Duke; PE, July 12, 1884).

The difficulties Mahone encountered with the patronage less often involved political enmities and rivalries or bureaucratic idiosyncracies than the question of what man for what office. The dimensions of the problem were daunting. Mahone had control of well over 2,000 federal offices. For every position, he had to find an applicant both competent and politically reliable. Mahone kept a bound volume in which he noted the character and political persuasion of each officeholder, but, when selecting a new man, he usually depended on the advice of his lieutenants who, in turn, were at the mercy of circumstance. From time to time, local leaders failed to find qualified Readjusters to fill vacant offices. They then were forced to recommend a political neutral or a seemingly-inoffensive Democrat and to hope for the best. Even the appointment of a competent Readjuster was not without danger. A Northern Neck man warned Mahone against filling offices in the midst of a campaign:

I would not fill up the blanks for the appointment of white men for office preferring to keep them open in the shape of rewards for service rendered until after Nov[ember]. Some of our people let the desire for office out weigh party service. To my mind it is not advisable to put the active men during a fight into the Quartermaster department and we should recollect old [Jubal] Early's fate at Fisher's Hill and not stop to plunder the camp until the enemy are defeated.

While some new appointees, having received their reward, relaxed their efforts, others found that the nature of

their office curtailed or precluded overt political activity. The appointment of John Paul to the federal judiciary possibly cost the Readjusters a seat in congress and certainly deprived them of one of their finest orators. "The day Jno. Paul went on the bench we lost a tower of strength." a Tappahannock man wailed. "I saw him turn Richmond County in one speech."⁵³

Yet, for all the problems that came with the federal patronage, Mahone found it an indispensable weapon in his political arsenal. He used it to reward the faithful, to punish the defiant or slothful, to encourage the loyalty of party workers and their families, and to fill through assessment the party coffers. Mahone's control of the patronage brought victory to the Readjusters in 1881 and legitimacy thereafter. It bonded the coalition together and made it permanent. It was the crucial factor in turning an insurgency into an institution, a coalition into a party.

At the top of the patronage pyramid were the more lucrative offices in the judiciary, in the customs and

⁵³Pearson, The Readjuster Movement, pp. 153-154; Richmond State, July 27, 1883; J. W. Reid to WM, January 30, February 2, John R. Waddy to WM, February 14, March 2, 1882, January 18, 20, 1883, June 24, 1884, January 5, 1885, Jesse N. Jarvis to WM, May 22, William Mayo to WM, September 8 (first quote), John J. Wise to WM, October 18, 1882, January 8, 1883, March 25, George L. Meenley to WM, September 12, 1884, WM Papers, Duke.

internal revenue services, and in the urban postoffices. The men who held these positions did most of the work of organizing and directing the Readjuster Party on the district and county levels. At the base of the pyramid were the less remunerative but much more numerous (around 1,700) fourth-class postmasterships. The wharf and crossroad storekeepers and other humble folk who held these places performed the critical task of representing the party at the grassroots. From behind their counters and around their stoves, the postmasters distributed Readjuster newspapers and documents, interpreted Readjuster pronouncements, and defended Readjuster policy. For the party leaders, they noted neighborhood concerns and gathered political intelligence, and, on election day, they helped get sympathetic voters to the polls. The postmasters generally earned less than \$200 per annum in salary and fees, but they also received hidden financial benefits. They often secured the household trade of their postal customers, and they more quickly collected debts because they knew when their farmer patrons received checks through the mail. These pecuniary considerations accounted for much of the Democrat's resentment at losing the post offices and for much of their lust to

regain them.⁵⁴

The Democrats habitually accused Mahone of abusing the patronage to satisfy the voracious appetite for office of his followers (the "Buccaneer Salvage Crew," John W. Edmonds called them). Mahone certainly was not reluctant to wield the ax. During the three and a half years that he controlled the patronage, he arranged for the removal of thirteen Eastern Shore postmasters. The removals, however, were not capricious. The decapitated officials comprised less than a third of the peninsula's postmasters, and all were bitter enemies of the Readjusters. They included a Straightout Republican, the wife of a turncoat Readjuster, and Democratic committeemen, precinct workers, and other partisans. One of the Democrats, the postmaster at Wardtown in upper Northampton County, was removed after Peter J. Carter and others complained that he "has been giving us trouble for the longest time & . . . he treats our requests with contempt. Our letters are invariably

⁵⁴Pearson, The Readjuster Movement, pp. 153-154; H. Wayne Morgan, From Hayes to McKinley: National Party Politics, 1877-1896 (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1969), pp. 251-252; Stewart Kellam to WM, May 20, John E. Bradford to First Assistant Postmaster-General, June, in Bradford to Wm, July 4, 1881, Bradford to WM, March 16, 1882, February 8, September 10, November 14, 1884, John J. Wise to WM, March 14, Wilbur F. Nottingham to WM, May 18, Samuel J. Taylor to WM, October 18, 1882, Post Office Department Notices, January 4, February 20, December 7, 1882, WM Papers, Duke.

broken open; and all this bad treatment seems to be on account of politicks; as everybody is treat[ed] right, except Readjusters."⁵⁵

Eastern Shore Readjusters left inoffensive Democratic postmasters alone, but, when vacancies occurred, they tried to find reliable men to fill the positions. The Readjusters also took advantage of Mahone's control of the patronage to increase the number of post offices on the peninsula from forty-four to sixty-seven. The Readjusters thus served their community as well as their party. The establishment of the new offices created jobs for deserving Readjusters and goodwill among postal patrons while the daily mails brought isolated corners of the Eastern Shore more closely into the economic and cultural orbits of the larger world.⁵⁶

The fear of losing control of the federal patronage

⁵⁵PE, January 19, 1882 (quote); Record of Appointment of Postmasters; Peter J. Carter et al. to WM, January 27, L. S. Read to P. J. Carter, January 26, in Carter to WM, January 27, 1883, WM Papers, Duke.

⁵⁶Record of Appointment of Postmasters; John J. Wise to WM, October 10, 1881, April 17, May 10, 1882, Thomas W. Taylor to WM, October 27; James A. Hall and Thomas S. Copes to WM, November 30, 1881, July 12, 1882, Hall to WM, August 25, September 15, October, December 4, Abel T. Johnson to WM, January 27, Ambrose S. Taylor, July 6, July 12, John D. Parsons to John W. H. Parker, July 27, in Parker to WM, August 3, T. H. Bayly Browne to WM, September 21, 1882, William F. Giddings to WM, February 16, John H. Snead to WM, September 12, 1883, John R. Waddy to WM, January 20, 1885, WM Papers, Duke.

led to the formal entrance of the Readjusters into the Republican Party. Mahone knew well that the patronage could be withdrawn as quickly as it had been offered, and he also knew that certain Republicans--especially the popular James G. Blaine--were perhaps as likely to withdraw it as were the Democrats. He therefore worked hard in the early months of 1884 to secure the Republican presidential nomination for Chester A. Arthur. Mahone issued a call to his fellow Readjusters to gather in late April in Richmond to select delegates to attend the Republican National Convention scheduled for June in Chicago. Privately, he instructed trusted county chairmen to send to Richmond men sympathetic to the Arthur candidacy. Here, Mahone ran into the opposition of a few of his ranking lieutenants. Congressman John S. Wise and others considered Blaine the strongest Republican candidate. They believed him destined to win the nomination and hoped that the presence of Blaine supporters in the Virginia delegation would win for the Readjusters the goodwill of the Maine statesman. Governor William E. Cameron and United States Senator Harrison H. Riddleberger, on the other hand, were motivated less by a preference for Blaine than by a hatred of Arthur. The president, an experienced machine politician, knew the advantages of undivided authority. He preferred to work only through

Mahone and studiously ignored Cameron's and Riddleberger's patronage requests. Riddleberger was the most aggrieved. Arthur not only denied him a share of the patronage but even failed to invite him to call at the White House.⁵⁷

As usual, Mahone had his way at the convention. Pro-Arthur delegates, many of them federal officeholders, composed a large majority of those who gathered in Richmond, and, over the impassioned objections of the Blaine men, they elected a presiding officer, cut off debate, and selected for the Chicago convention a delegation committed to Arthur, chaired by Mahone, and bound to vote as a unit. The Readjusters also passed resolutions condemning the Democrats and endorsing free elections, federal aid to education, and the protective tariff. Protection, they maintained, would encourage Virginia's mining and manufacturing industries and provide "a ready and remunerative home market" for its agricultural produce. Then, having proclaimed their fidelity to Republican principles, the Readjusters made their predestined break with the past. They declared "that from and after this day our party shall be known as the Republican party of Virginia."⁵⁸

⁵⁷PE, April 5, 1884; Campbell "John Sergeant Wise," pp. 153-154; New York Times, August 11, 1884.

⁵⁸Richmond Dispatch, April 24, 25, 1884; New York Times, April 25, 1884.

Few, if any, Readjusters objected to the platform or to assuming the Republican name, but Mahone's ruthless imposition of the unit rule caused lasting discontent. Wise and most of the other Blaine supporters soon swallowed their bile and forgave, if not forgot, the rough treatment. Cameron and Riddleberger, however, nursed their grudges. These pouting politicians were men of similar temperament and attributes. Both were splendid orators and skilled writers, but both were proud and undisciplined men, given to impatience, a detestation of administrative detail, grandiose reveries, and an overindulgence in alcohol. Both for sometime had openly resented Mahone's domination of the party, and the general had retaliated by ignoring Riddleberger during the 1883 campaign and by neglecting to include in the program of the Richmond convention a resolution endorsing Cameron's administration. In the months following, Riddleberger and Cameron responded in different ways to Mahone's slights. The senator retreated to his home at Woodstock in the Shenandoah Valley where he consoled himself in his usual fashion. The governor went into open revolt. In the summer, over the vehement protests of Mahone and Wise, Cameron acceded to Democratic demands for a special session of the legislature (the Anderson-McCormick Act resulted), and in the fall he supported a

black Straightout for congress in the district which embraced his and Mahone's hometown of Petersburg.⁵⁹

The estrangement of Mahone from the more ambitious of his old comrades was inevitable. The general would command; others would obey. Mahone was happy to reward his loyal followers with offices and emoluments, but men like Cameron and Riddleberger wanted authority as well as its trappings. "What has weakened General Mahone with his prominent followers is that he gives them no say in any matter, but determines everything for himself," a highly-placed Readjuster explained. "He is like a commander who ignores his generals, colonels, and captains, and prefers to consult with sergeants and corporals about matters of the gravest importance. He works too hard, instead of letting others do their share." Peremptory and exacting in victory, Mahone seemed even more so in defeat. Men who tolerated his imperiousness in the good times resented his demands and

⁵⁹Campbell, "John Sergeant Wise," p. 155-157; Walter T. Calhoun and James Tice Moore, "William Evelyn Cameron: Restless Readjuster," in The Governors of Virginia, 1860-1978, ed. Edward Younger and James Tice Moore (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1982), pp. 101-102, 106; Howson White Cole III, "Harrison Holt Riddleberger," M.A. thesis, University of Virginia, 1952, pp. 104, 157; Richmond State, November 10, 1883; Richmond Dispatch, April 25, 1884; Henderson, Gilded Age City, pp. 177-179. Cameron probably called the special session of the legislature in order to appease Democrats who wanted to impeach him over some shady dealings involving state bank deposits (Philadelphia Press, October 3, 1885; Calhoun and Moore, "William Evelyn Cameron," p. 106).

questioned his wisdom in the bad.⁸⁰

A few days after the Readjuster convention adjourned, the Straightouts assembled in Richmond. This small band of diehards--the 100 delegates, alternates, and guests numbered less than a tenth of those attending the Readjuster convention--was in a joyful mood. Blaine, their political idol, seemed well on his way to the Republican presidential nomination, and the Straightouts felt certain that he would restore them to their rightful role as dispensers of the federal patronage in Virginia. They passed a series of resolutions calculated to please Blaine and the Chicago convention. They condemned repudiation, bossism, and Arthur while they endorsed the tariff, federal aid to education, political rights for blacks, and (presumably with straight faces) civil service reform. They concluded by selecting a solidly Blaine delegation to challenge the Mahone men for the Virginia seats in the Republican National Convention.⁸¹

The national convention and its aftermath brought nothing but disappointment to the Straightouts. Blaine came into the convention with more delegates than Arthur or any other candidate, but the credentials committee seated the Mahone men. Blaine received the nomination

⁸⁰Richmond Dispatch, February 19, 1884.

⁸¹Ibid., April 24, May 1, 1884.

on the fourth ballot, but he chose to recognize the Mahone organization as the official Republican Party of Virginia. Several factors combined to humiliate the Straightouts. Their condemnation of Mahone and his followers as repudiationists fell on deaf ears. The non-Virginian delegates to the convention considered the debt issue confusing, boring, and passe. The Straightout revelation that only one of the twelve Mahone electors had ever voted for a Republican presidential candidate backfired. The delegates believed that only an infusion of new men would revive the Republican Party in the South. Mahone's friends in the convention were not limited to the Arthur faction. Twenty United States Senators and a majority on the national committee favored the seating of his delegation. Finally, Blaine had come too far to allow past differences to deprive him of the nomination or of a chance for victory in the fall. He initially controlled only a plurality of the delegates, but he believed that patience and careful management would eventually win him a majority. He wished to avoid antagonizing his opponents and arraying the field against him. The seating of the Straightout delegates would not guarantee him a first-ballot victory, so he

abandoned them to their fate.⁶²

After the convention, Blaine concluded that Mahone headed the stronger organization and that the Virginia senator would work desperately to ensure a Republican succession. He also reasoned that if the Republicans were to carry any Southern state they would need the votes of the independents to whom Mahone was an inspiration. Under pressure from the national committee, the Straightouts withdrew their electoral slate. Hoping for a few patronage crumbs, most continued to support Blaine, but an embittered few voted the Prohibition ticket in the fall.⁶³

Blaine's recognition did more for the Readjusters' morale than for their war chest. So much campaign money was diverted to New York and other critical Northern states that Mahone later complained that "we were absolutely abandoned by the National Committee." Meanwhile, Blaine's emphasis on the tariff as a means of rebuilding the South appealed to many Virginians, but his resort to the bloody shirt in the latter days of the campaign allowed the Democrats to revive some unpleasant

⁶²Ibid., April 25, June 4, 6, 1884; Morgan From Hayes to McKinley, pp. 201-204.

⁶³Richmond Dispatch, June 7, 1884; New York Times, September 20, October 9, 1884; PE, October 18, 1884. See also Thomas Crockett, Facts and Fun: The Historical Outlines of Tangier Island (Berkley, Va.: Berkley Daily News, 1890), p. 39.

memories.⁶⁴

The hard feelings engendered during the nomination fight carried over into the Republican conventions held in late August in Virginia's ten congressional districts. Mahone loyalists generally controlled the meetings, but in the Second, Fourth, and Eighth districts delegates dissatisfied with the senator's leadership walked out. In the Fourth (Petersburg) District the bolters nominated a black Straightout in opposition to the regular candidate.⁶⁵

No such incident marred the uncontested nomination of Robert M. Mayo in the First District. Mahone had tried unsuccessfully to interest others in challenging Mayo in the convention. The hard-drinking former congressman was another who resented Mahone's control of the patronage and, when in his cups or under the strain of his disputed election case, had openly criticized the senator and President Arthur. In early August, with an eye on the heavy Eastern Shore vote, Mahone told John J. Wise that "I am satisfied you are by every consideration the man for the nomination and you can get it and you can be elected. . . . If you cannot and will

⁶⁴Robert M. Mayo to WM, November 22, 1884, WM Papers, Duke; Richmond Dispatch, October 22, 29, 1884; WM to William B. Allison, November 17, 1887, in Hirshson, Farewell to the Bloody Shirt, pp. 122 (quote), 124-126.

⁶⁵Richmond Dispatch, August 30, 1884.

not then why not Baily Brown?" Although certain of succeeding with Mahone's support, both of the Accomac men declined to make the contest, and the convention unanimously nominated Mayo.⁶⁶

Anxious to mute the race issue in the closely-contested district and concerned with how an inebriated Mayo might perform in debate, Mahone suggested that the candidate conduct a "still hunt" campaign. "I thoroughly agree with you in respect to the canvass in this district," Mayo replied.

I shall not advertise to speak on Court days but shall appear at those times & places where the enemy will least expect me. I shall have placards for local meetings at fish fries & oyster roasts & in that way get at the white voters. The colored voters should be worked up by speakers of their own race at private places & night meetings & brought as little as possible to the front.⁶⁷

Mayo aroused scant enthusiasm among First District Republicans. "I fear the nomination of Mayo will give us hell in this county," Wise sighed. "I am utterly disgusted with drunkards and drunkenness." The candidate's lackadaisical campaign confirmed the

⁶⁶Ibid., June 7, August 30, 1884; PE, December 20, 1883; WM to John J. Wise, August 10, 1884, Letterbook, Wise to WM, August 15, T. H. Bayly Browne to WM, August 17, 1884, WM Papers, Duke. The reapportioned First Congressional District included Accomac and Northampton counties on the Eastern Shore and eleven counties on the Western Shore.

⁶⁷Robert M. Mayo to WM, September 5, 1884, WM Papers, Duke. See also Mayo to constituents, September 16, in PE, October 4, 1884.

apprehensions of his critics. He missed at least one appointment on the Western Shore, and he paid only a flying visit to the Eastern Shore.⁸⁸

On the Democratic side, Congressman George T. Garrison wanted to run again if only to seek vindication for having been counted out in 1882. Unfortunately for Garrison, state chairman John S. Barbour wanted a stronger candidate in the field and so combined his influence with Western Shore Democrats who believed that the Eastern Shore had controlled the nomination long enough. "Garrison has had two terms which is ample reward for his services, and more than ample for his abilities," a Western Shoreman wryly noted. In the district convention held in Essex County in early September, opposition to Garrison coalesced behind Tappahannock lawyer Thomas Croxton. Although Garrison enjoyed the solid backing of the Eastern Shore delegation, Croxton claimed enough Western Shore support to win the nomination by a comfortable margin. The Eastern Shoremen, piqued by Garrison's defeat, made the nomination unanimous only after Croxton declared that he would decline unless the entire convention accepted him. Croxton made a formidable candidate. "The democrats

⁸⁸John J. Wise to WM, September 1 (quote), October 13, George L. Meenley to WM, September 12, T. H. Bayly Browne to WM, October 20, Robert M. Mayo to WM, November 22, 1884, WM Papers, Duke.

have nominated one of their best men," a Tappahannock Republican told Mahone. "A fine, and polished speaker. One whom can handle any of our speakers with the exception of Riddleberger, Paul, or Jno. [S.] Wise."⁶⁹

Once tempers had cooled, Eastern Shore Democratic leaders reconciled themselves to the Croxton candidacy. "We have a gallant, an eloquent, an earnest, and strong standard bearer in the person of Thomas Croxton," John W. Edmonds thundered. "Let our rallying cries be: Democracy and victory! Cleveland, Hendricks, Croxton, and 1500 majority!!" Edmonds and his ilk continued what Bayly Browne described as "the usual flow of stuff" about corruption, bossism, and Republicanism. They excoriated Mahone, of course, but saved their fiercest blasts for Blaine. They recalled that Blaine had used his office for personal gain while Speaker of the House of Representatives and contrasted his record with that of the pompous Grover Cleveland, reform governor of New York who had received the Democratic nomination. Aware that the tariff had a strong appeal to the truck farmers of the Eastern Shore and to many other Virginians, the Democrats tried to dismiss the issue as relatively

⁶⁹PE, May 10, 24, 31, July 19, September 13, 27, 1884; Shelton, "William Atkinson Jones," pp. 76-77; R. M. Blundon to William Atkinson Jones, June 16 (quote), Thomas C. Walston to Jones, November 7, 1884, William Atkinson Jones Papers, University of Virginia, Charlottesville; George L. Meenly to WM, September 12, 1884, WM Papers, Duke.

unimportant. "Mr. Blaine's friends are frantically urging that the contest shall be upon the tariff--upon anything and everything but the supreme issue of the hour," Edmonds maintained. The issue, he continued, "is political reform and political honesty with personal fitness as represented by Grover Cleveland, and political corruption and dishonesty with personal unfitness as impersonated by James G. Blaine."⁷⁰

The Mayo nomination aside, Eastern Shore Republicans found much to encourage them as election day approached. The defeat of Garrison in the Democratic convention rankled many Eastern Shoremen, the brilliant Blaine generated considerable enthusiasm despite his faults, and the tariff seemed a winning issue. Straightout sentiment on the peninsula all but disappeared as original Republicans, black and white, followed the lead of Blaine and the national committee. Only Thomas W. Taylor and a few of his cronies refused to cooperate with the Mahone men. For the Readjusters, the move into the Republican Party proved a painless one. "None have been badly frightened as was predicted

⁷⁰PE, May 3, June 14, July 19, July 26 (third quote), September 27 (first quote), October 4, 1884; T. H. Bayly Browne to WM, September 13, 1884, WM Papers, Duke. The editor of the Richmond Dispatch asked "how can any Virginia Democrat talk about free trade, or protection, or any other issue less important than the great one of dethroning sectionalism and enthroning nationalism?" (August 29, 1884).

by the name Republican and [they] will give the usual vote next November," an Accomac man reported.⁷¹

On election day Virginia Republicans increased their total vote by 12 per cent over 1883. Still, Cleveland edged Blaine 145,491 votes to 139,356, and the Democrats carried eight of the ten congressional districts including the First where Croxton defeated Mayo 14,136 votes to 13,579. On the Eastern Shore, the Republicans registered a dramatic 27 per cent increase (32 in Accomac; 20 in Northampton), but the Democrats improved by 14 per cent (16 in Accomac; 5 in Northampton) and easily carried the peninsula. Cleveland outpolled Blaine 3,854 votes to 2,795, and Croxton achieved a slightly larger margin over Mayo.⁷²

The greatly expanded Republican vote largely resulted from the return of Straightout abstainers to the party fold. The popularity of Blaine, the summons of the party in a presidential year, and the belated acceptance of Mahone's supremacy in state party affairs all contributed to bringing the prodigals home. The

⁷¹Frank Hollis to WM, May 17, T. H. Bayly Browne to WM, June 15, August 17, October 1, 20, Ambrose S. Taylor to WM, July 18 (quote), George L. Meenly to WM, September 12, John J. Wise to WM, October 13, Henry W. House to WM, October 26, 1884, WM Papers, Duke; PE, October 25, 1884.

⁷²Guide to U.S. Elections, 2nd ed. (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1985), pp. 341, 809; Warrock-Richardson Alamanack, 1885, pp. 32-33, 35.

increased total vote--18,000 new voters across the commonwealth (1,000 on the Eastern Shore)--reflected the further extension of the machine methods of William Mahone and of his unacknowledged disciple John S. Barbour. So tight was the Republican organization in Northampton County that party chairman John R. Waddy boasted that "we got every vote we had any right to expect save three." In 1884, 85 per cent of the adult male population voted in Accomac and 94 per cent in Northampton, up from 71 per cent and 84 per cent in 1883.⁷³

Virginia Democrats greeted the election of Grover Cleveland with loud hosannas. Not only would the support of the national administration be withdrawn from William Mahone, but for the first time since 1860 the federal patronage would be in Democratic hands. Cleveland, who had campaigned on a reform platform, maintained that efficient and inoffensive Republican officeholders should not be replaced by Democrats until the end of their four-year terms. Nevertheless, he found himself besieged by a horde of importunate Democratic politicians demanding the spoils of victory.

⁷³Thomas C. Walston to William Atkinson Jones, November 7, 1884, Jones Papers, UVA; John R. Waddy to WM, November 28, 1884, Charles S. Baker to WM, July 15, 1885, WM Papers, Duke. Percentages based on 1880 census (Warrock-Richardson Almanack, 1883, pp. 32-33).

He soon found a way out. "Many [Republicans] now holding positions have forfeited all just claims to retention," he told the Civil Service Reform League, "because instead of being decent public servants, they have proved themselves offensive partisans and unscrupulous manipulators of local party management."⁷⁴

Cleveland's followers in the Old Dominion wanted the term "offensive partisan" broadly defined. "The Democrats . . . should do unto the Republicans as the Republicans have done unto the Democrats for more than twenty years," John S. Barbour declared. "Let the headsman be to his post," John W. Edmonds pleaded, "and let the ax fall rapidly with undulled edge until the head of every Mahoneite Republican shall lie in the basket." The administration obliged its Virginia adherents. A thorough purge of Republicans holding federal office in the state began in late May 1885 when the postmaster-general decapitated eighty-eight

⁷⁴Allan Nevins, Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1933), pp. 235-236, 246; Dorothy Ganfield, "The Influence of Wisconsin on Federal Politics, 1880-1907," Wisconsin Magazine of History 16 (1932-1933), pp. 4-5 (quotes Cleveland); Fowler, The Cabinet Politician, pp. 188-189; Horace Samuel Merrill, William Freeman Vilas: Doctrinaire Democrat (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1954), pp. 103-105.

postmasters in a single day.⁷⁵

Lust for office consumed the Eastern Shore Democracy. "I never saw such a scramble . . . in my life," a Pungoteague Republican exclaimed. Several candidates vied for many of the offices, and personal struggles for the more remunerative places--the post offices on Chincoteague and at Onancock and positions in the customs and lighthouse services--often evolved into factional warfare. The Democrats had pilloried Mahone for manipulating the patronage, but, once in power, they made the senator seem a civil service reformer. In nearly four years Mahone removed only thirteen postmasters on the peninsula; in eight months the Democrats removed twenty-four. The vacant offices went almost without exception to bitter partisans. Perry A. Leatherbury, the Straightout for whom the Democrats shed so many crocodile tears when replaced by Mahone as postmaster at Onancock in 1883, remained in private life. The Onancock office was claimed by a man whom his Mahoneite predecessor described as "an active, Democratic, politician . . . not the choice of the citizens of our Town." The Democrats also cleaned out

⁷⁵Baltimore Sun (quotes Barbour) in Richmond State, May 28, 1885; PE, May 2, May 30, July 18 (quote), 1885; Richmond State, May 26, June 22, 1885. First Assistant Postmaster General Adlai E. Stevenson decapitated so many Republican postmasters that he earned the nickname "Headsman" (Fowler, The Cabinet Politician, pp. 193-194).

the customs offices and the lighthouses. Under the Republican regime the removal of lighthouse keepers usually occurred only for cases of neglect of duty; under the Cleveland administration they also occurred for "offensive partisanship." In the end only the personnel of the Life-Saving Service avoided the reform guillotine, but, then, most of the keepers and surfmen already were Democrats.⁷⁶

Adversity never disheartened Mahone; it merely strengthened his resolve. He immediately turned his attention to the upcoming gubernatorial and legislative elections. As always, he considered hard work and tight organization the keys to victory. "We must have a thorough precinct organization," he told John R. Waddy. "One man at each precinct who will give merely the little time necessary to organize our voters completely." That man, he continued, would scan the registration books, identify friendly voters and keep them straight, cultivate the persuadable, arrange for transportation on election day, and get out the laggards. In a circular letter to his county chairmen and other Republican leaders Mahone emphasized the need

⁷⁶George E. Winder to WM, December 24, 1884 (first quote), John D. Tyler to WM, July 23, 1885 (second quote), WM Papers, Duke; PE, November 29, 1884, January 24, February 7, 14, 21, 28, March 14, 21, May 23, July 18, August 15, September 19, October 3, 24, 31, November 7, 14, 1885; Record of Appointment of Postmasters.

for face-to-face campaigning:

While it is important to cover the court-greens, it is not on such occasions votes are made. It is the local canvass--the school-house and cross-roads talks--not formal speeches, that do the work. No man, however distinguished, should hesitate to talk, make a conversational speech, to any number of people who come out to hear him. Whether there are five, ten or more, they are entitled to such consideration.⁷⁷

Before giving his undivided attention to the 1885 elections, Mahone first had to deal with an attempt by Governor William E. Cameron to undermine his control of the state Republican Party. In an effort to win the support of the Republican rank and file, Cameron and his allies proposed that the party convention to be held in Richmond in mid-July pass a resolution requiring the appointment of county chairmen by local mass meetings instead of by Mahone in his capacity as head of the state executive committee. The Cameron men urged the measure as a democratic reform. Mahone, however, saw it not only as a threat to his own authority but also to the party's delicate racial balance. The direct election of county chairmen might broaden the party's appeal in the predominantly white west, but in the east it would tend to drive away whites by Africanizing the local leadership. Recalling that Cameron had appointed blacks to the Richmond school board in 1883 and had

⁷⁷WM to John R. Waddy, November 15, 1884, Letterbook, WM to ____, July 1885 [circular], WM Papers, Duke.

endorsed a black Straightout for congress from the Fourth District in 1884, Mahone insisted that the governor was now touting the chairmanship reform "that he may appear as the special champion of the colored man . . . and thus induce them to send him to congress from the 4th dist. [in 1886]." ⁷⁸

In the days before the convention, Mahone mobilized his followers. To help counteract Cameron's influence with the blacks, he called on Northampton's Peter J. Carter. "I want you to come to the State Convention," he told Carter, "and I want you to come in time for me to see you. I want you to fix yourself to make a speech in the Convention. I will give you the points." Meanwhile, he directed loyal county chairmen to have mass meetings endorse the executive committee's administration of party affairs and to instruct delegates to the convention to sustain the existing plan of organization. Mahone's Eastern Shore lieutenants hastened to assure him of their fidelity. Waddy told the senator that "Our party in this county understand . . . the Governor and his movements. His course for a long time has certainly astonished many of us. Does he intend to go through the negroes into the Democratic

⁷⁸Richmond State, July 14, 1885; New York Times, July 17, 1885; WM to John R. Waddy, June 11, 1885, Letterbook, WM Papers, Duke.

party?"⁷⁹

Mahone men so completely controlled the convention that they prevented Cameron's proposal from even coming to a vote. Carter played his part well. Speaking on behalf of the black men who stood by Mahone, he deftly criticized the proposal and wittily exposed the motives of its progenitors. Harrison H. Riddleberger assumed the leadership of the anti-Mahone delegates. Sadly, Riddleberger made a spectacle of himself, enlivening the proceedings with drunken harangues and comic-opera posturings.⁸⁰

Having affirmed its allegiance to Mahone, the convention adopted a platform and selected a gubernatorial ticket. The platform arraigned the Democrats for resorting to violence and fraud in state elections, endorsed the protective tariff, and called for local option, an eight-hour work day, a mechanic's lien law, improved railroad regulation, state expenditures for road maintenance, state backing for the economic development of the Southwest, and (now that the Democrats held the offices) reform of the state civil service. The ticket consisted of the popular John S.

⁷⁹WM to Peter J. Carter, June 10, WM to John R. Waddy, June 11, 1885, Letterbook, T H. Bayly Browne to WM, June 18, July 10, John R. Waddy to WM, June 22, Peter J. Carter to WM, June 25, John J. Wise to WM, July 9, 1885, WM Papers, Duke.

⁸⁰Calhoun and Moore, "William Evelyn Cameron," pp. 106-107; Richmond State, July 14, 15, 16, 1885; New York Times, July 15, 16, 17, 1885.

Wise for governor, Henry C. Wood of Scott County for lieutenant governor, and Frank ("Honor Won't Buy a Breakfast") Blair for attorney-general. Wise's nomination pleased Mahone who had quietly supported him, but the besotted Riddleberger denounced the ticket as "the cheap work of cheap men."⁸¹

A couple of weeks after the Republicans left Richmond, the Democrats assembled in the capital city. The Democratic conclave was not quite as harmonious as those of the recent past as a rivalry between John S. Barbour and John W. Daniel, the Party's most prominent leaders, burst into the open. Both men wanted the United States Senate seat that Mahone would have to relinquish if the Democrats retained control of the legislature in the 1885 elections, and both believed that the right man in the governor's mansion could further their ambitions. Barbour's choice for governor was Philip W. McKinney, a veteran politician from the Southside county of Prince Edward. Daniel backed Fitzhugh Lee, nephew of Robert E. Lee and an ex-Confederate cavalry commander presently a gentleman-farmer of Stafford County in Northern Virginia. Daniel reasoned that with Lee as governor his supporters could

⁸¹Richmond State, July 14, 1885; Campbell, "John Sergeant Wise," pp. 159-160, 161; Henderson, Gilded Age City, pp. 191-192; New York Times, April 23, July 17 (quotes Riddleberger), 1885.

argue that to elect Barbour to the Senate would give Northern Virginia a disproportionate number of the state's major offices.⁸²

Happily for Daniel, Lee proved overwhelmingly attractive to the convention delegates. He possessed an imposing physique, a chivalrous manner, and a name evocative of martial glory. Never mind his shallow intellect and lack of government experience, he would cut a fine figure riding to Democratic rallies in Uncle Robert's saddle. During the campaign, the astute Democratic managers would refuse to allow Lee to debate John S. Wise, preferring, in the words of a reporter, "to make their canvass . . . upon the basis of brass bands, cavalry parades, Confederate battle flags, cannon and eloquence." Rounding out the Democratic ticket were John E. Massey for lieutenant governor and Rufus A. Ayers, an industrious hack from the Southwest, for attorney-general. The irrepressible Wise provided an incisive commentary on the Democratic slate: "If you are a Funder, there is Lee. If you are a repudiator, there is Massey. If you are nothing, you will never have such an opportunity as you now have, for there is Ayers." As usual, the Democratic platform revealed the party's paucity of ideas. Except for neglecting to endorse

⁸²New York Times, July 29, 1885; Harry Warren Readnour, "Fitzhugh Lee: Confederate Cavalryman in the New South," in The Governors of Virginia, p. 113.

internal improvements and for a tariff plank so equivocal as to be nearly meaningless, it merely echoed the Republican platform. A Democratic editor fumed that "if the Mahoneites were to endorse polygamy there are a few expediency Democrats who would cry out, . . .

"Hurrah for BRIGHAM YOUNG." ⁸³

On the Eastern Shore, Wise's friends and kinsmen debated how best to help "Johnnie" win his election. John J. Wise finally persuaded the other Republican leaders not to field a legislative ticket. Wise believed that the absence of Republican candidates would make the Democrats apathetic and thus reduce Lee's majority on the peninsula. Waddy explained to an irritated Mahone why he had been swayed by Wise's logic:

I am on general principles opposed to a still hunt, yet I cannot say under what plan the majority of the enemy would be least. One great difficulty is in not getting the right man to run. Unless we can get substantial men--men of character, I am of opinion that it would injure our vote in each county. My county is ready to furnish a good man [William T. Fitchett], who is willing to be put up for the interests of the party, knowing he is to be knocked down, but I fear it will be hard to find two more with similar views & determination as to the sacrifice to be made. ⁸⁴

Despite the dearth of willing martyrs, Eastern

⁸³Richmond State, July 28 (third quote), 29, 30, 31, 1885; New York Times, July 29, 1885; Philadelphia Press, October 12, 19 (first quote), 1885; Richmond Daily Whig, September 8, 1885 (quotes Wise), in Campbell, "John Sergeant Wise," p. 164.

⁸⁴John R. Waddy to WM, September 9, T. H. Bayly Browne to WM, October 14, 1885, WM Papers, Duke.

Shore Republicans believed that they could poll as many votes for Wise as they had for Blaine. They again had a strong candidate running on an attractive platform; Cleveland's victory had thoroughly alarmed the blacks ("I do not think we will have any difficulty in getting a full vote from them," Bayly Browne reported); and, perhaps most important, a recession had soured many Eastern Shoremen on the national administration. In October an Accomac merchant told Mahone that in 1884 he had predicted hard times for the working man should Cleveland win the presidency. Sure enough, sweet potato prices had declined precipitously. "Money makes men think," the merchant continued. "A fellow told me but last night that he had thought of my talk a thousand times, and he see that the sweat of his brow was in rain. Renters can't pay land lords and [are] in as bad a predicament as the tenants. All seems to portray one comon gulph of ruin."⁸⁵

The Democrats responded to Republican complaints about the economy with the lame excuse that Cleveland could not be held responsible for the recession because

⁸⁵John R. Waddy to WM, November 28, 1884, August 19, October 14, 1885, T. H. Bayly Browne to WM, November 30, 1884, John J. Wise to WM, October 8, Thomas G. Elliott to WM, October 20 (quote), Charles L. Byrd to WM, October 20, 1885, WM Papers, Duke; PE, August 29, 1885. Sweet potato prices declined on the Eastern Shore from \$1.77 per barrel in 1884 to \$1.34 in 1885 (B. T. Gunter Jr to editor, PE, July 25, 1891).

no laws had been enacted during his term. Mostly, though, they ignored the issue in favor of the usual ranting claptrap about black rule and Republican corruption interlarded with shrill personal attacks on Mahone. John W. Edmonds, who passed the Civil War years attending the universities of Maryland and Virginia, even cast aspersions on the general's military record. For the first time, Eastern Shore Democrats declined joint discussions with Republican speakers. On August court day, Accomac leaders insisted that Frank Blair erect a platform of his own instead of sharing with Fitzhugh Lee the one already in place. They hoped that the crowd would divide along racial lines and thus validate their claim that their's was the white man's party. As election day approached, Edmonds worried about Democratic overconfidence. "Every Mahoneite will be at the polls on election day," he warned. "The fight they are making this year is not an open one, but it will be more effective, if thereby your fears are quieted and you stay away from the polls. Like a thief coming in the night they hope to surprise us."⁸⁸

Edmonds need not have worried. Lee carried the state with 152,547 votes to 136,508 for Wise, and the

⁸⁸PE, February 28, July 18, August 22, September 5, 19, October 17, 24 (quote), 31, 1885; Richmond State, September 1, 2, 1885; John J. Wise to WM, September 5, 1885, WM Papers, Duke. For Edmonds during the Civil War years see PE, August 8, 1936.

Democrats maintained a firm hold on the legislature. On the Eastern Shore, Lee outpolled Wise by 3,710 votes to 2,686. State Republican leaders blamed their defeat on the Anderson-McCormick Act. "The Democrats have carried the state and legislative tickets by unscrupulous use of election machinery, over which they have absolute control, and which was provided by their recent usurping legislature with this end in view," Mahone declared. For the Southside and some other parts of the state, Republican accusations of fraud were well-founded, but in the Tidewater the election appears to have been conducted fairly. On the Eastern Shore the total turnout declined slightly from 1884 with the Democrats sustaining the greater loss.⁸⁷

For Mahone, the Republican failure to regain control of the legislature meant the loss of his seat in the United States Senate. No Democrat deserved the senatorship more than his great rival, John S. Barbour, but, when bestowing high honors, Democrats in Virginia often preferred oratory to organization, style to

⁸⁷Guide to U.S. Elections, 2nd ed., p. 532; W. H. T. Squires, The Land of Decision (Portsmouth: Printcraft Press, 1931), p. 198 (quotes Mahone); Philadelphia Press, November 9, 1885; Wise, The Lion's Skin, pp. 364, 365, 371; Campbell, "John Sergeant Wise," pp. 177-178; Joseph Patrick Harahan, "Politics, Political Parties, and Voter Participation in Tidewater Virginia During Reconstruction, 1865-1900," Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1973, pp. 192-193; John R. Waddy to WM, November 16, 1885, WM Papers, Duke.

ACCOMAC COUNTY PRECINCT RETURNS
FUNDERS/DEMOCRATS

	<u>1873</u>	<u>1881</u>	<u>1882</u>	<u>1883</u>	<u>1885</u>
Chincoteague Island	54	117	180	135	196
Greenbackville		48	60	87	87
Hall's Store	107	86	43	121	126
Saxis Island		59	44	59	73
Temperanceville	137	117	118	190	204
New Church	105	104	79	115	140
Mappsville	79	68	56	116	128
Muddy Creek				81	128
Masonville					258
Guilford	325	280	252	264	
Newstown	99	82	106	131	122
Accomac Court House	292	313	327	380	370
Onancock	237	267	252	299	357
Tangier Island				35	23
Locustmount	111	164	155	173	161
Hawk's Nest					90
Pungoteague	<u>299</u>	<u>359</u>	<u>372</u>	<u>391</u>	<u>334</u>
	1,845	2,064	2,044	2,577	2,797

SOURCES: Norfolk Landmark November 7, 1873; Accomac Court House Peninsula Enterprise, November 10, 1881; November 9, 1882; November 8, 1883; November 7, 1885. Precinct returns for 1884 not available.

ACCOMAC COUNTY PRECINCT RETURNS
 READ/USTER/REPUBLICAN

	<u>1873</u>	<u>1881</u>	<u>1882</u>	<u>1883</u>	<u>1885</u>
Chincoteague Island	138	78	34	72	78
Greenbackville		8	0	8	11
Hall's Store	10	5	8	9	1
Saxis Island		0	0	0	0
Temperanceville	73	115	101	86	108
New Church	114	145	100	95	115
Mappsville	59	67	53	78	100
Muddy Creek				33	25
Masonville					9
Guilford	6	21	21	0	
Newstown	41	82	71	59	107
Accomac Court House	178	230	216	236	282
Onancock	155	172	159	108	152
Tangier Island				19	34
Locustmount	61	114	136	112	131
Hawk's Nest					104
Pungoteague	<u>333</u>	<u>410</u>	<u>370</u>	<u>374</u>	<u>334</u>
	1,168	1,447	1,268	1,289	1,591

SOURCES: Norfolk Landmark, November 7, 1873; Accomac Court House Peninsula Enterprise, November 10, 1881; November 9, 1882; November 8, 1883; November 7, 1885. Precinct returns for 1884 not available.

substance, image to reality. The legislative caucus chose for the position the courtly, the handsome, the mellifluous John W. Daniel. The Funder wing of the Democratic Party had regained its preeminence in the Old Dominion. The Readjuster Movement was over.⁸⁸

The Readjuster ascendancy had fortuitously coincided with an upturn in the national economy. Agricultural disasters in Europe created brisk demand for American foodstuffs which in turn stimulated domestic rail construction and manufacturing. Still, Readjuster initiatives had done much to quicken the pace of Virginia's recovery. The reduction in real property taxes encouraged private investment while the readjustment of the debt and the imposition of heavier corporate taxes (the taxable value of railroad property increased from \$9,876,000 in 1880 to \$35,955,000 in 1885) allowed liberal expenditures for much needed services. Meanwhile, William Mahone helped persuade his colleagues in congress to raise the tariff on iron ore and to reduce the tax on tobacco. Iron manufacturing,

⁸⁸New York Times, December 6, 8, 1885; Richmond State, December 10, 1885. The three Eastern Shore legislators preferred Daniel as did John W. Edmonds (PE, November 14, 28, December 5, 12, 1885). In 1887 Barbour was elected to the senate in the place of Riddleberger (Allen W. Moger, Virginia: Bourbonism to Byrd, 1870-1925 [Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968], p. 61).

tobacco production, and truck farming steadily advanced while railroads increased their mileage and seaports and inland cities thrived.⁸⁹

Readjuster economics combined with the demands of practical politics to expand political, cultural, and intellectual horizons. The Readjusters dramatically increased appropriations for colleges and schools. The number of schools in the commonwealth grew from 2,491 in 1879 to 5,974 in 1883 (from 49 to 92 on the Eastern Shore), while the daily average attendance of white students doubled and that of black students tripled. Mahone used his influence with the Post Office Department to extend the postal service into the rural hinterland. The department added 600 miles of new mail routes and established 347 new post offices in the Old Dominion (23 of them on the Eastern Shore). For Virginia blacks, the Readjusters provided schools, a college, and an asylum, eliminated the whipping post and the poll tax, and opened for the first time numerous

⁸⁹Matthew Josephson, The Politicos, 1865-1896 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1938), p. 266; Rendigs Fels, American Business Cycles, 1865-1897 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), pp. 115-124; Moore, Two Paths to the New South, p. 121; New York Times, May 18, 1882; Pearson, The Readjuster Movement, pp. 144 n. 13, 170, Blake, William Mahone, pp. 232-233; William DuBose Sheldon, Populism in the Old Dominion: Virginia Farm Politics, 1885-1900 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1935), pp. 13-15. By 1883 the Readjusters had accumulated a surplus in the state treasury in excess of \$1.5 million (New York Times, April 23, 1885).

positions in the state and federal civil services.⁹⁰

Perhaps the most impressive of the Readjuster achievements was the establishment of a strong Republican Party. At a time when the G.O.P. in most of the South was but a husk of its former self, the party in Virginia posed a serious threat to Democratic supremacy. In 1886 Republican candidates (one of whom was T. H. Bayly Browne) won seven of Virginia's ten seats in congress, and in 1888 Benjamin Harrison came within 1,600 votes of defeating Grover Cleveland. In 1889, despite intraparty feuding and widespread Democratic fraud, Mahone polled 43 per cent of the vote in an unsuccessful quest for the governorship, and as late as 1896 the Republican presidential candidate received 46 per cent of the vote in the commonwealth.⁹¹

Nevertheless, by 1890 the party was in decline.

⁹⁰Calhoun and Moore, "William Evelyn Cameron," p. 102; Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1885 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1886), p. 778; Ninth Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction For the Year Ending July 31, 1879 (Richmond: Superintendent of Public Printing, 1879), pp. xix-xx; Thirteenth Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction For the Year Ending July 31, 1883 (Richmond: Superintendent of Public Printing, 1883), pp. 56, 58; Blake, William Mahone, p. 233; Record of Appointment of Postmasters; "An Address to the Colored Voters of the State of Virginia," pp. 787-791.

⁹¹Guide to U.S. Elections, 2nd ed., pp. 342, 344, 532, 813; Blake, William Mahone, pp. 249-251; Moger, Virginia, p. 65. Amazingly, Browne carried the Eastern Shore in 1886 (PE, November 6, 1886).

Mahone's imperiousness eventually alienated many of his key subordinates while continued defeat (no matter how narrow) demoralized the rank and file. Meanwhile, a new, more rigidly racist generation of white Virginians was coming of age. These young men knew little of the paternalism of the pre-war regime. They knew best the hard racial competition of the post-war era. Republican economic arguments made little impression on them. They heard only the siren song of white supremacy. They were less apt than their elders to join the Republican Party and more likely to result to fraud and violence to defeat it.⁹²

Democrats claimed that Mahone's failure to win the governorship marked the end of his political power. Yet, they remained terrified of him until the day he died in 1895. Children growing up in Mahone's predominantly Democratic neighborhood in Petersburg in the 1890s absorbed the apprehensions of their parents. Seeing him on the street, a bold lad might call out, "Billy Mahone," and then all would scamper away. "We

⁹²Campbell, "John Sergeant Wise," pp. 193-194. For a careful examination of the idea that by 1900 southern race relations were moving from a paternalistic into a competitive stage see C. Vann Woodward, "The Strange Career of a Historical Controversy," in American Counterpoint: Slavery and Racism in the North-South Dialogue (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1976), pp. 234-260. See also John W. Cell, The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

feared him as we would a wizard," one recalled.⁹³

⁹³Squires, The Land of Decision, p. 168.

NEW SOUTHERNERS

Virginia, virtually alone among Southern states in the post-Reconstruction period, enjoyed a statewide two-party system. The commonwealth's peculiar Reconstruction experience facilitated the political division of the white electorate. Reconstruction in Virginia was brief and benign, and it left the Conservatives, unlike their counterparts elsewhere in the South, with precious few horrors to invoke. Indeed, the end of military rule in 1871 was followed not by an orgy of Republican corruption, taxation, and mismanagement but by an orgy of Conservative corruption, taxation, and mismanagement. The relatively small size of Virginia's black population also encouraged the development of a two-party system. The prospect of black domination seemed less plausible in Virginia than in states farther to the south. Thus, neither memories of the past nor fears for the future precluded the division of the commonwealth's whites into Funder and Readjuster and, eventually, into Democratic and

Republican camps.¹

The extreme bitterness of the Funder-Readjuster contest obscures the many similarities of the opposing parties. A close look at nearly 600 white Funders and Readjusters in Accomac and Northampton counties reveals that the antagonists shared the same occupations, religious allegiances, and military experience (Table 1). In their landholding, farm value and income, and credit rating, Funder and Readjuster farmers and merchants bore each other a striking resemblance (Tables 2, 3, and 4). The insurgents certainly were not isolated, backward, and impoverished. Like the Funders, the Readjusters were substantial, literate men, a quarter of whom lived in the Eastern Shore's numerous towns and villages. Nor were they young turks, soreheads, or interlopers. The Readjusters were of the same generation as the Funders, had had the same access to political preferment and responsibility, and were as likely to have been born in Virginia.²

Funders and Readjusters also shared an

¹Reconstruction in Virginia, wrote John S. Wise, "was a violent but harmless effervescence, but it subsided in a little while. Its importance has been much exaggerated" (Wise, The Lion's Skin: A Historical Novel and a Novel History [New York: Doubleday & Co., 1905], p. 195).

²See Appendix II for the database on which this paragraph and the accompanying tables are based.

TABLE 1. WHITE FUNDERS AND WHITE READJUSTERS

	Funders (n-392)	Readjusters (n-203)
Age (av.)	38.6	41.3
Occupation (%)		
farmer	38	37
businessman	20	21
professional	13	11
Literate (%)	96	96
Born in Virginia (%)	86	84
Town Dweller (%)	25	26
Leadership Experience (%)	17	14
Veteran (%)		
Confederate	8	8
Union	1	4
Religion (%)		
Methodist Episcopal, South	35	20
Baptist	32	31
Episcopal	13	23

(For sources and additional data see Appendix II).

Notes

Businessman includes merchants, commission merchants, store-keepers, grocers, clerks, hotelkeepers, undertakers, lumber dealers, oyster dealers.

Professional includes doctors, dentists, lawyers, school teachers, clergy.

Literate indicates those who could read.

Leadership experience was possessed by acknowledged men of influence and by those who served as officeholders, electors, party chairmen, party committeemen, and party canvassers above the precinct and primary levels who were elected or appointed through 1879.

TABLE 2. WHITE FARM OPERATORS

	Funders (n-183)	Readjusters (n-107)	All (n-1,945)
Tenure (%)			
owner	66	78	51
cash renter	19	15	30
share renter	15	7	19
Improved Acreage (av.)	70	79	56
Total Acreage (av.)	144	148	106
Value of Farm (av.)	\$3380	\$3231	\$2348
Value of Produce (av.)	\$505	\$514	\$401

(Source: U.S. 1880 Manuscript Census Accomac and Northampton counties:
Agriculture).

Notes

Value of farm is the combined value of land, fences, buildings, livestock, and implements and machinery.

Value of produce is the value of all farm productions (sold, consumed, or on hand) for 1879.

TABLE 3. WHITE MERCHANTS

	Funders (n-55)	Readjusters (n-32)	All (n-212)
Credit Rating (av.)	2.9	3.1	3.3

(Source: Dun's Mercantile Agency Reference Book 47 [July, 1880]. R. G. Dun & Company assigned credit ratings at intervals of .5 on a scale of 4.0 [lowest] to 1.0 [highest]. Thus, Funder merchants enjoyed a slightly higher average credit rating).

TABLE 4. WHITE PRINCIPAL FARMERS

	Funders (n-68)	Readjusters (n-41)	All (n-349)
Acreage (av.)	458	503	434

(Source: J. H. Chataigne, ed., Virginia Business Directory and Gazetteer, 1880-1881. Chataigne listed farmers holding 100 acres of land or more).

infatuation with the New South ideal. "This is emphatically a progressive, practical and calculating age," declared an Eastern Shore farmer. "The usages and habits of the people of the 'good old Colonial days' of which the Virginian speaks so touchingly, have passed away. We have entered upon a new era of progress." Having learned the hard lesson of Northern economic superiority, Virginians of all political persuasions welcomed Northern ideas, immigration, and investment. They championed urban development and agricultural diversification and promoted mines, manufactures, and internal improvements.³

On the Eastern Shore, both Funders and Readjusters encouraged the establishment of new steamship lines and the building of a railroad. "When the railroad, the great artery of the Peninsula for its trade, shall be completed we may look with absolute certainty to a surer, better and more profitable culture

³"Farmer" to editor, Accomac Court House Peninsula Enterprise (hereafter cited as PE), August 2, 1884; Jack P. Maddex Jr., The Virginia Conservatives, 1867-1879: A Study in Reconstruction Politics (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), pp. xii, 33, 278, 290; James Tice Moore, Two Paths to the New South: The Virginia Debt Controversy (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974), p. 14; David R. Goldfield, Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism: Virginia, 1847-1861 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), pp. 276-277; John Burdick, "From Virtue to Fitness: The Accommodation of a Planter Family to Postbellum Virginia," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 93 (1985), pp. 14-35.

for our lands," John W. Edmonds prophesied. "Already we feel the grasp of the potent power of the hands of Philadelphia, New York and Boston, with whom we hope soon to be in a mere hour's presence." Eastern Shore politicians also invested in sawmills, barrel and furniture factories, and other local enterprises. "In these times of heated political discussion," remarked Edmonds,

it is a great relief to turn aside from the strife of the arena and behold the quiet, yet resistless struggle of the material energies of Virginia and whole South, as step by step they advance to a final victory over the traditions, the prejudices and the sloth which have heretofore obstructed their progress. The new political evangel which is to redeem the South will be preached by furnace, and shuttle and loom.⁴

Edmonds and his Funder compatriots wanted the prosperity that furnace, shuttle, and loom might bring, but they rejected any concomitant innovations that might threaten their continued social and political dominance. Profoundly conservative, they valued more highly the sanctity of contract than the expansion of educational opportunity. They so bitterly opposed readjustment because it at once affronted their concept of economic orthodoxy and challenged their right to dictate public policy. The Funders were further offended by the

⁴Norfolk Landmark, August 30, 1874; PE, February 23, March 9, 30, April 13, May 18, August 10, 24 (first quote), October 26 (second quote), 1882, April 12, May 31, June 7, August 23, 1884, November 21, 1885; Orris A. Browne, "The Eastern Shore," PE, April 11, 1885.

Readjusters' alliances with blacks and with Republicans--the one because it seemed to threaten the established racial hierarchy, the other because it seemed to call into question the justice of the Confederate cause.⁵

The Funder philosophy was rooted in self-interest. The Funders wanted for Virginia a larger economic pie, but they saw no need for slicing the pie more equitably. To them, a reformed tax code seemed an invitation to theft, and increased expenditures for schools, asylums, and the penitentiary a useless extravagance. Some powerful interests naturally gravitated into the Funder camp--bondholders and bankers for obvious reasons; railroad men and other corporate executives because they resented the Readjusters' outrageous scheme to make the corporations pay taxes;

⁵Moore, Two Paths to the New South, pp. 26, 29, 44; Carl N. Degler, The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), p. 275; Catherine Silverman, "'Of Wealth, Virtue, and Intelligence': The Redeemers and Their Triumph in Virginia and North Carolina," Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York, 1971, pp. 5-6, 27, 282-283; Michael B. Chesson, Richmond After the War, 1865-1890 (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1981), p. 210; James M. Lindgren, "'First and Foremost a Virginian': Joseph Bryan and the New South Economy," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 96 (1988), pp. 159-160; Wise, The Lion's Skin, pp. 246-247. In 1884 the Straightout Republicans resolved "That public faith must be kept inviolate" and "That vested rights must be respected" (Richmond Dispatch, May 1, 1884). A refusal to forget the Civil War might account for the comparatively high percentage of adherents of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in the Eastern Shore Funder ranks (see Appendix II, Table A8).

and lawyers because they often were bondholders themselves, because they received fat retainers to represent bondholders, and, more important, because their legal training taught them to favor precedent over equity. Tagging along were lesser fry--the remains of the old aristocracy, adrift in a bewildering world, and the clergy, obsequious in the presence of the wealthy. The bankers and prominent businessmen proved especially useful at fundraising; the lawyers at organizing. On the Eastern Shore, lawyers were among the few men with the time, money, and personal connections to canvass properly the precincts and with the oratorical training to make an effective stump speech. Happily for the Funders, the lawyers had not only skills and resources but a compelling reason to employ them. John R. Waddy explained the Funder grip on Accomac County:

At the Court House there are some fifteen lawyers (old & young) [of whom twelve were Funders]. Nearly all of the old ones want to go to Congress & nearly all of the young ones want to become members of the Legislature of Virginia. They are all the time in politics & with them, the canvass begins on the 1st day of January & ends on 31st day of December each year.⁸

⁸Allen W. Moger, Virginia: Bourbonism to Byrd, 1870-1925 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968), p. 64; Philadelphia Press, October 17, 1885; Lindgren, "First and Foremost a Virginian," p. 161; George E. Winder to William Mahone (hereafter cited as WM), August 8, S. T. Ross to the Honorable Members of the Re-Adjuster Party in the General Assembly, December 1, in John W. H. Parker to WM, December 3, 1881, John R. Waddy to WM, November 28, 1884 (quote), November 16, 1885, WM Papers, Duke University, Durham, N.C. For

For the Funder leadership, economic, philosophic, and racial concerns determined their resistance to readjustment, but only a terrible fear of losing the prestige and perquisites of power can explain the ferocity with which they attacked the Readjusters. Faced with political oblivion, the Funders unleashed on their opponents a torrent of abuse. They ridiculed the Readjusters as "the 'rag-tag' and 'bob-tail' of creation" and branded them as thieves, opportunists, communists, corruptionists, and miscegenists. They brow-beat the wavering and ostracized the apostate. The Funders portrayed themselves as "the real representatives of the worth, intellect and industry" in Virginia and as the repositories of the commonwealth's virtue, honor, and tradition. In their most audacious conceit, they invoked the names of Robert E. Lee and other Confederate heroes as if they were the patron saints of the high Funder church.⁷

enlightening comments on the legal mind see Gail Williams O'Brien, The Legal Fraternity and the Making of a New South Community, 1848-1882 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), p. 145, and David Ogg, England in the Reign of Charles II, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 10. By self-interest, I mean jealousy of place and power as well as of material possessions.

⁷PE, September 1, December 1 (first quote), 1881, March 30, 1882; Charlottesville Chronicle in Richmond State, August 6, 1881; Richmond State, July 24, 1883 (second quote); October 13, 1881, Bessie Gunter Diary,

Funder pretensions disgusted the Readjusters. Particularly galling was the Funder attempt to identify themselves with the Lost Cause. The Readjusters noted that most of the principal insurgent leaders--William Mahone, William E. Cameron, Harrison H. Riddleberger, John S. Wise, John Paul--had served in the Confederate military while a number of prominent Funders--John S. Barbour, John Randolph Tucker, John Goode, Anthony M. Keiley--had escaped combat either by staying at home or by holding public office. Mahone found Tucker's career especially revolting. Tucker, the Hero of the Crater told a friend,

was, as I was, a war-man, but took care not to expose himself to any danger in the conflict. When it was over he left his state and people to get along with military and radical rule, as how they could, while he lived in peace and luxury at the hands of the Baltimore and Ohio Rail-road company, the vilest enemy, in peace, in war, and during our distress and misfortunes that Virginia ever had.

1880-1881, Eastern Shore Public Library, Accomac, Va.; John R. Waddy to William C. Elam, April 9, 1880, Carlton R. Moore to WM, November 14, John W. H. Parker to WM, November 30, 1881, John E. Bradford to WM, January 23, 1882, March 30, 1883, John Goffigon to "Rod," June 27, in William T. Fitchett et al. to James D. Brady, August 10, 1882, Frank Hollis to WM, October 3, 1883, Thomas G. Elliott to WM, October 20, 1885, WM Papers, Duke; Nelson Morehouse Blake, William Mahone of Virginia: Soldier and Political Insurgent (Richmond: Garrett & Massie, 1935), p. 270. In 1879 a Southampton man stated that his county had "produced two noted characters--Nat Turner, the insurrectionist; and Billy Mahone, the communist; and the latter might profit by the example of the former" (Norfolk Virginian, December 18, 1879, in Thomas C. Parramore, Southampton County, Virginia [Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia for the Southampton County Historical Society, 1978], p. 193).

Mr. Tucker comes back to Virginia, when he finds a safe place at Washington College, and he steps into Congress, when of all men of any note in his district he least deserved it. . . . Latterly, he is bold to talk about maintaining Virginia's honour, if need be, by paying all her debt himself. No man . . . , in my opinion, is less deserving of the place he holds.⁸

Eastern Shore Readjusters harbored similar resentments. Their war horses--John J. Wise, T. H. Bayly Browne, John R. Waddy, William T. Fitchett--all were Confederate veterans while their Funder counterparts--Benjamin T. Gunter, John W. Edmonds, George T. Garrison, Thomas Walston--were, in the Readjusters' terminology, "bomb-proofs." An embittered Bayly Browne recalled that Gunter "actually crossed the [Chesapeake] Bay with myself in /61 and went to Richmond, drew in my presence over \$500 for services as a Militia Colonel and in less than three days had surrendered to the [federal] authorities at [Accomac Court House]!!! and remained here the balance of the war speculating upon our necessities."⁹

⁸James T. Moore, "To Carry Africa Into the War: The Readjuster Movement and the Negro," M.A. thesis, University of Virginia, 1968, pp. 11, 12; John S. Wise, The End of an Era (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899), pp. 395-396, 461; George C. Round to "Church," September 9, in Round to WM, October 15, 1880, WM Papers, Duke; WM to E. W. Hubbard, September 24, 1877, Edmund Wilcox Hubbard Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

⁹William H. Parker to WM, July 17, 1877, T. H. Bayly Browne to WM, January 8, September 26, 1881, August 17, 1884 (quote), Stewart Kellam to WM, May 20, 1881, John S. Wise to WM, October 22, 29, 1882, WM

Funder prattle about preserving Virginia's sacred honor also infuriated the Readjusters. John S. Wise maintained that the Conservative regime was erected on a foundation of deceit. He pointed out that in order to get Virginia readmitted into the Union the Conservatives consented to black suffrage all the while intending to deny the blacks a free vote and a fair count. "The pretended acceptance of negro suffrage," he explained, "started the people of Virginia upon a downward career of political dishonesty and duplicity." Wise and others wondered how the Funders reconciled their concept of honor with their use of money, whisky, and prostitutes to bribe legislators in behalf of Northern railroad interests. Moreover, the Readjusters questioned how honorable men could continue to offer toasts and testimonials to scoundrels such as Bradley T. Johnson and Gilbert C. Walker. As for the debt, the Readjusters believed that the Funders had no intention of paying it. "Our politicians howl for Honor on the Court House green," noted a Manassass man, "and in the same breath pretend to oppose the increase of taxation

Papers, Duke; PE, October 26, 1882. Gunter did spend a brief period under federal confinement in Fort McHenry, Baltimore (Ben T. Gunter, "Benjamin Thomas Gunter," ESPL. When the Eastern Shore leadership group is taken as a whole, Funders were as likely as Readjusters to have been Confederate veterans (see Appendix II, Table B15). However, the principal Readjuster leaders were more likely to have been veterans than their Funder counterparts.

necessary to maintain what they call Honor!" Or, as Wise succinctly put it: "a Virginian Debt-payer [is] one who would rather owe you all his life than cheat you out of a cent."¹⁰

Unlike the Funders, the Readjusters subscribed completely to the progressive spirit of the age. They advocated more equitable taxation, a comprehensive educational system, racial accommodation, and honest elections. "I have thought it wise to live for the future and not the dead past," Mahone told a fellow Confederate veteran, "and while cherishing honorable memory of its glories, I have thought that we should look to the future for life, power and prosperity--[to] practical policies and not to theories." Mahone and his followers believed that Virginia would not know prosperity until rid of the state debt and that prosperity under the new industrial order could be sustained only by an educated populace. "It is the poor men who build up a country not the rich," a Northampton

¹⁰Wise, The Lion's Skin, pp. 238 (first quote), 268, 303 (third quote), 322-323; Otho C. Campbell, "John Sergeant Wise: A Case Study in Conservative-Readjuster Politics in Virginia, 1869-1889," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1979, pp. 23, 67; Moore, Two Paths to the New South, p. 25; George C. Round, "To the People of the First Virginia District," Onancock Eastern Virginian, October 26, 1878 (second quote); Robert M. Mayo to Rutherford B. Hayes, November 28, 1879, Hayes Papers, Hayes Presidential Center, Spiegel Grove, Fremont, Ohio; T. H. Bayly Browne to WM, September 13, 1884, WM Papers, Duke.

insurgent told Mahone. "But the poor man must be educated or he cannot do it." The Readjusters maintained that partial repudiation attended by reduced taxation would free funds for both private investment in Virginia's economy and for public expenditure on the commonwealth's schools.¹¹

Ironically, for all the opprobrium that the Funders heaped on the Readjusters as the dishonorable agents of Northern Republicanism, the Readjusters proved far more faithful to the old dream of Virginia's economic independence than their opponents. While the Funders too often did the bidding of Yankee plutocrats, the Readjusters thwarted the Northern bondholders, led the fight against the Northern railroad men, and, by championing the protective tariff, offered tangible encouragement to Virginia industry. With a clearer conscience than many of his traducers, Mahone could declare that "My allegiance, under God, is to my country, and my first duty is to the people of Virginia."¹²

¹¹Moore, Two Paths to the New South, p. 120; Degler, The Other South, pp. 274-275; Wise, The Lion's Skin, pp. 165-166; WM to Thomas T. Munford, July 22, 1882, Munford-Ellis Papers, Duke; Carlton R. Moore to WM, December 16, 1880 (quote), November 14, 1881, WM Papers, Duke; Richmond State, June 3, 1881.

¹²Goldfield, Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism, p. 276; Blake, William Mahone, p. 210 (quotes WM).

The Readjusters united with black Virginians only because the cause of readjustment demanded it. From the outset, the Readjusters rejected the idea of social equality and reserved for themselves the leadership of the coalition. "Our colored people must now realize that to preserve their liberties they must let us lead--they must not over burthen us," Mahone counseled. "Prejudices are still to be consulted. Time will subdue them--but we must be wise not to fight them--even with reason--nothing vs. them avails." Yet, neither practical politics nor their own vision of a new Virginia would allow the Readjusters to ignore black aspirations. "Virginia . . . has no cause for hostility against the colored people who form so large a part of her population," Mahone told his Senate colleagues. "They are as essential to her fields of industry as the machinery of New England is to her factories. They are a factor in her life for which no other can be substituted, and between the races as between the classes there is a community of interest on which is dependent the happiness and welfare of all." To the end of elevating the blacks as workers and as citizens, the Readjusters provided them with vastly increased educational opportunities, places on juries, jobs in the state and federal patronage, and nominations in black districts. Most blacks heartily supported the

Readjusters. "The success of the Mahone movement in Virginia means education, liberty, a free ballot, and a fair count for the colored man . . . and I am for it heart and soul," exclaimed John Mercer Langston. Many whites, however, correctly perceived the Readjuster initiatives to be a radical departure from established racial norms.¹³

For most Readjusters, their entry into the Republican Party was quite painless. The idea of a Conservative rapprochement aroused in them a feeling akin to nausea. Funder sins were too grievous; Funder arrogance too unbearable. "I have no compromise to offer with the funders, brokers and their followers, who have, in my judgment, done more real harm and lasting injury to the good name and welfare of my state than all the federal forces ever did, or could do," William T. Fitchett told Mahone. The inimitable John S. Wise was

¹³Degler, The Other South, pp. 277, 310 (first quote); Moore, Two Paths to the New South, pp. 104, 105; James T. Moore, "Black Militancy in Readjuster Virginia, 1879-1883," Journal of Southern History LXI (1975), pp. 179-180, 181; John E. Bradford to WM, January 23, 1882, March 30, 1883, James Storum to WM, February 6, 1885, WM Papers, Duke; James Hugo Johnston, "The Participation of Negroes in the Government of Virginia from 1877 to 1888," Journal of Negro History 14 (1929), pp. 267-268 (second quote); Chicago Tribune, September 19, 1882 (third quote). "I did not want you to be freed," John S. Wise told a black audience. "I fought against it; but the difference between me and the Bourbons is that I have realized that you are free, while they won't believe it until they have another war, in which they will get licked worse then before" (New York Evening Post, November 4, 1882).

more direct. "Every stinking remnant of self-constituted aristocracy must be thrown on the manure pile," he exclaimed. As for the national Democratic Party, it had scorned the Readjusters in 1880 and seemed without a firm policy on the vital issues of the day. The Readjusters maintained that the blind devotion of Virginia whites to the Democracy had brought disaster to the commonwealth. "Where there is consolidation of political sentiment," an Eastern Shoreman noted, "there is bound to be oppression, bigotry, stagnation of progress and poverty of ideas." The Republican Party, on the other hand, offered to the Readjusters practical benefits and a clear and comfortable ideology. The federal patronage would provide the Readjusters with the cement with which to hold together their organization against Funder calumny and ostracism, and the Republican program of aid to education, the protective tariff, and internal improvements would bring to Virginia a Northern-style industrial economy and a thorough and sustained prosperity. In going into the Republican Party, the Readjusters simply followed the logic of the New South to its conclusion.¹⁴

¹⁴William T. Fitchett to WM (first quote), January 1, Carlton R. Moore to WM, December 16, 1880, March 4, 1882, John E. Bradford to WM, August 3, 1881, August 10, 1882, January 25, 1884, Frank Hollis to WM, May 17, 1884, WM Papers, Duke; New York Times, April 28, 1880; Campbell, "John Sergeant Wise," p. 116 (second quote); H. H. Riddleberger, "Bourbonism in Virginia," North

The brief Readjuster ascendancy humiliated and frightened the Funders, but it also gave them the opportunity to manufacture a component essential to Democratic rule in the South--a Reconstruction legend. In the context of events, Funder distortions, half-truths, and prevarications seemed credible. Were not the Readjusters repudiationists? Were not they the creatures of a boss? Were not they Negro lovers? Were not they Black Republicans? On the strength of these arguments, the Readjuster regime was overthrown. The Funders had won, and the winners and their heirs would write the history.

American Review 134 (April, 1882), p. 417; "Advance" to editor, PE, February 15, 1883 (third quote).

THE SOUTH

"The cause and motives of seditions are. innovation in religion; taxes; alteration of laws and customs, breaking of privileges; general oppression; advancement of unworthy persons; strangers; dearths; disbanded soldiers; factions grown desperate; and whatsoever, in offending people, joineth and knitteth them in common cause" (Francis Bacon, "Of Seditions and Troubles," in The Essays of Francis Bacon, ed. Clark Sutherland Northup [Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1908], p. 46).

The Readjuster triumph over the Conservative Democrats in the 1881 Virginia elections encouraged independents, dissident Democrats, and Republicans across the South. W. R. Hamby of Nashville congratulated Readjuster leader William Mahone "upon your grand victory. . . . I hope it may prove the Waterloo of Bourbonism. By your patriotism and courage you have made nationalism, liberalism and progress possible in the South." James Mitchell of Atlanta told Mahone of his hope that Virginia would lead "the south, the whole south." out of the clutches of the Democracy. Mitchell noted, however, that "she cannot lead without the leading power and patronage." and he wondered whether Republican President Chester A. Arthur would "give that needed aid."¹

Arthur indeed seized the opportunity to break the solidly Democratic South. He directed Republicans to support independent movements in most of the Southern states. Inspired by Mahone and backed by Arthur, the

¹Hamby to Mahone, November 12, Mitchell to Mahone, November 14, 1881, William Mahone Papers, Duke University, Durham, N.C.; New York Tribune, November 16, 1881; Chicago Tribune, December 10, 1881. "The whites must be divided and we can have peace, prosperity & honest elections in the South, and no such division is possible unless Independents are favored by the Administration & the Republican leaders," an Alabama man told Mahone. "Bourbonism can be broken to pieces by the Independents alone. The events since 1868 demonstrate that the Republicans cannot accomplish that desired result" (Anthony W. Dillard, Eutaw, to Mahone, April 8, 1881, Mahone Papers, Duke).

Republican-independent coalitions in 1882 presented the stiffest challenge faced by Southern Democrats between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and the coming of Populism in the early 1890s. Yet, outside of Virginia, these coalitions either achieved limited success, suffered crushing defeat, or failed altogether to materialize. An examination of these failures in the light of Mahone's accomplishment reveals the conditions necessary to successful political insurgency in the South in the latter decades of the nineteenth century.

ARTHUR'S SOUTHERN POLICY

The Republican Presidents who occupied the White House from 1869 through 1884 wrestled with the problem of how to sustain and enlarge an overwhelmingly black Republican Party in the South in the face of Democratic proscription, fraud, intimidation, and violence. Each executive's personality and experience dictated his approach to the problem.¹ U. S. Grant enjoyed life as President--the military pomp of his White House, whisky

¹For overviews see Vincent P. De Santis, Republicans Face the Southern Question: The New Departure Years, 1877-1897 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1959); Stanley P. Hirshson, Farewell to the Bloody Shirt: Northern Republicans and the Southern Negro, 1877-1893 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962); and Bess Beatty, A Revolution Gone Backward: The Black Response to National Politics, 1876-1896 (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1987). For Grant see William Gillette, Retreat from Reconstruction, 1869-1879 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), pp. 166-185. For Hayes see Gillette, Retreat from Reconstruction, pp. 335-362; and De Santis, "President Hayes's Southern Policy," Journal of Southern History XXI (1955), pp. 476-494. For Garfield see De Santis, "President Garfield and the Solid South," North Carolina Historical Review XXXVI (1959), pp. 442-465; and Allan Peskin, "President Garfield and the Southern Question: The Making of a Policy That Never Was," Southern Quarterly XVI (1978), pp. 375-386. For Arthur see De Santis, "President Arthur and the Independent Movements in the South in 1882," Journal of Southern History XIX (1953), pp. 346-363; and Justus Doenecke, The Presidencies of James A. Garfield & Chester A. Arthur (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1981), pp. 105-125.

and cigars with rich and powerful admirers, extended vacations at Long Branch--but he did not always relish the duties of the office. He pursued his Southern policy in fits and starts. Disastrously long periods of inactivity were punctuated by brief applications of armed force on the behalf of weak and corrupt carpetbag regimes. By the middle of his second term, Grant, like many Republicans in the North, was weary of maintaining the Southern wing of the party. "I begin to think that it is time for the republican party to unload," he said in January 1874.

There has been too much dead weight carried by it. . . . I am tired of this nonsense. Let Louisiana take care of herself, as Texas will have to do. I don't want any quarrel about Mississippi State matters referred to me. This nursing of monstrosities has nearly exhausted the life of the party. I am done with them and they will have to take care of themselves.²

Rutherford B. Hayes's removal of the federal troops from South Carolina and Louisiana shortly after his inauguration in March 1877 left all the Southern states under Democratic control. Hayes, however, did not despair. A moral reformer who believed that the best people should rule, the President hoped to invigorate the Southern Republican Party by replacing the reprobate carpetbag element with respectable native whites who shared his conservative convictions. While urging civil

²New York Herald, January 18, 1874, in Gillette, Retreat from Reconstruction, p. 182.

service reform for the nation, he manipulated the federal patronage in an attempt to bring Southern Democrats into the Republican ranks. Hayes shunned the rising Southern independent movements. Not surprisingly, he found Mahone's Readjusters to be particularly obnoxious because they offended both Northern financial interests and the Southern conservatives he wished to attract. Despite the pertinacity with which Hayes pursued his policy, it proved a dismal failure. Southern Democrats accepted his favors but laughed at his overtures. A North Carolina Democratic congressman observed that "having killed [the Southern Republican Party] and buried it with scorn and execration, it is nonsense to suppose any of us will dig it up and become its allies."³

James A. Garfield quickly put an end to Hayes's experiment, but assassination denied him the time to develop a policy of his own. A man of humble origin, Garfield had learned the value of education, industry, and patience. Shortly after his election in 1880 he sketched for a friend what probably would have been his long-range plan for making a Republican South: "Then give the South, as rapidly as possible, the blessings of general education and business enterprise and trust to

³William M. Robbins to Samuel J. Randall, May 19, 1877, in *ibid.*, pp. 351-352.

time and these forces to work out the problem." Once Garfield assumed the presidency in early 1881 the more immediate question of what to do about the situation in Virginia absorbed his attention. Like Hayes, Garfield at first regarded the Readjusters as mere debt repudiators unworthy of the support of orthodox Republicans. The temptation to bring Virginia out of the Democratic fold proved strong, however, and leading Republicans such as Roscoe Conkling, Don Cameron, George Frisbie Hoar, and Marshall Jewell urged the President to assist Mahone. After much hemming and hawing, Garfield decided to divide the patronage in Virginia between Republicans and Readjusters. "Of course I have no trouble in removing Bourbon Democrats of whom there are plenty in Virginia," he told John Hay, "but I will not remove Republicans to appoint Mahone men. I shall do enough for Mahone to help him against the Bourbons but not abandon our organization."⁴

When Garfield died on the night of September 19, 1881, Chester A. Arthur succeeded to the presidency. Tall, well-fed, and handsome, educated and cultured, his taste refined, his manner elegant, his disposition agreeable, Arthur was the consummate gentleman of his

⁴Garfield to Burke Hinsdale, December 30, 1880, in De Santis, "President Garfield and the Solid South," p. 449; Garfield to Hay, May 29, 1881, in Theodore Clark Smith, The Life and Letters of James Abram Garfield (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925), II, 1117.

era. He also was a high-ranking lieutenant in Conkling's New York machine, well-acquainted with hotel lobbies, barrooms, and smoke-filled convention halls. "He had moved," wrote John S. Wise, "in the highest social and in the lowest political circles of the great cosmopolitan . . . centre of this country."⁵

"Chet" Arthur knew well the fetid political milieu of the Gilded Age, and he also knew that a particularly rank odor hung closely about the Southern branch of the Republican Party. Arthur realized that its leadership was timid, lazy, and corrupt, more interested in feeding at the public trough than in winning elections. He had no illusions that the Virginia Republican leaders could carry the state but believed that if properly aided Mahone might whip the Bourbons. As Republican boss of New York City, Arthur had worked with dissident Democrats, having fused his organization with both Tammany and anti-Tammany forces. He had no qualms about the political company he kept or the associates he abandoned if victory could be won. A Boston newspaperman observed that

⁵Allan Peskin, Garfield (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1978), pp. 607-608; New York Tribune, April 16, 1882; San Francisco Argonaut in Nashville American, October 15, 1882; John S. Wise, Recollections of Thirteen Presidents (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1906), p. 161. For a splendid biography of Arthur see Thomas C. Reeves, Gentleman Boss: The Life of Chester Alan Arthur (New York: Knopf, 1975).

in politics he is given to schemes that are the next thing to trickery, that he believes it right and honorable to use all means against political opponents, that he has no conception of raising politics above the aim of office-holding, and that he will unhesitatingly turn against his political companions, if a turn of affairs makes it desirable. In short, he is one of the many who act on the principle that all is fair in politics.⁶

Soon after coming to the presidency, Arthur jettisoned Garfield's halfway plan. He turned over to Mahone the patronage in Virginia--more than 2,000 jobs--and ordered federal officeholders to work with the Readjusters or face dismissal. In November, the insurgents captured the state legislature and governorship, and Mahone acknowledged his debt to Arthur. "When President Arthur assumed office it was late to do anything," he told the New York Times, "but the acts of the Administration, although late, were effective. They indicated as plainly as could be the desires of the Administration, and wherever they were indicated they accomplished most desirable results."⁷

The Readjuster victory encouraged Arthur to extend his support to other independent movements. In January 1882, the administration's Washington organ informed Southern Republicans that it was their "duty . . . to encourage the men who . . . declare their independence.

⁶Boston Herald, June 12, 1880, in Reeves, Gentleman Boss, p. 190.

⁷New York Times, November 20, 1881.

They ought to be willing to waive all claims themselves in favor of any honest and capable candidate who goes before the people pledged against further co-operation . . . with the bourbon democracy." In April, the members of the Republican National Committee, Arthur ally Marshall Jewell presiding, expressed themselves "as earnestly in favor of a union of Republicans in the South with such liberal elements in those States as promise . . . a free ballot and an honest count." Meanwhile, with the fall congressional elections in mind, Arthur had endorsed Republican-independent fusions in Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas.⁸

To help implement his Southern policy, in April Arthur brought into his cabinet as Secretary of the Navy William E. Chandler of New Hampshire. Chandler had managed the Republican presidential campaigns of 1868 and 1872 and in the disputed election of 1876 had saved (or stolen) Florida for Hayes. He enjoyed a wide acquaintance with Southern Republican leaders and was considered the party's expert on Southern affairs. He, better than anyone, knew the sad state of the party in the South. A small, wiry man with a granite jaw and hard eyes, Chandler later in life would boast that he

⁸Washington National Republican, January 2, in Atlanta Constitution, January 7, 1882; Nashville American, April 16, 1882.

never missed an opportunity. In 1882 he saw fusion with the independents as the main chance.⁹

Arthur's program disturbed a number of Northern Republicans. Many Union veterans disliked alliances with former Confederates like Mahone, fiscal conservatives disapproved of the administration's endorsement of repudiators and greenbackers, and civil service reformers grew faint with horror at Arthur's use of the federal patronage on behalf of the coalitions. The fastidious New York Times wanted the party to stand clear of Mahone:

Bad as Bourbonism is in its practical denial of constitutional rights and its defiance of the principle of free suffrage, its sins lie at its own door. The dictatorship which has been erected in the departments for Mahone, and the license he has been allowed in abusing Federal offices for the purpose of influencing, through bribery or compulsion, the politics of his State are in principle as completely anti-democratic as the tissue-paper ballots of South Carolina or the bulldozing of Mississippi. And these wrongs have the peculiarly objectionable feature that they involve the Republican Party and the national Administration.¹⁰

Prominent among the critics was James G. Blaine, rival of Arthur for the presidential nomination in 1884. To Blaine's objections, Chandler replied with cool

⁹New York Times, April 7, 13, 1882; Chicago Tribune, April 18, May 8, 1882; Washington Post, July 16, 1882; Boston Globe, September 3, 1882. For Chandler see Leon Burr Richardson, William E. Chandler, Republican (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1940).

¹⁰Reeves, Gentleman Boss, p. 313; New York Times, September 4, 1882; New York Tribune, October 26, 1882.

practicality:

It is important to carry the House, for the next presidential election depends upon it. We cannot carry as many seats in the North as two years ago. We must increase our Southern representation by ten to twenty. That depends upon Republican support of the Democratic revolt in the South and the overthrow of the Bourbons there. The real question cannot be evaded by caviling about Mahone and the readjustment of the Virginia debt, which has now ceased to be an issue or practical question, nor about [former Confederate Brigadier General James R.] Chalmers and his Fort Pillow record. Those are only incidents of a great popular revolt in the South against Bourbon democratic rule and practices. Every independent Democrat in the South pledges himself to a free vote, an honest count, the obliteration of race distinctions and popular education by the common school system. Shall we fail to follow our principles when they are vital? Our straight Republican and carpetbag and Negro governments cannot be revived. Without the aid of the independent Democrats in the South we cannot carry enough seats there to save the next presidential fight. Beyond that, the safety of the colored race at the polls depends upon it.¹¹

Unfortunately, in practice the administration's policy lacked the conviction and coherence that Chandler's language implied. Perhaps because none of the other Southern insurgent leaders were as dynamic or as importunate as William Mahone, the administration

¹¹Chicago Tribune, September 19, 1882; Chandler to Blaine, October 2, 1882, William Eaton Chandler Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Deposition of D. B. Henderson, March 5, 1883, Deposition of Green B. Raum, March 18, 1883, in U.S. Congress, House, Papers and Testimony in the Contested Election of Case of James R. Chalmers vs. Van H. Manning, from the Second Congressional District of Mississippi, House Miscellaneous Document 15, 48th Congress, 1st session, 1884, pp. 108, 127. Chandler had recently broken a long-standing alliance with Blaine (Chicago Tribune, December 29, 1881; New York Times, January 4, April 7, 1882).

usually failed to afford them the same strong and consistent support that it gave the Virginian. Arthur and Chandler often extended aid in a half-hearted and fitful manner, neglecting to force federal officeholders to work with the independents and leaving important patronage decisions to mid-level bureaucrats. For better or worse, Arthur and Chandler shaped the administration's Southern policy, but its ultimate success or failure depended on circumstances and personalities in the states themselves.

THE SWAY OF THE MARKET

The Southern independent movements attracted the support of a variety of interest groups--sheep herders and port-city businessmen in Texas, delta cotton planters in Mississippi, sugar planters in Louisiana, anti-prohibitionists in North Carolina, old-line Whigs in Florida, reformers everywhere disgusted by Democratic arrogance, corruption, and parsimony. The independents drew their greatest strength, however, from hitherto self-sufficient white hill country farmers now painfully ensnared in the national market economy.

The principal agent of the farmers' integration into the national market was the railroad. Between 1860 and 1880 Southern rail mileage more than doubled. Railroads entered many hill country counties for the first time, and they expanded operations in others. New villages sprang up along the tracks, and quiet crossroad hamlets became overnight booming railroad towns. Merchants, scores of them, opened stores in the towns and in the nearby interior. Heavily in debt to wholesalers in New Orleans or Atlanta or Chicago or Cincinnati, the merchants would not barter with their

customers. They demanded cash or, because money was scarce, a lien on a cash crop.¹

Meanwhile, other forces also helped bring the farmers under the sway of the market. High prices in the immediate post-Civil War period encouraged the cultivation of staple crops; heavy taxes on real estate created the need for a steady supply of cash; an expanding population reduced the size of farms; the introduction of commercial fertilizers dramatically increased yields; railroads connected the localities with new markets; the telegraph brought quick and accurate market information; and car interchange agreements and through bills of lading hastened consignments to their destination.²

¹John F. Stover, "Railroads," in The Encyclopedia of Southern History, ed. David C. Roller and Robert W. Twyman (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), p. 1018; Gavin Wright, Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War (New York: Basic Books, 1986), pp. 110-111; David L. Carlton, Mill and Town in South Carolina, 1880-1920 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), p. 21; Michael Schwartz, Radical Protest and Social Structure: The Southern Farmers' Alliance and Cotton Tenancy, 1880-1890 (New York: Academic Press, 1976), p. 58; Margaret Pace Farmer, "Furnishing Merchants and Sharecroppers in Pike County, Alabama," Alabama Review 23 (1970), p. 149; C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), pp. 184-185; Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 159-162.

²Michael Russ Hyman, "Response to Redeemer Rule: Hill Country Political Dissent in the Post-Reconstruction South," Ph.D. dissertation, City

More often than not, the hill country farmers succumbed eagerly to these pressures. While the idea of agricultural self-sufficiency appealed to prosperous townsmen, to the farmers it smacked of drudgery, poverty, and deprivation. They welcomed the railroads and desired the things that the railroads brought--processed foods, ready-to-wear clothes, hardware, machinery, magazines, and musical instruments. They wanted the conveniences and amenities of modern life and were willing to gamble with a cash crop to get them.³

Climate and economic underdevelopment generally dictated that the cash crop be cotton. In the Lower South, indeed below the James River, climatic conditions

University of New York, 1986, p. 187; Wright, Old South, New South, pp. 110-111; Julius Rubin, "The Limits of Agricultural Progress in the Nineteenth-Century South," Agricultural History XLIX (1983), p. 369; Carlton, Mill and Town in South Carolina, p. 22; L. Tuffly Ellis, "The Revolutionizing of the Texas Cotton Trade, 1865-1885," Southwestern Historical Quarterly LXXIII (1970), p. 479.

³Paul D. Escott, "Yeoman Independence and the Market: Social Status and Economic Development in Antebellum North Carolina," North Carolina Historical Review LXVI (1989), pp. 297-300; Lacy K. Ford Jr., Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 52; Robert Tracy McKenzie, "From Old South to New South in the Volunteer State: The Economy and Society of Rural Tennessee, 1850-1880," Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1988, pp. 268-269; H. Wayne Morgan, From Hayes to McKinley: National Party Politics, 1877-1896 (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1969), pp. 373, 376; Randolph Dennis Werner, "Hegemony and Conflict: The Political Economy of a Southern Region, Augusta, Georgia, 1865-1895," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1977, p. 193.

considerably diminished yields of grains, potatoes, legumes, and grasses and discouraged the husbandry of high-quality livestock. Southern produce usually could not compete even in its local markets with that of the Middle West. Some Southern perishables grew well enough, but, almost everywhere, rough roads, an incomplete transportation system, a scarcity of refrigerator cars, and a lack of nearby urban markets reduced their value. Cotton, on the other hand, grew well, traveled well, and found a ready market.⁴

Cotton brought high prices for a few years after the Civil War, but overproduction and changing conditions on the world market caused prices to decline from 18 cents a pound in 1871 to 9 cents (barely the cost of production) in 1876. Meanwhile, a tight national money supply and the steady deflation following the Panic of 1873 made credit ever more expensive. Many farmers became heavily in debt to the local merchants. "The system of credits in the large cotton-producing

⁴Rubin, "The Limits of Agricultural Progress in the Nineteenth-Century South," pp. 364-368; John Solomon Otto, "Southern 'Plain Folk' Agriculture: A Reconsideration," Plantation Society in the Americas II (1983), p. 36; Barbara Jeanne Fields, Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland During the Nineteenth Century (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 170; Gilbert C. Fite, Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture, 1865-1980 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), p. 13; Harold E. Davis, "Henry Grady, the Atlanta Constitution, and the Politics of Farming in the 1880s," Georgia Historical Quarterly LXXI (1987), p. 579.

regions prevails to such an extent that the whole cotton crop is usually mortgaged before it is gathered," observed an expert in 1882, "and when we consider that the prices charged for provisions, etc., thus advanced are at least 50 per cent. higher than regular market rates, . . . it will need very little calculation to show that the laborer . . . will have the chances too greatly against him ever to be out of debt to his merchant when he relies solely upon this crop to provide the money." By 1880 a third of the white farmers in the South were tenants, and many of those who continued to own their farms lived in the shadow of dispossession.⁵

⁵Theodore Saloutos, "Southern Agriculture and the Problem of Readjustment, 1865-1877," Agricultural History XXX (1956), pp. 64, 66, 74-75; J. Mills Thornton III, "Fiscal Policy and the Failure of Radical Reconstruction in the Lower South," in Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 383; Constantine G. Belissary, "The Rise of Industry and the Industrial Spirit in Tennessee, 1865-1885," Journal of Southern History XIX (1953), p. 207; Kenneth A. Snowden, "Mortgage Rates and American Capital Development in the Late Nineteenth Century," Journal of Economic History XLVII (1987), p. 690; Rendigs Fels, American Business Cycles, 1865-1897 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), pp. 98-102, 107-112; Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1882 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1883), p. 634; Gavin Wright, The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), p. 164; Eugene Allen Smith, "Report on the Cotton Production of the State of Alabama," in U.S. Congress, House, Report on the Cotton Production in the United States, House Miscellaneous Document 42, Part 6, 47th

As the farmers' debts grew, their independence diminished. Once they had owned their farms free and clear, now they were mortgaged to the crossroad merchant. Once they had grown their food, now they purchased their meal and even their pork. Once they had planted cotton for extra cash, now it was the source of their livelihood. Once they had enjoyed leisure time, now they worked like slaves. Nor was this all. Common wisdom held that success went to the virtuous and hard-working. Yet, for all their toil, the farmers knew only failure, misery, and fear. Wealth fled the countryside for the towns, and the merchants, the lawyers, the brokers, and the railroad men grew rich. "A plentiful cotton harvest . . . must always be regarded as a blessing, without reference to the question of prices," a Galveston editor intoned. "Railroad transportation companies make money by it, ships carrying it make money by it, parties handling it make money by it." Power followed wealth, and in matters of taxation, railroad regulation, and the fence law, the politicians almost invariably supported town over country. The farmers believed their status declining, their freedom and self-respect slipping away.⁸

Congress, 2nd session, 1882-1883, pp. 62-63 (quote).

⁸Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhiney, "The South from Self-Sufficiency to Peonage: An Interpretation," American Historical Review LXXXV (1980), pp. 1115-1118;

In January 1882 Governor Robert Lowry of Mississippi analyzed the farmers' plight and suggested a remedy. "In a material point of view our almost exclusive devotion to the production of a single article of industry [cotton] is our bane," he told the state legislature.

We buy too much and sell too little. Our corn-cribs and smoke-houses are too far from home. Our income is princely, our expenditures are utterly exhausting. Legislation may do something to remove these barriers to our progress, but individual enterprise and exertion must do much more.

Lowry and other agricultural reformers advised the yeomen to diversify their crops and to improve their methods.⁷

Wright, Old South, New South, p. 35; Peter Temin, "Patterns of Cotton Agriculture in Postbellum Georgia," Journal of Economic History XLIII (1983), p. 663; Ted Ownby, "The Defeated Generation at Work: White Farmers in the Deep South, 1865-1890," Southern Studies XXIII (1984), pp. 329, 338, 343; Frank J. Huffman Jr., "Town and Country in the South, 1850-1880: A Comparison of Urban and Rural Social Structures," South Atlantic Quarterly 76 (1977), p. 380; Galveston News, October 17, 1882; John J. Beck, "Building the New South: A Revolution from Above in a Piedmont County," Journal of Southern History LIII (1987), p. 458; Wayne K. Durrill, "Producing Poverty: Local Government and Economic Development in a New South County, 1874-1884," Journal of American History 71 (1985), pp. 764-781; Michael R. Hyman, "Taxation, Public Policy, and Political Dissent: Yeoman Disaffection in the Post-Reconstruction Lower South," Journal of Southern History LV (1989), pp. 60-66, 70-73; Hyman, "Response to Redeemer Rule," pp. 159, 186, 230; J. Crawford King Jr., "The Closing of the Southern Range: An Exploratory Study," Journal of Southern History XLVIII (1982), pp. 53-70.

⁷Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia . . . 1882, p. 563 (quotes Lowry); Paul M. Gaston, The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking (New York: Knopf, 1970),

While a fortunate few benefited from diversification, most farmers remained shackled to cotton. They lacked a reliable alternative cash crop, and their lien holders insisted on their planting the staple. Those who adopted the new agricultural techniques usually conserved their soil and increased their production, but their more numerous brethren, fortified by an awesome ignorance, continued in the paths of the fathers. Most farmers, while not always unaware of their shortcomings, believed that the blame for their troubles lay less with their practices than with expensive credit, anaconda mortgages, discriminatory railroad rates, a rigged cotton market, and high taxes. "I am heartily sick of the lawyers, doctors, merchants, editors, clerks, gamblers, in short the whole non-farming class, dictating to them when, and how, and what to plant," complained an Alabama farmer.⁸

pp. 66-67; Davis, "Henry Grady, the Atlanta Constitution, and the Politics of Farming in the 1880s," pp. 571-572; Atlanta Constitution, March 1, 1882.

⁸Francis P. Ward, Huntsville, to editor, January 10, Harper's Weekly XXV (March 19, 1881), p. 182; New Orleans Times-Democrat in Montgomery Advertiser, April 5, 1882; Charles L. Flynn Jr., White Land, Black Labor: Caste and Class in Late Nineteenth-Century Georgia (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), pp. 170; Wayne Flynt, "Spindle, Mine, and Mule: The Poor White Experience in Post-Civil War Alabama," Alabama Review 34 (1981), pp. 244-245; Karl Rodabaugh, "The Prelude to Populism in Alabama," Alabama Historical Quarterly 43 (1981), p. 118; J. C. N., Mount Meigs, to editor, July 15, Montgomery Advertiser, July 19, 1882 (quote).

In the mid-1870s, thousands of Southern farmers joined the Patrons of Husbandry, better known as the Grange. Grange leaders preached the gospel of self-help, but they went beyond the usual call for diversification and improved methods. They urged farmers to cut costs and maximize profits by establishing cooperatives. At first, the Grange (which also functioned as a social club) grew rapidly in size and influence. Unfortunately, though, the cooperatives failed and many Grangers became disillusioned with the organization. They faulted their patrician leaders for stressing education rather than collective action and for being more sensitive to the concerns of the merchants, lawyers, and railroad men who were their social and business associates than to the concerns of the small farmers. By the late 1870s, many yeomen had abandoned the Grange.⁹

Disappointed at every turn, some farmers gave up, sold out, and moved to the towns or to the West. "I found in every part of the South a decided and extensive movement of the agricultural class," a Northern traveler remarked.

In many cases, the principal reason for this movement . . . is the improvement which is taking

⁹Lawrence Goodwyn, Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 45-56; Fite, Cotton Fields No More, p. 51; Rodabaugh, "The Prelude to Populism in Alabama," p. 128.

place in the older regions of the South. When 'the new order of things' begins to manifest itself in a Southern community there are many persons, of the poorer classes, who feel repelled rather than attracted by the indications of approaching change, and in their restlessness and discontent they leave their old homes, hoping to find more congenial conditions in newer and more sparsely populated areas.¹⁰

For those who would not or could not leave their communities, politics seemed the only recourse. The great majority of the hill country farmers were Democrats, but they had good reason to suspect the reliability of the Democratic leadership. Too many of the party chieftains paid lip service to the farmers while doing the bidding of the townsmen. Prospects for change seemed remote as lawyer-dominated cliques maintained a stifling control over the party machinery and the electoral process.

As for the Republican Party, it hardly merited the farmers' consideration. "The name of Republican is as offensive in Mississippi as the name of copperhead in Massachusetts or Jew in Russia," an independent exclaimed. The farmers knew the G.O.P. as the party of high tariffs, hard money, scarce credit, the internal revenue, federal patronage wrangles, and black officeholding. They remembered Reconstruction as a time

¹⁰Thomas Alan Scott, "Cobb County, Georgia, 1880-1900: A Socioeconomic Study of an Upper Piedmont County," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Tennessee, 1978, pp. iv, 75, 118, 121; "Studies in the South," Atlantic Monthly 49 (1882), pp. 683-684 (quote).

of oppressive taxation, extravagance, mismanagement, and lawlessness both petty and great. "The demoralization became inconceivable," recalled a South Carolinian who was no admirer of the Redeemers.

Larceny was universal. If a man hung up his coat at one end of a field, before he could plow to the other end and back it was stolen. Cows turned loose to browse came home milked dry. Live stock of all kinds were killed in the woods in day-time. Cotton was picked from the fields at night, corn 'slip-shucked.' Gardens and orchards were stripped, and water-melons actually became a rarity on white men's tables. Burglary, especially of smoke-houses and barns was common. Everybody had dogs and guns, and thousands kept watch at night over their property.

Recollections like these were, of course, deeply colored by racism, but, wholly accurate or not, they severely limited the possibilities of Southern politics in the post-Reconstruction period.¹¹

In the late 1870s and early 1880s, some farmers, tired of empty promises, cut loose from the Democracy and joined with other dissidents in independent

¹¹James R. Chalmers, Washington, to Chester A. Arthur, December, 1882, in U.S. Congress, House, Papers and Testimony in the Contested Election Case of James R. Chalmers vs. Van H. Manning, from the Second Congressional District of Mississippi, House Miscellaneous Document 15, 48th Congress, 1st session, 1884, p. 126 (first quote); James Tice Moore, "Origins of the Solid South: Redeemer Democrats and the Popular Will, 1870-1900," Southern Studies XXII (1983), p. 299; Thornton, "Fiscal Policy and the Failure of Radical Reconstruction in the Lower South," pp. 349-394; [Belton O'Neill Townshend], "The Political Condition of South Carolina," Atlantic Monthly XXXIX (February, 1877), pp. 179-180 (second quote); Mark W. Summers, Railroads, Reconstruction, and the Gospel of Prosperity: Aid Under the Radical Republicans, 1865-1877 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 290, 295.

movements or in the catch-all Greenback Party. Demanding an inflated currency, railroad regulation, and equitable taxation, the independents often entered into uneasy coalitions with the Republicans (the independents and Republicans could agree at least on the necessity for a free ballot and a fair count). These coalitions would reach their apex in 1882.¹²

¹²"My understanding of the term Greenbacker, as derived from themselves," noted the secretary of the Republican Congressional Campaign Committee, "did not involve so much financial issues as antagonism to the so-called 'Bourbon' party and what they claimed was the illiberal spirit of that party in the South" (Deposition of D. B. Henderson, March 5, 1883, Chalmers vs. Manning, p. 108).

THE SOUTHERN CORE¹

¹The Southern independent movements do not easily lend themselves to categorization. In "The Southern Core" are placed those states where the movements were primarily the instruments of farm protest. In the states of "The Southern Rim," other groups figured at least as prominently.

SOUTH CAROLINA

In the early 1880s, the South Carolina Democratic Party was an exceptionally disciplined organization. Its cohesiveness had little to do with shared principles. Indeed, a Sumter man accurately described the party as "an aggregation of various political creeds." Some Democrats looked fondly backward and wished to recreate in the 1880s the South Carolina of the halcyon antebellum days. The party so warmly extolled by mossbacked Congressman John S. Richardson was less that of Randall and Bayard than of Jackson and Calhoun. "The Democratic party," he wrote, "is the only party. . . . which labors and strives for [the people's] interest as against the interest of the monied class, the bond-holders, the banks, the Rail Road monopolies and the protectionists." While Richardson and his friends indulged in their nostalgic fantasies, other South Carolina Democrats, particularly the denizens of the booming Upcountry towns, eagerly embraced the New South. They agitated incessantly for diversified agriculture, cotton factories, phosphate mines, and railroads. Their agents in the state legislature and

local governments busily granted tax exemptions to industry, exclusive rights to phosphate companies, and local assistance to rail corporations.¹

The tie that bound Old South to New in the South Carolina Democracy was the party's peculiar status as a ruling minority. Outnumbered by blacks three to two, potentially outvoted by over 30,000, and in the minority in two-thirds of the state's counties, South Carolina whites felt awash in a black sea. They feared the inundation of society, of civilization itself, and they clung to the Democratic Party as to a rock. "The issues upon which every political struggle is fought are honesty versus vice; ignorance versus intelligence;

¹J. A. Mood, Sumter, to editor, May 26, New York Times, May 29, 1882; John S. Richardson, Glenn Springs, to Charles A. Buckheit, September 1, 1882, John Smythe Richardson Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia; William J. Cooper Jr., The Conservative Regime: South Carolina, 1877-1890 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), pp. 39-40, 120-124; E. Culpepper Clark, Francis Warrington Dawson and the Politics of Restoration: South Carolina, 1874-1889 (University: University of Alabama Press, 1980), p. 7; Peter A. Coclanis, The Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country, 1670-1920 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 137; Lacy K. Ford, "Rednecks and Merchants: Economic Development and Social Tensions in the South Carolina Upcountry, 1865-1900," Journal of American History 71 (1984), p. 318; Randolph D. Werner, "New South Carolina: Ben Tillman and the Rise of Bourgeois Politics, 1880-1893," in Developing Dixie: Modernization in a Traditional Society, ed. Winfred B. Moore Jr., Joseph F. Tripp, and Lyon G. Tyler Jr. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988), pp. 150-151; Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1882 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1883), p. 747.

Africanism versus Americanism," thundered a Democratic editor.²

White unity was reinforced by bitter memories of Reconstruction. In South Carolina black domination had been more than an abstraction imagined; it had been a reality experienced. Blacks had composed a majority in the legislature and controlled scores of local offices. Together with their few white allies, they had dispensed less than impartial justice, ran up a large debt, levied confiscatory taxes, and indulged in the most shameless speculations and frauds. The ends of Reconstruction--political equality, economic security, educational opportunity--had been noble, but many of its means and many of its results had sickened decent South Carolinians both white and black. In revealing, if lurid, language, Columbia newspaperman John W. R. Pope in 1881 recalled that

we came up to the year 1877 in South Carolina poor as the poorest, white and black alike, with a social condition in which law and order and society itself were literally sunk out of all recognition. A common demoralization swept the State. The successful rascal was the head of society, if there was any such thing, and the honest man his foot

²Okon Edet Uya, From Slavery to Public Service: Robert Smalls, 1839-1915 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 90; Charleston News and Courier, July 4, 1882; E. N. Thurston, Charleston, to William Mahone, March 24, 1881, Mahone Papers, Duke University, Durham, N.C.; James L. Sims, Orangeburg, to editor, May 18, John W. Holmes, Barnwell, to editor, May 20, J. A. Mood, Sumter, to editor, May 26 (quote), New York Times, May 29, 1882.

ball. Brazen strumpets rejoiced in their gorgeous array and flashed their jeweled limbs in the faces of honest virtuous women. God seemed absolutely to have closed his all-seeing eye on our doomed and wretched State, whilst lust and sin and villainy ravaged in the land.

Pope went on to declare that "the threat of negroizing a State brings all classes together and the white man stands in a solid column with a common touch of elbow when anything will be done, anything endured, before one jot or one tittle of the claims of white civilization will be surrendered."³

The Democrats were of two minds on how to deal with black political aspirations. Some, most of whom were Upcountrymen, believed that blacks had no political right--not "one jot or one tittle"--worth respecting.

³[Belton O'Neill Townshend], "The Political Condition of South Carolina," Atlantic Monthly XXXIX (1877), pp. 178-180; [Townshend], "South Carolina Morals," ibid., p. 473; Joel Williamson, After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina During Reconstruction, 1861-1877 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), pp. 115, 144-155, 226, 382-405; J. Mills Thornton III, "Fiscal Policy and the Failure of Radical Reconstruction in the Lower," in Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 384; Orville Vernon Burton, "Race and Reconstruction: Edgefield County, South Carolina," Journal of Social History 12 (1978), pp. 38, 39-41; Mark W. Summers, Railroads, Reconstruction, and the Gospel of Prosperity: Aid Under the Radical Republicans, 1865-1877 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 69-71; Columbia Register, May 24 1881 (first quote), January 15 (second quote), July 22, 1882. This, of course, is not to imply that the Democrats dispensed impartial justice or were incorruptible. Nor is it to imply that only black Republicans stole. Indeed, the white Republicans were probably the better thieves.

Others, following the lead of United States Senator Wade Hampton, maintained that if blacks were willing to accept a subordinate role they should not be excluded from the body politic. An English observer defined the Hampton program: "it is in effect said to the blacks: 'If you will accept the present regime, follow us, and vote Democratic, we will receive you, cherish you, and give you a reasonable share of representation, local office, &c.; but there shall be nothing for those who persist in voting Republican.'" The Hampton men were as good as their word. They discountenanced bulldozing, allowed blacks to participate in Democratic conventions and primaries, and appointed blacks to minor offices. Their policy had the virtues of convincing Northern investors of South Carolina's political stability and of dissuading the national administration from reimposing bayonet rule. More important, it also eased consciences formed in an earlier era of racial paternalism while confirming the principle of white rule. The practical result, then, was a curious mixture of moderation and extremism. While on election day Hamptonites walked to the polls arm-in-arm with cooperative blacks, the Red Shirts, the paramilitary wing of the county Democratic clubs, broke black

Republican heads with impunity.⁴

Despite Hampton's efforts, most blacks remained loyal to the Republican Party. The Democrats, therefore, had to resort to irregular methods to retain power. In this, they were both ingenious and brutal. At their crudest, they threatened, beat, and murdered their opponents. More often, though, they resorted to economic coercion and social ostracism. A Northerner observed that "the South Carolinian who has become a Republican meets with less consideration than would be accorded a dog from the families of Democrats." Neutrality and indifference also were penalized. Any white who refused to join his county's Democratic club was shunned as a pariah.⁵

The Democrats relied heavily on their control of the election machinery. In 1880 they elected their candidates in all of South Carolina's congressional

⁴New York Herald, June 21, 1877; Charleston News and Courier, August 14, 1882; [Townshend], "The Political Condition of South Carolina," p. 192; George Campbell, White and Black: The Outcome of a Visit to the United States (London: Chatto & Windus, 1879), p. 181 (quote); Edward Hogan, "South Carolina To-Day," International Review VIII (1880), pp. 108, 109, 110; Cooper, The Conservative Regime, pp. 28, 84-88, 96-97; George Brown Tindall, South Carolina Negroes, 1877-1900 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1952), pp. 21-26.

⁵Cooper, The Conservative Regime, pp. 34-35, 94-97; New York Times, October 4, 1880, November 21, 1881; Hogan, "South Carolina To-Day," pp. 118-119 (quote); [Townshend], "South Carolina Morals," p. 472.

districts but only after the most energetic ballot-box stuffing. A Greenbacker later recalled that "In one county . . . the Bourbons took complete possession of the ballot-boxes and spent the greater part of the day in voting by name all the dogs, pigs, and mules on their plantations." Not wanting to be put to similar trouble in future elections, Democrats in the legislature passed in early 1882 the notorious Eight-Box Law which imposed a de facto literacy test by requiring the unaided voter to place for each office a separate ballot in a separate box. The act also called for a total voter re-registration and gave sweeping powers to registrars and election officials. The passage of the Eight-Box Law led a Baptist wag to joke that "the success of the Democratic party next fall is 'foreordained.'" A black leader more acidly commented that "The Democrats seem to have changed from the Mississippi plan of violence to the Mississippi plan of fraud."⁶

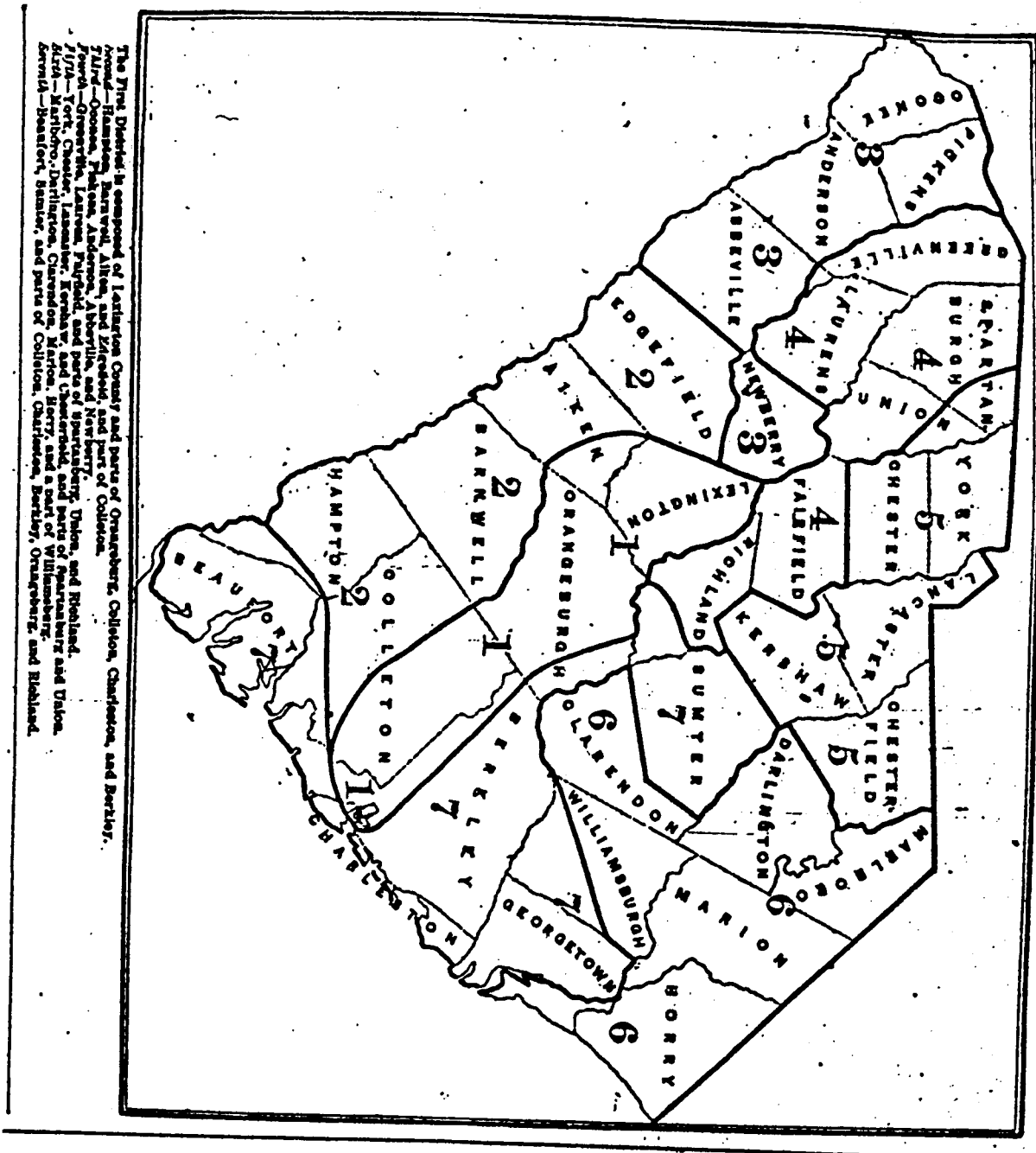
⁶New York Times, November 22, 1881, October 29, 1882 (quotes J. Hendrix McLane); James Welch Patton, "The Republican Party in South Carolina, 1876-1895," in Essays in Southern History, ed. Fletcher Melvin Green (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1949), p. 108; George B. Tindall, "The Campaign for the Disfranchisement of Negroes in South Carolina," Journal of Southern History 15 (1949), pp. 214-215; J. Morgan Kousser, The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 84-89; L. W. R. Blair, Camden, to William Mahone, January 30, 1882, Mahone Papers, Duke; Charleston News and Courier, January 23, 1882 (quotes a Baptist); Chicago Tribune, April 12, 1882 (quotes Samuel

The Democratic legislature of 1882 capped its work by redrawing South Carolina's congressional districts. Concocted in the Washington, D.C., boarding house of Representative Samuel Dibble, the new scheme created two marginally white (and therefore safe) districts, four marginally black (and therefore easily attainable) districts, and one overwhelmingly black (and therefore lost) district. The Black Seventh District was so malformed as to make the Mississippi Shoestring or the North Carolina Black Second seem models of uniformity. It embraced almost the entire coast and obscenely penetrated westward all the way to Columbia. It contained 31,000 potential black voters and 7,000 potential white. The Democrats had lost to Republican contestants two of the congressional seats they had so cleverly won in 1880, and they hoped that by lumping 25 per cent of the black electorate into the Seventh and by conceding the district, they would make future contested election cases more difficult to sustain.⁷

When first proposed, the Dibble Plan had seemed too outrageous to be adopted, but it won the support of

Lee).

⁷Narcisco G. Gonzales, Washington, to Emily Elliott, March 27, April 9, July 5, 1882, Elliott-Gonzales Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Charleston News and Courier, July 4, 1882; Patton, "The Republican Party in South Carolina," pp. 103-104.



Source: New York Times, July 13, 1882.

Francis W. Dawson, the slippery English emigre who edited the Charleston News and Courier. Dawson's intelligence, industry, and tact had earned him great influence in Democratic circles. "He is practically the Legislature," an enemy avowed, "and the Press of the State (with few exceptions) are inmates of his kennel, and with wagging tails are ever ready to howl response to their master's horn." With Dawson's backing, the plan passed easily into law:⁸

While the cause of white supremacy demanded political conformity, other forces encouraged diversity. The national market had come to the South Carolina Upcountry in the decade before the Civil War, and thus the social disequilibrium attendant on the shift from self-sufficiency to commercial agriculture had been subsumed in the crises of secession, war, and reconstruction. Yet, in the post-war years, cotton production continued its relentless expansion while towns multiplied and grew and crossroad stores proliferated. As elsewhere in the South, many farmers in the South Carolina Piedmont found themselves caught

⁸Narcisco G. Gonzales, Washington, to Emily Elliott, April 9, 1882, Elliott-Gonzales Papers, UNC; New York Times, March 30, 1880; Clark, Francis Warrington Dawson, pp. 159-160; E. B. C. Cash, The Cash-Shannon Duel, 2nd ed., comp. Bessie Cash Irby (Boykin, S.C.: Bessie Cash Irby, 1930), p. 18 (quote).

in the familiar vise of debt, lien, and tenancy. When the farmers complained to their leaders in the Democratic Party about short credit, expensive fertilizer, and exorbitant railroad rates, they quickly learned that the politicians had been seduced by the banks, the phosphate monopolies, and the rail corporations. They also learned that reforming the party would be difficult, if not impossible, as state and county rings controlled the party apparatus and much of the press. Noting that "there is the show of an unmistakable Ring [in Columbia]," a Spartanburg editor warned that "This is an abuse of place and power, and it should be repressed, or it will lead, one of these days, to disruption and independent faction."⁹

The farmers might grumble, but a tradition of white

⁹Peter A. Coclanis and Lacy K. Ford, "The South Carolina Economy Reconstructed and Reconsidered: Structure, Output, and Performance, 1670-1985," in Developing Dixie, p. 99; Lacy K. Ford Jr., Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 215-277; Harry Hammond, "Report on the Cotton Production of the State of South Carolina," in U.S. Congress, House, Report on the Cotton Production in the United States, House Miscellaneous Document 42, Part 6, 47th Congress, 2nd session, 1882-1883, p. 53; Ford, "Rednecks and Merchants," pp. 301-302, 309-311, 313; David L. Carlton, Mill and Town in South Carolina, 1880-1920 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), pp. 18, 23-25; Cooper, The Conservative Regime, pp. 33-34, 126, 134, 135-139, 141; Werner, "'New South' Carolina," pp. 149-150; Anderson Intelligencer, September 8, 29, October 6, 1881; Columbia Register, October 12, 28, 1882; Charleston News and Courier, January 23, 1882; Spartanburg Carolina Spartan, May 17, 1882.

consensus going back through Calhoun to the colonial period together with the exigencies of the current situation seemed to preclude a Democratic rupture. In early 1881 most knowledgeable South Carolinians undoubtedly agreed with a prominent Republican when he stated that "The time is not yet come, nor is it near, for any considerable number of the white people of South Carolina to seek affiliation with new parties." The results of the 1880 gubernatorial election had confirmed the naysayers in their opinion. The Greenback candidate had mustered a scant 4,000 votes against the 117,000 received by his Democratic opponent.¹⁰

Some few iconoclasts, however, thought a political realignment possible, but only if the national administration would convince the state's whites of its good intentions. "If the President would assure our people that the Negro was no longer to be placed over them, merely because his skin is black without regard to his qualifications & that the miserable whites, who seek & hold office for no better reason than that they stoop to consort with Cuffy, are no longer to be a power in

¹⁰Robert M. Weir, "The Harmony We Were Famous For: An Interpretation of Pre-Revolutionary South Carolina Politics," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd ser., XXVI (1969), pp. 473-501; Ford, Origins of Southern Radicalism, pp. 122-123, 191; Cooper, The Conservative Regime, pp. 16, 69; E. W. M. Mackey, Charleston, to editor, Philadelphia American, February 14, in Columbia Register, March 6, 1881.

the land, a very different state of things would soon be apparent in South Carolina," a Low Country man explained. "The State would be more equally divided than is now the case & soon, very soon, able & good men with an abundant following would be found to lead a new departure."¹¹

That "new departure" came sooner than the most sanguine might have expected. Chester Arthur's recognition of the Virginia Readjusters and their stunning victory in the November 1881 elections enlivened the would-be independents of South Carolina. The legislature then heightened political tension by passing the Eight-Box Law which discriminated against illiterates of both races and a fence law that enraged poor farmers across the state. The resulting furor prompted a Charleston Republican to inform William Mahone that "The Legislature of this Bourbon ridden State has gone crazy and the State is going to follow in the path you were the pioneer in." A Charleston independent agreed. Writing in the South Carolina vernacular, he told Mahone that "there is a large body of Democrats, the men who did the rough and tough work at the polls in slaying out the Republicans, who are ready to wipe these cases [Bourbons] just as you

¹¹E. N. Thurston, Charleston, to William Mahone, April 2, 1881, Mahone Papers, Duke.

have."¹²

The men who led the independent movement in South Carolina were a philosophically heterogeneous group, more often motivated by personal ambition or grievance than by economic program or social belief. They shared two salient characteristics. All had experience in South Carolina's violent political milieu, and all were brave, even reckless, men. Bravery was a requisite. Democratic regulars regarded independents as Judases worse than the Romans and reserved for them a special hatred. Once a man had cast away from the Democratic Party, his life was constricted by ostracism, menace, and the possibility of violent death.

Shortly after New Year's 1882, following a mass protest against the fence and Eight-Box laws in Summerville, Colleton County, Democratic Senator Robert Fishburne presided over a small gathering which created the People's Party of South Carolina. Fishburne and his friends adopted a platform acknowledging the supremacy of the national government, endorsing the protective tariff, and calling for equal political rights for

¹²Charleston News and Courier, January 4, 5, 23, 1882; New York Times, January 2, 1882; Thomas J. Kirland and Robert M. Kennedy, Historic Camden (Columbia: The State Company, 1926), 224; William M. Thomas, Charleston, to William Mahone, December 20, James P. Downing, Charleston, to Mahone, December 22 (second quote), 1881, W. N. Taft, Charleston, to Mahone, January 29, 1882 (first quote), Mahone Papers, Duke.

blacks. The People's Party proved a stillbirth, but Robert Fishburne had made his debut as an independent. Fishburne was a forceful, heedless man who on the stump or in convention was abrasive, insistent, and contentious. A reporter who knew him well privately commented on his ambition. "I foresee a general political breakup in South Carolina," the reporter told his aunt, "but Fishburne isn't the Mahone Moses to lead the movement. It will take a bigger man than Bob." The senator, he continued, "is more an object of pity than of disgust. He has been drinking himself to death for a long time and will die in the Asylum inside of six months unless he is jailed on bread and water."¹³

J. Hendrix McLane of Feasterville in Fairfield County was a former Klansman and Red Shirt who now was the most active Greenbacker in South Carolina. In early 1882 he was attempting to organize the party across the state. Tall and spare, the dark-eyed McLane impressed even his critics with his geniality, sincerity, and intelligence. In a tight spot (and he would find

¹³Charleston News and Courier, January 4, 1882; Narcisco G. Gonzales, Washington, to Emily Elliott, January 8, February 5, 1882, Elliott-Gonzales Papers, UNC. "To-day [Robert Fishburne] appeared in the senate chamber in his normal condition, uncompromisingly drunk. . . . When the stock law was again brought up he took the floor and made a vigorous effort against it, characterizing its defenders in terms which would better befit a rat pit than the serene atmosphere of a legislative chamber" (Atlanta Constitution, February 4, 1882).

himself in several in the coming year), he was invariably calm and self-possessed. McLane believed that the coming political struggle

will not be as formerly, between the white people and the colored people, but it will be between . . . the Progressive and the non-Progressive elements of the country. The Progressive element will be composed of men who entertain more liberal and advanced views in public matters, and will depend upon truth and argument to make votes with, and will contend for the right of free speech and for honesty at the ballot box. The non-Progressive element is the Bourbons, and will use the State Government, the railroads, the subsidized press and money to perpetuate their power over the people.¹⁴

Thomas Jefferson Mackey of Chester County held the reputation as "the most trustworthy weather-cock in the State." Scion of an old South Carolina family, Nicaraguan adventurer, and Confederate veteran, Mackey early had joined the Republicans and been elected to a circuit judgeship. In 1876, repelled by Republican excesses and recognizing the turn in the political tide, he defected to the Democrats, stumping with Wade Hampton during the fall campaign and in the ensuing electoral crisis acting as an intermediary between Hampton and Rutherford B. Hayes. Rewarded with reappointment to the bench, Mackey zealously persecuted Republican corruptionists. The Democrats, however, soon exhausted their gratitude and in 1881 eased the judge

¹⁴Charleston News and Courier, January 14 (quote), September 27, October 2, 1882; New York Herald, October 7, 11, 1882.

out of office. Piqued and sensing yet another shift in the political current, Mackey announced his conversion to independentism. He gave as his reason the deleterious effect of Red Shirt rule. "As a consequence [of Democratic violence and fraud]," he warned Hampton, "the State will soon be stranded beyond the flow of capital, with no tide of immigration or commerce laving her borders." While some questioned Mackey's honesty, both political and personal, none questioned his courage or ability. A newspaperman represented him "as a fearless man; as ready with his revolver as with his tongue. He has no superior in the State as a stump speaker, and promises--if not shot before the campaign is over--to tell some wholesome truths to the ruling powers in the State, with whose plans and past history he is perfectly familiar."¹⁵

Leonidas W. R. Blair was the son of a congressman and served as a major in the Confederate army. After the war, he farmed near Camden in Kershaw County and had fallen on hard times. As Blair's estate declined so too his attention to his toilet. W. E. Johnson, a Camden neighbor, described him as "the worse looking man you

¹⁵New York Times, November 25, 1881 (first quote); New York Tribune, August 17, 1882 (third quote); T. J. Mackey to Wade Hampton, Yorkville Enquirer, June 29, 1882; Williamson, After Slavery, pp. 227, 399-401, 403, 405; Thomas Holt, Black Over White: Negro Political Leadership in South Carolina During Reconstruction (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), p. 198.

ever saw & the worst dressed, and the filthiest. His hair is never combed, and his finger nails are never cut, or cleaned, and his clothes look as if he had laid them in the ashes all night." Violence tinged Blair's family background. His maternal grandfather had been hanged for murder, and his father had rode his horse into the house of a personal enemy, fought a duel, beat a political antagonist nearly to death, attempted to assassinate an actor on stage in a theatre, and, finally, committed suicide in a fit of morphine-induced despair. Blair himself was haughty, socially exacting, and dogmatic. His ferocious temper prompted a friend to declare that the major would "fight a circular saw."¹⁸

Blair cared little for the New South Carolina. "I am," he told Mahone, "a Jacksonian democrat who has stood firm to his principles while the so-called democratic party has drifted very far from them,

¹⁸Columbia Register, October 7, 1880; W. E. Johnson, Camden, to L. D. Johnson, October 13, 1880, Cash-Shannon Duel Papers, USC; E. B. C. Cash to Rollin Kirk in Winston (N.C.) Union Republican, July 20, 1882; Spartanburg Carolina Spartan, July 12, 1882; Patton, "The Republican Party in South Carolina," p. 93, n. 7; Kirland and Kennedy, Historic Camden, pp. 91-99, 224, 257-258; Charleston News and Courier, September 11, 1882 (second quote). On December 24, 1832, James Blair, father of L. W. R. Blair, "came into Pennsylvania Avenue behind [Duff] Green and, without warning, knocked him down with his cane, kicked him into the gutter, and jumped on him with all his three hundred and fifty pounds. He broke Green's arm, collar bone, and several ribs, and dislocated a leg" (Fletcher M. Green, "Duff Green, Militant Journalist of the Old School," American Historical Review LII [1946-1947], p. 252).

further, in many respects than the republicans." Both an admirer and a student of the past (an acquaintance commented that "too much ill-digested learning had rendered him somewhat mad"), Blair had come to regard the Greenback platform as a present-day expression of John C. Calhoun's financial program. In 1880, his devotion to the past, a populist impulse inherited from his father, and, perhaps, his own orneriness compelled him to accept the Greenback gubernatorial nomination. Blair's candidacy outraged many of his neighbors, but Red Shirt efforts to intimidate him only made him more pugnacious. Noting that Blair "is undoubtedly the most heartily hated man I ever knew in this county," Johnson worried that "he has been so much harassed and 'buldozed' . . . that he has made up his mind to fight some one."¹⁷

Ellerbe B. C. Cash was a wealthy planter of Chesterfield County. Educated at the South Carolina College, he served in the antebellum legislature and commanded a regiment at First Manassas. Cash returned home when the Confederate army reorganized in 1862 but

¹⁷L. W. R. Blair, Camden, to William Mahone, January 30, 1882, Mahone Papers, Duke; L. D. Johnson, Charleston, to W. E. Johnson, August 13 (second quote), W. E. Johnson, Camden, to L. D. Johnson, August 14, October 13, November 21 (third quote), 1880, Cash-Shannon Duel Papers, USC; Columbia Register, October 7, 1880; Charleston News and Courier, September 29, 1880; Kirland and Kennedy, Historic Camden, p. 224.

won much local good will by extending liberal charity to the destitute and to the families of soldiers. In 1876 he made a substantial financial contribution to the Democratic campaign and in the years following identified with the Red Shirt wing of the party.¹⁸

Like so many South Carolinians of his generation, Cash was possessed of a pricklish and turbulent nature. He engaged in one embroilment after another and was credited with killing from two to seven men. He achieved great notoriety in 1880 when he shot William M. Shannon of Camden dead in a duel. Shannon's death on the field of honor created an uproar in South Carolina. In an effort to outlaw in the state the anachronistic practice of duelling, Francis M. Dawson of the Charleston News and Courier depicted Cash as a blood-thirsty fiend who goaded the innocent Shannon into an uneven fight. A few of the state's leading politicians (among them L. W. R. Blair) came to Cash's defense, but most either remained aloof or joined in on the side of the News and Courier. United States Senator Matthew C. Butler, a close friend of Dawson, went to the head of the baying pack by denouncing Cash as a "border ruffian." Butler's criticism was not without irony, the senator having headed a band of Red Shirt assassins,

¹⁸Cash, The Cash-Shannon Duel, pp. 5, 25, 34; Clark, Francis Warrington Dawson, pp. 106.

stole from the public treasury as expertly as any Republican, and seduced (among others) the daughter of a friend. Naturally, Cash resented Dawson for making him his whipping boy and Butler for his hypocrisy, but he also resented the Democratic establishment for allowing him to be made a scapegoat for South Carolina's culture of violence. Dismayed that the code of personal honor and responsibility in which he had been reared was now considered passe, Cash wept for "poor, emasculated, Yankee-ised, South Carolina." In 1882 he declared as an independent candidate for congress from the Fifth District in order to seek his vindication.¹⁹

As the South Carolina independent movement experienced its birth pangs, the state's Republican Party struggled against premature senility. Demoralized by Red Shirt enormities, by internal divisions, and by empty coffers, the Republicans had not fielded a state ticket since 1876. They retained power only in a few

¹⁹Cash, The Cash-Shannon Duel, pp. 18 (second quote), 19 (first quote), 26, 39-40; Kirland and Kennedy, Historic Camden, pp. 237-248; S. W. Henley, The Cash Family of South Carolina (Wadesboro, N.C.: Intelligencer Print, 1884), pp. 20-22; Clark, Francis Warrington Dawson, pp. 105-108, 160; L. D. Johnson, Charleston, to W. E. Johnson, August 13, W. S. King to W. W. Sellers, September 15, 1880, W. E. Johnson, Camden, to R. B. Johnson, August 16, 1881, Cash-Shannon Duel Papers, USC; Williamson, After Slavery, pp. 267-270, 384; Holt, Black Over White, p. 196; Columbia Register, August 30, 1882.

Low Country counties like Beaufort where tremendous black majorities made them proof against ballot manipulation and Red Shirt terror. Personal battles over the spoils increasingly dominated the life of the party. The leadership divided along racial lines as black politicians expressed their discontent with white control of the more lucrative federal offices. "No wonder the Democrats say that the niggers are not able to govern themselves, when they select to govern them such ill-begotten white men," groaned a black leader from Union County. "When they meet you on the street and nobody is looking they 'damn the Democrats'; but the next thing you know you see them walking arm in arm with a Democrat, and saying 'these d__n niggers want to put on too many airs, they want to rise up!'"²⁰

Many Upcountry blacks, complaining of high rents and taxes and of the fence and election laws, removed to black strongholds in the Low Country or left the state altogether. Perhaps as many as 10,000 fled Edgefield and other Upcountry counties in early 1882. "Our people are suffering under a worse bondage in this State than they did before the war," a black leader explained.

²⁰Holt, Black Over White, pp. 213-217; Tindall, South Carolina Negroes, pp. 43, 44-45, 64-65; Patton, "The Republican Party in South Carolina," pp. 95, 97-98; [Townshend], "The Political Condition of South Carolina," pp. 193-194; Charleston News and Courier, April 29 (quotes June Mobley), September 3, 1880.

We have no rights civil or political, which the party in power respects. Congress gave us the right to vote, yet we are not allowed to exercise that right; or, when we are allowed to approach the ballot box, our ballots are not counted. Before we were freed the white man reaped the benefit of our labor, but he clothed us, fed us, and looked after us in sickness; now the situation is only changed in this, that we have to feed and clothe ourselves, and if we have not the means to employ a physician when sick we are allowed to die like dogs. Who can blame us if we are restless and anxious to seek homes where we, and our children in time to come, can enjoy the rights and privileges conferred on us by an all-wise Providence?

In the Upcountry and elsewhere, other blacks, discouraged by Republican corruption ("if the Republican party wants to find men enough to put on a ticket who haven't been 'cused of stealing, they never get up a ticket," quipped a G.O.P. insider) and by the party's inability to protect them in the exercise of the suffrage either withdrew from politics or succumbed to Hamptonite inducements and commenced voting the Democratic ticket.²¹

Ignoring the insidious effects of poverty and corruption, some Republican leaders accounted for their party's weakness by citing a lack of backbone. Black State Senator Thomas E. Miller of Beaufort revealed a quintessentially South Carolinian appreciation for

²¹Charleston News and Courier, September 3, 1880 (second quote), January 2, 5, 1882; New York Times, January 12 (first quote), February 20, 1882; Samuel Dibble, Orangeburg, to John S. Richardson, June 21, 1882, Richardson Papers, USC; Tindall, South Carolina Negroes, pp. 66-67.

courage when he complained of the white Republican leadership that "as soon as anything like danger or work appeared they shrank from incurring social ostracism, and were too cowardly to come to the front like men and go down with their colors flying." The independent leaders, on the other hand, were anything but craven, and their Red Shirt background merely made them more attractive to men nearly devoid of hope. "We should combine with such men as know the methods of the Democracy, and the Greenbackers having affiliated with that party know how to carry into effect the shot-gun policy," maintained the postmaster of Charleston. "We want to go with men who will shoulder their shot-guns, go to the polls with them and demand that their ballots be counted, or blood." The South Carolina Republican leadership desired coalition with a unanimity unique in the South. "We know . . . that we can get the aid of the Republicans every man of them. . . . They will vote for the devil just to feel how it is to vote once more and have it counted square," boasted a Charleston independent.²²

The Republican-independent coalition was formed in

²²Charleston News and Courier, September 3, 1880 (quotes Miller), September 13, 26 (quotes W. N. Taft), 1882; Columbia Register, December 3, 1881; James P. Downing, Charleston, to William Mahone, December 22, 1881 (third quote), Mahone Papers, Duke; Chicago Tribune, September 14, 1882; New York Times, January 2, 1882.

principle when Thomas E. Miller met with J. Hendrix McLane in Columbia in late January 1882. In early March a conference of leading Republicans confirmed the arrangement by agreeing not to place a state ticket in the field but to await the determination of the Greenback convention. President Arthur approved of the coalition and, in an attempt to insure a fair election, instructed Attorney-General Benjamin H. Brewster to prosecute vigorously Democrats indicted for offenses incident to the 1880 elections and to order federal marshals to monitor the re-registration under the Eight-Box Law. Ominously, both initiatives failed. The marshals merely inconvenienced the Democratic registrars in their machinations, and of the 400 elections cases on the docket only 3 resulted in conviction. A Justice Department detective lamented that

from the general tenor of public sentiment, the open hostility to the Government, and the general approval expressed on all hands of all measures, whether legal or not, to prevent the elevation of negroes or those in sympathy with them to office, it would be an impossibility to convict anyone, no matter how strong the evidence might be, who was charged with offenses against election laws.

For a lethargic Democracy, the trials proved a boon. A Charleston editor observed that "There was much laxity and lukewarmness until the course of the political trials . . . showed the people the depth and breadth of

the Stalwart conspiracy to Africanize the State."²³

The Greenback convention assembled in Columbia in early September. Composed of around 125 delegates, mostly whites and mostly farmers, it represented 22 of South Carolina's 34 counties. Confusion marked the early proceedings as the convention president revealed a profound ignorance of parliamentary usage and Delegate Robert Fishburne engaged in a series of belligerent harangues. Fishburne's expulsion and forcible removal brought a measure of calm to the deliberations, and a platform soon emerged which demanded an inflated currency while condemning phosphate monopolies, the fence law, the gerrymander, the Eight-Box Law, and Red Shirt rule. "The elements of every tyranny the world has ever known are found in this State to-day, from murders in the streets to ballot box stuffing, and the silent but savage process of starving out, all, all are

²³Charleston News and Courier, January 23, September 13, 1882; Chicago Tribune, March 4, 1882; Stanley P. Hirshson, Farewell to the Bloody Shirt: Northern Republicans and the Southern Negro, 1877-1893 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), pp. 100-101; New York Times, March 24, 27, 29, 31, April 15, 18, May 14, October 23 (quotes James J. Donaghy), 1882; Nation XXXIV (May 25, 1882), p. 439 (quotes Charleston News). "We have had enough of 'nigger' Republican rule in South Carolina, and do you suppose I would convict a white man on 'nigger' testimony?" remarked the foreman of one of the election case juries (New York Times, October 23, 1882).

found here," the Greenbackers thundered.²⁴

Fishburne and the platform out of the way, the delegates nominated a full slate of state officers, headed by J. Hendrix McLane for governor. No blacks appeared on the ticket, but McLane and other Greenback leaders assuaged black opinion by promising recognition in the county conventions. The Greenbackers also made nominations for every congressional district except two--the Second and the Black Seventh which they left for the Republicans. The Greenback nominees generally were unexceptional, but the nomination of Thomas J. Mackey for the Fifth District seat excited controversy. A number of the delegates distrusted Mackey for his political vagabondage and wanted instead to endorse the independent candidacy of E. B. C. Cash. Mackey overcame their objections by intense lobbying and by winning the support of McLane. When asked what would become of Cash, Mackey facetiously replied, "Oh, we have provided a place for him. We will need a school commissioner, and it will be admitted that there is no one in the State better qualified to teach the young idea how to shoot than Col. Cash, he being a d__d good shot himself." Hendrix McLane closed the convention with a defiant, indeed inflammatory, address. Proclaiming that

²⁴Charleston News and Courier, September 6 (quote), 7, 1882; New York Times, September 6, 1882.

"The living issues are between labor on the one hand and monopolies, rings and bossism on the other," he pledged that "If you stand by me and follow me through I will be governor of South Carolina, or by the Eternal we will have a military government."²⁵

The Republican convention, composed of around twenty-five white federal officeholders and one hundred blacks, met in Columbia a few days later. After the usual round of personal attacks and innuendoes, the convention took up the business of coalition. Recalling that "The last Legislature literally disfranchised four-fifths of the Republican voters in the State," a black delegate from York County urged his fellows to "let us break down the Bourbon Democracy by whatever means we can command. . . . We had almost as good be in hell as under present Democratic auspices." With little delay, the delegates joined the York man in his flight from perdition by resolving

That the Convention . . . , while repudiating the financial principles advocated by the Greenback party . . . , do recommend at the next general election the Republican voters of the State in the interest of a free ballot and a fair count cast their ballots . . . for the State ticket nominated by the Greenback-Labor convention.²⁶

²⁵Charleston News and Courier, September 6 (quotes McLane), 7, 8 (quotes Mackey), 1882.

²⁶Chicago Tribune, September 13, 1882; New York Herald, September 13, 1882; Charleston News and Courier, September 13 (first quote), 14 (second quote), 1882.

The delegates decided to leave the selection of congressional candidates to the district conventions. In the First, Third, and Fourth districts, the Republicans dutifully endorsed the Greenback candidates. In the Sixth, however, a poorly attended conclave nominated a Straight-out Republican, and in the Fifth the convention gagged on the candidacy of the apostate Thomas J. Mackey. When Fifth District delegates endorsed E. B. C. Cash, Mackey rather gracelessly withdrew from the race. By prior arrangement with the Greenbackers, the Second and Seventh district nominations were reserved for Republicans. The Second District was considered a forlorn hope and so went with little competition to a white internal revenue collector. In the Black Seventh, however, nomination seemed tantamount to election, and an arduous three-sided contest developed between a scalawag and a pair of blacks. The prize went to the scalawag, state party chairman E. W. M. Mackey, only after 251 ballots and the exchange of large sums of money. Infuriated at having been outbid, Samuel Lee, the strongest of the black candidates, declared as an independent.²⁷

The Republican-independent coalition would face an

²⁷Anderson Intelligencer, October 19, 1882; Charleston News and Courier, September 7, 14, 23, 26, 28, 30, October 1, 2, 7, 1882; Uya, From Slavery to Public Service, pp. 115-117.

aroused opposition. The Democratic convention which met in early August had been careful to avoid the impression of having been manipulated by sinister forces.

Rejecting candidates tainted by too zealous an advocacy of the fence law and too close an association with the Columbia ring, the delegates had drafted for governor a dark horse, Superintendent of Education Hugh S.

Thompson of Richland County. Thompson seemed a near perfect choice. He was a native of the Upcountry, a Confederate veteran, an able speaker, and an experienced administrator who recently had accepted the presidency of the South Carolina College. He had once headed a Red Shirt rifle club, but since his election to the superintendency in 1876 his energy and relative impartiality had won him the respect of many Republicans. Samuel Lee told a News and Courier reporter that the nomination "showed Democratic advancement and would be approved . . . by the colored people." A New York man confided to Thompson that "I hope you will win for many reasons, not the least of which is, that you in all places and at all times treated Republicans as though they had some feelings, and might not be as bad as they were painted." Many Democrats also regarded Thompson as a breath of fresh air. "The State honors itself in thus honoring a faithful son. Not all politics this time," a friend

exulted.²⁸

Having satisfied the demands of propriety by nominating the accomplished and upright Thompson, the Democrats launched a venomous attack on the coalition. They excoriated the independents as loafers, mobsters, communists, disappointed office-seekers, and--worst of all--apprentice Republicans. McLane, cried the editor of the Anderson Independent, "wants Republican money, Republican votes and Republican force to put him in office in South Carolina. . . . If elected he will be a Republican tool. He will owe his election to their money and their votes; he will do their bidding." The Democrats maintained that coalition victory would mean a return to the days of corruption, profligacy, and burdensome taxation. "The Democratic party," the Anderson editor reminded his readers, "has saved our taxpayers more than a million dollars each year since it came into power in 1876." The issue the Democrats chose to emphasize, however, was that of black domination. "The Greenback movement," hissed Francis W. Dawson, "is nothing more or less than a desperate effort to

²⁸Columbia Register, July 6, August 2, 1882; Charleston News and Courier, August 3 (quotes Lee), 14, Anderson Intelligencer, August 24, 1882; New York Times, August 11, 1882; Greenville News, May 17, 1931, clipping in Hugh Smith Thompson Papers, USC; William A Courtney to Thompson, August 1 (third quote), M. Hurley, New York, to Thompson, August 2, W. L. Trenholm, Charleston, to Thompson, August 2, 1882, ibid.

Africanize the State."²⁹

Dawson and his comrades ridiculed the independent leaders by recalling their Red Shirt past and by publicizing their eccentricities and their thoughtless remarks. J. D. Durham, the coalition candidate for superintendent of education, proved a particularly inviting target. Durham, Dawson informed his readers, had denounced the public schools and had been repeatedly jailed for refusing to pay the poll (school) tax. Moreover, Durham had advocated the enactment of the fence law and had "boldly asserted that a negro has no more soul than a dog or mule."³⁰

The campaign against the coalition united the moderates and the Red Shirts. Regulars of both persuasions would do what was necessary to keep their party in power. The attitude of moderate leader Wade Hampton is illuminating. While Hampton believed that the action of the legislature in regard to the fence and Eight-Box laws was "unfortunate," he nevertheless declared that "my opposition to these laws is no reason why I should desert the only party that has given honest

²⁹Abbeville Press and Banner, August 4, 13, 1882; Anderson Intelligencer, September 7, October 5 (second quote), 26 (first quote), November 2, 1882; Charleston News and Courier, September 7, 25, October 2 (third quote), 28, 1882.

³⁰Charleston News and Courier, September 7, 8, 19 (quote), October 7, 18, 26, 1882.

and good government to the State since the war." Hampton knew precisely how to deal with those who insisted on straying from the Democratic fold. "If any sheep attempts to bite, shoot him on the spot," he said.³¹

The Red Shirts took Hampton at his word, embarking on a career of terror that forcefully demonstrated that they, not the coalitionists, remained the masters of the "shot-gun policy." An independent described their method:

Clubs of irresponsible young men, mounted and uniformed with the Red Shirt, are summoned, paraded, and maneuvered. . . . The streets and roads leading to the place of [coalition] meetings are seized upon by these mounted bodies, and timid and responsible citizens are . . . deterred from attending their meetings by the clamor, the galloping of horses, and the yells of men, mingled with the reckless discharge of firearms.

Acts of Red Shirt intimidation piled one on another. In Lancaster County a white mob lynched a young black for the alleged rape of a white girl. Local black leaders complained that "this was prearranged to terrify the colored people." In Fairfield County masked nightriders surrounded the home of a deputy internal revenue collector and, after yelling and firing pistols, left a note giving the man five days to leave the county. In

³¹Anderson Intelligencer, July 20, 1882; Wade Hampton to editor, June 17 (first quote), Charleston News and Courier, June 20, 1882; ibid., October 18, 1882; New York Times, October 13, 1882 (second quote).

Aiken and Edgefield counties Red Shirts threatened the life of Republican congressional candidate E. M. Brayton and broke up coalition meetings. One attack resulted in injury to two blacks.³²

Speaking at Winnsboro in Fairfield County, Hugh Thompson asked the townspeople to give McLane the same reception that they had given a Republican orator in 1880. The Republican had been mobbed, and, when McLane arrived, drunken Red Shirts prevented him from speaking and cuffed and kicked him in the presence of his little daughter. Only the personal intervention of the county Democratic chairman saved McLane from suffering serious injury or death. Red Shirts also prohibited McLane from speaking in Chester and Marion counties.³³

While the Red Shirts did not always start trouble, they created a climate in which trouble thrived. In Camden in July, shortly before an independent meeting at which E. B. C. Cash and Bob Fishburne were to speak, L. W. R. Blair confronted Democratic leader James L. Haile over remarks Haile had made concerning Blair's

³²Chicago Tribune, October 31, November 5 (first quote), 1882; Memorandum of interview with C. G. McIlvain and J. S. McCain, October 30, 1882 (second quote), William Eaton Chandler Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; New York Tribune, October 27, 1882; Charleston News and Courier, October 29, 1882.

³³Chicago Tribune, October 7, 1882; New York Times, October 7, 1882; Charleston News and Courier, September 26, November 7, 1882.

attendance at secret meetings of blacks. In the course of their argument, a frightened Haile produced a gun and shot the unarmed Blair dead. Cash and other coalitionists claimed that Blair had been assassinated, but a jury acquitted Haile after numerous witnesses testified that Blair had seemed to be looking for a fight. One man stated that Blair's face at the time of the shooting was "as savage as a meat-axe." Thomas J. Mackey, as an attorney for the prosecution, did the state's case little good when he avowed that holding "secret meetings at night with negroes was . . . a crime against the civilization of the Anglo-Saxon race."³⁴

At Lancaster Court House in late September, following a speech by Cash, a crowd of blacks terminated an argument with some whites with a round of pistol fire. One white suffered a slight ankle wound, and the black county Republican chairman, who made the mistake of trying to calm the antagonists, was shot in the nose. Later in the day, the blacks, learning that the Red Shirts were gathering elsewhere in town, mounted horses and attempted a preemptive strike. On arriving at the Red Shirt rendezvous, however, they ran into a well-

³⁴Columbia Register, July 6, September 12, 1882; E. B. C. Cash to Rollin H. Kirk in Winston (NC), Union Republican, July 20, 1882; Chicago Tribune, July 8, 11, 1882; Charleston News and Courier, September 8, 9 (quotes Mackey), 10, 1882; Patton, "The Republican Party in South Carolina," p. 93, n. 7 (first quote); Kirland and Kennedy, Historic Camden, p. 226.

directed fusillade which left six of their number dead and more than a dozen wounded. In the days following, the Red Shirts capitalized on their victory by organizing a military company which overawed the blacks by drilling in the countryside by day and in the town by night. As the election approached, the Lancaster Red Shirts punctuated the affair by assassinating a black leader.³⁵

The coalitionists responded to Democratic invective by characterizing their opponents as ringsters and ruffians. They maintained that Democratic violence and fraud had made South Carolina "the dead line of American civilization." They vehemently denied the charge that a coalition triumph would result in black domination. "Colored citizens do not and will not challenge white supremacy," Mackey explained.

When this is the true issue I shall stand on the line of my race and march to fate abreast with it; but the colored people have not attempted to assert their race majority by even nominating a State ticket since 1876. . . . The Bourbon Democrats sound the false alarm of 'negro rule' to keep the discontented white working men from breaking ranks and trampling their ring rule under foot.

The mayor of Georgetown neatly summarized the

³⁵Charleston News and Courier, September 29, October 2, 1882; Chicago Tribune, September 29, 1882; New York Times, October 1, 4, 1882; New York Herald, October 7, 1882; W. E. Chandler, Washington, to editor, October 31, New York Tribune, November 2, 1882; Memorandum of interview with C. G. McIlvain and J. S. McCain, October 30, 1882, Chandler Papers, LC.

independent position: "We want no Negro rule, and no bourbon democratic rule."³⁶

Democratic buncombe proved much easier to answer than Democratic bullets. In early October, shortly after his dreadful experience at Winnsboro, J. Hendrix McLane traveled to Washington where he tried to get federal marshals or troops dispatched to South Carolina. Later in the month, two black survivors of the debacle at Lancaster visited the national capital on the same errand. Attorney-General Brewster responded by instructing his subordinates in South Carolina "to see to it that the laws are executed, and that fraud shall not interfere with an honest ballot." Considering the Justice Department's recent failures in the state, this was doubtless cold comfort to the coalitionists.³⁷

³⁶Yorkville Enquirer, September 7, 1882; New York Tribune, August 17, 1882 (quotes Mackey); David Risley, Georgetown, to William Mahone, August 25, 1882, Mahone Papers, Duke. "As for the negro, his inferiority to the white man is universally conceded," remarked L. W. R. Blair. "Yet with his acknowledged inferiority he has been endowed by his Maker and invested by the American people with the franchise of an American citizen. Of these no human power can lawfully deprive him, and the white man who would do it by fraud sinks far beneath the average negro in degradation" (Camden Journal, March, 1882, in Kirland and Kennedy, Historic Camden, p. 225).

³⁷New York Herald, October 7, 1882; J. Hendrix McLane, Washington, to Lee Crandall, October 7, Crandall, Washington, to William E. Chandler, October 14, Brewster Cameron, Washington, to Chandler, October 30, 1882, Chandler Papers, LC; New York Times, October 29, 1882; Charleston News and Courier, November 3, 1882; Chicago Tribune, November 6, 1882 (quotes Brewster).

By election eve, Red Shirt terror had forced the insurgents to abandon the stump almost everywhere in the Upcountry. E. B. C. Cash, however, refused to be intimidated. He continued to pillory the Democrats in his inimitable style. Cash spared no personalities, not even the admired Hampton. He denounced as abridgements of personal freedom recent acts of the General Assembly prohibiting duelling and the carrying of concealed weapons. He even dismissed his alma mater as a useless extravagance. He said he would "plow up the [South Carolina] college grounds, and if a certain set have to be maintained . . . convert the building into a soup house for their special benefit."³⁸

Cash's immunity from the Red Shirt scourge owed much to a devoted white following in his home county of Chesterfield, in Blair's Kershaw, and in other counties of the Fifth District, but it also depended on his awesome reputation. "No effort has been made to impede his canvass," a newspaper correspondent reported, "as his determination and personal courage would be apt to deter anyone from attempting to bulldoze him, unless they expected to meet the responsibility of such conduct." Still, Cash admitted to the pressures of the

³⁸Chicago Tribune, October 30, November 5, 1882; Charleston News and Courier, October 25, 1882; New York Herald, October 7, 1882; Yorkville Enquirer, October 5, 1882 (quote).

situation. Speaking at Yorkville in early September, he remarked that "He had been in battle, on the field of honor, and his courage had been tested on many other occasions, but owing to the peculiarity of being an Independent candidate, he had been in the tightest place of his life for the last six weeks."³⁹

On election day the Democrats crushed the coalition. Hugh S. Thompson defeated J. Hendrix McLane 67,158 votes to 17,719, and the Democrats won the six congressional races in which they entered candidates. The coalitionists won only in the Black Seventh where regular Republican E. W. M. Mackey easily turned back black independent Republican Samuel Lee. The only other coalition candidate to run well was the indomitable E. B. C. Cash who garnered 44 per cent of the vote in the Fifth District.⁴⁰

Greenback organizational ineptitude was partially responsible for the coalition defeat. Noting that McLane had not received a single vote in Anderson County, a local editor advised "the Greenback champions . . . to go back to their farms and quit politics." The

³⁹Charleston News and Courier, November 4, 1882; New York Herald, October 7, 11 (first quote), 1882; Yorkville Enquirer, September 7, 1882 (quotes Cash). In June in Cheraw Cash engaged in a fistfight and issued a challenge (Yorkville Enquirer, June 29, 1882).

⁴⁰Charleston News and Courier, November 25, 1882.

coalition's inability to articulate a program of reform also contributed to the disaster. Its leadership reflected a diversity of opinion. L. W. R. Blair looked to the Old South; Thomas J. Mackey to the New. J. Hendrix McLane was an orthodox Greenbacker; E. W. M. Mackey an orthodox Republican. E. B. C. Cash, the coalition's most dynamic leader, clearly longed for an earlier day and gleefully recounted the sins of the present regime, but his reason for entering politics was personal vindication. He ended his speeches by handing out gratis copies of his exculpatory pamphlet The Cash-Shannon Duel. "The feeling is negative rather than positive," observed the astute Francis W. Dawson, "The dissatisfied Democrats know what they object to better than they know what they want."⁴¹

Credit must be given where credit is due, and

⁴¹Anderson Intelligencer, November 9, 1882 (first quote); Columbia Register, August 30, 1882; Chicago Tribune, October 30, 1882; Yorkville Enquirer, September 7, 1882; Charleston News and Courier, January 23, 1882 (second quote). In September Rollin H. Kirk, editor of the Charleston Mercury, was jailed for libel for publishing a portion of The Cash-Shannon Duel reflecting on Francis W. Dawson. "A curious fact about it," a reporter noted, "is that the pamphlet . . . has been published broadcast throughout South Carolina, yet Editor Dawson does not feel disposed to call Col. Cash to account for it, but does assault the poor editor who publishes an extract from it printed in a Northern paper" (Chicago Tribune, September 15, 1882). Perhaps Cash's promise to "never let up on Dawson, God damn him" helps explain Dawson's reluctance to prosecute the colonel (W. E. Johnson, Camden, to R. B. Johnson, August 16, 1881, Cash-Shannon Duel Papers, USC).

credit (or blame) for the coalition's defeat belonged much more to the Democrats than to the coalitionists. The Democrats countered the cry of "ring rule" by nominating for governor the attractive Thompson. They defused the potentially explosive fence law issue by promising certain localities remedial legislation, by inviting anti-fence law men to enter party primaries, by providing pasture for the use of their tenants, and by pleading that the issue not erode white solidarity. Indeed, as the year progressed, the law redounded to the Democrats' advantage as numerous farmers netted handsome profits from bumper crops of grain grown in unfenced fields.⁴²

Yet, even had the Democrats nominated a party hack, even had the fence law become the nightmare it once promised to be, even had the independents effected a better organization and enunciated an attractive program, the Democrats probably still would have won. Their party clubs, their Red Shirt bands, and their control of the election machinery gave them a nearly impregnable social, legal, and extralegal power--a power

⁴²Charleston News and Courier, January 12, August 14, September 25, 1882; New York Times, January 2, 1882; John W. Holmes, Barnwell, to editor, May 20, ibid., May 29, 1882; Werner, "New South' Carolina," pp. 152-153. In December the newly-elected legislature passed an act exempting certain counties from the operation of the fence law (Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia, 1882, pp. 748-749).

made even more secure by the gerrymander and the Eight-Box Law. The gerrymander obtained the result that its sponsors predicted. Of the 60,000 anti-Democratic votes cast in the congressional elections, 28,000 were cast in the Black Seventh. Meanwhile, the Eight-Box Law disfranchised thousands of Republicans. Paradoxically, the law's efficacy was reflected in a precipitant decline in the Democratic vote. While the anti-Democratic congressional vote fell by only 2 per cent from 1880, the Democratic vote declined by 48 per cent (from 116,000 to 61,000). Independent defections accounted for some of the Democratic loss, as did the gradual realization that the independents posed little threat to Democratic rule. More important, though, was the certainty that the Eight-Box Law and the gerrymander had crippled and sequestered the Republican vote. Democratic election judges no longer had to tally so many Republican votes in the Democratic column or to count the ballots of so many Democratic dogs and mules.⁴³

The election of 1882 marked the end of effective opposition to the Democracy everywhere in South Carolina

⁴³Charleston News and Courier, November 22, 1880, June 27, August 14, November 25, 1882; New York Times, June 7, 15, 20, 1882; New York Tribune, July 17, 1882; Samuel Dibble, Orangeburg, to John S. Richardson, June 21, 1882, Richardson Papers, USC; Cooper, The Conservative Regime, p. 216.

except the Black Seventh. Reform would not come to the state until 1890 when Pitchfork Ben Tillman used the familiar tools of organization, intimidation, and race baiting to effect a revolution within the Democratic Party. Unlike the coalitionists, Tillman understood perfectly the basic principle of South Carolina politics. Dawson had stated it years before: "in no event, or under any circumstances, will South Carolina pass under the rule of the negroes again. That, at least, is certain."⁴⁴

⁴⁴Cooper, The Conservative Regime, pp. 143-206; Charleston News and Courier, January 23, 1882 (quote).

GEORGIA

Georgia in 1882 was under the control of the Organized Democracy, an oligarchy of businessmen, industrialists, and practical-minded planters. Principal among the oligarchs was the Atlanta Ring: Governor Alfred H. Colquitt, an upright Methodist layman whose piety seldom prevented him from cutting a political deal; former Confederate Major General and United State Senator John B. Gordon, utterly corrupt, utterly shameless, and extremely popular; and former Republican Joseph E. Brown, the Democracy's dark eminence. Brown, wrote an enemy, "has a million of money, controls the W[estern] & Atlantic R.R., is in the [United States] Senate, commands patronage and appropriations, and is not as much controlled by scruples as may be thought desirable."¹

¹Josephine Bone Floyd, "Rebecca Latimer Felton: Political Independent," Georgia Historical Quarterly XXX (1946), p. 16; Judson Clements Ward Jr., "The New Departure Democrats of Georgia: An Interpretation," ibid. XLI (1957), p. 233; Harold E. Davis, "Henry W. Grady, Master of the Atlanta Ring, 1880-1886," ibid. LXIX (1985), p. 7; William M. Browne, Athens, to Jefferson Davis, July 1, 1882, in Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist: His Letters, Papers, and Speeches, ed. Dunbar Rowland (Jackson: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1923), IX, 175-176 (quote).

The ring was interested in railroads, mines, the convict lease, and the development of the city of Atlanta. It enjoyed the support of Henry Grady, the New South zealot who edited the influential Atlanta Constitution, and received covert aid from conservative Republicans like former Governor Rufus Bullock who remained intimate with Brown. The ring and its cohorts cared little about the worsening economic condition of Georgia's farmers but managed to keep most of the "wool-hat boys" from crossing the party line by promoting some minor reforms and by appealing to race prejudice and to the memory of the Lost Cause. The oligarchs tolerated no opposition within the Organized Democracy and crushed it wherever it appeared and by whatever method seemed appropriate.²

The imperiousness of the leadership turned many Democrats into independents. The disaffected resented

²Atlanta Constitution, February 9, 1882; Olin Burton Adams, "The Negro and the Agrarian Movement in Georgia, 1874-1908," Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1973, pp. 15-16; Joseph H. Parks, Joseph E. Brown of Georgia (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), p. 574; Ralph Lowell Eckert, John Brown Gordon: Soldier, Southerner, American (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), pp. 155-156, 239-241, 263-265; Rebecca Latimer Felton, My Memoirs of Georgia Politics (Atlanta: Index Publishing Co., 1911), p. 348; Ralph L. Eckert, "A Breath of Scandal: John B. Gordon, Henry W. Grady, and the Resignation-Appointment Controversy of May 1880," Georgia Historical Quarterly LXIX (1985), p. 337; Davis, "Henry W. Grady," p. 8; Ward, "The New Departure Democrats," pp. 228, 232.

interference by Atlanta in local party affairs, and the more ambitious among them rebelled when political preferment did not come their way. "I can do a great deal in getting up and carrying out a strong independent movement in at least three of our Congressional districts," boasted a Macon man. "I worked long & faithfully in the democratic ranks & got only the reward of empty honors."³

Independents were present everywhere in the state but were strongest among the yeomen of the North Georgia upcountry. In 1851 the Western and Atlantic Railroad penetrated the western half of the region and connected Atlanta with Chattanooga. By bringing farmers along its route into the national market economy, the railroad proved a harbinger of the 1870s. In that decade rail mileage in the upcountry tripled. The number of stores doubled. The number of artisans declined by one-half or more as did the home manufacture of necessities. While corn production increased by over 80 per cent, cotton

³Olive Hall Shadgett, The Republican Party in Georgia, From Reconstruction Through 1900 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1964), p. 63; George L. Jones, "William H. Felton and the Independent Democratic Movement in Georgia, 1870-1890," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Georgia, 1971, pp. 16, 38; Lewis Nicholas Wynne, "Planter Politics in Georgia, 1860-1890," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Georgia, 1980, p. 346; George W. Cheves, Dawson, to editor, May 20, New York Times, May 29, 1882; John F. Toole, Macon, to William Mahone, December 20, 1881, Mahone Papers, Duke University, Durham, N.C. (quote).

production expanded by more than 400 per cent. Population grew by one-third and farms become more numerous and smaller. Mortgages multiplied and tenancy and sharecropping proliferated. More and more rural land and wealth fell under the control of the townsmen.⁴

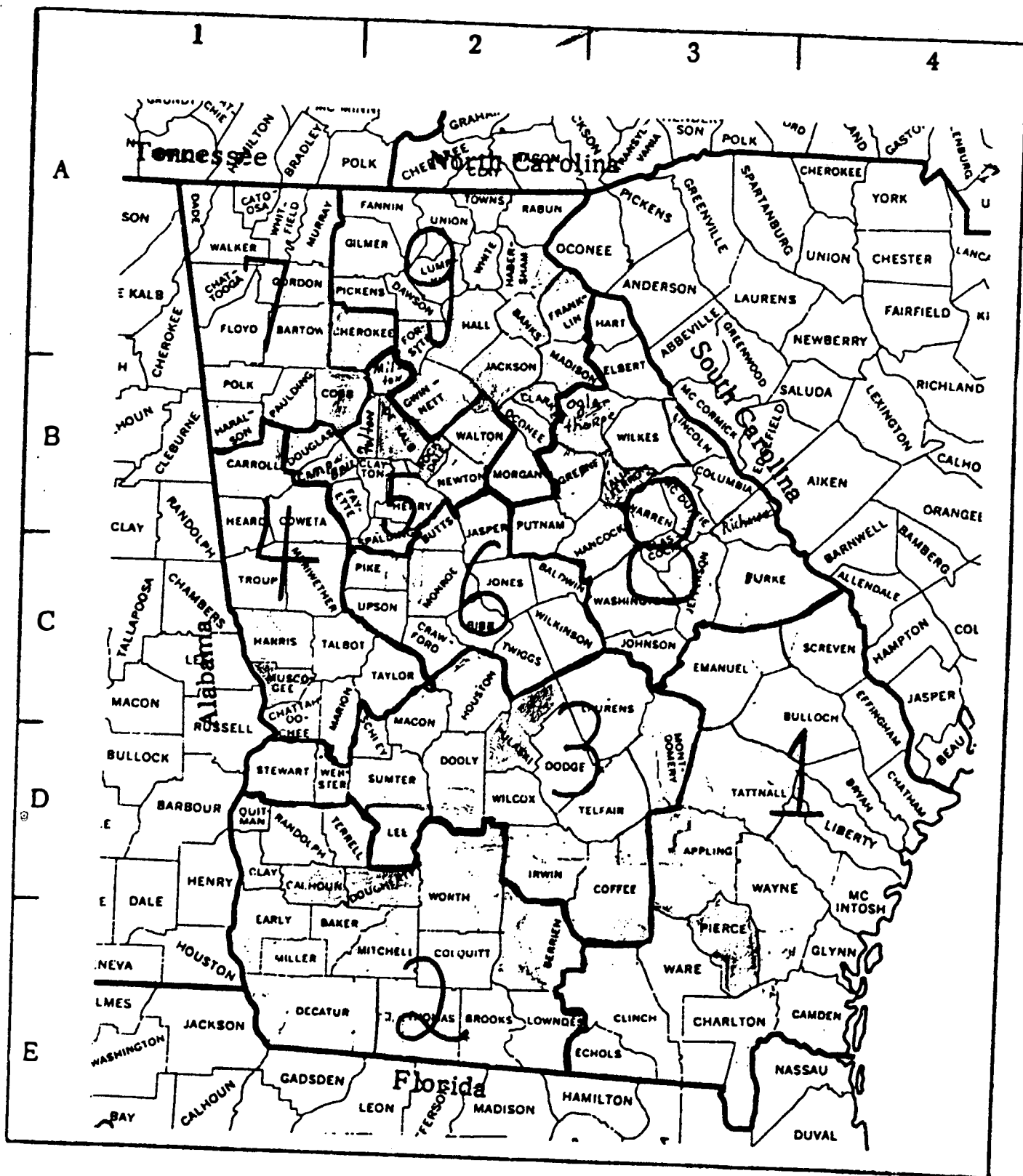
Overwhelmingly white, intensely individualistic, and possessing long memories, the upcountry farmers had not forgotten their ancient rivalry with the lowland planters, scorned the party whip of the village politician, and worried little over the specter of black

⁴Jones, "William H. Felton," p. 8; David F. Weiman, "Farmers and the Market in Antebellum America: A View from the Georgia Upcountry," Journal of Economic History XLVII (1987), pp. 630, 647; Weiman, "The Economic Emancipation of the Non-Slaveholding Class: Upcountry Farmers in the Georgia Cotton Economy," ibid. XLV (1985), pp. 77, 79, 82-83, 84, 85; R. H. Loughridge, "Report on the Cotton Production of the State of Georgia," in U.S. Congress, House, Report on the Cotton Production in the United States, House Miscellaneous Document 42, Part 6, 47th Congress, 2nd session, 1882-1883, p. 57; Steven Hahn, "The 'Unmaking' of the Southern Yeomanry: The Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1860-1890," in The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America, ed. Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), pp. 187, 190, 191, 193-194; Charles L. Flynn Jr., White Land, Black Labor: Caste and Class in Late Nineteenth-Century Georgia (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), pp. 141-144; Peter Temin, "Patterns of Cotton Agriculture in Postbellum Georgia," Journal of Economic History XLIII (1983), p. 664; Thomas Alan Scott, "Cobb County, Georgia, 1880-1900: A Socioeconomic Study of an Upper Piedmont County," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Tennessee, 1978, pp. 26, 107, 108-111; Frank J. Huffman Jr., "Town and Country in the South, 1850-1880: A Comparison of Urban and Rural Social Structures," South Atlantic Quarterly 76 (1977), pp. 366-381.

domination. The upcountry independents were led by Emory Speer, congressman from the Ninth District which encompassed the eastern portion of the region, and William H. Felton, former congressman from the Seventh District which embraced Georgia's northwest corner. Speer, a cold, ambitious, and selfish young lawyer of Athens, chose to concentrate on his congressional district, leaving to Felton, a doctor-farmer-preacher of Cartersville, the leadership of the state independent movement. A man of striking appearance and a speaker of real eloquence, Felton studded his remarks with Biblical references and often carried his listeners into a frenzy like that of a camp meeting. Although an ordained Methodist minister, Felton occasionally launched invidious personal attacks on his foes. His vendettas against Brown and Gordon were exceedingly bitter.⁵

Felton's political career reflected the growing fears and resentments of his constituents. When the doctor first went to congress in 1874, he held views as conservative as those of the Democratic bosses. However, as life in the upcountry became more bleak, Felton became more liberal. He attacked the convict

⁵Floyd, "Rebecca Latimer Felton," pp. 16-17; Shadgett, The Republican Party in Georgia, pp. 61-62; New York Times, February 6, 1882; Jones, "William H. Felton," pp. 39-40, 41; Judson Clements Ward Jr., "Georgia Under the Bourbon Democrats, 1872-1890," Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1947, p. 80.



lease and the poll tax, demanded an enlarged money supply and a more equitable system of taxation, and urged the strict regulation of railroads. He also endorsed the protective tariff as a means of encouraging the mining of coal and iron ore in his district.⁸

Despite Felton's adaptability, the doctor and the Georgia independent movement had suffered recent setbacks. In 1880, Governor Colquitt had defeated his independent opponent by nearly a two-to-one majority, and, although Ninth District voters had returned Speer to congress, Felton had gone down in the Seventh. Felton's defeat owed much to overconfidence, but it also resulted from the machinations of Joseph E. Brown. Worried that Felton's vociferous assaults on the convict lease might eventually cost him that lucrative source of income, Brown turned to his Republican friends for help. Felton's advocacy of the tariff and of equal political rights had won him Republican support in past elections, but in 1880 Brown (doubtless aided by Bullock and others) persuaded United States Internal Revenue Commissioner Green B. Raum to instruct Andrew Clark, his

⁸Steven Hahn, The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 229; Fletcher M. Green, "Ben E. Green and Greenbackism in Georgia," Georgia Historical Quarterly XXX (1946), p. 9; New York Times, February 6, 1882; Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1882 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1883), p. 345.

chief deputy in North Georgia, to exert his considerable influence against Felton. Ironically, even as Clark undercut Felton among Republicans, the doctor lost Democratic votes because of his Republican associations. Felton's defeat diminished his prestige. In early 1882, Marcellus E. Thornton, influential editor of an independent Atlanta newspaper, dismissed Felton as a "political fossil."⁷

The Georgia Republican Party had fossilized long ago. Crippled by the poll tax and tarred by the Democratic charge that it was a vehicle for black domination and by its own record of corruption during the Reconstruction regime of Governor Bullock, the party now existed principally as an employment agency for would-be federal officeholders. Outside of a few mountain and black-belt counties, Republicans rarely made serious efforts to win elections, preferring instead to war with each other over the federal patronage. Its corrupt and incompetent leadership was divided roughly into two camps. A pair of adventurers

⁷Kenneth Coleman, "The Georgia Gubernatorial Election of 1880," Georgia Historical Quarterly XXV (1941), p. 118; Jones, "William H. Felton," pp. 170, 171-172; Chicago Tribune, December 29, 1881; New York Times, February 6, 1882; Felton, My Memoirs of Georgia Politics, p. 323; Judson C. Ward Jr., "The Republican Party in Bourbon Georgia, 1872-1890," Journal of Southern History IX (1943), p. 200; M. E. Thornton, Atlanta, to William Mahone, December 17, 1881, Mahone Papers, Duke; Atlanta Constitution, December 14, 1881, January 25, February 22, March 30 (quote), 1882.

from Maine, Alfred E. Buck and John E. Bryant, led the dominant wing of the party. Buck and Bryant enjoyed great influence with black Republicans and were closely allied with William A. Pledger, black chairman of the state central committee. Typical of most Georgia Republican leaders, black or white, Pledger was more interested in the patronage than in victory at the polls. "The colored man wants post offices, custom houses, and collectorships," he told a Republican gathering. "Give him his sugar and you will satisfy him."⁸

Buck, Bryant, and their allies firmly repelled the idea of coalition with the independents. They maintained that "if these independents are honest in their high-sounding declarations . . . that 'bourbonism' must be put down in Georgia, let them join the Republicans who are already organized in opposition to democratic rule." The independents replied that it was the straightouts who were insincere. "Here are the independents fighting to break up the old moss-grown

⁸H. V. M. Miller to William H. Felton, January 16, 1882, Rebecca Latimer Felton Collection, University of Georgia, Athens; Shadgett, The Republican Party in Georgia, p. vii; Ruth Currie-McDaniel, Carpetbagger of Conscience: A Biography of John Emory Bryant (Athens: University of Georgia, 1987), p. 166; John M. Matthews, "Jefferson Franklin Long: The Public Career of Georgia's First Black Congressman," Phylon XLII (1981), p. 154; Atlanta Constitution, April 23, 1880 (quote); Athens Blade in Huntsville (AL) Gazette, June 3, 1882.

Bourbon party with its objectionable methods," sighed Emory Speer, "and here and there are Republicans perpetuating its miserable existence lest, it have been killed by a coalition, they might, in the distribution of patronage, be relegated to their proper place--the background." The straightout clique also rejected coalition because they wished not to disrupt their cozy relationship with the Atlanta Ring. In Washington Brown and Gordon brought their influence to bear on behalf of straightout officeseekers while in Georgia the pious Colquitt won friends among blacks by professing his belief that the races were equal in the eyes of God. In return, the straightouts helped the Organized Democracy in its struggle with the independents. In 1880, Pledger and other black leaders even took the stump for Colquitt.⁹

More ambitious, if no less venal, was the scalawag wing of the party. The Syndicate, as it was called, consisted of customs collectors Henry P. Farrow and James S. Atkins and a handful of other prominent white Republicans. Farrow and company reluctantly included

⁹Atlanta Constitution, January 24, 1882 (first quote); New York Tribune, December 11, 1881 (second quote); Chicago Tribune, December 24, 29, 1881, January 14, 1882; New York Times, February 6, 1882; Currie-McDaniel, Carpetbagger of Conscience, pp. 167, 169; Coleman, "The Georgia Gubernatorial Election of 1880," pp. 90, 96-97, 103; Matthews, "Jefferson Franklin Long," p. 153.

United States Marshal and former Confederate Lieutenant General James Longstreet. The Syndicate found that Longstreet's military reputation and influence with Chester Arthur outweighed his overbearing personality and political ineptitude. In recent years, Longstreet had championed Republican fusion with Southern independent movements. In 1878, he told United States Senator William P. Kellogg of Louisiana that

It has always been my theory that the republican party to become practical and successful in this section must adopt some plan by which we may secure cooperation from a large part of the best citizens of this section. The Independent move offers an opportunity which I think should not be overlooked. . . . It is the only way of making the republican party successful here.¹⁰

Longstreet's aspirations for the party and the Syndicate's lust for control of the patronage dovetailed nicely. Observing that President Arthur had thrown his support behind William Mahone in Virginia, the Syndicate resolved in late 1881 to attempt a union with Georgia's independents. On December 3, Longstreet requested of his old friend Dr. Felton that they talk politics. "It is my opinion," the general wrote, "that a combination

¹⁰Shadgett, The Republican Party of Georgia, pp. 91, 92; Henry P. Farrow to William H. Felton, December 28, 1881, Felton Collection, UGA; James Longstreet to William P. Kellogg, December 26, 1878, in Donald Bridgman Sanger and Thomas Robson Hay, James Longstreet (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), pp. 383-384; George C. Rable, But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), p. 102.

may be made, by which ideas may be so modified as to be acceptable to all." The two men soon met in Cartersville and scheduled a conference of leading independents and members of the Syndicate for December 29 at the Markham House in Atlanta.¹¹

The Markham House conferees agreed on a platform written by Dr. Felton. The document was Felton's usual mixture of Republican and pseudo-Populist principles. While it supported the protective tariff and internal improvements, the platform also called for the destruction of monopolies and for an inflated currency. It acknowledged the supremacy of the federal government, urged sectional reconciliation, and championed "a free ballot and a fair count." Touching on Georgia matters, it condemned ring rule and demanded free public schools and an end to the convict lease. A commentator found the platform "genteel and gingerly enough for Democrats to embrace and vague enough for Republicans to indorse."¹²

While attending the conference, Felton granted an

¹¹Jones, "William H. Felton," pp. 181, 183; James Longstreet to William H. Felton, December 3, 1881, Felton Collection, UGA.

¹²Ward, "Georgia Under the Bourbon Democrats," p. 123; Ward, "The Republican Party in Bourbon Georgia," p. 201; Chicago Tribune, December 29, 1881; Atlanta Constitution, January 3, 1882; New York Times, February 6 (quote), March 24, 1882.

interview to the correspondent of a Chicago newspaper. The doctor said that Mahone's triumph in Virginia had encouraged him greatly. It had proved that the Democrats could be defeated and that coalition victory would not bring with it black domination. He described Democratic rule as an "incubus" on the South. "Has the South under the domination of organized Democracy prospered and grown in manufactures, agriculture, population, and wealth generally more than the North under Republican sway?" he asked. "Have our affairs been administered more honestly, more economically, and more wisely than theirs?" Felton promised that the coalition would offer a full slate of candidates for the state offices. He also was careful to applaud the course of the Arthur administration.¹³

Shortly after the New Year, General Longstreet visited Washington. There, with help from his war-time comrade Mahone, he secured for the coalition the support of President Arthur and for the Syndicate predominant influence over the federal patronage in Georgia. When, in mid-January 1882, William A. Pledger called at the White House to plead the straightout case, Arthur spoke bluntly:

You men have run things for the Republicans of Georgia for years. You once had possession of the State. Under your leadership it was lost. You have

¹³Chicago Tribune, December 29, 1881.

grown feebler as a party organization ever since. There is not the faintest hope of your ever winning an election. Party leaders who cannot win are useless. They ought to and they must give way long enough for others to try the experiment. I am determined to work only for those who can show me some results.¹⁴

Besides desiring to rejuvenate the Georgia Republican Party, Arthur had another reason for favoring the Syndicate over the straightouts. He wished to be nominated for the presidency in 1884 and wanted the Georgia delegation controlled by Longstreet and Farrow rather than by Buck and Bryant. James G. Blaine would be Arthur's principal competitor, and the two carpetbaggers supposedly were devoted to the former Maine senator. Z. B. Hargrove, a Syndicate man from Rome, understood the Blaine connection. He informed Felton that Buck, Bryant, and their henchmen Andrew Clark and E. C. Wade were "all strong Blaine men and Blaine was opposed to the Independents and is now." Hargrove suggested that something be done "that will unhorse these malcontents."¹⁵

The Syndicate was of two minds about how to deal with those Republicans opposed to the coalition. Farrow

¹⁴Ward, "Georgia Under the Bourbon Democrats," p. 139; New York Times, February 6, 1882; Atlanta Constitution, January 5, 25, 28, 1882; Savannah Morning News, January 26, 1882 (quote), in Jones, "William H. Felton," p. 195.

¹⁵Shadgett, The Republican Party of Georgia, pp. 91, 94; Z. B. Hargrove, Rome, to William H. Felton, January 20, 1882, Felton Collection, UGA.

and Atkins wanted a general purge of straightout officeholders. Such a course would kill two birds with one stone. Doubters would be convinced and new offices would fall open to members of the Syndicate. Longstreet was more cautious. He worried about creating the impression "that our move is [more] for the purpose of getting hold of the spoils than for building up a party."¹⁸

After some bickering, Longstreet and the other members of the Syndicate agreed on the necessity for a few beheadings. They selected as principal victims Wade and Clark, the holders of the lucrative internal revenue collectorships. The latter's decapitation was especially desired. Clark, Farrow told the press,

has opposed every outcropping of independentism in any portion of Georgia, and has been its bitter enemy for the past six years. The office which he has held has more patronage and more political power than all the other federal appointments in Georgia combined, hence the necessity of some man in that position friendly to the new movement.

Clark also had erred by too zealously prosecuting illicit distillers in Emory Speer's Ninth Congressional District. Speer earnestly sought the removal of one so annoying to his constituents, and the Syndicate hoped to draw the stand-offish Speer closer to the coalition by

¹⁸Ward, "Georgia Under the Bourbon Democrats," p. 139; James Longstreet to William H. Felton, January 23, 1882, Felton Collection, UGA.

presenting the congressman with the collector's head.¹⁷

The patronage ax, however, fell more slowly than the Syndicate had hoped. The revenue collectors had friends in Georgia and in Washington (including Internal Revenue Collector Green B. Raum) who lobbied in their behalf. Clark and Wade's supporters defended the men as faithful public servants and condemned the members of the Syndicate as political cormorants interested only in the patronage. "The removal of Collector Clark would satisfy only a few office seekers, who would get places thereby, and would create much dissatisfaction among the republicans and many of the liberal democrats, and would certainly tend to defeat the new movement in this state," an Atlanta revenue agent disingenuously declared. "Do you for one moment think that the great mass of the Republicans of the State are going to submit to this?" a Washington man asked Felton. "Do you think they will follow the lead of such self-constituted leaders? Never, I tell you in all kindness, never!"¹⁸

The clamor made Arthur hesitate, and the removals

¹⁷Jones, "William H. Felton," p. 194; Atlanta Constitution, December 25, 1881, February 2, 18, 28 (quote), March 8, 13, 1882.

¹⁸Atlanta Constitution, February 12, 1882; W. H. Chapman, Atlanta, to James D. Brady, February 4, 1882, Mahone Papers, Duke (first quote); Sherman M. Merrill, Washington, to William H. Felton, February 11 (second quote), Jesse Wimberly, Waynesboro, to Felton, February 18, 1882, Felton Collection, UGA.

were delayed. On February 11, a nervous Longstreet wrote Mahone and urged him to use his influence to speed things along:

The delay seems to breed disaffection in our ranks, and want of confidence among our republicans, as to the policy that the Administration will pursue. I don't know but there seems some lack of decision and of resolution somewhere about Washington. . . . and of course all who have any hope of securing a place will make efforts now in opposition to our plans.

Wade and Clark were removed by mid-March but not before great damage had been done. The administration's indecision had encouraged the straightouts in their opposition to the coalition. In late June, a Rome Republican sadly observed that his party was "broken all to pieces."¹⁹

The patronage imbroglio sickened William H. Felton. Irritated by the Republicans' squabbling and by Arthur's procrastination, Felton was further discomfited by the President's dalliance with Joseph E. Brown. In January, Arthur had rebuffed Brown's guileful suggestion that Brown lead the independent movement through the agency of Rufus Bullock, but the Syndicate's failure to unite the Georgia Republican Party had made an exasperated Arthur willing to extend Brown a few patronage morsels.

¹⁹Atlanta Constitution, February 21, March 2, 12, 17, June 21, 1882; James Longstreet, Atlanta, to William Mahone, February 11 (first quote), William M. Burwell, New Orleans, to Mahone, March 17, 1882, Mahone Papers, Duke; P. M. Sheibley, Rome, to W. L. Goodwin, June 26, 1882 (second quote), in Jones, "William H. Felton," p. 220.

In early June, Arthur appointed Republican associates of Brown to the Tariff Commission and to the federal bench. On June 16, Felton responded by severing relations with the administration. "I am disgusted with the management at Washington of these appointments," he complained to an Atlanta Republican.

I wrote to you and others to say to the President that all recommendations I had made for any office were withdrawn. . . . I find that the unseemly fight over all offices has injured the cause of Independentism irreparably and the President delays and delays or follows the dictation of Jo Brown or some other Bourbon.²⁰

William Felton might deplore the failings of Chester Arthur and the Syndicate, but he himself had recently committed a colossal blunder in the selection of an independent gubernatorial candidate. The Markham House conferees had preferred a Felton candidacy, but the doctor, pleading poverty, had decided instead to stand again for congress. In early February, against the wishes of Felton and the Syndicate, former Congressman Lucius J. Gartrell of Atlanta announced as an independent. Felton considered Gartrell a poor

²⁰Atlanta Constitution, January 5, 28, 1882; Chicago Tribune, February 18, 1882; Felton, My Memoirs of Georgia Politics, p. 338; Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia, . . . 1882, p. 348; Jones, "William H. Felton," pp. 219-220; Reuben Arnold, Atlanta, to William Mahone, May 25, U. O. Robertson, Atlanta, to Mahone, May 27, William H. Felton, Cartersville, to John D. Cunningham, June 16 (quote), in Cunningham, Atlanta, to Mahone, June 26, 1882, Mahone Papers, Duke.

candidate and hoped to force him from the field by convincing Alexander H. Stephens, beloved antebellum relic of Crawfordville, to run under the coalition banner.²¹

Stephens enjoyed a close friendship with Dr. and Mrs. Felton, despised Gordon and Colquitt ("utterly hollow-hearted, deceitful, unprincipled and dishonorable," he called the latter), had endorsed the Readjuster Movement in Virginia, and had often expressed sympathy for Georgia's beleaguered farmers. Nevertheless, Stephens held his seat in congress from the Eighth District as a member of the Organized Democracy, and he thoroughly disapproved of the Republican Party. In a letter to Mrs. Felton written shortly after the meeting at the Markham House, he took Dr. Felton to task for his "quasi endorsement of the present administration." Stephens warned that he could not support the coalition if "a few specified, irresponsible men, such as Atkins, . . . etc., shall have the absolute control of all the Federal patronage

²¹Atlanta Constitution, January 3, February 21, 22, 1882; Ward, "Georgia Under the Bourbon Democrats," p. 123; Felton, My Memoirs of Georgia Politics, p. 350; W. A. Wright, Atlanta, to William H. Felton, February 22, James Longstreet to Felton, March 5, 1882, Felton Collection, UGA.

in Georgia."²²

Despite these signals, the coalition leaders went ahead with an attempt to persuade Stephens to lead the independent ticket--the Feltons and Emory Speer employing suasion, the Syndicate offering patronage plums to a few of Stephens's friends. Though old, ill, and addicted to morphine, Stephens remained a consummate political poker player. He held his cards to his vest and drew others into the game. In late February, Governor Colquitt, now a lame-duck, traveled to Washington for a meeting with Stephens. Fearing that the popular congressman might succumb to the independent blandishments, Colquitt strongly urged Stephens to seek the Democratic gubernatorial nomination. Stephens replied that he did not intend ever again to run for public office.²³

Stephens kept the game going until May. Shortly before a scheduled meeting of independent leaders in

²²Thomas E. Schott, Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), pp. 506-507, 508 (first quote); Washington National Republican, March 22, in Richmond Whig, March 23, 1881; Ward, "Georgia Under the Bourbon Democrats," pp. 127, 135; Alexander H. Stephens to Rebecca L. Felton, January 10, 1882 (second quote), Felton Collection, UGA.

²³Atlanta Constitution, February 24, 28, March 2, 5, 1882; James Longstreet, Atlanta, to Chester A. Arthur, May 1, 1882, Chester A. Arthur Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Schott, Alexander H. Stephens, p. 511; Jones, "William H. Felton," p. 201.

Atlanta, he went into conference with Speer. On Sunday, May 14, Speer sent Felton a telegram:

I hope the committee of independent democrats who meet monday will recommend Mr. Stephens as the people's candidate for governor. I know positively he will not reject such recommendation & that if elected he will be the governor of all the people without regard to party. He will be controlled by no ring.

Without hesitation, the independent leaders endorsed Stephens. The old politician now played his hand. The leadership of the Organized Democracy having assured him that the party's nomination was his if only he would repudiate the independent endorsement, Stephens on May 23 declared that he could not accept the nomination of any group hostile to the Democracy.²⁴

Stephens's announcement shattered the independent movement. "I love Mr. Stephens personally," wailed Felton,

but if he was an Angel (which his recent duplicity does not indicate) I would use every power within my reach to defeat him in his aspirations for the Governorship. I feel like the Independents has been sold out by an egotistical and infirm old man.

Though embarrassed, Speer stood by Stephens: "He is the sort of man to do justice to all men of all parties, & one of the finest friends of true Independentism. . . . Even when he is the standard bearer of an organization

²⁴Emory Speer, Washington, to William H. Felton, May 14, 1882; John E. Talmadge, "The Death Blow to Independentism in Georgia," pp. 44-46; Ward, "Georgia Under the Bourbon Democrats," pp. 131-138.

which denounces the independents, I shall vote for him." Former United States Senator Homer V. M. Miller of Atlanta pretty well summed up the independent predicament: "I think it impossible to defeat Mr. Stephens' election & undesirable to do so if it were practicable," he told Felton. "He was not my first choice for the candidacy, but I am now committed to his support so fully that I cannot withhold it except in case of his disability or refusal to accept office."²⁵

For a time James Longstreet indulged the fantasy that the Democracy's nomination of Stephens would redound to the coalition's advantage. Other Republicans were more realistic. The Syndicate, an Atlanta man told William E. Chandler, "expected to bring out Mr. Stephens as their candidate for Governor of the State. He, with his usual Jesuitical cunning, has completely deceived them, and placed their whole enterprise so flatly on its back, that it has no chance whatever to rise again."²⁶

The rest was anticlimax. In the fall elections, Stephens swamped Gartrell, Felton lost in the Seventh

²⁵Felton, My Memoir of Georgia Politics, pp. 370-371; William H. Felton to Henry P. Farrow, May 25, 1882, in Jones, "William H. Felton," p. 213; Emory Speer to Felton, May 27, H. V. M. Miller to Felton, May 25, 1882, Felton Collection, UGA; Atlanta Constitution, June 20, 1882.

²⁶James Longstreet to Chester A. Arthur, June 27, 1882, Arthur Papers, LC; William N. Smyth, Atlanta, to William E. Chandler, June 10, 1882, William Eaton Chandler Papers, LC.

District, and Speer in the Ninth. At year's end, an Atlanta friend informed John E. Bryant that "the Constitution . . . says that you & Col. Buck have had interviews with the President, and that the President will give his influence to the leaders of the Party. From which it is reasonable to infer that Col. Buck and yourself have given the Administration an insight into Georgia affairs which it has seemed to lack very greatly since its organization."²⁷

Political commentators and nervous Democrats often compared the Georgia independent movement with the Readjuster movement in Virginia. The Georgia insurgency, however, bore little resemblance to that in the Old Dominion. Independents were active nearly everywhere in Georgia but were strong only in the upcountry where hard times bred farmer dissatisfaction with the Democratic Party. In 1882, the inability of the independents to discover a vital issue on which to campaign hindered their statewide effort. The Markham House platform was such a mild and misshapen document that it failed even to excite the North Georgia

²⁷Atlanta Constitution, October 5, 6, 7, November 3, December 30, 1882, January 6, 1883; Ward, "The Republican Party in Bourbon Georgia," pp. 205-206; Volney Spaulding, Atlanta, to John E. Bryant, December 30, 1882, John E. Bryant Papers, Duke.

faithful.²⁸

The Georgia coalition also suffered from poor leadership. Emory Speer was a skilled lobbyist, organizer, and manipulator of the patronage, but he refused to bother himself with affairs outside the Ninth Congressional District. William H. Felton, on the other hand, pretended to statewide leadership, but he altogether lacked the necessary political talents. Felton neglected to undertake the extensive travel and correspondence required to effect a statewide organization, and, outside of the occasional recommendation, he left the patronage to the less disinterested Syndicate wing of the coalition. Without patronage or organization, Felton lacked the means to enforce his will. He had not the leverage to keep Chester Arthur's attention, to prevent Lucius Gartrell from announcing for Governor, or to persuade Alexander Stephens to head the independent ticket. He could neither adequately counter Democratic claims that the coalition intended to "Africanize" the state nor prevent Democratic intimidation of independent candidates. Under Felton, the independents' struggle against the Organized Democracy remained in Speer's apt phrase,

²⁸New York Times, January 17, February 6, 1882; Wynne, "Planter Politics in Georgia," pp. 340-341.

"guerilla warfare."²⁹

The Syndicate brought the coalition nothing but a reputation for venality. The more idealistic independents rejected the Syndicate as hopelessly corrupt while the straightouts despised them as hated rivals and other Republicans dismissed them as unrepresentative of the party. Blacks were particularly aggrieved. "The colored people . . . are the backbone of the republican party in Georgia, and yet they have been used without reward by a few politicians," complained a black editor. "That thing is playing out. We have nearly a hundred thousand voters to the five or six thousand white republicans in the state, and we have men as intelligent as any of them. We propose to take a hand in this affair." The Syndicate's attempt to seduce the black leadership proved an embarrassing failure. Even after receiving a position in the Atlanta custom house, William A. Pledger continued to sabotage the

²⁹New York Times, February 6, October 28, 1882; Atlanta Constitution, January 7, February 18, November 4, 1882; William H. Felton, Cartersville, to William Mahone, May 1, U. O. Robertson, Atlanta, to Mahone, May 27, 1882, Mahone Papers, Duke; James Longstreet to Felton, January 23, March 5, James Hook to Felton, January 17, Henry P. Farrow to Felton, May 8, 1882, Felton Collection, UGA; James Atkins to Farrow, April 24, 1882, in Jones, "William H. Felton," p. 206; Wynne, "Planter Politics in Georgia," p. 349; New York Tribune, December 11, 1881 (quote).

coalition.³⁰

While uniformly abhorring the Syndicate, black leaders held differing opinions about the independents. "We are at a loss for data to decide the difference between Democrats of different factions," wrote the editor of a black weekly. "Every time you shake the bag and drop him out, be he Independent, or Regular, he is 'moss back' just the 'same-e.'" Others, however, considered an alliance with the independents a necessary evil. Allowing that "our past experience with this class of politicians has not been as satisfactory in all respects as we could have wished," former Congressman Jefferson Long of Macon nonetheless declared that he had "the most unbounded confidence in this [coalition] method of dethroning Bourbonism." On election day, blacks in most of Georgia showed little interest in independent candidates, but in the north they voted solidly for their old allies Felton and Speer.³¹

³⁰Atlanta Constitution, January 3, February 24, March 11 (quote), 28, April 15, 1882; Adams, "The Negro and the Agrarian Movement in Georgia," p. 38; William A. Pledger, Atlanta, to William E. Chandler, May 25, 1882, Chandler Papers, LC.

³¹Atlanta Weekly Defiance, October 24, 1882 (first quote); Chicago Tribune, April 28, 1882 (second quote); New York Times, April 29, 1882; Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia . . . 1882, p. 348. Emory Speer's arrangement of the appointment of a black postmaster at Athens helped him in the Ninth District (Atlanta Constitution, January 25, 1882; Speer, Washington, to William Mahone, January 30, 1882, Mahone Papers, Duke).

The Democrats skillfully took advantage of black ambivalence and discontent. They offered Stephens as a friend of the race, purchased with Joe Brown's money the good will of black leaders, and generally eschewed violence and indiscriminate race-baiting. They reminded blacks that Chester Arthur had scorned Pledger in favor of the Syndicate. "Men who have no more control over the colored vote than they have over the breezes off Tybee island, are suffocated [at the White House] with sandwiches and persimmon beer," a reporter for the Constitution noted, "while colored republicans . . . are left to shiver in the vestibule in plain sight of the young man who has been employed to put their cards and communications in the waste-basket." Meanwhile, the straightouts (among whom were numerous Brown cronies) chimed in that the independents opposed black political equality as fervently as the regular Democrats. The Democratic strategy proved effective as Stephens ran well among blacks.³²

Stephens's victory destroyed the coalition. Felton

³²Ward, "Georgia Under the Bourbon Democracy," pp. 147-148; Chicago Tribune, September 28, 1882; New York Times, October 5, 1882; Jones, "William H. Felton," pp. 190-191; Atlanta Constitution, January 28, 1882. The Democrats did not eschew economic intimidation. "The last words of General R. Toombs to his servant, when he was about to take his departure from [his summer home in Clarksville] this fall, were substantially as follows: 'Good-bye; now, d--n you, if you don't vote for [the Democratic candidate] I will discharge you' (Atlanta Constitution, November 4, 1882).

went into retirement and Speer accepted a federal judgeship. The straightouts won favor at the White House. Alfred Buck became the boss of the Georgia G.O.P. and James Atkins and James Longstreet lost their offices. At the Republican National Convention in 1884, John E. Bryant voted for Chester Arthur while Longstreet supported James G. Blaine, the statesman from Maine.³³

³³Felton, My Memoirs of Georgia Politics, p. 338; Sanger and Hay, James Longstreet, p. 395.

ALABAMA

In the 1874 elections Alabama Democrats obtained their lease on power by violence and intimidation. They afterward maintained it by manipulation and fraud. The Democratic legislature gerrymandered congressional and legislative districts and subverted the electoral process. Everywhere in the state Republican strongholds fell. In the Black Belt, counties 70 and 80 per cent black suddenly returned impressive Democratic majorities. "Elections are no longer believed to elect," complained a north Alabama Republican in 1881. "They are decided, not by the people at the polls, but by partisan inspectors after the polls are closed and the elections over. The ballot-box stuffer has taken the place of the Ku-Klux to accomplish, perhaps with nimble fingers and perjured conscience, the nefarious but necessary work."¹

¹Allen Johnston Going, Bourbon Democracy in Alabama, 1874-1890 (University: University of Alabama Press, 1951), pp. 33-40; Karl Rodabaugh, "The Prelude to Populism in Alabama," Alabama Historical Quarterly 43 (1981), pp. 136-137; Jimmie Frank Gross, "Alabama Politics and the Negro, 1874-1901," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Georgia, 1969, pp. 65-66, 88-90; A. W. McCullough, Huntsville, to editor, Harper's Weekly XXV (May 7, 1881), p. 303 (quote).

The beneficiary of Democratic subterfuge was the usual combination of New South businessmen, industrialists, planters, and their legal lackeys. Lawyers dominated the legislature (in 1880 lawyer legislators outnumbered their farmer colleagues by ten to one), and careful observers knew for whom the attorneys worked. "The State Legislature is sandwiched through and through with railroad lawyers who prevent legislation in favor of the burdened taxpayers of this State and shield the corporations as a matter of course," a Huntsville editor complained. The legislators tolerated the abuses of the railroads, slashed expenditures for schools and prisons in order to placate the state's bondholders, and for the benefit of the industrialists sanctioned a convict lease so brutal as to be described in 1882 by the warden of the penitentiary as "a disgrace to the State, [and] a reproach to the civilization and Christian sentiment of the age."²

²Rodabaugh, "The Prelude to Populism in Alabama," p. 131; William Warren Rogers, The One-Gallused Rebellion: Agrarianism in Alabama, 1865-1896 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), p. 93; Going, Bourbon Democracy in Alabama, pp. 117, 134-138, 147-152, 181-183, 187; Gross, "Alabama Politics and the Negro," p. 136; Michael R. Hyman, "Taxation, Public Policy, and Political Dissent: Yeoman Disaffection in the Post-Reconstruction Lower South," Journal of Southern History LV (1989), p. 64 (quotes Huntsville Advocate, May 12, 1880); Michael Russ Hyman, "Response to Redeemer Rule: Hill Country Political Dissent in the Post-Reconstruction South," Ph.D. dissertation, City

Alabama's Democratic leaders thus encouraged the further integration of their state into the national economy, but they did little to shield their constituents from the economy's rigors. As elsewhere in the South, the expansion of the railroad system transformed the hinterland. Between 1865 and 1880, rail mileage in Alabama increased from 800 to over 2,000. Great trunk lines traversed almost every section of the state. In the isolated southeastern wiregrass a diversified agriculture took root, but elsewhere King Cotton established his suzerainty. Alabama farms became smaller and more numerous. The open range disappeared. Stores and mortgages proliferated. The downward spiral of debt and despair began. "In what seems to be the general prosperity of the State, the agricultural classes have not hitherto been sharers," lamented a Montgomery editor in 1882. "The farmers of the country are poorer to-day than they were twelve months ago, or

University of New York, 1986, pp. 244-245; James F. Doster, Railroads in Alabama Politics, 1875-1914 (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1957), p. 9; James F. Doster, "Trade Centers and Railroad Rates in Alabama, 1873-1885: The Cases of Greenville, Montgomery, and Opelika," Journal of Southern History XVIII (1952), pp. 174, 182, 183, 188; Horace Mann Bond, Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel (Washington: Associated Publishers, 1939), p. 60; George W. Cable, "The Convict Lease System in the Southern States," Century Magazine XXVII (1884), pp. 595-596 (second quote).

two years ago."³

Realizing that the Democratic leadership intended to do nothing about rack-rents, expensive credit, discriminatory railroad practices, and a tax structure that favored the planters and corporations, many Democratic farmers began to listen to the arguments of the Greenbackers and reform-minded independents. Sensing danger, the Democratic leaders threw the farmers meatless bones while shortening the party leash. They arranged their nominating conventions so that hard-money men were passed over in favor of soft-money rhetoricians. Meanwhile, the party press declared that only the Democracy could undertake currency reform. The editor of the Montgomery Advertiser told his readers that "The Democrats have prevented retirement of greenbacks and have made silver equal in value to gold. Hence if Greenbackers were in earnest in their pretences they would vote for Democratic candidates."⁴

The leadership warned the rank and file that a

³Going, Bourbon Democracy in Alabama, p. 29; Montgomery Advertiser, March 29, April 1, August 8, 1882; Grady McWhiney, "The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Alabama Agriculture," Alabama Review 31 (1978), pp. 4, 30; Rogers, The One-Gallused Rebellion, pp. 3-30.

⁴Gerald Lee Roush, "Aftermath of Reconstruction: Race, Violence, and Politics in Alabama, 1874-1884," M.A. thesis, Auburn University, 1973, pp. 210-211, 241-242; Going, Bourbon Democracy in Alabama, p. 57; Montgomery Advertiser, September 4, 1878, September 26, 1882 (quote).

party split would result in Republican rule. The abuses and excesses of Reconstruction then would be replayed.

United States Senator James L. Pugh maintained that

Every thing in practice and in politics must be subordinated to the single question[:] Shall the State be honestly and wisely governed for the good of all by competent and honest white men selected by honest, tax paying white voters, or shall the State be turned over to spoilsmen selected by ignorant negroes controlled by radical office holders[?]

A Butler County Democrat put it more succinctly: "The single and only question is, not who will make the best officer, or who is the cleverest man, but which color shall rule the country?"⁵

When promises and prophecies failed, the Democratic leadership resorted to vituperation, ostracism, and manipulation. They blocked the advancement of dissidents by handpicking candidates and by packing conventions. They abused the Greenbackers as social outcasts and their leaders as disappointed officeseekers. "Look at these Greenbackers and Labor party men!," fumed a Greensboro man. "Their ranks are

⁵Going, Bourbon Democracy in Alabama, pp. 31, 58; James L. Pugh, Washington, to Edward A. O'Neal, June 27, 1882, O'Neal Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; David Buell quoted in Greenville Advocate, 1877, in Michael Jackson Daniel, "Red Hills and Piney Woods: A Political History of Butler County, Alabama, in the Nineteenth Century," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Alabama, 1985, p. 304. One Alabama Democrat later admitted that "I am devilish tired of the old cry of 'nigger'" (Chappel Cory to Robert McKee, November 19, 1883, Robert McKee Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery).

composed of the idle, the vicious, the tramps, the thriftless and dishonest." While this furious reaction drove some of the insurgents back into the party ranks, it further convinced others that the Democracy was in the hands of corrupt and avaricious rings. A Birmingham newspaperman condemned both the Democratic and Republican parties as the champions of "the cause of the money power, the bondholders, the usurers, the railroad corporations and the monopolies." A Huntsville Greenbacker told William Mahone that "Democracy now means intolerance and persecution and he who presumes to think and act for himself must . . . fight back the tyranny and ostracism." Robert McKee, the thoughtful Democratic editor of the Selma Southern Argus, worried that his party's leaders had lost touch with the people. He found that the "number of independent votes cast . . . and the amount of scratching of regular tickets are suggestive. Party ties are loosened. The authority of the caucus questioned. The power of rings broken. The only way to achieve success is by deserving it."⁸

⁸Rodabaugh, "The Prelude to Populism," p. 135; Daniel, "Red Hills and Piney Woods," pp. 271-313; Hyman, "Response to Redeemer Rule," p. 64; L. H. Mathews, Blountsville, to editor, New York Times, May 29, 1882; Thomas R. _____, Greensboro, to Robert McKee, September 14, 1878, McKee to John T. Morgan, January 8, 1882, McKee Papers, ADAH; Birmingham Alabama True Issue, July 31, 1880, in Going, Bourbon Democracy in Alabama, p. 57; Lawson C. Coulson, Huntsville, to William Mahone, April 8, 1881, Mahone Papers, Duke University, Durham, N.C.; Robert McKee quoted in Selma Southern Argus, October 19,

In the late 1870s and early 1880s, Greenback and independent candidates appeared in every section of Alabama but were more numerous and successful in the north than in the south. In the heavily black south, the insurgents often were stymied by the plausible fear of black domination or by the reflexive resort of the Black Belt bosses to fraud. North Alabama was a different matter. The hills and valleys of the north were populated by white farmers who despised the Black Belt planters for dragging the state into the Confederacy. The upcountry men vividly recalled that the Civil War had brought devastation to their region. What Yankee raiders neglected to steal or destroy, rebel commissary agents confiscated. The often violent resistance of the region's numerous unionists to the draft and to war taxes occasioned a brutal Confederate repression. In the fratricidal conflict that ensued, robbery, arson, and murder became commonplace. Penury and starvation gripped the countryside. Hatred became a cherished heirloom to be handed down from generation to generation. In the immediate post-war years, the hill country unionists flirted with Republicanism, but most were driven away from the G.O.P. by black demands for civil rights. Holding their noses, some joined with the ex-Confederates in the Democratic Party. Others,

1877, in Roush, "Aftermath of Reconstruction," pp. 190-191.

however, resolved to remain independent.⁷

The economic changes of the post-war period had a more profound impact on north Alabama than on the plantation south. The coming of the railroad and the revitalization of the local textile industry increased cotton production more dramatically in the north. Thousands of hill country farmers thus found themselves drawn into the cotton economy. Birmingham (the focus of much of the rail construction) and other northern towns boomed as coal mines, iron furnaces, coke ovens, and lime kilns went into operation. The result was prosperity for the bankers, the industrialists, and the merchants; poverty for the farmers, the miners, and the iron workers. Times became so tight for some of the upcountry farmers that they abandoned their rugged lands for tenancy and day labor in the fertile Tennessee River Valley. Industrial workers fared no better. Forced to compete with convict labor, they endured stretch-outs,

⁷Roush, "Aftermath of Reconstruction," pp. 43, 181-182, 209; Rogers, The One-Gallused Rebellion, p. 37; Hugh C. Bailey, "Disaffection in the Alabama Hill Country, 1861," Civil War History IV (1958), pp. 183-193; Bailey, "Disloyalty in Early Confederate Alabama," Journal of Southern History XXIII (1957), pp. 522-528; Stephen E. Ambrose, "Yeoman Discontent in the Confederacy," Civil War History VIII (1962), p. 264; Michael W. Fitzgerald, "Radical Republicanism and the White Yeomanry During Alabama Reconstruction, 1865-1868," Journal of Southern History LIV (1988), pp. 566-569, 576-577, 588-590.

frequent layoffs, and miserably low wages.⁸

Discontent soon found its expression in the formation of greenback clubs and independent tickets. By 1882, the Greenback Party had officially organized, insurgent candidates had won a number of local offices, and William Manning Lowe, a dynamic young Huntsville attorney, had been elected to congress as a Greenbacker from the Eighth District which embraced the rapidly commercializing Tennessee Valley. Lowe perhaps was the most attractive and capable independent leader from the Deep South in the early post-Reconstruction period. The pampered, well-educated son of a prominent Madison County family, Lowe entered the Confederate army at age eighteen and by war's end had received a head wound and

⁸New Orleans Times-Democrat in Montgomery Advertiser, April 5, 1882; William Warren Rogers, "A Monarch Reinstated: Cotton Production and the Textile Industry in Alabama, 1865-1900," Cotton History Review II (1961), p. 216; Eugene Allen Smith, "Report on the Cotton Production of the State of Alabama," in U.S. Congress, House, Report on the Cotton Production in the United States, House Miscellaneous Document 42, Part 6, 47th Congress, 2nd session, 1882-1883, p. 61; Peter Temin, "Patterns of Cotton Agriculture in Postbellum Georgia," Journal of Economic History XLIII (1983), p. 664; Hyman, "Response to Redeemer Rule," pp. 10-11; Atlanta Constitution, March 26, 1882; Nashville American, October 3, 1882; Rogers, The One-Gallused Rebellion, pp. 93-95; Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1882 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1883), p. 4; Robert H. McKenzie, "Reconstruction of the Alabama Iron Industry, 1865-1880," Alabama Review 25 (1972), p. 189; Herbert G. Gutman, "Black Coal Miners and the Greenback-Labor Party in Redeemer Alabama, 1878-1879: The Letters of Warren D. Kelley, Willis Johnson Thomas, 'Dawson,' and Others," Labor History 10 (1969), pp. 506-535.

a colonelcy. He returned to Huntsville to practice law and take a leading role in the Democratic Party. His skill as a politician soon became apparent. Lowe, a friend later recalled, "had done more for the success of the [Democratic] party since the late war than any other man in North Alabama."⁹

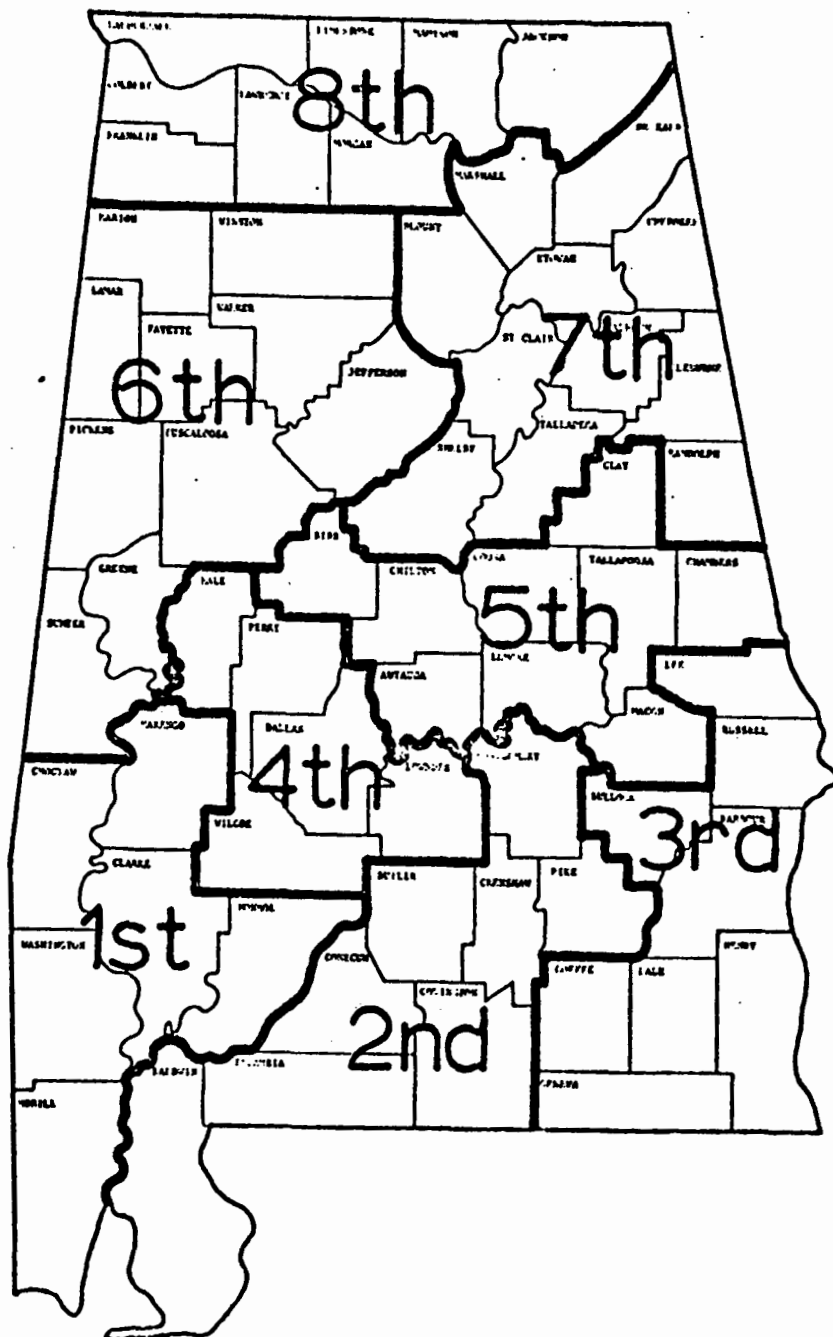
In 1876 Lowe entered the congressional convention with a plurality of the delegates but without the blessing of the party bosses who believed him too young, too brash, and too reform-minded. Denied the nomination, Lowe returned home to sulk and to plot. In 1878 he announced for congress on the Greenbacker ticket (he had been a soft-money Democrat) and campaigned against ring rule in north Alabama. He won handily. Two years later, in 1880, the Democrats tried to regain the seat by running the popular Civil War hero General Joseph Wheeler. The general gained a narrow victory but only after the Democratic-controlled returning board threw out over 600 Greenbacker ballots. To no avail had Wheeler sullied an otherwise enviable reputation. Lowe contested the election before the

⁹Montgomery Advertiser, August 21, 1878; Gross, "Alabama Politics and the Negro," p. 127; Roush, "Aftermath of Reconstruction," p. 265; Hyman, "Response to Redeemer Rule," pp. 14-16; William C. Oates, "Memorial Address on William M. Lowe," Congressional Record XIV, pt. 3 (February 3, 1883), pp. 2057-2059.

United States House of Representatives and was seated.¹⁰

Lowe was possessed of a charming personality, a ready wit, and a penetrating intelligence. He read widely, wrote poetry, sang, and played the guitar. Even his bitterest political enemies esteemed his friendship. Yet, Lowe's amiability masked the soul of a warrior. He was indefatigable and utterly fearless. On the stump or in debate, he proved a master of sarcasm, irony, ridicule, and invective. "No bond-holder," he thundered, "no railroad or bank-director, no man of stocks and bonds, no capitalist with a fixed income wrung from the hard earnings of the poor, is fit to lead a corporal's guard of honest men in this great fight between the money power and the people." As a tactician, Lowe was bold and contemptuous of convention. He had no qualms about seeking the aid of Republicans, black or white. He forged ties with the national administration and gained some influence over the patronage in north Alabama. Lowe's leadership was the crucial factor in Greenbacker success in the Eighth District, and his victories gave hope to insurgents

¹⁰Oates, "Memorial Address on William M. Lowe," p. 2058; Frances Roberts, "William Manning Lowe and the Greenback Party in Alabama," Alabama Review 5 (1952), pp. 100-102, 116-118; J. P. Dyer, "The Final Struggle for Democratic Control in North Alabama," Alabama Historical Quarterly 1 (1930), pp. 375, 376. A reporter maintained that Lowe "is simply an anti-Bourbon, being no more a Greenbacker than is Mahone" (Chicago Tribune, May 12, 1882).



Source: Roush, "Aftermath of Reconstruction."

everywhere in the state.¹¹

If Lowe and the Greenbackers were to wrest Alabama from the Democrats, they needed Republican aid. The state Republican Party, however, was a frail reed on which to lean. It polled a full vote in only a handful of counties and had not fielded a gubernatorial ticket since 1876. The party suffered chiefly from Democratic fraud, but it also was weakened by a disreputable past, a corrupt leadership, and internal rivalries. The Reconstruction debt haunted the Republicans like Banquo's ghost, and the Democrats (themselves bloody-handed enough) continually invoked the spirit. "Take Montgomery County," wrote a Democratic editor in 1882.

Democratic success found her burdened with a debt of over a hundred thousand dollars. Her taxes were at the limit of the law. Her paper was hawked about and found few purchasers at thirty cents on the dollar. Her juries and witnesses were unpaid. . . . Since her deliverance her debt has been nearly paid, her credit is above par, taxes have been reduced, and a host of other blessings have been wrought.¹²

¹¹Oates, "Memorial Address on William M. Lowe," pp. 2057-2059; U.S. Congress, House, Testimony and Papers in the Contested Election Case of William M. Lowe vs. Joseph Wheeler, from the Eighth Congressional District of Alabama, House Miscellaneous Document 22, 47th Congress, 1st session, 1882, p. 23 (quotes Lowe); Roush, "Aftermath of Reconstruction," p. 251; New York Times, April 2, 1882; Pittsburgh Chronicle in Montgomery Advertiser, May 20, 1882. Wheeler maintained that Lowe "taught and advocated the doctrine of the commune in flagrant form" (Lowe vs. Wheeler, p. 22).

¹²Going, Bourbon Democracy in Alabama, pp. 52, 65, 66; Gross, "Alabama Politics and the Negro," pp. 74, 85; New York Times, May 30, 1882; Montgomery Advertiser, May 2, 1882.

The Republican leadership included honest and capable men such as black Internal Revenue Collector James T. Rapier, but it also included spoilsmen, criminals, thugs, and a few cheap scoundrels employed by the Democrats as agents provocateurs. Egg throwings, fisticuffs, knifings, and shootings frequently marred party conventions. State leaders so single-mindedly pursued federal office that they earned the nickname "Bread and Butter Brigade." "If some men who call themselves Republicans would show one half the energy they display in hunting for office in working for the success of Republican principles the country would not be the worse for it," commented a black leader.¹³

The scramble for office created and exacerbated tensions between carpetbaggers and scalawags, blacks and whites. "If there be one thing that will prevent the blunders of the Democratic leaders from proving fatal to the final success of the Democratic Party," a south Alabama man told the New York Times, "it is the suicidal and cutthroat policy of the great lights who lead the hosts of the Republican army. . . . Internal strife is the fire that is fast consuming the remains of the Republican Party." The scalawags, who drew their greatest strength from among the unionists of north

¹³Roush, "Aftermath of Reconstruction," pp. 38-39, 160-161; Huntsville Gazette, April 1, July 15 (quote), August 19, 1882.

Alabama, generally loathed the carpetbaggers as panderers to the black element in the party. Not without reason, they insisted that the carpetbaggers' corruption and emphasis on civil rights had dissuaded respectable whites from becoming Republicans. The scalawags, however, were not so quick to acknowledge that they resented having to share with the carpetbaggers the slop in the federal trough.¹⁴

Many blacks distrusted both white factions--the scalawags for their thinly veiled hostility and the carpetbaggers for their unfulfilled promises. They believed that their numbers entitled them to more places and greater emoluments than the party bosses had afforded them. "What a shame would it be for colored Republicans here to clamor for recognition in Federal appointments when they cast only about nine-tenths of the party vote!," the editor of Alabama's leading black newspaper sarcastically noted. Some blacks so lost confidence in the party that they either abandoned politics or defected to the Democracy. Most of the

¹⁴South Alabama to editor, May 20, New York Times, May 29, 1882; New York Tribune, September 27, 1882; New York Herald, October 11, 1882; Anthony W. Dillard, Eutaw, to William Mahone, April 8, 1881, Mahone Papers, Duke; Fitzgerald, "Radical Republicanism and the White Yeomanry," p. 594; Sarah Woolfolk Wiggins, The Scalawag in Alabama Politics, 1865-1881 (University: University of Alabama Press, 1977), pp. 108-127; William Warren Rogers and Robert David Ward, August Reckoning: Jack Turner and Racism in Post-Civil War Alabama (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), pp. 19-20.

defections occurred in the Black Belt where Republican ballots already were nearly worthless and where the more paternalistic Democratic leaders offered protection and employment in exchange for political subservience. In the end, though, the great majority of the blacks adhered to the G.O.P. and its white leadership. The blacks had nowhere else to go, and intraracial jealousies prevented them from uniting behind a leader of their own color.¹⁵

During the late 1870s, Alabama Republicans had frequently fused on the local and state levels with Greenbackers and independents. They had supported independent congressional candidates in 1878 and the Greenbacker gubernatorial nominee in 1880. Many now argued that the coalition should be revived in 1882. "I . . . do not . . . indorse Colonel Lowe's wild and impracticable financial views. I am a hard-money, national-bank man," a Huntsville Republican told Harper's Weekly.

[But] there are questions of more vital importance in Southern politics than banking and currency or any phase of the money question. They are issues

¹⁵Huntsville Gazette, March 11, June 10 (quote), July 8, September 2, 1882; Montgomery Advertiser, July 7, 1882; W. B. Callahan, Opelika, to editor, May 15, New York Times, May 29, 1882; Roush, "Aftermath of Reconstruction," pp. 173, 257-259; Gross, "Alabama Politics and the Negro," pp. 94-100; Rodabaugh, "The Prelude to Populism," p. 139; Loren Schweninger, James T. Rapier and Reconstruction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 174-175, 178.

such as fair elections, an honest count, free thought, free speech, free government itself. Upon these Colonel Lowe and the Greenbackers were with us.

North Alabama blacks especially appreciated the readiness of Lowe and his friends to consult with black leaders, to support black candidates, and to protect black voters. They were cheered when the editor of the Huntsville Advocate, the state's leading Greenbacker newspaper, declared that "Race prejudice will not be a factor in the judgment of the practical, intelligent voter, who recognizes in the colored man the basis of our industrial economics, and is ready and willing to see him properly and justly recognized in the conduct of government." Yet, in south Alabama, where Republicans were many and independents few, numerous blacks scorned the idea of coalition. Why, these Straightouts wondered, should the tail wag the dog?¹⁸

The Bread and Butter Brigade worried over the division in the black ranks and over the prospect of Greenbacker encroachment on the federal patronage, but they worried more over preserving their jobs and their

¹⁸Roush, "Aftermath of Reconstruction," pp. 210, 243-244, 251, 293-294, 306; A. W. McCullough, Huntsville, to editor, Harper's Weekly XXV (May 7, 1881), p. 302; Montgomery Advertiser, April 19, July 7, 1882; Huntsville Gazette, June 10, July 15, 22 (quotes Huntsville Advocate), August 12, 1882; Hyman, "Response to Redeemer Rule," p. 293; Warren Kelley, Jefferson Mines, to editor, July 29, Pittsburgh National Labor Tribune, August 10, 1878, in Gutman, "Black Coal Miners and the Greenback-Labor Party," p. 512.

influence. They were well aware of President Arthur's infatuation with Southern independent movements and, therefore, easily discovered the wisdom of fusion. Still, agreement on the necessity for coalition did not ensure intraparty harmony. The Straightouts persevered in their orthodoxy while various leadership factions maneuvered for advantage. A carpetbagger clique, led by state chairman George Turner and national committeeman Paul Strobach, hoped that their long and friendly acquaintance with Secretary of the Navy William E. Chandler might win for them increased control over federal appointments in Alabama. "The men recommended by Turner, Strobach & others . . . are the proper ones to infuse new life into the party here," one of their associates told Chandler. A more responsible group, prominent among whom was James T. Rapier, countered that to recognize Turner and his crowd was to guarantee defeat. "If the carpet-bag element is again installed in power . . . all hope of the success of a liberal movement . . . may be abandoned," a Rapier lieutenant told Mahone, "for such a course will forever prevent the more progressive and liberal men, native Southern white men, from segregating themselves from the Bourbon Democracy."¹⁷

¹⁷New York Tribune, November 16, 1881; Pittsburgh Post in Montgomery Advertiser, September 1, 1882; J. J. Hinds, Selma, to William E. Chandler, May 17, 1882,

The warnings of the Rapier group proved ineffective. By mid-May, the carpetbaggers had won the support of the national administration, and, when the state Republican convention met in Montgomery in early July, the federal officeholders in attendance easily defeated Rapier's attempt to reorganize the party. The convention then adopted a platform calling for fair elections, free schools, and an end to the convict lease; endorsed the Arthur administration; and pledged its support to the as yet unnamed Greenback state ticket. The decision to follow the lead of the Greenbackers infuriated the Straightout delegates. The took the floor to denounce the coalition and the officeholders who had engineered it. One delegate, an exceptionally garrulous black preacher, won hearty applause (and not only from Straightouts) when he excoriated the officeholders as "contemptible nincompoops and pistoreens." The parson doubtless expressed what was on the minds of many Alabama Republicans, but the Straightouts did not have the votes to defeat coalition. A black delegate from Dallas County perhaps best expressed the sentiment of the majority when he said that "He wanted a party that would

Chandler Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Joseph H. Speed, Montgomery, to William Mahone, May 2, James T. Rapier, Montgomery, to Mahone, May 3, 1882, Mahone Papers, Duke.

protect colored Republicans at the ballot box, and if the Greenbackers and Independents could organize and do it, he favored hitching on to them. He didn't like the Independents much, but it was the best he could get for the present."¹⁸

While the Republicans noisily debated the merits of coalition in Montgomery, the Greenbackers held a more harmonious convention in Birmingham. They adopted a platform which in its principal planks mirrored that of the Republicans and nominated for the executive offices a slate headed by James L. Sheffield of Marshall County. The Democratic press gleefully pointed out that five of the six Greenbacker nominees were from north Alabama and that Sheffield, like Lowe, had been a Democrat until denied a congressional nomination.¹⁹

Despite protestations to the contrary, the

¹⁸George Turner, Montgomery, to William E. Chandler, May 25, 1882, Chandler Papers, LC; Montgomery Advertiser, July 7 (quotes), 8, 1882; New York Times, July 8, 1882. On July 7 the Advertiser reported a marvelous commentary by a Republican delegate. C. C. Sheats of Winston County "cited Mahone as an example of what could be done, and descanted at length upon what a little man weighing only 90 pounds had by his tact and firmness accomplished. . . . Mr. Knox, of Chilton, said Mr. Sheats had referred to Mahone. He wanted to say that a more miserable little scoundrel never lived. He had served in the war with him and knew him. He was a miserable little coward. He had risen to power over Republican votes."

¹⁹Huntsville Gazette, July 22, 1882; Montgomery Advertiser, July 7, 1882; Mobile Register in New York Times, July 11, 1882; Roush, "Aftermath of Reconstruction," pp. 43-44.

Democrats took the Republican-Greenbacker challenge seriously. They sought to counter the Greenbackers in north Alabama by nominating for governor the popular Edward A. O'Neal, a former Confederate Brigadier now a lawyer and land speculator of Florence in Lauderdale County. O'Neal ran on an innocuous platform--part platitude and part prevarication. It included a plank in which the Democrats shamelessly resolved that "We recognize the necessity of protecting and preserving the purity of the ballot-box as the safeguard of free institutions, and condemn any attempt to interfere with the free and full exercise of the elective franchise." The Democrats portrayed themselves as the responsible alternative. "The Republicans were aiming at a consolidated government and a centralization of its powers; the Greenbackers were tending to communism; while we occupied a happy medium," a leading Democrat cheerily informed the electorate. As usual, the Democrats recalled the horrors of Reconstruction and coupled the downfall of the Democracy with the restoration of black rule. They warned that the liberal movement sweeping the Southern States was merely a stalking-horse for the Republican Party. Liberalism, a Montgomery editor snarled,

is a cheat, a fraud, and the flimsiest of impostures. There is nothing in it but the name, borrowed by the Radical leaders to deceive and attempt to reduce the people from their allegiance

to the Democratic party. . . . Liberalism and Republicanism are convertible terms; they are one and the same, and the disaffected Democrat is the impersonation of obtuseness who has not been able to discover this fact.²⁰

The Alabama state elections were held in August and resulted in a clear defeat for the coalition. James Sheffield carried only six of the state's counties and received 46,386 votes to Edward O'Neal's 100,591. The coalition ran well in north Alabama where Sheffield won four counties and coalition candidates captured sixteen seats in the state legislature (up twelve from 1880). In the south, however, it failed to overcome Democratic fraud, black apathy, and Straightout sabotage. Sheffield carried only two south Alabama counties and coalition legislative candidates won only a handful of races. Sheffield's defeat disappointed but did not dismay most coalitionists. The upcoming congressional campaigns would give them a second chance to enliven the apathetic and to improve their organization. Unfortunately, though, the August elections proved but a foretaste of a more bitter draught to come.²¹

²⁰James Cobbs, Mobile, to Edward A. O'Neal, June 8, 1882, O'Neal Papers, UNC; Montgomery Advertiser, June 8 (quotes Samuel Blackwell), 9, 22 (quote), July 12, August 2, 1882.

²¹Roush, "Aftermath of Reconstruction," pp. 297-301, 308-309; Gross, "Alabama Politics and the Negro," p. 127; Montgomery Advertiser, July 28, August 5, 1882.

In each of the state's congressional districts, the coalition campaign struggled terribly. So demoralized by Democratic chicanery and Republican bickering were the coalitionists in the Third, Fifth, and Sixth districts that only obscure (indeed, eccentric) men came forward to claim the nominations. In the First (Mobile) District, Luther R. Smith, the carpetbagger who bore the coalition imprimatur, was far from unknown, but he found his effort hindered by black resentment of his nomination and by a rough factional fight among the Republicans of Mobile. Moreover, the Democrats took the trouble to murder a particularly effective black leader in Choctaw County (one of the two south Alabama counties to go for Sheffield) and to broadcast tales of black insurrection plots across the First District and the rest of south Alabama.²²

In the Second (Montgomery) District, Liberal Republican Samuel F. Rice had the cordial support of prominent Greenbackers and independents. He was popular with black leaders, and their influence won him the endorsement of the Republican convention. The carpetbaggers, however, resented Rice for his past

²²Roush, "Aftermath of Reconstruction," pp. 321, 324, 326, 328; Huntsville Gazette, October 7, 1882; Montgomery Advertiser, November 4, 1882; Rogers and Ward, August Reckoning, pp. 150, 157-165. The alleged black insurrection plot was a staple of Alabama politics (Roush, "Aftermath of Reconstruction," p. 188).

opposition to their schemes, and many federal officeholders in the district worked for him only after being threatened with removal by the Republican Congressional Campaign Committee. Rice had the history of a political butterfly--successively a State Rights Democrat, a Whig, a Know-Nothing, a secessionist, a Seymour Democrat, a Republican--and his opponents scored him for his peripateticism. "Nature gave that man great capabilities," sighed a Mobile editor, "but . . . there were placed upon his mental railroad too many side-tracks, and the switches are almost always turned wrong. It is a beautiful railroad, but the train is invariably ditched."²³

The Republican nomination in the overwhelmingly black Fourth District went to scalawag George H. Craig. Judge Craig was popular with both races, but his nomination led some black leaders to ask a reasonable question: why, with 30,000 black and 200 white Republicans in the district, should the choicest offices almost always go to the whites? To better express their indignation, the dissidents formed a rival convention and nominated for congress black leader

²³Montgomery Advertiser, September 15, November 1, 2, 4, 1882; New York Herald, October 11, 1882; Mobile Register, November 1, 1882 (quote), in Roush, "Aftermath of Reconstruction," p. 325; Hugh B. Hammett, Hilary Abner Herbert: A Southerner Returns to the Union (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1976), pp. 79, 80.

Merritt Howze. Craig supporters were not surprised by the leading part played in these proceedings by Benjamin De Lemos, curiously described by a newspaper correspondent as "a renegade Jew, . . . professing to be a Republican, but who always takes Democratic money to try and work disturbances in the party." Also damaging to the Craig campaign was the attempt to remove Craig ally James Rapier from his internal revenue collectorship in favor of a crony of Paul Strobach. A raucous public outcry caused the administration to suspend Rapier's removal, but the attempt to gratify the carpetbagger appetite for office and revenge had further disrupted party harmony.²⁴

In the Seventh (Birmingham) District, the carpetbaggers arranged the nomination of former newspaper editor Arthur T. Bingham, long an apologist for the Republican Party. Unfortunately, Bingham's involvement during Reconstruction in a fraudulent bond issue had brought into question his personal honesty, and his ties with Northern capitalists won him few friends among north Alabama farmers and industrial

²⁴Republican, Selma, to editor, September 9 (quote), New York Times, September 15, 1882; ibid., September 22, 26, 1882; Montgomery Advertiser, September 22, 23, 26, 1882; New York Tribune, September 27, 1882; New York Herald, October 11, 1882; Schweninger, James T. Rapier, p. 177.

workers.²⁵

The coalition campaign even went poorly in William M. Lowe's Eighth District. Shortly after the 1880 election, Lowe developed a malady of the throat. The condition worsened until in the summer of 1882 he underwent surgery in New York City. Badly ill, his magnificent voice reduced to a whisper, Lowe travelled to Colorado in the hope that the mountain air might effect a recovery. His stay extended from July into September and deprived the coalition of much-needed leadership during the state elections and the early stages of the congressional campaign.²⁶

In mid-September, Lowe, his health somewhat improved, returned to the Tennessee Valley to find himself the victim of carpetbagger skulduggery. In Lowe's absence, the carpetbaggers had had the administration appoint a personal enemy of the congressman to the vacant office of United States Marshal for north Alabama. Lowe's prestige, however, was barely diminished. He retained the solid support of black Republicans and of the Greenbacker faithful. His

²⁵W. E. Horne, Talladega, to William E. Chandler, September 15, 1882, Chandler Papers, LC; Roush, "Aftermath of Reconstruction," p. 40.

²⁶George Washington Jones, "Memorial Address on William M. Lowe," Congressional Record XIV, pt. 3 (February 3, 1883), p. 2061; Oates, "Memorial Address on William M. Lowe," p. 2059.

strength made Joseph Wheeler and the rest of the Democratic leadership despair of victory. Wheeler could have had the Democratic congressional nomination, but the general, as shrewd a politician as he had been a cavalry commander, declined to lead the forlorn hope. He instead personally nominated railroad lawyer Luke Pryor. Wheeler was too clever. On October 9, Lowe experienced a relapse while on a speaking tour of the western part of the district. He returned home to Huntsville, took to his bed, and early in the morning of October 12 died of consumption.²⁷

Friends and foes immediately grasped the significance of Lowe's passing. "Owing to the death of Hon. W. M. Lowe there is great danger of defeat in this district," groaned a Republican. "Before the death of Col. Lowe we had every thing right." A Democratic editor predicted that Lowe's death would make Pryor's election certain. "No other man of his party can pull the vote that Col. Lowe would have gotten," the editor observed. "Col. Lowe's following was largely a personal one, which will gravitate to no leader of less ability and popularity." The Democrats seized the moment. They

²⁷Montgomery Advertiser, August 6, October 7, 13, 1882; J. J. Hinds, Selma, to William E. Chandler, May 17, 1882, Chandler Papers, LC; Huntsville Gazette, October 28, 1882; Roberts, "William Manning Lowe," p. 119; Bond, Negro Education in Alabama, p. 46; Oates, "Memorial Address on William M. Lowe," p. 2059.

summoned into the district the party's most popular speakers; accused David D. Shelby, the young lawyer who replaced Lowe on the coalition ticket, of being a Republican rather than a Greenbacker; and drew the color line. "I want no nigger votes," thundered Luke Pryor.²⁸

The Democrats won all eight of the congressional races. The only close contest occurred in the Eighth District where Pryor defeated Shelby 12,155 votes to 11,418. Elsewhere, Democratic candidates polled at least 2,400 more votes than their opponents. The Democratic victory owed much to the strategy of appealing to racial fears and of recalling Republican profligacy and corruption, but it also depended on the Democrats' novel method of counting ballots. The returns from the black-majority counties best illustrate the efficacy of Democratic fraud. In the congressional elections, the Democrats carried eighteen of Alabama's twenty-three predominantly black counties. They won in the Fourth District (81 per cent black) by capturing counties 77, 82, 82, and 83 percent black. In the face of such transparent fraud, it is little wonder that many

²⁸D. E. Ridenhour, Hillsboro, to William E. Chandler, October 19, 1882 (first quote), Chandler Papers, LC; Montgomery Advertiser, October 14, 1882 (second quote); Nashville American, October 14, 20, 1882; Roberts, "William Manning Lowe," pp. 119-120; Huntsville Gazette September 30 (quotes Luke Pryor), October 28, 1882.

blacks considered voting a waste of time.²⁹

Republican weakness made easier the Democratic task. Many black Republicans remained apathetic, black soreheads campaigned openly for Democratic candidates, and Straightouts of both races impeded the coalition at every turn. The Republican leadership proved neither willing nor able to impose discipline. The carpetbagger clique that eventually achieved primacy in the party embraced fusion merely to ingratiate themselves with Chester Arthur. They no more intended for the Greenbackers to win elections (and set up as rivals) than did the Straightouts. Their selfish and reckless manipulation of the patronage during the congressional campaign demonstrated how little they really cared for the administration's Southern policy. The 1882 elections exposed the Alabama Republican Party as a political bankrupt, wasted from without and from within. The Democrats had stripped the party of much of its constituency; the Bread and Butter Brigade had stripped it of its moral authority.³⁰

²⁹Montgomery Advertiser, November 21, 1882; New York Tribune, November 16, December 27, 1882.

³⁰Roush, "Aftermath of Reconstruction," pp. 326, 328; Montgomery Advertiser, July 8, 1882; Huntsville Gazette, August 19, 1882. Even some of the Democrats in congress could not stomach the fraud in the Fourth Alabama District. Enough of them joined with the Republican minority to the unseat the Democratic winner in favor of George Craig (Roush, "Aftermath of Reconstruction," pp. 332-333).

Crooked elections and racial antagonisms precluded the formation of a potent Republican-Greenbacker coalition in heavily black south Alabama. In the predominantly white north, however, the Democrats' appeal for white solidarity lacked immediacy and their resort to fraud failed to receive the sanction of most whites. In the Tennessee Valley, the extraordinary William M. Lowe gave the coalition the leadership necessary to overcome Democratic proscription and fraud. Because Lowe's Greenbacker followers were no more amenable to organization than hill country farmers elsewhere, coalition victories depended less on party discipline and accountability than on the force of Lowe's personality. A Democrat sagely observed that Lowe's supporters "constituted . . . a great personal following--in fact a 'LOWE party.'" Predictably, Lowe's coalition did not survive his death. It failed to hold his congressional seat in 1882 and by 1884 had utterly collapsed. The recrudescence of Alabama independentism would await the emergence in the 1890s of another singular leader, Reuben Kolb, Populist of Barbour County.³¹

³¹Oates, "Memorial Address on William M. Lowe," pp. 2058-2059 (quote); Going, Bourbon Democracy in Alabama, p. 59; Roush, "Aftermath of Reconstruction," pp. 347-348.