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The One-Eyed King: The Reforms of Ben Tillman as the Reason for the Absence of Populism in South Carolina

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THE ONE-EYED KING: THE REFORMS OF BEN TILLMAN AS THE REASON
FOR THE ABSENCE OF POPULISM IN SOUTH CAROLINA

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
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Master of Arts
History

by
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Accepted by:
Dr. H. Roger Grant, Committee Chair
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ABSTRACT

This thesis is intended to demonstrate the tangible reforms initiated by Benjamin Ryan Tillman between 1885 and 1895 for farmers and other citizens of South Carolina. After exploring the most notable historiography surrounding the Tillman era in South Carolina, the thesis examines Tillman's appeals to the farmers' depressed condition, the establishment of Clemson Agricultural College, and state-level reforms of business and government institutions. Tillman's restructuring of the South Carolina Penitentiary, the Lunatic Asylum, and the creation of the state liquor dispensary are shown to be significant accomplishments in the reformer's political career. Tillman's assaults on what he perceived as monopolistic capital—in the form of the phosphate mining industry and the railroads—are also thoroughly discussed.

The emphasis of this analysis is to show that Tillman's reform movement, and not the concerns over white solidarity that stigmatized any third-party movement, was the primary reason for the lack of a Populist party in South Carolina. The fact that Tillman and the majority of white Democrats in South Carolina did not support the socio-political equality of African Americans is not in question. However, the purpose of this thesis is to illustrate that without Tillmanism and the real reforms that came along with the movement, South Carolina would have experienced a significant third-party bolt similar to other Southern and Western states in the 1890's.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Linda and Maxie Krause. Without their unswerving support, dedication, and self-sacrifice, I would have never reached this point in my academic career. Most importantly, however, their devotion and encouragement has allowed me to live a happy and relatively normal life despite a serious injury that has threatened such an existence. I will never be able to repay them for their continual patience and unconditional love.

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HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE TILLMAN MOVEMENT

In 1892 the emergence of the Populist Party challenged the two-party system that has dominated politics in the United States. Growing out of the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union, an organization of farmers who sought government amelioration of the system that kept agricultural producers in perpetual poverty, the Populists drew their ranks from former Democrats and Republicans primarily in the South and West. While the Populists never broke the grip of the two traditional parties in their respective regions, they did win a significant number of state offices and sent several representatives to Washington. From 1892 to 1896 Populist activity was visible across almost every Southern and Western state and territory—the exception was South Carolina. The Palmetto State saw no noteworthy move to the People's Party, even though agricultural conditions there were just as critical, and Farmer's Alliance activity was just as busy as in any other state.¹

The predominant reason given by historians for the relative absence of Populism in South Carolina—a reason that is incomplete and overstated—has been based in conservatism and white supremacy. In order to compete successfully with Democrats and Republicans, Populists, especially in the South, relied on African American voters to swing the vote in their direction. The customary reason supplied for South Carolina's

¹ For detailed examinations of Populism and the Farmer's Alliance see: John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1931); Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Robert C. McMath, *Populist Vanguard: A History of the Southern Farmer's Alliance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975).

rejection of Populism is that, despite the farmers' discontent, they were adamantly against any cooperation with blacks that might put the two races on equal political and social grounds. South Carolinians were obstinately opposed to allowing black voters to decide a contest between two whites. Although it is true that the majority of whites did not welcome African-American political participation, it is the objective of this thesis to reassess the importance of the racial factor in the politics of South Carolina during Populism's zenith.

Another reason for Democratic solidarity in South Carolina, as or more important than black participation, was the role that Ben Tillman played as a symbol of reform. Tillman and his supporters created the Farmers' Association (also known as Reform Democrats) two years before the Farmers' Alliance entered the state. Tillman was a flamboyant, hard-charging "dirt farmer" who railed against the Bourbon leaders of the state. He eventually usurped the Conservative leadership, and his election as governor proved both a real and symbolic victory for the poor white farmers who identified with him. It was the victory of Tillmanism in 1890, which many perceived as revolutionary, that precluded a need for Populism in 1892. Tillman provided the lower class of farmers with an outlet for their revolt within the Democratic Party. There was no need to bolt the party when their own party had been "reformed." While "Negrophobia" was definitely a factor in South Carolina politics, the reform measures and the symbolic revolution of Tillmanism over the Conservative regime were the most important reasons for the scarcity of Populist support in the state.

The scholars who have recently examined South Carolina history during the height of Tillmanism in the 1890's are essentially in agreement on Benjamin Tillman's character and the polarizing role he played in the state's political and social life. They rightly focus on his fiery blustering against Bourbon elites on behalf of farmers, his unabashed racism, and his political machinations that kept him in high office from 1890 until his death in 1918. One particular conclusion on which historians concur is the notion that Tillman's appeals to white supremacy and Democratic solidarity to white citizens, were the driving factors behind the absence and seeming irrelevance of the People's Party in South Carolina, during a time when many people across the South and West were bolting for the third party. Furthermore, scholars have maintained that the Tillman movement was basically a sham, relying on empty class antagonisms and demagoguery to further Tillman's personal ambitions to power.

Walter Edgar, in his comprehensive work, *South Carolina: A History*, devotes an entire chapter to Benjamin Tillman. While he does not directly address the Populist movement—possibly because the third party never made any significant headway into the state—he does make clear his position on Tillman's calls for white supremacy and his voracious appetite for political power. Of the 1886 Farmer's Convention in Columbia, which was ostensibly a meeting to organize and make demands of the legislature on behalf of the downtrodden farmers, Edgar insists that the convention was obviously “being molded into a political machine to further the ambitions of Ben Tillman.”² For

² Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 434.

Edgar, this is merely the first example of Tillman using popular discontent to further his own designs on political power.

Edgar also contradicts unspecified previous historians who interpreted the election of 1890, in which Ben Tillman won the governor's office, and the election of many other Tillmanites to the state legislature, as a class struggle and subsequent revolution of the agrarian sector against conservative aristocrats. Tillman had won the Democratic nomination for Governor in 1890 by way of the famous "Shell Manifesto," which expounded the farmer's grievances and called for a March convention of farmers that would "suggest" candidates to the regular party convention.³ Edgar, however, contends that Tillman's victory was no revolution, that there was no "groundswell of debtors and poor whites backing the Reform ticket."⁴ Edgar maintains that the Tillman movement was able to oust the Bourbons, the conservative leaders who were descendants of the antebellum elites, through "assistance of some of the elite and a goodly portion of the state's upper middle class."⁵ According to Edgar, the paramount reason Tillman benefited from these votes was fear on the part of whites that black voters might decide the contest between two white candidates. This same apprehension of blacks deciding elections between whites is often cited as the reason why South Carolinians did not support Populism. Additionally, he downplays the role of the Farmer's Alliance (the

³ Edgar, 435; see also John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1931) 171; Francis Butler Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman: South Carolinian* with a new Introduction by Orville Vernon Burton (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002) 133. Original text 1944, Louisiana State University Press.

⁴ Edgar, 437.

⁵ *ibid.*, 437.

agrarian organization that precipitated the formation of the Populist Party in 1892) in aiding Tillman's election, even though the Alliance had a significant following in the state, and had endorsed Tillman's candidacy.⁶ According to Tillman's most notable biographer, by 1888, two years before Tillman's election, the "Farmer's Alliance . . . had already won the active support of many South Carolina farmers of the class-conscious type to whom Tillman appealed."⁷

Although Edgar does acknowledge the physical suffering of South Carolina farmers and the organizations that attempted to ameliorate them, he insists that white solidarity was the key to Tillman's success and the subsequent locked door against third-party radicalism. While Edgar is a popular historian and has produced a well-researched and well-written history of the state, in this writer's opinion he is mistaken to disregard the farmer's movement and to emphasize Tillman's "empty" rhetoric in explaining the success of the Tillman movement. He has de-emphasized the white farmers' outrage against deflation, crop liens, exorbitant shipping rates, and the like—as well as their class antagonism against the ruling elites, and the upcountry resentment of low-country planters—in favor of white supremacy and party loyalty. Edgar, however, is not the only historian, nor the most adamant, to make this argument.

In his introduction to the newest edition of Francis B. Simkins' seminal biography of "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman, Orville Vernon Burton declares that Tillman's principal legacy was born not of the persecuted farmers whom he championed, "but from the persecution he—in league with the whites he mobilized—imposed on African

⁶ *ibid.*, 437.

⁷ Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 133.

Americans.”⁸ While this assessment is neither untrue nor unfair—Tillman was most definitely a racist who worked to disenfranchise blacks—it also overlooks the violent discontent among the lower class white farmers that was just as real and significant to the state’s socio-political climate as was Tillman’s bigotry. Burton also brings attention to Tillman’s political appointees. As the “state’s undisputed political boss,” Tillman replaced Bourbon Democrat officials with his favorite lieutenants, who were mostly attorneys, and not the “wool-hat boys’ and other poor men who made up the rank and file of Tillman’s supporters.”⁹ Burton echoes Walter Edgar’s assessment that the leaders of Tillman’s farmers’ movement “were anything but dirt farmers.”¹⁰ The implication is that Tillman was simply a political boss, that he was uninterested in true reform for whites or blacks, and that he would never cede power to radicals such as Populists when he could control the state without them. Both historians point out the fact that Tillman did not appoint any of the lower class farmers he represented to high offices, as though it is an elucidation of his duplicity. They do not, however, recognize that Tillman could genuinely be working for their betterment without giving positions to under-educated, often illiterate farmers who would have been woefully unqualified for government work.

No author stresses the primacy of white supremacy in all political matters during Tillman’s time as much as Stephen Kantrowitz. He writes of Tillman’s thought that “racial equality was an oxymoron; one race or another would dominate, and if white men failed to rally together, their households would be invaded or subjugated by hostile

⁸ Orville Vernon Burton, introduction to *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, by Francis B. Simkins (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), xiv.

⁹ *Ibid.*, xxii.

¹⁰ Edgar, 438.

forces.”¹¹ Kantrowitz places the failure of the Populist Party to thrive in South Carolina squarely on the white supremacy espoused by Ben Tillman. Although the Tillman movement was supposedly a “Reform” crusade, Kantrowitz insists that since the end of Reconstruction Tillman and his ilk had systematically “establish[ed] the limits of insurgent politics” by weeding out dissidents and radicals from the ranks of true white men.¹² Therefore, the only people with any voice of influence in South Carolina politics were those who would refuse any talk of appealing to the African-American vote.

Kantrowitz argues that the third-party movement supported by many of the Alliance members was an even bigger threat to Tillmanism than the bolters who had supported A.C. Haskell in 1890. Populism, which would evidently require the votes of African Americans to succeed, was anathema to Tillman. Along with the controversial sub-treasury plan, which Tillman considered too socialistic, Tillman mainly fought against the racial equality that populism inherently suggested. According to Kantrowitz, Tillman believed it erroneous to attempt to “fight the ‘money power’ by forming a coalition with its chief allies, black Republicans and the federal government.”¹³

Kantrowitz does not hold Tillman solely responsible for the defeat of the Populist movement in South Carolina. He suggests, however, that the few Populists in the state, such as Hendrix McLane, were defeated because of the “shared sense of privilege that all

¹¹ Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, 113.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 148.

too few white men could bear to surrender.”¹⁴ Kantrowitz posits the theory that white Democrats viewed black political participation as the precursor to political and social domination. In South Carolina, the only state with a black majority, this idea was extremely upsetting to all white citizens.¹⁵ Therefore, the Populists’ threat of cooperation with blacks and splitting the Democratic Party were more than white South Carolinians could stomach. If we accept the arguments of Kantrowitz and others, then we must believe that popular white sentiment, along with Ben Tillman’s demagoguery, was strong enough to convince South Carolina farmers that they were better off with the miserable status quo than with promising programs that might also put them on equal standing with blacks.

Another idea, however, is that Ben Tillman’s rhetoric and tangible efforts focusing on the needs of white farmers and the evils of the Bourbon aristocrats were enough to prove to his constituents that bolting for a third party was unnecessary—that their needs were being addressed within their own party. It should be made clear, however, that this critique of the previously mentioned scholars is not intended to de-emphasize, or to justify in any way, the strong white-supremacist attitudes held by Tillman and the vast majority of white South Carolinians in the late nineteenth century. Tillman’s home county of Edgefield was a hotbed of anti-black activity that became organized as Democratic clubs, agricultural societies, and rifle clubs during Reconstruction. The main objective of these organizations was to use whatever means

¹⁴ Stephen Kantrowitz, “Ben Tillman and Hendrix McLane, Agrarian Rebels: White Manhood, “The Farmers,” and the Limits of Southern Populism,” *The Journal of Southern History* 66:3 (2000): 502.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 507.

necessary to deprive blacks of their recently gained political rights.¹⁶ While holding office in Columbia Tillman openly defended the lynching of black men accused of raping white women. His racial attitudes are conveniently summarized in the following statement: “I don’t care what you believe, but I know God didn’t make the nigger of as good clay as he made me. What has he done for himself, or for civilization? . . . Whatever the niggers have today they got through slavery.”¹⁷

The fact that Tillman was driven by a vicious racist ideology is not in dispute, and the authors discussed here are correct to denounce Tillman and the Democratic Party of South Carolina for their policies regarding race. Nevertheless, scholars dealing with South Carolina during Tillman’s era have emphasized white supremacy so much that they have neglected the fact that Tillman was indeed an agricultural and class reformer in the view of many white South Carolinians. In fact, Tillman as a symbol of reform and class revolt was just as significant to the dearth of Populist activity in the state as were appeals to white supremacy and Democratic solidarity. To understand the role Tillman played in state politics and social reform it is crucial to examine the many ways in which he came to symbolize reform, and in some notable instances, achieved tangible benefits for the agricultural classes. We must also, however, explore the conditions of the “farmers” in the late nineteenth century, as well as the agricultural organizations that flourished in the state and sought to advance the economic and social status of the farmer class.

¹⁶ Orville Vernon Burton, “Race and Reconstruction: Edgefield County, South Carolina,” *Journal of Social History* 12: 1 (1978), 34.

¹⁷ Quoted in Lindsey Saunders Perkins, “The Oratory of Benjamin Ryan Tillman” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1945), 378, cited in Burton, Introduction to *Pitchfork Ben Tillman* by Francis B. Simkins, xxv.

The devastation of the Civil War had left many southern landowners wholly or nearly bankrupt. Without the benefit of slave labor that had sustained the Southern plantation society, many lands were foreclosed to creditors or divided up among tenant farmers and sharecroppers. South Carolina's smaller farmers struggled with high credit rates, tariffs, and new foreign competition for what was unfortunately their biggest export crop, cotton. Farmers of the South and West were also held to higher shipping rates than Eastern industries. Money was so scarce that farmers were forced to find credit through merchants and solvent landowners.¹⁸ The South was developing industrially due to Northern "carpetbag" investors, and an important segment of this "commercial revolution" was a "dynamic class of town merchants who quickly established themselves as important "middlemen" in the busy and expanding Upcountry cotton trade."¹⁹ One of the biggest disasters to the Southern economy was the wholesale reliance on cotton, which trapped farmers in a cycle of dependence for food imports, rendered them susceptible to fluctuating world markets, and dangerously depleted the soil while relying heavily on imported fertilizers. Despite the drawbacks, Southern farmers continued to increase cotton production. In the decade preceding 1890, cotton production in the South Carolina Upcountry increased by over thirty percent, while corn cultivation grew by less than fifteen percent.²⁰ Subsequently, the South became essentially a one-crop producer,

¹⁸ Joseph Church, "The Farmers' Alliance and the Populist movement in South Carolina," (M.A. Thesis, University of South Carolina, 1953), 2-3; see also Ford, 305.

¹⁹ Lacy K. Ford, "Rednecks and Merchants: Economic Development and Social Tensions in the South Carolina Upcountry, 1865-1900," *The Journal of American History* 71:2 (1984), 298.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 306.

ironically dependent on outside areas for goods, like foodstuffs, that they could have been easily producing on their own at much less cost.

One important reason why Southerners relied so heavily on cotton was that it was one of the only crops for which they could receive credit. The scarcity of money and banks in the South led farmers to seek credit for supplies through local town merchants. Merchants did not lend money to farmers; instead they advanced goods the farmer needed, in return for a lien on his upcoming crop.²¹ The merchant-loaners, with the help of state lien laws, thereby were granted first claim on the farmer's crop for payment of the advanced supplies. An additional blow to the farmer's purse was the practice of dual pricing—whereby merchants charged one price for customers buying goods with cash, and another higher price for those buying supplies on credit. Furthermore, merchants collected cotton from debtor-farmers at harvest time, when the market was flooded and prices were low. The farmer had no choice in this, but the merchant could hold on to the crop if he wished, and sell it at a time when prices had risen. Under pressure from small farmers, the South Carolina legislature abolished the lien law on January 1, 1878, but by March of the same year it reinstated the lien system due to a total lack of other sources of credit. Subsequently, by 1881 more than three quarters of all farms in South Carolina had at least a partial lean on the crop.²² According to John D. Hicks, “the effect of crop liens was to establish a condition of peonage throughout the cotton South.”²³

²¹ Hicks, 40.

²² Ford, 309.

²³ Hicks, 43-45; see also Church, 3; Ford, 309.

In concert with crop liens, high shipping rates, and exorbitant tariffs, factors of nature inhibited harvests. As the result of drought, insect infestations, and subsequent crop failures, thousands of farmers lost their land. In 1886 farmers unable to pay their taxes forfeited roughly 954,000 acres of land.²⁴ Farmers across the country decided on a pro-active approach to bettering their condition. The Patrons of Husbandry, better known as the Grange, was established in 1867 and reached South Carolina in 1871. Through the prodding of Colonel D. H. Jacques, editor of the “Rural Carolinian,” D. Wyatt Aiken led the state Grange.²⁵ The primary goals of the Grange were to improve farming conditions by the reform of railroad rates, establish a system of cooperative buying and selling, lower tariffs, and increase the money supply through the printing of greenbacks.²⁶ By 1875 there were at least 342 local chapters of the Grange active in South Carolina. Indeed, the Palmetto state was the “leading Southern state in the Granger movement.”²⁷

The Grange’s ascent in the state was matched only by the rapidity of its decline, for in 1880 only ninety-eight Granges were still alive. The reasons for its demise were manifold, but essentially the organization folded because of poor leadership, lack of money for membership dues, and disagreement among the ranks over national policies. In South Carolina the farmers were also preoccupied with “redeeming” their state from the Reconstruction government.²⁸ Despite the decline of the Granger movement, it is manifest that farmers were unanimously discontented with their situation well before Ben

²⁴ Ibid., 430.

²⁵ Church, 4; see also Edgar, 430-1.

²⁶ Church, 4.

²⁷ Ibid., 5.

²⁸ Ibid., 6.

Tillman became a state leader or the Populist Party was a consideration. Farmers were looking for a solution to their plight, but the Grange, being strictly apolitical, was not strong enough to succeed.

In the late 1880's however, another farmers' organization made even greater headway into South Carolina: the Farmers' Alliance. There were two Alliances, a Northern and a Southern. Alongside the Southern Alliance was a parallel organization for African Americans called the Colored Farmers' Alliance. The Southern Alliance was the most significant on the national scale, and merged with other organizations to become known as the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union, which hereafter will be simply termed the Farmers' Alliance.²⁹ The first branch, or sub-alliance, opened in South Carolina in 1887 in Marion County, and by 1890 there were sixty thousand Alliance members statewide. The first declaration of intention of the South Carolina Alliance was to "labor for the education of the agricultural classes in the science of economical government in a strictly non-partisan spirit."³⁰

Education was well organized in the Alliance; each state alliance and sub-alliance had lecturers who taught the benefits of crop rotation, improved techniques and better seed, and crop diversity. Information was also spread through many local newspapers and magazines. The organization's national newspaper was the *National Economist*, edited by Alliance leader C.W. Macune in Washington D.C. The Alliance organ in South

²⁹ Hicks, 117-18; Church, 12-13. See also Edgar, 431.

³⁰ "Constitution of the Farmers' State Alliance of South Carolina." (Spartanburg, 1888), 11-12. Quoted in Church, 14.

Carolina was the *Cotton Plant*.³¹ The success of agricultural literature was directly linked to the farmers' desire for immediate financial gain. According to historian Homer Clevenger, "If better business management would increase their profits, they wanted to know it. Their eagerness to have this kind of information was indicated by a growing demand for farm magazines."³²

The South Carolina State Alliance justified its existence by taking on the perceived enemies of the farmers. Subsequently, it staged well-organized boycotts of the jute-bagging industry and the fertilizer trusts.³³ One of the biggest draws to the Alliance was the promise of economic improvement through cooperative stores. Through a well-organized system of trade agents, South Carolina Alliancesmen set up many cooperative stores, grain elevators, cotton gins, and warehouses. These were an attempt to obtain better prices for its members' crops, provide lower prices on supplies, and to help Alliance members escape the clutches of what they perceived as the parasitic lending merchant. These cooperative ventures were initially quite successful, but they would not become permanent institutions because of a severe shortage of capital.

One of the problems plaguing the Alliance from its inception was the internal dilemma of whether or not it should become political. Officially the Alliance was apolitical, but the organization decided to support individual candidates that favored its issues, such as railroad regulation, opposition to monopolies and trusts, lower interest

³¹ Church, 16; Edgar, 431.

³² Homer Clevenger, "The Teaching Techniques of the Farmers' Alliance: An Experiment in Adult Education," *The Journal of Southern History*, 11:4 (1945), 510.

³³ Church, 24-26.

rates, and an increase of the money supply.³⁴ The Alliance, however, was unable to remain distant from politics for very long, and become more active in demanding that their followers vote only for those candidates who subscribed to its platform. According to historian Lacy K. Ford, in 1890 the South Carolina Alliance insisted its members promote Alliance candidates, and “the Farmers’ Alliance, or Reform, Democrats became the most powerful political faction in the state by 1892.”³⁵ While Ford is correct to note the influence of the Alliance in the state, he credits the movement too much to the organization. Ben Tillman had begun a political reform movement for farmers, in the form of the Farmers’ Association, two years before the Alliance entered the state.

One of the issues that the Alliance championed most fervently, at least until 1893, was a proposed remedy to the credit and money supply problem known as the sub-treasury. First presented in December 1889 at the Southern Alliance’s St. Louis meeting, the sub-treasury plan called for government-owned facilities and storage warehouses to be established in every county of each state that offered for sale five hundred thousand dollars worth of agricultural goods on an annual basis. The products imagined were non- and semi-perishable crops like wheat, oats, rice, cotton, and tobacco. The farmer would store his product in the sub-treasury facility, and then receive a loan in paper currency issued by the Federal government worth eighty percent of his goods. The farmer could wait (up to one year) and sell his product when market prices suited him, and then repay the government at an interest rate of merely one percent.³⁶

³⁴ Hicks, 140-143; Church, 18.

³⁵ Ford, 315.

³⁶ Hicks, 187-189.

Ben Tillman initially deprecated the plan, insisting that it was socialistic and would create a huge and unnecessary branch of Federal government. Nevertheless, he did reluctantly approve of the sub-treasury before the 1892 election. One may view this as a strictly political move; Tillman may have considered endorsing the sub-treasury as harmless since it would most likely never come to fruition, which it did not. It may also be seen as proof that Tillman was not interested in plans that would actually boost the economic status of poor farmers. What must also be noted is that the sub-treasury was never unanimously agreed upon among the upper ranks of the Alliance. Even the Alliance-backed Senator, Zebulon B. Vance from North Carolina, introduced a sub-treasury bill to the Senate in 1890, and then decided that he could not support it himself.³⁷

The Alliance was the most influential force behind the formation of the Populist Party just before the elections of 1892. The national defeats suffered by the Populists in 1892, and the failed attempts at fusion in 1896 dealt a serious blow to the Populist Party and the Farmers' Alliance. By 1896 the influence of the Alliance in South Carolina, and across the country, was on the wane. At the annual state convention in Columbia in 1896, thirteen counties went unrepresented.³⁸ The failure of the third party had stigmatized the Alliance, and its influence diminished significantly thereafter. Nevertheless, the Farmers' Alliance had organized, educated, and stirred into action farmers all across the South and West—and South Carolina was no exception.

The most important realizations to glean from the large but relatively brief successes of the Grange and the Alliance is that starting in the 1870's there was serious

³⁷ Ibid, 195; Simkins, 205.

³⁸ Church, 69.

and growing discontent among farmers in South Carolina. The farmers in South Carolina felt the same about the “money powers” of the East, shipping rates, and currency supply as did Georgians or Kansans. The primary difference was that no serious move towards the Populist Party ever occurred in South Carolina, while other states saw Alliance members bolting their traditional parties in significant numbers. Despite those historians who have attributed this to a fear of allowing black voters to decide a contest between whites, and therefore increasing the socio-political status of African Americans, there is another legitimate reason for Populism’s failure in South Carolina. Ben Tillman had started a tirade against the Bourbon leaders as early as 1885; his Farmers’ Association of Reform Democrats provided an outlet of class rebellion among white farmers, without the unwelcome necessity of switching parties. South Carolina did not suffer from a greater case of Negrophobia than its neighboring Southern states. Although several scholars have insisted that Tillman’s appeal to class-consciousness among poor whites was nothing more than demagoguery and political bossism, the fact that he did win support of poor farmers, who genuinely believed he was their champion, must be recognized. Had Tillman not led a reform—symbolic, or actual—the farmers’ revolt in South Carolina might have been drastically different.

In 1876, after a deal with national Republican leaders and what might be described as a coup, Wade Hampton and other descendants of the state’s old, landed families, reclaimed the state government and brought Reconstruction to an end. These “Redeemers” (also called Bourbons and Conservatives) were different from their counterparts in the other former Confederate states. Whereas the Redeemers of other

Southern states were often young, former Whigs, with the goal of bringing industry and Northern capital to their regions, the Wade Hampton regime was a true return to the antebellum system. Land-ownership and agriculture were the business of the South Carolina Bourbons. They ran the state with no interest in social or political progress, no modernization or industrial buildup. The Conservative regime was true to its name.³⁹

Ben Tillman, the future governor and senator from Edgefield County, was among the most adamant among the ranks of those who helped redeem the state to this Bourbon rule. Born in 1847, Tillman received a large chunk of land from his mother when he came of age; his father had died when Benjamin was only two years old. By 1881 he owned twenty-two hundred acres and employed thirty plow-hands, mostly former slaves.⁴⁰ Agriculture was Tillman's beloved occupation, but he was also deeply involved in the redemption movement during Reconstruction. As a member of the Sweetwater Saber Club from 1873 to 1877, Tillman helped terrorize potential black voters and was involved in the infamous Hamburg massacre, in which at least six black militiamen were murdered.⁴¹ Although Tillman had labored for the return of Wade Hampton's regime, by the mid-1880's he was clearly unsatisfied with its rule, and subsequently began a furious campaign for reform in favor of lower class farmers.

Tillman helped to found the Edgefield Agricultural Society in 1885. It was here that he first began to polarize friends and enemies with his confrontational style of

³⁹ Edgar, 407-8. See William J. Cooper, *The Conservative Regime, South Carolina, 1887-1890* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968)

⁴⁰ Edgar, 432.

⁴¹ For a fuller description of the Hamburg Massacre, or Riot see Kantrowitz, 64-71; and Simkins, 61-64.

rhetoric and his domineering character. Tillman perceived grave mistakes being made by farmers who were torturing the land with inefficient techniques, as well as a corrupt government that was allegedly content to keep the mass of dirt farmers in perpetual poverty. Tillman's first public foray into criticizing the Bourbon regime came at Bennettsville in 1885, at the annual meeting of the Grange and South Carolina Agricultural and Mechanical Association.⁴² At Bennettsville Tillman violently harangued the state leaders, accusing them of being "demagogues and lawyers in the pay of finance."⁴³ Furthermore, he deprecated their ostensible attempts at aid to farmers—such as the Agricultural Bureau and the agricultural department at the South Carolina College—as "sops" and "bribes" intended to keep the farmers in their place.⁴⁴ Although state agricultural leaders were not much moved by his offer of five proposals to better agricultural education, Tillman had definitely found a following. The hundreds of farmers in the Bennettsville crowd thunderously cheered his attacks on the Conservative regime; they loved his unpretentious manner, his fierce character, and his straight talk. Even Narcisco G. Gonzales, a reporter for the Charleston *News and Courier* who would later become one of Tillman's staunchest enemies, wrote that, "Mr. Tillman defended his resolutions in a speech full of hard sense, keen satire, and good-humored bandiage."⁴⁵ At Bennettsville a reformer, or a demagogue, had indeed been born.

Tillman continued his attacks on the Bourbon establishment at the first of his farmers' conventions on April 29, 1886. Tillman created these annual conventions for

⁴² Edgar, 432-3; Church, 9;

⁴³ Tillman at Bennettsville, 1885, quoted in Edgar, 433.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *News and Courier*, August 1885, quoted in Edgar, 433.

dissatisfied farmers, but they also served as the political machine that eventually propelled him to the highest office in the state. Although historians have dismissed Tillman's reform message and attacks on the Bourbons as political theatrics, it is important to realize that Tillman was indeed a symbol of the lower class bitterness towards the ruling elite. Tillman has been criticized for not really being a "dirt farmer" as he suggested, and being in reality quite conservative.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, it is mistaken to dismiss dramatic rhetoric and posturing, because these were the tools by which Tillman overthrew the Bourbons and prevented a potential third-party split. Tillman may not have implemented any programs that could be termed "radical." He did, however, make a grand show of the frustrations of lower class farmers against the privileged class. Tillman's rough demeanor and salty tongue convinced thousands of actual dirt farmers that somebody was fighting in their interest—he was a symbolic savior.

Tillman was a master at arousing the emotion of the white masses against lawyers, corrupt politicians, and the landed gentry of the Lowcountry. His unkempt clothing, untamed hair, and penchant for coarse language were crucial in the white masses' identification with him. A close friend of Tillman's, the Reverend S.L. Morris, described Tillman's "conspicuous untidiness," as well as his "tremendous head, and bushy hair, which hung down to his shoulders."⁴⁷ Newspapers ill-disposed to the often profane orator advised women to avoid Tillman's campaign meetings for fear of "having their modesty shocked and their sex insulted."⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Benjamin Tillman

⁴⁶ Edgar, 432.

⁴⁷ Orville Vernon Burton, intro to *Pitchfork Ben Tillman* by F.B. Simkins, xiv.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Kantrowitz, 133.

enjoyed a mass following that identified with his style. According to Francis B. Simkins, “farmers for the first time in the history of South Carolina were given the opportunity of being led by one who looked at life from their angle, who was like them in personal appearance, speech, and manners, and who expressed their ideals and prejudices.”⁴⁹ Out of the farmers’ conventions grew the Farmer’s Association, a group of Tillman’s supporters also known as Reform Democrats, and later simply as Tillmanites. Tillman’s ultimate political power may have benefited from calloused maneuvering and uncompromising intra-party rule, but his popularity with the common folk was surely based on his flamboyant attacks on the Bourbon regime.

Tillman symbolized the resentment of the populace against perceived aristocrats—especially in the form of Upstate resentment of the Lowcountry. He derided the South Carolina College, basically a liberal arts school with an insignificant agricultural annex, as a haven for effete dandies. He and his Farmers’ Association repeatedly called for The Citadel, the military college which he labeled a “dude factory,” to be closed, and for its buildings to be used as an industrial college for girls.⁵⁰ Obviously this proposal never came to fruition, but to dismiss the notions as the senseless blustering of a demagogue is to miss the symbolic weight that it carried with common people. In verbally assaulting The Citadel, Tillman was taking on the established institution of socio-political hierarchy within the state. He may have been powerless to implement his argument against the schools, but in establishing himself as an opponent of

⁴⁹ Simkins, 131-2.

⁵⁰ Kantrowitz, 118-19; Edgar, 434.

the historically conservative elite class, he set the stage for what appeared to be a revolution when he won the governorship in 1890.

In January 1890 the president of the Farmer's Association, G. W. Shell, published the famous "Shell Manifesto," a document likely penned by Tillman. The Manifesto lambasted the Bourbon regime and called for a special farmers' convention in March to "suggest" candidates to the regular Democratic Party convention.⁵¹ Although the subsequent March convention was undertaken with dubious validity, the result was that Tillman be suggested as the Democratic candidate for governor, and in a one-party state the Party's nomination was essentially a sure victory. Tillman arranged for a series of county stump debates in which he vilified the Conservatives; his influence and support were so great that the once widely venerated Wade Hampton was shouted down from the stage at a meeting in Aiken. The extent of Tillman's actual radicalism is irrelevant; the fact is that he symbolized a second "redemption" by the white masses within the Democratic Party. Tillman's enemies even unintentionally assisted in his symbolic leadership of revolt by reacting so pointedly to his verbal abuse. Conservative leaders and newspaper editors criticized not only Tillman, but the lower class farmers whom he represented as well. By "describing Tillman's putative constituency in insulting and belittling terms, these leaders seemed to be precisely the callous aristocrats Tillman had charged them with being."⁵² Tillman went on to win two terms as governor before being elected to the United States Senate, where he remained until his death in 1918. Therefore Tillman, an uncouth rabble-rouser who effectively toppled the Conservative

⁵¹ Edgar, 434.

⁵² Kantrowitz, 6.

faction of the state, symbolized a triumph of the oppressed farmer that precluded a need for the third-party bolt that occurred in other states.

It has been suggested that Tillman's Reform movement was heavy on rhetoric and light on tangible results. Historians insist that the measures he took while in the governor's office were essentially mild and not threatening to the conservative wing of the state. This may seem to be the case. Nevertheless, by understanding the symbolic value of Tillman's efforts it becomes clear that he was giving would-be Populists enough reform to deter them from a party bolt. Actually, one of Tillman's most significant and lasting contributions to agriculture in the state came before he was even elected—this was Clemson Agricultural College. The symbolic importance of Clemson College is evident in the serious protestations it caused among the Conservative faction, who perceived it as a threat to the hallowed South Carolina College. Conservatives made several attempts to forestall Clemson's establishment, especially by supporting the claim and lawsuit of Thomas Green Clemson's granddaughter, who insisted that Fort Hill rightfully belonged to her.⁵³ After the Democratic Party Convention of 1890, a mob of students from the South Carolina College followed Tillman to his hotel chanting: "We'll Hang Ben Tillman on a Sour Apple Tree," and "Pass Around Tillman and We'll all Take a Kick."⁵⁴ Clearly the Conservatives despised Tillman for trying to tear down time-honored establishments. Ironically, their indignation only served to reinforce the beliefs of thousands of poor white farmers that he was their flag-bearer.

⁵³ Edgar, 435.

⁵⁴ *Charleston World*, March 28, April 2, 1890, quoted in Simkins, 146.

Along with tangible reform measures in state institutions and business, the symbolic figure of Ben Tillman as a tribune of the plebian class was the most important factor in the dearth of Populist activity in South Carolina. One of the crucial elements of his career that allowed him to maintain that status was his endorsement of Farmers' Alliance platforms. Tillman resented the Alliance's position in South Carolina, suspecting that the group was fomenting a third-party bolt. Nevertheless, he realized the Alliance carried too much weight to have as a political enemy. Tillman was particularly antagonistic to the sub-treasury plan; but after being bested in a debate with Alliance leader Ben Terrell of Texas in the summer of 1891, Tillman decided to endorse the sub-treasury plan, going as far as adopting it into the Democratic party platform for the 1892 elections.⁵⁵ Tillman vocally endorsed almost every demand made by the Alliance and the Populists themselves, although this was usually for political expediency. It has been justly noted by several historians that a significant chunk of the state Alliance did not endorse Tillman, yet the organization unequivocally approved of his most symbolic and tangible accomplishment. At the fourth annual state Alliance meeting, president J. William Stokes proclaimed that Clemson College was "one of the most desirable advance movements in the history of the state. Its opening marks an epoch in the progress of the institution, itself the noblest palsible [sic] monument to the intelligence, benevolence and patriotism of its projectors."⁵⁶ While he was not as radical as some of the more socialistic Populists, he effectively co-opted every plank of their platform, rendering a

⁵⁵ Simkins, 204-5.

⁵⁶ Conclusion of the message of the President of the S.C. Farmers' State Alliance at its fourth annual meeting at Spartanburg, S.C., July 22, 1891. [By J. William Stokes], p.100 in the volume of minutes

third party unnecessary. In fact, when Senator Tillman first arrived in Washington, many of his peers mistook him for a bona fide Populist. White solidarity was indeed a real factor in the South Carolina's politics, but class division among whites was also just as real.

Tillman's reform movement was large on rhetoric, but it was not only bluster and dramatized belligerence. While Tillman held the Governor's office he did enact tangible measures to ameliorate the white farmers' condition. Included in his list of achievements were: the founding of Clemson and Winthrop (for women) colleges, tax reforms, the establishment of a railroad commission capable of fixing rates, and accomplishment of greater white democracy through the switch to a party primary system.⁵⁷ Furthermore, his battle against monopolies in the phosphate mining industry, the reform of the state Lunatic Asylum, and the restructure of the Penitentiary proved his legitimacy as a reformer. While the farmers' plight was just as bad when Tillman left office as when he entered, many of the problems were beyond his power to fix. Francis B. Simkins insists that he should not be judged by modern standards. "[He] came before socialist practices. Measured according to the standards of his day, he was the most successful governor South Carolina has ever had."⁵⁸

Ben Tillman was admittedly an integral factor in the oppression of African Americans in South Carolina that survived him for many decades. It was not, however, Tillman's appeal to white supremacy that kept a Populist movement from springing forth in South Carolina. It was instead the combination of tangible reform, his rough

⁵⁷ Simkins, 233.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

appearance and identification with poor farmers, his violent tirades against Conservative “dandies”, and his co-opting of Farmer’s Alliance and Populist Party platforms that precluded a third-party bolt within the state. He argued and cast blame enough, and realized enough concrete results, to convince a majority of white South Carolinians they had a populist reformer right in the Democratic ranks. The Alliancemen and the Populists were out for reform, and according to the Tillmanites, they had achieved just that without the need for a party change. Populists in other states did court the African-American vote, but only because the reform-minded of them were not able to usurp the leadership of their own parties first.

Much has been written about the radical leaders of other Southern states, such as notable Populists Tom Watson of Georgia and Leonidas Lafayette Polk of North Carolina. Additionally, historians like Stephen Kantrowitz have suggested that Populism was at its core a “biracial movement,” and that the Tillman movement was simply a white-supremacist reaction to progress.⁵⁹ Kantrowitz’s language proposes that Populists were benevolent and enlightened, while non-Populists, especially in South Carolina, were so consumed by racism that they deliberately avoided bettering their own situation through a third-party movement because it would inevitably lead to racial equality. Kantrowitz and others, however, have denied the importance of Ben Tillman as a symbol of reform, overestimated the compassion of the Populists, and overstated the strategy of the Farmers’ Alliance in the South.

⁵⁹ Kantrowitz, “Ben Tillman and Hendrix McLane,” 498.

Tom Watson, the Georgia lawyer turned Populist demagogue, is often cited as a Southern example of what South Carolina lacked, a politician willing to be radical enough for real agricultural reform. Watson sought African American's votes—although later in his life he became violently racist.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, historian Randolph Werner suggests that Watson's and other party-bolters might have had other motivations than honest reform and biracial cooperation. Werner contends that "Watson's call for men to join the People's Party may have been driven less by programmatic issues like rural poverty, the dispossessed, tariffs, or the sub-treasury plan than it was by the sense of betrayal that he and others felt towards opportunists . . . [who were] willing to accommodate metropolitan interests in return for investments in their city."⁶¹ Therefore, according to Werner, Watson and other Georgia Populists had motives similar to the Tillmanites, who were angered by the aforementioned problems, but were also rankled by Conservative leadership that did nothing to help their plight. The primary difference was that Watson was unable to oust the Bourbon regime from Democratic leadership in Georgia. This theory contradicts the notion that South Carolina nurtured a unique and more powerful brand of white supremacy than her neighbors.

It is also significant to note that the Alliance, the forerunner of Populism, was not a crusade for racial equality. In fact, the Alliance understood the racial situation and Democratic loyalty in the region, and did not initially urge a party bolt. John D. Hicks

⁶⁰ For an in-depth examination of Tom Watson, see C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York: 1938); see also Randolph D. Werner, "The New South Creed and the Limits of Radicalism: Augusta, Georgia, before the 1890's," *The Journal of Southern History*, 67:3 (2001), 586-600.

⁶¹ Werner, 596.

wrote that “there [in the South] third-party action was scarcely thought of; instead, control of the Democratic Party by the Alliance was the goal.”⁶² The Populists themselves did not always favor racial equality—they simply needed black voters for any chance at victory. In 1896 the *People’s Weekly Tribune*, a Populist organ in Birmingham, Alabama, boasted that “no Negro was ever promised any political position by the Populists,” and that “no Negro ever held a seat in any Populist Convention in Alabama.”⁶³ Again, it is clear that Populism did exist even where white supremacy was the norm.

Well before Ben Tillman began his assault on the Bourbon regime at Bennettsville, there was already a strong desire in the South to keep any reforms within the family. In 1883 the Alliance organ in North Carolina insisted that “if the farmers of the U.S. had voted continuously with the Democratic Party since the war,” the farmers would not be suffering from trusts, money shortages, etc.⁶⁴ Democratic solidarity was the standard in the South, not the exception. Despite what most historians have recently agreed upon, Benjamin Tillman was indeed a revolutionary figure—even if only symbolically. He pandered to the populace when those before him had “held themselves aloof,” unwilling to deign to hear to needs of common men.⁶⁵ To answer those who criticize Tillman’s lack of tangible reform, and conclude that his success was therefore due to political machinations, and not support of the populace, one need remember the

⁶² Hicks, 170.

⁶³ Reprinted from *People’s Weekly Tribune* (Birmingham), June 4, 1896. Alabama Department of Archives and History. Quoted in *The Populist Mind*, ed. Norman Pollack (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1967) 392-3.

⁶⁴ *Ashville Daily Citizen*, September 21, 1883.

⁶⁵ Orville Vernon Burton, Intro to *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, by Simkins, xx.

farmers' perception of government at the time. Homer Clevenger insists, "The nature of the farming enterprise made farmers individualists and conservatives."⁶⁶ Farmers followed Jefferson's maxim that "The least government is the best government."⁶⁷ Tillman's supporters, even those among the Alliance, may have roared at times for government action, but they were still essentially against too much government in their business.

Ben Tillman, scowling, shouting, and poking with his pitchfork, was the symbol that white South Carolinians wanted, though they might have needed railroad restrictions, free silver, and rain. For the mass of lower class whites, however, a symbolic champion who cast effete dandies from office, and enacted some meaningful legislation in their favor, was enough to satiate their anger towards a corrupt system. Take Tillman out of the equation and the sum changes. If there had not been a Tillman to overtake the Bourbon regime, as in most Southern states, or if no one had beaten the Populists to the mark and co-opted their platform, South Carolina would likely have had the same Populist movement as her neighbors. When A.C. Haskell and his supporters, the "Straightout Democrats," ran against Tillman in 1890, they openly sought African American voters. Despite the specter of racial fusion and a party split, the Haskellites won roughly ten thousand votes. As Francis B. Simkins suggests, this is proof of "the avid disesteem in which Tillman was held in certain circles."⁶⁸ It is, however, also proof that the idea of courting black voters was not unapproachable when candidates were

⁶⁶ Clevenger, 506.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Simkins, 168.

backed into a corner. The farmers of the Tillman movement might just have bolted in the same manner, had a wild and foul-mouthed agitator not toppled the old regime and provided them with a friendly symbol at the head of their traditional party.

TILLMAN AND THE CREATION OF CLEMSON COLLEGE

The initial foray of Benjamin Tillman into agricultural reform at Bennettsville in 1885 may have seemed unnecessarily strident to the genteel politicians of the Conservative clique, but his unorthodox ideas and aggressive approach initiated what is perhaps his most enduring legacy, the agricultural college now known as Clemson University. Tillman raged against inept state institutions that failed to benefit South Carolina's downtrodden soil tillers. He was motivated by a genuine disgust of the inefficient farming practices that were commonplace, and insisted on an institution of practical and scientific instruction to improve agricultural techniques. Tillman and his devotees resented the South Carolina College and the Military Institute known as The Citadel, which they perceived as snobbish and incongruous with the real needs of the state. Nevertheless, it was not merely spite that drove Tillman to push for agricultural education. He genuinely believed a separate agricultural college was the best chance of elevating the prosperity of the citizens of largely rural South Carolina, who were sinking in a debilitating cycle of soil-exhausting cotton production. Despite formidable opposition, but aided by the death of Thomas G. Clemson and his subsequent will, the Tillman faction achieved the goal of a separate agricultural college before he was elected governor in 1890. By playing such a significant role in the founding of Clemson College, Tillman proved he was not simply a political boss or demagogue, but was the most progressive statesman that post-Reconstruction South Carolina could have realistically produced.

About 1881 Ben Tillman began to realize the necessity for agricultural education when a series of droughts, insect infestations, and constantly fluctuating cotton prices caused him, for the first time in his farming career, to lose money. He concluded that Northern despotism and inequitable tariffs were not alone culpable for the southern farmers' plight, but that his and his compatriots' fundamental approach to farming was altogether wrongheaded. Tillman began to recognize that "the lack of rotation and the constant plowing of the soil leaving it bare to the winter rains, could only result in final and complete impoverishment . . . with resulting pauperism to the land owner."¹ He decided that he was "woefully ignorant" of the necessary knowledge for successful farming, and that the "agricultural masses" of South Carolina were in dire need of industrial training to improve their sorry financial conditions.²

While Tillman found many faults with the conservative, aristocratic leaders of the state, it was not class-based enmity or sectionalism that drove him to the public forum. Rather, it was Tillman's sincere determination to remedy the farmers' predicament, and he was thoroughly convinced that agricultural education was the most indispensable ingredient in rectifying the situation in South Carolina. Subsequently, the debate over an agricultural institution separate from the South Carolina College became the state's primary political issue from 1886 to 1889.³

¹ Benjamin Ryan Tillman, *The Origin of Clemson College*; with introduction and reminiscences of the first class and the opening of the college by his son, B. R. Tillman, who was a member of the first class (Class of 1896), (Winston Salem, 1941), 3.

² Ibid.

³ William J. Cooper, *The Conservative Regime, South Carolina, 1887-1890* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), 157.

Although the predominant industry of South Carolina had always been agriculture, until Tillman's "farmers' movement" in the mid-1880's there had been few efforts at educating farmers or providing practical training. However, there had been some attempts by planters to organize and improve farming methods. In August 1785 coastal planters established the South Carolina Society for Promoting and Improving Agriculture and Other Rural Concerns. This organization eventually developed into the Agricultural Society of South Carolina, which Tillman insisted was dominated by professional men and existed only to supply offices to wealthy politicians.⁴ The state's primary institution of higher education, South Carolina College, which had opened in 1804, provided students with a literary and classical curriculum.

Those whom Tillman perceived as wealthy aristocrats revered the college as near sacred. However, during Reconstruction and Republican rule, state lawmakers in the 1868 South Carolina constitution mandated that "all the public schools, colleges, and universities of this State, supported in the whole or part by the public funds, shall be free and open to all the children of this State, without regard to the race or color."⁵ The specter of "negro domination" loomed over the school, which in 1869 Republicans reorganized as a university, and the board of trustees admitted two African-American members, F. L. Cardozo and B. A. Bozeman. Subsequently, many white students left for other institutions, including South Carolina's several denominational colleges, as well as universities outside of the state. Furthermore, the school's faculty began to resign at an

⁴ David Duncan Wallace, *South Carolina: A Short History, 1520-1948* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1951), 361; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 152.

⁵ Edwin L. Green, *A History of the University of South Carolina* (Columbia, SC: The State Company, 1916), 92.

alarming rate. On October 7, 1873, Henry E. Hayne, a black man who was also the current secretary of state, enrolled in the medical school, prompting the single remaining professor from the ante-bellum faculty, Maximilian LaBorde, to resign.⁶

After Democrats regained control of state in 1877, they closed the college until 1880, when enough funds could be appropriated to reopen the school with loyal party members in control. Significantly, when the school reopened in 1880, it did so under the new name of the South Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanics. Nevertheless, the so-called agricultural college lasted only two years—with no graduates—until it was reestablished as the South Carolina College, with an emphasis again on classical education. Furthermore, historian Daniel Walker Hollis insists that even in the years of 1880-1882, “it does not appear that the chief interest of the faculty and students was in the field of agriculture or mechanics.”⁷

When Tillman began his assaults on the old guard, he did not initially demand a separate agricultural school. His proposals at Bennettsville in August 1885 were almost entirely focused on improving the state’s means of educating its farmers. At the joint meeting of the South Carolina Agricultural and Mechanical Society and the state Grange, after angrily castigating the haughty and corrupt officials in the current government, Tillman offered four proposals to benefit South Carolina farmers. First, he insisted on an experimental farm where modern techniques could be tested, and the resulting

⁶ Ibid., 92-95..

⁷ Daniel Walker Hollis, *College to University*, Vol. II: *University of South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1951-1956), 96; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 41-42; Sarah Edna Holleman, “Contributions of Benjamin Ryan Tillman to Higher Education for White Men of South Carolina from 1885 to 1895,” (unpublished Masters thesis, Dept. of Education, Clemson Agricultural College, 1952), 5.

information disseminated for practical use. Tillman also suggested that the South Carolina College—which he contended provided sufficient liberal education and training for lawyers, but was of no practical value to the agricultural classes—be converted into “a real agricultural institution.”⁸ He declared that the agricultural department of the South Carolina College was a mere “sop to Cerberus, a bribe to maintain support of farmers in the legislature,” and accused the college’s trustees of misappropriating federal land-grant funds to finance “literary education.”⁹ The two final resolutions dealt with restructuring the Board of Agriculture, which Tillman found to be a worthless distributor of weather and crop reports, and establishing farmers’ institutes. Tillman urged the restructure of the Board of Agriculture to include one farmer per congressional district, and he suggested that only actual farmers should direct a farmers’ institute.¹⁰ The convention accepted only one of Tillman’s resolutions, the creation of an experimental station, and tabled the rest. Many present were openly shocked and offended by Tillman’s criticisms of the Conservative leadership, and the Edgefield farmer went home in a bitter temper.¹¹

Although Tillman’s Bennettsville speech had offended Conservative leaders, lower-class farmers rallied to his words and he gained a following that spread across the

⁸ Charleston *News and Courier*, August 7, 1885; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 145; Neal, *Tillman: the South Carolina Years*, 52-53; Joseph J. Lawton, “Benjamin Ryan Tillman and Agricultural Education, The “Farmers’ College” in South Carolina Politics, 1885-1889,” (unpublished Senior thesis, Dept. of History, Princeton University, 1954), 22.

⁹ Charleston *News and Courier*, August 7, 1885; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 144; Lawton, “Farmers’ College”, 22.

¹⁰ Charleston *News and Courier*, August 7, 1885; Neal, *Tillman: the South Carolina Years*, 52-53.

¹¹ Tillman, *Origin of Clemson*, 4; Lawton, “Farmers’ College”, 22; Neal, *Tillman: the South Carolina Years*, 52-53.

state. Furthermore, Tillman continued his attacks on Conservatives in a lengthy series of letters to the *Charleston News and Courier*. He also changed a key component of his initial resolutions in that he no longer called for a restructuring of the South Carolina College, but proposed instead an entirely separate college devoted to agricultural and mechanical studies. He asserted that there was not enough arable land around Columbia to sustain an efficient agricultural college, and therefore the “corpse of agricultural education” should be exhumed from Columbia and replanted in “some healthy up-country county” where it might prosper.¹² In 1886 Tillman and his Farmers’ Association—a statewide organization of farmers who sought political and governmental redress of their grievances—took up the issue of a separate agricultural college with fervor.

To some it seemed the issue was just a political ploy by the Tillman faction to oust Conservatives from office and destroy the South Carolina College. While pressing the college issue Tillman in fact vigorously denounced as corrupt the state leaders. Furthermore, he accused the South Carolina College’s administration of unscrupulousness and prophesied its possible downfall. One of the biggest problems Tillman had with the Columbia school was that it offered agricultural education through an “annex” as a way of procuring the federal funds provided through the Morrill Land Grant Act. The fiery agitator denounced the college, saying that “it is agricultural and mechanical when money is to be received; it is classical and literary when money is to be spent.” Additionally, Tillman insisted college trustees relinquish their claims to the land-

¹² *Charleston News and Courier*, November 19, 1885; Lawton, “Farmers’ College”, 23.

grant money “before the storm, which is brewing, shakes the foundations of their beloved College, and perhaps, topples it to the ground.”¹³

Tillman’s barrages against the South Carolina College won him much support among the poorer classes of whites, but also alienated potential supporters among the state’s leadership. Several Conservative leaders, including the former governor Johnson Hagood, expressed a genuine desire for a separate agricultural college. Nevertheless, they refused to support the idea in light of Tillman’s harsh attacks on Conservatives. Hagood declared that while he felt that “collegiate teaching of scientific and practical agriculture . . . [would] best be done in a separate school,” while the farmers’ movement maintained the direction it had chosen of attacking venerable state personalities and institutions, he felt forbidden from “joining hands with it.”¹⁴

It is crucial to stress that Tillman’s interest in agricultural education was more than a tool for political gains. Tillman studied the progress of other schools, including the Michigan Agricultural College in Lansing, and the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Mississippi in Starkville. After researching these and other agricultural colleges he became firmly convinced that a separate college was necessary, and not an agricultural addition to an existing institution. Tillman wrote that he found the agricultural colleges in Michigan and Mississippi to be “so far in advance of any of the

¹³ Charleston *News and Courier*, November 19 and 30, 1885; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 157. The Morrill Act of 1862, named for Senator Justin S. Morrill, offered states 30,000 acres of federal land for each Congressional representative they possessed. The proceeds from the sale of said lands were to be used for education in agriculture, engineering, and military science. The lands were given to existing institutions in some states, while in others new agricultural and mechanical colleges were established. Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 157-58.

¹⁴ Quoted by Tillman in a letter to the Charleston *News and Courier*, October 23, 1886; Lawton, “Farmers’ College”, 24-25.

other hybrid institutions, that [he] appealed with all the power [he] possessed for the founding of a similar institution in South Carolina.”¹⁵ His belief in the necessity of a separate school for agricultural studies was only strengthened by a series of correspondence with General Stephen D. Lee, president of the agricultural college in Mississippi. Tillman sent Lee a copy of his speech at Bennettsville, and Lee’s response stressed the importance of a separate institution with administrators and instructors who understood the farmer’s life. According to Lee, the problem with “hybrid” colleges was rooted in the “literary professors who have been put in charge of agricultural colleges—men not in sympathy with agriculture or the industrial classes in any way, men who have always made their living with their brains and having no belief in any other than a literary training, or sympathy with labor—hence their general failure.”¹⁶ It is clear that Tillman did not begin the push for a separate agricultural college out of mere spite for the state’s Conservative leaders. Rather, he personally investigated the varying degrees of success of other schools, and came to a reasoned conclusion that a separate agricultural college was in the best interest of South Carolina farmers.

Tillman did win the approval of many South Carolina farmers by championing the agricultural college. In his own words, “many hundreds of men from all over the State whom I had never seen” sent him letters of endorsement for his ideas.¹⁷ Nevertheless, an ironic twist within the movement he had initiated almost thwarted the creation of an agricultural college. In April 1886 Tillman’s harangues against the state’s leaders led to

¹⁵ Tillman, *Origin of Clemson*, 4.

¹⁶ Charleston *News and Courier*, November 19, 1885; Holleman, “Contributions of Tillman,” 37-38; see also Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 157-58.

¹⁷ Tillman, *Origin of Clemson*, 4.

a farmers' convention in Columbia, where he was elected Chairman of the Executive Committee. Farmers from throughout the state voted to create an annual convention in November known as the Farmers' Association that would stress their demands to the state government.¹⁸ The Farmers' Association would be maintained in local county chapters. The overwhelming majority of delegates to the 1886 convention agreed on most issues, especially the establishment of a separate agricultural college that would be controlled by a reorganized Board of Agriculture and funded by the doubling of the privilege tax on fertilizers.¹⁹

Tillman insisted that each local Farmers' Association espouse as its first plank "the establishment of a real agricultural college, separate and distinct from the South Carolina College."²⁰ However, another significant goal of many farmers was retrenchment in the state government. During deliberation before the 1886 legislative elections, several county organizations stressed the importance of economic government over that of the agricultural college. Conventions in Laurens and Greenville counties, which were both hotbeds of the Tillman movement on most issues, emphasized retrenchment and ignored the college issue altogether. Surprisingly, the Farmers' Association convention in Spartanburg repudiated the separate college idea outright.²¹ Despite the lack of unity on the agricultural college, the majority of farmers still supported the plan, and Tillman continued to push the idea vigorously. On October 31,

¹⁸ Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 146-47; Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 104-105.

¹⁹ *Charleston News and Courier*, April 30, 1886; Holleman, "Contributions of Tillman," 42-45;

²⁰ *Charleston News and Courier*, November 11, 1886; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 157-58.

²¹ *Spartanburg Carolina Spartan*, July 21, 1886; Lawton, "Farmers' College", 45; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 158.

1887, he spoke in Barnwell, home of his political enemy, Senator Lawrence W. Youmans. To the well-oiled and supportive crowd Tillman thundered that ignorance was the blame for their plight, and he further advocated an agricultural college, nominating himself as trustee.²²

The near demise of the separate agricultural college came about from a combination of legislative maneuvers designed by Conservative politicians to prohibit the funding of the proposed school. In December 1886 the senate defeated the Farmers' Association's proposal to reorganize the Agricultural Bureau with members elected by the farmers' convention rather than the legislature. However, they feared what reaction a complete defeat of farmers' demands might bring. Conservative representatives proposed submitting the idea of an experimental station for conducting research that would benefit the agrarian community. However, they included an amendment that created two stations—one in Spartanburg and one in Darlington—so that neither one would become large enough to eventually grow into a college without threatening the other.²³ The Farmers' Association had urged the experimental station by insisting that the Hatch Bill, which would soon pass in the U.S. Congress, would provide sufficient funding for the station. The Hatch Act of 1887 supplied each state with \$15,000 annually to support an agricultural experiment station. Nevertheless, by splitting funds and creating two stations, South Carolina Conservatives were not bending to the will of the farmers, but instead ensuring that no significant reform was manifested.²⁴

²² *Keowee Courier*, November 10, 1887; Holleman, "Contributions of Tillman," 45.

²³ *Charleston News and Courier*, December 18 and 24, 1886; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 156.

²⁴ Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 156.

The defeat of the Farmer's Association's demands to reorganize the Agricultural Bureau had other ramifications for the Tillman movement than that of simply sustaining a Conservative-operated body. It also killed almost any hope of funding a separate agricultural college. The Farmers' Association proposed to fund the Agricultural Bureau—which would in turn operate the agricultural college—with the Morrill land-grant funds, the Hatch money, and the license tax on fertilizer sales. By defeating the proposal, Conservatives ensured that the current system would remain, whereby the South Carolina College's agricultural school received the Morrill funds, the experimental stations collected the Hatch appropriations, and the Agricultural Bureau operated on the fertilizer tax.²⁵ Furthermore, the only remaining option for financing a separate agricultural college would be through increased taxation, which was anathema to cash-starved farmers. Consequently, in 1887 a bill proposing the separate college received only four affirmative votes. Senator W.J. Talbert, a prominent Tillman backer from Edgefield, explained that he had voted against the college proposal because the people had not approved new expenditures.²⁶

What seemed to be the coup de grace for Tillman's college, and possibly his public career, was the transformation of the South Carolina College into the University of South Carolina. In the latter months of 1887, John M. McBryde, president of South Carolina College, arranged a plan together with the college's trustees to seize the

²⁵ Lawton, "Farmers' College", 48-49; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 158.

²⁶ *Journal of the Senate of the State of South Carolina*, 1887, 254.

momentum building among Tillman supporters for an agricultural institution.²⁷ McBryde argued the opposite side of Tillman's justification. He insisted that agricultural and mechanical training could be better taught in conjunction with a liberal arts curriculum, rather than in a separate institution. McBryde cited the examples of Cornell University and the University of California as proof that his proposed version of education would be successful. He proffered a plan to convert the South Carolina College into the University of South Carolina, which would include a bolstered agricultural school and subsequently acquire both the Morrill and Hatch funds that Tillman wanted for his school.²⁸

The Board of Trustees in Columbia approved the McBryde scheme, and began to rally Conservative leaders and the public to their cause. Former Confederate General and U.S. Representative John Bratton issued a public letter in the *Charleston News and Courier* declaring his support of the transformation of the South Carolina College, which he insisted would provide a "centralized unified system" of education.²⁹ Governor J. P. Richardson endorsed the University plan to the legislature, contending that it would serve to remedy the problems caused by the agricultural college issue that was dividing the Democratic Party. Despite the efforts of Tillman's followers, lawmakers passed the University bill before the end of 1887. The new University of South Carolina contained colleges of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts, Pharmacy, Law, Normal Education, and

²⁷ The South Carolina College's Board of Trustees was comprised of such notable Conservatives as John Haskell, John Bratton, Charles Simonton, James F. Izlar, Johnson Hagood, and Governor J. P. Richardson. Minutes of the Board of Trustees of the University of South Carolina, IX and X, South Caroliniana Library, cited in Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 160.

²⁸ Hollis, *College to University*, 136, 139, 145-46; "Report to the Board of Trustees of the University of South Carolina," *Reports and Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina*, 1886, Special Collections, Clemson University Libraries; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 160-61.

²⁹ *Charleston News and Courier*, November 29, 1887; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 161.

Liberal Arts and Sciences. For all but the most ardent devotees to Tillman's separate college, the Conservative's announcements that the newly reorganized school would cost approximately \$100,000 less than a separate school convinced the public that the plan made sense.³⁰

The creation of the University nearly spelled the end of Tillman's political career. In January 1888, announcing his retirement to farming life near Edgefield, Tillman delivered his farewell letter in the *Charleston News and Courier*, insisting that he could not "afford the costly luxury of 'reform' any longer."³¹ Tillman's apparent withdrawal from politics precipitated mixed responses across South Carolina, many of which were reprinted from small newspapers in the *News and Courier*. The *Aiken Recorder* seemed to delight in the agitator's retirement, writing, "It is the valedictory of a disappointed politician, who failed, utterly failed, in his grotesque masquerade as the champion of farmers' rights because he deserved to fail." However, this did not indicate popular sentiment. The *Newberry Observer* commended Tillman on his genuine and unselfish motives behind the pursuit of a farmers' college, and the *Timmons ville Farmers' Friend* exhorted its readers to "all unite . . . in urging Capt. Tillman to resume the field as leader of the farmers' movement."³²

During his relatively brief absence from public life, many farmers' clubs and county chapters of the Farmers' Association continued to castigate the Conservatives

³⁰ *Senate Journal*, 1887, 10-11; *Acts and Joint Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina*, 1888, 802-806, 843; *Charleston News and Courier*, December, 1, 3, 9-10, 13-15, 1887; Hollis, *College to University*, 143-146; Neal, *Tillman: the South Carolina Years*, 104-105.

³¹ *Charleston News and Courier*, January 26, 1888; Holleman, "Contributions of Tillman," 46.

³² Quoted in the *Charleston News and Courier*, February 13, 1888; Holleman, "Contributions of Tillman," 47; Neal, *Tillman: the South Carolina Years*, 108-109.

who had quashed the dream of an agricultural college.³³ Although this sentiment was a factor in Tillman's eventual return to the reform movement, it was ironically the death of one of South Carolina's leading advocates of the separate agricultural college that propelled Tillman back into the fight with renewed zeal. On April 2, 1888, Thomas Green Clemson died, leaving his Fort Hill property of 814 acres in Oconee County, along with roughly \$80,000, to the state for the establishment of a separate agricultural college. Clemson, the son-in-law of John C. Calhoun, who originally hailed from Pennsylvania, had spent time in Belgium studying agricultural techniques, and also in 1859 played a role in the founding of Maryland Agricultural College. Furthermore, Clemson briefly served as the Superintendent of Agricultural Affairs of the United States until 1861 when he enlisted in the Confederate Army.³⁴

In 1886, shortly after Tillman had taken up the farmers' cause of an agricultural college, Clemson had invited the Edgefield rabble-rouser, along with Daniel. K. Norris and Richard W. Simpson, both prominent upstate proponents of a separate agricultural college, to Fort Hill in order to discuss changes to Clemson's will and the ultimate fate of his estate. According to Tillman, during his overnight visit to Fort Hill, Clemson showed the guests his will. It had originally been intended to establish Fort Hill as a sort of Mount Vernon, a place of pilgrimage for the many admirers of the venerable John C. Calhoun. Although his ideas were not "clear or well defined" Clemson favored

³³ Orangeburg *Times and Democrat*, March 14, April 4, 1888; Spartanburg *Carolina Spartan*, February 15, 22, 1888; Neal, *Tillman: the South Carolina Years*, 109.

³⁴ Alester G. Holmes and George H. Sherill, *Thomas Green Clemson: His Life and Work* (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1937), 14-15, 157-79, 193-201; Neal, *Tillman: the South Carolina Years*, 109-10; Holleman, "Contributions of Tillman," 48-49; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 162.

establishing an agricultural and technical institution of education. Tillman assured the elderly Clemson that the state would accept the donation of his property and begin work on an agricultural college during his lifetime. However, Tillman later wrote that Clemson was “the most suspicious man in regard to lawyers and the dangers of getting involved with lawsuits [he had] ever met, and nothing [they] could say made any impression upon him to take immediate action.”³⁵

Just how reliable Tillman’s account is of the 1886 meeting is debatable, because Clemson’s 1883 will had called for the establishment of a scientific institution—this would have hardly resembled a Mount Vernon for Calhoun.³⁶ Nevertheless, Clemson did reshape his will to create an institute “to be modeled after the Agricultural College of Mississippi as far as practicable.”³⁷ This stipulation of Clemson’s will proves that he and Tillman were thinking along the same lines, because Tillman was in correspondence with Stephen D. Lee, president of the Mississippi college. Finally, Tillman, along with Simpson and Norris, convinced Clemson to provide in his will a Board of Trustees, seven of which would be life trustees who would be chosen by Clemson and would subsequently choose their own successors, so that the state could not control the college. Tillman and his peers feared that if the legislature had control of the school it might eventually be turned into a literary institution, or even opened to black students.³⁸

³⁵ Tillman, *Origin of Clemson*, 7-8.

³⁶ “The Will of Thomas Green Clemson,” reprinted in Alester G. Holmes and George H. Sherill, *Thomas Green Clemson: His Life and Work* (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1937), 193-201; also found in “About Clemson”, History, Clemson University Website, <http://www.clemson.edu/about/history/will.html> (March 3, 2008)

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ Tillman, *Origin of Clemson*, 7-8; Neal, *Tillman: the South Carolina Years*, 110-11.

The death of Thomas Green Clemson brought the issue of a separate agricultural college, as well as Tillman's political career, back to life in full force. Tillman called a meeting of the executive committee of the Farmers' Association, and they consulted on April 20 at the Central Hotel in Columbia.³⁹ Subsequently, in an "Address to the Farmers of the State," published in leading newspapers on April 26, the committee decided to beseech the public and the state to accept "the munificent bequest of Mr. Clemson."⁴⁰ Significantly, they now had the perfect counterpoint to those who had argued that the agricultural college would necessitate a tax increase. In addition to the money and land donated by Clemson, the Tillman faction noted that the license tax on fertilizer, as well as the federal grant monies, still rightfully belonged to the farmers, and not the University of South Carolina. The Farmers' Association also implored its agrarian supporters to choose legislators in the 1888 elections who backed the college proposal, and to denounce any candidate who was unwilling to openly endorse the acceptance of Clemson's will.⁴¹ The *Edgefield Chronicle* typified much public sentiment by writing that before Clemson's death the lack of funds for supporting a separate agricultural college was a justifiable reason for avoiding such a plan. However, the generous gift to the state invalidated the previous reasoning, and should be employed for the purpose he stipulated.⁴² In the *News and Courier* the Greenville County Farmers' Association issued a public "call [to] all who sympathize with the farmers of the State . . . to join with us in

³⁹ Charleston *News and Courier*, April 21-22, 1888; Lawton, "Farmers' College," 56.

⁴⁰ Charleston *News and Courier*, April 26, 1888; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 162.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Edgefield Chronicle*, May 2, 1888; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 163.

making the establishment of an agricultural college, without increasing taxation, the issue in the coming Democratic primaries.⁴³

The Clemson bequest had put the agricultural college issue on the political forefront again, with farmer's clubs vigorously writing newspapers in support and Tillman stumping across the state. The Conservatives and agricultural college opponents, however, were not willing to capitulate immediately. The University's trustees led a campaign to convince the citizens that the separate college idea was still inadvisable, and attempted forestall any changes in the University's structure.⁴⁴ Some Conservatives argued to accept the Clemson bequest, but to keep intact the agricultural school at the University with the land-grant funds. This scheme would nullify the Tillman camp's chief bargaining chip, the fact that a separate college need not result in increased taxation. Congressman Samuel Dibble argued that the farmers had every right to an agricultural college, as long as those who wished to have their sons "taught agriculture in connection with classical and literary branches, and in company with the youth of the State at the State University, shall not be deprived of the privilege."⁴⁵

The University also fought the Clemson proposal by reaching out to the state's farmers to show how the agricultural school in Columbia was already working for their benefit. University professors held farmers' institutes in Barnwell, Florence, Fairfield, Laurens, Orangeburg, and Spartanburg. The institutes featured lectures on scientific advancements in agriculture, along with musical entertainment and refreshments.

⁴³ *Charleston News and Courier*, May 1, 1888; Holleman, "Contributions of Tillman," 54.

⁴⁴ Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 163.

⁴⁵ Address to the graduating class of the Citadel, printed in *Charleston News and Courier*, July 5, 1888; Lawton, "Farmers' College," 62.

Following each speaker, the institute organizers circulated boxes for farmers to submit questions to the experts. According to newspaper accounts, the institutes drew large crowds and were generally regarded as a success.⁴⁶ Additionally Conservatives and University trustees argued that certain provisions of Clemson's will made it imprudent for the state to accept. They insisted that stipulation of a board consisting of seven life trustees with the power to select their successor, and only six state-elected trustees, rendered the state too little power in controlling the school. During a July speech in Greenville, Governor Richardson declared that "South Carolina . . . is no longer a pauper and need stand at no door in need of clothing, bodily or intellectually, but what she adopts should be under her control and used for her people and them only."⁴⁷ What Richardson failed to account for was that many South Carolina farmers—as the result of agricultural depression, crop liens, and mortgage foreclosures—were indeed paupers or at least close to it. Furthermore, Ben Tillman and the Farmers' Association had been drumming into their heads for three years the belief that their sorry condition could be improved with an agricultural college that was not shackled to an institution mired in aristocratic conservatism. According to Tillman supporter J. E. Tindall from Clarendon, "the farmers' movement had put into the mouths of all the politicians the song of education," and before the Democratic primaries the college issue had been "discussed on ten thousand stumps."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Charleston News and Courier*, July 12, 17, 19, 30, August 6, 1888; Lawton, "Farmers' College," 57.

⁴⁷ *Charleston News and Courier*, July 25, 1888; Lawton, "Farmers' College," 60-61.

⁴⁸ J. E. Tindall speech in the South Carolina House of Representatives, December 13, printed in *Charleston News and Courier*, December 14, 1888; Lawton, "Farmers' College," 59.

The greatest effort Conservatives made against the Clemson bequest was actually initiated by Gideon Lee, Clemson's northern-born son-in-law. On May 21, 1888, Lee issued a letter in the *News and Courier* arguing that Clemson had denied his daughter—Clemson's granddaughter and John C. Calhoun's great-granddaughter—Floride Isabella Lee, her rightful inheritance.⁴⁹ The stipulations of Clemson's will were straightforward and legal, but Lee still invoked the memory of Calhoun, and called on South Carolinians' "manliness, generosity, and chivalry" to rectify the wrongs done to his daughter.⁵⁰ He warned state legislatures that it would be undignified to join in a scheme that would rob the granddaughter of one the state's greatest heroes of her lawful property. In November 1888 Lee filed suit in Federal Court to protest the Clemson will. While Conservatives such as John Haskell agreed with Lee that it would be inappropriate to involve the state in litigation against Calhoun's descendent, Senator E. B. Murray maintained that swift action was unnecessary since the Clemson will gave the state three years to accept the gift. Therefore, the legislature could postpone any decision until the case had been decided.⁵¹

In 1888 the Farmers' Association failed to nominate its preferred gubernatorial candidate, Joseph Earle of Sumter. Nevertheless, a rowdy statewide campaign with Tillman stumping in almost every county resulted in the nomination of a majority of Democratic candidates who were pledged to support the farmers' movement.⁵²

⁴⁹ Charleston *News and Courier*, May 21, 1888; Lawton, "Farmers' College," 61-62; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 163-64.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Charleston *News and Courier*, December 15, 19, 1888; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 164.

⁵² Lawton, "Farmers' College," 68.

Subsequently, in late December the House managed to pass the Clemson College bill with relative ease. However, in the Senate it took the tie-breaking vote of Lieutenant Governor William L. Mauldin to ensure the bill's final passage.⁵³ Governor Richardson, however, decided to postpone signing the measure until the following year, an action that he was allowed by a peculiar constitutional provision authorizing the governor to withhold signature on any bill that did not reach him more than three days before the close of the legislative session.⁵⁴

Richardson in actuality was not delaying the building of the college, since that could not begin until Gideon Lee's lawsuit was decided. Nevertheless, the governor took serious heat from the state's farmers during the delay. The *Greenville News* accused the governor of straddling the political fence, while the *Florence Farmer's Friend* admonished him for being "the figurehead who sits in the gubernatorial chair and obeys the bidding of the bosses."⁵⁵ Even after the United States Circuit Court ruled against Lee in May 1889, Richardson balked at signing the bill. On May 24, even Francis W. Dawson, the editor of the *Charleston News and Courier* who had split with the Tillman faction when he publicly supported the earlier University of South Carolina bill, implored the governor to acquiesce to popular demand in an editorial titled "Sign the Bill Governor."⁵⁶ Richardson remained obstinate, but in November finally capitulated and endorsed the measure. Soon after the legislature passed another Clemson bill that

⁵³ *Charleston News and Courier*, December 14, 15, 19, 1888; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 164; Neal, *Tillman: the South Carolina Years*, 132-33.

⁵⁴ Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 165; Lawton, "Farmers' College," 73.

⁵⁵ *Greenville News*, cited in Holmes and Sherrill, *Clemson*, 186; *Florence Farmer's Friend*, cited in *Charleston News and Courier*, January 8, 1889; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 165.

⁵⁶ *Charleston News and Courier*, May 24, 1889; Lawton, "Farmers' College," 73-74.

appropriated funds for the maintenance of the college. The measure donated \$15,000 of state funds to the college outright; additionally it allotted Clemson College \$15,000 annually from the Agricultural Bureau's income from the fertilizer-privilege tax. Furthermore, the all-important Morrill land-grant funds would go to the new institution. The legislature compensated the University of South Carolina with \$4,000 in addition to its usual appropriation.⁵⁷

The initial appropriations to Clemson College proved to be relatively insignificant compared to what would come in the next year. In 1890 Tillman won the governor's office and effected drastic transformations to the state's agricultural and educational institutions. Tillman and his devotees in the legislature eliminated the two experiment stations in Darlington and Spartanburg, sold these properties, and turned over the revenue to Clemson. Tillman abolished the Agricultural Bureau; consequently, he gave to Clemson's Board of Trustees the bureau's annual income of \$25,000 as well as the profits from the sale of the "Agricultural Hall" in Columbia. Finally, in a stinging blow to his Conservative enemies, the new governor eliminated the University of South Carolina, which reverted back to the South Carolina College, a school dedicated to "theoretical science, law, literature, and the classics."⁵⁸

Those who had dispelled Tillman's backing of the agricultural college as simply a political maneuver were mistaken. Although Tillman might not have been in agreement with national agrarian organizations on every issue, one thing they did have in common was an emphasis on the importance of education. Historian Alfred C. True claimed that

⁵⁷ South Carolina, *Acts*, 1889, 299-302; Lawton, "Farmers' College," 74.

⁵⁸ South Carolina, *Acts*, 1890, 687-691, 705-708; Lawton, "Farmers' College," 75.

the original motivations of the Patrons of Husbandry (the Grange) were completely educational and social.⁵⁹ Tillman had no love for socialistic programs that would reward ineptitude or equally distribute wealth. His idea of reform was breaking any obstacles in the way of the farmer's prosperity—for example, unreasonable railroad rates or unnecessarily high taxes—and providing quality, practical education that would allow farmers to work their way to success. Therefore, if Tillman's plan for agricultural improvement seems less radical than those of the Farmers' Alliance or Populists, then it is because Tillman's ideas were rooted in an independent sense of self-reliance, not socialistic cooperation. Tillman's "conservatism" was a belief that good education and hard work were the keys to prosperity. Biographer Thornwell Haynes quoted Tillman as saying that "success in life requires self-reliance and labor; that work is honorable, that work is necessary . . . that knowledge of books is good, but not the only knowledge that is necessary, that knowledge of things is better; and that skill, energy and perseverance, with diversified pursuits, will alone make South Carolina great and prosperous."⁶⁰ On July 7, 1893, at the opening session of Clemson College, Tillman told the crowd of over 1,500 that "we intend to introduce you to science, and let you set to work to place South Carolina ahead in agriculture as she ought to be. Let me burn it into your hearts and brain, your motto should be 'Work'."⁶¹

⁵⁹ Alfred Chares True, *A History of Agricultural Education in the United States, 1785-1925* (Washington D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1929), 122; Holleman, "Contributions of Tillman," 65.

⁶⁰ Thornwell Haynes, "Biographical Sketch of Gov. B. R. Tillman of South Carolina," (Columbia, South Carolina: B. C. Du Pre, c1894), 54.

⁶¹ *Charleston News and Courier*, July 7, 1893; Holleman, "Contributions of Tillman," 67.

Clemson College opened to students in 1893, and by 1905 over 3,000 young men had matriculated at the school. Most were South Carolina natives, and a slim majority studied engineering and mechanical arts, while the remainder focused on farming.⁶² The agricultural college was both downplayed and criticized by Tillman critics who insisted it would favor upcountry residents, and that there were too many farmers in the state to benefit from a relatively small school. However, it is important to realize that Clemson College continued to serve the functions previously performed by the experiment stations and the Agricultural Bureau, one of the primary duties being that of fertilizer inspection. Accordingly, officials from Washington annually ensured that the college was conducting experiments on plant and animal diseases, working on remedies for such, analyzing soil and water, experimenting with new methods of producing cheese and butter, and “other researches or experiments bearing directly on the agricultural industry of the United States.”⁶³ The Clemson experiment stations also distributed thousands of pamphlets to farmers with information on multifarious concerns and products, such as meteorology, hog cholera, and the improvement of worn-out soils. In 1907 Clemson President P. M. Mell proclaimed that the experiment stations were “teaching the farmer how to save his crops; how to care for and use his machines; how to maintain the fertility of the soil; how

⁶² Patrick Hues Mell, *The Clemson Agricultural College of South Carolina, State Agricultural and Mechanical College. The work the College has accomplished in seventeen years and what it is doing for the benefit of the people of the State* (Columbia, SC: The State Company, Printers, 1907), 12.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 19.

to keep cash accounts, and know correctly the income and outgo of the energies of the farm.”⁶⁴

Clemson College also proved not to be only an upcountry bastion for a select few. Through 1905 Charleston county supplied 197 of the college’s students, second only to Anderson county.⁶⁵ Furthermore, through the work of “train-based” farmers’ institutes, the college disseminated relevant information to farmers across the entire state. The Clemson Board of Trustees began the institute program, through no insistence from the state government, to spread the experiment station’s findings to farmers who could use the information. The Southern Railway provided two coaches and free travel to Clemson, enabling the school to hold twenty-six farmers’ institutes in 1906 alone. Over 6,000 farmers attended the institutes, which reached virtually every corner of the state. Additionally, in August 1906 Clemson College held a two-day institute on campus, where over 1,000 farmers attended.⁶⁶

Ben Tillman was not directly responsible for Thomas Green Clemson’s donation to South Carolina; neither was he solely accountable for the state’s acceptance of the bequest. Nevertheless, through his letters published in the Charleston *News and Courier*, and his innumerable stump speeches across the state, Tillman, more than any other individual, convinced the mass of South Carolina farmers that a separate agricultural college was one of the first things they needed to ameliorate their impoverished condition. The agricultural college idea became the state’s most heated political issue

⁶⁴ Ibid, 20.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 12.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 23.

between 1885 and 1889. However, it is important that Tillman never ran for political office during this time, nor did he stand to gain financially by the construction of Clemson. Tillman seems genuinely to have been convinced that the college was crucial to the farmers' case. Obviously, Tillman did embark on a lengthy political career, and he personally considered the establishment of Clemson College as one of his greatest achievements.

It is also significant that Tillman continued to take a great personal interest in the operation of the college until his death in 1918. He corresponded regularly with Walter Merritt Riggs, president of Clemson from 1910 to 1924. In 1911 Tillman wrote to Riggs that he had “dreamed [of a] College where the studies would be not only Latin and Greek and the Classics, but such as would prepare a man to make his bread and butter.”⁶⁷ Tillman also argued to Riggs his importance in the creation of the college over that of R. W. Simpson, who was the executor of Thomas G. Clemson's will and also a life trustee. Tillman's sons, Ben Jr. and Henry, both Clemson students, also had lengthy correspondences with Riggs about the problems of nepotism and interference with daily operations by trustees of the college—particularly by Simpson.⁶⁸ Obviously, as proven by the time and effort devoted by he and his family members, Clemson College was genuinely important to Tillman, and not just a political tool.

⁶⁷ B.R. Tillman to W. M. Riggs, June 13, 1911, CU President's papers, Riggs, cited in C. Alan Grubb, “The Master Executive Walter Merritt Riggs, 1910-1924,” in Donald McKale et al. eds., *Tradition: A History of the Presidency of Clemson University* (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1998), 103-104.

⁶⁸ Robert P. Green Jr., “A Scholar's Turmoil, Patrick Hues Mell, 1902-1910,” in Donald McKale et al. eds., *Tradition: A History of the Presidency of Clemson University* (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1998), 93-94.

Another important factor in Tillman's ultimate political power in South Carolina is the fact that Tillman began his crusade for farmers two years before the Farmers' Alliance—the vanguard of the Populist Party—entered the state. Consequently, even though Tillman and many of his peers joined the organization, the majority of South Carolina Alliance members and farmers already perceived Tillman as their champion. Tillmanism and the Clemson College struggle had already served as an outlet for agrarian political protest before the Alliance was able to establish a secure foothold in the state. Therefore, the Alliance, although quite successful in South Carolina, did not acquire the same devotion as it did in other Southern and Western states. Many farmers were members of Tillman's Farmers' Association before they encountered the Alliance, and the Edgefield reformer was able to keep the vast majority of them from jumping on the populist bandwagon largely because of his early fight for the agricultural school. Furthermore, several members of the original Clemson College Board of Trustees were prominent State Alliance officials.⁶⁹ With these state leaders overlapping membership in the National Farmers' Alliance, the South Carolina Farmers' Association, and the Clemson College Board of Trustees, it was not difficult for Tillman to steer agrarian sentiment in his direction and away from third-party radicalism.

⁶⁹ D. K. Norris, an original life trustee of Clemson College, was a prominent Alliance member and served as the delegate from South Carolina at the 1889 Alliance convention in St. Louis. Ben Tillman, M. L. Donaldson, and J. E. Wannamaker, all Clemson life trustees, were also Alliance members. Furthermore, four of the six state-elected trustees (H. M. Stackhouse, J. E. Tindall, D. T. Redfearne, and John R. Jeffries) joined the Alliance. Joseph Church, "The Farmers' Alliance and the Populist movement in South Carolina," (M.A. Thesis, University of South Carolina, 1953), 20, 35.

Several historians have attempted to besmirch Tillman's legacy by insisting that he was not radical, neither socially nor politically. They maintain that he employed dramatic and revolutionary rhetoric to illicit lower-class approval and secure his political position, while actually remaining the conservative master of a calculating political machine. Often cited as proof of his reactionary personality is Tillman's disagreement with the Farmers' Alliance and Populists on critical issues like the sub-treasury plan, and his adamant avowal of the superiority of the white race. Furthermore, since Tillman's white-supremacist views are not in question, historians have taken the syllogistic step to concluding that appeals to white solidarity must have been the determinant in the relative dearth of populist activity in South Carolina. However, Tillman's attacks on Conservative traditions and symbols, such as the South Carolina College, and his promotion of a separate agricultural college that would benefit the state's farmers through the improving of modern, scientific techniques, were "progressive" in intent and the actual reasons that he was able to keep the support of Democratic farmers and forestall a third-party bolt.

TILLMAN'S REFORMS OF STATE INSTITUTIONS

Ben Tillman's reform agenda, despite its ostensible emphasis on agrarian issues, did extend beyond the plight of the farmers. Although he nurtured a sincere love for farming and worked to alleviate unnecessary financial burdens and better educate the people who practiced agriculture, Tillman also spent a great deal of energy reforming state institutions from both financial and humanitarian perspectives. Although he has deservedly been censured for his efforts to discourage African-American socio-political equality, Tillman made several attempts, albeit with varying degrees of success, to improve the condition of multiple matters of state, and these were issues that were germane to progressive-minded politicians across the country. Tillman revamped both the state's Lunatic Asylum and the Penitentiary, improving not only the institution's fiscal efficiency, but also the living conditions and the overall treatment of patients and inmates. Finally, although extremely controversial, Tillman's establishment of a state-owned dispensary for liquor sales was a realistic attempt to forge a compromise between the degradations of widespread saloons and proliferation of unregulated bootleg whiskey, and the outright prohibition of alcohol. Tillman's reforms in these instances might be interpreted as retrenchment, political machinations, or despotism; however, in each case the governor actually attempted to remedy preexisting problems and economize the state government with the ultimate objective of lightening the tax burden for the agricultural class.

When Tillman took the governor's office one of his first missions involved an investigation of allegations of corruption at the Lunatic Asylum and a review of Superintendent Peter E. Griffin, who had been appointed by Tillman's conservative predecessors. The original South Carolina Lunatic Asylum had been erected between 1822 and 1827 in Columbia.¹ The two men generally credited with the foundation of the Asylum are Samuel Farrow and William Crafts. Farrow, a Revolutionary War veteran from Spartanburg, served as South Carolina Lieutenant Governor from 1810 to 1812, then as a U. S. Congressman until 1815 when he returned home to enter the state House of Representatives, where he began his promotion of a state mental institution. William Crafts was a younger Harvard College-educated Charlestonian who worked for reform in the areas of increased rights for Roman Catholics and Jews, creation of the Medical College of South Carolina, and better education for the deaf and dumb. Historian Peter McCandless, the only scholar to have written a substantial account of the Asylum, argues that the creation of the institution was due to a larger movement than just Farrow and Williams. Despite the two reformers' importance in the issue, McCandless insists that "asylum reform in South Carolina," as in other states and Europe "was the work of an elite but diverse coalition of physicians, educators, lawyers, legislators, and social activists." Moreover, McCandless stresses the importance of those who wanted to keep their state up-to-date and respected among contemporary modern thinkers. "The

¹ Although term "Lunatic Asylum" seems not only outdated, but also politically incorrect and offensive, it was the correct and technical term for a mental institution in nineteenth-century South Carolina. Therefore, since the terms "lunatic" and "asylum" are historically accurate, they will be used frequently in this thesis. Any attempt to replace these terms with modern, politically correct descriptions would be anachronistic and not representative of the discussed era.

[Asylum] was as much an expression of civic pride as of humanitarian, medical, or social-control arguments.”²

During the later part of the nineteenth century the South Carolina Lunatic Asylum experienced a dramatic rise in population, increasing from about 300 patients in 1877 to approximately 1100 in 1901. Furthermore, the office of superintendent had become a post of political importance, as the job was generally given to a physician who backed the reigning regime.³ Before Tillman took office, his predecessor Governor J. P. Richardson had attempted to invalidate allegations of managerial corruption on the part of the Lunatic Asylum’s superintendent Peter Griffin, and of the inhumane treatment of the asylum’s patients. In 1877 the legislature appointed Griffin, a South Carolina native and Confederate veteran who received an M.D. from the University of Pennsylvania, to the post of superintendent of the Asylum.⁴ In his departing address to the General Assembly, the final steward of the “Conservative Regime” made a thoroughly unconvincing effort at justifying the problems of the asylum. First Richardson noted a significant increase in the asylum population—most especially among black residents—over the previous decade. Between 1878 and 1889 the white population increased from 230 to 409, a growth of 75%, while the black population had increased from 101 to 313, a spike of 200%. He also cited the Report of the Regents of the Lunatic Asylum that

² Peter McCandless, *Moonlight, Magnolias, and Madness: Insanity in South Carolina from the Colonial Period to the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 40-41. See also Barbara Bellows, “The Founding of the South Carolina Lunatic Asylum,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 82, (1981): 263-72.

³ McCandless, *Moonlight, Magnolias, and Madness*, 235; *House Journal*, 1881, 29. By 1880 the Lunatic Asylum absorbed almost one-third of the state’s appropriations.

⁴ McCandless, *Moonlight, Magnolias, and Madness*, 236.

revealed for the fiscal year of 1889-90, the total population of the institution had risen from 722 to 778, an increase of 56 patients within a single year. According to Richardson, any allegations of patient neglect could therefore be attributed to overpopulation, which was beyond the government's control. Another serious problem was the question of where or how to house the growing number of black patients. Up until that time black patients were accommodated in separate wards from whites, yet within the same building. Richardson insisted that though the government had been trying for five or more years to decide the fate of "this class of patients," it could not determine whether the blacks should be lodged in an annex to the main Asylum, or in a separate institution altogether.⁵ Over five years of indecision and inaction concerning an obvious problem in need of attention was exactly the type of government stagnation that Tillmanite reformers despised.

Richardson concluded his address on the Asylum issue with self-congratulatory plaudits for the frugal manner in which the asylum had recently been operated. He showed that the state's cost per patient had decreased from \$202.83 in 1876 to just \$131.05 thirteen years later. The 1889 cost per patient was the lowest in the asylum's history. Richardson marveled at the fact that for only thirty-seven cents a day, each patient was provided with "food, lodging, clothing, light, fuel, washing, medicine, and medical attention." Furthermore, this was especially miraculous because in this case the state was dealing with "repairing and refurnishing in a population [that was] peculiarly destructive." The meager funds allotted for the patients were thus proof that "there can

⁵ South Carolina, *Senate Journal*, 1890, 35-36.

be no possible ground for the charge of extravagant management.”⁶ Richardson, however, did not address the seemingly unmistakable problem posed by a combination of a large population increase, an ignored need of additional living space, and the sharp decrease in government funding. Richardson may have been trying to disprove fiscal malfeasance, but he inadvertently made a strong case that the Asylum’s living conditions, and its entire system of operations, were unacceptable to the progressive-minded community.

In his inaugural address Governor Tillman acknowledged the dilemma facing the Asylum and the state. After visiting the Asylum just once, he had concluded that the institution was overcrowded and also that many of the patients need not be there. He also disputed Governor Richardson’s claims that the cost per patient was thirty-seven cents per day. Tillman insisted “a glance at the accommodation, clothing, etc. of the colored patients shows that they do not cost anything like this amount; and therefore the white patients are costing much more per capita than is shown in the report.”⁷ In Tillman’s estimation, Asylum directors had inadequately provided for the black patients in order to report a more favorable expenditure to the legislature and the public. Tillman did not directly call for retrenchment or cutting the allotted funds for the Asylum, which he contended “[was] about one-fifth of [the] entire State expenditure.” Instead, he envisioned a different strategy for caring for the state’s “unfortunates,” which he maintained society must do “for the sake of humanity.” Tillman concluded that two points were certain: “(1) There are people in the Asylum who ought not to be there

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *Senate Journal*, 1890, 86-87.

because they can be more economically supported elsewhere; and (2) A change should be made in the law so as to require each county to support its own insane.”⁸ The new governor’s plan would ease the overcrowded Asylum’s problems by shifting needy but harmless individuals to county homes or poorhouses that already existed, and simultaneously decrease one of the state’s most burdensome expenses. Under Tillman’s plan, the state could therefore provide more than adequate care for the patients of the state Asylum, without the need for increased appropriations or higher taxes.

Tillman also discredited the state’s current system of caring for the insane on two other points. First, he insisted that many patients who were capable of paying for their care were actually living off the state’s dime because their families had taken advantage of the patient’s property. The law read: “lunatics who have property shall be supported from the income therefrom.”⁹ Tillman insisted, however, that he knew of cases where family members had taken the property of patients, while “the County Commissioners whose duty it is to enforce [the law] . . . have winked at the wrong to please some friend, and curry favor with an influential voter.”¹⁰ The next problem with the system was its procedure for assigning members to the Board of Regents who managed the Asylum. At the time, all six regents were appointed simultaneously, held office for six years, and were then replaced by a new group. Tillman complained that this was an inefficient practice because there was no chance of “injecting new blood into these important administrative positions” during their tenure, and also because there was too a great risk

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

for dangerously “abrupt change” when replacing the entire board and not benefiting from any of its experience.¹¹

Despite his grievances with several aspects concerning the Asylum, during his first year in office the only measure Tillman was able to pass through the legislature addressed the structuring of the Board of Regents. In 1827 the legislature had passed a bill extending the power to oversee operation of the Asylum and appoint employees to a board of nine regents.¹² On December 5, 1891, lawmakers endorsed a measure that permitted the governor to reduce the board to five regents, and that those individuals would subsequently draw lots whereby two would serve for two years, two would serve for four years, and one for six years.¹³ When Tillman asked four of the regents to resign, the entire board quit; Tillman considered this proof that they were unwilling to help the state in needed reform. The measure that restructured the Board of Regents thus ensured that it would continuously have both men with new ideas and those with experience.

Although this was the only tangible change to the asylum in his first year—he attributed any failures for better reform to the “driftwood” legislature—Tillman had not forgotten the other issues he had affirmed in his inaugural address, and he pushed harder for more change in his second year in office. In April 1891 a committee appointed by the legislature began investigating charges of corruption and patient neglect at the Asylum. For an unspecified reason the committee, according to Tillman, adjourned without completing its work. Nevertheless, it did interview several employees and found, among

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² McCandless, *Moonlight, Magnolias, and Madness*, 64.

¹³ *Acts and Joint Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina*, 1891, 1117.

other “reprehensible irregularities,” that one inmate had been regularly permitted to carry a pistol.¹⁴ The patient, referred to only as Milne, was also employed by the Asylum as carpenter and painter, and allegedly had a key giving him access to the entire building.¹⁵ According to the committee’s initial findings, this enabling of violent inmates to mix unrestrained with the other patients had resulted in injuries and at least one death. Furthermore, a number of people questioned maintained that the superintendent made few and irregular visits, and also that he had provided a male inmate with a key to the female wards.¹⁶ When Tillman learned that the same patient who had been alleged to carry a firearm made a homicidal attack on one of the attendants, the Governor recalled the committee to address the problem. Committee members Dr. T. J. Strait, a senator from Lancaster, and Dr. H. P. Goodwin, a representative from Greenville, joined Tillman and a stenographer in conducting another series of interviews with both staff members and patients at the asylum. The committee determined that there had been “very lax discipline and negligence, attributable to the Superintendent, Dr. P. E. Griffin.”¹⁷

Tillman invited Griffin to defend the accusations against him. Griffin refused, demanding instead that he be given a formal hearing before the Senate or the Board of Regents. He did, however, ardently repudiate all the charges that had been levied against him.¹⁸ On May 18, 1891 Tillman ordered Griffin to resign, after Griffin declined to

¹⁴ *Senate Journal*, 1891, 12.

¹⁵ McCandless, *Moonlight, Magnolias, and Madness*, 239.

¹⁶ *Charleston News and Courier*, April 3, 1891; *Columbia State*, May 21, 1891; *Senate Journal*, 1891, 12-13. The full names of the people involved in the alleged homicide are not given in any of these sources.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ B. R. Tillman to P. E. Griffin, May 9, 1891, and P. E. Griffin to B. R. Tillman, May 20, 1891, Governor Benjamin Ryan Tillman Papers, SCA; *Columbia State*, May 21, 1891.

defend himself to the governor in person. In July Tillman appointed Dr. J. W. Babcock to succeed Griffin as superintendent of the Asylum. Tillman's Conservative foes claimed that it had been his intention all along to oust Griffin and replace him with a political friend.¹⁹ While to some this may have appeared to be a legitimate complaint, it is apparent by Babcock's record both prior and subsequent to his appointment that he was a highly skilled physician and genuinely concerned with running a modern and humane institution. Originally from Chester, Babcock was the winner of the highly esteemed Story Scholarship at Harvard and had had experience as assistant physician at Massachusetts's most acclaimed asylum, McLean Hospital. Nevertheless, Tillman's actions in this case brought out from his enemies the usual cries of despotism and political bossism. Although Babcock himself had been in Massachusetts during the rise of the Tillman movement, his family members in South Carolina were open Tillman supporters.²⁰ *Columbia State* Writer Narcisco G. Gonzales protested that the charges against Griffin were never satisfactorily proven, and that the situation was simply another Tillman ploy to gain absolute control over the state. James C. Hemphill of the *Charleston News and Courier* echoed Gonzales' sentiment, accusing Tillman of acting illegally in Griffin's dismissal. Tillmanites, however, supported the governor and insisted that the dire situation at the asylum called for an immediate change in leadership.²¹

¹⁹ McCandless, *Moonlight, Magnolias, and Madness*, 242.

²⁰ Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 236; McCandless, *Moonlight, Magnolias, and Madness*, 244.

²¹ *Columbia State*, May 19-21, 1891; *Charleston News and Courier*, May 20, 22, 1891; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 236.

In his second term Governor Tillman also initiated measures—which were passed this time—to improve the efficiency and conditions of the Asylum. The legislature approved a bill penalizing sheriffs that violated a new law whereby they could not transport potential patients without the prior consent of the new superintendent.²² Furthermore the government approved funding of \$100,000 for general upkeep, \$1,000 to improve the sanitary conditions of the bathrooms, and \$150 for the asylum’s library.²³ During his 1892 address to the General Assembly, Tillman applauded the work that Superintendent Babcock and Steward and Treasurer J. W. Bunch had done in economizing and improving the overall conditions of the Asylum. He did, however, continue to urge the legislature to pass a bill that would send many of the harmless residents to county poorhouses. This measure, which would have greatly reduced state expenses, never materialized for Tillman. Nevertheless, Tillman had ousted a superintendent who had been accused of corrupt practices before he was even elected governor. He filled the post with a highly accredited physician who, by all accounts, ended such disturbing conditions as murders by pistol-toting inmates.

Tillman never achieved his biggest goal of sending more patients to county residences. Yet, he did introduce an improved system for appointing regents, supplied funds for sanitary improvements, and still commended the new administration for its work in creating a safer environment for the patients, as well as a more economical institute for the state. After his second year in office Tillman was content with the progressive changes he had helped to develop, despite not being able to shift expenses to

²² South Carolina, *Acts*, 1892, 112-13.

²³ *Acts*, 1892, 52.

the counties. This fact contradicts newspaper critics Gonzales and Hemphill who assured their readers that Tillman only wanted supreme control over every state institution.

Moreover, the previously discussed events draw a different picture of Tillman than the one painted by historian Stephen Kantrowitz, who is singularly interested in denouncing Tillman's entire career because of his views on racial equality. Kantrowitz never once mentions Tillman's reform of the Asylum in his lengthy political biography. Despite the verbal assaults from his past and present critics, Governor Tillman's dealings with the Lunatic Asylum show him to be a relatively social progressive and economically minded statesman, not a duplicitous political boss or power-hungry tyrant. Admittedly, Tillman's progressivism did not include the socio-political equality of African Americans or women, but this does not negate his credentials as a reformer.

During his inaugural address Tillman asserted that next to the Lunatic Asylum the state institution of the greatest "magnitude and importance" was the Penitentiary. South Carolina had a long history of penal reform. In 1820 a Board of Public Works investigation found that most county jails were in disrepair and overcrowded. Reformers argued that the state's criminal code was too harsh—in 1813 there were 165 offenses that were punishable by death. Therefore, reformers cited the need for a state Penitentiary, where criminals convicted of minor offenses could serve out long-term sentences in a more humane environment than in county jails. After years of debate, the General

Assembly approved the establishment of a state Penitentiary on the Congaree River in 1866.²⁴

It was widely accepted in the nineteenth century that convicts should labor to provide at least the expense of their incarceration, and thus lessen their burden to taxpayers. State officials faced the dilemma of trying to control prisoners, make their existence either profitable or at least self-sustaining, and ensure that prisoners were treated humanely.²⁵ The convict-lease system was designed to hire out prisoners—in the South these convicts were predominantly African-American—to farmers or businessmen, or to provide labor for state sponsored construction. According to historian Matthew J. Mancini, “leasing . . . took the care and expense of thousands of prisoners out of the direct purview of the state, it provided a large pool of extremely cheap labor . . . and it helped attract northern capital with which business leaders in the post-bellum South were so obsessed.”²⁶ Although progressive reformers across the country, such as prison reform crusader Enoch Cobb Wines²⁷ emphasized the evils of convict leasing because of the

²⁴ *Senate Journal*, 1890, 89-90; South Carolina Department of Archives and History, *CCI: The State Penitentiary in South Carolina History and Memory*, N.D.

<<http://www.state.sc.us/scdah/exhibits/cci.htm>> (4 February, 2008).

²⁵ Fletcher Melvin Green, “Some Aspects of the Convict Lease System in the Southern States,” in F. M. Green ed., *Essays in Southern History Presented to Joseph Gregoire De Roulhac Hamilton, PhD, LL.D. By His Former Students at the University of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1949), 112-23.

²⁶ Matthew J. Mancini, “Race, Economics, and The Abandonment of Convict Leasing,” *The Journal of Negro History*, 63.4 (October, 1978), 339. Mancini argues that convict leasing was not merely a way to profit from the existence of prisoners, but a social system of subordinating blacks and effectually extending the institution of ante-bellum slavery.

²⁷ Enoch Cobb Wines was a member of the New York Prison Association, and the chief organizer of the 1870 National Congress of Penitentiary and Reformatory Discipline in Cleveland, Ohio. The congress established the National Prison Association, which is today known as the American Correctional Association. Nicole Hahn Rafter “National Prison Association” *The Oxford Companion to United States History*. Paul S. Boyer, ed. Oxford University Press 2001. Oxford

cruel treatment received by the prisoners, Governor Tillman's primary objective was economizing the system and generating greater profits for the state. While this might suggest that Tillman was uninterested in the humanitarian aspects of the issue, it is significant that for penal reformers, South Carolina was not on the list of the most infamous abusers of the convict-lease system.

In 1880 the *New York Times* decried Mississippi's abuse of the convict lease system, noting that the prisoners, who were mostly African Americans, were hired out in gangs to farmers and railroads, where they were burdened by ball and chain and constantly at the end of an overseer's rifle. "They [the convicts] are treated like brutes, poorly fed, overworked, and badly housed. It is said that the average length of a convict's life in one of these gangs, is only three years."²⁸ South Carolina was not innocent of prison abuse, but reformers noticed a significant improvement of conditions, especially in death rates of convict laborers in 1882. The *New York Times* wrote that year, "it is but justice to that that the comparatively small average death rate since 1879 is due chiefly to the efforts of prison superintendent, Mr. J. T. Lipscomb."²⁹ In 1883 reformers elucidated the huge distinction between the treatment of those prisoners working outside the prison with private contractors and those under direct supervision of Penitentiary employees. "Nineteen out of an average 320 leased hands died in 9 months,

Reference Online. Oxford University Press. Clemson University. 6 February 2008 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t119.e1081>>

²⁸ *New York Times*, August 24, 1880.

²⁹ *New York Times*, December 17, 1882.

while only 5 out of 800 hands kept in the penitentiary died during that time.”³⁰ The Conservative superintendent Lipscomb had greatly ameliorated efficiency and humanity among prison authorities, but private contractors still abused the convicts in alarming fashion.

When Ben Tillman achieved the governor’s office, he promoted a plan that would both increase the revenue from the Penitentiary, and also curb abuse to the prisoners. Tillman maintained that the institution had been run inefficiently due to the fact that its managers had been selected by the General Assembly on a political basis. He contended, “offices requiring high order of business talent are given to men who can speak well or who have rendered political services, while they are wholly lacking in administrative ability.”³¹ Tillman also argued that convicts had for too long been only hired out for agricultural work. Since the country was in an agricultural depression, and subsequently farm work paid little, the state failed to benefit from the supply of labor it had to sell. Tillman insisted that convicts ought to be hired out to the highest bidder, whether to private businesses or public operations, no matter what the job. Furthermore, to prevent the previously mentioned abuses that often accompanied convict leasing to private concerns, Tillman suggested that the Penitentiary would continue to provide food, clothing, and guarding for convicts in order to prevent their mistreatment. In fact, his plan conformed exactly to the preferred system of reformer Enoch Cobb Wines. Wines illustrated the distinction between the contract system and the convict-lease system, and asserted that the former was much more humane. Under the contract system, which

³⁰ *New York Times*, August 15, 1883.

³¹ *Senate Journal*, 1890, 89.

Tillman was proposing, only the labor of the prisoner was hired out, while the feeding, clothing, sheltering, and guarding were still managed by the prison. Contrarily, in Wines' estimation, under the lease system "the whole control and management of the prison . . . is turned over to the lessee, who is . . . always a party whose object is to make money,--first out of what the convicts can earn, and next out of what can be saved from the cost of feeding, clothing and housing them." Moreover, according to Wines, "the system is injurious to the prison, because the lessee . . . thinks only how he can use [the prisoner] to the greatest pecuniary advantage, and he cares little whether the gains are made to the profit or prejudice of the discipline and good order of the institution."³²

During Tillman's first year in office he regretted that the majority of prisoners would have to continue working for shares on farms and on the Columbia Canal because the state had an additional year to fulfill on previously made contracts. Nevertheless, Tillman was determined to reorganize the Penitentiary and make it a profitable institution.³³ Tillman's reform of the Penitentiary began at the top; he replaced Superintendent T. J. Lipscomb with W. Jasper Talbert. As indicated, Lipscomb had done a commendable job at reducing the prisoner death rate and their overall wellbeing. Despite his success in improving the treatment of prisoners, Tillman was not satisfied with the economic situation in which Lipscomb had placed the Penitentiary. Tillman appointed Talbert, who had been a loyal supporter during the 1890 campaign, to remedy the institutions financial situation. Although Tillman's appointment of Talbert might

³² Enoch Cobb Wines, *The State of Prisons and of Child-Saving Institutions in the Civilized World*, (Cambridge: University Press, J. Wilson & Son Publishers, 1879), 111-12.

³³ *Senate Journal*, 1890, 90.

have seemed to his critics as a blatant example of cronyism, Talbert did increase the Penitentiary's profits while maintaining the humane care of prisoners that Lipscomb had instilled. Although 1891 saw little change in the prison's finances, due to the necessary fulfillment of contracts for the Columbia Canal and share work on various farms, Tillman managed to pass legislation which stipulated that the Board of Directors of the Penitentiary were "instructed, as far as practicable, in hiring out or working convicts, to hire or work the same on farms in healthy locations and which are exempt from danger of overflow."³⁴

Newly appointed Superintendent Talbert immediately began to revamp prison operation according to Tillman's wishes; he started contracting the convicts at fixed wages instead of leasing the laborers on a share basis. He also leased for \$2,5000 annually the institution's dam and hydroelectric plant on the Congaree River to the Electric Street Railway and Light Company of Columbia. Furthermore, Talbert sent many of the state's convicts to work on the state-owned farm in Sumter, known as DeSaussure Place, which had been purchased in 1890. By the end of 1892 it was clear that the Tillman-Talbert strategy was working. In 1891 the Penitentiary's Board of Directors reported that convict labor had resulted in revenues of \$25,922.14; the 1892 report showed earnings of \$39,681.83. DeSaussure Place produced ample amounts of corn and cotton for market, as well as food for internal consumption. In a single year the Penitentiary had increased the revenue from convict labor alone by over \$13,000. It is also important that this spike in income did not come from any cutbacks on prisoners'

³⁴ South Carolina, *Acts*, 1891, 1080-81; *Senate Journal*, 1891, 15-16; *House Journal*, 1892, 16-17; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 237-38.

essential needs; in fact the opposite occurred. In 1892 the expenditures on food for prisoners rose from \$13,232.17 the previous year to \$17,169.87. Funds for clothing also increased dramatically, from \$542.58 in 1891 to \$2334.93 in 1892.³⁵ The Penitentiary therefore had increased funding for prisoners and improved their living conditions, while simultaneously boosting revenues to the state. The Committee for the Penitentiary in the House of Representatives praised Superintendent Talbert and Governor Tillman indirectly, when it reported in 1892 that “the institution [was] well kept and in excellent condition, . . . more than self sustaining . . . [and that] the health of the prisoners for the past year, has been unusually good and the death rate considerably less than that of previous years.”³⁶

Despite what seemed to be an obvious success story of both fiscal and humanitarian reform on the part of Tillman and Talbert, the governor nevertheless heard the usual cries of corruption from familiar voices. In spring 1891 Narcisco G. Gonzales reported in the *Columbia State* that state prisoners claimed that they had insufficient food, clothing, and medical care. If the governor refused to act and investigate these allegations, according to Gonzales, it would prove that Talbert had been merely appointed superintendent as a political favor, and that Tillman had a “flexible and adjustable conscience.”³⁷ To the credit of Talbert and Tillman, however, the Penitentiary Board of Directors made an official investigation over several months and exonerated

³⁵ The revenues and expenditures for the Penitentiary are itemized in the *Senate Journal*, 1891, 14-15, and *House Journal*, 1892, 16-17. The confirmation of the Penitentiary’s contract with the Columbia Electric Street Railway, Light and Power Company is in *South Carolina, Acts*, 1892, 94-95. See also Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 237-38.

³⁶ *House Journal*, 1892, 411-12.

³⁷ *Columbia, State*, June 13 and 22, 1891. Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 237-38.

prison managers of any misdeeds. The inquirers found the inmates not lacking in any essentials, especially the quality or quantity of their food. They also noted the significant decline in the death rate, which obviously disputed any claims that Talbert had skimmed in the funding of decent food and medical care.³⁸ Board Chairman T. J. Cunningham asserted in his report that “the Board never at any time had occasion to find fault with . . . [the superintendent’s] management of the institution.”³⁹ It must be manifest that in the case of the Penitentiary, Governor Tillman affected not only fiscal reform to benefit the hard-pressed taxpayers, but also humanitarian reform in the living and working conditions of convicts that progressive reformers like E. C. Wines had been urging for decades.

Tillman proved he was willing and capable of transforming such pre-existing state institutions as the Asylum and the Penitentiary. Nevertheless, his most ambitious, controversial, and legacy-ensuring endeavor in state business involved an institution that he himself created. Rivalled only by the agricultural college and the state constitution of 1895, Tillman’s forging and operation of the state liquor dispensary is arguably the most significant venture of his political career.

While historians disagree on the merits of the state’s monopoly of the liquor trade—many critics perceive the dispensary as another example of Tillman’s tyrannical tactics—it is clear from the evidence available that the governor’s plan was well-studied, practicable, and beneficial to the state’s coffers and sense of respectability. The creation

³⁸ *House Journal*, 1891, 38-39.

³⁹ South Carolina, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1892, II, 400-402. Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 237-38.

of a state liquor dispensary was a reasonable solution to a confluence of problems in the forms of widespread prohibitionist sentiment, the shocking abundance of saloons and alcohol-related crimes, and the serious question of how far a government should interfere with the freedoms of individuals and businesses. Despite the skepticism over the dispensary's constitutionality and the criticism over Tillman's strict enforcement of the law that created the institution, the plan successfully avoided outright prohibition while curbing the proliferation of saloons and their concomitant vices of gambling and prostitution.⁴⁰

To understand Tillman's reasoning behind the dispensary, it is crucial to first explain the conditions that preceded it. Prohibitionist sentiment originated in South Carolina from the same temperance movement, largely championed by women and evangelical Christians, that began to gather steam across the United States in the 1820's and 1830's. On July 4, 1838, the State Temperance Society, South Carolina's first statewide organization of such, met initially to discuss their plans for spreading the gospel of abstinence from spirits. In 1842 Charleston saw the emergence of two notable organizations: the Young Men's Temperance Society, and a chapter of the Washington Temperance Society.⁴¹ The liquor business, however, flourished in the state despite ardent efforts of the antebellum societies to repeal liquor licenses, or at least to prohibit sales to nothing under twenty gallons. The adversaries of alcohol were persistent though, and after the Civil War they took up the banner of absolute prohibition with more

⁴⁰ For sufficient discussions of the South Carolina Dispensary see, Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 234-261; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 328-354; and John Evans Eubanks, *Ben Tillman's Baby: The Dispensary System of South Carolina, 1892-1915* (Augusta, Ga., 1950).

⁴¹ Eubanks, *Ben Tillman's Baby*, 42-43.

promising results. In 1885 South Carolina became the first southern state to organize a chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union and join the national organization. Three years earlier the state passed a law permitting local option—towns and counties would have the possibility to outlaw liquor in their own locality. Even more significantly, in 1889 and 1890 the prohibitionists lost bids for statewide prohibition by only a slim margin, and by 1891 over sixty towns and several counties were dry under the local option law.⁴²

Prohibitionists were appalled at the constantly growing number of saloons and the wicked behavior these dens of vice inspired. Furthermore, they were incensed by the cavalier manner in which the newspaper media advertised liquor. According to historian John Evans Eubanks, “corn liquor and beer had not yet assumed the mild designation of ‘beverages’ . . . but were boldly advertised under their own names, often side by side, with the “Keely Cure” for inebriety. The *Columbia State* even recommended the establishment of a government ‘Keely Cure’ to take care of the output of grogshops.”⁴³ Anti-liquor advocates also emphasized the high rate of crime that alcohol inspired. In 1892, just in the time period between July 1 and September 30, reports from twenty-two cities found that there were 577 arrests for drunkenness and public disorder. This statistic does not include other crimes committed under the influence of alcohol.⁴⁴ In his address to the General Assembly in 1891 Governor Tillman stated that although he was no prohibitionist, “There [were], as [he was] informed, between 700 and 800 bar-rooms in

⁴² Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 328; Eubanks, *Ben Tillman's Baby*, 46.

⁴³ Eubanks, *Ben Tillman's Baby*, 55; *Columbia, State*, October 5, 1892.

⁴⁴ *House Journal*, 1893, 38-39.

the State. . . . [and that] no sensible man [would] deny that one-half or three-fourths of the crimes committed in the State [were] traceable directly to the drinking of whiskey.”⁴⁵

As early as 1891 Tillman apparently wanted to curb excessive drinking in the state and the subsequent crimes that were directly related to it. He did not, however, consider absolute prohibition “practicable, or even desirable.” He would later say that he did not think people could be “legislated into morality.”⁴⁶ As usual, on this issue Tillman did not ignore the financial considerations of the government or his rural supporters. He sought a plan that would both exert a relative amount of social control and also benefit the state’s purse, whereby tax burdens could be lifted from depression-wearied farmers. Tillman proposed to modify the current system of issuing liquor licenses, whereby one could obtain a license by paying \$100 fees to both the county and the municipality in which they would operate. Alternatively, Tillman’s new plan suggested that municipalities should be barred from issuing licenses, and that all revenue obtained through liquor permits should go to the counties and the state’s general fund. The governor insisted that since county and state taxes—“and largely the country people”—funded the courts that bore the expense of handling the cases caused by whiskey drinking, the municipalities therefore had no rightful claim to profit from the licensing of barrooms. This proposal was more than an attempt to bolster his political power at the expense of local leaders; it was a clear example of Tillman representing the interests of the farming class. Historians have denied that Tillman led any real class rebellion by

⁴⁵ *House Journal*, 1891, 58-59.

⁴⁶ *House Journal*, 1891, 58; *Senate Journal*, 1892, 24-28; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 330-31.

citing the fact that many Tillmanite leaders were large planters and well-to-do lawyers, and in a sense they are correct. Tillman, however, did not necessarily represent the poor lower class against the wealthy upper class, but the rural country class against the town-dwelling class. “The people in the country not only pay tribute to those who sell liquor, by means of which the towns are beautified and adorned,” he declared, “but they pay tax for the suppression of crime produced by the maintenance of these barrooms.”

Additionally, Tillman suggested a higher license fee, which he contended would both increase state and county revenue, and also decrease the number of saloons.

Unfortunately for the governor, prohibitionists, liquor dealers, and municipal leaders disapproved of his plan, and the Senate easily killed the bill.⁴⁷

Despite their slight legislative defeat in 1891, prohibitionists maintained their pressure on citizens and government officials. Strongly influenced by the efforts of the state’s most widely read religious newspapers, the *Baptist Courier* and the *Southern Christian Advocate*, the South Carolina Democratic Executive Committee decided to give voters the option to express their opinion on prohibition during the August, 1892 primary. The committee, however, clarified that the results would not be official or binding on the elected candidates. It is also important to note that Wets and Drys (i.e., those who opposed liquor restriction and prohibitionists) were equally dispersed throughout both the Tillmanite and Conservative factions of the party. Almost 20,000 primary voters did not opt for either side of the liquor issue, but among the 68,515 who did, the prohibitionists

⁴⁷ *House Journal*, 1891, 58-59, 138-39; *Columbia State*, December 2, 6, 1891; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 329-30; Eubanks, *Ben Tillman’s Baby*, 55-57.

won a majority of about 10,000.⁴⁸ A significant number of Tillmanites voted for prohibition, so Tillman determined to pass some measure to alleviate the building antagonism between the opponents over liquor and forestall one of the groups from “[appealing] to the Negro as the balance of power.”⁴⁹

In a November 1892 message to the General Assembly, Tillman emphasized the point that the primary vote on prohibition had only been abstract, “without any definite legislation being indicated.” The governor also argued that prohibition laws were usually ineffectual, cost-prohibitive, and unenforceable. Moreover, he added that “all classes, men and women alike, feel, at times, the need of stimulants, and many who are never guilty of excess in their use resent any law infringing upon personal liberty.” Tillman also reiterated his earlier point that the “liquor men” and towns profited from the alcohol business, while country people suffered from it due to increased taxes. As he viewed the issue, South Carolina citizens were sadly already divided along town and country lines, “and the wisdom of further division [was] questionable.” The governor recognized that both current options—outright prohibition or unregulated trade—would continue to exacerbate the antagonism between the friends and enemies of prohibition.⁵⁰

During the 1892 legislative term there were several bills introduced offering various methods of deciding the liquor question; the two most popular were a statewide referendum, and prohibition with exceptions for medicinal purposes. Eventually

⁴⁸ Columbia *Southern Christian Advocate*, June 30, August 25, 1892; Greenville *Baptist Courier*, July 28, 1892; Columbia *State*, September 1-3, 1892; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 329-30; Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 235; Eubanks, *Ben Tillman's Baby*, 58-59.

⁴⁹ Senate Journal, 1892, 24-28; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 331.

⁵⁰ *House Journal*, 1892, 29-31.

legislators compromised and put forth what was commonly known as the Roper bill. This measure prohibited the sale of alcohol except for medicinal purposes, and also called for a State Commissioner who would scrupulously oversee distribution in order to prevent abuses of the medicinal trade. The bill easily passed in the House, but experienced defeat in the Senate. Tillman was determined to pass some measure on the liquor issue before the legislature adjourned for the year. He collaborated with Senator John Gary Evans, an important supporter from Aiken, to introduce a measure that would prohibit the private sale of liquor and establish a state-owned liquor dispensary. Tillman saw this as a viable path to eliminating saloon life and thus pleasing prohibitionists, while refraining from restricting the freedoms of moderate drinkers. Most importantly to Tillman, he saw the dispensary as a potential boon to the state's income that could decrease overall tax rates and further please his country-based supporters.⁵¹

Tillman's knowledge of the dispensary system is primarily attributable to T. Larry Gantt, editor of the *Columbia Daily Register*, a pro-Tillman organ that was established with a promise of the state's printing business. Gantt was formerly a newspaper reporter in Athens, Georgia, where the city had instituted a municipal liquor dispensary based on the Gothenburg system. He convinced Tillman that the compromise would destroy the antagonism between the Wets and Drys, and that it had brought Athens significant

⁵¹ *Senate Journal*, 1892, 357, 420, 504; *House Journal*, 1892, 98, 290, 574; *Columbia State*, November 11-13, 24, December 24, 1892; Eubanks, *Ben Tillman's Baby*, 60; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 331-32; Jack E. Tuttle, "Tillman and the South Carolina Dispensary," *Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association* (1961), 64-65.

revenue without the need for additional taxes.⁵² The dispensary bill was introduced as an amendment to the Roper prohibition bill, so as to avoid the necessity of three readings that was required under House rules. Opponents of the bill insisted that the “amendment” was not relevant to the original bill and unsuccessfully attempted to filibuster. Although there was fierce opposition to the bill by prohibitionists and liquor purveyors, Tillman, with the help of Senator Evans secured enough support for passage. The Dispensary Bill became law just in time to beat the legislature’s scheduled adjournment of December 24, 1892.⁵³

The most essential function of the South Carolina Dispensary Law, which was set to take effect on July 1, 1893, was to prohibit the sale of intoxicating spirits by both private individuals and companies, and to reserve that function solely to state government. The law prescribed the creation of the Board of Control, consisting of the governor, attorney general, and comptroller general that would supervise the dispensary’s operation. It also provided for the appointment of a Commissioner who would purchase all alcohol for legal sale in the state, and then distribute the liquor to county dispensers. Those agents were to be appointed by County Boards of Control. Each county received one dispensary, excepting Charleston and Richmond, which received ten and three

⁵² Eubanks, *Ben Tillman’s Baby*, 59; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 332-333; Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 237. Although the arrangement of establishing a public monopoly on the liquor trade originated in Falun, Sweden in 1850, the plan was “perfected” in Gothenburg. The system was meant to eliminate the motives of profit behind the liquor business and thereby reduce the overall consumption of alcohol. The plan was so successful in Gothenburg that the Swedish government instituted the system on a nationwide scale in 1895. Walter Thompson, *The Control of Liquor in Sweden* (New York, 1935), 13-16, as cited in Neal, 333.

⁵³ *Charleston News and Courier*, December 18-26, 1892; *Columbia State*, December 18-26, 1892; *Columbia Daily Register*, December 18-26, 1892; Eubanks, *Ben Tillman’s Baby*, 59; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 332-333; Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 238.

respectively due to their large populations. The state commissioner and the county dispensers were to be men not known to be addicted to alcohol or to have ever been engaged in the liquor business. Additionally, they were obligated to post bonds of \$3,000 to insure that they adhered to the new liquor laws. The revenue generated by the dispensaries would be divided among the counties, municipalities, and the state. Specifically, the state would receive one-half of the profit, and the county and municipality in which the liquor was sold would each receive one-fourth. This plan was more appealing to municipal leaders than Tillman's 1891 suggestion, which would have cut out municipalities from all liquor revenue.⁵⁴

The Dispensary Law may not have completely satisfied adherents of outright prohibition, but it did make the purchase of liquor a much more complex procedure than it had been. Furthermore it would now be a matter of public record. Persons wishing to purchase liquor from the dispensary would have to submit a written request including their name, address, the volume and type of liquor desired, and declaring for whose use the alcohol was intended. Additionally, no dispenser was allowed to sell spirits to anyone whom they knew to be a minor, to be currently intoxicated, or to be prone to excessive indulgence. Liquor purchases were only to be made in sealed packages between sunrise and sunset, and opening or consuming said liquor on dispensary premises was expressly forbidden.⁵⁵ It is also important to note that the law did not force dispensaries upon counties that did not wish to have them. A majority of electors of any municipality could vote to preclude the establishment of a dispensary in their community.

⁵⁴ South Carolina, *Acts*, 1892, 62-67.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

The Dispensary Law immediately faced harsh criticism from both sides of the prohibition issue. In an article, “An Obnoxious Law,” J. F. Clinkscales of the *Anderson Intelligencer* insisted that the liquor trade was not a proper government function and condemned Governor Tillman of practicing “mad paternalism.”⁵⁶ Narcisco G. Gonzales of the *Columbia State* maintained that Tillman’s sole purpose behind the dispensary law was destroying free business in order to collect huge profits for the state.⁵⁷ Several church leaders admonished their members for purchasing any sort of liquor, dispensary or otherwise, and worked with other prohibitionists to try and keep the local dispensaries from receiving the necessary signatures on petitions for establishment.⁵⁸

In an address to the General Assembly in November 1893, Tillman refuted critics of the Dispensary Law by describing its benefits. He argued that the incentive for profit had been eliminated, along with ambitious purveyors, which would therefore decrease the overall consumption of liquor. Additionally he declared, “the concomitants of ice, sugar, lemons, &c., being removed there is not the same inclination to drink remaining, and the closing of the saloons, especially at night, and the prohibition of its sale by the drink, destroy the enticements and seductions which have caused so many men and boys to be led astray and enter on the downward course.”⁵⁹ The governor also stressed the progressive ideas of government regulation of quality standards, maintaining, “a pure article is guaranteed, as it is subject to chemical analysis,” and that “treating is stopped,

⁵⁶ *Anderson Intelligencer*, January 4, 11, 1893.

⁵⁷ *Columbia, State*, December 24, 1892.

⁵⁸ Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 335.

⁵⁹ *House Journal*, 1893, 39-40.

as the bottles are not opened on the premises.”⁶⁰ The dispensary law did stipulate that the state commissioner “shall not sell to the County Dispensers any intoxicating or fermented liquors except such as have been tested by the chemist of the South Carolina College and declared to be pure and unadulterated.”⁶¹ This feature of the legislation was a comparable precursor of the progressive era Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. Evidence of the governor’s genuine concern for providing residents with pure quality liquor can be seen in the care with which he selected a manufacturer, as well as the study he put into the subject. Along with his appointed commissioner David H. Traxler, a tee-totaling Baptist from Timmonsville in Florence County, Tillman visited Louisville, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh to inspect distillers and bottling plants. He eventually contracted with George Hubbell of the Mill Creek Distilling Company of Cincinnati. After sampling different varieties and reading on liquor distillation, Tillman, who seldom drank alcohol, comprised a system of labeling whiskey barrels with one to three X’s to ensure quality standards.⁶²

One of the most effective statistics Tillman employed in defense of the Dispensary Law was the reduction in public drunkenness. He showed records comparing the number of arrests for drunkenness from July 1 to September 30 for both 1892 and 1893. While there were 577 such arrests during the summer of the year prior to the dispensary, records for the same period in 1893 showed 287 arrests, a reduction of 290.⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ South Carolina, *Acts*, 63.

⁶² Spartanburg *Carolina Spartan*, February 8, March 22, 1893; *Columbia State*, April 3, 12, 15, 1893; Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 242-44; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 337-38.

⁶³ *House Journal*, 1893, 38.

The governor also commended the Dispensary Law for the income it had secured for the state. He asserted that between the fifty-one dispensaries that were in operation by October 1893, they had collected a net profit of \$32,198.16 for the state—an equal amount would be split between the counties and municipalities where the liquor was sold.⁶⁴ Finally, though he did not address them specifically, Tillman spoke to those disgruntled citizens who were potential third-party bolters. Although the People’s Party had failed to make significant gains in the 1892 presidential elections, it was still relatively strong and was gearing up for the next round of contests. Tillman appealed to the might-be party bolters when he lauded the dispensary law as the destruction of the “whiskey rings” that had “been the curse of every municipality in the State, and [had] always controlled municipal elections.” To third-party radicals “rings” and “trusts” were the hated money power that kept the common man from prospering. Tillman assured those in his state that the whiskey ring had been “torn up root and branch” and that “the influence of the bar-keeper as a political manipulator [was] absolutely destroyed.”⁶⁵ Just how much political manipulation bar-keepers had ever actually instigated is debatable. Nevertheless, the most salient aspect of this point is that Tillman did reach out to potential populists with other appeals than the fear of Negro equality or Reconstruction-era Republican dominance.

Apart from the criticism of the Dispensary Law itself, ardent opposition developed to the tactics Tillman employed to enforce the law. The original act contained a clause stating, “the governor shall have authority to appoint one or more state

⁶⁴ *House Journal*, 1893, 36.

⁶⁵ *House Journal*, 1893, 40.

constables . . . to see that this act is enforced.”⁶⁶ Tillman employed constables across the state to search out and seize illegal liquor. The most flagrant violators of the law were illegal saloons known as “blind tigers,” which purchased illegal alcohol from manufacturers outside the state. Constables used disguises in many towns to infiltrate illegal whiskey sellers. They also drew ire from citizens by employing strong-arm tactics and searching property for no other apparent reason than to bully citizens. Although Tillman genuinely attempted to appoint trustworthy, reasonable men to the position of constable, some were unnecessarily rough and rude when searching potential violators.⁶⁷ In the constables’ defense, however, in many cases the public was as unruly and violent as the constables who were trying to enforce the law. In early August 1893 at Sumter angry crowds threw rotten eggs at constables who had performed legal searches and discovered contraband liquor. A constable was seriously bruised after a fight with a local rowdy. Tillman was incensed at the public’s rebellious behavior, and he subsequently supplied each of the constables with Colt revolvers, declaring that the law would be enforced even if it meant killing someone.⁶⁸ Tillman’s resolve to enforce the law only strengthened the determination of his opposition: his own brother George Tillman, a state representative, declared, “I’ll be damned if I don’t shoot the first spy that enters my residence or opens a package of my goods sneaking around hunting liquor.”⁶⁹

⁶⁶ South Carolina, *Acts*, 1892, 76.

⁶⁷ Spartanburg *Carolina Spartan*, July 5, 1893; Charleston *News and Courier*, July 17, 1893; Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 247-49; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 345-46.

⁶⁸ Charleston *News and Courier*, August 4-6, 1893; Columbia *State*, August 5, 1893; Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 247-49; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 345-46.

⁶⁹ Charleston *News and Courier*, January 16, 1894; Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 250.

In late March 1894 the building tension between the dispensary constables and the public erupted at Darlington. The town was a stronghold of anti-Tillman sentiment, and also home to multiple illegal saloons. The governor sent four constables to search for liquor law violators, and rumors spread throughout the town that the men had been ordered by Tillman to search private residences without warrants. The reports vary as to what actually happened at Darlington. Tillman's constables claimed that a large mob of armed men followed them, and that the unruly townspeople "guyed, cursed, and abused" them.⁷⁰ Another unnamed anti-Tillmanite, however, insisted that there were "very few citizens who were armed" and that all of the trouble was due to "the meddling of the constables."⁷¹ Nevertheless, Tillman ordered eighteen additional constables as well as the Sumter militia to Darlington under orders to quell the uproar. The situation calmed for the day, and on the following, March 30, the original four constables and their reinforcements attempted to leave the city. Still upset, however, a group of citizens followed the constables, and after several arguments and accusations, Constable John B. McClendon shot and killed Darlington resident Frank E. Norment. Consequently, an angry mob chased the constables into a nearby swamp and some rioters fired shots into a train carrying constables who had not even been present at the preceding altercation.⁷²

⁷⁰ Benjamin Ryan Tillman, "Our Whiskey Rebellion," *North American Review*, 158 (May, 1894), 516; Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 251; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 349.

⁷¹ A Citizen of South Carolina, "A Citizen's View of the State of Affairs in South Carolina," *The American Law Register and Review*, 42:5 (May, 1894), 345-346. The author of this article chooses to remain anonymous, but the rhetoric is highly anti-Tillman, which begs the question of the objectivity concerning the facts in the Darlington riot. The author also does not state whether he was present at the riot, or if the account is second hand.

⁷² *Charleston News and Courier*, April 1, 1894; *Darlington News*, April 5, 1894; Tillman "Our Whiskey Rebellion," 517; Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 251-52; Neal, *Tillman: The South*

The “Darlington Riot” ignited what looked sure to become statewide anarchy. Tillman ordered units from the Columbia militia to Darlington with the mission of suppressing the rioters. The Columbia units, as well as those of Charleston, Sumter, and Newberry refused the governor’s orders due to reports from the *Columbia State* that proclaimed the riot to have been sparked by the constables attacking innocent citizens. Additionally, mobs looted militia armories in Columbia, Florence, and Chester; separate mobs also ransacked dispensary buildings in Florence and Darlington. Amidst the chaos frenzied citizens disseminated rumors that Governor Tillman had been assassinated.⁷³

Although some militia units had defied the governor’s orders, many other units from across the state rushed to Columbia to defend Tillman, the state dispensary, and the governor’s mansion. In an address to the General Assembly Tillman personally recognized nineteen militia units and eight volunteer units that had come to the aid of the governor and the state. Tillman ordered the responders to protect the capitol, to enforce martial law in Darlington and Florence, and to occupy telegraph and railroad lines in order to prevent inflammatory reports of the situation. These decisive actions prevented further rioting, and by April 5 martial law was suspended and the dispensaries were reopened. The governor dismissed and verbally scolded those militia units that had

Carolina Years, 349-50; W. F. Dargan, “A Last Word on the South Carolina Liquor Law,” *North American Review*, 159 (July, 1894), 55-58.

⁷³ *Charleston News and Courier*, April 1-2, 4, 1894; *Columbia State*, April 1-3, 10, 1894; Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 253-56; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 350-52.

disobeyed his orders, and praised those, especially the Edgefield Huzzars, who had proved loyal.⁷⁴

Although Gonzales of the *State* and Hemphill of the *News and Courier* continued to criticize Tillman for his unnecessarily harsh actions during the Darlington riot, most state citizens approved of his determination to maintain law and order.⁷⁵ Even Alfred B. Williams of the usually anti-Tillman *Greenville News* declared, “Governor Tillman’s acts during the trying and memorable week just past have been sensible, conciliatory, and in all respects proper.”⁷⁶ No matter what people personally felt about the Dispensary Law, the overwhelming sentiment both in, and outside the state, was that the governor was correct to promote and maintain order in the face of widespread lawlessness. Governor Tillman’s reform and management of state institutions, those both preexisting and newly created, show him to be both progressive-minded and financially responsible. He restructured the Lunatic Asylum’s Board of Regents and replaced a corrupt superintendent with a physician who proved talented and concerned with the humane treatment of patients. Although some historians have suggested that he sought to remove harmless patients to their respective counties in order to recuperate financial losses from the Coosaw Mining Company case, Tillman had endorsed that plan in his inaugural address, well before there was any loss of mining royalties. In the case of the state Penitentiary Tillman ended the convict-lease system in favor of the more human contract

⁷⁴ *Columbia State*, 1-4, 1894; *Charleston News and Courier*, April 2, 4, 1894; Tillman, “Our Whiskey Rebellion,” 517-19; *House Journal*, 1894, 25-32; Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 253-56; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 350-52.

⁷⁵ *Edgefield Advertiser*, April 4, 11, 18, 1894; *Charleston News and Courier*, April 4, 1894; *Columbia State*, April 12, 1894.

⁷⁶ *Greenville News*, April 8, 1894, quoted in Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 257.

system and established a thriving state farm, while simultaneously reducing the death rates of prisoners through improvement of food and medical care. Thus, prison reformers never mentioned South Carolina alongside the notorious penal systems in Mississippi, Georgia, and North Carolina.

Although the Dispensary Law has been routinely used as proof of Tillman's hunger for power and control over every function of the state, it was actually a practical solution to a growing problem at the time. The feud between strict prohibitionists and free-liquor proponents was at its zenith upon Tillman's election to the governor's office. It was not a problem of his creation, but it was his responsibility to remedy the situation. The Dispensary Law provided for the individual's freedom to consume alcohol, while also seriously restricting the degradations that accompanied widespread saloons. Since the opponents over the liquor issue were at diametric poles of opinion, perhaps the best evidence that the law was the only viable solution was the fact that neither side endorsed it. For those who insisted the governor enforced the law too stringently, the case should be made that any effective prohibition law would have required as much or more force to implement. Alternatively, no limitations whatsoever would have perpetuated the rampant drunkenness and criminality that a large portion of the state detested so fiercely. Tillman struck a reasonable, and progressive, middle course.

Tillman's economic management of the state's institutions meant fewer tax burdens on farmers and other hard-pressed citizens. They saw efficient government, the assault on corrupt officials, and attacks against the "whiskey rings" as efforts with consideration of their welfare as the foremost principle. Therefore, Farmers' Alliance

members and laborers had little reason to leave the beloved Democracy when Tillman was making the party their champion. Tillman's white-supremacist views do not, however, nullify the other progressive feats he achieved. Furthermore, he had virtually no need to scare would-be populists back into the Democratic fold with tales of Negro dominance, for his governing of the state proved that he was a reformer, a friend to the farmer, as well as the enemy of corruption.

TILLMAN AND BUSINESS REFORM

“Tillmanism was a political machine, not a social or political revolution.”¹ This assertion of historian Walter Edgar has been widely agreed upon and essentially unchallenged by recent historians of the New South, the populist-progressive era, and Benjamin Tillman. Additionally, scholars have stressed the notion that Tillman’s cries for agricultural reform were primarily rhetorical, insisting that he did not share the sympathy for the lower classes or the bitterness against national evils that the more radical agrarian organizations espoused. According to historian William J. Cooper, “Unlike them, Tillman paid little attention to Wall Street, the trusts, or any other national issue; he called South Carolina his only concern.”² In actuality, however, Ben Tillman initiated tangible state-level reform measures while governor that served to mitigate agrarian discontent, and consequently averted a third-party movement in South Carolina. It was Tillman’s reforms that precluded a populist uprising, not racist demagoguery alarming citizens of the evils associated with a third party that would need to court black voters to succeed. It is true that Tillman never fully endorsed all of the Farmers’ Alliance’s platforms, never considered a third-party bolt, and focused almost solely on state issues before his election to the U.S. Senate in 1894. Furthermore, Tillman’s abrasive personality and his disavowal of the socio-political equality of African Americans makes it easy for modern historians to discount the entirety of his career as

¹ Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 438.

² William J. Cooper Jr., *The Conservative Regime: South Carolina, 1877-1890* (Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), 203.

the political machinations of a duplicitous and power-hungry white-supremacist. This attitude, however, is a mistake. Although Ben Tillman may not have led a radical “revolution,” for the place and time in which he lived, his two terms as governor proved to be the most forward-looking, reasonable, and progressive that most people could have expected. While historians eagerly cite the criticisms of contemporary Conservatives³ who hated Tillman as evidence intended to downplay his popularity, it is important to remember that the Conservative reign of power had been ideologically rooted in a backward-looking non-progressivism. According to one of the most notable historians of post-Reconstruction South Carolina, William J. Cooper Jr., “during their fourteen year hegemony the South Carolina Conservatives tried to recreate the ideals of that polity they esteemed above all other: ante-bellum South Carolina.”⁴ Therefore, in light of the fact that his predecessors were intent on recreating the pre-Civil War South, Ben Tillman’s reform measures—despite his white supremacist ideology—appear all the more progressive by comparison. Even if Tillman was a promoter of white supremacy, such sentiment was not enough to stop third-party movements in other Southern and Western states, and would also not have been enough in South Carolina. Furthermore, Tillman’s stance against monopolies and railroads, although not identical to populist sentiment, favored the common farmer and was similar enough to Populist platforms to preclude a significant third-party movement in South Carolina.

³ Throughout the course of this discussion the terms “Conservative” and “Reformer” are capitalized when they are used in reference to political factions of the South Carolina Democratic Party, and not simply as adjectives. When Tillman gained a significant political following, the two terms were commonly employed to denote political allegiance. Reformers who supported Tillman were also commonly known as “Tillmanites.”

⁴ *Ibid.*, 207.

It has been established that Tillman was primarily focused on state issues as opposed to national ones, and his critics have used this as another weapon in their arsenal to prove he was no true agrarian reformer; the most prominent agrarian organizations, such as the Grange and the Farmers' Alliance, addressed national issues like trusts and the money supply. Nevertheless, within South Carolina Tillman sought to create a more efficient government and remedy problems of the textile, phosphate, and railroad industries. It does make sense that a governor would be chiefly occupied with state issues, and Tillman clearly worked vigorously on national matters during his twenty-three years as U.S. Senator. Tillman's overall strategy to aid farmers and other struggling South Carolinians was regulation of business and the operation of an economical government that would result in a decreased tax burden, fair shipping rates, and better educational opportunities. During his first term as governor, Tillman initiated legislation that attacked the problems he had denounced since 1885, and had articulated more specifically in his inaugural address in 1890.

The first issue to be examined here—improvement of conditions and working hours for laborers in cotton mills—was not necessarily one of Tillman's chief concerns; cotton mill regulation was actually the objective of a few of Tillman's devotees. Nevertheless, the subject is important for two reasons: first, it represents one of the initial instances of social legislation enacted by Tillman's reform government; and second, it serves as an example of Tillman yielding to the wishes of other members of his movement, as opposed to continuously playing the tyrant who brooked no difference of

opinion. Furthermore, the issue is manifestly noteworthy since the textile industry would become a leading source of employment and income for the state in the next century.

Cotton mill operations existed in ante-bellum South Carolina; however, they were relatively small-scale and unimportant until the establishment of William Gregg's Graniteville (Aiken County) mill in 1845. Even then, there was no boom in the business remotely comparable to that of the later part of the century. In the years between the conclusion of the Civil War and 1880, the textile industry demonstrated considerable growth, but in the 1880's the business escalated so much that it rivaled railroads as the state's most prominent business. State government had been influential in the promotion of cotton mills, as well as all types of industry. To combat the inimical economic effects of the Panic of 1873, the state's Reconstruction government passed a law excluding "any individual or association of individuals" from taxes "upon the property or capital employed or invested in such manufactures or enterprises."⁵ By 1900 the cotton enterprise would have invested capital worth approximately \$40,000,000, and would usurp railroads as the dominant business of South Carolina.⁶

The conservative Democrats who "redeemed" the government in 1876 adopted the tax-exemption law for industry as one of their own. And the prominent Francis W. Dawson of the *Charleston News and Courier* heartily endorsed the law.⁷ Despite the widespread support from journalists, the legislature finally repealed the tax-exemption in

⁵ South Carolina, *Acts and Joint Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina*, XV, 513-14; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 120.

⁶ Gustavus Galloway Williamson Jr., "Cotton Manufacturing in South Carolina, 1865-1892," (unpublished PhD dissertation, Dept. of History, John Hopkins University, 1954), 4, 63, 68, 92, 94, 105; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 119.

⁷ *Charleston News and Courier*, November 27, 1884, November 25, December 23-25, 1885.

1885 due to growing opposition that denounced the fact that poor citizens received no such charity from the government.⁸ By the time Ben Tillman reached the governor's office, tax-exemption was a non-issue; however, the conditions of cotton mills and the hours of laborers had become a significant one. Yet, it must be made clear that Tillman was not inherently a foe of industry, even if he was the champion of the farmers' cause. One of the state's most salient pro-industry advocates, Daniel A. Tompkins, was a close friend of Tillman; also, highly influential Tillman leaders including Daniel K. Norris and Ira Jones were thoroughly invested in cotton mills.⁹ Just as those who had led the fight against tax-exemption, Tillman believed that those best equipped to pay—big-money industries—should shoulder their fair share of the tax burden.

Governor Tillman, a self-proclaimed reformer who esteemed farming and farmers above all else, nurtured little sympathy for the factory worker. In 1892 he loudly proclaimed that he would “rather deal with the negro any day than the damn factory class.”¹⁰ There were, however, significant members of the Tillman movement who genuinely desired to ameliorate the conditions of this new class of “lint heads.” In 1892 Joshua Ashley, a advocate of mill workers from Anderson who was subsequently dubbed “Citizen Josh,” proposed legislation that would limit mill hours to ten per day, or a sixty hour week. Cotton mill magnates balked at the proposal. James L. Orr, president of the Piedmont Mills, insisted that the imposition of a sixty-hour workweek would destroy all

⁸ *Charleston News and Courier*, December 4 and 1884; *Columbia Daily Register*, December 4, 1884; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 120-21.

⁹ Gustavus G. Williamson Jr., “South Carolina Cotton Mills and the Tillman Movement,” *The Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association* (1949), 45-46.

¹⁰ *Columbia State*, August 14, 1892; Diane Neal, *Benjamin Ryan Tillman: the South Carolina Years 1847-1894*, (PhD dissertation, Dept. of History, Kent State University, 1976), 232.

the mills in the state, and Ellison A. Smyth of the Pelzer Mills argued that South Carolina mills would be unable to compete with those of other Southern states and New England.¹¹ Although Tillman might not have instigated or even cared about legislation to benefit mill workers, he willingly supported a proposal to which Orr and his ilk so vehemently opposed. During the legislative debate, a Tillman supporter and future governor and champion of white mill laborers, Coleman Livingston Blease, declared to the mill owners, “If you have to buy any capital by murdering women and children, for God’s sake let it go!”¹²

Eventually, after a compromise that set mill hours at sixty-six a week, the legislation passed. Tillman had shown a willingness to accept a cause of his supporters for which he had no particular affection, suggesting that he was not quite as domineering as some scholars maintain. Furthermore, at least in the public view, he had shown his eagerness to combat the moneyed industry men in the name of the common man. Finally, the Reform leaders had managed, according to Tillman’s biographer, “a beginning in a type of legislation sanctioned by the progressive thought of the age.”¹³

Among the first state problems Tillman confronted with personal vigor was the phosphate industry and the government-sanctioned monopoly of the Coosaw Mining Company. Speaking of better management of the state’s phosphate beds, Tillman stressed that “nothing with which the Legislature has to deal can equal this in importance

¹¹ Charleston News and Courier, November 25-26, 1892; Neal, *Tillman: the South Carolina Years*, 232-33.

¹² Coleman L. Blease, quoted in Francis Butler Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman, South Carolinian*; with a new introduction by Orville Vernon Burton, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), 222.

¹³ Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 222.

and value to the taxpayer.”¹⁴ Before briefly describing the history of phosphate mining in South Carolina, as well Ben Tillman’s subsequent battle with the Coosaw Mining Company, it is important to recognize that at this moment Tillman was beginning to act the part of a legitimate reformer. Even though he publicly denigrated third-party radicalism, and would go on to deny being a Populist, by taking on big capital and industry in the name of the hard-working taxpayer, Tillman actually embodied what would-be party bolters wanted. One Southern Populist, J.A. Transom of Pfafftown, North Carolina attempted to summarize the core principles embodied in populist ideology and formally espoused in the various demands of its 1892 Omaha platform. He insisted that if the platform needed shortening, “ ‘Tis easily done. The one word ‘antimonopoly’ expresses every demand in, and outside the Omaha platform necessary to establish justice among us.”¹⁵ Tillman’s fight to destroy the Coosaw Company’s monopoly on phosphate beds was right in line with populist sentiment. He even invoked the language of Alliancemen and future Populists when he denounced the phosphate industry as the “octopus which . . . has kept the water turbid with its inky fluid; and while those on the inside have many of them grown rich, the taxpayers and their representatives know very little about it and every effort has been made to keep the facts from the public.”¹⁶ This assault on a moneyed monopoly contradicts scholarly assessments that “once in office the

¹⁴ South Carolina *Senate Journal*, 1890, p.97.

¹⁵ Bruce Palmer, *Man over Money* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 114-15.

¹⁶ *Senate Journal*, 1890, 97.

Reformers were not nearly as revolutionary as they had appeared on the campaign trail.”¹⁷

Phosphate mining, along with railroads and cotton mills, was one of the leading enterprises in the largely agricultural South Carolina. Unlike the other industries, however, phosphate mining did not begin in earnest until after the Civil War, which had halted its first attempt at mining in 1860. In 1843 Edmund Ruffin, the notorious fire-eating secessionist, conducted a geological survey and reported marl deposits located primarily along the coastal river beds between Charleston and Beaufort. These deposits were rich in carbonate of lime, a vital component for manufactured fertilizer. The Charleston Mining and Manufacturing Company, the state’s first such company, began operation in 1867—by 1870 there were twelve more companies engaged in phosphate mining.¹⁸ This healthy competition, however, was short-lived.

In 1870 the state legislature granted privileges to the River and Marine Company to mine phosphate in all the navigable rivers of the state for twenty-one years. In 1876 the General Assembly gave the Coosaw Mining Company exclusive rights to mine on the Coosaw River. After being directed to investigate the charters of the various mining companies on the river in a special legislative session in 1877, Attorney General James Conner recommended to lawmakers that a monopoly be granted to a single company

¹⁷ Edgar, 439.

¹⁸ Philip E. Chazal, *The Century in Phosphates and Fertilizers, a Sketch of the South Carolina Phosphate Industry* (Charleston, 1904), 55-56. Special Collections, Clemson University Libraries; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 119.

because of the large amount of capital required to finance such an operation.¹⁹ Although there were other phosphate deposits in the Lowcountry, the Coosaw River was where the preponderance of the rock resided. Consequently, the Coosaw Company enjoyed the benefit of mining the richest deposit, at that time in the entire country, without the threat of competition. Evidently, the Conservative government deemed free-market competition to be an insurmountable obstacle to the fledgling industry. By the time the Conservatives had lost the state's executive office there was a surfacing disagreement about the legitimacy of the company's monopoly on the Coosaw.

During his inaugural address in 1890, Governor Tillman elucidated a discrepancy in the Coosaw Mining Company's mandate. While he understood that the firm's lease was to expire on March 1 1891, he asserted that a large stockholder of the company had told him that their "tenure [was] not a lease expiring in 1891, but a contract running for all time."²⁰ Tillman went on to explain that the Coosaw phosphate deposits were possibly the richest in the world; and while the mining company's shareholders had become extraordinarily rich, the company had paid nothing to the state for its franchise. This was a bit of exaggeration, since the state's Reconstruction government of 1870 had established a royalty of one dollar for every ton of phosphate mined, and the 1878 legislature had upheld that price when granting exclusive rights to the Coosaw Company. In 1879 the state received \$98,000 in phosphate royalties; by 1890 the industry had

¹⁹ *Acts*, XVI, 320-21; *Charleston News and Courier*, January 18, 1878; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 121.

²⁰ *Senate Journal*, 1890, 97.

expanded, paying a royalty of \$237,149.06.²¹ In 1877 the state had also created the position of a phosphate commissioner whose primary duties would be to ensure that mining firms worked within their charters and to collect royalties. To Governor Tillman, however, neither the commissioner nor the current royalty rate was exacting nearly enough from the mining industry as compared to what he demanded they rightfully owed to the state and the independent taxpayers.

As early as 1886, well before he held any government position, Tillman's criticisms of the phosphate industry had forced the legislature to appoint a commission to probe the efficiency of the mining situation. The commission suggested a new plan in 1887 that would have mining companies pay a set fee of \$175,000, with a one-dollar royalty on every ton over 175,000. The Senate killed the measure by a vote that showed Tillmanites and Conservatives voting on each side.²² In 1890, however, Tillman, as the newly elected governor, had a far greater opportunity to change the phosphate-mining establishment than simply assaulting it through rhetoric and influencing ineffectual commissions. He promoted the immediate commencement of a new survey to fairly judge the value of the phosphate deposits, the fixing of a new royalty rate more favorable to the state coffers, and also opening up the territories to competition by offering leases in each newly proposed district to the highest bidder. At that point Tillman announced that phosphate rock was worth \$7 per ton, and the mining companies' cost was at the most \$4.25 per ton, royalties included. Tillman insisted the cost figure was most likely far

²¹ *Reports and Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina*, 1879, 116; 1890, II, 657; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 125.

²² *Charleston News and Courier*, November 30 and December 3, 1887; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 126.

less, and therefore the mining companies were collecting unnecessarily huge profit margins from state-owned lands, and subsequently the overstressed taxpayers had carried the burden of funding the government. Tillman stressed in his inaugural address that, “the expiration of the Coosaw lease in March next makes it possible, in my judgment, to double the income of the State from the phosphate royalty without injuring the industry or interfering unduly with any vested right.”²³ He proved his assaults to be more than mere rhetoric meant to pander to his constituency’s mistrust of monopolies, and soon he was embroiled in an all-out war with the Coosaw Company.

In January 1891 the state legislature passed (at the urging of Tillman) the Phosphate Commission Act, which created a five-member commission, including the governor, with the mission of conducting a survey of the phosphate beds and then recommending a course of action to the General Assembly.²⁴ Tillman and the commission made a relatively brief survey of the phosphate region and concluded that the \$10,000 appropriated by the legislature was woefully insufficient to fund a major and thorough assessment of the value of those mineral deposits. The phosphate was so far spread, and so deep within the earth, that the equipment needed to adequately survey it was beyond the means of the state’s treasury. The commissioners did, however, employ \$2,313.30 of the appropriation towards the purchase of a small steamboat so that the inspector (a position created by the Phosphate Act) could “exercise . . . intelligent

²³ *Senate Journal*, 1890, 97. During his inaugural address Gov. Tillman specifically mentioned raising the phosphate royalty to \$2 per ton, and also the considered the possibility of an objective survey of the state’s phosphate deposits conducted by the U.S. Navy or Coast Survey.

²⁴ *Senate Journal*, 1891, 16-17; Neal, *Tillman: the South Carolina Years*, 222.

supervision of the mining, and to enable him to see that the royalty was honestly paid.”²⁵ Although the creation of a new Phosphate Commission and inspector who would make unannounced visits on the mining companies was progress, Tillman was dismayed that the full-scale investigation of the rock deposits seemed cost-prohibitory. Nevertheless, he remained intent on destroying the Coosaw Company’s monopoly and opening up the river to competition.

In response to Tillman’s threats in his campaign and during his inaugural address to destroy the Coosaw Mining Company’s exclusive rights along the river, Robert Adger, the company’s manager, informed Tillman that they would seek legal retribution if the Phosphate Commission “aid[ed] or encourage[d]” any other mining operation to trespass on their territory. Additionally, he maintained that the Coosaw Company had abided by all of the stipulations of the 1876 contract, and enjoined the governor not to threaten the mutually beneficial relationship between the company and the state.²⁶ Notwithstanding Adger’s warnings of impending litigation, on March 1, 1891 Tillman and the Phosphate Commission formally took possession of the Coosaw River and issued licenses to three separate companies to mine within the region. Two of the firms did enter the river, but were prohibited from mining by the order of a Federal judge acting on the complaint of the Coosaw Company. Tillman insisted that Judge Charles Simonton had acted

²⁵ Ibid. Tillman was forced—in his estimation because of an omission in the appropriation Bill for the Commission—to borrow \$2,891.44 from the Carolina National Bank of Columbia to pay the salary of the phosphate Inspector.

²⁶ Robert Adger to B.R. Tillman, February 21, 1891, Governor Benjamin Ryan Tillman Papers, South Carolina Department of Archives and History; Columbia, *State*, February 21, 1891; Chazal, *A Sketch of the South Carolina Phosphate Industry*, 55-61; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 222-3.

improperly by treating the Phosphate Commissioners as if they were private citizens and not state officials.²⁷ In addition to securing the injunction that kept the other mining companies out of their contested river, the Coosaw Company also brought suit against the Phosphate Commissioners on the basis that the Act that had created the Commission in 1890 was unconstitutional since it contravened the 1876 contract between the company and the state. In response, Tillman and the Commissioners refused the company's request to continue mining until the matter had been settled in court.²⁸ The case made its way through the U.S. Court of Appeals and on to the U.S. Supreme Court, where in April 1892 the country's highest judicial body ruled the 1890 law constitutional and confirmed the undertakings of the Phosphate Commission.²⁹ Tillman had achieved what he set out to do; namely to destroy the "octopus" that was growing fat off the state's riches. However, not all had necessarily proceeded as he might have wished.

When he addressed the General Assembly on November 24, 1891 Governor Tillman admitted that up to that time the stoppage of the Coosaw Company's operations had resulted in a loss of \$52,636.60 for the state; by the time litigation ended the total loss was estimated at \$62,000.³⁰ Instead of filling up the state's cashbox with increased royalties, Tillman's crusade against the hated monopoly had deprived the state of crucial funds. Nevertheless, Tillman still insisted that breaking the company's stranglehold on the industry would open up competition and in the near future produce a huge influx of

²⁷ *Senate Journal*, 1891, 16-17.

²⁸ Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 222-3.

²⁹ *Columbia State*, March 17, 1891; *Charleston News and Courier*, April 15, 1892; *South Carolina, Reports and Resolutions*, 1891, I, 288-290; II, 429-443; *Reports and Resolutions*, 1892, I, 240-244; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 222-3.

³⁰ *Senate Journal*, 1891, 17; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 224.

royalties. Many citizens supported his efforts despite the loss of revenue for the state. Farmers' movement supporters from Spartanburg proclaimed that they would continue to support the governor even "if the royalty is reduced to almost nothing."³¹ More importantly, newspaper editors across the state—and noticeably those from usually anti-Tillman sheets—praised the governor for steadfastly upholding the rights of the state against the Coosaw Company.³²

Ironically, and unfortunately for Tillman's legacy, the battle with the Coosaw Company did not open the door for increased competition and greater royalties. Instead, during the time the Coosaw Company was out of business in South Carolina, newly discovered phosphate deposits in Florida essentially proved to be the end of phosphate royalties for Palmetto state coffers. The Florida phosphate was of a higher grade, more abundant, and could be mined at less expense than that of the South Carolina rock. Subsequently, phosphate that had commanded \$7.00 per ton before the U.S. Supreme Court ruling afterwards fetched at the most \$3.50.³³ Despite the fact that Tillman's battle with the Coosaw Mining Company had resulted in a major loss of state revenue, his willingness to act on his pledges to the taxpayers should not be ignored. No one could have foreseen the discovery of the abundant supply of phosphate in Florida; moreover,

³¹ Spartanburg *Carolina Spartan*, August 5, 1891, May 11, 1892; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 224.

³² Those newspapers that would normally be classified as anti-Tillman were the *Charleston News and Courier*, the *Darlington News*, and the *Columbia State*, which was established by Narcisco G. Gonzales, a former reporter for the *News and Courier*, in February 1891 as an outspoken voice against the Tillman movement. Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 224. *News and Courier*, March 21, 1891, April 5, 1892; *Darlington News*, April 2, 1891, April 14, 1892; *Columbia State*, August 4, 1891.

³³ Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 225; *Charleston News and Courier*, September 21, 1891, November 28, 1892; *Columbia State*, November 27, 1892.

even though Tillman's halting of the Coosaw Company's operation accelerated the move of mining companies to Florida, the shift would have eventually occurred regardless of his actions. Tillman had promised to topple a monopoly that he and many others—not just Tillmanites—considered to be profiting unfairly at the loss of the state; he did exactly what he had promised.

In a similar method with which Tillman approached the phosphate industry, he attempted—with an arguable degree of success—to regulate the railroad industry. While Tillman never endorsed the radical view of Alliance members and Populists that railroads and other public utilities should be publicly owned and operated, he believed the burden of taxes needed to run the government should be shifted from the poor agricultural class to those, for example railroads, who were thought to be best equipped to pay it. It may be argued that railroads—due to the enormous capital needed for operation—were just as needful of tax leniency as individual farmers. Furthermore, the service they provided opened markets to farmers and increased the acreage of land that might prove profitable. Historian Gabriel Kolko has even argued that in general, railroads were usually in favor of government regulation because it stabilized a business bedeviled by cutthroat competition.³⁴ Nevertheless, to the poor agricultural classes of the late nineteenth century, railroads were considered to be one of the biggest agents of oppression.

Derision for the money power and railroad barons like Jay Gould was thick in the rhetoric of agrarian movements of the time. In 1891 prominent Populist leader Ignatius Donnelly of Minnesota argued that the vital question one must ask in determining if a

³⁴ Gabriel Kolko, *Railroads and Regulation, 1877-1916* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), introduction.

political platform was truly intent on reform was: “Is it an honest attempt to suppress the monopolies, which recent legislation has fostered?”³⁵ N. B. Ashby, a prominent lecturer for the Northern Farmers’ Alliance, argued that “the railroad by nature is a monopoly. It controls the commerce of the country. This control gives it the power to levy taxes and collect tribute from every individual who buys or sells.”³⁶ Ashby and Tillman did not share the exact proposals for remedying the “railroad problem.” Ashby insisted that railroad capital was vastly overvalued, and that farmers and other small shippers were assuming the difference between the actual value and the real value in the form of exorbitant shipping rates. He also advocated government ownership of all railroads, a central plank in the Omaha platform.³⁷ Tillman, however, maintained that carriers in South Carolina accepted the undervaluation of their property in order to benefit from lower taxes. While he wanted to increase the assessment of the railroads’ property and consequently their taxes—an action diametrically opposed to Ashby’s proposal of public ownership—he also intended to create a strong railroad commission with the power to prevent unnecessarily high rates. It will be shown that Tillman’s plan in effect sought to achieve the same goal of the Populists—the alleviation of railroad oppression of the farmers—only through somewhat different means. Despite arguments against the underlying motives, the necessity, or even the ultimate success of Tillman’s push for

³⁵ Ignatius Donnelly, Circular of Los Angeles county committee of the People’s Party, September 14, 1891. Ignatius Donnelly Papers. Minnesota Historical Society, reprinted in Norman Pollack ed., *The Populist Mind* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1967), 54.

³⁶ N. B. Ashby, *The Riddle of the Sphinx* (Des Moines: Industrial Publishing Co., 1890), 128-42, reprinted in George Brown Tindall ed., *A Populist Reader; selections from the works of American Populist leaders* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 26-36.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

stricter railroad regulation, the simple fact is that it was another tangible effort to fulfill his earlier promises of reform.

Railroads had long been a symbol of industrial development and modernization in South Carolina. The 136-mile South Carolina Rail Road, which connected Charleston and Hamburg on the Savannah River, was the longest railroad in the world when it opened in 1833. Although efforts by the ante-bellum wealthy elite of the state to connect South Carolina with the West were unsuccessful, by 1860 there was 987 miles of line in the state. Even though the Civil War devastated much of the railroad system, investment and production eventually resumed, and by 1890 the state was laced by 2,297 miles of roads.³⁸ During the period of Conservative control of the state, railroads grew rapidly while the regulation and taxation of said carriers fluctuated in major degrees of efficiency.

Two primary factors went into the decision of the Conservative leadership to attempt some control over the state's railroads: first, most of the roads had come under control of capital and ownership outside of the state, a circumstance that alerted fears of the dreaded alien rule of Reconstruction; secondly, rising freight rates were exacerbating the pain that farmers felt due to low prices for agricultural staples, and tariff-protected prices of goods manufactured in the North. In 1878 D. Wyatt Aiken, a state Grange leader and Democratic congressman, petitioned the legislature to create a railroad

³⁸ John F. Stover, *The Railroads of the South, 1865-1900: A Study in Finance and Control* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955), 5; Francis Butler Simkins and Robert Hilliard Woody, *South Carolina during Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1932), 188; Ernest McPherson Lander, Jr., *A History of South Carolina, 1865-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 97, 193; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 117.

commission to oversee the industry. To support the necessity of his request, Aiken demonstrated that the cost of shipping cotton from Abbeville to Charleston was so exorbitant via the railroad that farmers elected instead to haul their load in wagons to Greenville. Due to the power and cupidity of the railroad barons, Aiken insisted the state needed a regulatory railroad commission.³⁹ Lawmakers were willing to act on Aiken's request since it was widely approved; however, they were wary of attacking the railroads too forcefully. The legislature responded by creating a one-man commission of Confederate Brigadier and wartime governor Milledge Luke Bonham, with only "advisory and supervisory powers."⁴⁰

Bonham soon realized that his position was ineffectual, and in 1880 reported to the members of the General Assembly the many problems of the railroad conditions and asked them to give the commission more authority, specifically the power to set freight and passenger rates. In 1880, after a newspaper campaign for better regulation by Charleston *News and Courier* editor, Francis W. Dawson, and a formal request by Senator Augustine Smythe, the legislature decided to investigate the problem and report at its next session. They nominated Smythe to lead the commission.⁴¹ In 1881 Senator Smythe's committee recommended a stronger railroad commission to the legislature, and after several modifications and narrow votes in the House and Senate, finally both bodies

³⁹ Charleston *News and Courier*, September 13, 1878, November 25, 1878; see also Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 127.

⁴⁰ South Carolina, *Acts*, XVI, 789-92; *Senate Journal*, 1878, 167; see also Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 127.

⁴¹ Albert Neely Sanders, "The South Carolina Railroad Commission, 1878-1895" (unpublished Master's thesis, Dept. of History, University of North Carolina, 1948), 19-20, 54-55; Bonham's report to the Legislature is in South Carolina, *Reports and Resolutions*, 1880; the history of the Railroad Commission between 1878 and 1890 is briefly but adequately explained in Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 128.

passed a law in December 1882 that established a three-person commission with power to set rates. Subsequently, Bonham had real authority and rates were indeed lowered significantly.⁴²

The 1882 law did not for long remain popular with everyone. One segment of the population criticized the new commission for not lowering rates enough, while on the other side, business groups and fledgling townships complained that the regulations were stifling commerce and progress. Railroad leaders took this opportunity to quash the commission's authority. In 1883, after a vigorous battle led by William P. Clyde of the Richmond and Danville Railroad, the legislature ended the rate making power of the Railroad Commission.⁴³ The law had passed by a slim margin and Narcisco G. Gonzales, who would later become a leading Tillman critic, suggested that Clyde had bribed the black congressmen with free passes.⁴⁴

From 1883 until Ben Tillman claimed the governor's office in 1890, the railroads conducted their business unhindered by any effectual state regulation. Had the conditions of farmers not declined so precipitously until that point, the railroad question may have been an insignificant issue to Tillman. Conditions, however, were ripe for unrest—as evident by the election of Tillman, the agricultural “Moses”—and Tillman proceeded to attack the railroads as oppressors of the agrarian class whom he championed. Farmers were ready to hold someone accountable for their plight, which over the last decade had

⁴² *House Journal*, 1882, 252-53; *News and Courier*, December 9, 1882; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 128-29.

⁴³ *Senate Journal*, 1883, 52.

⁴⁴ N.G. Gonzales to Francis W. Dawson, December 22, 1883, Elliot-Gonzales Papers, Southern Historical Collection at University of North Carolina, cited in Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 131.

been worsening. South Carolina historian Walter Edgar, who is a stern critic of the Tillman movement, acknowledges “drought, army worms, and crop failures followed one another like the plagues of ancient Egypt . . . [and] in just two years [1886-7] almost 8 percent of all farmland went on the auction block” because farm owners could not pay their taxes.⁴⁵ With the economic depression, the ills of Mother Nature, and the deluge of tax-related foreclosures it is understandable that farmers would rally behind their champion taking on the railroads.

During his inaugural address in 1890 Governor Tillman proclaimed that the “imposition and injustice” of the railroads on society was an evil from which the people begged relief. Although he stressed the need for better regulation of the deleterious shipping rates on the common farmer, Tillman showed prudence in not attacking the railroads with the ferocity with which he had assaulted his Conservative predecessors during his campaign. Rather, he assured the people of the state that “in seeking to control the railroads and other corporations strict regard should be had for their rights and interests.”⁴⁶ Tillman understood that railroads were crucial to the economic success of the state, especially to farmers. Therefore an unnecessarily brutal attack on the railroads would benefit no one. According to Tillman, “much of the material development and progress of the age is the fruit of corporate efforts, and many men acting under one head and guided by one will have done for our country what no individual could have possibly accomplished.”⁴⁷ Evidently, corporations did not have to be the enemy; they just needed

⁴⁵ Edgar, *South Carolina: A History*, 430.

⁴⁶ *Senate Journal*, 1890, 93.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

to be checked in order to keep them from evolving into the dreaded “octopus” that would devour the common man. This is where Tillman distinguished himself from more radical Farmers’ Alliance proponents and Populists. Rather than calling for the de-privatization of railroads and telegraphs, Tillman proposed a more reasonable and realistic goal of rate regulation that would benefit farmers and other shippers without crippling the railroad industry or turning it over to the federal government.

As in the case of the phosphate industry, Tillman not only wanted to reduce shipping rates, but to shift the tax burden off farmers and onto the corporations that were better equipped to shoulder it. He proposed to “sav[e] the people money, reduc[e] and equaliz[e] taxes . . . [and create] a good railroad law, administered by an honest, impartial, and fearless Commission.”⁴⁸ Unlike the phosphate case, however, Tillman encountered more problems passing a railroad law that he deemed suitable. Most historians of the Tillman era concur that the initial failure to enact an efficient railroad law during his first year in office was due to the legislature balking at his “strong-arm tactics.”⁴⁹ They maintain that the only issue was Tillman’s disagreement with the legislature over the appointment procedure of the members of the proposed railroad commission; i.e. Tillman wanted the authority to appoint the commissioners, instead of conceding that power to the legislature.⁵⁰ While this may have been one reason for the delay, there were other legitimate problems that historians have either mistakenly overlooked or willingly ignored.

⁴⁸ *Senate Journal*, 1890, 92.

⁴⁹ Edgar, *South Carolina: A History*, 439.

⁵⁰ Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 226.

When Tillman addressed the legislature in November 1891, he cited reasons for his failure to sign the proposed railroad bill other than who would have authority to appoint commissioners. His first complaint was the lack of a provision to prevent the consolidation of competing lines. Tillman insisted that, “the absorption by lease or otherwise has gone on until virtually there are only four railroad systems in the State.”⁵¹ He proclaimed that as new lines were constructed, they were being bought or leased by bigger corporations; in his opinion, this systematic elimination of competition placed an unbearable cost on communities that had gone into debt to help finance competing lines, but were left “without the benefit of competition.”⁵² Since the end of the Civil War, local governments had provided financial aid to railroads in order to induce them to build lines in their direction. All city or county aid that took the form of bond issues or public stock subscriptions required approval by the state legislature. From 1865 to 1900 the state endorsed 117 acts permitting local governments to assist railroads.⁵³ Hence the monopolization of lines by larger corporations ensured that municipal and county governments would pay whatever the most powerful railroads desired. In 1890 there were nine companies operating railroads in South Carolina; while this number may ostensibly appear to suggest a healthy amount of competition, in actuality five of those companies were owned or controlled by the Richmond and Danville system.⁵⁴ Tillman

⁵¹ *Senate Journal*, 1891, 31-2.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Frank William Putnam, “An Analysis of Public Aid to Railroads in South Carolina, 1865-1900” (unpublished Master’s thesis, Dept. of Economics, University of South Carolina, 1957), 23-25, 34, 41, 75; Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 122.

⁵⁴ Cooper, *Conservative Regime*, 118. The railroads controlled by the Richmond and Danville system in 1890 included the Atlanta and Charlotte Air Line, the Greenville and Columbia, the Charlotte, Columbia and Augusta, the Seaboard Air Line, and the Port Royal and Western

and his followers believed that although these railroads might be operating under different corporate names, they were in fact all fingers from the same avaricious hand. Significantly, all of the roads controlled by the Richmond and Danville were located in the Upcountry, where Tillman's greatest support resided.

In addition to relieving the state of "the oppression always incident to monopolies," Tillman also disputed the railroads' complaints that overvaluation of their assets had encumbered them with unreasonable taxes. In 1891 a new assessment of railroad property by the state Railroad Board of Equalization increased by \$8,000,000 their worth from the previous year.⁵⁵ Tillman estimated that this would result in a \$100,000 increase in the amount of taxes to be paid by the railroads, and he adamantly explained why the heavier taxation would not injure the companies. Moreover, he proclaimed that the job of assessing railroad property should fall to the railroad commission, and not the current board, which was composed of the State Treasurer, Comptroller General, Secretary of State, and Attorney General. According to Tillman, these men were less capable of a realistic assessment than the railroad commissioners who were more knowledgeable of the industry.⁵⁶

Tillman's two principal arguments against the malcontent railroads were that South Carolina railroads were overcharging passengers and shippers, and that the real value of the railroads' property—even with the recently increased assessment—was still

Carolina. Those roads not under outside control were the Savannah and Charleston, the South Carolina, the Northeastern, and the Wilmington and Manchester—these all ran through Charleston and/or Columbia. See Cooper, p.118 for an informative map of South Carolina railroads in 1890.

⁵⁵ *Senate Journal*, 1891, 32.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

“far from being their actual value.”⁵⁷ Since several railroads had failed to report their earnings for the year, Tillman used the 1890 figure of \$2,552,666.97 as the starting point for his argument. This was the revenue generated by passenger fares alone. The rates had cost South Carolina travelers three and a half cents per mile, which Tillman noted was a half-cent more than the rates in Georgia. Conceding that Georgia railroads did more volume than those in South Carolina and could therefore afford to charge less, Tillman still maintained that the South Carolina rates were one-seventh more expensive than necessary. The one-seventh difference over a fair passenger rate, Tillman concluded, earned the railroads \$364,666 in 1890; therefore, they should easily be capable of paying the \$100,000 increase in taxes.⁵⁸

While a new bill was being discussed in the legislature, railroad leaders—despite the seemingly obvious futility of their request—implored the governor to veto any measure that would authorize the railroad commission to set passenger rates or joint rates between connecting roads.⁵⁹ The railroad officials insisted that although their expenses had remained constant, their revenues, especially those for fertilizer shipping and passenger fares, had decreased significantly due to the agricultural depression. Fearing a loss of their jobs or a crippling drop in wages, between 8,000 and 10,000 railroad workers joined the magnates in petitioning the governor to veto rate setting measures. Tillman assured railroad men that neither he nor the legislature had any intent on unfairly injuring

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 226; see also Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 220. As with the phosphate mining issue Simkins’s description is succinct, while Neal’s is more in-depth and supported by specific and detailed evidence.

their business; he also suggested that any ill will towards them was the result of their employer's refusal to pay a fair share of taxes. The Governor forcefully declared that their complaints meant little compared to the roughly 60,000 farmers who supported the approval of rate-making measures. Narcisco G. Gonzales, editor of the *Columbia State* newspaper vilified Tillman for his stance and labeled him the leader of a political "faction."⁶⁰ Over the objections of Conservatives and railroad men, the bill passed, and created in 1892 a three-person commission with the authority to examine the railroads' books and tariffs, and most importantly the power to fix rates. Tillman did yield on his former insistence that the governor should have the power to appoint the commissioners; the new law stipulated that the three commission members would be initially selected by the legislature and thereafter, by popular vote of the citizenry, a common progressive-era response.⁶¹ The new Railroad Law also demonstrated Tillman's sensibility while proving the doomsayers wrong. The legislature appointed conservative men to the commission, and capital was not crippled or forced out of the state. According to Tillman's most notable biographer, "South Carolina had merely been given a railroad law like that already possessed by progressive Western states."⁶²

⁶⁰ *Columbia State*, May 24, 1891, June 13, December 18, 20, 22-23, 1892; *Charleston News and Courier*, December 10, 25, 1891, February 18, November 29, December 22, 1892; *House Journal*, 1891, 23, 300, 573; *House Journal*, 1892, 100, 276, 658; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 227-28. Neal maintains that Gonzales' animosity to Tillman's railroad policy was based in his ties to the industry, especially his connection to the Atlantic and Gulf Railroad. She also adds that four of the original seven founders of the *Columbia State* were stockholders and directors of railroad companies operating in South Carolina.

⁶¹ *South Carolina Acts*, 1892, 8-17; Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 220; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 226.

⁶² Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 220.

During the railroad officials' and workers' petition to the governor to veto the rate-making measure, the issue of the increased taxes due to a new property value assessment had not disappeared. Tillman refused to back down, but so did the railroads. The companies eventually refused to pay the new taxes and filed suit in federal court to nullify the state's decision.⁶³ The process by which the tax revenues were collected was somewhat indirect. First, county treasurers were to collect the duties, and then they were to be forwarded to the comptroller general and the state treasurer. Therefore, the railroads technically filed their suit against multiple county treasurers, including those of Berkley, Williamsburg and Florence counties.⁶⁴ Eventually, the suits were combined into the case of *Walter v. Northeastern Railroad Company*, which made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court. As in the case against the Coosaw Mining Company, the court ruled in favor of the state, directing the railroads to recognize the new property assessments made by the Railroad Board of Equalization and to pay the additional taxes. While this might have gone down as a solid victory for the Tillman camp, the triumph proved ephemeral.⁶⁵

The Richmond and Danville Railroad, the state's largest carrier, and the South Carolina Railway refused to pay the increased taxes on the basis that they were formally held in receivership, and thus were not subject to additional assessments. The courts investigated and discovered that receivers held 1,410 of the state's 2,552 miles of

⁶³ *Columbia State*, March 8, 17, May 12, 1892; *Charleston News and Courier*, March 15, 1892; *House Journal*, 1891, 54-55; *House Journal*, 1892, 13; *South Carolina Reports and Resolutions*, 1892, I, 249-251; *Senate Journal*, 1893, 12-16; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 228.

⁶⁴ Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 229.

⁶⁵ *Walter v. Northeastern Railroad Company*, *United States Reports*, Davis, vol. 147, 370-375, cited in Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 229-30; see also Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 220.

railroads. Consequently, Federal Judge Charles H. Simonton sent out an injunction prohibiting county sheriffs from issuing the new levies on the property held by receivers. Tillman was incensed at the railroads' refusal to comply as well as the court's approval and assistance of behavior that to him reeked of capitalistic greed and oppression. In a letter to multiple county sheriffs he railed against "the unholy alliance between the dignity of the Federal courts and these harlot corporations," and ordered them to confiscate and hold the property of the recalcitrant companies. Judge Simonton, with the aid of Judge Nathan Goff, countered the governor's measure by ordering the sheriffs to pay a \$500 fine or face prison time. The state appealed the convictions of the sheriffs, but the U.S. Supreme Court ruled this time against Tillman, sustaining the railroads' claims that those in receivership did not have to pay the increased taxes.⁶⁶ Tillman did manage to collect the new taxes from those railroads not held by receivers, but overall the battle against the railroads had been a net loss for the state. South Carolina was forced to pay the fines on the sheriffs that had violated Federal law on Tillman's orders, and had also incurred \$4,000 of legal fees. The situation was even worse for those counties that had lost great amounts of revenue during the standoff—some had even had to close down public schools due to treasury short falls.⁶⁷

Tillman did not accept defeat at the hands of the federal government gracefully; he spewed invective at the U.S. Supreme Court's decision with the same vehemence that

⁶⁶ Tillman orders to sheriffs, January 28, 1893, in Governor's Letter Books, SCA; Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 221; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 230.

⁶⁷ *Columbia State*, February 2, 14, 17, 1893; *Charleston News and Courier*, February 8-9, 12, 14, 17; *Orangeburg Times and Democrat*, February 15, 1893; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 230; Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 221.

he had attacked the Conservative “ring” during his campaign stump speeches. With rhetoric not dissimilar from the nullification and secession crises that had aroused the ire of previous generations of South Carolinians, Tillman castigated the “fungoid growth of modern judicial precedent. . . . [that had] spread and grown with the rapidity of a banyan tree in the tropical jungles of Asia, until it now overshadows the land and blights the sovereignty of the States.”⁶⁸ He specifically attacked Federal Judge Goff as a carpetbagger, and Judge Simonton as an effete Charleston dandy who had “sucked State’s rights with his mother’s milk, and now plants his dagger in the State’s breast.”⁶⁹

Tillman’s actions in the railroad battle—i.e. the defiance of what he saw as the marriage between big capital and the federal government—won him a mixed reception within the state. The railroad-friendly Charleston *News and Courier* labeled Tillman’s resistance of the courts “states rights gone mad.” As usual, the majority of the state’s newspapers sided with industry and capital, and vilified Tillman. On the other hand, the Farmers’ Alliance state newspaper, the *Cotton Plant*, vindicated Tillman’s deeds as being “exactly right.” One reform legislator echoed the Alliance stance by saying that “we either have to control the railroads or they control us.” This statement, while not exactly promoting government operation of the railroads, is strikingly similar to the third plank of the Populist Party’s 1892 Omaha platform, which stated, “We believe that the time has come when the railroad corporations will either own the people or the people must own

⁶⁸ *House Journal*, 1893, 15-34; see also Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 221-22.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

the railroads.”⁷⁰ Even Tillman’s most vehement critic among current scholars, Stephen Kantrowitz, concedes that Tillman’s actions were strategic and did indeed secure support among his base of followers. As he writes, “Tillman understood the political value of defiance of federal authority, even when it failed, and his aggressive style and choice of targets endeared him to those for whom the money power was a palpable enemy.”⁷¹ From his position as governor, Ben Tillman, although still a Democrat by name, forcefully attacked the oppressors of the downtrodden farmer. These were the same monopolistic moneyed interests and do-nothing conservatives whom he had verbally assaulted during his campaign and earlier speeches against the old regime. Though he was not nearly as radical or socialistic as many Populist leaders, by taking on big corporations perceived as enemies to the common farmer, Tillman provided his constituency with reason to believe he was a legitimate and progressive reformer, and thus effectively co-opted the third-party momentum that was building in other Southern and Western states.

⁷⁰ The Omaha Platform, originally printed in the *National Economist* (Washington, D. C.), July 9, 1892, reprinted in Norman Pollack ed., *The Populist Mind* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1967), 59-66. Pollack also states that the Omaha platform was released in all of the leading Populist newspapers following its introduction by the *National Economist*, the main organ of the party. Furthermore, the *People’s Party Paper* (Atlanta) reprinted the document several times until 1894.

⁷¹ *Charleston News and Courier*, December 22, 1892, February 8, 1893; *Cotton Plant*, February 18, 1893; Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy*, 186.

CONCLUSION

On November 28, 1894, as the end of his tenure in the South Carolina governor's office approached, and what would be a long stretch in the U. S. Senate was about to commence, Benjamin Tillman outlined to the General Assembly the virtues of his career to that point. He insisted that "reforms of a radical nature have been accomplished; [and] abuses of long standing have been corrected, or attempted to be corrected." Tillman contended that he and his reform faction had, through the promotion of more inclusive democracy, better education, and temperance, improved the state and the happiness of its citizens. Furthermore, he asserted that his two terms in office would "mark an epoch in our annals to which the future historian of the State must devote more than a passing glance."⁷²

Tillman's adieu to the state's executive office exhibited both prescience and overstatement. Historians have definitely taken more than a "passing glance" at the controversial figure's career, as well as the socio-political climate surrounding it. Nevertheless, scholarly interpretations of the Tillman movement have varied significantly. Tillman's most notable biographer, Francis B. Simkins, insisted that farmer's champion "cannot be judged according to the standards of social and economic amelioration prevailing in more recent times in more progressive communities," and that "according to the standards of his day, [Tillman] was the most successful governor South

⁷² South Carolina, *Senate Journal*, 1894, 15; Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 233; Neal, *Tillman: The South Carolina Years*, 384.

Carolina has ever had.”⁷³ The more recent historiography, however, has not been so kind to the Edgefield agitator. Historians Walter Edgar and Stephen Kantrowitz have not only criticized Tillman for his contributions to the systemization of white supremacy, but also attempted to dispel his credentials as a reformer for white farmers. They contend that Tillman was essentially a conservative political boss, who employed reform rhetoric to secure office. Additionally, historians of the Populist Party, including Lawrence Goodwyn and Robert C. McMath Jr., have agreed that Tillman and the vast majority of South Carolinians resisted the third party on the basis that it would possibly lead to political and social equality for African Americans.

Tillman may not have been as “radical” as he claimed; he was opposed to large-scale federal intervention programs like those advocated by the Farmers’ Alliance and the Populist Party. He disapproved of the sub-treasury plan and government ownership of railroads and telegraphs, insisting that these proposals were too socialistic. Ideally, Tillman believed in the Jeffersonian doctrine of self-sufficiency and minimal government interference. Nevertheless, he did not oppose government power to improve conditions and eliminate inequities imposed by big capital on individuals, especially farmers. Tillman fought and destroyed the monopoly of the Coosaw Mining Company, which he insisted had deprived the state of its due phosphate royalties by denying fair competition. He also established a Railroad Commission with the power to set freight and passenger rates—exorbitant shipping rates were one of the most prominent complaints of the economically burdened farmers.

⁷³ Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman*, 233

Tillman showed genuine concern and skill in reforming both the state Penitentiary and the Lunatic Asylum. In each institution his efforts improved the economic efficiency as well as the living conditions of the residents. Additionally, Tillman created the state liquor dispensary, which proved to be a practical solution to the heated contention between prohibitionists and liquor advocates. The dispensary not only curbed rampant saloon life and its concomitant evils, it also provided a boon to the state's coffers that resulted in decreased taxation for state farmers. Furthermore, when dispensary foes rioted in Darlington, Tillman's swift and judicious management of the situation won him praise from leaders across the country, as well as from his traditional enemies within the state.

In his calls for reform preceding his campaign for the governor's chair, Tillman achieved two of his most memorable accomplishments, creation of Clemson Agricultural College and establishment of the primary system for nominating candidates within the South Carolina Democratic Party. The primary system became a permanent institution, and helped to break the aristocratic "ring rule" over the Democratic Party by forcing the potential candidates to appear before the mass of common voters. Tillman counted the creation of Clemson College as one of his most important legacies. The school gave South Carolina a tool by which to train its farmers in modern, scientific methods of efficient and profitable agriculture. Furthermore, it was an important symbol that represented a step up for the agricultural classes against their perceived enemies, the genteel aristocrats who usually identified with South Carolina College and The Citadel.

Also, Tillman was influential in the creation of Winthrop College, South Carolina's first institution of higher education for women.

Historians may be correct in asserting that Tillman was not a "radical," but they are mistaken to propose that he was not a reformer. Recent scholars have downplayed the previously discussed reform measures, and instead emphasized Tillman's white-supremacist ideology as a way of discrediting the entirety of his program. By modern standards Tillman's racial views are unacceptable, but for the time and place in which he lived they were the standard. The Conservative regime that Tillman and his supporters usurped had no intent of promoting racial equality. Kantrowitz, however, points to Greenbackers and would-be Populists like Hendrix McLane, who did seek bi-racial cooperation for radical reform, as evidence that there were South Carolinians interested in such measures. He claims that it was the Tillman movement and its insistency on the continuing power of "white manhood" that prevented interracial cooperation. Kantrowitz, however, underplays just how negligible a percentage of South Carolinians favored political cooperation with African Americans. In fact, Hendrix McLane reflected the exact opposite of what the overwhelming majority of South Carolina citizens wanted, regardless of whether they were Tillman supporters or his enemies.

Modern scholars also argue that to conclude that Tillman was a reformer, because he represented the majority of white citizens, is to unjustly deny African American citizens their rightful and equal ownership of the state and its government. This contention, however "enlightened" it appears to be, is still faulty because it is anachronistic. Historians and students of the Tillman era in South Carolina cannot

legitimately interpret nineteenth century scenarios, much less judge them, by modern standards of racial equality that were essentially non-existent at the time. Historians often make the mistake of concentrating on what *should* have been, rather than what *was*. Benjamin Tillman was a product of the society in which he lived. Furthermore, the majority of those people who professed shock at Tillman's rhetoric were not grieved by the matter of what he spoke, but by the ungentlemanly manner in which he spoke it. What modern scholars feel should have been is merely academic; the fact is that the majority of white South Carolinians believed African Americans should not be on an equal socio-political footing with whites.

The existence of racial disparity was certainly not unique to South Carolina. In the 1890's every Southern and Western state that experienced a third-party movement also incurred the controversy of cooperating with black voters. Those state populist movements that did seek the African –American vote did so out of necessity, a lack of alternative options. Moreover, in addition to the stigma attached to bi-racial cooperation, the idea of abandoning one's traditional party carried significant drawbacks, including potential exclusion from the business community and rejection from friends and family. Therefore, Tillman's reform movement in South Carolina provided white citizens, especially farmers, with an outlet for their political angst, without the need for leaving their traditional party or indulging in schemes for major federal intervention. His tangible reforms in education, fighting monopolies, reforming state institutions, and regulating railroads were a legitimate alternative to third-party radicalism.

In 1892, during Tillman's reelection campaign for the governorship, the anti-Tillman *State* newspaper began a satirical series deriding the incumbent. The "Chronicles of Zeracchaboan," as the series was titled, began thusly: "Now in the fullness of time arose one Benjamin, a man haughty of spirit and subtle of heart, who greatly deceived the people. The same was spoken of by the Prophet, saying 'A one-eyed man shall be king among the blind.'" ⁷⁴ While the intent behind these "chronicles" may have been simply a humorous jibe at a political opponent, an explication of its language reveals the foundation for the loyalty Tillman engendered. The *State* was an organ—officially created by Narcisco G. Gonzales to denounce the Tillman movement—that was synonymous with the aristocratic elites of Columbia and the Lowcountry. When the newspaper suggested that Tillman devotees—primarily from the Upcountry—had been "deceived," and were furthermore "blind," it disclosed just how little respect the Conservative clique had for the common citizens. Ben Tillman may not have endorsed radical programs of federal intervention, and never considered joining the Populist Party. Nevertheless, he was a legitimate reformer on nearly every concern, and he represented the people of South Carolina more than any of their previous governments had even considered. Consequently, South Carolina experienced almost no Populist activity not because of the fear of racial equality, but rather because it already had a bona fide reformer within the Democratic Party before Populism was an option.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Edgar, *South Carolina*, 440.

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