

Unit **V**

Georgia from Reconstruction through World War I





The late 1800s ushered in great change to the United States. Settlers streamed to the West to claim land under the Homestead Act. Industrialists founded the great industries that became America’s modern corporations, and many built mansions that reflected their wealth. Cities grew as people from both American farms and European countries flocked to live in urban America, attracted by the factory jobs.

This time is often called the “Gilded Age.” American writer Mark Twain thought it a fitting term for a time when growth and prosperity for some covered poverty and despair for many, and when the American political system was often corrupt and unfair.

The early twentieth century is often called the “Progressive Era.” At the national level and in the states themselves, reformers passed laws to deal with the problems that the changes had brought. Some Americans also worked for more equality for African Americans and women. Throughout these years, America became a growing power in the world, and American foreign policy reflected a growing involvement in world affairs. By the end of the period, the country found itself drawn into the war between European powers. First called the “Great War,” we now know it as World War I.

For southern states, still agricultural and rural, this was the period after Reconstruction when they were left to determine their own paths and futures. Several questions about the South remained to be answered: Who would control politics and government in the region? What would the relationship between white southerners and African Americans be? What kind of economy would the South have? This unit examines these developments and analyzes their impact on Georgia’s people, black and white.

Nothing in Georgia epitomizes the “Gilded Age” like the Jekyll Island Club. Built in 1887 as a resort for wealthy northerners, its early members were some of the richest men in the country, including J. P. Morgan, William K. Vanderbilt, Joseph Pulitzer, and Marshall Field.

Focus on Reading Skills

Inferring

Defining the Skill

When you cannot easily find the main idea and supporting details in a reading, you may have to infer (figure out) what you think the author means. Inferences can also go beyond the literal meaning of the text. When you read, you may want to use some of your own knowledge, beliefs, or experiences to interact with the text. You can use inferences to

- draw conclusions.
- make predictions.
- interpret a reading.
- make judgments.

Practicing the Skill

The following excerpt is found on page 455 in your textbook. Read the excerpt and then infer what you think will happen to the Farmers' Alliances over the next few years. After you have made your

prediction, turn to page 455, find the passage, and continue reading. Cite evidence to support or refute your prediction.

The alliances served several purposes. Farmers, who worked alone most of the time, could come together for friendship and talk about their problems. They could also join together in cooperative buying stores, or co-ops. The co-ops bought supplies—seed, fertilizer, farm tools—so they could negotiate lower prices. The white Farmers' Alliance in Georgia began in 1887. In 1889, it successfully joined with other farmers in the South to boycott the monopoly (a group with exclusive control) that sold jute, the material used to bind and cover cotton bales. The boycott resulted in lower prices. That success brought the alliance many new Georgia members and more power. African American farmers started their own alliance in Georgia in 1889, meeting in Macon.



Market day, seen here at Newnan, gave farmers and their families a chance to meet and socialize with other farming families.

Signs of the Times

POPULATION

1,542,180 in 1880; 2,609,121 by 1910

WAGES/SALARIES

The average annual salary ranged from about \$400 a year around 1890 to about \$750 in 1919.

TRANSPORTATION

In 1903, the Wright Brothers made their famous flight at Kitty Hawk. Ocean liners were popular as new floating hotels, but the *Titanic* sank during this era in 1912.

INVENTIONS

Thomas Edison invented the electric light bulb in 1879. In 1897, Campbell's introduced canned soups. The ice cream cone and iced tea were introduced at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair.

MUSIC

Hit songs of the period included "Bill Bailey, Won't You Please Come Home," "Danny Boy," "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," "Lift Every Voice and Sing," and "Waiting for the Robert E. Lee."

LITERATURE

Lew Wallace published *Ben Hur* in 1880. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle published the first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*, in 1887. In 1900, L. Frank Baum published *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.

You can see late nineteenth-century agricultural techniques demonstrated at the Agrirama in Tifton.

Chapter 18

Bourbons, Populists, and Progressives

Chapter Preview

TERMS

Bourbon Triumvirate, Farmers' Alliance, co-op, graduated income tax, Populist Party, fraud, county unit system, progressivism, suffrage, Nineteenth Amendment

PEOPLE

Joseph E. Brown, Alfred B. Colquitt, John B. Gordon, William J. Northen, Thomas E. Watson, Rebecca Latimer Felton, Hoke Smith



The goal of many of Georgia's political leaders after the end of military Reconstruction was to keep political and economic power in the hands of southern white men. They wanted no further interference from the North or the national government. In other words, they wanted home rule. And that rule would be controlled by the Democratic Party.

Democratic politicians did have challenges to their power, first from Independents and later from farmers. In the 1880s, Independents, especially in some parts of north Georgia, campaigned for and won political offices. Their movement was short-lived, however. By the late 1880s, many Georgia farmers supported a political movement of the rural areas. Discontented farmers throughout the nation joined together, first in the Granges and Farmers' Alliances of the 1880s and later in the People's, or Populist, Party in the 1890s.

Although Populists did not achieve the reforms they had hoped for, the early twentieth-century progressive movement began to address some of the issues they had raised. Progressivism, however, focused on the problems caused by urbanization and industrialization. Nationally, progressivism was a diverse movement that included different political parties and groups of people. In Georgia and other states of the South, its reforms were more modest, and some changes were actually racist and discriminatory.

Left: Farmers became much more politically active in the period following the Civil War through the influence of organizations like the Grange and the Farmers' Alliance. This bedroom of a "progressive" farmer's house from the 1890s is on display at the Agrirama in Tifton.

Section 1

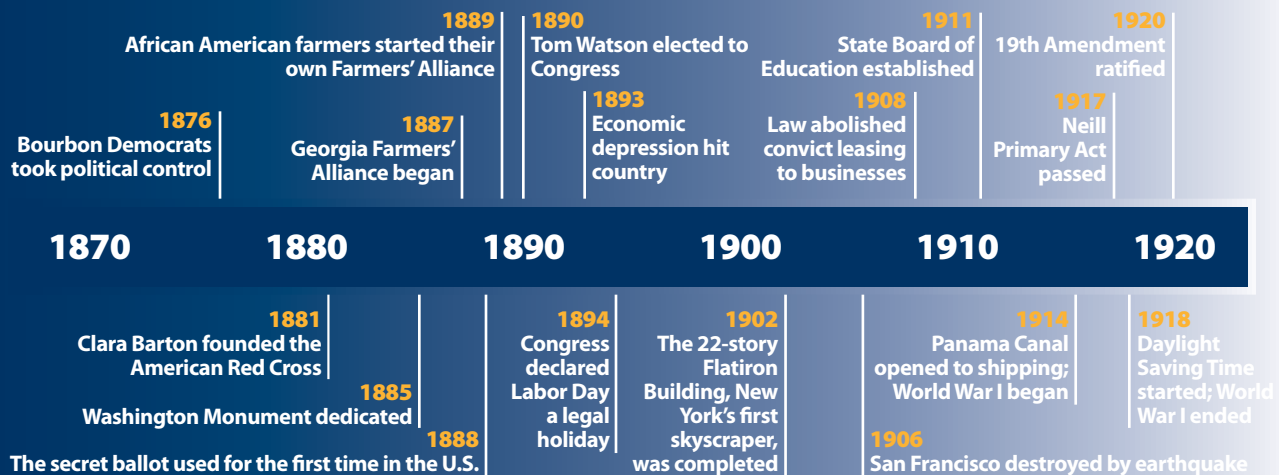
Bourbon Democrats and Independents

As you read, look for

- the control of the Bourbon Democrats,
- term: **Bourbon Triumvirate.**

By the end of Reconstruction in 1877, Georgia was once again controlled by the Democrats. Although they had the support of the majority of white voters, over the next two decades they faced challenges from the Independents and Populists. Politicians used intimidation to try to control the vote of African Americans and appealed to whites to support the Democratic Party saying whites had to remain united to maintain their power over blacks. In the 1890s, the Populists tried to challenge that by calling for farmers—white and black—to join them.

Figure 37
Timeline:
1876 to 1920



The Bourbon Triumvirate

Before Reconstruction ended, control of Georgia politics had fallen to the Democrats. The main politicians in control of the party were sometimes called the “Bourbons” by their enemies. This was a term making fun of the fact that they seemed to want to hold on to old ways and not make changes. The name came from the name of the Bourbon family dynasty in France. It was said that the Bourbon Democrats never learned from the past, but they also never forgot the past. The name came from their opponents, and some historians have said that it was not a fair one. All of these men and many of their supporters did accept the changes the war brought. Even though they praised the Confederacy, most of the Bourbons accepted that slavery was gone and that something new would have to emerge. Some even wanted to see some economic change by bringing in more business and industry. Because of this, they are sometimes called “New Departure Democrats.”

From 1876 until their first major challenge in 1890, three men controlled the governor’s office and the Senate seats of Georgia—Joseph E. Brown, Alfred B. Colquitt, and John B. Gordon. These men became known as the **Bourbon Triumvirate**. A *triumvirate* is a group of three in authority or government control. Colquitt and Gordon were born in Georgia. Brown was born in South Carolina, but raised in north Georgia. All three were lawyers, and Brown and Colquitt had both been in politics before the Civil War. As you learned, Brown was Georgia’s Civil War governor. Colquitt and Gordon served in the military during the war, both rising to the rank of major general. Gordon was wounded five times, including once at Antietam and once at Gettysburg. During Reconstruction, Brown had been in the Republican Party for a while before once again becoming a Democrat.

From 1877 to 1882, Alfred Colquitt was governor of Georgia. From 1873 to 1880, John B. Gordon, reputed leader of Georgia’s Ku Klux Klan, was one of Georgia’s U.S. senators. Gordon resigned from the Senate in 1880 to take a position with the Western and Atlantic Railroad. Governor Colquitt then appointed Joseph Brown, former president of the Western and Atlantic, to the Senate seat. Brown served as senator for over ten years, from 1880 to March 1891. In 1886, Gordon was elected governor and reelected in 1888 for another two-year term. When Joseph Brown retired in 1891, Gordon once again served as U.S. senator, from 1891 to 1897. When Gordon came back to the Senate in 1891, Colquitt was Georgia’s other senator. Colquitt served in the Senate from 1883 to 1894.



Above: John B. Gordon, who had served as a general in the Confederate army, was one of three Georgia Democratic Party leaders known as the Bourbon Triumvirate. He served thirteen years in the U.S. Senate and two terms as governor.



Something Extra!

Republican President William McKinley appointed African American attorney Judson Lyons (pictured above) of Augusta to the position of Register of the U.S. Treasury.



These three men were powerful politicians for all those years. While they agreed on many ideas and policies, they were political allies rather than friends. They controlled Georgia during their years in power. While they supported the “Lost Cause” ideas, they also supported business, the railroads, and other “New South” concepts.

The Republicans were no longer a major political force in Georgia, even when Republican presidents were in the White House. In the 1880s, Georgia Republicans were divided. The more progressive Republicans, called “black and tans,” wanted a party open to both whites and blacks. The more conservative Republicans, called “lily whites,” believed that they would get more votes if they did not have any black party members. Because their party was weak, Republicans joined with the Independents in trying to defeat the Democrats.

Challenges to the Bourbons

The only real opposition to the Democrats in the late 1870s and early 1880s came from the Independents. The Independent leader was U.S. Congressman Dr. William Felton, a planter and medical doctor representing north Georgia. Three of Georgia’s U.S. congressmen in those years



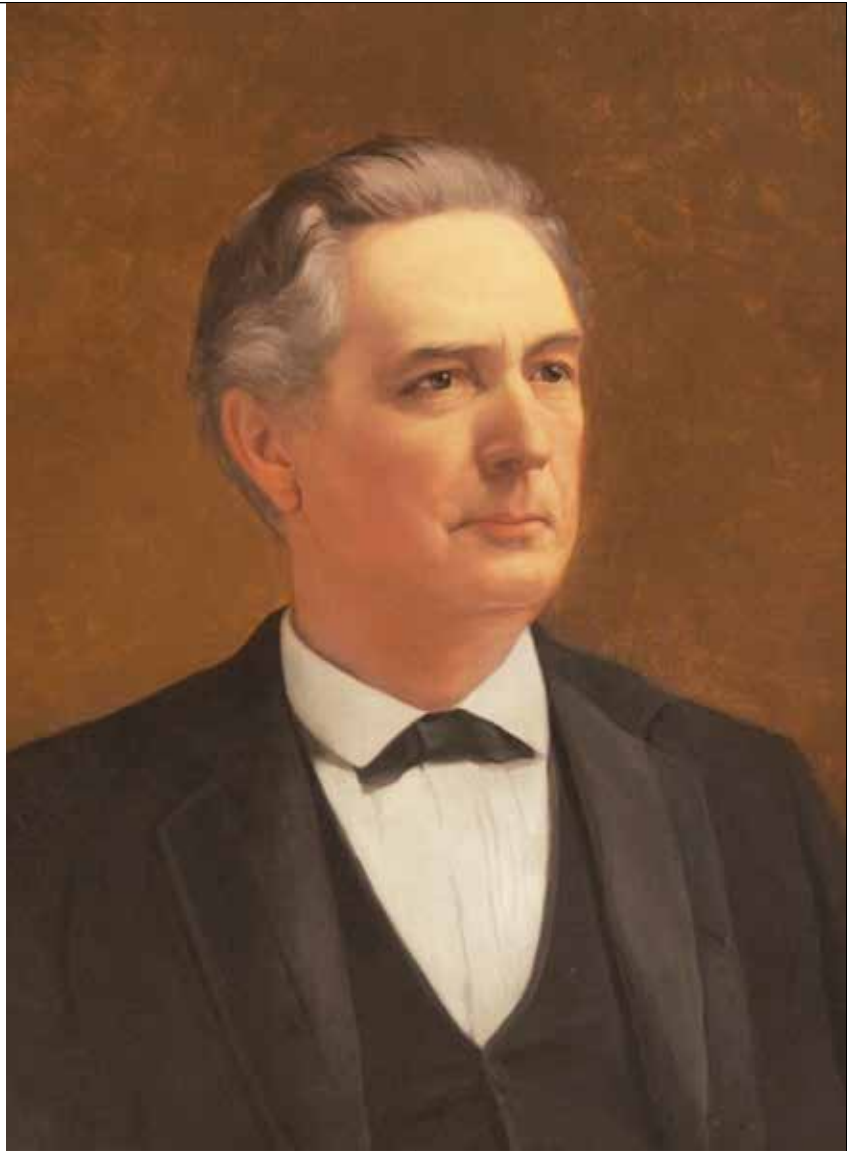
were Independents. By 1880, even with support from Republicans, Independents were unable to prevent Alfred Colquitt's reelection as governor. The governor's term at that time was two years. Hoping that they might win in 1882, the Independents tried to get a big name—Alexander Stephens, former vice president of the Confederacy—to run as an Independent. In the end, however, he ran as a Democrat, and once again the Independents lost. This was the last major political race in which they played a part. For the rest of the 1880s, the Bourbon Democrats controlled the state. In 1886 and 1888, John B. Gordon won the governorship, while Brown and Colquitt served as U.S. senators. By the 1890s, however, the power of the Bourbon Triumvirate had begun to fade.

The Bourbon Triumvirate were conservative with money. They believed in lower taxes and less government spending on public services, including the public school system that had been founded following the war. They also believed, however, in expanding the economy to include more industry.

The Democratic Party's control of white voters rested on the basic ideas in their public speeches about the good days of the "Old South." During Reconstruction, ex-Confederates had begun to glorify the war as the "Lost Cause," a noble effort that had been lost honorably. They emphasized states' rights, reminding voters of the period when the national government and northerners had controlled Reconstruction and African Americans had held public office. To try to keep whites in the party, they also talked about preserving the old ways, including white supremacy.

Reviewing the Section

1. Name the three men who made up the Bourbon Triumvirate.
2. What was the "Lost Cause"?



Above: Alfred Colquitt was the first Bourbon governor, elected at the end of Reconstruction in 1876. **Opposite page, below left:** Dr. William Felton was the leader of the Independents in the period following Reconstruction. **Opposite page, below right:** Joseph E. Brown was the oldest member of the Bourbon Triumvirate, having served as Georgia's governor through the Civil War. His son Joseph M. Brown was a two-term governor of Georgia in the early twentieth century.

Section 2

Farmer Discontent and Populism

Below: The National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry, known more often as the Grange, was founded in 1867 to provide fellowship and political influence for farmers. This poster, "Gift for the Grangers" extolls the virtues of the farming life. The Grange continues to this day with approximately 300,000 members in 37 states.

As you read, look for

- farmers' organizations,
- the rise and fall of the Populist Party,
- the county unit system,
- terms: **Farmers' Alliance, co-op, graduated income tax, Populist Party, fraud, county unit system.**

In the late 1880s, a new challenge to the power

of the Bourbon Democrats began to emerge, one that might challenge white supremacy as well. Many of Georgia's middle-class and poor farmers became increasingly unhappy as cotton prices dropped at the same time that the prices of goods they needed to buy went up. Railroad rates made the cost of shipping their products to market even higher. Many could barely make a living; owners of small farms sometimes found themselves having to sell their land to pay debts. Like sharecroppers, many of them were using the crop-lien system to buy the materials they needed. Because of the high interest rates they had to pay on the credit they got, there was often little or nothing left after they paid the merchant. Some ended up becoming tenant farmers or sharecroppers.

Farmers believed that taxes were unfair, and many even thought that they did not get the respect they once had. Electricity and telephones and the other wonders of the age had not yet made it to the countryside. Farmers' lives still revolved around long hours of hard, physical work with few of the conveniences that city dwellers had. As

farmers became more discontented, they organized, eventually founding a political party to work for major reforms.



The Farmers' Alliance

Farmers in other areas of the South and in the prairie states like Kansas and Nebraska had united to form farmers' organizations. The first farmers' group was the "Patrons of Husbandry," which soon became known as the Grange. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, the **Farmers' Alliances** formed. State alliances were members of larger regional alliances. There were two regional alliances in the South: the Southern Farmers' Alliance for white farmers and the Colored Farmers' Alliance for African American farmers.

The alliances served several purposes. Farmers, who worked alone most of the time, could come together for friendship and to talk about their problems. They could also join together in cooperative buying stores, or **co-ops**. The co-ops bought supplies—seed, fertilizer, farm tools—so they could negotiate lower prices. The white Farmers' Alliance in Georgia began in 1887. In 1889, it successfully joined with other farmers in the South to boycott the monopoly (a group with exclusive control) that sold jute, the material used to bind and cover cotton bales. The boycott resulted in lower prices. That success brought the alliance many new Georgia members and more power. African American farmers started their own alliance in Georgia in 1889, meeting in Macon.

In 1890, the Alliance began to get involved in politics. Members wanted reforms, including the use of silver as well as gold for money, the end of the convict lease system, the secret ballot for voting, and a **graduated income tax**. That means that the higher a person's income, the higher the percentage

of tax that person would pay. It was based on the idea of the "burden" of the tax. People who had more money would not be as burdened by a higher tax. The Alliances also called for the government to take ownership of railroads and communications such as the telegraph and the newer invention, the telephone. Under government ownership, they believed prices would come down because there would no longer be a need for profits for stockholders.

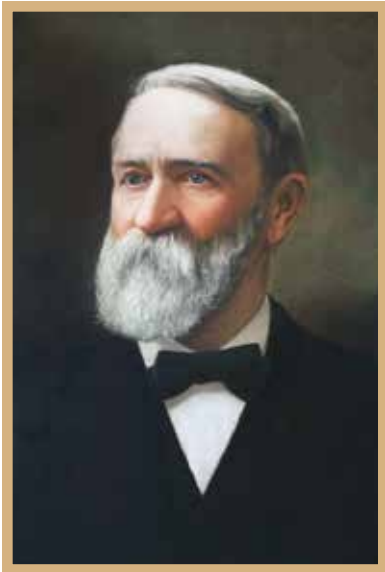
In the 1890 election, the Georgia Alliance encouraged voters to elect



Above: This cover of an 1891 issue of *Judge* magazine, which favored the Republicans, makes fun of all the things the Farmers' Alliance wanted from the U.S. government (in the person of Uncle Sam), which are listed on the board at the left.

Something Extra!

By the summer of 1890, the Farmers' Alliance had 100,000 members in Georgia. But by 1892, membership was down to about 16,000.



only Democrats who supported the Alliance reforms. Alliance member William J. Northen of Hancock County had no opposition in the governor's race. The Alliance was also successful in electing six U.S. congressmen and a majority of the legislators in both houses of the Georgia legislature. In fact, this Georgia General Assembly got the nickname the "Farmers' Legislature."

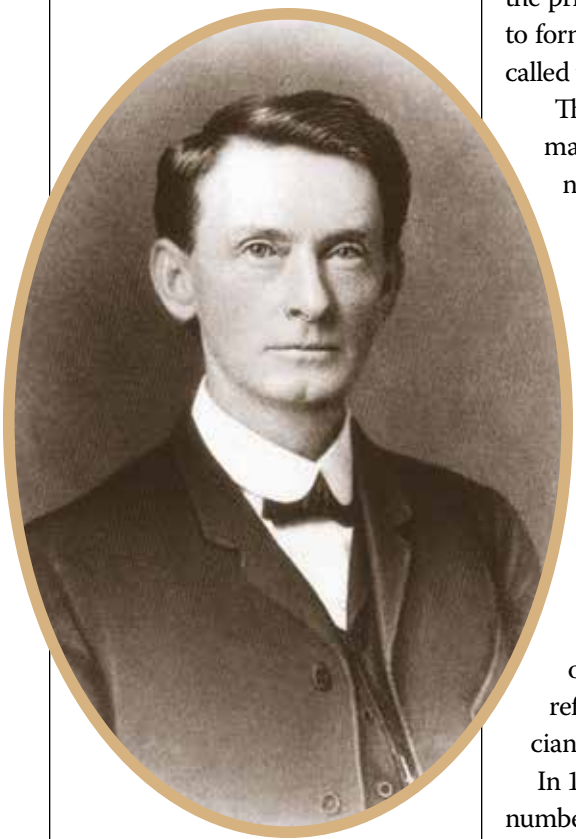
Unfortunately, however, many of the men who had pledged themselves to Alliance reforms were not friends of the Alliance once they were in office. They did not enact most of the reforms the farmers had wanted, and they appointed John B. Gordon as a U.S. senator even though he opposed many of the Alliance ideas. This major disappointment led many farmers to see the Alliance as ineffective, and membership in the group fell quickly.

The People's (Populist) Party

In its place arose a new political group, one that had begun in the Plains states. This group believed in *populism*, the political doctrine that "supports the rights and powers of the common people in their struggle with the privileged elite." Farmers joined with members of labor organizations to form a new political party called the People's Party, which was usually called the **Populist Party**.

Thomas E. Watson of Thomson became not only the leading spokesman for populism in Georgia, but a major figure in the movement nationally. Watson was born in 1856 in what is now McDuffie County. He attended Mercer University for two years and later read law while teaching school. He settled in Thomson in 1877, becoming well known as a "down-to-earth" trial lawyer. Elected to the state legislature in 1882, Watson became disillusioned by efforts to promote industry in Georgia and wanted to support the agricultural way of life. He supported liberal causes, including public education and the ending of the convict lease system. He became known for his support of poor farmers and sharecroppers, black and white. In the late 1880s, he supported the reforms of the Farmers' Alliance. In 1890, he won the seat of his district in the U.S. House of Representatives. He made his reputation when he did not support Georgia Democratic Congressman Charles Crisp for the position of Speaker of the House. Crisp was a Bourbon Democrat who had opposed the reforms of the Alliance. Watson's action made him a respected politician among farmers.

In 1892, the national Populist Party was strong in those states with large numbers of farmers. At its first national convention, it adopted a platform with many reforms. The party tried to make life better not only for farmers but also for factory workers and other people left out of the growing wealth that industrialization was creating. Among other reforms, the Populist platform called for a graduated income tax, government ownership of railroads and communications, a better system of credit for farmers, an eight-hour workday for factory workers, and a more democratic political system allowing the people themselves to vote for their U.S. senators rather than having them chosen by the state legislatures. They also believed in a secret ballot so voters



Top: Farmers' Alliance member William J. Northen was elected governor in 1890 as a Democrat. **Above:** Thomas E. Watson was the leading Populist in Georgia and, in 1896, was nominated by the national party as its vice presidential candidate.

could not be threatened into voting in a particular way. The party nominated James B. Weaver as their candidate for president of the United States.

In 1892, Georgia Populists held their first convention and nominated farmer W. L. Peek as their candidate for governor. The convention also chose candidates for other state offices and for U.S. Congress. Tom Watson was the Populist candidate for his congressional seat. Many of Georgia's Populists were yeoman farmers, owners of small farms threatened by the debt of crop lien. The Populists hoped to draw members of labor organizations into their party. While they had some success in some southern states, that strategy was not very successful in many areas of Georgia. In a few counties, members of the Knights of Labor (a national labor organization) did work with Populists.

The Democrats tried to keep whites, including farmers, in their party by calling for white supremacy and pointing out the danger of splitting the white vote between the Democrats and the Populists. While Populist leaders, including Watson, did not believe in the social intermixing of the races, they did appeal to black voters by showing how Populist reforms would help them. The Populists tried to convince white farmers that they had common problems with black farmers and that both groups would benefit from Populist reforms. The Democrats also tried to get black votes, sometimes by intimidation and violence.

After an intense and emotional campaign, the Democrats defeated most of the Populists, including Tom Watson. In some places, dishonest voting or counting of votes had taken place. This is known as **fraud**. The Populists lost the presidential race as well. The Populists did better in the Western states, where they won hundreds of state and local offices.

In 1893, the entire nation fell into the worst economic depression that had happened up to that time. Banks closed, and businesses went bankrupt. Farmers and workers suffered as prices dropped. At this time, there were no government programs to help the poor and the unemployed. The hard times revived the Populist Party. In the 1894 election, Populists made some gains. In Georgia, Populists won more white and black voters. Once again, however, Tom Watson lost his bid for the U.S. House of Representatives. At the state level, however, the election of both state senators and representatives gave the Populists representation in Georgia's legislature.

For the next two years, Georgia's Democrats tried to woo the Populists back to the party. The next major contest was in 1896, the year of the U.S. presidential election. At their convention, the Democrats nominated the young and talented speaker William Jennings Bryan. They adopted many of the Populists' reforms for their platform including the ideas of silver as well as gold money, the graduated income tax, and the direct election of U.S. senators.

Something Extra!

The secret ballot is sometimes called the Australian ballot because it originated in Australia in the 1850s.



Above: At only 36, William Jennings Bryan was by far the youngest man ever to be a major party nominee for president. Known as the "Great Commoner" for his belief in the common man, he was defeated for president three times, in 1896, 1900, and 1908.

The Art of Politics



This cartoon from the Republican magazine *Judge* depicts William Jennings Bryan as the Populist Party in the form of a snake, swallowing a donkey, the symbol of the Democratic Party. If anything, the opposite was true. Bryan was a staunch Democrat who adopted Populist reforms to get the votes of farmers in the South and West.

When the Democrats adopted these reforms, the Populists had a problem. Should they support Bryan for president hoping to get some of their ideas passed into law? Or should they remain a separate party with their own candidate? That might split the vote of those who agreed with their ideas. After much discussion, the Populists decided to also nominate Bryan as their presidential candidate. But many opposed the Democrat's vice presidential candidate Arthur Sewell, a banker. So Georgia's Tom Watson became the Populists' vice presidential nominee. He agreed, believing that Bryan would replace Sewell on the Democratic ticket with him, but Sewell remained the Democrats' vice presidential nominee.

In Georgia, the Democrats had passed some reforms, and the state party also adopted the crucial issue of silver coinage. That issue brought most farmers back to the Democratic Party. The result was a major defeat for the Populists. They lost over twenty of their state legislative seats. Bryan won the

electoral votes of the South and much of the West. He still lost overwhelmingly to Republican William McKinley, who got the popular and electoral votes of industrial, urban states with much greater populations.

This was the beginning of the end for the People's Party in the United States. It never again became as strong as it had been following the 1893 economic downturn. In Georgia, the Populists faded as well. Most whites went back into the Democratic Party. The remaining Populists did nominate Watson in 1904 and 1908 as their presidential candidate, but they were no longer a significant party.

One-Party Rule

Populism had stirred up racial tensions in Georgia. The Democrats had tried to keep whites in the party by appealing to racism and the goal of preserving white power. Although initially white Populists had appealed to African American farmers to join them, some Populists also began speaking against blacks and defending ideas of social inequality. The hope that some African Americans had for a party that would offer reforms for them too died quickly. Ultimately, whites in power decided that the threat that poor whites and blacks might join together could not be tolerated. A movement began to find ways to keep blacks out of the political process altogether. The Democrats wanted to make sure that, if whites had disagreements about politics again, they could split without worrying about blacks gaining power.

With the end of populism, Georgia was basically a one-party state, with the Democrats firmly in control for decades. Even though the Republican Party still existed in the South, no Republican could actually win statewide office in Georgia or other southern states. To make sure that the "right" Democrats kept power, the Democratic Party began certain practices in the late 1800s to eliminate any challenges to the elite class. You will learn about some of those in the next chapter.

County Unit System

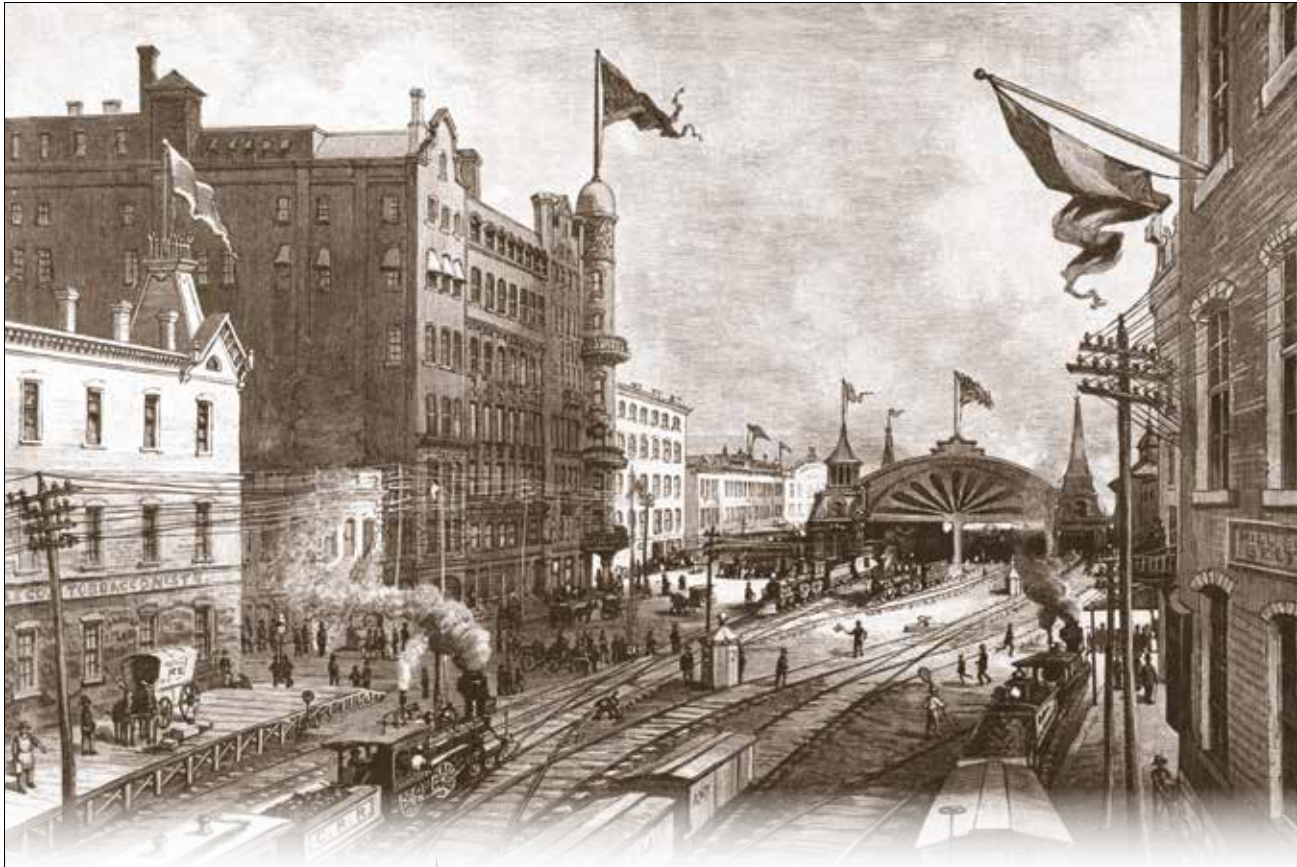
One of the practices began informally in the Democratic primary. In Georgia, the Democratic Party primary was very important for statewide offices because the Democratic candidate always won in the general election held later. In the late 1890s, in the Democratic primaries, candidates for statewide office were chosen not by the overall popular vote but by the votes of each county. The system was called the **county unit system**. For each representative that the county had in the Georgia General Assembly, the county got two unit votes. Representation was laid out in the 1877 constitution, which had three levels of representation: the most populated counties, the next twenty-six counties, and the least populated counties.

Something Extra!

The Populists' Bryan-Watson ticket was removed from the ballot in several southern states. Nevertheless, the Populists received 217,000 votes and 27 electoral votes.

Figure 38 Counties under the County Unit System, Neill Primary Act of 1917

	Number	Unit Votes
Urban counties	8	8 x 6 each = 48 total
Town counties	26	26 x 4 each = 104 total
Rural counties	125	125 x 1 each = 125 total



Above: Growing cities like Atlanta suffered for decades because of the inequalities of representation created by the county unit system, inequalities accentuated by the large number of very small rural counties in Georgia.

Since there were more rural counties, the rural counties always outvoted the urban counties.

Meanwhile, Atlanta and some of the Fall Line cities grew in the early twentieth century and became increasingly industrialized and modernized. The rural counties wanted to make sure that their ability to control the legislature, the governor's office, and other statewide offices would continue. In 1917, the legislature passed the Neill Primary Act, which legalized what had been the "informal" county unit system. For decades, the smallest, most rural counties had far more political power than the largest. This caused increasing problems as the business-oriented cities became more moderate on racial matters and more concerned about policies that were good for business. By the time Georgia had 159 counties, the 8 largest urban counties had only 48 county unit votes. The majority of the next 26 (town) counties were more rural than urban, and so they tended to support the same policies as the rural counties.

Although the county unit system was challenged in courts, the federal courts were initially hesitant to get involved. The system did not change until 1962 with a Tennessee case called *Baker v. Carr*, where the U.S. Supreme Court said that each person's vote should count equally. We will see what a change this made in Georgia when we study the period after World War II.

Reviewing the Section

1. Define: Farmers' Alliance, co-op, graduated income tax.
2. What Georgian was a major spokesman for the Populist Party?
3. Give reasons why people supported the county unit system and reasons why people opposed it.

Georgia Portraits

Tom Watson and Rural Free Delivery

In the late 1800s, those who lived on farms and in rural areas were often isolated. Radio and television had not yet been invented, and many rural areas did not yet have telephones. For most, the connection to the outside world was the mail.

While people in cities had their mail delivered to them for free, that was not the case in rural areas. A farm family had to go to town for mail. This was not a quick trip on foot, horseback, or in a horse-drawn cart over mostly unpaved roads. Imagine the disappointment after such a journey if the family had no mail. Some more well-to-do farmers sometimes paid mail carriers to bring mail to them. One Georgia congressman paid \$100 a year to have his mail delivered.

One of the reforms that farmers in the Grange and the Farmers' Alliance had called for was free mail delivery in rural areas. They thought it was unfair for city people to have mail delivered to their doors, while rural people did not, since both had to pay the same postage. Opponents said a rural mail system would cost too much money.

As a reformer for the farmers, Tom Watson supported this cause. While he was a U.S. congressman, Watson introduced a bill in 1892 setting aside money for an experiment in rural free delivery (RFD). Although the bill passed, the postmaster refused to put the program into effect. But the idea slowly gained supporters. In 1896, with a new postmaster, the first experimental routes

were established. One of the forty-four experimental routes in the United States was in Quitman, Georgia.

RFD became very popular, and Congress made it permanent in 1902. An 1899 report of the postmaster said, "There has been nothing in the history of the postal service of the United States so remarkable as the growth of the rural free delivery system." The system led to an increase in the value of farmland that was on an RFD route, to a movement to improve



roads so areas could get routes, and to increased postal revenue. Perhaps most importantly, it had connected rural people with newspapers, magazines, crop reports, and other materials that made them better informed citizens. Because of his important role in this legislation, Tom Watson got the name "Father of Rural Free Delivery."

Section 3

Progressivism in Georgia

As you read, look for:

- progressive reforms in Georgia,
- the role played by Rebecca Latimer Felton,
- the extension of suffrage to women,
- terms: **progressivism, suffrage, Nineteenth Amendment.**



Above: Newspaper owner Hoke Smith brought progressive politics to Georgia both as a governor and a United States senator. One of his important achievements was the establishment of the State Board of Education.

As populism faded throughout the country, a new reform movement had already begun. While populism was centered in the rural areas and composed mainly of farmers, this new movement began in cities where urban, middle-class, educated men and women began to call for reforms to deal with the problems brought on by industrialization and urbanization. This movement for reform was known as **progressivism.**

Many of the urban and industrial problems that faced other parts of the country did not have as much impact in Georgia. Georgia did not have giant cities like New York. Although Georgia had some industry, it was usually small and the companies were locally owned. Some Georgians, however, did feel the need for changes. Progressivism in Georgia and the South, however, was more modest than in other parts of the country.

In the end, one of the progressive ideas that affected the most Georgians was women's voting. The Georgia legislature voted against it, but women got that right when enough other states voted for a constitutional amendment. A major reformer in Georgia, who supported the right of women to vote, was Rebecca Latimer Felton.

Governor Hoke Smith and Progressive Reform

In 1906, attorney Hoke Smith, owner of the *Atlanta Evening Journal*, was elected governor as a reformer. Like other progressives throughout the country, Smith believed that government had a role in regulating business and industry and in protecting the public. In his years as governor (1907-1909, 1911), he supported campaign reforms including an anti-lobbying law.



He strengthened the railroad commission's power to regulate the railroads and gave the commission power over utilities such as electric companies and streetcar lines. He founded the juvenile court system in Georgia and convinced the legislature to increase funding for schools. In 1911, he established the State Board of Education and supported better funding for education. He also started the state's Department of Commerce and Labor and supported a 60-hour work week for textile workers. As we shall see in the next chapter, Smith also supported taking the vote away from African American men as a "reform."

One of the major targets of reform for Georgia's progressives was Georgia's justice system, which operated the convict lease system. Established in 1866, convict leasing had come under increasing fire from reformers, including religious leaders. The system had resulted in inhumane treatment for those convicted of even minor offenses. In 1908, the state passed a law that abolished the leasing out of prisoners to private business. Instead, prisoners could be used by the state or by local governments to work on the roads. While this was considered a reform at the time, this system also became abusive over time. To prevent prisoners from escaping, they were often chained together leading to the infamous *chain gangs*.

When he became a U.S. senator in 1912, Smith continued his progressivism by introducing in the Senate two bills that bear his name. The Smith-Lever Act (1914) established the system of agricultural extension agents who provided education and advice for farmers. This program still operates today. The Smith-Hughes Act (1917) set up U.S. government support for vocational education in high schools.

Above: A major goal of progressives was the abolition of the convict lease system. States favored it because it not only saved them the cost of imprisonment, but was actually a source of income. However, there were many abuses, and the burden fell unequally on African American men.

Something Extra!

In the early 1900s, journalists and writers who wrote about the problems of American life were called *muckrakers*.



Top: Georgia suffragists participate in a parade in downtown Atlanta.
Above: Many Georgia women were active in the temperance movement.

Women's Suffrage

A progressive reform attempted unsuccessfully in Georgia was women's suffrage. **Suffrage** refers to the right to vote. The movement in Georgia was led by educated middle- and upper-class women. In the 1890s, southern states, including Georgia, had chapters of the National American Women's Suffrage Association (NAWSA). In 1895, this organization had its nationwide conference in Atlanta.

Two of the best-known Georgia *suffragists* (as these reformers were called) were the sisters Rebecca Latimer Felton and Mary Latimer McClendon. Rebecca Felton became the more famous of the two. She was the wife of Dr. William Felton, leader of Georgia's Independent movement of the 1870s and 1880s. She had first participated in politics helping her husband's campaigns and, as a result, was a strong opponent of the Bourbon Triumvirate. She became involved in the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), which worked to make alcohol illegal. Like many southern women, the WCTU saw the prohibition of alcohol as an issue of defending the home. Rebecca Felton also worked to abolish the convict lease system and for educational reform. She was especially concerned about poor girls being able to get an education.

Their activities with the WCTU and other projects to strengthen home and motherhood led Felton and other women to support women having

the right to vote. If women could vote, they would be able to influence the laws in ways good for the home. The idea of women having political equality was, however, more reform than Georgia's politicians wanted. Even most Georgia women showed little inclination to allow voting. They saw it as being outside the "proper role" of a woman, whose focus was to be the home, not the sometimes hostile world of politics.

In 1918, Congress passed the **Nineteenth Amendment** to the U.S. Constitution, which said women could not be discriminated against in voting. The amendment then went to the states for ratification. The Georgia legislature very quickly voted *not* to ratify. It was the first state to reject the amendment. In the end, Georgia's action did not matter. In 1920, the required three-fourths of the states had voted yes, and Georgia women got the right to vote along with women throughout the country. Within two years, women were voting in Georgia.

Ironically, in spite of the opposition to women's suffrage, Georgia became the first state to have a female senator. In 1922, U.S. Senator Tom Watson died with four years remaining in his term. His friend Governor Thomas Hardwick appointed Rebecca Latimer Felton to Watson's seat until an election was held to choose a permanent replacement. By the time the Senate actually met again, Walter George had been elected to the seat. But he allowed Felton to serve the first day the Senate met. When she gave her first and only speech in the U.S. Senate, the eighty-seven-year-old Felton said, "The women of this country have reason to rejoice." Felton believed that other women would eventually serve. She had no idea how long that would take. Women being elected to office in Georgia would not come very quickly, and by the early twenty-first century, no woman had been elected to the Senate from Georgia.



Above: Rebecca Latimer Felton, the widow of Independent leader Dr. William Felton, was appointed to replace Senator Tom Watson on his death in 1922, making her the first female senator in U.S. history. She served only one day before being replaced by Senator Walter George.

Reviewing the Section

1. Define: progressivism, suffrage.
2. Which amendment gave women the right to vote?
3. Why do you think it took so long to give women the vote?

Something Extra!

Georgia finally ratified the Nineteenth Amendment on February 20, 1970.

Georgia Portraits

Presidential Aide Archibald Butt

Presidents **Theodore Roosevelt** and **William Howard Taft** were both part of the progressive movement, although they differed on exactly what progressivism should do. They did agree that native Georgian **Archibald Butt** was an excellent aide. He served Roosevelt in the last year of his presidency and stayed on in the White House as the personal aide to Taft.

Archibald Butt was born in Augusta in September 1865. His father died when “Archie,” as friends and family called him, was a teenager. His mother worked so he could attend and graduate from the University of the South in Tennessee. His first career was as a journalist working for the *Louisville Courier* and the *Macon Telegraph* and as the Washington correspondent for several Georgia newspapers. He briefly left journalism while he served as the secretary of the U.S. Embassy in Mexico in the mid-1890s.

When the Spanish-American War broke out in 1898, Butt volunteered for service and decided to remain in the military. Because he was so good at organization and logistics, he became part of the quartermaster corps, which coordinates supplies for the troops. In 1901, he became quartermaster in the Philippines, later in Washington, D.C., and finally in Cuba. In April 1908, President Roosevelt tapped Captain Butt to serve as his personal military aide.

When **William Howard Taft** rose to the presidency with Roosevelt’s support, the captain stayed in the White House as Taft’s aide. For the next few years, he was involved in all aspects of the president’s daily life. He was the president’s closest advisor, controlled appointments with the president, served



as chief of protocol, and accompanied the president on all trips. In 1911, Captain Butt was promoted to major.

Midway through Taft’s presidency, Roosevelt became increasingly unhappy with Taft’s policies. As the 1912 election approached, Roosevelt decided to run against him. Butt was close to both men, and



the stress of their break took a toll on his health. Taft suggested that the major take a vacation. Butt traveled to Europe in March 1912, had an audience with the pope, and left England to return to the United States on a grand ship named the *Titanic*.

On April 15, 1912, the “unsinkable” *Titanic* hit an iceberg and sank. Major Archibald Butt was lost at sea. According to newspaper reports, Butt was a hero in the efforts to save women and children. One woman was quoted as saying, “The whole world should rise in praise of Major Butt.” In May, a tearful Taft spoke at Butt’s memorial service in Augusta, saying “his life was spent in self-sacrifice, serving others.”

Two years later, Taft returned on the anniversary of the tragedy to dedicate a bridge the citizens of Augusta had built to honor their lost hero. In the 1980s and 1990s, when plans for modernizing included tearing down the Butt Memorial Bridge, citizens fought a successful campaign to save it. The bridge with its majestic four lions holding shields still stands today over the Augusta Canal. Although his remains were never recovered, a plaque in the Arlington National Cemetery also honors the memory of Major Archibald Willingham Butt.



Opposite page: Augusta-born Major Archibald Butt served as personal military aide to two presidents, Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft. **Top:** Archibald Butt, on the right, taking a stroll with President Taft, to his right, and secretary to the president Charles Dewey Hilles, to Taft’s right. **Above:** The citizens of Augusta saved the Butt Memorial Bridge across the Augusta Canal when it was threatened with demolition.

Chapter Review

Chapter Summary

Section 1 Bourbon Democrats and Independents

- Three men, known as the Bourbon Triumvirate, controlled Georgia politics for much of the 1880s. These men were Joseph E. Brown, Alfred H. Colquitt, and John B. Gordon.
- The Bourbon Democrats supported lower taxes and less government spending and encouraged the growth of industry.
- The only real opposition to the Bourbon Democrats in the 1870s and 1880s were the Independents, led by Dr. William Felton.

Section 2 Farmer Discontent and Populism

- Unhappy farmers formed Farmers' Alliances in the 1880s.
- In 1890, the Alliance got involved in politics, supporting the use of silver and gold for money, the secret ballot for voting, a graduated income tax, the end of the convict lease system, and government ownership of railroads and communications.
- In the 1890s, the Populist Party gained strength, supporting many of the same reforms as the Farmers' Alliances. Tom Watson was a Populist leader in Georgia as well as a national figure. The Populist Party faded after the election of 1896.
- After populism, Georgia became a one-party state controlled by the Democrats.

- The county unit system allowed the Democrats in rural counties to maintain political control of the state.

Section 3 Progressivism in Georgia

- Populism was replaced by the progressive movement in the early 1900s.
- Governor Hoke Smith initiated a number of progressive reforms including state regulation of utilities, the juvenile court system, and better funding for education.
- The Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1920, gave women the right to vote.
- Rebecca Latimer Felton was a suffragist. She was also the first woman to serve as a U.S. senator, if only for one day.



Understanding the Facts

1. Who were the Bourbon Triumvirate, and what political activities are they known for?
2. Why did the Populist Party appeal to poor whites and blacks in Georgia?
3. Explain the county unit system. Who benefited from this system?
4. Define *suffrage* and explain when and how women gained the right to vote in the United States.



Developing Critical Thinking

During this era of Georgia history, one political party, the Democrats, controlled the political power of the state. Develop a list of pros and cons of one-party political control. Prepare to discuss/debate the issue with your classmates.



Writing Across the Curriculum

Imagine you are a poor tenant farmer or sharecropper in Georgia after the Civil War. You have just helped elect Tom Watson to the U.S. House of Representatives. Write a letter to Mr. Watson describing an issue that you think he should work on to improve your life.



Extending Reading Skills

Reread pages 459-460. What inferences (conclusions) can you make about the role rural counties played in Georgia's growth?

Right: This man was the Populist Party candidate for president in 1892. What is his name?



Exploring Technology

Many items that we use today were invented during this era. Go to the Internet at www.enchantedlearning.com/inventors and identify inventions of this era that we still use today.



Practicing Your Skills

Electoral College votes determine the outcome of our presidential elections. Research the Electoral College votes from Georgia since the end of the Civil War. Identify any trends or patterns you see in Georgia's voting for president.

